

The Ark by VeryWellAged

A Novel



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Third Edition

06 December 2020 Revision

The Ark, copyright © 2020, was published on 22 February 2020 on ASSTR via PDF in the faithful original format, output into three ebook formats, epub, azw3 and mobi in formats, and recast in an HTML5 format.

The first edition and contained errors. Subsequent revisions and editions will remove errors.

Revised with publication date 25 February 2020. Seven errors fixed, one word added and a clarification in a footnote have been made.

The second edition with a publication date of 26 February 2020, adds a preface on language and fixes a textual error.

Revised with publication 29 February 2020. Eight additional errors [typos and textual correction] are resolved.

Revised with publication date 06 March 2020, corrects more typos.

One correction and reissued on 11 April 2020.

This Third Edition, with a publication date of 14 April 2020, is released following a complete read through of the HTML version which exposed some truly serious errors in the text. Additionally to all versions new text was added and some textual elements were altered.

A number of corrections on 18 November 2020.

A number of corrections on 06 December 2020.

None of this story, or any part thereof, may be used in any format by others without the express email consent of the author. You may contact the author at:

VeryWellAged@ymail.com

Acknowledgements

While *The Ark* is a work of fiction, I have had, once again, significant help in producing what you have before you.

Supreme of all is my principal editor/proofreader, CN, who through painstaking efforts made corrections to most every page of what became the finished work.

Anyone who writes, as a serious endeavor, can vouchsafe my assertion that the eyes that write will not find the errors written, and so, it is my trusted CN, who sees what I surely miss. That means hundreds of corrections. Many of them relate to commas, but commas are important. I cannot explain how much I trust and rely on his assistance these days.

I also want to mention a secondary proofreader, Burford. Burford volunteered and was one of three I accepted to review the work following CN's work.

One of the three was, due to unforeseen circumstances, unable to assist. Another read the work but submitted fewer than five error notices. His heart might be in a good place, but his proofreading skills were wanting.

Burford, however, has found approximately one error per chapter and that effort is greatly appreciated, as finding approximately fifty errors, at this late stage, has a big impact on the final product.

Lastly, I want to thank those who have assisted me in proofing my Cebuano and Ilonggo usage contained herein. You know who you are and, though you will not be named, I sincerely thank you.

VeryWellAged
Philippines
February, 2020

Preface on Language and Culture.

The Philippines, a cluster of over 7000 islands, is not homogenous in its culture or language. There are two national languages, English and Filipino, also called Tagalog, on which it is based.

However, a culturally native Tagalog speaker may use what is called “deep Tagalog,” which is not the Filipino/Tagalog taught in the schools.

English is the language of the Philippine Senate and House, but that does not mean the average Filipino has a very good grasp of the language. Nor should the reader assume that Tagalog is well understood by all. It is not! In the Visayas, (the middle islands,) it is not the preferred language.

In much of the Visayas, the preferred language is Cebuano and its variations, which we can cluster under the terms of Visayan and Bisaya. On other islands in the Visayas, the preferred tongue is Hilagaynon, which is also known as Ilonggo. Ilonggo speakers are not as vehemently opposed to using Tagalog as are Cebuano/Visayan speakers.

According to Wikipedia, the number of languages spoken ranges from 120 to 187, depending on how you count. There are major language groups, called dialects (they are actually separate languages), and smaller regional “dialects” with a circumscribed set of speakers, primarily based on a tribal affinity.

As this story works its way through the chapters, we see some Tagalog speakers, some Ilonggo speakers and some Visayan speakers.

As examples, here are the four major languages saying the same things.

Cebuano/Visayan:	Ilonggo:	Tagalog:	English:
Maayong buntag.	Maayong aga.	Magandang umaga.	Good morning.
Akoa baya ning sinilas.	Akin ang tsinelas na to.	Akin itong tsinilas na ito.	This is my slipper

These days, Tagalog frequently creeps in to common language as it is heard in national media and taught in the schools. But when not used at home, and it almost never is in the Visayas, it may be understood, at least partially, but not spoken well or at all.

This story involves an American English speaker, living in the Philippines and interacting with Filipinos.

For those of you whose primary language is English, it may surprise you that, compared to some other languages, your language is a highly precise stewpot of words, nuances, and structures that allow for a strict understanding of exactly what is intended to be conveyed. We have rules upon rules of what constitutes correct speech so that ambiguity is removed.

The languages of the Philippines are the converse. Ambiguity is part and parcel of their lives. States of being we use are completely missing from their casual lexicon. Where a child in the US might come to an adult and say, *'Mom says to tell you it is time to eat dinner.'* A Tagalog speaker might simply say *Kain na*. That Tagalog translates to *Eat now*. If you hand me a sack of potato chips, I might say, *I have had enough*; in Tagalog, it would be *Tama na*. Now, *Tama* actually means *Correct* and *na* means *now*. But when strung together it is understood as *Enough*. So *Correct now*, means *Enough*, and nowhere is there a verb of being.

The result is a spoken English which sounds a bit odd to your ears until you remember that the missing words come from people who are unaccustomed to using anything like them. An example is: *What you do her?* Which can mean: *What did you do to her?* Or *What did you do with her?* Or *What did you do for her?* You are supposed to gather the meaning based on the context of when the question was asked.

Also of note, foreign languages, in general, do not use vowels as we use them in English. The result is that it is a bit hard to explain the sound correctly when using what we might have learned as the rules in elementary school.

For instance, maybe you were told that there are short and long vowels. In point of fact, there aren't and that lesson needs to be unlearned. The 'I' when sounded like 'eye' (or what you might have been taught as a long 'I') can be spoken in a very short, abrupt

vocalization. The 'a' you were taught was short as in 'ah' might be prolonged in a word.

Your elementary school rules simply do not apply to describing vowels in foreign languages.

In this text I use the terms hard and soft. Is that perfect? No, but it gets us closer to the sound.

Within these pages, the dialog is as accurate to the place and type of conversation as I can make it given the above comments on dialect. There are things I don't do.

In real dialog, **he** is often confused with **she** and vice versa. Filipino dialects do not use gender pronouns and so the speaker will often make this mistake.

In all Filipino languages, pronouns are used freely within sentences and often do not refer to any identified subject. Further a number of individuals may be identified by the same pronoun in the same sentence. If there are four sisters, which sister is being referenced, is anyone's guess. If you ask, you often get a look, like, why does it matter?

That is the nature of the ambiguousness in lives led. You will often hear a Filipino complain that a foreigner is strict. The foreigner is trying to untangle the ambiguity and it is not appreciated.

So I have done as much as I can without making the reading completely impossible. I hope you enjoy what follows.

The Ark

Acknowledgements

*Preface on Language
and Culture.*

Making sense of it all

Birthday thoughts...

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*What was and what
will be...*

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God's Cleansing

*Gone in a matter of
minutes...*

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What will be anew...

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Making sense of it all

Birthday thoughts...

1

It's my birthday, October 14, 2013. I'm not sure why I'm writing this; no one will ever read it. Why would anyone care?

So why am I writing it down? Because, maybe, it'll help me make sense of what I have become.

What I have become wasn't ever something I hoped and planned for. It's not something I could have even imagined. Not one bit.

Let's start with the small and meaningless but still real stuff.

All my life I hated summer. It was simply too damned hot; I hated humidity. I actively chose, as an adult, to live in cold, northern desert climates. And no, that is not an oxymoron. There are such places.

So the first thing that makes no sense is that I'm living in the tropics, on an island of lush vegetation. It has the things I always disliked: heat, humidity and lots of creepy crawly things. Yeh, like cockroaches two inches long.

The idea of living surrounded by coconut, banana, mango, avocado trees and rice fields was sure as hell not on my bucket list. Rice terraces was a phrase I hadn't ever heard of. Rice paddies, sure, when I thought about the 1960s and Vietnam. But most certainly not across the road from my house. Fields of pineapples meant an expensive vacation in Hawaii. The type of vacation that I was simply disinterested in taking.

And then there's my interest in women. I have this thing for long-haired blondes, well bosomed, Nordic types, tall and trim. My wife was most of that, a little shorter than my ideal at five foot seven, but yeh, she had the rest of the package.

She and I split the sheets many years ago and I have been single ever since. She wanted kids; I didn't. She wanted to travel; I didn't. She wanted adventure; I wanted the peace and calm of hearth and home.

There are no more blondes in my life now. There are no blondes within a thousand miles of here. At least, not unless they are tourists. The gals here almost exclusively have black hair. They may be the shortest females I have ever been with. Maybe you've heard of the land of the itty bitty titties? This is it. And they all want children.

There will be no more dry, cold desert days in my life. Monsoon rains and warm weather are my ever-present companions now.

I don't swim. I don't like the ocean. I don't like to sail or fish. I don't even like to eat most fish. And now, I live just a couple of kilometers from the salt water of the Pacific Ocean.

I don't speak multiple languages. I speak English. I failed at both Spanish and French in school. I'm just no good at languages. And now I'm surrounded by folks who speak languages I don't know and had never heard of. I have no idea what they are saying.

While, where I live is safe in some ways, there's plenty of reason to believe that just wandering around these islands will put me in danger. And so, here I'm in my comfortable home on our land; a gilded prison of sorts. But there can be other reasons to not be safe.

I'm eminently comfortable. I have all the comforts I need and desire, but outside these walls, with exception of trips to fancy malls, those comforts do not exist. Stark and real poverty is the reality that surrounds me. I have enough money. I'm not of that which surrounds me.

But before all this... The pension, savings and the Social Security checks combined, provided me with a stable income without leaving my cold dry northern desert home. Not enough to go jet-setting around the world but, as I didn't want to be jet-setting, it was a non-issue.

I was already retired. Not working focused my mind on what I had been missing in my life these last many years. I heard about these online dating sites. Being bored and now very much aware of how lonely my life was, I signed up and tried to strike up chats with a few women from Eastern Europe. They were blonde and pretty. You know, just my type.

But they didn't have English. I was paying for translation services. It just felt like a scam to milk me of cash. The pictures of the gals were pretty enough, but as I couldn't talk to them, or even skype/type with them, I wasn't sure about exactly who I was chatting with.

I gave up on it for a while.

And then, I heard horror story after horror story about these sites. Even if the gal was pretty and for real, once she got to the USA and got her green card, she would bail out on her guy.

It even happened to a guy I know.

I gave up. This was not for me.

Still bored and with far too much time on my hands, I decided to try the US based dating sites. I tried Match.com, eHarmony and a couple of others. But, after seeing those young pretty girls on the foreign sites, what I was seeing on these US sites was not working for me. The matches proposed just were a joke. I gave up on those as well.

I started drinking more than I should. I guess being bored and alone will lead to that. I wasn't liking what I was becoming.

It was in September of 2004, I was out at a local café one evening, eating some BBQ ribs when I see a fella I know fairly well walk into the place. He wasn't what you would call a close friend but the place was pretty busy, he'd have to wait a bit and I was sitting alone at my table for four. He was with a young pretty Asian looking gal I didn't know.

Being a bit nose, and more than a bit bored, I wave at him and signal that as my table for four had three unused chairs, they might

just want to sit with me. Like I said, the place was pretty crowded and he could see that for himself.

It turns out that this fella had met the gal online, travelled to the Philippines to see her, flew back home, filled out some paperwork and got permission to bring the young'un over so he could marry her. They have been married for no more than a week. He's close to my age and a good forty years older than the gal. Now that gets me scratching my head.

She is really cute. Not a knockout the way I measure gals, but way up there on the scale at any rate. She speaks English at least enough to communicate if not smoothly; she is communicating with me and able to tease in English. No translator needed. It turns out that she is twenty-three years old. The guy is sixty-four.

I'm a little intrigued... Nah... I'm more than intrigued.

The gal is offering to hook me up with one of her friends. I'm not going to take her up on the offer, but it does tell me that there might be many opportunities for me if I looked in that direction. I don't want to be rude to the gal, so I tell her I'll give it some thought.

In truth, I give the girl's friends no thought at all, but that very same evening I do check out websites of Philippine women. I'm not 100% sure I want to go in that direction, but I pay a forty-five dollar registration fee on one site that looks promising and, after filling out my info, I close my browser and figure I'll come back and look at the girls the next day. It's late and I'm tired.

I strip down and start the shower. There's no hot water! Damn.

I go downstairs to check out the hot water heater. There's water all over the floor. The water heater has cratered.

I have a mess down here. The next five hours are spent shutting off the water going into the heater and then mopping up the mess as well as I can. I'll have to get help in to take care of some of the damage, that'll cost me some... and then there's the cost of a new water heater.

I get to bed a little after 3am. I have no idea how long I'll be without a water heater. Plumbers are notoriously hard to get on a moment's notice and I'm not sure if I can find the water heater I need right away.

I spend the next day contacting my insurance company, looking for a replacement heater, looking for a plumber, and hiring a company to come in and pull up carpets and dry all sorts of shit out.

As I have no hot water, I pack a small bag and check in to a Comfort Inn for a couple of days. That night I'm too damned tired to do anything but grab a meal at the café and go to bed.

The next morning, I go back to the house, but pretty much only to let the cleaning crew in. Still, as I'm just hanging out while the crew is working, I fire up my laptop and check into the website that I had found two days ago.

Logging in I find seventeen messages waiting for me from females on the site. Twelve of them I ignore completely after just looking at their photos, but that leaves five. I look at the details of each and there's no reason to disqualify any of these five. I send a message back to each and shut the computer down. The insurance company adjuster is here and I need to deal with him.

There's extensive damage downstairs. I'll need new carpeting. Some woodwork will need to be replaced. I'm on the hook for a new heater, but the insurance will cover the house repairs.

I get a call from the local Sears catalog store. The heater they said they could get me, when I was down there, is not in stock anywhere near here. It's coming, but not for another week. Did I want to buy a different unit or wait for the one I ordered?

Damn. The one they are offering just is not going to work for me. I'll have to wait. Damn and shit. More days at the Comfort Inn.

I contact the plumber and tell him what is up. He says he will contact the Sears store and make arrangements to install it when the unit arrives.

I go downtown to a carpet store and select a new carpet. The store will coordinate with the cleaning crew before scheduling the install. I contact a contractor. I've used the guy before and hire him to do the woodwork repairs. I drop off paperwork, bids and receipts at the insurance company.

Another day blown. I grab the laptop from the house, stop off at the café for another dinner before heading back to the motel.

There's nothing I want to watch on the TV. I turn on the laptop and log back into the dating website. More messages greet me. There are responses from the five I had responded to, plus over a dozen more new messages. I look at the new ones first. Six of these are possibly OK, but the rest I delete. I send responses to those six and then open up the mail from the other five gals.

Two are asking for money. I block them. The other three continue to seem nice, but two are saying, 'when will you come?' They are happy to correspond if I'm serious, but each is saying I need to come or all we do will amount to nothing.

That gets me thinking. I'm spending money now just so I can have a place to take hot showers. It's going to take at least a couple of weeks to get the house repaired.

The gals I'm messaging are all very pretty and impossibly young. They are in their twenties and early thirties. I have ignored the messages from the ones who aren't. That they are far younger than I am doesn't seem to be an issue for them, much as it didn't seem to be for the girl who I met here with my friend.

So here I am, sitting in a motel room, looking at photos of pretty females who are saying, come! My house is a mess and will be for a while. What the fuck. Why is this even a question? It's time to take a trip.

I send nine new replies. That includes the three original ones and the six new ones. To each I say, *'I will be making plans to fly as soon as I get up tomorrow morning. I will be visiting a number of you gals once I get there. So while I'm coming to meet you, it will not just be you. There will be*

others. I offer no promises other than I'm coming. I will let you know details of my arrival later.'

I try the TV and give up. There's nothing worth watching. Time for bed.

Morning comes and with it the realization that I'll have to do a lot of work to get the cleaning crew, the contractor, the plumber, and the carpet layer all set up to be able to complete things in my absence. I call the contractor first and discuss it with him. He offers to act as a general contractor and manage all of it. It'll be more money out of my pocket, but I decide to go with it. I give him an advance to pay the subs as needed. I contact the others and inform them of the change in plans. Everyone seems OK with it.

I stop off at my local Wells Fargo bank. I have been told that I can transfer money easily to an account in the Philippines from it should I need that. I also make sure that I can use my Wells Fargo debit card while over there. I'm told it'll work.

I stop at the county courthouse to see if I can vote absentee before I leave. Exactly how long I'll be gone is unknown. I can't vote before I leave. And so, no, if I don't make it back by November second I won't be voting this year. Such is life. President Bush may just have to win without my support.

I log back in to the website to see if there are any problem responses. There are three gals of the second batch who are pissy. If I'm going to see other girls too, they don't want to meet me. OK, that is fine. I delete them from the list.

Of the three of the original batch, I have also gotten replies. They are not asking for money and not balking at my last letter. Good! That leaves six. Let's see how that works.

And now there are eight more new messages from new girls. Four of these look promising. I send an initial reply to these, but don't tell them that I'm coming.

All in all, I couldn't ask for a better start. I sort of figured that there must be something up with the Philippines when the gal I

met here was so hot to get me hooked up with her friend. Looks like I wasn't wrong.

I check online and find that I don't need a visa to travel to the Philippines. All I need is my passport and I'll automatically get a twenty-one day visa when I arrive. I already have a passport. Now it's time to book a ticket.

There are times when, if your itinerary is pretty much open to go whenever, you can get a good fare. Mine is as open as you can get and I gather that, this being late September, it's a good time to get lower fares to the Philippines in general.

It takes a few hours to nail it down, but I get my tickets. I'll leave for the Philippines tomorrow. But I need to get to the airport today. I don't want to do the three plus hour trip and then, with no sleep, fly for most of the day.

Before I leave, I send a message to the first gal I'll meet, as she is one of two who live in Manila. I'll message the rest of the gals I actually decide to meet after I have been there for a couple of days.

And then it dawns on me, I'm not sure how to use my cellphone over there. I call Verizon and they tell me my cellphone won't work outside of the US and Canada. At least that is what the Verizon rep whom I'm talking to tells me. He says Verizon uses something called CDMA and over there they don't use that. I'm going to be without a phone as soon as I leave the States. I have the guy suspend my service contract until I return. He warns me that all that does is push out the actual date of completion of the contract. Yeh, I get it, but I might as well. I decide to leave the phone at home. No sense in dragging it all over the Philippines so that I can use it at the airport.

I'm equidistant from the Portland and the Seattle-Tacoma airports. This time the least expensive flight is from Portland. It's between a three and four hour drive to either airport depending on traffic, road construction and weather. Rather than driving my Suburban, I'll rent a car here and drop it off at the airport. It'll be cheaper and safer than leaving my vehicle there for at least twenty days and paying for the parking.

Am I sure I'll be back in twenty days? No, but that's the basic working plan. The house should be fixed by then. Still, with so many gals to visit and nothing here really pressing, why make assumptions? I have read online that I can extend my stay if I want to.

I get a bag packed, though it's pretty light. I won't need any heavy clothing and I suspect I don't need anything formal. If I'm missing something, I'll get it when I arrive in the Philippines.

I have a tablet and will take that rather than the notebook. Using that, I can continue to connect with the gals so long as I can find WiFi service. Until I get a cellphone over there, it'll be my only way of communicating with anyone.

I get to Portland and get a room at the Holiday Inn Express close to the airport. They have WiFi and it's working.

Logging into the dating website I find I have responses from all the gals of the first group, the three from the second and four from the third group. There are even more messages from newer ones, but I'm ignoring them.

Of the second group of three, none have dropped out. I send an 'I'm coming' to the last group of four based on what I sent to the previous group. We will see how many of them drop out now. But in truth, that makes ten and I just can't imagine meeting ten gals. I can't even imagine meeting six. I think I'm being a little, or maybe way, too foolish. I probably am.

From what I can see, the girls I have been messaging are scattered over five islands and seven cities or towns. There's regular air travel between the islands, but not all cities or towns directly. I think it'll be OK, but that will have to wait until I'm in the Philippines.

In truth, the idea of extending my stay is becoming increasingly attractive. There's no way I can see all these gals in twenty days. ... And, I'm fed up with what has happened with the house.

It's not just the cost of getting the house fixed back up. It's the hassle of it all... and for what? So, after it's fixed, I can be bored

and lonely in comfort again? No, I'm not anxious to quickly get back home at all right now.

This trip can take as long as it needs to. I'm fed up with snow, water heaters, heating bills — and they are coming again soon enough — and all the rest of it. Being retired ought to mean more than not showing up at work. Six more hours and then I need to get to the airport. I'm ready for an adventure.

I have booked a room in Pasay which, the gal I'm meeting first tells me, is part of greater Manila and is close to her. That's where I'll start. I don't know much about her other than her name is Princess, she is twenty-six, unmarried, works as a clerk in a retail operation and has a six-year-old child who stays with her parents in what she says is the 'province,' as she can't care for her kid alone.

All the gals seem to have goofy names. So the fact that this one is named Princess, while odd to my ears, doesn't seem any more odd than other names.



The problem with choosing a flight based on price, is that you can get long layovers. As it is, my flight is via multiple airlines with a stopover in Vancouver and one in Japan. It takes far longer than it might have if I had paid more, but I do get to the airport in Manila at about 9pm, about twenty-eight hours after I boarded my first flight yesterday. I'm exhausted, but glad beyond words that I drove to Portland the day before!

I find a currency exchange booth in the Manila airport and get one hundred and twelve thousand pesos for two thousand dollars. I suspect I have far too much money! The largest denomination is a one thousand peso bill and not all I'm given is in that large denomination. As my credit card and debit card will work here, maybe I shouldn't have brought so much hard currency.

Anyway, I know I have enough for the taxi! Right now, all I want to do is get to my hotel, which, I read when I booked it, is close to the airport. I need to get some sleep.

The room at the hotel costs a whopping \$46 a night, and it's supposedly a four star hotel. It doesn't make a lot of sense. Can things be that cheap here? It's cheaper than the Comfort Inn. If it is, then this is a good start. There's only one small hitch in my plans.

I told Princess where I'm staying and when my flight was scheduled to land in Manila. When I get to the hotel, as I'm walking up, totally beat, to the reservations desk, I find I have a companion.

Princess has a hold on my arm.

I have a reservation. The name is Ira Courtwright.

Yes, Sir Ira, Ma'am. We have you here for three nights. I see it is listed as a single occupancy. Shall I change that to two for you and your wife? It is the same price.

Yes, please. ...

I finish up at the reservations desk and am given two keys. The guy behind the desk never blinks. When it's all done, he smiles and says, *Welcome to the Philippines!*

Once in the room, no bellhop is needed for my small bag, I turn to Princess and warn her that all I want to do is sleep. Maybe she should just go home and we can meet up in the morning.

I stay with you, Ira.

There's a big smile on her face and I'm too tired to argue.

For what it's worth, this room is far nicer than the Comfort Inn! It actually seems like it might be close to the four star place it claimed to be. Also for what it's worth, Princess is as pretty as her photos made her out to be. There's no problem with that. I'm not sure I like how she is just taking over, but, shit, I'm really not wanting to even think any more. I need a shower and then a good long rest.



I'm not sure I really understood how tired I was. For the life of me, I don't remember when the shower ended and I got into bed. I clearly did, as I'm under the covers and, while I have no clue yet as to the time, I know it's the next day as there's sunlight peeking through the curtains on the windows.

Princess is not in the bed, but there's evidence that she was, at some point, based on the state of the covers on the far side of the mattress.

Whatever... I need to get up and take a leak. And as I do so, I realize that I'm not wearing my briefs. Clearly I must have been very tired last night!

Opening the door to the bathroom answers one question. Now I know where Princess is. Standing inside this large bathroom, she has my suitcase open, and is ironing one of my shirts.

I'm about to ask her why she is doing this, and I don't mean why is she doing this in the bathroom, but rather why she is doing this at all, when she smiles and announces that my clothing is wrinkled from the trip. She didn't want to awaken me and so chose to do the work here.

So many things come to my mind that I'm stumped for a second to even know where to start.

Do I want her ironing my things? Am I OK with her going through my suitcase? How am I going to deal with this woman who seems to have decided to 'own' me?

Standing completely naked, I shelve all of it and simply say, *You need to get out so I can use the bathroom.*

She does, eventually, as she removes the ironing board, iron and all my clothing with the exception of freshly ironed briefs (a first for me at any time in my life) and my toiletry kit.

I was just intending, when I walked into the bathroom, of taking a piss, but I guess it's time to shower and dress. I need to deal with this princess of a Filipino, who may well have taken her name a bit too damned far.

Fifteen or so minutes later, I'm out of the bathroom. I grab the socks, shirt and jeans she has ironed and put them on while beginning what needs to be said clearly and right away. Putting it off will be a bad idea, as every moment she seems to be getting more and more into a controlling mindset.

Princess, I told you that I'm going to meet a number of you. I'm happy to know you, but you are not the only one I'll be with and you don't own me. Even while I'm here in Pasay, and staying in this hotel, I'll meet another gal.

Why you mean to me?

Telling the truth is not mean. I told you this before I came. Why are you acting like you are the only one?

I not! I know there are others! Why you think I not know this?

The girl looks like she is going to cry. For God's sake, I don't need this.

Where I come from, a gal doesn't act like you are acting unless she thinks she is the only one.

Ha! You not where you come from! You not know us! You not know me, Ira Courtwright! I only do what is right to take care of you. I know you meet others. When you do, you will think, does this one take good care of me like Princess do? See? I making sure you not have bad idea of me and now you accuse me of doing wrong!

I feel like crawling into a hole. I was all so high and mighty. I was totally fucking wrong.

I'm sorry. You are right. I didn't understand. I am a fool! Please forgive me.

You not angry with me, now?

No, Princess, I'm not angry with you. I'm angry with myself for not understanding.

OK, you not know. So maybe we both make mistake. Maybe I should tell you this, so you know. We start over? OK?

Yes, OK.

Good. Time to eat now. Downstairs there is food I think.

I seem to remember that this place does have a complimentary breakfast and so the suggestion makes sense. I'm dressed at this point and so off we go.

Over a breakfast that provides foods I recognize and others that I don't, Princess wants to know what I want to do today. I honestly haven't given it any thought and admit as much.

You not be angry with me if I take you to places?

Ab, I see. No, I'll not be angry. Where should we go?

I think first we go to Intramuros. This the oldest part of Manila. Many tourists go there. Maybe good for you to see it.

And so, after breakfast, I put my hand in Princess's. She leads and shows me her city. The walled city in the morning, and a huge mall in the afternoon at which, she asks for and I agree to buy her a dress and shoes for the evening's activities.

I need a cellphone and it seems that there are any number of phone vendors here. Princess assists me in buying one I can use while here. I buy a cheap Nokia unit and a SIM from one of the local outfits. These SIMs are the prepay type. And so I need to buy a load to use it.

After a prolonged and somewhat confusing conversation, I ignore her advice to buy a thirty peso load. Instead, and to her horror, I buy a three hundred peso load instead. With a promo the salesgirl tells me about, it gives me unlimited texting to other phones for thirty days. It may be longer than I'll stay, but I won't run out of load while I'm here.

To Princess's horror, I add enough load to her phone to take advantage of a less expensive promo. She can now text me without eating up her load each time she does it.

And then it's back to the hotel for a change of clothing before a seafood dinner on Manila bay and a nightclub after that. The fact that I'm not a fan of seafood does come up in conversation and all I get is a look of incredulity. She just can't fathom it. But I have to admit the shrimp dish I order tastes just great. She has something called tuna belly. Don't ask me, because I most surely don't have a clue how a fish can have a belly.

It has been a full and truly enjoyable day. I'm sure that not every day will be filled like this one was. I wonder now how I'll fill the days to come. Sure, meeting all the gals is great, but what will I do with them other than say hello, feed them and try to fuck them? I

have only another day with Princess before I meet another gal here and now I'm getting worried.

Speaking of fucking, I have not even kissed Princess yet when we reenter the hotel room. We have held hands. I held her when we danced. There was no hesitation on her part to put her body next to mine on the dance floor, but that is all that has happened. I'm pretty damned sure nothing happened last night. Yes, she has seen me naked, but I have only seen her clothed. There have been no intimate moments. That is about to change.

She says she wants to show me why she can be the one, in comparison with the others. She has to know that sex is part of it and I think she has just told me that it's the next thing on the agenda. It may be awkward, but she came to stay in this room with me, so I guess she is willing.

I have been divorced for over twenty years. Sure I have dated a bit, but in truth, there has been precious little in the way of sex for many years. While I know it's time to see how it is with this gal, I'm having a little pre-performance anxiety.

I hear that kids these days think nothing of 'hooking up,' but that was not something my generation ever did.

Still, there's no time like the present. The longer I put this off, the more awkward it'll be. And so, now in the room, with the door closed behind us, she turns to me at the same moment I reach out to her. I bring her into my arms.

There's no hesitation. None. She is tight against me. Her head is tilted up toward me, ready to accept the kiss she is sure comes next. She is right.

My head tilts down. Lips meet lips. Her hands grip my arms. My arms encircle her waist. My hands on the small of her clothed back.

The kiss is soft and does not need to end. Her hands move up to my shoulders. One of my hands finds the back of her head, while the other moves down until it holds her small, firm behind.

There's no pushback against my hands. There's a coming tighter to me. Her legs spread just enough to put one of my legs between her two and she pushes her crotch hard against my thigh.

It's not surrender on her part as much as it's willing acceptance. This is what she wants. I feel it being communicated to me in so many ways.

One of her hands moves from my shoulders to the back of my head. We are, both of us, taking from the other and giving back.

I don't think our feet have moved more than a few inches since this mating ritual began. It has lasted a long time. It has not lasted much time at all. There's so much more that needs to happen. There's so much that has already been communicated.

I move my hand down from the back of her head and find the zipper of her dress, sliding it down until my hand holding the zipper meets the hand holding her ass.

Moving my hand back up, I find the clasp of her bra and, using a technique that I haven't used in a couple of decades, I undo the clasp. The only things holding the dress and bra up are her arms as she holds my shoulder and head.

I pull back from her. She allows the clothing to fall to the floor, steps over them and approaches me, not to resume the embrace, but rather to remove my clothes.

She is in her panties and heels.

Ever so carefully, she removes the shirt she ironed this morning and tosses it on an easy chair a few feet from us. Next she unbuckles my belt, unbuttons the top of my jeans, lowers the zipper and then, while grabbing the elastic of the briefs, lowers both to the floor.

She is squatting now while still in her heels. Before she removes the jeans and briefs completely she loosens the laces of my Nikes, removes those prior to removing my briefs, socks and jeans in unison, one leg at a time.

I'm now completely naked and Princess is still squatting in front of me. Her nose is on a level with my manhood, which has seen fit to harden. She leans forward and kisses the very tip of it before taking my cock in one hand and my balls in the other.

Her hands are gentle. She strokes my cock, slowly. There's no hurry in it. She appears to be enjoying herself. I feel warm, moist breath on my member as the stroking continues.

Now, while she has not broken contact, she is pushing me back toward the bed. And, in a weird fashion, she gets me where she wants me. The backs of my legs are against the mattress.

Princess removes her hand from my balls, reaches for my chest, and pushes. I fall back onto the mattress with Princess's mouth attached to my cock. It's quite a performance.

She has her hands on the back of my thighs and my cock is still in her mouth as she urges me higher on the mattress. I get the point and slide up a bit.

I must have gotten far enough because Princess has removed her mouth from my manhood and, having evidently removed her panties and heels in all these doings, climbs up on the mattress and mounts me. My cock is now deep in her cunt.

My worry about my ability to perform is now a nonissue.

I'm fighting the feeling that she is trying to control me. In my world — where I come from — that is the message I'm getting from her. I know what is really happening is, her telling me, she will give me everything and anything I might ever want. Different cultures, different meanings, the same acts. I'm struggling with it.

In the middle of this love making, I'm learning that context is everything. I need to let go of the assumptions I have lived with all my life. This world is different.

But for now, I decide to take control and roll Princess over onto her back. It helps my head and emotional conflict. She doesn't fight it. She welcomes it and does all she can to encourage me to take her as hard as I wish.

Does she hope for a knowledgeable lover? I'm not sure I fit the bill. I only know straight-ahead fucking. There isn't a large repertoire of positions and techniques in my head. She isn't complaining as I charge ahead and pump until I'll have no choice but to cum. I start to pull off her as I know that the time has arrived when I must cum, but she refuses.

No, Ira! Do not stop! Please! Give it me! Please, Ira! Please!

Well, whether I really wanted to stop or not, I don't. Princess gets a load of cum deep in her cunt.

This time alarm bells are going off in my head. Why did she fight to get my cum? Is she trying to trap me? Even if she is, I'll be long gone before she will even know if she is pregnant and I'll be on the other side of the world. It's nuts. The likelihood that she, being the first, is going to be the one I really end up with after being with all the other gals, has got to be pretty low.

The lovemaking was great. If she wants cum tomorrow again, I guess I'll do it again. Still, it's nuts. I'm wondering, what if all the gals are equally good and willing. How do I know who to choose?

It's late and I think we are both tired, because we hardly move before falling asleep.



I'm awake. I don't really think it's close to morning yet, but I'm awake and my cock is hard. It's not that my bedmate is the cause. I suspect she is still sound asleep but I start grinding my cock against her hip.

This continues for a few minutes before Princess murmurs, gets onto her back and pulls me on top of her. I push in.

The clock on the nightstand says it's 2:43.

I've been presumptuous, waking her up, so that I could fuck again. I feel a little out of control. It's like anything I want, I can have. Can that really be true? Or is it only true until her man has been hooked?

As my cock slides in and out of her willing cunt, I start talking to her. I'm sure it's not what she was expecting or wanting, but I'm an asshole. At least I feel like one right now.

So, and I slam deep into her, what if every one of you is as good, and as willing as you are? What if I can't make up my mind? How do I pick one to take home? And though I have been pumping in as I have been talking, this last time I truly slam in extra hard as the word 'home' comes out of my mouth.

She is grunting as her cunt takes a pounding. She grunts again, before, *Then, don't. Don't go back. Stay.*

Slamming in, as I utter, *Hub?* Confusion is exactly what I'm feeling and it puts a damper on any chance of an impending cum. What is she saying?

Stay! Stay with us. The pounding continues as her words come between grunts and moans. *Be good to us. If we good to you, why you leave? If only me, take me. If more, stay! Love us, Ira. Love us. Just not leave me. Please, keep me with you. Please, Ira. Please. Please.*

I'm sure it would have been romantic if I could cum right now, but I can't. My mind is a muddle of confusion and lust. I pound Princess for a few minutes more before cumming on my own schedule.

Ira?

Hub?

Ira, what I say. It true.

How? How can that be? Why do you think women will want to stay with me as a group?

If you good to us, maybe it is the best thing we can have. Truly. You not know our world, Ira. You not know.

Princess, I like you a lot, but I don't see any way that will work. I'll just have to see if one of you stands out better than the rest. That was the plan. It's what I told you I would be doing. So don't say you didn't know.

*I know, Ira. You tell the truth. But, I right. You not know our world. ...
You say you are retired? Correct?*

Yeh, so?

So... no real reason to go back if you not want? This true?

*Princess, you said it yourself. I don't know this world. How do you expect me
to live here?*

You will learn. It OK.

Well, it's all silly. No gal is going to say, 'Sure, Ira, we will share you.'

You wrong.

Well, we will never know.

Why?

Because there is no way for me to find out.

There is!

How?

The next one. Maybe she is good too? But maybe not better? OK?

Sure. How does that make it any different?

*Tell her. Say, 'You are good. Same as Princess. There is no way to put you
over her but no way to put her over you.' Ask her, what do she think you
should do? She want you to stay here and keep both? See what she say. If she
say no, do not keep her. If she say yes, then I am right and we keep her. Do it
for each the ones you see. I not think any better than me. Maybe some worse. I
do anything you want, always. So how anyone better?*

I want to go back to sleep. My brain is not cooperating.

I had planned on getting myself a pretty, and pretty accommodating, wife to bring back to the states. A wife to live with me much like what my friend has done.

I have no plans to pick up stakes and live in the tropics. This concept of telling a girl that she can either join a group or get left in the dust makes no fucking sense. Of course, I'm about to meet at least five more gals. So, if I don't do what Princess says, I am, in the end, going to leave five out of six (or nine out of ten if I see the last four) in the dust. And so... that gets me thinking.

If, in the end, one really stands out, then OK, maybe I should say, you're the one. But what if I'm wrong and make a poor choice? What if, once I get her to the States, it all falls apart?

Which is the smarter and safer way to go? Maybe, just maybe, if Princess is right, then maybe that is the more decent way to go. In any case, I'm sure, some of these gals will tell me to blow it out my ass. So no matter what, there will not be six or ten of them. If Princess is wrong, then I'm back to my original plan and I choose one to bring back to the States with me.

Damn, my head hurts.



Hub?

Ira, get up. We go for breakfast!

She seems happy and at ease. How can that be? There's no talk of what transpired in the middle of the night. It's not that it didn't happen. It's more like things are stable now. I'm not sure I'm explaining it right. Maybe I have it completely wrong.

It seems like I have been wrong, far more than I have been right, ever since I got here.

Breakfast is much like it was yesterday. Nothing startling and, if my world was to be defined by the amenities of the hotel and not by the nature and patterns of Filipino behavior, I would assume this place was an exotic version of the USA.

But this land is anything but that. Leave the hotel and go out into the city, and you know you are far from the USA. Even here, within the hotel, the behavior of the staff, and of Princess, makes it clear that I'm far from home.

It's jarring. There are signs in English all over, but people don't speak English with each other. Yes, here in the hotel, they speak English to me, but not to each other. And when out in the city, many have no meaningful English, though all the road signs are in English, as are many business signs.

It's truly confusing. It seems that most can read some English but many are unable to use it themselves. I make a comment about this to Princess but I'm not sure she understands what I'm trying to say.

As we ride back up to our room via the elevator, I decide to ask her where she wants to go today. I get a few moments of silence and a look on her face I cannot decipher.

Who you see next?

I'm a little irritated. She really has no business asking.

Why do you want to know? I told you that you aren't going to control what I do.

I not controlling! I will help you! You will see.

I'm far from satisfied. The rest of the way to the room is done in silence. But once we are in the room and the door is closed, she turns, puts her arms around my neck and kisses me hard on the lips. Pulling back, she smiles and says, *OK, show me, Ira. You will see. It truly OK.*

For a second, I consider arguing with her, and then I think, what the fuck. If she wants to knock herself out of the running, why

stop her. Let her show me her true colors. I might as well see them now, rather than later.

There's WiFi here in the hotel. I pull out the tablet and connect to it. Before long I'm able to log into the website. I haven't looked at it since I left the states.

There are far more first time messages waiting for me, but there are a number of replies as well.

I open up the reply from that gal I'll meet tomorrow. She is excited. She says she understands that I'll see others, but is sure I'll choose her. She has given me her cellphone number in the message. Princess is reading along with me. She has taken note of the number. That pisses me off but I don't say anything.

Ira, show me her page. I want to see.

Yeh, let Princess dig her own grave. I open up the page for the gal who has messaged me and hand her the tablet. Princess looks at all the parts and pieces of it. She isn't saying anything as the investigation continues. And then she is done. She hands the tablet back to me. There's a frown on her face. Clearly she is bothered by something she saw. Good! Maybe she is learning that it isn't going to go the way she thought!

She is no good.

Well, that is for me to decide, not you. I know you have her phone number. Do not contact her!

Yes, yes. I know this! I not call her. But she will argue with you. You will see. This one is difficult. I not think you will be with her more than one day. Then you will send her away. What you do then? Who next?

The next one is on another island.

Oh? So what you do when you send the next one away? You here alone for two more days, or you ask me to come back, maybe?

Just because you think I'll send her away does not mean I will! You are not the one who decides!

Ira, I know! Please, who next?

What the fuck. I'm going to fly to Iloilo on the island of Panay to meet the next gal. She lives in Tigbauan on Pinay, but there's no airport there. She also has left a message. I open it up. What she says is nice, and presents no problem for me. She asks where she will find me and if I have a cellphone number so she can message me.

I grab the card my SIM came attached to. I had put the card in my wallet. The number is on that card. I send her the number but not the expected date of my arrival nor where I'll stay. That all depends on what happens with the next gal.

As Princess did the last time, she is watching all of this. Once I send the message, before she even asks, I open up this gal's webpage on the site and hand the tablet to this gal sitting next to me who is clearly making it very easy to say goodbye to later.

The scrutiny of these pages takes a bit longer before I'm handed the tablet?

Well, are you going to tell me that I'll have problems with this one?

No. Why I do that. I like Lorie. I think she will be good. We will be happy with her.

Oh? "We" will? Why is that?

She will not argue. I think there not be a problem with this one. Yes, it true that all want to be the one and only. It true that she want marriage. But, I think, if she learn you are good but marriage not possible, there not be a problem. Maybe I wrong, but this is what I think. ...Who next?

What the fuck? OK, so I go back to the messages. There's a message from the gal I expect to see after Lorie. I open it up. I'm not sure I like what I'm reading. There's too much religious crap and thanking Jesus for my arrival. I don't send any message back before clicking over to the gal's pages and handing over the tablet.

Princess doesn't even spend a minute looking at the pages before handing it back to me with a question. *You really going to see this one?*

I guess I'm smiling. *Why? What is wrong?*

You love Jesus like she do? Really? I not think you do.

Oh, well, maybe she is expressing her happiness in a way that seems nice. Maybe she really is not all that religious. Regardless of my own cautions and concerns after reading the gal's message, I'm not going to give Princess any room to operate.

Ha, you will see. You will waste your time with this one!

Maybe, I will. But it's my time, not yours. You don't get to make decisions for me.

Yes, OK. I am wrong, but I just trying to help you. You not understand us!

Maybe you are right about the gal, but it's for me to find out.

You angry with me?

I'm not happy. Maybe not angry, but it isn't good. I warned you about this before.

I think she wants to cry, but instead she seems to gather herself up emotionally and says, *Next, my love?*

We go through all those I have answered at least once. Not all know I'm coming, but all know that I would be seeing more than them when I came. Four had reacted badly to this and I had removed them, but these are all seemingly OK, based on the responses that sit in my inbox.

In each case, Princess has given me her opinion as to whether the gal is a potential keeper. Are the ones she warns me about really problems for me? Or are they more a case of a problem for her, as they might be the ultimate keeper?

I suspect the former as I look at them now. I'm beginning to see what Princess might be seeing. Only time will tell, I guess. I'll see each, regardless of Princess's score card.

We have spent all morning at this and a bit of the afternoon. I have a clear need for a bite to eat and, while the hotel restaurant is the

closest answer, I saw a McDonald's down the street. I need a burger and fries.

On the way there I learn that Princess has never been to MickeyD's. She tells me she likes a place that is called Jollibee. I see one close by our destination. It's obviously the competition, but my choice is the golden arches.

I thought I was completely familiar with the MickeyD menu, but this one has fried chicken and rice listed. There's also a lot of signage that says McDo. That is strange. Once again I'm getting a strong message I'm not in the USofA. But the Big Mac still tastes like a Big Mac and the fries still taste like they are supposed to. So, different or not, I'm OK.

As Princess and I walk back to the hotel, she shares a little of what her life is like. I'm not sure that it's making a lot of sense to me. One thing that freaks me out is that she has had to quit her job to spend time with me. On top of that, I gather that getting a job is not all that easy. Is this a con? How can I know?

If it's true, I can see how it may have ramped up the urgency I feel from her. It's also setting off alarm bells inside my head as to what I'll be doing to the others. If she is being truthful, then each might have to quit a job to be with me... and I'll leave all but one in the dust. My decision to meet so many gals may be truly unfair to all and damned sure evil, all because I don't know their world.

Of course, if each is OK with joining as a group, then those who join will be OK. Is that the reason why Princess thinks it'll work out OK that way?

It sure isn't what I was planning, but I just don't understand this place. That I don't have a clue is becoming ever clearer as the hours pass.

Back in the hotel room, I decide I need a shower. The walk has left me sweaty.

I have never seen needing a shower as an invitation to have sex. But then, I have never been with a gal who has decided she needed to use every trick in the book to land her great white whale.

I'm in the shower no more than a minute before I have company. If this was a small shower stall it probably would not have been possible, but this is not a shower in a tub like you see in hotels in the USA, nor is it a small enclosure. There's ample room and Princess is making good on that feature to grab the soap, squat in front of me, wash my genitals, rinse them off and proceed with water streaming over her head to give me head.

How she can squat flat-footed as she can and not blow out her knees is an amazement to me, all on its own. That she can be sufficiently comfortable to give me head, in a completely leisurely manner at the same time, is worthy of some damn award.

I was completely limp when she starts. I'm not limp now. With her long black hair plastered to her head, she isn't the prettiest she can be, but that just doesn't matter.

What matters is that she has me rock hard as her head bobs up and down. Her hands are on each of my glutes, holding on firmly, to make sure that the performance will reach her desired end before I can disengage.

Why didn't she wait until I was out of the shower? She could have done this on the bed. I sure wasn't going to leave her once I dried off. That question, and dozens more, will not be asked.

I'm really done with the shower but do not want to turn it off as it'll disturb what Princess is engaged in. So, I just stand upright with my cock in the gal's mouth.

She is getting to me.

My hands cup the back of her wet hair and I fuck her head. It may not look different from an outsider's view, but she is no longer controlling the process of giving me head. I'm controlling her as I fuck her head and push in harder and deeper than she was taking me before.

It doesn't last long, I don't pull out and I don't warn her before cum enters her mouth.

She allows my less rigid cock to slide out of her mouth, cum dripping from the side of her lips, and tilts her head up showing me a big smile. How can this be real?

Five minutes later we are out of the shower, I'm lying on the bed, still naked. She is sitting on the bed with me, almost naked as she has a towel wrapped around her hair. It looks like a turban. Her small, pert breasts are firm against her trim diminutive frame.

Again, she asks?

I laugh. There's no way I'm going to give her a ride now.

Why you laugh?

There's no way I'll get hard so soon.

OK, we see. I try!

Princess, there's no way.

OK, so maybe you right. But I try anyway.

Why don't we just kiss instead?

I think I have gotten her to agree. She does come to me, allows me to hold her and taste her lips. But as we are doing that, I feel her hands on my manhood, gently caressing it.

The kisses continue during this midafternoon siesta as does her manual attention to my lower regions.

Her lips are soft and playful. Her hands never stop, never give up. And, slowly, she gets her reward as there are signs of resurrection below. My kissing becomes more energetic as my cock regains structural integrity.

Princess's breathing is becoming a bit ragged. She is using her teeth on my lips, on my neck, on my jawline.

I roll her onto her back and push in. She is hot and wet. I slide all the way down and in, on the first stroke.

There's no talking. And this will be no short ride. Having cum in her mouth less than half an hour ago, I won't be cumming anytime soon, this time.

The only things to be heard are the sounds of our breathing, the mattress and the air conditioner. There isn't even the ticking of a clock. It has a digital display with glowing red numbers.

Can it be said that there are times fucking is an act without a path towards a completion? It seems an odd thing and yet, as our bodies pump and pump, it seems to be that there's no goal here. It's the act, in and of itself. It's the act that matters right now, not a reward at the end. It's without meaning other than being what it is. I'm not trying to prove anything.

I gave her cum in her cunt last night. She took cum by mouth just a bit ago. She isn't begging for completion and I can't give it to her. Still, she reaches up and pulls me in for a kiss, as we fuck through the late afternoon.

If I had just chosen her, if there was no competition, would things be like they are right now?

It's one of hundreds of questions that I'll never have an answer to. All I do know is that this has been one of the most remarkable two days I have ever had in my life. I'm hoping that these two days are not the end of my good fortune.

My cock feels... so good, so right, inside this gal. And now, for some reason I feel the swelling of passion announcing that completion will actually occur.

She knows it, too. She breaks off a kiss, looks up at me with an expression I cannot decipher and, at that very moment, cum enters her. She closes her eyes tight and smiles.

When you going to meet her?

Let's just enjoy this dinner. I'll figure that out after we get back to the room.

She is waiting for your message. It is cruel to make her wait, Ira.

This is the one you don't think I'll like. Why is it important that I contact her?

She not right for you, but that no reason for you to be bad.

My tablet is up in the room. I'll do it when I get there.

You have your Nokia. Here is her number. I keep it on my phone, remember? Text her.

She is a combination of a steamroller and a battering ram. She will claim it's all for my benefit, but still, I'm not happy with it, even if she is right... which she probably is.

OK, give me her number. I'll tell her I'll see her tomorrow, after 3PM, here at the hotel. That gives you time to leave and room service to clean up the room, in case she comes up to it.

Where will you take her?

Really? You think this is your business? Prin, knock it off.

Ira, I am just trying to help! If she is right for you, then I not want to have it be wrong because you not understand our culture. Please, where you go with her?

I was thinking about that mall we were at. What did you call it?

MoA¹? That what you mean?

Yes, that's it. We can walk around, talk, have a meal, all in a safe place. Then if she wants to come back to the room later, we can do that, but there's no pressure.

¹ Mall of Asia. The initials are pronounced as a word: mO-ah

Good! Ira, that's a good plan. Thank you for telling me.

Hub, why do you think it's a good plan?

Because she won't come back to the room. You will see. Before your dinner is over with her tomorrow, you will decide. But you won't have to tell her that. She will tell you she not think she right for you and leave from MoA to go back to her home.

So maybe I should bring her up to the room first.

Ha, you try and she be angry with you, call you bad names and make a scene in the hotel. Bad idea! Then we have to find a new hotel to stay in!

We?

Yes. She leave and you not seeing anyone else here, before you fly to Iloilo. So why not? Text her. Tell her the plan. If you tell her to meet you at the hotel, she will ask for somewhere else.

Fascinating! Here's a test of her perception. Let's see if Prin is right. I grab my phone, get the number from Prin and text the gal.

This is Ira. I can meet you at the Heritage Hotel at 3PM tomorrow.

I figure we will get an answer later and put the phone down on the table. In the meantime I can return to our dinner, which is pretty good.

Not five minutes later, I receive a text. Prin grabs it before I get to it, looks at the response and laughs before handing me the phone.

Can we meet somewhere else? A hotel is not proper!

Mall of Asia at Starbucks Coffee?

Yes good! See you then.

Prin smiles. There's no reason to say anything. I can tell just by the nature of the response I got in the text that this gal will never make it. I just nod and return to the meal.

Back in the room, I'm just relaxing on the bed when Prin plops down beside me. She clearly has something in mind. I'm getting to recognize her moods.

OK, *what is it?*

How you know?

I know. So what is it?

Well, tomorrow night you alone, unless you allow me back. And then you not planning to fly for three more days. That is a mistake too. No need to wait. Better to see the next girl sooner.

OK. *I agree and yes, if tomorrow's meeting goes like we both think it will, yes I'm happy to have you here tomorrow night. But there is more you are thinking. What is it?*

How you know?

Stop your silliness. What is it?

If Lorie is good, she will agree she not alone, you see?

I know that is what you want me to do. Assuming she is not super special and above everyone else, I see your point.

But how you know? That is a bad plan. We are all Filipinas. Either we are good for you or not. No one that special! And what if you think one is special and you wrong? Big mistake!

Yeh, I have considered that.

So, change your plan, na².

OK, *so I think you are right. So what? She will know she is not the only one or she is not at all. That is what you want and I see that is better than my plan. That way I don't hurt as many gals. More gals get something, if not everything. But then I have to stay here. I wasn't planning on that. But like you say, I'm retired ... so if these gals give me a good life here, maybe it's better than risking that one might, if I bring her to the States, not really be good. I get all that. Still, it requires that I be OK here and I'm not sure about that.*

² Tagalog for 'now'

But there's something more. ... Something you are thinking about. I'm not getting what it is.

Bring me with you to Iloilo³!

You'll scare Lorie away! No, bad idea.

Ira, I stay in separate room. You meet Lorie and make sure you want to keep her. If you do and she agree she cannot be the only one then I meet her. Not before. It OK.

For the life of me, I try to find a hole in her argument. There isn't one. Is she that fucking smart or am I just slow on the uptake on this culture crap?

OK, but that still assumes a number of things. That I can handle the culture here. If I can't there's no way I can stay. I don't really know that tomorrow goes like we both think it will. I'm not giving up on the gal. There's no sense in even meeting her unless I really try to see if it can work. And finally that there really is no gal who is that much better, though I think you are right on this last point.

You right, but I sure you will be OK here. You right about respecting the next Filipina.

If it does work, then for tomorrow night, at a minimum, you are not here. If it does work, we add you later, maybe the third day and not before.

OK. You right.

Good. Now I'm going to take another shower and unless you want to just sleep tonight, I suggest you not shower with me!

That gets giggles and a few kisses.

The shower is a quick one and Prin follows with her own shower after I'm done.

The lovemaking that follows is sweet and languid in pace. We know each other's bodies now. We know what to expect and there's no sense of concern or tension. We have, at least for the

³ Iloilo is the big city on Panay and where the airport is.

moment, become a couple who can work together. Prin has won some important arguments, but she has backed off when needed.

In most of the cases where she prevailed, I can chalk it up to my own errors in judgment and my failure to understand her world. The more I do so, and it has taken me a while to see how wrong I have been about things, the more I see how wrong my entire plan was.

That she, rather than tell me to fuck off for being such an idiot, has helped me make a better decision is all in her favor. The more I think about my marriage which ended so badly years ago, I can see that I might well have made a hash of the same thing again with my original plan.

I had taken the impression of what I thought I understood when I met my friend and his new wife at the café and tried to copy it. I didn't have a real clue about the why of it and how it really came about. The offer of hooking me up with a friend was in a way to short circuit exactly what I'm learning right now. It should have set off a bell, telling me that I was missing an important piece of the puzzle.

It has taken Prin to get me to see that.



I have breakfast with Prin. An hour later she takes off. I have her cellphone number in my phone. We both have that promo, so I can contact her when needed and she can without penalty text me back. I decide to text the new gal and ask if she wants to move the time up to about one and we can have a lunch meal together if she likes.

I get a text back, almost immediately, agreeing. We will still meet at Starbucks before deciding where to grab a meal. That gives me some time to relax before going to MoA, but I won't be cooling my heels for hours upon hours waiting on the meeting. It also gives me more time to see if I'm able to turn this next gal into a keeper. Just because it's starting off on the wrong foot, doesn't mean it has to stay that way.

And there's the fact that it'll salve my ego a bit if I can prove Prin wrong. It might be a good thing if I can take Prin down a peg in this whole business.



I know what this gal, Cincer, looks like and she has seen my photo, so I don't think we will have any problems finding each other. I get to Starbucks a little bit early, a few minutes to one. Prin told me that here in the Philippines, everyone is always late. I take that as a bit of an exaggeration. But, I have been here for half an hour and have already drained my coffee.

So far, no sight of Cincer. If she doesn't show or text by two, I'll text her that it didn't work out. Maybe that is shortsighted on my part, but if this isn't important enough for her, then I might as well bag it now.

At one forty-five she walks in and is close to tears. It seems like there was a problem with the train and they said there would be no more trains for hours, so she took three jeepneys⁴. But that made it very slow. She moans that it took forever to get here. She wanted to text me but she was out of load on her phone. It's another lesson. If she had been twenty minutes later, it would not have been because she was blowing me off.

Once again, I have failed to account for the culture. I smile, tell her it's OK, and suggest I get her a drink before we figure out where to get a bite to eat.

She looks around a bit, settles down in a chair and accepts, but...
They have food here. Maybe we just do this now? I not need much. That OK?

Sure. Why don't you go up and look at what they have. Then come back, tell me what you want and I'll order the food and drink.

That works out fine. She gets a sandwich type thing of ham and cheese on a croissant plus a Frappuccino. I get another brewed

⁴ A Philippine type of bus.

coffee and some type of wrap that looks safe and is possibly a bit more filling.

She seems like a bright gal. She works as a bookkeeper and was able to get the afternoon off. So she clearly didn't have to quit her job to see me. Is that one of the things that told Prin this gal wouldn't be a good fit?

Sir Ira, what is your plan?

Excuse me? My plan?

You say you will meet a number of girls? Why you do that? What is your intent? Your plan?

OK, so here's another gal who isn't anyone's fool. Just as Prin, in her way, was figuring out what was going on, this gal is even more direct. She is not being rude. She is just getting right to the point.

If the assumption is that Asian women are subservient and obsequious, they must not have Filipinas in mind!

It's a good question and a fair one to ask. I had one plan when I got here but realized it wasn't a good one. I changed my mind and now there's a new plan. I originally thought I would meet a number of you and figure out which one to be serious with and then bring her back to the USA and marry. But once I got here, I realized that many of you will be good and all I'll be doing is hurting many of you to meet all and then choose only one. ... Plus, what if I chose wrong? I was married once, many years ago. I thought that was the right girl to marry and I was very, very wrong.

I see, so what is your new plan?

I'm not sure that this will be my plan but decide to take it out for a test drive. I need to see how it plays. *I'm retired. And I can sell what I have in the US and live here instead. No need to bring one gal back to the USA. And because of that, I can be with all those who I find good and are willing to be with me. I can make more than one girl happy. So, even if one or two say no, if others say yes, I have hurt fewer hearts. I want to be happy but I don't want to hurt others just so I can get what I want.*

Sir Ira, you know most girls, they will not agree to do this!

Maybe, but if only one does, then I haven't hurt any more hearts than I would otherwise.

She looks at me, takes a bite of her sandwich, puts it down, takes a sip of the Frappuccino, puts it down, pats her lips with what they seem to call a napkin here, though it looks a lot like a tissue to me, puts it down, and smiles. *You have already found that one. Am I right?*

I bet you are a very good bookkeeper, aren't you? My guess is that you don't miss much.

I don't miss anything. It's why I keep my job. It is why I am not as poor as many Filipinas. ... She knows you are meeting with me today?

Yes.

Another smile and another sip of Frappuccino. She looks at me as she picks up the sandwich and takes another bite. *She doesn't think I will agree. I can see that in your face.* She takes another bite, masticates and swallows. *Tell me, can you afford to live here and support us? I will still want to work, but I need to know what I will be getting into. What type of pension do you have?*

You are considering saying yes?

Ira, you didn't lie to me. You told me the truth. I like that. Maybe, you are not making promises you can't keep. I like that. I don't care about going to another country. I like mine. I am a proud Filipina. So, yes. Maybe. But, can you really do what you say? If I decide I really like you enough to be yours; and if I like the other girl; are you really able? She giggles. That a maybe and two 'ifs.' So, what is your financial situation?

I have three sources of income. My social security is just over \$2,231 a month currently. There's a cost of living adjustment so it goes up a little each year; a pension, which provides \$3,712 a month; and a retirement account which provides an additional \$1,890.00 a month for a total of ...

Seven thousand, eight hundred and thirty-three dollars or three hundred twenty-eight thousand nine hundred and eighty-six pesos. Ira! ... That is a lot of money.

Fuck, I could never do that in my head like that. She is way too fucking fast for me.

Look I can live on that amount in the USA, so I figure there will not be a problem living on that here. Plus I own some things that I can sell.

What that?

My home should sell for over \$440,000, there are some other parcels of land I guess I could sell. I've got two vehicles, a good bass boat, some firearms... stuff.

Your house... that is over twenty-four million pesos. OK, yes, financial, it all OK. So that not a problem. The question is, will I really like you and will I like your other girl.

Am I a business proposition to you?

Oh! No! I am sorry. Truly! But you not seeking a normal life with a wife. So there are other ways to understand this I think! Ira, I am not poor, so I not think 'anything is better than nothing.' You see? ... But I like that you tell me the truth. You think your first plan is bad and you decide on a kinder plan to help more. I like this. You are kind to me even though I am late. I know foreigners not like it when we late. I learn that at work! I want to like you very much. But how I know? It will not be just you and me for a year or more getting to know each other, I think.

Yes. Very true.

OK, so how I know? I think, there is another Filipina who you already want. If not, this not be happening. That is what I think. So, will I like her? Even if I like you but not like her, then it not work, I think this.

You know I'll take you to bed? There will be sex in this. It isn't all being nice to each other.

Yes, of course. I know. If I like her, I am willing to be with you if you are a good man.

I don't know if I'm a good man. I don't know if what I'm doing would ever qualify as good. Only you can decide that for yourself. It seems like you want to meet the other gal before anything else happens. Do I understand you correctly?

Yes. Are you willing for me to talk to her? Truly?

I must be smiling.

Why you think this funny?

You, Cincer, are the one who guessed she thought you would refuse. What do you think will happen when you call her?

I get a genuine smile. One of shared understanding. *Oh! I see. You think she will be surprised.*

At the very least. Yes.

But I can't call until I get a load. So maybe we do that next.

I will get you a load no matter what. I will take care of it, no matter if you like her or hate her, but here, let's use my phone. That should confuse her even more.

That produces another warm smile.

5

Her name is Princess Mangalop. She is expecting me to call her to say you have decided to not join me and that she should come back to the room. But I told Prin that I would not even bother to meet you unless I hoped in my heart that you would say yes and if you did, I might not see her for three days. Now you know all there is to know before you speak with her.

My phone is on the table. I pick it up, open the contact and press the icon to call Prin's phone before handing the phone to Cincer.

I hear the phone ringing and then, *Ira? What happen? I right, yes?*

There's a smirk, not really a smile, on Cincer's face as she launches into Tagalog. I have no idea what is being said, but it isn't a brief discussion.

As the conference drags on I sip my coffee, eat my wrap and consider that no matter what happens, I'm OK. What's the worst? That I lose both of these gals? OK, so I'm going to see Lorie. She doesn't know what has happened here. It'll be a fresh start and maybe, just maybe it might be wise to revert to the original plan.

Damn, this conversation is going on for a long time. I think I hear the word 'pesos.' I'm sure I hear 'Iloilo.' But everything else is word salad.

My coffee and wrap are long gone. I'm expecting to talk to Prin when the gals are done with their session, but no such thing happens. Cincer ends the call and hands me my phone and rises. *Come, Ira, I need a load, you are going to buy me a dress and shoes, and then we will meet Prin at the hotel before we go out to dinner.*

Sit down, Cincer. What has happened?

That stops her, and it's a damned good thing it does. I like straightforward honesty, but I don't need any bosses. I think Prin is learning this. Cincer may need a taste of it as well. She might well think she likes me, but I have to like her and I don't like being bossed around. I suspect most men my age feel about the same way.

Yes, OK, sorry. I guess, I wrong.

That's a good place to start. I don't like being bossed around. I'm willing to do many things, but you can't just tell me what to do. It's all well and good that you decide you like me. But remember, I also have to like you.

If it's possible to see the blood drain out of a Filipina's face, well, I'm doing that now.

Yes, Sir Ira. I make a big mistake. Maybe I should call Prin and tell her that you have not agreed yet.

Yes, as I think there's more that has been decided between the two of you, that might be a very good thing to do.

I pick up the phone, get the thing dialing again, hand it back to the gal and wait. The call is not brief, but not too long before, without hanging up, Cincer hands me the phone and says, *She will talk to you, Sir.*

I pick up the phone and say, *OK, I'm here.*

I sorry, Ira. Truly.

Yes, maybe you are, but this is not the first time, Prin. You can't do this and expect me to be OK with you.

You will leave me for Cincer?

No, I will leave both of you and fly to Iloilo alone... if that is necessary. Is it?

No. It not. It not happen again. Ira, please get Cincer some nice things and come back to the hotel with her. We will talk more there. No other decisions. We talk, but you make the decisions. OK? Please?

Yeh, OK. I'll let you know by text when we leave MoA.

OK. Good. I love you, Ira. And the line is dropped.

OK, so where can we get a load here?

We OK, na?

Yes, for now. Where can we get a load here?

I know. Come, OK?

I nod and get up.

She is going to get a thirty peso load. I interfere and get her one for three hundred pesos. She wants to argue.

Knock it off. It's my money and I'm buying it, so it's my decision, not yours. And here, enter this promo code in.

It not work with my SIM. Sorry.

Really? Hub. ... OK, we are looking for shoes and a dress. I'm going to take you to where Prin and I went yesterday. Maybe we can find both a dress for you and a new one for Prin.

OK, so now Cincer is just looking at me, like 'who the fuck are you, anyway?' It's not that I was against buying the girl a dress before. What I was opposed to is being ordered around. I'm the one with more jingle in the pocket. It'll be me who calls the damned tune.

When we walk into the shop where I was before, the salesgirl recognizes me and I think recognizes that I'm with a new girl. She looks like she is unsure how to play it. So, I'll detangle the mystery for her.

Good afternoon. We are here for two dresses. One for this lovely lady and one for my friend from the other day, if you can remember her size.

Yes, Sir! Of course! I remember. No problem. Are you the one to pick out the dresses?

No. Cincer, here, will pick out her dress. You will show Cincer the dress that my other friend bought before. Maybe knowing that, we can find a dress that might be a nice complement to what Cincer will wear tonight.

I see, Sir. OK, I will do that. Would you like to sit over there, while your friend selects her dress?

Yes, thank you.

And so it goes. Cincer finds a nice dress and the three of us select a new dress for Prin. She also buys bras and panties to go with the

two outfits. I ask how she can know Prin's bra size. All I get is a confused look in return.

Next stop is a shoe store where Prin bought her heels. I remember that Prin's size is 5½ and show Cincer what we bought before. If Cincer thinks Prin can wear the same shoes with today's dress then we don't need another pair for her.

Cincer decides that both of them need shoes. Cincer wears a size 6. We leave the shop with complementary but different shoes for the two of them. As we leave the shop, I playfully remark that we are about to go to that very place she thought it was improper to enter before. Heavens forfend! We will be entering the hotel as a couple.

Cincer says not a word.

We are done at MoA and I text Prin that we will take a taxi back to the hotel.

I get a text back from Prin.

Busy now. Will be there before 7.

I'm OK with that and text back.

OK. Have a new dress and shoes for you tonight. Not sure what we do after dinner.

OK. I understand.

We get to the hotel a little before five. Cincer knows Prin will not arrive for close to two hours. I have no idea how to play this. Sure, we will be alone in the hotel room but I don't think that is enough of a reason to have sex with her.

I didn't have sex with Prin until the day after I met her. OK, that first night I was wiped out, but we were in bed together and nothing happened. This time, our clothing is still on and there's no reason for me to remove mine.

When we get to the room, Cincer inspects the place, comments that it'll be the poshest place she has ever stayed at and, in that way, is telling me what I need to hear. It may not happen now, but she does expect to slide under the sheets with me at some point.

All I say is that I agree it's a nice room.

Ira? It OK if I take a shower? I get dirty riding the Jeepney to MoA. It nice to be clean before we go out.

Yes. That's fine.

Cincer doesn't use it as an excuse to undress in my presence. She will do that in the bathroom. I see no problem with her choice. She may not be throwing her body at me, but she is communicating that she expects to live with me in an intimate manner. I'm getting the message.

I have possible plans to fly to Iloilo tomorrow, but I think I'll put that off for at least a day and see how this is working out. I'm in no rush; no rush to get back to the States where my house is not repaired yet; no rush to meet another gal; no rush to bed Cincer, though I'm pretty damned sure I will.

I don't have a clue as to what happens with Prin tonight. Clearly, Cincer wants to meet Prin face to face, but where each of them sleeps tonight is totally undetermined. They don't know and I surely don't either.

The reason they can't know, even if they have a preference, is that I have made it clear that they can't decide for me. I guess I'll figure it out later. I can't require them to do what they don't want to do, nor do I have any idea what I'll be OK with later. In any case, it doesn't matter right now. For now, I just don't care. I'll figure it out when the time comes.

Part of what does matter is exactly what Cincer wants to know. Will she and Prin get along well enough together to join me as equals in my life? It's one thing to say, 'all can join.' It's quite another as regards their compatibility with each other.

Both may well think the plan is fine but dislike each other. Then what? That's a reality that Prin didn't figure on and it had not crossed my mind until Cincer made it clear that she needed to resolve the matter.

The more I think about it, the more I doubt that the plan is as good as Prin has made it out to be. I suspect that I was far too fast to jump on the wagon, thinking it was even possible. This choosing companions is far more complicated even here in the Philippines. In the USA it would never happen. But here, Prin had me thinking it was. I feel like a simpleton... a schoolboy with a crush on all the girls, all at the same time.

As to Prin's savvy, I'm thinking that she isn't as savvy as I have been clueless. Cincer has shown herself to be a bit more savvy than is Prin, but that might also be a misread.

I suspect I'm still essentially clueless. I don't know their language. I have seen precious little of their country. I have never ridden in one of these jeepneys. I'm staying in a hotel I gather they would never stay at on their own, as they could not afford it.

This cocoon I'm hanging out in is not their world, not their culture. Even the food at the breakfast buffet is different enough that Prin asked me what I was eating this morning.

Somehow, I'll need to leave this cocoon and they will need to join me on some other middle ground. If I stay here, I'm not sure my style of living will be exactly what they are used to.

While Cincer is taking her shower, I peruse the real estate listings here around Manila and in other parts of the country. One thing is clear. It's way far more expensive to live in and around Manila. If I'm to stay here, it'll probably have to be outside the city region.

I wonder. How these two gals will handle not being here in the city?

Cincer exits the bathroom in just a towel. She shyly explains that she left the new clothing in the bag on the bed. I smile and tell her she looks pretty just as she is and tease her that maybe she should come with me to the restaurant just like this. She, being playful, asks, *What I do if the towel falls off?*

Smile, Cincer, just smile. I'm sure you look as lovely without the towel as you look with it.

Ha! How you know that? You not see me yet!

No, you are right. But I suspect I will soon enough. So when I do, I'll tell you that I was correct in my assessment.

So! You think you will see me naked?

Do you think I won't?

She gives me a long look and then drops the towel. Cincer's form is every bit as good as I expected it would be. She is a very pretty gal.

See? I'm right! You are lovely without the towel and I'm a lucky man to call you mine.

Am I yours, Ira?

She has not picked up the towel.

Do you want to be?

I think, yes. Please be kind to me. It scary, I think. ... Princess say we lucky to meet you. I think she afraid she lose you if it only one girl. That why she say there be more. If she right, then I stay too. Better that way. Better to be more if you really good. Many bad men, I think. Better one of more with a good man then the only one with bad one and truly married to him. There a Filipina here who I hear say, she wish her marriage have an expiration date!

She could always get a divorce. That's the expiration date.

Ira, you not know? Divorce not legal here. Marriage here, it forever.

I didn't know. So, in some ways safer to live together and not marry?

Yes. Many do this for a year or many more before true marriage. That way you know. Not all men good I think.

Well, now, am I a good man? I have no idea what being a good man, in her eyes, even means. And how could Prin or anyone else really know if I'm a good man in just the few hours I have been in this country?

Anyway, Cincer is still standing there naked as the day she came into this world. I guess it's an invitation to take her. But it's an invitation I'll pass up.

Cincer, I truly find your body beautiful. But I want to kiss you and the first time I do that, I prefer that we both have our clothing on. There will come a time when we will both take our clothing off and make love. I very much look forward to touching you all over. But I don't want to take you until you are really sure and not scared. That OK?

Clearly it is and it isn't. She does not grab her clothing. What she does is run to my sitting figure, still quite unclothed, hug me, kiss me on the cheek, neck, forehead, eyes, nose and finally my lips, before saying, *Thank you, so much. Yes, you are good! I know it. You are good.* And then she just holds on to me tightly for a while, crying on my shoulder. I know she is crying as my shoulder is getting wet. My arms are holding bare skin, but there's nothing sexual about it. I'm encircling her shoulders.

She is still hanging on to me when I finally say, *Now, go put on your new clothing. I want to see you all done up!*

I get a giggle, a nod, as I can feel the nod against my shoulder, before she rises, scoots to the bed, grabs the garment bag and runs into the bathroom.

Did I do right? I don't have any idea what 'right' is. There are no guideposts for me. I'm winging it and hoping that I don't mess up. But even if I do, I don't think it's critical. Like I surmised before. I can always start over fresh in Iloilo.

I'm doing the numbers on the cost of nice homes in various places here. Actually, Iloilo works so well within a budget based on the potential sale price on my place back in the States that I could buy two or three places, but the lots are just too small. Maybe the lots would be bigger out of town proper. I look at the prices for homes in Tigbauan and it's far less expensive than Iloilo for nice places, but it really is rural. Hell, I could buy five homes and have money left over based on my budget. I'm OK with rural in the US, but I'm not so sure of it here.

I look at Leyte. I have two gals I was planning to see who live there. Once again, there's no problem. I can afford it all. Of course, I don't know the laws here and what I can and can't do. But whatever it is, I'm sure there's a way to do what I want.

Cincer exits the bathroom by peeking her head out and asking if I'm ready to see her.

She gets a smile and a nod.

Out she comes. She has fixed her hair a bit. Her outfit, dress and shoes look great on her. She sure is a good looking gal. I tell her that and she curtsies.

You like?

Didn't I just say I like? Yes, I like!

You like the shoes?

Cincer, there's nothing that I don't like. I like you; I like your body; I like your hair; I like your dress; I like your legs; I like your shoes. Have I left anything out?

My heart?

That is a very good question. What I know of your heart, I like. But, just like you don't really know if I truly am a good man, I really don't know your heart well enough. We must both learn about the other. Do you not agree?

Yes. I like your answer. It's true and honest. It's good. We will both learn.

Come sit here and tell me about your dreams. Tell me about your family. Tell me about what your life has been like up to now. I want to learn. We have plenty of time. Remember, I'm a foreigner and know nothing about your world. So don't skip over things. Don't assume I know. I really don't.

It's hard to get her started but, once she does, there's a lot to tell. For the better part of an hour, I listen. I ask a few questions but, mostly, I listen.

I have done this with Prin. While there are many differences in their two stories, there's much that is the same. Life here is not easy for these gals. Marriage is clearly dangerous. There are

annulments, but they are hard to get and expensive as all get-out. They are out of reach for most Filipinas and so, like she said, once married, always married.

Marriage here is intertwined with Catholicism. In the church, marriage is a holy sacrament. And so it is in Philippine Law. It's a sacrament and not a contract. Once married, always married.

For that reason, marriage is not something that young girls want to run out and do. Shacking up? Yes, depending on the family, absolutely, yes. But marriage? Maybe after shacking up for a few years. You have to be sure!

Better to break the Catholic rule about sex outside of marriage and go to confession, than to be married and stuck.

So, if I'm to stay here, at least for a few years, it's safer to not marry me, than to make a bad choice in any case!

See how much I didn't know the culture?

6

Prin doesn't have the key to the room. She gave it back to me this morning. The elevator requires you have a key to get to our floor, so I'm not surprised when my phone buzzes at a little before seven.

In the lobby. Can't get up there! Come get me please.

Coming.

Cincer stays in the room and I go to retrieve Prin.

How you do it?

Do what?

Convince her?

I didn't. You did?

What? No, I not!

Well, she hadn't decided until she talked to you.

But she was willing to consider before she ask you call me and give her the phone, right?

Yeh.

So? How you do that?

I told her the truth.

That it? No, 'oh you are so pretty'? No, 'please join me'?

No. None of that. When I met her she says to me, 'What is your plan?' I didn't understand at first but when I did, I told her about the first plan and how I had changed my mind and came up with a second plan. I didn't tell her it was your plan. I didn't mention you. But she said to me, 'You already have one you don't want to lose. Who is she?'

What? She really say that?

Yes.

Oh my God! She is very smart I think.

Yes. Probably smarter than you. And now you need to meet her. And I open the door to our room.

She is there all right. Pretty as a picture... with my tablet in her hands.

Prin and Cincer lock eyes and tentative smiles form on both faces. It's Cincer who speaks. Friend, why do you think I will not join?

Prin is not going to be intimidated. She cocks her head and says, You have a good job I think. You have a bachelor degree from a university. In the website you say you want a one woman man and all else not to bother. I think, OK, this girl will not work for my Ira. I not think bad of you. I just think, not a good fit. So, why you say yes?

He tells the truth. You know he do. How many men do that, friend? He admit his first plan not good and so he change it. How many men admit they make a mistake, and admit it to a woman? He admit that it a mistake to contact so many women, but also it risky to marry one and find out it a bad marriage. I see he has a brain. ... Yes, it true I have a degree, in accounting, but I not a CPA. I will never be. So, the pay not good. My prospects not good. Maybe you see now? Maybe you assume because you not know my life?

Ira tell me maybe, I wrong. I think, ha, he will see. Now it me who sees. ... This the dress he get for you? I like it.

Yes, and we get another for you. I hope you will like it too. Come na. In the CR⁵. It there.

Prin laughs. It's OK, I will get it and dress here. There's no need to hide from Ira. I am his in all ways. He knows this. More important friend, I know it.

Maybe I make a mistake earlier dressing in the CR?

No, I not think that a mistake. You love with him yet?

⁵ Comfort Room is one of their terms for bathroom. They almost never say the words and use the initials instead. There is a Tagalog term as well, banyo.

No. I willing, but he say, not yet. Maybe he think it too soon?

Maybe.

And with that Prin goes to the bathroom to retrieve her new outfit. I approach Cincer and take the tablet from her hands. What I see does not please me. She has been looking at the dating website I used to find her and the others. She has been checking out what I have there to see.

Tell me why I shouldn't be angry with you.

She is looking at me and saying nothing.

I'll ask again. Why should I not be angry with you, Cincer?

As I'm asking again, Prin enters the bedroom and sees the tablet is now in my hands. I'm not sure Prin has any idea why I'm asking Cincer what I have asked. But Prin is smart enough to know what to say.

Tell him. Maybe it wrong, what you will say. That not matter, tell him the truth. It always the best with him.

Much like the moment of panic she had with me at Starbucks, Cincer is freaking out. But she stammers out, *I want to see who you find and what they say to you.*

Prin, what should Cincer have done?

Ask you to please see what is on the tablet.

Would I have allowed it?

Yes. You allow it with me.

What do I not want?

You not want us to take without asking first.

Cincer, will I have more problems like this?

No. I will ask first. I understand why you are angry. I was rude in what I do. Your tablet is private even if it is just laying out where I can get to it.

OK. Good. Now, what have you learned from looking?

She is frozen again. Prin speaks up. *Tell him. He done being angry. Now he wants to know what you know! Tell him.*

The gal is just not sure how she should proceed but takes a stab at it anyway.

I think some will stay. Maybe others not. They all seem nice. All maybe if they the only one. But not this way for some.

Prin is getting dressed and I hand the tablet back to Cincer. *Tell me which you put into each group.*

I get a brief and cautious nod as she gingerly accepts the tablet from me and then asks me, *Which one you meet next?*

I point to a link on the screen, *This one, Lorie.*

Prin thinks she will be OK, but I don't say a word to Cincer as she moves around on the gal's page and her messages. Cincer opens up Friendster⁶ and finds the gal's page. Finally, I get a verdict. *This one will not join.*

Prin was wrong about Cincer and now Cincer is saying she is wrong about Lorie.

I only ask Cincer, *Why?*

Too many family members and friends all close by. No outside interests. Prin and me, we far from family. This one is the opposite. She seems nice, but no. She will not join. Who you will see next?

The next one is the religious gal. Prin is sure she is a no-go. Once again I say nothing to Cincer.

I'm waiting so long for an answer I'm about to say, fuck-it, let's go eat, but finally we get the answer from the oracle.

This one I am not sure. At first I think she not OK for this. But I look more and more. Maybe she will join. If she do, she will love you very much. Maybe

⁶ A social networking site before MySpace and Facebook. It was popular in the Philippines.

*she will call you a devil and scream at you. Maybe she will truly say Jesus good to her because she find you. For her I think bahala na!*⁷

We can look at the rest later. Let's go eat.

Who picked out this dress and shoes?

Why, Prin? Is it wrong?

No, I love it. Who has the good taste?

Thank Cincer.

As we ride down in the elevator, Prin asks when she can come back again.

You mean after we have dinner.

Of course, yes.

I have no idea yet and am not prepared to answer. I probably scrunch up my face because Cincer asks, *Ira, may I ask something?*

Yes. Please do.

Is it OK with you that Prin stay with us tonight?

That probably means no sex, but that's OK with me. *Sure, I would like that. Is it OK with you, Prin?*

Prin looks at Cincer as the elevator doors open and asks, *Are you sure, friend?*

Cincer raises her eyebrows twice.⁸

On the way to the restaurant in the taxi, there begins a conversation about travel and Cincer's job. It seems both want to fly with me to Iloilo. Prin is pushing to go tomorrow. I think that is a little too soon, as I have not been intimate with Cincer yet and for the life of me, I fail to see how Cincer can come, as she has a job.

⁷ There is nothing to know or do, it's up to God.

⁸ A quiet way of saying yes.

A taxi is not the best place to talk about when I'll bed the girl, but I do mention the job. Cincer has no problems with it. She will give notice tomorrow morning. She is done with it. But that means she is committed. Is she ready to do that?

Ira, we will take care of that tonight when we get back to the hotel.

I look at Cincer and then clearly at Prin and back to Cincer and ask, *Are you sure?*

She reaches out and grabs Prin's hand before saying, *Yes.*

OK, I see. I still think tomorrow is too quick. I suspect you both have some things that need to be resolved before we leave. We will leave in two days. I'll make the reservations in the morning.



As we ride the elevator back to the room after dinner, I still have no idea what is going to happen. Let me be clear. I have never been with two women at the same time. Never. Sure, it's a fantasy I guess, though not one I have ever focused on. I'm just happy to have the companionship of both of them. There has not been even a moment's consideration of being with them sexually at the same time.

Sure, I know guys brag about such shit, but... guys claim to have done all sorts of shit. I have always ignored the guys who make such claims. What am I to think now?

Right from the beginning, I was worried about making a bad choice but, I figured, life is a crap shoot like that. I didn't see a way around it.

After Prin also mentioned it, told me about her life and quitting her job, I did feel guilty about what I'm doing to all these gals. And so, my head has turned enough to seriously believe that assembling a damned harem is the insane but ethical thing to do. But... making love to a woman when another is there as well? How the hell does that work?

As much as they are acting brave, I imagine that both gals will be weirded out when the time comes. I'm pretty sure I'll be, too. I'm not saying a word. Best to wait until we are in our room. Are they also wondering? No one is saying a word.

The door closes; I have held this in long enough. *Does either of you have a plan? I have no idea how this is going to work.*

You and Princess say there will be more than one girl. You two are a couple, now. That why I decide I need to know. Will I like Prin... and Ira, why you call her Prin?

It's short for Princess.

But that not her nickname.

OK, Cincer, what is her nickname?

Bim.

Bim?

Yes.

Prin, you want me to call you Bim?

Prin is laughing. It is what everyone calls me. But it OK whatever you want! That OK with me.

Cincer, I get that you think ...Bim and I are a couple, but we aren't more so than you and I'll be a couple. I'm still confused about how you two see this working.

Ira, will you please give up trying to control everything tonight and let the two of us make this work with you?

As I have no clue about what needs to happen and they don't seem to be able to explain, I'm not sure I'm succeeding at controlling anything anyway. So, sure, why not? Maybe I'll learn something.

OK. So what happens now?

You shower now. Then we shower.

I still have no idea of what the ultimate plan is, but at least there's a direction. I go to the bathroom.

As I'm toweling off after taking my shower, both gals come in and start taking theirs. I finish up and get onto the bed, pulling the sheet up.

It's a weird feeling of anticipation mixed with a bit of anxiety. I know they haven't been in there very long, but it feels like they have, as I wait for what comes next. But the wait does come to an end and I find myself in the middle of the two of them.

I'm propped up against the headboard on my back. What happens first is Bim draping over me and giving me a truly loving kiss. She holds my head with both hands. My senses are encased between her palms. But as the kisses continue, I feel hands on my manhood, stroking me.

There's a rustling of the sheets on Cincer's side and then maybe a minute later, while I still feel her hands, I'm pretty sure I feel her mouth as well. Cincer is giving me head.

Lips on lips; lips on cock. Did they discuss this while in the shower? How does this get choreographed? Fuck if I have a clue, but one thing is certain, I'm enjoying it.

Bim's lips, Cincer's lips, mouth and hands, it's amazing.

There's no timer; it just goes on and on... until Bim pulls away from my lips and whispers in my ear. *Pull her up, put her on her back and fuck her hard, my love. Make her ours.*

Ours? As in Bim and I are a couple? Huh. Well, since I gave up the control, I guess I will just follow the instructions.

Pulling Cincer up off my member is not a difficult task as she comes willingly. Putting her on her back is equally easy to do, but before I plunge in I want a kiss. I also want to feel her cunt with my fingers. If she isn't wet, I really need to deal with that rather than just plunge in, as Bim wants me to do.

Cincer is more than willing to accept my attentions. Her lips accept mine and her arms encircle me as we proceed. And, in part of the process, my fingers explore her cunt lips, separating them and looking for the moisture we will need to complete the coupling.

All the while Bim — damn it's hard thinking of Prin in that way — Bim is kissing the back of my neck, stroking me from my ass and down my leg. It's sweet and feels wonderful as I continue to kiss Cincer.

The outside of Cincer's cunt lips are dry but just inside I find the moisture we need. I start fingering the gal, bringing moisture up to her clit and over her cunt lips. She is getting revved up. Her lips are more demanding and she is pushing her cunt up, seeking more from me.

I don't need any more clues. I mount her and slide into a tight and willing cunt. Her legs spread as far as she can, and I put my arms under her hips, pulling her up as I push in.

Bim's mouth is on my shoulders... licking, kissing, biting. Her hands are on my ass as if to push me deeper into the other.

Cincer is going nuts all on her own as I pound the gal. I have no idea if it's an orgasm, but she is definitely experiencing something.

No words are spoken. Nothing is in slow motion. This is not sweet love making. This is frantic, pounding, demanding, sweaty, and primal. It doesn't take long by the clock, but it has changed everything between the three of us. I can't explain it; but, we are a unit now. There are three of us, and yet there's only one of us.

Does that sound nuts? It sort of sounds a little too much like Leonard Cohen or Kahlil Gibran to me, and yet there's a simple truth to it. I guess there are times when the sappy stuff becomes the stuff of reality.

Sappy or not, cum is in Cincer. I'm on my back again with an arm around each of them. Each has a hand on my chest and a head on a shoulder.

I would be sweating buckets if it wasn't for the air conditioner which is still on a high setting. As it is, I'm happy right where I am.

You two, who think you know better than me all too often... do you know what I'm thinking now?

It's Cincer who answers, *Yes and the answer is no. We are going to Iloilo. No stopping now.*

Hub, am I that easy to read? What are you saying no to?

But it's Bim who answers. *No, we do not stop with just us, we go to find the other girls. That what. Yes, especially since this wasn't ever your idea. You know what else? I know something else you are thinking.*

Oh, and what have you decided that I have thought?

Not a couple any more. We are three now.

Cincer grabs my arm, *Is she right, Ira? Is it the three of us and not you and Bim allowing me to be with you?*

Well, is that how it feels to you?

Yes. That is how it feel. Truly. Is Bim right? Has it changed in your heart?

Bim's right. It is exactly how it feels to me. I can't say I know why. It sure is happening way too fast, but yes. Are the two of you really ready and wanting to share me with others? I know it was my idea to meet all those gals, but things have changed now, and now I have both of you. So, regardless of my sense of guilt in leading the others on, Cincer do you really think we should go to Iloilo?

Yes.

Bim?

Yes.

You know this is nuts, right? You two are plenty. I don't have a need to add anyone else.

Bim and I know you can afford it. Why is it nuts? You will make others happy. We will have good lives. Why it nuts?

Does love have any part of this?

The Ark

Ira, how we not love a man who is good and sweet, and good to us? How that?

Both of the gals are gone, tying up loose ends and getting ready to go tomorrow.

I have been thinking about how these two gals see the next two potential additions completely differently. I suspect that both have a piece of it right.

In a way, Bim... damn I'm still struggling thinking of her as Bim ... anyway, Bim was right about Cincer in many ways. She was definitely not a 'grab on to the raft' gal. She is analytical, careful, and not likely to make impetuous decisions. What Bim didn't figure on is Cincer's lightning fast ability to sort through all the variables and come to a reasoned decision. She sure as hell is far faster and smarter than I am!

But, each of us, I guess, has our biases which can alter how we see things. When it comes to Lorie, Cincer's thinking may be right, but what if she isn't physically close to her family when we meet and where we eventually will settle. Will she simply resist the separation, or will it free her?

I have decided to meet Lorie in Iloilo and not her home town. The two places are not incredibly close to each other. From what I can tell it's about a ninety minute drive, so while that isn't perfect for the gal, as it'll be hard on Lorie to get there, maybe it'll allow something to get sorted out without family interference.

I make two room reservations at the Marriott in Iloilo for tomorrow. I got lucky with the Heritage Hotel, but I know Marriott as a brand name and am sure it'll be fine. I book a flight for tomorrow for the three of us.

All that done, I message Lorie via the website, telling her I'll be there tomorrow and giving her my Philippine cellphone number.

I don't send a message to the 'Jesus' gal yet. We will see how it works out with Lorie first.

All the travel arrangements made, out I go for my Big Mac, fries and a coke.

It's a twelve minute walk from the Heritage Hotel to MickeyD's. Most of it is along the EDSA, a main road here, and then you turn left on Taft. Yes, that Taft, as in US President Taft. It turns out that he had been the American governor-general of the Philippines before becoming president in 1908. Being in the Philippines has this echo of US history woven through it like the backing thread on a piece of cloth you must use every day. It isn't central to your activities when in the USA, but it's there, always there.... And here it's in view. Here, you are on the other side of the cloth.

I'm a little sweaty when I get to my destination, but the place is air conditioned and I needed to stretch my legs. The breakfast food at the Heritage is fine, but it isn't comfort food for me. A Big Mac is. With all the craziness, which I'm complicit in as it swirls around me, I want this moment of being centered in something that I know so well. Is that nuts? Maybe it is.

