



LOIDA
LEWIS

AND
BLAIR S. WALKER

WHY SHOULD GUYS HAVE ALL THE FUN?



AN Asian American Story
of Love, Marriage,
Motherhood, and Running
a Billion Dollar Empire

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WILEY

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DEDICATION



Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

(To the greater glory of God) – St. Ignatius Loyola

TO

Leslie Malaika Lewis

Christian Roy Vincent Hamadun Harelimana Lewis Sword

Savilla Joy Innocente Niyonkuru Lewis Sword

Gavin Rodney Sword

January 26, 1973–April 27, 2022

Co-parent with Leslie

Father of Christian and Savilla

TO

Christina Savilla Nicolas Lewis and Daniel Noah Halpern

Calvin Reginald Lewis Halpern

Sasha Lewis Nicolas Halpern

Macy Savilla Lewis Halpern

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PROLOGUE



“All things work together unto good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

—Romans 8:28

Lord, please destroy the cancer that’s sapping the life of my beloved soulmate. Father God, have mercy in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Slowly lifting my head from my clasped hands, I make the sign of the cross and then open my eyes onto the sumptuous interior of 834 Fifth Avenue, a breathtaking, 15-room, two-level East Side co-op apartment across the street from Central Park. New Year’s Day 1993 was celebrated a few days ago, meaning my family and I have lived in 834 Fifth Avenue less than a month.

My husband, Reginald Lewis, purchased and oversaw the decoration of this exquisite \$12-million abode, which holds four upstairs bedrooms, a dining area capable of seating 24, antiques that include two eighteenth-century French writing desks, and masterpieces from artists such as Romare Bearden and Picasso.

I’d sell it all in a heartbeat, if that would obliterate the inoperable brain cancer my spouse is bravely battling.

Ditto Reginald’s private jet and our majestic, multimillion-dollar rental home in Paris, where Reginald guides the fortunes of an international food corporation he acquired five years ago for \$1 billion.

Wealth has never been my be-all and end-all. At the moment, my top priority is saving the love of my life, the father of our daughters, Leslie and Christina.

If God gave me a choice in the matter, I’d gladly exchange my life for Reginald’s. He’s the rock our family is anchored to.

My thoughts are interrupted by the voice of our butler, Lucien Stoutt: “Mrs. Lewis, the Reverend Angelo Lando is downstairs.”

“Bring him upstairs, Lucien.”

Easily the best-known faith healer in the Philippines, my homeland, Lando (not his real name) gives me a firm handshake after striding confidently into the master bedroom. A slightly built man who’s pushing 60, he has jet-black hair and looks to be about 5-foot-6. Lando’s accompanied by another Filipino who’s carrying a black leather bag. I’m guessing it contains what Lando needs to perform psychic surgery on my husband.

As Lando approaches a massage table that’s been draped with towels for my spouse’s procedure, I draw in a super deep breath and hold it for a second, then exhale slowly.

This desperate faith-healer gambit is my idea, not my husband’s.

Few individuals are as analytical, fact-based and no-nonsense as Reginald, who turned 50 last month. When he decided against chemotherapy and radiation treatments in order to protect his diminishing brain function, I secretly wept because I would have opted for both of those regimens.

But once it was clear that Western medicine’s top cancer-fighting weapons were off the table, I began looking into the Philippines’ rich history of nontraditional medical treatments.

Faith healers do booming business back home. And the best of the best has flown to Manhattan from the Philippines for the express purpose of saving my darling husband.

Reginald initially wanted nothing to do with “that bullshit quackery” as he characterized it, but now that his weakened left side has left him barely able to walk, he’s reluctantly agreed. Explaining why Reginald is lying face-up on the massage table, wearing shorts that a towel has been draped over.

Joining me, Reginald, Lando, and Lando’s assistant in the huge master bedroom is my brother-in-law, Tony Fugett, who’s traveled from Baltimore to assist his stricken sibling. Someone who’s been a who’s been a godsend since his brother has taken ill, Tony is looking at Lando with unabashed skepticism that borders on hostility.

