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## Translation of Baradero

Januar Yap

*University of the Philippines Cebu*, [jeyap@up.edu.ph](mailto:jeyap@up.edu.ph)

John Bengan

*University of the Philippines Mindanao*, [jbbengan@up.edu.ph](mailto:jbbengan@up.edu.ph)

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*Januar Yap*

## BARADERO

*Translated from Cebuano by John Bengan*

*“I am a leper. I was torn away from the love of my family. I live in Culion, exiled to the island of pain. High mountains entomb me, a vast sea imprisons me. You, who listen, have compassion for a leper. Help him to be healed.”*

—On display at the Culion Hospital museum

They would be stranded for what could likely be forty days at the wharf in Bantayan. The propeller at the rear of the *Arko Niño’s* hull had been dented and disfigured when the ship mysteriously scraped something none of them knew what. The waters off the north of Cebu, in the Visayan seas, had not once been known for being rough. The seas were deep, steep, and dark. No whale had washed up bloody and torn at the mouth, if a whale had indeed caused the damage to the propeller.

“An American submarine!” said Andot, a porter, but no one paid him attention.

“Probably the forehead or tentacles of a giant squid if there ever was one,” Kiko said, weeds still sticking on his legs after he’d swum to the bottom of the ship.

“Did you see ink then, your vision grew dark?” said Emil.

“Ay, sus, maybe just octopuses having an erection, I mean, indigestion!” Emyot joked.

Enriko, the youngest among them, didn't get in on the wisecracks and merely stared at the broken propeller.

They swam to the bottom and yet couldn't find a reason for the damaged propeller. The ship just suddenly got stuck and even if the engine was running, it didn't move an inch, except whenever it slipped slowly when the ocean swelled.

They fell silent, running out of guesses over the real cause, while they encircled the propeller that looked like crumpled paper. Perhaps each one of them worried about what they would face in the next hours. The days. Weeks. After they had hit the jackpot fishing near Busuanga, they followed the west wind back to the heart of the Visayas. They sailed north of Coron and the islands of Calamian. They navigated the edges of Caluya Island, Tambaro and Libagao, north of Caluya. Traversing Carabao Island, above Boracay, they cruised into Kintolo and then along the cove of the Visayan Sea, north of Cebu, supposedly through to the city where they would ship their haul of an arm's length-sized tuna each. But when they were beneath Placer in Masbate, the *Arko Niño* trembled, and they bobbed about remotely in the immense sea.

"Our ears ring for real when we hear total silence," said Kap Joe, captain of the ship.

"Maybe there's really no such thing as true silence, Kap," said the young Enriko.

"Probably . . . In the *Arko Niño* lifecycle, many captains have handled this ship, but it has dry-docked only now."

"We can't be sure, Kap Joe. Considering how old this boat is, it must have failed before," Enriko said.

"Ship, not boat," said Kap Joe, but his gaze wandered far. In truth, nobody else had commandeered the ship. No one else had mastered the *Arko* but he. The *Arko Niño* had a history of failures. A little stir of the ocean and wind and the engine would choke and tremble. The captain couldn't remember if the ship's balance had ever been set right, nobody would notice the tilt amid the rocking and swaying at every slap of the waves. It carried a burden

like a person hesitating to leave the place from which they came. When you are weighed down, one way not to go down is by moving forward, charging into the ferocity of a destination. But their trouble with the propeller at the moment, this was new. How to advance? This was a rare incident, the cause of which they couldn't comprehend.

Good thing there were a few fisherfolks who witnessed the slight tipping of the ship and raced toward it to offer help.

The islands of the Cebuano, Waray, Ilonggo, Karay-a girded the waters. About ten motor vehicles and pump boats pulled the *Arko Niño* toward the Bantayan dock—fisherfolk from nearby islands in the Visayas. They made arrangements among themselves and managed to reach Bantayan after dragging the *Arko Niño*. The sailors offered each fisherman a few kilos of the day's catch but none of them accepted the reward. Should the same thing happen to them, heaven forbid, they hoped the same kind of help would come. The Visayan Sea was full of waves, the current turned into a whirlpool, and it was no pleasant matter if one got caught in its tail. Who knew which godforsaken shore you'd wash up on? God forbid you'd be spat out into the Pacific or the waters of China.

"Perhaps you'd be stuck for a while here. At least you'll have that to get by," said one of the older fishermen who helped them.

"We probably won't be able to deliver the tuna to the city, *bai*," said Kap Joe. "We've run out of ice. We're just going to make do with these while waiting for the new propeller. Thank you so much, *bai*."

The day the propeller was returned or a new one arrived, Kap Joe said, they'd pass through the island of San Juan near Surigao where there was a mysterious abundance of fish after the tremor and waves brought by Typhoon Yolanda and the great earthquake that shook up the islands in 2013.

"They said ugly-looking whales floated up," said Kap Joe. "Have you seen Emyot's face, that nose like a whale shark's twin? The likes of those surfaced in San Juan!"

"How terribly ugly, Kap Joe," said Emil.

“Don’t get me started, Emil, and your face! And Kap Joe’s just lucky he got a sharp beak,” Emyot said.

Sometimes, it was hard to laugh when you were suddenly run aground by some nameless tide, Kap Joe thought to himself out of a sadness he couldn’t quite understand. Many years in his youth, he was given the nickname “Tsila” because of his nose. Castilian—Spaniard. What Spaniard? Damn you!

## Day 1

Kap Joe’s drink could have brought the dead back to life. Everyone’s fatigue and drowsiness went away.

But here was Enriko at the base of *Arko Niño*, earnestly chiseling the rust off. It had been a while since the ship had had a good scrubbing. His chisel was newly filed. Even though the peeling off of rust did not require a sharp end, he went ahead and sharpened his chisel. The scoop of the dull end was heavier, but the aim of the sharpness was precise. Also, maybe the work was easier if the chisel was sharp. Nothing that shouldn’t be cut would be cut. Only the rusty parts would splinter off.

Even if the sun was out, the wind blowing through Bantayan was cool. Would barnacles sprout around the bottom of the *Arko*? Maybe not, said Enriko, because it wouldn’t stay there for a long time. He’d been chiseling away at the stern of the ship when he found a lump of rust. As he began to chisel it away until the layers of paint began to fall out, he found a barnacle that seemed to have stuck there since the time of the Americans. He gouged it out by the edges until it dropped into the sea. A large chip of rust came off along with the barnacle and it left a huge gash on the *Arko*’s paint job. Letters peaked underneath: OLI. He continued to chip away the layer of paint until a large chunk of it was removed. The letters forming “POLILIO” appeared. The American flag and the words “US Navy” also emerged.

Enriko quietly went on scraping the rust off the *Arko*. His fellow sailors were loud and merry. They downed two bottles until their wits rocked to the waves off of Bantayan. After he was done with the task, he retreated to his quarters and kept to himself for the rest of the day.

## Day 2

At the Poblacion in Bantayan Internet cafés had opened shop, but Enriko still wrote down what he wanted to say to Aurora, who was finishing her degree in Business at the Ateneo in Manila. If he would get the chance to come down from the ship, he would send the e-mail to his beloved.

*Dearest Aurora,*

*How are you? So sorry that we can't meet again during your summer break. I've been so busy at work. I need to meet the monthly quota. I am competing with a lot of agents here around the Mindanao area. Sorry also because I wasn't able to respond when you offered to come over to Davao. The times are dangerous. The killings are everywhere and I'm afraid you'd get ambushed on your way here. It's still Martial Law here in Mindanao, and it's not good to roam about because the military are suspicious. Don't worry, we'll see each other soon. After I've saved up a little, I'll visit you there in Ateneo.*

*I love you.*

*Enriko*

Enriko folded the paper he'd written on, which had come from an empty pack of cigarettes, and he slipped it under the elastic of his shorts. He could have called Aurora, but he couldn't do it. He didn't know how to hide the truth if he spoke to her.

For two years now, Enriko had been working in the *Arko*. He was the son of a Waray fisherman who married an Ilongga, but for whatever reason they washed ashore in Tubigon the year they wed because they believed the waters there were abundant and their family would thrive. Now at the age of twenty-one, he sounded like an adult when he spoke. So, Kap Joe trusted him because he was a responsible kid. He would do whatever he was told. When he

was still eighteen, his father quit fishing and started a small business involving giant clams. But one day, the DENR cracked down on it and his parents were arrested for selling an endangered species of shellfish. They were in jail for several months, but then someone from the DENR set them free on the secret condition that they give him a cut. Before long, Enriko also found out that his parents' release from prison was also facilitated by Honorable Eloy Salubre, a loyal client in the giant clam trade. His father continued the business but not even two months later, he had a heart attack and died. Soon, his mother followed suit, having developed an illness in the lungs. Enriko took over the giant clam business but because of the turn of events, he had to go elsewhere.

Enriko left behind his younger sibling Ermie, who was still ten, at their neighbor's to look for a job somewhere else. He'd given him a few grains of pearl. "If you have nothing else to turn, this will see you though. I'll come back for you. I promise this to you, I'll come back for you," Enriko said to his brother.