For cripes sakes, I'm the one gathering all these gals. Just who the fuck do I think I am? Right? You know, not a one of them is thirty yet. The oldest is Cincer and she is twenty-eight. Bim is twenty-six. The next two are even younger!

And here I am. I'll be sixty-six in a matter of days. I don't care if they don't think this is robbing the cradle, I know it damned sure is. But I'm doing it, right? So, why am I complaining? Why am I so fucking conflicted?

Here I'm making plans in hopes of adding Lorie when, if I met her in her home town, I might reasonably expect that she would simply say no and I would be able to just move on. That might be the sane thing to do. But, no, I'm doing the insane thing and attempting to move the chess pieces around to get a different outcome.

Ah, the Big Mac is just perfect. And the fries are spot on. I wonder how they do it. Do they actually ship the sauce and fries from the USA? Wherever I settle here, there had better be a MickeyD close by!

As I'm walking back to the hotel, I get a text from a number I don't know.

You really coming?

It must be Lorie.

Yes. Tomorrow. Will I see you?

When you come to Tigbauan? I see you there.

No. Better I meet you at Iloilo.

Why that? My family need to meet you. They not approve I meet you in Iloilo.

Maybe it is best if we not meet. I am wanting to meet you. Not your family.

Really? You that way? OK, don't come. I won't meet you!

Score one for Cincer. She was dead on with her assessment. I don't bother texting the girl back. In a way, I'm grateful for Cincer's assessment. It allowed me to shorten the time between the contact and the exit. I might have wasted a lot of time and energy on an impossible mission.

I'll message the Jesus girl, Nelia, when I get back to the hotel. She is also on the same island, but in Passi City. I'm not sure how much the cost of transportation is from her town to Iloilo, but it shouldn't be too much. If Nelia blows me off, the plane fare to Iloilo will be a simple loss. There's no one else on the island of Panay I'm intending to meet.

I take a shower once back at the Heritage. The walk has left me sweaty and there's nothing to do other than messaging Nelia, and that can wait a few minutes. So, I might as well wash up. It doesn't take long.

My message tells Nelia where I'll be and I give her my cellphone number. I mention that I'll reimburse her for the cost of the travel to get to Iloilo from Passi. I try checking on what options she has for travel and I come up with nothing. There's no information to be found.

We will see if she even sees the message today. She might not see it until later tomorrow or the next day or the day after that. I'll wait up to two days on Iloilo before giving up if I don't hear from her. I might as well see the island anyway. I'll play tourist with my two gals.

The next place to visit will be Tacloban on the island of Leyte. There are four gals there who I contacted on Leyte and Samar. Samar is an island so close to Leyte that the two are connected by a bridge. There are more gals on other islands, but I think Leyte will be the last stop. It's crazy enough as it is.

Bim arrives back a little after four and I show her Lorie's texts.

Cincer is very smart, Ira. She smarter than me. Maybe smarter than you?

I laugh. There's no question that I'm not nearly as sharp on these issues. But I'm not as sharp as Bim in the same way. I don't know the culture.

Yes, maybe. When it comes to the minds and hearts of you gals, I guess I'm stupid.

I get a kiss and then, *It OK. We love you even if you stupid.*

I put my arm around Bim and just hold her tight. We are still that way when Cincer texts saying she needs one of us to come down to the lobby and bring her up to the room.

Bim decides it's her task and off she goes only to return with Cincer who can't contain her laughter. *Ira, the texts! Show it me.*

She clearly is referring to Lorie's texts and so my phone is placed in her hands. She reads it. *Ha! See? I right. She too close to her family. What we do now?*

There's the Jesus gal. I messaged her via the website. So far there's no text. ... Hub, I didn't check back on the website to see if she messaged back there. Grab the tablet, will you? Let me see?

Bim gets the tablet from the far nightstand and hands it to me. Sure enough, there's a message.

OK, I come tomorrow afternoon. My cell number is 09123154xxx. Text me when you get this.

You know why she not text you?

No, Cincer, why?

Your SIM Globe and her SIM Smart. See? 0912? That Smart! It not a free text. If you text her, she pay nothing. Better it be you. See?

Oh, really? OK. How much will it cost?

A peso.

That's all?

Yes, but if she have only 30 peso load and maybe she use some already... you see?

Yes, I see. What is your SIM?

Sun.

Bim, yours is Globe?

Oo⁹. That why I get you a Globe SIM.

If we are all going to stay together, we may need to standardize on one provider. Cincer, are you willing to switch?

Yes, of course.

I text Nelia.

Got your message. I see you use Smart. I use Globe. I will buy you a 300 peso load when I see you. You can message me via the website until you arrive.

I am staying at the Marriott Courtyard. Ask the desk to ring my room when you arrive.

I'm suspecting that she won't text back, but I'm wrong. Two minutes later, the phone buzzes. I have an incoming text.

OK, see you then! How long you stay?

⁹ Yes. (Tagalog)

I am staying in the Philippines. Not sure where I will settle. Maybe in Iloilo for two or three days. Are you willing to travel with me?

Really? You stay here?

Yes.

OK. I travel too if we good.

See you tomorrow.

The gals want to know what's what and I hand them the phone.

They are talking to each other but in Tagalog. I don't have a clue until Cincer says, *You are smart to say what you say. We will see when we get there. She may not be OK with us, but this is the best start.*

Bim, you may be right. I also have my doubts based on her religious talk. We will try and see. In the meantime, it's time to go to dinner and then I think tonight it will be Bim's turn in bed. Maybe we will start a little early and see how long we can go?

Together they both scream, *Bastos!*¹⁰, followed by laughter.



I might be 'Bastos' as the gals say, but that is our reality. They are the ones who double-teamed me last night, so they have nothing to complain about now. Last night, Cincer got cum; tonight it needs to be Bim.

Last night it was both of the gals in control. Tonight, now that I have a sense of how this will roll, I want some of that control back. Exactly how I'll accomplish it, I'm not really sure. But if we are all three in bed, then we need to see how far that takes us. We might as well experiment a bit more before we meet Nelia.

I took a shower after I got back from lunch and really don't need another now, but the gals do and they once again go into the bathroom together. I find that interesting. They really are not

¹⁰ Rude, nasty, cheeky. (Tagalog)

interacting with me, or each other, as individuals, but rather as a team.

Will all the gals do that? Will the team just get more members, or are these two going to stay a team of two? They probably don't know either. I suspect it'll depend on the nature of who else joins me, if anyone else does.

When the gals do come out of the bathroom, they are completely naked, and laughing, as they run to the bed and get under the covers.

There are times when you just know two things. First, that you are one God-damned lucky son-of-a-bitch. Second that you have no damned business being so fucking lucky.

Last night I was so wrapped up in the question of how this would work that I didn't ponder the larger reality of my situation. Not so tonight. I know that these two very pretty females, each of whom is more than thirty-five years younger than I am, is ready and willing to engage sexually with me at the very same time.

That not a living soul I have known, in the last four decades, would believe the reality of my current situation is of no matter. For crying out loud, why would they? I'm having a hard time believing it as I'm living it.

And yet, that is where I am right now. To make what is already crazy even more insane, we will, as a threesome, fly off tomorrow to see if we can add another gal to our world.

When Princess/Prin/Bim told me less than twenty-four hours after I met her that I was stupid and didn't understand her culture, I had no idea how bizarrely true her observation was.

I'm here because a water heater failed. That is the entire reason.

Sure, I met a friend at a café and he had a Filipina wife, but that is not why I'm here. I'm here because of that damned water heater. If it had not failed, I might be back at home right now. Yes, I registered on the website the same night, but I might not have ever returned to it.

Maybe, just twelve hours ago I might have been back at the café and visiting with my friend again. I might notice how pretty his wife is, and think about the fact that the only women I might socialize with all have Medicare cards, but that's it.

It's a big leap to fly to the other side of the world. If it wasn't for that damned water heater I'm not sure I would have done it.

I reach out and give Cincer a good, long and meaningful kiss. She knows I'm not phoning it in. She responds in kind. I can feel her answer in my heart.

When it ends, I pull Bim to me and kiss her in a manner that a man ought to only kiss his wife. Is that corny? Well, damn it, I'm old and corny. But, it's just that Bim has come to be important to me in a way I had not expected. Does she know that? — That she is important to me? I have no idea, but her way of kissing me suggests she may.

I roll her onto her back, still kissing. My manhood is rigid and, somewhat impetuously, I slide into her without checking if she is ready first. I'm lucky. She is ready and the entrance is a smooth one.

Cincer is stroking my back but kissing Bim's forehead as I push in to Bim's wet cunt and pull back repeatedly. Bim's right hand is now on the back of Cincer's head, holding her friend close to her, as she looks up at me.

We are making love. We are. The three of us. Until last night I truly never understood how it could work. I'm not sure it can work with most folks, but it works with us.

I reach out to Cincer and grab on to her ass, snaking a finger into her cunt from behind. She spreads her legs to accommodate my entry.

All I can think about at this moment is something so goofy that I almost laugh. When I die, let it be when I'm just so engaged. Not yet, please God, not yet. But when it's my time, let it be like this!

Bim's cunt is making noises, it's so juicy, as I pound her tight opening. Cincer's cunt is watering the sheet below my fingers as she arches her body back and up against my fingers.

I feel cum welling up. I'm looking right at Bim. She is mine. She knows it and I'm sure of it, as I grunt and cum enters her.



We need to be at the airport a little before one. The hotel isn't far from it and so, even though the traffic in Pasay is horrible, we don't have to leave before noon. After an early breakfast at the hotel, we make a quick trip back to MoA and buy two small suitcases that can be carry-on luggage. Everything the gals have fits in one with room to spare.

We get to NAIA¹¹ terminal 3 in plenty of time. But, of course, our flight is delayed. We are sitting in an incredibly crowded waiting area when my cellphone buzzes. I'm hoping that it isn't Nelia cancelling on us. It's not her number, not any number I have seen before, but...

I wrong. Can we meet?

Who are you?

Lorie, of course! Why you ask?

This is not the number you used yesterday.

Oh. OK. Can we?

Why do you want to meet? I thought you don't want to.

I make mistake. Sorry. I will meet you first.

I am not sure. I am busy for a few days. I made other plans after you say you are not interested.

Change your plans, please.

¹¹ Ninoy Aquino International Airport. The abbreviation is pronounced as a word, not as the initials. Nah-EE-ah. Terminal 3 is (was at the time) for domestic flights.

I am sorry, but that is not possible. Give me a few days to think about it. Why did you change your mind?

Nanay¹² say I am hardheaded. I should not make the requirement before you meet me.

Bim, what does Nanay mean?

It mean mother.

And you always listen to your Nanay, correct?

Of course, yes!

OK, I will text you in a couple of days.

Please, I wrong!

Yes, I hear you. In a couple of days. Nothing sooner.

I show the texts to my gals. I think it's pretty clear that I should simply blow Lorie off. Both of them agree.



The Marriott Courtyard in Iloilo City is a four star hotel. It's nice. Breakfasts are not included, and so it'll be more expensive than the Heritage was, plus I'm paying for two rooms. But there's no sense in complaining. This is my doing.

The room I get, and I gather the other one is the same, is nice but it's a bit odd. The wall between the shower and the bedroom isn't a wall. It's a glass partition. While there are blinds of a type you can use to provide a little privacy, I sure haven't seen anything like it before. They certainly don't do this in the States.

Nelia is still on a bus. I have gotten a text from her. She is on her way, but it remains unclear when she will arrive. If she doesn't get here before dinner time, I'll have the gals get dinner alone anyway. I'll have my dinner with Nelia, even if she is late. I have to avoid

¹² Mother in Tagalog

the possibility that if I have it with the other girls, she will show up while I'm with them. That would be a problem all on its own.

It turns out that my caution is warranted as the gal shows up fifteen minutes after the other two have been seated in the hotel restaurant for their dinner. I meet her in the lobby.

Nelia, in person, is prettier by a fair degree than the pictures suggested she will be. Her smile is bright and seemingly genuine.

I so happy to meet you, Po¹³!

It's nice to meet you, too. Where are your things?

Sir?

Changes of clothing? Do you have a bag?

She giggles. *Everything I need, it here, Po.* And she pats a handbag.

I see? Would you like to freshen up in my room, or would you like to have something to eat first?

Oh, yes! I am ready to eat. Where you want?

How about here in the restaurant? OK?

Yes, Po. We do what you want! Po?

Yes?

How many others?

What?

How many other girls. You say you see many of us, true?

Yes.

How many other girls you have?

¹³ Sir in Tagalog. Pronounced: POH

Why do you think there are others?

Po, if a man want a wife, he meet one girl. She be good. We Filipinas, we good girls. If a man good to us, we be good to him. No problem with that unless the girl a scammer. If she is, maybe the man, he just go home, no trust.

I see. And since I'm meeting more than one girl, what do you think that means?

How such a man choose. We all good. We all same-same that way. So now he have more than one. Maybe he break many hearts, but if he do that, he call the other girls and say, sorry I not coming to see you!

But I didn't say that to you.

Yes! So you have many, I think. Maybe you bad, but I not think that. How many of us?

Why do you say 'us?' Have you decided to join?

Po, I not stupid. Jesus give me a chance to be happy. You that chance. What I care if there are others? You be good to me, I be good to you. We Filipinas, we smart girls.

I see. Well, let's have something to eat and then you can meet the other girls before I take you to bed.

Good. She giggles. I hungry, truly. Better to eat first! Then I meet them, then the bed.

I'm not sure where she puts all the food that comes to the table, but she clearly enjoys food. Height-wise she is a couple of inches taller than the other two, but she is damned sure thin. I wonder if she has one of those metabolisms whereby she can't gain weight, or if now that she has access to food she will blow up like a balloon.



I knock on the gals' door. From inside I hear voices of concern before the door opens to reveal both of them. Two faces change from concern to absolute surprise in a flash.

Bim, Cincer, allow me to introduce you to Nelia. Nelia, these are the two other gals you were sure I already had with me. I'll leave the three of you to get acquainted. Nelia, I'm in the room, here on the right. When you are done with your meeting, come to my room.

Yes, Po. I do that. And then she and my other two disappear behind the door.

Three minutes later there's a knock at my door. It's Bim.

What happen?

What do you mean, what happen? You were just talking to her. What did she tell you?

Wala¹⁴, nothing! She want to know about us.

All I know is that I have learned something. Loving Jesus doesn't mean you don't have a brain. She clearly has one and was just as quick about it as was Cincer. She knew she wasn't the first and she assumed that unless I was a bad man, that there had to be others, otherwise I would have cancelled on her. I think the way she put it was 'We Filipinas, we good girls. If a man good to us, we be good to him.' She doesn't think she is better or worse than any other Filipina, therefore there were more than her or I was a bad man. She was betting on the hope that I'm not a bad man.

What happens tonight?

I told her to come to my room when she was done with her visit. She knows I'll bed her. I was clear about that once she was clear that she was joining me. She was clear that she was joining me once I told her she would meet you two.

You not need to convince her?

Did I have to convince you?

Silly. It me to convince you.

¹⁴ Nothing in Tagalog.

Exactly.

Did I have to convince Cincer?

OK, you not.

Isn't her logic the same as yours in the very beginning?

True.

So why are you surprised? I grant you that I'm more than surprised. But as you told me in the beginning, I don't know your culture.

Do we join you tonight?

Ask your new friend. I suspect that is up to her, don't you?

OK, I go back now.

Forty some-odd minutes later there's another knock on my door. This time it's Nelia and she is alone. I step back and she enters.

Just me tonight. Tomorrow all.

OK. Do you want to talk or take a shower or just relax for a while?

A shower?

OK.

With you?

Ab! OK. That works.

It works as a way to be intimate without sex. It works because the glass wall for the shower will be a non-issue. It works because I genuinely like this gal and how she thinks. Jesus aside, she is fun to be with.

I'm not sure how the Jesus stuff fits in, but the stuff I have dealt with isn't about that and it all works.

The next thing I learn is why she said she had all she needed in her handbag. As she removes her clothing, she washes each article in the bathroom sink and hangs it up to dry. She pulls a toothbrush

and a hairbrush out of the handbag and puts it behind the sink. She doesn't appear to be wearing any makeup.

As she is naked and ready to take a shower, I get undressed too. I toss my shirt on the floor. She picks it up and washes it. She does the same with my briefs and socks. Only when done with those duties is she ready for the shower. At this point we have both been naked for a few minutes. There's an ease about it. There will be no anxiety going forward. She is relaxed with me, and I with her. It doesn't take long. It takes being normal with each other without our clothing on.

In the shower, she scrubs my back; I scrub hers. She scrubs my chest; I scrub and play with her breasts. She smiles. There are no giggles now. Smiles, not giggles. She scrubs her own genitals but then scrubs mine and plays with my cock a little bit.

There's no drama. This is a sexual, but friendly, time together.

There are a number of towels in the room, and so each of us towels off once out of the shower. I'm done at about the same time as Nelia and take her hand as we walk back into the bedroom.

I reach out to take her in my arms when she grabs my hand and inspects it.

Wait!

Hub?

Wait, Po. I get what is needed.

I have no clue what she is talking about, but she returns with a manicure kit: clippers, nippers, cuticle tools.

Come here. The light better.

For the better part of ten minutes, she trims ten fingernails and ten toenails. And then, once done, she re-inspects all of them before putting her kit back together and away in her handbag.

And then she says the most amazing thing with total sincerity. *I not have my man look like I not take care of him. I not be embarrassed that way!*

So... being one of three mistresses is not an embarrassment, but badly trimmed fingernails, or toenails, is? That is going to take me a while to process.

We mount the bed as I expect a married couple does. I'm not leading her to it. She is not being coy or seductive. She is forty-three years younger than I am.

I don't think it matters to her. I honestly don't think it crosses her mind at all. Once we are both in the bed, all I have to do is reach out toward her and she comes. She kisses my chest, my arm, my shoulder, my cheek, before finding my lips. Once found, we stay lip-locked for a few long minutes. My hands wrap around her. Her legs spread, putting one of mine between hers. Her crotch is pushing against my thigh.

That crotch is damp and my thigh is the recipient of her female lubrication. Her hand finds my manhood again and strokes it, though it certainly doesn't need the assistance to get firm. It's firm already. If lovemaking can be called languorous, this is it. There simply is no hurry. We both know how the story will end.

Her brown skin is smooth. She has no perfume; she needs none. The smell of her body is erotic without any artificial help. Her lips, tongue and teeth playfully engage with me. We, quite simply in these few minutes, have come to understand that we really like each other. There's humor in the playfulness, but not to distract. It's playful in a loving way. It communicates, we are safe: with each other; to love each other; in each other's arms. And... we are.

I put Nelia on her back. Mounting her, looking directly at her, she is looking back at me. This joining is meaningful, not to be ignored. That, I think, is what we are communicating to each other.

It just feels good to be inside her. The feel of her, the moisture, communicates her own physical needs. Leaning down, I kiss her, while deep inside her. She is right there with me. I'm not sure how to explain it.

There's lovemaking where you are fucking someone. You feel the power. You sense the response and you drive to a pinnacle of completion. There are the times when, the act, the feelings you have, are separated from the person you are having sex with; each participating in the act and yet separate at the same time. But there are times when you are with the other. Seeing each other, in each other's eyes, mouths, and hearts. The sense of the sex is the sense of a connectedness that transcends the act and binds the hearts.

That last type is, I suspect, very rare. It may not even happen often or again with that same person. I have read of it in books, so it does happen. But it's so special that I suspect if it happens to you, you know it. It has got to be something that stays with you for life. It's a first for me and I can't believe that I'll ever forget it, as it's happening to me, right now.

Is she experiencing what I am? For some reason, I really think she is. It's in her eyes as she looks at me. There are tears. Not tears of sorrow. They are tears of joy and those tears are matching mine. The tears remain as we both find that end point and cum exits me and enters her.

We are done, and yet we are not done. I'm still looking at Nelia, and she at me. There are tears, now soft sobs. At the same time, there are smiles and nods. She knows. I know.

If she had been the first one... but she isn't.

She will never leave me. I know it. I'll never leave her. She knows it. We are to never part.



The gals have taken off to buy some clothing this morning. The trip may be the top priority because Nelia arrived with nothing but the clothes on her back. Cincer tells me not to worry, it won't cost much.

I have given them some cash in line with that, just five hundred pesos, so I guess there really isn't any concern. They mention a type of place that is sort of a second-hand public market. But there's nice clothing at a very low price, if you are careful when

looking. I'm not sure I follow all of what they are telling me. They used a term for it, but it means nothing to me and I can't even remember what they called it.

As to what my plans are now that we are in Iloilo, all I can say is that I have decided, these three are 'enough!' The three of them are beyond plenty. I just don't see adding more making any sense. To meet more women would be a foolish attempt at assuaging my guilt at being stupid. I should have never kept on answering the messages from all those gals.

I spend the hours, while they are gone, looking at some email I have from back home about my house and how things are going. There are a few hiccups but nothing major. It'll take a couple of extra weeks to finish up. While that might have mattered to me before, I really don't care anymore.

I do need to deal with monthly bills that will need to be paid. It's pretty clear that I'll stay here longer than the twenty-one days of my current visa. So, I send an email to a friend asking for a favor in that regard, before exiting the email app.

I have an audiobook I got from Audible. I was halfway through it while on the plane to the Philippines. I decide to listen to another chapter as I wait for the gals and get about three chapters finished before they appear.

Ira, what you have for lunch?

I didn't. What did you all eat?

We not. You want to go and get now?

OK. Is there a McDonalds anywhere near here?

The gals are laughing. Bim says to them, *See?! ...* and then turning to me, *Yes, we find it. Up the same street. Maybe seven minute walk from here. At the far end of Festive Walk Mall, across the street from the Bureau of Immigration.*

OK, let's go.

Wait! CR first!

I sit back down as this will take a few minutes when Nelia asks, *Ira, maybe I see your phone?*

OK, *but why?* And I hand it over.

That girl, Lorie. I want to read what she say.

There are two separate numbers she used. Let me show you the first one.

She reads it and, *Which one the second?*

I show her and she reads that before handing the phone back to me.

You want to add her?

No. I don't think it would work and there are enough of you already. You three are wonderful and I don't see a reason to add anyone else.

She make a mistake, Ira. If she not do that, maybe I not here.

No, I don't think she would have worked out even if she had agreed. She is too close to her family and they would have said don't do it. I was going to meet you no matter what she did. That decision had been made.

Ab, OK, good I know that. But maybe she be OK.

Why?

Her Nanay. I think this different. What Bim and Cincer think?

They were of different minds on it. Bim thought she'd be OK. Cincer was sure she wouldn't. ... But it doesn't matter. Whether she made a mistake or she is just regretting that she didn't check it out, I'm done. I don't want to meet with her. I didn't like her attitude in the first text and I sure as hell don't need another gal.

Cincer has been listening but not offering anything. It's Bim who was in the can. Now, as Bim comes out, Nelia goes in. Cincer and Bim are talking but it's in Tagalog, so I haven't a fucking clue what they are saying. I'm not sure I like it, but I guess it only makes it easier for them. Otherwise, maybe they would just wait until they are alone to share the shit.

The conversation goes on for long enough for Nelia to come out of the bathroom. Cincer breaks free and makes her visit to the can.

Clearly, Cincer has told Bim what I told Nelia, and I guess they have waited for Nelia to come out of the CR to address me.

Ira, Cincer tell me what you say. I not argue with your heart. I know it true. I not try to boss you or tell you what to do. OK?

OK, I guess ... but there's a 'but' coming, so what is it?

We agree. You not tell Lorie to come here and you not talk to her.

But?

Maybe Nelia and me go see her? It not far from here. We can go after lunch and be back before dinner.

No. It's farther than you think.

No? As in... never?

No. Not today at least. It would take an entire day. Bim, let me think about it.

Thank you for thinking about it.

While I do that, what would be the purpose of you meeting the gal? Why even go?

I think we know why you say no to even meeting her. I think there are maybe two, maybe more, reasons. One because you think Cincer is right about the girl and her family. True?

Yes.

Another, she rude to you. True?

Yes.

Another, you say to Nelia, three is enough. True?

Yes!

We think, if you not want to add any more, not add the ones from Leyte, OK, we agree. But we think, maybe Cincer is wrong about Lorie. If that true, then

maybe you wrong about her. Nelia and me meet with her. We be honest with her. We tell her the truth. If she not want to join us, we know then, when she still home and she never meet you. Then no issue with her family and you. You never see Lorie.

I'll think about it. As to the three reasons, your solution only solves the first. She was rude and I think I'm done adding anyone else. But I'll think about it.

Cincer exits the can and off we go to fill my soul as well as my stomach. I may not want another gal, but I sure want another Big Mac.

We are staying at an interesting place. Across the street there's a really big mall called SM. The girls tell me I'll like the stores inside. Maybe we will check it out on the way back after MickeyD's. They are calling it McDo. Same church, different pew.

One thing is clear. While this may well be a third-world nation, there are enough first-world amenities that I won't have one hundred percent culture-shock.

Nelia tells me she has never been in a 'McDo' before. The last time I was in one, I noticed that most of the folks in it were ordering fried chicken and rice meals. Getting fried chicken at MickeyD's makes no fucking sense to me. You go to the golden arches for burgers... or the BBQ rib special when it comes around. Everything else is a waste of time. Yes, that includes the chicken nuggets and the Filet-o-Fish. You want fish? Go to Long John Silvers. You want Chicken? Go to Popeyes, Churches, or KFC. I mean, really. Why screw around?

The SM mall leaves me asking, are there enough wealthy folks around here to support the type of stores in that mall? Yes, in Manila, I can see there are enough to support a MoA... but here?

Even I really don't need the upscale stuff sold in most of those shops. If I did need something, it would be one thing in a year or more. Considering that I have a fair bit of pocket change for the odd impetuous purchase, and most Filipinos don't, I just don't get it. Most of those stores are not selling essentials. As to the clothing stores, the gals tell me that the prices in them are far too high and they will shop at the type of places they told me about before.

I decide to go from store to store at SM just checking each out. Why are these stores here? What does it tell me about the place? I'm not sure I learn much, but we do burn through the afternoon and end up eating dinner at Vikings buffet at the mall before returning back to the Marriott.

There clearly was not enough time for the gals to go see Lorie. I just let it be. Yeh, I let it be, but the gals have not.

As we are walking back to the hotel I catch enough of Bim's Tagalog to know they are talking about the girl, Bim has handed Nelia's cellphone to Cincer. Something has happened.

Bim, Cincer, am I about to get very angry with you gals? What have you done?

Neither of them answers. It's Nelia who speaks.

They do nothing, Ira. I see Lorie's number on your phone and text her. I not tell her to come. I not tell her we come. I tell her that I not think you will contact her again and I tell her why. Do I do wrong?

Why'd you do it?

So she know why you not text her. I only want to explain to her. I not go against you. OK?

If that is all you did, then I guess it's OK. So why the conversation now?

Excuse?

What is the talking about?

She say she willing to join. She want to come. She promise, she no more rude. She be good.

What did you tell her?

I say, not to come. That is your decision. No more additions. She ask if it OK to text you again. I tell her this a bad idea.

That's all?

Yes. That it.

OK.

Ira?

What?

Please, tell her to come.

Nelia, I thought we have just resolved that you told her I was not wanting another gal.

Just her. No more after. We agree. Please?

What do you mean, 'We agree?'

No more after Lorie. That all. ... If she not rude before, she here now. Please allow. Jesus give us you. I think Jesus want you to add Lorie.

Jesus has nothing to do with this.

Why you say that? How you know?

You really think your Jesus wants me to fuck four Filipinas? Really?

Why not?

Hub, I guess it's pointless to discuss Jesus with you. Nelia, I'm done adding. And even if I wasn't, as soon as I added Lorie, I would have problems with her mother.

You not!

What?

No problem with her nanay.

How do you know that?

She say her mother know this. She say better to do it.

What? What does that even mean?

Better to join.

Who said this?

Her nanay.

Nelia, I just don't believe that can be really true.

Why you not believe when I tell you?

Because you are only telling me what Lorie told you, right? Have you really talked to her mother?

Why? You think she lie to me?

Yes! She may very well be lying. ... Nelia, I have had enough of this! Here is what you are to do. This is not a discussion any more. Do this and do not argue. Ask Lorie for her mother's cell number. Text the woman and tell her the truth about what is happening between us. Tell the truth about what you say Lorie said. Tell the mother that even if she, the mother, thinks Lorie should join us, I'll not promise that I'll agree to accept the girl even after I meet her. Do you understand? Lorie can only come tomorrow if: her mother tells you she knows what it'll be like and she agrees; and that even if Lorie comes, I may not accept her. If she accepts all that, then tell Lorie to be here tomorrow afternoon.

Nelia nods but starts talking in Tagalog.

What are you saying?

Bim previously told me that Nelia's mother tongue is Ilonggo but has some Tagalog too. I'm not really sure what that means, but the conversation in Tagalog is a bit labored.

I ask if they understand all you say. I want to make sure I not make mistake! I will do this, but afraid that you angry if I do wrong. Both tell me you are strict! I not want to make mistake.



We are in the lobby of the hotel. The three of them are still working on the text to Lorie. I tell them to go up to the room and figure it out. I'm going to the bar here and have a drink. I see worried faces, but they do as I asked.

I need a scotch but settle for a beer. This is nuts in so many ways. The issue about what Jesus wants isn't even at the top of the list and by all rights it ought to be.

There aren't too many folks at the bar and I'm enjoying the quiet alone time. I have been nursing my second beer for a good while when Cincer sits down next to me.

You want something to drink?

She smiles, catches the barman's eye and says so he can hear, *Kuya¹⁵, SanMig Light*. The barman raises his eyebrows.

The bottle when it arrives is a clear glass long-neck, as opposed to the short necked brown glass of my Pilsen. Cincer takes a long swig of it, sets it down, smiles and says, *They afraid you getting drunk*.

I smile. I can see why they might well think that. I won't, but there's no way they would know. *Not tonight, Cincer. Not tonight.*

No one do anything against you. OK?

Yes, I'm aware of that.

What you say, I think you right. Nelia not really know what Nanay think or do. No way to know if Lorie tells the truth. You do right. Bim and I say that to Nelia. She want to believe Lorie, but we tell her that bad idea. We do exactly what you want.

Thank you.

¹⁵ Brother in Tagalog

It OK if the others come down too? So they not worry?

Sure.

A cellphone is used to send a message. Cincer puts it back down and grabs the long-neck. *Where you want to live?*

I don't know. Cincer, do you really need to be in Manila? It's so crowded there. There's air pollution and the price of housing is very high compared with Iloilo. This place isn't low cost. It's more expensive than other places, including the Tacloban area.

No need. Manila best for work and salary, but if we with you, then anywhere OK so long it a city and not out in the provinces.

So nothing rural?

Yes, that what I think.

Closer to the malls? I'm smiling, teasing, but the answer I get is revealing.

Yes! We like to go to the malls. If too far to them, it not good.

Malls mean civilization. Civilization is preferred. Being in the country is for the poor. Think back a century ago in the USA and consider how cities and rural life were valued. Welcome to the third world. There's no desire to 'get back to nature' here.

We continue to nurse our beers. There's music playing, some 70's Donna Summer song if memory serves me. There's a lot of that sort of music here.

The other two sit down. The barman looks over but neither of the girls indicates a need for a drink. I ask them what they want and I get nothing back. There's some Tagalog between Cincer and the other two ... and then, *Kuya, Coke, dalawa*¹⁶. I indicate that I'll have another as well.

I look at two faces who clearly have news and are antsy to spill it.

¹⁶ Two in Tagalog. So the request is for two Cokes.

OK, *what has happened? Nelia?*

First, we text Lorie and tell her we need her nanay's number. She ask why. I tell her it your requirement. She argue and ask, do you want her nanay and not her? I tell her, if she argue one more time she never hear from us again! She must give me the number and she do this.

I'm beyond happy to hear Nelia being firm, but I wait as there's clearly more that is to be said.

I text her nanay and she say who am I? Why I contact her? I say, it OK if I call and we talk. She say this is OK, so I call her. I sorry because this use up your load, but I think it best.

I agree. There is no problem about the load.

I think I need to hear the voice. That way, I will know if Lorie lying. Maybe if it just text, I not really chatting nanay.

Yes, I see.

I call. We talk. ... She say she guess what happening. She think you already have a girl. She tell Lorie that she is stupid to give up her chance. She should try and see if maybe you will take her too. Maybe as mistress. Better than losing you. I tell her that not right. I tell her what is true and what you say now. Better Lorie not come if her nanay not approve. I say correct?

Yes, that's fine.

See? I not do anything against you. ... She say, tell me about what is true. I do that. We talk a long time. Bim talk to her too. She tell her about the beginning¹⁷. This I not know. So we on the phone a long time. She say she not know if her daughter will behave good, so maybe you not willing to keep her. But she give Lorie permission to come now.

I see. And you are sure, absolutely sure it was the mother you were talking to?

No. But I think yes because she ask something I think only nanay asks.

¹⁷ If you are confused about the use of pronouns in this sentence, all I can say is welcome to the Philippines! Such a sentence is par for the course. I am not sure if Filipinos when hearing this can make much more out of it than Americans (and I suppose other English speakers) can, but this type of speech is common. I could have changed it for your eyes, but then it wouldn't be a faithful transcription!

What?

She ask. She want to come too. She want to meet you, and us! She want know who Lorie with. I tell her it up to you. I not have permission to allow this.

What you want?

What do I want?

Right now I want to wake up in my bed back home and realize this has all been a fevered dream. That's what I want. As sexy and incredible as this dream has been, it's slowly but assuredly turning into a nightmare.

The mother of a volunteer to a harem wants to meet me and my harem? ... To evaluate what? What's the purpose? I mean, really, what would the purpose be? ... other than to say to the police, 'there, that's the man who does wrong!' Unless ... yeh, unless that! Damn!

I hadn't believed the mother knew all and was approving as Lorie claimed. I was right. Lorie lied. The phone call clarified that the mother really didn't know. Yes, the mother knew something was up, but not the entire story. Nelia told Lorie everything and the gal claimed her mother knew and approved. Now we know that didn't happen. So, Lorie was not telling the truth. That alone is a bad sign.

I'm about to dig a deeper hole. I know it and, for the life of me, I need to know something that may make it even worse. I have a sinking feeling that I still don't have the complete story.

Nelia, where is Lorie's father in all this?

Excuse?

What does her father say?

I not know. I not ask.

Ask the mother what her husband will think if Lorie comes to me.

Really? I should ask that?

Yes. You can say that you told me everything including the mother's request and instead of giving you an answer, I asked this question.

OK, I do that now. And it appears she is as she is tapping away madly at her cellphone.

I have finish my third beer and signal for a fourth. Sometime soon I may need to take a piss, but another beer is probably smarter than switching to scotch.

*Bim puts her hand on mine, squeezes gently a bit, and asks, *Ira, why you ask about the tatay*¹⁸?*

I have a sneaking suspicion that there's no father in the picture. That the mother is single.

Oh!

Yeh. Oh.

We not think of that.

Uh huh.

The beer has arrived and I take a long draw on it. Please let this just be a bad dream.

Ira?

I look at Nelia who clearly has news.

She single. No husband. Lorie's father gone many years ago.

I nod, close my eyes, and pray I'll wake up now.

Ira, what do you want me to tell her?

Tell her she better not come with any idea of joining as well. If she does try, she damned well better be a beauty queen, with no illness, and no bad habits.

Other than that, she can come to visit with you but not me. As Lorie has lied to you tonight, it's unlikely that I'll accept her.

Lorie lied? Why you say that?

¹⁸ Father.

She told you her mother knew everything and approved. That was not true.

Oh.

So you tell the mother what I say and no changes.

OK. And she picks up the phone again.

Cincer takes a long swig on her second SanMig Light, puts it down a little harder than needed and announces that they all made a mistake. No one should have contacted Lorie earlier. When I said enough, that should have been it. Clearly, all they have done is make more of a mess.

I couldn't agree more but I keep my mouth shut. Bim tells me she is sorry. Nelia isn't saying anything but is seemingly in the middle of an SMS chat session with one of the two on the other side.

There's a Jackson 5 song playing. Somehow it just doesn't work. The lyrics, the tune, just don't belong in this dark bar tonight. The whole thing is incongruous.

Ira, Nanay say, 'Is he serious? This my hope! Truly! I be good to him, truly. No trouble from me, but I am old.' ... I say, 'Nanay, what your age, please.' ... She say she thirty-eight. Ira, she not young but not very old! I not know what to tell her, but ask, how old Lorie? ... How Lorie really be twenty-one if nanay thirty-eight? She say Lorie nineteen! I tell her, Lorie do nothing but lie! Everything she say a lie. ... Ira, what we do?

Tell her what I said before. Nothing changes. My words are my words.

You still maybe accept Lorie?

I smile. What is the likelihood that she won't lie again?

She will lie. Why you ask?

Liars cannot stay.

Then why allow?

After what you have done, better just let it play out. Next time, when I say enough, do not find a way to go around me. Clear?

Yeh, I think she got the message. But she is texting again.

I'm half way through beer number four, but maybe that is as far as I want to go. I think I'm done. I say as much and all of us get up. It's time to put an end to this day. I had expected to be with all three of them tonight, but at this point I'm more than willing to sleep alone.

Nelia has been texting back and forth. Now she announces that we will see Lorie and her mother tomorrow. Even Nelia seems unhappy with the report.

I may not be in the mood for sex with these gals, but they have all assembled in my room. And yes, sure, they are all pretty. But for crying out loud, this has become one fucked up day.

Do they see that? I'm not sure they do. Yes, my ego got an adrenalin boost when Bim said I should collect a number of gals. What guy wouldn't, but in no time at all, this thing has proven to be really weird, messed up. I wish I could unwind the clock and start over. Even that crap I said about the mother joining if she was a beauty queen was fucked up. Why did I do that?

The gals are dragging me to the bed. I'm not fighting them. Not exactly, but I'm hardly getting with the program. They are all talking in their language. I have no idea what is being said, but they start undressing me. Once again, I'm not fighting. I'm just not helping.

They have me down on the bed. Each of them has a different part of me. Bim is kissing my forehead and stroking my hair. Cincer is sucking on my left nipple and running her hand over my chest. Nelia has my manhood in her mouth.

I wasn't hard when she started, but I am now. Bim's lips are communing with mine. I might have not been in the mood before, but these three have gotten me there. My hand is in Cincer's hair as she continues to suck that nipple. Who knew it could feel so good?

Nelia's mouth has me elevating my hips up off the mattress each time she slides her lips back off me a bit. I want her back. And

then she is off me completely... before mounting me. I'm deep in her now.

Damn, it feels so good. These three have me incredibly stimulated in so many ways. I'm not sure how long I'll last in Nelia, and then, she is pulling off! What the fuck? I'm so horny and she stops?... damn it, get back on! Now Cincer's lips leave my nipple. This is so not fair. They have me so needing it and then cold turkey... fuck!

Oh, yes! Cincer slides onto my cock as Nelia starts sucking my other nipple. Good lord. This is so damned intense. Oh, man! I'm going to cum ... What?

Why? Get back on! What the fuck? Oh! They are changing again. Bim slides on and Cincer's lips meet mine.

These gals have me bouncing off the wall. I'm so close to blue balls that I'm freaking out. Don't stop! Don't! I'm so fucking close. Stay with me! Oh, fuck yes! Oh, yes... God yes.

Cum pumps through me, desperate to get out, going deep into Bim's cunt.

I was in each of them. It was them, together, acting as a team. Was that a message to me?

Bim collapses on top of me, her tits against my chest. The other two are by my sides, my arms around each. This is my world. It's not a world I ever dreamed of, or wanted. It's not a world I ever considered as possible. But it's the world I inhabit. Welcome to my fucking weird world.

Lorie and her mother will be here in just a few hours. I still don't know the woman's name. All I have ever heard is nanay, and that is not a name nor a term I have any reason to use.

The gals have been out of the rooms. There's a hotel pool outside and a fitness center inside. They went out to the pool early this morning before the sun got high. I guess they are in the fitness center now.

There are emails regarding my house I have been answering. Typing on a tablet really sucks, but it's what I have, so the process isn't quick. I send an email to a real estate agent in my town and ask what the market is like, in case I want to sell my place.

I send messages to the gals I haven't seen, telling each that I have canceled my trip, and so, I won't be seeing them. I then close the account entirely. No sense keeping it open, even though I guess it's technically dormant and doesn't get removed until the thirty days I already paid for. Paid for or not, I don't want to meet anyone else.

I spend some time trying to read Philippine government websites. Maybe half of them are broken. Some are just way out of date. I find some non-governmental sites but one contradicts the next on what they say. It's incredibly frustrating.

I get it that I can't own land. But I can own a house. I find that really confusing. There's this thing called an RFO certificate for buying a house, if I want to use it for a visa. I'm not sure what that is or how to get it. But I see that I can invest far less in a certain bank here, and if I just leave it alone, it'll allow me to secure a long term visa. That's confusing too.

There's that immigration bureau across the street, but the visa I'm looking at doesn't come from that office. It's a completely different thing in Manila. It's enough to give you a headache.

The girls are back and want to know where I want to eat lunch. Hell, let them eat wherever they want. I'm going to walk down to

MickeyD's. They want me to try something else. Maybe another day I will, but today it's going to be a Big Mac.

It seems that if I'm going there, they are too. I tell them it isn't necessary, but am told to please be quiet, they are coming along. And so they do.

They have been active all morning. I haven't had a chance to even stretch my legs, and the walk to the restaurant is needed. Once again, MickeyD's is consistent. When it comes to the Big Mac, it's the same thing no matter where in the world you can order it, or so it seems to me based on my limited experience.

We get back to the hotel just before two. I gather Lorie and her mother will be here shortly, because Nelia gets a text indicating they are close by. So, she and Bim are waiting in the lobby for their arrival. Not wanting to even meet the mother, I go back to my room with Cincer.

Cincer has my tablet in her hand and is looking at some websites, but stops, looks at me and asks, *You going to take both the mother and the daughter?*

I don't expect to take either of them.

OK, but if the mother pretty you tell her maybe. So you going to take the mother and send the daughter away? How that work?

Not well, I guess. It was a dumb thing for me to say.

She laughs. *So true! Lorie will lie. Maybe the mother does not. Are you going to take both the mother and the daughter even though the daughter lies?*

I haven't even considered the possibility.

You need to. They are here and Bim says the mother is very pretty.

You got that from the tablet?

No, on the phone here, see? I am chatting them now.

Hub. OK... the daughter... has she told any more lies? What's the mother's name?

Just a second. I will ask. ... And so there are a few minutes of silences, followed by ... Lillian. The mother's name is Lillian. ... No lies they think.

Send the daughter up here. Just the daughter. And Cincer, I'm going to make it very hard on this kid. I know you won't like what I'm going to do, but no problems please. Even if it repulses you. It's best if we get rid of them fast.

I get her eyebrows.

We wait. I'm sure it doesn't take as long as it feels to me, but time seems to be stuck. Finally, there's a knock on the door. I make a face to suggest Cincer should open it. She figures out what I want, opening the door to Lorie.

Now Cincer is not the tallest of the gals, but seeing her with Lorie makes Cincer look like a giant. The girl is tiny. Maybe four foot eight¹⁹ if not shorter. She's cute, but is she really even nineteen? Are there other lies?

Good afternoon.

Yes, Po. Good afternoon.

Do you have any official identification on you?

Excuse?

Cincer says something in their language and I make a face. *Ira, I ask her if she has any picture ID. That all.*

I nod, and then looking at Lorie, *Do you?*

Po, I have my college ID.

Let me see it.

The kid is not happy, but she pulls it out of a small purse and hands it to me. I haven't seen one of these before so it takes a few moments before I can find what I'm looking for.

How old did you say you were?

¹⁹ 142cm

Twenty-one.

Do you know how old your mother told us you were last night?

Nineteen?

Do you want to tell Cincer how old this ID says you are?

Po, I can explain!

Tell her, Lorie. Tell her how old you really are.

Po....

Tell her or get out.

Seventeen. It say seventeen. The kid starts crying.

I look at Cincer. I have had enough of the lies. The kid isn't done.

Po, you know it say I turn eighteen next month. It say that.

Yes, it does. I fail to see how that makes any difference.

It is OK, Po. I old enough.

I don't think you are old enough, legally. But beside that, you lied. Lying gets you kicked out.

Po, I only lie so you will agree to meet me. I must lie about my age or the website not allow me on it. So the lie, it required. But if I put eighteen, there are perverts, Po. I not want one of them. They say, if you put a little bit older, the perverts leave you alone. My mother, she just try to protect me so you will see me. That why she lie. Po, this is true. I never lie again. Never!

I can see from Cincer's face that she is buying this. Maybe that is true, but you were rude to me the first text. I don't like rudeness either.

Po. When you say come to you and not meet my mother I think, Oh, no! Maybe you a pervert! Maybe I make a mistake. Best to not meet you. ... Nay²⁰ not know what I do! But she see me crying after I tell you I not meet you. She say, tell me everything. I do. I show her your page and your messages. She tell me I am a foolish girl. You are a good man. Nay say no man wants to meet family unless he likes the girl. We talk and talk. She think I am too

²⁰ Short for Nanay. Pronounced NI. (A hard I)

young but I tell her, Nay what my life to be? I want better. Finally, she say it probably too late, you already meet another, but send you a message, say I sorry. I do that. But wala²¹! Then I get a text from Nelia. I so happy! Nay know if she tell you seventeen you will say not to come. So she lie for me. Please, I promise, I never lie again!

I have three gals. None are as young as you. We have sex together. Do you understand what that means?

Yes, I meet the other two but, really? Really, sex all together? All the girls together?

Are you saying I lie like you?

No! No! I not think you lie! Sorry! I truly sorry. I not mean to say you lie! Oh my God! Please no!

I may not be a bad man. I may not be a pervert. Still, my life with my three is a different type of life. You really want sex with my three girls and me?

The kid turns to Cincer and says, Ate²², you be good to me? Not hurt me? I be good, I promise.

Cincer just smiles at the kid. I'm not sure she really knows how to respond. I didn't lie, but I may have made it wilder than it is. Still, the kid didn't say no, so how do you parse that without testing it? There's no sense asking her if she knows how different our ages are. She knows.

I've only one more thing I need to confront her with. And then, if that doesn't shake the tree a bit, I think I may push the female-female sex bit a little harder. Words are one thing. Deeds are another. I'm not sure how Cincer will deal with it, but I might as well do all I can to get the kid to back out. Then none of my gals will be criticizing me later. The kid's explanation was enough to sway Cincer, and that is not a good sign.

Lorie, downstairs your mother is waiting to see if I'll take her too. Did you know that?

²¹ Nothing. Tagalog

²² This is a term for older sister or older respected female. Pronounced ah-TA (A hard second A. The first one is soft.)

The kid's eyes get really big. I don't think she had any idea. *My gals tell me she is pretty. What happens if I take you and your mother? We all have sex together, remember?*

You wouldn't!

Oh, yes, I would. If I accept you, I'll probably need to accept your mother, because of your age. So are you really ready for that?

Ate, is Sir just trying to scare me?

Friend, maybe it a little of both. Yes, he hope you will say you not want this. I know that is true. But it also true what will happen. It true that we all in the same bed having sex at the same time. So that is true. This not what you really want so, Ira, think you need to make the decision to go. If you not, I think he will take you... and your mother because he say you too young! So it best you be honest. I know this not what you think it like. Best you go home with your mother now. If you stay, you know what it like with us.

Ate, if I not rude, would Sir be different now?

Some yes, some no. Your mother not be here then, correct? So that is different. It be Nelia after you, but she would have joined us. But, when Ira learn your age and your mother not here to say you can join with her, I think you will not join. No way he allow without your mother I think. But maybe not allow because of the lie.

Po, may I ask some questions?

Yes.

What my life like if I stay with you?

I'm looking to buy a home here. We will settle down. I guess you would go to school or work. It would be up to you.

How I pay for school?

If it isn't too much, I would have paid for it.

Excuse me, Ira. Let me answer. I know the cost of things here and your finances. Friend, Ira will pay for your education. No problem with that.

Oh, my God! Really?

Cincer gives her the eyebrows.

So, my life will be better. My future better. Po, will you give me children?

Do you want that?

Oh! Yes! Of course, yes! Ate, don't you want, Sir's children?

Yes, friend, but we have not spoken about it yet.

Oh, I sorry!

Cincer smiles, *It OK.*

So I get educated, children, and love? Po, will you love me?

Yes, I would have, Lorie, if you were good, and honest, I would have loved you. But you have lied over and over. Why should I even agree to be with you?

Because I never lie again? Because I be good?

Cincer is trying to get my attention and, when I turn to her, she comes to me, leans in to my ear and says, *Allow this.*

Oh Jeez. Fuck. I turn back to the kid. *The next time you lie, I'll kick you out and I think that will be soon enough.*

No more lies! Not one. I swear this true! Po, I will do the sex with all. It is only the body and if all love, then it good I think. Po ... I think if you tell Nay she have sex with me, she will not stay! I hope! Please allow me without Nay, Po. ... And then the kid giggles. When we do the sex? I need to prove it now?

No, Lorie, not now, but maybe you will kiss Cincer good so she knows you mean to love her too.

Lorie gets up from where she is sitting and goes right to Cincer, who stands up too. Lorie is on her toes, but does kiss Cincer well and good on the lips. Cincer, being the good soldier that she is and knowing that I want to push the kid as far as possible, slips a tongue into Lorie's lips ... and I'll be damned; the kid goes for it and reciprocates with her own tongue.

OK, Lorie, I'll accept you, provisionally. But I have yet to meet with your mother. If there are any lies, or problems, it will be the end. Depending on how things go with your mother, if you are good and honest, you may be here permanently. If she doesn't stay and really is OK with you being mine, I'll allow it. ... Cincer is going to put you alone in another room while all of us meet with her. She may well leave, but she may not. That is just the risk you will have to accept. If she is as pretty and as nice as my gals' think she is, and if she agrees to how we do things here, I may accept her too, and then ... if you stay ... you will be having sex with your own mother. ... Cincer, please take her to the other room and come right back.

I text Bim.

*You and Nelia bring Lillian to my room.
Both of you and Cincer will stay with me
while I am with her. Bring her now.*

OK

Cincer returns to the room before the other three arrive.

Lillian is a very attractive gal. There's no question about that. She is no taller than her daughter though they really don't look alike. Everyone sits, though Cincer and I are on the bed. There are only two easy chairs and one desk chair.

It's my show, and the gals aren't talking.

Lillian, my three tell me you are very good looking. You are. And they tell me they like you. I'm glad they do. But first, I've a problem with you. I think Cincer may know what my problem is, but my other two do not and they look a little panicked.

You lied to us yesterday. Lying gets you excluded.

Nelia blurts out, *How?*

I give Nelia a cold look and she shuts up.

Now Lillian, would you care to explain to the others here what I already know?

Po, it was a harmless thing. It was just so you not reject my daughter.

There's no such thing as a harmless lie, Lillian. I do not tolerate any lying.

Yes, Po. Po, it is different here. These things are done. I not know your rules. I sorry I tell you my child is nineteen when she not.

Bim gasps. Nelia shouts, *How old?*

Seventeen, friend. She seventeen. She be eighteen next month and then you know we always talk about what comes next. So it ... The woman starts crying. I have no idea what she means about the next year.

Cincer sees my confusion and says, *Ira, when we are asked how old we are, it is common in our culture to say what we will turn next, not what we have already turned. Lillian is saying that since Lorie will turn eighteen next month, it wasn't a very big lie because next month the coming birthday would be nineteen.*

Thank you for the explanation, but it's still a lie and Lillian knew it. I get a nod of acknowledgment from Cincer.

Lillian, you did not know my rule, and given Cincer's explanation, I'll not tell you to leave because of it, but there must never be another lie. Not one. Do you understand?

Yes, Po.

Now it occurs to me that you don't know how we as a group function. I went over this with your daughter earlier and she knows, and, because of it, she hopes you will not join us. Cincer was there when I told her. Cincer, did I tell her daughter anything that was not absolutely true?

Friend, Ira only told true things to Lorie.

As Bim and Nelia were not with us, they don't know what I'm about to tell you. I do not know if it will embarrass them but they are to say nothing while I tell you, regardless of how embarrassing it is or for any other reason. So do not turn to them. You may turn to Cincer if you need to do so. Am I clear?

Yes, Po.

We, the three of us, and now it'll be the four of us, with Lorie ... in sexual matters, we are all together. We are all on the bed having sex with each other at the same time. If you stay, you will not just be with me alone. You will be with me and the others in this room plus your own daughter. That will be true even when my cock is in your cunt. Do I make myself completely clear?

Lillian does look at Cincer and Cincer bless her heart speaks up and says, *This is completely true and if my friends here do not tell you the same thing they would be lying. Since they do not lie, they will agree with me. I know Ira say they to be silent, but Ira, allow them to say this is true.*

OK.

Both Bim and Nelia tell Lillian it's not only true but we were all together last night, swapping positions as the evening progressed. They didn't explain what that meant, and so they gave nothing away.

Po, I not know this. I see why my daughter hope I leave now. Will she leave if I stay?

Probably not. I suspect she will stay if you permit it.

Yes, I will permit her to stay, but I am OK with what you say. When we do this? I like women. For me this is good.

Just when you think you have a winning hand, someone has a better one. How the fuck was I to know that Lillian likes sex with women? Is that why she has been without a guy and, if she is that way, why the fuck does she want on my bus?

Huh, OK, so let's see if I can throw her off her game a bit.

Of course, you will also carry my children, if you are still having your periods. Are you?

Yes. I still have them. Really? You will give me children?

We are going to have sex. I'm going to put cum inside you. What do you think?

I think I will be very lucky.

So you want to have sex with women and you want to have my children? Is that what you are saying?

Yes!

Are you ready to have sex with your daughter?

You really mean that?

You talk big. But are you really ready to join us? That is really what my question is about.

Yes, I do that. I am ready.

This has gone way too far.

I was sure as I could be that the woman would eventually come to her senses and say this guy is a fucking madman and she would leave. The problem with bluffing is that there are times your bluff gets called. This is one of those times.

I have no idea if this will be a fucking disaster and someone will run away screaming, if the gals I have now will turn on me, or if no one turns away, no one screams and my life becomes a porn show.

If it was nuts before, what is it now? I'm just a normal guy. I'm no sex freak. I'm no pedophile. I never did anything kinky in my entire life. Nothing! Man alive, I never did anything with more than one woman before I came to these islands. I never was with any female more than a couple of years younger than me. If I have sex with Lorie, the difference is forty-nine years.

That alone is crazy. But if her mother has sex with her too? How do I even categorize that? Is there still a way I can stop this train?

Well there's one other matter that I haven't mentioned. These three gals must be willing to take you on as a lover. If they don't want you, then you can't stay. They may have thought I would get rid of you, so no reason to not be nice to you. But now, it's on them. They all have to be willing for you to eat their cunts and for them to eat yours. ... If for any reason, they don't think it will work with you, then you can't stay. Since I don't want to embarrass my gals by having a vote in front of you, I'll leave you in this room and meet with them privately. If there's just one no vote, then you can't stay. But if all vote for you to stay, you will have sex with all them and your daughter tonight. Do you understand?

Yes, Po. You respect your partners and they are not to be forced. I respect that. I will wait here, as you say.

I get up and walk towards the door. My three follow me out into the hallway. I walk them down a ways, close to the stairwell.

OK, all I have to do is go back and tell her that one of you voted no. Unless you as a group tell me to keep her, she goes. So I don't need to hear 'I not want that.' All I need is for you as a group to not tell me I must keep her. Am I clear?

I get eyebrows.

Now I'll give you five minutes without me here to decide. Is that enough?

I get eyebrows again.

Will one of you give me the key to the other room? I'll talk with Lorie. Come get me when you are ready if it's before five minutes. Otherwise, I'll come out here.

Key in hand, I enter the room Lorie is in.

Lorie, are you OK?

Yes, Po. OK. What you decide about Nay?

It isn't decided yet. It will be in a few minutes.

How?

I'll tell you later. ... Look, Lorie, I'm almost fifty years older than you. You have done the math, right?

Yes, Po. I know.

I'm old enough to be your grandfather.

My grandfather, he is dead. Not alive and handsome like you, Po.

You're very sweet. It's hard not to smile at this sort of non-sequitur. Tell me, have you had sex many times? I may not be as good. I'm so old.

Po! I never have sex. You will be my first! So how I know?

Oh, fuck. The other gals were not virgins. Of that I'm sure. I would like to just hold you for a couple of minutes and then I need to go back out. Is that OK with you?

I do want to hold her. I want to hold her as a man holds a child and not a sexual partner. Will she even have a clue about what my heart is telling me, if she accepts my arms now?

Yes, Po. It is nice you ask. I will like it.

I approach her, put my arms around this... child... and bring her to me. She comes willingly. OK, so she will be legal in a month. OK, I know that somewhere it says here in the Philippines this is legal now, but it isn't back home. Back home we call this jailbait. I'm holding jailbait and the jailbait is trying to kiss me. Oh, shit, I'm going to kiss her back. And then reality hits me. Forget kissing, I'm going to be nuts deep in her probably tonight.

But... now I need to go find my gals. Five minutes are up.

OK, there was no knock on the door. I take that to mean there's no affirmative demand that she stays. Do I understand that right?

Each looks at the others. There's no a word spoken... and then Cincer, *We decide, Ira, she stays. We sure.*

Bim, you agree?

Oo.

Nelia, you agree?

Yes.

You know I am going to make her and her daughter go down on each of you and on each other, right? If she or the daughter can't, she still has to leave. You three understand this? I really don't think this is smart.

Ira, we understand, we think maybe you angry. We know you want them to leave. That why you do this. But if this is so important to them, then they should stay with us. We will be OK. I was the one to do this. I texted Lorie and then Lillian. I know what you think. We all know. We are sure.

Cincer, if we start this, you are going to be eating Bim's cunt and Nelia's cunt. You know darned well, this is not what our life has been like together. I never asked you to do anything like this. Are you really ready for this change in our life together?

I get eyebrows.

Same with you Bim and you Nelia? You ready to have sex with each other?

More eyebrows.

OK. Cincer go get Lorie and bring her to my room. The rest of us will go there right now.

God damn, I was sure these gals would say 'no way' to this. Why didn't they? Everything I know of how the world spins tells me that this result isn't just unlikely, it's damned close to never going to happen. So why has it happened?

Do I really want to make the mother go down on the daughter? Hell no, I don't. Nor do I want the daughter to go down on the

mother. But that might just be the very last way I can get them to leave without having my gals give me trouble later. And why are they so ready to have sex with each other?

Yes, this is taking things to the extreme, but Lillian will want to go down on my gals, so it's not so far from the mark.

We have reassembled in my room, all six of us. All are standing. Once again, all are waiting on me to speak.

Lorie, your mother insists she wants to stay. ... Based on what you know already, you know what that will mean for you. Your mother knows and she says she is ready to have sex with you. ... Before we go farther, I'm giving you a chance, here, as you look right at your mother, to say, no, you don't want that. I don't want you or anyone here to say they were forced to have sex with someone they not want to. ... But if you say it's OK, you and your mother will have sex in front of the rest of us. At that point, we will all know, no one lied to get in the door and then changed their story. Neither of you have been truthful in the process of getting here. But now there must only be truth.

That last bit takes my gals a bit by surprise. They had not put together that I'm not sure they are not still scamming us.

Mother and daughter are not standing next to one another. Nelia and Bim are between them, but as they are not in a straight line, they can turn and look at each other, and that is what they do. If this afternoon has been weird for my gals and something of a trial for me, it's hard to know how out of any reality it has been for these two. I feel incredibly sorry for them and, at the same time, I'm pissed off as they scammed, lied just to get here.

Nay, you say this?

Lillian raised her eyebrows.

Lorie looks at me. *Po, I know the good things that will happen for me if I with you. What things are for my nanay if she stay?*

I don't know. I don't know about your lives. I have offered her nothing. I only told her that there's sex here with everyone participating. She says she wants that. But like I said, I offered her nothing. Ask her.

Nay, that true?

She gets raised eyebrows.

Po, I want to stay with you. If Nay wants sex with me, she is my Nay. I say I not tell her no. If she wants this, we do it. I not go against Nay!

OK, so for a second, in your mind, circle back to Cincer's first impression of Lorie. She was dead on. She was exactly right in every particular, except for the fact that the mother would want to climb aboard on the back of the daughter's ass. I look at Cincer and can't help but smile. I think she knows why, because she rolls her eyes.

OK, then, this is the time and place. So that the two of you don't feel even more embarrassed and awkward, we will all undress. And with that, I start unbuttoning my shirt, and my three gals get the clue and begin disrobing.

Seeing that, Lillian is not far behind and, slowly, Lorie starts to remove her clothing, once she is seeing naked bodies on both sides of her.

The bed is king-sized and, though six is more than can sleep on it, we can all fit on it now as we arrange ourselves. I pull Bim and Cincer close to me. I really don't want to make this harder than it is on Lorie. Lillian may be just fine with it, but I really doubt Lorie is. Are we going to screw up the kid's head?

Cincer has taken hold of my limp package. I'm far from excited. It feels creepy to me. But if this is going to be how the gals roll from now on, we might as well all get used to it.

Bim has a hand on my chest and is nibbling on my neck. It all feels good; I'm liking both Bim's attentions and Cincer's. I'm not wanting to stare at Lorie and Lillian, but it's hard not to see them as they are pretty much center stage. Lillian has moved Lorie into position.

I say only one thing. *Do not break her hymen. That is mine, Lillian. Are we clear on that?*

Lillian turns to look at me, gives me her eyebrows and dives face first into Lorie's cunt. I suspect the most surprised person on the bed is Lorie. This kid may have never had any sexual stimulation from anyone in her life. And now... yeh, and now her mother is munching on her cunt. Go fucking figure.

All the while, Cincer's attentions to my manhood have been effective. She has me fully erect. I think she expects to climb aboard, but I have another idea.

I grab a pillow. Moving behind Lillian and pulling her hips up, I slide the pillow under her hips before spreading the gal's legs and pushing in to the woman's cunt as she eats her daughter. As I fuck the mother, the daughter is looking right at me. Nothing could be more depraved. And yet, all I can think about is fucking the daughter as she eats out her mother.

How does a normal guy like me become a monster like I am now?

I was normal. I'm sure of it. And yet, what am I now? Clearly, this is far from normal as my cock is sawing in and out of this woman, with her secretions dripping from my cock. I feel both the woman I'm in and the anticipation of the girl to follow. No, this is far from normal.

My gals have attached themselves to parts of us: to me, to Lillian and to Lorie. If there was any question in the minds of mother or daughter about my claim that we engage in sex together, this will end the doubt.

We've been at this a while. I've not cum and I'm not sure if Lillian has either. I suspect Lorie has had enough of having her cunt munched on.

Before I have Lorie go down on her mother, I decide it's time to take the girl's virginity. I pull out of Lillian, and her off her daughter. Sliding up on Lorie, I give her a kiss before telling her, *Sweetheart, I'm going to take your virginity now.*

The girl only smiles, nothing else. My cock is still wet with Lillian's secretions and Lorie is wet from Lillian's mouth. I place my cock where it needs to be and push in firmly. *Aray!*²³ *Aray!*

It's OK. The pain will be gone soon and you will never feel the pain again. It's what happens when you lose your virginity. It'll be replaced with good feelings from now on for the rest of your life.

Nelia and Cincer attach to Lorie, each sucking on a tit. Bim is being eaten out by Lillian and, in the process, gives me a wink. I'm not sure what to make of that.

I slowly start up again, pushing deeper into Lorie, pulling back and pushing in again. *You OK now?*

Yes, Po. It good now.

It must be, as I start feeling the warmth of lubrication from Lorie and the results of it, as my cock is bathed. I'm now able to move in and out without the possibility of rubbing her raw. I continue on. Lorie seems perfectly happy to be under me as the moments turn into minutes and the minutes go on and on.

She is a good partner. Her youthful body accepts all I offer and is seemingly happy to receive it. I've no intention of stopping until I cum and so we fuck on and on for a good long while. The presence of others with us is a distraction enough that it takes a long time before cum finally enters Lorie. She knows it when it does. Her eyes get really big, and what comes out of her mouth is, *Po?*

I push my two gals out of the way and, though I'm becoming increasingly limp and still in Lorie, I kiss the girl with as much meaning as my lips can convey. She puts her arms around my head; her lips responding in a clear and cheerful manner to my kiss. Lorie has been taken and is happy in that fact.

I break the kiss after savoring it a good long time and pull my head back, my cock having long ago slipped out of its home. *Now my sweet Lorie, it's time you eat your mother out and let her know she is just*

²³ Ouch in Tagalog

another cunt you will eat. You're not hers anymore. You're mine now and will never be hers again.

Yes, Po. I understand.

We rearrange ourselves on the bed and in a very workmanlike fashion. With coaching from Cincer, Lorie goes about the task of giving Lillian a good munching. Lillian is having a fine time of it, though none of my gals are helping her along. Instead, Bim and Cincer are massaging and stroking Lorie.

Nelia has settled in my arms and we are wrestling with our tongues.

As things proceed, I think I hear Lillian getting off good twice, after which I call an end to the event. It's time for showers and a late supper here in the hotel restaurant.

Getting ready takes far longer than I want, but then, these are five females, so what was I thinking? Not a one of them is willing to just throw something on and troop downstairs for a meal. Each has to primp, even if there's no makeup to be applied. So, even with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, by the time we are in the restaurant, it's pretty late.

I'm having a hard time believing that what happened actually did happen. But one of the results is that Lorie refuses to leave my side. If I go three inches one way, so does she. When we sit for supper, she is next to me.

There are six of us at a table for six, and that causes me to say, possibly louder than needed, *Let me be very clear. No one else can join. We're done adding. We may be fewer should some leave, but there mustn't be any additions.*

Ira! Who you think is leaving?

No one, Bim. No one. I just mean that no matter what happens, no one new.

There's quiet for maybe half a minute but Nelia wants to know, *Where we live?*

While I have given some thought to the matter, I have no answer.

I don't know. I don't even know which island. I have been reading about the legal issues involved with my getting a house. It seems to be pretty complicated. I need to get us settled temporarily. Then we need to figure out where permanent will be. But before permanent really happens, I need to go back to the States and sell my stuff. ... There are lots of things to do.

Lillian takes a bite of what I'm told is something called Crispy Pata²⁴ and asks, *Sir Ira, what you looking for to have?*

I want to build a house, but I gather I can't own the land. So I'm not sure how to go about it, though I guess it's possible. I read about homes with RFO certificates. I really don't want the RFO for a visa, though I guess it can be used for that. There are many things that need to be resolved.

Sir, I have land. Not in the city. It farmland. Mostly coconut. We not live there. Our place is in Tigbauan, but it not far from the farm. No need to buy land I think. I dream of a house there!

That sounds nice, Lillian, but it's an hour and a half from a mall to your place and I'm afraid at least two of my gals will find that too far. I'm also thinking that makes it a long drive to MickeyD's.

I not!

I was not referring to you, Nelia. I was referring to Bim and Cincer.

Cincer appears to be wanting to speak but not wanting to cause a problem. I've no idea what she's struggling with, but Bim jumps in and offers, *If we have a car, maybe it OK if we not that close, Ira.*

Yes! Yes! I think the same thing! See, I was right! Cincer was not wanting to be against Bim, but Bim set her free. Ira, maybe you get a car?

²⁴ Crispy pata is a dish consisting of deep fried pig knuckles served with a soy-vinegar dip.

We'll probably need a couple of vehicles if we are that far out of town. So yes, we'd have a car.

Then Bim and me OK with the land of Lillian. Ate, are you rich?

Ha! No. It land I inherit. Not good to sell. No big value. But nice I think. I think if I not have to work selling things at my sari-sari²⁵, then that place be nice to live.

OK, Ate, you say nice. You have electric there? Water? If Ira build there, there must be electric service. Cincer is using her brain. I would never have thought to have asked.

Electric there. No problem with that. Water need a well. There a well there but not good for a house I think, so need to drill another one.

It safe there? Bim and me, we live in Manila. We not know Panay.

Yes, it safe, but maybe kawatan²⁶. Yes, always robbers I think, no matter where.

OK, tomorrow I'll see about renting a car and we'll take a look at this property.

I'm a little apprehensive about building a house on her land. What if she just kicks me off it for some damned reason? I'll talk to Cincer about it later. She may have the best mind for business here. There's no reason to discuss it now.

Po, when you leave us?

Lorie, I'm not sure yet. We have to get things at least temporarily set up before I go back home. I've no idea where or how long that will take before I can go.

We not all go back to our homes when you leave?

Cincer and Bim can't. They have quit their jobs to be with me. So even if three of you went back, they can't. I'm not sure about Nelia. We haven't talked about it. ... Nelia, what would be your situation while I'm gone?

²⁵ A small storefront at a private house. The buying public stands outside and does business through a grillwork. Selling little sachets of items, soaps, candies, home sundries and notions, soda, and cigarettes by the stick.

²⁶ Robbers, thieves.

Maybe I stay with Cincer and Bim if you allow.

Yes, that's OK with me.

So while I'm gone I need to find a place for these three, and maybe myself. When I come back, I need to find a place for all of us close to where we will build a house.

Po, how long you gone?

I'm not sure, Lorie, but not too long. ... Maybe a few months.

I scared you not return.

I understand, but there's really no choice. I must go back to sell things, like my home and my cars. I've got to do some banking while I'm there and get set up to live here full time.

Ri²⁷! He will be back. I sure. He loves them. And she points to my other three gals. Sir Ira, I think I know a place you can rent that big enough for all until the house is built. It a church before but no more. Many rooms. This close to my sari-sari.

OK, well, we can take a look at it. I'm not committing to anything yet. It's happening too fast and I need time to consider what other options I have.

Lillian thinks I have spanked her because she immediately apologizes, which isn't necessary. I don't know how to settle her down as the gal looks to be frantic, thinking that I'm angry with her. That I'm not, is seemingly irrelevant. Bim takes another approach.

Ate, stop it! Ira is not angry. He not upset. He only say it too soon for him to decide such an important thing! Behave! You not do anything wrong. Ira say we will look at what you tell us. He only say it too soon for a decision. You not understand this man. He like ideas. He listen to ideas. But he will make up his own mind.

Lillian is still quietly caterwauling, if such a thing is possible. At the very least she seems inconsolable. It gets bad enough that Cincer

²⁷ Lillian's nickname for Lorie. Pronounced RE (a hard E sound).

slaps the older woman and tells her to knock it off. That seems to do the trick.

I'm not sure what the problem really is. She's the only one of these gals who actually owns something and maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's a good reason why she really should not be part of us.

What if I hadn't said 'enough, no more gals' and flew us to Leyte next? Would she fall apart? Maybe I ought to reconsider that.

Have any of you gals ever been to Leyte?

None have. Cincer may be picking up on what I'm pondering.

Ira, isn't that where some of the other girls live?

Yeh, it is.

Maybe some of them own property too?

Maybe, and maybe I just need to look at all our options.

And now Lillian is coming undone again. I bet she can't leave her land. Maybe that's how I strip her off from us. Nothing that I have tried so far has gotten her to back out. Since Lorie will turn eighteen in a month, I guess keeping her with us is possible without her mother. Is the land issue the way to jettison her?

Bim is looking confused, as is Nelia. They know I said just a few minutes ago that no one is to be added.

Lorie is totally lost. She's confused about her mother's behavior and not my comments.

Bim knows that Cincer sees things she doesn't. I can see Bim looking at Cincer, trying to divine what her friend has realized. But, Cincer has no intention of saying anything more at present.

The rest of our dinner is completed in awkward quiet.

Afterward, I speak to the hotel concierge and ask help in arranging for a rental car. I gather it'll be done and we'll have a car tomorrow. We'll take Lillian back to their place and I'll look

around. I've committed to nothing and have taken nothing off the table.

The gals are going back to the rooms and I decide I want a drink or two at the bar. I'll join them later. Lillian, Lorie, Bim and Nelia head back to the rooms, though Cincer joins me at the bar.

Cincer has a SanMig light. The barman asks me and I tell him, *I'll have a scotch on the rocks with a beer back.* The guy looks at me and is totally lost. So I explain in more simple terms what I want and he goes about getting it. As the guy moves away, Cincer asks, *That really a common thing?*

You mean asking for a beer back?

Yes, that what I wonder.

I can walk into any bar in the US and say that. All would understand, so yes, it's common there. Maybe not here.

About Leyte. You see the need to change your decision because of Lillian?

Yes.

Maybe someone really have land there? Or maybe just other options?

Maybe, but I really don't expect anyone to have other land. Yes, I want other options. I'm pretty sure I don't want to be that dependent on Lillian, especially should she own the land I build on. ... In any case, I'm not sure I should be making any long term decision without thinking it through a bit more. Plus, I wonder ... if Lillian is so attached to her land, by going to Leyte, might she decide to leave us? So, all those things are in my mind. Using the possibility of other gals, whom I have already contacted, makes the Leyte option more understandable.

Cincer was all for keeping Lillian until the gal pitched the weird fit at dinner. Now, I suspect she isn't as sure that Lillian is right for us. I'm pretty sure that the woman isn't. It isn't that she is too old. She's not. I just don't see her as good for us in a number of other ways. This land thing is only the most visible of those things.

Bringing Lillian home tomorrow may allow me to say goodbye to her without a lot of trauma. She may even come to understand on her own that she isn't a good fit for us.



The trip to Tigbauan is long, and the sense of being well and truly outside the city is damned clear. The town of Tigbauan has a population of about sixty thousand, but you sure wouldn't know it by being here. This is not a place I want to call home. Lillian's land is closer to the town of Leon than her own, and it's hillier. I guess it's possible but I'm not sold on this option.

I'm not saying an absolute no, but it sure would not be my first choice. I would not mind being on the sea, or up in the hills. But I want to be closer to town and this is far from town. The town of Tigbauan is on a flat plain... far from sea, mountain and city. It's totally uninteresting to me, and too far from where we would be building to make any sense.

The abandoned church, which has had a secondary life as a home, is far from suitable without a lot of work; I don't want to put that much work into it.

I'm not being rude, but Lillian can see based on my concerns, that this really isn't working. She doesn't want to shut down the sari-sari and, in point of fact, needs to get back to it right now.

She is looking at it, and then at me, and back at it. I'm not saying a word. I'm allowing her to listen to her own thoughts. Finally I hear, *Sir Ira, take Lorie and look at Leyte. Maybe you stay there. Maybe you come back here to me. OK?*

Yes, I think that is a good plan, but Lillian, even if we are to settle on the coconut farm, there would need to be a change in ownership to provide safety for the other gals and me.

She looks at me, nods, and says, *Maybe Leyte is better, I think.*

Yes, maybe.

The ride back to the Marriott is light two gals, as Lillian and Lorie have stayed behind. Lorie technically remains with us, but I don't want to fly with her until her eighteenth birthday. I have read that travelling with a gal underage can get you arrested for human trafficking. In a month that will no longer be an issue.



Let this be a lesson to me. Never say never unless I want to eat my words. I have to reacquire my account on the website and send new messages that I have decided to come to Tacloban on Leyte and want to know if they are still interested in meeting.

Two of the four are not interested, but one still is and one has not answered. I let the two that remain know that I'm looking to settle somewhere in the Philippines. So being with me will not get them to the USA. I further let them know that I'm not going to get married. Are they still interested?

One is. But the other hasn't answered the first message yet. However, I'm being messaged by more gals. I don't respond to anyone else, but I keep those messages as possible future contacts. And that makes no sense as I tell myself, I don't want to add anyone else. I do want to see if the city of Tacloban and the islands of Leyte and Samar, in general, offer a place to settle down.

There are no direct flights from Iloilo to Tacloban. One can get there by air with a stop in either Cebu or Manila, and it's also possible to take a ferry. However, the ferry is a full day plus. The cost of the fare via Manila is too high. Tomorrow we fly there via Philippines Airlines, using Cebu as the stopover.



There's an interesting selection of hotels in Tacloban, and I choose the Leyte Park Hotel, deciding to splurge on the Pool Villa which is really pricy, at ten thousand pesos a night. Still, even five adults can stay here, which would allow me to add another gal right now, and there's a private pool²⁸. At the Marriot I had to pay for two

²⁸ Later, after Typhoon Yolanda, the Pool Villa will no longer even be there. But such is life.

rooms and so, even though this room is pricier, it ends up being cheaper.

The place is right on Cancabato Bay which is on the north end of Tacloban. We get to the hotel late in the afternoon, and I tell the gals, *Let's have some fun*, as I take in the reality of the beauty of our selection.

The next thing I do is text Lorie regarding where we are, and telling her I look forward to being with her again as soon as possible.

She texts back.

OK, if I fly alone?

She makes a good point. As she is not with me, why can't she fly? It won't set off any red flags unless she is flying on my credit card. Cincer tells me I can send her money to pay for the ticket via a cash service that works like Western Union.

Yes! Cincer tells me to send you the cash via Cebuana²⁹ for the airfare. Will that work for you?

Yes. OK, Gud³⁰.

I provide cash to Cincer and she gets the rest worked through with Lorie. My jailbait gal will get here in two days.

Tonight I'll meet Shaniel. I know very little about her. The website shows a pretty gal but I'm not clear on much else. The description is too vague. After the issue with Lorie and her real age, I decide to not trust what I read. Vagueness in details may well indicate problems.

Cincer and Nelia are waiting for the sun to go down a bit before going out to the pool for a dip. I gather swimming when the sun is up, and strong, is a bad idea. I noticed that back in Iloilo at the hotel pool there. It's the same issue here.

²⁹ While the Cebuana has many services, the Pera Padala or money remittance is what is referenced here.

³⁰ Taglish for Good.

Bim has decided it's time to get a manicure and pedicure. The hotel information booklet notes that it's available as an in-room service. She calls and someone's on the way, right now. The cost will be under a buck fifty.

I'm looking at real estate values locally, via my tablet, but I can't find much useful information. I'll need to find another way to get the skinny on this. With little else pressing at the moment, I decide to check on my email and I'm glad I do.

There are issues, a pile of them, I need to resolve regarding the house. Some extra damage has been discovered that was likely caused by the failed heater. The insurance adjuster needs to be notified before I can have the contractor fix it.

The real estate agent I contacted back home has made a walk-through of the house and tells me that before I sell it, I need to replace all the carpeting, not just the part that was water damaged, fix some dripping faucets, and paint the house!

I email the realtor back and ask, why paint it when the new owners might want a different color? I can either ask the buyer what color they want me to paint it or discount it based on the value of the painting work. As to carpet, I'm of the same opinion on that, up to a point, as carpets come in all levels of quality. I can either offset for what some new carpet would have cost me at the time of sale or carpet it, and then the future owner is stuck with what I decide. Does that second option make sense to anyone? Really?

I do contact the plumber and ask him to fix the drippy faucets. I'm so over wanting to be back in that house that I can't wait to see it sold.

I had emailed my neighbor to handle some issues for me regarding bills. He is letting me know that it's done. I contact my bank to see if I can get the gump made whole before I return.

My friend with the Filipina wife wants to know what's up. I only tell him that I'm traveling around the Philippines and enjoying my time here. He doesn't need to know the rest of this.

There's an email from a friend just wanting to touch base with me.
I'm in the middle of answering him when my cellphone buzzes.

I had given Shaniel my number. It's she who is texting me.

I at the front desk. Where are you?

I am coming. Wait!

Fuck. I wasn't supposed to see her until tomorrow. I'm really not ready.

When I get to the reception area I don't see her. There's a couple chatting with the person at the front desk. There's a guy a fixing hinge on a door. There's a child, I assume waiting on the couple at the front desk. No Shaniel.

I text her.

Where are you?

I hear a cellphone chime. It isn't mine. It's the child's. She looks at the message, looks around the room, and walks up to me.

It me. I here. Why you not see me?

Oh, fuck. I know what I want to ask, but I don't want to ask it here. No, not in front of all those in this room. I don't say a word but indicate that we should leave.

Luckily she follows me out of the building and I immediately ask.
How old are you?

Eighteen?

Show me your picture ID.

I not have.

How old are you really. Tell the truth.

Sixteen.

She doesn't look sixteen to me. Yes, sure, I can't really judge age in younger folk any more. It's even harder for me when judging age in Asians well at all, but she just looks very young. It's not the small breasts. Clearly that would describe most Filipinas.

What's your nickname?

I'm learning that many do not really use their given name. Princess is Bim. Lorie is Ri. And Shaniel sounds too long to be used here.

Ann. I am Ann.

OK, Ann. I'm visiting with some friends in my rooms. Maybe you and they can talk a bit. Come with me.

I'm not ready to say anything else to the kid and don't want to explain anything about what I'm doing here to a child. I take her to the Villa which is an entire building that constitutes our rooms.

Bim, Cincer, Nelia, this is Ann. The one who contacted me as Shaniel. She claims she is sixteen. That is way too young but I'm not even believing that is the real number. I have told her nothing other than you are friends visiting, which is very true. Please figure out why she is here.

There appears to be a negotiation related to language. Bim and Cincer are Tagalog speakers. Nelia is an Ilonggo speaker but she is able to speak a reasonable amount of Tagalog. Ann is a Visayan speaker. She doesn't know Ilonggo and has little Tagalog.³¹ In the end, it's determined that the only language they have in common is English! Go fucking figure!

So instead of their conversation being meaningless to my ears, I'm hearing everything. Will wonders never cease?

Cincer takes the role as interrogator.

Friend, what year is your birthday?

1989, Ate.

What month and day?

February fourteen.

³¹ All Filipino dialects share the same sentence structure. Sometimes it is VSO (Verb, Subject, Object) and sometimes it is VOS, but it is never SVO. Some of the one hundred 'dialects' are subsets of a family of a language. Other dialects are actually different languages that share some root words but little else. Of these totally different families of languages, Tagalog, the Visayan family based on Cebuano, and Ilonggo (technically called Hiligaynon) are perfect examples. They are truly different languages. Someone from Bohol will speak Boholano which is part of the Visayan family which is based on Cebuano and so a Cebuano speaker can communicate with a Boholano speaker. But here we have a problem. Visayan speakers aren't comfortable with Tagalog or Ilonggo. Please note that even though Visayan is a broader category than Cebuano, the terms are often used interchangeably.

So, you will be sixteen next February?

Yes!

That why you tell Sir you are sixteen?

Yes, of course.

You in school?

No.

What your last grade?

Six.

You stop school at age twelve?

Yes, Ate³². The high school too far away and no way to go.

You live in the province³³?

Yes! You know this?

A little I guess. That all.

Why you want to be with Sir Ira?

My friends all get married.

In the province?

Yes.

All married at your age.

Of course, yes.

But you not want to marry?

I not want to live in the province. I want different. I hope maybe the city. I hope a nice foreign man, so life better? You know?

³² Elder sister, surrogate female parent, older respected female. Pronounced with two syllables: ah-TEH

³³ Here the meaning is 'rural.' Not living in a city.

A foreign man cannot marry you. It not legal. You too young. You too young to be legally married to anyone in the Philippines. Yes, tribal marriage, but not true legal marriage.

Oh! I not know. We all marry at this age.

Yes, I understand.

No one say it wrong.

So long as you are in the province and the boy is from the province, they do not argue, but it truly is not legal.

Oh.

Do many men where you live have more than one wife.

Yes, of course! Why you ask that? This is marriage.

How many wives does your father have?

Two, but he is poor. He not afford more.

So, if a man has money, it OK for four or five wives?

Wow, he must be rich! The wives very lucky I think! Is Sir rich like that? You his wives?

Yes. We are his wives in the same way of your province. Not legal by Philippine law, but in truth we are. Friend, do you want this man to take you as a wife, too?

If he a good man, I will be very lucky I think.

I have heard all of this. Cincer looks at me and I haven't a fucking clue what that look means. Bim has tears in her eyes. I don't know what that means, either.

Nelia is just smiling. I turn to her and ask, *Is this the same as where you live in Passi City?*

No, but I know places where it that way. I see it before. Nothing new.

I decide to ask Ann a question.

Do your mother and father know where you are?

Yes.

Do they know that you have come to see me?

No. How they know that?

How long have you been in Tacloban?

Maybe five months I think. I tell my parents I come here. I not like the province.

And what did they say?

They say it my decision.

Have you spoken with them since you left the province?

No.

When do you have to go back?

Excuse? Why I go back?

I see. Never mind. ... How do you get money to live? To get food?

I get numbers for jueteng³⁴. I a tigkolekta³⁵.

What's that?

Cincer explains that Ann must be working for what I think she is describing as a bookie.

Where do you live?

It a bed spacer³⁶.

I'm lost again. I have no idea what a bed spacer is. I have Bim and Cincer explain all of this to me. It turns out that while the kid isn't living on the street, it's damned close to it. Which gets me thinking.

How did you get on the website?

³⁴ Jueteng is an illegal numbers game played in the Philippines.

³⁵ A bet collector in Cebuano. In Tagalog it might be kubrador or kolektor ng pusta

³⁶ Literally a rented bed in a rented room with other renters.

My employer, he run the Jueteng, she³⁷ has a computer. She allow me to use it when I not busy. It a good deal. I not have money for the Internet cafes.

I feel lost. Truly lost. I think back to Bim's '*you not understand our culture.*'

I truly don't understand this world. It's so radically different from my world that wrong and right are losing their meanings. Ann fundamentally left home to avoid a bad marriage and a bad life, with hopes for a better marriage and more opportunities. In the meantime she is working for an illegal numbers operator and is living hand to mouth.

What she wants is to, at fifteen years of age, be one of my wives, leave her rough existence behind her and live a good safe life. In her context... in the context of this place, Ann and my gals seem to think it makes sense.

In my world of life in the US, it makes no sense at all. It's a combination of juvenile delinquency, child abuse, and statutory rape.

How do I deal with this? If I stay here, will I get in trouble? I surely need to consider that. But even if I don't, how do I make sense of this for myself, outside of both contexts: the Philippines and the USA?

I'm lost in thought when Cincer asks, possibly a little more forcefully than needed.

Ira, can we order some food please?

What, now? And then I realize why she is asking. *Oh, yes. Of course. Please. Get lots of food. I am sure we are all hungry.*

I'm thinking of my friend with the Filipina wife. How much will she simply infer by what I'm not saying? How much will she put together when I sell the house and move here? And if she does put

³⁷ Confusion of pronouns he/she is common as the languages of the Philippines do not have gender specific personal pronouns.

it together, how much of that will she share with her husband, my friend?

Will she dare? What if what she tells him, communicates that he got the raw end of a potentially better deal? What would be the way she sees it? What if she tells him I'm busy sexually exploiting Filipinas and that is why I'm staying here?

What will it matter what folks think of me when I'm gone? I would like them to think I'm a good guy. But will it really matter?

Ignoring the potential underage stuff, I'll have what amounts to four wives including Lorie as she turns eighteen. That alone would have repercussions back home. But it won't be home any more. So why am I caring about that?

It's been twenty plus years since I was married and there are no children to worry about. So is it just my ego and my vanity? My need to have people think well of me? If I'm gone from there, there won't even be a burial plot for people to spit on if I disgust them. Why should I even be a topic for them if I'm well and truly gone?

It won't affect my pension, my 401K, or my social security checks. Why is it bothering me?

I think it's because I'm no different from them, back home. In my head it just seems wrong. That's why. It seems wrong, but as Bim said to me, '*you not understand our culture.*' I really don't, and that keeps on tripping me up. I need to find a way to let go of my cultural beliefs. They don't work here and are just getting in everyone's way.

I have a headache. All this is stressing me out.

There are bedrooms in this villa. I go into one, pull the drapes, turn off the lights and lie down. ... Someone is kissing my neck and ear. Huh, I think I have been sleeping.

Ira, Sir, come eat. There is food here.

I don't think Nelia is comfortable enough yet to just call me Ira. It's cute. We make love and yet, 'Sir' is still there.

OK. ...Wait a sec... Before we leave the room. What do you think I should do about Ann?

What you mean?

She's too young, right?

I not think this. It OK. I think she is yours now. Jesus brings you to us for this! And, Ira, Sir, we like her.

You all like her? You all think she should stay? Really? You discussed this? How?

We talk in Tagalog. She hear it but not know it. So we can discuss privately, see?

Yes, I get it. And you really all think I should accept her?

We do... Ira, Sir, she know about land we can get. A good price not too far from the city, but far enough that the cost not bad. The owner, he needs to sell it bad. If you have the cash, we can get five hectares at low price! She also know a house close to it we can rent. She can show us tomorrow if you like.

Wait! How did we go from, I should accept her because the kid is needing a safe place to land, which is where I thought we were, to this? How does she know all this?

Nelia laughs. It the jueteng. She learn much when she do this. Yes she need us but she know a lot too.

I see. OK, I guess it is time to eat.

Once out of the room and among the rest of them, I tell Bim that I think it'll take me a while to really accept all the differences between my culture and this one, but as of now, I guess I need to accept the way they see things. Following which, I turn to Ann and tell her, *Here are the rules. You must never lie to me. You must never be sneaky. You may disagree with me, but that means you must tell me what you think and why you think it. If you can agree to those things, I accept you as a wife.*

There's complete silence. No one is speaking. Cincer and Bim seem happy with what I have said, if I'm reading facial expressions correctly, but I'm not getting any audible feedback. And then... *Sir, come eat. Your other wives get lots of food! There is so much!* So says my new wife, Ann.

Ann has a Nokia phone. I gather it is a necessary tool of her trade as a bet collector. She uses it to text her employer. She's quitting.

The border between dinner and afterward is elusive. There are platters of food just lying about. Every once in a while someone eats something. Oh, we all eat a fair amount to begin with, but the rest of the evening, grazing continues.

