

# LOVE DOCTOR RIZAL

## PART 2

There is a certain level of cruelty in remembering a past buried deep in an attempt to forget. In Jose's case, it was the pain of mourning a love left unsaid that he forced himself to recall in an attempt to inspire a poem to be passed by tomorrow.

His creativity has dissipated from constant overuse that he is left with no choice but to subject himself to pain. He's been staring at this blank piece of paper for hours and it's already half past two in the early morning. His fault, really, as he chose to be happy all day thinking the night would help him become productive. He tried to mindlessly scribble in the hopes of coming up with something, anything. His brain tried to conjure an image from a long time ago when he first learned how to love but it was of no use. He had long forgotten her face, or her voice, her touch. That memory had been rendered to ash, together with the paper rose and the photograph.

Jose grabbed whatever book and began skimming through the pages. For the longest time, his life revolved around burying his nose in a book and collecting awards from the academe. As tedious as it may sound, it was the one thing that gave his life purpose...Until he met Leonor.

Leonor, the love of his life, the blood that fills his veins, the point at which everything intersects, his sweet Leonor, his greatest downfall, his original sin, the destroyer of men.

He could start at any point in time but it was when he was sixteen when he experienced his first heartbreak that ultimately dictated the course of history. He spent most of his days agonizing over the what-could-have-beens that he had managed to amass more than enough romantic literary content to last a few months. For fear of being made fun of, his notebook containing poems, short stories, essays and drafts was left in a small corner of his room to accumulate dust. Hidden. Or so he thought.

### MARCO SORIANO

I read your writing. It's good,  
it hurt me.

What he initially thought of as a cause for social suicide quickly made him famous among his close knit group of ilustrado friends. The compliments inflated his ego and somewhere down the line he developed a hyperfixation to gather as much material for

his magnum opus as possible. And so, he flirted and got involved with as many binibinis as he desired. He enticed them with sweet words, love letters, and romantic poems. He would send them flowers illegally picked hanging from some random Spaniard's gate. He would offer to draw their likeness and carve hearts out of a block of wood. In his own made up world, he was the epitome of a romantic and he intended to uphold the title. He found out he could charm his way through any binibini he wanted...except for the tall girl next door.

Jose, now on the cusp of adulthood, had transferred to a boarding house owned by Doña Concha Leyva. He was next door neighbors with a kind couple that would invite him over for snacks. He refused out of courtesy but it had more to do with the fact that he didn't want to appear 'patay-gutom'.

That was until one afternoon when the scent of champorado had overpowered his resistance where he found himself outside their doorstep. The kind and overly hospitable couple welcomed him in, satisfied that he finally gave in. There he saw for the first time the tall girl which he later found out to be their daughter. It wasn't that she was tall that made an impression but the combination of her stature and how she carried herself with such grace and elegance that really drew Jose in. Ever since then Jose would visit their house even on days devoid of any occasion.

Jose knocked on the door. He heard footsteps approaching.

**LEONOR V.**

Jose! You're here. Again...  
Earlier than usual. Mother has not  
prepared snacks yet. Come in.

**JOSE**

Leonor, good to see you too.

Jose said a little louder. He surveyed his surroundings and inched himself closer for a whisper.

**JOSE**

Are your parents here?

**LEONOR V.**

No, they're out for work.  
They'll be returning shortly.

Leonor closed the door. She came face to face with Jose as she turned her back against the hard wood. Jose gently placed a hand on the flat surface just inches beside her neck, cornering her. He wanted to make her feel as if he had the power in this situation. Appear imposing. He would have if only she wasn't a couple of centimeters taller than him. It was moments like this that he cursed his kuya Paciano for inheriting the taller gene. Good thing he stuffed his shoe with his spare sock.

**JOSE**

Good...Orang?

He said her nickname softly, laced with tenderness.

**LEONOR V.**

...Yes?

She held his gaze. Impressive. Other girls would have melted on the spot.

**JOSE**

About my proposal...

He took advantage of Leonor's firm gaze. He looked at her lips a second too long hoping she wasn't dim enough to misread his intentions. She stiffened, eyes wide, breath hitched. Good.

**JOSE**

What do you think?

She glared at him and walked forward purposely bumping Jose on the shoulder. Jose let out a small 'ow'. Only Leonor, a lady of good standing, would have the audacity to bump into him. They started off as playfully good friends.

**LEONOR V.**

Other men would have just  
courted a lady instead of  
asking for permission.

Jose was feeling his shoulder. It didn't hurt of course but he wanted to make her feel slightly sorry.

**JOSE**

Perhaps.

**LEONOR V.**

Perhaps you want to save yourself

the trouble of courting me in case  
I reject your proposal of being your  
sweetheart?

Jose thought about what she said. He asked permission to make  
her feel safe and that she had a choice.

**JOSE**

Perhaps I just didn't want to make  
you feel uncomfortable.

Leonor stayed silent. A slight wrinkle on her forehead.

**LEONOR V.**

I don't understand. Why me?

**JOSE**

You're different.

And Jose meant it. Leonor was different. Other girls he met  
would have thrown themselves at him the minute he showed  
interest. Leonor was a challenge. He liked a good challenge.

**LEONOR V.**

How many ladies have you said  
those words to?

Jose smiled. Leonor was a tough cookie to crack. He put on the  
most dramatic voice he could muster and braced himself for his  
embarrassing theatrics.

**JOSE**

Oh, Orang. My dearest Orang.  
You hurt me with your presumptions!  
Your words cut deep you might as  
well just grab a knife and stab  
me straight through the heart.

Jose flailed his arms around like a mad man and made his best  
impression of one of those theater actors he saw in school.

**JOSE**

(cont'd)

Thou art hurt thee or thy shall  
die lonelieth death.

He pretended to be dead by closing his eyes, cocking his head to the side with that last line. Leonor let out a suppressed laugh. Good. His plan worked. Jose composed himself.

**LEONOR V.**

Just because you don't understand  
Shakespeare doesn't mean you  
can just go and make fun of him.

**JOSE**

Okay, now I'm offended.

They looked at each other seriously and then broke out in laughter. This is why he liked Leonor, she was hard to get but easy to be with. She was serious but knew how to crack a joke every now and then.

**LEONOR V.**

I'm not helping you when  
Shakespeare decides to rise from  
the dead to curse you.

**JOSE**

Shakespeare knows very well not  
to exact revenge. The last time his  
character did that, everyone died.  
Including the main character.

Jose walked closer to Leonor. He held her by her fingertips maintaining a featherlike touch.

**JOSE**

(cont'd)

So...what do you say?

**LEONOR V.**

Let me think about it.

A knock on the door alerted them both. It was Leonor's parents. Capitan Juan and Capitana Sanday Valenzuela.

**CAPT. JUAN**

Jose, you're here!

**CAPT. SANDAY**

Sorry we're late. We brought  
home snacks.

**CAPT. JUAN**

I hope our daughter was on  
her best behavior.

**JOSE**

Oh no, Leonor was rather kind  
to me.

Jose flashed Leonor a teasing grin. Leonor rolled her eyes.

**JOSE**

(cont'd)

I was just showing her the new  
hand tricks I learned.

**CAPT. JUAN**

Well, son. Show it to the rest  
of us!

That afternoon, Jose had impressed the Valenzuela household with his hand tricks over cake and hot chocolate. He would glance at Leonor and catch her glancing at him too accompanied by a warm smile on her face. He had a feeling that things will go the way he wanted to. Good.

**INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT**

Jose didn't anticipate how fast things would spiral into disarray. When he got to his boarding house, Doña Concha Leyva broke the bad news to him.

**DONA CONCHA**

I'm so sorry Jose, my son  
decided he would finally  
come home to me. You understand  
how we haven't seen each other  
in years, do you?

And that's the story of how Jose became homeless.

**JOSE**

When is he arriving?

**DONA CONCHA**

In two days.

Jose was supposed to vacate the room and find a new place in two days. Nice.

**JOSE**

I don't understand, why  
didn't you tell me earlier?

**DONA CONCHA**

I didn't know how to break  
the news to you! You are so  
sweet and kind and agreeable.  
You helped me with chores and  
made my life easier.  
You're like a son to me. I  
couldn't stand seeing you  
distressed.

But she could stand throwing her sweet, kind and agreeable 'son'  
on the streets in favor of some man that abandoned her years  
ago. Mother of the year.

**JOSE**

How am I supposed to find  
a new boarding house in two  
days?

He considered sleeping on the floor of his classmates' boarding  
house until he could find a new place to stay but he's afraid  
the house rules were being strictly implemented. No freeloaders.  
Besides, their rent was quite expensive. Or...he could ask the  
Valenzuela's to take him in temporarily. Maybe he finally had a  
good enough reason to be in close proximity to Leonor. And he  
liked Capitana Sanday's cooking. Perhaps...this is a blessing in  
disguise? Is the Lord Almighty finally favoring him?

**DONA CONCHA**

Oh don't worry Jose, I  
contacted Paciano a week ago.  
He's already arranged a place  
for you to stay.

She gave a piece of paper to Jose. Oh, how he would love to rip  
it to shreds and feed it to the flames.

**DONA CONCHA**

(cont'd)

That contains the address of  
your new boarding house.

She smiled apologetically. Well, Jose supposed he could forgive her for being a terrible stand-in mother. Refusing her son would mean keeping Jose but losing family instead. She made the decision that would be the least damaging, by keeping them both. He respected that. He unfolded the paper to check the address.

Calle 6 Santo Tomas, Intramuros  
Casa Tomasina  
Antonio Rivera

Tiyo Antonio? Of course, how could Jose forget? It's been years since they last saw each other and it ended up with Jose getting reprimanded by his kuya Paciano for throwing fists at arrogant Spanish boys.

"In Spain, Indios are just zoo animals"

"In the Philippines, Spanish is just bread"

Jose cringed at the memory. He would see his silhouette sometimes on the street but Jose was quick to either hide or avoid his tiyo. He didn't like his tiyo reporting his every move. Living under his roof would be a problem.

Jose bid his landlady goodnight and packed his belongings. He went to bed thinking about how his plans of courting Leonor were ruined. Maybe it would be best if she outright rejected him. His thoughts wandered to the other girl sharing Leonor's name, his cousin. How is she doing? With the way things are in school, the tension between the Spaniards and his brown brothers growing by the day, it wouldn't be a surprise if Jose found himself in another round of a fist fight. Maybe she could help him cover up for his foolishness.

#### **EXT. STREET - MORNING**

Jose was walking along the streets of Intramuros when he saw a familiar building housed by some Spanish scoundrel he didn't bother remembering the name of. Just outside his gate hang beautiful bougainvillea in pretty shades of pink and orange.

#### **GARDENER**

Jose, you're here.

Jose looked at the speaker. Manong, the gardener, was a thin middle-aged man. For reasons unknown to Jose, he was somehow always so tense with a slight shaky voice. In the past, he would



see Jose picking flowers and just let him be. Later on, he would voluntarily snip the best looking flowers in exchange for food. They sometimes talked in passing.

**JOSE**

Manong, good morning. Just passing by.

Jose admired the flowers. They looked more vibrant than usual. He looked at the gardener and smiled.

**GARDENER**

Oh, I don't like the look on your face.

Jose walked towards the gardener. He stuck his hand inside the paper bag he was holding in his other arm.

**JOSE**

I don't think I'm that ugly, am I?

In his hand were two pieces of warm pandesal. The gardener stared at the bread. He hesitated but snatched it anyway.

**GARDENER**

Well, I guess you're sort of cute.

**JOSE**

Manong?!

**GARDENER**

What??? That's what the girls say.

The gardener gobbled up the bread, keeping the last piece in his pocket. He grabbed the pruning shears from his toolbelt and began snipping. He handed the bouquet to Jose.

**GARDENER**

Jose, I don't think I'll be able to help you next time.

Jose wondered what he meant but quickly dismissed it, he had other things to worry about like Leonor and the girls who said they found him cute. He stuck his hand again inside the bag and offered the gardener another piece of bread.

**JOSE**

I'll keep giving you food when  
I have extra.

The gardener munched on the bread and grinned at Jose as thanks. Jose bid him farewell and walked towards the direction of his boarding house, armed with a bag of bread, flowers and a plan.

**EXT. VALENZUELA HOUSE - MORNING**

Jose was outside the Valenzuela household's doorstep. He's been pacing back and forth for what felt like hours. Is this how Dona Concha felt when she broke the news to Jose? Because for some reason he is nervous. And scared. For what could possibly be the first formal rejection he will ever receive. No girl would want to entertain an absent suitor.

**LEONOR V.**

Jose!

Jose yelped. He found Leonor looking at him from the window. She walked away to open the door. She examined the flowers and the paper bag he was holding.

**LEONOR V.**

I don't remember agreeing  
to your proposal.

She hasn't officially rejected him yet but it still stung. Jose scrambled his head to find the right words to say.

**JOSE**

Well, you see...I have to...  
You know...

**LEONOR V.**

Yes...?

Jose took a deep breath to calm his nerves. He looked at Leonor with purpose. It's now or never.

**JOSE**

I'm leaving.

Leonor stared at him in confusion.

**LEONOR V.**

Is this about yesterday?

Jose I told you, I just need  
more time-

**JOSE**

That's the thing. There is  
no time left.

Jose looked down on his shoes. He felt smaller. Literally. He had no spare socks left at his disposal; he couldn't stuff his shoe to add height. Today was supposed to be laundry day.

**LEONOR V.**

Wait, what do you mean there  
is no time left?

She spoke a little louder, temper rising. He peeked at her. Her brows furrowed.

**JOSE**

I'm leaving. Dona Concha's son  
is coming back. He needs the room.  
Are your parents there?

Jose scanned the room inside. Anywhere to not meet her gaze.

**LEONOR V.**

No...they left to run errands.  
When are you leaving?

She asked him softly. It turned Jose's insides into mush.

**JOSE**

This noon. I can't stay for long  
I still have to pack my things.

**LEONOR V.**

Oh...

Jose had nothing else to pack. His luggage was already sitting outside his bedroom door ready to go. He just came up with whatever excuse to avoid staying and prevent any opportunity she could find to reject him. He couldn't take another heartbreak.

**JOSE**

This is for you.

Jose forced the bouquet and the bag into her hands.

**JOSE**

(cont'd)

Tell your parents thank you for everything and that I appreciated their kindness and hospitality.

He turned his back on Leonor ready to make a leave. He was a coward like that.

**LEONOR V.**

Jose, wait!

Jose stopped on his tracks. He couldn't face her.

**LEONOR V.**

(cont'd)

Write me letters.

Jose turned around to look at her. Her eyes had become glassy.

**LEONOR V.**

The past couple of months  
I spent with you was fun.  
More than I would ever dare  
admit. I don't think I'm fine  
with you leaving me behind.

Jose absorbed her words. He scanned her face for any sign of a joke. None.

**JOSE**

Are you saying...

**LEONOR V.**

Yes. Don't make me say it  
a second time.

Jose stared at her. Taking it all in, and then he started laughing. The butterflies bursting with happiness in his stomach. He covered his face with his hand, hiding his excitement (kilig).

**LEONOR V.**

Don't laugh at me.

**JOSE**

I'm not, I promise.

Jose wiped a tear at the corner of his eye, laughter dying down. He studied her face, took in her entirety. She's pretty, not the kind where she lights up every room she enters but the kind where you have to get to know her to see it. They just stood there in silence, facing each other. Just existing in what could possibly be their last moments together.

**LEONOR V.**

Don't forget about me.

**JOSE**

I won't, I promise.

**EXT. CASA TOMASINA - NOON**

Jose wouldn't have made such a big of a deal moving away if he only knew his new boarding house was just over two kilometers away. He's lived in Intramuros for quite some time but he hasn't exactly explored every nook and cranny. Casa Tomasina was neat. It looked like one of those expensive boarding houses his classmates resided in. Dona Concha's boarding house was a level far lower than Casa Tomasina but he was content. It provided him the space he needed and he grew fond of it. He missed the leaky roof already.

He saw his tiyo Antonio come out of the double doors from where he was standing. A boy which Jose could only assume to be a helper, trailed behind him.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Bring his luggage to Room 203.  
Jose!

His tiyo walked to him with a huge grin and open arms.

