

A Diwata Story

Mykelle Pacquing

The Diwata had traveled far to protect the one who was meant to bring healing to her people.

The young healer from Maharlika did not yet know the responsibilities that she carried, and it was the Diwata's task to ensure that she be ready when Water would begin her cleansing.

Christy Cagayan did not know that the roots of her body and soul hailed from a land across an ocean, roots that held connection to a line of healers who could see and heal the afflictions the body, mind, and spirit; a line of healers who knew the necessary balance needed for Creation, and the deadly choices that would have to be made in order to maintain that balance. A line of healers who knew when they would have to sacrifice themselves so that balance be maintained and Creation can continue for their people and their descendents. It is this line—and many others—that the Creator had given gifts of song and dance in beauty and strength. It is this line that Christy has no knowledge of, a line that had been buried deep in her memory, beneath layers of trauma, violence, and lies. Layers upon which Men flourish, layers of which Men also carry, which have been hardened, solidified and passed as “Truth,” layers upon which consume the insides of the body, tearing away at the gifts of beauty and strength that the Creator had given. Layers of which the plucky Diwata was determined to unravel within Christy and prevent the End of Creation of which Men had driven her to.

The Diwata straddled between the spirit and physical worlds. She carried no corporeal body, but had manipulation over earth, fire, water, and wind, a skill that would come handy when poking persons towards their rightful path. But her most powerful skill was the love that she would shower upon those she was tasked to protect, a love that would warm them on their nights of long journeys when they had no skin to touch, a love that would make them sing and dance when they would drift into dream, a love that would ignite their desire to let go of the pain and trauma that they carried on their backs, and return honor to the gifts of beauty and strength that the Creator had given them.

Christy's ancestors had called upon the Diwata as an act of desperation in order to save their line. The Diwata was not familiar with the land of which Christy had migrated to, nor did she understand the language Christy adopted. Still, the Diwata had traveled the winds far from her traditional lands in Maharlika upon the request of Christy's ancestors because they knew, as well as the Diwata knew, that a great Flood was coming, and the people of the land must be readied.

As the Diwata arrived to see what Christy was doing, she clucked her tongue as she watched her dancing in a dance club of empty promises and mirages of love, her supple body and hair flowing to the lights and sounds orchestrated by Men as they lusted for her love. Christy's blood flowed with the poison of fire-water, her senses dulled as she surrendered herself to the desires of the Men who danced about her.

The Diwata looked upon the other people as they danced their dance of lust, finding no interest in them, as fire-water and other strange poisons flowed within their bodies, dulling their connections to their spirits. The Diwata coiled in shock as she watched one of the Men drop a potent poison into Christy's glass of fire-water, capable of rendering her unconscious and vulnerable to any twisted abuse. The Man had gone back to manipulate Christy's desire on the dance floor with the intention to return her to the bar and her now-poisoned drink.

The Diwata connected with the Water inside the glass. *Think you can move over a bit?* she asked the Water.

Before the man could return with Christy, the Water inside Christy's glass pushed itself over to the other side of the bar, the smashing of the glass drowned out by the pounding music as Christy thought nothing of her missing drink and called for another.

For the millennia that the Diwata had existed, she had never seen such disrespect for the bodies that these people were given as gifts as she saw here in Christy's Time.

"So, what's your name pretty?" the Man asked.

"Christy," Christy said as she sparkled her eyes with her beauty-magic.

"Christy! That's a pretty name..." the Man said with a mask of sincerity. Had Christy had clean blood, she would have wandered off from the Man long ago, but she gave in to her loneliness and touch that her body longed for. "Are you, by any chance, Filipina?" he asked.

"Mmhmm."

"Mmmm, Filipinas are *so* hot!"

"Hehehe!"

The Diwata rolled her eyes and smacked her forehead in dismay, throwing her arms up in frustration as the Man managed to convince her to come with him to his concrete hut high in the sky.

