

# Matapos ang Duwal

by Juleini Vivien I. Nicdao

Original in Filipino

"All in all, *paglililihi* is a cultural concept about pregnancy that has endured for a very long time. In Vocabulario Tagalog-Castellano published in 1887, *paglililihi* translated to la concepción or conception. Common understanding of *paglililihi* manifests in many ways: nausea or morning sickness, taking an inexplicable liking to someone or something, and developing extreme cravings for certain types of food . . . *Paglililihi*, moreover, supposedly influenced physical attributes of the unborn baby, as well as influence its personality growing up. The truth, however, is more complicated."

– Gerald Dizon, "The truth about 'paglililihi'—an expert explains", *Philippine Star*

Dahan-dahang lumiligwak ang putik  
mula sa aking bibig. Dahan-dahan ko ring kinakalkal  
itong bagong-luwal na luwad upang mahimay  
kung may buto, hasang, kuko, buhok,  
o perlas. Mabibigo ako sapagkat hindi matatapos  
ang lahat sa sandali ng hilo at luwa. Sapagkat ito  
ang simula ang lahat.

Sapagkat mula ngayon, ang lalamunan ay isa nang mag-aaral  
ng dulas. Sapagkat bawat singhap, sisidlan na ng dahas.  
Sapagkat darating ang mga araw at gugustuhin kong  
tikman ang amag, dilaan ang puyo sa ulo  
ng mangingibig, agawin ang sampalok ng batang  
hindi naman nang-aalok o ano mang tamis na bitbit  
ng mapungay na estranghero, ngatain ang pulseras na iniwan  
sa aking ina ng kaniyang ina, higupin siguro ang hamog.  
Buong bayan ang manonood. Ngunit  
sa paghinga at pahinga sa ngayon, katawan ko  
ang magbibigay sa akin ng pahintulot.

Sa ngayon. Sapagkat mula ngayon, hindi na sagrado  
ang malamig na sahig ng banyo. Sasangsang ang lahat  
sa ngalan ng antiseptiko ng klinika, ng sumpa at basbas  
ng hagikgikan ng mga sakristan, at sa ngalan ng anghel,  
giit nila, ng anghel. Wala akong taglay na oyayi  
o hiya, kuna o pagkukulang, ngunit  
buong bayan ang hihingi't sasamo:

Ano nga ba ang nais ko? Sa aking nginig sa ngayon, iadya itong sagot. Hindi gatas o alak, kahel o asukal, ngunit nais ko lamang bigkasin: aking dasal, aking laya, aking lubos, aking oras, aking sukal, aking lugod, aking di-mawaring krimen, pagkababaeng akin. Sa darating na mga araw, lahat ng di-mawaring akin.

Sapagkat darating ang mga araw at buong bayan ang hihipo't maghuhubo nitong baywang, tititig at aangkin nitong kabataan. Sapagkat maging tadyang, hindi mag-aalinlangang umusog. Ngunit sa ngayon, habang nakaluhod pa rin ako sa banyo, tahimik ang aking katawan. Sapagkat akin: ang garalgal, ang alaala ng putik na gumagasgas sa ngalangala, ang putik na nanunugat, nambubusal. Hinihipo ko itong mga labi, sinisigurong hindi pa nabubura. Kinukutkot itong pusod at hinaharaya ang ngatngat. Pinipitik ang sariling suso at dinadamdam ang bulok, imbis na banta ng mugto.

Sa sandaling ito ng pag-iisa sa banyo, nag-iisa at sagana pa rin ako. Saksi at salaysay ang dalagang anino. Hindi niya ako ipagkakanulo.

# After the Gag

by Juleini Vivien I. Nicdao

English translation

"All in all, *paglililihi* is a cultural concept about pregnancy that has endured for a very long time. In *Vocabulario Tagalog-Castellano* published in 1887, *paglililihi* translated to *la concepción* or conception. Common understanding of *paglililihi* manifests in many ways: nausea or morning sickness, taking an inexplicable liking to someone or something, and developing extreme cravings for certain types of food . . . *Paglililihi*, moreover, supposedly influenced physical attributes of the unborn baby, as well as influence its personality growing up. The truth, however, is more complicated."

– Gerald Dizon, "The truth about 'paglililihi'—an expert explains", *Philippine Star*

Mud spills with slowness  
from my mouth. With slowness, too, I dissect  
this newborn clay to search  
for wishbone, gill, nail, hair,  
or pearl. I will fail because everything does not  
end at the moment of nausea and spit. Because  
this is where everything begins.

Because here, my throat is now a student  
of wetness. Because each heave, soon vessel of violence.  
Because days will come and I will want  
to taste mildew, lick the curl on the head  
of a lover, snatch tamarind candy from a child  
resentful, or whatever sweetness is carried  
by a tender stranger, bite at a bracelet left  
to my mother by her mother, perhaps drink dew.  
This is what the whole town will watch me do. But  
for now as I breathe, my body permits me  
my own reprieve.

For now. Because here, the cold tiled floors will cease  
to be sanctuary. Everything will reek of the antiseptic  
imprint of the clinic, the cursed blessedness  
of altar boys giggling, and the angel,  
they say, the angel. I have neither lullaby  
nor shame, neither nursery nor need, and yet  
this is what the whole town will ask of me:

What is it I crave? And for now as I shiver, forgive  
my answer. Neither milk nor wine, citrus  
nor sugar, I only crave to speak: my prayer,  
my right, my indulgence, my time,  
my wilderness, my pining, my contentious  
crime, my womanhood, mine. For days  
to come, impossibly mine.

Because days will come and the town will pet  
my waist and strip it of my youth with  
their gaze. Because even my ribs will not hesitate  
to move. But for now as I kneel  
in this bathroom, my body is still. Still mine:  
the gravel, the memory of mud that scratches  
the roof of my mouth, mud that wounds, mud  
that gags. I touch my lips, making certain  
they have not yet been erased. I finger my navel  
and imagine the gnawing. I flick at my breasts  
and feel decay instead of the threat of soreness.

In this bathroom and moment of aloneness, I am still  
ample, and my own. A girl's shadow, witness and testimony.  
She will not forsake me.

*Juleini Vivien Nicdao hails from the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic nation where abortion is completely outlawed and access to reproductive health rights and services is severely limited. She finished her Master of Arts in Social Psychology and currently works as a part-time instructor at Ateneo de Manila University. As a member of the Gender Hub in the same university, she also participates in creating safe spaces, holding gender sensitivity training projects, and responding to cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Her research work involves material-discursive approaches to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights. In her undergraduate years, she has also won awards and been a fellow at a few national writing workshops for poetry.*