

FAITH HEAL HER

prologue

WRITTEN BY TOBIE ABAD



Credits

Written by: Tobie Abad

SPECIAL THANKS:

Special Thanks to my TAG TEAM SUPPORTERS
Rocky Sunico, Rob Abrazado, Tania Arpa, and
Hello, Mirai.



VÄSTGÖTAGATAN 5
SE-118 27 STOCKHOLM
SWEDEN

© 2018 White Wolf Entertainment AB. All rights reserved. Vampire: The Masquerade®, World of Darkness®, Storytelling System™, and Storytellers Vault™ are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of White Wolf Entertainment AB. All rights reserved.

When I was little, just over ten, I used

to attend these prayer sessions that my parents required me to take. Every weekend, in our subdivision in the south, the statues of the Santo Niño, the Blessed Virgin and the Risen Christ were paraded around before being brought to a house where they were to stay for a week.

This was called the Petition.

And in practice, it was meant to give a family the blessing of spending an entire week in the presence of the Lord. The blessed family was expected to celebrate the entire week with daily moments of prayer and quiet meditation. I used to find it strange. Alien, even. How neighbors would vie for the opportunity to keep the statues over to their homes for the weekend. It was like a competition. Some kind of unspoken contest on whom among them was... gooder? Is gooder even a word?

I felt the practice was a strange contradiction of what I had learned during my years in Catholic school. The idea that the three statues were sacred and holy just struck me as odd. As was the way so much attention and meticulous care was given to the three graven images. Each statue had its own collection of tiny yet well-crafted clothing. The red velvet bejeweled robes that adorned the Santo Niño. The blue and white silks that were trimmed in gold which dressed the image of the Blessed Virgin. The gem-encrusted gold-plated rays that symbolized light that were slid into and locked onto place on around the heart and adorning the head of the Risen Christ. Each statue stood around two to three feet tall. And each were treated like unmoving nobility.

The practice seemed to me a tad strange and contradictory to what I had learned in school. The idea that the three statues were sacred and holy and deserved to be treated like nobility assaulted my beliefs. Wasn't idolatry a sin? Wasn't this... wrong?

All through-out my childhood, our weekends demanded we attend these Petitions. Friday and Saturdays were days to play and have fun. Sunday evenings, however, were intended for prayer. And after the weekly celebration of mass, we would take to the streets and make our way to the family where the Petition was last delivered. There, we would greet each other, sing the hymns and the prayers, and after a quick quiet dinner, all stand up to carry the statues in a single file procession to the next house. I never understood how they accomplished planning this. Or how families were chosen.

I just knew, based on what the older ones told me, this was all another way to be in God's good graces.

Now, I was not a particularly religious person. Raised Catholic, I did not have much of a choice during my younger years. The scolding I got from my parents typically consisted of warnings on how I was doing actions which was making the Blessed Virgin weep. Or how the lies I told were each a new nail hammered into Christ's hands. I understood I was being taught to understand the difference of good and evil. I just didn't see the point of associating my mistakes with further acts of violence upon the Holy Host.

One of the people whom I truly admired was Tita Cleso. Tita was our word for "aunt" and for Filipinos, the word was used as a show of respect towards anyone

older than yourself. While Tita Cleso was not related to our family in any biological manner, she was the person whom my parents trusted enough to watch over me while they were busy with their jobs. Tita Cleso, you must understand, lived alone. She was a kind woman, though a little eccentric. She did not like watching movies; she found most of them confusing to follow.

Tita Cleso was not a religious woman. Her husband passed away three years after they were married, and she never found love in any of the other suitors that followed. She lived in a single storey house at the end of the street, beside a massive mango tree. The tree towered over the house, casting a wide cooling shadow over the place (and the house beside it) on those terrible summer days.

