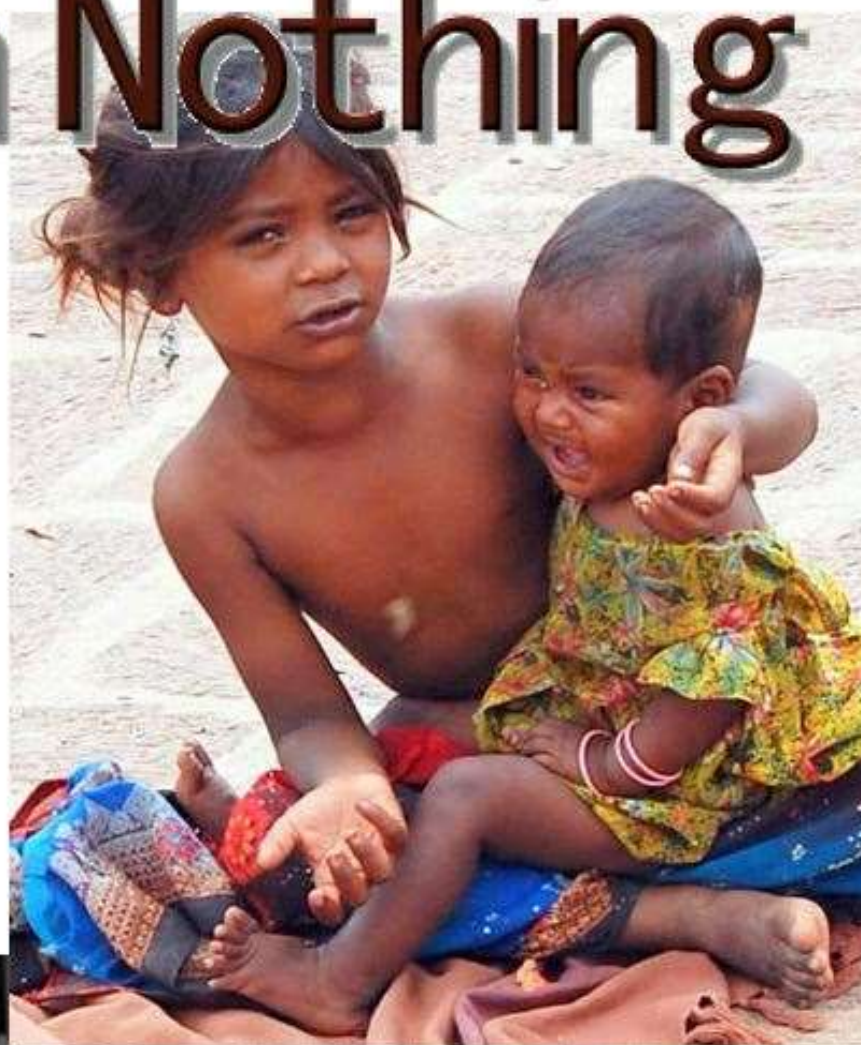


From Nothing

by VeryWellAged



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A Novella

*Saving Nene, didn't come with a price.
It was its own reward.*

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Warning to reader: Chapters 6 and 7 of this story is connected to material from BOTH Jake's Journal: The Philippines - Joyfully ([PDF](#) / [azw3](#) / [ePub](#) / [mobi](#)) AND Retirement ([PDF](#) / [azw3](#) / [ePub](#) / [mobi](#)) stories. While it is possible to read this story without reading those stories, to understand all references, the reader should consider reading those two stories first.

Chapter 1: A fine fix

It was a fine fix I was in, as Oliver might have said to Stan.

I am 66 and my wife, if she had lived would be 37 today. Our marriage lasted ten years. The first nine were glorious. But cancer ravaged her that last year. We had just made the move back to her homeland, the Philippines; I had just retired from my job of the last 23 years. We had sold our home in Thousand Oaks, California for less than we had hoped to get for it... oh if we had sold in 2007 and not 2010! But that along with a great deal more was water under the bridge, (or was it over the dam?).

She, my wife, had been a stunningly lovely 27 year old, when we married. I was 56 and beating myself up for thinking I could/should marry a woman so young. I knew she would out-live me by decades. I felt as if I was a con artist and she was the mark. How could I do this to her? Still I loved her and she really did love me. That love held us tight and happy for most of a decade. And then the cruelest of God's tricks, he took her first! That should never be. It should never have happened. It was beyond unfair.

In the years prior to my retirement, we had bought land, in her name, as I was not a citizen of the Philippines. We had built a home, a wonderful home. And now, rather than living out my retirement with the love of my life, I was inconsolably... alone.

We had sold off everything we had in the States. There was nothing to go back to. I rambled around our house in General Santos City,

without a plan, without an agenda, without companionship, and without a damned idea of what to do next.

I did create a daily routine, partially just so I didn't go nuts and partially because things still needed to be done and there was no one else to do them.

Shopping for food was one of the daily things. Shopping in the Philippines is qualitatively different from going to Von's in the USA. You don't buy for the week and more at a time. You buy for the day or maybe two days at most. Fish is best when consumed the day it is caught. The fresh produce is best eaten right away. There are no preservatives coating things, no special packaging keeping, triple washed salad, green and good for a week.

Maybe just maybe something might be wrapped in cellophane, but mostly it wasn't wrapped in anything and you had better wash it before you ate it when you got it home because of the dirt not the chemicals. The quality of the food, with the exception of beef, was wonderful. So a trip to the market each day was the best policy. Sometimes that meant a trip to the open-air markets; sometimes it meant a trip to a supermarket. Sometimes it was a trip to both.

Bill paying also required trips. Bills had to be paid in person, not by mail or automatic debit card. I could pay the Socoteco (electric) bill at KCC mall. The PLDT phone and internet bill I paid at the PLDT office downtown, one block off Pendatun Street, right by the BDO bank and Jollibees. The water bill was paid at their office. I had to travel down Salvani Street cross the last paved road before the street becomes dirt, and then over the rutted route until it hits a paved cross street, where a right hand turn takes you to their office. Once inside, the guard gives you a number/ticket. There are rows of chairs and tellers behind cages for the average person and there is a

separate window for Senior Citizens... I qualify for that. Payment for the cable TV is at the SkyTV office on my way to two of the malls, the KCC and Gaisano. For most things, I prefer KCC but there are times when Gaisano is the better option. There is a new Robinson's mall that has opened but they seem too expensive and for some reason the place is off putting. SM is building a mall but it isn't completed yet. It will be closer to home when it is finished.

I'm rambling... sorry. I tend to do that a lot these days. Anyway, as I was saying, I do get out of the house. It has been just forty-four days since I buried my sweet wife. We, she and I, knew that day was coming, but knowing hardly made it easy.

§ § §

If you have ever been in a country with real and pervasive poverty, you have seen beggars. Such people are not unique to the Philippines. I gather it is far more of a problem in places such as India than it is here. Still you will find them. They will approach you on the street, when walking to store and even at times, when you are stuck in traffic, or parked or waiting for someone, like I used to do when waiting for my wife at the BDO office. It is mostly kids, ragamuffins, their hands out and hoping for a peso or two. If I had a peso in my pocket I would, if there were not too many of them, give a peso. If I had no pesos or there was a crowd of them, I would say, *walá*, which is Tagalog meaning 'nothing,' or I don't have anything to give you. Unfortunately, many of those kids had never been to school and do not know Tagalog. I guess they might know Cebuano, but I don't know any Cebuano.

To say that these beggars are dirty is only to point out that they have no way to wash themselves. It is not a comment on their values or their standing before God or Man. The beggars in the Philippines are very dark skinned. That is not a racial matter. It is caused by the

fact that they are constantly out under the sun. Caucasians tan, but Filipinos vary from a light *café au lait*, to dark, dark brown. Not every Filipino is as light skinned as the next one, but none are as dark by genes as a beggar appears to be. So, while the beggar is visible in a number of ways, none of the reasons are a matter of race or caste. The reasons are economic. Regardless, of the cause, they are desperate, but I cannot be every man's keeper and I can't raise every beggar up. That is the work of governments and NGOs, not a single human. And so while I might feel sorry for them, I do frequently walk by them without stopping.

I have been speaking of the past. It is my past, but not the long past. Day forty-three was yesterday. I need to talk about yesterday. I need to talk about how I got to where I am today. I need to do that because, for the life of me, I don't know what I was thinking and what the fuck I'm going to do now.

I had been to the supermarket at KCC Mall, which is either the basement or the first floor depending on your way of thinking about it I guess. Anyway, I had parked in the lower level parking facility from which I had close access to the supermarket. If you go there after 1:30PM and before 3:00PM it is generally possible to find a parking slot. Go earlier and you will be out of luck.

I picked up eggs, bread, tocino, beer (San Miguel Premium,) fresh pork, garlic, onions, salted black beans and ampalaya. For supper I would fry up the pork, black beans and ampalaya in a light broth. Of course, it is served over rice, but I had a 20 kilo bag of rice at home.

With the groceries in the back of the Toyota Corolla Altis sedan, I traveled through the outlet drive underneath the mall, handed in my parking receipt (there is no money attached to the process but you get one when you enter and have to surrender it when you leave) and turned left onto the street as I exited.

As you do so, almost immediately you can turn left again, and drive by the front of the mall, or you can continue on and turn left at the cross street half way between KCC and Robinsons (and just shy of my car mechanic's shop). I drove to the cross street and turned left. A short hop to a light brings you to the National Highway where by literally going straight at the light I join the Highway going west through Gensan (General Santos City). That is my regular path to go back home. This was yesterday. It was 2:30PM and I was stopped at the light. Next to me on my left was a large delivery truck. Not a semi, but not a van either. He couldn't see me and I could only see his fender. Ahead of me were two large trucks. My windows were up and the air-conditioner was on.

I must have been in half a daze, waiting for the light and the trucks to move. There was a knock on the front passenger window. It startled me. She, it was a she, of that there was little doubt, could not have been much over 135cm (that's about 4'6" for those of us from the USA). She was beyond dirty. She was almost black. Her hair was a rat's nest. I was pretty sure the person was a 'she' for the simple reason that standing out in broad daylight on a city street, she was as naked as the day she was born. There on the other side of my window were two puffy little breasts and a completely hairless, if dirty, vagina.

