THE AFTERNOON I LEARNED THE USE OF SEX

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About the Author
Enrico C. Santos is a writer and film producer, and is currently the Vice-President/Head of New Media and Concept Development of Star Cinema/Skylight Films. During his early days on TV, he developed Martin After Dark, ASAP, Salinggonaposila, Game Ka na Ba?, SuperInggo, Kung Fu Kids, and Dyosa, among others. He launched the Asianovela trend with the release of Meteor Garden, and pioneered local animation with SuperInggo Animated. As a screenplay writer, among his awarded works are In The Name of Love and The Trial. He has produced independent-mainstream films such as Corazon, Bromance, Tuhog, My Illegal Wife, among others. He is now working on the revival of the Darna film franchise.

Santos graduated with a BS in Industrial Engineering from the University of the Philippines Diliman, and he is currently finishing his MA in Theological Studies at the Ateneo de Manila University. He lives with his two children, Pio and Noah, in Antipolo.
My father brought home a puppy, a white fur ball that rolled about in our apartment. It missed the sound of its mother’s heartbeat, and kept whimpering to be carried.

I must have been eleven then, four years older than my brother Guillermo. We thought the puppy was to be our first pet. We almost agreed on a name for it, when my father pulled the puppy to the backyard, and hit it on the head with a hammer.

After one yelp, the puppy collapsed, a red medallion gurgling from its nape. Father hung it upside down to drain the blood. He used a blowtorch to singe off the fur until the blackened skin showed, and the whole place reeked of burnt hair. He peeled off the skin, and ordered my mother to cut it.

I did not recall if Mama recoiled at the task, but she diced the skin as deftly as she did carrots. Her shoulders heaved at each slice of the leathery sheets, knife sweeping the skin squares from the chopping board to a shallow basin, to be encrusted with chopped shallots, chili, ginger and vinegar, to form a lumpy terrine, which she then kneaded until the skin of her hands wrinkled, grayed from the vinegar.

“**Kilawing aso,**” she whispered to me through thin lips, “eaten raw, with vinegar doing a bit of the cooking.”

Of the rest of the puppy, Father made spiced stew, ribs and legs swimming with tomatoes and potatoes. The head would be roasted, the brain an extra treat. The offal would be boiled into bitter *pinapaitan* soup, and the penis and balls saved for last as aphrodisiac.

“**Mateo.**”

I jumped when my father called me. He and I have the same name, but during my baptism, my grandmother Nanay insisted on adding Sean, ostensibly in honor of actor Sean Connery, turning me into Sean Mateo. Pronounced by my classmates as San Mateo, the name courted teasing. Still, I liked my added name. All I cared for was not to be my father’s namesake.

“**Ssssstttt, Mateo!**”

My father, in a puckered hiss, signaled for me to speed up my approach. I would grow up considering *sutsot* despicable. I thought to myself, only snakes made that sound.
“Mateo, taste the kilawin. Needs more salt?”

I entered the space of the man, an atmosphere of brown heat and tattoos, two yellowed eyes, held between a leer and a glare, greasy fingers dangling a piece of skin for me. There would be no refusing; I swallowed it. Dog meat was hot, not hot like pepper, but hot like eating a piece of charcoal; it smoldered in the belly. I shook my head; no need for salt.

Father’s guests arrived, smellier, baked in Brylcreem, straight from their jobs at the auto shop. Strangling bottles of gin, the men croaked out stories: the stupid customer they fleeced by reusing old spare parts, the itch they got from that last girl, things like that. The fidgety one rimmed his lips with his tongue, while he griped about their coworker who put himself up through an accountancy course, and got promoted to supervisor, that wimp who could not finish a beer without blooming in rashes. The older one beside him proclaimed—life had always been pure luck of the draw; neither education, industry, nor God’s grace altered that. After he said it, the huddle went silent, all eyes glazed like the dead dog’s.

The fidgety one broke the dead air. “Mateo, pare, how did you get this kilawin tasting so good?”

“Soledad mixed it with her bare dirty hands, that’s how.” Snickers.

Mama smiled, sad as a guitar. She wiped her hands on her apron, and brought out clean glasses on a tray. As she bent down to serve, she kept her eyes lowered, even when my father touched her thighs, to more snickering from his friends.

Excusing herself, she entered the bedroom. “Guilly, Sean, close the door.”

I was glad Mama did not call me Mateo. She unrolled the woven mats that were our beds on the concrete floor. The noises of the drinking session seeped through the wall. “Try to sleep. I’ll clean up later”, Mama said.

“I’ll do the cleaning, Mama. You sleep,” I said, although we knew I would drift off before the drinking was over.

My brother and I shared one pillow. He turned to face me.

“Let’s name him Ben.”
“Name who Ben?”

“The puppy.” Then Guillermo drifted to sleep.