As Christy hopped into the Man's car, the Diwata was determined to prevent this liaison from happening.

The two conversed in non-sense, heading towards the man's home. The Diwata thought of a way to stop the man and get Christy to go home to her mother. *Hmmm... Oh! It looks like you've been drinking too much fire-water there mister, and your liver and tummy is looking a bit weak... Especially here... and here...* The Diwata had poked the poison in the Man's liver in key spots and then...

The Man had stopped cold in his conversation and his face contorted into a mixture of embarrassment, anger, and panic, as he rushed through his emotions, knowing that his pride was falling apart before him, his near-success with the Beauty-Woman exploding within his body.

"What? What's wrong?" Christy asked, her nose noticing something in the air.

"Oh my God, please no," the Man pleaded. The Man stopped his car at the side of the road. He rested his head against the steering wheel and began to sob.

"What?? What's wrong??" Christy repeated.

"I have to let you go Christy. I... I shit my pants." The Man then began to sob uncontrollably, as his self-delusions crashed upon him in a violent emotional drama.

Christy's eyes widened, as the sight of the Man sobbing had cleansed the numbing effects of the fire-water straight out of her blood. She wanted to help the Man, but knew better and decided to leave him be. She walked out of the car. And it sped away.

The Diwata smiled.

Good.

Lola Lualhati kneeled at the edge of the ocean, looking out into the infinite love of Water, praying for what was about to fall upon her, as its waves rolled against the beach, as it has since time immemorial, when the first island folk had been birthed from Bamboo.

She held her ceremonial knife against her own wrist, a knife that had been used to sacrifice numerous chickens, pigs and even a few *kalabaws* throughout her role as the village healer to demonstrate that they recognized and honored their gods, the Anitos and Diwatas.

The grandmother had been throwing the Japanese troops into disarray for weeks when she had heard word that they were encroaching upon her village. The stories of violence that had begun to sweep her home islands fueled her fiery heart, calling upon all Women and Men to fight back against the Evil which took over the insides of these Japanese people, but Lola Lual had reached the limit of her abilities, and that Evil had begun to work its way into her own people, as she saw friends and allies fall from their place as models of beauty of strength, to become reduced to Shadows of what they once were, surrendering to violence within their bodies that poisoned their thoughts, bringing them to reprehensible behavior which rivaled that of the invaders.

The old grandmother was now prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Lola Lual had sent her family into the bush with her friends amongst the forest tribes. She knew that those tribes knew how to disappear into the bush when invading peoples would arrive to their islands; it has happened numerous times in their oral traditions, and it has happened again—they were ready for it.

As the old grandmother heard the Japanese soldiers down the path heading towards her, having heard that one of her own trusted Women-healers had revealed Lual's location to save her own family, her brutal calculations had brought her to this last resort. She prepared her final prayer, channeling the strength of her Spirit, to sing her final words to all those who would listen to her:

*to all the Diwatas and Anitos,
to God and the Creator,
my work
is nearing its end
i offer my blood
to you
to protect my children
to protect our healers
to honor our place
as people of this land
to sing and dance
for you
in Beauty and Strength.*

Lola Lual repeated her prayer, her Spirit reaching out to Water, reaching Earth, to all the Grasses, and Beetles, and Birds, to all the Trees and their Spirit-Keepers, all the way up to Sky, as they all acknowledged her words, remembering them, watching

carefully as what was about to unfold on their lands, as they always have done—since time immemorial.

“There’s the old witch that’s been poisoning our food stocks!”

“Where are the rest of the villagers?”

“Who gives a shit? Let’s see her magic work now... Kill her!”

Lola Lual knew it was time. Kneeling, she let her knife open her wrist, letting her blood flow from her wrist, raising it above the ocean, offering her blood, from Water to Water.

The Water Diwatas would remember her work.