**JOSE**

Tiyo Antonio, it's nice to  
see you. Thank you for having me.

Jose hugged his tiyo. Another figure approached them.

**JOSE**

Tiya.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

Jose.

His tiya Silvestra regarded him up and down.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

(cont'd)

You've grown since the last  
time I saw you.

Jose hoped that wasn't an insult. She stretched her arm forward. Jose took it and pecked the back of her hand. He never really liked his tiya, she looked like she hid secret information she could use against him inside her sleeves. His tiya withdrew her hand.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

(cont'd)

Leonor, darling, come greet  
your cousin.

Jose shifted his gaze to the doorway, there he saw a girl peeking from behind the door. She gasped, eyes wide in surprise as if she were caught stealing food. Cute.

The girl stood straighter and wiped her hands on her tapis. She breathed in and out. Jose held back a smile. She walked towards their direction.

**LEONOR R.**

Kuya Jose.

She extended her arm with elegance that could only have been acquired through practice. Jose kissed her hand. He never really thought much about her, she was still very much a child the last time he saw her.

**JOSE**

You're taller. How old are  
you again?

**LEONOR V.**

I'm 13.

**JOSE**

Goodness how fast time flies.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Right? They grow up so fast!

Tiyo Antonio looked at his wife for approval. She didn't look as pleased, which is probably her default expression so Jose didn't

really mind it much. Tiyo Antonio cleared his throat, swallowing the disappointment.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

(cont'd)

Jose, let me tour you around  
the casa.

**JOSE**

Alright.

As tiyo Antonio was leading him inside, Jose heard murmurs behind him. He took a peek and saw Tiya Silvestre reprimanding Leonor in hushed tones.

**EXT. ESKINITA - NIGHT**

A few days have passed since Jose arrived at the Casa. Nothing eventful happened. Go to school, casually hurl insults at his Spanish classmates, go home. His days went on as usual, aside from one little inconvenience that later turned out to be quite endearing. He pretended not to notice his cousin spying on him. He let her have her game of fun and he was a willing participant. It was cute. Later that night, he sneaked out of the Casa to deliver a letter to the post office addressed to Leonor Valenzuela.

It was dark at half past eight save for a couple of lamp posts when he heard shouting and hurried footsteps approaching. He could make out a couple of "Stop!" and "Catch him!" from a distance. Jose had stepped out of an alley when a person crashed into him.

**JOSE**

Hey, watch where you're-

The figure aggressively pulled him into the darkness and covered his mouth. Jose tried fighting back but he was overpowered by the tall figure.

???

Shhh, shut up. Shut up!

He half whispered, half yelled at Jose. From the limited lighting, Jose could make out a busted lip and a black eye. He decided to cooperate, he didn't know what this runaway criminal was capable of.

**GUARDIA 1**

Where did he go?

**GUARDIA 2**

He went that way, sir.

**GUARDIA 1**

You, follow me. The rest go that way.  
Get moving!

They controlled their breathing, careful not to get caught as they listened to the sound of fading footsteps. The tall figure finally let go of him, sighing in relief. Jose watched as he stepped towards the edge of the alley where the light could hit him. He was young, tall with a scrawny build and tan skin. His wounds also looked a lot more terrible under the light. He looked like someone Jose could take on in a fist fight.

???

The coast is clear.

**JOSE**

And you're telling me that because?

The boy turned his head to take a good look at Jose.

???

Hey man, I'm sorry for dragging you  
into this.

Jose softened at his apology. He remembered his mother. Was he one of those people that got wrongly accused of a crime?

**JOSE**

Careful, the guardias are more  
vigilant at night. They patrol the streets  
armed with batons. May catch yourself  
facing one.

Jose didn't know why he was helping him. He heard talks about an underground radical group in passing and it alarmed the guardias. He didn't have anything to do with him but he had a feeling he was innocent. The boy nodded and removed himself from the light. He continued scanning the surroundings from his obscured spot.

???



You live around here?

**JOSE**

Yeah, just around the corner.

**???**

What's your name?

Jose paused. He didn't know how much of his personal information he could trust with the boy. His mouth ran before he could regret telling him.

**JOSE**

Jose. Jose Rizal.

The boy stiffened. He asked in a controlled voice.

**???**

Jose, do you happen to like flowers?  
Particularly the pink and orange ones?

Jose remembered the bougainvillea from a couple of days ago.

**JOSE**

Yes. They look even more beautiful  
now that they are in full bloom.

The events that followed were too fast for Jose's brain to process. The boy went berserk and punched him on the face. He held on to the wall for support.

**???**

It's you! You asshole...

He said those words filled with the rage and accusation of a hurt boy. And Jose decided he didn't care. He shouldn't have extended understanding. The boy prepared to land another blow but Jose was quick to see the attack. He dodged it with the speed of an experienced brawler and punched him straight to the nose. He tumbled to the ground.

**???**

Ow!!!

Jose was ready to pounce on him one more time but paused in realization.

**JOSE**

Sorry!

He hurried to his side to inspect the damage.

???

Ow! Watch it!

**JOSE**

Sorry...why are we fighting again?

Tears spilled from his eyes along with blood dripping from his nose.

???

'Cause you're an asshole!

Jose kneeled on his side, took a handkerchief from his pocket and offered it to the boy. He accepted it without any fuss and started dabbing on his nose. Jose thought back to the other girls he had sent flowers to.

**JOSE**

Is this about Esperanza? Are you her lover?

The boy was busy tending to his nose to give Jose his full attention.

???

Who?

**JOSE**

Esperanza, I sent her flowers.

The boy glared at him.

???

You send flowers to girls who are already in a committed relationship? How low can you possibly go?

His condescension had completely dissolved the little patience Jose had left. He grabbed the boy on his shirt collar and pulled him up to full height. He slammed him hard on the wall.

**JOSE**

Listen here, you pig. And I want your undivided attention.

The clanking of metal alerted the both of them. They looked to the side. A cat. Jose slammed him again to get his attention.

**JOSE**

(cont'd)

You think you can just attack me and throw insults like some wartfaced buffoon and expect no repercussions? I can rearrange your face with my fist; the guardia civil won't be able to recognize you. You tell me what is going on and I might just let you go.

The boy looked alarmed. Terrified even but Jose may have been mistaken. It was too dark to tell. The boy sighed in defeat.

**???**

It's Lizares.

**JOSE**

Who?

**???**

Lizares. The Spanish dude with the obnoxious garden at the end of Calle Paloma. They mistook me for you.

Jose let him go. Lizares? Could it be? He shook his head no and focused on the situation at hand. How could a mistaken identity be possible when they looked nothing alike?

**JOSE**

Why, I didn't do anything...

The boy scoffed at him.

**???**

Oh yeah? What about stealing his prized flowers you flower thief. You almost got Luisito fired.

**JOSE**

Luisito?

The boy let out a breath of frustration.

**???**

And now I find out you don't even know the gardener's name? I didn't think you could go any lower than that. Oops.

The boy covered his mouth with both hands. He muttered 'sorry' in mock sincerity and sat down on the concrete floor with his back against the wall. The blood had stopped dripping.

**JOSE**

What happened to manong?

**???**

His boss noticed something wrong with how the flowers were arranged and *forced* Luisito to confess.

Jose didn't want to think what 'forced' implied. He hoped that wasn't the case.

**JOSE**

He willingly gave the flowers to me.

He omitted the part where he *did* illegally pick flowers in the beginning and that Luisito had known but just let him be.

**???**

You bribed him with food. Don't paint yourself a saint.

**JOSE**

He was hungry.

**???**

How convenient.

**JOSE**

It's the truth.

**???**

You took advantage of him.  
You're not fooling anyone.

Jose had enough. Luisito had been a willing participant in this mess and he won't allow this brat to pin all the blame on him.

**JOSE**

Have you seen how frail he looks?

He could die from a simple cough.  
Making it seem like a barter spared  
him the shame of begging for food

Jose waited for the brat to disagree with him. They stared at each other waiting for the other to concede. The brat sighed in surrender.

???

Alright, I believe you.

Jose slumped on the wall and let himself slide in a sitting position beside the brat. He buried his head in his hands. The turn of events was simply unbelievable. Jose thought back to the brat beside him.

**JOSE**

What's your name?

**JOSE CECILIO**

Jose Cecilio.

Realization struck Jose. He looked at the boy in disbelief. Of course, how could he not realize sooner? His name was quite common, he even shared it with his tiyo from his mother's side. He blurted words he didn't mean to.

**JOSE**

He snitched me.

**JOSE CECILIO**

I would too if it meant keeping  
my job.

The boy said it nonchalantly. Jose was hurt at the betrayal and it seemed the boy noticed.

**JOSE CECILIO**

Listen. He has a sick mother.  
He's saving money to send her  
to a decent hospital, you can't  
blame him.

Jose could empathize with that. He was currently studying to be a doctor in hopes of curing his mother's failing eyesight. If his mother were here, she would reprimand him for stealing flowers to impress unsuspecting binibinis.

**JOSE**

I'm a thief.

**JOSE CECILIO**

Yeah.

The boy snorted and agreed in between giggles.

**JOSE**

Why do you sound so happy?

The boy shrugged.

**JOSE CECILIO**

Hey, I just think that Spaniard  
deserved it. He's an abusive asshole.

**JOSE**

That doesn't make me feel any better.  
I'm still a thief.

The boy sat up straighter and looked at Jose pointedly.

**JOSE CECILIO**

This is the problem with you ilustrados.  
Your lot only see the world in black  
and white when we're painted with grays.  
Lizares? He's the real thief. He's stolen  
money from Luisito by not compensating him  
exactly for his labors worth. He's built a  
house in a soil that doesn't belong to him,  
basically stealing land that should've been  
ours. Now that, that is stealing.

The boys continued dabbing on his nose as if he didn't just say anything profound. Jose thought about what he said. The boy had a point, he did. But he still couldn't shake the feeling of error. The act of stealing had primarily been an act of petty rebellion. When Luisito negotiated with him, it turned into an act of compassion. Now, it was just that...an awful case of miscalculation. Lizares may have stolen on a larger scale, but Jose's guilt wouldn't let him reconcile with the fact that no matter how miniscule the gravity his crime had been, it wasn't enough to absolve him of any responsibility as he had hurt people in the process.

**EXT. CASA TOMASINA - LATER**

Jose was lost in his own thoughts when he arrived at the casa. The faint glow of a lamp inside the house alerted him. Someone was awake and he was about to get into more trouble than he could handle. He circled the casa and looked for the backdoor. He planned on entering the house as stealthily as he could when the door swung open.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Jose? What are you doing here?

Jose stiffened. He masked his surprise.

**JOSE**

I was getting some fresh air.  
I couldn't sleep.

Jose smiled sheepishly. Tiyo Antonio looked panicked. He walked closer to Jose.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Well now that you're finally here,  
help us boy!

He grabbed Jose's shoulder and shook him.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

(cont'd)

My daughter is missing!

Jose processed his words. His heartbeat rose more than when he'd arrived.

**JOSE**

What!?

**TIYO ANTONIO**

We've been looking for her for almost  
half an hour. My sweet daughter, gone!

Tiyo Antonio tightened his grip on Jose's shoulder. He looked destroyed. Jose guided him inside the house and made him sit on a chair. His Tiya Silvestre was weeping when the creaking sound of a door opening caught their attention. There she was, his cousin, looking shocked at the scene. Tiya Silvestre stopped crying and went to her daughter.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

Leonor! Where have you been!?

**TIYO ANTONIO**

My sweet child, we've been looking  
for you!

Leonor hadn't recovered from her shocked expression. Suspicious.

**LEONOR R.**

I saw a cat. He sounded like he was  
crying so I went outside to see him.

Tiya Silvestre looked satisfied at the lame explanation and hugged her. She didn't care about the circumstances. Seeing her daughter safe was enough. Jose sized Leonor and that's when he noticed the cat. The cat. He couldn't explain it but it felt like something wasn't clicking. Like he missed something and he couldn't see the full picture yet.

Once Tiya Silvestre gathered herself, she began reprimanding Leonor. Tiyo Antonio ordered everyone to retire to their bedrooms to dismiss the situation. Before Jose could go, Tiyo Antonio approached him.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Jose, you have dirt on your cheek.

Jose covered it with his hand. His bruised cheek had slipped his mind. As Jose was walking down the hall, he couldn't shake the feeling of having forgotten something important. When he entered his room and saw the papers on his desk, he figured out it was the letter he was supposed to deliver to the post office. He immediately looked for it in his coat pockets and found them empty except for his handkerchief soiled with some annoying brat's blood. He threw it in the trash and began preparing for bed.

That night, when Jose was lying in bed, he kept rewinding the events in his head. The feeling of something amiss hadn't left him. The cat. The lost letter. He reached for the lamp when his hand accidentally hit an empty tin can and fell off the side of the desk, making a metallic clang as it hit the floor. The sound had triggered Jose's memory that had him sitting stiffly upright in cold sweat. A while ago in the alley when Jose was using force to intimidate the boy, a metallic clang had alerted him of an intruder that happened to be just a cat. The same cat that his cousin Leonor had brought home. Leonor has been following him the whole time during his stay in the Casa. She wasn't missing, she intentionally sneaked out to follow him. The cat



had been an alibi and Leonor had bore witness to his spectacular display of violence.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

Jose didn't sleep a wink. He went to school earlier to avoid any interrogations from his Tiyo and Tiya. When he arrived home, his Tiya had been on her bedroom window watching him tiptoe his way inside the Casa and caught him just as he entered the backdoor.

He really should stop using the backdoor.

As anticipated, she asked him about the bruise on his cheek. He lied as if it's the most natural thing that one of his Spanish classmates pulled a terrible prank on him. She accepted it with no questions and dismissed him. Jose went to his room and sat down on his desk, grabbed a paper and quill to pen a letter to Leonor Valenzuela.

(He lied as if his cousin slapping him was a reasonable response to him stepping on her cat's tail. She raised a brow, not even questioning her daughter's actions and proceeded to tell him to ask for her apology. Jose obliged of course, he had a score to settle. But first, he had to draft a letter. So he went and did just that.)

*Dearest Orang,*

*I hope this letter finds you well. Unforeseeable events have occurred that prevented me from contacting you sooner and for that, I apologize. I hope-*

A knock on the door disrupted Jose's writing. He got up from his chair and opened it. There he saw his cousin Leonor, and in her arms lay the cat comfortably. The cat screeched at the sight of him. Offended, Jose made a mental note to make a siopao out of him later.

**JOSE**

Is there anything I can do to  
help you?

Jose searched Leonor's face for any sign of guilt from the night before. None. Instead, he noticed her blemish free skin, the fringe that pleasantly framed her face and how the color of her eyes weren't the deep brown, almost black that was ascribed to their ethnicity. He could already envision the line of suitors

hoping to win her. Tiya Silvestre did a splendid job taking care of her.

**LEONOR R.**

It's Ramoncito, he's hurt.

Jose looked at the cat. He had gone docile. Of course he would, smart animal. Jose motioned for them to come inside. He pointed at the empty bed. Jose kneeled on the side of the bed and began inspecting the cat's body.

**JOSE**

So...you named him Ramoncito?

Jose asked in an attempt to make light conversation.

**LEONOR R.**

I think it's cute.

Jose spotted a dry patch of blood on the side of his leg.

**JOSE**

There's nothing to worry about.

**LEONOR R.**

What do you mean? He was clearly hurt last night.

**JOSE**

That was last night. His blood has already coagulated. Not much medical attention needed.

**LEONOR R.**

So that's it? Nothing to give him to make sure he returns to health?

**JOSE**

I wouldn't know. I'm a medical student, not a veterinarian.

Leonor pursed her lips in frustration. Jose felt an unexplainable pang of guilt.

**JOSE**

Listen, it's just a small wound. Nothing serious. If you brought him to me immediately then I could have patched him up to make

sure the wound doesn't get infected. Luckily for Ramoncito, he-

And just like that, Jose found the final piece of the puzzle that he never knew was missing. She followed him last night in hopes he would heal Ramoncito. It made perfect sense.

**LEONOR R.**

Are you okay?

Leonor looked at him with concern.

**JOSE**

Oh, I'm fine I just realized something-

**LEONOR R.**

No, I meant your cheek.

