

Someday

Arnie Q. Mejia

My brother Arnel is impressed that I am able to convince his five-year-old son, Tonyboy, to sing the Philippine National Anthem without threats or cajoling, as we drive in the middle of the night from the airport to my two-bedroom apartment on Decatur. Arnel and his wife Cookie have decided to move to Las Vegas to build their life since their son is now of school age. The move to the USA is also possible for Arnel and his family since he is just a few steps away from securing a green card, his wife being a naturalized citizen, and their son, a US-born citizen. After my adorable nephew, who at some angles looks like a miniature version of my brother, sings his heart out, we drive on in silence.

I smile as I get a glimpse of my sister-in-law from the rearview mirror. She is petite with shoulder length, straight, brown hair, looks smart in her glasses and is enviably slim considering she is a mother of a young child. I am not at all surprised how pretty she is since Arnel, whom I haven't seen in seven years, has grown up to be as handsome as a movie star.

I break the silence by asking Cookie how she ended up with my brother. Her face lights up despite how tired they all must be from the long flight from Manila. She tells me how they kind of knew each other already since the university they attended wasn't that big. Cookie and Arnel had both attended high school in the USA and most of the students that spent time there belonged to the same social circle. Cookie then tells me how they started talking about music and discovered that they both

adored Morrissey. She says that she asked Arnel to make her some copies, but was turned off when he asked her to provide him with blank cassette tapes. I laugh and tell her that Arnel was also a cheapskate even when we were growing up. Arnel looks half amused as we arrive at my apartment complex.

Taking care of one's own is a value shared by most Filipinos. But I wasn't sure at first about how to respond to my brother's email asking if they could stay with me. Arnel was not my favorite person growing up since he always tormented me. I was also not used to living with family since my parents had left me behind when they returned to Manila.

But the loneliness of being separated from Ansel made me long for the company of people who loved me. I finally responded after seeing the picture of my nephew that Arnel emailed a few days after his request. It showed a little boy with big dimples. This made me open my home to my brother and his family.

Arnel grabs their baggage from the back of my Jeep and I help Cookie climb down by carrying Tonyboy who has fallen asleep. I wanted to give them a quick tour of the lights along the strip, but the long flight has exhausted them. The casinos and their free shows along the strip will have to wait. I manage to open the door with one hand and am greeted by Eartha's meows. She rubs up against my legs as I lead Arnel and Cookie inside my small apartment, which I found using the Penny Saver.

I gently lay my nephew on my gray sofa. Eartha plops herself on the other side of the sofa and looks at Tonyboy suspiciously. I help Arnel with their luggage into the extra bedroom with the inflatable mattress I bought just days ago in preparation for their arrival. I give Arnel and Cookie a quick tour of their new home by pointing towards the kitchen and the bathroom door. I tell them that Eartha's an indoor cat and to please make sure she doesn't get out. Cookie asks me where she pees and I tell her I have a litter box under the bathroom sink. I assure them that the apartment never smells a long as I clean the litter box twice a day.

Eartha has now inched closer to Tonyboy and both are sleeping. Cookie and Arnel are in their room unpacking as I make three cape cods with the citron vodka I store in the freezer and the cranberry juice from the fridge which I recently filled with milk, eggs, bacon, bread, and butter for my new housemates I ask Cookie and Arnel to join me for a night cap

in the kitchen. We sit around the folding table that came from our house in Moreno Valley where Arnel and I went to high school. Cookie takes a sip of the drink and comments on how strong it is. I apologize and offer her cranberry juice.

Although he has seen the pictures of myself which I sent to our parents in the Philippines, Arnel comments on how different I look now. He says he's not used to seeing me slim. He chuckles as he tells Cookie that my nickname was "Fatsuto" and how I used to devour quarter pounders, layering them with french fries in between the buns and patty. I let out a huge laugh and realize that I haven't laughed quite that heartily since Ansel and I split.

The effects of the vodka are beginning to show. Cookie observes how Arnel and I both suffer from the *Asian Flush*. She is more relaxed now that she has taken her glasses off. I see where my nephew gets his deep dimples when she smiles and laughs as Arnel and I continue to tease each other. I feel at home with my brother even though I haven't seen him since he moved back to the Philippines, after graduating from high school in Moreno Valley seven years ago. He never seemed truly happy with his life in California even though he eventually made some friends. Our constant moving must have made it hard for him to feel settled. He decided to return to the Philippines to attend university. But now he's back here. I guess he was truly meant to be in the USA.

