

Chapter 3

Clashing of Dragons

I began this chapter on September 1, 2008

I first met Paulie over four years ago. Since that day, he has become part of my family. He is half Muslim and half Ilocano. He is also one of my seers. I am what they call a genuine Ilocana, daughter of the north. This means both my parents are Ilocano although my mother has Chinese blood and my father had Ibanag and Spanish blood. That really makes me multi-racial I suppose. I also have Muslim relatives. If anyone cares, they should find my mother and ask her to explain. I have to get back to my essays, which is the reason for writing this book.

Paulie is 29 years old and keeps his head shaved. He stands 5'6" and, according to him, weights around 180 lbs. He is not thin, although he goes to the gym five days a week at 'Fitness First' in Greenhills, and claims he spends three hours there each visit. I say he spends more time in the steam bath goofing around with other gay men. He is a lot of fun to be with and is warm, loving, caring and nurturing. Paulie is totally flamboyant and as gay as gay can be, so I totally adore him. He plays "mother" to our six-year old daughter Maya, smothers her with attention and spoils her. On weekends,

upon my daughter's request, he takes Maya to the playground and the small zoo at Tiendesita's open market to feed the animals. Paulie has a very special relationship with Maya, who loves him and can't get enough time with him. It has been arranged that Steve and I, Paulie and Maya go on a short trip to Hong Kong one day in the near future. We have agreed that it should be my gay friend and seer to take my daughter to Disneyland in Hong Kong since I hate crowded places.

Paulie is gifted with incredible intuition and insight when reading the tarot. He is also very bright and well read. He is devoted to reading books and buys only hardcover editions, an obsession both he and I share. He is well informed about an endless array of subjects due to his love of reading. Paulie is fascinated by a wide array of activities ranging from raising rare birds and dogs, to growing exotic rare plants, embroidery, crochet, knitting and cooking. He is interested in learning about precious stones, exotic fabrics, Asian art and much, much more. He loves to read literature, physics, psychology, the occult, history, poetry and the world's current events. He is outspoken and will discuss almost anything under the sun. But if you give him a glass of red wine or two then he will insist upon discussing only one subject, sex, sex and more sex. To people like Paulie and I, one lifetime is not enough to accomplish all the things we would like to do. These are some of the reasons why he and I are so close – our minds connect on a myriad of levels.

He has a split personality. While reading the cards, his spiritual personality reigns and he is for that magical moment of truth, full of great wisdom and clarity. Outside that moment, he switches into a totally different species.

Buddhism does not frown on homosexuality. The goddess Kuan Yin is sometimes shown in masculine positions. Like the goddess

Ishtar of Babylon, Kuan Yin is androgynous and carries the masculine and feminine personalities in equal measures – the perfect balance between yin and yang. One of the Buddhist saints, amongst the members of the eight immortals, is a gay man wearing the most ostentatious, elaborate, feminine oriental gown and holding a flute. I believe that you can only achieve your full potential when your masculine and feminine qualities unite. Therefore, I have absolutely no gender issue. As far as I am concerned, it is only our physical forms that dictate whether we are branded as male or female in this existence. The soul has no gender. I hereby declare that every gay man and woman be granted the same human rights as everyone else on earth!

One Tuesday morning in early April, I returned home from the gym around 10 am, to find Paulie sitting outside in our tropical garden. I live in a rustic Asian home embraced by a lush and natural garden where Maya, my partner and I spend most of our time. On this particular sunny day, I found Paulie sitting at the dinner table in the open air eager to read the tarot for me. We greeted and kissed each other and I sat across from him, delighted to see him. The table was lined with an exotic hand woven red silk fabric that I purchased from an open market in Yangon, Myanmar, during my last visit there.

Paulie reads the tarot for some of the most influential VIPs in the country. They all use the same string of cards, a practice shared by all tarot readers. But I have my own separate and personal series of cards, a deck I have never seen any other tarot reader use. Paulie believes that this set of tarot, with an art nouveau design, was created by a gay artist and this makes it perfect for me. He says he does not allow anyone else to touch my tarot cards because of the spell I have placed upon the cards. If someone were to dare touch this chain of

cards he claims, "I will bring forth the curse of eternal damnation to that mortal so that he may never escape the reincarnation cycle." Paulie believes my personalized deck of tarot is alive, and bonded with my soul. It carries with it the knowledge of all my lives past, present and future. According to him I was born with the ability to summon the five elements, making me a natural born witch.

He says, "Only those born with the special gift of sight can summon the forces of heaven."

When Paulie and I brave the tarot, something incredibly amazing happens to us. The world spins and transforms into wonderland. We enter into another dimension, another state, and another world of reality. I believe our gifts of time gazing join forces, our energies fuse, our spiritual powers combine and there is synergy. There is magic. His third eye is heightened to astronomical proportions, to a higher level unknown to man, willed by heaven - so he is able to help guide and prepare me for what lies ahead.

Paulie calls Gabriel, G2, and he refers to Caesar as G1.

On this particular Tuesday morning while consulting the tarot, half in trance, he began his reading,

"During the Age of Aquarius, there will be a clashing of two dragons, a black one and a white one. In ancient times these two dragons were depicted facing each other fighting over the flaming pearl floating between them, up above."

"In this time on earth you are the symbol of the flaming pearl. The two dragons tattooed on your back are the symbol of the clashing dragons. By instinct you have permanently marked your body with the signs. And you are the pearl these two dragons are fighting for. "

"We are now in the Age of Aquarius, East and West are fighting for dominance. The earth is at a tipping point struggling for life or

death. Evil fights against good. If the black dragon triumphs, there will be more chaos, more death, more destruction and more disaster. The earth will be covered with blood. If the white dragon prevails, there will be a golden age, a golden era. Peace will reign. You and these two great warriors from your past will play a crucial role in all of this. The three of you were great warriors before and all of you were reborn in this life with the spirits of dragons, crucial to the evolution of mankind and the earth. These two warriors stand by you on opposite sides. They are each other's polarities, exact opposites, Yin and Yang. You are in the center, the cosmic conduit. G1 holds the celestial sword of fire. He is the sun, the child of Ra. His heart is pure like yours. He will purge. “

“The other warrior, G2, holds the key to the tower of destruction. He is driven by evil and black forces. If you fail to absorb his spirit and achieve balance with his soul and account for your karmic debt, the door to the tower of destruction shall open and demons will be unleashed on earth...”

Paulie was suddenly interrupted by a loud exploding clash, his time travel finished by the sound of war from above. By the end of his sentence, we heard a thunderous sound and clapping caused by a foreign, grey helicopter hovering right above my swimming pool, both doors open, the kind you find in countless Vietnam War movies. The hostile sight instantly presented the image of Rambo gripping his high-powered machine gun and shooting the enemy on the ground.