But some time before that: he'd given Aurora the same kind of pearls. "Wherever you are, keep this with you," he said to Aurora, his secret love who was the daughter of Bokal Salubre. After Enriko's father passed away, he took over making giant clam deliveries for parties at the Salubres'. That was when he first saw Aurora, like a pearl that sprung from a giant clam.

Once, he slipped one of the clams that contained a living pearl into the basin. True enough, he made sure Aurora was by herself inside the Salubres' large barn when he delivered the clams. "The one at the top, try to open it," he said to Aurora.

Aurora's eyes lit up upon seeing the pristinely white pearl, then she looked up at Enriko, and said, "Is it alive?"

"In the best conditions, it may still grow. That is yours," he said to Aurora.

"Ay, I don't want it to grow. I want it just as small. Uyyy, thank you *ha*. Your name's Enriko, right?"

"Yes, Enriko."

Yes, Enriko. This was also Aurora's response when Enriko asked her if she'd accept the love he proposed after several months of them stealing

time to be together on the zigzagging shores around Bohol. Yes, Enriko. It was as though all the islands of the Visayas suddenly rose up to what Aurora had said.

But no smoke could be hidden, as Bokal Salubre and two of his men once and for all caught them in the barren lands of Anda, on the other side of Bohol island. Enriko would have been beaten up, if one of Bokal's men had not prevented it.

"You're just one voter." And that was what Salubre had said while dragging Aurora into the SUV. Aurora's face was white with fear, like a pearl inside a giant clam slammed shut. Everyone was quiet when they sped off. Each fiddler crab returned to their crevices among the rocks, leaving as though the young man by himself after the vanishing of an enchanted spring.

According to Enriko, he hadn't even registered yet to vote. He wasn't a voter. He hadn't been listed anywhere.

### Day 3

When Enriko asked permission to go to Poblacion, Kap Joe forbade him. The captain was convinced that he was trying to avoid having drinks with them.

"Just a piece of advice, Dong Riko," said Kap Joe, putting an arm around Enriko. "Get to know your workmates better. Especially when you're on the ship. It's not good that you're keeping to yourself. The time will come when you'll need someone's help. Think of me as your father here."

In truth, Kap Joe had a point. You had to get to know your companions in the Arko, but he had one thing against it. The entire world wasn't contained in that ship. It was the Arko, indeed, but the *Arko Niño*, not Noah's. Aurora was in the center of town, swept there by fate. The ocean that came between them was vast and brutal.

"This is your world now, Dong Riko," said Kap Joe. "Just accept it. Look at the sea. Against all that wide emptiness, you'll need someone to talk to."

Kap Joe took out one more bottle from his waist and their companions cheered.

“This is the propeller that will lift us toward departure!” said Kap Joe.

“Propeller it is. You’ll feel one spinning in your head the next morning. Hahaha!” Andot interjected.

“That is, if you run out of appetizers!” Emil said.

“Tomorrow, Emil,” said Kap Joe to the young man, “you go down to the city and look for Iyo Juan Pugaldo. He’s a knifemaker. He also forges propellers.”

Enriko couldn’t help but speak. “But, Kap, I have an errand in the city. Let me do it.”

Kap Joe wasn’t listening and went on toasting drinks with his crew. Astonishment mixed with rage flamed within Enriko.

“This ship has only been going through this now,” said Kap Joe. “But we will have a more durable propeller made so that no giant squid or American submarine could overturn us.”

Hear, hear! Hear, hear, Kap! The crew roared.

“Even if our propeller is the strongest, Kap,” said Enriko, “if it’s drunkenness that’s piloting us, we’ll always be tilting.”

Already sloshed, Emil, who’d actually piloted the ship, was jolted by Enriko’s comment. “Watch your mouth, Dong Enriko, *ha*. I pilot this ship better when I’ve had a few drinks. I understand the sea better!”

“*Yati ra!*” said Kiko. “The fool is deep.”

“Aw, this mind of mine sure has many depths, Bai Kiko!”

“It goes straight to a drop, no warning, Bai Emil,” replied Kiko.

When the crew turned the music louder, Enriko approached Kap Joe and whispered, “Kap Joe, let me be the one to go to the city, let me meet with Pulgado.”

“Is this yours?” asked Kap Joe, while clutching a folded piece of foil paper from a pack of cigarettes on which Enriko had written his missive to Aurora. When Enriko didn’t answer, Kap Joe went on. “This is what’s going to snag you,” said Kap Joe, putting an arm around Enriko. “This is what’s going to get you stuck. You have plenty of ambitions, *dong*, don’t let this hold you back.”

“But, Kap, she and my younger brother are the reason I’m working so hard,” Enriko said. “I’ll come back for them when I’ve saved up enough.”

“You’ve turned your back on her, Riko. For all your lying, there will come a time when you’ll believe anything.”

I’ll tell you about the story of my father, Dong Enriko . . .

(Day 500)

Kilum promised that that day would be the last box to tick. The engravings of days counted in Culion reached the pillar of the hut’s alcove. After the twelve days since the *Polilio* had been dry-docked, while the entire place was celebrating Dr. Heiser’s birthday, their chance had finally come. You’ll get what’s due, *Polilio*, he seethed.

The date May 27, 1906 was written on the bottom of the post on which he’d been carving. Although instances overlapped with time, some strands held on like barnacles on the mind: He stood at the rear end of the *Polilio* while Leonore waved and bade him goodbye from the wharf in Cebu. May 27, 1906. The young woman plunged into the sea to swim after the *Polilio* already cruising. He too jumped in to save his beloved, but about ten white and black soldiers dove into the water as well to separate them at sea. When love grapples, it wraps around you like a giant squid, it even shoots ink. But it was as though the islands’ entire history was struggling to free them. Leprosy is a crime! Today—on the five-hundredth day since heartless soldiers shipped about four-hundred lepers from Cebu to Culion in Palawan—he would fix on the *Polilio* a new vane. In the dark of night, when they set off to sea. *Polilio*, you’ll get what you deserve.

Day 4

Enriko had been staring at the door of an Internet café for ten minutes down at Poblacion. He was stuck hesitating whether to come in while holding the foil paper on which he’d scribbled his message for Aurora. He didn’t want to let the lie he’d told his beloved get deeper like the sea. If she found out that

he just caught tuna and his line of work reeked of fish, would his beloved be proud of him still? If he had only given Aurora clams without pearls, would he end up with the same affliction? If after finding out that he was in the broken Arko, stranded on an island with a bewildered crew, this ship of fools, she would change, then she was nothing but a shell. She was only a shell with nothing inside it and least of all, a pearl. Her heart too was a shell. Empty. “A shell full of sand!” Nothing else.

“Nang, where can I find Iyo Juan Pugaldo’s workshop?” he asked an elderly woman who was balancing a basket of eggs on her head.

“It’s hard to locate, *dong*,” said the old woman.

“Could you please sketch it for me, nang, on this paper here,” said Enriko while stacking a piece of cigarette foil paper. “Here’s a ballpen, nang.”

“This won’t confuse you, *dong*, because something’s already written on it?”

“Write over it, nang. I probably won’t get lost just because of that.” Press the pen harder, nang, cover the lies scrawled on that paper. Only half of it was true.

Enriko had to walk some distance to get to Pugaldo’s. When finally he located the actual house, he met a man with an uneven face—the right half had gone pale. He spewed thick smoke from the cigar he held in her mouth. When the smoke cleared, she looked up upon seeing him and said, “Uy, Dong Enriko, don’t get cowed by the dogs’ barking, *dong*!”

Truth be told, he then heard the yelping of what he thought were ten dogs approaching him. “Isabelo! Paterno! Luna! Jose! Marcelo! Andres! Gomez! Zamora! Lapu-Lapu! Damn these kids!”

“What fearsomes names your dogs have, noy!”

“I can make the propeller in ten days,” Iyo Pulgado responded.

“Wait, how come you know what I’ve come here for. Are you Pugaldo?”

“At your service, Dong Enriko.”

“How did you know?”

“Don’t ask anymore, *dong*.”

“How much would it cost, the propeller? Maybe you need to visit the ship so you could take measurements, Iyo?”

“No need. I had it figured out.”

By midafternoon Enriko returned to *Arko Niño*, bearing with him many questions. Why had Iyo Pugaldo known who he was? Why had he known his intention? And what had he meant when he said he had the ship’s measurements figured out? That he didn’t need to measure the old propeller? He wanted to ask the old Pugaldo, but he wouldn’t listen to him. “Hell, this arthritis of mine, I struggle even hitting the curves of a sickle,” Pugaldo had said. And then he wouldn’t stop talking about his arthritis.

(Day 500)

Kilum had just installed the propeller onto the *Polilio* when Sister Veronika came bringing chaulmoogra oil for the patients’ lumps.

So they wouldn’t have to queue at the infirmary. Or so she said, but then she suddenly kneeled in front of Kilum and pleaded, “Please take me with you!”

“What are you talking, sister?”

“Please, Kilum. I’m going to die here. Please, take me with you,” said Sister Veronika. “Your men told me. Please, take me with you.”

