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Message to PressStarters:

To say that 2020 is challenging would be an understatement.

It is rough and tough.

It has brought pain that tested us in many ways.

Surviving the year is not a walk in the park.

But we walked together, and we will continue to walk together--- hand in hand.

It may be difficult to understand, but perhaps it is meant to be understood. Perhaps, what we are going through is meant to change us.

After the storm, we are reminded to #pressstart again.

Time and again, we are reminded that there is always something to be grateful for in the midst of the most trying times.

We are thankful for the unwavering trust and support that you have given us. You have been generous in sharing your time and resources. One of which is our #PressHeart initiative that aims to support those who were badly affected by the pandemic and typhoon that hit us.

Thank you for continuously believing in our projects and advocacies. We have successfully rolled out over 200 online webinars and workshops for the year and built partnerships with over 20 brands. These would not have been possible without all of you.

Thank you for helping us reaching more and more people worldwide through our platform. From the bottom of our hearts, we extend our sincerest appreciation.

As part of our commitment to help you achieve your goals and dreams, we came up with this e-mag compilation as a medium to create, collaborate, and connect.

This first edition features PressStarters who took action in writing a plot twist for the year. In this edition, they have contributed amazing stories and poetries to inspire the writers within us to continue sharing our message to the world. Congratulations to all who completed their passion projects for the year!

Furthermore, we are working on more exciting programs and projects for 2021 and beyond. We will strive to continuously provide you with more valuable opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed.

Indeed, the best is yet to come so let's keep pressing on...

To God be the glory!

Much love,

Elaine and Ralph



Anna Catherine Villamor

is a storyteller and aspiring writer. She spends her free time writing personal essays and doing passion projects for her community.

Romantic Interlude

Anna Catherine Villamor

He sang the loveliest melodies.
In the warmest of nights and the coldest of days.
But he sang it brief and momentarily,
Before he paused, stopped singing, and got away.

Facing the Kinnara

Anna Catherine Villamor

Solana trembled as she looked at the dainty amber eyes and felt the ethereal presence of the kinnara, the celestial deity who shall fulfill her desire to bewitch the writer she admires.

“You are supposed to be a half-man and half-bird. Where are your wings?” Solana asked as sticky sweat poured out of her pores.

“What can I do?” the kinnara wry response. “You summoned me in the open!”

Conscious of the scathing eyes around them, Solana took three steps back and inspected the library. Then, she returned her gaze to the kinnara. Speechless, she released a long, dreadful sigh.

Opposite her stood the answer to her prayers, waiting rather crankily for her command.

“Come on, now. Who do you want to bewitch, Master?”

Solana’s jolly face brightened up as she entered the well-lit hall of the library. Although her new hair color failed to bring beauty back to its former glory, she stands with utmost pride wearing a black dress that highlights her slim figure.

All for the attention of Alphonse, the award-winning historical fictionist, who is a regular guest to the library where she is working. His timeless beauty never fails to amaze her. Hence, like a hawk hunting prey, she observes him every day – from the time he peruses bundles of ancient manuscripts to the time he leaves the library. She craves his physique all day.

20 years have passed since she caught a glimpse of him. She was a college freshman then, while he was a novice writing instructor. Since then, she attends all his public lectures and book launch, and fills her room with his memorabilia – ranging from cutouts of stories he contributed to Liwayway to the plethora of books he published.

Surprisingly, she wasted thousands of chances to connect with him. Even if she craves his touch, she cannot wield the courage to speak, more so confess her aging feelings to him. So, she took the longer route to his heart.

She wandered from Baclaran to Pateros, from Quiapo to Capul to search for modern-day Catalanans of Luzon who could teach her the ancient rituals for love. She chanted Latin spells, concocted moon water, danced in festivals, joined processions for Nazareno, but in the end, she failed to beguile him.

Her desperation even took her to Siquijor where she collected dolls, charms, and potions from various herbolarios. She even climbed the highest peak of Mount Bandilaan to search for the last Asog, male Babaylan, of Siquijor.

“That man Alphonse, the one you desire shall fall in love with you after the next full moon,” the Asog promised.

But three full moons already passed and Alphonse, her sweet Alphonse, barely noticed her. Even worse, he did not show up in the library for months after that. And her bloods drained when she saw him chatting with a handsome middle-aged woman in a cafeteria.

She let out anguish cries after that.**

She felt indifferent when he returned to the library. But when he approached her, her heart skipped a beat. That is when realized her body still ached for him. For the last time, she promised, for the last time she will search for potions and herbs and magic to get him. So, she went to the powerful Babaylan of Samar.

When she entered the abode of the Babaylan, the shaman looked at her with pitiful eyes, and grabbed her palms and said, “You are not for him from the very start.”

She was startled, but not disheartened.

Even after the Babaylan saw her fate, she decided to proceed and cast a love spell. But their rituals were interrupted by heavy rains and thunder. They sensed a strange force protesting and fighting against their pleadings.

“We cannot finish the ritual because the gods forbid it,” said the Babaylan. “I am sorry, but I cannot do anything for you anymore.”

“Is there another way I have not tried before?”

“There is but—”

“But what?”

“But it is dangerous, impossible.”

“Pray, tell me. I will catch the moon for him.”

“No, my child. You need to hunt for a kinnara, the mythical half-human, half-bird deity who can bewitch the one you desire for you. The only way to summon him is to form a *gugma* blessed by the shamans and deities of Makiling, Banahaw, Mayon, Kanlaon, Apo, and Bukidnon.”

And fiercely, Solana did.

She took her chances.

She arranged Alphonse to be the speaker of the talk for her Library’s World Book Day celebration. That day, she listened intently to his lecture on prose and poetry and prayed for him to notice her.

After the talk, she mustered all the courage, not to confess to him, but to summon the kinnara. With all her heart, she closed her eyes and inspirited the *gugma*.

She had goosebumps after she felt the divine presence of kinnara. Her heart pumped faster and faster, and harder and harder until it went back to normal. She was excited and anxious. Today is the day the kinnara makes her wildest dream come true.

Alas! When she opened her eyes, she sees a familiar face opposite hers. Bewildered, she froze.

“What can I do for you, Master?” Alphonse said.

“You are supposed to be a half-man and half-bird. Where are your wings?” Solana asked as sticky sweat poured out of her pores.

“What can I do?” Alphonse answered wryly. “You summoned me in the open! Come on, now. Who do you want to bewitch, Master?”

[This work is originally written for the Storywriting School’s ‘How to Write Sci-Fi/Fantasy’ Workshop, July 11-17, 2020.]

Four Quarters of Love

Anna Catherine Villamor

It is an understatement to say that 2020 brought a conundrum to our lives. People suffer loss one way or another. Yet as the uncertainty continues, we discover who and what really matter to us. As for me, I have rediscovered the many faces of love.

In the first quarter of the year, I was in a relationship with an amazing and talented man. He had shown me what unconditional love is. And I have enjoyed the comfort, familiarity, and stability. The only problem is I cannot requite his affection, which is something he knew from the start. Even so, he asked me to come with him to the province before the lockdown was declared. I refused and chose to stay in the capital. As the “New Normal” was unfolding, our long-distance relationship began to shatter. So, we faced the inevitable. We parted ways.

I spent the next few months redefining myself. I followed the routines of the Japanese centenarians, decluttered my closet like Marie Kondo, and consumed healthy food for the first time. I laughed and cried alone, wishing I could come home to my family. Then I found a distraction. I read the works of a writer I admire for so long. I watched his webinars, and a part of me was falling for his charm, eloquence, and intelligence over and over again. We met several times before, and he waves at me

whenever sees me. But his caliber is too far to reach. Even so, I still got curious and asked his friends what his relationship status was. They told me he is married. I felt blue after that, but I moved forward and wished to find someone like him – intelligent, practical, street smart, great storyteller, and organized. He was my ideal man. That hopefulness ended the second quarter.

In the third quarter of the year, I met a man with my ideal qualities. Despite of the quarantine restrictions, we found ways to meet each other and spend time together. He would call me for hours at night and we talked about our family, dreams, and preferences. In the process, we discovered our incompatibility. I love reading, he does not. He likes deep learning; I am broad-based learner. He wants a ‘normal house’ in the city; I prefer a cozy home with French windows in the countryside. I laughed so hard when he asked me what a French window is. More so, he did not want to commit into a serious relationship, I was rushing him to have one. He wanted an anchor, but instead I made him my anchor. He was always comforting me, and I became increasingly overbearing. In spite the differences, we went on. But at the back of our minds, we knew our whirlwind, undefined relationship was not meant to last.

I found a convenient arrangement at work that presented me a chance to come home. I said goodbye to him fifteen days before my departure. That time we exchanged a very intimate embrace. He asked me if I would miss him, I answered with a smile. Three days before my trip, we spent a final night together. The atmosphere was very calm and peaceful. He asked if

I was bored, I said no. Honestly, I enjoyed our conversational silence. We said our goodbyes once more.

But the story did not end there, he reconnected with me while I was spending the mandatory 14-day quarantine in my hometown. He tried to video call; I did not answer. Then I called his mobile number. We spent at least 30 minutes talking but the conversation was hollow and shallow. He finally said goodbye a day before my home quarantine ended. But I mindlessly searched for him. Deep within, I desired to continue the relationship even when the confusion was hurting me.

I returned to the city a month before the end of the fourth quarter. I asked him if we could talk, but he refused. I asked for a closure. He said he does not care and he does not need it. I guess that is the closure I was seeking for to move forward.

In my brokenness, I found the most important kind of love, that is self-love. After four quarters of enjoying a rollercoaster ride on unconditional love, reverence, and undefined romantic interlude, I finally found what really matters to me. As I relearn to love myself in the last month of 2020, I became closer to God, to my family, and to my immediate community, and became passionate at work again. I started to forgive myself and others, and decided to cultivate high-minded relationships.

Hence after so many years of seeking love from another, I finally realized that true love really starts with the self. ❄️



Charles V. Tomeldan

Charles is a writer by profession. He penned articles for *Writers.PH* (as a member of the Professional Writing Team) and two I.T. lifestyle magazines, *PC Shopper* and *PC Direct*. *The Kaya Natin! Champions: Inspiring Stories of Good Governance and Leadership in the Philippines*, Volume 1, written along with other writers, is his first book. Currently, he writes freelance online.

He is also a Certified Life Skills and Self Discovery Coach and a Certified Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt. An artist at heart, he considers his most precious memories as among the greatest treasures that he keeps. Charles is a bachelor to this day. He lives under the skies of Quezon City.

On the 12th of March, Pres. Rodrigo Duterte appeared on national TV and announced that Metro Manila will be placed on partial lockdown or in “community quarantine” beginning on midnight of the 15th, or three days after, in light of the rising cases of COVID-19 infection that has befallen the metropolis.

People scrambled to leave Mega Manila for their hometowns. Many, those who anticipated future events, planned to store food and other necessities lest they would be apprehended in violation of quarantine protocols

I was among those who made plans.

Before the calendar reached March 15, I drafted a list of what I am going to do and buy.

So the next day, I donned a face mask (I bought a bunch when news of the coronavirus becoming a pandemic dominated the news) and headed off to the neighborhood grocery store.

When I reached the place, a long queue had already formed. Anxious buyers wore face masks as well.

It dawned on me that I would be staying home more and going out less. I would be working from home. Weekly meetings with my boss and colleagues would be held online. Food would have to be bought and delivered by couriers. Delivery companies would make a killing. Face masks would become a fashion.

It was the start of a new normal. Life was never the same again.

While on lockdown, I learned a slew of new things that I would not have had if things were “normal.”

I became accustomed to attending on-

line meetings via the popular platform Zoom. I was tough at first, but Zoom was user-friendly.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) became vogue.

To keep up with the times and upgrade my skills, I enrolled in a handful of those virtual courses.

I became a student of Alison, Udemy and Coursera, favorites among those whose thirst for knowledge was unquenchable.

Webinars, free or otherwise, became a hit as well. Not wanting to be left behind, I joined the bandwagon and registered for and attended multiple webinars that I lost count.

These webinars I joined in dwelt on the subjects of data science, data privacy, cybersecurity, vlogging, literature, education, digital marketing, social media marketing and management, project management, risk management, crisis management, and WFH. Well, almost everyone works from home nowadays.

Health is wealth, as the maxim goes, so I didn’t pass up on every opportunity to join webinars on mental health, psychology, caring for oneself, stress management, and tactical emergency casualty care. Who knows? I might be able to save a life someday. That will be the day.

One does not live on bread alone, but on God’s Word too. I took online classes that teach stuff from the Bible. I learned more of Peter the Apostle and Jesus our Redeemer. I read stories from the book of Genesis to the Gospels.

Webinars in writing I engaged in as well. They ranged from creative writing to ebook writing, from content writing to copywriting. Oh, I attended a couple of writers online camp, too.

Being alone is a sad state. I joined communities on Facebook and got to meet new friends, touch base with old ones, and belong to groups whose undertakings echo like mine.

And so I rediscovered myself when I joined the webinars that focused on working with words.

Writing has always been my passion. I get a kick when I punch on my keyboard or take a pen and paper to write an article or tell a story.

I will always be a writer at heart, and I wish that someday, I will write a book that touches other people’s lives and gives them courage when the going gets tough. I will pen a novel that tells the story of a winner in life and inspires others to write their own.

So, what did I learn to value or give importance to during the government-imposed lockdown?

Relationships matter. What good is it if success feels like a second skin but my relationships suck?

Who would forget friends? They are endeared more now that I am holed up in my abode because of the community quarantine.

According to my faith be it unto me. In these trying times, when the future looks uncertain, when hope fades, and when my faith gets tested, prayers will see me through.

I look forward to the day when the world heals from the pandemic, the crisis ends, and smiles return to our faces.

No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn. – Hal Borland

OUR MOMENT

By Emerald Mino-Dulay

I waited long for this
 And prayed a thousand times
 To be one with a stranger
 I knew only in my mind.

I thank God you are here
 I thank Him for those eyes
 Though life can bring some gloom
 Your voice will give me smiles.

Looking back, we are friends
 I cannot help but recall
 My secret fantasies
 Just before we fall

Soon the piano will play
 And I will walk the aisle
 In a few gentle steps
 I am ready to say, yes...

I see you adoring me
 Wearing pink, satin, and lace...
 See how I adore you, too.
 You are handsome in that suit.

After the vows we'll make
 The promises must last
 And in some moment more
 Please show the world
 I am yours.

Dear, Lawyer

By Emerald Mino-Dulay

You must have slept
 Too late last night
 And still you faced
 This day with might

To see the light
 And suffered
 Till you proved you were right

A sweet ordeal
 Assure yourself
 After the case,
 You will drink His cup.

All prepared
 Have prayed so hard
 That only truth
 Must come to rule

It took you days



Glaiza Antonio

is a software developer who cannot let go of writing for humans, so she continued. She likes to read fantasy, science fiction and anything weird so her works are along those lines as well. She writes mostly short stories, but she writes novels as well on online platforms. When she is not writing and working, she spends her time on anime and games.

Rainbow Clored World

Glaiza Antonio

I took a towel from my bag and wiped the sweat and grime off my face. I got off at Monumento LRT station and walked along the lines of shops and hotels. It was noisy, together with all the jeepney and bus drivers' loud voices to pick up passengers, to the street peddlers tempting passersby to buy their wares. What I needed was a quiet place, but from Baclaran to Monumento, I found no area that fits that description until I was at the end of the route.

I looked up, it was noon and sweltering hot, and the humidity was so much that my hair started to feel like it's never been washed for days. Maybe, I should have alighted at the UN Ave. Maybe somewhere there, I could find a quiet place to think about my life. But it's too late now. I'm already at the end of the LRT route, like how it's already too late because I already said yes to Mike.

I turned right at a street whose name I did not bother to look at. I was wandering aimlessly, going to places where there were the least number of people and the least number of buildings. I saw an old, closed zoo so I turned towards it. Passed a church, a couple of restaurants until I reached a memorial park. It looked quiet inside, not many people, but the gate to it was closed. I walked around it but there was no entrance.

When my stomach grumbled, I looked around. Across the street was an old building and close to it was a mais vendor. I crossed the street and bought one for myself. After the vendor lavished it with margarine and salt, I took it and paid for it. I went closer to the old hotel and saw that it was more dilapidated than I thought. The stairs going up and the first floor doors were locked up, there were no elevators and some windows were broken.

After my inspection of the old hotel, I sat down at the edge of it and looked towards the main street. The mais vendor went to another area to sell his wares, besides he'll have more chances at the other side of the street. I started biting on my salty, greasy, steamed corn and liked its taste. I bit at it again and looked at my watch, 3.30PM. I was supposed to meet my fiance at 6PM.

I sighed at the recollection. I shouldn't have said yes to Mike especially when I was uncertain about my love for him. Yes, he is kind and he loves me. My parents love him too, maybe more than what I really felt for him. After our first anniversary, I started to doubt my feelings

for him. I started to look for opportunities to break the relationship but every time I had a chance, I was too afraid to say it. Maybe, Mike noticed my hesitance, that's why on our second anniversary he organized a mob proposal. And in that setting, I didn't have the courage to say no to him, which was a mistake.

I was about to have another bite when, "That looks delicious, can I have some?"

I looked up at the voice. It looked like a security guard but for what? I looked around again and noted that there was nothing to guard except the old hotel. Is he guarding a property that was currently embroiled in a family dispute?

I smiled forcibly at him and went back to my corn. "Where are you from?" he asked.

I looked back at him. He looked like a young man, mid or late 20's. I'm used to them--guys striking up a conversation with me. I'm on the pretty side so guys flirting with me was a common occurrence. Although, it stopped when I and Mike became a couple.

"What's your name?" he asked again.

It was kinda refreshing though. It's like I'm back to those times when Mike was still persistently courting me and I still had my freedom.

"You're lost?"

This time, I smiled naturally at him. These types of guys will never have a chance with me unlike Mike. Mike had the courage to tell me directly that he loves me, that no matter what, his love for me would never wane. He never lacked in showing that too. He never failed in asking me what I need so he could provide it, be it physical or an emotional need.

“I’m not lost, Kuya,” I answered.

“At last, the woman speaks.”

I laughed, broke the corn cob in half and handed it to him. “Here. Congrats for having half of my corn,” I teased.

“Timely! I’m already hungry.”