Paulie and I came out of our trance, violated by this dreadful disrupting noise. He looked at the sky and saw the threatening helicopter tipping on one side towards us allowing the man on the passenger seat to get a better view of us.

Wide-eyed in disbelief, he asked, “What did you do now?”

“What do you mean what did I do? You have spent more time in my home during waking hours in the last four years than my sons. You should know of all people I am not doing anything. I’ve written essays against American Imperialism and America’s wars. I’m not the only one who does that. Many journalists and writers do that, even in the States.”

The helicopter continued to fly in circles above my property. Suddenly we heard it flying away and it was quiet for a minute or two or maybe more. Paulie seemed relieved thinking the intrusive flying machine had gone. He and I stared at each other with uncertainty. The moment felt surreal, a suspended form of unbelievable reality – a twilight zone. He gazed at me with piercing eyes, examining my face, my body, my aura, my energy, questioning me, trying to find an answer through the essence of my being as if I should be able to explain exactly why this military helicopter should be flying directly above us. Then the awful sound of disaster returned. It had come back, now hovering above us one more time.

“Maybe the US ambassador sent them because she finally realized you despise her,” he remarked.

“She doesn’t have the power to do that,” I snapped.

“Maybe she sent the helicopter to frighten you so you will stop sending the embassy your invitations with essays denouncing America’s international affairs,” he said.

“That is not her business. Her job is to look good and pretend she has a mind. Part of her job is to act as if she cares about the poor Muslims in Mindanao spending “Thanksgiving” dinner there, never knowing that those people couldn’t care less about the damn affair,” I added.

“It gave her press publicity and they say she would do anything to get media attention,” Paulie explained.

“She spends so much time buying the cheapest fresh water pearls from the Muslim traders in Virra Mall while they spit on the ground she walks on. I don’t understand why in these trying times, the US sends the most incapable charlatan of an American ambassador I have ever seen. Like you said, according to one of the officers in US Embassy, the woman cares for nothing but her promotion. I wonder if she has seen her husband in the last three years. No sex for her I suppose. Imagine what that does for one’s mental health,” I said.

“She is hated by all the staff at the US embassy”, said someone in the US military who knows her personally. Actually, I haven’t met any American who had worked with her who has anything good to say about her. If even they loathe her, can you imagine what she must be like?

Marcus bought my book, the “Encyclopedia of Philippine Art” to give to her as a gift around Christmas time, and wanted it autographed for her. He told me to write:

“To her Excellency Christy Kenney...” I growled at Marcus saying, “She may be excellent to you but she is definitely not excellent to me!”

“If you want to kiss her ass, go ahead. But do not expect me to do the same.” I added.

“I swear you are going to get us all into trouble because of your mouth,” Paulie protested and got up from the table to watch the helicopter.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Lord if these people are going to abduct Marlene, please let them take me instead. But if they do, please Lord, please I beg you, let them send a squadron of gorgeous muscled Arabian men to rape me,” he prayed fluttering his lashes clasping both hands as he looked up above.

Then he looked at me. “Sister, do you think those men in that helicopter have big pricks?”

“Shut up! Sit down. Continue the reading and ignore that bird,” I demanded.

“I can’t do it. I can’t,” he whined.

Excited, he declared with hands on both cheeks, “What if they’re here to take our pictures? Oh my god. I must look good for them! Hurry! Somebody help me look like a real girl!”

“Mary Jean! Mary Jean! Maaaaary Jeeeeeeaaaaaaan!” Paulie yelled for my secretary now, screaming at the top of his lungs with his feminine high-pitched soprano gay voice, dancing and swaying to the sound of thunder coming from the helicopter, with over excitement. I swear only flaming gay men are capable of such dramatic explosions.

“Quick! Give me your Ma’am’s wig and make-up! Mary Jean!”

While Paulie performed and danced like a Russian prostitute performing in Broadway, the grey helicopter continued swirling above, giving him the beat of a drum, the foreboding of upheaval. For a moment I closed my eyes and thought this is not happening. This can’t be real. This is one of the many reasons I don’t take drugs. Christ. I gave birth three times to eight-pound babies without a drop of painkiller. I don’t trust the effect of drugs. Things happen to me anyway that other mortals would never believe. I have kept myself sober almost all my life - only to make sure that I wasn’t just imagining things. And no I am not dreaming this. This is real.

“Maaaaary Jeeeeeeaaaaaaan!” Paulie howled some more.

“Sit down!” I said.

“I can’t. This is my chance to hook me a military man. Did you know that around 15% of the men in the US armed services are gay?” he asked.

“For such a gifted Buddhist seer, you are such a whore!” I’m yelling at him louder than the helicopter now.

Laughing like a drunken female Gypsy he answered, still swaying and waving at the man in the helicopter, grinding his butt like a professional dancer, “I am a whore, a happy one.”

“Do these men know you are a gay icon?” he asked.

“Stop it!” I ordered.

“Do they know you are like Cher to homosexual men? I wonder if these dangerous people realize you have “green blood” like the rest of us homosexuals. Do they know you are a mutant? And that you inspired “Jean” in the movie X-Men, the one who is purely good but also purely evil,” he continued.

“Stop it now!” I hissed.

At this point I didn’t know whether to laugh, cry, shoot the damn helicopter down or give Paulie a shot of morphine.

“Do these military men know that all sex thriller movies were stolen from your sexual personality?” he added provoking me.

“That’s it sit down or I will voodoo you!” I yelled. “You will die and in your next life, you will still have your dick!”

All of a sudden the sky cleared and once again there was peace in my garden. The granite and limestone Buddhist images surrounding us all seemed to rejoice with us. The helicopter had flown above my roof first clock-wise and then counter-clock-wise at least nine times and this had lasted for more than 20 minutes. I wondered in silence, had they come to intimidate me or to protect me?

Paulie calmed down and returned to his usual position at the old wooden Ilocos table where we do our reading.

“It’s your fault,” I said to him.

“Me?” he asked. “What did I do?” He smiled, rolling his eyes, avoiding my stare.

“You have emailed me a number of times using “*Swarding*”! You know my emails are compromised. You did it on purpose to confuse these people decoding my emails,” I accused him.

“So! I’m just trying to see how good they are,” he replied.

“One time you emailed me three long paragraphs in “gay *Swarding* lingo” that no one on this planet would understand except for you and me, and maybe Alwin. And all you said was hello. This is why they have become more paranoid,” I stated.

“Then they should find a gay man to spy on you,” he answered.