Clad in a white Cuban shirt and dark slacks, Lando isn't wearing a mask or gloves but has a thick gold ring on his left hand and a hefty gold bracelet on his right wrist.

Picking the black leather bag from the floor, he suddenly thrusts it toward the ceiling and calls out in a booming voice:

"Mga espiritu! Alisin ang lahat ng negatibong energies mula sa katawan ni Reg Lewis."

Not understanding Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines, my husband and Tony are clearly baffled.

I'll tell them later what Lando has just bellowed: "Spirits! Remove all negative energies from Reg Lewis' body."

Now Lando begins silently kneading Reginald's stomach, before making a quick north-to-south incision using only his hands. Torrents of bright red blood begin flowing down Reginald's sides, staining the white towels protecting the massage table.

Alarmed, I peer at my husband's face to see if he's in excruciating pain, but miraculously he seems to be doing just fine. Lando runs his hands and fingers through the massive incision he's created, then starts pulling bloody entrails out of Reginald's midsection . . . even though my husband's cancer is attacking his brain . . . I really want to believe this, I really, really do.

But it doesn't take long to see Lando is relying on impressive sleight of hand and is substituting animal entrails for the cancerous material he's supposedly extracting from my soulmate. As Lando continues his routine, it's clear to Reginald, Tony, and me that the renowned faith healer is merely an opportunistic charlatan, but we allow him to finish his "operation."

When it's over about 15 minutes later, Reginald calmly and courteously thanks Lando, who I direct Lucien to escort downstairs.

Lucien, Lando, and Lando's assistant are barely out the bedroom door before Tony, who has a temper like his older brother, pops off. Noting that Lando was "palming" Reginald and little else, Tony is dead set against Lando receiving his \$20,000 fee.

Reginald, who's now sitting upright on the massage table as I numbly wipe fake blood off his stomach and chest, is equally adamant that Lando is getting paid.

"Why am I paying him?" Reginald asks quietly. "Because there was a promise of hope. Is this amount of money worth the promise of hope?" "Yes!"

Hope. I'm armed with something considerably stronger than that, namely, the unparalleled might of my Lord and Savior. I'm able to see Angelo Lando's visit this morning for exactly what it is: a test of my faith.

Nothing I just saw weakened my allegiance in the slightest, which is what God wanted to learn before He blesses my spouse and I with a miracle.

"Darling, we're going to beat this," I tell Reginald as I look him in the eye. Upon hearing this he wraps both arms around me, and I can practically feel the determination emanating from his fierce heart.

With God in our corner, there's no way the malady sabotaging my husband's brain can win.



1



THE GIRL FROM SORSOGON

Like most ultra-successful entrepreneurs, my father, Francisco J. Nicolas, Sr., has a knack for peering into the future.

When my mother, Magdalena Mañalac Nicolas, was lugging me around in her belly, Papa sensed that my brothers, Danilo and Jose, would soon have a little sister. Whenever a hunch takes root in my father's hyperactive brain, he leaves nothing to chance when it comes to turning that hunch into reality.

That explains why Papa scours the Philippines in search of a picture of brunette Hollywood actress Deanna Durbin. A huge star during the 1940s, Durbin clearly has something that resonates with my dad, because after locating her photograph, he brings it to our house in the town of Sorsogon and hangs it in my parents' bedroom, right in my expecting mom's line of sight.

He believes that if Mama gazes upon Durbin's image day in and day out, I'll *have* to come out a girl! Perhaps one resembling Durbin, a cute, young White woman with an ample forehead, high cheekbones, and winsome smile?

If this sounds off-the-wall, eccentricities and willful ways are part of Papa's charm. Weeks before Mama's due date, Papa strolls onto a Sorsogon field where several water buffalo he owns are kept. After carefully inspecting the beasts, my father hand-picks one to fulfill the sacred duty of pulling a cart that will transport him and Mama to the hospital for my birth.

You can't let a water buffalo full of negative energy pull your wife and newborn child around town, right?

