

# **THE ENCOUNTER**

***A full-length play***

## THE ENCOUNTER

Scene 1. Lights up on Ferdinand, the President of the Philippines. He enters the scene looking very exhausted and agitated at once. Then he turns to his aide who's behind him and orders for a drink. The aide goes to the bar. FERDINAND continues to pace the floor, looking very worried. When his aide finally gives him his drink, Ferdinand dismisses him.

Enter REMEDIOS, the First Lady.

REMEDIOS

Well, did you get him out of the way?

FERDINAND (holding up a visa)

I had his visa worked out.

REMEDIOS

Where to?

FERDINAND

Boston. To teach at Harvard.

REMEDIOS

He would love that. What with his gift of gab.  
Loves to talk. Always having the last word.

FERDINAND

This time, I have the last word.

SILENCE

FERDINAND

He collapsed. He almost died.

REMEDIOS (excited)

He did?

FERDINAND

I had him taken to the hospital.

REMEDIOS

Are you crazy? Why didn't you just let him die?  
That was your chance to get rid of him!

FERDINAND

I'll get rid of him in my own time, in my own way.

REMEDIOS

Think of the lost opportunity. God!

FERDINAND

You think anyone will believe that he died of a heart attack in prison? They'll suspect we killed him. Politically, that's not good.

REMEDIOS

You're so indecisive about him. Why don't you let me take care of him? I have no mercy for that man.

FERDINAND about to say something...

REMEDIOS

I know. I know. Years of working together in Congress and the Senate...

FERDINAND does not respond.

REMEDIOS

What are you thinking?

FERDINAND

With him out of the way, I can now call for an election right away so you can run. I don't have to wait for another three years.

REMEDIOS (excited)

Right now? (Checks herself) But, you're still president.

FERDINAND

I'm thinking of you running for governor.

REMEDIOS (disappointed)

A governor? A mere governor?

FERDINAND

Just to test the waters. You have to be primed for the big office. The governorship is the best way to go.

REMEDIOS

Governor? Don't you think it's below me to be governor? I have international status!

FERDINAND

We can't appear greedy for power. Think of our American friends. (Pause) You know who are coming to visit us soon?

REMEDIOS looks at him, puzzled.

FERDINAND

Human rights advocates. Senators Boyton and Lugar have been hinting about human rights abuses.

REMEDIOS

Okay, I'll run for governor. BUT, it comes at a price.

FERDINAND

What?

REMEDIOS

Ask them for a bigger military aid. Pump up the communist threat.

FERDINAND

I will. (Pause, then reflects) Ahhh, a truly democratic election. (Winks at IMELDA) That should please even Amnesty International.

THEY embrace.

REMEDIOS

I hope he stays away as long as possible.

FERDINAND

I hope he never returns...

REMEDIOS

Alive. By the way, how did you convince him?

FERDINAND

I didn't. His heart told him to go.

REMEDIOS

Huh? The man has a heart?

FERDINAND

Yup. And it's in bad shape. He needs bypass surgery.

REMEDIOS (getting it)

Oh. (Pause) Thank God! (Makes the sign of the cross)  
What a threat, that man is. Imagine declaring himself  
as the hope of the nation. The worst part is, he's able  
to convince people in power, including Cardinal Camacho  
himself! I begin to worry when a man like our enemy  
gains influence that reaches heaven. What a troublemaker.

FERDINAND

The albatross around our neck.

REMEDIOS

The albatross around our neck. It's a necklace, isn't it?

FERDINAND

It's a dead bird, for God's sakes!

REMEDIOS (fingering her own necklace)

You don't have to shout at me.

FERDINAND

You're so...

REMEDIOS

You think just because you read a lot of books,  
you're smarter than me? Think again. Who gets  
you the support of America? Me! I put my life,  
my reputation...

LIGHTS dim on MARCOS and IMELDA. Enter a young American  
who  
holds up a book, reads it silently and after a while, puts it down.

THOMAS SEAGRAVE

I love this book, WALTZING WITH THE DICTATOR.  
I'm going to tell you a fascinating story and I will  
have to pick up some lines from this book.  
(Puts the book down) I had known the First Lady  
when I was a political officer in Manila. That was  
about three years ago. When she came to DC  
for a visit, I picked her up from the airport and  
escorted her home. Later in the evening, I was  
summoned, yes, summoned to her suite. It was

almost midnight. I was tired... very, very tired.  
But I had to do my duty. I went back to her suite.  
"Now what?", I asked myself. Little did I know  
that the First Lady has her own special way of  
understanding "foreign relations."

REMEDIOS enters and with SEAGRAVE, performs what is  
being  
narrated.

SEAGRAVE (continues)

She met me at the door, wearing tight black slacks  
and a tight-fitting, low-cut leopard-skin top and for  
added effect, spikes heels. Boy, did I feel trapped  
in some kind of jungle. With those high heels of hers,  
I felt like a cat facing a fierce, determined she-lion.  
She was much, much taller than I was. She greeted  
me nicely, in the tradition of Filipino hospitality. Then  
she asked me to take a seat, which I did, and when  
I started to sit in one of the chairs across her, she  
patted a spot on the love seat next to her. I tell you,  
I felt like a hundred megawatts went through  
my body! I wasn't just electrified by her presence,  
I felt electrocuted! (Pause) She gazed at me with  
her heavily made-up bug eyes, her voice taking on a  
sultry whine and she said, "Dick, you're not taking  
care of your baby. The Philippines is your baby,  
and you're not taking of your baby."

LIGHTS dim on REMEDIOS.

SEAGRAVE (wiping his brow with a  
handkerchief)

Where in God's name did she learn those  
jungle tricks?

LIGHTS dim on SEAGRAVE. LIGHTS UP on FERDINAND  
and  
REMEDIOS.

FERDINAND

I'm sorry. I know to what extent you'll go just  
to help me.

SILENCE

REMEDIOS

By the way, I want to be the one to give him the visa.



FERDINAND

You don't have to do that. You're the FIRST LADY,  
not a courier.

REMEDIOS

You're jealous? After all these years?

FERDINAND

Of course, not.

REMEDIOS

Then let me. Let me shove it in his face. (Looks at  
FERDINAND long and hard) It's personal.

FERDINAND (giving her the visa)

Have it your way.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 2. A quiet corner in Manila Hotel. The American agent we see  
earlier and a Filipino informant are deeply engrossed in conversation.

AGENT

What's up?

INSIDER hands a folder to the AGENT who reads it.

AGENT

So it's the end of Rolex 12?

INSIDER

Yup. One of its key members, the Defense Minister,  
is defecting. He's forming his own group.

AGENT

One less Rolex watch user.

INSIDER

He brought half of the group with him. They can't stand  
the First Lady.

AGENT

How about the military Chief of Staff?

INSIDER

He's with the Defense Minister. You know, birds of the same feather...

AGENT

That leaves our man in the lurch. Pity.

INSIDER

Amen. (Takes a sip, savoring it) This chardonnay is good.

AGENT

By the way, here's something for you. (Gives the Insider an envelope)

INSIDER opens the envelope.

AGENT

No need to count it.

INSIDER

But, of course. (Puts envelope in his shirt pocket)

AGENT

You're one helluva good informant, you know that?

INSIDER

The best. Didn't I tell you about martial law even before it was declared?

AGENT (lifts his glass)

Here's to you.

INSIDER

Now tell me. What's at stake for the agency?

AGENT

Without our man in Malacanang? A lot! All our work in Asia. Down the drain. (Sighs) Consider us flat-footed.

INSIDER (prodding)

Oh?

AGENT

For starters, we'll lose our arms deal in this part of the world. Who'll issue us the false certificates?

INSIDER

I've heard of that one. (Pause) Well, you can blame your Congress.

AGENT

Fucking crazy rule. Why should they require a certificate to sell arms to third world countries. Don't they realize we're at war?

INSIDER

Cold war.

AGENT

Cold or hot, your country, any third world country still needs guns. (Reflects) But our man is smart, huh? Really has a lot of brains up here. Who would ever think of sending arms through Indonesia, Thailand or God knows where, just so they'd get here.

INSIDER

Re-routing is the name of the game. Imagine how much dough ends up in Malacanang?

AGENT

Yup. He surely knows how to turn things around. The son of a bitch!

INSIDER

Who was it who said, "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's OUR son of a bitch."

AGENT

Yup. (Looks around) Waiter! Waiter!

WAITER approaches their table. They stop talking momentarily.

AGENT

More chardonnay, please.

WAITER

Yes, sir.

WAITER exits. They resume their conversation.