He gazed at the nun whose cheeks were so plump and Kilum was thinking he could make use of Sister Veronika, but in what way, he still didn’t know. “If you really know, you also know what time we meet and where,” Kilum said to the nun. “So I’m not tell you.”

“Yes, please, Kilum.” And Sister Veronika threw her arms around Kilum, kissed the man’s cheek, and then ran outside.

In the entire Culion, only Sister Veronika believed his claim that he didn’t have leprosy. In Cebu, the American official Maj. Stephen White had feelings for Leonore and when the officer found out that she and Kilum were lovers, he had Kilum captured. In one of the cells in the barracks, they poured acid on him, beat him, and left him in the company of hundreds of lepers. Leonore, who only plied rice cakes at the piers, was snatched away by the white-balled ape. Kilum had been hired at the piers to scrape rust off the vessels, the American-owned ships, which was why Maj. White knew him.

At suppertime, the white officers would toss bread on each of the workers. And they were content with it, because it could make them stronger, imported bread.

### Day 10

“Do you see these teeth-like parts at the front of the propeller?” Iyo Pugaldo pointed at the two overlaid and opposite barb-like drawings of propellers he had made.

“What are those for, Yo?” Enriko asked Iyo Pugaldo.

“Those are there to bite and tear away at whatever that may ruin the propeller because, hell, these teeth would rip them to shreds. The propeller’s protected by these,” said Iyo Pugaldo.

“Did you invent that, Yo?”

“Hell, if they’d thought of these before, there wouldn’t be derailed trips,” said Pugaldo, suddenly reflecting.

“You know the *Arko Niño* well, Yo?”

The man took a deep breath, and then he said, “*Polilio*, Dong Enriko. *Polilio* is that ship’s real name. The Americans owned it.”

### Day 11

“You can beat all your anger at the world into the steel, Dong Riko. Will it make you stronger?” said Iyo Pugaldo as he laid a large piece of iron on the anvil.

“You’re right, Noy.”

“Wrong, *dong*. It’s not about strength. It’s about hitting the target.”

“You must hit the corner you want to bend. Is that right, Yo?”

“You’ll only be able to do that if you hold the metal right. That’s why you need the right tongs and clamps. The ones that will hold correctly, tightly, grip firmly, and won’t easily loosen.”

“Won’t tongs grow hot too, Noy?”

“For sure, *dong*,” Iyo Pugaldo said. “Let’s shake hands.”

Enriko was puzzled why the old man wanted to shake his hands. But as he got hold of the man's palm, he felt the thick calluses.

"Nothing would pierce through that, Yo, even a bullet from the enemy?"

"Sometimes, *dong*, to make things quick, I'd hold the metal with my bare hands."

"Where did you learn that, Yo?"

## Day 12

This is the story that would put a hem around what you don't know, Dong Riko. Kap Joe is the son of an American nun, José being his real name. His father Kilum was a Cebuano who'd been thrown along with the hundreds of lepers shipped off to Culion from Cebu. After five hundred days of being cast away in Culion, his father managed to escape along with the nun aboard the US Navy's *Polilio* ship. The vessel had been dry-docked for fourteen days. They were accompanied by my father who had forged the propeller they installed on the *Polilio*. Kilum had escaped because he wanted to return to his beloved Leonore in Cebu. They were able to get *Polilio*, but as they were sailing the waters near Masbate, the ship ran out of fuel. The *Polilio* didn't move an inch. Fortunately, a few fishermen towed them toward here in Bantayan. There on the Lipayran island the *Polilio* was docked, and Kilum resumed his journey to Cebu on his own. My father and Sister Veronika stayed behind in Lipayran. When Kilum arrived in Cebu, he discovered that Leonore had married the American officer Maj. White, the one who threw him in jail. But what really wounded him was the news that Leonore had fallen for the American. At that moment, he felt his skin stinging. And even if he put his fingers over smoldering coals, he didn't even feel the slightest pain. Because of this, he returned to Lipayran in Bantayan because he believed only the nun could take care of him. He believed that at that time, even your relatives would drive you away if you'd been infected with leprosy, whether you were a sinner or a criminal, you were cursed by the heavens. Throughout the years until Kilum

passed away, Sister Veronika never left him. “Jesus loved people like you,” the nun said to him. Kilum hid inside the nun’s hut and never spoke to other people for many years. Kilum didn’t have feelings for the nun, but after a few decades of them being together, Kap Joe was born. According to my father, Kilum had treated Sister Veronika poorly because whenever he looked at her face, he would remember Maj. White, the one who marred his face and stole the woman he loved. Kap Joe had grown up witnessing his mother suffer. And a few days after Kilum died, Sister Veronika swam to the sea and was never seen again. My father took over the responsibility of raising Kap Joe. He had also married someone in Lipayran. My mother was a blind woman, the daughter of a fisherman on the island. I grew up believing that Kap Joe was my brother, until I wondered when I got older after noticing that his nose was actually sharp, his eyes blue, and his skin pink. We couldn’t have been brothers. But my father insisted that we were. When we were old enough, Tatay took us to the piers in Lipayran and it was there, among the mangroves, that the *Polilio* was hidden. “This is your arko *ninyo*,” my father said to me and Kap Joe. My younger brother became the captain. I, here on the anvil, in the heat that could melt iron.

### Day 13

Kap Joe hugged Iyo Pugaldo tightly at the pier.

“The next time you sail, this propeller won’t hold you down, Noy Jose,” Iyo said to Kap Joe. Kap Joe didn’t turn to look at the propeller that Iyo and Enriko had carried to the pier.

“What makes this one different?”

“Ask Dong Enriko.”

“I’m old, Juanito. I’m about to pass on the captaincy of the Arko to the young ones,” said Kap Joe.

“Where will you go home then, Noy José?”

“My address is the sea, Juanito. Almost no one on dry land knows who I am,” said Kap Joe.

“If so, then this propeller is sturdy enough,” said Pugaldo.

“Thank you so much, Juanito.”

“While my calluses grew on top of another, Noy José, in all these years, you almost grew scales.”

The two of them laughed, along with the crew around them. The two old men embraced each other with tears in their eyes.

**June 23, 2018**

“What’s in the island of San Juan, Kap Joe?” asked Enriko.

“Your future, Enriko,” said Kap.

“If we chance upon gold, Kap, then my future is secured.”

“More than gold, *dong*.”

According to Kap Joe, the island of San Juan lay near Surigao, on the east coast of Mindanao. The island was as wide as Bohol, he said. Kap Joe laid the old map on the table and pointed at “St. John Island.”

“But what’s written isn’t San Juan, Kap?”

“It’s the old way of writing, *dong*. When you return to Cebu, or wherever you’ll ship the find at San Juan, price it accordingly in the market. We’ve gone so far to get something valuable.”

Kap Joe’s face bore the weariness he felt. Gray clouds were spreading on the whites of his eyes. Kap’s eyes used to be blue, one crewman had said. He had the blood of those-not-like-us, said Andot. The strength that moved in his neck, which Enriko had often noticed when he watched the captain, was gone. One time, two times, it was there, but rarely. On a third time, but also it lasted only for three minutes.

“Don’t lie to the ones you love, Dong Enriko.”

**June 24, 2018**

After passing through narrow islands and rough waters around Dinagat to Bucas Grande near Siargao, the *Arko Niño*’s engine could finally breathe. Kap

Joe could hear the sound of the engine, powerful, not a single faulty noise. He could also sense that in the calm waters that morning, the ship didn't tilt. It was cruising smoothly. Perhaps this was also how the *Polilio* had sailed from Culion back then, Kap Joe said to himself.

He stood at the fore of the vessel, inhaling the fresh air that met their journey. The boys were asleep, he thought. They would wake up in search of the destination island. They would have to know how to twist the helm and where to find the island named after the saint who baptized the faithful. He felt equal parts hope and equal parts rage. "Your faces are crooked!" he whispered into the wind.

Kap Joe leaped into the sea, to be with his mother. To be with everything that had been lost from our lives, with the history that they had wanted to forget. He plunged into the water curled like a newborn.

"Someone jumped! Who was it?" Enriko cried out to his shipmates.

They rushed to the ship's fore to investigate, but nothing floated up. "Maybe something fell over? What could it be?"

Enriko turned to his shipmates and noticed something. "Where's Kap?"

He ran to Kap Joe's cabin, but he wasn't there. The map was still lying on the table, only the compass kept it from being blown away by the wind. "Kap? Kap?" Nobody answered.

Andot and Kiko dove into the sea to look for the captain. Both had tremendous lungs and so they swam in the ocean. Apart from stray jellyfish and sea turtles, they found nothing else. A few more kicks and he would see the sea beneath him darken. A frightening darkness, they didn't have enough courage to dive any deeper. They swam back to the surface, and they saw the middle section of the *Arko Niño's* hull. But Kiko noticed something on the hull of the ship. He tugged Andot by the shoulder, pointing at what he saw. The ship's propeller was gone. The rotor Iyo Pugaldo had cast was missing from the end of the tube. What had happened? They told their shipmates about what they'd seen.