“How in the world are they supposed to decode gay lingo in the Philippines? It is so personal and specific. It is dynamic and changing on an almost daily basis. How are they supposed to understand that such a culture exists when even Filipinos outside the gay community are alienated?” I complained.

“That means these people watching you have not done their homework. They should know you speak gay lingo,” he protested.

“But “*Swarding*” is so abstract, so unique. I don’t think there is training in the military for that,” I answered.

“They can come to me,” he whined. “I will train them.”

Here is an email from Paulie I received sometime in June 2008.

Dear Ateh,

“Ang habahaba ng hairlalouh mo mala Ricky Reyes Annie batung bakal to the son of bunnggah ka day!!!!Ano po pa ang brand ng Shampoo po ninyo nang makagamit din po ako at mag maega Rapunzzel and drama ng chabilita liit ng lolah moh.Sus, talaga po atang tapos na ang chapter ninyo ni G2 wonderfuul KaneyRroggers down under where happiness lays hitting me from behind and around the world in 88 days where my passport is leaving on a jet plane telling Laura that I love her and miss here. Crazy na ang magiging

team song ng orrangu. Well ano po ba masasay ko eh kahit naman po ako pag tinamaan ng dalubyo raramphage na rin. Bastah kung san ka masaya, eh di supportahan tah kah...mala pldt...hehehe . Lab you po ateh!!!!”

Truly yours,

*“Countessa Marquissa Nicolah de lan Craig
Barronessa du Rothchild Jedah Maria
Sshophia Alexandre Minerva Mineverra
EscalrettiDonnatella Vversace Sigalithiea
Jessa Zarragoza Antoinette the French and
Austrin Princesss Helena du troy Elene des
Sparta Miss Sweden I Vankah Trump
the golden gurl!!!!”*

It says, Dear older sister. Then the first portion of his email praises me for having such long hair. In gay language that is the ability of a woman to attract sexual attention but this translation is specific only in this one context. He is asking me what brand of shampoo I use implying that if he used the same brand, it would increase his sex appeal. Then he jokes around saying the chapter of my life with Gabriel must be over. He’s really just playing around. It’s a joke. It means nothing. He sends me emails like this to make me laugh. That’s all.

The last long paragraph after “Truly yours” simply means Paulie.

Dear god! I don’t know if they teach gay Filipino lingo in espionage! And so the heat on me increases only because I have wild and crazy gay friends trying to humor me.

“And why did you join Howard Marks’ chat room?” I asked Paulie.

“I don’t remember. It just happened,” he answered staring at the ceiling, again avoiding my glare.

“For all you know Howard Marks’ chat room is not a chat room. You are playing with fire,” I scolded him.

“But I like Howard Marks’ chat room. The members are intelligent and interesting. They have more mind than the members in other chat rooms where all you talk to are air heads,” he said.

Paulie spent half of that day with me, which is not unusual. As the days passed, Paulie’s computer and email accounts also became surveyed and monitored. He had a friend’s daughter who is a computer hacker check his email accounts and she confirmed that his emails were filtered. Later on my dear friend Alwin’s computer and email accounts were also monitored. Why? I guess it is because every time I write an essay, I send it to these two people first.

One Tuesday morning in May, 2008, Paulie and I met once again at the same place in my garden.

This was the reading he gave me,

“All is falling into place. Everything you need is at the tip of your fingers. You are protected on all fronts by greater forces. Stop sabotaging your destiny. Whether you like it or not you will be in the limelight.”

“Stop fighting the will of heaven. The cosmic universe is too great an adversary. Whichever path you take, all roads will lead you to Rome. You were not born to live a quiet life. You were born to fulfil a great mission. You will rise into fame and glory. As you rise, both warriors G1 and G2 will rise with you. The world will know you and learn to love you...You are earth mother.”

“In mind and spirit, no man is your equal. You are not human.”

“Every event that happens henceforth will only push you towards your destiny. There is no escape.”

Right after the tarot session he quickly changed personality and said, "I saw your movies again yesterday."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"*Basic Instinct* parts one and two, your movies," he responded.

"Oh no. Don't start," I warned him.

"But it's true. Steve told me Hollywood has to catch up with you since you've lived "*Basic Instinct*" parts three, four, five..."

"When you were living with James...didn't he laugh after seeing "*Basic Instinct*" and announce, they finally made a movie about you," he said provoking me.

"That's it, no more bedtime stories for you," I said smiling.

"I used to be a virgin", he said. "Now look at me. You have corrupted my gay soul and pushed me into a life of lust and carnal desire that ordinary people only read about," he whined.

"The biggest sex organ is the brain and when the mind is free, the imagination has no limit. It's part of your growth. It's not my fault," I protested.

"Yes it is. You don't understand. You are like an opiate. Thank god you are not a man. If you were I'd run from you as far as possible because you would "chew me up and spit me out." Isn't that what Marcus said? Isn't that what Steve also says about you?"

"Give me that article where you wrote something about sex," he added as he grabbed a piece of paper from the table.

"In this composition you wrote:"

"The sex that I know involves unity of the spirits. This is when physical expression of love enters another dimension where right or wrong does not exist, a higher plane where the souls copulate. And the bodies are used as naked instruments. Such is only possible through total surrender of mind, body and soul."

“Sexual expression must have absolute freedom and purity. One must never hold back. It must be powered from within the center of your sexual being, releasing all your basic instincts, your carnal and animal desires in one single performance.”

“Only in this manner, can orgasms become a physical and spiritual explosion connecting your soul to the very essence of the cosmic universe. You explode with the stars!”

“How can you expect a normal person to grasp what you have written about sex? I know the most fabulous homosexual men in this country and we pride ourselves on our sexual creativity. But your sexual persona goes far beyond the imagination of even the most creatively gay men I know.” Paulie declared.

“On July 23, 2008 you wrote something entitled *“Sex and Heaven”*. It says here:”

Sex is a totally separate world, a unique state of mind. One must leap into this void without doubt and without hesitation – but with complete freedom and with genuine expression of pure lust, lashing with carnal desires, biting into the taste of flesh, ablaze on wildfire.”

“The ultimate sex can only be powered by the combustion of willing spirits. It must come from the deepest source of lechery and sexual hunger and yearning. It is created by the agreement of two trusting, lustful souls that will trigger the minds, demanding to enter a domain secret to mortal men. The mind, the biggest sex organ of all, must command the bodies as sheer instruments to perform the most ancient of all rituals and deliver the most primitive acts of sensual and animal play burning with passion of raw sex as it enters the inferno of a forest on fire. Only then can our bodies turn into naked instruments pushing the limits of physical

performance and endurance further and further into the unknown of boundless intensity charging into infinite space - floating, penetrating, slicing, assaulting, cutting into the raw flesh of life, demanding the necessity and urgency of climax. And death! Thus, these two bodies fall into their eventual end and into the abyss, claiming their prize, gasping for air over and over... gasping for life that lasts and lasts until their souls enter the very gates of heaven and hell.