INSIDER

What about the other man? The leader of the opposition. He was once on your payroll. Is that true?

AGENT

It's ancient history. He's changed. Transformed. He's now for the national interest. Your agency can't touch him with a ten-foot pole.

WAITER appears with a bottle of chardonnay and puts it on the table.

WAITER

Will that be all, sir?

AGENT

Yes, thank you.

WAITER exits.

AGENT

On the issue of bases, Malacanang is completely, totally, absolutely in favor of retaining the bases.

INSIDER (lifts glass)

Here's to the bases. America's gateway to Asia, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean...

AGENT

...and the Middle East.

INSIDER

But, and there's a big BUT. If the other man wins, goodbye to the bases. I'm sure you know how the game is played. Langley and Washington will wait until the election is over. Only then will they decide what to do. They'll wait and see how things play out.

AGENT

You're getting smarter. You should join the Agency.

INSIDER (showing the envelope)

I already have.

BURPS down his glass of wine and burps loudly.

EXITS

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 3. 1980. Two years later. A penthouse in an expensive five-star hotel. SERVILLANO, the opposition leader examines a painting on the wall. REMEDIOS enters, looking very regal.

SERVILLANO

Oh, hello. I didn't mean to intrude like this...  
your maid let me in.

REMEDIOS (cold)

To what do I owe this visit?

SERVILLANO

I..

REMEDIOS

Your second one, if my memory serves me right.  
The first time was in Manila Hotel.

SERVILLANO

Yes. Force of circumstance on both occasions.

REMEDIOS

You haven't changed.

SERVILLANO

You, too. You haven't changed a bit. You're still  
beautiful.

REMEDIOS

How do you like it?

SERVILLANO

Huh?

REMEDIOS

The painting.

SERVILLANO about to say something.

REMEDIOS (showing off knowledge)

Do you like Boticelli?

SERVILLANO

Ah...I...

REMEDIOS

I like the way he makes women look so ethereal.  
As if they're angels. Like me. Do you know  
President Nixon calls me "the angel of Asia"?

SERVILLANO (humoring her)

That is accurate.

REMEDIOS (suddenly switches  
to another topic)

And Seurat. Now that's the man. Never undermines  
prostitutes. Even visits brothels so he could get  
to know them. Then elevates them no matter how  
lowly their station in life is. Do you know, some people  
have called me a prostitute?

SERVILLANO

It's Toulloise.

REMEDIOS

What?

SERVILLANO

It's Toulloise, not Seurat.

REMEDIOS

Oh, yes, yes. I always get them confused.  
That usually happens after a long ride from home.  
Jet lag, you know.

SERVILLANO

Isn't it dangerous?

REMEDIOS

Flying? No.

SERVILLANO

I mean this expensive painting with you...  
a masterpiece, no less.

REMEDIOS

Dangerous? In what sense?

SERVILLANO

Security wise. Transporting this must be major production.

REMEDIOS

You're forgetting, Servillano. I'm the First Lady. Other people worry about my security.

SERVILLANO

I'm sorry.

REMEDIOS

You're forgiven. (Pause) You see, these precious things. And I mean, not just the paintings. This collection. Faberge. Lenox. They all remind me of home. I want every hotel room to remind me of Malacanang, my palace. You see, at the rate I'm traveling, I get ... what's the word?

SERVILLANO

Dislocated. (With meaning) Yes, I know that feeling.

REMEDIOS

How's Maria? The family?

SERVILLANO (exasperated)

Fine. Fine.

REMEDIOS

You know, I've always envied her.

SERVILLANO

You do?

REMEDIOS

Such a comfortable life. A stay at home Mom. Not like me. (Pause) Do you allow her to drive now? I hear you like your women (searches for word)... traditional.

SERVILLANO does not respond, visibly impatient by now.

REMEDIOS

How's her Peking duck?

SERVILLANO

Her what?

REMEDIOS

I heard she cooks the best Peking duck in the world.  
You think she'd give me her recipe?

SERVILLANO (controlling anger)

I didn't come here to discuss recipes.

REMEDIOS

But you haven't answered my question.

SERVILLANO (exasperated)

I'll tell her to give you the recipe.

REMEDIOS

That's not it.

SERVILLANO is confused, by now.

REMEDIOS

I asked you why you're here. You haven't answered  
my question.

SERVILLANO

It's about my...

REMEDIOS

Let me guess. You were here last time for the same  
reason, if I remember correctly.

SERVILLANO nods.

REMEDIOS

Is it urgent like last time?

SERVILLANO

Yes. Yes.

REMEDIOS

You know, I don't understand why you want  
to go home. You have a good job here.

SERVILLANO

My contract with Harvard is ending.

REMEDIOS

What about your house in Boston?

SERVILLANO

It just a house, not a home.

REMEDIOS

What about your health? You have to think about that. You can't have another episode like last time.

SERVILLANO

My doctors have given me the "good-to-go" signal.

REMEDIOS

The "good-to-go"? They don't decide on that.  
(Pause) We do, Ferdi and me.

SERVILLANO

I need to go home. My mother is sick. She's 84. I haven't seen her for three years. I want to see her before she dies.

REMEDIOS

If my instincts are right, and they usually are, that's not the reason.

SERVILLANO

Please.

REMEDIOS

The snap election. You know that there's a snap election this November, and you want to run.

SERVILLANO

I no longer have political ambition.

REMEDIOS

Then why is Senator Tanada campaigning for you? Is he your front man?

SERVILLANO

I come as a peacemaker. Believe me, I come to heal the nation, not divide it.

REMEDIOS

You sound as if you're already campaigning.

SERVILLANO (lies)

I will cooperate with your New Society. My exile has taught me one thing: peace is necessary for progress.

UNCOMFORTABLE silence

REMEDIOS

We can't let you go home, even if we want to.

SERVILLANO

Why not?

REMEDIOS

For your own protection.

SERVILLANO (in disbelief)

You're concerned about my safety?

REMEDIOS

Believe it or not, yes.

SERVILLANO

Protect me from whom?

REMEDIOS

Your enemies.

SERVILLANO (with meaning)

You'd be in the best position to know that, I'm sure.

REMEDIOS

How long have you been away? No, don't answer me. Since you left the Philippines, things have changed.

SERVILLANO

I only know that too well.

REMEDIOS (conspiratorially)

We got an intelligence report. The loyalists, the fanatics who are devoted to my husband, have plans to kill you.

SERVILLANO

I'm not afraid. I'm willing to take the risk.

REMEDIOS

You're aware, of course, that we can't control them.  
We can't protect you from them.

SERVILLANO does not answer.

REMEDIOS

Here, you're safe.

SERVILLANO

What will it take for me to get my passport?  
I'll do anything.

REMEDIOS

There's one thing you can do.

SERVILLANO

Anything.

REMEDIOS

Apologize.

SERVILLANO

For what?

REMEDIOS

Remember the fiesta in Tarlac when I was  
proclaimed the beauty queen of the year?

SERVILLANO

I've escorted many beauty queens.

REMEDIOS

But I was the tallest. That should make you  
remember me.

SERVILLANO

I really don't know what you're talking about.

REMEDIOS

You flirted with me. I even thought you had a crush  
on me. Gosh, all that attention, and the flattery.  
There I was comfortable with the idea that you  
like me. Then just like that, you dumped me.  
Snubbed me...as if you never even met me.

(With vengeance) There's one thing I want you to do!

SERVILLANO

Anything. Anything at all.

REMEDIOS

I want you to make a public statement, apologizing for what you've said about me in public. (Claps her hands)

AN ASSISTANT enters with a huge box and gives it to

REMEDIOS.

She then waves the ASSISTANT away.

REMEDIOS

You know what this is?

SERVILLANO shakes his head.

REMEDIOS

These are newspaper clippings of the statements you made against me.

SHE opens the box and throws contents on the floor. SERVILLANO stares at the clippings.

REMEDIOS

Now pick them up, one by one.

SERVILLANO hesitates.

REMEDIOS

You want your passport, right? Pick them up!

SERVILLANO (saving face)

I will do it as a gentleman, not as your servant.

REMEDIOS

Suit yourself. But remember, I want each insult retracted. (Pause) Women should be praised constantly, don't you think?

SERVILLANO is about to pick up the clippings when the phone rings.

REMEDIOS (goes for the phone)

I've been waiting for this call (boasting) from George

Hamilton. (In a better mood this time, she turns to SERVILLANO) Okay, you don't have to pick them up. Take the box with you. You have one month to complete your assignment.

SERVILLANO

What about my passport?

