

Flores de Mayo ngan Iba pa nga mga Siday

(Flores de Mayo and Other Poems)

Jessa A. Amarille

I was raised by women. Maternal figures—mothers, grandmothers, aunts, older female cousins—were present throughout my childhood and adolescence. So strong their presence was in my formative years that, now, in my adulthood, whenever confronted with a situation that requires making choices, I still turn to them for advice and validation. Turning to them means sometimes having a little conversation in my head: *Will Mother get angry if I do this? What will my late grandmother say?* These choices involve seemingly trivial (but not really for me) moments: picking clothes to wear (*Is it the knee-length dress with a conservative sweetheart neckline? Is it not too revealing, this pair of shorts? Or too daring, this sheer blouse?*), choosing the dishes to prepare for a family gathering, or selecting the color of the curtains. Or at times, they are big life-changing commitments: the career to pursue, the person to spend a lifetime with, and, ultimately, the kind of life to live. *Will my mothers approve?* This has always been the guide question.

This collection of poems chronicles a girl's childhood and coming of age and how the women around her shaped these life stages. Derived and inspired from moments in my childhood spent in a quiet town in Eastern Samar called Balangiga, the poems are vignettes of learning moments and turning points. In *Sudsud* ("Step no, step yes"), the persona

playfully narrates a game of hopscotch among three young girls. It ends with ambiguity, implying an unfinished business that extends beyond the children's game.

Different coming-of-age moments are captured by the poems, "*Nanay, waray na an kamadlos*," *an baton ni Naning kan iya Nanay kahuman lumabay an pira katuig*; *Flores de Mayo*; and *Kun hi Layong Uray waray ginhimos*.

Naning, the girl in Iluminado Lucente's poem *Hangin Gad La* finally speaks her mind in *Nanay, waray na an kamadlos*. The poem responds to Lucente's poem by presenting an alternative voice. In *Hangin Gad La*, Naning is warned not to respond to whoever or whatever is knocking on the door because it is only the wind; in *Nanay, waray na an kamadlos*, she now asserts herself and demands that they let the wind enter the next time it knocks.

Flores de Mayo tells the annual tradition that Catholic girls must participate in every May. In my hometown, every May, neighborhood girls must dress in white and offer flowers to the Virgin Mary as an act of praise. In *Flores de Mayo*, after several summers, the girl outgrows the tradition and suddenly yearns something as "sweet" as the act of offering flowers to the Virgin Mary.

Kun hi Layong Uray waray ginhimos amplifies the subtle desire for freedom that "*Flores de Mayo* hints at. Based on a local myth, the poem reflects on the fate of Layong Uray, the mythical girl who possessed beauty but never freedom.

The last poem in the collection, *Masapnot man ngay-an it tuba nga diri pa bahal*, is an allusion to William Butler Yeats' *A Drinking Song*. Things take a bittersweet turn at this point. Using the *tuba*, the concept of the "right time" in love is relayed. The use of time is not exclusive to this poem; the other poems in the collection also rely on it for meaning. The passing of time and the changes in body, temperament, and needs are found in the coming-of-age poems: the goals in life in *Sudsud* and the physiological and emotional developments in *Nanay, waray na an kamadlos* and *Flores de Mayo*.

This collection of poems is an attempt at capturing the poignant yet powerful moments in a girl's life when she must become and *unbecome*.

This is a homage to all the women present in her process of becoming and unbecoming. This is for my mother who made sure that I was always part of the Flores de Mayo festival at home. To this day, I still try to understand what the flowers are for.

Sudsud (“Step no, step yes”)

Pakabiling niyo hin tagsa-tagsa nga tarap,
Pipiiton niyo ha iyo palad,
Kukurumson,
Ngan huhudim-hudiman.

Kahuman, itsa!
Sudsud
Piyong (ayaw ha paglimbong)
Pitad, tamak
Step? No. Step? Yes!

Hasta mabalayan na nga tanan nga kwadrado.
Haruy kay tumarithi.
Panirong kay paninip-unon!

Adi an resulta han mulay: Nganhi, puyde duha nga tiil an itamak,	Balay ni Regine
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pero diri puyde balayan. Balay ni Elizabeth	Balay ni Regine
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(Waray kabalayi kay nahiabtan na kamo han tarithi.)	Balay ni Elizabeth
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Ginhimos mo la anay an im' tarap.
Pero pira na katuig an naglabay,
Waray ka la gihap pakakabalay.

Sudsud

After you find your stone,
 Enclose it in your fist,
 Tighten your grip,
 And whisper prayers to it.

And then throw it!
 Hop
 Close your eyes (no cheating)
 Take a step, and land
Step? No. Step? Yes!

Until all the boxes are conquered.
 Oh, no! Here comes the rain.
Seek shelter because you might catch a cold!

