

To My Surrogate Sibling in Singapore¹

(6 minutes past midnight on April 26, 2007 because I could not sleep)

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You must live in the penthouse
of a nice building with a rooftop swimming pool.
Your laundry must hang from a pulley
where your underpants flail in the wind like victorious flags.
(I think 'Ma wrote to us you have a dryer
but your parents would rather save the money.)
I can imagine 'Ma fiddling with the contraption,
afraid to look below at your clean city.
Do you know how much courage she musters
just to hang your clothes?
I bet you
'Ma never told you how horribly afraid she was of heights.

She is too considerate.

She must let you play whenever you want,
even if you pull her hair.
How you must love to ride her back
like a horse or a cow or even a dinosaur.
(I wonder what names you call her
when you tug on her hair like a leash:
Spot! Silver! Donkey Kong?)
Do you know how much it hurts her back

¹Of the 4.5 million people in Singapore,
130,000 are from the Philippines—
most of them women who left their own children
to care for the children of others.

²Francis Tanglao-Aguas is a poet, playwright, actor, and theater director. He is the author of the play *when the purple settles*, winner in the Palanca Awards, the Philippines National Prize in Literature. He is also the Co-editor of *Tibuk-Tibok Festival Anthology of Young Filipino Writers*. He continues to tour his original solo play, *The Sarimanok Travels*, all over the world. His newest work is *Ramayana La'ar*, a theatrical adaptation of the sacred Hindu epic *Ramayana*. He is Assistant Professor of World and Multicultural Theatre at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, USA.

To My Surrogate Sibling in Singapore

when you beat her to go faster?
I bet you
'Ma never told you she has scoliosis and arthritis.

She is too considerate.

She must sing you such beautiful songs
when you sleep atop your pillow-top mattress.
You must never have heard such a beautiful voice.
(The Tokyo recruiter only needed a male singer;
So Papa's in Roppongi, and Mama's now your lark.)
Have you ever wondered
why it's not your own Mom or Dad who sing you to sleep?
I'm sorry.
My bitterness
is showing.
I bet you
you never imagined
my Mama
had such
an audacious
bitchy rude child.

Unlike my mother, I am not considerate.

Consider
the fact
that I
cry myself to sleep
alone
at night.
While my mother
sleeps
at your bedside
so your parents
can go out
on a date.
Or maybe...
They're just
at work
for overtime
or at play

having an affair.

Did you ever think
your parents
were gay
and lesbian,
and their marriage
was a sham?

I'm sorry;
I heard
they whipped people
for such acts
in your city
country.

Or was that in
Malaysia? Or Burma? Or Thailand ?

Maybe
I'm just
making
it up.

I'm sorry;
I probably have the wrong country.

I can't
help it.

My mother is not here to tutor me.

She is too busy being considerate-

-hanging your smelly underpants as she looks out the window, nauseous and scared
shitless she might topple over to her death, but she does not because she still has to
cook your lunch or dinner or tea or whatever it is whenever you eat until you shit it out
and she has to wash you and bathe you because you tried to wash yourself and now
have shit under your nails so she has to scrub it.

I'm sorry
My bitterness
is showing.

If you sent me back my mother.

She might teach me to be considerate.

Sincerely,

To My Surrogate Sibling in Singapore

Mary Grace Esmeralda
Daughter of your nanny Maria
(That is her name if you never knew
because you never asked.)
Anyway
I am your surrogate sister
in Joyful Maligaya Village,
Joyful means Maligaya,
It's translated for your convenience
So I suppose

I am a little considerate

Even
if I live
with relatives
who steal
the money
my parents send me
here
in Maligaya Village, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines
where they
crucify people
for real
every Holy Week
every year
as self imposed penance
for their sins
and misgivings
so God
will grant them
a better
if not less insufferable
life.

PS:
Please
Tell
Mama
Now:
They crucify women too.

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