REMEDIOS

Someone will call you. Now, go! (Talks on the phone)  
Hello? George, how nice to hear from you. I've been waiting for this call. What about? Guess. No, I'm throwing a party tonight. Yes, here, Ritz Carlton. Van Cliburn will be coming. Can you make it? Good. Good. I will have my chauffer pick you up.  
(Giggles like a little girl) We'll have a ring-a-ding-ding.

REMEDIOS, preoccupied, does not notice SERVILLANO exit.

He

leaves behind all the clippings scattered on the floor.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 4. REMEDIOS friends from the upper crust society enter.

They

bring champagne glasses with them as they joke and share pleasantries.

REMEDIOS

My dear friends, for our entertainment tonight, I will show you tapes from my travels. No, no. Don't turn off the lights. I don't want us to sit in the dark. Take your seats.

THE GUESTS sit, facing the audience, as if they're looking at the screen.

REMEDIOS is holding the remote, and looks at the audience as well.

REMEDIOS (operating the remote)

This one was taken during my visit to WILSON's inauguration as president. I'd like to think that we have something in common. We both started as entertainers before we made it big in politics. You see me right there on the stage, just few rows behind Frances. They really made me feel special.  
(Lowers voice) The next one was during Carter's inauguration. I wasn't happy about that event. They placed me in the back where I could hardly be seen. You know what I did? I snubbed the ball.  
(Turns to one of the guests) Cristina, you remember?



We went clubbing all night. Just enjoying ourselves.  
George was there, too. Wait. The next one is really big.  
Me, with Khaddafy. Ah, the meeting was memorable.  
We talked in his tent. Four, five hours, I think.  
(Smiles mysteriously)

GUEST 1

What does his tent look like?

REMEDIOS

His tent? It was nothing like you've seen before.  
It had five-star hotel accommodations. It was air-  
conditioned and the furniture and facilities were  
first class. Of course, he's the ruler of Libya. And  
of course, I got the oil deal. The Tripoli Agreement.  
(Smiles mysteriously, again) Ferdi  
was so happy about it. What would take diplomats  
months of negotiation, I got it in less a day. You know  
what Khaddafy called my diplomacy? "Special foreign  
relations." (Laughs) The rumor going around Manila  
was just hilarious. They said that Khaddafy and I had  
an affair. You know how it is back home. Gossip there.  
Gossip here.

GUEST 2

Who's that man with the beard?

REMEDIOS

That is Fidel Castro and that's me beside him.  
Like Khaddafy, Castro said, my diplomacy is special.  
And he never experienced it before. (Giggles)  
And the next tape shows me with Mao. Dear  
old man. He took the time to take me on a tour  
of the villages, the country side, you know. He  
and his wife were like family to me. Up to now,  
they still send me Chinese goodies. So you see,  
I literally live on a plane. But with this kind of people  
I meet, who's complaining? (Turns off tv)

CRISTINA

You're amazing, my friend. Right now, you're  
the only woman in the whole world who can  
command such power.

GEORGE

I'm sure these world rulers think of your unforgettable

beauty when they go into negotiations with your country. You're a global phenomenon!

GUEST 3

Let's drink to our amazing and fabulous friend, Remedios.

GUEST 4

Here's to the next president of the Philippines.

ALL

To the next president of the Philippines!

LIGHTS OUT

Scene 3. Enter SERVILLANO from the right. Another hotel in New York, this time, less expensive.

SUPPORTER 1

We've been wanting to meet with you for months.

SERVILLANO

You didn't tell anyone outside of this team, did you?

SUPPORTER 1

No, except for our friends. Sympathizers. Don't worry, we're safe.

SUPPORTER 2

You've been getting our messages.

SERVILLANO

Yes.

SUPPORTER 3

And?

SERVILLANO

I've been thinking about it seriously.

SUPPORTER 1

You must consider it. Fast. We have no time. They're calling another snap election. His administration is under pressure from the US.

SERVILLANO

Another snap election? Jesus, this can't be happening!

SUPPORTER 2

Ferdinand is panicking at this point. He's very sick. He has no clear successor. And he's not too sure his wife is capable....or popular enough to win the election.

SERVILLANO

He can always buy the election. Manipulate the results. It's a done deal, as far as his wife is concerned.

SUPPORTER 3

God knows how many government positions she's occupying.

SUPPORTER 1

Minister of Human Settlement. Governor of Manila. Minister of Culture. President of Life University.

SUPPORTER

She's being set up to be the next president of the Philippines.

SUPPORTER 2

Not only that. She and Fabian are allies. With the two of them, we will never see the end of Ferdinand's regime.

SUPPORTER 1 (to  
SERVILLANO)

You're our only hope. You can't let us down.

SUPPORTER 2

You don't want to see our country fall into the hands of that woman, do you?

SERVILLANO reflects.

SERVILLANO

I don't even have a passport.

SUPPORTER 3

We'll take care of that.

SERVILLANO

What about my safety?

SUPPORTER 2

You're in good hands. We have organized a huge welcome for you. You're a hero now. You left as Servillano, the man. You're going back as Servillano, the national hero. Like Jose Rizal.

SERVILLANO

He was shot.

SUPPORTER 3

They're waiting for you...the masses, the middle class, and the well-to do. You should see hundreds of protests and demonstrations in the streets of Manila. (Repeats) You're the modern Rizal.

SERVILLANO

I said, he was shot.

SUPPORTER 1

We will protect you.

SERVILLANO

What about my family?

SUPPORTER 3

You have to leave them behind. It will be temporary.

SERVILLANO reflects.

SUPPORTER 1

They will be taken care of. Do not worry.

SERVILLANO

I'm not to worry?

SUPPORTER 2 (firm)

Yes, you're not to worry, at all.

SERVILLANO

When do I leave?

SUPPORTER 2

We'll keep in touch. We'll give you the details before you leave.

THEY shake hands.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 5. A bedroom in a suburban house in Newton, Boston. SERVILLANO and his wife, MARIA are both busy packing his clothes in a huge suitcase. They both look anxious.

SERVILLANO

The fucking bitch! She made a fool of me.

MARIA

Don't curse.

SERVILLANO

That's the least I can do, considering...

MARIA

You shouldn't have trusted her.

SERVILLANO

Who else can help me with my passport?

MARIA

She kept your visa. How can you get your passport now? And she already fooled you once, remember?

SERVILLANO

It's different this time. I'm wiser and I've got connections.

MARIA

Who?

SERVILLANO

A few friends...and someone in the Philippine embassy.

MARIA

Go on. I'm listening.

SERVILLANO

He helped me get a fake passport.

MARIA (making the sign of the cross)

Fake? Good God, that will get you into trouble.

SERVILLANO

Now, now. We can't have our Catholic scruples get in the way of liberating a country, can we?

MARIA

But how will you get away with it?

SERVILLANO

I got a new name.

MARIA

Jesus, who are you now?

SERVILLANO

Marcial Bonifacio.

MARIA

Who's that?

SERVILLANO

Nobody.

MARIA

You have a passport of a man who doesn't exist?

SERVILLANO

Well, he does now. Exist, I mean. And that's me. Okay, let me tell you what my name means. Marcial for martial law and Bonifacio after our great hero. What do you think?

MARIA

I think that name will be the death of you. This is crazy. (Sits down wearily) Why can't you be like everybody else? Why can't you just be a father to your children? Think of your children. They grew up without you. This is your chance to make up for your long absence. Please, please stay.

SERVILLANO

We've talked about this. There's no turning back. Don't worry, Mahal. I took all the necessary precautions.

MARIA

What precautions?

SERVILLANO

I contacted my sister Lupita. Her husband has connections with the international media.

MARIA

So?

SERVILLANO (proud)

I'll be escorted by journalists around the world.

MARIA

I don't think that will stop Ferdinand and Remedios from...

SERVILLANO

I think Ferdinand is smart enough for that. He won't do it. At least, not before the entire world.

MARIA

I doubt if they'd even let you step on Philippine soil.

SERVILLANO

The crowd will protect me.

MARIA

What crowd? You've been out of public eye for three years.

SERVILLANO

Where's your faith? The Lord has taken care of us this far. He can't let us down this time.

SILENCE

MARIA (realizes something)

What if...(gasps)

SERVILLANO

Now, what?

MARIA

What if Remedios?

SERVILLANO

No way. You're forgetting Ferdinand may be sick, but his mind is still on top of things.

MARIA (getting emotional)

What if...and this is just one chance in a million... he's out of the country having surgery. I heard his long absences can only mean one thing... he's not in control. (Gets more hysterical) What if Remedios decides to take matters into her own hands? What if...Dios ko! What if her brother Kikoy and my cousin Sojuangco...

