

The Monsters

A Novel in Progress

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It is the best place to make out or smoke pot, a huge vacant lot with wild grass, weeds, and dry bushes lit only by a street lamp post. It lies just beside the filthy river which has become a dumping site for garbage, old tires, dead cats and rats, used sanitary napkins and condoms, rusty tin cans, large empty sacks, bed pans which look like beautiful porcelain cups from afar (especially if you see them from a window,) feces of different colors, shapes and sizes, and other things unrecognizable and in various states of decay. Anything unwanted and undesirable floats in the filthy river.

Adults warn children not to play in the vacant lot which everyone calls *malignuhan* because of rumors that a hideous white lady with sharp claws haunts the place. Some say a *tikbalang* guards it which is why nobody wants to purchase the lot thinking that it brings *malas* to whoever will buy it, while others say a mermaid claims a young boy or a young girl's life every year. But despite the stench and scary stories, children are often seen in the lot catching spiders and fireflies, and when they can't find any of these, they settle for cockroaches, putting them in jars to keep as pets or as specimens for torture, or playing *habulan* or *tex*. But the children immediately scamper away when it's about to get dark or when they see the bigger kids and drunk men who go there for a variety of reasons.

One November evening, just after Halloween, four young boys who were barely in their teens went to the vacant lot. Celso, the tallest, the stockiest of the four, the group's leader, told his gangmates that they would meet after dinner because he would be teaching them something that all boys should know, but only if there were no other people in the lot. His friends were quite excited about the idea since he also told them that what they were going to do would change their lives forever. Francis thought that Celso would teach them how to smoke; Ringo thought the same thing. Danny thought that they would be drinking their first beer or gin. He had *inuman* on his mind. Danny always saw his father and his friends huddle around a small table just outside of their house on a Friday or Saturday night drinking numerous bottles of beer until they were dead drunk.

They agreed to meet at seven thirty, but the gang wasn't complete until eight o'clock. Ringo still had to wash the dishes and he didn't want his mother to suspect that he was up to no good with his friends. They all told their parents that they would be working on a group project. When Francis' parents asked him what project he and friends would be working on, he told his mother that they had to make sea creatures out of small stones or pebbles. They believed him because it wasn't the usual generic answer boys give. They were lucky that there were no one else in the vacant lot. Celso brought a big red flashlight and a satchel that seemed to contain a lot of things because it was bulging, while Danny brought a kerosene lamp.

"Let's go there near the river," Celso urged the other boys.

"Why near the river? They say that there's a..." Danny said.

"What? A *tikbalang*... a white lady. You believe in them? You're such a sissy! There are no such creatures!" Celso mocked his friend.

"Yeah, let's just follow Celso. He knows what he's doing," Ringo said trying to hide his fear. He didn't want Celso to think that he was a scaredy cat. Francis remained quiet but he was breathing heavily, thinking about what Celso hinted that they would be doing that evening.

"I'm not scared! Who said I'm scared? I'm thinking of bad people silly... Like criminals... Who might be... You know?" Danny defended himself but he knew that he didn't sound convincing.

"Oh c'mon! I've always known you easily get scared shit. Don't deny it. Remember, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*? You could hardly sleep after we

saw that on DVD. Trying to hide your fear, little man? Hehe... I know. I always know,” Francis said.

“Stop it, you blabbermouths! What the hell are we gonna do here Celso? What’s your fucking bright idea?” Ringo couldn’t contain his impatience. He was actually excited about what Celso was going to teach them.

“Hey, watch your mouth! You’ll know in a short while!” Celso said. He stared Ringo down to show him who was boss.

Ringo and the rest kept their mouths shut. They didn’t want to cross Celso. He was their leader and he called the shots.

“Now guys, I’ll show you something...” Celso said. All of them sat on the grass.

“The river stinks! But I love it! Haha!” Francis said.

“Yeah, it smells like your butt!” Celso teased Francis.

“It’s probably your dick! That’s how your dick smells!” Francis retaliated.

“We’ll get to my dick later, shithead!” Celso said.

Celso brought out of his satchel of magazines that displayed naked women with big boobs on the cover, old issues of *Hustler*, *Playboy*, and others that had foreign titles, probably French, which the boys could not pronounce correctly.