Here are the game's results:

This box is neutral ground; both feet can step on it.	Regine's box
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Elizabeth's box	Regine's box
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Nobody was able to earn this because the rain interrupted the game.	Elizabeth's box
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You keep your stone in the meantime.
 But years have passed,
 You still have not won a box.

**“Nanay, waray na an kamadlos,” an baton ni Naning
kan iya Nanay kahuman lumabay an pira katuig**

(ngan baton na liwat han maniriday ha siday nga *Hangin Gad La*
ni Iluminado Lucente)

Nanmati gud ak' ha imo hadto, Nanay
Waray paalantad
Kay siring mo man hangin la
Kamadlos tikang ha dagat
Huyop han habagat.

Pero nagmuok ada
An hagong kay makusog
Kay waray na gud ako
Bati hin pagtinuktok.

Ada, adi ako
Nanmumuhay-puhay
Nanngungunat
Nanngangabri
Han bintana, han sada
Nga nanhihingit
Kay pinanbutlaw pagpugong
Han siring mo hangin la.

Humuyo na an dagat
An langit nakadeskanso na
An habagat
Lumarabay gud la.

Pero ha sunod niya nga pag-abot,
Aton na gad pasudla.

**“Nanay, the monsoon wind has passed,” Naning’s response
to her mother after several years**

(and the author’s response to Iluminado Lucente’s
Hangin Gad La)

Nanay, I heeded your advice before
I did not allow the wind to sway me
Because it was just wind, you said
Winds from the sea—
The southwest monsoon.

But perhaps I overslept
Snored loudly
Because I did not
Hear the knocking.

Ada, here I am
Waking from slumber
Stretching
Unlocking
The window, the door
That creak open
Exhausted from stopping
What you said was just wind.

The sea has calmed down
The sky has taken some rest
The southwest monsoon
Is indeed just a passerby.

But the next time it comes,
We let it in.

Flores de Mayo

*Gitatam-isi nga Birhen
Ha langit kalipayan
Inin bukad nga halad namon
Hin maluluy-on karawton.*

An sul-ot kay an gibubusagi nga bestida
Diri puyde nga may iba nga kolores
Kay magiisog hi Ma'am Ibi
Makukutlig ka gud.

*Malipayon an kalibutan
Han hingpit mo nga pagtabang
An adlaw ginrayandayanan
Han mga bukad han Mayo
Pareho han kapatagan
Maglarab an kakahuyan
Mga tanom nga bulawanon
Makawiwili nga tanaman.*

Ayaw paghinulat hit bagtingon
Pag-abot hit alas tres,
hunong na kamo hit nga turumbalata.
Panguha na hin bukad nga iharalad.
Panarit naman anay kamo ha tag-iya.
Pero ayaw gud han orkidya ni imo Nanay Nina!
(Kay nasiring an gihuhusayi nga bukad an angay
kan Birhen Maria)
Ayaw liwat ha bougainvillea
kay matunok.
An santan nala,
pero paghirot la
ha tubak.

*Aton pasalamatan
Hamili nga kapalaran
Ipasangyaw an himaya
Han diyosnon nga tag-iya
Hasmin, azucenas, claveres ug mga hiyas
Halad namon igpakatakos
Dinhi hini'n im mga kamot.*

Kahuman mapuno an basket hin bukad,
paglabar na.
Isul-ot an busag nga bestida,
an belo, ngan an paha han Lourdes
Nga an kolor sugad han langit.

Adto, nagripiki na!
Ayaw na paglinibang-libang.
Kay nahulat na hira imo Apoy Liyang.

Kun adto na ha simbahan,
Upaya iyo kalingkod.
Ayaw sige hin hilud-hilod
Nga sugad hin mga ulod.

Sabat naman kanda imo Apoy Wanang
Ha pangadi ngan panganta.
Ngan kita ha mata ni Maria
kun nahalad ka na ha iya.

*Ipakita an kasaliyaya
Han pagpalarab han gugma
Karawton hin maalayhon
Han Birhen Maria
An kalag ko Señora
Makaluluoy waray sama
Hin marig-on pasariga
Han puroy-anan mo sakupa.*

Nanay, diri na gad ada iton
mauba hi Maria.
Damo naman adto ka-Mayo
nga sige am saburak ha iya.
(Ambot ngani kun nalipay adto hiya)

Makaluluoy na gad an kasantanan
Ngan iba na nga panripiki
an akon nahibabatian.
Himaya nga nasakup
han dughan, han kalibutan.
Ngan utro liwat
Gitatam-isi.

Flores de Mayo

*Sweetest Virgin Mary,
Heaven's grace
These flowers we offer
Please have mercy and accept them.*

What is worn is the whitest dress
Any other color is prohibited
Ma'am Ibi won't approve if you wear a different color—
She might pinch you if you do.

