



Soul
by VeryWellAged

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A Novel

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Prologue

*Let me introduce myself
Sympathy from a Devil
What's puzzling you is the nature of my game.
Hope you guess my name.
Pleased to meet you.*

*Every cop a criminal, all the sinners saints.
Have some sympathy, and some taste.*

Jig-Saw Puzzle

Parachute Woman

Valley of the Shadow

Bankrupt beliefs and other human foibles

Say the word.

Jacobo

The Portrait Gallery

Whack-a-mole

Consequences

Who are you?

Things that endure

International Harvester

A matter of Will

Bacchanals.

Francine

The game's the thing.

A history lesson.

No gods here.

Images

Prologue

The Philippines, 2015

Dad, ignore them. I will deal with it.

Why, what's this about?

We were sitting at a McDonalds at the mall. My daughter was home for a few days between semesters at Adamson University. It was good to see her. It's hard to explain. I guess she will never be the ravishing beauty that her mother is, but I am to blame for that, as she got half her genes from me. Still whenever I see her, I feel lighter, happier. When she is gone from the house, there is a hole in it that refuses to be filled.

I rarely eat out and would never have chosen McDonalds, but if my daughter wanted it, then that is all I needed to know.

Anyway, there was this kid going from table to table. He looked about my daughter's age and seemed neatly dressed, respectable. But at each table he handed a piece of paper to the person sitting there. I was intrigued.

Really Francine, what do you know about this?

Dad, he will claim to be a college student who needs money today or he will be forced to leave school. His parents have a medical emergency, or they lost their job... anyway, it's a lie. The money is going to a church. It's a scam.

Sure enough, the young man came to our table as I was finishing off my Quarter Pounder with Cheese. He did just as my daughter had claimed he would do. She sent the fellow off after telling him that I am angry that he was soliciting here. If he had a problem, she told the young man, I had told her that he should ask his uncles and aunts for help. To not be a beggar.

He left. I had not been happy with how she dealt with it, but didn't want to criticize her. Anyway it stuck with me for a few weeks. Francine was back in school and it was still playing back repeatedly in my brain. There was something about how we had handled it that just didn't seem right. Why, I did not really know.

I did some digging. Francine had told me the name of the church. The church had an online presence. Their staff was listed on the website, with email addresses and phone numbers, as were all aspects of their supposed mission. Frankly the operation gave me the creeps.

Let me introduce myself

I really do rarely eat out. Maybe it happens two or three times a year. But today I need to run a number of errands and decided to grab lunch at a Yellow Cab Pizza while at a mall. I order a NY Classic ten inch and a bottle of beer. There is a table outside and am sitting there when a cute, college age girl approaches me and hands me a piece of paper. It is a bill she tells me she can't pay, but she must or she will not be allowed to take her next exam.

Maybe, it's not too much for you Sir? Will you help me?

It isn't too much, but I don't like cons and by now I knew that it is just that.

What's your name?

Amelae, Sir. May I know yours?

Yes you may, but for now you should just call me Ninong¹.

Why I call you that Sir?

Because you are asking me for money Amelae. And if you are still asking for money, that is what you will call me. Clear?

Opo², Ninong.

Good. Now, Amelae, let us only say true things. You are not a student. You are collecting for your church. I know this, so do not lie to me. Understood?

Why you mean to me? If you not want to give, why not just say it.

Amelae, did I say I would not give?

No, Ninong. It true what you say about the church. You will give to the church, Ninong?

Maybe. We will see. How important is this church to you, Amelae?

Very, Ninong. The church must be helped. It is doing God's work!

So, is your life as important as the needs of the church?

No! How can that be? The church is the only thing that is important. It saves souls!

¹ God father / Sponsor.

² Yes Sir.

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Yes, I see. So your life is not as important as the church. Is that right? Is that why you collect money for the church?

Yes! Of course yes.

Amelae, how much is your soul worth?

Sir?

You heard me. How much is your soul worth?

I don't understand.

Well, if you were to sell your soul to help your church, how much is it worth?

Sir, why you ask such a question?

You are asking me to give you money for your church. Correct?

Yes. So why you ask about my soul?

Well, you already told me that your soul is not worth as much as the church. Correct?

What you mean?

Is your soul worth the same as another soul?

Maybe.

Is it worth the same as two other souls?

Why you ask that?

Your church wants to save souls, right?

Opo, Ninong.

How many souls can you help your church save now, without selling your soul?

I not think I can save a soul alone.

So if your soul can save two souls by you selling your soul, is that a good thing?

I guess, maybe.

What if it could save three souls? If the best way for you to help your church is to sell your soul, will you do it?

How can that be?

Answer the question, Amelae, or leave.

You will help if I answer?

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Maybe, but I will not help if you do not answer.

I not know how much my soul is worth.

If you can do the best for the church you are able to do by selling your soul, will you?

What you mean, sell my soul?

Amelae, what did you mean when you said the church is saving souls?

Saved! They go to God, of course!

And where do they go if they are not saved?

That is a silly question! The devil takes them! All know this. Why you ask?

I asked because you asked me what I mean by selling your soul. You think you already know the answer. Why did you ask?

I do not think you are the devil! You are crazy, I think!

You are right, I am not the devil. No, I am just a field agent. I work for someone who collects souls.

I don't believe you. You are crazy!

Tell me, Amelae? Do you like Assistant Pastor Manoj?

How you know him?

Answer the question, Amelae.

Yes! He is the best at saving souls!

Well Amelae, because you did not sell your soul today, you will be the reason for what happens next. Here is my cell phone number. Call me if you decide that your soul is available. You should go now.

It isn't hard. With a nasty little tool I have stored away on my PC, I create an email that the good pastor will open that will slide a bot into his PC. The bot will download a raft of child porn. It will also kick out, once the right amount of porn is on his PC, enough info to the PNP that they will come knocking on his door.

It really doesn't take much to destroy a guy who works exclusively with teens, if you desire to do that. As this whole operation seems unacceptable to me, I have no qualms. The email is sent in afternoon when I get back home. I wait.

Five days later I get a text from Amelae.

Please, what did you do?

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Let me introduce myself

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Are you ready to sell your soul?

You undo what you do?

Your Pastor cannot be saved now. The question you need to ask yourself is, do I allow the entire church to be destroyed, or do I sell my soul?

If I not sell, more will happen?

Of course.

Don't, please don't.

Meet me for pizza at Yellow Cab in an hour. No more texts.

‡ ‡ ‡

Nice to see you again, Amelae. How about the NY Classic? OK?

Opo, Ninong.

What would you like to drink?

Royal³, Po⁴. ... Po, why are you being nice to me?

Why not, Amelae? We are not enemies. I think you are a nice girl.

But, Po, you threaten me by destroying the Pastor! Why you nice?

Well Amelae, you just thought I was a crazy man, Right?

Opo.

You still think I am crazy?

You really do that to him?

Do I have to do something to someone else, for you to believe?

Why you want my soul? You just took the Pastor's soul.

Oh, but I didn't take his soul. I made his life worse, here on earth, but I did not do anything to his soul. Think of Job. He can think of this as a test. No, souls are something else. The question you need to answer is if your soul is more important than the church that sent you out to scam money.

Po, it is not more important, but I do not want to burn in hell for eternity. I am too scared.

Relax, Amelae. No one burns in Hell. That is just God's propaganda nonsense.

³ Orange flavored soft drink.

⁴ Sir.

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Po? *What you mean by that?*

There is no heaven. There is no hell. Doesn't exist. All that is, is the Fat Bastard's marketing to collect more souls for his side.

Fat bastard? Who?

God, child. The one you call God. He is a lazy fat bastard. My boss is a hard worker. We are retail collectors of souls. We go out and work the job. His Fat and Laziness, depends on marketing to do his collecting.

Collecting souls? I do not understand.

What do you think happens when you die?

I go to heaven! I meet Jesus!

Amelae, there is no Heaven and Jesus, well Jesus that's an interesting story.

Why, Po?

Well, Jesus was ours. He was walking around making fun of God's well-ordered world. Turning water into wine... yes, yes that was fun. that was fun. We created a drunken bacchanal. Walking on water? We were busy causing folks to understand that this place was just a stage prop and that religion was just for suckers. We had Jesus walking around saying that if there really was a divine, it existed in each one of us, not in any divine being. It does you know. It exists in us and us alone. Oh the big guys play their game collecting our souls, but there really isn't anything divine about them. ... We were having a great time, screwing with his Lardness Bullroar. We got the folks so pissed off that, much to our amazement, the powers that be, had to kill our boy off; he was so disruptive. We figured, well that worked OK. But Lardass, played us and created a second Jesus who did a 'Rise from the Dead' bit and then vanished. It was a cool trick. As he just floated away, Lardass's Jesus didn't have to hold it together as he was gone in a flash. No one was going to figure out the switch that he pulled. That one trick really set us back quite a bit this time. We thought the whole thing would be over again very soon. ... We tried to pull it back by having Thomas write a gospel, but it didn't work. His Great Lardness, had that schizo John write a crazy book and we lost that little trick.

Po, what you mean when you say it would be over again? What that mean?

It's a competition, Amelae. Best two out of three. We won the first time, hands down and walking away. But the Fat One pitched a fit, washed the board clean and demanded a rematch. So we agreed, best two out of three.

What you mean, washed the board clean?

The flood, Amelae. You know, the flood. We won just about all the souls and His Great Ass-nipeness had a majestic, and super wet, shitfit. ... So my Boss agrees to the best two

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out of three and we start again with Noah. Ha! As soon as the flood is over we score with Noah and his son! Right now it's pretty even. Of course we get most of the preachers and priests, getting those is easy picking. Nuns are hard for us. They just sort of go catatonic when it all becomes clear. So their souls can't be collected by either side.

What happens to me, to my soul when I die?

A soul is an essence, but not a consciousness. Just as perfume contains the essence of lilac, or lavender or roses, but does not contain the lives of them, a soul is not you. You die and are gone. But the essence, the aroma, of you, lingers. That is all.

If you are opposed to what my church teaches, why you not destroy it?

Because that does not win us any souls. ... Let's eat before this pizza gets totally cold!

The pizza has been just placed on the table and is actually a bit too hot, but we have already consumed our drinks. I order two more drinks as we dig into a fourteen inch pizza that will clearly be too much for us.

She really is a cute kid. I wonder how much it will take to break her down and seal the deal.

Why you tell me this? Why you have to ask for my soul and God does not?

You have already given your soul to his Laziness. Through baptism and confirmation, he has tacitly bound your soul to him. You have asked that your soul be in his care in churches and at dinner prayer. For us to win it, you have to formally renounce it and sign up with us.

How do I know I won't burn in hell?

How do you know you won't burn in hell with his Slovenliness? All you have ever heard is his propaganda machine. However, because you do have to formally sign up with us, we will put it in writing that you will not burn in hell and if we are lying, your soul is released from our hold. OK?

What if I don't sign up?

I get to have fun with another of your pastors. Shall we see how that goes? Or maybe you would be more convinced if something happened to your mother?

No! No! Don't! OK if you do something to Pastor Dodong this week. Maybe I do this. But you ask me to sell my soul to you, not give it. What I get for that?

You don't like him! Ha! OK let's do it. What I will give you is the freedom to sin without consequences. How's the pizza, Amelae?

Hmmm. Good. What you mean freedom to sin?

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Morality, my sweet Amelia only matters if you are on his Lazy-Ass's list. It was part of the deal between the two of them. His High and Mighty Laziness can get you passively, but he cannot keep you if you don't follow the rules. If you break the rules, you become ours. Many folks break the rules and so we get them anyway. But you don't break them, so you, we have to contact directly.

You mean I can kill someone?

Well yes and no. It doesn't stop you from getting arrested. So, immoral things: adultery, sodomy, greed, avarice, slovenliness, prostitution, those sorts of things are safer bets. And if you play your cards right, you end up living a very good life here on earth.

But I can do that without signing up, right?

Yes, that is true, but my job is to make sure you stay at it long enough that there can't be any backsliding. And so if you don't sign up, I take down your Church and mess with your mother. If you are OK with that, then we are done here.

OK you prove it is true by hurting Dodong. If true, I sign up.

Fair enough. Which do you prefer? You want him accused of molesting little boys or plotting to plant a bomb?

I get to choose?

Sure why not?

The bomb.

It isn't hard. I use a bot to allow me to run some chats through his laptop. Via the bot I also contact some folks to purchase chemicals, and gee, what do you know, he gets arrested on terrorism charges.

It isn't four hours later that Amelae texts,

OK. Leave the church alone. Maybe there is no hell, maybe there is. I not want to see my mother hurt next.

It really is that simple. When you are dealing with people who believe in fairy tales, getting them to do what you want is not hard. If she hadn't 'believed,' she might have gone to the PNP and told them that the pastors were set up and who the real bad guy was. But she didn't because she is a believer of fairy tales.

She is about to be mine. What will I do with her? Have fun of course! I might as well play it out as far as I can. I can't allow her to have second thoughts and go to the PNP. I have to cement in the belief that I have given her.

Oh what fun!

Sympathy from a Devil

Why do you want me to call you Ninong?

What, does a Ninong do Amelae?

The Ninong is a sponsor. He is a supplement to the parent. Is concerned with the life of the child.

Yes, and you, when you sell your soul, will be mine to guide, groom, and teach.

Why do you say you will do this?

It is the task assigned to me. I am happy to do it.

Will you help my mother? Ninong?

Why should I do that Amelae?

If you care about me, and want me to be happy, then you need to help her! She is dying from TB and her diabetes! I pray to God to save her, but she just gets sicker. Pastor says we cannot know God's will. Will you save her?

Amelae, neither His LardAss nor my guy can end or save a life. To do that violates the rules of their game. When His High and Mighty Dumbfuck flooded the place, he ended the game the first time, by violating the rules. That is why he promised not to do that again.

But Pastor say that God can.

Your Pastor is lying, that is why he says, you cannot know God's will. There is nothing that can be done for her except for the medicine you and your family are providing.

Pero walang sila pera!⁵

Calm down. I can help with that. I can change things here sometimes. There are rules but I can help with this.

You do this?

When your soul is ours, and I am sure of it, yes. But, Amelae, she will still die. You must understand this. If either side could kill or sustain life, there would be no point in competing for souls. You will die at some point. All die eventually. It is the way of this

⁵ But they have no money!

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world. If it were not for the competition, it would be different, but this world is the game board.

What do I have to do? I give you my soul. You take care of Nanay⁶.

Come with me.

I take the girl home with me. To her eyes, she is walking into a mansion. She says nothing.

I had prepared a document on flash paper. Printing on it is not all that easy but I use some good calligraphy and it turns out nicely. All that is required is some of Amelae's blood and a pen with a nib.

I open a drawer and remove the document, pen, a small dish, and a small knife.

I prick the girl to raise enough blood and let it drip onto the dish. She signs her name on the document, and then with a bit of the theatrical, before her eyes, the contract goes up in a flash and smoke. Amelae screams, cries, shakes, and damned close to faints.

Take off your clothing girl. When you are in this place, you are not to wear anything.

Ninong? Must I?

You will no longer call me Ninong. You will address me as Master. Your soul belongs to me. You belong to me. You no longer have any choice in the matter. You will do as you are instructed, or I will rain down misery on you and all you are related to. Now take off your clothing.

Master, I thought my soul will belong to the Devil.

It does in a way, but there really is no Devil. It is just one side of a bet. Do as I say now or you will forever regret it!

And that does it. She almost rips her clothing off.

Now go in to that room and wash yourself. You are to be completely clean when you receive my seed. Go!

To truly believe in religion is to believe in magic. It doesn't take much to convince someone who is already a believer. Amelae doesn't argue. She accepts her fate and does as told.

I have a small sturdy table set up with a little foam on the top covered with a blood red damask cloth.

⁶ Mother.

About twenty minutes later the girl presents herself. She really is cute. Not stunning, but cute.

I place Amelae on her back on the table, drape a small damask cloth over her eyes and part of her head. The click of a remote to my sound system plays a piece of music by Jocelyn Pook.

There is a small decanter of warm fragrant oil next to the table. I anoint the girl's breasts, belly and pubes by gently pouring a small stream over her, making sure some of it covers her labia. She is shaking as I drop my trousers and move my tool over her labia, adding oil to it before grabbing and spreading her legs. I plunge in, not allowing any time to contemplate the loss of any hymen.

She cries out as I run deeply into her body. I am not kind. I am insistent and unrelenting as I pound into her repeatedly. The crying stops and gasps follow. She is breathing hard and fast.

I place a finger on her clit as I continue my assault on her cunt. She groans, screams, spasms and arches her back. She screams *Niiii-Nooooonggg*. I don't correct her. I am still ripping through her. She is groaning again. I grab a nipple and pinch hard. *Niiii-Nooooonggg! Oh Niiii-Nooooonggg!* I pinch the other nipple even harder and Amelae's body just jerks and flops around in my arms. As that is happening I dump cum in her, eliciting a new scream.

I lower her legs. There is blood on my tool. I raise my trousers and close them around me. Amelae just lies on the table, shaking, and taking short gasps of air. I turn the music down lower and lower so that it is no audible before turning it off.

Get up girl and go to that bedroom. Rest until I call for you.

Master, may I cover myself on the bed?

Yes.

This is not a bad start. But it is just a start. I need to teach her to do my bidding.

As the girl sleeps, from exhaustion, fear, and confusion, I lay upon a table a feast of fruit: Mango, Durian, Marang, Guyabano, Jackfruit, Mangosteen, Lanzones, Passion Fruit, Lakatan Bananas, and Rambutan. Next to it is a platter of sliced Cassava Cakes and Bibingka Cakes. There is also a thermal pitcher of chilled Buko Juice and two lead crystal goblets.

I retire to my study and pick up a book I am in the middle of presently. I need to debrief the girl and figure out my next move, but for now, I can

relax. I miss my daughter's presence, and the presence of this girl is in truth a little unsettling, but it is the right thing to do. And while it may be unsettling it also feels right. The only way to deal with fairy tales is to pervert them, to make them untenable.

I wonder. Will it become untenable or just replace the old one if successful?

I hear sounds. The child is awake. I enter the bedroom she is using and tell her to come to the dining room.

As she enters the dining room, she asks, *How many people will come? May I dress before they arrive?*

If anyone came, you would still be as you are. You may not be clothed here. But no one will come here today.

Who is all this food for?

You.

I cannot eat all this!

No, but you are to eat as much as you wish.

There is so much here! How do I chose?

This is a new concept for you?

Yes! Yes, it is! Oh, Master. Is this what my life is now like? Eat, sleep, make love?

No, not completely. We have work that must be done. But yes, this is part of it.

May I bring some of this to my Nanay?

Yes, when you see her, you may. Tell me about your family. I cannot take notes, but I have a pickup mic that is recording this. I will replay it later in private. I need to learn enough to slide in the palliative care and medicine her mother needs. After I learn about her family, I also need to learn about other girls involved with the church.

I actually get quite a bit from Amelae. She is the youngest of five kids. All are struggling just to keep their heads above water. She has an uncle who has been helping a bit but his funds are also limited. She mentions that she knows the guy's account number at his bank, as she had to text it to another extended family member who helped once. It is in her cell phone. When she goes to pee an hour later, I find it before she returns. I may add a little there for some drugs, but I will probably have better luck accessing the hospital accounting and give her a credit for treatments. Network security isn't exactly strong around here.

As I wind up getting her family history, the DriveMax I took, while she was eating fruit, has kicked in. It is time for a repeat of the earlier performance. Once again she is on the draped table. Once again a heavy damask cloth covers her eyes and most of her head. Once again I anoint her with oil. Once again the music plays. Once again I enter her forcefully.

Who do you belong to, Amelae?

You, Master.

Are you sure, Amelae?

Yes. I am sure, Master.

I take a clamp and attach it to her left nipple and screw it on hard.

Are you still sure, Alemae?

Yes! Yes!

I take a clamp and attach it to her right nipple and screw it on hard.

Are you still sure, Alemae?

Yes! Master! Yes!

I take a clamp and attach it to her clit. Amelae screams.

Are you still sure, Alemae?

Yes! Master! I am sure.

I tighten each clamp a bit as I pound her cunt. She is bucking, gasping and cumming. I do not let up. Ramming into her cunt over and over, the minutes pass as I use her harshly before dumping my cum inside her unprotected cunt.

Once again I redress before removing the cloth from her face. *You may wipe yourself off but you may not wash what I have put inside you. Do you understand?*

Yes, Master.

You are to stay in your room until I call for you in the morning. Go.

And go she does. It really isn't all that unfair. It is already eight thirty in the evening. I have some work to do. It takes some time to spear a user account in the accounting office at the hospital, but I do it and make sure I can get back in. I find some funds in an account that doesn't seem to get touched too often. I create a new account not attached to anything else and move three hundred thousand pesos into it. There is no "new" money and the

books will continue to balance, at least for a while. By the time anyone finds it, my bet is that Amelae's mom will already be dead.

I have a small account in the same bank as Amelae's uncle, and so I make a small 'charitable' donation to the cause. In the morning I will tell her to tell her uncle to remove the funds and buy the drugs.

Finally it is time to sleep. After having fucked twice today, my body seems at peace with the world and I sleep soundly until awakening at five the next morning.

I am out of my rooms thirty minutes later. Looking in on Amelae, she is sleeping soundly. But it is time to awaken. *Amelae, take a shower. We have much to do today.*

The girl stirs, looks at me, nods and goes about her instructions.

I have a low coffee table. I place the foam and damask cloth over it. When Amelae exits the bedroom, I tie a piece of damask around her head as a blindfold and have her get into a dog position on the table. Once again I apply clamps to her nipples but hang small weights to each clamp. Applying a bit of oil on my member, I slide into the girl while mashing her clit with my fingers.

There is not one moment of resistance from the girl. She accepts it all. Juice runs down her legs as she begs me to do anything I desire to her. It is a good fuck and eventually I fill her cunt again enough to watch some of it dribble out of her cunt and down her thigh.

She is going to the bedroom to clean up. I do not allow it and tell her to come to the dining room table and eat some breakfast. She wants to warm me than she is not dry enough and will soak the seat. I ignore the matter.

Call your uncle right now and tell him to remove the money he will find in his account. He is to purchase medicine for your mother.

How? He has no real money, Master.

He does now, Amelae. Do it.

She calls him. There is an argument. He has only five hundred pesos in the account. He knows as he put one hundred into the account yesterday. If he removes it, they will close the account on him. She tells him not to argue and remove all but the five hundred. He is telling her that there isn't any more that. She is telling him to stop arguing and just do it. The call ends in an ugly manner. She wants to ask if there really is more money in his account but is afraid to ask. I ignore it.

I tell her to call her mother. Her mother should get the tests and treatments she needs right now. Once again Amelae points out that they don't have money for the hospital.

Amelae, this is the last time I will say this. Next time, you will regret arguing. Now, shut up and do as I say.

Yes, Master.

She makes the call and once again there is pushback from the other side. Amelae, promises her mother that she has the money to cover it. Just please get ready to go!

I do what you tell me to do, Master.

Good. Now tell me about the others who collect for the church.

There are quite a few. It's a mix of boys and girls. All are between sixteen and twenty-two years of age. Each it seems has a hard luck story about someone in the family who needs help. The church while not promising anything, talks about the laying on of hands and miracles for those who, in the deepest reaches of their hearts, accept Jesus as their savior without any hidden reservation. See that's the trick. If you, or your loved one doesn't get healed, there is something about you that is still holding back... just a little bit! Oh, the art of the con artist. Flimflam nonsense. They give the neophyte nothing but vacant hope. I am delivering real benefits! So I may be pure bunk, but to Amelae, and probably some others, how could they know I am not a more powerful force, for the good in their lives, even though I seem to represent the evil side of the coin?

Amelae has been having a fine time working through more of the fruit and cakes. We make coffee and relax. We are on a couch. Me sitting up and her reclining against me as I finger her cunt and she mews. It is ten in the morning. She is telling me about the personalities of her cohorts, when her cellphone comes alive. It's her uncle. He wants to know how she did it.

What I do, Tito⁷?

You put fifty thousand pesos in my account! How you do that?

Prayer, Tito. It is the power of the divine!

Then we must thank our savior, Amelae!

I am doing that right now, Tito. Just get Nanay the medicine please.

⁷ Uncle.

Soul

Yes, of course. I go do it right now. Bless you, child.

And the call ends.

Master, I know you do that. You keep your word to me. You do what the church never do. Why they say you are evil? How does evil do good and the good do nothing?

Amelae, I told you that we work at it. His Big and Mighty Shitface does nothing! He is all con and scam. Now, knowing what you know, will you help me gather more souls?

Yes, Master. I am your girl now. Mmmm... that feels good!

You are one of my girls. We will collect others.

You want some of the other girls who collect from the church?

Yes, that is exactly what I want. Do you have some that you want me to choose?

Hmmm, I think yes. Aaahhh nice! Oh Master, you do me again?

No. Now, you will call one of your friends and tell her that you saw a man who seemed to know you are collecting for the church but is still willing. She should be at McDonalds at two thirty today.

The call goes OK and Amelae provides a description of me that will work. I am sending Amelae to her mother with the instruction to call me when they are at the hospital and have the appointment. She takes some plastic bags, loads up some of the food and leaves with money for the tricycles and jeepneys.

Once she is out of the house, I get to work on some of what I will need for this next girl. I have a few hours and I don't need to do much. At one twenty I get a call from Amelae.

Master, the hospital says we must pay at the cashier and get a receipt before treatment can begin. We have no money! What have I done to us?

Amelae, get in line. When you get to the cashier, you demand a receipt! The bill is already paid.

How that?

Are you arguing?

No, Master. I do it.

Logging back into the hospital, I find her mother's account and the new posted charge. There is plenty of money in the reserve account I have sent up and move just enough over to zero out the balance before logging out.

Soul

Fifteen minutes later Amelae is calling again. *Master, I swear, I never doubt you again. I do what you say. The Cashier get angry with me, but I demand she check. She do and she screams. How that? I tell her she is foolish and to give me the receipt. She do and all is good now. I tell my mother that I am protected by divine powers and she is not to question it. She say, OK. She agree.*

What did God ever do for her? What did I do? In her eyes I am more powerful than the God she prayed to. I am! I am for the simple reason that the real me is not a fairy tale. She needs me to be a fairy tale to make it work in her brain. Being human just isn't going to work for her. She needs the divine.

Amelae, when you are done, take your mother home, gather all your things and return to me here. You have no life outside of me. Do you understand?

Yes, Master. Completely.

What's puzzling you is the nature of my game.

I really don't like McDonalds. I didn't care for it in the States and it is the same here. Exactly the same. Depressingly the same. Still, that is where I am going to meet Mirafe.

There is a tax lien on the family farm and they are about to lose it. It was a big lien until about noon today. Now the lien is six hundred and sixty-six pesos. Of course Mirafe and her family do not know this, not yet anyway. And of course, if all my work goes sideways, the old lien amount will reappear.

Mirafe is seventeen. I think I see her when she enters McDonalds and I am right, as she makes a beeline for my table. She has that silly piece of paper in her hand, even though Amelae warned her that I know the scam.

She walks up, stiffly and a bit unsure of herself, the paper gripped tightly in her left hand. She hands it to me. It reads, *Po, I am mute, unable to speak, but I can hear you when you speak. I have a serious problem. You look kind. Maybe you can assist?*

Sit down, Mirafe.

She looks at me, stunned and writes down, *How you know my name?*

Child, you are not mute. I already know this. You have really come to solicit funds from me for your church. You are praying that if you are a good Christian who does God's work, by some miracle, your family will not lose your farm. Stop panicking, girl. I am not going to bite. Have I said anything that is not correct?

How you know this?

I know many things. I know you told your friend Amelae that your father owns the farm. But that is not true. Your uncles own the farm. Your father was supposed to pay the taxes as he is using the land. He hasn't and now your uncles will lose the land, but you haven't told them yet.

You are not Filipino so you cannot take the land from us!

I am not here to take your land.

Why you tell me this?

Tell me, Mirafe, how much is your soul worth?

Why you ask a crazy question?

Soul

Do you want to save the farm, or are you going to argue with me?

My soul is in God's hands.

No, Mirafe, your soul at this moment is in your hands. You get to decide what happens to your soul.

I don't believe you.

Do you know how much money is owed on the farm?

Yes! I not tell you!

It is twenty-nine thousand eight hundred and forty-six pesos as of today eleven this morning.

How you know this.

Mirafe, you are going to sell me your soul for that amount, or I will make sure that the farm is lost and your favorite Pastor, Rodgie, is arrested for solicitation of murder. Here is six-hundred and sixty-six pesos. With exactly this money the lien will be paid in full if you go right now to pay off the lien. Once you do that and the lien is satisfied, your soul will be mine and you must return to me by eight tonight. If you do not, your family will lose the farm and the Pastor will go to jail.

How I know this?

Ask your friend Amelae if I was not the one to send your two other Pastors to jail. Now go, or you will be too late to pay the fee. Go!

I can see the girl trying to text Amelae as she leaves the restaurant. Some of what I have told her was guess work, but I do know her father's name and I can see on the recorded deed that he is not the owner of record. By comparing names, it was pretty clear that the owners are related and probably brothers of her father. The investment is trivial, around \$15.

My phone is ringing. It was Amelae.

Master, may I tell Mirafe how you make things miraculously happen for me?

Yes. You may.

Thank you, Master. Master, you scare her.

I know.

This is what you think is right. I not argue. I will be back by six tonight, Master.

Good. And I end the call.

Soul

The Quarter Pounder with Cheese is still sitting in front of me, uneaten. I leave it and return home.

I am home by three-thirty. There is plenty of time to do some work on the next girl Amelae had mentioned. This one will be a far more complicated thing to resolve. I am just finishing up at five-twenty when my phone shows a text.

How you do this?

I am pretty sure it is Mirafe.

You know how. Amelae told you.

It not possible.

Are you refusing me? I told you what will happen.

How you do that, it is already paid!

No. Only six hundred and sixty-six was paid. If you are not here by eight, another sixty-six thousand and six hundred will show as unpaid on the land. It is your choice.

I am about to end the call when Mirafe says,

You do one more miracle and I believe.

I am not interested in negotiating.

You say you will destroy Pastor Rodgie. Do that first. If that happen, I accept that you own my soul.

Be here by eight Mirafe.

And I do end the call. However, before six PM, just before Amelae walks in, I log into Rodgie's cellphone via an iBot that isn't supposed to exist and send a text to a PNP officer offering cash to kill the big kahuna at Rodgie's church.

All is peaceful and quiet as Amelae removes her clothing and approaches me. *I need you inside me Master.*

You need to shower first, but Mirafe may be here by eight, so that will have to wait. Clean up and eat. There is lechon manok and pinakbet on the table.

Will you eat, Master?

Yes, we will both eat. Now go.

Amelae is no longer questioning. She has accepted the new reality, though she needs some gaps filled in.

Master, why we told to pray to Jesus?

Soul

His Lazy and Majestic Asshole needed to get the Romans and Greeks and, and and...to buy into his new who-hab. He had too many belief systems and like I say, he's a lazy ass. So he creates a 'son-of-God' because those folks believed that Gods have sex with humans. Just like your Pastors tells you to trick the people you solicit, His Laziness is also scamming humans. He has reduced the number of scams he is running by creating a religion that many can accept.

Then why there is Muslim people?

Interesting story, that one. People like to fight each other and each major group wants to be different in some way. People from the Middle East were fighting with Europeans and they decided that they needed their own religion. Well His Laziness first tried to kill it off, as it made his life more difficult, but he failed. The original stuff this Mohamed came up with, gave us all too many souls, all at once. There was too much killing. So the boys got together to get this Mohamed to modify a bunch of this his crap. The second half of his teachings are peaceful. It leveled out the killings. Lately, version #1 is back on and it's making both sides unhappy. Clearly not nearly as bad as the world wars, but it is worse than a Rwanda. Far worse than a Srebrenica. We like a normal steady flow. Neither side needs a deluge. OK that was a long answer to a short question... the short answer is we can alter human history, but we don't make it. You do.

Master, is this magical rice?

What?

It is so good and soft. It tastes better.

Ah, no child. It's just that you normally eat the cheap NFA rice for twenty-eight pesos a kilo. This is the good stuff which sells for forty-four pesos a kilo. It is what your corrupt Pastors eat. It is what the corrupt politicians eat, and the corrupt judges.

So this is not magical?

No, I am not a magical person. I am an agent, not a god. I have no magical powers.

Then how you...

There is a commotion outside. I get up and look out. It is a little after seven and already dark. But I can see Mirafe screaming to a guard at the gate to be allowed in. I open the front door and call out. The guard allows the girl to pass.

He is in jail! How you do that? Who are you? Why you want my soul?

Shut up! ... For a mute you sure do make a lot of noise! ... Right now I am not interested in answering your questions. I am only interested in you answering mine. So say nothing until I ask and only answer what has been asked of you. ... For now, come in and sit at the table. There is food to eat. Do that and no speaking.

Soul

As the girl enters, she sees Amelae sitting at the table eating and quite naked. She is about to say something but Amelae signals her to keep quiet as she addresses her colleague. *Friend come sit here. There is good food on this table. Even the rice is special. Do not worry. Come and just eat now.* Mirafe is surely not at ease, but she does sit and accepts a plate. The first bites of the chicken and rice are tentative at best. But fear of the food, at least, abates and the girl takes a goodly portion.

The rest of the meal is completed in silence. As we finish the meal, I go to a side board and pour myself a brandy of good quality. It is dark and full bodied with a flavor of sweet prunes. Returning to the table, I sit, enjoy a few sips of the brandy by the half light of the indirect lamps in the room.

Mirafe, this has been a confusing day for you. You have seen your farm saved and in that way, saved your father. You have heard that your Pastor has been jailed. You have been given an ultimatum. You are to sell your soul or the farm will slip from your grip just as quickly as it has been saved. There are no other options and there is no possibility of a negotiation. It is a choice you need to make. Have you decided?

May I ask questions?

You may ask three questions. No more.

Why are you doing this?

I am collecting souls. Next?

Who are you?

An agent for the collection of souls.

What will happen to me if I sell my soul?

You will become mine, as Amelae is mine.

This is not fair! I didn't learn anything! Am I going to hell?

I am not going to answer, but Amelae, speaks without permission. I will chastise her later for this. *Friend, there is no heaven and there is no hell. I learn there is a soul, but it not contain life. When that is gone, it is truly gone.*

Amelae, who is he?

I not know. I only know he is powerful and do what your God not do to help people. He help you, true?

Yes. But he make Pastor arrested.

Yes, he is powerful and not to be challenged. Accept him and give him your soul. There is good in him.

Soul

Why are you naked?

It is required. Give him your soul or leave. Do not make him angry.

You sure we not burn in hell?

How that? You sure Jesus save you? Why you believe that? Because someone who also not know tell you? Jesus not help my mother, he do. Jesus not save your farm, he do. Choose now.

What if I chose wrong?

What if you chose the other way and live your life wrong and there nothing there? What then? It is only faith, di ba⁸? Faith in Jesus who do nothing for you or faith in him who do help you. Choose.

What if I choose to sell my soul and then ask Jesus to accept me back?

Your family will suffer greatly. You cannot withdraw without the evil falling on you.

So my soul for life to protect my family?

Yes, friend. That is the arrangement. It is a better arrangement than you received from the church.

But my soul?

Friend Mirafe, this hard to explain. Your soul not what you think. It OK.

You sure?

How can anyone be sure?

But the Bible say it true.

Who say the Bible true? How they prove it? It all hope, di ba? What it do for you? What this one do for you?

How he know about my Titos⁹? I never tell you.

What about your Titos?

Hub, you not know?

Know what?

He know!

Yes, I tell you. This one is real. Give him your soul.

⁸ OK? or 'Is it not?'

⁹ Uncles. Tito = Uncle.

*Sige, sige.*¹⁰

Master, she agree.

Take her into your room and prepare her.

Yes, Master.

The two disappear for a bit. The food is cleared.

It is evening and dark outside.

The warm fragrant oil is set next to the tall table holding the foam pad and the red damask cloth. I get the sound system ready and the remote close by. I light a cone of incense on the other side of the room. A small fan is near it. When the music is turned on, the fan will start gently blowing the incense aroma towards the table. I have a remote dimmer for the indirect lighting. They are the only lights that are on. As the music starts, I will slowly dim the lights until they are off before dropping the slacks and entering the girl. Amelae will see nothing as I will stand her on the other side of the table from me.

I need to make this more dramatic than I did for Amelae. This one needs more pomp and circumstance.

I am ready long before Amelae brings Mirafe out of the bedroom. Both girls are naked. Both are easy on the eyes.

I bring out a contract. I pierce her index finger and the blood drips into a small shallow dish. The nib pen lays next to it. I dip the nib into her blood and tell her to sign the contract whereby she sells me her soul.

With a trembling hand she picks the pen up and writes her name in her own blood. I take the pen from her hand and put it down by the dish. I pick up the contract, nod and announce, *Mirafe, now and forever, you are mine.* And the contract flashes into oblivion.

Amelae places Mirafe on the table. I place Amelae where I want her, and whisper in her ear that I want her to rub Mirafe's temples. I put the cloth over Mirafe's face and dim the lights as the remote for the music is also keyed. I have the volume for the music louder than the last time. The room throbs with the chants and the music. The incense is noticeable.

The room is pitch black, the sound intense. I drop my slacks. There are no undergarments to remove. I anoint the girl with the warmed oil and make

¹⁰ When said in a double, it is understood as OK I will continue or OK, I will go on with it. It is an acceptance, even if grudgingly so.

sure it runs over her exposed cunt. Once again my truncheon is oiled. I run it into the girl, whose legs I hold up and out.

The girls cries out. I pull back and ram in again. She moans, almost sobs. Placing her legs up on my chest, I keep them in position with one arm, using the other to grab and pinch a nipple while ramming her again. That elicits a groan. Ramming in yet again, while continuing to maul her nipple, finds her humping her hips up and urging me onward. My free hand moves down and I pinch her clit as I fuck her hard. She screams and trashes under me, letting loose a river of female fluids. With my free hand I grab Amelae's hands, one at a time, moving them down to Mirafe's nipples. Amelae knows what to do.

My hand returns to the girl's clit. She is moaning, sobbing, cumming, and talking in tongues, as I plow on. When I sense she really can't take much more, I give her my cum. Standing back, I redress, before removing the cloth from her head, lowering the music and raising the lights.

Mirafe, your soul now belongs to me. Before, if you had refused to sell your soul, only your family would have been injured. Now, if you leave, you will suffer greatly. However, as you are mine, I will take care of you for the rest of your life. It is done. From now on you will be without clothing when in this house. You will address me as Master.

Amelae, take her to the room the two of you will henceforth share. Do not allow her to cleanse her female parts, but you may clean her torso. Come to me in the morning and not before. Go!

Both leave me. I reset the room, and pour myself another brandy before retiring for the night.

It has been an interesting day and I think I will collect one more girl for now. Once I have them, the games will begin!

Hope you guess my name.

Master?

Good morning, Amelae.

Master, do you sleep like humans do?

Why do you ask?

I was up at five this morning and I saw you were walking around.

I am just someone who doesn't need much sleep. That's all. Many of us as we get older don't sleep as much.

I see. Master, Mirafe and me talk last night. She is confused. Will you explain to her about the contest and the flood? I try to explain essence, but maybe I get it wrong.

No, you told her correctly. She is just having a hard time unlearning what she has been taught.

How you know what I say?

I smile, kiss her cheek and whisper, *She told you, 'How can this be, Amelae? The Bible says we will burn in hell!' and you told her, 'Master says the Bible is just a book of propaganda.'* The Master tells the truth.'

Oh Master, truly I am sorry for doubting your ability to know all and see all. Yes, I know better now. I am sorry!

I smile again. It's amazing what a miniature microphone can pick up in an otherwise quiet room. *It is alright Amelae, I do not know everything. I am not that powerful.*

Master, I know you are. I see it, feel it, and now I hear it. Master, I do all for you. Truly. Master, Mirafe is frightened to leave the bedroom. I tell her that you will take her again many times. She say she afraid she will give birth to the devil. Master, I know you not really a devil. That is just more propaganda, but she is afraid.