There are a number of beds in the villa. No one seems to be interested in sleeping, but I feel exhausted, probably more emotionally than anything else. And so I slip into a bedroom, shed my clothing and get under the sheets. Let the others just figure out what they want to do.

I don't even shower and I probably needed to. But I don't have any intention of being with anyone tonight. I know I'll need to take the child who has joined us, but for the life of me, as far as I care, it can wait. Let her just settle in. Is she a pity addition? I certainly haven't added her because I want to jump her bones.

As I drift off, I'm thinking about Lorie. She was my little one until today. She was the one who didn't want to leave my side. She is the one who figured out how to get here sooner than the month's moratorium I had imposed. I didn't want her. She had lied to me. She had been rude. And yet, she crept deep into my heart. How do these things happen? If I were to be with anyone tonight, I would choose Lorie, who isn't even here.

I must have been sleeping pretty soundly for a while, but I'm awake now because there's a hand on my cock. I can see well enough to see who it is.

It's little Ann. I suspect the others sent her in to make sure the deal is sealed before I have second thoughts.

I have, most assuredly, had those second, as well as third thoughts, but I'm going to take her, regardless of those thoughts.

I pull Ann up and bring her to my lips for a kiss. She is willing and the kiss I receive is enthusiastic. I need to slow her down a bit, but she takes the hint and the rest is more than good.

There isn't much to her. She is small in all ways. It seems to be true of all of them with the only real exception being Nelia. These gals are as far from the tall Nordic beauties I lusted over as it's possible to get, and yet they're real pretty. I'm not having any problem on that score.

Ann is naked and my hands roam over her body. It's small and taut, muscle and sinew. No fat, no extra anything. Everything she has is there for a purpose. When I feel her butt I'm feeling the muscles beneath the skin. Running a hand over her back is to feel muscles tight over ribs. Her breasts are small and incredibly firm. She may well need a bra later on in this life, but now, there's no need.

Her cunt is moist. Not wet, and most assuredly not gushing. But there's dampness as I part her lower lips and slide a finger up and finally over her clit. She gasps a small gasp and clutches tight to me. I do it again and she squeals in delight. Again, and this time she grunts, hunching her pelvis forward, greedy for that which is being felt and wanting more of it.

She is on her back and I put my cock where it needs to be. I push in. There's an obstruction. I push harder and get through. She hasn't made a sound. I pull back and push in again, a bit harder. She grunts and throws her arms over my neck, pulling me in for a kiss. I like this kiss and hang in there with it while pulling my cock back out a bit and pushing in again.

Her mouth is hard against mine. It's almost teeth against teeth, Ann is pushing so hard. I move my mouth a bit and kiss her cheek as I pull back and plunge in again. I hear her whisper, *Do me gud husband. Do me, do me... my husband now.*

My mouth is pulled away from Ann. I gather her legs up in my arms, and push them back onto her shoulders as I pound her with all that is in me. An almost sixty-six-year-old fucking a fifteen-year-old. It's nuts, and right now I don't care. Her dream was for something just like this, and now she has her dream in real terms. No one made her do this.

My cock has never been in a more welcome home than it is in now. We fuck for how long? I surely do not know. It seems like a long time, but maybe it isn't. I know Ann is happy. I know my cock is getting the message my balls are sending.

And then, without warning from me, cum fills the recesses of her cunt and we are done.

Could I have been a better, more inventive lover? Sure. Do I know how? Maybe only on the margins. Does it matter to Ann?

No.

I have rented a car. Once again it's time for a road trip. This one promises to be shorter. We are headed over a bridge to the island of Samar and the town of Santa Rita. It's only a little more than half an hour from Tacloban. This is where Ann says there's a parcel of land for sale. It's also where there's a house she says we can rent.

Cincer is concerned that my white face will bump up the prices. If I like what I see, she wants to be the public face of the dickering and, in truth, since I can't own the land anyway, she might as well do it. I think that, if I put the land in equal parts in all their names with non-severability, then my investment will be safe and I can build the house in my name on land in theirs.

I have discussed this with Cincer and she agrees that it protects me, though she is concerned about what might happen when I die. We talk about it a bit, and I think she is OK with it now.

Of course, we may well have the cart before the horse. The land may be unacceptable and the price may be too high.

It turns out to be a nice drive. Though Santa Rita is pretty rural, it's close enough to Tacloban that the distance is no problem. You do have to cross a bridge between the islands, but that doesn't seem to be a problem, either.

The land that Ann has told us about looks interesting. It's mostly flat country covered with coconut trees, but the land in question has some small hills on it and it's not far off AH26, the national highway. It's a bit far back from the water, but nothing here is really that far from it. I guess it's OK. For what it's worth, I like it a lot more than the land Lillian has. It'll require a purchase, but I won't have to deal with Lillian and that ownership issue there.

I ask Ann to get a firm price. She texts the owner. He gives her a number which evidently she does not like. Without asking me she is texting back.

What are you doing? I need to know what he is asking!

Sir, I tell him, do not be stupid. The person I find have money. No need to find loan money. This will be cash and fast. I tell him to give me a good price or the person buy other place.

What other place?

Ann laughs. She is aware of another person who has land for sale. She doesn't think the other place is as good as it's farther away from Tacloban, but this guy needs to feel the pressure. Ann, at fifteen, is a first class saleswoman.

He comes back with a price she is willing to share with me. It turns out I can buy five hectares of land for twelve thousand dollars or what amounts to one thousand dollars per acre. Five hectares is more than twelve acres. I'll have to wire some cash from my savings account and that means I need to get an account with a bank here, but I tell Ann to agree and set it up for a sale in twelve days' time. *And tell him, if he backs out or wants more I'll not argue, I'll just deal with the other guy.*

Ann smiles and finalizes it, as much as is possible, for now.

Next we look at the house to rent. It's a red roofed, two-story right on the highway. The concrete structure is not painted and it's set back a bit from the street. Fancy it isn't, but it's about as big a place as there is in the hamlet.

It isn't too close to Tacloban and I'm sure the gals would be unhappy, but as I'm promising vehicles, they are pacified.

Still, Bim asks more than once why I not get a place in Tacloban itself.

I am confused.

You mean instead of buying twelve hectares? Or as a temporary place while we build? Look as to long term, the bottom line is that the cost per square meter in the town is actually pretty high, (yes, land here is sold by the square meter), and I want to spread out a bit. As to temporary housing, it is best to be close to where we will be building.

These gals are used to tiny accommodations. I'm not. I don't figure a little more than half an hour from the city by car is a big deal. It takes longer to get anywhere in Manila just a few blocks away.

It's just that they have also never had their own vehicles. Rather, they have always depended on the public transportation of jeepneys, buses, vans, tricycles³⁸ and pedicabs³⁹. Public transport is not all that expensive and, in all truth, if you are in the city proper, far less expensive than having your own transport, but when it rains you will get wet. There's the reality of limited ability to carry purchases back home, as well as the waiting for and flagging down a ride. The luxury of controlling your own destiny in these small ways is something they have never had reason to appreciate. It was outside of their economic reality.

We will be out of town but not too far; plus, we will have our own car. That second piece will have to wait until I return. So if I get this place, they will be mostly afoot until I return, unless... That has me hemming and hawing about renting this place. I haven't explained my concerns and, Nelia is pushing to know why. I suspect Cincer and Bim would prefer to be in Tacloban until I return, for the very reason that I'm hesitating.

Why? You want to know why? You might as well ask Cincer and Bim! I won't have a vehicle here until I return from the States and this is too far from Tacloban without that! That's why.

Ira, you are wealthy! Why you not buy a motorcycle? That all we need I think.

First off, I had not considered a motorbike. Second, looking around, most of these bikes here have pretty small engines. Some are barely more than 100cc. But can they even operate a bike? Will Cincer and Bim think that is enough for them to compensate for being far from the city?

How much does a motorcycle cost?

Cincer is laughing.

³⁸ Motorcycles in a steel cab. Three wheeled.

³⁹ Same as the tricycles but using bicycles instead of motorcycles.

Have I said something funny?

Ira, you are paying ten thousand pesos a night for the Villa, correct?

Yes.

So how many night we stay there?

Three or four I guess.

So three or four nights, that the cost of a motorcycle, maybe. Depending.

Oh.

See why I laugh?

Can you operate a bike?

Of course, yes!

So, if I get a couple of motorbikes, you will be OK with staying here?

You get two? Really?

Well, there will be five of you, so yes. I have seen three riding on a single bike, here. So, two bikes carries five, right?

You can afford this now?

Yes, if I can use my credit card.

Cincer and Ann handle the transaction related to renting the house, while I wait in the car. Two hours later we have a year's lease and the keys to the place. I finally get a chance to look inside. It's pretty iffy when it comes to the bathroom. That will need immediate remediation. We will need some beds. But, if we don't stay at the villa for the last two days, the gals assure me I can afford the beds and the repairs to the bathroom plus have money left over. However, they point out, I should return the rental car right away, and get the bikes right now.

Ann knows a plumber. We agree to meet him in Tacloban in an hour. Miracles of miracles, we do. That would never happen in Kennewick.

The meeting place is at a store that sells plumbing fixtures. We need a new toilet, a new faucet for a sink and a small on-demand water-heater for the shower.

All the parts are purchased, and the plumber, owning his own tricycle, puts all the stuff in, and on the top of, it. Ann will travel back with him and get him into the house.

There are places all over Tacloban that sell motorcycles. I check with the front desk at the hotel for a reference to a reliable place and am given two names. While at the hotel, I let them know we will be checking out tomorrow. Our four days at the villa is reduced to two.

We find new Honda and Yamaha bikes with under 130cc engines for sale. Both models sell for under thirty-five thousand pesos. I buy two Hondas for a total cost in dollars of well under a thousand, four hundred.

I'm legal to ride a bike here for 90 days with my US license, but the gals aren't legal. They tell me not to worry. It'll be easy for each of them to get a student license and the salesman, selling us the bikes, tells me that the gals are right. As to licenses for the bikes, the bikes will get temporary tags. It seems the real plates will take a while.

The last thing we need to do is get some beds. I'm not sure how to deal with this but Cincer seems to know the answer. She asks the salesman at the bike shop for directions to Mandaue Foam.

Foam? Cincer?

You will see. Bim and me, we ride the bikes back to the hotel. You come with the car. Then we all go to Mandaue.

Nelia rides shotgun with me back to the hotel where we reassemble. Not trusting the directions Cincer got, as we are now coming from a different direction, I ask the front desk for the directions to this foam place. They seem to know about it, commenting that there's nice stuff there. I get directions I can follow.

Mandaue Foam is actually a furniture store! Yes, they sell foam mattresses, and the product is supposed to be really good. It turns out that they also deliver and will set up a bed for a small additional price. I buy two king size beds and two foam mattresses.

We are asked to draw a map of where the house is and they have our cellphone numbers. I was a bit surprised about the request for a map, but am told this is how things are done, not just here, but all over the Philippines. The delivery will be tomorrow afternoon.

Lorie arrives tomorrow morning and the beds later the same day. It's going to be another busy day.

And so, in the span of one day, we have an agreement on some land, a house to live in, vehicles purchased and beds bought. I'm done-in, both physically and emotionally. But tomorrow won't be any less filled, as it includes my need to open a bank account and contact my bank in Kennewick, on top of Lorie's arrival and the Mandaue delivery.

I'm sure there will be other things. Sheets, pillows, cooking pots and utensils. But in the coming days, I hope, it'll all get sorted out. In the meantime, the rental car has been returned, Cincer takes a bike to get Ann from the Santa Rita house and I cool off in our pool. I might as well. This is the last night here and I haven't tried it out yet.

Poor Lorie won't even get but a few brief moments in this luxury place before we decamp to Santa Rita.



The next day is a whirlwind again. I do succeed in opening a bank account at PNB⁴⁰. We pick up Lorie at the airport via motorcycle. Bim and Nelia go shopping for things that we absolutely need at the house by tonight.

With Ann's guidance, and yes, I'm aware that fifteen-year-olds don't normally have the sagacity that this one does, I'm guided to an attorney to work up the sale of the property. It is to my gals,

⁴⁰ Philippine National Bank

who will each own a share of the undivided parcel, placed in escrow. The shares can only be redeemed from the escrow if a no-interest loan to me is repaid. So they own the land, but it carries a loan for the full cash price. There's no due date on the loan, but the land cannot be sold unless the loan is paid off six months earlier than the proposed sale. It's a legal sleight-of-hand that cures my problem of building on land I don't own.

Tonight, I will call my bank.



I have to wait to go to bed tonight. Calling my bank in Kennewick means a late night here. They don't open until 9AM and that makes it midnight local time.

The call isn't cheap, but there's no choice. The quality of the call via the cellphone is also not close to good, as the call drops twice before I can complete my business with the bank. But there was no choice about that.

I have the SWIFT code (PNBMPHMM) for the bank here and my account number. That plus my name on the account, as the bank here has it, is all the bank in the US needs to send the money. I'm told the cash will be here within three banking days. As a weekend falls in the middle, it'll take up to five days. Still, that's within the ten days we gave the seller of the property.

It was a hassle, but it is done and the money is on the way.



For what it's worth, I suspect that there are no more depths to Ann that we will be plumbing other than locating a good electrician. While I need to find an architect, Ann doesn't have that type of knowledge. Finding one will have to wait until I sell my house in the States. That can only happen once I get back there.

But my trip back won't be right away. I'll need to extend my visa. I gather I can do that in Tacloban and the extension is good for sixty days. As this is only my eleventh day in the Philippines, I don't need to extend it just yet.

Once we move into the Santa Rita house (and the beds arrive there later today), I really just need to settle in with my gals for a bit. So far, it has been an exercise in figuring out what I'm doing here, figuring out who will be by my side, and where I'll settle. All of it has happened with lightning speed, but it's now done.

I have five gals. Three adults, one almost an adult and one not yet close to that. What they will do with their time beyond just being my gals is unknown to me and probably unknown to them.

In a way, Cincer will have the biggest adjustment unless she gets a bookkeeping job in Tacloban. She might do just that, though we haven't discussed it.

The others didn't have anything close to careers. Bim had a job, but it wasn't exactly a career. Lorie helped at her mother's sari-sari and nothing else. I guess we could run a sari-sari store but I really don't want to. She said she was interested in going back to school, but I'm getting the sense that her interest may be cooling now. Nelia's background remains undiscussed. It's something I need to learn. And little Ann was a numbers runner. What she will do has yet to be determined.

One thing that becomes clear during the day is that until I get a car, SUV, or Pickup, we need one more bike. I suspect we will need another one anyway. There are six of us. We already have a situation today where we have a need for trips to places that can't happen until one of the bikes returns. I put that on the list for tomorrow.

Tonight we will not eat at the Santa Rita house, but at a restaurant. We will sleep there, but cooking will have to wait a day.

The last time I shared a dinner meal with Lorie, her mother was pitching fits and freaking out. This time her mother is out of the picture and dinner is a quiet affair. Ann has decided that while Lorie is closer to her age, Nelia is more her type of gal. I can only wonder why.

Lorie has resumed her position next to me. She stays glued to my side at all times. She is right behind me on the bike as we ride back

to the house. Bim hangs on behind Lorie. Cincer operates the other bike with Ann and then Nelia on the very back.

The evening's doings, including sleeping arrangements, have not been organized by anyone. We're just hanging out at the house, talking and relaxing. I think there's some confusion as to what will happen as I announce I'm going to bed.

Immediately Lorie announces she will come with me and without a moment's pause asks Bim to join us. Bim is surprised but jumps right up. I'm intrigued.

Intrigued or not, I need a shower and, thanks to the plumber, we have a working shower able to deliver hot water. Once I'm out of the bathroom, the gals go in and do whatever they need to do.

I find that the Mandaue foam mattress is pretty damned comfortable. But, as I'm finding common in the Philippines, the height of the bed frame it sits on is way too low, as are chairs, couches, tables. I'll look for a way to get the bed higher, though I'm not sure how to do it. But it's not an issue for tonight.

There's a fan running, and I guess I'll be OK with it. An air conditioner may need to be added to the list of things to get.

I'm in bed, but far from asleep, when Bim and Lorie join me. Bim snuggles in and says, *I think you are in for a surprise.*

Why?

Wait!

Bim gets a pillow and puts it high on the headboard before putting her back against it. Next, Lorie grabs another pillow and gets belly down with the pillow under her own hips. Her head is bobbing over Bim's cunt.

Po, do me this way. OK?

So it wasn't only the mother who wants to eat pussy, or maybe this is what Lorie thinks is standard fare in this house. I really don't have a clue. All I know is that Bim thinks this is more than a little humorous and that Lorie's cunt seems to be dripping with need.

I gather there's no expectation of foreplay, and take my position before sliding into Lorie's cunt. I'm not sure how to express my amazement as this incredibly young gal sticks her ass up and asks me to fuck her. That this should even be happening is the stuff of fantasy.

The sense of delight as my manhood sinks deep into the hot wet cavity defies my ability to express. I feel all sorts of things I probably shouldn't feel. There is a feeling of possession, of owning her; a feeling of unchecked power; that I can have anything I want as I wear her body on my cock.

She must know that she might be now, or some other day soon enough become, pregnant. I haven't been wearing a condom and she's not on birth control. Still, she presents her ass and says fuck me knowing that. Where's the difference between being a partner and being owned by your own need for security?

That thought is rattling around in my head as I stroke her cunt, over and over again, as she eats out Bim in a dedicated fashion. Bim is having orgasms. That much is clear. Lorie is having her own moments of that same sensation. I know it as her cunt clamps down hard, and my cock is showered with her fluids each time. I had not been really ramped up at the start, and so the fucking goes on and on.

Lorie gives up on eating Bim, much to Bim's relief, as Bim can't take much more of Lorie's mouth and tongue. I keep on pounding Lorie. Bim slides down and takes one of Lorie's tits in her mouth, biting on the nipple.

Lorie goes damned close to catatonic, and I, finally, cum deep in her.

I'm done for the night, and well aware that before Lorie turns eighteen, she may be pregnant.

The morning brings another hectic day. First marked off the list is the purchase of another bike. The one I get has more engine and it'll be mine. It's not a monster, but at 250cc the Honda CMX250C4 has far more power than the other two and is a far more comfortable ride.

The gals are busy purchasing everything we need for our kitchen. The only really pricy thing, on their list, is a fridge. While at the place we buy it, I also get a small air conditioner for my bedroom. Both will be delivered for the sum of four bucks by the appliance store.

In the process, I learn that they don't call air conditioners by that name. They call them 'aircons.' Fridges are not call fridges, but 'refs.' I guess I caused a few rolled eyes today. It's good to know I can be the comic relief.

I have brought my tablet into Tacloban, as I have no WiFi at the house. We have applied for a wireless WiFi antenna install from Globe Telecom, and I guess we will get it in a few days. In the meantime, I need to be in town here to check my email.

I'm glad I did. The real estate guy says while, theoretically, what I said makes sense, it doesn't work that way in reality. I need to do what he says.

I guess carpet will have to wait until I get back, but I have the contractor arrange to get the house painted the same color. Just a new coat. Nevertheless, I mention the carpet issue to him, and that I'll have to do that when I return.

My friend with the Filipina wife is asking, what has happened? Have I found a gal? When am I coming back? I non-answer him.

My bank has sent me a scan of the transmittal document for the wire transfer.

There is, of course plenty of spam. All the normal spam: penis enlargement; Nigerian funds transfers; hot babes; illegal drugs. There needs to be a way to weed this shit out!

I log back into the dating website to close it down again, but there are two message replies I guess I need to look at first. The gal from here who didn't answer before, has answered now. She wants to meet. The other is from one of the gals who blew me off. She has changed her mind.

I don't tell either of them that I'll meet them. I tell each that I already have some gals living with me here in Santa Rita. I tell them I'm closing this account and give them my phone number, but tell them I'm unlikely to meet with them. Still, if they want to share their numbers with me, I'll keep them in mind.

Following that, I do close the account down.

I'm back in Santa Rita by late afternoon. Cincer, Bim and Nelia are all still in Tacloban. Lorie and Ann are at the house. The aircon has been installed in my bedroom, and I decide to take a hot shower and a nice cool afternoon nap.

Turning on the aircon first, I get my shower and enter back into a now nicely cooled bedroom. Temporary curtains have been hung over the windows, and the room is reasonably darkened. I gather, however, that my nap will have to wait. Ann is in the bed, fully clothed, waiting for me.

Clothed or not, I think I know what she is here for, and while it was not what I was intending, I'm willing to accommodate her. *So, don't you have too much clothing on if you are wanting to join me in bed?*

Po, I OK with that, but Reyna ask to see you now. You want her?

Who?

Reyna. You meet her on the website and give her your cell. She want to meet you.

I don't know which one that is. It's not a name that was used on the site. I told two that I was already living with you gals and wasn't adding any more.

But, duh, you gave your cellphone number so now she want to come.

As I'm not going anywhere right now, why do you have your clothing on?

Because she lives next door! She want to come, Po.

She knows I live here?

Duh! Of course, yes. Everyone here see a white guy move in with some Filipinas and then you tell her you move here with Filipinas. Why she not know?

How old is she?

Why you ask?

Because I think I would know which one she is based on age.

You wrong.

How can you be sure?

She my age. You think the one you message my age?

No, I didn't but that's enough information. She can't come over.

Why that?

Because I don't want to be killed by her mother or father.

Why that? No one kill you.

Why're you so sure?

I talk with her. She live with her sister and her partner. Mother and father, they gone, long time ago.

OK, so her sister and the gal's partner will kill me.

You are crazy. I talk to them. They ask about you. I tell them the truth. There no problem. It OK with them.

Ann, are you going to eat that girl's cunt? Is that girl going to eat Lorie's cunt? Get real! I told her I'm not adding. I did it for a number of reasons. But she needs to be happy to have those things happen to be OK here. You know that. Now I'm either going to fuck you or I'm going to take a nap. Which is it?

Sorry, Po. Ri say same as you. But, Po, she really pretty and really nice.

Ann, there are many good looking Filipinas here, and I am sure there are even more nice ones. That can't be the only things. There are five of you. That really is more than enough.

I go and tell Reyna. She must want to do like Ri say, or you say no.

Ann, I haven't said yes under any circumstances. For now it's no without exceptions. I told her no, and it remains no.

But that not right. OK, if you not message her then why she try to join, but you message her. ... Po, you not angry with me for saying this?

No, I'm not angry for telling me what you think. I need to know it. Look, maybe I'll change my mind, but for now it's no.

OK, OK. I tell her. Not now, and never unless she ready to do like Ri say. OK? That right?

Yes, that is fine.

And with that, I get to take a nap.



How was your day, Ira?

I'm having my first home cooked meal. Nelia was the cook today. The meal is, I'm told, a traditional dish called pakbet⁴¹. They say they didn't make it the normal way because I would not like the taste of something called bagoong. I take them at their word on this. The version Nelia has made uses coconut milk and is delicious.

⁴¹ Pakbet is the contracted form of the Ilocano word pinakebbet and refers to the traditional Filipino recipe of Pinakbet.

It's Bim who asks me the question and I can see she is not the only one looking for a response.

Good! I got a really nice motorcycle this morning. You know you can make the trip to the city in twenty-five minutes?

No! You go too fast, Ira. That dangerous! Go slower, please! It not good if you get hurt.

OK, I'll go slower. ... So with the aircon? And the ref? I'm saying that right? OK? Well, with both of them here plus the new bike, it has been a very good day. ... And whoever put the curtains up in the bedroom, thank you. That was really nice. And on top of all that, I got a Big Mac at MickeyD's. It has been a really good day.

Ira, there is more. I hear from Ri and Ann. What happen?

Nothing happened. Someone else wanted to join us and I said no. That is all. So nothing happened.

But the girl lives right here, right?

OK, so how many other Filipinas will live close to us in the future? Is that a reason to say, OK, you can join?

This is one you message, right?

Yes.

And she want?

Yes, that's what Ann tells me.

Why you say no?

You know why. There has to be an end to adding. There are five of you. That's enough. And that doesn't even cover the fact that she is another one who has lied about her age and she is not comfortable with being with other gals.

You allow the age lying with Ri and Ann. Allow it now. No difference.

Even if I do overlook the age issue, and I really don't want to, the sex issue remains, as does the fact that I really want to be done adding.

All this conversation is taking place as I'm almost wolfing down the pakbet. It's damned good! Well, OK, I wouldn't put it in the same level as a McRib, but I do like it.

Cincer has been silent, allowing Bim to carry the ball, but she offers, *OK, so no new ones who you not contact on the website. This one you have. She is of that group. If she OK with the sex part, maybe you should allow.*

Ann, has she had to quit her job to seek admission?

Po, I not understand.

Bim gets the point and offers, *Ira, she not do anything like that. You know this. You not leave her in worse situation. No one say you do. I agree with Cincer. I think Nelia, and Ri agree too. Ann say she understand the sex thing but think we are being wrong in that.*

How old is she?

Ann say she the same age.

Yes, I know that, but how old is she really, Bim?

Ann say...

Bim!

OK, OK. I find out. Sorry.



Tonight my bed is peopled by Nelia and Cincer. As it is, I have too many companions. The simple fact is that I'm more than fond of each of them. If we add more gals, it's actually unfair to those who are already here, unless I, as a person, am irrelevant to them and the only relevant thing is my money and the security it offers.

There's something to that. I don't have a clue how much. Am I not equally getting the stability of companionship that will endure even if one or two of them turn sour? So in a way, I'm just as mercenary as I think they are. Not completely, on either side of the coin, but some on both.

When it comes to Nelia, for some reason, we have a connection that is unique and outside the mercenary track, but I can't understand what it is. I don't know a thing about her and she has, in her own way, simply offered up nothing. I surely can't figure out the Jesus stuff she comes up with.

Tonight's pairing is the odd couple. Cincer is my most trusted of advisors. She is smart; far smarter than I am, and probably the smartest of us all. That she has thrown her lot in with me is a lucky happenstance. It's not that we have something special. With Cincer, it's more like, both of us sees that we are better together. We are and I never want to lose her. She shines in all she does. But, her heart? Yeh, I'm not sure how much I have her heart in the deepest sense.

Oh, our relationship is more than purely transactional, but how much more I can't tell you.

Like I say, the two are as different from each other in their connection with me as there is with any of the gals.

And yet... there are times in their different ways they argue for the same things. Both of them argued for Lorie and both of them are for this Reyna.

We are just snuggling. The showers are completed. The aircon is on as is the fan. The room is wonderfully comfortable this second night in Santa Rita. We are chatting about how the house is coming together and things we will like to do in the future. Nelia mentions that the stairs here are placed wrong.

Why?

Ira, when the front door open to the stairs, all good luck run out the door!

Buang ka!⁴² Chinnoy⁴³ nonsense!

Hub? What?

⁴² You are foolish.

⁴³ Ethnically a Chinese Filipino.

Ira, why you think Nelia, she is tall. There Chinese in her. That why. The thing about the stairs? That a Chinese idea. It not Filipino.

Nelia, do you have Chinese blood?

I not know.

How much do you know of your family?

Nothing.

What? How can you know nothing?

Orphan, Ira. I am orphan. No parents.

All your life.

Oo.

You lived on an orphanage?

Oo. I pray for someone to adopt me but no one do this. The Sisters say, 'Be patient, Nelia. Jesus have a plan for you. Wait. It will happen. You never know until Jesus send you the path. Then you must follow it. Never doubt Jesus.' So I wait. I wait long time. And then I old enough to leave the orphanage. I do and I not know what I will do. I ask a Sister, maybe I be a Sister too, but she say, she not think this my path. ... Sorry, sorry for telling this. You not want to hear my tale. Sorry. I just not know. Maybe it true I chinnoy. How I know?

No need to apologize! I'm glad you told us. How long after the Sister told you that you have a different path before I see your message to me on the website?

Maybe a year. I send messages, but there are no answers. Not one. So I pray. I say to Jesus, OK, maybe this not my path. If no one answer this next message, I will find a different path. I not say anything different in my message to you. Same as before. You were my last. The one I tell Jesus, it is my last.

I see. Why do you think Jesus wants me to take all of you?

That what Jesus want you to do. He send you to give a path to us who need one. If Reyna want to join, it because she need a path. Ri, she needed a path. I know this and I right! We all need this. Cincer need this. Ask her.

I look at Cincer. She is crying.

You OK?

Oo. Nelia, maybe she is right about Jesus. Maybe I too stupid to see the plan Jesus have for us. Maybe I too hard in my heart to allow Jesus to speak to me, but maybe Jesus not care my heart is hard. Maybe he think I still need this path.

There is deep inside every Filipino, it seems, a deep spiritual world of belief. Oh, we have evangelicals in the US, but this is qualitatively different. It isn't concerned with saving the souls of others. It's the comfort of believing in a loving God, who will in the final tally, take you into his arms. In a way, and maybe I'm pontificating out my ass, it's more like the fervency of rural southern Blacks in the USA and how they see 'mother church.'

As hard-edged as I see Cincer to be, strip the veneer off and there it is.

I gather both of these gals into my arms and hold them tight. They wrap up, in my arms, and in each other's arms. Kisses are distributed equally with Cincer kissing Nelia as often and fervently as kissing me. We are a hot mess. Both gals crying a bit and moaning too.

And then... yeh, and then Nelia says to Cincer, *We must do all for Ira. Jesus give us him. We will show Jesus we understand. We must feed the heart of Ira. He will protect our hearts.* And at that moment, Nelia slides down and takes my manhood in her mouth. It gives one a real appreciation of the benefits of prayer.

Cincer's lips seek mine. The kisses are not soft. Her tongue is deep in my mouth as her tears wet my cheeks. Her hands are in my hair. Her chest heaves and shakes. She is a hot mess.

At the very same time, Nelia has my nuts in a vice with her hand as she works my cock with authority and energy. As the predicate to her application of her mouth on my manhood had not been erotic, I started out completely limp. I'm limp no longer.

No, I'm not limp at all. What I'm needing is more than her mouth. But to do what I want interrupts Cincer. I'm having a fight in my heart about moving the gals around to achieve what I want, when Jesus must have whispered in Nelia's ear, because she disconnects her mouth and mounts me from above.

I'm deep in her hot cunt as she rides me. With Cincer still kissing me, and seemingly pushing her heart through her lips as each moment passes, I'm taken to a place that is pure emotion. Logic has no seat at this table. I feel. I do not think. Intense waves of emotion, of loving, of caring, of needing, and finally of needing to plant seeds overwhelm me. And they wend their way from my nuts to Nelia's cunt via cum.

I have been in the Philippines thirteen days now. Not even two full weeks and look at what has happened. This is October 9th, a Saturday.

My call to my bank in the US was on the morning of the seventh there and midnight between the seventh and the eighth here. That was a Thursday night, Friday morning for me and Thursday morning for them.

The bank says three business days, but I'm not sure how it's counted with the international dateline in the middle. Three days might make it what?

Counting from their Thursday, one day, the next day is Friday, Monday makes two and Tuesday makes three. But if counting from my Friday the third day will be Wednesday. I'm pretty sure that no matter how I figure it, the money will not get here on Monday... except I don't know if SWIFT transfers obey banking days, or if things happen on Saturday and Sunday.

So, it seems to me that there's a possibility that the money just might make it by Monday. I'll check each day, not because it's a crisis now, but I need to know more clearly for later transactions, when I'm transferring a lot of cash.

The gals have taken off, back into Tacloban, for real curtain rods, curtains, towels and more kitchen utensils. I have decided to savor another Big Mac and since I'm going, Lorie decides she needs to come with me.

She doesn't want the Big Mac or the Quarter Pounder, she wants the chicken and rice. I decide to take a taste of the chicken, and uh-huh, it's horrible. She admits that the chicken is better at Jollibee's, but also admits I'll not like their burgers. What can you say, life is like that sometimes.

Sir Ira, what we do about Bim's daughter?

Hub?

Her daughter. She told you about Niana. She tell me that.

OK... and?

What we do?

How do you mean?

When she working she not have a way to have Niana with her, so her parents take her⁴⁴. She send money home every month from her pay to help support her.

So I need to give money to Bim to send to her parents?

Maybe. Maybe, Niana can come? Bim now have a home and a way to care for Niana if you allow.

Did Bim ask you to talk to me about this?

No! No! We girls just talking about it last night in the bedroom. I not know about Niana until then. I ask Bim why she not here. Bim say, no way to do this.

I see. Thank you for telling me.

You not angry?

No. Why would I be angry?

I not know. Just worried.

Hub, OK. Well, Bim was right. Until we settled here, there was no way to have her daughter with us. But now, there probably is. Her child is about six, right?

Yes, she is six. In first grade.

When did the school year start?

June. It almost sembreak⁴⁵ now.

⁴⁴ Once again, this is a 'welcome to the Philippines' lessons in Filipino use of English. It is all too common to find indiscriminate use of pronouns in the same sentence referencing different people. If I was to write this as a native US English speaker, the sentence would read: *Since Bim was working she did not have a way to have Niana with her, so Bim's parents have taken Niana. Bim sent money home every month from her pay to help support her daughter.* Unfortunately this is not how Filipinos speak. So all I can say is, Welcome to the Philippines!

⁴⁵ Means semester break, or midyear of school. Classes typically start the first week of June and end the third week of March.

Which is better? Send money to Bim's folks until the end of the school year, before we bring the daughter here, or bring the child now?

I think it OK if you do it at sembreak.

Is the school calendar the same here as where she is now?

Same everywhere. DepEd⁴⁶ set the schedule. She need a form 138 to transfer. But that not hard. Maybe some money needed. I not know. Principal will give the form after all fees paid. Maybe some fee needed.

OK, I'll speak with Bim about it.

You OK with Niana come here?

Yes.

See, you a good man!



It's Sunday and we are all at home. Much to my surprise not one of them said she wanted to go to church. Things are quiet. That evidently is distressing to them and great for me. I'm having a hard time understanding why they are moping around saying 'It too quiet!'

I have no agenda today. Most stores are closed. We don't have WiFi access here and so there's no way to use my tablet. I guess I could ride into Tacloban for that purpose, but it isn't that important. Whatever the news, it can wait a day.

Bim is hanging a curtain in what I call a living room this morning. They seem to have another name for it.

Bim, let me help. This job requires more than two hands.

Maybe I grow an extra one!

I don't recommend it. It'll be so hard to find clothes that will fit if you do!

Ab! Yes, that is true.

You know, I was thinking, don't you miss your daughter?

⁴⁶ Department of Education is run from Manila and established the calendar, and the curriculum nation-wide.

She pauses and looks at me. I think I see some sadness in her eyes, but maybe I'm imagining it.

Yes, I miss seeing her. Before I see her on my day off. I not see her for three weeks now.

She is in Manila?

No, she with my parents in Mabitac. I take a bus to get there. It a long way from Pasay, more than seventy kilometers.

Bim, you're too low. Raise that up a bit. ... A bit more I think. ... Yes! Perfect. Right there, my love. ... It's too far to take the bus now. I don't like you being so far from your daughter.

Ira! What choice? I not leave you. I not! It OK. My daughter be OK. Her lolo and lola⁴⁷, they are good to her. She be OK. I am sure of this.

I'm sure they are good people, but I think there are better options.

What options? You really going to fly me back to Manila once a week?

Well, maybe once.

You do that? I can see Niana? Truly?

Yes and no. Bring her here. We have room.

You joking? Ira? This not funny.

It's not a joke. Bring your daughter here.

You mean this?

Is there a reason why you don't want to?

What? No! Ira! I can get her?

I think it's for the best. She can go to school here just as well as there, right?

Yes. Yes! But, you not mind having my child here?

Bim, do you really love me?

⁴⁷ Grandfather and Grandmother

Yes, of course. Why you ask that?

Well, if you do, then you are staying with me, right?

Yes... Ira? I not understand. What you saying.

We have a place to live. We will build a home. It may be a home you live in for many, many years. Maybe for long after I die. We are stable and can afford to have your daughter here. What's the reason for not having her here?

When you want me to do this?

Is there a break in the school year that makes the change easier?

Yes, it very soon.

Call your parents and work out the details. We will fly you back to get her. ... Hey, you've let that drop too much! Higher, my love. Yes, that's it.

Ira, you like this color? Cincer think maybe you want a darker color.

It's fine, but Cincer is a smart gal.

Ab, so darker for the bedroom, maybe?

That would be nice.

Good thing I meet you first, she smarter and prettier than me.

But not more loving, Bim. Not more loving.

It OK if we have a party tonight?

What type of party?

Lots of food. The neighbors come. We will have karaoke. It will be fun.

Are you sure it's a smart thing? There won't be a problem with two underage girls?

No problem. Ri not really underage. I not think anyone will complain about Ann. Cincer, me and Nelia are not underage. No one think a problem.

What do we need to do to get ready for a party?

You not do anything. We take care of it. But, you need to sing tonight. It important that you join with us. We will get beer. You want us to get scotch? I think we will go to Tacloban for that, maybe. Most here drink Tanduay, I think.

What's Tanduay?

It rum.

I can drink rum. That will be fine.

Good, then the men, they be happy to drink with you. But, they get drunk. That what the men do. Will you get drunk?

No. I won't drink that much. Thank you for warning me.

Wow, what a good day! I get my daughter and we have a party!



As the day progresses, more people I don't know are in the house. There must be over twelve people in the process of cooking various things. A guy with a tricycle, designed to probably carry pigs and not people, shows up with three cases of a type of beer I have not seen before, called Red Horse. Ann tells me it's preferred to the Pilsen I drink, as the alcohol content is higher. I take that as a warning to be careful.

Huge pots and pans are in evidence. When I say they are large, I can only say that I have never seen such large cooking pots and pans in my life, outside of maybe a school cafeteria. A four quart Dutch oven would look positively diminutive in comparison. Cooking is over charcoal fires and homemade grate affairs made from lengths of rebar welded together.

There are both men and women cooking, though the men are doing their things quite separately from the women. Someone has brought a live goat. Five men hold it, slaughter it, and butcher it. Among other things, it will be the meat for a dish called caldereta.

Sometime mid-afternoon, I notice a girl with Ann who is not cooking. The kid is looking at me and then looking away. I don't

approach Ann and her friend, but later ask Lorie if this Reyna will be here too.

You saw her. She with Ann.

I thought so. Well, she's a neighbor, so it was to be expected.

Good. Thank you for not being angry.

Why be angry? No one has done anything wrong. At least I don't think anyone has. I never told anyone to not speak to Reyna. I assume that since she is a real neighbor, we would see her from time to time. ... Do you have parties like this where you lived?

Of course. It is how we Filipinos live. We like the parties. Maybe next time we will have lechon. I hope.

Lechon?

A pig. It is so good. I love lechon.

How many people will be here tonight?

Hard to know. It be exciting.

This party is for no reason other than we have moved here?

Yes, that true.

Wow, I have never had such a big party at my home in the USA ever.

Not even for your birthday?

No! Never. And for my birthday I don't think I have had a party since I was a child.

Really? No one gives you birthday parties?

Really.

Ira, when is your birthday?

This coming Thursday.

What?! Your birthday this week?

Yes. It'll be my sixty-sixth.

Oh my God! Do anyone know?

You mean here?

Yes!

No, I don't think anyone does, why?

Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! CINCER, CINCER!

And off she runs. What the fuck has just happened?

Fifteen minutes later I have every one of my gals in front of me. Their faces are stern. Bim seems to be the spokesperson.

Why you not tell us this your birthday?

Why would I?

What you mean? It important!

Why?

Do not be difficult! Ira, why you not tell us? If we know, we get lechon! This is important. Please give me some money. I need to go shopping right now.

How much you need?

Six thousand pesos. Maybe I not use most, but I not sure. But I need it right now.

Six thousand pesos is a tad more than one hundred dollars. I figure what the fuck. I hand it over.

Bim takes it, announces that Ann will go with her and off they go while the others continue to huddle by me. Cincer is maybe the only one not ticked off. But that doesn't mean all is OK with her.

Ira, it really true that, in your country, adults not celebrate birthdays?

It's different. Sometimes there will be a small party, but mostly you just have a cake, or go out to a nice dinner at a restaurant. It's not normally a big deal and most folks don't celebrate at all.

If there a party, how many people?

Three, four? I don't know. Not too many.

Always?

Sincer, nothing is always. There will be exceptions. But there never would be a party the size that we are having today. Of that I'm sure.

It different here. We celebrate birthdays here. If we know your birthday this Thursday, we make a very big party. There be three or four cakes, a big lechon, platters and platters of lumpia, tuna kinilaw, fried chicken, chopsuey, sweet and sour fish, cassava cakes, maja blanca, biko, leche flan, and brandy for all the men. Not just the rum. You not know, but your birthday very important to us. We will have a big party for you every year. This true, even after you die, we will celebrate your birthday. Oh, Ira, you just don't know how important this is. It important we honor you every year!

They are absolutely right. I have not a fucking clue. If it had just been one or two of them so totally bent out of shape, maybe I would have discounted it. I'm not discounting it now. This appears to be a very serious issue.

I'm sorry. I had no idea. None. But if there's a failure, it's not yours, it's mine for not letting you know. Please don't let this spoil the party we will be having today. It'll be possibly the biggest party I have ever had in my life, in my own home. For me this party is amazing already. Please allow me to kiss each one of you, and thank you for your caring.

That's what happens and all seem to be mollified. While it hardly seems to be the basis for a crisis to me, they seem to feel differently. Once again, I'm faced with the reality that I really do not know their culture.

Bim and Ann return three hours later, I don't actually see their return, but hear their voices. They seem excited. I gather the word that it's my birthday is circulating as a couple of people have come up to ask me exactly how old I'll be, before telling me I look so much younger. It makes me laugh, to myself. I look every bit the sixty-six years I have traveled. Some of it has been over hard road.

The doings for the party have been going on all day, and the actual party seems to be beginning about six this evening. It starts with a prayer before the meal. An older woman I have yet to meet has been asked to give the prayer.

In my heart of hearts, I hope she doesn't have a clue as to what goes on in this house. The gal is taking her assignment very seriously and she isn't short about it. However, as the prayer is in Visayan, of all of my household, only Ann has a clue as to what is being said.

In my way of thinking, a prayer that last more than twenty seconds is way too long. This one lasts over ten minutes. There's no way I'll ever learn all what was said. But I swear, I'm pretty sure I heard the name Reyna mentioned. I'll ask Ann later.

As I look around at all the makeshift tables of food I see something that just can't be. It's wrapped up in cardboard and it's pretty large. At one end it looks like cloven hooves and at the other end, can that really be the head of a pig? Is this lechon? If so, how in God's name did they get it in such a short time?

The mystery, if it can be called a mystery is resolved soon enough as the cardboard is removed. It's apparently a whole spit roasted pig. Nothing is missing from the nose to the tail. It's all there.

The next thing that happens is a crush to grab a chunk of the skin which comes off adhering to pieces of white fat in the fingers of the attackers.

Someone shouts something and all stand back. Ann approaches the animal and snaps a large chunk of skin with the adhering fat off a section close to the cheek, puts in on a plate and brings it to me. All seem to wait as I'm handed the plate. Gingerly with two fingers I pick up the hard, thin and greasy slab and bite off a piece. It's wonderful. Truly great. I must be smiling. I take another bite and say something totally foolish. *Wow, this is great!*

It seems like I have rewarded all with vast dregs of happiness. There's whooping and laughing, and once again, a crush to get to the pig and its crisp, crunchy delectable skin.

The Ark

The pig is cut up into chunks of meat with a machete by one of the men. I gather this is a task relegated to the men, who then hand large trays of meat to women, who then arrange the same on serving platters and distribute those to the diners. There are bowls of banana ketchup which the pork is dipped in, as well as gray-green sauce from bottles with the label Mang Tomas. There are three birthday cakes on display with my name on each. None of the cakes are being touched.

There are platters of lumpia⁴⁸, bowls of what I'm told is goat caldereta⁴⁹, a noodle dish I'm told is called bihon⁵⁰. There's a huge bowl of a macaroni salad with canned fruit cocktail in it. It's incredibly sweet. There's fried chicken. And there are bowls and bowls of white rice. The eating goes on for the better part of two hours as more and more folk appear. No one is leaving. But as the new ones start to eat, those who came earlier, move on to after dinner activities.

The party has now been going on for hours.

The women are drinking sweet red wine over ice. The men are getting smashed on Red Horse beer over ice, and on bottle upon liter bottle of Tanduay Dark Rhum. For some reason there's an H in rum here. Once again, even in small things, I don't know the culture. There are tables of card players.

There are those who are busy with the karaoke. I have been induced to sing a few songs. There's a catalog listing the songs available along with a number to input into the machine to bring the song up. I find a couple of Billy Joel songs I can sing. Having completed that, I'm off the hook for further songs.

I know where three of my gals are, but don't have a clue where Ann or Lorie are. I'm also aware that I haven't seen Reyna since

⁴⁸ The Philippine version of a spring roll.

⁴⁹ A stew of sorts.

⁵⁰ Thin stringy noodles that I am told is made from the starch of mung beans.

this afternoon, not that I want to see her again, but only that I have seen everyone else numerous times.

Nelia is bringing more ice out to the men who are drinking the Red Horse. I gather it's common here to drink beer over ice, something I would never consider doing. I ask her where Ann is as I want to ask her about the prayer and what she might remember about what was said.

Nelia gives me an odd smile and suggests I look in the back bedroom upstairs.

I'm immediately concerned that Ann has been drinking and maybe is ill or hurting; I make the trip up the stairs and down the hall as quickly as my sixty-six-year-old legs allow. Opening the door tells me far more than I want to know.

I now know where Ann, Lorie and Reyna are. They are all before me, naked and engaging in sex play. Reyna's mouth is attached to Ann's cunt. Lorie's mouth is attached to Reyna's cunt. Ann looks at me and simply says, *She's ready for you now, Po.*

This is beyond a weird place for a conversation, but what the fuck. *Ann, during the prayer, I heard Reyna's name. What was said?*

Tita⁵¹ Desa say we celebrate many things! Your birthday and Reyna joining our family. Po, she truly ready now. Please join us.

Ann how old is Reyna?

I told you!

No you didn't. Not really. What is her birth day, month and year?

I not know exact!

Reyna, stop eating Ann's cunt and tell me.

The kid does stop. Her cheeks awash with Ann's fluids. She looks scared. *January 28, Po.*

⁵¹ Aunt (in this case only reflecting a far older female).

What is the year?

She really doesn't want to tell me. That much is clear.

If you don't tell me, you can't stay. It's that simple.

1990, Po.

You're fourteen?

Fifteen soon, Po.

Fifteen in three and a half months, fourteen now.

Ira!

What, Ri?

All know she to join you. All know her age. Everyone happy for you and for her. Why you make a problem?

And once again I hear loud and clear that I don't understand the culture. ... I don't. Clearly, I don't. I stop trying to understand. I stop trying to fit all this into a morality that is evidently meaningless here.

I undress.

Reyna is cute. Visually there's no problem with her. But what about the rest?

Reyna, have you been told about the rules?

Here she is, naked, cunt juices remain on her cheeks as she answers, *Po... I not to lie, ever. I not to tell you what to do. I may tell you, you are wrong, but I must tell you why I think that. I to be good to the others in the family. That what you mean?*

Yes, that will work.

It's time I just threw out the rule book, as it has no value here. I'm about to have sex with someone who, by that rule book, no matter how I might try to interpret it, I clearly shouldn't. But here and now it seems I clearly should. What good is a rule book when none of the rules make sense anymore and, in fact, contradict reality?

Once on the bed, I grab Reyna's small body and drag her by her hips, putting her under me.

Her skin is brown. Her hair is a thick mat of black. Her eyes are bright, even in the dim light of the bedroom. And even in this light it's clear that there's no makeup on her. Her body is as honest as it can be. Her breasts, what there are of them, mound gently, up to very dark brown nipples. Her cunt is shaved. I have no idea if it was done in preparation for today's activities or if it's the normal state of things with the kid.

My fingers glide over her cunt. She has been engaged in sex play, so I figure she's not dry; my fingers confirm that assumption. Leaning down, as I'm over her, I kiss the kid. Why do I do it? I suspect that the idea of just fucking her straight out seems far too coarse an action. If she wants to be a wife, then a kiss is in order.

She not only allows the kiss, but it sets her into an explosion of emotion and action. Her hands fly up and grab the back of my head. She pulls herself up to me, her tongue invading my mouth. Her breath invades my lungs... and at the same time she is crying, moaning, whimpering.

Her companions have removed my slacks. My cock is hanging at her vaginal portal and, as Reyna's emotions are transmitted to my mouth, chest and ears, I push in to her waiting cunt.

She is small and the fit is difficult; it's so difficult that I can't tell the difference between the resistance of a membrane and the resistance of a tight channel. In either case, persistence, and repeated short strokes, allows me to find bottom.

My cock is tightly nestled in a hot glove. My head is clamped to her with the vice-grips of her hands holding me in place. Her vocalizing is of the most primitive of sounds. They are sounds of mating. They are sounds so ancient and basic that they are both instantly recognizable and without words to describe.

Lorie and Ann are bystanders. Though on the bed, they are not engaged and I don't want them to be. This is between Reyna and me. My manhood makes the journey back and down repeatedly.

The way is smoother now. Reyna's legs are spread wide, very wide. Her eyes are wide open and staring at mine. She is not fantasizing of someone else. She is experiencing me as I am, taking her as she is. It's as real as it gets. There's no artifice. We are two bodies, engaged with each other, without distraction, brutally and physically honest as to what we are about: fucking.

Though there's a fan in this room, there's no 'aircon' and I'm beginning to sweat. That sweat is dripping on Reyna. She might have wished to change position or seek a towel. She doesn't, but she does stop kissing, pulls her head back and gives me a gleaming smile, all the while looking right at me.

That, for some reason, triggers something inside me and cum floods Reyna's cunt.

Reyna and I just lie there together on that bed. I'm a sweaty mess. She spies a towel, gets up, grabs it, and comes back to bed. But instead of giving me the towel, she starts wiping me down, and doesn't stop for a good five minutes, until I'm done sweating.

Her smile is simply brilliant. Bright white teeth across that brown face, just glowing with happiness in that dark room. I just have to kiss her again. I move to begin the kiss and she just takes it from there. Her lips lock on to mine in a kiss that reprises the passion we just experienced before.

It's an amazing feeling. There's no faking it.

By the time I get cleaned up, dressed and downstairs, Reyna has already left the room, following a series of thank you kisses. I expect, as I walk down the stairs, to find that the party will be pretty well wrapped up. I'm wrong. It's still going strong, but as I appear, all fall silent. All are looking at me. I have no clue what it's about.

My gals, Bim, Cincer, Nelia, Lorie and Ann are all there, beaming with smiles. I don't know why.

And then Reyna runs to me, hugs me and pulls me down for a kiss. The entire assemblage erupts in clapping and sounds of joy. I'm

surrounded by many who are slapping me on the back. I feel like I was supposed to walk out with a bloody sheet.

I was afraid of someone wanting to kill me for taking a child so young. The only killing I'm getting is of the kindness variety. Go fucking figure.

I'm pulled by all my gals to sing a bit more. I find Fire and Rain by James Taylor and sing that, before singing a couple of John Denver tunes, Annie's Song and Country Roads.

I decide to just go to bed by about midnight. I have no idea when the party winds down, but am awakened at six in the morning when the karaoke is turned on and loud singing starts again.

My bed holds Cincer, Bim and Nelia, but all seem to be sacked out. It's been one hell of a party.

There's plenty of food in the fridge (I just can't call it a ref) for a breakfast, but I also grab a bit of birthday cake. It's Monday, and even though I know it won't really be there, I'll check my bank account later today. I have no urgent 'have to' things on my list. Sometime this week, I need to check in at the Immigration office and get my visa extended, but I don't have to do it today.

I do want to check my email and so, when I go into Tacloban to check at the bank, I'll bring my tablet with me and go to the coffee shop that has WiFi for its customers.

And, as I'm going into the city, I'll first get my lunch at MickeyD's. Gotta have my Big Mac.

As I'm finishing up my birthday cake breakfast, I'm joined by Lorie, Ann and Reyna. Lorie turns on a rice cooker which still contains rice from last night. Ann finds another bowl of rice and, with Reyna, starts making some garlic fried rice. Lorie gets the bihon out of the fridge and puts it in a wok to heat it up.

As all this is in motion, Lorie inquires, *What your plan today?*

I explain what I expect to be doing, only to be told that Lorie will come with me. So I ask, *What are you needing to do in Tacloban?*

Nothing, I just come with you. Maybe I will try a burger at McDo!

I seem to have my shadow resuming her role. Ann and Reyna seem totally unperturbed. But then Ann asks, *Ira, will you take Reyna to school today so no need for a tricycle?*

At least the kid is still in school! *Sure, when do we need to go?*

Maybe an hour.

Is it far?

No, not far. It just nice for you to bring her, I think.

OK, I get the point. This is show and tell.

When we leave, Reyna is wearing a blue and white plaid pleated skirt, a white blouse with loose-fitting large collar, a thin blue and white plaid tie, white ankle socks and skimpy black leather shoes. The blouse is not tucked in but, rather, has a belt-type affair at the bottom and is outside the skirt at hip level. It's a cute uniform, and only serves to remind me of how this is so wrong by all I know. Last night I resolved to throw out the rule book. This morning, that resolution isn't so easy to fix in my head.



Lorie does have a burger and fries. But I have to order a side of rice for her. If there's no rice, she informs me, it's just not a meal.

It would be nice if MickeyD's had WiFi, but it doesn't. So the next stop is a coffee shop that does.

There's not much to report regarding the email. Things are proceeding with the house. The real estate agent will wait until the house is painted and there's new carpet down. My contractor tells me he can get 'standard' neutral colored carpeting installed now for a good price, as it's what he always uses and he gets a bulk discount because of how much of it he buys. I tell him to go ahead, and notify the real estate agent of the plan.

I don't need to look at the dating site, as I've closed the account. Lorie was not aware of that. I think she might have been looking

to make sure I didn't turn anyone else away. If that was the reason for her coming with me, she has wasted a trip.

My trip to the bank is a surprise. The money has arrived. I speak with a bank officer and tell her that my plan is to take most of what has just been transferred in, out of the account a week from tomorrow. It amounts to six hundred and seventy-five thousand pesos. She suggests that I arrange for an armed guard to accompany me when I come for the cash. I appreciate the caution, asking for a recommendation in that regard, and receive one.

Lorie has been waiting for me outside the bank, hanging out close to my bike. It's a successful trip for me. I've no clue what Lorie gets out of it. But she just seems to need to be with me.

I find it interesting. Ann is fully connected to me. Of that I've no doubt. But she acts independently, not needing to be with me. Nelia is firmly connected, but doesn't seem to have a territorial bone in her body. I'm the gift Jesus has given her. She relishes the gift, and will never betray me, but the gift has set her free in a way. She doesn't need constant closeness.

These three have been the youngest until Reyna appeared. All three are fully attached to me, and yet, there are three different ways of being connected.

How Reyna will be is not clear yet. Today, when I took her to school, she didn't seek to do anything overt, such as kissing. All that was said was a 'thank you' and a sincere smile. Yes, others noticed me, but nothing was said.

As to my oldest two, they are in town looking for work. I find that incredibly smart. It's not that we need the money. But they need to be doing something, and having their own money makes plenty of sense.

It's unclear how successful their job search will be. I can only hope they will find success.

Just before Lorie and I ride back to the house, I get a text from Bim. She needs to meet with me about Niana. And so, back to the coffee shop we go for the meeting.

Bim's folks are happy to hear that she will reunite with her daughter. There's a matter of a couple of hundred pesos before the form 138 will be released. It's no big deal and it will be taken care of once she gets there.

It's too late to go today, to get to her folks' place. But, if she leaves early tomorrow morning she should be able to get all the way there and possibly even get to the school to resolve the payment issue.

The flight is inexpensive enough that I've sufficient cash in my wallet to cover both a round-trip fare and a one-way fare for her daughter. And so, with pesos in hand, Bim, a few minutes later, takes the bike she is using and rides over to where she can purchase the tickets. Her leaving tomorrow morning, Tuesday, even allowing for screw-ups that may burn a whole day, still allows her to be able to fly back here late Thursday. That's the plan. She won't be gone for long.

But just before she left to get the tickets, as she straddled her bike, I got a request. *OK if we together tonight?*

Yes. Absolutely, yes.

We see Bim's taillight in the distance as Lorie asks her own question.

Ira, if my nanay want to come, you allow?

I don't think she will ever join us, Ri.

Oo, true. But to visit?

Am I so mean that you think I would not allow your mother to visit? Yes, of course she can visit.

My friends? Can they visit?

Will your friends be able to pay the fare to visit? Really?

Maybe.

Ri, do not ask me to add your friends. OK?

Lorie says nothing. And with that, I get back on the bike, with Lorie following suit.

When we get back to the house, Ann asks if I'll ride over to Reyna's school and give the girl a ride home. I do it, but wonder if I'm becoming a school bus for one.

The school is about twelve kilometers farther away from where our place is, in relation to the bridge to Tacloban. There's washed out yellow paint and washed out teal trim on the concrete fence around the school. Maybe it's got great academics, but it's a rural school. That much is clear.

When I get there, Reyna is ready to climb aboard, but is surrounded by other girls, each with a big smile on her face. Are they just happy for Reyna or do they want to climb aboard? In truth, it may be better if I don't try to find out.

Bim is with me alone tonight. It's the first time we have been alone at night since Cincer joined us.

Tell me, do you regret your advice to me? All this now, these five other females are assembled here because of your initial advice. Was it a mistake? Do you regret it?

She just looks at me. There are some tears forming, maybe, but not flowing. She cocks her head to one side, and in the most quiet of voices asks, *Ira, would I be here if I didn't? I really not think I be here. Maybe it be Cincer. Maybe Nelia. Yes, I think Nelia. Not Lorie. I don't think you take her. Not Ann or Reyna; they too young. I not think this a mistake. You love me. I know this. You respect me. I know you do this. I am with you as wife. This is true. And now you bring my daughter here. I not have this without you.*

Promise me something.

What that?

Niana will be fourteen in eight years. The same age as Reyna is now. Promise me that no one will try to put her in my bed.

You think...?

Lorie and Lillian. I know Lorie is older than Reyna, but Reyna's sister was here last night and she had no complaints, right? Niana will be here, as your daughter and not mine. I don't want her in my bed, ever. Do we have an agreement on this?

Yes. That is good. I am happy you say this.

Tell me. Do you really like the girl-girl sex?

Yes, it fun. I not love them, not like that. It not about love. I love you. They love you. So no one think it love. It just feel good.

Tomorrow, Bim will be away from me for the very first time. Will the separation be the basis of a reevaluation of what has transpired? There's a possibility, I guess that once she is back in

Manila, I may never see her again. But tonight we will connect; hopefully, just as completely as we did in the beginning.

This is not a seduction. We know each other intimately. We both need showers and tonight there's no need for, and no physical way for, an ambush in this shower. The primary reason is that this shower is not the luxurious one we had at the Heritage Hotel. It works as a basic, one-person affair, but just barely, and nothing else. And...it doesn't matter. Bim isn't needing to prove anything or seal any deal. She and I are happy with each other.

I may need to call her Bim, but she is a princess. She was graceful during a difficult beginning. Her wisdom and forbearance are the prime reasons all is well now.

For those reasons and many, many more, I hold her close to me. We nibble at each other's lips. My fingers entwine in her hair. Our legs rubbing against legs, bellies touching, and breath mingling. Smiles and sighs are the quiet punctuation of a rich sense of loving.

Bim's fingers are exceedingly gentle on my skin, almost not there, but there just enough to make that sensual connection that I feel throughout my body.

We are incredibly quiet in a quiet room. The air conditioner is on but the fan is on a low setting. The sound is barely audible. I slide completely on top of Bim, center my cock and push in. It's not a violent action. Though firm, it's no more than what one does when walking into a familiar room.

I've been here before. I'm expected.

Bim welcomes my presence. I'm enjoying my return to where it all began. That being back to where it all began, is the critical truth to all of it. If it were not for the beginning there would be no now. If it were not for Princess then, there would be no Bim now. I belong inside this gal. It's where I need to be, now and many times in the future.

We both know it, as my cock drives in, and out and in again, repeatedly, over many minutes. As we fuck, we look at each other, we kiss, we smile, we groan, and we gasp.

The heat and juicy connection is all I could ever want. As much as I'm fully connected with others here, nothing will ever come between me and this gal.

Right now, there's nothing between us at all. And I look down at her once again. This is the mother of one child. Maybe it's time for another.

The thought heightens my urgency and the immediacy of my desire. I start slamming into her. I have her attention now! She seems to understand. I start hearing, *yes, yes, yes.*

The culmination is hardly immediate, but it does occur. Cum enters Bim and, in that moment, I sincerely hope it has the impact I desire.



I've taken Reyna to school and then Bim to the airport. My appearance at the school was noted more today than it was yesterday.

Yesterday it was just a few kids. Today, it is what I gather is a teacher and a guard. I'm greeted formally by the teacher, and asked if I'll be taking Reyna to school often. I feel pretty defensive and uncomfortable. Reyna does not, as she leans in, kisses me on my temple, smiles and says, *See you tonight, Ira.* Before taking off.

I smile at the two adults and say, *Well, I guess you have your answer.*

Where do you live, Sir Ira?

Right next door to Reyna's sister.

What is your full name, Sir Ira?

So I give it to her. Is my goose cooked?

Sir Ira, may we have a contact number for you? It's good to have in case there is an emergency.

OK, so that is a bit weird, but I give them my cellphone number.

Sir Ira, may we know the name of your wife?

Oh, shit, this may end up very bad.

I'm not married.

You have a girlfriend? Yes?

I've many girlfriends.

Sir!

Ma'am?

Miss!

I just have to laugh at that! *Ok, Miss?*

Why you say you have many girlfriends?

Would you prefer I lie?

Why you say that?

I told you I've many girlfriends, because I do. To say otherwise would be a lie!

If they find out about the others, you will be in big trouble! If Reyna tell them what you are doing, and a sweet child such as our Reyna will want to protect the hearts of other Filipinas, it will be dangerous for you!

Are you trying to threaten me? I don't understand. What is your point?

I am just advising you, for your own safety! Pick one!

If I do that, they will all be very angry and then I'll be in trouble! Reyna knows all about my girlfriends and they all know Reyna. Miss, respectfully, you are very wrong. And at that moment, I notice the guard is having a hard time not chuckling out loud.

I look at him and just shrug as the teacher seems to be turning shades of red. *It OK, Sir, maybe she not understand. It not a problem, I think. You can afford. I sure they happy.*

The teacher says, *Guard! How you say that?*

Miss, Sir is correct. I think you maybe not understand correctly. Maybe your nanay tell you things that are not true. I not know. But Sir, he is telling truth.

Better to be careful with your words. He not say anything disrespectful. You make threats, Miss. Miss Reyna, I sure she knows all too. Best to leave alone.

The teacher is hardly mollified but she has been warned, and not by me. I shake the guard's hand, thank him and am on my way to pick up Bim and take her to the airport.

At home I seem to have taken on the image of a great man, for the simple reason that I'm not only allowing Bim's daughter to stay here, but that I'm paying for the process of bringing the kid.

Nelia has another reason to thank Jesus. Cincer feels like her judgment of me has been rewarded. Lorie is thinking about her mother and it'll do her no damned good. That one is dead in the water. Ann seems simply to be happy she has a good guy, I guess.

I'm not sure how to explain Ann. In her own way, she's an operator. She left home, on her own. She came to the city on her own. She found work and lodging. She made contacts, negotiated deals and, in each case, it seems, she has bettered her position. And now she has attached herself to me, possibly permanently, but maybe not. Might Ann seek to better her position again? Yes. Do I care so long as I don't get hurt? No.

For some reason, I don't think I'm simply another stop along the way, but that's just a guess.

I putter around the house today. Tomorrow, I'll go to Immigration and get my visa extended. The gals are busy with various tasks and I'm pleasantly ignored. I get a chance to finish the audible book I've been listening to. I've other books, but leave them for now, as it's time to pick up Reyna from school.

When I get there, I find Reyna waiting for me with the teacher by her side. I don't figure this is a good omen. Being on a bike instead of a car has its benefits. Rather than driving up and parking, I just wheel up to Reyna, who is more than ready to climb on to get going.

The teacher has other ideas. *Sir Ira!*

Yes, Miss?

Reyna say she love you. You know this?

Miss, if you have any questions about Reyna, I sincerely suggest you take them up with her guardian, her sister.

Sir, Reyna say her sister know and is happy that this is true.

Miss, has Reyna or anyone asked for your help?

No! Why you say that?

Are you thinking that someone is hurting Reyna?

No!

So what is your point?

She is too young for you!

Oh. OK, I agree.

You what?

I agree. Her sister doesn't agree, our other neighbors don't agree, and Reyna doesn't agree. But I do. She is years too young.

Oh. You tell her that?

Oh hell, I told everyone who would listen exactly that. They all told me, I don't understand their culture. So, Miss, do you understand their culture? Because it seems to me that we are the only ones who feel like you say.

The teacher is a bit confused. She looks at Reyna and asks something in their language. Reyna looks back at the teacher and tells the gal, *It rude to speak so Sir Ira not know! Sir, Teacher ask, are you liar? Miss, Sir tells the truth. He tell everyone I too young. We all disagree, all. I love Sir. We all love Sir. Why you this way. No one hurt. Sir good to all! He even pay to allow family to stay together. He good to us.*

I don't understand, Sir. What is our Reyna talking about?

One of my girlfriends has a daughter who has been living with my girlfriend's parents. I didn't like that. I've sent the gal to go get her daughter. We have room. A daughter should be with her mother.

Oh! Where in Samar the grandparents live?

They live on Luzon. I put the mother on a plane this morning to go there. She will return here on Thursday.

Will the child be enrolled here?

No. I'm told she is in first grade. So, not this school.

You pay for the airfare?

Yes. Of course.

This is very unusual.

Miss, I find much of my life these days 'very unusual.' This is hardly the most unusual part.

Promise me that no one will hurt our Reyna.

I can't.

Excuse?

I can promise you that I'll not intentionally hurt her. I can promise that I'll not knowingly allow another to hurt her. But I can't live Reyna's life for her. Each of us gets hurt at times. Surely, you know that this is true. Reyna will get hurt. How and why, the three of us do not know. But it'll happen. If you live, you will experience hurt.

Yes, OK. I understand. Do I have permission to visit Reyna?

Do you normally visit the homes of your students?

No, but this is unusual. I think it is best if I visit.

Allow me to behave like the foreigner that I am. In my world, it seems to me that you are asking two separate questions. First, may you visit my home? The second is, may you visit Reyna outside of your duties as a teacher? The first requires my permission. The second requires Reyna's guardian's permission and that means her sister. ... I've no reason to invite you to my home unless you come as a friend, and I sincerely, don't think that is your reason. As to the second, ask her sister.

I see. I not have experience with foreigners before. I understand what you say, but it is not our way.

You may well be right. I've been told over and over that I don't understand your ways. So, give me a contact number and one of my girlfriends will contact you. Then you can avoid dealing with a foreigner's logic.

The phone number is provided, following which I can finally leave with Reyna.

It may be only twelve kilometers from school to house, but feels like it takes forever this afternoon. I so want to have Cincer deal with this and hopefully resolve it. I'm far from OK right now.

While we are on the bike, Reyna says nothing. When we arrive, she only seeks to kiss me and tell me her teacher is a pain. That much I already know.

The bottom line appears, to my uneducated brain, that there are multiple understandings of Filipino culture. What some Filipinos view as normal and OK, others do not. If I'm right, then shit may well hit the fan.

I'm not sure exactly how to deal with this, but I ask Cincer and Ann to sit with Reyna and me while I, with Reyna's help, explain what has happened so far. Ann and Reyna speak the same language and so, between them, we might be able to get it into an English that I can understand and either agree with or at least put my spin on.

As Reyna has information I don't have, it takes a good half an hour to put it all together.

I'm about to ask Cincer to call the teacher, but she already knows that it's she who needs to do this.

Ira, what is her number?

I give it to her and she makes the call. The conversation is in Tagalog. Teachers all know the national language and, as Cincer is most comfortable in it, it only makes sense. However, Ann doesn't

know Tagalog at all, and Reyna knows the basics, but not the language in depth.

The call is taking a long time. I guess I can walk away, but I wait. It's fair to say I'm a little scared. After about fifteen minutes, the call ends. Cincer is smiling. Why?

Ha! Ira, she a foolish one. She say first that you not respect our culture. I tell her she the one who not respect it. She say why I say that? I tell her there are many things. First, Ira correct. The sister is the guardian. You want to visit the girl at home, you ask the guardian. Why she not respect Filipino culture? Why she think that not the way it is? ... Then I tell her that she has no business with me and the other girlfriends of Ira. It is none of her business how we live. Why she think it culture to interfere? Ha! She not have any answer.

OK, what about the rest of it?

I say to her. What you think you accuse my Ira of doing? ... She say 'Reyna say she love Sir Ira. That is wrong!' I say why that? My Ira good to all. Fair to all. Respectful to all. Why not love such a man? She say, you mean he not do anything wrong? I say to her, who accuse this? You tell me. They will have trouble from all of us! She not want to say. ... Ira, I say to her, she not respect the culture of the Filipino to protect their own. She is an evil gossiper; a bad person. She say she only want to protect a child. Ha! I say, who ask for this protection? Does Reyna ask? Who ask? Name the person! She admit, no one ask.

CiCi, I get that you got angry with her, but that does not mean it's over. I think she thinks she is better than you all are.

Yes, she say that! She say, we not educated and she educated! I say where you get your degree? She tell me, she go to Eastern Visayas State University. I tell her my BS degree in business administration and accounting come from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila! Why she think she so smart. She say she sorry, she make a wrong assumption. I tell her she makes many wrong assumptions. All she do, it cause trouble where there no trouble. ... Ira, then she ask, why my Tagalog so good? She a fool. I tell her it my native tongue. Now she know, yes she know, she not do right to threaten. We not be scared of this little fool.

She may still feel that she needs to make trouble. I understand that you told her she isn't as smart as she thinks she is, but why do you think this is the end of it?

Cincer really doesn't have an answer.

When I drop Reyna off at school the next morning, the teacher is not in view. I get a kiss on the cheek and that's all there's to it. I take off to Tacloban and the Bureau of Immigration.

It takes more than two hours, mostly sitting and waiting my turn, but the visa has a new stamp on it and I'm good for another sixty days.



Ann has been in contact with the seller of the property we are acquiring. As the money is here and he wants to get his hands on it, we contact both our lawyer and the bank to move up the date. The sale will occur tomorrow afternoon, my birthday.

Once again, when I return to Reyna's school at the end of the day to pick her up, there's no sign of the teacher. We see the guard, who waves at me in a friendly fashion. All is quiet.

I get a text from Bim. She and Niana are coming back as scheduled tomorrow. They should arrive late afternoon.

In the grand scale of things, this has been a nice day. No new gals, no new problems, just a day of getting errands done. As they say back home, three up, three down, no hits, no runs, and no errors. We remain where we were. I can go to bed with peace of mind and no issues disturbing my sleep.

Oh, it's true that Ann and Nelia do their damndest to delay the sleeping part. While having two of them in bed at once shortens the number of days between sleeping with each of them, only one of them gets cum. So maybe cum isn't as important to them as they claim. I'm confused about the thing. I'm in Ann first, and she is a scrappy gal, all muscle and bone. In a way, she's a bit too much for me, as I'm just not as physically able as she is. It's not that she's complaining. She isn't, but I feel like she wants to pat me on the head and tell me, 'it's all right' at the end of being inside her.

Nelia is too busy thanking Jesus to even notice that I'm no great specimen. We make love and I swear she is praising the lord upon each stroke. I'm no lothario but it doesn't seem to matter. Nelia just gets her body underneath mine and opens wide to accept cock in cunt. There's nothing particularly erotic about it.

Yes, it's sex. Yes, we love each other. Yes, cum exits me and enters her. Yes, she's happy. But it's not wild lovemaking. There's no great existential, orgasmic moment. It's her body welcoming me inside her and happily accepting the final result. What's probably just as important to them is knowing that a certain part of their lives, the one where they were needing both love and safety, has ended in success. There are, now, other items to check off a list. These two items, important as they were, aren't on it any longer.

As important to them as it is, on my side, I'll never again wonder if I'll ever be truly loved. I am. That empty part of my life, the twenty plus years of frustration, is now over. I'm loved and, if not completely settled, there's a working plan.



This is my sixty-sixth birthday and, truth be told I'm feeling the years weigh on me. There's no second celebration, but all here have noted it and there are repeated comments.

I take Reyna to and from school each day, and I've not seen her teacher. Reyna only says that the gal isn't bugging her. I gather she hasn't heard anything from anyone about what transpired with her teacher. Clearly, Reyna is still pretty incensed that the teacher was mixing where she didn't belong, but nothing further has occurred.

Today we spend far too much time both at the bank and then in the lawyer's office.

The bank was ready for me, and yet it takes a good three-quarters of an hour before we are able to leave, with an armed guard accompanying us, to the lawyer. The guard might be overkill, but what the hell, the few pesos spent bring peace of mind to all. I figure it is worth it.

The lawyer uses an out-of-date computer running Windows 3.1, a cheap inkjet printer and a tiny photocopier to create the documents that must be signed by all. You would think, as he had a few days to get ready, the documents would be ready. They aren't, and the creation of them takes over two hours, while we just sit and wait.

Finally, it's done.

I spend an hour at the coffee shop before swinging over to the airport, as I need to check my email.

It looks like repairs will be completed on the house in about a week. The real estate agent is OK with the contractor's offer to put in some replacement carpet. I send an email to the contractor to go ahead with that. I don't give a shit what color it is. I'm not going to live there. If it increases the sale price of the house, all is well and good.



I'm to meet Bim and Niana at the airport this afternoon. They have a small valise that's in checked baggage, and I wait anxiously to see them emerge from the terminal. I need to get back in time to pick up Reyna.

Finally, emerge they do. I'm happy to see Bim. Niana seems like a sweet kid, but she's shy; I'm a white guy, and she seems scared of me. Bim promises that it won't take long before the kid comes around. I'm not worrying. The girl is six. This is hardly a big deal. I've got time and there's no reason to not be very patient.

The biggest problem we have is riding back to the house.

First, Bim wants Niana to sit in the middle, between me and her mom. Niana isn't wanting to, but she does anyway, as Bim tells her to knock it off and get with the program.

The second problem is the carrying of the luggage. Placing the valise between Niana and Bim, we are far less safe than is comfortable to my way of thinking, but Bim sees no problem with it. And so it is, as we leave the airport.

We get back home just in time for me to get Reyna.

Once again, there are no issues. Another successful day without problems. Another day without a new gal wanting to join in. Thank God, that part is over.

We are all back together. Bim will sleep with Niana tonight. I'll be with Cincer, just the two of us.

Cincer has got to be the brightest of us all, and I do include myself in this. That she is attractive is a killer combination. That she wants to be with me, makes no sense until she explains it, and then OK, I get it. But it's only because her life is here in the Philippines. With her brains and beauty, if she was living in the US, I don't think she would even know I was alive. And yet, and yet, here she is. She knows she has my heart. I know I have hers.

Ira, come, be mine alone tonight. This the very first time it just the two of us. You know this, right? ... That day I meet you at MoA, I hear what you say, I think, no one tell the truth like this. I think, maybe this the one for me! I right. Now, Ira, show me your heart. No one here but me. Show me.

Show her? How do you show someone your heart? It isn't a real heart. That blood pumping muscle is hardly the thing she really wants to see. How do you show love? Especially when both of us know she isn't the only one.

I don't have a clue. I never planned on loving six females. I never knew it was even possible to love two females equally. But six is the number and, as crazy as it sounds, I love them all. Is it true love? Yes. How do I know it's love and not lust? I know it sounds nuts but, it's easy. If I didn't have sexual relations with any one or five of them, in some ways, it wouldn't matter. In fact, it would make it easier.

But the reality is that they would not feel safe and truly bonded to me, and I guess I would worry about it, too. So, in a way, the sex stuff is really needed.

That is especially true with the younger ones. Yes, Lorie is almost 18; yes, when she crosses that threshold she isn't jailbait any more, but what business do I have being her lover? For that, matter Nelia

isn't much older at nineteen... but the really young ones, Ann and Reyna ... I would be happy to just be the nice uncle at this point. Yes. I'd love them but, well, you know.

Does it feel good when I'm inside them? Damn straight it does. Do I have any business being inside them? There's the rub, if you will allow the Shakespearian reference. They want it, so... yeh, on a mental health issue I would prefer otherwise, but that ain't life as we know it, now is it?

But tonight I'm not with a really young one, though based on my advanced age, by US standards, she's still way too young for me. Cincer was born twenty-eight years ago. Subtract 28 from 66 and you get 38. She's thirty-eight years younger than I am.

To put it another way, if I'd had kids in my twenties, she'd be a granddaughter. And of the six, she's the oldest. Does that help you see why this is so nuts?

Still, here she is asking me to show her my heart. What am I doing? I'm crying. Not outright sobbing, but crying.

How can I show you what can't be shown, but only felt? ... CiCi, I never want to be without your love. I never want to be separate from you in any way. But, how can I show that? I don't know. All I know is that I want to see your face every morning. I want to hear your voice and your honest truths. I need you to keep me on a straight path. And tonight, my love, I want cum to enter you and make something that will forever be yours and mine. Is that enough?

Yes, that what I want. Come my love. Make history with me.

Cincer is a woman in every sense of the word and, as we embrace, as I enter her, there are only the hallmarks of a coupling between two fully consenting adults. She is no less the active participant than am I.

Cincer's legs lock around me as she pushes her cunt up, insisting on the deepest penetration I can muster. Her arms are on my arms. My arms are on her shoulders. There's a need pushing us both forward. Tonight is not about enjoying the moment. It's about creating something lasting. We have expressed it and we now live it.

I feel her cunt open to me. I feel my need to fill her. I feel the love in her heart. I can only hope she feels mine, as I fill her cavity with all that there is within me.

Did she cum? I honestly don't know. Tonight it was the last thing on my mind. It wasn't to make her day. It was to make us something far more lasting. If God is smiling on us, maybe we have.

Thank you, Ira.

Why?

You, silly. You really love me. It easy to know. This not about being a great lover tonight. Tonight it all about being my loving husband. That what you do. I know, you know this.

Yes. I'm glad that you feel what I feel.

Ira, I will say something. Promise you not be angry with me for saying what in my mind?

Yes, I promise.

OK, I hope this true, that you not get angry. I think you wish it just me and Bim. That what I think.

You are a very smart wife, CiCi.

I right?

Yes. But I have the others, and I do love them, so no choice, but yes. You are right.

You a good man. It true, the others love you. This real and I glad you love them; I glad you good to them. Bim agree with me. But Bim and me, we know your true heart.

CiCi, promise me one thing?

What that?

Always tell me the truth. Even if it hurts me.

Ira! Oh, Ira. I always tell you true. You only hurt if it a lie, I think. Yes, this I believe. ... Hold me. Hold your woman.



Friday, my nineteenth day in the Philippines, and another school day. A day for Bim to enroll Niana in first grade. Another day for me to take Reyna to school.

It's just nineteen days, and so much has happened that it feels like a lifetime. Not three weeks, and yet, my sixty-six years in the USA feels like ancient history that is to be remembered but not yearned for. It's what was, and not what is. What is, is here before me.

Twelve kilometers to the school. The road is good. Yes, sure, there are slow-moving vehicles I must pass. But on a motorcycle, as opposed to a four-wheeled vehicle, getting around them is of no consequence. Reyna doesn't mind a bit of speed every once in a while. She holds on tight, as much as a matter of love than for any other reason.

This time, when we reach the high school, her teacher is outside waiting for us.

Reyna gives me a kiss every day, but this time, knowing her teacher is watching, it seems, she makes it on the lips instead of a cheek. And then a second one on my forehead, before taking off into the school.

I'm about to take off, my task complete, but I see the teacher approaching me, and to leave as she does would be cowardice and simply wrong. I wait upon her approach.

Was that kiss, for me? Was Reyna challenging me?

Yes, I think she might have been doing that. It surprised me. That's for sure.

Sir, I hear gossip you buy land yesterday. I confused for many reasons.

Oh?

Yes, I know foreigners may not own land here. So that confusing.

Yes, I understand the same thing. I own no land here for that very reason.

But you bought the land? How is that?

I lent money for six Filipinas to own five hectares.

Six?

Yes.

These six, they are your girlfriends?

The six are Filipinas I care about and for. I want to make sure that they have something of value when I die. Do you think this is another violation of your cultural values?

Oh! I am sorry, Sir. I am not accusing you of anything like that! May I ask, who are these six?

No, you may not, as it's none of your business. Respectfully, Miss, my life is not your concern.

May I ask what you will do with this land?

I'll answer only because it'll be public knowledge soon enough. I'll build a home on the land and we will farm some of it.

So, you are truly staying with us?

It seems so.

Sir, I have a confession to make.

Really?

Yes, I know the names of your six. One of them is Reyna. From what you say, Reyna is one of the land owners.

And if she is, what is the problem? I admit, I'm not happy with any of this. It's probably coming out in the tone of my voice.

Oh! None, Sir! It not a problem. I only wish to say that a man who gives land to his women, he is respecting an old custom here. It a very old custom and one worthy of the respect of all. Now, no one will question anything between you and Reyna. You act honorably. All know this.

I see. Well, I'm glad that there will be no problem between you and me. It was bothering me.

Sir, there no problem. But may I enquire if I might seek your assistance?

Damn, please, please don't tell me she wants to climb aboard.

What is it?

There a child in one of my classes. Her parents, they dead. She live with neighbors of her parents, but it cannot continue for long this way. Maybe you assist?

Miss, I doubt I can do anything for the child. However, I have someone in my home who is good at solving problems. If you will explain to Reyna what the issue is and tell her that she is to discuss it with Ann and not me... that may work. I'll let Ann know that she may hear about this.

Thank you for your willingness to assist in any way. And Sir, I hope we can be friends. Please call me Debbie. I would like that.

OK, Debbie.

And Sir, please tell Miss Cincer, I apologize to her. I am sorry I am rude to her.

OK, Debbie, I'll tell Cincer.

Sir, can we be friends?

Debbie, I don't think you want to be my friend. I bed my friends, or haven't you figured that out yet?

What I get is a smile and a, Yes, I think this too, Sir.

Debbie, don't you think a man with six friends, has enough friends?

Maybe not, Sir?

Debbie, do me a favor and stay with your boyfriend or husband. I'm sure he is a nice guy.

There none, Sir.

As pretty and as employed as you are, I'm really not convinced of that. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but it just doesn't make sense.

Thank you for thinking that others would be interested in me. Yes, it true, others they sometimes interested. But it also true. I not attached myself to anyone.

Debbie, in all honesty, I don't want to add anyone else to my household and I truly don't think, as nice and good looking as you are, that you would fit into our home and my life. Of the women in my life, one or two might be willing to say, yes, to you. But, I doubt that either Lorie or Cincer would say yes. ... And, I doubt once you meet them, you would want to join the household. Cincer knows I don't want to add anyone else and so she would be a block. Lorie has additional requirements, which will make it difficult for anyone else to join them.

But you not saying no?

I don't need to. You will not get past Cincer and Lorie.

If I do?

Then think about Reyna and yourself, what are you opening up?

Now I get a look that tells me I've struck a nerve.

Are you going to...

I didn't before, but others did. Or didn't you get that point?

I didn't... I mean...

Yes, I know. Do us both a favor. Don't pursue your fantasy. It isn't going to end up as simply as you would wish. It's not my culture that's the problem. It's yours.

All I get is a nod, as she steps back and I take off.

It's a hell of a way to start a Friday.

Once back home, I give Ann the word that Reyna may come to her about a kid in trouble and that under no circumstance is the kid to end up with us. I'm pretty sure Ann gets the point.

I then sit down with Cincer and Lorie and fill them in on parts of the conversation with Debbie. Cincer is rolling her eyes. There's no way the gal is getting a pass by my guardian. Lorie, however, is giggling. Hell, if Debbie wants to eat her pussy, Lorie is ready.

I don't think Debbie has the appetite, but what the fuck do I know? Hopefully, we will never have to find out. I think I may have scared her off. At least I hope so.

After the confusing start to my Friday, the rest is on greased skids. It just slides by. Bin has enrolled Niana in school and orders three uniforms for the kid. I'm told two is the norm and minimal, but three provides for grace and ease. At about six hundred pesos per uniform, I don't have a problem with the expense.

If I had flown back to the States now, and I guess I could have, I would not have needed to extend my visa, but the house is still getting work done on it, and I figure I need to spend a few more days with the gals before I leave.

The only other thing of note today is that we finally get Internet access. I succeed in connecting my tablet to the WiFi. I'm thinking of leaving it with the gals when I go back to the States. When I come back next time, I'll bring my laptop.



When I ask Lorie to be with me tonight, quite on her own, to say that she is surprised is to under-report her response. What she does is nod and stare, with eyes as wide as they might ever get. It's pretty funny.

I don't see Debbie as I pick up Reyna this afternoon. The ride back is a bit different. Not only does Reyna hold on to me. Her cheek is attached to my shoulder the entire time and my shoulder is wet from tears. I've no idea why.

When we get to the house, I get a kiss, and, *I love you. Truly.* Nothing else. She just walks into the house, while I'm putting the bike where it'll sit for the rest of the night. Other than for the supper meal, I don't think I'll see Reyna again.

Lorie is my shadow. I've mentioned it before. I don't mention that it's all the time, every day, and at all meals. It would be horribly repetitive to restate it time and time again, but that's the reality of it.

That she will have me alone tonight is causing even more of the hanging on than is normal, which is excessive to begin with. Cincer just thinks it's funny. Ann thinks it's weird. Nelia thinks it's sweet. Bim puts up with it. I've no idea what Reyna thinks about it.

Lorie's birthday is in eighteen days. I've not decided if I'll be here for that, but I suspect I should. I suspect I should bed her on that day. That's just a gut feeling, but there it is, in any case.

I mentioned before that Bim didn't follow me into the shower and, considering the shower, I didn't figure it possible here. I now have to amend that. Lorie insists on showering with me and washing me. I figure I need to wash her in return. I didn't think it was possible here. Allow me to be wrong.

There's something simply sensual about Lorie's connection to the world in general, and to me specifically. It isn't as much dripping sexual desire at all moments as it's a physical connection that announces its presence in a very sensual nature. If Cincer is the cerebral actor, Lorie is the other side of that coin. Tonight there are no distractions, and it's directed fully at me, and me alone. I've

heard it said that our bodies are sexual in total. Yeh, it's an interesting concept, but when it comes to Lorie, she lives it. Tonight, once out of the shower and on the bed, she starts with my toes.

I'm not kidding. She is kissing and making love to my toes. And then to the arches of my feet and my heels. She makes sweet love to my calves.

She does not want me to reciprocate. She wants me to accept her love. By the time her mouth reaches my cock I'm climbing the walls and I damned well tell her to move to a different style of lovemaking or accept the consequences of her actions.

Lorie relents. I roll her over and fuck her hard. Truly little Lorie, not yet eighteen-year-old Lorie, is looking up at me in odd hero worship as my cock pounds her cunt.

It makes no damned sense. None. What the fuck will happen should she bear me a child? Why is she so attached to me? And... why am I so attached to her?

She is looking up at me. What does she see? What she is, is a kid who has a load of cum in her cunt.



Ann spoke with Reyna last night. And now, this morning, Ann is chewing me out. I evidently failed to tell Reyna that she is now a landowner. The kid learned it from Debbie, who told Reyna that she is damned lucky to have such a good husband. And then, Debbie launched into the tale of the kid without any family who has nothing, and why won't we help the kid?

And there you have it. That's the reason for the tears yesterday.

As to what we can do, the answer is probably nothing. Not every problem has a solution.

We have reached a weekend, so no school for Reyna or Niana. Bim is busy with housework as Niana just trails behind her mom

and is being loved on by all the other gals in the house. I suspect the kid will adjust just fine.

I decide to take the bike and ride around Samar with Ann as my guide. It's a fun day of no real significance. I get to see more of where I live and spend time with the only one of us who actually knows the area. Yes, Reyna is from here, but her experience has been far more circumscribed than has been Ann's.

Nothing I learn today is particularly important, other than it seems to me most homes here are based on the concept of impermanence. They are designed to not last, or maybe more accurately, there's the concept that, as the weather will do its best to destroy them anyway, why tempt the fates? Just go with the flow. And yes, I know that's a pun.

Ann and I nibble our way through the day as we ride around. A bite here, another small thing a bit later. Nothing is formal. And, in that way, we chew through the day. We arrive back a little after five, to find Reyna's sister visiting and, evidently, waiting for me, as when I step on to the terrace, she rises, sort'a bows before me, grabs my hand and brings it to her forehead.⁵²

I've no clue what this is about, but Ann is right there with me and acts as an interpreter. *She is respecting you because of what you do for Reyna and all of us.*

Oh, well, I see. What am I supposed to do?

Nothing. Just give her a hug.

There's something of a party again tonight. I'm getting the feeling that these parties are going to occur frequently; they are a sort of a drop-of-the-hat thing... a 'hey, we have a reason to celebrate.' But then again, maybe I'm wrong. I just haven't been here long enough to know.

I enjoy the food and socialize with all the folks who just seem to appear from the neighboring homes, but the ride today has left me a little tired. I beg off and get to bed early while the rest continue

⁵² Mano, a sign of respect.

with the party. It's the first night I'm alone in the bed as I go to sleep.

