

SAMPAGUITA

Written by

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EXT. ESPERANZA - FOREST - DAY

A clearing in a thick forest. The ground is dotted with the stumps of felled trees that stick out of the soil like graves.

The mechanical arm of a picker truck drops a pile of logs into its carriage. A bold text on its side reads: 'THOMPSON LUMBER'. Below it, the logo of a tree being bulldozed.

The truck moves forward.

A dozen raised mounds of soil cut across the clearing in horizontal rows. The truck grinds to a halt.

WORKER 1 (40s, Filipino, khaki uniform) jumps out and approaches the mounds. Head bowed.

WORKER 1
May I pass?

WORKER 2 (30s, American, khaki uniform) stands behind.

WORKER 2
What was that?

WORKER 1
Nothing.

WORKER 2
Said something.

Worker 1 raises his head.

WORKER 1
We really shouldn't run over these mounds. It's a tradition to ask if we can even be here.

Worker 2 laughs, and kicks a mound of soil.

WORKER 2
Anthills. Come on, man. We've got acres left.

Worker 2 is already in the truck. He speeds ahead and flattens the mounds. Stops. Reverses. Worker 1 looks back at the remaining mounds. He clutches the stone necklace under his shirt.

WORKER 1
Forgive us.

He jogs over to the truck.

EXT. METRO MANILA - HIGHWAY - DAWN

A crowded highway in the city's metropolis.

Street vendors drift from car to car, bright plastic toys and bags of peanuts poised in-hand.

The traffic extends for miles.

EXT. FAST FOOD CHAIN - SHOP FRONT - DAY

A BUMBLE BEE MASCOT stands outside a fast food restaurant with a tray of samples hanging around its neck. Quick-stepped commuters walk past.

A SMALL CHILD launches at the mascot, throwing it off balance. An apologetic MOTHER grabs her son's hand, but he will not let go of the mascot's leg.

The Mother takes a food sample and hands it to her child. He accepts the treat. They walk off, hand-in-hand.

INT. JEEPNEY BUS - DAY

A tired but determined MELODY(26) sits at the front of a packed Jeepney Bus. She is wearing a smart dress-suit and a red cap with a cartoon bee symbol stitched to the front; a bag clutched tightly to her chest.

The OLDER WOMAN beside her is asleep. They've been here a while. Melody twists around and sticks her head out of the open window.

INT. UNIVERSITY - MOOT COURT - DAY

A lecture hall has been shifted around to resemble a court.

JUDGE SANTOS (O.S)
... And as you know, the winner of
the final round will be offered a
year-long clerkship with the
Federal court.

Draped across the wall is a hand-painted banner that reads 'ANNUAL MOOT COMPETITION - FINALS'.

Two podiums stand on opposite sides of the room and a panel with four EXAMINERS sit behind it. JUDGE SANTOS(50s, stern) sits at the front. Students, posing as the council, sit on benches to the left and right.

ENZO(25, perpetually composed) stands at his podium. He looks at his watch. The other podium is empty.

INT. JEEPNEY BUS - DAY

Melody weaves through the crowd towards the back of the bus and hops out.

EXT. METRO MANILA - HIGHWAY(CONTINUOUS) - DAY

Melody sprints along the highway, overtaking cars and street vendors. Sheets of paper fall out of her bag. She grabs the muddled papers.

EXT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

The facade of a colonial-era university. Neoclassical architecture, a water fountain, well-kept gardens. Students gather in small groups, chatting at the start of their day. A Philippine flag waves in full mast.

Melody runs towards the main entrance.

INT. UNIVERSITY - MOOT COURT - DAY

Melody bursts into the room. She approaches her podium and unloads the papers from her bag onto the plinth.

Everybody stands.

JUDGE SANTOS

In an effort to save time we will
bypass introductions and go
straight to opening statements.

(beat)

You may sit.

The audience sit. Enzo glances at Melody. He gestures at her hat. Melody remembers it and takes it off.

ENZO

Good morning. The opposition and I
will debate a recent bill that
proposes the legalisation of
divorce in the Philippines. As it
stands, the Philippines is one of
only two sovereign states in the
world where it is still prohibited.

Melody scans the crowd.

ENZO (CONT'D)

The present case concerns the prosecution of Mrs. P, a fifty-two year old woman caught guilty of murdering her husband by piercing an air-filled syringe into his neck while he was asleep. The defense council humbly request this court dismiss all charges against Mrs. P on the grounds that this was an act of self defense.

Melody flicks through her notes.

ENZO (CONT'D)

Mrs. P had been married for twenty years to her husband, Mr. P, a successful businessman. For sixteen of those years, Mrs. P reports being victim to continuous violence. A pregnancy she could not terminate despite it being an act of rape.

Melody rifles through her papers. They are crumpled and muddled, the text obscured.

ENZO (CONT'D)

She was pushed to extreme measures. Mrs. P should be entitled to the assets her ex husband had accrued throughout his career, and be let off without a sentence.