SERVILLANO

Calm down. Take it easy. (Takes her into his arms) Why this sad prediction? And since when did you learn about conspiracies.

MARIA

Since my osmosis.

SERVILLANO

Huh?

MARIA

What do you think I was doing when I was playing host to your guest? I listened. I absorbed what I heard. I should have a Ph.D in Political Science by now.

SERVILLANO (amused)

Good girl!

MARIA

And I don't have to be an intellectual to speculate On what she will do. It only takes common sense.

SERVILLANO

Look, who gave me the passport so I could have my bypass surgery? Why are we here? Who made it possible for all of us to be in America?

MARIA

She did it because she wanted you, us, out of the country. She also wanted you to realize how

powerful she is.

SERVILLANO

You're overestimating her power.

MARIA

And, you're underestimating hers.

SERVILLANO

Wow, your resolve surprises me. (With irony)  
You should be the president of the Philippines.

MARIA

You're kidding me, right?

SERVILLANO

Why not? After all, you're the better half of me.

MARIA

You're not yet the president so a little humility  
is in order here. (Pause)I don't want to be president!

SERVILLANO

Never say, "Never".

MARIA (misty eyed)

I don't feel good about this. When will we see  
you again? This is such a long prison sentence.

SERVILLANO

Please, don't. You're making me weak.

MARIA

You don't have to save the country. Just try  
to save us, your family.

SERVILLANO

I've been waiting for this, all my life. If I don't go  
now, everything would have gone to waste.  
Seven years in prison. All those campaigns  
and meetings. How many handshakes have  
you made ? How many cups of coffee have  
you prepared? Think of the humiliation you  
underwent...being inspected from head to foot  
everytime you visited me in prison. And our  
daughter, Iris, forced to keep secret messages

in her underwear. Don't you see, all those years,  
we were being prepared...for this!

SILENCE

MARIA

You're just like him.

SERVILLANO

Who?

MARIA

That man in Malacanang.

SERVILLANO

You mean, Ferdinand? No way!

MARIA

You both want to be at the top. To be number one.  
To be president of the country. You both desire power.

SERVILLANO (angry)

You're comparing me to him? Think again.  
He has ravaged the land...stolen the wealth  
of our people and dragged millions of our people  
into abject poverty. He's responsible for the  
suffering of generations to come. He has driven  
people away from our country to seek jobs elsewhere,  
sometimes, under the most horrifying conditions.  
How many coffins come back every month bearing dead  
bodies of murdered overseas workers? Count, count  
the number of young activists who have been salvaged  
under his military rule. (Pause) His regime is worse  
than the Holocaust!

MARIA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. (Pause)  
I...I have to take my valium.

MARIA exits. SERVILLANO is left alone. He takes the family picture on  
top of the dresser, looks at it and puts it inside his luggage. He sobs  
quietly. When MARIA enters, he wipes off his tears and pretends to  
continue with his packing.

MARIA (trying to be cheerful)

I'm back!

SERVILLANO

You know you're right...up to a point.

MARIA

I don't want to talk about it anymore.

SERVILLANO

I was ambitious like him. But that was before. Now, I've changed. Those years in prison have taught me there's something more important than one's ambition. Love for one's fellowmen. Christ said, "And the greatest of this is charity." Sure, I've been very blessed. It's time to give back. How could I miss something so simple...so basic?

MARIA

You're such a complicated man, Servillano.

SERVILLANO

Would you have married me if I were not?

MARIA

No. (Closing the luggage) There. Everything's ready. (Pause) When will I hear from you?

SERVILLANO

I'll call you.

MARIA

When?

SERVILLANO

I don't know.

MARIA

You don't know? Come on, I need a better answer than that.

SERVILLANO

They haven't told me everything. Right now, I'm following orders as they come. Right now, all I know is, I'm not going straight to the Philippines.

MARIA

One never gets used to this kind of situation...

but, I'll wait.

SERVILLANO

Promise me one thing.

MARIA

What?

SERVILLANO

Don't ever let the kids see you cry. It's a sign of weakness.

MARIA

I try.

SERVILLANO

And start packing as soon as I leave. You and the kids might have to follow me sooner than expected. Take only what's necessary.

MARIA tries hard to stifle her tears.

SERVILLANO

You know what my greatest regret in life is?

MARIA looks at him quizzically.

SERVILLANO

I didn't give you enough happiness. My political life gave you so much pain and suffering.

MARIA

I wouldn't have it otherwise. (Repeats) Like you, I was being prepared for this.

THEY hug.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 6. The conference room in Malacanang. REMEDIOS comes in followed by SERVILLANO, and General FABIAN. REMEDIOS is a mess while SERVILLANO looks visibly agitated.

REMEDIOS

I can't believe they did to us. A bunch of stupid activists! Don't they know what my husband did

for them? What (emphasizes) I did for them?  
If not for me, this country is nothing. I was the one  
who put this country on the map.

FABIAN is preoccupied with taking care of SERVILLANO who is  
too  
tired to stand. The assault of the protestors obviously had a terrible  
effect on him. FABIAN gives him a glass of water.

REMEDIOS (angry, turns to FABIAN)  
You did not protect me.

FABIAN  
Huh?

REMEDIOS  
You didn't take care of me. I was attacked by bottles,  
sticks and placards but you did nothing.

FABIAN  
Ma'am, security did the best they could. I did the best...

REMEDIOS  
...for the President. You pushed the president into  
the car for safety. But nobody helped...

FABIAN (stutters)  
The men...the security...were ah, reluctant to...er..  
touch you.

REMEDIOS  
You mean, they'd rather see me dead? Good thing  
the President grabbed me into the car. If not for him...

FERDINAND (cuts)  
We need a plan...

REMEDIOS  
If you ask me...

FERDINAND  
Nobody did, so will you shut up?

FABIAN  
The first thing you do, Apo, is to put to jail whoever  
was behind the demonstration.

FABIAN whispers the name to FERDINAND, not REMEDIOS who is fuming mad. FABIAN shows her beneath the president.

FERDINAND

Him again? Damn that student. To think I made him one of the outstanding young men last year. He should be expelled from the university.

REMEDIOS (demanding)

Who is he?

FERDINAND (evades)

Me I'll take care of him.

REMEDIOS about to insist...

FERDINAND

I said I'll take care of him. We can't afford one more sloppy job. (Turns to REMEDIOS) Know your place, woman.

REMEDIOS

I'll know it sooner or later, anyway.

FERDINAND (ignores)

We need to focus on a plan. (To FABIAN) Give me an assessment of the situation.

FABIAN

We're facing a bigger problem. What happened today is nothing compared to Servillano's arrival. He's on his way here...

REMEDIOS

When? When is he expected to arrive?

FABIAN

I'm not sure. The last time I heard, he took off from Logan Airport. Intelligence report says he's entering Manila through Taiwan...in a week's time or so.

REMEDIOS

Goodness, gracious. Are you sure he's on a plane, not a ship? That's such a long time to travel.

FABIAN

He's not going straight to Taiwan. He's taking side trips to China, Singapore and Malaysia.

REMEDIOS

What for? Who does he think he is? A tourist?

FABIAN

He plans to gather support from other Asian leaders.

REMEDIOS (shrill)

FERDI, we have a problem. What will you do?

FERDINAND

We have no time to waste. Once his plane lands in Taiwan, we're good. We share airspace with that country. Have his plane put under surveillance. Put our two best planes in Taiwan, and have his plane escorted.

FABIAN

They're planning a big welcome for him.

FERDINAND

They?

FABIAN

Farmers and peasants from all over Luzon. I heard the organizers will bring them in buses to meet him in the airport. Not only that. They'd be bringing yellow ribbons to encourage other people along the wayside to join the crowd. It's going to be (clears throat) massive.

FERDINAND

These organizers, are they involved in the recent bombings in Manila?

FABIAN

Yes, Apo. They're the rich Filipino businessmen based in California. They finance the local bombings to disrupt the peace and order in this country.

FERDINAND

Get the names of the members. Confiscate their passports.

REMEDIOS

Don't allow any of them to enter the country. If one dares to come, you take care of them.

FERDINAND

Yes, Apo...ma'am.

REMEDIOS (to FERDINAND)

Now we're on the same page.

FERDINAND

Right.

REMEDIOS

What about Servillano? What do you plan to do with him?

SERVILLANO does not respond.

REMEDIOS

You're not going to let his plane land in (emphasizes) our airport, are you? You're not going to allow him to enter (emphasizes) our country, right?

FERDINAND

I will, under certain conditions.