By eleven that night, Father was pissed. His friends had to leave before midnight because tomorrow was a working day, whereas my father was a still part-timer at the auto shop, and could stay up late. He had stared at the bottom of his glass many times already, but continued to drink alone.

To my dread, he called my brother. I woke Guillermo up. Here it goes again. Guillermo and I have a name for this: the Ashtray Test.

Holding Guillermo’s hand in his palm, my father aimed the ashtray above it. The ashtray was cheap glass, octagonal and pestle-heavy. Father drawled, “I ask you a question. If the answer is wrong, I hit your hand with this ashtray. If you lie, I hit it, too.”

Guillermo started to tear up, but stifled his sniffles. We knew that seeing us whimper was what got my father up.

“How old are you, Guillermo?”

He straightened five fingers from his free hand, then two.

“Correct. Now who do you love more—me or your mother?”

“I love you, Daddy.”

“That was not the question.”

My brother yelped when the ashtray banged on his knuckles.

“Mateo.” A faint plea. It was Mama’s bravest attempt at reproach.

My father hated being opposed. He threw the bowl of leftover kilawin at my mother. It did not reach her, but the bowl meteored across the floor, the vinegar for its tail. She got the broom and dustpan to pick up the food, small as a bird.
Father resumed his text. “Guillermo, who do you love more?”

“Love more? Let’s see.”

Guillermo took his shorts off. Because his t-shirt was big, he looked skirted.

“I love dancing more, Daddy! Like this!” His squirming looked like those cartoon cats we saw on our neighbor’s TV.

My father waved my brother away, laughing. When desperate, Guillermo usually resorted to prancing butt-naked.

“Where are you, Mateo?”

“Daddy?”

“Fag, your turn.”

I sat in front of him. He positioned my hand on his palm.

“And you, who do you—

His other hand lifted the ashtray to aim at my hand, but froze in mid-air. He was looking at the brown map growing rapidly on my crotch. Warm urine soaked my front, trickled down the chair, and dripped to his foot.

He looked me, eyes like black tumors. I felt the dog meat enflaming again in my belly. He rammed the ashtray down.

The next morning, Mama checked our hands for fractures. My father had been playacting, she said. What seemed like hard hits caused only slight bruising. He did not really mean to hurt us. It was gin that did it.

“Besides, the buddy drinking was necessary, Sean. The guys really liked your father, you know. They will push the boss to hire him.”

I nodded. I was old enough to appreciate her effort to salvage the way we see our life. At least, the Ashtray Test was better than last month’s Belt Buckle Chase. That produced blood.
“But they did not have to eat Ben,” Guillermo whispered.

“I got even, actually.” Mama’s lips smiled only on its left half. “Before I mixed the kilawin, I shat, but did not wash my hands.”

We smothered our laughter, so as not to wake my father, who snorted a snore beside us on the floor.

Mama leaned closer. “Soon we will run away—you, Guillermo and me—to where your father will never find us. My Nanay will get us a new home far away.”

Again. Nanay made Mama run away when I was a baby, but Father found us, and axed down the front door of Nanay’s house, to retrieve us. Mama would attempt to escape again, and again. It had been that way throughout my childhood, the accordion of separation and reconciliation. They must have done this, six times or more since then, each time with greater scandal. The whole neighborhood in Pandacan knew of Nanay’s axe-wielding son-in-law, and the year would not be complete without my mother running to my grandmother with a black eye and a suitcase hastily locked, shirtsleeves sticking out of the sides. They knew that within the week, my father would come banging at the gate to smoke my mother out, until she emerged, same suitcase, same children trembling like livestock approaching slaughter.

The plot of one day leaving my father eked out some hope in our days, so I played along.

“Yes, Mama. One day, I will buy us a home where he cannot not find us.” Or, I thought, I could just find a hammer for his head, like what he did to Ben.

For now, Mama would prepare a pitcher of cold water. Father always woke up thirsty after a night of bingeing. By the time he emptied in the toilet, Mama would be ready with two cups of coffee, both for him. Guillermo and I decided to go out to play before he woke up.

We missed school this year, because Mama inconveniently timed one of her recent escapes during enrolment. By the time my father traced us in a hut in Bulacan, the school year had begun.

I spent the unattended school hours playing with the slum kids, who, I supposed, had not seen a classroom in recent years. We would play dodgeball, or I would
watch them scavenge in the garbage dump beside our apartment. On lucky days, the dump would yield them an old yoyo or a chess piece.

That day, it was a *sipa*. Most of the time, our *sipa* consisted of a metal coin with tufts of straws attached to it. We found a different kind this time, a wicker ball with better bounce. I explained that it came from another country, having seen one on TV. We kicked the ball around in a circle, balancing our kicks to make it stay within our formation. My playmates could pass 30 kicks or more without the ball falling on the ground, but when the ball reached me, my kick made it careen off, to groans and jeers.

Before noon, Father passed us by on the street. Dressed in pressed shirt and pants, he would make a go at selling the second-hand Datsun outside the auto shop. He would be made employee if he proved to be a hot seller.