While eating half the corn I gave him, he started to talk, about his parents, his siblings and almost everyone that he knows. I listened although at times, my mind wandered off to the wedding preparations that Mike and his family was handling. They said I was lucky to marry into a family who likes me. However, I don’t feel anything that deserves to be congratulated. I was going with the flow and intentionally being late for an important wedding preparation was the first rebellious act I will ever show to my parents. Maybe Mike would think about it and decide to break off the engagement and all the wedding preparations.

“So kuya, what are you guarding here?” I finally asked just to stop him from the retelling of his life. “Is some rich family in an inheritance war? Which one paid you to guard this property, the eldest?”

The guard laughed. “It’s not like that. The eldest was paying me 80k a month as a guard because his youngest sibling still lives here.”

“That’s a huge salary for a security guard.”

“I also take care of the kid’s food and cleaning after him.”

“You also live here?”

“Yes, I’m an all around guard and yaya to a seven year old child.”

“You should’ve asked for more,” I teased.

“So whatever-your-name-is, why do you look depressed?”

“I mean, ask for a higher salary, not ask me more.” I said, “And Sarah, my name is Sarah.”

“But Sarah, I’m more interested in you.”

I stopped laughing. Somehow, this guard was starting to feel creepy. I looked at the time again, 4PM. I sighed. Just when it was kinda refreshing, it made a 360 degree turn and hit the limit. Now, it was just plain creepy. I mean, yes, the guard was young and not ugly, but acting like that to a stranger. It’s no longer funny. I mean, I’m not as pretty as before, it was only Mike who tells me that I still am.

Should I leave? But that means I would be facing Mike sooner than expected and that scares me. Today was the last chance I could tell him to break off the wedding. After today, it would be too late. I would be married to a man I have not felt a single spark of romance. Yes, I like him but as a friend. He was likable, cute and we share the same values, except I’m a coward and he’s nothing like that.

“I’m more interested in the little kid though,” I answered.

“Well, he’s thin and frail and does not want to live with his older brother. He’s a picky eater as well. Does not want vegetables and only eats meat.”

“You could have mixed some veggies in his meal. Kids usually don’t notice that.”

“This kid gets sick whenever I do that.”

“That’s a weird sickness.”

“My employer said that it was a genetic disease.”

A creepy, flirty guard taking care of a spoiled, sick kid? So instead of leaving the area after I finished my corn, I let him talk about the kid, his interests, his age, his parents and his relationship with the guard.

As Kuya Gary--the name of the guard--talks about the little kid named Denny, I became more and more enamored. I have this weird fantasy that Denny looked like Artemis Fowl. Was he smart and cunning too? That was why as a kid with an illness, his parents allowed him to live alone. Would I be able to? If I ask Mike to break off the engagement, could I live and grow old alone too? Could I really say no even if Mike insists that given the time, I will learn to love him too?

“Give me a moment. Denny texted me for his meal.”

“Go on,” I said. Maybe now, I can face Mike with this new-found courage. I stood up to leave when Gary stopped unlocking the door.

“Maybe, you like to meet Denny?”

“Unannounced?”

Gary looked at his phone and texted something. A moment after, his phone vibrates, “He said yes and wants to meet you too.”

I raised my brow. If the guard was as lax as this, it was a miracle that nothing bad happened to this kid before. I looked at the time, close to 5PM. I turned to Gary. The door was unlocked and inside was a stair going down.

“Denny does not like sunlight so he prefers to stay in the basement,” Gary said.

Denny seemed more and more like a fictional character. There were apprehensions because what if, the little kid isn’t real, what if, this creepy guard made up Denny’s existence. Instead of a room down there, there’s nothing and I’d be--I stopped the thoughts, swallowed hard and let the curiosity win over.

I went inside the building with Gary behind me. Tensed and prepared if he does anything to me, I descended the stairs, so far, I’m safe. He passed me and I almost hit him, I stopped just in time before he slid a curtain and behind was a door. He opened it and inside was a clean room. Living room was at the center with a couch and TV. There were doors at the right, possibly leading to the bedroom and bathroom. The kitchen and dining area was on the left.

“Denny?” Gary called.

When the small head of a young boy peered to us from the couch, I felt relief. At least, whatever bad things I was thinking about Gary was unfounded. The little boy stood up, went to me and hugged me. He was really thin when I returned his hug, I felt that he was only skin and bones. Seems like the guard was not doing his job of properly feeding the child. Or was it because of his disease?

“Welcome! Thanks for visiting me,” the kid said.

“Yeah, well, your guard, Gary--” I looked back and saw that he already left the room. I looked back at the kid. “He said that it’s fine even if I’m barging in unannounced.”

“Oh, I am thankful for him for bringing you in,” the kid said and buried his face on my stomach.

I reached for his shoulders and tried to extract him from me. I mean I’ve been out for hours and with all the Manila pollution, it will not be good for a sheltered boy to get all that muck.

“I don’t smell that well so--”

“Oh, you’re wrong, you smell so good, unlike all the other women Gary let in,” Denny said and I heard him breathe me in. I got embarrassed. I tried to pull away but his hold on me was tighter than what I expected a thin seven year old to have.

That instant, I felt nervous then I caught my reflection on the mirror. Instead of just a little boy, there was something more. His limbs became longer than 5 feet behind me. There were also tentacles growing from his bony back. Those limbs and tentacles were like that of an octopus but will claw at the end of each tentacle. I watched one of those tentacles pierce me and I felt pain in my neck.

I lost strength in my knees, but the little kid-monster supported my weight, his face still buried in my stomach like he was taking in mouthfuls of my smell. Then, I remembered that story about a woman and a pet snake. The snake was not eating because he was preparing to devour the woman.

Maybe, it was similar to my situation. The kid-monster ran to me to smell its food. It was thin because there’s very little supply for real-live humans who could get curious about a strange child. And maybe that guard, Gary, really did enjoy the women he tempted, before letting them into the kid’s room, maybe that’s why they don’t smell the same thing as me to Denny.

My eyes started to hurt but I continued to stare at my reflection, I saw myself getting thinner like my inside was being siphoned. Then my attention went to my eyes, it became larger, unbecoming of my small face. It’s different now, rainbow colored flecks appeared as my eyeballs continued to increase in size. Due to the enlargement, my eyelids and eyebrows receded somewhere and my cheeks puffed up.

Before I lost my sight, I understood that Gary’s main job was to ensure that Denny was well fed so it would not come out of its prison. Maybe, it’s the reason why his paycheck was huge but damn, he’s still underpaid for this kind of job.

And yet, somehow, I found similarities between Denny and me. I knew I was dying, but before I lost any strength, I reached up to the little kid-monster and hugged him as tight as I could.

“It will be okay,” I whispered. “I’m sorry.”

However, the first was a phrase I wanted to be said to me and the second was meant for Mike and my family.

Imelda Caravaca Ferrer



A published textbook writer as well as a soon-to-be self-published author (of her first book of poetry!-The Moment I Knew I'm So Into You), she is an M.A. Reading graduate of UP Diliman; a proud member of Hogwarts Philippines who is also a Taylor Swift stan and roots for Kween Lea Salonga and J.K. Rowling.

She is also a former public school principal and a national trainer of the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), the training arm of DepEd and the Foundation of Upgrading of Standards in Education (FUSE).

Currently, she is a Public Schools District Supervisor of DepEd Makati. She is into training, books, poetry, music, movies, theater, doodling, museums, art galleries, journalism, superheroes, traveling, beaches, sunset –gazing ,swimming, coffee, chocolates, and most of all, LIFE.

She is currently working on her passion project- her memoir--Coming Out of the Dark: A Life Under Construction which will be self-published in Amazon next year.

Do buy her poetry book which will be available mid-January 2021 – a perfect post-Christmas gift, a New Year's gift, a Valentine's Day gift which is actually perfect for all seasons

Musings I've Had When You Passed By

By Imelda Caravaca Ferrer

Musings I've had when you passed by (If ever I see Timothee Chalamet)

I looked up and I saw you,
 you- a spot of art,
 you catch and kill girls with the sparkle effect
 and I am changed.
 I played 19 love songs today,
 a playlist for lovers before I saw you.
 You glow like a tale of magic.
 Normal people sleep the night through,
 the night finds me awake straight on till morning,
 dreaming of you.
 Dear, I hope you get this message.
 Every last word is for you, my dear.
 Hello, universe.
 What is holding you up?
 My cruel prince, you wicked sexy liar,
 I am in a mythic journey with you.
 My thought for today: My hunger for you.
 The day of a nobody confessed,
 the secret life from the secret diary of Imelda.
 Do I understand the wisdom of not escaping you?
 I was perfectly fine until I met you.
 Is it just me?
 Or is this my first day in hell,
 one night gone,
 more to follow until I give you up?
 The art of peace,
 on minding the beloved,
 meditations bring the singularity of being single.
 Can I be fearless in 21 days?

What about the people and places that scare me?
 Should I take the leap, dare to lead?
 Talk to you?
 'Who do you say I am?', you asked.
 'You are heaven on earth', I replied.
 I am coming home to you.
 The night ocean roars.
 You give the smile of a wolf
 and I take the form of a mortal girl with the secrets I keep.
 Let me tell you the story of how we disappeared.
 You were the stranger in the house: the hidden thing.
 I am reminded of things gone astray
 when things fell apart.
 The life I left behind,
 my ex-life,
 the ruthless examination of boundaries.
 I saw the world in 60 seconds;
 99.9% of me was enamoured with you.
 I saw lifetimes before me;
 the ocean at the end of the lane started with you. I
 saw you in the cosmos,
 in all the bright places.
 What if it's us,
 all the lights we cannot see?
 Yes. No. Maybe.
 Just because you stopped me dead
 when you passed by.

February 21,2020/1:05 a.m.

My Song of You

I've read this book ages ago
 and I'm reading it again
 because the sadness
 is haunting me once more.

You'll never come back.

I heard your footsteps
 as you walked away,
 wreaking havoc on my emotions,
 wearying my mind.

A repeat is happening
 in my life,
 a pattern of my personal history,
 my memories,
 my feelings,
 my stories of goodbye.

I waited for you
 to look back,
 as you walked away that night,
 to pause and smile.
 You never did.

And the years I've spent loving you
 ended under five minutes.
 You left my heart in exile,
 in agonizing solation.

I realized that you were never mine.
 Choosing and deciding,
 I thought you were my city,
 my world,
 my everything.
 But the lights
 don't offer comfort now.

You packed us up,
 serrated our relationship
 with a saw.

I didn't see
 beyond your smiles.
 I found myself sleeping with the enemy.

Did you love me
 all those times
 you held me tightly

like you'd never let go of me?
 Or was it all a farce?

The thicket of emotions overwhelms me.
 You are my loss
 and in the process,
 I also lost myself.

All the stoplights
 Were painted green.
 You went full throttle and left me
 For somebody else.

Our relationship was a fever, a fire
 That burned out and fizzled out
 one day at a time
 that I hardly noticed it.

Impermanent,
 fragile,
 tenuous.
 That was our relationship.

Loss and failure
 marked by pain and agony.

To mourn
 is to say goodbye to grief,
 to tiptoe
 like a ballerina
 on the wings of birds.

There are things I cannot speak about.
 You placed a muzzle over my mouth.
 I choose my words with care.

You are held captive by your inability to
 forgive,
 imprisoned in the dungeon of unforgiveness.

How shall I sing of you?

I'll sing it with love still
 because my life with you,
 an experience with broken shards and unful-
 filled promises
 had spaces of love, worth and wonder.

This is my song.

July 25, 2020/Saturday

Special Note: Inspired by Taylor Swift's song-
 "Exile"

Alone

All these nights
 for the longest time,
 I've been sleeping alone.

I wake up alone.
 No one calls me "My Favorite Cheesecake!"
 No one asks me if I've eaten.
 No one messages me in the middle of the
 afternoon.
 No one asks how my day went.
 Or asks me out.

I should be used to all these by now.

Solitary days
 bleeding into lonely nights.

I've become stoic.
 Just accepting my reality.

But no, you never really get used to it.

You get tired, yes.

But you find things to do
 all the time.

Anything.

Just to escape this yawning, empty ghost town
 of a love life,
 starring one lonely girl:
 me.

I am nobody's favorite.

August 19,2020/Wednesday/Day 159/GCQ

Special Note: This was inspired by Taylor's
 Swift song- "Cardigan." "And when I felt like I
 was an old cardigan under someone's bed. You
 put me on and said I was your favorite."

My Happy Pill

By Imelda Caravaca Ferrer

I don't think of you every waking moment

I still love you
even if you don't feel the same.

But I don't know

how long my can keep up with this.

I wish I could say: I'm over you.
I tell myself many times
to kill this love.

But this virus- worrying situation
that ails everyone
has somehow made me grasp
a happy memory -- YOU!

I've been on my own
for far too long,
needing love
that no one's giving.
I should be used to this by now
but every day is a fresh wound.

I don't want you to judge me.

I don't think of you
every minute of the day
but I do every now and then.

You're better off than me
because you're with someone else.

I have no intention to burden you
with this feeling
but if I were you I'd be grateful.

To love you from afar
is my only intention.

I don't need to call you mine
but sometimes I wish
I'd see you even just once
and talk to you
about this and that.

I'd let you listen to all the songs
that mean so much to me
so you'd know how I feel about you.

I'd pray for you,
that God would keep you safe,
love you just because.

I do not have the luxury to say
that I can't sleep
without your touch,
that's something I'll do without forever.

I'm alone in my bed without you,
never been that way with you anyway.

What if I'm someone
you don't want to talk about ever
even with our friends?

What if I'm persona non grata
in your newsfeed?

What if I'm just
a fleeting memory
that passed your mind at 2 a.m.?
(Wishful thinking! I have flights of fancy!)

Everyone is sleeping
but I'm awake with your memory.

And I converse with you
in my mind in the dark of the night.

And I say:
I don't think of you all the time
That's not a lie.

I don't think of you
every minute,
just every now and then.

22 March 2020/3:15 p.m.

I do not want to bother you but thoughts of you come
freely on my mind. I have a lot of worries: money
problems, writing deadlines, book launchings, the
three days of darkness, this enhanced community
quarantine that has curtailed my mobility and God
I'm all alone!

My fingers itch to send you a message via Messenger
but you ghosted me months ago. I wrote you a letter
that I will desist from telling you I love you. Instead,
I will qualify it and say "I love you just as a friend."
though we both know I am just pretending.

I listen to Finneas sing "Let's Fall in Love for the
Night" and I change his lines to fit my purpose: "You
need a pick me up. I'll be there in 10 hours. I like to
push my luck. So take my hand, let's take a drive.
"I've been living in the future, hoping I'd see you
sooner."

Finneas' 25 minutes to 10 hours for me because I'd
have to travel to Naga. My eyes fill with unshed
tears.

There's no denying

If I see you,

I don't think

my eyes could lie.

My heart is beating,

There's no denying

that I love you still.

I'll be there to pull you up,

when you're down.

I'll choose you

if you choose me

but you finally found forever

in the arms of another.

22 March 2020/4:05 p.m.

And looking at Yoon Seri and Ri Jung Hyuk, I'd
rather be apart from my love if I have that kind of
Love. I'd rather be Seo Dan and have Gu Seung-
Joon die on me if I have been loved that way. I can
live on that.

Even if I can't call you mine

Your heart is beating well,

Mine is breaking.

You showed me how to be lonely,

You simply ignore me.

You don't offer a kind word.

You simply stay silent.

I don't expect you

to tell me that you love me,

that's been settled a long time ago.

I just hope

you'd say you understand how I feel.

Tell me that no matter what happens

I'd always have a special place in your heart

even if I can't call you mine.

22 March 2020/4:21 p.m.

Acceptance

Will I be someone who'd say

I wish we've never met?

But I'd rather feel this pain

than to never have met you.

You taught me how to care.

You taught me how to love.

And though we'll never be together

because you have someone else already

this heart will always have a place for you.

I'd rather we met in this lifetime

and loved you

than never to have met you at all.

And love is also acceptance

of things that could never be.

22 March 2020/4:31 p.m.

Do you think I'm pesky? Do you think I'm foolish
for harbouring feelings for you still? Do you wish
sometimes you could tell me to stop offering this
unwanted feelings of mine? Do you think it's mighty
useless because you have a common-law wife and
you have made your choice a long time ago? Do you
think you're being a gentleman by not saying any-
thing? Have you read my second letter or you think
not knowing anything is far better? Do you think by
being silent, my feelings would stop growing? Do
you think by not saying anything you have solved
everything? Or do you even pray that I'd get over
you so I could move on?

Ahh, you break my heart again.

I lost a friend. I'm also losing my mind.

I wish I could finally say: "I don't miss you at all."

I'll never ever call you mine.

But you are my heartbreak.

Jazira M. Ismael



Jazira M. Ismael is described by people who know her the most as "Jazz of all trades". Jazz or Jazzy as she is fondly called,

loves to write stories, has been writing for decades but not one has been published. Her busy lifestyle hindered her from honing her

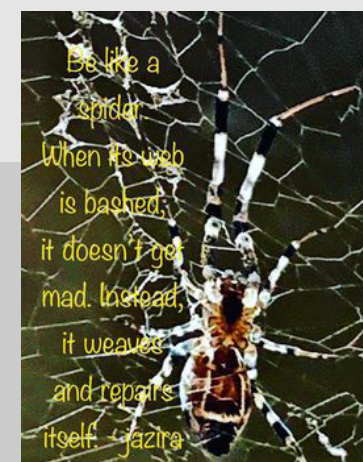
knacks for creative writing. However, the trying times of pandemic has brought her back to sit and pen a novella (fiction) entitled

"Two Days and Ten Years Later". With the encouragement of PressStart Studio and being inspired by her PressStart Writing Commu-

nity, she dreams of publishing her book in 2021 and be an author in her own right.

Jazzy also plays guitar but prefers the uniqueness of the ukulele. She is also a photo enthusiast and her motivational works

can be found in her instagram account: Fotografia Y Viaje Alrededor.



Jennie Lou Dalangin



Jenn is a Communication graduate. She’s currently an OFW in Dubai, U.A.E. and she’s serving as one of the household leaders of the CFC-Singles for Christ community. She loves reading, writing, and dancing. She’s also into photography, events management, and some other forms of art. One of her dreams is to publish her own book.