REMEDIOS

You're courting disaster.

FERDINAND

It wouldn't look good, especially to the international community. It looks like we're afraid of him.

REMEDIOS

But we're not. Ferdi, it's too dangerous to have him back here. Don't even let them land the plane.

FERDINAND

I'd say, make everything look normal. He doesn't need all this attention...not from the government, at least.

FABIAN

Apo, if you don't mind my saying so, I think

Ma'am is right.

REMEDIOS

Ferdi, I beg of you, order his plane to go back to Taiwan. The huge welcome, that's only the beginning. Once he's here, he will run for office. Then he wins. Oh, please, get rid of that son of a bitch!

FERDINAND

He's not running for office. I'll see to it, he doesn't.

REMEDIOS is pacified.

FABIAN

I have security around the airport. I have a thousand men to...

FERDINAND

Put him under heavy guard and bring him to his cell. Keep him there until I know what to do with him.

FABIAN

Apo, we can create a scenario...

FERDINAND

No! If anything happens to him, people will suspect us. And it will only incite more anger. (Looks at REMEDIOS and FABIAN) Nobody touches him until I can negotiate some arrangement with him.

MARCOS

I have to think this through. I'll be in my room.

HE stops before opening the door. Reflects.

FERDINAND (to FABIAN)

By the way, I want you to take care of this problem.

FABIAN

Me? I thought.

FERDINAND

You heard what I said. Take care of this problem. Do what you have to do.

FABIAN (confused with this mixed message)  
But, Apo, didn't you say you have to think this out?

FERDINAND  
I have. Use your discretion. I give you full responsibility.

FABIAN  
Me? Full responsibility? But Apo, you're the president!

FERDINAND  
When the plane lands, it's your call.

FABIAN  
I need orders from you. It has to be official.  
If something happens to that man in the airport...

FERDINAND (vague)  
Whoever said something will happen in the airport?

FABIAN  
Didn't you just say I take total control?

FERDINAND  
Yes.

FABIAN  
Does that mean I can do anything I please?

FERDINAND  
Is it hard to understand what I just said?

REMEDIOS (seeing an opportunity  
to intervene)  
You're not getting it, up to now? Listen.  
The president wants you to take charge  
of the situation in the airport. He is, you  
could say, coming to my way of thinking.

FABIAN (reflects)  
Oh.

FERDINAND  
Good luck to both of you.

EXITS

FABIAN

Is he saying what I think he's saying?

REMEDIOS

What do you think?

FABIAN

I'm not sure, anymore. This is rather confusing.

REMEDIOS

It's simple. He wants you to put your reputation and your life on the line for him.

FABIAN

You mean, my career...my future.

REMEDIOS

Nonsense! Your future is with us. You're as good only as long as we're in power. You know what's at stake. If you mess up this job, think of what you will lose.

FABIAN

Lose?

REMEDIOS

Yes, For one thing, the Philippine Military and Veterans Bank. We made you chairman of that, remember? Then there's...

FABIAN (cuts)

Okay, if I decide...

REMEDIOS

You don't. We decide for you.

FABIAN

If I decide to decide, will you help me?

REMEDIOS

Of course.

FABIAN

Thank you.

REMEDIOS

Don't worry, it's going to be fast.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT 2

SCENE 8. A secluded place in Tagaytay where two cars are parked side by side. An American steps out of one car and joins VER in another car.

FABIAN (guarded)

What's on your mind?

AGENT

Oh, just to see you. It's been sometime since last...

FABIAN

You asked me to meet you here just to "see me"?  
Come on, what's on your mind?

AGENT

Something in the air is not right, and I wonder  
if you could set it right.

FABIAN

If you tell me what's really on your mind, perhaps  
we can start this conversation.

AGENT

How are things in the palace?

FABIAN

Why how are things supposed to be in the palace?

AGENT

I like this. You answering my question with a question.

FABIAN

How can I answer you when I'm not even sure  
what the question is. Things in the palace? You  
can be more specific than that.

AGENT

We're hearing things, like for instance, who's  
in control now?

FABIAN

What kind of a question is that?

AGENT

We hear Madam is the...

FABIAN

Bullshit! I've been hearing that rumor. (Loud)  
It's not true!

AGENT

We hear otherwise.

FABIAN

Do you have proof? Any goddamn proof?

AGENT

Want something to drink...you know, for the nerves.

GETS a glass of wine from the bar.

AGENT (continues)

She who holds the purse, holds the power.  
She's got it and spends it abroad. You know,  
Gen...you don't mind if I call you, GEN...  
it's not good for rumors like this to get out  
of this country. Especially if it reaches America.  
You know why, I'm sure.

FABIAN

I'm a general, not a treasurer.

AGENT

Oh, but these things are related. Some lady  
spends millions in Harrod's and Tiffany's,  
America is going to wonder, "What the heck  
is she doing with our money?" And people here  
are also going to get mad. You know why?  
It's also their money.

SILENCE

FABIAN

What's on your mind?

AGENT

There you go again, answering a question with a question. (Pause) Okay, here's what's on my mind. We think the president is not in control, anymore. And we're not happy with who's running the show here.

FABIAN

So?

AGENT

So we think YOU should run the show.

FABIAN (incredulous)

Me? You must be kidding.

AGENT

It's not a bad idea. It has its...possibilities.

FABIAN

No way.

AGENT

Why not?

FABIAN

Because, no matter what you think, it's still the president who's pretty much in command. That woman...er, madam is just given enough power to amuse her. Like shopping, for instance. Or being governor. You know, the housekeeping part of governance. But real decision-making power, that's the president's territory. She's not real politik.

AGENT

You forgot what I just said. Shopping and the anger of the people. They're connected. We can't read in the papers that she shops for buildings in New York and these poor people, your people, have nothing on their table. That's pretty serious stuff, don't you think? We can't raise the level of that anger, do we? Because if that anger gets unchecked, there will be a revolution. We don't want that...no, no... we don't!

FABIAN

What do you want me to do?

AGENT

Now you're talking.

FABIAN

What do you want...

AGENT

We want you to stage a coup. A military coup.

SILENCE

AGENT

I'll say it again...

FABIAN

I heard you the first time.

AGENT

So?

FABIAN

I can't do it.

AGENT

You mean, you won't do it.

FABIAN

Both. I mean, both.

AGENT

Why?

FABIAN

It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

AGENT

Not to me.

FABIAN

Let me spell it out for you, then. Reason number 1, the president himself. Reason number 2, the Secretary of Defense and the Military Chief of Staff. And reason number 3, me.

AGENT

Now that you have those numbers up, explain.

FABIAN

I will, if you say it nicely.

AGENT

Will you please...

FABIAN

The president, as I said...

AGENT

...is still in control.

FABIAN

Ramos and Enrile are also in the right place, right now. They're doing their job well and the president is happy with that. He has their confidence and loyalty.

AGENT (like "I don't think so")

Hmmmm...

FABIAN

And reason number 3, I can't betray my president. We go a long way.

AGENT

Okay, I got you. Now let me tell you why I don't believe anything you said is true.

FABIAN

I don't blame you. In the business you're in, nothing is true.

AGENT

A source told me, the president is sick. His life is threatened by the very air he breathes. The germs in the air are fatal to his health. Now, how sick is that? In the condition he's in, how can he serve his country or his people? And for reason number 3, I give you the benefit of the doubt.

SILENCE

FABIAN

What about reason number 2?

AGENT

That's when this business turns ugly.

FABIAN

Ugly?

AGENT

Yes.

FABIAN (eager)

Why?

AGENT

Because...

FABIAN

Because what?

AGENT

Because if you're not with us, they will plan a coup.

FABIAN

I doubt it. I doubt it very much.

AGENT

Oh, yeh?

FABIAN

America will not support them.

AGENT

How sure are you?

FABIAN

The president has the silver bullet. As long as he has it, he's safe. I'm safe.

AGENT

By silver bullet, you mean, the support of OUR president? I won't count on that.

FABIAN

Why not?

SILENCE

AGENT

If I were you, I'd consider my offer before it's too late.

FABIAN

The answer is still no.

AGENT

So let me put it bluntly, how about money?

FABIAN

You just said it. I'm satisfied with the power Apo is giving me.

AGENT

I mean money, not power.

FABIAN

Oh, but my dear boy. (Repeats) These two are connected. With power comes money. No, thanks. Now if you'll excuse me.

AGENT

You'll regret this.

FABIAN

I hope not.

AGENT

Well good day to you... (sarcastic) general.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 9. An entertaining political mime, which is anti-government and anti-American is performed by activists. The entertainment is an example of "agit-prop."