There was silence in the *Arko Niño*. The wind was picking up and suddenly dense clouds covered the sky. Like the clouds in Kap Joe's eyes, Enriko said to himself. Thunder clattered and, each time lightning struck in the distance, he saw that there was no dry land around them. The waves tossed the *Arko Niño* about and all they could do was hold on to anything they could. Soon, the ship careened and they were thrown to one side. The *Arko* sat on a huge wave before it was devoured by a fathomless sea.

Where is the gold you spoke of Kap? Where is it? Enriko shouted into the whirlwinds amid the ocean. Where is my future?

### Enriko, 72

He made a request to have the tubes attached to his body removed. He wanted to see the sea one last time. Just that. His children had all moved away, to the United States, to Australia, to Germany, to France. Perhaps they'd never see him alive again. Aurora had long been gone. It was probably the last great storm that had eroded him from within. But he was alive. Alone, but alive. Like the feast of San Juan five decades past. He drifted in the merciless ocean alone, but he lived. He curved his lips at the nurse pushing his wheelchair to the beach. The north wind kissing him was cool. The sea was not rough. His eyes closed as he recalled the islands. In the end, a deep breath.



## BARADERO

Januar Yap

*“I am a leper. I was torn away from the love of my family. I live in Culion, exiled to the island of pain. High mountains entomb me, a vast sea imprisons me. You, who listen, have compassion for a leper. Help him to be healed.”*

—On display at the Culion Hospital museum

**B**anabana nga dul-an sa kwarantana diyas pa silang matanggong niining gamayng pantalan sa Bantayan. Wala mahitsurang napsilo’g napangag ang palabad sa sampot sa kasko sa *Arko Niño* sa dihang misteryoso kining nasangko sa wa gayud nila mahibaw-i’g unsa. Ang lawud sa may norte sa Sugbo, sa Visayan Sea, wala bisan makausang gidungog nga dunay piliwng bahin. Puro kini laglum, kantilado, ngitngit. Wa man puy balyenang milutawng nagkadugo’g nabungi kon balyena na man lang gani ang hinungdan sa pagkagusbat sa palabad.

“Submarino sa Amerikano!” sulti pang Andot, usa sa mga kargador, apan way bisan usa nga mitagad kaniya.

“Lagmit agtang o kasway sa higitang barawan kon mao man gani to,” sulti pud ni Kiko, nangumbitay pa ang mga sagbot sa bitiis niini human gilangoy ang ilawm sa barko.

“Nya, kita ka’g ata, nagkaiitom ba’s tan-aw mo?” tubag pud ni Emil.

“Ay, sus, mga tabugok tingaling giutgan, aw, gisul-an!” bugal-bugal pud ni Emyot.

Si Enrikong kinamanghuran nila igo lang kining mitutok sa napsilong palabad ug wala na moantog pa’g pasiaw.

Gilangoy kini nila sa ilalom ug wala silay nakit-an nga hinungdan sa pagkapangag sa piraw. Igo na lang miungot makadiyot ang barko ug bisan pa og nag-andar ang makina, wala na kini modis-ug bisag dangaw man lang, gawas kon kini modailos inig huyatid sa lawud.

Nangahilom silang nangahubsa'g mga tag-an sa matuod nga hinungdan samtang nag-alirong sa palabad nga daw kinumot nga papel. Lagmit matag usa kanila nabalaka pud sa ilang dangatan sa mga mosunod nga oras. Mga adlaw. Semana.

Gikan human nakadyakpat sa pamukot duol sa Busuanga, nanganaway kini sila paingon balik sa kasingkasing sa Kabisay-an. Miagi kini sila norte sa Coron ug sa Kapuluan sa Calamian. Namidpid sila sa Isla sa Caluya, Tambaro ug Libagao, norte sa Caluya. Tadlas sa isla sa Carabao ibabaw sa may Boracay, lusot na dayon sa Jintolo ug ngadto na dayon sa bukana sa Dagat Kabisay-an, norte sa Sugbo, paingon na unta dayon lahos sa dakbayan kon diin unta nila itumod ang kuha nilang tagsa'g-katunga ka dupa nga mga tuna. Unta, apan sa dihang didto na sila tungod sa may Placer sa Masbate, didto na natay-og ang *Arko Niño*, nag-utaw-utaw na lang sila sa halapad nga lawud ug kamingaw.

“Mobagting man gyud tinuod ning atong dunggan kon makadungog tag tumang kahilom,” sulti pang Kap Joe, ang kapitan sa barko.

“Basin wala gyud tingali tinuod nga kahilom, Kap,” tubag sa batan-ong Enriko.

“Lagmit...Sa kinabuhi ning *Arko Niño*, pipila na man gyud ka kapitan ang mikupot ini, karon ra ni mabaradero.”

“Way siguro, Kap Joe, uy. Sa edad ining barutoha, kasuway sad tingali ni'g palyar,” tubag ni Enriko.

“Barko, dili baruto,” tubag ni Kap Joe, apan nahipadpad sa halayong dapit ang iyang panan-aw. Sa tinuod lang, walay laing nangapitan ining barkoha. Walay laing nasuhito ning Arko kon dili siya lang. Dunay kasaysayan ang *Arko Niño* sa pagkapalyado. Gamayng hapak sa lawud ug hangin, dayong kurog ug hutoyon ang makina niini. Wala pud siya nahinumdom kon bisan kausa man lang natarong ang balanse niini, ang harag niini dili na lang mabantayan taliwa sa iyang tuya ug kiling matag laparo sa balud. Aduna kini sangkiig sama sa tawong nagduhaduha'g biya sa gigikanan. Kon magsangkiid man gani ka, ang usa sa mga paagi nga dili ka maunlod, mao ang pag-abante, dasdas ngadto kabangis sa padulngan. Apan kining kasamtangang kahimtang sa palabad, bag-o kini. Unsaon pag-abante? Talagsaon kining panghitaboa, wala sila masayud sa hinungdan niini.

Maayo na lang dunay pipila ka mananagat nga nakasaksi sa pagtakilid gamay sa barko ug dali kining mipaduol aron motabang.

Gitaliwad-an kining dagata sa isla sa mga Sugbuanon, Waray, Hiligaynon, Ilonggo, Karay-a. Dul-an sa napulo ka sakayan ug pambot ang miguroy sa *Arko Niño* paingon sa pantalan sa Bantayan—mga mananagat gikan sa mga kasikbit nga kaislahan sa Kabisay-an. Nagkasinabot ra man pud sila ug miabot ra gyud sila’g ginuyod sa *Arko Niño* ngadtos Bantayan. Gitunolan unta nila og pipila ka kilo nga kuha matag mananagat nga mitabang apan wa gayud kini nila dawata. Lagmit mahitabo pud kuno ni nila, simba ko lang, ug nanghinaot silang dunay susamang tabang nga moabot. Baluron ang Dagat Kabisay-an, mag-abot ang su’og ngadtos pagka-aliluyok, ug dili lalim kon hisakpan kas tilwa niini. Pastilan og haing ispidnoha sa kapuloan kaha puniton? Simbako’g ibugwak ka ngadtos Pasipiko o kaha sa kadagatan sa China.

“Lagmit taudtauran pa mong matanggong. Maayo na lang na ninyo ikabawn,” sulti pa sa usa ka hamtong nga mananagat nga mitabang pud nila. “Di na tingali namo matumod ning tuna sa dakbayan, bai,” tubag pud ni Kap Joe. “Lagmit hutdan mi ani’g ice. Konsumo na lang ni namo samtang magpaabot sa bag-ong *propeller*. Daghan kaayong salamat, bai.”

Sa adlawng mahibalik kadtong palabad o duna man silay bag-o, sulti pa ni Kap Joe, molahos na lang kuno sila ngadto sa isla sa San Juan duol sa may Surigao kon diin mysteryuso kunong nangabunda sa kaisdaan human sa linog ug humbak nga gihatud sa bagyong Yolanda ug sa dakong linog nga mitay-og sa kaislahan niadtong 2013.

“Mga balyenang laksot og dagway lagi kuno ang manglutaw,” sulti ni Kap Jo. “Kita mo anang nawng ni Emyot, kanang ilong nga morag kaluhas butanding? Ingon ana ang nawng sa manglutaw didtos San Juan!”

“Laksota gud diay, Kap Jo,” tubag pud ni Emil.

“Ay na lang ta, Emil, nawng nimo! Salig pud nis Kap Jo nga taliwtiw kaayo’g pangilong,” tubag ni Emyot.

Usahay, lisud pud baya mokatawa kon kalit kang masangad sa honasang ambot og unsay ngan, ni Kap Joe pa ngadto sa iyang kaugalingon

mahitungod sa dili niya masabtang kasubo. Pipila ka katuigan sa iyang pagkabatan-on, gianggaan siya'g “Tsila” tungod sa iyang ilong. Unsang Katsilaa ba? Loslos ninyo!

## Adlaw 1

Makabuhi'g patay ang pagpagawas sa ilimnong makahubog ni Kap Jo. Nangawala ang laay ug katulugon sa katawhan.