When my mother's contractions begin the morning of December 23, 1942, the designated water buffalo is hitched to our cart, and my parents set off for Sorsogon Provincial Hospital. With World War II under way and the Philippines besieged by Japanese occupiers, most Filipinos aren't driving cars, in part because Japanese soldiers have no qualms about commandeering every operational civilian vehicle they encounter.

So, my solidly upper-middle-class parents ride in an animal-drawn cart to the medical facility where Dr. Saturnino Lopez helps me draw my first breath. Despite being born into noteworthy affluence, my first ride is in a creaky wooden cart that trails a smelly water buffalo! War and pestilence are great equalizers indeed.

As we head home from the hospital, my parents and I roll past smiling, waving fishermen and farmers, the primary residents of Sorsogon Province. Papa, who's built a lucrative lumber and furniture business in Sorsogon Province, is universally admired thanks to his kindness and generosity.

Mama, on the other hand, elicits province-wide fear and trepidation, thanks to her terrifically exacting nature. Like Papa, Mama also thought I was going to be a girl, which is why she put up with Deanna Durbin's cheerful, intrusive gaze while waiting to deliver me.

I spend the bulk of my childhood in a huge two-story concrete house that's the most prominent dwelling in the town of Sorsogon, as well as the only one with a drugstore, bowling alley, gasoline station, billiard tables, a lumber business on the first floor, and living quarters on the second.

As children are prone to do, I spend a lot of time quietly observing the interpersonal dynamic between my parents. There's no question Mama is every bit as strong-willed and set in her ways as Papa. That sets the stage for a lot of bickering, which is usually due to their differing management approaches when dealing with the many workers our family employs.

One particularly spirited quarrel kicks off after a carpenter arrives at our house to tackle a project but fails to bring the tools he needs to do the job properly. When Mama discovers this, she immediately begins pummeling the poor man with blistering sarcasm.

When my father hears the commotion and has the audacity to object on the carpenter's behalf, this sparks a disagreement that's considerably louder and more fiercely contested than the usual knock-down, drag-out shouting matches Papa and Mama are always having.

Papa always sides with the poor, the oppressed, society's have-nots. I embrace this same worldview, as do my brothers and my sister, Imelda, who was born a few years after me. But like Mama, I have a hard time dealing with people who are incompetent, inefficient, and lacking in focus and common sense. I just happen to be more tactful than Mama when encountering someone's inadequacies but, like her, I can also be stern and uncompromising.

Lest I leave the impression that my early days are dominated by strife and turmoil, my childhood is actually very joyful. My parents may have markedly different personalities, but they deeply love each other and always sing from the same sheet music when it comes to loving and nurturing their children.

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

During those times when my parents aren't around, it falls on my older brothers Danilo and Jose to show me how the world works. Their lessons tend to be more entertaining than Papa's and Mama's, so I'm over the moon when an opportunity arises to hang out with my brothers and some of their buddies in a Manila neighborhood where Mama's parents own a big home.

An energetic and inquisitive 5-year-old attempting to stave off boredom on a blisteringly hot summer day, I'm about to discover that the Almighty has ordered one of His most vigilant guardian angels to watch over me. As I play with Danilo, 10, Jose, 7, and their pals alongside an empty dirt road, far in the distance a tiny plume of tan dust materializes and silently grows larger as it creeps toward us. We all watch this development with eager grins.

Traffic has been sporadic in the Philippines since World War II ended two years earlier, thanks to the fact that a large number of roads and bridges are pockmarked with massive bomb craters. The national economy is pretty bombed out, too, leaving Filipinos without much disposable income for purchasing and maintaining cars, trucks, and scooters.

Consequently, the sight of a vehicle coming our way has my brothers and their friends chattering excitedly. How better to spice up an unremarkable Philippine day than with a Kamikaze dash in front of an oncoming car!

"*Takot ka ba, Loida?*" (Are you scared, Loida?) my brothers and their friends taunt in singsong Tagalog, our native tongue. "*Takot ka ba?*"

No, not in the least. Not many things generate fear inside pre-pubescent brains, including scenarios that could easily result in grievous bodily harm or death. Likely assuming that I'm too petrified with fear to join them, my brothers and their buddies flit across the dirt road well in advance of the fast-moving vehicle, which is almost upon us now and resembles a landlocked olive-green battleship trailing a brownish wake.

