

## Footnote to Youth

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<sup>1</sup>The sun was salmon and hazy in the west. Dodong thought to himself he would tell his father about Teang when he got home, after he had unhitched the carabao from the plow, and let it to its shed and fed it. He was hesitant about saying it, but he wanted his father to know. What he had to say was of serious import as it would mark a climacteric in his life. Dodong finally decided to tell it, at a thought came to him his father might refuse to consider it. His father was silent hard-working farmer who chewed areca nut, which he had learned to do from his mother, Dodong's grandmother.

<sup>2</sup>I will tell it to him. I will tell it to him.

<sup>3</sup>The ground was broken up into many fresh wounds and fragrant with a sweetish earthy smell. Many slender soft worms emerged from the furrows and then burrowed again deeper into the soil. A short colorless worm marched blindly to Dodong's foot and crawled calmly over it. Dodong go tickled and jerked his foot, flinging the worm into the air. Dodong did not bother to look where it fell, but thought of his age, seventeen, and he said to himself he was not young any more.

<sup>4</sup>Dodong unhitched the carabao leisurely and gave it a healthy tap on the hip. The beast turned its head to look at him with dumb faithful eyes. Dodong gave it a slight push and the animal walked alongside him to its shed. He placed bundles of grass before it land the carabao began to eat. Dodong looked at it without interests.

<sup>5</sup>Dodong started homeward, thinking how he would break his news to his father. He wanted to marry, Dodong did. He was seventeen, he had pimples on his face, the down on his upper lip already was dark--these meant he was no longer a boy. He was growing into a man – he was a man. Dodong felt insolent and big at the thought of it although he was by nature low in statue. Thinking himself a man grown, Dodong felt he could do anything.

<sup>6</sup>He walked faster, prodded by the thought of his virility. A small angled stone bled his foot, but he dismissed it cursorily. He lifted his leg and looked at the hurt toe and then went on walking. In the cool sundown he thought wild you dreams of himself and Teang. Teang, his girl. She had

a small brown face and small black eyes and straight glossy hair. How desirable she was to him. She made him dream even during the day.

<sup>7</sup>Dodong tensed with desire and looked at the muscles of his arms. Dirty. This field work was healthy, invigorating but it begrimed you, smudged you terribly. He turned back the way he had come, then he marched obliquely to a creek.

<sup>8</sup>Dodong stripped himself and laid his clothes, a gray undershirt and red *kundiman* shorts, on the grass. Then he went into the water, wet his body over, and rubbed at it vigorously. He was not long in bathing, then he marched homeward again. The bath made him feel cool.

<sup>9</sup>It was dusk when he reached home. The petroleum lamp on the ceiling already was lighted and the low unvarnished square table was set for supper. His parents and he sat down on the floor around the table to eat. They had fried fresh-water fish, rice, bananas, and caked sugar.

<sup>10</sup>Dodong ate fish and rice, but did not partake of the fruit. The bananas were overripe and when one held them they felt more fluid than solid. Dodong broke off a piece of the caked sugar, dipped it in his glass of water and ate it. He got another piece and wanted some more, but he thought of leaving the remainder for his parents.

<sup>11</sup>Dodong's mother removed the dishes when they were through and went out to the *batalan* to wash them. She walked with slow careful steps and Dodong wanted to help her carry the dishes out, but he was tired and now felt lazy. He wished as he looked at her that he had a sister who could help his mother in the housework. He pitied her, doing all the housework alone.

<sup>12</sup>His father remained in the room, sucking a diseased tooth. It was paining him again, Dodong knew. Dodong had told him often and again to let the town dentist pull it out, but he was afraid, his father was. He did not tell that to Dodong, but Dodong guessed it. Afterward Dodong himself thought that if he had a decayed tooth he would be afraid to go to the dentist; he would not be any bolder than his father.

<sup>13</sup>Dodong said while his mother was out that he was going to marry Teang. There it was out, what he had to say, and over which he had done so much thinking. He had said it without any effort at all and without self-consciousness. Dodong felt relieved and looked at his father

expectantly. A decrescent moon outside shed its feeble light into the window, graying the still black temples of his father. His father looked old now.

<sup>14</sup>"I am going to marry Teang," Dodong said.

<sup>15</sup>His father looked at him silently and stopped sucking the broken tooth. The silence became intense and cruel, and Dodong wished his father would suck that troublous tooth again. Dodong was uncomfortable and then became angry because his father kept looking at him without uttering anything.

