

UNIT 3

REPRESENTING THE FILIPINO FAMILY

The family is a universal social group that is significant in an individual's social life. Much of our concerns and activities are spent on networks of family interaction. In fact, we have consequently developed fundamental beliefs, systems and generalizations about life and humanity because of our daily dealings and experiences with other members of the family. Life's first lessons, rites of passage, and social and emotional awakenings are virtually experienced because of familiar networks. This explains why it is still regarded as the fundamental social unit in Philippine society.

However, certain phenomena in Philippine society have dramatically affected and problematized our traditional concepts about the Filipino family. Among these are:

- a. the influx of new perceptions and values interrogating traditional gender roles and patterns of authority;
- b. the rise of modernization challenging the strength of family and kinship ties;
- c. the development of existing alternative lifestyles among single parents, homosexuals, unmarried couples, and other individuals;
- d. the growth of diaspora, migration, and intercultural marriages;
- e. the evidence of dysfunctional and broken families.

Because of these trends, the family, which serves as the microcosm of Philippine society, is once again at the center of social discourse. Does the Filipino family still play a critical role in the religious, social, political, and economic formation of the people? Do we see the family performing an important function in the transmission of values and the molding of the character of its members in the age of information technology/mechanical reproduction?

The five selections under this theme “Representing the Filipino Family” present multivalent vestiges of the family from different and differing locations and perspectives. National Artist Rolando Tinio’s “Claudia and Her Mother” proves the uncanny but tragic relationship between an obedient daughter and her domineering mother. “Breaking Through” by Myrna Pena Reyes, foregrounds the reminiscences of a daughter about her distant father while opening a gift. Focusing on the “silences and gaps” – issues that families deem not to discuss openly – are the main themes of National Artist Francisco Arcellana’s “Mats” and Merlinda Bobis’s “The Sadness Collector.” The former, by spreading the mats to ascertain “no longer present” members of the family; the latter, by the tale of the Big Lady who feasts on scraps and mounds of sadness to save a troubled child. Finally, we encounter “Bringing the Dolls” by Merlie Alunan, highlighting a child’s insistence in holding on to her toys as a metaphor for keeping memories alive which grown-ups and parents would prefer to forget.

Through the timely issues embedded in the selections which surmount the Filipino family, we may see and contextualize the family as a representation of the macro-social organization of Philippine society. Almost all our activities in the community from business to religion, and from politics to aesthetics, have been invariably “familial” in scope. This means that despite modernization and its adverse effects, family ties and traditional values may still be observed and upheld over the long haul.

CLAUDIA AND HER MOTHER

Rolando Tinio

The Characters:

Nora - about 30, a sophisticated career woman.

The Mother - about 62 years old, a woman of the previous generation.

Ed Pasion - about 30, a journalist and man-about town.

Time: The early sixties.

The scene is a room on the ground floor of an old house in a no-longer-fashionable district such as San Juan or Paco. Down right is a narrow entrance with a flight of steps connecting the room to the rest of the house. Above it is an old-style steel bed set against the wall and running across the stage. The bed is dressed with crocheted lacy curtains and a bedspread. On the up-staged wall, extreme right, there is a hanging altar of the Sacred Heart with votive candles and silver paper flowers. To its left is a door leading to the bathroom hung with a lacy curtain, also crocheted. At center is a large brown aparador with suitcases piled on top. To its left is another curtained door which opens to the kitchenette. Against the wall upstage left is an old straight piano with a brown cover and a crocheted runner on top. There are pictures on the wall above as well as on top of the piano: a girl in a white dress with a light blue sash, obviously a devotee of Lourdes; a girl seated before a grand piano, wearing a terno with a pañuelo and surrounded by caskets of flowers, obviously a graduated recitalist; a family picture; a close-up of the girl in long braids; diplomas. From upstage left downward are windows with capiz shells hung with lacy curtains, also crocheted. At down left is a small door leading outside by four steps. Below the piano is a round table with a crocheted cover and some bric-a-brac, as well as a vase with withering gardenias. There are two straight-backed Vienna chairs with crocheted coverlets. There is a large shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling above the main table. Downstage center, facing stage left, is a Vienna rocking chair that squeaks. Behind it, to its left, is a floor lamp. To its right are small round table with the telephone, a rack for magazines and a wickerbasket for crocheting materials. The room looked very much lived in.

A stormy evening: strong winds and heavy rain. The room is dark when the curtain rises. A few moments later, loud knocking is heard at the door down left. Also a woman's voice calling out "Claud." The knocking and the voice are heard

three or four more times before the door opens and the woman enters, hardly visible. She remains near the door. Afraid to move about, she calls out softly "Claud... Claud... It's me Claud..." Shortly afterwards, a perfunctory knocking at the same door and a man's voice: "Nora, are you in there?" The woman opens the door for him and he enters.

ED: No lights?

NORA [*peevied*]: Can't you see?

ED: I'm all wet.

NORA [*produces a lighter from her handbag*]: Here find the switch.

ED [*flicks the lighter*]: Isn't Claud around? [*bumps into a chair*]

NORA [*silently*]: Careful.

[*Ed whistles as he moves across the room, the light goes out. Ed screams.*]

NORA [*screeching*]: What happened?

ED [*flicks the switch; and the Sacred Heart lights up*]: Good Evening, Mrs. Henderson.

NORA [*fuming*]: Very funny. [*Turns on another switch. The lamp above the table lights up.*]

ED [*approaches her*]: Help you with your coat?

NORA [*undoes her bandanna*]: Drop dead.

[*Ed undoes his shirt.*]

NORA [*taking off her raincoat*]: What do you think you're doing? [*Hangs it on a chair with the bandanna*]

ED [*hangs his shirt on a chair*]: I'm soaking wet, do you mind?

NORA [*sternly*]: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

ED [*gazing at the room*] Man, oh man. [*Giggles.*] Man, oh man. [*Smells the withered gardenias and snorts.*] Look at that bed. [*Crosses and fingers the curtains.*] God, I'd go nuts. You sure we're in the right place? [*scanning the pictures on top of the piano*] See these?

NORA [*peevied*]: Stop it, darling.

[*Ed gives another horselaugh.*]

NORA [*sharply*]: I said, stop it.

[*The rain stops.*]

NORA [*very cross*]: Where are the boxes?

[*Ed is still at the pictures.*]

NORA: Where did you park?

ED: Outside. You said, outside. So, outside.

NORA: Please get the boxes.

ED [*finding a note on top of the piano*]: Hey, Hey!

NORA [*snapping*]: Stop poking around.

ED: It's for you.

[*Nora grabs the note and reads, and throws it on the table exasperatedly.*]

ED: Talk to Mama about what?

NORA: Do get the boxes, darling.

ED: That's what the note says, dear. "Talk to Mama." Where's Claud? Where's Mama?

NORA: Guess.

ED: I don't know.

NORA: Join the club.

ED: I thought Claud rang you up? Nobody's around.

NORA: Tremendous insight.

ED: But the note—

NORA [*screaming*]: For the last time, darling. Are you or aren't you going to get those boxes?

ED [*smiling*]: Sure. But do you have to snap?

NORA [*furiously*]: I broke a dinner engagement with my sponsor. Do you realize that?

ED [*stiffly*]: Mrs. Henderson. I have an article to finish tonight and I could get fired tomorrow if I don't deliver. And I don't even know your lady friend.

[*Nora walks slowly to the bed and sits.*]

[*Ed opens the piano and plays with the keys with one finger.*]

[*Pause. The rain potters lightly.*]

NORA [*quietly*]: Sorry, Ed. I think you're right. I need to get away for a while.

ED [*seriously*]: Don't you like your work?

NORA: That's just it, I do. But it's all those people who just stand around at the studio, and I have to sit on everyone to get anything done for the shows. Day in and day out, it's the same stupid routine. I'm getting sick and tired of it. God, I'm sick and tired.

ED [*finds another note on the table*]: Hey, another one. No, it looks like a laundry list.

NORA [*very tired*]: Don't mess with it.

ED [*reading aloud*]: "Gold chiffon dress, yellow shoes, yellow gloves, emerald necklace—" Do you send necklaces to the laundry?

NORA: Darling, please don't poke around anymore. This isn't Bloomington anymore, you know. Claud might not like the idea.

ED [*brightly*]: Hey, wasn't that the dress she wore in what's the revue where she got dunked in a swimming pool?

NORA [*suddenly concerned*]: Let me see that.

ED [*crosses to her with the note*]: I have those things in the boxes. [*finds another note on the bed*] Want to hear this one?

NORA [*worried*]: I wonder what's up?

ED [*read aloud*]: "Hello. Be around."

NORA [*Thinking hard*]: Be around?

ED [*shrugging his shoulders*]: Be around.

NORA [*visibly frightened*]: Any more notes around?

[*Ed looks high and low, obviously having fun*]

NORA [*sighing in exasperation*]: I give up. She told me to go right in through the back door. Of course, that was yesterday. I had work last night, I told her. I thought she'd be expecting me tonight. [*angrily*] What I can't understand is why she came back before she got her degree. She had only a couple of months to go. It's so stupid.

ED: Well you know Claud. She's always being goddamn mysterious. She thinks it's simply so dramatic. Remember that weekend when she took off for Chicago with a classmate without warning any of us? Just before I left IU, there was this musical where she was second lead and she didn't come in opening night until a few minutes before curtains. She was having you know what, she said. And she made it a point to collapse after the curtain call.

NORA: Yeah, she wrote me about that.

ED [*seriously*]: You know, Nora... I mean frankly speaking. I wonder if she isn't a bit—

NORA [*amused*]: Oh, come on, Ed.

ED [*with grave concern*]: I don't think she knows whether she's coming or going.

NORA [*more amused*]: Don't be silly.

