

Breaking/Not Breaking

Mark Dimaisip

I spent my childhood mirroring my favourite sibling. Titas call her *di makabasag pinggan*, literally cannot break a plate. She sips in between mouthfuls. Napkin before the next bite. Never talks while her mouth is full. After dinner we would lock up & she would doll me up just like her. Round lips. Button nose. Porcelain skin. I was her canvas. Once, she showed me a school uniform breast pocket, plucked from the playground bully. Once, a fistful of short brown hair, a keepsake from her latest win. Once, a pencil with dark red coating its lead. She's neat, pressed & tucked. But also fire. Also rain. Also blood.

When she came home with broken fingernails & mauled arms, her room turned into stray pets, dirty clothes, rotten food. Hard to differentiate what is cat piss & what's not. Clenched fists. Nails burrowing palms. No fire. No rain. Just blood. Most days her only noise is rocking from side to side. But some mornings, she shakes the neighbourhood like thunder. When she roams, she moves the vases, the bowls, the pitchers, halfway over the edge of tables, shelves & desks, leaving them breaking/not breaking. When titas follow her around to reposition everything she touched, there is an outpouring of crystal debris.

Every few months, I drop by. Sometimes, she would bathe if she knew I was coming. Sometimes, she waits for me to call her *mabaho* first. But sometimes, the sky swells into the colour of dreams. One sunset, backs on the floor, both neat, pressed & tucked, she reached for the sunbeam that slid through the makeshift walls. I mirrored her. Trying to catch light. Asked if she wanted to stare at the heavens like we did as kids. If we could race again to see who would sneeze the most. We stood up. Shaking the dust. Watching the light gathered in our palms slide back to the floor, out the window & up to the sky.

Mark Dimaisip is a Filipino writer from Manila. His works have appeared in *The Brasilia Review*, *Cha*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *harana poetry*, *Human Parts*, *QLRS*, *Radon Journal*, *Strange Horizons* and elsewhere. He has performed for poetry slams and literary festivals in Southeast Asia and Australia. More information at <https://markdimaisip.carrd.co/>.