YAMASHITA’S WEDDING

Or

FOUR FILMS AND YAMASHITA’S WEDDING

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PREMISE: The history of how Manila was almost saved by Godis Withus Go, the professional filmmaker and accomplished liar, and how Yamashita’s wedding was put on celluloid because eventually, the truth always finds its way to film.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

FADE IN

My name comes from the English phrase, “God is with us.” It is spoken using my mom’s raw Bisaya accent and is therefore pronounced as “gu-dees wi-tus”. She was religious when she was fifteen; now, not so much. But the Japanese soldier I am dealing with wouldn’t care anything about that.

I’m a filmmaker in Manila, or I was, before the Japanese showed up. There has been a long drought but if I can run a film crew, with each member a genius (and some of them two geniuses in their single body), then I can survive this pesky Japanese occupation. Eventually, we will extricate the occupiers from our
humble islands. Never mind that I’ve never really been more than twenty km outside of the city, but I’m feeling now that maybe at last I can help the fellows up in the mountains.

It isn’t going well. This Japanese soldier is polite enough—they are always polite—but I am losing him. The Americans will be here long before this Japanese fellow will pay me a single yen.

“It’s a fantastic story,” I say. “There’s this actor—Humphrey Bogart, he will be amazing in it. It’s a part he will be interested in. You know who Humphrey Bogart is?”

Of course, he knows Bogart. A little ground regained. Bogart is what always gets them, they have no idea he is under contract.

“Go on,” he says.

“There’s this man,” I move on but he interrupts, which is fine, it’s his story.

“He’s an aristocrat by birth but fallen on hard times. He’s begging in the street,” the Jap soldier says.

“That’s good,” I say thoughtfully. “Americans like that.”

“And one day he’s sitting outside the temple...”

“Churches. The Americans call them churches,” I correct him.

“Or maybe a synagogue? Maybe you mean these fellows are Jewish?”

The Jap corporal just gives me the most confused look.

“If you do, that’s perfectly okay. It might even help.”
“I don’t know,” the Nip admits.

“If you wanna sell a script in Hollywood, you gotta get the lingo down. *Hai*?”

“*Hai.* Thank you,” and the soldier/screenwriter makes a note and continues.

“With his hat on the ground and his dog on a bit of string…”

“No dogs. Americans hate dogs,” I just have to warn him. The kid, he is just a kid, makes another note.

“With his hat on the ground, when who should walk up but the American Vice President and the FBI Director. In disguise, of course.”

“Edward G. Robinson and Bob Hope,” I suggest.

“Bob Hope?”

He has no idea who I am talking about so I gesture that the man has a large nose. He is still lost. I should have chosen a better-known actor/comedian.

“*Give Me a Sailor? Road to Singapore*?”

“*Road to Singapore*” seemed to ring a bell with him. But they are so damn polite you never really know if they understand. He smiles stupidly and makes even more notes.

This kid needs some confidence before he pays me. So I tell him. “You skillfully show them in the White House working in the
scene before, so we know it’s them. I like that. Shows real skill.”

“Of course. And they point out that the beggar man bears an uncanny resemblance to the President. Yes, the poor beggar says, he’s my sixteenth cousin four times removed, that’s why I grew the beard because it’s impossible to find work looking like that, but what can a man do?” Don’t get me wrong this Nip doesn’t speak perfect English; they never do. I’m paraphrasing.

“Can’t find work. Now that is a clever line. Very witty. I think you have a career in Hollywood when the war is over. You do need to work on the English, however. I can hardly understand you.”

I never have an hour for a mark (or a client) either one, and so I finish his story quickly for him, “And then the Vice President says, we need you to do a job for us, and you’ll be well paid. And it turns out that the President’s been abducted by spies in the pay of the enemy, who want to start a war, so we need you to pretend to be him, just long enough so that…”

He raises his hand. “Please stop you. Do you think possible?” he says.

Oh well, I thought.

“It’s a great story,” I say. “I agree. It’s a fantastic story. Always has been. It was a great stage play in France with
Napoleon as the subject. It was even better in Russia, with Nicholas abducted.”

“But this would be modern film,” he pointed out.

“I don’t produce stage plays,” I remind him. “But still, it’s one of those stories – well, a bit like this war,” I say with a smile. “Starts off really well a long time ago and just keeps on getting worse and worse, no matter how many times you tell it, up to a point, but after a while…”

Like the five other Japanese soldiers I’ve worked with, he’s lost all pretense of the Japanese winning the war. They are all focused entirely on their lives (in Hollywood) after the war.

“Best of luck with it,” I say, “but I don’t honestly think I can help you; thanks all the same.”

I’ve learned not to make it too easy for them. A few roadblocks and hurdles only make them more hungry.

“I can fix it,” he told me.

“Add a love story? Maybe we can get Myrna Loy?”

He is filled with new enthusiasm and his pen works on his notepad feverishly.

I hesitate. “Occupations are good,”

He hands me a curious look.

“Tell you what. Why don’t you go away and rewrite it with just the occupation, and forget about the other romantic stuff?
Occupation stories are going selling really well right now in Hollywood.”

“No Myrna Loy?”

“Of course. Put a role for her in there. I know someone who knows her secretary.”

“Occupation would be bizarre.” He wanted to resist.

But (I explain to him, when he objects), “What the Americans want is something that looks at first sight like real life, but which actually turns out to be a fairy tale with virtue dominant, evil completely defeated, a positive, uplifting message, a gutsy, kick-ass female lead and, if at all possible, mermaids.”

The Jap guesses, “So we market it as an occupation story and slip the mermaid in secretively?”

I nod and he scribbles feverishly and doesn’t stop to think. I know he won’t think, or maybe not until it is too late. But then I realize throwing in an occupation AND a mermaid will just delay my getting paid.

But, I tell him, this would be a very expensive movie to make and that he would need one of the major studios behind it. They all had their own writers, but there was a way around all that; that I know men that might help in pitching it directly to the studio bosses. That John Wayne is…

“The cowboy?”
... was also a great pitchman and that he supplemented his acting salary by helping friends. I did freely admit to him that I received a cut, but that if anyone could sell the idea, John could do it.

And he suddenly realized what a mermaid actually was.

“A mermaid?”

“Yes; what the Americans want is something that looks new and completely original but is actually the same Greek mythology we’ve all known and loved since we were kids.

“Agreed,” he says.

“The way this is, it’s the same old, same old; after a night or two, the projectionist will start to feel terribly bored. But, add the occupation and the mermaid and you’ll give them what they want. The box office will be huge.”

So finally he gets up to leave and as that happens, I give him a positive, uplifting piece of bullshit about an occupation where virtue triumphs, evil is vanquished and Myrna Loy looks stunning in slinky black leather pants as she kicks German ass from the Bavarian Alps to the North Sea. And that he needs to bring me 20,000 yen, which is John Wayne’s fee, or about $5000 dollars.

What an idiot I am! He’d never come up with that amount of money, not before the end of the war. Unless his father was rich, or he wants to gamble. In all honesty, I tell him even the
silver-tongued cowboy lawyer, John Wayne, isn’t always successful. Who knows; his Japanese Army superiors might get wind of his ambition and end our deal. Or the Americans might show up at any moment.

I tell him he must write a story so the Americans is think the war has been worth it; not bad advice. Righteousness wins, evil utterly bleeds out before the medics can get there (a positive, uplifting message), and he absolutely must have a gutsy, awesome soy-sauce female lead and, if at all possible, an air-breathing mermaid. I have to confess, I’m no scholar; so for all I know, there may be mermaids, in Westerland or somewhere cold like that. So maybe one component of that to-die-for (excuse the pun) list does actually exist in real life. Wouldn’t like to bet the kid gets it done, though.

SCENE 2

The Japanese soldier leaves and I am exiting my office/apartment when the most outstanding thing that could ever happened, did happened! A fully credentialed man (I checked him out) named Paul Delibes, cultural attaché (and an avid collector of antique stamps or just about anything else a person brought him) approaches me.

I am on my way to swing by his embassy with three letters for the States and three for Tokyo, but since he is standing there,
I hand him the six outgoing letters. He smiles as everything is normal. Except...

My Spanish friend hands me a letter. The letter is addressed to me, care of the Spanish Embassy. It has the flashy “V” logo return address, apparently, nothing of a secret, except it is stamped “DIPLOMATIC.” It is from Vanguard Films. And inside it is a letter with the best of all possible news. A life-changing opportunity signed personally by David O. Selznick.

Before the fighting, Spain initially aligned itself with the Axis powers (although officially neutral during rough stuff). However, Japan chose and always used Spain for the representation of Japanese interests in the Latin-American republics. That’s why the letters I hand him for Hollywood, at stamped “DIPLOMATIC” and visit Mexico City before entering the U.S. But the letters he forwards to Tokyo go directly there via airplane.

The imminent victory of the allies in the Pacific Ocean theater had induced a change in the Spanish diplomatic position vis-à-vis Japan and, using as a pretext the massacre of Spanish nationals in the conflict, the former accused the later of deliberate attacks. And currently, some members of the Spanish government suddenly view Japan as being "Anti-Christian" and are debating the idea of a war declaration. But of course, the
Spanish Embassy in Manila is still open and functioning. This Paul fellow will mail anything I ask him to, for a fee.

The letter says Selznick needs a feature “ASAP,” a biopic or action-thriller based on a Filipino resistance leader. Doesn’t say which one. In English and with strong roles for the “Filipina Ginger Rogers” and “an Asiatic Shirly Temple.”

Asiatic? These Manila girls aren’t some sort of flora or fauna? And besides would that even be possible? I mean I have never seen a curly redheaded teen ever. Not ever! But the letter says, and Paul repeats it, that he has the money ($20,000, only it will be paid in Spanish Pesetas). I say I didn’t care and the women I run with don’t care either. And he tells me he will hand it over as soon as he has the script.

I asked Paul if he meant after he’d read the script, or seen the finished film, and found it acceptable. His response made me stand two inches taller, “Mr. Selznick apparently trusts you.”

The money is in a safe inside the embassy.

Selznick’s name is not to be used, his code name will be “Culver City” and I am to hand the letter back over when I’m done reading it. I do hand it back and Paul tears my “keep-sake” into 100 pieces and throws them into the gutter drain. He smiles (at my success) and says to bring the script to the embassy when it is complete. We shake hands like always and he forgets to take payment for the six letters I’ve just handed him.
SCENE 3

I walk over Santa Cruz Bridge into Ermita. The curious thing about this new “Japanese” city, all the parts appear to be in place, but with different names; but really, who cares? I’m talking about the renaming of the Bureau of Posts to the Bureau of Communications. Why, for what purpose? I believe the Japanese occupiers rename everything to show their total arrogant dominance.

I’m sentimental; I polished my skills in and around the Manila Central Post Office. Before the Japanese arrived, I sent three letters per day to Hollywood, via the regular post. I began with honest appeals but slowly it evolved (or as the priest insists “devolved”) into less than honest efforts.

Understand please, I may lie to foreign studio executives daily (excluding Sunday), but I am a good person. Since I am a filmmaker (potentially), I’m choosy about the company I keep, so I tend to stay clear of murderers, muggers, rapists, and extortion gangs.

That leaves me with plenty of friends and not a single one of them makes legal use of the postal system. The confidence men are alright, but they’re smarter than me and don’t limit their adventurism to the Japanese occupiers, so I generally gravitate to forgers and counterfeiters of stamps and currency. First,
it’s good business, and second, you meet a better class of person running in the company of harmless tricksters. Violence just isn’t my style and what are a few paper cuts?

I’m talking about it because I’m walking past it. No one I know uses that building anymore; except for Tokyo, all mail is limited to the Greater Manila area, comprising of – Manila, Caloocan, Makati, Mandaluyong, Parañaque, Pasay, Quezon, and San Juan del Monte. Provincial post offices will probably never reopen until the Japs are driven out, as the situation in most areas aren’t stable.

The Japanese Imperial Forces entered Manila on January 2, 1942. Postal service was temporarily suspended until full instructions were laid down for its reopening. Rules and regulations were formulated and implemented by the new Department of Public Works and Communications.

The postal service was formally reopened at Manila Central Post Office on March 4, 1942. Two stamps and a postal card were issued. Stamps from the Commonwealth were overprinted with two black bars covering the words “Commonwealth of the” and “United States of America.” My friends think these are easier to counterfeit, if you are curious.

This occupation, I’ve sent one-thousand and thirty-eight “DIPLOMATIC” letters to studios and producers in Tokyo. Unfortunately, Tokyo has been more of a water-haul than
Hollywood. So, I have been saying "screw you Japs too," but certainly not to their faces.

No one I know uses the post office; all mail is subject to censorship. And who wants to pitch an idea and see it produced in Tokyo under the name of some Japanese intelligence officer? So, I’m not so desperate to use the Post Office. I use the Spanish Embassy; Paul is very reasonable. He once even accepted a bicycle for his services.

But it is an impressive building. The post office is strategically located where it is because of Daniel Burnham. It is at the foot of Jones Bridge for of two reasons. First, is that the Pasig River which can be used conveniently as an easy route for delivering mail; and secondly, the post office can be accessed from all sides including Quiapo, Binondo, Malate, and Ermita.

When the Americans come, the Japanese will probably burn the building down. Pity. Everyone will miss it; but no great loss for the Japanese. We may lose a nice impressive building but in exchange, the summary executions will be down about onehundred percent once they leave. It’s so much easier to tolerate your enemies if you’re not being bent over to have your head chopped off.
SCENE 4

A respectable professional man like myself has to have a reason for setting foot on Del Pilar Street; not something one can do frivolously, or unless you absolutely have to. I walk down a couple of alleys, with that dreadful twitchy feeling you simply can’t help, like you’re a cat down at the palengke, then I stopped at one of twenty, or so, identical dive bars. I put on my gloves and walk up to the door. The surface of the bar was is filthy, and this woman stands there staring at me.

I wouldn’t put her in a film. I wouldn’t dare. Barroom caricatures and the theater of the grotesque are all very well – a filmmaker’s lifeblood if the truth is told – but there’s such a thing as overdoing it. So, if you want an obnoxious old hag, you go for two or three out of the recognized iconography – furrows for wrinkles, crooked nose, a receding hairline, wispy thin white unkempt hair, weathered hands like lobster claws, all that. In film, smart directors never use them all in one character, because it’s overdone. Nobody would believe it on the screen. If forced to choose, I would rather film an ugly baby Jesus than overdo a red-light madam.

“Hello, Mother,” I say.

She gives me a bitter look. “Oh,” she says, “what do you want?”

“Can’t I just check in on you? See how you’re doing?” I ask.
“Like you give a rat’s ass?” She was always a negative type of mother.

She doesn’t like me in her bar. “Can I just sit here for a minute?” I asked. She maybe feels it’s a bad influence on me.


She loves me really, but I’m a great disappointment to her. “I haven’t been to see you for a while,” I say.


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to Davao and back. I told her that. She has no idea where Davao is, and couldn’t care less.

“You want money?” she asked.

True but tactless; very occasionally I’ve been obliged to borrow trivial sums, but not recently. Not for at least six months.

“Of course not,” I say. “I just wanted to see you, that’s all. You’re my mother, for crying out loud.”

She walks down to the far end of the bar, past two Japanese sergeants, and help a known murderer and a professional blackmailer. She helps everyone in the bar and returned to me. I tell her what I’d been doing, or I deliver an artistic version of it, in which virtue wins and sin is utterly overcome. She pretends she can’t hear me over the noise of the bar. Like I say, I’m a disappointment to her. She wants me to be a provider, like my father.

A man can take only so much from the head of his family, so I cut short my narrative about the mail to an appealing conclusion. I tell her to take care and I leave.

SCENE 5

So, I’m walking the streets of Manila and trying to understand my place; how I got here (the Japanese occupied Manila in 1944), and what I should have done earlier to correct that. I’d been an
assistant to the assistant director on three wildly popular Filipino films made in thirty-three, thirty-four and thirty-five. The director and his assistant had been executed by the Japanese in forty-two, so as far as I was concerned, they were now my films and my good name.

And say what you will about me; I’ve heard it all. I’m a fraudster, a confidence man, a liar, and a cheat, but in this town, who isn’t? But you MUST give me some credit. I shot a wicked wedding film, if the father of the bride is willing to pay enough, and I’ve been able to survive doing that for seven long dry years. The wedding thing and the reputations of the dead men who made those films in the 1930s, I’ve been able to keep my office desk, film lab and the modest apartment above it.

SCENE 6

Back up toward the theaters, and fortunately, the wind is from the sea, so by the time I emerge onto Carriedo, I’ve left the smell of Ermita behind me. I pass a theater with a line of soldiers for a Japanese propaganda film, which by the way I had the chance to direct.

From Carriedo I turn left onto Escolta Street. Expensive weddings aren’t popular during the occupation, but I have a paying job; ushering at the fashionable Avenue Theater on Rizal. Ushering is one of the most prestigious jobs in Manila and the
teenagers aren’t much competition, so I’m the head usher. With a higher pay than most jobs available – and the perk of seeing free movies – I’m happy. The Avenue Theater has a 1,000-seating capacity, two eight-pipe organs, and its lobby has marble flooring. Since 1942, they show almost entirely propaganda films, like every other theater, and I’m always trying to remember which side the owners, my bosses, were on. Which bothers me a bit, but what can be done?

But today, I am headed for a different theater. The movie theater I am looking for is the third from the east (more fashionable) end of Escolta, with one with an art-deco tower.

Rumor is that the Capital Theater is showing a film that has “not an ounce” of propaganda in it. As I turn the corner into view came that magnificent example of early art-deco architecture. The tower facade emphasizes two strong and rigid geometric forms; both vertical surfaces have low-relief figures depicting two Filipina muses which are portrayed wearing native dresses or traje de mestizas. I don’t know if you are an artist, but Filipina muses are far more efficient than the other foreign muses. For the sake of art, man, if you ever happen to come across one, keep her if at all possible.

The Capitol Theater has balconies on its second and third floors, and figures of maidens bearing baskets of offerings on its third floor. That trip to the top goes down very well with
children but makes me dizzy. The building which is attached to the theater houses a hardware store and a dress shop, a photographers’ studio, and a closed export company office.

I’m standing in line to buy a ticket (if you can imagine that) and I hear this humming noise. It is just like the buzz of my mother’s bar, but it can’t be, could it? In context, there isn’t a whore house or whiskey bottle in twenty blocks. I listen to it for maybe three heartbeats, and a shadow passes over my head and puts me in the shade for just a split second, and then there is that awfully loud thump and a big mist of glass and dust comes screaming through the theater’s front doors out into the street. It comes from where the back of the theater used to be. The façade in front with the muses remains but the seating area is in rubble.

It is the United States’ “casualty-avoidance” policy. Some of us have read about it – “the unrestrained and indiscriminate application of overwhelming firepower.” All of us have seen it. The Japanese are here, in our theaters and in our buildings, so we are a legitimate target. If we don’t want to be bombed, we should get rid of the Japanese ourselves. And the implication seems to be we should have done that a long time ago. However, what the Americans don’t understand is that it’s just our a Filipino nature to put off today what might get us killed.
There’s almost always a moment of dead silence before all hell breaks loose. When you’ve been around as long as I have, you know what that moment is for. It’s the true and living God giving you enough time to choose: do I charge in and assist, risk getting involved, or do I discreetly turn round and walk away?

When the Japanese bombing first happened, in 1942, nobody thought about choosing. Didn’t matter who you were, when one of those colossal explosions leveled something, you didn’t walk, you ran to help, did whatever you could; even me, once or twice. I did; I swear it.

I remember the dust blinding me and coating the inside of my mouth with dust, and breaking two fingernails wrestling with a two-ton chunk of concrete with a man half under it - his eyes had been squeezed out of his head by the pressure, but he was still alive. I remember my fellow Manileños pushing me out of the way so they could help him. They seemed in a rush to get there first. They even accused me of gawking.

But that was three years ago. Since then, we’ve settled down into a sort of a pattern. The Americans fly a new low-level bomber capable of reaching the city; they buzz in at all hours of the day, we spend all night pulling people from the rubble. It takes them until the next morning to show up again. The buildings are a tragedy but there is a half-sunk Japanese
destroyer in the bay: now that is a bit humorous. The Japs ought to haul it up or properly sink it so it’s not so obvious. It looks to me like a huge billboard that says, “look at us, we’re losing.”

So, the Japanese try to do their best to repel the bombers but the Billy's make their way wherever they wanna go, and so it goes on, pointlessly and catastrophically, like the occupation; and once or twice a month, a theater gets smashed (I wonder if they have intelligence that the Japanese soldiers spend half their days in theaters) but on the other hand you can’t drop bombs over the city’s center and not hit a theater or two); that’s just the Philippines. We love our movies and, even at this devilish pace, the war will have to rage on for another three years before we run out of theaters.

Infrequently, there are terrible personal costs to commonplace people like me, who just then “almost” paid good money for a movie ticket (only to be killed); the Capital is now a mess of smashed bones and rubble. That’s real life in this “Japanese” town. You can see why nobody wants any more of it than they can possibly help.

I used my God-given moment of absolute quiet sensibly. I turn around and walk back the way I came, quickly but without breaking into an undignified run.
I’m not a writer (as you might have noticed). I only open my typewriter when times are slow, theater attendance is down, and right now nobody wants anything but propaganda. When the Americans come, I’ll make more films. I’ll make films with a flashy cameo (my new trademark) usually – and a story to go with it and tout it round the money people until a dozen of them are trusting enough to accept it. I'm not gonna make tiny pictures; I wanna make them so large that it takes a dozen investors to make one.

Because I’m good at passing on propaganda pieces, leaving them for the others, Manila’s pre-war producers generally tolerate me; and what the big names in the profession tolerate, the directors tolerate, and what the directors tolerate, the actors and the small crew/fry they like. In fact, everybody likes my stuff (the public, but they like anything), everyone except for me. I’m hardly ever satisfied.

It’s no wonder we are all conmen and theater ushers these days; before the Japanese came, we were all making a killing. Now the occupiers have abolished sexually frivolous films (one can’t even look at a girl on film) and all mention of any social issues (poverty, starvation, rescue). Instead, they want us to make films to “elevate national consciousness”, present the national and international situation “appropriately,” and otherwise, “aid the public welfare.” And so, now as often as
not, a theater will break even. Three out of five movies from Tokyo in this “Japanese” city close inside of a week and make a loss.

The Americans will be here soon and that makes me a bankable producer. I have a letter; actually I had a letter. I’ll make this film, but I’m not a writer, and I don’t want to be one.

Nor do I particularly want to do what I mostly do for a living these days, which is tell lies. However, Louis B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck, or someone like that, might respond to a letter, but they don’t really give a damn about what I want. But these gentlemen didn’t have the dignity to respond, so why shouldn’t they be bombed as well?

Most do not respond, which is why I’m glad I was born and grew up looking entirely, undeniably unremarkable, and why I have this uncanny knack for lying to the other producers. Productive lies possibly, or the basic filmmaker’s urge taken to fruition. And while I’m thinking about it, screw the Shochiku Company and Kazuo Takimura as well. They don’t answer their mail either.

Not that I’ll ever be a proper producer and make a film without putting together a nearly unmanageable team of investors, let alone a studio-chief for which I’m profoundly grateful. There’s an absolute rule that only leeches and swine can really run studios. Take Marcus Loew, or Walter Disney, or
Joseph Brandt – loathsome, arrogant, all lonely people and self-centered as cavemen and the rest too.

It’s easy to explain. If you spend most of your life being Joe Brandt or Walt Disney, think how wonderful it must be to be Filipino, for six hours every evening. I can imagine no greater incentive for mastering and perfecting the lies. And of course, working the matinees.