Tita Cleso was kind to me. I'd like to think she appreciated how I tried to visit her often. I would sneak by her place whenever my mom and dad would be at the grocers or busy with some other work-related thing. She would let me in, offer me some sugar cookies from this large blue round can, and play music. She didn't know anything about mp3s, and when I told her there was such a thing as streaming music, she would laugh and call it another one of the miraculous inventions of man. She would instead have us listen to music from these large black fragile things called "records" which required a much bulkier machine to play. I learned to appreciate older kinds of music through Tita Cleso. The Everly Brothers. The Beach Boys. The Temptations. But my favorite would be the Chordettes. Songs like Mr. Sandman and Lollipop were just so fun to sing along with.

She lived a few blocks away from our house. So, each weekend, before heading to the next house, my parents would have us stop at Tita Cleso's house, ring her door, and ask if she would like to join us for prayers.

She always said no. She would stay in her room, reading a book, humming a song, or listening to the radio. She would wave at times when she would see me on the street outside. But she rarely ever stepped out.

Last week, however, things took a very different turn.

Once a year, the Petition would be routed through the streets until it was brought back to the family that started the religious practice. In some ways, this was like an anniversary celebration for the event – which made me once more confused why there was so much self-promotion in what should have been a religious selfless practice. There, on that special day, a guest from some larger national network of the religious group would come to visit our village. This guest, I was told, was a particularly devout and blessed follower compared to the rest of us. While we were content to show our passion for the Lord and His Works through song and prayer, this guest, we were told, was special enough that the Santo Niño noticed her devotions. She was someone whom the Santo Niño would possess, we were told, to speak to us that night.

Barely deep into my teens, I was fascinated and frightened by this prospect. I was terrified at the thought that something from... the otherside... would actually come to manifest before us. And yet I was excited to see an undeniable display that life beyond death did exist.

Even until now, I remembered that night from last week so vividly.

It was a cool January evening, and I remember standing outside of the house with the throng of kids of the other families that attended the Petition. We all wanted the chance to see this sacred guest. Tita Salbe, whose name seemed apt because it made me think of salve or healing, gathered us all to sit outside of the house and told us the rules. These firm reminders, we were told, were to be strictly obeyed or else the visiting Santo Niño would be incensed and leave.

The Rules were simple:
No touching the guest, we were told.
No speaking while she spoke.
And when the guest would ask us to do stuff, never to question her words.

We all bowed our heads, crossed our hearts, and promised to behave.

As the minute turned into hours, some of the kids began to lose interest. Waiting was never an easy challenge for anyone young. The pent-up energy and desire to play did not jive with the call for patience and silence. Many began to inch away, eventually escaping out onto the street to play *patintero* or grab something to eat on the *merienda* table.

For me, however, I could not help but wait for the time to come. My heart pounded so hard it was an excitement that made my entire body shake. I looked up to ask my parents if it was okay to step out of the line to use the restroom when I realized, "Mom, Tita Cleso... we forgot to invite Tita Cleso!"

My mother looked around and shared my worry. She hurried off to my father and

upon hearing it, he promised to bring her back in time for the ceremonies. I felt bad that we forgot Tita Cleso. Perhaps all the excitement of seeing the impossible distracted us.

Mother asked me to stay and left Dad instructions on what to do if I made a fuss. Dad gave a noncommittal smile and simply returned to his *kumpares* to talk about sports, politics, and the latest action movies. I stayed in line, quietly watching the other kids grow impatient with every minute. I wondered what would happen once Tita Salbe gave the go signal. I tried to imagine what it would be like to hear the Santo Niño himself tell me something. Can you imagine it? To receive a message from the Divine! A missive from Heaven itself! So intense was my desire to hear this message that I remained by the door, waiting for the fated sound of it being opened from within.

It was then that I noticed the altar with the three statues. I realized something that seemed to suddenly make the whole thing odd: If the Santo Niño was Jesus when he was a young boy, and he was now the Risen Christ... who then was doing the possession and claiming to be him?

The door opened.

I looked up and saw the serene face of Tita Salbe who had a black veil over her hair. A midnight blue blouse covered her to the neck. Around her neck, a rough cord was wound around her neck, ending in a plastic covered prayer booklet which hung from its spine. The cover had a sketchy image of a pierced hand, palm facing the sky. And the words around it were in Latin.