Apan ania si Enriko sa may sampot sa *Arko Niño*, nangunay og tiltil sa taya. Taud-taud na pud nga wala malimpyohi ning barkoha. Bag-ong baid iyang tigib. Bisan tuod og wala magkinahanglan og hait nga tumoy ang pagtiltil sa taya, iyaha lang gyud kining gibaid. Mas bug-at og kandos ang habolan nga tumoy, apan mas tukma ang tirada sa hait. Niya pa, tingali mas dali ang trabaho kon hait ang tigib. Walay maapil nga walay labot. Kadto ra gyuyng partes taya ang mangatipak.

Bisan tinuod og init ang adlaw, bugnaw pud ang hangin nga nahasuroy sa Bantayan. Hitugkan kaha'g sisi ang sampot sa *Arko*? Dili tingali, sulti pa niya, kay wala man kini magpundo sa dugayng panahon. Niabot kini siyag tinilti sa ubos nga bahin sa sampot sa barko sa dihang duna siyay nabatyagan nga nagtibuog nga taya. Iyaha kining gisugdan og tiltil og sa dihang nagpangatagak na ang mga sapaw-sapawng pintura niini, duna siyay nakit-ang morag sisi nga lagmit mipilit sa panahon pas mga Amerikano, niya pa. Iyahang gilugit and ngilit niini ug dayon kining katagak ngadto sa dagat. Dako-dako ang tipaka sa taya nga nabaklas kuyog sa pagkatagak sa sisi ug nagbilin kini og dakong pahak sa pinal sa *Arko*. Dunay mitumaw nga mga letra: ILO. Iyahang gitiwas og tiltil ang taklap sa pinal ug natiwasa'g kaukal and dakong bahin niini. Migawas ang mga letrang “POLILIO.” Dunay migawas usab nga bandila sa Amerikano ug ang pulong nga “US Navy.”

Padayong nanilti si Enriko sa mga taya sa *Arko* sa hilom. Banha ug sadya na ang iyang mga kauban sa barko. Naduhaan gyud ka botilya ug lagmit midungan nag tuya ilang pamuot sa bawd sa Bantayan. Pagkahuman niya sa iyang bulohaton, misulod siya sa lawak ug nagpakahilom tibuok adlaw.

## Adlaw 2

Sa Poblacion sa may Bantayan duna ra may Internetan, apan gisulat na lang daan ni Enriko ang gusto niyang isulti ni Aurora nga nagtiwas pa sa iyang kursong Business sa Ateneo sa Manila. Kon makanaug siya sa barko karong adlaw, iyaha kining i-email sa iyang hinigugma.

*Dearest Aurora,*

*Kumusta na man ka? Sorry kaayo nga di na pud ta magkita karong summer break nimo. Na-busy kaayo ko sa trabaho. Kinahanglan kong makaabot sa quota every month. Daghan ang akong ka-kompetensyang ahente dinhi sa Mindanao area. Sorry pud na wala tika matubag katong pag-offer nimo nga ikaw ang molarga dinhi sa Davao. Delikado ang panahon karon. Kusog ang patay ug mahadlok ko nga basin ma-ambush ka sa pagpaingon mo diri. Martial Law pa dinhi sa Mindanao, ug dili maayo magsuroy-suroy kay madudahon ang military. Sagdi lang magkita ra unya ta. Makatigom-tigom lang ko gamay, bisitahon tika diha sa Ateneo.*

*I love you.*

*Enriko*

Gipilo ni Enriko ang iyang gisulatang papel nga gikan sa kaha sa sigarilyo ug gisuksok kini niya sa garter sa iyang purol. Pila ra man unta kon iyang tawagan si Aurora, apan dili gayud kini niya mabuhat. Dili siya makamaong motago sa matuod kon makigstorya na siya kaniya.

Duha na ka tuig si Enriko nagtrabaho sa *Arko*. Anak siya'g mananagat nga Waray nga naminyo og Ilongga, apan unsang pagkaunsa nga sa opon sa Tubigon nahidagsa ang katuigan sa ilang kaminyuon tungod kuno kay mas abunda ang kadagatan didtong dapita ug mas mabuhi silang pamilya. Sa iyang

pangidaron karon nga 21, mora na kini og hamtong manabi. Gani, sinaligan kini siya ni Kap Jo tungod kay responsable kini nga bata. Mobuhat gayud og unsay isugo. Niadtong 18 pa lang siya, niundang og panagat iyang amahan ug nag-negosyo na lang kini og takubo. Apan usa ka adlaw niana, giinitan kini sa mga taga-DENR ug gidakop and iyang mga ginikanan tungod sa ilang pagnegosyo og usa ka *endangered species*. Natanggong og pipila ka buwan, apan gipagawas kinis taga-DENR sa sekretong kondisyon nga mohatag kini og komisyon. Nahibaw-an pud niya sa wala madugay nga ang ilang pagkagawas sa bilangoan agi'g tabang pud ni Bokal Eloy Salubre, ang suki nila sa takubo. Nagpadayon ang amahan sa negosyo apan wala abti'g duha ka bulan, giatake kini sa kasingkasing ug namatay. Wala magdugay, misunod pud ang iyang inahan sa sakit sa baga. Gipadayon ni Enriko ang negosyong takubo apan agi sa mga panghitabo, kinahanglan siyang mopanaw sa laing dapit.

Gibilin ni Enriko ang iyang manghud ngas Ermie nga dyis anyos pa lang sa ilang silingan aron pagpangita na lang og trabaho sa laing dapit. Gitagaan kini niya og pipila ka lugas sa perlas. “Kon wala ka na gyuy malingian, mabuhi ka niini. Balikon ta ka. Saad ni nako nimo, balikon ta ka,” ni Enriko pa ngadto sa iyang manghud.

Apan atras gamay sa panahon: Susamang perlas pud ang iyang gihatag ni Aurora. “Bisag asa ka, dad-a ni,” tugon niya ni Aurora, iyang tago-tago nga hinigugma nga anak ni Bokal Salubre. Human namatay ang amahan ni Enriko, siya na ang nangunay og hatud sa order nga mga takubo sa panahon nga adunay salo-salo sa balay sa mga Salubre. Didto niya hikiti si Aurora, daw perlas nga miturok sa takubo.

Usa ka higayon niana, giapil niya'g sulod sa planggana ang usa sa mga takubo nga adunay buhing perlas. Ug tuod man, giatol niyang nag-inusara si Aurora sa dakong kamalig sa mga Salubre sa iyang pagtumod sa mga takubo. “Kanang naa sa ibabaw, sulayi og abli,” sulti niya ni Aurora.

Misiga ang mata ni Aurora sa pagkakita niya sa puti kaayong perlas, mihangad ngadto ni Enriko, ug miingon, “*Alive* siya?”

“Sa saktong kondisyon, o, modako pa na. Imo na na,” tubag niya ni Aurora.

“Ay, di ko ganahan padak-on siya. Ganahan ko gamay lang. Uyyy, thank you ha. Enriko to imong name sa?”

“O, Enriko.”

O, *Enriko*. Mao pud kana ang gitubag ni Aurora sa dihang nangutana si Enriko kon gidawat na ba ang iyang gitanyag nga gugma human sa pipila ka bulan nilang kinawat-kawat nga panagkuyog sa mga giring-giring nga kabaybayonan libot sa Bohol. O, *Enriko*. Morag kalit lang nga misakar nga nagsumpot ang tanang kaislahan sa Kabisay-an sa gisulti ni Aurora.

Apan kay wala may asong makumkom, naapasan gyud sila usa ka higayon ni Bokal Salubre kuyog sa iyang mga tawo didto sa panas sa Anda, pikas bahin sa isla sa Bohol. Diryot kini masukmagan si Enriko, maayo na lang napugngan sa usa sa mga batos si Bokal.

“Botante ka lang!” Ug mao ra kadto ang nasulti ni Salubre samtang gipasakay niya sa SUV si Aurora. Luspada ang kalisang sa nawng ni Aurora, daw perlas nga gitakyopa’g balik sa bayanang takubo. Nangahilom tanan sa ilang pagbiya. Nag-iyahay og panago ang mga agukoy sa tagsa-tagsa nilang buho sa panas, daw gibiyaan ang batan-ong nag-inusara sa pagbiya sa gamhanang bokal.

Ni Enriko pa, wala man gani intawn siya marehistro pa. Dili siya botante. Wala siya mahalista bisan asa.

### Adlaw 3

Sa dihang nananghid na si Enriko nga mokanaog ngadto Poblacion, gipugngan kini siya ni Kap Jo. Nagtuo kining naglikay siya sa inom.

“Tambag ko lang, Dong Riko. Makigsandurot pud kas imong mga kauban. Labi nang dia kas barko. Dili maayo nang mag-idya-idya ka. Moabot ang panahon nga magkinahanglan kas imong isig ka tawo,” sulti ni Kap Jo, samtang miagbay ni Enriko. “Isipa nga amahan ko nimo.”