“Wow, where did you get them?” Ringo looked at the covers of the smut magazines one by one until his hands became sweaty. He had never actually seen one. His parents were fundamentalist freaks. They talked about God everyday. Their sentences always ended with Amen. They called everyone brother and sister, particularly those who attended the same church as them. But Ringo was an eleven-year-old-boy whose hormones were raging, though they were kept in check by his parents with talk of fire and brimstone. They knew that their son was an adolescent and for them that was dangerous. They didn’t want him to be like other boys his age who thought about sex all the time. They placed the computer in the living room so that they would see what Ringo was googling or surfing. There was no way that he could surf porn sites. But he masturbated on a regular basis, usually before taking a bath. His parents never knew this of course. They thought he was an innocent

and obedient boy. They didn't know that he was horny all the time. They had regular bible readings in the house. The television also had its special place in the living room. For Ringo's parents, watching television was a family thingy. They believed that their son's viewing habits should be closely monitored. Ringo had no choice but to watch religious programs, cartoons—the-not-so violent ones—and game shows. There were times when his parents watched television until midnight, especially during Friday and Saturday night.

One night, Ringo had found it hard to sleep; he twisted and turned but sleep never came. He heard the sound coming from their TV; the volume was turned down. He checked the time on the wall clock; it was a few minutes past midnight. For some reason, he suddenly had the strong urge to take a peek at what his parents were probably doing while watching television. He stood up and slowly opened the door of his room just enough to see what was going on. He covered his mouth when he saw his parents lip locking on the sofa. Ringo closed the door. He crawled to his bed and there he laughed silently, but he also felt a bit nauseous.

The only magazines in the house were those that dealt with their religion and pamphlets on how to be a good Christian boy. It was Ringo's first time to see a magazine that had women in their birthday suits who either caressed their boobs or had their legs spread-eagled for every boy to have a glimpse of the promise of hot sexual paradise. The yellowish light coming from the flashlight and the kerosene lamp made the naked women on the pages of the magazines look even more real and inviting. The shadow made the women's lips redder, their pussies pinker, and their eyes looked as if they were on fire. Ringo already had a hard on.

"I saw them hidden in the *bodega*. I'm sure my dad put them there for me to see. He wants me to be like him ... A real macho man. I'm gonna fuck girls when I reach seventeen. I heard my dad telling my uncle that he couldn't wait for the time that he could take me to a place where I would be 'initiated'. I can't wait for that. I wanna taste a real pussy!" Celso said proudly.

Celso came from a family whose parents allowed him to do whatever he wanted to do. He was spoiled rotten, especially by his father, since he was the youngest and the only boy in a brood of four. His parents, both government employees at the *municipyo*, thought that he would bring the

family good luck because of the popular belief that having three girls and a boy in the family was a sign of *buena suerte*. Their relatives told them so.

His father was rumored to have a mistress, a much younger woman who liked daddy types, but no one was able to prove it. When Celso heard these rumors, he would tell his friends that it was a big lie. Celso idolized his father. He bought Celso the best bike when he was ten years old. He bought him boxing gloves and taught him how to box like a champion. He even bragged about Celso becoming the next Manny Pacquiao someday because he was a fast learner. He bought Celso signature shirts and branded rubber shoes that he always wanted. His sisters envied him and told their parents that he was lazy, that he didn't do anything in the house. They just laughed and told his sisters that he was a boy.

His sisters just stared at their parents in total disbelief. One time his eldest sister, Carla, had the audacity to ask at the dinner table, "Why does being a boy come with a lot of privileges? Why do you spoil Celso?" Their father banged the table and told Carla that she had no right to question him. Those were his rules, and if they weren't happy with them, they could leave the house anytime. The girls looked at their mother who seemed like she didn't hear anything. She was forking the liver in the menudo and just continued eating. Celso just kept quiet; he never thought his father would defend him that way and he really felt good about it. Celso looked at his sister who was in tears. He gave her a grin that seemed to say "I am the boss here and you can't do anything about it." His sisters never said anything about him being a spoiled brat anymore, but he knew from the way they looked at him, particularly Carla, that they hated him for being their dad's favorite. Celso didn't care. In their house, he was the king.

"This is nothing! Just old magazines! There are better sites on the Net." Francis said, but he also flipped the pages of the magazines.

"Just shut up! Look at those boobs? Do all white girls... Well... You know... Have no hair down there?" Ringo said.

