

COLLECTION

A Full-length Play in English

COLLECTION

THE PLAY IS SET IN MANILA, WHERE FAR MORE ABSURD EVENTS THAN THE ONES DEPICTED IN THE PLAY, HAVE TAKEN PLACE.

UNLESS SPECIFIED, MOST OF THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN THE MAIN HALL, PENTHOUSE AND OFFICES OF THE MAHARLIKA PILIPINAS AUCTIONS HOUSE.

THE STORY OF THE HERMANA'S VIRGIN TAKES PLACE FROM 1590 TO 1715, IN THE PROVINCES OF LAGUNA AND PRESENT-DAY QUEZON AND IN THE WALLED CITY OF INTRAMUROS.

CHARACTERS

CARLO VIBAL, The Auctioneer
HELENA ZIALCITA, a government official
MANOLO ESTANCIO, a business magnate
TATIANA OLANDREZ, a jeweler
ALPHONSE CASTRENCE, a film director-designer-entrepreneur
STEPHEN YAN, doctor and scientist
GUS, a member of the audience
ADELA URQUIJO, a socialite
INAKI GIRL, a socialite

THE AUDIENCE
THE PRESS
SECURITY GUARDS
A RAGTAG GROUP OF IFUGAO ELDERS
THE WINNERS OF THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
TATIANA'S CLERGY

1590-1715

LA HERMANA AUGUSTA BEATA, a mystic
THE BABAYLAN, a priestess
FRAY TOMASO, an Augustinian friar
TENYENTE DE ALCALA, a soldier
DONA AGUEDA, a widow
DON IGNACIO, her steward
DON COSIMO, a minor count
THE ARCHBISHOPS
SOLDIERS
REBELS
THE DEVOTEES OF THE HERMANA

The play was inspired by two works of fiction.

The first is Salman Rushdie's short story "The Auction of the Ruby Slippers", published in his anthology "East/West".

The second is Chapter Four "The Hermana", of Nick Joaquin's second novel "Cave and Shadows".

The Hermana's chants were inspired by recitative verses from the 1882 version of "Casaysayan ng Pasiong Mahal", annotated and translated by Rene B. Javellana, SJ.

ACT ONE

THE AUCTIONEER

I

(As the houselights go down, a murmur begins , growing louder and louder until the stage is pitch black.)

(As the murmur grows into a roar, a series of projections are seen. Then Manunggul jar, Then the Malolos Constitution, then Chocolate Hills of Bohol, the manuscripts of Rizal's novels---all of them stamped with the word SOLD in bright red.)

(Then the lights suddenly come on, as the roar of a crowd is heard in the main hall of Maharlika Pilipinas Auction House.)

(A thunderous, almost hysterical burst of applause is heard also.)

(CARLO VIBAL, the Auctioneer, is seen. He is handsome, middle-aged and very much in control. He presides over a select crowd of wealthy bidders all holding --and as the auction commences --- waving numbered paddles.)

(Among this select crowd are TATIANA OLANDREZ, a jeweler, ALPHONSE CASTRENCE , Creative Industries magnate, and other bidders---ADELA URQUIJO, INAKIGIRL and various other Society types. They are all of undeterminable age, their waxen features look permanently airbrushed.)

(Surveying the scene is HELENA ZIALCITA, a Government Official.)

(Not seen in the crowd, but represented by a fidgety assistant is MANOLO ESTANCIO , business tycoon. ESTANCIO appears later. Right now his assistant whispers into a cellphone, while nervously bidding against a group of KOREAN BUSINESSMEN.)

(What is most remarkable is THE AUDIENCE, a hysterical, unruly public watching from the sidelines. They watch the auction with an almost manic devotion, reacting loudly, ogling the wealthy, shouting their approval or disapproval, egging rival bidders. It is almost as if it was a boxing match they were watching. Among them are many news and television crews, all covering the event. Among them, we see GUS, a young man , who watches the action intently.)

(CARLO VIBAL, the Auctioneer, works the room, focused and undistracted ,though keenly aware of every movement. Like most great auctioneers, he plays the roles of both salesman and showman with a riveting, almost sinister, aplomb.)

(Behind them, the very focus of the whole hall, a huge slide of the Banaue Rice Terraces is projected.)

CARLO:

...Sixty five to the gentleman on the left...now, let's see if we can bring it up just a little higher. After all, ladies and gentlemen, we are talking about the most perfectly preserved examples of the world-famous Banaue rice terraces...I don't need to tell you, my friends, that this magnificent property represents thousands of years of gargantuan labor, indigenous culture, mythology, history and...yes, national pride! Do I have sixty seven? Sixty seven... a small, small price to pay for your own piece of our patrimony...yes, I see sixty seven from the gentleman on the right!

(THE AUDIENCE applauds enthusiastically)

CARLO:

Sixty eight on my left...Sixty eight...no wait, sixty nine ! Sixty nine point five...and yes!...Seventy million in the back!

(THE AUDIENCE roars wildly.)

The Koreans are back in the game, my friends and they have changed the rules! Seventy million for the last lot. The last prime examples that could very well be someone's own private set of rice terraces!

Seventy million to the Korean gentleman in the back! Do I have seventy one million? Will the home team try to regain the private ownership of this unparalleled property?... I need to see seventy one million...Yes! And the home team is back in the game! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas! Seventy one million...but wait, our Korean friends say Seventy-one point five!! Our Korean friends want this and they want it so badly! But time is running out...and I need to see seventy two million!... Yes!

Yes! Seventy two million from the Pinoy gentleman on the left! Wait...wait! Seventy-three from out Korean friends! Are we giving up! No! Seventy three point five from the nationalistic gentleman on the left! This is no longer just an auction, ladies and gentlemen...this is a matter of national pride! And we have seventy four from our Korean friends...and wait...wait...hindi magpapatalo ang mga Pinoy! We have seventy-four point five from the gentleman on the left...

Seventy four point five is the bid to beat! And we have seventy six million pesos from the Koreans. Seventy six million...and I can see that this auction will soon come to an close. But who! Who is going to..

(MANOLO ESTANCIO walks into the Auction hall. His presence is immediately noticed by everyone.)

(He moves to his assistant who immediately hand him the paddle.)

Ladies and gentlemen, Manolo Estancio has just walked into the auction hall...and I can feel that the real action is just getting started. I have seventy six million from the Koreans...will Mr. Manolo Estancio ...

MANOLO:

(To his assistant)

Puneta, ang bagal-bagal mo....

(He shouts straight at CARLO.)

One hundred million pesos!

(The AUDIENCE is wild with excitement.)

CARLO:

One hundred million pesos from Mr. Manolo Estancio! One hundred million pesos for the most prime lots of the Banaue Rice terraces... One hundred million!...

(To the KOREANS.)

Gentlemen, are you still in the game? I have one hundred million going once...going twice...and ... Sold to Mr. Manolo Estancio for one hundred million pesos!

Ladies and gentlemen, Consumatum Est! Another legendary sale from Maharlika Pilipinas auctions is finished!

(THE AUDIENCE applauds wildly and spill onto the floor. THE PRESS especially, breaks through the barriers that separate them from THE BIDDERS and make a mad rush. SECURITY MEN try and hold them back. THE BIDDERS huddle together, nervously posing for cameras before being ushered out later.)

(MANOLO joins CARLO and HELENA, they are the center of attraction.)

(A group of IFUGAO elders in tattered jeans and jackets and wearing odd bits of Ifugao costume enter and begin to protest, adding more mayhem to the situation.)

(THE PRESS— represented by a series of reporters, annotate the bedlam.)

REPORTER 1:

Dyan po nagtatapos ang isa pang napaka-suspenseful na entertainment at social event mula sa Maharlika Pilipinas auctions na pinangunahan ng star auctioneer na si Carlo Vibal ...

REPORTER 2:

---Vibal, of the renowned auction house, Maharlika Pilipinas has once again presided over another record-breaking sale, yet another blockbuster event in a series of that has enthralled the Philippines and the world!

REPORTER 3:

---Sa halagang one hundred million pesos, natalo ni billionaire industry magnate na si Manolo Estancio ang mga Korean bidders! I'm sure lahat po tayo ay very proud na isang Pilipino ang nakabili nito.. At alam po natin ang ibig sabihin tayo, ilan sa ating masusuwerteng kababayan ang muling bibiyayaan sa darating na National Patrimonial lottery!

REPORTER 1:

--- Ngunit hindi dyan nagtatapos ang coverage natin ng Aksyon sa Auction !Kasalukuyan pong nagkakagulo sa labas ng bulwagan, dahil sa isang grupo nng mga matatandang Ifugao na magmula pa nung simula ng auction ay nag-protesta na.

(The ragtag group of IFUGAO are herded out by the Security men.)

REPORTER 3:

Sa ngayon...naghahalo ang hiyawan ng mga manonood at ang protesta ng mga matatandang Ifugao...na ...ayan po.kitang-kita---live...nakapasok po sila at kasalukuyang pina-aalis ng mga security forces ng Maharlika....

REPORTER 2:

In past Maharlika Pilipinas auctions billionaire conglomerate magnate Manolo Estancio, has successfully bought the Manunngul Jar , the Malolos Constitution, the original manuscripts of Rizal's Noli and Fili as well as thirty-two of the Chocolate Hills of Bohol.

I also spot Tatiana Olandrez, the international jeweller... Film maker, lifestyle designer, merchandising mogul, all around creative genius Alphonse Castrence... Arms and ammunition heiress Adela Urquijo and even Shopaholic Diva, Inaki Girl...

REPORTER 4:

Sinusubukan ko syang lapitan ngayon, bagama't napakaraming security at iba pang media ...

REPORTER 2:

Live from the auction floor...we see Manolo Estancio paying for his latest purchase with a check for one hundred million pesos which is now given to Carlo Vibal himself. Mr. Estancio...Sir?...Sir! A few words, please...

REPORTER 1:

Sir, very dramatic po yung pagka-panalo niyo .

MANOLO:

Eh medyo mabagal yung assistant ko . I always say, if you want something done, aba eh , do it yourself!

REPORTER 3:

Hindi po kaya medyo mataas ang pagka-bili niyo? Talagang nagulat ang lahat sa bid niyong One hundred million.

MANOLO:

What is that compared to the fact that I was bidding on a historic property? Eh yung mga lupang pinagtayuan ng Estancio MegaCity sa Cavite , umabot na ng Sixty-five billion! Compared to that amount, mura ang Banaue Rice Terraces...but more meaningful.

REPORTER 2:

How does it feel to have beaten the competition?

MANOLO:

Good...very good. Especially since they were Koreans...

REPORTER 2:

Mr. Estancio, All of South East Asia calls you Asia's King of Buy-outs, Mergers and Acquisitions---from electricity to communication to media . But now that you've been buying history, ang tanong po---What do you plan to do with your newest acquisition?

MANOLO:

Well,...Alam niyo naman na pangarap kong magtayo ng isang theme park for my collection, para makikita at ma-enjoy ng lahat. I will have the terraces transplanted to the Estacio Industrial estates , where the terraces will be the highlight of the planned theme park's collection.

REPORTER 4:

Tulad po ng ginawa niyo sa Chocolate Hills.

MANOLO:

Exactly. That way, although these are my private property, all Filipinos can get to see them.

HELENA:

So, parang wala ring nawala sa bayan natin.

MANOLO:

Exactly.

REPORTER 2:

We are also with the Head of the National Council on the Disposal of Philippine Patrimony, Helena Roxas de Zialcita. Madame, you can see there are protesters here. Ano po ang masasabi niyo sa protestang kagaganap lang?

HELENA:

Madami pa naman ang terraces na na-iwan. Yung pinaka-sellable lang ang binenta ng ating gobyerno. Parang yung Chocolate hills, nagtira pa kami ng madami.

As you know, it has been judicially decided by no less than our Supreme Court that the patrimony of the Philippines belongs to all Filipinos. Therefore, this sale, amounting to One hundred million pesos will benefit twenty thousand lucky Filipinos whose numbers will be chosen at the Patrimonial Lottery . They will each win a total cash prize of Forty thousand pesos!

(The AUDIENCE cheers.)

HELENA:

O, hindi ba talagang nakakatuwa? Nakakabigay ng hope and positivity! One hundred million pesos! Paghahatiin ang pera...matapos ang taxes at mga commission ng Maharlika Auctions, siempre. Sino kaya ang mga masu-swerteng kababayan natin na mananalo sa Patrimonial Lottery? Imagine... twenty thousand lucky Filipinos will have money to alleviate their poverty, which we at the National Council are very concerned about.

REPORTER 1:

Pero Mada'am, marami po ang nagsasabing hindi naman daw umaabot ang pera sa mga nananlo ng patrimonial Lottery?

HELENA:

Ah no, no. There is no corruption in our office.

REPORTER 2:

Madame, what will happen to the protesters?

HELENA:

Haay Naku.. The forests around Ifugao, all the mountains have been denuded na. So wala nang tubig ng terraces. Nahihirapan na ang Gobyero mag-maintain! Dios mio, mabuti nga may bumili pa eh...

HELENA:

Can't you see what we are doing? And even the tourists and the foreign news agencies, they come to watch and cover the auctions. Our slogan at the National Council is "Take Home a piece of Our History...and Help a Filipino make His Story." Or Her Story, para gender sensitive naman. Hindi pa naman na-re-resolve yan.

(CARLO interrupts her.)

CARLO:

Thank you all. I wish I could invite you all upstairs for the after- auction reception . But unfortunately...