My heart is filled with joy as I look at my brother, his wife, and child, but part of me also feels jealous. How I wish I could be just like my brother and fall in love with a woman and have children. Their life seems so much happier than mine. I thought I had found a life with Ansel. It was with him that I felt settled. It's a shame that two people who love each other are not able to marry even after living under the same roof for five years.

I ask my brother how our parents are doing and if it had been hard for them to see him leave. He tells me they should be able to visit us soon since they were applying again for tourist visas for the USA. They were denied it a few years back. I panic a little since I haven't officially "come out" to my parents whom I haven't seen in almost six years. I ask Arnel how he thinks our parents would react when they find out I'm... different. He tells me it's a known secret to everyone, especially since Armand hinted my being gay to my parents when he last visited them.

He tells me not to worry, and that our parents love me no matter what. I believe him, of course.

The next morning, Cookie and I are at the laundromat while Arnel continues to unpack and Tonyboy plays with Eartha. I feel an instant connection with my sister-in-law when she tells me how doing laundry was also one of her chores when she grew up in New York. I tell her how much I loved my trip to New York last summer. She listens attentively to a wash cycle worth of my city adventures and the shows I got to see. She shares with me how her parents are still in New York. Initially, she and Arnel were supposed to move in with them, but my brother wanted for them to try and make it on their own without any parental support. I tell her that I dream of moving there once I finish culinary school.

Although Cookie doesn't ask me any questions regarding my personal life, I feel comfortable enough to tell her stories of my life with Ansel and the loneliness I feel from our split. Even though I have a deep connection and closeness with my brothers, I can never truly share my emotions with them. I suppose that is why my closest friends are mostly women. They understand the complexity and angst that is part of loving men.

The energy and warmth I get from women put me at ease. Growing up in a family of six boys and no girls made us treasure Mama. We competed for her attention by showering her with compliments and affection. I learned to respect and regard women through Papa's example.

Cookie and I place the last of our laundered shirts and delicates in the basket and head back to our apartment.

Tonyboy is sitting in a corner pouting. There's a small scratch on his face and Eartha is nowhere to be seen. Arnel tells us that he scolded Tonyboy for playing rough with Eartha. I go over to Tonyboy and give him a hug. I tell him Eartha doesn't like to be teased and that I will show him where I keep her toys so that he could play with her properly. Arnel and Cookie ask if they could borrow the Jeep to pick up some supplies at the nearby store. I hand them the keys and offer to watch Tonyboy. My nephew refuses to be left behind, but changes his mind when I point to the playground across our apartment.

I lift Tonyboy so that he straddles my shoulders and tell him that he is the tallest boy in the world. He laughs with his whole body. I can't help but laugh along as I feel his bony body digging into me. I place my feather-

light nephew on the swing and start to push him gently with one hand. He squeals and urges me to push harder. I tell him to hold on tightly to the chains, as I use both hands to push him farther up. He laughs and giggles and tells me he can see the tall buildings from afar. I tell him that he is seeing the Las Vegas strip, and that we will go there later tonight to see the shows along the boulevard. A small part of me is scared that my nephew might fall off, but I see his little face beam with sheer joy and I continue to push.

How is it possible that a child so young can contain so much happiness in his tiny body? Eventually, my arms grow tired from pushing and I take a break, and Tonyboy uses the momentum of his body to keep swinging. He is humming now and then he breaks into song. I don't recognize the song at first, but I am certain it's not a children's song. I listen to the song's hook and realize in amazement that this five-year-old knows the lyrics to *Someday* by Sugar Ray.

We spend the afternoon at the park singing and playing. I feel as if I were a kid again running around with my skinny brother. I am transported to a simpler time when affairs of the heart didn't exist and my only goal seemed to be to laugh as much as possible.

Tonyboy sees his parents return with bags of groceries and runs to them. I chase after him, but I stop myself just before I get to them. I watch them—my brother and his family together. And suddenly, I don't feel so alone anymore.