Jubilis
Jesu Vincit
Christi Victis

From the doorway, a cold curtain of air wafted outwards and enveloped me. I felt the fine hairs on my neck rise in fear. I felt my knees buckle in worry. My palms were wet with sweat.

“*Halina,*” Ate Salbe motioned me to step inside, “It is your turn to step inside.”

I felt Ate Salbe’s gentle pull to walk inside. But I was suddenly afraid; I wanted to tell them to stop and ask my questions but I remembered part of the rules were not to talk unless spoken to. I looked back to see if my mother was back but she wasn’t. I saw my Dad laughing in the distance, as Tito Beno and Tito Lheo walked him outside likely for a cigarette. I closed my eyes and stepped inside.

The darkness was suffocating. I raised my hand to my face and realized I could not see my own fingers. I struggled to move in the feeble light, forcing each leg to move despite how leaden they felt.

The room was a mass of odd shadows and strange dark shapes. A curtain moved somewhere in the black, allowing the feeble light from the empty lot outside to come in. Near the window was a bed. Tita Salve pressed my hand and told me, “Wait here.” She then walked up to the bed, gave a small bow then reached past it to where a single lamp stood on a low bedside table. Tita Salve then knelt down leaned towards the bed and listened. I could hear the whispered voice, but the words were beyond my comprehension. I looked down at my shoes and realized

one shoelace was undone. But I was too scared to reach down and tie it.

“You can approach,” Tita Salve whispered across the room and it took a beat before I realized she meant me. With a loud click, Tita Salve switched on the lamp. Its white light was a round corona that lit the face of the guest who looked almost childlike in her sleep. The guest was wrapped up in a blanket like a baby. I suddenly became aware that there were other adults, all standing at the other side of the bed, towering over the guest. They were all looking at the guest with adoration. My gaze swung back, towards the door, hoping to see it open.

I imagined my father’s face among those still outside. I imagined him realizing he could not see me and after looking around for me, walking to the door to open it and call for me. I imagined his voice, stern and willful, telling the others to leave me alone. But unlike what was happening right now, that was all in my head. A foolish fantasy born from fear.

I saw two other kids. They were the children of Tita Salve. The older one, Joyce, was five years older than me. She was close to the bed, holding her rosary close to her lips. The younger one, Vince, was wiping away tears. At least, I thought, I was not alone. I worriedly stared at the guest’s face and wondered what was going to happen. The adults near the guest spoke in soft whispers. Joyce began kissing her rosary repeatedly.

The guest spoke.

“Bring the children closer.... Where are the children?”

The voice was high-pitched. Like that of a shrunken person in those funny movies. I

froze as I realized the other adults walked up to me and began pulling me towards the bed. The terrible chilling feeling slid down my neck as if I stood in numbing cold. I felt sweat dot my face and hands and realized I did not feel strong enough to carry myself. A bigger kid behind me shoved me forwards and kept me moving towards the guest with the rest of them.

“Bring them closer...”

The adults parted to let the kids and me closer. In the spotlight of the lamp, the guest seemed frighteningly fragile, like a Chinese porcelain doll whose features were barely lines of shadow and make up. She seemed to try and prop herself up and before she could do so, one of the adults shut the lamp. Plunged into darkness, I prayed in my mind for the door to open. For my dad. For my mother to arrive. But then, I realized, if this was Santo Niño himself inhabiting the guest in front of me, then who was I praying to? Wouldn't the Santo Niño hear it?

I wanted to run.

"There are stars!" Vince, the younger child, exclaimed and I shot a glance back at where the guest was to look for anything that looked like a star. I didn't think I would see anything, but I was wrong. Like tiny motes of illuminated dust, the motes spiraled where the guest lay. I rubbed my eyes with my hands, wondering I was just seeing things. But despite doing so, the stars remained in the air, lazily swirling an invisible course.

