

## **Daffodils on a Hearse**

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**Genre:** Psychological Thriller, Drama

At the peak of his career, artist Ludo is diagnosed with a psychosomatic disorder called Stendhal Syndrome. When exposed to a work of art or any natural phenomena of beauty, he experiences an altered perception of reality, emotional disturbances, depression and anxiety crises, and in extreme cases, death. Visual arts, performing arts, music, and literary works set off hallucination, and affect his physiological processes. His episodic attacks reek of family issues, intrapersonal conflict, psycho-social trauma, and the idea of being unvalued.

In place of clinical treatment, he takes matters into his own hands, and sets out on a journey. He ought to expose himself to the most exquisite artwork, and die the most poetic way. This way, he becomes a celebrated figurehead of arts in world history for redefining death. His female colleague, Clary, a film maker, keeps him company across the country in museums, art galleries, music bars, a road trip, a natural volcanic vent, a flower field, an Indigenous People community, and suchlike. On his suicidal escapade, rather than breathing his last, his episodes illuminates him about his *self*, and his interpersonal relationships to a great extent.

After several attempts of looking for a baneful artwork, Ludo hits his lowest point and loses hope on his quest for death. He decides to live with it, and forsake the only thing he relishes- the arts. To put their traveling to an end, they settle on a beach at dawn. Clary shows Ludo a montage video of their journey. Watching it while occasionally setting his eyes on Clary, Ludo experiences an array of emotions, and a hallucinogenic blast of artistry and splendor. Ludo figures out that the artwork he is looking for has always been with him. Ludo dies seeing all forms of arts, relief from agony, and love in Clary.

### **Plot:**

Ludovic Bernath, a 25- year old multifaceted artist, works as a supervising producer for Hibah Goode Corporation, a joint venture between the biggest arts and show-business guilds based in Baguio City. He is a Filipino-Jewish whose mother, Amelia Mara, a venerable Filipino litigator in America, wants him to work in her large-revenue law firm. Growing up fathered by an award-winning Jewish filmmaker, Timothy Bernath, Ludo learned many customs of arts that are progressive in particular. His father's craft resonates with him, as much as it does to the downtrodden. Ludo vividly remembers back when he was just a child, he is tremendously fascinated by arts that, though it may seem strange, he gets sexually stimulated by the abstract colors of paintings, even not having any apparent figures. Ludo discerns that it is best for him to do something he relishes, to quit a lucrative job, work as a local artist, and turn down his mother's offer. Amelia does not approve of this and

casts his son off. This worn-out relationship with his mother makes him bear clinical depression and separation anxiety disorder, to say nothing of his struggles in the cold of the city, day and night.

Many of Ludo's chief executives have every confidence in him, for his rare quality talent always takes their breath away. Naomi Vaydal, Ludo's handler, calls him for an office appointment. She tells Ludo that the council has arranged for him to preside over a cultural production. The benefit show will bring the 3-day Papal visit to a conclusion, while its proceeds will be in support of displaced Indigenous People. Ludo sees this as the prime of his profession and philosophy. The biggest show he is offered to handle will have spectators including the catholic pope, the president, national artists, among others. Furthermore, his father always reminded him of his artistic purpose to help the poor.

On the first assembly, Ludo meets a college friend and colleague, Clary Rebato, a filmmaker known for her astounding montage clips in mainstream and indie Filipino movies. Each production has an artistic director for several forms of art accompanying them in their committee. One of them, Bill Acojido, is the designated musical director who happens to be Ludo's old flame and former friend. Bill begrudges his natural talent, over and above that, Ludo has a renowned surname in the industry.

