

Lampara: A Story of Bagyong Ferdie

By Jascha Kaye L. Gabriel

Pauli nalang, Be... Pagsakay ug pedicab mintras hinay pa ang ulan.

I frowned as I read the text that my mom sent in a groupchat with my sister. It was actually pouring, and the rain was not *hinay* at all, which means it might be difficult for me to get a ride even at the early hour of 7:56AM, not to mention I will be carrying a big bag of laundry.

Pwede ko pakuha ka Uncle Boning?

I replied, with the hopes of relieving myself of the burden of having to wait for a pedicab. I ended up being disappointed though, my mom said Uncle Boning had to go somewhere for an important errand, so I had no choice but to weather the storm. I really was not planning on going home, as I knew it was safer to be here than back home, with the old, creaky trees and the river just a few steps away from our house. But of course, my mom was alone, probably scared, too. I could never get myself to stay warm in a concrete room when she's sitting in worry.

As I started to pack my bags and clean my room before leaving, there was a loud thud, just outside of our boarding house. The building was all solid concrete and my room was labeled **20**, the last room and the farthest away from the main entrance. Most of the time, I can never hear what is happening outside unless I leave the door and windows open. So, for me to hear that noise means that it was not anything random. Curious, I decided to go out and check, just as a cold gust of wind blew my damp hair away from my face. That never happens, not if you're in room number twenty.

Walking through the narrow hallway, I started to hear more noises, and the whistling wind was becoming louder. The manzanitas tree by the *poso* was swaying too much with the wind, I was worried it might even break. Seeing this, I immediately thought of my mom back home, and how the narra must be wobbling in the same way, with its big branches and thick *kabkab*, threatening to split and crush our thin roof.

I walked to the street of *Crossing Escaño* with an umbrella on one hand and my bag on the other. The leaves were falling like it does in the movies during autumn, and I would've loved it if it weren't for the raindrops that came with it. I liked how the water from a big puddle wet my feet, glad that it washed away the dust and dirt from my worn out slippers. After waiting for longer than ten minutes, an empty pedicab finally came, and I was grateful to the Manong driver for giving me a ride in the middle of a storm, when he was supposed to be staying warm and dry with his family at home.

The ride home was not at all pleasant. I needed to ride a motorcycle to take me to our barangay, but the place where the *habal-habal* drivers used to stay was deserted, not that I was surprised, given the unkind weather. Luckily, a relative who owns a tricycle showed up and offered a ride, so I stayed dry against the pouring rain and angry winds.

“Ganiha raka, gang?” Uncle Celso asked, pertaining to the time I spent waiting for a ride home.

“Dili ra man kaayo, Kol...” I replied, out of courtesy. But in reality, I did wait for a while, alone, in the shed where they used to wait for passengers.

“Wala man gud ga byahe ron, gang, walay pasahero.” I nodded in reply. I also wondered how the *habal-habal* drivers are managing in this unfortunate time, knowing that that is their only way to put food on their tables.

“Dako na tubig sa suba, Kol?” I asked. Mostly because when the river rises, the *sapa* near our home, would, too. I got even more worried for my mom when the driver said yes.

When we reached the bridge, I had to walk since his vehicle cannot pass the raging waters of the San Jose river. Looking at the murky, brown, almost chocolaty water, I remembered how we used to ride the *balsa* on the way to school during the rainy season, back when the bridge was still under construction. It was a difficult time, as we had to hold our breaths and pray that the raft holds our weight and keep us from drowning. I probably worried the most while crossing the floods in a *balsa*, as someone who does not know how to swim.

When I arrived, the door to our small house was wide open and a familiar lampara was lit up.

“Niadto ko sa tindahan, nipalit unta ko ug ice cream para pag-abot nimo bugnaw na. Unya, ni brownout man!” my mother, in her *pantulog*, said as she pointed to two packs of *pinipig* ice cream placed in a small bowl, still inside the wrappers. I do not know whether it was because of the lampara, but home suddenly felt warmer than back in my boarding house. The sweet dessert was already melted, but as I took a bite, my heart was filled with warmth from my mother's thoughtfulness, contrary to the cold weather.

My mother and I ate dinner earlier than usual, as she said if we have to *bakwit* when necessary, at least we would be well-fed. We ate in silence, but I was sure both of our minds were busy thinking of ways to survive the night. The pork *sinigang* has never tasted so bland.

The first night since the storm hit was absolute torture for me as much as it was torture for my mother. The strong winds made our curtains dance with urgency, and I hated when they did. They seem to be dancing out of fear, against their will, as if they just sway because the wind forced them to. The lampara was also fighting for its life. Air is supposed to keep its flame burning, but with every blow of the wind, the lampara struggles to breathe.

Directly above our roof was where the branches of the narra tree settled. Just a few steps back was the *dao* tree. Its round fruit as small as *calamansi* rained on our home stronger than the rainwater itself, they almost sounded like gunshots. The mighty mahogany didn't keep its silence, either. She threw leaves, twigs, and branches on the thin roof I was afraid it would go through.

In the middle of all these, my mother and I sat on our mattress, covering our heads as if it would help shield us from the possible debris.

“Lord, insakto na tawon! Maluoy ka, panalipdi tawon mi!” I almost didn't hear my mother cry in the noise of all the chaos. I was never religious, but feeling hopeless, I said a little prayer, too.