“Eat it and be blessed,” the guest spoke in her high-pitched voice. I felt a cold surge run up my spine. I saw the shadowed forms of the other kids reaching upwards and chomping their jaws in the empty

space above their heads. It was like they were those plants in that Super Mario videogame, gulping at the sky then drawing back down for another bite. One of the adults walked up to me and gently placed their hands on my shoulders, to guide me closer. To bring me towards the guest.

I squinted, and saw more stars dancing at the fringes of my vision. I saw Joyce glance at me and motion with her head for me to walk closer. I saw the guest looking at me with what looked like blind white eyes. I thought I saw a smile. I closed my eyes and opened my mouth. I raised my head...

And my thoughts asked... Jesus Christ was already resurrected, right? He was not a young Santo Niño anymore. That was just an image of who he was. A venerated image of how holy Jesus was even as a child.

The door opened.

Just as I thought hope finally came and my prayers were answered, what I instead saw were a few more kids being ushered inside. Like me, I could see the fear and uncertainty in their steps. I could see the wariness in their motions. But then, I heard it too. The wet sound that was like someone drinking from a juice box after forgetting to bring a straw. I turned to the sound and saw the guest holding Joyce much closer. A pair of sinewy hands holding her head against the guest's own.

“What's happening,” one of the new kids whispered to me. And before I could answer, the adult behind me shushed them to stay quiet.

“Remember the rules,” they said.

But my eyes were still focused on Joyce. I saw the tears in her closed eyes as she mumbled an, “Amen” and raised her head from the guest. I do not know why but I thought I saw the guest’s tongue slide against Joyce’s neck before she stood up. The adults asked us all to quietly gather and the guest asked, “Did any of you see the stars?”

I did not know what to answer. Somehow in the heart, I sensed it was better to stay quiet. I faced the door again, wondering if my parents would appear. Instead, I saw Tita Cleso. She was standing in the dark, close to the door. I rushed to her, my feet pounding against the floor, but as I reached the corner where she stood my hands found nothing catching them! Half a second later, I slammed against the wall, and nearly knocked down a small side table that was heavily laden with religious icons.

“*Ay susmaryosep!*” one of the adults exclaimed and I fought every urge to break out laughing at she had just called out to the Holy Family in a curse in the very presence of the supposed Santo Niño. The other adults quickly closed in on me, worried if I had hurt myself or worse, broken one of the religious items. Tita Salve was known to spend thousands of pesos on such during their infrequent family trips to Rome and other places.

“Get up,” one of the other adults scolded me as he lifted me to my feet with a single pull. Another bent down and cupped my knees, inspecting for any bleeding. I yelped from the roughness of their actions. And from the callused hand scratching against the small scuffed portion of my knee. That merited another scolding to stay quiet.

“Bring the girl to me,” the guest suddenly whispered.

My heart froze.

Deep down, I did not know why for certain, but I just knew I had no desire to obey. I wanted to leave. I wanted to run.

“Bring her to me!” the guest suddenly cried out and the other children all screamed as they scampered away in fear. The adults hurried to obey. But then, the door slammed open and as the lights from outside poured into the room, I saw my chance at salvation.

And my parents.

“Mama! Papa!” I cried out even as the other adults surrounded me to pull me back. The guest cried, “The door! Close the door!” The other children ran as well, their own fear of the guest’s piped voice fueling their legs! I kicked and pushed and could not break free. I saw my parents staring back in surprise. In confusion. They had no idea what was happening, it seemed.

“SHUT THE DOOR!”

The guest’s voice was a demand. And one of the adults, Tito Maris, I think grabbed it and slammed it shut only to have it swing back open and smash against his face! Tito Maris stumbled to the ground, nose spraying blood in all directions. Amidst the screaming, I found the grip on my arms loosening and the opportunity to escape now a reality. I saw Tita Cleso’s face nodding in the darkness. Like she was telling me to do it.

I ran.

My parents were quick to drive me home that night.

In the car, my parents asked me to explain what had just happened. As far as they knew, the other kids spilled out of the house of Tita Salve, ecstatic and screaming. They babbled about strange and magical things... of stars that could be eaten... of cold touches... of happiness... All my parents could pick up from them was that some kind of strangeness had transpired in that room and I was witness to them.