At the end of each rehearsal, the committee members go out for dinner. Ludo and Clary would often get separated from the group. The two walk down the streets at night, bar-hopping, and doing habits in a loop to mask how the job tires them out the whole day. The two bypass personal small talks with pints of lager and each night learn more in-depth inside stories about topics that get at each other's inner world- their interests, secrets, guilty pleasures, frustrations, and even Ludo's mental state. While this strips Ludo off of his worries, the exhausting 10-hour work still gets to him. He starts to get irascible, easily triggered by his ambiance. His anxiety attacks have become more detailed, torturous, and crippling.

During a vocal rehearsal of the piece **Kundiman ni Abdon**, Ludo rushes to a corner to whimper. The song and the yearning in the singer's voice set off a disturbing flashback of his father's 1972 Martial Law clips as if he was in the scene. Bill goes after him, all the more provoking him of their past. Clary

approaches them and asks Ludo if he needs her to vent out or keep him company to consult a doctor. Ludo asks Clary to leave to tell the committee that he has to head home, and will not make it to dinner. He balks at it, but what he does not know is that he is in for a rude awakening.

On the next day, Ludo wakes up only to find out that he slept so soundly inside his workplace's toilet cubicle last night that he did not wake when the lights went out. He gets out to the sink to wet his face. On his way to his office to get changed for work, the paintings in the hallway start acting weird. A surreal painting of **Garden of Earthly Delights** behind his office chair catches Ludo's eyes. It is almost as if the artwork is absorbing his soul, leaving his physical body behind like a onesie costume that has been taken off. This makes Ludo see synchronized characters of the painting moving and almost dancing, and cause him to be in shock. While zoning out into a trance, Ludo hears a knock at the door. When he gets out, Ludo's talents ask him why he was crying and laughing simultaneously. Ludo not remembering any of it, makes an excuse, saying he was just characterizing, he will be mentoring actors in the afternoon.

Right through a dynamic tableaux rehearsal of the **Via Crucis (14 Stations of the Cross)**, Ludo yet again starts to feel anxious about getting attacked by another episode. He sees the performing chorus in their very realistic make-up, fully painted in white while nude, looking like actual marble statues forming tableaux. There is something in many anthropomorphic artworks that can be repulsive to trigger emotions. To his surprise, nothing bad was happening to him, and he sits still.

While the performers are still onstage rehearsing, the choreographer-director asks the committee for criticism and suggestion. The senior creative director speaks briefly of her plans to incorporate a church-like stage design well-suited for the performers. Ludo has some points to say, but another episode caught him off guard. the music seems to get louder while each second pass. He shouts but the deafening music muffles his voice. He experiences tinnitus, the music has become so loud, it is ringing in his ears. Then, the spotlights move on themselves, seemingly becoming one with the whiteness of the painted performers, hitting Ludo with a strong flash of light in his eyes. He finds himself paralyzed and robbed of his ability to speak.

Tears came rushing down his face, while he strenuously hums to the baritone music of a back-up oktavist choir singing **Akh ty, step' shirokaya (Oh You, Wide Steppe)**. After about ten minutes of being frozen from his distant seat with no one to see him, Ludo collapses in convulsions and foams at his mouth. Clary notices this and makes a run for an ambulance call. Ludo blacks out, while the rest become panic-stricken.

Ludo wakes up to see himself in a hospital room with Clary. Clary leaves the room when Ludo receives a call from his worried mother. Hearing his mother speak, Ludo feels like it is all but an act of crocodile tears to persuade him back to America. Ludo bursts into tears, and finally tells his mom how upset he is about forcing him through legal emancipation, as his price for choosing to stay in the Philippines. Amelia laughs at her son, and tells him how there is a reason for him being a spitting image of his father- an ambitious man who goes against the perpetual disregard for pursuing arts as a career, she says. She continues to tell Ludo that his father was a delusional artist who exploits elite members of their class while vouching for the rights of peasants. It was her call to end an oligarch's hold on conventional arts, she speaks with no regrets as if her husband's death was a good thing. Ludo finds her arguments pointless and impudent and tells his mom to never give him a call again. He goes on to say that he is living a life better than any of the soul-sucking luxuries Amelia gets, then he hangs up. Much to his relief, Ludo is now reassured and happier, for standing up against his egotistical mother at long last.