"They shave it, dummy!" Celso joined in the reading.

"Shave? Why would they shave it? Mrs. Serminio said that pubic hair serves as protection..." Francis said.

Francis wanted to think that he was the brightest among his friends. He was an average student, but he worked harder in school than his friends. He knew he wasn't going to be as popular as Celso. Celso had a commanding

presence; the other boys listened to him. Besides none of the others had it, which was the reason why he wanted to be the bright one in class. He would listen attentively to teachers' lectures, submit assignments and projects even earlier than the deadline. Celso would sometimes call him *sipsip*, but Francis didn't care. Because he was such a hardworking student, he would always be in the class' top ten, number nine or ten usually, never in the top five. He was happy with his standing in class, because his friends were not even in the top thirty. Francis never knew his father. His mother, a saleslady in a department store, had him when she was only eighteen. She barely talked about Francis' father. When he asked about him on occasion, she would just shrug her shoulders and say, "He left us. What else do you want to know? If you want to know if he was handsome, he was, but that was it." After that, Francis tried his best not to ask his mother about his father. It was pointless anyway. When his classmates asked about his father, he told them the truth. He never elaborated when they wanted more information. He would tell them, "That's it. That's the story of my life." They would leave him alone after that.

"Who cares about what she said? It's better when it's shaved ... Pussy looks better that way," Celso said with authority.

"What's that? Yuck, is that your saliva Ringo on that blonde's pussy?" Danny was surprised to see a sticky colorless liquid on the page that had a Miss America type of girl, blonde and blue eyed, who had large pink bunny ears on her head. Everyone laughed and called Ringo *tulo laway*.

Danny was the shortest in the group. He looked more like he was eight instead of eleven. His mother left the country two years ago to work in London as a domestic helper. His father did nothing much; he just loved drinking with his *ka-tropa*, mostly jobless men like him whose wives were either housewives who depended on their parents for support, or women who sold fish, meat or vegetables in the market, or former G.R.O.s in Videoke bars. Danny thought that his father was lucky because he had a wife who supported him. He wasn't a bad man. He took care of Danny, bought the things that he needed, took him to the mall every now and then to eat in burger joints and watched him play arcade games, and he treated Danny like they were of the same age. Danny remembered how his mother joked about his father being a drunk despite being born on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The people in their vicinity

respected his father. They listened to what he had to say. Danny didn't know why. Neighbors knocked on their door with such regularity asking whether Ka Tony was around. People in Danny's neighborhood always had problems which his father could solve. Danny had no idea how his father was able to do this. He had tattoos on his chest and arms, mostly of strange looking creatures: one was a half-woman, half-bird creature on his left arm, and a head of a one-eyed monster on his right. On his chest was a fire-breathing dragon that attracted stares when his father was shirtless because he resembled prison inmates like those you seen in old action movies.

When his mother would come home for a vacation, she would shower her husband and son with gifts. For his father, T-shirts with the faces of Bob Marley, Led Zeppelin, Ozzy Osborne, The Doors, The Beatles, David Bowie printed in front; an assortment of alcoholic drinks; audio CDs of his favorite rock bands, and rubber shoes and jeans; and for Danny, battery-operated cars, a remote-controlled airplane, t-shirts with cartoon characters printed on them and rubber shoes too. There were of course a lot of imported canned goods and a variety of candy bars. Danny would see his father kiss and hug his mother even when he was around. He felt embarrassed when his parents did this. Danny would look away or pretend to be doing something, like fixing the small angel figurines on the shelf. At night in those two or three weeks that mother was on vacation, Danny would hear his parents moaning in their room. There was a time when Danny suddenly woke up from his sleep because his mom screamed so loud. He went out of his room, knocked on his parents' door, and asked "Nay, are you and dad all right? Did you just scream?" His parents didn't answer immediately. Danny heard them laughing softly until his father replied, "We're okay, Dan. Your mother just got pierced by something really sharp!" They continued laughing inside their room. Danny went back to his room, worried that his mom had been hurt by thumb tacks or a big nail.

"Are these all, Celso? This is it? Old smut magazines? We kind of expected more from you," Francis said. He sounded as if he were challenging Celso.

"That is not all, guys! I brought something that will blow your minds!" Celso arrogantly replied.