It is what I did next that created the initial problem that I have been trying to cope with ever since. I took a ₱50 note from my billfold and put it on the dash right under the rearview mirror and then leaned over and opened the passenger door.

She looked in, warily, eying the note. I motioned for her to take it, which required her to enter the vehicle. She hesitated, as the light changed. She saw that and lunged in to the car to get the bill before I drove off. As her feet left the pavement and cleared the doorframe, I hit the accelerator, the door slammed shut behind her as I passed

under the light, entering the National Highway. Her eyes were wild with fear. The ₱50 note was still on the dash. She was crouching on the floor below the dash, shaking and whimpering. Did she know Tagalog? ***Kalma ka!*** [you relax! or calm down!] I prayed she would understand. It seemed she did or maybe my harsh voice settled her down.

She was still in the foot well in front of the passenger seat as I drove on. I stopped at a street side stand selling sweet yellow mangos for ₱55/Kilo. I told her to stay, in Tagalog, and exited the car to purchased two kilos worth. Putting them in the trunk, I removed two bananas. Once back in the car as I was buckling up I handed the bananas to the girl. At first, she just looked at them, and then gently took them from me. I don't think I had gone more than 100 meters before the first one was fully consumed. The second one disappeared almost as quickly.

I turned right on Aparente Street and travelled to the Mercury Drug store. Once again I ordered her to stay before entering the store. I purchased shampoo and soap for lice, and various antibiotic formulations, plus a toothbrush, comb, hairbrush, and a bag full of chocolate bars.

I guess I was half surprised, to find the girl was still in the floor well when I reentered the car. Though I had just spent money on things for her, I was sure she would take the opportunity to run away. She had not. I handed her a chocolate bar. Her eyes widened. She looked at me real hard like. She took the bar, unwrapped it and bite by decisive bite she consumed that bar. And then, God help me, and then, she smiled. *Salamat Po.*

I was floored. Her very first words to me were 'Thank you, Sir,' '*Salamat Po.*' Now it was my turn to be stunned. It took a couple of beats before I managed to eke out, *Walang anuman or 'You are*

welcome' and was rewarded with another smile. After the death of my wife, I had felt that I had lost every reason to smile. This girl's smile shook me to my core.

The rest of the drive home was quiet and uneventful. I pulled up at the iron gate, got out, unlocked the gate, and opened it. After driving in, I reclosed and relocked the gate.

We were now safe inside the walled and gated compound of my home. As she exited the car, no one could see her save me. Grabbing the packages I walked to the front door unlocked it and motioned for the girl, to leave the car where she was standing, and follow me inside the house. She came.

The house is air conditioned, and I could immediately see that was a problem for the naked girl. Grabbing the bag of soaps and shampoos from the drug store, I took the girl's hand and brought her to the washroom. The room is only partially enclosed, and is open to outside air. It is next to the dirty kitchen and is not the regular bathroom. This is normally where the laundry is done. But it has washtubs, running water and it looked to be a good place wash the girl down. Seeing the big plastic wash tub and the soap that I pulled out of the bag, she, without prompting, took the soap from me. I started running fresh water into the tub as she squatted down next to it. She took a plastic ladle¹ type of thing that holds better than a liter of water, and started pouring water over her body. With soap in hand, she started scrubbing herself vigorously and all over. Nothing was neglected and there was no sign of embarrassment as she washed her pubes, breasts and anus. Everything got washed right down to her feet.

I took the bottle of shampoo - that was promised to kill lice and an extra ladle. With water from the tap, I filled the ladle and poured it

¹ A [Tabo](#). ([Photo](#))

over her hair half a dozen times. Then applying shampoo to her head of hair, I went to work, shampooing her. She allowed me to do this, with what seemed like a little bit of a smile. I scrubbed her scalp good, hard, and long, finally rinsing her head of the soap. There was no conditioner this time, as I was warned against using it with the anti-lice medication in this shampoo. My reward was a scoop worth of fresh water dumped on my head and a giggling girl with a smile on her face.

Oh that face. Clean, a few shades lighter without all that dirt, she looked remarkably different already... but now some real hard work was about to begin. I took the comb, prepared for an argument and maybe a few sobs as I tried to work the tangles out. But that is not what happened.

She took the comb from my hand and with great determination and patience, lasting a good 30 minutes, combed every knot out of her hair. While she attended to this, I entered the house and found one of my wife's pretty silk robes. All her clothes were still there. I had not yet built up the courage to give them away. For this girl, I chose a red and orange on white robe. It only came down mid-thigh on my wife. Once the girl put it on it came down to her knees.

Here is what I saw looking up at me. She was skinny but not scary skinny. Her face was sweet, angular with a good cheekbones and chin, neither too much, nor too little. Clear bright eyes, blemish free skin, a huge smile and she was pretty. I was dumbstruck. She giggled. She pointed to herself, *Ako si Nene*. Point to me she said, *Ikaw?* Bright eyes looking at me...*Howard* I said. *Ako si Howard*. I pointed to each of us and said *Nene at Howard*. Nene smiled again and said, *Oo, mabuti! Nene at Howard!* [Yes, good! Nene and Howard.]

Kmusta ka, Nene?

Ok lang!

Ganun?

Talaga Sir Howard, talaga!

What had been said was, ‘How are you?’ She had answered, ‘I am fine.’ I asked, ‘Really?’ and she had answered, ‘truly Sir Howard, truly.’ For the rest of what I write here, I will write it in English for you, but we were speaking Tagalog.

How old are you?

Fourteen Sir Howard. May I ask how old are you?

I am sixty-six.

Wow you don’t look sixty-six. You look a lot younger.

Thank you Nene, that is a nice thing to say. All I can say to you is that you are pretty. It is hard for me to say if you do or do not look fourteen, but you are very pretty.

Why did you bring me here? Why have you done this?

I don’t know. And, in truth, I didn’t have a clue why I had done it. I was stumped. Come, let’s get you some more clothing to wear and then I will make some supper for us.

I had also snagged a pair of my wife’s slippers, we call them flip-flops, and placed them at the girl’s feet. She slipped them on and followed me into the house and the master bedroom.

When she saw my wife’s clothing, Nene froze. *Who is she? Where is she? Will she be angry I wear her things? I am scared to wear another person’s clothing!*

I just slumped down on the bed in our bedroom where we were standing. The air had been taken from me. *It is my wife's Nene. My wife's. She died last month. She is dead, Nene. No one will be angry with you. I had not the courage to give these things away. I was not ready to say goodbye to my wife, who I love so much. These are hers and you may wear them, as I am sure she will not mind.*

Nene sat down on the bed next to me, put an arm around me. *It's OK Howard, don't cry. I am sure she loved you too.*

Chapter 2: Even a broken clock is right twice a day.

What was her name?

Who?

Your wife's, stupid! [I should explain. The literal translation for the Tagalog word **bobo**, which is what she said, is 'stupid'. However, it can have and, often does have, a soft edge to it; there is a sense of kidding and playfulness.]

Oh, Flor.

You learn to cook Filipino by Flor? I had served her a dish that was essentially a Filipino recipe.

Yes, I guess so. It would be hard to cook American here. Things are different here.

You like Filipino food? You eat rice? We had rice for supper, so in a literal way she knew I would eat rice. This was a deeper, a more global question. She wanted to know if I was comfortable with the concept of a rice-based diet. One where there was rice at essentially every meal.

Yes Nene, I eat rice. Why?

Well this food is fine, I like it, but if you like Filipino, I can cook for you.

I see. You can cook?

Yes I can!

Ah OK well that will be nice, thank you.

You have maid.

Huh?

Howard, who is cleaning your house?

Oh, me. I am cleaning the house.

That's no good. I will clean it for you. Men cannot clean correctly.

So my wife used to tell me. But I do OK.

Your wife was right. I will clean it. I will start in the morning.

I see. Any other changes I need to make?

I don't know yet. I will tell you later.

We ate the rest of the supper in silence, or I should say, I ate, as Nene ate very little before indicating that she was full. When I finished and started to clean the dishes from the table Nene stopped me. *Go away! Go into the sala. I will clean up. Go, Go!*

Oh, God preserve me if I didn't hear echoes of my wife in those words. I did as instructed by this fourteen year old. I was being bossed around by someone fifty-two years my junior, but no differently than I had experienced with my wife. I allowed it because I wanted to allow it. There is no other way to explain it.

I sat in my easy chair in the Sala and picked up a book I had been reading before Flor died. The book had not been touched for forty-three days, and now it was back in my hands and I was reading it. In the kitchen, wearing a simple top and shorts of Flor's, Nene was scrubbing the pot I had used to cook our meal. She was humming to herself.

The next thing I knew, I had made it through a few chapters, it was nine o'clock and all the lights, save those in the sala had been turned off. The house was quiet. I found Nene in my bed, under a

comforter and wrapped up in the silk robe I had given her to wear earlier. I was tired, confused, giddy, feeling pangs of something I could not assess. I undressed and climbed into bed on the opposite side from Nene. She could not have known, that the side she had taken was Flor's side... there was no way she could have known. I lay down and went to sleep, and for the first time in many, many months, I slept through the entire night without once arising.

§ § §

You have now almost caught up to me. This is the forty-fourth day and it is this morning I am writing about now. When I awoke, I was alone in the bed. The robe Nene had worn was hanging from a hook. I got up, slipped into the master bathroom, toileted, showered, and shaved before reentering the bedroom, only to find clothing laid out for me. It was my clothing but it had been ironed. Flor had ironed my clothing but I hadn't and so after 44 days, nothing I owned had been ironed until... this morning.

Once dressed, as my fourteen year old would have me dressed, I entered the kitchen to find a freshly washed, smiling face, dressed in one of my wife's dresses and a pair of pretty slippers. Granted the dress went below her knees and was never so long on my wife, but she looked good in it. The dining room table was replete with a bowl of fried rice and a mango sliced in three sections. *What do you want to drink Howard? I found three-in-one packets. Is that what you drink?*

Yes, three-in-one coffee is fine. Have you eaten?

