



## JONATHAN CAALIM

### Lemongrass Tea

the prescription for pain

prayer

my mama said

pray in earnest

ask ask ask

for heaven

to provide honey

to sweeten the bitterness

to cure each pain

each heartache

there is no use crying

over a silly little girl - snooty and lousy

a boy must man up

hold his head high

honey, pray for strength, pray baby

my mama said

any wound heals, with prayers

she said

as she wiped webs off papa's only picture



the girl prefers other boys over you  
it's okay, just pray  
your mama is here, just pray  
my mama said  
lemongrass tea brewing, fogging the  
kitchen window with mist  
pray, pray i pray:  
that other boys  
would play with me, too.



## **Flores de Mayo**

Red hibiscus flowers  
pounded by a stone  
release a red stain  
vibrant on their young lips  
against their white cheeks  
powdered with rice flour  
two children in  
a silly harmless child game  
of painting the face  
playing under the afternoon sun  
amidst the hot winds of May  
concealed by tall blades of rice

Flores de Mayo  
the religious procession  
parading the image of Our Lady  
and beautiful barrio muses  
in red, pink, beige and golden long gowns  
sequined and glittering with rosette gems  
juvenile women hiding their laughter  
behind their fans made of buri fronds  
oblivious of the buoyancy  
of these two innocent lads  
absorbed in their own make-believe



## Hair

The mother's Alzheimer  
makes her remember the son,  
long since gone,  
in fragments  
in vignettes of his kindness  
and raucous laughter  
and astute persistence  
the son that wouldn't give up  
despite his bitter and bristly life

"where is my child? Come here,  
come here,"  
her searching eyes too blind to see

her skin is yellowish  
like the tarnished wallpapers  
of once bright dahlias and  
sunflowers  
our histories etched  
along the folds of her body  
creases, wrinkles, and crevices  
can they hold new stories?  
new wonders for this new daughter  
caressing her mother's gray hair  
willing the other memories,



both hurtful and hopeful,  
to come back.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Jonathan Caalim** writes poetry and teaches math at the University of the Philippines.