It’s not quite like that for me, not since this morning. Mostly, the people I wrote to are serious celebrity figures: producers, directors, the occasional actor, writer, or lawyer. Most of them are profoundly unpleasant people, and on balance I’d rather be me than them (only they aren’t in Manila, starving and being bombed), but obviously, they make films.

I’m relatively sure I was about to make a breakthrough with Louis B. Mayor when Tojo flipped his wig. I figure that particular Jap owes me several hundred thousand dollars, let’s just call it a billion yen.

There’s an extraordinary paradox here. No Japanese in his right mind will invest good money in one of my ideas; I’m a Filipino. We’re in open rebellion, not so much in Manila but in the north for certain. And nearly everybody in Hollywood will have a chance put down a sum for the rights to some of the things I’ve put together here the last three years. But how to communicate with Hollywood? I’ve tried using a pseudonym and
Kenpeitai (secret police) always comes around asking for him. I tell them the pseudonym was executed last year and they are satisfied until they have to come back.

The Kenpeitai agents might invest if there is a guarantee that the chief of Tivoli Films of Manila will never inconvenience them again.

But when it’s me, in some very expensive Japanese translations, pretending to be the chief of Avenue Studios or Scala Film Productions – well, there aren’t sacks mail. But I have a job roaming theaters, ensuring safety, and engaging guests, and a part of the usher’s job (many people don’t know) is to greet the postman. Nothing ever arrives but Japanese investigators, but the job is enough to survive and a year ago there was a very modest profit. Make of that what you can.

Along with the Avenue, the head ushers at the Scala and Tivoli Theater are running the same game and we network, which means we look out for each other’s mail. I’d like to expand our network to the other twenty-six theaters, but the other ushers are simply devoid of ambition; they don’t even want to produce films AFTER the war. And probably eighty percent of them wouldn’t even let me in their theaters for free, not even as a professional courtesy. I regard it as rather more curious than interesting, why so many ushers are collaborators. I only know three that aren’t collaborators.
SCENE 7

Just my bad luck, the Capital Theater is showing a pre-war Japanese film, without the propaganda, and it has just now been blown up. Dust from the theater, and I think some of the stuffing from the seating, all down my clothes and in my hair, and now an unexpected, unwanted, free evening.

I dredge out of my pocket what only looks like a promising number of Southern Development Bank Notes (Japanese fiat occupation currency); but half of the notes turn out to be this week’s food money, a quarter are what I owe various compatriots who are getting increasingly skilled at finding me, and rest are for cleaning and a new suit – not a luxury, in my line. You go and see a potential investor, the first thing he looks at is your clothes. If you’ve been in a collapsed building lately, you’re probably not going to get a dime, no matter who I know in Tokyo and Los Angeles.

I try the other pocket because you never know, and to my surprise and joy, I find a silk Japanese Order of the Rising Sun 3rd Class, which I remembered picking up off the bar at my mom’s bar about three hours earlier. She’d slid it over to me wrapped in newspaper (like a small fish), I’m sure she wants me to find out whose it is and give it back – very virtuous of her. I don’t have time, but the owner would surely be checking the pawnshops
and now my virtue is about to be rewarded. I take it to the place I usually go to, Tambunting’s, and they give me about a quarter of what it is worth, which if you ask me is downright dishonest.

Since I am on Gastambide Street, I figure I might as well go the extra fifty yards and show my glorious face in the Backlot Bar. I have not been in there for a while, on account of not wanting to meet certain people who’d been kind and understanding when I was down on my luck, but for all its faults (it’s mostly in public), it’s a useful place; and it isn’t long before I learn I’ll be safe, since my golden-hearted creditors are both buried under the Capital Theater, the building that it was just bombed. And therefore they won’t be drinking today, or any other. I’m glad I had not really dusted the concrete off of my clothes before I walk in. Luck is everything in this business.

The Backlot never changes. They’ll tell you that’s because the floor is the exact same wood planks that Honorio Lopez stood on when he was rehearsing the La vida de Jose Rizal, and it would be sacrilege to replace them; likewise, that’s the very same table on the back corner that José Nepomuceno's organized Dalagang Bukid (Country Maiden), sitting in that very corner, on the same wobbly chair, next to the table that it doesn’t do to lean on too hard if you don’t want your rum all over the floor.
The bar is nearly submerged in tradition, like all the film industry people that drink there.

SCENE 8

The usual crowd too, mildly surprised to see me, after so long. They know I am one of three men actively pitching the Americans – every Juan knew, the whole lot – so I didn’t have to buy my own bottle. Various old friends brush the dust off me, and I feign a bit of shock to avoid explaining where it had come from, their interest in current affairs peak considerably once they realize I’d been there when the theater fell.

They are more interested in what I’ll be writing for the Americans (my Mom must have told everyone), with particular reference to any small but lively roles for which they might just possibly be granted. I promise something nice to everyone who asks me, the way everyone always does. It’s remarkable how hope breeds in this city, like mice.

“Someone was in here looking for you,” an actress tells me.

Note the grammar. If the subject of the sentence had been a proper noun, nothing out of the ordinary; A, an enlisted fool with money for me, good; B, an officer with a sword, bad; the two sides of the occupation’s endlessly spinning coin. But “somebody” meant somebody actresses can’t read (and in the
Backlot they know how to read everybody). My legs tensed, ready to launch me into flight, like a hare in front of a greyhound.

“And?”

My actress friend grinned. “Not in the business,” she guesses. “Wouldn’t last five minutes if they were.”

“Spanish?”

“Japanese suits.”

“Ah.” I pick up the bottle and hold it over her glass without actually tilting it.

“Not very good at acting,” she explains. “We’re old friends of his, haven’t seen him in ages, got the impression he hangs out here. Like hell, they were Japanese.”

“Maybe they were producers?” I ask.

She’d earned an inch, which I pour. “In what sense?”

She frowned. “Enter Mikio Naruse and his assistants, disguised as Japanese secret police. Shoes and jewelry all wrong. Not a clue.”

Unsettling. “What did you tell them?”

“Haven’t seen you forever, no idea where you might be, thought you were dead.” She smiles at me.

A particularly attractive young Filipina adds, “Never heard of you. I told them that.”

“Nice shoes, expensive,” I observe.

“Of course, my dad’s a lawyer,” the young girl explains.
“But aren’t you a little young to be in here?” I ask.

“Why? I’m an actress and this is an industry bar.”

“We’re being occupied. There isn’t any real work,” I remind the younster.

“I’ll take my chances.” She retorts.

“She’s under my wing and you’re not to touch her,” my actress friend warns me.

The young actress says again, “I told them I never heard of you.”

“Nice, always go with the truth. You don’t know me, do you?”

“No, but they said you’re a producer.”

“I am today,” I can grin.

To which my actress friend adds, “Of course, we weren’t the only ones they asked.”

“When was this?”

“About an hour ago.”

So, they’d left very shortly after I arrived. Without being too obvious about it, I glance around. Everyone who’d been in when I arrived is still there; who am I kidding? I can’t do that anymore. A few faces are missing? I have no idea. I slide the bottle – still half full – across to her, pick up my hat, and slip out through the side door.
SCENE 9

I walk back up Recto Avenue, where I was nearly run over by a truck leading a half-company of heavy infantry. I step back into a doorway and let the trucks pass. No prizes for guessing where they were off to in such a hurry. If I were a soldier on a mission from which I wasn’t likely to come back, I don’t think I’d be speeding along minor Manila streets. There they go north. Presumably, they all reckon they’d be the lucky ones, or the lucky one. Remember about hoping like mice breed.

SCENE 10

It’s awkward keeping your head down and staying clear of people who are looking for you if you’re a filmmaker, so I decide it is a stroke of luck that I didn’t have any film work on at present. Correction: I had a script to write for Selznick; I mean Culver City, in theory, something I could do anywhere. It irked me that I wouldn’t be able to go back to the office/apartment, but I’d still have to rent a space, which would eat horribly into my capital. I resolve to channel my righteous indignation at the unfairness of it all into my writing, which I’m sure is what Loos and Emerson would do in my shoes.

If you want to lie low in this “Japanese” town, the closer you can get to the docks the better. Ever since the occupation
began, they come and go at night by sea. The roads in and out of
town have roadblocks. There’s been an awful lot of strange
people living in and around the docks, where luckily rents are
cheap. Nobody knows them, you’re afraid to ask them their
business (as it should be), but their money is as good as
anybody else’s.

To me they look like a collection of fish traders, our
southern indigenous people, at least one Torres Strait Islander
(obviously an Australian spy), Japanese and German sailors
discharged from foreign ships probably for stealing or
drunkenness, and none of them seems to even speak Tagalog; and
you know what we’re like with anyone who can’t understand us. I
figure that if I pretend I am from the south and reply in
Cebuano, if anyone speaks to me, I’ll be left blissfully alone.
I can write my play, collect the money and stay out of sight
until whoever was looking for me decided I must be dead or in a
Japanese prison, and all that at a price I can afford.

So, I wander around for a bit – found a discarded Bagobo
abacca cloth. It is dark as inside a lady’s purse by then and I
reckon I’d find somewhere equally anonymous, but where I can
stomach living for a week or so; and I knock on the door. Long
wait; then a panel in the door shots back and a swollen and
inflamed eye glares at me.
“Room,” I say, with my very best Bagobo accent. I stand back out of the light to hide the color of my skin.

The panel snaps shut and the door opens. The man with the inflamed eye saw what he expected to see. “Forty Mickeys a night,” he says. “Rice not included.”

I hold out my gloved hand palm upward, with a roll of notes in the middle of it. “Room,” I say.

“Sure.” He stands aside to let me pass. “Heard you the first time, moron.”

The room isn’t bad. It has four walls, a tiny, tiny window, and a door that shuts if you slam it.

The only problem all my stuff, that goes without saying, is back home, and I can’t afford to go out and buy any more. Just as well, I know how to improvise. The lack of a typewriter wouldn’t be a problem; I’d stumbled across one, and a glass of lemonade, on a professors’ veranda just after the trucks nearly ran me over.

SCENE 11

My film pitching business requires me to keep well-informed of the news. Speaking of which, I’d like to applaud in the strongest possible terms about David Selznick’s – and that means Hollywood’s – great insight and enthusiasm for my ideas.
Make films about what you know, I’ve been told this since I was a teen. And filming what we know might be what the genetics of film is, like our own mother’s and father’s initial contribution. One strand is born of what filmmakers have experienced. The other is born of what we wish to experience. So frankly, I have no intention of traipsing out into the jungle to biograph a leach, tick and flea infested freedom-fighter. Remember, I’ve never had mud on my boots. Also, stories (especially action-thrillers) alter the filmmaker and I have no wish to change. I need a story that won’t alter me. The safest thing for me to do is find an urban story for Selznick, I mean Culver City. I keep forgetting.

The leaders, for this or that resistance, have probably never set foot inside Manila and probably can’t find the red-light district with a map. That’s plenty of reason for creating my own subject.

Replacing the mountain fighters with someone local, almost certainly is the answer for me. A strong municipal face, a strong resolute voice that will bounce off the concrete and buildings.

It’s bad enough when a filmmaker gets killed documenting from the front; but it’s totally avoidable. I can’t survive on what they eat in the hills, but I do understand, these things happen in war. But finding urban fighters might be impossible.
I’d have to be creative. It wasn’t like that in the old days, of course, before the occupation. Criminals to pitch Hollywood about were easy to find, just get drunk and arrested, and you knew you could spend the necessary time and interview them with a reasonable prospect of seeing a return on your investment.

But when the Japs took over and the collaborators began ratting out every shoplifter, writer, and social snob, befriending the guerillas - I don’t suppose they deliberately set out to make my life hell. The unfortunate consequences to me personally being a collaborator probably crossed all their minds. I have pitched all the Japanese companies which makes me a collaborator, or maybe worse somehow, in their opinion. But, I’ve not and I won’t do that anymore, not after this morning.

Following the news, when you’re effectively confined to a third-story cardboard building, it isn’t the easiest thing in the world, particularly if you’re playing the part of an ignorant indigenous person who knows nothing about politics and cares even less. Some news, however, gets everywhere, the way sand gets in your shorts at the beach.

**SCENE 12**

I go out, well disguised and in full costume, to buy a loaf of bread and a few anchovies - which I don’t actually need straight away - but when you are locked up (three days) with no story and
no character in mind, any excuse will do. The merchants in the little market in the square opposite the docks are used to strangers, though they tend not to look at them when they’re taking their money; all to the good, as far as I am concerned. Anyway, there is this obese woman, and she is talking to the woman in the next kiosk, who I can’t see. I wasn’t really listening, but then I caught: “All lies, of course.”

“That’s not what I heard,” off-screen to my left.

“Lies,” the large woman repeats, inadvertently spraying my fish with spit. “They’ll say anything, the damned Nips.”

“It’s true,” asserts the voice off-screen. “Tokyo Rose was talking about it on the radio last night, my brother heard her. She was saying, he’s dead.”

“Your brother is an idiot.”

“Almost an idiot. Not entirely.”

“Bullshit, Marcos is fighting in the north,” says the large woman.

“It’s true. Marcos is dead. He was at a theater and a bomb fell on him. Exploded into a thousand pieces, like the theater.”

**SCENE 13**

That got my attention. I actually knew Marcos; and while they said he was fighting in the north, he loved films and I had “covertly” ushered him to a seat more than a few times. He
creeped me out a bit because the other ushers said I looked strangely just like him. I hate resembling anyone but it could have been true. I had no idea he was a rebel commander, but how would Tokyo Rose even know who he was? I thought he was a mafioso.

But the fighting in the north changed everything. Marcos and the theater being in a thousand pieces; it is a cliché, but icy fingers touch audiences. It’s only when it happens to you that you realize just what a film-worthy metaphor (a thousand pieces) actually means in box office receipts.

Let me make one thing clear upfront. I don’t care if it is him or not. I don’t (hardly ever) give a damn. I had Selznick; I mean Culver City on the hook. I just needed a story.

Accordingly, the death of Marcos (if true) is a devastating blow to the resistance, but personally, to me, it seems like $20,000 (in thousand peseta notes). Sure, you can still romanticize people after they’re dead, but there just isn’t the same demand. But on the other hand, in bread-and-butter war films, once someone’s dead, he’s moved directly into the lead. He won’t ever be going back to being a supporting character. And if I can just get a script to the Spanish Embassy, Culver City will punch my ticket.

On the other hand... So a river of thought runs through my head as I wander back to my cardboard box, devastated, hardly aware
of where I am or what I am doing. On the other hand, Marcos isn’t, sorry, wasn’t just anybody. He could easily have been THE man; I can create him, a film persona. At the darkest hour in the islands’ history – one hundred thousand bloodthirsty Japanese in the city, the Philippine regular army all dead and scattered and the navy on the bottom of the ocean; with a barracks of untrained men, Marcos leads half the Japanese army on a wild goose-chase through the city; his determination, his dauntless courage, et cetera. If he hadn’t been there, we’d all be dead. Not opinion, war-film fact.

Therefore – I convince myself – there’s always going to be a demand for a really first-class Marcos film, and more so now he’s dead (if he’s dead), because he’ll become the ultimate symbol of hope, and what’s the theater about if not peddling hope to people who ought to have better sense? The only problem is getting this on film and to Culver City before the war ends and he loses interest.

I’ve been known to exaggerate but not this time, by the time I get back to my room I already have a plot and rough outlines of Acts One and Three, in which Mary (the mother of Jesus) escorts Marcos from the theater (past me on the sidewalk) with the purpose of saving the Philippines in its darkest hour. And there’d be an occupation in it, violence against our oppressors and you bet seductions. Surely someone with my rich imagination
should be able to figure out a way to squeeze in a strong female lead – that youngster for example, the one with the nice shoes, at the bar.

**SCENE 14**

Turning it over in my mind as I grind my way through the last scene of Act Two, I try to think about it logically. What had actually happened? I’d overheard two market women sharing a rumor; and one of them swore an unknowable fact that it wasn’t necessarily true, maybe just a pack of lies put out there by the Japanese. Hardly proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Maybe it wasn’t rumored; the women had acted as if they knew him. Maybe he extorted money from them before the war?

I felt an urge to go out and eavesdrop some more, maybe in places where they might be more knowledgeable than my two rumor-mongers. But then I thought, what the hell. If Marcos was dead, he’d still be dead tomorrow, probably even the next day as well. Death is like real estate; it’s different from everything else because of its permanence. Meanwhile, I have work to finish, and Japanese suits (maybe the police) are looking for me. Insight is nice, but remaining indoors is everything during an occupation.
SCENE 15

Act Two is always such a bitch. Acts One and Three are easy, but Two is the toughest part of your standard photoplay.

I tend to write long – scrawl down any old thing, just so long as it moves the action forward and gets you to the scenes you know and give a damn about; if you absolutely must edit and rewrite later, well, fine. That way you don’t have to think too much, which is half the battle, because my mind tends to ignore everything but the beginning and the end.

Prompt the rumor; someone got killed in the bombing; Marcos is someone; therefore Marcos was killed. He was at a theater and an American bomb fell on him. Definitely. Common knowledge, by now, that a bomb flattened a theater on Escolta earlier; and the rumor-monger in the market is the ultimate reader. My job is to paint a few coats of glittering shiny stuff round a tiny speck of fact.

All right, now let’s try using a tiny bit of movie logic. I am on the way to the very same theater. Marcos can easily become one of my greatest war-time characters. Would Culver City have hired me to tell the story of Marcos, if they knew he was killed in the theater? At the very least, I’d hate to be told, we can’t do a Marcos film, for crying out loud, unless you want the project canceled. I wasn’t killed. Exactly. Therefore, Marcos wasn’t in the theater either, therefore he wasn’t exploded by a
bomb, therefore, he must still be alive. This is redundant; Mary guided him from the theater. That is established.

SCENE 16

I reckon I am on fairly solid ground with Mary. Yes, Marcos might come up to me tomorrow, put a knife in my back and murmur, by the way, it would be better if Marcos is exploded; there’s a good Filipino patriot. If he dies in the theater, my entire plan for the film is lying in more pieces than the theater. But think about it. It’s hardly a secret; Marcos is my subject for the entire length of the film.

I’m very good at fiction, though I do say so myself. Presumably, Marcos knows this; from what I’ve heard about him and the nature and quality of his sense of humor, he’s not likely to be amused. So, if you’ve stumbled across the most famous and important man in the struggle and lure him to your film party, are you really going to risk offending him by bringing on an indignant death? No, of course not. Therefore, redundant, the rumor isn’t true. Worrying yourself to death over nothing at all. Pull yourself together, for crying out loud and get on with some pages.
SCENE 17

Getting a script down on paper, during an occupation (with the additional bombing), is like having surgery without anesthesia, but I endured it somehow. I feel as bad as I must look. For ten days, all I’ve had to wash in was the piss-pot, and the nearest water was the pump, three flights of narrow, winding steps down, but loneliness has been the least of my problems, if you count tiny brilliant scenes that have kept me company. I’m not the cleanest of men, at present, but I don’t like it when I turn into the sort of creature that women cross the street to avoid.

Finished, I am sick to death of that awful little room and the smell of fish and slaughter from the market three blocks down. That smell is thinly blended with the open drain under my window, so I slap on my Bagobo costume, roll up what I’ve written and sneak out into the street.

SCENE 18

I’ve written the bloody thing, but how am I supposed to deliver it and get paid? If the Japanese suits are serious about finding me, with spies everywhere, they might have found out by now that I was writing something for Culver City and maybe they know how I communicate with them, so I can’t go to the embassy myself; therefore I have to get someone to go for me. It’s an
utterly depressing time when you find out you probably don’t have any friends, not one, that is up to it.

To get from the docks to the Grand Theater you have to walk right across Manila, something I really don’t want to do in broad daylight, in a discarded Bagobo shirt. For a start, it sticks out like a sore thumb, which might mean people will look at me. I have a hat and chose to do the best I can. I decide to go with the Bagobo look, and it must be working because people look away rather than stare.

The Grand Theater started off as an impressive theater for people who liked being seen going to a theater but preferred what the Filipino cinema offered. Homophily. In the 1930s they were swimming against the stream in this incurably star-struck town. Instead of American films, the Grand put on the newest Filipino films all with uplifting themes. And even though the writers and the cast were basically the same people as you’d find in the taverns ten minutes away in Ermita, the high-minded types reckoned it was all right and the Grand did a roaring trade for many years.

My three films played there quite a few times on and off. When the Japanese arrived, a new owner took over and changed it into just another second-rate Japanese propaganda house, and for obvious reasons, my films didn’t fit anymore. That was the owner I was going to see.
SCENE 19

Her real name is Ahrianna Dixson and she’s been portraying herself as the Filipina version of Ginger Rogers for about fifteen years. In what I’m sure is Ahrianna’s favorite film, not one of mine, she gets abducted by Chinese slavers in Act One and rescued just in time by her village sweetheart in Act Three, which is exactly what they want to see in the provinces; unfortunately, the movie theaters were and still are in the cities.

She runs a painfully tight rein on the movie house and costume rentals (a sideline), and she drives the hardest bargain in Manila; that’s how she’s parlayed a few acting roles and a few hundred costumes into being the owner of what could be a gem of a theater. She was an exceptional dancer, but all that ended when the Japanese beat her three years ago; when she isn’t in character, she walks with a walking stick. She is, come to think of it, the nearest thing you’re likely to find in real life to a strong kick-ass female lead, limp or not. She has dignity, a doll face, and a nice smile. Charming creature. She can’t sing worth spit, though.

“Who the hell are you trying to look like?” she says.

She can turn it on and off.
I looked over my shoulder. “Keep your voice down, for God’s sake.”

She rolled her eyes. “That costume. You’re in trouble again.”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“It’s not money,” I say, without thinking, “Something much worse.”

I had her attention. “What have you done?”

“Can we go in your office, please?”

“You look absolutely ridiculous, do you know that?”

SCENE 20

She seats herself, in this modern, beaverboard office, at a massive, shiny desk. There is a Victrola (probably broken) but it hides a row of medicine bottles. There is a huge humidor on her desk but I’d never seen her open it. She has a big pirate’s trunk with three padlocks where she keeps her money and a couple of bottles of whiskey. Don’t get me wrong, she is as feminine as she has to be, but her office is manly, except for the fruit, a tray of apples, and dates.

“Well?” she says.

“Has anyone been here asking after me? Japanese police in suits?”
She knows I don’t drink during the day so she doesn’t offer me one, but her hand shakes slightly as she pours her own. “No. Why?”

“Japanese men I don’t know are asking after me,” I say. She raised her eyebrows. “Why would the police want to do that?” she says.

“Don’t ask me.”

“You’re not in the habit of pissing off Japanese,” she says. “Only your friends and colleagues.”

“Exactly.”

She drinks her whiskey, looking at me over the rim of the glass. It’s a nice gesture, very popular with her male audience over the years, and I guess she likes practicing even when she’ll probably never be asked to perform it for the cameras again.

“What’s any of that got to do with me?”

“I need a favor,” I admit.

“Of course you do, why else are you here? Not to see me, you can bet your life.”

Well, yes, we were sort of good friends once, and then we weren’t friends at all.

“I’ve got a movie to make for Selznick.”

“So I heard. Any good?”
“Garbage,” I say. “Good part for Ginger Rogers and some local Shirley Temple. Filipinas cat-fighting over a Filipino, some brown-skinned guy that looks like Joseph Cotten, who’s come down from the hills to fight the Japanese in Manila.”

“Americans won’t wanna see that,” she pointed out.

“We can do whatever we want,” I reminded her. “But in my head, that’s what they look like.”

“You dream in white?” she asked.

“And color it later.”

“So it seems,” she scoffs.

“Anyway, the script is finished, and I need someone to deliver it for me.”

“And collect the money to make the film?”

“It’s in the Spanish Embassy.”

“Never been there,” she protested a bit too much.

“A fellow named Paul Delibes; he’ll have it.”

