**Palihug**

Tina Lentz-McMillan

When I was a young girl, I knew

only the word palihug,

the Cebuano word for please*.*

It was the only word my mother spoke

when she spoke to me.

Bend over so I can rinse your hair

/ *palihug*

Take these dishes to the table

/ *palihug*

Stay right where I can see you

/ *palihug*

When I visit my childhood,

it is the only thing remaining within
a sea of silence.

Now, I have so many English words, like *empty—*

*wound.* Words to describe who my mother is—

*missing.* Words that can’t capture this longing:

the scent of ivory dish soap coming from her

brown skin, fresh wet with shower dew, before

I understood what it takes to be clean.

Except maybe I am being dishonest when I write

the English words first. She never spoke

about my hair, or the dishes, or being lost.

She was always trying to say *please.*

Please see me as I am: dark-haired, brown-bodied

/ *palihug*

Please find me within the throw-away drawer

/ *palihug*

Please don’t leave me buried beneath the white lilies

/ *palihug*

Please see me, please see me, please see me

 / *palihug*

I was the one who did the erasing

even though I was young and didn’t understand.

Mixed daughters are given the sins

of their fathers—handed the knife, told

*cut the things that do not sound* *like assimilation*.
My father told me to cut palihug
from my tongue. It wasn’t a matter of love,

it was simply a matter of being American, half-

white. How do I carry this truth? My father

teaching me to forget my mother-

tongue, when all I want to do is scream, *please*.

Take me to my place of origin

/ *palihug*

Let me find my mother again

/ *palihug*

Take this knife, I do not want it

/ *palihug*

*Palihug ipakita kanako kung kinsa ako.*