

THREE STORIES IN THE LIFE OF JULIAN CANDELABRA

Lualhati
Bautista,
translated by
Adolfo
Aranjuez

INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE'S TRANSLATION BY ADOLFO ARANJUEZ

The original intention for this translation was as an exercise in creative potential: what would happen when I, as a non-professional translator, was faced with a 'gap' in my knowledge of both languages? As I dived into the text, however, attuning myself to cadence and connotation, I was compelled to rediscover a part of me that I had been neglecting. It seems the gap didn't just exist in the space between Filipino and English, but also in my conception of the bilingualism that is central to my identity.

I grew up an Anglophone in the Philippines. To this day, I still flounder with Filipino – or, to be less political, Tagalog, as the former term was born of a 1930s decree to establish a national language based on Tagalog, to the exclusion of the country's hundreds of other languages. My parents have videos of me as a four-year-old, mouthing away in perfect English, speaking only the occasional word or phrase in Tagalog. And when I got to school, at which point I'd begun to parade the status of 'bilingual', I found that Tagalog didn't come naturally to me. I was a bibliophile but wasn't enraptured by Tagalog literature. I was a word-nerd but found Tagalog grammar laborious. My case was such that I learnt English slightly earlier and was encouraged by my socio-political context to continue favouring it: Tagalog may have been more widely spoken throughout the archipelago, but it was English that bore prestige.

Back then, I often sought recourse to English analogues of Tagalog terms. I perceived Tagalog as reducible to English, albeit with its own syllables and orthographic scribbles. Noam Chomsky, proponent of the concept of Universal Grammar, would have commended me for thinking that I could understand Filipino via/as English. Yet what was it that kept Tagalog at a distance from me, leaving me always knowing but never fully understanding?

Moving to Australia at fourteen enabled me to make better sense of my bilingualism. I studied linguistics in high school, and this catalysed my interest in the relationship between language and culture, in how a society's values become embedded, over time, into the language it uses. And after becoming acquainted with Lacan and Derrida and poststructuralism at university, I more deeply appreciated how reality is not only represented by, but also constructed through, language.

Interestingly, my not-so-perfect fluency in Tagalog allowed me enough 'linguistic distance' to engage with it on a constructive level. My disconnect, I've concluded, lay in my desire to reduce one language to the other, in my failure to recognise the particular permutations of particles and prepositions, affixes and articles, verbs and vocatives, that shape them both. I don't have enough

space in this piece to go into all of these differences, but perhaps the most interesting is that Tagalog is verb-centric. In its conventional voice (something akin to the active voice in English, though the use of the term would be strictly incorrect here), the order of words in a sentence is *verb-noun-noun*. Which of the two nouns acts as subject and object is dependent on the verb's conjugation, alluding to its power in determining meaning. For example: *Hinuli ni José ang isda* directly means 'Caught by José [object] the fish [subject]', whereas *Humuli si José ng isda* is 'Caught José [subject] the fish [object]'. Tagalog's word order contrasts with that of English, whose conventional (active) sentences are always arranged such that the main noun (subject) in some way acts upon (verb) another noun (object). And when swapping voice, both verb (conjugation) and nouns (positions in the sentence) change. In English, therefore, the focus remains on the noun in the subject position.

Tagalog's favouring of action over actor can be more effectively illustrated when pronouns are involved. What would be the same pronoun in English, occupying the same position in a sentence (e.g. 'he'), would take either a doer or receiver form in Tagalog depending on the verb, which, as the focal point, is unchanged: *Kinain niya* means 'He ate', whereas *Kinain siya* is 'He was eaten'. By the same token, Tagalog's third-person pronouns (*niya/siya*, as well as the plural *nila/sila*) lack gender, which can lead to ambiguities about who does what when multiple agents are involved in the same paragraph. Thus, in the earlier example, *Kinain niya* could have easily been 'She ate'. Lastly, Tagalog has a 'first-person dual' pronoun (*kitá*), which dissolves the doer-to-receiver directionality of actions into a sort of circularity. The well-known sentence *Mahal kitá* literally translates to 'Love I-you'; it is the 'loving' that is important, not who loves whom.

