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Seraphina

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Seraphina

Her bathrobe is loosely tied around her waist, while the sun is stuck in the dry ocean of her throat. Why can't she scream? *Jesus no love screamers, if you love Jesus you no scream* Ninang Nitta would hiss as she prayed her rosary every morning, afternoon, evening, and in her dreams. Screw Jesus. Mary too. Maybe a shower would help. Ninang Nitta would make her a bath and say that happy spirits like to swim. Seraphina Marlon can't afford a bathtub so this little three by three shower will have to do. She slips off her robe, a robe filled with the scent of Ninang's climbing orchids, her homemade cigars, and her coconut oil hair. In the canyons of its surface lie miniscule mountains of her home soil where bright girls like her marry successful young men, grow babies in their backyard, and don't become accountants who move to the cement diseased city. Seattle. Cold. It's cold in here. But anger keeps her warm. Feet brown, step on to the tiled floor, and they wheeze like an old man's emphysema lung because they've been running. From her? From Ninang? *If you going leave, no stay by the white guys. Japanee men eat with their eyes that's why they skinny and Filipino men kiss with words that's why they get plenty money, but white men feed their hands, kiss their food, and polish their skin in the morning.* Yes, they must be running from him. She turns the pipe handle; the faucet vomits. It's cold like those false rays from his staring hazel eyes. The water soaks her straight black hair and combs in a blonde rainbow. It chills her bare thigh under that business skirt.

"Good morning Seraphina," the voice of the boss-man would say.

No no, not Seraphina, too Filipino like coconut milk, pink and brown shoes, and balloon puffed yellow sleeves. Not Seraphina. Not Seraphina Marlon. Sera. Sara. Sara Maron, Dreighton & Associates, Accounting Department.

"Good work Seraphina."

Sara.

"You look beautiful today Seraphina."

Sara.

Warm water licks Sara's bare skin. Why can't it eat her skin away? Brown skin, it's all brown. Brown like the dust in her baby hair, brown chocolate bark of the mango tree, brown dirt on Ninang's hands, brown dirt faced Seraphina. She scrubs and scrubs her brown body clean.

"I love you Seraphina," the boss lover-man tells her.

She scrubs and scrubs, scrubbing and scrubbing like a rock scrubbing itself until it would become a feather of sand. She presses the sponge to her skin, as if cleanliness is her life's one true calling. She remembers scrubbing Ninang's face after eating pancit with her under the calamungay tree, where she and Ninang would stick the noodles between their teeth gaps and spit them on each other's black tanned faces. Ninang. Ninang with the black brown shinning orchid face who on her deathbed calls *Seraphina*, a little girl in a woman's body who left one life in exchange for another one an ocean, a continent, and a world away. The child woman is making clouds now. Clouds of suds build; white on the body.

"You would look so much lovelier if you got rid of that gap in your teeth," the

boss-lover said one day after coffee.

Sara scrubs and scrubs.

"How pretty you look, such a lovely smile."

She scrubs until she can scrub no longer, when the suds cover the brown perfection and stick to the sweet air of her body. Sara turns off the water and stands in the robe of suds in her shower; the place that is hers and hers alone, where her spirit tries to swim, but drowns in soap. It is her shower. She hears the voice of her boss, her lover, her American man calling, "Sara. Hon? Are you out of the shower yet? It's getting late." Sera wonders what Ninang would say. *White men, so stupid. If I had three wishes I would wish to be a tall woman with balls and a large dick, larger than any other dick in the world, so I could rape all of their asses.* Sera wants to laugh at her boss at herself and at the words that Ninang would never say, but her little body smothered under the icing of her own cleanliness cannot pray for a single word or sound. Jesus help. She turns on the water and rinses off the white shell. Seraphina brown, wet, running fills her lungs with a scream that bursts the seams of her body as she gracefully swims into the colorless, tasteless, and blind ditch of her lover's white hand, where she believes expensive wine tastes better, money is the reason for living, white is her favorite color, and her legs are her greatest asset.

—Jenny Silva '02