ED [*laughing*]: Of course, you must admit it, whether she is coming or going she leaves a trail of notes behind her. The last Christmas I was there...after you left...I got to the apartment while she was still in church, and there were cards all over the place saying where the sandwiches were and what to do if the radiator started making a racket. Except I couldn't find the screwdriver that was supposed to be on top of the bureau. You know where it was? In the freezer. I was looking for the beer...which was in the crisper, naturally. [*pause*] Do you think there's some beer stashed away somewhere.

NORA: Ed, please.

ED [*starts to giggle*]: The piano. That's where she used to keep the beer. One time, there were a few of us from the fiction workshop, and she couldn't find the beer until we asked to play Polonaise Militaire. There it was right on the first chord.

[*Pause, the rain stops.*]

NORA [*scared*]: This place, sort of gets to you. [*Paces around seriously*]

ED [*discovers the wickerbasket near the waste basket*] Look... home economics homework.

NORA [*looking at the wall above the piano; whispering*] Ed, look here.

ED: Another one?

NORA: Intercom, I think.

ED: How cozy.

NORA: No buttons.

ED: You mean it's on all the time?

NORA [*getting agitated*]: I don't know.

ED [*lightly*]: You mean they are spying on us all the time?

NORA: Don't be silly!

ED [*putting his mouth against the speaker*]: Hello there!

NORA: Are you crazy?

ED [*giddily*]: Advance to be recognized!

NORA: Stop it, Ed.

ED: I think it's dead. [*tries again*] Merry Christmas!

NORA: You're making me nervous.

ED: Happy New Year!

NORA [*trying hard not to shout*]: Ed, be charming and get the boxes so we can go.

ED: We haven't seen Claud.

NORA: Some other time.

ED: Look, why don't we try upstairs.

NORA: She'll kill us.

ED: How do you know she isn't up watching TV?

NORA: We'll leave the boxes and go.

ED: "Talk to mama"—that's what the note said.

NORA: I don't want to talk to Mama.

ED: The notes.

NORA [*losing her temper*]: Ed, please get the boxes. I don't want to talk to anybody. Get the boxes. I'll leave a note and we can go. [*Gently.*] Do you have a pen?

ED: No.

NORA: Help me find one.

ED: Sure [*Looks around*].

NORA: No, get the boxes. I'll find a pen.

[*Ed exits. Nora looks for a pen in vain. Finally, she searches in her handbag. She shrugs her shoulders. She picks up a cigarette, looks for her lighter and finds it on the table. She sits there, getting nervous by the moment. She mutters to herself, probably something like "Crazy kid, crazy." In a moment, an old woman's voice is heard through the intercom. Nora steels herself. The rain pours heavily.*]

VOICE [*gently*]: Claudia... Claudia. Hija. Your uncle kept waiting for you, hija. What happened to you? Did you lose your way? Claudia, please talk to me, Hija. I will not disturb you if you tell me what happened. We were so worried about you. Your uncle especially, you know how he is. Claudia, can I come down to your room? Hija...

NORA: Mrs. Cruz.

VOICE: Who are you? Where is Claudia?

NORA: Good evening, Mrs. Cruz.

VOICE [*sharply*]: Who are you? What do you want?

NORA: I'm Nora, Mrs. Cruz.

VOICE: Nora?

NORA: I'm a friend of your daughter.

VOICE: Nora...yes...

NORA: We were in college together.

VOICE: Yes.

NORA: Don't you remember?

VOICE: Yes.

NORA: Claud called up yesterday. I couldn't make it last night because of work. I assumed she'd be here. I have some packages for her. Ed is getting them now. Ed was also with us in Bloomington. Shall I leave the packages here, or do you want them upstairs? They're not very large. There's some dresses... costumes actually... and some personal stuff... Claud was mailing them to me, I think, so you wouldn't have to go to all the trouble at the post office. I have a cousin who works there. .

THE MOTHER [*at the foot of the stairs*]: Do you need anything from me?

NORA [*rising, very much startled*]: Oh, good evening ma'am.

THE MOTHER: What do you want?

NORA: I came to see Claud.

THE MOTHER [*with clear though quiet hostility*]: My daughter is not here.

NORA: Yes, I know. She left notes-

THE MOTHER: She went to America in 1962.

NORA: Of course.

THE MOTHER: I'm not sure when she will finish her studies.

NORA: How's that again?

THE MOTHER: Probably at the end of the year.

NORA: That's what I thought.

THE MOTHER: Your house is probably far from here. I am sorry for the trouble-

NORA: Mrs. Cruz. I'll just wait for Claud, I mean, don't let me get in your way.

THE MOTHER: Claudia went to America-

NORA: Mrs. Cruz, she called me up yesterday morning.

THE MOTHER: Our telephone is out of order.

NORA: She asked me to come over last night.

THE MOTHER [*Exasperated.*]: Claudia is not here, Nora.

NORA: But, Mrs. Cruz-

THE MOTHER [*almost shouting*]: I don't know where she went.

NORA: Oh... I'm afraid I misunderstood you.

[*Silence. The rain gradually subsides.*]

THE MOTHER [*turns on the floor lamp, sits on the rocking chair, picks up her crocheting materials and works on them, sweetly*]: My eyes are very good, you know. I have grown older in many ways, but my eyes are still the way they were when I was a little girl.

NORA: Do you have an ashtray?

THE MOTHER [*without looking at her*]: No, no. We do not smoke in the house.

NORA: I'm sorry, ma'am.

THE MOTHER: It's all right for you.

NORA [*throws the cigarette butt out off the door and remains there looking for Ed*]

THE MOTHER [*as if amused*]: You came in through that door. What did you do with the padlock?

NORA [*amused*]: Padlock?

THE MOTHER [*smiling*]: There are so many burglars in the district. That door was for my tenants. But when Claudia came back—

NORA: Why did she come back?

THE MOTHER [*very sweetly*]: What did she tell you on the telephone?

NORA: I'm sorry ma'am?

THE MOTHER [*pleasantly excited, almost gossipy*]: What did my daughter tell you on the telephone?

NORA: Nothing much. Why did she come back before the end of the term?

THE MOTHER: Did you ask her?

NORA: Yes, but—

THE MOTHER: What did she say?

NORA: Actually, I don't remember. The line was bad—

THE MOTHER [*confiding*]: She was unhappy.

NORA: She was almost through. She finished her comps last summer, and she was almost finished with her thesis.

THE MOTHER [*as if revealing a secret*]: Oh, Nora, I don't understand about those things.

NORA: Well, it's such a pity.

THE MOTHER [*lightly*]: She was unhappy.

NORA: Claud?

THE MOTHER: [*amused as by a joke*]: You call her Claud.

NORA: I don't understand.

THE MOTHER [*bubbling*]: Every time she wrote to me, she said the same thing over and over again in her letters. She did not like the food, she did not like the weather...even her classmates... She said they were very shocking. Would you like to see her letters? I have them in a scrapbook. Would you like to see them?

NORA [*quite embarrassed*]: Oh no, it's ok.

THE MOTHER: You remember Claudia, I think. Even in school here, she was not very fond of going around at night and going out with people whom she did not know very well. She has not changed, you know.

[*Pause. A momentary patter of rain, then silence*]

NORA [*carefully*]: Didn't she tell you I was with her in Bloomington?

[*The mother looks up at her for a while, apparently disturbed, then goes back to her crocheting.*]

NORA [*nervously loud*]: I was there from '59. We shared an apartment for a whole year, my last year there. After that, I went to Columbia... in New York... for my Ph.D., which I didn't bother to finish. I had the bright idea of getting married. I came back last year. [*Very gently*]. Didn't Claud tell you we shared apartment for a year?

THE MOTHER [*frantically crocheting; she speaks in spurts, stammering progressively*]: I think... I think she told me... I don't remember very well. It's so long ago. I have so many things to worry about, you see. My husband left me with the farms in the province. I have to go there all the time. It's very difficult for me. I'm 62, you know. What do I know about farms? My father trained me to be a singer. I wonder if you have heard of my father. He conducted the most popular orchestra... symphony orchestra... in Manila during the 30s [*Pause and deep thought*]. You know, European opera companies would not come here unless their contract said it was my father who would conduct for them. I was a singer too. I studied in Italy for years and I sang all over Europe.

NORA [*brusquely*]: Were you any good?

THE MOTHER: I sang in Milan and Budapest.

NORA: I said, were you any good?

THE MOTHER [*blustering*]: Of course, I gave up my career when I got married in 1939. My husband was a real gentleman of the old school. He did not want to permit his wife to be watched by paying customers. I'm very modern compared to him. [*Long pause.*] But Claudia took after her father. [*Long pause.*] She wants to be a piano teacher so she can stay at home all the time. My family loved to travel. My grandmother was half-Russian. But Claudia... you know... [*Long pause.*] I have to take care of her all the time. Her father spoiled her too much. And I'm not like many mothers nowadays. She's like a little girl when she is in a bad mood. [*long pause*]. She sits down by the window and she is very still. She isn't crying... no... But she is very quiet. [*Long pause*] It's very funny... [*Looks away, in a deep thought*]

[*Long silence*]

NORA [*carefully*]: Was there any special reason why she came home?

THE MOTHER [*snapping*]: I have told you.

NORA: It doesn't make sense to me—

THE MOTHER [*flaring up*]: What sense?

NORA: Well, I mean—

THE MOTHER [*threatening*]: What do you know about my daughter?

NORA: I'm sorry if—

THE MOTHER [*seething with anger*]: What are you trying to do?

NORA [*firmly but kindly*]: Mrs. Cruz, you forget that I lived with Claud for a whole year. I saw how talented she is. People at IU thought so, too. Most people there thought that she was the most promising material they had that year. She's so wonderful, I mean her personality. I'm sure she'd have no difficulty setting up a show here. I thought that was the reason she asked me to come last night.