That verbs are so prominent in Tagalog reflects my experience of life in the Philippines. In addition to the traits I've discussed, there are words for very specific actions, like *magmorokolyo* ('to act a fool', as rapper Ludacris would put it); *tungangá* (which means 'to be idle', but also encompasses a sense of 'spacing out' and 'listlessness'); *maglupasáy* (literally 'to lie prostrate', but always used in the figurative to evoke an image of frustration or exhaustion); and even *anuhin* ('to do something unspecified', literally 'what-ing'). The focus of the language, it seems, is on living and doing – which is unsurprising, as Filipinos are known for being vivacious and industrious.

Tagalog's emphasis on action played a significant role in my choice of text to translate. The story not only won first prize in the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature – the Philippine equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize – in 1982, but is also in the realist style, which lends itself to honest depictions of activity. Much like the rest

of Lualhati Bautista's work, its realism pulls our attention towards 'what is', rather than possibilities or the unseen or internal conflicts (admittedly, though, there are brief soliloquies in 'Julian Candelabra'). In this form, it is conveniently placed to highlight the value, in Philippine culture, of making and acting upon the right choices. The protagonist, Julian, falls prey to three instances of misjudgment. Consequently, he dishonours both his family and himself, which is salient given that pride (in both positive and negative senses) is paramount to Filipino identity. Here, the reader is made to ponder less on what Julian was trying to achieve, and more on the means he used to attain it. Bautista's story is not so much about characterisation – the subject, his origins and motivations – but rather what her protagonist has done to enact, and ultimately efface, his *dangál* ('honour').

As I worked on the translation I easily immersed myself in the 'macro' literary aspects of the text; my difficulties arose when honing in on the mechanics of the language. I'm normally quite the pedant, but linguistic pedantry is fuelled by a full command of the language. And as I've said, I'm not as versed in the many shades of Tagalog as I am with English. At the same time, however, my fourteen years in the country did afford me a *lived* awareness of how the language works. It was this pragmatic knowledge, coupled with my linguistic distance, that drove my translation. Working on this piece was both exciting and unnerving. Whenever I wasn't absolutely certain I knew what a term meant, I resigned myself to a contextual derivation of its meaning – one of my 'translator's rules' was *No dictionaries*, regardless of how much I worried this could distort Bautista's intended meaning. Similarly, there were occasions when I 'just knew' what Bautista was hoping to communicate and deviated from the literal translation; these, I felt, would be more 'true' to the text than any direct translation could be.

I'll probably never get an opportunity to engage with Tagalog – to be as considered with word choice, to be so attentive to etymology and turn of phrase, implication and intention – like I have during the course of this translation. But I am grateful for the way this experience has enriched my relationship with the language that formed the backdrop of my childhood. I do hope I've managed to capture the animated nature of Tagalog and done justice to Bautista's poignant and masterful story.

THREE STORIES IN THE LIFE OF JULIAN CANDELABRA
BY LUALHATI BAUTISTA

TRANSLATED BY ADOLFO ARANJUEZ

He, Julian Candelabra, is the son of a couple who, despite being poor, as his father would have put it, live 'honourably'. This being the case, Julian learnt early on that it can be difficult to live honourably if you're hungry, or, as he experienced as a child, if there are lots of things you can't buy. And when, all the while, your playmate Bong is loaded with cash and his mother, *Aling Sandra*, is showy about it around you.

True, *Aling Sandra* was significantly better off compared to their other neighbours. In those days, when only a few people had TVs, he couldn't just peek through his neighbours' windows to watch *Popeye* or whatever. They would have certainly closed their windows! But *Aling Sandra* would welcome him in, sit him next to Bong, and let him watch until such time that she really needed to turn off the TV. When you think about it, he did run errands for *Aling Sandra*. But *Aling Sandra* was fair even with her errands. Often, she would give him a five- or ten-peso reward for every little errand she had asked him to do.

"Julian, accompany Bong to the pharmacy," and in front of him *Aling Sandra* would open one of the dresser's drawers and take out money from her wallet. In front of him, *Aling Sandra* would parade, without reservation, her tens and her twenties. "Good gracious, turns out I have a seventy in cash here. O, take this tenner, then, Julian. You hold it, ha? Bong might lose it."

Perhaps it was because he was a friend of Bong's that *Aling Sandra* was congenial with him. As he saw it, *Aling Sandra* just wanted Bong to have playmates with whom he didn't quarrel. Whatever her plans, *Aling Sandra* would leave Bong at home so long as Julian was with him. Even though the boys were roughly the same age, *Aling Sandra* considered Julian a trustworthy person-of-the-house.