I tried to explain. I tried to tell them of the oddity of the guest. Of Joyce and the errant tongue. Of my fear that the guest was someone else. Something else.

They told me to stop talking nonsense.

But we never participated in the Petition again. Maybe Tita Salve and her friends told my parents we were no longer welcome. Or maybe my parents decided something strange had just happened to their only daughter. And they never wanted it to happen again. I don't know for certain.

I didn't tell them everything. I chose which stories to share. And locked away in secrecy the other things I knew I saw for certain. Like, how I know I did see Tita Cleso that night. Or how I am certain it was her that helped me escape. The incident left me traumatized. I could never stay in the company of nuns or priests for longer periods since then. I could never enter a darkened prayer room. I could never look up at the stars. Thankfully, my parents did not linger long. They brought me home, tucked me in my bed, and asked me to behave before leaving. I would not see them again until the next morning.

I only learned then that my parents took so long to get back for Tita Cleso's because they arrived to find her dead by the record player, with the LP record on her lap. A pink ribbon had been added to it. A small card marked it as a gift she had hoped to give me. The doctor dad spoke with stated she had died of a sudden aneurysm. He insisted she had suffered no pain. Mother did not want me to know what had happened, but when I asked them what will happen to Tita Cleso's body, they realized they had to tell me something. They did not know how I knew something had happened to her. I never told them it was because I could see her, standing in my room, staring at me with sad eyes.

We attended her wake the next evening. Many of our neighbors – those who attended the Petition – were there too. Most seem to have forgotten (or chosen not to ask about) the previous night. There was, however, one older man who walked up to me, placed his hands on my shoulders, then turned me around to face him.

“Did you see?” he asked me with a huge grin that fought against his scruffy beard, “Did you see her?”

“Her?” I asked, not certain what he meant.

“The guest,” he explained, “She was once a nun, I heard. But she always had visions. You have gone inside? Seen her?”

My dad found me and noticed how much paler I was than normal. He walked up to me, nudged me to go get something to drink, and told the man with the beard that I was tired. I said I was.

“Will you come back? To see her?” he still called out. A question even as we left. We did not respond.

In fact, our family never attended the Petition ever again.

Years passed. Mother was the first to go. A freak accident that involved a storm and a truck driver who was too busy trying to text his boss. Father and I grew close, but I was never as honest as I used to be towards him. Not since that night. He would complain about me always playing that old record at night. But I realized a trick when I tried playing Tita Cleso’s LP on an old record player one summer night.

As the Chordettes sang their vocal harmonies, Tita Cleso would be able to manifest much stronger. More visible. The first few times this happened, she would be mostly a strange white sheet in the air. And whispered words. But lately, she was more able to speak sentences. And a few times even, I saw her face.

Tita Cleso told me things.

She told me after she died that night, she found herself in a place of darkness and screams. She saw her husband sitting in the darkness, surrounded by black roaches that constantly crawled in and out of his open mouth. She wanted to help him, but a dark shadow told her the only way she could was if she walked into the swarm.

She nearly did, too.

But as she approached, Tito Roger rose from his position and held his hands out

towards her. He reached out and waited for her to embrace him.

“Your Tito Roger was never into physical contact. Even back when we were young. He showed his love through words. Not actions.”

Tita Cleso tells me she things there’s a side of her that wants her to walk into the darkness. To give up. But in the many years she has been watching me, she has started to realize something worse.

“There are things out there, *iha*. In the night. Things that prey on the young. On the innocent.”

Tita Cleso is able to go around. She once vanished for a few months and I started to think I was just imagining all those times I would talk to her. But by Halloween, she returned and for the first time, we were able to talk even without playing the record. She told me she tried looking for the Petition again. She tried looking for that guest. And what she discovered made my skin crawl.

She said the guest never stepped out during the day. And that it had many other small religious groups out there which truly believed they were faithful to their faith. But none of them knew the truth. None of them realized the guest was something more malignant. Something evil. Something that corrupted the faith and used it as a means to feed on the pure.