A doctor comes in to tell Ludo of his situation. Ludo learns that he almost had a hypertensive emergency, only lying next to a fatal heart attack. The doctor could not identify the nature of his symptoms, there was not an illness that can be examined. He is referred to a psychiatrist for a better diagnosis. Driven by an earlier encounter with his mom, Ludo lets out his secrets, a very confidential matter. The psychiatrist adds up all of Ludo's abnormal hallucinations and the anxiety triggers which are out of the ordinary that caused them. All this time, Ludo has been experiencing oddities perpetuated by a psychosomatic disorder called **Stendhal Syndrome/Florence Syndrome**.

(Amancio, 2005) People diagnosed with Stendhal Syndrome experience an altered perception of reality, emotional disturbances, and crises of panic and anxiety with somatization when exposed to a work of art of great beauty. Precisely sensitive individuals who admire works of art, artists, poets, writers, among others are written in Stendhal Syndrome patient profiles. This also applies to any phenomena of beauty that occur in nature, especially when displaying picturesque natural beauties. This recounts the psychedelic experience of French author Stendhal with a phenomenon in Florence, Italy. It is also best to mention that this is a psychosomatic disorder. It may seem true that this can cause unreal and imaginative sensations to transpire, but it also harms body functions and life processes. This means that excessively exposing patients put in the worst situation can threaten their life.

Ludo has never felt more miserable in life, it is almost as if the universe is playing on him. A passionate artist getting diagnosed with a disorder making him suffer and tormented when seeing things he works with. Whatever gods there may be, he feels punished for the bad decisions he made. He thought about why his mother rejected his plans of becoming an artist, and why he should have just stayed in America, thinking it was after all accurate.

After nights of contemplating, drinking like a fish, Ludo arrives at a decision. Hitting many birds with one stone, he chooses to take matters into his own hands, and not get clinically treated. Since he will be living with uncertainty, he thought he might as well end his life. The catch, his quest is to find a way to end his sorrows in the most beautiful, and most artistic way. To make a mark in the history of arts, and become a figurehead of death in artistic historical records- Ludo opts for an adventure. The escapade will involve visiting an art gallery, a flower field, the beach, forest patches, remote Indigenous People areas, music bars, a reading nook, a volcanic vent with sulfur mining, among others. Although warned by his doctor, Ludo wishes to expose himself to all forms of beauty, seeing that one will give him the most

overwhelming episode. An episode which can cause extreme mirages and illusions, leading him to a hypertensive emergency, and ultimately death.

On the following day, Ludo reports at the Hidah Goode Headquarters to tell his headmen and headwomen of his situation. Even supposing that a lot has already been mastered in the production rehearsals, Ludo's bosses believe that the company still needs him and that people have to recognize that everything was presided over by him. Ludo insists that he can no longer work with anything that involves arts, and would rather live on his own, and figure things out. Much to their dismay, the chief executives allow his resignation to pass and is effective immediately.

Ludo's benefit show committee has already been notified of his leaving and has prepared to throw him a farewell party. Ludo arrives at their theatre building and is surprised by the whole team, and their performing artists. Nothing can make Ludo happy, not even a surprise party. Clary sees this, and apologizes to Ludo, saying it was Bill's idea, and a lot of them did not agree to it. The two speak to each other, while the others dance, Bill, being the life of the party. Clary and Ludo drink and talk all night long.

Ludo wakes up before dawn to get prepared for his trip. When he was about to take a shower, he heard a noise coming from the comfort room. Holding a baseball bat, Ludo forces his way in, busting the door open. To his shock, Ludo sees a naked Clary who just got out of the shower. They shout at each other, then Clary laughs at Ludo. Ludo asks Clary what she is doing in his house, Clary dresses up and tells him everything. Ludo finds out that he was so drunk at the party, he told Clary about all of his plans and even invited her to join. Ludo argues that he was drunk and was not thinking straight, while Clary insists that she is all ready to roll. Clary tells him that he is her best friend and that she would support him however he wants to go.

