

# Don Pepe's Farm

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The farm had a special attraction for me. It often had the pungent smell of moist chicken manure because, when it rained, the fighting cocks in their flying pens would get wet, and so would their shit. It also seemed like the cocks were always crowing—at any one time, five or more among the hundreds of cocks in their flying pens in the strange farm would be hurling out their challenges to the world with unsettling arrogance. The hens ran around freely among the tightly clustered pens of green wooden posts, chicken wire, and G.I. sheet roofing. They would hang around the cages to flirt with the cocks, pretending to look for insects or feed grains on the ground. Occasionally, one would assume a sexual position by squatting down, half-opening her wings till the tips touched the ground so that the cock could plant his feet on them, and raising her tail and spreading it like a fan to flash her asshole cum vagina in its full glory. This would drive some of the cocks crazy and they would break into a full run to mount the hen—only to hit their heads on the chicken wire that enveloped the pens. A few of the cocks were more experienced, perhaps because they had been in the tight little backyard farm longer. They would just fly up to their perch, flap their wings hard, and crow at the shameless hen. The smells, sounds, and sights of the gamecock farm on Fifth Street, off Broadway in New Manila fascinated me. I spent many hours there whenever I could spare the time from my classes at the U.P. in Diliman.

Don Pepe Cariño, the farm's owner, was a distinguished old man. He was the comptroller of a large company that made household appliances like air-cons and fans. Cockfighting was his lifelong passion and, every year, he imported hundreds of cocks and a few dozen hens from the United States to sell in his backyard farm. He had crammed every foot of land around his house with cages—some fixed, some movable—to accommodate the cocks and hens. He even had tiny wooden stalls for the cocks inside the den on the ground floor. As a

result, his house was unlike any other in the entire block, which had a few other houses and a number of empty lots. The land in Don Pepe's house sloped severely down to the maroon metal gate fronting the street, so that when one entered the driveway, it looked like there were only the towering fly pens and no house. One had to walk up the lengthy driveway to the garage to finally see the two-story concrete and wooden house, which was also painted green, like the cages. I could find that house with my eyes closed, as all I had to do was to follow the crowing of the boastful cocks.

Don Pepe told me during one of my visits that he never went to the cockpit and never fought his cocks. He just liked having them around and taking care of them with the help of his young wife, who I presumed was his second wife, as Don Pepe was, at least, in his late sixties, what with his severely thinning white hair, deeply wrinkled face, and slow movements. I found it strange that the couple had no help—no young boys, not even a maid, to help take care of the game chickens. Don Pepe was home only very early in the mornings and after six in the afternoon. The rest of the time, there was only his pretty wife, Rosie, who was perpetually feeding the cocks or moving them around to exercise in different cages, while dressed in tight jeans and a loose, comfortable blouse that revealed her white bra whenever she leaned over. At first, I always made it a point to visit the farm when Don Pepe was there, to learn about cockfighting from him. But later, when I became convinced that Rosie knew almost as much about the cocks as Don Pepe, I would come over even when Don Pepe was at work. It was more convenient for me and, besides, Rosie was vivacious, with a delightful *Ilongga* lilt in her voice, whenever she animatedly talked about the cocks and hens. She also liked to make explicit sexual jokes about breeding gamecocks.

One day, I convinced my high school buddies, Bobby and Rick, to join me in a cockfighting venture. We spent the entire Saturday afternoon with Don Pepe on his farm, sparring dozens of imported cocks in the makeshift earthen pit in the garage. Their ferocity was awesome—all of them fought with a deep-seated hatred that I admired but found hard to understand.

"That dark red one with the green legs was outstanding," I said to Don Pepe.

"He's a pure blue face Hatch from Oscar Akins. Two years old; perfect for a derby or big hackfight. You boys can have him for only five hundred," he replied.

"A bit too expensive for us," Bobby said.

"How about the gray one with white legs? He was also a terrific fighter," I asked Don Pepe.

"That's a pure regular gray from Rey Alexander. The price is also five hundred—my discounted price for my imported fighters. How much can you fellows afford, anyway?" he asked us.

