

MANNY PACQUIAO SPEAKS TO A BUTTERFLY IN CALIFORNIA

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O, Butterfly, you are der apter all. At pers I don't see you, now I see you der. What you doing here outside Persian Deli? Da flowers here are far. Why you still fly dis time of today? Me, I'm jas chilling, you know? Well, I want to go out da hotel, away from da gym. I finish trehning anyway so no problem. When I see you landing in da metal pens of da park, I know a good day is here. Now I'm not feel bad to escape only few minutes. You know, I miss my kids so much. But don't git me wrong, I love here in California. Jas like my home General Santos, all da leaves are green and da sky is great.

If you ask why I'm here alone it's because I want to fresh my mind. Away from coach, from trehners, from HBO TV camera, from everyone who fighting to sleep in my hotel room wid me. You see my entorads? Where do you find eighteen or tweynti or tweynti-seben people palow jas one man for da whole day? Half of dem I don't know who really but all of dem are now friends of mine, you know? Ders a guy who cook me, wahs my clohds, clean my room. For dat others say we are crazy. But dey don't see my entorads is like shield of me.

They shield of me but I'm very smart today. Dey don't find me escape to da deli.

Butterfly, I hope it's okay wid you what I talk about. It's about my mader. It's about my mader olwis.

TWO MONTHS AGO, in da airplane back to Mindanao, I notice my entorads act strange. I know dey act strange because dey silent like young dogs apter fighting each other.

“What's da matter? Is der new actress linked to me again? One of my children drop out? Another report of me using steroid? My brader knockout in da fight?” I tell to dem loudly and take off my dark Oakley shades so dey see my eyes want honest answer.

One sitting next my seat, who earlier massage my legs, turn. Slowly his face give serious look. Very serious look like I telling him to jump out da airplane.

“It's Madam,” Jayke, Team Pacquaio chip-of-stap of da moment, say like he jas eat a chili. “She's not in da mansion. For three days.”

Apter he say it everyone in da team know he will not sleep in my room tonight.

I breathe long time. Pretend looking for island under giant clouds. My wife did not say to me dis, but I know she already know bepor we git in da plane. She sleeping in da other side and I don't want to wake up her.

We land in Davao International Airport. Pers thing I do is order one of my team to call my brader, who is also boxer like me. He konperm to us dat Mama is not home. She's not home por three days, my brader tell me in da cellphone. I give da phone back to Jayke.

The whole team don't go out of airport. I start to angry little bit, you know, but I cool my head. I remembering last time when I talk to Mama. She almost cry to me because she say I

making myself da parent and she da small child. She tell me dat she raise me well in da eyes of Lord God our Savior even if my maderpaking-shit-kagwang-inatay! pader leave us. But I only explain dat I am so sad when I hear what people say of her.

My wife come near me and I see to her pink face dat she know I know where really my mader is now. She know also I don't want to believe dat I know.

"I told you so," she say to me. Well she don't really say dat but I know she saying it to me inside her head.

Three big cars arrive in da airport to git us and I supposed to ride da black Pajero wid my wife. But when we go out I run to da green Mercedes Benz and say to Jayke, "Come wid me." Everyone of dem is shock like dey can't believe what I say. I say to my wife and others to drive home to General Santos. I say to dem I stay in Davao por a while. Dey protest me but still let me go. If dey don't let me go nobody will hear me talk por a long time. Quiet always like I am deh. Dey scared of dat because when I'm not happy it's impossible to win a fight.

Jayke palow me inside da Mercedes. Outside I see my wife tell me something but I cannot hear because of da window is close.

"You know where dat D.I. is living?" I ask Jayke for da address of Mama's Dance Instructor. "He's in Davao, right?"

Jayke look white in da face like I trying to uppercut him. He bounce-bounce his head to say he know where dat D.I. is living. So he say to our driver where to go.

You know, I heard bepor of dis D.I. Mama is seeing. I thought he jas teach her to dance tango, swing, boogie, cha-cha, rumba, salsa, all dat ballroom. He go to my house three times, dat lucky amaw. He's taller than me but his body is softer. I don't know if he's good dancer really because I don't watch dem practice in da

house. He's recommend of my auntie who meet him in a night club in Davao City.

We arrive to da place where dat D.I. is living and I surprise what I see. From da main road we track a very thin street dats make more thin because of fish vendors and parking trisikads. You know, da bikes dey put sidecar to make two or four or more passengers ride. Many people also go in and go out of da street dat it's easy to bump someone and kill him.

