

LITERARY SECTION

ROAD TRIP

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About the contributor

Ian Rosales Casocot teaches in Silliman University in Dumaguete City. He has won the Palanca, the NVM Gonzalez Prize, a PBBY Salanga Writers Prize Honorable Mention, and the FullyBooked/Neil Gaiman Philippine Graphic/Fiction Prize for his fiction. His books include *FutureShock Prose: An Anthology of Young Writers and New Literatures, Old Movies and Other Stories*, *Beautiful Accidents*, and *Heartbreak & Magic*. He was Writer in Residence for the International Writers Program of the University of Iowa in 2010.

“Oh, thinking about all our younger years
There was only you and me
We were young and wild and free...”
—BRYAN ADAMS, “Heaven”

“The journey, not the destination...”
—GREG ANDERSON

VII.

I finally slept on Randy’s chest. I would always think of that as a kind of primal memory that I never knew would, in graying years, become all-consuming: but that night, in the hours before morning, I slept, my head nestled near the crook of his arm, my lips grazing the downy hair

that trailed somewhere south, my forehead against the rise and fall of his breathing, and where—in my half-sleep—I could feel his heart beating. It had been frantic minutes before. Now there was only a kind of calm. And everywhere else, into the deep darkness that father’s car hurtled to, the night wind kissed our skin. We slept.

VI.

Then, with a jerk, Randy came all over my left hand, with my right still firm against his mouth, where I could feel against my palm the violence of his gratification. He had already bitten me on the arm minutes before, and now I could not care less. I smelled the Chlorox-like whiff, then lifted my head out of the blanket for air. *They know absolutely nothing*, I thought, with guilt and relish, as our bodies wrenched and relaxed, and we soon eased into the smooth ride of the open Sakbayan. The rice fields passed in the darkness outside, and I knew we were finally almost there. *Almost there*. I already smelled Sta. Catalina town, entryway to Bayawan—it was pungent with country air and pregnant with so many promises.

V.

We were going fast. I went back under the blanket, the edges of which were flapping in the wind that snapped through the car’s interiors. The cold didn’t matter anymore—but we were careful with our little noises, and I hoped, with a dash of unthinking abandon, that the purring of the engine and the crunch of the wheel upon gravel road outside could drown whatever noise it was we were making.

The ferocity of my sudden decisiveness must have surprised even him. I, too, marveled at the impulsive knowledge, screaming out of nowhere, of where my hand and my mouth could go—and what they could do. “Ugh,” Randy whimpered—but it must have been new for him as well. How many nights have I imagined something like this? My fourteen-year old brain had always been capable of kinetic imaginations, but this was suddenly *it*—and in the split second when I both nipped at his left nipple, and felt for his muscled entrance that throbbed with both anticipation and fear, the thought came to me that all it took, really, was surrender.

“What are you doing?” Randy hissed softly at me, even as his hands pushed my head down harder, where my teeth could do ravage to his nipple, my tongue on his chest. He smelled of bottled heat, and I did not say anything. His sphincter, too, throbbed—and that was all the invitation I needed. Remembering all this, I think now I must have been clumsy, and it must have been quite

uncomfortable—our little bodies thrashing together in the claustrophobic space of the Sakbayan's black-upholstered backseat.

But I had entered him, somehow: it was quick, a kind of quivering really, and Randy was surprised at his own acquiescence, surrendering to the rhythm of our suddenly rocking bodies as I pounded upon him, his insides warm against my penis. There was a look of shock to his face, and it must have been painful—my sudden invasion—because when I stooped forward to kiss him, he suddenly wrapped all of me in a savage embrace, and then I felt his lips on my arm. When he bit me, he drew blood, and I came too quickly.

The thing you swiftly learn, the moment you grasp for that one seemingly final grunting and breathing, is not satisfaction, nor conquest: it is utter, unbelievable surprise of having come.

Somewhere in the receding shallows of my breathing, I believed myself to have finally become a man.

IV.

I found it strange how he wanted me to turn around, to lie on my belly on the backseat, the blanket still wrapped around us. "Come on," he whispered to me, his heaving hot on my ears. It was surprising how I could only think of how far Bayawan still was. We had been driving for three hours now. I thought of how we had not been to Bayawan for the longest time, and right then and there, in the middle of Randy's odd insistence, all I could think about was the *baye-baye* I missed—that Bayawan delicacy of coconut and sticky rice which made for a sweet serving of native cake, and how Lola Beatrice used to make them just for us. I felt suddenly, stupidly happy. Like a puppy of some shallow joy. Happy, too, for the foregone conclusion of this fervent, odd waiting, that feeling as Randy jerked me off, harder this time, both of us trying not to move too much, even as we moved in desperate little steps to get at each other, the stirring under a blanket the only movement in my consciousness.

He reached behind me, and I could feel his hands massaging my buttocks, his fingers inching somewhere. I knew somehow where they would lead, and when I finally felt the tip of his pointer tickling my suddenly uptight muscle, I resisted. This was something I had never imagined. It felt dirty. But his sixteen-year old body was strong, and I struggled against my own helplessness.

"No," I whispered to him.

But he kept massaging the suddenly puckish hole, and despite myself, I quivered from the sudden—almost ugly, brutal—knowledge of having discovered a new spot for pleasure.