Warning! Do not fall in Love

By Jennie Lou M. Dalangin

I know this warning bothers some of you who have just read this. Maybe you are thinking that someone have just hurt me or that I am a man-hater on that note because I warn you not to fall in love. But I am not. I love and I am loved. So, what do you think is my reason to give such warning? One thing is for sure, my reason could be different from yours, so, as you continue reading this, please read it with an open heart.

Many people who fall in love eventually get hurt. But why do you have to go through the pain? Why do you need to feel such terrible feeling? Have you ever wondered why? Well, I know, these are all part of life in general, but what if you can avoid these? What if you will not fall in love?

Have you ever thought of literally searching the meaning of *fall*? Try searching and it will appear that it has a negative meaning – drop, down, stumble, etc. Now, try searching the word *grow* and it will give a positive meaning – develop, produce, multiply, etc. Now, try saying this out loud, “*I grow in love*” instead of “*I fall in love*” Would it be a different? Or would it be just the same? What do you think?

Let’s compare the two expressions. According to Mr. Webster, “fall” means “to drop down suddenly or to flow down” while “grow” means “to spring up or to develop.” “Love” means “affection and warm attachment”. When we combine the meaning

of the first expression “**I fall in love**” it’s like saying “**I drop down suddenly in affection and warm attachment**” which is a negative idea but when I say “**I grow in love**” it means “**I spring up and to develop in affection and warm attachment**” which is a very positive idea. Do you agree?

I repeat, do not fall in love. I’m not telling you this for you not to be hurt or anything because as I also mentioned it’s part of life in general. The main purpose of this is for you to know that you must never learn to fall in love; **you must learn to grow in love.** In whatever kind of love it is – love for family, love for friends, love for work, love for someone special and most importantly love for God, **decide to grow in love.**

Always remember, love is not to be treated as a game that you can request for a time-out if you wish to or if you’re tired. So as early as now, tell yourself this “**I will not fall in love**” but instead “**I will grow I love.**” But then again, the decision is yours to make.

Ephesians 4:15 (NLT) “Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.”

Midielee Ditablan



Midielee is my full name but friends and relatives call me Jhel which I love to hear and is used to. I am accountant by profession but writing is my passion. I always dream of writing a book and see my name on it. It is a leap of faith, so I decided to do it step by step and this is one step that I am taking

Tanaw

By Midielee Ditablan

Masarap pala ng andito sa ibabaw ng mundo

Tanaw ang ganda ng paligid, ang ganda ng kalikasan

Kulang na lang ang makipagniig kay Haring Araw,

Mahiga sa malambot na pahingahan ni Maputing Ulap

Sa buong maghapon marahil masaya akong tatanaw lang

Ngunit may mga dapat gawin na hindi dapat balewalain

Dagdag pa rin ang pag-iisip sa mga bagay-bagay sa buhay,

Pag-iisip sa taong mahal ko, ang taong sa buhay ko’y nag-bibigay-kulay

Totoo nga sana bawat salita na kanyang nasambit

Bawat pangako na kanyang binitiwang

Pagkat itong aking imbing puso ay sadyang naniwala,

Nagtiwalang muli sa salita, sa Pag-Ibig.

Tanaw ko ang buong paligid

Ang buong sangkalupaan na walang hanggan

Tanaw ko rin ang pag-asa

Na sa bandang huli’y Pag-ibig pa rin.

Sabay

Midielee Ditablan

sabay sa pagsikat ng araw

ang bagong pag-asa

na sa kabila ng kapighatian

ay may ligayang makakamtan

sabay sa pagsikat ng araw

ay mamumutawi ang ngiti

at masisilayan sa mga mata

ang ligayang pinagkait

sabay sa pagsikat ng araw

ang pagsilay ng liwanag

sa kabila ng karimlan

ng buhay na tinahak

sabay sa pagsikat ng araw

ang paniniwala na ang Diyos

sa kabila na lahat

ay patuloy na kumakalinga

Luther (2003 Movie)

By Midielee Ditablan

Martin Luther, is he a heretic or a saint? Perhaps, this can pass as another title for the movie, Luther shown last 2003. He was a 16th century Augustinian monk who led a Christian Reformation which paved the way on the exploration of the Catholic faith. But, instead of reforming the church inside, he created a new denomination which attracted many believers who were dissatisfied with what's going on in the church.

I have never known this fact about Luther until I have seen this movie. I thought he was just another preacher who criticized the Catholic Church and started a new religion. But, in this, I have seen him as more than that. He was a passionate lover of Christ who just wanted to see Him in everything inside the very Church He founded. He wanted to see the mercy and compassion that Jesus shown while He was still here on earth. To alleviate the poor in their saddened state and not to use their hard-earned money to attain their "salvation." We could not blame him for wanting to see that because at that time, in the 16th century, indulgences were bought for a fee to buy their place in heaven and lift the souls of their relatives from purgatory which was for Luther was a form of mockery since, Christ never said that you should pay for these because He had paid for it already when He was crucified in calvary and poured out His blood for the sake of us all.

He was a great professor in Theology but his teachings were considered subversive, not acceptable at that time and seen as an attack to the very Church that he was in. We had seen that he did not really want a revolution but he was misunderstood by peasants and all the people that surrounded him, even the church which caused too much bloodshed on the side of the poor. He was ousted from the Augustinian order but had a consolation from the royalties of Germany. Later, the state and the church accepted the religion that he founded.

I believe if he persisted and remained within the com-

pounds of the Church, Protestantism would not emerge. If he was just given the chance to be heard and be given a free hand in his teachings, he could do more. A reform would be made inside and eventually, he would see what he wanted in the first place. Even before his death, the religion that he created was still struggling for unity because of differences in ideologies. And even up to now, five centuries later, the number of denominations are still growing. For sure, Martin Luther would not wished this for the church and would be unhappy with what is going on now in the reformed church he established. And, as for the Catholic Church, she learned from this reforms that Martin Luther showed and had made many changes up to the present day. Payments for indulgences are abolished and there is the preferential option for the poor. She may still not be perfect but at the very least, it continues to learn, grow and mature to adhere to the teachings of Christ that He handed down to His disciples 2,000 years ago.

Fr. Martin Luther could be a saint, perhaps. After all, he opened the eyes and minds of all those in the church. If he did not stand for what he believed in, we might still be succumbing to the ills of the past. As what Psalm 145:8 said, *The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in loving kindness.* No one knows what the grace of God can do even to the most sinful human being.



John Peter Naoe

An amateur writer who works as a proud government employee in his country. When he is not working, he is reading and on rare occasions, writing. Like most amateur writers he loved writing even at an early age. And like most amateur writers, when life happened, writing lost its allure.

He rarely writes. When he does, he welcomes positive reviews and comments while ignoring negative comments.

He knows Karate, Judo and Kung-fu. To be accurate, he knows that those martial arts exists and hopes to one day to master them.

The Dirty Diary

By John Peter Naoe

Carl and Louise have only been in a relationship for the past couple of months. Almost a year of patience finally born fruit. The day that Louise said yes, she also admitted to Carl that she loves him since before he expressed any intension to court her. It's true that they have been schoolmates since grade school but sadly haven't they been acquainted with each other. Louise admitted that she had Carl go through months of courtship simply to determine his sincerity. A fact that Carl himself accepted. he respected her decision and in the past few months they were in bliss. Love is clearly in the air. At least we can clearly see it in them.

The many months that Carl courted Louise he became acquainted with her friends, family and even neighbors. In those long months they have all accepted his passion and love for Louise and gained their approval. Everyone believed that these couple were headed for the altar in the foreseeable future.

One day everything started to change. The sweet Louise became possessive and almost each and every action is choking Carl. Carl can't even make phone calls or text without going through Louise. Any text or call without Louise 's approval turns into a fight. To most couples a fight over seemingly nothing would end the relationship. but not this couple. Despite her sudden change there are still times when they are both happy. Although Carl's friends would argue that such happy moments were brought by Carl's love for Louise plus patience and tons of understanding. At least they are still happy. Sometimes.

The relationship lasted a couple more months until Carl's siblings were unable to take it and they confronted Louise. They took Carl's love and the couples future into consideration and brought Louise 's sister, mother and best friends into the discussion.

They said it's a simple overnight swimming and tried to convince her that all these people that she knew somehow booked the same hotel on the same day. Despite their poor acting they believed that somehow Louise accepted their excuse. Their lame excuses.

The day was long and they were unable to find the right timing to talk to Louise. She somehow managed to find ways to avoid everyone. The zipline she avoided like the plague was able to get acquainted with Louise that afternoon. She went there fifteen times. Fifteen. Most of the time was wasted waiting in line which is obviously her intention. But when Louise decided to return to her room to take a shower everyone saw an opportunity.

Louise came out of the shower and found fifteen people in her room. All female. All people she knew and all of them coincidentally are staying in the same hotel in the same floor. Although one can see surprise on Louise 's face there is no hint of anger or resentment. There is even a trace of relief on her face. That's how we knew that she is looking forward to this unavoidable talk. This is good although we half expected her to not want this conversation. And if that is the case, we dreaded to know the reason. It seems that things will work out somehow.

It didn't even take some convincing to make Louise talk. Upon asking her, why? Louise broke down crying. For almost an hour she was inconsolable. After Louise had time to calm down, she began explaining.

Carl kept a diary. It's a diary he wrote from time to time. It started a few months before he started courting her. And a few times a month he writes on it. The fact that Carl has a diary isn't the problem it's what he has written that is the problem. The first few

months was okay. It was even wonderful. Each entry is filled with wonderful experiences of Carl. How he faced the day? What problems did he encounter? He even placed lots of comments on his friends and classmate's behavior on those days. It was funny, it was witty, it was full of Carl. This is a real diary.

Louise brought the diary out and the whole gang read it. We read from day one. And we were immersed in the world of Carl for dozens of pages. I didn't even know he is like that. Each page is a marvel and a revelation about Carl.

On one page of the diary, Carl talked about Annie. The 1st year muse in the engineering department. Despite Carl being a fine arts student, they shared a class. Something impossible unless Annie herself choose to enroll that subject. Carl wrote on the diary that Annie sat in a different row and the past few days they didn't even share a conversation. But today, ed their teacher, had them form into pairs. And magically Annie and Carl got paired somehow.

Carl omitted what happened in that page. He specifically wrote that he won't talk about it not even in the diary. But at the end of the page, he wrote that they went home together.

There are many other such entries. some talks about Annie, some about other girls. But in each page Carl never said what we were all thinking. It's just clear for all to see what is happening. and instantly we moved over to Louise 's camp.

We urged Louise to give Carl a chance to explain himself and if the explanation is unsatisfactory then leave him. It's clear that they both love each other. But the entries in the diary are hurting Louise making her hurt Carl. We urged her to clear things with Carl and move on.

Carl has kept his patience despite the way Louise treated him the past months. But when everyone began treating him badly, he couldn't take. He didn't snap or anything but he talked. He wanted an explanation. All they could ever say was talk to Louise. As if that is a good enough excuse for the badmouthing, the petty actions, the joint movement of womenfolk to treat him as someone who is dirt, as someone who have done wrong. Someone guilty. When they keep pointing to Louise he went and talked to Louise.

Louise welcomed the fight. And fight she did. But she never explained what did Carl ever do wrong. The next day would be the same and the next and the next and the next. Until finally Carl had enough. He said that he didn't do anything wrong. And if he really did, he wanted to know what it is. So that he can explain or better

yet correct his wrong doing. He gave Louise the ultimatum. if she won't talk. Then there won't be a relationship.

Louise wouldn't say so he wouldn't stay.

Carl left.

Carl sold his car and resigned from his job. Then he moved to the province. To find peace and quiet. To find himself.

Just so that his parents won't get worried Carl gave them a piece of envelope. In it he wrote his new address for next few months or years. It depends on how long it will take him to forget. He talked to them about his break up with Louise. And informed them that clearly his heart is in pieces right now. But he still loves Louise and he can feel that she really loves him. But being with her is toxic at the moment and each fight feels like being stabbed. And ever since he tried to get the truth from her, they fight. Finally, Carl told his parents that if all Louise plans to do is fight then all he will feel is hurt, the deep hurt of being stabbed. So, ma and pa, if you ever feel that you want to stab me then tell Louise my new address. Or tell someone who will tell her. For example, her sister or her best friends.

I am tired and I can't do this anymore. I need a break. A time for myself.

For two agonizing months Louise cried. She deeply regretted her actions and wanted to make up with Carl. She does not know where to find Carl but she knew that that his parents were aware of his whereabouts. So, she gathered her courage and talked to them.

Louise felt that it was Carl that betrayed her and she have the diary to prove it. But she can't let go of Carl. She loves him too much. She can't even imagine life without him. Every day she misses him. And every day she wants him back. This is the truth and this is what she told Carl's parents.

Seeing Carl's parents read the diary Louise is nervously waiting. She has shown the diary to a lot of people and after reading it everyone came to her side. Sure, the diary revealed another side of Carl. Some are good like, they never expected him to have that wit, or that he has a unique view of certain things. But the diary also revealed that Carl isn't 100% into Louise. He loves her. Everyone can see that. But the diary says that not all of Carl is for Louise. He has left something back for other girls.

Carl's parents quietly read the diary. Then they said something which somehow shocked Louise to her very core.

Did you tell my son about this? Did you give him a chance to explain?

Maybe it is in the way they said it? Or the look in their eyes. But Louise realized that she never bothered to even listen to Carl. In her mind, his guilt is set in stone. There is no need for excuses.

Louise have been too busy nurturing her pain and making sure that Carl feels that very same pain. That's what she has been doing the entire time, ever since anger took control. Ever since she read that stupid diary. And Carl has been patient and understanding for the longest time. At the end he even asked her, he begged her, while on his knees, to tell him what's wrong. What did he do wrong? What does he need to apologize for and what does he need to correct?

Louise realized that she never gave Carl that chance. The chance to redeem himself. But he only needs to redeem himself if he is guilty.

Louise never gave Carl a chance to explain himself. Carl does not even know what is wrong.

In tears and on her knees, Louise begged a chance to talk with Carl.

Carl's loving parents told Louise that she only has one chance. If when they talk and it becomes a fight. It will be the final nail, the final stab. Carl's feeling for her will die. Their relationship will be over. They explained that destroying a relationship is simple. One person needs to let go.

Louise tears fell like flood. Carl refused to let go while being subjected to attacks. Not only from her but also from everyone in her camp. Anyone that ever read that stupid diary helped her to hurt him. It took months for him to finally let go. Will he hold on to her if she simply asks?

But how can that be? Louise knows that she loves Carl. She feels tremendous pain knowing that their relationship is almost over. But she cannot believe in her heart that Carl is the one at fault. Yet she knew that he sacrificed for their relationship. He endured for a long time.

She has never felt so confused in her life. Louise knows that she wants Carl in her life. But she can't forgive him either. And as long as she can feel that anger, she will continue to lash out. And she will. And she did. But she is only willing to do that provided that Carl stays by her side. She does not want him to go. She knows that Carl is her world.

She babbled like a baby and incoherently spoke her mind. Her anger. Her love. Her more than justified actions. How her heart aches knowing that he is gone? How she still misses him? How she cries herself at night and hopes every morning to wake up and see that this is all a bad dream.

Somehow, she managed to convince them and she got Carl's address.

She found him sitting on the porch, drinking beer. Her Carl. How she missed him? How she hated him? Still, she knew that on this day their relationship will either be fixed or broken forever.

Anger and pride clouding her eyes while love pushes her to approach him. She sat beside her love and stared silently. He never even looked at her and just opened up another bottle of beer.

Louise feared that if she opened her mouth, hurtful words will come out. Holding onto little hope that a miracle would happen and they would magically get back together, she tried to think of what to say. She can't think up of any.

If its words to accuse him? She had plenty. If its words to ask for forgiveness. She can fake saying it. As long as it gets them back together. But deep down she still thinks that the one at fault is Carl.

She cursed inside. This kind of mentality will not bring him back. What can I do? What should I do? She asks herself repeatedly for like several minutes.

When she looked down, she saw that in her hand is Carl's diary. The source of everything. Maybe this is the best way to end things, she thought. So, while tears began to fall from her eyes, she nudged him with the diary.

Carl simply said that the diary is a dirty diary.

She couldn't quite catch what he meant. Of course, the diary is dirty. She held it in her hand every night while she cries. Everyone who loves her has read it. Some even threw it after reading some of its contents. What does he mean the diary is dirty? Is he mad that she didn't take good care of it?

Carl took a deep breath and repeated the words that he said. But saying that the diary is dirty just made Louise confused.

Seeing her anger temporarily dispelled by her confusion made Carl start his explanation.

A dirty diary is a diary written with the expectation that someone

will read it. It does not contain one's true feelings. It does not even contain the full truth. Its mainly to practice writing. Still, it is written in a way that others will believe it. Only those who really know Carl will notice the lies and the half-truths in the diary.

Louise when I wrote in the diary that i went home together with Annie, I meant that we rode the same bus home. If you forgot your anger and read carefully you will see that what you imagined that happened is simply a lie. That day is the day we first went on a date. On that day after school i rushed straight into your house and we went to the mall to watch a movie. If other people read that page in the diary then they might have come up with many ideas. That's the point of this diary. To lead them into thinking things. To make them think of a lie and believe it. This diary isn't about stating facts. It's about twisting facts and omission. The goal being to make them, those that take the diary and read it without permission think differently of me. It's you, only you, who knows me that shouldn't be led with a lie or even think in that way. Especially since that day should be something you and i would not forget.

I was only writing a diary, a dirty diary to practice my writing skills. And i wrote it like that because i know that a diary will never be safe and people will never respect your privacy. As long as they see it then they will read it. In their minds a simple apology would suffice. That's why I don't want to write a real diary with my real feelings. Ever. I realize that I view a diary differently.

Dirty diary is dirty in a sense that it is a fabrication. Each entry contains half-truths and is written in a leading way to make people think in a certain direction. All in anticipation of the day that this diary, this dirty diary will be read by someone. I know that someone will someday ignore my privacy and read my diary. This diary was made in that way so that I won't be ridiculed when that time comes. I cannot imagine the gall of people who would do that. Disrespect you by reading your innermost, most private thoughts and ridicule you for it or worse.

That's why a made a dirty diary. So that in case someone found out about my diary then at the very least they won't be able to ridicule me with it.

But why would you do that? why would you create a dirty diary? Louise interrupted Carl. She did not expect him to say that.