So in behalf of the Maharlika Pilipinas Auction house, I thank you...Madame Helena ...please...

(HELENA takes CARLO'S arm, as the security ushers them out.. CARLO is left behind with the press. GUS appears and inches his way through the crowd, just as CARLO takes a few questions from LIFESTYLE BLOGGERS AND REPORTERS .)

LIFESTYLE WRITER:

Sir Carlo...please, for my blog, Living With the Shamelessly Stylish
Now, fill in the blanks...the next big thing, the next hot, must-have piece of Pinoy patrimony that the National Council will allow you to auction off is ?

CARLO:

--- a secret , as of now.

LIFESTYLE WRITER:

Ay, ang daya...o cige , Clue nalang?

CARLO:

It will be important. It will be exciting. It will cost a lot of money. And it will be a good show. I promise.

REPORTER:

And what is the secret of a successful auctioneer?

CARLO:

Love what you do. Have the passion for it...and most important, keep them wanting more...and more.

So...thank you all. And I'll see you at the next auction!

(As the PRESS exits, GUS call out to CARLO.)

GUS:

Sir...sir...

(CARLO stops, puts on a smile and patiently faces GUS.)

GUS:

One last question please. Hindi ba parang may mali?

CARLO:

Mali?

GUS:

Okay, there is money for a few lucky Filipinos...a lot of excitement, glamour...the thrill of seeing millions spent by the very rich . It's like the new religion, this constant selling and buying..

CARLO:

Whoa...

You are?

GUS:

Gus...sorry, Augustine Mendez.

CARLO:

Blogger? Reporter?

GUS:

No, sir. I'm just a member of the audience. I paid for my ticket .I was standing in the back. I've been following the auctions, sir.

CARLO:

What do you do? Between following the auctions?

GUS:

I'm a student. Working for my Masters degree in Social Anthropology.

CARLO:

One of the lucky few still in college huh?
So...were you...entertained?

GUS:

Yes. In the beginning. You get swept away in the rush...the energy.

CARLO:

Good for you...

GUS:

-- but I also...thought a lot...about what I was watching.

There is something wrong here, isn't there? I mean--

Deep down inside of you, your conscience must be saying that there is something wrong with what your company is doing?

CARLO:

Listen. I should be upstairs at the party, but I will answer you.

You know how I started ,Gus...when I was a kid , I collected stamps. Then, coins, then whatever old odds and ends I could afford. And guess what...I could sell pala. I could make a little money dealing in things I loved. I thought that ownership was the biggest come-on. You know what I noticed ,Gus. As I got older? It's finding the right buyer...the one who will love it and care for it and treasure it more than you ever will.

It has to do with demand, with what the people with money want, and want now. The must-haves, the got-to-owns, the next big thing. Used to be gadgets...gizmos...luxury cars...watches...real estate...vacation houses...art... antiques. Then , we changed the game. We made owning history cool.

Then the next big thing will happen.

GUS:

When it does, what will we have left?

CARLO:

The patrimony of this country in the hands of those willing to take care of it. Listen Gus, we live in a country where not many care for these things anymore. Once you get over that, you'll see that what I do isn't so bad. We keep many impoverished Filipino families going---

GUS:

But with what?

CARLO:

Objects. Art. Real estate. Old manuscripts.

GUS:

So, okay lang yun?

CARLO:

Look, life today moves so fast. Faster than we ever imagined. And harder too, for so many Filipinos.

GUS:

That doesn't justify what you do---

CARLO:

Gus, you're a smart guy. I can see that. But hey, this is reality .

GUS:

It doesn't make it right for me.

CARLO:

Okay, I'll tell you what makes it right for me.

Nasa puso na natin yang mga yan eh. Yung essence ng Malolos Constitution, for example...or yung Noli at Fili manuscripts...nandito na yan, kid. Yun ang hindi na mabebebenta. What's important for me is that they are here, in our hearts, in our minds, in our consciousness. Yon ang importante.

GUS:

And you make a lot of money doing it. Importante din yun.

CARLO:

So, you think I'm the bad guy? Well, wala akong magagawa.

But all these things I've sold...I have them, Gus. In here.

Face it, 'di naman natin kayang alagaan. Benta na natin.

Now, excuse me...I have a party to go to.

(CARLO turns to go.)

GUS:

Sir Carlo... it may look well and good to you down here. But there are some people who still care.

CARLO:

Where? Not in here.

GUS:

Well, out there in the real world.

CARLO:

Listen...Gus? You wanna know about the real world? Come with me.

(CARLO rushes out. GUS is taken aback and does not follow.)

(Without breaking his pace, CARLO turns and signals to GUS to follow.)

(After a moment's hesitation, GUS rushes after CARLO.)

II

THE REAL WORLD

(Loud music fills the air. An exclusive party is in progress at the PENTHOUSE of the Maharlkika Pilipinas. Everyone is slightly stoned or drunk, still high from the Auction madness.)

(CARLO enters, and makes his way through the crowd. He is stopped by ADELA URQUIJO, a socialite.)

ADELA:

Carlo, darling...you didn't even encourage me. I could have bought it...but you weren't even looking at me anymore. All you saw was money, money, money and those damned Koreans and ...well, boring old Manolo barging in.

I got bored. All these people, those cameras...so tacky...Next time, do a private sale nalang.

CARLO:

Adela, you'll be so bored , admit it. Everyone comes to see you too, you know? You're part of the show!

ADELA:

I know, right!

CARLO:

Adela Urquiyo, wacky heiress to a Gun- running industry. Who wouldn't watch to watch you?

ADELA:

Gun running isn't illegal anymore! And my dad's money is as good as anyone else's!

CARLO:

They should you make you illegal! That dress!

ADELA:

Pure dugong leather! With one hundred percent silk from the Philippine Silkworm. Farmed, mind you! So walang masasabi ang mga animal rights defenders or whatever!

CARLO:

Adela, you are something else!

ADELA:

Next time! Keep on looking at me and I am gonna win! I'm gonna spend! Lots and lots of hard-earned gun run money!

(CARLO moves on. Once in a while, we see GUS, looking oddly out of place, as he tries to follow CARLO.)

(CARLO rushes off. Again, he is stopped by INAKI GIRL, another party goer.)

INAKI GIRL:

Hello gorgeous!

CARLO:

Inaki Girl! Saw you kanina! Thought you were gonna bid.

INAKI GIRL:

I was waving and waving my gold credit card. You were making me dedma naman.

CARLO:

We don't do credit cards here. Cash, Inaki Girl, cash!

INAKIGIRL:

Hoy, I'm a reformed shopper. No more credit card fraud for me. I'm purely legit now.

CARLO:

Your credit is good...but you know the rest! Teka, I thought you only bought expensive accessories, handbags...that sort of thing.

INAKIGIRL:

History is the new handbag, darling. And I can't afford it! I hate it! Hey, can I go with you inside? I need to be inside with the big fish! This crowd is soo laos! Cige na bring me with you!

CARLO:

Sorry, Inaki Girl. We'll be doing business in a while.

INAKI GIRL:

Then dance with me Carlo! I need to be seen with you! Please! Dance with me!

(CARLO is swallowed up by the dancing crowd. GUS searches for him.)

(The scene changes.)

(MANOLO, TATIANA and ALPHONSE are inside in some sort of an inner sanctum. Drinks have been served.)

TATIANA:

Were you watching Helena? Naku, that woman. She has political plans, believe me! I mean, para siyang nangangampanya! So vulgar no? Can you imagine her in the senate?

ALPHONSE:

Pero, when she's in front of us, mountain climbing, mountain climbing, social climber. Kanina, she was the mayora of Bilibid, I swear!

(CARLO enters, trailed by GUS.)

CARLO:

Wow, I thought the circus was downstairs.

TATIANA:

The man of the hour! Que guapo!

CARLO:

I think you mean Manolo. Congrats again... Tatiana, you know how I knew you were waving your paddle? Your necklace was flashing light!

TATIANA:

I'm an international jeweler, Carlo...I come to bid and to advertise my stock. This is sold na. The Emir! Shhh! I said, I'll wear it once before I deliver.

CARLO:

Alphonse...you didn't bid. You could have used them in a set or something.

ALPHONSE:

Rice terraces??? Hello! I came for the entertainment. I was just telling Manolo, I am so low on inspiration. You know naman the creative industry. I have to give them a movie first, then the

fashion , and then home décor line, the perfume, the merchandising. But right now, I feel sooo ...uninspired. Besides, Tribal-tribal is just sooo--- turn of the last century. I did that na.

TATIANA:

Those young people outside., so flashy... hindi naman namimili yang mga yan. And who is this young man?

CARLO:

Everyone, this is Gus...he was in the audience, and he was asking some really interesting questions about the trade. . So, I brought him up here. Gus, you know these people.

GUS:

Ahm, yes...hello.

TATIANA:

Do you collect?

GUS:

No.

TATIANA:

Oh. How refreshing. You know these after –auction affairs are very exclusive. You will write about us ba?

GUS:

Carlo just brought me along. To see the real world, he said.

CARLO:

By real world, I meant the major players. Gus here seems to have a lot to say about we do.

TATIANA:

O, if you will write about us, don't be mean ha? I mean don't just describe us as filthy rich or whatever. The public is so obsessed with the lives of those with money.

MANOLO:

I don't like negative press, okay Gus?

GUS:

I'm just a member of the audience.

MANOLO:

Be sure to let it stay that way, hijo.

TATIANA:

Feel at home. Since Carlo has obviously taken a liking to you , you are very welcome. Come, Sit...over there.

MANOLO:

O Carlo, ano pa ang mabibili ko sa iyo?

TATIANA:

You, Manolo. Always you! Bigyan mo naman ng pagkakataon kaming makabili din no.

MANOLO:

Aba, I have. Remember I let you win the Gold burial masks ...

TATIANA;

No. You're talking about the Hidalgo painting...

CARLO:

Banqua De Aqueronte. Tatiana paid...

TATIANA:

Sixty something million...I think?

Yung Gold burial masks kay Alphonse napunta. Thirty million lang naman. You know, Manolo, I know you so well...kung walang foreign competition or kung less than fifty million ang starting bid, ayaw mo! Namumurahan ka! It's beneath you.

Ayan, sa amin tuloy napunta. Haaay, Carlo, we always end up with the cheap and cheerful stuff.

ALPHONSE

So? Cheap and cheerful nga, napagkaka-kitaan naman!

Those masks were a bargain at thirty million! And the return on investment! They were inspiration for my Pre-hispanic Dayang-dayang collection. They loved it in Paris...all the models wore the exact replicas of the death masks! Naku, you should come to my house. One wall, painted blood red...and the gold burial masks, framed . Yon lang! Dramatic. So graphic and modern.

TATIANA:

That's what I like...yung kayang ilagay sa bahay. These things you buy, Manolo...rice terraces? Chocolate hills? Dios ko, gagastos ka pa para i-transport sa estate mo.

MANOLO:

Theme park.

ALPHONSE;

So common. You're not really serious, are you? Better to call it a museum! An inter-active museum or something...

MANOLO:

Luma na yan. At sino ang pupunta, aber? No one goes to museums anymore. They've become boring, out-dated. The government can't maintain them anymore...kaya nga binebenta na lahat. Theme Parks are the new museums. They are the future of our heritage! Kaya nga, naiisip ko...saying din yung Hidalgo at yung gold burial masks...

O, benta niyo na sa akin.. I need them for the theme park.

TATIANA:

Magkano?

MANOLO:

Patutubuin ko kayo.

TATIANA:

Ay... Would I rather have your money?...or would I rather have you die of envy? Carlo, advise me.

CARLO:

Manolo promised you a profit. Think about it.

TATIANA:

May pera naman ako. But my Hidalgo hanging in a theme park? Que horror!

ALPHONSE:

Haay naku, kung ako yan, nunca. It's all mine and for my eyes only. What the public will get is the essence of the thing...A dream...a movie maybe... a new line of furnishings...a fashion collection. But the things, akin lang yun. My consolation for the anguish of creation!

TATIANA:

Anguish of creation! Listen to him.

ALPHONSE:

Gaga! That's part of the image! If I looked like I were having the easiest time, mabibili ba ang gawa ko? Hype, darling! Everyone believes it! I love being a creative genius!

MANOLO;

But you just said, you were running out of inspiration.

ALPHONSE:

Kaya nga I need something to buy! Naku, this is a disease! And we all have it!

TATIANA:

But such a pleasant one. And such a wonderful way to give back to society.

Ako, when I buy something--- that is, if I win something and snatch it away from Manolo's greedy little hands---I always make sure that Helena's office submits to me the names and addresses of the lucky recipients. Aba, I have a girl in my office who personally checks on how they will spend my money.

CARLO:

She does. Helena tells me all the time.

TATIANA;

If the winner says na maghahanap siya ng trabaho abroad or para sa anak niya na mag-o-ofw, I will add pa a suitcase and some jackets. Para maginhawa sa biyahe . Kung, mag-nenegosyo sila, I will add pa groceries, if its is a sari-sari store or whatever. I mean, let's be frank..alam mo naman ang mga mahihirap at desperado, uubusin agad ang kwarta na napanalunan! And kung may konting utak ang mga anak-anak nila,gagawin kong staff sa jewelry shop ko. You have to guide them and encourage them. It is part of our social responsibility.

(To GUS.)

Hindi ba,hijo, I am correct?

GUS:

Uhm...

TATIANA:

Well, I am. I have done my part for the masses.

MANOLO:

Enough of the small talk. So, Carlo, ano ang sunod na pagkakaguluhan namin?