Yes, I have shrimp paste and rice! I am full now.

Ugh, I never could understand how Flor could eat that stuff. You like it?

You mean shrimp paste? Wow yes, very much.

You sleep OK? You want a better place to sleep?

I slept fine. You don't want me to sleep with you?

Well do you want to sleep with me?

Yes!

OK, then you sleep with me.

Good, now eat Howard!.... Howard we need some things.

What?

We need bars of laundry soap. We need floor wax. We need dish soap. And vinegar, and sticky rice, and some saba bananas, and brown sugar for the sticky rice, you know the very dark type? Yes? The banana leaves I will get from the tree out back. Same with the buko juice, I will get from the coconut tree out back. I want a big hard green papaya, and carrots and red pepper. I will make you some atchara, OK? But Howard, I do not want you to go into the market with me. If they see you, the price is too high.

You want to go on your own?

May I?

You will come back?

Silly! Yes I will come back!

You need to know this address. I will give you money.

Thank you for trusting me Howard.

You are welcome... now I think you can get everything with ₱2,000 but here take ₱4,000 just in case.

Howard, I do not need so much. No please, I only need maybe ₱1,500.

Nene, do not argue. If you do not need it, you bring it back and we will use it another day.

OK. Tell me my address Howard. I need to know where I live.

I told her. We discussed where she could get a tricycle and how to get through the gate. And then she was gone. I wrote the first part of this while she was shopping. That was four hours of solid writing during which I did not know if she would really come back. The writing was a way of trying to understand what had happened to me. A sort of self-therapy, if you will, like the journal writing that patients sometimes do for their high dollar head shrinking therapists. There sure are a lot of them around Thousand Oaks, California.

I was pretty much at the end of the first chapter, and had tears in my eyes when Nene returned. I don't know whether the tears were for my greatly missed Flor or my fear that Nene might not come back. But return the imp did. She had bags, and receipts, and money to return. She wanted me to review her receipts and check the accuracy of the receipts plus the returned cash and made sure that the numbers equaled ₱24 less than ₱4,000, as ₱24 are what the tricycles had cost. ₱8 each hop. I didn't think it was necessary to do that, but Nene got panicky when it looked like I might not check. So check I did. I totaled the whole damned thing up and put on a sour face. *Oh God, Howard, what did I do wrong?*

You didn't eat any lunch. You didn't grab even a drink for four hours. Next time you are gone so long I want you to sit down somewhere, relax and get some food Nene! God damn it, there is not a single peso unaccounted for. You spent nothing on yourself!

I screwed up, because the girl came all apart, sobbing and wailing and alternately hitting me and hugging me. *Why? Howard why?! Why are you doing this to me? Why are you doing this? Why me? Why are you so nice? Why? Howard, WHY?*

I don't know. Maybe because I am lonely? Maybe because you were in so much need of help? Maybe because, even if I can't help everyone, I can help you? Maybe because I need you to love me? Maybe because I am an old fool? I DON'T KNOW!

She's sobbing, holding on to me. She is so little. She can't weigh 35K. I have hard time even holding her, she is so far down below my arms. She is crying. I am crying. We are a couple of loons.

You want me to stay with you? I was hoping you would let me. That's why I say I will clean and cook and do all those things, so you know I am good to keep here. You will let me stay? You want me to love you Howard? I will, I promise, I will take care of you and love you and be good to you and be careful with your money and make you happy? Can I live here with you Howard? You won't tell me to leave after we have sex? I can really stay? Howard?... Howard?... Howard?

Yes, Nene, Yes.

Howard, I have never had sex. You will have to teach me. Do you still want me?

Yes. Now Nene, relax, nothing bad is going to happen. You live here now. You live here with me. There is food to eat, a bed to sleep in, water to wash with, a roof to keep the rain off, and money for the doctors and medicine when we need it. Whatever you worried about before... that is over. You are safe.

She is jumping up on me, kissing me, holding on to me. I grab her under her ass, lift her up by holding her thighs so that she is face to

face with me, her legs spread out above my hips. Her arms are around my neck and we kiss. I am a sixty-six year old man, French kissing a fourteen year old and she is as passionate as I am at the moment. She weighs so little, I am in no hurry to put her down. Yesterday at this time, she was naked, barefoot, scared, in the middle of a city street, dirty and alone in the world. The Nene in my arms is clean, combed, perfumed, well dressed and well shod and happy. Twenty-four hours and you would not even guess by looking at her now that she could have been that girl in the street yesterday.

Finally I put her down when she whispers in my ear that she needs to put the food away. I am looking at her now. I am just standing in the sala, watching as she organizes the things she has purchased, leaving the things out she will cook now and putting away what she does not need. She is talking to me as she works.

Promise that if I make something you do not like that you will not eat it and tell me not to cook it again, please.

OK I promise.

Do you like sticky rice Howard? I am going to make it but maybe you do not like it!

I like it Nene.

Really?

Yes really.

OK, is there anything you do not like?

I do not like shrimp paste, dried fish, or that ox tail soup. And I am not a fan of the snails in coconut milk recipe. You know that one?

Really, you do not like the snails? It is so good! OK Howard, I not make it for you. You eat durian?

Yes.

You eat balut?

Young balut. Sixteen day, not the old ones.

Good! Ha I think you just look like a white guy, you must be Filipino! You like fruit salad with buko?

Yes very much.

You eat tilapia?

Yes but I sometimes have problems with the bones.

How about tuna, you like tuna.

Yes, very much, just don't overcook it!

Really? You want it wet in the center?

Yes.

You are weird Howard! But OK I will cook it that way for you.

Howard, you know about woman's things?

A little.

You know about our monthly?

Yes. Why?

I think I will start mine soon. I used rags, what should I use?

You need it now?

No, maybe in two or three days.

OK, there are some things in the bathroom, I will show you later today.

Thank you, I am sorry to ask you.

It's OK Nene... Nene, do you have a family?

No Howard. My mother left when I was a baby. My father died last year from tuberculosis. I have a little brother but when my father died, someone took him and I don't know where.

We need to take you to a doctor for a check-up. We can do that tomorrow.

OK. ... Howard, why are you living here in Gensan?

And so I tell her the whole story, from my meeting Flor, through our life together in the USA and our move here and her diagnosis of advanced stage uterine cancer. She is stopping me every once in a while and asking for clarification, so I know she is actually listening. By the time I stop talking, the sticky rice is done and ready for me to test. The result is remarkably good. She tells me that she was the one cooking for her family since she was seven. She also cleaned the house all those years until her father died. She tells me proudly, she knows how to cook and clean. I believe her.

We finish what is either a snack or lunch, you can call it what you will, it is good and I am no longer hungry. We get up and I try to clear my place, but she stops me.

That is my job Howard. Put it down.

I put it down. Nene is cleaning up and by the look of things she is about to get ready to start preparing the supper meal.

Do you have friends here in Gensan?

Yes, Flor and I... sorry I mean, yes I do. They have been calling and coming by to see if I am OK.

Are they single women?

No, mostly wives of my male friends. Sometimes with their husbands, sometimes just the women call my cell. They invite me to their homes for dinner sometimes.

Have they tried, you know, to have you meet other women?

Ah! No, not yet, but it hasn't been very long since Flor died. I think they will try soon. ... huh. ... oh! I see. That would affect you.

Yes, she will kick me out.

Nene there is no, 'she'.

There will be.

Why do you say that?

Because you need a woman and I am just a kid.

You are far more than 'just a kid.'

I am too young to marry.

I know that.

How will you explain me to your friends?

I don't know Nene. I have to think about it.

You promised I can stay. I don't think you will keep your promise Howard. I think I will have to go soon.

Kid! [I would prefer to say, 'Young Lady' but there is no current equivalent in Tagalog. The term is archaic and no longer used. Some think 'nene' means 'Miss' as well as being a name or nickname, but it can also mean a young child... plus it's her name! So I

used **Bata!** Which does mean **Kid!**] *Now you listen to me. If I promise something, I will do it.*

I don't think so. See you just think of me as a kid! You will want a woman!

You can 'think' all you want. You will see. ... and don't you scream at me. I can hear you without the screaming.

Sorry. I am sorry. I am just scared you will tell me to go when you find a real girlfriend.

I am not looking for a girlfriend.

Maybe not today, but you will. And anyway, there will be Filipinas all over here trying to win you. You know that Howard. You are not stupid.

Maybe I am stupid. I should have known it. Nene is right. As soon as it appears that a suitable morning period has passed, I will be a magnet attracting interest of women, most of whom I would never ever be interested in for any reason. Still there will probably be a few I will find interesting. I have already promised Nene and I'll be damned if I will go back on that now. Do I treat her like a daughter? She's too young to be my maid. Everyone here knows I do not have a Filipina daughter, certainly not a daughter fourteen years old. She doesn't speak the dialects Flor spoke. Even her Tagalog sounds different. Saying she is a niece will only raise more questions. ... I have an idea.

Nene, let us get settled for a week. Let us get used to each other, have some meals together, learn a bit of each other's habits and ways of doing things. Then I will invite some of my good friends over for a supper, which you will cook and I will introduce you to them.

What will you say?

Wait and see! I think it is time you learn to trust me. This will be a good lesson.

She is grumbling in Tagalog. She knows I can hear but she also knows that she is not expecting a response. It is an under the breath... 'you are truly a difficult man.' 'trust me, trust me... haha why should I do that you old fool' 'Some sexy Filipina is going to knock you off your feet and I will be gone as fast as a drunk finishes his Red Horse'

I figure this is a good time to ignore her and read a book. It's too hot to sit out on the porch right now, so I sit down in the sala to enjoy the book. Nene is still grumbling... 'go ahead and ignore me, read your book, you difficult, difficult man.' [This is a poor translation. Nene is calling me *makulit*, which means more than difficult. It is difficult, obstinate, have it only your own way, wear the other side down, like a dog chewing on a bone. She is also referring to me as *bastos*, which is ill-bred, discreditable.] Finally I say, *Ah, I see that you are getting to know me! But I have a question, how fast does a drunk finish a Red Horse beer? I can't stand the stuff.* That shuts her up.