Louise, I believe you have shown this diary to many people. When you showed it to them did you tell them that this is my diary, one where i keep all my most private thoughts? You didn't have to tell them that it contains my private thoughts because they know it.

And did anyone say no to reading that diary? Did anyone say that they will respect my privacy and not read it? Even despite the fact that you gave your permission for them to read MY diary?

No one will say that. No one will do that. Privacy? Respect? It doesn't exist when there's the promise of something to make fun of, something they can use to ridicule you or even something to prove your claims. Or maybe they just do it because they can.

That's why I'm against writing a diary. But still, I think it is the great way to practice writing. So i made a compromise. I made a dirty diary. I called it dirty because it is untrue.

Carl, I regret it. I regret reading your diary. I'm sorry. If didn't read it then this wouldn't have happened.

Do you know Louise that I never regretted writing that diary? It's just an exercise for me. Didn't I say it before. If you write a diary no one can ignore their desire to read it.

You know what I regret? What I regret is your actions? After you read that diary you thought that I did something wrong. At that time, we have a problem. As a couple we should have solved it between us. But you kept it to yourself instead of talking to me about it. You told everyone else instead of talking to me about it. You didn't want to talk to me about it because in your eyes my guilt is set. Everything went downhill from there. You didn't even really believe in what's written in the diary. If I really did anything implied in the diary then you would have broken up with me long ago.

.....

And they lived happily ever after.

Joy Chuyaco



Writing has been my favorite thing to do since I was young. I used to spend time at the library and would imagine seeing my name in different publications. What a dream, right? Well, those dreams are not impossible. Just keep on trying! I could never forget the elation of seeing my first article in a major broadsheet. Thanks to "Press Start Studio", by the way, for organizing that writing workshop I joined last March 2020—they inspired me to keep on writing and to never stop.

Is There A Way?

By Joy Chuyaco

Is there a way for us
To press "PAUSE" for a while?
To let us catch our breath
From this unending battle

Is there a way for us
To press "REWIND" for a while?
So that we can prepare ourselves
For what is yet to come

Is there a way for us
To press "FAST FORWARD" for a while?
In hope of escaping
This overwhelming fear

Is there a way for us
To press "STOP" for a while?
So maybe, just maybe
We don't need to play it again

I guess there's no way
But to press "PLAY"
For we can't stop what's to happen
But we can always have hope



Joyce Hondos

Joyce is an artist and a writer that born in Davao City. She has the passion and dedication in every work she made. For her, writing is her stress reliever and can build a new world. She loves travelling and spending time with her friends and loved ones.

Her journey started when she was young. She started making comics and inspired by anime since she was an otaku. It gave her the motivation to create more fiction stories and continued sharing her ideas to others. As time goes by, she enjoys watching Asianovelas and different movies.

In 2018, she was more active in the world of writing and discovered beyond wattpad. She joined in different facebook groups related to wattpad and wricons. Also, she joined workshops in Penmasters Administration and PressStart Writing Community. She continues gaining knowledge and exploring more.

Her motto: *“Keep believing, don’t stop dreaming. Let your imaginations fly.”*

Forget me Not

By Joyce Hondos

“Sino si Annie? Sino si Anna? Kaano– ano mo sila?”

“Ano ang huli mong naaalala na kasama sila?”

“Anong pangalan mo?”

Mga tanong na naririnig ko habang ang mga mata ko ay nakapikit.

Magkaklase kami nina Annie at Anna na nasa Senior high school sa St. Joseph Academy. Kambal silang dalawa pero magkaiba ang ugali. Si Annie ay medyo mahiyain at mahinhin di gaya ni Anna na masayahin at friendly. May angking ganda si Anna na hinahangaan ng mga kababaihan at kalalakihan dito sa school.

Siya nga pala, ako si Hailey Kristoff. Kaibigan ko silang dalawa. Hilig ko ang pagpipinta gaya ni Annie. Mahilig rin siya sa musika habang si Anna naman ay sa pagsasayaw at sa acting. Kasama ko si Annie sa art class ni Sir Gary Harris. Tuwing hapon, binibisita kami ni Anna sa art room. Masaya siyang kumakaway sa amin habang tinatapos namin ang aming artworks. Napapasulyap – sulyap naman kami ni Annie sa kanya.

Isang araw, naabutan namin ni Anna na binubully si Annie ni Janet sa bakanteng lote sa likod ng gusali. Nakayuko lang si Annie na ang mga mata ay natatabunan ng kanyang bangs. Binubuhusan ni Janet ang kapatid ni Anna ng mantika at dinagdagan pa ng harina at itlog. Sinugod agad ni Anna ang dalaga at pinatigil ang bruha.

“Hoy! Anong ginagawa mo sa kapatid ko!? Itigil mo iyan!” Sigaw ni Anna.

Tinulak ni Anna si Janet at sinabunutan ito. Napaupo si Annie sa lupa at niyakap ko siya. Alam kong umiiyak ito kahit di ko makita ang kanyang mga matang lumuluha. Dumating si Tom at inawat niya ang dalawa.

Bakas sa mukha ni Janet ang inis at umalis na ito agad sa lugar.

“Okay ka lang ba?” Nag-aalalang tanong ni Tom kay Anna. Halatang may gusto si Tom kay Anna.

“Okay lang..” Sagot ng dalaga. Pero binalewala lang niya ang pag-aalala ng binata.

Pagkauwi namin sa bahay, tinawagan ako agad ni Anna na may natanggap na magandang balita si Annie.

“Besh, natanggap sa art screening ang ginawang artwork ni Annie para sa exhibit!” Masayang pagbalita ni Anna.

“Really? Wow! Congratulations!” Bati ko sa kanila.

Kinabukasan, nadatnan ko si Annie sa ladies room. Nakaharap siya sa salamin habang hinahawakan ang sariling pisngi.

“Anong ginagawa mo?” Nakangiting tanong ko sa kanya.

“Bakit nila ako binubully? May nagawa ba ako? Pangit ba ako?”

Nagulat ako sa tanong niya. “Huh? Bakit mo naman naitanong? Hindi ah! Ang ganda kaya natin parang mga artworks natin. Magaganda lahat!”

Pero kahit sabihin kong maganda siya, malungkot pa rin ito.

Hanggang sa art class ay malungkot pa rin si Annie. Ginuguhit namin si Anna na nakaupo sa gitna as a model sa aming artwork. Nilapitan ni Sir Gary si Annie.

“Anong problema Annie, malungkot ka yata?” Tanong ni Sir Gary. Lumipat sa may likuran ni Annie si Sir Gary.

“Wala po sir!”

“Ganoon ba.. in fairness, ang ganda ng pagkakaguhit mo sa kapatid mo.”

Napansin ni Anna ang pagiging close ni Sir Gary at ng kakambal niya. Napahawak nga sa may balikat ni Annie si sir.

Sa maulang hapong iyon, mag- isa lang akong umuwi. Naglalakad ako sa may kalsada ng mag- isa nang makita ko si Anna na nakasukob sa payong ni Sir Gary sa kabilang kalsada. Napatitig ako sa kanilang dalawa at napahakbang. Iyon na pala ang huling araw na makikita ko si Anna. Hindi pumasok ang kambal kinabukasan. Pinuntahan ko ang bahay nila pero walang tao.

Dalawang araw din na lumipas bago ko nakita muli si Annie. Tinanong ko siya.

“Annie, anong nangyari? Saan ba kayo nagpunta? Nasaan si Anna?” Natatarantang tanong ko.

Hindi siya sumagot at nakayuko lang ang ulo. Tahimik lang si Annie.

Bigla nalang nagkagulo sa labas ng classroom. Nagsitakbuhan ang mga estudyante palabas sa gusali.

“Saan sila pupunta?”

Sinundan ko sila at naiwan doon si Annie na akala ko sumunod sa akin. Ang mga estudyante ay papunta sa may ilog sa may likuran ng campus.

Humihiyaw sila. “May patay!”

Dumating ang mga pulis sa lugar. Naroon din ang principal at iilang mga guro kasama na si Sir Gary. May natagpuan silang bangkay ng dalaga sa may ilog. Hindi pa matukoy kung sino. Nakasuot ito ng unifome ng eskwelahan. Tinanong ng pulis ang principal kung may nawawalang estudyante ba.

Napatakip ako sa aking bibig. “Si Anna kaya iyon?” Tanong ng aking isipan. Ang natatanaw ko lang sa kinatatayuan ko ay ang polo sa may balikat. Nanghina ang aking tuhod kaya muntik na akong matumba. Salamat at nahawakan ako ni Tom at tinulungan niya akong makatayo ng direktso.

“Salamat..”

Napatingin ako sa seryosong mukha niyang nakatingin sa lugar kung saan naroon ang bangkay. Napasambit ito.

“Hindi siya si Anna..”

Nagulat ako sa narinig ko mula sa bibig niya. Napakunot – noo nalang ako. Hanggang naalala ko si Annie. Napalingon – lingon ako pero hindi ko makita si Annie.

Umuwi nalang ako sa amin. Sa aking kwarto, hindi ko maiwasang hindi mag – aalala sa dalawa. Hindi ko pa rin nakikita si Anna at walang nababanggit si Annie. Tinawagan ko siya pero hindi siya sumasagot.

Simula noong nawala si Anna ay nagbago na ang lahat. Malungkot na ang bawat pagpunta ko sa paaralan. Hanggang ngayon ay hindi pa rin siya nagpapakita. Pinagmasdan ko si Annie sa mga kilos niya pero hindi man lang siya nag-aalala sa kapatid niya. Napapatanong ako sa sarili kung alam ba niya kung nasaan si Anna.

Lumabas na ang resulta sa imbestigasyon sa bangkay ng dalaga at napag-alaman na ang dalaga ay si Janet.

Nagulat ako sa aking narinig.

“Hindi ba siya iyong babaeng nang-bully kay Annie na sinugod ni Anna?”

Nalunod daw ang dalaga sa ilog. Sinadya man o hindi, hindi pa nila matukoy.

Napapatanong ako sa sarili. “May kinalaman kaya ang pagkamatay ni Janet sa pagkawala ni Anna?”

Pumunta ako sa art room at nilibot ko ang buong silid habang minamasdan ang bawat artworks. Naalala ko tuloy si Anna na nakaupo sa gitna bilang model namin. Napaluha ako dahil kasama pa namin siya sa mga oras na iyon.

Tumigil ako sa paglalakad para punasan ang aking mga luha. Pagdilal ko sa aking mata ay napatingin ako sa isa sa artwork. Napatitig ako sa mukha ni Anna na ang ganda pagkaguhit. Kuhang kuha ng artist na si Jacob ang itsura ni Anna at ang paligid pati ang background nito na may babaeng nakasilip sa bintana. Napansin ko ang nakasulat sa gilid.

“Goodbye..”

Dumating naman si Annie sa art room. “Anong ginagawa mo?”

Napalingon ako sa kanya. “Huh? Uhm, wala naman. Gusto ko lang tingnan ang mga artworks. Eh, ikaw?”

“Inutusan ako ni Sir Gary na kunin ang mga art materials,” sagot niya.

Pumunta si Annie sa Yellow cabinet at binuksan ito. Sinabihan ko si Annie.

“Annie, wala riyan ang mga art materials. Nasa Blue cabinet..”

“Huh? Alam ko! May tiningnan lang ako rito!” ani nito. Sinara na niya ang cabinet at pumunta sa may blue cabinet.

Dumating naman si Jacob na nakayuko ang ulo. He is a nerdy guy at mahiyain rin pero magaling sa arts. Hindi ko na pinansin si Jacob na papunta sa kanyang upuan.

Napatanong ulit ako kay Annie, “Annie, nasaan na ba ang kakambal mo? Ilang araw na siyang absent! Nagpaalam ba siya? Alam mo ba kung nasaan si Anna?”

Biglang may nabitawan si Jacob kaya napalingon ako sa kanya. Nanginginig ang kanyang mga kamay.

“Okay ka lang ba?” Tanong ko kay Jacob.

Umalis naman agad si Jacob na dala – dala ang kanyang gamit na di man lang nakapag- ayos. Napasulyap siya kay Annie bago lumabas ng pinto.

Kinabukasan, pinapunta ako sa principal office. Naroon ang mga pulis, guidance counselor at ang principal.

“Magkaibigan kayo ni Anna hindi ba?” Tanong ng principal.

Napatango lang ako.

“Kailan ang huling araw na magkasama kayo?”

“Po?”

“Kailan mo siya huling nakita? Sino ang kasama niya?”

“Huh?”

Wala akong matinong sagot sa mga tanong nila. Hindi ko maintindihan ang kanilang mga tanong. Bakit nila ako tinanong? Hindi ba mas mainam kung si Annie ang tatanungin nila.

“Pasensya na Hailey. Alam naming na nabigla ka. Napag- alaman lang naming na nawawala si Anna kaya tinanong ka namin.” Paliwanag ng Principal.

“Tanungin ninyo si Annie..” Mungkahi ko.

Malungkot ang ekspresyon ng mukha nila. Mukhang wala silang nakuhang impormasyon kay Annie.

Nagsalita ang pulis at tinanong ako.

“Ano ang huli mong naaalala na kasama sila? Magkakilala ba sila ni Janet, ang dalagang namatay sa ilog?”

“Po?”

Bigla nalang akong kinabahan.

“Kung may naalala ka, sabihin mo sa amin para sa imbestigasyon sa pagkamatay ni Janet at pagkawala ni Anna.”

Napatanong ako, “ May kinalaman po ba si Anna sa pagkamatay ni Janet?”

“Hindi pa namin masasabi. Possible na may kinalaman siya kaya kailangan namin ng ibedensya.”

Tumayo ako. “ Wala pong kinalaman si Anna! Sigurado po ako!”

Seryosong tiningnan nila ako.

“Paano ka nakakasiguro? Nasaan ba si Anna?”

Natahimik nalang ako at yumuko. Hindi ko sinabi sa kanila ang tungkol sa alitan ni Janet at Anna. Hindi ko rin sinabi na huling kasama ni Anna ay si Sir Gary. May kinalaman kaya si sir sa pagkawala ni Anna?

Habang naglalakad ako ay nakita kong magkasama sina Annie at Sir Gary sa student lounge. Bigla akong kinabahan. Huling nakita ko si Anna ay magkasama sila ni Sir at nawala na siya kinabukasan. Ayokong mangyari iyon kay Annie kaya pinuntahan ko agad sila.

Hindi ko na napigilan ang sarili ko. Hinablot ko ang braso ni Annie papalayo kay sir. “Lumayo ka sa kanya!”

Nagulat si Annie sa ginawa ko.

“Ano bang nangyayari sa iyo?” Sermon niya sa akin.

Medyo mataray ang tono ng boses niya kaya nabigla ako. Napatingin ako sa kanya.

“Tama na iyan! Ano ba ang nangyayari sa iyo Hailey?” awat ni Sir.

Tiningnan ko si sir.

May dumating na mga pulis at hinawakan nila si sir.

“Sumama ka sa amin!” Utos nila.

Dinala nila sa office si sir.

“Sir!”

Sumunod kami ni Annie. Isinama ko talaga siya. Nagulat ako ng makita ko sina Tom at Jacob sa office rin.

“Anong ginagawa nila rito?” Tanong ko sa sarili.

Tinuro ako bigla ni Tom at sinabing, “Naroon rin si Hailey nang sinugod ni Anna si Janet!”

Napatingin sila sa akin na para bang may kasalanan ako.

“Totoo ba Ms. Hailey?”

Bigla ko nalang tinuro si Annie. “Si Janet ang nagbully kay Annie. Naroon rin si Annie!”

Nagsalita si Annie at pinagtanggol ang sarili. “ Wala akong kinalaman sa pagkamatay ni Janet. Ako ang biktima niya!”

Nagtaka ako dahil ngayon ko lang nakitang nagsalita si Annie at pinagtanggol niya ang sarili.

“Binubully rin ako ni Janet!” ani ni Jacob na nakayuko.

“Baka ikaw ang salarin. Kayo ni Annie! May mutibo kayo na patayin siya!” Pag- aakusa ni Tom sa dalawa.

“Bakit a- ako?” nauutal na tanong ni Jacob.

“Ikaw!” Turo ko.

“Huh? Ba- bakit ako?” nauutal na tanong ulit ni Jacob.

“May nakasulat sa iyong artwork. Goodbye! Nagpapaalam ka kay Janet o di kaya kay Anna!” Sabi ko.

“Iyon ba? Isinulat ko lang iyon doon dahil may nakita akong reflection ng salitang iyon sa may salamin..” Paliwanag ni Jacob.

“Di ba si Janet ang babae sa bintana?”

“Oo pero..”

Nagsalita ulit si Tom, “ Jacob, ikaw siguro ang salarin sa lahat pati sa pagkawala ni Anna!”

“Hindi!” Matapang na reaction ni Jacob.

“Tama na!” Pagpapatigil ni Annie sa kanila.

“Hindi pa rin mahanap ang kakambal mo. May nalalaman ka ba, Annie?” tanong ng isang officer.

She shooked her head.

May inilabas na painting ang officer at ipinakita sa amin. Ang painting na iyon ay nasira at may mantsa ng itim na tinta.

“Nakita namin ang painting na ito malapit sa ilog kung saan nakita ang bangkay..”

“Kay Annie ang painting na iyan! Iginuhit niya iyan para sa art exhibit...” Sabi ni Sir Gary.

“Huh?”

Parang hindi alam ni Annie na sa kanya ang artwork.

“Annie, ikaw ang pumatay kay Janet! Ikaw ang tumulak sa kanya sa ilog!” Turo ni Tom.

“Aminin mo na Annie na ikaw.. at sabihin mo kung nasaan si Anna!” Pakiusap ko.

“Wala akong kasalanan! Wala akong ginawa!” Sagot ni Annie. “Hindi ako pumatay kay Janet!”

Napasambit nalang ako sa pangalan ni Anna. “Anna?”

Napatingin si Annie sa akin.

“Ikaw ang pumatay Hailey! Ikaw!”

Namilog ang mga mata ko at nanginig bigla ang aking katawan. Tiningnan ko sila isa – isa at lahat sila ay nakatingin sa akin. Hindi ko maintindihan ang sinasabi ni Annie.

“Ano ba ang pinagsasabi mo Annie?” Tanong ko.

“Ikaw ang pumatay kay Janet! Ikaw rin ang pumatay sa kakambal ko!”

utak ko. Napahawak ako sa aking ulo.