THE MOTHER [*visibly stung*]: What show are you talking about?

NORA [*eagerly*]: There are great opportunities for Claud in TV.

THE MOTHER [*almost screeching*]: Television? Claudia?

NORA: Yes, of course.

THE MOTHER [*derisively*]: *Madre mia*, what can she do in television?

NORA: But Mrs. Cruz—[*stops short, realizing the situation*] Didn't Claud... [*Breaks off deliberately.*]

THE MOTHER [*slowly in sharp pontifical tone*]: She is going to Milan. She will stay there for a few months while I make arrangements about my farms. And then we are both going to Europe. She would be a concert singer, not a

piano teacher in a neighborhood like ours.

NORA [*very gently and very slowly*]: Mrs. Cruz, Claudia left the conservatory after the first semester.

THE MOTHER [*rising, controlling her agitation*]: You are wrong.

NORA: [*smiling*] I was there.

THE MOTHER: I don't believe you.

NORA [*still smiling*]: But I was there.

THE MOTHER [*with great fire*]: Why should Claudia leave the conservatory? Tell me. She studied music all her life here. She wanted to study music some more. She wants to be a piano teacher. Even when my husband was still alive—

NORA: People change their minds.

THE MOTHER [*with awesome finality*]: Not when they are left alone!

[*Nora smiles meaningfully.*]

[*Silence. Quiet rain.*]

THE MOTHER [*with calculated sweetness*]: You work in television. Didn't you say you work in the television?

NORA [*disarmed*]: Oh yes. I produce shows, I direct occasionally. It's all very exciting.

THE MOTHER: You studied that in America?

NORA [*eagerly*]: Yes.

THE MOTHER: Do you know that Claudia was going to Milan right after college?

NORA: Yes?

THE MOTHER [*with growing sarcasm*]: She said she didn't want to study Italian, and what was the use of going to all the trouble when she could go to America? Did she know you were in America before she left the Philippines?

NORA: I suppose so. We wrote each other regularly.

THE MOTHER [*disarmingly*]: Did you help her get that scholarship?

NORA: Oh, not much. I was there and I knew her. I suppose that helped a little.

THE MOTHER: You lived together for a year, you said.

NORA [*dodging the point THE MOTHER is making*]: Well...

THE MOTHER [*with quiet but very clear contempt*]: Why do you do these things?

NORA [*rising making no attempt to conceal anger*]: Mrs. Cruz, I had nothing to do—

THE MOTHER [*very sharply*]: After one semester, my daughter—

NORA [*very slowly and very sharply*]: After one semester, Claud was advised to quit. She flunked a few exams. They didn't like her technique. She not only lost the scholarship, she was asked to quit. That was all there was to it. She was asked to quit.

THE MOTHER: That's not true.

NORA: Why don't you ask her?

THE MOTHER: She would have told me.

NORA: Well...

THE MOTHER: She tells me everything.

NORA [*smiling*]: Apparently...

[*Pause.*]

THE MOTHER [*quietly predatory*]: Will you forgive me for saying this, Nora? I want to be very honest with you.

NORA [*steeling herself*]: Good.

THE MOTHER [*smiling*]: You know why Claudia never asked you to come here?

NORA [*hitting back with a patronizing air*]: Oh, it doesn't matter. I understand. She came to our place many times... and I suppose she was kind of embarrassed about this place. I understand perfectly.

THE MOTHER: I prohibited her from going around with you.

NORA [*refusing to be flustered*]: Oh? May I know why?

THE MOTHER [*jeeringly*]: I know a lot of things about you.

NORA: Really?

THE MOTHER [*almost lightly*]: The boy who killed himself... his mother is a friend of mine.

NORA [*annoyed*]: He was crazy. I didn't have anything to do with him.

THE MOTHER [*very much amused*]: Oh, I know all about you and what you did to him.

NORA [*shouting*]: I had nothing to do with him.

THE MOTHER [*still smiling*]: He killed himself.

NORA [*seething, talking between her teeth*]: Look Mrs. Cruz. You can think anything you like, there's nothing I can do about it. I'm sorry I have bothered you. I

came here to see Claud. I'll see her some other time. You can think whatever you like. Please excuse me.

THE MOTHER [*holding Nora's arm to stop her from going*]: Claud will be here soon.

NORA [*almost gasping*]: You have no right... you have no right...

THE MOTHER [*sincerely*]: I am very sorry, Nora. Please believe me.

NORA [*still angry*]: I have some packages that belong to Claud. Ed is getting them from the car. I'll leave them with you.

THE MOTHER [*desperately*]: Did she tell you where she was going tonight?

NORA [*opening the door and seeing the heavy rain*]: What's keeping that stupid Ed?

THE MOTHER [*more desperately*]: The water is coming in. Why don't you close the door? Can I get you some wine?

NORA [*screaming*]: For heaven's sake, Mrs. Cruz!

THE MOTHER: Did you say Ed? Did you say Ed!

NORA: You don't know him.

THE MOTHER: What's his last name?

NORA [*screaming*]: That idiot!

THE MOTHER [*with authority*]: You're getting wet, Nora. Close the door.

[*Nora closes the door.*]

THE MOTHER [*tenderly*]: What's his last name?

NORA [*sighing in exasperation*]: Pasion.

THE MOTHER [*smiling*]: His father was a judge?

NORA [*perfunctorily*]: Was he?

THE MOTHER [*on the verge of pleasant discovery*]: He died a year ago?

NORA [*brushing her off*]: Sure. Sure. [*Opens the door again and calls out.*] Ed! Ed!

[*Ed enters, very wet, the two boxes looking very soggy. He stands near the door for a while. Neither of the women makes any move to help him.*]

ED [*mously*]: Help.

THE MOTHER [*with great tenderness*]: Put them down on the chair, Ed. No, on the floor.

ED [*unloading his arms*]: The back windows were open. I had to dry up. I couldn't get out of the car because of the downpour.

THE MOTHER: Ed you want some wine?

ED [*as if to his own mother*]: Coffee, ma'am, if you don't mind.

THE MOTHER: Your father was my classmate in grade school... public school. He was our valedictorian. I used to see you when you were still a baby.

ED [*very much pleased*]: I didn't know.

THE MOTHER: Are you married?

ED: No...

THE MOTHER: But why?

ED: I will be... soon.

THE MOTHER: I probably know the girl.

ED: Of course.

THE MOTHER: Oh?

[*Ed looks uncomfortably with Nora*]

NORA [*sharply*]: It's me, Mrs. Cruz.

THE MOTHER [*taken aback*]: I thought you said...

NORA [*sharply*]: Yes? What did I say?

THE MOTHER [*provoked*]: Didn't you say...

ED [*tossing it off*]: Oh, she has gotten a divorce from Frank. She's working on her annulment papers.

THE MOTHER [*sincerely concerned*]: Ed... you don't know what— [*Breaks off.*]

NORA: Go ahead and say it, Mrs. Cruz.

ED [*with forced lightness*]: I think we had better dry those things. They must be soaked through. What's inside them, Nora?

NORA: Open them.

THE MOTHER: Yes, Ed. Please open them. I cannot bend down. It's my arthritis. I am more than 60, you know.

NORA: Let me do it. We must hang them out one by one. [*Opens a box.*] I'll do it myself.

THE MOTHER [*sincerely disturbed*]: Madre de Dios!

NORA [*picks up a black chiffon peignoir*]: Where do we hang it? Where do we hang it?

[*THE MOTHER looks at her coldly.*]

ED: Here, let me help—

NORA [*sharply*]: I'm okay, Ed. Sit down and drink your coffee.

ED [*sitting down*]: May I have some coffee, Mrs. Cruz? I feel cold.

[*THE MOTHER does not react.*]

NORA [*hangs up the peignoir on the rocking chair*]: Now let me give you a running account of the whole thing. This exquisite piece here was used in a racy musical revue called "Bloomington Belles." That was a little before you came, Ed. You wouldn't remember. [*Looking into the box*]. It was worn with something under it, of course. Let me see... [*Picks up a colored lace corset*]... here and... [*Picks up a bright pink strapless swimsuit*]. She didn't go swimming, no... That was the winter show, "My Heart Belongs to Santy." That you saw, Ed. [*Picks up the gold chiffon evening dress*]. Here's the dear thing. At the end of the show, they were all dunked in a swimming pool, remember? Fantastic, considering the staging limitations at IU. Hang this up, Ed.

[*Ed gets the dress and lays it over part of the round table.*]

NORA [*puts the corset and swimsuit against her*]: Lovely.. [*leaves them on one of the straight-backed chairs*]. Now, let me see... [*Picks up a multicolored leotards and tights*]. For rehearsals only. [*Dumps them on the floor*] Where's that... [*Picks up a strapless sheath in sapphire blue crepe*]. Here... *crepe de chine* for the all time cling... from "The Jordan River Revue." [*Goes towards the bed to lay it there.*]

THE MOTHER [*almost screaming*]; I've just changed the bedsheet!

NORA: Sorry. [*hangs it on the metal railing at the foot of the bed.*] I think there's another precious item there. [*Picks up a net-like negligee with spangles all over*] The last show I saw her in... I can't remember what went with it. Where are the gloves?

[*Ed opens another box.*]

NORA: Oh, there they are. Very lovely.

ED: She spent for all of these?

NORA: I don't know. Oh, here are the pictures. [*Takes out a large brown envelope*] Take a look at these. [*Gives the envelope to Ed.*]

[*Ed pulls out the pictures, lays them out on the floor and whistles once or twice.*]

NORA: Isn't that something?

ED: Man, oh, man. [*Almost sneezes.*] I think I'll have some tea instead of coffee. Do you have some tea, Mrs. Cruz?

THE MOTHER: What?