“My god, you should consider writing porn stories...you will make more money,” he declared.

“I don’t believe this, I haven’t even given you wine to drink yet,” I stated.

“Do these upper class military men in your life realize they’re only tapping into two of your personalities? Do they know that you could never ever find any man attractive who does not possess your kind of intellectual capacity? You admire these mighty warriors for their exceptional courage and spirit, but that is not enough for you. On top of that a man must have the wisdom of Ghandi, immeasurable depth and a free and creative mind for you to respect him. According to Steve, only a very small fraction of one percent of the male population in this entire planet could possibly meet these criteria. Do you think these men even read the variety of books one can find in your library?”

“Once our friend Nellie Yui asked me where she could get a copy of the book on Carl Jung she saw you reading when she visited your home. I told her that she doesn’t have the mental capacity to even begin to fathom the insanity of Jung. But that is the kind of brain you find challenging and inspiring. That is the kind of mental ability you seek.”

“How many people in this world do you think could possibly comprehend one of the most complicated minds in the field of Psychology? Yet you were researching this historical figure so you could dissect his psychological profile. And what did you say after you read that book?”

“You told me, Paulie, you must always read between the lines and search for what is kept hidden, search for what is not being said...in my own opinion Carl Jung had sex with Sigmund Freud...”

“How incredibly fascinating, you said. According to your devious mind these two fathers of Psychology were gay...”

“I do believe they were gay. It makes their lives more exciting as far as I’m concerned. To be androgynous gives one a wider perspective of human existence,” I interrupted, laughing.

“Do these lords of war have the common sense to consider that you are so much more complicated than they could ever imagine? That’s what Marcus meant when he warned the Colonel. Imagine that. An assassin who has known you forever calls you dangerous - these other men don’t know what’s coming their way. Your sexual persona alone can corrupt the minds of even the bravest men. This is why your current and former lovers claim you are the living truth behind the movie *Basic Instinct*,” Paulie continued.

“And didn’t someone very close to you, who knows you very well say, “It is not possible for America to produce a military mind that can equal your mind...”

“G2 is very clever when he said welcome to my parlor said the spider to the fly.” “Black widow,” he called you. He knows about you....” Paulie said.

“I have seven personalities and because my mind and spirit are free, the make up of my psyche can merge into any state of consciousness

I please. Imagine the mathematical combination of that? It is endless. But this mutation happens only when the situation threatens me. Otherwise, my spiritual personality is above all my other personas,” I explained.

“Do I have permission to write about your sex stories?” he inquired with laughter.

“No! Do that and I will curse you so that for the rest of your life on earth, you will have nightmares of girls molesting you sexually every night,” I barked.

“You have to turn me into a lesbian first before you do that,” he laughed.

“Okay your turn to read my future,” he continued. “Tell me that in my next life my dream of becoming the most alluring mermaid in the ocean kingdom will come true,” he teased.

“You’re permanently insane!” I said smiling.

Then I began to share with my beloved seer my fears concerning the people who I believe are watching me.

“I am warning you,” I said. “Be careful. I have a strange feeling these people after me are going to compromise you or the old seer. You are the easier target,” I advised him.

One week later, Paulie came to see me in my home. We sat behind closed doors in my office and had a very serious talk. He was in tears. According to Kristina from Baguio City, a close friend of Paulie’s, she has never seen him in tears in the nine years they have known each other.

“Paulie never cries,” she said.

What happened was a girl, an acquaintance whom Paulie and I both know, called him one day. She invited him to go to a child’s party at the Polo Club in Makati. When they arrived, the place was empty. There was no party at all. Then the girl received a

call. She told Paulie that they had to visit her friend who lived in a house nearby.

To make a long and complicated story short, and therefore less incriminating, Paulie ended up talking to a foreign man for many hours. A man who claimed he was Jewish. I doubt he was. He didn't have a Jewish name.

The man offered Paulie a thick stack of hundred dollar bills. Compressed as best I can, this is what the foreigner told my Buddhist oracle that particular evening in May,

"I am a dangerous man," he said. "I have killed people before and I will not hesitate to kill again. Be warned that your computer and your phone are monitored. So are the computers and phones of those close to you."

As he placed the bundle of cash in front of Paulie, he explained, "If you accept this money, then you embrace me as family and will allow me into your inner circle. I do not wish to see more people get hurt. I do not wish to see war in Mindanao. You must bring us to the right person, the right contact. If you fail to do this, then we will obliterate the people in Mindanao..." The man asked Paulie repeatedly to tell him about his publisher friend, me.

By the time he'd left it was midnight. Paulie stood outside for a while looking for his driver. Although his car was there he couldn't find him. Then out of nowhere he saw him running towards him, out of breath, panting and soaking in sweat. He felt that his driver was very shaken and psychologically tormented that evening. He never saw his employee again after that incident. He never came back to work. One week later Paulie's driver sent him a text message saying that he had decided to go to the mountains in the north, far, far away from Metro Manila.

There are other events that have occurred from November, 2007 to the present day which, according to my partner Steve, would put the average human being on a constant dose of Valium or Prozac. Strange and mysterious events, some of which I am not in any position to share. But after what happened to Paulie, I felt it was time to run. I needed space, a better perspective. I told Steve, who has always been kind and ready to hear my plea that I needed to see an old friend, someone whose mind I deeply admire and respect, someone I trust implicitly - Howard Marks. I had to go to England to find some answers.

When was the last time I saw Howard? God, it seems so long ago although in spirit he is never far away. I had last seen him seven years ago at the Marriott Hotel in London.

In 2001, the old Buddhist seer told me that temptation would come to me during the first three years of my life with Steve. Allurement comes in different forms but I thought they meant temptation of carnal desire. And I should add that the seers are never good at predicting time since time does not exist. They also speak in riddles and their words can be interpreted in various ways. But what they saw alarmed me. I thought there were only two men alive in the entire world at that time that possessed the mind and spirit to fascinate me - Marcus and Howard Marks. I am not good at running away from my fears – rather, I confront them. I told Steve about the prophecy and told him that I would face these two men because I didn't want seduction to arrive unannounced. I would prefer to face it head on.

