



'STORYA

For Grace and Onang

When you teach breastfeeding
to the village's young mothers, I
was told,
the rudiments obvious —
cleaning the nipples, how
to tell when the milk goes sour or
stale,
the clam soup with lemon grass
and horse radish to keep the
nourishing
surge coming - so,
expect these girls to bare their own
lessons for barter.

I expect nothing vast or vital, only
something of immediate use, like
how to make easy the backbreak-
stances
of shore gleaning for drift
weed or shell at lowtide, but

Today, Laureana asks if I've heard
of the news over the radio

How in Paniqui, Bulacan a women
clouds inside her belly swirled,
the eddy of flesh there
molted into her first
child of a mudfish.

Fifteen-year old Maria dreams
out loud, I wonder
the wonder, fishmouth
the shape of a little star sucking
the lukewarm yellow
of colostrum.

Valeria, hawker of crabs and fish
entrails, would like hers
an angelfish, fins silent
white wings underwater,
its eyes so full
of nothing, no clawing
screams to rival her own hoarse
voice
braying past the village huts
and by the blacksmith workshops.
Then giggles Valeria, but we have
to
learn new tricks to keep away the
cats,
teach ourselves the habit
of breeding mosquitos for
babyfood,
find out exactly how a suckling fry
would smile,
giggles Valeria the peddler,
giggling
as if to save herself from some pain.

My own thoughts ripplerush
like the tapwaters I carry along
within the pufferfish
swell of my womb, my oddhearted
eelchild, swimming in the slow
ooze of red mud
to the rivermouth
of the vagina.

I will name you
Milk. Or Gold,
or Faith. Or Consuelo,
from the former conquerors'
vocabulary, meaning,
comfort.
Or Mistral, after the dry wind and
for her
who wished a fisher's daughter a
dreamful
of fish, leaping and aglow.

You see, for us it is not difficult to
believe
in makebelieve.
Though, of course,
we do not call them makebelieve.

They are waters villagers dive
into, far below the tethered
purse seines of reason and reality.
We keep them
simple and true, these stories
our living stirs afloat.

Today, in this school of mothers,
nipples darken, and arise.
All our dolphin minds together
somersaulting and somersaulting
foward.

Lina Sagara Reyes
of "Writers Involved in Creating
Cultural Alternatives" (WICCA)
Philippine participant

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