I'm joined by others as the night progresses, but the others just sleep as well. You would think that, as I was the first to go to bed, I would be the first one up, but these gals are far younger than I am and they seem to require far less sleep than I do. Ann, Nelia, Lorie, and Reyna were here, but they are all gone when I'm finally ready to get out of bed.

As much as I was gone from the house yesterday, today I just hang out and listen to another book from Audible. As we now have WiFi, I check my email and look at some websites.

The gals are still busy getting the house whipped into shape, but that activity doesn't touch me. They are being productive. I'm not.

The only thing of interest occurs mid-afternoon, when Cincer sits down by me, places her cellphone down on the table by me and asks, *What did you tell Reyna's teacher?*

Excuse me?

Ira, what did you tell that woman?

What are you talking about?

She say, you tell her to be my friend. That true?

No.

Why she say it, if it not true?

CiCi, she said she wanted to be my friend. I told her that I wasn't adding anyone and you were going to help me keep it that way. I told her that, unless she could get past you and convince Lorie that she should be accepted as a friend, it wasn't going to happen... and that there was no way you would allow it. So, no, I didn't say what she told you.

I get a smile and a kiss, before Cincer gets up and leaves to do God knows what.

I spend the next two weeks just hanging out, going on shopping trips for groceries, and getting a feel for living here. Each day I'm

Reyna's ride to and from. Bim takes Niana back and forth to the elementary school. It looks like Cincer may have secured employment at a business in Tacloban as a bookkeeper. Bim has taken on the role of primary homemaker, with the assistance of Nelia and Lorie.

While I see Debbie on occasion, there are no more discussions. She keeps her distance, and I'm perfectly happy that she does.

It seems fifteen-year-old Ann is setting herself up as a broker of sorts. She knows where there are deals to be made and who might need to be assisted in an acquisition. Now that she doesn't have to worry about the basics: food, shelter and such; and now that she can use one of the bikes when needed, even if it isn't legal for her to be operating a bike, she seems to have found her calling, as it were.

In the past two weeks, I've had bedmates every night. This is so different from being married that it begs the question of why a man would ever want to marry.

Today, in the US, is Halloween,⁵³ but here they don't celebrate it. It's just another day. That works for me. I hope that no one will egg my place back home, as there's no one there handing out treats.

In two days Lorie turns eighteen. In a weird way, that isn't as important to me anymore. Considering that I'm bedding Ann and Reyna, Lorie's age isn't my real concern. It's important to Lorie, and so, as it's Sunday and her real birthday will be on Tuesday, we are having the party today.

Once again, there are people at the party whom I don't know. There seems to be more, each time we have a party. The gals have previously met these folks, and so it's not like they are complete unknowns. They're just unknown to me.

A few of the females I don't know are flirting with me, but I take it as playful silliness and ignore it. The guys all want me to drink with them, drink for drink. I'm just not going to do that, but I do have a

⁵³ Oddly enough, some fifteen years later, Halloween has caught on in the Philippines.

few drinks with them before moving off with an excuse that I'm needed elsewhere.

I've been able to stay up to date with email now that we have WiFi. The house repairs are done and the new carpet has been laid. The painting will be finished this coming week.

The question arises, when do I leave here? I really don't want to go, but I must, and it's best I do it soon, as winter will set in before long.

I've been here for thirty-five days. My visa will not expire for a while, but I need to leave and leave soon. Maybe as soon as sometime next week. If I leave after Lorie's birthday, the next one isn't until the end of January. That will be Reyna's.

The gals tell me I really should be here for New Year's Eve, as it's special here. I'm not sure why, but I see no reason to ignore them. Still, that does not give me a lot of time to wrap things up in the States. The longer I wait now the tighter that time frame becomes.

I want to talk with Bim and Cincer about it, but with the party tonight and Cincer working during the day tomorrow, the conversation will have to wait a good twenty-four hours.

I'm sitting inside the house, out of the view of the guys who want to get drunk with me. I'm not exactly hiding, but I guess I'm close to it.

Nelia finds me.

You OK, Ira?

Yes. I'm fine. Why do you ask?

You not outside with everyone else.

Sweetheart, you gals sit with each other and the guys sit separate. Right?

Yes. You not do that where you come from?

Oh, a little but not as much. And where I come from, the guys don't sit around trying to get drunk.

Oh. That the problem?

Yes, that's the problem.

It our culture.

I gathered that, as none of the women seem to mind that their guys are getting seriously drunk. But it's not something I will do. If I'm out there, they push alcohol on me and don't understand why I don't want to drink.

Then join us!

No, sweetheart, you gals want to gossip and I'm not part of that. It's best if I just relax in here. Besides, I've some things on my mind. This quiet time is actually good for me.

It a problem? You have a problem?

No. It's not that. It's just that I need to go back to the States and sell what I have there. I need to end my life there. I can't do that from here.

When you leave?

Maybe in a week. I'm not sure.

That is very soon! We not want that.

I know. But waiting creates problems.

Oh. I not know.

There's no reason why you would.

How long you be gone?

I don't really know. I'll try to make it back as quickly as I can.

You tell CiCi yet?

No, I'm planning on telling Bim and her tomorrow night.

OK, I not tell anyone. Ira, me tonight?

That will be nice.

Good, then you take Lorie the next two nights. Before and after!



I do lie with Nelia tonight, but not alone. Ann is with us.

Here's a question that I can't wrap my head around. Why, when I'm fucking Ann I'm without a massive sense of wrongdoing, but when fucking Reyna it is there? Both are far too young. Yes, Reyna is a year younger than Ann, but really, they are both way too young. Besides, at the end of January, Reyna turns fifteen while Ann will still be fifteen. Granted, sixteen days later Ann will turn sixteen. But still... what's the difference in my head? Is it because Ann is the more street savvy? Is that it?

The fact that cum is in Nelia tonight is not a matter of age. It's simpler than that. Nelia asked for cum before we even started. But Ann will get her share of it soon enough. I'm not backing away from her. In point of fact, I've become very fond of Ann as a companion out of the bedroom. She has become a friend in a way that has surprised me. I never considered that I could have such a young friend.

The three of us find sleep long before the party ends.



Monday morning means me getting Reyna to school, Bim getting Niana to school, Cincer going to work, Ann texting others back and forth on a couple of projects she has going, while Nelia and Lorie get the housecleaning started.

We have established a routine, a way of life. It feels good. I know that it must change. Nelia will be the one to take Reyna to school when I'm gone. When I come back, I want to get started building a house, and that is going to create an entirely new routine. The one we have now can only be temporary.

We need to talk about my leaving.

Cincer nudges Bim before asking, *When you leaving?*

Maybe at the end of the week. Were you expecting it?

Of course! It need to happen. I tell Bim this a week ago. I tell her, you will wait for Lorie's birthday before you go.

I look at Bim and can only say, *If she scares you sometimes, remember that she scares me too. She is just smarter than we are.*

Ha, this really true. It good that she is with us and not against us. She tell me you will go and I think, no! I not want this. But CiCi say you must go back and finish things there before we can use the land we bought. That it?

Yes, that's a huge part of it. There are other things too, but that's the major thing.

I ask her, when you come back, but she say, no way to know. Only that you come back. So, my love, when you do that? I not want you gone!

You know, it's not that Cincer doesn't care about me. I sincerely believe she does. However, she is analytical in her reasoning. Emotions exist, but they are not allowed to cloud her thinking things through. Bim is just a mere mortal and at times doesn't want cold reasoning to trump the desire of her heart. There's no faulting her for that.

I don't know how long it'll take me to wrap things up back in the States. I'll definitely try to be back for Reyna's birthday. I know you all want me here for New Year's but I doubt that I can be back that soon.

Cincer appears to have made a decision. *Do it next Sunday. Then we all see you leave. Don't go when some in school or work. Make sure we all together.*

See? It's not that Cincer is without emotion. It's more that she puts her skills to work in the service of emotional stability and safety. I like her plan, and so next Sunday it is. I'm pretty sure I can get a

ticket from Tacloban to Manila but the flight out of Manila may be a little tricky. I may have to lay over a day or two.

We agree to not discuss it with the others until Wednesday, and I warn them that Nelia already knows. Bim says she will speak with Nelia tonight.

I'm with Lorie for the rest of the night. Lorie, the gal that I was so infuriated with and with whom I didn't want to meet. Lorie, who hangs around me even now, more than the others. Lorie, who I was so sure was too damned young and is not nearly as young as two others. Lorie, whose mother didn't prohibit our connection, but was instead instrumental in its occurring. Lorie, who both Bim and Cincer read wrong, but for different reasons. My loving Lorie.

Ira, it really OK if just me?

When it comes to making love, it's not that she has never been with me alone; she has, once. It's not that I prefer it that way. It's more of how she joined us. Still, I decide to play dumb.

Yes. Why do you ask?

I think there a rule there to be more than one, always. I think the time before not normal, special.

It's perfectly OK, sweetheart.

She is wearing something I've not seen before. It's blood red and mid-thigh length; I think it's called a nightie, as it's too short for a nightgown. It's the same length as a short but full slip, but it's clearly not a slip. It's not got any buttons and it's far too shapely to be a nightshirt. I'm not sure what else you might call it. So, I'll call it a nightie because I don't know any better. Whatever it is, she's damned cute in it.

The color of her light brown skin, the red of the satin-like cloth, her black hair, and red lips on her clearly youthful female form standing barefooted in front of me, make for a vision that I've no business seeing alone in a bedroom... unless it's in a man's magazine... Do they have those things anymore?

She is an old man's impossible dream.

She is giggling. *Why you look at me that way?*

I'm just appreciating your beauty.

*Buangit*⁵⁴

Hub?

You need glasses! I not!

And you are falsely modest. All you need to do is say 'thank you.'

I reach out, take her hand, and lead her to the bed. It's where we need to be.

Tonight I just want to hold her, to enjoy being with her, feeling a closeness, an attachment that ought not to exist but does, in so many unspoken ways, throughout each day. There's no master plan. There's no goal other than to end the evening having loved and having been loved... having cum given and received... and finally to sleep with a gal who I truly care about.

Her touch is gentle on my skin and then... I can feel the hair on my arm being touched but nothing else. I feel her warm breath on the back of my neck and yet not a hint of lips or a nose touching.

Her tongue licks the back of my ear. Her fingers weave through my hair as she kisses my eyebrows.

I've become the object of her desire... a gentle, and sweet desire. She is savoring each moment. I'm being savored, but not consumed. Tasted but, as of yet, only an appetizer.

I've been passive. A recipient and not an actor. That needs to change. My hand slides a spaghetti strap of her nightie off her shoulder, giving me access to a breast. And, as Lorie has done, I glide my fingers ever so lightly over and across a nipple. That... that alone... produces a moan from my little love.

⁵⁴ Foolish or crazy in Ilonggo

I lean in, allowing my tongue to replace my fingers. Ever so lightly my tongue moves over a nipple. Lorie sucks air into her lungs and arches her back. I expel the hot moist air from my lungs over her nipple and then take another lick.

She pushes up, wanting, needing more, a more complete interaction. I give it to her, taking her nipple between my lips and flipping it back and forth with my tongue.

Lorie is groaning.

I slide a finger lightly over her cunt lips. They are dripping with need as she pushes her cunt up to meet me more firmly. I'm thinking, *'See my love? Two can play the teasing game!'*

But now the teasing time must end. I move my far larger frame over hers and without ceremony mount my sweet young gal. I'm looking at her face as I make my entrance and what I see is simple satisfaction. It's what she wanted and now has.

The walls of her cunt are both tight and hot. That tightness is no issue because of the juicy lubrication she is producing. My cock is being bathed in her fluids. I slide in and out to the sounds of that liquid. Our loins are wet with the discharge.

She is a beautiful sight. Her eyes locked on me. Her pert breasts giving not an inch to gravity. Her flawless mocha skin encasing her sexy form. Her hands grasp my shoulders. Her legs are splayed as wide as she can make them to accommodate me.

She says nothing. I say nothing. We rut away.

I want to bring us to culmination. I want to keep us just where we are forever. And yet, I don't know exactly what I want. Everything is a jumble of feelings and needs.

I feel what seems to be her orgasms. It's not that she is announcing them. It's what she is doing and then not doing before doing again. It's the extra female ejaculate that floods out of her at those moments. It's the breathing I hear from her.

That I'm giving her pleasure makes me truly happy. I know I'll cum and that would be a selfish thing without her getting off first. I don't want to be a selfish bastard more than I already am with so many gals being mine.

Those thoughts have kept me from cumming, but they are being crowded out now by a growing need for completion. Does she see it in me? Maybe she does. Lorie's breath is getting ragged; her grip on my shoulder is far tighter.

I'm pounding her ass into the mattress as my cock smashes into her little cunt. She looks up at me in a manner that betrays so many emotions all at once that it's impossible to unpack the thing.

Finally, cum enters her and her face expresses but one thing. Happiness. Lorie is happy.

Tomorrow my happy gal will be eighteen.

We snuggle in, until the heat of our bodies make the result a little too sweaty. We move apart a little as we seek sweet sleep.



It's Tuesday morning and a workday / school day. It's also Lorie's birthday.

She isn't more than ten feet from me all day. Often she is next to me, holding my hand. Three times she tells me that she can travel with me from now on. There will never be a reason to worry. It's all legal now. Well, OK, that is partially true. She and I can travel together wherever a passport will allow. The USA is not one of those places. Yet, the knowledge that she is a legal consort is a relief.

Oh, if it were only as legal with Ann and Reyna, but it isn't. Those two present a problem for me, should we all ever need to fly out of here. It's good to know that the issue is resolved for me as regards Lorie, but these last two have made my concern far greater in that way.

It's a quiet and lazy day. I'm attempting to listen to another book but Lorie is seemingly unwilling to just leave me be.

Ira? ... Ira? Maybe we can have a nice time tonight. You know, just the family here, but maybe we can sing and have a nice night, OK?

You want to rent a karaoke for the night?

Can we?

Why not? If we do that there will be no second act for us as the singing and accompanying party will go on late into the night. While Niana and Reyna will need to crash long before it's over, tomorrow being another school day, I don't see how Lorie and I will make love following that. But, why not?

Maybe last night was enough. She wants a party, and what eighteen-year-old wouldn't?

Sure. See if you can get one.

Good! Ann will get it! Bim will get the food ready. ... Ira, maybe we can be together now, instead of tonight?

I think it's fair to say that, at times, I've no clue how their minds work. I, sure as hell, was not expecting that!

That would be very nice. And it will be.

Last night it was with the bells and whistles, with the blood red nightie. This afternoon it is just us, in our everyday clothing, as we, hand-in-hand, retire to my bedroom.

This is an act of making love as an expression of coming of age, of adulthood. In many ways, it would make more sense if Lorie had yet to experience it. What are we to make of this now? I wish I could say I have any idea. I do not.

I know what is happening. Yes, that is very clear. At this moment I'm on my back and Lorie is riding me as we look at each other. My hands are on her hips and her hands are on top of mine.

That much I know. I know I'll likely cum again and I hope Lorie will too. This is lovemaking between consensual individuals, now

adults. But it was consensual last night when she wasn't an adult; and, it was just as loving then.

We are celebrating a birthday, but not creating a historic moment. In a weird way, it seems to be less important, while still symbolic. Just as there are cakes and there are birthday cakes, how do you explain the difference other than the frequently bad writing on the top and the placement of some cheesy looking candles?

Last night was wonderful. This is sex. There's nothing wrong with sex but, as Lorie rides me, I know that this is not what we had last time.

Is it my fault? Maybe. Possibly. If I knew a way to change it, I would. I don't. That isn't to say that being with her isn't a joy. It is. Being inside her is an exquisite joy. The fact that it's the other side of crazy, that this should be happening at all, isn't lost to me as we continue on with this ritual mating.

I feel every fraction of an inch of her cunt as she slides down and pulls back up.

As I'm looking up at her, I see a change in her countenance. There's a new sense of determination being announced in it. She flops down on me, grabs my shoulders and pulls me up and on top of her.

Hard now. Hard! Cum!

I would love to cum right now, but I'm not there yet.

Still, hard it is, as I slam into her, only to hear her grunt and call for more. More it is, and what I hear next, I definitely don't expect.

Oh, God, I love you so much! Never leave me! Never! Never! Now, give it me, now!

As I hear her affidavit of 'love', I am, in what seems like nothing more than a fraction of a second, now, almost ready to cum. Why has that triggered my balls into getting with the program?

Damn, I can't stop it now, even if I wanted to. I fill her with the present she requested. Happy birthday, sweetheart.

We lie together for maybe another half an hour before there are those things that need to be done if we are to have a party tonight, and so out of the bedroom and into the shower we go.

The party is pretty much what Lorie has wanted. There's that damned birthday cake that is displayed but oddly not consumed. There's plenty of other food and plenty of guests, our neighbors mostly, seem to just miraculously appear. The singing and drinking is still going strong when I retire at midnight. I don't think anyone even noticed, not that I needed or wanted them to.



Wednesday is just another day as the days here have been playing out. Bim takes Niana to school. I take Reyna to hers. Cincer goes to work in Tacloban. Ann seems to always have some business that needs her attention. Lorie, Bim, Nelia and I are home during the day, but they are busy cleaning, cooking and doing the laundry, though Lorie tries to stick pretty close as she goes about her activities.

Nelia has been good at keeping my plans to leave a secret. There has been no talk about it. It was a challenge to book my flights without Lorie learning of it. It took a trip into Tacloban to a Philippine Airlines office to get it done, while she just had to stay and finish cooking a cassava cake. It drove her crazy that I would not put the trip off until later, but it's done!

I have tickets. I fly from Tacloban to Manila on Sunday and then leave for the USA on Tuesday, landing at Sea-Tac.

Cincer usually gets home from her bookkeeping job at about five-thirty, and today is a normal day. By six we are all assembled, Ann being the last one to join us.

Supper is proceeding, gossip is being shared. It's a nice evening with some damned nice gals. As I look from face to face, all I see are happy faces — lovely faces — sweet faces.

I need to speak to all of you. It's sort of important, and not bad. But you all need to know. ... As I think all of you know, I need to go back to the USA to sell my home there and take care of things so that I can live here full time.

No one is saying a word. No one moves. The smiles and happy faces have disappeared. Some faces seem simply studiously calm, but there appears to be fear on a couple.

I'm leaving here this Sunday. Cincer and Bim will have the cash to pay the bills while I'm gone. I don't know how long it'll be exactly, but, Reyna, I hope to be back in time for your birthday.

That causes a brief smile to break over a face that was filled with fear. She's not so fearful as to be mute now. *You text us each day you are gone? OK?*

I'll try. I'm not sure about the times I'm flying, but yes, I'll try on all other days.

Lorie announces, *Saturday! Despedida⁵⁵ party!*

We need lechon! Announces Ann. She being one of those who didn't look fearful. Ann is a business woman. She may not yet be sixteen, but that is a side issue. Ann's instinct is transactional. What I need to do makes sense to her, so she sees no reason to complain. To Ann, it's a milestone that needs to occur so that we can move on to new things. That makes it a reason for a celebration; a reason for a lechon.

There's general agreement. My leaving will be an event to be commemorated. The conversation moves on to the planning of the party. Cincer is sitting next to me and leans over. *Come back soon, please. They happy now, but they worry if you are gone a long time.*

And you? Will you worry?

I want to say I not, but that not true. I will. Come back soon.

⁵⁵ Farewell, send-off, or leaving. (Both Tagalog and Cebuano) An organized expression of goodwill at the start of a trip or new venture. Despedida parties are common.

What was and what will be...

1

The party is another massive affair. More food than could possibly be consumed.

The attendees are, as usual now, all the neighbors but we have the (unwanted by me and Cincer) addition of Reyna's teacher, Debbie, and a few of Reyna's friends. All told there are at least forty folks here.

As I'm the reason for the party, I can't just disappear as I've done midway through the previous ones. Most of the guests have little English. My gals have more English skills than any of the others, with the exception of Debbie.

I'm not really wanting to engage with Debbie and have been successful at avoiding her so far. She has been spending time with Cincer, with Nelia, and with Lorie.

I'm sure I'll get an earful later from each of those gals about what transpired, provided we can find the time before I leave.

Only a few minutes after that thought crosses my mind does Cincer join me, handing me another beer and sharing exactly that.

She ask, how it is you have so many loves.

What did you tell her?

The truth! Why not?

And what, CiCi, is the truth?

You make a big mistake and agree to meet many. Each is good and what you do?

OK, so in the short form, that works, but I can't help but chuckle at it. *Did that satisfy her?*

Not sure. But it not matter what she thinks. She wanted to know why you not help the girl she ask Reyna to talk to you about. I ask her, what she expect you to do? I think she expect you that you take her as yours. I tell her you say absolutely no more. So there nothing you can do. She say why that? She say you take others so why not the one she ask about? I say, the others you contact first. So it your problem. Even then you not take all those you contact. This one not the same.

Was she angry?

No, she just not understand, I think. ... Ira, it OK if I with you tonight?

I'd like that a lot.

That gets me a kiss on the cheek and neck, as my arm finds its way around Cincer's back.

We are just talking about my plans for when I get back to the States as Nelia joins us. She is patient as that conversation comes to a stopping point before she feels she can break in and share her Debbie moments.

Ira, CiCi tell her you say 'no more' but not why, at least she say you don't, CiCi. So I ask her, You know about Noah? She say she do, so I ask her how many of each Noah allow on? She say, I am foolish! All know it two of each. So I explain. Two Tagalog, two Ilonggo, two Cebuano speakers. That what there is here. This like Noah and the Ark. Reyna and Ann make two. There no room for three!

I know I shouldn't laugh... I know it. So tell me, could you have maintained a straight face? I can't. But as I laugh, I give Nelia a hug, and continue to hold her tight as I ask, *How did she respond to that?*

She understand. We talk about the girl she want you to help. That all.

The rest of the night is simply nice: good food, joyous singing, sweet companionship, and good neighbors who all are wishing me a safe trip and a quick return.

For a guy who only moved in thirty-one days ago, this stands in stark contrast to what my life was like in Kennewick, Washington.

While I'm not the most social of creatures, I'm not a hermit either. This feels nice.

I find Cincer and quietly mention that tomorrow will be a busy day and I need to get to the airport early. She gets my point and, with all the decorum needed, she lets all know we need to wrap this up early.

All are gone by eleven, and I head off to bed with Cincer. The other gals will do the cleanup.

Being with her is not hard duty, but it's qualitatively different. She really is a no-nonsense female. She isn't the one to flirt, or dress provocatively. That's not to say she doesn't dress well and look great, but she doesn't 'sell' it, if you catch my meaning.

She wasn't the day I met her and that hasn't changed one iota since then. When I say she is smarter than I am, I'm not sure you believe me, but she is.

The difference between us, other than she is a damn sight better looking than I am and thirty-eight years younger, is that my access to a good and stable income has been far better than has hers. Put her in the USA as a kid growing up and me here, and well, shit, I would be a pitiful thing and the good lord only knows what she would be capable of. If I was to guess, she'd probably still be at some university working toward a doctorate or, maybe, already having earned a degree, off doing something incredible.

Her being naked with me in this bed, as she is right now, would never have happened if things were different in the Philippines. But that is where she is, naked and under me. Her legs are spread wide, her hands are on my hips, as I push into her repeatedly.

It may be late, but I'm in no hurry, and Cincer isn't either. In the middle of all this she asks, *You have a girlfriend there?*

That's a damned weird thing to ask. I don't, but why do you ask?

Then this is the last you get until you come back, silly. I want you to remember this, every day you are gone. I give you a reason to come back soon. And that is followed but a self-satisfied giggle.

Well then, maybe I ought to give you something you will think about when I'm gone!

And with that, I grab a tit while I'm fucking her, mauling a nipple good and hard, as I ramp up the power and speed of my fucking.

We are doing the best we can do to break the bed. The giggles are gone. Groans and gasps have replaced them. I'm not being careful or considerate.

My sweat covers her as I press on. Cincer has had at least a couple of orgasms, maybe more. She starts talking again, but this time it isn't conversation. It's pleading. *Cum, Ira. Cum na. Cum na, cum na, cum na.*

Finally I can oblige her. ... She's right, though. This is probably the last time I'll bed a woman until I return to the Philippines.



It's Sunday morning and I'm travelling light. I've a very small bag. Just enough clothing to get me back to the States. Everything else stays here. I've two days and nights in Manila before flying back. I left from Portland but will return via Seattle-Tacoma. The road time from Sea-Tac to home is about the same as it is from PDX, so it's not a big deal. The hotels are more expensive around Sea-Tac and so that's not great, but it's what it is. I'll get home on Wednesday, forty-six days from when I left. It's been only a month and a half, but I'll return a very different man.

As I return to Manila on my trip back to the States, there's not a gal meeting me at a hotel. There's no one I'm adding to my group. I arrive alone and will leave the same way.

I've nothing to do here for two days and that's a pain. I decide to hang out at the Mall of Asia. There are movie theaters at the mall with English language first-run films, good restaurants, and places to sit and read.

It's not perfect, and I do that for the balance of Sunday, but I just don't see it working for Monday.

Instead, I just hang out in the hotel room today and watch US and British news channels. And in that totally boring way the only interruptions, and there are many, are from the text messages I'm getting from my gals. Every one of them seems to have the need to make sure I still exist.

They didn't text yesterday, but they had seen me that morning. When they awoke this morning, I gather it was a different vibe and so the result has been a volley of texts.

I don't find the texts a problem. No, it actually feels good. My last text is a sweet goodnight message from Bim. It's perfect. She is my bookend.

Wednesday is hardly worth mentioning. Between the time spent at the airport, the plane's delayed departure and the flight, it's a day consumed by the process of travel and ending in another hotel room, another Comfort Inn. I get a good night's sleep before the next morning, as I return to the airport to secure a car rental and make the trip back to Kennewick.

I left here in September. I've returned in November. The house has been fixed. There is new carpet throughout the house and some new woodwork is in place downstairs. Do I like the carpet? No. But I just don't care. I want the house sold.

The place is pretty dusty. It needs an airing out but it's in the thirties outside (that's Fahrenheit not Celsius) and so, while I open a window for a little bit, it's too cold to really get much fresh air in here. And then...

And then my head snaps into the realization that the air in the house was never aired out from pretty much October through March or April. I lived this way my entire life. It seems wrong because I've been essentially living outside for a month and a half. Yes, sure at night we would close windows, and turn on an air conditioner in the bedroom, but when in Santa Rita I was not in a home that stayed closed up most of the year, every year.

The carpet seems wrong. It hits me that here I didn't take off my shoes when I walked in and this damned carpet is just hiding the

dirt in the process. For about a month and a half I lived in places without carpets. There were tile floors. Those floors were swept repeatedly during each day. The gals would sometimes be barefooted inside the house. Those floors were clean. This feels far from that.

There's an answering machine on my phone and the message waiting light is blinking. The message counter indicates that it's full and can't accept any new messages. With a pad and a pen in hand, I work through all fifteen messages. I'll follow up on a couple tomorrow. Most don't require anything on my part any more, or ever in a few cases as they were unwanted sales calls.

There's no food in the house. I'll go out for dinner tonight and maybe breakfast tomorrow before shopping. Right now I need to lie down for a nap. I didn't sleep all that well last night. Back in the Philippines, right now, it's 4AM and I would be sleeping. My body thinks that sounds like a good idea.

Well, it was and it wasn't. I got maybe four hours' rest before I awaken, feeling groggy and grungy. A shower resolves both things and I decide I'm hungry. It's like my body is trying to sort shit out and is having a rough time doing it.

On top of that, I feel guilty. I haven't texted the gals in two days. I start freaking out, worrying that they are freaking out too. I have my Verizon phone, but the service is still suspended. Using my landline, I call Verizon and ask that they turn the service to my phone back on. It's a hassle but doesn't take long once the request is made.

The gals have never gotten a text from this number, but I gave them the number I use here. The text app on my phone allows me to send the same message to a number of phones at the same time. First things first. I create contacts for each of them in my phone before sending. It's 5PM here and that means it's now 8AM there. Knowing they will all be awake ...

Hi! I made it. I am back in my house now.
All is OK. Missing you already. Missing
Santa Rita too.

I put the phone back in its holster and decide to go out to the café. But before I can get out of the door my phone goes nuts. Each of my six is sending not just one text but two or three each.

They range from...

Thank God you safe!

to

Now you back there, you really coming back to us? Maybe you like that better?

And so to each I need to answer at least one of their texts, which gives rise to yet another volley. I give up trying to get out the door for now and just sit at the supper table and engage with their texts for the better part of an hour.

I'm finally able to let them know that I'm going out to eat and will text them when I get back in under two hours. That seems to satisfy them; I'm finally able to get going.

It's another night where the special is all-you-can-eat BBQ ribs. That works for me, and I tie into a plateful of them and some mashed potatoes.

They have what they call BBQ in the Philippines, but it isn't like this. Theirs is good, but this is better. It's also the first time I've had mashed potatoes since I left. They do rice. Rice is OK, but I've missed my potatoes.

The glass of coke on the table looks improbably large. The chair seats me higher than I've become accustomed to. But I doubt the café has increased the size of the cups or raised the seats in my absence. It's just that in the Philippines the chairs are lower to the ground and the drink cups are smaller.

I like the height of the chairs here but the size of the cups seem too large. And yet, both here and there, there are things that will be unlimited portions. It's just that in the Philippines the unlimited thing is always the rice, not the meat or the drink.

I'm experiencing culture shock in reverse as I see my native culture through fresh eyes.

While I'm eating, I see faces I haven't seen in a while. Some nod or wave, but none look surprised. My absence wasn't noticed and my return seems to simply be a 'nice to see you, it's been a while' type of thing.

They have been trundling through their days here. Day in and day out going through the paces with little changing. And little has in that way changed for them. That it has for me, they have no way of knowing.

As I leave the café, I pass the movie theater. They are playing one of the same films I saw at the Mall of Asia in Manila. In its own way that is a culture shock as well.

I never texted much before I left for the Philippines. I guess the kids do it a lot, but those of my generation don't. The kids often don't even have a landline. All they have is a cellphone. It's a generational thing here. Over there, I'm not sure I saw any landlines outside of businesses and the hotels. It is cellphones only for most folks, and because the quality of voice calls is generally poor while at the same time the cost of calls is high, texts, at a peso each, are preferred.

None of my girls expect a call from me. They just want to be able to text.

I arrive back home and enter my house quite alone... and yet I'm not alone. My six are a few key clicks away. I don't feel alone. I feel apart. I don't like it.

Before I sit down to start texting again, I see that there's a new message on my landline phone's answering machine. I tap the play button.

Ira! Tom here. Word has it that you are back. Elena and I would love to get together with you and talk about your trip! Give me a call.

Tom is the guy with the Filipina wife. I'm not sure I'm up to this as I suspect I'll have to do a lot of lying. I just can't tell the truth. Not

here, anyway. It would not play well. On the other hand, I don't think I can blow the guy off.

I call Tom and make plans to join them on Friday night. I gather we will eat some Filipino food. I'm not sure why that is needed, as I've been eating nothing but that for a while, but I don't have a problem with it.

I have ice cubes in a rocks glass and a bottle of bourbon. I pour some in the glass. It's 7:30PM here which makes it 10:30AM in Santa Rita. I can't text Cincer, who will be working or Reyna, who will be in class. Ann may or may not be somewhere she has any signal. I send a text message to Bim, Lorie and Nelia.

OK, back from supper. How are things there?

[Bim] OK my love. Miss you.

Miss you too. Truly.

[Nelia] OK here. No problem. When you come back?

I don't know when I'll return.

[Lorie] What you eat?

I had BBQ. It was good.

The texting continues for another half an hour before we wrap it up.

I look around the house and immediately feel an emptiness. There's nothing for me here. I need to get back to my girls. Exactly how long that will take is the unanswered question. Yes, I've moved before, but that only entailed renting a U-Haul, canceling utilities and informing the landlord. Granted, that was years ago, and I own this house. Leaving the States entirely is a far more complicated thing.

This is going to take a bit to figure out.

There's a bunch I need to do at the end, like the switching the utilities to the new owner, but even then, the last bill will come after I'm out of the house. Maybe a month after. When living in the USA, the bill would follow me to my new place. This time it can't.

I can't simply use the bank branch closest to my new house and so handling banking issues presents some obstacles.

I need to sell and dispose of my stuff here. At least I need to do that for most of it. I'm not sure about all of it. But my firearms can't come with me. I have four rifles: a .30-06, a .308, a 7mm Magnum, and a .22 for plinking; three shotguns: a 12 ga., a 16 ga., and a 410 for varmints; and two handguns: a 9mm and a .22. They all need to be sold.

I won't need most of the clothing hanging in my closet. Coats, jackets, sweaters, wool shirts, insulated coveralls, wool socks, gloves, winter caps, boots, all that sort of stuff has no place in a wardrobe in Santa Rita. Even long sleeve shirts are essentially non-starters.

What will I do with the furniture, the tools in the garage, the mower, the ATV, my boat and boat trailer, and so much more? All that needs to be figured out.

There's no way I'll be able to live in my house as things start going out the door, but some of the clothing needs to stay until the day I leave. I'm not sure how I do that, but I'll be out of the house long before I can leave town. I think I'm going to need some help.

I've been up for hours but the gals are sleeping now. They won't be up until about four in the afternoon here. I spend the day with the real estate agent, a bank officer and my attorney. Nothing is resolved, but a plan of attack is being formed.

I think one thing I need from the agent is a place to rent toward the end of the stay. He thinks that I'm assuming far too much. The house may not really be able to move until spring, *'so what's the problem?'* After I've spent time telling him I'm leaving the country, he really says to me, *You can live in it until you leave.*

When I point out that I need to sell everything and the place will be pretty much unfurnished, long before I leave, he seems confused. He doesn't get it.

Once again, I explain to him, I'm not moving to another town and taking my stuff with me. He is used to a moving van backing up to the house and emptying it in one huge move. That's not going to happen this time

I told him. Didn't he believe me?

You're really leaving the US?

Yes, I really am leaving the US.

Why?

You married?

Yes. Why do you ask?

Never mind. I can't explain why I'm going. Just know that I am and so I'll need a place to stay at some point. Some place like a furnished apartment.

Normally, there are a couple of homes or apartments that are available, as furnished, in the area if you include Richland. Let me know when you think you will need one within a month or so.

I think you need to start looking next month. I really want to be out of here by mid-January the latest, if at all possible.

OK. But understand that your home will sell faster if it's furnished.

Why? Whoever buys it won't want my stuff.

Yes, but visually, buyers respond better to a furnished place.

Unless you can sell it before Christmas, I don't see it being furnished beyond that.

Why?

Because I am, one way or the other, going to be gone in January and, unless you are going to move all my stuff out and dispose of it once the house sells, there is no way I can leave anything in it once I'm gone.

Are you sure you really want to leave the US? Why?

Do I need to find another agent? I have my reasons and I don't have to justify them to you.

Understood. ... So what do you want to do with your other properties?

Let's put all three parcels of land up for sale. There's no hurry on them. I want to set the price above current market value. If we get an offer at the asking price, I'll take it, but I don't want to dicker. It will be the asking price and no lower.

They may not sell for years.

That's just fine.

I'm finally done by two in the afternoon.

Next is a stop at MickeyD's on West Kennewick Avenue, and then just over N Ely Street to Safeway for groceries. There won't be a need to go out to dinner tonight.

It won't be a fancy meal, but with a pouch of premade salad, a bottle of Safeway brand garlic ranch dressing, a loaf of fresh Italian garlic bread from their instore bakery, a plastic pouch of ready-to-boil raviolis, a jar of pasta sauce, and a bottle of Pinot Noir, I'll be just fine, with leftovers for a second meal.

And once again it strikes me that this is not the world I just left. There's no premade green salad in Tacloban. Nor are there the pouches of ready to boil pasta or the fresh garlic bread, which is ready to pop into your oven. This is what I'm leaving. I tell myself, enjoy it now because when you leave, this is gone from your life.

Is it really that important? No, I guess not. The food is different there, but it's fine. It's just that here I'm in a weird way self-sufficient, and there I'm not. And no, here, I don't need everything premade like I just bought. It's just that it's easier. Here, I understand how to use the things that are sold in the market. There, I more than not, don't. There, I depend on the skills and knowledge of my gals.

I'm unpacking the bags I've brought into the kitchen when my cellphone buzzes.

[Cincer] You OK?

Yes. I am fine. How are you?

[Cincer] OK Lang⁵⁶ They ask me when you will return. I tell them too soon. This correct?

Yes. That is exactly correct.

[Cincer] If you keep me informed, I will help to keep them from worrying. OK?

They are worried?

[Cincer] Yes, very much.

OK. I will let you know each morning when you wake up.

[Cincer] Good. Very Good. OK I get ready to work now. Love you.

Love you too.

I'm barely done unpacking the groceries when the phone goes nuts again. It's clear to me that, each evening, I can expect something like this.

Tomorrow, I'll need to leave for Tom's place at around five thirty, which is eight-thirty in the morning there. I tell the gals to not text me after eight in the morning tomorrow, as I'll visit a friend and his wife. I do not need the texts streaming in while I'm there for all sorts of reasons. So long as my phone is quiet after five-thirty tomorrow night, all will be good.

⁵⁶ Means "I'm OK" in Tagalog.

I spend much of Friday finding a place that rents a dumpster container in which I can start throwing things out when I get ready. I make another trip over to my attorney to sign a power of attorney, as things will need to be signed in my absence. I gather that the sale of the house will require my signature, and the real estate agent seems to have an idea how that can be done if I've already returned to Santa Rita. Maybe he's finally accepting the reality of my decision to leave the USA.

While I'm with the agent, we talk about pricing the place a little bit on the low side if I want a quick sale. I tell him I'll think about it and get back to him on Monday. The market is strong right now, so how low do I really want to go? I need to sleep on this for a couple of days.

I get a call from an old friend, who then comes over as I'm cleaning one of my rifles. I want them to be in as good a condition as possible when I sell them.

James is retired, just like me. He isn't in any hurry and we just chew the fat while I get on with the cleaning. It ends up being a nice afternoon, but he hasn't left when the clock shows four in the afternoon and my cellphone goes nuts again.

I apologize, but it's a little awkward as I really need to respond and he's here. There's nothing to do but say, *I'm sorry, but these are my good friends from the Philippines and I really need to answer their texts.*

What time is it over there now?

Seven in the morning.

James gives me a look that suggests he thinks something just ain't right, but he doesn't want to intrude. Instead, he just gets up and leaves. Damn. That's how rumors of all sorts of shit start. It's not what is known. It's what is surmised. The problem is that laying it all out would not solve the problem.

So, sitting alone at the kitchen table, I text with my gals. Since I told them it was early today or wait until I got home, each independently decided early is better. It's sweet. They are asking

me to take pictures of this city. They want a connection to what came before. I guess I can see that.

The texting continues for the hour. They really are worried and there's little I can do to allay their fears. Their fears produce frustration on my end. I simply need to get back. It's all I can think of as I drive over to Tom's.

That, and the fact that, once again, I'll sleep alone in my bed. I miss my gals.

The dinner at Tom's starts up well enough. Elena has made lumpia and bihon. That's about as basic Filipino as you can get. There's also a bowl of afritada⁵⁷ along with the white rice. Once again the afritada is nothing novel to me. The rice is different from what was served at home. But it's no big deal.

Tom smiles at me as I simply proceed to add things to my plate.
Not exactly new to you?

No. This is, of course, very good. The dishes are standard Filipino fare. It's what you might think of as Filipino comfort food.

I grab the tablespoon and take a bite of the afritada with a little bit of the rice.

The afritada is very good!

Elena is smiling at the complement, and possibly going to say something when Tom asks, *You gone native?*

Excuse me?

The spoon. You really eat with the spoon?

But before I can answer, Elena pipes up. *Tom! That rude! He eating correct.*

Thank you. I was about to tell you that you are clearly a good cook. This is masarap⁵⁸!

⁵⁷ A type of Filipino stew.

⁵⁸ Delicious (Tagalog)

Thank you, Sir Ira.

Hey, she is talking to you like she used to talk when I met her in Manila.

I think she is trying to make me feel at home. ... You are welcome, Elena.

Sir Ira, may I ask why you in my country for so long? You meet someone there, perhaps?

Tom is a little put out. Babe, that's private! It's not right to ask!

Why that? I want to know. If he not want to say, that what he will say. It proper to ask, I think.

Ira, you don't need to answer.

Look, Tom, I don't want to make this awkward. Elena is no different from the Filipinas I've met. In her world, it's OK to ask. I respect that. ... But it's also true that a man ought to be able to keep things private he wants to keep private. I think that is true in both of the cultures. ... Yes, Elena, I did meet many people there and I really like your country. I decided to figure out if I want to live there.

Sir Ira! She is married!

Elena! Tom is really getting pissed with his wife.

Tom, why a man who meets a woman in my country not able to bring her here? Because he not able to marry her! If she not, I sure she wants to come here! Yes, this is true!

Ira, you opened the door and now she has nailed you as an adulterer. See what a mistake that was? I'm sorry, my friend.

It's OK and, no, Elena, I'm not seeing anyone who is married.

Oh! No! She too young!

Elena!

Tom! Why I not ask?

Elena reminds me a great deal of Cincer. She's smart and quick. She's partially right of course, but now I have to lie.

No, Elena, that is not the reason either. I really don't want to say any more about it.

Elena gives me a good hard look. She looks at Tom and then back at me. Is she asking herself, *'Do I want to put ideas in my husband's head?'* All she does say is, *OK, it not needed. I know now. You be careful. Maybe it OK, maybe it not.*

I take a lumpia, dip it into some sweet chili sauce and take a bite. *You really are a very good cook!*

When you go back?

I'm wanted back before New Year's but I probably can't make it back until close to the end of January. There's too much to do.

Where will you live?

On Samar, across the bridge from Tacloban. It's a place called Santa Rita.

So Cebuano, not Tagalog.

Mostly English.

Not all Cebuano dialect?

Would you be so kind as to pass the bibon? ... Tom, how long did it take you to figure out that your wife is smarter than you are?

As I'm adding some of the noodles to my plate, Tom is chuckling. But it isn't Tom who answers.

Sir Ira, you have one like that too?

Oo.

Her name and number? Maybe, I will text her.

Her name is Cincer, but she is working at this hour. She has a bookkeeping job in Tacloban and must not do any personal texting.

Tom just about chokes on a sip of beer, before, *That's a name?*

Yes, that's really her name. And I spell it out for him.

Elena is giggling. She is well accustomed to the fanciful names of her sister and brother Filipinos. *Sir Ira, I understand. I will text her before she goes to work. She really work on Saturday? But Cincer not her nickname. What that?*

CiCi. And yes, she's working this Saturday. Not all Saturdays, but she's working today. And that's actually the truth as she works every other Saturday.

Tom is looking at me with a pained expression. He knows Elena knows something she doesn't want him to know and that I don't want to talk about. I give her the phone number rather than laying the phone in front of her. I don't want to risk what else she might see.

Sir Ira, what places you visit?

Manila, Makati, Quezon City, Pasig, Pasay, Iloilo, Tacloban and Samar.

Wow you see a lot but you not see Palawan caves, Boracay beaches, Baguio, or the chocolate hills of Bohol! You not see the famous tourist places.

I saw Intramuros.

Yes, OK, but not the rest.

True.

Tom is confused. *You visited seven islands?*

No, just four. The first five names are really part of greater Manila. What we call Manila is actually a metro area of many cities.

Oh. I guess I missed all that.

How long were you over there?

A week.

Oh, so you didn't get a chance to see much then.

Now, Tom with lecherous grin from ear to ear says, *No, Elena kept me pretty busy.*

And, I think to myself, she kept him distracted. She wanted to seal the deal and she didn't want any second thoughts. *I bet she did, Tom. Of that I have no doubt. She's a smart one.*

What do you mean?

Elena is squirming now. She knows I know.

Oh, Tom, she just knew she was the one for you and she wanted to make sure you knew she knew it. ... Right Elena?

Relief flows out the gals face as she replies, *Yes. Correct!*

Sir Ira, maybe you like maja blanca?

It's a weird dessert as it uses a huge amount of corn starch and kernel corn, but it's good.

Yes. Very much so.

Good. But I have one more question. I see Tom tense up. At this point I don't think it'll be a problem. The damage, if it's damage, has already been done. *What you think of the rice?*

It's not like the good rice in the Philippines.

Yes! Exactly. I tell this to Tom. What you really think. Tell me.

It's not soft. It doesn't clump like rice does there and it's a longer grain. It's the rice we serve here, I guess, but it doesn't really work for Asian cooking.

Yes! Yes! See Tom? I right. This rice not good.

The poor guy looks at me. He is one poor, sad fella, as he asks me, *Is there that much difference? I mean... rice is rice!*

Yes, there's that much difference and no, not all rice is the same. Sorry, but your wife is correct.

I feel sorry for the guy. Elena's sharp and he just isn't close. He has no idea what her culture is and how different it is from his. He married a body. A very pretty body who would give him sex, cook his meals, do his laundry and keep him warm in bed. There isn't anything wrong with that. She gets to live in the States, gets a green

card and maybe citizenship. They both win but, on another level, they are worlds apart. Maybe that will change in time, but I don't know if Elena wants him to know too much.

I finally offer my thanks for a fine meal and good company a little before nine, and only drive a couple of blocks before pulling over. Cincer will be on lunch break.

Small problem here. A Filipina here figured out that there are a number of you.

She figured out that there was a smart one and she asked for your name.

Lying to her will not work but do not allow her to know the ages of Ann or Reyna.

[Cincer] What her name? How you meet her?

She is Elena, wife of my friend, Tom. She is much smarter than Tom.

[Cincer] She trick him? She bad?

Yes and no.

Yes, I think she was careful in a way so that he never really saw the Philippines while he was there, but I think she is good to him.

[Cincer] You like her?

How do you mean that?

[Cincer] Oh! Hihihhi. No, not like that. She nice?

She has her own agenda and her own needs. She was nice tonight. But I don't really know the answer beyond that.

[Cincer] OK. I understand. Work na, my love.

OK. Love you too. Bye.

That done, I finish my drive home.

I sleep in on Saturday morning and lollygag around the house until noon, before enjoying a lunch at MickeyD's. I'm told that there will be an appraisal on the house and following that, the paperwork I need to sign with the real estate agent will be ready. The appraisal will occur this coming week.

There are many small things I'll do in the coming days. Things like placing a classified ad in the Tri-City Herald for my firearms. It makes no sense to go into all the details, but these things need to happen. This act of leaving the country is far more involved than moving to a different State.

By half-past four in the afternoon, I have a text from Cincer.

[Cincer] Hoohoo. She is a smart one, truly. You right. She asked about how many and ages. You not tell her how many?

I didn't tell her anything other than I was not marrying and bringing to the USA.

[Cincer] OK. She figure it out. Yes she smart. She ask if you good to us. Of course I tell her yes.

[Cincer] She ask how many before me. I ask her why she ask that. She say because if I the first then I am stupid.

What do you think of that?

[Cincer] How I know? You not like her husband I think. That what I tell her.

[Cincer] Ira, she say you nice to her and keep her secret. She will do the same for you. What secret you keep?

Hard to explain, but she hid things about life in the Philippines from him.

[Cincer] I think she believe some of us are young. I not tell her this.

[Cincer] She ask your cell number. I give it to her. Do not let her trick you.

[Cincer] She try to trick me. But I not allow it.

Why does she want to know my number?

[Cincer] Hard to know my love. But be careful. She ask for the numbers and names of the other girls.

[Cincer] I tell her, if you want to give that to her, it up to you, not me. I not give it.

OK. How are you?

[Cincer] OK lang. We all OK. No problem here.

The text exchanges with Cincer and the other gals continue on and off for hours. If it were just two of us, I would have suggested the use of Yahoo messenger as my tablet is there, but there isn't any way to do that with six of them⁵⁹.



I have some surprising news. There's interest in all three parcels I own. They are adjacent undeveloped lots. The offer is too low and I'm rejecting it. I'm in no rush on them.

On Sunday, about the time I and, I assume, Tom, are watching an NFL game, in this case, the Seahawks against the St. Louis Rams, I get a text. It's late in the game and we are losing. It's possible that one of the gals is texting. I can't think of who else would, so I pick up the phone.

[509-378-xxxx] How many Filipinas?

Who is this?

[509-378-xxxx] Elena

How many? How old?

Why are you asking?

[509-378-xxxx] Want to know.

Why?

⁵⁹ Remember this is 2004. Three years before the iPhone. There are no real smartphones. There is the Blackberry, but there really aren't Internet based messaging apps on cellphones. The phones my gals have at this point are Nokia cellphones with just the twelve buttons on them. The world has changed a lot since then!

[509-378-xxxx] Maybe bad for me.

You mean bad for your marriage to Tom?

[509-378-xxxx] Yes. That why. He ask me what you doing. Why I not tell him.

How is anything you learn from me going to help you with Tom, unless you are intending to hurt me?

[509-378-xxxx] Ha! You have young ones!

I hate to lie. It goes against my gut, but there are times when you just really don't have a good option.

No. Not like you think. There are four gals. The youngest is only eighteen, but her mother approves. Another is only nineteen

So yes, they are young. Maybe too young. But not illegal. Still it embarrasses me.

[509-378-xxxx] They too young for you.

Maybe, but they are with me by their own choice. Stay out of my life or I will make trouble for you.

Leave me alone, I leave you alone.

[509-378-xxxx] What I tell Tom?

Tell him my love is a Muslim woman and I don't think it would be smart for me to bring her here. There would be prejudice.

Tell him, that is why you warned me it might be dangerous.

But tell him to keep his damned mouth shut. I don't need any problems while I am here.

[509-378-xxxx] OK, yes, OK. I do that.

[509-378-xxxx] Why you want four?

I didn't.

[509-378-xxxx] I not understand.

It is complicated and I am done explaining.

[509-378-xxxx] OK, OK. No more.

Seattle has lost... to a team that should be in LA.



The next two weeks are pretty much the difficult part. The selling of what I can. The giving away some and throwing away the rest.

The house is appraised at four hundred and forty thousand dollars. That's what happens when you are single, don't have kids, have money and can buy a nice large place on a decent amount of land as an investment, even though you don't need anything that fucking big. I always saw it as a safe investment for when the wheels came off the economy and the stock market crashed.

Did I need that large a house otherwise? No, of course not. And it didn't cost me anything near half of what it has been valued at. I always intended to sell it for a good bit more than it cost to build. The appraisal number is in line with what I suspected it's worth, based on what things have been selling for lately. But then, it's a strong market right now. And so, while I'm not downsizing in Kennewick, as I expected to do in my later years, I'm going to benefit from my plan.

On November 26th (their 27th in the Philippines) I get text messages from the girls. There's a big storm there called Winnie. There's flooding and school has been cancelled. They are OK and wanted me to know that.

For the next couple of days I track Winnie. It continues to gather strength, but it has moved north of Samar where it pretty much transforms from a major tropical depression to a typhoon.

In the end, the storm causes the death of over fifteen thousand souls and massive loss of property on the island of Luzon. It was a surprise and a bit sobering.

Life for my gals seems to be OK. They were more inconvenienced by the storm than anything else.



My next three weeks continue on, much as the two previous ones had. I'll move out of the house on Wednesday, three days before Christmas. It's not too cold today. Right now it's 42F and they say it may get as high as 55F later today. I can only hope it'll be as warm later in the week. I'm bringing very little with me to the rental in Richland, so... so long as it isn't snowing, all will be OK.

I've had a few interested parties in regard to the sale of the house. Interest rates are low and banks are lending. I'm crossing my fingers.

The texting with the gals continues every day, but I can tell they are getting increasingly stressed out.

Elena has not been a problem, but Tom has avoided me and, if that is the worst of it, I can live with it. Elena is one version of the mistake that I might have run into if I just found one gal over there. At least, it doesn't look like she is taking Tom for a ride and then dumping him. But even that assumption is a guess. She has just recently gotten her two year green card. She will have to wait at least close to two more years to get her ten-year regular card that is without conditions. I've no way to know what she will do then.

There's no way I can leave until after the New Year, but I need to leave as soon as I can. Other than the last bits to get out of the house, just about everything else is resolved. I've worked out how to handle the bills for the utilities that will accrue before and up to the sale, but for which I'll only be billed for after the house sells. The bank has legal paperwork for sending funds to my bank in the Philippines on a quarterly basis via wire transfer, plus the funds from the sale of the house if it doesn't sell until after I'm gone.

I'm told that the house may not sell until next August, close to the start of the next school year. I hope that is not the case. There are a few last items to get out of the house and I'm sure I could get it out before New Year's, but the plane fares between Christmas and New Year's are very expensive. It just isn't worth paying double for travel to get back that fast. But with any luck I'll be out of here by January 15th.



Another week has passed, and there have been major developments. Christmas was yesterday. This morning I received word that we have an offer on the house. It's a bit under the asking price, but if the house doesn't sell until August, the cost of utilities will be close to the difference. I've forty-eight hours to chew on it. I'll take that chew time.

The other piece of news doesn't affect me directly, but it's a warning I need to pay attention to. The news is that there has been a tsunami that wiped out a bunch of shit in Indonesia and appears to have cost many thousands of lives.

I knew, from what the gals said, that there were earthquakes and monsoons in the Philippines, but maybe I didn't give it enough consideration.

As I'm currently just sort of sitting on my ass, I decide to read up on these things. As I do, all my ideas for what I wanted to build are trashed. I learn that monsoons can come with storm surges. Surges of ocean water that can be as dangerous as tsunamis.

I read up on the 1881 typhoon Haiphong, which is said to have caused twenty thousand deaths in the Philippines. The 1991 storm Thelma hit the middle islands of the Philippines, called the Visayas. Santa Rita is in the Visayas. Thelma caused maybe eight thousand deaths. The really bad ones are not every year or even every decade, but they do come. If this climate change shit turns out to be real, things might get nasty. Clearly, even a storm that never made it to typhoon status can cause massive problems on our island. Winnie is a prime example of that.

I don't think I made a mistake settling in Santa Rita, but I think it's fair to say that I'm less complacent now than I was before. We don't get hurricanes or typhoons, much less tsunamis, in Kennewick, and I wasn't really paying attention. When I noticed the building for impermanence I didn't really understand the why of it.

Nothing I saw in Tacloban or Santa Rita would survive such an event. There's talk of climate warming. I'm not sure I believe all they say. Folks cry wolf a lot. Al Gore is going hoarse crying about

it. They say that there will be stronger storms related to this and that the oceans will rise. So far I'm not seeing any signs of that, but shit happens. The Indonesians weren't wiped out by climate change. It was an undersea earthquake and subsequent tsunami.



It's January 15th and I'm sitting on my damned ass still here in Kennewick. We have a closing in nine days. As everything will go smoother if I'm here, I have tickets to leave out of Sea-Tac the day after the closing. I should be back in Santa Rita on the twenty-seventh, a day before Reyna's birthday.

Everything is out of the house. I spoke to Elena a while ago about how to send things to the Philippines, and she kindly guided me through a process called balikbayan⁶⁰. I shipped nine large cardboard boxes of stuff. The cost was under one hundred dollars per box. I sent a bunch of my small kitchen appliances, a computer, keepsakes, linen, pictures and artwork I've purchased over the years, some tools, a silver service I inherited years ago, a complete china dinner service for twelve, and a bunch of good distilled spirits that I didn't see in the stores in Tacloban when I went looking.

Elena warns me that I will make it back long before the boxes get there, and so not to stress out if I don't see them for a while.

As I sit here and look around at this town I lived in, it becomes clear. What was holding me here was inertia and little more. I had my routine, places I'd go at different times; MickeyD's three or four times a week for lunch. The café for supper three times a week; the movies once or twice a month; the library; the morning coffee in my breakfast nook while reading the Tri-City Herald; tinkering with fixing small engines for friends when needed; messing around with my fishing boat, a 1973 Bayliner, which sold fast; keeping my firearms in good condition; sighting in at the range in the fall and hunting in the winter.

⁶⁰ Tagalog for 'return home.' Balikbayan boxes are sent in cargo containers via ocean going ships. They are priced by size and not weight.

OK, so that was my life. It filled the time, but did I need to be in Kennewick? I could have been in a hundred other places. It's just where I was. And, in truth, I was just treading water. Nothing more. I was comfortable, but empty and lonely. Nothing much would change until I died, except that one thing after another would fall off the list as I became too old to do the thing. I was marking time until my passing.

Now, the house is gone; the firearms are gone; the boat is gone. That which I made use of to fill my days is gone and I'm ready, no, itching, to leave.

As I know when I will be leaving, I contact Verizon. I gather I have to buy out the remaining time on my two year contract. When I call the company I am getting a lot of pushback, but I do finally get an agreement. The cut-off date is set for the day after I leave. It's not too bad. There are only three more months left on it. They can charge my debit card one more time and close the account. It's the very last bill issue I have needed to resolve.



Finally! The day has come. The house is sold and I deposit a cashier's check in my Wells Fargo account, fill out the paperwork for a wire transfer of about one-fourth of it now and another fourth each quarter.

My Social Security checks and pension arrive in this account as well.

I've arranged to sell my Suburban, though I've been driving it. I'll drop it off and get a lift to the Avis car rental at the Pasco Airport. Returning to the bank, I deposit a cashier's check for the Suburban. That is the very last thing. I'm done.

I'm on my way and travelling light again. All the other stuff is in the boxes that will arrive later. Most of what I have in my bag are small presents for the gals.

I'm not coming back and so I didn't need a round-trip ticket, but because of a rule, I had to have a 'return flight.' I chose a cheap

flight out of the Philippines to Penang as my 'return ticket.' I'll not use it, but a foreigner is not allowed to fly into the Philippines without a ticket to leave it. It does not have to be a return from where you came from. It just has to be a ticket to leave. So a ticket from Manila to Penang gets me on the plane in Sea-Tac. It's a game, but one I have no choice but to play.

The gals know I'm coming and they know exactly what flight I'll return on. It has been a long separation in their minds. In truth, it has been only seventy-two days. I've accomplished a shitload of stuff in a very short period of time... and, because of all I did, I do not need to come back, ever.

I began this journey four months ago... a lifetime ago. I'm not the man I was when I left in September. Not close to it.

A couple of hours before I board the plane to Manila, I get a text. The gals really should be sleeping, and so I guess, though I would have looked at the text anyway, I'm curious. It's Elena.

[Elena] OK, you gone now, right? I not tell anyone. What is the truth?

Truth about what?

[Elena] You really have four girls or you just bragging?

It could hardly be bragging as I wasn't telling anyone.

[Elena] What the real reason you staying there?

There aren't four.

[Elena] I knew it! Why you try to act big. Two is plenty!

If it were only two, that would have been fine with me. No, there are six. Their names are Cincer, Princess, Nelia, Lorie, Shaniel and Reyna. And yes they are every bit the reason.

Two from Manila, two from Panay, and two from Tacloban/Samar area.

[Elena] How old?

Old enough.

[Elena] Thank God you not tell Tom. I think I will lose him!

I really doubt that. There is no way to bring them to the States and I truly doubt Tom would be happy in the Philippines. It's the rice! ☺

I think you were worrying about a nonissue. I know why you did what you did, but it was probably not needed.

[Elena] Maybe you right. Maybe I worry too much. I do love him.

I'm glad you do.

[Elena] Have a safe trip, Ira. Be good to your girls. Too many bad men I think.



For once in my life, I booked a first class seat. I'm actually able to lie down! When I get to Manila, I feel fine, and the flight to Tacloban leaves in just four hours.

I stop off at a Philippines airlines counter while at the airport and exchange the ticket to Penang for a round trip from Iloilo to Tacloban in the name of Lorie's mother, Lillian. I'm sure she would like to see her daughter. The reticketing cost is minimal.

Having crossed the date line, it's the twenty-seventh, a Thursday. Reyna's birthday is tomorrow, a Friday, and I've no doubt we will have a large party.

Ninety minutes after we take off from Manila, we are landing in Tacloban. It's only 2PM, and so Cincer, and Reyna will not be here to meet me, but I expect to see all the others.

I walk out of the airport to find not four gals, not six, but eight!

Of the eight, I know all but one. Clearly, Cincer has taken the afternoon off and Reyna has stayed home from school. Reyna's older sister is here. That's a surprise, but a sweet one. She has been

supportive of Reyna's life with me. My returning for her sister's birthday will not have gone unnoticed.

But who's the eighth female? She can't be any older than Reyna. No one is introducing her. The kid stands a little back from the group and isn't engaged.

I'm getting hugs and kisses from my six plus Reyna's sister, Jessa. Maybe Jessa's hugs and kisses are a little more enthusiastic than I expect from her, but maybe she's just relieved to see me for Reyna's sake.

That eighth face, who isn't seeking hugs or kisses, who the fuck is she?

There are nine of us here and three motorcycles. In the States it would be a problem. Here it's not. With two riders behind the operator of each bike, we ride back to Santa Rita and home.

As we approach the house I notice that Reyna's sister's place looks deserted. I wonder where she is living now. They must be living close by or she wouldn't be here today.

We put the bikes up under a roofed over area attached to the house. I guess you might call it a carport, but it doesn't look like it in a formal way.

I was half expecting to see the signs of an imminent party in progress, and was going to comment on just that, but there are no signs. That's OK with me and I'll say nothing, but I seem to have jumped to an unwarranted conclusion, as Cincer points out, *Ira, it a long trip. We know you are tired. So we will be quiet and you just go to sleep, unless you want to eat first. What you want? Food or sleep?*

I got a special type of seat on the flight from the States and was able to lie down and sleep. I feel fine. I had a meal at the airport before my flight here less than three hours ago, so I'm not hungry. If I feel tired later, I'll lie down, but for now, I have some presents to hand out!

I think that takes them by surprise, though the presents will be welcome, I'm beginning to feel like there are a couple of things I need to know.

But before I hand out the presents, tell me, Jessa, as I see you have moved, where are you and your husband living?

That seems to have hit a nerve, if the looks on eight faces are any indicator. Bim looks nervous. Nelia looks determined. Cincer looks sad. Ann is clearly frustrated by something. Lorie, Reyna and her sister, Jessa, are clearly scared.

Jessa is frozen, as is Reyna, with eyes wide open.

Well, will someone tell me what's going on?

Both Ann and Cincer start to talk at the same time. They both stop, and look at each other. There appears to be a quiet negotiation and then Cincer starts again. *Jessa's husband... he find a new girl and leave her. He living in Ormoc City. Jessa live here now. We decide this. She ask and we agree. This is best.*

Did any of you think to ask me?

We think you busy there and we not want to make things more difficult for you.

I'm not buying that. Was it that you decided it needed to happen but if you told me, you were afraid I might not return?

Yes.

No! That loud and determined last exclamation has come from Ann, who appears to be fed up with something, and it seems like that is what it is, as she takes a deep breath and adds, *If it just Jessa, they not worried. They sure you come back. But if they tell you about Jessa, then they tell you about Eva. It the other one, Eva, that they accept. You already say no to her. That why.*

When did I do that?

When Reyna's teacher ask you to help her?

Eva is that girl? And I point to the kid I had not recognized.

Yes.

You disagree with her being here?

No. It OK she here. I disagree we not tell you this.

Oh? ... Cincer, care to explain again why you didn't tell me?

Ann think, you will come back, but just tell us Eva must leave. You will say she can stay until you get back. Nothing more.

None of the rest of you agreed with Ann?

Ira, maybe you do what Ann say, OK you will say that now because you are back. If we tell you when you away, maybe Ann is right, but maybe she not.

Ha! That is Ann again. She really isn't having any of this. I look at her. If she has something to say, let her say it.

Why they not know you love us? Why they not trust your heart? I know. Yes, I do. I know you love me. You not say, 'Here is a poor but pretty Filipina I can fuck.' No! You good to me. You are happy to see me do what I do each day. We talk and be happy. That a good heart. Why they not see this?

Nelia, when we had Reyna's party, you spoke to Debbie. Is that when it was decided?

No. Debbie come to us after you leave and say, please allow the girl to stay here. You not here so it decided it OK until you come back. We not need to tell you, we think. But, Ira, we like Eva. We talk and want her to stay. That when we decide and Ann say we are wrong. ... Ira, what you do now? You angry with us?

Am I angry? I sure am. I don't think it'll help to show it, but, yes, I'm pretty well ticked off. I had told them no. That should have been the end of it.

I can get how my being gone made it seem like it was justifiable, but that only allows for bonds to form, which makes it damned close to impossible to send the kid away now.

*As to Ann's logic and CiCi's concern, it's the difference being right, which Ann was, and being cautious, which CiCi was. Both of those positions are defensible. But the decision, to allow Eva to come in the first instance, is not defensible and you are **all** responsible for that. You should never have allowed it, as it makes sending her away now simply impossible without creating*

problems within this family. Every one of you has failed me in this. Eva can stay, but each of you has hurt yourself in my heart.

That last part, I really had not intended to say, until it just came out anyway. And now, as the reality of what I've said sinks in, there are looks of shock on faces.

Eva, maybe ten seconds later, runs out of the gate.

You might as well bring her back, as the damage is done whether she stays or goes, and her going will probably just make it worse for all of us now.

Bim and Cincer run out after the girl.

Jessa, I know Alvin was your partner but that you were not really married. Still, are you sure Alvin and you are done with each other? If it was just a fight, maybe you will get over it.

It over, truly, Sir Ira.

I'm sorry, Jessa. You loved him, right?

Maybe, it true. But no more.

When did this happen?

A week before Christmas.

I would ask her if she just needed a bed to sleep in and a roof over her head while she figured out what to do next, but the kiss and hug I got from her at the airport have far more meaning now. She wants in completely.

OK, so you want to join these other six gals and be one of my lovers? Do I understand correctly?

Yes, Po.

If you are serious, you can join me Saturday night. I'll be with Reyna tonight and tomorrow night.

Alone?

Why not? Yes, Jessa, there will be many times when we are not alone, but we don't have to start that way. Of course that is only if you want to really join. If

you just need a place to stay for a bit before you find a new place or a new partner and then leave, you should stay out of my bed completely. Do you understand?

Oo, Po. I understand.

I think Reyna might have been happier right now if it were not for the Eva issue. Still, it's just her I want in my bed tonight and that surprises her. *I to be with you? I think you angry with us. Why you want me if you angry?*

I'm angry at what you gals have done. You are still one of my loves. That cannot change

I not understand, Po.

I'm disappointed with each of you. There's a difference. You are still my gals.

To which Ann explains, *See? See what he do? Why you not know?*

But I'm shaking my head. *Ann, you were also wrong to allow Eva to even come in the first place, so don't be so hard on them now.*

OK, yes, but I not understand about what you call bonding. I not think anyone ever this way here.⁶¹ Maybe it because you think like a foreigner. I learn this and not make the mistake again.

Oh, don't give me that crap. Even for as little time as I was here, I see you treat non-family members as family. And when they are family they stay. Sure, I used a different word, but the concept is the same.

Reyna, Nelia and Lorie are all taking this in. No one is smiling. No one is coming to Ann's defense, probably because as wrong as Ann was, they were even more wrong.

Bim and Cincer are not back yet and I don't really feel like handing out any presents. So that isn't going to happen, but I could actually stand a bit of food.

Lorie, what do we have to eat?

⁶¹ Ann is wrong, as I have heard the term out of many a Filipina's mouth. It just isn't in Ann's experience.

Both Nelia and Lorie jump up to get whatever they have fixed for me.

Jessa, what was the fight with Alvin about?

He start using shabu⁶². That devil drug. I find it and throw it out. Not in my house! No! Then he hit me. I get a knife and go after him. I tell him to leave and not come back ever! I tell him I call the pulis⁶³. Then he go.

Why do you want to be with me?

Ha! I crazy if I not want. This better. You like Reyna? Yes? Then you will like me. I am sure.

Platters of bihon, fried rice with shrimp, sweet macaroni salad, and puto⁶⁴ are placed on the table. This is not designed to be a balanced meal, nor an inspired selection of compatible dishes. It's a case of not being sure exactly what I might want to eat.

It just so happens that I'm a sucker when it comes to fried rice and this tastes great.

It's getting late but Bin and Cincer have not returned. The person who does come to the gate is Reyna's teacher, Debbie. I can't say that I'm looking forward to seeing her.

I don't think she is particularly happy to see me either. *Why you mean to Eva? Why you mean to the others?*

Just who the hell are you to come here, to my home, and ask any damned thing?

Eva say she won't come back here. Why you do that?

Once again, you're not welcome here. Go away.

Debbie isn't leaving. Ann decides, since I'm not going to talk, she will. *Miss Debbie, Ira not mean to her. He say she can stay. He get angry with us, not Eva.*

⁶² A powerfully addictive meth stimulant, easily accessible and affordable, it is the drug of choice of over 90% of Filipino drug users. Usually, a "fix" is used every 3 hours. A single "pingi" or 0.1 gm costs P100.

⁶³ Police. (Cebuano / Tagalog)

⁶⁴ Steamed rice flour cake, cupcake sized snack.

That not what Eva say!

Miss Debbie, I not know what she say, but if she say different from what I say, she lies.

Debbie looks like she is about to start screaming at Ann but Reyna pops up with, *Teacher! Ann tell you the truth. Ira angry at us for allowing her to stay here. He say she can stay now, no choice, but we wrong to allow it. He say to us, if he say no, then it no; why we say yes when he leave?*

Debbie looks at me and is about to say something, but before she does, I say only, *Leave.*

I will, but, you mean it? She can stay?

That gal is just pissing me off and I think Ann can sense it because, *Miss Debbie, take me to Eva.*

Why you need to go? CiCi and Bim with her now.

Because Ira tells you to go and you don't go. If Bim and CiCi there then you already know Ira say she can stay before you come and you are a maldita⁶⁵. Bim and CiCi need to come back, with or without Eva. Take me there. Now.

But he say she should never have been allowed to come!

You think you can tell this man what he should do? If I him right now I say Eva not allowed back because of you! That what I do. He tell you to leave. Why you still here?

Ann has gone with Debbie. Maybe an hour later Ann, CiCi, Bim and Eva return. Not a word is spoken.

I haven't handed out any presents and I'm not sure if I'll do so any time in the future. It has been one hell of a homecoming. I've been away for almost eighty days. I was looking forward to a happy, loving return to my six gals. And now I'm dealing with this fucking mess.

⁶⁵ Having undesirable or negative qualities / a woman who is an unpleasant person.

Before I spend the rest of the evening with Reyna, I think it's best I speak with Eva... that is if she even has any English. I've no idea what she heard or thought she heard.

I also have no idea where Eva is at the moment, but I see Ann.

Does Eva speak English?

Yes, Ira, it is required in school.

I know it's required but that doesn't tell me if I'll actually be able to have a conversation with her.

She is smart. It OK.

And so I ask her to find the kid and bring her. Ann doesn't argue. Ann may be fifteen, but she is a shrewd operator. It may be the reason she survived as well as she did prior to my arrival here in October. She knows when to negotiate and when to just do as asked.

As I wait for the kid, what no one here seems to grasp is that, other than Jessa, there's no one in this house I'm less frustrated with than I am with Eva. The kid has done nothing wrong. At least, not that I'm aware of.

In she walks. Her head is down. I'm not sure bowed is a good description, as much as it's looking at the floor and being afraid to look up. I'm not sure walk is right. Maybe shuffles is the better word. Her shoulders droop. She is trying to make herself as small as possible.

Please sit. I'm not angry with you.

And sit she does. I suspect if I had asked her to stand on her head, she would have done that as quickly.

Am I remembering correctly that your father was a fisher⁶⁶ and he died at sea?

Yes, Po.

⁶⁶ If this was the USA I would have said fisherman, but here all I have heard is fisher.

And your mother died when a tricycle she was in was hit by a van?

Yes, Po.

And your younger brother also died in that same tricycle accident?

Yes, Po.

And your lolos and lolas⁶⁷ are all dead also?

Yes, Po.

You have no tita or titos⁶⁸ with whom to live?

None, Po.

Is it true that you have been sleeping at the homes of batchmates⁶⁹?

Yes, sometimes, Po. Sometimes I sleep at the school because there nowhere to go.

But there are orphanages, right?

I'm too old, Po. I sixteen next month. Too old for orphanage.

I thought you were Reyna's age. You are a year older?

Debbie told us this girl was only fourteen. What the fuck is that about?

Yes, Po.

Do you want a safe roof and food, or are you actually asking to be my lover? I'll allow you to stay here until you finish school without being my lover. If you will be sixteen that means you will graduate in a few months, right?

Po?

Eva, you say you are almost sixteen, so you will graduate in two more months⁷⁰, right?

Yes, Po.

⁶⁷ Grandfathers and grandmothers.

⁶⁸ Aunts and uncles.

⁶⁹ The meaning is similar to classmate but typically is referring to those in the same class and not the grade.

⁷⁰ In 2005 high school ends at grade 10 and age sixteen. The school year begins in June and ends in March.

And after that you might find work as a helper⁷¹ in a home, right?

If I want, yes, Po.

If you do that, you just need a roof at night and food until you graduate. I'll ask again. Do you want a safe roof and food, or are you actually asking to be my lover?

I want to stay with you, Po.

Is she avoiding the answer or does she really not understand?

Eva, that didn't answer my question. To stay with me, you need to be both my lover and a lover to the other gals here. I really don't think most gals want that. Given that is what it means to stay with me, I need to know what you really want.

I know what it means, Po. I know about the sex. The others, they tell me. I want to stay with you.

Eva, please tell Ri than she should find out if you are really able to live here as my lover. Use those exact words. If she decides you are, we will be together sometime this weekend.

Thank you, Po. But she will say not needed. We already do that. It OK.

I'm not sure she should be thanking me.

Why did Debbie mislead me in what she originally wrote about the age of the kid? I'm sure she wrote that the girl was actually younger than Reyna. Did Debbie think I'm a pedophile and would be more likely to take the kid if younger?

I really don't think Eva was lying just now. She was too damned scared to be lying and, in truth, looking at her now, she's a bit more developed than is Reyna. But, in a way, I hope she is lying in at least one way. I hope Lorie reports to me tomorrow that she won't do gals. If so, we house her for two months and out the door she goes. That would be the best of a bad situation.

⁷¹ A maid.

When it comes to Jessa, I suspect she will be with us no matter what. Reyna is mine and so I can't really kick out her sister without huge problems.

I don't get it. Normally a guy might dream of a threesome, but his wife would likely cut off his nuts before it would ever happen. With these gals, they are adding to my bed, not subtracting from it. It makes no sense. I know I could have asked for a threesome tonight, but I just don't want it.

I wish I could make sense of all that is happening, but I can't.

And... explain this to me. I'm angry as all get out with Debbie, so why in God's good name do I want to fuck her now?

I just want to bend her over and fuck her good and hard before tossing her out onto the street. Not that she seems interested in being fucked by me. My head is messed up pretty damned good.

It's getting late and my body is feeling the strain of the screwed up day/night cycle from my move from GMT-8 to GMT+8.

I'm about to change my mind and give Reyna a rain delay until tomorrow, but she says if all I want to do is sleep, that's OK, she will be with me tonight just the same.

I start thinking about Reyna and Jessa. They are pretty much the same body type. They're the same height and, while I suspect Jessa carries a couple of extra pounds, the only major difference are their faces. Both are cute. It's not a complaint. It's just that looking at them, you know who is who. For two nights I'll be with the younger before bedding the older.

But before bedding anyone, the one thing I really need at this point is a shower. Gal or no gal, it makes no difference; I need to take care of the basics.

As I shower, I'm reviewing the past few hours. I know Jessa wants to join with me. Even though I told her to come to my bed in two days, in all honesty, I'm still not sure I'm really OK with this. I don't mind if, like I suggested to Eva, Jessa just hangs out here a bit before taking off. Just as I succeeded in ridding myself of a

mother-daughter pairing with Lorie and Lillian, I really don't want siblings. It's just too weird.

No matter how much Reyna might want me to believe that she is OK with it, I'm just not buying it. She can't be. Why would any sibling be OK with such an arrangement? Is it that Reyna is more concerned with Jessa's safety than anything else? Is sharing me, possibly, in her mind, a small price to pay to secure Jessa's safety, stability and close proximity?

As the shower water rains down my body, I'm searching for a way to stop this without causing a problem with the gals. I'm finding none.

It's not particularly cold in the room, but Reyna is under the covers. This girl, she surely merits that label (she is a gal who will be but fifteen tomorrow, a girl), is here very much by her own accord.

She has chosen to graft herself to me, and I see no equitable way around that. I've taken her quite biblically before, and I suspect I'll do so tonight. Her being under the covers is not evidence of fear or shyness. I don't feel cold, but she may. I'm convinced it's a genetic thing.

Sliding on to the bed, I push the covers back. I have the air conditioner on, but it has yet to fully bring the temp down to where I want it. Yet, the breeze from the air conditioner may be the very reason why Reyna is cold.

She reaches an arm out to me while asking, *Init ka?*

What?

You hot?

A little.

You weird. I kabugnan⁷²!

You're what? Cold?

Oo. It mean cold. Ira, you need to learn. Before you just here to visit, maybe. Now you not. You need to learn!

I'm not sure I can.

Why that? You smart.

Maybe I'm not as smart as you think.

Warm me up. What follows is a giggle.

⁷² Cold in Cebuano. It would be 'malamig' in Tagalog.

Reyna has nothing on below the sheet and her skin meets mine softly but with desire. She presses her body close to me. *Basa ka!*

What?

You are wet. Why you not dry yourself?

I'm not really wet, but I do have body hair and I'm sure there are some damp spots. I find it's not all that easy to get totally dry with a towel.

Ha! It won't kill you.

It occurs to me that this is lovemaking when there's no seduction. Reyna knows what is going to happen, as it has happened often enough before. She feels safe and secure, therefore what comes is the playfulness. The playfulness of a girl towards an old man. But this old man is going to slide a cock into her cunt soon.

Incongruities. This world is filled with them.

She pushes me onto my back with a bit more strength than I was expecting and, without fanfare, slides my cock deep into her cunt.

She is not moving up and down. It's side to side, front to back, and then side to side again. She sighs, savoring feelings as a smile envelopes a face that appeared to be far away from me for a moment or two. And then, as she keeps up the motion...

Ira, you know what I eat tonight?

Really? This is the time to discuss that?

You know?

No. What did you eat?

Anything I want. As much as I want. ... Ira, you know what I eat last year this time? Last year on my birthday?

No. Reyna how could I know?

I happy there a little salt, a little oil, a little soy sauce, and the rice. I happy there something to put on my rice. I think I lucky that there salt and the soy.

That what. ... That more than Eva have before she come here. That more than Jessa have when she alone last month. Ira, we not mean to hurt you. You offer food and roof to them. For how long? Ira, what they do after that? We be good to you, always.... Just love us, OK?

There are times when it's perfectly clear you have been a creep. This is one of those times. I've been fucking with the lives of two gals whose lives are on the edge. Maybe, probably, they would have survived. But at what cost?

I'm sure there are many more who will pay the cost, whatever it is. But these two must not. Reyna has made that requirement perfectly clear. And what is my punishment? What am I giving up? Not a damned thing I can't easily afford: some extra rice, soy sauce, salt and oil... and I'm given two more gals to love me.

Damn, I feel like the asshole I most certainly am.

There's anger in me, but it isn't directed towards Reyna; it's toward me. The anger rises and, as it does, I flip Reyna onto her back and start pounding my cock hard into her small, tight, wet cunt.

I'm not thinking of Reyna at all. She is merely the receptacle for that which has welled up inside me. She is mine. She has grafted her body onto mine. My mind is awash with confusion.

I'm having a hard time parsing the differences between indentured servitude, outright slavery, the economic dependency of a share cropper, and this.

Yes, she seems to believe she loves me. Yes, I really do feel love for her, but then there's this... the salt, oil, soy sauce and rice. Oh, fuck.

I'm sweating profusely now. Reyna's body seems to be glistening with perspiration, my perspiration. I hear gasps and groans as I pound her cunt relentlessly. I'm looking down at her as she looks up and whispers, *Love me, Ira. Please, love me. Oh, Jesus... Ira, please.*

I do, but nothing comes from my mouth, only cum from my cock as it floods an almost fifteen-year-old cunt.



Morning feels different. The anger is gone and the need to give out the presents I brought is pressing on me, but three members of the house need to go to school, one is at work in Tacloban, another is working in her own way, but God knows where. Plus, I need to go to Tacloban after dropping Reyna and Eva off this morning. Jessa and Eva will need gifts and I've nothing for them. That will not do.

This is Reyna's birthday and, waking up with her, she tells me, is the best birthday gift she could ask for. I feel so diminished by my failure to understand how much a kid of this age could mean that.

It's all I can think about as Reyna clings to me as I take both girls to their high school this Friday morning. Eva rides behind Reyna... three of us on the bike.

Once I stop inside the gates of the school, I get a kiss on the cheek, a smile and, *It is good you back now*, before she walks up the stairs and into an inner courtyard. Eva, who just stood by Reyna as the kiss occurred, has walked in with her. Both are now out of sight.

I'm about to get going when I see Debbie approaching. I guess I could just blow her off, but the anger really is gone. I wait.

You hate me?

No. Hate takes way too much energy.

I not understand. What you mean.

Can't help you with that. What do you want?

I want to thank you for accepting Eva.

I'm not sure I had any choice once she was in the house, but that does remind me of a question I have for you.

Excuse me? What question?

Why did you lead me to believe Eva was younger than Reyna when she is almost a year older?

You like young girls, I think. So better I do that. That why.

You screwed that up. It's just the opposite. I far prefer a woman of your age. I fought against accepting Reyna, but my other gals told me I should accept her. You have me completely wrong, but that doesn't surprise me one bit. We have been out of phase since the very first moment we met.

I'll be damned. Debbie is at a loss for words. That suits me fine. I start the bike and ride off.



With Lorie's help, I select a couple of things for Eva and Jessa before we stop for lunch. I get a quarter pounder with cheese. Lorie chooses fried chicken and rice. I just can't get over that you can get that at a MickeyD's. It's like getting a Big Mac at KFC... just does not make sense.

While I'm in town, I stop by the bank to let them know a large deposit will appear in a few days, only to learn that the money has arrived. From the reception I get at the bank, you would swear I'm a celebrity. But then, I gather a deposit of more than six million pesos, one fourth of what the house brought, is an event.



Even with all that has transpired at the bank, I get back to the house long before I need to get the girls from school. Lorie is well aware that the money has arrived and is busting at the seams to tell others, as it appears I'm not so inclined.

Ann, Bim, Jessa and Nelia are home, so, after gathering all four together, Lorie makes the grand announcement. They are the gals of a very wealthy man. I decide to leave them alone as the details are discussed ad nauseum.

Eventually the time comes to collect Reyna and Eva. I'm relieved to get out of the house, as the gals are still glorying in the good news. I suspect they know that most of it will be spent on building a home and buying a good vehicle. I haven't decided on an SUV or a pickup. But I want something more than a bike. It'll be nice to

not need to ride in the rain! Not that it's raining now, but it rains often enough.

Riding into the gated school entrance, I see both Eva and Reyna chatting with Debbie. What the fuck now?

It doesn't take long to find out. Reyna breaks away from the other two, runs to me and asks, *Allow Teacher to come to my birthday party tonight, please?*

I can't help but to wonder whether this is Reyna's true desire, or if Debbie is finagling her way into our house. I suspect asking will do me not a damned bit of good. I'm learning that there are times clarity is not a viable option. Nevertheless, I ask anyway.

I thought you were angry with her.

Maybe, but Eva wants. So we do it, OK?

OK, but I have presents I want to give to all of you from my trip and that comes before the party. So tell her not before eight.

We all get? Even Eva and Jessa?

Yeh, I bought for them today in town. The rest of you get stuff from the States.

OK, I tell her now. Wait a while.

The 'wait a while' is a warning that what comes next will not be fast. So, I get off the bike and find a place to sit. As I wait, I'm greeted by parents of kids here. There are smiles, attempts at a conversation in English, mostly barely successful, but with genuine good humor. It would appear that I'm the talk of the area, and am getting high marks for sheltering Eva. If they only knew, I think, as the smiles continue.

Between the times I'm greeted, I text Bim and ask her to push off dinner until eight, with the info that Debbie will be joining us.

You invite her? Why that?

No. Reyna asks for it because Eva asks her.

Not good! OK we do it.

A good fifteen minutes later my two girls are ready to climb onto the bike and ride home. Not another word about Debbie is mentioned.

Back at the house, I can see that those who know about my bank account want to share the news. I, however, want to get the minds oriented towards the presents. All are here but for Cincer, and I'll give her present to her when she arrives. And so, as soon as I walk in the door, I ask Lorie and Nelia to bring my two bags out onto the terrace, and inform all that there are presents to be had.

It's sort of funny how the mention of presents quiets any thought of my bank account!

Initially, both Eva and Jessa slide to the back of the circle around me, assuming that they are not included. It's a reasonable surmise, and I don't pay any attention to their choice of body placement. As it's Reyna's birthday, and as being here for her on her birthday was my goal, I have far more gifts for her than anyone else.

While in the States, I sought the advice of sales staff at a number of department store women's departments. I had Reyna's clothing sizes, shoe size, and suggestions of makeup needs from Cincer and Bim. With that, I loaded up on as much I could for the girl and, to a lesser amount for each of the others. There are bracelets, watches, tops, bras and panties from Victoria's Secret, lipstick, nail polish, shoes that they can slip on and out of so that size isn't as critical, and there's chocolate. Lots of chocolate.

Other than Reyna and Cincer, who is yet to arrive, I give the presents out in the order they joined me. By the time I get close to giving Lorie her presents, my gals have figured out what I'm doing and Ann announces that I should be fast about Lorie's as she can't wait for hers!

Jessa asks, *How you know Ri next?*

Ha! Wait and see. I know.

Sure enough, of course, Lorie is next and gets her haul. As Ann finishes her collection, it's clear that there's far more that is yet to

be distributed. Jessa mentions that Cincer must be my favorite. But Ann just laughs and tells her, *Buang ka!*

Seeing as I've already given Reyna hers, the next is Eva and as I grab the next wrapped package and call out, *Eva!*, I hear two gasps and see a knowing smirk coming from Ann.

Eva and Jessa get their gifts amid tears. Jessa, through sobs, informs me, *Sir Ira, you not need to do this! I lucky you allow me to be here. That enough!*

Hearing that, Eva says much the same thing.

You're right. Both of you. I didn't need to do this. I did it because I wanted to. It was my choice. Now do not mistake my decision for an assumption that I'm a good man. I'm pretty sure that many in this world will say I'm an evil man for bedding children. And I'm not sure I will not do things that will make you angry sometimes.

All I get in response is a sea of confused faces. And with perfect timing I note that Cincer has been standing behind me.

Good you say that. ... Maybe you have something for me?



The presents are all distributed and I grab Reyna's arm. *Come with me.*

Where?

To the bedroom.

Oh! Now?

Yes, now. I'm not going to wait until after midnight to have you.

Oh, my gee. OK. Hehe, Teacher will not know what is running down my leg as we talk!

That's a hell of a thought!

Amid laughs and tears of joy, the others are enjoying trying things on and 'bonding.' My leading Reyna off to the bedroom is noticed

by no one other than Lorie, my shadow, who signals her delighted approval as we leave the room.

There's no seduction; none at all. Before I can even close the bedroom door, Reyna is removing her blouse with the school girl's skirt following immediately thereafter.

No seduction... just unmitigated joy. Joy — boundless — with a passion that comes from within the heart, unprompted. Quite naked, Reyna now jumps onto my standing naked figure, latching arms around my neck and legs around my hips. My little monkey.

Does that sound negative to you? It isn't meant to be. It's what she calls herself often enough... Ira's little monkey. She's too short to reach the top cupboards as all the gals are, but it's she who simply vaults onto the countertop and then stands to reach those cupboards.

Her young, lithe body becomes my appendage as her lips seek my face in short, staccato, kissing: cheeks, forehead, eyelids, chin and lips, all interspersed with giggles and vocalizations. *Ira?*

Um?

Debbie.

Um?

You know, right?

Hub?

Dub!

What?

She want you.

What!?

She do.

No!

It OK, I not mind.

No!

Mmmm, Ira, you get hard. I feel it!

I flop, back first, down onto the bed and roll over, putting Reyna under me. And then, repositioning a bit, I plunge into her underage cunt without seeking permission, as I know I would get it.

God! See, you excited.

Maybe I am, but it's Reyna I'm inside. The thought of making Debbie watch, as I fuck Reyna over and over and Debbie frigs herself, is an image I can't get out of my mind. Debbie might want me, though I can't really believe it. But I don't want her. So let her watch as I love those I do love and want.

Reyna wants to be back on top and so, still fully inserted, we flip over. Once again, as was the case last night, she isn't moving up and down but rather sliding side to side, forward and back, over and over.

It feels great and Reyna is clearly enjoying it, but it won't get me off. Maybe that's the point. Maybe she is just wanting it to last. If so, that works just fine for me. I get a chance to look up at pert little breasts and a sweet, lovely face framed with luxurious thick black hair, as my cock is bathed in her juicy hot cunt. Oh poor me, right? I mean this is hard duty, right? Ha! Damn, I'm one lucky bastard.

Mmmm, Ira, what you want to do about Teacher?

You really don't want to know, sweetheart.

Reyna squeezes her cunt muscles just a bit and gives me yet another mini-thrill as the side-to-side and circular motion continues.

Yes, I do. Tell me.

No! You will think I'm a bad man.

Tell me. I want to know!

I want her to see my cum slide down your thigh and then you tell her to lick it up!

Oh, God! Do me! I do it! Really!

And, as God is my witness, I roll Reyna back over and thirty seconds later am flooding her cunt with cum.

6

She is dressed to kill. She doesn't look like a proper school teacher tonight. She's not drinking like one either.