Sa tinuod lang, saktong pud si Kap Jo. Makigsandurot gyud tinuod ka sa imong mga kauban sa *Arko*, apan duna siyay gamayng pagsupak niini. Dili ang tibuok kalibotan ang nahikarga niining barkoha. *Arko* tuod, apan *Arko Niño*,

dili kang Noah. Tua si Aurora sa kaulohan, didtong bahina siya nahipadpad sa kapalaran. Halapad, bangis ang lawud nga nagpataliwa nilang duha.

“Mao na kini imong kalibotan ron, Dong Riko. Dawata na lang na. Lingiang dagat. Sa kadako sa hawan, mangita man gyud kag kaubang ikaistorya,” sulti ni Kap Jo.

Nagpagawas si Kap Jo og laing botelya gikan sa iyahang lawak ug pwerteng lipaya sa mga kauban niini.

“Mao ni ang palabad nga mokandos nato ngadtos pag-abante!” ni Kap Jo pa.

“Palabad tinuod. Palabad sa ulo inig ka ugma. Hahaha!” tubag pud ni Andot.

“Kana kung makuwangan kas pulutan!” ambit pud ni Emil.

“Ugma, Emil, ikaw kanaug didtos lungsod ug pangitaa nis Iyo Juan Pugaldo. Manghimuay ni siya’g sundang. Mopanday pud ni siya’g palabad,” sulti ni Kap Jo ngadto sa batan-on.

Wala mahimutang si Enriko ug miingon, “Pero, Kap, naa man koy tuyo sa lungsod. Ako na lang kaha ang sugoa.”

Wala kini siya paminawa ni Kap Jo ug padayon nga mitagay sa ilimnon ang kapitan ngadto sa iyang mga ginsakpan. Kahibulong sagol kapungot ang gibati ni Enriko.

“Karon ra gyud ni naingon ani ning barkoha,” sulti ni Kap Jo, “Apan magpahimo tag mas lig-on nga palabad aron bisag ma-barawan ba na o ma-submarinos Amerikano, way dag-aganan!”

Uyon! Uyon mi nimo ana, Kap! Tubag pud sa mga ginsakpan.

“Bisan pa’g lig-on ning palabad, Kap, kung pirling kahubog ang nagdaldas timonil, kiling-kiling ra gyud ta ani,” ni Enriko pa.

Si Emil nga maoy sarang magdala sa timonil nahaigpot sa komentaryo ni Enriko. “Klaroha na, dong Enriko, ha. Mas maayo ko modalas timonil kung nakainom ko. Mas hisabtan ko ang dagat!”

“Yati ra!” tubag ni Kiko. “Lawma’s kagaral!”

“Aw, ingnon tang kantilado gyud nuon ning pangisip ko, bay Kiko!”

“Derecho’g lawm man gyud, way pupananghid, Bai Emil,” tubag pud ni Kiko.

Sa dihang nagpakusog na sa tukar ang mga ginsakpan, miduol si Enriko ni Kap Jo ug mihunghong, “Kap Jo, hangyo lang ko nga akoy kanaug sa lungsod, makigkita ni Pugaldo.”

“Imoha ni?” pangutana ni Kap Jo, samtang nagkupot sa pinilo nga papel sa kaha sa sigarilyo nga maoy gisulatan ni Enriko sa iyang mensahe kang Aurora. Sa wala pa katubag si Enriko, mipadayon si Kap Jo. “Mao ra ni kasangitan nimo. Mao ra ni ang makatanggong nimo. Naa man kaha kay daghang ambisyon sa kinabuhi, dong, ayaw pabira ani,” sulti ni Kap Jo, samtang miagbay ni Enriko.

“Pero, Kap, siya ug akong manghud ang rason nganong naningkamot ko. Balikon ko sila kung makatigom-tigom na pud ko,” tubag ni Enriko.

“Gilimoran nimo siya, Riko. Sa tanto nimong pamakak, moabot ka gyud sa panahon nga bisan unsa na lang ang imong tuohan.”

*Sultian tika sa sugilanon sa akong amahan, Dong Enriko...*

(Adlaw 500)

Nanumpa si Kilum nga kataposang kudlit-kahon na lang kini karong adlaw. Misangko na sa alkobang bahin sa haligi sa payag ang mga kinudlit niyang ihap sa mga adlaw dinhi sa Culion. Human sa napulo’g duha ka adlawng nabaradero ang *Polilio*, higayon na kini nila samtang magsaulog ang tibuok pook sa adlawng natawhan ni Dr. Heiser. Karon ka lang, *Polilio*, dumot pa niya.

Didto sa tiilan sa gikudlitan niyang haligi nahasulat ang petsang Mayo 27, 1906. Magsapaw-sapaw man ang mga takna ug higayon, aduna gayuy mga lugas nga mokuopot daw sisi sa panumduman: Didto sa sampot sa *Polilio* siya nahimutang samtang nangamayng nanamilit ni Leonore nga mitiyabaw sa pantalan sa Sugbo. Mayo 27, 1906. Milayat ang dalaga ngadto sa dagat aron sawmon og apas ang naglawig nang *Polilio*. Milayat pud siya aron pagsalbar sa iyang hinigugma apan dul-an sa napulo ka mga sundalong puti ug lagum ang miapas pud og layat aron sila buwagon didto sa dagat. Ang gugma kon maglayog, mora man gyud og barawan makakupot, mbugwak pa’g ata.

Apan daw tibook kasaysayan sa kapuloan ang milugnot nilang duha. Krimen ang sangla! Karong adlaw—ikakinyintos ka adlaw sukad dul-an ka kwatro sintos ka mga sanglahon sa Sugbo gihakot ngadto sa Culion sa Palawan sa mga way puangod nga kasundalohan—tauran niya og bag-ong piraw ang *Polilio*. Gabiing dako, gawasnon na unya silang maglawig palawud. Karon ka lang, *Polilio*.

#### Adlaw 4

Abta’g dyis minutos nga nagtutok si Enriko sa pultahan sa internetan sa Poblacion. Naungot siyang nagduha-duha sa pagsulod niini samtang nagkupot sa papel sa sigarilyo nga iyang gisulatan daan sa iyang buot imensahe ni Aurora. Di na niya buot paablong mulalom daw lawud and limud niya ngadto sa iyang hinigugma. Kon mahibaw-ang tigpamukot ra siyag tuna ug langsa ang matang sa iyang panarbaho, ikapasigarbo pa ba kaha siya sa iyang hinigugma? Kon gidalitan niya kaniadto og takubo lang nga walay mutya si Aurora, mao ra ba kaha gihapon ang padulngan sa iyang balatian? Kon gani mausab siya kon mahibaw-an niyang ania siya sa Arkong palyado, natanggong sa isla kuyog ning mga tripolanteng nangalipong, ning barko sa mga tonto, bagal ra siya. Bagal ra siyang way unod ug labaw nang walay mutya. Bagal usab ang iyang kasingkasing. Haw-ang. “Balasong bagal!” Wala nay lain pa.

“Nang, hain gani ning pandayan ni Iyo Juan Pugaldo?” pangutana niya sa edaran nga naglukdo og basket sa itlog.

“Lisud man tultulon, dong,” tubag sa tigulang.

“Mamalihug kog iskets, nang, aning papel,” ni Enriko pa, samtang naghapnig sa papel sa sigarilyo. “Diay bolpen, nang.”

“Di ka maglibog ani, dong, nga duna na man ni sulat daan?”

“Sapawi lang, nang. Di na tingali ko masaag ana.” *Iduot nang bolpen, nang, tabuni nang bakak nga nahipatik diha. Ang katunga ray tinuod niana.*

Layo-layo pud ang gibaktas ni Enriko paingon sa ka Pugaldo. Sa dihang miabot na siya sa gitumbok nga balay, dunay tigulang nga kabhang og nawng—ang katunga sa tuo namuti. Mibugwak kini og bagang aso gikan

sa giugom niyang tustos. Pagkahanaw sa aso, mihangad kining nakakita kaniya og miingon, “Uy, Dong Enriko, ayaw padalas paghots iro, dong!”

Tuod man, nagdungan og paghot ang bana-bana niyang napulo ka iro nga misugat kaniya. “Isabelo! Paterno! Luna! Jose! Marcelo! Andres! Gomez! Zamora! Lapu-Lapu! Pastilan ning mga bat-ana!”

“Kuyawa gud og ngans imong mga iro, noy!”

“Mabuhat nako ang palabad sulod sa napulo ka adlaw,” tubag ni Iyo Pugaldo.

“Taym pa, kahibaw lagi kas akong tuyo. Ikaw diay si Pugaldo?”

“At your service, Dong Enriko.”

“Giunsa nimo pagkahibaw?”

“Ayaw na lang pangutana, Dong.”

“Tagpila man pud ang imong palabad? Kinahanglan tingali nimo adtuon ang barko aron nimo masukdan, Iyo?”

“Ayaw na. Nasuhito na ko.”