She nodded. “Ten percent.”

I stared at her. “I can’t.”

“It’s you I’m thinking of,” she says, pure butter melting. “I go into a… Where?”

“The Cultural Attache at the Spanish Embassy.”

“So, I go into his office, hand him a manuscript, fine, I’m just the messenger. But he’s not going to hand over cash money,
enough to make a feature. No, unless I’m your duly accredited agent. And the going rate…”

“Ahrianna, I need that money. I may have to be invisible for quite some time.”

“Take it or leave it.”

“Fine.” I stood up and grabbed my hat. That’s all I did.

“Well?”

I sat down again. “Ahrianna,” I say, “In the past, I may not have been entirely honest with you.”

“You can say that again.”

“About – well, things that happened long ago.”

She has this nasty sceptical streak. “Don’t tell me,” she says. “Really, you’re the Anita Loos in disguise.”

I scowled at her. “Something like that. The point being, for all I know these Japanese suits might be truly unpleasant, Kenpeitai, and obviously while they’re in Manila I can’t work, so I really do need that money. All of it.”

She pursed her lips. “I could do with a short and a comedy,” she says.

“I could do with a hundred percent of what I’m owed.”

She smiled. “Deal,” she says. “You film me twenty minutes of cheerful rhyming bullshit and I’ll go and get your money for you. All of it.”

Like I say, I’m not a writer. “Twenty minute short?”
“We can discuss that later,” she says. “And I tell you what, I’ll throw in a better costume absolutely free. Just to show there are no hard feelings.”

I hang around just long enough to find a costume in her collection, then walk off in a huff back to the docks. I really don’t fancy three days cooped up in that disgusting stinking room, coming up with a light comedy (for free), but that’s what happens when you ask a former lover to do a favor for you for free.

SCENE 21

While I am gouging myself trying to be amusing in my dockside cage, things are happening in the outside world, although nobody sees fit to tell me about them. There is another visit by Billy Mitchel, which hit a music school for children of the wealthy; no survivors. There is a riot – not Filipino against Japanese but fathers and mothers against the Americans, and some Japanese buffoon sends in two tanks and then there is a second horrible mess.

Clearly, the Japanese don’t understand why the Filipinos are gathered and screaming; reason matters little to them at this point. But it all goes to add to my general sense of gloom and unease. I really miss 1939. I miss my quiet life, with money and things to spend it on, and clean clothes, and soap.
No point trying to find out what the riot was about, since a Lumad wouldn’t be interested either way; couldn’t really eavesdrop effectively because people have that tendency to dummy up if they think an indigenous is listening. All I gathered was that there are now soldiers on the streets – oh, and all the cinemas are closed until further notice. That makes me grin; the Japanese were closing their own propaganda houses. I felt okay until it occurs to me that Ahrianna might not have been to the embassy yet; in which case, I am screwed. So, I reason, she is screwed, but probably not nearly as screwed as I am, not to mention the whole film industry,

Trouble is, I have no idea where to find her if her theater is closed. Presumably, she lives somewhere near her theater, with a roof and a bed. I’d always thought its none of my business to know. Nobody knows where anyone lives when they’re not at it, if you know what I mean. I hate fluttering around like a moth around the projector; it could be dangerous. The Grand would be locked up, and I don’t show my face in any of the usual places, not even in her best costume.

If I stay where I am for more than a day or so, I’ll exhaust my tiny reserves. I recount my blessings and find that I have miscalculated. I just have enough to eat three times, nowhere to sleep, no idea for a short film. She wants that before she hands
over my money. My shoes have holes in them and strange Japanese suits are looking for me. I tell ya, I get no respect.

SCENE 22

I can imagine what you’re thinking. This will be cut from any film adaptation, just a process of logical deduction. So that means you’re reading this, you’re not in a movie theater directly now, so more than likely, you’re educated (reading); you might even be part of the attentive public.

I know you book people like the back of my hand. You’re thinking: if a filmmaker is starving it’s his own stupid fault, because he should have paid attention in school; not have been the sort hanging out around in movie theaters. I shouldn’t be parroting someone else’s words. I heard you say, “he doesn’t even have the brains to make up what he says, for pity’s sake (a writer does that for him).” Also, filmmakers are too proud, won’t do proper hard work, loading barges, shifting bales, fetching, carrying, digging holes in the ground, and filling them up again. Not even if he’s starving. But that wouldn’t occur to the filmmaker. Nobody to blame, therefore, except himself.

Couldn’t agree with you more, except for one thing. Not pride, because someone who spends day after day talking to one investor after another, to be politely told he’s no good, doesn’t have
much pride left. No mortal terror of breaking into a sweat. Try finding the funds to develop a can of film, pay the actors who’ve stood in the sun for five hours straight (and they already want to murder you), because we’re over budget and it’s still not right; and show me the producer who could do that without passing out and being carted off to the hospital; and bear in mind (after the Japanese leave) you’ll have to be graceful and smile nicely the whole time at the Americans, or their money (and Manila’s best talent) will go somewhere else.

If the Americans don’t liberate us soon, I’ll be forced to jump off a bridge or I’ll starve. Or...

**SCENE 23**

Actually, it sort of follows on from my earlier rant, because if I hadn’t spent my entire adult life making (mostly not making) films, I doubt very much whether I’d have had the necessary dexterity for robbing houses. Years of setting up and tearing down have made me fit and agile; I have sprinted from a house on Chica Street to the Scala Theater non-stop, wrestled an exotic dancer and played tug-of-war with a baker over a dozen donuts.

Aside from the occasional chase and fisticuffs, what’s the very core of the criminal’s craft? Not being seen or heard. That’s something I know all about, sort of like my film work the
last seven years. There are times in the film business when you want everyone to look at you – your big pitch; and other times (after collecting the box office) when you wanna be the invisible man unless you want to hand over all of the profits leaving none for yourself. Or when they know you’ve held back on them and they have weapons and you’re lying dead; CUT TO CASKET, you won’t last five minutes in the trade unless you can keep perfectly still and quite dead for a very long time, and be totally convincing.

My burgling is a serious part of my filmmaking, about more than bringing in everyday operating funds. It amounts to a little shinning up and downpipes and walking silently across slippery roof tiles. You’ll realize, if you think about it for a second, that I left something out. Why? No one is going to invest in a film unless the organizer is willing to invest in his own project. I burgle never for sheer fun or sport but always for film capital. And I never robbed anyone who didn’t first have the opportunity to invest in a piece of film immortality.

Something I happen to have are principles, in good measure, because of my moral training, but maybe not quite enough. It takes courage to walk out onto a room of wealthy men; your blood, your breath, your guts, remember what I say about hearts and icy fingers. But there’s fear and there’s fear.
Climbing up the side of a house, can so easily get a person into trouble. Your grip can go, or the drainpipe can be rusted (clear through). Then you reach the window, it might be locked, so you try and go back down; only going down is a hell of a lot harder than going up. You’re fumbling for your footholds in the dark and you pulled the nails half out of the wall on your way up, it’s common to feel them loosening. Or maybe the window is not locked, in which case you have to hang by one hand while you mess about with it (and by now your fingers are lethally tired, and maybe you slice open one or two of them, so they really can’t be relied on) – and then suppose you actually make it inside, whereupon someone smashes your head with a wok or a huge Akita tears into your privates, because they are conveniently at about at the same height as his bite. I’m sure nature designed it that way.

A thief might lose his life, but the worst a filmmaker can do is lose money. I know a former filmmaker who stopped subsidizing his films with such criminal feats, he stopped making films all together and he’s better off for it. You might even call him wealthy, now that he only robs.

But I prefer film work, I guess. But there you go. I know a house that requires no climbing; I’d entertained a select gathering of Japanese managers and civil servants, their best
people, leading men from occupation politics and business, only a few hours earlier.

They’d moved me into a sort of library on the ground floor so they could discuss my proposal, and I distinctly remembered noticing that a window didn’t close properly, and from the library, to the drawing-room you only had to walk down one corridor and open one unlocked door. No climbing up walls, no stumbling about in the dark in an unfamiliar settings, and I knew there was something worth taking, and where to lay my hands on it. And no dog.

SCENE 24

Naturally, always politely, they decline to invest in my film, based on the demise of the terrorist fighter Marcos. I go to the nearest park and lay down, hoping to get an hour or two’s sleep, but that isn’t going to happen, so I stare at the stars until I reckon it is about time; then I creep quietly back (good practice) and drift up toward the house. I haven’t heard any traffic while I lay awake, and the street is empty. I make myself inconspicuous all the way down Carlos Palanca to the wall, then turn right and take the back alleys, eventually coming out at the foot of Oscariz Street. The Nip house is one of the big ones clustered at the bottom, General Solano Street where the Japanese invaders mostly live.
The house is easy to recognize because some clown with a bad cash-to-sense ratio had thought an orange Torii gate in the middle of the garden is a good idea. We’re all Catholics and a gate like that is just an open invitation to steal whatever it’s guarding; should bought a dog instead. I walk around the edge of the garden wall until I reach the house, then start counting windows. There isn’t a glimmer of light to be seen inside.

The window practically flings itself open as soon as I touch it. I stop, kneeling under the sill, and count to fifty, just in case the hinges woken anyone up with a tiny mouse-like squeak, but no sound and no movement; everything is perfect. I hop up over the sill, feel the hardwood under my feet, crouch down, and wait some more, almost as if I am anticipating something might go wrong. But it doesn’t, so I stand up, walk delicately (true hardwood flooring is silent) until my fingertips connect with the door latch. Now, latches sometimes rattle like the devil, but this one doesn’t, bless it, and I am out in the hall, lined with rush matting (because Japanese HATE to hear servants clattering about when they’re trying to have a political conversation).

I should stop and listen some more, but it is obvious there isn’t any point; you can feel when a house is alive, and this one isn’t. Fifteen paces take me to the drawing-room door, which doesn’t creak, and there isn’t a dog so I needn’t have bothered
with the chicken wing in my right pocket. Directly opposite that
door is a cabinet, and in that cabinet is a collection of
antique stamps – I know that, because they’ve been stupid enough
to have it open when I was there pitching.

I find the cabinet by walking into it, very slowly and softly;
I feel one of the metal handles against my knee. It hurt but it
wasn’t too loud. I filled my left pocket with small, flimsy
things. Job done. There is art on the wall, but greed isn’t one
of my many faults. The pocket-full will tide me over with the
embassy man for a long while. Taking more than I needed would be
an act of desperation. Then back the way I came; careful not to
hurry, which is the novice’s classic mistake.

Nobody in the kitchen. I open the shutter, poke my head out,
nobody in the alley; climb through, taking care to close the
shutter behind me. Deep breath, then I walk briskly down the
alley, each step severing the connection between me and any
indiscretion that may have been committed. At the end of the
alley, I turned left into Nicanor Padilla, where someone steps
out of nowhere and hits me in the face with a shovel.

SCENE 25

I think I may have mentioned in passing that my father was a
provider (until he wasn’t) and you may have got the impression
that I’m not proud of that fact. I’m not.
He came to Manila (God knows how often I’ve heard this) with fifty pesos in his pocket, from a Muslim village on Lake Maranao. He was fourteen-years-old and he’d already killed three grown men; one in self-defense (he emphasized this) and two for money. Not a great deal of money, because life was cheap on Marawi though everything else was extortionately expensive. The idea was, nobody would suspect a kid from a Christian (actually non-Muslim) family of being a paid assassin for the rival Islamic sects, but a boy can slip something nasty in a grown man’s soup or cut his throat while he’s asleep, just as well as anyone else. Which was true for a while, but then the authorities (such as they were) got smart, and another good idea fell off his horse; rough on my father, because he nearly got caught standing over an Imam’s bed with a knife in his hand, hard to explain your way out of that. He didn’t try. He ran, and he was as slippery as an eel, and he stowed away on a barge and arrived in Manila, one more scrap of trash to add to an already burgeoning accumulation.

His idea was to pick up where he’d left off back on Mindanao, and one thing he wasn’t short of was guts. He sneaked into the bedroom of one of the Santa Cruz bosses with a razor in his pocket, then woke him up. After the Santa Cruz boss had let go of his own throat, my dad pointed out, if I can get in here, I
can get in most places, and out again, and nothing to connect me to anyone.

The Santa Cruz boss explained to him that they didn’t do things that way, or at least not often enough to support a full-time employee; that said, he could always use a young man with guts and resourcefulness, and if he cared to call back in the morning they could have a constructive talk. Then, when my father was nodding and smiling and thanking him for giving him a break, the boss punched him in the face. Taught you something you haven’t learned yet, he explained; never assume you’ve gotten away with anything, and don’t you ever tell anyone you had me at a disadvantage.

Which is how my father joined the Santa Cruz mafia, starting very much the way he was to carry on. Bear in mind that this was the heyday of the Manila mafia. Anyone who got in their way had his legs broken, and the leg-breaker-in-chief for the whole of the center of the city was my dad.

It was a good line of work to be in, he never tired of telling me. It was safe as real-estate, because anyone who gave you any trouble would be floating face down in the harbor before the next morning; you’ve got to have respect for that, or what have you got? The pay was good, and everybody went out of their way to be nice to the man who could have their building burned down on his say-so alone. From time to time, there was friction with
the police, but that was true for all members of society; and if my father ever needed someone to make a confession on his behalf, or provide an alibi, there were plenty of men who could be counted on to oblige.

It’s a wonderful life, he used to tell me. And he watched me grow up big and strong; he used to clutch my biceps; plenty of muscle there, he’d say. And for a time, that was fine. I liked the way the other kids went out of their way to be polite to me, and if anyone was mean to me, he’d be sure to apologize before school started the next day, with a sort of frightened look in their eyes, which I thought was just swell. The only thing I found a bit annoying was that my dad had taught me to fight, really well, but I never got the opportunity, because none of the other kids would ever stand up to me.

It all went bad for the two of us when my dad decided it was time for me to start my apprenticeship. The idea was that I would go with him on his rounds, collecting money, advertising his potential violence where needed and giving the customary “one” friendly warning. I didn’t mind that at all. I liked the way people went all quiet when we walked in a business, and I felt proud of the way they were afraid of him – of us, because he made no secret of his plans for me. Take a good look at my son, he’d say, so you’ll be sure to know him. I liked that a lot.
Because my dad was so good at his job, he didn’t have to do it very often. But from time to time, there’d be some poor foreigner who simply couldn’t help breaking the rules, Chinese, usually. In this case, it was a Laotian. He’d been a boatswain’s mate on a freighter, but he got too sick to work, so they left him behind; get well, they told him, and next time we come, we’ll take you home. But some rascal stole the money the Laotians had left for him, and there weren’t many Laotians in town back then, so there wasn’t anyone to look out for him. By the time he was back on his feet, he owed too much rent, and no way of knowing when his shipmates would be back. So he found himself sleeping under a movie theater’s archway on Rizal Street, and he made the mistake of putting his hat down on the ground next to him, the way beggars do, only you weren’t allowed to beg, not in the entertainment district, unless you were paid up with the mafia. The Santa Cruz bosses met up and tossed a coin, and my dad’s boss lost; it was now his job to take out the garbage. My dad’s job.

When we came looking for the Laotian, the poor fool was just sitting there. The hat, I remember, was empty. I could’ve told him he was wasting his time, because no Filipino would dare to be seen giving money to a Laotian beggar. But that was beside the point.
Thinking back, I guess my dad was feeling the effect of a long spell of idleness. He hadn’t hurt anyone for a long while. He explained it to me once. It’s like making love, he said (that wasn’t quite the phrase he used); when you’ve been without it for a while, it sort of builds up. That would explain it, I guess; also, the man was a foreigner, so there was no family to get upset if my dad went too far.

My dad walked up to him with his hands in his pockets, stopped and looked down at him, dead silent. The man looked up at him, hopefully. My dad nodded politely, then kicked him in the face. I remember the way his jaw flew out of joint; I couldn’t believe my dad hadn’t broken it, just dislocated it, but I didn’t give my dad enough credit for his skill. The man was lying on his back, belly up; my dad stomped on him, four times, each time a different limb, and I heard things break, a very distinctive sound, like nothing else. Then he rolled him over onto his side with his foot and kicked him three times more. Then he rolled him over onto his back, looked him over appraisingly, nodded, turned away, turned back, and put the heel of his boot in the man’s right eye. “That’ll do,” he said cheerfully. “Let’s go see a film.”

In the theater, I was unusually quiet. But eventually, I asked dad why he’d turned away and then turned back. He’d sent the message, so why put the fellow's eye out?
He looked at me in the dark, and for a minute I thought he was going to answer. Then just he watched the screen.

“Dad?” I asked him.

“Come on,” he says. “You know how I hate paying for a movie and not be able to watch it.”

SCENE 26

The next morning, when I was supposed to be going with dad on his rounds, I pretended I had a cough and a sore throat. I worked that con for a week. Then I told him; I didn’t want to be his assistant, that I wanted to be a goldsmith or a lawyer, something like that.

Dad took it well, I’ll say that for him. I’d chosen nicely; I made it sound like I was ambitious, wanted to improve myself, get out of the business. He liked that idea; my son the government official (there was a lot of mafia in the civil service). That would show just how far he’d come from Lake Maranao, that was for sure.

In fact, it was my mother who raised hell over it. She was mafia to the core, the way some people are. Dad laughed at her, which didn’t improve matters. So the boy wants to be a big clerk and sit on his ass all day, he says; good luck to him, he’ll go far. She didn’t say anything; she didn’t want smacked, but she gave me a look that made me wanna run away.
So I put in for a vacancy in accounting. So did a lot of other young people, but, guess what, I got the job, without even a resume or an interview. The work was much harder than I thought it would be, but my superiors were amazingly tolerant and helpful, even when I made a series of serious errors. They laughed nervously and said not to worry about it. I promised I’d do better in the future. It’s all right, they smiled at me, it’s fine, don’t give it any worry at all.

And then something happened and it all ended. To this day, I don’t know what it was, though I suspect my dad had taken money to let someone clear out of town before getting what the mafia said was “owed” to him. Dad should have had more sense, but I think he figured he was immortal. He wasn’t, though, not in the least.

SCENE 27

There wasn’t a funeral, because there was nothing to bury. My mother was allowed to move to Makati, as a special favor, but she had managed to eventually get control of a bar and then the brothel next door. A Russian had owned the bar and they were seeing each other until he had a heart attack. No mafia would visit her bar or buy sex from her girls, so she, her brothel, operated for foreigners.
But she made it okay in Makati, and naturally, she blamed me - if I’d only gone to work with my dad, I’d have been able to stop him from doing whatever he’d done, or I’d have been able to protect him. What she really meant was, I could have protected her; whatever, it was all my fault, but she now owned the Russian’s bar and a stable of girls. That said, I couldn’t actually find it in my heart to disagree with her.

SCENE 28

And I lost my job with the city, of course; and that’s when I became a filmmaker. I don’t know why the mafias never bothered to take over the movie theaters, but they never did. While I was still in accounting, I’d spent a lot of time at the restaurant across the street, learning how the film people there spoke and moved; educated, refined, sophisticated people, or so I thought, and compared with what I’d grown up with. It’s all relative, you know.

In accounting, there’d been a dozen or so young twiglets of the élite, second sons of second sons, forced to work but with family connections that meant they didn’t have to work too hard, and I’d chosen to model myself on them; and, of course, they were all hopelessly star-struck and movie-mad, so I was too. Some young idiot, I was sort of friends with, was spending a lot of money he didn’t have on an actress by the name of Alicia,
who’d married a leading man out at Sampaguita Pictures; my co-worker introduced me to her, and she took me on as a grip, lighting, and cameraman and also stunt actor. I’d like to say the rest is history, but that would be premature.

**SCENE 29**

All of this may strike you as irrelevant, but I thought I’d mention it anyway because I know a bit about getting knocked out; not much, but probably more than you do if you have time for reading books. At least I hope so, for your sake.

My dad could put a man’s lights out with one punch. Nobody doubted that, but now and again, he liked to prove it. He told me, don’t do the big swing, like you’re playing baseball. Make it come from your back and shoulders. Move your arm a short way, and his head a big one. And then he demonstrated, on a hopeless drunk who happened to be standing on the wrong street-corner. Dad was right, of course. His fist probably traveled no more than eighteen inches, but the losers’ head snapped back, and he dropped, the way you drop your shorts on the floor at the end of the day.

What the hell, Santa Cruz was that kind of neighborhood, and my dad wasn’t the only one who liked to see men drop.

Now, some people get back up after a while and they’re more or less fine; no worse than a bad hangover, they say, not such a
fun way of getting it but cheaper, and the effect’s about the same. Other people are different. Their brains get all rattled up – I felt it once myself when I was a boy, that absolutely unique sensation of your brain bouncing off the inside of your skull. They find and they forget things, they lose their sense of direction, sometimes they stutter, sometimes they say there’s always a fog, even when it’s sunny.

Now I’ve accidentally knocked men out on a film set and been knocked out more times than a professional cares to admit; I fall down rather well, though I do say so myself, I’ve been complimented on it by directors, who aren’t prone to saying nice things about stunt doubles. On a set, it’s a great big sweeping swing so they can see it on screen, and if you’re getting hit, you clap your hands together unobtrusively down at waist level, to supply the sound effect.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

I come round in a hospital, and all I can see is a misty blur, and my head hurts so much I want to cry. I felt sick and my head is spinning; I close my eyes, but that makes it worse. I can’t remember anything after walking up the alley. I can hear a voice, very far away, but I can’t make out what it’s saying. Then my stomach heaves and I throw up, but I can’t move, not
even my head, and the puke comes gushing out over my chin, and
my throat is so raw I can’t hardly breathe.

Something swoops down on me. At first, I think it’s an angel,
a dove, or something white like that, but it turns out to be a
nurse, mopping up the sick with a wet cloth.

Part of my brain – probably not the portion that was bruised –
is making a lame effort. I must have got knocked cold, it tells
me; those troublesome Americans did this, but the Billy’s don’t
come in the night. It was their artillery? The Americans were
near enough to shell the city? Couldn’t be, not this soon.

Maybe I was hit by a truck or something. No, that made no
sense, because I can remember looking carefully, always and both
ways twice, before exiting out of an alley. Then I see this
peculiar image, a man approaching me like he’d just sprouted out
of nowhere, and lifting a stick, and the silhouette of a shovel
blade, heart-shaped. This was no accident. Somebody bashed me, I
realize.

Then I think; when someone bashes your head, you lose your
memory. That really scared me; who’s going to want to trust
their investment to a filmmaker who can’t remember anything? So
I started remembering stuff, speedy, directly, at random: my
dad’s full name, the monologue speech from Mr. Smith Goes to
Washington, the number of spokes in the wheels of the milk cart
I used to hitch a ride on when I was nine, the managers of all the theaters in Manila.

“He doesn’t look anything like him,” someone says.

“Not right now, maybe,” someone else says. “I don’t think we’re catching him at his best. You hit him entirely too hard.”

I remember that the pockets of my coat are stuffed with stolen stamps. You idiot, I scold myself, how can you have been so stupid? But this isn’t a sensible time for recriminations; perhaps I should save that for later.

“He’s awake.”

Immediately, I closed my eyes but not quickly enough. Someone literally pulls my eyelids apart. I opened my eyes and there is this enormous face glowering down at me. I recognized it.

I remember the first time I saw him. It was on the newsreels; you know, after the surrender of the American general who got marched off after the big surrender at the beginning of the occupation, just after General McArthur left, his name’s on the tip of my tongue. Never mind. Anyway, him; and all the other men in the fatigues were all filmed making speeches about how smart and brave whatishisname had been, and how he’d fought saving the island, which wasn’t true, of course; there were just as many Japanese on Luzon as before, maybe more.