ED: May I have some tea? I'm catching a cold.

THE MOTHER: Yes, I'll get some. Excuse me. I'll get some tea.

[The mother exits by the stairs. Nora follows after, full of concern, then stops. She bites at her fingernails worriedly. Ed succeeds in sneezing. Nora sits at the piano and starts to improvise a bluesy tune. She is very sad.]

ED: Can I have a cigarette?

NORA: No smoking, darling.

ED: Silly.

NORA: And it's bad for your cold.

ED: I haven't got it yet. Haven't you got any more cigarettes?

NORA: Try my bag.

[Ed opens Nora's bag and picks up a cigarette]: Want one? *[Lights his cigarette.]*

NORA: Later, darling.

ED *[sits at the table, fingering the wet dress, now and then glancing at the pictures on the floor.]* She's a very nice old woman.

NORA *[tenderly]*: Yeah.

ED: She must be kind of lovely.

NORA: Yeah.

ED: Remember what you used to say? "The loneliest vocation is motherhood."

NORA: True enough.

ED: But there's an unmistakable air of authority about her, did you notice?

NORA *[almost tearfully]*: Was that all you noticed?

ED: Yeah, what else?

NORA: You didn't notice anything else?

ED: No.

NORA *[her voice actually quivering]*: Aren't you supposed to be a writer?

ED: What's that supposed to mean?

NORA *[stops playing the piano, turns to Ed]*: Nothing. *[Verging on tears]* I'm just sorry. I'm really, really, sorry.

ED: About what?

NORA *[forcing a smile]*: Oh, nothing. *[Resumes playing.]*

ED *[pulls up a chair so he can put up his feet, gaily thinking aloud.]* I was just

thinking... just out of the blue, I had a brilliant idea. Why not a novel? About exiles. I don't mean exiles, I mean, people who go abroad and come back and they become kind of exiles. Like me. Probably I can do it as a series of letters. Dear Mama... Dear son... you know? I mean, when I got back, my father kept saying he made a mistake sending me abroad, imagine that? You really get disoriented, you know what? The curse of knowing too much. 'Hey! [*Beaming gloriously*] Hey, hey! Like Eden probably. One of these days... I'm sure, what happened in Eden was really an acute case of cultural disorientation. Come to think of it, I can have three levels going on at the same time... the biblical... the cultural... the psychological... Isn't that terrific? I'm getting all excited just thinking about it [*Sneezes violently*.] I've got it.

[*Nora chuckles aloud.*]

ED: What are you laughing at?

NORA: The only thing you've got is a cold, darling.

ED: A-aaa! You're laughing at me, darling.

NORA: Oh, come on.

ED [*teasing*]: Suppose... after you get your papers. I just plain scoot?

NORA [*seriously warning him to stop*]: Hey, hey.

ED [*farcically*]: After all, Mrs. Henderson, there aren't too many perfectly eligible bachelors like me who would risk...

[*Nora slams her hands on the keyboard and turns angrily to Ed.*]

ED [*Chuckling*]: Oh, I mean...

NORA [*breathily vociferating beyond control*]: You think you're so clever. That's what I like about you. You think you're the cleverest person in the world and you haven't a damned thing to show for your cleverness. All these big plans... big novels... big prizes... Big deal! You've got to find out what you can do, and then do it! You don't... you don't—

ED [*with humor*]: Hold it, hold it, darling.

NORA: Just go around talking your head off about the great things you're going to do when you damned well... at least everybody else knows damned well you haven't got what it takes to do it. [*Pause.*] There, I've finally said it. I've been waiting for a chance to say it and I've said it.

ED [*still with humor*]: Okay, okay. I don't see why you have to be all heated up about it, that's all.

NORA [*subsiding*]: I've been wanting to say it. I finally did.

ED: Okay, you did.

NORA [*chuckling nervously*]: Do you have to be nice about it?

ED: -That's me, doll. I may not be the most talented writer this side of journalism, but I'm certainly the nicest potboiler in the market. That's my specialty... being incredibly nice. [*Noticing the box on the floor.*] Are those letters I see before me?

NORA [*moving towards the box*]: Claud's.

ED: From Mama?

NORA: From Kenneth, the Trombone Player.

ED: Kenneth?

NORA [*teasing*]: You don't know him?

ED: No. [*makes for the letters.*]

NORA [*grabs the letters*]: A-aaa!

ED: Who's Kenneth? There wasn't any Kenneth when we were around.

NORA [*teasing*]: Your one other great talent, darling, aside from being nice, is you just love to poke into other people's business [*Puts the letters in her handbag*].

ED: They're wet. Why don't you dry them up?

NORA [*chuckling coquettishly*]: Never mind.

[*The mother enters from the stairs carrying a silver-plated tray with a bottle of chianti and two glasses. She has a scrapbook under her arm.*]

THE MOTHER [*with infinite tenderness*]: We don't have any more tea, Ed. I hope wine will do. It's very good chianti. [*Lays out the tray in the table*] You will have some, Nora. I will not join you because my stomach is a little bad. [*Pours for Nora and hands the glass to her*]

NORA [*sweetly*]: Thank you, ma'am.

ED [*delighted*]: Looks good.

THE MOTHER [*pouring for Ed and giving him the glass*]: Here, Ed.

ED: Lovely. Thanks.

THE MOTHER [*lightly*]: Ed, could you please put those pictures back in the envelope? I can't bend down, you know.

ED: They're still wet, ma'am.

THE MOTHER: It's all right.

[*Ed collects the pictures from the floor and puts them inside the envelope.*]

He hands them to the mother while Nora watches with great concern. The mother exits through the kitchen door and switches on a light.]

NORA [darkening]: What's she doing with them?

ED [shrugging his shoulders]: Drying them up, I suppose.

NORA [opens the kitchen doors lightly and peeks, then closes it]: Poor Claud.

ED: Poor Claud, why?

NORA [resigned]: Mama's burning them.

ED: The pictures?

NORA: Yeah.

ED: Oh, come off it.

NORA: Go and look.

[Ed doesn't move.]

NORA: Go and look.

ED: Oh, well.

NORA [disgusted with him]: Oh, well.

[The mother enters, beaming brightly, carrying a sooty-looking clay pot with a pot rest, which she sets on the table.]

THE MOTHER: Here's something you can use as an ashtray. I found it out there. That used to be my tenant's kitchen. We use it only during brownouts. It is quite convenient. It is miraculous that the lights have not gone out, with this weather. But our telephone is dead.

NORA [gently]: Did you have to, Mrs. Cruz?

THE MOTHER: Nora, you are not drinking your chianti. Don't you like chianti?

NORA: I mean, the pictures.

THE MOTHER [in a very kind tone]: Look at this way, Nora. In America, it is all right. But here, people are different. If people saw those pictures, what do you think they will say? You and I, we understand. We have lived abroad, they are not as modern as we are. They do not understand these things. You know, when I married Claudia's father... he was gentleman of the old school and I was a young girl who had toured all over Europe... You know what that meant for me. But Celso was different. He would not hear any of my nonsense. And let's be practical, Nora. We live here, we have to be like our people. Otherwise, we will be out of place in our own homes. Don't you agree with me, Ed?

ED [dodging the issue]: Well... I suppose so...

NORA [*sarcastically*]: Do you, darling?

THE MOTHER: You are a novelist, you must think about these things very deeply. I would have liked to be a writer myself. If I had not become a singer, I would have become a writer.

NORA [*sarcastically*]: Oh, really.

THE MOTHER: Ed, this novel you are writing about... about a mother and a son... I think it is very good.

[*Nora and Ed looked at each other completely taken aback.*]

THE MOTHER: Here is my scrapbook. I'll read you Claudia's letter. [*Sits on the rocking chair.*]

NORA [*sarcastically*]: More chianti, darling?

ED [*meaningfully*]: Yeah, I think so.

[*Nora pours.*]

THE MOTHER [*at her scrapbook*]: Claudia writes very well, you know. She could have become a writer too. That is one thing she got from my family, her artistic talent. "My dearest Mama, she says. Bloomington is such a large place, full of old buildings and trees. It is nice to walk under the maples when it is summer. But the winds are getting colder in the evenings. I am afraid of the cold, you know that, Mama. Even the people are cold, and I can no longer take walks in the afternoons when winter comes. I am wearing the sweater you made for me. I'm very sorry I made such a big fuss about it before I left you. Actually, I became very fond of it. I'm so afraid of the cold..."

NORA [*to Ed, making fun of the mother*]: Did you know that, Ed?

[*Ed makes a face at her*]

THE MOTHER: Here's a very short letter she sent me before the end of last year.

NORA [*with a sneer*]: The end of the first semester.

THE MOTHER: "Last night, I dreamed that I had come home... there was a party in our patio and Tito Ramon was there with his *rondalla*. It was my despedida party, I think. The moon was full and yellow. We were all looking very lovely. When I woke up, I felt so sad. Spring is a long way off and it is still very cold although there is no more snow."

ED: Lovely prose.

NORA [*still very vicious*]: Yeah.

THE MOTHER: "—I want to be home before the snow comes down again."

[Pause. The mother looks up, staring blankly. It is as if she were going to cry.]

ED: Finished?

NORA: Yeah.

ED [whispering]: Stop heckling, Nora.

NORA: Am I, darling?

ED [teasing]: just because you don't write as good—

NORA: Oh, shut up.

ED: What's next Mama?

THE MOTHER: I'm sorry.

ED: Let's hear more.

THE MOTHER [closing the scrapbook]: You read them.

[Ed gets the book from her and returns at the table to read.]

NORA: As long as we're reading the letters all evening—[Gets the letters she has placed inside her handbag]—I wonder if you'd be interested in these. [Hands them to the mother.] They're letters to Claud.

