Ang  Tunay Kong  Kaibigan  ( A Storyline for Ricky Lee Batch 25)

by Joy L. Buensalido

Si Norma ay isang successful head ng isang NGO na tunutulong sa mga may sakit na HIV or AIDS.  Matulungin siya  sa mga taong disadvantaged o nangangailangan ng attention o pagkalinga. Pero hirap siyang makipag kaibigan.

Her childhood history:

Pangalawang anak si Norma ng kanyang ina.  Lalaki ang panganay na sinundan niya after fourteen months. Wala pang isang taon ay ibinigay na siya ng kanyang magulang sa Ate ng kanyang Mama:  single, matandang dalaga, isang strict music teacher na nagtuturo ng piano. Ang tawag niya dito ay Ninang. Si Ninang ang nagpalaki sa kanya sa malaking ancestral home ng kanyang lola. Tatlo lang silang nakatira doon kasama ng mga katulong.

Samantala, ang Mama niya ay sunod-sunod na nanganak pagkatapos niya: halos every year  kaya nagkaroon siya ng 4  brothers, 3 sisters , so kasama siya at ang kuya niya - siyam  silang lahat  magkakapatid.

Ang walong kapatid ni Norma as pinalaki lahat ng kanyang mga magulang; wala nang ipinamigay kagaya niya kaya lumaki siyang malayo sa mga kapatid. Nagtataka siya nung umpisa pa lang kung bakit siya ang bukod-tanging ibinigay sa Tita/Ninang niya. May kaya naman sila so hindi economic ang dahilan.

Lalong may kaya ang Ninang niya pero siya ay mahigpit at mabait naman. Nagsisimba araw araw at nagrorosaryo pag gabi .Hindi malambing ang Ninang niya pero kumpleto siya sa mga laruan. Binilhan  siya ng bisikleta na ginamit niya para gumala gala siya sa paligid ng bayan nila. At gitara  dahil na-interest din siya sa musika habang nakikinig siya sa piano lessons na binibigay ng Ninang niya sa ibang bata,  pero hindi siya natutong mabuti sa piano dahil mas gusto niya ang gitara. Ang gitara ang naging palagi niyang kasama sa pagiisa.

Ipinasok siya sa exclusive girls' Catholic school.  Hindi siya masyadong pinapansin ng mga classmates niya dahil ang typical beauty ng panahong iyon ay mga mestisa at mapuputing babae. Si Norma ay maitim, medyo mabilog, at hindi typical ang kanyang itsura.  In fact, she was known for her messy hair which she did not use to comb or sometimes, her Ninang would just cut her hair really short para hindi mahirap suklayin.

Dahil dito, palaging mag isa si Norma at naging loner na siya and she turned to books for company. Her journey with books gave her deeper insights into life and slowly turned her into an intellectual. And she never had any close friends but she got good grades and managed to graduate among the top 20 of her class in high school.

When she went to college in the same school, she was drawn to a few non-conventional  and intellectual characters who became that period's activists and anti-establishment students.

Parang nakakita si Norma ng "safe place" at mga tamang  kasama niya na pareho niyang magisip.  Norma was naturally drawn to join these groups where she became actively involved. But they were never considered close friends.

Dito niya nakilala ang isang mayumi, matalino at magandang babae na graduate din ng isa pang malaking exclusive girls' college. Si Rosanna. Naging magkaibigan sila pero hanggang discussion groups at meetings lang sila nagkikita kaya hindi lumalim ang kanilang pagkakakilala sa isa't isa.

Nagiiba na ang situasyon sa Pilipinas at umiinit na ang paghahanap ng pamahalaan sa mga political activists na ang label nila ay Communists.  Ang balita ay mag de-declare daw ng Martial Law. Dahil ang ama ni Norma ay nagtatrabaho sa gobyerno, minabuti niyang ipadala na si Norma muna sa America para hindi siya mahuli at makulong.

Two months after Norma left reluctantly, Martial law was declared at nakulong nga ang mga lider ng kilusan .

 Middle:  (Sa America)

Pagdating sa New York, nagtrabaho muna si Norma sa isang art museum dahil sa magandang kaalaman niya tungkol  sa Art galing sa mga librong nabasa niya. Unti unti ay nacontact na naman siya ng mga kasama niya sa movement at muli siyang nag join sa mga protest action sa NY.  Unti unting tumaas ang posisyon si Norma sa kilusan dahil mahusay siyang, mag isip, mag strategize at maghawak ng tao.

Sa isang meeting, nagulat na lang siya na may bagong member na sumali at ipinakilala sa kanya: ito'y walang iba kundi si Rosanna..