CARLO:

I think we should wait for Helena. She's bringing in a guest who has just flown in.

ALPHONSE:

A buyer? A good one?

CARLO:

A beginner. But a serious one.

TATIANA:

Male?

CARLO:

Yes.

ALPHONSE:

Young?

CARLO:

My age

ALPHONSE :

I like!

MANOLO:

Business?

CARLO:

Health and Beauty. Dr. Stephen Yan.

TATIANA:

Intsik?

ALPHONSE:

The Doctor Yan? Tatiana, you use his Sui Generis line. Super advanced cell regeneration formula. I do too. Everyone I know does! Manolo...those tiny vials that you squeeze onto your tongue. Instant regeneration, inside and out...

So, Stephen Yan is here? I heard he was half-Filipino?

CARLO:

He was born here, educated in the States but developed his technology in China. The Chinese think of him as a good example of an expat son, who returned home to contribute to the country's growth.

ALPHONSE:

As if naman China needed anymore growth. So mahilig din siya...

CARLO:

In just a few ...specific things, like the one I'm going to show you. He's just flown in from Shanghai, where his laboratories are based.

TATIANA:

Ayan, Manolo, may kalaban ka na. He has a fortune ---

ALPHONSE:

Mega-fortune. Uber-fortune. In fact, the Sui Generis of fortunes! I'm so witty no?

MANOLO:

So, Carlo , you're cultivating new markets. Good . That's what I do too. Kapag masyado nang maliit ang mercado, kelangan dumiskarte na. More buyers, make a more active market. Better for all of us. Frankly, I should be upset. But I'm not. I like the thrill of competition.

(They laugh.)

(HELENA enters with DR STEPHEN YAN. He too is of undetermined age. What separates him from the rest is his reserve.)

HELENA:

Hello everyone! I'd like you to meet Dr. Stephen Yan, who has just flown in from Shanghai. Doctor, this is Tatiana... Alfonse ...and Manolo Estancio. Well, no need to introduce all of you really. The titans of Industry, Luxury, Creativity, Health and Beauty. In the service of the Filipino. And over there is...?

GUS:

Gus po. Member of the audience.

HELENA:

Oh.

Carlo, you brought a member of the audience?

TATIANA;

Been as quiet as startstruck little mouse. Not like all the rabidly noisy audience in the galleries.

HELENA:

Well, if it's okay with all of you...

ALPHONSE:

It is, mayora. It is! Kidding...

TATIANA:

Come, Doctor...sit.

Look at me, I could be your endorser. Guess how old I am! No...no...I am not ashamed to say it. I am fifty-five years old and I don't look a day over thirty! Thirty five! And I can move my face! I must confess napagdaanan ko na lahat ng treatments, but thanks to you! Doctor, I feel like I could live forever!

ALPHONSE:

We didn't know you were half-Filipino.

STEPHEN:

I've always believed in keeping my privacy. Best to make Sui Generis speak for itself. Alam niyo na...

MANOLO:

Ayan, nag-ta-tagalog ka pala.

STEPHEN:

Best not to forget my roots. There's a famous saying from Rizal, I believe...

HELENA:

Is there? Twei la. Manolo, you bought the Noli and Fili manuscripts...

MANOLO:

I haven't had the time to read them...

GUS:

Ang hindi lumingon sa pinang-galingan ay di makakarating sa pinaroroonan.

STEPHEN:

Tuey. (correct!)

HELENA:

Tuey la!! (that's right)

GUS:

You guys don't know it?...

HELENA:

Of course, we do... I just forgot!

TATIANA:

Helena is so charming no? And this boy is so bright...but enough about them.

O, so what are the newest development with the Sui Generis line, tell us? Did you bring the latest products? You should, you know...Ako, I believe that I am my own best advertisement.

STEPHEN:

The Sui Generis line is only one part of my business and having grown it into a mega-brand , it takes care of itself.

In fact, if I may confess, I'm rather bored with the regenerative health and beauty business already. I have a very good scientific staff that takes care of constantly developing the health and beauty brand . Leaving me time and more than adequate resources to funnel into ...other interests.

MANOLO:

Like Collecting. Carlo says you're a beginner.

STEPHEN:

Maybe, I will start. I don't know yet. The objects Helena was telling me about...it may have a special significance to me. And to the work that I've been doing.

But please... I wouldn't want to bore you.

HELENA:

Please. We are all so...eager.

GUS:

The Soul Project...read about it online.

STEPHEN:

Well, yes. My main interest and field of study these past few years has been the soul.

MANOLO:

The what?

STEPHEN:

The soul. I want to know if it exists.

ALPHONSE:

It does...we all have one. That's why we create.

STEPHEN:

Who said so?

TATIANA:

The church...the great religious leaders.

GUS:

Well, yes... but these days without science, how can you really tell, right?

STEPHEN:

Right. What else do you know...Gus?

GUS:

You want to know if the soul can be measured, quantified, if machines can detect it. And if it can be detected, what form does it take?

STEPHEN:

Correct.

GUS:

We all think of a soul as something abstract...but maybe, an energy...a mass of molecules that transform into energy in the moment of death. Something that we can if not see, then measure.

HELENA:

Hijo, we'd really rather hear it from Doctor Yan.

STEPHEN:

I'm afraid of boring all of you.

GUS:

No, please, Doctor.. I'm very interested.

ALPHONSE:

At least, someone is..

TATIANA:

Shhh..

Go on...please. This is so ...something.

STEPHEN:

I work with terminally-ill and the very old who for ...well more than decent remuneration for their families , allow themselves to be strapped with hundreds of tiny electrodes, naked, on a specially-designed mattress that is actually a complex weighing scale.

TATIANA:

Why not just give them free samples of Sui Generis? Hahaha...

GUS:

Shhhh.

Please...go on .

STEPHEN:

The electrodes are so sensitive that they can detect the gradual loss of life, of energy as death comes. You know what we've detected? At the exact moment of death, just when the heart stops beating and the internal organs cease to function, an energy still remains. Flickering ,so to speak, before it dies out. Or is it leaving the body?

And when it...leaves, if that's the word... by one tiny milli-ounce, the dead body is lighter. The weighing scales show that consistently.

What was that millionth of an ounce that was lost? What is that energy? Where did it go?

A trace of a heartbeat? A whisper of a spleen as it stops functioning? A wave from the brain maybe, in a last desperate attempt to cling to life?...or it could be...

GUS:

Physical evidence of the soul.

ALPHONSE:

New-Age-Drama. I love it.

STEPHEN:

Yes... I believe it is.

MANOLO:

How much money have you put into this research, Doctor?

STEPHEN:

Millions?...I'm not sure. It really doesn't matter to me.

TATIANA:

And for what?

STEPHEN:

If I could prove the existence of a soul, then maybe I will have given far more to humanity than just...eternal beauty and good health and whatever Sui Generis can give.

But I'm boring you all.

MANOLO:

Millions of dollars? Yuan? You spent on this soul project? What a waste...

STEPHEN:

Is it?

HELENA:

There is a better use of your money, Doctor. You can help so many impoverished Filipinos. What do you think, Tatiana?

TATIANA:

I think I'm going to be depressed.

ALPHONSE:

I'm suddenly inspired...Etherea...a movie about Ghosts in ultra-light chiffon slip gowns ...in shades of gray! Soulful couture!

TATIANA:

I like. You make me one na.

MANOLO:

No offense, Doc, but personally, your search for the soul doesn't mean anything to me. The present is what matters. The moment, and what we can do when we seize it. When you're dead...you're dead. What do you leave behind? What is the legacy? Yan ang importante.

So, Carlo, what are we looking at?

HELENA:

Carlo, the...member of the audience must leave.

STEPHEN:

No, let him stay. He's...quiet. Interested. I like that.

GUS:

Thank you, sir.

HELENA:

Alright, if you insist. Carlo...

(CARLO moves to the center of the small crowd.)

CARLO:

First of all, let me thank you all for coming to the exclusive preview of our latest offering. Now, I realize that I don't need to bullshit you guys by using words like "rare" or "exquisite" or "Important". The object you are about to see is all of that and more.

When we talk about the great virgins of the Philippines, we all think, La Naval or Antipolo or Manaoag. All nationally venerated representations of the Mother of God.

ALPHONSE:

Those are for sale now? I like!

MANOLO:

Kung ibebenta, La Naval ang akin. Sa inyo na yung iba. Usapan yan ha.

TATIANA:

Naku, akin ang alahas ng birhen. She has the most fabulous treasure trove I've heard.

CARLO:

Helena, the documentation please...

(HELENA distributes folders among the four. GUS stands to receive his. Reluctantly HELENA gives him one.)

(The lights grow dimmer. CARLO begins his spiel, clicker in hand.)

CARLO;

One Virgin, because of her particular history, has remained unknown. But if you could know her history, I'm sure you will agree that she belongs right up there with the others. My friends, I give you , a masterpiece from the sixteenth century and discovered only in recent times... in the ruins of an old crypt at the foot of mount Banahaw, when a government run resort was being built there... La Nuestra Senora De las Almas Perdidas....the Virgin of the Lost Souls.

(The slide of an Ivory Virgin comes up behind CARLO. As he talks, more and more slides come up magnifying the details of the sculpture.)

(The light begins to dim as they speak. A solitary female voice, chanting melismatically, is heard almost inaudibly at first.)

MANOLO:

That's it? So, where's the historical significance? I have tons of ivory santos from that period.

HELENA:

Perhaps, we should let Carlo go on with the presentation. You may all be in for a surprise

CARLO:

Thank you, Helena. The actually image is one of the largest ivory pieces ever discovered.

Carved in one piece, from creamy, almost translucent ivory from the African elephant. The image stands three feet tall from base to head. The virgin is depicted at the very moment when she offers salvation to all the lost souls in purgatory.

STEPHEN:

The souls of the damned! Fascinating. All that catholic guilt...

TATIANA:

She doesn't look like a virgin...I mean, not a European one. The ones I have look like ...well...old-time movie stars...or royalty. She looks ...almost native!

CARLO:

She could be. Or it could have been a miracle...

ALPHONSE:

Carlo, we know you are a good salesman. Pero medyo OA ka na ata ngayon?

CARLO:

In the folders, you will find extensive documentation which took us a year to put together.

TATIANA:

He always says these at the beginning of every sale. Didn't you notice?

CARLO:

To establish the history and provenance, we traced lost documents and journals, searching for clues here as well as in the archives in Spain.

ALPHONSE:

Naku! Do you really believe that they would go through all that effort. Ine-eklay lang tayo niyan.

CARLO:

You will find that this is more than just an object with historical significance.

MANOLO:

Wasting time.. Just get to it before I lose interest.

CARLO:

The premium that this Virgin has...is that she challenges the imagination.

STEPHEN:

Now you're talking.. I like imagination..

CARLO:

For what you are looking at, my friends, is not only an important ivory figure of the Virgin.

HELENA:
Sell it, Carlo. Sell it.

CARLO:
Our research shows that it may also be the only known portrait of a 17th century mystic known as La Hermana Augusta Beata. But I am getting ahead of the story...

(The chanting voice grows louder as the lights die on the scene.)

III

THE VIRGIN
(Another world and time.)
(We see CARLO, dimly lit. Everyone else is gone.)

CARLO:

The earliest record of the image is from a church inventory of 1590, when it was commissioned from a Chinese carver , by one Fray Tomaso de Olvideo, an Augustinian friar , newly assigned to the lakeside area of Laguna...

(FRAY TOMASO is seen.)

FRAY TOMASO:

Let there be made of finest ivory, an image depicting our most holy mother in the full glory her title, La Nuestra Senora De las Almas Perdidas She ,who in her grace, compassion and serenity, succours all souls , deceased or still living , lost to sin and to the passions of the flesh, to the darkness of ignominy and heathen ways, and leads them through her mercy ,to the light of our Lord's forgiveness . Let this image travel with me to the lakeside kingdoms of Bae, that she may provide solace and inspiration to the souls of all poor indios who look upon her.

And may she bless me always, her poor servant Fray Tomaso de Olvideo, so that in my work among the miserable heathens of our newest colony, I shall serve the lord almighty for the glory of Madre Espana.

(The actual image of the Virgin is seen for the first time, as Fray Tomas receives it. His journey begins.)

CARLO;

Fray de Olvideo took the image with him to his post near the mountains of Laguna in 1592, where the image was immediately –well ,for want of a better phrase --- a smashing success with the natives .

(Native Filipinos, their costumes suggesting the transition period between Pre-hispanic and colonial cultures, surround Fray Tomaso and the image. They are both welcoming and menacing at the same time,)

FRAY TOMASO:

Everyday, the indios , who up until this time, were most belligerent and foolish in their refusal to hear mass, now flock to the little capilla, to pray to the image of the lady of the lost souls. Some bring white chickens, others, the produce of the fields and forests. They come at night, and in the early dawn and chant their praises in their tongue...

(FRAY TOMASO begins to intone the names and titles of Mary in latin. The BABAYLAN appears , and begins to chant over FRAY TOMASO's litany. Soon, she has all the natives chanting with her.)

FRAY TOMASO:

Virgo Gloriosa...Virgo inter Virgenes...Virgo Sapientisima....Regina Angelorum...Regina Coeli...Mater Pia...Mater Amabilis...Nuestra Senora de las Almas Perdidas...

