

Synopsis of Potato Queen

by Rafaelito V. Sy

JUANCHO CHU is a gay man who was born and raised in the Philippines and has moved to San Francisco after four years at Williams College. He has wanted to make San Francisco his home ever since he was twelve, when a neighborhood watchman named **JAMES CAGNEY ALEJANDRO** awakens in him a fascination for the west. In San Francisco, Juancho befriends an American named **GERALD** and another Filipino, **ROWELL**, who, like Juancho, is an immigrant to the United States.

Although Rowell and Juancho are of the same nationality, they are different in appearance, personality, and social background. While Juancho is fair-skinned with Chinese features and is western educated, Rowell is dark-complexioned and a graduate from the University of the Philippines. Juancho is shy and lives in an antique-furnished condo provided for him by his parents. Rowell is outgoing and depended on a “Sugar Daddy” upon his arrival in America. The two meet in a travel agency, Access to the Seas of Asia, Inc. (ASEA, Inc.) where they both work as agents. Rowell’s true vocation, though, is as an artist. His art is his main reason for his move to the United States from the Philippines. His motto: once you’re a success in America, you’re a success all over the world. Rowell is driven by his need to prove that regardless of his being Asian, he is capable of great achievements, for the American gay community is a racially segregated one. Stereotypes are plenty: Latinos are passionate; black men are well-endowed; Asian men are frail. Juancho learns this himself, particularly through his relationship with Gerald.

Gerald is a computer analyst at Charles Schwab with a penchant for photography. He is a good looking man — even teeth, attentive eyes — but what makes him endearing is his self-deprecating sense of humor. He criticizes himself for having a “poochy” belly and “Brockwurst thick” fingers which he constantly nibbles on. Gerald admits to being a Rice Queen, a non-Asian gay man who has a liking for Asian men. He labels Juancho a Potato Queen, a non-Caucasian gay man who is attracted to white men. The two forge a strong friendship. Juancho denies to strictly being attracted to Caucasian men and thinks this labeling based on the basic food group associated with each race ridiculous. Yet he can’t ignore the gay community’s obsession with Marky Mark and men in billboard advertisements. Their images dominate gay pornography, club flyers, and gay media. Those in the gay community who fall after these images are the most desirable. Those who don’t are invisible. Since Juancho doesn’t perceive of himself as wholly living up to this western ideal of masculinity, he wonders on what basis a man would find him attractive. His physique? His skin color? What are his chances of finding love?

For the next ten years, Juancho meets various people who provide plausible answers to these questions:

NANDO is his first heartache. After one night together, Juancho later pursues him, but he rejects Juancho in favor of someone more timid and dependent on him.

LUNA SOLARES is a Filipino transsexual woman who emcees striptease acts at a gay Asian club. She is at home in America because here she finds acceptance within a community, whereas in the Philippines she is still considered a gay man, for that is a country ignorant of the difference between homosexuals and transsexuals.

IAN is Rowell's former "Sugar Daddy," though still in his thirties. He tells Juancho that Juancho is unlike most Asian men he's met in that Juancho didn't have to depend on anybody upon his arrival in the United States. This indicates to Juancho that Rice Queens generally favor Asians who are less westernized. The irony is that to belong to the American gay community, he must adapt to its trends in fashion and downplay his Asian heritage.

ALVIN KAPINSKY is a gay adult film star known by the screen name of **BIFF O'BRIEN**. During his years at Williams, Juancho would sneak off to Boston's red light district on weekends to view Alvin as Biff O'Brien. In San Francisco, he meets Alvin through Ian and discovers that Alvin is a solitary person whose sole dream is to open up a carpentry store.

Juancho learns that despite racial and cultural differences, regardless of physical appearance, everyone is in search of love and acceptance. Loneliness does not discriminate. Though he is alone now, he is confident that someday, even if it be in the distant future, he will find someone.