"A couple of hundred," Rick answered apologetically, "we're just students and beginners in cockfighting."

"Why don't you show them the rebel broodcock?" Rosie asked Don Pepe with a broad smile.

"Okay, get the cock," Don Pepe ordered Rosie. "It's getting late and we'll have to start feeding soon."

We sparred the broodcock against the dark red one that I liked. The red was a two-year-old, in the prime of his life, but he couldn't lay a glove on the wily, old blue broodcock. We sparred them once more, and the blue again peppered the young fighter with numerous jabs as he easily sidestepped its foolhardy rushes. We were impressed.

"This broodcock is a pure rebel from Hugh Norman—a gift cock for breeding sent with my last order for two dozen fighters. Hugh said that he won thrice in big derbies in the States and was retired only because he's over four years old. None of the young fighters here can beat him. You can have him for two hundred," Don Pepe said as he sprinkled the blue's face with water and massaged his legs.

"Buy him and fight him," Rosie whispered to me with smiling eyes. "He's a better fighter than breeder. Too old to mount the hens."

"You better start feeding the cocks inside," Don Pepe told her sternly. "I'll wind up here."

We grabbed the bargain and tried to pump Don Pepe for tips on how to prepare the blue to fight in the cockpit again. He shooed us off as soon as we had paid, with the excuse that he had to help Rosie feed the cocks.

I tied the blue in our backyard and fed him exclusively with malt grains twice a day. Sometimes, I would pull up the stake of his tiecord and chase him around the garden for exercise. After a couple of weeks, I took him back to Don Pepe's farm to spar him for a last time before we fought him in the cockpit.

"My God, he's gained half a kilo! What have you been feeding him?" Don Pepe asked, as he weighed the blue before putting on the gloves.

"Malt grains," I said. "That's what the fellow in the poultry store recommended."

"Switch to conditioner grains," he said. "It's a more balanced diet."

We sparred the blue and he was still very good. But he had become very aggressive, not wily like before, probably due to the weight he had put on from the spent malt grains that had been used to make beer.

"He's ready," Don Pepe said after the sparring. "On second thought, don't change his diet. Just fight him as soon as you can."

We fought the blue a few days later at the old Marikina cockpit in San Roque, beside the church. We matched him against the first cock that was proffered to us—a much bigger spangled white—and bet a small fortune of eight hundred pesos on him. Our cock repeatedly rushed the white and managed to cripple him in the first few buckles. But our cock couldn't kill the white, though he lay paralyzed on the ground from a spinal blow on his back. The rebel panted heavily throughout the fight and hit his downed opponent very sparingly. Luckily, the white died after a few minutes and we won our first cockfight.

The three of us went back to Don Pepe's farm the following Saturday afternoon, to give him the good news. The gate was open, so we walked up the driveway to the garage and called out for Don Pepe as we sat down. Rosie's muffled voice answered from the second floor bedroom. We made ourselves comfortable and waited for Don Pepe. We waited for half an hour before Rosie finally came down.

She was breathing very heavily and her blouse was drenched with sweat, which made it transparent. I could clearly see her tight white bra beneath the blouse and thought that I could even make out her nipples.

"Hi," she said to me and smiled at Bobby and Rick. "Don Pepe is releasing a shipment of cocks at the airport and won't be back till this evening. Are you going to buy another cock?"

"Oh, I thought I heard him moving around upstairs," I said.

"No, that's just my nephew, visiting."

"We came to tell Don Pepe that the blue won in Marikina and survived the fight."

"That's good. You're lucky. Is that all?" she asked with some impatience. She leaned over to whisper in my ear and her right breast brushed my shoulder. "Why don't you come back another time? I'm busy now discussing business with my nephew."

She smelled funny. I could swear that she just had sex. Something

about her, perhaps the slight flush on her face, the panting, the sweat, her rancid smell, or the urgency in sending us away, told me that she had just screwed. I smiled at her and she lowered her eyes.

At that moment, a tall young man, a bit older than us, came down the stairs that led to the garage.