<sup>16</sup>"I will marry Teang," Dodong repeated. "I will marry Teang."

<sup>17</sup>His father kept gazing at him in inflexible silence and Dodong fidgeted on his seat.

<sup>18</sup>"I asked her last night to marry me and she said...yes. I want your permission. I... want... it...." There was impatient clamor in his voice, an exacting protest at this coldness, this indifference. Dodong looked at his father sourly. He cracked his knuckles one by one, and the little sounds it made broke dully the night stillness.

<sup>19</sup>"Must you marry, Dodong?"

<sup>20</sup>Dodong resented his father's questions; his father himself had married. Dodong made a quick impassioned easy in his mind about selfishness, but later he got confused.

<sup>21</sup>"You are very young, Dodong."

<sup>22</sup>"I'm... seventeen."

<sup>23</sup>"That's very young to get married at."

<sup>24</sup>"I... I want to marry...Teang's a good girl."

<sup>25</sup>"Tell your mother," his father said.

<sup>26</sup>"You tell her, Tatay."

<sup>27</sup>"Dodong, you tell your Inay."

<sup>28</sup>"You tell her."

<sup>29</sup>"All right, Dodong."

<sup>30</sup>"You will let me marry Teang?"

<sup>31</sup>"Son, if that is your wish... of course..." There was a strange helpless light in his father's eyes. Dodong did not read it, so absorbed was he in himself.

<sup>32</sup>Dodong was immensely glad he had asserted himself. He lost his resentment for his father. For a while he even felt sorry for him about the diseased tooth. Then he confined his mind to dreaming of Teang and himself. Sweet young dream....

<sup>33</sup>Dodong stood in the sweltering noon heat, sweating profusely, so that his *camiseta* was damp. He was still as a tree and his thoughts were confused. His mother had told him not to leave the house, but he had left. He had wanted to get out of it without clear reason at all. He was afraid, he felt. Afraid of the house. It had seemed to cage him, to compare his thoughts with severe tyranny. Afraid also of Teang. Teang was giving birth in the house; she gave screams that chilled his blood. He did not want her to scream like that, he seemed to be rebuking him. He began to wonder madly if the process of childbirth was really painful. Some women, when they gave birth, did not cry.

<sup>34</sup>In a few moments he would be a father. "Father, father," he whispered the word with awe, with strangeness. He was young, he realized now, contradicting himself of nine months comfortable... "Your son," people would soon be telling him. "Your son, Dodong."

<sup>35</sup>Dodong felt tired standing. He sat down on a saw-horse with his feet close together. He looked at his callused toes. Suppose he had ten children... What made him think that? What was the matter with him? God!

<sup>36</sup>He heard his mother's voice from the house:

<sup>37</sup>"Come up, Dodong. It is over."

<sup>38</sup>Suddenly he felt terribly embarrassed as he looked at her. Somehow he was ashamed to his mother of his youthful paternity. It made him feel guilty, as if he had taken something not properly his. He dropped his eyes and pretended to dust dirt off his *kundiman* shorts.

<sup>39</sup>"Dodong," his mother called again. "Dodong."

<sup>40</sup>He turned to look again and this time saw his father beside his mother.

<sup>41</sup>"It is a boy," his father said. He beckoned Dodong to come up.

<sup>42</sup>Dodong felt more embarrassed and did not move. What a moment for him. His parents' eyes seemed to pierce him through and he felt limp.

<sup>43</sup>He wanted to hide from them, to run away.

<sup>44</sup>"Dodong, you come up. You come up," his mother said.

<sup>45</sup>Dodong did not want to come up and stayed in the sun.

<sup>45</sup>"Dodong. Dodong."

<sup>46</sup>"I'll... come up."

<sup>47</sup>Dodong traced tremulous steps on the dry parched yard. He ascended the bamboo steps slowly. His heart pounded mercilessly in him. Within, he avoided his parents' eyes. He walked ahead of them so that they should not see his face. He felt guilty and untrue. He felt like crying. His eyes smarted and his chest wanted to burst. He wanted to turn back, to go back to the yard. He wanted somebody to punish him.

<sup>48</sup>His father thrust his hand in his and gripped it gently.

<sup>49</sup>"Son," his father said.

<sup>50</sup>And his mother: "Dodong..."

