

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 sahog 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

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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."

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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.