So going back to 2001, I made a phone call to Marcus, who at the time was travelling in and out of the Philippines. One day we met for lunch at a restaurant located at the Richmond Hotel along ADB Avenue in the city of Mandaluyong. He came with a Muslim

friend so we couldn't talk in private. After lunch, he escorted me outside and we stood out in the road waiting for my driver to come. While we waited, I told him about the prediction of the seers. I told him that I thought there were only two men who could tempt me and that he was one of them.

"Twenty-four hours, just you and me together. Your choice of place, just make sure I get out alive at the end of it," I offered.

God, I couldn't believe I was doing this. The last time I had had "foreplay" with this man was over 20 years ago.

He stared at me confused, examining my face seriously as if he'd seen a monstrous beast return to life to haunt him again from another time. He stepped back, intoxicated and overwhelmed. I stood staring back at him, waiting in anticipation.

Finally, when he regained composure, he replied, "I consider myself a very good warrior. So if I am sent to battle, I am sure I have a good chance of winning that war. But twenty four hours with you... No. No. I already know what's going to happen...I don't want to go."

Wow! I thought. Then he's not the one. He is not going to tempt me. I jumped up in joy with arms stretched open and hugged Marcus so tight.

"Thank you. Thank you." I said smiling. "It is not you I should worry about then."

I came home that day and told Steve what had happened. Now it was time to go to Europe. We agreed to prepare for a vacation to go to Spain after which we would stop over in London on our way home to Manila so I could meet Howard Marks. It is not easy for Steve to plan a holiday for us considering the last places I ever want to go are tourist destinations. I do not desire to be in crowded places. And I certainly do not appreciate being surrounded

by countless Koreans and Japanese with their cameras blinding my eyes and invading my personal space. Why do they take so many photographs? Who would care to look at them after they are dead? As far as I am concerned they are only creating more trash for the earth to bear. I hate my photo being taken, unless it is a part of my work. The memories of my vacations are in my mind and forever recorded in my subconscious.

I deeply sympathize with Steve each time he has to arrange a trip abroad for us. Unless absolutely necessary, I avoid standard world-class hotels because I do not fancy being processed. I am not pleased to see hotel employees stuffed in their immaculate uniforms like egg rolls drilled to show their synthetic smiles instantly at the sight of any human being that approaches them. I definitely shudder at the notion of taking a package tour. To follow an itinerary while I'm on vacation, a schedule created by a total stranger, is totally ridiculous to me. I can't be told when to wake up, when to eat and where to go anyway, let alone when I'm on vacation. I do as I choose when I choose. The idea of travelling with a group of strangers, normal people whose lives are restricted and limited by the rules of society and institutions, so excited to join the rest of their fellow inmates to be taken in yet another "box," conveniently branded as "package tours," is a living nightmare to me. These group excursions seem to have been created by people who do not want to think for themselves, those people who are afraid of freedom. But this is only my personal opinion of course. I'm sure package tours are paradise for many people.

So during the summer of 2001 Steve and I visited Spain. We hired a car at the airport in Marbella. Steve drove patiently for over three hours over mountainous and twisting roads that eventually brought us to a small ancient farm hotel called "El

Horcajo,” hidden in a national park somewhere in the middle of the mysterious Andalusia Mountains surrounded by olive tree farms, and far away from the hustle and bustle of the Mediterranean coast. Most of the people who were staying in this place were British nationals, bird watchers. The countryside was swarming, during certain hours of the day, by these beautiful colorful winged creatures. I don’t mind the Brits. Most of them are soft and quiet and pleasant company.

Thirty minutes from our hotel by car is the tourist town named Ronda, which is perched on a rocky hillside located inland from the Costa del Sol. Here you will find the oldest bull-fighting ring in Spain. This small town is renowned because it is split in two by a majestic 300-foot canyon bridge giving the most magnificent views of the abyss and the River Guadalquivir, a spectacular sight that will permanently mark one’s memory. Each afternoon Steve and I would drive there to walk around the narrow streets made of cobblestones and do a little shopping. I’d like to tell you that whenever I go abroad one of the most important aspects of my holiday adventure is finding the best places to eat. And in Ronda the best place to dine is in a restaurant you will find at the fabulous “El Parador Hotel” sitting right on the edge of the splendid cliff offering you an impressive sight of the breathtaking ravine. Second best is the “Pablo Romero Restaurant,” situated right across from the bull-fighting plaza.

We stayed in Spain for a week. We packed our things and headed back to the airport in Marbella to take a plane to London where we would stay overnight at the Radisson Hotel along Tottenham Court Road. I choose to stay at this hotel when in London because it is near an Indian Restaurant that serves excellent food. I had arranged to meet Howard at the Marriott Hotel, where he normally

stays, at seven o'clock in the evening, the same day Steve and I arrived in London. Meanwhile Steve met with an old friend, Pete Selley, an airline accountant he knew from the 1980s while working in Kiribati. Located in the heart of the Pacific, Kiribati is one of the most isolated places in the world, a cluster of islands scattered over an area of ocean greater than the entire continent of North America.

When I arrived in the lobby of the Marriott, I saw Howard walking briskly toward me with arms wide open and with the warmest smile I've ever seen from a grown man. We embraced like two kindred souls sharing the knowledge that we have been repeatedly connected through time. I should say that Howard has my gift of sight.

How can I describe my relationship with this unbelievable man whose life he describes to me as being bizarre? From the very instant we met, endowed with our spiritual gift to see into the inner self of human beings, we were both aware that we were not strangers to each other and that this particular meeting on earth, at this time, was not the first time, nor likely to be the last. It is like losing one's best friend and meeting him or her again in another time.

In my copy of the hardbound edition of his book "Mr. Nice," Howard had written "To Lady Marlene, Keep sharing lifetimes," XXX! Signed, Howard Marks.

And so silently, from the moment we met, we recognized the probable reality that in another dimension, we had met and, or would meet again in another world, swinging through time and space with the possibility of our existence as brother and sister, mother and son, rivals or lovers of the same gender for all we cared.

Several years before I met Steve, I had planned to meet Howard during one of his live shows in India. But some great universal force

prevented me from going. If I had joined him at that time, I believe my life would have taken a completely different path, away from my beloved Philippines. It was heaven's will.

So here we were once more, Howard and I, on planet earth at the Marriott Hotel in London. As we walked toward our designated table, I travelled back in time again. When was the last time we were together? - I asked myself searching my memory. Where was it? It was Germany. I remember sitting at a party in Hanau, Germany, bored out of my consciousness and surrounded by countless people drinking their cocktails, talking endlessly about absolutely nothing after an art exhibition I had organized. I have never had the patience to witness human beings suffer from oral diarrhoea. I was going insane listening to people's trivial conversations. Oh god! My mind requires more out of life. I can't do this. 'If this is sanity, I would prefer to be insane,' I silently said to myself staring out at the theatre of real life and emptiness that played itself before me. I thought I'd rather negotiate a kidnapping incident at gunpoint, which I have done in the past, than be stuck amongst the normal existence of mankind. I picked up the phone and called Howard who was in Spain. I asked him to rescue me from the mundane reality from which I had found myself entangled.