Tell the girl that refusing to come out will make me unhappy. If I was the devil, would it be smart to make me angry? If I am not the devil, why be scared? There is no reason to stay in the room either way.

Master, you are very smart! OK, I tell her this.

The table is set once again with all varieties of fruit and fresh buko juice. I am enjoying a passion fruit, and a seniorita banana, along with a mug of

Soul

baraco coffee, when the two girls appear. Mirafe is trying to cover herself with her arms. *Stop being stupid, Mirafe. You are mine. All of you is mine. Put your arms down and come eat.*

Amelae comes to me and honors¹¹ me, before taking a plate. Mirafe sees this and decides to copy it. I did not ask for it, but see no harm in it. Amelae is eating to exuberance. Mirafe takes notice of this and digs in. I hear her whisper to Amelae, *Is there something important happening here later?* Amelae giggles and answers in a more normal tone. *This seems to be just the way things are here. It was the same yesterday morning.*

When all are done eating, it is time to send Amelae off to visit her mother. There is another visit to the hospital and I need some alone time with Mirafe. I tell Amelae to return by six. Mirafe asks Amelae what is happening.

This is what Master does for my mother! I take her to the hospital. We have no money to pay the bill but when I get to the cashier the money is already paid. Master makes miracles. Truly!

Mirafe looks at me. She has a strange expression on her face. *Master? Amelae say the money just appears. How can that be?*

No, Mirafe, she did not say that. She said that she is told to pay a bill but when she gets to the counter, she finds the bill has already been paid. Money does not appear out of the air. Amelae is nodding.

Mirafe looks from me to Amelae and back to me. *Master, will this happen again today?*

I expect it will.

Are we going anywhere today?

No, Mirafe, you and I will stay here all day.

But the money will be paid?

Yes. The money will be paid.

How this happen?

It is one of the benefits of selling your soul. Now, Amelae, off you go! Text me when you get to the hospital, and get the appointment. I like to make sure all is OK. If not I need to know it, so that I can help you.

¹¹ Taking another's hand and bringing it to your forehead is a sign of respect.

Soul

Yes, Master. As soon as they give us the appointment I will text you.

Good, now go!

A giggle and the girl is gone. Once Amelae is clearly on her way, I turn to Mirafe. *Go wash yourself completely. Make sure all of you is completely clean. If anything needs shaving, shave it. When you are done, come out here to me.*

Will you take me like last night?

No, this time it will be different. Go.

And go she does.

The food is removed and the table, foam, cloth, and oil are present. The music and incense are ready. Also ready but not currently visible are the nipple and clit clamps.

When Mirafe returns all is waiting. She sees all, turning to me. *Master, I do not wish to become pregnant.*

Child, what you wish is no longer of any importance. It is time you learn that. You are a vessel, which I will use, as I need it used. You signed that contract and you will forever be bound to it. Now up on the table.

If this girl didn't in her heart fear magical or divine powers, she would have been out the door before you could blink twice. But she genuinely believes though she desperately does not want to believe. In the church, she had wanted to believe in spite of the absence of any tangible evidence that it really mattered. Now it is the opposite. She doesn't want to believe but there is too much evidence for her to ignore. Life's a bitch, ain't it?

She gets up on the table. I tie a blindfold across her eyes and tell her to lie back. The music starts, the aroma of the incense arrives, and I drop my slacks. The warm oil anoints her breasts, abdomen and cunt. I lift and separate her legs. My tool gathers some oil, and I plunge in.

Once again holding her legs in place with one arm, my free hand grabs the clamps and one by one as I continue to pound her cunt, I attach the clamps. Cries pierce the air as I assault her body with both pleasure and pain mixed in a manner that bleeds together and makes them indistinguishable.

Her orgasms follow with my cum adding do her soupy mix. It is over. The clamps are removed and hidden from sight. I redress and remove Mirafe's blindfold.

Soul

You are to return to your room. You are to wipe yourself off but not wash any of me from inside you. Do not fail me in this, or there will be punishment. You are to lie on your bed and rest or sleep until I call for you. Your body needs time to absorb my seed. Now go!

The table and items are put right. I sit down with a book for three hours before returning to the dining area. The dining table is spread with fragrant rice, bihon, lumpia, and roast tuna belly. There is an ice bucket filled with Coke, Sprite, and Royal.

Entering the bedroom where Mirafe is lying, and evidently sleeping, I call her name and tell her to come and eat.

Five minutes later she emerges from the bedroom after apparently washing her face. She looks at the table and in a moment of confusion asks, *Who else coming?*

No one. This is for us.

How? Why? Surely we will not eat a small bit of it!

What we do not eat will be given to those who have little to eat. Do not worry. It will not be wasted. Now eat.

Following lunch I show her where there is a TV and she admits she likes to watch Showtime. I tell her I understand and leave her to it. Fifteen minutes later I am at a computer when Amelae's text arrives. I log into the hospital computer and move more money between the accounts.

I set up the low table, and the blindfold.

I return to Mirafe who is still watching Showtime. We get a call from Amelae. I put it on speakerphone. Her mother has just now been handed the bill. Amelae will go to the cashier. Mirafe asks, *Did Master give you the money?*

No silly. It will just be there, wait, I am about to see the cashier now... listen! I will put this on my speaker phone. Be quiet!

We hear the Cashier asking for the money. Amelae tells her it is already paid. The cashier calls Amelae stupid. Amelae tells the cashier that she will need to apologize in a second. There is silence, a gasp, and then a *How?*

Do I get the apology now, Madam?

Yes, yes, sorry, sorry. It true. It paid. It can't be but it be true. OK, OK, here is your receipt.

Soul

And then the speaker phone seems to be turned off before Amelae's voice returns. *Master, I not understand how this happens, but I know this real and nothing else I ever been told is real. When I pray now, Master, I pray to you.*

Amelae, I am just keeping my side of the sale of your soul. There is no need to pray to me.

Maybe no, Master, but I do it. It not cause harm! See you at six! And she ends the call.

Mirafe looks at me with eyes filled with both wonder and confusion. *How you do it?*

Come with me.

I bring her to the low table and instruct her to mount it. Once again she is blindfolded. I put the clamps on her. They are very tight. I put oil on the spear and commence the intrusion.

She is grunting, gasping and pushing her cunt into me as I push into her. There may be pain but this is most assuredly consensual. She is calling out, *Yes, Master, yes! I am, oh yes, oh, good, oh, Master! Oh! Shiiiiit! Oh fuuuuccckkk!* *Obbbb!*

We go at it until it appears she is giving out. I hammer her hard once again and leave my cum behind.

Once again, same rules, Mirafe. You may wipe down, but you leave my seed inside you. Rest for two hours.

I suspect Mirafe will be OK now. We will see. If I can pull off the next one, I don't see any reason why she will be a problem. But the next one is not easy.

It's a confusing mess and I am not buying into the girl's story. I think it is pure horseshit. However that may play into my needs better. I have been spending time breaking into the text message logs for a number of individuals. There have been more than a few false turns and a significant amount of wasted time. But I have found what I am looking for. My initial hunch appears to be right. But I will play it straight as far as the girl thinks and lay the trap for others. It will be a valuable lesson for the new girl and it should cement Mirafe to me in the bargain.

I will start on this third one tomorrow morning. At three-thirty I awaken Mirafe and sit on the bed with her.

Master, you said, I could ask questions.

Soul

Yes, you may.

Who are you?

I told you, I am an agent whose job it is to collect souls.

What is your name?

Master.

Really?

That is the only name you are to use for me, with the exception of when we are in public. Then you will call me Ninong.

What will happen to my soul when I die?

Your essence will travel to be who owns your soul.

Is that Hell?

Amelae told you that there is no such place. She was telling you the truth. There is no Hell and there is no Heaven. Your Jesus was an actor and your Bible is fiction. None of it is real. There is no God. There is no Devil. There are beings that are not human. But they do not keep you alive and they do not kill. Humans do that to themselves. These beings can affect things on earth, but life is not one of them. It is not allowed.

So when I am dead, there is nothing?

There is the essence. That is the soul.

But I am not alive anymore?

When I burn incense, what do you smell?

The aroma?

The essence of the incense. It is what is within the incense and is only released when the incense itself is burned off. And so it is with humans. As humans die, their essence is released. That is what you have sold. That, which controls you in life, gets your essence at time of death. But to get that essence, we must not kill you ourselves. If we do, we forfeit the soul we sought.

That is why I am now bound to you?

Yes.

This is confusing. Will there be more of us?

Yes.

Will you love me?

Soul

That is not possible. But I will care for you and I am not sure that you are able to perceive the difference between love and real caring.

Why me, why Amelae?

Because both of you really, truly, and deeply believed that hogwash and would until you died. If I didn't take you, there was no way we would have gotten you. Many other people say they believe but in their deepest regions, they have doubts. We can work with that. There was no way to do that with you two.

Are there people who believe in God that you cannot reach?

Sure. Like I told Amelae, many Nuns really do believe in a way that cannot be shaken without making them so mentally unstable that they become catatonic. We stay away from them. The side that you think of as God has folks they stay away from as well. One of those are the Catholic Priests. They are a fucked up bunch. Typically we don't have to reach out as they come to us anyway. Of course, they think they are going to the Devil. They aren't, but no harm is done.

Is Amelae's Nanay going to get better?

No, she is dying. We can help her prolong her life a bit. We can ease her pain. But her body is failing and she will die.

Does Amelae know this?

Yes. We all need to accept death as inevitable. However, we don't have to be cruel about it. The other side disagrees and doesn't seem to care. Oh they say they do, and sometimes they make a show of it to attract more followers. We don't do that. We just take care of those who come our way as Amelae and you did.

Why do you let God say the things he says about you?

The other side has created their own nightmare because of that. Humans are just not in their nature as the other side's "God" image demands. Most folk fail and so we end up doing better because of the 'bad publicity.' We are for the real, average human, failings and all.

But you are not treating me like an average person. Why?

You and Amelae and one or more others will be acolytes. You are to be part of my team. You are special.

Is that good, or should I be scared?

Good question. I hope you see it as a good thing.

What will we be doing?

Soul

You will be doing what we always do, we pull the blinds up, turn up the lights, and help folks see the world without the painted fake landscapes.

I don't think I should like you.

But?

I do. But, it is giving me a little bit of a headache.

OK, rest somemore until Amelae returns.

Master, if you get me pregnant, will it be a God?

No, it will be as human as you are. Your child will live and die as do all humans.

Are you sure, do you have other children.

Yes and yes.

Where are they?

They are grown and gone.

How many are there?

Enough and not too many.

Do you love your children?

I miss them when they leave. It makes a hole in my world.

I think I am happy to hear that. But you didn't love their mothers?

I cared for them completely and deeply.

But not love?

Mirafe, what do you know of love? You loved a God who did not exist. You love a father who failed to protect his family because he drank the money away. You think I didn't know that? Did "God" love you back? Did your father love you enough to protect you from his weaknesses? Tell me, what is more important, loving or caring for and being responsible?

So you will care for me and our children?

Yes.

What am I to you?

What is a Nun?

A bride to Jesus?

Soul

How many Nuns are there?

Oh! There must be thousands.

Are they jealous of one another?

No.

So what do you think you are to me?

Oh. OH! ... OK now I will sleep.

I pull her into my arms and settle in with her. We sleep.

Pleased to meet you.

Master?

Good evening, Amelae.

Yes, good evening to you. What you do Mirafe?

Why do you ask?

She say she think she love you.

Hub, I can see my talk with her didn't help a bit!

From behind me I hear, Yes it did! You can't admit love, but you do love.

Mirafe, I do not lie.

Maybe not intentionally. Maybe you not understand what you are feeling because you are not human.

I never said I wasn't human.

You never said you were human! And you not say it now because you not lie!

Not saying is not an admission of anything.

See Amelae? See? Master loves us, but he not know what love is.

Enough of this nonsense, girls. It is time to eat. After dinner, both of you have things that need to get done.

The girls make no comments on the quantity or quality of the food. They have come to accept that this is now part of their world. However, that doesn't mean the girls are silent.

Friend, did Master tell you he not interfere to stop or cause death?

Yes. He say that it a violation of the rules of the game. We humans are not to be killed or kept alive. We live and die as we are supposed to live and die. Why?

Your Nanay is very ill, di ba?

Ah yes, I know she will die. But she will live a bit longer because she has medical care. Master can do that! And she is not in as much pain because Master gave money for her medications. So Master cannot keep Nanay alive, but he does everything he is allowed to do. He says there are no miracles. That is not true. He do miracles. He just not make or take life. I think that is a good thing.

Soul

Girls, that is technically true, but this next project is going to show you that it isn't as clean as all that.

Amelae looks at me, and in the quietest of voices asks, *Explain please.*

Your friend Erlyn's family is in trouble.

Yes, Master, I told you that.

Amelae, you do not know even a small part of how serious the trouble is that they are in.

Master, her brother is sick, he needs help to get off the Shabu¹². It will kill him. How more serious can it be?

It is far more serious, dangerous, and deadly. Tell me, is this girl worth keeping alive?

Master?

Is there reason that she should survive this coming week?

You say that you cannot give or take lives! Why is this?

I cannot change nature. But most assuredly, if it is a matter of bullets, knives, or bombs, then there are things that can be done, within limits. Any human can do this with enough knowledge and access. That does not violate any rules.

You say she will die?

Most likely, she will perish in two days as will her brother.

You can save her and her brother?

I can save her, if she sells her soul. If I try to save her brother, there is a strong possibility that he will die anyway, as will her mother. Both are souls we will get in any case. It doesn't change any balance for me, but if I don't try to protect her brother, and he dies now, her mother may live for years. If I save your friend, and not her brother, someone else will end up dead. There will still be a death, just not her. And that person might not deserve to die, just as your friend does not deserve to die now. So tell me, is it important to save her?

There are no smiles or happy faces near me now. All of a sudden, the nature of the consequences when interfering as they have asked me to do, are made very clear. I have asked them to choose, not if someone should die, (maybe an easier question,) but rather who should die.

Master, do we know, who will die, if Erlyn not die?

Why should that matter?

¹² A mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine prevalent throughout Asia.

Sige, sige. You are correct.

Mirafe has been quiet, but clearly something is bothering her?

Master, is it you who will do these killings?

Ah, I see... No, Mirafe, I do not ever kill. It will not be me. It will be the world that family operates within. The people with whom they associate. It will be from their own choices. Choices they made long before I was aware of them.

Even the innocent ones, like our friend?

Yes, to a certain extent, that is true. When you associate with bad people, bad things may happen to you.

But our friend does not choose to associate, it is her family. Would the other person be a family member?

No.

Then I say, save our friend!

Master, I agree with Mirafe. Please save our friend.

I will give her the option of living or not. She will have to decide, just as you two have made choices, so will she. Do not tell her of this discussion, but invite her to meet us at the mall tomorrow.

Not here?

Absolutely, not here. Do not mention this place to her. Now, I understand you have a teleserye¹³ you both like to watch. Go now. I will see you both in the morning.

There is work I must do to prepare for tomorrow. It is a tricky business with a number of options. None may be put in motion until I meet with the girl. I will need to bring an Android tablet with me to access a few Shell files in a Bash environment. Each Shell file will activate a different option I have designed. I can trigger it while still talking with the girl as needed. We will see how it plays out.

My screens are filled with the timestamped links between dozens of cellphone SMS logs. I can see who is talking to who. The texts reveal a complex and highly hierarchically structured interplay of individuals within an illegal drug network. I do not know the names of most, but I can see what they do, whom they control and who controls them. It's a nasty business and I am happy to stay invisible to all of them.

¹³ Soap opera, or television drama. In the US, these are daily daytime shows, but in the Philippines many are shown in the evening. They have huge followings.

Soul

I wonder how much Erlyn actually knows. The texts to and from her phone to her mother and brother indicate she is mostly clueless. Is she?

Good morning, Master! Why do you sleep alone?

Mirafe, I work late and get up early. There is no reason to disturb you by being in the same bed. ... I gather your friend texted you last night that she has agreed to meet us at ten this morning.

How you know this? I just turned on my phone and read this now. I not receive it last night!

Yes well, she did agree, so you two must be ready to leave here at nine-thirty. And by the way, I am glad you told her to pack a small bag as you want her to stay over. If she agrees to sell her soul, she can't go back home for a few days. Thank you.

Master! How you know this?

Get Amelae ready and have some breakfast.

I'm not hungry now and we have hours before we need to go. You will do me again, maybe? Or maybe you prefer Amelae? She willing too.

This is not a good time. Today's seed is for your friend, if she agrees. If she does not agree, then you will get the seed later.

Why you not know if she will agree?

Because humans really do have free will. Yes, it is possible to apply stimulus to achieve an outcome, but it still requires the agreement of a human with free will. It is also a matter of what a person chooses to believe. No matter how many facts you put in front of a person, if they choose to not believe the facts, there is little that can be done to overcome that belief. In this case, I have no idea what your friend will choose.

Master, we find a plastic crate filled with nail polish, clippers, nippers and cuticle nail pushers. May we use these?

Yes.

Who these belong to?

You.

No, who bought them?

They are for you. Use them. There is also a carton filled with powders and compresses. Use those on various parts of your body as you are always to be without clothing in the house. Make your body more lovely. You can assist Amelae and she can assist you in this matter.

She just looks at me, at one level, understanding and at a deeper level, completely confused.

I have done all I can do. After a breakfast of fruit and coffee, I retire to read a book until it is time to go.

It appears the girls have given themselves manicures and pedicures in the intervening hours. They are dressed and are ready to leave the house with me.

This is not a setup where Erlyn is thinking she is going to solicit money. My girls have told her, they have met someone who can potentially help her, but there will be no promises. However, it may require her to stay away from her home for a few days and to pack a small bag.

I saw a photo of the girl on her Facebook page. She is good looking, but is not going to stop traffic anywhere. Her age is sixteen. Her brother, who is in deep trouble, is fourteen. I have no doubt that she loves him intensely. That's the problem with love. It blinds you to reality.

We enter the mall a few minutes after it opens at ten and find seats in a large open area in front of a National Bookstore. Texts are exchanged. Erlyn is on her way. The jeepney she is on, is still moving slowly through traffic.

My tablet is in my hands, but I have not turned it on. It looks like Erlyn will not get here for another fifteen minutes. I tell the girls to wait here, while I go to Bo's Coffee for a few minutes. Sure I like the coffee, but it also gives me a way to look at a few current SMS logs. Ones that have deadly connections to our girl and her family. There are tables and chairs both inside the café and out of the doors on a terrace. I am sitting on the terrace, and away from the wait staff.

What I see is not good news. We have only four or five hours. If the girl does not come with us, she may well not live to sleep soundly tonight. It's a good thing I didn't put this off another day.

I still have a sizeable amount of coffee in front of me when Amelae texts to say Erlyn has arrived. I tell them to bring her to me, here outside Bo's.

She is shorter than I expected. Probably no taller than 4'9" or 145cm. She is as cute as her photo suggested. Based on her Facebook photos, she takes after her mother, which does not seem to be a problem as far as looks go. Her mother's choices in life are another thing entirely.

Amelae brings her to me and introduces, *Ninong, this is Erlyn.*

Nice to meet you Erlyn. Please be seated.

Po, what is your name?

You should call me Ninong.

Excuse me? This is your name?

It is Ninong for you at this time.

I do not think this is right. What is your name?

Erlyn, you have these options. You can call me Ninong, or Po, or you can leave. I really do not care which. Your friends asked me to help you. I may be able to do that. But I have no obligation in the matter. Choose.

Why are you rude? I will leave.

Please do. And I take a sip of my coffee. Erlyn is getting up and my girls are grabbing her tightly, arguing with her.

Erlyn pulls away from my girls, and turns to me. *My friends tell me that my life is in danger and you may be the only one who can save me. Why do they say this?*

Sit down and be respectful and I will discuss it with you. Stand over me and I have nothing more to say to you.

She doesn't want to, but she does sit. *OK? Now, why do they say this?*

Arjun and Eryl are on their way to kill your brother and you tonight.

That stops her. *How you know their names? I never say these name to anyone! Never! How you know? I only tell Amelae and Mirafe my little brother addicted to Shabu and needs help!*

Yes, that is what they told me. But it isn't why you are scared. He lost those packets last week and he can't cover the cash for it. You know this.

How you know?!!! How?!!!

Quiet, we do not want to attract attention. You and your brother are to die today. I can save you, but saving your brother is not a good idea. Do you want me to save you?

No one want to kill me, you lie!

Arjun's boss Rykel knows your brother told you about it. If he kills your brother, Dany, and leaves you alive, he doesn't like the risk.

A number of things are happening. The blood is draining from Erlyn's face and tears are beginning to appear. Amelae and Mirafe are just staring at me. I think 'dumbstruck' is the right term.

Ninong, what do I have to do for you to help Dany and me?

Soul

For me to help you, I need your soul. There is little I can do for Dany. If I save him today, worse things will happen in two or three days from now and more people will die. You may lose both Dany and your mother.

Wait! Wait! Too much information. What you mean I may lose my mother.

Dany is doing the running of the packets now because your mother stopped. She is in this, but Dany told Arjun, she doesn't know about the matter of the packets. If I move to protect Dany now, your mother will probably become a target.

I don't believe you. My mother has nothing to do with this! You are a liar!

She is trying to get up but Amelae is not allowing it to happen. She is whispering to Eryln. I cannot hear most of it. I do hear, 'not human.' Eryln struggles and looks at Mirafe. Mirafe leans her head in and there is more talking. The struggling has ended.

My friends say you are God. I not believe them.

They are wrong, I am not God. Even God is not God. There is no 'God.'

Yes, they say you tell them this, but they see what you do and they not believe it. If you not God, then you are the Devil.

I am not the Devil. There is no Devil. And while we are on the subject, there is no Heaven and no Hell.

So why you want my soul?

My boss is a collector. I am just an agent.

You save Dany and me. I will sell you my soul for that.

I can save you. I can keep Arjun and Eryl from killing Dany. I can make Rykel no longer a problem. But I can't stop what will happen if I do.

If you stop those two, Danny is safe. No problem!

That is not true and you need to understand that I am not promising that Dany will live out this week. I am promising that you will live. All I can do is give Dany a few more days. But if I do that, there is a real chance that your mother dies. I cannot stop that.

That it not true! You are just trying to stop me from saving Dany!

Eryln, I really do not want to help you. I do not like your attitude. The simple truth is that I do not lie.

You will kill Arjun and Eryl?

Soul

No, I will not. But they will die if I have your soul. To save you I also have to deal with Rykel.

You guaranty it will happen?

Yes, I will. It will be in the contract you sign. Your soul returns to you if that does not occur. If it does occur, not matter what else happens, your soul is mine.

I sign a contract?

Yes.

There is no time!

There is plenty of time for this. The contract is in my hand and then on the table. There is a spoon on the table and next to it now is the nib pen.

Stick out your finger. We need a little blood. Once you sign this, you are bound to me and your soul is mine for eternity. You must understand this. It is real. Read it.

She does read it. Slowly and completely. As she works her way through the document she looks over at me and the back to the document more than a couple of times.

Give me the pen. She signs.

I lift up the document, inspect the signature and note that it is misspelled. *This will not do. You tried to cheat by misspelling your name. The signature is not valid. Go!*

Wait! I will sign correctly.

This time the signature is correct. The contract is in my hand, and up in the air, as I state to Erlyn, *From now until you die, you will call me Ninong in public and Master when in private. The other rules will be explained to you after we leave here. For now and forever, you are mine!*

I twitch the wrist of the hand that holds the document and in a flash it is gone. Erlyn turns white again.

Every cop a criminal, all the sinners saints.

You three go walk around the mall for a bit. I want to finish my coffee in peace.

I will enjoy Erlyn today, but this will be an object lesson for Amelae and Mirafe. Right now I need to start the tablet again and put some things in motion. Dany will get a text, sending him on a snipe hunt along with his mother. I need to get him out of town. At fourteen, it is far easier to make that happen if ‘mother dearest’ is part of the package.

Our two potential murderers have their own problems. There are others who have been looking for them and their boss. A few well designed text messages, allegedly from numbers the others know, will work just fine. Spoofing outgoing caller ID’s is easy enough if you can access a PBX using a PRI outbound line.

It takes twenty minutes, but the work is done. Now we wait for the result.

I text Amelae. I forgot to tell her to confiscate Erlyn’s phone. She needs to do it immediately. Once that is done, they are to meet back with me. It is time to go.

I get a text back almost immediately from Mirafe. Erlyn is fighting with Amelae. The girl is refusing to give up her phone. I text back,

OK just keep her busy for a couple of minutes and stop trying to take the phone. Just don't let her use it. I will text back soon.

I know her number and I stole her IMEI¹⁴ when she was with me at Bo’s. Logging in through the Talk ‘N’ Text servers. I find the right code and essentially brick both her phone and her SIM card. She will be unable to use the phone on the Talk ‘N’ Text network. She would need to buy another SIM from a different network. She can never get her old number back. It takes ten minutes, but it is done.

I send another text to my two stalwarts, *OK just come to Bo’s with her.*

¹⁴ The International Mobile Equipment Identity is a number, usually unique to identify GSM, LTE and other mobile phones. It can be used for stopping a stolen phone from accessing that network. For example, if a mobile phone is stolen, the owner can call his or her network provider and instruct them to "blacklist" the phone using its IMEI number. This renders the phone useless on that network and sometimes other networks too, whether or not the phone's SIM is changed.

Two minutes later, they are approaching, and Erlyn is screaming. I just do not like this kid. When they get close enough I can tell that she is accusing the girls of damaging her phone.

Erlyn, do you want to die today? Do you? Because if you keep this up, I will allow it to happen. Neither of these two, who at least were your friends before you started acting like an ass, damaged your phone. I bricked it.

What?! How?!

You need to learn some lessons. The first is that I am not to be disobeyed... ever! If I am, you will suffer. I told the girls to take your phone because I didn't want you using it for a few days. You refused and so I killed the phone myself. ... You have two minutes to convince me not to just walk away from you.

You can't! The contract!

The contract allows me to release you and your soul whenever I want. You are bound to me. I, Erlyn, am not bound to you. You have used up thirty seconds of your time.

Tell me how you kill my phone!

No. ... Amelae, Mirafe, let's go. I have had enough. She isn't worth saving. At this moment, Erlyn doesn't know that she won't be killed as soon as we leave her here. She has no way of knowing what I have done. My two know not to argue with me and they fall in as I walk away.

We get to the second floor of the parking area garage before I hear the footfalls of Erlyn running towards us. I ignore it. As we approach the Everest, my fob unlocks the doors and I get in as do three girls.

Turning around toward the back seat, I speak my mind. *Erlyn, you need to get out.*

I need your help, Po. Please.

It is no good. You are either unable or unwilling to submit. I do not need to bother punishing you as you will be dead soon anyway. There are many souls I can gather. I don't need to bother with yours.

No more problems. I promise. I will be good. I will do what you say. Please save my brother.

I told you earlier that even if I keep him alive for a few days, he will surely die. There is nothing I can do about that. So he will not die today. But he still will die in a matter of days. So will your mother. I told you this. It was only you who would live a long life. You chose to ignore my warning and sign your own mother's death warrant. I kept my part of the bargain. If you do not seek them out, right now; if you stay away from all of them and

Soul

of the others, whose company they keep, they will live a few more days. But if you go to them, you will now all die.

Po, Ninong! I was stupid. I sorry! Truly. Please help me. No more problems. I promise. Just please take care of Arjun, Eryl, and Rykel.

I already have.

What? How?

How, is none of your business. Just as how I bricked your phone is none of your business. Are we clear on that?

Po, you never left Bo's coffee. But you do all that?

Yes.

May I stay with you please?

Maybe you need more time to understand the power that exists. We will go back into the mall. Amelae and Mirafe will stay with you for the next hour. After that we will meet to eat a lunch here at the Mandarin Restaurant at noon. That may be enough time. There is to be absolutely no use of any cell phones. No exceptions. OK girls, out!

I go back to Bo's, order more coffee and read the news online. It's as good a way to kill time as any other and costs far less. I am also watching some of the SMS traffic via logs. It seems that things are about to get bloody.

I am not a fan of the Mandarin, but it is one of those places that doesn't get super busy with a lunch crowd. That affords us some privacy during the meal. The Mandarin is one of those restaurants that sells Chinese food that really isn't Chinese. How do I know that? Here's the first clue. They have General Tao Chicken on the menu. Go figure. So what do the girls order? Chicken Chow Mein, and sautéed vegetables that includes broccoli. Whatever.

The food won't make you sick and it is quiet in there. At least it is quiet for forty-five minutes. But at that point both Amelae and Mirafe's phones go nuts. There are five people dead just two streets away from the Church. The messages say that they were killed in a shootout with the police. The girls know the place. It is the street Erlyn lives on. Photos are sent over Facebook messenger. None are Dany or Erlyn's mother. When Erlyn looks at who is dead, she stops eating and starts shaking.

Erlyn, three of them, Rykel and the other two, are the three we spoke about before. The other two are your friend Chona and a young man who runs packets for your mother, correct?

Soul

Erlyn cries out, *There can't be a shootout! Chona not have a gun! The Police kill her?*

Those police run shabu too. It is a rival group. Rykel thinks theirs is spiked with strychnine and it is killing people. In this case Rykel was the good guy.

How? How? You know them? How you know this?

No. I have never seen them. Never. And how I know things is none of your concern.

But you know why Chona and the boy dead?

Your mother asked them to deliver shabu for her and Dany as they had to leave town.

How you know?

Erlyn do I have to tell you again. I am not going to explain. I told you I would do as you asked in payment for your soul. It happened. Your soul is mine.

Erlyn doesn't need to know I was watching her mother's text messages while sitting at Bo's. For her, it is seeming to be magical. And for her, it better be as she is a handful of difficulties all wrapped up in a 4' 9" package. The next days will be instructive for Mirafe, at least. I am no longer concerned about Amelae at all.

Still it is Amelae who speaks. *Last night you said that if you saved Erlyn, another would die. You said we had to choose, Erlyn or someone else. It seemed easy last night. But, Master, I know Chona. She is a friend. I not know she do this shabu, but she is a friend. Last night, we did not know Chona would die. Now I know. By saving one friend, I killed another. It like you say. You don't kill. But interfering with one death by violence may simply lead to another. I not know what to think. I am glad, Erlyn is not dead. But I maybe killed Chona.*

Amelae, all those who swim in those waters are asking to die early. You asked me to save Erlyn. I did it. Chona chose to run shabu and didn't ask for help. That was her choice. You did not kill her. But it is important to remember that asking me to save a life that will be lost to violence is not something you should do without understanding the consequences. Also, this is not over. The only way Dany and Erlyn's mother will live is if they never return. Even then, I can't be sure they will survive. If they return, they will die. Of that I am sure.

Now it is Erlyn who asks, *You will kill them?*

I kill no one. I just cannot stop those who want your mother and brother dead. I can do many things. But I cannot do that. The only one I can keep alive right now is you and I was only able to do it because Chona would die in your place. I am not allowed to kill and with the exception of some very narrow guidelines, I am not allowed to help someone in harm's way of a bullet. Even you, Erlyn, may yet die unless you do exactly what I tell

Soul

you to do without exception. One mistake and you will die in spite of what I have done. Using your phone just once will be enough to tip the scales against survival. Is that clear.

Yes, Po. It is clear.

Is it also clear that your soul belongs to me?

Yes, Po. It is clear.

Is it clear that from now on, until the day you die, you, Erlyn, belong to me?

Why that?

Because, for me to control and own your soul, I must control the vessel that contains it. Think of your soul as water. That is what you have sold me. Can you give me the water without the glass that contains it?

Oh! I not understand that part of the contract where it talk about the possession of the vessel. I am the vessel?

Yes, you are the vessel.

So when I sold my soul, I sold myself?

Yes.

That is a trick!

Even if it was a trick, what were your other options? Do you want to leave? I will relinquish the hold on your soul and you can leave.

Yes, I see. I not like, but I see. I will not leave.

So are we clear now?

Yes, Po. I am yours. It clear.

OK. Let's go home.

Things are silent inside the Everest as we traverse the streets. Each of the three has a lot to chew on. For me, there is less now. The only question revolves around Erlyn. We will see.

Entering the house, Amelae and Mirafe immediately disrobe and instruct Erlyn to do likewise. The girl is just not wanting to get with the program. I am about to do something drastic when Amelae slaps the girl across the face and tells her that she is to do as told or Hell will really break loose and it will not be a saying. *You will be the real damned, you fool! Don't you get it? He is not human!*

Of course I am human. And of course, I am not the devil. But they seem to have no other way to categorize me. I can say there is no God and no Devil. I can say it for all eternity. It makes no difference. It is how their minds work.

And so, Erlyn does disrobe. She is then pulled into the bedroom to be 'prepared.' As they drag her along, they are telling her what comes next. In that process, she swivels around to look at me just before the door closes behind her.

It takes a good forty minutes before the three appear. Erlyn looks none too happy. The girls place her on the table. Mirafe drapes the cloth over her head.

I signal to two to walk away from Erlyn. I take a moment to give them instructions. Each is to suck on a breast, massage a temple with one hand and cooperate with each other as they play with Erlyn's clit. I get no pushback.

The music blares. The incense fills the room with aromas of vanilla, cinnamon and sandalwood. Oil is applied but I avoid the breasts. My phallus is well lubricated and I enter deep into virgin territory, yet again. All this is totally new to Erlyn. The sensations are so many and so varied that she is having real trouble sorting out what she is feeling. All that is clear is that she is being stimulated in a way that defies description.

A river is pouring from between Erlyn's legs. We push her on and on, until it is clear that she is going to be unable to sustain much more. I deposit my seed and back off.

The two know the drill. I hear them telling Erlyn what happens next. As they move toward the bedroom, Amelae turns, a bit, to say, *We will come out for supper, Master.* And then the bedroom door closes.

I set up a trap on both Amelae and Mirafe's cell phones. It's not that I don't trust them. I am worried that Erlyn will grab one and send a text of her own. I need to know it, if she does. If she wants to kill herself, OK, I can't stop her, but I do not want bad guys coming here.

I continue to monitor the SMS traffic in the network that Erlyn's family swam in. There is great confusion and anger. Someone is asking where Dany and Erlyn went. Had they set Rykel and his guys up to be killed? It sure seems that way to some of them. Others are saying, why would they do that? The answer comes and it is a story about the packets that Dany lost. They don't know about Erlyn, but they now connect Dany and his Mom. If those two show up, they are dead.

I text the Mom, spoofing Erlyn's now dead cell number. *All are looking to kill you and Dany. I am in hiding. Do not come back. Never come back! Do not look for me. If you do we all die. Last text! I am removing the SIM and smashing the phone so no one ever sees this. Love you. Bye forever!*

The Mom answers but she will not get a reply.

The supper food is laid upon the table and all three girls join me. Erlyn is fidgeting. I gather it is because she is naked. The others tease her. It isn't helping but I doubt it is hurting. I ignore it.

Po?

Erlyn, when in this house you will call me Master and nothing else.

Master? Are Dany and my Mother OK?

I do not know.

Are they alive?

Yes, for the moment they are alive.

How you know this?

Erlyn, stop asking me questions like that. I am not going to tell you how I know things, or how I do things. All you need to know is that I tell you the truth and if I don't know something, I will tell you that too.

She is quiet for a bit, but she is far from happy.

The rest of the meal is eaten in silence. There is the beginning of an idea, possibly between Amelae and Mirafe, that it was a mistake to step in. No, it is not that they hate Erlyn. It's just that we can't really help her. Erlyn is not fitting in and in the end she will most likely leave and then subsequently die. I haven't said a word about this. But I can see it in their continence.

After dinner as the girls excuse themselves so that they might watch the teleserye, Mirafe whispers that Erlyn is in no condition for another fucking tonight.

I guess I am not surprised. As it is, I am not wanting any of them at the moment. I retire to a book and the screens that are tracking the SMS traffic.

There is a frantic search going on for Dany and his Mother. One person is asking about Erlyn. Right now, no one else is echoing that.

I am pretty sure I know how this is going to end.

Soul

I pick up a book that I have been reading and try to relax. My shoulders are tight, I am edgy and just uncomfortable. I pour myself a brandy and return to the book. But I can't concentrate. My mind wanders to thoughts about my daughter. How would I feel if someone wanted to kill her? What would I do? Would I violate my own rules and ethics?

I try reading again. Maybe I can relax enough to get through a few pages.

I hear a ping. Mirafe has texted someone. I look at the log. It wasn't Mirafe who sent the text.

Have some sympathy, and some taste.

The text itself isn't going to cause me any trouble, but it does set things in motion. I know what is about to happen, and I have a pretty good guess of how it will end.

There is nothing I need to do now, and no one I need to contact. I swirl the brandy in my glass. The mostly flat wide bottom and the gradually curved sides provide my hand a comfortable way to gently warm the liquid, and the sides keep it on the lower reaches of the glass as it swirls, releasing its aroma. Its essence. The taste is not harsh like that of even the best whiskies. It is mellow. The alcohol is only 80 proof. But I don't drink it to get drunk. Why some seek a high proof is beyond me.

The distilled wine slides over my tongue and down my throat without complaint. The warmth of it does still my previously uneasy aspect. Things are settling. Not as one might wish, but rather as it needs to be.

Accepting reality, and accommodating the results, allows for both compassion and understanding.

I finish a chapter before deciding it is time to sleep.

I am up and about at four in the morning. That is early enough the watch Erlyn slip out of the bedroom, clothed and make her way to the front door. She does not see me. She does not know I have removed the security measures that would have inhibited her from leaving. She makes her way out, and is gone.

I am still on my first mug of coffee. The sun has yet to rise.

I am on my second cup when Amelae appears from the bedroom. She looks a bit panicky. She is looking around and in a moment of surprise sees me rather than the girl for whom she was searching.

Sit down. You can stop your search. Erlyn is gone.

You allow this?

I do not force anyone to stay. Each of you is fully informed of the consequences of your choices. Each of you then chooses. It is called Free Will. Each of you has that. But Free Will does not make the consequences plastic to your desires. Consequences are real and often immutable. ... We all operate in this world in that manner. Erlyn was fully informed on the matter. She, never-the-less, chose a path that will probably see her killed.

Soul

That she is hoping that she will live, and that she will see her brother again, is driving her in spite of what she has been told. She just doesn't 'believe.' She is sure that all I have done are tricks and once she is gone, she can control the outcome.

She will die?

Yes, I think she will.

So we chose the wrong one! We killed Chona for no reason!

It is not clear how long Chona might have lived. Death in her line of work is more than an occupational hazard.

I know this is weird, but I need to feel you inside me. I feel empty, scared.

I understand and I am more than willing to take you, but you have not thought about Mirafe.

Why? She sleeps.

And when she wakes? You are not to be found. I am not to be found. Erlyn is not to be found? Erlyn's clothing is gone. What does she think? How does she feel? What will she do?

Oh, I not think. What we do?

Wake Mirafe. Be close to her and tell her what has happen. Then if you still want, I will be here in the house.

Amelae returns to her bedroom. I retrieve my tablet. I can see enough from that for now. Erlyn has no cellphone. She can text no one. Her mother is a different story. She can and is texting. What she does not know, cannot know, is that she is texting the very people who want her and Dany dead. By the time she and they meet up, Erlyn will be with her. I am not all knowing. Maybe the family survives this, but if I was a bookmaker, the odds would be heavily against that outcome. I would have better odds of picking the winners of a *superfecta*¹⁵, by throwing darts at a board while blindfolded.

I can see what starts as a trickle of text messages, becomes a volley of confirmations in regards to a suggested plan. And then the messages are silent. What will likely occur has been agreed to by the actors. All now go about their lives without further comment.

¹⁵ A type of bet, especially on horse races, in which the bettor must select the first four finishers in exact order.

For me, there is the need to add another girl, here. She, who will be the third. I have four possible candidates. It is time to look into each one. I do not need another Erlyn.

