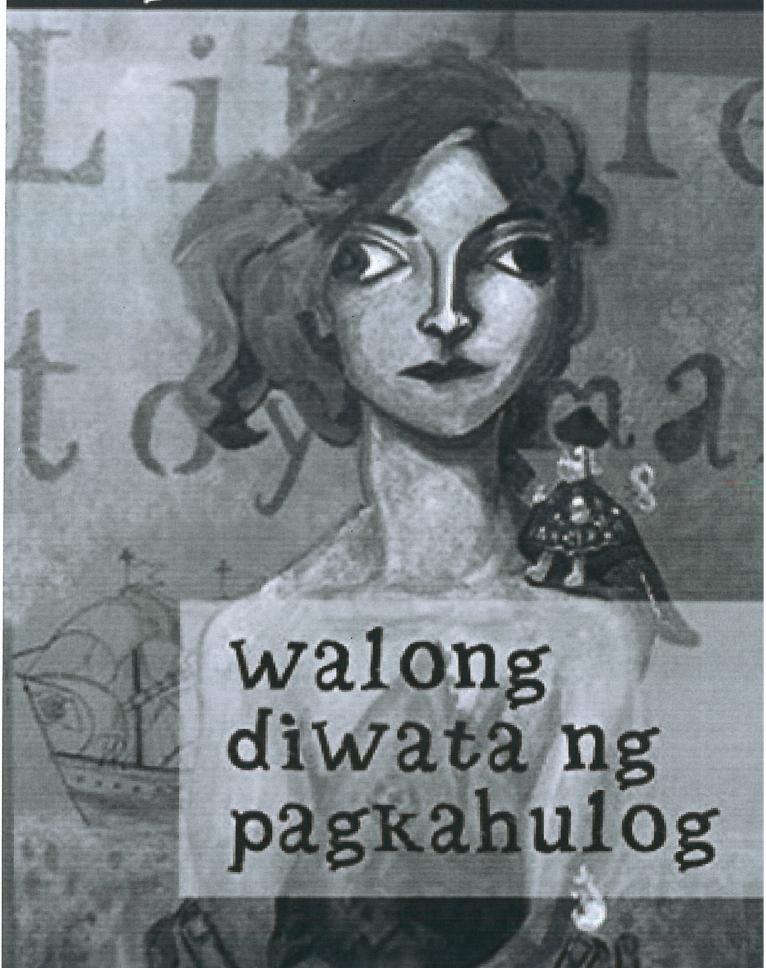
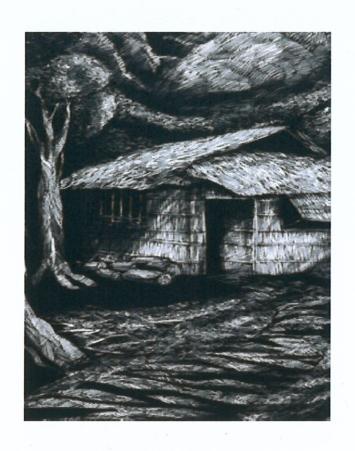
edgar calabia samar





2. Atisan

EACH PERSON HAS several worlds. You will create one when your hands cannot find anything to grasp. You will add to it when you feel it lacking, search for it when it is lost. When it is found, the cowards will do everything to es-

cape, while the brave ones will tear it apart so that new ones can be created.

When Daniel read that in a novel (even marking it with a yellow highlighter so that he can always go back to it) and then met the author in a book launch: Thus began his dream of writing a novel. And he wanted to write a novel, a novel at once even though he hadn't yet even published a short story anywhere. All of the short stories he'd written were nothing but pieces stuck at the beginning. He couldn't finish anything; he felt that he was really meant to write a novel. That whatever it is he wanted to say wouldn't be able to fit inside a mere short story.

"I'll create my own world," he'd always remind himself as he waited for the ride to school. He was in college then.

There were days when Daniel would be staring into space, waiting for the right words to come so that he could begin to say what he wanted to say. And even though these things were still to be written, even though they were as yet only in his mind, he was utterly convinced that they were meant to be written in the form of a novel, and not in a short story. He never thought about what he really meant when he said this, that these things were meant to be in a novel. Just that he had an abstract idea of the vastness, the grandness, whenever he thought of it. Like the view on top of a mountain, or from the edge of a cliff. Yes, he thought, it would be great. There were nights when he would fall asleep with a smile on his lips, thinking perhaps that he could embrace it, or that it would embrace him, whatever this great thing was.

He started buying and reading novels. He skipped the classics, the "Old Greats"; he thought that he wouldn't write like that. Those were old, obsolete. For him the classics were past its time, and it wasn't true that a classic always stood the test of time. Who would be reading Faulkner if it wasn't required in class? Or Dostoevsky? Especially in the Philippines. Or even Aguilar or Pineda, for example. It didn't matter that he did like Pineda's *The Gold in Makiling* when he read it for his class in

Philippine Literature.

I'm going to write something different, he said to himself. New. And his collection of books grew and grew, books he bought secondhand (most of the time), or from mainstream bookstores (sometimes), or from specialty bookstores (whenever he felt that it wouldn't be so bad to go hungry, or whenever there wasn't anything else he'd have to pay for or buy)—books by Garcia Marquez, Kundera, Murakami, Rushdie, Fuentes-all of them still alive. He couldn't care less what dead people had to say. There was never a shortage of titles in his reading list; he had so little time to read these novels in the middle of all the other things he had to do for his major-Psychology at first, before he shifted to Developmental Studies which he was able to stand for only a few terms, before he went to Communications, until he came to terms with himself and shifted finally into Creative Writing, which is taking him ages to graduate from, anyway. The books piled up. Time passed and still he couldn't write anything. All he knew was that he was going to write something immense, something different. The only problem was he didn't yet know what to write.

SOMETIMES DANIEL WOULD think that what he lacked was experience. Maybe he needed to go out, to observe, to mingle with other people, until he "felt the deep effect of the picture that mirrored the truth, a truth that although bitter and brutal had its own beauty and magic," as that Jesuit priest wrote, the Jesuit who after some time went on to study the crumbling of mountain soil, the cracking of fault lines, the different intensities of quakes, the raging of volcanoes and other cruelties of nature that cause people's minds to tremble. Last he heard, the Jesuit became an administrator in a university catering to rich students in Mindanao.

That was when Daniel thought of writing about the history of the place he grew up in. Atisan. At this time he had just read Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; he envied the author's Macondo, although of course Daniel didn't admit this to himself. He didn't harbor any sentiments about his barrio. It wasn't a

place he'd want to go back to again and again,

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