She continues to prepare supper and I return to my book. I must admit, she is cute when riled up. I have to admit something else. Dressed as she is in an adult's dress and footwear, with her hair combed and shiny and smooth, it is hard to see her as a girl. Her lack of major breast development is not a factor as many Asian women have tiny breasts. As she stands in the kitchen preparing supper, her age could be anything from fourteen to twenty-four. There is a worldliness about her that eclipses her years as a young teen. This is a person who has seen much. And as I look at her, much to my confusion I am experiencing a stirring in my loins. She doesn't look like a child. She looks like a woman. Right or wrong, it is affecting me.

Chapter 3: Don't Ask

Thank you, this supper is wonderful.

You are welcome. You are easy to cook for.

Why am I easy?

Because you like rice, silly!

Ah, I see. I am easy because I eat Filipino food.

Of course! I cook like I cooked for my father and you eat it. Easy!

Will you let me help clean up the supper plates.

No, I will not. You read or watch TV. I will clean up and then I will shower. After, maybe you will shower too?

Oh, OK, sure. I don't have to ask what she has in mind. I think I know. But do I want to? She's a minor. She's pretty and probably willing, but that isn't the point. When I was a boy, when I was a young man, I didn't ask myself if I should. The only question I needed to answer was, *'would she let me.'* But now I have to ask another question. I know she will probably *'let me.'* Now I must answer the question *'should I.'* The stirring in my slacks tells me at a base level that I want to. So I both want to and she will let me... should I?

This is too soon. My Flor has not been gone for two months yet. Nene is only fourteen. If I were in the States, I would not even entertain the possibility. But I am not in the States. In the States, I would not have a fourteen year old housekeeper, but at a minimum, Nene is that. She is cooking and cleaning. In the States, I would not have washed a girl as I washed and assisted yesterday. I am more familiar with her body than many a married man is his wife back in

the States. Last night, she chose to sleep in the same bed as me. That would never have happened in the States. In the States, Nene would not be worried that she will be pushed out for an older woman. While I told her not to worry about it, this may be a way for her to stake out her claim on me when that comes up. If I reject her tonight, will that signal in her mind that I will dump her later? This is a fine kettle of fish!

It takes Nene an hour to clean the kitchen. When she announces she is going to shower I get up and scoot into the master bathroom. Flor's 'pads with wings' panty liners are in a cabinet under the sink. I explain that when Nene's period comes she should wear panties, lined with the pads. She is fine with that and ushers me out of the bathroom.

She is in there for well over an hour. God knows what she is doing, but eventually I am called, the bathroom is empty.

I have still not resolved what I should do. As I enter the bedroom, I see her. She is wearing the sexiest negligee Flor had owned. She has lipstick on. She has painted her nails. If I thought before that she didn't look like a little girl, now there is no question. She's a young'un, but there's a woman in my bed waiting for me.

I shower, it doesn't take long. Nene has hung my robe on a hook in the bathroom. It is a dark blue but lightweight cotton affair. I dry myself, put on some Old Spice deodorant, slip into the robe and exit the bathroom to the bedroom. Yesterday she was little more than a ragamuffin. Today she is something else again. She looks up, smiling and pats the mattress next to her.

You are beautiful Nene, but are you sure about this? You should stay a virgin for maybe another ten years. Are you sure you want to lose your virginity tonight and to an old man? You don't have to do this

to stay here. I promise you that staying a virgin will never be a problem that will cause me to ask you to leave.

Howard, did Flor ever tell you, you talk too much?

Yes.

I thought so. Come to bed Howard.

I get onto the bed, but not close enough for Nene.

Closer Howard. Come here.

I slide over next to Nene. I can smell the perfume. It is Flor's of course. I recognize it and yet I don't at least not fully. Perfume is different on each person who wears it, and this scent is spicier on Nene than it was on Flor. Just by wearing it, she has made it her own.

I guess Flor had red nail polish, but she used pinks. This deep red looks good on Nene and it doesn't remind me of Flor at all.

Nene must have spent a long time scrubbing the calluses off her feet. They are smooth as she runs a foot up and down my leg, showing off the red nails and the smooth sole at the same time.

She has shaved her legs. That is obvious. The result is another slight shade lighter. Tomorrow I will make sure she has an umbrella before she goes outside. I run my hand over her thigh and calf; they are smooth and soft. I can feel the last residue of some lotion. Nene's negligee slips just ever so gently and her slick, smooth labia is exposed. It glistens. Nene draws a finger through and between those, lower lips, and then brings the finger to my lips. For the very first time I taste her. She tastes like Nene. This is not Flor. This is Nene filling my senses. My hand finds her breasts and rolls a nipple, pinching it, cupping her little breasts. Nene sighs. She moves. We are now side-to-side, and face-to-face. A hand reaches behind my

head and pulls me in to her lips. Her tongue enters me. Her breath enters me. Her aroma fills my head. My senses are filled with Nene. She slides a leg over my leg and then grinds her pubes against my thigh bathing it in her womanly moisture. She moans and grips my hair on my head harder, grinding in pubes harder.

My hand finds her small firm ass cheek, pulling her up on me as I roll on to my back. My robe is open and my erection obvious. Nene giggles as her hand seizes it. And then she says one word, *Good*. She is gently now playing with my penis. Stoking, sliding her nails ever so gently along the now rampant underside of my penis from my balls right up to the glans and down again. She is touching it ever so lightly, as if to tease me into further excitement. It is working. My breathing is shallow. I reach in from behind her and through her legs to finger her slit lips. She gasps. She lifts her hips up, centers my shaft on her vaginal entrance, sliding the glans over it repeatedly, endowing it with her secretions. She whispers in my ear, *Am I doing this right?* Oh God, she couldn't be doing it better! *Yes, Yes you are perfect.* And she lowers herself onto my penis. Immediately she hits the membrane, her hymen. I want her to keep it intact. I want to break through it right now. I want her to be a Nun! I want her to be my whore. *What do I do now Howard?*

Is this God playing with me? 'Heaven or Hell Howard?' And which is which pray tell? I answer her. *If you stop now, and lift off, you are still a virgin. There will be no pain and no blood. If you push harder, you will feel pain, and you will break your hymen, and I will enter you and you will lose your virginity.* How many angels are there on the head of a pin? Does my answer send me to Heaven or to Hell and how can I tell one from the other?

Aray! [That's ouch in Tagalog, (pronounced 'ah-RYE') but it is maybe referencing a bit more pain?] She screams *Aray!* Again. And then sobs softly.

Are you OK?

Yes Howard. I'm OK now.

Do you want to stop?

No!

She is moving on me now. Slowly she is testing the pain and the pleasure. The pain seems to be dissipating. She is becoming more active. I feel hot female fluids bathe my penis. She's bouncing on me now. Almost laughing, joyful. She has a big shit-eating grin. She's yelling 'Yes' over and over in Tagalog, *Oo oo oo OO! Howard OO! OO Howard OO!* Finally, she is losing steam as her legs are giving out. I put her on her knees and take her from behind. It is a straight shot in and by now she is well lubricated and opened enough that there is no problem. I play with her puffy nipples as I fuck her. I move from her nipples to her clitoris and gently touch that. And that is what it takes to send her into orbit. She is screaming. She is slamming her vagina, as hard as she can, into me, and then she is leaking like a faucet, and squeezing my penis hard inside her. That was enough for me. I cum and cum hard inside her. Hot semen, hits her within the tight, but deep opening, triggering a new orgasm for Nene. By the end of it she just about crumples. Then *Howard, what happened?*

That, my love, is called an Orgasm. You had at least two of them. And that is also how you get pregnant. Did you feel that hot stuff from me at the end? She did. *Well that's the thing that can make a baby inside you. We need to get you on birth control if it isn't too late already.*

We cuddle for a while, but we are sweaty and sticky. We decide to shower together and right away. The warm soft spray is welcome and relaxing. We are kissing and touching, but the intense need to

copulate is spent. We exit, dry off and slip back into bed, this time to sleep.

§ § §

It's morning. I think I should feel guilty, I should feel like I have failed, I should feel like I have disrespected Flor. I feel great. There, next to me, is Nene and she is snuggled up tight to me and sleeping blissfully. I kiss her. She awakens, *Good morning Howard!* There is a big smile on her face. I ask her, *How do you feel?* She looks at me with a big grin and says, *What do you think silly! I feel great! When can we do that again!* I shake my head, *Try walking first.* She gives me a look of confusion, *Why?* And then hopping out of bed to prove she is indeed ready, she takes a step and *Oh! Howard, I hurt a little.* I look down at the bed sheet and there is the blood. I point to it and *Remember last night? You did that to lose your virginity. You are going to be a little sore today. Give it a break. You will feel better later.*

OK, You take a shower, I will make you breakfast.

§ § §

And so started our first day, as a couple. It would have been day forty-five. But that was over. This is day one. We go to a women's clinic and Nene gets birth control. She also gets a full physical. I take her to a dentist. She has a cavity and gets a cleaning. She needs her own clothing. Wearing Flor's is not bothering me, but Flor was 15cm taller than is Nene and the size is just wrong. She can wear Flor's shoes and her panties. The bras? Who knew in the future. I think the lack of proper nutrition may have delayed breast development but only time will tell. She purchases jeans, shorts, skirts, tops and dresses.

§ § §

This evening, as I promised Nene last week, we are having a couple over for dinner. They are friends and have been friends for years. Nene is anxious. She is at the market at the moment getting the ingredients for tonight's meal. She bought a nice dress and a new pair of shoes yesterday. She didn't want my friends to think she was wearing any of Flor's things. She told me it might make them angry with her.

Every time Nene goes out now she uses the umbrella. It makes her giggle that she is going to get light. She also purchased a lightening lotion. I doubt those things have any value, but what the heck, it is probably fine as a generic lotion.

We have established what we are calling 'household petty cash.' At Nene's insistence, receipts are placed in the drawer to account for the cash spent. Once a week we review the cash draw, total up the receipts and add that amount of money back in. The drawer has enough to take care of all our bills for the month, electric, water, Internet/Phone, and Cable plus food, sundries, clothing and incidentals. I figure that is about ₱50,000. When I told Nene how much would be in the drawer, she seemed scared, saying it was too much. *Nene, who is cleaning, cooking, and taking care of this house now? You or me?*

I am.