Napapatanong ako sa sarili, “ Anong ginawa ko?”

Natawa lang ako sa mga kasinungalingan niya.

“Paano nangyaring ako? Hindi ko magagawang saktan kayo!” Tinuro ko bigla si sir Gary. “Si sir ang huling kasama ni Anna! May relasyon sila!”

“Nagawa mo iyon dahil sa selos at inggit!”

Napatingin ako kay Anna.

Nagsimulang magkwento si Anna, “Nang umuwi ako sa amin, nakita kong wala ng buhay ang kapatid ko. Nasa sahig siya sa aming kwarto na walang buhay. May iniwan siyang note na nagsasabi na I hate black but I saw it! Ibig sabihin noon ay ang kanyang artwork na may mantsa ng itim na tinta. Ang artwork na iyon ay para sa exhibit pero nasira. Sinira mo iyon para hindi mapasama sa exhibit dahil na- reject ang sa iyo.”

Unti – unting may mga imahe sa utak ko. Ito ang mga pangyayaring nakalimutan ko.

“Wala akong maalala!” Nakatulalang sagot ko.

All of a sudden. Bumalik ang mga pangyayari bago nawala si Anna. Napaka-aga ang pagpunta ko sa paaralan at kaya agad pinuntahan ko ang mga artworks na pasok sa exhibit. Nabalitaan ko kasi na natanggap ang kay Annie. Nakita ko roon ang gawa ni Annie. Nagdilim ang paningin ko at hindi na ako dalawang isip na buhunan ng itim na tinta ang artwork. Pagkatapos noon, umalis ako kaagad. Pinalipas ko muna ang ilang oras bago ako pumunta sa ladies room. Doon, nakita ko si Annie na malungkot.

Pagkatapos ng art class, kinuha ko ang artwork ni Annie na walang pasabi. Sa tingin ko, nakuha ang artwork nito dahil close sila ni Sir Gary. Pumunta ako sa may ilog na nasa likuran lang ng campus namin. Nakita ko roon si Janet. Nakita niya ako.

“Kaibigan ka ng babaeng iyon di ba? Akala ninyo nakalimutan ko na, that nerdy girl!”

Sinabunutan niya ako at gumanti naman ako. Hindi sinasadyang naitulak ko siya sa ilog. Humihingi ng saklolo si Janet pero iniwan ko lang siya. Itinapon ko ang artwork malapit sa ilog. Bigla nalang umulan.

Mag – isa nalang akong naglakad sa kalsada papauwi. Nakita ko si Anna na nakasukob sa payong ni sir. Pupuntahan ko sana sila pero hindi ko namalayan na may paparating palang kotse at nabunggo ako. Simula noon, nakalimutan ko na ang mga ginawa ko.

Napaupo nalang ako sa sahig ng office at napaiyak.

“Ako pala ang dahilan ng lahat...”

Hindi ko na maibabalik ang buhay na nawala.

“Patawad...”

Gulong – gulo na ang utak ko na tila maraming mga boses na umiikot sa

Justine Ragos



Justine graduated from De La Salle University with a degree in International Studies. She is currently a writer and a proofreader who is extremely particular about grammar. She loves improv theater, the horror genre, and Disney movies.

Erika and Maji

By Justine Ragos

Erika dreads summer vacation. She would just look out the window and see all the other kids playing patintero, hide and seek, and all the other street games she has always wanted to try. Last summer, she mustered the courage to approach the kids and asked if she could join them. The kids only made fun of her because she only had one eye. Since then, she decided to stop trying to make friends and to just stay at home.

The kids in the area are from middle-class families. They would meet every day of the summer to play patintero, piko, hide and seek, and many other street games. While they are simple kids, they easily judge others based on appearance. They do not like Erika because of how she looks.

One day, Erika decided to take a walk on her own. She stayed on the swings at the park and watched the other kids from afar. A thin, brown, and medium-sized aspin slowly walked towards her. Erika started patting the dog’s head and said “Hello, doggie.” To Erika’s surprise, she heard the dog say “Hello!”

“I’m Maji. I’m 7 years old!” said the dog. Erika was still in shock, but she talked to the dog anyway. “Wow. Um, I’m Erika. I’m 7 too. How is this happening?” The dog didn’t seem surprised that a human was able to talk to him. It seemed like it was all normal for him. “Oh, don’t be scared!” Maji said, to which Erika answered, “I’m not scared. I just didn’t know that humans can talk to dogs.”

“Don’t be too shocked, but I feel that we were meant to meet and talk to each other. You see, my mother has one eye, just like you. Maybe the universe gave us the magic of speaking with each other because you’re just like her. I miss her. There’s no one I can be with, you know. I feel alone.” Maji said.

Erika somehow related to Maji. “I get you,” she said. “I feel alone sometimes too. There’s no one to play with. I’m always jealous of other kids. I hate being born with one eye!” Erika explained that the kids didn’t want to play with her because they think she’s weird.

“Hey, why don’t we keep each other company? Let’s go on an adventure or something!” Maji said. He wagged his tail and got all excited. “Come on!” he said. “What? Where are we going?” asked Erika.

Maji was so excited to be walking around with Erika. “I’ll show you something! Just follow me,” Maji said. He brought her to a giant mango tree in the middle of a sari-sari store and an old house. “This is where I was born,” said Maji. “My mother had seven puppies. I was the only one who survived, but some naughty teenagers took me away from her.”

“That’s terrible!” Erika said in shock. “What did they do to you?”

“Well, I’m not sure. It’s all a blur to me. What matters is I managed to escape,” Maji explained.

Maji continued to tell Erika about his life. He talked about the vague memories he has of his mother. Erika felt glad that Maji thought of Erika’s condition as a reason to be friends, rather than how the other kids think of it.

“I remember how my mom would cry about losing my other siblings,” Maji said.

“Wait, where is she now?” Erika asked.

“I was afraid you would ask that,” Maji answered. “I can’t tell you.”

“Why not?” Erika asked.

“I just can’t,” Maji said.

“Well, okay. What else do you remember from your childhood?” Erika said.

Maji went on to tell Erika about how he didn’t have that many friends either. Erika sighed and said, “I know exactly what you mean.”

Erika and Maji spent the whole afternoon together. They played tag and hide and seek as they tell stories about their lives.

Maji has influenced Erika to advocate animal rights. That evening, Erika maximized her social media presence by talking about how animals deserve love, care, and shelter. Erika spent the whole night watching animal videos and animal rights seminars on YouTube. She got hooked on her newfound love for animals – specifically dogs – and couldn’t wait to see Maji again the next day.

The next morning, Erika told her parents about Maji. “He’s a really cute aspin. I think we should bring him to our home!” Erika said. Her parents were hesitant, but they eventually agreed. Erika was so excited. She couldn’t wait to tell Maji.

That afternoon, Erika stepped out of the house, expecting to see Maji – but Maji

was nowhere to be found. She went to the park where they first met, but Maji wasn't there. She started to get worried. She ran to the mango tree where Maji was born – she really couldn't find him. She asked the sari-sari store vendor, "Have you seen the dog I was with?" The vendor responded, "What dog?" Erika was confused.

She didn't want to approach the other kids, but she was desperate to find Maji. "Hi, guys. Did you happen to see the dog I was with yesterday?" she asked.

The kids laughed hysterically. "What dog? There was no dog! You were just running around alone. We were right – you really are weird!"

Erika was confused. She didn't know what to do. She cried in frustration. "What happened to Maji? Was he taken away? Did he get in an accident? Did people take

Not Home for Christmas

By Justine Ragos

Christmas has always been extra meaningful for Allana. More than it being a traditional celebration, Christmas Day is also her birthday. She would remember how her family would bring out her favorite chocolate mousse cake on the stroke of midnight. Their noche buena celebrations are always memorable because they bring out their Christmas gifts to one another and one special gift for Allana. Christmas Day has always been Allana's favorite day.

Allana is the youngest of four siblings. She was born mute, so she never got the chance to talk to anyone in the family. She is always just the listener. She has a notably big age gap between all her siblings, making her feel unique from everyone else. She grew up close with her mother and she was homeschooled. She did not prefer to join extracurricular activities either, so her only close friends were her family. Allana would stay at home all the time and each member of the family would talk to her every day. As a natural homebody, Allana didn't go out that much. She always preferred staying home. She found contentment there.

On the night of December 24th, Allana was eager to turn another year older the next day. It's the year of her 18th birthday, and she would always see how it is a significant event in any young lady's life. She would see pictures of her older sister's 18th birthday, and she would always see special 18th birthday celebrations of celebrities on TV. "I'm finally turning 18!" she thought.

From Allana's everyday conversations with her mother, she knew that they did not have the budget for a huge 18th birthday celebration. She felt that simply spending time with the family is fine. After all, she didn't have that many friends.

At 8pm on Christmas Eve, everyone started getting busy before midnight. It seemed that they were all trying to get things done so nothing else will get in the way of Christmas Day. Allana felt so loved. She passed by her brother Johnson's room. Johnson is 36 years old and just got engaged to his girlfriend of 8 years. Every year, Johnson would buy a special toy for Allana for her birthday. She always thought of him as her personal Santa Claus. Allana heard Johnson greeting his fiancée a merry Christmas and telling her about how they're preparing for Allana's birthday. Allana did not want to hear about any surprises, so she walked away.

She swiftly passed by her sister Andrea's room. Andrea is a 34-year-old preschool teacher. Allana believed that Andrea played a huge role in her childhood because Andrea taught her to read and write. Allana never had formal schooling and has always been homeschooled. Her whole childhood revolved around Andrea who taught her everything a child needed to know. She saw Andrea put on her makeup and thought, "she is always beautiful."

As Allana was walking towards her parent's room, she saw her brother Jasper all frantic and sending an e-mail to his professor. Jasper is a 29-year-old businessman finishing his master's degree. Allana has always been proud of Jasper for being able to balance his work, studies, and family. Allana always considered Jasper as her playmate when she was younger. Jasper would always play with her toys with her. Despite her language condition, she always felt that Jasper was the one who did not treat her any different. They would share ice cream and cake all the time – two desserts that they both really love.

Allana caught a glimpse of her parents preparing some gifts. She figured that her yearly special birthday gift may be one of those. She was so excited. Since she could not talk, she just approached her parents and smiled. She knew that her parents understood that it was a thank you.

him away again? I don't know what to do."

Erika really wanted to find out what happened to Maji – or at least where he came from. She asked the sari-sari store vendor and the neighbors about the dog that gave birth to seven puppies seven years ago. Erika was in shock. She couldn't believe what she was hearing.

It turns out that both Maji and his mother died the day after they were separated from each other. What Erika didn't know was that she was Maji's mother in her past life. Her ability to speak to Maji and her eye condition explain this.

Erika will never know that Maji was just granted one afternoon to spend some time with his "mother."

It was 10pm when everyone finished what they had to do. "2 hours until I turn 18!" Allana thought. When she stepped out of her room, she was surprised how dashing and elegant everyone looked. Her mother and her sister were wearing silky blue cocktail dresses; her father and her brothers were in nice suits. "Are they throwing me a surprise debut? I thought I made it clear that I didn't want a big celebration. I don't even want to leave the house!" Allana thought to herself.

Her dad started the car and everyone got in. Allana was caught off guard that she didn't even have time to be as formal as them. Luckily, her mom brought another cocktail dress for her. "This one is for Allana," she heard her mom say.

Allana was feeling nervous and excited. "Are they actually holding a debut party for me?" she couldn't stop asking herself. She wanted to scream in confusion, but she knew it will never be possible.

They finally arrived in a garden. It had lush green grass and a few lights. The place felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. "Have I been here before?" she thought. Everyone in the family sat down on the grass and each one had something to say. "Wow, this really is a surprise debut party! I can't believe they're each going to give a speech about me," thought Allana.

Her mother stood up first. "Allana dear, remember when we were both praying for mangoes? Those were crazy times! We would wake your dad up in the middle of the night just to get mangoes for us," her mother said. Allana smiled.

Her father was next. "My sweet Allana, despite what happened to you, you are in our hearts," he said. Allana wondered, "why is he so emotional about what happened to me? I'm only mute! It's not like I'm in critical condition or anything."

Johnson stood up and talked about how he would tell Allana everything. Allana was always there to listen. He said, "I hope you always liked the toys I got you," in which Allana thought, "of course I did!" Andrea and Jasper then brought out the birthday gift that the whole family would get her every year. They each talked about how special Allana was and opened the box. It was a certificate of Jasper's newly opened business: a dessert shop named "Allana."

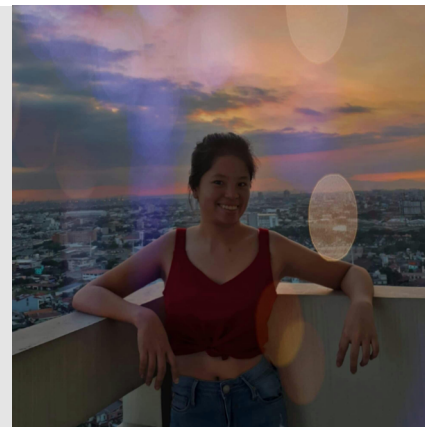
"Jasper named his shop after me? That's so cool!" she thought.

When Jasper read the certificate out loud, everyone started crying.

"She would have loved this," her mother said.

Allana was so confused about why they seemed so sad. "Aren't those supposed to be tears of joy?" she wondered.

Allana's parents cried while looking at something on the ground. They cried so loud that she had to see what they were looking at: "Our angel Allana. Born asleep. December 25, 2001."



Janesis Ma. Katrina Castillo

"God's plans for my future are far greater than those people who judges me and is far greater than our fear. Let Him be your guide." – this quote made by the writer herself spells Janesis' God-given talent in writing. She was chosen and called for a reason.

Janesis Castillo with the pen name Maria Hestia is two things – impeccably imaginative and extraordinary with a creative and imaginative soul. Fueled with burning passion and light in her soul, she is ready to conquer the world and own her dream. With the guidance from above, her family, relatives and friends she is fully ready to stand and make her name known.

I am Janesis Ma. Katrina B. Castillo an aspiring writer with a passion to share a lot of stories to a lot of people. Ever since my freshman year of high school I discovered I have a creative soul through writing stories it was year 2011 when I discovered it. While reading an English novel a plot came to my head and I heard a whisper on my ear telling me to write down the plot

on a notebook. Romance genre was my forte because I was a hopeless romantic when it came to love. I have been chosen and called by God for a reason. I hold a gift from God and He gave it to me to share it to others.

Love of a Lifetime

By Janesis Ma. Katrina Castillo

Title: Love of a Lifetime

Note: The characters are all made up and some terms on the story is from Korea. I won't tell the whole story but just read it instead.

☺

Terms used:

Oppa means older brother in Korean. Uri Wangja means my prince Uri Gongju means my princess in Korean. Nampyeon, Seobangnim, Anae and Seiksha means husband and wifey in Korean. Hyung and Dongsaeng is used to speak to a male who is older than you. Appa means father.

Once there was two childhood best of friends named Jace Ares and Freya Iris. They were very inseperable until one of them fell for each other. Freya fell for Ares and decided to confess to him. This is where our story begins. Freya was sitting on her own room and writing a note for Ares after finishing the note she slipped it on his b. window sill. Ares saw the note and his forehead creased.

"Jace, meet me on our favourite spot which is the stream valley within thirty minutes. I have something important to tell you. Bye for now see you later. ☺." –Freya Iris

Jace went to their favourite spot and waited for her there. She got there within thirty minutes when she saw him she instantly smiled and he smiled back at her. Freya caught her breath before she said the words she's been dying to say to him.

"I-I love you, Jace. I love you since we were kids, I've been in love with you since God knows how long. Tell me do you feel the same way?"

"I'm sorry, Frey but I don't feel the same way. I love someone else, I don't want to hurt you but that's the truth. I'm so sorry, Frey."

"O-oh who's the lucky girl? I understand, Jace."

"It's Melody Rose your close friend. Are you okay?"

"Oh it's Melody. She's so lucky to have you. I'm fine, Jace don't worry about me."

"Are you sure, Frey? I know you so well."

"Y-yes I am, Jace. Bye I gotta go now."

Freya left and Jace just stood there shocked. She was running while tears were streaming down her face until she bumped into one of her closest childhood friends. She looked up but was stunned to see Drake Lewis D. Chua one of her childhood close friends. She wiped away her tears before she apologized and faked a smile.

"I just confessed to Jace about my feelings but turns out he was in love with my close friend Melody Rose. It hurts it's like my heart has been shattered into a million tiny pieces. I can't blame him if he can't love me back. Maybe I should just go away for a while."

"Oh so that's why you were crying, Frey. You deserve someone better, if he can't love you back then let him go. Give other guys a chance to be with you. Let him see your worth, I'm here, Frey. I won't leave you. That's a good idea, why don't you talk to your parents about this." Drake said and hugged Frey while she sobbed on his shoulders.

"Thank you for always being there, Drake. I'll tell my parents about this."

The two friends went on their way and when they arrived Frey saw her parents on their garden talking and laughing. She approached them and they smiled at her, she faked a smile that didn't go unnoticed to her parents. She didn't realize that tears were streaming down her face and Drake put an arm around her to stop her from crying. Her parents were shocked when they saw

their only daughter crying. They approached her and Drake let her go before her parents hugged the girl.

“Why are you crying, Princess? Is there something wrong?” her parents asked and right the timing when her brother arrived and saw her crying.

“I’m not alright, Eomma, Appa. My heart is shattered into a million tiny pieces. I confessed to Jace not too long ago and he said something that broke my heart. He said he doesn’t love me and that he’s in love with Melody my close friend. It hurts, Eomma, Appa, Oppa.” she cried again and broke down her parents and brother hugged her.

“Why that, Bastard, I’m going to kill him! How dare he hurt my little sister! I don’t make my little sister cry but that douche just had to make my sister cry!” Lucas Chryseis said in a pissed off tone while shaking in anger.

“No don’t do that, Oppa. It’s not his fault, it’s mine if I didn’t confess to him he wouldn’t have rejected me. So blame me, not him, Oppa.”

“But still it’s his fault, dongsaeng. Sheesh, if you say so. You know how overprotective I am to you, dongsaeng. I don’t want you getting hurt or getting your heart broken.”

