



BRUSHES OF HOPE

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WORLD LITERATURE

To be able to capture beauty and freeze it for all eternity; that was something worthwhile.

-Master of the Game
By Sidney Sheldon, 1982

Colors. Hues. The sticky paint. The bare hands that drew the Canvas of Society. What do I know? I'm just a student who knew nothing about living. I'm just someone who keeps on painting my own life with colors I like. Someone who knew, that I, myself has more money for my allowance than the parents of those poor children wandering the streets. I had been living with prosperity, and always had the choice whether I would eat or not. I choose my own colors, my own scenes I want to paint. I knew that I have a secured future, and that I have everything I need in life.

Am I just like Nene? Am I living, or just barely existing? Nene is the picture of countless people who day by day, struggles to live. She is a picture of every one of us. We are not living. We exist in this world for the mere fact of existing. We are here to eat, sleep, work, and do the cycle as if we are born for it. We live life as a daily routine, a routine of survival. But when can we say that we have lived? Can I say that I have lived if I already watched the movie of the month? Have I lived when my parents already bought me a car? Or am I living as me and my friends spend our parents' money for worthless shits? No. I am alive, but I am dead. I am breathing but I haven't lived. Do I even give life to others?

Joyce, is not just the face of young mothers, but the face of the society who had chosen to give life rather than destroy it. Looking more keenly, it may have been a scar to her life to bear a child at an early age. But if you are to see, she chose to let the baby live. The situation could have brought her to decide not to keep the baby. Having small amount of money, risking her future and education, it might have been a mistake that led her to that, but it takes courage and bravery to let the baby live. Some people that could have been in the situation would choose not to. And yet, she had been brave enough to face it. Am I brave enough to face life? What choices could have I made if I where her?

What storms have hit my life? Tinay, how helpless could she be if I would call myself helpless? Being the face of the weak, the face of us those who are not on the winning side. The image of being helpless, of having no choice but to cry. The picture of stormed life. Sometimes, I find myself staring at nothing. On a state where nobody could talk to me, and where I can't speak of anything. What was I thinking? I'm thinking how I had been. How did I overcome what I had overcome? How did I passed life storms? It may appear simple, but it's not. Going into fights which you, yourself was the enemy. What about the storms I have given to others?

Itok Garganera. He is the representation of Nature vs. Nurture. Someone who is as clean and white when first came to the world, but as the environment change him, as the society colors him with dark gray palette, what could I do? What if he could be the face of those criminals one day? What if he turned and grew to be someone meant inside a jail? That is the irony of life. What a waste. A terrible waste he could be. Someone who has the talent to do, the strength to kill and the mind to think. How can you put everything of that to trash? He should be lead to the right road before it's too late. Or are we Itok Garganera? Could we be someone that would stab a dagger on someone's chest in the future?

Emong. The face of the innocents. The face of the society who don't have anything but still have something to give. The representation of those who are ready to share what they have even how little it was. These people are endangered. Only a few bears a face Emong has. The face of friendliness, the face that is ready to help and give. The innocence and mind which thinks about others. How about me? When was the last time I thought about others? When did I take the initiative of asking what I can give and do?

How can life be this unfair? Onse. Whose name was damaged and judged by what his mother has done. A face who carries and bears the name of his parents. A mother who had no choice, and a father who took all the choices his mother could have. A child who became a laughing stock because of something he never did. How many are judged just because they happened to be a fruit of what seems evil to others? How many are those mistreated by fortune, to be born carrying someone else's name? Sometimes we are tired and ashamed of it, but what can we do? For what has been implanted on those criticizing eyes is that a bad tree bears a bad fruit. In what way am I like him?

Hunger. Fear. It was all painted on Buknoy's face. The face of those children who are beaten to death by those irresponsible parents who let their children find a living for them. The afraid faces who prays every night not to get beaten again. Those who wishes to know where to find food, and when they would never be famished again. We are full. A lot has the most decent way of living, with eating tables filled with foods that in the eyes of someone like Buknoy could be feast. We have a lot, even more than what we need. I may be full, I have the choice of how many times I want to eat a day, but is my inner life full too? How can I give nutrition to my soul?

Risking your life to live. The irony in that. As Michael risks his life to live, is he even trying to live? How come that you have to risk something you want to attain? We have no choice but to do that. We stink. We smell because all we do is dig up to the sea of garbage. No matter how expensive our perfumes are, no matter how white is the shirt we are wearing, we are all dirty. We are all the same face as Michael, and we do dirty stuffs to keep us alive. It may not always be literal, but in every wrong deed we are doing to gain what we have, to gain the life we need to live, we are more than what dirty is. We hold the same sickle that is ready to cut everything that would hinder the way. Have I done anything to make the society smell good? Or do I make it smell even worse?