Palis nang nahiuli si Enriko sa *Arko Niño* ug nagbalon kini og daghang pangutana. Nganong nakaila man kaniya si Iyo Pugaldo? Nganong nasayud na man kini sa iyang tuyo? Ug unsay iyang pasabot nga nasuhito na siya sa barko? Nga dili na niya kinahanglang sukdon ang karaang palabad? Buot unta kini niya ipangutana sa tigulang nga Pugaldo, apan wala siya pamatia. “Matay pa, kining arthritis ko, maglisud na man gyud kog tira aning mga kurbada’s sanggot,” ni Pugaldo pa. Ug wala na kini dayon moundang og istorya kabahin sa iyang arthritis.

(Adlaw 500)

Bag-ohay pa lang gyud gisuksok og balik ni Kilum ang palabad nga igtataud nila sa Polilio sa dihang misulod si Sister Veronika nga nagdala sa chaulmoogra oil nga idapat sa sangla sa mga pasyente.

Sa madre pa, aron kuno dili na lang sila molinya ngadtos *infirmary*. Kuno, apan mikalit kini og luhod atubangan ni Kilum ug miingon, “*Please take me with you!*”

*“What are you talking, sister?”*

*“Please, Kilum. I’m going to die here. Please, take me with you,”* ni Sister Veronika pa. *“Your men told me. Please, take me with you.”*

Nagtan-aw siya sa madreng lamurok kaayo og aping ug hunahuna ni Kilum, magamit tingali niya si Sister Veronika, apan kon sa unsang paagiha, wala pa siya masayud. *“If you really know, you also know what time we meet and where,”* sulti ni Kilum sa madre, *“So I’m not tell you.”*

*“Yes, please, Kilum.”* Ug migakos si Sister Veronika ni Kilum, mihalok sa aping sa ulitawo, og midagan paingon sa gawas.

Si Sister Veronika lamang ang bugtong tawo sa tibuok Culion nga mituo kaniya nga wala siyay sangla. Didto sa Sugbo, kadtong Amerikanong opisyal nga si Maj. Stephen White dunay dakong kaibog ni Leonore ug sa dihang nahibaw-an sa maong sundalo nga managtrato na sila ni Kilum ug pasabot nga naunhan na siya, gipadakop dayon niya si Kilum. Didto sa usa ka selda sa baraks, gibubuan siya og asido sa iyang kalawasan, gikulata ug gitanggong uban sa gatosan ka mga sanglahon. Si Leonore intawn nga tigtumod lang og puto sa may pantalan, gidaginot pas puti’g itlog. Sinuholang maniltily og taya si Kilum sa may pier, sa mga barko sa Amerikano, maong nakaila kaniya si Maj. White. Sa tingpaniudto, itsahan ra sa puting opisyal ang mga trabahante og tagsa ka pan. Gikalipay lang pud ni nila, makakusgan man kuno to, *imported*.

## Adlaw 10

*“Kita ka aning ngipon-ngipon sa pangunahan ning palabad?”* Gitudlo ni Iyo Pugaldo ang duha ka managhut-ong ug manag-atbang nga daw mga sima-sima sa drowing sa palabad nga iyang gibuhat.

*“Para unsa diay na, Yo?”* pangutana ni Enriko ni Iyo Pugaldo.

*“Mao ni ang mopang-it o motagud-tagud sa kon unsa man ang mahimong makaguba sa palabad. Sama pananglit sa pukot. Walay pukot nga mabubod sa palabad kay, matay pa, kunis-kunison man gyud niining mga ngipona. Protektado ang palabad niini,”* ni Iyo Pugaldo pa.

“Imoha nang inimbento, Yo?”

“Matay pa, og nahunahunaan pa ni kaniadto, wala untay mga biyaheng mangalangay,” tubag ni Pugaldo og kalit kining naghinuktok.

“Nasuhito kas *Arko Niño*, Yo?”

Miginhawa kini og lawm, ug dayon miingon, “*Polilio*, Dong Enriko. *Polilio* ang tinuod pangan anang barkoha. Gipanag-iya kana sa mga Amerikano.”

### Adlaw 11

“Mahimo nimong ibunal tanan nimong kaligutgot sa kalibotan ngadto sa puthaw, Dong Riko. Maoy modugang sa imong kusog?” ni Iyo Pugaldo pa samtang gibutang ang dakong palad sa puthaw ngadto sa landasan.

“Sakto gyud, Noy.”

“Sayop, Dong. Wala kana sa gikusgon. Mas gikinahanglang hingigo ka.”

“Kinahanglang ig-on ang eskinang buot nimong bawgon. Di ba, Yo?”

“Mabuhat mo lamang kana kon sakto ang imong kupot sa puthaw. Mao nang magkinahanglan ka’g saktong mga kimpit. Kanang mogunit sa insakto, hugot, pilit og hawid, dili daling makabuhi.”

“Di ba diay maapil og kainit ang kimpit, Noy?”

“Labing siguro, Dong,” tubag ni Iyo Pugaldo. “Lamano ta.”

Nahibulong si Enriko kon nganong makiglamano ang tigulang. Apan sa dihang nakuptan na niya ang palad sa tigulang, didto niya nabati ang baga kaayong kubal.

“Di na ni madutlan, Yo, bisag bala pas kontra?”

“Usahay, Dong, sa paglikay sa hasol, kuptan ko na lang derecho ang puthaw.”

“Diin pud ka nakat-on, Yo?”

## Adlaw 12

*Mao ni ang sugilanon nga modispuga sa tanang wala nimo mahibaw-i, Dong Riko. Kana si Kap Jo anak kana sa usa ka Amerikanang madre, Jose ang tinuod niyang pangan. Ang iyang amahan ngas Kilum usa ka Sugbuanon nga naapil sa mga gatosan ka mga sanglahon nga gihakot kaniadto sa Culion gikan sa Sugbo. Human sa kinyintos ka adlaw sa pagkatanggong sa Culion, mi-eskapo iyang amahan uban ang madre ginamit ang barkong Polilio sa US Navy. Katorse ka adlawng nabaradero ang maong barko. Nahakuyog nila ang akong amahan nga maoy mipanday sa palabad nga gitaud nila sa Polilio. Mi-eskapo si Kilum kay buot niyang balikon sa Sugbo ang iyang hinigugma nga si Leonore. Nakuha tuod nila ang Polilio apan sa dihang naglawig na sila sa lawud duol sa Masbate, nahutdan kini og lana. Wala na modis-og bisan gamay ang Polilio. Maayo na lang dunay mga mananagat nga miguyod kanila paingon nganhi sa Bantayan. Didto sa isla sa Lipayran gibilin ang Polilio ug gitiwas ni Kilum ang biyahe ngadto sa Sugbo nga nag-inusara. Nagpabilin ang akong amahan ug si Sister Veronika sa Lipayran. Sa pag-abot ni Kilum sa Sugbo, didto niya nahibaw-an nga naminyo na si Leonore sa Amerikanong opisyal nga si Maj. White nga maoy nagpaprisko kaniya. Apan ang mas labaw nga miluba sa iyang galamhan mao ang balita nga nahigugma si Leonore sa Amerikano. Niadtong puntoha, nabatyagan pud niya ang hapdos sa iyang mga panit. Og bisan pa og ipatungod niya sa naglagiting nga baga ang iyang mga tudlo, dili na kadto makabati pa og gamayng sakit. Tungod niini, mibalik siya sa Lipayran sa may Bantayan kay sayud siya nga ang madre lang ang bugtong makaatiman kaniya. Sayud siya nga niadtong panahona, hingpit kang isalikway sa kaparyentihan kon hitaptan ka sa sangla, kriminal ka o makasasala, gisilotan sa kahitas-an. Sulod sa mga katuigan ug hangtud namatay si Kilum, wala gayud siya biyai ni Sister Veronika. “Jesus loved people like you,” sa madre pa kaniya. Mitago si Kilum sa payag sa madre ug wala na kini makig-istorya og laing tawo sulod sa pipila ka katuigan. Wala mahigugma si Kilum sa maong madre, apan nahimugso si Kap Jo human sa pipila ka dekada nilang panagkuyog. Sulti pa sa akong amahan, gidaug-daug ni Kilum si Sister Veronika kay samtang magtan-aw siya sa nawng sa madre, mahinumdum siya ni Maj. White, ang mikampat sa iyang nawng ug*

*ang nagkawat sa iyang hinigugma. Naabtan na'g buot si Kap Jo nga nakasaksi sa pag-antos sa iyang inahan. Ug pipila lang ka adlaw human sa kamatayon ni Kilum, milangoy si Sister Veronika ngadto sa lawud ug wala na sukad hikit-i. Ang akong amahan ang misalo sa responsibilidad sa pagpadako ni Kap Jo. Didto na pud naminyo sa Lipayran ang akong amahan. Bota kadto akong inahan, anak og mananagat sa Lipayran. Nagdako kong nagtuo nga igsuon nako si Kap Jo, hangtud nga nahibulong na lang ko sa dihang duna na koy buot nga taliwtiw man diay siya og ilong, asul og mata, ug puwahon og pamanit. Dili mahimo nga kami magsuon. Apan gipamugos gayud sa akong amahan nga igsuon mi. Sa dihang ulitawo na mi, gidala mi ni Tatay ngadto sa may pangpang sa Lipayran ug didto diay gitago taliwa sa pagatpatan ang Polilio. "Mao ni ang arko ninyo," sulti sa akong amahan ngadto kanamo ni Kap Jo. Nahimong kapitan ang akong igsuong sunoy. Ako, dia sa landasan, sa kainit mamunalay og puthaw.*

### **Adlaw 13**

Hugot nga migakos si Kap Jo kang Iyo Pugaldo sa pantalan.