An hour later, I know I have two possible candidates and two I just don't know enough about. For those, I need more information and it is not clear that the girls will be able to enlarge on what I have now. Still there are the two and I really only need to add one more. And, maybe I really don't need to add any more at all. I suspect Mirafe will now not be a concern for me. Possibly the only reason to add a third, is because I told the girls I would and to change my mind now might suggest I was fallible. That is something I ought to avoid at the moment.

I concentrate on the two possible ones and am still digging when the girls tap my shoulder.

Yes? It looks like they have both been crying.

Amelae inquires, *Any news?*

About Erlyn?

Yes, Master.

No, and I don't expect any until this afternoon.

What then?

Then there will be news. I haven't had any breakfast yet, have you girls eaten?

No, Master.

OK, let's have a bite.

After, may we be with you? Will you fill us? We both need this.

I am not sure how I fill both of you, but yes, after we eat, we will see how this works.

Do I enjoy sex? Sure. Yes. Am I a satyr? No.

In truth I didn't select these girls to be a harem as much as to see what it might take to get them to see that all they believe is pure bunk. At each step along the way, I have been over playing the thing, while trying to stay in character. Still, rather than getting them to slowly perceive the craziness of such beliefs, it appears that I have become a deity.

I initially hoped that I could get three girls to grasp the craziness of such beliefs. I hoped they might be my assistants in defrocking the charlatans. That will not happen.

I have progressively allowed them to see that I am the one setting the table. That they smell the incense because there is a fan. I thought by the third time they saw a contract disappear, that they would have figured out I was using flash paper.

In the beginning I didn't want to walk away from the role and hid some of that because I was afraid of the angry backlash. Now? Now I am afraid of what I will do to their psyches. These two seem to be convinced that I am not really human. Telling them I am, will have no impact. Them seeing me starting the fan or setting the food out doesn't seem to matter. They will not believe that I am not a real deity.

So what am I to do with these girls now? Am I to found a new religion?

I read once that the problem with satire is that it actually doesn't work for those you are skewering. They think the satire is truth. Satire only plays to the folks who are already inclined to make fun of that which is being satirized. It happened to me as a student journalist. I wrote a broadly over the top piece. What happened? I won an award from the very folks I was poking fun at. It was not a small award. It was a national award.

Maybe I should have remembered that before I started all this. But my concern is a little too late. I had better eat a bunch of Durian. They say it is an aphrodisiac. It looks like I am going to need all the help I can get. I sneak a DriveMax pill when I go to the bathroom.

Our breakfast is a quiet and sober repast. The girls are thinking about Erlyn. I am really not. I am trying to sort out who the next girl will be. Sure, I am sad for Erlyn, but she is fully responsible for each of the three deaths she will cause today. No one in the world will be more to blame than she is. Even the guys who kill her are not as much to blame, at least for the potential loss of her life as she is. And as to the loss of her mother's life, she too is the proximate cause of that already. Even if that death was not to happen today, it was going to happen because of her choices. I can feel sympathy. But I feel not a scintilla of responsibility. And so my mind is on two other girls. Ones I have never met.

As the meal ends, Amelae receives a text. Her mother needs her. They need to go back to the hospital. Her mother is having an adverse reaction to a drug that was prescribed at the last visit to the hospital. Her uncle still has money for additional meds. Nothing is needed in that regard. I tell Amelae that she is to call me before any trip to the cashier. She simply doesn't put two and two together. She simply acknowledges that she will do it.

Twenty minutes later Amelae is gone and I am alone with Mirafe. It wasn't that long ago that Mirafe was really pissed with me for jamming her up regarding the family taxes. Now?

Master will you lie down with me?

I take Mirafe to her bedroom, disrobe and join her under the sheet. I bring her to me, just to hold her and comfort her. She is enjoying it, but snakes her hand down to my penis. I am hard but not rigid. She strokes me, bringing forth desire and need.

I slide into her, eliciting sighs of pleasure and contentment. We have no clock on us and no appointments we need to keep. I am in no hurry. Mirafe needs to feel a connection. That is what I am providing. It is a physical connection. It is a meaningful connection. There is a reality to it. It doesn't require an act of faith.

This is the first time we actually make love in a normal fashion. It is not a ceremony. There is no music or incense. There are no clamps. It is just the two of us, on a mattress, fucking away, if not like rabbits, then at least like lovers.

I am not trying to 'get her off.' I am trying to 'be with her.' To give her a sense of safety, before a girl, who slept in her bed last night, gets gunned down today.

Mirafe's arms are around me. She needs to feel me firmly against her small body. Her fingers almost dig into my flesh as she grasps me to her. Small noises escape from her that bear no resemblance to language.

We rut on and on. We burn through the time, taking no notice. But eventually both of us feel a need for completion. I sense it in her, and possibly she in me?

My cum enters her and she seems at peace with that fact. There is no fear of an unwanted pregnancy that so animated her before. We rest in each other's arms.

Master?

Yes?

Is this what you mean when you say you care for us? There is a giggle that follows. I say nothing. I kiss her forehead.

A few minutes later I tell her I have work to do. I ask her about one of the girls that I am researching. The answers match what I have been seeing. It is

time for me to get up and I do, telling her to rest. That is good for my seed if she does. She only smiles and says, *Yes Master.*

I see to a lunch meal and then check the SMS traffic. I have some catching up to do. All remain alive for the moment. I spend a little time checking some additional aspects of the girl I spoke to Mirafe about. Maybe she will be the one. It looks promising.

I notice some new SMS traffic just as a text comes in to my phone. Amelae has just received the note to take to the cashier.

It doesn't take more than two minutes to get the money into the correct account and log out. I text back... *Just saw the message, please tell your Mother that she has my attention. See you this afternoon?*

Twenty minutes later I get her reply. *I will be back before four. Everything goes OK. Funny thing today. All OK. I will tell when I get home.*

I wonder if I can see who logged into her Mom's account and when. I log back in. I can see the account access history in the administrative logs. There were four logins to her Mom's account. The first one was about ten minutes before I got the text. It was the person posting the charge. Then a second access from the cashier's PC about a minute later. It is three minutes before Amelae texts me that she is about to go to the cashier. Next I see my previous login which is only a minute after the text I received. Finally a four minutes later I see the cashier again.

I can't wait to hear how Amelae processed what happened today.

My mind shifts to Erlyn. For the first time since I met the girl, I have the sense that she believes that she failed in so many ways. There is no SMS traffic at the moment. All is silent. It is happening... right now.

I leave the screens, and return to Mirafe rejoining her on the bed. I put my arms around her and rest. Mirafe snuggles in.

We eat a late lunch before she excuses herself to watch some of Showtime. I return to my book. Neither of us wants to know what has happened with Erlyn and her family. It is best left alone.

I am still reading and Mirafe is still watching TV when Amelae returns. She is ebullient, plopping down on my lap and giving me a kiss, something I certainly did not expect.

OK, why the happy stuff?

You! You!!! Ha! Why the fools pray to a false God? You are God!

Soul

I am not God. That guy is an AssWipe! So what happened?

The Cashier. Master, she see me before they hand me the bill, and decide she will see what I have put into the account. They already posted the bill before they give it to me. She see that I have a charge to pay. She watch me the whole time from then on to see how I make the bill go to zero. But, of course, I not do anything! That is you! When I get to the cashier, she is sneering, and say I have a bill to pay. I say I do not, that it is paid! She call me a liar. She say she has already checked. I say, 'you check again.' She do and then she scream. She say, 'not possible!' How it done? How I trick them. I say I not trick anyone. I say it is the work of the divine. I say you protect me and my mother because my soul is in your hands. She cross herself. I laugh and say, 'Ha, that a false God!' and walk away. Everyone moves away from me. Some kneel down! The doctors who treat my mother say, 'No more bills. You come and we will take care of you. Just do not get angry with us.' I say OK.

And that is how religions start. Yup, sure enough, that is no different from when we had Jesus do the water and wine trick. It doesn't take much. And Amelae? Will they see her as a disciple? How many miracles does it take?

Master, my Mother say she will pray to you, but not know your name. I tell her to pray to the Master. She say OK. From now on, no praying to God. She will pray to our Master. Someone hear us and ask, 'If I pray to your Master, will I go to heaven?' I tell him, 'Master say that there no heaven, and no hell. It just a con. The thing is to be good here. Here is what matters.' That right, Master? I say right?

You said fine. I don't think I could have said it any better. I couldn't, but my life is now in danger. It's not the drug lords who will kill me. It is the Church. They will need me dead and dead soon, before it becomes too late to stop the results, even if I am dead.

Amelae, it is good news that they will not bill your mother. That means you do not need to go back there. It is a good thing because I am fearful of what the priests will do to you if you return.

Oh! I have not thought of that. OK. I understand. Like Jesus, right?

Yes, exactly.

I do wrong?

No, but we need to be more careful.

Yes, Master. Thank you for not being angry with me for the sin of my pride.

Amelae, there is no sin. I am happy you are proud. It is just that in this case, it might have bad results for us. I am not angry, because there is nothing to be angry about. You obeyed me entirely.

Soul

And that gets another hug and two more kisses. There are definite benefits to being a divine.

Jig-Saw Puzzle

There are definite drawbacks with being perceived as divine. The primary one is that others get really pissed off as you are raining on their parade.

Being a magician is OK. You are a sideshow. A carnny act. Being a divine is something else entirely. The first thing is that it seems that everyone has a vested interest in proving that the claim is bunk. And so I have to send the dogs on a very nasty and false trail.

The first dog contacts Amelae only an hour after she returns home. It is a text. *Where is your Master?*

I am standing next to her as she types, *Hindi ko alam*¹⁶.

How to you know him?

*He just appears out of nowhere. I cannot summons him. I have not seen him for a while. All I know is that he takes care of my Nanay.*¹⁷

Why does he do that?

He said, 'Sell me your soul and I will take care of your Mother until she dies.'

You see him after that?

No.

What he look like?

Smoke.

That it? Just smoke?

Oo¹⁸.

What else he say?

He say, "God" is not real God. He say there is no Devil. All silly talk. He say, no heaven, no hell. He not give life. He not take life. He can only make life a little easier for some. Soul is a vapor at the end of life, not life eternal. He collects vapors. Nothing else.

What else he say?

¹⁶ I do not know.

¹⁷ Mother.

¹⁸ Yes.

Soul

Never lie about this. If someone ask you to lie, I will know and they will be hurt.

He really say this?

Oo.

What else he say?

Wala na¹⁹.

When you pray, does he answer you?

Hindi²⁰. He just takes care of my mother. That is all.

Thank you for your answers.

The volley of texts ends. I am not relieved, but I think the answers will cause both some confusion and a desire to sweep it under the rug. Their bullshit God is selling life eternal. So a competitor, who is not competing for money and is not offering salvation is not a divine they really want to acknowledge. There is nothing to fight. The 'being is Smoke' and not walking on the earth. How do you jail, much less kill Smoke? On top of that, this being is doing real 'miracles,' giving money instead of taking any money. How do they fight that?

A new text arrives. *You must never mention this 'Master' again. Your life is a risk.*

I am prompting her on her answers.

Why my life at risk? Who want to kill me?

Believers in our Savior.

OK. I not mention the Master, but what happens when he do things? Are you telling me to lie?

Yes, you not know who I am so I cannot be hurt.

I think you are wrong. He is powerful. I worry for you and your family now.

You are a stupid girl. Do as I say.

Tell me that tomorrow. I do not think you understand. Do not text me again until then.

And Amelae turns off her phone. She just doesn't want to see any more texts. The reality that the texts may be continuing doesn't seem to connect.

Amelae turns to me. *I am sorry for what I say earlier.*

¹⁹ Nothing else.

²⁰ No.

Soul

Yes I know. There is only one thing you need to know now. I am not angry with you. You are still mine. You are not in trouble with me. Allow me to deal with the others. I need to be alone for a while now.

I get a look that I can only describe as a mix of fear and awe. And then she leaves me, and she enters her bedroom.

I work the connections from her phone back through the logs. I can see a matrix of messages between two priests, a city official and some ranking PNP officers. I can see all the messages of each of them going back for months. It is time to have some fun.

One of the Priests is having an affair with a parishioner. The woman's husband doesn't know... or at least he didn't know until now.

The other is blackmailing another Priest about a matter of incest. ... Ooops. The Priest who is being blackmailed just now got informed that if his blackmailer doesn't die tonight, his secret will be out in the public.

The PNP Captain's wife is fucking around on him. I warn her that she had better disappear tonight and never return as he will learn of her adultery in the morning. A local newspaper also gets a scoop on how this guy is running drugs as a side business.

The city official has a problem with accepting bribes. A list of them just, and gee whiz by accident, falls into the hands of those who lost bids due to the bribes.

It has taken me a while, and it is late but I am done. Let's see what the morning brings.

I wander out to grab a bit only to find both girls sitting at the table. Neither is talking. Both look ashen.

It is Mirafe who finds her voice. *Master, you hear the news?*

No. What is it?

Many things. First, Dany and his mother are dead. Killed. They say others dead too. But no names. No word about Erlyn. Maybe they not know her name.

I see. Is there more?

Yes, much more. It is just now reported. Two Priests were murdered tonight.

Wow. Do we know them?

Amelae know both. They are from her mother's parish.

Hub. OK. Well that is a lot of news.

Not all.

There is more?

Yes. It just reported, the vice mayor dead from suicide. Also just now Amelae get a text. 'Tell your God to stop! We not cause any more trouble for you!'

I see. Do you want to answer that?

We did. We say, 'We not know about this and no way to tell Master to stop. He warn you. I warn you what he say. Now no choice. You not like what Master do? Ask your God to stop it and see if that happen. Then tell me, which is stronger.' ... Master, you did this? You say you not kill.

I can't and I didn't. Others did. I didn't tell anyone to kill anyone. All I did is give others reason to want to kill, or hurt, or forgive. It was up to each one to make a choice.

Amelae is crying. This my fault. I sorry.

This is not your fault. There was no reason to threaten your life. They did it to themselves. They threatened violence, violence found them. It is as it needed to be. It is balance.

But they not threaten you. Only me. You do all this to protect me? Why? When I die you get my soul. Why not now for you?

Amelae, I want you to die of old age. Not before. I will protect you until that time. Then we can both be happy about what I collect.

See, Master, that why I pray to you. Truly, I do.

I didn't get lucky finding the dirt on those guys. Like I said before, we get the souls of Priests most of the time. They and murderers are the most reliable groups we have. Right behind them are politicians and policemen. Drug dealers, burglars, rapists and lawyers are further down on the list. I would have been far more surprised if I didn't find anything on any one of those guys.

My best guess is that we will have no other issues in this regard for a while. The word will get out locally to not mess with Amelae's Master. My concern now is what happens when the word spreads. But that won't be for a while. Anyway I will monitor some communications just in case.

For a while tonight I just sit on a couch with the girls on either side of me. My arms holding them close. They have missed their teleserye tonight. We turn on the local news only to see reports of that which we have been discussing. In all of it, there is no mention of me or Amelae, or of Erlyn for that matter.

Mirafe asks me what is like to be a god.

Soul

I am not a god. Nothing I did today is something that anyone, with the skills I have, could not have done.

Ha! Mortals not have your skills.

No, Mirafe, some do. This is true. I did nothing a human cannot do. I am not a god. I never told you I was a god.

True, you say you are Master. Not Juan. Not Dodong... no, you are Master. Amelae is right to pray to you. May we be with you tonight?

No. I have work to do. You two go to bed. I will see you in the morning.

They do go to bed and I choose the next girl.

This kid has been mind-fucked by a priest, who has her convinced that her heart is filled with such sin that if she doesn't do as he directs her, she will burn in hell forever. She's a nervous wreck and is unable to eat without puking.

This priest is pissing me off. I decide it is time to intervene. I send two SMS messages. One to her, supposedly from his phone, telling her to meet him at a specific bench in a park tomorrow at nine in the morning. I send him a text. The number +39-06-698-84300 will display on his phone. It is a number for the Vatican. The message says, *'His Holiness wishes to inform you that it is required that you stop any and all contact and all activities with and regarding young women immediately. There must not be any exception.'*

That ought to make things interesting.

I retire for the evening.

I enjoy the early morning. It is cool, and quiet. I catch up on the doings of the previous evening. I have time to think without disturbance. The girls are rarely up before five and often not until a half hour later than that.

There has been not a peep from our obnoxious priest. Nor has there been a peep from our girl. Did she get the text? Yes, I am sure she did.

I see no interesting activity regarding the mess we had with Erlyn. That network, while not silent, has other fish to fry. I see nothing related to the mess we had with Amelae yesterday, other than confusion. None of it is pointing back to us.

I do see one thing of note. I need to speak with Mirafe.

I think I need a passion fruit.

Good morning Master.

Mirafe, come sit by me.

Master?

I have some news. It is not good news, but it is unwise to keep it from you. ... I believe your father is in trouble.

But you take care of the taxes on the land!

Yes. That in an odd way is connected to this. Now that the land is safe, your father has been drinking very heavily every day. He is spending all the money your family has for rice. His liver is going to fail. There is nothing I can do for him. But before he dies, he will leave your family without food or money. And he will once again not be paying the land taxes. I cannot help the next time.

I understand. I need to go back home.

Yes, I agree. I want to see you back here by tomorrow night. Understood?

Yes, Master. Master?

Yes?

Thank you for telling me.

I am not sure I did you any favors. There are no good answers. Maybe only less bad ones.

I understand. I know I am only seventeen and maybe a child still to my family. But they need to make a choice. Just as you cannot help them, I cannot do this for them. Still they need to be told. They need to choose. Do I understand correctly?

Yes.

OK I go. I know maybe I not make a difference. My life is not with them. But I can tell them what they need to hear. It then up to them. It is Free Will.

After all that, I get a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Amelae shows her face fifteen minutes later. She is not bubbly today. The events of yesterday have drained some of that from her.

Girls, I am going to see if we can add Aina. Any questions?

Mirafe asks, When?

I meet her in a little more than two hours.

Oh! OK if I am not here?

Yes, you need to go to your family's home. Amelae, you look like you want to speak but I do not hear anything.

Soul

Master, will there be any more deaths?

Not from what is occurring with Aina.

Good. Master do you know how many die in the past three days?

Yes. It is sad, but it does happen. It is not something that makes me any happier than it does you. ... Will you accompany me today?

Really? You want me there?

Yes. This girl is sick. We must bring back her health before she joins with me. She is scared and alone. I need you today. Will you come?

Yes. Of course yes! Master, you not ask. You tell. That is enough.

At nine in the morning, Amelae and I approach the bench. Aina is already there. We sit down, with the girl between us. I have given Amelae the opening lines. After that I figure we will wing it.

He not coming, Aina.

I know you. Amelae, correct?

Yes. The priest is not coming.

How you know he not come?

Because the divine one, the Master of all, he was the one to send you the message. The Priest will never speak to you again. The Master, he decide it must be this way. He say you have suffered far too long. He say you have no sin to atone for. He say you need to be loved, cherished and made healthy again. He say there is nothing bad in you. He is angry with the priest for scaring you. The Master say, if you believe in him there will never be a hell. You will not burn for eternity. The Master promises this. He says, no sin can make you unworthy. You are worthy, no matter what you may have in your heart. He say he not care if you sin, so long as you accept the Master. The Master say, it is evil for a man to scare you like the priest do. The Master hates such evil and loves sweet hearts like yours.

Who is this Master?

He is the true divine one. He is not a false god who makes you feel pain and fear. But he say, before you know more, he wants you healthier, happier. He wants you more at peace. Then he will allow you to feel the power of the Master. The Master wants you to know these things. There is a soul, but there is no life after death. There is no eternal. Your soul is the perfume of your essence, but it is not you and not your consciousness. The Master will care for your soul when you pass from the earth. But there is no heaven, no hell and no sin. There are only acts of good and bad. Master knows you have done only good.

Soul

Master say it is only the acts that count. It is time for you to come with us Aina. There is no other path for you.

Will the Master hurt me if I do bad?

No. The only one that hurts you if you do bad, is you.

The priest will be angry. I cannot.

Try to call the priest.

She does try. And someone does answer, but it is not the priest. She asks to speak to him. She is told that the priest has been ordered from the highest of high, that he is not to ever speak to her again. The call ends.

Aina, it is time to go. You need to enter the world of the Master. He has set a place for you. Your time of suffering is over. He has heard and ends it.

She turns to me. *Who are you?*

I, am the Master.

She faints.

But just for a moment, and then she just seems bewildered. Amelae, takes her elbow and gets the girl to stand. Aina is not stable on her gams but we are able to get her into the Everest for a trip back to the house.

It really didn't go in a manner I would have preferred but as I was the one to enlist Amelae and give her the speaking part, I don't have a lot of room to complain. I do have a contract prepared for Aina at the house. At this point I have no idea if she is fully of compos mentis to sign it.

When we reach the house, I see someone slouched down by the side of the gate. Whoever it is seems to be in bad shape. As I was not there, and the guard does not know the person as having rights to enter, the result is what we see.

I roll down the window to speak to the guard as the gate opens. Whoever it is, gets up and moves towards the vehicle. The guard gets between us in an effort to protect me if needed. I cannot see a face, but I hear a voice.

Allow her in, Edgar. I know her. I drive into the lot, parking the Everest under the car port.

Amelae and I are assisting Aina out of the vehicle and toward the front door, when the other girl grabs me by my legs, prostrates herself at my feet and kisses them!

Parachute Woman

Get up Erlyn! You are here and safe. You don't need to kiss my feet.

Master, you save my life. You know you do. I know you do. I am alive because you will it. Why I not kiss the feet of my savior?

Get up and come inside.

Amelae already thinks I am a divine being. This crap is just reinforcing that. Aina is in a vulnerable state. She was confused, but I suspect, had sincere and deep doubts about this divine hoo-hah. But now?

I get the assembled inside which only scrambles Aina's head further as both girls disrobe once the front door is closed.

I can see that there are two problems with Erlyn. For one thing, she is filthy and I do not just mean dirty. I mean filth. The other is that she has what appears to be a flesh wound. It looks like it was caused by a bullet.

Amelae! Take Erlyn into the shower and clean her up now! I am going to call a doctor. She needs help with that wound.

Amelae and Erlyn, naked as they be, leave us. I am left with Aina. I ask her to sit down. She does, as I go to the kitchen and pour both of us a tall cool glass of pineapple juice. I hand Aina a glass, and take a sip from mine.

She say you save her life. She call you her Savior, but you are not Jesus. How are you a Savior?

I am not. I know Erlyn thinks I am. I am not.

I think Amelae think the same thing.

She thinks I am divine. That is different from "Savior." I have never claimed to be divine. I do collect souls and I will protect you while you live. I cannot give or take life. There is no heaven and there is no hell, so there is no way I can be a savior.

But you saved that girl's life. She say it.

I know she thinks it. That does not make it true. What is true, is that you are safe. There is no sin. You are a good person. I will protect you, if you sell me your soul.

She takes a sip of the juice. *I not talk about my soul. This tastes good. Thank you.*

Soul

Will you excuse me? I want to call a doctor to look at Erlyn. And while the doctor is here, I want him to look at you. You are painfully thin. I know you haven't been eating, but I think a check with a doctor is needed.

I cannot afford it.

I am paying. So no problem.

Why you do this?

Because I want to make sure you live a long time.

Why that, if you want my soul?

Because a soul from someone who has lived a long life is the best type of soul there is.

That gets a surprised look. I take my leave of the girl as she sips the juice.

The call doesn't take long. The doc won't get here for hours, but at least he is coming. I return to where Aina is and keep up a casual and desultory conversation about her family, life goals, fashion, and her friends, while I put some food out on the table. It is too early for lunch, but I suspect neither Erlyn nor Aina has eaten for quite a while. As we chat I toss her a lakatan banana. Without thinking, she peels and eats it, while keeping up with the conversation we are engaged in.

Why do they think you are a god? You seem normal to me.

You mean other than the bit about collecting souls?

I get a laugh. *Yes, other than that!*

Oh, it's complicated, but after a while you will sort it out.

She looks at the remains of the banana, the peel, at the empty juice glass and then back at me. *You just did that, didn't you?*

Do what, Aina?

This the first time I eat and happy in a long time. How you do that?

I didn't do anything. You were hungry and you ate a banana. What is more normal than that?

Is it a trick?

No, no trick. I didn't do anything. It just happened. That's all.

She is just looking at me. I smile back. Amelae and Erlyn reenter the room. The wound on Erlyn looks nasty, but not in any way life threatening. I tell her the doctor will be here this afternoon.

Amelae is giving me a hard look. *Master?*

Yes?

I think you have some explaining. How you do what you do?

Just what are you talking about?

You save the life of Erlyn.

I didn't.

You say you not lie. Why you lie now?

I am not lying. Erlyn, I didn't save your life. You saved your own life.

No! I not able, I stuck. I am hiding behind a tricycle. There is a door behind me but a big lock is on it and I cannot open the door. I am already hurt by a bullet, but no one know it. They are coming my way. They will see me. If they do I will die. Just like you tell me, if I go, we all die. I see Dany die. I see them kill my mother. I know, I am next. They coming. I know there is truth in you. I know you try to save my life but I am too stupid to be a good girl and listen to you. I know you not punishing me. I know I do this to myself. I know you are the only real god. All the others are kwak-kwak²¹. I pray to you to save me. When I do that, the lock falls open. I sneak into the building and they not find me. I hide in there for a long time. I afraid to come out until the sun is down and it is dark. I have no money. It take a long time to walk here and I am hurt. That make it slow, too.

Once again Amelae has that damned look on her face. *So why you lie?*

I am not lying. Maybe the lock opened because a stray bullet hit it. I don't know. Erlyn you are very lucky. Even if I had opened the lock, that on its own didn't save Erlyn. It required the bad guys to not test the door. It required that the wound was not too bad. There was a lot of luck in this.

But you opened the lock, Master.

You do not know this, Amelae. You want it to be true, but you do not know how the lock opened.

Master, you make miracles. This is not the first. You make money appear in my mother's account at the hospital. Not once, not twice, no! ... Three times! Three men die because they threaten me. You know about what people are telling me before I even get the text. And you know what I text someone without seeing my phone. Do not say you are not divine. Do not say there are no miracles. Do not lie.

²¹ Quacks. As in a quack physician. In this case a false god.

Soul

Aina has been listening to this. *Po, I am taught that God wants us to bow down and supplicate ourselves to him. We are to beseech him to protect us. You are saying, no, do not pray to me. Do not say I am a god. But I think it is clear you are God. I am confused.*

I am not God. Your "god" is a lazy asshole. I am not "a god." Real gods give and take lives. I do not do that. I am prohibited from both actions. I can give you a happy life if you want it. But to do that you must give me your soul. I am not sure you want to do that.

They did it, right? (She is referring to Amelae and Erlyn.)

Yes, they have.

Erlyn disobeyed you but you saved her life anyway. Correct?

No. She did disobey me. But I did not save her life. She did that.

Erlyn is not having this. You unlocked the door! Stop being difficult.

I can't stop you from believing it. I am not admitting it.

Aina is confused by all this. What I do to sell my soul?

At the moment, I will not take it. You need to eat, gain weight and get healthier. I find your condition scary. Once you are healthy, I will allow it.

Am I supposed to remove my clothing?

Not before I take ownership of your soul. Stay dressed until then.

Am I supposed to call you Master?

Call me Ninong for now. Amelae, take Aina to your bedroom, she needs to sleep and eat and sleep, for a few days.

Yes, Master. And those two leave the room. I grab two more bananas and toss one to Erlyn.

Erlyn, what am I to do with you? She is grinning a little bit.

Use me anyway you want. I am your girl now, Master. There is no other way. And she takes a good sized bite of the banana.

I just nod. She means it. It took losing everything she had before she figured it out, but she has.

So now I really don't need Aina here, but I suspect she will stay. At the moment I have two who need medical attention and bed rest, one away and

only one who is not otherwise unavailable. It takes four to have one. It explains a great deal as to why marriage is such a bad option.

Erlyn are you sure you don't need some time just to process the loss of your family?

What you think I doing since they killed? They choose that life. Maybe my mother live longer, maybe not. But she get Chona and that boy killed because she not there to run the drugs. So maybe I stupid. Maybe I am selfish and not see truth. Maybe I should be gone from them and let them live or die without me. Maybe I not hear what you trying to tell me. I hear it now. ... I need to not let love hide evil. I do that. You try to tell me that, without being mean. I think you mean, but it not true. You not say to me, 'why I am stupid, loving evil people.' No, you just say you cannot help Dany, but if I stay away maybe my mother, even though she is evil, she will live. Yes that what you tell me, but you nice about it. Still, I am stupid and I not listen right. So, now I know. Now I know to listen to you. You say important things. Just like you ask Amelae and Mirafe, who should die. They not think what that means. Now they do. Now they know. I think if there something wrong, it you too nice.

There's a criticism I never thought I would hear. And I sure as hell never expected to hear it from Erlyn. I toss her another lakatan. She just smiles as she catches it. *It true, see you are too nice. I am tired, Master. OK if I go to bed?*

It's a good idea. See you later. Erlyn limps off to the bedroom as Amelae exits it. *Thank you for saving her life, Master.*

Will you stop it, please? I do not know why the lock came loose. I can do many things. That is something I never claimed to be able to do.

When the doctor coming?

I don't think we will see him earlier than three and maybe not until far later. ... There will be four of you. I need to split you up between two bedrooms. Who do you want to be with?

We all be together for now. Maybe we do that later. I will let you know. Master, that priest was evil, what he do to Aina.

Yes, he was. Priests are a real problem in that way. In another, we get all their souls. But I wish it wasn't so easy with them.

I not understand. You want all of us who don't or can't give ourselves to this 'god,' to give our souls to you, but you don't like evil.

The other side uses a con to get souls. It is the promise of life after death. Christians, Muslims, Hindus all do that. With the Hindu it is re-incarnation but he gets them all if they really buy the bullshit. It drives us crazy. It's a lie. ... We get those who don't believe and those who think they aren't good enough. Yes sure we get real creeps too, but

Soul

that doesn't mean we have to like the creeps. ... We just want the average soul from the average person. There is nothing evil about us. Look at it this way, maybe I have lost the priest. Maybe he thinks it is God who was warning him and his soul goes the other way. We get Aina. So even if it is just an even swap. I figure we won.

You know I hear what Erlyn tell you. Maybe you are too nice! And she giggles.

Come with me?

Where we going, Master?

To my bed.

I have never had one of them in my bedroom. It is in a part of the house she has never had a chance to see before, as it is beyond a locked door that opens on to a hallway. My bedroom, library/study, and office/work area are all back here. Once in the hallway, I lock the door behind us. I lead her down the hallway and around a corner, before entering my bedroom.

It is spotless, Master. It only you here, di ba?

Yes it is only me.

Who care for you?

Me.

That not good. I want to do that. OK na²²?

Yes, but I will allow Erlyn to assist too.

Oh! You have decided something about us I think.

Hop up on the bed. I will be right back.

I return to my work area. I want to take a quick look at SMS traffic. There is nothing about Erlyn. There is nothing about Aina, or Amelae. All this is good. But there is traffic about Mirafe's family. There is nothing I can do. It is time I rejoin Amelae.

I am removing my clothing. Amelae asks, *Are you going to take me here?*

Yes and no. We are going to take each other. There will be no pain. We can take our time and just enjoy each other.

Master, is this not making love?

This is real caring. It is what we will have with each other.

²² Na = now. So she is asking, it is OK now that I care for your personal things?

Not love?

Love is what killed Erlyn's mother. This is caring. And with that I cup Amelae's left breast in my right hand. We are not off to the races. We are beginning a slow, leisurely exploration of each other. I find out where she is ticklish. She discovers that I am not ticklish in the least. She grumbles, that makes it so very unfair. I am simply in no rush. We just need to be together. She sees me as a god. I am not a god. This will hopefully make that clear.

Not that I can't perform. It's just that my body is simply a body. As we spend the time together, she will hopefully learn that while I am to be respected, I am safe to approach, to touch, to tease.

We roll around on the bed. I am more than a good foot taller than is she. I weigh close to double what she weighs. Still it all works and eventually I slide into her as she mounts me from above. She starts giggling.

What? I ask.

I am riding a God! For real!

OK, well, the plan isn't exactly going the way I wanted it! *Why do you keep on calling me a god? I am not a god.*

Oh yes you are. And she giggles again. *You are a shy God! You are embarrassed to be a God! Why that?* She asks as she grinds her cunt into me.

Master, can you really give me human children.

Yes.

Will they have any of your powers?

Any human can have my powers.

Answer the question!

That will be up to them.

All through this she is bouncing up and down on me. I can see it is getting her off. I reach up and pinch a tit. Sure enough, she likes that. I give both her tits a pinch and she smashes down on me hard, driving my ass into the mattress.

As much as it is getting her off, it isn't doing much for me. I roll her over and just pound her cunt for all I am worth for a few minutes before giving her the dessert I suspect she desires.

Master, maybe I can be here some nights with you?

Soul

Maybe. We will see. I go to bed late and get up very early.

How early?

Normally around four in the morning.

When you go to bed?

Around midnight.

Wow. Not much sleep! OK I see that not work. Better in the day!

Yes, better in the day.

Master, why you start with us? Why now?

I guess it was the lies of the soliciting. It was one con too many. It ticked me off. I see churches solicit all the time. OK, they do it, and I ignore it. But you were going around lying about why you needed the funds and the church had told you to do it. It was just one con too many.

They still doing it.

I know and I want to make an example of them.

When I join you, I think I am protecting the church. Now I see why you are angry with them. What we do?

Soul
Valley of the Shadow

Four females. Each of them diminutive, and one, just about, wasting away. It's not exactly an impressive army, but I don't need an army. As I have nothing planned at the moment, I don't really 'need' a single one of them.

Is this just an excuse to distract me because I miss my daughter?

I do feel her absence intensely. Her mother has been gone for so long that she is but a ghost of a memory. A memory of a memory. Her legacy is no ghost. She is flesh, blood, and part of me. She is what remains. Love blinds. It blinded me back then. Why had I not seen what was coming? I could have. I should have. It is what makes me, me. And yet I was blinded. She is gone and I could have prevented it.

I will never make that mistake again. I will never love again. Just as Erlyn has learned her lesson, I learned mine. But for me, Francine remains. She is both an anchor for me and a never ending reminder of my failure.

Be it Amelae, or Mirafe, or Erlyn, each might have been able to find love in my heart at one point. But not now. Not ever again. Still, even though I will not let love in, I will not allow anything to happen to them. So long as they want that, which I am, to them, I will protect them.

That is not to say they will not be disappointed on occasion. They will. They will have scrapes and bruises. Right now I have two that need medical attention.

The doctor is not expected for a few more hours. Amelae sleeps in my bed. I need Erlyn and Amelae to see the office/work area as it might give them a sense that what is happening is not the acts of god. I wanted to hide this before, but the balance has tipped too far in the other direction. It is a difficult balancing act. I need them to believe I am collecting souls for this to work, but I don't want to be the basis of some new religion.

I stroke Amelae's hair and she murmurs a bit, gently waking up. *Come girl, let's eat a bit and see if the other two are awake and desire some nourishment.*

Rather than get up, Amelae rolls on to me and kisses me on the lips. *I not care if you come to bed late and get up early. I want to be here.*

I see. I will consider it. Now it really is time to get up, Amelae.

When the two of us enter the dining room, I am witness to both Erlyn and Aina sitting at the table, with plates that show the evidence of a meal eaten. I am both happy and a little concerned.

Aina, I am pleased that you have found your appetite, but am concerned that if you eat too much, too fast, you will not be able to hold the food down, as your body won't be able to handle it.

Aina cracks up laughing. As I fail to see that I said anything humorous, I wait for an explanation.

I am sorry, Ninong. I do that right? I supposed to call you Ninong? Yes? OK, yes, good. Ninong, this Erlyn tells me the same thing as I start putting food on my plate. She say, slow down. There is always food here. Do not take too much right now.

Thank you, Erlyn. ... Yes Erlyn is telling you the truth. For now, stay away from the pork. Stay away from chips, and nuts. Eat rice, gulay²³, fruit, and fish. Drink tubig²⁴ or buko²⁵ or pineapple juice only. If the doctor tells you different, listen to him and not me.

Why not you? A doctor is not better than God!

OK... now listen to this and believe it. I am not God. There is to be no more of this nonsense about that in this house!

Erlyn who has been attacking a Marang with gusto, has her own take on this. *We not say it, but we think it and believe it. You do not punish for thoughts. Di ba?*

Erlyn, you clearly have a brain. Use it. If I was a god, there would be no reason for a doctor at all.

If you used all your powers, this is true. But you always say, we humans must live our lives without divine interference as much as possible. The only exception you make is for the purchasing of souls. So, see, we need to see a doctor. Yes, I use my brain. OK?

I load up a plate with some cold rotisserie BBQ chicken, rice, and chunks of very sweet pineapple, sit down and lick my verbal wounds. They just won't give up.

Talk swirls around me, but I am ignoring it. Amelae's phone indicates a text message. *Master, you need to see this.*

²³ Vegetables.

²⁴ Water

²⁵ Coconut juice.

I look at the message on her phone. *My wife and children have left me. I am being investigated for selling drugs. Please tell your Master, I will stop praying to Lord God Jesus. I will pray to him. Just please stop this!*

I tell her to text back. *What is done is done. It cannot be undone. I cannot ask the Master for anything. That is not how it works. You are the one who threatened me yesterday. I warn you then. Yesterday you say I am stupid. Just be thankful you are still alive.*

Amelae has sent the message, but she is unhappy.

OK, girl, what's the problem?

Please fix this for him.

I can't.

You mean you won't!

No, Amelae, I really can't. Let me explain. His wife is the mistress of another man. She has left him and will not return. There is nothing I can do to make her return to him. The information about his illegal drug activities has been turned over to others. I cannot remove what others now know. Once informed, based on actions he really took, I cannot change reality. Just like I cannot bring the other three back from the dead. ... I am telling you that I am not a God. I tell you the truth. For me, what is, is, and cannot be changed. I can ring a bell. But I cannot un-ring it.

The conversation ends. A few minutes later, Amelae suggests they go watch TV. Showtime is on.

The doctor shows up at three-thirty and examines the two girls. Erlyn gets fixed up a bit. She has prescriptions for topical antibiotics, and a pain killer. We will need some gauze and tape.

Aina gets a list of things she can eat, instructions to eat modest but frequent meals. The types of food are pretty much in agreement with my list. He says, no milk products. I hadn't thought about that. He wants her to weigh herself every day at the same time and keep a record. He also wants her blood pressure tested twice every day. He is concerned with the stress on her heart from her malnutrition.

By five, he is gone and Amelae has gone out to fill the scripts. I have picked up a book that I have been promising myself I would get through even though it seems to put me to sleep every time I pick it up. Maybe, by reading when I have no excuse to be tired, I can knock down a few pages.

I get only forty-five minutes of reading before Amelae requests my undivided attention. Two priests and a bishop are at this very moment

sitting in her mother's house. They have been questioning the woman, somewhat intensely. Of course her mother doesn't know squat, and that, it seems, has become clear to the three Men in Black.

They ask for directions to Amelae's home, but her Mother doesn't know that either and says as much. While this is going on, her mother is texting Amelae. They ask to speak to the woman's daughter, but the woman, with some justification says she does not have the load in her prepaid cellphone for such a call. They ask for her daughter's cell number and it is given.

By now I am with Amelae. Her phone rings and she puts it on speaker.

Sino to²⁶?

This is Father Lorenz. Is this Amelae?

Oo. Baki²⁷?

Child, I would think that is somewhat obvious, is it not?

It is not.

I see. Well, we want to talk with you about this thing you call 'Master.'

Why? Why it your business?

We have two dead priests here. I think that makes it our business.

Your priests were killed by others. You know this. Why you bother my mother and me?

Child, your Master is the Devil and you are in grave danger.

There is no such thing as the Devil. It is made up to scare ignorant people. You are either a fool or a liar. Leave me and my mother alone.

I am afraid we cannot do that. Our Savior requires we fight the Devil wherever we find him.

You not find him. I do not know where the Master is. All you doing is bothering decent people who have not done any harm to anyone.

