

Meminero *(I Will Remember)*

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Tonight by the shore

Tonight, I learned that not every wave arrives with thunder. Some merely touch the shore as if to ask permission before dissolving. Because the sea, that old mourner, doesn't shout your name anymore. However, there's a bend in its silence where I almost hear it. Driftwood comes back, never whole, and still, I call it returning. There is no promise in the salt, only persistence. For even the smallest swell carries the weight of moonlight.

Tonight, I no longer search the horizon for your shape. I watch instead how light leans into water, again and again, without asking to be held.

Laundering

For a long time, I kept your shirt folded. Its sleeves still bent the way you left them; the fabric clinging to the hollow of you. I just let the dust settle. I just let silence find its weight in the cloth.

But today, I lower it into water and the cotton surrenders. The water becomes darker—and even, heavier. I do not scrub and I do not press it. I let the water take what it will instead.

For there is a grief I do not clean away. I just carry it differently. Because believe me, your name no longer burns on my tongue. It just hums quieter now, almost like prayer.

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Earlier at PSA Gaisano South

I lined up for nearly three hours before the clerk handed it to me: the record of my beginning. My mother's name is still written in careful letters. And then the line for father, still empty and waiting.

I knew him once. Not the way you know a river. But like the flash of a match—bright, hot, and already burning out. I remember the sound of his boots in the hallway. The way the door learned to close itself. I also learned, even then, that a hand can be given only halfway. That a voice can leave no echo. For there are stories he never stayed long enough to tell. There are questions he wore like a second skin, unspoken and unshed.

Now, what I know of him thins even in memory. I will not carry him like a wound. I will not leave the pages of others empty. Let him be the ghost that taught me *what it is to remain*.

Carrying

I once was cradled in the hollow
of a smile too vast to fill
now, with bristling limbs and hollowed chest,
I wade through days like fog,
soft with wonder,
hard with time.
The teeth I've sharpened,
wish to gnaw on softness—
a hunger for the breast of memory,
but instead I sip from the cup
of weight and reason,
and still am clumsy
in my grown-up feet.
In boardrooms, I bury my cries
under the weight of briefcases,
the diapers of adulthood thickened with expectations.
I struggle with the milk of maturity,
gagging on the spoons
that feed me tired words—
the alphabet of the world
sharp, angular,
but I taste nothing
but the want to be held again.
I wear this suit
like a blanket too heavy
for my frame,
and the world, a playpen
I cannot escape,
keeps me pacified with its bright lights
and harsh hands.
But when night breaks,
and I cradle myself

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in the soft dark,
I still hear
the lullaby of all things undone,
and find, perhaps,
that in my grown-up skin,
there still rests a child,
small and trembling,
waiting for the soft reassurance
that comes
when the world is less real
and the arms of sleep
hold tighter
than the world ever could.

Mark Aiden Arcenal, or known for his byline, Aiden Arsèn, is the author of the chapbook "Walay Bayot Sa Langit." He bagged third prize in the 2025 Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature for his essay "Autoethnography of a Hermit Crab." He also received the Graphic Salute Award by the Philippines Graphic during the 2025 Nick Joaquin Literary Awards. Additionally, he is a member of the BATHALAD, the oldest literary community in Cebu, and the Sunday Club, where he was awarded the Omar Khalid Literary Award during its national writers' workshop in 2023. In June 2023, he was also awarded the Don Vicente Rama Memorial Literary Prize conferred by the Cebu City Government. He currently serves as the research coordinator of the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center Research Institute, and a member of the Institutional Review Board of the Southwestern University—PHINMA. His works have appeared in various local and international periodicals, including Philippines Graphic, Bisaya Magasin, PhilStar, Sunstar, Rappler, SuperBalita, Dagmay, TLDTD, Katitikan, Mountain Beacon, and Canada's Queen's Quarterly, among others.