"Give me two days to arrange something," he told me.

"Thank you," I said.

After two days, and as promised, Howard called me and instructed me to take a train to Heidelberg, a breathtaking town in Germany that I now always dream of returning to. I have travelled to 35 countries and this town is one of my favourite places on earth.

Heidelberg is located in the Neckar River valley where the Odin Forest opens up toward the beautiful plains of the Rhine Valley.

The Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, the oldest university in Germany, which was built in 1386, is one of the country's largest academic institutions and prides itself with a full academic spectrum ranging from ancient Egyptian studies to modern computer technology. The university's school of Medicine, Law and Natural Sciences is the best in Germany. The university subsidized the establishment of several other world class research institutions such as the German Cancer Research Centre, the European Molecular Biological Laboratory, and the Center for Molecular Biology and Max-Planck-Institutes for Medicine, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics.

During WWII much of Germany was destroyed by the allied bombings. But some places were protected from these attacks by a treaty that was agreed upon by the warring states. And so Heidelberg was spared. Therefore, Heidelberg has eternally preserved its baroque, medieval charm of ancient narrow streets, breathtaking houses built in another time and the most magnificent castle I ever saw, the world-famous Schloss.

“...Out of a billowy upheaval of vivid green foliage ...rises the huge ruin of Heidelberg Castle, with empty window arches, ivy-mailed battlements, moldering towers—the Lear of inanimate nature—deserted, discrowned, beaten by the storms, but royal still, and beautiful.” Mark Twain

Heidelberg has attracted countless artists and intellectuals from all over the world including the scientists Bunsen and Kirchhoff, philosophers such as the founder of the “Illuminati” order von-Knigge, atheist Ludwig Feuerbach, existentialist Karl Jaspers, political theorist Hannah Arendt, and the poets Joseph von Eichendorff, Jean Paul and Goethe to name a few. And

for this reason, Heidelberg is considered to be the intellectual capital of Germany.

During this time Howard had a column in the British magazine called “Loaded.” And so he made arrangements for this publication to send him to Heidelberg on a mission, just so he could come and meet me. He arrived with an American photographer who worked for Penthouse magazine. The photographer travelled with us wherever we went taking photos for “Loaded.” Howard’s German publisher, who had long blonde hair braided in dread locks and who organized the translation of his book “Mr. Nice” into German, was also with him.

We stayed in a beautiful charming hotel where, according to Howard, Mark Twain used to stay when he visited Heidelberg.

Howard had arranged for us to visit the European Space Agency. Established in 1975, the agency is an inter-governmental organization dedicated to the exploration of space with headquarters in Paris, France. It has over 17 member states and an annual budget of around 3 billion euros in 2006. ESA missions are based in Noordwijk, Netherlands, earth observation missions are in Frascati, Italy whilst the mission control is based in Darmstadt, Germany. Howard’s mission was to write about the new satellite ESA was preparing to launch.

The German publisher, the one with the blonde dread locks, drove us there with the American photographer beside him. Howard and I sat in the back. As the car was about to enter the gates of ESA, I saw two gigantic and very serious German guards in uniform march quickly, like the Germanic robots they can be, toward the car. You can only imagine the kind of serious security involved entering the European Space Agency in Germany.

Suddenly, Howard started searching, his clothes, his body... “Damn. Drugs! I’ve to get rid of the drugs,” he announced as he quickly searched and stripped every pocket of his coat, shirt, pants, shoes...

I put my hands on my face.

“Ohhhh my God! You’re going to get us all busted,” I shrieked
“Don’t worry. My publisher will get us out,” he said laughing.

I didn’t realize then that at any given time Howard Marks has hashish or dope in his possession, anywhere he travels in much of Europe. No one would dare bust him because it would just make him more famous. And he really, really wants to get busted.

So I toured the impressive European Space Agency with a German publisher who stood around six feet tall, blue eyed with the wildest dread locks I’ve ever seen, and with the body of a Chippendale dancer, an insane American photographer from Penthouse who looked like he was on a constant dose of cocaine, and the craziest living man on the planet, Howard Marks! As I walked fascinated by this amazing scientific research facility, I thought to myself, ‘I must be imagining all this’.

Do you have any idea how many visitors are allowed to tour this highly secured scientific laboratory? Close to none.

Oh god. What the hell is Howard, who looks like one of the Rolling Stones, doing in a place like this with those two other lunatics? Oh shit! They’re going to steal something. Oh no! No! No! I thought again. Why the fuck do I end up in situations like this, over and over again, all my life? Aaaagggghhhh! If someone steals something, I’m going to kill him. I’m going to kill him...I thought, while my mind was rushing, calculating, spinning. My heart pounded faster and faster as we toured the ESA facility. I made sure to walk two paces away so I could watch my group of wild men, whose minds

were tripping somewhere on planet X because of all the uppers and downers they'd taken earlier. Fortunately, I don't believe they stole anything from ESA that day. And if by chance they actually did steal something that particular time...do you think I would ever admit that to you?

That evening Howard took us bar hopping. We went to the best pubs and clubs that part of Germany had to offer. I remember him taking me to a huge club with many large rooms connected to each other, with bands playing. He told me this was where Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine would meet to have sex. It was then I noticed that wherever we went, women swarmed around Howard asking for his autograph. He called some of these women "star fuckers."

"You didn't tell me you were so famous," I stated.

"If I told you...you would have said, so what," he said smiling.

He was right. But I would have preferred it better if he were not in the limelight so much.

Back to the Marriott in London, we sat down facing each other smiling, delighted to be in each other's physical presence once more while the waiter poured us two glasses of fine cabernet sauvignon. We made a toast.

"What brings you here," he asked, smiling like an innocent child.

I ran through my short trip to Spain. Then I proceeded to tell him about the forecast of the old Buddhist fortune-teller and told him that I believed he was now the only living man on earth capable of tempting me.

"I am certain your seer has made a mistake." He explained seriously while smoking dope. "Nobody tempts you. It works the other way around..."

Incredible, I thought. With these few words, Howard washed away all my pain and fear like a spell bestowed upon me by another Welsh shaman – like “Merlin”. I left the Marriott Hotel that evening with a renewed sense of freedom, a gift from my soul consort.