How does he give you the money to pay the hospital bill?

He not.

Are you saying that the bill is not being paid? Do not lie! We know that it is paid.

²⁶ Who is this?

²⁷ Why. As is why do you want to talk with me?... or, What do you want?

Soul

You are a fool. You asked how the Master gives me money. I tell the truth, he not. The Master do that. I do not.

How?

I do not know. It is true. I do not know.

You tell this Master how much you owe?

No. I tell the Master nothing. Now stop bothering me! Leave my mother alone.

We need to meet you.

No.

I am afraid I must insist.

I tell you to leave me alone. It is safer for all of us that way.

Are you threatening me?

Me? No! I am worried for you. Truly. But I mean you no harm. I am a simple girl. I threaten no one. . . . I think it is necessary that you think about what you are asking. If you still want to talk to me in two days, maybe I will consider it. For the next two days, I recommend you pray to your Savior for guidance.

Amelae, ends the call and turns off her phone. I kiss her forehead and excuse myself.

Tracking the phone call back to the sending number is no problem. It is also no problem determining the numbers of the other priest and the bishop. From there I can build a matrix of associations and work through a myriad of relationships. I ignore the priest who called for the moment and concentrate on the Bishop's actual family. I can also see some things related to his lay staff. There will not be any deaths, I hope. Five things are going to go off the rails on three continents within just a few hours of each other. Marriages will be at risk. Land will be foreclosed upon. Two children will be expelled from school for essentially the same thing on two continents. I send a fax message, to the bishop's fax machine, in his office, with names of all those who have been touched. Let his staff call him with the curious information. The fax is sent hours before those folks know they have been touched. The number that appears to be sending the text will be one from a Priest who didn't call but was there.

It is late. The girls are in bed. I grab a bite and return to my work. This time I am looking at the priest, whose number I used in the fax to the bishop.

I find that I can break into the Bishop's secretary's computer. From there I find the access to personnel records. It turns out that our priest is a

pedophile and the Bishop has correspondence related to this. I send his personnel file to four different news organizations and using the Secretary's Facebook account, I share it with family members of the victims. I "cc" a copy of the file to both the priest and the bishop.

When the bishop contacts his secretary regarding the personnel records, he will learn of the fax, even if he didn't know of it before.

It's close to midnight when I quit and go to bed.

When I awake and check the doings, it appears that our good bishop has not slept a wink. He has had a very busy night. It looks like the priest I targeted has been summarily discharged from his duties of assisting the bishop. Where that priest is now is not clear. He hasn't responded to anything since two this morning.

I make myself a pot of coffee and relax with a mango, while I read the news sites. There is nothing I need to do.

The coffee is gone from the pot and the last remnants are in my cup. The mango is a distant memory, as is a banana, and a small cheese puto²⁸.

Erlyn is up first and she says nothing. All she wants is a cup of Milo, a banana, and a puto.

Aina follows close behind her and mimics Erlyn's choices. We are not talking. I am not sure they are fully awake yet.

Twenty minutes later Amelae finally appears. She goes to the coffee pot and proceeds to make a fresh pot. Once the pot is working its way toward some fresh coffee, she sits down by me, just about slaps her phone down on the table, and just stares at me.

As my cup is empty, I ask, *Will there be enough coffee for me to get an extra cup when the pot is ready?*

That it? That all?

Excuse me?

That all you have to say, Master?

Hub. Yes, I guess it is? Why?

What you do to them?

Who?

²⁸ Steamed rice flour cake often the size of a cupcake but steamed in a piece of banana leaf.

WHO? You know who! What you do?

What has happened Amelae? Why are you upset?

The bishop, he come to my mother this early morning. He drop to his knees and beg 'it to stop!' She tell him he is crazy. She not know what he is talking about. Then the priest who call me yesterday, he call me now. He say, why is this happening? What I ask my Master to do? I tell him the truth. I not ask anything. ... He say, how I know about who the bishop is? How I know the other priest. I tell him, I not know the names because Nanay not tell me. He say, then how this Master know? I tell him the truth, I do not know. He ask me to ask my Master to stop. I tell him I cannot. I tell him, he should stop and maybe that will end it, but I not know. ... Master, what you do?

Is anyone threatening you now, Amelae?

No.

Is anyone threatening your mother?

No.

Good.

What you do?

I make sure no one threatens my Amelae or her mother. That is what I do.

But... Erlyn breaks in and yells, Amelae, shut up! He protect you. That all you need to know!

Amelae's phone is ringing. She doesn't recognize the number. Sino to?

Is this Amelae?

Yes, who this?

I am Bishop Diez. Please, your Master has injured many innocent people. It must stop!

You come after the Master and come after my family. I do not know the Master's mind. I do not know what the Master do. Truly I know nothing, but I tell you this. Anyone who come after me, or my family, or the Master, will suffer. Others will suffer. If left alone, no one suffers. It is up to others, what will happen. Master told me the time I meet him that your god and your Jesus are false. But he will do nothing against them so long as you leave us alone and do not lie about why you collect money.

We all collect tithes. Is your Master demanding that this stop?

No. But there is another church that lie about the collection of money. That he will stop. Your way he not stop, even though it for a false god. Now you must stop and leave us alone. What is done, it is done. It cannot be undone. I do not know if all that has been

Soul

done, is known to you. I not know what is done. If you stop, nothing additional will be done. If anyone do something new, I not know if it will not hurt you again.

Wait, someone is talking to me... 'what is it Father?... be patay²⁹? Oh dear Jesus, no!' Amelae! One of my priests commits suicide! Please stop!

How? I not do this! I not want any death. Truly. Amelae is crying. She ends the call.

Master! Why?

I didn't kill anyone. I didn't ask anyone to die. Amelae, I told you that priests are often evil. Sometimes that evil is too much to handle. I do not do that. They do that.

All this because I talk to the cashier! All these dead. It my fault.

No, it is not your fault. You didn't create a false god and a scam that needs to be protected by all and any means including death. Amelae, if they thought they could stop this by killing you or your mother, they would. They are evil. The fact that they are vulnerable is a new concept to them. They are used to being the ones who can force others to do what they want. But they have feet of clay and that is why they die.

No more, Master!

I am sorry Amelae. I cannot promise that as I have never killed anyone. Those that die, do not die by my hand.

²⁹ Dead.

Bankrupt beliefs and other human foibles

I excuse myself and return to my work area. I send another fax also allegedly from the now dead priest's number. The message is simple.

*I have stopped things from happening to the last two names on the list from before, due to your penance..... However, if anyone hurts Amelae or her mother, I will change my mind on those two and I will rain down misery on all in your parishes. I will tell each, it was your doing. ... Keep my two safe, or many will pay the price. I do not kill, but I cannot stop others who will be angry with you from doing so. ...I say this to you so you hear me! **I do not take life. I do not give life. I am not a god. But I am powerful.....Do not allow those in my care to suffer because of your foolish beliefs.** // /Master*

I wait and watch. I see a call ten minutes later from the secretary to the bishop. It is time to rejoin Amelae. I think she will be getting a call.

Amelae is sitting with Erlyn on a couch. She has been crying. Erlyn is comforting her. It doesn't seem to me that Erlyn is upset. She has seen death close up. I suspect that she sees this very differently than does Amelae.

I sit down on the couch. Amelae is now sandwiched between Erlyn and me.

Amelae, you may get another call. No one has died. Turn on your phone and take the call.

She does as requested but continues to sob quietly. The phone rings. She seems incapable of answering it. Erlyn picks up the phone and accepts the call.

Hello? Is this Amelae?

No. She is here but unable to speak. Who this? What do you want?

This is Bishop Diez. I wish to speak with Amelae.

Are you unable to understand? She is unable to speak now. I will tell her. What you want?

Tell her, I will make sure no harm comes to her or her mother. I promise this.

I will tell her. It is good that the Master finally get you to understand.

You know this Master?

Yes.

Who is he?

You mean 'What is he?'

Yes.

He say to us, he not God. I know he not the Devil. He stop evil against me. I think he is God, but he say I am wrong. He say he not give life, or take it. Maybe that true. I not know. But I know he save me from death by others.

What does he look like?

He is fog.

Fog? Not smoke? No fire?

Just fog. No smell. No fire.

You do not smell sulfur?

No, not smell anything.

Do you see him often?

No.

Do you pray to him?

No! He not allow it. He say that is foolish.

What does he require of you?

He required I sell him my soul.

What does he promise you?

Safety, protection.

That it? Nothing more?

He wants us to be happy and have a long life.

And for that you are willing to burn in hell for eternity?

You are a fool. The sale we make promises that there is no Hell and no burning. That the sale not valid if that not true. That is in writing.

There was a contract?

Soul

Yes. He require I read it all before I sign it. It clear. He not get my soul if there is a Devil or Hell.

It must be a trick!

You are a fool. No trick. Believe what you want. I not care. Just be careful what you say. Master will be very angry with you if harm come to Amelae or her mother. Of this I am sure. He not care if all priests everywhere die. But he care about those two.

He tell you that? He say he will kill all priests?

No. He say he not take life. But others may.

All priests?

I not know. I only guessing. I just know, Master will be very angry.

Yes, I see. Please tell Amelae. She is safe.

OK I do that.

Erlyn ends the call and puts the phone down. *I do OK, Master?*

Yes, you did fine. Fog is better than smoke! You did fine and you are correct. If anything bad happens to you girls, I will be very angry.

Master?

Yes Amelae?

You really kill all the priests?

No. First, I don't kill. Second, I have no way to even set about to discover all who are priests. I am not that powerful.

Good. Master, please try. No deaths.

OK, I will try, but I cannot promise.

Amelae reaches out and hugs me. Erlyn smiles.

We are still sitting on the couch when the front door opens and Mirafe walks in. She sees us as she is removing her clothing, smiles a wan smile, and upon completion comes towards me, and honors me before sitting down next to me.

It didn't go well, I gather.

It go very bad for my family. I ask all to meet with me.

I was aware of this, from the texts I saw yesterday. There was fear and anger expressed from what I read.

What happened?

I have Nanay, Tatay³⁰, my brothers, sisters, and my titos there. I explain what happen before with the taxes and how I get help to fix this. But then I tell them what Tatay do again. Tatay try to hit me. My Tito Roland, he protect me. He hit Tatay. He curse Tatay and Nanay. ... Tito Elmer, he get very angry. He ask why he not told of this? There is much screaming. Tatay is drunk already when we start the meeting. My Titos tell Tatay and Nanay to leave the land alone. They take it back. Nanay screams at me. She asks, 'Am I happy?' I scream back, 'Why you allow your asawa³¹ to be a drunk?' Tito Roland take me to his house to sleep last night. It too late to come here then. ... Nanay come to Roland late last night. She say, she kick Tatay out. Please let her farm the land. She make sure the taxes are paid. Tito say no. She pay the money to him. He pay the taxes. He say if he go back and find Tatay, then she must leave. He say he only say OK because of the children. Nanay tell me to never come to her again. Then she leave. Tito say, I am welcome in his house. I am good for telling the truth and protecting him. Master, I am tired, dirty, hungry and sad. May I go na?

Yes, do what you need.

From the couch three of us watch Mirafe walk off. I guess she is going to shower. Amelae is looking at me as if I had failed again. Has Erlyn read the same expression the same way? I am wondering what I should say when Erlyn says what I really cannot.

Friend, he protect you and your mother because she do no wrong. But he not protect Dany or my mother. What happens to them is what they do to themselves. Same now. Same with Mirafe's mother and father. He helps Mirafe, but he cannot stop her parents from their own failings. They do this to themselves. Mirafe do the right thing. She protect her uncles. They do no wrong. Mirafe do what Master do. He help the deserving. He allow those not deserving to get what they do to themselves. Your Master, he is good. Do not be angry. Do not be sad for people who would hurt you.

Amelae nods but says nothing for minutes. And then in a small voice she asks me to take them to my bed.

Who, Amelae?

Erlyn and me.

I can't say I saw that coming. But I wasn't trying to see, either. My mind was otherwise engaged. I get up. Amelae does the same and pulls Erlyn up too.

Erlyn has not been in my private rooms, but Amelae has decided this is the time to remedy that. She stands by the locked door, waiting for me to

³⁰ Father.

³¹ Marriage partner. Can mean husband or wife. Not gender specific.

unlock it. I do as she wants, and we enter the hallway. As we pass my office and work area, Amelae is pulling Erlyn, but Erlyn pulls Amelae back. She is looking into that room.

Master, what you do here?

I watch what is said between people. That is one of the things I do.

You can see things here that no one can see?

No, everything I can see here, someone can see.

OK I think I ask wrong. Master, maybe one person can see this part, and she points to a monitor, and maybe some other person can see that part, and she points to another monitor, but maybe no one sees everything. True?

True.

How many different things you see at once?

Maybe a dozen or more.

Hala³²! OK, I see. Yes, I see. You see things others not see. I hear on TV some say we no longer have any privacy. I say, how that? But now I see. It true. I think this how you see things we not see.

Yes, it is.

But this not all your power. I know it. You cannot use this to open a lock. This one of your tools, it not all. ... Friend Amelae, you see this before?

Maybe a little. But I not understand it like you. Why you know this?

A friend, he a hacker, steal credit card stuff. I see screens like this before, but they tiny, not like this. Master? That screen, it showing texts from someone who is asking for guards. You see it?

I do. It is the bishop's cell. The text is to his secretary.

Yes, I see it.

Who the guards for?

I walk over and scroll through the message history. It is the bishop. He has instructed his secretary to have guards placed at Amelae's mother's house. The guards are to be there twenty-four hours a day to protect the woman. The bishop is saying she must be kept safe, or all their lives are in jeopardy. ... I point to another screen. Here is the

³² An expression that translated to, 'Watch Out'. But here it would mean that others are in danger, not us.

secretary contacting someone, maybe a security service, inquiring about getting some guards. ... Yes they are agreeing. They ask how soon to begin. The answer is right now. They say they can get someone there by six tonight, but not sooner. It is agreed to. ... Ah here the secretary is contacting someone else. He is asking someone if they can provide protection immediately until this evening. ... OK, the answer is yes. Oh! It must be the police. A PNP officer will be dispatched right away.

Amelae calls her mother. Nay, is there a policeman at the house? ... Sige sige, I think one will come. And later security guards. They will be there to keep you safe. ... What? Ok. Good. Master, a PNP officer drives up when I am talking. Master, it is scary being in God's computer room.

I am not God!

How not? No human can do this!

Yes they can.

See, you are not human, you say 'they.'

Oh, good grief. Let's go to the bedroom.

Amelae hops up on the bed. Erlyn is in no condition to hop. She really is in a lot of pain. Sex with her is completely out of the question, but we can be close. I am not sure what Amelae is thinking we will do with Erlyn here. Evidently, she thinks she does. Master, why are you still dressed. In your bedroom we are all naked! You too!

Amelae, there is no way Erlyn can have sex and it is not nice for us to do that when she can't join in.

Master, please get your clothing off. I know maybe I am not smart like Erlyn, but I am not stupid.

I start undressing. The two are whispering to each other. Now naked, I get on the bed with the two and am summarily pushed onto my back. It seems like they have no problem pushing god around. A pillow is placed under my head. Erlyn spies a folded towel unfolds it a bit and places over my nose, eyes and forehead as the two giggle.

The next thing I know is that one of them is giving me head while the other is sucking my balls. I am enjoying the experience and relaxing when she who is giving me head moves around and while still taking me down, must have positioned her cunt over my mouth and nose. Her cunt is dripping juices on my chin and through the towel. The aroma of her cunt is impossible to ignore.

They keep this up for quite a while. Though I am hard and enjoying it immensely, I have not cum.

The mouth on my shaft pulls up and the mouth on my balls relinquishes its position. The towel covering my face is removed just in time for a cunt to cover it. A cunt covers my shaft.

I am pretty sure at this point I know who is who. I decide to eat out Erlyn's cunt as well as I can, given my current position. I am afraid to reach up and accidentally grab Erlyn's wound. Maybe that is why I am not ready to cum, but just like before, having Amelae on top isn't getting me off. We keep this up for a good amount of time, before both seem to give out. I am rock hard and needing a release. It just doesn't work for me in that position. Since I have given Erlyn a good eating out, I guess I don't feel as bad now, leaving her on the sideline as I roll Amelae on her back and give her a missionary position good fucking.

A few minutes later I put my cum in Amelae's cunt, for the second time today. Now exhausted I slide them both under the covers with me and just rest. My mind is drifting. I am wondering down paths far from these girls, and this room, when Amelae tells Erlyn that this is their bedroom now.

What? Wait? No... I said I would think about that. I said I wanted both of them to know what was happening in the rooms, not make this their bedroom.

Amelae?

Master?

When did I say that this is your bedroom?

You not. I say it.

And this is your right to say it?

You say me and Erlyn to be back here to take care of you. Correct?

Yes, something like that.

So how we do it if this is not where we are? Master, you need us here.

Erlyn needs more rest for a while. This is not a good thing for her right now. Yes, I said I wanted you to both here back here on occasion, but it is too soon for Erlyn.

OK, I wrong. Sorry.

Soul

Not completely wrong, but too soon. And there are four of you in the house. One isn't part of us yet, and another didn't need to see the work room like I needed you and Erlyn to see it. All who stay and sell their soul will be back here, sometimes. OK?

Sige.

Good. Now let's go and see how Mirafe is doing.

Sige.

The two leave. I dress before leaving. Before I return to the main part of the house I check my screens. Amelae, Erlyn, and Mirafe's church is having a bit of indigestion. They have lost three of the pastors who are directly responsible for their cadre of youthful solicitors. Plus now they realize that they have lost track of three of their girls. Six people gone. Three of whom are in jail and three of whom are simply not to be found.

They have texted Amelae's mother, but she isn't talking to anyone now. She is simply not responding. They text Erlyn's mom, but that call is going nowhere, as the woman is dead. A text to Mirafe's mother produces a reply that is unhelpful to the church as she has been essentially disowned and told to never show her face again, and that is pretty much what the mom texts back.

Three texts and no useful information. That has the congregation a little off its game. Nice to know. Aina is not one of theirs. Both Mirafe and Amelae knew her, but not from the church.

This is not something that requires anything from me now. But it is something I need to watch.

There is nothing on the issue of Amelae and her mother. The matter of Erlyn's family appears to have found a conclusion. The matter of Mirafe is not over but it is no longer an issue for her.

I exit the work area and go to rejoin all four girls. There is food on the table and what appears to be a conference in progress. I hang back. They have not seen me. The meeting appears to be a lessons learned gathering.

At the moment, Mirafe is detailing how she has learned that there is only so much you can do for another. They either want to accept that change needs to come or they won't change. Erlyn laughs and says, yes and she is a prime example. Aina asks why and Erlyn goes into what happened with her in detail. Her detail is far more critical of her own actions and understanding of mine, than I think is warranted, but as it is her story, who am I to have the last word on the matter?

Aina says she does not have that type of problem. All seem to agree, that with her, it was simply a matter of an evil priest. And then she says something that sends Amelae a bit into a dark place. Aina mentions that no one killed her priest and nothing bad seems to have happened to him. Why, she wonders, did three of the priest involved with Amelae need to die?

Amelae is beginning to cry. It is time my presence is known. *Because Aina, your priest went away and he did not threaten you once we contacted you. In Amelae's case, her life and the life of her mother were at stake. There is a real, and meaningful, difference. ... Aina, how do you feel?*

Alive? Ninong, I feel alive for the first time in a long time. I can breathe again. I do not shake. My stomach is not fighting with me. Sleep feels good, but waking up feels better. I feel alive.

Good. You are still far too malnourished, but you look better. It makes me very happy.

Ninong, when am I allowed to join you? It feels weird. I wear clothing and they do not. Maybe it should be them who are embarrassed. But they not and I am.

It's too soon, Aina. Get healthy first.

But I am ready!

No you are not. Your body is not ready to carry a child. When it is, you can join and not before?

A child? You will give me a child? Ninong, I am a virgin.

And when you join, if you join, you will no longer be a virgin. Understood?

The others? They will carry a child from you?

Yes.

All of us?

All who join, yes. You may not want to join. The others needed to. You really do not need to. You just needed to get out of the mess you were in and get healthy. I want your soul, but it is up to you to sell it. No one will force you.

I get looks from the others. I did force Amelae and she is about to say something but Erlyn twists her wrist and tells her to shut up.

Soul
Say the word.

*E*rlyn that hurts!

*Friend, why you think he make you join? Yes, he force you, but you were doing evil!
Aina not do that!*

*Oh! The soliciting! Yes, I see. It me doing evil, but I change because he make it happen.
Aina never do evil. It different. Same with me and Mirafe. Mirafe fight joining. Master
make it happen.*

Tama³³.

*Amelae, you, Mirafe, and Erlyn were engaged in a scam. That is, in my eyes, evil. Aina
was not engaged in anything evil. So yes, I did force you. I forced you to stop doing evil. To
do that, I forced you to sell me your soul. Was it unfair? You be the judge. Have I helped
you, and as far as you are concerned, have I helped your mother?*

Yes, OK. I see.

*Good. ... Aina, if you decide to not join me, the only thing I require is that you never
mention my existence to anyone.*

Ninong, how long do I have before I need to make the decision?

It ends when you are ready to join. If you are ready but unwilling, you must leave.

How do I repay you for what you do if I not stay?

You repay by never speaking of us to anyone, ever.

That it?

Yes, that is it.

What if the priest returns?

Tell him to get lost.

But he will tell me that I will go to Hell? What then?

Aina, is there a Hell?

Not if I am with you, Ninong.

Erlyn?

³³ Correct.

Master?

Erllyn, is there a Hell for anyone?

Master, Hell does not exist. If anyone say it, they are wrong.

Aina, priests are professional liars.

All?

Yes.

Bishops too?

Yes.

The Archbishop?

Yes.

The Holy Father, the Pope?

Very much, yes.

Why they lie?

They say there is a Heaven. They say there is a Hell. They say Jesus is the Son of God. They say that if you pray to Jesus and do good works, you will go to Heaven. They say there is a God. Aina, not one of those things is true.

None, Ninong?

None, Aina.

You really sure?

Yes. I know it.

How you know, Ninong?

*Erllyn is about ready to slap the girl... and then she does just that! She slaps Aina, and says, *Bobo ka, talaga!*³⁴ He is God!*

Erllyn! Stop saying that!

Amelae is thinking, I can hear it. No, Erllyn, he is not God. There is no God, not like what they teach us. Right Master? I nod. Erllyn, Master is powerful, and not human, but he not God. Remember what he teach us. He say he not allowed to create life. He not allowed to take life because of the rules. I think if there were no rules, maybe he could do both. But for humans, he is not a God to us. I not know what Master is. I

³⁴ You are truly stupid!

Soul

think he must be divine, but that all I think. I think he is telling us that there cannot be a god, because of the rules. That why the priests must be lying. Master, please tell Aina about the game and the flood. Maybe she will understand.

You tell her, Amelae. Erlyn, you listen again too. You need to stop thinking I am God.

Then how you save my life?

OK, listen closely. I am allowed to protect the lives of those who have already formally sold me their souls. You see, if they die, they are already mine. So it makes no difference if they die or I protect them, so they can live longer. But the power of mine to save a life can only be used for those who sell their souls and for whom the potential cause of death is not natural. It's in the rules. For me it means that there are only three of you, who live with me, right now, for whom I can provide some accident insurance. But I have to be aware of it before it happens. If you die, I cannot bring you back. If I am thinking about how good the Marang tastes, while you fall off a cliff, well, you fall off the cliff, because I was thinking of something else.

So you were thinking of me?

Yes. I heard you.

You opened the lock!

No.

What?

I didn't.

Then how?

You did that yourself.

I not touch it! I not do it.

Yes you did. I told Amelae, I didn't tell you this. The divine is in all of us, not in Jesus. There is no path to God. You are the closest thing to God that there is. The power, the goodness, it exists in us. I simply helped you find the divine inside of you. It was your power as you looked at the lock that opened it. Not me. I cannot do that. I am not divine more than are you. All of you are divine. I am simply a collector of souls and I inhabit, and I live as, a human.

I get up from the table and leave them. I need to be alone. I miss Francine.

My study is a sanctuary, a place where I can sit and relax. But I am anything but relaxed. Wound up, tense, on edge, are far better descriptors. I want to reach out to Francine but do not want to alarm her. Skype is out of the question. I send her a simple SMS.

Miss you.

Just three minutes later I get a text back.

Miss you too. You OK?

Of course. I am OK.

No, Dad, I think there is something wrong.

The texts stop and a Skype request replaces the text messaging.

What is it, Dad? What's wrong?

You know what it is. I miss your mother.

Dad. Sorry. I know. You think of me and then you always think of her. But Dad?

Yes?

I am glad you still love her.

Why are you glad? If I didn't maybe she would be alive today.

If you didn't, would I be the same daughter to you that I am today? Would we be as close? Would you mean as much to me? Dad, let go. She loved you. And she gave you, me.

Francine, how many times have we repeated this rosary of yours?

You are the very best Dad a daughter ever had! I mean, there really isn't another you in all the universe! And knowing that even the best Dad that there is, isn't perfect, is maybe the best gift any father can give his daughter!

Ha! Good one. OK. That actually helped.

Good! So now I get to piss you off by asking the question you really don't want to hear.

And that is?

Dad, it's been years. You need to find another girl!

And that is supposed to piss me off?

Always has until now? What's up, big guy?

Well, I may have found three, or four.

What? EXPLAIN!

Hummm, now, I am not sure I really want to explain all this to my daughter.

Why not, greatest Dad in the world? You hiding something?

No, not from you. Not really.

So?

OK... well, remember the well-dressed beggar at Mickey-D's?

Yup, sure do. And Dad, it's McDo here. Remember?

Hub, yeh. OK well remember him? To be honest...

Oh! I know! It pissed you off. You don't like scamming for a church which is scamming to begin with. But maybe a double scam was just too much. Right?

Right. Exactly on the money.

Oh, such a bad joke! I didn't think your divine presence did double, double entendres.

Well I do, so there! Anyway it bothered me.

And?

About ten days ago, a girl came up to me as I was eating at Yellow Cab.

You ate out, by yourself? What has come over you?

You are in good form today, missy! Anyway, she tried to pull that with me.

Let me guess. You had already researched the church, because I told you the name of it... and you knew all the personnel attached to it because you wanted to rain on their parade. And Dad... you weren't really at Yellow Cab by accident. You were phishing! So what did you do to 'miss, I wish I had chosen another table?'

I bought her soul.

Dad?

Yes?

You are serious?

Yes.

OK, I think I need a second to get this news digested, because I think you are going to tell me you have bought 'three or four' souls. Right?

Yes.

Dad, do they know who you are?

No, not completely.

Well if they don't know, do they think you are the Devil, or God?

It has crossed their minds. I have told them often and emphatically that I am not.

Do they believe you?

No, I don't think they do.

I don't have to ask if they are safe. Do they understand how lucky they are?

Three of them do, and I think they will be with me for decades to come.

Good. I am happy to hear that. What about the fourth.

Time will tell. She's a good kid. I got her out of a mess, but she had done no wrong and didn't need to protect anyone. So it is unclear if she will stay.

So I am going to get three or four siblings! Finally I will not be an only child!

Very funny.

I want to meet them. Do they even know I exist?

One or two do, in a way, but not fully.

OK, names, ages and all the dirt. I want to know how you met them and how you got them to agree.

For the next hour I give Francine the story. With Erlyn I take Francine through Erlyn returning to the house after being shot.

Dad when did the thing with the lock occur?

Why?

Because I felt it. I am sure of it. I felt a pulse from you. It's what I felt as a child only once before.

When was the last time?

I had the sense you were thinking about when Mom died.. Dad, it was the same feeling. I could feel you pushing. I thought you were dreaming of Mom. ... Dad, I don't want to meet them via Skype. I want to meet them in person when we do meet. I don't have any time off right now. But I will come home as soon as I can. Will you please tell them about me? ... And Dad, you need to tell them about Mom. You haven't done that, right? You owe it to them and you owe it to Mom. Dad, did you tell them that their kids will be normal humans?

In what world are you normal? ... Yes I told them.

Good. Very good. Now I will not worry that you are lonely! Four! Dad that is amazing.

Maybe three.

No, it will be four. You will see. OK, gotta go now. Love you!

Bye sweetheart.

Say it!

I'll miss you.

Dad! Say it!

You are my special daughter. I will never let anything bad happen to you. I promise.

You still can't say it. Dad, you need to get over it.

OK, bye now.

Bye.

And the connection breaks. The longing feeling is eased, but a new sensation replaces it. I go to my work area, but there is nothing worth noticing in the traffic. Still, something is up. Then I note call logs between one of mine and a girl with a connection at the church. It is time to find out what is brewing.

It doesn't take long to find out. Amelae has been told that a church official has contacted the police, claiming that three of his congregants may have been kidnapped. This is not a huge problem, but we need to jump on it right away. I give the girls instructions about what to say and who to talk with. I have Erlyn take one extra dose of the pain meds to lessen the obvious gimp in her gait. We drive close, but not to the police station. From there the girls will take a tricycle. Erlyn is wearing a big floppy hat to disguise who she is from being accidentally ID'ed by some folks I want to avoid. The corrupt cops I am concerned about, regarding her family, are not posted to this station. But I can't be sure that they will not see her.

The girls are to walk in and say, 'we are not victims of a kidnap. We three just don't want to have anything to do with that creepy church.' That's it. Say it and leave.

Nothing is that easy in reality. The cop makes them wait until the big pastor strides in and does his thing, trying to intimidate my girls into returning to his flock. That doesn't go too well for the guy. As he is trying to say the girls have been brainwashed, they ask if they can press charges against the guy for forcing them to lie by soliciting under false pretenses, for him, and the church. That gets the cops attention. He is about to start taking statements, but leaves for a moment to get assists from others in the station. In those few moments, the pastor and the girls come to an agreement. He will bug off and leave them the fuck alone and they won't press charges.

Soul

When the officer returns, he is informed of the agreement and it appears that it works fine for him. The other way was going to force him to do a great deal of work. Now, he has time to buy a nice fish on his way home for the family tonight.

It works for me. I want to shut the guy down, but not that way. The girls rejoin me, via another tricycle, and we head home.

I am pleased until I check the SMS traffic. Erlyn was spotted but they have no idea where she went. They tracked down the tricycle driver but he dropped them off at a resto-bar. The trail ends there as no one in the resto-bar ever saw them.

However, they are now looking for her. I am about to break my promise to Amelae. This will take some time, and I do not have to attend to it at the moment. I rejoin the girls.

Erlyn, you are not to go outside until I tell you it is safe.

Why?

You were spotted and some bad folks are looking for you.

Will they find me?

No.

Amelae looks at me and without any noticeable emotion asks, *Will they die?*

I hope so. I don't think there is any other way to keep Erlyn safe. You going to complain?

No. Do it. Keep us safe.

Good.

Ninong?

Yes?

What have these people done that they deserve to die?

They are part of a Shabu drug syndicate and they want to kill Erlyn. It is them or her. We choose her.

Oh. Why you not call the police?

They are the police.

Oh! Oh no! I not understand. Police selling Shabu? Truly?

Yes, truly.

Ninong, if you not take Erlyn's soul, she is dead already?

Yes.

And if you not do this, she is dead?

Yes.

Is it not a sin to take a life?

Aina, there are two answers to that. First, sin doesn't exist. For Sin to exist, there has to be a Heaven and a Hell. As there isn't, Sin can't exist either. Is protecting a life from evil-doers wrong? No. . . . Now if you are asking if it is illegal from me to kill someone, my answer is, I will not kill anyone. Neither will I ask anyone to kill another.

Then how they to die?

Their deaths will be by those who live in the same evil sewer that they swim in. Bad guys will kill bad guys. It happens all the time.

Where will their souls go?

Probably to me. After all, they are bad guys.

Mirafe is a little frustrated. *Aina, it is like we told you. He gets the creeps, but that doesn't mean he likes creeps. He protects us. If you stay, he will protect you. He won't ask, 'is Aina worth protecting today,' he will protect you. Period. Others he doesn't protect. In all the world there are only three he protects now. The question is, will there be a fourth?*

And that is a beautiful segue that I would be a fool to ignore.

Actually there are four now. The question is, will there be a fifth?

That produces silence and stares.

My daughter. I have a daughter. I protect her.

Erlyn asks, *Where is she?*

At school in Manila. Adamson University.

How old she? She our age?

She is your age Erlyn. She is sixteen. This is her freshman year.

She know about us?

Yes.

What she know?

Everything.

All?

All.

What her name?

Francine.

Nice name. What you call her?

Oh, I call her many things. Sweetheart, knucklehead, beautiful, daughter, and Francine.

Her mother, your wife?

No.

You buy her soul, like us?

Yes.

Where she, the mother, now?

Dead.

How?

I was distracted. I allowed myself to not see what I should have seen.

You screwed up! You were supposed to protect her and you failed!

Yes.

How that happen?

She said, 'Please, if you love me, no more die.'

And you allowed someone to live?

Yes.

Because you loved her so much that you didn't do what you must to protect her?

Yes!

Like me and Dany?

Yes. Like you and Dany.

So it not only because you are smarter. It because you know that love blinds.

Yes.

Soul

Mirafe has been patiently waiting to ask, *Do you love Francine, Master?*

I miss her greatly when she is gone. There is a hole in my world when she is not here.

Do you love her?

I care for her deeply.

Does she ask you, if you love her?

Yes.

What you say then?

I tell her she is the most important person in my world and I will never let anything happen to her.

Ha! I bet she say, 'Still can't say the word, Dad?'

Yes, that is what she says.

Soul
Jacobo

It was the same way before. They get under your skin. They learn to tease. They learn that they are really safe and then... oh yes, and then their real personalities emerge from under the shells of fear and deprivation that has followed them all their lives.

Both Mirafe and Erlyn were feisty from the get-go. The fact that they have taken that which was a defensive stance and allowed it to be reinvented as loving, and chiding, is not surprising.

Amelae, is right. She is not as smart as the other two. She is loyal, and I will never lose her, but she isn't the one to raise her shield, as much as she wants to cuddle and mew. Death simply depresses her. It drains her of happiness.

For Mirafe and Erlyn, death may be necessary and it is to be accepted.

Clearly Mirafe sees it as her mission to get me to find love in my heart. She sees the hurt I carry and wants to pull it out of me and discard it. She is convinced she is right.

Erlyn, I suspect knows exactly why that would be a bad thing. She is not arguing with Mirafe. She doesn't need to do so. She knows why I am the way I am, and has come to savor it. My telling her to cool her heels while I go about protecting her is not a reason to pout. For her, it is a reason to rejoice.

And yet, acknowledging the differences, they are forging a powerful interdependent relationship. I see no jockeying for position.

When Aina says she can breathe now, she can, but she is still scared. She sees this as a momentary respite and is not at all sure what the coming days will bring. She is in many ways still psychically attached to the abusive priest. I have no idea if she will ever really be able to let go. I have a suspicion that if we go too deep into her head, she might shut down as the Nuns do. Francine may be very wrong about this one. The most charitable thing I might do is lose her and place her in a convent, or as Shakespeare would call it in mocking jest, a Nunnery.

What I am about to do will not upset Mirafe or Erlyn. Amelae, as much as she says she understands, is in some turmoil about it. Aina just can't wrap her head around why it is necessary. In this, they are far from cohesive.

The cops that noticed Erlyn are with Rykel's old syndicate. There are cops competing with cops in the thing and working for different drug lords. I watch the SMS traffic for a while and note when the guys I need gone are going to be occupied with a load of Shabu. Using the cell number of a snitch the other cops use, I get the needed info about the Shabu transfer and shipment to those who need to know. They are not good cops. They are very bad cops, but I don't care which side has the drugs, I need a few guys growing daisy's above them.

It has taken twelve days of watching and waiting before I am able to put the plan into action. In the meantime, Aina eats and sleeps and watches TV and eats and sleeps. She looks healthier, but is still painfully thin. She needs to add a good eight kilo's and if she adds it too fast, her heart just might quit on her.

Amelae has wanted to accompany her mother, but I am not allowing it. Her Mom is getting treatment without fees. Her bodyguards are transporting her in an SUV with very dark windows, because they are terrified of her being out in the open. All that needs to happen is some fool to take a pot shot to ruin their days. Visitors to her mother are being searched before they can enter her door. Between the TB and an advanced case of diabetes, her mother is not very mobile anyway.

To fill their time, the girls have started a vegetable garden on my grounds. They are cooking up a storm and cleaning the house so well that I have had to make some adjustments from how things had been done before. I have allowed Amelae and Mirafe to do some reconnaissance on what their old church is up to.

Erlyn has asked me to teach her about some of the surveillance tools I am using. It seems like a good idea and we are spending a lot of time together as I put the current plan in motion. Her wound is healing, but she did lose some muscle as well as skin. Healing completely will not be a fast thing.

Tomorrow is the day that things will resolve for us. However, for a cop named Jacobo, the only name I actually learned via the traffic, this Friday is going to be a very bad day. We put the plan in place now, on Thursday.

It is Erlyn who sends the texts. I figure it's only fair. They want to kill her. They killed her brother and her mother. What is the saying, 'Payback is Hell'? Now, that is funny. And so my pretty little Devil is giving them their payback. Maybe 'Payback is a bitch.' But I just don't see her as a bitch. No, not a bitch.

At the dinner table, after the texts have been sent, there is a stillness. The food is a bit special. I have a recipe that I picked up many years ago in

Mexico. I have it every year on this day, to remind me of the foolishness of conquests and the reality of the fusion of cultures that eventually rise up in spite of the intents of the conquerors. So tonight we silently eat a dish I love, some call it, chicken mole.

In the old days, before Americans decided all holidays should be on Monday, this would have been their Columbus Day. A day to celebrate the guy who didn't discover America and who never landed on the continent, and whose personal habits resulted in his soul being in my collection. He is one of those guys whose life is so disgusting that I just can't fathom why he is celebrated. I mean he butchered natives and sold their meat as dog food. Old Chris was a real asshole. And that is why I remember him every October 12th with pollo 'de mole' poblano.

But it is awkward tonight. Mirafe mentions that Aina has gained two kilos this week. That's three kilos in the last twelve days. It's a lot of weight, and though she needs to gain even more, I ask her to slow down.

Maybe you not want me to gain weight fast because you like me here and not want to see me go!

That is an interesting question. But the answer is that I just want you to be healthy when you leave here.

Amelae is close to apoplectic. Master, why you both say, 'when she leaves.' Has this been decided?

No, not for me. It was she who said it first. Ask her if she has made up her mind.

Aina, you decide na? You decide you go?

Hindi. Maybe I just teasing.

Master, you know what is in our minds. Is she teasing?

Why do you think I can read minds?

You can, don't argue. What she thinking?

Ask her?

I did!

No you didn't. You asked her if she had made up her mind. Now ask her what she is thinking.

Sige, sige. Friend Aina, what your thought?

I am unsure.

Soul

Amelae looks at me. She wants my help. *Aina, do you miss Jesus?*

Oo, talaga.

OK, Amelae, do you see now?

But there is no Jesus!

OK and how does that matter to Aina, who needs to believe there is a Jesus?

Oh, it like you say. If people want to believe, there is nothing you can do about it. It is free will?

Yes.

That why Aina is needing to leave?

Ask her.

Amelae, takes Aina's hand and places it above her own breast, on her chest, *Friend Aina, is it true that you reject the teachings of the Master and want to pray to this Jesus, who not really exist?*

I know you say Jesus not exist but many others say he does. How I know?

When you pray to Jesus, he do anything to help you?

How I know?

Ask Erlyn what happen when she pray to Master! She know!

Yes, yes, maybe it true. Maybe both Master and Jesus powerful. How I know?

OK, you pray that, ... Master what's the name of that guy who will die?

Jacobo?

Tama! Aina, you pray to your Jesus that he spare Jacobo tomorrow. See what happen.

How I know Jesus not want him dead too?

Aina, you believe in Mumu too?

Oo. You not?

I give up. Get fat and go!

Why you mean to me?

Not mean, but Master save you. Jesus never save you. But you want to believe in a mumu and not a real divine. No helping you!