[The mother pores over the letters while Nora remains standing in front of her, eager to observe her reaction. The mother shows immediate signs of agitation, but she is obviously making a supreme effort to keep it to herself. The signs become more and more vivid as she goes on reading. Her face begins to twitch and show contortions. It is clear now that she is on the verge of crying.]

THE MOTHER [rising, letting the letter drop to the floor]: Excuse me. [Darts towards the bathroom door and stops somewhere near the bed, obviously steeling herself.]

NORA [to Ed]: Having fun?

ED [without looking at her]: Huh?

NORA: It's disgusting.

ED: I'll pass them to you in a while.

NORA [almost shouting]: No, Thank you.

ED: Listen to this, "I don't care if I don't finish my course. I'm feeling too lost in this world to worry about degrees and careers. I'm tired of being always at the top of my class. I just want to go back where I feel I can belong." This was written just a month ago. You know, Nora, I have always suspected that of Claud... I mean being soft inside. All that razzmatazz doesn't fool me, you know.

NORA [peevish]: You don't know what you're talking about.

ED: What am I a writer for?

NORA: Take my word for it, darling, there's more than that meets the eye.

ED: Just was I was saying.

NORA: You don't understand, so why don't you just shut up?

ED: I think you don't understand.

NORA [*blowing her top quietly*]: Claud wrote to me every month, sometimes twice a month. She had plans. She knew where she was going, she knew how to get there. This summer, she was going to star in a musical Kenneth wrote for her. She said she might go to East to teach and perhaps try TV. And she wasn't just having grand illusions like some people I know. She's got what it takes, take my word for it. I'm not going to buy this sob story you're trying to make me buy. She doesn't make compromises and she has the kind of drive and honesty that separates successful people from total failures.

ED [*joking*]: Are you making accusations, darling?

NORA [*sharply*]: If you like.

THE MOTHER [*quietly*]: Ed, have you met my daughter?

NORA [*seething*]: There's nothing that burns me up more than talent that goes to waste because you're so happy just coming along any which way.

ED: So?

NORA: So I push, and you ought to thank your stars I have enough energy to do a lot of pushing because half of the world isn't going to budge an inch unless the other half does a lot of pushing.

THE MOTHER: Ed, did you know my Claudia?

ED [*sincerely*]: I thank you, Nora. I really do.

NORA [*gently*]: It gets pretty tiring sometimes. But if I don't do it, who will? [*Pause.*] I had to do a lot of pushing myself. There wasn't anybody who would do it for me... [*with decided bitterness.*] not my parents anyway. They're so happy with their lumber concession in Butuan, you'd think it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me.

THE MOTHER: I asked you, Ed—

ED: I'm sorry, Mama?

THE MOTHER: About Claudia. What do you know about her?

ED: Nothing really Mama. I don't know her that well.

NORA: Say that again?

ED: I was in Bloomington for a while—

THE MOTHER: In Bloomington?

ED: It was very short, the time I spent there.

NORA: Darling, you practically lived on us in IU, so what are you trying to say?

THE MOTHER: Be honest with me, Ed. You know you can tell me anything.

ED: As I said, I was there only for a year. Even less—

NORA: Because he got thrown out, Mama.

ED: I quit.

NORA: Because he came to classes stone drunk most of the time and he hasn't snapped out of that.

ED: Nora, You know that isn't fair.

NORA: Because it has finally dawned on him he isn't as hot a writer as all his stupid cronies like to make him think, because they are all bunch of stupid people who like being a mutual admiration club. *[to Ed]* You know something, I don't think you can really stand objective criticism. That's why you thought IU was such a hell of a place. They dish it out to you if you haven't got it and you either take it sitting down or you get out. You know something, in many ways you're so like Frank. You're so cooped up in your dainty little world you can't see beyond your little nose.

ED *[sharply]*: That's enough!

NORA: I'm going to push if it kills me because I want to see you making sense. You're no schoolboy anymore, Ed. You've got to stop depending on what people say about you and start taking a good look at yourself. At your age, it's just absolutely disgusting the way—

ED: If it's absolutely disgusting— *[Gently.]* why do you hang on with me?

[Silence. Then the mother picks up the blue crepe dress hanging on the railing of the bed and sits on the rocking chair. She produces a razorblade from the wickerbasket and slowly rips the dress at the seams. Nora watches her blankly.]

ED *[softly, very much hurt]*: Is it because... is it because there aren't too many guys around here... I mean real high-caliber guys... who'd be brave enough to settle for... for a hand-me-down?

[The mother stops worrying for a while and looks at Nora, who stares back coldly. Soon, the mother resumes her work.]

ED *[regretfully]*: Funny thing about life, darling. All your life you look for somebody who'd be good enough, really good enough, for you... and then he finds out... why, he finds out you're just not good enough for him.

[Nora walks slowly to the bed and sits down.]

THE MOTHER: Why did your husband leave you?

ED [*rising*]: Please, Mrs. Cruz, Don't!

THE MOTHER: Why did your husband leave you? What's his name, Ed? What's his name, hijo?

ED [*reluctantly*]: Frank Henderson. [*Sits down.*]

THE MOTHER: Why did Frank leave you?

NORA: [*with a distant look.*] I left him.

THE MOTHER: Did you?-

NORA [*calmly*]: I left him, Mama, if it's any of your business.

THE MOTHER: I want to help you, hija. I'm trying to help you.

ED [*agitated*]: Mama, what time is Claud coming home?

THE MOTHER [*tenderly*]: I'll tell you something, hija. Do you remember what I told you? When I came to marry Claudia's father, I wanted to go on singing and he didn't want me to go on. What do you think I did? I fought him. For about ten years there was no end to the fighting in the house. He was a farmer. He was wealthy, but he was a farmer. One Sunday afternoon, I remember, I still remember, I asked my friends to come here, four of them, so we could talk about operas and museums in Europe and the painters who did portraits of my family. Celso was having merienda with us, and he knew why I invited them, and every time my friends ask him to say something, he said the granary was the only important thing to him. You see, I married him because he was wealthy, and I tried very hard to get him to travel with me, and read books, and attend concerts. I didn't succeed. He was contented with the way he was and he was getting wealthier and wealthier every year. When Claudia was... I think she was nine... my husband died. Something happened to his liver and he died. And I realized that I have been unfair to him. It wasn't his fault that I married him. He was a very kind man and I realized all that after he died. [*Forcing herself to chuckle.*] Really, it was about nine years after I stopped singing when I finally gave up the idea. [*with infinite regret.*] And he was already dead.

[*Nora buries her face in the pillow, her body shaken by sobs which remain inaudible.*]

ED [*rising*]: Mrs. Cruz, why did Claud come home before she finished her degree?

THE MOTHER [*tenderly*]: You cannot go around changing people, hija. You must also let them change you. Some people, they are better left the way they are. They have their own way of life and you make them unhappy if you change them. It may not be the best thing, the way they are, but what can

you do? All my life, I have regretted one thing, I learned to accept the way my husband was, only after he died. His liver...as if I didn't know.

[The mother folds neatly the parts of the blue dress on her lap, returns the blade to the wickerbasket, and rocks the chair slowly. She stares blankly, perhaps tearfully.]

THE MOTHER: I nearly made another mistake. I wanted Claudia to go abroad like me. And she was unhappy. I had to ask her to come home. She would have stayed there as long as I wanted her to stay, even if she was unhappy. And that man was ruining her.

ED: Kenneth?

THE MOTHER: Yes.

ED: You know about him?

THE MOTHER: Mrs. Carney—

ED: Mrs. Carney?

THE MOTHER: She married a grocer.

ED: In Indianapolis, I met Carneys on the way to Bloomington.

THE MOTHER *[regretfully]*: She is a friend of mine. Your father knew her too, I think. She said she and her husband went to Bloomington last Christmas, and she asked about Claudia...and she heard that Claudia was somewhere else... Chicago, I think... with this man, and this man has a wife in San Francisco. Did you know him, Ed?

ED: No, Mrs. Cruz.

THE MOTHER: You can tell me anything.

ED: I don't know him.

THE MOTHER: I don't believe you.

ED: I left Bloomington after less than a year. I wonder what time Claud is coming back. The rain has stopped. You know, I'm kind of getting hungry.

THE MOTHER: I'll get something for you. Sandwiches, maybe. We were supposed to eat in my brother-in-law's house tonight, and I let the maid go to a movie. But I can make sandwiches. Do you like Spanish sardines?

ED: Oh yes, thank you.

[The mother exits through the stairs, Nora sits up. She repeats the name "Frank" almost inaudibly. Ed pours chianti into Nora's glass and approaches her. A knock is heard at the door.]

ED: Try this, darling.

NORA *[hoarsely]*: I'm okay.

ED: It will warm you up.

NORA [*almost whispering*]: Just leave me alone.

ED: Come on.

NORA [*almost tearfully*]: Please go away, Ed.

[Ed leaves the glass on the table and answers the door. A boy selling gardenias has come. Perhaps they speak in the dialect. When Ed enters again, he is carrying a bunch of gardenias wrapped in newspaper. He leaves them on the table and picks up the vase with the wilted flowers and decides to change the water. He exits through the kitchen door and comes out quite soon. He eyes the bathroom door and decides to go there. He opens the door, gropes for the switch, puts on the bathroom light and suddenly freezes.]

ED [*whispering*]: Nora...

NORA [*quietly*]: Please go away.

ED: No, look...

[Nora does not react.]

ED [*desperate*]: Nora!

[Nora gets up slowly, sees the light in the bathroom, enters and disappears from view for a while. When she comes out, the full horror of Claudia's suicide is registered on her face, but she is determined not to break down. She holds an empty bottle in one hand and a note on the other. She reads the note and almost begins to giggle, bitterly]

ED [*whispering*]: What does it say?

[Nora looks at the bottle.]