Jose had forgotten all about his bruised cheek, he suddenly felt self-conscious with her intent gaze. Leonor pushed her torso forward and began reaching her hand out. Jose just knelt there, paralyzed in his position, just waiting for the events to unfold. He gulped down the familiar feeling of excitement. It wasn't right. He had to get back to writing to the only Leonor his heart opened up to.

Jose caught her wrist before she could touch him. He can feel her pulse. Leonor's eyes widened with realization.

**LEONOR R.**

I'm sorry.

He released her hand. He is sick to even welcome the idea of a woman other than the one he had committed to pursuing from days back. A woman in close proximity, young and beautiful with the grace of a trained ballerina.

**JOSE**

It's fine. It hurts when you touch it.

**LEONOR R.**

I presume as well. It's a terrible color.

Jose hoped that alley brat looked somewhat disfigured.

**LEONOR R.**

I can help you.

**JOSE**

What?

**LEONOR R.**

You're a brawler. Getting hurt is inevitable. You can teach me first-aid.

Jose shook his head in amusement. Of course that's how she perceived him.

**JOSE**

I don't exactly participate in fights because I enjoy it.

His position was getting uncomfortable. He stood up and brushed invisible dust off of his pants.

**JOSE**

What do you get out of this?

Leonor stood up to match his height. Her short stature made him feel secure in ways Leonor Valenzuela couldn't. It wasn't her fault, but he liked that with his cousin, there was no need to overcompensate, no room for backhanded compliments. He was brilliant with no doubts.

**LEONOR R.**

I want to become a healer.

Jose didn't know if she meant a doctor or a nurse. Either way it was impossible for her to achieve it.

**JOSE**

Your mother will never allow you.

**LEONOR R.**

Exactly. You can help me. I can help you. I'll even cover for you. We can be partners in crime.

Leonor picked up clueless Ramoncito from the bed and brought him up close to Jose's face.

**LEONOR R.**

Please. Please. Please.

Jose liked the idea. It didn't require much thinking. It sure didn't require a cat shoved in his face to convince him. After

all, the conditions were all in his favor. He took one last look at Ramoncito before agreeing.

**JOSE**

Deal.

When their agreement had long passed and the day faded into night, Jose went out discreetly to send the letter long overdue to Leonor Valenzuela. Written inside were instructions on how to write using invisible ink.

## INTERLUDE

**EXT. ???? - NIGHT???**

That night, Jose dreamed.

He found himself traversing a dark road in the middle of the night. His feet moved mechanically, compelled by an invisible force to keep moving forward. Each step gave an accentuated crack, as leaves and twigs snapped and were crushed. There was not a single sound to be heard in that forest. No birds to sing, no insects to feed. No whistling breeze and no groaning trees, heaving under the weight of their ancient pasts. There was only silence. A silence so loud that it rang in his ears, making the sound of his heartbeat even louder still.

He stopped in front of a giant rubber tree. Its gnarled roots splayed outward before him, beckoning him inside its dark embrace.

Cold light seeped through the clouds, the moon stretching across the pitch black sky. "Jose" stared up at the arms of the unforgiving god, where a lone rope dangled downward. Its knot gave way to flesh and bone, the body of an old Spaniard adorning the branch like a Christmas decoration.

Father looked down on him, eyeing the bolo he had in his hand.

**FATHER(?)**

Have you come to finally kill me?

**ME**

It would be a waste of time  
to kill a dead man.

He laughed. So did Father.

**ME**

I have come to make this place  
my home. This is where I will  
make work, and rest my head.  
I'll eat here, and find a wife.  
We'll have a son and then I will die.  
They'll bury my body where  
they found you.

**FATHER(?)**

And what will they put  
on your gravestone?

**ME**

Ibarra.

**INT. SANTO TOMAS - DAY**

Tensions were high in Jose's class that day. The fat priest babbling away at the front pretended to blissfully not notice it, but even Jose in his exhaustion ridden state could feel the glares of his Spanish classmates at the back of his head.

There was a clear distinction in social ranks that could be discerned by the way the seating plan was arranged. *Peninsulares*, or those from the Mainland kept to themselves in the front. *Insulares* occupied the row behind them, *Mestizos* the row after that. And dead at the back were the so-called *Indios*-Students of only native descent who either had the money or connections to get into a prestigious university like Santo Tomas.

Now, by no means was Jose's uniform shabby or his supplies of low quality. But compared to the expensive custom uniforms and plumed dipping pens of his Spanish counterparts, he sure did feel like a pauper. And boy, did they never let him forget it.

On days where he'd shine his shoes, some of his classmates would 'accidentally' step on his feet and make them dusty again.

At first he tried his best to just leave it be. It was important to learn when to pick your battles, as chances are that the teachers and faculty would side with 'one of their own' anyway. No use getting angry when a Spaniard cuts in line before you at

lunch time. Nope, Jose wasn't bothered by that at all. Not at all.

Fortunately, most of the Spaniards considered Jose as too far beneath their notice to bother with him. That was, until Javier Lizares came along.

Fucking Lizares and his stupid smug powdered face, stupid shined shoes, stupid puffed up hair and the stupid way he looked at Jose like he was a bug. It had been a while since Jose felt this same kind of implacable irritation he had felt all those years ago with Manuel Luz. At least Manuel hadn't been trying to antagonize him on purpose.

He was about to pick up his bag to follow his friends out of class when just within earshot he heard Javier and his pack of goons loudly conversing.

**JAVIER LIZARES**

-And just the other day, my father had that gardener whipped and thrown into prison. But that was only after he first confessed to who kept stealing mother's prized flowers.

**DANIEL SEVILLA**

Was he able to give a name?

**JAVIER**

He sure did! And would you believe it if I told you his name was "Jose"?

The group suddenly turned to look at Jose.

**IGNACIO ARAN**

What are the odds it's our Jose over here, huh?

He did his best to hide the pensive expression on his face.

**JOSE**

You know Jose is a common name, right? At any given point you'd be able to find a dozen men with the same one.

**JAVIER**

True. But what exactly differentiates one rat from another? You might as well look and sound the same.

Javier's minions laughed along.

**JOSE**

I could say the same for every Spaniard I've ever met.

The room suddenly devolved into silence, with his classmates throwing him dirty looks. He ignored them.

A part of Jose wanted to admit it really was him, just to wipe the smirk off this guy's face. But the punishment of doing so outweighed any possible satisfaction he might have felt for a moment. Javier was right— he just had no proof. Jose forced a laugh, hoping to God it came out more confident than he felt.

**JOSE**

Well good luck with finding that thief or whatever. It's been nice talking to you all but I've really got to go.

**JAVIER**

Of course, when my father gets his hands on that thief, he'll make sure the poor bastard won't get to keep his hands afterwards.

Jose couldn't have gotten out of there any faster.

**EXT. SANTO TOMAS FOOD HALL - NOON**

Hours later, when Jose ate his lunch with his friends, he would think back to that interaction and wonder if he had given himself away. There was something sinister about the way Javier talked about the supposed thief. It was less about the desire to pay the perpetrator back for stealing his mother's possessions, or the idea of perhaps "restoring" his family's honor. No, what Jose saw in the other boy's eyes was a desire to hurt someone he saw as less than him. A shudder ran down his spine, he hoped that Cecilio boy was okay.



His attention was brought back to reality when he heard his two mates mentioning girls.

**PAUL SAGAHUN**

And what about Leonor  
Valenzuela?

**MARCO**

She's pretty, I'll give  
her that. Though kind of...  
unapproachable? Gives me the  
impression of an ice queen,  
like one wrong move will  
set her off.

**PAUL**

But that's the appeal isn't it?  
She's "hard to get"-- cold until  
you melt her heart, then she'll  
be as sweet as a kitten. It adds  
a bit of thrill to the chase.

**MARCO**

To each his own I suppose.  
Personally I prefer Leonor  
Rivera. She's sweet and cute  
as a button, to boot. Being  
around her is like a breath  
of fresh air...!

Marco looked off into the distance wistfully.

**JOSE**

What are you guys going  
on about?

**PAUL**

The fiesta dance, of course!  
It's all anyone could keep  
talking about these days.

**MARCO**

You got any plans of inviting  
someone, lover boy?

Jose contemplated it for a second. There was Orang... though curiously his mind wandered to Rivera as well. Well, it's always good to have backup right?

**JOSE**

Not at the moment, no.

**PAUL**

You know, somehow I don't believe a word of it.

**MARCO**

Yeah! Why don't you leave some for the rest of us sorry fucks? We need all the help we can get. I can't remember a time when a woman even looked at me without turning in disgust...

Paul patted his depressed friend sympathetically.

**JOSE**

Truth be told, I'm not sure if she'll accept

**PAUL**

So what? Plenty of fish in the sea.

**MARCO**

Easy for you guys to say...

**PAUL**

Shut up, Marco. So, anyone you got in mind?

**JOSE**

I'll... think about it some more and then get back to you on that.

**PAUL**

Whatever you say, Pepe. Speaking of which, what's that you've been working on?

Jose looked down at the stack of papers he was writing on.

**JOSE**

It's a collection of essays  
I'm planning to submit to the  
student paper.

**PAUL**

Essays, huh? Can't say I've  
ever read an essay from you.  
Though if they're anything  
like your poems I'm sure they'll  
get accepted.

Marco leaned closer to look over Jose's shoulder.

**MARCO**

What's it about?

**JOSE**

I was thinking a little  
bit about the way things are  
run here-

Jose thought hard about how to word what he wanted to say  
without sounding too subversive. He had to lay on the 'good boy'  
act *really* thick. It wasn't that he thought his friends would  
rat him out to a friar or anything like that, but Jose would  
rather not repeat the argument he had with Mariano again.

**JOSE**

-Could be done better. The  
preferential treatment the  
faculty gives to Spanish  
students does a disservice  
to this prestigious institution.

Marco and Paul gave each other an unsure look.

**MARCO**

Well... you're not wrong...

**PAUL**

But are you sure they're  
going to allow you to  
publish this?

**JOSE**

I don't see why not. All I'm

saying is that if everyone  
can be on the same page here  
that the learning process is  
going to go a lot smoother.  
They don't even teach Filipino  
students Spanish- which is  
required for most of our subjects.  
We had to learn that ourselves!

**PAUL**

I agree with you completely.  
Don't get me wrong, it's just  
I'm a bit worried they'll  
accuse you of trying to  
undermine the school admin.

**JOSE**

Well if they think so then they  
can just talk to me about it  
and I'll clear it up for them.  
If I don't say anything, then  
who will? And if they tell me  
that they won't publish the  
article then I'll just find  
another way to get people to  
read it.

**PAUL**

Heh, you're really something else,  
you know what? With that kind of  
attitude you're going to get  
yourself in trouble one of  
these days.

Jose looked his friend straight in the eye.

**JOSE**

Then that is an outcome I am  
willing to accept.

**PAUL**

Alright, count me in! You  
need someone to find people  
to read your essays, I'm your  
guy. We're not gonna let you  
do this all on your own, right Marco?

**MARCO**

W-what? Why me?

**PAUL**

Don't tell me all those  
times you said you'd give  
those old geezers a piece  
of your mind was just a load  
of hot air?

**MARCO**

O-of course not! I meant every  
word of it! It's just- Ah! What  
am I even saying? Fine! I'm  
coming too.

Paul came up behind Jose and Marco and wrapped both arms around  
their necks, bringing them all closer together.

**PAUL**

Look at us, just a bunch of  
guys heading straight first  
for disaster. They better call  
us like some kind of Three Musketeers.

**JOSE**

I didn't know you read the  
works of Dumas.

**PAUL**

I don't. But that's beside  
the point. We're all in this  
together, right?

Jose couldn't help but smile at that moment, touched by the  
sentiment.

**JOSE**

Right, together.

#### **INT. CASA TOMASINA - NIGHT**

Jose rubbed his tired eyes as he stared at the piles of paper on  
his desk. At the top of the figurative mountain was the essay he  
was supposed to submit to the student paper. He looked over it  
once more, finding himself unsatisfied with how it looked. Under  
it were some notes he made for class, each page scribbled with a  
hurried but legible cursive script.

It was until he looked to the edge of the table that he noticed the letters he had received that week but forgot to open. The first were from his parents, the usual small talk asking how he was and if he was doing well in school. "Give my regards to your Tiyo!" his father had said. Each one of his siblings sent him letters too, to varying lengths. Paciano just gave him a curt note and told him to study well.

When he had finished reading, he was surprised to find an envelope with no return address in the back. It had the vague smell of flowers wafting from it and the stationary looked decidedly feminine. He unfolded the letter.

*Dear Pepe,*

*I hope this letter finds you well. I am told that today you will have settled down in your new boarding house. Are you getting along with your boardmates? I find that it is important to develop connections with the people around you, as they may eventually help you in the future.*

*I am looking forward to the next time we meet. If you are free anytime soon, I'd like to see you.*

*Thank you as well for the flowers, they are lovely. How were you able to obtain the same type grown in the gardens of Doña Lizares? It must've been really expensive.*

*Speaking of Doña Lizares, my father informed me that recently there have been complaints from her about someone stealing her flowers. You wouldn't have anything to do with that, would you? I merely jest, of course.*

*Stay safe, Jose.*

*Yours always,  
Orang.*

Jose sighed. It seems like nothing can escape her sharp perception. He picked up his pen and quickly wrote a reply. As much as he'd like to say he was free immediately to meet with her, he wasn't sure now that he had also agreed to spend time with Rivera. He hoped Orang would understand.

He also made sure not to answer her question about the flowers.

Satisfied with his reply, he placed the newly written letter in the "To Send" pile and promptly went to bed.

## LEONOR VALENZUELA ROUTE: EPISODE 1

Playful songs of Love's delight,  
He, too, murmurs his love's feeling  
In the tongue he learned at birth.

### **EXT. CASA TOMASINA - DAWN**

That weekend, Jose woke up earlier than he expected. When he pushed aside the curtains of his window, he could barely see the sun peeking through the horizon, the sky still a dark shade of blue.

Yet despite that, he could not find it in himself to go back to sleep. Without anything else to do, he dressed himself, put on his shoes, and went downstairs.

To his surprise, he came down to find his boardmates shifting around furniture and trunks. It seemed that everyone had already woken up and were hard at work. Marco looked up from the heavy trunk he placed on the floor and waved to Jose.

### **MARCO**

Hey, Pepe! Mind lending us a hand?

### **JOSE**

What's going on here?

### **MARCO**

We're helping the new guy  
move into his dorm.

**JOSE**

Is he someone we know?

**MARCO**

I don't think... so? Does  
the name Jose Cecilio ring  
a bell for you?

Jose couldn't help but laugh. Really, what were his odds? He did  
in fact know of him. Not that he could explain the circumstance  
of how they met.

**JOSE**

Can't say it does.

**MARCO**

Cool. So... are you gonna  
help out or...?

**JOSE**

Ah, sorry I gotta go to  
church today.

He did not need to go to church that Sunday, but he also didn't  
want to carry furniture all day.

**MARCO**

Oh, I hear the barangay  
captain's daughter always  
goes there too around this time.

**JOSE**

Valenzuela?

**MARCO**

That's the one.

Without anything to do, he was sure she'd make better company  
than being by his lonesome like he originally intended.

**JOSE**

In that case, I'm heading out.  
See you later.

**MARCO**



Don't try to pull anything  
funny at church!

Jose pointedly ignored Marco's last statement.

**EXT. SAN AGUSTIN CHURCH - DAWN**

The walk to the church had been uneventful. It was still too early for any of the shops to be open, and only a few people could be seen on the streets. The sky was a little brighter than the near-night it had been a few minutes earlier.

The church was situated in the middle of a plaza, the cobblestone and dirt road crossing paths under the myriad of trees that dotted the area. The church was by no means as large as some of the other ones he had seen in Manila, but it still bore an imposing and solemn visage. Its edifices were carved into likeness of medieval saints, trapped between Corinthian pillars, and staring blankly down at him. Jose stared back into their eyes for a moment, and found that they too were dead. He pushed aside the giant wooden doors.

