



CASA ACACIA

by Marnie Elizaga

I remember Dasma as it was being built. A carpenter named Roger gave us rides in his wheelbarrow as the workers dug out the swimming pool. We played downstairs on fine new wooden bunkbeds. I once spent the night with an accommodating Tita upstairs in the green room. She brought out a nightlight for me, a little statue that glowed. The rehearsals for the Christmas pageant for 1968 were still in C. Ayala, but the party was at Dasma. Cristina played Mary, Arthur was Joseph, Alfie (who was Ponchit in those days) lay on a pillow as Baby Jesus. I wore paper angel wings from my nursery school and also had a birthday cake that day. Shortly afterward, my family left for America.

The next time I saw Dasma was when I was about ten, when Cristina, Peppy and I accompanied our mother on a monthlong trip to the Philippines. We were awed by the scale and luxury of the place, the swimming pool, the pantries full of snacks and Coke, the two kitchens, the household help, and the surrounding mansions and embassies. Not to mention the parade of

enthusiastic Titas that had to be kissed (never had to kiss anyone in the States) and the bright talented bilingual cousins who swam like fish and danced like pop stars. We enjoyed finding little *butiki* (lizards) on the screens—we would send them flying with a quick tap against the mesh. We congregated with other cousins in the ultramodern Music Room to take advantage of the air conditioning. Cristina had a birthday while we were there and Lola threw a spectacular party with an ice cream cart, cotton candy man, and other amusements, and gave her a diamond ring. At the airport I felt I was leaving my homeland and my people and I wept. I spent the next year begging my parents to let me go back to this paradise to see more, learn more, try St. Scholastica's, and spend more time with Tita Malu, whom I adored.

I got my wish and I lived in Dasma for an entire school year when I was twelve. I remember having breakfast in the kitchen and thinking that the pineapple juice sometimes tasted odd. It took a while before I realized that this was because I kissed Lola on the cheek in the mornings and her night cream with its peculiar fragrance was still on my lips.

Lola loved to go to restaurants. In Spanish restaurants one could predict she would order *callos*. I thought she could probably think of something more glamorous to eat in a fancy restaurant than boiled beef stomach in tomato sauce. But since then I have boiled tripe myself several times with the windows open and the kitchen fan blowing during severe *callos*-craving emergencies no doubt inspired by my memories.

Staying in Dasma, it seemed I came upon new rooms and closets every few months. I opened one door, and there was an

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Chandelier from Italy not Spain.
Arms are of gold plated brass
unlike the Spanish glass that
easily breaks like our old ones
in C. Ayala.