We take da street dats wet of black water like da ink from a squid. Da Mercedes go slow because it almost don't fit da street. On our sides I see da small houses build close to each ader. Dey all looks like made of cardboard and bamboo and nipa and garbage. Bepor when I still small I live in da same house like dis.

Jayke say to da driver to stop and da driver stop. Jayke looking me like he's sure. He don't look scared of me now. Actually he look barumbado and hard in da face like he's ready to beat someone wid me.

I stip out of da Mercedes and people don't know me. Dey stare to da Mercedes Benz looking out of place in dat place. Aside from people passing by, ders also people in prunt of sari-sari store besides anader small street. Da boys playing basketball in da gym to my back don't stop playing. Da people in prunt of sari-sari store playing baraha card games and also drink Tanduay rum. When dey finish looking at da Mercedes I see in deyr face dey suspect who I am. I go to dem and say, "Naa diri akong mama?" Is my mader here?

They complete quiet all da time like dey don't see me but dey look me. Dey are five of dem, one woman, four man. Da guys have no shirt and da woman smoking cigarette and blow smoke to her cards. Ten eyes look me but no words from deyr mouths. Like dey see angel. Reporters saying I am only man in my country, you know, who make peace for everyone. My fight

stop da trapik, criminals don't do dey krimen and da military and rebelde make ceasefire. Maybe I'm only one who can visit to Armed Forces of da Philippines, New People's Army camp, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and Abu Sayyaf and no firing will happen. (But maybe I don't go to Abu Sayyaf because I become most expensive ransom.) I bring peace because God is wid me always. Da meaning of Emmanuel, my name.

To dem I repeat again, "Naa diri akong mama?"

The woman maybe finally remember and put one to one together. She bounce-bounce her head and looking concern for me like I git lost.

"Yes, Manny. She is over there. The only house made of cement." Da woman stand up and point da small street beside a small grocery store.

When I leave I start hearing dem go crazy to my back. Like der is earthquake. Da boys stop basketball and run to da store. Jayke call da driver to help control da people who wanna palow me. You know, I am popular in my country but I still don't win in da election. Da pers time I run for congressman of General Santos I lose. Dey love me so much dey don't vote for me.

So I walk. To da small street. I stip on dirty ground dat smell like burn rubber. Dat smell I remember also when I'm still a boy.

I pass very thin kids who stop playing to look me and shout. Dey run to palow me even some of dem don't wear slipper in dey feet. I pass skeleton askal dogs dat bark to me. I pass more houses dat look like gonna destroy. I jump of a small kanal full of black water.

Finally I reach. Der I see, in da back of bayabas tree, da only house made of cement.

Butterfly, to be honest to you, I almost go back. My chest start to pain very hurting pain. And my stomach like burst. I only feel dat time when I'm still small boy and watch Papa punching Mama in da body one night dey fighting. I feel it again when da girl I have crush laughing to me apter I tell her I lab her. I was still working in da bakery dat time, deliver pan de sal and monay and pan de coco. I feel same pain when dey announce dat Erik Morales win apter our pers encounter in da ring. Dat time I cry to God. My chest is very tight to exploding. I almost stop boxing good for life. My soul is feel like a rug.

But like all those moment, I courage myself.

For my countrymen bepor. For myself now.

So I walk to da door dat is open actually and I see da TV showing apternoon lab story drama. Der two little girls watching da TV.

“Is der people here?” I ask da little girls.

I stip inside of da sala. Seeing picture frames on da wall and diplomas and face of Jesus Christ wid eyes dat don't stop seeing you. Not far of Jesus Christ is calendar of Angel Locsin wearing white two-piece. Apter da TV, der is a wood shelve of figurines and plates and teddy bears big and small. Apter da shelve is kitchen wid round table and gas stove and old refrigerator. I see two doors of two rooms.

Apter one of da girls shout, da D.I. git out of da door near da kitchen. He wear only sando and short pants. When he see me, his knees starting to shake. He know already dat he is very bad shot to me.

In dat moment my two hands itchy like one thousand ant is biting me. I can erase dat face from his head for jas one swing, you know? It's gonna be hurt. But I can do it easy.

Still I cool my head. I think him as opponent in a fight. Because, you know, I don't take lightly my opponent and always think he's a champion for dis fight and he's bigger than me, stronger, and I have to focus and concentrate da fight. I cool my head but my hands are fists.

Again I ask to him same question I ask to everybody, "Naa diri akong Mama?"

Tears go out now of D.I.'s eyes very fast and he drop on da plor like he's praying for me. Bay, Sir Manny, Idol, Pasaylu-a ko! His mouth open wide and twisted to ask my porgivness. He's howling now like I going to chop off his testikols. Da two little girls scared and run away.