BABAYLAN:

Ynang diwata...Pintakasing liwanag ...liwanag ng poong kalikasan...ika'y nagbalik ...ika'y nagbalbalik...ika'y babalik at babalik..Ynang patnubay...diwatang nagmamasid, naghihintay...Yna...Yna...Yna nga mga babaylan...Yna nga mga nagpapasusong ina...Yna ng nagsisiping ...Yna ng bukid at parang at gubat...Ynang diwata...Ynang pinagmulan ng anito...Ynang babaylan...pintakasi ng mga babaylan...ina ng lahing babaylan

FRAY TOMASO:

Ynang babaylan...The Mother of priestesses...I have learned that this to be the name of the ancient goddess of the lands they venerated in the dark times before Madre Espana—through the grace of our lord—claimed these islands for the cross. And though the indios will for a while, give in to my wishes, they forsake the reflection of true prayer to return again and again to the barbarous worship of old ways.

(The BABAYLAN begins to dance, as do her followers.)

FRAY TOMASO:

In these savage and cruel land filled with constant threats of banditry, I fear my mission is for naught. So addicted are the indios to their dark past, so deeply imbedded in their miserable heathen souls are the old, barbaric ways , that they see in the most sacred and venerated image of the mother of God, a base goddess of ancient times that we, by the will of god, seek to banish...Madre, I shall not weaken...Madre , I shall serve you always and spread your light even though it is most trying with these ...these devils...yes, devils.....Madre ,have mercy on my soul...save me from barbarians...

(HE IS OVERPOWERED BY THE BABAYLAN AND HER FOLLOWERS, WHO CRUCIFY HIM UPSIDE DOWN.)

(THEY TAKE THE IMAGE OF THE VIRGIN.)

CARLO:

The natives of the lakeside kingdoms soon rose up against the Spanish. Fray Olvideo's mission and capilla were among the many burnt in the uprising. The image was lost, reported stolen and taken to the mountain strongholds of Laguna, where she was venerated by the rebels. We know this through the journals of one Tenyente Salvador Monteserrano de Alcala... who led the punitive expeditions against the rebels in 1640. Fifty years after the image had been carved

(TENYENTE ALCALA IS SEEN, WITH HIS MEN.)

DE ALCALA:

It appears that in the mountain fastness of La Laguna in the wilderness between the sacred mountains of Makiling and Banahaw, there survives to this day, a cult of bandits and rebels whose mission it is to constantly rally the people to return to their heathen ways. Their leader is a warrior-priestess who claims she is the incarnation of this land's great and ancient goddess. Terrible is this warrior-priestess in her wrath and vengeance, which so inspires her forces to banditry, but equally renowned is she for her piety towards a strange object of veneration.

(THE LIGHTS CHANGE TO SUGGEST THE REBEL STRONGHOLD, WHERE THE BABAYLAN LEADS THE REBELS IN WORSHIP OF THE IMAGE. TENYENTE ALCALA AND HIS MEN SURROUND THE REBELS.)

BABAYLAN:

Inang babaylan.
Pintakasi sa aming paglaban
Inang babaylan
Patnugot sa aming hustong digmaan

DE ALCALA:

Para Deo y Madre Espana!

(A BATTLE ENSUES.)

CARLO:

In 1643, after three years of chasing the warrior-priestess and her the rebels through the mountains, De Alcala's forces subdued them at a battle in which the sacred streams of Banahaw were said to have run red with the blood of the rebels. The warrior-priestess, was hanged...her body dismembered and sent through all the towns of Laguna, as a warning.

(Amidst the carnage, DE ALCALA discovers the young HERMANA.)

DE ALCALA:

When we had razed the rebel stronghold to the ground and executed all the rebels along with their loathsome priestess...we found , saved and unharmed by some miracle of Our Lord ,a girl...la Nina Perdida... a lost child, kneeling at the foot of the image of the stolen Virgin. And though we pulled her away, she would not be separated from the holy image. With a calm dignity remarkable in one so young, and a voice so pure it could only come from angels, she announced that she was the image's custodian and that she would never be parted from it.

(As the young HERMANA chants, DE ALCALA and his soldiers become mesmerized by her grace. One by one, they surrender their arms and kneel before her.)

(The young HERMANA's recitation overlaps with DE ALCALA's narration, as the trip to Intramuros is enacted.)

HERMANA

Kaaway kong sinisinta
Ngayon at magdilata ka,
Iyang mabigat mong dala,
Bitawan at ang cucuha,
Ang nahahabag mong ina.

Anac co, anitong ina
Minamahal co touina
Aniyo ay huag mabalisa
Hapis co ay itahan na
Tantong dili co mabata.

Huag acong pasakitan
Na sa ina'y mawalay
Lalo sa caloloua co
Ang pag-ibig co sa kanya
Siyang tunod na totoo
Na tumimo sa puso co.

DE ALCALA

I ordered my men to take the image, but lo---the Virgin would not be moved! Only when la nina perdida carried it in her frail arms , was the image brought down from the mountains. It was as if the virgin herself would only touched by one without guile, without hatred...in all aspects, of paramount innocence. .

Some say she was taken as a child by the rebels and raised as their own. Still others whisper that she was the daughter of the warrior-priestess herself. But I see in her neither trace of rebel or pagan priestess...for this child...this lost daughter of the Virgin is the very picture of quiet grace

and calm. And though very young, she claims only one vocation. To serve the Virgin and do penance for the sins of the world.

HERMANA:

Loob co ay masigasig
Sa madlang sinta't pag-ibig
Virgeng inang nahahapis
Madla mong hirap at saquit
lahat ay aquing nababatid.

(The lights change again, suggesting a home in the walled city.)
(DONA AGUEDA receives the child.)

DE ALCALA

Upon reaching Intramuros, both child and image were entrusted to the care of one Senora Dona Agueda de Montespejos y Torrejon, a wealthy, childless widow renowned throughout the city for her great piety and charity .

Through the years, I have followed the child's progress. The pious lady has built a small shrine to the Virgin of the lost souls in her property by the river Pasig,. The custodian is the child forever in my heart known as la nina perdida of the mountain wilderness , now renamed...

DONA AGUEDA:

- Augusta , for the holy doctor of the Church, Saint Agustin.

This child shall be my ward. And she shall be raised as an anchorite of the Virgin, chaste and pure , to care for me in my old age and for the chapel which I have built for the Virgin. Together, we shall spend our lives in the adoration of the most holy mother, and in the service of all poor souls of this colony. This I promise to you , Santisima Madre , for you have given me that which wealth and glory have not, a daughter uncorrupted by the world .

(DONA AGUEDA and the Young HERMANA set the image on an altar and kneel before it.)

(CARLO is seen again.)

CARLO:

In 1660, seventeen years after Augusta became her ward, Dona Agueda published a small book for the devout, Una Historia de Verdadero Milagros de Hermana Augusta , a copy of which we located in the archives of Seville.

By that time, the great lady was very weak and facing death. It was her own record of the true miracles that she claimed, were from the Virgin, and performed by the lady who was now known through all Intramuros , as La Hermana Augusta Beata. Sister Augusta the Blessed.

(The HERMANA, now a woman is seen again. She attends to the Virgin, and to a small crowd of the devout.)

DONA AGUEDA:

I have called out to the heavens. Nuestro Senor, what bliss, and what rewards for my sins, is this? To have for a daughter, one who is herself as venerated as any saint. Her holiness and charity belong to no one order. It is as if, she was an angel or dominion sent by God, simply to serve.

All her days are spent in the service of the Virgin, and all those who come to visit the shrine. Here are the sick and destitute, the lost souls of the city. Hermana Agusta, they call out...and with one gentle touch, all illness is banished. Those suffering from the maladies of the soul are soothed. Those seeking God find him in her kindness and compassion.

So renowned is she, that the Archbishop himself calls on her for spiritual counsel, and she who has never been to the motherland, converses in the language of the mighty! A miracle of God's wisdom indeed. And all throughout, she refuses any glory, living only in the simplicity of a hermit of old.

I would call her mine, but I am afraid that God will punish me for my vanity. She is not mine, she belongs to all who know her as La Hermana Augusta Beata.

I am old, and I have seen many wondrous things, none as wondrous as this child of innocence, All that I have, I will to her...my Augusta, La Hermana Beata, that she may, in every way, serve him whose great mysteries we cannot fathom.

(The devout, who have surrounded the HERMANA, kneel before her.)

DEVOTEES:

Hermana, kami'y iyong ipagdasal.

(The Hermana suddenly cries out.)

HERMANA:

Hindi po. Aco po ang inyong ipagdasal.
Pagka't nabibilang na ang arao co.
Tilang nag-uumapaw ang biyayang,
Bukas ay agad-agad babawiin.
At sa karimlan aco'y ay babalutin.

Hindi niyo ako kikilalanin
Kapag ang birhen ay mawala sa atin.
Aco ay inyong palalayasin,
Langit malalayo sa akin.

Aco...aco po ang inyong ipagdasal...

(The HERMANA prostrates herself before the devotees.)

CARLO:

When Senora Agueda died in 1665 , her vast lands and all her wealth passed to Hermana Beata, whose troubles began, when she started giving it all away.

(The HERMANA divests herself of her veils and apron, leaving only her coarse shift. Behind her, the devotees cart away the SENORA's wealth.)

HERMANA:

Aanhin pa karangyaan
Kun balot ka ng kadiliminan.
Lahat ng yama'y kawalan
kung may hapis at karahasan.
Dios lamang ang kasintahan.

Yna...yna...
Parating na...
Oras ng pagdurusa.

(The HERMANA takes off her girdle , we see it is a small whip of cords. She begins the discipline while intoning the litany of the virgin.)

HERMANA:

Virgen de las Almas Perdidas...Huag acong iwan
Virgo inter Virgenes...huag acong iwan
Virgo Gloriosa...huag acong iwan
Mater amabilis...huag acong iwan
Virgo Sapientissima...huag acong iwan
Regina Angelorum...huag acong iwan
Regina Coeli...huag acong iwan
Mater Pia...huag acong iwan
Mater Amabilis...huag acong iwan

(Halfway through the HERMANA's litany, CARLO narrates.)

CARLO:

From the journals of Don Ignacio de Montespais, who was , during Dona Agueda's lifetime, steward of her vast estates.

(DON IGNACIO, who has been surveying the scene, speaks . As he does , the devotees as well as others, enter and observe the spectacle of the HERMANA. The ARCHBISHOP enters, and is visibly moved .)

(DON IGNACIO's voice rises above the chanting of the HERMANA.)

DON IGNACIO:

This is a scandal! This woman they call La Hermana Augusta is mad! No sooner had her sainted mother been laid to rest than she gives away the great treasures of my late employer. Great wealth--given without thought to the poor of the city! While I who served the late Senora am left with nothing. Soon, she may start giving away the great tracts of land that her mother was at such pains to purchase and preserve. And all in the name of God and the Virgin! It is not prudent!

My lord Archbishop, I plead for the preservation of Dona Agueda's estates. The prudent thing to do is to turn over these lands to holy Mother Church or to the State, that they may best be put to use.

(The ARCHBISHOP kneels before the HERMANA.)

ARCHBISHOP:

La Hermana Augusta Beata is an innocent---a true mystic and visionary---a soul claimed by God himself.

Hermana Augusta, amado de la virgen....Aqui estoy, la nina perdida...calma...calma...aqui estoy...

HERMANA:

Senor...senor...resa por mi alma eternal. No me dejes separarse de nuestra senora de las almas perdidas... no me dejes, senior...no me dejes...

(The ARCHBISHOP cradles her and leads her away.)

(DON IGNACIO spits.)

(A murmur begins over CARLO's narration.)

CARLO:

In March of 1666, a pamphlet was distributed in Intramuros, a copy of which found its way to the offices of the Inquisition in Spain. No writer claimed authorship of the work. In it were claims that the woman known as La Hermana Augusta was a fraud, an instrument of the Old religion, the very daughter of the Devil herself...

(The Devout gather, and whisper among themselves.)

DEVOTEES:

-Ang sinasabi dito ay anak daw siya ng babailan. Hindi ba't yun nga ang nagpalaki sa kanya...

-Bastandang anak ng isang pagano at mamamatay -tao.

-At instrumento ng dimonyo.

-Huag daw tayong magpapaniwala sa lahat ng inaasal niyang kabutihan .

-Paraan lang daw ito ng hermana upang linlangin tayo.

-At kapag tanggapin natin kayamanan na kanyang ipinamimigay ang kapalit ay ang ating kaluluwa.

-Sugo ng demonyo, at hindi ng birhen ang hermana!

CARLO:

No one knows if the pamphlet was the work of Don Ignacio. What we are sure of is that when the Archbishop of Manila died, the Hermana was left without a protector. The new Archbishop was not a believer in mystics. And a firm supporter of the Inquisition.

(DIGNITARIES and OFFICIALS OF THE CHURCH enter.)

(The HERMANA, in a soiled shift, is dragged in. She still clings to the image.)

(DON IGNACIO presents his case .)

OFFICIAL OF THE CHURCH:

The matter of the India sorceress known as La Hermana Augusta Beata.

DON IGNACIO:

My lords, that God would choose for the instrument of his work, one so crude and low-born? An India bastard of a pagan priestess. Is this the way of God...that he would confound us , his very church and chosen, by choosing one so unsuitable. She is a member of no sacred order, a woman and an India. Behold how she profanes the holy image of our mother .

(The HERMANA begins to chant the litany of the Virgin . She is transfixed , unmindful of all that is going on around her.)

DON IGNACIO:

Though she was adopted by the late Senora Dona Agueda , the truth of her parentage cannot be denied. She is the very soul of heathenism masquerading as holiness, my lord, we cannot deny that.