Soul

OK, that's enough Amelae. There is no reason to argue. Aina has every right to see the world as she needs to see it. I will not try to change it. I like Aina, and have no interest in making her unhappy. If she wants to go, that is fine.

But...

Erllyn breaks in, *Amelae, stop. Master say stop, you stop!*

Mirafe is playing with her spoon. I can hear the wheels spinning.

OK, Mirafe, I know you are afraid to say what is on your mind, but please share it.

Why she need to stay? She not sick. She not at risk of dying. You sent the priest away. She rejects you and still prays to Jesus. Why she here? Yes, she is not ready to carry a child, but if she not staying, she not carrying your child.

As far as I know, Aina has not made up her mind yet. She asked a little less than two weeks ago, how long she had to make up her mind. I told her she had until she was healthy enough to carry my child. She can leave whenever she wants before that. I never said she couldn't. But I will not kick her out if she hasn't made up her mind and she isn't well enough to get pregnant.

Mirafe looks at Aina. *If you want Jesus and not Master, I think you have already made up your mind. I think Master is being too kind again. What you think, girl?*

I not sure yet. Master is kind. This is true. But Master is also cruel. Some will die tomorrow. This is also true. I know Master is powerful. I taught that Jesus saves souls. I not know what to think right now. I need time.

She does need more time, if only to find the courage to say goodbye to us. I see no point in pushing. She is, in her own way, teaching my girls a great deal about how the world works and why it is so hard to change things.

Mirafe's brain is bubbling again. *Girl, what is the question you are afraid to ask now?*

How you do that? It not fair. Why I ask? You know already.

I don't know. Tell me.

You allow me to be with you tonight?

You may sleep in my bed tonight. I am not sure I will be in it much.

You have to sleep!

Erllyn is giggling, *Friend, I slept in his bed last night. I not sure he ever was there. When I go to sleep he was in the work room. When I wake up, he was in the work room. If he come in I not know. If he do me, it must be a miracle, I not feel it!*

That gets Amelae and Aina laughing. Mirafe is nonplused. *Master, when this is over, maybe you will find time for me?*

Yes. That will be nice. And, it will be nice. I do not enjoy this tense period. These things are not easy. We normally allow humans to go about their business uninterrupted. With three billion on the planet, there is really no reason to micromanage. What I am doing is highly unusual. I almost never take souls... well that isn't true. Over the years I normally take one and stay with her until the years take her. So it is infrequent that I really do any of this type of thing. Once they are with me, I normally don't have to do anything. Francine's mother was an exception. To say it caught me by surprise is to state the obvious.

It was easy to love in the past, when there was little need to be always vigilant. But with Francine's mother, things were different. It taught me to never make that mistake again. How many women have I had as mates over the many years? I most certainly do not count. I do not want to feel the weight of those good women on my heart all at once and all together. Each was a good companion for decades, then yielding to time and age, giving way sweetly as I always took their pain away.

Each gave me a child. Each child grew up and until Francine, emerged from my roof without ever knowing anything other than I was a good father. I allowed them to see me appear to age along with their mother and at her passing, they were left to understand that I too had passed.

Do I need to be here?

No, I most certainly do not. It's just that I really don't like the game. Yes, it is the game we agreed to, but that was a mistake. So, as a reminder of the evil created by having the game, I live among those who are the game pieces. This is my penance.

Francine is the weight on my being. She is the loving reminder of my one failure. I cannot afford to forget. And so Francine had to know how I failed, if not exactly who I am, or the punishment I dole out to myself would be too easily left aside in the passing of time.

If I took but one female again, I might have lulled myself into complacency. I cannot allow that to happen. And so there are three here who are more assuredly now mine. And having three gives me reason to not love any. It is protection. I chose females with difficulties to remind me to be vigilant. I may have chosen too well.

Tonight I will watch and wait. What is going to happen will occur in the very early morning hours. As I watch, Aina is silently praying to her Jesus.

She is imploring him to intervene and save lives. She sees it as a test. If her Jesus comes through against this lesser god, she will take it as a sign. What she will do when the guys die, is less certain in her mind. She wants to believe that they will be saved and in that act of redemption find Jesus in their hearts, mending their evil ways.

I could tell her that if they don't die they will only take it that they were successful and continue on in their evil path, but such logic is beyond her need for faith. There may be many such battles she will see fought in the coming weeks while she gains weight and continues to say she is unsure. I suspect in the end she will go, but free will is just that. I have no way of knowing what she will choose.

Jacobo is the top cop in his region. He strides around in his para-military PNP uniform. He wears a cross which is always visible. In some ways, he sees himself as a modern day Christian Knight crusading against the heathens. He justifies his Shabu activities as that which he must do to finance his holy war. Jacobo the Grand Master of his coterie of modern day knights.

How do I know this? The man is constantly writing to his bishop of his valiant efforts and those who serve under him. He takes selfies of himself in a manner that leaves little to the imagination. I am not reading his mind... I am reading his mail.

And so I am thinking about Jacobo as I scoop up the last of my 'de mole' and wait for the early hours of Friday the 13th.

After dinner I kiss each of my three a sweet goodnight, only to find Erlyn unwilling to leave my side. *Go to bed. There is nothing for you to do now.*

Master, you are not going to bed and the same advice can be given to you. I want to watch with you.

I allow it and am about to leave the others, only to hear Aina ask, *May I come too?*

No, Aina. Only those who have put their souls in my hands may pass this locked door. You may not enter.

I want to see what happens.

There will be nothing that you will see in there. That is not why we will be there.

What does it matter if you have my soul, to allow me to go in there?

Aina, you are a guest in this house. You are welcome to stay in here. But you are only a guest and have no rights. Do I make myself clear?

Yes. Sorry.

If there comes a time when your soul is mine, you will be back in those rooms often enough. But only if that happens.

Erlyn and I enter, locking the door behind us.

It is a series of long and uneventful hours until three in the morning. Erlyn and I pass the time talking about her life growing up. We talk about the games she played. The candies she liked to eat. The names of the tricycle drivers who her mom trusted and the ones she was to stay away from. We talked about her dreams, and her fears.

At three we start seeing activity, on both ends of the matter. We watch as some assemble and others are in transit. The sun will rise a little after five-thirty, but the sky will lighten at about five-fifteen. All will transpire before that happens.

We wait and watch. I wonder, will Jacobo live long enough to see the dawn break?

The Portrait Gallery

He doesn't. For Jacobo, the last second his wristwatch records, when his pulse is present, is a little past four forty-nine this morning. The elegant man, in his starched and pressed uniform, with his spit shined shoes, ends life sprawled out in a dirt alleyway, next to a pile of trash and a meter from a crack in the concrete from which the effluvia of city dwellers effluent rises into the air, unfiltered and unpleasant. His drawers fill with shit and piss that leak out of his lifeless corpse.

His assistants lay around him in equally squalid states. There are four of them who die this morning and with those deaths, die the memory of Erlyn's connection to the syndicate that took the lives of her family.

But they don't die as a means of retribution. They die because their existence threatened Erlyn. They die because others wanted them dead too. The first reason required the second reason for any summation.

Neither Erlyn nor I know of this until far later in the morning. It isn't the two of us, who inform others. It will be Amelae, later.

All Erlyn and I know this morning, as we exit the work area, is that there is nothing from one side after about four thirty and the other side is texting about other issues later in the morning. There is nothing to tell us what transpired. We know something dramatic has occurred only because there are text from others, wondering where their guys are, who has the Shabu? There are complaints about someone not showing up.

Erlyn and I are sitting at the dining table. She is drinking Milo and I have a cup of coffee. There is a large pan of sticky rice with a brown sugar and coconut topping on the table, from which we have both been spooning mounds onto small plates. It is five thirty and the others have not awakened.

You know, I will never be pretty again? I have this bad scar now. I never walk correctly again. You still want me? You tell me before, I not permitted to go, but you not required to keep me.

Do you want me to release you?

No! Never!

Good, because as of now, I renounce my ability to release you. You must stay.

Soul

Even though I am ugly?

I smile. She is not ugly. She will never walk smoothly again from what the doctor tells us. Yes, the scar is ugly but she is not. That is something that she will never figure out. From now on, she will think of herself as damaged goods.

Erlyn, you are mine. I do not want to hear about this again. You may not leave and I will not tell you to leave. Your job is to make me happy. My job is to make you happy. Are we clear on this?

Yes, Master. Master, are you happy?

For the moment, I am as happy as is realistic, until I learn the fate of those men. I need to keep you safe.

Why that?

The fact that I do is all you need to know.

Master, why sometimes it look like you are sad?

Because we all have regrets. You have regrets, and I have mine.

Francine's mother?

Yes.

Why you not say her name?

It is too painful.

Sorry. Sorry I make you sad now.

We drink our drinks, eat the sticky rice and are enveloped by the quiet, and the dim half-light that sneaks through the sheer drapes covering windows facing away from the sun on this overcast day.

Master, will your daughter like us? She not be angry we are here?

Francine is very happy you are here.

How it feel to you? I am her age.

Yes, you are. But you are not my daughter.

Sige, sige. Master, the nail polish, the make-up. That hers, di ba?

Why does it matter?

It not old. These colors, they like we have now. The polish still very good. The powder in the same type containers in the stores now. She the only one here before?

Erlyn, why does it matter?

Things in it for the body, not just the face. You know this?

Yes.

So?

Erlyn, why does it matter?

How you with your daughter?

I am her father. If you are asking if I am her lover, I am not.

Sige, sige. Sorry I make you mad.

I am not angry with you.

Once again silence rules as I sip more of my cooling cup of coffee. I reach out and take hold of Erlyn's hand. She smiles. We will be OK.

Mirafe and Aina emerge from their bedroom. Both look groggy. They must have just rolled out of bed. Both make a beeline for the Milo and then settle around us, using spoons to eat the sticky rice, directly from the pan.

Appreciative smiles grace both their faces as the sweet concoction fills their mouths with the soft, but chewy treat.

The warm Milo having infused some sense of life into Mirafe, the girl, glancing over the edge of her cup, asks if there is any news.

Nothing worth mentioning yet, I tell her. Erlyn's eyebrows confirming my assertion.

I can see Aina hoping that our failure to claim success is a harbinger of news that her Jesus has saved the men. She is on edge. I smile at her. She tries to smile back but is conflicted. A smile briefly appears and is turned off as she turns her head away from me.

Ten minutes later Amelae appears. It is clear she has toileted and is fully awake as she heads straight to the coffee pot and pours herself a cup. Sitting down, tablespoon in hand she scoops up a decent size clump of the sticky rice and nibbles a piece from the spoonful she has gathered. *That was a bloody mess this morning.*

Excuse me? Do you know something?

You don't, Master?

No, I don't. What have you learned?

Soul

There is a report that the NPA attacked and gun down four PNP this morning.

Erlyn is pissed. *Hindi! Wala³⁵ NPA!*

Amelae is signaling that she understands. *They have to say that. They not going to report the PNP are in a drug syndicate. Di Ba?*

Erlyn is mollified. Aina asks, *Any live?*

Wala na.³⁶ Master? This what you hope for result?

Yes. All those who needed to die are now dead. It is over.

Amelae, looks at Erlyn, and you can see the wheels turning. This time I really do think I know what is in her mind, but it is best if she is the one to say it.

Friend, you and me, we cause many to die. Many want to kill us. I am glad it is over for you. I am not sure for me. Why so many want to kill us? We not do anything bad.

Hindi ko alam³⁷. Without Master, I patay³⁸. Maybe you are not patay, but your mother patay, di ba?

Oo, talaga. Without Master, maybe the wrong ones dead.

Sige.

Aina seems to be mortified and quietly leaves the table, and the room. The girls look at her and glances are exchanged. They wanted to like her. They wanted to have her join them. For a while they were not sure. Now they are. She, in their eyes, needs to go.

Master, I can go out now? I can look to see what the church doing, also?

Yes, you no longer need to hide.

Good. Now I will use an umbrella! I am lighter now. I want to stay this way. And Erlyn giggles.

The three of them appear happy. There is an ease in their posture and their expressions that was not there before. As they exit the house, a house they see as home, they are sure of who they are and where they belong in the world.

³⁵ Wala means nothing but here it can be translated as 'it was not the NPA.' The NPA is the armed insurgent arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The NPA is an armed force and they do use violence. So the attribution will hold up in the press.

³⁶ None now. (Meaning no one is alive of the four.)

³⁷ I do not know.

³⁸ Dead.

I still have concerns about Amelae and more seriously, her mother, but they are not in any immediate danger from what I can tell. At the moment, my attention is shifted toward the church for which the girl's had been soliciting. Lying, as they were doing, to support a church in a manner outside the agreed upon rules. In this, I do not have to keep my hands off, even though I am not protecting a soul contracted to me.

But I can't do it myself. That is not allowed. My girls are not nearly numerous enough to stop what is happening. What is needed is overwhelming action. I know exactly where to get the needed forces.

There is a total lack of accountability of the funds collected in the manner required by the church of these kids. How much is going to the work of the church and how much is going into the personal pockets of the high and mighty within the church is a mystery. These churches are scams of scams. If folks want and need to believe in whatever... OK, let them. That's the deal. That's in the rules of our game. But stealing by deceiving kids that they are doing "god's work" by deceiving others in a scam that steals from the end patron and stealing again from those deceived into taking the money under the false pretense... no, that is enough to really piss me off.

I need an army. What I need is "god's army." Luckily they are here, all around us. They are organized, and disciplined, and able to be turned out on orders from on high. And it is somewhat fitting that they be the instruments of the demise of this sham church. The question of how I can get them to act is the challenge of the moment. I will use the Catholics. The Inglesia ni Cristo functions too much like the mafia as it is. OK so do the Catholics, but they don't kidnap their own senior officials during turf battles. The INC does. Plus there are simply far more Catholics.

The sham church has activities throughout the islands. So one bishopric is not enough, I need the entire Philippines.

I decide to send a fax to the bishop with whom I have already had a run in. The sending number will once again seem to come from his dead priest.

You are instructed to do as follows.

Contact all in the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Inform them that you have received a divine command that the congregation of the Catholic Church of the Philippines shall interfere with those who are instructed by a false church to solicit funds for said church and its leaders by false claims, false premises, and subterfuge.

Each parish church, and each congregation of each cathedral shall be so directed to act without failure, and without relaxation, until all activities by such solicitors is ended by any means required.

Soul

You are instructed to say that failure shall bring with it the deaths of priests, if the failure is limited to a locale, or the death of any bishop who refuses these instructions. Deaths will commence in one week.

To talk to me directly, text the number on this fax. I will receive your messages. Leave those I protect alone. They know nothing of this.

I see the fax is received in the office of the Bishop. Within minutes a SMS text is sent to the dead priest's cell number.

Give me time.

I send a text back from that number.

No.

An hour later I see a phone call from the Bishop to the offices of the church which I am targeting. The call ends fifteen minutes later and a new text is sent.

They refuse to stop. They tell me it is none of my business.

I answer with,

Six days, twenty-two hours and thirty-four minutes. Do not haggle. Do not anger me.

I see a fax is sent to the secretary of the CBCP. It reads as I have instructed. I see a broadcast text message that I gather includes all those in the Conference. I collect all these numbers. How very accommodating they are to provide this to me. A fax is then transmitted to all those on the list as well. I can now start connecting the dots between the bishops and their seats of operations, and to their priests.

I have done all I can for now. I know there will be strong pushback, and lots of anger. I just don't care. These are pompous fools. Well educated to be sure, but fools.

I need to spend some time with the girls. Mirafe has been needing attention and it is more than time to provide it. After a nice lunch of heart of palm and coconut milk, I take the girl by the hand. She looks at me, nods, smiles, and tells me, *Í am ready.*

I guess I am too. We go through into the locked passageway, back to my bedroom. She has not been here before. *Master, may I look around?*

Yes.

And that is evidently the permission she needs to look into every possible hidey-hole in the room. There is really nothing to see, except for one cabinet. There, neatly kept, and in order, are the likenesses of each of the

females with whom I have spent a life. Some are portraits. A few of the later ones are pictures. Attached to each: a lock of hair; a record, where such existed, of the birth of our child; a letter, or testament from my companion to me, of that, which she wanted me to remember of her; and the place and time of her burial.

The letters are in many different languages. A few on clay tablets. Many on parchment. Some on vellum. The last on acid free paper. As Mirafe cannot read them in most cases, she decides I need to read them. She also decides that Amelae and Erlyn need to be here too. She asks permission to have them join us. I grant it.

She goes back down the hall to allow the two through. Mirafe tells me Aina looks on with a pained expression as my three souls disappear from her view down the hallway.

Mirafe sets about the task of telling her companions what she has found. She announces, she will set out the likeness of the companion, and as it is in view, I will read aloud to them the testament.

I cannot think of a sweeter and simultaneously more painful duty. Questions frequently interrupting the reading as meanings need clarification or enlargement. Some of the letters are brief. Certainly the ones on the tablets are not very demanding of elaboration. But as we get to the parchment, time after time, one of the three has questions. Reliving all this is beyond difficult.

Amelae asks, as we have moved through the first ten or so, *Why do you change locations so far?*

Because I do not want to take the progeny of my progeny.

Why? There is no sin. Why not?

I don't want to be the father of a monster. That is why.

Oh!

The reading of the letters continues, until we get to Francine's mother. Here there is a picture, a lock of hair, but nothing else. No name, no letter, and no child's birth record.

Erlyn is holding the photo. *Master, she was truly beautiful. Maybe one of the most beautiful of all. I mean no bad things for us, but we not beautiful like her.* The other two are silently agreeing with the assessment.

Mirafe asks the obvious. *Master, they loved you. Some say your love kept them alive. Why you not love your daughter? Why you not love us?*

Soul

Because, friend, says Erlyn, who is still holding the photo, because of her. He can't love us until he can say her name and say goodbye to this one who he loved so much. Even then I am not sure. Love blinds. He must never be blind again. That why! ... Amelae what you doing?

Taking photos of the children's records. Maybe we can research and find Master's heirs!

You ask the Master if he will allow this! He is right next to you. Maybe he not want this.

Why had I never cared? I am not opposed to it. I just didn't see the point in it. This whole process has taken a toll on me. I feel exposed in a way I have not felt in a long time. *Amelae, you may do this. You have my permission.* And all look happy.

It is long past time for supper. Mirafe will take a rain check on the rest of this. We exit the private rooms and rejoin the rest of the house and Aina. She has been crying.

I ask my three to get food on the table and sit down with Aina.

OK, why the tears?

Don't you know? You are a powerful god!

Are you trying to anger me?

She is just looking at me, bewildered.

Aina, I know you are angry with me, but why do you want me to be angry with you?

Why you mean to me?

I am not mean to you.

You keep me out!

You have not given me your soul. How is that being mean?

How you powerful, if you don't know my heart?

Because humans have free will. Thoughts are transient and change from moment to moment. Thoughts tell us nothing. We don't waste time with them. So I don't know what you have in your head.

You heard Erlyn's prayer! So that not true.

A prayer in time of life's threat, of one who has given her soul, is not a thought. It is an arrow that pierces my mind. It is entirely something else from a thought. I cannot read your mind at all simply because you are not mine.

Soul

You are not powerful like God or Jesus!

If there was a God or Jesus, you would be correct. But there isn't.

How I know this?

You don't. How you know there is, without the answer, faith. Faith is not knowing. So how you know?

It is faith!

Yes I know you want to believe. That requires faith because you don't know. Knowing is the opposite of Faith. You do not know there is a god or a Jesus. And I can't help you with that.

Why you not know my heart?

Because I don't have that power, Aina. What does your heart say?

Why I have to ask? Why you not just take me and it be over?!

Oh. I see. Yes you want others to direct you, to take control of you. Yes, I can see that in your personality. But then later you can hate and resent the person or the group that did that to you, and took your freedom away. It is somewhat how you allowed that priest to control you so entirely. Aina that is not how it works here. I will control you for life, but only if you ask me to do that. Yes, I know I could force the issue, but I will not. It is you who has to choose. Only then do you own the results.

Whack-a-mole

Aina is a problem. She has fundamentally told me to rape her and be done with it. That just isn't going to happen. But I do think she needs to see more of my cruel side. She responds to that. Nice isn't what turns her crank. Power does. She wants to believe she has signed up with the more powerful team.

Her problem is she doesn't know where power really resides. She has been taught it is in the Church and in Jesus. I am challenging that and do seem to have power. But is it enough? She doubts it, but she is not sure.

At the supper table I discuss my plan with the CBCP. I explain that it will probably mean a few deaths.

Ninong, you will kill a bishop?

No, I don't kill. I thought I had made that clear. But others may. When it comes to clergy who have climbed up this far, all have left behind some very angry people. It's just a question of turning over some rocks.

Bishops are very powerful. They are close to Jesus. We will be in danger.

If there was a Jesus, you would be correct. But there is no Jesus and we are in no danger. The bishops however are in grave danger. I will keep you all informed of how things progress, including you Aina.

That night I am reviewing the messaging that has been flowing. I see one bishop who is fairly abusively upbraiding the bishop I have contacted. I send "my" bishop a message. *Tell your detractor that I am aware of him and shall make him an example for the others.*

I cannot!

I will do it for you. Wait and learn.

It only takes me five hours to find the bishops greatest vulnerability. I exploit it. I will wait as things start to congeal.

At breakfast, all seem to be in good moods. My three were gone for a few hours, in an attempt to learn about the current doings at their old church. I need to hear what they have to say about it.

Aina is still ‘grounded’ and reports that she has gained another kilo. It is just too fast and I say as much while we are still at the table. But I have something else to ask her.

Aina, have you heard of a Bishop Burgos?

Yes! He is a very important man. Why you ask?

He needs to learn a lesson.

You cannot! He is too powerful.

We will see. In the meantime, girls, what did you learn yesterday?

Mirafe has decided to speak for the three of them, and it appears to be by consensus.

They doing the same thing we always do. They meet in the morning, agree on who gets what area that day. They do the soliciting most during the lunch times and return to the church to give the money to the pastors in the late afternoon. After that they attend religious instruction until meal time. Later the boys are sent out to solicit at venues and the girls are sent to the dormitory. No change. But there are new pastors. The old ones you send to jail.

Anything else?

Wala. I not think we need to go back. This morning we will work in the garden. In the afternoon we will clean your rooms in the back. OK?

Yes. OK.

May we have a key to your rooms?

It took them long enough to ask! I made three for them. They are in a pocket. I reach in and pull the lot out, giving each her own. Each gives me a kiss before taking off to work outside in the cool of the morning.

I expect the next few days to be uneventful on the clerical front as what I have set in motion needs time to mature. Still, I look at the traffic with the bishops as well as circle back on things past. While all should be quiet on those older issues, I don’t want to be blindsided by my own hubris.

And sometimes what you do not expect is exactly what you find. There is an anomaly in Amelae’s mom’s patient records at the hospital. They have hopped her up on painkillers and anti-anxiety meds, but are giving her placebos instead of real anti-biotics for the TB. I look for and find the personnel record for the doc who has done this and send a text using his “next of kin” contact number. That is his wife’s number.

Soul

Correct meds > no placebo > or I will destroy you. Do it NOW! /s/ The Master.

The text was read because the next thing I see is him calling his wife. No doubt, she is denying sending the text. I see a call to someone else. It is a voice call and I can't tell who it is. So I open up the unknown phone's SMS log. It is another doc.

I watch traffic from both docs. Number two doc calls the local parish. Someone at the parish is calling 'my' local bishop.

The bishop is texting the dead priest's phone.

*Not me, not the church! We not doing this.
Doctors decide to kill the woman. They tell me
it is too late now to save her.*

I answer.

Save her or they and you will all suffer the same fate as that woman. Act NOW.

I watch has four numbers go into action at the same time. The bodyguard protecting Nanay is instructed to bring her to the hospital immediately. New doctors are asked for. A text to the PNP informs them of two docs who were trying to kill the woman. PNP officers are dispatched to arrest two docs. The officers are told to shoot if the docs resist arrest.

In the next two hours, the mom has been hospitalized and is receiving intensive treatments. Armed guards are stationed outside her room. Two docs may or may not have resisted arrest, but they are dead in any case.

A text from the bishop to the dead priest's phone asks,

Did you kill them?

I am not sure I want to answer. I choose to leave the question hanging. I circle back to the phones of our now lifeless physicians to see to whom they were talking. I see it. It was another priest. That is where the idea was been spawned.

I text the bishop using that special number.

You have a problem. Your priest, Cruz, needs to tell you what he did, or it will be more than the priest who will suffer. I put the priest in your hands for his crime. He is not to be saved, unless you want my wrath on all.

He answers.

Are you telling me to kill him?

He attempted murder and it was only with divine intervention that the woman is not dead right now. She will likely die because of his actions. Do what you must. I will be watching.

Soul

I am not watching. At least not like he may think I am. Still I will eventually see what comes of this. I am frustrated and greatly irritated. These priests have been killing in the name of Christ for millennia. This is no different from a thousand years ago. Priests are bloodthirsty. The more my mind remembers all the wrongs over the years, my heart hardens against them. It is time to shake them up. It is time for a bishop or two to die.

I get up and walk into the main part of the house. Finding Amelae, I tell her, *Your mother had a problem with her meds. She is in the hospital. At this time there is nothing immediate that is happening and she is being treated. I don't want to alarm you. Hopefully she will be OK. As soon as I am aware of how things are going, I will let you know.*

Thank you for looking after her, Master.

Ninety minutes later I am back in the work area when a text to the dead priests phone appears.

Cruz told the doctors to 'allow her to die, as the illness was God's will.' I ask my priest, 'Is it God's will that we all die?' He look at me. He ask, 'Why I say that?' I tell him you will kill all of us if the woman dies. I tell him that he must die now. No matter if she live or die. His life is forfeit now, or maybe we all die anyway. He say, 'How Jesus allow this?' I tell him, maybe there is no Jesus. I not know anything now. He has a gun. He kill himself. Please no more death!

I do not answer. No answer is required. I log into the hospital network and read the newest notes. It seems that the removal of the antibiotics too early made the TB resistant to the drug. There is another drug but it is far more expensive and they don't have it at the hospital.

I text the bishop on our special connection.

Pay for and get the drug, Delamanid. It is expensive and the treatment cost can be as high as eighty thousand pesos. It is your church that makes this necessary. Do it NOW.

An answer comes back.

Yes, Master.

There is nothing more I can do about this. I see the messages to secure the needed meds and follow up messages regarding that the meds are on the way but it must be flown in as there is none of this medication in the city. The docs are not saying it will work, but they are saying it is the only option left open to them.

I need to relax. I am surely not feeling relaxed now, but there are times when things do seem to come as they are needed.

The cleaning of my rooms this afternoon takes a turn that I have not expected. I am still looking at messaging traffic around four in the afternoon when all three girls appear before me.

Erlyn has an impish smile on her face as she tells me, *Master, I think you need to come with us.*

They are a team! I can feel it. They sense that they all need each other to deal with me. Each doesn't think she is pretty enough, or smart enough to compete with the females who came before. But there were never three of them before. They see that as their great advantage and one they want to exploit.

It really isn't necessary. Each of them alone would, in another time and place, have been a wonderful companion.

OK, why?

Our job is to make you happy, di ba?

Yes, sure.

So come! It is time we do our job.

Give me a sec and I will join you in the bedroom.

I text the bishop.

Visit with the new doctors and explain in graphic detail why the woman was taken off her meds and what has happened to the two doc and the priest for trying to kill her. Tell them, that their only hope is to do what is right. They may not run from treating the woman or they will suffer as assuredly as if they tried to kill her.

The text back says,

Yes Master.

The girls are waiting for me, but there is a surprise for me in the room as well. The portraits of some my most beautiful companions, as based on the eyes of these three girls, are now hanging on the walls. Among them is Francine's mother.

I think I see both pride and fear on each of the three youthful faces. They like what they have done, but are afraid of my reaction to the same. I freely admit being a little surprised. Does that surprise them? If they thought I was all knowing, what do they think now?

What do I think now? I am not sure. I like their initiative. I like the respect they have afforded these women. No companion of mine ever has been as gracious as these three are now. Am I ready to see Francine's mother's visage so frequently? Maybe I should get ready. Is that the underlying message here? Is that the subtext to all of this?

I look into each of these girls. Yes, that is it. She is to be honored and not hidden. My failure should not lessen her importance. They are right. Good for them.

I like what you have done with the room. Thank you.

Gone is the fear. Happiness and pride reign. I am quickly surrounded and undressed, as coordinated by a hive mind.

I am escorted to my own bed and asked to lie on my back. A cloth is draped over my face and the assault begins. I feel a mouth on my spear, and one each on my nipples. Hands massage my temples and I drift in a state of euphoria. Time vanishes, gravity ends, I float in wet delicious warmth. I am not thinking. I am simply existing, happily existing.

But at some point the girls have decided that it is time for completion and I am rolled over and on top of Mirafe. I enter the girl and find her arms pulling my face down to hers as she pushes her tongue into my mouth as her pelvis flexes up to take me in more completely.

Her cunt is wet and hot. It feels like it is running a fever. Her legs wrap around me. I pull my head back and lifting my torso up, Mirafe rises with me. I pound us down hard onto the mattress, pushing her ass deep into springs that have no choice but to give way.

I lift us up again and smash us down. I repeat the act over and over.

Swinging an arm out I grab Amelae and bring her face to mine and bite down on her lower lip, I move my hand and two fingers enter her cunt and smash against her G-spot. Two girls are cumming.

I roll off Mirafe, grab Erlyn, toss her on top of Mirafe and take my youngest girl like a dog. Smashing her down against Mirafe as I pound her cunt from above.

Eventually I take pity on the girl and give her my seed, before rolling back onto the mattress and resting for a good twenty minutes.

My mind is wandering down other paths. I am thinking about Francine. I will not allow Amelae's mother to suffer the fate I allowed Francine's

mother to face. I will not fail again. It is time to shake things up. That much is clear. These priests and pastors need to hit a few walls.

I return to the work area, but there is little movement on any front.

When I come to the table for dinner, it is clear that something is bothering Aina.

Aina, what is troubling you?

You not hear the news? You are supposed to know everything!

That again? Really? OK, be angry with me, but tell me what has you so upset.

You kill my priest!

What? What are you talking about?

The priest you send away from me. He dead. It say he commit suicide. I not believe it.

Who said he committed suicide?

I hear it on the radio. They say he try to kill a woman and he caught. So he kill himself instead of going to jail.

What is this priest's name?

Cruz. Why you ask? You already know this!

I didn't. Yes I know Cruz did something very bad. I know exactly what he did. It had nothing to do with you.

What you mean? What he do?

He tried to kill Amelae's mother.

Amelae screams. Mirafe and Erlyn gasp. Aina looks terrified.

Amelae, when I told you that there was a problem with your mother's medications, it was because Cruz told the doctors to remove the meds from her and allow her to die as it was "god's will." The doctors did it. I found out what they did and intervened. Your mother is being treated with new powerful drugs to prevent her immediate death. The two doctors are dead and evidently so is the priest.

Amelae looks at me with a steely gaze. She is angry but not at me. *Who kill the doctors?*

The PNP.

Good! Good. This priest, how he know to kill himself?

I am not sure, but I think his bishop told him it was required.

Soul

Hala.³⁹ OK, good. Master, you keep your word. You protect me and my mother. She looks at Aina. Your priest tried to murder my mother. You should go! He is your priest. He means more to you than we do. Go!

Amelae, Aina could not have known Cruz would do this. You are wrong for telling her to go.

Why? She call him, 'Her priest!' Master! That is enough. She has chosen.

It's too soon Amelae. Aina, do you agree, it is too soon?

But Aina says something that we are not expecting. What if it was the will of God, and you interfered?

There are many answers to that. Priests always say that God's will is unknowable. So no priest can claim to know it. By making the statement, he is making himself god. Next, if it was god's will and I interceded I am more powerful than is god. Finally, any god who capriciously wants people killed isn't much of a god to be admired.

But you wanted the doctors and the priest killed! How that different?

I did not ask for the doctors to be killed when they were. But it is true that I would have seen them dead if Amelae's mother died. They attempted murder. The PNP did that on their own. The priest I did want killed. Priests are a special class of hypocrite. And it was the priest who decided that Amelae's mother should be killed. I passed judgment on a man who ordered a murder. That is justice. I didn't kill him. But I did set the stage for him to know he had to do it. Now Aina, I was going to tell you that it's time for you to come to grips with who is more powerful. But your mind cannot accept it. Should you really try to accept reality, will result in disaster and it will make you useless for me. It will destroy your mind. I didn't see it until this last few questions you asked. But Amelae is correct. It is time for you to go.

You deny me the right to choose? What if I want to give you my soul?

You mean sell it?

No give it. Will you, can you, say no?

Why would you want to do that?

You are evil and more powerful than good. You are the devil. I choose to give my soul to the devil!

Then you really must go.

³⁹ Watch out!

Soul

Consequences

Why?

Because I said so.

But I want to stay!

OK, so tell me why you want to stay.

You are more powerful than Jesus.

There is no Jesus, Aina. I told you that, but you really will never believe it. You truly do believe in Jesus. There is nothing I can do to change your mind. You need to think I am the devil, even though there is no devil, because your mind cannot accept any other possibility.

If you are not God you must be the Devil!

Aina, God and Devil are the same thing. They are the two sides of the same coin. It is a coin that has nothing to do with me.

They not the same! They are at war with each other!

Yes I know that is what you were taught. I know you believe it. That is why you must leave. Those whose souls are bound to the devil or to god, go to the other side. I cannot claim them. They are true believers. If you truly believe that you are giving your soul to the devil, I don't get it. The priests who think their soul may go to the devil actually have doubts. You don't. So there is no choice, you need to go.

But I will give you my soul!

No, child, in your heart you will be giving it to the devil. I am not the devil.

WHAT ARE YOU?!?!?!?

Aina, you need to go.

NO!

Aina, listen to me. I am worried about you. It is not safe for you to stay here.

WHY! What are you?

I am a collector of souls. I told you that.

Only God and Devil collect souls. Why you say you not them! You always say this! I not believe it! Why you say such a thing?

Soul

Aina if I go into your head to show you, there is a good chance that your mind will fall apart. It is called catatonic, though I am not sure that is something that makes any sense to you right now. But, if I try to show you, you may end up sitting in a room, just rocking back and forth until you die. I don't want to do that to you. It is best if you just leave. I cannot use words to show you. For you there are no words that will work.

Show me!

No. I do not want to hurt you.

Show me, or I will tell all the priests about you! Ha! Yes, I will not be silent!

Are you trying to blackmail me?

You say you will hurt me if I tell? OK hurt me and show me. Maybe I survive. If not, I not able to tell anyone, di ba? So do it. Show me.

She is a real pain in the ass. She is also right, to the extent that I do not want her talking. The likelihood is that I will turn her into a vegetable, but I may not. Or she might go into a fugue state for a period of time and emerge from it. I can't know. It is free will.

My three souls look stricken. I can't blame them. I am not happy.

Very well Aina. Say goodbye to the world as you know it. If you ever see the world again, it will be a different one. You may never see anything again. This is your choice. You have asked for it. I give you two hours to clean up, toilet and get your affairs in order. It may be the very last time you will have the opportunity in your life. Go!

Amelae, please make a large pot of coffee. I will not eat. Eryln and Mirafe, if you two are hungry take some food with you and then go assist her. Talk to her but do not allow her to eat. I do not want her to choke on her own vomit later. Ask her if there are any things she wants to be told about, if she loses all her memories. You have two hours.

Master?

Amelae, I need to get ready and you need to be doing something, not hanging over me. When the coffee is made, eat something and then please prepare the spare room across from my work area for Aina.

Master, she has not sold you her soul. Why you allow her there?

Sweet Amelae, when I am done with her, she will either be quite mad, out of her mind, or the most obedient of all of you. I suspect one of the former possibilities. But if I am going to destroy her, I will give her the privacy that seems most decent, as her madness envelopes her and kills her from the inside out. Either way, I expect her to lose herself, and be unable to communicate for some time. We will need to nurse her.

What I am about to do is possibly the cruelest of acts. The human mind is not designed to contemplate this. I am about to, metaphorically, pull back the curtain and show Aina what she and all humans really are. I am going to show her the game board. She is going to see the collector, ***His Majestic Fatness***, as he scoops up the souls as they slip from the vessels that contain them. She will see herself, and those around her, as the vessels they are. And when I am done, what will be left of Aina? What will she be? She has demanded I take her soul. I am obligated to do it, but I can't until her mind is adjusted. This is the nightmare scenario I never want and try to avoid. I should never have taken this one from the control of the priest. Better to have let him kill her, than my doing so.

Amelae has the room prepared. I ask her to keep a carafe of coffee filled for me in the room, but not to try talk to me or communicate with me until I leave the room.

Master, how long will this be?

It is not something that happens quickly.

Maybe two days. I am not sure. Each mind is different. If it ends sooner, it will be because Aina's mind has shattered.

You will be with her for two days, in that room and all you want is coffee?

Oh, I could drink water, but yes I prefer the coffee. It is an indulgence, if you will allow the sick pun.

I do not understand.

Never mind, it is hardly important.

An hour later I am in the room. Aina appears, escorted by her two guides. She is dressed and has a determined aspect.

Remove your clothing.

Why? Will you give me a child now?

No, I will not touch you. But for what we are about to do, your clothing would be a problem. Take them off. Mirafe, will take them from you. You will never wear clothing inside this house again.

The girl disrobes. While she is not as painfully thin as she had been when she first arrived here, she is still not robust. She is not juicy. That makes what we are about to engage in all the more troubling. Still the recent weight gain, may prove a boon.

I ask all three souls to leave me alone with Aina, who is currently sitting on a chair.

Are you ready?

What are you going to do to me?

I am going to show you who your god and your Jesus really are. I am going to show you, what you really are. I am going to rip all that you know out of your mind so that it can perceive the game in which you are but a simple pawn. If you survive, you will be a loyal servant to me. If you do not survive, you will sit in your own filth and rock in that chair all the days following this one until you die.

You are going to kill me?

No Aina, you have demanded I kill you or make your mind see what it is incapable of seeing now. I asked you to leave and you refused. This is entirely your doing. I will show your mind what it seems to be unable to fathom on its own. Whether you stay sane, go insane, or die, is out of my control. It has to do with free will.

See you are the Devil!

Ab, that again. No, the devil is a construct, just as god is. These are two sides of the same coin. To believe in one who represents divine goodness, you need to believe in the other who represents divine evil. That is the "Christian god concept." The Jews do not have a devil because their god is not divine goodness. Their god concept is both good and evil. They believe they have to pray each year to be allowed to live another year! That is why your church tells you that the god of the Jews was a vengeful god and yours is one of salvation. I am not part of that nonsense.

She spits out, So! You are going to show me the truth?

No, I am going to show you, what is not the truth. I am wasting my time. She will never get it, no matter what I say. Ab, but you do not believe me. All I can do is show your mind. So here we go...

Her eyes flash wide open, and then, she screams. It is excruciatingly painful for her, as I move in and start ripping away the artifice. You think you are naked when you disrobe? Ha! That is not really naked, this is naked. When your mind faces what it, under normal circumstances, is designed to never see, and there you are, defenseless, alone, and exposed, you are truly naked. I am not kind. There is no way to be kind.

She is whimpering. She gasps. She sits silently sobbing. I take her on a journey. It is not a fast thing. It must be absorbed, or her brain will fight back and reject that which it is being shown. The human brain is

programmed to deny some things. I have to override that, to force it to see what it will not willingly see.

Human time is lost to me now as I take her on her journey.

My senses smell shit. She must have defecated. I ignore it and continue on the journey.

I think I hear her trying to retch, but her belly is empty, it will be dry heaves. Still the acrid aroma of stomach acids reaches me. We continue on.

Now she is moaning, pleading, *No, please, no... Ob, no, no, no, no... how? But why? ... No! no, no, no...*

I press on. I am sad, sad for her. She should have left peaceably and lived a life without this torment. I wish such pain on no one. It is, simply, and by definition, inhuman. That is a tautology, but could not be truer, even if it were intended as hyperbole.