He would be alone in the lounge room, with *Aling Sandra* possibly doing something in her room and Bong momentarily outside. And just there, open, would be the dresser containing the wallet. Maybe *Aling Sandra* would be chatting with someone outside and Bong would be briefly in the toilet, and he would be alone in the lounge room near the open dresser containing *Aling Sandra's* wallet. There had been several instances of this, and he had estimated that he'd be left inside with enough time to dive into the dresser, yank a note from *Aling Sandra's* wallet, and return to where he had come from as though he hadn't moved at all, had done nothing wrong, and appearing like he had been behaving himself.

He really wanted to buy chicks that he could take care of and raise into chickens before his father's birthday, so his father could cook something for his mates that they wouldn't tease him about. But he had nothing, really nothing at all; and all this time, just there, often left uncounted, would be *Aling Sandra's* money.

Little did they know how his heart quaked when he did do it. Little did they know how desperately he called out for God. But God occasionally played deaf. At the very moment that he was putting her wallet back, *Aling Sandra* suddenly entered the room. And inscribed on her face was surprise, coupled with anger.

"Julian, what are you doing?"

He could say nothing. Pale in the face, weak in the knees that he let *Aling Sandra* check his pockets and discover the tenner that he would have otherwise successfully hidden.

A never-ending belting is what he got from his father when *Aling Sandra* tattled on him, and his mother could do nothing other than yell and cry. He had bruises up to his face, he wet his pants from the pain, he almost couldn't get back up because of how difficult it had become. He really thought his father would keep going so long as he was still breathing. A strong disappointment was sown in his young mind over his father's inability to understand the urges that had pushed him to do it:

"I really, really wanted to buy some chicks! Father, I was just tempted! I just couldn't stop myself, Father!"

Never again did Julian ever enter *Aling Sandra's* house, nor the house of anybody else, from then on. A long time passed before people forgot what had happened. In truth, there were many instances when he caught older people talking about what he had done and shaking their heads, with words like, "If he were my son, he'd have gotten more than just this from me," and, "Oh no, don't let your chil-

dren get mixed up with him, love! They might learn his bad ways, too!"

Not one of them ever considered that he, too, might be capable of shame.

People were wary of him for a rather long time. They didn't know that Julian was himself aloof with them: he worried that, if someone were robbed, he would automatically be blamed for it. He was branded, people saw him as evil, and he feared the possibility that they'd turn him in to the cops.

Even after some years had passed, Julian remained scared of entering another person's home. He was seventeen and everything but he was still scarred by the terrible event he had been implicated in at age twelve, which birthed in him an intense lack of self-confidence and a wariness.

"Hus, silly you! You think people are out to get you," he'd be told by *Aling Connie*, the wife of the courier *Mang Felix*. "Aba, Julian; if you're to clean the gutters in my backyard, you're going to have to walk through the inside of my house!"

Aling Connie often called on him. Julian, could you assemble my daylight lamp, please. Julian, could you take a look at my fuse; it's blown. That he immediately pursued each of *Aling Connie's* errands was a vestige of his sky-high aspiration, despite everything, to gain the trust of others.

"O, take these five pesos, Julian. For some smokes, at least."

"D-dear me, I don't smoke!"

"O, well then, it can be for your afternoon snack. It would be terrible if I just set you task after task without recompense. Don't be shy. Just take it."

He still felt bad about it; he would have been satisfied with *Aling Connie* being pleased with him. But the five pesos would have also been valuable to him, should troubled times come. In particular, he was graduating from high school, and the amount he owed the school was especially large.

At some point, *Aling Connie* called on him again.

"Julian, could you help me?"

He was alarmed. "What is it?"

But *Aling Connie* was smirking. "Would you believe it, I locked myself out of my house? You know our door: if you forget the key when you leave the house, you're dead! And your *Mang Felix* just happens to be away."

"E, what should I do, then?"

"Take apart the jalousie windows. We can go through that way."

Take down the jalousies of someone else's window, in the dark of night? My, how scary! What if people thought he were a burglar! What if they suddenly fired shots at him?

"Don't you worry, I will be on guard," said *Aling Connie*. "I won't leave you while you're removing the jalousies."

He was still reluctant but he pitied *Aling Connie*. And, in any case, nothing unfavourable ever happened to him while he was in *Aling Connie's* charge.

"O, don't leave so quickly," interrupted *Aling Connie* as he was saying farewell. "You may as well eat here."

