

While the Wind is in Your Face

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North Texas, April 12, 2007

The patio still smells faintly
of sawdust and adhesive.

Inside the house
the carpet lies in tired rolls
like something we peeled off the day.
Your knees are dusty,
mine worse.

The new hardwood waits in neat stacks
by the wall—
maple the color of late afternoon.

You said it was cheaper
if we did it ourselves.

Two bottles sweat
on the small iron table.
The sky over the subdivision
is wide in that Texas way,
light draining slowly
behind the rooftops.

You open your beer
with the edge of the railing
like you've done it all your life.

We don't talk at first.
We sit there
with the quiet of men
who have already said plenty
with their hands.

Later
you ask me
about work—
about ambition,
about what it costs
to build a life.

You look at the house
as if it might answer.

I take my time.
The cicadas have started.
A neighbor's dog barks
at nothing in particular.

Finally you say,

Anak,

'dim koma pilien
ti biag nga pakabaludam

I nod
but not too quickly.
I was always careful
with advice.

The porch light flickers on
without asking.

Years later
the house feels larger than it should.

Rooms echo differently
when half the furniture is gone.

The hardwood floors—
the ones we laid together—
have small dents
where ladders once stood,
where a couch dragged
during an argument
no one won.

Your chair on the patio
is empty now.

I keep it there
like an unfinished sentence.

Work went sideways.
Then sideways again.

Titles shrank.
Offices lost windows.
Paychecks came
with explanations.

The mortgage sits
on the kitchen counter
like an unpaid dare.

Some days
I walk through the house
touching the floorboards
as if they might remember
your hands.

But there is another memory
that refuses
to stay quiet.

Philippines.

Morning light
still thin and blue
over the rice fields.

My brothers and I
had become obsessed
with mountain bikes—
steel frames
patched together
from whatever money
I could scrape up:

honorarium pay,
t-shirts sold after services,
the repair work
I did in your makeshift garage.

I bought bikes for my brothers
one piece at a time.

You watched us
like a man
studying a language
he might still learn.

Then one day
you came home
with a bike of your own.

We laughed at first.
You laughed louder.

One Saturday
we pushed our bikes
halfway up Mt. Namamparang.

No one rides that steep uphill portion—
that's suicide.

Asphalt looked like a void
we all might fall in to.
The sun climbed steadily.
Somewhere below us
a rooster argued with the morning.

At the ridge
we lined up.

The rules were simple:
ride down the mountain
and see who goes the farthest
once the road goes flat.

We launched together.

The sound of tires
swishing through air.
Our shouting
scattering birds from the trees.

Gravity took hold.

Wind filled our shirts
like sails.

Halfway down
I turned my head
to check on you—

and there you were.

Crouched low
over the saddle.

Butt hanging over the rear wheel,
Thighs tucked-in close to your body,
feet locked to the pedals.

Both arms stretched
gripping the handlebars
like a trapeze artist
grips his fly bar.

And you were screaming—
not in fear
but in the wild, ridiculous joy
of someone
who had decided
the mountain could have him
if it wanted.

You sounded
exactly like your sons.

Even now
that image returns
without warning.

The house quiet,
the bills waiting,
the world pressing close—

and suddenly
I'm back on that mountain,

watching my father
let go of everything.

Somewhere
between the patio in Texas

and the asphalt of Namamparang
I begin to understand
what you meant.

Not as advice.
Not as philosophy.

Just the shape
of a man
leaning into speed.

A lesson
in how to live
while the wind is in your face.