

## FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Polichinelle –  
wide, up-curved  
American lip-stick smile,  
mischievous eyes  
under a crazy orange hat.  
Welcome to Canada.

Soft-voiced Filipina  
from a land of violence,  
your voice echoes  
like a fiesta bell  
in the stolid  
airport terminal.

Sweet woman-power  
with the foreign face,  
dreaming of  
landed-immigrant status:  
freedom is your  
lace-edged valentine.

Desirable alien,  
opportunity stirs  
the Madonna in your soul.  
You sashay to interviews,  
dance like a gipsy  
into the job market.

Nursing home beckons –  
bed-pan kingdom  
of Alzheimer king-pins,  
self-governing body  
of decaying bodies –  
godless existence.

Hours ungodly . . .  
midnight till dawn,  
Christmas forgotten  
Sundays a memory,  
overtime, underpaid  
spaced out exhaustion.

Your soft velvet soles  
whisper on hallways,  
shepherding souls.  
Vegetable patients  
line the walls  
like dried fruits.

Polichinelle –  
dark circled eyes  
circle a wasted world.  
Your letters  
dare not speak  
of the work you do.

## REFRAIN

There is expertise  
in your gentle hands;  
what you hold comes home  
in your embrace.

And the old ones sleep  
an eternal sleep,  
not hearing the scream  
the silent scream

that leaps from your throat  
and pierces your head  
as you wash the dead  
the unclean dead  
as you wash the unclean dead.

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Credit: E. Fernandez/Philippines