But never mind. First, on the newsreel, they had Hemenez, an American Corporal with skin dark enough to come into town, and
then the Cagayan Apayao Forces (CAF) bosses, which no one noticed were a bit shady even though they were all heroes and respectable now, then Marcos, who was obviously reading from notes someone had written for him, and finally, Manuel Enriquez, the CAF new commander-in-chief, land forces; his broad, noble face, his piercing eyes, his striking profile, and I remember thinking: I could pass for the kid that couldn’t hardly read.

And now here Enriquez was, the most important man in Manila, looking down at me, as though he’d just noticed me stuck to the sole of his boot.

“I saw him a long time ago,” he says, in that quiet, measured voice, “in the theater. He can do it.”

I had no idea what he was talking about.

“You must be joking,” said someone else, and he steps forward, and I saw him. Tomas Quiocho, Enriquez’s second-in command, who I have actually met once. They had all been to my theater.

“His nose is too short, for a start.”

“From a distance,” Enriquez says.

“And he’s a filmmaker,” someone else offers. “He was. Actually.” I knew the American’s voice: Hemenez.

“Fine,” says Quiocho, “but we don’t need him to make a film, we’ve got you for that. And I say he’s nothing like him. Shape of the head’s all wrong. And he’s a foot too short.”
“Actually,” Enriquez corrects him, “he’s four inches too tall.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I’m serious.” Enriquez turns away to shine some light on Quiocho. “Which proves my point. You see what you think you’re seeing. He’s just some movie usher, so you think he’s shorter. Actually, he’s taller. So, if you think you’re seeing the real thing, it doesn’t matter.”

“That’s right,” Hemenez says. “Well, he’s obviously taller than me. But when I saw him, I didn’t notice that.”

“You all appear to be under the impression that we’ve got a choice,” Enriquez says. “Look, he’ll be with us, so who’s going to suspect anything? And he’ll be wearing the right clothes, and we’ll make sure he’s got hats and stand him in the shade, get some tall guards to make him look shorter.”

“Why?” Enriquez asks.

“You said he’s too tall already,” Quiocho says.

“Huh?”

Enriquez laughs. “See? You’ve got me at it now. The point is, nobody suspects. They see what they want to see.”

“All right,” says Quiocho. “What about the voice?”

“Passable,” Hemenez puts in.

“Fine.” Quiocho is getting cross. “Let’s hear him, shall we?”
“All right,” Enriquez says. “You’ll have to make allowances for him being a bit groggy.”

I opened my mouth. My palate had been stripped raw by the acid from the vomit. “Excuse me,” I say.

“And anyway,” Hemenez says, over me, “it’s not just the voice. It’s the voice and the speech rhythms and the phrasing, and all the little gestures and mannerisms. And of course we’ll tell him what to say, so the words will be right. You know, all the little turns of phrase and pet expressions…”

“Marcos could hardly read, so…”

“He’s trying to say something,” Quiocho interrupts.

“Are we going to let the CAF in on this?” Hemenez says.

“The hell we are.”

“I agree,” Enriquez says. “This is between the three of us.”

Which struck me as odd, because if this is some sort of political thing, then surely Marcos would have to know. They say the four of them never went anywhere without the others. But, none of my business. “Excuse me,” I repeat.

They look at me.

“Excuse me, but what am I doing here?”

Enriquez gives me a strange look. “You know what,” he says, “you may be right.”

“Who’s right? I mean, I’m sorry. I don’t know…”
“We’ve been looking for you,” Quiocho says, leaning forward so I could smell gin on his breath. “The length and breadth of the city, in all the nasty places. And then, just fancy. Where do you eventually turn up? Breaking into a house.”

I am about to object, and then I remember. He is quite right.

“That was our house; we found it,” Quiocho goes on, “when you went over the fence. Do you know the odds of that happening, you thieving little rascal.”

I am getting scared. These guerilla fighters do bad things to people. On the wall are my pants; he has his hand in my pocket and he pulls out half the stamps.

“I’m sorry, I botched your mission,” I mumble. Not perhaps the smartest thing I ever said.

“What were you gonna do with the stamps?” Hemenez wants to know.

“Trade them for new stamps,” I answer.

“What?

“There’s this fellow at the Spanish embassy, he collects.” I explain but I don’t say the man’s name. I’m not a rat.

“Who do you know outside of Manila?” Hemenez asks.

“Film producers.” I admit.

“Where?” Enriquez asks.

“Everywhere.” I answer.

“Berlin? Tokyo?”
“They don’t answer back.”

“That doesn’t matter, you are a traitor,” Enriquez is firm.

“The Americans write back,” I told them for no real reason other than to communicate that I was as patriotic as any other Filipino.

“Really?” Enriquez responds.

“Culver City,” I am adamant.

“What does that mean?” Quirocho is puzzled.


“Oh, good for you. Because, we need you to do something for us, and there’s a remote chance you might not want to do it. And we’re not barbarians. If you turn us down, we don’t want to force you. But now, that we know you’re in correspondence with the Japanese and the Germans AND you botched our burglary, I mean attack. We can legitimately make you an offer you can’t refuse.”

“And if the script sucks?” I can be obstinate.

Enriquez laughs. “They warned me about you,” he says, “Your mother operates a bar that isn’t legally hers and then of course there are the girls. And if you don’t do as we say, we’ll make her wish you were never born.”

“Nothing personal, but there is a war on, you know,” Quirocho adds.

My mouth was extremely dry. “I’ll do it,” I say.
“You don’t know what it is yet,” Enriquez grins.

“Doesn’t matter.” I flat out tell them.

“Some of us,” Quiocho put in, “aren’t entirely convinced you can do it, make a film.”

“That’s the only thing I can do. Direct and act.”

“You’re not gonna direct.”

“I lied. The only camera I operated was a 16 mm. And I don’t know shit about processing the film afterward. So, if you wanna do it right…” Quiocho admits.

“You lied?” Enriquez wants to confirm.

Quiocho shrugs.

“I have the equipment and the experience. I’m the man for the job. Please.” I jump on the opportunity out of pure habit.

They all look at each other, and I know I haven’t made a good impression. They had the look of a woman who’s just bought something and got it home and realized it doesn’t go with the curtains.

“Listen to him,” Quiocho says, “he’s pathetic.”

“That’s his job,” Enriquez replied, trying hard to be fair.

“Let’s try and keep this moving along, for crying out loud.”

Enriquez turned his head and looked at me. “I want you to make a movie about us, and Marcos,” he says.

“He’s dead,” I let them know.
“We can’t say, perhaps he’s in hiding,” Enriquez strategically leaves it open.

“Yes. Go on. What’s the action?” I need to know.

“He has to be portrayed as...” Enriquez begins to explain.

“Living,” Quiocho finishes.

“Then he is dead?” I ask.

“Tokyo Rose is a bitch. She’s lied about our friend,” Hemenez says angrily.

You know when your mind goes completely blank.

“Then he’s alive?” I ask.

“We wouldn’t be here if he was.” Enriquez finally admits.

“And you’ve gone to all this trouble to prove the bitch wrong?” I reason.

“The Americans,” Enriquez says.

“So this isn’t your idea,” I reason.

“Sort of,” Quiocho is clear.

“They want a hero from the hills...” Enriquez says.

“Carrying the battle into Manila?” It was becoming more clear.

“On film.” Quiocho points out.

“To prove Tokyo Rose wrong?” I ask.

“Thank God,” Hemenez exclaims.

“What?” I wondered what positive thing could there possibly be.

“I thought I hit you too hard,” Hemenez says.
I can feel the room spinning, and picking up speed, but then I think; hold it, I know tons of stuff to say, even if they think it’s not, my head is okay. My brain has slowed but hasn’t stopped working. And then I thought: I am a filmmaker, and I just sent a script to Culver City and I’m due $20,000 (only in Pesetas) and Marcos has agreed to star for free; that should suit Selznik perfectly.

“Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore,” I say. You can’t beat The Wizard of Oz, on these occasions. Any moron can sound good saying that stuff.

They look at me, and I stop quoting. My throat is sore and my head hurts so much I can’t stand it. They are looking at me, as if I was a bill they are splitting three ways, and they can’t decide who’d had the lobster.


“He’s talking non-sense,” Hemenez said guiltily. “Probably nervous.” The Mexican-American that had hit me with the shovel leaned over me, smiled horribly. “Relax,” he says.

“Stay out of his face, Hemenez,” Enriquez says, “you’ll only make him worse.”

“You have a strange look on your face.” Quiocho notices. “Like you’re frightened.”
“Frightened? Child, you're talking to a man who's laughed in the face of death, sneered at doom, and chuckled at catastrophe. I was petrified,” I knew they wouldn’t understand.

“What?”

“I was supposed to be there that afternoon. I was outside about to buy a ticket,” I explain.

Enriquez looks at me, shocked but steady. “Just as well for us you weren’t inside,” he says. “All right, then. Can you do it?”

“I’ll do my best,” I say, trying to sound just like Marcos.

“But don’t expect miracles.”

They smile and begin to leave.

“Sorry to bother you, sir, but is there any money in it for me?”

They stop smiling and remain.

Enriquez turns his head and gives me a look I won’t ever forget. “You can stay alive,” he says. “You want to do that, don’t you?”

SCENE 2

Not five minutes after the proud boys leave, the polite Japanese suits walk into the hospital room. There is a Mr. Takahashi, a Mr. Nakamura, and a Mr. Ito - a producer, a lawyer, and an underling. All from the Nikkatsu film corporation.
I can not remember what I have pitched them; my records are back at the office and my head still isn’t clear.

“What happened to you, please?” asks Mr. Nakamura.

“I’m not sure where to begin,” so I don’t.

“It’s concerning,” Mr. Takahashi is worried.

“The rebels beat the hell out of me,” they were Japanese so I was blunt and told them what they wanted to hear.

“Lucky they didn’t kill you,” says Mr. Nakamura.

“Lucky they attacked you or we would have never found you,” Mr. Ito observed.

That observation gets a few strange looks from his colleagues.

“I’ve been staying down at the dock.” I explain.

“Out of sight of our enemies,” Mr. Takahashi observes.

“We have an official letter for you,” Mr. Nakamura beams proudly.

I read the letter, obviously written by a Japanese, but translated into perfect English. They wanted me to make a film about an “overzealous Quiotic resistance fighter.” Quiotic, I’ll need to look that up later.

It must have been the last pitch I’d sent, probably the letters I’d handed to the stamp collecting diplomat the same day I was contacted by Culver City. Ironic as all get out, I’ve been pitching these people four years before the occupation and then
throughout the occupation and now I’m going to make three movies in what are probably the waning days of the conflict.

A nurse stuck her head in the door and abruptly turns around when she sees the Japanese in suits.

“Mr. Nagata called me into his office and told me you performed well making a Filipino film in 1936 and he was particularly happy you’d turned down the errant films you were offered by the Americans. And he said you need to be signed and paid immediately. The Emperor has been told to expect a Filipino friendship film,” Takahashi says.

“The Emperor strikes me as the type who enjoys a good film with action,” I say, then add in a whisper, “and thrills. And imagination and intrigue.”

“I think that might be true, but our government expects propaganda,” Nakamura is clear.

“Thank you for being so blunt,” I answer.

“I’ll sign.” I agreed.

“We will be here all week,” Nakamura wants time to prove his negotiating skills.

“So he has sent a contract?” I tried to sign.

“Yes,” Nakamura reluctantly admits.

“I’ll sign now?” I keep trying.

Nakamura frowns. “You don’t want to discuss the terms?”

“We’ve not discussed the budget.” Ito chimed in.
This is all very irregular for the Japanese.

“This is the least expensive place in the world to make a film. And you will be happy with the result. I trust Mr. Nagata,” I smile confidently.

“You think there will be problems getting the film made?”

“No, why not?” I want to know.

“You are in a hospital,” Ito is there to mention any embarrassing items that the others don’t want to speak about.

“I’ve come to an agreement with the rebels.” I bluff.

“Aside from everything else,” Ito continued, “you’re a movie producer without a studio. How do you plan on filming it?”

“I have GODIS WITHUS Productions.”

I’m sure my eyes glazed over.

“It is in the contract but I thought that existed solely on paper,” Nakamura comments.

“Actually, it’s mostly cardboard. But unless there’s a typhoon, we should be alright. It’s located by the docks and occupies an eight square block area. I’ve been sleeping down there. If I weren’t confined to this hospital, I’d give you a tour.”

SCENE 3

When the three men approach me the next day with a contract, it isn’t just the colossal budget that surprises me or the
stipulation that I will retain approval of my own director, script, and entire cast and crew. It is all nice and does sweeten the pie that the motion picture would carry the opening credit:

A

Godis Withus Go

Production

But, what is really surprising is that they agree to my Garbo-like demand for a multi-picture deal. American bombers raining down hell on them every night and they are game for ten pictures AND...

I had mentioned in the letter that I was a humble man and a team player but that my lawyers (trained in the west) insist that Nikkatsu insert a proviso that should I ever part company with Nikkatsu, the copyrights of all films produced under the Godis Withus Go Productions shield would remain with me.

In Tokyo, I’m sure Nagata’s jaw dropped; it sounded smart and something the Greta Garbo always insisted on.

We all sign, we take a photograph and they leave the islands. Their empire’s islands; everyone knew but them, it wouldn’t be that way for long.

Literally, a ton of money (Japanese Occupation Script) would be available at the Japanese Embassy, again, on the mere
presentation of a script. Not to mention, I would also receive a dozen cannisters of 35 mm film. When it rains, it pours.

I honestly couldn’t remember what all went into that pitch letter (and I don’t make copies, no time), but, to the best of my memory, it was the same thing I’ve been sending for nearly three years, to Stolkholm, Rome, Peking Berlin, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, New York, London, others and Tokyo. With no real result until now.

Now Selznick is totally jazzed; I can tell from his letter. The Americans are rid of Hitler and they are firebombing Japanese cities. But the Japanese are the most cordial and certainly the most generous. Was it the end of the war and their desperation, their need to show they weren’t losing and they expected to go on, business as usual? Or, and this is a real possibility, had I simply refined my skills enough where they finally couldn’t resist? But if you want to know the truth, they probably knew the money would be worthless soon, so they said, “What the Fuck! We’ll just toss it out there and if the film works, then it works. If it doesn’t work, well we’re screwed anyway.”

Anything could be true. The men I’ve ever encountered in the entertainment business are like not like these Nips. I knew only hard-nosed producers, egotistical directors, self-righteous
agents, miserly bankers, even the casting guys were total
assholes.

I didn’t become a filmmaker for the money, or the fame, but
the ten picture deal I just signed (with honest players) made me
stop and think.

Damn, I wish it was for real.

SCENE 4

Enriquez brings me his journal to read: a history of the
occupation, it says on the cover, which isn’t strictly accurate,
since it only goes down to where they leave the hills and enter
Manila. Nothing about Marcos (Enriquez’ old friend) getting
blown up. It is quite difficult but I struggled through it.

From it, I gathered that at one point things had been very bad
indeed. Apparently, the Japanese lured the entire CAF garrison
out into the open and slaughtered them like goats. The only
thing preventing total annihilation was Marcos, Enriquez,
Quirocho, and Hemenez, who happened to be feeding a group of
orphans (they were probably in town watching a film at the
time). Marcos, returned, pulled off a series of tricks that made
the enemy think they were more numerous than they actually were,
and that bought some time.

I read the journal in a small cell – call it a hospital room,
because that’s what it really was – in San Lazaro Hospital,
while I was waiting for someone to come and tell me I could leave. You’d have thought from all that intensity – all the funding available – that I’d be in a hurry to get on with it, but apparently not. I was frozen in my bed. Euphoric sure, but none the less unable to move. Still, the doctors gave me time to reflect, reach the hurdles, overcome them, relapse into a frozen mass, and gradually pull myself together again until I resembled something vaguely productive. My headache slowly subsided, but I was still too frightened to leave.

SCENE 5

So this young lady (actually still a girl), the same one from the Backlot Bar, the one whose father bought her the nice shoes, she enters winded. Evidently, she’d run to beat the others and we had time to talk.

She was born in San Miguel. Her father was a respected lawyer, and her mother was his second wife. She is the sixth of the lawyer’s eleven children, and her mother’s firstborn. I ask her about these things as they are almost always important when negotiating with fathers.

There are a lot of rapes, and so her father is not letting her attend school. But she has managed to find her way to my hospital room. She pitches me this lucrative scheme to sell stag
films (first to the Japanese and then to the Americans), but she doesn’t want to act in them? No, that she’s still a virgin.

So, she’s best suited to play the role of the virgin for Selznick. Ambitious, and all wrapped up in an enticing package, quite aware of sex but not her personal sex-appeal. She must be half my age! I turn away from her slightly, she moves to that side of the bed. But the desire to be an actress — that shows drive and purpose. Those were the sorts of qualities that makes my heart beat a little faster.

Five hours after the Japanese leave, the hospital room is more like a last-minute party at Charlie Chaplin’s pool. I haven’t felt much like a party, but such an interesting crowd followed the young lady. The girl had been pretty enough in an ingénue sort of way, and tempting enough to invite home for the night. But the girl, apparently confident of new role (her hold over me), had just disappeared when the crowd arrived.

You know at that original party, a hospital room or restaurant, whether a film is going to work or not, and sometimes you can hear the convulsions at the first gathering. I had a really bad feeling about the whole idea of making three films, all during a serious and deadly occupation; had the young lady remained, I might have felt different. Of course, it could have been entirely physiological, my brain injury.
It is all the result of desperation, and that’s not good. When you get bounced into something by force of circumstance, you don’t have options, and it’s in choosing between alternatives that we get a chance to exercise wisdom, whatever the hell that is during war. It’s the difference between being behind the wheel of a tank and being strapped over the barrel of the gun. The Japs did that occasionally. So, if it turns out that I might have any say in the matter, I’m not planning on sticking around. If I saw a chance to run, I’d take it, simple as that.

However, on the other hand, let’s say I do get a chance to run, is there nothing I can do to improve my chances of survival? Nothing immediately comes to mind, other than giving this ridiculous movie (or movies) that have been laid at my feet, a reasonable shot.

Actually, the journal makes me feel a bit better on that score, since it purports to record examples of rational human beings believing the most atrocious garbage, on both sides of the war. By the same token, there’s only so much dumb luck in the world either side of the camera and, by all rights, the Japanese contract had used up all of it, leaving me none for later.
SCENE 6

Fine. There’s an old saying; the worse the script, the harder you have to try. Which means, among other things, that I will have to take this ridiculous Marcos business seriously; not just snake through it looking for an opportunity to slither away, but actually think about it, focus, concentrate, get every last detail exactly right; not simply do enough to satisfy the executioners, but put everything into it, as though it matters, because it does matter. Selznick’s goons (I’m sure he has them) reach might not reach this far, but the CAF and the Japanese certainly would kill me.

Hard to say, given the ludicrous situation, but like the man said, it’s not like they have a choice. I don’t either.

SCENE 7

For the next five days, the journal – let’s call it that – worked on me to bring me up to date on the action in the hills, nothing I couldn’t learn from any number of radio broadcasts.

In practice, that meant that for four hours a day, the young actress sits with me and talks to me; all I have to do was run these Marcos ideas by her. If I get something wrong, I am corrected. No, he wouldn’t say that, she says if it sounds wrong, he won’t laugh at this or that, that doesn’t sound right, try something else.
She is patient and she always brings a pen and paper and eventually goes to fetch my typewriter. Can you imagine a young girl down at the dock finagling a typewriter from a landlord that I owed money to AND this during the Japanese occupation? I can say this about the Youngster, she get things done.

We don’t waste a second. By the end of the third day I am released; that is early, she says, but now that I have three films to make, no need to feel fresh as a daisy. She says now that I am “big time,” I’d never feel fresh as a daisy again.

I had to be with her nearly all the time after that. Together, we take the script and fetch a taxi load of the Mickey Mouse money from the Japanese. The girl’s father is incensed to find out what his daughter is involved in but, when we unloaded the taxi, his position seemed to moderate. He agrees to change 3/4th of the script for gold, silver and real-estate if half is put under his daughter’s name. I agreed, naturally. It won’t be a fair exchange with the Americans knocking and about to kick in the door, but still it is workable. I was actually more concerned with the film. I’d make two feature films and a short with a quarter of what the Japanese have given me to make their one film. Selznick’s money in the Spanish Embassy will wait and be a bonus, my big payday at the end.

Still, with all that money laid out on their living room floor, enough to cover the carpet entirely, this noble father
forbids his daughter's name to be divulged, either as an actress or in any way associated with “any” filmmaker or filmmaking. I nearly take offense but the father acts like I’d already deflowered her, so why argue with him? You don’t look a gift horse in the mouth, it might become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

That done, my new constant companion (the young Filipina) and I, go to see my friend at the Spanish Embassy. He doesn’t have any mail for me but he did say he’d given the pesados to Ahrianna. It was bad news because she would be difficult to find. Her theater is, of course, still closed and no one at the Backlot has any clue where to even begin looking for her.

That night, the Youngster keeps watch as I kick in the door of the Japanese press office on Recto Avenue. Well, I don’t literally kick in the door, but I do pick the lock and liberate enough unexposed film canisters to make the Selznick’s feature. I carry four and she carries three.

SCENE 8

My new constant companion learns how to operate the camera quickly. I’m a good teacher, and that’s in a number of fields not just camera work, that’s film processing too.

Early that next morning we shot: Quiocho waking me up after I’d had one hour’s sleep. She says I played it perfectly, that I woke up perfectly in character; violent start, a backward
wriggle that put an arm’s length between me and him, and my hand on where the hilt of a pistol that should have been on the bedside table, only there wasn’t one. Not bad, her endorsement, and from then on Quiocho started treating me with a bit of respect.

“This might not be a colossal FUBAR after all,” he says.

“No, it fucking won’t.” I demand.

He grins. “Swearing,” he points out.

“Swearing’s called for,” I reply. “And if you do that to me again, I’ll break your arm.”

“A nice touch,” the Youngster whispers. “You’re almost a better actor than a lover.”

For a split second, I thought she meant the opposite. For a split second. But she says “ALMOST” and come think about, maybe I was what they said I wasn’t, a very good actor.

SCENE 9

On the second day, we shot big public scenes. The first part belongs in the Selznick film, at the end when Manila is liberated, but the authorities don’t know that and I carry credentials from the Nikkatsu Corporation. Of course, I have an actress at my office, renamed the Nikkatsu Corporation Field Office in Manila. And she tells the Japanese policeman that the Emperor himself has ordered the film. I knew they would call to
investigate and fortunately, I have the entire Backlot Bar backing my play. They believe I’ve tricked the Japanese into allowing me to make the Selznick movie. Well, in a way I have.

It had been a very long time, they say, since anyone had laid eyes on Marcos, and the mafia had noticed; ugly rumors were flying around - true ones, but never mind that - and nothing could be done straight away. After all, the purpose of the CFA film is to dispel the rumors.

The scene would serve one clear purpose, I (as Marcos) would make just a short fifty-five kilometer-per-hour appearance down Rizal, six cameras in an eight-block span, smile and wave with one hand but wave an automatic weapon with the other. The American Jeep would not stop, not stop for anything, and everything would be just fine.

We have our extras, professionals mostly from the Backlot, hired to cheer the triumphant Marcos as he rides down Rizal Street in the Jeep. Unfortunately, some Filipino citizens come down from their apartments and join in; well, with no way to prevent that, no way to warn them it is only a film, they clearly feel the rebels have maybe arrived. It is some amazing footage. There have already been riots, which were put down with considerable brutality, and we all regret the riot and brutality we inadvertently create, but manage to conveniently film. But what’s a film without a few snafus? It comes with the territory.
It’s regrettable, but at least the war crime tribunal that is surely coming will have some film evidence.