"Mag-usab pay layog, di na mo matanggong aning pirawa, Noy Jose," sulti ni Iyo ngadto kang Kap Jo. Wala molingi si Kap Jo ngadto sa palabad nga gidayongan ni Iyo ug ni Enriko paingon sa pantalan.

"Unsay nakalahi ani niya?"

"Pangutan-a si Dong Enriko."

"Tigulang na ko, Juanito. Lagmit ipasa na nako ang pangapitan sa Arko sa mga batan-on," tubag ni Kap Jo.

"Hain ka na man tigpauli, Noy Jose?"

"Dagat ray adres nako, Juanito. Lagmit wa nay taga-mama'a nga nakaila nako," ni Kap Jo pa.

"Kon mao na, sakto kaayo ning kalig-on sa bag-o mong palabad," sulti ni Pugaldo.

"Daghan kaayong salamat, Juanito."

"Nagsapaw-sapaw na ning kubal ko, Noy Jose, lagmit sulod ning katuigan, gitugkan na pud kag himbis."

Nangatawa silang duha ug ang mga tripolante nga naglibot kanila. Nag-gakos nga luhaan ang duha ka tigulang.

**June 23, 2018**

“Unsa man gyuy naa sa isla sa San Juan, Kap Jo?” pangutana ni Enriko.

“Imong kaugmaon, Enriko,” tubag ni Kap.

“Aw kung makabaling tag bulawan, Kap, solbad tingali akong kaugmaon.”

“Labaw pas bulawan, Dong.”

Matud pa ni Kap Jo, ang isla sa San Juan anaa duol sa Surigao, sa sidlakang bahin sa Mindanao. Niya pa, sama kuno kalapda sa Bohol. Gihapnig ni Kap Jo ang karaan kaayong mapa sa lamesa ug gitudlo niya ang St. John Island.

“Dili man lagi na San Juan ang nakasulat, Kap?”

“Sa kinaraan na nga pagkasulat, Dong.”

“Inig balik ninyo sa Sugbo, Dong, o kon asa man gani itumod ninyo ang kuha sa San Juan, presyohi sa insakto ang merkado. Layo-layu pud tag naabtan makakuha lang tag tarong.”

Makita sa nawng ni Kap Jo ang kakapoy nga iyang gibati. Mga abuhong panganod ang mingkatag gikan sa uyok sa iyang kalimutaw. Kanhi asul kuno ang mata ni Kap, libak pa sa ubang tripolante. Dunay kaliwat nga dili ingon nato, sulti pa ni Andot. Ang kanhi kusog nga paglabtik sa pulso niini sa may liog nga kanunay mabantayan ni Enriko kon magtan-aw siya sa kapitan, wala na. Kausa, kaduha, anaa pa, apan panagsa. Katulo, apan tulo pud ka minuto ang milabay usa milabtik.

“Ayaw limori imong hinigugma, Dong Enriko.”

**June 24, 2018**

Human sa hagip-ot ug liloan nga kapuloan lusot sa Dinagat ngadto sa Bucas Grande sa may Siargao, nakaginhawa na ang makina sa *Arko Niño*.

Madungog ni Kap Jo ang kondisyon sa makina niini, kusgan, walay tingog sa pagkapalyado. Nabantayan pud niya nga bisan kalmado ang dagat rong buntaga, wala magharag ang barko. Sakto ang lawig niini. Lagmit mao ni ang kondisyon sa *Polilio* sa dihang misutoy kini gikan sa Culion kaniadto, sulti ni Kap Jo sa kaugalingon.

Sa du'ong nga bahin kini siya nagbarog sa barko ug mihanggap sa lunhawng hangin nga misugat sa ilang pagbiyahe. Nangatulog pa ang mga bata, niya pa. Mahigmata silang mangita sa islang ilang padulngan. Sila na ang masayud unsaon paglubag sa timonil ug hain nila hikaplagnan ang isla nga ginganlan sa santos nga magbubunyag. Sagol paglaum, sagol kapungot iyang gibati. “Mga kampak mo’g dagway!” hunghong niya ngadto sa kahanginan.

Milayat si Kap Jo ngadto sa dagat, miapas sa iyang inahan. Miapas sa tanang nangawala sa atong kinabuhi, sa kasaysayang buot nilang hikalimtan. Mitidlom kining nagluko daw puya.

“Naay milayat! Kinsa to?!” ang siyagit ni Enrico ngadto sa iyang mga kauban.

Nanggawas sila ngadto sa dulong aron sa pagsusi, apan walay milutaw og balik.

“Basin naay nahagbong? Unsa kaha?”

Milingi si Enrico sa iyang mga kauban ug dunay nabantayan. “Asa si Kap?”

Midagan siya paingon sa lawak ni Kap Jo, apan wala kini didto. Nakahapnig pa ang mapa sa lamisa, ang kompas lang ang nagpugong nga dili kini paliron sa hangin. “Kap? Kap?” Walay mitubag.

“Asa si Kap?” singgit ni Enrico ngadto sa iyang mga kauban.

Milayat si Andot ug Kiko ngadto sa dagat aron pagpangita sa kapitan. Hanginan kining duha ug gilangoy niini ang lawud. Gawas sa mga saag nga bokya ug pawikan, wala na silay lain pang nakit-an. Pila lang ka sikad, mongitngit na ang dagat sa ilalom. Makalilisang ang kangitngit, wala silay igong kaisog nga mopatighulog pa sa unahan. Mibalik na lang sila og langoy paingon sa taas, makita nila ang dughan sa kasku sa *Arko Niño*. Apan dunay nabantayan si Kiko sa sampot nga bahin sa kasku. Gibira niini ang abaga

ni Andot ug mitudlo sa iyang nakit-an. Wala na ang palabad sa barko. Wala na sa tumoy sa tubo ang hinimong piraw ni Iyo Pugaldo. Unsay nahitabo? Gisuginlan nila ang ilang mga kauban sa ilang nakit-an.

Dunay kahilom sa *Arko Niño*. Nagkakusog ang hangin ug kalit nga mitabon ang habaga kaayong panganod. Morag mata ni Kap Jo, sulti ni Enriko sa iyang kaugalingon. Nagpaka-paka ang dugdog ug makita niya nga walay timailhan sa mama'a sa palibot kada labtik sa kilat ngadto sa kanawkanawan. Gikuso-kuso ang *Arko Niño* sa balud ug wala silay laing mabuhat kon di pagpangupot sa unsa man ang makuptan nila. Taud-taud, miharag ang barko og nahalabay silang tanan sa usang bahin niini. Gisabak ang Arko sa dako kaayong balud sa wala pa kini gitukob sa tubig nga way kinutuban.

Hain na man ang giingon mong labaw pa sa bulawan, Kap?! Hain na?! Singgit ni Enriko ngadto sa mga alimpulos taliwa sa kadagatan. Asa akong kaugmaon?!

## Enriko, 72

Nihangyo siyang ibton na lang ang mga tubo nga gitaod sa iyang kalawasan. Buot niyang makakita sa dagat sa makausang higayon. Kana na lang. Wala na iyang mga anak, tua na sa Estados Unidos, sa Australia, sa Germany, sa France. Lagmit di na nila hiabtang buhi pa siya. Pipila na ka tuig nga mitaliwan si Aurora. Mao tingali kadto ang kataposang unos nga mibanlas kaniya. Apan buhi siya. Nag-inusara na lang, apan buhi. Sama niadtong pista ni San Juan lima na ka dekada ang milabay. Nag-inusara siyang nag-utaw-utaw sa bangis nga kadagatan, apan buhi. Mipahiyum kini siya sa nars nga maoy nagtukmod sa iyang wheelchair paingon sa baybayon. Bugnaw ang mihalok niyang amihan. Dili baluron ang kadagatan karon. Mitikyop iyang mga mata samtang naghandum sa mga kaislahan. Sa katapusan, usa ka lawm nga ginhawa.



**JANUAR YAP**

jeyap@up.edu.ph

Januar Yap is an educator, novelist, poet, journalist and filmmaker. He teaches at the University of the Philippines Cebu. His fiction and film have been recognized by the National Book Awards, Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, NCCA Writers' Prize, Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and the Gawad Urian. He is currently finishing his doctorate at the RMIT University Australia.

**JOHN BENGAN**

jbbengan@up.edu.ph

John Bengan has taught writing, literature, and translation at the University of the Philippines Mindanao. His translations have appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *LIT*, *ANMLY*, *World Literature Today*, *Shenandoah*, and *The Margins* among others. He co-edited *Ulirát: Best Contemporary Stories in Translation from the Philippines*. He was a David T.K. Wong Fellow at the University of East Anglia. His collection of stories *Armor* won the Madrigal González Best First Book Award. He is pursuing a PhD in literary studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

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