A U.S. Army truck.

"*Takot ka ba?*" Here's your answer, fellas!

Intent on pulling off a daring sprint that will be the stuff of legend and that will make these silly boys stop equating frilly cotton dresses with timidity, I start running as fast as my little legs can propel me. About four paces into my mad dash, the world unexpectedly goes topsyturvy. The blue of the sky and brown of the dirt road begin to intermingle in rapid-fire fashion, punctuated by a terrifying CRUNCH! When the herky-jerky kaleidoscope finally stops turning, I find myself sprawled

awkwardly on the ground, listening to blood-curdling screams from my brothers as a roiling cloud of thick brown dust nearly obscures the sun.

I also hear soul-rending wailing that could be coming from only one person—my mother. How did she get here?

Mercifully, a little greenish-blue apron that was draped over my dress got entangled in one of the truck's huge wheels, resulting in my right foot getting crushed, but saving me from being completely smashed beneath a gargantuan tire like a cyan-colored bug.

Perhaps due to the onset of shock, I don't feel any pain as I listen to the truck's diesel engine clatter to a stop, followed by the sound of several deep, anxious-sounding voices. In no time, Mama is hovering over and comforting me, and she's quickly joined by a group of dark-complexioned men who have close-cropped black hair and are clad in green military uniforms. From my vantage point on the ground, they all look to be at least 10 feet tall.

They're babbling excitedly in an incomprehensible language, but it's clear from their tone of voice that they're nearly as frightened as I am. One of the soldiers quietly squats beside Mama, before picking me up with a combination of tenderness and strength I've only felt at the hands of my father.

I must have passed out at that point, because the next thing I remember is being in a hospital bed inside a U.S. Army medical facility, feeling an eerie numbness on my right foot.

After getting discharged, I spend several months hobbling around in a white plaster cast that encases my foot and ankle, a small price to pay in light of what could have unfolded. My injury transforms me into a neighborhood celebrity whose friends and family sweetly scribble touching messages on my cast.

A post-crash activity I've come to enjoy is watching my parents put the fear of God into my brothers Danilo and Jose, who are admonished repeatedly for not taking better care of their little sister. While I do get a kick out of this, I feel sad whenever I think back to the mournful sounds that came from my Mama and brothers while I laid crumpled in the dirt. I don't ever want to be a source of pain or discomfort for my family again.

There's a saying that goes "the past is prologue," which definitely proves to be true where my mishap is concerned.

First, getting mowed down by a huge military truck and escaping largely unscathed is confirmation that God holds me firmly in His loving, protective embrace. Moving forward, I never doubt that the Almighty is my strength and my shield, just as Psalm 28 states.

Second, that fateful day won't be the last time an African American man sends me flying head over heels and then helps restore my equilibrium with quiet inner strength and compassion.

Third, I learn it's a dumb idea to rubberstamp a plan simply because males have signed off on it. Because even my young mind instantly understood that running in front of that truck might not be the brightest thing to do. Using my accident as a yardstick, in the future I give my feminine intuition much greater weight when mapping out potential courses of action.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FROM PAPA

The man who views himself as the king of foreshadowing, Papa, naturally has his own unique take on my accident. To him, my escape from death is simply God's affirmation that I'm going to be a great lawyer, in keeping with Papa's dreams for me. My father attended the University of the Philippines College of Law for two years, but was making so much money from his burgeoning lumber business that he left law school before graduating.

According to my father, I'm tailor-made for a legal career, thanks to being articulate, fast-thinking, and someone who gets along with the impoverished and the wealthy equally well. It never occurs to me that Papa might still be a wannabe attorney, even though the Nicfur Furniture business he started in 1940 has prospered impressively.

Papa's keen interest in my future highlights one of the main parenting differences between him and Mama. A pharmacy school graduate, she's a doting mother who's one of my main confidants. Unlike Papa, Mama seems more inclined to allow for free will when it comes to the professions her offspring pursue.