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**From the Pedicab a Sea
The Leavetaking
At the Coming World
Paper Boat**

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EUGENE GLORIA

From the Pedicab a Sea

From the pedicab a sea
 of blue uniformed men hold fort
 outside a bank in my neighborhood.
 My brother is not among them,
 but I think of him as I watch
 these gaunt, angular guards
 dawdle in their starched blues.

My eyes drink the blue of their
 uniforms, serious as the sky,
 and almost as officious as the dress
 blues my brother wore when he came home
 for good after that shameful war,
 after grandmother lived with us,

after the president's speech—
 Mass was said, and my mother knelt
 before a long list of names
 in the far left corner of the church.
 My brother Jose dignified in bold-type
 as private first class, baby blue

marine with his mighty Mattel M-16,
 GI Joe greens, Raybans for effect.
 Once a guard at Binh Thuy Bridge,
 my brother spoke the idiom of Southern
 Blacks, the grammar of military English.
 Years after he came home,

my brother tasted the callous metal of a .45
 'cause his wife, found another man, the pain,
 his son complained was that the other
 man was white, whiter than white,
 like a white guy even—
 And my brother Jose learned to sing

the tune of goodtime Charlies
in the somber iambs
of jarheads called upon by America.
Semper Fi, little bro, Semper Fi, mothafuckas.
Here in a small pocket of Manila,
I imagine the sea blue as the sky

my brother cursed when he was a boy,
where thirty years ago he drove a pedicab,
then watched the sky blaze
like the tip of his cigarette,
and in the slow exhale of day cooling into night,
darkness fell upon him like light.

The Leavetaking

Now there is this side of leaving,
when promises can no longer bind us—
words not enough to contain
the weight of flight.
We're given to instructions at the parting,
emotions inarticulated with terse goodbyes.
We say, *ingat*, and the feelinglessness
of roadmaps with lines
that curve this way
then narrow to a stop.
We say to the wanderer: at the crossing
is a row of bougainvillaeas and dahlias—
admire them from a distance,
then follow the signs.
At land's end is a man with a sparrow
cupped in his wide hands.

And those of us who stay behind
know what we're left with: a memory
of stones, nameless rivers,
and children with strange eyes.
And this man always leaving
carries nothing, except the road
he wears embroidered with distance,
as florid as the wind on his back.

At the Coming World

I wanted to tell her yesterday that the sky
was fuchsia, or that it blossomed into
a metaphor of woman—a red, red rose. No,

it was not like that all. The sky was
actually undramatic, until darkness slowly
became us, and the sun changed into a yolk

of a pickled duck egg, and it sank lower,
almost touching the rusting sea and an old
ship at the near horizon. Luzviminda

suddenly turned sentimental as most of us
tend to be, and she bandied words like *faith*
and *hope* for *Inang Bayan*, her voice mingling

with the breeze and twilight aflame
with sulphur clouds. Maybe that moment *is* rose,
that the sun setting is the coming world

and the sky would yield to a sliver
of light, from the one lone star
at the southern tip of the cuticle moon.

Paper Boat

—for *Bienvenido N. Santos*

He is an old man like my father,
a tenuous ship when he
sleeps, filling up with water,
then sinking by its own weight.

A paper boat nestled
in the blink of night's eye,
this old man sleeps
not at bottom of the sea,

but in his hut
of thatched palm leaves.
His sheaves of paper
piled on a table beside an open window.

A gust breathes life
into the old man's
work, and like startled birds
the pages scatter in all direction.

Here the balinsasayaw weaves
a nest with its own saliva—
the way poets dwell in language.
Here song is a ghost

walking over waves
almost wind, almost hand
of swiftlets
flitting in the strand.

In its slow descent one page begins,
"I got up at five and went to get water."
And another: "I would like to swallow
the whole earth.
I would like to drink the whole sea."

In the swirl of pages singing
throughout the black Sibuyan Sea,
there is a body of a man
mapped out in white sheet,

there is this carnal wind
unfolding the comings and goings of desire,
and this Magellanic cloud in the soft
palm of dusk where my father sleeps.

This man who is not my father,
is but an empty vessel emptying all
the day's task; a sheaf of moments set afloat—
unmoored, a man without a home.