I tell you when she will give away the great lands of her adoptive mother to the Indios, it will be the ruin of us all...the ruin of Madre Espana. Do you not see here, my lords, a plot to overthrow Spain through the distribution of the late Dons Agueda's wealth?

For the salvation of the colony, we beg the Holy See of Manila, close down the capilla. Expose the woman Augusta for what she truly is. Not blessed or holy or claimed by God, but a fraud, an instrument of the devil...a pagan.

Declare her a heretic...and banish her.

OFFICIAL OF THE CHURCH:

Latae Sententiae

DON IGNACIO:

Latae Sententiae

(The crowd sets upon the HERMANA. They take the image from her.)

CARLO:

And so it was that late in 1666, the hermana's chapel by the Pasig was closed down, and the hermana herself banished from the city. Her vast lands confiscated by the state and turned over to the church.

Separated from her beloved image, desolate and near madness, she wandered the countryside only to be mocked by the very indios she had helped.

(Alone, the HERMANA sings.)

HERMANA:

Yna, inyo pong pagmasdan
ang ganitong paghihirap
ang pagdurusa nang anac
na sa inyo'y hiniwalay
mabuti pang nanga-matay

Madla ang buntong hininga
Tinangis-tangis nang tuwina
Nang poong Virgen Maria
Cun tumungo at makita
Anac niyang nagdurusa.

Yna?...Yna?...

(The HERMANAS singing grows fainter and fainter as she is swallowed up by darkness.)

CARLO:

No more is heard of the Hermana or her image, until the end of the seventeenth century. In his travel diaries of 1698, A minor Spanish Count, Don Cosimo Llamanzares y Geronimo, wrote of a mysterious image recently discovered and claimed miraculous.

(DON COSIMO is seen. Behind him a procession of the Devout.)

DON COSIMO

The foolishness of the Indios is indeed , remarkable. Consider the matter of an ivory virgin recently discovered locked up in a forsaken chapel by the banks of the Pasig. Once this statue was the property of a madwoman and heretic known as Le Hermana Augusta Beata. Recently, this image was discovered and lo---it said that the face has been miraculously transformed from that of the Most Holy Virgin---to a portrait of the Hermana herself. It is sheer and utter blasphemy.

(The throng of devotees turns into a procession, holding aloft the image of the Virgin..)

DEVOTEE:

Nakita ng sarili kong mata ang imahen ng birhen nung ako ay bata pa. Sinasabi ko, hindi yan ang mukha! Ang imahen ay nagmilagro, nagbago! Iyan at iyan ang mukha ng kaawa-awang Hermana Augusta! Patawarin tayo sa ginawa natin sa kanya!

DON COSIMO:

I myself find it absolutely ridiculous that the indios would even consider this miraculous. None whom I have interviewed can even recall the face of this mysterious hermana, who was said to have perished in the wilds near Mount Banahaw some thirty years ago.

(The procession progresses into a pilgrimage, Then, a search.)

DEVOTEE:

Ang sabi ay nilibing daw ang Hermana sa paanan ng Bundok Banahaw. Ngunit san dun? Tanging ang Imahen lang ang magtuturo ng mga labi ng Hermana sa atin, nang sila'y ipagsama uli!

DON COSIMO:

-The authorities are helpless to stop the throng as they go off to search for the very crypt of the sorceress of Banahaw whom they now call a saint. The mad goal of these poor fools is to reunite both statue and sorceress .

DEVOTEE:

Dalawang araw naming pinasan at prinusisyon ang imahen. Walang signos Nung ikatlong araw, dumating kami sa mismong paanan ng bundok. At dun—maniwala kayo, hindi ako nagsisinungaling---ang imahen ay bumigat ng bumigat hanggang hindi na naming ito mabuhat.

DEVOTEE:

Ito na nga ang signos na aming hinihintay. Kung saan tumigil ang aming prusisyon, agad-agad kami'y naghukay. At habang naghuhukay, ano't kumalat sa kalawakan ang halimuyal ng mga bulaklak. Sumambulat ang bango.

(The body of the HERMANA is revealed.)

DEVOTEE:

Dios na mahabagin, anong milagro ito? Bagama't matagal nang nakabaon sa lupa, ang bangkay ay walang bahid ng kabulukan! Ayun siya at di ko kailanman makakalimutan nang una

naming makita ang bangkay ng Hermana na animo'y natutulog lamang. Malambot pa ang balat. Hindi siya nabulok. Banal at sagrado ang kanyang labi at di kailanman marurungisan ng kamatayan.

Isa siyang banal. Naniniwala kami. At nagsisisi.

(The devotes chant, as the HERMANA once did. They reunite both image and body.))

DEVOTEES:

Hermana, narito na siya
Ang pinatakasi at yna
Ngayo'y muling pinagsama
Humimlay sa kandungan niya
Patawad sa aming sala.

(The devout light candles as they reunite both the image and the body of the HERMANA.)

DON COSIMO:

The poor misguided Indios petitioned to the Archbishop that their hermana be declared a saint. But the calls of the populace went unheeded, for Rome would never confirm sanctity on an Indio, much less declare a saint one whose properties had been confiscated and turned over to the church.

Undeterred her devotees built a humble crypt and there interred once again, the uncorrupted body of the poor Hermana, along with the image that they claim, she had loved so much. At first, the crypt was a popular pilgrimage site among the devout. But with neither sanction nor recognition from our Holy Mother Church, the crypt was soon forgotten. Along with the Hermana and the image that was said to have miraculously, changed its face.

(Little by little, over DON COSIMO's narration, the candles are extinguished, as the devout leave.))

DON COSIMO:

When I returned to the colony in 1715, the madness had been forgotten. None who I spoke to could even remember that a woman called La Hermana Agueda Beata had once existed...or that they had once called her a saint.

These indios are children with no memory. No one remembers...not one...

(DON COSIMO extinguishes the last candle.)

(The stage is black for a moment, then the loud noise of a jackhammer is heard)

(Above the crypt a modern day workman is seen wielding a jackhammer)

CARLO:

When the construction team discovered the crypt, they notified helena's office. After they had ascertained that the crypt was on national property, Maharlika was called in. To extract the image. and evaluate it. Believe me. I wanted to do it myself. So, I went into the crypt.

I wasn't counting on finding the body.

I remember, I had a flash light with me...but I didn't need it. I could see clearly. You see, the construction workers had lit candles, They weren't supposed too.

But they had somehow entered, and lit candles. I didn't know how to react. It seemed so...primitive.

(THE BIDDERS RE ENTER ONE BY ONE)

STEPHEN:

What did she look like?

CARLO:

She was sleeping...That was my first impression of the body. When I look back, knowing what I know now...it was like she had forgotten all that she had been through in her short ,sad life...and just drifted off to sleep.

MANOLO:

So alin ang inuna mo?

CARLO:

I was reluctant to even touch both. For once in my life...I hesitated to touch something...to evaluate it...to think if it was a good object or not... How rare? How big? How much?

MANOLO:

So how much?

CARLO:

It didn't matter to me. At that very moment, at least. I just wanted to look at ...the perfection. The simplicity of that composition...a body...a guardian...candle light.

And the air in there. I've been in excavations before. I know that smell...dry, musty, like centuries of air grown stale, refusing to leave .

But no, the air was nothing like that. And it wasn't fragrant either. No sickly sweet odor of sanctity, if that's what the odor of sanctity is supposed to smell like.

MANOLO:

You're wasting time Carlo.

CARLO:

It was like smelling fresh, running water...a spring...moss, rocks, the jungle, blades of grass, new leaves ...cold , clean air...

STEPHEN:

I want the body for science and the virgin for art.

CARLO:

It was like innocence ...if you could bottle innocence and sell it as a perfume.

TATIANA:

And when you touched it? The ivory?

CARLO:

It was solid and warm. white and glowing and pure...like the body.

ALPHONSE:

You Really know how to make us want it.

MANOLO:

Wasting time! All of you just wasting time!

CARLO:

Then, I came to my senses.

HELENA:

Twenty percent! Mr. Vibal for every sale, we have a mandate to uphold and many Filipinos to help.

GUS:

Wait! The body what happened to the body?

CARLO:

It had rotted. In the few short minutes, it had rotted away.
She had turned into...a bit of skull, some rags...some hair...dust.
The smell had gone to. It was just dry, musty, dead air. I've never felt guilt...until now...just for a moment.

MANOLO:

The moment will pass, trust me.

CARLO:

It has.

(Now, they're all back in to INNER SANCTUM)

TATIANA:

I was moved! I never thought, but I'm moved! Alphonse...

ALPHONSE:

You're moved? Ako I'm spooked! Medyo spooky yung back story.

STEPHEN:

(In Chinese) I'll be needing some money, a lot of money. I finally found something I want to bring home...

HELENA:

Tatiana, you want it?...an inspiration!

MANOLO:

Punyeta! Kanina none of you were interested. Ngayon na-enganyo kayong lahat! You all want it. Well, I want it and when I want it, everybody else wants it...

GUS:

Wait! Why did that happened to the body?

(Carlo moves down stage where the bidders have reassembled)

CARLO:

My Friends, The Maharlika Pilipinas Auctions , in cooperation with the National Council for the Disposal of Philippine Patrimony, is proud to offer in auction---The Nuestra Senora De Las Almas Perdidas.

(Two assistants enter, and place the image before the BIDDERS.)

(The BIDDERS applaud.)

TATIANA:

Now, that is something I really want. I will build her an altar! ! A chapel? No, a church... Wait! A basilica!

ALPHONSE:

I see a movie...then a perfume ,“Odor of Sanctity” by Alphonse...

MANOLO:

So, Carlo, magkano ang starting bid?

You know, we can do this right now. We don't have to wait.

HELENA:

It must be a public auction, Manolo. That is in the council's charter. The public has to be made fully aware of the auction.

STEPHEN:

If I win, can I take it with me?

HELENA:

Yes of course, the necessary export papers will be issued.

TATIANA:

I'm curious. Doctor...aanhin mo naman yan sa Shanghai?

STEPHEN:

I don't know, really. It just appeals to me...

She is the Virgin of the Lost Souls. Maybe, she can help us find one?

I don't know. I don't really buy art...but this one is special.

MANOLO:

So, magkano ang starting bid? I mean, you can tell us that now no?
Para makapag-handa-handa.

ALPHONSE:

Haaay sus, magtataas nanaman ang koryente at tubig, right , Manolo?

(They laugh.)

GUS

Wait...what caused the rot?

Or was I the only one listening to the story? The hermana rotted away when carlo took the image. Doesn't that mean anything to any of you?

(There is a moment of uneasy silence.)

STEPHEN:

Of course, there is a perfectly logical explanation for what happened. Contact with the air outside caused the body to rot. Previously, it had been kept in a vacuum of some sort. We'll never know that now...

You mentioned candles, then there was the pressure from the construction and excavation . It could have been any number of things that caused the rot. That should be the logical scientific explanation.

Unless you all just choose to be ...spooked.

(There is a moment of silence.)

MANOLO:

Gusto ko pa din. Eh ano ba naman yang mga binibili natin, panay mga patay na may-ari nyan, hindi ba? Pa- bless nyo muna bago i-auction.

HELENA:

Naku, I had that done na. Ako mismo nagdala sa Cathedral.

TATIANA:

Okay naman sa simbahan?

HELENA:

Aba, it was found on government property. No claimants. The piece is clean.

ALPHONSE:

Come to think of it. I don't mind kung medyo spooky yung back story.

TATIANA:

A basilica, definitely. I will build the image one.

MANOLO:

So, magkano na nga ang starting bid?

I think Dr. Yan and I want to know.

TATIANA:

Ang yabang mo talaga, Manolo. If you think I'm not going to bid, you're wrong!

HELENA:

This cannot be as expensive as the other pieces we have sold. Carlo and I were discussing...siguro mga twenty million ang starting bid.

ALPHONSE:

Twenty Million lang? Ayan, Tatiana...out na agad si Manolo. Too cheap and cheerful for him.

TATIANA:

Naku, maski magsimula pa yan sa seventy million, I will bid!

MANOLO:

Game ako.

TATIANA:

Que arrogante! Manolo, I will sell you the Hidalgo painting. Bastang akin na lang ito!

ALPHONSE:

The burial masks, Manolo! Free! Regalo ko na. Tatal kumita na ako...

MANOLO:

Sa inyo na !

I like this. It will give the theme park... an added attraction.

STEPHEN:

I think seventy-five million is a good start.

CARLO:

Seventy-five million? Did you say...seventy-five million?

STEPHEN:

That's how much I want it.

MANOLO:

So...It's going to be a tough fight ha? I like that!

TATIANA:

Naku, Manolo will just come in at the last minute and say one hundred million. Or two hundred million!

STEPHEN:

And I will simply say three hundred million.

TATIANA:

Naku, you people...how vulgar!

HELENA:

Praise God....so many Filipinos, Carlo...so many Filipinos...

GUS:

Teka muna!

Something happened in there. Something we can't explain. Or understand. And all you want to do is to buy it?

People should know. We have the right to decide too.

MANOLO:

Decide what? It was found on government property.

HELENA:

And cleared by the government—

GUS:

Yes, but ...it should not be for sale.

TATIANA:

--I agree.

At least to people like Manolo and the doctor. I have ...better intentions.

ALPHONSE:

I have better ideas.

TATIANA:
Tell them ,hijo...tell them they have no right!

GUS:
Pare-pareho kayong lahat.

HELENA:
Hoy, you have no say here.