The Manila police are enraged and follow us to the Malacañang Palace gates. Fortunately, we manage to film the last scene of the Japanese film before they catch up. I am riddled with blanks from our actors as I try to scale the fence and fall on the sidewalk in a puddle of fake blood. Regrettably, that scene is also ill-conceived (rash), one of the guards inside the gates creases me in the leg with an actual lead bullet.

So, I say “cut” and I’m laying there and the Manila police roll up, locking their brakes, and run at me pistols drawn, but I hobble up as gingerly as possible and smile. I show them my credentials and explained how the actors... (in the authentic Japanese uniforms we’d liberated...) had just killed me, the rebel leader (Marcos), in a desperation move coming down from the hills trying to occupy the palace. The Filipino police have no idea what to think, but the Japanese soldiers clearly don’t like it and neither seem to understand the importance of propaganda.

They radio for instructions, and after a time, word comes back it is all legitimate. However; I am told, in the future, I need to inform them of our activities to avoid accidents. The bartender of the Backlot agrees to take on this task and might be the first government permits and regulations executive in history. At least, he is the first in the Philippines; he is.
As a consequence of the leg wound, the Youngster issues a statement that Marcos has been shot, a dangerous wound, though the doctors are hopeful.

The footage of the unsuspecting citizens is just priceless and so I float the idea that maybe not everything should be entirely scripted and the public shouldn’t be entirely aware of the movie we were making.

And it goes as planned. Playing shot and injured would normally be harder than it sounds, but fortuitously I had actually been shot, and I guess an infection sets in and my joints ache and I complain how much effort it takes to do anything at all. Don’t worry, the Nikkatsu Corporation安排s for a doctor treat me. Thank goodness, Japan is the third country, after the United States and the United Kingdom, to develop penicillin manufacturing.

He wants me in bed for two weeks. I told him, he does his job, I’ll do mine. Idiot, the studio sent him. Doesn’t he realize that what’s got to be done? Films don’t just jump into theaters. And I don’t suppose the doctor figured the nightly firebombing in Japan would suddenly end? There is always a deadline, even if not set in stone, it might be set in rubble and ash. You don’t need to have served your time in the film profession before you understand that, but it’s true.
The Nikkatsu executives that don’t want any part of wartime Manila see the account ledgers and have a certain level of patience. From Japan, they can’t actually see us working, but they know if a film is being made or not, just as they can tell if an actress is fooling around with the director. I have no idea how, but they always seem to know.

So, I do it my way, and it works. I think that is when I realize exactly what Marcos means to the people of Manila. For another scene: We put Marcos (me) out on a hospital balcony (supposedly on film, the palace), I’ve hired 147 extras but when I say “roll ‘em” and walk out there, I discover I can’t see anything except real (unpaid) people - no garden, no pavement, just bodies squeezed up tight against each other, a solid mass of faces, eyes all fixed on me, as though the homes have emptied and flooded the set. And the noise. I don’t hear screams like that even from the young lawyer’s daughter. I stand there suffocating in the noise, and, God, I was jealous.

The Manila police show but the Japanese soldiers don’t. The bartender tells me he doesn’t expect them to show up anymore. No shots are fired on the crowd this time. Good job cast and crew.

“I think we got away with it,” Hemenez says, as I limp away from the porch, still sick from the leg wound. “You look awful,” he notices.
“I’m fine,” I say, but it takes me a moment to pull myself together. “Just acting. Now what?”

“Let’s not get carried away,” Enriquez said. “Thirty seconds at an open window is one thing.”

“You Cagayan Apayao guys are worried about the dialogue. Now, after we’re already shooting? You said I had creative control. Script control.”

“Who said that?” Enriquez asked.

“You did, you promised me that,” I insisted.

One thing I’ve learned from the journal. One thing I’ve found out about my CAF friends (the two Filipinos, the American and especially the dead anti-hero), Marcos hadn’t done much but set up a bunch of cardboard dummies in the jungle and the Nips believed them to be real in the moonlight. They ran away but that’s hardly anything. Marcos did save the day but Enriquez and Quiocho feel the war has been more a case of keeping Marcos on a leash, to keep him from interfering in things he didn’t understand and screwing things up. Yet, still, they insist that the film encompasses their adventures together, all four of them.

Fairly good scriptwriters themselves, the American psyop officers, of course trying to reduce enemy morale, in the journal tell Enriquez to call themselves, “los cuatro guerrilleros masculinos.” They have invested quite a lot in the
narrative and are obviously looking to maintain the story.

SCENE 10

Quiocho confides in me the next day, over what his friends say is Marcos’ favorite breakfast of tocillog, salty dried tuyo and tsokolate.

“Your script is shit.” Quiocho complains.

“You mean it’s not history or you mean it’s not the real Marcos?” I’m curious to know.

“He was a clown.” Quiocho reveals to me, after I’d written the script for their short.

“Now, you tell me? I despise tuyo.”

“He worshipped the old American, but once he was captured, the fool started believing what the U.S. public relations men said about him. He forgot he was nothing but the old man’s tool, started thinking he’d actually done it all. To tell you the truth, he was starting to get out of control.”

Despite the leg injury, I’m doing exercises the entire time we are filming. Marcos had been an athlete, so at that time he was killed naturally he was said to be amazingly lean and fit. Either that or someone is playing a cruel trick on me. It’s probably these CAF boys playing a trick on me.

Of course in the north, fighting there is limited access to food. I live in Manila and I’ve existed by liberating war script
from wanna-be Japanese corporals and privates. Every three or four months, I’d score and start eating with a sort of savage passion. Maybe I’m in a rush to consume as much as possible before I am discovered and executed.

Marcos’ metabolism might have burned most of it off, but they tell me he was starting to get curvy at the end. The worse the Japanese fared, the more Marcos ate, just like everyone. But that will not do for film. Everyone expects Marcos to have the physique of a heroic statue, and that is non-negotiable.

“Actually,” Hemenez tells me, as I return from a long walk to the port and back, “you were about right when we caught you.”

“You know you knocked me out? Put me in a hospital.”

“Well, sorry. But you were about the same build as him, I mean,” Hemenez tries to be my friend suddenly.

“But this is a movie; people wouldn’t believe that, you see,” I explain.

I try to use films he might relate to, *Cleopatra*, *Viva Villa!*, *Henry VIII*, *Captains Courageous*. But he only accepts my exercising, after I tell him about a friend of mine who used to make a living counterfeiting American dollars. My friend told me that a forgery’s got to be better than the original. Hemenez never gives me any shit after that.

And then there are the scars for the close-ups. Everybody knows Marcos has scars, because he’s been a jungle fighter, and
then there is a scene earlier where he is wounded in the face while diving on a grenade meant for the American general. It had saved Wainwright’s life; that was the General’s name, Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright. I remember now. The script refers to him as “the old American.” I’m sorry; that might appear insensitive but I have three narratives running in my head and that’s the movie business.

And Enriquez tells me, WHILE the make-up woman is working, Marcos had remarkably few scars for a jungle fighter, because he was good at avoiding them; he didn’t get himself all cut up, but that’s not what people expect to see, is it?

With Enriquez, I dispense with the complicated film analogies, that proved not to work on Hemenez and go directly to the story about the counterfeiter. And still, Enriquez doesn’t budge, damn peasant historian.

He wants to negotiate the issue. The woman is there working on scars and he isn’t having it, the meddler. I tell him, there is a place in hell, I guarantee it, for outsiders that intrude in films. He told me there is a place in hell, and he also guaranteed it, for filmmakers that meddle in history.

This constant meddlesome interference shows how much I’d managed to please them, not at all. I tell everyone from the Backlot not to speak with them and they are not to be on the set unless they are in the scene. And, we would use actors in their
places for the Culver City and Nikkatsu film. They were technically the producers of only the short film, but they have yet to contribute a single peso. Sometimes a producer must stand on principle. The only thing they have contributed are a few old, mostly ruined and ragged, Japanese rifles and uniforms. I could have bought them just as easily.

About the scars, instead of coming to blows (he probably had six different weapons on him), we compromise on a relatively small number of deep scars, which the woman executed with remarkable faith to the script.

We shot a dozen close-up scenes that day and I can see it hurt like hell, a Filipina, that should be in high school, telling him he isn’t welcome on the set anymore. I had to dig deep into Marcos’ character (F word and all) and walk over there and yell at him. I should have knocked Enriquez out for raising his voice to her that way.

Intermission, while I help you with a question that’s probably occurred to you already. Why didn’t I slug him?

Marcos was a jungle fighter and, until he heard the call to a higher destiny, all three movies center on his move into Manila, the way my dad moved into Santa Cruz. My dad said: you only get really good at fighting if you enjoy it. So Marcos says it in the script.
It’s a great line, the Youngster tells me. You have to take this war seriously. Well, yes, obviously you take any fight seriously if you want to stay alive. But that, according to my dad, isn’t the point. If you fight just to stay alive, sooner or later, you’ll lose. You need to fight to win. You need to enjoy winning, more than anything else in the whole world. That sentiment is NOT in the Nikkatsu script. It’s in the Culver City script and I added a line (my dad would love) to the CAF script. To get that enjoyment, you need to relish your opponent’s defeat, and his pain, and his death.

I had a daydream, while sitting at a typewriter, that my dad said that.

I try the lines out on the Backlot crowd and they all seemed to think all three statements work. Marcos is a vertical character. Many faceted but all about victory.

My dad would love me making these movies, all three of them and not just because his blood is making them. They’re not done of course, yet. But my dad was so good at what he did. He wasn’t the biggest man ever, he didn’t have muscles like – well, Marcos, or (come to that) me. He didn’t have any philosophy, but every time he went into a fight – I don’t think I can do better than his own favorite metaphors or is it a simile. I don’t know, I’m a filmmaker now. It’s one or the other!
Dad said a fight, it’s like going to meet your best girl. I’m paraphrasing that for modesty. It’s not just a case of liking to “hurt” people. You need to be in “love” with it.

Did Marcos love what he did? In the scripts that matter, he does. Maybe I went too far? Maybe Marcos is, yes, a chip off the old block (my father). And, I’m going about my work here with the same – I’m reaching for a word here – the same gusto that my dad went about his. I have no idea how Marcos fought; I’m not sure that he ever did fight or now even if that really matters.

An actor told me once to stand back and look at your character in a mirror. Marcos. One way of looking at it, it makes the job easier, but actually, a mirror is a kid’s toy. If you really want to know a man, write a script about him. Easy-peasy, your teacher is sleazy.

I look into the script and I see Marcos. I look into the mirror and I see my father.

SCENE 11

Once the close-ups are done, I need an American. And I’ve written a real problem. Where in the hell would I find an American looking actor in Manila here today, with Nips everywhere and spies?
So I have to go on my hands and knees to my CAF partners. I find them attached to a short-wave radio; something about Lingayen Gulf. Fortunately, they don’t hold a grudge.

No big deal, they tell me, they’ll just smuggle one in from the hills. They know plenty and it can be done in the night. But the scene calls for Marcos talking to the top American, and they’re prepared to give over weapons, and they need a guarantee of results. Dialogue. You’ll have to get off your asses and get out there. Or something similar.

And then I realize something, they might just know or be on good terms with the actual CAF. And maybe they’d made a fake newsreel before, the one I’d seen, where they vowed to keep fighting after Wainright’s surrender. They DO seem to know a lot about propaganda and the film business. On the other hand, they might be entirely honest and real jungle fighters. I’m trying not to judge.

However, I don’t like the idea of these guys sitting in a Tondo apartment listening to the radio when the American Navy is bombarding Lingayen. They clearly might be landing boys that very minute. The one aspect of my distrust is their arrogance toward me. All films are personal, especially to the man behind the camera. It’s bad enough trying to tell me how many scars Marcos should have; that damn radio bothered me.
I have a level of distrust that comes from growing up in Santa Cruz, where everybody knows his place, like in every pack of dogs. In the mafias, your place is your most valued possession, because it guarantees that you’ll always eat something and sleep somewhere, and it takes much of the stress and anxiety out of life. You know who you’re allowed to beat up, and who’s allowed to beat up on you. It’s only the highest echelons, the big boss in each Mafia, who have absolute freedom of thought and action, who could just turn the world off and listen to it on a radio. Something is rotten in Tondo.

They might be legitimate for all I know. I have a fine imagination, but I wasn’t sure I was going to be able to extrapolate all the truth. I mean they did have a radio, where’d they get that?

**SCENE 12**

They do produce a skinny American kid that very night. And the next day, I tell them how surprised I am. Quiocho tells me not to be such a pussy and to get on with it.

My crew dresses him up in a colonel’s uniform; they did the makeup thing so he looked fifty at least and the Youngster trotted him down about a million miles of corridor to a dark storage room (in the script, a “war-crimes library”), its walls are covered in file folders on all the Japanese oppressors.
There really isn’t such a room but we use the accounting department’s tax records archive in the basement of City Hall. It’s unbelievably vulgar; it is supposed to be the safest and most secret place in Manila. And the tax records vault might have been that; I know a few hundred businessmen that would like to see it burn. If I weren’t making three films...

I do my Marcos entrance, quickening my step as I walked through the door to make sure I was a clean stride ahead of the CAF three.

The American is a small man, thin and even malnourished, sick in an almost heroic way – he keeps his hat on in the scene (even though it’s inside) because when he took it off, he had the hair of a 20-year-old farm boy from Nebraska, I think he actually was a corn farmer, as a matter of fact. But I wish they’d brought a fat American with a shiny bald head.

I never learn anything from my CAF friends, but, after the scene talking to the American, I learned a new Japanese word when I ask him about Lingayen Gulf. It seems the lack of oil has crippled the Jap’s war machine, forcing the navy to relegate its once-powerful battleships to antiaircraft duty and leading to the creation of the kamikazes that were harassing MacArthur’s forces.
SCENE 13

I catch Hemenez staring at the Youngster’s backside, my camera operator, the girl who is taking down the equipment. I mean MY camera operator; her father had pretty much signed her over to me. And she was literally just a kid.

“She was a virgin when you met?” Hemenez whispers.

In all my meetings, arguments, propaganda chalk-talks, and beatings that resulted in hospital stays, the CAF had never brought up my interest in either women (Ahrianna or the young girl). But it was probably because Enriquez was afraid to risk what had become an essential partnership. But now, I immediately sense that Hemenez is someone who would judge a person for their sex life. But when it came to who went to bed with whom, and why, and how often, it seemed to me that Quiocho and Enriquez gave it no thought.

The only thing I can think of to say, concerns the relatively low age of consent in the Philippines, as compared to where? New Mexico?

“I think you and I are long past the bullshit, so I’m just gonna ask out loud. When it comes to your penchants of the amorous nature, I bet the fellas that you’re not exclusively, one way or the other.”
“And you just lost that bet. But I’m not sure how I feel about…” Hemenez fluttered his fingers toward a truck’s tailgate. The young Filipina was loading the camera into it’s case.

“She’s fifteen. I’m watching after her for her father.”

“I should let you know then how positively charged and curious young girls are at that age,” Hemenez tries to joke.

“Point taken. Now, about the next scene, you’ll have to leave.”

“Not that again,” Hemenez whines

“I didn’t get a chance to plead my case.”

I wave his cigarette smoke away from my face and he takes it as I’m saying, very well, then, plead away.

SCENE 14

These CAF guys just will not leave me alone.

“It worked, didn’t it? Marcos looks like a big man with the American?” I ask.

“Yes, these two told me, but that’s beside the point,” Enriquez admits.

“It’s what I would’ve done.” I tell them.

That was scary.

“Can’t we just stick to the journal?” Enriquez asks. He is the least upset of the three of them. “That was the whole idea. The
Americans went out of the way to make the journal sound convincing.”

“It’s not like that,” I say. “It’s not the journal, all or nothing. Either I’m the director or I’m not. Otherwise, it’ll just fall to bits and you won’t fool anyone.”

“We never used to let Marcos talk to the Americans,” Hemenez points out.

“But this general insisted,” I point out.

“This is a waste of time,” Quiocho said.

“Be that as it may.” Enriquez was being the alpha-wolf today, but it isn’t the role he is cut out for. “All right,” he went on, “you were right, as it happens. But you didn’t follow the journal.”

“Fine,” I say. “So, if you could just clarify. Which is more important, continuity and doing it right, or doing what’s in the journal?”

“He thinks he knows better than we do,” Quiocho says.

“As far as telling a story goes,” I say, “I probably do.”

“Smart though,” Hemenez put in. “I hadn’t thought of it like that. The Americans will love it, I mean. You were right about that,” he says, actually talking to me, not the others.

“Right, you can travel all around America giving speeches and screwing all the girls that want a certified war-hero. I understand every ‘documented’ war hero has a number of options -
red, blonde, and brunette. It’s already started, I understand. You just hike up that poodle skirt and go at it. They love it and they don’t care if your skin’s a little tan. They see the newsreels and understand these battles take place in the sun.”

The frauds looked at each other. Only Hemenez (an American) shows any skepticism on his face. He might have an inkling it wouldn’t be so easy.

“All right,” Quiocho says, “you’re so smart. You think you can make us war heroes?”

“That’s up to you,” I say. “You hired me. But I have to do it my way. Marcos’s way. And would you please talk to each other occasionally, not to me?”

“Our fault,” Enriquez says, “for running before we can walk. And from what I’ve seen, it hasn’t turned out so bad, and we’ll get away with it, so no harm done. But Tomas’ right,” he says, turning to me. “You do not run us. We run you! Got that?”

“Where’d that come from?” I ask, “I don’t want any problems.”

“I’m thinking I’m gonna like America,” Quiocho says.

“Hollywood will love you back; I promise,” I reply.

SCENE 15

This Sea Hag, I don’t know, walks up to me and embarrasses me in front of the entire cast and crew, “how do you justify yourself, the hero of the piece?”
I can’t say anything but, “Who are you, his mother?”
She gives me the middle finger salute and walks away, and then I shout a bit late. “You know he’s out up in the north fighting so you can be here safe.”

She kept up with the bird for at least a city block.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” Enriquez said. “There was no need. He never usually shouted after old ladies.”

“Or anyone for that matter,” Quiocho chimed in.

“I told you earlier that I’m much better at writing parts for other people, and I imagine by now you’ll agree?”

SCENE 16

But later, the woman, maybe Marcos’ actual mother (perhaps not), made me think. I’m the protagonist of this story. One because I’m a filmmaker and I look like Marcos. And two, these CAF thugs will never hike up a poodle skirt and bang away at anything but their hand and they know it. They know any self-respecting American chick will find them ugly (and dumb) as sin.

I’m the sole protagonist of these films. And, I’ll use the word, “hero,” as it implies actions of heroic stature – great deeds, brave, clever, everything. I’m telling you my story, which I wrote. Or, I have to be honest (she’d only deny it), I think my young lover suggested some of the scenes.
Call me gross if you want, but you’ll buy the theater ticket. You’re already pissed off enough to go for your wallet (Selznick did, Nakamura did as well), and you are just curious enough. Am I anti-hero enough for you to give a damn? Look at your body language. Squirming in your chair like you would in the theater seating.

However, don’t buy the rights to this book. There are no anti-heroes buried in Philippine soil; Filipinos reject this form of expression totally, and any film adaptation of this novel will absolutely prove this. For the time being, anyway.

I don’t look back; I’ll never admit to that. They say tell the truth all the time and you don’t have to look back to find what lies you told. But, I did use that word, “history,” which implies a commitment to the truth, whatever that may be. But just what do you want here on paper, as opposed to the screen? I’m writing down what actually happened, not making anything up, not leaving things out because someone will find it offensive, or the scenes are too expensive to shot.

SCENE 17

Three more public sequences for the films: two are battle scenes, the third is laying a wreath on the tomb of the first citizen executed in the occupation (his father). The Japanese authorities come around and they don’t want me to film this
scene, but I say a few words, which go down really well with them; I tell them it is the wrong grave and Toyko Rose will ridicule Marcos for the mistake. How does a dutiful son not know his father’s grave and then lay a wreath on the wrong grave? Marcos’s father is buried in La Union.

They chuckled and congratulated me (and themselves), which is quite a tribute to ignorance when you think about it.

SCENE 18

The next day, I am in the shower when all three of the halfwits come in, and Hemenez shuts the bathroom door and wedges it with the back of a chair. I sure don’t like that.

“Clearly,” Enriquez says, “he wasn’t married.”

I shrugged. “Just as well,” I say.

“You’re shooting a scene,” says Quiocho. “You should probably know, he was more inclined the other way, if you know what I mean.”

“You are pretty progressive for Filipino fighters. The public might have a problem with that, if you’re saying he’s gay,” I say.

Culver City will have a cow!

“And you boys can forget about any hero tours of America (other than San Fransisco) and you won’t like that.” I point out.
“No, you don’t understand.” Quiocho said.

“Lucky for you, us, but kept it quiet,” Enriquez says. “But he was definitely both sides of the fence, so we need to take care of that.”

“Explain what you mean about taking care.”

“There is a certain amount of gossip,” Hemenez joins in.

“However, he was seeing an actress.”

He made it sound so awful I couldn’t help laughing. “First I’ve heard of it,” I say.

“I thought it was fairly common knowledge among you people.”

“You people?”

“Your film cabal.”

“The Manila film industry has a really first-rate intelligence network,” I think it’s true and I try to explain. “It’s vital in our line of work to know who’s screwing who, to avoid unpleasant conflicts when you’re casting a piece. Or, directing a film. The love scenes can be especially tricky. So, if one of us had been…”

“But he was.” Quiocho was about to enjoy himself, I could tell. “Pretty well everybody knows about it, except you.” He treats me to the nastiest sympathetic smile I’ve ever had the misfortune to share a shower with. “Always the last to know, as the saying goes. Her name’s Ahrianna.”
He could have kicked me in the balls instead, but, no, he had to be cruel. “I find that hard to believe.”

The role of Marguerite isn’t in the CAF script. This is a documentary about a band of ruthless and patriotic guerillas and doesn’t (until now possibly) require a woman.

I make Quiocho’s day. “You filmmakers think you know people,” he says. “I imagine your friends kept it from you. Nobody likes to be the messenger.”

I take a deep breath. Doesn’t matter. Hardly anything off camera does. “So,” I say. “I didn’t go into the Backlot too often back then. I don’t, not unless I have a project and I need labor.”

Enriquez gave me his steady look. “He needs a girlfriend,” he says. “Because of those other rumors. And you know this Ahrianna…”

“I think he dumped her when he got blown up,” I say firmly. “She probably thinks he’s cheating on him. It happens a lot during war,” Quiocho reasoned.

“So you know her?”

“I know lots of actresses,” I say.

“What about Ahrianna? Shouldn’t we use her, since…”

“Aharianna owes me money,” I make the point. I need paid.

“So, if we find her, you’ll use her?”

“Yippy Ki Yay. I will.” I agree.
And then I try to figure out how to film it.

“So, what do you have in mind? How is this going to go?”

“There was no settled pattern,” Enriquez said, every inch the amateur historian. “Sometimes she came to a hotel in La Union, sometimes they met at well, Quiocho’s mom’s house. Never at the theater.”

“Damn guys, it’s a movie; they can screw at the theater. If you’d ever been inside the Grand, you’d know it’s perfect,” I was firm.

“So, that’s the plan?”

“So, I need to collect my money.” I insist.

“It’s easier and safer to have her come to a public place to start with,” Hemenez said. “Her face is quite well known, people will see. Word will get out. It will prove, one, he’s not dead and two, he’s not a homo.”

“She has a lot of my money. You understand that, right?” I state very clearly.

“How much is a lot?” Quiocho is curious.

“I need it. I need all of it,” I demand.

“Do we look like your collectors?” Quiocho asks.

“I can’t finish your documentary without it,” I sound reasonable.

Enriquez purses his lips. “We’ll get your money, but we think the two of you should be filmed together,” he says.
“Like on a date,” Hemenez suggests.

“There’s a war on!” I argue.

“For one thing, if anybody is harboring doubts about his sexual identity, that ought to set their minds at rest. Maybe at a hotel,” Hemenez finishes.

