



The Unfolding

Jeehan Quijano

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Jeehan Quijano's novel *The Unfolding* concerns itself with the roots of trauma: Where does loneliness begin? How does guilt take up residence in a family? Can grief be traced through a lifetime, or even multiple lifetimes?

Benjamin, an occupational therapist living in Los Angeles, has returned to his native Philippines to mourn the death of his younger brother, Omar. At the same time, he's awaiting news of whether or not his childhood benefactor, Don Rafael, has survived a terrible storm.

These two deaths—one certain, the other in question—set the unfolding in motion. It is a slow excavation of sadness and longing handed down from father to son, beginning with Benjamin's early memories. They show that from an early age he dreamed of a life outside of rural San Jacinto, while Omar wished for deeper connections—with his brother, with the natural world, and with God. Their lonely widower father, Pablo, longs for a future that he can't possibly provide for either son.

When the wealthy Don Rafael extends an unimaginable offer to impoverished Pablo, it's not a question of whether Pablo will take him up on it, but of how quickly he'll grab at the chance to better his children's lives. The impact of his decision has unintended consequences; eventually, Benjamin alone is left to sift through the remains.

Layered details build lush settings. San Jacinto becomes a living, breathing place, with "a view of verdant plains or the fog circling the hills ... the fading light of late afternoons." While the story's pace is sometimes leisurely, it feels appropriate for the depths of mourning that Benjamin plumbs. *The Unfolding* is a moving story of family and loss that lingers in the senses.

ANITRA BUDD (November/December 2018)

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