The exterior did not do justice to the sheer splendor of the interior of that church. Inside, one could find themselves teleported to a remnant of a bygone age, far away from the rustic locale of the Philippines. Crystal chandeliers hung from the majestic domed roof, and religious artifacts gilded in gold were displayed alongside the pews. It was far more luxurious than anything one would find on the outside, where beggars and thieves would scrape for food. Jose wasn't sure if what he felt in that moment was awe or revulsion for it all.

He could make out the dark outline of a woman kneeling before the golden altar, her hands clasped together with a rosary. Leonor Valenzuela was as still as a statue, and the sharp lines of her face gave her the quality of being one too. Below her, the maroon fabric of her skirt pooled outward like blood on the marble floor.

Jose knelt alongside her, and neither said a word. He could see a priest scurrying off to the side of the hall. The two were alone.

**JOSE**

I never took you to be a

pious type.

**LEONOR V.**

And I never took you to be  
the type to stalk a woman  
during her time of prayer.

The light of the candles illuminated the smirk she had on her  
face.

**JOSE**

What can I say, there's a  
lot about me you don't know.

**LEONOR V.**

I could say the same for  
myself.

**JOSE**

They call you the 'dutiful  
daughter of the respected  
barangay captain', you know.

**LEONOR V.**

Is that so? And perhaps it was  
from one of these people that  
you learned of my ventures  
here?

**JOSE**

It's not like it's a well-kept  
secret.

**LEONOR V.**

How typical.

Her face became blank once more.

**LEONOR V.**

So why have you come here,  
Jose? I don't assume you  
wish to pay respects to the  
Virgin Mary.

**JOSE**

To see you, of course.

**LEONOR V.**

I thought you were busy.

**JOSE**

Ah... Right-

From the corner of his eye he saw her shoulders shake with restrained laughter.

**LEONOR V.**

I'm just messing with you,  
Pepe. There's no need to be  
so tense. I've missed you too.

Jose pouted in mock offense.

**JOSE**

You can be quite cruel, my  
lady. Do you not have it in  
you to show me some mercy,  
sometimes?

**LEONOR V.**

And where's the fun in that?

**JOSE**

Do you really come here often?

She paused for a moment, looking straight ahead at the statue of Mary in front of them.

**LEONOR V.**

Well you see, *good* girls of  
*good* standing are taught that  
they must pray daily to the good  
Lord Jesus Christ. They must  
always recite their prayers  
and be docile and submissive so  
that they might attract a good  
husband, who will grant his seed  
and give them children. Then her  
purpose will have been fulfilled  
as a *good* woman.

Leonor sounded remarkably bored as she parroted what sounded like the words of someone else.

**JOSE**

That doesn't really answer my question.

**LEONOR V.**

That depends, are you really interested in knowing what I think? Or are you just asking to humor me?

Jose wasn't sure what came over Orang at this time. Normally she would be a bit standoffish towards his advances, but it wasn't anything like this. This somehow felt like a test, like the church walls have stripped away the pleasant and polite shell of Leonor Valenzuela to reveal her true self- A woman who was always watching you. Whose gaze pierced through your flesh and tore you open for examination. At that moment, Jose felt not unlike the frogs he dissected in Natural Science class. It was... unsettling. He turned to stare at her dark impassive eyes, searching.

**JOSE**

Now you've got me really curious.

Orang laughed quietly, her lips curving into a sly smile.

**LEONOR V.**

Then come with me to the back gardens. But make sure you pray aloud a single Hail Mary before you do so, we cannot be seen leaving the doors at the same time.

**JOSE**

Very well.

Orang stood up and left. Jose did exactly what was instructed, reciting the verses he learned from childhood without thinking much about it at all. While his lips moved in holy prayer, his mind took instead to sordid matters. The smile she gave him flashed in his head again, and the unspoken agreement between them.

Once he was done, he headed out from the backdoor into the gardens beside the church. Orang sat demurely on a stone bench, in her hand was the rosary she clutched whilst she prayed. It

was made up of fifty wooden beads in total with a cross at the end of it. Orang stared at it intently before looking up at him.

**LEONOR V.**

I had to believe a great deal  
in God, because I had already  
lost my belief in men.

Jose stared at her in surprise, not expecting such a cynical response.

**JOSE**

You say that as if most people  
you've met are bad.

**LEONOR V.**

Not bad, or even evil. Just selfish.  
At the end of the day, people will  
hear only what they want to hear.  
If it has nothing to do with them,  
then they care not to know about it.  
The flimsy house of cards holding  
up their worldview works fine just  
for them. But that does not make  
them evil- it makes them ignorant.  
The only ones who would say all  
men are evil would be this fine  
establishment.

**JOSE**

You're right, I do agree with you.  
After all, if we were made just to  
go to hell like the church says  
then we wouldn't have the capability  
to do good things.

**LEONOR V.**

You think hell is a place.

**JOSE**

What else would it be?

**LEONOR V.**

Hell is a state of mind. It  
isn't a place you can go to or  
escape. When a person commits a  
sin, or has a sin committed  
against them- then they are in

hell. If you wish, you may even create your own hell wherever you go. The gospel of God, Gold, and Glory created the hell we currently live in.

The might of Spain that crushed them all like a mace...

**JOSE**

You know, when I came out here I didn't expect this would be the kind of conversation we would have.

**LEONOR V.**

Disappointed?

**JOSE**

Not at all, it's actually a relief. I know for sure now that I am in good company.

For the first time that day, Orang gave him a sweet smile.

**LEONOR V.**

I'm glad.

#### **INT. CASA TOMASINA - NIGHT**

That night, Jose looked down at the wooden rosary in his hand and was reminded once more of the events that transpired that day. Was Orang opening up to him more? He felt that was the case.

He didn't know what to make of her statements in the garden, it seemed that she was inviting him to question everything she said. It was like a puzzle he couldn't wrap his head around.

On one hand was the carefully cultivated image of a well-mannered and bred lady, befitting of the status of a Valenzuela. On the other hand, there was a curious lack of respect for the status quo, a deep bitterness that colored her tone whenever she spoke of the things that were expected of her.

Jose wanted to understand her more.

**INT. SANTO TOMAS - DAY**

Class was dismissed earlier than usual, much to Jose's relief. It seemed that Friar Balsemo didn't even want to bother teaching any lessons and just assigned them some readings in history that day. Jose had gone to the library shortly thereafter to borrow a book relating to the topic that he had to study for, but found that Lizares had gotten to it first.

**JAVIER**

Oh, it's you.

Jose looked at the book in Javier's hand.

**JAVIER**

Here for the assigned  
reading too?

**JOSE**

Unfortunately, I do not  
have untold riches for which  
to buy my books.

For some reason, that jab looked like it annoyed the other boy more than usual. Javier's eye twitched.

**JAVIER**

Tch. You're a real piece of work,  
you know that Rizal?

**JOSE**

I try my best. Besides,  
what are you doing here  
anyway? I would've assumed  
you already read the material.

**JAVIER**

What? Can't I use the school  
facilities in peace without  
some know-it-all questioning  
my every motive?

Jose rolled his eyes.

**JOSE**

Alright, since we're both here and we both need that book- how about I propose a truce? Let's put aside our differences because I honestly would rather not get into a fight with you right now.

**JAVIER**

Funny, that's the smartest thing you've said all day. Agreed.

The two boys dropped their bags on one of the tables that lined the university library and sat across from each other. Javier placed the book between them.

**JAVIER**

You go first. You need it more than I do.

**JOSE**

Your generosity knows no bounds, my liege.

**JAVIER**

Just get on with it already.

Didn't need to tell him twice. Jose got straight to opening the relevant chapter. Predictably, the lesson was about the 'glorious' history of Spain's rule in the Philippines. There wasn't much on the Philippines prior to that, or if there was it had probably been destroyed by the *conquistadors* that landed on their shores all those years ago. So many things had been lost to the abyss of time, out of the reach of the people of today who look back and saw their ancestors as merely primitive.

The following chapter dealt with the landing of the Portuguese explorer Magellan and his circumnavigation across the world. An impressive feat, admittedly, but not the focus of the lesson. What was more interesting was what he found at the end of his journey: The Philippines.

At the time, the Philippines was less a nation and more of a collection of interconnected but disparate ethnic groups ruled by Datus or chieftains. The exception to this was the southern largest island, Mindanao, which was instead ruled by a Sultan and followed the teachings of Islam.



**JOSE**

To say that the subjugation  
of the Philippines by Spain is  
a result of natural racial  
superiority is a mistake.

**JAVIER**

Huh? What are you talking about?

**JOSE**

Oh I was just thinking out loud.

**JAVIER**

No, I meant by what you said.

**JOSE**

Exactly that. The author of this  
book made an error in his  
interpretation of the events  
of the Battle of Mactan.

Javier didn't look convinced or impressed.

**JAVIER**

Oh yeah? And I bet you're about  
to tell me what it is.

**JOSE**

The way the events are written  
here leads the reader to believe  
that the *conquistadors* just walked  
into the Philippines, crushed all  
resistance, and claimed the country in  
the name of King Philip II. That it  
was the *will of God* that they succeeded.

**JAVIER**

And?

**JOSE**

But the truth of the matter was  
that they had played local politics  
to gain dominance over the natives.  
Lapulapu, the *Datu* of Mactan who  
would come to kill Magellan, was  
the rival of another chieftain  
*Raja* Humabon. Magellan's party acted like  
neighbors, accepted the

hospitality of the Filipinos,  
and then offered to 'deal' with  
their enemies as a token of goodwill.  
They had the opportunity to ingratiate  
themselves to the people they would soon  
subjugate, it had nothing to do with moral  
or racial superiority.

**JAVIER**

You call yourself a Filipino, you  
and the other natives of this country.

**JOSE**

That's right.

**JAVIER**

The reason you can call yourself  
that is only because of Spain. The  
term itself was named after a Spanish  
king and given originally to Spaniards  
born in the Philippines. One could  
argue that the fact the people were  
so regionalistic and constantly  
warred amongst themselves necessitated  
just cause to unite them under one  
nation. Otherwise, regional differences  
would've ensured that they'd be divided  
and weak- ripe for the picking of  
another sovereign nation if not Spain.

**JOSE**

There was no way for the Filipinos to  
become united because of the 'divide  
and conquer' strategy that was employed  
on the Spanish side.

**JAVIER**

That's exactly right. Because there  
was no reason for the groups to work  
together. In the first place, it wasn't  
something they anticipated to be a  
sufficient threat. They were wrong.

Jose's face scrunched in distaste.

**JOSE**

It sounds like you are arguing

that colonization was the catalyst  
for the birth of a national identity.

Javier shrugged.

**JAVIER**

Who knows? Maybe it is, maybe it  
isn't. What's important is that  
we are a part of Spain, isn't it?

**JOSE**

Are we, really? The mainland  
would claim that to be so, and yet  
refuse to grant us the same rights  
and privileges enjoyed by Spaniards  
from the peninsula. The extent  
that the Philippines 'belongs to  
Spain' only goes as far as how it  
can exploit us.

Javier's blue eyes narrowed dangerously then.

**JAVIER**

Careful, Rizal. If I didn't know  
any better I'd say you're suggesting  
a revolution would be the solution,  
right?

Jose looked at him for a moment, before laughing.

**JOSE**

Not at all. That's not the kind of  
fight we can win.

**JAVIER**

Good to know you're smarter than  
you look.

The two boys fell into uneasy silence then, before Javier took  
out his pocket watch and balked at the time.

**JAVIER**

Damn it. I'm going to be late!  
Here, you can have the book.

**JOSE**

Got somewhere to be?

**JAVIER**

Yeah, it's called "none of your business".

Jose waved a hand dismissively at the other boy, and flicked through another page of the history book. From the corner of his eye he could see Javier looking almost... nervous. But it held a tinge of excitement that manifested in the curve of Javier's mouth. Was that a smile he could see?

*'Maybe he's meeting with his girlfriend or something. Not that I care.'*

Javier took one look at him and left without saying another word. Typical. Jose wasn't even surprised anymore at the antipathy the other boy felt for him.

And yet, the conversation they had also got him to think about what he meant about a 'national identity'. Even if it wasn't something that existed before the Spaniards, it didn't feel right to simply accept an identity that is foisted upon them by the same powers that oppressed them. According to them, the *indio* is indolent, lazy, and backwards when that couldn't be farther from the truth.

Self determination is something that should be decided by the individual themselves, and in the case of the group- by the group. Not by an outside third party that had an obvious agenda.

Jose smiled sardonically. Javier was kind of right, just not for the reasons he thought he was.

LEONOR RIVERA ROUTE: EPISODE 1

*For I am a plant immature,  
Torn out of the Orient where  
The perfumes sleep on the air  
And life is a dream to allure.  
Ah, memories ever endure,*

**EXT. CASA TOMASINA - DAWN**

That weekend, Jose woke up earlier than he expected. When he pushed aside the curtains of his window, he could barely see the sun peeking through the horizon, the sky still a dark shade of blue.

Yet despite that, he could not find it in himself to go back to sleep. Without anything else to do, he dressed himself, put on his shoes, and went downstairs.

To his surprise, he came down to find his boardmates shifting around furniture and trunks. It seemed that everyone had already woken up and were hard at work. Marco looked up from the heavy trunk he placed on the floor and waved to Jose.

**MARCO**

Hey, Pepe! Mind lending us a hand?

**JOSE**

What's going on here?

**MARCO**

We're helping the new guy  
move into his dorm.

**JOSE**

Is he someone we know?

**MARCO**

I don't think... so? Does  
the name Jose Cecilio ring  
a bell for you?

Jose couldn't help but laugh. Really, what were his odds? He did in fact know of him. Not that he could explain the circumstance of how they met.

**JOSE**

Can't say it does.

**MARCO**

Cool. So... are you gonna  
help out or...?

Although he didn't feel like carrying heavy furniture all day, a part of him felt a little awkward to be standing around while everyone else worked.

**JOSE**

...Sure. Hand me that trunk.

He bent down to grab the handles of the trunk and pulled. To his despair, he found that he had to expend considerable effort just to even lift the damn thing. Since when was he so out of shape? Marco looked at him with an amused smile.

**MARCO**

Doing alright there, buddy?

Jose gritted his teeth, unable to admit defeat.

**JOSE**

Never been better.

**MARCO**

Great! Then you can help me bring it upstairs to Cecilio's room. Don't give me that look, I'll be carrying the other end.

The other boy took half the load from Jose as they started their arduous trek to the second floor. By the time they reached there, Jose was already winded and breathing heavily. He gave an incredulous glare at Marco who seemed just fine. Jose made a quiet promise to himself to exercise more in the future.

They dropped the trunk at the threshold of Cecilio's room when the door swung open to reveal the man himself.

**CECILIO**

Hey thanks for helping me carry my luggage and all- *JOSE?*!

**MARCO**

Well look at this, Jose meet Jose. Now both of you must duel to the death to assert who's the dominant one.

**JOSE**

As if, I'm obviously the cooler Jose.

**CECILIO**

This is crazy, man. I had no idea you were boarding here too.

**MARCO**

Wait, you two know each other?  
But you said you never met him.

Jose glared at Cecilio, silently pleading with his eyes to 'just go along with it!'. Thankfully, Cecilio caught on quickly enough before laughing in an obviously forced way.

**CECILIO**

Well... uhh... I know of him but we've never actually gotten to talk until now.

**MARCO**

Oh? And where did you two meet?

**JOSE**

The market.

**CECILIO**

What he said. He was looking at eggplants to give to his lady friend.

Jose's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. What is this idiot saying? Cecilio looked entirely unrepentant even as Marco burst into laughter.

**MARCO**

You're pretty funny, man! The name's Marco. If you ever feel like hanging out with me and the boys, we'd love to have you around.

**CECILIO**

Thanks. Pleasure is all mine.

Jose resisted the urge to groan even as the two shook hands. He couldn't even contradict the statement because it'd completely undermine the bullshit they're trying to spin. There was no two ways about it, he owed Cecilio and they both knew it. So if Cecilio wanted to be petty and embarrass him then let him do it.

After a short moment of chitchat, Marco went back downstairs, leaving Jose and Cecilio alone.

**JOSE**

Eggplants.

**CECILIO**

Sure beats getting smashed  
by the *Guardia*.

**JOSE**

Fair.

**CECILIO**

If you're worried that I'm going  
to rat you out, don't be.