“Getting out of a cab in front of a hotel,” Enriquez suggests.

“With the hotel facade in the shot. An upper-class reticence, sort of says something during a war,” I caustically observe.

“And it’s just the sort of thing you wouldn’t allow to happen if you were running an impostor,” Enriquez said. “So it makes sense.”

“Then we’ve decided,” I end it and dry off.

SCENE 19

It is all arranged. The CAF are bringing Ahrianna to the Tivoli Theater at the Plaza Santa Cruz. The feature is Army, which tells the story of three generations and their relationship with the Japanese army, from the Meiji era through the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The final scene I tell them they’ll love; the Japanese censors hate it and them it’s a miracle film’s still out there, I tell them.

So, Ito (the Japanese studio subordinate) tells me the set was firebombed and they couldn’t reshoot it. Not easily. The lack of silver he tells me is crippling the nation’s propaganda machine
and asks me be economical and not too experimental with the film they sent (they don’t know I stole the jap journalist’s allotment). I’d heard that the Japanese were eating acorns and even sawdust. He’d asked me about life in Manila and I tell him. The Japanese were like madmen knowing that the Americans were coming. So after that, I feel free to asked him about life in Tokyo and he whispers that he’s seen new mothers too malnourished to nurse.

I really was quite good and worked it so we’d have the theater to ourselves; we being me, the she-wolf, Enriquez and Quiacho. Only “Wholf” and I will be sitting on the front row of the first balcony, while the others sit in the very top. That is the deal.

“Fine, but you’re not to be alone with her.” Enriquez demands.

“Why?” I demand.

“She insisted,” Quiacho says.

“It’s an awful lot of trouble to put you through. Those are the WORST seats at the top.” I say.

“It’s no trouble,” Quiacho smiles.

I arrive five minutes early for the afternoon matinee because that’s what Marcos would have done. I ride there in an open car, with four Santa Cruz mafia bodyguards; we talk and I tell them about Ahrianna’s favorite position, which amazes them to no end. I enter the empty theater.
It is a nice place, very tasteful, very expensive wallpaper; really for the occupation, the carpet is in excellent condition, and I am wearing U.S. Army fatigues. They thought it best to tell her that she was meeting Marcos, that he was alive. I was thinking seriously about my future plans in Hollywood when Quiocho came down the aisle and sits next to me.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“You know.”

“I thought you were going to sit up at the top?” I ask.

“She specifically said she didn’t want to be alone with you,” Quiocho says.

“And you just let her dictate that?” I want to know.

“She’s a well-known actress, a woman and she smiles a lot, so we can’t just ignore her, not without a lot of trouble and guilt.” Quiocho explained. “You know what I mean?”

It took me a moment to work out what he was getting at. “For God’s sake,” I say, “I never hit a woman in my life.”

“She was very insistent,” he replied, looking at me.

That kid (Quiocho) is a moron!

“Look at me. I’m not Marcos.”

People like to believe the worst about Marcos, I have no idea why. “Fine,” I say. “We can all sit here in silence watch the movie, and then go home.”
“Let’s do that,” Quiocho said, and made himself comfortable in the seat next to mine.

I was beginning to wish I’d chosen a different feature when I sensed that Ahrianna was walking down the carpet. Quiocho turns; so do I. While she is coming down the aisle, I quickly confirm the scene the way I wanted to play it.

The Filipina had loaned me a tiny mirror. I pull it out and hold it in just the right position. In the mirror, I can see the aisle, but all she’d be able to see is the back of my head and shoulders. I take a deep breath and a long look into the mirror, and wait.

Enter Ahrianna left, she advances, sees man in balcony, first row. Just for a moment, she freezes like she’s seen a ghost. While she’s still frozen, I spin round in my chair and scowl at her.

“You heifer,” I say. “Where’s my money?”

Enriquez blocks her exit.

She always recovers well, I’ll give her that.

“Hello,” she says, and takes off what is clearly her best hat. Quiocho is on his guard, in case I make a lunge for her with some knife I’ve managed to conceal. I give him an evil eye, and he sits back. He pretends to watch the movie. It’s pretty, he can’t keep up with the subtitles and loses interest.
“I haven’t got your money,” she says. “There was a closedown, remember?”

“That was weeks ago,” I say.

“I’ve been busy.”

I’d made my point. Time to let her off the hook. “How’s it doing, by the way?” I ask.

“The theater? Oh, not bad. First night back was a bit touch and go, but it’s settled down now.”

“So you read the Culver City script?” I ask.

“There isn’t a part for me. I thought that was the reason you chose me to deliver it.”

“Oh, sure there is,” I say.

“No. There isn’t.”

“You can play Marguerite,” I say.

“She’s a whore,” Ahrianna protests.

“So? You’re an actress.” I make a point.

“No. I want the girl.” Ahrianna begs.

“You’re gonna play the virgin?” I ask with ten percent sarcasm.

“I don’t know, why not.” Ahrianna is annoyed.

“Not even ten years ago,” I say.

She is looking at the screen, not me. But for a split second there, she thought she’d seen him, Marcos. I decided to change the subject and point this out.
“Yes,” she says, “that is really quite impressive. Pity, really. If I’d known he was dead, I’d have suggested this meeting myself.”

That makes Quiocho laugh out loud, and Enriquez smiles behind his hand on the second row. She has two close protection body guards. Not that I mind. Someone has to be the straight man.

A bit like fight scenes; you don’t mind one bit when he pretends to stab you and you die, so long as he minds what he’s doing and doesn’t accidentally stab you.

“Do you theater people always carry on like this?” Quiocho says. We both look at him, like the outsider he is.

He shrugs. “I was only asking,” he says.

BEAT

Enriquez leans foreward, “You have his money; give it to him.” She turns to him. Cold and reptilian.

“You wanted us to be here,” Enriquez makes it clear.

“And it was very kind of you,” Ahrianna said sweetly.

“Still, this could…”

“That was when I thought I was meeting Marcos.”

“We’re both professionals. Let us negotiate like we always have,” I suggest.

“I’m sure two important gentlemen like you have better things to do,” she adds.
That’s the disadvantage you face if you’ve been born and bred a Filipino. If you get a direct order from a lady, or an actress dressed up as one, you’re obliged to obey it. No matter that Hemenez wouldn’t have the car around to collect them for another hour or so, and they’d have to walk home through the streets. My heart bled for them, and then they left.

And then we looked at each other for a bit. I’ve always liked Ahrianna. She’s not as pretty as she looks. Her own hair is kinky and a bit wild and just sort that gives the wrong impression of her recent activities, so for a role (which is every public appearance) she irons it like a blouse and uses chemicals to keep it straight.

Consider her face in repose and you’ll see she’s quite plain really, nose too flat, face a bit round for Hollywood (but she was the fashionable mix, half white and half Asian) but her forehead is unfashionably huge, with the first signs of crow’s feet under her eyes. But the trick (on camera) is not to show her face in repose. And if it is the editor, should just cut away. She’s smiling or frowning or pouting or doing her thoughtful face; she can do a whole five-reel tragi-comedy without saying a word, all by expressions. She says or does something horrible and you forgive her instantly, because of that little didn’t-really-mean-it twist at the corner of her mouth.
The last time I worked with her three years ago, she was slim but now she’s getting fat, and the backs of her hands are starting to show that. She’s got a tongue like a razor, but she’s smart. Thousands of men in this city might still be madly in love with her, and I don’t blame them.

“You’ve really got yourself in a mess this time,” she says. I nod. “No real choice,” I say.

“It’s not a bad take, though,” she went on. “When I saw you there just now…” She giggles.

“Just so I know,” I ask. “Were you porkin’ Marcos while you were with me?”

Her turn to nod. “And there, the similarity ends,” she lashes out. “Not that it matters. Did I ever tell you, I never really enjoyed sex with you?”

I absorbed the beat, then my cue. “If that’s true, you’re not just a pretty face; you really can act.”

“I can play Nora?”

“No. You can’t play the virgin. Geez, you’re thirty-five.”

She gave me her most genuine smile. It’s not nearly sincere, of course; but with her, it’s better than nothing.

“I don’t get what people see in you,” she goes on. “I’ve always thought our sessions were a bit like killing a chicken. If you stop and think about it, I should have never done it with you. I just never stopped to think.”
“When did you ever kill a chicken?”

“Didn’t you know? I grew up on a farm, on Mindanao. God, was I glad to get up here. I was promised at birth to the local fisherman’s son, would you believe. He had three teeth and smelled of dead fish by the time we grew up,” she lied.

Great line, good character, but not true. I met her father once. He was the projectionist at the old Rex Theater on Salazar Street. Still, you can’t expect an actress to remember everything.

“What are you going to do?” she asks.

“Make the movie. See it through, probably,” I state.

“You’ll never get away with it. The Japanese will kill you.”

“Probably,” I was mater-of-fact.

She gave me her most corrosive stare. “That’s idiotic,” she says. “You can’t make an American film, not here, not now.”

“I’ve made a commitment,” I’m an artist and noble.

“Well, you’ll just have to disappoint Culver City.”

“Who told you it was for Selznick?” I needed to know who was talking.

“That Spanish fellow, we’re close,” she admitted.

“So, you do have my money,” I guess.

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“Hand it over… please,” I ask.
“I can’t in good conscience give you the money knowing it’ll end in disaster. You’ve got to show me this will work,” she is a mean-ass-cat.

I could belt her one, and throw her over the balcony and hold her by the ankles. Shake her a bit. Let her think I’m gonna drop her. Scare the living daylights out of her. She’d hand over the money then. Marcos would have gotten his money.

She pauses.

“What are you grinning about?”

“I have a plan,” I let on.

“What is it?”

“I have an entire bar of filmmakers behind me,” I spill the beans. “It’s all laid out, script, shots, call sheets.”

“You’re gonna get them all killed, the entire Manila film industry lives in that bar!”

“They’re waiting for an opportunity,” I point out.

“They’re desperate. Shame on you!” She’s acting outraged.

“Nothing. No, you’re right. I can’t keep this up for very long, but I’ve never been so lucky in all my life. It’s crazy.” I retreat. Strategically.

“And now I’ve dragged me into it,” she says, “and you’re playing the lead and I can’t choose my role? Thank you very much.”
“Don’t start on me,” I plead. “That’s not fair, and you know it.”

She sighs. “It’s just,” she says, “every time I get bent over a desk, there you are. That’s not entirely your fault, maybe, but it’s a fact.”

“Can’t argue with facts.” I quip.

“Funny,” she chuckles.

I have her; she is about to break. But, she is starting to get on my nerves.

“Given this is a matter of life and death, the war, it’d be better if we were on the same side,” I say. “Just this once.”

“True.” She smiles. “I forgive you. Right, let’s start again. What are you going to do?”

I pause.

A thought crosses her mind. “Did you tell that guerilla unit how to find me?” She gestures to the back of the theater.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I didn’t know where you were,” I plead ignorance.

“No, but you knew where they could start looking.”

“Everyone knows you own the Grand,” I reason with her.

“That’s all right then.”

There are times when it’s good to claim the moral high ground; remarkably few of them, in my experience. “What’s showing at the Grand?”
“The films are lousy, but they don’t seem to mind. And you never did deliver that short you owe me.”

“All right,” I say. “So what do you think I ought to do with this feature for the Americans?”

Her face changes. “Now, just promise you’ll hear me out, all right? Only I know you. You can be so quick to fly off the handle sometimes.”

“I promise.”

She pauses, and I knew a big speech is coming.

“Just ask yourself this,” she says. “Precisely, what has this city ever done for you?”

I wasn’t sure if I was expected to reply. “In what sense?”

“In any bloody sense. Think about it. Everybody keeps banging on about your mafia heritage and your place in the city and you helped make three films, but what does this city mean to you? Because to me it’s just a place where I happen to own a theater, that’s all. And the people here, they’ve done nothing for me.”

“You were a star… you ARE a star,” I correct myself.

“I’ve done it all myself. I’ve fought like a tiger to get what little I’ve got.” She argues.

“You OWN a theater.”

“Nobody’s ever gave me anything.”

“Were they supposed to?” I ask politely.

“Your script sucks,” she’s not shy.
“I think I know where this is going, and...” I’m interrupted.

“Maybe not. They don’t owe us anything, fine. You don’t owe Hollywood anything either. Oh, and one small detail. At some point, in the course of the occupation, your CAF friends have so pissed off the Japanese, Yamashita’s promising to slaughter the entire city before your American friends get here.”

“Maybe they’re your friends too,” I suggest.

“Don’t know if you keep abreast of the news, but there are about 200,000 Japanese soldiers on this island sore as hell at us about something and want to kill us. Now that makes me uncomfortable.”

I grin at her. “You don’t say.”

“I’m not joking. And one of these days, they’ll kill us on their way out of town. And I don’t want to be here in front of a camera, playing a whore, when it happens. Can’t you understand that?” Drama from an actress, always emotive, but hardly ever persuasive. And never entirely.

“Fine,” I say. “I agree with every word you’ve said, as it happens. So, what are you still here for? Get up in the hills. Those guys that bought you here, Enzime and Qbert, they’re men, you’re a woman; they’ll take care of you (in the manner you are accustomed). I’ll find a different actress. It is Hollywood you know.”
She shakes her head, and there is something about the gesture. “Last time I saw you, you were hiding from someone. I gave you a costume,” she says. “Trouble is, I don’t think it’s going to be enough, when the time comes. Use your brain. If Manila falls and everybody dies, Selznick will want a movie about that and your precious guerilla leader sketch will never see an American theater.” She just never gives up.

“Now, that’s an idea... a second film about the actual end. So just for that story, I might write it; you wanna tell me exactly what you are saying? You know dialogue. You and me talking about Yamashita.” I try to warn her, I’ll be using this material.

“Okay, here’s my line. This is me talking to you about leaving. In a theater, just like this one.”

“I gathered that.”

“Okay, I say to you... You’re holding a camera on a street corner filming the Japanese leave, you’re going to stick out like a sore thumb. And it’s all I’m saying, with that money, we can go a very long way away.”

“The money? The money in your office safe?” I ask in character.

“Yes,” in and then out of character, she says, “I mean, no.”

I leave my character. “You may be right. I wasn’t sure where this was leading, though. You, after all we’ve been through,
would have me give up my chance in Hollywood. I mean, you saw
the amount of money, didn’t you?” I ask.

BEAT

“You know this is for Selznick, right?”

“I’m not talking to you…”

LONG BEAT

“Except to say… if you’re staying and the Nips are promising
to kill everyone, why not be on their side? Why not help them?”
She paused, but only for a second. “Do a deal. Personal
immunity, in return for valuable assistance. You can do it.
You’re not a bad actor. I thought you were him, for crying out
loud.”

She may have a role in my next film… the one with the
villainous backstabbing bitch. And she can’t complain; I told
her I was making notes for dialogue.

“You’re crazy,” I say.

“I’m serious. It’s the only way out of this.”

I’m sure you can see it. I’m sitting on the inside of the row
and she’s on the outside. If I’m gonna exit, I’m gonna have to
walk the entire row of empty seats to get out of there.

I remember one time I was cornered by this dog. Beastly thing
was obviously mad, it was foaming at the mouth and its eyes were
fixed on me; if I’d made the slightest movement it would have
had me for lunch. So I kept very still and as calm as possible,
until its owner came and pulled it off me. He gave me ten pesos for my fright. But no experience was ever wasted on me. Thanks to that dog, I knew how to handle this scene.

“I think you’ve got the wrong idea about how things are fixed,” I told her. “I may look like him, but I’m me, and those three know it.”

“You can be him,” she says. “Establish yourself on film. Everybody will judge from the film if it’s you.”

“Your point?” I ask.

She stretches out her vertebrae and sits up in her seat. Very nice gesture, which I hadn’t seen before. It’s going in the script for certain.

“You appear in the market square,” she says, “all covered with blood. There’s a conspiracy, you tell everybody: Enriquez and Quirocho and Hemenez just tried to kill you. Ten minutes later, there won’t be enough of them left to fill a cup. Then you’ll be in charge. Then you can do what you damn well like,” she’s adamant.

Didn’t I tell you, she’s smart? Smarter than me, anyhow, by a long mile. “I couldn’t do that,” I say. “I haven’t got that sort of nerve.”

“We could do it together,” she says. “We could’ve done it this afternoon: it would’ve been easy. My theater is packed with patriots.”
“Filipinos watching a Japanese propaganda film?”

“So? That doesn’t matter. They’re still Filipinos.”

I nod slowly. “Yes,” I say, “we could.”

“So next time, we’ll do it?”

“Let me think about it,” I put it off.

She is very close to striking me. “What in God’s name is there to think about? Let’s just do it. Say you’ll do it.”

The first time I met Ahrianna, she was “playing” a virgin, a farmer’s daughter, and we had these appalling farm animals, out in the north, where all the fighting is taking place now. And I was an extra but the director told me I was also in charge of controlling the animals. It wasn’t supposed to be funny. But she laughed and laughed and finally, she got in trouble with the director and his people.

“Fine,” back in the theater, she says.

“Have you seen this?” I ask her.

“What is it? No. I’ve been trying to save your life.”

“Thank you, but watch this last scene,” I request.

“There aren’t any subtitles,” she points out. “Where did the subtitles go; they were there.”

“There aren’t any words in the last scene.”

“Shintaro, that’s the young soldier, he marches off with the army for deployment in the invasion of Manchuria. Tanaka’s
character runs alongside him tearfully and expresses her anxiety over his well-being.”

“So?”

“Anti-militarism.” I explain.

“Huh?”

“Japanese wartime censors shit a brick because Japanese mothers in films are supposed be depicted as being proud to send their sons to war, and not being at all upset about it.”

She’s an actress but I gotta outline it for her?

The scene has some effect on her; because immediately I think: she is telling me we can satisfy Selznick. Between the two of us, we can pull it off. That is what she tells me with her face. I’d have her to help, but say what you like about Ahrianna, she’s good, really good, the very best Manila can offer, especially when the heat is on.

“We’d have to be careful,” she says.

I’d been poking her on and off for years, ever since the farm movie. And I thought it was exclusive all through the occupation. My mistake; Marcos was in there as well. But this is a collaborative form of art and if you hold a grudge against everyone that stabs you in the back, nothing would ever get done.

Anyway, at some point during the filming in the north (I think we’d be together six days, more or less) Ahrianna and I promised
we’d be true to each other until the theaters closed and the island sinks. That was some time ago, but the sea is still where it always has been, and a promise is a promise, at least as far as I’m concerned. You never forget your first roll in the hay, they say.

Of course, a lot can happen in a war.

SCENE 20

Ahrianna’s restaurant pitch is fabulous. And much appreciated. Earlier in the theater, that wasn’t the true Ahrianna. The war, the Japanese, the guerillas, the B-25s, the stress of trying to keep her theater solvent with shitty films, and her stubborn (once a starlet, always a star) pride. She pitches me her role in the movie.

She insists that I take her to eat dumplings. A unique Manila scene, all that on and off again sex over the years, and never have I sat down with her in a restaurant. Fifteen-years, I thought she was ashamed to be seen with me in public.

“I think I’m your lead female because that’s the role I’ve built my name on. I’m the Filipina Ginger Rogers.” Ahrianna remind me.

“How do you know...”

“I am THE Filipina Ginger Rogers,” she insists.

“Okay.” Granted.
“When I filmed At the Tivoli in 1937, virtually every single reviewer – and certainly every significant one – said that my portrayal rivaled Ginger Rogers in Stage Door and perhaps my smile ‘surpasses’ hers.”

“They plagiarized each other?” I suggest.

“Fine, but all Filipino audiences know who I am. Unless they’ve been killed in this god awful war, they know me. But a Selznick picture will allow the entire world to see me in what could be my finest role. I think they’ll jump at the chance to see me in your movie.”

She was maybe a bit predictable and frankly the delivery sounded a bit like rote memory too. But fine. I am listening.

“No. I’m thinking you’re too fine for this role.”

“I’m not too fine. I’ll do it.”

There are two female roles… let’s call them – Ginger and Shirley. Actually, there are Marguerite and Nora.

“And I’m Nora?” She wants to know.

“No, that’s for the Filipino Shirley Temple.”

“Well, who’s that?”

“I don’t know, but she’ll be around.”

“So, I have to be Marguerite?”

“Well, you ARE the Filipino Ginger Rogers.”

“But you can re-write it for me, right?”
I grimaced. “That’s not going to happen; you have to leave your husband and children at the end.”

“I do?” She can’t believe her hard luck.

“You have to go with the outlaw bandit; I mean the guerilla Marcos, fighting in the hills?” I explain.

“Ginger Rogers would never do that.”

“No. I don’t know that Mister and Missus Toyama Prefecture are going to be too impressed with that.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

She has an idea.

“My husband turns out to be a traitor.”

“A collaborator? It’s not in the script.”

And I think, that’s not a bad idea. Of course, we can edit it out of the Japanese picture.

“You could do it. You could insert just a tenny weenie scene. How long could it take to establish that... show a man talking to the Japanese police and then swinging from a tree?”

“Marcos is an urban leader of the resistance.”

“A telephone pole then.”

“No.”

“And he collaborated with a JAPANESE woman!”

“And this will appeal to who?”

“The victimized women in the world!”
“And this is a new demographic group? Do they go to films even? Alone?”

“No, a fellow takes them.”

“Then they aren’t victimized.”

“Godis, you told me that Mr. Selznick cabled you specifically, you had the cable in your hand; where is it now? Well, you have it; it’s not likely you’d throw it out and it says that for this picture to succeed, it must appeal to small-town folks as well as urbanites? That means women!”

I’d lied to her with a prop in hand, a diplomatic cable supposedly from Los Angeles, to Mexico City and then to Madrid and then routed to Manila. I don’t know why I lie. She had collected the money from Paul at the embassy, surely he’d told her what the money was for. But I did it anyway. Call me a showman, if you want. It is show business.

“We’d be making this film for the newly oppressed women.”

“Sure you are! There is a war on and their husbands are scattered all over the world. And women know when they’ve been cheated on and lied to in lame-ass-letters that never come often enough. Now they want choices and options that weren’t available to their mothers, whoever, never let their husbands stray more than a few miles from home.”

“Like for example in the Great Patriotic War?” Not quite rising to the level of ridicule, but let’s call it satire.
“What?” She doesn’t understand.

“So you’re saying this war has uniquely created a new demographic of moviegoer?”

“I don’t know what dematraffic (demographic?) is, but I think if Ginger Roger’s man cheated on her and with an enemy sow, she’d hoist him up a pole and the audience would love it.”

“The men too?”

“We have the right to vote.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“We are accustomed now being in control of our own destiny. Now that we can vote, more and more of us are insisting on taking control of our lives. You can’t tell me you disagree.”

“Voting? During a foreign occupation? You’re serious.”

“You know what I mean!”

“I think what you mean is that you’re tired of being pushed around and portrayed as whores on screen?”

LONG BEAT

“I insist that, that part be rewritten.”

“Insist, you don’t even have the part.”

“I own a theater, outright.”

“What are you showing right now?”

“Momotaro: Sacred Sailors.”

“Japanese propaganda. Look, I’m not changing the script, Marguerite is a whore, that leaves her husband and I’m not
putting the Ginger Rogers of the Philippines in that role. I’m doing it for your own good.”

“Then I can play the virgin?”

“Don’t make me laugh.”

“The housewives in Texas will never buy that.”

“But, there are only two female roles.”

A light goes off in her head. She is probably anticipating someone like… the Youngster, the lawyer’s daughter. Not a bad guess.

“And your damn Shirley Temple girl is a good Catholic girl?”

“That depends on your definition of ‘good.’”

I can finally see the resistance in Ahrianna’s face starting to crumble.

