



BENEATH THE KILING'S WATCH: RITUALS OF RESPECT

by: **MANNEFER B. TALLAYO**

High in the mist-shrouded mountains of Benguet, Ogayan, a young Kankanaey farmer, carefully tended his "num-a/nem-a" (a small patch of forest cleared for planting). The soil was rich, and his crops promised a good harvest, but mysterious events soon disturbed his peace. Night after night, his "mula" (fruits of his labor) disappeared without a trace. No wild animal tracks could be found, and the villagers grew uneasy, whispering about the unseen forces called "Kiling"—the spirit who govern what is seen and unseen, also known as "Adi-kaila."

One evening, determined to uncover the truth, Ogayan hid behind the towering pines, or "batang", near his "num-a". Suddenly, large monkeys with bright eyes and gentle hands approached and lifted him up. Instead of fright, Ogayan felt a strange calm as the creatures carried him deep into the forest. Before long, he found himself at a radiant clearing where a great feast—a *cañao*—was ongoing. The air was filled with the scent of roasted "baboy" (pig) and the sweet tang of "tapey", the rice wine sacred to the Kankanaey.

The monkeys, it seemed, were messengers of the Kiling, and the feast was a ritual to honor the spirits who walked between worlds. Here, Ogayan saw the power of the "manbunong", the chosen indigenous priest who could speak to the spirits through dreams and visions. The manbunong explained that the Kiling were not mere shadows but powerful beings: the "Adi-Kaila" in the sky who ruled over lesser gods, the "Kabunyan" who watch the mountains and rivers, and the revered Anito—the ancestors speaking wisdom and protection from beyond.

Ogayan learned that balance was vital. When people failed to honor the spirits with *kalalag/kararag* (prayers), *alagaden* (offerings), and *sida/ cañao* (ceremonies), the Kiling might bring misfortune or "sakit" (illness), poor harvests, or storms. But when respected,

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they blessed the “kapageyan” (rice fields), guided hunters, and guarded “pamilya” (families). The manbunong showed Ogayan how to prepare alagaden of baboy, rice, and tapis and wan-nes (woven cloth), and how to join tayao and sadong (communal dances) and ritual songs during “sida” (celebrations)—thanksgiving rites welcoming the spirit’s gifts.

As seasons passed, Ogayan returned home changed. He shared the stories of the Kiling with his barangay villagers, reminding all to live in harmony with the spirits of the daya (sky), daga (earth), and danum (water). Whenever hardship struck, the community gathered beneath the towering “batang” to call upon the manbunong, offering alagaden and cañao to restore peace. The Kiling, once invisible and mysterious, became a living part of their lives—whispering lessons of respeto (respect), panagyaman (gratitude), and connection to the great mountain world that cradled them.

In this way, the Kankanaey of Benguet wove their lives with the spirit realm, passing the sacred tradition of the Kiling from generation to generation. Through Ogayan’s journey, the ancient belief thrived like the green “batang”—silent, powerful, and ever-present beneath the endless langit.

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Definition of local terms used:

num-a/nem-a: swidden or patch of cultivated land

mula: crops or produce

Kiling / Adi-Kailà: spirits governing seen and unseen realms

batang: pine tree (common in Benguet)

cañao/sida: traditional feast and ritual

baboy: pig

tapey: traditional rice wine

manbunong: indigenous priest or shaman

kalalag/kararag: prayers

alagaden: offerings

kapageyan: rice field

pamilya: family

barangay: village/community

daya: sky

daga: earth

danum: water

respeto: respect

panagyaman: gratitude

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