GUS:
I do, as a member of the Audience...of the public...I say you can't.

TATIANA:
Hijo naman...if I build a basilica...

GUS:
No! No basilica...or theme park...no shang-hai...no movie!
I ...can get people...I can tell the story I just heard. I can get...people who...think this is wrong. This is wrong.

MANOLO:
It's a piece!

TATIANA:
But a holy one, undoubtedly!

ALPHONSE:
A piece of Ivory, three feet tall.

GUS:
It's a story... of a life...many lives. What she went through...what she believed...what they did to her. Doesn't all this mean anything to you?

STEPHEN:
Of course ,it does. Her story makes the piece more enigmatic.

GUS:
An enigma your money can buy. That's all it is to you. You wanted to find the soul, Doc. But you're just like the rest of them. All you can see is something to own.

HELENA:
Alam mo ,naiinis na ako sa iyo ha? Wala kang karapatan dito!

GUS:
No! Sir Carlo, you said it yourself. Innocence...

ALPHONSE:

You know, Gus dear. I know your problem. Sensitive ka, artistic...cultured. Probably gay, if you didn't know it yet.

GUS:

What is your point?

ALPHONSE:

Ganun din ako dati. What -is- the- mystery- of- life- and -what -can- I- do- to-keep-it-sacred- new-age- drama. But that's not the way the world works anymore. We can't renounce it, like the Hermana did.

You have to find ways of being a part of the world, while being yourself. Look at what I did .

GUS:

Please. This is not about you.

None of you are going to buy this. I promise...kung kelangan ko manggulo, manggugulo ako...something has to be done. And I will do it.. I don't know how...but I will.

(GUS is about to rush out. But he returns for his folder.)

(HELENA tries to take it from him.)

GUS:

Sorry. This is mine. I need this.

(GUS turns to run . CARLO tries to stand in his way.)

GUS:

You were there. You caused the rot.

(GUS leaves.)

HELENA:

Carlo, this is your doing. Kung magkagulo, kasalanan mo.

CARLO:

Well and good. The more buzz, the better.

That is an important part of what we do, right?

(HE POURS HIMSELF A DRINK ,AND RAISES THE GLASS.)

CARLO:

To the auction.

ALPHONSE:

To the money.

MANOLO:

To the two most interested bidders.

(They lift their glasses. TATIANA is about to life her glass. But changes her mind and leaves. ALPHONSE is about to drink up, but she drags him out with him.)

TATIANA:

I still think I have better intentions! Alphonse!

HELENA

Naku, nagalit yata...Tatiana, Alphonse...please . You can still bid. Dr. Yan, Manolo chill lang kayo. the drinks are free.

(MANOLO, STEPHEN are left with CARLO.)

MANOLO:

They will be back. Maghahagilap na ng pambili yan.

I can tell you now...Tatiana will have a very expensive garage sale...Alphonse...well, siya naman ang pinaka-pobre sa amin. But who knows...baka mag benta ng dreams-dreams.

It will be just you and me, Doctor Yan. You better sell a lot of beauty products.

STEPHEN:

I will be ready, Manolo.

So, Carlo...are you happy ? I think this may just be the sale of your life.

CARLO:

It will be....

So, gentlemen...To the last ones standing!

To the Auction!

(They drink up , as the lights fade out, leaving only the image.)

(Then, the slide of the image is projected again. As the lights grown on CARLO, and the BIDDERS.)

ACT TWO
THE LOST SOULS

I

(Again, the roar of the crowd is heard. It subsides as the lights grow on stage, but is eer present, audible .)

(It has been a month since the last scene . CARLO is alone.)

CARLO:

Welcome! Today, the Maharlika Pilipinas Auction house is proud to present---for sale---a truly unique treasure of our history.

No, wait. I've said that already so many times...how do I start this? How?

I have to connect agad. They'll be shouting already, so I have to connect...

Tagalog ko kaya?

Mabuhay... ikinararantal kong buksan... buksan? Ikinararantal kong simulan and...uhm...ang auction ng milagrosang birhen ...

Wait, wait, Milagrosa? That's dangerous ground, Carlo...not established yet...Gus will use it...no...

Enigmatic?...Mysterious? No. No more art talk bullshit. Connect, Carlo, connect... Make them know it's for them.

Yes...yes!

Mabuhay! Ngayong araw na ito... Maraming ng Pilipinong mabibigyan ng pagkakataong magka-pera! Magbagong buhay! Mag-negosyo! Muling mangarap! Better.

Seventy five million, Carlo. Seventy five million...and that's going to go up. If Manolo says two hundred...Stephen will come right back at him with three. You don't know just how far this will go. They want it...you made them want it. Don't lose your nerve.

Cut to the chase... Tatiana will bid first, just to impress. Then, maybe Alphonse...Manolo and Stephen will come in last. They're the ones to watch. You made them want it. Now, make them want it more...

The ivory is of the highest quality! If you do notice any slight discoloration.... Because they will see...any one can see...it's begun to turn yellow..not yellow...

Sell it, Carlo, sell it!

A true sign of the age of this masterpiece. For as you all know, the discoloration is a sign. A sign of great antiquity!

Yes, The ivory, as you can see, is a turning a rich shade of yellow...no, amber yellow. The lucky owner of this rare object will have the chance to hold it, caress it. The purity of it...no, don't use that word anymore.

It isn't pure anymore. Not white anymore. It's changing color. Face it. Face it ,,something is happening to the ivory.

(He stops. And grabs his cel to make a call.)

CARLO:

Yes...Mr. Vibal here... stop scraping and sanding the image. No more acid washes... It's the light! I know, it's the light. That's why it's changing. That's all it is. Close the lights. No more ultra-violet rays. Leave it in the vault and close the lights. And change the lights in the auction hall. Softer, dimmer...like a chapel. Yes. When they come in , it should look like a chapel. After the sale, we'll treat the image again..sanding to get the discoloration out...or something...Akong bahala sa bibili. Leave that to me. Just do it.

(He puts his cel away.)

(The melismatic singing of the HERMANA is heard.)

CARLO:

Go away please.

Go away . Just give me the noise of the crowd...go away...

(The singing stops abruptly. CARLO grabs his cellphone again and makes a call.)

CARLO:

Are my ads running yet?

(The lights die out on CARLO. On the screen, A PROMOTIONAL AD for the upcoming sale is seen.)

(Over a close-up shots of the ivory statue CARLO's voice over is heard.)

CARLO VOICE OVER:

Never in the Philippine history of Maharlika Auction House has there been an object so rare, so mysterious, so coveted. As the world watches we invite you to witness the Auction of La Nuestra Senora De Las Almas Perdidas.

Sino ang Makikinabang?

Sino ang Makakabili?

II

(First, we see a REPORTER, with GUS. The awkward young man of Act 1 is transformed. He wears a black t-shirt with the words "REMEMBER THE HERMANA" as do the motley group of young men and women , who are working the crowd with pamphlets .)

REPORTER 2:

A few hours to go before the Maharlika Pilipinas Auction house opens its doors for what may be the most controversial sale yet. A sixteenth century ivory virgin that was only recently discovered, is now the center of a raging controversy. While other more famous pieces of Philippine history have been successfully auctioned off before by Maharlika Pilipinas, the ivory statue known as the Virgin of the Lost Souls has received much more attention and publicity than other patrimonial properties sold before.

With us is the young man known only as Gus, who has organized “Remember The Hermana” movement. Gus, marami ang nagtataka. With all that has been sold, why are you only speaking up now?

GUS:

Because there are many of us who are becoming sick of the way the auctions are making our history commodities. Because we are shocked at how so much money is thrown away by people who do not care, who see these things as just ... things to collect. We have had enough!

REPORTER 2:

You're all over the internet. How many members do you have?

GUS:

One hundred fifty

GUS GROUP:

Remember the Hermana!!

GUS:

and counting.

REPORTER 2:

Sapat na kaya yon to stop this sale?

GUS:

The auction of the Virgin of the Lost Souls is a crime! These people hold nothing sacred. We do not want the image –and all that it stands for---sold! ALL: No adlib!!! What we are fighting for is more than just a statue. We want people to know about the woman behind the image, and her story.

REPORTER 2:

There are those who say this is just a legend...

GUS:

It is not a legend! It is history! And we want our fellow Filipinos to decide! Our movement is against the government or the National Counsel deciding what is to sell and what is for all Filipinos to have. It is high time that we speak out against this kind of materialism and conspicuous consumption!

(GUS grabs the mike.)

GUS:

Mga kapwa kong Pilipino. Samahan niyo ang “Remember the Hermana” movement. Sabay-sabay natin isigaw, Hindi lahat Mabebenta! Hindi lahat Mabibili! Remember Hermana Augusta!

ALL: Hindi lahat Mabebenta! Hindi lahat Mabibili! Remember! Remember! Remember! Hermana!

(The cry is taken up by GUS’ cohorts.)

(The scene shifts.)

III

(Another area lights up. We see HELENA surrounded by indigent folk. She too is speaking to a reporter, as she hands out checks.)

HELENA:

Pag sama-sama!!

ALL: Kayang-kaya!

HELENA:

I am very proud to stand before you today to present five of the thirty Filipinos whose lives have been uplifted by sale of the Banaue Rice terrace properties! Each of them will receive One hundred thousand pesos in cash . Go ahead, you can interview them now. This is... Manong Ponce.

REPORTER 3:

Ano po ang trabaho niyo, Manong?

PONCE:

Wala po...

HELENA:

Manong Ponce is the father of the former reality tv star Almira Bueno. Natatandaan niyo? Si Almira was supporting her whole family before she died of a drug overdose.

REPORTER 3:

Ano po ang balak niyong gawin sa perang natanggap niyo, Manong?

PONCE:

Negosyo po.

REPORTER 3:

Anong negosyo po?

PONCE:

Kahit ano po.

HELENA:

Siempre, tutulungan ng office namin sina Manong Ponce at ang ibang mga nanalo para mas maganda nilang ma-invest ang pera.

REPORTER 4:

Madame, mukhang lalong lumalala ang protesta laban sa pagbenta ng Almas Perdidas-

HELENA:

Anong protesta? Sa internet at sa social media lang naman. Panay information campaign at black propaganda lang. Ewan ko nga ba dyan sa mga batang yan. Hindi ba nila nakikita na ang daming nakikinabang? Tanungin mo sila..

REPORTER 3:

Ano ang masasabi niyo, ma'am?

LOTTERY WINNER:

Para sa akin, hindi naman mahalaga yan. Ang dios naman ay nasa puso natin ,hindi ba? Kung makakatulong na maibsan ang paghihirap ng iba ang pagbenta sa santo, baka mas lalo pang ikatuwa ni Lord at ni Mama Mary yan.

ANOTHER LOTTERY WINNER:

Hindi kami tutol dyan. Malay mo, baka niloloko lang tayo ng Augusta movement na 'yan. Wala naman santang ganun. Baka culto –culto lang yan. Mabuti nga na ibenta na yan, para kumalat ang biyaya.

ANOTHER LOTTERY WINNER:

Ang tunay na biyaya, kamo. Yun ang tunay na biyaya!

HELENA:

Maganda yang slogan. Kakalat ang Tunay na Biyaya!

ANOTHER LOTTERY WINNER:

Hindi naman masa yang sina Gus na yan. Mga intelektual lang yan na walang mabuting magagawa para sa amin.

Kasi, isipin niyo, aanhin naman naming yang mga yan kung kumakalam ang tiyan naming? Eh ang daming ng santong pagdadadsalan. Ang daming birhen, nino, nazareno---ang dami na! Kung ako sila, tigilan na nila yang protesta nila. Mas mabuti pa na kumalat ang biyaya.

ANOTHER LOTTERY WINNER:

Kaya siguro nilagay ni lord yang rebulto ,para mahanap at para mas lalo pang dumamai ang matulungan.

HELENA:

Ayan, o di you have heard it na mismo from them. And even the church has agreed to the sale. Ano pa ang sinasabi ng Gus na yan? Hindi nila mahal ang mga Pilipino! I can assure you! Kami sa National Counsel...mahal naming ang mga Pilipino! Why don't they believe us? We are not corrupt, as you have seen. We do our best to uplift lives...That is our mandate!

REPORTER 3:

Ma'am, last question. May balak daw kayong tumakbong senador sa dadating na halalan?

HELENA:

Ha? Ngayon ko lang narinig yan. I am just a humble public serant who wants to help her fellow Filipinos. Pero kung yun ang nais ng mga tao ...aba eh, I will humbly give in to the call of the people.

LOTTERY WINNER:

Mabuhay! Ma'am Helena, ikakalat ang biyaya sa senado!

(The WINNERS take up the cry as Helena bursts into tears.)

(The scene shifts again.)

IV

(We see a LIFESTYLE REPORTER as she interviews ALPHONSE on a set, surrounded by models and actors in costume. ADELA is the lead model.)

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

Alphonse' Garden...

Alphonse' atelier...

Alphonse' salon...

I am so privileged to be here, to witness the creative genius Alphonse Castrence, prepare his latest multi-merchandising creative coup. Tell me ,Alphonse, is this for a movie?

ALPHONSE:

I don't know yet!

I am sorry. I am in such anguish when I create.

The germ...the blossom of a movie, maybe. An idea...a dream. As with every creative enterprise I embark on, I really...don't...know where this journey will take me. I started out with costumes. But maybe a film...I don't know yet. I am so consumed by the idea, so inspired by the story of the Hermana I don't eat anymore.

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

What is it called?