“I know that, Oppa. But still let me handle this on my own. I’m not a baby anymore, I’m a grown lady. By the way, Eomma, Appa and Oppa I want to talk about something.”

“What is it, Princess, dongsaeng? You sound so serious.”

“Can we migrate to Korea and stay there for 3 years before we go back here? I need to do this for my own good. I want to move on from Jace if we’re here it will only make things worse. I won’t be able to move on if I keep on seeing him.”

“Of course, Princess, dongsaeng. We will migrate in 4 days, pack your things and say goodbye to your friends and to Jace. We will organize a farewell party today so pack your things now.” her parents and brother said.

“I’ll call my secretary to prepare our private plane so we don’t have to go with other passengers.” said her father and pulled out his phone.

Frey hurriedly went to her room, pulled out her suitcase and prepared her passport. After packing everything in her room she pulled out her phone and called her friends, they hurriedly went to her house and after a while they knocked on the door of her room.

“Frey, what’s wrong? Why did you call and you sound so serious and sad.” Aurora Louise asked while she was feeling worried on the inside.

“Guys, I’m sorry to break it to you but my family and I are going to migrate to Korea for 3 years. There was a problem on one of our companies there and my grandpa is getting weaker by the day.

My aunt just called my Mom today and my grandpa’s condition is getting worst. And also I’ll tell you the real reason when we leave in two days. Don’t be sad, girls I’ll come back in three years. Don’t worry about it.”

“It’s alright, girl. We’re feeling sad but we know you will come back just keep in touch with us and we will also visit during special occasions and during summer.”

“Okay, girls. Now we have a farewell party today so help me get ready.”

“Okay then, girl. Now go inside your walk-in closet and show us one of your dresses so we can choose what you’ll wear.”

Freya went inside her walk-in closet and her friends followed. They picked a white double strapped off shoulder bodycon dress and paired it with a 5 inch blue glass slippers. After a while Frey changed into her dress and her friends were stunned. They smiled at her, she smiled back at them. Her friends sense there was something bothering their friend so they asked her something.

“Girl, we know there’s something bothering you. What is it? Spill it before we continue.”

“Okay you got me, girls. Hand me my board and I’ll write it down.” her friends searched for her board and found it on her desk. They gave it to her and handed her a marker.

“I confessed to Jace a while ago but he rejected me. He said he’s in love with you, Melody twinsis. It hurts my heart is shattered into a million pieces. So I talked to my parents and they agreed that we migrate to Korea. It’s the main reason why we’re going back to Korea so I can move on. Aside from that we heard from my aunt that my grandpa’s condition is getting worst by the day. Don’t tell Jace about this, I’ll be the one to tell him the news later.”

“We understand, Frey. Are you sure you can tell him without breaking down later?”

“Yes I can, you know me, girls. I’m a great pretender, I can easily hide my feelings. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“Frey twinsis, you know it’s your older brother that I love so you don’t have to worry. Once he confess I’ll also reject him if ever.” said Melody while hugging her.

“I know, Twinsis but still it hurts.”

“Okay stop with the drama. And let’s start your hair and makeup.”

“Surprise me then, Louise.”

“We’ll be the one to do your makeup while Aurora will do your hair.”

Aurora begun her hair and once she was done she pulled Frey’s chair and showed the hairstyle she did on her hair. She was surprised it was a dutch crown braid with her naturally wavy hair cascading down her back. At the same time her friends finished her

makeup it was very light with a hint of seductive smokey eye. After her preparation there was a knock on the door Melody opened it and revealed her older brother. He smiled at his little sister and she smiled back at him.

“Dongsaeng, you look so beautiful. You are not my baby sister anymore.”

“Thank you, Oppa. Your not so bad yourself. Why’d you came to my room?”

“Oh right, before I forgot. Eomma and Appa said the party is going to start in a few minutes. And also can I talk to Melody for a while?” said Lucas while blushing and gazing at Melody. Frey smirked and gave a teasing smile to Melody who was also blushing.

“Okay then go ahead, love birds. But don’t go that far, I’m still young to be an aunt.” she said while smiling teasingly at the blushing two.

“Let’s go to my room, Melody. Shall we?”

“Okay then lead the way, Luke.”

Luke led the way to his room and Melody followed. Once there, the two sat on his couch and Lucas can’t help but to gaze at her. She caught him gazing and she smiled at him which caused him to blush furiously. Melody broke the silence by asking him the reason why he wanted to talk to her. Lucas breathed and held her hand to his chest.

“Oh that, well I have something important to tell you.”

“What is it, Luke? Tell me. I won’t get mad.”

“I-I love you, Melody. I loved you since you were a kid but now I had to tell you because I can’t keep it any longer. Tell me do you feel the same way?”

“I-I love you too, Luke. I loved you since I first saw you when you accompanied Frey to the playground so you can look after her.”

“Will you be my girlfriend, Melody Rose C. Grey?”

“Of course I will, Lucas Chryseis B. Lee.”

“I’ll call you, Anae. Is it alright, Melody?”

“Of course, Lucas. Anae means Wife in Korean, right? I’ll call you Nampyeon. It means Husband in Korean so that’s my endearment to you.”

“Okay it’s settled our endearment is Anae and Nampyeon. Let’s go I’ll introduce you to my Mom and Dad they will surely love you.”

“Okay then let’s go, Nampyeon.”

The couple went out and Melody went to Frey’s room. Lucas followed and kissed her forehead before closing the door of his sister’s room. She was greeted by a teasing smile from her friends she smiled sweetly while blushing slightly. Melody hugged Frey and she hugged her back before smiling sweetly at her.

“Do you have good news, Twinsis?”

“Yes I have, Twinsis. Luke and I shared a moment of bliss and he asked me to be his girlfriend. I’m on cloud nine, it feels like I’m dreaming. He also said he’ll introduce me to your parents.”

“Waaa, you two are so adorable! Finally that was a long wait!” Frey said until they were interrupted by a knock on the door. Melody opened it and revealed Lucas while smiling.

“Dongsaeng, girls, Anae the party is starting go downstairs now. There are a lot of visitors waiting. Shall we, Anae? Dongsaeng follow Anae and I.”

“We shall, Nampyeon. Let’s go then.”

The couple went downstairs followed by the girls and Frey. Once Jace saw her his jaw dropped at the sight of her. She was so beautiful with her naturally wavy hair cascading down her back and she was wearing a very simple dress and stiletto. He never saw her wear a dress before this was a first. Suddenly his realization earlier was proven right. He loves her already but was too dense and blind to realize that Frey was the one for him. She caught him staring at her she smiled at him which caused him to blush slightly. She approached him and he was still in a trance she tapped him on the shoulder and he returned to reality.

“Jace, I have to talk to you for a while before the party starts. Let’s go to the garden.”

“Okay then let’s go, Frey.” she led him to the garden and they sat on a bench.

“I have bad news and I don’t know how to break it to you, Jace. My family and I are going to migrate back to Korea. We’ll be staying there for 3 years, I’m sorry.”

“W-Why, Frey? Is this about what happened today?” he said while tears are streaming down his face. Frey saw this and she hugged him while also crying.

“No this isn’t about what happened today, Jace. It’s just because there’s a problem on one of our companies in Korea and also because my grandpa’s condition is getting worst with each passing day. I want to be there for my grandpa before he dies.”

“Do you really have to leave, Frey? I don’t want you to, please don’t leave me. I love you and I only realized it a while ago. Please don’t leave, Frey. I don’t want you to go. For once, let me be selfish I don’t want you to leave.” He said while sobbing and hugging her close.

“I’m sorry, Jace but this is goodbye for a while. I love you too, don’t ever forget that. You can’t be selfish, Jace my grandpa is dying. You can also visit us you know that.”

“Frey, please don’t leave me. I’m begging you, I can’t bear not to see you everyday.”

“I’m really sorry, Jace. But please understand me, my grandpa is dying. I want to see him and be with him before he dies. You can

“Okay I understand, Frey. I love you so much, I’ll come and visit you every special occasion and during summer. Before you go, I want to give you something. Here open it.” He said and handed her a sky blue box. She opened it and saw a gold locket with a background music and picture on the inside.

“Thank you for the locket, Jace. I’ll cherish it, I promise. I remember you’re always giving me gifts even without occasions so you mean this is a remembrance for me to remember you by.”

“Before you go inside, Frey. Let me ask you a question.”

“What is it, Jace? You can ask me anything.”

“Will you be my girlfriend, Freya Iris B. Lee? I’m sorry about what happened earlier.”

“Of course I will, Jace Ares C. Romualdez. It’s alright, Uri Wangja.”

“I’ll miss you so much, Uri Gongju.”

“Me too, My Prince. You can always visit us.”

“I will. Oh I almost forgot, My Princess. I have one last question. Will you make me the most luckiest man in this world by marrying me, will you let me change your surname to Mrs. Freya Iris Lee-Romualdez? I know you’re thinking it’s too early to get engaged but I don’t want any other man to have a chance with you. So will you marry me, Freya Iris B. Lee?” he said then pulled out a sky blue box from his coat, knelt on one knee and opened to box to reveal a rose gold blue diamond halo engagement ring.

“Of course yes I will, Jace Ares C. Romualdez!” she screamed making everyone including her parents look at them. She blushed while smiling at everyone. Jace slipped the ring on her finger and kissed her on the lips. Everyone clapped and her parents together with Jace’s parents approached the two and hugged them.

“Of course yes I will, Jace Ares C. Romualdez!” she screamed making everyone including her parents look at them. She blushed while smiling at everyone. Jace slipped the ring on her finger and kissed her on the lips. Everyone clapped and her parents together with Jace’s parents approached the two and hugged them.

After the proposal, Jace and Frey’s parents invited everyone to the engagement of the couple and begun planning the details of the engagement and wedding. When suddenly Lucas knelt in one knee, pulled out a red box from his suit and opened it to reveal a rose gold aquamarine engagement ring. Making Melody gasped in surprised and blush furiously while calming her heart. Frey and Lucas’ parents smiled at him as if they knew what he was planning.

“Melody Rose C. Grey, I know you’re thinking it’s too early for us to get engaged and married. But I can’t wait any longer. Actually this party is not just a farewell but also a surprise proposal party my parents, lil sis and I planned this. Will you make me the most happiest man on earth by marrying me, will you let me change your surname to Mrs. Melody Rose G. Lee?”

“Yes of course I will, Lucas Chryseis B. Lee.” she said while crying tears of joy and Lucas slipped the ring on her finger then kissed her on the lips.

“Congratulations, Twinsis. I am so happy for you and welcome to the family.”

“Now that the proposal is done, let us discuss about your engagement. When do you plan to have the engagement and wedding?” asked Melody and Lucas’ parents while smiling.

“Actually we’re planning to have the engagement on the same day as the engagement of Lil Sis and Ares, right, Anae?”

“Yes, Eomma, Appa. We’re planning to have a double engagement with Twinsis and Jace.”

“Okay then it’s settled. Anyway, let me ask your sister when there planning their engagement. Princess, Jace when and where do you plan to have your engagement?” asked her parents

“Tomorrow at 6 pm, Mom Dad. On our private resort here.”

After 3 days.....

The Cristobals are leaving together with Melody, Jace went to say goodbye to his

Princess. He was trying hard not to cry but still he cried while hugging Frey. She was also crying and hugging him tightly. Before leaving, Jace smiled genuinely while hugging her and tears streaming down his face.

“Goodbye for now, My Prince. I will surely miss you, you can come and visit me.”

“I’ll miss you so much, My Princess. I’ll come and visit you every once in a while. I’ll wait for you. We will get married in a year, My Princess. Don’t ever forget that.” He said to her while crying again.

“I will wait for you there, Uri Wangja. I won’t forget it. Bye we have to go now.”

“Bye see you in a few months for our wedding there, My Princess.” He waved and smiled at her while crying. She waved and smiled back. With that Frey and her family together with Melody went inside they’re private plane. As the plane took off, Jace stood there while still crying.

After calming down and wiping his tears away he drove home. When he arrived at their mansion he can’t help but to reminisce the memories he and Frey shared all those years that brought tears streaming down his face again. He missed Frey terribly, he broke down which his parents saw. They hugged him while he sobbed uncontrollably.

“Mom, Dad I miss Frey terribly. I can’t help but reminisce the memories we shared. I wanna follow her to Korea.”

“If you want you can go, son. It’s your decision if you want to follow her. We’ll inform her parents once you make your decision.”

“Okay then, I’ll follow her but tell her parents not to tell her about my arrival I wanna surprise her. I’ll just file my credentials on our school so I can transfer to her school.”

“You don’t need to worry about that anymore, son. We got you covered, we knew this will happen so we filed your credentials so you can transfer to our school there in Korea.”

“Okay then, Mom, Dad please inform aunt and uncle about my arrival there. I’ll just pack my things on my suitcase. Thank you

for everything, Mom, Dad.” He said then went upstairs to pack his belongings.

“Seiksha, adeul come here. I have something to tell you, it’s about Princess.”

“Seobangnim, appa, what is it about Princess, dongsaeng?”

“Shhh, be quiet lower down your voice. Princess might hear you. Bryce just informed me that Jace will be going here and he will arrive tomorrow evening. Don’t tell Princess just yet, Jace wants to surprise her so don’t ruin it.”

“Okay we get it. So he will be staying with us?”

“Yes so we have to prepare the guest room. He will be staying with us for four years.”

“I can’t wait to see the look on dongsaeng’s face when she sees Jace.”

“I can already imagine Princess’ face when she sees him. She will be ecstatic I bet she will hug him so tightly. Hehehe, ohlalala.”

“Seiksha, lower your voice, Princess might hear you.”

Meanwhile in Jace’s room he was busy double checking his things when his father approached him. He hugged his son and he hugged his father back, after checking his things he sat on his couch and talked to his father for a while.

“Dad, go to Korea after 12 months okay? I will be expecting you, Uri Gongju and I talked about our wedding and we want to get married in a year.”

“Of course, son. We will after all it’s your important day, we wouldn’t miss it for anything in the world. I remember when your Mom and I got married I was in cloud nine and felt very lucky because your Mom is a very talented and extraordinary lady. I felt nervous and agitated on that day, but when I looked at your Mom all my worries and nervousness disappeared in an instant.”

“I can’t wait to get married to Frey, Dad. Thank you for everything and for loving Mom so much. I can already imagine what Frey and I’s future will be. I am guessing

we will be just like you and Mom. Can you tell me something about the Romualdez’s history, Dad?”

“Of course, son. Let me tell you about the history of the Romualdez clan, it began on your great great grandfather. When your great great grandfather got married to his wife and she got pregnant he was surprised that it was twins. Turns out that our family has the capacity to bear twins on their first born child. When your mother and I got married and I got her pregnant we also had twins. You’re twin sister who is now married. So I’m guessing when you and Frey got married and she got pregnant she will also be conceiving twins. We’ll just have to find out when you get married.”

“Thank you for the details, Dad. I’m guessing too Frey will also conceive twins.”

“No problem, son. Anything for you. Oh by the way, here’s your ticket to Korea and your passport and credentials for transfer. Your flight is 2 am tomorrow and it will be a very long flight so get some rest.”

“Goodnight, Dad I’ll see you tomorrow then.” He said then went to sleep. After 4 hours he woke up, brushed his teeth, took a shower and put some clothes on before preparing all his things. Once done, he went downstairs and prepared his breakfast. After eating he went upstairs and woke his parents up. The Romualdez’s went to their car and drove off to the airport. Once there, Jace went to the checkpoint and they waited for his flight. After an hour, his flight was called and he said goodbye to his parents. He hugged his Mom who was crying and being consoled by his father.

After 10 months.....

Everything was ready for Jace and Frey’s wedding they were separated by the all the girls because of superstition. Right now they were on the hotel owned by the Lee’s nearby the cathedral to prepare for the wedding. Freya was busy with the photo shoot for their wedding album after an hour the photo shoot ended.

Then she put on her wedding gown and the makeup artist started her hair and makeup

while the other girls were also there with the makeup artist’s assistants for their make-over. Once done she looked at herself on the full length mirror on her room and the girls who just finished their makeup also looked at her they were stunned at how beautiful she was.

Half of her auburn waist length hair was pinned back with a studded diamond hair-piece while the other half of her naturally wavy hair was cascading down her back. She was wearing a white lace off shoulder ball gown with a white off shoulder strap on each sides of the arms and small dangling diamonds on the strap while small blue stones on the waist line her veil was a white angel-cut lace. When suddenly there was a knock on the door it revealed Frey’s father.

As if on cue the background music of On This Day played on the background. Her father pushed open the door to the cathedral then slowly walked her down the aisle to her soon to be husband. Freya was nervous but she kept it inside she looked to where her friends, Jace loved ones and her loved ones are seated. Melody had a pleasant and sweet smile plastered on her face and she smiled back at her. Before she gathered the courage to face her groom there her groom standing at the altar looking at her lovingly. When she reached the altar Jace bowed to her father.

“Now by the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss your beautiful wife, Jace.”

Jace reached for Frey’s veil and slowly lifted it up. Her beautiful face was revealed, and their eyes met again. Crystal blue clashing with Aquamarine blue. Slowly, Jace leaned in and kissed Frey passionately.

-THE END-

“Dream Big, Work Hard, Make it a Reality and Own Your Dreams

By Janesis Ma. Katrina Castillo

Being an aspiring writer, is hard but if you love what you’re doing then all the obstacles in being a writer you have to overcome it. There are times you will just give up but like others say own your dream. If writing is your passion you will never give up and if you love writing you will never get tired of it. Others might say that a writer is weird but who cares about it. When you realize your passion in life you will never pay attention to those people who belittle your passion of being a writer. So dream big, work hard, make it a reality and own your dream.

I am Janesis, being a writer is my dream since I was in high school. I was a freshman when I discovered my talent in writing. Ever since then I started to write my own stories in a notebook and published it on Wattpad. I have been a writer for 9 years since high school after finishing my college course I came across Ms. Elaine Roanne Ruiz and Ms. Emerald Blake. I’ve seen their programs on Facebook and suddenly I felt a whisper saying it is time for me to jumpstart to my dream of becoming a writer so I registered for the face-to-face Bookwriting Workshop held last February 29, 2020. When I went to the event I was so ecstatic and excited it was face-to-face I was shy and timid at first but then I grew to warm up to Ms. Elaine. Before going home to Batangas I saw on their calendar of events that there will be a Writer’s Camp on March 29 so I inquired about it and told my Mom. She told me to go to the event but sadly the pandemic started and the event was put on hold.