Most of the females here are drinking coke. A few have beers. Debbie is drinking brandy, a goodly amount of it. Is she trying to find fool's courage?

I find Reyna at my elbow as I watch Debbie putting the spirit away. *You have any of me running down your thigh, my love?*

Maybe a little dry there now, but I still wet inside I think. Why?

Evil thoughts, sweetie, just evil thoughts.

Tell me!

You already know.

We do it?

Do you want to?

Why not? Maybe we teach the teacher a lesson.

Well, we had better do it before she gets any more liquored up than she is now. You sure?

Oo.

OK, come with me.

The party has been going on for the better part of ninety minutes. Much food has been eaten, though that will go on in a desultory manner for a few hours yet as others wander in. Karaoke and card games are in process. Groups engaged in discussions are clustered here and there.

Reyna and I come up on either side of Debbie. *Put the drink down and come with us.*

I think she does primarily because she is too surprised to even formulate a reason to disagree. I put my right hand on her left arm.

Reyna's left hand grasps Debbie's hand, as we walk the gal to my bedroom. My fantasy is about to get a workout at Debbie's expense.

Once in the bedroom, I turn Debbie around to face me and bring her in for a kiss. She is willing. Sure the liquor has eased her up, but it's clear that she wants this.

Once the kiss breaks, I turn to Reyna and kiss her as I unbutton her blouse. She lets it fall to the floor as the kiss continues.

That kiss breaks and I turn back to Debbie, and another kiss, but this time I pull the zipper on the back of her dress down, down to the crack of her ass. The dress hasn't fallen on its own or by Debbie's assistance. Seeing that, Reyna places a hand on each of Debbie's shoulders and gently pulls the top away from her teacher's shoulders. The dress drops away.

Reyna isn't done. She unhooks Debbie's bra and causes it to drop. I reach up and take a breast in a hand while Reyna lowers Debbie's panties to the floor.

I curl a finger into Debbie's cunt. My lips remain attached to her as Reyna strips down and gets up on the bed, her legs spread wide.

Debbie is lost, confused and a little drunk. I move her over to the bed but not fully on it. No, just enough to bend her over, her nose close to Reyna's cunt and her ass sticking out toward me from behind.

I slide my cock deep into an apparently willing cunt before telling Debbie, *Suck my fresh cum from your student's cunt or I'll send you home right now.* And I slam my cock hard into the gal's cunt.

Debbie grunts. Reyna positions herself before grabbing her teacher's head and guiding it to where it needs to be. Reyna's face now displays both pleasure and surprise. She never dreamt of having her teacher eat her out and now what seems inconceivable has become very truly the reality.

Eat her good, Debbie. Make my little love cum with your tongue.

I hear only a grunt from her. Reaching around as I fuck her, my fingers find her clit. This sets her off like a rocket. *You only get me again, if you get all my girls off. Understand, Debbie?*

I hear a muffled. *Oo.*

Reyna gasps.

I stay inserted but stop pumping. I continue to finger the gals cunt as Debbie gives Reyna a good time. My little one is getting off. Debbie's cheeks are sopping wet. I take that as a good time give the gal a few solid pumps and to say, *That's my cum on your cheeks Debbie. Drink it up. Put me and Reyna inside you.*

Reyna gasps again before, *Oh God, Ira. Teacher... she... Ok na.*

I take that as a clue to start fucking the girl hard once again, spearing her repeatedly as I tell her, *You want me to fuck you again? Do you? If you come back you will eat Eva's cunt. You will eat Ri's cunt. You had better get used to eating cunt if you want me inside you ever again. Do you understand? Do you? Do you? You will see Eva and Reyna in school every day. Two girls you will have had sex with. Do you understand?*

Oo. OK. Yes! Oh God, oo.

It might have been nice if I was able to dump cum in her at that very moment, but I had cum in Reyna just three hours earlier and I wasn't quite ready. I kept on pounding away.

Reyna slides away from Debbie's face and sidles up to my side, snaking her face in front of mine for a soul announcing kiss. Our tongues tango. Cum erupts down below, entering Reyna's teacher.



What did you do with Reyna's teacher?

Cincer is beyond confused. She knows I was angry with the gal and that I'm not adding anyone to the house.

Ask Reyna.

I get a surprised look from her. Confusion and surprise. I smile and give her a kiss. *You look so damned cute when you are completely confused.*

As I don't have a logical reason for being an asshole, I leave it there.

Saturday morning starts out as a peaceful day to follow the craziness of the night before. There's the issue of Jessa and Eva. I haven't bedded them and I would just as soon not, but after bedding Debbie last night, to not take them... well the message they might attach to that would probably not play well. I figure that it'll probably be best to 'welcome' them officially and if I never bed them again, well... so be it.

Jessa is sweeping the terrace as I find her, her long black hair tied up in an impromptu topknot, wearing a raggedy tee-shirt, ill-fitting knee-length shorts and a pair of worn-out flip-flops. The gal is good looking, but right now she sure as hell isn't advertising it.

Clothing like this is worn by many most of the time. It's used, bought cheaply and covers the body. Even though she does have a few nicer things, she wouldn't wear it while cleaning. It, however, triggers in me the remembrance that these new gals will need monthly allowances, much as I've already set up for my other gals.

I don't need to tell them what to wear, but I do need to make sure they can afford to purchase nice looking things.

Jessa, when you are finished sweeping, I'd like to spend some time with you.

That gets me a frozen stare and a slow, oh so deliberate acknowledgement, as the import of what I've just said sinks in. Finally, as if time has stood still for ... how long...? she says, *Sige na⁷³, thank you, Sir. In a little bit.*

And so it is. She wants what is to come, but work comes first, and right now that is sweeping the terrace.

⁷³ 'All right' in Cebuano. 'Go ahead', or 'continue' in Tagalog. (Remove the 'na' from this and oddly enough the resultant translation reverses in meaning between the two languages.)

Jessa is an earnest, cautious and determined gal. That's not to say that she can't smile. She can and, when she does, her face is alive with joy. When at work, other than humming a tune, which she does on occasion as the work progresses, she doesn't evidence anything but pure concentration on that which is before her.

Not as smart as a Cincer or Ann, not as emotional as Bim or Lorie, Jessa is steadfast. Reyna tells me her sister brooked no disobedience from her and was pretty hard on Alvin when he was too drunk to make it to work the day after a night of drinking. The act of throwing Alvin out over the drugs is no aberration. Jessa has rules and they are not to be broken. So how does putting her sister in my bed coincide with that? It's not a rule that required breaking in Jessa's head. Nor is it a problem for her to enter my bed.

These things do not upset the balance in the need for survival and safety. Failure to go to work and the taking of illegal drugs does. The values and standards of perception here are simply so different from those in the States that a comparison is impossible. On either side of the Pacific, the other would make no sense whatsoever. I get that, deeply, and I'm still a neophyte, learning as I go.

Less than an hour later, Jessa seeks me out. She has washed, changed clothing and is, *OK na, Po*.

The clothing is simply a shift. Her hair has been combed and is down now. The flip-flops are gone. Jessa is barefoot. There's the hint, maybe, of light pink lipstick, but surely not much has been applied. A hint of a smile attaches to the lips of pale pink.

I stand, put my hand out toward her and Jessa grabs it. Now it's time to seek the privacy of my bedroom. As we walk through the house, Nelia and Lorie look on... approvingly? Yes, I think that's what I see. A task needing to be completed, no?

Jessa's thick, black hair is no different from her sister's, as is her shape. It's not the body shape or hair.

It's the face and her demeanor, the somber and cautious manner in which she approaches life that sets her off from Reyna. She is Reyna's Ate. The weight of that responsibility has been on her

shoulders for years. In the absence of parents, that weight has been great. It has molded her personality and, maybe a little, her face? Even now that the weight has essentially been transferred to me, the effects of a life of singular responsibility, at such a very young age, have molded this gal's personality.

None of that is a problem for me, but it does mean that Jessa has a harder time allowing joy to be savored for long, before she needs to do a gut check. It's the very essence of who Jessa is.

I don't try to joke or be lighthearted with her. My sense is that it won't work. Rather, as we enter the bedroom, I close and lock the door while holding on to Jessa. Now, with the second hand free, I reach out and bring her to me fully. A hand reaching behind her head and pulling her in for a kiss, a first kiss as my gal. Before, at the airport, it was a trial balloon, a hope. This is different.

As kisses go, this one is meaningful. It lasts before finally breaking. Jessa's lips have met mine, not as a greeting at the airport, but as a prelude to her new life. Her tongue and mine have exchanged greetings. Our lungs have exchanged breath. She pulls her head back from me, looks directly into my eyes. I see a tear forming before she pulls my head to hers and kisses me with a fervency that matches the earnest demeanor of her soul.

Jessa, in her own way, is announcing that she is committing. How can a kiss convey so much with not a word passed to accompany it? I truly don't understand it, but I know it, fully. I know it. Jessa has sealed herself to me... with that kiss.

I reach down to the hem of the shift and pull it up, up and over Jessa's head. There's no bra. There are no panties. Jessa is naked. And, Jessa is still looking right at me, at my eyes as I look at her eyes.

She reaches up to my shirt and starts to unbutton it. One of my hands finds the back of her head and the fingers bury into her thick hair, pulling her into me a little closer as she proceeds with her task.

Rather than move to take my shirt off, she shifts her attention to my shorts, unbuttoning them and lowering the zipper before squatting down. My hand on her head gives way as she pulls my shorts and briefs down to my Florsheim moccasins.

Jessa deftly removes the shoes, briefs and shorts in two swift motions. Standing up once again, she removes my shirt. Jessa and I stand inches from each other, before the distance disappears and we are skin to skin, kissing once again.

I'm not sure how long the kissing has lasted. I'm not counting the time, but it has felt damned good. When I decide to move up onto the bed, there's not a moment's resistance from my partner. She is ready.

She is very ready, until I make a move to go down on her, and then there's a hitch. She wants no part of that. She wants me inside her now, right now. No side trips, *Dili*⁷⁴, *Po*.

She has a firm grasp on my package and she wants me inside her. Nothing else is to be entertained, at least not now. And now is not a time to argue. I plunge into a path that at least one other has trod before.

Granted, I don't know Jessa as well as her previous partner did, but for the life of me, it seems like he lost a great gal when he chose drugs over her.

Jessa is welcoming my entry into her in every way she can. From the heat of her cunt, to the lubrication flowing from it, to the tight grip on my arms, to her lips seeking mine, to her legs seeking to lock me in to my place. Jessa wants me exactly where I am.

The pace of the lovemaking is slow, measured. It's to be appreciated, savored and celebrated. I move in and back, feeling every inch of the movement of cock in cunt.

And now, Jessa smiles. It's a good smile. And then I hear something that surprises me.

⁷⁴ No in Cebuano.

Ab! Feel good. I never feel this before!

What?

Your cock, Po. I never feel the cock before.

How can that be?

Condom! I always make him wear a condom. I not want a child before. I careful. It feel good without condom. Better!

Ignoring the fact that she is calling me Po as I'm fucking her, the fact that she is willing to get pregnant now, for the first time in her life, I guess ... I guess I'm thinking so many different things all at once it's hard to pull them apart to explain.

She wants safety and stability before bringing a new life into this world. That connects with her sense of obligation. The reality that she sees being with me as having achieved safety and stability is fascinating.

Clearly, she has no intention of moving on. It isn't that she finds me handsome, or hers and only hers. No, that's not what this is about. She simply has decided that she is mine and has no intention of screwing it up.

Should I be looking for a condom now? Should I not ask myself if I want children? For Christ's sake, will they all become pregnant? Am I even thinking about these things in a rational way?

I'm not. Instead, I start driving her ass into the mattress as I pound my cock into her cunt as hard as I can. The excitement builds in me.

Is she worried by the violence and power of the intensity of our lovemaking? It appears that she is welcoming it and urging me on towards... completion.

Ah, completion. Cum dribbles out of her hot and well fucked cunt.

I roll off her. Jessa rolls on to me, and proceeds to kiss my face: chin, cheeks, eyes, forehead and nose, before just putting her head on my shoulder and settling in for a rest.

We lie on the bed with each other, for a long time. Positions shift every so often. She is no longer on me at some point. Her hands stroke my chest. Her lips gently nip a shoulder, an ear lobe. She musses up my hair and chuckles. We kiss again. Nice, sweet and gentle kisses, languidly savored and bookended by smiles and sighs.

It's not a bad way to begin the day long before lunch might be enjoyed.

And it occurs to me that this won't be a one-off. We will be back in each other's arms many times.



As afternoon gives way to evening, I'm sitting on that same terrace Jessa swept this morning. Long before lunch is served, all who were in the house know I've consummated things with Jessa, though the gal herself is not commenting on the assignation. All seem happy with maybe one exception, Eva. She who is yet to join with me.

In these last forty-eight hours, Eva has hung back with Reyna or Ann, and avoided me as if not wanting to intrude, or being not too 'in my face.' That has changed now. I'm not sure if the others are pushing her forward, or if she has chosen this path on her own. But regardless, all afternoon, and even now, she is never more than an arm's reach away.

I put my book down, look at the kid and ask, *Waiting for your turn?*

When that?

When do you want it to be?

Now?

I'm not a young man. You know I was with Jessa earlier today. I may not be as good as I can be, if we do anything now. You sure you don't want to wait until tomorrow, or at least until a little after supper?

It OK na, Sir. Ri will give you supper after we done.

I'm not exactly horny right now, but I guess now's the time, regardless. But as we walk off the terrace and on to the bedroom, Jessa's words are ringing in my ears.

Eva, are you sure you want to get pregnant, or should I purchase a condom first? And then I'm thinking back on last night and being bareback in Debbie... Just what was I thinking?

No need, Sir.

Each of them has decided. Pregnancy is OK.

Eva is a bit taller, with a few more curves than Reyna. Depending on what she is wearing you might or might not even notice the difference. I've no idea if the girl is a virgin. I honestly know nothing much about her, other than why is she is an orphan.

She has no makeup on at all. She is wearing purple shorts and a red and white knit top. That's all I see. So maybe there's a bra and panties, but she is barefooted and without any jewelry. Her black hair frames her cute brown face.

Virgin or not, she has had some sex with Lorie, so she knows something about what's going to happen.

I was going to reach out to kiss her, but she is busy disrobing in an all-fired hurry. I might as well ditch my clothing as well. Eva isn't interested in romance. She wants to get fucked... even more than Jessa, and Jessa wasn't dawdling. I guess we will have to reorder things, if possible, and put the romance at the back end. Fuck first, love later.

No sooner than the last of my clothing is off my body, Eva is dragging me to the bed.

Eva! Are you a virgin?

The kid looks at me, frightened. She says nothing.

Are you?

It OK. No one complain! I promise!

That's it? She is a virgin and she's afraid I'll not enter her because maybe I'll be afraid?

Eva, relax, we'll do this. But if you're a virgin, the first time, maybe it will hurt and bleed a little. I'll put a towel down so no blood gets on the sheets. That's all. So... are you a virgin?

I think, yes.

But you're not sure?

It OK, Sir. I promise.

I'm not going to get anything useful out of her. OK, I know she's older than Reyna, but in some ways she is more at risk in so many ways. She hasn't had her own Jessa to watch over her. She has been floating in the ocean and I represent maybe just a life preserver, maybe flimsy and barely enough to keep her from drowning right now, or maybe the Promised Land: high dry and stable. She can't know which it is.

Which I am for her, I really don't know, either.

Taking her seems so damned wrong. And yet, she damned sure wants it. But like two others, she's so fucking young. I've no business taking three children as lovers. It's wrong on many levels, but in the two previous cases, it seems to me, it was different.

Ann was an independent actor, able to fend for herself and make reasonably informed decisions. Reyna had Jessa as counsel. Reyna would not have entered my bed, regardless of her initial request, if Jessa didn't support it. To that extent, Reyna had help in making an informed decision.

But Eva... it's different. She was without a roof or even a safe source for sustenance. Might she not have been willing to grab on to a snake if it swam close enough to grab? I'm not a snake. Or at least, I don't think I'm a snake. Is that enough of an excuse?

I'm no closer to equanimity of conscience as my cock meets hymen and pushes through. I know I've pushed something aside, as I feel it give way, but Eva doesn't evince any indication that the moment occurs. What I see on her face is determination and concentration.

Sex is supposed to feel good. I'm not sure if that is Eva's reality. I decide to flip us over. Let Eva be on top and control what is happening.

As I begin the move, the girl is panicky. She simply has no idea what is happening.

Relax, child. It'll be OK. Roll over with me and try to keep me inside you.

She indicates that she understands and it's done. I'm on my back looking up at her sweet face with furrowed brow and confused aspect.

You're in control now. Do what feels good to you. OK?

Slowly, she processes the information. Small movements, this way and that. A little more before another stop. And then a bounce. And a surprised look. Another bounce. A smile. A bounce and a giggle.

And now she's got it. She's not stopping. Eva's riding my cock, and if her expression is any indication, she's having a damned good time.

Her black hair is going in all sorts of directions as the passion of her activity ramps up.

Now, as if, for the first time aware that she has a partner, and not someone doing something to her, or whom she is taking something from, her eyes lock on to mine. The motions of her body become more regular, more involved with communicating something from her body to mine.

As if a new concept reaches her brain, she posts⁷⁵ twice more, stops and, *Sir, roll me back again, please. I understand now.*

The education of Eva. We cooperate in the move. I'm nuts deep in the girl. Gone is the look of concentration and concern. It's replaced by one of amazement and anticipation. *Ready na, Sir. Do me good. I truly ready. Your girl na. Truly. This truly good.*

Having cum earlier today, I was not sure if this was a good time and I'm really not sure yet. But I'm having no problem staying hard.

⁷⁵ Posting is described in [this Youtube video](#).

Eva, if you get tired in this position, we can try another one.

This good, Sir, says she with a big smile across her face.

And so, on we fuck, and apparently the longer it lasts the happier Eva becomes. She is egging me on, wanting all I have to give her. She's teasing me that she will need this every day. I tease her back, *Be careful or I'll have Teacher Debbie eat your pussy.*

It doesn't faze her a bit as she retorts... *That OK, just fuck me when she done!*

And with that, I blow my load. Welcome to the family, sweet Eva.



Supper is a little late, but that is no problem, though I'm certainly hungry!

We, all of us, are sitting around the table after the meal when there's a call from out on the street, *Ay-oooo*⁷⁶!

Bim looks out. *It Debbie.*

I nod and Bim goes out to unlock the gate and let the gal in. As Bim leaves the table, Eva says... *Make her eat me like she do Reyna. I ready!*

There are chuckles from others at the table. The doings of last night have been well parsed by all here. But the merriment ends with, *You rape me! Why you think you can do that?*

If you think I raped you, why are you here and not at the police department?

Who take care of Eva? If not that, I would!

Why do you think I raped you?

You do!

Did Reyna rape you or did you rape Reyna?

What?

⁷⁶ Cebuano way of saying 'Hello inside' and pronounced EYE-OOOO as the Ay sounds like a hard "I"

Well, you had sex with Reyna. If you say what happened was without consent, then one of you raped the other. Who raped whom?

You get me drunk!

I did no such thing. You did that all on your own. I never poured you a glass of anything. There are plenty of witnesses to that and you damned well ought to know it.

You took advantage of me!

Didn't you take advantage of me by placing Eva here? You lied and acted in a sneaky way. This time, Eva is not going to run away. She understands what is happening. No, indeed... Eva, out of Debbie's sightline, is flicking her tongue in mock suggestion of potential events to come.

Debbie, last night, what did I tell you would happen if you came back here?

*Oh! She had forgotten! Her eyes open wide. She looks at me and then turns to Eva, who looks right back at her without a blink, before Debbie returns her gaze to me and says, *You wouldn't!**

I wouldn't what?

I not want to say it. You know, yes, you know. Why you ask? Why you make this threat?

Well, you are back here. Right? So, is it a threat, or simply what will happen since you are here, once again? You are not going to the police; you told us that. So, what is the purpose of your coming here, if not for what I told you would happen? ... Do you need some brandy to find the courage?

Debbie crumples into a chair and starts crying. Why you do this to me?

You know, I could ask the same thing of you.

Why you make me have sex with Reyna?

Why did you tell me Eva was fourteen, when she is almost sixteen?

I tell you I think you like young girls!

Debbie, allow me to make this crystal clear to you. From now on, every young girl you push on me, I'll make you have sex with. And if that girl doesn't want it, I'll make you have sex with a girl even younger. You leave me alone, I'll leave you alone. But every time you come here, you will have sex with an underage girl. So if you don't want that, don't come here.

Why you do this?

You have been butting into my life since I first arrived in Santa Rita. I didn't ask for that, and I don't want it, but you don't seem to care. You have been a problem for me since the beginning. Like I said, leave me alone and I'll leave you alone. But since you are here, take Eva into my bedroom. You will find your dinner between her legs.

Debbie is close to freaking out. Nelia and Lorie have taken up posts close to the gate. I gather they have no intent of letting the gal run away. Debbie sees them and screams, *Why?*

Because you came back. I warned you last night. ... Eva, you ready.

Yes, Sir.

OK, take her back to the bedroom.

Eva gets up and takes hold of Debbie's arm. *Come, Miss. Sir say you come with me. Please just come.*

Debbie's looking around in panic. *Not alone! I not want to be alone with Eva. It wrong!*

Of course it's wrong. The whole damned thing is wrong. The one thing I'm sure of is that I've had a bellyful of Debbie's interference in my life. It needs to end. She is clearly not going to the police, so, while this is wrong in so many ways, maybe it'll end her stirring the pot and interfering.

OK, you don't have to be alone with Eva. Which one of the gals do you want to add to the party?

No! You come. Like last night.

You said I raped you last night. Why would you want me there tonight?

OK, it not rape. I wrong. Just come.

I've had sex twice today and I'm no young man. What's that song, I'm not as good as I once was? I think it was by Toby Keith. I'm just not sure I'm up to anything right now.

Cincer sees the look in my face and starts to chuckle. And that causes the other gals to get the point and now all are. That is confusing the hell out of Debbie.

Why they laughing? What funny?

They know what I've been doing today. You don't. So they know why my going with you seems funny.

What they know!

They know how old I am and how many women I am likely to be able to service in one day. We, all of us, suspect that I've already hit that limit.

I not understand. Service?

Cincer decides I need a translator. *Fuck... Service mean fuck.* Cincer, it seems, isn't done. *Try, Ira. Maybe you set a new record!*

Did she just double-dog dare me?⁷⁷ There's some guffawing and laughing, but Cincer follows up with...*Go with them. It not matter if you can. Just be there. You are mean to the Teacher. I know you right, but it mean, so do this anyway. She learn the lesson, even if you just there.*

I get up to go with Eva and Debbie, back to the bedroom I just left not more than ninety minutes before. Debbie's whimpering, but I'm just not buying her act. I've had enough of this bitch. *Reyna, Ann come with us.*

All having entered the bedroom, Ann closes the door while Eva politely asks her English teacher to strip. Debbie is not moving, and this isn't going to work. All three of my gals grab parts of Debbie in the effort to strip everything off the woman.

⁷⁷ A phrase used in elementary school to pressure someone into a situation. After the dare has been declined the person "daring" the other will try to take it to the next level. The origin is unknown but is commonly believed to have made its debut in the movie "A Christmas Story". Use before going to the Triple Dare, Triple Dog Dare, and then if all else fails revert to cursing.

Debbie's not fighting them, as much as she isn't helping. So the process isn't fast, but it's completed, following which Eva strips down.

Ann looks at me for guidance and, yes, she and Reyna need to get with it too, just as I'm in the process of doing. Clothing litters the floor. Not an article of clothing is left on anyone's body.

Reyna tells Eva how to position herself before getting Ann's help in forcing Debbie into her position, face down in front of Eva's wide-open, slick cunt. Debbie swivels her head and looks back at me... for what? Does she want me to mount her? My cock isn't even at half-staff. I grab Reyna and put her kneeling, facing Debbie's cunt. I don't need to say anything.

Ann decides my cock needs therapy and squats with lips at cock level, and begins the treatment, just as Eva grabs her teacher's head and brings it into contact with her cunt. Reyna starts, somewhat aggressively, fingering Debbie's cunt with both her hands.

But Debbie hasn't really gotten with the program. *Reyna, if Eva tells you to be mean to Debbie, you are to shove your hand into your teacher's cunt and make a fist once you get inside her. Eva, if Debbie isn't eating you good, tell Reyna.*

That does the trick. Debbie starts eating Eva in a meaningful way. No more inducement is needed. Debbie's cheeks are dripping Eva's juices but, equally interestingly, Reyna's hand is dripping Debbie's juices. The gal is getting off on the attention. Reyna can see me, but Debbie can't. I make a fist and nod toward Debbie. Reyna gets the clue and inserts her whole small hand inside her teacher and makes a fist before fucking the gal with her hand.

Debbie is going nuts, screaming, squirting, and cumming. Eva is having a hard time keeping Debbie's mouth where it needs to be and starts cussing her teacher. Debbie tries to get back to what she has been told to do, but Reyna isn't letting up... until her arm gets tired and she asks Ann to spell her.

Ann has me sort of hard... hard enough to slide into a cunt. As Ann pushes her hand into Debbie, eliciting more screams and cusses, I mount Reyna from behind.

Eva has had enough and pushes away from her teacher. Ann now has Debbie's complete attention. I'm ignoring the woman, but Ann decides she can impart some advice to the bitch.

You come back here and all us girls do you. When we done you not walk anymore. That true! You want that, you come. You not want that, you not come. You not have Ira again. Never. ... You want Ira to take another girl, we do you this way and the new girl; she do you this way. Ira say stay away. I say, I not care. You want, we do you every day. I not care. Come and we do you!

All the while, Ann has been fist-fucking Debbie hard as hell.



An hour later, Debbie is gone, hopefully, for good. I, sure as hell, hope she doesn't decide to take up Ann's invitation. For what it's worth, Reyna got a good ride out of me, though I'm damned sure I'll be useless tomorrow.

As Saturday comes to a close, there's no one waiting in the wings. I'm exhausted from the trip and that which has followed. I want a peaceful Sunday. On Monday I want to find an architect and an engineer.

The reality of the Indonesian tsunami, and the infrequent, but real, threat of massive typhoons, plus all this talk I hear about climate change, has me more than a little worried. This place where we live is basically a flat plain surrounded by ocean. Yes, there are gentle slopes and gullies, but it's basically flat and damned close to sea level. Before the tsunami, it wasn't a real concern I had. But the death toll, which even now continues to rise in Indonesia, has really focused my attention. I need a solution.

I've read up as much as I can on technical ideas, but what the fuck do I know about this sort of shit? I need help. I'm not going to

sink (pun?) all my profit from my house in the US into something that is going to get washed away.

I gather that some things seem to do better with storm surges and tsunamis, but I don't really understand why, and so, that's not a good way to start.

Some of my money is sitting in the bank, and the rest of it can follow as needed. I definitely want out of the place we are renting. It's OK for a little bit, but it really isn't working well for us now that we are nine.

It has taken me three weeks to find both an architect and consulting engineer with whom I can work. My foolish expectation that I could find the 'right guy' in one day displayed my total ignorance.

Look around. Look around at these buildings that would not survive. They are what is being built by the architects here. Finding one who can entertain the ideas I need considering, becomes a major problem for a bit. I do find a guy, and I can only hope it'll work out.

Each day, I take Reyna and Eva to school and pick them up at the end of the day. Not once have I even seen Debbie.

Eva tells me that she took two days off that first week, returning on that Wednesday. My girls have seen her each day since then, but not a word about what has happened is mentioned.

The only difference is that Debbie is no longer pumping either girl for information, nor enlisting help for another project such as 'project Eva' was in the past. I hope that is a good sign, but am just not sure.

On the building front, I've been disabused of my inclination to build low with sloping-sided walls, like a bunker. I'm told that will not work and am pretty much assured the entire structure, though it might stand the onslaught, would be buried in mud and flooded. Clearly, I need help.

The design being proposed seems crazy to me, but I'm told it'll work, stay up and dry. I'm still not sure I believe it.

The idea, in simple terms, is to build a house on stilts and allow the water to pass under the house, not around it. Contouring the land, I'm told, is not a good idea as it creates unpredictable currents and eddies. Yes, if we knew the exact angle from which water might come at the house, it might be possible to contour land, but there's no way of knowing the exact angle. So flat is better.

We can have multiple levels with open space below the lowest floors and even floors with open areas below closed-in floors. So it's possible to have a car port via a ramp. But the car port might need to be ten or more feet off the ground and the living space ten feet above that!

The drawings I've seen look nuts. It'll require sinking many deep steel posts of I-beams which will connect both to I-beams below the ground and to floor I-beams above, with some cross hatching I-beams, each pair looking like a huge X. In that way it bears a strong resemblance to how some bridges are built.

The reason for the belowground I-beams is that we need to assume anything left on the ground will be washed away. The crossing I-beams will add rigidity to the structure without having a massive amount of exposure to the pressure of a storm surge or tsunami. If we don't link the beams below and add the cross bracing, even if they survived a massive current, an earthquake might well topple the building. There are earthquakes here and they occur more frequently than any massive typhoon will occur. There's also need for there to be sufficient posts that, should we lose a few, the structure will continue to stand.

It's going to be a weird looking place, though the engineer tells me that the higher we are, the more comfortable we will be, as we will be cooler for a few reasons. We won't get the residual heat from the ground, something I've not understood was even a thing, and we will get more cooling breezes that don't exist on ground level. We will also have better sightlines.

As I want a large home, we consider the use of smaller and multiple pods, attached to each other by sections of walkways, up in the air. Though attached to the pods, the walkways, with some flex and give, can break away if needed, rather than pull a pod down.

I'm shown photos of car parks that survived tsunamis with no structural damage, while traditional office buildings right next door were destroyed.

There will be nothing delicate or elegant in such a design. I mention to the architect that it looks to me that the appearance will be somewhat brutal. He asks me to look at a photo of the Speyer house. That house was built on a forested hillside and, granted, it isn't brutal looking. But we will need something far larger, with more stories high. He promises it will have its own type of beauty. I'm not convinced, but decide to withhold any further comments.

I do complain that, sure, the water will pass under, but in a typhoon the wind will destroy the exterior glass, especially those large vertical surfaces. We talk about angling the glass and creating mated louvered horizontal shutters (like venetian blinds) that work as sun screens in good weather and can fold down into full shutters, protecting the glass without the need of finding a way to board up those windows in an emergency.

My ground-hugging design idea is long gone. In its place, our home will be in the air.

Using stilts is making me nervous. I hope he is right. We will need a pod, maybe of two levels, for bedrooms. We will need a pod for a living room, dining room and kitchen. We will need a carport pod, or maybe that can be a level below an upper level of common rooms. And maybe we need an open-air but roofed over pod as well. It seems to me we need a place for parties, as they seem to happen often. Without an upper roofed area, we will be having parties in the carpark!

There's enough land, so that's not a problem.

The architect broaches the issue of self-sustainability. This project has gotten him thinking about the other issues regarding survivability. One of the problems that occur with events such as massive typhoons and tsunamis is the loss of power and potable water.

He suggests the idea of a large water tank, built into the roof over a carpark structure, with sloped sides like I had envisioned for the windows. The low, long design, held up with additional steel I-beams, can provide the needed strength for a significant amount of water reserves without the need for electricity. He envisions a pod

with three levels above ground: carpark, common rooms, and water tank.

Some power can be gathered by solar panels arranged across the flat roofs on the pods. Even if we don't have battery storage, we might have twelve hours of power each day. If there comes a time when I want to add battery storage, the design should be flexible enough to allow for it.

The architect asks me if I want to consider wind power, but I'm initially disinclined, as a turbine on a tower would be a risk, as it might hit the house in a typhoon. But the architect introduces me to an engineer who has done a fair bit of work with wind power generation. The engineer mentions shrouded horizontal helical turbines that have a low profile and can be attached to a roof. I agree to consider it.

Clearly, even if the area is otherwise devastated, if the building stays up and we have power and water, we will be in good shape.

Each time I come back to our house and discuss the plans, my gals tell me I'm being beyond foolish. There's no need for such a thing. They have met a gal who is married to an expat here. Word has come back to me that he told his wife that I must be a 'wacko prepper.'

Maybe. Just maybe, I'm being foolish! Am I? Am I being obsessive? As to the prepper thing, it wasn't me who started the discussion about solar and wind generation. But I guess the design of the house might have been enough to earn that term.

My gals have been living here all their lives and have not felt the need for any such thing. But what if this climate change thing is real? I'm no scientist. How the hell can I tell what's real and that's just the fear of the year, only to be replaced by another fear next year? And what about Winnie? It wasn't even a typhoon as it hit Santa Rita, yet it had a massive impact.

When I mention that, I just get either blank stares or am told that there's no way to find safety, if it's God's will.

Storms, I gather, are God's will.

I've asked for some drawings for four pods. I'm not committed to any project. I want to see the drawings and, even if I like them, I want to price things out before we turn a shovel of dirt.



As the months roll on, there are important birthdays.

Nelia turns twenty, and we celebrate on the first Saturday in February, the fifth. My sweet Jesus-invoking gal has been a pure joy since the day she joined me. Any concern about religion creating issues disappeared as soon as I met her. The time with her, alone, from Friday through until the party on Saturday night, is possibly more a treat for me than it is for her.

As crazy as it still seems to me, Nelia truly believes that Jesus sent me here to take care of these eight gals. In her mind, I would be defying God himself if I turned my back on any one of them.

Friday night, she asks me to go very, very, slowly as I slide my cock into her cunt.

Ira, in and out and wait. I will nod for the next one. OK?

I agree, pushing in and out. I wait. I hear...

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified; died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

She nods. I agree, pushing in and out. I wait. I hear...

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.

She nods. I agree, pushing in and out. I wait. I hear...

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

She nods. I agree, pushing in and out. I wait. I hear...

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

On and on she goes. Sometimes there's silent meditation before another nod. It seems like it goes on forever. But finally I hear,

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

O God, whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal salvation; grant we beseech Thee, that meditating upon these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen...

... it ends with a, *Thank you, Ira. Now hard and fast. Time for you to make it happen.*

I, the human Rosary, fucked the ever-living shit out of Nelia until she could only grunt and leak her juices. By the time cum enters her, I'm reasonably sure her juices evacuated it in a river of her own making.

The following week, both Ann and Eva turn sixteen. Their birthdays are only three days apart; Eva on the eleventh (only four days after Nelia) and Ann on the fourteenth. Saturday this year is on the twelfth, and so we have a joint birthday party for the girls.

In bed, we also celebrate together, though I'm really thinking I'm shorting the gals by doing this. I tell them as much. All I get back is, *Relax! Don't worry.*

They are sixteen and I'm sixty-six. Fifty years! So, the sex isn't as athletic as it's loving and slow. On the evening of the eleventh, Eva's birthday, a Friday night, while both are with me, Eva gets the results of the evening's activities. The thought that she wants cum inside her, with the hope of a pregnancy, makes no sense to me, but they all are hoping for the same thing. Saturday we have the

party, and so an evening session in bed isn't going to work. I gather the two up in the afternoon and give my all to Ann.

March is Bim's daughter, Niana, who turns seven. We get her a cake and invite some school friends and their mothers over for an afternoon party.

That may be a big mistake. I'm not sure if the mothers, as they are nosing around, are going to cause me trouble later, or maybe one or two might try to jump on-board.

It's not like all these gals are young and pretty. I gather, in one case, the kid attending the party is the gal's ninth child. That is not to suggest anything, other than she isn't young any more. All are courteous while with us, but I'm just nervous as all get-out nevertheless. Bim tells me I'm over-reacting. Am I? I hear one mother say she wishes she was my girlfriend, and another asking, *'which one the wife?'*



April brings Jessa's and Bim's birthdays. Jessa is now twenty-one and Bim is twenty-seven. Once again, there are parties on consecutive Saturdays and, once again, each gets me alone for two days. So far, there has been no blowback from Niana's birthday party.



It's now May fifteenth! Cincer's birthday is in six days.

Eva has graduated. School is out for the summer⁷⁸, and has been since late March.

Reyna will be a tenth grader starting next month, and is on her way to being far more legal to fuck, or so one side of my mind wants to tell me. The other side of my mind isn't buying that one bit.

I'm looking forward to getting some actual architectural plans and a cost analysis. I've warmed to the concept both the architect and

⁷⁸ Yes, I know there is technically no summer in the Philippines, but don't tell that to a Filipino, as it is from about March 21 to the first week of June. Argue with them, and not me!

the engineer are pushing, but the question is, can I afford it? Clearly, I don't need the size of I-beams used in skyscrapers, but it's still a lot of heavy steel. And the steel we will bury, won't it rust?

The guy points out that I'm not needing to spend on lots of rebar, or concrete block, which he insists on calling 'hollow block,' or ready-mix concrete in forms. So, he posits, it won't be too much more. I'm not buying it. The rust issue, he claims, is no different than what you get when sinking pilings for bridges and, as the ground here all the way down is sandy and well-drained, it won't be a problem. Really? And on top of that, those steel window shutters and all the other specialty stuff will likely drive the price far too high. I want to see the numbers.

The gals are frightened that we will be a laughing stock with the building, as I've described it. I need the drawings. I find it funny that our lifestyle doesn't worry them, but the design of the house does.

I haven't mentioned it, but I bought an SUV, an Isuzu Crosswind. It's a 2.5L diesel with a manual transmission. I looked for an automatic, but couldn't find one. These days, it can rain all it wants. I stay dry... until I get to the house.

There's no way to get out of the vehicle and to the front door of this place without getting soaked when it's raining. I'm less and less enamored with this house.

Once we celebrate Cincer's birthday, we are done with all of them until mine in October. Of course, that does not mean that there won't be parties. I'm learning that parties, in a way, replace the observation of the seasons and the seasonal holidays.

There's no Halloween, no Thanksgiving, no Groundhog Day, no St. Patrick's Day, no April Fool's Day, no days for the adjustment of the clocks... no spring forward and fall back, no July Fourth, no Memorial Day and no Labor Day like they have in the States. Yes, they have a Labor Day of a type... Mayday, which just passed two weeks ago, but there are no parades, no family picnics. Yes, they

have an Independence Day, June 12th, and it's a holiday, but also not a big deal.

So... parties fill the gaps.



Cincer is the oldest of my gals and, while she is hardly old, she looks at the other gals and she feels old. She doesn't mention it much... no, not much, but enough to know it's bugging her.

CiCi, do you want me to find a love in her thirties or forties? Would it make you feel better?

What? Why you say that? You always say, no more! Why you want to add?

So you won't feel old. That's why.

I am old! Why you say that?

How can you be old?

I thirty; it over. It true. It OK because you take care of me, but if not, it over for me. No man for me if you not have me. No job maybe. Maybe, if I am a super good bookkeeper they keep me, but if not, no work unless a family member own the company!

Why do you say that?

Ha! You new here. You not know. It true. I am old now. Lucky I have you. Truly.

The twenty-first, Cincer's birthday is a Saturday, a Saturday she doesn't have to work. For once we have perfect timing, and yet hers is the one where there isn't as much joy in the celebration.

To let her know I'm happy to be with her, I carve out three days, Friday through Sunday, to be with her alone. I'm rarely alone with her. I wasn't alone with her that first day. Then, it was Bim, who I was calling Prin.

I had almost crossed Cincer off the list. Bim was sure she would not join us. My foolish irritation, at her perceived tardiness, almost sealed her fate.

I'm more than lucky that I have you, CiCi. I think you know I love you. Maybe you don't know how much I value and need you.

You mean this?

Yes.

Happy to know, Ira. Totoo⁷⁹.

We are alone in the bedroom. Clothing is removed, as couples do when it's time to call it a night. There's no romance, no seduction, no playful peekaboo moments.

Cincer has attractive, but not overly provocative, clothing on. Sure, the panties are black and red lace hip-huggers, and sure, they look good on her trim frame, but she's not flaunting it. And, eventually, they get tossed in a hamper right along with my briefs.

The lights get turned off and we slide into bed, each to a side, only to meet in the middle, reaching out, and bringing close with silent, soft, caresses announcing a beginning, a mating, and our love.

We don't need to speak. There's nothing that needs to be said. Neither of us is jockeying for dominance, neither of us is here to prove a point. My hands caress her arms, her neck, and her breasts.

She strokes my cock and nibbles on my lips.

I move my fingers down to check for moisture... is she ready? Do I need to help her to lubricate more? Yes, maybe a little, but she's close already. I attend to that and she moans, pushing her mons to meet my fingers.

No sounds. Just touching.

She's ready and pulls me to mount her. I'm ready and, once in position, my cock slides in smoothly.

She sighs.

I feel things from the back of my neck, to the small of my back, and down my legs, and most assuredly on my cock. My cock is

⁷⁹ True (Cebuano and Tagalog)

stationary and then twitches. Cincer makes a small gasp. I twitch again, and the first words Cincer utters are, *Stop teasing, my love. I am ready for you so much.*

And it begins. At times slowly and methodical. At times fast with passion. Ramping up, slowing down. Stopping to kiss and nibble. Stopping to squeeze a tit, or reposition and launch into passion once again.

We have time, all the time we want. No one has a clock on us. Her body is magnificent and I'm savoring all of her as we push through the evening, enjoying each other.

I'm sure there's far more for me to savor than there is for CiCi. She is in the prime of her life, regardless of what she thinks. I'm on the far end of it. But she isn't complaining, and so I get to appreciate her deep into the night, until, finally, cum ends it, hot inside her cunt, my cock wilted and useless.

The school year has begun.

Until I got Eva to enroll in college, she was offering to take Reyna to school on the bike, but she doesn't have a license. No one here seems to care about such legalities, but I do. I had declined her offer to relieve me of the task for that reason, but now, she is riding a bike to get to college. I can't win for losing.

Eva is on a teaching track. She wants to teach math.

I haven't seen Debbie, though Reyna tells me she is at the school and asks about Eva. When Reyna tells Debbie that Eva is attending Leyte Normal University, Debbie cries.

Reyna asks her why she is crying and, according to Reyna, Debbie says, *How such a bad and evil man do such a good thing? I will do whatever he make me do, if he do this for a child! Why he so mean to me and so good to others?*

Reyna tells me she doesn't know what to say, so she just holds her teacher for a bit before getting on with her day. Nothing more is said later.

Cincer has gotten Nelia a job where she is the bookkeeper, and word has it that Lorie may also get hired next month.

Bim and Jessa will take care of the house. Our peripatetic Ann has become a fixer connected with Tacloban city hall and in the city of Catbalogan, Samar's provincial capital. She tends to be out of the house early each day and returns only after the government offices close. The only days she is likely to be around are when there's a government holiday.

Ann did report on something of a commotion the other day. It seems like my architect is well regarded in the government offices in Catbalogan, and our potential project is being discussed up there. It's so different that it has caused some consternation.

The question arises to me, how can our project be discussed and I don't even have a drawing?

And so, this morning I'm meeting the architect with the hope that I'll return with the drawing that seems to be circulating in the provincial capital offices.



I have a preliminary sketch. The reason for the commotion in Catbalogan, it turns out, is that the design is not in compliance with the building code. It's not that it isn't good. It's more like they had not considered a structure like it when the codes were created. That's why my architect got the provincial government involved.

As of this moment, there's no decision as to whether I'll be allowed to even build the thing. It's a little bit frustrating, but it's nice to know that they take their building codes seriously. They are most concerned with earthquakes. It makes sense, as we have them here. But the issue of massive storm surges and tsunamis are not factored in.

I gather some up in Catbalogan think I'm an alarmist.

Once I explain all this to my gals during supper, following my time with the architect, and with the drawings in hand, we have a lively discussion at the table.

Cincer and Bim are in agreement with my skeptics. Nelia is giggling, which stops all conversation cold as all eyes focus on her.

Ira, remember? ... I say you take two from Manila, two from Panay, and two from Leyte and Samar. Now we add two more from Samar... Always pairs! Like Noab! Debbie not a pair she so not allowed! And Ira! Now you will build the Ark! ... Ira, you doing what God Jesus want! He want us to have an ark. You must build it. It must happen, my love. You are building an Ark for us!

I guess I should be grateful that Debbie did not come with a plus-one, or that would have made it a pair, and Nelia would think I would need to accept the gal.

Crazy as Nelia's beliefs sounds, it also stops any criticism. It has been resolved. The Ark must be built. Ann looks troubled, but it's Jessa, in a quiet moment later after supper, who asks me, *Ira? You really hear God tell you? You do this for Him?*

No, Jessa, I don't think so. But they say that God works in mysterious ways. This wasn't even my idea for a design. It was the architect's. I know Nelia believes it is God's will. I never thought any such thing. But I guess I have to ask you, does it matter? Is it important that God should be directing me? What if we never need what the building offers in the manner of safety? Was I just a crazy old man who had silly fears?

I not know. I hear from a preacher. He tell us about crazy prophets. He tell us about Isaiah who walk around naked! About Jeremiah and something call a cattle yoke, like we use for carabao! He tell us about others, but he say God was in them. Maybe this like that!

So I'm a crazy prophet?

Jessa smiles, kisses me and says, *Maybe. Maybe just crazy!* And kisses me again.

But eventually, Ann does approach me. *Ira, maybe I can help.*

How?

Help get you the permit.

How?

It what I do. You know.

Really? You can fix what the architect can't?

I think, yes. It OK that I try?

Yes and no. I do not want a permit yet, as I don't have the cost for the project. The architect doesn't want to price it out until the provincial government tells us we can build such a thing. It's a lot of work for nothing if there will neither be the possibility of a permit allowing us to use such a design. What we need is for the Samar government to agree to accept such a plan if submitted. If you can do that, then yes, but, let me tell him what you will be doing before you start.

Sige na.

Explaining to a man in his fifties that a sixteen-year-old will fix what he has been unable to do, takes some tact, something that I'm not known to have in abundant supply.

So, instead of presenting it as a fact, I present it as my crazy friend is convinced that she can do what the adults can't and, to keep peace here, I'm going to allow her to try her hardest and will not demean her when she fails. The guy laughs and says something to the extent of, might as well. He doesn't think she can do any real damage.

He thinks it's pretty funny, and so the call ends without rancor. Truth be told, I suspect Ann just may succeed. She has a talent when it comes to working the system.



I haven't heard any more from Ann on the matter of the building design and the provincial government. The architect is not having any luck either. I'm frustrated. We are fast approaching September and nothing has happened.

I've not heard from Debbie at all. Reyna mentions her infrequently.

Every once in a while, there are meetings for 'parents' at the high school and, weird as it seems, these days I'm expected to attend with Jessa. I do see Debbie when I'm there, but she keeps her distance from me. Other teachers do not stay away, however, and that gets a little dicey. Luckily, my sweet Reyna is not heavy with child, and having Jessa on my arm allows all to behave as if I'm a quasi-step-father.

Reyna tells me most of them actually know better, but we all play our part as in a Noel Coward comedy of manners. It does make for some hilarity at the supper table, as Reyna and Jessa frequently relate what was originally said in Cebuano that I had not understood at the time, and the others are just now learning about.

Things are stable and quiet here. We are happy with each other. And if there's any friction at all, I'm truly unaware of it. But, I'm

really beginning to strongly dislike this house. In all other ways, things are fine.

Nelia and Lorie are gone most days because of employment. It's just Bim and Jessa with me most days. Throughout the work week, the others show up at the end of the day only.

Spending my time with just the two of them hasn't changed my relationship with Bim, but it has with Jessa. This is maybe going to sound as crazy in its own way as Nelia sounds about Jesus. I know all the gals say they love me, and I really do love all of them, but this thing with Jessa... it's taking on proportions of emotional commitment that have me wondering if this is what is meant when you hear someone say, *'We were made for each other.'*

All I have to do is begin thinking of something and Jessa is already making it happen, or getting it, or... answering that which was not asked yet. It's a combination of thrilling and spooky as all hell.

Yes, there's a sexual component to it and that is beyond great, but it's far more than that. It's the everyday, the mundane. It's the being handed ibuprofen for a headache, when I just this moment realized I had a headache. It's seeing a dress in a shop window and Jessa saying, *I agree. She will like it.* I was thinking of Bim, but I never said a word. I never said anything. How did she know I was even looking at the dress? It's not science fiction. She just gets me on a really basic level. She tells me I was rubbing my forehead and that told her I had a headache. She is paying attention... to me, all the time.

And to think, the only reason she is with me is that her partner became a drug user and they split up. It's so fucking random.



There's sad news from the USA. I don't follow things back in the States very much but this has become international news.

There has been a hurricane in the US that, for a while I guess, was listed as a category five. It was maybe a category three by the time it made landfall, not nearly as bad, but New Orleans is under water.

I guess the levees were topped or there was a storm surge, or maybe it was just a more damaging storm than folks assumed. Hell, there's no way to know from here.

Anyway, it's a mess. People are stranded, starving and some are dying. I hear news of incompetent governmental responses, but that may just be Monday morning quarterbacking. I sure don't know.

What it has done, locally, is moved some in provincial government to reconsider my proposed house plan. It was not done at the architect's urging; it was at Ann's intercession.

Sixteen-year-old Ann tells me she got in their faces and said, *'The climate is changing. Even big powerful nations can't cope. We need to change our attitude. Just because we haven't had big storms and tsunamis yet doesn't mean they're not coming. The world is changing!'*

Enough of them bought it that, though Ann didn't initially know she had been successful. The architect got a call afterward that they will approve it if we still want to go ahead with the plan. I'm told that a cost analysis is in process. I should have the numbers in a couple of weeks.



Nelia's pregnant. She has known, or at least suspected, for three months, but it's official now. At the end of October she will end her employment. She has seen a doctor and all is fine.

This house just doesn't work for us. I'm in the process of grouching to all of the gals that we have to do something about that very thing, when I get a call from the architect. He has the numbers on a four pod house complex. It's a rain free day and I ride over on the bike to get them.



We can do it. Surprisingly so! But the four pod design, as it is now, isn't going to work if we have a lot of children. Looking at the numbers, it seems like adding another pod is not much more costly than adding another floor on an existing pod. The architect tells

me it will also be safer, and gives us more roof area for solar panels and wind turbines.

So we are now at five independent pods with floating walkways that can move somewhat or just break away if needed, allowing each pod to move independently. Small movements will not cause the loss of the walkway. There's a flex and telescope function allowing for some movement, but there's that breakaway if all goes to hell.

The carpark will be accessed via a ramp. At the bottom of that pod will be a concrete pad that will extend out beyond the pod, but the ramp will not be attached to it. It's connected to the car park structure and can be raised/tilted and slid in tightly underneath the carpark floor level via electric motors and cables. During the day, we can leave the vehicles on the lower pad, but at night we can put them in the carpark and roll up the ramp.

The design of all the pods quasi-floating on the pilings way up high means that, as the ramp is pulled up at night, we really don't need a 'fence' to protect the house.

However, to secure everything else that would have been on the ground and needing a fence, I have to move all I might have otherwise put in a free-standing shed, up on the carpark. Rather than solid walls on the level, we will have a chain-link walled room for that stuff.

I kid the architect and suggest we attach boat anchorage to the outside of the Carpark. He must think I am serious! A drawing I have in front of me has it drawn in! I tell the girls I'll have him remove it, but Nelia wants it to stay. That doesn't surprise me one bit, but no, it's gotta go.

The most expensive elements for the house are the safety glass panels for the exterior walls, and all the louvers that will be custom made to provide shade and protect the glass during major storms.

I'll say this for the design, it will be the only one like it in the Philippines. I agree to the design and, though we do not have the

stamps from the government yet, the steel beams have been ordered. All the exposed steel will be powder coated black.



The birthday season is upon us. I turned sixty-seven last week. Lorie's birthday is just around the corner.

Time! Time just slides by. As there are no real seasons like we have in the States, you just don't notice it and then, holly shit, it's been a year!



Cincer and Ann are pregnant! Three pregnant gals. Who's next? Jesus, I need this house built!

Cincer's employers don't want her to quit. That pleases her in one way, but she doesn't want to work after the birth. She hasn't really decided what she wants to do.

We now have officially approved plans. The steel is on site and we are pounding the posts in and then welding them to the horizontal I-beams three meters below ground. Other vertical I-beams, sitting on top of the horizontal beams, attach in a way that allows them to slide back and forth a little. Once the next level's horizontal beams are in place, the crossbeams are also welded and bolted in to the upper beam and to their mate, but use the same sliding technology as at the base.

It allows the house to sort of float above the foundation, and be safe when the ground shifts during earthquakes, while preventing it from being washed away by massive water events. This is one of the issues that caused so much of a problem in the permitting process.

It's slow getting the basics installed, but I'm told once that's done the rest happens pretty quickly. As we don't have any concrete in the house, there aren't issues of allowing for curing times until we pour the pad for the driveway and, as that is not weight bearing, the delay is minimal. Plus the 'floating technology' is not used on the upper levels, so the bolting and welding happens very quickly.

We have dug a well. I place a very large septic tank with leach field quite a ways away from it. Until the house is up, we have a temporary water holding tank for use during construction.

There's commercial electric service, provided by Samelco II, of a minimal type. As we expect to generate most of our own electric, I'm hoping that we won't need very much of the Samelco II service. So, even though the house isn't up, we have water and power. A crude toilet and sink has been fabricated with some plywood walls to provide some privacy, though it's without a proper roof. It has a tarp covering to keep the sun and rain off, and the damned thing threatens to blow away frequently enough.

Now that the crazy prepper comment has been fully accepted as something I'll just have to live with, and as I've accepted the suggestions about solar and wind, my new long-term idea and goal is to live 'off-grid' as much as possible.

I'm looking into storage batteries, but so far I think the thing to do is wait on that. I read that newer technology batteries will be coming in a few years.

There are lithium-ion batteries now, but they can catch fire, especially when they get hot, and we specialize in 'hot' here. They also lose efficiency when too warm. There are technologies to cool them, but that pretty much defeats the reason to have them. I guess if you are using them in a car in a cooler climate, you can cool them via air flow, but I don't see the point in it unless we are generating enough excess power that cooling them doesn't really amount to a real significant loss of stored capacity or limited supply.

That's something I'll only be able to evaluate once we have the solar system in place and in use.

But, with our own water and our own power, so long as the house stands and we have enough food, we will be OK. I've been reading up on the type of people called 'preppers.' When I look at them, I see people with bunkers and weapons, radiation protection and storerooms of MRE's enough for years. I'm not expecting that

type of Armageddon. It's natural disasters and the aftermath of such that is my concern.

If shit can go as bad, and it sure has in New Orleans, imagine how bad it might get in a third-world nation such as this. On the positive side, it's so much cheaper to build here that the cost of proactive mitigation is not only really possible, but possible with some amount of style and class.

I'm spending all my days at our property. After taking Reyna to school, I travel to our land and stay until it's time to pick Reyna up at four-thirty. Jessa brings me a lunch each day so I can stay out here.

Ann is really happy that our storable ramp for the vehicles will provide us with added security from the kawatan⁸⁰ if we retract it each night. I had not been thinking about it, but Ann insists that our new home will attract bad men.

I mention it to the engineer. He agrees and then adds, *It is good that you use it every day. Then you know it will work if the bad weather comes. If you not use it regularly, maybe it not work when needed?* Yeh, maybe. He's got a point.

The architect rarely comes by, but the engineer has been keeping a close eye on the creation of this radically different foundation. Ann tells me that some of the folks in the permitting office are leaning on him for regular updates and reports. The engineer tells me that, because of the nature of the project, we can plan to move in to the place before next Christmas. That thought excites me.

Speaking of Christmas, this is what the gals call the 'ber' months. From **September** through **December**, the ber months comprise their Christmas Season.

Christmas is only a few days off now. It will be my first in the tropics, and the vibe is very different here. Maybe it's that the weather does not announce it as in the States. Maybe it's that I've

⁸⁰ Thief.

been seeing Christmas displays for four months now, and it loses its specialness in a way because of the commonness of it.

There's the inevitable consequence of fucking eight females. They get pregnant. I now have just come to the conclusion that I'll have to keep a formal calendar of birthdates.⁸¹

Valentine's Day a seriously observed holiday here, maybe one of the very most important. It's focusing my mind on the intricacies of having so many gals here. It was bad enough with eight loves, but now Nelia is due to give birth to her child next month. Cincer's is due in June and Ann's in August.

Reyna tells me she is carrying. I got the word just last week. I gather she is two months along and will not be showing until long after she graduates.

Today, Bim tells me that she is carrying. Well, that's not exactly right. Niana sat down on my lap and tells me,

Uncle, I hope it a boy.

Who?

My brother! I want a baby brother.

Oh. Did your mother tell you that you will have a baby brother or sister?

Oo, Uncle, but we not know yet, of course. I not complain if I have a sister, but a brother is better.

I see. It will be exciting to have a little one. You will be the Ate!

Yes! Really true, Uncle.

After Niana leaves to pursue other matters, I find Bim chopping carrots in the dirty kitchen⁸².

Niana wants a brother. Do you have a preference?

She tell you? Ha! I tell her, it secret!

⁸¹ I will attach one to the end of this later.

⁸² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_kitchen

A secret from me? Why?

No need. You busy. I tell you later. I not need to see a doctor. It too soon.

I'm not sure I really understand the logic of all that, but there's no reason to fight her about it. There's no harm done. It was an odd choice, but maybe I just don't understand the culture enough.

One incredibly difficult issue with eight loves is, who do I take to my bed on Valentine's Day evening?

The Valentine's Day dinner is easier. I take them all out to Guiseppe's,⁸³ which may be the best place in all of Tacloban. I have to make reservations a couple of weeks in advance. There are ten of us at the table, as it includes Niana as my step-daughter.

But what happens later? The fact that I bed all of my gals is not secret to Niana, so I'm not breaking any barrier when, in the middle of our meal at Guiseppe's, I open the matter up for discussion.

I have a problem.

That gets some surprised looks, but now that I've their attention, I continue.

Who do I take to bed tonight without hurting the feelings of the rest of you?

There are a few guffaws and rolled eyes, but Cincer intercedes.

Why you laugh? He right. He take one and other think, 'oh, she the special one.' He say to you, there no special one. We all special, so what he do? He being good. Help him. ... No need for me, I know you love me, and I carry a child. So no need. OK for me.

Bim decides, if there's no need for Cincer, then there's no need for her. And in that way, though the others had not been told yet, she informs the table that she is also carrying, and so clearly she has no need for my bed tonight.

⁸³ The place is now out of business, but it was a great at the time.

That causes, or forces, Reyna, Nelia and Ann to all follow suit as each is carrying a child. From eight, we are down to three possible contenders.

Someone mentions Rock, Paper and Scissors, but as Ann points out, with three of them it does not work. Assuming each chooses a different one, rock beats scissors, but scissors beats paper, and paper covers rock. All lose.

Cincer asks a waiter for three fresh drinking straws, and all immediately understand what is to follow. The straws arrive a few minutes later. The articulated end is removed from one. Cincer, with her hands under the table and surrounded by table cloth, arranges the straws, bottom end up.

Now, holding her fist up containing the three straws, each with the same visible length, Cincer offers the first pull to Lorie. It's a long straw.

Next, her fist is presented to Jessa. There will be no need for Eva to select. Jessa has the short straw and she will be with me tonight.

Well, that solves it for tonight, but I decide I need to resolve what happens for the next two nights.

OK, Eva, Ri... Rock / Paper / Scissors next. Winner will be tomorrow and the loser the next night. And so all a winner. And, the one who is with me on the sixteenth is with me on the seventeenth. Then, the one from the fifteenth is back on the eighteenth. Finally, Jessa is back on the nineteenth. I love you all and for me there must not be winners or losers.

Eva throws paper. Lorie throws scissors. The order is settled for the next six days. Reyna is giggling. Looking at my youngest one, I ask, *What?*

Reyna isn't answering, Cincer is. *She wonder, who is pregnant next. Each have two chances in one week. Maybe none, maybe all?*

Reyna, is that really why you are giggling?

Two eyebrows go up.



Jessa has every intention of making tonight special. And I? I've every intention of telling her to knock it off. I don't need drama and artifice. I just want to be with her as she really is.

Maybe this is the best time to explain it, as I guess I've avoided it up to now. There's no secret to the fact that sex is a wonderful thing. There's no secret that the act of seduction and the first few sexual encounters have a heightened level of passion attached to the act.

There should also be no secret that sex between stable couples, unless one of the two has a power or domination issue, is more quiet and gentle. It's the love shared, not a love just discovered. In it, there's room for playfulness, silliness, timeouts, and communication. In it we can say, *'would you try this?'* *'too rough my love,'* *'ah, that's better,'* *'oh! that's nice!'* Things that don't really happen until we know our partner and trust that our words will not cause problems, when we have had enough time with the other to make and suggest adjustments.

I've been with Jessa many times. In that way, we will break no new ground tonight, nor do I want to. What I want is to share the truth of our real connection.

I know her body, small that it is. She knows mine. No surprises there. I know her nipples are small dark brown pebbles and her breasts are barely A cups. She uses a very well-padded bra to give definition to her form when wearing a dress. Of course, it's the same for Reyna. Their bodies are pretty much the same, other than Jessa has more in the hip department.

She is short. No more than maybe four foot nine. But she does not look like a child. Her face is that of an adult, as is her way of behaving. There's not a damned thing childlike about her, with the exception of her foot size.

We playfully undress each other, pretty much at the same time. It's a way of announcing, we are a couple. There's banter between us. She tells me, *You know, I see which is short straw, my love. That why I here now.*

How?

The way CiCi hold them. The short one not as round on the bottom by her hand.

Then you were lucky Ri didn't pick that one.

True. But I think she picks the one in front and she do that. So I not really worried.

Jessa's blouse and bra are off. She has my shirt off and has unbuttoned my jeans. I'm working on her super-skinny jeans, but am not having a great deal of success.

Let me, sweetheart. And I do; as she wriggles out of them and her panties, I take the opportunity to finish removing my jeans and briefs.

She poses in a position like a weightlifter and tries to flex muscles she honestly doesn't have. All I can do is laugh, lift her up with one arm and carry her to the bed.

Not fair!

Why?

You too big!

And you are so small that I think maybe I should just eat you.

You like the taste? OK for me. I just relax and you work!

And so it goes. I go down on Jessa's smooth, hairless cunt. She always keeps it shaved as do all of the gals, but she clearly has just shaved it smooth again this evening. There's a hint of baby oil having been applied.

I shaved the stubble off my face an hour ago. If I don't, the sandpaper-like result will leave a rash on her.

So, now it's smooth skin against smooth skin, as I lick and finger Jessa to her first orgasm of the night. By the time she has had her second, she decides I need to stop.

OK, my turn, my love. On your back!

We pretty much have swapped positions, as Jessa begins a slow, oh so slow, session of head on my cock. She is not, in any way, trying to get me off. Her idea is to keep me hard for as long as she can, until I decide that if I don't fuck her hard I'll get blue balls.

Jessa is a tease tonight. She alternately is licking my cock like a lollipop, then stroking while looking up and smiling, before returning to licking, sucking and licking.

The smiles are the tease. By it, she is saying, see, I can keep you going, but I'm not really trying.

And she is right, she can. She can at least for a while. During that 'while' I am exclaiming, *You are evil! ... Oh, that's good... Nah, nah, don't stop... Oh, so unfair! ... Shit! ... Damnit Jessa! ... Oh, fuck!*

But I've reached the limit and pull her up, flip her over on to her back and mount the gal, bareback as usual.

We have fucked this way many times and there has been no pregnancy. But it has never been the 'first time' with any of the gals. If Jessa can carry, she eventually will. I doubt this time will be the magic moment. But, you never know. Maybe it will. Each time I send cum into a cunt, there's this question, unvocalized, *Is this the time?*

This time I'm not quick to cum and we pound the mattress for a goodly length of time, soaking the fitted sheet below us before the final moment arrives and cum enters my love's sacred place. What happens now is hidden and, at least for a time, unknowable. Still each time, we both see it as mating; it's another attempt and our earnest desire.

We are too warm to hug, but we lie there, with the wet spot between us, arms outstretched and holding hands. *I love you, Ira.*

I know, Jessa, and I love you. Very much.

I want, you know?

I know. It'll happen. Maybe now. Maybe soon. Maybe later. But it'll happen.

Our house... there enough room for all our children?

I think so. We are adding a fifth pod.

She laughs. *Maybe not enough!*

She may be right. One of our neighbors, a woman of forty-three years, has twelve children. If each of my eight have only three each, that means twenty-four kids. I'm too old to be able to father twelve with one woman, but if I were, that number would be ninety-six kids. Can you imagine?

I guess, in a way, my age is a form of birth control. Let's hope that I don't have to die soon and enforce an extremely low limit! Lorie and Eva are just as desirous of the same result as is Jessa. It becomes like a competition. No one wants to be left out.



The construction is now really moving quickly. Just as the engineer said. Once we had the supporting posts and structure all in place, the speed of the shells accelerated significantly. We are still working on the foundation posts for the fifth pod as the order for that steel came later, but the first four are well on their way.

Also well on their way are the pregnancies. In fact, one is already over. On the last day of March, Nelia's son, Mark James Lopez Courtwright, is born, weighing a healthy 3.8 kilos. They don't weigh in pounds here, but it's about eight pounds, I guess. I'm told that makes him a big baby for a Filipina. To my untrained eyes, he just looks like a baby, but the gals tell me that he has my eyes and nose. I gather they see it as a good thing.

Reyna's child will be next, with an expected date in September. The thought of five infants in this place, along with the ten of us already here, is not making me happy. The faster our new place is ready the better.

I've been researching wind turbines. There's a shrouded micro design that is said to be able to produce 6 kilowatts of power. They are small and don't need tall posts. Theoretically, a series of the posts for them could be attached to the horizontal I-beams on the

edges of the roofs. If I mounted twelve per pod, then, at maximum output, with all turning (highly unlikely) we might see 72KW per pod. I don't expect anything like that on normal days, but considering I've five pods, when there's wind I'll have lots of power. Plus there will be solar arrays.

The low-mounted, small turbines will not create a massive wind load on the pods, and it'll not create the risk a large tower being blown over would create. Even if a number of them are taken out of service in a typhoon, the remaining ones would still provide enough power until the rain ends and the sun shines again.

I decide to send what I have to my engineer. If he is OK with the concept, I think this is the way we will go.



When dealing with huge, weight-bearing steel I-beams, rather than concrete and rebar, structures go up in weeks and not months. We are in the process of putting on roofs, which will be followed by glass. Each pod's roof is cantilevered well out from the glass walls. I-beams are perfect for that. The extended ceiling at each level is a major part of what provides for shade. It also extends the roof area for the solar panels.

We initially conceived of the outer glass walls being angled with a narrower top and sloping down to the bottom. But we have swapped the design. The glass will tilt out at the top by 1.5 meters. The floor is four meters from the ceiling. It lessens bringing unwanted sunlight into the pods. The glass will not create a lens for the sun.

Each glass panel is 4.27 meters tall. The angle from the top of the glass, as it slopes down to the floor, is just shy of 70 degrees. That gives us just enough to not take on the wind full force, ever. The cantilever extends out one and a half meters from the top of the glass.

The stainless steel louvers, powder coated white, which are being fabricated now, will, when open, be parallel to the ground, but the frame holding them will follow the angle of the glass, and provide

additional shade to the rooms. When closed, the louvers will fully seal the glass, edge to edge, with a 15cm gap between shutter and glass. No matter what debris hits the buildings during a typhoon, nothing will reach the glass, even if a shutter is dented a bit.

As there's no way to mount air conditioners on the exterior walls, we are using ceiling mounted cassette air handlers. The compressors will be mounted on the roof. The idea is to create a vertical space between where the solar panels are mounted and the actual roof. That is so repairs to the roof can be made without removing the panels. The edge of the roof will have an angled false fascia on the eaves that rises up to be higher than level with the solar panels. We will place the compressors and vents in the space between the actual roof and the panels.

The 70 degree angle of the fascia will be a reverse of the angle of the glass below.

We hope that, with this design, we will create a way for air to move across the top without ripping everything off.

The micro wind turbines will therefore look like they are forward from the roof, as the posts will appear to rise up from the outermost portion of the fascia, while actually attached to the I-beam behind the fascia.

To hang the glass panels, we are using more steel, and the panels will sit in steel channels. The interior channel sections will be removable for the installation and removal of glass panel sections.

We have allowed for custom designed sliding glass doors, which are fully vertical and meet the wall glass at the foot. Tall, narrow wedge shaped sections of glass seal the gaps between the doors and the wall on each pod's cantilevered section. That allows us access to the exterior of the cantilever of the roof below and becomes a wrap-around terrace surrounding each pod level. A few of the window panels on each side and each floor will also slide open, but on that 70 degree angle. If we couldn't open some windows we would be way too sealed up.

In those sections where there are no louvers because of the sliding doors, there will be a motor operated roll-down steel barrier much like used to protect shop fronts at night. The angle will match that of the shutters. When we are sealed up, the 'wrapper' will be a consistent shape around each protected floor.

The gals have been vocal that they are really not happy about the lack of a dirty kitchen. The architect and I have modified the design and, in the pod that houses the kitchen, the interior glass will be moved back in to the building proper. There will be a large area of floor space 'outside'. They get the dirty kitchen by reducing the space of what is 'inside.' The louvers, however, remain where they were and, if we need to seal everything up, the dirty kitchen will be inside the steel envelope.

Daddy, daddy, daddy.

I'm a father three times over now. In June, Cincer gave birth to Ira Edgar Santos Courtwright. Just now, Ann gave me my first daughter, Iris Rose Ramos Courtwright.

All three children are fine. Given my advanced age, I was concerned about the possibilities of birth defects, but so far I've been lucky or, actually, it's the kids who are lucky.

Each, I'm told, has some of my features. Do I see it? No. Still, what the fuck do I know about infants?

But, the hits keep on coming. Reyna's is due next month and Bim's is due the month following that. And we now know that Eva is carrying. Her little one is due in December.

As it comes to the new place, we have gotten a lot done. We really only got started in a serious way last October. It's August, 2006, now. All the pods are up with roofs on, with the glass walls in place. Everything is sealed from the elements.

On the outside, we are dealing with the louvers, the roll-down sections, railings and outfitting the dirty kitchen. Inside, we are working on plumbing, electrical, non-loadbearing walls for privacy in bathrooms and bedroom areas.

There are no loadbearing posts inside, but we need some posts to hide and contain electrical conduit and water pipes.

We have yet to hang the ceilings. We haven't started on the solar panels or the wind turbines. We don't need all that fully completed before we move in, but the Samelco II electric service we have is a minimal feed. It's enough for construction but not for living here. I need to get our solar panels installed and working before we make the move. We have water, as the well is a good one, but it isn't plumbed into the pods either, as that requires that the water tank on a pod roof be completed. It isn't.

Maybe we will be able to move in by October. I surely hope so.

On a more mundane matter of housekeeping as it were, I don't have a single gal in high school any more. My youngest, Reyna, has graduated and is sixteen. Eva is seventeen. My oldest, Cincer, is thirty, with Bim being two years younger at twenty-eight. I'm still sixty-seven, but my birthday is in two months.

Reyna has started her studies for a bachelors in Banking and Finance at Holy Infant College.

Lorie is still working. And that is weirdly a blessing, as she had been my shadow. That's pretty much what Jessa is now. I'm not sure how that would have worked if they both were in that role.

Cincer has been convinced to return to work half-time, starting next month. I'm not sure how long that will actually last. Nelia has decided to stay home and not return to work. Ann's work is a matter of self-employment. She has certainly cut back, but she will never simply quit.

Jessa is disappointed at not conceiving yet but, other than that, all is fine with her. She is a surrogate mommy to three babies, and that is making her very happy.

My days continue to be filled with matters of construction, and my evenings are filled with my gals. It has been a while since I was even able to get to MickeyD's. I'm at the construction site each day, all day. It was a pleasant surprise when Jessa showed up here at the building site today with a bag of burger and fries from MickeyD's. It's not as good as getting it right at the restaurant, but it's pretty good, as I can't do that.

I haven't even seen Debbie since Reyna graduated last March. Before that, I did see her at school events, but we have not spoken since that last time when I put her with the gals.

Everything is as stable as it can be, considering we are in the middle of a construction project and the house we are in is bursting at the seams with three infants added to the mix.

I've lost track of what's going on back in the USA. It just doesn't have anything to do with my life here, so I don't even try to keep up with it.

Every once in a while, I'll get an email from a friend back in the States and I, of course, answer it as vaguely as I can. That's the sum of it. I really find it impossible to write back honestly. Considering what my life is like here, there's no way I can respond honestly to, *How are things going? What are you up to over there?*

What am I supposed to say? How would one of those who reached out deal with it? Imagine if they read, *I am finishing up the structures for my eight lovers, my three newborns, and the three more little ones on the way.* There's no way I can say anything like that.

So I send back answers that are meaningless and designed to discourage any follow up. All that was my life in the States is now, in a meaningful way, part of my past. It's not connected to the life I have here.

Maybe you are one of those who keeps on going back to your high school reunions. But for the rest of us, high school was something we did and even the memory of it has faded. We no longer remember with whom we associated, or anything much about those days. It becomes the distant past.

And so it is for me, as I think about my life in the States. That was then and this is now.

Now is having lovers who are years away from their twentieth birthday. Now is seeing six females with either babes in arms, or truly with child. Now is worrying about being fair to each of my gals so that not a one of them feel slighted. Now is its own sort of nuts. And in a few days it'll be the **ber** season again.



I'm now the father of another daughter, Reyna's Michelle Arroyo Courtwright. I told Reyna I'll call the girl Mac. All is well with Mac and, once again, I'm told that she has my features. I'm really

beginning to think such claims a little bogus. Yes, I know the child is mine, but she looks pretty Filipino to me.

Bim's due date is next week.

We are completely out of room! It's a madhouse here.

And, at each birth, there's a party. As each infant adds a month of life, there's a party. At each birthday there's a party. Do the fucking math! There were ten before the babies arrived. There are fifteen now but five of them will get a party each month on their moniversary. We are having parties every weekend! I'm trying to slow this shit down, as it's getting out of control.

I know the gals are out of their collective minds with happiness over the births and the approaching move to our own place, but, really!... they need to cool it.

Next month, once again we are expecting to see Lillian. She visited once after I returned from the States and stayed for three days that time. This time she is planning on staying for a week. I sure as hell hope we can move first. There's no way we have room for her here.



We have moved in, and I'm a father once again to a daughter! Bim has given me Elenora Arlene Cabreza Courtwright. The infant and mother are doing fine, as is Elenora's older sister, Niana, who is now eight years old and taking the role of an Ate most seriously.

Lillian arrives tomorrow. Last time Lillian was here, there were all sorts of issues regarding the settling in with Jessa and Eva, plus the crap with Debbie had just occurred. I pretty well ignored Lillian. This time, things are in one way a lot calmer, but with all the infants, and issues surrounding our new home, it's busy in other ways.

I'm trying to get a handle on our power generation and consumption. With the exception of storms, average wind speed is between six and ten miles per hour. But the best wind is early morning and late afternoon. Sunlight is pretty good, and gives me

between eleven and thirteen hours of some sunlight, though early morning and late afternoon the sun isn't that strong.

So when one source isn't strong, the other usually is. But there are the evenings, when there's little wind and, of course, no sunlight. I'm generating far more power during most of the day than I can use, but do not have a way to store it. Every night I'm using Samelco II power. I really need to rethink my position on the batteries. Even if I was OK using commercial power, the line we have doesn't provide enough current. It would require a major upgrade of poles, line and a new transformer.

We designed the entire area below the roof of the carpark, as a place where I can place the batteries. The area has a floor of its own of open grating, well above the floor of the carpark. It will keep batteries out of the sun and off the ground in a way where there's fresh air moving between the batteries on top, bottom and even sides, as they can be spaced apart a little. With enough space between them, I don't think I'll have an overheating problem.

The biggest users for energy in the evening are the aircons⁸⁴. Hot water is generated via solar hot water heaters on the roofs of the pods, one large one per roof. So we don't use power for the hot water and, while the water is not steaming hot in the early morning, it's far from cold, as the tanks are insulated.

Other energy users at night include a couple of large refrigerators, three coolers, five hot/cold water dispensers, the submersed water pump and three freezers, but in truth they don't use too much current and, while we have perimeter lights outside, they also don't use that much juice. Raising and lowering the ramps and the shutters do take a lot of energy.

There is no power needed for the water pump at night. The pump is run automatically twice during daylight hours. As the tank is large, the drawdown would have to be beyond our usage to turn it on by the depletion 'float' inside the tank. I have the pump on a

⁸⁴ I seem to have adopted the Filipino way of referencing air conditioners. It's what they say and I guess I am just getting used to it.

timer the looks for a repletion 'float' before turning off. The times are at 7AM and 5PM.

If I could store our excess power we generate during the day, I doubt we would use any Samelco power on most nights. We surely don't use them during the day now.

Even with under .5KW per micro-turbine on average per day, with the sixty we installed, we are getting on average over 27KW of power from 4AM through 7AM and then again 3PM to 7:30PM. The panels are giving us about double that from 9AM to 3:30PM. We are using less than 25KW during the day and under 8KW from 10PM to 5AM. If I can get decent storage, then I'll never even be touching Samelco power.

I never contemplated being off-grid in the USA, but I never would have thought a Katrina-type catastrophe was possible there. Now I do, and this place doesn't have any resources compared with the USA. Here, I need to take care of myself. That's exactly what I'm doing.

As to Internet, I've purchased a wireless link from a company called Globe Telecom. They provide a little flat panel antenna and a receiver with a cellphone style SIM in it. I have to buy loads for it, but it's 3G and it works. It isn't the greatest signal or speed, but we are connected.

We don't have a landline. Unless you are in Tacloban, no one I know here has one. Welcome to the third world.



Lillian is here. Yes, I paid for the airfare. Her sari-sari is being run by a niece of hers for the week. The last time she was here, we were in the rental and, while it was OK, it was hardly special. This place is special, and Lillian is being really weird.

Twice so far, she is saying she made a mistake not sticking with me. Both times I just ignored her, but Lorie hasn't. I can't ignore Lorie as I can Lillian.

No, Ri. No. I know your mother wants me to ask her to stay. But no. There are eight of you here as it is. Besides, she will soon enough want to go back because she misses it, or she will want to open a sari-sari here and, sweetheart, I don't want that on this property. Anyway, the answer is no. She can visit once a year for one week each time, but that's it.

Maybe you will change your mind if she is nice to you?

Sweetheart, she is being nice to me now. The answer is no.

Lillian isn't hard to look at. She wasn't before and nothing has changed in that regard. It's that she carries with her complexities I don't need and, in truth, I'm absolutely done adding.

For the entire week that Lillian is here, it never gets any easier. It's not that it ever gets ugly. It's just that she doesn't want to go back to her own island, until, just like I guessed, she gets a call from her niece about a problem at the sari-sari. Then she can't get back soon enough.

How you know?

Know what?

She not want to stay.

I didn't, not for sure, but I remembered what she was like the last time and, well, I figured that sooner or later she would miss it. Granted, it happened faster than I assumed it would, but it was just a guess.

Good thing you not fuck her. Lorie is smiling.

Why?

If she pregnant, what then?

Oh. Yeh, got it.



It has taken another six months to get all the final parts and pieces finished here. And still there are future plans for changes and additions we will make. There needs to be, however, a point in

time when you say, the job is done. And so it is with this place. There are five pods, but they make up a home. We are home.

I added an embarrassingly large number of lithium-ion batteries, and our storage problem is no more. While we have a hookup to Samelco, we aren't using their power. We have our own water and septic. We are composting what we can, and burning/burying the rest.

Since we have lots of electricity, we use that for all our cooking, with the exception of when the gals want to grill with locally sourced charcoal. That makes us a little different from most here who use LP gas to cook.

Bim, Nelia and Jessa have a large vegetable garden, going and the expectation is that we will be at least growing some of our food. They also have what they call native chickens, which provide eggs, chicks, and a fairly tough but tasty meat that they use in soups.

I forgot to mention, four months ago Eva gave me a son named Charlie Beloy Courtwright, and Jessa's with child. We can expect Jessa's in October, and maybe within a week of my birthday. Nelia's not showing yet, but she has missed two periods and is having morning sickness.

Jessa is elated and I'm happy for her. Lorie, on the other hand, is pretty depressed, as she isn't with child. I've offered to send her to a doctor and she has agreed. She and I know that some women simply can't have kids. Nelia has been staying pretty close to her and supporting her as best she can with her, 'Jesus has a plan for you' stuff. It wouldn't work for me, but it actually may be working for Lorie.



Lorie's trips to an OB/Gyn only tell us that there is nothing obvious causing a problem.

I'm not sure how to proceed, in sexual matters, with Lorie. Do I increase the times we are together? Might that seem like I'm being desperate, or suggesting that it's important to me that she 'take?'

And if she doesn't, which is likely, might that suggest to her that she will fall out of favor?

Do I lie with her, as in the normal way of things, not changing the frequency of our times under the sheets? Might she think that she isn't important enough for me to care if she gets pregnant or not?

I'm really lost. I don't tell anyone this. Fuck if I know how to proceed.

When you going to talk to Ri?

What? About what?

Ira, you not stupid. If I know, you know.

There's this thing about Jessa. She sort of is able to know my mind.

What should I do?

Tell her?

Tell her what, Jessa? What the fuck can I say?

Gah! Tell her you want her to decide, more or the same. Do she want you in bed more, knowing probably make no change, or the same, knowing that no matter what, you always love her, baby or no baby. That what. That what you think, so ask her.

Jesus Jessa, you are both wrong and right. Yes, I was worried which way would be best, but no, I've not put it together like you did. Do you think she will be OK if I ask her?

Why not. You respectful to ask. You tell her you love her no matter what. You know she want a child, but that up to God, not you. She know that.



You tell me how you want to proceed, Ri. You know I would be happy if you give me a child, but I'll never love you less if we are not able to do that. I'm your guy.

It not 'we' who unable. It me! Ira, you think I am stupid? It me. I fail you.

You can't fail me. That is not possible. I love you and that has nothing to do with children.

But I want you to have a child from my blood! Mine, Ira!

I know and you know the doctor say maybe and maybe not. Ri, don't make our love based on whether you can have a child.

Maybe I not able, but Nanay, she is.

Ri? What are you saying?

If Nay⁸⁵ have your child, it my blood.

Oh, Ri, that is not a good idea for many reasons.

Please, if I not able? You think maybe we do this?

I don't want to think about this. Have you already spoken with your mother?

Yes, she say OK for her.

Ri, she doesn't really want to live here and I can't see her having a child and just walking away. This is not a good idea.

Nelia say she not allowed to stay because we only come in pairs. Maybe she come with another?

Ri! No! No more. No more anything. We are done adding.

We need to add or I need to have your child, so I think... extra time in your bed. If that not work then we should add Nay and another so Nelia get her pair!

Are you even sort of aware how crazy this is, Ri? You are already the Tita⁸⁶ to six of my children. There's no shortage of kids in this house. Those kids love you as much as their birthmothers. You've been part of their world from the time each opened their eyes. You're a mother to each. Why can't that be enough if you are truly unable to have your own? I'll never love you less. Never.

Not the same.

⁸⁵ Short for Nanay.

⁸⁶ Aunt.

She's right. It's not the same and I pretty much know that.

Well, I'm not saying yes to Lillian. When is your next period?

Probably in a couple of days.

So come to me a week after your period and stay with me each night for ten nights. We will do that each month for the next two years.

Lorie is laughing. *Ira, you hoping Nay is too old in two years?*

It was worth a try. *I'm hoping that if it is possible, we make sure it happens. That is all.*

OK. Thank you. We do it.



I know, fucking a pretty gal ten evenings straight each month isn't difficult duty, and I'm surely not complaining. The fact that she is still not old enough to get served a beer in the USA is a little odd, but it is what it is. As Lorie has been with me since before she turned eighteen, it's just part of my screwed up reality.

The fact that I far more prefer to get her pregnant, so that her mother doesn't get added, well, that's a detail I would just as soon wish all would forget. Even acknowledging it leaves me thinking I need a drink.

My other seven are not giving me a hard time over this. They are actually cheering us on. I suspect it'll make for a more harmonious home life if all are members of the mommy club.

But, fuck me... I was a decent guy, living a decent, but dead end life, at the beginning of a retirement in eastern Washington State. There was nothing wrong with it, but I was going nowhere and doing nothing, other than paying the bills and marking time.

Sure, I liked to hunt and fish. But how many hours a year did that consume? How often can a man clean and reclean his firearms?

Never, even in my fantasies, did I ever conceive of eight young gals and one of them with a mother who also wants to be fucked by me. At any given moment, I'm having trouble processing the reality of this life. It has been going on now for two and a half years. Even now, as I'm ready for starting ten days of fucking a twenty-year-old, I'm still lost in a real way. This just should not be happening. This should not be possible

And yet... and yet here she is. Lorie stands before me in bra and panties. She's not fearful. There's no reason to be. There's a smile on her face as she sees me.

Her black hair hangs down over her back. Her toenails and fingernails are painted blood red. There's no other makeup on the gal. Other than simple studs in her ears, and a gold anklet on her left ankle, with my name engraved on a small gold plate which is attached by a delicate chain, she has no jewelry on.

Lorie is not here to discover love, or to claim her man. She is not going to seduce or be seduced. She doesn't have to guess what will happen, or what she needs to do to make sure it happens. Tonight is about two adults attempting to create a new life. We will stay at it night after night, hoping, though not really sure, it'll produce the result we both desire.

At this moment, I'm fully aware that God is a mean bastard. He gives children to those who neither want them nor are equipped to raise them. He gives them to those who choose to abort them. And to those who so much want a child, who have the resources to raise a child and do right by that child, he denies that very thing he freely gives those who don't, can't or shouldn't.

My gals are religious, deep down, faithful creatures, and they are afraid to ask 'why.' I'm not and it pretty well pisses me off. I, for sure, do not want to fuck a mother to fix a daughter's problem. And so, hope against realistic expectation, I'll do all I can to create a life within my little love.

Clothing removed, I mount the bed and lie next to Lorie. She extends an arm to me as I do the same towards her. Reaching out, bringing close, our bodies join, flesh meeting flesh.

She is warm in a good way, as I hold on to her. A hand strokes my back. I stroke her hair, the side of her head and down her neck, around toward the top of her backbone. Lips touch, but just barely. Her head tilts up a bit and she kisses my eyelids and my forehead. I kiss her neck.

As this non-aggressive foreplay continues, as if totally disconnected to it, Lorie is sliding on top of me and centering her cunt in a manner to envelop my cock. And then it does. I'm inside her. There was no assertive taking of her. It was no more than a glove sliding over the fingers as it envelops a hand.

That is not to say that I don't feel anything. To the contrary. I feel her heat. I feel her tight cunt as she flexes her muscles. I feel her pelvic bone against mine. I feel lubrication flowing from her and over me.

I feel her rise up and drop down, slowly and repeatedly.

When we started, I was firm but not rock hard. I was firm but not ready to pound her until cum came forth.

Now, as she continues on, I feel a building need to take her more completely. She wants that as much as I now feel the need to do it. It's not me taking from her. It's something that involves her desire and mine in equal measure.

I roll us over. She's not complaining. She's joyful. This is what she wants. It's now what I want and need. She's on her back as I gather her legs in my arms, raise her ass up off the mattress, my cock now able to penetrate more completely, and start pounding her cunt, hard and insistently.

Lorie is crewing the boat, *Harder, again, Harder, yes, yes, yes, good, yes, oh yes, Ira, yes.* And I'm the one rowing, putting all I have into each stroke. Stroke after stroke.

Her cunt hunches, contracts, squeezes, dribbles juices and hunches again. On and on we go, delirious in our needs, hopes and desires. Until, until there comes a moment.

In that moment, all I can do is bellow, grunt and... cum. Oh God, yes, as all I have, leaves me and enters Lorie.

For tonight, we are done. Tomorrow we will repeat this horizontal dance of love and hope.

I say nothing. Lorie only says, *mmm, nice*. We sleep.

Each night for the next nine nights, Lorie and I fill each night with equal measures of desire and, each night, we complete the assigned task, not knowing if we are successful. We will engage again next month even should there be no period in the intervening days, just in case that there's another reason why the period has been missed.

I do have seven other gals and, as the tenth day has elapsed, there's a veritable line waiting for my attentions. Certainly not all of them are equally as demanding. Eva gave birth only four months ago, and Nelia may be carrying again, but with Cincer, Reyna and Ann especially, the desires are there and the knowledge that Lorie has had me for ten days does seem to have amped up their own desires.

I gather I need to take Cincer tonight, before she blows a gasket. At times like this, a fella needs a Big Mac, fries and a Coke. I need to find 'center,' to regain some equilibrium. For me, a meal at MickeyD's is what I need.

It's funny. I like the house and really have little need to leave it, but I do need to get out and away every once in a while, even if nowhere else is as nice. MickeyD's isn't anywhere anyone would want to live or even hang out in, but I do need to be there every once in a while. On a side note, I really wish, rather than the fries, I could get a double order of their hash browns with the Big Mac. I know it's just a pipe dream, but just saying...

For no particular reason, my mind has wandered to something totally different, a weird little meaningless thing I ran into yesterday. One of the gals, I think it was Nelia, who said '*sayang*'. Bim looked at her and asked, *You want honey?*

Nelia looked at her with a wrinkled brow. When it all was worked out it turns out that, in Tagalog, *sayang* means 'honey' and in

Cebuano *sáyang* means 'alas.' Based on the totally different meanings, I doubt they are cognates.

I did run into something that might well be a cognate, but has strayed a bit over the many years. It turns out that '*walang sakit*' means '*I am not ill*' in Tagalog and '*I am not hurt*' in Cebuano. That also caused a bit of confusion a couple of days ago.