Danny and Ringo looked at each other. They were already happy looking at the countless naked bombshells who did not only pose for the mag without a stitch on, but also sucked the men's long and hard penises and posed in various sexual positions with them.

From his satchel, Celso brought out something that looked like a bigger flashlight that had a long slit in the middle. He proudly held the thing like it was some kind of trophy. The other boys looked at it with wonder and amazement.

"Do you know what this is?" Celso waved the thing right in front of their faces. His friends hadn't seen anything like it, but the sight of the strange thing excited them.

"This, guys, is called a fleshlight! I'm sure you haven't seen one!" Celso felt he was the coolest of the four by simply holding the treasure in his hand.

"What is it for?" Ringo asked.

"It's supposed to make our dicks happy, Dummy!" Francis shouted.

Ringo and Danny looked at each other again and they knew immediately what the flesh light was for.

"Francis is right. I'll give you a demo." Celso pulled down his basketball shorts and underwear. Ringo, Danny, and Francis stared at him in amazement. Their leader and friend was already naked from the waist down. Celso rubbed his cock until it was hard. They looked at Celso because compared to what they had, his was bigger. Celso lay on the ground and kept on rubbing his dick.

"Hey, one of you, put that magazine right up so I can see some pussy..." Celso instructed his friends. Danny reached out for one magazine and opened it on a page with a long-haired brunette spread-eagled in bed.

With his left hand busy stroking himself, Celso inserted his hard cock inside the fleshlight using his right hand. He started to move it up and down. He began to moan while his friends stared at him and the wondered that the fleshlight could offer them.

"Guys, this feels like the real thing! Shit! Shit! Ohh... Ohh... I'm coming... I'm... I'm... Oh... Shiiiiiiiiit!" Celso came inside the flesh light.

"Boy, that feels good! Now your turn guys! Who wants to be next?" Celso offered the flesh light to his friends. Francis took it from him

immediately. He removed his shorts and underwear and began to pleasure himself. Danny was next. Ringo was last. They didn't care if all their jizz were mixed inside the flesh light.

After being serviced by the flesh light, the four boys laughed. They talked about how great the experience was. Each one of them felt that their bond was sealed by the strange intimacy, a secret that only the four of them shared. They wouldn't tell the other boys in school. They felt they were already men, and better educated than the other kids. They felt they knew something that the others didn't. While their schoolmates talked about stickers and robots and sneaking from their parents to go to the mall, which to Celso and his friends, were silly kid stuff, what they experienced was definitely life-changing as Celso had promised. The three boys knew that they had chosen the best leader. They also knew that he would introduce them to other cool stuff which excited them even more, especially Ringo, who felt he had found true salvation with the fleshlight.

"Now what do you think guys? Isn't that the coolest?" Celso asked his friends. He sounded as if he wanted approval.

"Where did you get that thing?" Danny asked.

"I also found it in our *bodega*." Celso answered

"That might be dirty. We might end up infected with like... Like having tetanus!" Francis cried.

"Did you even wash it?" Danny asked Celso.

"Wow! You smart asses have a lot of questions! You should have asked before inserting your dicks into the thing!" Celso said.

"I don't care! We will all die of tetanus! Let's do this again!" Ringo cut in but the other boys ignored him.

"Look, it was inside a box and sealed. It was never used. Maybe my dad bought it but never had the chance to use it. When I saw it, I took it immediately and wrapped it with old newspapers just scattered on the floor. You have to admit, it was good, wasn't it?" Celso explained.

"Let's do this again!" Ringo repeated what he said.

"Hey, little man here is a sex maniac, hahaha!" Francis made fun of Ringo.

“Look who’s talking. You were the first one to grab the thing from Celso, you fucking sex freak!” Ringo defended himself. Danny joined in the laughter.

“Don’t worry, we will do this again. You can borrow the fleshlight if you want. But you have to be careful; your parents might find out. You’re in for a lot of trouble, unlike me, I am a big guy. My dad would be okay with it.” Celso said.

“My dad too would be okay with it. If he sees me using it, he might even congratulate me,” Danny said.

“You two have a problem, especially you Ringo. What if your parents find out? They’ll surely freak out. They might invite their friends to give you a pray over to banish the devil inside you, hahaha!” Celso laughed.

