

REBECCA MORGAN FRANK

The Last Time I Saw Manila

Whenever I hear that haunting song, "The Last Time I saw Paris," I always think of Manila, for the last time I saw Manila her "heart was young and gay" and now, like Paris, she is sad and wise with too much knowledge of death and destruction.

—Genevieve Frank

From the deck of the freighter carrying us
across Manila Bay, I watched the city fade

all that I had loved, what the Spanish had left:
churches, the gold cross, Luneta Park's

Sunday ritual of carriage rides, families strolling
in white. Raised houses, furnished porches, roofs

of galvanized iron that let rain back to the ground.
They baptized a land.

And what had we brought? Power, roads, appliances,
convenience. Suddenly it was a city that moved

on bikes, buses, Fords. We brought golf, and *Vogue*.
We brought our families.

The red sky sunk the sun behind
the United States Fleet, and the city shone.

The novelties of that life now familiar
as I stood at the rail. I imagined glasses raised—

businessmen at the club, sailors in the bars by the bay.
My friends and husband remained.

There was no new war there yet, when sky
and water merged in the dark, and left us to blackout

on the slow ship where even diapers
couldn't be hung on deck to dry,

for a white flag at night could call
the fire down, could drown us.

REBECCA MORGAN FRANK is the author of *Little Murders Everywhere* (Salmon 2012), a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and her poems have recently appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The New England Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and *Washington Square*. She is co-founder and editor of the online magazine *Memorious* and an assistant professor in creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Writers.