*That's right and you need ₱50,000 to run **your** house, so stop complaining.*

I don't need so much to run this house!

We will review the receipts for the next three months. If we really don't need that much in petty cash, I will reduce it at the end of the three months.

This is day eight. Bill and Jasmine will be here at five tonight. Tomorrow night we will have John and Susan here.

These last eight days have been remarkable. They have not obscured my love for Flor, but they have put it in context. Nene says that if it hadn't been such a good love, I never would have taken Nene in. She says Flor taught my heart how to love honestly. The most overwhelming thing for me is that Nene is taking flowers to Flor's gravesite once a week. She says that she owes every good thing that has happened to Flor as much as to me.

I am no longer walking around half dead myself. I am reading again, tinkering with things, fixing things that need attention. I am laughing and I guess I feel like I can breathe again. The last year with Flor had been torture. Only now do I see how difficult that year was on me as well as on Flor.

Nene is gaining a little weight and it looks good on her. I swear that her breasts are getting larger, but maybe I am just imagining that.

§ § §

It is five in the evening now. Nene has a wonderful meal prepared. She is wearing her new dress and shoes. We talked about it and she is wearing a padded uplift bra. It helps her fill out the dress better and she looks stunning in the dress. The three inch heels on her new shoes adds to her beauty in the dress as well. She just looks great.

Bill and Jasmine arrive pretty close to five and we sit them down at the table. Mango shakes for Jasmine and Nene, Beer for Bill and me. There is '[fresh' lumpia](#)' on the table for starters.

Howard! Bill and I have known you too long. So I am going to ask right now and not wait. Tell us about Nene. What has happened?

You are right and Nene is the reason I invited you here tonight. There are times when things just happen and you don't second-guess fate, or God, or just luck. I was and will always be in love with Flor. You two know that and Nene knows that. I do not now and I think I will never want to 'replace' Flor. She was my one and only wife. But, as will not come as a surprise to either of you, the loss of Flor left me very lonely and sad. Nene was also lonely and sad. She lost her mother shortly after her birth and never knew the woman. She lost her dad about a year ago to tuberculosis. She was completely alone. We met each other quite by accident last week. As God is my witness, we found in each other a person who could make the other smile. Nene needed a place to land. I needed a friend, a companion but not a replacement for Flor. It is an odd companionship, but it works. And so long as it works, I am content to not disturb it by dating or otherwise try to fill a void that no longer exists anyway. I am 66 and Nene fourteen. I am the safe place this girl needed, to survive. She gives me the friendship and space I needed to adjust to life after Flor. I ask you to accept her as part of my life for all the best of reasons. And Jass... I ask that you not try, in your loving way, to set me up with anyone. I am truthfully not interested.

Bill turns to my new roommate. *Nene, I must say that if you have made my good friend that happy, I am grateful. But do you really want to hang around with this old man?*

I want to take care of Howard. Howard gave me my life back. It was gone. I was probably not going to live much longer and he, in an instant, gave me life. I see Howard and my heart is full. I will die if I lose him.

Jasmine is not convinced. *I am sorry Howard but I must ask. Nene, do you have to do anything for Howard that you should not be doing?*

No! How could you think that of Howard? He is a gentleman!

Bill wants to defend me. Yes he is and he always was. Jass, I think you owe Howard an apology.

I disagree. No she doesn't. She was quite right to ask. I would have been surprised if she didn't.

*Jasmine takes a deep breath. Nene, this is very unusual, but it is plain to see that even if nothing is going on, that you love Howard. It is also pretty obvious that Howard loves you. I will not interfere with that and I will put the word out that Howard is **not** available. That is your fear, isn't it child?*

Yes, you are correct. Thank you Ate.

Nene, come to me, if something happens that you can't talk to Howard about, like girl stuff.

Yes, I will. Thank you Ate.

I have had enough of this! Can we please move on to supper now? Nene made a great meal and I am hungry!

Well that isn't quite the way I hoped it would go, but it worked out anyway. The meal tonight was great, and Nene, holds her own in conversation throughout the evening. Bill and Jass left about an hour ago and Nene is allowing me to assist in cleaning up.

Thank you. Now I know you are really mine.

We have others to tell. You are welcome but you need to understand I did that as much for me as I did it for you.

You mean you really don't want anyone else? Is that it?

Exactly. Tomorrow we have to do this all over again with John and Susan.

I think Jasmine knows we have sex. And speaking of sex... Howard, my period is over.

Chapter 4: Shades

Tonight it is John and Susan. I have my fingers crossed.

Susan puts her spoon down, takes a deep breath and says, *Nene, this supper is wonderful. It's every bit as good as Jasmine told me last night's dinner was. She also told me to consider Howard to be 'taken.' I don't quite understand all of this but it is clear that Howard is not going to be available. Jass has already put the word out and I will confirm it. Your Howard is yours and yours alone now.*

Thank you Ate.

§ § §

The supper part went as well tonight as we could have hoped. My good friends will not pry and will assist me in establishing that I am not on the market. Nene and I have space to live our life. We can relax the next few days as there are no more parties and such. Not much more for me to say now. I just want to enjoy my life.

§ § §

Last I wrote anything here it was day nine. Today is day two hundred and forty eight. So I guess I need to get this all up to date. There is in truth, little to tell. Nene and I are happy. Life has been good. There have been no real surprises. We see John, Susan, Bill and Jass at least once a month. Nene goes shopping with the girls on occasion and they seem to get along even with the huge age difference. She is just their little sister in that way from what I can see.

Nene continues to go alone to Flor's grave once a week to place flowers. I am humbled by this.

The only surprise for some, was no surprise to Nene, who had every reason to know. It had to do with her appearance. As the months wore on, she got lighter and lighter. Now I want to go on record here and say I do not care for myself. All colors are beautiful. I clearly fell for Nene when she was dark. But I also know how important it is to Filipinas. Nene had never mentioned it, which I thought odd. But she is actually very light skinned; lighter than either Susan or Jasmine. That caused a bump! As the truth of it sunk in to Jass, she began to understand Nene's original comment about me saving her life. From what I gather, I was not there, it was just the three females, Jass and Susan must have compared notes and decided to have a sit down with Nene. This is what Nene told me Jass said to her. I will put it into 'dialog' but it is really hearsay.

Jasmine said to me, 'When we first met you, you were really dark skinned. But you were wearing an off the shoulder dress. If it had been from sun, we should have seen lines. Neither Susan nor I saw any. We both assumed you were naturally dark. Clearly, you are not. You are as light as anyone I know. You said Howard saved your life. I took that as a bit of an exaggeration. Now I am not sure. I think you need to tell us. How did you meet Howard? And Nene, we have kept your secrets and protected you. You need to tell us the truth.'

That is what was asked. Nene said, she told them about her life. About how bad it had gotten, by the time she banged on my window that day. She told them *about being naked under the sun, about being without food, or shelter, or anything, and how you saved me. We all cried after that. They asked me what you did and I told them about you feeding me and washing me and giving me clothing to wear and not touching me for sex or anything. I told them about how you love Flor. I told them I was afraid you would send me away if you found a woman. I told them you said you would not send me away but I did not feel safe. You then said you will tell your friends you are taken even though we did not have sex. Then I tell them how*

I make you have sex with me. I tell them everything Howard. Are you angry with me?

No Nene, I am not angry.

Shortly after Nene related this, we were invited over to John and Susan's. That was not unusual. We go back and forth with suppers. However when we arrived, Jasmine and Bill were there. That was a bit unusual. The next thing that happened was very unusual. Both men came up and shook my hand and then both woman came up and kissed me on the cheek.

Bill, what's this about?

Last year when Nene said you had saved her life, I don't think any of us took her literally. We just thought it was the excessive description of a teenage girl. We didn't know and you never said as much. You seemed happy and so we were just happy for you. What you did, well Howard, I can tell you that Flor would have been proud of you. We are all proud of you.

Well I don't think I'm much of a saint. So can we all just keep this to ourselves so I don't get jailed for having sex with a minor?

The six of us have gotten even closer since that night. They now call Nene, my wife. I guess she is.

One other thing that just happened yesterday and was the reason I decided to update this thing. Nene and I were down by Gaisano Mall. We were walking between that mall and the street that KCC is on. I guess we were busy in conversation when a young female approached us begging for a peso or two. Nene looked up and she gasped.

Nita?

How you know me?

It's Nene!

Nene? No you are not Nene? Nene I know is poor like me. Who are you really? How you know my name?

Nita, truly I am Nene. You see this man right here? He saved me. I am his now and lucky in life. Where is your son, your baby?

Dead, they dead. You really Nene?

Oh Nita, I am so sorry. Howard, please Howard, is your heart big enough to save one more?

Chapter 5: Alive, alive-O!

Her name is Anita. She is skin and bones. Not much more. She is sick. That much is clear. We put her in the back seat of my car and take her to a health clinic. She is afraid. She has no money and can't pay. Nene, tells her to *Kalma ka!* And in that moment, I have a flashback to my first few minutes with Nene.

Nene tells Nita, we will pay for the doctor. Nita asks why we will do this. Nene's answer is a simple one. *Because Howard loves me and he does this for me.*

§ § §

We are at the clinic for a good two hours. They have an x-ray machine and take a chest x-ray of Nita. At a minimum, she has walking pneumonia and very high fever. There is a possibility she suffers from tuberculosis. They take a sputum sample. They will give us the results in a couple of weeks, but I hear a nurse say, quietly, to someone else in the office, *If she lives that long.* I get three prescriptions to take to a drug store.

§ § §

In truth, Nita looks like shit. Physically, she is taller than Nene. She does seem to have all her teeth. But her body is without anything under the skin. The skin just hangs and droops over bones. She does have clothing, if you can call a ripped faded tee shirt, and faded worn ill-fitting shorts, clothing. The flip-flops are well beyond their expiration date. She might as well be barefoot.

On the way home, with Nita in the back seat, I stop at the same Mercury Drug I stopped at last year, that first day I met Nene. Nene reminds me we still have the medicated shampoo, but need some

medicated soap and a few personal items. She tells me she will stay with Nita as I make the purchases.