And he was, what? Supposed to just take him at his word? Not like Jose had a choice but to trust the boy.

**JOSE**

If I didn't know any better I'd  
think you were stalking me.

**CECILIO**

You wish. I'm not one of your  
many girlfriends that tail after  
you. Speaking of which- how exactly  
are you so popular?

**JOSE**

What's *that* supposed to mean?

**CECILIO**

What I mean is that- hey no offense-  
is that you're not exactly a  
tall rich handsome guy.

**JOSE**

I really don't want to hear  
something like that from you.

**CECILIO**

And yet you've got women flocking.  
*How do you do it?* You're like 5  
foot 3. Even I'm taller than you.



**JOSE**

Wouldn't you like to know,  
garden boy?

**CECILIO**

C'mon. Tell me.

**JOSE**

I don't know. What will I  
get out of it if I do? All  
this time you've just been  
antagonizing me.

**CECILIO**

Hey, you're gonna want to be  
friends with me. I can be a  
very useful ally whenever you  
need it.

**JOSE**

And in exchange you want me to  
tell you my "secrets" for  
attracting women?

**CECILIO**

That's right.

**JOSE**

Pfft..!

Jose couldn't help it. It was like a dam bursting open and he  
couldn't hold back his laughter.

**JOSE**

You-! Aha, you can't  
be serious!

The serious expression on Cecilio's face told otherwise.

**JOSE**

Good lord. You really must  
be desperate to be asking  
me about this.

**CECILIO**

And so what if I am?! Do you  
have any idea what it's like  
to be sad and lonely? To never

feel the pleasure of a warm bosom  
on your cheeks?! Don't you  
have a heart?

Jose gave the other boy a look of contempt.

**JOSE**

Can't say I have.

**CECILIO**

And that's exactly why you  
can never understand the  
common man's struggle.

**JOSE**

Look, alright, enough of this.  
I'll help you out.

**CECILIO**

You will?!

**JOSE**

Keep in mind that I won't be  
doing this for free.

**CECILIO**

You're going to charge this  
poor boy money?

**JOSE**

No, we'll be exchanging  
information. I tell you what  
I know and if I need your  
help you'll oblige.

**CECILIO**

Heh, that's it, then?  
You got a deal.

Cecilio reached a hand forward, Jose took it in his own in a  
shake.

**JOSE**

Really hope I won't end up  
regretting this.

The other boy gave him an easy assured smile.

**CECILIO**

You won't.

**INT. CASA TOMASINA - NIGHT**

Jose threw himself onto his bed, shoes and all. He didn't have the energy to move at that moment. A dull ache throbbed on his lower back and he groaned, regretting the moment he agreed to help Marco carry heavy furniture. He really overestimated himself this time and pushed his body way too hard.

A tentative knock came from his door. Jose didn't feel like getting up to answer it. Another knock.

**JOSE**

Yeah just come in already!

The door cracked open slightly, where he saw a pair of big brown eyes peeking through it.

**LEONOR R.**

Jose? If you're busy, I can come back another time?

He immediately jumped out of bed, the whiplash of the action causing his back to crack painfully. Jose winced.

**JOSE**

No! No, not at all. I'm not busy right now.

**LEONOR R.**

Okaayy...

Leonor stayed outside his room, a tray of snacks in hand. Jose rifled through his drawers and pulled out a first aid kit. The two of them then took the short walk to the next room which was the azotea.

Ramoncito followed shortly after, his white furry tail standing straight up as he strutted in like he owned the place. Leonor looked a bit out of place as she shuffled awkwardly.

**LEONOR R.**

I brought you these  
snacks... as a way to y'know,  
pay you back for agreeing  
to teach me some first aid.  
But it seems like you're  
really tired right now, are  
you sure it's okay?

Ah... right. Jose had almost forgotten about his agreement with Leonor what with all the stuff happening lately. Although a part of him just wanted to go to sleep already, he couldn't bring himself to say no when his cousin was giving him those watery big doe eyes.

**JOSE**

Right, yeah it's no  
problem at all. Just put  
the tray on the table over  
there and then we can start.  
Do you have any ideas for  
what you want to learn first?

As Leonor placed the tray of biscuits on the table, she paused with her back to him.

**LEONOR R.**

Umm... Just the basics first.

**JOSE**

The basics, huh.

It was clear then that Leonor had no idea what she was talking about.

**JOSE**

Let's start with sprains  
first. A sprain is what  
happens when an injury tears  
the fibers of a ligament.  
The most common type of  
sprain are ankle sprains  
and they swell rapidly and  
are painful. If it's minor  
you can treat it yourself.

Leonor nodded and pulled up a chair in front of him, listening with rapt attention as she pulled a notebook and pencil from the pocket of her skirt.

Jose pulled one of his first aid kit open to reveal a first aid kit he kept for emergency situations. He took out an empty cold compress and a roll of bandage for demonstration.

**JOSE**

To easily remember the steps, it's helpful to shorten the procedure to the abbreviation 'R.I.C.E'

**LEONOR R.**

Rice?

**JOSE**

Yes! It's short for "Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation."

Leonor scribbled furiously on her notebook.

**JOSE**

In fact, I think it'd be better if I showed you through a demonstration.

**LEONOR R.**

Demonstration? What do you mean?

**JOSE**

If you'll act as my patient for a bit, I can show you all the steps in a way that's easy to remember.

Leonor froze, her face taking on an interesting shade of red.

**LEONOR R.**

What would you have me do? Lie on your bed!? Are you going to do something lewd to me?

Jose sputtered. He didn't think of that until she mentioned it!

**JOSE**

What? No! I'll keep my hands to myself, okay? Just put your ankle on the edge of the bed so that I

can elevate it.

**LEONOR R.**

Ahhhh, you better keep your promise! I'm trusting you this time!

She plopped her dainty foot on the edge of the a stool, her long skirt pulled back very slightly to reveal her pale bare ankle. Her lips were pulled into an embarrassed pout, her head turned away to look anywhere else except him. There was something about it that endeared Jose greatly.

**JOSE**

I'm going to touch your foot, okay?

She nodded, still determined not to meet his eye. Jose sighed.

**JOSE**

If you're to look somewhere else instead of paying attention then I don't see the point of doing this at all.

**LEONOR R.**

Fine! But don't you feel embarrassed at all by this?

**JOSE**

What kind of doctor would I be if the sight of another person's body was enough to make me nervous?

**LEONOR R.**

...Point taken.

Another thing for him to file away later.

**JOSE**

Right, so the first step is pretty obvious. It stands for Rest. You should avoid putting any weight on the injured area for 48-72 hours, so you might need the help of crutches, a splint, or brace. Don't forget to keep moving the muscle though to minimize deconditioning, just make sure to keep the exercise light

and easy so you don't worsen the injury.

The initial nervousness that showed in her face melted and her expression took on a more inquisitive look.

**JOSE**

(Contd.)

The next step is to use a cold pack.

Jose brought the empty cold compress and placed it above Leonor's foot.

**JOSE**

Ice the area by applying a slush bath or compression sleeve filled with cold water to help limit swelling after an injury. It's important to do this as soon as possible after the injury for about 15-20 minutes, four to eight times a day, for the first 48 hours until it improves. Another thing to remember is to not use the ice for too long or else you'll cause tissue damage.

As Jose held the compress with one hand and her foot with the other, he couldn't help but notice how soft her skin was. As much as he said that he was planning to become a doctor-a professional!-- he also wasn't being completely honest in denying that the sight of her lower leg didn't affect him at all. He tried his best to keep his eye from roaming anywhere else.

His eye caught Leonor's and he quickly coughed. Leonor stared at him with a blank yet searching expression.

**JOSE**

Next is compression. Wrap the area tightly- tho not too much- with a bandage.

**LEONOR R.**

What happens if you don't have any in hand?

**JOSE**

A strip of cloth will do.

Not ideal, of course, but  
if you have no choice then  
at least make sure it's  
sterilized first.

**LEONOR R.**

Got it.

Jose picked up the roll of bandages from the bed and gestured in a way that looked like he was wrapping it around her foot. He didn't literally do it as it would be a waste of perfectly good bandages just for a demonstration.

All the while, Leonor seemed genuinely interested in the lecture- to his surprise. He initially thought of her request to learn first aid as a passing fancy of a bored upper class girl. Something to occupy her attention before she inevitably got bored and moved on to something else like sewing or whatever.

Still, it was too soon to say whether she would stick around to learn more. He couldn't help but realize he was having fun too. There was something to be said about how teaching someone helped you remember your lessons better.

**JOSE**

Last step is to elevate the  
injured limb above your heart  
whenever possible to limit  
swelling. That's about it.  
Simple, right?

**LEONOR R.**

Yes! I didn't expect it to be  
so simple. When you see doctors  
work it almost looks like what  
they're doing is magic. But it's  
far from it.

**JOSE**

Don't get too excited now, I'm  
only teaching you basic first aid.  
If things get really serious  
then you're still going to have  
to consult a real doctor anyway.  
There's a whole lot more to medicine  
than just this, and it requires  
years of study just to learn even  
one discipline.



**LEONOR R.**

I understand. Thank you for taking the time to teach me all this. I feel like I understand you a bit better now.

That made Jose pause. When he looked up at her he found her smile to be too brilliant. It was like he had given her a beautiful gift, just the simple act of spending time with her. The sparkle in her eyes held such a wholesome joy at learning something new that Jose found himself getting embarrassed.

When he learned things in school it always felt like a chore. He wanted to become a doctor to help his ailing mother's poor eyesight, so the tedious act of studying for tests and exams was just a means of doing that. But it was rare that he ever found himself to be as happy to have learned something new as what he saw in Leonor now. Perhaps when he was a child he did, but overtime the magic faded when he grew up. Things became predictable, boring even. Information was collected for functional use later, and not just for the simple desire to learn for its own sake.

Jose couldn't help but feel like he had taken it all for granted. He should be grateful that he got to study at a good school and get an education instead of feeling annoyed at all his workload. Not everyone had the opportunity to do so. In fact, the average Filipino didn't even get to pursue higher education.

And despite how beautiful Leonor looked in that moment, he couldn't bear to stare at her any longer for shame at himself.

**JOSE**

No, thank you. I've also learnt some important things today.

**LEONOR R.**

Hehe! It's the least I can do. If we're learning things from each other then that means we're getting along.

**JOSE**

Right, though I wonder what makes you think we're not.

**LEONOR R.**

Well, it's kind of hard to talk to you sometimes. I'm not sure how to strike up a conversation.

**JOSE**

Are you shy to talk to others?

Leonor blushed.

**LEONOR R.**

It's not that exactly... just that I haven't gotten the chance to talk to others who aren't girls my age. I've been too busy with school and going to after-class tutoring lessons that I haven't had the time to meet new people.

**JOSE**

I can introduce some of my friends to you, I think you'd like them- they're all good guys.

**LEONOR R.**

Really? I'd love to!

He thought of the group of boys he hung out with, "The Three Musketeers" as Paul put it. Well, he supposed it would actually be four musketeers now since Cecilio is part of the group. Though now that he thought about it, he'd really rather Leonor not meet Marco after remembering the weird love-struck speech he made about her a few days ago.

**JOSE**

It's no problem at all.

The two made to stand from where they were seated, only for Jose to stand up too quickly that an audible 'crack' was heard. He winced painfully and groaned, rubbing his lower back like a terminally old man.

**LEONOR R.**

Pepe? Are you okay?

**JOSE**

It's... It's nothing.

It was not nothing. It hurt like hell!

**LEONOR R.**

It's not nothing if you're  
looking like that! Here, let  
me help you.

Before he could react, Leonor was already behind him. She grabbed his left shoulder with one hand and pressed the other to his spine and *pushed*.

*CRAAAACK!*

Jose involuntarily let out a low moan, to his complete and utter embarrassment. They both froze at the sound.

**LEONOR R.**

Anyway I gotta go, bye!

The girl practically ran out of the room, leaving behind the tray of snacks and even Ramoncito. The cat stared at him from its perch on his desk, almost as if in judgment. His face burned.

He twisted his shoulder a bit and found to his surprise that it no longer ached. Jose chuckled in amusement. Guess she had a few tricks up her sleeves too.

[END EPISODE 1]

INTERLUDE

**EXT. ??? - NIGHT???**

That night, Jose dreamed.

He stood above the crumbled earth, eerily still, as the shovel hit the soil again and again with a 'clack'. The lantern in his hand illuminated the harsh frown on his face, the flickering of the candlelight morphing the shadows into inhuman shapes.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

He snarled.

**ME**

What have you done with my  
father, you ingrate?

The gravedigger stopped what he was doing, stabbing the shovel into the ground as he wiped the sweat from his temple. He gave Jose a hideous yellowed smile.

**GRAVEDIGGER**

Threw him into the river, I did.

**ME**

You were ordered to transfer him  
to the Chinese cemetery.

The old man spat on the ground beside Jose's shoe.

**GRAVEDIGGER**

It's bad enough he was born a  
Filipino, but to be buried with  
the Chinese is worse.

The two watched as Father's body was carried away by the currents. After a brief moment, it finally succumbed to the depths.

**INT. SANTO TOMAS - DAY**

Jose's train of thought was broken when he heard the ringing of bells that signaled the start of noon prayer. The rest of the class stopped what they were doing to fall into silence and form the sign of the cross on their chests. Jose did the same, if only not to stand out like a sore thumb, though his mind was elsewhere.

As the prayer ended, he was about to pick up his notes and bag when he once again caught the tail end of what seemed like an argument between Javier and his minions. It would've been unusual by itself, since Daniel and Ignacio were such suck ups that Jose was sure they must've had their spines surgically removed right before enrolling in this school. What made it more surprising was what Daniel had said.

**DANIEL**

Ehh?? What do you mean you won't  
*libre* us today?

**JAVIER**

You heard me, I can't just keep  
treating you guys to free food  
all the time. Don't you have your  
own money anyway?

**IGNACIO**

Wow, never took you to be such  
a stingy guy.

**DANIEL**

Though I guess I should've expected  
it from a guy who comes from a family  
like yours.

**JAVIER**

Watch your tongue!

**DANIEL**

Or what? You're not on top in  
class anymore, *Lizares*. I thought  
I'd keep you company out of pity  
but since you won't even show any  
gratitude for my friendship I don't  
see why I should bother anymore.

Daniel left.

**JAVIER**

Tch. Let me guess, you're also the  
same, Ignacio?

**IGNACIO**

Eh, my parents told me to leave  
you be. Speaks badly of our reputation  
to be seen with you these days. Try  
not to take it so personally.

**JAVIER**

You really got some fucking nerve.  
Go, I don't need you two stooges anyway.

**IGNACIO**

Pride can only get you so far, Javier.  
One day you'll find yourself alone

with no one to call your ally.

This time it was Ignacio's turn to make his leave. Jose saw Javier silently fuming in his seat, a lacquered wooden box in his lap. 'Never thought a guy like him would need to bring boxed lunches to school'.

As interesting as that exchange was- "interesting" being a generous way to describe it- Jose didn't find it in himself to be particularly invested in what he saw. It was only a matter of time before Javier's rat bastard friends would show their true ugly colors. Javier had no one but himself to blame for choosing such terrible company.

Jose gave one last side eye to the sullen boy before leaving the class.

#### **EXT. PUBLIC MARKET - DAY**

Cecilio and Jose had planned the other day to meet up in the public market after classes. Jose had a bit of spare cash left to spend on other things aside from school supplies and food so he decided now would be a good time to buy some presents for his special girl. Cecilio just decided to tag along for whatever reason, citing the 'importance of learning from a master at work' or some nonsense like that.

By the time Jose had arrived at the meeting spot, Cecilio was already there and waved back at him.

**CECILIO**

Hey, you ready to go or what?

**JOSE**

How long have you been waiting here?

**CECILIO**

Just a couple of minutes I think.

**JOSE**

Alright then. Let's go, Cecilio.

**CECILIO**

There's no need to be so formal haha

**JOSE**

I can't just call you 'Jose'. It'd get confusing for both of us to have the same name.

**CECILIO**

Then call me "Chenggoy". That's what my friends call me.

**JOSE**

That's a pretty weird sounding name. Makes you sound like a monkey.

