

Rain Story

by Antioco-Rino Rafal

It was December. The world started to fade, that fleeting moment between day and night. Before him a mug of steaming hot coffee, its aroma gently wrapping his senses. He looked out through the grilled window and saw the white curtain of rain. Now it was a gentle song, now it was an orchestra.

Across the city, a million people.

Then a story. Its beginning unknown, but it was there, like a compass that points to the north. A false north.

The light gave in and the rain covered everything. It muted all other sounds except thunder that shook the walls around him and woke things up. It was a conductor's magnificent clap. Or was it God's?

There was lightning of course, like a spike in the graph that momentarily revealed everything. A few seconds of flickering light. Was this how foreshadowing worked?

In this story within a story, everybody was dancing in the rain. The rigid houses were props. Dead props for the living who danced.

Oh, it was a celebration. An ecstasy. His body could not move. It was a sin to move, lest the living would hide again. He was not thinking about the dark. The dark could not hide a single soul. It was the mind that hid everything.

A miracle happened that one afternoon, his coffee before him still hot and untouched. Something inside him swelled infinitely. He felt himself expanding as if he had been in many stories in a single instant. There was the constant urge to flee, from something both known and unknown.

What were they afraid of all this time? He had seen them dance and joyous before but that was ages ago when he was still a child. A passing memory and a feeling that lingered which he thought was strangely too clear despite the time that passed.

When his grandfather died, it was hot in the morning and the sky was blue. But it rained hard throughout the afternoon and the downpour extended all night.

"He didn't want to go. I did not want him to. At least not yet." Words from his grandma.

Presently, thunder struck again; thirteen seconds later, lightning fell on the ground. The chaos on the street ceased. Many felt embarrassed to have been seen naked. Some slipped into dark doors, while others went silent in the wet corners, waiting for their cue.

He had been embarrassed before. Like that one time he rode the Jeepney with no pants on. How curious, when he never really thought much about it and only came to realize the absurdity of his actions when he sat at the leather-covered seat and people started staring at him. His silly attempt to cover his hanging penis only made things worse. It was very curious that people had to stare.

Among the things revealed by the lightning was the river. That beautiful river, he thought. Only, it did not look like the river he adored each time he crossed that bridge while on board a Jeepney or a motorcycle. It had gotten wider like a mouth, its sound boisterous. Boisterous and possessed. There were things, floating things. Some alive, some dead.

And he flew above everything in another story, overlooking the stretch of the whole city. Above the golden skyscraper that was hailed the tallest of its kind down here in the south. Above the pregnant clouds, nature's killing machine.

The dive was magical. Like entering a new world. His wings got soaked with the waters from the clouds. He never felt this light before. He looked down and saw a bird as his shadow. As the dots of lights faded, a hand picked them out one by one, the darkness gained strength.

He remembered it like it was yesterday, along with the rest of the scattered sixteen events that instantaneously took place, their inevitable repeat, and that single moment.

He blamed the coffee he had not taken. It had turned cold. Now it was just liquid, its taste escaped with the heat. The rain could be at fault too. He had now a different image, and therefore a different story, of what rain brings.

Funny thing, these days, it only stretched for a couple of hours. In some instances, it lasted only for minutes. Too short.

This one was no different from the others. It climaxed after only a few claps of thunder during which he actually thought the world was coming to an end again. Like that nosedive from the clouds. That dive that strangely took long and the impact never felt. Like that split of second that was divided into numerous spiraling voids, morphing into universes of their own. That feeling of sudden jolt and the unexpected relief afterwards, of remembering and forgetting.

The living subsided with the water. The props had gained back much of their composure, standing firm and solid. Un-uprooted.

So when he heard the last raindrop on the roof, only then that he moved. He would see the dancing people again, someday. In the meantime, other mystical objects appeared up there in the sky. From his window, behind the grills and the fluttering white curtain, tiny blobs of fire, burning millions of light years away.