The drugs are all generic and the cost is minimal. The soap, toothbrush, razor, comb and brush are also inexpensive. It's not a big deal for me, but for Nita, it is a very big deal and when she realizes what we have gotten for her, she starts to bawl.

When we come to the house, Nene gets out, unlocks and opens the gate. I drive through and she closes it. I am busy with the Mercury Drug bag and the packages we have in the trunk, while Nene gets Nita out, pulling her to the house. Nita is whimpering. Nene is having none of it. She scolds her friend, as she drags Nita through the house and out to the wash room.

Dropping the other bags on the kitchen counter, I follow to two of them out to the wash room, handing the bag from Mercury Drug to Nene, before retreating.

Howard! Come back!

Why? You don't need me.

Yes, I do. Help me with Nita.

Nene, why? You can do this.

Nita is cowering and whimpering. I doubt she is even paying attention to the conversation. The female is terrified.

Do not be difficult! Help me. Nita, she needs to know this.

Know what?

That she is yours, you fool. She not a guest here. She belongs to you. You do this.

Since when did I become a slave holder?

Howard! Stop being so difficult. She must know this, or she will not do as we need. She will run away, because she cannot repay you. Maybe she will die. She must know she is yours. Then she will be good and stay.

OK, OK, so what do you want me to do?

Here, take this soap. Nene hands me a bar of the antibacterial soap I have just purchased. *I will use the other bar. You soap her front. I will soap her back.* And with that, Nene reaches down, grabs Nita's tee shirt and pulls it up and off the girl. She stands Nita up and removes the shorts which look a bit soiled on the inside where we find no panties. Nita is naked, shaking and freaking out.

Nene and I have removed our house slippers that we put on when entering the house. Nene removes her dress and is standing in bra and panties. I remove my slacks and shirt, tossing them on a counter.

Nene dumps a huge ladle of water over Nita and then another. Wails come from Nita. Nene ignores them and starts soaping the girl up while telling me to get with the program.

I start with Nita's shoulders, neck and arms. The sobbing continues but not as hysterically as before. Nita seems to be accepting this, a little. I tell her to close her eyes so that I can wash her face. She complies.

I dump water over her face, soap it up and then more water to rinse the soap of her face. Next I start soaping her belly, outer hips and thighs. Nita reaches down and pulls my hand up to her breasts. With the bar of soap in my hand, she uses my hand to soap up her breasts. They are nice breasts, a bit larger than are Nene's. The nipples are dark points and they are hard pebbles.

Then, Nita, soap still in my hand, soaps her pubes. There is more than stubble on the pubes. Nita stops the sobs long enough to ask

Nene if she can have a razor. Nene asks me if I have purchased a razor at the drug store. I have and Nene removes it from the bag, before handing it to Nita.

Nita uses my hand again, soaps her pubes before pushing my hand aside and applying the razor to the stubble. Nita is no longer crying. She concentrates on the task at hand. The stubble is removed, with intermittent applications of additional soap from my hand. Finally done with that task, Nita sticks out a leg, indicating that she is ready for the leg to be washed. I try to hand the bar to her and tell her she is to complete the task. She looks at me, and in a very small voice pleads, *You please?*

I finish off washing her legs, but tell her she is to wash her own feet. Nene has given her back and ass a complete cleaning. What is left is the hair. Nene tells Nita what it about to happen. We dump ladles of water over Nita's head and begin shampooing it, vigorously.

Once the shampoo is completely washed off, the procedure is repeated with a second application of the medicated shampoo. Nene hands Nita a comb and tells her to finish the task. Grabbing our clothing, Nene and I retreat from the room.

Nene, she needs clothing.

I know. I will give her some now.

How? Yours are too small for her.

Flor's will fit.

We still have those?

Yes, I save them in some boxes. I not throw Flor's things out. I think maybe that will be bad luck. Well that is news to me, but not a surprise in some ways. Flor hangs over all that happens in this home.

Now dressed, Nene goes into a back bedroom and comes back a few minutes later with the same robe I first put Nene in, when she was the one in the washroom. She gives me a smile that is a cross between a conspiratorial grin and the smile of a loving wife, hoping to make her husband happy.

Nene scoops up a pair of flip-flops, and adds that to the robe and bath towel, she has draped over her arm, and before going out to the washroom.

When the two females emerge twenty minutes later, Nita is wrapped in the robe, her hair wrapped in the towel and is she smiling but her head is tilted down towards the floor. She stops in front of me. Without ever looking up she says, *Thank you, Sir. Thank you very much. I will be good to you.* She then scurries off into the back bedroom with Nene.

A couple of minutes later Nene is back out and getting the rice cooker going. *Howard, we need to feed her, and let her rest. OK?*

Yes, of course. Why do you ask? This is obvious.

OK, well, she is yours now and she needs to make that real, but first I want her to be healthy.

Nene, I do not need anyone else. I thought you knew this better than anyone else!

She will not kick me out! I am not worried about her. She needs you and I am giving her to you.

Nene, she is not yours to give!

Yes she is. I make you save her. She is mine to give you. She knows this.

That makes no sense! Let Nita get healthy and she can go do what she wants. I do not own anyone.

You are a fool! Howard! Stop being difficult! You will see. She is yours now.

She had children?

Yes, a small boy and a baby boy.

She said they are dead?

Yes. Dengue. Last month.

Damn. Both last month?

Yes.

§ § §

For the next two weeks, all Nita did was take the medicine, and eat [misua soup](#), and rice topped with vegetables and/or egg. Nene said her stomach was not strong enough for chicken, fish or pork. But more than anything else, it was rice. Three meals a day, lots of rice.

Nita rarely came out of the bedroom, and when she did, she was wrapped in the white silk robe with red and orange flowers that she had on the first day. When I did see her, she was invariable polite and shy. Her face appeared to be taking on a more healthy aspect. But there was little to see as she was wrapped in the robe.

Nene takes her back to the clinic. The sputum test result comes back negative, and a chest x-ray shows that the pneumonia is gone. The doctor announces that she is pleased and sends Nita back with a glowing report. But she is still weak. She sleeps a great deal of the time and when she is up, she putters around in the garden. She does start eating chicken and fish, joining us for some meals. In the days

that follow her second clinic visit, she starts slowly coming back to life. She displays a sense of humor. She is teasing Nene. She is still shy around me, but she does talk to me.

She has gained three kilos in the five weeks since we brought her home.

I receive this news about the three kilos as Nita is standing in front of me in one of Flor's dresses. I am having a hard time paying attention to the news as Flor's form stands just five feet from me, a bright smile beaming at me, white teeth distracting me, and hips that are swaying to some unheard tune moving my heart.

But the next part I hear very clearly. *And so Sir, I am healthy for you to take now. I can cook for you, clean for you and I am ready for your bed.*

Nita, I do not need you in my bed. Nene is in my bed. I am not going to change that. And if Nene stops being in my bed, then I will sleep alone.

No Sir! I not to replace Nene! No! Never! Never! I owe all to you and Nene. I not do that to her! Sir! I will be in your bed also. Both Nene and me, we are yours.

Nene! This is your idea?

Howard, I tell you, she belong to you! Why you not believe me?

Because, my love, people are not property. People cannot belong to other people.

Howard, you are the one who is wrong! Nita, who you belong to?

Sir Howard, of course!

Why do you belong to him?

Because he saved our lives. Without him, we both dead! He give you life and then he give me life, because of you. Without him, all is dead. Why I not belong to such a man?

Howard, do you understand now? Nita and me, we belong to you.

Nene, you belong to me in the same way I belong to you. It is because of love.

No! It true I love you, but I belong to you even without love. You not die, if we not meet. Howard, it not the same. You could have sent me away. That is what I afraid of. Remember? You make it so I not leave, but you not have to do that. It is a choice you make! I have no choice. I am yours. I glad of it, but there really no choice.

And the same is true for Nita?

Yes!

That is not good. I do not want anyone to feel they must be with me.

Howard! You are being super difficult. You are like a god. You give life when it was all gone. Why you want to take away what you give. Without you there is no life for Nita. If she belongs to you, then she lives. Do not throw her away, please.

Nita, you are standing here, and have heard all this. Is what Nene says true. If I say you are not mine, you think you will die.

Yes, Sir. I know this. It is true. Where I go? What I do? You not find me pretty enough? I not good enough for you?

Nita, when I first see you, it is true that you are not pretty. But now, yes you are pretty. It is just that I already have my girl, my Nene, and how do I take another girl, when I am Nene's?

It is OK with Nene. We share. You will see. It is OK.

Nene, you are going to be in bed with Nita and me? Truly?

Yes, of course. We will make you happy.

Nene, I am already happy.

Happier, Howard. And you can give Nita another child. She needs this! Howard, give her life.

Chapter 6: Bitch!

There may be a centimeter difference in height between my Flor and Nita. The shoe size is identical. The black hair, black eyes, hips and breasts are all very much my Flor all over again. Oh, Nita's face is Nita and not Flor, but from the back, you cannot tell the difference. It is unnerving.

Cooking wise, she doesn't cook as well as Flor, or Nene for that matter. Clean she does well. Wash clothing, iron, scrub floors, care for the flowers outside, yes sure, she does all those things well. I would love to just pay her a couple of thousand pesos a month and call her the maid. But Nene and Nita will not hear of it.

For four days, I have been avoiding this successfully as Nita was having a period. It was the first one in a while. I guess the malnutrition caused a problem with the normal menses cycle. Nita was so glad to have her period, though she found it painful, that there was no pressure for her to climb into my bed. Not so tonight. Tonight a woman whose body type is very much an echo of Flor is in the middle of my bed. On the far side is Nene.

I slide onto the bed and am barely getting under the covers when Nita grabs my package and looking at me with big doe eyes, and a bit of fear in her expression, kisses my chest as she strokes my cock. She isn't going to get pregnant tonight. It is too soon after her period. But this is not about getting pregnant. This is about assuming her place in my bed.