For the moment, she lives. Her brain is stronger than I expected. That is both good and bad. It means I have to work harder to rip out the mythical constructs. It means that her defenses are stronger, and we have to go at this far longer. It means she is enduring more pain, it may just possibly mean she will survive, but not that she will be sane. That is unknowable now. Only time will tell.

I back out of her mind and reenter the human world. She is a mess, but I can see signs that my three souls have washed her and cleaned around her. The carafe by my side has some hot coffee in it and my cup is half filled. She sits there. Her eyes open and peering out to something beyond her and not here. She is motionless.

I get up and walk out of the room. I shower, change my clothing and leave my private rooms. The girls are sitting at the dining table. It is evening outside.

Hungry, Master? Erlyn has a look on her face of incredulity.

I guess a little. Are you OK, Erlyn? Why the 'off' expression?

You know how long you take?

No. I think it must have been a while, but, no, how long?

Three days. You were in there for three days. We force her to take water by putting it on her lips. We afraid she will die! We afraid you will die, even though we know you not die. You not eat for three days. And you not very hungry? What about her?

I am not sure she will eat. Make her some broth and take it to her.

Amelae, gets up and says she will do it. Mirafe says she will put a plate together for me. I reach out for Erlyn's hand and she quickly proffers it.

Master, will Aina survive?

I think she will live. I do not know if she will be sane.

When we know it?

If there comes a time that she ends the walled off, non-communicative state she is in, she will either be quite mad, or dangerously and murderously violent, or she will be sane, but different. I do not hold out hope for the latter.

Why?

It is just not the likely outcome.

When will we know?

There is no telling. Someone will need to be with her at all times from now on. ... Tell me, have we heard anything about the bishops?

Wala pa⁴⁰.

Mirafe returns with a plate of food. I eat some. Rarely am I tired, but what I have done, has exhausted me. I pick around at my food, eat a bit more and retire to my bedroom, to sleep for a couple of hours before entering the work area to check on things. As tired as I am, I am concerned about Amelae's mother and I need to know what is happening with the bishops.

I log into the hospital network, and look at the SMS messages between the docs treating her. The new meds appear to be working. She won't die now, at least. The docs are patting themselves on the back. The bishop has texted me. It came a day ago. It is a supplication. I do not need to answer it.

With the bishop who was causing problems, I watch as things move toward completion. It has taken three days. But as of now I can see things are about to come to a conclusion.

Two hours later and about half an hour before the act, I send out a broadcast to all the bishops less the one who will likely die. *This is a token payment for failure to do as instructed. I am watching all of you.*

That evening the late news programs lead with a story of a mentally unstable man shooting a bishop before killing himself. Later reporting indicates the

⁴⁰ Nothing yet.

man was a congregant in a church where the bishop was the local priest many years ago. No motive is known.

Text traffic between the bishops and the PNP is frantic. But there is nothing to indicate the gunman had any accomplices. As the gunman is dead, there is nothing to follow up. The SMS text is not mentioned. One of the reasons is it is from a dead priest's phone and the SIM is in police custody. No one wants to mention that.

I send out another text. *How many of you want to die? Do as instructed or perish.*

A number of bishops send texts back with questions that amount to, 'who are you?' I don't respond.

Within hours, two bishops have committed suicide, unable to accommodate what is occurring. Other bishops are busy communicating with their priests. We will see how things progress.

I poke my head into the room that Aina now occupies. Amelae has her lying on the bed and is lying next to her. Both are asleep.

I return to my work area. There is a text from 'my' bishop.

Rome asks to talk with you, I give them this number. Please do not be angry.

I say nothing in return.

I look at the bishop's call, text and IP logs. I can see who he has been talking with in Rome. I do not reach out. I dig. I want to know who this guy's family is. I look for vulnerabilities.

It is so easy! I have a basket of fruit from which to pick. I choose three ripe fruits. I set things in motion, and at the same time, I wait. I don't have to wait long. The text is angry, threatening, demanding and at the same time dismissive. It is curious how much of a buffoon, and puffed up pontificator each of these guys are.

*Fool, I will rain down on yours, now. Consider this a warning. Stay out of this or all will feel my wrath. In the next 48 hours, things will befall your loved ones. Just be thankful none will die. It could have been far worse. Threaten me again and it *will* be far worse. You are nothing. Beware of who you threaten.*

I see email traffic from the Cardinal to the bishop. "Have this man arrested!" The email back says, "How I tell police to arrest smoke or fog? Not a man!"

The Cardinal replies, "This is a parlor trick! It is only a man!"

A few hours later, it is time for some fun. I can see someone approaching the Cardinal's rooms. CCTV is a wonderful thing. It is a nephew who has

Soul

the problem I created for him a few hours ago. I send a text to the Cardinal, *Knock, knock, let your nephew in.* Twenty seconds later, that is exactly what is happening at his door. Thirty minutes later, his nephew is still with him. I suspect things are getting ugly. But I am not done.

His younger sister has just received very bad news and it says the Cardinal was the cause. She tries to call him, but I make the SS7 signaling indicate a busy condition. I send him a text, *Ring, ring, your sister is calling.* I allow her next attempt to go through.

I wait until I see the call ends, and send,

Enjoy her call? This is just the beginning. I will rain pain down on all you know. There is one more yet to come in the next forty hours. Each will believe it is you who is doing this. I can and will do this, and far more, to you and to the entire church, or you can stand back. I have plans for your congregants in the Philippines. When it is done, I will have no further need of you or your church unless you interfere further. Choose.

I get a reply.

All you want is to shut down that other church's solicitation game?

Yes.

OK. I will order the bishops to comply. No more!

When I see the results, I will end your misery and not before.

Who are you?

Never trust a Cardinal.

I learned that lesson a very long time ago. I make mistakes once, not twice. I will wait to see what comes of his promise. But just to make sure, I go back and look again at the phone, text and email traffic to the Cardinal. I want to see who, of the bishops, asked for help.

What I find is it was three bishops, as a group, who asked for the intercession. Exactly what they were hoping for after the death of their colleague is unclear, but the three are the ones who called on the Cardinal. I will rattle their cages in a fun way. I have the cellphone number for each of the three. Let's call them B1, B2, and B3. Using B1's number I send a text to B2. *Your life hangs in the balance for contacting the Cardinal.* Then using B2's number I send the same to B3, and using B3's number I message B1. And then I watch.

They are going nuts. I can see calls going every which way between the three of them and then calls to the Vatican. And then there is a call from the Cardinal to "my bishop". It lasts for a good long while.

The call between the Cardinal and the bishop lasts a good forty-five minutes before it ends and a new volley of calls, this time from the Cardinal to the three bishops.

I will wait and see what happens with the bishops. I walk over to Aina's room and see a curious thing. Amelae is asleep, but Aina is stroking Amelae's hair and humming a melody that I haven't heard in millennia. It is disconcerting. Is she insane? Have the remnants of her ordeal left her with fragments of the past lodged in her brain?

I am about to back out of the room, assuming that she does not know of my presence, when Aina speaks. *You always said that boy would bring you grief. He certainly has. I will help you with these three. They are good girls. You chose well. Shall we still call me Aina? That was my name. It seems odd now.*

Is Amelae sleeping? Can she hear us?

I put her in a deep sleep. She will hear nothing now. You were right, of course. Aina should have left. The pain was great, too much. She was a stubborn fool and she is no more; but you knew that when you gave her those two hours. You know what she did with those hours?

No, what did she do?

She prayed to her Jesus and thought of nothing else. The girls asked her what she wanted them to remember for her. She said, 'Nothing, Jesus will protect me.'

What do you remember of her?

All, nothing... I remember what she experienced but not how she felt about those things. ... Do you want me to call you Master? It will make it easier for the girls I think.

Yes, I guess that is a good idea.

OK, Master! Hey, I'm hungry. How about you? Want to eat?

Yes, that sounds nice. About Amelae...

No problem. I will put the thought in her mind that I awoke and you took me out of the room to eat, and then to your bedroom. She won't be frightened.

Good.

This female is Aina and then she really is not. She has crossed the Rubicon and is connected to the world in a different way. She is still the human that Aina was. But she no longer sees the world as a human sees it. She sees it much as I do. Not completely, but much the same. She can't do what I can, but she is not bound by the rules I am bound to obey. This Aina can kill. I cannot. This Aina can enter a mind without being asked and without taking a soul. I cannot. She cannot collect a Soul. But she is dangerous and powerful and my servant.

We exit the back rooms and move toward the dining table. All others are in bed. There are mounds of fruit sitting here, a plate mounded up with puto, a tray of sticky rice, and that is all we need. No words are passed between us. None are needed. We eat, relax, smile, get up, take each other's hand, and walk back to my bedroom.

I need to shower well before you take me. Do I really need to call you Master when we are alone?

I think it is best, so that there are no slip-ups.

Yes, OK. That makes sense. ... Oh!

Yes?

Your wives! You hang the pictures?

No, the girls did it. Don't call them wives in front of the girls.

OK, but it is good that they did it. These three are good. Mirafe and Erlyn are smart, but Erlyn is the smartest.

And your point?

Sometimes your biggest challenges are your greatest successes!

And the most notable failures too! And are you considering yourself a success? I had to destroy Aina!

Call it even then, and with that comes a big smile.

I smile. She is a success. As unlikely as the outcome was, she is every bit the best I could have hoped for. She jumps up on to the bed, turns her back to me, wiggles her ass, looks over her shoulder at me and asks, *Well big boy, are you going to sire a young one? Or are you too shy to give this girl what she needs, a good hard fucking with consequences! Oh! Wait! I still need a shower! Back in a few minutes!* And she jumps off the bed and runs into the bathroom.

I am alone and not alone. I am surrounded by images of the women I have spent lives with. Women who lived to love me and care for me and eventually died, with me by their sides. I don't feel alone. I feel like the room is alive with their presences. I hear them all in my head. I know how each of them thought; these good women.

The portraits do not do them justice. The portraits do not capture the sparks that animated them. But in my mind I make each come alive for me as I move from one of them to the next.

Are they answering you? Aina is standing behind. I didn't hear her come back into the room.

Yes, we were talking, in a way.

What do they think?

It didn't come up. We were just reliving old times.

She moves around me and starts removing my clothing. I assist. She has my slacks down and I remove my shirt. Quickly enough I am undressed and we are on the bed. Aina's body is virginal, but this one's heart is anything but. There is a lust and a passion pulling me on and into her. She is not concerned with a membrane. It is not a consideration. She wants, no needs, me deep inside her. There is nothing sweet or gentle about this. Her teeth have sunk into my shoulder. Her pubic bone is slamming into mine as I pound her relentlessly.

Body fluids soak us and the bed. I squeeze a tit. I bite a lip. I slam her into the mattress. We make a mess of the bed. Her little body is all muscle and sinew. I am fucking someone who knows who she is fucking. She is a committed partner and will be until the day she dies. She knows I am hers for the rest of her life and she knows it in a way that no human could normally know.

I feel her in ways that allow me to feel what she is feeling. There is a feedback loop between us as we both drive toward the completion that must occur. For the child she will bear. This is not an “*I hope.*” This is a “*we know.*” She will guide my seed into her egg. It will happen. And then... it does.

Sleep now. We both need to sleep now. Did I say that or did she? Does it matter?

I hear giggling.

I ignore it. The rest is good.

I hear whispering and more giggling.

I open my eyes. *What?*

You! Master! You! You know what time it is? Aina is rousing now. She grabs on to me and pulls me next to her. I feel her warmth.

No, what time is it?

Noon! It is noon. We not see you this morning. We not see Aina this morning, so we look for you. Both you are sleeping when we look six hours ago. We think, yes, the two of you must be very tired, but you never sleep so long!

Aina has taken advantage of my attention being on the others, to slide down on me and start giving me head. She is doing a masterful job. There is no way that the Aina the girls had known, would have known how to do this. But this is not that Aina. This is the Aina who, now that she has gotten me hard, has removed her mouth and mounted me, then grabbing me by the shoulders and flopping herself down, pulled me into missionary position all while the others were trying to have a meaningful conversation.

As I start fucking her in earnest, she tilts her head sideways and addresses the girls. *If you want him to sleep, just keep on fucking him.* She laughs, throws her legs up in the air and brings her heels bouncing on my ass. I am fucking her hard and she is laughing and screaming, *Harder!*

The other three just stand there. They are statues, confused and immobile.

Soul

I finally reach the point where I must plant my flag, though this one is in truth already pregnant. I grunt, howl and cum hard. It is time to rest. My eyes close. I can hear them but am pretty well done in.

See? Fuck him like that and he will sleep.

Who are you? I think that is Mirafe. I can't be sure, but, ... yes, it must be.

Aina. Why?

You not Aina! Yes indeed that is Mirafe. *Aina speaks like a Filipina. You not do that.*

I am the one who was Aina. I am your Master's servant now. You can call me Aina.

He not your Master?

Excuse me?

The way you say it. He your Master?

Yes, we all serve him.

But, it different with you! You not like us. Something different. What you call him?

I will call him Master.

You believe in Jesus?

No. There is no real Jesus. The one who was Aina was foolish. I know she thought Jesus was real. I do not. I know there is no Devil. I have seen much. It is good that you do not have to be shown the way Aina was shown. It is very painful and knowing what I learn does not make me happy or better. It just changed me. I will protect the three of you. I will protect your Master. There is nothing I will not do to keep you all safe.

Nothing? This is Erlyn, I am sure of it.

Nothing.

But there are things that Master cannot do. So how can it be 'nothing?'

Your Master is not allowed to kill. I can. And I will. Your Master does not direct minds. He must stay out of human minds. I have no restrictions. I will keep you all safe.

Do you hear prayers?

Soul

No. Only your Master does that. But if needed he can send me; if you need help.

Are you a divine?

No, I am human, but I serve your Master. He is a divine. I will die, just like you. I can be killed, just like you. Come let your Master sleep for two hours. He will arise then.

Aren't you supposed to lie down for a couple of hours to allow his seed to find your egg?

Not needed. I am already pregnant with his son. But I have a question. Who decided to put her picture up there?

It was me. That is Amelae's voice.

Good, I am very glad you did it. Yes, very glad.

The rest did me good. I look at the clock. It is about two thirty in the afternoon. I dress and go to the work area. There is activity with the bishops and their priests. From what I can see, I will have the army I had hoped for. But I also see some things that worry me. There are face to face meetings being arranged between clergy and the PNP. I need to know why.

A check on Amelae's mom indicates all is stable.

The bishop has sent me a message that all will proceed as I had demanded. He did not call me Master this time.

There is not one word related to Erlyn or her family in the air.

I am about to leave the room when a Skype request from Francine pops up.

Hi!

Hello to you, Dad! I just had the most interesting Skype session. You want to guess who it was with?

No, there is only one possibility. Is all OK?

Yes. Dad, she's perfect. She told me what happened. You were right to tell Aina to leave. This one is very lucky she lived. But Dad, you are lucky too. She is great. I think she and I can be good friends.

I suspect you are right. So when are you coming to visit?

Is next week too soon?

Soul

The next minute would not be too soon.

Good. Dad, should I really call her Aina. I mean she isn't...

Yes, call her Aina.

She told me you have Mom's photo hanging over your bed. She was very happy to see that.

I am sure she was.

Is it true that Erlyn asked if we are lovers?

Yes.

That's sweet.

That is a weird way to describe it!

Well, I do love you!

As a daughter!

OK... still. I think it is sweet that she had the courage to ask you.

Ab, OK yes, it was sweet.

See? OK, Dad, see you next week.

And the Skype session ends. I walk out of the work area and enter the main part of the house.

I see my original three souls but not Aina. I sit down and ask where the newest of my souls is, only to be told, *She say you send her on a mission to learn what happening in a meeting between priests and PNP. We ask if she permitted to leave the house and she laughs. She say that she always could leave. She kiss each of us and leave.*

Uh, OK.

Master, you not send her?

Oh, I was going to send her. But she got the message faster than I expected.

She reads your mind?

Soul

So it would seem, or maybe I projected it to her and she heard me. I will have to ask her when she gets back.

Master, what happened to Aina? Where did she go? She dead now?

I am not sure I understand. Weren't we just talking about Aina?

We were talking about the person inside Aina's body. Where is Aina?

Aina is in that body.

She a prisoner in there? What happen to her?

All Aina's memories of all she has done, are still there. She is still there. But the personality who spoke before crumbled when confronting the fact that there was no god, no devil and no Jesus. This personality took over.

Who is she?

She is Aina.

No, Master, we listen a bit to the Skype session between Francine and her. She say something to Francine. Francine say, 'You not Aina. Who are you?' Then the start speaking another language. We not know it. Who she?

Ask Francine when you see her. I am telling you she is Aina.

How she know Francine?

She must have picked that up from me when I was inside her mind.

How she know that other language?

I guess I need to give you the same answer.

She say she not a divine. That true?

Yes, she is just as human as you are. I'm hungry. And I get up to put a plate together. There is some fried Lumpia⁴¹ with Hito⁴² inside it on a platter. I fill the plate up with it, and add some dipping sauce, and some rice.

There is no way I can explain to the girls who is really inside Aina's vessel. It just won't work. Better to leave them frustrated and confused as it is.

⁴¹ Spring rolls.

⁴² Catfish.

Hopefully this will settle down. I hear what Aina told them while I was resting. Seeing as how they outed her, she did just fine. There are things you just can't hide and there is no question that she is not a Filipina, not inside, not completely.

As I work my way through my reasonably high cholesterol meal I start hearing a conversation from afar. It is what Aina is hearing. *'...not sure. Whoever it is, is watching networks but not face to face. This guy is not a god. He can't hear this. He can only track things on the network. ... be sure? I mean know that? ... ust me, this guy is just a hacker. You think he is going to strike me dead now? HELP... DOCTOR... HELP!!!!... ... What? ... He's dead? Oh Jesus. OK, no more. I not go against this god! I quit! ... You're not the only one. I want nothing to do with this.'*

I think to myself, *Aina. Come home.* I hear on the other end. *I'm coming. But this was on orders from a Cardinal. I read it in a mind. May I go looking?* I think back, *No. I know who it is. Just come home.*

Things that endure

Aina walks in as I am enjoying a dessert of a little *senorita banana*, with a snifter of brandy.

The girls have taken up positions in front of the TV. A local news reporter is relaying the story of a PNP officer who was meeting with two priests. He says that according to one of the priests, they had gone to the PNP as directed by a Bishop. They were asking the help of the police in tracking down a very dangerous man. Some thought that this man was really the Devil, but their bishop was convinced that it was just a hacker.

The priest explains that the PNP officer was agreeing that it was just a hacker like the Bishop had said. He was joking that no god, no Devil, was going to strike him dead by talking about it. And then the young and healthy officer was struck dead. The priest is saying it is the work of the Devil and if his Bishop orders him to do anything further, he will leave the church. He had decided, it is best not to anger the Devil!

The reporter reaches 'my' bishop who says he was afraid of what would happen but he was ordered to do this by a Cardinal.

Aina and I listen to this as I finish my brandy and she eats some of the food on the table.

The girls are sneaking glances at Aina and then returning their gaze to the TV. Aina calls to them, *You want the tsismis*⁴³?

They leave the TV and gather around us. I get a look from Aina that tells me to just let her do this. I will.

Your Master is not allowed to do things here that are outside of what a human can do. The exception is when he cares for you, or a religious person does some things outside the rules. In all other ways he must not, and even with the religious people, he must use human things. He is also not allowed to kill.

Erllyn interrupts, *Sige, Sige, we know this!*

So, this cop would have tracked your Master down via his activity on the Internet. I had to stop him. I could have wiped it out of his mind. That is what I was going to do, but when he began to tell the priests what he found, I decide I need to kill him right away before he could say anything more... and then he did the best thing. He challenged god to

⁴³ Gossip?

Soul

strike him down if he was wrong. I may not be a god, but I did strike him down! That told the priests, that he was wrong and ended their inquiry. I wiped the minds of the others in the PNP department where this man worked. No one there now remembers anything about the Master. I don't think the bishop is a real problem. He is scared of your Master but had to obey the Cardinal. It is the Cardinal who is the problem.

How you kill him? It is Erlyn again.

I give him a heart attack and a stroke at the same time. His brain and his heart stopped.

How?

Friend Erlyn, I told you that I will protect your Master and you. How I did it is not important.

How you do this if you are human?

I am human. I am Aina. But when your Master entered my mind I learned a great deal about this world and one of the things I learned allows me to do this. ... Master, what do you want to do about the Cardinal?

I want you to make him a breathing statue.

You know this man?

I think, [Look into my mind](#). I am thinking about him.

She nods. She is seeing him. I hear, [Yes, I know who it is now](#). What you do want me to do? What do you mean a breathing statue?

I think, [OK when you are ready do these things](#). Tell him, [You have made the Master angry and so I will punish you](#). First, [I will still your voice](#). Next, [I will end your sight](#). Then, [I will block your hearing](#). And then, [I will stop your ability to move](#). But, that is not all that will happen to you. [I will send pain into your body but keep you alive for many years](#). This is your punishment and no one will know of it but you.

I hear, [OK, may I do it now?](#)

I say so all will hear me. [Yes, do it now](#).

There is silence in the room and Aina is both here and not here as she carries out my instructions. But the silence only lasts a few minutes before Aina sits back in her chair and smiles. [That was truly creative](#). I liked that. I think [your' bishop wants to tell you something](#). He is afraid of what you will do to him.

What you do to the Cardinal?

Erlyn, I did what your Master wanted me to do.

You kill him?

Oh no, Erlyn! I make sure he will live a very long time!

Then what you do?

Your Master wanted the Cardinal to be a human statue. That is what he is. He cannot bear, see, speak or move, but he breathes, and, though in pain, will live a long life.

Did Master want you to kill the Officer?

*No, and if I knew his mind better at that moment, and more like I do now, I would have made the PNP officer a statue too. It is far more satisfying. ... *Master, any instructions about the bishop?**

No.

The girls are taking all this in. I can see both fear and a bit of confusion about Aina. I decide to change the subject. *Francine is coming to visit next week. She is looking forward to spending time with all of you.*

That gets them started on questions about my daughter and what she is like. The somber mood has been lifted and some excitement fills the room with the noise of happy voices.

I also take the opportunity to let Amelae know her mother has responded well to the new drugs and is doing OK. It looks like the TB will be cured. There is nothing I can do about the diabetes. The toll the TB took on her body has not made the matter of the diabetes any better. She will die from this as her liver fails and will soon need dialysis, but it will only prolong the inevitable. Still, for now, she lives. Amelae snuggles against me, crying a little, but I know she is appreciative. Aina sees it and smiles. She especially likes Amelae as it is she who put Francine's mom's photo right over the headboard of my bed. Amelae may not be the brightest, but that is hardly worth mentioning. She did what no one else would have done and she was right.

Then, Mirafe decides to find out if Aina is really Aina. She starts asking Aina about what went on in the house before I entered her mind. All those memories are actually intact, and Aina answers easily. She may not remember the emotions surrounding the events, but the events are there.

Next, Mirafe asks her about the priest and what life was like before we met her. Aina knows all of this and provides the answers.

All three of them are a bit beyond confused. Clearly, only Aina would have all the answers she gave. I had no idea about many of the things that came up between the girls. So most assuredly, this is Aina, and yet most assuredly, this is not Aina.

Erllyn has one final question. *How did we feel about you?*

At first you wanted me to stay, but later you were not sure and then before your Master entered my mind, you told him I didn't belong here and you wanted me to go.

Are you angry with us for that?

No! You were all correct. I should have left.

But you have such power now. Why do you think it was wrong for you to stay?

There are things I just cannot explain to you. But much that I was, was lost to me, . . . to live through what the Master did, great damage to Aina was done. It would have been better if the Aina you knew had left.

It seems that they will accept this as definitive. For that I am thankful.

It has been a long few days and I have not been with three of them for more than half a week. I ask if they would all like to join me in my bedroom now. I get an enthusiastic response. As we walk toward my bedroom, Aina gives me a kiss and opens the door to the room she had been brought to when I entered her mind. That stops my girls in their tracks. They are just looking at Aina as she enters the room.

Mirafe can't stand mute. *Aina! Why are you going in there? That was just for what Master did to you.*

Friend, this is my bedroom for now. I was with your Master twice today. He needs to spend time with you. Do not worry about me. I am fine. She kisses Mirafe on the cheek and closes the door. I proceed to the bedroom.

They are of course naked and I get that way soon enough, but have engaged in sex twice today. My very human body has limits, however, I can be with them and hold them. More than anything else I just want to be close to them. They can't read my mind like Aina can, but Aina can and she can put it in their heads. Sure I can just tell them, but this is so much better. . . . But it causes Erllyn to ask, *Did you give her special powers when you went into her mind?*

No. Yes, she has powers now. But, no, I didn't intend for this to happen. I really thought Aina would die. But instead something I didn't expect happened and she is what we have now. I did not know anything of this until she first spoke to me after awakening. I was surprised. It was a happy surprise, but a surprise never the less.

I know she knows about Aina, but she not Aina. Do not lie to us. Who is she?

It is something that I cannot explain to you easily, but you are right. There is more than Aina inside her. Still she is truly human. She will live and die as a human, her powers notwithstanding.

She know you for a long time, true?

True.

How long?

Aina was right. You are very smart. Erlyn, just know that this Aina knows me well. But what I can't really explain to you is how those three days in human time, were years, eons of time, more than a human lifetime of time, where we went.

Talaga⁴⁴? That long you gone from us?

Yes.

So that really Aina?

In a way yes, and in a way, no longer.

We are wrapped up in each other's arms and legs. Hands caress without looking for reward. Smiles, sighs, giggles, playful jostling, are the ingredients of this bouillabaisse of caring and closeness.

But it doesn't last more than an hour before Aina comes charging through the door.

Master, there is chaos. They were told to do what you said, but only as far as getting ready. They were told to not proceed unless the Cardinal gave his approval. Just now, word is spreading about what the two priests saw tonight and no one is able to reach the Cardinal. There is rumor about what has happened to the Cardinal but no one knows what to do. The three bishops who you said contacted the Cardinal are telling everyone that nothing can be done without the Cardinal's orders. They have told the others that 'your' bishop has been told he is not to be listened too.

Can you be in three heads at once?

Yes.

Do you know who and where these three bishops are right now?

Yes.

Do to them exactly what you did to the Cardinal.

And we wait as Aina closes her eyes and concentrates on her tasks. A couple of minutes later she is back with us and reporting that it is done. I get up and quite naked, go into my work area. I have all the cell numbers for

⁴⁴ Truly?

the bishops. Removing the numbers for those three and the one who died earlier, I send a brief text.

Three more of you will never speak again. Your choice is to do as told or join them in a world walled off from the world. Both living and dead. You have until sunrise to act. The Master.

These guys know who the three are and I can see a myriad of attempts to contact the three statues. Calls then go out via secretaries and the word spreads about what has happened.

A text appears on a screen to the dead priest's phone.

I will comply. Spare me, Master.

I do not reply. I see he thinks I am his Master again. This one bends with the wind.

I hope I don't need to do more and I return to the bedroom and three girls. For some reason I feel rejuvenated and decide it is time to give Amelae a good ride. But before I do, while still standing, I have the girl squat and give me head, and motion for the other two to come close to me. One on either side. I kiss them and play with their breasts as Amelae gives me the head I desire. Erlyn's and Mirafe's hands caress my back and chest. Tongues invade mouths as suction below is strong and insistent. I am enjoying this immensely. And then I hear a sigh, inside my head, and a moan. And then she is talking to me, *Oh, that is so good. Yes, I like it. I want to know what it feels like when you enter her. Oh!*

I think back to her, as I feel passion rising inside of me, *Damn you are a horny bitch now.*

I pull Amelae up put her on her knees, on the bed and mount her. She is tight, hot and wet. Amelae sighs, Aina sighs. I grunt.

I pound her cunt hard. Amelae is grunting as juices erupt from inside her and are forced out around my pike. Aina is cheering me on with a drumbeat of *cum, cum, cum*. Erlyn and Mirafe are playing with Amelae's tits as they hang down.

I think, *Give her an orgasm that will blow her mind*. I hear back with a giggle, *Your wish is my command*. And then Amelae goes off the rails. I, in appreciation, give her my seed. I sense something is not over for Amelae. She arches her back, cries out and collapses.

I think, *What did you do?*

I gave us another child. This one is a girl.

Soul

Are you in my mind at all times?

Yes. But then, shouldn't I be? We are married.

Interesting way to look at it. You were not in my mind before.

Well, hun... Didn't you stop me from dying by pulling me out of the world before. By the way, where is my old body?

I have not returned your vessel to this world. If I had, you would not be here now.

So, do I get to attend my own funeral?

You would get a kick out of that, I think.

Why not? Oh, I forgot to tell you. I liked what you told the girls about how Aina had been gone for Eons. That should quiet things down.

It won't when I bury you!

She is giggling. OK, so not now. Not yet. ... It is time for you to rest. Sleep now.

Not yet. We haven't talked about this. You know, I didn't know if I could have you, or if I would lose both Aina and you. I knew that Aina would probably shatter and there was no choice there. But I had no idea that you could thrive in her vessel. Until you woke, I was pretty sure I had lost you forever. I pulled you out, only because I could not bear to see it end. I could not bear to say goodbye. But when Amelae put your photo up, I decided it had to be. I needed to accept that you were gone. And then Aina demanded I take her though she still believed in her god. I knew her mind would shatter. I didn't think it would work, but decided to try. I was going to lose you anyway.

I know. I know your heart now, just as much as you know it. I know there has never been one such as me before and there will probably never be again. I know how much you love me. I knew it before, but not like this. This is not faith. This is proof. I know it because I am inside you. Nothing is hidden. I know that this time I will die and you will bury me. But I know it will be because I have grown old and it will be my time. Hun, ... You know I love you. Always have. But now I have to tell you, I like you. I am happy to be with you. Maybe this body is not like my old one, but I don't care because when you look at me, you see me, and not her. See? It helps to be inside you. I don't have to be afraid. Now please, go to sleep. I will watch over the house. Don't worry. There are two of us watching now.

That tune you were humming. Where?

Your boy. He hums it all the time. Didn't you know?

Hub, no. I have stayed away from him as much as I can. You could hear him?

Oh, yes.

Sorry. I didn't know.

I am sure he didn't know either. Apology accepted.

Soul

I am tired. My head hits the pillow and my three souls cover me and leave the bedroom.

I am awakened by her voice in my head. It is a nice thing to hear. *Hun, many of the dioceses are moving forward, but where we have made statues of the local bishop, nothing is occurring. Also in two other dioceses, a bishop and an archbishop are not proceeding.*

Are there any reasons for why those last two are not?

They are not going to take orders from you.

Then you know what to do.

OK, but then you will have the same problem as you have with the other three.

I understand. I still need you to do it.

International Harvester

What to do about the six vacant bishoprics needed resolution. I 'think' a question towards Aina. *Can you query the statue bishops and find out what is needed to specifically happen, to initiate the action?*

Yes. Wait a bit. ... OK I know, do you want me to do it?

Yes. Then I just need to figure out what to do about the first bishop, - the one who is dead.

No, I am covering that now. His duties were covered by one of the other five.

Thank you... I am having a hard time knowing what to call you. Joana is gone. I will bury her. Aina is right there with you. Her memories are now included with Joana's.

You are the Master and I am the Master's wife. But it is best you not call me wife. Keep calling me Aina. That is the name of this vessel.

Yes, good.

Hun, once we take care of this church thing, do things go back to normal? I know why you are doing this to the church and it is not entirely for the reasons of having them follow your orders, at least not these orders.

How could you know? Oh! Of course, you are in my head. Yes, these damned fools took Joana from me. Sure I love Francine, but there were ways to keep both alive. Instead they were allowing Joana to die. They lied to me and I don't read minds. If Joana hadn't prayed to me at that very last moment, it would have been too late.

But you brought me back!

Not completely. Part of you is from Joana, but not all. Aina is really part of you. You have her memories, and Joana's, as you are well aware. I was, briefly, in the vessel you inhabit in some ways. I needed to be in it to stitch the two of you together. Maybe that is why you can read my mind, and it is how you know how to do things that Joana did not know anything about. You speak like me now, and not the Filipino English that Joana spoke. You think you are Joana, but think back to the Joana who was.

Oh... Oh! Oh, Master! I never would have called you 'Hun!'

Uh-huh.

I didn't know you had a son! ... So I think I am Joana, but I am not?

You have Joana's personality, her love of me. But, no, you are not Joana. Joana is dead.

But I am not Aina. I have her memories but not her feelings. I think Joana loved you but she was frightened by you too. I do not have that fear. Joana stopped her schooling in 8th

Soul

grade, right? Ha, yes, I can see that she did not know what I know! So whose feelings are these? Is it Joana's feelings or yours inside me now?

Mostly Joana's but they are informed by the awareness that, I guess, comes from me. You are not me, but you have a vast amount of knowledge that must come from me.

So we are not really married?

Legally in this world, no, as I am not married to Aina. Joana is dead and Aina lives. But, in your heart, we are, and so yes, we are married.

Good. You know it was strange to experience sex from your side of the mattress.

I imagine it was. I gather you enjoyed it.

Wow, yes. It is very different. Maybe if I was not in your mind I would be jealous of those three. But when you make love to them, I do too. They don't feel like competitors.

Good. They are scared of you.

Yes I know. ... Master?

Yes?

All dioceses are in motion now. I do not think there is anything more you need to do with them.

Good. Why did you call me Master and not Hun?

You asked me to think back to how it was with Joana. She called you Master. That is what I will call you. ... Master, Francine is beautiful, just like Joana. Did you make that happen?

No, it is just how she is.

I have been listening to her. She is a good girl. You did a good job raising her.

Thank you.

Master, may I change the minds of those three souls so they are not frightened of me?

No. I want you to not alter anyone's mind unless I ask you to do it. I won't be asking often. I will join them. Where are you?

I am with them. We are watching a teleserye. There is food on the table. Please eat something. We will join you when the show ends.

What time is it?

A little after one in the afternoon. You slept a long time. The girls were worrying again. I told them that it was OK. You needed the rest. I am not sure they believed me.

I haven't slept more than three hours at a stretch since I lost Joana.

I take it as a good sign that you can now! Come eat.

If I ever thought about putting in an intercom system, there is no need for it now! I approach the table to find a place set for me, with plate, utensils, a glass, and food in dishes surrounding the setting. I have to admit, it takes me back many years. This is Joana in action. My now dead Joana has set my place at this table.

I am halfway through and enjoying a bowl of lomi⁴⁵ when Erlyn sits down cattycorner from me as I am sitting at one end of the table.

Master, I know she know what Aina know. But she not Aina. Who is she?

Erlyn, why do you say that?

How she know you like lomi? You like it, true? How she know where you keep that spoon you using? We not see it before. She goes for it, finds it in first place she looks, smiles and puts it out for you. I see it and I think, that is not a normal spoon. I will put a tablespoon out for you too. But you use the weird spoon she finds. I grab a glass for you, but she says, use this one, he will want beer with the lomi. I never see you drink beer, and I say this to her. She smiles and says, yes, but he will have it with his lomi. How that? That not from being somewhere else for millennia. She know this house! Who is she?

Aina has not been making this easy with that type of strutting. Is this because I told her not to change any minds? *Well, Aina is it? Are you trying to teach me a lesson?*

No, Master, I think I am just too happy. I am not being good. I am being silly and foolish and, Master, I am very, very happy. It is just something I am not really able to hide.

OK, well, come out here and sit with Erlyn and me.

Erlyn, Aina is really Aina in many ways. Her memories are still intact. Her brain is still her brain and her body is still her body. At this point as I go on talking Aina has joined us and sits down next to Erlyn. Aina as you knew her was unable to accept that Jesus was not real. When I showed her what I had to show her, her personality, that which made her Aina as you knew her, collapsed and disappeared. If I didn't do something she would have died. I didn't want to kill her.

So what you do?

You know that photo above my bed?

Yes, the one who died? Francine's mother? Yes. Her name I not know, but yes. Bakit?⁴⁶

Her name was Joana. She was pregnant with Francine. There were complications.

⁴⁵ A noodle soup.

⁴⁶ Why?

She die giving birth?

Yes, ... and no.

Hala! What happen?

The doctors were letting her die, Joana knew she was slipping away and she prayed. I heard it. Her pleas pierced my mind and I panicked. With all the power I have, I sent her to another place, out of your world. She was frozen in time, not dead and not alive.

Oh! That why there is no burial record? You broke the rules! You not supposed to do that. True?

Yes, that is why there is no burial record and yes I broke the rules. But she was mine and I am allowed to save her. I am just not supposed to do it in that way. But the Church is supposed to stay away from those souls who are mine. That's part of the rules. But those doctors did that to her, because they stop being doctors when their catholic beliefs get in the way. The church teaches that women are dispensable. They are there to make babies, souls. Once they have made one, it's perfectly ok to let them die, the church will harvest that soul and will have the baby's soul to harvest later. They don't want the babies to die because if they die before they are baptized, they come to me. Catholic doctors who follow the church are no better than mercenaries. I know that now, and I knew that then. It is why I wanted to keep her safe, but she said don't interfere!

Why you tell me about... Oh! This Joana. Her body no good, di ba? Aina's mind no good but her body is good! Ganun⁴⁷?

Yes.

Erlyn turns to Aina with eyes that are opened in amazement. You are Joana!

Partly, Erlyn, only partly. Aina's personality is gone, but her life's memories are not. They are part of me. Also, I was not as frozen as Master says. I learned much. And when Master, put what he could inside Aina, some things were left behind, and somethings about Master were added. But this is Aina's body. I am Aina. Joana is dead now. Truly dead. Master needs to bury her.

Oh! What? You to see yourself buried? That is very weird. I not like that. Master, that really to happen?

At some point, yes. Erlyn, Aina is your friend. You do not need to be frightened of her. She was to me then, in the past, as you are to me now. She knows the love and the fear you have inside of you. No one in this world will be more kind and honest to you than Aina.

⁴⁷ True?

Soul

Master, I not think you can tell this to the others. They not understand. But I need to tell them something. They all know she not the Aina they knew.

Ok, I agree. But, Aina, you are going to have to curb your enthusiasm.

Yes, Master. But at least Erlyn and I can be closer. And with that Aina reaches out and takes one of Erlyn's hands in her. Erlyn squeezes Aina's hand but addresses me. *You saved my life and you did all you could to save Joana's. You say you do not love. I say, all you do is about love. Yes you get angry if some rule is not followed. I not understand this, but we are here because you need love. It OK if you call it caring. I not care. I know it is love.*

Erlyn, Master thinks he failed to protect Joana. He blames his love of her, for not being careful. Joana told him to trust the doctors and allow nature to be nature. If he had not listened to Joana, if he did not allow love to cloud his judgment, Joana would have lived. That is what he believes. Maybe that is why he tells you he doesn't love you.

Oo.

Master does not lie. So I understand this. I agree, he loved Joana. I think he must be afraid to love you.

Yes, maybe he think it hurt too much to love if you lose that person, like he lose Joana. If Joana not die, they still be together. Di ba?

Yes.

Oh my gee. OK, yes, I see why he not love. I think he still love Joana. But maybe that change now?

Erlyn, that was true. But he told me, when Amelae put Joana's picture up on the wall, he knew he needed to let go. If that did not happen, I am not sure he would have risked what he risked with Aina. Maybe he would have allowed Aina to die and leave Joana outside the world. He said, he thought Joana would be gone completely if he tried to do what he did with Aina, once the girl's brain collapsed. Until I spoke to him, he thought he had failed completely.

But he didn't. You are really Joana!

No Erlyn, I am not. I know how Joana thought and felt. I am not her. I have her personality, but I am not her. Joana has died. Aina lives because of what Master did, grafting Joana's personality on Aina's mind. Master needed to accept that Joana needed to die. He has.

Master, maybe you will love now?

Erlyn, is your teleserye over?

Sige, sige, I go.

Both of them get up, still holding hands as they leave the room. My lomi has been consumed.