**CECILIO**

Hey! Don't be rude! My mother gave it to me. I would've thought a guy like you who goes to a fancy high-class school woulda learned some manners. But you're just as rude as a hoodrat.

**JOSE**

I really don't know what to tell you. You could probably say that I've progressively lost it in me to care anymore about propriety.

**CECILIO**

So it's just a front, then? You clean up real nice with your suits, shiny shoes and fancy degrees but on the inside you're no different from me.

**JOSE**

If you say so.

**CECILIO**

So anyway, why are we here again?

**JOSE**

To get a present for someone.

"Chenggoy" gave him a cheeky smile.

**CECILIO**

Oh? So which is it, *Leonor* or *Leonor*?

**JOSE**

Leonor.

**CECILIO**

HAH! Good one. It's kind of genius, in a way. If you were to accidentally cry out the other woman's name, they would be none the wiser.

Jose gave a long suffering sigh.

**JOSE**

Leave it to Chenggoy to lead his mind to the gutter.

**CECILIO**

What? So you never thought about it? Sounds like a load of bull.

**JOSE**

There's a lot more to romance than scheming to get under women's skirts.

**CECILIO**

Like what?

**JOSE**

Like getting to know them. You know, their *personalities* and *hobbies* and likes and dislikes.

Chenggoy didn't look too convinced.

**CECILIO**

So what you're trying to say is that you like the Leonors for their *personalities* and not their looks.

**JOSE**

I didn't say that either...

**CECILIO**

Then?

**JOSE**

They're both pretty girls, there's no competition. What makes them different and unique is how they act. Like, uh, Valenzuela is industrious and hardworking. She also has an easy confidence that is hard to emulate.



Rivera is docile and sweet and is generally very cute. It'd be like comparing apples and oranges.

**CECILIO**

Eh? Then if they're all different how do you know what to impress them with?

**JOSE**

Haven't you been listening? There is no special secret, just don't act like a horny loser.

**CECILIO**

Damn, this is a lot harder than I thought.

Jose rolled his eyes. He caught a glimpse of something shiny in one of the market stalls and stopped in front of it. It looked to be something of a gift shop, with the front display showcasing different kinds of handmade jewelry and accessories for women like handkerchiefs and fans. Admittedly, it wasn't anything too fancy but the pricing was affordable and the quality was decent. Cecilio picked up one of the colorful fans and jokingly pretended to be a coquettish lady, his voice taking an exaggerated feminine pitch.

**CECILIO**

You really are nothing but a dog,  
Jose! First I hear you've been sleeping  
with my best friend, then my sister,  
then my aunt, then my own mother! What  
say you in your defense?

Cecilio fanned himself even harder. The store clerk gave both of them a bemused glare.

**CLERK**

Is there anything you'd like to buy?

**JOSE**

Please ignore this idiot. How much for these?

Jose picked out a few of the items on display. One was a maroon paper fan painted on the front side with scenery of mountains and cherry blossoms. It wasn't a painting style he was familiar with, which lent it a kind of foreign and exotic appeal.

The next item was a white embroidered handkerchief, its borders were hemmed with delicate lace and lavender swirls.

Jose grabbed one of the brooches on the rack and held it up to the light. The stone in the middle was a deep shade of green that reminded him of the verdant forests that lay beyond the walled boundaries of Intramuros.

The last item was a sewing kit inside of a tiny painted wooden box. It wasn't what one would traditionally give to a lady as a courting present, but Jose could see the appeal in giving something that she could use often in the future. Plus the design of the box wasn't bad either, it was minimalist and depicted colorful fishes in the front.

**CLERK**

Oh, those? They're 50 pesos each.

**JOSE**

50 pesos?!

No way. That was too much! Jose felt doubt sink into his mind as fears of being scammed of his meager allowance surfaced.

**JOSE**

I guess that means I have to pick one.

**CLERK**

How about this, if you take two items I'll charge you 80 pesos.

**JOSE**

It's really not that much of a difference.

**CECILIO**

So why not take both?

**JOSE**

I know you think I'm some sort of rich kid but I really am not.

**CECILIO**

What's the harm then? If she doesn't like one gift you can always give her the other.

**JOSE**

It's kind of overkill to be honest.

**CECILIO**

Fine, suit yourself.

CHOOSE:

-Paper Fan

-Handkerchief

-Brooch

-Sewing Kit

**CLERK**

A fine choice. Here you go, sir.  
Come again next time.

**JOSE**

Thank you, we've got what we came  
here for.

**CECILIO**

So what's next?

**JOSE**

What else? To give this to the  
recipient of course.

## VALENZUELA ROUTE: EPISODE 2

As Jose looked at the prize he had in his hands, he felt a tap on his shoulder from Cecilio, who pointed right behind him. Jose turned, not at all expecting what he ended up seeing.

In a street food stall adjacent to them was none other than Javier Lizares, scion of the Lizares name and wealth, ordering a shanghai lumpia in a public market. Jose couldn't believe his eyes.

**CECILIO**

Hey, isn't that the guy from the  
house where you stole those flowers?

**JOSE**

Not so loud!

Thankfully, the devil in question was too occupied to have heard them. The sight was so absurd that it looked comedic. Javier stood out like a sore thumb, his off white school uniform suit pressed and spotless. It stood at odds with his dirty and muddy surroundings.

And what exactly did someone like him have any business to do there? Javier bought an exorbitant number of lumpias that the food stall cook hastily shoved into a paper bag. The boy examined the fried treat as he took a tentative bite. The crispy wrapping gave a loud 'crack' and his expression changed from mild skepticism to pleasant delight.

Javier looked up at the stall worker.

**JAVIER**

How do you make something like this?

And now he's taking recipe lessons? This day was getting too weird.

**JOSE**

Come on, Chenggoy. Let's get out of here before he realizes we're gawking at him.

**CECILIO**

Don't have to tell me twice.

The two boys left.

**EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NOON**

It had been two days since. Jose had taken his gift to be wrapped up nicely in a small box and tied with a red and white ribbon. Now was the time to give it to Leonor.

He walked down the familiar pathway to the Valenzuela household where he once dormed at. Jose took the scenic route through the clearing of trees at the back of the house. He didn't yet want to make his presence known to her parents, as it would make it difficult for them to find some time alone afterwards.

As he neared the back gate, he heard voices from the gardens. Jose's hand froze on the handle. The first was the familiar lilting voice of Leonor Valenzuela while the other was...

Javier!?

Confusion and indignation filled him. Why is this guy appearing everywhere these days? And around Leonor no less? Jose had to stamp down the impulse to just rush in there and demand to know what Javier's business is. As it was, Jose stood there motionless in bewilderment.

He took a peek inside and every thought about the propriety of eavesdropping was thrown out the window when he saw Javier and Leonor sitting on a stone bench together. Granted, they were still a respectable distance apart but somehow he doubted Javier was here just for a nice chat.

Speaking of which, that was the exact moment Jose also noticed a huge lacquer wooden box by the boy's feet. Javier said something to Leonor before picking it up on his lap and handing it to her. Inside were even smaller boxes filled with... lumpia. Just so much lumpia that it would've probably been enough to supply an entire town fiesta.

Leonor stared at the pile of boxes in front of her, before bursting into laughter. The sound of it rang like the twinkling of small bells, loud and clear but somehow also elegant. Javier's face burst crimson.

**LEONOR V.**

So I tell you once that  
lumpia is my favorite and  
you decided to buy this many  
just for me?

**JAVIER**

Ah... Well... I didn't buy these.

**LEONOR V.**

Hmm?

Javier stammered like a schoolgirl.

**JAVIER**

I actually made these.

*Really?!*

**LEONOR V.**

Really? My, that's a surprise.  
You didn't have to put all this  
effort just for me.

**JAVIER**

Well it's not a big deal.

Leonor looked like a cat who had caught its meal. She put a  
finger under her lip in mock contemplation.

**LEONOR V.**

'Not a big deal' huh? Prior  
to our conversation before,  
you had not heard of lumpia. And  
this many, it must've taken you  
hours right? Have you always  
known how to cook, or did you  
learn it just so you could  
impress me?

She smiled, but it was the kind that made Javier burn up with  
embarrassment.

**LEONOR V.**

That's very cute, I didn't know  
you held such strong feelings for  
me. It's enough to touch my heart.

**JAVIER**

It's not...

She interrupted him when she cupped a hand to his face. His  
words died in his throat before he could say it. Javier's mouth  
opened and closed like a fish.

**LEONOR V.**

Your face looks very red, have  
you become shy all of a sudden?

Javier stood up so abruptly that he almost dropped all the boxes  
of lumpia he was carrying. He scrambled with the watch in his  
pocket, making a gesture as if he was looking at the time when  
in reality he was looking at Leonor and her assured smile.

**JAVIER**

Ah, would you look at the time!  
I'm very sorry but I didn't  
anticipate that I'd have prior  
engagements to this. I bid you  
well, Lady Valenzuela.

Leonor giggled, flicking her wrist to open her paper fan.

**LEONOR V.**

Goodbye, Javier.

Javier escaped before she could say another word. Jose had never  
seen the man act so cowardly-and in front of a woman no less. He  
had to stifle his own chuckle as he revealed himself to Leonor.

**LEONOR V.**

So it was you the whole time.

**JOSE**

You knew?

**LEONOR V.**

No, but thank you for confirming  
it for me.

*Damn it. Fell right into that one.*

**JOSE**

So... Javier Lizares.

**LEONOR V.**

Good afternoon to you too,  
Jose. What about him?

**JOSE**

Is he courting you?

**LEONOR V.**

If you call that sad attempt  
"courting" then sure.

OUCH.

**JOSE**

Not to tell you what to do or  
anything, but you should really  
pick better company.

Leonor rested her chin in her free palm.

**LEONOR V.**

Hmm... Much like you, right?

**JOSE**

Pardon?

**LEONOR V.**

If I recall, you also have a habit of keeping 'good company' yourself right? It's okay though, I'm not the type to get jealous.

Jose sighed as he took the seat right next to her.

**JOSE**

My lady, when you accuse me of such things it wounds my heart.

**LEONOR V.**

Please. It's not like we're engaged to each other so there's no need to be so sentimental. You and I both know that courting is just a bit of fun, just a song and dance we all agree to play before we tie ourselves down to one another for eternity.

**JOSE**

Not exactly something I am used to hearing from a woman.

**LEONOR V.**

Oh and why's that? Should I silently pine and long for you while staring off into the distance when we are not around each other?

**JOSE**

Alright, I get it.

Jose felt something poke his cheek. It was the lumpia Javier made.

**LEONOR V.**

Come now, Pepe. Don't be upset.



Here, have some of this. It's good.

**JOSE**

I'm not upset-mpf!

The moment his mouth opened, Leonor took the opportunity to shove the fried treat into Jose's mouth. His initial irritation melted away when the flavors of the meat and vegetables touched his tongue. Despite himself, he had to admit that Leonor was right- it was good. Damn it, who would've thought Javier would be a good cook of all things? Leonor's grin was contagious.

**LEONOR V.**

See?

**JOSE**

Are you sure it's okay to  
feed me with a gift another man  
gave you?

**LEONOR V.**

I don't see why not. It's not  
like he said I couldn't share.

Oh! Speaking of gifts, he had almost forgotten about hers.

**JOSE**

I got this for you.

CHOOSE:

- Paper Fan
- Brooch

IF GIVE HER THE PAPER FAN:

**LEONOR V.**

Oh, Jose...I don't know what to say.  
You didn't have to go so far as to  
Purchase me a gift.

**JOSE**

It's no problem. Do you...?

**LEONOR V.**

Like it? I love it!

**JOSE**

I'm glad to hear that.

IF GIVE HER THE GREEN BROOCH:

**LEONOR V.**

...!

She cradled the brooch in her hands, bringing it up to the light of the sun to admire the way it shimmered in differing shades of blue and green.

**JOSE**

Do you like it?

**LEONOR V.**

I love it. It reminds me a lot of the province where my parents were from. I never got to see the outside of Intramuros, but someday I would like to.

**JOSE**

I'm sure that someday you will.

-

CONTINUE DIALOGUE HERE:

**LEONOR V.**

Now that you've had your share, why don't you try to feed me next?

**JOSE**

Ehh?

Jose held the lumpia awkwardly in his hand as he saw Leonor close her eyes and open her mouth slightly. Her pink lips parted and he couldn't help but notice how they glistened slightly. He swallowed hard, the two of them leaning nearer to each other.

**JOSE**

Okay, here it comes.

His trembling hand brought the treat to her lips, where she took a big bite of the whole thing. Jose had to quickly remove his fingers or otherwise risk losing them to her teeth. She giggled.

**LEONOR V.**

Not bad! I'll give it a 4/10.

**JOSE**

Aw, come on. I think I did pretty good there.

**LEONOR V.**

You did, up until you froze up like a scared rabbit. Reminds me of poor Javier.

**JOSE**

What do you even like about Javier, anyway? He's... well-

Jose ran out of nice ways to say exactly what he thought of the boy.

**JOSE**

He's an *asshole*.

**LEONOR V.**

True. But I think he more than makes up for it by providing me *with an endless source of entertainment*. He's so easy to tease, everytime I look at his face on the verge of tears I feel like I want to torment him more. I thought he would stop coming after a while but he always returns. Adorable, isn't it?

**JOSE**

...

Jose felt like he just heard something he wasn't supposed to. Women... women were scary, he concluded.

**LEONOR V.**

Do you want some *kalamansi* juice to go with this?

**JOSE**

...Yeah, sure why not.

[END EPISODE 2]

## RIVERA ROUTE: EPISODE 2

### **INT. CASA TOMASINA - NIGHT**

Jose threw his shoes and bag in the corner of the room, too tired to pick them up and put them in their proper place. By the time he and Cecilio parted ways, the sun had already reached the horizon. On the walk towards home, he looked up at the sky to find stars peeking out from the clouds. He didn't expect how fun it would be to hang out with Cecilio, considering the terrible first impression they had of each other. But somehow once they got talking, time would fly by until it was already late at night.

The gift he had gotten for Leonor was tucked safely in the pocket of his overcoat, and he took it out to gently place it atop his desk so that he didn't forget later.

Jose had the oddest feeling of being watched. Even as he walked up the stairs to his room that burning sensation in the back of his head remained. It was only when he closed the door did it finally cease.

He thought maybe it was Leonor up to her usual antics, but he was always able to catch her in the act of following him, just little things that gave her position away. This time felt different from that- and it was enough to put him on edge.

A light knock rapped on his door. He stumbled out of bed to answer.

**LEONOR R.**

Hello...

**JOSE**

Leonor? What are you doing  
up this late?

Jose stepped outside and closed the door behind him.

**LEONOR R.**

I heard you come up.

**JOSE**

Ahh... sorry if I disturbed you.

**LEONOR R.**

Oh you didn't wake me, don't worry. I was waiting for you to return. You seem... tired than usual.

**JOSE**

Yeah I was out with Cecilio... wait just a second.

Jose went back to retrieve the box.

**JOSE**

I got this for you.

IF GIVE HANDKERCHIEF:

**LEONOR R.**

Aww, Jose! You really shouldn't have!

**JOSE**

It's no problem at all, I just wanted to see you smile.

**LEONOR R.**

That's very sweet of you.

IF GIVE SEWING KIT:

**LEONOR R.**

How did you know this is exactly what I wanted?

**JOSE**

I didn't, but hey it's a pretty good coincidence isn't it? Figured you'd appreciate something practical.

**LEONOR R.**

Yes! I love it!

There was a glint in Leonor's eyes as she examined the blade of the pair of scissors.

—

**JOSE**

You ready for your next lesson?

**LEONOR R.**

Truly? I'd love to!

**JOSE**

But it'd be better for me if you tell me what you're interested in first.

**LEONOR R.**

Hmm... well I did have a couple of questions for you.

**JOSE**

Shoot.

**LEONOR R.**

Let's say a man is wounded - like from a stab wound - and he is bleeding. How long does he have left to live?

**JOSE**

Hmm... well that would depend on a number of factors like the size of the wound, the placement of the wound, if it hit an artery-

**LEONOR R.**

So how long would it take for him to die?

**JOSE**

If the wound doesn't stop bleeding it can take as long as five minutes.