I am hard. Nita has clearly been around a penis before, as the two deceased children are the evidence. She strokes me, spits on my cock and takes me orally. Was she a whore before? Is that where the off-spring came from. For the love of God, she is only sixteen now! She must have had the first kid when she was thirteen. I am not sure

I want to know. According to the blood test the clinic took, there is no venereal disease and so, what her past life was like will remain unknown to me, unless she wants to tell me. There is too much pain back there. I do not want to dredge up.

Nita's mouth is keeping me rigid and happy, but not pushing me over the edge. Nene is looking on a bit worried. I pull her over and kiss her as Nita continues to suck my cock. As the kiss breaks, I whisper in her ear that I love her. Nene whispers back, *I know. I not worried about that. Why she not getting you to cum? You need to cum.*

I am not ready and it is true that Nita has not gotten me there. But that is probably something in my head and not her skill that is interfering. *Nene? Are you sure you want me to get Nita pregnant before you are legally old enough to give me a child?*

Nita continues to suck my cock and I do moan, and hump against her face while at the same time I wait for Nene's answer. And answer she does. *I am sure. Make her a mother again.. She needs this.*

Well I am not going to make her a mother tonight, but I guess I do need to take her in a literal way. I pull Nita's mouth, up, off my cock, and pull her over onto the mattress. I mount her without ceremony. She is looking up at me with a look that I cannot fathom.

Nita, if I take you, if you have my child, you must never, ever, leave me. I will never marry you, but you cannot leave. No matter what may happen, you are to stay with me forever. I will not have my child taken from me. Do you agree?

Yes! Yes! I agree! Oh God Yes! YES!

I look over at Nene. *Do you understand what is going to happen?*

Yes, it is what I want to happen. Do it.

My cock is deep in Nita. Her cunt is juicy and warm. She gets my legs to the outside of her legs, as she squeezes my cock. The friction is amazing as I saw in and out of her cunt. She pulls my head down and kisses me, pushing her tongue deep into my mouth. Nene gets behind me and finding my legs spread across Nita, she puts her mouth on my ass and tongues me. That is something I have never experienced and for the life of me, I can't figure out where Nene learned this. But at the moment, that is not really what is on my mind as I blow a load into Nita's cunt.

§ § §

For the next few days, each night finds me giving a deposit inside Nita. I suspect she is not physically ready for another child, but logic has no seat at the table at the moment.

What does have a seat at the table is a visit by John and Susan. I have no warning that they are coming. But the table is set for five, a fact that had not caused me any concern as I have been unaware of it until the moment they appear. It is always nice to see them, but a little forewarning might have been nice. I make that point to Nene who quietly mentions to me that I would have been tied up in knots worrying about how they would accept Nita being here. This is better, she tells me. I would like to argue the point with her, but this is not going to be the time as they are here and so, it's sort of a moot point.

John puts his hand out to shake mine as he looks over, nods at my new addition and says, *So, this is your Nita?*

Yes, this is Nita. You have heard about her?

Susan told me yesterday, that it is now three of you. How are you handling it?

Funny you should ask. I guess I am somewhere between freaked out and accepting. Tergiversation describes it pretty well. So are you thinking I am a real pervert now?

You worried about that?

Yes.

Oh, sorry. You don't know about Lawrence?

No. What has he to do with this?

Susan has joined us, and has an arm around John. She looks at him and then me and then John again. John has a pained expression. He is a bit uncomfortable. Susan smiles at him, gives him a hug and tells John, *It's OK.*

Susan turns to me, while continuing to hold on tight to John.

Howard, Lawrence is a polygamist. He has many mistresses. And we met a man named Jake. You know him?

Can't say I do.

Well he's a polygamist too. We were at a party with them. I think I behaved very badly toward Maricar. You know how close we are. It was hard to see her husband surrounded by so many mistresses. But Maricar tells me she is happy and it is OK. I worry that I will lose John, but he says he doesn't want anyone else. Still I see you guys adding girls and I get worried. When Nene tells me you have added Nita, I worry for Nene. We talk a few days ago. I am afraid you are being bad to her. But you know what she tells me?

No, Susan I have no idea. What did she tell you?

She say it is her idea that Nita is yours. You do not want this. She say she make it happen. Is that true?

Yes.

OK, well, I still think it is weird, but first Maricar and now Nene. I guess I need to accept that maybe I am wrong in many ways. Nene says it is good with the three of you. Is it?

I don't know how to answer you. I didn't want this. I know, or I think I know, that Nene loves me. But that understanding has been shaken by Nita's presence. Do they love me, or am I a life preserver to which they hang on for dear life, afraid to let go? I am confused. They are both more than good to me. Nothing is kept from me. But is this love? Susan, if you are confused, then so am I. Is it comfortable here? Yes. Are they a problem for me? No. Are they cute, lovely, arousing to be with? Surely. But is this love? I don't know any more.

Does Nene know how you feel?

I don't think she can. She just thinks I am being difficult.

Is Nita a good person?

She seems to be. Susan, I am having a problem. Her face is not Flor, but she is the same height, the same shape, the same hair. I see her and I see Flor. So my heart is playing tricks on me. How do I separate out what I am feeling from what I am seeing? And it gets worse. Did Nene tell you her two little ones died of Dengue?

Yes. That is so sad.

Did she tell you that their plan is to get Nita pregnant?

No!

Yes.

Oh, I see. Howard, this is not good. If nothing else, you are not ready for this.

No kidding.

John, why don't you and Howard grab some beers and go sit down. I am going to scoop up the girls and have a talk. And Howard... Flor was very lucky to have you as her husband. She was as lucky as I am, to have John as mine. Go have a beer guys. This is going to take a while.

And take a while it did. John and I have a couple of beers as he tells me the craziest story about Lawrence and this guy, Jake, that I have ever heard. I guess my issue is small potatoes compared to what these guys are into, but, John says that this is what they want. It isn't what I want. And yet, I did tell Nita that if she had my child she could not leave. I failed to tell Susan that. Damn, that will come back to bite me. I tell John about it and all he does is shake his head. *Damn Howard, of course she can't leave you if she has your child. Why would you think anything else? Man, you are one confused poor SOB right now.*

And that is exactly what I am.

Eventually Nene comes out to the terrace and asks us to come to the table for supper. No one is saying anything meaningful. There is talk about local government. We talk about some of the stores in the malls. John and I talk about with cable TV service we are using and the lack of Tivo. What we don't talk about is the elephant in the room.

Finally John and Susan take their leave of us. I walk them out and lock the gate once they drive off.

Howard, we need to talk. Nene has a stern and pissed of look on her face. I don't think I am going to like this. Nita is sitting and shaking. She is close to tears.

Why you tell Susan you not sure I love you?

How can I know? Why do you want me to make love to Nita? Why? I love you and now I am supposed to think that Nita will suddenly fall in love with me and you want this? I am confused. You know this.

Nita, you love Howard?

Yes, friend. Yes I do.

Howard, why you not believe Nita?

Nene, can you tell me what the difference is between being safe by living here and loving me?

Yes, you fool! Yes. Susan say, we can live with her. She will take care of us. No problems. They have money. We don't have to stay here to be safe. You know what I tell her?

No, what did you tell her?

I tell her, she not my friend if she ever ask me that again. Then she say, is it OK if Nita speaks for herself? I say sure, OK, ask Nita. She do. Nita, tell Howard what you tell her.

I tell Susan, she is a bitch and no one takes me away from my Howard. It nice that she can offer me money. I not want money. I want to be with Howard. I tell her to leave us alone. Howard do not send me away!

Nita, Nene, she was not trying to be a bitch. She was trying to make sure you wanted to be with me for love and not for need of safety. She was trying to help you, if that was your need. She meant no harm.

Howard, Nita and me not like it. I love you and Nita loves you. Stop pushing us away.

OK. I hear you. Look I think I need to call Susan and apologize to her.

Why? She do wrong!

No, she was just trying to help.

Tell her if she not do that again, I will be her friend, but not to do it anymore.

OK. I will tell her.

I leave the room, and go out on the terrace to make the call to Susan's cell phone. I think they are still driving, but Susan can talk while John is behind the wheel.

Susan, I want to apologize. I am sorry for that happened with the girls.

No Howard, you don't need to do that. I was clumsy in what I did. Howard, they both love you. I believe that completely.

Yes, I know. They screamed at me and told me to never do that to them again. Nene says she still wants to be your friend but that you should never bring this subject up again.

Tell her not to worry. It will never be discussed again. Howard, you had better get ready to be a daddy.

Do you know something I do not?

No, but unless you can't have children, it is going to happen.

Chapter 7: Calm seas

Well a lot has happened and not much at the same time. I am not sure where or how to start.

At home, life with Nene and Nita is good, stable and uneventful. There has been no pregnancy. Nita will never be the cook that Nene is, but she is a great gardener. Between the two of them, there are no bumps. Yes sure sex is good. Nita has this thing about being fucked with her legs closed. It's sure as hell different and I don't mind it, but it is a bit weird.

When I first met Nita she looked far older than her sixteen years. Now, as she has added meat back on her bones, she is looking more like a young woman, though the years of desperate living will never be fully erased. The extra weight has made her appearance even more startling to me on occasion. We never got rid of Flor's things and Nene insists I not do it. Nita fits Flor's things exactly and she is wearing them around the house. It is shock to me seeing Flor in front of me when I am looking at Nita! Nene says is good because it means Flor is still here with us. She says, it is nice for her, Nene, to see Flor in our home.

That is hard for me and yet I love it too. I miss Flor so much. Nene knew this from the very first. Nita has come to understand it. Last month she asked me to tell her about some of Flor's physical habits. I thought nothing of it, and enjoyed reliving those sweet moments as I would watch my wife in unguarded moments. What I didn't prepare myself for was the fact that Nita started doing those things in front of me. There are moments I want to cry, scream and hug her all at the same time. I asked her why she is doing that. Her answer is simple. *You still love her and I can bring her to you. That is a blessing from God. God gives me to you so you can see Flor. You see, God is good to us.*

The two of them cleave together as much as they cleave to me. There are times that I see looks in their eyes as they talk and glance over to me that I cannot understand. They don't seem to come to terms with how to express those moments to me. All they tell me is not to worry. It is not a bad thing.