SCENE 10. Camp David. Midnight. FRANCES, the First Lady of the United States roused from her sleep by a bad dream, stares at the ceiling. WILSON, the President of America, in his pajamas and robe enters. He looks worried.

FRANCES

Is there a problem?

WILSON

Yes. FERDI and REMY...

FRANCES (cuts)

Jesus, they've not been assassinated, have they?

WILSON

No, no.

FRANCES

Thank God. What's the problem, then? Must be that serious for White House to call you this late.

WILSON

There's an emergency meeting. Gotta go.  
(Takes off robe)

FRANCES

Right now?

WILSON

It's urgent.

FRANCES

Wait. We've got to talk about it first. Process it together, you know.

WILSON

But...

FRANCES

No buts, about it, darling. I've got to protect you from your staff. They don't care about you. All they think is how they'll get the limelight away from you. And I don't trust them, especially that Donald Regan.

WILSON

Now, now, Mommie. It's not good to get excited.

FRANCES

I worry about you, Ronnie. You've got to be careful especially with your image in the world.

WILSON (kisses her on the forehead)

I better hurry before they blow up the place.

FRANCES

What!

WILSON

The people are storming the palace.

FRANCES

How can this be? We were just there last year.  
Was it last year?

WILSON

Listen. They're both in danger. I've got to do everything to save them. But honestly, I haven't a clue how to go about it. I'm caught in the crossfire...between the Ferdi and those liberals!

FRANCES

But, Wilson, darling, you're the president of the United States.

WILSON

You know what that means? I'm accountable to the Congress, the Senate, the State Department and ...

FRANCES (repeats)

To me. (Smiles) It's not going to destroy your image, is it?

WILSON shakes his head.

FRANCES

What exactly do they want you to do?

WILSON

Cut the military aid. Leave them to the lions.  
Oh, a lot of things.

FRANCES

But, Ronnie, why make such a fuss over a small, small country?

WILSON

Small, yes. BUT we have two American bases

there. And Mommie, you know how I feel about the communists... the bastards.

FRANCES

I know, I know how you feel. But we can't abandon the Ferdi and Remy. They're our friends!

WILSON

I have no option left. I've already sent two investigation teams to see how Ferdi is doing.

FRANCES

And?

WILSON

The reports have not been optimistic, I'm afraid.

FRANCES

Oh, Ronnie. Why does it have to be now?

WILSON

It's never the right time. If there's one thing I learned as president...

FRANCES

She just sent me two beautiful red gowns which must have cost a fortune.

WILSON

Huh?

FRANCES

Remedios. You know how generous she is.

WILSON (annoyed)

What are we talking about here? A country is about to fall and you're talking about a red gown?

FRANCES

Wilson, you're in a bad mood. That's not good aura.

WILSON

I'm sorry, Mommie. (Kisses her on the forehead)  
You think I like doing this to them? They're my friends, too.

FRANCES

Try the delaying tactic. You did that last time, when Ferdi was accused of vote buying. You deflected the controversy by saying there was fraud on both sides.

WILSON

I was criticized for supporting a dictator.

FRANCES

Who? Who said that?

WILSON

The wife, no less.

FRANCES

The naïve, inexperienced housewife?

WILSON

Not anymore. She might be the next president, if she hasn't been sworn in yet. Things are happening fast out there.

FRANCES

How did she get to be so smart? Well, what do you know?

AIDE enters.

AIDE

A call for you, sir. From the Philippines. It's ...

WILSON

I know. I know.

AIDE

Are you taking the call, sir?

SILENCE

WILSON

No. Tell him I'm in a conference.

AIDE

He left a message, sir.

WILSON looks at him quizzically.

AIDE

He's asking you what he should do now. He says it's emergency.

WILSON

I'll take care of this. You can go now.

AIDE

Yes, sir. (to Frances) Good night, ma'am.

EXITS.

FRANCES

Hold on for a little while. Think of something. We can't throw our friends to the dogs!

WILSON

If I delay this further, I'll be accused of protecting a dictator, not only of supporting one. And that's not good... to my image. You know what I mean?

FRANCES (concerned)

But if they're driven from the palace, where would they go?

WILSON

I have no idea.

FRANCES

Why don't you invite them here? They can seek asylum in America.

WILSON

I have to ask them first. They might want to go elsewhere.

FRANCES

I think it's a good idea. Having them here, I mean.

WILSON

Let's see what happens. (Kisses her on the cheek)  
Don't wait for me. I'm in for a long haul.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 11. REMEDIOS watches the funeral of SERVILLANO on television. The sight of the massive crowd attending the funeral depresses her. A knock is heard.

REMEDIOS (turning off tv)

Come in.

Enter FABIAN, in his military uniform. Seeing the windows open, he immediately closes them.

REMEDIOS (strident)

What does this mean? Explain to me why this is happening!

SHOUTS of "Makibaka! Huwag matakot! Down with dictatorship!" are heard from demonstrators.

FABIAN (closes the window)

Ma'am, don't let the air in. We can't have germs get inside the palace. You know how susceptible the president is to germs.

REMEDIOS

Damn that Pasig River. We had this palace insulated, but that river keeps the smell in.

FABIAN

Don't worry, Ma'am. Everything's under control... for now.

REMEDIOS

For now? What do you mean?

FABIAN

I had men deployed at the gates.

REMEDIOS

I need a better answer than that. Where are the guns? The planes? What about the weapons the Americans gave us? Where are they?

FABIAN

It's too early for that.

REMEDIOS

Too early? The enemies are at the gates!

FABIAN

We can't put the country into an alarm mode,  
Ma'am. Not yet.

REMEDIOS

You mean, you want us dead before they fire  
the first shot? Jesus, where are your balls?

FABIAN

Ma'am...

REMEDIOS

You were trained abroad by the Secret Service.  
Do your job.

FABIAN

We have to take things slowly. Carefully. I mean,  
after the fiasco last time.

LONG silence.

REMEDIOS (reflects)

Where did we go wrong? The plan was perfect.

FABIAN

One of the journalists followed the military escorts  
and saw one of the three soldiers shoot Servillano.  
He saw everything, Ma'am.

REMEDIOS

In the first place, how did the journalist get onto  
the tarmac?

FABIAN does not answer.

REMEDIOS

Clumsy, clumsy job. Now the whole world  
knows about it.

FABIAN

Sir said...

REMEDIOS

Shut up! Sir this, sir that. Can't you see he's

too sick to run this country? Can't you smell  
his rotting flesh from here?

FABIAN (shocked)

Ma'am!

REMEDIOS

I'm sorry. I forgot you're like a brother to him.  
(Pause) Keep those bastards away from the gates.  
Put them in prison. Shoot them. Pulverize them.  
Anything! The ungrateful wretch. I gave them  
the Heart Center. The Kidney Center. I built a hospital  
for each of their fucking body parts!

FABIAN

I'll see to it that your family safe. I'll take care...

REMEDIOS

I don't need "taking care". I need some quiet  
so I can sleep. Oh, God, I really need to sleep.

FABIAN

May I make a suggestion?

REMEDIOS

What?

FABIAN

You should all sleep in the master bedroom.

REMEDIOS

All together in his bedroom? Like, bunker style?  
What are we? Hitler's people?

FABIAN (ignores)

Bring all your valuable things with you. Ah, some  
of them at least, not all. (Pause) I have to go,  
Ma'am, to see how Apo is doing.

REMEDIOS waves him away. As soon as the door is closed,  
she  
begins to gather her things.

SCENE 12. Sound of a helicopter is heard. FERDINAND, rushes  
to  
the door.

FERDINAND



Guard! Guard!

FABIAN enters.

FERDINAND

Oh, it's you. What's that noise?

FABIAN

An American helicopter circling the palace.

FERDINAND

Fucking vultures! I'm not even dead yet.

FABIAN

Apo, I'm here so ask your permission to use air power to fight the rebels at the gates.

FERDINAND

It's too early yet.

FABIAN

But the enemy is gaining strength. That helicopter you heard a while ago? That's for you and your family.

FERDINAND

Impossible. America is on my side.

FABIAN

Precisely. That's why they're sending a helicopter to transport you to...

FERDINAND

I'm not leaving. This palace is mine and I'm not surrendering it to these stupid, misguided activists. (Pause) I have American friends in high places. They won't let me down. Haig. Kissinger. And how about Wilson and Frances?

FABIAN

Apo, we can't depend on them. We've got to use military power. We've got to strike back. Please let me use our tanks, artillery, everything we've got.

FERDINAND

We can't!

FABIAN

Can't?

FERDINAND

And we shouldn't.

