

Phantom pains



POETRY

THERESE ESTACION

Phantompains
Therese Estacion

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Once upon a time the spectacle A young woman flatlined herself into oblivion Seemingly so Really she became the subject A body made machine-dependent, tube down her throat her holes sliced and closed lines for the drip taped to her skin Organ removed Her body was dead dying then automatic pilot One time they brushed her tender gums so hard her mouth bled Another time they would not let her speak to her mother father sister anyone Apparently she needed sleep Still she forced herself to stay awake afraid she would never wake up again— Awakened Nightmare Syndrome Later someone asked how she was feeling When she replied *psychologically perturbed* they took a syringe from the locked box and squeezed fluids down her neck forcing her to rest for tomorrow when they will sit her up for the first time After all she does is sit stare blankly at walls the blurs and the clocks 11:30 turned into 12:34 into 1:41 twenty seconds past 3 a.m. *When is lunch coming* Oh gawd she was bored At least they found a way to put her bed by the window so she could stare at a tree and someone once washed her greasy hair braided it beautifully for sleep But let us fast-forward a little past the sanitary purgatory to a time when our woman-child would cycle in and out post-coma necrosis exposed mummified fingers and feet A spectacle outside a spectacle A beast that wore her dead hide outdoors

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On a bed that moves, on a white sheet *I may
be over or under* Someone in the distance speaks
to me and asks my permission *I guess* Then, I
am in an elevator Four people are around me

Who are they? I am wearing clothes, *mine or
the hospital's* I cannot tell the difference A
man with a coffee, a woman with scrubs

*I want to kiss them all
They can read my mind*

I am in another room They say it will only
take three hours, or was it three minutes I look up
and see large blades on the ceiling They are
circling and circling, taking scans of my body

Suddenly I am under bright lights Someone is
telling me to look at the X-rays

“Do you see this? This? It must be
done” *I don't understand*

I nod agreeing to it all

“Take deep breaths Count backwards
from five”

5,4,3 ... beep, beep, bee— A pause in time
Someone thinks that **it** is slipping away so they
work faster Pump harder I can no longer

feel I am under bright lights again and on steel

Cold *Who else has been on this*
table? Were they able to wake up?

A woman with a mask and rubber gloves strokes
my hair Soundless

to be done Sleep” “Work is

An abrupt slumber *Come here*
No Not there Over there
Two figures are
waiting They listen for my answer but there is no
question I do not have words I feel that I do not
want to move I want to stay

There

here

Here
I open my eyelids My parents' faces

My face

I want to see my face

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There were no goodbyes, no casket,
no kiss,

no sobbing no epigraphs no kneeling

just doctors in disposable masks and gloves—
that go in the same garbage can—

my body belonging to my body for years
go into—

trash in a trash can—
my body—trash— trash

belonging in the dump—with their trash

my body—flesh made trash — theirs
to

trash
—garbaged body— waste

Waste body garbaged
while I was anaesthetically asleep

naked under medical fluorescence

—intubated —dead bits cut off

—dead bits deemed
“biohazard”: waste

—feet
—ankles
—fingers
—Uterus
———biohazardbodyparts

all go into their fucking garbage can

Abat/Monsters

*a rare bug caught, fusobacterium necrophorum
perhaps it was always in me, dormant, still*

Agta

Ganahan man gyud ko namaka kita ku ug agta—
I've always wanted to see an agta, the smoke ogre
that lives in green mango trees They say that an
agta used to live in the old tree found on my ang
kong Tyrone's front yard Ni ingon sad sila
nakakita siya ug agta They said that he had seen an
agta when he was young

Di man ka makakita ug agta You can't see an agta
He is the one that chooses to see *you* I'm not sure
how this is decided It may be based on his fetish
for naïveté or how bored he is that day Pero ni
ingon sila na ang manga agta, beware, kay But,
they said that when you see an agta *beware* basig e
temptado ka nila ug paglaum because he will try to
tempt you with an offer you can't refuse: a wish

Morality is of no concern to agtas, so you need not
worry if you are a little shit But be *careful* He
should never be trusted For instance, you might
take up his offer and wish for 100 million pesos so
you can get into the cockfighting business, breed
prize cocks and win some matches that leave the
other rooster bloody, perfect for sabaw soup

Later, the agta may decide to fuck with you All of
a sudden your cocks are dead because your yaya
accidentally fed them raw beans

Now, you are old Have no teeth, no rice

Pero, sa bata pa ko, dili gyud ko kahibalo ani!

But, when I was a child, I had no idea! I wished
I could see an agta, eye to eye

And when katong na matay ko sa I died in August I
swear I saw something like an agta At the foot of
my hospital bed a form with no eyes watched

He said to all the devils that came

Ayaw Pag Ari Do not come here

Ayaw Pag Hilabot Do not touch

Duwende

Duwendes are little flat-nosed gnomes that are known to be some of the first inhabitants of the islands. They usually live sa gamay na bontod, og sa sud, ug sa luyo sa inside hills, and mounds. Duwendes are so light-footed that you'd never hear one walk across your room.