“And this stag film stratagem,” Ahrianna gambles on the ad hominem (never a wise move attacking a man’s lover), “I know it’s a moneymaker, and you can do with the cash, but you must admit, it’s all rather tacky, isn’t it?”

Another LONG BEAT.

“Well, okay, yes. You make a fair point. But it makes her happy. Her friends are bored. And even a pared-down production will cost a ton.”

I receive a hateful… certainly not a Ginger Rogers scowl if she even had one.
Ahrianna lashes out, “And I have your money, I went to the embassy and I have it.”

One last LONG BEAT.

“Okay you have the role but you’ll play it as a straight whore.”

“Look, if you want me to, maybe play it in the middle…”

“No, I’m just going to find another actress. And, I’ll tell my CAF friends to fetch my money.”

“They aren’t your friends, you banned them from the Selznick sets.”

“They are dangerous men. You know they put me in the hospital.”

“I know. I heard.”

“And you didn’t come to see me?”

Another BEAT.

“I’ll play the whore,” she meowes.

“And you’ll hand over my money?” I ask.

She only nods. Defeated.

“Great, let’s go get it. We can talk about the role on the way.” I say cheerfully.

She looks like a truck hit her, but she is going to do what I ask.
SCENE 21

I can’t have Ahrianna mucking up the set... she is a good actress. Hard worker. And she did earn the role of Marguerite in the restaurant, but I know she will literally be a whore and a bitch, off and on camera, until the film wraps. It will be better if she is different with me. I need to matter, so I lie.

I don’t always lie, only on special occasions. But I know if I don’t cheer her up, she’ll maybe stab me in the back, keep the pesetas and/or wreck the film by turning everyone against me. She doesn’t know about the Japanese version.

In the Nikkatsu version, she will lustily (voluntarily) leave her perfectly good and honest husband for the rat dog Marcos, only for him to cheat on her (with the young virgin) and then die in a hail of bullets. The dead outlaw rebel leaves both women pregnant with only each other for moral support, at the end.

If she finds that out, she will be out for my hide. She is a professional, but after I had to “undress” her (destroy her) over this role... all that good-will could be out the door. After you have to talk to a woman like that (in public), like I just did in the restaurant, there isn’t any more trusting.

I am in trouble. What the hell was I thinking of? I must have been out of my single-cell brain, I fully realize that I nearly
jeopardized, put at risk, et cetera. I’ve GOT to be more careful.

However, I’ve read Jack London, and I’m aware that talking to Ahrianna “that way” is like crossing a river of ice that you know won’t bear your weight: you can only do it if you don’t stop and you move real fast.

SCENE 22

Why had I gambled my film on a woman? And I am gambling except for, I am struck with inspiration crossing Avenida Rizal, on the way to her theater, sucking in the exhaust from an Isuzu truck. She can always back out delivering the money. Tell the police I am in the theater robbing her. It would require yet another lie.

“The novel by that Texas writer?”

“Ginger Rogers is from Fort Worth.”

“The Writer. The one that everybody is nutty for?” Ahrianna perks up.

“Well, don’t ask me. I don’t know.” Ahrianna says.

“Katherine Anne Porter.” I recall her name.

“You sure know a lot.” Ahrianna seems to love smart men.

“So you know it?”

“Are you talking about the one with the woman and the man...”

“She’s a jouarnalist.” I say.
“He’s a journalist?” She’s confused. She doesn’t know any women journalists.

“No. He’s a soldier. She’s the journalist.”

“Okay, I heard about it. But remind me what happens.”

“She gets sick, but recovers, only to find out that the soldier has died of the flu, which he probably catches while nursing her.”

“Oh, that one. I heard about it.”

“I’m going to finance it myself,” I told her. The lie.

“You have that much money?” she asks.

“You are about to hand me that money. Don’t forget,” I remind her.

“And the role of... I don’t recall the character’s name, the journalist, but I know the book you’re talking about.”

“Let’s just call her ‘Ginger Rogers.’”

“And she’s not a virgin?”

“Certainly not.”

“And she’s not a whore.”

“Certainly not.”

“Haha. So, okay. It’s mine?”

“Of course it’s yours.”

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

She kisses me illegally on the street, in public.

“But I do need those pesetas,” I remind her.
“Of course, they are in the pirate’s trunk in my theater.”

SCENE 23

Ahrianna glances towards the safe, I think she is gonna back out, but then I realize she is praying that some street criminal won’t waylay me. But she opens the trunk and fills a suitcase conveniently on the floor directly beside it.

All the while talking.

“Okay, I see. It’s about the influenza epidemic of 1918,” she parrots me from before.

“I do know what it is about; I’m buying it,” I say.

“It was a lot of potential?”

“Could be huge,” I say.

“So you’re gonna buy the North American screen rights?”

“You said you wanted to be in a Selznick film.”

“I’m already in a Selznick film.”

“This one is more for you,” I say.

“For me?”

“Of course,” I say.

“Oh, how romantic. Thank you.”

“Romantic?” I ask.

“Why not? I can do things that girlfriend of yours could never imagine,” and she’s about to.
“Well, you never properly thanked me for the role in this picture yet,” I say.

“Oh, is that all you want? Why didn’t you just say so in the first place?”

SCENE 24

The CAF schemers are irritated and unhappy. Major Emigdio Cruz is insisting on seeing all four of us, and won’t take no for an answer.

“He’s a brave man,” Enriquez says grudgingly. “General MacArthur sent him here in 1943 to spy and report back on the Japanese activities.”

“And he’s back?” I ask.

“A submarine landed him on Negros and he’s worked his way ingeniously across the various islands to Luzon. He’s a master of disguises (an itinerant trader, a vendor of chickens, and a vegetable peddler). He’s been arrested three times and searched five times, but he’s still here,” Enriquez relates.

“But you don’t want me to meet him?” I ask.

“Hell no,” Quiocho says. “He’s sharp as a needle.”

“Does he know Marcos?” I ask.

“He met you maybe three times, at clandestine meetings. He told MacArthur’s staff you sit around on your ass all day and don’t wanna fight,” Enriquez explains.

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“We have something in common,” I say. “That’s true.”

“He needs our help,” Hemenez says. “Intelligence says as the Americans are converging on Manila, Yamashita plans to move his soldier out of the city to Baguio. He wants to fight us in the mountains and hills. Use city as a hill station to shell Americans as they approach.”

“With the aim of buying time before the Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands,” Enriquez elaborates.

“Time, so they can build-up the defense of Japan. I figure that much out.” I tell them.

“Yamashita has three main groups under his command: 80,000 men of the Shimbu Group in the mountains east of Manila, 30,000 of the Kembu Group in the hills north of Manila, and 152,000 in the Shobu Group in northeastern Luzon.

“What does that have to do with us?”

“He wants us to raise so much hell in Manila that Shimbu and Kembu can’t leave for Baguio.” Enriquez says.

“What am I supposed to do about it?” I wanna know.

“Your mafia friends.” Quiocho says.

“Well, they will be in charge once the Japanese leave.” Enriquez says.

“Can you have a word with them?” Enriquez asks.

“What am I supposed to tell them?” I ask.
Cruz has been talking to the Americans, evidently. He has the plan and Enriquez explains.

“Some of the Japanese soldiers like to hang out in the dockside bars. Most go there and sit in a corner, quiet as little mice, and wallow in all the raw life and desperation (and I’ve been in those places, and you can have it). Your friends, their time-honored method is to bash everyone’s heads in with axe handles. Pitch their bodies in the bay or leave them in the street, the Americans don’t care.”

“I don’t have much time for the mafias, but I’ll say this: I have a movie to make…”

In fact, three movies to make.

But I continue, “The mafias might put a small dent in the Japanese army, but they aren’t gonna wanna do it without something in return. I don’t mind good honest reconnaissance work, but I can’t get involved in this heavy lifting.”

But I do have an idea for them. “They can have kids watching the barracks, and when the soldiers set out in that direction, they can be followed every step of the way, with relays of kids to pass on the happy tidings. All the bargirls are/or want to be actresses, and I do know every bartender in town.”

“See fellows, he’s not dumb. I told you Go would be the man to see about this.” Quiocho is beaming like it was his idea to consult me in the first place.
“Let him finish.” Enriquez raises his voice.

“By the time the Nips leave the bars, my friends can be ready when they come out. And why limit the operation to the dock area, the Nips hit the bars further inland too.”

“I’ll tell Cruz it’s a go.”

“Get it... a Go... your name.” Hemenez, not really an Asian, always got such a thrill out of making puns out of my name. I figure I’m the only Go he knows.

“Hold it. Are you sure? Largely the Japs we’re gonna find drunk are mostly losers, thieves, and no-goods. I can argue they cause the Japs more trouble than they were worth. Eliminating them might be a favor for them.”

“But it would be psychological, you see,” Enriquez points out.

“I know some people. I can talk to them,” I agree.

“We know you do, that’s why we’re here.”

“Well, if this mysterious Major Cruz wants to start up that old game, you tell him he needs me and I’ll need to be paid.”

“Pay? Cruz won’t wanna pay,” Enriquez says.

“Why?” I ask.

“He’s Filipino,” Enriquez reasons.

“These mafia men are burrowed deeply into the city and they are the outlaw variety, and they are motivated more by the lucrative prospects of war. They might like working under the
cover of guerrilla warfare. But I doubt they will be inspired by your plea of patriotism. So, I need money.”

“Well, for that, you’ll need to meet Cruz, personally.”

“Just a second,” I say. “Is that actually necessary?”

Quiocho stared at me. “You won’t meet with him?”

“It’s dangerous for me to meet with anyone,” I say.


“Is it?”

“Absolutely. Cruz is Philippine Army but linked directly to the Americans. He needs this done. And if you don’t agree, he’ll probably bring in guerillas from the hills.”

“The mafias won’t let guerillas take over their city like that. Therefore I need to be paid.” I say.

“Now look,” Quiocho said. “This is nuts. During the meeting, you keep your face shut. Got that?”

“What meeting?” I asked.

“I’m gonna pretend I didn’t hear that. There must be a meeting,” Quiocho said.

“I like your ideas,” Enriquez said. “Trouble is this could get expensive.”

“It could get expensive either way.” I half point out and half threaten.
“So, we’ll do your way. But you will have to meet with Cruz.”

“And you will not rock the boat, understood?” Enriquez puts his finger down.

At this point I am still thinking it over – that stuff I’d talked about with Ahrianna, you know. And, by coincidence, the plot now reached Major Cruz.

SCENE 25

If you take a step back and think about it clearly, it is Cruz and the Americans that will liberate Manila. Not the Backlot crew. Not the mafia and certainly not the three CAF clowns, that have extorted me to document their heroism.

Apparently, Cruz has spent very little time in Manila, which was good in one sense and bad in another: good, in that he didn’t interfere in local politics, bad, because he couldn’t be used by one mafia against another. That might sound odd, but you get what I mean.

Now, if Ahrianna and I were going to pull off our little coup d’état, a great deal would depend on the view Cruz took of the matter. If Americans seize control, Cruz is clearly a man who can expose my numerous manipulations and bring Marcos down. But if Cruz decides he likes Marcos after all, he can make Marcos’ position as a war hero effectively unassailable. Only a true war hero could lead the movies I’m making to profitability.
The third choice will be to include Cruz in the plot against Marcos’ life, get rid of him, and hopefully replace him with someone we can control, but I didn’t like that; not my style to double-cross an actual hero. Point one: he is never here, and therefore can’t be torn to bits by a furious mob. Point two: MacArthur’s people knows that Cruz would not get involved in that sort of thing, so they’ll be downright suspicious if we try to implicate him. Point three: for what it was worth, he was the best patriot we’ve had this war, and we probably still need him desperately if we wanted to survive the Japanese exit.

Not that I’ve mentioned anything to Ahrianna. Manila and the Philippines were past saving, for her. But I still need the city as a backdrop to make these three films. All right, then. Ahrianna’s plan can just go to hell, until this gets sorted.

SCENE 26

Believe it or not, the meeting went perfectly. Cruz states his case concisely and logically; the three conspirators agree with him, and then it was my turn. The mafias aren’t going do this for free, I tell him. No, Cruz says, probably not. Never mind that, I say, you can count on my support.

He looks at me oddly, sort of shrugs; he thanks us for our time and goes away. “Well done,” Quiocho said to me, after he’d
gone. “Glad to see you can do as you’re told, at least some of the time.”

Cruz is occasionally “with” several actresses but the premium one is named Paraluman. She is married to a Japanese businessman. She is also a friend of Ahrianna.

I manage to get a message to Ahrianna, and she passes it on. The problem, naturally, is getting away from the three CAF duds, and finding a place for a second meeting with Cruz.

“Why not just make it the Grand?” I suggest.

“My theater?” Ahrianna is skeptical.

“They’ll never suspect it.”

“But…”

“You don’t need that danger in your place?” I ask.

“But I will.”

“Japs find out… It could all go south,” I warn her.

She looks at me. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

I try to look embarrassed I even brought it up. “Look,” I say.

“Ahrianna, we had a sort of a thing once.”

“Yes. So?”

“Well, it’s come back.”

She did her for-Pete's-sake sigh. “Do you have any idea how inconvenient that is right now?”

“We can film it, and watch it together later.”

She’s better at it than I am, but I’m still very good.
“Okay. But just make absolutely sure the CAF goons don’t find out we’re talking to Cruz,” she says.

SCENE 27

So it is all arranged. I will be at Ahrianna’s Grand theater, and Paraluman will bring Cruz. From Paraluman, we gather that he likes Mitsuya cider, popcorn, and with bad hips has no intention of climbing any stairs. That leaves out the balconies and the office. So we met in the middle of the main level seating.

It is relatively dark. He looks at me when he walks in and for a moment I am scared stiff. But it turns out not to be that kind of look. He sits down; the women bring us drinks and popcorn and disappear. I am sitting beside him.

“Thanks for coming,” I say.

“This is all a bit cloak-and-dagger, isn’t it?” he says. “I thought we settled everything at the meeting.”

I nodded. “I’ve been thinking,” I say.

“Is that right?”

Everybody’s a comedian. Note to self, he had good timing. “I said, I’d try and sell the idea to the mafias,” I told him, “and I’ll do that, if you want me to. But I don’t think they’ll accept it, not from me.”

He frowns. “Maybe not. I know it’s a money issue.”
“You bet,” I say. “And every time I support something and it turns out that they hate the idea, the respect they have for me goes down a notch, and I don’t like that. Can’t afford that.”

He dips his head very slightly to acknowledge a fair point. “And your point?”

“So,” I say, “we need a better idea.”

He treats me to a superior smile. “Speaking for myself,” he says, “I hate the idea of asking outlaws for help. Begging is a weak and inefficient way of recruiting men and it causes a lot of problems/debt. Unfortunately, the Americans won’t want to pay for this… Truman is a straight shooter… and certainly not the amount the mafia will want. And until someone comes up with a better idea we’re stuck.”

“If I made a film about it. The mafias could be war-heroes and, for them, it would essentially erase their early war record. I just need funding for the movie.” I added, “Put them on film for the entire world to see and bribing them to be patriotic wouldn’t be necessary.”

“I see. They will want photographic proof of their participation. Their loyalty.”

“Doesn’t everyone these days?” I come to the point.

“So the mafias will be the actors. And you can sell that. You’ll make the heroes?” Cruz confirms everything.

“That’s what I do.” I admit.
Cruz is puzzled. “A filmmaker? I didn’t know you made films. That’s not in your file.”

“There are a lot of things NOT in your files,” he should know. “What is this gonna cost us?”

“Fifty-thousand US dollars.” I quote.

“What!”

“You get the mafias AND the propaganda value for let’s say a year, two years, but I keep the future film rights. Truman will love it. Films are totally legit. Deal?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says. “But you can’t film.”

“Why not?”

“Because there is a war and the city is occupied.”

“So?”

“So, it’s dangerous.”

I pulled out my Japanese credentials. The ones from the Nikkatsu corporation.

“These are fake?”

“No.”

Cruz’s eyes widened.

“Nikkatsu, in Tokyo, they think I’m making a movie for them. Film, lights, doctors, documents, they sent me two trucks; they’re good for a lot of stuff. I’m making a movie, but for David O. Selznick. And that’s two-hundred-thousand U.S. dollars.
So, the fifty I’m asking from you isn’t really that huge an amount. Not for the US government.”

“Selznick?” Cruz questioned.

“Culver City, California,” I state.

“Can you show me that?”

“Well, you’re gonna have to trust me on that.”

“We’re not really in the trust business. You have to understand.”

“Well, there is a bar, called the Backlot, over on Gastambide Street; the bartender can vouch for me. And there is a fellow, named Paul, he collects stamps at the Spanish Embassy, but he might deny everything. And don’t say Selznick, say ‘Culver City.’ But first, you should ask the woman that owns this theater; she has a bit role in it.”

“This all sounds like an elaborate ruse. Well, orchestrated but still is smells of a con.”

“I have about 5,000 feet of film.”

“Done?”

“Of course.”

“Here?”

“Where else?”

I signal to the women, who are already up in the projection room. Waiting.

After the first reel, I look at him for an answer.
He nods. “You’ll have the money in a week.”

I promise, “I’ll go talk to my friends tomorrow.”

He laughs. “Not sure you can pull it off, but I like your style. But if you can get them to listen, you’ll be doing your country a great favor, believe me. Is there any more popcorn, do you think? It’s like I’m a kid again.”

**SCENE 28**

“Now you’ve gone too far,” Ahrianna says.

“No,” I say, “listen.”

Cruz and Paraluman are doing it like rabbits on the back row of the theater. Army is showing and Ahrianna and I are alone in her office. I don’t have much time and Ahrianna isn’t inclined to listen to me. Everything is totally normal, really.

“It can be done,” I say. “It’s basically a lighting problem.”

She thought about that and gave me a grunt of reluctant agreement. “No, it isn’t,” she adds. “You’ve got to get them drunk first and alone in a well-lit alley.”

“We have fast film and even the new lights. The bartenders juice them up lavishly and the bargirls give us the heads-up when they are leaving. Lights, camera, axe handle!”

“The Japanese, they’ll decapitate you. I’ve seen them do that. THEY’LL film it and use YOU as propaganda. You’ll make the silver screen alright.”
Curiously enough, that thought had occurred to me.

“The Nips won’t find out,” I say. “And before you say it, yes, I can talk to the mafia bosses easy as pie. The bargirls might not be so easy.”

She sighed. “I can do that.”

God bless the Filipino film industry; we always come together when you so much as mention a project. Among other reasons, because it’s a great gatherer-up of beautiful women; and once it’s got all these gorgeous creatures, it doesn’t pay them enough. Which means, they need to supplement their incomes from other sources. It’s not an ideal system, because contrary to popular belief, not all actresses are low enough to work in a bar. But a girl’s gotta survive. And these are tough times.

That said, any means of earning a living in Manila is perfectly legitimate. It doesn’t matter how nasty or unpleasant the task; people gotta eat. And until they bring about Marx’s ideal utopian state, I don’t see it changing.

Every self-respecting mafia boss has an actress as a fashion accessory, just like a crocodile leather belt. Therefore, either of us (Ahrianna or myself) can talk to them anytime we want. And the rest is, as I’ve so acutely pointed out, just a matter of fast film and lighting.

“You’re not ready for something like this,” she says.

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” I tell her.
“And all this is your idea?” she asks.

“You mean you’re done thinking it over?” I ask her.

“It’s gonna solve a lot of problems,” she admits.

“I wouldn’t go that far. But if we can impress Cruz. He’ll not only promote Marcos and there’s $50,000 to boot.”

“This isn’t going to work. These mafia people know you.”

Which was true. The Makati boss, maybe not; but the Santa Cruz boss, had grown up a few blocks from me, so she was quite right, it was a risk, if one stopped to think about it. But, like the lady said, the answer is, don’t stop and think. Besides, we had an advantage. In a dark theater, I can pass for Marcos.

SCENE 29

Fortunately, they both bought it. Ninety percent a new Filipino legitimacy (literally a pardon by film) and ten percent patriotism.

“I told you. If we get Cruz on our side...”

“We could rule this city. We could own the whole country,” Ahrianna daydreams.

“Ahrianna. I thought you said Manila was toast.”

“Oh, don’t be stupid. It’s nearly a million people and they’ll never stop loving Marcos. You rode down Rizal with a rifle waving it. You were the first to liberate us. It’s documented.”

“We’re not liberated,” I complain.
“Yet.” She answers, “Never mind what I say. You show that Rizal Street parade in theaters and they will all remember.”
“Just a few times,” I say. “And just for ten minutes.”
“Then we’ll get rid of Cruz. All your CAF pals, gradually, one at a time.”

I think I back away a step. “I can’t believe you just said that.”

“Nor can I, actually.” She blinks, as though I’d turned one a light in the dark room. “No, we can’t go around slaughtering people wholesale, that’s ridiculous. But the rest of it — we could do it, you know. We could run this place.”

“Should I take this off or leave it on?” She asks.

“Ahrianna,” I say. “Do we really want to?”

“Are you kidding?”

“Politics is work,” I say.

She grinned at me. “And film work isn’t?” she counters.

“I’m an artist. Not a politician.”

“Just long enough to cream off a great deal of money. And then we get on with building our own studio and you can go back to being an artist.”

She has a lovely grin. It suits that angel face of hers. “Had you going there for a minute, didn’t I?”
Killing chickens! Such a graphic image. Hard to get it out of your mind, but not once you get her positioned the way you want her, the whole chicken thing goes away.

SCENE 30

Two dry runs and then the Santa Cruz mafia make their first score, followed a dry run in Makati and then they score. It is sufficient enough for the Major to hand over ten-thousand of the dollars. Expenses for the five (alleyway) setups and takedowns comes to only twenty-seven dollars. The result is two scenes, two-hundred and seventy-six feet, a bit over two minutes run time. A second unit (with Japanese credentials) are inside each bar, producing more film. A third (fully credentialed) unit is camped out to cover the discovery of the body for a nice entire story (start to finish) touch.

Major Cruz comes to the Grand to see the three CAF goons (who are scarce these days) and pay me the balance. Word has obviously got about, Cruz says (he doesn’t bat an eye when shown the footage; I don’t think he is physically capable of blinking); he says several thousand soldiers have been observed moving back into Manila from the north. Cruz says there is no real need for filming; but what is the damn point to it, if not. He didn’t look at me once during the viewing.
Later, I get a note from Cruz, passed from Paraluman to Ahrianna and then to me. Thank you, Cruz says. Good job, well done.

My first thought is that it was a forgery, she’s faked it or had it faked. But she swears that it’s legit. Time to think about it a whole lot more. Time out, while I’m thinking about it, for some divergent reflections on filming the war in alleys.

SCENE 31

I could’ve been a terrific lights man. I’m interested in what you can achieve, by way of light and dark, and the million degrees in between, with just candles, hoods, and bits of colored parchment. Take shadow, for example. You can stretch it, bend it, layer it, cast another shadow across it. Nobody ever notices the dark – why would you take any notice of what is, after all, basically, only an absence of light – but dark shapes and twists, the way we perceive things just as light does. You can mess with people’s heads.

Manila is a city of great shadows; as for light, don’t get me started on the lights in Manila. You think you can trust it, but only if it’s in the right hands. But there’s nothing trickier than shooting at night, believe me.
SCENE 32

“Don’t give me that bullshit,” Enriquez yells. “You did something. We told you we’re in charge of this town, and you are just a filmmaker and now you’ve done something.”

“You don’t know the mafias,” I reply. “I do. They got wind of what Cruz had in mind, they weighed up the costs and the benefits and made a business decision like they always do. Regardless of what you may have read, it’s not a crime to club a Nip to death these days.”

Quiocho grins at me. “Well, you’d know more about them than us. But I always thought they were stubborn as hell. Worried sick about always getting paid and losing face.”