"Pardon me?"

"Why not? I've already cooked. To be honest, I was about to set the table when *Mang Felix* called to say he wouldn't be home until tomorrow." He sensed a bitterness taint *Aling Connie's* voice.

He was hungry, too. More than that, it pleased him that *Aling Connie* seemed to be overflowing with trust in him. And he did crave the trust of others!

Aling Connie's demeanour, and the fact that she was sharing her secrets with him, was very heartening for him:

"I'm so grateful you joined me. You just don't know how important it is to me that I have someone to share a meal with. You know, I'm often almost in tears after I've cooked

something special, only to have your *Mang Felix* call me to say he won't be home until the next day!"

It felt good to have *Aling Connie* run to him, that it was he she chose to report to, with whom she confided her most private feelings:

"Come back, okay, Julian? Sometime. When your *Mang Felix* isn't around. So I have someone to talk to!"

He couldn't understand why it was he, a mere boy you wouldn't even call clever, that *Aling Connie* felt compelled to chat with. But the *why's* never meant anything to him. It was enough that *Aling Connie* liked to chat with him; it was enough that he felt a sense of importance. So when *Aling Connie* met him on the street to say, "Come to the house later; *Mang Felix* is away," he went to her without hesitation.

Aling Connie was looking very sexy when he arrived. So much so that he felt embarrassed to look at her chest. He feared she might say he was being rude, so he kept his head down the whole time. But *Aling Connie* was chirpy, teasing him: "Why won't you put your head up?" she said. "It's not like you have dirt on your face, a! O, it's not like you don't have something going for you. It's not shameful to show your face. Julian, come here, won't you. Why do I get the feeling that you're being evasive?"

His skin was thick with sweat. "E, A-aling Connie."

"Come to my side. Sus, Julian, don't shake! What is wrong with you, you've just been touched! ... You're a man, I'm a woman. There's nothing wrong here, Julian. Except, well, are you gay?"

"Don't, *Aling Con*—"

"Don't you, either! Haha! Don't worry, I'll take care of it. Hmm, that's what I like in a man. A man who really smells like one!"

After that, he asked God: "My God, how could I have done this?" And again, the only explanation, which he had also used when his father was close to paralysing him about five years ago: I was just tempted! I just couldn't stop myself! He wanted to go to *Mang Felix* and say, I was just tempted; I just couldn't stop myself. But at the same time he was so, so scared that *Mang Felix* would find out that something had happened between him and *Aling Connie*, despite him being tempted, despite him being unable to stop himself.

He would cross paths with *Mang Felix* and he would almost be unable to lift his feet due to the extreme knobbliness of his knees. Did *Mang Felix* already know? My God, had *Mang Felix* found out? Then *Mang Felix* would nod to him in greeting and he would become listless from the relief of knowing that *Mang Felix* still did not know.

Apparently, *Mang Felix* was looking for him! And so his soul would be filled to the brim with nervousness. Did *Mang Felix* already know? My God, had *Mang Felix* found out? It turned out *Mang Felix* was merely sending him on an errand and he would become listless again from discovering that, so far, *Mang Felix* still did not know.

But, of course: *Aling Connie* wouldn't talk about it! Of course: *Mang Felix* couldn't possibly find out about it. After a few days, Julian estimated that he was off the hook and felt he could breathe freely. So when *Mang Felix* visited him again one afternoon, he approached the man without worry.

He barely avoided the jab *Mang Felix* directed at him. The expletives from *Mang Felix's* mouth were clear, the startled screaming of Julian's mother was ominous, the commotion that formed around them was rapid, and at the forefront of his mind was one lucid command to himself: Run, Julian, you'll be killed! Run!

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you, snake!"

There was no chance for him to tell *Mang Felix*: *Mang Felix*, I just couldn't stop myself!

Julian scrupulously stayed hidden after that incident. Wow, if you were in his shoes! Even when he heard news that *Mang Felix* had stopped trying to hunt him down, he still remained in hiding. Julian tossed and turned, he was anxious. He was restless from worrying that *Mang Felix* would find him, from worrying about his father's fury, and from worrying about his mother. And while his father was strict, that was nothing compared to having a roof above his head; it meant he wasn't completely alone in life. At the end of it all, a brief moment of joy with *Aling Connie* wasn't

worth the self-inflicted punishment he was undergoing; it was much like how ten pesos wasn't worth the belting he received from his father and the shame brought by having committed such a misdemeanour at a young age.