Shorter if their wounds are severe.  
The average human adult has around  
five liters of blood. If you lose  
40% of that, you will die. That's  
about... 2.4 liters I'd say.

**LEONOR R.**

I see... that's awful. And which  
parts of his body would be more  
susceptible to that?

Jose was glad he got to flex a little of what he studied to the  
girl he liked.

**JOSE**

The jugular on the side of the neck  
or even the Adam's apple would be  
the most dangerous I'd say. The  
others I can think of are also  
the wrists and the inside of your  
forearm.

**LEONOR R.**

Oh god! That sounds really  
gruesome!

**JOSE**

Yeah it is, just be thankful  
you'll probably never have to  
see it for yourself.

**LEONOR R.**

I really hope so too.

**JOSE**

Hey, I've been wondering...

**LEONOR R.**

Yes?

**JOSE**

You said you wanted to become  
a healer, but you never told me  
why.

**LEONOR R.**

...

The smile on Leonor's face disappeared in an instant and was replaced by an eerie blankness. Her tone was devoid of emotion.

**LEONOR R.**

You know, I'm not really sure  
why either.

**JOSE**

Huh?

**LEONOR R.**

Do you know what it's like to  
always be *watched*? To have the  
gaze of others constantly trained  
on every single move you make? Have  
you ever felt the weight of a hundred  
eyes crawling over your skin, Pepe,  
have you?

**JOSE**

Uhh... I'm not sure, I guess  
I have.

**LEONOR R.**

No you haven't. You don't know  
anything. You're just like everyone  
else, Pepe. Always thinking so well  
of me, like I am a good girl but  
I'm not. I'm a fraud. I'm not nice  
at all- it's all just pretend.

**JOSE**

I think you should calm down  
a little-

**LEONOR R.**

Mother always decides everything  
for me and I'm sick of it I'm sick  
of it I'm sick of it I'm sick of it  
I'm sick of it I'm sick of it I'm  
sick of it I'm sick of it I'm-

**JOSE**

LEONOR!



She stopped, her anguished expression calming just a bit.

**LEONOR R.**

I have one last question.

Jose swallowed the unsettled lump in his throat, worried for what other outburst would come out of her.

**JOSE**

Are you sure you're okay?

**LEONOR R.**

The Lord once said that if your hands cause you to sin, then you must cut it off. And if your eyes cause you to sin, you must pluck them out. So tell me, if you had to choose: Which one would you rather give up on? Your hands or your eyes?

He couldn't comprehend the words she was saying anymore. What kind of insanity has gripped poor sweet Leonor? Sweat dripped down his temple and he couldn't formulate a reply.

**LEONOR R.**

Answer me, Jose. Your eyes or your hands?

**JOSE**

I- uhh... I'd need both to perform my work. I think I would give up one eye and one hand so that at least I could still see and hold a scalpel.

**LEONOR R.**

Hehe. You're so smart, Pepe! You always know the right things to say.

She laughed, and Jose found himself laughing nervously as well. After a brief moment she composed herself and looked as if nothing had happened at all.

**LEONOR R.**

Thank you for tonight. I'm sorry for my outburst, I shouldn't have been so mean to you. After all, I like you a lot!! So I'll just

leave now so you can rest, okay?

Jose nodded shakily. Leonor left not long after that. He scrambled up from his bed and looked out the window. Right across from where he was, he could see another window adjacent to his that had a clear view of the gate leading up to the front door. The same room also led to the staircase that oversaw the reception room and the stairs which came up to his room.

That was Leonor's window.

[END EPISODE 2]

#### INTERLUDE

**INT. ??? - NIGHT???**

That night, Jose dreamed.

His red rimmed eyes stared at the open flame of the candle, watching it flicker and dance erratically through the night. He did not feel its warmth on his cheek, but his whole body froze in that shivering darkness. All around him were repurposed jewelry making tools and beakers holding unknown liquid.

He imagined the faces of Paulita Gomez and Juanito Palaez, at the joy and laughter of their friends and family as they celebrated their wedding reception in the late Capitan Tiago's house. Everybody who was anybody was sure to be invited- important political figures and even the clergy.

He imagined giving this kerosene lamp as a wedding present. 'What a thoughtful gift' the guests would say. They'd admire the glittering jewels that dangled from its body, and be overcome with envy at its sheer magnificence.

He imagined the expressions they'd make when they'd turn on the knob and be engulfed in flames, the mechanism inside sparking a tinder that activates the kerosene- creating an explosion that would consume the entire living room and everyone therein.

He imagined the screams of every corrupt priest as they burned in a hell of their creation.

Jose smiled.

What will you do?

CHOOSE:

- Kill them all
- Kill them all
- Kill them all
- Kill them all

...

**EXT. PLAZA SAMPALUCAN - NIGHT**

Tonight was the night of the long-awaited fiesta dance, where everybody could come and unwind in the name of some random long-dead saint. Tonight would define the course of a young man's life, if he was to finally find a girlfriend or to remain *forever alone*. Everybody in Santo Tomas has been tearing their hair out over who to invite as a date. Not Jose though, he already had it all figured out.

From the looks of things, Marco Soriano was to be the latter. Jose stifled a snicker as he saw the poor guy get rejected for the nth time that night. Paul gave him a sad pat on the back as they rejoined the group of lonely men in the corner, gazing longingly at the pretty girls on the dance floor.

The fiesta was a special thing, it brought a sense of community to the town where everyone would share food and talk and dance and drink the night away. Though, despite the merrymaking, one could not ignore the signs of disparity and social hierarchy from the placement of every group. High class people stayed in their own circles and the poor stayed in theirs. Same story, different day.

Jose sighed, cynicism dulling his mood in a way that even the bright lights and loud music couldn't remedy. It was time he found his date.

WHO WILL YOU GO TO?

- Leonor Valenzuela
- Leonor Rivera

## VALENZUELA ROUTE: EPISODE 3

### EXT. PLAZA SAMPALUCAN - NIGHT

Jose looked out into the crowd of partygoers when he spotted the Valenzuela's making conversation with the Lizares family. Orang was there, lovely as ever, in a maroon dress and matching fan. She had a bored expression on her face until her eyes met his. Javier was thankfully absent from the occasion.

Jose waited until the two families had parted ways before he approached them.

#### JOSE

Good evening, Capitan Juan and Sanday Valenzuela. I hope you and your family are having a good time at the fiesta.

#### CAPT. JUAN

All is well, Pepe! I hear you're making a name for yourself in the university. My daughter has been asking about you ever since you left.

#### LEONOR V.

Father...

#### CAPT. SANDAY

Oh won't you spend some time with us this evening? It's been a while since we've talked like this.

#### JOSE

I'd love to but maybe some other time.

#### CAPT. SANDAY

Oh is that so! Well then don't let us stop you.

The couple were then approached by another figure, an affluent Spaniard by the looks of it. Leonor rolled her eyes and Jose gave her a meaningful wink. He stealthily left their side and

waited in a quiet spot away from their earshot. A few moments later, Leonor arrived.

He raised his elbow and Leonor gracefully took it.

**LEONOR V.**

You came right on time. I was starting to get sick of all this Noise. I'd have been stuck with A chaperone for the rest of the night.

**JOSE**

Then let's go somewhere quieter.

**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

The two of them walked arm and arm in relative silence as the noise of the fiesta grew muffled from distance. Jose remembered this part of Intramuros as being the street where he used to make his rounds to Manong gardener.

He wondered how that man was doing now.

**LEONOR V.**

Jose, do you smell something?

**JOSE**

Huh? What is it?

**LEONOR V.**

It's coming from over there.

Leonor pointed in the direction of the Lizares manor. Now that Jose paid attention to it, he could pick up a whiff of the faint smell of kindling and... oil.

The two rushed over to the scene and the smell became more pungent as well. When they made the turn, Jose saw the once magnificent gardens of the Lizares manor was in flames. What once housed the priceless collection of imported and local flora was devoured into ashes.

A lone figure stood above the inferno, their silhouette standing starkly against the harsh light.

**JOSE**

Javier...?

The boy stood still, turning his head only slightly to look upon Jose. Dark circles covered his red rimmed eyes, a look of confused mania in his expression and the tilt of his smile.

**JAVIER**

Ah, it's you. Have you come to witness the fall of this decadent house?

**LEONOR V.**

Javier, what's gotten into you?  
Did you do this?

**JAVIER**

It's kind of funny really, all this time I thought I was someone special. That I was destined for greater things than being stuck in this washed up country.

**JAVIER**

(contd.)

But you want to know the truth?  
I'm just a fucking nobody. Just like you. Just like everybody else.

**LEONOR V.**

I don't... understand.

**JAVIER**

I'm a bastard. My father slept with some Filipino maid and got me! Hahaha. HAHAAHAHA!

**JAVIER**

(Contd.)

It all makes sense now, can't you see? Why everybody's been avoiding me all of a sudden, treating me like some kind of invalid. It's because they knew! They were just waiting for me to find out, like some kind of half baked joke. A laughing stock! And it's so funny because I get it now. I get it, I GET IT!

**JAVIER**

(Contd.)

Don't you find it funny too,  
Orang?

**LEONOR V.**

Javier... I'm sorry.

**JAVIER**

You were always too kind to me.  
Even when I didn't deserve it.  
Even when I never really had a  
future to begin with. My family  
is done. We're all broke thanks  
to my mother's excessive spending  
for this stupid garden. So this,  
all of this.

He gestured out into the burning fields.

**JAVIER**

This is all just payback. I'm sick  
of having to sink or swim for this  
family. Sick of my bitch mother  
treating me like shit- she probably  
knew the truth and that's why. So  
I'm going to take away the one thing  
she treasured most and see how she  
likes it. Hope she just keels  
over in embarrassment when  
everybody finds out that her husband  
is an adulterous whore.

**JOSE**

Javier, I know we haven't gotten  
along in the past, but you've got  
to stop this. You're going mad!

**JAVIER**

I KNOW RIGHT!? I'VE NEVER FELT  
BETTER IN MY LIFE!

Javier suddenly stopped when he felt himself being embraced by a  
familiar warmth.

**LEONOR V.**

Javier... Please stop.

**JAVIER**

Leonor...

Jose heard the sounds of boots hitting cobblestone.

**JOSE**

This is all very touching and all but can we speed things up before the *Guardia* arrive!? In case you forgot, we're right in front of a walking arson case!

**JAVIER**

Oh.

**JOSE**

"Oh" is right!

**GUARDIA #1**

Hey, you there! What's going on here?

**LEONOR V.**

Run!

Jose made a beeline for the other side of the street, but before he could get away he tumbled forward to land face first on the cobblestone. He felt himself being picked up by the collar of his shirt before a powerful punch smacked him right in the face.

**GUARDIA #1**

Filthy *Indios* having to ruin a perfectly good drinking night. You're the one who did this, didn't you!

**JOSE**

Bwuah? Why me! I had nothing to do with this!

**JAVIER**

He's right! It was me... I was the one who set fire to the gardens. So please, let him go.

**GUARDIA #1**

Is that so, huh?



The guard dropped Jose unceremoniously on the ground. Jose rubbed his aching cheek and stumbled back.

Next thing he knew, he saw Javier eating dirt too when the guard rammed his fist into Javier's torso. Spittle flew out of the boy's mouth as he fell to his knees.

**GUARDIA #1**

Then how about this? I'll arrest  
you both for fucking up my night.  
Serves you bastards right.

**JAVIER**

Hngg..! You brute!

**???**

Hey, why don't you try looking  
elsewhere for a fight, buddy?

The entire group was caught off guard by the sound of another voice. It was enough to have the guard pause long enough for a brick to hit him in the face. The man fell to the ground with an exaggerated 'thud'!

**CECILIO**

What are you guys waiting for,  
an instruction manual? Let's  
fucking go!

**LEONOR V.**

And it looks like we've got  
company!

**GUARDIA #2**

You there, stop!

The group ran towards the darkness of the alleyways. Groups of armed guards passed where they last stood, a couple of them examining the downed guard from earlier. Cecilio 'tsked' in annoyance.

**CECILIO**

What I say, eh? Told you that  
you'd be glad to have me as  
your friend.

**JOSE**

Can't say I disagree with you there. You sure are a sight for sore eyes.

**CECILIO**

And look who we have here, Javier Lizares in the flesh. Last I saw you, you didn't have as many loose screws on.

**JAVIER**

Who are you? Nevermind that, I had the situation under control had that guard not acted so impudently. I never would've thought they would engage in such brutish behavior.

**CECILIO**

Guardia being brutes? *Welcome to the real world, asshole!* Without your money protecting you it becomes really clear now who these pigs are serving, huh? Last time I had a run in with them, they gave me a black eye for a crime I didn't even commit—courtesy of this dipshit over here.

**JOSE**

Hey!

**CECILIO**

So I've been waiting to get one of my own back, heh. Feels good.

**LEONOR V.**

Can we cut the chit chat? They're still looking for us.

**JOSE**

Right. Cecilio, can you take Leonor safely home?

**CECILIO**

Aye aye, *Capitan!*

**LEONOR V.**

And what about you? What if you  
get caught?

**JOSE**

I'll figure a way out. It's safer  
that we're not together if they do.

Leonor pursed her lips in obvious disagreement. But for whatever  
reason, she decided not to push the subject.

**LEONOR V.**

Fine. But you stay safe. You  
too, Javier.

**JOSE**

Goodbye, Leonor. May we meet  
again.

She took his hand in hers quickly before leaving with Cecilio.  
Javier stood there watching in silence.

**JAVIER**

Do you love her?

**JOSE**

Well *that* came out of nowhere.  
Do you really think now's the  
right time to talk about this?

**JAVIER**

I have to know if you love her.  
Otherwise I can't let myself  
back down.

CHOOSE

-Say you love her  
-You're unsure

--

IF CHOOSE 'LOVE':

**JOSE**

I do love her.

Javier gave a long suffering sigh.

**JAVIER**

I see...

**JOSE**

And it seems that you do too.

**JAVIER**

Yes. Even though I know I shouldn't. Even though I know I can't give her the life she deserves.

**JOSE**

Then why continue to see her?

**JAVIER**

Because... Because when I'm around her I don't feel like I have to fulfill any expectations. Like I can just be myself and not keep putting up this self-important front. I just feel so tired.

-

IF CHOOSE 'UNSURE':

**JOSE**

I might come to love her someday, but I'll have to wait and see.

**JAVIER**

Leonor deserves better than some playboy treating this as if it's a game.

**JOSE**

Oh yeah? Well she can tell me that herself if she likes. She doesn't need you playing white knight for her. Let me guess, you love her?

**JAVIER**

Yes. Even though I know I shouldn't. Even though I know I can't give her the life she deserves.

**JOSE**

Then why continue to see her?

**JAVIER**

Because... Because when I'm around her I don't feel like I have to fulfill any expectations. Like I can just be myself and not keep putting up this self-important front. I just feel so tired.

—

**JOSE**

I see.

**JAVIER**

Maybe if things were different. Maybe if I was a different person...

**JOSE**

No point wishing for the impossible.

**JAVIER**

Wow you're really not good at this comforting thing.

**JOSE**

Who says I'm trying to comfort you? I'm saying it like it is. If you want to be a coward and not pursue the girl of your dreams because of your insecurities or whatever then that's on you. Just don't be mad if some other man sweeps her off her feet before you come to your senses.

**JAVIER**

Grr.. why you..!

Jose laughed and felt the tension of that night melt away a little.

**JOSE**

If you don't somehow end up in a cell before this night is over, you should go to her. Tell her

how you really feel. If she says yes then I'll gladly back off and let you two do your thing. But if she says no then I'll give it my best shot. Deal?

**JAVIER**

But I thought you hated me.

**JOSE**

Oh I do. But I feel sorry for you too.

**JAVIER**

Tch. Fine, it's a deal.

The two boys shook hands.

**JOSE**

Now let's get out of here.

[END EPISODE 3]

## RIVERA ROUTE: EPISODE 3

### **EXT. PLAZA SAMPALUCAN - NIGHT**

Jose hesitated, unable to forget their last conversation. Something about Leonor felt... off. He didn't think much of it at first how she asked all of a sudden about blood loss and stabbings but now he couldn't help but think back on it again. What made her ask such specific questions? And what was that whole thing about cutting off hands about!?

