



GIANTS OF JOY

by: DAPHEEN S. LAMOGAR

Art-loving tourists Jack and Claire, who had traveled from Canada to the small town of Angono, Rizal, hoped for a peaceful stay. They'd read that Angono was the "Art Capital of the Philippines," but nothing could prepare them for what they were about to see.

Their host, a bubbly 17-year-old named Maria, introduced herself in front of her family's ancestral home. She was in a colorful batik-strewn skirt and her eyes twinkled snickersomely.

"You come at the right moment," she said. "Tomorrow is Higites Festival. You'll meet the giants."

"Giants?" Claire raised an eyebrow, chuckling. "Like, tall people?"

Maria laughed. "Not quite. You'll see."

Jack and Claire woke the next morning to the sound of drums, whistles, and laughter. They stood outside and froze in admiration.

Lording over the crowd were giant papier-mâché figures — higites — that paraded through the streets, each one more than 10 feet tall. Their painted faces were stylized, some smiling, some stern, some just plain silly.

Children ran beside them, laughing. Hurrying dancers in bright baro't saya and kalis twirled to the music. The air was heavy with the scent of sweet kakanin, lechon, and smoke from firecrackers.

"Maria! This is amazing," Jack bellowed, snapping photos of a higitante in the costume of a fisherman.

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Maria said, "Every higante is what we represent in our culture — farmers, fishermen, bakers, even artists. They used to serve as forms of protest during Spanish colonization, mocking landlords and oppressors."

One higante woman stood over Claire with an oversized wooden spoon. "So they're like... giant storytellers?"

Maria nodded. "Exactly. They literally hold the spirit of the people. Big and proud."

In the afternoon, they visited the town museum in which Maria's father exhibited his (sculptural) art. He etched tales into wood —hundreds upon hundreds of epics of the Filipino people.

Jack thought for a moment, looking at a piece depicting farmers dancing under stars. "Here, you don't just maintain tradition — you live it."

Later that night, Maria had asked Jack and Claire to be with her at the town square, where the post-parade festivities were still going on with her family. Foods stands on the sides sold fresh off the grill inihaw na liempo, isaw, kwek-kwek and cold cups of sago't gulaman. The air smelled of charcoal smoke and street food.

Claire munched on a longganisa-stuffed lumpia and grinned. "This is not just a festival — it's a street party to its fullest.

Maria laughed, taking the last sip of iced buko pandan. "And that's how we do it in Angono. Culture, food, music and family — masaya, magulo, makulay."

Jack gestured to a group nearby taking pictures with a giant higante figure dressed as a painter. I love that each piece tells a story. They're not just props — they are your people."

Maria nodded. "Exactly, and yeah, they make hella good TikToks."

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They'd all come out this night to join the party, to dance, to laugh, to drink in the rhythm of a town that had learned to make a festival out of tradition — and history out of something you could put on post, share, and never forget.



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