"Naa diri akong Mama?" I ask to him again still sounding calm. I imagine to cage my fist inside my stomach. Twist it der so I don't injure him.

But he don't say. He keep saying me to porgiv him, porgiv him. Dis man is younger than me. Tweynti-payb, tweynti-seben years old. His nose is long. I notice his skin very clear and smooth.

I walk porward to pull him up, but da door explode and I stip back.

Mama fly out of da room like angry bat. Her face sharp and cutting me. I see da veins of her arms stick under her skin and run to her neck all da way to her head.

"Ma!" I shout to her.

Da D.I. move away and he watch us two, still crying when he watch.

“Go home!” Mama shout to me. “Go home, Manny!” She say like she commanding me out of da sugarcane field when I was small boy flying kite in da hot apternoon.

“Ma, let’s go home,” I say. “You don’t stay here.”

“Don’t porgit dis, Emmanuel!” Mama is screaming to me. “I am da mader. You are only my son. Don’t porgit dat. I am da mader.”

“You’re not shame of what you doing?” I ask to her. “People laugh wid you. You are embarrass in TV and radio and newspapers. Dey make you joke. In da mansion dey don’t respik you to your back. Is okay when dat happen to me. I take it. I take everything dats thrown me. Eben when I still small boy. You know dat. I’m build hard. Dats why I’m here por. But not you, Mama. I don’t want you like dis.”

“Why, you don’t want me happy?” Mama is crying now. “I jas want to happy, Manny. All my life I saper. Now is my enjoyment. I don’t care por da aders. I hab small time left in dis world.” Her voice sound scratch.

“But I give you everything now, Ma!” I fight myself to not cry. “I give you big house, nice clohds, cars, I bring you to ader country, Disney Land, Reno, Universal Studios. What more you want?”

D.I. is quiet now and sitting da floor. He look like he jas wake up from sleep.

“He make me happy,” Mama say to me. “Wid him I’m young olwis.”

I try convince her more, but I feel very tired already like I run up and down da mountain. My chip-ob-stap, Jayke, arrive in da house, he saying to me we should go or else more people will see us. He come inside and ask if I need helping to git Mama. Jayke’s polo shirt is wet and stick his body. He catch his breath.

I look to Mama for da last time. She quiet and waiting. I move near to her and try take her arm.

But she speak.

“Let me go, anak. Lib Mama alone.”

Now it sweep to me like a little typhoon in my heart. Da time when I leave Mama alone. I go to Manila to work, jas fourteen years of age, leaving Mama and my braders in Gen San. Da time when I enter boxing eben if she don't want. Da time she wait in da house por news of my fight. Da time she pray novena por me to win or jas to live anader day. She pray until her eyes are tired of tears and her mouth dry of whisper. Butterfly, it hit me like a rapid hook in da ear, Mama olwis let me go.

So I leave her der wid her dance partner. My body light and heavy both in one time, jas when I lose a beautiful fight.

DEY SAY, BUTTERFLY, I have big head now because people palowing me where I go. It's impossible for me to go to mall because a rumble will start and I can't buy anything. In my house everyday, ispisyal apter a big fight, ders a lot of people fall in line outside da gate. I give what I can give dem, but, you know, it's not enough.

My coach Freddie now is talking about Mayweather to Bob Arum again. Everybody talking about da fight of Mayweather. I wanna fight Mayweather but boxing is not jas fighting, you know? I mean, it's business also. Dey still negotiating, so I continue trehning here in Los Angeles.

Deyr camp want me to give blood bepor da fight start but I do not want to give my blood. Dey don't listen dat it's gonna affected my condition. Blood cannot go out of my body or I will weak. My punch lose speed. My feet can't dance good. Because dey want to prove I use steroid dats why dey iksamin

my blood bepor da fight. No way, men. I work hard for my body to solid like dis. Bepor I sleep I pray very hard for my healthy and stamina. I pray also my opponent is safe. But dats very long from now, Butterfly, you know? Who knows? Only God knows. What I know is dat you and me are like each other. If you don't believe, ask da greatest Muhammad Ali. Float like a butterfly and sing like a bee.

Apter what happen in Davao, I ask now dis question por myself. Butterfly, when is my countrymen let me go?

When I go home to mansion in General Santos, Jayke already tell everybody I don't wanna talk about Mama. My wife also don't say about it. I meet our kids, play wid dem until I tired. I go to youngest baby daughter's room, kiss her goodnight. Bepor we go to sleep my wife ask me if I'm okay. I say to her, "Babes, I'm fine. Let's go to sleep." I hug her very tight like if I don't she disappear in my side.

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