

The Question That Opened the Window: Clinical Parable

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Title Verse

"The purposes of the human heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."
— Proverbs 20:5

The Parable

Mang Tonyo was once a school principal
in a quiet barangay tucked behind Quezon City's chaos.
He had a voice that could silence a room
without raising it.
Students feared him.
Parents admired him.
He ruled with reason, not noise.

Now in his late seventies,
his sharpness remained
but his body had bowed.
He walked with a walking stick,
every step a negotiation
between bones and memory.

His home sat near an intersection
of tricycles, sari-sari stores, and noise.
Yet inside, there was quiet—
in his books, in the scent of liniment,
in his old AM radio-
the voice of Nora Aunor.

When he came to the hospital,
Stage IV prostate cancer had already reached his bones.
The pain had long nested in his hips and spine,
but Mang Tonyo rarely named it.
"Okay pa," he would whisper,
even as he winced when rising.

The hospital moved fast.
Vitals. Blood draws. New meds.
Scan orders. Protocols.
Radiation? Chemotherapy? Clinical trial?

No one asked what mattered most to him.
Until DocChap came.

He didn't carry just a stethoscope.
He carried stillness.
He pulled a plastic chair beside the bed
and simply sat.

He listened.

They began with the pain.
Then came the noise in the hallway.
The saltless soup.
The memory of old songs.

Then—
the grief of losing strength.
The fear behind the brave smile.
The questions about faith.
And finally: the unspoken words he still longed to say.

After a long silence, DocChap asked:
“Mang Tonyo, we've talked about what's the matter with you.
But may I ask—what matters most to you now?”

There was a pause.
Then, with eyes that wandered beyond the fluorescent lights,
he answered:

“I want to go home.
I miss the hum of my electric fan.
The smell of garlic rice in the morning.
The windowsill where my wife dried her lemon grass.
I want to tell my grandchild the stories I never told his father.
And if God allows—
to sing with the church choir again. Just once.”

That one answer shifted everything.

Discharge planning replaced admission plans.
The meds were adjusted.
The home readied.
The nurse trained his family.
And DocChap stayed—present not only for the body's return
but the soul's remembering.

And yes—one Sunday,
the parish choir came.
Outside his window, they sang *Be Not Afraid*.

Inside, Mang Tonyo wept.
Not from fear.
But from finding the life
he thought he had already lost.

He did not die in the ICU.
He died at home.
In his chair.
Near his books.
With his family.
With his voice.
With meaning.

Poetic Afterword: The Soul Has a Chart Too

We are trained to ask,
"What's the matter with you?"
And yes—pain must be named.
But healing begins
when we dare ask the deeper question:
"What matters most to you?"

This question does not diagnose.
It dignifies.
It listens not just to organs,
but to stories.

It is a question that leads not to tests—
but to truth.

In Filipino homes,
we have long practiced this.
We sit beside the sick.

We stir porridge slowly.
We wait with their silence.
We offer not just *pakikiramay*,
but *pakikidamay*.

To ask the deeper question
is to knock on the soul's door.
And sometimes,
the soul opens.

Silent Invitation to Prayer

Find a quiet place.
Close your eyes.
Imagine someone you love—growing older, growing tired.

Now ask:

Lord, what matters to them now?
What haven't they said?
What haven't I asked?

And Lord, what matters to *me* now?
What song still wants to be sung
before my voice is silenced?

O Divine Listener,
teach me to ask the questions that open windows—
not just charts.

Teach me to sit still.
To accompany.
To bless the longing, not just treat the pain.

May I become like DocChap—
a presence of healing
not just in the hospital,
but in the heart.

Amen.



FILIPINO TRANSLATION

Ang Tanong na Nagbukas ng Bintana: Talinhagang Klinikal

Talatang Pamagat

*"Ang layunin ng puso ng tao ay tulad ng malalim na tubig,
ngunit ang may unawa ay marunong sumalok nito."*

— Kawikaan 20:5

Ang Talinhaga

Dati'y punong-guro si Mang Tonyo
sa isang tahimik na barangay sa Quezon City.
Hindi kailanman kailangang lakasan ang boses—
isang tingin pa lamang ay tumatahimik ang buong silid.

Hinangaan siya ng mga magulang.
Kinagalangan ng mga estudyante.
Maayos, matuwid, tahimik.

Ngayon, nasa huling yugto ng kanyang dekada setenta,
tuwid pa rin ang pag-iisip,
pero ang katawan ay yumuko na.
Lumalakad siya sa tungkod,
tila bawat hakbang ay pakikipagkasundo
sa lumilipas na alaala.

Nakatira siya malapit sa kanto—
may tricycle, jeep, at sari-sari store.
Pero sa loob ng bahay:
tahimik.
May lumang aklat sa estante
may amoy ng liniment,
ang kanta sa AM radio –
boses ni Nora Aunor.

Nang isugod siya sa ospital,
Stage IV na ang kanser sa prostate.

Umakyat na sa kanyang balakang at gulugod ang sakit,
pero bihira siyang magreklamo.

“Kaya pa,” ang bulong niya,
kahit nanginginig habang bumabangon.

Mabilis ang ospital.
Vitals. Dugo. Gamot.
Scan. Pirma. Options.
Radiation? Chemo? Trial?

Ngunit walang nagtatanong
kung ano ba talaga ang mahalaga sa kanya.

Dumating si DocChap.