I have kept it buried for all these years. I didn't want Francine to be burdened by this anger, anger I feel now rising up. Just as Joana was frozen in time and out of reach, so I put my feelings of anger and rage. I swallowed it and kept it deep within me. Never letting it out. Never acknowledging its presence. But it abided, unreleased and unresolved.

The church solicitors were not part of that, at least not consciously. But as the doctors were mercenaries for the catholic church, those kids were unwitting but compliant mercenaries for their church. Stealing money, rather than souls from the unsuspecting. Is it a lesser crime? Surely. But it must have been why it bothered me so deeply. It was being fueled by that which I had kept buried for so long.

Those kids will, within days, be liberated, against their own wishes, from that duty. But what am I to do with the anger I feel rising up? I will soon bury my Joana. The interregnum is about to end. I have been cruel to a few in the church, but it is not enough. No, it is not nearly enough.

MASTER!

Aina?

What are you going to do?! Enough!

Just because you are in my head, does not give you the right to play the role of conscience. I am my conscience, or did you not get that message when you learned about me?

Yes, Master, you are right, but I am with you. Yes, you will bury Joana, but not all is lost!

And I am pleased you are here. But there must be a reckoning.

Please, before anything else happens, spend time with Francine. Allow us to all be together without your reckoning of others hanging in front of our eyes.

You are a dangerous woman!

Master? Why do you say that to me?

Because now I must wait. With what you have said, there is no other option. I did not appoint you to the role of censor, but you have taken it and done it effectively. You have your wish, Aina. I will wait.

Thank you, husband.

You are welcome, wife.

I am sending Mirafe to you when this show is over.

Soul

I see. I gather you think she needs some attention. Anything else?

Please allow Amelae to visit her mother.

OK. Next?

I will take Erlyn with me and we will arrange for a casket and burial plot for Joana. I want to see Joana buried while Francine is here.

Does that complete the list, Aina?

Yes, husband, that completes the list.

Very well.

My meal over, I wander back to my work area. There is nothing in particular I am looking for. I am just reviewing all that has been before me. Amelae's mother is being treated properly. There is not a single bit of chatter related to Erlyn. Mirafe's father has caused a ruckus and her mother let him back into the house. His brothers have gotten wind of it and there is about to be some ugliness. But Mirafe is not part of it. She did all she can do and, what is about to play out, is just not anything she can control. From our discussions, she has expected this to happen. There is no need to burden her with the news.

The church-on-church conflict I have stirred up is beginning to become big news across the country. There have been some physical altercations. Restaurants have started kicking the kids out, if they show up. The restaurants can't afford to tick off the church. Members of the church have been standing as observers at many restaurants, waiting and watching.

News crews are now doing the same thing. One kid approached a patron at a Jollibee, claiming to be mute. He got chased out into the street and started calling for the police to protect him. What the kid didn't know was that he was on a hidden camera the entire time he was making his silent pitch, and still later again, as he was calling for the cops.

When a cop arrived on the scene, the video, conveniently was made available to the cop. The kid, being threatened with arrest by the cop, gave a detailed confession, also on video. It made for great TV and even better social media posts via Youtube.

There are now calls to arrest church leaders, with others saying the government should not get involved in this religious dispute.

I lit the match and am watching all this unfurling as a voyeur. I am enjoying it.

Master? Aina said you wanted to spend time with me?

Soul

Yes, Mirafé, I do. And I get up and walk back to my bedroom with her, hand in hand. Things must be a little unsettling to you, now.

Maybe a little. Erlyn say that Aina really part Aina, and part Francine's mother. Aina say that only partially true. We are confused, but both Erlyn and Aina say it is a good thing and you are happy. Is that true?

Yes.

Erlyn say we all stay here. That true?

Yes.

Aina say you love us. That true?

AINA!

A matter of Will

*W*hat?

What do you mean, 'what?' Weren't you listening?

Actually? No.

Interesting. OK, so why did you say I loved them?

I didn't.

So Mirafe is lying?

Just a second... let me look. ... Oh! OK, I told them that your caring for them was the same as what love might mean to them. So Mirafe...

...conflated the two. Aina, you have to be careful what you say. Nuance is not widely understood here. Think back to Joana's mind.

Oh! I was.. oh my, yes! OK, OK, I see. I will be more careful. Sorry.

OK, well I will see if I can untangle this.

Good luck, Hun!

Mirafe, Aina did not say I loved you. She said that 'caring' might feel the same as love to you. That is not the same thing.

How not?

I am not sure I can explain, but you need to just understand that Aina did not say what you think she said.

But you understand the difference, yes? And she really mean it different, true?

Yes.

Aina smart like you when she Joana?

Aina was never Joana. Are you asking me if Joana was as smart as this Aina is?

Yes. Why you being difficult?!

I am not intending to. The answer is Joana would probably not have understood what this Aina was saying. She was very much like you.

Will my brain die if you go into it, like Aina?

What?

Why you ask what? You know what I ask!

Why do you want me to go into your mind?

I want to be like Aina. I want to be smarter.

You want her powers and her knowledge?

Maybe.

I do not know what would happen to your mind and I am unwilling to do it. I have no reason to believe you would have the powers that Aina has, and you might not live. As to knowledge, it would not happen. I will not risk losing you.

Will my mind break?

Maybe, I can't be sure.

What you think?

Probably not. But I cannot be sure.

If you do it, I will be smarter.

No you will not.

Aina is smarter!

No she is not. She knows more, but she is not smarter.

What the difference? I think it the same!

When a child goes to school, do you think the child gets smarter, or learns new things?

Learns new things make you smarter!

No it doesn't. It just means you have new tools in your mind, not that your mind is better.

So Aina not smarter, but have new tools?

Yes.

If you go into my mind, I get new tools!

Probably not. I am not sure.

But maybe?

Yes, OK, maybe. But maybe you will not live.

But I probably will live. True?

Yes.

So do it!

No.

Why?! Why you say no?

Let's say it all worked the way you wanted. You might have powers that you would use in ways that would be bad.

Why you say that?

Give me a second. I am going to ask Aina, to see what is in my mind, and send it to you. OK?

Sige.

Aina?

Yes, Hun, I hear you and I see what you want Mirafe to see. She will do things to her mother and father. Right?

Yes, and I am not sure she might not kill one of them.

Yes! I see that. OK I will do it and heighten her emotional response so she can understand it better. Do I have your permission?

Yes, but wait until I tell her that you are going to start.

Mirafe, the next thing that will happen is that Aina is going to show you something I just discovered this morning. You will feel the power inside and how you might respond if you actually had that power. As of now, there is nothing you can do about it and I think you have accepted that. OK Aina, now!

This is the very first time Mirafe has felt Aina in her mind and it is a shock as the experience begins. Her expression changes and changes again and again as the minutes pass. Finally there are tears cascading down her face. She begins sobbing as she collapses onto the bed.

I am confused as to the cause of the deep sorrow, but Aina sees what is in me and explains. *Hun, I walked her through getting the power, learning about her parents and was going to show her how she might well react... but she went there all on her own. I didn't stop it. I let it play out until both are dead. And then I got smack dead in front of her mind and told her, 'That is why Master won't want to give you the power. You would misuse it.'* She sees that and starts crying. *She knows she is not deserving of such power. Master, I was frozen for years and listening the entire time to the evil your son does. It taught me that power is very dangerous. She does not have that time to learn. There is no way to teach her and be sure ever; certainly not without years of pain and unhappiness.*

Soul

I am sorry I did that to you. ... Thank you Aina. I will take it from here.

I sit down on the bed and hold Mirafe. She does not want to be held. *Mirafe, no human should have that power. I am not upset with you. You are good and you are mine. Nothing has changed.*

But I not good like Aina!

Do you want your existence to be frozen for close to two decades? Joana was, and when she was, she witnessed great evil each and every moment. Yes, she is able to handle the burden now, but it was at a great and painful existence for many years. It is not something I ever want you to discover for yourself. If I had known what would happen to her, I would have allowed her to die. I do not want to inflict such cruelty on any of you.

I sorry. I not know.

I didn't know for all those years. So, who is more sorry? Come, undress me.

Mirafe doesn't. What she does is throw her arms around me and holds on for dear life, sobbing and kissing my neck alternatively. A few moments ago, she did not want to be held. Now, she wants nothing more than to be held.

As my arms encompass her small frame, she almost disappears from view. I feel her love. I feel her need. I feel her fear of losing this. I feel the fear that she has that she might do something wrong and be ejected from this place.

Her fear isn't well founded. She is safe.

Finally she settles down and I whisper, *Aren't you supposed to undress me?*

Oh! Sorry, sorry! Yes! Of course, yes!

In short order I am as naked as she is, and we make use of the bed, lying down, only to hold each other again.

She wants to kiss, to nibble, to suck my ear lobe into her mouth and play with it via her tongue. I respond in kind. It is sweet. It is romantic. We roll around in each other's arms. She wants to give me a massage. I allow it. It's good but I suspect it is Mirafe who is getting the most from the laying on of her hands as she takes ownership of the body she is working.

But she has to stop at some point and when she does, I put her on her back. Without ceremony I mount her in what in some odd quirk of an enduring malapropos is called missionary position.

Mirafe is a small girl. She stands no more than 148cm/4'10". Her face is open and sweet. Her breasts are perky, her waist narrow, and while her hips are not generous, for an Asian they are pronounced. She is not hard to admire.

Right now as I run into her repeatedly. Her tight but welcoming cunt provides both stimulation and lubrication. I am no great lothario. My very human body has limits. But I can give Mirafe the sexual satisfaction she needs. And so I continue the repeated penetration, only to hear in my head the groans of Aina. Is she experiencing Mirafe's pleasures, or is it mine?

Whichever it is, it is sexy as hell and I am getting off on it which only seems to heighten both Mirafe's pleasure and, seemingly, Aina's.

Mirafe, is wailing. She is screaming obscenities of no particular intent. The sexual feedback I am getting from Aina, which adds to what I am feeling, being inside of Mirafe, takes me over the top and I cum hard inside the girl. That causes another explosion in both of them.

I am wiped out. It appears Mirafe is totally spent as well. Exactly how, and where Aina is, is unknown. I roll off Mirafe, pull her into my side and go to sleep.

Someone is giving me head. Of that I am sure. It is no imagining from a mind at a distance. I am enjoying it and have yet to open my eyes. Why bother? This is great. I am sure I am getting harder and that seems to be verified by the giggle from down below.

Is it the best head I have ever gotten? No, but who cares? I am just absorbing the good feelings. What a nice way to awaken. She is cupping my nuts, sucking hard on my pole, with a hot and wet mouth. And then Aina breaks in to my mind to offer commentary. *Mirafe is doing a really nice job of it. Oh, that's nice.*

Where are you?

We just got back from the funeral parlor. Ah! Master, you know what they say about durian?

Which, that it is bad for high blood pressure, or that it is an aphrodisiac?

The aphrodisiac part. It really isn't bad for high blood pressure, is it?

Aina! This is not the time for such a conversation! I am getting head. Can't this wait?

I guess, but eating durian while feeling what you are feeling at the same time? Now that is an aphrodisiac!

I see. Now, be silent for a bit please.

Ok.

Thankfully, I don't go soft with all that chatter. Mirafe is still perfecting her art and I continue to enjoy her efforts. She keeps at it and though my eyes

are closed I know who it is and run my fingers through her hair. I am relaxed, happy and my passion is building.

My activity seems to spur Mirafe on. We build on each other's responses until I let lose my seed in her mouth.

Mirafe disengages from my appendage and moves up on the bed. Her mouth is close to my ear as she tells me to... *sleep*. I do.

Have a nice nap, Hun?

That is not in my head. It is next to it. I open my eyes just in time to see Aina come in for a sweet kiss.

Mmmm that's nice.

Uh-huh.

Did you have a successful trip?

We picked out the casket. And with that she is giggling and blushing.

Ok, there is clearly more to the story than that. Let's have it.

I think I am going to be in trouble!

Really? What makes you think that?

I did something I am not supposed to do.

Is anyone dead?

No!

Hurt?

No, Hun. No damage.

Well, tell me.

You know when you started making love with Mirafe?

Yes, and?

We had just picked out Joana's casket. I felt you slide into Mirafe. Oh, Hun, it felt so good! I just wanted to lie down and feel all of it.

Aina, out with it. What happened?

I got into Erlyn's mind and the mind of the man from the funeral parlor. I told them to sit in his office and go to sleep. Then I crawled into Joana's casket and felt everything you felt and everything Mirafe felt, all at the same time. Hun, it was the most amazing feeling

Soul

I have ever felt. I felt what you felt as you reamed her cunt. I felt what she felt, being driven to orgasm after orgasm by your stiff cock. Her breasts ached and I felt it. I can't describe it. It took my breath away. My body felt each cum as it came crashing down on her body, it crashed down on mine. Then I felt it from both sides when your cum entered her!... I came so hard that if the two had not been sleeping, it would have been very embarrassing!

I am not sure what to say. It is true I don't want you entering other minds like that, but I am not going to be angry with you. Just please refrain in the future. OK?

Yes, OK.

A little later we wander out in into the main part of the house. Erlyn is watching TV with Mirafe. Amelae has not returned yet. I sit down to a ripe papaya that has been sliced in half, and the seeds removed. It is good, but leaves me wanting something else. I see a heart of banana salad and have some over rice.

Aina eats a papaya. After that she eats the salad but without rice and tells me that she is on a diet! I come close to being unglued and tell her she needs to gain some more weight. The answer I get back is sorta not something I want to write down. I am a little frustrated by her, but have to chuckle later as I see her eating some peanut snack food and then some popcorn. Huh, some diet.

But then I think back, Joana would do the same thing. She didn't connect eating junk food with weight gain. For her it was the rice. If she wanted to lose weight she needed to avoid the rice.

And thinking back to those days does make me smile. Joana was a good woman. I have missed her and while she will never return to me, part of her has and that is enough. I am happy. Oddly, though, I am still angry. Angry with the doctrines that condemned her to too early a death.

I think that is why I got so angry when those doctors decided to "allow" Amelae's mom to die. Once again they justified it as 'god's will.' Pure horseshit. It is murder, not 'god's will.' Death by natural causes, isn't 'god's will,' it is nature. Death by doctor is murder. Death by doctor following the dictates of the church ought to be a high crime, worse than murder.

I wasn't going to allow Amelae to suffer. Yes she will eventually watch her mother die, but it will be with the full understanding that her mother did not go before her time. She will have the solace of knowing that all that could be done, was done. It will comfort her heart. It will comfort mine.

Soul

I am thinking about Amelae as I walk back to my work area. I am checking to see if there is any communications traffic regarding Amelae. There are a few pieces but nothing threatening. I note that the local bishop has sent a message to the dead priest's phone. It reads, *It is not me! I am not doing this! Please spare me Master!*

I see no other traffic from the other bishops and that in itself is a bit odd as they are prolific texters. *Aina, look at my mind.*

...Oh! What you think they are doing?

I don't know. Please find out.

OK wait...

While I wait, I note that the war on the other church is proceeding as I have desired. Do the bishops think I will be distracted by this success and not notice what else is being brewed up? Certainly they might have been correct if it had not been for the text I received. I can rationalize that the lack of any traffic would have tipped me off, but it hadn't. If it weren't for Aina, I would have no way to know.

I have something, Hun. The rest of the bishop's conference have decided that you are an evil demon who must be exorcized. They have sent an envoy to Rome to request a specialist in exorcisms be dispatched to the Philippines. They are afraid you can read what they write. So they do everything now by word of mouth.

Has this envoy arrived in Rome?

No. He is sitting in a waiting room in Hong Kong waiting on a connecting flight.

Turn him into a statue.

Wait... .. Done.

Now who else? How many others are there?

There are four of them. I am to do the same to them?

No, do this. Have each of them see through the eyes of the envoy. They are then to bear his mind. Then dim that. Pick one of the four and have the other three see through his eyes and bear his mind as you turn him into a statue. And then the next the same way, before you finish the last. And then link their minds so that they can hear me.

This will take a while. Wait...

And I do wait. I have no reason to be in a hurry. Finally, Aina tells me I am linked into their minds. It is time for me to say my piece.

All five of you can hear me. You have no option but to listen, and listen you must. I am Master. I am neither god nor devil. Those things do not exist. They never existed. And

Soul

that is good news for you. That means your death will be the end of your suffering. There is no eternity, no heaven and no hell. You have the misfortune of being clergy and as such I can hurt you. Ordinary humans live their lives without risk of my actions, unless they hurt those whom I am protecting. But you are a special class and if you take up the task to injure me, I have no reservations but to destroy you. I do not take lives, but I can and have made your existences, miserable. Your envoy will not reach Rome. I will now search the minds of your staff members and loved ones for any who know of this intrigue. Each of those will be silenced, but unless I find that they were about to act in a way I find troubling, they will feel no pain. Your intrigues will end or I will silence every last member of the clergy until it is over. This will be your legacy. This is your doing. Think of those who you have just condemned and the damage you have done. There is no god's will, but there is Master's will.

Soul
Bacchanals.

I meant every word of it. I am angry. It is an ‘angry’ that has been awaiting release for close to two decades. But maybe not an ‘angry’ enough to turn scores more into statues, if it can be avoided. I give Aina the job of wiping memories and hope that it will be sufficient to end this mess. However I have my doubts, as does she. She wants to know who has said what to whom, before she does any memory wipes. It will take a while, but I agree.

I am still stewing about it when Amelae returns home. I can see in her continence a mixture of happiness and sadness. It is to be expected. She can see her mother is dying, but she enjoyed the time they had together.

I am about to go to her, and spend some time helping her relive the good she feels, when Aina comes running into the room. *Master, she was followed! There are three men outside right now!*

Who are they?

Pulis.

Make them confused. Stop them from doing what they were doing. I want to talk to them. Have them stand in front of the gate. And get dressed, we are going out to talk to them.

OK.

Aina has some clothing in a cabinet by the front door. It doesn’t take her long to get dressed in a long, ankle length dress, with nothing underneath, and some sandals. She grabs an umbrella from a stand by the front door. It is not for rain. It’s to keep the sun off her.

Aina, I want them to see me as their supreme commander. They will remember what their orders are, but think that I am here to re-evaluate whether the orders are proper. However, they are to believe they are not in any trouble.

I understand.

We find the three PNP officers, relaxed and waiting, as we exit the gate.

Officers, who is the most senior of you?

I am, General! His name tag says his name is Abaya.

Officer Abaya, what were your orders?

We are to follow a woman and determine where she goes.

Who gives you this order?

Captain Cabreza give it us, General.

Has this woman done something wrong? Why did he tell you she needed to be followed?

I not know, General. Captain not say.

Did Capt. Cabreza tell you on whose orders you are to follow an innocent woman?

No, General. I think it his.

Who knows about this assignment?

All in the station. Sir.

Have you reported back to your station that you find where she went?

No General. We will do that when we return.

Very well. Wait here. You will get further instructions shortly.

Aina and I walk back through the gate. Re-entering the compound, I decide I need to know more about why they were sent. *Aina, can you find this Cabreza?*

Yes, I see his mind.

Why did he detail these men?

Oh! OK, I see, yes, it was a request from the local priest! He does not know why the priest wants to know. He is just doing a favor.

Who else knows about this?

I think there are two other PNP who know of the request. But there is no evil intent.

OK, send these three back with the story that as they were following her it was like she just disappeared. They have no idea where she went. Have them see her board a jeepney headed toward downtown, but nothing after that and send them back. Have them forget about this meeting or where they are now.

Just a second. I will do it now. ... OK, done. You want me to look at the priest's mind?

Yes.

Hun, this is not good. He is worshipping you! He wants to be a servant to his god.

Before we reenter the house, I give Aina one more set of instructions.

Soul

Just what I really don't need. For now put a fear in him. Make him afraid to seek me out. Make him afraid that if he even thinks about worshipping me, he might not live another day.

Amelae is partially aware of what has transpired, to the extent that she has been followed. She is afraid that these PNP will be killed. She is curled up in a fetal position, crying and shaking. Aina knows what I see, but she has some other news to impart, without talking. *She is sorry she has caused you problems.*

I think back to her, *I see. Aina, comfort her mind. Let her know it was the evil church that causes me the problems. It is not her and no one is going to die. I would not change a thing I have done for her.*

I leave the room and see if there is anything I can see by my more mundane means. I can't. There is something akin to radio silence. And then... a while later, a single text from a priest to another priest. *Father, possibly this being can do more than read electronic messages. I try to find where this girl goes. I give all instructions verbally. The girl just vanishes. Maybe this would have happened anyway. It is hard to know. But I get a message in my head. Hard to explain. It tell me to never try again or I will be turned into a statue like the bishops! I am sorry I act. God forgive me.*

And again silence. Aina joins me and reads the message. She wants to know to whom the message was sent, but I don't know. All I can tell is that the person is a priest. All I can tell is that the person is a priest. I do not know who the sent the message, though Aina was in his head. I ask Aina if the local bishop had anything to do with this.

Hun, the bishop did not instruct the priest. But he believes many now think you are the real god and maybe they, the Catholics, are the apostates. The warning I sent the priest will stop that priest's acts but not his feelings and not of others.

Just what I do not want.

The priest meant only good. You are Master and he knows it.

Master of a game board! That is all! The last thing I want to do is start a new religion! On the matter of the envoy, how many subordinates knew about the trip to Rome?

Only one. A secretary of one of the bishops. He was sworn to secrecy and kept his word. No one else knows, other than the local bishop.

No one? Really?

They were afraid that if word got out, you would punish them. It was their hope that by keeping the circle small, they would escape your notice.

Good! Can you wipe the secretary's and bishop's minds of this matter?

Yes.

Please do it. It won't take Aina long.

I wander back out to the Sala. Amelae is sitting with Erlyn and Mirafe. They are giving pedicures and just being silly. I had intended on pulling Amelae back to my bed, but I don't want to disturb them. I look over at Aina, and hear in my mind, *Consolation prize?*

That's a mean way to put it, but yes, go back to the bedroom with me.

Goodie!

There is nothing about this that feels like a consolation or compromise, or second best, to me. I had it in my mind to give Amelae comfort in knowing that I still want her. I do not have to convince Aina of that. Aina knows, in the most complete of ways, how happy I am that she is here.

Aina's body is both relatively new to me, and at the same time, a body I have known for years. Yes, physically this is Aina who was until days ago a virgin. But inside there is a Joana whose body I knew in the most intimate and intense ways. And there is something else. There is a worldliness that has been infused into this creature that comes from that time of isolation. Clearly there are things about that time I still cannot fathom. It is not me who has infused some thoughts and understandings in there. There are things that Joana was not, Aina was not, and I could not have added. I thought she was frozen. But she tells me she experienced pain and knew what my son was doing in exquisitely painful detail. This makes that stay, far from being frozen. Who gave her the powers she has? Did I, as I worked on fusing minds together? How? I don't do those things that she can do. My son does not do those things. We might in a different reality, but not this one. It is part of the rules of the game. All I know is that, this being, this Aina, human in form, and clearly mortal, has immense power. In many ways she is the mate that my time in human form has denied me.

She loves me. She knows I know this.

She has a wicked sense of humor and irony. Experiencing sexual ecstasy in the coffin, which a prior body of hers will be buried within, would creep out just about anyone else. For this creature, it is a turn on. It is a cosmic joke.

Thinking of ironies, I wonder what it would feel like if Aina created a feedback loop between us as we make love, so that I feel what she feels as she feels what I feel. What if it is an endless loop, not just one cycle?

I enter the bedroom. Aina is waiting for me. The smile on her face is of a loving mate. We say not a word. But she is in my mind. She knows what I know, what I want, and what I need.

I disrobe and join her, her arms pulling me in, her lips seeking mine, her heart beat, her pulse, giving the backbeat to our loving. She is juicy and I slide into her in a manner that can only be understood as the joining of two pieces of the same puzzle.

My desire to feel what she feels is now a reality. I feel myself slide in and I feel her accepting the intrusion. I feel her feeling as my glans push past and back out over her G-spot. Oh, yes! No wonder!

I pinch her nipples and it sends me into orbit.

The stimulation is too great for both of us. We both cum hard and way too soon; spent, exhausted, inexplicably sated.

I look at her, almost staring. She is looking at me, through me.

She asks, *What did we do?*

It was something like an instant orgasm. The feedback loop was too complete, too intense.

Yes. I do what you want, but I think that is a mistake! Still I am happy I experienced it once. Hun, you need to bed all three of those girls once more before Francine arrives.

OK, but I don't think I have anything left after this. Three in one day is my limit and I have already reached it today.

You better get busy with them tomorrow. ... Hun, I am thinking about what you told the others about Nuns.

And? What's the point? They are of no use to me?

Maybe... maybe there is something else. I don't want any more death, and your anger maybe is in the wrong place.

Am I going to regret asking what you are thinking?

Maybe! And she smiles broadly, flops over on top of me, giving me a sloppy kiss and my balls a good squeeze at the same time. You can't get Nuns to give you their souls directly, but maybe you can fool them? Want to try?

Why? There aren't enough of them these days to tip the scales.

I know, but it will really piss off your son and that will make me very happy.

OK what do you propose?

Soul

Make every novice and young nun super horny.

I don't have that power. You know that.

But I do.

The rules don't allow it.

*No, Hun. The rules don't allow **you** to do it. The rules say nothing about me.*

That's playing a bit underhanded. It's playing fast and loose with the rules.

You think your son didn't have a hand in what happened to Joana?

What?

He did. She shouldn't have been at risk. He did that. So anything that I will do now is the result of his meddling.

Are you sure?

Yes. So what is your problem?

None! OK. But do all Catholic Girl's schools as well as novices and young Nuns. And Aina, make the horniness somewhat indiscriminate. It should not matter, men, women, boys, girls, dogs, farm animals. Just not inanimate objects. Dildos, broom handles, and eggplants will not do. All it will do is heighten the need. Don't change their mind as to that this is against their rules, a sin. Make it that they can't help it, and have them wonder why their Jesus would do this to all of them. Make sure they know it is all of them. If they just think it is their failing, they might still believe. But knowing it is all of them, their faith may not be as strong.

Doubt! You will give them doubt. Ha! Yes that will give your son something to panic about.

Once you have that done, I have some ideas about other churches. But that can wait until Francine has been here.

May I start right now?

Yes. But start it in Rome, not here. Make it go outward from there. Can you do it so that my son does not see that you are doing this?

He will not know.

Good.

Aina gets up and wanders off to her bedroom. I wash up and rejoin the other three.

Master?

Yes, Amelae?

It is not good for me to visit my mother. Maybe it is possible I can get her a tablet so I can Skype with her?

Yes, of course. That is a very good idea. I have a tablet here that she can use, I will set it up and get it delivered to her.

The rest of the day is filled with issues of true unimportance, much to my great happiness.

I sleep among my girls, sans Aina, tonight. There is no sex, but the closeness is welcome.

What I will do to all those Nuns, young girls, and women, is nothing more than have them feel what it is to be truly human. To obey the needs of their bodies. These girls, my girls, have no such issue to confront.

I awaken with Erlyn stroking my member. I reach down and stroke her hair with one arm, while bringing a sleepy Amelae in for a kiss. My member is awakening as fast as Amelae's lips awaken meeting mine.

Having stroked me into tumescence, Erlyn mounts me. Her cunt is not fully lubricated at first, and it takes a couple of pumps for her to get full insertion.

I move my mouth to Amelae's ear and ask her to coordinate with Mirafe and each suck on one of Erlyn's tits. Having re-tasked Amelae, I can now look up with pleasure at Erlyn. Little Erlyn is working her small cunt hard on my pole. Our eyes are locked on each other as her body moves up and down. Her black eyes refuse to even blink as they look at my eyes. No words pass. Erlyn, in the deepest recesses of her being, believes that I saved her life in a way that only a god can save a life. She is not in love with a man. In her mind, she is in the thrall of a god. For Erlyn, nothing matters but to join with me in any way I will allow it. Erlyn's hands are now gripping the hair on the back of the two girls sucking her tits. Erlyn knows I have directed this. She knows I want her to feel pleasure, ecstasy. And secure in that knowledge, she cums and cums again, never taking her eyes off me, even for a moment.

Finally, she can take no more. She pulls the girls off her tits and slides off me, happy and contented.

I am still hard. This is a signal for Amelae to get aboard. And aboard she climbs. She is already juicy and sliding over my member is no big deal. We are bone against bone. Amelae smiles in a small but confident way. She

needs no proof that I am happy she is here. What I have done for her mother is all the proof she will ever need.

As she rides me, astride my hips, Mirafe moves behind her and, from around the back, grabs hold of both Amelae's nipples. I can see Mirafe pinching the nipples hard. Mirafe sucks on Amelae's right earlobe while continuing the pinching. That seems to do it as Amelae cums hard on my pole. As when she begins coming down from that peak, Mirafe starts the nipple torture again and again Amelae cums. Her cunt muscles are doing a line dance up and down my member.

That is all I need at the moment and Amelae gets my morning cum.

I pull Amelae down for a kiss as she slides off me. Mirafe is in the meantime cleaning me up while Erlyn is cleaning Amelae up. Once Mirafe is done with me, I reach down and pull her alongside me, kiss her and apologize for cumming before I would have been able give her a good ride.

Why you say sorry. You do me twice yesterday and these two not get that! It their turn now!

You are keeping count?

Of course, yes. Not good for one to get much more than others. Makes for hurt. You have Aina yesterday too, correct?

Yes. OK. Well, Francine will be here soon and I am not sure how we will handle all this while she is here and we are burying her mother.

Hala! The cry seems to come from all three at the same time. I am not sure they connected the dots until now. But my engaging in bacchanalian romps as we bury Joana, in front of Joana's daughter, doesn't really seem like a good idea to me.

Erlyn asks, *When she coming?*

I really don't know. Francine gave me a vague answer the other day. I don't know more than that. However, Aina can find out now.

Aina, when is Francine arriving?

Tonight. Why do you think I told you to get with the girls today?

She will be here tonight.

And that sets the girls in motion, as they all but leap off the bed?

Why?

We must clean the house!

Francine

There is no end to the cleaning three females can conjure up to do, when they feel their entire self-worth is about to be evaluated in terms of it. I am not exaggerating. The fact that Francine will appear tonight and they are responsible for my wellbeing is enough to create the madness that has taken hold. I have decided that the only safe place to be, is in Aina's room. The other three were told by Aina to stay out of it.

I can't even venture into my work area, except to grab a device or two. The three have deemed that a major disaster zone. The fact that I have lived in this house for almost two decades, without them, makes no difference. They are the current responsible parties.

And so here I sit, on Aina's bed. Aina is here and not here at the same time. The task she gave herself, and which I enlarged upon, is both complex and vast. By adding the schools, the numbers exploded.

She has been using a fairly simplistic method of searching out the establishments. It has been both time consuming and tedious. The problem arises is that in many locales, almost all schools are church schools. It has meant turning entire national younger female populations into horny nymphs.

That was not my original intention. Luckily Aina is not at the implementation phase yet and so a retooling is called for and timely.

I suggest we limit the schools to ones connected to convents, whereby we might well see the postulants and novices being groomed. Simple Catholic schools in communities that more rightly are replacements for public education we will leave alone.

That puts Aina back on the track of finding convents. I can help with that, and gathering a notebook from my work area, I have assembled lists of various orders with address locations for each, merged them into one database and run a sort to extract the latitude and longitude for each. By using the coordinates for the Vatican as "home", I produce a table for convents in terms of proximity to Rome.

Aina has that list now, but before she acts on it, I suggest she use a method whereby she only needs to 'contact' one or two individuals at each location. By having the 'condition' spread a little like a virulent common cold, or

precisely like a computer virus that calls back to a server for instructions, she should get good coverage with far less effort on our end.

But that causes a problem with unwanted contagion outside the walls of those places. I suggest that her virus 'test' for fervency of belief. We will still see contagion, but only of the true believers. I can't think of a more wicked and better measure.

The result is a winnowing down of the list of all contacts from tens of thousands to fewer than two thousand.

We decide to limit the first day to those within 500km radius of the Vatican, but that list is also pretty large, so we narrow it down further to 250km today and 250km tomorrow.

It will give the sense of growth over time, or a natural spread.

Hun, what is the effective life of the 'infection'?

Make the infection end when the female hits menopause.

Really?

Aina? Is there a problem?

Do you have any idea what you will be doing to those women?

Yes, I think I do. You think they will be wandering the streets looking for cock.

Yes!

I think they will cloister themselves and do each other repeatedly and with abandon. There will be nothing else for them to do. Shakespeare's saying, 'get thee to a nunnery' will be forever the true meaning henceforth. The church will not have a clue how to deal with it. Parents will do all they can to keep their daughters from falling into the religious doctrine.

But the older ones will age out or never become infected. And what of those who at some point lose their fervent belief?

Yes, some will lose it, but that's just how it must be. The older ones will be ministering, so to speak, to the ones infected.

This is going to be an international crisis. How long before we see it on the news?

I don't know if we will ever see it. The church will do everything it can to keep this under wraps.

Can they do that?

Soul

For those inside the Church, yes, they can. I don't think you understand how powerful they are. I am not sure about those outside, but I suspect the church will quickly develop an active outreach service and bring those infected inside their walls. If they don't, I suspect there will be a shit storm of anger against them in the greater public sphere.

But your son, he will know something is happening?

Yes, he will know.

Good, I thought so.

You are angry with him.

He killed me.

Yes, I see. You mean he killed Joana.

Yes! I will make him eternally sorry he did that.

But he must not know it was you!

You will tell him after Aina dies. Then he will know. And there will be nothing he can do to me.

And so, like I said above, I am sitting on the bed with Aina, but Aina is elsewhere. I am surfing my logs as best I can from a laptop. I see that there is a problem that has cropped up. There are, of course, a number of bishoprics that have fallen vacant, but no one wants to fill those seats. Two men have resigned the clergy rather than be forced to take those chairs.

No one knows what has happened to the bishops who all appear to be catatonic. For that very reason, no one wants to be the next. I suspect that talk of a 'Master' is circulating, making matters worse.

While I was grabbing the laptop. I also grabbed a tablet and have configured it for Amelae's mom. I venture out to speak with Edgar, who is on duty as a guard to the property, and ask him to arrange for the delivery of the unit.

Here I am taking care of one woman, while Aina is dealing with thousands. It is an odd turn of events. It occurs to me that I have some errands I can run while the hubbub in the house continues. I will return for supper.

It has been days since I ventured out of the house. Granted there have been many times prior to these girls living with me when I was at home for a week or two at end without venturing forth. This doesn't feel like a jail break for that reason. However, now that they are here, I sense that they see it as their jobs to fetch what is needed. Will they panic if they realize I am not at home?

Soul

It takes a few hours for the first text to display on my phone. It is from Erlyn, and it simply says,

where r u?

I answer,

shopping.

I get nothing back. Erlyn is hardly a girl who will give me any grief.

Two hours later, Mirafe texts,

when u back?

I answer with the non-answer,

when I am done.

But Mirafe isn't having any of that.

When that?

Mirafe, I will be home for supper, OK?

Sige, sige. No more girls, OK?

Now that makes me laugh.

Mirafe, I am not looking for any more girls. Relax.

Sige na. OK.

I hear laughing in my head. Aina seems to be getting a kick out of this. *Hun, I am done for today. It will take a while for the symptoms to manifest broadly inside each community.*

Aina, I was thinking. Please find the maker of electric massagers that function as dildos.

Why?

I want you to put a concept in their heads to make a dildo in the basic shape of a cross. The long end having the rounded tip and the dial in the middle of the cross.

That's evil! That will just make them hornier! So...Hun, can I play with this and add some features?

Sure, what do you have in mind?

A cross that plays a Gregorian chant as you pump it. Three sizes of Dildos, Postulant, Novice and Nun. Speeds from "Seeking Solace," midway at "Seeing Angels," all the way to "Holy Rapture." A package containing the cross and Rosary ben-wa balls!

Works for me. Sure.

Soul

So are you really going to stress these girls out more and not return until supper?

Oh, they will live through this. All I did was leave the house.

Yes, and without them.

They leave the house without me. What's the difference?

To me, nothing. But they are coming apart with unreasonable worry.

They need to get over it. I am not going to be a hostage in my own home because the girls need me there.

OK, I will explain that to them. Maybe it will help. So see you by six?

Yes.

At six, I walk into the dining room and no one even notices me. They are all there, but their attention is affixed to Francine. And so I stand back, in the shadows, watch, listen, and learn.

All are of course, without clothing, and that goes for Francine too. Mirafe wants to know if I really have never had sex with my daughter. Clearly there is nothing wrong with the girl, and I required her to be naked.

Francine answers her and I think ends the matter effectively. *I have always been this way in our home. There never was a time when I wore clothing. Dad raised me this way from the very beginning. Being without clothing has nothing to do with sex. If you ask me, women look better, sexier, with clothing. When you are without clothing, you are just you. There is no hiding.*

But your dad wears clothing.

Yes and when I was growing up that didn't really click for me. But you know, he is Master and he does hide things. He hides things from all of us. So I guess it is as it should be. Sometimes I wondered if he hid things from my mother. Since she died when I was born, there was no way for me to know. ... Aina, how can you say you knew my mother? You told that to me over Skype, but I thought then, OK maybe she just looks young. We are the same age. She died before you were born.

May I tell her, Hun?

You know I am here?

Yes of course. May I tell her?

Yes, go ahead. She needs to know.

Soul

Francine, your mother was supposed to die when you were born, but Master got very angry with the doctors and took your mother to a place where she was neither dead, nor alive. That is why you never went to her grave. There is none.

So Mom is not dead?

She died last week.

What!?!... Wait! Is that why he refused to be with any other woman for all these years?

Yes. I think so. In his heart he was still married to your mother. You look just like her. You know that, right?

No, she was beautiful. I am not.

There are a few differences, but you look like her. Every moment your father sees you, he is also seeing her. He couldn't, wouldn't walk away from you or her. His love is too strong.

He never tells me he loves me! He refuses.

He was trying to protect his heart. He failed at that. Maybe when you see him again, you will get a different answer. I don't know. I do know he loves you.

What happened last week?

I died.

What?

Aina demanded Master take her soul.

And he obviously did! You are here and quite alive.

No, Francine, that Aina really and truly believed in Jesus. Your father told her to leave. She refused. She demanded he take her. He told her she would not survive the attempt, but she demanded it anyway.

Oh no! Did you understand that Master must take the soul of someone who demands it?

Aina was told that. Yes and she demanded it yet again. And so in the attempt, Aina, the person, died. Her mind shattered. Her memories remained. Master kept her heart pumping and her lungs taking air. Without that, she would have perished completely. He reached out to Joana, and tried to bring her back in Aina's body. He was able to bring enough to keep heart, and lungs working. Her memories were, for the most part saved. But there was much that could not be saved, and the woman who was Joana died. I, Aina, have the old Aina's memories, some of Joana's memories and there is part of me from the world that your father comes from. So when I told you I know your mother, I am telling you the truth. But I am not your mother. We will bury her this week. You will help.

Part of my mother is inside you?

Yes. But I am not her. I do not think like her. I do not talk like her. But I can remember things from her, when I go looking.

Francine looks at the females assembled in front of her. You all know this?

She gets three quiet 'yes's'. But Erlyn has something more to say. Yes, we know this, but Aina not tell all.

How? What did she not tell me?

She has great power. She get it from your Father, I think. I not really know. But she can go into minds. She can kill. She is dangerous to those who would hurt your father or any of us.

Francine, looks back at Aina. It is a look of confusion. Dad cannot look into minds. He cannot kill. How could you get such powers from him? I do not understand.

You are correct about your father. I do not know the answer. But what Erlyn says about me is true. It is also true that I know your brother.

I... don't... have... a... brother.

Not in this world. But you do in another realm. He is a bad man. I am sorry that I tell you what your father did not.

I think it is OK. I do not think he will be angry. He will probably just tell me it was something I didn't need to know. He has done that many times. I don't like it, but it is just who he is. What is my brother's name?

I am not sure he has a name. I never heard it.

My head hurts. I am going to lie down.

Wait! This is Amelae. I will get you a Biogestic!⁴⁸ It will solve that. You need to eat.

Aina, if Dad loved my Mom, does he love you?

That Francine is private between your father and me.