I attended the first online writer’s camp and for the first time I saw Ms. Emerald Blake. I have been her fan since she wrote her first book entitled Sa Agos ng Tadhana published in PHR. I actually have a copy of it but sadly someone borrowed it from me and they lost the pocketbook. It was my only copy of Ms. Emerald’s story, it was my favourite. Both of them were God-given instruments for me to achieve my dream of becoming a writer. Since the time I first attended the book writing workshop from PressStart I have been they’re loyal fan supporting all their events. Aside from that Ms. Elaine, Ms. Emerald are not only important to me there is also someone out there who made me realize my own dream. Her name is Ms. Jewell Atienza also popularly known as Ms. Pinkyjhwelii she was one of my favourite authors from this generation. I was in my first year of high school when I read her stories from Wattpad. Ever since then I started collecting all her books up until now I am still collecting her books. I saw her for the first time when she went to the Book signing event in SM Batangas Event center, she signed my own copy of her book and I can’t get enough of it.



Maricon Lastrilla

I am currently working as an analyst in a BPO company for almost 3 years. But despite the stress it gives, I found comfort in writing stories that run in my head.

Since high school, I’ve been writing my feelings down in a journal and then it develops into writing stories that I wanted to share. I mostly get inspiration in writing by watching anime, reading fiction books and manga’s online, and songs from one of my favorite J-rock bands - ONE OK ROCK.

I was born under the sign of Leo in Western, or Rat in Chinese Astrology. But once upon a time, my dream is to become a nun. Yet, today my dream is to publish a book under my own name.

Come Back Home

By Maricon Lastrilla

I was born from a family of farmers yet I hate farming. I hate how our family is isolated from the world like we’re from another planet of universe. We are not aliens. Me, my parents, and my four siblings has a pair of eyes, ears, hands and legs; our nose is perfectly working, and our mouths don’t sputter words that needs deciphering. Although, sometimes, I could hear my parents say some strange words. Probably another dialect from faraway province and I don’t bother to care at all.

Anyway, our home is standing in the middle of vast rice fields and a few kilometers behind is a gigantic mountain full of tall, proud trees that defeated a lot of monsoons during wet season.

Way back to our ancestors, the only means of our living is farming, planting seeds, root crops and anything related to brown, muddy land that house a lot of gross insects and worms. I really detest our home and the land we are supposed to work on for the rest of our lives. I don’t care if these lands and our living is an inheritance. I hate everything around me. So when I finished high school, after attending the graduation, without saying a word, I ran off and leave the disgusting land and life behind.

Why? Because I know, deep inside, this is not my place.

I was eighteen years old when for the first time I walked out the bus and breathe the city air. I am totally in awe to see a lot of skyscraper buildings, very modern and most importantly, there is a minimal piece of soil. I ignorantly shouted for joy that day despite an unusual thunderstorm roaring in the city sky. The land in the city is either concrete or tiled. Everything is clean even the rain throws tantrums to our heads. This is a happy place to me and I was so determined to live happily in here.

Despite being a high school graduate, I managed to land a good job as sales person in a small department store as a starter. I am good in selling products and the manager of department store is happy to the point he wants to regularize me. But I have a dream. I want to work in a well-known company. I left my first job and got lucky to get into BPO company where the wage is better than my previous job. I managed to earn money and after four

years of hard work between being a sales agent and a student, I got my degree from popular university. I resigned from BPO and starts to work in corporate world as a junior executive accountant. Because of much better salary, I am able to possess my own condo unit. And on the day I move in to my new place, I told myself, I can live happily-ever-after in this place.

Monsoon season. As expected, the typhoons are in queue to visit the country. No pun intended.

Our company allowed us to go half-day work because of the weather that is expecting to unleash its wind and rain in the afternoon. So before we got stranded in our way home, they’ve already sent us out of the office until the typhoon leaves us in peace again.

My condominium building is four streets away from the office. It is sure windy when I stepped out of the building but no rain yet. I decided to go to supermarket first and buy provisions because for sure I would be lazy to go out of bed once the storm started.

“Miss, wait up.”

I didn’t stop on my way. There’s a lot of female walking around me so it’s not me that innocent-like voice he is calling out.

“Miss,” he called again. I will not turn my head. I’m pretty sure I’m not the one he’s calling. But I did when he speaks the unspeakable. “Ellie”

I froze on the spot. There should be a logical reason why that name is called out. The name ‘Ellie’ is common in the city. I have an officemate with the same name and the spelling could be in different form. For sure, it is not the same form as the name I don’t want to recognize.

‘Ellie. It is you I’m calling.’

The voice I heard in my head, that can’t be. I dare not to look at the person talking in my consciousness and began to walk fast. Forget the grocery. I need to go home.

‘Yes. You need to go home. You’re in danger. But not in this home.’

Crap! My heart is pounding like hell when the voice of a guy continues to go inside my

head. The cold wind starts to get stronger. Rain will start to shower its wrath soon so I better go home fast.

‘Don’t go to your room, Ellie.’ His voice warns but I didn’t listen. Instead, I madly talked back.

Without my voice.

‘I’m not, Ellie. The name is Maya’

I halt at the realization. My mind is freakily bursting in surprise. My respiratory system seems to malfunction. H-how...

The earth almost shakes when the sky screamed in madness that transmits to my very bones. This is not happening.

‘Anoufs corye morils.’

If reality really bites hard, I am probably bleeding right now and will die in blood lost. That language is the same language I heard to my parents!

‘Those are the words of the lower faeries,’ the voice continued to explain, clearer this time. He must probably near me. It is not making any sense.

‘They’re not mortal being. The family you have known is not mortal beings. They are lower ranks of faeries.’

“What kind of joke is that?”

I turned around only to meet his emerald eyes that looks like in deep forest that got sunshine in the morning. He sure looks human from head to toe but his eyes are definitely high regarded to unknown world. And it scares the hell out of me.

“Ellie.”

My strength to talk back vanishes. Those eyes remind me of something, I just can’t recall why or what or who or when. I immediately dash to my condominium. I’ll be safe there. This is just a dream.

I ignored the greetings of security personnel when I enter the hallway. Great timing one of the elevators just opened and people gets out. I immediately ride the lift and hit the 35th floor button to where I stay.

While waiting for the lift to stop, I scrambled my bag to fetch my keys. The beat of my heart continues to drum that my head could hear it.

This must be a dream. Or a nightmare. I don't know. Nothing today is real. Right

I am ready to stepped outside the elevator when I noticed muddy footprints on the floor. I tried my best to ignore its connection with that mind-reader stranger and considered a new tenant just arrived on the floor. I am staying at the 35th floor of this building and I am the only one, so far, the resident occupying the floor.

I walk towards my unit; the chills are taking over me. The footprints seem to be leading me on a room. I tried my best not to fall down. Every parts of my body is shaking, my brain is in total chaos. I am now drowning in this indescribable fear as I stand in front of the door where the footprints ended: 3508.

My condo unit.

I looked the floor again to double check but imagination seems not in the mood to trick all my senses. And the mud is not just like the typical mud that can be seen on the streets. It was thick, and has few grasses and small insects. Like from a farm. Worst, there is a mud footprint visibly in half under the door giving me an idea that whoever has muddy shoe enters my turf.

'No. This is not happening.'

I am not sure how long have I've been a statue in front of my doorstep when it suddenly it opened in an angry bang. Mentally, I am screaming in fear but my voice seems to run away in evacuation center for safety.

“Maya, welcome back.”

That voice came inside my lights-off unit. I am familiar with the voice calling me even I haven't heard it for so many years. It was my sister's voice but it rang cold, eerie.

“We've been waiting for you,” another voice reached my ear. It was my mother's!

What is going on? There's only one pair of muddy footprints that was supposed to crashed into my unit. How come there are two voices calling me?

'Ellie, get out of there!'

I am starting to cry. I wanted to escape but both my feet seem to hit the landmine that if I try to lift one of my feet I'll be immediately sent to afterlife.

“Why did you leave us?”

This time it was my father's voice cracking in tears even if I don't have any visual of his face. My room remains in pitch black combining with

the angry weather outside the window aligned to where I am standing.

'Ellie, run!' The voice of green-eyed stranger is getting near.

“H-help me,” I pleaded. “I can't move.”

“The Lord Faery is mad, Maya. He wants you to return,” a young voice said.

I really want to move and run but I am so deadlock to where I stand. I feel the death scythe in the form of ugly, full of roots of hand slowly reaching for my neck.

'Ellie, say these words. Mogrit vrab lasyani.'

“Mogrit vrab lasyani. Urter hewer genolb!”

The hand reaching me moves back to my dark unit. However, a small light starts to shine. It was dark violet, slowly glowing like fire. Not one but two hateful fire floating.

“Despicable fairy!” the frantic voice of an old woman screamed along with the loud thunder. “If not for the Lord Faery, I would have killed you right now!”

I felt my pinky twitch. I can move, at least. However, I was too late when both of the angry fires fast approaching me. This must be the end of my happy life.

“Ellie!”

Do I really have to turn my head towards the emerald-eyed guy in this kind of ominous situation when he just shouted that freaking name?

But, as if on cue, both of us recite the same words.

“Eardity. Aevsam morfis sennrad.”

“Eardity. Aevsam morfis sennrad.”

And in the blink of an eye, I was already in his front and we are in different place. Still in the city. Just inside the ordinary room but the furniture's and ornaments sings royal blood.

“You did a good job, Ellie.”

“What?” my voice is weak. My energy is starting to leave me. I don't want to but I reached to his shoulders to support my limping body.

My eyelids start to fall as I feel my weight fly away. But didn't hit my head to the tiled floor. Instead, a familiar warmth from long time ago makes me feel at ease.

“You're still the fieriest of them all, Queen Ellie.”



Miyok

By Rubelyn E. Verterra

Mananatili ang pagmamahal sa iyo

Iniwanan mo man kami—

Yaring alaala'y mananatili

O kahit kinuha ka na ng Panginoon

Kailanma'y di kita malilimutan, aking ama.

Magandang Salamin

By Rubelyn E. Verterra

Nagniningning na mga matang may impit ng sakit

Nunit hindi alintana sa matimyas nitong paniningkit—

Kumukurbang labing paitaas, pinipiling masungkit

Makikinitaan pa ring matatag kahit na mapait.

Hindi kakinisan ang iyong balat na namumukadkad

Marahil ito ang mga sugat sa nakaraang napadpad

Humuhulma sa pagiging matatag sa patuloy na paglalakad

Pakikibaka sa araw-araw na pamumuhay kahit na bumabaliktad.

Ang iyong pisikal na kaanyua'y walang makapapantay

Iyo mong ipagmamalaki ang pagiging ikaw na tunay

Wag ipagkukumpara ang sarili't ikahihiya ang Kaniyang bigay—

Ikaw na natatanging hinulma ng Panginoon at binigyang buhay.

Akin kitang iniingatan at tunay na pinahahalagahan—

Rubelyn E. Verterra

Rubelyn E. Verterra, edad dalawampu. Kasalukuyang mag-aaral sa ikatlong taon ng kolehiyo na may kursong Batsilyer ng Sekondaryang Edukasyon, Medyor sa Filipino. Isang manunulat at dating kontesera sa mga patimpalak sa pagsulat. Marami siyang mga pangarap sa larangan na ito. Bagamat wala pang natatapos na nobela, hinahasa naman niya ang sariling kakayahan sa tulong ng kaniyang kursong tinatahak. Ang kaniyang pagsusulat na ninanais na makapagmumulat sa tunay na kalagayan ng Pilipinas. Siya ay opisyal na miyembro ng Penmasters Administration at iba pang mga organisasyon sa pagsulat na nakatutulong sa kaniyang paglago. Naniniwala siya na ang lahat, ay may tamang panahon para sa matamis na pag-usbong. Laban lang, subok lang nang subok!

Ikaw na mayroong mabuting kaloobang tangan-tangan

Patuloy mo lamang palaganapin ang ganitong kaugalian,

Ikaw na labis kong mahal, ikaw na ako, na aking kaharap sa salaminan.

Tali ng Nakaraan

By Rubelyn E. Verterra

“Mama, Papa, sana palagi tayong ganito! Palaging magkakasama at palagi po tayong masaya,” nakangiting sabi ni Elena habang nasa gitna ng magulang niya at nakayakap.

Nagkatinginan ang mag-asawa, bakas ang hirap na kanilang dinaranas. Mula sa tagpi-tagping mga kahoy at trapal na nagiging takip nila sa init at ulan, dikit-dikit na kabahayan. Sa tapat nito'y gabundok na tapunan ng mga basura, at sa ilalim ng kanilang bahay ay naglulutangang mga dumi ng tao na nagiging banyo nila kapag tinatawag ng kalikasan.

“Masaya ka ba kahit ganito ang buhay natin? Kahit sa ganito tayo nakatira?” matamlay na tanong ng ina kay Elena.

Tumango-tango lang siya, halatang walang problema ang bata kabaliktaran sa tunay nilang kinahaharap sa kapaligiran.

Maaga kasi silang nag-asawa kaya't walang paghahanda. Laning walong taong gulang pa lamang ang ina ni Elena nang mabuntis ito ni Arman na kaniyang ama. Nadala ng kapusukan ang magulang niya— makisingit pa sana noon sila sa magulang ni Arman ngunit hindi na kasya dahil may anim pa itong maliliit na kapatid at masyado nang siksikan doon. Kaya pinatayuan na lang sila ng maliit na bahay upang matulugan nina Arman na ngayon ay kanilang sinisilungan.

“Anak, patawarin mo kami kung ganito ang buhay na natatamasa mo. Patawarin mo kami kung hindi ka namin mabigyan nang maayos na buhay,” naluluhang sabi ng ina kay Elena na apat na taong gulang pa lamang.

Ang kamusmusang taglay ni Elena ang nagbibigay ng lakas ng

loob sa kanilang magulang. Ang kaniyang ama na nangangalakal at ang kaniyang inang si Annie nama’y minsang tumatanggap ng labada.

“Arman, paano kaya kung sumunod ako kay tita sa Amerika para magtrabaho?” tanong ng Annie. Lumalim ang tingin ni Arman sa asawa.

“Matatanggap na ako sa trabaho sa edad kong ito na bentedos na. Para naman ito sa atin, sa kinabukasan ni Elena.” Kapwa nila pinagmamasdan ang anak nilang naglalaro ng hanger.

Hinawakan ni Annie ang kamay ni Arman. “Wag kang mag-alala, magtatrabaho ako para sa pamilya natin hindi para humanap ng iba, pangako.”

Sa kanilang dalawa kasing mag-asawa, si Annie ang nakapagtapos ng sekondarya ngunit nabuntis bago magkolehiyo. Samantalang si Arman ay nakapagtapos lang ng elementarya bagamat masipag.

“Mama ano pong pinag-uusapan ninyo?” malambing na singit ni Elena.

Nginitian lang siya at pinalapit. Tinitingnan ang kaniyang buhok ng magulang, hinihimas ang poknat ni Elena na hugis puso malapit sa likod ng kaniyang tainga— palatandaan. Pati ang kanan niyang paa, magkadikit ang dalawang daliri dahil pinaglihi raw siya sa saging na kambal.

“Gusto mo ba magkaroon ng maraming laruan bukod sa hanger, anak?” malungkot na masayang tanong ni Annie. Tumango-tango siya sa sobrang kagustuhan na magkaroon nito.

“Baby Elena, magtatrabaho muna si mama sa medyo malayo, kay tita Susan mo. Para magkaroon tayo ng maraming pera. Saka si papa mo muna mag-aasikaso sa iyo.”

“Matagal po ba iyon?” nakangusong tanong niya.

“Hindi naman, saglit lang iyon! Babalik din agad ako, pangako.”

“Oo nga, ayos lang iyon! Tapos bibilhan ka pa maraming pasalubong na tsokolate!” masiglang singit ni Arman bagamat may impit.

“Payag na ako,” bulong ni Arman sa asawa.

Lumipas ang isang buwan, kinuha na si Annie ng kaniyang tita at nagsimula nang magtrabaho sa America bilang caregiver. Naging mahirap sa umpisa dahil kapwa pa sila nangangapa ngunit naging maayos din naman.

Sa kasamaang palad ay hindi pinapayagang makauwi si Annie taon-taon dahil masungit ang among napuntahan.

Lumipas na rin ang dalawang taon, hindi pa rin nakauwi sa Pilipinas.

Sa hindi inaasahan, dumagdag muli ang isang taon at walang paramdam si Annie kina Arman. Maski tawag o text, wala. Bagay na labis na ipinag-alala ng pamilya.

Nanghina ang loob ni Arman na baka iniwanan na sila ni Annie at ipinagpalit sa iba. Labis na nalulong sa alak si Arman at napabayaan na si Elena. Nakuha rin nitong lumandi sa ibang babae sa pagkasabik na maramdaman ang asawa.

“Anak, iiwanan muna kita rito, maghahanap ako ng trabaho para sa atin. Kinalimutan na tayo ng ina mo, pupuntahan ko lang ang kaibigan ko para ipasok ako sa trabaho,” pagalit na sabi ni Arman dahil sa kalasingan.

Pumunta siya sa kaibigang sinasabi ngunit babae pala ito at gusto na ng bagong buhay. Hanggang sa mag-iisang linggo na’t hindi pa rin bumabalik si Arman sa anak. Tuluyang naiwan si Elenang mag-isa na pitong taong gulang na.

Ayaw rin ni Elena sa pamilya ng papa niya dahil ginagawa siyang alila at pinagugutuman. Kaya’t nagpasiya siyang magpalaboy-laboy sa kalsada, umaasang makikita niya ang ama.

Sa lansangan ang naging tahanan ni Elena ng isang taon hanggang siya’y kuhanin ng DSWD at inaruga. Hindi na nagparamdam pa ang kaniyang magulang. Inabot na siya ng labing walong taong gulang sa pangangalaga ng mga opisyal na kawani nitong programa, at umalis na siya upang humanap ng trabaho.

Hindi naging madali ang lahat ng karanasan ni Elena ngunit pagkalipas ng tatlong taon, guminhawa na ang kaniyang buhay bagamat mag-isa pa rin. Nagpalit na rin siya ng pangalan na ngayon ay si Selene. Dito siya nagpasiya na hanapin ang kaniyang ama at ina ngunit magpapaalam muna siya sa kaniyang boss.