According to my tita, there are three types of duwendes: itom, puti ug puwa (black, white, and red). All you need to know is that a red duwende is ambivalent about you. A red one can either fill your life with goodness or rot it with dread.

Once, when my dentist was picking at my cavity, she told me a story that a friend of a friend of hers told her. *Apparently*, na-ay usa na puwa na duwende naka sud diri. *Apparently*, a red one had been able to enter. This red duwende had fallen in love with her friend's friend and had decided to latch on to her.

The thought of a red duwende being here, possibly hiding behind our bags of rice freaked the shit out of me.

I was so afraid that I threw out every red object I owned. I hate red duwendes. I hate that my life has become a red duwende.
Will I be okay? Or will I constantly be subjected to fate's diabolical teasing.

Afloat

Gi ingnan ko sa ako-ang pa pa na na-ay ukoy My
papa told me that there was a merman nag puyo
dapit sa dagat who lived by the sea in his hometown
of Gihulngan This merman and his family lived
there for years as fishermen

My papa told me that hibalo siya na ukoy sila kay
baho kaayo siya na buwad, he knew he was a
merman because he smelt so badly like fried dried
salt fish, had green skin and webbed fingers and
toes Papa said he once saw him dive into
the water from his boat, hunting sa dagat in the sea
for days When he finally emerged, he had a string
of dalupapa giant squid hanging from his neck

I think about this merman often when I'm
sitting in my prosthetist's office without my
legs on Seeing my limbs halved without feet
makes me wonder if I am a fish-person as well

Maybe somewhere down my blood line a perverted
lola had fantastic sex with an ukoy Or maybe
they did what they used to do to their unwanted
girls—dumped them in the water

Perhaps I was always meant to be the child who
had to pay debt to all their libidinal bestiality and
female infanticide An offering of my soles for
their souls

Tianak

You may hear the cry of a tianak baby vampire while walking alone at night by the rice fields or cemetery on the islands

The tianak uses its desperate wail to seduce any sense of goodness you may have into cradling it When you inevitably succumb, the tianak will then transform into its truest form—a red-eyed vampiric baby One of satan's little darlings

Iyahang change, mas pas pas gyud sya sa kidlat! His change is faster than lightning! Mu budlat iyahang mata og mo dako iyang pupils... His eyes enlarge and pupils widen parihas gyud ug ka dako sa meaty tamarind seed to the same size as a meaty tamarind seed Dayon, Then the tianak will thrust its fangs into your neck ug kanun gyud ka niya! and he'd fucking eat you!

Hadlok gyud ko aning estoryaha sa una ... pero I've always been afraid of this story, for good reason But now, that I am barren and without my uterus, I wonder if I may just decide to walk the rice fields and cemeteries alone sa gabi-i para maka kita ko ug at night so I can find a anak para nako child for myself, even if it is satan's cherubic spawn

The White Lady of the Philippines

There was one type of ghost that repeatedly appeared when my friends and I told each other ghost stories during recess. The White Lady—a woman’s ghost who liked to float around schools, hospitals, cemeteries, and old homes

She looks like this:

taas ka-ayo iyahang buhok ug itom her hair is very long and black Iyahang mata Her eyes ... usahay pula, usahay itom, ... sometimes red, sometimes black, uahay wala siyay eyes sometimes she doesn’t have eyes Dead eyes

We used to swap stories of various White Lady sightings while sitting on the grass waiting for the recess bell to ring. One time, a White Lady turned the whole kindergarten yard upside down para mu baliktad ang langit so she could inverse the sky. Meanwhile, another White Lady roamed our hall’s bathroom, feeling nostalgic about her school-ruler abortion. And once, during a nap, naka kita gyud ko ug I honestly saw a White Lady ... Nara siya sa kwarto ni mami ug ni papa na-ko ug iyahang kong gi tutukan ... She was in my parents’ room and she was staring at me. Pula gyud iyahang mata! She had fucking red eyes! I immediately shut my eyes and burrowed between my parents, trying to convince myself that she wasn’t really there.

White Ladies can’t actually *do* anything to harm you. They’re just *there*. Wa silay kalibutan.

They're a bit clueless Sigi rana sila ug appearing
and All they do is disappear in and out of rooms
passively or melodramatically Unlike these
spectres, ni balik man ko I came back

Maybe with a purpose? I don't know.

Usahay, though, mu bisita siya nako *Sometimes*,
though, she visits me ug mag higda siya tupad nako
ug mag hilak and lies down beside me and cries
Kusog gyud iyahang hilak kay makakita man siya
She weeps and weeps and weeps. She weeps
because she can see our dead uterus lying sadly on a
pillow—mura gyud ug pagod na tocino looking
very much like the burnt pork belly at breakfast no
one wants to touch