FABIAN

I had a hard time explaining to Ma'am why we're not responding the way we should. I don't understand...

FERDINAND

I promised.

FABIAN

Promised whom?

FERDINAND

The Americans. They made me promise I wouldn't use force.

SOUNDS of helicopters.

FERDINAND

Are you hearing what I'm hearing?

FABIAN

We have to act fast, Apo. The Philippines Air Force is on the side of the rebels. The 15<sup>th</sup> Strike Wing from Cavite. And the 5<sup>th</sup> Wing Division of Basa Air Base.

FERDINAND

My American friends can eliminate them in seconds.

FABIAN

I wouldn't count on that. Basa Air Base is next to Clark and Subic. If your American friends haven't stopped them by now, why would you expect them to help us now?

FERDINAND

You see that red phone. It's a hotline straight to the President of the United States. I can call him anytime. In fact, I just did. And right now, I'm waiting for him to return my call.

SUDDENLY, we hear the sound of a rocket attacking another part of the palace. FERDINAND looks pale and shaken.

FABIAN  
Are you alright, Apo?

FERDINAND nods.

FABIAN  
I'll see what's going on.

EXITS. The red phone rings. FERDINAND picks it up frantically.

FERDINAND  
Wilson? Oh, it's you, Senator Laxalt. Uhhuh.  
He must be very busy. Yes, go on. I'm listening.  
(Silence) Yes, I'm still here. (Pause) Please tell  
him I'm disappointed. Very, very disappointed.  
(Puts down phone. Sobs quietly.)

Enter FABIAN.

FABIAN  
Everything's under control. But we have to act fast,  
NOW. (Notices FERDINAND) Apo, what did they  
say?

FERDINAND  
They've abandoned us. They're getting rid  
of me after what I did for them.

FABIAN  
We didn't see this coming, huh?

FERDINAND  
NO, we didn't.

FABIAN  
I don't believe they could do this to you.

FERDINAND  
I gave in to everything they wanted.

FABIAN (diverts)  
What about your security? Did they say something  
about that?

FERDINAND nods.

FABIAN

Are they sending tanks? Bombers?

FERDINAND

Helicopters.

FABIAN

What?!

FERDINAND

Three lousy helicopters. To take us out of the palace.

FABIAN

What about me? Did they say about getting me into a helicopter, too?

FERDINAND shakes his head.

FABIAN

Apo, don't desert me. I'm not safe here. Take me with you.

FERDINAND

I'll call a friend in Fort Bragg. I'll see to it they can spare one more helicopter for you.

FABIAN

Thank you. Thank you, Apo. In the meantime, let's get out of here!

FERDINAND

They'll send me to God knows where. Like a common criminal. How will history judge me? (Realizes)  
I remember someone saying exactly the same thing, many years ago. It was an encounter. A memorable encounter.

LIGHTS dim. LIGHTS UP on a prison cell in Manila. Prisoner SERVILLANO is asleep on his bed. He is awakened by the entrance of a guard who turns on the light, inspects what's underneath the mattress, and checks a book or two on a small shelf. SERVILLANO, rubbing his eyes, sits up. He is naked from waist up because of the hot tropical weather.

SERVILLANO (covering his eyes against  
the  
the harsh glare of the light)

What's going on?

THE GUARD gives SERVILLANO'S cell one last look and exits.

SERVILLANO

Hey! Don't you even have the decency to tell me  
what's going on? Hey! (Under his breath)  
Son of a bitch!

SOUNDS of approaching steps are heard. The cell door opens.  
FERDINAND enters. He wears dark glasses and a cap for  
camouflage.  
He surveys the cell, his face shows dismay.

SERVILLANO (recognizes visitor)

Why are you here? What do you want from me?

FERDINAND (imperious)

Is that the way to greet the President?

SERVILLANO

I don't care who you are. You could be a dogcatcher  
for all I care!

FERDINAND is about to hit him, but decides not to.

FERDINAND

I can see prison has done you no good.

SERVILLANO

You can say that again.

FERDINAND

You should really stop this.

SERVILLANO

I should be saying those very words to you.  
STOP THIS NOW.

FERDINAND (conciliatory)

Let's both do ourselves a favor. Just say "yes" and  
everything will be fine.

SERVILLANO

NO.

FERDINAND

You're causing me a lot of trouble, do you know that?  
(Wags his finger)Naughty, naughty boy.

SERVILLANO turns his face away from FERDINAND.

FERDINAND

I have sent three, let me repeat, three delegations  
to convince you to sign these papers.

SERVILLANO

I will not sign a document forcing me to retract  
what I said about your administration.

FERDINAND paces back and forth. Sees a cockroach and steps on  
it.

FERDINAND

I've been lenient with you. You have better accommodations  
than the other prisoners.

SERVILLANO

It's still a prison, and the window is still small.

FERDINAND

Your family has visitation privileges.

SERVILLANO

And surveillance cameras that monitor what's  
going on when they do come.

FERDINAND

I was told your wife covers the cameras with  
pillow cases and blankets. I told the guards to  
ignore this... "cover-up".

SERVILLANO (mocking)

Big brother, I appreciate.

FERDINAND

Guard!

THE GUARD appears with a document. FERDINAND grabs it  
and  
puts it on the bed where SERVILLANO is sitting.



FERDINAND (to the guard)  
You may go now.

GUARD exits.

FERDINAND (sarcastic)  
If you read it, you might be willing to sign it.  
I've made some revisions to suit your taste.  
Come on, read it.

SERVILLANO refuses to budge. FERDINAND gets back the document.

FERDINAND  
It's not only a retraction, but a pledge that  
you will stop all subversive activities. You know  
what that means, right? No protests, No  
demonstrations. No secret meetings.

SERVILLANO  
It's no use, I won't sign it.

FERDINAND  
Perhaps, if you know what I will give you in return,  
you might have a change of heart.

SERVILLANO  
Try me.

FERDINAND  
In exchange, I will release you. You'd be a free man.

SERVILLANO  
Just like that, huh? You really think I believe you  
will set me free with a mere signature?

FERDINAND  
Actually, there's a fine print somewhere that says...

SERVILLANO  
I knew it!

FERDINAND  
That if I release you, you will never run for office...  
against me. (Pause) You see, I just want you to be  
my friend.

SERVILLANO

Why now? Why are you letting me go after seven years. Seven long years!

FERDINAND

I just told you. I want us to be friends again. Like old times.

SERVILLANO

What old times?

FERDINAND

Upsilon sigma phi. I was your neophyte and you were my master.

SERVILLANO

Old times, my foot. Look what your regime has done to me, under Martial Law.

FERDINAND

I can see you're a very unhappy man.

SERVILLANO (like, "Isn't it obvious?")

Ha!

FERDINAND

Just sign the papers so we can go about our business.

SERVILLANO

Your monkey business. (Pause) Tell me, why now? You could have set me free, say after the hearing, when no real evidence could be presented to justify this incarceration.

FERDINAND (impatient)

Stop yakking and sign this. You know what people call you? The King of Yak. That's what got you into trouble. So if I were you...

SERVILLANO

I know why you want me to sign that damn document. You want to prove to your American friends, you're no dictator. Now's as good as anytime to prove that. I hear attention has been called by the UN and the Amnesty International

about your human rights violations. Let me see. What's in store for you? 10% of 18 billion in US aid. That's a lot of money. Why don't you tell them about the mass killings, the salvaging, and corruption that brings our country to this level of poverty?

FERDINAND

Why, you... (about to attack SERVILLANO)

SERVILLANO (stepping back)

Why don't you tell your American friends about the army trucks that travel at midnight carrying cadavers for mass burials.

FERDINAND (slaps

SERVILLANO)

You're still the arrogant, self-righteous spoiled rich kid from Tarlac. You're nothing but a CIA collaborator.

SERVILLANO

You've no proof.

FERDINAND

Indonesia.

SERVILLANO

I was invited by Sukarno to negotiate peace with the guerrillas, not to work for the CIA. I am an effective negotiator.

FERDINAND (laughs)

You mean the "peace talks" with the communists in your hometown? That was no negotiation. You've been cuddling them for years. Hey you were already on your side when you brought them to the table to talk. You're a fraud.

SERVILLANO

And so are you!

THEY glare at each other.

SERVILLANO (with meaning)

You can't keep the lid on something that stinks and smells. Everybody knows.

FERDINAND

Everybody also knows I was saved by President Quezon. He saw great potential in me.

SERVILLANO

Still, murder is murder! No one has the right to kill any political opponent...even for one's father.

FERDINAND (shoves

SERVILLANO

against the wall)

Why, you...