Ha! Good answer. Did he tell my Mother that he loved her?

Yes. She is the very last person he audibly said, 'I love you' to.

That jibes with what he told me. He said if he didn't love my mother so much, she would still be alive.

Yes, he believes that.

⁴⁸ Brand name for Paracetamol.

But you don't?

It is more complicated than that. Your father knows why I do not think that, but it is not something that you need to be concerned with.

You know something he didn't know?

Yes.

Shit, where is that Biogesic? My head feels like it is exploding.

*Amelae is running back in and hands Francine a pill which is downed with a glass of water already on the table. Francine closes her eyes, takes a few deep breaths, and shakes her head before she opens her eyes and asks, *If Dad just learned this, it means he probably got very angry. What has he done? Who has he sought revenge from?**

*Erlyn looks at Francine and asks, *Why do you think he did something?**

Dad has always hid his hurt and his anger. But I always think, someday it will come out and if it does, the world will shake.

*Amelae standing by Francine decides to handle this one. *It sort of happened before he learn about your nanay. Aina, this Aina, not here yet. He see doctors doing same to my mother. He get very angry. He not kill, but he do things and others kill. Many die. Doctors, priests, police, they die. Then more, more police. Then he make living statues out of archbishops and many bishops. I not know what he do when he learn about your mother. Aina, you know?**

Aina gives a silent yes.

*Amelae asks, *What he do?* But Aina refuses to say. Of that I am glad.*

*Francine is not done. *Where is my mother's body?**

*Erlyn fields that one. *At the mortuary. Aina and I there yesterday. We pick out the coffin.**

I want to see her.

We take you tomorrow. But Friend, it be a shock to you. She close to your age and she look like you.

You mean similar to me?

No I mean the same. She part her hair different. Wala na.

Dad always said I looked like her, but that she was a real beauty. While I was pretty, Mom was very special.

Soul

Erlyn smiles. *Your father not know Joana when she was a baby or a young girl. How he know? He see you as a daughter, not a lover. It changes the eyes of a father I think. You just now the age she, when he meet her first time, I think. You the same.*

Erlyn, show me how she had her hair.

You not know?

I have never seen a photo of her. No, I do not know.

Come na! Come. There is a photo. We will show you. There is a mirror in your father's bedroom. We will fix your hair like your mother's and put you and the photo in front of the mirror!

All but Aina leave. Aina walks to me, as I am still in the shadows. You were smart to not interfere with the discussion.

I am not so sure. That last bit is a little disturbing.

You really didn't see it?

No.

Then you are in for a real shock. She is, physically, Joana all over again.

Shit.

The game's the thing.

There are times when the only sane thing to do, is to have a good brandy. Yes, you know your world is about to get kicked a good bit sideways and, no, you aren't looking forward to it, but there is no way around it. And that is exactly when it is time for a brandy.

Am I ready to see a living, breathing Joana? No.

Did I have any idea that Francine could be that living, breathing Joana? No.

Do I doubt Erlyn and Aina's judgments on the matter? No.

Time for a brandy.

Aina doesn't drink. Joana didn't drink. The old Aina sure as heck, didn't drink. Drinking alone right now seems like something I ought not to be doing. But Aina is here, giving me emotional support and sipping on a hot Milo.

We had to do it. Imagine what would have happened if she saw it for the first time as she looked at Joana in the casket.

Yes, OK, I get it. I am not complaining.

I know. You aren't even complaining silently. Still, it is hurting you.

Yes. That is true.

It is also true that you love Francine. You always have. Why don't you tell her?

Aina...

What? Stay out of it? How? We are bound together. You know that. I cannot be separate from you. It is not possible. So, Hun, why don't you tell her?

It won't change anything for her.

How can you even think that? Tell your daughter!

OK, OK. I will tell her.

Tell me what, Dad? She is standing behind me. I turn around to tell my daughter that I love her, but my daughter is not here. Joana is standing six inches from my face. Joana, I was going to tell our daughter I have always loved her. But you always knew I would from the moment we knew you were pregnant.

Soul

From six inches there are no inches. Arms encircle me. Tears wet my cheeks. In my head, Aina is telling me I could not have done better.

They were right. Francine is Joana in the flesh. How did I not see it? Are the eyes of a father so keen to deceive?

It takes a bit, but eventually we regain twelve inches of distance between each other. Yes, the hair is parted differently. That is about it.

Francine, I think you better comb your hair back the other way, otherwise I am going to have a hard time not thinking of you as Joana.

What if I don't want to?

Aina, would you please go into my daughters head and give her a picture of me wanting to have sex with my wife?

A little graphic, big guy?

Maybe not graphic enough if it doesn't work!

Francine, allow Aina to explain why.

There is a pause. I can see that Aina is doing something. Francine is clearly experiencing something, and then *Oh! Oh fuck! Dad! Dad, you wouldn't!*

Change back or I might.

I'll think about it. Aina, was that to scare me, or did Dad really think that.

Both.

Can you put some of my Mom's feelings and thoughts in my head?

Some. Why?

Will I be disappointed about how she felt about Dad?

No, she loved him for real. But you don't want to feel her passion. That is exactly what your Dad does not want you to feel.

Why?

Are you playing stupid on purpose? You know well enough. If you, through your Mother's feelings, want Master to make love with you, what is there to stop wanting it from happening?

But he loves her still and still wants her, right?

Yes.

And I can be her?

Physically yes. But you are his daughter.

I have always been the replacement for my Mother in his eyes. You think I don't know this? Maybe I need to take on the role completely.

Hey! I am right in front of you. Why are you talking about me as if I was not here or unable to hear you? No, Francine, you are not a stand-in for your mother. I love you as Francine, not a stand-in for Joana.

OK, sure partially, Dad, but not completely.

Bullshit. Francine, I love you as my daughter and I want to see you as my daughter. By looking exactly like your mother, you are doing weird things to my heart. I grab my brandy and start walking back to my private library.

Dad, did you hide things from Mom, like you hide them from me?

I stop, frustrated to all get out, and turn around.

Yes, some. There is no option. There are things that cannot be explained. There are things that should not be explained.

But Aina knows?

Yes, I gather she does.

So if she knows, why can't I know?

Because, Daughter of Mine, you are not in my head, knowing everything I think or do, including taking a crap, twenty-four hours a day. Because your mother was in constant extreme misery for your entire life, every moment of her existence and it was in those moments she learned, I suspect, what this Aina now knows. I would never have allowed your mother to suffer like that if I had known what was happening to her. So no, there is no way I can show you what you want. If I tried to do so, I might kill you, or drive you mad. I have done enough harm to your mother. I will not do it to you.

*As I turn back again and walk toward the library, I say to Aina, **I will sleep alone tonight. Make sure all know this.***

Don't you want some supper?

No. Not hungry.

Not even brandy can solve all problems.

I need a distraction and decide to look at how that church, the one with the kids making false claims, is doing. I move over into my work area. If the church was a commercial enterprise, what it was doing would be in violation of the Consumer Act of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 7394) Article 110. But there is no law about what a church can do, as all churches are

built on lies as an 'a priori' concept. Still, the church has stopped the crap they were engaged in. So, all is well and good on that front.

I look at Amelae's mom's medical status and all looks OK with that. The TB is in remission and the diabetes, while progressing, is still manageable.

The drug matters that Erlyn was tangentially connected to, has simply slipped out of the consciousness of those who are so engaged.

Mirafe's mom and dad have been kicked off the land they had been farming. For them, it's a mess now, but there is nothing requiring Mirafe's involvement.

No one, and I do mean not a single person seems to be looking for Aina. It's like she never existed. The church swallowed her up some years ago and all others lost touch with her. When the church lost her, no one else even noticed. It is truly amazing how a life can disappear unnoticed.

I ask Aina for updates on the statues. The bishops and archbishop in the Philippines have all been moved to a church facility on Cebu. It seems they share the same room but not a one of them can know that. All outside sensory input has been lost to them. They live inside their own minds and for three of them, those minds have become completely mad. But what does it matter if they are insane? No one will ever know.

Also going slowly mad is the local bishop from what Aina reports.

There is a delegation at my work area door. Three of them, Amelae, Mirafe and Erlyn stand there, patiently. If I had not turned around, I do not know how long they would have just waited. I knew to turn around because a voice in my head told me to do so. Am I running things now or is it Aina?

We do this together, Hun.

And no idle thought goes unanswered?

Seems so. Now talk to them.

To what do I owe this gathering?

Mirafe speaks for them. *Do you need us to leave now?*

Why do you ask?

Aina tell us no one is with you tonight. Why that?

I told you earlier that we would not do this while Francine is here.

Francine not care. She knows what happens here.

Soul

You spoke with her about this after she learned her mother's body is lying at a mortuary and we will bury her mother this week?

Well...

Did you?

No. We speak about it before. I sure she OK with it.

I am not and I do not know how to resolve it.

Master, you know. Ask Aina to look in Francine's mind.

I don't want to do that.

Why?

Yes, why?

I don't want to know what my daughter thinks about my sexual activities. That's why.

You scared what you will learn?

Maybe. What father would ever want to know such things?

Maybe a father who sees his wife in his daughter!

Maybe Marife, maybe.

Maybe you want us to go so you can be with your daughter!

Is that what you really think?

We don't know. I think your daughter wonders what it would be like to be with you.

She has asked you this?

Yes.

Aina, did my sending the girls away, give Francine the idea that I might want her in my bed?

Yes.

OK girls, join me tonight. You three and Aina.

Good, now come eat. We keep your plate on the table. Come na.

I rejoin them in the dining room, only to see Francine with her hair still combed as Joana combed it. I swear, I haven't seen this visage for close to seventeen years.

She sits across from me with an expression of complete and profound irritation. I have seen that look before, but not on Francine's face. No, it was on Joana's face. I remember the fights we had that produced it. If I loved her so deeply, why did I keep things from her? Why was I so hostile to her going to church? No, she didn't believe it, but it was the expected thing to do. Why did I hate clergy? How did I know so many languages? Why did I not trust her doctors? Why didn't I seem to trust anyone?

Yes, I kept things back from Joana. There was no way to explain them to her. I loved her deeply. She cared for me in a way that defied understanding. And that is all that seemed to matter to her, so why was I not open to her?

She was magnificently beautiful and yet that didn't seem to register in her mind. It wasn't important.

I see all of that now, facing me as I eat some very nice poached pangasius with butter and seasonings served, as usual, over a bed of white rice. Erlyn has poured a beer for me.

I know enough of the look I am getting, that Francine is waiting on me to give her permission to 'unload' whatever she is chewing on, on me.

OK, let's have it.

Why are you being weird?

Me? I am being weird? How?

You look at me like I am toxic.

Well OK, let's start with that. You are not appearing as my daughter, who I have known for her entire life, and love now as much as I did the day she was born. You are appearing before me as a doppelganger of my dead wife. And that has me freaked out.

Why does it freak you out?

My feelings for my wife are not the same as my feelings for my daughter. I find it very confusing.

But all my life, you always told me, my presence reminded you of her.

It has, but not in the way I think you mean now. You were the proof of that love we had. You were what remained of that love. To have you, meant I never had to lose the memory of that. It was a present each and every day. You, Francine are not like your mother in your emotions, or your intellect, or your choices. You are special and unique. Uniquely Francine. Joana would have been immensely proud of you, but I suspect she would have told you, you have my sense of humor. She never really got the concept of irony. You have

Soul

that down cold. I don't want to lose the connection I have with my daughter for a false connection, an ephemeral fantasy of my dead wife.

I am having a fantasy of knowing the man who loved my mother. I know you as Dad, but not the other. Is that wrong?

No, it is not. In truth nothing is ever really wrong if all consent. You know that.

So why can't I experience that?

Because it will change us forever and I don't want to lose what we have.

Will you at least think about it?

OK, that is a reasonable request. Yes, I will think about it. Now, will you please stop looking like Joana?

Maybe later, but not yet. I am just now getting to know my Mom. Aina has been giving me glimpses. She calls them safe glimpses. Ones you would approve of.

Hub. Well I have no control over Aina as you will figure out if you haven't already.

Ummm, yes, I figured that out. I think she is good for you. So, why do you bed the others. Aina is your real wife now.

That is hard to explain. I am not trying to hide anything. It's just that our connection allows for the others and I think Aina would be as opposed to pushing the others out as I am.

True.

I hear you will be with them tonight. Is that a message to me, to stay away from your bed?

If you were considering crawling into it, it would be. I hope that thought has not crossed your mind.

Very diplomatic!

Very diplomatic, Dad.

Uh-hub. Did you tell the girls how nice the house looks?

No, why?

Because they spent an entire day cleaning every little nook and corner in preparation of your arrival.

Oh, shit! OK, I had better make amends now. Thanks for that.

Done with supper, I push my chair back, gather up the dishes and carry them to a sink. I will spend some time reading before retiring. I don't need

or want sexual contact. The girls are welcome in my bed, but that does not assure any action is forthcoming. I just need time to integrate all I have heard and seen today.

How do you know it will forever change your feelings for Francine?

How could it not?

We'll consider that our feelings change over time as we and those around us age anyway. Children become adults. Adults form relationships with others, modifying how we interact with them. How do you know that your relationship as you have had it, hasn't already changed forever and profoundly? It was a nice speech, but, Hun, is it true?

Are you telling me to screw my daughter?

No, but I am not saying you shouldn't. You are the one who always points out that there is no such thing as sin. We can do whatever we want. Why can't you? Why can't Francine?

You do know what I am thinking right now, right?

That your life would be far simpler if you had just let Joana and Aina die? Yes, I know what you were thinking. And you are right. But you are happy I am alive. You are also, for the first time in millennia, not so alone. So suck it up big fella. You have four of us in bed tonight and if you think there won't be any sex, you are sorely misinformed. In fact, I am going to use what we did earlier on those three. They will be in an endless feedback loop between just the three of them. This is going to be fun!

Fun? It sounds like I am going to have three freaked out girls on my hands. And yes, I am not alone, but while you are in my head, I am not in yours. Not exactly equal.

You escaped, to the game board, because you didn't want to be in the heads of all the others! So what are you complaining about?

You... you were in their heads for all those years? All of them?

Yes, Hun. All of them.

But they weren't in yours? Oh, they couldn't be!

So it seems.

So you know, everything...

I think so.

You... Joana created you out of that place! It is how she protected herself. You were her golem, her shield. It is how she survived.

Yes.

Soul

Now, finally I understand. You were Joana's golem and now you are mine. As part of me as was Joana.

Yes. Joana's love for you is inside me. As I was her protector, I am your partner now.

You are aware that by following Joana into Aina's body, you signed your own death warrant. You can never leave Aina's mortal shell.

Yes, I know, and it is only right. Let's give your son some real problems, Hun. Christianity isn't the only playground we can mess up for him.

Yes but I do not want to touch off a holy war. If that didn't matter to me, I could have probably torn the whole place apart long ago. These humans are too precious. They may frequently be silly and wrong, but they are special and not to be treated harshly.

The others do not agree with you.

I know.

They think this obsession of yours is a waste of time.

I know. What do you think?

I think that they are cruel, mean, and missing the thing you find so special among these humans. I think that Joana is the very essence of what they will never, in their eternal existence, be able to comprehend. Hun, what I don't understand is, how were you able to see it?

It was an accident. I decided to see how it looked from the actual game board.

Another Joana?

Yes, in a way. I could not understand it at first. I was just playing along. It was a game... why not play along. But she wasn't playing a game. And finally, I couldn't either.

A history lesson.

I am in Erlyn. Erlyn is eating Amelae's cunt. Amelae is sucking Mirafe's left tit. Mirafe has three fingers in Aina's cunt. That is weird enough. But Aina has the three girls in a sensory feedback loop. What one feels the other two feel. And then those feelings are sent back doubling and trebling each time without end and almost instantaneously exploding through their bodies.

All I have to do is move my member a few millimeters and they are having massive orgasms. But it isn't me alone. Anything they do to each other has the same effect on them.

I have been super careful to barely move. But Erlyn's juices have washed over me repeatedly and her orgasms have played havoc with my pole. I decide to fuck her good and be done with this.

Well I do, for a few strokes and all three pass out cold. I still haven't cum.

Pulling out of Erlyn, I grab Aina, pull her under me and take her hard as I look down at a face that simply smiles back. It is a wicked smile. I can't read her mind, but something is going on inside there.

Think so, Stud?

Ugh, Yes.

Fuck me hard.

What do you think I am doing?

Fuck me harder! Harder!

And I do. I pound her ass into the mattress. I am spearing her cunt over and over. Her legs are spread wide, as I hold them apart. I care not for any discomfort she might feel. I turn her over and take her cunt from behind, mashing her clit with my fingers as I go. I reach up and squeeze a nipple as hard as I can. She wants it hard? I give it hard. And I cum hard.

Yes! Fuck me! I feel your cum in me. And she feels it as I send everything you do into your daughter's head! You fucked us!

Oh fuck, what has Aina done?!

Soul

She wanted to know your passion. You were unwilling to give it to her. You gave it to me, as you should, always! I shared it with your daughter. She got what she wanted and you keep your sense of dignity. You didn't fuck your daughter.

Aina!

Shhh, sleep now. Sleep Hun.

I awake some hours later with as rigid a pole as I am ever likely to have. All the girls are asleep. But as randy as I am, I care little for their current states. I spread Erlyn's thighs and plunge back in. Her cunt instantly lubricates. Evidently Aina has not removed the feedback loops as each of the three start cumming again. But as the other two aren't touching one another, the amplitude isn't as great.

But I am rocking their bodies in any case. When I cum, and I do cum, all three moan. I fall back asleep.

I awake again, but it is morning and Erlyn has my pole down her throat. Mirafe and Amelae are gone. Aina looks on, as Erlyn continues to suck on me. I reach out for Aina and bring her to my lips.

Erlyn has me going and my passion spills over on to Aina's lips as my groin pushes my pole up into Erlyn's welcoming mouth. I can no longer hold back and Erlyn gets my seed down her gullet.

Aina is still in my arms. Her lips on my lips. Her hands in my hair. She pulls away and looks straight at me.

Love her, Hun. Her life is weird enough. Rejecting her need isn't going to make it any better. Just don't get her pregnant!

But I want her to find a guy. I want her to get pregnant! It won't happen, must not happen, if she is with me.

I will talk to her about that. She doesn't have to always be with you.

I don't know. I told her I would think about it, and I will. We will see.

Good, I know you mean it. Thank you.

Of course you know. Is there anything you don't know?

That doesn't warrant a serious answer. You know how little I know. I have to go looking for things.

Speaking of looking for things? Want to look at your work from yesterday?

Hub, give me a minute. I think nature calls!

Make it fast. It's calling me too.

Yes dear!

An hour later we are all at the dining table. There is a big bowl of bihon, a bowl of rice, a tray of fruit, a bowl of freshly cut pineapple chunks, all spread out.

Amelae asks what happened last night and Aina explains what she did to the three of them. That causes a bit of a ruckus as they think it was beyond unfair.

But you enjoyed it, right? Aina is confused. She thinks they should be grateful. They on the other hand are mildly incensed and are more than ready to make their feelings known. It's time for Aina to apologize. She was not going to, but I think she is reading my mind and gets the point that there are things she ought not to be doing.

While Aina begins what will be a long and protracted apology, Francine zeros in on me, as I am out of the line of fire.

Can we talk about last night?

OK. What exactly do you want to discuss?

Did you know she was doing that?

No.

That's what I thought. Do you want to know how I feel about it?

So long as you were not traumatized... no, I do not.

Why?

Francine, what you felt was what Aina felt, her passion for me, and my passion for her. It should have been private between Aina and me. How I feel about you is, and will, always be different. With Aina, I very much want her to have my child. I do not want to have a child with you.

Oh! OH! OK, yes sure, I can see that!

There is loving. There is sweet caressing. There is playful sex. There is mating. What Aina and I were doing is more mating. Sex or no sex, I do not want to mate you. I want you to find a mate. A good one. A stable one. And I want you to have many children. Just not mine.

But Mom gave you only me. If Mom had lived, there would have been many, right?

Yes.

Soul

So maybe, I should give you what Mom could not. I mean, yes I know you love Aina, but she does not carry Mom's DNA. I do.

You also carry my DNA. It is of critical importance that I not give you a child.

Why?

The child would not be normal.

You mean birth defects? Recessive genes?

No, I mean not human.

Dad? Are you trying to scare me?

I am telling you the truth. Ask Aina, when she is free.

Dad, I know you have great power, but you are human!

Aina stops what she is doing and turns to Francine. No he isn't!

Friend do all in this house know this? Erlyn, do you know what Aina said? Is this true? Is my father not human?

You not know?

No! I know he has great power, like a magician, or a witch or warlock, but it is real. I know he seems to be in contact with a spirit world. I mean that is where he sent my mother, right? But he is human! He is not the young man I see in photos when I am a baby. Why do you say he is not human?

Master, she not know?

No.

When we take you to his bedroom yesterday and show you the photo of your mother, did you not see the other women on the walls?

I guess, sure.

You know who they were?

His girlfriends?

They his wives. Each lived with him until she die. This go far back in time. Back to the Flood.

No! This cannot be, Dad, is this true?

Yes.

Aina, are you all teasing me?

Soul

Come with me. Hun, you come too. Only you can read what is written on those things.

Amelae interrupts, Francine, you have many half brothers and sisters and they have many children and those children have children. Mirafe and me look this up. You want to know some of this?

I must admit. I am curious. Amelae, you could not have gone far back. How many did you find?

We sign up ancestry service. We list your children from five hundred years ago and two hundred years ago in France! We find them! We do that in the USA for the three hundred years ago. We find them. We find when you there early in the last century. No luck when you in China. No luck when you in Africa or India, the first time. But you in India one hundred and fifty years ago. We find that family. We not go too far back. There no records. We want to take a DNA sample from you and see what we can find!

I suspect the DNA sample will do you no good.

Dad, I want to see these wives! Show me.

We assemble back in my bedroom. Three of them know this from before. Aina actually doesn't though she is aware of my past. I have never shared this with Francine. I didn't share it with Joana.

OK, Francine, where do you want me to start.

But Francine does not answer. Aina does. Start from the beginning Stud. The others may not know this, but that first one was very, very special.

Indeed she was. I go through the first three carefully and then suggest that while we might want to revisit some of them later, we skip many and move up to the ones Amelae and Mirafe have family trees related to the unions. We spend the better part of the day doing this. I have learned much about my lineages. Some actually cross back across themselves, but at a distance from me, so no harm is done.

If anything Francine is stunned and a little disoriented. It is like the moorings have come lose for her. She thought she knew who her Dad was. A powerful "Honest to Pete" magician. This is much of the stuff I had hid from her mother and from her for all these years.

But it is time for Francine to go to the mortuary. Erlyn goes with her. The others stay behind.

I am emotionally exhausted. In all these many centuries, millennia, never have I ever had to explain what I have disclosed to these girls. I would marry, settle down, raise a family, age along with my wife, bury her and move on, once again a young man.

Soul

The life and companionship of a woman who placed her life in my hands as I allowed her to think I placed mine in hers, has brought me endless happiness and much joy. Yes, there have been disappointments, but knowing what existence is like without this, there are no better alternatives. The funny thing is that it is within many a woman to be this good, not just one. Certainly not all, but it is in many, given the right circumstances.

There are times when a culture becomes jaded and good matches are scarce. But if you track where I have been, over the millennia, you will find I was careful to avoid those places where a match would be less likely to hold. In the beginning, it was simply not a problem. But most assuredly for a few hundred years I stayed away from France until the very end of the Reign of Terror and found my mate in Troyes where I was a carpenter. I never went to Paris.

I mated in the USA in 1907 in the western part of Tennessee, not far from Dryersburg where I repaired rail cars. Yes, there is evil in this world and the lynching of Lation Scott some ten years into my marriage there, was a dark time.

My first mate in the USA in the 1700's was a sweet maid in Connecticut where I ran an apothecary. She died in childbirth as was common in that time and place. There was no one to be angry with. It was life as it was then. I took a second wife and had four more children, before we got old and she died.

I have never wanted the attention of others. No, it was the taking of Joana that set me off my balance. I swallowed that hurt and anger for a time. I was determined to raise our daughter with the care and love that was her due.

In all these years, in truth, I never collected souls other than my wives. I had no interest in it. I allowed each soul to fall in to the basket it was destined for without intervention. I was disinterested.

Now, after all this time, I am as angry as I have ever been. It started that day with my daughter. She had emancipated, and as she acted in a way that made it clear to me that she was seeing that, my psyche let my anger lose. Now, knowing that my son, that creation of pure vile did this, has me willing to upset much. One of the results is the unmasking of who and what I am. But this is as it must be.

I have gotten a very non-sexual massage and am just relaxing when Francine returns.

Dad, you know what she is dressed in?

No. Did someone have to buy a dress for her?

No, Erlyn found a dress here. Aina says it was the one she put on when she went to church!

I see. A little weird.

More than a little. Dad, it was so strange. She looks so young.

She was young.

Dad, I am confused. Erlyn tells me that if she has your child, the child will be normal.

Yes, that's right.

But if I have your child, we will produce a monster of some type?

Yes.

Are you sure?

The man who is responsible for killing your mother is just such a monster.

How did this happen?

Do you really need to know this? What purpose does it serve?

Don't I deserve the truth from you? Didn't Mom?

Truth? Of that, no, truth is nothing. Nothing you see before you is true. I will not try to explain that to you. Everything you see, is an illusion. The only things that are true are how you feel and how you act. You want to know about the boy.

Yes. What is his name?

He has no name. None that can be pronounced here, anyway.

Why? What is he? He was born of you and a human, right?

My fourth wife was of a place you would now call Harappa. It is in present day Pakistan. She was a good and quite lovely girl. She was 12 when we married as was the custom in that place and time. Her father received ten goats, and some silver from me as a dowry. She bore four children. The oldest of these was a daughter of exquisite beauty. I had no intentions for the girl. As the oldest, and as was the custom there, and the custom here now, she cared as a second mom to the younger children. Her mother, my wife, died delivering a fifth child when she was twenty-six and this girl was twelve. I was deeply sad over the death of my wife. I knew that I would find another to raise the family, as was the custom of the place.

I pause. This is not an easy thing to say, but say I must now and I continue. I was not looking at the child. But the night of my wife's death she lay next to me,

Soul

seeking comfort and solace from her father. In my agitated state following the loss of my wife, that night, without consciously intending, I nevertheless, took the girl and gave her a child. It is not an evil thing, but it was not a smart thing. She loved me and never left me, even though I had taken her that way. As she was no longer a virgin, no other man would ever have her. She could have hated me. She loved me until the day she died at age 54.

I can see her now in front of my eyes. It haunts me. But the thing inside her grew at an alarming rate and then one day she was without child. I thought she had caused it to be ripped out of her body. But it was not the case. I learned that a monster had appeared in the other realm. That monster is my son. He is a malevolent thing.

Dad, is that the only time you had sex with one of your children?

Yes.

And that is why you are afraid to have sex with me?

Well it is most assuredly a big reason. But even if you were on birth control, I would have a problem with it.

If we produce a monster, we can abort it.

Not here. It's not legal here.

It's legal in Hong Kong, and that isn't far away.

OK but there is no guaranty that we could abort it. Anyway, like I said, there are other reasons.

But it only happened once and you do not know if the next one will be a monster or a wonderful child.

It isn't worth the risk.

It is. Dad, you have Aina now. It will be safe.

Aina has great power, but I doubt she is that powerful.

Is it OK if we ask her?

Even if she says she is powerful enough, it does not mean that I agree to lie with you.

OK, but it takes one of your concerns off the table.

OK ask her.

No need, I was listening. And yes Hun, Francine can hear me too right now.

Can she hear me right now?

Yes.

Soul

You know, this having no privacy is more than a little unnerving.

Suck it up big fella. Now, as to pregnancy and monsters, Francine, your father is right. I do not have that power. I can make sure you are not fertile when you lie with him, but if you mate, there will be little I can do. I suspect there will be nothing anyone can do. And as to the odds of a monster, I give it an absolute certainty.

No gods here.

Francine is in my arms, as a daughter ought to be. I am consoling her. I just wish she would put her hair back the other way.

Aina, where are we with the Nuns, and did you find the time to add the next group today?

I added the second group while you were getting your massage and relaxing. It is done. Tomorrow I will add all within 1000km. There are not that many by density.

OK, and how is it progressing with the first group?

It's a little like I thought but mostly like you thought. Some found cocks but most of it was cloistered sex. There have been many calls directly to the Vatican. They think the Devil has risen and are seeking to use exorcists. But the number of those affected has them stunned. They have no idea how to handle that number. The order from Rome was to isolate those females. That has created the problem of how it is to be done. At the moment all the convents are on lockdown as if they are prisons. Of course there are no suicides, at least not yet.

Suicide is the one thing I do not expect a female so devout to do. It is an irreversible mortal sin for them. Yes, if they lose their faith, they might consider it, but they are not in pain and the enjoyment of the sex, as they lose their faith, and thereby having assuaged feelings of guilt, ought to argue against suicide then as well. ... This is good. When are we burying Joana?

Tomorrow. Hun, the mortuary asked which church would officiate. I told them that our pastor would take care of it.

Who?

You!

I see.

Yes, I told him your name was David Hume.

Having a bit of fun?

Why not? He won't have a clue, anyway. No one will. Only you and me. Anyway, he is part of your family tree from the 1400's.

Very funny. Amelae didn't mention any lineage from that era.

She left four lineages out of the conversation. This was one of them.

Why?

They cross over, a lot.

All four?

Two pairs of crossings. One pair, the one in Europe and Great Britain is just a bit weird. The other is here.

What do you mean, here?

Joana's great grandfather on her mother's side is from Spain. Maybe you remember your wife Mirela and your son Eduardo?

Yes.

Eduardo became an official under the Governor-General Antonio Maria Blanco in the Philippines. That is part of it. But it is not all of it. Joana's grandmother on her father's side was a Tan. Maybe you remember the name, Tan?

Aina, there are millions of Tan's.

Only one, whose grandfather was a Dutch sailor. Ring a bell?

Yes. Shit.

You are very lucky Francine is not a monster.

That is why you said it was a dead certainty she would beget a monster?

Yes. Sweetheart, you need to track your lineages more carefully.

So Hume is one of mine?

Yes. But so are Christopher Wren and Gesche Gottfried. It's a mixed bag.

And there you have it. Sometimes it is best not to know. But, yes I get the point. Taking Joana was risky.

Hun, I am not pushing, but Francine will have her period in two days. She is not fertile. There is no chance of a pregnancy.

So you say. What do you know exactly about the creation of monsters?

Ummm. OK, nothing.

Right.

Point taken. I'll take care of it with her one way or another. She won't push any more.

Good. ... Gesche Gottfried, really?

Eventually Francine gives me a daughterly peck on the cheek and moves off to figure out what she will be wearing to the funeral tomorrow. I sit down to read a bit, but find myself distracted. We have been focusing on the Catholics and while they certainly deserve it, there are others for whom a little disturbance in the normal order of things is long overdue.

It seems to me that if I am getting the Nuns to throw off their habits, then what about burkas, niqabs, shaylas, hijabs, al-amira and chadors? Is it not time to mess with others? How about this? Any female wearing these garments will feel the extreme and urgent need to remove all clothing and exit buildings into the streets. But to make sure none are hurt, no man or woman will find the desire to hurt these females, but they also will not be able to take their eyes off them. And the more they stare, let them feel nothing but love for all they have hated. I wonder if Aina can come up with a virus for that?

It will be two viruses. But the women have to come in at some point... and do we start in Mecca and just let it spread on its own?

Yes, they come in at sundown, but there is to be no retribution when they go inside. Still the clothing stays off. Yes start in Mecca and just let it spread for now but give it a 48 hour incubation period for the women and zero day for the male tolerance virus.

Sweet. You do know there are grandmothers and great-grandmothers who will be out there.

Yes.

I wonder if I can get back to my book now.

Of course!

The morning comes with five females in my bed. None of them have coupled with me. Aina has made sure that at least two other females are between Francine and me at all times.

As I stir, so do they. There is a scramble for the bathrooms and their morning activities. I decide to just check Internet news portals and see what's of interest at the moment.

Our interference has broken through. News that the Catholic Church is under demonic attack is being reported, though the Vatican is denying the reports, calling it sensationalism. There is no news from Mecca as the incubation period has not lapsed yet. The Manila Bulletin is reporting that a high level Vatican investigation team has arrived to assess the matters with the local bishops and what has befallen them. This may be of no importance to me, but I cannot be sure. It is something to ponder.

I feel something.

Sbit! Hun! You see?

I shout as loud as I can, *Girls, I want you to go to your rooms and not come out until I call for you. No exceptions. Go now!*

I'm not, and then again, I am prepared for this. It was going to happen. That is certain.

He approaches the gate, *Good morning, Edgar.*

Good morning, Sir. I will tell Master that you are here.

No need, Edgar. I assure you, he is aware. In fact in ten seconds he will open the front door and say, 'I was expecting you earlier.'

Huh, yes I was going to say that, but there is no need now. So I open the door and say, *No, I am not. It's alright, Edgar. Allow the Lazy Ass-wipe to pass.*

Always the sweet tongued gentleman! That is something I most assuredly do not miss.

You look odd in human form. It most certainly doesn't fit you well. It is far too untidy for your OCD'ness.

Funny, very funny. But you are right, I find the thing far from acceptable. Still if we are to chat, I gather it must be this way, though I still find your choice baffling.

We are walking through the house

This 'house,' for instance. You are comfortable living thusly? Truly?

Yes. I find it pleasing. I know he doesn't, which makes it even more pleasing to me. We enter my private area and walk down the hall and into the place I use as my study.

I must say, I never understood why you chose to do this. And then I thought, well, OK, once she departed, you would see the silliness of it and give it up. But no, you stayed.

That was a lesson, the death of that first wife. ... I had wondered what it was, in this second round that had changed things so much. I mean the first time, you couldn't get a soul, no matter how hard you tried. They all just came my way. Then this time, it was splitting down the middle. Even right now you and I are even. You aren't even trying. I needed to know what you did, back then. I needed to understand what changed and allowed you to improve so much.

You know, now. You must. How could you not. It happened to you. You chose to live as a human. You must know.

Soul

Yes. I learned. It was a very crafty thing you did. You played on my sensibility and turned it against me.

Good! I am glad you understand. It is far more satisfying to hear that from you, than it would have been to hear you complain and whine about it.

Oh, how can I complain? You know full well, I argued for it! Yes, you led me by the nose. But it was I who asked that it be included in the second round. So yes, I understand.

Wonderful. So why are you still here?

Because, what we did, made more of a difference than you will ever understand. It makes this place quite remarkable.

You have told this daughter you have now about who you are?

Francine. Yes.

She knows?

Some, but not all.

At some point she will be confronted with the reality, no?

Yes, maybe, as will others.

You mean the four you have taken?

Yes them and their children.

So this is not going to end? Really? I mean, look, what's the point? You know now.

I have known since the very first wife. You and I created this. You do not feel. It is just a game to you. You know I had second thoughts ever since the flood. The first time, there wasn't much to them. I didn't find them interesting. But what we did, for this second game, well, they became far more interesting and I started to regret the decision to continue the game. And then I was not sure it was regret that we started it, but rather concern that it might end. I mean, a two out of three? What if "two" never ended? How would that work? Was it possible?

You are right. It did appear to be a stalemate. I found it boring.

I worried that you would end this game like you did the first, but then you would have to admit defeat when you were really not losing. You may be bored, and you may not be winning, but you aren't losing. We were tied. And it isn't in you just to quit in that case.

Yes. That is true. So what was your plan? To just hang out here as it grinds on?

Soul

I thought, you and I might not end it, but they have free will and they might do something stupid and end it for us. If that happens, we would tally up the numbers at the end and see who's ahead. In the meantime, yes, I hang out here.

You do know the irony of this, do you not?

Yes. The very thing that I asked to be included; the very thing that allowed you to tie up the board; that is the reason I am staying.

I have found it fascinating. Living as a human, you are limited to what humans can do. The only time you can act as 'you' is once you have bound a soul. I must admit, I was amazed that you had not violated that rule. Until recently you had only acted as 'you' on rare occasions. Yes, you had every right to save Erlyn. But in doing so, you tipped your hand. I was surprised you did that for a human you didn't much like and who had disobeyed you. But then I find it odd that you are willing to accept the infirmities of humanity, even if you will not die as one ... Do you not find it a bit contradictory that it is one of my rules that allows you to live as a human in such comfort?

Yes. You would have let Erlyn die. It is the difference. And yes, it is your need for orderliness, for sublimating the nature of humans into other tasks that has produced the feats of social and scientific engineering that gives me the vehicle I drive. Yes, I know. I am aware that my way would have not produced such things. It also would not have produced world wars and holocausts. My way is that of a three year old with Jenga blocks. They have fun at times and get angry at times. Sometimes they build with the blocks and other times, they throw the blocks, one at a time, and at anyone or anything. I would never have come to stay here as a human if it were that way. You added something that is a lie, and cruel, but creates things, while at the same time, depends on that which I asked be added. It was intriguing.

Is that why you left my churches alone, until now?

Yes. For the most part, though I did get pissed off at that one place that took bullshit to another level.

I find it humorous that you chose to settle down this time in my most productive region.

Oh, over time I have settled in many of your productive regions. What better place to understand about what makes it all work for you? I am surrounded by your faithful, though they would be appalled if they knew the truth. I mean, between us, you really are the asshole.

Isn't that what these humans would call, "divine justice?"

Right now I am not thinking of divine justice. I am thinking about what happened to my last wife. The one you allowed my shit-for-brains son to kill?

Are you saying I broke the rules?

Yes.

And that is why you are braking them now?

I haven't broken a single rule.

Then why are things happening that are beginning to tip the scales?

Not my doing. Maybe it is divine justice.

You are serious?

Yes.

What did the boy do?

Come to the funeral and look into the body of my wife. We will both look together and by doing that, not break any rule. That will be enough. I am not done taking vengeance for his act. But I am not breaking any rule to do it.

After I find what he has done, what do you expect me to do?

See that he is destroyed.

If I don't?

You will lose. No round three.

And if I do?

I will return as best I can, the order of this world, and we will play it out, allowing for free will to end the game.

Tell me, have you thought of how you want to change things for round three?

I know why I am not doing better, and why you aren't either. I am sure I don't want to do anything about it.

I am curious. What do these new girls think you are?

They think I am God on one level and on another level, they haven't got a clue.

But they love you, do they not?

You know that is a stupid question. What is your point?

I think I just made it. It is time I go. There is no need to look into your wife. I will take care of the boy. I will see you when the game is complete.

We get up and I walk him out to the gate. We don't shake hands. It is not our way and we are not friends. But I do say goodbye. He says goodbye to Edgar, and is gone.

Soul

Walking into the house, I call out to the girls that they are released from their rooms. They emerge with questions on their faces. It surprises me not at all that it is Erlyn who asks, *An old friend, Master?*

No, not a friend. He is an old acquaintance, but not a friend.

How old? He know Francine's mother? The two of you talk about those days?

He never met her. But he knows of her. Erlyn, he is such an old acquaintance, it seems like I have known him forever. He asked after the four of you.

He knows about us?

Yes.

Why you not allow us to meet him?

He doesn't deserve to meet you. He is not good enough. He asked if you four loved me.

What you tell him?

I told him that, it is a stupid question.

Why it stupid? It true!

And that is why it is a stupid question. The answer is painfully obvious.

Aina, we have some things to undo... potentially. I will let you know.

You know, I know who that was and what has transpired, right?

Yes, I know.

Tell them!

You tell them. I want to spend some time alone before the funeral. If the boy is killed, after the funeral, I want you to wipe their minds of all they have learned of me. Let them think I am simply a polygamist. They will stay but we will find a new way forward. Let there be no gods here.

The End

Soul
Images



Tricycles are motorcycles attached to or covered within a steel cab. These are common and inexpensive transports typically for distances of a few kilometers.

Return to text



Jeepneys are public transports and are based on a frame whose front end is traditionally designed to suggest a WWII jeep. Passenger entrance/exit is from the rear.

Return to text

Soul



Return to text