"Wait," Rosie stopped him. "Don't go yet. These guys were just leaving."

The young man went back to the bedroom and we hurriedly left.

We decided to go to the Marikina cockpit. In the car, we discussed Rosie.

"I'm sure those two were fucking when we arrived," I said.

"Yeah, she was all flushed and smelled of sperm and vaginal fluids," Bobby agreed.

"Do you think they finished?" Rick asked.

"Of course, who would stop fucking to talk to the three of us?" Bobby answered. We all laughed.

"Well, if they were, she can't get enough of it. She asked the guy to stay for another round," Rick observed.

"Maybe it's because Don Pepe, like the old cock we bought from him, can't get it up anymore," I said.

"I don't like the look on your face," Bobby said to me. "Remember, the old rebel we bought killed a young cock in his fight, even if he can't do it anymore."

I laughed. But Bobby was right. Rosie stayed in my mind all weekend. She was so fair. Her short hair made her look young, though she must have been in her thirties. Like a good broodhen, she was fine-boned and well-proportioned. She moved quickly and gracefully and handled the cocks like a pro. She brushed her soft breast against my shoulder. She liked whispering to me. I didn't sleep well from thinking about how she was sex-starved and, hence, would be a terrific lay.

That Monday, I skipped my classes after lunch and went to the farm. The gate was open again and I went straight to the garage. Rosie was washing the face of a young stag, squatting by the faucet in the garden. I waved to her. She waved back.

"What a good-looking stag," I said. "Can I hold it?"

Rosie handed me the stag and I let my hands tarry on her warm hands as I pretended to fumble with the stag. She smiled at me.

"How old is this stag?"

“About a year.”

“Wow, he must be hot as hell with the hens, then.”

“He’d be in his late teens, if he were human, about your age,” she said to me with a soft laugh as she touched my right biceps.

“Oh, you’re here!” Don Pepe’s voice boomed from the doorway, startling me, as he wasn’t supposed to be home. I gave the stag back to Rosie and approached Don Pepe.

“Give the cocks in the den their vitamin pills,” Don Pepe told Rosie, “I’ll take care of Rey.”

“I came to tell you that the rebel won his fight in Marikina and that he’s still alive,” I said.

“Well, you’re lucky I took the day off, then. You know that I work during the day,” he answered coldly.

“I was in the area and decided to take the chance,” I said lamely. “In fact, we all came last Saturday, but you weren’t here.”

“Rosie told me.”

“We didn’t stay long. She was busy with her nephew,” I said slyly.

The color drained from Don Pepe’s face and he slowly walked to the garage and sat down. He was quiet for several minutes, which made me uneasy.

“The rebel killed a much bigger cock,” I said to break the silence, “he crippled him on the second fly and won with minor wounds.”

Don Pepe was not listening. He rubbed his chin with his left hand as he stared at me vacantly. We sat in silence for several more minutes until he finally said: “Would you know the name of the nephew? She has several, you know.”

“I’m afraid we weren’t introduced. You’ll have to ask her.”

“Yeah,” he said, as he gazed slowly around his poultry. “It’s getting harder and harder for me to run this farm, you know. Good help can’t be found anymore. They all steal. If not for Rosie, I’d probably give it up. I’m lucky to have her.”

“I’m glad you have the farm. Your cocks are good. We made a lot of money with the rebel.”

“I don’t know. The young don’t always understand the true value of things. That rebel has extraordinary courage. It took that to win one more fight, at his age. It takes great courage to do anything at all, when you’re old”

“Right. I think so, too. He was panting real hard during the fight.

Well, guess I'll go now. I'll tell you if we decide to fight him again."

As I walked to the gate, a hen assumed the sexual position in front of a cock in a pen along the driveway. The cock flew toward her and hit his head hard on the chicken wire. He fell and quickly got up. He was dazed and staggered around like a drunk in his cage. I laughed. I looked back at Don Pepe and he had also seen the comic incident. He laughed, too.

I went out the gate and figured, for the briefest moment, that maybe sex isn't always what it's cracked up to be, after all. ☺