ALPHONSE:

“Hermana In My Mind” ang working title. These are the costumes, which we will use in the movie and then as a fashion collection. As you can see, the reference is the seventeenth century monastic style but reinterpreted for today. All very, very pale colors...almost sombre ang dating... out!!

My muse and inspiration, Adela Urquijo is wearing one of my creations for the film...fashion line...I don't know yet. I call this gown Alma Perdida, ninety yards of hand-dyed grayish - white silk gazar with hand-crafted and eco-friendly beads and tulle wrap...

ADELA:

Can you imagine? Me? A monastic...but I will do anything for Alphonse! Maski sabihin niyang mag-madre ako!

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

Alphonse, they say you are going to bid for the image of the Almas Perdidas.

ALPHONSE:

Me? Against sina Manolo Estancio...why, I am the poorest of them all. But who knows, I just may surprise them all. I always do...

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

Are you religious ba, Alphonse?

ALPHONSE:

Organized religion is so...last century...so divisive and conflicting.

What I am is a deeply spiritual being, my dear. The spirit is all that matters to me. In our humanity, we create. And in our creations, we become the Divine.

Oh, did I mention the perfume “Odor of Sanctity”---or Eau d’Sanctite, in French. I haven’t decided yet to what call it....

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

Thank you both for this very precious preview of what will yet be, another successful creative endeavour.

The Virgen de las Almas Perdidas has certainly caused quite a stir.

REPORTER 2:

In Shang-hai, Doctor Stephen Yang of the renowned Sui Generis line has caused controversy by asking the Vatican for special permission to study the remains of saints whose bodies have withstood decomposition over the centuries.

REPORTER 3:

A request that the Vatican has flat-out refused. Dr. yan is said to be bidding for the image against the likes of billionaire Industry magnate, Manolo Estancio.

LIFESTYLE REPORTER

That feature up next...in our special coverage of

ALL 3 REPORTERS

The Virgin and the Madness.

(The scene shifts again.)

V

(MANOLO and STEPHEN are discussing.)

MANOLO;

Really now, Stephen? The Vatican? Dead saints? What for?

STEPHEN:

I know this will sound strange , but if there could be a way to ...maybe, reconstruct some kind of a model, a substitute for the body. Then, the tableaux, what Carlo called the composition, could be completed again.

MANOLO:

Why should that matter to you? It's not going to be the real Hermana.

STEPHEN:

Completeness matters to me, Manolo. I think that that is our essential difference. You collect because you need things for your park. Like the way you buy industries and corporations. Just one more , what does it matter?

MANOLO:

That is unfair, Stephen. From stupid people like Tatiana , I can let that kind of judgement go. But not from you. You are ...an equal.

Aba, I care for completeness also in my business acquisitions. That's part of my mission and vision, to enable the give Filipinos complete and satisfying lives, while moving industries, creating jobs. As for the rest, negosyo ko yan. I owe no one an explanation.

STEPHEN:

Not even the Virgin.

MANOLO:

Iba naman yun. This is how a private person like myself preserves things for this country...for the masses who should, but don't care. All they want is the entertainment.

I care. If my legacy is a better system, then my theme park is part of that system. No one can argue with that.

The future, Stephen, not the things. But the future they will be part of.

All that matters to me.

Ikaw, what does this statue mean to you? You don't even collect.

STEPHEN:

I don't collect simply because the objects themselves don't mean much unless I get a feeling of the complete, the perfect, the absolute.

MANOLO:

You and that Gus are both the same. All this intellectual talk. Very un-Chinese of you.

STEPHEN:

I may be very much like Gus...just as I am very much like you.

We both want the Virgin. But I want her complete. I'm planning a special crypt for it already. Air-tight, temperature and light-controlled to simulate candle light. If I can't buy myself a dead saint, then I may as well know how to make one.

MANOLO:

Why does it matter so much? The completeness?

STEPHEN:

Because that is the one thing that we can never be.

Beautiful. Thin. Young. Rich. Healthy. Happy. Successful. It's become so easy...all it takes is money.

But complete? The way we keep on wanting the next new thing all the time? I am afraid completeness is the one thing that will elude you and me and the rest of mankind forever.

Maybe that's why I obsess about the soul project. Deep in my oriental, scientific heart, I know... I know....

Despite the electrodes and the weighing scales and the dying bodies, science can prove nothing about the existence of the soul. Just as that perfect system you are building for the future cannot provide that...completeness.

That statue, together with that body will remind me that some sort of completeness is possible.

MANOLO:

Well and good and deeply philosophical.

Ordinarily, I would say that this is all bullshit.

But you are an equal.

Unfortunately... I still want it.

STEPHEN:

And my wanting it makes you want it even more, correct?
If I did not want it, you would let Tatiana or Alphonse have it at...what thirty million?
You and I know that even at thirty million, it's is a very expensive part of an elephant.
You want it because you cannot bear the thought of me—an equal--- winning it .
And for that, we are both prepared to spend unreasonable amounts of money.
Vanity, Manolo...that's all it is to you.

MANOLO:

What this is to me...is talk. All talk,
In the end, it will be about...just who has more money .

STEPHEN:

Sad...but true.

(STEPHEN offers his hand to MANOLO.)

STEPHEN:

Good luck to you, Manolo.

(MANOLO takes STEPHEN's hand.)

MANOLO:

Good luck to you.
(The scene shifts again.)

VI

(TATIANA , in a simple black sheath, with a mantilla over her head and no make-up or coiffure, is being attended by a group of clerics. Also attending her is a much more toned-down and very sober INAKI GIRL.)

(TATIANA has spread out her jewels.)

TATIANA:

These are for her crown...and these for her cape and vestments . I know that it would be a shame to cover the ivory, but...that is how Filipinos imagine God and the Virgin. That is what makes us venerate them and maybe, by indulging them, we bring them come closer to God and Mama Mary. So, went into my vault and I saw all that was there, all the worldly goods I had accumulated. Shaming me... their brilliance made me see clearly what I had done with my life. I knew at once what I had to do...

I thought...maybe the rubies for her halo ...or the sapphires? Or both, with diamonds ,siempre.. And white, not yellow gold, so that the brilliance of the jewels is seen. For the beso

manto ceremony. I have commissioned a silver carroza...to be drawn by horses. A magnificent chariot for the lady to ride as claims all lost souls.

You see, Fathers...Sisters, I have spoken to the Papal Nuncio and he has promised me that he shall move heaven and earth to have the image canonically-crowned. And the Hermana declared Blessed.

I don't know what has come over me...some sort of conversion, perhaps

Well, it's true. All day, I think of the image and how I can help to spread her devotion. How I can help find justice for that poor Hermana.

I have not yet shown you the plans for the basilica I will build for our lady. Inaki? ...Inaki, the plans please.

(INAKI GIRL spreads out some blueprints.)

TATIANA:

You all know Inaki no? He used to be notorious...credit card frauds and high , loose living. But that night, when I first heard about the Almas Perdidad and Hermana Augusta, I bumped into him and I don't know why...but I told him the story. Ordinarily, I wouldn't even speak to his type. But I felt compelled. As if the Virgin herself was saying "Reach out, Tatiana...save him."

INAKI GIRL:

I was lost. So depraved. My life was a mess. That night, I planned to end it all. I was drinking and drugging, hoping that I would pass out and die. Spectacularly, of course. Then.. I saw Tatiana.. Sister Tatiana, I mean. I used to think she was such a stuck up bitch..

TATIANA:

Inaki, your language.

INAKI GIRL:

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Sister. What I meant to say was.. she came to me. She wasn't a stuck up...

TATIANA:

--When I told him, he broke down and cried. And we have been together ever since...making plans for the Virgin...the basilica...the beatification.

INAKI GIRL:

Sister Tatiana has been so kind to me. She's taken me in. Finally, after so many lost years.. I'm home. In this beautiful palatial home. I love it! Of course, I try to help as much as I can. I advise her on how we can best serve the virgin.

TATIANA:

And all our extravagant clothes, we threw out. These days, we dress in the most sober colors and in the simplest cuts---

INAKI GIRL:

-Inspired by Cristobal Balenciaga no less.

TATIANA:

Well, yes. Old habits die hard. But what we are aiming for is simplicity...a true and heartfelt simplicity in life. Some sort of redemption is possible for us.. even if it comes little by little.

I have spoken to many of my clients---even the international clients---and they have all promised that they will help me buy the virgin and build the basilica.

INAKI GIRL:

Can you imagine—sheikhs and emirs and sultans and the crowned heads of Europe. Just yesterday, Tatiana was speaking to the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, the infanta of Spain and a major major wife of the Sultan of Brunei. I swear, nahilo ako sa social connections ng lola mo. International!

TATIANA:

Inaki, please. Simplicity..

INAKI GIRL:

I'm sorry, sister..

TATIANA:

What is important is this.. different faiths and persuasions, coming together to buy the Virgin and build a basilica for her! It is a miracle, I tell you.

I am told that the Vatican will need serious documentation of the miracles to be attributed to the Virgin and the hermana? I asked the Papal Nuncio, Is my conversion—and Inaki's , as well as the numerous pledges for the basilica--- are these not enough? He said that we would need cures and sightings and more important proof. As if what has happened to me is not miracle enough.

INAKI GIRL:

My faith is so weak. I tell Sister Tatiana that she is up against so much. Manolo Estancio and Doctor Stephen Tan are both going to bid. What will happen if they win?

TATIANA:

They will not win.

Our Lady is on our side.

ALL:

Our Lady is on our side.

TATIANA:

She will only be made into a trophy by the others. But I...I will bring her back to the people.
We will win the auction!

ALL:

We will win the auction!

TATIANA:

Pray with me, fathers..sisters...pray with me. The image must not fall into the hands of the enemy!

ALL:

NO!

TATIANA:

Not the Enemy! Pray with me brothers and sisters. Pray with me.

(The murmur is heard again, growing louder over TATIANA's lines.)

TATIANA:

Pray with me.

(The scene shifts again.)

VII

(Outside the MAHARLIKA PILIPINAS auction house.)

(THE AUDIENCE is seen again, rowdier, uglier. On one side, GUS and his group chant their slogan "Hindi Lahat Binebenta! Hindi lahat Mabibili!" On the other, Helena's winners chant "Tunay na Biyaya, ipagkalat!")

(The mayhem reaches a pinnacle.)

(CARLO enters, with HELENA . He is greeted by both applause from HELENA'S winners who shout "Mabuhay si Ma'am Helena at si Sir Carlo." But there are also boos and hisses from GUS' GROUP.)

HELENA:

Carlo, I heard...something is happening to the image.

CARLO:

From who?

HELENA:

Your staff...they've noticed something...

CARLO:

Just a bit of discoloration.

Natural reaction to the environment. I've arranged to have it restored after the sale.

Go ahead

HELENA:

I'm telling you---

CARLO:

Akong bahala..

HELENA:

Kung manggulo yang Gus na yan?..

CARLO:

Just go ahead.

(HELENA leaves.)

(GUS breaks away from his group, and runs to CARLO.)

GUS:

You can't do this!

CARLO:

Gus please. Haven't you caused enough trouble already?

GUS:

You wanted this to happen. All this...

(REPORTERS notice the two, and surround them.)

REPORTER:

Sir Carlo, ngayon na nagkaharap kayo ni Gus, ano ang masasabi mo sa kanya?

CARLO:

Ang sinasabi ko lang, wala kaming ginagawang masama. Para sa bayan ang auction na ito.

GUS:

Dahil sa iyo, nabulok ang bangkay ng Hermana. Hindi mo sila dapat pinaghiwalay. Alam na ng bayan ang buong kwento. Hindi ka ba na-gi-guilty sa ginawa mo?

CARLO:

Science can explain what happened.

Three hundred years, nakatago ang bangkay. Eh nung na-discover siya, siempre may changes sa atmosphere. Siempre ,may chemical reaction. Yun lang ang dahilan.

GUS;

That's not how you felt when you told me the story.

CARLO:

Science, Gus...plain and simple science lang yun.

Pero kung gusto niyo akong sisihin, sure...go ahead...be my guest! Ang alam ko, ang nasa puso ko...maraming matutulongan ang auction na ito. Kanina lang kausap ko si Ma'am Helena at sinabi ko sa kanya na kusa kong babawasan ang komisyon ng Maharlika Pilipinas sa sales results ng auction.

Dati, alam niyo naman ito, twenty percent and nakukuha namin sa bawa't benta . Transparent yon, alam ng lahat. Nasa agreement naming ng Gobyerno.

But for this sale, I have voluntarily cut our commission down to ten percent only. I repeat, ten percent only!

(Cheers from the crowd.)

GUS:

Ten percent? The starting price is seventy-five million! That's going to go up because of the greed of the bidders. That's still a lot of money for you.

CARLO:

A lot more money for the winners of the Patrimonial Lottery. Don't forget.

Nakikiusap ako sa iyo Gus. At sa mga ka-grupo mo, huag niyong sirain ang pagkakataong ito para sa mga kababayan natin.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an auction to attend to.

Mga kaibigan. In a little while, we'll be letting you in! See you inside! Maya-maya!

(CARLO leaves.)

REPORTER:

Gus, katoliko ka ba?

GUS:

Ahm...oo, pero matagal na akong di nagsisimba.

REPORTER:

So , bakit ka interesadong-interesado sa birhen? Hindi ka naman pala nagsisimba?

GUS:

Hindi naman yung ang point namin! Kasaysayan natin ito...

LIFESTYLE REPORTER:

Uy...si Alphonse, ayan na...