The soldiers closed behind her as their bayonets feasted upon her body in a twisted dance of violence, letting their weapons slide from her flesh in and out, holding her body down with their boots. Satisfied that her body could no longer feed their lust for blood, they kicked it into the ocean.

We hear you, and welcome you.

As she made her way back home, home to her *nanay*—her mother—Christy had a panging feeling that something was disrupting her pathways, that there was something happening beyond what her physical senses could tell her, a chill running down her spine every time she questioned it.

You can feel it, can’t you? You can sense the winds between others, between yourself, between you and me...

The Diwata had a difficult task. The acts she chose to carry out were heavily calculated—their costs and their consequences carefully drawn out. No earthly being has the capacity to carry out such decisions responsibly as did the Diwatas and Anitos. This Diwata has to choose how much pain to inflict upon Christy’s mother, so that Christy would force her own spirit out, force the gifts that the Creator had given her, to protect her mother, and protect her family and all her relatives.

It is a decision rarely understood by earthly beings, the kind of decision that brought the earthly beings to shun their Diwatas and Anitos for their actions. Where they once were respected and honored for their place in Creation, in protecting and guiding the people through Beauty and Strength, the Diwatas and Anitos were now forced to carry their duties in the shadows, fearing that their work would cause the people to bring themselves to self-destruction—along with their place in Creation.

As Christy reached the front door nestled in an alleyway, she noticed water spilling from beneath the door. Without a further thought, she opened the door and had found the apartment flooded—the carpets, the shoes, the couches—they were all drenched in a layer of water—coming from a broken pipe behind the laundry machine.

Christy walked around the corner and found her mother lying unconscious on the floor next to the burst pipe.

Christy’s heart sank as she saw her last link with her ancestors lying motionless, without the spark of fire that made her smile, without the love that gave her her place in Creation. Christy suddenly felt the weight of her ancestors bearing down hard on her shoulders, crying out for her mother, reaching down for her while scrambling for the

phone in a frantic hurried panic, sobbing and cradling her mother as she realized that she was not breathing.

The paramedics arrived applying defibrillator shocks to Christy's mom with no results.

She's cold and has no pulse, Christy realized.

The paramedics picked Christy and the body of her mother into their truck as it raced to the hospital. Christy sat with her mother, holding her hand, rubbing the hit on her head when she must've slipped on the water and gone unconscious.

'Nay... 'Nay... Don't leave me... Please come back... I'm all alone here... I don't know what to do in this place...

As Christy's heart was at its wits' end, she dug deep into her memory, beyond her waking-memory, past her ancestors' memory, to the place that connected her to Creation, connected her to all of Creation, and dragged a song from the depths of Creation and wailed it out in the back of the paramedic van, calling out for her mother to come back, her Love splitting through time and space, to guide her mother back into her body.

Yes! Yes! the Diwata cheered.

You come right back into your body, 'Nay! It is not your time yet!!

As Christy's mother followed the fire of her daughter's song back to her body, her mother bolted up, looking surprised to see herself in a strange van with her daughter holding her hand, tears streaking her mascara, making her look like she came from a Halloween party.

"'Nay!!!" Christy cried out as she embraced her mother. "You hit your head," she told her, dumbfounded.

"I saw the most beautiful angel!" Christy's mom told her. "She told me to give you something, something that you should always pray for."

Christy had thought at first that her mother had gone delirious again with her religious teachings, always having been cynical of what she preached from the church, but still respected her to listen to her.

Christy's mom opened her hand and revealed to her a small droplet of water, swishing back and forth in her palm, like it was dancing with the movement of the paramedic truck.

"She said you can find more songs here," Christy's mom said, getting her sudden attention.

Christy was filled with love and wholeness. Though her mind would not truly comprehend her mother's words for some time to come, her heart now knew the place where her love could be called upon again to bring song into Creation that would honor her voice, her body, her ancestors, and her place on the land.

The Diwata had smiled to herself for a job well done and receded from the ambulance, back into the fires, winds, waters, and soils—till she was called upon again.