SERVILLANO coughs violently. FERDINAND lets him go.

FERDINAND

Okay, I will "up" the offer.

SERVILLANO continues to cough.

FERDINAND

You don't have to sign anything. Just go.  
(Destroys the documents.)

HE opens the door and motions SERVILLANO that he is free to go. SERVILLANO hesitates. He apparently considers the proposition.

He stands from his bed, takes a few steps, then stops.

FERDINAND

There's a car waiting for you at the gate.  
It's a silver gray Civic Honda. The man  
at the wheel has the key. Tell him "code blue".  
He knows what to do.

SERVILLANO

Where will that lead me? To my death?

SOUNDS of torture come from other cells.

MARCOS

I want you alive, Servillano. If you die, you achieve martyrdom. I don't want that. Not on my watch. So here's my plan. I will allow you to leave this prison. The next day? The headlines will tell the entire nation you have escaped. Simple, isn't it? I can even facilitate

your travel papers. Where do you want to go?  
Bermuda? Aruba?

SERVILLANO (sarcastic)

What do you take me for? A tourist?

FERDINAND

Okay, how about Boston? You can teach at Harvard.  
Be a lecturer. You'd like that...a job that requires  
talking.

SERVILLANO

Are you aware what it will do to me? To escape?

FERDINAND

Improve your health, for one.

SERVILLANO

It will reduce me to a common criminal.  
For God's sakes, I'm a statesman, not a criminal.  
Everything I've worked for all these years  
will turn to nothing.

FERDINAND (desperate)

Think of what's at stake. Your life. Your future.  
Look, I'll give you anything--- money, lots of it...  
a house, no, a mansion abroad--- just get out  
of this country, I beg you.

SERVILLANO does not respond.

FERDINAND

What about the safety of your family? You're  
not worried about them?

SERVILLANO (suddenly vexed)

My family? What's my family got to do with it?  
Don't you dare involve my family!

FERDINAND

I might not have any choice in such matters.

SERVILLANO

No choice?

FERDINAND

The military junta will meet tomorrow. If they  
Decide to execute you, I would have no choice.  
(Pause) Think of how it will affect your family.

SERVILLANO

You're the real leader of the junta. Those people  
are merely your puppets. I'm not afraid to die.

FERDINAND

Spoken like a real hero.

SERVILLANO

You're setting up your wife to run as president,  
right?

FERDINAND does not respond.

SERVILLANO

My goodness, how can you let that woman  
run for the highest office of the land?

FERDINAND

Under martial law, it's treason to speak against  
the First Lady.

SERVILLANO

If that woman runs, I, too, am running for president.  
I can't in good conscience, allow a nincompoop to  
lead this country to ruin.

FERDINAND

You can't run a campaign from this shithole.

SERVILLANO

But I can.

FERDINAND

With what? Your resources are gone. You  
don't have the funds. It's madness to run!  
I hear your hacienda is in deep trouble.

SERVILLANO picks up something wrapped in brown paper.

SERVILLANO

This. I'm running for election with this. (Shows the bible)

FERDINAND laughs.

FERDINAND

If it only took the Bible for me to win the election  
I would have been a billionaire by now. Think of all  
that money I could have saved.

SERVILLANO

Read this. It might do you good.

FERDINAND

The guards tell me you've read it a hundred times.  
Running for office in heaven?

SERVILLANO opens a page in the Bible. Reads it quietly, ignoring  
FERDINAND.

SERVILLANO (his hand on the Bible)

There's nothing you can threaten me with, anymore.  
Nothing. Not even my family.

FERDINAND

Your partners in crime. Coming to visit you here  
to plot my downfall. How do people outside know  
what's going on here? Your wife gives your letters  
to your friends who circulate them to your sympathizers.  
Maria, she's your conduit. And your daughter Iris,  
she hides these letters in her underwear. That's your  
small revolutionary cell right there.

SERVILLANO

Don't you dare say anything about my family,  
don't you dare!

HE drops the Bible on the floor. Struggles to breathe. Collapses.  
FERDINAND examines the body. Goes to bed to get a pillowcase  
and is about to suffocate SERVILLANO with it when he realizes  
something. He stops.

FERDINAND (to himself)

No, you're better alive to me than dead...now.  
(Shouts) Guard! Guard!

The GUARD enters.

FERDINAND

Get an ambulance. We're taking this prisoner  
to the hospital.

GUARD

Yes, sir!

GUARD exits.

LIGHTS dim on SERVILLANO.

LIGHTS on FERDINAND. Back to present time. Enter  
FABIAN.

FABIAN

We have no time to lose, Apo. I've got to coordinate  
with the pilots so...

FERDINAND

Does it have to be now?

SOUNDS of helicopters can be heard.

FABIAN

You have to go, Apo. Maria...Maria has just been  
sworn in as president.

FERDINAND

What?! How did this happen?

FABIAN

She was sworn in this noon.

FERDINAND

Where?

FABIAN

Wack Wack Club.

FERDINAND

He's still with us, huh? Even when he's dead.  
How do you fight a dead man? A fucking dead  
man? (Pause) MARIA cannot be president.  
(With irony) Why, it's a snap inauguration. There  
was no election. (Turns to FABIAN) I want you to do  
something for me. And make it quick!

FABIAN

Yes?

FERDINAND

Before we leave, I want my inauguration as president to take place.

FABIAN (Like, "What are you talking about?")

Apo, where?

FERDINAND

Here. Where else?

FABIAN

It's dangerous...

FERDINAND

By the balcony. One last ceremony. It will be short.

FABIAN

But...

FERDINAND

I want to leave this country as president. With or without the help of America. Talk to REMEDIOS about the rest of the plans.

FABIAN

Er, Apo... please don't forget about the helicopter for my family.

EXITS

FERDINAND

One helicopter. One fucking helicopter. That's all that's left. My power for one helicopter. Me, the Iron Man of Asia begging a Hollywood B actor. Oh, God, how did it all come to this? My palace destroyed...my body diseased... putrified. My organs fail as my power disappears. My body has betrayed me, like everyone else. Where are all those friends whom I have dined, wined and entertained? My political cronies whose coffers I have filled with gold? No word from them, not a murmur of consolation. What will happen to me? My family? Where do we go?(Pause) Damn it, I did not become president to plead for one fucking helicopter!

SCENE 13. LIGHTS on the AMERICAN AGENT.

AGENT

The perception of the general public, that relied on the rumor mill, is that the assassination of SERVILLANO was plotted by REMEDIOS and FABIAN. That rumor was circulated by word of mouth. Others thought it was a conspiracy, including some important military officers. Another theory states that FERDINAND couldn't have taken part in the death of his arch rival. At the time of SERVILLANO'S death, FERDINAND was out of the country for surgery. Some say, FERDINAND could have initiated a plan long time ago, even before SERVILLANO decided to come back. Who knows whose plan it was? It could be anybody's guess. (Pause) There is also a theory that the CIA was involved. American planes were said to have been deployed to intercept SERVILLANO'S plane. But who knows? Who knows for sure?

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 13. Twenty years earlier. A deserted classroom in the University of the Philippines. We see SERVILLANO and FERDINAND as young students.

SERVILLANO

What's your name?

FERDINAND

Ferdinand.

SERVILLANO

So you're the neophyte assigned to me.

FERDINAND

Yes. (Extends hand to SERVILLANO)

SERVILLANO (stern, refuses  
handshake)

A neophyte does not shake hands with his master.

FERDINAND

I'm sorry, Mister Servillano.

SERVILLANO

Rule number 2, do not call me mister. Call me Master!

FERDINAND

Yes, Master.

SERVILLANO

Next time you forget these rules, I'll have you dropped from the initiation list.

FERDINAND

Yes, master.

SERVILLANO

Okay, here are your duties. (Takes out list) One, you will carry my books when I attend my first class, which is 7:30 in the morning. Meet me in the parking lot. (Pause) You will also be my courier for the entire period of the initiation. You will go the post office to pick up my mail. If I'm in the mood to write a love letter to one of our sorority sisters, I want you to deliver it to her.

FERDINAND

Yes, master.

SERVILLANO

Say "Master Servillano".

FERDINAND

Yes, Master Servillano.

SERVILLANO

I want you to attend my classes, so you can take notes for me. That is, when I'm not in the mood to go to school.

FERDINAND does not answer.

SERVILLANO

What do you say?

FERDINAND

Yes, Master Servillano.

SERVILLANO

One final thing. From now on, you have to take care of me. You hear? TAKE GOOD CARE OF ME.

LIGHTS OUT  
THE END