(The crowd roars and the reporters rush to photograph the bidders as they enter one by one. Last to enter is ALPHONSE together with ADELA ,in the Alma Perdida gown, with other models in Alphonse's creations . Suddenly, it's a Red Carpet event.)

(The scene shifts again.)

VIII

(The stage empties.)

(We are in the Auction hall. It is quiet for once, empty and bare, almost like a chapel, especially because the only thing inside, aside from a few gilt chairs and the auctioneer's podium, is the image lit by a soft light.)

(CARLO is seen , standing in the dim, studying the image.)

(In the dim light, the HERMANA enters.)

(She sings melismatically, a wordless ,haunting chant as she stands there.)

CARLO:

I see you.

Well, maybe not really see. But I know you are there.

I don't know what you want from me. Or what it is you want me to do.

I haven't done anything wrong, you know. I didn't know that you would crumble, or rot or turn into dust. I was just doing my job. Just like you did yours.

I just do what I do...and I do it well.

Kasalanan ko ba yun?

(The singing stops.)

HERMANA:

Hindi.

CARLO:

So,what do you want from me, hermana?

To say I'm sorry? I am. If I could have stopped the rot...if I had known, I swear, I wouldn't have touched the image.

HERMANA:

It was bound to happen.

CARLO:

Yes. Thank you for understanding that. Thank you!

But the fact that ...you're there, everywhere I look, smiling and chanting.

HERMANA:

Hindi mo naman ako pinaalis. It is so easy , Carlo. But you want me here.

CARLO:

I don't need you to be my conscience, hermana.

HERMANA:

I never volunteered to be your conscience.

CARLO:

I cut my commission down to ten percent! Ten percent!

HERMANA:

Where I am, ten percent...twenty...it really doesn't matter .

CARLO:

Great, so now you're telling me, it isn't enough.

HERMANA:

Enough for what?

CARLO:

To make up for causing you to ...rot!

HERMANA:

Everything rots eventually, Carlo. Even me...

CARLO:

So, why are you here now?

Just when I am about to conduct the most important auction of my life. I need to concentrate. There is so much at stake...

HERMANA:

It's only ten percent.

CARLO:

For me...but what about the others? The winners? Think of what it means to them.

HERMANA:

I gave it all away, remember?

CARLO:

Fine. But it doesn't work that way anymore.

HERMANA:

So go ahead. Don't mind me.

I just want to sit here and watch you sell my virgin.

Everything gets sold somehow...

Just let me sit here. I don't bother anyone..

(Outside, the roar of the AUDIENCE is heard.)

HERMANA:

That noise...I've heard it before. But so much louder now...angrier.

CARLO:

The world is out there, howling to get in.

CARLO:

The world which you renounced.

HERMANA:

Did I?

I lived in the world...

CARLO:

I do too. Bigtime. But between the 17th century and today...a lot has changed.

HERMANA:

As it should.

CARLO:

See, we've both gone through the world...been changed by it...I adapted. It's not my fault you didn't.

HERMANA:

Then, I shouldn't be a bother, should I?

(The HERMANA sings again.)

(CARLO goes up to the image.)

CARLO:

Please ...please, hermana if you're going to stay, then help me . The ivory...it's turning brown...and chalky...

It is not what I brought out of the crypt anymore. It used to be so white...starting to flake...chip...it was perfect but look here...and here... We were very careful. We wore gloves and all...maybe it's the exposure to light ...or too much handlingpollution...something...

HERMANA:

The world.

Maybe it's the world.

CARLO:

Please stop it. Try to stop it. You really want to do something for me...for the world? Please stop it.

HERMANA:
You're praying to me, Carlo?
Hindi bagay.

CARLO:
I'm just asking you—

HERMANA:
You have all the means, Carlo...Science, conservation, there has to something in your world.

CARLO:
It hasn't worked! Believe me. We know how to handle art...things...

HERMANA:
Things...that's all they are, really.

CARLO:
Help me. This means so much to so many people.
It can't just crumble.

(The HERMANA sings again.)

CARLO:
Yes....go and sing ...renounce the world.
Dash the hopes of thousand Filipinos. Dash my hopes. You think I really care?
Please, hermana...some kind of a miracle is needed here.
It can't just crumble away,

HERMANA:
Nasa puso na natin yan. Yung essence ng gamit na yan. Nasa puso na yan, kid. Face it.
.Gamit lang naman yan, hindi ba? Kung di naman natin kayang algaan...ibenta mo nalang.

CARLO;
Fine!

(The HERMANA is gone.)

(A roar is heard.)

(The AUDIENCE rushes into the hall.)

(CARLO stand at the podium and watches as the hall fills.)

IX

(They occupy different parts of the hall. GUS' group on one end. Helena's winners on the other. Behind them, more people including TATIANA'S clergy. All of them hold banners, placards, tarpaulins all proclaiming their sentiments, so that the auction looks like a huge political rally or a the final judgement night of a reality show. The PRESS is having a field day.)

(On the main floor, The BIDDERS . ALPHONSE and ADELA, TATIANA and INAKI GIRL, in their cassock- like outfits, STEPHEN YAN and some Chinese bidders.)

(Another roar goes up as MANOLO enters, and takes his seat.)

(HELENA senses that something is wrong.)

(She moves to the podium.)

HELENA:

Mga kaibigan, salamat sa inyong pagdalo ngayon...

Welcome. To our top bidders from here and abroad, to our audience... even to our detractors and to those who do not believe in the mission of the national counsel. We at the National Counsel for the Disposal of Philippine Patrimony will not be deterred. There are those who believe that all we do is to sell our patrimony. That we do not remember. That we do not value. They are so wrong. Before I turn over to Mr. Carlo Vibal, here is our message to those who doubt. Listen and believe...

(A short but unbelievably tacky production number takes place. It is a loud, ear-splitting , vulgar jingle for the National Counsel. Amidst all this ,CARLO remains at the podium. His head bowed ,his shoulders hunched, unmindful of the madness. A Dark Eminence who is the quiet center of the rabble.)

SINGER:

In the 17th century, there was a holy young lady
Who carried an image of our most beloved Virgin
La Nuestra Senora de las Almas Perdidas
She is now here in our time
She has come to save us

Chorus:

Open your eyes (Salvation of the nation)
Open your hearts (This is the revelation)
A worthy addition to the collection of pieces of history
Helping out the poor through the Patrimonial lottery
We'll walk together hand in hand
She is the salvation, the salvation of our land
Open your eyes.....

Open your open your open your! Open your eyes!!!

(The production number comes to an end. CARLO raises his head and surveys the audience He regains his nerve. He roars above the crowd.)

CARLO:

Welcome... to Maharlika Pilipinas Auction house...and to the sale of La Nuestra Senora De las Almas Perdidas!

The excitement over the image has risen to surprising levels...we have bidders on the phone Belgium, Rome , and New York. Now... Sino ang makakabili ng Birhen ...at sino ang makikinabang?

Work with me here,ladies and gentlemen...work with me now...

As we open the bidding at seventy five million pesos!

(The crowd roars as TATIANA starts the bidding.)

CARLO:

Thank you, Tatiana Olandrez for the opening bid of seventy-five million. Do I have Seventy-five million and a half? Seventy-five million and a half?

(ALPHONSE raises his paddle.)

CARLO:

Seventy five million and half to Alphonse. Do I have seventy six million?...seventy six million from ... I see seventy seven from a bidder on the phone! And yet again ,on the phone , seventy-eight from ...where? ...from a bidder from Belgium! Seventy-eight...and seventy nine million to Tatiana Olandrez ,once again...

Now, who will give me eighty million? Do I have eighty million...yes...from Belgium...and eighty one from Alphonse. I have a bidder from New York who says eighty two million.

(TATIANA stands .)

TATIANA:

One hundred million pesos!

CARLO:

Tatiana Olandrez has bid one hundred million pesos
Who will top Tatiana's bid? Who will give me....

(STEPHEN raises his paddle.)

STEPHEN:

Two hundred million !

CARLO:
Two hundred million pesos! Will I have ---

(MANOLO raises his paddle.)

MANOLO:
Three hundred---

CARLO:
Yes! Manolo Estancio has just entered the bidding at three hundred million pesos!

(The AUDIENCE goes wild.)

(GUS sees that something is going wrong.)

GUS:
Look!

CARLO:
Friends...I see the glimmer of hope in the eyes of so many of our kababayans.
(The AUDIENCE roars in approval. But GUS, who has been watching the image, shouts.)

GUS:
Look...look!
The Virgin...
(The Virgin has begun to turn a deep brown.)

(The AUDIENCE begins to fall silent.)

(CARLO is flushed.)

ALPHONSE:
Look...look! It's not white anymore!

(The AUDIENCE begins to hiss.)

CARLO:
It's a normal thing for very old pieces.. it does not. I repeat, does not detract from the beauty, the singularity..the rarity of this magnificent 16th century image..

GUS:
Look...look...can't you see? She's rotting away!

(The AUDIENCE reacts differently, some hiss, others cross themselves and swoon. A member of TATIANA's clergy shouts.)

CLERGY:

It's a sign... Ayaw magpa-benta ng birhen!

(The cry is taken up by the CLERGY, and other members of the audience.)

CARLO:

No, my friends...there is a perfectly logical explanation for all of this...the ivory is reacting to ...the heat of our bodies...yes...to the noise... to the noise...to the world! Yes, ladies and gentlemen , to the pressures of the world!

We will fix it, I promise... Our laboratories are perfectly capable of restoring the image to it's former beauty. Now, back to the bidding... Going once...Dr. Yan , you still have a chance...going....

(DR. YAN stands up and tries to move through the crowd.)

MANOLO:

Stephen? Where are you going? Don't you want---

STEPHEN:

I'm out Manolo, I don't want this anymore.

(STEPHEN shakes his head and tries to hurry away, but the crowd has begun to press in. MANOLO rises and collars him.)

MANOLO:

Stephen, this is no longer about it. Don't you want to bid? Punyeta kang intsik ka...bid! Bid! I said Bid!

(STEPHEN's bodyguards attack MANOLO. MANOLO'S bodyguards rush in. And pull the two apart. But the encounter between the two has set off panic.)

CARLO:

Gentlemen, please..please... Security...

(STEPHEN's bodyguards try to move him out. But the crowd is pressing in. They are all trapped.)

TATIANA:

The mother is angry at us. She is displeased! Forgive me,. Mother.

(TATIANA stands to move away. INAKI GIRL pulls her down.)

INAKI:

It is a test, sister! A test! Bid! Bid, I said...Four hundred million!

(TATIANA slaps him hard.)

GUS:

Hindi lahat nabibili! Hindi lahat binebenta!

(The cry is taken up. Others oppose it by hissing and booing.)

(The roar is getting louder.)

(The BIDDERS are getting extremely nervous. Several of them stand up to push their way out.)

CARLO:

Mga kaibigan, konting katahimikan lang po...Please, quiet! A little quiet! There is nothing strange or mystical going on... We already have three hundred million! Going once...going twice...

(A member of the AUDIENCE breaks away from the crowd, and runs towards the image, upsetting TATIANA's chair as well as the other bidders.)

PONCE:

Ayaw magpa-benta ng Birhen...

(The cry is repeated and taken up, especially by GUS, who has moved to the floor.)

(CARLO blocks the intruder, but others have broken through to the floor. The security enter and try to maintain order. But the AUDIENCE is becoming a MOB. The BIDDERS are swept up in the crush .)

CARLO:

And sold! For three hundred million to Manolo Estancio! SOLD! Congratulations, Manolo estancio...

(MANOLO suffers a heart attack on the floor.)

PONCE:

Isinumpa sya ng Birhen!

GUS:

Hindi lahat mabibili! Hindi lahat mabebenta! ...

CARLO:

Please, ladies and gentlemen...if you do not behave, I will stop the auction...please, a little quiet!...Security!

(GUS has almost reached the image, still shouting his battle-cry.)
(CARLO rushes to the image and grabs it from the pedestal. He holds it aloft.)

CARLO:

The auction is over ...Now, do you hear? We cannot go on with this sale ... not now...stay away....STAY AWAY!!!

(The image crumbles in his hands. CARLO tries to save it, to clutch at it. But the image crumbles like chalk in his hands.)

(There is a moment of stunned silence.)

(CARLO watches as the fragments spill over his hands.)

(The murmur begins to grow. Over this, the other characters speak, adding to the mounting hysteria.)

TATIANA:

Madre...dear mother...he has destroyed you!

HELENA:

What will we tell the people? What will we give them now?

GUS:

You destroyed it...like you destroyed the hermana...

(The MOB murmurs ominously .)

CARLO:

We will find something to sell...I promise you all...Something to sell...for all of you to buy...We'll find something....something...

(The MOB closes in on CARLO ,with one great, savage roar. GUS tries to protect him, but the crowd closes in on him too.)

(Pandemonium breaks out . It is a riot. A terrifying, unstoppable riot. TATIANA'S jewels are ripped from her ears and neck, ALPHONSE 's models are mauled and molested, STEPHEN 's bodyguards fire shots in the air.)

(They are all trapped. There is nowhere to go. The violence consumes them all.)

(Amidst the violence, the roar of the crowd dies out, leaving only the action.)

(Instead, what is heard---rising above the roar as it fades away --is the melismatic singing of the HERMANA .)

CARLO:

We will find something to sell.... For all of you to buy.... Something... I promise

(The HERMANA enters the fray , unmindful of the carnage.)(She scoops up the dust of the image and blows it all away as the lights fade)

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