

I CAME UPON A CAMPUS soaked in green: sharp days in June, the sharpness of wet leaves, of acacia branches riven at the core by lightning, the tang of broken grass.

So fresh, it was unlike the rest of the city on whose eastern fringe it stood. A long broad avenue swept up to its entrance archway, and on both sides of this avenue lay wide stretches of grass and solid foliage in the distance. Even while in high school I had visited this place. One other summer I had watched red horses roaming the perimeter of what I was to learn was the School of Animal Husbandry, on the right of the avenue.

In my second year of college, I ran across that field in a blind panic, hurried along by gunfire. The university was under siege by the military; we had set up barricades of commandeered tables, benches and chairs near the spot from where I had admired the study horses. We camped behind this makeshift wall, students and professors alike, listening to speeches and singing revolutionary songs. Our bones were cold, but our breath was warm. People talked of France and China and Vietnam. On the other side of the barricades stood Marcos's assembled legions: truncheon-wielding riot police in khakis and cobalt-blue helmets, the army in fatigues, riding armored jeeps. All through the morning emissaries had crossed over from one side to the other. Colonels debated academic vice-presidents while we jeered at the sol-

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diers and threw paper grenades across the lines, with messages like "DOG" scribbled on them. I tossed a few of these with the easy conviction of my seventeen; we all felt seventeen.

At exactly five that afternoon someone behind the jeeps gave the order to disperse us. Tear gas canisters exploded in our ranks and we, too, exploded, but in slow, reluctant billows, back down the avenue and into the grass, as the jeeps rolled forward, splintering the furniture, the mock infantry stirring behind them like a many-legged insect rudely awakened, its antennae bristling. We stumbled, we rallied, we scrambled, we came together. I took Nina's hand at the first pop of tear gas, and never let go, until we had cut across the grasses.

We stood in a closet full of cleaning supplies in the Business Administration building until the sirens faded and the air thinned out. We said nothing all the while, suffering the dampness of the mops. When we stepped out, night had fallen, and we found her father in a steaming rage behind a police cordon at the university entranceway.

"That's my daughter!" he yelled at the corporal who was checking our ID's. "She can't be mixed up in this thing, it's all a stupid mistake."

Nina allowed herself to be dragged off to the family car, a powder-blue Mercedes that picked her up at school in the late hours.

"Can I offer you a ride?" she asked me by the door.

Her father pushed her in and shut the door behind her. "No. We're rushing home, your mother's hysterical, and I've been here for the past two hours. Where the hell were you?"

What a stupid thing to do, fighting the army with tables and chairs! You'll not get mixed up with this crowd again, I'll tell you that."

And the car sped away with Nina in the backseat, her head hung low. Two weeks later she was out of the university and in her cousin's place in Baguio, acclimatizing herself to possibilities in Boston, or Louvain, wherever her father thought she would be safe from the revolution. Her father owned a paper mill. If I had married Nina, the streets would have been sandbagged with my prose.

But today Nina works in her family's front office, and has two sons and a daughter by her estranged husband Sammy. I met Sammy in New York once, near Herald Square, his head barely visible above the oversized collar of a new trenchcoat. He was standing on the curb and seemed amazed to see me there, and to realize that I still recognized him.

"Hello, Sammy," I said, "*kumusta na*, how's it going?" He scuffed the sidewalk with a shoe and mumbled something about the years; he tried to count the years and couldn't remember how many had passed. The last time I had seen him was in a theater in Makati, in the audience of a production of "The Music Man." I loved Broadway but Sammy was bored. He whispered constantly to his date, a small bright-eyed woman who appeared just about ready to fling herself onstage, and they left quickly before the lights came on. At one time or another Sammy had done business in labor recruitment, passports and travel, a Singaporean restaurant, and, it was even rumored, gunrunning through his connections in the customs bureau.

NEW EDITION



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**in a
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PLACE**

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