

## Ode to a Seafaring People

By Sol Diana

*[Special thanks to the Igorot people of Northern Luzon, Philippines, whose origin stories have greatly influenced this poem.]*

In the Beginning, there were no human beings.  
Until *Lumawig*, the great spirit, descended from the heavens,  
and crafted the first humans out of reeds.  
Immediately, they took to the sea in search of home.

We, the people,  
whom the world now knows as Filipinos,  
We have always been a seafaring people.  
Navigating the veins of archipelagos by starlight,  
In outrigger canoes held together by little more than coconut fiber and jackfruit sap:  
How much we must have looked like the stars to the fish beneath us.

We are still seafaring.  
But today, most of that prestige is lost.  
Our pandan-woven boats have been replaced  
by lonely steel looming, larger than life lost  
Harbouring goods that aren't for us.  
We toil for companies as elusive as the homes we've left behind.  
Honour replaced by longing (every single one of its senses)  
Recognition replaced by sea blindness  
It's a marvel how we make ghosts  
Out of the living.

Sometimes, all we have to offer is gratitude  
To those making it their mission  
to restore *Lumawig's* initial beckoning to be.  
To make homes away from home emerge on the horizon  
So that weary hardworking seafarers can rest their bones  
this is more than a 10-month return home  
this is a return to who we once were, a half-millennium overdue  
We, the people known as Filipinos  
We have always been  
Always will be,  
A seafaring people.