

WATCHING policies amounting to some ₱13,000 is success, he thought. Way above conservative estimates, he continued. Contracts were on file and the anticipated collections were black and livid on a yellow ledger. The reports were signed. The small sound of the city flew in from several stories down like black birds, to fall, to die, at the touch of the cold conditioned air. The secretary's mascaraed face stolidly announced her leave.

"So long, sir. I'll see you Monday."

"Have a good weekend."

"Yes. You too."

He closed the office and left after her. At the close of the column of figures down the white sidewalk, he hailed a cab. Through the main street, once around the park, twice around the marketplace until ₱5.75 he told the driver to drive him home.

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It was Sunday noon. He was standing under a dead tree. Acacia, most probably. It had been dead for almost a year, this huge ugly looking thing at the corner of the rotunda. A red car came and he told the driver to go on home. He got into the car and drove. He made a swift, clean U turn and was on his way down the narrow street that cut through the estero like a wound. Horses grazed peacefully along the sidewalk.

The beach was opulent with Sunday worshippers. By twilight the beach was empty except for some persistent, lazy bathers. The beach seemed sad with all the turmoil of footsteps and amorphous tracks. He walked past the swimmers dead under the weight of sand. He traced a thousand gay footsteps that lay dead, like some painful memory. He watched the fishermen glide across the tranquil, twilight sea. He walked — his mind desperately trying to get hold of something, like the fishermen's net. He watched the fishermen. He watched the sea. He sat down on the sand and watched the peace and the fury of the sea and sand meeting. Ants crept up his feet to his calf. The tiny, seemingly, harmless pincers pierced his skin. But he did not move. He thought about the empty paper bag running with the wind. The

ants continued their assault. The sand mound where the ants marched in regiments was smooth on the dry sand. With a piece of derelict stick he erased the mound from the sand and the ants spilled like a red piece of tattered flesh. He wondered why he did this.

"What are you doing, mister?"

"Nothing, just passing the time away."

"Can't you think of anything else to do?"

"What's your name, kid?"

"Silvana."

"Good."

"What is good?"

"Never mind. Do you know what I'm doing?"

"Yes, you're destroying those poor little things' hill."

"I'm scaring these ants away. They're little but they bite."

"You know Mister? I've been scaring those ants away all my life. Those ants have always been here, even before we built our resthouse. See that fat man cleaning his ears way over there? That's my father. Anyway, I come here everyday to destroy their hills. It's a passion in me. But they go building them again. Then I destroy them once more and once more they build them, higher and higher. Seems stupid, isn't it? Then I destroy their hills again and right there exactly, they build them again. Talk about persistence!"

"No brains, these ants."

"Well, not exactly, just... I don't know. If I were an ant I think I'd do the same."

"Why?"

"Well, I have to go." She wiped away an ant from her hand and licked it, soothing it with spit and sand. "I'll see you again, mister."

The little girl disappeared behind the palms. He thought of his own girl. But she wasn't as smart as that one, he thought. The thought of the ants assaulted his mind. But he did not care too much whether or not the ants planned on building their anthills again. He knew the ants would build their hills again, in

T O M O R R O W is a L

*How difficult to be human!*

the night. *Tomorrow, tomorrow the child will come...*

He wiped the ants and the sand off his trousers and walked. A young girl, her legs white and shiny where the sea licked her, splashed sea water toward him. But he walked, leaving her invitation wild and vagabond as the wind. It did not matter now, he thought, whether or not he took the girl; whether or not the ants built their anthills again. *Nothing mattered.*

Now he wished he had been a writer, or a poet, walking down the beach, seeing mermaids and all kinds of crazy things. He should have been. That's the rut — a poet walking down the beach, *old, with the bottoms of his trousers rolled.* The anthills disturbed him again. Even if their hills were destroyed they came again to build them, higher than the last.

Life is an insurance company, he thought. Life is no more than a figure and a fact. Love is statistics. Annika — he knew he was not making her happy. How much can an unhappy man give happiness to his wife? He let the foam lick his feet and the wind sing songs to touch his heart. A body was washed from the sea and the scream of a woman seared the twilight and the silent rustle of the sea. He did not move. The disciples of the sand hurried toward the scene. In a moment everyone was around this bloated body. He walked past thinking about the ants who were building their hills.

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"I am unhappy," Annika said, clinging to a young man's bare chest. "I am unhappy," she repeated.

Anacleto kissed her on the forehead. "How? you have everything here."

"Except what I want."

"What?"

"Maybe love."

There was silence—because a caress was soundless.

"God!" She tuned in the radio. "There must be sound between us."



# Only Breakfast

by Bataan Faigao

"I'm sorry," he said and switched the music off.

"That's a ritual in this house. Silence is a password. My husband is in insurance. In that business they insure everything except the heart."

She switched on the record player. "We must do something, Anacleto."

He switched it off. "Do something? Of course."

She switched on the record player.

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Anacleto walked down the deserted street, thinking about her scheme. He wondered how things would turn out, with Annika and her daughter Agnes. Life appalled him, as much as the church piercing through a dark sky. He remembered his days in the seminary, those lost and ancient days. He went inside the church. Everything to him was strange. He walked out. An old woman stretched out her palms. She cursed him as he walked past. After a block a girl in a red tight dress asked for a light to her cigarette. He handed her his match and walked on. Emptiness descended upon him like a sudden evening. After several turns a man stopped him in a corner and threatened him with a knife.

"Your money, sir." He took out his wallet and handed it to the man. The man walked away and he stood there, very sleepy. He stood beside a lamp post thinking how to get home.

Crispin opened the door and kissed Annika on the cheek.

"Hello, Daddy." Agnes climbed up her father and kissed him. "Daddy, I got a doll from Uncle Andy." They walked to the living room. He sat on his easy chair, took off his shoes, sighed.

"Hello, Annika. How was your day?"

"Fine. How was the beach?"

"Same."

She walked out to the kitchen to see if dinner was ready. Agnes came in with her doll.

"Forgive me Agnes, but not now. Your Daddy is tired."

"Okay, I'll go to my room and play. I called her Annika, like mother."

The light was insipid in the meticulously decorated room. The grandfather clock killed the seconds away. Dinner was served and they took their places at the table. Dinner was silent. Dinner was over.

They walked to the living room. Crispin read the newspapers. Annika smoked. Agnes played with her doll Annika. The grandfather clock ticked the minutes away.

"Time for bed, darling."

"Postponement, mommy."

"No postponement tonight."

"Kill-joy!"

"Come now." She took Agnes to bed. She was nervous, thinking what he would do when she told him she was going away. She came back to the living room. After a while both marched to their bedroom. Annika slipped into her night gown. Crispin put on his pajamas, settled in bed, and smoked a cigarette. The light was dim, dying . . . He switched it off and the darkness murdered her in the dark.

"Come now, dear."

"Crispin?"

"Yes, Annika."

"I have something to tell you."

"What?"

"I'm going away."

"You're going away?"

"Yes, with Anacleto, away from here."

"And Agnes?"

"She's coming with me."

"Will she be all right?"

"I will go away tomorrow."

"Give her my love."

"Are you mad?"

"Yes."

"Won't you be lonely?" She felt a tear in her eye.

"Of course."

"Forgive me, Crispin."

"Yes."

And he turned to face the wall. He was sad and sleepy. He knew the ants were building their hills at this precise moment.

And she came to bed silently, her back against his. He slept, separated from her by an emptiness thick and resilient in the dark.

She knew the silence and soon, tomorrow, she hoped, it would be gone. Perhaps. ‡