Hindi siya bata, pero hindi rin matanda.
May stethoscope at katahimikan sa puso.
Hindi siya tumayo sa dulo ng kama,
bagkus, umupo sa plastic na upuan
sa tabi ni Mang Tonyo.

Tahimik siyang naghintay.
Nakinig.

Nagsimula sila sa sakit.
Sumunod ang reklamo sa pagkain.
Ang ingay sa corridor.
Ang pananabik sa mga lumang kanta.

Hanggang sa lumalim ang usapan.
Lumutang ang lungkot.
Ang takot sa likod ng tapang.
Ang pananampalatayang minsang malapit,
minsan tila malayo.

At sa kalagitnaan ng katahimikan,
tinanong ni DocChap:

“Mang Tonyo, napag-usapan natin ang mga nangyayari sa katawan mo.
Pero maaari ko bang itanong—ano po ba ang mahalaga sa inyo ngayon?”

Nagulat si Mang Tonyo.
Wala pang nagtatanong ng ganoon.

Tumingin siya lampas sa kisame.
At dahan-dahang bumulong:

“Gusto kong umuwi.
Miss ko na ang tunog ng electric fan tuwing gabi.
Ang amoy ng sinangag sa umaga.
Ang bintanang tinutuyuan ng tanglad ng asawa ko.
Gusto kong magkuwento sa apo ko
ng mga kwentong di ko nasabi sa anak ko.
At kung maaari—
makakanta uli sa choir, kahit isang kanta lang.”

Nagbago ang lahat dahil sa sagot na iyon.

Hindi na pag-stay sa ospital ang plano—
kundi pag-uwi.

Inayos ang gamot.
Tinuruan ang pamilya.
Tinawag ang kapitan.
At si DocChap—hindi lang nanatili sa katawan,
kundi sinamahan ang kaluluwa sa pag-uwi.

Dumating ang choir.
Umawit sila sa labas ng bintana: *“Huwag Kang Matakot.”*

Si Mang Tonyo, nakahiga sa banig,
may luha, may ngiti.
May tinig muli.

At isang umaga,
habang dumadaloy ang araw sa bintana,
hinawakan niya ang kamay ng kanyang apo,
huminga nang malalim,
at nagpahinga.

Hindi siya namatay sa ICU.
Hindi sa ilalim ng alarm at tubo.
Kundi sa bahay.
Sa tabi ng libro.
Sa piling ng pamilya.
Sa musika.

Sa alaala.
Sa kahulugan.

Makataang Pagmumuni: May Tsart Din ang Kaluluwa

Sanay tayong magtanong:
“Ano pong problema ninyo?”
At tama naman iyon.

Sana tanungin rin,
ang mas mahalagang tanong ay:
“Ano po ang mahalaga sa inyo ngayon?”

Hindi ito tanong para gamutin.
Tanong ito upang kilalanin.
Upang igalang ang kwento.
Hindi lang katawan—kundi kaluluwa.

Sa ating kulturang Pilipino,
sanay tayong tumabi sa may sakit.
Hindi minamadali ang lugaw.
Hindi pinipilit ang katahimikan.

Hindi lang *pakikiramay*.
Pakikidamay.

Pagdamay habang buhay pa.
Pagkikinig habang may tinig pa.

Tanungin natin:
“Ano po ang mahalaga sa inyo ngayon?”
At baka sakaling
magbukas ang bintana ng kaluluwa.

Tahimik na Paanyaya sa Panalangin

Maghanap ng katahimikan.
Pumikit.

Isipin mo ang isang taong malapit sa iyo—
tumanda, napagod, pero tahimik na naghintay.

Ngayon, itanong sa Diyos:

**Ano po ang mahalaga sa kanya ngayon?
At sa akin—ano po ang hindi ko pa naitatanong?
Anong awit pa ang dapat kong awitin,
habang may tinig pa?**

Panginoon,
turuan Mo akong magtanong
hindi lang sa sakit,
kundi sa diwa.

Gawin Mo akong katulad ni DocChap—
tagapagdala ng katahimikan,
ng pakikiramay,
ng pag-uwi.

Amen.

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This document, "The Question That Opened the Window: Clinical Parable," draws inspiration from and is informed by human creativity, empathy, and the profound narratives of care. While the core themes, emotional depth, and narrative structure originate from the author's personal insights and professional experience, generative artificial intelligence was utilized in the following ways:

- **Ideation and Brainstorming:** AI tools (ChatGPT, Gemini 2.5 Flash, DeepSeek, Copilot, Grammarly) were employed to assist in brainstorming initial concepts, exploring linguistic nuances, and generating diverse phrasing options to enrich the poetic and narrative elements.
- **Language Refinement and Enhancement:** AI was used to refine sentence structure, enhance vocabulary, ensure grammatical accuracy, and suggest stylistic improvements for both the original English text and its Filipino translation, aiming for clarity, impact, and cultural resonance.
- **Exploration of Figurative Language:** AI assisted in exploring various metaphors, similes, and imagery to deepen the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the parable and poetic reflections.

The human author maintained full creative control and oversight throughout the writing process, making all final decisions regarding content, tone, and message. The generative AI served as a collaborative assistant, augmenting the author's creative output rather than replacing it. The intent was to leverage technological capabilities to enhance the humanistic and heartfelt message of the narrative, emphasizing the importance of profound human connection and understanding in the context of care.

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