He decided to check on her to be sure.

He waded through the crowded streets, passing by drunkards and musicians playing on their guitars. A few blocks in the direction of Casa Tomasina he found Leonor's mother, Tiya Silvestra, looking around her wildly.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

Pepe! There you are,  
have you seen Leonor?

**JOSE**

No, I haven't. Why, what's  
the matter?

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

She's gone missing!

Missing...?

**JOSE**

What?

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

I went upstairs to tell her  
to get ready for the fiesta  
but she didn't answer. And  
when I opened the door, she  
was missing! Oh, Jose, you  
have to help us!

**JOSE**

What about the *Guardia Civil*?

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

Your Tiyo Antonio is contacting  
them now. But if there's anything  
you know about where she may  
be, it would really help.

He honestly had no idea. Intramuros wasn't a small place and she  
could be anywhere. Maybe she might've even gotten in trouble-  
murdered, kidnapped even!

Jose scrambled through his past interactions with her. Think  
Jose, think! Was there any clue that she left when she talked to  
him?

*'The Lord once said that if your hands cause you to sin, then  
you must cut it off. And if your eyes cause you to sin, you must  
pluck them out.'*

Could it be?

**JOSE**

I have to go.

**TIYA SILVESTRE**

Pepe, where are you going?

*PEPE!*

**INT. SAN AGUSTIN CHURCH - NIGHT**

Jose's lungs burned as he ran through the streets of Intramuros. There was no time to call a calesa, the streets were crowded with people anyway and it wouldn't be fast enough to make it to the church. He pushed aside festival goers, which elicited a couple of angry insults thrown his way but he didn't care. He didn't know what would happen if he had arrived too late.

There were a few passerbys when he arrived at the church doors, though most of them would be heading to the center of the festivities in the plaza. Jose crept inside, noticing that the interior was mostly empty save for two figures down the aisle.

Jose snuck forward and hid behind one of the confessional booths to have a closer look at the two. It was Leonor... and a young handsome priest.

**LEONOR R.**

Father Salvi...

**FATHER SALVACION**

Yes, my child?

**LEONOR R.**

There is something that occupies my mind that I can't quite seem to figure out. I figured you'd be able to help me since you know so much!

**FATHER SALVACION**

Of course, ask me anything.

**LEONOR R.**

You asked me once if I wanted to join the convent here and I told you I'd give it some thought. I said I'd tell you my answer today, but I'm



thinking I will only after  
you clear some things up for me.

Father Salvi's initial eagerness was quelled by the sudden questioning.

**FATHER SALVACION**

And that is?

Leonor walked up to the priest, closer than what would've normally been deemed acceptable. The innocent smile remained plastered on her face as she reached up on her tip toes and whispered.

**LEONOR R.**

*THE LORD ONCE SAID THAT IF YOUR  
HANDS CAUSE YOU TO SIN, THEN YOU  
MUST CUT IT OFF. AND IF YOUR EYES  
CAUSE YOU TO SIN, THEN YOU MUST  
PLUCK THEM OUT. TELL ME, FATHER,  
IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE. WHICH WOULD  
YOU GIVE UP, YOUR EYES OR YOUR  
HANDS?*

From under her long sleeves, the light caught a shiny glint of a pair of scissors from behind her back.

**JOSE**

LEONOR STOP!

Jose had jumped just in time to catch her wrist before she could pull her arm back to stab the priest. Thankfully the blade was still hidden in her sleeve, but Leonor struggled wildly.

**LEONOR R.**

JOSE LET GO OF ME! Ugh-

**FATHER SALVACION**

What is the meaning of this!

**LEONOR R.**

Father, help me this man just  
assaulted me out of nowhere  
- AH!

**JOSE**

That's enough out of you!

**FATHER SALVACION**

I don't really understand  
what's going on but don't  
worry, I'll get you some  
help, Leonor.

**LEONOR R.**

Hehe.

**FATHER SALVACION**

Leonor...?

**LEONOR R.**

"Help me". That's what everyone  
always says. They think they're  
helping me but they're just  
making everything worse. You  
make me sick. I hate the way  
you stare at me like I'm just  
a piece of meat. Something to  
lust after and ogle.

**FATHER SALVACION**

Don't say that, it's not true.

**LEONOR R.**

It's true. I hope one day your  
eyes and hands fall off.

The concerned look in the priest's face disappeared and was  
replaced with a cold and calculating look.

**FATHER SALVACION**

It's clear that you're not  
yourself at the moment so I  
will forgive you this time.  
Boy, make sure she reaches  
home safely.

**JOSE**

Come on, Leonor.

**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

Leonor was silent throughout the trip. Jose brought her to an  
isolated spot in their neighborhood and made her face him.

**JOSE**

Hey. What was that? Were you really planning on killing that man!?

**LEONOR R.**

Why did you stop me.

**JOSE**

Because it's madness! What you were about to do- you can't take that back!

**LEONOR R.**

So what? At least I'd be free then.

**JOSE**

Free of what?

**LEONOR R.**

FREE OF EVERYTHING! Free of this stupid shell I am supposed to inhabit! Of this docile, sweet, *weak* woman I'm made to become! I hate this, I wish I could just disappear. Why wasn't I born as a man instead...? Then I could do whatever I want. I wouldn't have to attend dance and singing lessons, or be made to sit and be quiet while some disgusting *worm* leers at me!

**LEONOR R.**

(contd.)

The problem is that I have to live in a world with *other people!* And because these other people are always looking at me, I become a subject to their gaze. I have to always look at myself from the perspective of someone else. Who even am I anymore? I bet you're disgusted with me now. Because I'm just a filthy sinner and I nearly killed someone right? I'm not the person you thought

I was, right?

Jose grabbed her by the shoulders.

**JOSE**

Leonor, it's not like that. I am  
in no way disgusted.

**LEONOR R.**

But why?

CHOOSE:

-Because I have come to love you

-Because that's what  
family are for

-

IF CHOOSE 'LOVE' OPTION:

**JOSE**

Because I have come to love you, Leonor.

Tears filled Leonor's eyes.

**LEONOR R.**

Why is that so hard to believe?

The sight of Leonor wiping her tears broke something inside of Jose. Broken people had sharp edges, they cut and make you bleed but they were also fragile that ought to be handled delicately. Jose couldn't stop himself from putting together the shards, to make something whole again.

**JOSE**

You don't have to believe me right now.  
But someday, I hope you heal from the things  
you don't tell me and allow yourself  
to accept the love that you deserve.

Leonor let out a sob and broke down. Jose didn't know how to comfort a lady without seeming inappropriate, so he just let her be true to her feelings and cry herself towards clarity.

-

IF CHOOSE 'FAMILY' OPTION:

**JOSE**

Because that's what family

are for, Leonor.

Tears filled Leonor's eyes.

**LEONOR R.**

Family...

**JOSE**

Even then. I know you're  
going through something heavy  
now but I want you to know that  
I'll be there for you.

She looked up at him with a sad smile on her face.

**LEONOR R.**

Thank you, Jose.

The two made the rest of the way back home in silence.

[END EPISODE 3]

INTERLUDE

Jose no longer dreamt at night. Ibarra was dead.

VALENZUELA ENDING:

**INT. CASA TOMASINA - DAY**

Despite Jose's wishes, the entire arson debacle did not die down the next day. If anything, it got worse. Lots of accusations were thrown around, from rumors about revolutionaries to claims of the *Guardia Civil*'s lax security of the event. The blaze had left the entirety of the Lizares's front manor in shambles, though thankfully nobody was around at home during the fiesta.

News of possible suspects had been scarce, and Jose chose to stay at home the following day- hoping that the darkness of that night was able to conceal his features. The last thing he needed was to get arrested!

Stupid Javier. He hadn't heard of what happened to him since that night, and his letters sent to Leonor confirmed that she didn't either.

**LEONOR V.**

I tried talking to everyone  
he knew of where he could be  
but none of them have seen him.  
Do you think he could have ran  
to avoid arrest?

**JOSE**

Had he spoken to you at all  
before going missing?

She shook her head.

**JOSE**

Then he didn't run away. I'm  
sure of it.

**LEONOR V.**

What makes you say that?

*Because he hadn't told you how he felt yet.*

**JOSE**

I just know it.

**LEONOR V.**

Do you think... that something  
bad happened to him?

Her voice became almost inaudible. Jose grabbed her hand.

**JOSE**

We'll find him, that's a  
promise. There's something  
I still have to settle with  
that guy.

**LEONOR V.**

Thank you.

## RIVERA ENDING:

### INT. CASA TOMASINA - DAY

Despite Jose's wishes, the debacle with Leonor the other day did not subside or merely fade into the background. Father Salvi contacted Leonor's parents, exaggerating the role of his involvement. Tiya Silvestre couldn't believe her daughter would act in such a way. It was absurd she said, there was no way.

So naturally the blame fell on the person who came at the opportune moment that her behavior started to change: him.

Tiyo Antonio sent word for Paciano to come and pick him up. It seemed that he was no longer welcome here.

**LEONOR R.**

Jose, I'm so sorry.

**JOSE**

It's not your fault.

**LEONOR R.**

But it is my fault. If you weren't there to stop me then I would've done something unforgivable. And because you stopped me, now you're in trouble.

Jose sighed, as much as he didn't want to say it- she was right. But seeing her on the verge of tears tugged at his heartstrings and he patted her on the head.

**JOSE**

There, there.

**LEONOR R.**

No fair. Shouldn't I be the one comforting you?

He opened his arms expectantly, and Leonor jumped straight into them. She hugged him tight.

**LEONOR R.**

Please don't go...

**JOSE**

Trust me, I don't want to.  
But I also don't want to be  
the reason you and your  
parents aren't on good terms.

**LEONOR R.**

We'll see each other again  
right?

**JOSE**

Of course, I won't be far  
anyway.

**LEONOR R.**

Make sure to write me lots of  
letters, okay? And come visit  
when you have the time! And-and-

**JOSE**

Alright haha, I get it.

The doorbell downstairs rang. That was his cue to leave. Jose hesitantly let go of Leonor and picked up his suitcase.

The girl looked suddenly very small, alone in the space of that room. The sight made Jose feel lonely, but he still gave her one last smile.

He opened that door for the final time.

HERO ENDING:

IF SEEN VALENZUELA ENDING:



A knock came on the azotea door. When he opened it, he was surprised to find Tiyo Antonio on the other side.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Pepe, your brother has  
come to see you.

**JOSE**

What? Why all of a sudden?

**TIYO ANTONIO**

I'm not sure but he says  
it's urgent.

Jose and Leonor gave each other a bewildered look before he nodded.

**JOSE**

Alright, I'll be going.

IF SEEN RIVERA ENDING:

When Jose opened the door, he saw Tiyo Antonio standing right in front of him. The older man grabbed him by the shoulder.

**TIYO ANTONIO**

Before you leave, your brother  
is in the other room. He says  
he wants to talk.

Jose nodded, stunned.

--

He excused himself from the room and went downstairs to the guest room where his brother presumably was staying. He breathed in and out. Why was Paciano here? He couldn't recall receiving a letter in advance of his arrival so this must've been a spontaneous visit.

Did he know? He couldn't have.

Only one way to find out. Jose opened the door.

On the other end of the room, sitting on his bed, was his older brother Paciano. Somehow he looked older than when he last saw him- more haggard looking too. The grim expression on his face didn't look promising.

**PACIANO**

I found out about your  
little stunt last night.

**JOSE**

What? But how-

**PACIANO**

How I know is irrelevant.  
What matters is that I'm not  
the only one. Did you know  
there's a warrant out for  
your arrest?

Jose's mouth became dry.

**JOSE**

But I- I didn't do anything  
wrong.

Paciano gave him a look of pity.

**PACIANO**

Pepe, haven't I told you  
before? The truth is not  
what matters in this country.  
Someone of greater power has  
deemed that you have wronged  
him, and now you're going to  
pay for it.

**JOSE**

Oh god... What should I do?

His older brother put his hands on his shoulders in a comforting way before tucking a ticket in Jose's breast pocket.

**PACIANO**

You're going to listen to what  
I have to say. I've already  
booked you a ticket to sail  
to Europe. Your schedule is

tonight. Don't miss it.

**JOSE**

Wait wait, but this is all so sudden! What about my studies here, my friends, what about-

**PACIANO**

Did you not hear a word I just said? If you want to continue living like a free man you'll leave this country immediately. You won't become a doctor at this rate.

**JOSE**

If you wanted a doctor in the family so much, why don't you become one?!

**PACIANO**

You know the answer to that!!!

Jose zipped his mouth shut. Of course he knew. Paciano sacrificed so much for him and his family. Jose intended to match that sacrifice by being a good student. That's the least he could do. And he did, he was smart and talented, he exceeded expectations. The medals weighed him down but Paciano didn't know that.

**PACIANO**

I've always known I would be the one to inherit the hacienda. I till the land, plant seeds. It's noble work, feeds the people, eases their hunger. Our history is rooted in reclaiming our soil, Pepe. I choose to stay...but you. You are far too intelligent to be stuck here in this country. Your talents are better off being used elsewhere. I contacted our Tiyo, he made sure your travel will be smooth. Pack your bags, you're leaving.

**JOSE**

You just lectured me about how our history is rooted in reclaiming our soil, how do you expect me to leave right after hearing that?!

**PACIANO**

You don't have much time.

**JOSE**

But Kuya, listen. I intend to stay and serve the country. Our country. Just like you. Isn't that as noble and patriotic as it could get?

**PACIANO**

Patriotism has no room when our survival is being threatened.

**JOSE**

Kuya please, I can't just leave Leonor. I love her too much I don't know where else to put it.

**PACIANO**

Put it somewhere the future generations will thank you for.

Jose felt unheard.

**PACIANO**

(cont'd)

What are you still standing there?  
Let's go.

**JOSE**

I refuse to be a pawn in your game of chess, Kuya.

**PACIANO**

You...how selfish.

Jose took offense.

**PACIANO**

(cont'd)

I did not just get out of my way to raise someone who has no resistance to the slightest display of affection. You don't know where to put that love? Look around you, Jose. Children are starving. Their ribs poking out of their

torsos and yet they are forced to build these churches that we worship and celebrate for its disgustingly unapologetic beauty and extravagance. All the while our countrymen are dying of hunger...They deserve just as much love as Lucia.

**JOSE**

Leonor

**PACIANO**

Whatever

Jose had a feeling his kuya Paciano was annoying him on purpose. They waited for the tension to subside and quietly sat at the edge of the bed. Jose thought back to many years ago and the stories he heard about his kuya. Never once had he confronted him about it.

**JOSE**

Have you ever fallen in love?

Paciano looked at his brother. A sad, lonely look in his eyes. For some reason, Jose already knew the answer and his heart ached for the only brother he ever knew.

**PACIANO**

I have, once...

**JOSE**

What happened?

**PACIANO**

Our values didn't align. I wanted to do many great things. She wanted peace and stability. I couldn't give her that.

**JOSE**

I don't know how you could love this country so fiercely.

**PACIANO**

They can steal away our lands, revise our history, feed us a false narrative where they're the heroes burdened with saving us from being savage subhumans. But they can never take away our hopes.

We won't let them.

**JOSE**

You'll get yourself killed.

**PACIANO**

Every drop of blood will water  
the seeds of a growing revolution, Pepe.  
Remember that.

**JOSE**

I want to help, I really do.  
But I don't think I have it  
in me to become a hero.

**PACIANO**

I'm not asking you to become  
a hero, Pepe. I'm asking you  
to open your eyes from the  
bubble you've been living in.  
While you've been here dancing  
and chasing skirts, our country  
is being ravaged by a social  
cancer. Tell me, is that the  
life you want to live? Stop  
thinking of only yourself.

Jose didn't really know what to say. Although he felt angry and  
frustrated, he knew his brother was right. There really was no  
option left.

**JOSE**

Fine... I'll go.

**PACIANO**

I hope one day you'll come to  
forgive me.

**JOSE**

I won't have to, because I  
was never really angry at  
you in the first place.  
Just myself.

That night, Jose left for Europe.

[ANG CARINOSA PLAYS]  
TITLE "LOVE DOCTOR RIZAL" FLASHES ON SCREEN

ROLL CREDITS