The bottom line is that the gals are more likely to understand each other when speaking English. I find that humorous.

But getting back to MickeyD's, even though I needed to get away from the house, did not mean I could go alone. As I have the Isuzu that means Nelia, Eva, Reyna, Bim, along with infants, and Niana, also come along.

Do they really want to be at MickeyD's? No, they don't. They would prefer to be at Jollibee's. I offered to drop them off there, as it isn't far from the golden arches, but no, they are going where I'm going, but they sure wished I would accept reality and go to Jollibee's as, '*It's better.*'

Well, now, when it comes to burgers, '*No, it isn't!*'

So getting out of the house does not mean getting away. These gals are almost always with me. Most of the time that works out fine. But there are moments when being alone would be better.

And now, it comes as a fucking realization that I traded hunting, fishing, cleaning my firearms, plus relative loneliness, for a pickup load of young pussy, a house full of infants... and no alone time.

To a certain extent, it's more of a 'this for that' and not a complete answer. Yes, sure, I love my new home and I really do love these gals, but much of my time is not filled with stuff. I've heard that some guys here get involved with church or medical missions. That leaves me cold for a couple of reasons.

First, I've got no stomach for missionaries. Second, who the fuck do these do-gooders think they are? Isn't that just some colonial self-righteous bull-roar? If there's a real medical need, let the real

doctors, nurses and dentists do it. For the rest of us it's just self-serving, ego-inflating nonsense.

And yet, I'm just sitting around a bunch. Just like I was sitting around before I came here. I'm the same guy at loose ends, just in a different place with different loose ends.

Looking down the road, I don't see much changing, other than our adding more children to the household. Eva and Reyna will get college degrees, and that will be good for them. Cincer will eventually go back to working full time as a bookkeeper, unless she keeps on popping out children. But I'll not be changing.

I've changed where I hang my hat but, on a very personal level, I'm the same guy I always was. The main difference is that I'm no longer alone, and I'm loved by some really sweet gals. And I'm even a loving uncle to nine-year-old Niana. So, yes, I'm better off, but there are still issues and gaps.



Miss me?

How could I miss her? She hasn't been gone. I see Cincer every day. So no, in that way, I most certainly haven't been missing her. But that really isn't what the question is about.

Has it been that long?

Yes! It be a month! Yes, OK, Ri need this. And we all know Jessa your second shadow. You with her a lot. Ira, I happy I am in your bed tonight. It too long since last time, my love.

OK, I hear you. I will not fail in this way again. I promise.

Good. Maybe when I old I not want this so much. It will be sad if that happen maybe. I not sure. But that time not now. I need you my love. Truly.

CiCi, when you are old I'll be dead.

Don't talk about that! Bad to say that!

They just do seem to get weird when I mention the simple realities of my age as it will affect them.

Now that I've been suitably chastised, I think she's ready to get with the program. Her comment about Jessa is bugging me a bit. Cincer is right. My affection for Jessa may need to be directed in a way that doesn't cause problems for my other gals. I need to think about it more, but this is not the time to do that.

We are already in bed. The preliminaries are over in that way. But nothing has begun again. For the life of me, I don't understand why things are so awkward for us right now. We are here together, naked in bed and yet, considering her comments, how do I start in a way that Cincer doesn't just think this is a pro forma performance? How do I show this gal I truly love that this lovemaking is more about love than a simple, '*OK let's fuck, since you clearly want it.*'

I decide to start by stroking her hair and kissing the nape of her neck. I nibble on her ear and on her forehead, then down between her eyes to her nose, before coming to rest on her lips and seeking her kiss.

She is responding now with her own kisses and her own hands. My hands work down her flanks, down to her hips. My hands resting there, as my tongue and hers engage in playful exchanges and her fingers weave through the hair on my head. Dueling tongues come to a détente as lips seal against lips and my hand moves from her hip to her mons.

I curl a finger between her labia as she reaches out and takes possession of my cock. She finds clear evidence that I'm aroused as do I, as my inserted digit is awash with her juices.

I press my finger deeper into her as I tap her g-spot. Just as tapping a key on a computer, I repeatedly lift up my finger and tap that fleshy place that does feel different than the rest of her cavity. Tap... tap... tap...

Cincer explodes in seeming ecstasy. Tap... tap... tap...

She is coming undone. *Fuck me!* As she pulls me on top of her.

No delays are permitted. Insertion must commence immediately, and it does. I'm as deep as I can get and now we are both on

automatic. It's not about thinking of where to place a hand or finger, or where to kiss. We are fucking, and maybe I'm wrong and stupid, but it seems to me that, once really fucking with a partner you love, you lose all but the most basic of human instincts. Nothing is planned. The most basic parts of our brains are engaged and in control.

I find myself just pistoning in and out of her with real passion. My eyes have been closed. I open them to see Cincer looking at me, nodding and crying and smiling. Something deep inside me is triggered and I cum hard.

Mmmm, Ira. This good. Next time soon, OK?

I'm damned close to being out of breath. *OK, my love, OK.*



It has been three months since Lorie and I started our ten-day-a-month attempts. We try again this third month... I am not giving up, as I really don't want her mother here.

There's additional pressure, as Nelia told me today, she is pregnant again. The announcement would be unmitigated good news except, for the effect it has on Lorie.

I've taken the announcement to suggest that two kids per gal really ought to be the limit, and no one is pushing back on that. Our home can handle that for now. I'm putting money aside each month in recognition of the eventual need that we will have to add one more pod. That won't be for some years, and there's no crisis. This place is working well as a functional home, albeit a weird looking one.

We get all sorts of comments about it, some good, some disparaging, but mostly neutral on that type of scale. It's just that the place is different and folks find it confusing.

I mean, you really don't see homes with a carpark above the ground floor and kitchen, dining room and what they call here a

sala⁸⁷ above that. So yeh, it's weird. I mean just think about parking and entry into the house.

As to the carpark, we don't use it during the day. If we have a need I'm sure we will, but the concrete pad below the carpark works like any carpark, sheltering vehicles from rain and sun.

We do use the elevated carpark at night, as I keep nothing on the ground, for the simple reason that we don't use walls (they call it a fence, but a ten foot concrete structure sure as hell isn't a fence) around the house. The reason for not having a fence is the same for having a house that allows the water to pass below. A fence would create a hazard when hit by a tsunamis or by storm surges.

I rigged up something that works like an old-style dumb-waiter to lift packages up for when we don't need to be going up and down ourselves.

We can climb the 'break-away' stairs on the side of the ramp and get a bit of exercise. It and the ramp get 'pulled up' every night for security purposes. However, I normally use the small elevator, from the pad. It's 'open air,' to the extent that while there are handrails, and thin vertical parts of metal, plus a flat steel grate for the floor, all the electrical, gears and the motor are above.

The only electrical component on the pad or the carpark is a 12V .5mA UP/DN/STOP button arrangement that is connected by a CAT3 wire run through a 1/2 inch steel conduit to the equipment above. Even if it's damaged, there's no risk of injury. The elevator is in the center of the pad under the carpark, and it rises up through the carpark, to the floor above it, allowing entrance into the house proper.

The placement of the elevator in the center of the pad is so that the force of any water might not be as destructive as it might be felt at the edges of the structure. When it's UP, there's nothing below other than the buttons, which can be disabled from above, as they are every night.

⁸⁷ Living room.

Each of the other pods are connected via enclosed walkways on each floor of the two floors, the lower of them being at least nine meters (or about thirty feet) above the ground. That puts them even with the common rooms level and the level of the water tank. None of the other pods has a floor at the carpark level.

That is weird all on its own. The roofs are ringed with the wind turbines, yeh, that's weird. (Those looking at the pods can't see the solar panels.)

The glass walls all around the pods cause comments every time.

But for all the odd comments and confusion the place causes those who look at it, it works really well for us. There's room to have your own space and room to be together. There's room for the children we have now and for some years to come.

The place satisfies my need for security. We really are off-grid in all meaningful ways. I do have a connection to Samelco, though we don't use it.

Communication is all wireless from the home to the outside world. We are self-contained. Sure, if there's a nuclear war, this is not a bomb shelter, and there's no panic room, but that is not what I'm concerned about.

The law here precludes my owning a weapon, but the gals can, and I'm giving that some thought. But when we are all upstairs at night we are reasonably secure and, should I want to, I can lower the louver shutters and the sliding steel outer doors to lock us up tight. As the power comes from above and not below, bad guys can't clip wires on us. In reality, the entire structure, when sealed off, is a massive panic room.

I could not have afforded to build this place in the USA, but my twenty-four million pesos was just enough. I pretty much spent it all, but I figure it's about right as that is the cash I got when selling the house in the States. I haven't sold the three parcels of land yet, though I got word that there's a party who is interested in buying all three.

Huh, that was a bit of a digression, but we are happy here and the place works well. Should each of the gals really have two children, by the time they become teenagers we might need that extra pod, but not now, not yet.

What is now, is Lorie. She's waiting for me. It's our time once again.

Good evening, sweetheart.

She has a smile on her face that will not go away as she says, *Good evening to you, my handsome man. Are you ready for the insurance deposit?*

Insurance?

Oo. Insurance. In case.

In case of what?

In case the reason I didn't have my period isn't because I am pregnant! And now she's beaming. That smile just can't get any larger.

You missed your period?

Yes! But it too soon to be sure, my love.

Lorie is with child! We are sure of it now, as it has been four months since her last period. The gals have all decided this requires a party. ... And, they tell me, it requires Lillian to attend.

Why? We will bring her for the birth. Why now, CiCi?

Don't be difficult. This important. You must show respect.

That makes no sense. There's nothing about this party that requires the 'respect' thing. Sure, when the baby arrives, then respect... sure... the grandmother can be here. That's respect. ... Besides, Jessa's due date is in ten days. Why the fuck would I want Lillian here and the focus all on Ri at such an important time for Jessa? So, no. It's not going to happen.

CiCi is not happy, but Lillian is a wildcard for any number of reasons, and I want to limit the time she will be with us. She will likely be here for a month or more once Lorie gives birth. If she comes now, will she ever leave? I can see the stay extending, and extending more, and then... No, uh-uh, not having that.

There's a downside to building a really nice and large home here. People look at what they have, and what they might have if they move and... then they do the mental math. *'What do I need to do to get that nicer place?'*

Think I'm wrong? Move here and find out. Of course, if you are just scraping by as a pensioner in the UK, or Norway, or Germany, you probably don't have the pesos to build a nice place. But if you own a decent home in the USA, where most of us own our homes rather than rent like they do in Europe, well then, you will have the funds to build something the locals here will call a mansion, even if you wouldn't.

You know, it's odd. I have, over the three years I've lived here, met a number of expats. They fall into five buckets for me.

The bucket with the fewest members holds those guys who got here decades ago, married, got employment and became part of the culture here. All of them speak the local languages. Most of these

guys are from Europe and originally were seafarers. The Philippines was a port they would come to and, eventually, they found a Filipina and never left.

Their homes are pretty traditional Filipino-style places. Some of them are farmers now, and so, the homes are nicer than the basic Filipino home, but no one would call these places mansions.

The second bucket are those guys from Australia. There aren't many of them. They tend to be a hybrid of sexual tourist / vacationer and local ne'er-do-well drunk. Typically, they have more money than brains, or they have pickled those brains. They have steady 'family' income from something in Australia, but are useless fucks, drunks, losers, con-artists or fighters. They live in meager accommodations, where they shack up with their local squeeze, before returning to Australia every so often for a long stay there.

The third bucket are ex-military guys from the US. Many of them are on double or triple pension schemes. They spent twenty-plus years in the service. That gives them their first pension. They have a disability payment from a seventy percent to over a ninety-five percent disability. Plus, many of them worked for a civilian company after their service, which generated yet another pension.

So, on a monthly basis, these guys have a shitload of money. But they never owned a damned thing. They either couldn't settle down, or drank all the funds every month. In many ways, they behave like their Australian counterparts, other than they do not leave. They mostly live in tiny, hot, cramped little shitholes. While most of them have wives, and kids with those wives, they are rarely home other than to sleep before meeting up with their buddies at a bar. Eventually, they wear out their welcome at one establishment and have to find a new bar.

The fourth bucket are the guys from the EU and UK who got here for a woman and to retire. Their income is limited and they never owned a home in their lives. They brag about how much better healthcare is in their country than it is here, or in the US, but they ain't in the EU or the UK, so why are they here if it's all so peachy there?

These guys tend to hang together; the Brits with other Brits; the guys from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark tend to hang out as a group; the Norwegians floating between all of them. Their places are often modest and, while there are drunks in the group, others try to find work to supplement their meager pensions.

The fifth group is the one I guess I belong to. Guys who are non-military US citizens. We were stable in the US. We had homes. We had good employment or owned businesses. We have retired here and have female companionship. Because we had a nest-egg of savings in the form of a house we could sell, we live in nicer surroundings now. We are not drunks and we pretty much don't mix much with the other expats, as we have nothing in common with them.

The ex-military guys look down their noses at us and we, I guess return the favor, as many of them are drunks and clueless asses who deride those useless welfare types in the US, who didn't serve and live off the largess of the welfare tit, as they, at the same time, scheme to cook up new ways to increase their disability pay by making bullshit claims they cook up while getting polluted at the bars.

We don't mix with the Europeans who think they are more cultured and worldly than are we. Oh, they are decent enough when talking to them, but it's like oil and water in other ways.

I, and the others in the same bucket I seem to be in, don't interact much with the other expats. We have families here and keep to ourselves. For me, it's pretty much essential that I do so. But to get back to what I started out musing on, if you have the funds and build a nice place with enough room then, yeh, then others scheme to figure out how to move in.

Lillian may not be in that mode right now, with her sari-sari business, but should she stay here long enough, I can see that changing. So, no, I don't want her here for a party next week, and while we do need to show our happiness for Lorie, I don't want Jessa's time to shine to be diminished.



Jessa was three days early. I have another son, Ira Victor Arroyo Courtwright. And yes, this is the second of my sons with the first name of Ira, if you see names as we do in the USA. But this is not the USA, and he is Ira Victor. The other is Ira Edgar. See? Different names!

So, maybe you ask, which one will I call Ira? Neither. We have Ed and Vic. And, most likely, they will get nicknames that they will use on most occasions. Welcome to the Philippines.

I haven't written much about Niana and, in truth, there hasn't been reason to do so. She is Bim's kid, and is here for that reason alone. She goes to school, is a good student, and is respectful. Yes, she eats the food that comes from my money, but that is inconsequential. She does need uniforms, shoes, books and school supplies, and other clothing, but those expenditures are minimal. Her presence is simply a function of my loving her mother.

She is nine years old now. Another new baby in our home is yet another opportunity for her to learn to mother, according to the gals. She has been mothering her little sister, Elenora Arlene, for a year, Ira Edgar for a year and a half, as well as Iris Rose, Mark James, and Mac. In fact, each of the mothers of these kids has been asking Niana to act as the Ate so often that she is in constant demand.

I've been becoming increasingly worried that all this is far too much to place on the kid's shoulders. But, until now, Bim has warned me off of saying anything to the others.

There are times that I hit the bullshit button.

As I hear the gals, once again, kidding Niana that she has yet another kid to care for, I pretty much unload on all of them. OK, so the kid is not my daughter, but she lives in my home, and this has gone on long enough.

No! Niana is not your *yaya*⁸⁸. Not for any of you! She is a student and a child in my home. If she has time and it doesn't interfere with her responsibilities as a student or to her own baby sister, she may **choose** to help you, but you may not **assign or ask** her for assistance. Are we clear?

Bim is uncomfortable and Niana doesn't want the gals to be angry with her. Is she afraid they will think she came to me and complained?

Ira, it is OK for Ana to help others, please. She not complain, I sure of it.

Niana is making noises of agreement with her mother, but I really don't care.

*I never said you, or Ana, came to me. I know you don't want me to say what I have said. I don't care. Ana lives in this house. She may not be my daughter but she is my responsibility and this is my rule. She is to have all the time she needs to be the best student she can be. You all want children? OK, that's fine but Ana is not your *yaya*. Are we clear?*

Tito, I want!

I know, Ana. I know, but your school work comes first. After you satisfy that, your next obligation is to your own sister. If you find you have time during breaks to help with others, OK, but they need to stop assigning you duties. And if you offer too much I'll limit that. I may not be your father, but in a way I must act like it. Do you understand?

Yes, Tito.

Bim, are we going to have a problem, you and me, over this?

She is crying. No, Ira, no problem. Thank you for loving my daughter. I not argue with you.

No one else is arguing either. Sometimes a guy just has to be an asshole.



Ann has been keeping an eye on land we might find worth considering. It's not a full-time activity, but when she finds an

⁸⁸ Nursemaid or governess

opportunity, she will mention it. Most of the time we just discuss the thing but take no action, or talk about which contact she knows might make the best use of her find.

This time, she has brought news that a parcel of land adjacent to our land is delinquent in taxes. Someone working in provincial government has been quietly paying the tax, in hopes of getting the land deed for the delinquency. The actual land owner can't cover the taxes, as he has diabetes and is in failing health with large medical bills.

Ann suggests we intercede, give him a price for the land he will accept with the understanding that some of it will be used to pay the back taxes, which a proxy for Ann will pay in his name. He will get the balance and will not lose everything.

I ask her why he hasn't sold it already.

No one want to buy. Land not on a road. No access unless through our property.

You do see landlocked properties here on occasion. I guess he could have come to me for a variance or donation for a road, but he didn't. I can't help that. But adding land behind our current property that is good for farming is a fine idea. There are eight hectares (about 20 acres) in the parcel. I have Ann make an offer via the proxy, to hide who is offering to buy the land. If Ann's name is known, my involvement will be known and more money will be demanded. The proxy we use is an attorney from Tacloban. And the buyer is our trust. The landowner will not know that name, so the sale can proceed without the actual owners being identified.

We have five hectares (12 acres) now. Of that, two hectares are used for our home and grounds. The balance, three hectares, is being used for farming. We currently lease the farm land on a yearly basis. These extra eight hectares will create a far larger farm.

There's talk that we should be farming it with hired labor. How we use the farm in the future is only being talked about but, for now, we will continue to lease our farmland.

Ann thinks that, as time passes, there are other adjacent parcels that may become available. If that is true, we may be forced to operate the farm ourselves. Managing multiple independent leases with farmers might prove to be more of a hassle, and the profits insufficient to the task.

I'm concerned that the offer to purchase will make the owner curious. Ann has a solution. The owner will be led to believe that the parties seeking to buy the land are hostile to the gal in the provincial government office that is quietly trying to gather up all sorts of properties in a stealthy manner. This is more of a war between a pissed-off citizen and the provincial government. The landowner is simply the sick but lucky fuck... between warring factions.

It sounds like a stretch to me, but it does appear to work. It takes only three weeks to make the purchase. It'll take far longer to get a new clean title, but it'll happen.



As Nelia's second child, a daughter with the name of Maria Fernada Lopez Courtwright, enters the world on the twenty-ninth of February, 2008, her mother is part of a trust controlling thirteen hectares of good land. For Nelia, it's quite a turn of life's possible outcomes from her days before she came into my life. For our daughter, it's a fate that will be unlike most Filipinas she will know as she grows into her own adulthood. Though there are other large landholders here, the percentage of them to the general public is very small.

Lorie's due date is in two months. There have been no other pregnancies mentioned, but that does not mean there aren't any. I typically don't get the word until the third or fourth month.



We have been in the house long enough for me to know what our regular energy production is like, as well as how low it'll go during bad times, and how much excess we produce at other times. I also

have a sense of where I need to be in storage to manage it correctly.

I need to add storage as, in good times we produce a shitload more energy than we use and, while we do dip into the reserves each night, there are days where we are dipping for a prolonged period of time.

It's not that we aren't generating anything, it's just that at those times we aren't generating enough. By increasing our storage capacity by eighteen percent, it appears that I've solved that problem.

It also means that I can add another large refrigerator and another large freezer.

There's another benefit that my gals had not considered when I told them that we were going to be completely off-grid. There are frequent power outages here. Such things happen for a variety of reasons, from rebuilding the infrastructure to equipment failures. At times we are the only place with power, with the notable exceptions where someone is running a generator.

I had thought about adding a generator but decided against it. There were a number of reasons. First, unless I elevated the generator, it would be at risk of inundation from water just when we might need it. Elevate it and you have to be hauling fuel up, plus the noise up here would be horrendous. It was simply better to increase storage capacity.



Allow me to introduce you to Lorie's little girl, Cherry Joy Cruz Courtwright. She arrived on the evening of April 30th. Lillian arrived four days earlier and was with Lorie for the delivery. Mom and Lola⁸⁹ are beyond happy. My initially underage love is twenty-one now and very much an adult.

And on this day I have nine children! Nine, for God's sake. For a guy who will turn seventy in six months, it's beyond crazy, right?

⁸⁹ Grandmother

It's a damned good thing that there will be the large farm to support my family because I've no idea how much longer I'll live, but I can't imagine I'll see all, or any, into adulthood.

With so many little ones, each a little younger than the next, we don't have to buy a lot of new things for each as the next child comes along. What one grows out of, the next grows into. While folks swear that clothing for infants never wears out, here we seem to be trying to find out if there's a limit to that.

There are interesting challenges, like feeding the kiddies. Sure, the younger ones are on a mixture of breast milk and formula, but the older ones are eating cooked food. And since there are a number of them, cooking a meal for so many little ones becomes a special daily activity of creativity.

And... if one of the kiddies starts to bawl, other kiddies seem duty bound to chime in. Luckily, that doesn't happen often. They are pretty happy little tykes, and crying is at a minimum.

One other thing I note is that, while in the US, a kid wants 'mommy' and no one else. Here all eight gals seem to qualify as mommy and, when Lillian showed up, they accepted her as a surrogate mommy, too. Not a one of them seems to need a specific mommy. And, as a number of mommies have milk, finding the official mommy is not normally needed. It makes for happier kiddies and less stressed mommies.

All the little ones are OK in my arms as well, and I have to say I enjoy getting time with them. When I can hold a little one who has been fussing, he or she often enough just slumps into my arms, rests their head on my shoulder and goes to sleep. It feels damned good.

That happens on occasion when we are out shopping. Other women look, smile and make sweet comments to whichever gal is with me at the moment. My gals get a kick from it and seem proud.

Is it silly to say, it makes me happy too?

Thankfully, Lillian only stayed for three weeks. I was beyond relieved to see her off at the airport yesterday. She is a somewhat disruptive presence, as she sees herself as senior to all the gals.

It doesn't just ruffle feathers, it really tends to disrupt the normal patterns of how we function and, for right or wrong, we do have routines we stick to that work for us.

Toward the end of her stay, it was Lorie who decided that it really was time for her mother to go back home. I think that fact was more than appreciated by her colleagues.



Ann has information on another parcel. I'm going to need to dip into the fund I was accumulating for the next pod. It would be easier if my three remaining parcels in the US are sold. Every once in a while, we get a nibble, but that's about it.

In any case, I think we need to make the purchase, for the simple reason that, with the expansion of this additional adjacent land, we may be able to use profits from our farming business to fund future expansion from farming alone.

And so, we (that's Ann, Cincer and I) have decided to take all profits and plow them back into growing our holdings. We will see enough of a profit later to take care of adding the next pod and, by growing it now, while what I have coming in from my pension, 401K and SSA allows us to pay our monthly bills, we are creating a self-sustaining income far into the future, when my US sources are not here for my gals to use.

Beyond the money, the farm already provides us with much of the vegetables, rice, chicken and pork we consume.

It really is quite something. As we have our own power, our own water from a well, and much of our own basic foods, what we buy at the supermarket, while not insignificant, requires far less money than it would have cost otherwise.

What we still have to purchase are: cleansers; soap; shampoo; beauty products; paper products, including my coffee and the filters; salt; sugar; flour; cans of condensed and evaporated milk; cream; seasonings; liquor; noodles; raisins; light bulbs; and all sorts of little things. But the shopping trips are far less frequent and the cash outlay is easier on the budget.

We are not becoming totally self-sufficient, and there's no future in which I can see that occurring, but we are far more so than the average family.

With as large of a family as I have now, my eight gals, plus Niana, my nine kids, and me, there are nineteen of us. Each time that number crosses my mind I'm, at the same time, embarrassed at what I have around me, proud as all get out, knowing I've so many offspring, and happy as hell that the pods allow me to get away from the noise that comes with so many souls. Filipinos are a noisy bunch!

In a way, we are reprising an older way of existence, whereby the farm was central and life was more rural. Our home is rural, though it's true that it doesn't take all that long to get to Tacloban with its malls and MickeyD's.

We are increasingly looking at the farm business as the future for the employment of my offspring. Sure, not all of them, but the farm will cover the cost of higher education even when that education doesn't lead back to the farm.

Ann and I'll work at growing the land holdings of the trust. To that extent, she will be keeping our needs foremost in her activities. In that, Ann is an important part in our future. But that is not to say that it's the only place she is important.

Ann has been with me at night, frequently, and that isn't by accident. It's hard to explain. She's the same and yet she's changed. Ann was fifteen and a half when I first met her. She's nineteen now. She has grown into a woman in my bed as it were. She's no longer an improbably young wheeler-dealer... well, to everyone else maybe she is... but now, it doesn't blow your mind like it used

to do when she was swinging multi-million peso transactions at age sixteen.

At night, she is every bit a young woman, with grace and the self-assurance of one who knows she is loved. In truth, I don't spend a lot of time dwelling on Ann's age. At some point, you just don't see a gal as a category, an object, an age, but as a real person with whom you have history. I have history with Ann, and more than that, Ann is a partner.

Not only as a business partner, she is an almost wife, in a real way. Ann has been at the core of all we have here. If the others have created a relationship with me, it's not like this.

Yes, Cincer's life is better, and Cincer is clearly smart as all-get-out ... and yes, I deeply love Cincer as much as, I do believe, she loves me. That is pretty much how it is, in a way, with all of them, but none created ... this.

It was Ann who decided where we should live and has been making it better as we go forward.

She didn't have to do that. Yes, I know, it benefits her, but she makes a significant chunk of cash every time she puts a seller and buyer together. She doesn't make a cent in the actual transaction when she is doing it for us.

Oh, Ann didn't tell me that. She has never mentioned it, and she never will. It's part of her being my partner in life. She is all of that and she is part of the trust, right along with the rest of them. So every time she does one of these deals, she does not benefit more than the gals who didn't make it happen. It goes unsaid and unacknowledged.

I reach out and bring her close to me. It doesn't take much more than the lightest touch. I don't need to coax her. I just need to let her know I'm ready for her.

It has been more than a year and a half since Ann gave me our daughter, Iris Rose, and looking at Ann's body, naked as she is right now, you simply couldn't tell she has given birth, other than her breasts are larger. She is still breast feeding. She simply looks

great and, once again, I marvel at what a lucky fuck I am, as my finger traces up her cunt lips.

Legs spread, and a murmur reaches my ears. I reach her clit. Ann sucks in a gulp of air. Her hips rock up and down, seeking more than I'm doing for her at this moment.

My fingers push in, seeking her G-spot. She tilts her pelvis, in an effort to guide me in my journey. Her G-spot isn't as smooth as the flesh around it. It's a little bumpy. The flesh seems softer, spongy and a bit pronounced. Once found, it takes little to send my gal into orbit. I'm not in her, nor am I actually ready to slide in. I don't need to be. I'll keep Ann going on my finger for a while, as I suck on a tit at the same time.

I want to wear Ann out before I give her my all, as at my advanced age, I suspect my all really isn't enough on its own, though all the gals tell me I'm full of shit and they are not being short-changed.

Yeh, well, I don't believe that for a second, so giving Ann a good ride means having her gallop before I get on for my ride. It's not that I can't take them for a long ride on occasion; I can, but I'm simply not the guy I was just three years ago. Life will slow you down. It doesn't stop you, but it does slow you.

Ann is getting pissed. She has had enough of my fingers, she wants my cock in her and she wants it to happen now. So, now it is. There's no worry about her not being wet enough. There's a river between her legs. I mount her and slide in effortlessly. It's not that she isn't tight for me. She is. But her desire and the lubrication make the sinking in smooth all the way to the bottom.

She moans. She's happy. My cock feels like it's home once again. Ann is talking to me as we continue to fuck.

Good, my love. Yes, good. Give it, now, my love.

Give it? Shit, I just got here! Why does she want the dessert so soon? I just grunt.

It time, Ira. It time for my second. I ready my love.

For crying out loud. She wants to get pregnant again. OK, sure, I'm in her, but she has been breast feeding, and the old wives' tale is, so long as you are breast feeding there will be no new pregnancies. So, either that isn't true, or she doesn't know about it.⁹⁰

Nelia has had her second child, and maybe Ann thinks it's simply her time now. I most assuredly don't know, but you see very few mothers here with just one kid.

We are still at it. I'm sure I can't hold out for much longer. Ann's body is making demands and mine is receiving the message. This sweet, pretty teenager is looking right at me as my cock is deep in her. She smiles and nods her head. *Now, Ira. Now, my love. Now.*

Now, it is.

Damn, my balls ache.



A month has passed. It's the seventeenth of June, and typhoon Frank has hit us. There's a 'Public Signal Storm Warning' of a signal number three for Samar. We are told we can expect smaller homes to be destroyed, trees knocked over, rice harvest lost, 'considerable damage to light to moderate structures, and heavy losses to all agricultural land.'

We're given about eighteen hours' notice. That's enough time to stock up on enough canned goods and sacks of rice to see us through. I shutter the windows, put all the vehicles up in the car park and raise the ramp. We are sealed up and ready for the storm.



The storm is intense, and there's significant loss of life nationwide, with six hundred dead. There are over one hundred dead or missing in Iloilo alone. Lillian's store has been washed away, but

⁹⁰ It's true that a woman may not ovulate for several months (or even longer) after giving birth, especially if she's exclusively breastfeeding her baby. The fact that breast milk production delays the return of menstruation is actually the basis for a contraceptive technique called the lactational amenorrhea method (LAM). But in order to use this method properly, she has to meet certain criteria: The baby must be younger than 6 months old; She has to breastfeed at least every four hours during the day and every six hours at night.

she is OK. Lucky for Lillian, she figured that the sari-sari wouldn't survive. She removed all her stock to a better shelter. The sari-sari is being built anew, and with her existing stock, I gather she will do fine economically.

As the first test of our home in a typhoon, I'm happy to report we weathered the storm with not a single problem. While many lost power and some their entire homes, when it was over, other than a little cleanup on the ground below, you cannot tell the house was even in a rain storm. There's damage to the farm, and we will lose income until a new crop comes in, but that's the worst of it.



I've been here in the Philippines for five years now. At the exact five year mark there are two deadly storms, one a typhoon that twice transverses Manila, and Luzon in general, doing massive damage up there.

The first one, Ondoy, is a tropical storm, resulting in a 'state of calamity' in greater Manila and twenty-five other provinces. We don't have a PSWS⁹¹ signal here. It hit far enough north of us that we didn't get much more than rain. That is on September 26th.

But right after that, on the 27th, the typhoon Pepeng hits. It doesn't exactly hit the Philippines, as it's a bit too far north, but it dumps a shitload of more water on top of the flooding of Ondoy. A state of calamity is declared for the entire nation.

Estimates are that, by the time we get over Pepeng, there's over half a billion US dollars' worth of damage done. We are just fucking lucky those storms were north of us. As it is, I look at what we have built and hope that it'll continue to work as it did so far.



It's October, 2010, and another typhoon, a super typhoon! This one is called Juan, and it has just now created massive damage up north on Luzon. Oh shit, am I ever happy we didn't settle up there. Maybe settling in Santa Rita will end up being a blessing.

⁹¹ Philippine Storm Warning Signal

Those up on Luzon seem to be getting the worst of these storms. Maybe my caution was excessive. Up on Luzon, there have been mudslides as well as flooding. Here, I don't have to worry about mudslides.



I get an interesting email today. It's from my old friend in Kennewick, who stopped talking to me when his wife told him my cover story, that I was with a Muslim woman. Only it's not from him. It's from his wife, Elena.

Dear Ira,

I am not Tom. I am Elena. Maybe you remember me?

Before everything else, I hear about Juan. Are you guys OK? I hope you not have big damage. My family say this one really bad. So I pray for you too, just like I pray for my family.

Like you say, I tell Tom you with a Muslim woman so he not know what you do. He angry with you then. I think he now change his mind about you, and think that maybe you are OK.

I am now a US citizen, and so not worry about that. But Tom, now he want to go back to the Philippines. He say he never really see the place before. Maybe now I am a citizen here, it a good time for us to go back there. He want to visit my family. He say, maybe we visit you.

That worry me. What I do?

BTW, I make an email address. It is ElaGurlxxxx@gmail.com.

Elena

It's not a problem for me, anymore. I mean, none of the gals are underage. So, if they come, there will be young gals, but nothing that would cause Tom to think I was doing something illegal. But there's the lie. I never told Tom I have a Muslim lover. That was Elena. Yes, I suggested it to her as a cover story, but he never heard it from me.

So what will happen if he comes and finds not a single Muslim but, rather, eight females, from their early thirties to a twenty-year-old? That begs the question, do I ever want to see him again? We haven't spoken, or even emailed, in five years.

He doesn't know where I live. I did mention Santa Rita to him. Does he even remember that? No one back in the US knows

where I live, other than a lawyer, the Social Security Administration and the bank. Not a one of them is going to tell Tom. So, just how is he going to find me? If he never comes, there's never any issue that needs resolution. I email Elena at her own email account.

Elena,

Thank you for asking if we are OK. Yes, we are fine and we have no damage from Juan.

As of now, neither you, nor Tom knows where I live. I have not spoken to Tom in five years. Unless you tell him you emailed me and I answered, there is no reason to believe that he will ever reach out to me. It is just probably a thought he has had that never will become real.

Delete the copy of the email you sent from his account and don't mention me or this matter to Tom again. Let's hope it never really goes any farther.

Ira



It's October 19th, 2010.

On the home front, we are stable, but my family is growing. I have three more kids. Ann got the son she wanted. Bim has another daughter. She just doesn't seem to produce boys, a fact that Niana has noted, loudly. And sweet Eva has another boy. Rumor is that Reyna is pregnant, but she hasn't made it official so, maybe she isn't.

Niana is in high school this year. I'm not taking her to school each day, Bim is, but we have had contact with Debbie. Debbie has been pumping Niana for news about our family.

Will that bitch never give up? It's putting twelve-year-old Niana in an impossible position. Bim is furious, and that isn't helping Niana at all. I've been more than happy to not see Debbie since Reyna graduated, and that was four years ago.

Reyna was sixteen then, and still too damned young, but even though she is my youngest love, Reyna is twenty years old now. I'm not bedding anyone younger than she. So, maybe I can be a little less ornery regarding that damned teacher. It's better if she gets what she needs to know directly, so that she can stop pestering Niana.

Bim is too pissed off to have a civil conversation with Debbie, so, while we are all having supper, right after Bim has gone off on another rant about that tsismosa⁹² of a teacher, I turn to Niana and ask, *Child, would you mind if I take you to school for a few days, instead of your mother?*

Yes, Uncle!

OK, Ana⁹³. I asked if you would mind. Does that mean you mind?

Oh, why you so strict?⁹⁴ I want. OK?

You OK with that, Bim?

You want? OK with me.



The damage from Super Typhoon Juan, as it hit on October 17th, is still obvious on Luzon and worst in the northern part of that island, but not for us. Pepeng last year was not as bad as was Frank the year before. These typhoons are becoming a yearly thing. Is it a warning of this climate change shit?

Right now, there's plenty of muddy dirt, the result of Juan's presence, covering the pavement in sections as we ride along. As the sky is clear, and it's just the two of us, I have taken a bike.

I was wondering how many days I would need to take Niana to school before I would run into Debbie. The question now has an answer. It's one. I see her at about the exact moment she sees me. Before Debbie reaches us, I tell Niana, *Child, go in now, and I'll speak to your teacher in private.*

Niana giggles, tells me, OK, Uncle, and trots into the schoolyard, giving Debbie a wide berth.

⁹² Gossiper (Tagalog) tsismis means gossip in Cebuano but the form here is Tagalog only.

⁹³ Nickname for Niana.

⁹⁴ Strict is used to mean exacting. It is a common complaint that foreigners are 'strict' while Filipinos seem to expect you can read their minds and interpret what they really meant.

Debbie seems to chuckle at seeing Niana steer clear of her, and doesn't stop her approach to me. As I've not moved, she knows I'm waiting for her.

It has been a long time, Sir Ira.

Maybe not long enough, Debbie. Why do you want to know about my family?

It different. Who is new there?

There are twelve children my gals have given me, though I fail to see why that is any of your business.

That not what I mean.

I know what you mean. The answer is, there are no new partners.

It's obvious that she doesn't believe me. If it wasn't for the need to end the pressure on Niana, I would just blow her off.

Look, if you want to see for yourself, come to the house.

No! You will make me have sex with little girls. I not want.

There are no little girls in the house older than four years old. I'm not going to put my daughters in your bed. So that won't happen.

You promise you not make me have sex with little girls?

I promise.

How I know you not hide some away while I am there?

OK, Debbie, how long do you need to live in my home to convince yourself that there's no one else?

You mean you let me stay until I sure?

I will, if you promise to leave Niana alone from now on. Do we have an agreement?

That why you do this?

Yes.

Is CiCi still there?

I'm confused. Is she afraid of CiCi for some reason?

Yes, they are all still here.

But CiCi, she is old now! You still want her?

You think thirty-four is old?

If not married by then, it too late, I think. What she do? How she work?

My gals have told me that most jobs for women, if not nurses, teachers or government workers, tend to disappear for women who reach their thirtieth birthday. But CiCi would have still been working as a bookkeeper if she had wanted to keep the job. She didn't, as the farm keeps her busy but, in a way, she is probably the exception.

She's my partner and a part owner in the land and the farm. She, I hope, will always be with me. I certainly don't think she's too old.

What she do when she sees me?

Well, she won't kill you, but I have no idea about the rest of it.

But Bim, she will scream at me! I sure that.

Don't talk to her, or Niana, and she will have no reason to scream at you.

You will protect me?

No, Debbie, but I can't see that you will need protection if you are respectful to those in the house.

You invited her to stay here?!!

You have a better idea, Reyna?

Why you ask that?

Have you been listening to Bim lately?

OK, yes.

Is Ana really wanting to go to school each day?

No, she not.

So, how do you think we should fix this?

That why? How that help?

Oh, come on. You're smart. You know why.

But you tell her to never come back here. I hear you say this.

Yes, I did. That was years before Ana was old enough to go to high school.

Tell me, am I allowed to change my mind to protect one of you?

Oh.

You get it now?

Sige, sige.

Cincer, Jessa, Bim and Nelia understand right away. There's no blowback from them, though Cincer snickers a bit and asks, *When she coming?*

I don't know. I just made the deal that she could stay until she was satisfied with whatever was bugging her, but that she must stop interrogating Ana and bugging Bim. I suspect we will see her soon enough.

And, just when you think the discussion has come to a close, Nelia voices, *She can't stay unless she bring someone else.*

What? Nelia! I'm not seeking to have Debbie join us. All I want to do is get her to leave Bim and Ana alone.

Yes, we all know this. We know when you send Reyna and Eva to university she sad she not able to give you more girls. You know this!

OK, without me being a bastard again, how can we make it clear to her that she will not fit in and not try to place another here?

You tell her she will have no sex with underage girls, right?

Yes.

Did you tell her no sex with any girl?

Ab. No.

So?

So, she asked me to protect her if she came. I told her I wouldn't, but that I knew of no reason why she would need protection. I think that means I'm not going to be mean to her.

Sex not mean.

Look, I don't want to push her out until we get this resolved for Ana and Bim. If we get aggressive with her, it undermines that which I need to have happen.

But then she will stay!

No, Nelia, I'm not allowing that.

Watch! She will bring a girl with her. If two, then Jesus wants them to stay.



I hadn't heard this Jesus nonsense for a couple of years. I am, sure as hell, unhappy to be hearing it now. Last time, it was as an explanation as to why Lillian couldn't stay. This time, with Debbie into saving little girls, I'm way beyond unhappy at the thought.

Debbie has not come to our door yet, but maybe it's too soon. Maybe she thinks she needs to show that she can leave Niana and Bim alone before she shows up.

And that gets me thinking. She has run out of time to show me that before sembreak⁹⁵, as it starts tomorrow. Yes, that is what I'm thinking, when there's an *ay-oooo*⁹⁶ from down below.

In the center of the cement pad at ground level below the carpark, there's a 'call' button right by the elevator, and another one right above in the carpark. Both have a speaker and a microphone but, clearly, Debbie has no clue about any of that. She is just hollering from a good ways away from the house.

Jessa walks out onto the balcony and tells Debbie that we will send the elevator down for her. When she gets in, she should press the 'UL' button.

As Jessa comes back in, Nelia has a question. *She alone?*

That question carries weight throughout the room.

Jessa is a bit slower to answer than I would have preferred, when she finally answers, *Yes, she alone.*

The tension that was present a moment ago is gone. Why do we all believe in Nelia's crazy theory?

Jessa pushes the button to send the elevator down, and all of us wait. The panicky tension is gone, but no one is happy. No one wants Debbie here. No one. But what we want is not what needs to happen. Yes, Bim can take care of herself, but Niana is a different matter. As her virtual uncle, and surrogate father, it falls on my shoulders to protect the kid from the harassment. Debbie has been a problem from the first time I met her in 2004, and what she is doing now just has to stop.

The elevator must have reached the bottom, but I don't hear it coming up. Surely she has used an elevator before... Silence. And then I remember that the ones in the mall always have an attendant

⁹⁵ Mid-year or semestral (semester) break. As the school year begins in June and ends in March, the last two weeks of October is typically when the break from school occurs. There are years when it can slide into November.

⁹⁶ Sounds like I-oooo as the 'ay' is voiced as a hard 'I.' In Cebuano and Ilonggo essentially means 'Hello inside the house.' There is a different term in Tagalog.

in them who presses the buttons. Can she really be stuck on something like that? Could it be the lack of numbers?

We had a discussion about the buttons for the elevator when we put the thing in. The gals were unsure that the buttons would be understood, but there really isn't a simple labeling scheme for how it works here.

I've seen all sorts of button labeling. If we were in the US I would have either used: G,2,3 or 1,2,3. If we were in Europe it would be G,1,2. Here I've seen LG, UG, 2 as well. Ours is G,CP,UL for Ground, Carpark and Upper Level.

There's a speaker in the elevator, and I'm about to suggest that we use that, when the sound of the unit rising ends the need. We wait. No one is speaking.

As the top of the elevator cabin clears the floor, the glass walls which surround the shaft begin to display Debbie's head, as she rises up to our floor.

The elevator has stopped. She is looking at us through the glass and we look at her, but the gal isn't moving. Jessa approaches the door to the shaft, which will now open, as the elevator is fully on our floor. With the door open, Jessa swings the interior bar up and away, allowing Debbie to exit.

Debbie is just standing there. She hasn't moved. Jessa grabs the handle of a small valise and pulls it out. Debbie follows.

I... I never see something like this before. She is looking right at me and is, I guess, freaked out, by the look on her face.

You've never seen an elevator?

Yes, I have seen. But not one like this. And I never see a house like this.

You've seen this house from outside before, haven't you?

Yes, from outside, not like this.

I see. Maybe you need time to adjust before we talk. ... Jessa, why don't you show Debbie to a room she can use while here, in the sixth pod, and then give her a tour of the entire house. Just bring her back here in an hour.

Jessa grabs the valise handle and moves toward the walkway to an adjoining pod. Debbie silently follows.

Pod six is not occupied yet, though it'll be soon enough. Presently, it's easy enough to keep the little ones close to each other in three rooms with the mothers for those kids in adjoining rooms. That only absorbs three pods. As the kids get older, that won't work. Even with the sixth pod, none will ever get a private room until most have grown up and flown the coup. For now, Debbie has the pod to herself. She is welcome to wander around but, at the same time, she is separate.

Now that Debbie is out of the room, Cincer is cracking up with laughter. All the others, with the exception of Ann, are just looking at her and wanting to know the cause. Eva notices Ann's nonchalance and challenges her. *Why is Ate laughing?*

Because it's funny. Last time the sex, she confused. This time it like she walk into another world. If she confused last time, she super confused now. You all think, OK, this our life. You see this place built. You used to it. When we move in, it not a surprise, diba? So Debbie, she never see anything like this before. Eva, she confused you and Reyna get university education. She not understand why Ira do that for you. She not understand the sex. She never see a place like this.

Evidently, Eva is not convinced that Ann has it right, because what comes next is, *Ate, it true what Ann say?*

Eva gets Cincer's eyebrows and, in a moment of frustration, turns back to Ann. *How you know this?*

Friend, how much time you spend outside this house when you not in school? How much time you spend in the home of other students?

How I do that? School is hard and I have Loy2x⁹⁷ and John2x to take care of?

See? To you this normal. It not normal. How many elevators you see here in Samar? Yes, sure at the mall in Tacloban, but where else? Where you see a steel and glass home. The best, they concrete. The others, maybe just bamboo. I see what is normal every day when I out working. CiCi, she older. She know this is not normal. That how I know.

Cincer has regained her composure, smiles at Ann before turning her gaze to Eva. *Sister, Ann is right, that why I laugh. And I hope Nelia right about the pairs. But we not know what Juan do to where she lives. Maybe she will try to stay. Maybe this seem to her like going to heaven.*

Oh, fuck, I had not considered that. *OK, everyone! No one, and I mean no one is to ask her how Juan affected her. Do not bring the topic up!*



Half an hour later, Debbie and Jessa have rejoined us. Jessa starts putting a plate of food together for her, as she tells one and all that Debbie has lost everything in a flood because of Juan. Oh, fuck. Cincer snickers, Ann rolls her eyes, and the rest can barely keep from laughing, with the exception of Bim, who is quietly crying. She does not want Debbie anywhere near her daughter, and this is freaking her out.

OK, you're here. What do you need to know to leave us alone?

Where are the others?

Jessa, did you show her the kids?

Eyebrows.

Were Ri and Reyna there?

Eyebrows.

There's no one else, Debbie. Explain to me how I can prove that there isn't anyone else.

⁹⁷ Her son is Charlie Beloy and she calls him Loy-Loy (Loy2x).

Why all the empty rooms?

The children. As they grow they will need to be separated more than they are now. And it's not clear that we are done adding children.

Where the underage girls?

Debbie, Jesus! I told you that I'm not interested in that.

Ha, if you not, then why Reyna and Ann here?

We have explained this. You know why.

Maybe that just a story. Why you so good to Reyna and Eva if you not that way?

So, it's not possible that I'm just a good guy? Is that it?

Men not like this.

If there's no way to satisfy you, then there's no reason for you to be here. You might as well leave.

That seems to have an impact on her. She grimaces a bit before, Maybe, I am wrong. Maybe, if I here I will see that you are telling the truth. If there no underage girls here, who you make me have sex with now?

No one. As far as I care, you can sleep alone every night you are here.

See, you not want older women!

What the fuck? She is only thirty, for God's sake.

I'm done fucking females who I don't want to live with. Your age isn't the barrier. Your beauty isn't the barrier. ... As CiCi and Bim can testify, I very much love both of them. As Eva, Reyna, and Ann can testify, I haven't lost my interest in them as they have advanced in age. In point of fact, I suspect that things are better with them now than they were before. As Ri can testify, I didn't want anything to do with her, as she was seventeen when we met.

Why you not want me? Why you always mean to me?

All you have done is cause me problems! I don't need a woman who does that! Even if you were not the bitch that you are, I'm done adding. It's as simple as

that. But when it comes to you, there's the reality that you just piss me off. It started out bad the first day I met you. It has never gotten any better.

What if I have another young girl for you? If you take me, I bring her too.

Jesus H. Christ! How many times do I have to tell you I don't want any young girls?

You take Eva!

Now, I'm about ready to throw her off the balcony without anything resembling a parachute. I can't even begin to formulate a response to that fucking insane comment. I give up trying and instead ask, *Why do you want to be one of my girls?*

She isn't saying a damned thing. ... I wait. ... Nothing. And then, *I am tired. Maybe I go to bed now. Jessa, please show me again where it is.*

Two minutes after Debbie has left, Nelia says to no one in particular, *If she brings another girl, that is a pair.*

No fucking way.

Bim and CiCi, will you two join me tonight?

Eyebrows.



See, if it had just been the two of you, my life wouldn't be so fucking nuts!

Cincer doesn't say a word, but Bim starts to cry. The reason why is obvious. It was she who said take more, so that she didn't get left behind but, as I mention it to the two of them, she is missing the point. Cincer gets it.

Bim, he not blame you. He blame us. You and me together. He happy to find both of us. He know you right in a way, but maybe two enough. ... When we add more, things not go right. Remember? Remember the problem with Ri and Lillian? Remember who created that problem, Nelia? If it just us then that not happen. He go to Tacloban to see if he can end Lillian, remember my love. But when he get there, Ann is too young and Reyna is younger. Because he get Reyna he meet Debbie. Debbie with Nelia's help brings Eva. Jessa come

because of Reyna. If it just us two these things not happen. Now Debbie again. See? ... Bim, he also saying he love us. He happy with us.

The crying has stopped, at least momentarily. OK, but he still sorry because of what we do. So that still not good. Debbie think he not love us. She think Ira a pervert who want children.

True, she has a bad heart. ... Ira, what we do?

I don't know. I do know that Nelia is making things potentially worse with the 'come in twos' nonsense.

I think Bim is freaking out a bit. Ira... you not love Nelia? You want her to go?

No, I love all of you. Just because I'm unhappy with something, it doesn't mean I don't have love. It's just that... at each addition, you gals — all of you — seem to find a way to justify why adding is OK. We have had six years without additions. I assumed we all knew we were done adding. ... Now, I'm not so sure that all agree and when it comes to Nelia, I am sure she will be for adding. I can love someone I am unhappy with. Right now I am unhappy with Nelia and frustrated that some of you might agree with her.

We have all taken our showers and are under the sheets as this plays out. It's not the most romantic of evenings, but Cincer has decided we need to 'change the subject' as she has taken a gentle but firm grasp on my cock and is stroking me to rigidity.

I reach out to Bim and bring her in for a kiss as Cincer replaces her hand on my package with her mouth. We aren't going to resolve my feelings of concern, but we are going to experience joy.

Joy. That deep, warm feeling of connectedness. Eventually, my cock pushes deep in Cincer's cunt, and she is alternately gasping and whispering, *Yes, yes.*

Joy. The feel of Bim's gentle, loving hands roaming over my back, and my ass, as this loving consort sucks on my earlobe. I may not be inside her right now, but I have a place in her heart as she has in mine.

Joy. The sense of ecstasy as my cock gets even firmer and thicker while inside a welcoming cunt. The feeling as I ram in and withdraw repeatedly. Each stroke having its own wondrous effect on my mate.

Joy. The sense of existential release as cum leaves me and becomes part of her. Cum that may hold the beginnings of yet another life.

Joy. The sense of creating life from the literal outpouring of love.

Do I need any more children? No, of course I don't. But to deny my gals the future fruit of their bodies because I would choose to be a curmudgeon with my seed would be an act of self-centered meanness. If they don't want to have more children, they are entitled to say so and to seek a way to make that happen. I've placed no requirement on them. This is their choice, their desire.

The act of lovemaking is over for now, but will be rekindled again and soon. Now, I settle in with my very first two gals. They were then incredibly different in attitude and temperament but found, in each other, a partner, with which to support each other, in their support of me.

As much as I have my moments of frustration, I'm lucky to have found these two first.

Breakfast is a meal I typically eat alone. Each of us has a different schedule, and so, when we rise and grab a bite it's pretty informal and varied in time and substance.

Today is only a bit different, as Debbie is sitting by me as I partake in some fried rice and links of longanisa.⁹⁸ I have a glass of buko juice⁹⁹ today, as the gals opened some young coconut from which they harvested the 'milk'. The juice, conserved in a couple of two liter pitchers, must be poured off before the milk can be removed. There's a hint of sweetness to it. The gals know it's my preferred juice in the morning.

Debbie pours herself a glass of the juice and just looks at me. She is a fine looking woman. No longer the young teacher I first met, she is thirty now. While she still looks youthful, these days, no one will mistake her for one of her students. She must be about five foot two. I know they use centimeters here, but I just can't make the adjustment. Her hair is black but her eyes are brown. Her complexion is lighter than many Filipinos.

I've mentioned before that there's nothing physically wrong with her. It's what is in her head that has been the problem. Why she doesn't have a partner in life is curious, but not entirely unusual.

As marriage here is a forever thing, some Filipinas often don't marry until later in life. But there typically is a partner, even if they are not married. I gather there's none for this gal. I don't think she is a lesbian, so what her issue is in this regard is unknown.

Eva came to my room last night.

Oh? Was that a problem? I told all to not give you any problems.

No problem. We talk. Eva a good girl and a smart one I think.

We can agree on that.

⁹⁸ A sweet Filipino sausage the length of which is typically no more than two cherry tomatoes side by side.

⁹⁹ The clear liquid at the center of young coconuts.

You change her life. You know that.

Sure. That's obvious.

Why you do that?

What do you mean?

When I ask that she come here, she need a place to live and food. Nothing else. I know there be sex, but she say she willing, so I think, yes, here a man, maybe be a pervert but she get a place to live and food. That what I think.

I'm not sure why you think that. You already knew I have placed the land I bought in the gals' names. But whatever... what's your point?

But you like young girls! That the point.

Why do you think that?

Why else you have Ann and Reyna and even Ri she just barely eighteen then?

The gals told you why, years ago.

I not believe them. Men not have sex with children unless this their true desire. That mean they are perverted.

OK, so now I'm confused. What is the issue?

Eva say when she younger you not spend as much time with her or Reyna as you do with Cincer, Bim, Nelia and Jessa. They the one you with most. She say, even now she not with you as much as you with them.

Once again, Debbie, what's the issue?

Why?

Why what?

You like young girls. Why you not with them more?

You still stuck on that? ... Look, I like Eva, and Reyna and Ann. And now that they are older it's easier for me to be with them. They needed the knowledge that they were accepted as mates, if only to get them to stop being crazy with worry. I would have been happy to just give them shelter until they

got old enough to leave here. They didn't want that. But as a general rule... no! I don't 'like' young girls. I like adults.

Then WHY?

Why what?

Why you not want ME?

Oh.

Why?

Two reasons, I guess. But the first one is the most simple. I have too many here already. I had too many here before Eva and Jessa joined.

What the other reason?

You.

What?

You, Debbie. You, from the very first time I met you... you have been accusing me of being a bad man. You have been sneaky, insulting, mean spirited and, in my mind, dangerous. But I have a question for you.

What is it?

Why don't you have a partner?

She just looks at me. For the very first time this morning, she is silent.

Well?

Nothing. She is just looking at me as tears begin to form. I just sit and wait. I take a sip of the buko juice and wait. The tears are on her cheeks now. She's not wailing. She's silent. Sitting upright with tears falling from her cheeks. I take another sip of the buko.

It is because of you. I love you.

How? I mean, Why?! I haven't been nice to you.

Yes, true. You are mean to me. I not want to love you.

And you really don't, do you, Debbie? It's just that, to be one of my gals, you get to own land, you get a place to live, you don't have to attend to me, as there are others here who will. So you get the economic benefits, without the day to day drudgery of being a wife. Right?

No! No! That not true.

So, what is it? If you are here, you can save more girls?

She gasps. Ha! That's it! Well, let's see if I can spoil that for her. Debbie, first the requirement is that any additions come in pairs, and I'm absolutely not wanting anyone underage. So, if you want to be accepted, you would have to find a gal around your age who would also want to foolishly join nine other gals as one of my consorts. ... The second is that you and she would have to have sex with all the other gals in this house. I don't think that is going to happen. The third requirement is that the two of you have to convince me that you don't want to bring anyone else along. And the final requirement, is that I have to actually want you and the other one. I honestly don't think you can get past the first requirement.

Why you make the rule about age? You not have that rule before.

When all this started, I never even thought an underage girl would be possible. So I didn't make it clear. And when the first gal who was underage joined me, she was seventeen and turned eighteen in a month's time. The underage ones were not what I wanted and tried to exclude. This time I know to make a requirement about age. How many times have I told you I don't want young ones?

But they say you good to them. You have sex with them. You not say no. Eva and Reyna say you very sweet with them.

I didn't say I was unable to be with a young one. I only said I do not want more.

Maybe if there a special one?

Jesus, Debbie, what's with you? You think I'm evil for taking young ones and then you give me young ones. Why do you do that?

Maybe best for them. Maybe I wrong. Maybe you not evil.

Debbie, you are here because you say you think that I have others here and we have all been lying to you. I told you that you may stay until you are satisfied that there are no others here. I agreed to that so you would stop harassing Ana and Bim. If you have decided we are not lying, and not evil, you need to leave.

Please...

Debbie, you are here for one reason only. And...

Ira! Eva has entered the room and it was she who has just yelled my name.

What?

Let her stay.

Why?

Because I asked?

Eva, Bim doesn't want her here and Ana certainly is uncomfortable with her here. Talk to them. I'll agree, only if they say Debbie can stay.

OK. I talk to them. Wait until that done?

No, Eva. You have until tonight. If they say OK by then, then I'll agree. But if they don't tell me OK by then, it has to be over.

Salamat¹⁰⁰.

I don't think Eva will be saying 'thanks' after having a word with Bim.

OK, Debbie, you have until this evening.

There are times when the food you were enjoying simply becomes fuel. The joy of it is gone. Jessa has been in and out of the room since she first placed the food in front of me. She clears my plate and returns to sit by me, as Debbie has left the room.

There are no words spoken, but her hand holds my hand in silence. Outside are fields of rice surrounded by banana trees on one side and coconut trees on the far side. There's beauty there.

¹⁰⁰ Thank you.

There's a peaceful calm in the view. That is so different from the turmoil in my head. I hold Jessa's hand, tight. I don't want to let go.



No!

Am I to understand that Eva came to you regarding Debbie?

Duh! Oo. Of course!

OK, Bim. I'm not surprised. I pretty much expected that you would say 'no' to the request.

Why you want her to stay? You say last night, no more!

Did Eva tell you I want Debbie to stay?

She say it.

She is wrong and she knows better than to tell you that. I want the woman gone. Eva wants her to stay. I told Eva that if all you gals wanted her to stay I wasn't going to fight all of you. But if just one of you doesn't want her here, then she has to go. I told her to go this morning. Eva pleaded with me to allow her to stay longer.

Good. Tell her to go!

Bim, did you tell Eva that you don't want Debbie to stay?

No, she ask. I tell you.

Go tell her. She needs to hear it from you.

Without another word, Bim leaves.

Difficult.

Yes, Jessa, difficult.

What you think will happen?

You mean when Bim tells Eva that Debbie needs to go?

Oo.

I don't know how invested Eva is in having Debbie stay, but I know how invested Bim is in the gal going. It may not be fun for them, but Eva needs to know that I'm not being arbitrary.

But then she is angry with Bim. That not good either.

If there is a problem with Eva's feelings toward Bim, there are others here who will tell Eva that she is in the wrong. Eva needs to get over it, even if she doesn't want to.

Nelia will agree with Eva.

Anyone else?

I not know.

How about you?

You not want her, so I not want her. Simple for me. I think Ri like me. If you say no, she say no.

Well, Cincer will agree with you and I suspect Ann will too. What about Reyna?

*Ha! My sister thinks her teacher is *maldita*¹⁰¹. She not want her here. I sure that.*

In a way, I have never understood Nelia's desire to add gals as Jesus's answer to some grand plan. In all other ways, Nelia is as great a gal as you could ever want. But that one thing leaves me scratching my head.

Eva's salvation was based on Debbie's actions. I get why she is supporting Debbie's request.

That's enough pondering about what I don't need to be thinking about right now. Breakfast is over. Jessa has tasks she needs to follow up on. Ann gives me a kiss as she takes off to city hall in Tacloban. Cincer wants to talk about getting some of our equipment fixed or scrapped for newer stuff. I ask why some of

¹⁰¹ Naughty, bratty, bad, mean. Same in both Tagalog and Cebuano.

these things failed so soon. I never saw stuff fail so fast in the US. Is the equipment being mishandled?

Maybe we use it harder here?

CiCi, I doubt that.

You think the equipment in the US better?

I don't know. It's the same brands. We have Black and Decker, Makita, and Bosch in the US, same as here.

Maybe same name but different? Maybe China made?

You think so?

Maybe.

Let's find out. I can get someone to ship me a cordless grinder and a cordless drill from the US. Let's find out.

Ira, they use different electric in the US, right?

Sure, but I suspect the batteries are the same and we can use the chargers we have here, or we can use a step-down transformer to run the US battery chargers. I'll email someone back in Washington to purchase them for me.

It will take a while. What we do now?

Try to fix them again. Maybe they will last long enough for the US stuff to get here.

OK... Ira, have you seen Bim this morning?

Yeh, maybe forty-five minutes ago. Why?

She supposed to go to Tacloban to pick up somethings for the guys getting bananas ready to ship, but she not go yet. I not find her.

I'm not sure I can help you but look to see if she is with Eva or Ana.

I get eyebrows and Cincer is gone.



Using the computer these days is pure frustration.

The speed is the same as it was before, but the websites load so much slower. Even my Hotmail account loads more slowly. I haven't been in it for a while. There's no one here in the Philippines I exchange emails with and there's little I need to connect with back in the States any more.

Working through spam, I find an email from Tom that has been sitting in the inbox for a bit. I decide to send the email I need to send first before I deal with this.

I get a message out to the contractor I used in Kennewick asking if I send him money, will he purchase and ship a couple of tools to me. That done I open Tom's email.

Hey Ira,

Look, I am sorry for giving you the cold shoulder when you were here. I guess I was pretty confused about you being with a Muslim. Not sure how that works and maybe I was wrong.

Elena and I are thinking of taking a trip to the Philippines. Is there any chance you are up for a visit?

*All the best,
Tom*

That's a pretty thin apology / non-apology, but it really doesn't matter, as the cover story was designed to keep him from discovering what was up. How do you weigh a non-apology for a lie?

There's no way I can answer him. It wasn't me who told him I was with a Muslim. That was Elena. So if I tell him I don't know what the fuck he is talking about that will blow back, maybe in a number of ways, towards Elena, who may be accused of lying; and then Tom will want to know the 'truth.' From me? From Elena?

As I have an email address for Elena, I decide to send her the following.

Elena,

Below, I have sent you a copy of an email I received from Tom. I haven't answered and I don't have a safe way, for your sake, to do so.

Ira

Lies. They all too often come back to bite you. In this case, it will bite Elena, not me. Still, it's a minor mess. My email to Elena is far from satisfying, but there's nothing I can do to fix this. I close the computer down. Between the slow websites and the emails I can't deal with, there's little reason to spend time on that damned machine.

I've promised to take my four four-year-olds (MJ, Ed, Ris2x and Mac) plus Leeni and Loy2x, both of whom will be four soon enough, plus Niana, to Jollibee's.¹⁰² Nelia, Reyna and Eva will come with us as I just can't handle the six kids on my own. I'm not counting Niana as a little kid, and she is like an older sister to each of them, so that makes for five parenting figures for the six little ones.

I tried to get the kids interested in MickeyD's, but it just doesn't work for all sorts of reasons. As a concession to me, I'll get a Big Mac and fries via the drive-through at MickeyD's before we arrive at Jollibee's.

We are all assembled and ready to leave, except Eva's nowhere to be found. I need another 'parent.'

Ann is probably already in Tacloban. I text her and ask if she will meet us at Jollibee's at 11:30. She responds that she is happy to do so, and so, off we go without Eva. Do I need to even mention that Ann is Ris2x's mother?

If we were in the States, the drive into the city would be highly illegal. Not a single kid is in a car seat. And with three adults and six little kids, and one aged twelve, we have far more in the vehicle than there are seats. So, while it's illegal there, it's par-for-the-course here.

Spaghetti and fried chicken. Not a single burger is ordered, nor is there an order of fries, but right along with spaghetti, the fried chicken and rice, there's gravy! There are no potatoes in sight, but there's gravy.

¹⁰² See the attachment for the nicknames of my children, here.

Never in a million years would I ever dip fried chicken, in gravy but that's why it's here. It's not for the rice. They don't put gravy on rice. It comes with the menu item '1-pc. Chickenjoy with Jolly Spaghetti.' Every one of them, kids and moms, are having the same thing, except for Ann. She's having a 'Cheesy Classic Jolly Hotdog,' and a spaghetti.

I'm so glad I had my Big Mac, even if I did have to eat it in the vehicle. Yes, this place is fast food, but not the type I like. I do not begrudge that it's what they want. But it just doesn't work for me. Yes, the chicken is pretty good, and I've no problem with buying a bucket of it, but the stuff that comes with it makes no sense to me.

And then there's the thing that fried chicken is nice, but it's not what I'm looking for when I decide I want a burger and fries. If I want fried chicken, I want beans, coleslaw and mashed potatoes with my gravy.

Our time at Jollibee's is over. It takes a while, but we finally get the kids back in the SUV, and I have put the vehicle in gear. But, at that moment, my cellphone chimes, a text has been received. I figure it's best to check it now before we leave town. Taking the vehicle out of gear, I read Cincer's question,

When will you be back?

Leaving Tacloban now. Be back soon.

OK. Text as soon as you get back.

Problem? Can I pick up some part here before we return?

No. That not it. Explain later.

With the vehicle loaded like it is, I take it easy getting back, but forty minutes later, I pull onto the pad below the carpark.

OK, we are at the house. What's up?

Come to Eva's room.

This can't be good.

There are four of them here. It explains why Eva and Bim went missing when Cincer and I were looking for them earlier. Clearly, Cincer found Bim and, for some reason, has stayed.

OK, I'm here. Now, tell me. ... Why am I here?

And I hear... nothing.

I look at my watch. It's not that I've anything important to attend to. I just want to move this along. Clearly, something is brewing that I may not like. Otherwise, none of this would be happening.

I look at each of them, but each of them is looking at someone else.

CiCi, what the fuck is this about?

The cuss, as it escapes from my lips, causes her to recoil a bit.

Debbie needs you to accept a new girl. Not her. She know she not welcome here.

Did she tell you that I specifically told her no one underage ever again?

Yes, she say that your rule. She ask we break the rule, it important.

I see. Do you and Bim remember what I said last night?

See!?, explodes from Bim.

I remember. ... Debbie not tell you why she so bad to Niana and Bim. She tell Eva. She afraid to tell us. Eva tell Bim and me. It OK if I tell you?

I want to tell her that it isn't OK. I really don't care. No matter why she did it, it was unacceptable. For some reason, Cincer thinks it matters. I don't want to say it, but I utter, ... *Why?*

She sure you still have young ones. She want you to take another young girl, but Bim and Niana tell her there not any here. She sure you just have to have some. She need you to be evil. She think OK, evil, but best for the girl. She still not understand you not like that. I sure this is true.

OK, so, CiCi, why am I here? You know I don't want any more young ones. What is the point?

Eva thinks we must do this.

So? Of course she does, CiCi! I'm sure she sees herself in the shoes of this new candidate. Other than Eva and Debbie, who else thinks I should do what I already have said many times I'll not do?

I not sure. Bim agree with you. No more. But we love Eva and Eva cries.

This house is not an orphanage. Why do any of you think that this would be the last time Debbie pulls this shit? ... In fact, I want each of you to answer that exact question right now. And the first one to answer must be Eva.

*Eva is a mess. That much is clear. She is sobbing, but she's also angry as she screams, *It just this once!**

No, Eva, you were the 'just this once.' This will be twice. Why won't there be a third and a fourth?

She just glares at me.

Well, Eva? Do you have an answer?

Sullenly, she voices, No.

Bim?

I agree with you. There always another.

CiCi?

Yeh, you correct.

OK, are we done here?

*Evidently not, as Eva, with some anger in her voice asks, *You make me leave?**

No. Of course not.

If you not allow Dessa to stay, why you allow me?

Who is Dessa?

Eva screams, *The new girl! The one Miss Debbie say need us.*

I understand your question. You should never have been allowed to come, but once you were here, I could not throw you out. You are here because all my other gals worked against my wishes. And you got to stay because of that. You did nothing wrong, but they did. This time they know to not act against me. Do you?

Not a word.

Do you, Eva?

Cincer spits out, *Don't be stupid. Ira is the father of your son. Do not act against Loy2x's father!*

That seems to bring Eva up short. She wipes tears from her face with the back of her wrist and nods before looking at me and saying, *Sorry, Ira. CiCi right. I not be against you.*

And now Debbie is crying. I don't care. Let her cry.



Debbie is gone. If there's one thing I think I'm sure of, it's that Debbie has been convinced that I'm not itching for underage girls. If there's a second thing, it's that I don't want her.

Now, if she will just leave us alone, Niana will be a happier girl and Bim a happier mother.

I spend the night with Reyna. There's no hidden meaning in that, but Eva thinks there is. The next morning, Eva asks Nelia if I'm going to freeze her out... at least, that is the meaning of her query. Nelia tells her that her fear is baseless, and then just about runs to me to say that I have a problem. I need to bed Eva.



I don't want you to leave. Do you understand that?

Why? You didn't want me.

I didn't want anyone new. But that has nothing to do with you as a person. You are here, and I do not want you to leave. There are no exceptions to that.

I love you and want you to stay. I would have been willing to see you go in the beginning, but as we have a child, that is no longer OK. I want you to stay.

Maybe you will love Dessa.

Maybe I would. We will never know. I'm sure there are hundreds of thousands of women and girls I might find love for, but we will never find out about those gals either. Eva, this house is not an ark, I'm not Noah, and all of you gals are not animals who have come aboard, breeding pair by breeding pair. I love Nelia, but she is wrong.

And with that, I slide my cock deep into Eva's cunt. My reward is a grunt. Eva is not awash with her juices when I plunge in, but she isn't dry either, as I had been fingering her as we were talking before.

Eva and I have been together for almost six years. She is twenty-one now. We know each other's bodies. On any other day, I would say we know each other really well. This dust-up with the Dessa kid has caused a fracture in the normal, stable relationship we have. But that is because we do have a relationship, in and out of bed.

This... this lovemaking... is not a distraction from our relationship. It's fundamental to it. It's lovemaking, and not simple fucking. I'm not in a hurry to 'get myself off.' I am, if a bit crudely, reminding Eva that we are mated in the most basic way. I want this to last, and it seems Eva does too.

She rolls me over and gets on top, as she grinds her pelvis against mine. This is not the high school girl looking for a safe place to land. Eva is a young woman and, until today, I would have said she was secure in her world. She seems secure right now, as she rides me with confidence.

We have been like this many times before. I enjoy looking up at her beauty, as she pumps up and down. Her still-tight cunt slides, with some regret, over my cock, as her skin does not want to give way and does so only grudgingly, as the fucking continues.

As the lubrication pours forth from her cunt, the sensation of permitting, begrudgingly, gives way to a slicker and smoother

motion, and I roll Eva over again. The gentle fucking needs to give way to a more powerful version.

It's not like she or I am trying to prove anything. Our child Loy2x is almost four. We are bonded, regardless of her comments earlier suggesting that we aren't. That there's an 'our child' makes our connection more than a choice for a moment. In the end, Eva knows it.

My being in Eva is simply what couples do. They make love. And, as cum leaves me and enters Eva, she knows that getting pregnant, if it happens, is what happens to a married woman, even one who is one of eight wives to one man.

The main event completed, I roll off Eva and she sidles next to me, her head resting just above the hollow between the side of my chest and my arm. Small kisses are a staccato on my neck as her hand strokes my chest.

Ira, sweetheart?

Mummm?

Meet her, please?

Who?

Dessa.... please?

Oh, sweetheart — I'm sure she's nice... and deserving... and possibly even pretty... and willing. But what's the point? We can't keep on adding.

Why not? The others say 'no more' because you say it. They not feel it. If you say OK, they not unhappy.

My love, on top of every other reason to say no is the simple fact that Debbie is convinced I have a thing for underage girls. That will get me into trouble.

Why? No trouble for Ann, Reyna and me. Right?

Yes, in a way that was simple luck. But that luck will not last.

It be OK. I am sure. Please?

My love, there are eight of you here already! It's crazy to add another.

Why? We share you. Why it matter?

She's not being over-wrought. As crazy as it might seem, it's a sane question. Yes, it can be traumatic to add a mistress to what is a monogamous marriage. It can destroy that marriage. And it can be a challenge to go from two lovers who are close with each other to add a third, who does not have that close a connection.

Eva does not belong with me in that type of world. Her question is based on how she knows me since joining us. It's the only way she has ever known me.

In a way, my mind is partially stuck back in Manila with Bim and Cincer. Eva has no such early history to purge from her thinking. In that, her question is valid. There's a reason, but it isn't one she can see, at least maybe until things have changed so much that she wonders, why has everything changed?

It has to do with how I can have anything close to quality time with so many loves. In so many ways, every day, I feel that I'm already struggling to stay connected to each of them. I feel torn at times, knowing that too many of them need my attention at the very same time. Maybe Eva can't see the angst I feel, even now, on occasion.

I suspect each of us stays wrapped up in our own world, looking at things from one vantage point, our own. I'm just as guilty of that as the next person. So, there's no shame in it. Still, it generates the kind of question that Eva has asked.

From my vantage point, it's hard enough to let each of these gals know I love them just as much today as I did yesterday, each and every day. It's too easy for someone to feel overlooked. You can say, they ought to know better. Maybe. But our feelings, sense of worth, and our ever real need for love, can trip us up and result in feelings of loss and depression.

Simply normal hormonal changes can exacerbate these feelings of loss. I'm all for females having normal and regular menstruations. And I do not think periods make my gals unstable. But there are

moments each month when they are more susceptible to feelings of isolation, loss, and failure.

There's no simple way for me to know when those moments occur, and so I try my best to communicate my love for my gals — all of them — frequently. Adding more gals makes this ever harder for me.

It matters because I love you and I love the others in our home. It matters because there's just so much of me and just so many hours in each day. It matters because it's hard enough to find the time in each day to be with all of you.

You think we not know you love us?

Eva, I hope you all know it, now. But adding more risks there being times when you might not know it.

It's OK now, so it is OK to add Dessa!

What if it's the straw that broke the camel's back?

Hub?

How do you know that adding Dessa won't cause exactly what I'm worried about? Once she is added, we can't un-add. I really feel we have reached our limit.

But, you thought the same thing before Jessa and I joined. Right?

Yes, we got lucky that time. I don't want to risk it again.

Ira, love me enough, please.

If I didn't love you, we would not even have had this conversation. ... It's late, sweetheart. Let's get some rest.



Why?

Ira, we all need to be here. What you tell Eva, it make it needed.

CiCi, what are you talking about?

You afraid we not know you love us. We know! We all here so you know we all do. So maybe you should meet this girl, this Dessa, who Debbie asks for.

Eva, is that what you told them?

It what you say!

No, it isn't.

Cincer takes a breath, before, OK, so maybe it even more important we all here now. What you tell Eva?

I tell her I hope you all know I love you, but there's just so much of me and just so many hours in each day. As it is, it's hard enough to find the time in each day to be with all of you often enough... hard enough to make sure each of you is with me enough to hold it all together. Adding another risks making a mess of what we have now.

I don't think Eva is particularly happy right now, as she says, a little louder than needed, But, that what you say before you add last time! ... See CiCi, it what I say!

I feel stuck, and I think the gals feel stuck too. They want to back me up, and also know that they went against me last time. They know I was very unhappy with them, and that Eva is right, nothing bad happened last time other than that. It was just that I didn't want any more loves in my life. So this time, while my rationale might be good, history isn't in my favor.

On top of everything else, the dynamics of what we are, has changed. This is no longer the original question I had in the beginning, when Bim suggested I take more than one gal; a question of how many lovers am I able to add before one says, no.

Now we function more as a cooperative, a commune. The senior member is CiCi, who in many ways functions as the chief operations officer. She looks at me and asks, *If we all know the risk, and all us girls agree to try, maybe we can try adding another. Then, if there a problem, Ira, it our fault not yours.*

I don't care whose fault it is. The damage would be to all of us.

We can do it. I am sure!, comes from Jessa.

I think it's fair to say that Jessa is no one's fool. In all the time I've known her, Jessa has been a rock, something that Reyna greatly benefited from, long before I came into the picture. She doesn't believe in fairy tales, and is the least likely to tell me I'm like Noah. Though not the brightest, nor the most enterprising, Jessa makes everything work. And so, Jessa saying she is sure we can do it, is not something I can shrug off as an uninformed comment.

I'm pretty sure she won't be able to explain why she is sure. I've been down that road with her before. It seems that her ability to articulate her perceptions has its limits. With Jessa, you just have to take her at her word. Since her word has always been good, there's every reason to believe that her word is good now.

I'm not the only one who is coming to that conclusion. I can see it in Bim's eyes, and in Cincer's expression. Eva is delighted. Lorie and Ann seem to be simply glad that this will all be over soon enough. Reyna loves her older sister in a way that is all it should be. If her Ate says, no problem, that's all Reyna needs to know.

The only one who seems uncomfortable is Nelia. I wonder why for only a second, before the reason becomes clear to me. If we take just one, and not two, either Nelia's theory springs a leak, or Jessa is wrong.

Am I being a bastard when I think that I would like to put an end to Nelia's religious theories?

But there is something else. *I have another reason for saying no that Eva hasn't mentioned. This is about Debbie's belief that I am a pedophile. I have had enough of that, and for that reason alone, the answer must be no.*

My comment has changed, what seemed a moment ago to have been, to some in the room, a successful conclusion, to a full stop. The sense of relief is gone and frustration returns.

No one is saying anything for a few moments, before Jessa offers, *Maybe she just stay until we find somewhere else for her to go. That what we tell Debbie and that what we do. She not join us.*

While it might be a good solution in reality, I don't think it will disabuse Debbie of her beliefs. *Am I the only one who thinks that Debbie will not believe that?*

Jessa seems to think we can make it work. *I will tell her, you say no until I make this suggestion. You agree only if this the way it happen. She can stay here only until that happen and she goes.*

I can read the faces of my gals pretty well these days. They all want this to be the solution. Even Nelia is happy now.

OK, Jessa, contact Debbie and arrange for me to meet this Dessa.

Jessa is giving me her eyebrows when Eva says, *I will to it.*

No, Eva, I want Jessa to do this. ... and, addressing my entire family, I ask, Now, are we done?

Evidently we are, as they start going in different directions. *Eva, stay with me and tell me about this girl.*

I not know her.

Then why do you want me to add her?

Miss Debbie say it is needed. She say Dessa like me. She need to have a future. Ira, you do more than be good to me. You send me to college. You do what no one else here can do. She say Dessa need a future too. That why.

But I have just made it clear that I am not going to do that for Dessa. Are you clear on that?

She doesn't give me eyebrows, but nods her head before she walks off.

It's typical in one way. It's sad in another. I've a long laundry list of the reasons for the sadness, but Dessa's name features in all of them.

I've not met Dessa yet. I will soon enough, but as of now, I really know very little about her as a real person. All I know is why she and I will meet.

Her mother, at the ripe old age of 37, died. I ask, *Of what?* and am told, *High blood.*

They sure as hell don't say hypertension here, nor do they append 'pressure' to 'high blood.' But you don't die from that directly. Maybe the mother died of a stroke, but that I may never learn. Does it matter? I guess not. But hypertension can be treated... if you can afford the medicine. Many here can't.

Dessa's father is an alcoholic, and a tricycle driver when able to get off the floor to drive. The few pesos he gets are dedicated to getting drunk again. No one has seen the guy for a good three months. He may be dead. No one really knows. In any case, he might as well be dead, as Dessa is without a parent.

Dessa's grandparents are all dead. One grandfather was a barangay captain¹⁰³, in Northern Samar¹⁰⁴, who, it seems, was targeted by the NPA¹⁰⁵ and was assassinated a few years ago. His wife was also killed in the gunfire of that event. The other set of grandparents came to more mundane ends: a motorcycle accident and cancer.

I gather that there are some family members up north, but none around here, and the kid wants to stay here. Why she does is unclear to me, but her last name is the same as the barangay

¹⁰³ Barangays are the smallest national governmental unit in the Philippines. The top official in a barangay is the captain. As tax money gets funneled to each barangay and the captain controls the money, there is a huge potential for the diversion of those funds. Elections for the post of captain are often vicious, as captains often become very wealthy by virtue of holding the position.

¹⁰⁴ A separate province.

¹⁰⁵ New People's Army. The communist paramilitary arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

captain who was assassinated. I've no idea if that ties into it, but it's a working theory for now.

The last thing on this laundry list is Dessa's age. The kid is thirteen.



Did a single one of you know how young this kid is when I was asked that I accept her? Anyone? ... No one? Before I said she couldn't stay, would any of you really have expected me to have sex with this kid?

No one is saying, yes, so I'll assume that we are all in agreement on this detail, or at least I hope so.

You are all, each of you, her Ate. I need one of you to take on the role of mother for her. If she stays at all, she is to be like Ana. And if she stays at all, we are going to locate a family member who can take her as fast as possible. Long term, she isn't staying. I'm just not having a girl of that age here without her mother. Have I made myself clear enough?

That not what Miss Debbie want.

I know, Eva, and I honestly don't care. It's what must happen. Thirteen is just way too far over the line. You were almost three full years older than Dessa when you first came here. Ann was more than two years older. Reyna was the youngest, but she was more than eighteen months older, and she had Jessa next door. None of you are like this Dessa.

I see acceptance in most faces. Clearly, Eva is troubled, but there's nothing I can do about that. There's one who is smiling. It's Nelia.

Eva is quietly freaking out. *Ira, I have to tell Miss Debbie!*

Why?

Maybe she tell Dessa the wrong thing before she bring Dessa.

No. Don't tell her anything. Don't contact her at all. I don't want Debbie bringing the girl here. ... Jessa, you contact Debbie, find out where the kid is and bring her here. If Debbie misinformed her, we will correct that. I don't want Debbie to have any part of this.



You can't expect a kid, living as this one has been, to be in today's fashions. But her clothes aren't just old, they are third or fourth hand. I'm not sure how you could even tell if they are clean. The colors are faded; the cloth is worn out.

She is a small girl. Small in every way. Her feet look tiny. Two of my gals wear a size 4 shoe. This girl must be wearing size 4 as well. Her hair is long and it doesn't look like it has been trimmed in a long time. Her skin is pretty dark, and that may be because of being out in the sun a bunch.

There's little else to report, as her clothing is just hanging on her frame and is at least two sizes too big.

She's not shy. She fixes her gaze on me, but she is clearly scared. That much is easy to see. She's trembling.

Jessa has brought her up from below. As the two meet us in the Sala, Jessa decides she should do the introductions.

Ira, this little girl is Dessa. Dessa, say bello to Sir Ira.

Hello. ... Po.

Good afternoon. Tell me, why are you here?

Sir? Because Ma'am Jessa come get me?

Yes, yes, but why did she get you?

Sir, it because my teacher, Miss Debbie, say I am to be one of your girls.

Do you want to be one of my girls?

I guess, Po.

For now you will stay here and you are safe. You are not one of my girls, but you will stay with us while we find which of your relatives can give you your new home.

Po? Miss Debbie say being here better for me. She say better to not go to the relatives.

Yes, well, this isn't Debbie's decision. This is my home; I say who may join. You are too young to be one of my girls. So that isn't going to happen.

A look of panic in her face is followed by what I gather is a stream of Cebuano to Jessa, who then answers in the same tongue, before turning to me and explaining, *She is afraid she didn't understand what you say. I tell her.*

Does she understand now?

Yes, she really understand you. She just think it cannot be true. Debbie tell her you have taken other young girls.

Dessa, I've never added anyone to this house as young as you are now. It's best that you join your relatives.

Maybe, not best for me, Sir. Maybe this is best for me.

And, she may me right. But that isn't a good argument. If deciding on how far they might get in their educational pursuits, or their quality of life, were the only deciding factors, this house would be filled to the brim and way beyond. That just isn't going to work. I get it that her relatives might live a meager existence. Sometimes the outcomes are pretty shitty.

And it isn't a matter of whether she is pretty. I guess, for a thirteen-year-old she is about as cute as anyone might envision. But, for the love of God, she's just too young, no matter however else I might want to rationalize it.

Dessa, for now you are staying here. But you really can't stay here for long. Maybe it is best for you. Maybe that is true. But, this is my house and it is not good for me.

Why you break your word to Miss Debbie?

I never gave any promise to her. Did she tell you I did?

Oo.

What promise did she say I made?

That you would make me your girl. Just like you do with Eva.

Jessa, get that lying bitch here. Now!



Why did you ask me to come? Just earlier today, Jessa say you never want to see me ever again. Now she call and say you need to see me immediately.

Eva, Reyna and Dessa are in the room adjoining this one. Normally they would not be able to hear conversations in this room, but I have a cellphone with the 'speaker' on, sitting on the table in front of me with a connection to Eva's cellphone. Eva's phone is set to mute. She can hear us but we can't hear her. Jessa is in the room with me.

Tell me, Debbie. Did I ever tell you I would take that girl to my bed?

Jessa say you told her to come and get Dessa.

I did. I repeat, did I ever tell you I would take that girl to my bed?

But you accepted Dessa.

That's not an answer. Let's start with a yes or a no. Did I?

Why are you asking this?

Answer!

No! No, you didn't. Not in so many words.

Did I ever promise you that she was joining this family?

But you brought her here! Ira, what is this about?

Answer, Debbie. Did I promise you anything at all?

Why are you asking me this?

Because, Dessa says you told her I made promises. Why did you lie to her?

I didn't lie!

How can you say that? I never made any promise to you.

But you told Jessa to get her!

Yes, I did. What part of that is a promise?

Debbie just stops talking.

Do you really think I was going to bring a thirteen-year-old to my bed?

Silence.

Maybe it's you who is fantasizing about sex with young girls. Is that it? You want to rub bodies with Dessa?

She's weeping now. I'm not sure why, but there are real tears. I leave Debbie sobbing and walk into the next room, closing the door behind us.

Do you need any more proof that I never made any promise?

Both Dessa and Eva are sobbing too.

Dessa, I really need an answer. Do you need any more proof that I was telling the truth?

She, in an almost whisper, says, *No, Po. No need.*

I grab the Eva's cellphone, unmute it and say, *Jessa, send Debbie home. We are done.*

Po, what you say about Miss wanting for sex with me... that true?

Dessa, I have no idea. She probably doesn't, but it's possible.

The cellphone connection is live and it seems Debbie has heard the exchange, because I hear a gasp from the next room. And with that I close the connection.



I have an email from the contractor in Kennewick. He will get me the power tools I want. Once he gets them sent to me, he will send me the total cost I need to cover.

My email back is simply a 'thank you,' along with the shipping address.



Ann, that can't be right. There are no relatives with whom we can place Dessa? None?

None.

Are you absolutely sure?

Ira! Four days I spend there. There is no one.

No one even if we give them a sack of rice every month?

No one. No one to give rice to!

OK, thanks for trying.

No problem. So she stays?

I don't know.

It OK if we do it with her?

Ann, you want to bed the kid?

All I hear is a giggle, as Ann rolls over and on to me, grabbing hold of my balls.

Ann?

*Sabaa nimu oi!*¹⁰⁶

I get the point, or rather, Ann would like to get the point. But I am not going to slide into her just yet.

My lips latch on to her right tit and start sucking. Ann's girl, Ris2x, is four-years-old, and though, no longer needing breast milk for her, her breasts now feed little Mark. So, sucking on them is no less pleasurable for either of us than it was four years ago.

I'm flicking a nipple with my tongue and sucking a bit. I would manually play with her other nipple but, with milk flowing, it would be a bad idea. Still, just the sucking is great. And no matter what, it's good to be with Ann. There's no having to justify my desire for her. She is great in so many ways. The fact that she is

¹⁰⁶ You're noisy. (Cebuano) as opposed to Tagalog where it is Ingay ka.

one of my gals, is a reward that I have no way to say I earned. I'm damned lucky she is mine.

Ann likes a lot of stimulation on her breasts. Not all my gals do, at least, not as much as Ann does. But then, each of them is special. This is me with Ann.

As my Ann gets ready to launch, I mount her and slide in, accompanied by sighs and gasps, both hers and mine. She digs her heels into the mattress and pushes her body up to meet mine, as I drive her body down and into the mattress.

She reaches up, hands on my shoulders, pushes one heel into the mattress and, with the accompaniment of her arms, rolls us over.

Now on my back, I'm looking up at my beautiful twenty-one-year-old lover. My cock embedded in her cunt, and a smile on her face.

The sounds are not to inflate egos. They are not information. The noises she is making are more honest, more primal, and far more basic. In truth, there's little sexy about making love. We are not being sexy right now. This is far more elemental. Yes, it feels way beyond good. It's supposed to. It's the cue bodies generate to make sure we propagate the species, even when we know that will not happen.

There's little thinking. It feels way too good to think. At this moment, I never want the feeling to end. Does Ann feel the same way? How do you ever know how your partner really feels, other than the simple fact that she is here with me, has been before and will be again in the future.

All I do know is that, when cum spills into Ann, I grunt and hear her sighs.

Deliverance.



Dessa is looking down at the floor and being pushed forward by little Niana.

I hear Niana whispering, *Tell him.*

Dessa is shaking her head and still looking at the floor.

If you ever hope to stay, you have to talk to him.

*Bakit?*¹⁰⁷

*Hindi ko alam.*¹⁰⁸*Do it!* And she pushes her older companion forward towards me.

Po, may I talk to you?

Of course. What is it?

Miss Debbie. She run away when she see me. What I do?

Don't you have a class with her?