*The world rejoices
In your great mercy
The day is adorned
By May flowers
Like plains
Forests ablaze
Golden plants
Lovely fields.*

Do not wait for the bells to ring
Once the clock strikes three in the afternoon,
enough with *turumbalata*.
Pick flowers to offer.
But seek permission from the owners first.
And never the orchids of Nanay Nina!
(But I thought only the most beautiful flowers for
Virgin Mary)
And not the bougainvillea
because of its thorns.
Pick the *santan* instead,
but be careful
with the ants.

*We thank you
Precious fate
Spread the glory
Of the divine creator
Jazmin, azucenas, claveres and other gems
Our offering, please accept.*

After the basket is filled with flowers,
go wash up.
Wear the white dress,
the veil, and the Lourdes belt with the color same as the sky's.

There, the bells are clanging!
Hurry up.
Because your Apoy Liyang is waiting.

At church,
Sit properly.
Stop wriggling
Like worms.

Join Apoy Wanang
In praying and singing.
And look at Mary's eyes
when you offer her the flowers.

*Show the splendor
Of blazing love
Received with joy
By the Virgin Mary
My piteous soul, Señora
Give it strength
Enliven it with your grace.*

Mother, perhaps
Maria will not mind anymore.
I spent many Mays
offering flowers to her.
(And we do not even know if it pleased her.)

I pity the *santan* flowers
And I hear
a different kind of ringing.
Glory that conquers
the heart, the world.
That is also
the sweetest.

Kun hi Layong Uray waray ginhimos

An istorya han kalagsan
 Hiya daw an pinakamatahum
 Nga ira nahikit-an
 Hadto nga panahon—

Gibubusagi
 Gihahamisi
 An panit
 Nga sugad hin pinanitan
 Nga bilanghoy.
 Ha iya kabusag
 Makikit-an ha iya liog
 An tubig
 Di ngani pagkaon
 Nga iya tinutulon.

An ira tahap
 Diri daw hiya
 Sugad ha aton.
 Usa daw hiya
 Nga digkusanon.
 Nahiag-an
 Ha usa nga sapa
 Didto dapit
 Ha tago nga parte
 Han Cansumangkay.

Ginhimos
 Ginhirutan
 Waray pasiraki.
 Gin-algan
 Hin tubig
 Tikang didto
 Hit nga sapa
 Kay an iya panit
 Asya gud
 An pili.

Pero siguro
 Tungod na liwat ada
 Han iya katahum
 Han pagrangat
 Han iya panit
 Han iya bulaw nga buhok
 Hiya in nahikit-an la gihap
 Han mga Moros.
 Ngan hiya kinawat
 Gin-angkon
 Ngan utro liwat
 Ginhimos.

Pero ano daw la adto
An mahinanabo
Kun hi Layong Uray
Waray ginhimos?

An ulitawohay nga sige
 An pagbinantayon
 An paghiniling-hiling
 Ha ira bungsaran
 In waray gud nahimo.
 Sugad ha iba
 Nga mulupyo
 Nahulat, naantos
 Nalaum
 Nga usa ka-adlaw
 Bumalik
 an kan
 Layong Uray
 Katahum
 Ngan
 Gahum.

If Layong Uray was not kept

According to the elders
 She was the most beautiful woman
 They had ever seen
 During that time—

The fairest
 The most flawless
 Her skin
 As white as
 Peeled cassava.
 Her skin was so fair
 That you could see
 The water
 Or food
 That she swallowed.

Their theory:
 She was not like
 The rest of us.
 She was a
 Supernatural being.
 Found
 In a lake
 There
 In that hidden part
 Of Cansumangkay.

Kept
 Sheltered
 Protected from the sun.
 The water she used to bathe
 Was fetched
 From that lake
 Because her skin
 Preferred it.

But perhaps
Due to
Her extreme beauty
The glow
Of her skin
Of her golden hair
She was still seen
By the Moros.
And stolen
Owned
And again
Kept.

*But what
Could have happened
If Layong Uray
Was not kept?*

The young man who kept
On waiting
On looking
At their yard
Could not do anything.
Like the other
Residents
He waits, persists
Hopes
That one day
Layong Uray's
Beauty
and
Power
Return.

Masapnot man ngay-an it tuba nga diri pa bahal

Para kan William Butler Yeats nga nagsurat han A Drinking Song

Masapara.

Mabilin

an rasa

han larog.

Maalop

ha im utok

an iya kahimo.

Masangko

ha im talinga

an iya baton—

“Diri pa asya an higayon.”

Maraug-daog.

Pero tutulnon mo

an tuba

hasta dumangat

ha imo dughan

nga nadalugdog.

Tuba that is coarse to the palate

For William Butler Yeats who wrote A Drinking Song

Rough.
The aftertaste
lingers.

It will remain
on your brain
his face.

They will stop
in your ears
his words—
“The time is not right.”

Cruel.
But you swallow
the *tuba*
until it reaches
the thunderstorm that is your heart.