Clary goes with Ludo to his trip, bringing with her some of her video production equipment, and filming gears. They start their expedition.

The list goes on and on, Ludo and Clary first visit a museum. The art gallery features a series of one man of many self-portraits with degrees of uncertainty and deformation. This is where Ludo confronts episodes that make him fully aware of himself and his impairment, an intrapersonal relationship. He recognizes that his disorder is a part of him, it is the ground

of his being, the very thing that makes him who he is. Something inside Ludo still wants to end his suicidal mission to live a better life. For all that, this does not change his view, he still believes that his entirety is worth getting rid of. Even so, he represses his feelings, and chooses to leave the art gallery, disregarding the lessons of his *self*.

The museum similarly has a photo exhibit that tackles Philippine controversies. The halls display Raffy Lerma's Pieta-like photograph, the exhibit's main attraction, among other Drug War victims. Ludo seeing photos of dead bodies, suffers dismaying episodes that make him fathom out interpersonal relationships, with one particular for his mother, and another for Bill. At a point, he becomes certain that people have to be foolish to forgive others who have done them wrong. This puts an end to what others did to Ludo that hurt him, making him free, no longer bound by the pain.

Ludo and Clary rent a car to better admire the roads and the idea of traveling. Clary plays classical music, and some critically acclaimed songs in the car. Ludo gets subtle episodes from these that bring him back to a couple of his good memories. They also go bar-hopping across cities at night, listening to different live performers singing diverse genres. Ludo lives at night like any other normal person without a restricting disorder. The moon can magically make his anxieties and episodes vanish.

The two travel to see a volcanic vent with sulfur mining, Ludo's first nature encounter. The smoke can be very dangerous, so Ludo decides to go by himself down the crater. The yellow minerals and smokes make Ludo hallucinate patterns and figures that form his father. Here, Ludo faces an episode of his father to ask him about the things he could have asked when he was still alive. He gets answers that are embedded deep inside his thoughts, finally finding the key to accepting his father's death. Making it right for his father, and for the progressive arts that Timothy Bernath has always been fighting for.

On rounds, Ludo and Clary venture out into the wild. The forest patches make very delicate episodes that do not harm Ludo. His mind just makes the forest even more heavenly and hypnotic. They now go to a flower field of vibrant colors, Ludo was expecting this to be the one to give him excessive amounts of emotions, and even bids Clary goodbye. Even so, he does start to

feel sick in his stomach, enduring a feeling of disgust while seeing the flowers. He cries noisily, the loudest he has ever been, and does not stop getting the feeling of throwing up in disgust.

They go back to the car, hopeless, the two have nothing to say. Ludo seats at the back of the car, while Clary buys them foods. Ludo already feels hopeless and does not seem to want to end his quest. He thinks that his journey has finally revealed itself to lack common sense and judgment, it is stupid and silly. Ludo grabs a romance-comedy novel and reads it. A part of the book reflects his sad encounter in the flower field, making him giggle, which makes his sorrows die out for a little. His laughs gradually put him to sleep, where his hallucinations take him to sweet dreams.

Ludo wakes up at night, and Clary tells him that they are back at Cordillera, to finish his list of destinations. Meeting them is a group of Indigenous People that so heartedly accept them into their community. With a large bonfire, the group perform cultural dances with Ludo and Clary and enjoy warm traditional cuisine in the cold night. Ludo did not have any episodes from the dances or the food, but while listening to the stories of the group elders, and staring at the bonfire, Ludo falls into another trance. He sees himself in the position of displaced Indigenous People, sees their struggles- military battalions closing in, shutting down schools, rounding up men, and harassing women. Ludo remembers his father's principles in the arts and empathizes with the people.