Yes, she not run away when in class, but she never call on me. She not look at me. She avoid me out of class.

I'm not sure you can do anything, but I might be able to do something. Do you want me to try?

Oo. You angry with me?

No. Why do you think I would be angry?

I cause a problem.

Who said you cause a problem?

No one. I just think it.

Ana, come here, child.

Niana knows she isn't in any trouble and steps forward with a sense of safety. She doesn't say anything but stands upright and looks at me straight on. *Do you have any idea why Dessa thinks she caused a problem?*

Uncle, you told her this is not the place for her. She think that because you think she is not good.

¹⁰⁷ Why?

¹⁰⁸ I don't know.

Oh. OK, yes, I see.

Dessa is shitting bricks. What are you afraid of now?

You be angry at Ana.

Ana, do you think I'm angry at you?

No, Uncle, you not angry.

Dessa, why do you think I'll be angry with Ana?

She tell you what you do. That not respectful.

Ana is respectful. She told me the truth and helped me see what I was not understanding. No one in this house will receive my anger for being truthful. I'm not angry with Ana and I'm not angry with you, Dessa. ... Dessa, I like you. The reason why I say no to your living here as my gal is simply because you are too young and because I am done adding anyone.

She is looking down again and mumbles, Ana is younger.

Yes, Ana is younger. But Ana is here because she is the daughter of Bim and Bim is one of my gals. Ana is not an orphan, and more importantly, Ana is not one of my gals. ... This house is not a good place for a thirteen-year-old without a parent here too. You aren't a real orphan, if you father lives, though we don't know where he is, you are almost an orphan. ... While you are here, you are my responsibility. Your problem with Debbie is up to me to fix. I'll try.

Thank you, Po.

Niana guides Dessa away and I'm left in thought. What is Debbie's problem? Does she think Dessa will accuse her of acting badly for placing her here? Is she mortified about my comment, when she was here, about Debbie wanting sex with Dessa? She clearly heard that conversation. I'm just guessing. I have no idea why Debbie is acting as she is.

I wonder, which one of us should meet with Debbie? Clearly, I don't want to, and it would not turn out well if I did. Jessa carries out a lot of the errands here, but this one is really above her

paygrade. Bim would be a poor choice, for any number of reasons. I think this one falls on Cincer as the best option.



Are you sure she not imagining it?

No, I'm not sure. All I know is what she is saying.

What do you want me to do? How can I accuse her of something I am not sure really happening?

Sit down with her and say, 'This is what Dessa thinks is happening. Do you think she has a reason to feel that way?' If she says yes, find out why. If she says no, ask her if she might go out of her way to let Dessa know that she is not avoiding the kid.

You not really think she want sex with Dessa, right?

She probably doesn't, but I can't figure Debbie out at all, so no matter what I think, it hardly matters.

She says she want you, Ira. What so hard to figure out?

But she has always thought I have, and want, young girls here. She was still holding on to that belief when she came here. So what's the real motivation?

You think?

I honestly don't know. But if she thinks her desires have been exposed to Dessa, via that verbal exchange when she was here, I guess it's possible.

Why she not just grab one of the kids in her school?

Hell, I don't know CiCi, but maybe she doesn't see that as a safe way to go about it. Maybe ... if there are young kids here... oh hell, I don't know, but if Debbie is here, then in her mind maybe the access to the young ones is sort of hidden. Of course, there were no young ones before she got Dessa placed here.

Why even bother with this? You are sending Dessa to live with her relatives, right? So, it will end then.

Well that was the plan. Unfortunately, Ann has been unable to find any relatives for the kid.

So, she staying?

I didn't say that. But we don't have a plan yet. So for now, Dessa is here.

I know Ira the wrong person to do this. But I not think any of us good to do it.

Debbie, we need to talk.

Did Ira send you?

Yes.

Why? He afraid to talk to me?

Don't be stupid. He just want to avoid argument. This way there no problem.

What he need?

Ira not need anything. Dessa come home crying. She say you are avoiding her. That true? You do this?

Why he care if she cries? He sending her away.

I not here to talk about Ira. You avoiding Dessa?

Maybe. What it matter?

Debbie... why you avoiding her?

Why you care?

You send her to us, to care for her, and now you act like this? What wrong with you?

Why Ira not want the girl?

You know why.

No. He lie when he say he not want the young ones. Why he not want Dessa. When he going to fuck Ana? ... Ha! You act surprised! He will. You will see.

Ana like a daughter to him. It not like that. The Ira you dream of not the real Ira.

Why you say that? He make me have sex with girls!

Maybe to show you that if this what you want of him, maybe you the same way. He not want young girls.

But he fucks them. If he not really OK with that, I think he not get hard!

Maybe he like it but afraid of the trouble it can bring. Debbie, I really not know why he not want them. I only know that he not. But that has nothing to do with why you are mean to Dessa. Why you that way?

Why Ira tell Dessa I want sex with her?

Do you?

Why Ira say that!

Ira confused why you send these girls to him. He wonder if it because if they are OK with sex, sex with girls, maybe they OK with sex with you. He not know. He just wondering.

Why he say it in front of the girl?

Why did you promise the girl that she would join with Ira? That start the problem. That the reason. Dessa want to know why you lied to her. You create the problem. First you lie to her and then you avoid her. This not fair to Dessa.

But she thinks I want her that way now.

Do you?

I not comfortable to be with her.

Why? Why that? If you want her that way, be honest. If you not, just say Ira wrong in his guess. Why that a problem? Just do not lie. When you lie, you make things worse.

I cannot. I cannot.

I not understand.

She hate me.

If Dessa hate you, she would be happy you avoid her. She not happy. So no hate.

But she know I lie to her.

This true. But she not hate. Maybe it confusion, I think. Do not avoid her. If you want sex with her, we can find out if she OK with that.

See! See! I know Ira wants her!

No, fool, not Ira. The girls. If it girl-girl sex we want to know if she do, why Ira be involved? That make no sense. Do you want to know, Debbie?

Debbie fidgeting. I think she wants this. I think Ira right. Maybe she scared if this known, she be in trouble. Ha! See Ira worries about trouble, but maybe this worse trouble for Debbie, the teacher.

I think Ira right. That what you want but it frightens you. It safer for you if you live with Ira. But being with her, maybe it hard to hide if not with Ira. True?

Why you ask me that?

You not saying it not true. Why you not if it not true?

Why you do this to me?

We not do anything to you. Everything that happening because of your actions. We not see if she OK with girls if you not want her that way. I just want to know if that the reason you are avoiding her.

If I not avoid her she will think I want sex.

No. She not think that. Maybe she wonder, but that all. ... Debbie, if you not want girls, why you not have a boyfriend? It not a secret that there no boy. If a woman you want, why you not live with one. This not uncommon.

Maybe in Manila it normal. It not so normal here.

So this what you want?

No! Why you say that?

OK, I give up. No sense to this. Ira says stop avoiding Dessa. Do what Ira say.

Why should I?

Do it, Debbie.



I want to hit her!

I've felt that way many times, CiCi.

I think maybe you add her just so we hit her every time she do a stupid thing.

That is a spectacularly bad idea!

I think you right. She want sex with the young ones. She afraid to say it. She afraid to do it. But that what she wants. ... Ira, she ask when you will have sex with Ana.

She is a truly messed up gal.

Do you want that?

Want what?

Sex with Ana?

Why would you even listen to Debbie's craziness? Jesus, how can you even think I would want to do that?

Well, if you not want sex with young ones because someone will find out, no one would wonder, since she the daughter of Bim and Bim is your gal.

Do you really think I would do that?

Ira... I know you not want young ones. I not know truly why you not want them. You get hard with them. We all know this.

Ana is like a daughter to me. There's no way I'm going to fuck my daughter.

Ira answered my question but I still not know why he not want young ones. In all the time I have lived with this man there more I not know about him than things I do know. It not that he lies. It just that he only tells you enough but no more.

Ann seem to understand things about him that I just not, but it not that he tell Ann more. It that on a gut level Ann seem to understand what make him tick better than the rest of us do.

I ask her about that once. She just shrug and tell me that his decision predictable and OK for her. I know Bim gets confused and surprised by his decisions to this day. He not predictable to her. Jessa seems to know, but when I ask her, I just get a confused look. To her, Ira, well, Ira. I not sure she can explain that.

Lorie and Nelia see Ira as their own private God. They not have the need to understand him. So long he gives them love, they happy. I think Reyna like those two until Jessa join. Now, it like, it just not matter. She his and that it all she needs to know.

Eva attached to him... her sage and mentor.

It odd. Ira not a different person to each of us. But each of us attach to him in a different way, understanding, or not understanding him on a one-on-one level. Maybe we are a group in some ways, but not in how we connect to him.

I know he trust me. I know he see me as better able to deal with complex issues. Issues that the others here cannot handle. Ann and I share that type of respect from him. No one else have it. But, it not that he love us more. He not. He not play favorites like that.

Ira, what we to do about Dessa? You say there is nowhere for her to go and you say she not to stay. If she confuse by the behavior of Debbie, she also deeply confuse about what is going to happen to her.

I know, CiCi, I know. But I don't have an answer yet.

But if there nowhere for her to go, she not stay here? ... Ira? ... Ira, what you thinking? ... Ira?

I don't know.

Ira, if there no family, there no one to threaten you. If she want to stay, you not forcing her. Why you this way? I truly not understand?

She's too young.

Ana is half a year younger.

Not the same.

How? ... Ira, this not fair to the child.

Yeh, OK. Jesus, I don't want the kid to stay, but OK, we will try once more to find a relative for her. If we fail, she stays.

How long you try to look? This not fair. Ann looked. There no one there to take the girl. You know that. How you look when there nowhere else to look? ... Ira? ... Ira, this maybe because you angry with Debbie? Maybe if it not Debbie who send us the girl, it be OK?

OK... OK. The kid stays. Happy?

Not sure. But good for the girl.

Humph.

I will tell Ri and Nelia.

CiCi, don't you think they are a little too old for that now?

What you mean?

Well, why tell them first? What are you thinking?

They the ones to explain how it is here. You know this.

Yes, but that was six years ago. They were just a few years older than the new girls. This is different now. They are almost twice this kid's age. I don't think it'll work the same way this time.

So who you want?

That's part of the problem, CiCi. We are all too old in relation to this kid. Reyna's the closest in age and she is seven years older than Dessa. Eva is eight years older. Shit that's two-thirds of the kid's lifetime. The kid doesn't fit in here. You are not her cohort. You are all mommy figures to the kid.

I admit, I not think of this. Ira right. Ana the closest in age and he clear that Ana a niece and only a niece. So how it work if we all bed Dessa and Ana right here knowing it? That what Debbie hinting at? That why Ira so clear in not wanting Dessa to stay? That why Ira so angry at Debbie? Maybe he see this whole thing as Debbie intentionally causing this exact problem?

Ana the responsibility of Bim. Ira have almost nothing to do with the girl. But Ana and Dessa friends now and in the same grade. I

need to talk to Bim and Eva. They the two sides of this. No one else here have the emotional involvement in Dessa that they have.



I not believe Miss Debbie sends Dessa to make trouble. Why you say that?!

Eva, I didn't say that this is certain, but that it works out this way. But! It true that when I meet with Debbie, she asks about Ana in this way. Why she do that?

What she say about my Ana? Exactly, what she say?

Bim, she say, 'He lie when he say he not want the young ones. Why he not want Dessa. When he going to fuck Ana? ... Ha! You act surprised! He will. You will see.'

Oh my God! Yes, this her plan. She is evil. You tell Ira this?

Yes, I tell Ira. He gets angry. He say Ana his niece. So what we do? Do one of us become the mother to this child and treat her like Ana is treated? How she become part of us and separate from Ana?

We go over and over this but find no acceptable answer. Bim need to leave to pick the girls up from school and Eva also busy. They go do what they need to do, but I just sit and think some more.

My good friend Bim angry. I think, to her, Debbie as evil as Ira says she be. This Debbie way of attacking Ana. She convinced that Dessa nothing more than a weapon she use to do harm to us and most especially to Ana.¹⁰⁹

Eva not want to accept this way of seeing things, but she aware that the presence of Dessa here more complicated than she think before.

The idea of making Dessa a 'niece' not a good one. Bim say that make Dessa a risk to us, a source of gossip to others. Ana protects her mother. Dessa have no reason to be that loyal.

¹⁰⁹ Here we have more of the typical pronoun confusion, as there are two different 'she's' in the sentence. The same problem will continue throughout CiCi's musings.

Eva think Bim exaggerating this. Maybe she do, but it a risk. She an outsider, a boarder, in our home. Maybe it not be a problem in the beginning, but who know when a small problem we not notice create a bigger problem.

I think all, except Eva, agree. Thirteen too young to start in our beds. But what the options? I push Ira into saying yes. Now I see so many problems. I want to go back to Ira and ask that we look for a relative again!

But it not just that thirteen too young. It that we should not have anyone here close to the age of Ana. As she grows older, so will the age when we could even consider accepting someone.

And that gets me back to the comment of Debbie about Ana. Did she see this? Did she see the issue of Ana getting older and what that mean to us?

When Bim gets back, I think I need to talk with her again. We all love Ana, but her presence here now affecting all of us in a way none knew would happen. Maybe Debbie right about Ana and Ira? Maybe I need to talk to Ira first.



Yes, until she leaves home, whenever that happens and if that happens.

Ira! You know this? Why not tell us? Why you not tell me when I ask before? Why you not tell us all? Why we have to guess your reason?

What did you want me to tell Bim? That her having her daughter here will, in the future, have an impact on all of us? Why would I want to do that? I don't want anyone else anyway. But even if I did, Bim's need to raise her daughter is far more important. I am, sure as hell, not going to have this discussion with Bim now! No good will come of it. And telling one of you is normally the same as telling all of you. Nothing remains a secret for long in this house. So if I tell any of you, Bim will learn it and then Ana will learn it too. I do not want that on Ana's shoulders.

I think there no choice. Ana will know. If Dessa stays, she know. No matter what we do, Ana know why we do it.

So it is an 'if' now? You pushed me to say OK she stays and now you say 'if'?

Better that you tell me why you say she should not stay in the beginning! Then, I not need to say 'if' now. Ira, you are wrong in hiding things from me. OK, so you not lie. But hiding not good. You should have told us all why you think it a bad idea even before you say she can stay until we find where she can go.

But I thought it would be a short time and no harm done. Yes, looking back that was a mistake. But once she was here and Ann could not find a place for her to go, I just felt jammed up. I didn't want Ana to learn about this. That's why I 'hid it.'

She will learn now. No choice.

You had better talk to Bim about that decision first, CiCi. I'm not sure it will be a pleasant conversation.

Bim already thinks Debbie did this to hurt Ana. This no good. Before I talk to Bim, I will talk to Ann. Maybe there is some idea she not think of.

OK by me. See what you can do. But... you said Bim had left to pick up the kids? What if she has told them that Dessa can stay?

Shit!



Bim, what you tell the girls about Dessa staying.

Wala. Walang halaga.¹¹⁰

Mabuti.¹¹¹

Bakit?¹¹²

I go over the entire conversation I had with Ira. I was ready for Bim to be angry, but she thinks Ira's actions were right. In my friend's eyes, Ira is a hero who is protecting her daughter. I guess that is exactly what he was doing. He hid things from us to protect Ana.

¹¹⁰ Nothing. No value. [Tagalog as both girls are Tagalog speakers.]

¹¹¹ Good. [Tagalog.]

¹¹² Why? [Tagalog.]

This mean Dessa not staying?

Not clear, yet. I will meet with Ann. Maybe go back north with her.

Older face, better answer?

Perhaps. People know and respect Ann here, but they not know her up north.

You better tell Eva of the change! Maybe she will tell Dessa.

Eva in Tacloban. I texted her. She knows the plan changed. She ask why. I tell her I explain when she returns. ... This so complicated. All I want a simple life!

How this a simple life? All this land, this house, all of us with all of our children. Tell me, friend, how this ever a simple life? You want simple? Live in a bahay kubo¹¹³; wash clothing for enough pesos for rice. That, friend, a simple life.

¹¹³ Bamboo frame hut with a grass roof, until the grass wears thin and scrap corrugated steel sheeting covers what remains of the grass.

Ann and Cincer have left for Northern Samar. Dessa is aware that they have gone and the why of it. No one is aware of the flip-flop in our plans for Dessa.

On the Dessa/Debbie issue nothing has changed. Debbie is still being weird towards the girl. Ana has not a clue as to that which brews around her. Bim isn't going to say anything. Eva has been warned to keep her mouth shut and she seems to be OK with that.

I turn on my laptop to seek a diversion from the craziness of my current life to find an email waiting for me. It has been in my inbox for a few days.

Ira,

Tom insists we go the Philippines. He say he want to learn about my life before I meet him. Many of our Phil/Am friends tell him he is being rude to me because he not understand. This true, but I not want us to go. It a bad idea.

But he also say he want to find you. You didn't answer his email and he think you just not getting emails where you live. How I tell him different?

Maybe it better for you if he not make noise looking for you when we get there. Maybe it better if you tell him where you are. What you think?

Elena

I open up Tom's email, the one I never answered and click to reply. I tap on the BCC tab and insert Elena's email address.

Tom,

Nice to hear from you. Sorry I am so slow in replying to your email. I rarely check email these days!

It would be nice to see you again and here, this time, on my side of the world. I live in Samar close to Tacloban. So if you are coming this way we can pick you up at the Tacloban airport. I am sure Elena can explain what you need to know about what I just said. You will need my cellphone number here as that is the way folks around here communicate. Once again, just give the number to Elena. She will know how it works once you get to the Philippines. My number is 0955-24x-xxxx.

Do you know when you might make it here?

Ira

Jessa is standing over my shoulder as I press SEND. She has a confused look on her face.

Why he think you with a Muslim?

She deserves an answer and the rest of the gals will need to know, but Cincer was involved with this back in the beginning and she needs to be here. Of course, she just left with Ann and will probably not be back for a few days.

I will explain, but CiCi needs to be here. Can you wait until she returns?

Of course. Thank you. How you know him?

He was a neighbor from when I lived in the USA. He has a Filipina wife.

She nice?

Not sure I know the answer to that. I can tell you she is smart.

Jessa giggles. *Ira, we all smart! How long they married?*

About six years, I guess.

They have children?

I don't know. They didn't six years ago.

Why you wait so long to answer him?

That will have to wait until CiCi returns. OK?

Sige¹¹⁴.



We talked to so many people, Ira, my love. So many know of the family. But after the assassination they all leave. No one knows where. Some say they in hiding. Maybe they fear more killing if they not hide. If someone knows, they not tell. A priest asks us why we looking for them. We tell him, and he say, better for the child to not find this family. Her life might be in danger too.

So she stays, I guess. Bim needs to hear all this. We need to talk to her. I think before any others hear the news, I may need to talk to Ana.

OK.

¹¹⁴ All right.

There's one other thing. It might not happen soon, but I don't know. Do you remember a Filipina from where I used to live in the USA? Her name is...

Elena. Yes, I remember her. She dangerous smart.

Well, I need you to read some emails.

It doesn't take but fifteen minutes for the emails to be read and I'm ready to suggest we have a sit-down with all here to discuss fall-out from this, but Cincer sees it differently.

Ira, maybe they come. If they do, we tell everyone. No need until then. Maybe they not come. Many say they will come but many do not really come.

OK, but Jessa read Tom's email and my response to it. She is confused and wanted to know why he thinks I am with a Muslim. I told her that I wanted you to return first.

It's OK. I will explain to her. No problem.



Bim, it looks like there's no choice unless we just kick Dessa out. There's no relative for her to go to. To the extent that much is true, the kid is without anywhere to go. I gather the father is still missing. I don't like it, but I'm not sure putting her out on her own is acceptable.

What we do about my Ana?

I think I need to talk with her, with you there. You OK with that?

Yes. ... OK. ... What you going to do with Dessa? She like a niece or in our beds?

I think that depends on the girl, don't you?

Yes, true. Who you talk to first?

Hub, good question. Maybe, Dessa first. Then maybe the rest of us with the exception of Ana. After that I need to have that chat with Ana.

When you do this?

I want to speak with Reyna and Eva now. Once they are OK with it I'll find Dessa. After we talk to the others, I'll let you know when I'm ready to sit down with Ana.

OK. So, everything a secret at each step?

Yes, I think that sounds right. CiCi, do you have anything to add?

Bim... good friend, I really tried to find a place for Dessa. I think the priest, he know more than he admit, but he clear. It is dangerous for Dessa to be there. I think, knowing that, there no choice. It not what we wanted, truly. But it what we found. Sorry, good friend.

Bim just nods her head. There's no animosity between the two, but there is sadness.



You two are the youngest of all of my gals but, when it comes to Dessa, you are years older. The two of you know what it means to join us. It appears that Dessa will be staying here. Exactly how is not clear. If she is to join us, as you two did, there's a question of who she will be with in the beginning. Everyone else here is more than twice the girl's age. So I come to the two of you. I really don't know if she really wants to become family, and I sincerely don't want that to happen. I want you both to strongly support a decision to be treated like a niece, like Ana. But if she insists on joining, she needs to take the first steps. Are you willing to be her partners?

Clearly, Eva has more information about this matter than does Reyna. It's not exactly a surprise to me, though it is to Reyna, when she asks, *Does Ana join too?*

No, absolutely, no.

Reyna looks to me, hoping for an explanation. I'm not offering one. Eva, seeing the impasse, rubs Reyna's back, leans in and suggests, *Friend, I will explain later.* Reyna, being mollified a bit, accepts the offer, and both gals tell me that they will guide Dessa if needed.

As I'm exiting the room, I hear, from Eva, a quiet, *Thank you, Ira.* I don't turn around but nod my head in response as my hand

touches the door knob. I've no idea if she notices the nod. It was more one of resignation than it was of acknowledgment.



Dessa is watching a teleserye¹¹⁵ with Lorie and Nelia. I whisper in her ear, *When this is over, please find me. I have news.*

Her eyes betray a bit of fear and maybe concern, but all she does is quietly indicate her acknowledgment.

About a quarter of an hour later, she finds me in my study. *What news, Po?*

You get your wish. You will stay with us.

Really? You not looking for my relatives?

There are no relatives to find. We looked. So this will be your home. But now you must make a decision. No one can — or should — make this decision for you. And this is a major choice you need to make. I am going to explain it as well as I can. I will answer any and all questions you may have now and in the coming days. I do not want you to make a decision today. You can take a few days, or a few weeks, or a few months. There's no pressure on you to choose, but in the end you will need to make a choice. In both cases you get to live here. There's no difference in that. Do you understand what I have said so far?

Opo.

OK. You are only half a year older than Ana. I treat Ana in a way that is part Tito¹¹⁶ and part Tatay¹¹⁷. Do you understand what I mean?

Opo.

For all the other gals here, I'm their Asawa¹¹⁸. So I'm the Asawa for eight gals. That's pretty crazy, but it's the truth.

I know this, Po. We all know this.

What you may not know is that my gals are also married to each other.

¹¹⁵ In the US this type of TV program is called a soap opera.

¹¹⁶ Uncle.

¹¹⁷ Father.

¹¹⁸ Husband.

I not understand.

Dessa, do you understand that sex is part of marriage?

Opo.

So when I say my gals are married to each other and to me, and sex is part of marriage, can you understand now?

Oh! ... Truly? Even Eva?

Yes, even Eva and Reyna.

I not know.

There's no reason why you would, since you share a room with Ana. So, Dessa, you get to choose. Do you want to be like Ana or like the others? ... I don't want your answer now. I want you to think about it. You may not talk to Debbie or anyone outside this house about this matter, but you may ask questions to all of us here.

Po?

Yes?

Po? What do you want?

Dessa, I wanted you to live with a family where you didn't have to make this crazy choice. But that is not possible. ... You are a lovely girl and a sweet one. I like you a lot. But you are very young. ... I'll accept your choice, but I really hope you choose to be like Ana. ... You will get the same good education Ana gets, so all the benefits you may want to get will happen if you are my second niece. If you choose to be like my other gals, you will forever be an asawa to me and to the other wives. You will have my true love. I'll treat you with the respect and dignity that each of my gals receive. There will be no difference. ... If you choose to be like Ana, I'll see you through school and then you will have the skills to make your own way in the world, finding your own mate and building your own life. ... If you choose to be like Ana, and not an asawa, this will always be your home and you will never be kicked out, just like Ana. And in that, I'll be happy and proud.

Po, each sound nice to me. How am I to choose?

How about if you start by talking to Eva and Reyna. If you decide to join my gals, as they will be the ones to guide you, and they are my youngest loves, they are a good place to start in your search for an answer.

When must I decide?

Do you really need me to set a date?

Yes, please.

OK, then it's Holy Week.¹¹⁹

Very good, Po. Thank you.



Family meetings like this are rare. In point of fact, half of them already know what is to be said. And Ann has a pretty good idea. I could have just sat down with Jessa, Lorie, Nelia and Ann, but I think this is better. Better that all of them feel they are working with the same set of facts.

Some of you already know this, but now all must know. Dessa is staying.

I see only one surprised face.

But how she stays is not clear. She is only six months older than Ana. And as such, I gave her the option of living in this house as Ana does. Or she may choose to live in this house as you eight do with me. I find neither option perfect, but there are no other options. ... It's up to Dessa to make that choice. She has been told about how we live with each other. She has been told to ask questions of anyone here in the house, and of no one outside this house. ... Be honest with her, but you should know that it's my hope she will choose to be a niece to me. Still, the decision must be hers alone. We cannot tell her what to do.

Lorie is squirming and needing to talk. I nod to her. *When does she come to me?*

That's up to her, but I've asked our two youngest ones here to be her initial guides. If I understand your question, it will be after them. Others are chortling, and Nelia lightly punches Lorie on the arm, while calling

¹¹⁹ The week preceding and through Easter Sunday.

her a sex-crazed maniac. *It OK, Ri, I will take care of you until the child is ready to be molested!*

Jessa wants to know, *When she to make the decision?*

By Holy Week.

That a long time from now.

Yes, but she is so young. I don't want to rush her. Still, she can choose any time before that. That is the end date.

Ira, she is rooming with Ana now. Should we change that?

Eva, ask her with whom she would like to room while she makes her decision. She may decide to stay in Ana's room and that is fine. ... You can tell Dessa that she may choose to explore all possibilities — other than with me — while she makes up her mind. Exploring will not be evidence of choosing. ... OK, anything else?

Bim wants to know, *What happens, Eva, the next time Debbie comes to you?*

I will tell her to leave us alone, Ate. She is a trouble maker. I know that now.

Anything else? No? OK... Bim, CiCi, with me please.



Ana, this is not a discussion I want to have with my wonderful niece. And it's not about you. It's about Dessa. I have asked your mother to be with me, because I feel uncomfortable discussing it without her here. Your tita is here because we love you so much. Child, you know why Dessa is here. And you know we have been looking to find her relatives, so she could go there. Right?

Uncle, she doesn't want to go. She wants to stay here.

Yes, I know. Tell me. If she stays here, did you think she would be like you, a niece to me, or like your tita Reyna, an asawa to me?

Like tita Reyna, Uncle. How she be a niece?

I glance over at Bim, whose face is one of amazement.

Well, that's a very good question. Here's a fact and two questions. Dessa is only six months older than you. Do you think being that young is a good time to become an asawa? And, how will you feel about me if your friend, pretty much your age, is my asawa?

It is weird, right? But I am not the only one not your asawa. I have four cousins and two sisters. None of them will ever be your asawa. We are family. Dessa is not family. So it is different.

Your mother is blessed with a very smart daughter! However, Dessa has been given a choice. She may live here like you or become an asawa. She has until Holy Week to choose. If she speaks to you, please answer her questions honestly but don't tell her what to do. OK?

I understand, Uncle.

Bim do you have anything to say?

You should have asked her earlier. I have a very smart daughter!

Fair enough. CiCi? Anything?

If I ask, my friend will be angry.

Is there something not clear to you?

Maybe.

Is it important?

Maybe.

Then you need to ask it.

No, friend Bim will be very angry.

Bim, you say your daughter is smart. So please allow CiCi's question without anger.

Ask your question, friend. I promise. No anger.

Ana, if it allowed, do you want to be an asawa too?

Bim gasps. Ana's brow scrunches up and looks at CiCi, then me, and then her mother. Is such a thing possible?

CiCi, having opened the door this far, feels the need to get a final answer. *Little one, if it was, would it be your choice?*

I afraid my mother will be angry.

If your mother is not angry, would it be your choice?

Uncle? You want?

I take a good long look at Bim, who is sort of quietly freaking out. I really need an answer to CiCi's question. Not so anything can be consummated, but to understand what is inside Ana's head.

I want to know what you want Ana. What do you want?

I never think this is possible. Maybe, I can think about this until Holy Week? I will be thirteen then, Uncle.

OK, do you need to talk to anyone while you decide?

Maybe I can ask CiCi if I need?

Cincer tells her she can, and off Ana goes to get ready for bed. Tomorrow is a school day.

I look at CiCi. *Why did you think to ask that?*

Well, it was what Debbie asked. Remember? I always thinking it is not possible. And then when I hear Ana tonight, I think, maybe I am wrong. Why not see if it possible. ... I am not sure she will end up wanting it. But better to ask her and know the truth.

What if Debbie reads the family dynamics better than I do? Nah, no way. Granted, that's a scary thought, but it just can't be the case. She's just a bomb thrower. The question to Ana tonight would never have come up if it had not been for the combination of Dessa and Debbie's comment, and the fact that we couldn't find the relatives.

As I approach my study, there's something of a committee at the doorway. Jessa is there with a bowl containing some mango float¹²⁰ for me, and next to her are Lorie and Nelia.

Once I'm in possession of the bowl and a spoon, Jessa withdraws, leaving the sex-maniac and her Jesus-loving partner.

Finish that, Ira. We have a need!

Why the rush, Ri? We have all night.

I tell her the same thing, Ira.

Why don't you both give me about an hour? I want to check my email, and I might need to respond to a person or two, if I have received what I think I might. I'll be in the bedroom by nine-thirty.

Nelia is happy to comply and Lorie does so grudgingly, reminding me to not be late as she walks out of the room.

The mango float is melting a bit, and I give it my undivided attention until the bowl is emptied of the concoction. Just as I'm about to set the bowl down and turn to the laptop, which I had turned on as I worked the float, Jessa appears, takes the bowl from my hand and tells me she will be back in a minute to see what type of email responses I may have received.

There are two emails waiting for me in my inbox. I open the one from Elena first.

¹²⁰ A frozen, multi-layered dessert of graham crackers, dairy and sliced sweet mangoes. Not sure why they call it a float.

The Ark

Ira,

You write a good letter to Tom. He is happy to read it. It is good you not mention the Muslim thing. He come to me and ask about the phone number. I explain to him that this how we dial in the Philippines. I not tell him how to change it to dial from the US. You very smart about that.

Do I have your permission to contact Cincer? You still in Santa Rita?

We will come after New Year's. I tell Tom, it not a good time to go there now. Too much chance of typhoons plus the airfare too high. If we wait until middle of January or February both problems disappear. I will let you know when we are coming.

Elena

I hit reply.

Elena,

Yes, you may contact Cincer. Your advice about travel dates is smart. We will be beyond traditional typhoon season and the weather will still be cooler than it will be in March.

Ira

Clicking on send, I move on to the second email.

Hi Ira!

Great to get your email. I understand not checking email too often.

I did ask Elena about the phone number. It sure doesn't work like numbers here work. She tells me we will have to purchase a phone once we arrive there as our phones here are locked to AT&T and will not work there without huge bills. Elena says it will be far cheaper just to buy the phones once we get there. It seems nuts to me, but she swears it will be fine.

From what Elena says, I guess we will get hotel accommodations and a car rental in Tacloban. The map shows me that we will be on the wrong island, but she swears that this is the best way forward.

We plan on making the trip sometime after January 15th. See you soon.

Tom

I click on reply and then add Elena's address to the BCC line.

Hi Tom,

Elena is right on all counts. If you need us to make hotel reservations for you (you may get a better rate if a local Filipina makes it), we will do so.

See you in a few months,

Ira

I send the email and sit back.

Jessa has been hanging back quietly. I gather she read what I wrote.

I will tell CiCi to expect a text from Elena. Why you think she want that?

I don't know, but we will find out soon enough.

You talk to Ana?

Yes.

She OK with Dessa. She not upset?

She's fine with it. It was a surprise to me how OK she was with it. I guess I have a lot to learn.

Ana's a good girl, good and smart.

Yes, she is. And full of surprises, too.

That gets a look from Jessa that goes unaddressed, as I shut the PC down and leave the study for my bedroom.

Moving from Jessa to Lorie and Nelia is moving from the land of Cebuano speakers to the land of Ilonggo speakers. When they interact with each other, it's in English and I know what is occurring; when they are alone as these two in my bedroom are, the mother tongue is spoken.

And so it is now, as I enter the bedroom. They don't change to English, or much acknowledge my presence, as the dialogue continues. They are not intentionally being rude. It's just that this is the way they are most comfortable communicating and, now that they have the chance, they will just about always grab it.

Care to share what you two are so deeply concerned about?

Nelia says it is wrong that only one is added. It is not right. I say there is no real rule about pairs. That is just in her head. What do you think?

I agree that there is no real rule about pairs. I know all who got added have been in pairs before, but that is just dumb luck. Still, it isn't a sure thing that Dessa is joining, and it isn't sure that, if she does that she will be the only one to join. Nothing has been determined.

I may have said more than I should have, because a very animated Nelia asks, *Who the other?*

There is no other right now.

Yes, but who the other that may be later?

Oh, Nelia, I was just making an offhanded comment. There is no one now.

But you know something. Who?

If there becomes a 'someone,' you will know who. Until then there is no 'who.'
Tell me, Nelia, did Noah's children also get produced in pairs? ... I ask because you are the only one who has given me two children. Shouldn't I have sixteen, or don't children come in pairs like partners?

Lorie takes the bait.

Yes! Good. It is my turn tonight. Nelia assists, but you give me the present!

Sounds right to me. How would you like to start, my sweet little breeder?

Friend, you suck him hard and finger my pussy. He kisses me and plays with my breasts. When he is hard enough, you stop that so he can fuck me and you suck my breasts.

And off to the races we go. It starts pretty much the way Lorie said, except that while kissing Lorie and playing with one of her breasts, I have my other hand on the back of Nelia's head as she gives me head. And Nelia definitely is doing a fine job in that regard.

We must be getting to Lorie as well, because she is panting and gasping.

I'm truly rigid now, and enjoying this immensely, but Nelia disengages. I gather it's time to plunge into Lorie, who, from the sounds she is making, is more than ready for the main event.

It takes no effort to slide into to Lorie. Her cunt is awash in her own fluids. The only sounds from her are grunts as I slam down hard looking for the bottom. She has her legs as wide as she can get them. One hand is on my back. I think her other hand is on the back of Nelia's head, as Nelia sucks on a tit.

With my free hand, I'm fingering Nelia. All three of us are in motion. The bed creaks from our activities. Nelia is flooding my hand with her fluids. Lorie has my loins soaked. The sheets are wet as I pound and pound Lorie's cunt.

She has been the last to give me a child. She so wants to give me another before anyone else does. I know it intellectually and right now I know it physically. She wants this in every way there's to want. Her body convulses beneath me. She is wailing with desire. Those desperate sounds tug on me. I know what she needs from me. My old body, not near what it once was so long ago, does all it can to give her what she so wants. It floods cum into her. She gasps, I howl.

And we are done. What was in motion is now at rest. So much for I. Newton.



Elena texts me.

I figured she would. What did she want?

She want to know if you have any 'underage' loves here.

What did you tell her?

I tell her, there are none. It the truth.

OK, I guess it's the best answer and it may still be the answer when they come.

You know you may have two young ones when they are here, right?

Oh, I really don't think Bim will allow that to go through with Ana, no matter what Ana might fantasize. I just don't see that happening. I can't conceive of bedding Bim's daughter. Can you?

Maybe, yes. I am not sure. I am also not sure about Dessa. From what Eva tells me, Dessa is not as sure about this as Ana thinks she is.

So Dessa talked to Eva?

More than that. She stay with Eva and Reyna last night.

How do you mean 'stayed with?'

Yes, that way. She try with them.

Well, shit, that was fast. How did it go?

Eva not sure. Nothing truly bad. But the girl is shy. Maybe it OK. Maybe the girl not want now. Maybe we will learn more tomorrow.

Did Elena want anything else?

Oo, she ask how many here, what the house like, how much land we have, how we use the land. She ask if you really good to us. What you like. She ask who else here she can text. I talk to Ann and to Jessa. Both say OK so I give Elena the numbers. ... Ira, she a US citizen now. You know that?

No. Well, maybe. I think she might have mentioned that in an email.

Oo, she will become a Dual before they come here.

Dual?

Dual citizen. She give up her Philippine citizenship to become a US citizen but then she can take an oath with our government and you are a Dual citizen. Both passports.

I see.

Yes with Dual, she can buy land here. I think she interested in that.

Here, as in the Philippines or here as is Santa Rita?

I think maybe where she comes from but I not know. I ask her, I say, 'Ate, you afraid your husband will want other girls now if he visit us?' She laugh and say, 'Let him buy the land I will own. Let him build the house I will own. Maybe I will not care. I not know, but I not know if he will want more girls. He not even know it is possible.'



Ira, Ana asks that you pick the girls up from school today.

Is there some reason why she doesn't want you to pick her up like you always do? Has something gone wrong, Bim?

We not fight, or anything, but Dessa and Ana were whispering all the way to school this morning. I not hear what they say. When they get out of the car, she kiss me on the cheek and asks me this. That all I know.

OK, and it may not be about Ana. CiCi told me that Dessa was with Eva and Reyna last night. Eva is not sure how it went.

Oh! I not know.

Yes, I figured that might be the case. OK, I'll get the kids this afternoon.



Elena texts me. You know this?

Yes Ann, CiCi told me she gave Elena your cell number. What did she want?

She ask how many of us? How many children? If there any she call the underage girls. I ask what she mean underage. We have daughters, they are young. She say she mean lovers. I say there none. Right? None now?

Yes, still none now.

Good I say right. She ask about land. A lot about land. CiCi tell her I do land work.

She interested in buying land?

I think, yes. I ask her why she not want land near her people. She say, bad idea. Maybe like me.

Could be. She ask you to find some land for her?

Yes, she say she will look with me when she comes in January.

How it going with Dessa?

Not sure. May know more later today.

OK, see you dinner time. ❤️❤️❤️



Elena texted me.

I'm not surprised, Jessa. What did she want?

She ask how many underage girls are here. I not know what she mean so I say there seven. She say how old, so I tell her Ris2x, Mac, and Leeni are four. And before I can tell her more, she stop me and say, she means lovers. I tell her there not any. That OK?

I'm smiling. I can just imagine the other end of the exchange. Yes, that is fine. She ask anything else?

She ask how I run the house. I tell her there are eight of us. She say she know, but CiCi tell her I run the house. I tell her there are five of us who take care of the house. Maybe I am the organizer, but we share the work. I am no one's supervisor.

That all?

She ask about you. I tell her you are fair to us and a good man. That all. ... Ira, Reyna say Dessa with her last night. You know this?

Yes. I hear it was Reyna, Eva and Dessa.

Oo. Reyna say Dessa not sure. She shy and maybe scared. You know this?

I heard shy. I didn't hear scared. That is new.

Reyna not sure. She say it a guess. Ira, she say Ana ask her if she can visit another night. You know this?

No... No, Jessa I didn't. What happened?

My Reyna surprised. She say Ana should ask you. It will be your decision. She cannot make such a decision. You OK with Reyna?

Reyna did perfectly. And in a way, so did Ana. I will speak with both of them. No one needs to be worried. We just need to sort this out. All is OK.

Good, I will tell her now. She worried you will be upset.

The only thing I would be upset about is her being afraid to tell me. I'm not a monster. Reyna is my girl.

True, but I am her Ate. I think an Ate is always important, even when there is a husband.

You're right. I apologize.

No need. I will tell her to talk to you.

OK, but ask CiCi to join me when Reyna comes. She needs to be there. That gets a reaction of surprise. And Jessa, you, Eva and Bim should be there too. That gets a smile.



Reyna, I understand Ana asked you something this morning. Before we get into that, I would like to ask about the timing of that meeting. When was it this morning?

Just before she left for school.

Do you think she had time to talk to Dessa before she made her request?

Yes, because she was with Dessa when she make it.

So Dessa heard her request?

Yes.

Was Dessa happy, sad or nothing special when Ana made the request?

Happy? Maybe?

OK, what did she ask? I want you to try to be as exact as possible.

She say, 'Ate, may I be with you and Eva next?'

What did you say?

I say that this must be up to you. This is not something an Ate can decide.¹²¹ Only the husband of Ate can decide this.

How did she act when you told her this?

She say she will ask you this afternoon. I worry that maybe I am wrong telling her to come to you and not her mother. Bim, do you forgive me?

¹²¹ Yes, technically Niana does not have an Ate (older sister) but the term is also used for an older and respected female. For Niana, Reyna is an Ate.

You did right, friend. Maybe if I not know about something you not know, then it be different. But you do right.

Right, and now CiCi, Bim and I need to tell you and Eva, about our meeting with Ana yesterday. We need to all share information better. This is my fault for not telling you. I am sorry.

Reyna giggles. *Sorry, Ira, but I thought I needed to apologize to you and now you apologize to me. Sort of funny, see?*

I smile. *Yes, I guess I do.*

We spend the next half an hour going over the details of our meeting with Ana, Ana's conversation with Bim this morning and how Dessa was with Reyna and Eva.

In the end, we all know what all the others know, and no one has a clue about what the two young ones are thinking. Jessa suggests that there's a generation gap. I suspect it's more of a chasm.

I also suspect I need to update Ann, Lorie, and, God help me, Nelia.

Following the meeting, I take a few minutes to check my email, but the only new message is from the contractor, giving me a total. I contact the attorney with the PoA, to draft a check out of the Wells Fargo account, and send the contractor the money.

There is no message from Elena. I wonder what she is really thinking. All this texting she has been doing seems a bit excessive.



OK so why did you ask me to be your driver?

Uncle, you tell Dessa she should decide. She should be with Eva and Reyna to help her. Yesterday you tell me to decide, too. You not tell me how to do this, only that if I have a question I cannot figure out I can ask CiCi. If Dessa gets help from Reyna and Eva, why can I not get the same help?

I guess you can, if you are at the same place in your thinking as is Dessa. You and Dessa are not the same. ... Dessa has never been my niece and has no mother who is my wife. ... I thought you would first need to think about your

relationship with your mother, if you become a wife. ... I thought you would have to think hard about if you could change how you saw me. A change from Uncle to loving husband seems to me to be pretty extreme. ... I thought that only then, if you even got that far without saying, bad idea, that you would need Eva and Reyna.

Oh. Well, no, I not need to answer those questions. I talk to mother and ask her if she is angry with me for what I say. She say no, she just really surprised. I know about Ri and her mother. If her mother not sort of crazy you would be OK with it. So, no, I need to find out about the Eva and Reyna stuff.

Really? Did you talk to Dessa this morning about how it went with her?

I tell Ana, Ira. She know what I do with your wives.

Does she know how it felt to you, how you feel about the experience?

Oo. I tell her I scared I not good enough to be accepted. She tell me I am stupid. It not a test, except to make sure I happy with our life together. She say, so long as I happy then I pass. I say, how you know? You not do this. She say she know because it the way it works in the house. I just not know the house good. Is she correct?

Yes, she is correct.

Then I worry for nothing?

I guess you did, yes.

OK, I not need until Holy Week! I decide.

Dessa, make sure. Spend a few more days with Reyna and Eva. Then you need to spend time with all the others. I recommend the next two you spend time with be Ri and Nelia. From each, you will learn and become one of us. Ana, when Dessa moves on to Ri and Nelia, you have my permission to join Eva and Reyna. But sweetheart, will you please wait until you turn thirteen before you join with me?

Ana is laughing. OK, Uncle.

So my next question is, what are we going to do about Debbie? I do not want her knowing what is happening in our home.

Dessa is silent, but Ana suggests, We both call you Uncle from now on. That way Miss Debbie not know we wives. She think Dessa like me... not me like Dessa! OK, Dessa?

Good idea. OK with you, Po?

Yes. It's perfect for me.



Ann, remember when I said in the text that you were right that there were no 'underage' lovers? Well, you were right then, and you will be right for a few more weeks, but Dessa has decided she wants to be a wife. Ana has too, but I asked her to please wait until her thirteenth birthday.

Ana?

Yes.

And Bim?

Ask her. But I guess she is OK with it. Maybe it's the result of almost having Lillian and Ri.

Hub, OK, I guess. Weird though.

It is that.

Who else knows?

Everyone but Ri and Nelia. I will tell them next.

OK. It's going to be really weird when Elena and her husband visit.

Yeh.



The 'who' is Ana.

What! No!

Yes.

You sure?

No, as she has not been with anyone yet and maybe it won't work out, but she has made the request and Bim has said OK.

When she ask?

This morning.

Who she with tonight?

No one. She will be with Eva and Rena after Dessa moves on to you and Ri.

Why?

Why what?

Send Ana to us! No need for the other two with Ana.

Nelia, she can't enter my bed until March. There's no rush.

Why that?

Because she isn't even thirteen yet. That why.

Ambót!¹²² She is ours! Send her! Ha! We have a pair!

We will see. Until they enter my bed and stay, it's only a possible pair. We might have had three in Iloilo if Lillian had stayed with us. Nothing is certain right now. But, OK, go get her and tell her I said OK, but it's up to her if she wants to wait for Eva and Reyna.

I get a kiss, a squeeze and a giggle before they are gone.

I grab a beer and sit down, only to be joined by Bim. I guess I'm sad for her. I feel like I have betrayed my first wife.

I'm sorry, my love. If I had known this day might ever occur, I would never have suggested you bring your daughter here. It's my fault.

Why your fault? It what my daughter want.

It can't be what you want.

I want my daughter to be happy, healthy, safe, educated, and to live a long life. You cannot give her long life. But you do the rest. It is OK. Yes, it surprise me. But it OK.

Do you know she may be with Ri and Nelia tonight?

Ha! No. Truly?

I guess so. Unless Ana says no, it will happen.

¹²² The key word of the phrase *ambót sa imo* in Ilonggo and *ambut nimo* in Cebuano, essentially meaning, 'I don't care,' 'It doesn't matter,' 'Why you ask me,' or 'Whatever'. The term does not exist in Tagalog and *Ewan ko sa 'yo* is used. Nelia is an Ilonggo speaker.

She not tell me. I just talk to her. She happy and she ask you take her to school in the morning. ... So Nelia is happy? A pair again?

Seems so.

You think Ri will make any comments about age? Remember how you were with her?

I don't know if she will, but I clearly am not the same man I was back then. I'm not sure I was wrong then. I'm not sure I'm right now. But I'm clearly different. Ann, Reyna, and Eva were responsible for that in large measure.

Who you with tonight?

Jessa.

Me tomorrow?

Yes. Good.

My beer bottle is empty. It's time for bed... and Jessa, my erstwhile neighbor.

Jessa, another gal I sort of inherited rather than pursued. She glommed on to me and I accepted her because I knew her, liked her and loved her sister.

I meet her in the hallway and we enter the bedroom together. It seems fitting. She is never 'waiting on me' but rather is there with me often, enough just when her presence is needed or desired... or as with the unscripted appearance just when reading an email, it was an opportune moment for her presence. Seeming frequently, to be at the right place and the right moment, her ever-presence in my life is something I now have come to depend upon.

For a while Lorie, was my shadow, but Jessa is hardly that. She is more the concierge to my life. Lorie has become the ever-present tita, and now a mother, roles she relishes. It's Lorie who takes the two oldest of the four-year-olds to Kinder 1¹²³ every day. Jessa is the mother of my three-year-old, Victor. It isn't that she neglects

¹²³ Two years of kindergarten. The child needs to be four by June, which is the beginning of the school year to enter Kinder 1. To enter Kinder 2, the child must be five in June. We have two who entered as Kinder 1 this past June.

him. She doesn't, but her compass is set to my north. In that, there's harmony. If she was this way with the guy she was with six years ago, all I can say is that he blew the best thing he could ever find.

Jessa is not a sex bomb. She doesn't do a lot of coy things. We take clothing off, shower and get into bed. Cell phones are plugged in for the night, hers with an alarm set in case she might oversleep a bit.

She rolls onto my side and runs a hand down my chest. It's not the sexiest of moves, but it feels good. She snuggles her cheek into the hollow below mine, as she rests her head on my shoulder and against my neck, her hand still stroking my chest.

I kiss her forehead and run a hand through her thick black hair. She sighs. She swings a leg over my legs and, ever so slowly, rubs her pudendum against my thigh. Her hand glides down from my chest as she strokes my cock, bringing the old boy back to life.

My hand finds a tit and starts desultory play with the nipple. I'm in no rush. This gentle sexual stimulation is welcome. Just being with Jessa is welcome. I have no desire to 'bring us home,' as it were. Let us dally a while. With all the craziness of life, this safe harbor is welcome.

Jessa actually likes me and I like her. Yes, sure, there's love. But like... now that is, it seems to me, to be the harder thing. It's possible to fall in love with someone you actually don't like. But to intensely like someone as well as love them, well now, that is a sweet thing. I love Nelia, but her Jesus thing drives me a little crazy. Lorie is maniacal about some aspects of the sex life in the family. I love both of them and like both, but not the intense like I have for Jessa.

I know it's hard to explain, but there it is.

We pleasure each other for the better part of an hour, but there does come a time when my cock needs to be taken out for a ride. And ride we do, as I mount my friend, her body giving itself to mine, in harmony, in sync, as we rut, grunt, sweat, ... my cock

slamming repeatedly into her cunt. Her body grasping onto mine. The aroma of her body increasing my desire. My sweat dripping onto her body, onto the sheets. And then, the moment of exquisite pleasure and loss. Cum exits one body to enter another. A task completed, a love restated, a potential promise that may yet be delivered. And to that last, only time will tell.

You are a wonder my love.

No, Ira, it is you who are that. I am lucky.

We are both lucky.

Tulug na, mahal ko¹²⁴.



This is the last time I'm going to take you two to school. If I do it any more, Debbie will know you two are more than my nieces. Do you understand?

I hear amongst the giggles, *Yes, Uncle, twice.*

OK so why did you want me to drive you this morning?

They are nudging each other. Who is to speak? OK, it's decided. It's Ana.

Uncle, can we choose who we are with at night?

Really? ... OK, yes.

Anyone?

Yes.

Even you?

No. Ana, I asked you to wait until you are thirteen.

But Dessa can?

With birth control, yes. But only after she has been with everyone else. No getting pregnant, yet.

¹²⁴ Sleep now, my love.

So Dessa should be with my mother?

Yes.

And I should be with my mother?

Yes, and that is one of the reasons why you should really rethink your decision, Ana. Don't you think it's too weird to be with your own mother?

It is weird, but I will do it. Ri did it. We talked about that last night. You made your wives vote. Mom voted it OK for mother and daughter to be together and she be with them. So we will be OK with it.

My sweet child, there are times that logic has no seat at the table. That was then. That was not her own daughter. None of my wives back then had any emotional connection to Ri or Lillian.

Ri say they had to be with you together. True? So... we need to do the same thing!

Ana, not until your birthday in March. Don't push this.

OK, Uncle. Sorry.

Dessa, is there anything you want to ask.

No. I am good, Uncle. ... Oh! Yes, one thing. What we do if Debbie wants you to take another?

I thought she isn't talking to you.

True, but if she does, what do I say?

I laugh. I know what I want them to tell the woman, but it can't be done. I don't know. I will think about it.

Why you laugh?

Oh, I was just thinking of what I would like you to tell her, but it would be a bad idea.

It evil?

Yes, Dessa, very evil.

The conversation ends as we pull up at the school. The windows on the SUV are tinted and so exactly who is driving cannot be seen easily. But there must be no kisses. The girls get out without a fuss and I drive off. In the future, it needs to be Bim, and not me, behind the wheel.



Bim, I think I need to warn you. Both Dessa and Ana will ask to be with you. I don't think you will have a problem with Dessa, but Ana is a different matter. If you reject her request I will understand. I love you and nothing changes that.

It's the Ri and Lillian thing?

Yes. They were willing. Lillian was the one to propose it. This is different in that way. You are clearly not Lillian.

You said that if they not OK together, then only one could be a wife to you. I remember. I remember what happen. All of it. What you want me to do?

I want you to be honest with your heart. You and I'll be together for years to come. I do not want anything to come between us. Do what you feel is right. It'll be OK with me, so long as we are still together and OK together.

I get a kiss and a thank you. It's all I want.

There are no more emails waiting for me. This checking every day is a pain. I was quite happy to look once a month or so, but this thing with Tom and Elena has me changing my habits.

Jessa and CiCi tell me there have been no more texts from Elena.

I warn all the gals that our two aspirants will be asking for time in their beds and, as they choose to schedule it, I have given my approval.

For the next few days, everything settles out a bit. Oh, there's teasing between the gals about Ana and Dessa, but no issues, no problems. Even the cold shoulder that Debbie has been giving Dessa is discussed. I ask Dessa if it's still a problem. She tells me that Debbie is still behaving coldly toward her, but she just doesn't care anymore. Dessa has decided; it's Debbie's problem, not hers.

None of us have heard anything more from Elena or Tom.

Life returns into its normal routine. Issues of our farm take on primary focus. Ann has been able to get back to her primary job as the wheeler/dealer.

A box containing a cordless five inch angle grinder, a cordless rivet tool and a cordless cut-off saw arrives. They use the same batteries as the ones we bought here, but, man alive, these things feel heavier. Maybe they do sell better quality tools in the USA. We will put them to use. Time will tell if they really last longer.

The little ones, those not yet in school, live lives unaffected by the activities of the rest of us, but I have a bit more time for them these days. I enjoy my children. It's a part of my life here that I, most assuredly, had never even considered as occurring, when I decided to come to the Philippines.

Christmas break arrives and, with it, Dessa and Ana are home when not at the mall in Tacloban watching a movie. Both are pushing for a new iPhone. I'm holding back so far, but the campaign to get the phones continues.

On the Dessa front, I have not been with the girl. I guess she has yet to be with Ann. However, once that is dealt with, I'm expecting a request.

There have been numerous trips to the stores as we get ready for Christmas. This time of year, text messages fly around... please pick up x at the store... when will you be back... where can we find... who do you want to invite... we have been invited to...

It seems I have not noticed a text message, buried below so many others, from Debbie.

Why Dessa call you Uncle? Weird name for a bedmate.

It's a couple of weeks, old but I decide to answer.

That's because she is to be treated like I treat Ana. No different. Another niece.

Later in the day I get a reply from Debbie.

I do not believe you.

I really don't care what you believe. I have not been with the girl. I treat her like I treat Ana.

Well, I told the truth, as it exists today. But that gets me thinking. When did I last check my email? I had been careful to check it every day for a while, but nothing was happening with it, so it fell off the list again.

It arrived four days ago. At least it's not a month old like the first one of Tom's that I opened.

Hi Ira,

Elena and I will arrive in Tacloban on January 17th. She tells me that our visa will be good for a year! The last time I was given a twenty-one day visa. Things must have changed quite a lot in the past few years!

*All the best and Merry Christmas,
Tom*

The guy is sort of clueless. Either Elena didn't explain the visa thing, or he isn't listening. And I don't know if he needs help with a hotel reservation. So I reply, with a BCC to Elena.

Hi Tom,

We are looking forward to seeing you on the seventeenth. As I asked before, do you need help with a hotel reservation? If so, for how many days do you want to stay?

As to the visa, last time you had a tourist visa. This time you will receive a 'balikbayan' visa. That's because you are coming with your Filipina wife who has been out of the country for years. If you were coming alone, you would still get the twenty-one day visa.

*Merry Christmas to you and Elena,
Ira*

The mail is sent, and so that I don't forget, I send out a group text to my gals.

Tom and Elena arrive January 17th.

I have taken care of all the loose threads and am sitting down to lunch, when Lorie sits down next to me.

My nanay want to come for Christmas. OK, I get a ticket for her?

Get a round trip ticket for her. Warn the others. Ana and Dessa are not to be in anyone's bed while Lillian is here. We are to call them nieces. Clear?

Oo. Thank you. I promise, she will not make trouble. She just want to see her granddaughter.

How soon does she want to come?

In two days. I will get a ticket for the twentieth through the twenty-sixth.

OK.

Ann is busy out of town until the twenty-second, so that keeps Dessa out of my bed until after Christmas. It's a Christmas miracle!

I'm sure our Christmas celebrations are like no others. There are twenty of us in the house every day. That makes for a lot of presents under the tree. The really little ones are not old enough to get hyper over Christmas yet, but they will all be crazy by next year.

Lillian is staying focused on Joy, her granddaughter. She tried to upbraid Lorie on childcare just once, but got unloaded on by five of the mommies here. That hasn't happened again. So far, the presence of Dessa as a niece has not been questioned.

She goes home tomorrow, and Dessa is counting the hours. Ann is here and will be here tomorrow night. Dessa has a promise from Ann that the two of them will be together.

I have not heard back from Tom or Elena, so we have made no additional plans. But it seems like Dessa will be in my bed before they arrive. If, and it's a big if, I knew Tom and Elena's visit would be a short one, I would try to persuade Dessa to wait until they leave. At least, I would attempt it. But as Tom gets a BB visa, and as he is retired, it's impossible to guess how long they will stay. Maybe they will write once Christmas is over.



Ira,

Has Tom not written you? He hasn't said a word to me. If you not send me a copy of your last answer, I not know anything.

We stay for two weeks in the Philippines. Not sure how long in Tacloban. Maybe the whole time. I want to see what land Ann can show us. I tell Tom that if we find land, we must stay until paperwork complete.

I texted Ann to get a good hotel room with aircon and hot water for shower. Maybe for four days to start and maybe extend if needed. Hope she will answer soon.

Thank you for explaining about the balikbayan visa. He not really believe me. He think Filipinas are stupid because we do things different.

I want to see your farm. CiCi tells me about it. It sounds wonderful. Your wives are very lucky. There so many! I will meet all. You lucky too. I think they really like you.

Elena.

I wonder what's with Tom. It seems that his fire for Elena has died down a fair bit. I hear from gossip that guys who meet a gal here and bring her back to the States without learning anything of her country get pretty frustrated with their wives.

Some say that those guys who have spent some time in the Philippines, even years before they ever met their wives, like guys who were in the service and stationed here years ago, seem to do better.

I saw some of that first hand, when I visited Tom in his home with Elena that night. True, it wasn't real bad, but if it has gotten worse, it would be sad. From all I can see, Elena has tried to make it work with Tom and genuinely loved him. Has that changed? Is she looking for an escape route? ... One with land and a house back here?

It's not that she is shimmying up to me. It's that she is shimmying up to my gals, to figure out the lay of the land. Is she wondering if living like I do would change Tom for the better for her? Hell, I'm just making wild-assed guesses.

I wish Tom wasn't so sort of shut down about what is going on.

I click on reply.

Elena,

Just read your email. Ann hasn't mentioned anything to me. I will check with her and have her get back to you.

Sorry to hear of your problems regarding Tom. For what it is worth, I have you pegged as super smart. Smart enough that I saw you as dangerous to me back when I was in Kennebec. I don't feel any danger now, but know you to be far smarter than Tom. Is that the real problem? Is he getting defensive because you are smart?

If Tom screws things up with you, he is a fool.

Merry Christmas,

Ira

I find Ann playing cards on the deck outside.

Hey, did Elena text you about getting a hotel room?

As she studies her cards, I get those eyebrows telling me she did get it.

Why didn't you text her back?

Not done yet. When I get the room.

No, sweetheart, you text you receive the message and that you will text back once the room reservation is made.

Why? Waste of pesos.

We can afford it. Text her.

Eyebrows again.

You with Dessa tonight?

Eyebrows.



I'm ready, Ira.

I'm not, and I may not be for a good three years.

What! You say I can be with you. Why you change?

I didn't change, and you can be with me, but in my heart, I wish you would wait.

Oh. No. Bad idea. We do this.

I have no idea why it's a bad idea to wait.

It is. Do not be difficult! All your wives say you are difficult about this.

OK. OK.

We go to your room now?

It's eight in the morning! You just left Ann's room. Don't you think this is a little too soon?

No. We do it now. We do it tonight and again tomorrow. Then I know we OK.

Have pity on an old man!

You not old. Come na.

Dessa has my left arm in both her hands as she drags me down the hallway to my room. I was with Eva last night and I'm not at the top of my game right now. None of this will matter to Dessa.

As my final steps take me back into my bedroom, I catch of glimpse of Jessa looking at me, and then I'm inside the room and the door closes.

I'm not too old? Hell, tell that to my body. Tell that to the old boy. He isn't standing at attention, and I'll be damned if I know if he will salute.

Is Dessa cute? Sure, for a kid, she's dandy. But really, I mean, thirteen? OK, so there are times I can't discern the difference between a kid of fourteen and one of eighteen. So, maybe I'm getting worked up over the number and not the person. I guess it's possible. But how do I split it?

Ira! Come!

She pulls me toward my bed. I don't think she has ever been with a guy before. She won't have a clue about what to do, and I'm lost in action. I swallow hard and come face to face with Dessa. Putting my arms around her, I pull her in for a kiss, only to discover that was the one thing she wasn't expecting.

I put a finger under her chin, lift up her face and try again. Rather than reach the lips, she presents me her cheek.

Dessa, if you can't kiss me, we are not going any farther. It means to me that you really are too young.

Sorry, Po. Your wives, they not kiss me.

They are not replacements for me and they do not do the things I do. Being with them was not training for being with me.

Oh! I not know! I am confused now.

Would you like to stop now? Nothing bad has happened and you can still be my niece. If you want you can still spend times with the gals. That doesn't have to stop.

You want to kiss me? Really? This not a test?

Yes, I really want to kiss you. But, I guess, it's a test, because if you are unable to really kiss me and make me believe it's something you want, then you cannot be a wife to me. Wives should always be happy to kiss their husbands.

As in a real marriage?

*In all ways other than the law, this **is** a real marriage. We do not play as if we are married. I'm truly married to eight gals. Each one of them knows it. Do you want to stop for now and ask them? If you want, we can restart tonight.*

I believe you, Po. No need to stop. ... Po, when I marry you, this mean it true? It mean I have a husband to love me?

Yes. It means those things.

OK, kiss me. I am ready now.

I lean forward again and this time I find lips seeking my lips, arms around the back of my neck and tears running down a cheek. There's a hunger in her I feel expressed in these kisses. These are meaningful acts. Dessa is not playing a role, she is who she is, a very young girl who has met her betrothed and is giving her heart to him.

This is not an arranged marriage between families. It was arranged, I guess, by Debbie, though I hope she never learns the truth of it. But the reason for the arrangement, I suspect, was to create a seed of discontent between Bim and me. In that, Debbie failed. The result is a sweet, blissful connection that should never have been.

Dessa is mewling as the kisses continue. I slow us down and get my hands on her blouse in an effort to seek the removal of the same. Dessa seems to grasp what I'm attempting and makes cooperative adjustments to our physical connection. Slowly the blouse is removed. I'm about to start on her bra, but she moves to remove my shirt, button by button, until the shirt is on the floor.

I remove her bra and unbutton the top of her shorts. She struggles with my belt, and I stop what I'm doing to assist her in that effort.

Slowly, all our clothing is removed. We are an incongruous pair, though she doesn't seem to notice it. I cup her small breast, encasing all of it in the palm of my hand. This time it's she who pulls me in for a kiss. And it's a very nice kiss, as we stand skin to skin.

We find our way onto the bed. For all my worry about my old soldier, he is standing perfectly erect. My hand finds her mons and my fingers hang lower, encasing her entire vulva in my grasp. I have not penetrated by any digit her sacred place. Surely she will allow it, but instead, with a firm grip on her female parts, my lips seek hers again. She reaches down, holding my cock with a firm grip of her own.

I guess I could ask her if she is sure about what is yet to come, but I suspect it's a meaningless question. She has already communicated her readiness.

My index finger probes her passage, seeking intelligence of moisture. I find plenty. Lifting myself up and over her, I center my cock over her labia and push in, slowly but steadily. The passage is tight but her fluids provide the lubricant. I reach bottom and wait. Waiting for Dessa to come to terms with my presence inside her.

She pumps against me. I'll take that as a signal that she is ready to engage with the main event. I back out a bit and push in. No problems, no complaints. I pull back and run in harder. All good as the fucking takes on its own logic. I'm no longer thinking of a kid of thirteen. I'm experiencing my partner as we make love.

As if a switch has been flipped, that is how I see her now. She is my partner.

Her face is alight with joy. There's no pain. There are no grimaces. She isn't doing it for the Gipper. She is here because she wants to be here. She feels the pleasure that comes with the decision. It has been her decision and this is her joy. We fuck on and on. Sticky body slapping against sticky body.

I'm feeling bad that she might be getting sore. But she isn't saying there's any soreness. All there is, is that expression of joy on her face. I'm looking right at that lovely face when cum erupts from my balls and enters Dessa.

OK, husband, make sure you are here and ready for me tonight. ... And husband... that was so great. Thank you for loving me.

I'm looking down at her. My cock is still inside her though it has wilted. All I find the words for is, *Oh Dessa*. And I kiss her forehead.

I roll over onto my back and off Dessa. She rolls onto me, planting kisses all over my face, before a final, *That was great!*

She gets up grabs her clothing and, naked as you please, walks out of the bedroom.

I'm just lying naked on my newly mussed up sheets, head on a pillow, and looking at the ceiling, when Jessa enters.

You OK?

Yeh. OK.

Want to talk about it?

You mean because I didn't want to be with her?

Jessa laughs. *Of course.*

Actually, there's not a lot to say. She's mine now. She committed herself and I accepted. It is done. Thirteen is simply a fact of biology and nothing more between us.

I met her in the hall.

Oh?

Oo. She looked at me and said, 'I know now.'

That all?

Oo. You know what that mean?

You will have to ask her. I could guess but it would just be a guess.

Really? I know what it mean, Ira. I feel the same thing when I know we will share a real love. That this not a game. You not know that?

I wasn't sure.

Yes, she is yours now. I know this.

She's coming back to me tonight. How about you join us?

Good. Thank you.

Jessa...

No, my love, do not say anything. I already know. We are good for each other. ... Take a shower and get dressed. I will make the bed.



Showered and freshly dressed, I enter the sala to find all but CiCi and Dessa sitting there, each with an expectant look on her face. If they were expecting something momentous, my *Where's CiCi?* was not it.

It did break the ice, though, and Bim found good reason to laugh before offering, *Dessa grabbed her and, Ira, I am not making this up, we all hear her say to CiCi, 'You the top wife here. I need to talk to you.'*

What, in God's name, did CiCi say?

She say, 'Thank you for the promotion. But I think it is Jessa.' Jessa say, 'No, the child is right.' So then CiCi say, 'What you need to talk about.' Dessa say, 'Not here, please.' And then they leave.

I look around the room and ask, *You all hear this?*

I get a roomful of eyebrows. Bim gives me a curious look and asks, *What she need to talk about?*

I have no idea.

She one of us now?

Yes, absolutely, yes. Do we have any buko juice in the ref¹²⁵?

You want?

Yes, and if it wasn't so early I would add some rum with it. And with that, I plop down on a couch between Lorie and Reyna, as Jessa gets me a glass of it.

The gals are too smart to ask for details of what transpired in the bedroom. I would never talk about that, and they know it. It's really just more of what Jessa wanted to know earlier. They want to know if I'm OK.

That topic gets exhausted soon enough, and the topic of what Ann has been working on gets our attention. There are some major land acquisitions occurring, but the buyers are hidden inside a shell company. Ann has been digging to find out what she can. It looks like the shell companies are hiding majority ownership of Chinese investors. That would make it illegal, as foreign ownership is limited to forty percent of the total stake. The balance must be owned by Filipinos.

Ann has been warned to be very careful, as there are powerful and dangerous individuals behind the scenes in this business. I wonder if Ann might be better off staying clear of this. She doesn't want to back off, but knows it might be the prudent thing to do.

It's not that she might get sued. It's that she might get killed. It's a real problem here. People do get gunned down when meddling in such things.

Reyna says she should send what she has through a friend who has friends in the NPA¹²⁶. They tend to operate in Northern Samar, but they are a violent group who might not be afraid of shaking the trees. I want nothing to do with the NPA, but the sentiment of my gals from Panay, Leyte and Samar is that it's a good idea. There's a belief outside of Manila that some in the capital are too chummy

¹²⁵ Instead of fridge it is called a 'ref.'

¹²⁶ New Peoples Army. A Maoist communist Filipino terrorist military group. They have cells throughout the nation.

with the Chinese, and allow a lot of illegal stuff to occur if it's for China. Ann says she will give it some thought.

CiCi and Dessa emerge from their sequestration, and it appears that CiCi needs to speak.

We failed Dessa. Ira made it right, but we really failed. Friends do you bear me? ... You, me, we love Ira and in truth I love you. I think you love me. Correct?

Eyebrows go up.

Every one of us protects each other. Correct?

Eyebrows go up again.

We kiss each other, di ba¹²⁷?

Eyebrows go up again.

But not one of us kiss Dessa. Not one of us show her love. Yes we do sex with her, but not love. Why that? You know the first thing that Ira do? ... He try to kiss this girl. Ha! She surprised. She not ready for this. Ira, he almost end it with her because of this. This our fault. We know Ira love us. Love as much as sex. But we not show this. Maybe we forget it ourselves? Maybe we forget to love Ira correctly? Think of this tonight! I tell you true. I make the same mistake you make. I think about this tonight.

There's silence in the room.

¹²⁷ Is it not so?

I do spend the night with Jessa and Dessa. But while I'm in the room, it's a discussion between the two of them. As they are both Visayan speakers, they could have carried it out in their tongue, but they use English, I assume for my benefit.

I want you to know, just like CiCi say, I failed you. Ira knows I love him truly, but I not show you that love. I make the mistake because I not trust you will love him. I was wrong. I am sorry.

Ate, maybe the others, they have the same reason?

I not know. I only know my heart. Ira say you are truly his. I know now I am wrong. I also know I am wrong because you go to CiCi and tell her we do you wrong. You have my respect for this act. I will always remember it.

And then they kiss. It's as simple as that. The kiss is a real one and lasts a while. I must admit it makes me happy. Jessa is the gatekeeper of my life. She has just shown me that she has accepted Dessa as deserving of access.

The rest of the evening is predictable. I'm inside both of them. We each take care of the others. It's much like what I have on any given day at any time when I'm with two of them. And in the end Jessa gets what cum I still have to offer this evening.

Once the cum has been spent and the lovemaking has concluded, Dessa snuggles into my left side, looks across me and says, *This morning CiCi say you are most important. Tonight it is you and me. What do I not understand?*

Jessa is tongue-tied and unable to answer. I understand. It's a difficult issue for her.

Dessa, maybe I can explain, because I don't think Jessa is comfortable doing so. I think all in this house know that the best brains are CiCi and Ann. Different brains but both are very smart. Smarter than me too. CiCi is also the oldest. In some ways, that makes her senior of all the gals. CiCi had gone the furthest in school until Eva and Reyna graduated. They all have bachelor degrees now. ... But Jessa is the person I depend on the most. She runs the

house and seems to be able to read my mind. I love every gal here. That love for each is true and deep. I'll never turn away from a single one of my wives. I love Jessa no more or less than the others. ... I trust all of my gals. So it's not a matter of trust ... or of love. ... But there's something between Jessa and me that I cannot explain. She is the glue in my world. ... And Dessa, make no mistake, Jessa knows it. She just doesn't want to talk about it.

Dessa looks good and hard at Jessa and says, *Oh.*



Like every New Year here, the firework displays that are created impromptu are magnificent. I know now why the gals wanted me back for the New Year back for 2005. I missed that one but I haven't missed one since.

No matter where you are standing, the fireworks are in a three hundred and sixty degree spray around you and they go on and on for the better part of an hour in heavy display. Some before that and some afterwards, but the intensity of it for that hour is something I don't think you will see in another country.

The first two weeks of January pass pretty quietly. We know Tom and Elena are coming, but it has no impact on our daily activities.

There are no issues at the high school. Dessa is careful to refer to me as Uncle as does Ana. Debbie has broken her code of ignoring Dessa and does engage with her. Dessa is less interested in Debbie's approval than she had been before.

Ana tells me that she heard Debbie ask Dessa if there was any sex activities she engaged in at the house. Dessa, according to Ana, said, *'Not with me. I'm so horny I dream of you eating my pussy. Will you do it now?'* Ana says Debbie just about ran out of the room.

I never told the gals what I would have told Debbie if she tried to make another placement, so I'm surprised as hell that Dessa pretty much read my mind. That was pretty much the idea.

There has been news that is not related to us, but I suspect may be in a way. The NPA has been reported to have killed three politicians in the region. Ann says she doesn't have anything to do

with it, but they were the big players in the China land deal that is now dead as well. Somehow, I suspect that there's some connection to my gals, but there are times it's probably best not to ask too much.

Anyway, the year is 2011, and January seventeenth is tomorrow. Tom and Elena are on the morning flight from Manila.

What will unfold from this is more than a mystery.



I see Tom as he exits the building. I'm not sure I would have recognized Elena. Maybe I just had not spent enough time around her.

The guy looks a bit bewildered. Traveling as far as they have will surely do that to you. But he really looks confused. I have Cincer with me as I greet them.

Hi Tom, Elena, good to see the both of you.

And who be this lovely lady?

Tom, this is CiCi. We have been together for over six years. Come. We will take you to your hotel.

We grab their bags and guide them to our SUV. The hotel is the same one I stayed in when we first arrived here. They, being just a couple, don't need the villa we rented, but their room will be nice.

Would you like to just relax and rest a bit? We can come back and pick you up whenever you want. If you are hungry we can bring you to a nice restaurant or the local MickeyD's if that is what you crave.

They have a McDonald's here?

Sure do.

I'll be damned.

And a KFC. It's a bit better than the ones in the States.

Really?

Yeh, it honestly is, Tom. Of course we do a damned good spread at the house, too. I bet Elena would enjoy that.

Ha! Lots of rice, right?

Sure. This is a rice culture. All of Asia is a rice culture.

I guess. ... Jesus! That guy just came out of nowhere and from your blind side.

Driving here is definitely different from the States. No question about it.

You goina report that fella?

Nothing to report.

They let that shit happen?

They do.

Damn. How can you live in a place like this?

Quite easily. Maybe you'll see why, maybe not. So what is it? Rest or food?

How about McDonald's and then rest for a bit?

OK. And I point the vehicle to MickeyD's.

It's clearly a McDonald's, but inside, there's lots of signage that says McDo. That is confusing Tom. He thinks it's a rip off and not the real deal. He sees offerings of chicken and rice and is convinced this isn't a real McDonald's. He orders a quarter pounder and fries ready to be irate at how it isn't right... but it is right. Now he's really confused. Elena orders a one piece chicken and rice. It's not what I order, but it's what my gals order when they come here, so it's no big surprise to me. Tom is going crazy about how it's just so wrong.

CiCi and Elena are talking to each other in Tagalog. Tom is getting pissed off. I tell the guy to cool it. This is their country and Tagalog is the national language. They have every right to use it.

But it means you don't know what she is saying.

So? If you aren't in the house and Elena picks up the phone you don't know what she is saying either. If you have a good woman, you need to trust her.

When we get up, Tom is looking for the trash containers. There are none in sight. He is furious as I tell him to leave everything on the table. He says that is just wrong and he is about to go on a rant as a young man in a MickeyD's uniform busses our table. We drop them off at the hotel and tell them we will be back at 5PM to bring them out to the house to meet the family. That gets Tom a little confused and a look of excitement from Elena.

Back in the vehicle CiCi unloads. *This Tom is a friend?*

Oh, not much really. I knew him and when he heard I had been to the Philippines he wanted to get together. But, no, he's not a close friend.

He rude. He rude to his wife.

Yes, I noticed that too.

Why you want to help him?

I don't. If we are helping anyone, it'll be Elena.

OK, I agree. She smart and I like her.

You like her because you don't like the way Tom is behaving towards her.

True.



Rested and ready to meet the family?

Sure. Look, Ira, Elena tells me I am acting pretty rude. I guess I am sorry. This is just a lot to deal with all at once.

Yes, well, Tom, this isn't the USA, and the first thing to remember is that you're a guest in their country.

Elena just about told me the exact same thing. I hear you. It's just so similar and so different at the same time.

The drive to the house takes about thirty-five minutes. Tom is in the front passenger seat. CiCi and Elena are in the bench behind us. As we approach my place, Tom let's out, *What the fuck is that?*

That is our home.

How much did that set you back?

About the cost of my house in Kennewick.

No! That has to be far more expensive!

Construction costs here are a lot lower.

As I'll be taking them back to the hotel later, I don't park in the carpark but, rather, below on the concrete pad. The elevator can handle four adults, and so we take the lift up to the sala/kitchen/dining room floor, passing the carpark and the storage area for the lithium batteries.

What's with all those batteries?

We are off-grid. We use solar and wind. We store excess power in the batteries.

Why so high up?

There are flooding issues here.

The lift stops and we exit. Here in the sala are all of my gals. My 'nieces' Ana and Dessa are in the nursery.

What do we have here?

Tom, allow me to introduce you to Bim, Eva, Nelia, Ri, Reyna, Jessa, Ann, and you know CiCi.

Are they friends of your wife? And if CiCi is your wife, why ain't she wearing that Muslim stuff?

I'm not married to a Muslim. These are essentially all my wives. There's another one in the nursery along with two nieces.

You have how many wives?

Eight.

And now Tom turns to Elena. *You knew this! Right from the start, you knew this!*

Yes. I knew.

Why did you lie to me?

Because I not want to cause Ira any problems.

What the fuck are you talking about!

Tom, please, watch your language. ... See all these women. They have all been with him from the beginning, right Ira?

Pretty much.

When you were visiting us it was six years ago?

Six years, one month.

Tom, ask them how old they are now?

Why would I want to do that?

Please, Tom, just ask.

OK, from my left, how old are you.

Thirty-four.

OK, Tom subtract six.

Yeh, yeh, she was twenty-eight.

Ask the next.

OK, you, how old?

Thirty-two.

Big deal, she was twenty-six.

Ask the next?

Really, Elena? OK, how old are you?

Twenty-five.

Hub? You were nineteen?

Yes, Po.

Po?

Sorry, Sir. Po like Sir.

OK and you?

Twenty-four.

Eighteen? Wow.

No, Sir. I meet Ira when I am seventeen.

O... K... that's a bit young. ... And you?

Twenty-one, Sir.

No, you didn't meet him six years ago. You would have been fifteen.

Yes, Sir. I fifteen when I marry Ira.

Tom turns to me and then to Elena. *You knew this?*

No, but I guess. My guess right.

Ira, that's stat rape.

Not exactly, not here. Once again, Tom, this isn't the USA.

Elena pushes on. *Tom ask her?*

OK, how old are you?

Twenty-one.

When did you meet Ira?

Six years ago, Sir.

And you?

Twenty-one, Sir.

Also six years ago?

A little more, Sir. I was fourteen. Ira fly back for my fifteenth birthday.

Tom just looks at me. I don't think he has words to express what he feels and, from the look of it, it's revulsion.

Before I can say anything CiCi speaks up.

Sir Tom, if you think this wrong, you should know that Ira think it very wrong. He say no to Ri when she was seventeen. He not know she seventeen in the beginning because her mother lie for her and say she nineteen. When he find the true age he tell her to go. Her mother Lillian plead for Ira to accept her. He still not want to. Bim, Nelia and me convince him to accept her. ... Sir, then we fly to Tacloban. ... Before he come here, he agree to meet two women here. Both say they are over twenty. But when we get here, the first one we meet is Ann. Ira is very angry. He say she should go. But we hear her story. It a true story and we tell Ira, Ann must stay. So blame us, not Ira. ... Ira say OK but he will not even meet the next, He is done. No more! So we find a house and we move in. ... Next door to us is the girl he said he not meet. It is Reyna. She fourteen. She live with her sister and the partner of her sister. Ira not know Reyna the girl but we learn it. We invite her over when we have parties. Ira meet her, but he still not know. He meet her sister. All the neighbors know, but Ira not know. All us, even the neighbors we decide to have a party for Reyna's joining us and Ira, he caught in the wedding we make for him and Reyna. All in the little village, we all agree. Reyna for Ira. That why they here.

Tom looks at me again and asks, *Is that really true? It really happened that way?*

Yes, it pretty much happened that way. But they didn't explain Eva, who was literally placed here by her high school teacher. And you don't know that Reyna's older sister is here, too. That's Jessa here.

Sisters? Two of your wives are sisters?

Yes.

Holy shit, Ira. And he turns to his wife. This is what you were guessing?

Yes. I not sure, but I get Ira to give me cell number for CiCi. I text her while Ira still in Kennewick. By the end, I know most of it. If people there learned it, Ira in trouble. No? So I hid it for him.

How can it be? I mean, sure, I guess the old Mormons did it. But not like this and not now. I never heard of anything like this about the Philippines.

The people you talk to are ones who stay in Manila, Angeles City or maybe Cebu. It not like this in those places. But when I hear Ira in the provinces and

how he is moving there instead of bringing a wife to the States, I think, why that? I think she already married, very young or there many.

Is it common here, like this?

I think it's my turn to answer. No, Tom, it isn't. What happened to me was an odd set of mistakes and odd luck. While it is possible, it is far from normal.

Well, you are all legal age now. I guess that is good.

I see a look in Elena's eyes. Oh shit, no!

I'm not so sure, Tom. Ira, you say you have two nieces. But you not. You not married, not legally so no nieces. Right?

Friend, Bim engages Elena, Ira means my daughter. She is twelve, now. Ira has helped raise her with me for more than six years. She is not a wife to him, truly.

There's a softness in Elena's eyes. Thank you for explaining that. You Bim, right?

Yes.

Has Ira been good to your daughter?

Yes, friend. Ira treat her like his own daughters. I sure of this because Ira and me have our own two daughters. He is good to all three girls.

The other niece, who she?

None, friend. She is an orphan and a friend of my daughter. They go to the same school. Ira allow her to stay. She have nowhere else to go.

You say you have a daughter with Ira. How many children does this man have?

There are twelve, friend. Each of us give one. Nelia, Eva, Ann and I give Ira two.

Tom looks a bit wobbly and Elena grabs hold of him, as he turns to me. Ira, I think I just need to sit down. You got something non-alcoholic to drink?

Jessa runs to the ref and grabs the pitcher of buko juice. She pours out a fair amount in a tall glass. *Here, Sir Tom. This is best for you.*

What is it?

Buko, Sir. ... You know, the juice of the coconut. It from our trees.

Tom looks at me and asks, *You drink this stuff?*

Yes. All the time. It tastes great and it's healthy.

He takes a small sip as if to determine if it'll kill him. His fear of the new and unknown is palpable. Elena is bracing for a negative reaction. I gather such trials have happened before. So I say, a bit louder than needed, *Jessa, please pour a glass for me, too.*

She goes to get it and, though Tom has screwed up his face, there will be no explosion. Finally he comments, *Pretty different. Not very sweet. Maybe a little. Not a strong flavor, but it's there. Huh. I guess it's OK.* And he takes another sip of it.

I have mine in hand now, and raise my glass to him, *To your health, my friend,* and I take a goodly swig of the liquid. Tom follows suit. Crisis averted.

I grab a chair and sit down by Tom and Elena. Nelia says dinner will be in about an hour, before kissing my cheek and leaving. Then, in succession, all but Jessa approach, kiss me on the cheek or brow, and say it's nice to meet our guests, before retreating. I guess it's quite a performance, as it gets a chuckle from Elena and a wide eyed stare from Tom.

Jessa grabs another chair and sits next to me. We are now two couples. Elena tries to engage Jessa in Tagalog, but Jessa doesn't have much of it. Instead she answers in Cebuano, but Elena doesn't have that. Tom is confused and I'm laughing. He's about to say something, and I motion him to wait. Finally, the two gals figure out that English is their only option. It's resolved, and Tom asks, *What just happened?*

Elena, laughing, says, *Ira, stop laughing!*

Jessa is only smiling, and Tom turns to her and asks, *Why are they laughing?*

I not know all, but your wife, she speak to me in her dialect. It not mine and I not have it good. I can understand some, but not speak it. I answer in my dialect. She not have that. So we try English. We both have that. That what I know.

Tom! Ira knew what happening. He knows you not really like it when I speak Tagalog. He see you about to complain about this, but he know what happen before I know. So he tell you to wait. She looks at me, Right? I nod. Her face turns back to Tom, So he laugh because you will get what you want without the complaint!

Ira, does she have that right?

I'm getting the laughing under control as I manage to get out, *Yeh, that's about it. ... Here we have three Tagalog speakers, two Ilonggo speakers, and three Cebuano speakers. The only tongue all can speak is English. So this house pretty much operates in English. Though, I suspect our children will end*

up speaking all four languages. We will see. ... So, Tom, what are your plans for while you are here?

Elena says we just need to be here a little for me to understand her better. She thinks that if we do that, things will be better between us. But she says we need to avoid the tourist things, because that is not the real Philippines.

Makes sense to me. Getting a feel for your wife's culture is a good idea. Anything else?

Well, we've been talking about buying land here. Elena says we can live here like kings on what income I have coming to me. I'm not sure about that, but maybe, if we can get some land, it'll be a good thing for her after I'm gone. How's the land prices around here?

It depends on where you look, but you can pick up a nice parcel for sure. In truth, it's often not the land itself that is far less expensive, it's the cost of construction. When it comes to land, you better talk to Ann. She is our specialist in that. All the land we own, she brokered. Ann is amazing when it comes to wheeling and dealing. When it comes to your land needs, she's the one to work with. And for you, she will not take a cut.

Ann? Ain't she one of the young ones? How long has she been doing this?

She was doing it when I met her at age fifteen. Fifteen, living on her own, working as a numbers runner for a gambling operation, and doing land deals on the side. She is a force to be reckoned with.

What happened to her family?

I think they are OK. She is from a truly rural remote village where the kids are married off at about fourteen. She didn't want that life and left to come to Tacloban and make her way in the world.

Tom looks at Jessa and asks, Any chance this Ann was making the story up to get Ira to accept her?

No, Sir, what Ira say, it is the truth.

He looks at Elena and asks, Is this the reason you didn't want me to see your country before we married?

Elena is clearly uncomfortable and is stumbling, so I offer, *Look, there are things in the Philippines that Filipinos are not proud of and would just as soon leave in the past and never speak of again. I think, as an expat and husband of a Filipina, we need to allow those things to be left unspoken. If a gal wants to tell us, she will. Otherwise it's best to leave it alone. This is probably one of those times.*

You covering for her? You know something?

Yes and no. I don't know anything about Elena and I'm not going to try to find out. Yes, to the extent that I know when there's something hidden that needs to stay hidden. Life is like that in the Philippines.

Elena is crying, and Jessa moves over to comfort her. They are talking in quiet tones. Tom looks at his wife and asks, *Is Ira right?*

We hear a very quiet, *Yes, Tom. Ira correct.*

He looks back at me. *You some sort of mind reader?*

No. I just live here and I have learned some things about life here. Things you don't learn in the States. Life here can be very different. For us, life can be amazingly nice, but for others it can be pretty damned hard. The longer you are here, unless you are always thinking that the US is better, you will learn a great deal and probably learn to appreciate your wife far more than you might if just living in the States.

And who might you be?, says Tom looking over my shoulder.

Excuse please, Uncle, supper is ready.

Thank you, Dessa. ... Well shall we go to the table?

Elena is walking between Tom and me as she says, *What a pretty little niece, Ira.*

Jessa says, without missing a beat or betraying any feelings, *Yes, isn't she?*

There are bowls of rice, bihon, boiled shrimp in the shell, a bowl of afritada, a platter holding two offerings of crispy pata, and a platter of fried bangus. The table is set for thirteen.

Tom, allow me to recommend you allow Elena to put a plate of food together for you.

I'm not a child! I don't need anyone to do that for me.

Look, I'm not suggesting that you aren't a grown man, but you may not be familiar with how this is done here. And, in truth, wives here often prepare a husband's plate. It's seen as something of respect of the wife for her husband.

Humph.

Well, Tom may not be pleased with my answer, but Elena is, as she puts a plate together for her husband and says, *Thank you, Ira. You are right.*

I'm quite capable of putting my plate together but Jessa, reading the situation like the majordomo she is, picks up my plate and takes on the duty, before placing the completed plate in front of me and asking what I would like to drink.

Elena, picking up on that last detail, asks Tom for his preference. I have already asked for beer, and he says he will have the same. Jessa gets it for both of us.

The gals are drinking Sprite. No one asks Elena, but she is given a bottle of the stuff with a straw in it. Tom makes a comment, a bit too loud, that someone should have asked her, and Elena, in a voice a bit on the testy side, informs him, *They do just right, Tom. This just the way we do it here.*

In truth, if we had some Coke or Royal here, she might well have been asked. As it is, the cooler only holds Sprite. However, I'm on Elena's side and keep my mouth shut.

But we are not done with the complaints yet.

This rice ain't cooked right. Ira, don't they know how to cook it? You say this is a rice culture and they can't even cook that right?

Elena is furious. *Tom! Please, you are talking nonsense!*

The hell I am. Tell her, Ira. Tell her that this ain't right.

No, Tom, I'm going to tell you to take your cultural prejudices and stow them. This rice is cooked to perfection. First, this type of rice is radically different from the rice you get in your supermarket. While not technically short-grained, it's the shortest of all medium-grained rice. It's softer than the rice you buy and it's starchier. It's meant to clump. The soft clumping nature allows the rice to be eaten with the fingers, like this. And with that, everyone at the table, including me, demonstrates how it's eaten.