“Selene?” narinig niya ang kaniyang bagong bihis na pangalan. Hinarap niya ito.

“Yes po, Sir Roman,” sagot niya at nakipagkamay.

“Magpapaalam sana po ako na mag-leave pansamantala para hanapin ang magulang ko.” Isa siyang sekretarya sa malaking kumpaniya ng palaruan.

“Hmm okay, sure. Gusto ko rin mag-leave to smell fresh air.”

Nag-leave si Selene ng isang buwan, ngunit makakasama niya pala ang kaniyang boss na si Roman. Dahil kahit saan siya magpunta, handa siyang samahan. Hanggang sa nahulog na ang loob ni Selene sa binata. Si Roman na nakapagpatibok ng puso ni Selene sa unang pagkakataon.

“Hindi ko maintindihan bakit ganito pero basta kakaiba ang nararamdaman ko sa kaniya,” bulong niya sa sarili ngunit narinig pa rin ni Roman.

Bakas ang takot na baka magkaiba ang kanilang nararamdaman.

Malaki ang agwat ng edad ni Roman kay Selene, labing walong taon ang tanda ni Roman sa kaniya at masyadong kumplikado—

“Selene, hindi puwede ang damdamin mo sa akin dahil may asawa ako. Isa pa, napakalayo ng agwat mo sa gaya ko, para mo na akong kuya o tatay sa tanda,” sagot nito. Napayuko si Selene.

“Saka nakauwi na pala ang asawa ko mula sa abroad. Alam mo ba, napakatagal niyang nandoon, ikinulong pala siya ng walang hiyang amo niya kaya hindi na nakatatawag sa amin. Akala ko iniwanan na kami, mabuti na lang at nandoon ang kaniyang kamag-anak bagamat matagal siyang nahanap dahil tagong-tago,” naluluhang litantiya ni Roman.

“P-pwede ko bang makita ang asawa mo? Pasensya na sa nararamdaman ko, ngunit sisikapin ko na ituring ka na lang

kaibigan dahil ayokong masira ang pamilya ninyo gaya ng amin,” pabulong niyang sabi.

“Bakit wala ka bang pamilya?”

Hindi maipinta ang mukha ni Selene sa tanong.

“Buweno sige, isasama kita bukas sa bahay namin para makilala mo ang asawa ko.”

“Friends?” Inilapat ni Selene ang kaniyang kamay kay Roman at nakipagkamay bilang magkaibigan.

Kapwa nila ayaw pumasok sa relasyon dahil alam nilang mayroong kulang sa kanilang pagkatao.

“Sige, tamang-tama, kaarawan ng asawa ko bukas, magpapahanda ako. Pumunta ka ha!”

Nagpasiyang umuwi ang dalawa at nagpahinga para makapaghanda.

Kinabukasan, abalang-abala sila sa pag-aayos ng sarili.

“Nasasabik ako,” ngiting bulong ni Selene sa sarili habang nakaharap sa salamin at naglalagay ng make-up.

“Ano na kaya ang lagay nina mama at papa?” Napahawak siya sa kaniyang puso.

“Mahahanap ko rin kayo!” sigaw niya sa isip saka ngumiti.

Si Selene na maputi, singkit, matangkad, at mahaba ang buhok.

“Magtatali nga ako ng buhok para umaliwalas naman mukha ko kapag makikipagkita kina Roman.”

Itinali niya ang buhok at ipinusod, wala nang nakalaylay pa sa kaniyang batok. Bakas ang ngiti niya sa sarili dahil ngayon pa lang siya nagkaroon ng mga tunay na kaibigan gaya nina Roman. Pinagkakamalan kasi siyang mataray at masungit kahit na malambot ang kaniyang puso.

Pagkarakaraka’y umalis na si Selene, mula sa suot niyang bistidang may kaiklián, at sandals na kita ang kulay pula niyang mga kuko sa paa.

Nang makarating na siya sa bahay nina Roman, kabadong sabik siyang nag-door bell.

Pinagbuxan siya ni Roman at manghang-mangha sa nakitang kagandahan ni Selene.

“Tuloy ka sa loob,” pag-aaya ni Roman.

Ang laki ng bahay at kumikinang sa kaputian. Ligas pa dahil may gate na mataas at maraming cctv ang nagkalat. Malawak ang harding iba’t ibang kulay ng bulaklak ang bumubungad. Sandaling pumikit si Selene at may inaalala—

Para bang ganito ang kaniyang pangarap dati na bahay na makapasok at hindi maipaliwanag ang saya dahil nasa loob na siya nito.

Pinapasok na muna siya ni Roman sa loob dahil nandoon pa ang kaniyang asawa, nakaupo sa wheel chair dahil pinilayan noon sa abroad.

“Mahal ko, si Selene, ang kaibigan ko at sekretarya rin ng

kumpaniya natin.” Naghawakan sila ng kamay.

“Napakaganda mong bata.” Hinawakan ang mukha niya at niyakap nang mahigpit kaya medyo nakaupo si Selene para maabot..

“Sabi na matutuwa si mahal sa iyo.” Napalingon sa likod si Selene upang ngitian si Roman.

“A-arman!” tawag ng asawa nito habang nakaturo sa buhok ni Selene. Nagtataka siya lalo nang tumingin din si Roman sa kaniyang ulo sa likod ng tainga.

“A-anak ko? I-ikaw ba ‘yan?!’ tanong ni Roman. Nakataas ang kilay ni Selene sa sinasabi nila.

“Pahubarin mo ng sapatos, mahal,” pag-uutos ng asawa nito.

“Sige na, hubarin mo lang.” Sinunod niya ito at hinubad. Nanlaki ang mga mata nina Roman sa nakita.

“Siya nga ang nawawala nating anak! Ikaw si Elena na may ganiyang palatandaan! Pero bakit iba ang pangalan mo?” masiglang sabi ni Roman.

“Ikaw ang Baby Elena namin, hindi ako nagkakamali tama ang kutob ko, mahal,” nakangiting sabi nito.

“K-kayo ho ba ang magulang ko?” takang-taka siya lalo.

“Magpa-DNA tayo para masiguradong ikaw nga. Hindi rin totoong iniwanan kita dahil ako ay nakulong matapos mahulihan ng droga. Pero nagbago na ako pagkalabas! Nagpalit na rin ako ng pangalan para tuluyang magbagong buhay, ako ang tatay mong si Arman, Elena,” naluluhang sambit ni Roman sa kaniya.

Naguguluhan man sa nangyayari si Selene ngunit tila sumasabay siya sa agos— ang lukso ng dugo.

| **TALI NG NAKARAAN** |

AUTHOR IN FOCUS



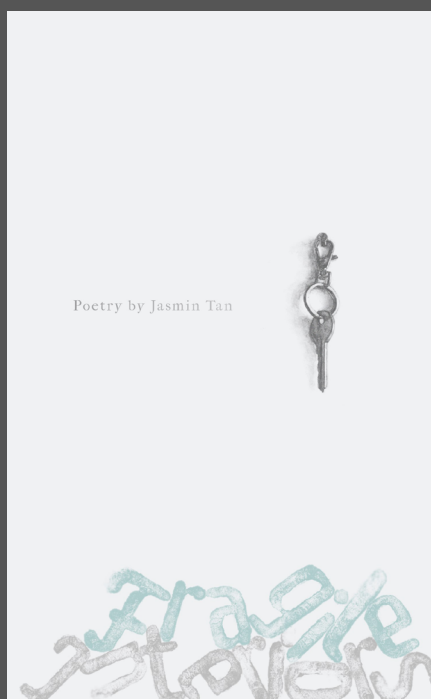
Jasmin Tan

Jasmin Tan is a self-published Filipina author born and raised in the Province of Bulacan. She started to pen poems in high school as a hobby, and eventually fell in love with the craft. She graduated AB Journalism in 2014 from Bulacan State University, where she held the Editor-in-Chief and Literary Editor posts of its official student publication, Pacesetter.

Currently, she is working as an independent writer and a social media manager – with *yaya-ninang* duties to her two adorable nieces, and a lot of fangirling in between. She is also a volunteer at The Outstanding Students of the Philippines - Region 3 Alumni Community of Heroes.

Fragile Interiors is her self-published debut book. It is an original collection of poetry about breaking down our walls to unearth and understand our feelings. The book dove into themes of vulnerability and recklessness, heartbreak and love, fear and bravery, torment and healing—in all its kinds and facets.

To see more of her poetry, visit @theclumsylass on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



AUTHOR IN FOCUS



I am GILDA FORTUNATA G. ALTEZ, 61years old, born on October 14, 1959 in Gumaca, Quezon and has 5 children.

I am a Marriage, Relationship & Family Counselor and the Founder of A Voice In The Storm Counseling Advocacy. Having guested at ABS-CBN & DZMM Teleradyo, ANC since 2009-2020, GMA7 & DZBB in 2009 - 2014, TV5 in 2011-2013, RHTV & DZRH in 2012 & 2018 is an honor for me.

I was involved in doing charity projects as the President & CEO of World Letters Assurance Society Inc. since 2010 to resent.

In 2012, I was awarded Top Ten Happiest Pinoy, 2015 by Rotary of Guadalupe Viejo in Makati and in 2018 as Gawad Kaagapay Awardee by Quezon

DepEd.

It has been my dream to write a book based on the many stories of my counseling clients since 2011 but it only become a reality during this Pandemic when I crossed upon the series of A LOVE TO LAST, a Filipino soap that tackled family love, romantic and platonic love in Netflix. Equipped with so much love, I was able to write my very first Book.

My book entitled LOVE FOR ALL REASONS, LOVE FOR ALL SEASONS is a compilation of wisdom on Love transcribed in narrative manner. This book identified different kinds of Love that each person can and had experienced. And through each experience, a test on character surfaces. It also features about different kinds of values like Hope, Patience, Courage, Faithfulness, and Resilience.

This book cites true to life stories according to every narrative and an illustration relevant to the topic. I look forward to sharing this book to my counseling clients and more so to many people who seem to be hopeless about Love and who never give up on Love no matter what situation they are into in this present time.

As a newbie Author, I chose to write few narratives yet...hoping in the coming seasons of my life, I can write more and multiple narratives based on the dictate of my heart and stories I had witnessed.

By: MOMMY G

GILDA FORTUNATA G. ALTEZ



AUTHOR IN FOCUS

Melissa Dona

Maria Melissa Galauran Lacerna-Dona is an Engineer. At a young age, she was trained how to play various Musical Instruments. In fact, she took her Music Lessons with Kundiman Composer, Eddie Nagar. Learning about the history of her family, she wanted to follow the footsteps of her grandfather, Dr. Fausto J. Galauran. She first completed her degree in Engineering before going back to her first love-Music and Arts.

She wrote and directed her first musical play entitled, “Chiara” which was performed in different theaters including Philam Life in 2003 and “Francesco” in 2019. Melissa became a member of Pansol Choir in Quezon City and had the opportunity to learn more about Culture and Arts. Learning the importance of preserving the family history, she wrote “Ang Kwentong Isang Kwentista” as a school project that led her way in becoming a grantee of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts for Dr. Fausto J. Galauran, Ang Ama ng Nobela at Maikling Kathang Tagalog ng Liwayway at iba pang Lingguhan.

Dr. Fausto Jacinto-Galauran y Sanchez is a Filipino poet, novelist, historian and a medical doctor. He was born on October 18, 1903. In 1896, his father, Patricio Galauran is the Cabeza de Baranggay in Caloocan. His mother is Bonifacia Asistio Sanchez.

He came from the 7 founding families of Caloocan where most of the Katipuneros in town came, the closest of which is Emilio Jacinto, the uncle of Patricio. He was originally a Jacinto but had it changed to Galauran when Emilio Jacinto was hunted by the Spanish authorities. Although he came from a political lineage, he chose a different path.

He started writing at the age of 15 and his poem “Ang Bandidang Pilipino” was published in the front cover of Ang Mithi. He was only 18 when he became one of the three personalities that started Liwayway. Fausto is their first paid writer in 1922 and wrote novels for 50 years.

His first novel “At sa Wakas” was published by Liwayway. Aside from his writing stints, he is also a film director. His novel, Dr. Kuba, had received

distinction as “Kauna-unahang Nobelang Tagalog na may Ganitong Uri”. Lihim ng Kumpisalan is his masterpiece written in Spanish and later translated in English, Tagalog, Japanese and other dialects.

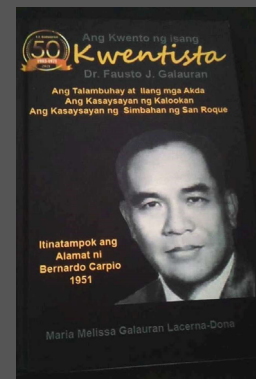
He spent three years in Baguio to gather information about the Igorots. In 1945, Igorota sa Baguio was bought by United Artists in Hollywood. He also wrote novels in Ilokano, Bicolano and Cebuano.

He was acclaimed “Nobelista ng Republika” for his novel Madam X. He had received numerous awards in the international and local scene with his more than a hundred novels and poems.

Dr. Fausto J. Galauran is also a historian as he worked in uncovering the historic past of Caloocan. As a physician, he became the President of the Rizal Medical Society and the first president of Caloocan Medical Society.

50 years may have past, but the theme songs from his classical novels remains, like that of Dahil Sa yo, Hindi kita Malimot, Dalagang Pilipina, Ang Tangi kong Pag-ibig, and Bakya Mo Neneng, to name a few. His classical novels remains, like that of Dahil Sa yo, Hindi kita Malimot, Dalagang Pilipina, Ang Tangi kong Pag-ibig, and Bakya Mo Neneng, to name a few. His classical movie, Bernardo Carpio is being studied for Film Adaptation as well as Maalaala Mo Kaya for Musicology.

His biography was written by his friend, Lope K. Santos, Ama ng Balarilang Filipino. His works are considered Panitikang Popular and had gained his title in 1933 as Ama ng Nobela at Maikling Kathang Tagalog ng Liwayway at iba pang Lingguhan.



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WITH HIS PASSION AND COMMITMENT IN DELIVERING PROJECTS, ARCHITECT RALPH RUIZ BELIEVES IN PURPOSE-DRIVEN ARCHITECTURE WITH THE RIGHT DOSE OF CREATIVITY, INNOVATIVE AND RESOURCEFUL OUR PRESSSTART STUDIO FOUNDER AIMS TO EXCEED THE EXPECTATIONS OF HIS CLIENTS WITH HIS HANDS-ON INVOLVEMENT AND ABILITY TO BRING IDEAS TO LIFE

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ARCHITECT RALPH LEANDRO RUIZ EARNED HIS BS ARCHITECTURE DEGREE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS MANILA AND PASSED THE LICENSURE EXAMS IN 2012. HE IS CURRENTLY TAKING UP MASTERS DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE FROM THE SAME UNIVERSITY.

COACH EMERALD BLAKE
PENMASTERS LEAGUE
PRESIDENT



EMERALD BLAKE IS THE CURRENT HEAD MENTOR AND PRESIDENT OF PENMASTERS ADMINISTRATION, A NONPROFIT WRITING ORGANIZATION THAT AIMS TO HELP AND SUPPORT ASPIRING NEW AND SEASONED WRITERS.

SHE HAS TWO SELF-PUBLISHED NOVELS, "MEMORIES OF JEDDAH" IN 2014 AND ITS FILIPINO VERSION MGA ALAALA NG JEDDAH IN 2018. HER ROMANCE NOVEL ENTITLED "SA AGOS NG TADHANA" WAS ALSO PUBLISHED UNDER PRECIOUS HEARTS ROMANCES IN 2017.

ASIDE FROM WORKING AS A CONTENT WRITER FOR INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL CLIENTS, EMERALD BLAKE IS ALSO ONE OF THE CURRENT WRITING COACHES OF PRESSSTART STUDIO.

COACH ELAINE ROANNE F. RUIZ
OWNER OF **PRESSSTART** STUDIO



WITH A MISSION TO HELP PEOPLE GET STARTED AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AND DREAMS, ELAINE IS A WRITER, CERTIFIED TRAINER, PROFESSIONAL TEACHER, AND LIFELONG LEARNER. SHE FACILITATES CREATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS, WRITING WORKSHOPS, AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS.

ELAINE STARTED HER CAREER IN THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING COMPANY. SHE LATER GAINED EXPERIENCE AS HOSPITALITY, FASHION RETAIL AND CORPORATE TRAINER FROM WORLD-RENOWNED TOP GLOBAL BRANDS. SHE HAS SUCCESSFULLY TRAINED AND SPOKEN TO THOUSANDS AROUND THE PHILIPPINES AND ABROAD.

WITH A DECADE OF STRONG EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT, ELAINE GRADUATED CUM LAUDE WITH A DOUBLE-DEGREE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS MANILA. SHE TOOK UNITS OF MASTERS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES FROM DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY. SHE PASSED THE LICENSURE EXAMS FOR TEACHERS IN 2010.

PASSIONATE IN WRITING, TRAVEL AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT, ELAINE IS THE AUTHOR OF THE SELF-HELP BOOK, PRESS START: PLAY GUIDE FOR LIFE GAME CHANGERS. HER SECOND BOOK IS A COLLECTION OF POETRY ENTITLED PRESSING ON.



DAILY ROUTINE
ELAINE RUIZ

THE MORNING HAD GONE WHEN
YOU WERE WATCHING THE CLOCK PAST ONE
THEN YOU REALIZED
DIRTY CLOTHES WERE STILL IN THE BIN
DINNER PLATES WERE STILL ON THE SINK
YOUR HAIR CRAVED FOR WASHING

FROM THE NIGHT BEFORE
WHEN YOU PROMISED YOURSELF YOU
WILL COMPOSE YOUR NEXT POETRY
BUT

THEN THE NEWS
WAS MORE PRESSING
AND THEN YOU LOST THE ENERGY

SO YOU MADE A RESOLVE
TO BEGIN

BUT THEN YOU WENT BACK IN THE SAME
OLD ROUTINE

EXCEPT FOR THAT ONE MORNING
WHEN YOU
STOPPED WATCHING THE CLOCK

AND INSTEAD MADE USE OF YOUR TIME
TO WRITE WORDS THAT RHYME

YOU HAVE NEVER FELT MORE ALIVE.

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