There was a point in our life where there was no one we can lean on to. Like Dodoy, every time the water rises near their house, all he can do is to sigh in fear. Because there is nothing strong he can hold on to, and he knew that he may not be able to find anything strong to lean on to. We may find ourselves deep down under that bridge, afraid for the water to go up and drown us all. We try to find something we can hold to, and sometimes, we just find ourselves holding our own hands, and all we can do is close our eyes and sigh. Where do I hold on to?

Jun and Roselle, the face of a happy family who lacks in basic needs. The face of uncertainty. That in any moment, we could lose the little things we have. The face of unplanned future, unknown tomorrow, and things we aren't even sure of. Of us who lives day by day not knowing whether we have tomorrow ahead of us. Not having any sure idea where we would be, or who we would wind up. Am I living on my own strength? Or because of His infinite goodness and mercy?

Sudan. The reason that sometimes, I asked if God can even hear all our prayers. The face of tragedy, befall and sadness. How is it that you are alive, and someone was waiting for you to die? That you struggle to live, but someone was waiting for you to give up? How can someone be born to die, to suffer, to just surrender? How can life be so unfair, that as they are dying there, someone at the other face of the globe was swimming in the pool of prosperity? If there is a word for poorest of the poorest, where would I be?

Day by day, realizations crossed my mind. I may not have any colors and brush to draw my own canvas, but I have my pen and my imagination. I write things, and these things I am thinking is always bringing me to realizations of how come life is this unfair.

There was a time that I went to a church with my best friend after having ourselves full. We still have left overs on our bags, which we tend to eat during the ride back home. As we enter the compound of the church, my peripheral vision caught a sight of the most miserable sight I could see in front of the house of God. There was a girl, scavenging foods from the garbage dump. I stopped walking and my best friend looked back at me. She saw where I was looking, and knew what I was thinking. She gave me an approving look as I reached for the food in my bag. I gave the food to the young girl, who looked at me with those innocent eyes. What am I when I was at that age? I may be wearing a brand new pair of shoes on my pink dress, holding a balloon on my hand. But how is it that that girl don't happen to share the fortune I have? I saw her went to the back of garbage dump, where there was a younger girl waiting for her. She gave her the food, and hungrily shared what was left on us. Then I thought, have I ever shared a food with my own sister? Just as then, I told my best friend to drop by a store before we go home, for I need to buy something for my siblings. And that is when I uttered thanks to God, for giving me everything I need, and asked for those kids to have what He has given me.

Then I recalled the questions I knew I have to ask to myself. Not because it is required in some subject I am taking to pass my course, but because I knew I have to find the answers for the sake of knowing myself more. Do I even give life to others? At some point in my life, I remember being a high school student. The most emotional and crucial stage of my life. It is where my life is upside down. I take everyone who's not on my side as an enemy, and treat my friends as siblings. This is where I

remember, I spend most of my times comforting and helping them. Being a person they can lean on to when they need me. I let them live their lives within me. And that is the least a person can do for their friends.

Am I brave enough to face life? What choices could have I made if I were Joyce? I still ask myself about that. Being the bread winner of the family, it would worsen the situation if I was there. What would I do? Would I keep the baby, or would I choose to kill that poor innocent life so that I can continue living my own? Then I imagined my life eighteen years ago. The very first time the world heard my cry. Would I not let the world to hear my baby's cry too? Then I realized, that in the very first place, I would not let myself be in the situation. I have parents who cared so much for me, siblings who loved me a lot, friends who cherished me, and myself whom I never want to disappoint. And I knew, that I would not do anything to lead me to that situation, and if I will be there, it's my fault, not the baby's.

What about the storms I have given to others? What about the pain I have brought to other people? I may be someone that would easily get to someone's nerve. I can easily annoy people when I want to, and I don't know if they had been keeping it to themselves. When I realize it, I feel so angry at me, to the point where I almost hate myself for doing things like that. I just kept hoping that up until now, no one is wishing me dead. And even though I knew in certainty that almost every day, someone inside the same room, same class of mine, had been wishing me dead, I just pray that they would forgive me for things I have done unknowingly that had unknowingly stepped them.

Could I be someone that would stab a dagger on someone's chest in the future? A critical question I have to ask myself a lot of times. Am I just a burden in the society? Someone raised to do the bad things in the future? I can say that I am capable of doing things, things that could be used in a bad deed. But as they say, with every power, comes great responsibility, and this power I have should be used in a good way. I am still hoping that I would not be in the position to hold a dagger, and that I would have my life in the future the other way around.

When was the last time I thought about others? When did I take the initiative of asking what I can give and do? Every day, I find myself asking people of what I can give or do. It could be my family, my friends, classmates, or even acquaintances that I know. I am a person who is helpful innate. The characteristic I don't know whether I would thank for or hate about me. There was this time that I was bullied emotionally, inside the very classroom I had been for four years. I had been the most hated of this group, and been the topic of their judgmental conversations for a long time. My friends kept on saying that one day, they will need my help, and I should not be there for anyone of them. But when that day arrived, I just found myself helping them. I was like feeding the snakes that had bit me, and almost killed me. It just happened that every time I know that I can help, I would reach out to give it no matter how hard it was, or who the person involved was. My parents hated me for helping those who had been stabbing me behind, and there is nothing I can do, for that is who I am. When is the last time I thought about others? Just few minutes ago.