My affinity with Howard Marks is not limited by the material and physical world, as you know. Our alliance is joined by the spirit and the mind that subsist together on a higher plane unknown to many of you. We share an exceptional love and admiration for each other that doesn’t confine, that doesn’t judge, that doesn’t imprison but provides security and freedom.

Although I had not seen Howard for seven years, he remained, as he remains, close to me in spirit, and in constant communication. And so in May, as I felt the world crumbling around me, threatening me, I was to reach out again to my old friend, my ally, my confidante – my soul mate.

On Friday evening, June 27, 2008 I went to see my brother, Freddie, perform at the Hobbit House along M.H. del Pilar in Malate, Manila. Freddie’s song “*Anak*” became number one all over Europe and Asia. It had been translated into over 42 languages since the late 1970’s making him a music icon in Asia. I came with my friends Alwin and Paulie along with Steve. As we entered the dark, low lit pub, I saw another old familiar soul sitting at the bar drinking his beer. Someone I’ve known practically all my life, Jim Turner, the Irish man who owns Hobbit House, who came to settle in the Philippines a long, long time ago. The place was crowded with its usual interesting mixture of retired US military men who reside in the country married to local girls, with its Japanese and Korean tourists, local bar girls and musicians and Filipinos of varied ages. It was around 9:30 in the evening and the band before

Freddie was playing music from the 1960's. I sent a text message to Howard Marks who at this point was spending most of his time in Wales with his two children Francesca and Patrick.

“I arrive in UK July 6. I will be there until the 11th. You must see me.” I wrote.

“Yes I will do my best to go to England and see you. Where do you want to meet?”

“Bristol.”

“Temple Meads, Tuesday, July 8, 2pm, okay with you?” He wrote.

“Yes. See you. Thanks.”

On Sunday, July 6, 2008, Steve, my daughter Maya and I took a plane to London. We arrived in Heathrow late afternoon and took a taxi to Hertz where we rented a car. As always, Steve drove patiently for hours, away from the busy airport, and headed towards the magical, ancient village of Monkton Combe. The village sits in a beautiful valley where countless sheep and cattle graze happily upon the massive imperial green lawns stretching as far as the eyes can see. This charming village looks like a perfect setting for a fascinating Arthurian movie, a world of noble brave knights, kings and queens, good and evil, magic spells of witches and demons prancing in the dark fighting for the dominance to rule over heaven and earth.

This splendid village is completely isolated from the reality you know, protected from the material world of globalization and commercial conquest, tucked-away secretly in a small serene gully. The village itself looks to me like the grand setting for classic films such as “Howard’s End” or “Ladies in Lavender.”

Steve found us a large quiet house that was built during the Sung Dynasty in China, in 1210. It had five bedrooms hidden at

the end of a long and curving narrow road. The façade of the house was shielded by creeping ivy and was surrounded by centuries-old trees, rosebushes, rose vines and a classic English garden facing the large dining room. We arrived past midnight, exhausted from our long journey. A tired looking English woman who sounded like Emma Thompson greeted us. She walked us to the second level of the huge house and showed us to our bedroom.

The next morning when we woke up, our five-year old daughter Maya, who has now also travelled to Indonesia, Cambodia and Laos - was greeted by a fat, long necked, loud, white gawking goose I named Cleopatra, staring at us from the outside garden whilst we sat around the breakfast table. We were offered freshly baked English bread, black mushrooms lightly fried in butter, ham, bacon and a variety of cereals along with orange juice and coffee prepared by the innkeeper and owner Norman, a kind, warm and gentle-natured British man who graduated from Oxford University. After breakfast, Steve took Maya for a walk picking wild flowers and examining the small creatures that invaded the foliage of the trees and the fauna in the nearby area, a familiar activity my daughter Maya will always welcome at any given time. I stayed behind doing my “body balance” exercise, a 45-minute work out which I give myself while I am abroad and have no access to any gym facilities. It is a combination of tai-chi, Pilates and yoga.

Later, Steve, Maya and I drove to Bristol to see Steve’s mother Vanda, a very cheerful woman despite the fact that she is already 87 years old. She lives in a nursing home called Southlands, located in the suburb of Knowle. On the way there we stopped by “Tesco’s,” a large UK supermarket with a bountiful variety of fresh produce, to buy the ingredients for our lunch. During our entire stay in England, I cooked lunch at Vanda’s apartment feeding my family

freshly prepared oriental dishes. While in UK, given the choice between eating out and cooking, I'd prefer the latter only because I really don't mind cooking when I'm on holiday and because I am absolutely sure that I'm a better cook than anyone else around. Unfortunately we were not allowed to use the kitchen in the place where we stayed. Next year when we return to UK we plan to rent a house where I will be granted the freedom to use the kitchen. That would make my vacation to this part of England perfect as far as I'm concerned. But the UK does seem to have an increasing number of good restaurants. Steve and I had discovered a very nice restaurant and bar in Bathampton, called 'The Mill' that serves an excellent selection of Greek food. This place was only 15 minutes away from Monkton Combe.

On Tuesday, July 8, Steve, Maya and I headed toward 'Tesco's' one more time to buy the ingredients we needed for our next luncheon. After our meal, Steve drove me to Temple Meads, with his mother Vanda and our daughter Maya sitting in the back seat, delighted as ever. Steve dropped me off ten minutes before two o'clock. He then took Maya and his mother to visit Bristol Zoo, located in the old Bristol suburb of Clifton and not far from the 19th century railway station of Temple Meads.

I sat outside Temple Meads on a wrought iron bench next to a middle aged, overweight Chinese woman who was wearing a black light jacket and skirt, watching passengers come in and out of this large, old, train station - a gateway to destinations all over Europe. This Asian woman next to me smoked cigarettes like there was no tomorrow. I detest the pure disgusting aroma of burning nicotine. I could think of endless things to suck on that would give me far greater oral gratification other than inhaling cancer from dead, rolled tobacco leaves. I saw people of all sizes, colors

and forms marching up and down in different directions, some holding hands, some hugging, others kissing, others arguing, some dragging their suitcases, others tugging their small children. Others bought newspapers and flowers while some just stood in silence, catatonic, staring at nothing, waiting, and waiting... I counted the big British cabs that came one after the other, collecting passengers and dropping off people who rushed and struggled to get into the old railway station. Temple Meads is like an interesting painting on a large mural portraying life, full of endless contradictions and disagreements searching for balance and conclusion, with an intricate palette of contrasts and incongruous emotions - of laughter and tears, joy and pain, questions and answers, hellos and goodbyes.