ED: What does it say?

NORA [*drops the bottle on the floor*]: "I'm always getting stuck in bathrooms. Hope you didn't mind." [*Lets the note drop on the floor.*]

ED: Aren't you going to call her mother?

[Nora does not react.]

ED: Why don't you call her?

NORA [*under her breath*]: What for?

[Ed returns the vase to the table. He paces around briefly, then goes to the door.]

ED [*softly*]: I've got to go. Anyway, you're... you're just tremendous. Do you mind?

NORA [*flatly, but full of regret*]: No, go ahead. You've got to finish that article. We don't want you to get fired, do we? Goodbye.

[Ed exits agitatedly, slamming the door behind him]

NORA *[almost tearfully]*: Goodbye.

[Realizing she is alone, Nora pulls herself together and becomes machine-like in the calm with which she moves about. She opens the brown aparador. Inside the left door, there is a picture of the Virgin of Antipolo. Inside the other door, there are blue sashes and white chords hanging on a wire. There is a large rosary hanging from one of the nails. The dresses are mostly white or pale yellow and pale blue. Nora pulls out a drawer and gets a hairbrush and some curlers. She also picks up a bottle of perfume which she drops accidentally. The bottle breaks on the floor. She lays the hairbrush and the curlers on the bed and goes back to the aparador to fetch the undergarments.]

[She picks up the gold chiffon dress, looks for yellow gloves on the box, which is still on the floor, and searches the aparador for a yellow pair of shoes and the emerald necklace. She lays them out on the bed. She notices a rip in the chiffon dress, looks for a needle and thread in one of the drawers, and begins to mend the dress. She decides that she wants a cigarette, she gets her handbag, picks up a cigarette, and puts the clay pot on the floor near the bed before she resumes her work. The mother enters with a tray of sandwiches and two cups, presumably of coffee.]

THE MOTHER *[putting down the tray on the table]*: Where's Ed? *[Silence.]* How did you break the bottle? *[Closes the aparador.]* What's this? *[Picks up the empty bottle of pills.]*

[The mother sees the light from the bathroom and enters. When she comes out, she seems terribly exhausted. She leans on the wall, looking up at the Sacred Heart. There is pain on her face but, otherwise, she merely looks tired. After a while, she looks at Nora darning the chiffon dress. With sudden energy, she lurches at the dress to grab it.]

NORA *[clutching the dress and moving away, shrieking wildly, frighteningly]*: Don't touch it!

[Nora freezes still clutching the dress. Now her eyes were blazing with fury. The mother looks at her and, at that moment, seems to accept her guilt. She seems to crumble as she gropes for the telephone. She collapses on her knees as she lifts the receiver and dials slowly. She makes about four attempts, her agitation mounting with each frustrated attempt. She looks up to see Nora towering above her, still clutching the dress, her eyes still a blaze with fury and contempt. The mother, now almost ready to break down, slowly drops the receiver on the cradle. The patter of the rain is heard, as if coming from a distance, slow and distinct at first, becoming faster and sharper while the lights begin to fade, and soon it is a deafening downpour and the stage is completely dark.]

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the real cause for Claudia's homecoming just as her career is starting to pick up in the United States?
2. Give a character sketch of Nora and Ed.
3. Describe Mrs. Cruz as a mother. What is the reason for her guilt, initially her husband, and finally her daughter?
4. Explain the line: "*The loneliest vocation is motherhood.*"
5. What is the significance of the rain, first in the opening scene in which Nora and Ed got drenched, then in the final scene where there is heavy downpouring and deafening thunder?

textured discussion

WANTED "PERFECT MOTHER:" INTERROGATING MEDIA'S CONCEPT OF MOTHERHOOD

Rolando Tinio's "Claudia and Her Mother" offers insights about the importance of family in shaping an individual's life and centers on the viability of the parents (a mother in this case) as influential figures who shape their children's destiny.

How do you describe Mrs. Cruz as a mother? Is she a good one? Would you want her to be your mother?

The discourse on motherhood and the subject of mothering have been engaging areas of interest in the media to such an extent that their images have provided a spectrum of study from liberal thinking to radical formulations. Women have been deluged by an avalanche of maternal media advertisements stressing the importance of how mothers should feel about their relationships with their children, their husbands, and themselves. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels in their book "The Mommy Myth (2004)," call this the "new momism," postulating that motherhood has been reduced into a marketing tool and a target commodity (4). Media has constructed the image of a good mother as doting, self-sacrificing, protective, and child-centered through commercials, TV, and film. How many ads of detergents and fabric conditioners, food seasonings and sandwich spreads, vitamins and aspirins, and infant milk and supplements do you know that stress that motherhood is the best and only vocation a woman could aspire for to pursue her true happiness even at the expense of herself?

This phenomenon has definitely alienated working mothers, single and childless women, and lesbians due to the power of the media to endorse the romantic idea that having and spending one's time with children is the most fulfilling experience a woman can have. Without children, life for a woman is purported to be meaningless.

Douglas and Michaels maintain that this new momism is political: a result of the combustible intermixing of attacks on feminism and women, media's target marketing of mothers and children, the collapse of government institutions, and mothers' own desires to raise children in a culture that praises mothers in rhetoric (2004, 23-24).

The new momism has become a central ideology of postfeminism, a term that suggests that women, after having embraced and radicalized their oppression forged by feminism, are still left unhappy and dissatisfied. Thus women have articulated

a new mode of experience not by espousing feminism nor anti-feminism.

Each mother has her own individual history as a mother, her own angst and glories, her own strengths and failures. However, the media endorse that motherhood presents a collective experience – sometimes demeaning, sometimes uplifting, and at all times, misrepresenting.

How does motherhood become central to women's conception of femininity and marriage? Is there a cultural difference between the terms "mother" and "mom"? How do media present the "perfect mother"? Give examples of scenes from film, TV shows, print ads, and commercials that showcase this.

MATS

Francisco Arcellana

For the Angeles family, Mr. Angeles' homecoming from his periodic inspection trips was always an occasion for celebration. But his homecoming—from a trip to the South—was fated to be more memorable than any of the others.

He had written from Mariveles: "I have just met a marvelous matweaver—a real artist—and I shall have a surprise for you. I asked him to weave a sleeping-mat for every one in the family. He is using many different colors and for each mat the dominant color is that of our respective birthstones. I am sure that the children will be very pleased. I know you will be. I can hardly wait to show them to you."

Nana Emilia read the letter that morning, and again and again every time she had a chance to leave the kitchen. In the evening, when all the children were home from school she asked her oldest son, José, to read the letter at the dinner table. The children became very much excited about the mats, and talked about them until late into the night. This she wrote her husband when she labored over a reply to him. For days after that the mats continued to be the chief topic of conversation among the children.

Finally, from Lopez, Mr. Angeles wrote again: "I am taking the Bicol Express tomorrow. I have the mats with me, and they are beautiful. God willing, I shall be home to join you at dinner."

The letter was read aloud during the noon meal. Talk about the mats flared up again like wildfire.

"I like the feel of mats," Antonio, the third child, said. "I like the smell of new mats." "Oh, but these mats are different," interposed Susanna, the fifth child. "They have our names woven into them, and in our ascribed colors, too."

The children knew what they were talking about: they knew just what a decorative mat was like; it was not anything new or strange in their experience. That was why they were so excited about the matter. They had such a mat in the house, one they seldom used, a mat older than any of them.

This mat had been given to Nana Emilia by her mother when she and Mr. Angeles were married, and it had been with them ever since. It had served on the wedding night, and had not since been used except on special occasions.

It was a very beautiful mat, not really meant to be ordinarily used.

It had green leaf borders, and a lot of gigantic red roses woven into it. In the middle, running the whole length of the mat, was the lettering:
Emilia y Jaime Recuerdo

The letters were in gold.

Nana Emilia always kept that mat in her trunk. When anyone of the family was taken ill, the mat was brought out and the patient slept on it, had it all to himself. Everyone of the children had sometime in his life slept on it; not a few had slept on it more than once.

Most of the time, the mat was kept in *Nana* Emilia's trunk, and when it was taken out and spread on the floor the children were always around to watch. At first there had been only *Nana* Emilia and Mr. Angeles to see the mat spread. Then a child—a girl—watched with them. The number of watchers increased as more children came.

The mat did not seem to age. It seemed to *Nana* Emilia always as new as when it had been laid on the nuptial bed. To the children it seemed as new as the first time it was spread before them. The folds and creases seemed always new and fresh. The smell was always the smell of a new mat. Watching the intricate design was an endless joy. The children's pleasure at the golden letters even before they could work out the meaning was boundless. Somehow they were always pleasantly shocked by the sight of the mat: so delicate and so consummate the artistry of its weave.

Now, taking out that mat to spread had become a kind of ritual. The process had become associated with illness in the family. Illness, even serious illness, had not been infrequent. There had been deaths...

In the evening Mr. Angeles was with his family. He had brought the usual things home with him. There was a lot of fruit, as always (his itinerary carried him through the fruit-growing provinces): pineapples, *lanzones*, *chicos*, *atis*, *santol*, *sandia*, *guyabano*, *avocado*, according to the season. He had also brought home a jar of preserved sweets from Lopez.

Putting away the fruit, sampling them, was as usual accomplished with animation and lively talk. Dinner was a long affair. Mr. Angeles was full of stories about his trip but would interrupt his tales with: "I could not sleep of nights thinking of the young ones. They should never be allowed to play in the streets. And you older ones should not stay out too late at night."

The stories petered out and dinner was over. Putting away the dishes and wiping the dishes and wiping the table clean did not at all seem tedious. Yet *Nana* Emilia and the children, although they did not show it, were all on edge about the mats.