Melody is still looking through her notes. Desperate, now.

JUDGE

The opposition?

Melody ditches her notes and looks up, suddenly composed.

MELODY

Mrs. P could of course have arranged for her marriage to be annulled by the church.

ENZO

But she would have no financial stake in the marriage despite her contributions in child-rearing, home-making. The money she lost not pursuing a career.

MELODY

Mr. P tried to arrange this.
Several times.

Melody stands up straight. Enzo shuffles through his notes.

ENZO

Merging church and state robs
citizens of the right to live
autonomously in the event of a
relationship breakdown.

MELODY

The Philippines must maintain our
religious and cultural
independence. Why should we
Westernize? This bill is an attack
on the family. Passing it destroys
everything that is sacred in a
nuptial bond. Mrs. P murdered her
husband so that she could take his
hard earned money. Her motivations
were clear. If she wanted to leave
him, she could have opted for a
legal separation.

ENZO

But that would still not allow her
to marry again.

MELODY

Explain this.

Melody takes out a photograph of a couple embracing outside a
hotel. A CCTV image. The paper is crumpled, but clean.

MELODY (CONT'D)

She had been cheating on her
husband with his best friend and
business partner for three years.
They planned to run away together.

An examiner at the panel nods and writes something down.

INT. UNIVERSITY - CORRIDOR - DAY

Melody stands outside her locker. She opens it.

A rose lies on top of a stack of books. Sigh. She shoves the
contents of the locker into her bag.

Enzo approaches her.

ENZO
Congrats.

MELODY
Preaching to the converted.

ENZO
You were convincing.

MELODY
We don't know who's won yet.

ENZO
I really need that clerkship

MELODY
The pay is good.

ENZO
Well, we made it to the finals.
That's something.

Melody shuts her locker.

ENZO (CONT'D)
Hey. Are you doing anything this
weekend?

MELODY
Visiting -

ENZO
A few of us are going to my
parent's place. Manila Bay. Take a
boat out, celebrate the end.

MELODY
My family live out in the country.
Sorry. Sometime.
(beat)

ENZO
You go to class, you go back home.
That's most personal thing you've
said, in ... where do you even
live?

MELODY
City-centre.

Melody starts to walk off.

ENZO
Maybe we could go to the Duterte
protest when you're back. Get in
the spirit.

He lifts a fist.

ENZO (CONT'D)
Revolution!

MELODY
'No political affiliations in
public'.

Melody continues to walk and does not look back.

ENZO
They're training us to be
hypocrites.

MELODY
See you next week.

EXT. TOWER BLOCK - NIGHT

A tower block on a busy street.

INT. APARTMENT - DORM ROOM - NIGHT

A crowded all-women's dorm room, three bunk beds on each side. The space leads into a small, open-plan kitchen. On the table sits a clear vase with a bunch of roses in it - some fresh, some wilting. Someone is snoring very loudly.

Melody lies in her top bunk awash with moonlight. She is wide awake.

SISTER LALAINÉ (30s) clicks the door open and traces the beds with her torch light. She walks out and shuts the door.

Melody climbs down the ladder, pulls the suitcase wedged behind the bed and sneaks out of the room.

EXT. METRO MANILA - MAKATI - NIGHT

Melody drags her suitcase down a trendy, bar-lined street.

INT. PASSENGER SHIP - ROOM - NIGHT

A room in an overnight ship, a bunk bed on each side. Melody sits at the top of one.

She is boarding with a family. The MOTHER combs her DAUGHTER's hair. The FATHER sits and studies a large map.

A tropical storm ricochets the carriage from side to side. Melody sits in her bunk, head in her knees.

CUT TO:

Melody vomits into a plastic bag.

CUT TO:

The Father hands Melody a life jacket.

TANNOY (V.O.)
This is a precaution only.

INT. PASSENGER SHIP - ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Melody wears the orange life jacket and closes her eyes, sitting up.

EXT. ESPERANZA - DOCK YARD - DAY

A bright, sunny day. Melody walks out of the ship and across the wooden platform. Streams of passengers rush towards their family and friends. Melody scans the crowd. No familiar faces. She walks on.

INT/EXT. ROAD TO ESPERANZA - DAY

Melody sits in the back seat of a motorised pedicab.

The DRIVER has a cigarette wedged between two fingers as he manoeuvres the loud motorcycle. 'Nosi Balasi' by Sampaguita blares out of the tinny speakers.

They speed through provincial villages - a collage of shanty houses and colonial mansions along the same coconut tree-lined streets. Young children in old basketball shirts play along the dirt paths. They are not wearing any shoes.

They approach a village denoted by a sign that reads 'ESPERANZA'. A truck with the bright yellow 'THOMPSON LUMBER' emblem on its side is parked on the road.

The opening of a lush forest can be seen ahead.

MRS. LING(60s) stands outside a small chapel holding a bunch of sampaguita flowers. Beside her, a DESSERT SELLER scoops sticky rice into small cups, serving customers in a long queue.