Seeing what we have done, Elena then forms a small ball of the rice with her fingers and, in full view of Tom, pops it in her mouth. And then she does something I'm sure none of us expect. She closes her eyes, smiles and savors the rice in her mouth.

Once she has swallowed it, she asks, *Where this from?* To which CiCi answers, *Here. This is the rice we grow. You like it?*

Yes! It a long time since I eat such good rice.

Tom is shaking his head and says, *Sorry.*

He is a bundle of righteous attitudes, wrapped in aging skin and bones. He has been arguing, right along, wrongly over things he's totally ignorant of. Elena is seemingly just tired of his asinine behaviors. I have only been dealing with it for a few hours, but I'm already tiring of it.

Ann, Tom and Elena here are interested in acquiring some land. Why don't you sit down with them and see if there's any way you can assist them.

I get eyebrows.

Elena thanks Ann and Tom is confused again. *Did she answer you?*

Yes, she say yes.

I didn't hear it.

That because you not listening with your eyes, my love.

That's crazy talk.

Once again I decide to intercede.

No, Tom, your wife is literally correct. Here, you listen with your ears and your eyes. It's a cultural thing. How can you be married to and live with this woman for six years and not know this? ... May I make an unwanted suggestion? ... Every time you are ready to criticize or complain, instead ask, 'What did I miss?' ... I say that because it seems to be the primary issue that keeps on popping up. Remember, you said Elena wanted you to experience her culture. Each thing that has happened today where you were ticked off is you, not realizing, that you haven't understood the culture.

You saying I made a mistake marrying a Filipina?

No, I'm saying you are not giving your wife room to introduce you to her culture. Now, if you think that anyone who doesn't think your view of your culture is the only acceptable one is always wrong, then I guess marrying anyone beyond your own twin might be wrong.

So you are saying I'm being a bonehead?

I suggest you look in the mirror and answer that yourself.

Elena has been listening but has remained silent. Now she speaks to Ann. *Maybe Tom and I can sit with you after supper.*

Opo.

Tom looks at me. *Ann said yes, in a respectful manner.*

Ann speaks Tagalog?

No, but some words and phrases bridge the dialects. This is such a case.

There is little more that anyone wants to say, and we all pay attention to the food on our plates. And, for a minute or two, there really is not a word spoken, until Tom utters, *Say, this is pork, right?*

I'm happy to engage in this subject, and answer, *Yes, the dish is called crispy pata. It's a deep-fat fried whole hock of a pig.*

It's good.

Yes, it is. The crunchy skin makes it a favorite.

Skin? I'm eating skin?

Yes. It's good, right?

I guess. It tasted better before you told me.

When supper is over, Tom asks me to stay with them as they talk to Ann, but I think it's best if I leave this all to her. I suspect I have butted heads with Tom too damn much as it is. It's time I left the field of play.

When they finish up with Ann, CiCi drives them back to their hotel. It will allow Elena and CiCi to chat in Tagalog while Tom rides along.

I take the opportunity to sit with Ann and find out what they might be looking to buy. The answer is, nothing special. Just some land along a road, where a home of a decent size can be built, and where they might already have water and electric service. Ann will show them some possibilities tomorrow.

Ira, why they want to buy? I think Tom does not like the Philippines.

I don't know, but it may be primarily for Elena.



I don't see the couple for three days. For a lot of that time, they are busy with Ann, as she takes them all over Leyte, Samar, and, I gather, they got as far as Biliran. CiCi has been in frequent contact with Elena as well. So it's not like I have no way to know what's going on. I just choose to not know.

I have said my piece with Tom. I'm sure he will ignore it.

If Elena is looking for an escape route, I can't blame her. Tom really seems to regret making the marriage. I have no idea what Elena was escaping when she married Tom. Maybe, compared to the former, the latter is to be preferred. I simply do not know, nor should I. I don't owe Tom any favor. There's nothing unresolved between us.

If Ann can help them, fine. If not, fine.

On the evening of the third day, Ann sits down by me.

I was rude to your friend today.

Oh? Did he deserve it?

She grins. Maybe.

Did Elena get angry with you?

No, she not say anything.

OK, how were you rude?

I tell him, he not respect the Filipino. He should go back to America.

Are they leaving?

How I know?

Well, are you going out with them tomorrow?

No. No more.

OK. That's fine with me. Thank you for your efforts.

*You know, the wife is nice. I like her. Too bad marriage not have a time limit.
She married a bad man.*

You don't have that problem.

What you mean?

You can leave me any time you want?

Ira! Why I do that? Never! You are crazy.

Yeh, you don't need marriage for forever if it is a good thing.

Yes! I think this too. It only hold together the bad things.

Seems that way.

CiCi walks in, holding her phone out to me. I guess there is a call for me on it. That's a bit weird but... whatever.

Sino to?¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Functionally means, 'who is this?'

Hello? Ira, is that you?

Yes, Tom. What's up?

Elena. She's leaving me.

What do you mean, leaving you? Are you stranded somewhere? Where is she?

No. She's here, in the bathroom. She says she wants out of the marriage.

OK, I'm sorry to hear that, but why are you calling me?

You know about these women. Why is she doing it?

I have no idea. Did you have a fight with her?

We always have these little things. You know.

No, I honestly don't know. What was this little thing about?

Ann said I should go back home, that I didn't belong here. After Ann dropped us off at the hotel, Elena said she was leaving me.

Why did Ann tell you to go back to the States?

Hell, I don't know. It had to do with a cart being pulled by some damned ox. The thing was creating a traffic jam in the middle of nowhere.

And?

And I told the guy to get off the fucking road.

Do you think you had a right to say that?

Hell, what the fuck was the guy doing with an ox cart, this is the twenty-first century.

Tom, I want you to accept this with all the love and caring I have in my heart. Go back to the USA and never, ever come here again. Many people here farm with carabao, and you disrespected a hard-working farmer. That is entirely unacceptable.

So you're saying I screwed up?

That's the mild way of saying it. You have no business running your mouth like that.

You think that's why Elena says she's leaving me?

I have no idea.

You know, I had to grab her phone just to get to you. If she leaves, I won't even know how to call you, much less get to the airport and get home.

Oh, she might get you a taxi to get to the airport. From there, as they will be speaking English, you will be able to get home. Of course, I really don't know what she will do.

The call ends and I hand the phone back to CiCi.

Trouble?

Not for us.

I reflect on the strain of what I understand some call “American exceptionalism.” This weird concept that America and Americans are better than anything and anyone else. Beyond being wrong and stupid and jingoistic, it creates real messes. It gives permission for some of the worst that America has to offer.

Tom seems to be a classic example of all the ills that this concept offers.

Ninety minutes later, the doorbell on the pad is pressed. The camera displays Elena standing there. I don't see Tom, but he might be off to the side. I send the lift down to the pad, and I see Elena alone walk, without a valise, into it. Whatever her plan, it won't be to stay here.

She presses the button to bring the lift back up, and we wait. Looking out a window, I see a taxi driving back toward Tacloban. I text for Ann, CiCi and Jessa to come.

Difficult Day?

Oh, Ira, you have no idea.

Really? Do you have your phone with you?

Yes. Why?

Look at the call log for a little less than two hours ago.

Elena is confused, but does look. And then she looks back up, a question framed on her face.

Yes, he called here using your phone while, he said, you were in the bathroom.

What did he say?

Oh, he gave me good cause to tell him to go back to the US and never come here again.

He tell you about the karabao?

Yes, though he called it an ox. And while he was telling me, he still thought he was justified in his behavior. I was very clear with him that he wasn't. I'm sorry, Elena. I tried to be nice and helpful to him, but there's a limit.

For me too. Yes, there is a limit I think. He is so stupid. Why he like that? Other men not like that. You not like that. You respect the Filipino.

Oh, now, don't hold me up as an example of good, with eight wives.

You mean ten.

Eight.

Don't lie to me, Ira. Not after this. I not care if Dessa calls you Uncle. I meet Ana. She is a sweet girl. Sweet and she loves her Uncle. It's ten. I know it.

Elena, it isn't ten, but if it were, holding me up as an example of respecting the Filipino makes no sense. Anyway, this isn't about me. It's about Tom. Speaking of the guy, where is he?

I leave him in the room. I tell him I will be back to get my stuff later. I just need to be alone to think.

OK, so why are you here? This does not constitute 'alone.'

I want to talk to CiCi and Ann. ... How you know to have them here?

Maybe it's just a good guess, but I really think you should include Jessa.

I get a look from Elena I can't decipher, and then, a nod of the head. I leave her with my three gals. I can't conceive of a better team.



I haven't heard from Tom or Elena since they left for the States two months ago. Ana has turned thirteen. Holy week is close upon us and, as is no secret in the house, Ana wants to be a wife to me.

I have already been with Dessa many times, and you would think that being with Ana would be no big thing now, and you would be wrong. I have been part of her life since she was six. I have a real emotional connection to her as a daughter, regardless that she's not, and she calls me Uncle.

Still, I'm here with her in my bedroom. She has been with everyone, and I'm told that includes Bim. I just didn't want to see it. Am I a chicken? Maybe. I didn't want to see Lorie and Lillian, but I was angry enough to participate then. I have no anger now. Sadness, but no anger. I'm losing my daughter.

I have read news reports of sexual manipulation of minors by adults. There are all the stories of the priests, though those appear to be homosexual activities. I have read about girls gone missing, raped and killed, or held hostage, sometimes for years, for sex. I have read all of it and it feels dirty... dirty and wrong.

I have shared it with Ana. I wanted her to rethink this. You know what she said? She said those things were against the desire of the girl and for the desire of the man, the abuser. Then she asks if she is the abuser? ... Because it's she who wants this, not me. How is it, she asks, the same thing?

Damned if I know.

She promises me that we will stop if it ever feels wrong to her. And I wonder, how can it ever feel right?

She is in front of me ... naked. A nude reclining. No Rueben's, this one. There's no extra flesh anywhere on her. Her nails are painted deep red. Her lips are covered with deep red lipstick. Her eyelids have liner and subtle colors. Her lashes have been filled with mascara. I think her nipples have had some color added, but I'm not sure. Her pussy is clean-shaven, and glistening with lotion.

It's uncanny. She looks like a woman and a girl, all at the same time. If she was a photo, you would swear it had been photoshopped.

I'm naked too. But no beauty, I. That alone should set off alarm bells of the imbalance in the activities that will soon commence. The alarm bells are ringing in my head. It seems that Ana does not hear them. I so wish she would.

One knee up on the mattress, and then the other, my body comes to rest parallel to hers. We are face to face. Hers is jubilant. There's not a scintilla of concern in evidence.

It OK, Uncle. You love me. I know it. Do not be afraid, please. This will be good. You will see.

And with that, she leans in and kisses me in a way she has never kissed me before. Her lips are tender on mine. Tender but not tentative. She is sure of herself; sure in every move of her body.

Her hand strokes my cheek as the kiss continues. The kiss is about love and not sex. She is telling me that sex is not the reason for this, and I'm reluctantly hearing her. She is telling me that she is becoming a woman. Granted, a small and young one, but the change from child to woman has already truly occurred.

Some people stay childlike all their lives. Ana is telling me with her voice, her lips, her hands, that the life in her has transformed her into a woman with love, desire, assurance and confidence.

Until this moment, I had no idea. Was I blind, or is it hard to see through the filter of our own prejudices?

The kisses continue, but she swings a leg over mine. I feel all of her. She gently grinds her female parts against my thigh, and my thigh is anointed with her essence.

The kisses become more sexually charged. Her hands grip harder, search more intensely. I feel her heart pumping against my chest. Her breasts are pushed hard against me. I roll her onto her back, break the kiss and ask, *Are you sure?*

The answer, *Yes*, is without hesitation.

My cock, hard as it has ever been, pushes resolutely into Ana without waiting for further comment or concern. She says she will stop me if needed. She is tight, but not as tight as Dessa. I'm all the way in her. It's crazy, but being in her feels like I'm in her mother. That's not a bad thing. It's just strange.

Ana is not complaining. She is joyously accepting all I deliver, as my cock repeatedly plumbs her depths, pulls back and plunges in again. She is looking right at me. Right into my eyes, as I look into hers. Fucking as we go, she is smiling. She isn't saying Uncle. She is saying, *Ira, Ira, Ira*. Smiling as she does, and looking right at me.

Something has been triggered inside her. She gasps. Her eyes widen. *OK, Ira, I am ready now. You will be mine. Give it me.*

I feel her urgency. I feel like I'm being bathed in hot liquid. Hot liquid making for a warm welcoming for seed that I sincerely hope does not find a home tonight. And yet I do, as my body betrays my brain and sends her cunt that most elemental fluid.

It is done. Truly and completely done.

I roll off her and onto my back. She remains where she is, a goofy smile across her face.

Ira?

Hmmm?

Maybe, I have a new nickname?

Oh?

Uh-huh.

What is it?

Ten.

You're kidding?

No. Ten.



It's June now, the beginning of the school year. We have two of our kids starting in Kinder 2, with four more in Kinder 1. By next year all will be in school.

It's a big deal getting each fitted out in a uniform and school shoes, plus book bags, paper, pencils, etc. We take a group photo of all of them on their first day this year. We have decided to do this every year from now on, and will mount the photos on a wall. I'm proud of my kids.

We have heard nothing from Tom and Elena. Whatever has transpired, I suspect we will never hear of it.

The farm is productive and the income is good. It isn't making us wealthy, but it alone pays all the bills, plus far more. I'm banking my retirement pay. We don't need it for living expenses.

The tools I received from the US are outperforming the locally purchased ones, but the batteries run down far sooner on them.

There's a pregnancy. It's Lorie. She is two months along now, and so we will have a newborn in the first month of the New Year. As Lorie was the last to catch last time, this is welcome news for her.

Between abundant harvest and Lorie, this month is a celebration of fecundity in all its manifestations. We are filled with joy.



Elena is here in Tacloban. Tom is not.

I haven't seen her. CiCi and Ann met with her at her hotel in Tacloban. They report that she received a divorce from Tom in Washington State. That divorce is not recognized here, and so, divorce or not there, she's still married to Tom here.

On the good side, for her and not for Tom, with the community property, she's sitting pretty, financially. At least as it works here. Tom must be hurting, as he lost his house in the divorce. Elena has the money to buy some land to work, and build a house. Technically, Tom's name should be on the deed as husband. Putting the land in her maiden name keeps his name off, but it really isn't legal.

Ann says Elena needs an attorney. That makes sense to me.

What Elena wants to do is create a stable source of income for herself and own her own home, paid for, free and clear. Ann says she will find land for the woman and, Ann tells me that, if Elena is careful with her money, she can do what she sets out to do. All of it based on what she got out of Tom and the six or seven years of marriage.

I'm deeply ambivalent on the matter. Tom acted badly. There's no denying that, but to lose half of all he had for being a stupid, ill-informed, jingoistic asshole seems a bit too much. Elena had to know she wasn't getting the pick of the litter when she married him. And she got US citizenship out of the marriage. How do you add that to the equity settlement? But I'm not the judge, nor the legislature that passed the laws. Tom had to know what the law is when you marry. This is what you risk.

So like I said, I'm ambivalent on the whole deal. Since I have no role in Elena's undertaking, I have no ethical dilemma to resolve.

There has been no email from Tom, and I had no advance knowledge that Elena would appear, until she texted Ann from Tacloban.

Initially, Ann told her that she was done with them, after Elena's first attempt at contact. It was then that we learned Tom is history.

Ann's role is limited to helping the woman purchase land. Then she is done. CiCi's role hasn't started, but I gather it may involve assistance in setting up the business.

Both of my gals think Tom got what he deserves. They have no conflict to deal with. That has led to the request I have just received from CiCi and Jessa. Currently, Elena is staying in a hotel. That needs to end. The request is that we let her stay here in a spare bedroom, until she can secure a place to live near the land she will eventually acquire.

That is pretty open ended. She hasn't found the land she wants to acquire. She hasn't met with an attorney to learn how she is to do it legally. And there's also the question of, do I want her here in any case?

I don't.

But my three gals are pushing the request.

How long do you think it'll take for the land to be acquired and a residence established? And, Ann, be realistic, not optimistic.

I know some places. If she wants one of them, maybe two weeks plus finding a place to stay. She say she willing to stay in bahay kubo. So not long I think.

So you are telling me that, if she can't find a place to rent close to the property, that she will put a hut on the property and live there?

Yes, she say that.

Do you understand that she already thinks I may be bedding Dessa and Ten? I don't want to give her any proof, and even calling Ana Ten is a problem!

Why? It not a problem.

The hell it's not.

Ira, she will not hurt you. We sure of it.

Well, I'm not so sure, Ann. Not at all. CiCi, are you as sure as Ann? And you, Jessa, are you so sure?

Ann's a broker, a wheeler-dealer, but CiCi is a bean counter by trade. She is not natively optimistic. And Jessa has my back in all ways. I need to hear why they think it's really no problem.

CiCi?

I don't know.

Jessa?

No way to know. She smart, but she not loyal to you. No reason to be loyal. ... I will talk to all. We will be OK. She will not know. Allow it.

Three weeks and no more. She can't stay more than that. You OK with that Ann?

OK.

She is to be out of the house no later than September 30th. Not a day later.



Thank you for allowing me to stay here.

You are welcome. I am sure this must be a period of difficulty for you. No home and an uncertain future.

It is better than a bad future. It is good that is over. ... Ann said I need to find a place to live before October. Is this because you don't want me staying a long time?

I find it's best to have limits. There's an old saying, though maybe you have heard it. I think it comes from Europe, but I really don't know. It is, 'after three days, fish and visitors begin to stink.'

That's funny. No, I not hear that before. You sure you not worried I will learn about Dessa and Ana? Or maybe you not want me to be number eleven?

There's nothing to learn about my nieces. And you would not want to be one of my gals.

I am not here to be one of your 'gals.' But why you think I would not want it?

You just got free from a bad marriage, there's no reason why you want to commit to a complicated relationship here. There are other reasons but those may be TMI.

Like I said, I am not here for that, but there is nothing complicated about being number eleven. And, Ira, if you are going to insist that there is nothing happening with your nieces, you need to tell one of them to not change her nickname on Facebook to Ten.

I guess I look as stunned as I feel.

You haven't looked at her Facebook page?

I didn't know she had one.

She does and so does Dessa, Ann and a few others. The only ones who don't are CiCi, Jessa and you I guess. At least I couldn't find ones for the three of you. Ten is your niece Ana? Bim's daughter?

Yes, Ana is Bim's daughter.

Relax, Ira, it's OK. Ten loves you and you told her every way you could to not want what she wanted. But with Dessa becoming a lover, you really were stuck. I know.

Who told you all this?

So you shoot her? Won't work. It was Ten. I friended her on Facebook.

What do you want, Elena?

I want exactly what you have been told. Nothing more. Now, Ira, will you lift the three week rule so I don't feel pushed to buy something that isn't just right?

You are a dangerous woman, but, OK, the limit is removed.

I am not a danger to you. You kept my secret when I needed it. Even when it probably would not have mattered, you kept the secret from Tom. You have nothing to fear from me. You are a friend. I don't have many.

Fair enough. ... Jessa have you heard all that? She was standing just out of sight, but I knew she was there. There was a second when a shadow betrayed her. I'm sure Elena was not aware of her presence.

Yes, I hear. What we do with Ten and the Facebook?

I have no idea. Ask the others, but let Ten know I'm not happy.

OK.

Anything else?

I will speak with Elena when you done. If she a true friend for you, she need to be my friend.

Go deal with Ten first. I'll be done in a few minutes.

And with that, Jessa is gone.

Does she always eavesdrop like that?

Only when she needs to. She needed to this time. Nothing gets past her, when it comes to me, if she can help it.

I thought that was CiCi's role.

Funny, so did Dessa in the beginning. And in truth, before Jessa joined us, it was CiCi in that role. CiCi is still very important to me, but it's more on the business side of the ledger these days.

Three weeks have passed and rather than Elena leaving, the news is of a major category 4 typhoon called Pedring that missed us and slammed into the northern island of Luzon. Now today, the 30th, a twin of it, called Typhoon Quiel, is hammering them on Luzon again. It's a real mess up there. We have been getting some rain, but it's not a problem.

The TV has been filled with video of the devastation. Elena has been watching it, and commenting to me that the type of home she was envisioning would be flooded in such a typhoon.

We have had many serious typhoons here before, but maybe she wasn't seeing the results on a TV like she is now.

I have been looking back at the history of typhoons that hit these islands and, while there were a couple of monster storms way back in history, most, until recently, weren't that fierce for many decades. These recent ones seem to be getting stronger. Maybe it's climate change, maybe not, but something is happening. We were just lucky this time.

In these three weeks, Ann has shown Elena a number of properties. Nothing is 'just right' for our Miss Goldilocks, but Ann tells me she knows what the problem is and, with any luck, they will find the answer soon.

Elena has bought a car, a Toyota Vios. I tease her that she can now be a taxi service. The Vios is used by many for just that purpose. As a way to do a little to pay back for our hospitality, she has been doing the chauffeuring of our two high school girls. Bim has appreciated the help, and Ten has been forced to be face to face with the results of her loose lips each day.



Ira, I meet a friend of yours today.

Oh? Who was that?

Debbie.

She maybe a lot of things, Elena, but the one thing she is not is a friend.

I'm teasing. Your two young ones told me how you all feel about her. But I did meet her.

How did that go?

She seems curious to know if you had added a new wife.

I bet she was. I also bet that she didn't believe you when you told her you weren't a wife to me.

I didn't.

You didn't, what?

I didn't tell her I wasn't a wife.

Why?

I wanted to see how jealous she would get.

Why would you want to know that? We all know she wanted to join me but not the other gals.

I think you are wrong.

In what way?

She will accept the others.

Elena, she has worked against me on a number of occasions. She harassed Ten and Bim. I really have nothing but dislike for the woman.

But you fucked her.

Yes, I did. It was an angry fuck.

She wants to know what it will take to get accepted.

She can try dying.

Ira!

Well, I told you. I don't like her.

Make peace with her.

No. She is a bomb thrower, a sneak, dishonest, offensive, and simply not to be trusted.

You can't think of a single good thing to say about her?

She's good looking. There, happy?

Jessa, I know you are here somewhere. Come out and explain to him why he should get over his feelings about the woman.

Sure enough, Jessa is here. I just hadn't seen her.

Elena, if Ira does not kill the witch, I will do it for him! She is evil.

Oh! Is this the general consensus in this house?

No. Bim will want to torture her first and then kill her.

So, all of you don't like her?

Correct. ... I not talk to Ira about this, but I think she just jealous that we have the land. She knows all the wives here own the land. Ira set it up that way. She wants the land. That all. She not want Ira, really. She think he a pervert. So she send him young girls. He not want that. Why she do that except she try to make herself important to him. That why she that way.

Ira, does that make sense to you?

I guess it does. From the very first time I met her, the land was the big part of the conversation... that and accusing me of being a monster with Reyna. She is not to be trusted.

You have explained quite enough. I not trust her again. She fooled me today, but no harm was done.



It's Christmas time, 2011.

Elena has been true to her word about staying away from Debbie. She has possibly found some land close to ours. It's landlocked, however, and, so while the price is attractive, it isn't accessible right now.

Word is that the owners of the landlocked parcel and the parcel that's blocking it have been at war with each other for a long time. The reasons for the dislike are not known, but the result is all too clear. The guy with the land who has the road access might sell if he thinks the buyer will continue the block on the other parcel.

Ann has an idea. First, she gets a commitment from the guy to sell the landlocked land in thirty days, with the buyer holding a right to refuse. In other words, he has to sell at a certain price a month from now, and can't refuse to sell it at that price. But the buyer can back out. All this is to be a hidden agreement, but legally binding via a contract.

Next, she lets it be known to the guy with the parcel in the front that she has a buyer who hates the guy in the back. If he will sell it at a good price, the buyer will make sure that this other guy never gets access.

We will end up acquiring the front hectares, and Elena will get the back hectares. She will get access through our land. The agreement that the guy in the back will never get access will be fulfilled, as he will not be the owner anymore.

This is pure Ann. She will use a straw broker, and our shell company as the buyer of the front hectares. No one will see her hands on that transaction.

CiCi and I approve the deal on our side. Elena is willing on her side. So the question is, will these two boneheads each individually agree to the terms each is offered? Each is being offered below market value because of the two issues. The land being locked and the guy requiring the new buyer to continue with that policy.

The guy at the back has to agree to the thirty day deal first. The deal is a good forty percent off market value. He does, and the papers are notarized with an attorney.

The broker for our shell company offers for his client a ten day offer with a contract, twenty-five percent off market value, specifying the name of the man who will never be given access. The contract carefully omits the possibility of the sale of the back

lot to another buyer. The seller agrees, evidently with some real joy.

The back parcel is still in the ownership of the guy who is blocked.

We conclude the sale of the front-facing parcel first. The paperwork is signed. The title transfer paperwork is completed and the money is in the guy's hands. We start the processing of the papers and, because of Ann's connections, things that normally take eons are at least processed quickly enough that the first seller can't back out.

On the twenty-ninth day of the contract for the landlocked parcel, the sale is made and the papers processed. Elena has a good ten hectares; we gain only four hectares, but the land is usable and we will farm it.

Her land is more than enough to support her with income, if the farm is properly managed.

Ann's part is complete.

It would have been nice if Elena could have afforded to buy our four hectares from us at the price we paid, but she doesn't have the capital to do that and get on with the rest of her plan. It's OK. Like I said, we can use the land.

In the middle of all this excitement, we have a different type. Lorie has given me another daughter, Princess Honey Cruz Courtwright. Baby and mother are doing fine and, yes, Lillian is here, a happy lola.

I now have thirteen children.

As a happy coincidence, Lillian is here just long enough to know that Elena is not mine and that I have clearly said, *No more!*



We have another wrinkle. CiCi and Ann think that, until Elena gets her house built, she should stay here. It isn't causing us any problems; she is the daily driver for the high school run.

I point out that, as her house gets built, she will not be the daily driver. And, once her farm is in operation, she will likely also be busy.

OK, they say, so she will be busy. That means she will really only be here to sleep and shower, so what's the problem. I relent.



Another wrinkle. This time it's CiCi, Bim and Elena.

The conversation is stilted and a bit circuitous but it boils down to... 'Why don't we run her farm for her and provide her a share of the profits the crops generate after expenses. CiCi is running the books, so we would not be having to trust Elena. She would be trusting us.' As part of it, Elena informs me she has complete faith in CiCi.

Bim says that she has spoken to our two foremen whose crews will be affected. It'll require more men and equipment, but should actually make us more productive.

Why do I get the feeling that this was the plan all along?

How that? Bim is indignant. Until we know this the land that is so close, no plan like this would have worked.

That's true, but was it the plan since then? Oh, well, no fighting it now. I agree.

Good, says Bim, now let's talk about where she lives. Why she need to build a house? She can live here.

No.

Why not?

You know damned well why not, Bim. No.

Ira, maybe Bim knows why, but I do not. And since you are talking about me, don't I deserve to know?

You are not a wife to me, Elena. Let's start with that. There are other things, but that is probably top of the list.

I could be. Debbie still thinks I am. You could call me Eleven.

No, Eleven is too much of a mouthful. I already have too many wives. And of all people, Bim knows how I feel about that, don't you, Bim? And you do too, CiCi, or do you have Alzheimer's?

Excuse me?

She's never far from me. Jessa, good that you are here. What do you think?

I think we can handle one more wife and it means no pair this time. See?

I have to laugh. CiCi does as well, offering, It's a good point, Ira.

Well, I don't know what you are all talking about.

Elena, offers CiCi, we will explain it later. It's just a silly thing, but if we can end it, it would be nice.

Sure it would, but there are other issues. Such as the Ri and Lillian test.

Bim tells me, She knows about that. She OK with us. We do that already.

Oh. ... With all?

Not yet. Bim giggles, She not count to Ten yet!

Look, my sweet loves, even if all those things are OK, we have equity issues. There is no balance. None of you came with anything and you are all vested in the land we own. Elena comes with her own money and owns her own land. If she becomes a wife, she gets a portion of the family holdings plus her own holdings. She will be earning a far larger amount of income every year. How does that work? I can't say she is a wife but not entitled to what a wife gets. And I'm not going to make her give up what she has to join us.

CiCi has a brain on her head, even if it seems to have been in neutral on this until now. Ira is right. We need to think about this more.

But Jessa is disagreeing. Why?

CiCi is stumped. She thinks it's clear. I think it's clear. What does Jessa see?

We are all looking at her, and waiting. Is there something more?

Yes, her land is hers. So what? She comes and joins us. She is one of us. She has what she had. Why that not fair? Why that not right? I not care she has more money. No one here goes hungry. No one here worries how we pay for the school. No one here work in the sun all day, or wash the clothing of others for pesos. No one here worry about the future. Why I care if Elena has her own money? She have that money now. She not throw it around and say, look what I have and you not. She not do that.

CiCi looks at me and only suggests, *She is correct.*

Well there's one more thing but it's between Elena and me. It needs to be in private. CiCi and Bim leave. Private from you too, Jessa. If you need to know, I'll tell you, but I doubt that you will. Jessa decamps. I have known for seven years you had a secret and that you ushered Tom out of the Philippines before he could learn it. But I'm sure you know, I do not know what that secret really is. ... I'm happy to have you as a friend and not ask you for the truth. ... I'm not willing to have a wife who has secrets from me.



Uncle, your new wife eats my pussy very good.

She's not my wife yet. Has she been with Ten?

Maybe no. I think soon. ... Uncle, maybe she will show you how she do me. You do good, but she eat me better. ... You angry with me for telling you?

No. I'm not angry, and I'm really not surprised by what you said. I'll make sure we three are in bed together soon.



I never thought, that first day we met in the café, that you would be in my bed.

I never think this too. I think I live my life in Kennewick. Not what I want, but I escape my life and that is a blessing. Tom makes that happen and I think, OK, he will be better. This just the beginning. Yes, this what I think. We meet you that night. I not think you ever wonder about the Philippines. Maybe I will help another girl, but you not interested.

You are right. I had never even considered the Philippines. You were sure pretty, but you were maybe a little too ready to have me meet someone. I decided

to check it out myself. And that created some real problems. It's why I have eleven wives!

You not have me yet.

True enough.

She was twenty-three when I first met her. She's thirty-one now and not the improbably young gal that she was then. Still, she's not hard to look at.

I know this is nuts but, when my cock enters her, I'll feel like I'm taking something away from Tom. Yes, I know they are divorced, and I did not cause that divorce. Still, that stupid thought keeps on popping up in my brain.

I surely haven't pursued her. I'm not sure she pursued me, at least not consciously. If her land had been a distance away, surely this would not be happening now.

She is in my arms and we kiss. We fondle. Skin touches skin. We are both naked. She has been with all my wives. All of them. I'm told she was even with Lillian, while the woman was here enjoying her grandchild.

Elena is a very smart woman, and she is smart about the bed. She slides down on me and does what no one has ever in my life done to me. Good God. How does that even work?

All my adult life, when it comes to the bedroom I felt it was my role to make sure my partner was OK and satisfied. I'm pretty sure that the tables have been turned.

Maybe tomorrow we will have a conversation about making sure she is satisfied. Right now is not the time.

I can't think. All I can do is respond and allow. Elena is touching places I didn't know existed. Oh, fuck. What? How? ... Oh oh oh oh shit! ...

Nah, I'm not even going to try to explain this, but it's like I'm on a loop and she's keeping me going. Oh God... how long? She has me cumming! Damn.

What the fuck happened?

Ok, I've got one thing and only one thing to say, but maybe not to Elena. I don't care how much she might be as crazy as a pet coon, this is one woman you do not abuse, berate or walk away from. No way, no how. God almighty.

OK so this is totally inappropriate, but you did that with Tom and he was still rude and unpleasant to you? How is that even possible?

I'm glad you like me, Ira, but how can I explain to a man who never rude or unpleasant to me? You would think it being rude. He not know he rude. Maybe you see?

Maybe I do. Maybe I do. But...

But what?

How can I do good for you when you do that to me?

Say that again please, and say it slowly.

Well, it was wonderful. Maybe the most intense I have ever felt, but I didn't get a chance to please you. That's just not right. I feel like things are not in balance.

You really feel that? I mean it bothering you? Yes! I can see it. ... OK, you can start by just holding me and maybe kissing me.

And I do. We kiss for a long time. I cradle her breasts, kiss her shoulders, her neck, her ears, her eyelids. I kiss her breasts and then suck a nipple. And we kiss again. I gently rub her clit and there's a little shudder. We kiss yet again and then more rubbing and another shudder.

She sighs. Ira, I make the right decision. It is good to be your wife. And now I know what they know. I am a lucky girl. Tonight my love, it is all in balance. I promise you.



It's another June and the start of another school year. This year we have nine of my children in school. Three in Kinder 1, four in Kinder 2, and two in Grade 1. Dessa and Ten are still in high

school. We have a photo of my nine children in the school uniforms as they are dressed for their first day this year.

Life is good. My children are growing up happy and healthy. The farm makes money. My gals, who I now call my wives, are busy and happy. And I'm happy in all ways. I'm a lucky man. I look out from these glass window walls onto my domain, and just can't figure out how I got so blessed in this life.

God's Cleansing

Gone in a matter of minutes...

1

It's November 5, 2013. Things have continued to be good for us. The kids are fine. The farm does well. My gals are wonderful.

Bohol, a neighboring island, had a bad earthquake that did a lot of damage, but we were OK.

Weather-wise, the big storms have all gone north of us. But right now I'm worried.

There's a typhoon headed our way. It's a big one. At this moment, it's a signal 4 storm, but they say it's getting stronger, and it looks like it's coming right toward us.

As a precaution, I'm watching our power consumption. If we dip into the batteries in any way I'll tell the gals to cook with charcoal, as that seems to be a big power draw. I need to make sure our batteries are at one hundred percent charge when the storm hits. Even with the entire water storage we have, we have stowed as much potable water as we have containers for. If things go terribly wrong, I want backups.

I have tested all the shutters, and we have moved everything that was on the decks inside. All the vehicles are up in the car park. The motorcycles are chained to steel columns when not in use. I have also run heavy chains from the tow-bars on the pickups and SUV to steel columns. Sure, if the water tops the carpark it might not take the building, but it might try to wash the vehicles away.

The TV and radio stations are all issuing warnings. Some folks have flown out, but there aren't enough planes to carry all who want to leave. Shelters have been set up all over the island. Here's hoping we'll be OK, because the news stations are saying that this thing might become a super typhoon, a signal 5 storm.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*



It's the morning of November 7th and they say the storm is headed right at us with winds of 280km/h. I convert that as best I can and I get 175mph. The storm is the largest we have real records for. Calling it a super typhoon may be underestimating the reality of it. I have a sinking feeling that the optimism that this place can handle bad weather may have been misplaced.

Things are already getting nasty outside. I close all the shutters and add more protection to what I can. I have added extra-large, heavy chains between the already secured vehicles and the steel posts in the carpark, along with the existing chains I already am using. I also fit in as many of our farm tractors as I can, and have chained them up, too. The ramp is up.

I have physically disconnected from the commercial power. While we don't use it, I had never physically disconnected, as I figured if we have a momentary need I might switch over, but I don't want a fire from an electric line flapping around. The wind through the generators is now producing excess power, far more than we are consuming. The batteries are at 100% charge.

We wait, with radios and TVs turned on, and the house sealed up tight.



The radio reports the storm has hit the eastern side of our island head on at Guiuan, Eastern Samar, at noon. The place is a tentacle sticking far out into the ocean to the southeast of the rest of Samar. We are on the western side of the island. So, while the history books will say it hit Samar first, it really is headed right for Tacloban!

The worst for us hasn't hit yet. Oh, it's bad already. It's real bad, but it's clearly going to get far worse.

We still have radio and TV. But maybe not for long.

The sound outside is deafening. Things are crashing against the house. We can feel it and hear it.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

The noise, the rain, the wind, goes on for hours. Some of the shutters are showing serious dents. The recessed CCTV cameras I have that are still working show that not a tree is still standing. Everything is being blown down and away.

A wave of water comes at us with real force. It's pretty damned high. It looks like it may rip through the carpark. ... It does! We can feel the force of the water as it hits the posts. My CCTV cameras on the carpark show it happening, but it's not way up.

The cameras show that the water isn't topping the cars, and it's nowhere near the batteries.

The sound is incredible. The whole house shudders, like a god with a sledge hammer is pounding the building.

There are things, big things, being carried in the water. At that moment, I realize that our vehicles will probably not survive this. But all I can think about, again, is that the water is not high enough to reach our storage batteries. I never considered I would need them even higher than they are.

The local radio stations are silent. I have a shortwave, and pick up a few calls of distress and a lot of useless chatter.

Monitors show I may have lost a couple of wind turbines. I have no idea how the solar panels are faring. We still have plenty of power. The water pump is still functioning.

The banging of things against the house has stopped. We wait inside, sealed off from the world. I have never in my life seen such destruction, even via our few little cameras. The water is gone. God, what it must be like outside these walls.

Rains, heavy rains, smash against the house. The winds are still gale force, though they come more and more separated by moments of calm, and then the torrents again. We remain closed up.

There's silence for a while, followed by more torrential rains. This goes on and on, hour after hour, for more than twenty-four hours.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

Our power generation has our batteries at 100% and we are producing excess current, primarily because of the strong winds driving the turbines that are still functioning. We still have water. While all the vehicles still exist because the chains held them in the carpark, I doubt they will function.

I have no idea what has happened more generally. There's no news, no cell service, and no internet. The world outside our home has gone silent.



A CCTV camera shows the sun is out and the winds are safely down to manageable levels. I open up a shutter on the leeward side, the side away from where the wind came.

It's hard to explain. The words cannot convey my meaning, when I say, it's all gone. Everything is gone. Can you even begin to understand the immensity of it? All that was, has been wiped from the face of this earth. There's nothing there. Homes I used to see do not exist anymore. I do not see roads where there should be roads. It's all gone, or covered by debris.



I open up every shutter I can, that hasn't been so badly dented that opening is not possible without an acetylene torch or a pry-bar. The elevator, which in nominal status sits inside the house is operative. We can get down close to the floor of the carpark, by operating it in manual mode by use of a key and a stop button inside the lift.

Clearing the carpark, just to allow the elevator to reach the floor and then down to the pad below, is slow going. It takes the better part of a day. Once we have cleared that debris away on the carpark level we are able to get close to the pad below. The pad isn't strewn with debris as bad as was the carpark. It's mostly mud here. We shovel it away, and are able to get the elevator all the way up and down.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

Back up on the carpark, I open up the hoods of the SUVs and all looks OK inside the engine compartments. The panels of the vehicles are pretty well beaten up but the doors open. While the carpets and seats are wet, I don't see anything particularly troubling. The seat backs are dry and the dash panels do not show signs of water damage.

I decide to try and start one of them. Some water blows out of the tailpipe, but it does start. I decide to run it for fifteen minutes, and try to start the other SUVs and our pickups. All start. Even Elena's Vios does. I'm frankly amazed. Sure, they all look like someone has been at them with a sledge hammer, but they all run. I'm sure the bikes are going to need far more help, but I try mine. It takes a while but, sure enough, it starts.

Getting them off the carpark means a lot more clearing on the carpark level, and the ground around where the ramp lowers down.

That takes a while, but I'm able to use two tractors, with a heavy chain run between them to clear off the area up on the carpark level. I'm able to get the ramp close to the pad, and by driving those two tractors with their large tires and sizeable ground clearance off the ramp, as the ramp hangs a bit in the air, I'm able to use the chain again and clear the ground around the ramp landing area and finish lowering the ramp.

We have spent two days since the storm just to get this far. We haven't seen anyone. We haven't heard anything. And what was a road will need large earth moving equipment to create a passable trail of any type.

We still have power, water and food. We are OK. But what about anyone else? We haven't seen a living soul.



It's day three after the storm.

We hear and then see some aircraft. Later we hear and then see a helicopter.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

A radio station is on the air. There are messages about relief supplies. Cell service is still down.

I figure at some point we will see equipment cleaning the road. We go about cleaning up what's ours, and wait it out. We have no idea what is happening elsewhere. With the help of some pry-bars, I get more shutters opened. I get up to the roofs and inspect the turbines and the solar panels. We will need to replace some panels, but most just need to be cleaned off. It looks like a tree branch ran right through a turbine. It's a total loss. Another has lost its blades but can probably be repaired. Three others I'm able to put back in service for now, though I do need some parts replaced on them.

I figure we have enough rice, and frozen and canned foods to keep us going for a month. The first things we will run out of are eggs.

I figured we would lose the chickens, the goats, and the pigs in the storm. So all those animals were slaughtered, butchered and put in the extra freezers we purchased at the last moment.

All the crops are gone. The coconut and banana trees are a complete loss.

It'll take some years to fully put the farm back together. We can probably clear enough to start planting vegetables and some rice a little later. I suspect livestock will need to be bought from other islands. We will want to get a flock of chickens as soon as we can. But right now we can't drive off our property.

It has been three days and we see no sign yet of a government effort of recovery. I'm sure it's happening in Tacloban, but it hasn't reached us yet.



Day four.

There's a large yellow 'grader,' with a dozen or so men around it, clearing the road. We go out to meet the men and ask, what has happened?

The Ark
God's Cleansing

What we learn is hard to understand. So many thousands are dead and even more just missing. Some were washed out to sea, and never to be seen again. A thirty-foot wall of water has leveled much of Tacloban. Very little remains standing.

In the city, food and water are on very short rations. Government planes have been unable to land. Supplies are coming in via the sea from other nations, but only via small craft, as the harbor has been severely damaged.

The Philippine government is completely unable to cope. Almost no large equipment has made it to the island as the docks are all destroyed. People wander around in a daze. Families are unable to find loved ones. Shelters that were supposed to offer a safe place to weather the storm became places of death.

We are asked, are we OK? Who are we still looking for? Do we need any food or water? What are our needs? When we tell them that we will be OK for a month or more, we get dazed looks lacking comprehension. We ask if any of them need water?

They ask why we are willing to share such a scarce resource. To their total disbelief, we tell them we have power and water. Someone tells another that we must be in shock and denial.

Finally, a man who seems to be running the crew asks if we will prove it. Maybe he thinks we are all insane, as he brings some large men with him as he comes to the house. We have a garden hose out on the pad. We ask if he needs to come inside, or if this water will do. He smiles and says this is OK, turn on the water. The hose has a lever-activated spray nozzle. Bim grabs it and sprays his men down, cooling them off. The looks of the men are ones of those who see a mirage that turns out to be real. They are laughing and jumping up and down.

The man who appears to be the leader asks us to show him we have power. The lift is here on the pad. I walk into it and motion him to come. He comes slowly, unsure if this is a game. Once he is in, we use the lift and bring him up, through the carpark and into the house.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

As we pass through the carpark, he asks indicating the vehicles, *Do any of these still run?*

Yes. All of them are OK.

As we rise to the living room level, lights are turned on and an aircon is running.

He looks at me and simply asks, *How?*

We use solar and wind power. There's some damage to the system, but we are still generating more power than we are using. The batteries are all fully charged. The power runs the submerged pump in our well. The storm didn't hurt that. We have enough food for a while.

Why is the glass not broken?

Watch over there. I'll close that shutter. I flip a switch on the shutter on the leeward side, as it was not damaged. It closes smoothly. I walk him outside onto the deck to look at it. The entire house, all these pods are covered with these shutters. We were closed up completely during the storm.

Sir, if your vehicles truly run, they are needed to carry supplies to many in need. The government will pay you for them.

Where should we take them?

The guy tells me and, with one gal per vehicle, two of our three SUVs, two pickups, and the Vios are sent on their way with more gals following on three bikes that are still running. Once the vehicles are dropped off, all will come back on the bikes. I hold one SUV back for now.

The guy's crew has pressed on and, once I lower him down on the lift, he trots out to catch up with them.



I am standing on the pad watching as the grader and work crew moves slowly along.

Ten has come to my side and pulls on my arm. *Ira, my school a shelter. Maybe some people still there and need help. Please, can we check to see if any there?*

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

Honey, that was four days ago. There's no sense in looking now.

Ira, please. Look out there. Where they go? Please, we really need to go and check.

We' are not going. You are going to stay here. At times like this, people do desperate and stupid things.

But...

OK, OK, I'll go, but alone. ... No, don't even think of arguing. I need to take a bike. There's no way I'll get there by the SUV. If I need to carry someone they can ride behind me and it is also easier if you are not there.

Ira, please...

No. That's final.

Take a photo of what you find. Please, for me?

OK. That, I'll do.

My bike's gas tank is full. We filled all the tanks before the storm hit.

I put some water bottles and some energy bars in a bag and hang it behind me. In case I do meet someone, they will probably need water and a bit of food.

It's not much of a problem getting to the road and, where the road has been cleared, there's absolutely no one else out here but me. However, it doesn't take long before I pass the grader. From that point on, the going is slow. I pick my way along.

As I go, I see bodies, clearly dead. They are bloated and unrecognizable. Bugs crawl over the dead flesh. Some are broken in seemingly impossible ways. They lie lodged against a tree trunk or just out in the fields. It's beyond gruesome. It's the stuff of nightmares.

The men who were working spoke of thousands dead. That might be a pitifully major undercount. The death toll may well reach the tens of thousands, if what I see holds true.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

What normally is a fifteen minute ride takes me an hour and a half. The school is partially standing and partially gone. I see more dead. Many of these are children. I know I promised pictures, but I'll be damned if I take pictures of this.

There are some angles where, if I take a picture, there will be none of the dead. I take a couple of these and then put the cellphone away.

I hear something.

It's not clear what it is but, parking the bike, I walk in that direction. In a well-built alcove, against one of the stronger sections of wall, there are some bodies. I think someone is alive.

It's dark in the alcove, and the bodies are a jumble.

So as not to scare someone, if there's a person alive, I call out the Cebuano version of hello. *Ay-ooo, ay-ooo!*

In a hoarse, parched voice, I hear, *Here. We are here! Please...*

Wait a minute. I'll bring some water to you.

Yes, Thank God! Yes!

I grab the bag and the bottles of water. And return. There are three children and an adult. They are a mess, and I can't make out much more. There are dead bodies nearby. It's not something you want to remember.

I open the cap of a bottle and bring it to the lips of the adult, but a hand pushes me toward a child. I give the child a few sips and move to the next child, and then to the next. A few sips each. The adult lifts up her head to take a sip now and, as she does, I realize, it's Debbie.

I don't say a word. Once she has had a few sips, we repeat the process. A few sips and then on to the next. One bottle is emptied. I open up another and return to the routine. When half of the bottle is gone, a child pushes the bottle away. She has had enough for now. I offer water to the next child and on we go until the

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

second bottle is also emptied. I'm about to open up the third when two more say, *No. It's OK.*

I grab an energy bar from my bag, break it into pieces, and hand a piece to each. Slowly, these are consumed. Another bar is brought forth and another bar is consumed, if a bit even more slowly.

I ask, *More?*

Debbie says, *Not now.*

Can you all walk to my motorcycle?

I think so. You take us to town?

No. They say the town is destroyed. We will go to my place.

It standing? Ira? Your place survives?

Yes. It survives.

How?

Not now, Debbie. Not now. I need to figure out if there are any more here alive.

There none. I look. None.

Then let's get out of here.

Five on a motorcycle is not a record, but four horribly weak riders behind me on this difficult path, as the sun is setting, is a challenge. We need to get back while I still have daylight.

We aren't going to make it. The sun is getting very low, and I'm going slowly. I have to be careful not to pitch off one of my riders. A few minutes before total darkness, I see the yellow grader. Beyond that, the road should be clear.

It's dark by the time I reach the men and the grader. I stop for a second.

Sir, you find some in need?

Yes. Just these.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

They need water?

No, I brought some with me.

Where will you take them?

To my house.

God bless you.

Yeh, I'm not sure about God right now. ... I better get going. Thanks to you the road is clear back to the house.

The rest of the ride only takes five minutes, and I quickly drive up onto the ramp and the carpark. All the other bikes are here, so I turn a key and press the switch to withdraw the ramp, and call the lift down from above. The lift is designed to carry no more than four, but these kids are small enough that we call all cram in.

I press the button to go up and the lift takes us to safety.

What will be anew...

1

The first face I see as the lift reaches the sala floor is Ten's. Curiosity morphs into panic and fright. The four individuals I have brought with me are not in anywhere near good shape. They are badly bruised, bloodied, with clothing that is more ripped and tattered than a rag you ask yourself why you haven't thrown away yet.

The dehydration and lack of food adds to their pallor. Behind Ten are Bim, Jessa and Lorie. Each grabs a child and disappears from view with them. I'm left standing with Debbie and Ten.

Ten, go get some clothing for Debbie. I'll take her to my bedroom and she can shower.

She doesn't say a word, but goes to do what is needed. Debbie also doesn't say a word. She follows me to my bedroom and CR. I grab a fresh bar of soap, a tube of toothpaste, the shampoo and a new toothbrush, and set all down on the counter by the sink.

Ten will be in with clothing. You may sleep as you wish or come out for some food. We will figure out the rest later. And with that, I leave her to her needs.

As I re-enter the Sala, Dessa asks, *How many others you leave behind? You take all you can on the bike, we know you not able to take more.*

I saw no others alive.

Dead. You see people dead?

More than I ever want to remember. So many dead. All over, including your school. Dead everywhere.

Others are in the room. No one speaks. There's nothing to say. For me, today, I lived a nightmare. For those men working the road, I cannot even begin to imagine what they are dealing with. I don't want to imagine.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*



I built a house to be safe. I succeeded, and yet I feel guilty.

We are OK, and so many others lie dead. They lie alone. They were without hope from the very beginning. They had no option to live. Their only option was to die, and die they did.

It's good to know that my concerns were justified. I feel horrified that my concerns were justified.

Who has survived? Did the architect who did the design for this survive? Did those who approved the plans? Did the attorney who drafted the ownership documents for the land survive?

Did any of them make it through this?

What else is standing? What other building survived?

How many are truly dead? Will we ever really know?

I have heard the phrase that, in the US civil war, the dead were piled up like cordwood. Here they were strewn about without pattern or ceremony. Lying on the ground like so much driftwood.

This is a day I want to forget. This is a day I fear will live with me until I die.



A number of us are in the sala. No one is talking. A radio announcer is calling names of people who have been found alive, if any one is looking for them. An interview with the mayor is played. Tales of the horror are described.

Initial death tolls are given. Over six thousand have perished. That number is ridiculously low. The numbers have to be in the tens of thousands. Most buildings in Tacloban have been washed away by the thirty foot storm surge. It wasn't the winds that killed so many, it was the water.

As the men said, some were washed out to sea. Some bodies have now washed ashore.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

We listen in horror, in sadness, in shock. And then Nelia speaks.

I know you not believe, but Jesus put Ira here. We are on the ark he built when all around him think he is strange and maybe crazy. We come, two by two, each time, two by two. God destroys all around us, but he not touch us. All around there is death. All around what was, is no more. But we are here. We remain. Our children are here. All are safe. All. And from the wreckage, you Ira, you find four souls alive. Alive among the dead. This is the Ark and Jesus send you to us. I sure of it. Laugh if you want. Laugh. But I know, this is true. And Ira, the last pair was you and Elena. She come to be your pairing. Jesus bring us here together.

I had not noticed it, but Debbie was standing just outside my field of vision. She has been silent since we left the school. But now she does speak.

When I meet you, Ira ... I think you an evil man who do evil things, but help others because of your evil needs. ... I think, how is this? ... How an evil man gives land to women? But you do. I jealous. I not want the evil but yes, I want the land. I see you build this crazy thing and I not understand at all. I think it must be for your evil needs with young girls. ... I not know that God sends you to be my savior and the savior of the children I rescue. ... Yes, Jesus sends you. There no other way to understand. I sure of this.

Well, I don't feel like God has anything to do with this. ... Jessa, how are the children we brought?

They scared. They want to see their families. I tell them we will ask for help to do that, but for now they should eat and sleep and get healthy.

Jessa, Debbie offers, there no help to be gotten. Their parents all dead. I see it. It a miracle the children and I survive. God's miracle. No one else survive. I not tell them because I need them to have faith that we would survive. ... Ira, God gives you three more. Maybe God works in ways I not understand.

No.

I look at Jessa. No, what?

Four more. Not three more.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

Oh. ... I see. Maybe just one more. Debbie, why do you assume those three will be mine?

Nelia is right. This God's doing. Jesus has a plan for you here. We part of it.

Well, as much as you two think those three are mine, they have a choice in the matter and not only has no one asked them, but I vote that they not join with me. You, however, are mine. So no arguing and no more scheming. I sure as hell didn't save you to throw you out.



In the days and weeks that follow, core communications infrastructure is, slowly, rebuilt. Assistance from the national government and other nations, such as the USA, Australia and Japan, come onto the island. A Chinese ship sends a little help, but compared to the other efforts, it's pretty pathetic.

Roads are cleared. Water and food stores are brought through the Tacloban airport, as the harbor is still not useable. Remittances from loved ones on other islands and abroad flood in, but there's often little to spend it on.

It's hard to know if the national government is as incompetent as people are saying, or if they are just overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, but things are moving very slowly in the public services response.

People have lost everything in so many cases, and many just want to leave. The lack of governmental support only amplifies that.



We find ourselves in the awkward position of taking advantage of the misfortune of others. Many need money to leave, and have nothing but devastated land to sell. The land isn't worth much now, and everyone is selling what land they can. We are buying.

We have cash, lots of it, because of CiCi's management, plus I banked the sale of my last properties in the States. It'll take a long time to make the land we have, and the extra land we purchase,

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produce again, but we also have the cash to pay wages for men, and equipment that still runs, to clear land.

Men who have lost their livelihood are working for us as unskilled labor. It doesn't pay much, but there aren't that many places to find paid employment here. The result is, we can hire as many men as we want.

Slowly, little by little, we clear areas. We plant vegetables first, as those crops grow, and can be harvested, the fastest. The cash these crops generate when sold at local markets is sunk back into wages and more land clearing... and on occasion the purchase of yet more land.

We are getting very good prices on our produce, as we are competing with food that is being flown in from other islands. Our prices are not predatory. It's just that we have no waste or loss. Everything we harvest we are able to sell.

The vehicles that went to the government in the immediate aftermath were purchased at new vehicle prices, and we have now acquired new vehicles to replace them, as the harbor has been rebuilt and new vehicles have arrived in port. Even the one I initially held back was sold to the government.

The result is that, while almost all here are suffering horribly, we are profiting. It feels wrong, but we have helped over twenty families gather the money to leave this island with cash in their pockets to start somewhere new. We are paying wages for scores more and, by doing so, helping the local economy recover.

Is this a rationalization? I don't know. As a capitalist, it seems like the natural order of things, but as we become a huge land owner, it feels really odd.



I haven't addressed the matter of adding Debbie, probably because I don't want to.

I was angry with her for so damned long, for nine years. But she lived, she survived when all around her perished. Was it by force of

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will? She gathered the children she could save and kept them alive. That has to mean something.

When she got here following all that, she, for the very first time, told the truth. That has to account for something.

So, call me a fool, but saving lives and telling the truth scores pretty high in my book. She probably also saved Eva and Dessa's lives. Five lives saved ought to earn you a gold star, no?

For the first few weeks, I just let Debbie and the new three settle in. We had to break the news that their parents had passed away. That was a little easier, as the TV was cataloging the grief, the death and loss of so many here. In that way, these three didn't feel like they were alone in their grief. It was a shared experience.

Still, we just let them be. Showing gentle caring and attention, but not demanding anything. There was no school for any children hereabouts for quite a while, and there was no reason for us to deal with the issue.

In the process, Internet via Globe cellular returned. Cell service was restored to almost pre-typhoon quality. TV was back on, if a little bit shaky. There were impromptu stores selling a wide variety of things. The docks having been rebuilt, fuel, which had been scarce, became readily available. And in that way, life here has become a little more normal, if not normal in truth. But Debbie and the three girls are here without a plan, and that most assuredly leaves them far from living normal lives.

I told Debbie that she was mine, but I have not done anything about it. The kids don't have any guidance from us. We have no expectations of where their future lies, and that lack of structure from us has been hard on them.

The girls are not all the same age or of the same grade. They had not been friends before Yolanda hit. It was the storm that brought them here as a group. All are younger than Ten, who is now fifteen. Their lack of common background in age and grade has meant that each is, in a way, here alone. Ten and Dessa have done

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their best to address it but, as they are a bit older, it hasn't been entirely successful.

I don't have a clue what we do with the three of them.

In another way, I don't have a clue of what to do about Debbie. I'm stalling. I don't think she is really wanting to be with the gals. I forced it on her years ago, but I don't think she's a volunteer. Without that, she's here and not part of here. And that gets me to this.

Ira!

Yes?

When you going to take me?

Excuse me? You are already taken.

Not what I mean.

What do you mean?

You know. Do not act stupid.

OK, so have you asked any of the gals this question?

Why should I do that?

Because you would have gotten your answer.

You not tell me?

Ask Ri, or Nelia, or Jessa, or Eva... or any one of the other eleven. They will tell you.

Why are you being difficult?

I am sorry you feel I am. It is not my intent or desire.

You say eleven?

Yes.

You call Ana Ten now?

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Yes.

Oh.

Ask them. Ask Ten.

Debbie leaves me.

Was that really needed?

Maybe not, Jessa. But she has to start with the gals, so why not?

What if she doesn't want?

I really don't have an answer.

What you going to do with the girls.

Isn't it a little too soon for an answer for that?

They are asking.

What exactly are they asking?

They want to know if you are expecting them to be your girls.

What has the answer been?

We say we not know.

That, my love, is the wrong answer.

Oh? What the right answer?

*Only a girl who wants to be, and asks to be, has any chance of being my girl.
All others do not.*

*OK, I make sure they told this. So when you say maybe only one, that what
you thinking?*

Yes.

Hub. OK, I miss that.

*Yeh, I'm not surprised. It seems to be a recurring theme here. I don't want
more girls, Jessa. ... Jesus didn't send me, and this place isn't an Ark.*

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And yet, the damned shoe seems to fit. Of course, you can twist many things to seem to fit. Here's hoping I don't have any more volunteers.



You really send Miss Debbie to me?

Uh-huh.

So it OK that I tell her?

Uh-huh.

She ask, if I am Ten, that make her Twelve?

I smile at the thought, though calling her Doz for Dozen might be easier on the tongue. And then I consider calling her Dallas, but only for an instant.

However, the question remains, will there ever be a reason to call her any of those terms? Will she be OK getting on board?

I hope you told her no.

I tell her I not know. I send her to Ri. OK?

OK.

You know the news about Ivy?

Ivy is the youngest of the three children from the school.

No. What is it?

She find her tita on Facebook. She in Manila and say she should come stay there?¹²⁹

Good! Very good. Is her tita coming to get her? I'm not sure she is ready to go anywhere alone right now.

Mmmm... maybe you message her?

¹²⁹ Once again we come to the use of pronouns in a sentence like this. All I can say is that it is typical for a Filipino speaker when using English. You are supposed to figure it out based on context.

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The tita?

Of course. Why you ask?

OK, get me her Facebook name and I'll see what I can do. Any chance the other two have family they can find?

Maybe Suzie. She looking.

Good. Help her look.



You want to delay me joining?

Excuse me?

Why you make me be with all eleven of your girls before you be with me? You know how long that take, right? You know, it not an eleven day thing and then done. You know. So why you make this delay? You say I am yours. Why wait?

Because I want you to be sure that you and all the others here are OK with each other. That may take a while.

Can I double up?

Yes, if they are OK with it.

Me with Bim and Ten?

If you are trying to provoke me, you are failing. Yes, with Bim and Ten if they want to. ... Look, Debbie, if you do this and are OK with all of them, I'll be OK with you. We have had years of distrust between us. See this through and we will put all of it in the past.

OK.



Uncle, this the cell number for the tita of Ivy. She ready for you to text.

I open up my text app and tap in the phone number.

[Are you Ivy's Tita?](#)

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*Yes, I am. Thank you for caring for my niece.
You do God's work, Sir.*

When was the last time you saw Ivy?

*Not for two years. I sad I not see my brother
for so long. Now he dead I am told.*

Will you come to get her? She is still
frightened and scared.

*Yes. I will come. But to get tickets is hard. I not
know when I will be there yet.*

OK. Please let me know your plans.

Yes. Of course. Thank you.

Ten, ask Ivy, when was the last time she saw her tita?

Why you ask?

Call it due diligence. Do it right now, before they can Facebook again.

The woman is in all likelihood her aunt, but I have no idea if you can see faces on Facebook. I want to make sure the stories line up and then I want my gals with Ivy at the handover. If she doesn't see the aunt, we don't hand the kid over. There are stories out now about kids being taken for sex trafficking. I'll be damned if we save a kid only to put her in that type of a situation.

Uncle, I ask her. She say there a big family reunion two years ago. She see her tita then.

So she will recognize her tita when she sees her?

Yes.

OK.

You worried? Maybe this not her tita?

I'm just being careful. That's all.

What if it not her tita to come and get her?

That is why I asked. She is only allowed to go if she sees her tita. When we hand her over, if her tita is not here, she stays with us.

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OK, I will tell her that it is your rule.

Five minutes later I get a text.

*Thank you for caring. You are right. I will be
the one. God bless.*

Ivy is with her aunt. It looks like Suzie may have a second cousin who is stepping up. We aren't sure yet. So we may be down to one of the kids. I gather that this last one has no family of any sort that survived.

Of this last kid, no one uses her given name. She is called Pinky and is fourteen, which puts her a year behind Ten in school. When the kid was told the rule about me not interested in taking any one who does not request, she only said thank you. Nothing more has come up about it.

In other news, it seems that Debbie is blazing a path through the wives. In almost all cases, she has asked that she engage with two at the same time.

Dessa and Ten have spoken to Eva and Reyna. They are proposing that Debbie do them all at the same time. It'll be a real school reunion of sorts. They see it as being a final challenge to Debbie's attitude toward me and the school girls. I'm asked if I approve. All I say is this is not my decision, but it'll be an interesting challenge for Debbie if it actually happens.

I'm thinking about Pinky when Elena sits down next to me.

You know why she not wanting to do girls?

Who?

Debbie.

OK, no, I don't have a clue. I gather you do.

Her tita do her when she was young. She not want it then; it scare her. When your young wives do her long time ago, she think of her tita. She see herself as tita with the little girls. She hate herself. She angry at anyone who do young girls.

I see. Should I assume you have fixed her head on that problem?

Yes. It not a problem now. But maybe a new problem.

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Please, no. No more problems.

Yes, now I think she likes young girls.

I have to smile.

Why you think this funny?

Because, you don't know what Ten is planning. And I explain it to Elena.
And now... Elena is smiling.



I ready now. You know, what the four do, it not necessary.

I didn't ask or advise them to do what they did. That was all them, or more specifically, probably all Ten. But, yes, I'm aware it was an effort without a need. Elena told me as much.

She really special.

Elena? Yes, she is. When you say you are ready now, do you mean right now?

Yes. Right now. I tell Jessa. You busy for a while. Not to disturb you.

I'm hardly in the mood right now. For Christ's sake, it's ten-fifteen in the morning. While I can appreciate Debbie's desire to nail this down, if you will pardon the phrase, I do prefer a more apropos time for such festivities. Regardless, down the hall we go.

When we enter the bedroom, surprise awaits me. Elena is here.

Here to push someone's buttons?

Absolutely. You ready, handsome?

Really? Is there someone standing behind me?

Relax, Ira, this will be fun.

As all of this is going on, Debbie is shedding her clothing. Elena has damned little on as it is, just some hip-hugger panties and nothing else. I shed my clothes and, along with Debbie, get onto the bed, joining Elena, who is already on it.

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My thought that Elena was going to be pushing my buttons disappears, as she goes after Debbie. In no time at all, Debbie is bouncing up off the mattress with serious orgasms. I'm nothing but a voyeur with a ringside seat, until Elena brings me in for a kiss and tells me to mount Debbie.

With all the visual stimulation I have received, I'm truly hard enough to mount the gal. I plunge in, and Elena renews her attack on her too. This is not love. This is raw, and simply over-the-top, sex, but, in Elena's world, the love will come later. I have learned that about her and learned to trust her instincts.

Debbie's orgasms are nonstop now, as I fuck her through one and into another. I'm not doing anything special, other than repeatedly running my cock into the gal. Elena is delivering the special sauce, and I'm too busy now to notice what that is.

Eventually, I do cum and, I suspect, Debbie is relieved to come back to earth following the physical expression of my desire now, deposited deep within her.

As I pull Debbie in for a kiss, Elena quietly leaves the bedroom. Debbie's eyes are having a hard time focusing, as my lips meet hers and my hand totally cups a breast.

She kisses back sweetly.

For the first time in the nine years I have known this woman, we are sharing a gentle intimacy. For nine years we were combatants of a type. And now? And now, we share what seems to be a love for each other. Our bodies sated, and our hearts meeting in earnest repose. The touching is to explore without stimulation. The breathing is measured and slow. The smiles are not fakes, but guides. Eyes meet in sweet, shy, innocent joy. She is a revelation to me. Am I to her?

We lie here with hours to spare. Sleep will not claim us. Duties are reassigned to others. We have the day and, for hours of it, we claim it for our own. Kissing, touching, holding and just being together.

Hours have passed, and neither of us wants to be the one to end it. Such an odd moment. We are probably done, but unable to say I'm

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the one to know it. I look again into her eyes, and all I see is a happy woman. She smiles at me and I smile back. We are a bit silly in this.

The bedroom door opens. Weren't we supposed to be left alone? In come Dessa, Eva, Reyna and Ten. All arrive naked and all join us on the bed. The elder two grab me. The younger two take hold of Debbie. Slowly their mouths descend on sex organs, on breasts and lips. Most assuredly there's a plan in all this, as both Debbie and I are stimulated into arousal.

We are moved around. I'm now on my back with my cock deep inside Debbie. Reyna has my lips. Eva has Debbie's lips while Dessa and Ten take Debbie's breasts into their mouths and finger her clit.

Maybe it's the excitement and the stimulation provided by the girls, as I'm not doing much inside her, but Debbie starts rocking on me and then cums hard, then cums again on my cock. It's enough for me and I return the favor.

Let there be no doubt. Debbie has joined us.



Suzie and Pinky are still here. It looks like the second cousin idea for Suzie has faded.

We have no clarity of what their future will be. I have made it clear that I want no pressure placed on either girl. Neither is housebound. They can come and go as they like, and both have run errands for us. Neither is allowed to take a bike, but someone is always going somewhere, and the girls take advantage of that. There are also tricycles operating on the road now. I have provided each with a small, but real, allowance, and so paying for a ride is well within their ability.

They are young, certainly, but right now it seems that many young people are pairing off, more than before. Dessa tells me that Pinky has a suitor. It's one of our workers. If she takes up with him,

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there will be enough money for rice. Probably not much more, but at her age, I'm not sure the rest matters much.

If Pinky is looking for my encouragement or disapproval, she is getting neither. I want her to choose without interference. But it blows up in my face. Or rather at my face.

She throws a cup at me.

If you not want me, just say it!

What?

I try to make you tell me to stay, but, you say nothing! If you not want me, why give me the allowance and the clothing. What wrong with you?

Aren't you sweet on Edgar?

No! I mean, he nice and he likes me, but no! Why do you not say, 'What can Edgar offer you? Look what I can offer you?' Why do you not say, 'Stay with me?' I see you looking at me. Why do you not say 'be my girl?'

You were using Edgar to make me jealous?

Yes!

You want to be my girl?

Yes!

Well then talk to Ri. That's the next step. I'll be happy to have you as my girl if Ri and the others agree.

Debbie and Jessa have been picking up the pieces of the broken cup, and both are having a good chuckle. Pinky sees it and screams, *What so funny?*

You! If you want to belong to Ira, any of us tell you how. Go talk to Ri. That the place to start.

I see Suzie in the hallway. She has been watching. I turn to say something to Jessa and then turn back. Suzie is gone.



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Life here has a different rhythm than it did before Yolanda. It's a curious mix of government projects that get started with fanfare but sort of dwindle down, not near to fully completed, and commercial activity that is booming now, with jobs to all who want to work and have the skills.

But there's much quasi-homelessness. Temporary huts abound. Schools are being rebuilt, but classes are not ready for all yet. Prostitution is rampant, as many of the skilled workers are from other islands.

There are children wandering around without parents. Parents wandering around looking for children. This is not as much as before, but it still common to see. Ann tells me she almost brought a kid home with her last night.

We have lost some of our laborers to the skilled job market, but most of the men we have working for us don't have the skills needed for those jobs. They had been farmers before. They know how to use a hammer, but not as skilled carpenters. They know how to mix a bag of Portland cement to make concrete, but they are not masons. They really don't know how to weld or lay tile.

So they clear fields and plant crops. With so much of our land now cleared enough to farm, we have some rice planted, along with the vegetables. We are reforesting with coconut and have banana trees started, as well as papaya. It'll take years to be into full production but, as the land we purchased was so cheap, the crops we can grow quickly brings in a substantial income.

Because of our greatly expanded holdings, just about all the wives, except for Eva and Reyna, are out every day supervising the operations. Reyna is working at a bank in Tacloban, as she graduated university in banking and finance.

I'm ignoring the political mudslinging between the local politicians who, in truth, have family ties to, or are literally part of, Imelda Marcos' Romuáldez clan, and the Liberal Party, run by Noy-Noy Aquino, who has no love for the Romuáldez clan, seeing as how he blames them for his father's assassination. It's a distraction and doesn't help the people here.

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Debbie had set up a temporary school for our kids. But the schools are functioning again, and all but one of my children are in class five days a week. Lorie keeps the little one with her, as she goes about her day.

As the schools are back operating, Debbie is teaching again, as is Eva, who has been teaching elementary since 2010. Elena's warning about the new Debbie is not far from my thoughts frequently. So far, so good.

It's been nine years since I left Kennewick. These days, all my ties to the USA, with the exception of a bank account, have been severed. I hear nothing from anyone back there. Most assuredly, I have not heard from Tom.

I have a need to add another bedroom pod to the house, but I have been unable so far to contact the architect. I have the plans for the pods. If I can't find him soon I'll have to find someone else to do the final drawings to get the building permit.

The issues related to the farm keep me busy most days. Add to that the maintenance on the house, and my days are well filled.

And, speaking of the house maintenance, when I communicated with the company that sold me the wind turbines relating to repair issues following Yolanda, we struck a deal. They filmed a video on how their equipment did in a category 5 super typhoon and I got all my replacement parts free of charge.

The solar panels were not as big a deal. I just ordered them and set the units in. We are now back, and capable of generating full power. When I add the pod I'll add more turbines and panels.



Po, we are ready.

Before me are Pinky and Suzie. They have just returned from school. Debbie drives them to and from each day, and Debbie is standing behind them.

Ready for what?

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For me with you, Po.

Have you talked to Ri? I know I told you, Pinky, to see her. Have either of you done that?

Po, we have been with all the wives in your house. Even with Miss Debbie. We are ready, Po.

Jessa!

No need to shout. I am right here!

Do you know anything about this?

Yes, of course.

Well?

They tell you the truth.

I see. And turning to the two girls, Well, I'll be with you two, one at a time, and one per day. Who goes first?

Each one points to the other. I take a ten peso coin from my pocket. This side is heads and this side is tails. I'll flip the coin. Pinky, you are heads, Suzie you are tails. Ready? They both give me eyebrows. And I flip the coin high in the air. It comes down ... tails. OK, Suzie today. Pinky tomorrow.

Suzie is thirteen. I had been thinking that Debbie had been holding her need for young girls back, but it doesn't look like she has. As we walk to the bedroom, Suzie tells me she has been with Debbie about half a dozen times. She was with the other wives only once, or twice at the most.

There isn't much to distinguish Suzie from other cute, young Filipina girls. There's nothing outstanding. She's cute, but so are many others. At first, when I found her and the other two, they were far from cute. But the damage that was done to them then, has been healed. She is healthy and filled with spirit.

I can say she's under five feet tall, of slight build, black hair, black eyes, small breasts, small hands and feet, with an oval face and

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bright white teeth that show every time she smiles. Unfortunately, that describes over a million young Filipinas.

As we enter the bedroom and close the door, Suzie immediately closes the gap, grabs onto me and seeks out my lips for a real kiss. To say I'm surprised is to understate the moment.

I readily accept the kiss and hold her tight to me. That produces a murmur from her chest as the kisses continue. Eventually, the kisses do subside, and Suzie rests her head on my shoulder.

Po, I want to do this for a long time. You saved us. You not have to, but you do. You bring us to your home. You not have to, but you do. You feed and care for us. You not have to, but you do. You not make us do anything for this. ... I think how I repay? I ask Jessa, how to repay. ... Sir, she say find where you want to be and go do it. Be healthy and strong. That all Sir wants. He not want payment. It not why he do this. So I try to find this place. I try to find where I should be. ... Then I hear the time Pinky angry with you and what you say to her. ... I think, I know now. I want to be here with you. You tell Pinky how to do it. I decide I do this too. Now, I am here. This where I always be. I be a wife to you, just like the others.

I see. That was a big speech, Suzie. I didn't save you to make you mine. You know that, right.

Yes, I know. I want this. It my choice. Just like you say to Pinky.

My lips find hers and, once again, kisses follow. I feel no rush. In a way, I sense no need to rush from Suzie. My hand slides down and firmly cups a globe of her ass cheek. Her kiss gets more animated. My other hand moves down and takes the other cheek in the same measure.

Both cheeks in hand, I lift her off the floor, still kissing, and she locks her legs around my legs; her arms hold tight around my shoulders. I lift her up more and walk us to the bed.

She holds on, as I put her back onto the mattress with me still attached to her. The kissing continues.

Breaking off the kiss, I unbutton the one button she has on the waistband of her skirt. Lowering the zipper and sliding the pleated

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skirt off from around her reclining body, I then unbutton her blouse. With her assistance, she is shorn of it. Now in bra and panties only, she waits as I arise and remove my clothing.

Once again, all I can think about is that what we have is beauty and the old beast. But she doesn't appear to be put off in any way. I unsnap her bra and remove that last vestige of clothing, her panties.

Before we do this, I need to make sure. Are you really sure you, at the age of thirteen, want to be the wife of an old man? Think for a second. I'll be happy to have you as a wife, but does this make sense to you? You don't have to leave if we don't do this. You are still safe.

Po... I safe already. I know this. No one say I to leave. I know this. I here because I want this. Truly.

Naked as we are, I draw Suzie to me for yet another kiss, skin to skin, body warmth against body warmth. She rolls on her back, pulling me with her; her arms holding me firmly. The kiss ends in a smile on her lips. *It's time, Po. I think we both ready!* And a giggle escapes her lips.

I'm ready, and right where I need to be. Suzie is hunching her hips up, seeking my entrance. I now do my part, and find myself against a firmness that needs to be pushed through. I reach my hand down to guide my cock straight and true, as the curtain is pushed aside of this virginal entrance. ... And, I'm in.

She looks up at me. She has been biting her lip. I see the tooth marks. There was pain, but it will never be mentioned. Maybe it'll be celebrated, but only silently, in her remembrance of this special time in her life.

She gives me another smile and, with a laugh, says, *Come and get it, Po.* Or maybe it was, *Cum and get it.* There's no way to know, and this is not the time to ask. She hunches her hips again, and the fucking begins in earnest.

Suzie isn't looking for the novel, the unique, ... the acrobatic. She is wanting something far more basic, the taking of her body by the man she loves. She is getting that. But I decide to turn the tables on her. I have a firm grasp on her and, while still inside her, I roll onto my back, pulling her up and onto me. *Now it's time for you to cum and get it.* I end it with a big smile. I get a huge smile in return as Suzie takes the pole position.

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Suzie experiments with various movements, seeing what feels good and what feels even better. She's having a good time, being playful. The feel of her is amplified by looking up at her, as her sweet body moves, adjusts and savors. If I'm not going to get off this way, I'm still staying rigid. That has the benefit of delaying the inevitable, and completely predictable, end.

Her breasts are too small to sway, but they do jiggle a bit as she fucks herself on my cock. But now, she wants on her back again. She wants to feel her man's power. I roll over with her and run deep into her. She grunts and only says, *More*.

More it is, and I pound away on her. Copious amounts of her fluids are flowing now and, though she is very tight on my cock, there's a sloshing sound each time as I push in.

I grab a nipple and, on the next push, I pinch it. The result is dramatic, as Suzie cums hard on my cock. Her muscles tensing on it, releasing and tensing again... and again. And, on the fourth epic time, her body spasms beneath me, cum pours forth. Her eyes fly open wide, as she feels my essence enter her.

As surprise gives way to comprehension, a broad smile graces her sweet face, and she pulls my head to hers for a meaningful kiss, following by a heartfelt, *Salamat, maraming, maraming salamat*,¹³⁰*Po*.

You are welcome, Suzie. You are a wife to me now.

She giggles before telling me, *I know. Truly, I know.*



You bedded her how many times, Debbie?

Why you ask?

Just curious. It's not a problem nor a criticism. It's just that the others were with her only once or twice. Was she special for you? Or maybe you enjoy her youth?

I think it exciting... you know, I not forcing her. It what she want.

¹³⁰ Thank you very, very much.

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I know. You can be with her as many times as you both want to be. I have no objection. So long as any two wives want to be together, that is perfectly OK.

Thank you. We have fun.

I'm sure you two did.

And with that, Debbie leaves with Suzie and Pinky to school. As the elevator reaches the carpark and the three exit it, Jessa asks me, *Was there a warning in what you said?*

Yes, but I'm not sure she heard it. Elena resolved her inner demons but she may have released something with a vast hunger. I suspect we will have to keep close watch on it.

The others will tell you, I am sure.

I'm not thinking of my wives. I'm thinking of the kids in the school.

Oh. I not think of that. You really think she will do that?

I don't know. But it is a worry.



The farm is far more productive, far faster in recovery, than I expected. With the exceptions of trees that simply take time to grow, all is happening rather quickly. Everything we can produce is being readily consumed locally.

There's satisfaction in that. We are having a hand in the recovery of the island. Some things are taking a long time, like the promised government housing. That is moving at a snail's pace. But we are doing far better than I expected.

We aren't buying as much land as we were before, but we are still buying, and now we don't have to dip into savings to swing the deals. Some farmers who tried to stick it out are giving up. Not all, and really, not most. But we are one of the only ones who are buying. Much of this land has been partially cleared. We invested in some new farm machinery, and so, clearing the remaining areas is easier for us, as we aren't trying to do it with carabao.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

CiCi has been pushing for setting up a canning and processing plant. The reality is that we are giving away value when we sell to other processors, so we are developing those plans. I probably won't have a major part in this. My wives are taking the lead. However, it will necessitate a bank loan, and Reyna is pushing for us to bring the business to the bank where she works.

I tracked down our architect. He's been hanging his hat in Manila. He got out of Tacloban a day before Yolanda came to visit us. I think he was hiding from me, afraid to hear that maybe the house had not survived. When he heard that it survives and weathered the storm so well, he was happy to finally respond.

Right now, he is completing the work needed for the new pod. Actually two pods. One will have a large playroom for the children, as well as extra bedrooms. We will finance the construction with profits as they roll in, month by month. This time I'm not expecting any pushback from government regarding our plans. The storm proved the worthiness of the design, but I note, no one is copying us.

Ira?

Hub?

Ira, it is time!

School over already?

Dub? Yes! Come eat and then we go to your bedroom!

Pinky, calm down. There's time between eating and the bedroom. Breathe! I'm not going to say no to you. You will be a wife to me. Just relax a little.

OK. Sorry.

Good, so sit with me and tell me, how many times were you with my other wives?

Oh! Is there a special number?

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

No. I guess I'm smiling because she gets a confused look on her face. I just figure that if there is one more than another, maybe you like that wife in a special way. Things like that are good for me to know.

Oh! OK, I with Eva three times. Everyone else once, except for Miss Debbie. I think five times. But that because she so excited for me. She invited me.

Was that OK for you?

Yes? Imagine what the kids in the school would think? I the sex partner of our teacher! Ira, it OK if sometimes I think about having sex with someone at school? That a girl I mean. Is that OK?

It's OK to think about it, but it's not smart to do it.

Because maybe they not like it?

Yes, that's one reason. Another is, what if they decide they love you? How will you deal with your life as a wife here and a love away from here?

You know, Miss Debbie say the same question. She say there only one way. The girl to join us.

There's one big problem with that. I'm not adding anyone more. You are here because of the typhoon. If there was no typhoon, Debbie, Suzie and you would not be here now.

So, Miss Debbie wrong?

Well she is right to the extent that, it would be the only way, but that way isn't really OK.

But if it a really special girl?

You are all really special girls, Pinky. All of you. No one could be more special.

How about if it not a girl, but a really pretty teacher?

I guess I'm smiling again, because Pinky gets the message that I think that's funny.

No, I'm not laughing at your question, I'm laughing because you think the rule is just for girls. It's for all. I don't want any more wives.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

Maybe if you meet her you change your mind!

Is this what you want or is it what Miss Debbie wants?

She want my schoolmate. I want my math teacher!

Don't we have enough wives here for you to have sex with?

Mmmm, maybe, maybe not?

Oh, good grief. Let's have supper.

The supper table conversation is mostly about some new land we are acquiring. It connects two parcels we already own. The question is, do we use the land for the same crops? Do we find a better use for the now larger, contiguous field? What can we sell at a good price locally without flooding the market, or do we start shipping product to Manila? Then we get into a discussion of how our land use will change once the processing plant is ready for operating. Clearly, the canned goods will be shipped to other islands, and maybe for export.

There's discussion around the purchase of another tractor. We do need one, and some additional trucks, for hauling produce. As the discussion continues, I can see Pinky getting antsy for us to get with her program. The food has already been consumed, and so I get up and pour myself a bit of the Tanduay Select Rhum and, *I wish all a good night, as I'm about to welcome the very last wife I'll ever accept into the fold.* I raise my glass to all assembled, offer my arm to Pinky, and walk down the hall to hoots and laughter.

As we pass through the walkway from one pod to the next, Pinky asks, *Why you say that?*

Say what?

That I be the last.

Because you will be.

Ira, I here long enough to know that not true. You think we not talk?

The Ark
God's Cleansing

Oh? So tell me, great sage, just how do you know this? We are entering my bedroom and, as we enter, Pinky closes the door, smiles, shakes her head, reaches up and kisses me gently.

She takes a step back, looks right into my eyes, sighs a bit and offers, 'When you met Nelia, you said, 'no more.' And then there is Ri. When you fly to Tacloban, it not really to meet another girl, it to stop Lillian.

Ah, that is not right! I did make contact with other gals.

Oh! They not tell me this. ... OK, but when you meet Ann you say, 'no.' Pinky is taking off her clothing. You say she too young. And you refuse to meet the next. You say 'no more.' Then you move next to Reyna and she joins. You say 'no more.' When you come back from America, Eva and Jessa here. They stay and you say 'no more.' Elena comes and you say 'no more.' She is down to bra and panties. Then Ate Debbie sends you Dessa and all of a sudden Ana and Dessa are yours. You say 'no more!'

She is beginning to undress me. Well, it didn't quite happen that way, but OK.

And now it Ate Debbie, Suzie and me. You say 'no more.' ... Ira, there be more. Debbie wants more. Suzie wants more. There always more. Why you not know this? My shirt is off and the slacks are being removed. Squatting, Pinky smiles as she removes them and strokes my cock through the cloth of the underwear.

She removes my briefs, tossing them aside and takes my cock into her mouth, stroking it at the same time. She's pretty damned good at this. How?

Jesus, who taught you to do that?

She removes my cock long enough to say, Elena. Before returning to her mission.

It feels great, and I'm satisfied to allow her to go on for a goodly while. But I figure her jaw has to be getting tired and, though I'm truly hard, I'm not nearly ready to cum. I bring her up to her feet and lead her to the bed.

The Ark
God's Cleansing

There's not one moment of hesitancy. All I see and feel is someone who is comfortable with all that is occurring. Yes, she is so young, but sexually she has been with all of my wives. So that part is no longer new, no longer a mystery to her. For some damned reason, just like the others, she has actually chosen to be here. I'll not gainsay her choice. She has made it and, if history here has taught me anything, it's that I don't really understand shit.

Pinky is in my arms. I pull her close and we kiss, but she really doesn't want to kiss. I'm about to get pissed, but she puts a finger to my lips. *Ira, we kiss all night. I kiss you so much that you say enough! But first, make me your wife. I want that. I want to feel that.*

Did Elena tell you to do this?

No. She do this too?

Yeh, it is what she is like.

I get a big smile. *Good to know. I like her.*

I put Pinky under me, move my cock over what might have been a dry labia, only to find it's dripping with her fluids. My glans, anointed with the juices, makes my cock's slide, up and back down, smooth, as it splits the outer lips.

And then I center myself, gather up her legs in my arms, raising her hips a bit, and push in hard.

Pinky cries out briefly. I must have hurt her, and so I stop. *Why you stop?*

Are you OK?

Oo. Continue.

We fuck. There's no sweet way to say it. It's not romantic. It's pure horny fucking. It's rocking the bedframe and wrecking the sheets fucking. She may be too young and too small, but I'm too old and too out of shape.

*The Ark
God's Cleansing*

It's hard to know who would have given up sooner, but my nuts finally call a halt to the proceeding by bringing forth a prodigious amount of cum and flood her cunt.

She laughs and exclaims. *That was so good!*

A little humbled, I can only offer in return, *I'm glad you enjoyed it.*

Enjoy it? Ira, it was fucking great! Now before we kiss, can we take a shower?

We can. The shower is plenty big enough for both of us, and Pinky wants to be with me right now. The water splashes down as I soap her and she soaps me.

Ira, you know, I never have a warm water shower before?

Don't you have one every day?

No, silly, I mean before I come here. Never. Always just water from a bucket. I am a princess now. You always have this hot water?

And that takes me back.

Funny you should ask. There's a story attached to that. Maybe I should tell it to you.

The End

Images



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Public Storm Warning Signal

Revised Public Storm Warning System

PSWS	LEAD TIME* (hrs)	WINDS (KPH)	IMPACTS OF THE WIND
#1	36	30 - 60	No damage to very light damage
#2	24	61-120	Light to moderate damage
#3	18	121-170	Moderate to heavy damage
#4	12	171-220	Heavy to very heavy damage
#5	12	more than 220	Very heavy to widespread damage



* On first issuance only.

The delineation of areas for a given signal number is based on the intensity, size of circulation and the forecast direction and speed of movement of the tropical storm or typhoon at the time of issue of the warning bulletin. The change in intensity, size of circulation or movement of the tropical cyclone also determines the change in the PSWS number over a given locality.

When any Public Storm Warning Signal Number is hoisted or put in effect for the first time, the corresponding meteorological conditions are not yet prevailing over the locality. This is because the purpose of the signal is to warn the impending occurrence of the given meteorological conditions. It must be noted also that the approximate lead time to expect the range of the wind speeds given for each signal number is valid only when the signal number is put in effect for the first time. Thus, the associated meteorological conditions are still expected in at least 36 hours when PSWS #1 is put in effect initially; in at least 24 hours with PSWS #2; in at least 18 hours with PSWS #3; in at least 12 hours with PSWS #4; and in at least 12 hours with PSWS #5. The lead time shortens correspondingly in the subsequent issues of the warning bulletin when the signal number remains in effect as the tropical cyclone comes closer.

It is also important to remember that tropical cyclones are constantly in motion; generally towards the Philippines when PAGASA is issuing the warning. Therefore, the Public Storm Warning Signal Number over a threatened/ affected locality may be sequentially upgraded or downgraded. This means that PSWS #1 may be upgraded to PSWS #2, then to PSWS #3, PSWS #4 and to PSWS #5 as necessary when a very intense typhoon is approaching or downgraded when the typhoon is moving away. However, in case of rapid improvement of the weather condition due to the considerable weakening or acceleration of speed of movement of the tropical cyclone moving away from the country, the downgrading of signal may jump one signal level. For example, PSWS #3 may be downgraded to PSWS #1 or all signals from PSWS #2 may be lowered.

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Jeepney Busses and Tricycles

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References

Gal	BD
Cincer/CiCi	21-May-76
Bim / Princess / Prin	12-Apr-78
Debbie	17-Apr-80
Elena	21-May-81
Jessa	4-Apr-84
Nelia	7-Feb-85
Lorie / Ri	2-Nov-86
Eva	11-Feb-89
Ann / Shaniel	14-Feb-89
Reyna	28-Jan-90
Dessa	16-Jul-97
Niana/Ana	3-Mar-98
Pinky	26-Sep-99
Suzie	3-Aug-00

Mom	Name	Nic	BD
Nelia	Mark James Lopez	MJ	31-Mar-06
Cincer	Ira Edgar Santos	Ed	30-Jun-06
Ann	Iris Rose Ramos	Ris2X	31-Aug-06
Reyna	Michelle Arroyo	Mac	30-Sep-06
Bim	Elenora Arlene Cabreza	Leeni	31-Oct-06
Eva	Charlie Beloy	Loy2x	31-Dec-06
Jessa	Ira Victor Arroyo	Victor	31-Oct-07
Nelia	Maria Fernada Lopez	Ada	29-Feb-08
Lorie	Cherry Joy Cruz	Joy	30-Apr-08
Ann	Ira Mark Ramos	Mark	13-Jul-08
Bim	Precious Girl Cabreza	Inday	23-Aug-08
Eva	Ira John Beloy	John2X	11-Oct-08
Lorie	Princess Honey Cruz	Honey	31-Jan-12