<sup>51</sup>How kind were their voices. They flowed into him, making him strong.

<sup>52</sup>"Teang?" Dodong said.

<sup>53</sup>"She's sleeping. But you go on..."

<sup>54</sup>His father led him into the small *sawali* room. Dodong saw Teang, his girl-wife, asleep on the *papag* with her black hair soft around her face. He did not want her to look that pale.

<sup>55</sup>Dodong wanted to touch her, to push away that stray wisp of hair that touched her lips, but again that feeling of embarrassment came over him and before his parents he did not want to be demonstrative.

<sup>56</sup>The *hilot* was wrapping the child, Dodong heard it cry. The thin voice pierced him queerly. He could not control the swelling of happiness in him.

<sup>57</sup>"You give him to me. You give him to me," Dodong said.

<sup>58</sup>Blas was not Dodong's only child. Many more children came. For six successive years a new child came along. Dodong did not want any more children, but they came. It seemed the coming of children could not be helped. Dodong got angry with himself sometimes.

<sup>59</sup>Teang did not complain, but the bearing of children told on her. She was shapeless and thin now, even if she was young. There was interminable work to be done. Cooking. Laundering. The house. The children. She cried sometimes, wishing she had not married. She did not tell Dodong this, not wishing him to dislike her. Yet she wished she had not married. Not even Dodong, whom she loved. There has been another suitor, Lucio, older than Dodong by nine years, and that was why she had chosen Dodong. Young Dodong. Seventeen. Lucio had married another after her marriage to Dodong, but he was childless until now. She wondered if

she had married Lucio, would she have borne him children. Maybe not, either. That was a better lot. But she loved Dodong...

<sup>60</sup>Dodong whom life had made ugly.

<sup>61</sup>One night, as he lay beside his wife, he rose and went out of the house. He stood in the moonlight, tired and querulous. He wanted to ask questions and somebody to answer him. He wanted to be wise about many things.

<sup>62</sup>One of them was why life did not fulfill all of Youth's dreams. Why it must be so. Why one was forsaken... after Love.

<sup>63</sup>Dodong would not find the answer. Maybe the question was not to be answered. It must be so to make youth Youth. Youth must be dreamfully sweet. Dreamfully sweet. Dodong returned to the house humiliated by himself. He had wanted to know a little wisdom but was denied it.

<sup>64</sup>When Blas was eighteen he came home one night very flustered and happy. It was late at night and Teang and the other children were asleep. Dodong heard Blas' steps, for he could not sleep well of nights. He watched Blas undress in the dark and lie down softly. Blas was restless on his mat and could not sleep. Dodong called him name and asked why he did not sleep. Blas said he could not sleep.

<sup>65</sup>"You better go to sleep. It is late," Dodong said.

<sup>66</sup>Blas raised himself on his elbow and muttered something in a low fluttering voice.

<sup>67</sup>Dodong did not answer and tried to sleep.

<sup>68</sup>"Itay ...," Blas called softly.

<sup>69</sup>Dodong stirred and asked him what it was.

<sup>70</sup>"I am going to marry Tona. She accepted me tonight."

<sup>71</sup>Dodong lay on the red pillow without moving.

<sup>72</sup>"Itay, you think it over."

<sup>73</sup>Dodong lay silent.

<sup>74</sup>"I love Tona and... I want her."

<sup>75</sup>Dodong rose from his mat and told Blas to follow him. They descended to the yard, where everything was still and quiet. The moonlight was cold and white.

<sup>76</sup>"You want to marry Tona," Dodong said. He did not want Blas to marry yet. Blas was very young. The life that would follow marriage would be hard...

<sup>77</sup>"Yes."

<sup>78</sup>"Must you marry?"

<sup>79</sup>Blas' voice stilled with resentment. "I will marry Tona."

<sup>80</sup>Dodong kept silent, hurt.

<sup>81</sup>"You have objections, Itay?" Blas asked acridly.

<sup>82</sup>"Son... n-none..." (But truly, God, I don't want Blas to marry yet... not yet. I don't want Blas to marry yet....)

<sup>83</sup>But he was helpless. He could not do anything. Youth must triumph... now. Love must triumph... now. Afterwards... it will be life.

<sup>84</sup>As long ago Youth and Love did triumph for Dodong... and then Life. Dodong looked wistfully at his young son in the moonlight. He felt extremely sad and sorry for him.