Around 2, I saw a man with long black hair, dark pants and dark long coat staring at me. There stood a dear old Irish friend I haven't seen in a long time. My heart filled with immense joy at the sight of him. How I missed him. He looked like a shadow of Howard Marks, but it wasn't Howard. We approached each other with uncertainty. There was something strange in the air that stopped this man and I from embracing each other as we had in the past. Rather I felt it was okay to kiss him lightly on the cheek. I will call this old friend William, a special friend of Howard Marks.

"Howard sent me," he said.

"I'm disappointed Howard couldn't come. But it is a great surprise to see you."

William and I took a cab to the Marriott Hotel in Bristol, not far from the train station. We sat together in the back of the car.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"Monkton Combe," I replied. "We are staying in an old house."

"I've been to Monkton Combe," he said. "How are you?"

“Overwhelmed...which is why I came. I needed to see Howard. I need him to help me process the events that have happened in my life,” I told William.

At the Marriott we went directly to the restaurant on the mezzanine level and found a quiet private place tucked away in the back. William and I stared at each other delighted to be in each other’s presence. A young lady with a big smile on her face poured us two glasses of the hotel’s house wine, Errazuriz cabernet sauvignon from Chile which I found interesting since it is the same brand we serve in Bulan. William and I picked up our wine goblets and made a toast.

Then William’ phone rang. He answered it and gave the phone to me. It was Howard on the other line.

“I’m sorry I can’t be there. I’m out of the country,” he said.

“I will explain everything when I see you next time,” he added.

“Amazing, it’s been so long since I spoke to you last. And yet it seems like yesterday,” I stated.

“But time does not exist. And we are soul mates, always connected...you must have been my grandmother in my last life,” he said teasing.

“How is Francesca?” I asked.

“She’s in Wales with my son Patrick,” he responded.

“You know I haven’t met Francesca but I feel so bonded to her also. I can’t wait to meet her. I feel I know her soul...” I uttered.

“She feels the same about you. She feels connected to you,” he said.

Then I began to cry. Howard listened patiently on the other end of the line empathizing with my grief. I told him about the prophecies of the seers. I told him about the tap on my computer and my phones. I told him about Paulie and the two foreign men

who followed me in Palau during my trip there in January 2008. In tears, I told him all I could. I would like to remind you that Howard has a highly developed scientific mind and the wisdom to describe paranormal behaviour as physics.

When I was done, he said with a gentle voice, "Tell me...do you believe a person can alter his or her future?"

"Yes I do. Most people can," I answered.

"You see the future. Does it confirm what the seers see?" he asked.

"Yes," I cried, sobbing like a child.

"Do you believe you can dodge your destiny?" he continued.

"No," I gasped catching my breath. "The seers said people like us are born with special souls bestowed with spirits of dragons. We are warriors of heaven. We are here to play a crucial role. We will execute a monumental task. We cannot escape this fate. Therefore we don't have much choice. No matter what we do, heaven will throw us back on our destined path."

"Then accept your fate. If you believe you can't change the future then accept it. Embrace your destiny. You are already leading your people anyway. They just don't realize it yet," he explained.

"I have a friend who is just like you. He is from Panama. I can see that both of you will lead your nations. The trouble is both of you are whining about exactly the same thing. Both of you cannot accept the limelight that comes with it."

"I can't do it, I don't want it. I wish for a simple quiet life," I continued to whimper.

Howard said, "I believe I've been kept alive because there is a need for someone like me. There is a need for a symbol. People need an image to look up to, an icon that will give them hope. Why can't you accept that we are very much alike? We have the charisma

to inspire people. I didn't plan to become a leading figure. It just happened."

"Why are those people after me? What am I doing? I'm not doing anything extraordinary," I said still grieving.

"The CIA must spy on the top 100 most interesting people in the Philippines and you are definitely up there when it comes to international affairs. So why are you surprised that you are under surveillance?" he announced.

"I need you. I need you to help me. You must come to cut the ribbon at one of my book launches," I implored.

"Yes. Of course," he assured me.

"Promise me. Promise..." I cried. "That wherever the road takes me I can always run to Wales for sanctuary and that I can always run to you for comfort. I need this. I need this from you..."

"Yes, you have always been welcome to come to Wales," he answered.

Again, my living "Merlin" grants me my wish. Once more, he has lifted the dark clouds hovering above me giving me strength to face what is about to come.

After my telephone conversation with Howard, William and I walked back to Temple Meads. I was in better spirits.

Switching personality now I pronounced smiling, "I say 99% of the male population in this planet is not good enough for me to use as a vibrator."

"And that goes for women as well," he replied instantly.

Cool. I thought giggling. Here is another human being who sees the opposite sex in exactly the same way I do. I am not alone after all.

We continued walking towards Temple Meads. When we reached the train station's parking lot I kissed and hugged my old friend

goodbye. Then I saw Steve walking towards us, smiling. I grabbed William' hand tight and held him back.

"I want you to meet my partner," I said. I introduced them to each other.

And they embraced each other sharing a common bond, me.

As Steve and I walked away, he said, "That man loves you. You are so lucky. So many people love you."

"I know," I said. "And I am grateful."

As I got into the car, I saw Maya sitting ever so happy, with her grandmother in the back seat with face painted like a butterfly. She couldn't stop telling me about her adventure that day, her first trip to a British zoo.

"Bristol Zoo Gardens maintains and defends biodiversity through breeding endangered species, conserving threatened species and habitats and promoting a wider understanding of the natural world." The zoo is home to the Giraffe House, which joins the main entrance. It also houses the old Monkey Temple that resembles an Asian temple, which shows an on-going exhibit called "Smarty plants" showing how plants control and manipulate animals to survive. The zoo proudly records a black rhino born in Britain in 1958, the first chimpanzee born in Europe in 1934 and the first squirrel monkey born in captivity in 1953.

On another day, we drove to "Longleat," in Somerset to visit the Safari Park, about an hour's drive away from Bristol. It rained all the way, with the clouds clearing when we reached Longleat. The Safari Park is located in Wiltshire and was inaugurated in 1996. It was the first drive-through safari park to be built outside of Africa. It is situated on the grounds of Longleat House, the home of the 7th Marquess of Bath, a large estate covering 9000 acres (36 km²) in the beautiful English countryside. It is amazing how unequal British

society has always been. Longleat prides itself with a collection of over 500 animals roaming freely while visitors remain in their cars as they drive around the compound within the large open park.

The Safari Park's Reserves include giraffes, zebras, llamas, ostriches, vultures, Kenyan bongos, Bengalese tigers, African lions, Canadian timber wolves, hippos, camels and gorillas among others.

We returned to the Philippines a week later, leaving England on the 12th.