I won't do it again, Julian promised himself, along with attempting in earnest to be better. He tried everything to ensure he could eat: he pushed carts at the market, became a bus cleaner at the terminal, a *passenger-announcer* at Sangandaan highway, a street vendor and, when he could no longer resist, went home to ask for his father's forgiveness.

"About what happened in the past, Father."

"Can you just not mention it to me anymore, Julian," forbade his father. "No explanation could possibly justify your foolishness. Ever since you were little, you couldn't be trusted."

He could do nothing but keep his head down.

"Yes, you're grown up now. I can't hit you anymore," his father added, sadly. "But can you not rob me of so much honour? In the end I don't want to regret having had you as a son."

He wanted to protest and proclaim his father vicious and truly closed-minded. But one look at his father's face and he could see that any such resignation was false. It was only recently that he left, but in that time his father had aged significantly, as though he had seriously worried about Julian's disappearance. Despite his father's sharp tongue and stern hands, Julian knew that the old man loved him.

Julian felt sorry for his father. After all, it's difficult being a parent, he thought.

After a long time spent stumbling along and giving things a go, Julian decided to become a waiter. Being a waiter wasn't the basest of jobs, and that aside it offered a good wage. In fact, would it be so bad if he were to get one- or two-peso tips from each customer? *Sus*, especially if he were to land himself a job in a hotel!

In preparation for the said profession, Julian attended a comprehensive seminar as required by an employment agency, whereby he and the other attendees were taught a few important things about serving others, including etiquette and the skilful handling of plates. Upon completing the seminar, he was one of the first to be taken on by the employment agency.

Of course, as a newbie, he started as a temporary waiter. That was okay because, you see, he was assigned to a first-class hotel-restaurant. They didn't have a clear arrangement regarding pay—nor did he know what percentage of his income went to the agency—but he had no complaints about the tips. And, as far as he understood as a newcomer, it was okay for him to help himself to the food. I'll surely balloon, Ma, from the food strewn all around me!

Little did he know that that restaurant's policy was to *bring your own snacks!*

"Pardon me? You mean, the food isn't free, Ma'am?"

The uncompromising Ma'am raised one of her eyebrows. "Are you crazy? This isn't just some restaurant, kid. And considering how many of you waiters there are, just feeding you would prevent management from breaking even!"

That seemed fair, agreed the 'understanding' newcomers. Consider how it would be if each waiter ate fried chicken worth seventy pesos.

Then a veteran whispered to Julian: "You will get to eat the food here, don't worry."

And he immediately discovered what the veteran meant after they both worked at a luncheon meeting and were tasked with bringing trays of leftover food back to the kitchen.

"There," said the veteran. "That's been paid for. We can help ourselves to that."

After the initial indulgence of his self-worth had passed, Julian began to think that, since it was only they that knew about their situation, about their social status that was lower even than dogs, he should no longer be ashamed. No outsider needed to know that they were scavenging leftovers.

But at that point they had to first put lids on the food, it wasn't yet time for merriment. Ma'am could catch them chewing, and they'd be fired from the job. It wouldn't be until two o'clock that the waiters had their break, when everyone was full and only a few lonesome customers could be seen.

But if that were the case, it wouldn't be wise at all to snub the leftovers of the patrons who had already left, for by then any packed lunches they had brought themselves, wrapped in plastic, would have spoiled!

"Eat up, Julian. It's all clean, they used serving spoons on those."

"And why be so picky? This place is expensive; tourists and big shots eat here. That is to say, people with money. Surely none of them are sick with anything. Even bad breath, surely none of them have it!"

"Eat up, Julian. Damn, *pare*, even though it's all leftovers, it'll be a change from the eggplant and shrimp paste that you've brought for lunch!"

After a month had passed, Julian finally understood the management's policies to do with waiters' wages (he asked around after wondering why his current pay was lower than the previous fortnight's):

It turns out that the hotel-restaurant had a predetermined budget for waiters' wages; it's just that no-one knew how many thousands it amounted to per month. One single predetermined budget that was divided by the total number of employees. So if it happened that a lot of extra waiters were called upon, or if the restaurant catered a large number of events and therefore had to employ lots of party waiters who were paid by the hour, it was no wonder that the share of the many temporary waiters would become increasingly small, as they had no set wage. The number of employees went up and down while no changes were made to management's budget.

