

Damp

by Lem Cacho

I'm a madman. People call me other stuff, but I'm a madman. My name is Roberto Nolasco Bahag-hari. Yeah, I know. It's kinda funny for a name. Friends sometimes call me RNB though I hate that freakin' music. Sometimes people tease me and ask if I'm related to that gay actor. I'd always say he's called Gandang-Hari, not Bahag-hari. Then I'd take pride that real men wear "bahags" and we don't mind our balls peeping out at times.

I used to work in this grand office in Makati, but I called it quits. I got tired of taking orders from my boss who has a knack for bossing around. Well, he's the boss anyway that's why he does that. He'd disturb me in my quiet space and ask me to go in his room. Then he'd ask, "what do you think of the game last night?" He wants to know what I think about the match between Orlando and Miami or whichever team played the night before. He wants to make me feel that he's one of the boys and how regular he is. Of course I'll give him the bullshit, give him my analysis why Miami won and why Orlando sucked. At other times he'd ask me about the F1 race and how great the Ferrari driver was. He'd continue telling me his dreams of owning a Ferrari someday, before he retires. In my head I would go, "So fuckin' what?" I grew tired of it.

The thing is, I hate hacks. It's not that I know a lot of genuine folks. Sometimes I'm a hack, too. But what I really hate is when people pretend they're oh so true when you can smell their hackness from a mile away. They're full of bull.

I hate girls, too. Don't get me wrong. I love girls in their full glory -- all those supple breasts, those fine legs, those smooth skin. What I hate is when they're being girlie in their ways. You know? All those crap about their being fragile, their being sensitive, the I-can-take-care-of-you type? I also hate their being extreme. You know? Those girls who claim to be feminists and don't fix themselves and look like guys in the end? I just hate it when they're like that.

There was one time I went out with a girl. She's not an absolute stunner, but there's something about her that would make other guys turn and give her a second look. She was fine to look at. Then she started talking. She started asking me what I thought of John Mayer. I wasn't sure if she was trying to sound cool or what but that pissed me off big time. She kept harking that Mayer just released his best album yet. "What do you think of Gravity?" she asked. "I'm not Newton," I said. I realized later she was talking about the song with Gravity as its title. It was an awful date. She was an awful shag. She was too "square."

I dated another girl. I keep calling them girls because they're not even close to what a lady is. Anyway, this other girl was okay at first. She's a lot prettier than the John Mayer girl. But what got into my nerves was her never ending jolliness. When she sees a baby in a stroller, she'd go "Awwwww. What a cute baby!" We were in Greenbelt Plaza and she did that twenty times. I almost tied her in a stroller. Then she said, "if you're going to have a baby, what would it be? A girl or a boy?" I said I'd rather have a Terrier than have a kid. That was the last I heard from her.

The third one was very remarkable -- if you're from Saturn. She started asking me about books I've read, what I thought of Philippine politics, and what I thought of Marx. I told her my fave is not actually a book (I told her I love Pugad Baboy), that Philippine politics is entertainment at another level, and that I'm not fond of the song "Right Here Waiting" by Marx. She gave me this look, a very dry look. I had a feeling that night she would swap me for a cigarette stick if she got the chance. Unfortunately, she never did.

Then there were those girls who put a cool air around them. They walk around as if they just came from a rock concert. They also have a knack for making fun of other girls. They have this habit of dismissing people just because they don't share the same thoughts, their love for the same things. I've been with those kinds of girls. I was in a cafe one Thursday in Adriatico and one girl from another table said "hi." It took me a while to recognize who she was not until she reminded me. It was really embarrassing. She asked if I

wanted to join them at their table because she wanted to catch up with me a bit. "It's been eons, Berto." She's in the habit of saying "eons" like I was from a bygone era, if you know what I mean.

"So, how's it goin'?" she asked. I said I'm still the same, but she wouldn't take that. "How could you still be the same? There must be something that has happened to you. It's been eons, right?" she said. I just smiled. There's no point explaining to someone who knows you more than you do. When I tell someone I'm still the same, I'm still the same. Who's the better person to know me more, right? But she went on asking anyway. That was annoying. She only wanted to hear what she wanted to hear.

"Me and my friends are having an argument," she said. "We're trying to find out what is the best movie of all time." Like I care, but I listened anyway. They're debating if *Snatch* is much better than *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels*. They all of a sudden became Guy Ritchie experts. They weren't able to settle it except that Brad Pitt was gorgeous. Then one of them asked, "so, which do you think is better?" I said I love *Petrang Kabayo*, the original, and not the one with Vice Ganda. They all went quiet.

That's how far I got with girls. I never had luck with any of them.

You see, I hate it when people put on airs and make you feel they're superior than you.

Then there are the guys. I hate the intellectuals as well as the athletic ones. Even those who project an image that they are indestructible. And there are plenty of them.

A guy friend called me up once and invited me to go drinking. So I did. I haven't seen my friend for eons now (see how contagious girls are?). We went to this pub along Leon Guinto Street, the one owned by a basketball coach and now a councilor in Quezon City. It was okay at first until he opened his mouth. He kept reminding me how I've been wasting my life for nothing. I told him I was taking it easy, that I'm taking things lightly. But like the girls I just described, he has this preconceived notion that he's better and that all the things I do are for my demise. I hate it.

After that I went to my mum's place. I saw my childhood friends drinking at a street corner. They invited me to join them and I did. They were talking about the same shit they talked of from five years ago. They dissed each other nonstop and they wouldn't let anyone finish a sentence. One was always better than the other. If someone cracked a joke, the other made sure that his was funnier. They did that since I was fifteen and they're doing the same thing, cracking the same jokes, telling the same stories nineteen years after. It was boring me to death.

I feel alone you see. So alone. I never like anyone. I never like myself. The only thing that keeps me is not the light at the end of the tunnel. In fact, it's the darkness of the tunnel that keeps me. Chuck Palaniuk once wrote that he had a feeling that if he sleeps, he'd never wake up. But then the next day he wakes up. How tragic.

Now, I don't know what to do. There must be something that I can do. Whatever it is, I don't know yet...