In what way am I like Onse? A lot. Being a daughter of a teacher, my mother and a good man, my father, I was raised to act pleasingly to everyone. Every move I will make should not cause any bad reputation to them. I grew up watching my every move, since I knew that any slight slip could cause me trouble. I can't be seen anywhere doing anything wrong. It feels like they have eyes everywhere I would go. I grew up hearing the words *"Ay ano nalang ba ang sasabihin ng makakakita sayo? Yan?! Yang anak ni Teacher Rhea blah blah blah."* I grew up being afraid of what people would think. I grew up doing decisions that would favor them and not what would make me happy. I based my life to their standards, and be the daughter every parent would wish they had. I have never tasted alcohol, I never had any relationships, or failing grades. I had been a daughter every parent would be proud. I studied what I don't want, and disregarded my passion for writing to take the course I don't like. I excelled at it and became someone they could be proud of. That is because I am carrying my parents' name. And I was born not to destroy that.

How can I give nutrition to my soul? Was helping others enough? Was going to church every Sunday enough? I kept on asking myself. How. When everything that is right is difficult, and everything wrong is much easier? As I remember the scene in front of the church, I am full that day, literally, I entered the church and prayed, spiritually, and helped those kids, and I felt that my soul received the nourishment it needed. And for a while, I can call my inner life nourished.

Have I done anything to make the society smell good? Or do I make it smell even worse? I am a person that finds breaking the rules without being caught fun. I enjoy doing stuffs that could lead me to small punishments and fines, and treating rules as joke. But I can say to myself that when I know that a rule is too right to be disobeyed, I would be the very first person to follow it. I am, in my better side, a good citizen of the country I live. I may be a burden sometimes, but I know when a joke is not funny anymore.

Where do I hold on to? When the water of problem rises in my life, where do I hold to? I hold on to God, that I know He will never ever forget me. I honestly believed that I had God on my side since I was a child. I was never a religious person. I don't go to church regularly, I don't pray regularly, but I always talk to God, as if He was a comrade. I was talking to Him every day as if I am talking to someone so close to me. My family was close, but we don't go to church together regularly, but when we did, sometimes four to five times a year, we never fail to be complete. I even find talking religiously over acting. I mean, no offense meant, but can't people like us talk to God as if He was our best friend? Because that is how I do things my way, and I never felt God left me behind.

Am I living on my own strength? Or because of His infinite goodness and mercy? I am living because He has given me strength, through His infinite goodness and mercy. I am living here, with more than enough I could ask. I had a happy family, not perfect but perfectly okay, I have friends that are too epic to fail, I have a healthy body though I don't look like it, I have good grades, great mind that can think of things that are sometimes beyond imaginary. I am full of hopes and beliefs that my future will be great, as long as He stays by my side. And I live the way He wants me to.

If there is a word for poorest of the poorest, where would I be? I am not rich. That was what I knew before I saw the photo of Sudan. I don't have enough money to go and buy things I like, I don't have enough money to do things my own way. I always thought that why I can't do all I want, just because I don't have enough money? But after I saw the photo, "I am rich" is what I had muttered. I have all the wealth I could have, and he seemed to don't even attain even the 0.01% of what I have. Life is unfair. I was born with a clean, soft cloth covering my body, while some are born to the cold and dirt of the earth. I eat at a table that was filled with foods I need, while some doesn't have even a small table to sit at. Some even die without seeing a face of a doctor. How rich I am compared to them?

The most striking part that hit me is the thought of life's fairness. Life was never fair. Life has been a game we have to play. We would enter the game and have all the resources we could have, only that we need to find a way to attain it. Some people had it knock on their door, others die running after it. Others had enough, others have more than life could offer. And then the game would begin, and you don't know whether you will lose or win. You may be living this moment, but someone could cast a dagger at your chest, while someone behind you was waiting for you to die. Some could just lose hope and wait until the game is over, for they have no other choice but to do so. But me, I will never give up on the games of life. One day, I'll show the world that things could turn the other way around. I may not be able to do great acts to be remembered, but I could do small things that are worth remembering. I will not be unfair as long as I can, because I know, that someone out there could be suffering because of me. Life is too unfair. Life will never be fair. But as long as I breathe, I will try to make things work my way, and maybe, try to convince others to do the same. Life is a game, I will not just win it, and I will help others to do the same.

This is the painting I never want to freeze for eternity. The painting that if I would have the chance to change it, I would choose to repaint it again, with them on better lives than that. Life for them is too simple, too innocent. Will they grow old to where they are? Or will they stay the same? And this is what I want the society to do, to paint the changes to this canvas, using the brushes of hope.