The driver slows down to manoeuvre around a GOAT HERDER leading a tribe of goats across the street. Mrs. Ling sees Melody in the pedicab and waves her flowers at her. Melody waves back. They speed ahead.

The driver takes a right turn.

Melody leans forward. She shouts over the sound of the engine and the radio.

MELODY
Here is fine.

The Driver stops outside a house with a tall gate hiding its front. Melody hands him a wad of notes and waves away his attempt to give change.

She waits for him to speed off before she walks straight past the unknown house and down the road, suitcase-in-hand.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

A large garden encircles a detached wooden house. A baby goat sits underneath the mango tree and is tied to it by a rope around its neck.

Melody stands outside the door. She bends over and upturns a large, imitation rock. The bottom has been hollowed out. She taps it against her palm, and a gold wedding ring falls out. She eases it onto her ring finger and returns the rock.

She opens the door.

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

A well-lit, open-plan ground floor. The kitchen and lounge are connected. Wooden interior, slightly cluttered. The walls are adorned with framed photographs, certificates and medals.

ROSA(8) launches at Melody and wraps her arms around her waist. The impact pushes Melody off balance.

Melody kneels down and takes her daughter's face in her hands. She gestures for Rosa to open her mouth.

Rosa complies. Melody inspects her teeth - the front tooth is missing.

MELODY

Did the tooth fairy leave you something?

ROSA

Grandma is the tooth fairy! She keeps all my teeth in a bag in her jewellery closet.

A big, toothless grin. Melody lets go.

MELODY

Who told you that?

ELENA(50s, domestic worker) emerges from the kitchen. She tries to take Melody's suitcase. Melody hugs her instead. Rosa runs off.

MELODY (CONT'D)

Where's Ma?

ELENA

She went to Mass. Come, eat. You got so skinny.

They walk towards the kitchen. Rosa is doing a handstand against the wall.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Melody and Rosa sit at the kitchen table.

Two halves of a mango have been cut and placed on separate plates. Melody's half is cut neatly into grids. She guides Rosa's hand as they slice the mango flesh together.

She hands Rosa the mango stone, and scoops the flesh into a bowl. Rosa eats it messily.

MARIA(50s) enters, dressed in church clothes.

MARIA

Father Toby was looking for you. We expected to meet you outside.

She kisses Melody on each cheek.

MELODY

I'm tired, Ma. Held up by traffic.

MARIA

The Mayor sold some acres of the forest to an American company, all those trucks in the road. They're building a plant.

Maria notices Rosa's sticky fingers and leads her to the kitchen sink.

MARIA (CONT'D)

How's school?

MELODY

Fine.

MARIA

Good. No P-A-U-L?

MELODY

He's building a new software, up all night. Next time.

Maria pats Rosa's hands dry with a towel and leads her to the lounge area. She sits in her rocking chair and fans herself. Elena is folding clothes. Melody sits on the sofa. Rosa sits on Melody's lap.

MARIA

Aren't you going to sing Mummy a song?

Rosa shakes her head 'no'. Melody leans in and asks Rosa -

MELODY

Please?

Rosa buries her head in her mother's shoulder, shaking her head.

MARIA

We'll close our eyes.

(CUT TO)

Rosa faces the wall - the last few lines of a hymn or a lullaby. Melody notices a 'family portrait' drawing on the wall signed by Rosa. Rosa stops singing, still facing the wall. A beat. They all clap.

EXT. GARDEN - MANGO TREE - DAY

Rosa unties the rope attached to the baby goat's neck.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Elena is chopping fruit. She watches Rosa from the window, leading the goat towards the mango tree. Melody sits at the kitchen table studying a thick textbook.

EXT. GARDEN - MANGO TREE - DAY

Rosa addresses the goat.

ROSA
Pierrot, you are the lion and I am
the scarecrow.

Rosa assumes the gait of a scarecrow, arms outstretched, a rigid walk.

ROSA (CONT'D)
We must save the good Queen from
the Wicked Witch.

GREENA (O.S)
Help! Help!

Rosa takes the rope and leads the goat towards the sound of the cries.

Forest spirit GREENA(Rosa's age) is tied to the gate with a rope. She struggles against it. Greena's appearance is that of a human child, except for her distinct troll-like features.

ROSA
There she is!

Rosa runs towards Greena, forgetting for a moment that she is a scarecrow. She unties Greena. The rope falls to the ground

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Melody dries the plates. She and Elena watch Rosa playing alone in the garden through the window.

ELENA
Something's not right with the
girl. Your mother won't tell you,
but she bit another child at
school.

Melody pauses.

ELENA (CONT'D)
She's afraid it'll interrupt your
studies.

She picks up a new plate.

ELENA (CONT'D)
You should stay. For the summer, at
least. Though it'd be better if you
took her with you to the city.

MELODY
I can barely afford rent as it is.

ELENA
What about Paul?

MELODY
He isn't interested.