Finally, after a long time over his cigar, Mr. Angeles rose from his seat at the head of the table and crossed the room to the corner where his luggage had been piled. From the heap he disengaged a ponderous bundle. Taking it under one arm, he walked to the middle of the room where the light was brightest. He dropped the bundle and, bending over and balancing himself on his toes, he strained at the cord that bound it. It was strong, would not break, would not give way. He tried working at the knots. His fingers were clumsy, they had begun shaking. He raised his head, breathing heavily, to ask for the scissors. Alfonso, his youngest boy, was to one side of him with the scissors ready.

Nana Emilia and her eldest girl, who had long returned from the kitchen, were watching the proceedings quietly.

One swift movement with the scissors, snip! and the bundle was loose.

Turning to *Nana* Emilia, Mr. Angeles joyfully cried: "These are the mats, Miling."

Mr. Angeles picked up the topmost mat in the bundle.

"This, I believe, is yours, Miling."

Nana Emilia stepped forward to the light, wiping her still moist hands against the folds of her skirt, and with a strangely young shyness received the mat. The children watched the spectacle silently, and then broke into delighted, though a little conscious, laughter. *Nana* Emilia unfolded the mat without a word. It was a beautiful mat: to her mind, even more beautiful than the one she had received from her mother on her wedding day. There was a name in the very center of it: EMILIA. The letters were large, done in green. Flowers—*cadena-de-amor*—were woven in and out among the letters. The border was a long winding twig of *cadena-de-amor*.

The children stood about the spread mat. The air was punctuated by their breathless exclamations of delight.

"It is beautiful, Jaime; it is beautiful!" *Nana* Emilia's voice broke, and she could not say any more.

"And this, I know, is my own," said Mr. Angeles of the next mat in the bundle. The mat was rather simply decorated, the design almost austere, and the only colors used were purple and gold. The letters of the name Jaime were in purple.

"And this, for you, Marcelina."

Marcelina was the oldest child. She had always thought her name too long; it had been one of her worries with regard to the mat. "How on earth are they going to weave all of the letters of my name into my mat?" she had asked of almost everyone in the family. Now it delighted her to see her whole name spelled out on the mat, even if the letters were a little small. Besides, there was a device above

her name which pleased Marcelina very much. It was in the form of a lyre, finely done in three colors. Marcelina was a student of music and was quite a proficient pianist.

"And this is for you, José."

José was the second child. He was a medical student already in the third year at medical school. Over his name the symbol of Aesculapius was woven into the mat.

"You are not to use this mat until the year of your internship," Mr. Angeles was saying.

"This is yours, Antonio."

"And this is yours, Juan."

"And this is yours, Jesus."

Mat after mat was unfolded. On each of the children's mats there was somehow an appropriate device.

At least all the children had been shown their individual mats. The air was filled with their excited talk, and through it all Mr. Angeles was saying over and over again in his deep voice:

"You are not to use these mats until you go to the University."

Then *Nana* Emilia noticed bewilderingly that there were some more mats remaining to be unfolded.

"But Jaime," *Nana* Emilia said, wonderingly, with evident trepidation, "there are some more mats."

Only Mr. Angeles seemed to have heard *Nana* Emilia's words. He suddenly stopped talking, as if he had been jerked away from a pleasant phantasy. A puzzled reminiscent look came into his eyes, superseding the deep and quiet delight that had been briefly there, and when he spoke, his voice was different.

"Yes, Emilia," said Mr. Angeles, "There are three more mats to unfold. The others who aren't here..."

Nana Emilia caught her breath; there was a swift constriction in her throat; her face paled and she could not say anything.

The self-centered talk of the children also died. There was a silence as Mr. Angeles picked up the first of the remaining mats and began slowly unfolding it.

The mat was almost as austere in design as Mr. Angeles' own, and it had a name. There was no symbol or device above the name; only a blank space, emptiness.

The children knew the name. But somehow the name, the letters spelling the name, seemed strange to them.

Then *Nana Emilia* found her voice.

"You know, Jaime, you didn't have to," *Nana Emilia* said, and her voice was hurt and sorely frightened.

Mr. Angeles jerked his head back; there was something swift and savage in the movement.

"Do you think I'd forgotten? Do you think I had forgotten them? Do you think I could forget them?"

"This is for you, Josefina!

"And this, for you, Victoria!

"And this, for you, Concepcion."

Mr. Angeles called the names rather than uttered them.

"Don't, Jaime, please don't," was all that *Nana Emilia* managed to say.

"Is it fair to forget them? Would it be just to disregard them?" Mr. Angeles demanded rather than asked.

His voice had risen shrill, almost hysterical; it was also stern and sad, and somehow vindictive. Mr. Angeles had spoken almost as if he were a stranger.

Also, he had spoken as if from a deep, grudgingly-silent, long-bewildered sorrow.

The children heard the words exploding in the silence. They wanted to turn away and not see the face of their father. But they could neither move nor look away; his eyes held them, his voice held them where they were. They seemed rooted to the spot.

Nana Emilia shivered once or twice, bowed her head, gripped her clasped hands between her thighs.

There was a terrible hush. The remaining mats were unfolded in silence. The names which were with infinite slowness revealed, seemed strange and stranger still; the colors not bright but deathly dull; the separate letters, spelling out the names of the dead among them, did not seem to glow or shine with a festive sheen as did the other living names.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Cite milestones or situations in the Recuerdo family and relate them with the mat given to Jaime and Emilia as a wedding gift.
2. What traditional characteristics of a parent do you see in Jaime? In Emilia?
3. Why are there "*other*" mats? What are they for?
4. How does the author use the symbol of the mat to define the family?

THE SADNESS COLLECTOR

Merlinda Bobis

And she will not stop eating, another pot, another plate, another mouthful of sadness, and she will grow bigger and bigger, and she will burst.

On the bed, six-year-old Rica braces herself, waiting for the dreaded explosion-

Nothing. No big bang. Because she's been a good girl. Her tears are not even a mouthful tonight. And maybe their neighbours in the run-down apartment have been careful, too. From every pot and plate, they must have scraped off their leftover sighs and hidden them somewhere unreachable. So Big Lady can't get to them. So she can be saved from bursting.

Every night, no big bang really, but Rica listens anyway.

The house is quiet again. She breathes easier, lifting the sheets slowly from her face - a brow just unfurrowing, but eyes still wary and a mouth forming the old, silent question - are you really there? She turns on the lamp. It's girly kitsch like the rest of the decor, from the dancing lady wallpaper to the row of Barbie dolls on a roseate plastic table. The tiny room is all pink bravado, hoping to compensate for the warped ceiling and stained floor. Even the unhinged window flaunts a family of pink paper rabbits.

Are you there?

Her father says she never shows herself to anyone. Big Lady only comes when you're asleep to eat your sadness. She goes from house to house and eats the sadness of everyone, so she gets too fat. But there's a lot of sadness in many houses, it just keeps on growing each day, so she can't stop eating, and she can't stop growing too.

Are you really that big? How do you wear your hair?

Dios ko, if she eats all our mess, Rica, she might grow too fat and burst, so be a good girl and save her by not being sad - *hoy*, stop whimpering, I said, and go to bed. Her father is not always patient with his storytelling.

All quiet and still now. She's gone.

Since Rica was three, when her father told her about Big Lady just after her mother left for Paris, she was always listening intently to all the night-noises from the kitchen. No, that sound is not the scurrying of mice - she's actually

checking the plates now, lifting the lid off the rice pot, peeking into cups for sadness, both overt and unspoken. To Rica, it always tastes salty, like tears, even her father's funny look each time she asks him to read her again the letters from Paris.

She has three boxes of them, one for each year, though the third box is not even half-full. All of them tied with Paris ribbons. The first year, her mother sent all colours of the rainbow for her long, unruly hair, maybe because her father did not know how to make it more graceful. He must have written her long letters, asking about how to pull the mass of curls away from the face and tie them neatly the way he gathered, into some semblance of order, his own nightly longings.

It took some time for him to perfect the art of making a pony-tail. Then he discovered a trick unknown to even the best hairdressers. Instead of twisting the bunch of hair to make sure it does not come undone before it's tied, one can rotate the whole body. Rica simply had to turn around in place, while her father held the gathered hair above her head. Just like dancing, really.

She never forgets, *talaga naman*, the aunties whisper among themselves these days. A remarkable child. She was only a little thing then, but she noticed all, didn't she, never missed anything, committed even details to memory. A very smart kid, but too serious, a sad kid.

They must have guessed that, recently, she has cheated on her promise to behave and save Big Lady. But only on nights when her father comes home late and drunk, and refuses to read the old letters from Paris - indeed, she has been a very good girl. She's six and grown up now, so, even if his refusal has multiplied beyond her ten fingers, she always makes sure that her nightly tears remained small and few. Like tonight, when she hoped her father would come home early, as he promised again. Earlier, Rica watched TV to forget, to make sure the tears won't amount to a mouthful. She hates waiting. Big Lady hates that, too, because then she'll have to clean up till the early hours of the morning.

Why Paris? Why three years - and even more? *Aba*, this is getting too much now. The aunties never agree with her mother's decision to work there, on a fake visa, as a domestic helper - *ay naku*, taking care of other people's children, while, across the ocean, her own baby cries herself to sleep? *Talaga naman!* She wants to earn good money and build us a house. Remember, I only work in a factory... Her father had always defended his wife, until recently, when all talk about her return was shelved. It seems she must extend her stay, because her employer might help her to become "legal." Then she can come home for a visit and go back there to work some more -

The lid clatters off the pot. Beneath her room, the kitchen is stirring again. Rica sits up on the bed - the big one has returned? But she made sure the pot and

plates were clean, even the cups, before she went to bed. She turns off the lamp to listen in the dark. Expectant ears, hungry for the phone's overseas beep. Her mother used to call each month and write her postcards, also long love letters, even if she couldn't read yet. With happy snaps, of course. Earlier this year, she sent one of herself and the new baby of her employer.

