

Ang Tunay Kong Kaibigan (Revised storyline Oct 5, 2020)

by Joy L. Buensalido

Opening scene is an outdoor garden where Mark, 25 years old, is strumming his guitar while watching how Andrea, 55 years old, is leading a meeting with a group of rowdy children whose attention Andrea is trying to call. She is assisted by a teacher who tries to make the kids focus on her. The children are special. They're all autistic kids.

Mark's music and memory brings him back to New York, 20 years ago when he himself was about the same age as these children. When he himself was an autistic child.

Flashback: His mother, Rosanna is tearfully clutching him, a five year old kid, while angrily shouting at her husband to stay away from them. He is about to leave them for another woman and even it hurts her, she vows to Mark that she would never leave him and they will be better off without his father.

Rosanna picks up the pieces of her life when she decides to do well at her job as an analyst in a big investment firm. She meets Andrea at a Filipino fundraising event where Andrea, a leader in the NY protest movement, was the guest speaker trying to persuade the Filipino community to contribute to their cause. After they were introduced and spoke about common friends, they realized that they had met briefly during college when they were both student leaders from different Catholic universities.

Rosanna and Andrea slowly became friends because they found many things in common. They were both outstanding students in college, they shared the same passion for books, the arts, and their ideology, and now they were both immigrants who had both been recently divorced from their husbands. Physically, they were very different: Rosanna was attractive, fashionable and outgoing, while Andrea was simple, did not care what she wore or looked like, but always spoke intelligently, softly and with purpose.

While Andrea was the more serious one, Rosanna had the tendency to be carefree, fun-seeking and adventurous. Rosanna would invite Andrea to visit unusual places in the city, to try new restaurants, eating Greek, Turkish or even African food and sometimes to smoke pot. Andrea was stiff, a bit conservative but she would often give in to Rosanna's whims because she did enjoy doing novel things especially when they were with Mark, whom she had taken a special fondness for. Andrea did not have a happy childhood. She had always been a loner since her mother had given her up to live with her spinster aunt who raised her to love music, books, and the Church where they would always go. So every time Rosanna would introduce a new idea to her, she would initially refuse but because Rosanna learned how to persuade her in various ways, she would agree.

But Mark grew to be the major bond of the two women. Andrea showed extreme patience on occasions when the boy would throw tantrums, or refuse to eat or get into trouble. It was Andrea who offered to accompany him to his doctor appointments. Whenever Rosanna needed to go some official function, she would leave Mark with Andrea who considered it a privilege to be with Mark because she felt for him, as a disadvantaged child and someone who needed extra care and attention.

One late evening, after the three of them had come from a friend's party, they went home to Rosanna's place first to tuck Mark into bed (it was Andrea who insisted she do this) and after that, they had a few more drinks and Rosanna insisted on lighting a few sticks of

pot. When both were relaxed and Andrea said she should head home, Rosanna stopped her, hugged her and then asked her to sit back down as she had something to say. Then she blurted it out: " Sorry Andrea but I can no longer hold my feelings back. You're my best friend and I'm beyond grateful for everything you're doing for me and Mark. I love you Andrea. I think I've loved you from that first moment we met and now my heart is bursting! I want our relationship to go deeper. "Best friends "is no longer enough. I want us to be lovers! Total lovers, you know? Can you understand that? " And then she kissed her passionately.

Andrea was shocked but she didn't pull away although she found it awkward. Is this really happening? This beautiful woman - her only close friend who claims to be her best friend is now proposing something more? She never thought of herself as gay or as a lesbian. She grew up Catholic, she had always been guarded because of her conservative upbringing. After a few moments, she hastily said thank you and left for home.

The following weeks were tense but Andrea continued with her duties of picking up Mark and bringing him to school while she gave it a lot of thought. Instances of Rosanna being sweet and excessively touchy to her came to her mind and now she understood why. Did she like it? Yes. What will her friends and her family say? Will it affect her reputation as an activist/leader? Her answer: I don't care because I love Rosanna too and I have these strange new feelings inside me and I should listen! It's time to use my emotions instead of my head.

Andrea eventually embraced her new relationship with Rosanna and found that the world could accept anything. They moved in together, became like a family and they continued their community involvement and dreams together. Andrea's closeness to Mark became even stronger to a point that many times she and Rosanna would argue over what was best for him. Andrea insisted that Mark can be taught music so she found a music teacher to teach him how to play the guitar. And Andrea's decision always won because she was used to having the last and final word.

On their tenth year, Rosanna started to get restless and would often leave the house for hours for meetings or other excuses. Andrea became suspicious so she followed her one day and saw her meeting a man in a coffee shop. When Rosanna came home, she confronted her and asked who the man was. Rosanna admitted that she had fallen for this younger man, her co-worker, who had showered her with attention and affection until it led to an affair which she was not about to give up. When asked why, she reasoned: " I've discovered once more how it feels when a real man loves you. He made me feel like a woman again. You and I have become just like sisters! And you seem to care more for Mark now. The excitement has disappeared. Don't get me wrong. I still love you, but I need something new.. I'm so sorry.."

Andrea was stunned and could not believe it. After she had turned her world upside down and given Rosanna not only her heart but her entire being, how could she betray her? What happened to the best friend that she thought she had? This was just too painful. But wasn't she used to pain, loneliness and being alone? She had always been a strong person so she must use her head again. Forget Rosanna. Forget that it ever happened. She will miss Mark but he's already 16 years old, working part time as a greeter at a fastfood chain. He'll be fine. But I can never forgive Rosanna.

Andrea left their home, refocused on her work at the NGO, and pretended that she didn't care. She even ignored some attempts by Rosanna to call and apologize. Andrea who had

not called her mom in the Philippines for years now decided to confess everything that had happened to her and to announce that she was now thinking of coming home for good. To retire in the Philippines. Her mother was overjoyed but when she heard the name of Rosanna, it sounded too familiar. Her last name was the same as the name of her husband's mistress with whom he had a daughter one year younger than Andrea.(Could it be possible that Rosanna was her husband's daughter and therefore Andrea's half sister? This is a secret that she may or may not reveal to Andrea.)

After several months of not seeing or hearing from Rosanna, Andrea got a call that Rosanna had passed away due to terminal cancer. Rosanna must have known about it but did not get to tell Andrea. She was devastated. For the first time in a long long time, she cried and allowed her tears to flow. It was a mixture of frustration, anger, loneliness .

But what about Mark? Who will take care of him? She fled to see Mark and swiftly decided: She will adopt him legally. She used her legal contacts to apply for his adoption and they both came home to the Philippines where she built this Center For Autistic Children.

Mark who witnessed how Andrea and Rosanna cared for each other and for him until he became almost normal is now living in a new environment with his adoptive mother and his extended family. Mark who has a simple mind, a caring heart, and genuine feelings for others is not affected by any problems in the world. He has his guitar, his music, and so much love.

Mark is Andrea's "Tunay na Kaibigan".

(The guitar music by Mark continues until the end. This time there will be lyrics to be sung with the music.)

THE END