"No...", I said—and that was when I felt his lips mangling mine with deliberate biting and sucking, his tongue darting into my mouth, seeking my own. I must have felt a little panic, but

from the corner of my eyes, I saw Tatay lost in his own world, his eyes firmly on the road. He was no longer telling stories, instead he was humming a Frank Sinatra tune, of old “Moon River,” and when he hit the song’s next crescendo, I fought back, my lips suddenly milking Randy’s tongue, and that was when I knew there was no turning back.

III.

I had my hand on Randy’s crotch. He was already hard. I began to tremble in illicit excitement, my face lit up like fiesta lights, but I had to be quiet. I had to keep my slowly-moving hand all the way inside his shorts. I felt jittery and thrilled—and more animated. But what did you expect? Nanay and Tatay were so near, I could practically smell them. Yet that only made everything seem like a contraband dream: this was how it *is* to breathe and live—in quiet, and in secret.

The quiet and the secret made me drunk, and Randy and I were two boys submerged in an ocean, feeling reality fading away. Without thinking, I pulled the blanket over my head and went down. Under the covers, in my own private world, I smelled how our bodies’s odors intermingled.

For what seemed like a long time, my hand stayed where it was until I slipped my fingers under his briefs. With his eyes closed, Randy shifted to make things easier for me. Suddenly, my hand was inside his underwear, and holding him. I started jerking him off, and I could hear him whispering, “*Goddamn,*” and then I felt his hands taking *my* underwear off. Randy started rubbing me, and it felt so right and so wrong. In a fleeting panic, I wondered if Tatay and Nanay knew, but I still heard Nanay snoring away.

I peeked out from under the blanket to look at the front seats, and there they were, encased in shadows. Tatay was starting another story, this time about how he worked for the American Army intelligence during World War II, when he was a young boy. But we were no longer listening, lost as we already were in this strange preoccupation of groping hands, and teeth biting lips, enough to ensure the quiet we needed.

II.

“Hoy, Fermin,” Nanay said in sleepy admonition, “stop that.” Turning to me, she smiled, her weariness shrouding her, and said, “That’s an operation scar, Rodrigo. Your father had his left kidney removed some years ago. *That’s* what *you* get when you drink too much beer.”

Our blanket was warm, although the wind outside, rushing into our car, was not. It was a clammy air. “Night-time air,” Nanay said when the trip to Bayawan began, “is never good. It produces perversions.”

I asked her what “perversion” meant. She said it was a French punctuation.

Nanay’s thin face rested against the upholstery, and Tatay’s fat frame made squishy sounds against the leather. The night was so dark you could taste it, or feel it: the way it snaked through our clothes, swathing everything in shadow, casting a kind of mask on all our faces. Randy looked like somebody else. Then, when he looked at me, he started laughing. “You look like a *girl* in the dark,” and laughed some more.

I punched him in the arm. “*I do not!*”

Nanay shushed us both and told us to go sleep.

“But Rodrigo’s taking up too much space!” Randy said.

“*I am not!*” I protested once again.

There were scarce lampposts then, in those days. There were only the car’s headlights to illuminate everything on the road. Nanay had earlier prayed that no rebel or bandit would ambush us. The Negros countryside was notorious for its red rebels. “Red rebels, ‘nay?” I asked earlier that morning. “Because they wear red all the time?”

“Because they drink blood, that’s why!” Randy hooted. He could be such a baby, and he was *two years older* than I was. “Shut up, Rands!” I said. Nanay never really said anything. These days, she often forgot to even look at us, as if we weren’t even there at all.

“Why did we have to go to Bayawan tonight?” she now asked Tatay sleepily. “Why not drive tomorrow?” And Tatay replied: “Because...” and stopped at that, the ellipses pregnant with things unsaid.

Later, Nanay huddled deep in her seat and began her campaign for sleep, which soon came, mercifully.

She was snoring before long. The darkness flowed across the Sakbayan, but I could not sleep. There were visions of Japanese samurai or red bandits in my head, and kidneys, and rolling heads. Randy was pretending he was fast sleep.

I.

I cannot forget the night drive down to Bayawan, Nanay’s hometown, that one time long ago, when I was still a kid. It was the first summer I have chosen not to forget. It may have also been the first of everything else.

Tatay had just bought a funny-looking car—something boxy and angular—with no doors, a yellow Sakbayan he called Roger. My brother Randy was sixteen and I was fourteen, and we were huddled in the backseat with a heavy blanket on, something Lola Mediong made when she was still a young girl. The blanket smelled old, like mothballs.

Nanay was sitting up front with Tatay. She was trying not to fall asleep, but she was soon nodding off to sleep. There was still no car radio in those days, at least not in our province, so Tatay was trying to entertain us with tall tales he called his memories. How one time during the war he had to fight a Japanese soldier in a duel, how Yellow Chinky-Eyes (that was how he called him) had a sharp samurai sword, and how Tatay was armed only with a knife. Tatay won, *but of course*, then—with one hand on the steering wheel—he lifted his shirt to show off his “battle scars,” a terrifying keloid sharp and shining on the left side of his belly.

When I touched it, it felt real.