And you know, I told you that Nene takes flowers to Flor's grave every week. Well, now it is Nita and Nene who go. Rather than buying the flowers. Nita puts a bouquet together for them to take each week. Each night at dinner they now say a prayer for Flor in heaven.

They are cute, sweet, loving and good. Yes, I miss Flor every minute of every day. But truth be told, I would miss these two just as much if they left me. The reality is that they will never leave. I am an old fart with two far too young mistresses. Far too young to marry. Nene is approaching fifteen and Nita is nearing her seventeenth year. Between the two of them there is not a single living parent that they know about, though it is possible that Nene's mother lives. The reality is that she has no idea who the woman is. Without parents, I don't think they can marry until they are twenty-five as parental permission or notification is required up to that age. Maybe I can get around the issue and marry one of them when they reach twenty-one, but surely, not before that.

I had been avoiding seeing some of my old acquaintances for quite a while. First because I didn't go out to socialize during the difficult times that last year with Flor. And then once Nene entered my life, well, I just wanted to be left alone. What would they think about me and a fourteen year old? And so I hid out I guess. Yes, sure Bill, John, Jasmine and Susan know. But that was as far as I was willing to go.

When I heard again from Maricar, about yet another party, I just ignored it as I had done last year. I didn't give it another thought. I didn't, but Susan contacted Maricar and Maricar contacted Nene. I had no idea about any of this. I would have said 'no' if asked, but I wasn't asked. On the appointed night, I am told we are going out for dinner and to put on something nice. I ask, where are we going? The answer is, *Get dressed!*

Once in the car, and having backed out of the gate, I ask once again, *Where?*

Maricar's.

What?

Susan says you know how to get to Lawrence and Maricar's house. That is where we are going. Hurry, we are late!

I take a deep breath and put the Toyota in gear.

Actually I find out that I don't know where they live. It appears they have moved in the three years since I visited their home. I text John and get directions. We will be even a bit later than Nene was thinking.

When we drive up to their place, all I can think is, wow. Lawrence must be doing very well. This is a mansion. One of the out buildings is bigger than the mansion. I have no idea what is going on, but there are far more females here than there are men. We are walking in and it seems like all hell is breaking loose. I am about to load my girls back in the Toyota, when Jasmine and Susan hem us in and act as body guards at the same time. There is a crush of females I do not know who are surrounding us. And then I am split off from my girls and am standing alone.

And then I am not alone, but surrounded by men I have known for years but have not seen for a few years. The only two who are not around me are John and Bill. Where are they when you need them? I am feeling more than a little defensive about showing up with my underage girls when a host of young girls, some of them far younger than mine are flooding the area.

It is unreal. Just in simple numbers, there must be ten women for every man here. It is confusing and I am being pelted with questions while at the same time I have questions of my own. The mayhem lasts for a good hour as yet more young females arrive. Someone tells me these are from Jake's house. I meet this Jake. He seems nice enough, but man alive, this is nuts. All these women, mistresses. I feel positively conservative, though neither Bill nor John have taken other women, some of the other guys have.

It is a crazy evening and I am sure I miss out on much of the doings as my brain can only absorb so much. What I know does happen, is that Nene and Nita make friends with some of the other girls and those friendships allow my girls to talk with others who seem to share similar issues. I guess that is a good thing, but am I not really sure.

I get to talk with Lawrence for a while and he is in a very different place in regards to his life than I am in mine. I guess I find it a little interesting, but it is not for me. What I am gathering is that having many females who say they love you at the same time, is not all that impossible. I also gather that these men love more than one woman. I was having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that I felt love for both Nene and Nita. Maybe it is more normal than I thought.

Anyway, by the time we leave, I have reestablished friendships with a bunch of the guys and my life with Nene and Nita does not seem like it is the problem with them that I figured it would be. Who knew?

When we get home, I am more than ready to just get some rest. But the girls are giggling and playful and want to talk. I am peppered with questions. *Do I want to be with younger girls?* *Do I know that we can add more girls now?* *How many girls do I want?* *Aren't they all so pretty?* *Did I meet Joy?* *Did I meet Rose?* *Do I like Ikay?* And on and on for a good hour.

My answers both deflate them, and, I hope, make them know that I think they are special. I tell them I don't want to be with anyone else. The two of them are all I will ever want and they must not bring anyone else home to us. Were the girls pretty? Sure, but so are they. And no I didn't meet Joy or Rose. Should I have? Both insist I must. I don't remember meeting Ikay, but the girls tell me I did.

I am exhausted and tell the two, to 'can it.' It's time for some rest. And then something happens I have never seen in my bed before. *Howard, does this seem sexy to you?* And I see something that I am not at all prepared for... Nene goes down on Nita, licking the girl's pussy.

Whether it does, in the abstract, seem sexy to me, Nita is having a major positive reaction to Nene's tongue and that does seem very sexy to me. Watching Nene drive Nita towards orgasm is amazing to watch. Nene's rear end, sticking up off the mattress, is a cute little rump. The sight of Nita going quietly crazy with her legs spread wide, knees bent, hands on the back of Nene's head, which is buried between Nita's lovely legs and Nene's ass up in the air, gets my attention in a way I had never dreamed possible. I am ramrod hard.

I get behind Nene and find her pussy is dripping with juices. I mount my little love sliding right to the hot bottom of her cunt. I reach around the play with her clit as I saw in and out of her sweet pussy. Nita is cumming and crying and gasping as she pumps her hips up against Nene's face. But Nene is not backing away from Nita. She

grabs the girl's hips and goes for broke on Nita's cunt. Nita is screaming and flopping around before just lying quiescent on the mattress.

I step up my assault on Nene's cunt and clit. Nita moves enough to get one of Nene's breasts in her mouth. Nene is now the one gasping and screaming. Nita and I give Nene no quarter as we drive her to orgasm after orgasm. Finally, I erupt with cum that floods Nene's cunt.

All is quiet.

Where did that come from? Nene, why? Who put that idea in your head?

I kay, Jovelyn, Rose, Anabel, and others! They all do this! They surprised that me and Nita not know about this.

I see. I thought Filipinas not like lesbian sex.

Howard, is it lesbian when we do it with you in the bed with us? The girls say, it just sex, not real lesbian sex. They say, you are the one we love, so it not lesbian stuff. See?

Sort of, I guess. I gather them up in my arms and drift off to sleep.

§ § §

The days slide by without remarkable events. We are happy, at peace and comfortable.

Lawrence and Maricar drop by one day, unannounced and Lawrence proceeds to give me a lesson in Filipino marriage laws and regulations. It seems that I can marry Nene far sooner that I had thought. I guess I want to do that.

Both girls have birthdays. We have a small party each time, with Bill, John, Jasmine and Susan joining us. Both are still far too young and I am getting older and older.

Nita has yet to get pregnant, but hope still exists. The girls go to Flor's grave every week and insist I go with them. I have seen other guys on occasion, but in truth, I don't really want to socialize that much. I am happy at home with my girls. They seem happy taking care of the house, gardening, cooking and taking care of me. They watch TV, shop, and gossip with some of the girls of the other expats, but I have made it clear. There are to be no additions to our home.

I still miss my Flor, and I guess I always will. But Nene and Nita are part of me now. I cannot see a future without them. It's silly but I wish there was a way to marry them both.

The End

From Nothing



Ladle and Pail

Recipes

Lumpiang Sariwa (Fresh Lumpia Recipe)



Filipino vegetable dish composed of different vegetables with a soft (unfried) wrapper garnished with sweet sauce and crushed peanuts.

Serving size: 5

Ingredients

Filling:

- 2 cups sweet potato, cubed
- 2 Tablespoons fish sauce (patis)
- 1 lb cabbage, shredded
- 1 ½ cup carrots, cut in small very thin strips
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup peanuts, crushed
- 6 lettuce leaves
- 1/4 kilo pork, (or 1/2lb.) thinly sliced
- 1 pack extra firm tofu, sliced in strips
- 1 cup shrimp, shelled and deveined

- 2 cups string beans (baguio beans), chopped
- 1 medium sized onions, minced
- ½ cup cilantro, minced
- 3 Tablespoons garlic, minced
- 1 pork flavor cube seasoning

Lumpia Wrappers (Spring Roll Wrappers)

Sauce:

- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 cups water
- ½ pork flavor cube seasoning
- 1 Tablespoon garlic, minced
- 2 Tablespoons corn starch (diluted in 1/4 cup water)

Instructions

The Filling:

- Cook the filling by heating a pan.
- Pour-in the cooking oil then sauté the garlic and onions.
- Add the pork and cook until color turns light brown.
- Put-in the pork cube and add ½ cup water then simmer until pork is tender.
- Add the shrimps and sweet potatoes and cook for 5 minutes or until potatoes are soft.
- Add the tofu and cook for a few minutes.
- Put-in the cilantro, carrots, and string beans then mix with the other ingredients.
- Add the cabbage and let cook for 5 minutes.
- Add the fish sauce and mix.
- Set aside

The sauce

- Pour the water in a sauce pan and Bring to a boil.
- Add the brown sugar and pork cubes.
- Put some salt and soy sauce then mix well.
- Dilute the cornstarch in water and pour in the saucepan.
- Cook until the sauce becomes thick. Set aside.

Wrap the filling:

- Place the wrapper in a plate then place a lettuce leaf in the middle top part of the wrapper.
- Spoon the filling and place in the middle of the wrapper (over the lettuce leaf).
- Close the wrapper by folding the lower part first then roll the sides until the filling is sealed.

Pour the sauce over the Lumpiang Sariwa and garnish with crushed peanuts and minced garlic.

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Misua Soup with Egg



Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 3 cups chicken stock or water
- fish sauce (patis), salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 oz. misua (fine threadlike egg noodles)
- 4 eggs
- green onions, for garnish

Instructions:

1. In a medium saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté garlic and onion.
2. Add chicken stock or water and bring to a boil.
3. Stir in misua noodles and then lower the heat to simmer.
4. Season with patis, salt and pepper.
5. Break the eggs into the simmering stock.
6. Cook until eggs are set for about 2-3 minutes.
7. Remove from heat. Serve hot and garnish with green onions.

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