Cutlery noise. Does she also check them? This has never happened before, her coming back after a lean meal. Perhaps, she's licking a spoon for any trace of saltiness, searching between the prongs of a fork. Unknown to Rica, Big Lady is wise, an old hand in this business. She senses that there's more to a mouthful of sadness than meets the tongue. A whisper of salt, even the smallest nudge to the palate, can betray a century of hidden grief. Perhaps, she understands that, for all its practice, humanity can never conceal the daily act of futility at the dinner table. As we feed continually, we also acknowledge the perennial nature of our hunger. Each time we bring food to our mouths, the gut-emptiness that we attempt to fill inevitably contaminates our cutlery, plates, cups, glasses, our whole table. It is this residual contamination, our individual portions of grief, that she eats, so we do not die from them - but what if we don't eat? Then we can claim self-sufficiency, a fullness from birth, perhaps. Then we won't betray our hunger.

But Rica was not philosophical at four years old, when she had to be cajoled, tricked, ordered, then scolded severely before she finished her meal, if she touched it at all. Rica understood her occasional hunger strikes quite simply. She knew that these dinner quarrels with her father, and sometimes her aunties, ensured dire consequences. Each following day, she always made stick drawings of Big Lady with an ever-increasing girth, as she was sure the lady had had a big meal the night before.

Mouth curved downward, she's sad like her meals. No, she wears a smile, she's happy because she's always full. Sharp eyes, they can see in the dark, light-bulb eyes, and big teeth for chewing forever. She can hardly walk, because her belly's so heavy, she's pregnant with leftovers. No, she doesn't walk, she flies like a giant cloud and she's not heavy at all, she only looks heavy. And she doesn't want us to be sad, so she eats all ours tears and sighs. But she can't starve, can she? Of course, she likes sadness, it's food.

Fascination, fear and a kinship drawn from trying to save each other. Big Lady saves Rica from sadness; Rica saves Big Lady from bursting by not being sad. An ambivalent relationship, confusing, but certainly a source of comfort. And always Big Lady as object of attention. Those days when Rica drew stick-drawings of her, she made sure the big one was always adorned with pretty baubles and make-up. She even drew her with a Paris ribbon to tighten her belly. Then she added a chic hat to complete the picture.

Crimson velvet with a black satin bow. Quite a change from all the girly kitsch - that her mother had dredged from Paris' unfashionable side of town? The day it arrived in the mail, Rica was about to turn six. A perfect Parisienne winter hat for a tiny head in the tropics. It came with a bank-draft for her party.

She did not try it on, it looked strange, so different from the Barbies and pink paper rabbits. This latest gift was unlike her mother, something was missing. Rica turned it inside out, searching - on TV, Magic Man can easily pull a rabbit or a dove out of his hat, just like that, always. But this tale was not part of her father's repertoire. He told her not to be silly when she asked him to be Magic Man and pull out Paris - but can she eat as far as Paris? Can she fly from here to there overnight? Are their rice pots also full of sad leftovers? How salty?

Nowadays, her father makes sure he comes home late each night, so he won't have to answer the questions, especially about the baby in the photograph. So he need not improvise further on his three-year-old tall tale.

There it is again, the cutlery clunking against a plate - or scraping the bottom of a cup? She's searching for the hidden mouthfuls and platefuls and potfuls. Cupboards are opened. No, nothing there, big one, nothing - Rica's eyes are glued shut. The sheets rise and fall with her breathing. She wants to leave the bed, sneak into the kitchen and check out this most unusual return and thoroughness.

That's the rice pot being overturned -

Her breaths make and unmake a hillock on the sheets -

A plate shatters on the floor -

Back to a foetal curl, knees almost brushing chin -

Another plate crashes -

She screams -

The pot is hurled against the wall -

She keeps screaming as she runs out of the room, down to the kitchen -

And the cutlery, glasses, cups, more plates -

Big Lady's angry, Big Lady's hungry, Big Lady's turning the house upside down -

Breaking it everywhere -

Her throat is weaving sound, as if it were all that it ever knew -

"SHUT UP - !"

Big Lady wants to break all to get to the heart of the matter, where it's the saltiest. In the vein of a plate, within the aluminum bottom of a pot, in the copper fold of a spoon, deep in the curve of a cup's handle -

Ropes and ropes of scream--

"I SAID, SHUT UP!"

Her cheek stings. She collapses on the floor before his feet.

"I didn't mean to, *Dios ko po*, I never meant to - "

Her dazed eyes make out the broken plates, the dented pot, the shards of cups, glasses, the cutlery everywhere -

He's hiccupping drunkenly all over her -

"I didn't mean to, Rica, I love you, baby, I'll never let you go-" His voice is hoarse with anger and remorse.

"She came back, Papa -"

"She can't take you away from me -"

"She's here again -"

"Just because she's 'legal' now -"

"She might burst, Papa -"

"That whore - !" His hands curl into fists on her back.

Big Lady knows, has always known. This feast will last her a lifetime, if she does not burst tonight.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the tale of the sadness collector?
2. How does this tale initially affect Rica when she was three? As she turns six?
3. Explain the line: "*As we feed continually, we also acknowledge the perennial nature of our hunger.*"
4. What is the meaning of the heavily clunking of cutlery and crashing of plates in the last scene?
5. Paint a picture about the sacrifices a family makes when some members go abroad to improve their lot. Are these sacrifices worth it?

textured discussion

THE FAMILY AT THE VORTEX OF MIGRATION AND DIASPORA

Merlinda Bobis's *"The Sadness Collector"* subtly critiques the growing turmoil of a family that is about to crumble due to the ravaging effects of migration. The Philippines as a country has seen an ever-growing number of its own citizens who go abroad and leave their loved ones behind in search of a better life. The onset of OFWs working as professionals, domestics, entertainers, etc. has christened them as the "Bagong Bayani," consequently resuscitating the sagging economy from the quagmire of national bankruptcy.

Expat writers have enriched their imagination by drafting notable accounts of the Filipino experience in diaspora by means of story-telling and counter-memory. Their ethnic formations abroad have framed their new ideologies, realizing that analyzing identity through race, class, and gender is more than just appreciating cultural diversity, but examining the real figurations of the diasporic formation – nostalgia for the motherland, "imagined" returns or homecomings, and what literary critic Oscar Campomanes calls "exilic displacements" (1997, 85).

Recent films have similarly dealt with the subject of Filipino migration and diaspora. In *"Anak"* (2001) for example, a mother tries her luck as a domestic helper in Hong Kong but eventually pays a high price when her children suffer from her absence. In *"Milan"* (2003), an abandoned husband searches for her missing wife in a cold and alienating city in Italy, only to encounter heart-breaking truths about separation and struggle. In *"Caregiver"* (2008), a submissive wife follows her husband to London in the pursuit of a blissful and blessed family life but decides to leave him for good.

Can you see similar patterns between the films mentioned and Bobis's short story? Cite other films that depict the same theme and/or subject matter. What advantages and disadvantages can you mention about families when some of its members work overseas? Arlene Chai, a Filipino Australian writer, said in her novel *"The Last Time I Saw Mother"* (1997), that migrants are "people who are never whole and never completely in one place," for they live in a "fractured existence." What does she mean by this? Do you believe in this contention? Prove or disprove her point.

BREAKING THROUGH

Myrna Peña Reyes

Haltingly I undo the knots
around your parcel that came this morning.
A small box should require little labor,
but you've always been thorough,
tying things tight and well.
The twine lengthens,
curls beside the box.
I see your fingers pull,
snapping the knots into place
(once your belt slapped sharply against my skin).
You hope the package will hold its shape
across 10,000 miles of ocean.
It's not a bride's superstition
that leaves the scissors in the drawer.
Unraveling what you've done with love
I practice more than patience
a kind of thoroughness
I couldn't see before.

I shall not let it pass
My Father, this undoing is
what binds us.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the meaning of "*break through*"? How does it differ from other similar phrase verbs like – "*break away*," "*break from*," and "*break out*?"
2. What trait of the father does the persona remember most? How does she see this as she opens the package?
3. Describe the relationship between the father and daughter when they were together in the Philippines and now that they are apart.
4. Explain the lines:
"I practice more than patience
A kind of thoroughness
I couldn't see before."
5. Explain the paradox of "*this undoing is what binds us.*"

BRINGING THE DOLLS

Merlie Alunan

Two dolls in rags and tatters,
One missing an arm and a leg,
The other blind in one eye –
I grabbed them from her arms,
“No” I said, “they cannot come.”

Each tight luggage
I had packed
Only for the barest need:
No room for sentiment or memory
To clutter with loose ends
My stern resolved, I reasoned,
Even a child must learn
She cannot take
What must be left behind.

And so the boat turned seaward,
A smart wind blowing dry
And stealthy tears I could not wipe.
Then I saw – rags, tatters and all –
There among the neat trim packs,
The dolls I ruled to leave behind.
Her silence should have warned me
She knew her burdens
As I knew mine:
Her clean white years unlived –

And paid my price.
 She batted on the truth
 She knew I too must own:

When what's at stake
 Is loyalty or love,
 Hers are the true rights.
 Her own faiths she must keep, not I.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why is the mother bent on her decision not to bring the tattered dolls with them as they leave?
2. Explain the line: "*No room for sentiment or memory to clutter with loose ends.*"
3. How does memory play in a relationship that is about to disintegrate? Is it a blessing that one has memory to remember, or is it a curse?
4. It is always said that children suffer the most when parents separate. Do children equally suffer in the company of parents who do not love each other anymore? How?
5. How do you picture the little girl in the poem?
6. Explain the line: "*Hers are true rights. Her own faiths she must keep, not I.*"