Toothless Pando pestered him, “Mr. Paredes, your son Sean is eleven, and still could not kick *sipa* properly.”

“Eh, what do you expect from the fag?” He said it, in that tone of someone telling time. He walked to the corner, the bastard, and did not even look back. He should have heard that the jeering got louder, and seen that someone slapped me at the back of my head, and another pulled my shorts down.

I will show my father. I will make him proud right there. I wished there was *kilawin* I could mix shit into, or an ashtray I could hit my hand with. I asked my playmates what fags did. They falsettoed their voices, and sashayed, but I knew it meant more than that.

I ran to the construction site of the old Chinese man’s warehouse, just beyond the dump. The carpenters had white faces from cement, and worked naked except for denim shorts and busted sandals. They wrapped their t-shirts over their heads, so that the cement would not clump their hair when their scalps sweated.

The brownest among them, Gary, once asked me to take a puff from his cigarette. I sought out Gary.

Gary sweated so much that he looked like he came from an untowelled bath. Dropping the cement bags, he paused, scratched his armpits to signify deep thought, and smelled his fingers. Then he smiled, lips broadened, eyelids heavier. “I can teach you how to be one, if you want.”
Gary led me by the hand to the darker part where the hollow blocks stacked higher. He asked me to watch closely. He slid his fingers up and down the cigarette, then his tongue painted saliva on it. He put it in his mouth, with lit end inside.

“See? Now Sean, do to me what I did to the cigarette.” He pulled down his jeans, then his briefs. He inhaled hard, red tumescence threatening. Horror and fascination clanged inside me, cymbals I would be feeling for the rest of my life.

Before I could touch him, a voice came from behind us. “Hey kid, are you going for sucking, or would you rather see how a woman does it first?”

The adagio of a girl’s just-past pubescence lilt came from Jiang. She had emerged from the warehouse in purposeful languor, clouded by a scent I would always associate with every Chinese girl, a synthetic jasmine. Gary did not pull up his briefs; he arched his hips higher. Jiang seemed vaguely amused. They had dealt with each other before.

“Just wanted him to clean the pipe. He was the one who asked.” Gary said as he unzipped her shorts. He stuck his hand into her panties, and then dragged them down.

Jiang offered, “Kid, you can watch, as long as you don’t tell the warthog.” I saw an old heap on a bench at the end of the warehouse, eyes shut, head bobbing, red Chinese newspapers propped on his hands.

Jiang lowered herself into Gary, as Gary leaned back on the hollow blocks. Jiang’s white skin pressing on Gary made him browner. Their sweat mingled. I found that when I closed my eyes, I could memorize the faint suction sound of flesh entering syrupy flesh, with melodious variations from vacuum sucks to thick thuds, muffled breath joining the rhythmic slither. I found the act faintly consoling; some things could be inflicted upon others with pleasure, not pain.

“There are better names for it,” said Jiang later, “but for your education, what you have just witnessed, in English, they call that inter-cost.”

Someone screeched in Chinese; the warthog had awakened. Gary pulled up his jeans, strangling his penis in the garter of his briefs, willing his erection to melt. Jiang struggled slipping back to her panties; the cotton stuck to her sticky skin. I handed her my handkerchief. She wiped her genitals with it. Warthog popped in, just as Gary was lifting a cement bag in the pretense that he was passing through. Jiang touched my head with her dry hand, and gave back the handkerchief with the other.
The warthog was not Jiang’s father, but an employer who took her in when she was thirteen, and made her live in his garage, iron his shirts, and mind his store, in payment for a loan from her parents. The warthog claimed to be raising Jiang like a daughter, but for some reason, she hated the old man.

The warthog stared at us, seething, unable to prove his hunch. Jiang smiled, and walked close to the warthog, knowing he would smell her sex. He would see in his mind his jasmined nymphet being horned by a cement-crusted laborer. *Pu ch kan un*, he would curse. Ingrate.

I walked home, awed by this new weapon.

A week later, my father gathered his friends again, for celebratory drinking. He got the auto shop job. No dog; this time, they bought a cooked goat on a spit. Mama stayed in the kitchen. I cracked ice for the glasses and ladled sauce for the goat meat, occasionally pointing the bathroom to those who wanted to pee.

As I served my father’s friends, they stiffened. My self-induced erection lolled about, brushing their knees with the hardened tip straining from my shorts. Like my mother, I pretended I did not notice where they looked.

The fidgety one could not resist. After I went to the kitchen for more beer, I heard him tell Father, “Mateo, *pare*, your son might have a urinary disease or something. His dick is—”

The red veins webbing the eyeballs of my father bulged a bit when I brought in beer. He grabbed my crotch. By then, I had made my erection subside, a quick trick taught by Gary. “Nothing there,” he snarled.

The *compares*’ disgust over my erection was just a bonus. I had already jacked off on the ice before I served it.