On their way home to Baguio, Ludo asks Clary to drive straight to La Union, telling her that he wants to see the beach. Ludo wakes up at dawn from a dream of nothing but complete darkness. From the car, Ludo sees Clary sitting on a blanket on the shoreline. It is plain to see that the sun is about to rise, he approaches her. Ludo puts his head on Clary's shoulder, there is nothing but the silence of the night. Clary surprises Ludo with a collection of all the clips she secretly took of him while they were on a trip. Ludo watches it and starts to feel every single emotion all at the same time: fear, sadness, disgust, happiness, surprise, anger. The montage Clary created is so flawlessly compiled that Ludo could not say a word, but his frozen body, his eyes, and moving face says it all. The video ends, and Ludo stops reacting, he shows a visage lacking any expression. Ludo slowly lays his head on Clary's lap, stares



through her eyes, and gets himself in a trance seeing the beauty inside Clary. This beauty starts to grow from the inside, spreading all over Clary's body. It is as if Ludo was watching a live performance. Clary shapeshifts into a glowing human angel of colors likened to the pigments of nature. Clary is a work of art, a complex of all art disciplines combined. And right as they are about to kiss, her Red Macaw wings spread wide open. Right then and there, Ludo's heart stopped. All this time, Ludo has been looking for someone to fill in his yearning for his father's love. All this time, the most beautiful work of art, and the most artistic way of dying have been with him from the get-go.

Clary makes a biographical film of their love story with transitions that were taken from her collection of their actual video clips, which she calls **Daffodils on a Hearse**, making them into beautifully woven montage clips. The movie is a paradox between daffodils, a flower of rebirth and life, also reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh, and a hearse, an emblem of death and mourning.

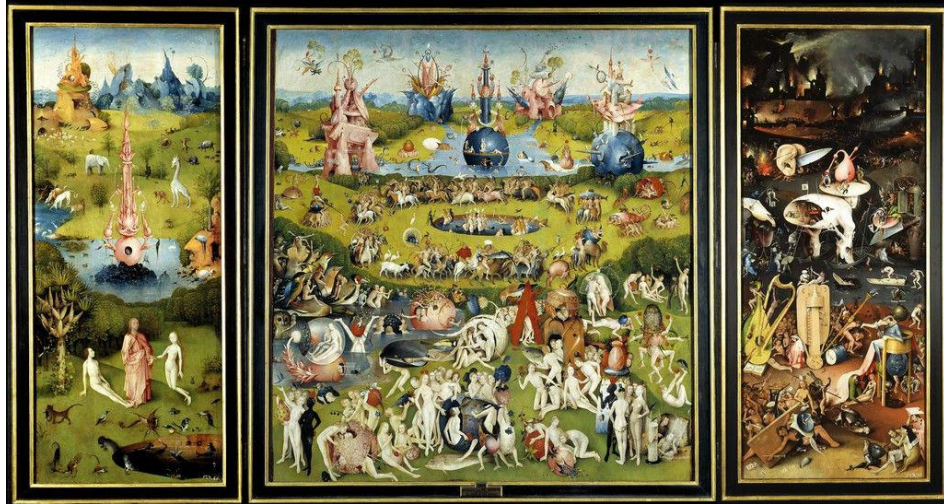
**Daffodils on a Hearse** has become a hit in the film industry, and one of the arts' greatest masterpieces throughout world history. Changing the idea of death, making it an object of beauty. If truth be told, the movie did not make death beautiful, but only unmasked the breathing seed stone in a rotting peach. Death has never been perceived the same way again.

End.

### ***Kundiman ni Abdon***

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[Pennygentieu]. (2018, March 31). Artists of Toledo: Toledo's art history and history making. Retrieved from:

<http://artistsoftoledo.com/2018/03/31/william-machens-stations-cross/>

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