Nagpunta na rin pala si Rosanna sa America dahil nagpakasal na sila ng Pinoy na boyfriend nito na US citizen kaya sumama siya para mag migrate sa US.  Masaya si Norma at Rosanna nung muli silang magkasama at inalala nila ang kanilang pagkikita sa Pilipinas.

Dito tumubo at lumago ang pagkakaibigan nila. Habang nakikilala ni Rosanna si Norma ay lalo siyang humanga sa talino at galing nito. Si Norma naman ay na-in love sa isang kasama nilang Puti sa kilusan at sila naman ang nagpakasal pero hindi sila nagkaanak.

Si Rosanna ay nagkaanak ng isang autistic na lalaki - si Mark.

Dahil matalino at maganda si Rosanna, nakakuha siya ng magandang trabaho sa isang big investment firm as an investment analyst. Gumanda ang buhay niya pero  tuloy pa rin sila ni Norma sa pakikibaka  at pag laban sa mga nangyayari sa Pilipinas.

Lumipat na rin ng trabaho si Norma. Kinuha siya ng isang Agency for Immigration Rights at tuloy tuloy na rin ang pagtulong niya sa mga naaapi at mga minority groups dahil yun ang strength at passion niya.

Hindi naging successful ang marriage ni Norma sa asawa nyang puti kaya nag divorce sila. Tumigil na rin siya ng pagtawag or pagkumusta niya sa  kanyang pamilya sa Pilipinas dahil ang pakiramdam niya ay hindi naman nila siya na mi miss.

Si Rosanna naman ay tumaas na rin ang puesto sa investment  bank pero naghiwalay na rin sila ng asawa niya na na "insecure" sa talino niya at sa taas ng suweldo.  Naiwan sa kanya ang anak nilang autistic - si Mark na lumalaking mabuting bata kahit na siya ay special.

Lalong naging close ang dalawang babae dahil pareho silang hiwalay, pareho silang matalino, at pareho sila ng paninindigan sa buhay.  It was just like any close and long friendship between two like-minded women.

And then it happened. In one of their long, deep intimate conversations, Rosanna confessed to Norma her long hidden love and admiration for Norma. It went beyond admiration and friendship now, she said. It had become a consuming love brought about by how she had witnessed Norma's passion for her work, her nationalism, and most of all, her soft side in caring for her son Mark. She didn't only want to be friends. She wanted a total relationship with Norma.

Norma was shocked because she who never had friends since she was young, had never expected that anyone would ever be attracted to her, much less this gentle, soft spoken and very intelligent woman who had known her for many years. She had never thought of herself as gay or as a lesbian. Her Catholic upbringing and her education  were all against it.

But her intellect  and her inner emotions worked it out and she realised this was what was lacking in her life. For someone to want her so badly and for her to accept these new feelings. Admittedly, it was very flattering to be desired like this and she discovered entirely new and stronger feelings she had never felt before. For the first time, she understood what it was to be loved totally for who you are, and she liked it that she could respond and give back the same passion. It awakened something deep inside her and she unleashed her emotions on her new love object.

Their relationship flourished for several years and they bought a house together as she devotedly also took over the parenting of Mark and fiercely protected and cared for her new family the way a head of the family would.

Until one day when she discovered that Rosanna had changed.  She had fallen for a co-worker at her work place: a younger but married man who had paid her extra attention and who eventually became her lover.

Rosanna tearfully admitted to Norma her affair when she was confronted ; her reason was: she missed having a heterosexual relationship. She missed having a man. She liked the excitement.

Norma was completely devastated. This was something she was not prepared to face at this point in her life. She had a great career, she was now a respected community leader, and her advocacy work was at its peak. But none of it  could mask or hide  this great and deep pain that struck not only at her heart and gut, but reminded her  once again that maybe it was not possible for someone  or anyone to love her . She had been loyal to this one love but she was completely disappointed. There was no such thing as real friendship.

ENDING:

 Norma musters all her energy to go back  to her childhood strength and creates a personal shield against what she had always been subjected to. She was used to being rejected, living alone with no real love, no family  and having no close friends. Even if she had now opened her heart to love in reckless abandon,   she decided to refocus her emotions and bring them  back to her community work.

After a few months, a common friend brought her the news: Rosanna had passed away due to a terminal disease she must have known but chose not to tell Norma.

Pained and almost repentant,  Norma decides to adopt Mark legally and brings him home with her.  This is her way of transferring her lost and displaced love to someone who's connected to Rosanna. This was her redemption.

Mark who only had happy memories of both women accepts his single parent, his Godmother (Ninang) and now works with her in her advocacy work.  It is  Mark who will recall the story of his life and how he ended up where he is. He will recall the friendship of these two women who were the greatest influence on him.  The simple, affectionate and unaffected Mark is the one remaining friend who will stick with Norma.

Siya ang tunay na kaibigan.