

American Dream

By Kezia Brechtoldt

Maybe I want to become something someday

Not so awkward, unsure –
as I raise my hand to speak
fingers stirring nervous waves through cold, unfriendly space
regret translates as heated skin, sweat on palms

Huwag na sabi, nakakahiya

Magiging ulol ka na umutal-utal

Words rush out in clipped vowels, harsh consonants

“Speak up,” teacher says, “I can’t hear you.”

Thoughts that march confident strides within my mind,
now stumble out my mouth through a trembling, tangled tongue
as halting Tag-lish runs commentary in response,

Sabi ko na nga ba! Next time, huwag ka nang lang magsalita

Maybe I want to buy lunch one day
sink my teeth into greasy french fries,
side salad drenched in creamy white ranch dressing,
hamburger, cheeseburger, chicken nuggets

Instead, today’s lunch special

includes, but is not limited to

whispers of “What the hell is that smell?”

kare-kare, pancit, sinigang, lumpia, adobo, pinapaitan,

wafting eloquent from the lunch room microwave

all my cultural quirks in all their quiet glory

packed inside my mother’s yellow Tupperware

Maybe I want to live without
that constant hope that

today’s the day

I say the right word

speak a straight sentence

look directly into my boss’s eyes

and call him “Joe”
without feeling the need to call him “Sir”

Maybe I want to feel like I could be
that American woman standing next to me
in her chic Prada handbag
delicate Manolo Blahnik high heels
intentionally-frayed Citizens of Humanity blouse
and trendy True Religion jeans

Instead of this preening pretense
in a crisply-tailored work suit,
faux leather purse,
heavy, thick-soled shoes
and perfectly pressed and repressed white cotton shirt

Maybe today’s the day
I won’t feel so strange
dis-
jointed
so un-United

Maybe I want to become that Dream
someday