“I’ll find a way. I’ll find a place to hide it. They won’t suspect. I’ve never disobeyed them. I’ll borrow it one of these days,” Ringo said it like he was an adult.

“Little man sounds like big man now. Now that you know what your dick can do, there’s no turning back!” Francis said.

“I hope a girl sucks my dick soon!” Ringo said.

“I would be the first one to be given a blowjob because I’m the biggest. You know what I mean? You all have kids’ dicks! No girl would want that! They’ll think they’re sucking Stork candy!” Celso bragged.

“Asshole!” Francis said.

“Just telling the truth man! You three are still children and you look like children. That would be child abuse, hahaha!” Celso spoke in a very condescending tone.

“But we’re all the same age, you idiot! You’re just like us... You’re...” Danny tried to make a point.

“Yeah, but I look like a young man! I’m taller than you, got no tummy, and I have a big dick! That makes all the difference, children!” Celso continued to brag.

“That’s true, but you’re still using a fleshlight. If you’re so hot why don’t you bring girls here so we could fuck’em!” Francis challenged Celso.

“We can’t do them here, dickhead. You can only fuck girls when we treat them special. You can’t bring them to a vacant lot!” Celso said.

“C’mon stop it guys! We enjoyed it right. So chill...” Ringo said.

The four boys just looked at each other and they all laughed. Francis picked up Celso's red flashlight, turned it on, and walked a few steps towards the river.

"Hey, what'cha doin? Looking for ghosts?" Celso jeered at his friend.

"No, I'm just checking it out. Looooook into the daaaaark and dirty waaaaaater..." Francis joked.

"Why don't we just smell the fresh air? Hahaha... if it weren't for the mags and that flesh light I wouldn't be here!" Danny said.

"Do you see anything?" Ringo asked.

"Not much... Cans and the usual trash... There's a... What's that?" Danny was trying to make out what he was seeing in the water with his flashlight.

The other boys stood up and walked towards Francis.

"Do you see that?" Francis asked his friends.

"You mean that huge floating trash bag?" Danny asked.

"What could be inside it?" Francis mused.

"Oh, that's just probably some old... You know... Equipment or furniture... Don't be such sissies..." Celso said.

"Let's check it out." Francis said.

"Let's not... What if it's some dead animal?" Danny said.

"Like a horse silly!" Celso said.

"If you're scared, you might as well go home," Francis said.

"Me? Scared? You must be joking. C'mon let's drag it here," Celso replied.

"I'm not going into the water," Danny said.

"Me neither," Ringo said,

"Well, since it was you who suggested it, why don't you get it?" Francis challenged Celso.

"Oh, I get it now. You three are just a bunch of sissies! Since I'm the only real man here, I'll get it." Celso dipped his feet into the water. The black trash bag was about five feet away. The water was up to his thighs. He pulled the trash bag which he thought was quite heavy.

"Hey, help me here, will you?" Celso told his friends.

The three boys helped Celso bring the trash bag to where they were seated earlier.

“C’mon, let’s open it!” Celso said excitedly.

“Wait, wait! What if it’s a... It’s a...” Ringo stammered.

“A what dummy?” Celso was already pissed off.

“We should leave it... Here.” Danny said.

“After all the trouble, no way!” Francis said.

“Yeah, too late for that now.” Celso said wiping his legs with his hanky.

“Who’s gonna, you know?” Ringo asked.

“I’ll do it! You’re all just chicken.” Celso was already in a bad mood.

Celso checked out the rope and saw that it was knotted tightly.

“Give me a hand here...” Celso said. Francis knelt beside Celso. He didn’t want to be called chicken.

“God, there’s another trash bag inside!” Francis breathed heavily.

“What could be inside must really be kept hidden,” Ringo said.

Celso and Francis loosened the rope tied around the second trash bag. The four boys looked at each other. They knew that they shouldn’t have done this in the first place, but it was too late. Celso stood up and reached for the end of the trash bag and pulled it up so that what was inside would come out.

The four boys gasped. They froze in terror. Ringo felt nauseous. He walked a few feet away from his friends and started vomiting.

Inside the black trash bag was the upper body of a woman whose face was mutilated; her breasts cut open. They were staring at a body which resembled a *manananggal*, a dead one. The three boys ran away, leaving Ringo who was still vomiting, and screaming at his friends to wait for him.