Tita Cleso tried her best to stop it. But the world of the living was simply something she could barely touch. She needed someone who could act upon her knowledge. Someone who could help her stop the darkness.

She needed me.

Sometimes, I think of how my mother's passing was so sudden, so strange, and wonder if it has anything to do with what had happened. After the wake, mother wrote a stern letter to our local parish, complaining that the Petition needlessly traumatized me and possibly other children. There was never any resolution to that complaint.

Or perhaps, her death a few years later was it.

The evil that Tita Cleso claims to exist around us... she insists someone has to stop it. Someone has to fight it. And she promised she can help me. Like she did that night at the Petition.

Like how she did afterwards.

You see, while in bed, as mother and father debated on how to tell me that my favorite Tita was dead, I stared at her from across my room and asked her how I was to know that it was really her.

She walked up to me, sat on my bed without making it move, and reached for my injured knee. I watched as her hand passed through it, like she was nothing but a dream, and suddenly, miraculously, my wound was a dream too. My knee was whole. The pain was gone.

Tita Cleso confessed that she had no idea how she was able to do it then. She prayed to God that she could somehow take my pain away.

Faith healed me that night.

And a twisted faith was now hurting so many others.

I am now nineteen years old. And I have finally come to a decision. I always find myself remembering how I nearly had swallowed a star in the darkness ten years ago.

And I think about all those other kids, like Joyce. And Vince. And many many others. Ten years have passed and the Petition still continues.

Someone has to stop it.

Someone with faith.

Someone like me.

Lexicon:

Tita: Aunt, informally used as a term of respect to any older woman.

Tito: Uncle, informally used as a term of respect to any older man.

Santo Niño: an image of the Christ child. Directly translates to “Holy Child.” Basic figure designed by Flemish artisans towards the end of the Middle Ages, hence the foreign European features.

Patintero: A game played by Filipino kids at the street. From the Spanish word *tinte* or “ink” in reference to the drawn lines which the game uses. Also called *tubiganay*, from *tubig-tubig* or “water” which was commonly used to make the lines in other areas.

Kumpare: Derived from the Spanish word *comrade*. Masculine.

Merienda: A snack or mid-day meal.

Halina: “Come here” or “Come along”

Susmaryosep: Filipino cuss word. Derived from the names of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, Joseph.

About this Work:

Faith Heal Her is the first of possibly a series of books sharing the stories of a currently unnamed protagonist who joins forces with her wraith aunt to fight against the darkness in the world.

If the reception to this initial book goes well, more books will be written and released. These will not be limited to only fiction but also possibly include game resources and a book set to run **Faith Heal Her** as a campaign.

For any comments or feedback, please feel free to reach out to the Author through social media.

Thank you for checking this book out.

About the Author:

Tobie Abad is a game designer and author based in Manila, Philippines. He is the brains behind TAG Sessions and has written for 7th Sea 2nd edition Pirate Nations, The Sound of Water, Girls Elsewhere, Itras By: Menagerie, Cold Shadows, Tiny Dungeon 2e and more.

He has also written for the Master Story Creators Anthology 1: Of Fans, Dragon and Blood, Queer Gaymers, and has dabbled in online comics.

He has committed himself to playing 12 new games each year and runs completely-free open-table one-shot sessions called, TAG Bites, that aim to help more gamers try unfamiliar games and expand their palate.

He and his partner, Rocky, are huge fans of the World of Darkness and as of this writing, are currently playing in ongoing campaigns of Vampire: the Masquerade, 5th edition, Wraith: the Oblivion 20th Anniversary edition + Orpheus, and a Trinity Continuum game inspired by the comic, Planetary.



tagsessions



tagsessions.blogspot.com



TobieAbadGaming



@AllTobieNoShade

FAITH HEAL HER

prologue

Children are gathered to take part in a religious activity. But what awaits them is something far more sinister and it will take an act of faith to stop the darkness to come.

This is a prologue book which, if received well, shall be the first of a new ongoing series.

Intended For Mature Readers

Content Warning: Sudden Death, Religion, Possession, Children, Parental Death