“Mo adto na ta ila Tiya, Mang!” I suggested, panicked, when the sounds of the branches breaking grew louder. Tiya Ligaya's house was bigger and safer, as it was elevated to avoid the floods, and the ceiling was high enough to tone down the sound of things falling onto it. Almost every time during typhoons, our house would be flooded, yet Tiya Ligaya's floor stays dry. I lost count of all the times we spent the night in her house, waiting for a storm to die down. Even during typhoon Odette, her home kept us safe and I wished to be protected by it as Ferdie lashed out as well.

I poked my ears with my fingers to drown out the sounds, but it barely helped. My mother said we should stay, because it would be more risky to go out, with all the coconut trees lining up the streets that are bending to the will of the wind. And so, we stayed. With every thud, my heart jumps in surprise. I held my breath every time, keeping my gaze up the ceiling, just waiting for a big branch to finally puncture the thin sheets of our roof. My mother and I were almost at the point of hiding under the mattress, a not-so-practical idea, but given the size of our home and the lack of sturdy furniture, we did not have a better choice.

After a while, the winds calmed down. I tried to peek through the windows but I could barely see through the pitch black. I was sure, though, that the waters had not reached our home.

My mother laid down to rest, hoping to finally get an ounce of sleep and so did I. The clock read 11:16 P.M. We were both tired from staying up too late. However, the storm decided to taunt us. Just as we finally dozed off, the wind howled again, laughing at our audacity to sleep at its peak.

“Bangon, Be, bangon!” Her panicked voice woke me up.
“Hangin na pud, bangon diha!”

We just sat there, hugging each other for comfort waiting for the worst. My mother was still mumbling a quiet prayer, and I was closing my eyes and covering my ears, wishing for it all to be over. I started to wonder how I dealt with these typhoons when I was a kid. I certainly do not remember being so scared and on edge as I did now, but I do remember the little assurances and comfort that my dad gave at a time like this.

Ayaw ra gud kahadlok, dili lagi na... he used to say just to calm me down, and looking back, I figured he was just as scared as I was. My younger self just didn't see through his pretense. He put on a brave face to make things feel better for me. *Katulog ra ug balik, mawala ra ni...* and as a kid who trusts her father with her whole heart, I felt safe enough to sleep amidst the storm, without any care or worry in the world, because dad was there.

Was it because my father was here in all those years, being brave enough for everyone, that I was not restless? Was it because of the lack of a male presence, may it be of my father or my brother, that I felt mom and I were vulnerable?

The morning after, I sat on the floor with the door wide open. I could see the aftermath of the storm and it has left so much for us to clean up. The slippers that I forgot to take inside the night before were all muddy and wet. Some of my mom's potted plants have toppled over, and the *alugbati* vines looked all beat up.

After such a ravenous storm, I suddenly had a realization. One that is quite sad, in my opinion.

I realized, there are people like myself, who live in a house that feels everything. We feel the wind, we feel the rain, we feel every risk and danger to the point we can barely even sleep. Our doors are kept locked by chains that are easy to break, our roof full of holes we have to keep a bucket to catch the drips, and we constantly have to worry about the floods sweeping away our houses. Like the lampara, we struggle to keep our flames from dying out.

Then, there are people who have the luxury to not care about such things. People who can afford an 8-hour long sleep during a 10-hour typhoon. Ones who live in houses that are so secure they never have to worry. Their lampara is probably fiery and never swaying. Or, they might not even have the need for a lampara at all.

I am not, in any way, wishing for such calamities to affect anyone, simply I wish that there comes a time when every single family never has to worry about losing their homes.

“Be, buntag na. Palonga na ang lampara.” My mom says.

As I take a sip of my coffee, I have yet another story to tell.

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Reflection

Question: In writing your composition, which of the "Nature, Essence, Qualities, Values, Purposes, Importance, Functions, and Roles of Literature" most resonated with you? Why?

The values of literature that resonated most with me, which is also where I based my composition on as I think it is what has come out from me writing the piece, is that it promotes self-expression and it provides therapy.

When I started writing *Lampara: A Story of Bagyong Ferdie*, I wanted to use it as an outlet where I can share how scary and how intense the experience of the typhoon was for me, and I couldn't have chosen a better genre of literature where I can really storytell. I generally do not have anyone I can share the experience with aside from my mother, even though I have friends who check up on me. So, this composition was an opportunity to finally voice out how dreadful and terrifying it is to live in a place that feels everything. I have been meaning to really tell someone what happens in the case of typhoons and how I exactly feel as I anticipate the storm, and what happens during and after it. Because I feel that if I talk about it with someone orally, I tend to miss some details and also I cannot describe my feelings with complete nakedness as I do when writing about it. With that said, through writing this piece, I was given an opportunity to express myself through writing with raw emotion and real first-hand experience. In relation to this, by expressing myself through sharing what I have been through, I was also being unconsciously provided therapy, because as I write every single word in the story, I feel lighter and better in general, for the reason that I get to feel that I am no longer alone in dealing with my fear.

I am grateful and blessed to have survived yet another storm, literally and figuratively, and I am also just as grateful to have been given the chance to share my story. As I reflect on this experience and all the past experiences with typhoons, I have grown more resilient and I feel that I can now brave any storm (again literally and figuratively) that I may experience in the future.