And so Julian wondered. In all honesty, even if the hotel-restaurant he was working for did take on a large number of events, meaning that the number of staff that had to be paid likewise grew, didn't this mean that profits also rose? That is to say: if every chicken, for example, required an expense of fifteen pesos and was sold for seventy pesos, certainly the profits from one thousand chickens would be greater than just one hundred, right? So why is it that they thought the cash register would suffer if the budget for wages was increased?

You have no business questioning how management runs, Julian. Ask if you want to, it's a sure-fire way to lose your job!

Julian, the thing is, you know what they say: total. Temporaries end up with a larger tip.

O, e but what about the regulars, aren't their tips equally as large?

You can't do anything about that; they're regulars, e. They have a clear arrangement regarding their wages.

Tsk, tsk; it's lovely being a regular, isn't it?

You're a nincompoop! Why, is Ma'am your godmother? Maybe you think it's that simple becoming a regular!

Why not? My probation's done, a!

That's what you think. What you mean to say is: your probation's almost done. So watch yourself! As soon as they find something wrong with you, you're gone!

What? Why, I don't do anything wrong, a!

Doesn't matter! Do you have trouble understanding me? Here, they limit the number of regulars they have. Why, you ask? Because all of those are entitled to benefits! What management would derive pleasure from giving out benefits?

I-I don't do anything wrong.

Don't be so sure, Julian. Just before, I caught you red-handed. You snacked when it wasn't the allocated time, again!

"MA'AM!"

"You heard me, Julian. I'm sorry, you're a violator, e. I've told you before, I don't like catching staff munching when it's not time to eat!"

Oh, please no, prayed Julian. My God, please no. If Dad finds out about this, he'll think I've done another thing wrong.

"The thing I dislike the most is when people can't be trusted!" Ma'am added aggressively, and he was bruised by those words. "*Hala*, sign your termination paper!"

Termination paper?

"Ma'am," Julian said in a frenzy. "Please forgive me. You see, I was so, so hungry. I-I just couldn't stop myself!"

Julian heard an echo of reminiscence upon saying those very words. *I just couldn't help myself!* Is that really all that he could say whenever he committed some misdemeanour? Is there nothing else?

He was so, so hungry and food was everywhere. He just couldn't stop himself! Just like he couldn't stop himself when faced with the truth that he had absolutely no money and *Aling* Sandra's wallet was just there. Much like when, in a moment of passion and heat of the blood, *Aling* Connie prostrated her beautiful and sweet-smelling body upon him. Despite that, it was as though he still wasn't appeased, as though he had to keep wanting more. It was precisely when he felt extreme need and desire that people put him in situations he just couldn't fight. It would be then that he'd be seduced, charmed, tried.

"If you were going to starve us, Ma'am, you shouldn't let us see food," Julian managed to say.

Ma'am's eyebrow rose. "I'm sorry, say that again?"

"Ma'am, I-I'll just write myself a resignation letter, Ma'am."

With a cheeky smile, Ma'am tested his wits: "Why, what's the difference between a resignation letter and a termination paper?"

"If I apply elsewhere, Ma'am. You mean, I'm to show them a termination paper as a reference?"

Ma'am's face grew cheekier. "In that case, it reflects badly on the reputation of the company when its staff resign!"

Reputation, thought Julian. Do I not have a reputation?

And he also thought: Don't people have moral obligations to their fellowmen any longer? Have we come to the era of robots? Or have monsters just taken over?

He remembered his father and the latter's words: "But can you not rob me of so much honour?" and he almost wanted to cry upon discovering that it wasn't his father's but rather his own honour that had been robbed, right from the start. *Father, it isn't honourable to live like a dog scavenging leftovers! It isn't honourable to beg for mercy from monsters who pillage your honour!*

"My time is precious, Julian. Sign this already, if you want to receive even a morsel of your pay."

Julian couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when his mind turned dark. But, suddenly, he grabbed Ma'am's high collar, dragged and raised her by it, then put his hands on her neck. Tightly, thoroughly, twistedly. And the muscles on his arm, and the veins on his neck, they grew agitated while Ma'am tried to scream despite Julian's resolved wringing, until she took her last breath and, as though from somewhere, Julian heard the shocked screams of his mother.

In the courtroom, Julian could only give one alibi in response to the crime put against him, along with his decided avoidance of his father's accusatory eyes: *I just couldn't help myself!* ●