“Which is why they originally decided not to pick a fight with the Nips,” I explain to him. “Isn’t that what it says in the Art of War? The best way to win a fight is not to fight at all.”

“Until now? Suddenly they’re clubbing Japs in the head and pitching them in the bay,” Enriquez complains.

“Aren’t we supposed to get credit for that?” Quiocho asks.

BEAT

“No one ordered them to do that!” Enriquez cried.

“Yes, but maybe we should get you on film ordering them to conduct retaliatory action against individual Japanese who have been tied to war crimes?” I suggested.

LONG BEAT
“Are you the guerillas that run Manila, or not?” I ask?

That got me the grinning too. Interesting man, Quiocho, in his way. Grins at you when he despises you, grins at you when he likes you, and always the same stupid grin.

“You are ordering the mafia to keep the Japanese occupied and out of the fighting in the north. Understand?” I hint to them.

“People are saying we give in to the mafias all the time,” Hemenez said. “It’s causing a lot of bad feelings.”

“Really?” Enriquez looked at him over his shoulder. “Who from?”

“Well, the General’s Chief of Staff for one.”

“Don’t think I’ll lose too much sleep over that.”

“We ought to denounce the mafia as collaborators,” Quiocho stretched. “We don’t need them.”

“Sure,” Hemenez said, “we can kill drunks as well as they can.”

“They’re late to the party,” Quiocho replied. “So, screw them.”

“People like to hear these stories of redemption,” Enriquez says mildly. “Maybe you should make a movie about that?”

There isn’t anyway anyone told him about the Cruz movie. I can’t take on any more projects (as far as I know) as there are only four industry bars. I’m hiring the Selznick crew out of the Backlot on Gastambide; you know that already. The Japanese
feature for Nikkatsu, I use traitorous persons for the scenes that are just too obviously pro-Japanese, I find them at the La Cienega Bar in Makati. Now, most of the on-camera talent double in both these films, but I’m not sure any of them realize what they are doing. They just do what I say; I’m the director. And they sure as hell aren’t being paid twice.

For the CAF piece, I’m using the Te Ammos Martini Bar in Antipolo. And for the Cruz work, it’s not even a “film” crew. I got them out of The Abby Singer in Quezon City. Now, despite the bar’s name, only two had experience on a film set (sweeping up); they said their friends were all criminals who hated the Japanese and knew how to keep their mouth shut. They followed my lighting instructions perfectly and I doubt they’ll ever talk.

But maybe Enriquez knows nothing, but is correct, redemption always makes a powerful film. And Lord knows, in Manila there were enough slackers to fill bill, ten films of redemption.

“Maybe you should make a movie about late-comers?” I answer, “I just might do that; know any subjects?”

He took it personally.

“I ought to kick your ass!” Enriquez shouts.

The other two thugs pull him back, or I could have to cold-cock him.

They release Enriquez and he storms out. I am hoping the other two follow him but no such luck.
“Maybe it was Major Cruz,” I suggest.

“He’s got enough men and money he can take care of this without the mafia. Cruz swore an oath. How seriously he takes it, I really wouldn’t care to say,” Hemenez says.

“He’s never in Manila,” Quiocho replies to Hemenez. “Besides, he’s a realist, and he’s got far too much on his plate to bother about who kills the Japs. Whatever we decide, he’ll be fine with that. Now when will this SOB get our film done?”

Hemenez is getting uncomfortable. “Well, calling Go names and glaring at him like you’ve been, won’t help speed things up.”

Quiocho stretches again, this time making a show of it. “He’s probably right,” he says. “It’s not like the mafia will be heroes and we’ll be in prison. More likely they will be in prison and we’ll be in the Senate.”

Hemenez speaks, “Let them just do their own thing either away of their own accord, and nobody will notice or care. It’s not like they’re on film or anything.” He smiles. “You sure you aren’t helping them?”

I held up my hands. “I wouldn’t do anything like that.”

“We two believe you,” Quiocho says.

“But don’t do it again,” Hemenez.
SCENE 33

I expect the CAF to put me on a shorter leash, but apparently, they might reckon I’ve been warned and have learned my lesson. To be honest, I believe they are worried about appearing not to run the show in Manila anymore, and naturally, they are looking for a scapegoat. I’m just on their minds at this particular time. They’ll sleep and forget about it by tomorrow.

There is bad news from THE General - they were reprimanded for not using the mafia earlier - they didn’t tell me, but they were careless with their papers and left them laid out for Paraluman to peruse and summarize for Ahrianna, who told me.

SCENE 34

None of this is the CAF slackers’ fault; it goes without saying. The island has 200,000 guerillas and half of them do nothing but pick their teeth. Or it was true, up to Lingayen. Now suddenly, they are climbing out of the woodwork and you and I know the only ones that will get the “reel” credit are those captured on film, because the other filmmakers basically have no film and are forced to sit on their ass. The Americans have landed but they aren’t going to get involved in local politics. I’m in the catbird seat, the director’s chair.

The independent juvenile gangs didn’t scare anybody, but they got ‘em a few Nips, but what’s a few more here or there? People
explained it away as “youthful exuberance,” and they chuckle, even one kid’s mother. I happened to film her and I think the power of that twenty-seconds might propel that murdering little kid into politics. Just for kicks, I send her a copy.

But the puppet government’s cops are another matter. I have argued that the reason why they hadn’t rebelled earlier was that they are stupid/soulless and thought the Japanese would win the war. This is how mindless they turn out to be; NOW, two weeks after Lingayen, they start to personally bring Japanese soldiers into the bars (so everyone can see them) and then take them out the back to shoot them in the head. I understand Yamashita is highly pissed at the practice.

But as soon as word gets out, a lot of people in Manila start feeling unhappy the cops will be forgiven. Of course, they don’t miss any departed Nip soldiers, but the idea after going along with the Japs all the while, they can redeem themselves by shooting a drunk Japanese teenager in the back of the head is repulsive to them.

Rather more serious in political terms is jockeying to replace the puppet government. Philippine politics have always been controlled by a handful of old families, big names in the old Senate, who have controlled the nation since long before this war and despite the occupation, they’ve kept up their small fiefdoms – to everybody’s benefit, commerce, let’s not forget.
But of course, some families have collaborated. The jousting going on is basically a contest: who will replace the families who collaborated and what film evidence is there and the replacements are genuine.

SCENE 35

Everyone understands; the new power will come from those who have fought guerilla-style. And I’ve never had so many offers of work. The problem is I only have six cameras, all booked solid through even the next world war. I’m making four films after all, but no one but the Youngster and the Backlot’s barkeeper knows that.

I suggest everyone try to document their heroism with still photography and I recommend every still shot photographer I know, which turns out to be the young Filipina’s school friends. They’ve left the stag film business and moved into the hero documentation business. The Youngster is taking a commission on the business I sent them, and there is an agreement her friends were limited to still photography. For moving-picture evidence, the future politician needed to hire either me or the Youngster directly. Battle scenes are her high-end product.

What I find to be despicable are the young heirs to family fortunes, who’s fathers' names are on the lists of collaborators. They are most adamant that I take their money to
film them in action, guerillas terrorizing Japanese soldiers. I thought of sending to Japan for another camera to accommodate the spoiled and frightened children but reasoned it wouldn’t arrive until the fighting is over. I feel that whatever I send for, it will probably be late and be good for only a few reels of patriotic proof. Or not arrive at all. I don’t order anything because the plane (or ship) bringing it would sure to be shot down (or sunk). I could have asked Major Cruz for an American camera. When I refuse, the young brats see their chance of ever reaching the Senate slip away, and bring mafia people with me wherever I go. The Youngster, as well, refuses to help the old ruling class. Most of the kids sulked; one cried.

I choose to rescue ONE son of a collaborator. His wealthy father had backed my 1937 film. Personally, I hated to see the Lopez kid go to the dogs; his father would go that way and that is bad enough. It is (was) a political family as well; one never knows when a political favor might get you out of a jam. I send the kid to the Youngster with a note to help the boy if she could. She filmed him stealing an Isuzu truck and crashing it into the wall of the main Japanese prison. It knocked him silly, but his friend kept up the weapons fire until he recovered enough to run off. I saw the film she made; clearly, twenty or twenty-five prisoners escaped. That kid clearly has a spot in
his heart for my young Filipina but he reverently is keeping his distance.

And everyone comes in a group of confederates. Witnesses. They come to me, and I’m sure others as well, three or four men in a quartet, like Marcos (him, not me), Enriquez, Quiocho and Hemenez. Why four is a magic number? I have no idea... just covering their bases? Never in the history of the Philippines has comradery been so strong with the war is ending this way.

**SCENE 36**

All this politics is food for thought for someone who is spending a lot of his time framing shots, thinking, and I wished I understood more about it than I do. I understand the basics.

As far as the Japanese are concerned, I know we’ve beaten them, so presumably, we can beat them again, on their way out of town. But sometimes a big victory is a difficult win to repeat (especially under a microscope).

However, I’m influenced by work. I look at the scenes we’ve finished and worry that I’m not bothered especially (not enough to suit Ahrianna) about the Japanese exit. She warns me daily they're gonna kill us all, but the Japs Army looks pretty damn stupid letting me film four right under their noses.

The Americans, though, are another matter. The city is surviving because, for the time being, life isn’t any better or
any worse because of them; I'm publically advocating they stop the bombing and drop peanut butter instead. What is confusing for me, is the public who turn a willfully blind eye to the bombers pounding us. And all I hear of are stories of people waking up hungry in the night, their kids screaming.

Okay, I’m not the most articulate guy to be explaining this and I don’t know really how to film it. The Americans look pretty damn stupid bombing a city the Japs are trying to leave anyway. And double stupid bombing while I’m trying to make a film for Selznick. The B-25s never interrupt any of the other films it seems. We are behind schedule on that one.

SCENE 37

So if a man is thinking about leaving Manila, this might be a good time. You won’t be surprised to learn that the thought has crossed my mind. It did more than a few times, especially before all this Marcos business began, just as it must have occurred to every single one of my fellow-citizens at one time during the occupation. I’m not unique. Many left because food had become impossible to find and the southern islands do have beautifully fertile fields.

Also, we are all aware (the government had seen to that) of the promise that Yamashita has made. He swore to annihilate the
Filipino race, which means that as and when the city fell, he won’t be leaving it to any more slow starvation.

Not everyone can work miracles with actors like I can; in the midst of it all this, how far will one go to eat, and is there any realistic prospect of them finding food with the Japanese script I’m using to pay the casts and crews?

Chances are that if the Americans take the city, they’ll capture at least some of the Japanese rice as well; even if they didn’t, Cruz’s men wouldn’t have enough food for all million of us, at which point the Americans won’t want to feed us, thank you very much, and neither will any of our other tried and trusted Asian friends. Add to that, in my own circumstance, the sad truth that the Culver City movie is literally my only hope, so I have to get it done and to the Spanish Embassy for transport to the U.S., so on balance, I’d rather risk the sword than not finish that film.

No one ever talks about proper nutrition as one of the ingredients necessary in making a film, but it is. I am beginning to worry about my crews showing up; I might need to pay them more and in dollars? The Japanese script is wearing thin and it’s extremely hard to work when you haven’t eaten. Of course, they are caught with dollars...
Culver City has a scene at nine, Nikkatsu at eleven, the three stooges, will be here at three to shot with some actors portraying mafia leaders; we’ve leased a January 1942 newspaper.

The film lab, or the six cameras of course, you might say are my most valuable possessions, but maybe perhaps it’s one camera AND the unexposed film. Of course, the exposed film wouldn’t be worth much unless I’m able to expose it.

What I’m getting at is that my young Filipina found a woman, a very thin older woman, who never parts with the newspaper. She insists on accompanying the paper and even though she and the Filipina have grown close (and might trust her), the woman is never more than a few feet from that newspaper. Seriously, three times I had to move her back, out of the shot. The newspaper is her most valuable possession and she is living off leasing it out for photographs in the wave of new evidentiary films.

Quirocho, a piece of shit, realizes the value of the paper and tries to leave the set with it. The woman kicks him in the balls and gains possession of the newspaper again. I pay her in new U.S. dollars and she eats; no problem.

SCENE 38

“Do you know what just happened?” Quirocho groans to me.

I don’t have hackles, but if I’d had some they’d have shot up like Jap artillery. “Enlighten me,” I say.
“It’s crazy,” he can hardly explain.

“Ah?”

A brief digression on place and time, sustenance, prejudice, and morality. There are a few things, a very few things, that I don’t hold with. Some of them, like bombing civilian populations and beheadings, are pretty unpopular with most people, so no real issue arises. One or two of the other things I disapprove of, other people might not.

I might as well come straight out with it and tell Quiocho why his nutsack is aching. I disapprove of depriving an elderly woman of her source of sustenance. Taking her newspaper was like killing her last egg-laying hen. I believe, in the epicenter of barbarism and atrocity, it’s the most sick and dispicable thing a villain can do. It further brutalizes and hollows the people who allow it, and there’s nothing good to be said about it. I did, while he is immobilized, take the opportunity to laugh in his face.

SCENE 39

Since the war doesn’t affect me directly, I’m just documenting it; I don’t have and shouldn’t have any say in the matter. I’m clearly playing both sides against the middle. One man’s opinion is another man’s prejudice is yet another man’s decapitation.
Have a stake in this war? By all means, this late in the game, keep it to yourself.

At four, I’m done filming the CFA pretenders cajoling, then threatening, the mafia to do more in the rebellion. For conmen and fraudsters, these three jokers are terrible actors. My actors (playing the mafia heavies) were fine; its Enriquez, Quiocho, and Hemenez who are total dumbasses. Thank God they disqualified themselves from the two “money” studio pictures. If they had been “likable” I might have let them continue to play themselves. As it is they are playing themselves only in their own bullshit film and they can’t even do that properly.

Quiocho isn’t speaking yet. He’s lifeless and his privates are visibly swollen on a sofa. I mention that sometimes the doctors amputate; he stops complaining but continues suffering. Also, apparently, he has fleas because he’s itching with one hand and holding his privates with the other.

Hemenez and Enriquez remind me that they want me to film them, robbing a Japanese bank, only it isn’t a traditional bank (those don’t exist); it is a fortress where they store the phony Mickey Mouse currency. They show me still photos. It didn’t seem prudent; not for me.

Anyway, the point being, I’m, of course, the producer, director, and lead actor of two feature films, fully funded, with major studios waiting for a diplomatic parcel; I tell them
to find a still photographer. I tell them to put young girls on
the sidewalk with cameras... one to the left and one to the right
and have them look like they are casually begging for food. But
they wanted me, or the young Filipina. Morons.

“That’s not gonna look too patriotic, you, robbing a bank of
money that will be totally worthless in two weeks.”

“He’s right,” Enriquez said. “It’d look bad, later.”

I mention to them that it looks bad now.

“When we’re done, we can go to the market. And hand out say...
twenty percent of it,” Hemenez pitched.

“Make that ten percent,” Enriquez corrects him. “The rest is
needed for weapons.”

“Cruz brought you weapons, I spoke with him you know. That’s
them over in the corner. There are 100,000 Japanese still in the
city and you haven’t even fired the weapons yet.”

Quiocho moves his head to look at the weapons. Just that,
seems to be painful.

“That’s because we need bullets. The cash will buy us ammo.”
Enriquez fibs.

I hate being lied too. I may have sold my soul to Culver City
and perhaps Nikkatsu Corporation as well, but I’m not stupid.
Those are two totally different concepts.

“I can’t do it,” I say.
“Horseshit,” said Quiocho. “Of course you can. Just hold the movie camera from around the corner.”

“Wish I could afford the time. But, you guys knock yourself out.”

“The Nips won’t be able to see you,” Quiocho says. “They’ll be face down. And they’ll all be worried about being shot.”

“No way; I’ve been shot, and it hurts.” I explain.

The connivers are hard men to reason with, but I manage it. There is a stunned silence, then Quiocho says, “That was a scratch.”

“You are a guerilla leader,” I say. “Get out there and get to robbin’ banks.”

“Help yourself out and film it for us.”

God help us, a wheeler and a dealer.

“I’m really sorry,” I say, “but it’s like self-interest, it’s not something I can help.”

Enriquez closed his eyes for a moment, asking God what he’d done to deserve me. “We’ll go see this fellow out in Batangas,” he says.

“If you’re going to do that, take him film. He’s out.” I lied. I’d managed to gather and hide all the film in Manila, this joker out in Batangas might have some film. But the war made these losers believe it would be a wasted trip.”

“You have some? Just a bit?” Enriquez asks.
“I just used the last of it just then.” I lied again.

And I’ll continue to lie. Not a problem!!

“Where am I gonna get film?” Enriquez said firmly.

“Rob the Japanese and buy some film.” I suggest.

“Then the next robbery, you can take it out to Batangas,” I add.

**SCENE 40**

Something happened that night of note. The rumors about Marcos’ homosexuality showed signs of acting up again, (a priest casually came by to visit Marcos). So I believe I need a red-hot female escort to show around town. Just as my luck, I have one on the team, so to speak.

“I’ve never been to a cockfight before,” the Youngster admits to me, as we drive there in an open car.

Of course, she’s filmed six stag films and was twenty feet away from a violent (and deadly) jailbreak. So, I’m thinking maybe the cockfight will be a disappointment.

“Count yourself lucky. It’s barbaric,” I say.

“Still, I’m looking forward to it,” she smiles better than even Ahrianna. And it’s certainly more sincere.

She loves it. But it’s nothing like the very best fight scenes in the movies; she whispers to me as some poor chicken gets his neck wrung. I whisper back to her; now, that chicken can act.
“We should hire one of these people to do some security for our sets.”

“Keep your voice down,” I say. “They think I’m Marcos.”

“God, sorry. Only, it’s so exciting. When I think what I’ve been missing all these years.”

“What? You aren’t even old enough to be in here now. And you’re the wrong gender.”

She looks around. No women. None at all.

“Yes, but I’m with our beloved guerilla leader.”

Of course, I know all about cockfighting. I learned it from my father. A winner breeds and trains for endurance, he’d say. Endurance is everything; if you don’t have it, you can’t win. And there’s a lot of truth in that.

I’d taken him at his word and not been there for a long, long time. Now, it seemed, I was back, watching one rooster destroy another and was expected to act like it was a good, noble, thing. Time spent with your father, they tell you, are the best days of your life. Well, that’s their opinion.

SCENE 41

In the seats in front of us, my three CAF conspirators are completely engrossed, caught up in the action. It seems what Hemenez likes best is the fighting, which is what I’d expect from New Mexico, where he says the sport is fairly popular, but
not as popular as it is in Luzon. But still, he says he’s not seen one since he was seven.

Enriquez is following all the gambling, seeing if there is anything he can learn; he’s a serious-minded confidence-man with a strong sense of his own inadequacy.

Quiocho is enjoying my date, eyeballing her, turning around every minute or so.

As for my date, the floor is dirt and her shoes are dusty. But with her, I believe it is the fighting and the blood and the men and the money, and I believe she doesn’t mind teasing (destroying) Quiocho; every time he turns around, she uncrosses and recrosses her legs. For the Youngster, it’s all of it, though I can’t really guess the exact proportions.

I can’t enjoy myself, then I decided I am becoming ill. About the only thing I’d ever experienced myself is mountain fever, so naturally, that’s what I think is happening.

I have been suffering from the early symptoms of diarrhea since arriving, but since more people were looking at me than the fighting, I’d shrug it off, ignored them, treated them with the contempt they deserve.

Ideal for my purposes. I close my eyes and remember the pain, which isn’t difficult to do. Then I remember the shivering, which starts in your knees and spreads upwards; then the muscle
spasms, and I realized I am maybe going to be late arriving at the toilet. So I run.

I don’t know it at the time, but my sprint for the toilet saves me having my face split open by a Japanese sword. Some elite fraternity of Samurai warriors… maybe some sort of military society, barge in; eternal brothers slicing away. One might make an entire movie around such violence, but that’s decades down the road in Hollywood.

I do barely manage to empty my bowels into the toilet.

Then, someone grabs my hand and pulls me off the toilet and all hell breaks loose. Pistol shots ring out from outside the restroom, maybe my CAF friends have grown a pair and are fighting back. When the Filipina pulled me up, fighting to keep my balance, I lost the struggle and toppled slowly forward (hobbled at the ankles by the pants), like a felled tree. I’d have gotten up to help her but I lost consciousness.

SCENE 42

The hospital nurse, she wasn’t there, but she tells me that my date is one hell of a fighter. That it was all over town that she’d put a Nip’s eye out, and though she swears it was an accident, I think she probably did.

I ought to explain that I had caused a lot of confusion. The terms of my agreement with the three CAF clients was that if I
was ever discovered NOT to be Marcos, if the con was up, I was supposed to pass out. They thought through the whole battle, the gig was up and they said that is why they didn’t come to my aid. I had to explain to them I was still good as Marcos and they were as famous as ever for defending me. Too bad it wasn’t on film.

Quirocho, it’s always Quirocho. He wants to know if we can’t, rewrite it, stage it again, and put the scene in the documentary. Geez, it was already over twenty-minutes and they were beating a dead cat.

Turns out the pistol shots didn’t come from them; they aren’t even armed. Ha! The leaders of the most photographed guerilla unit in Manila and they aren’t even in a position to protect themselves. Fortunately, it is a Manila cockfight and mostly all the participants (sportmen), not even guerillas, are well armed for what is essentially, a knife fight.

My three hero friends leap into the pit, duck low and escape harm with the two roosters. I give them a hard time about it, but eventually concede that they do manage to act logically, and therefore, by implication, we all are lucky.

By this point, we are having trouble hearing ourselves think. There was a throng of Catholic women under the window, singing hymns to Saint Hermenegild for my recovery. Quirocho brings word that the whole hospital yard is packed solid, though I think he
is exaggerating. If the Japanese learn about this, they’ll lop some heads. Enriquez, rather more plausibly, puts the number at roughly four-hundred. If so, that is still a lot of prayers, and all begging Saint Hermenegild to reattach my severed head. Listening to that is probably the weirdest experience I’ll probably ever have, and thus far it’s been a somewhat unorthodox life.

Quirocho’s arm is in a sling, the doctor figures that maybe he’s broken his collarbone. I did that once as a stuntman and I can tell you it hurts and you don’t wanna fight someone for five or six weeks. By then, the Americans would be in Manila.

So I tell Quirocho not to be such a pussy; what’s he gonna do about it in that condition.

SCENE 43

I tell the Youngster I probably don’t need to see a doctor. Her response was it’d look really strange if I didn’t, and something she says which Lenin once said, “Never let a good samurai attack go to waste.” She was no Marxist (trust me), but a philosopher in her own making; a bit of V. Lenin a bit of A. Smith combined to make everyone want to listen.

The Filipina was a clever and tight filly. Having survived the attack, Marcos could be wrapped up in mysticism; the leading medical doctors, knowing how important he was to the resistance,
had been treating the sword wound with the newest medical techniques.

Enriquez whispered to me that I was getting above myself, letting a fifteen-year-old run my public relations. She overheard and told him not to be so stupid, that she’d read books.

“You see?” the Filipina was sitting by my bedside; I dare not get up just in case a nurse came in. “They love you. It’s magic; they really do.”

They’d been there all day, apparently, praying and chanting; they showed no sign of leaving. I doubt I’ll be able to get any sleep and that won’t help my recovery. Wasn’t that clear to anyone?

My Filipina was plotting something; she always bit her fingernails when plotting. So, I asked her, “Why do I get the feeling you want to use this to our advantage?”

“I remember when Crispina was dying,” she says, “and ten thousand people stood under her window all night, holding lighted candles. And she staggered to the balcony and took one last bow.”

“Is that true?” I ask.

“I don’t know, my teacher told us that story.”

“You do realize,” I say, “oh, never mind.”

“Something is bothering you,” she is all intuition (tons).
“The films.”
She looks at me, trying to sense something.

BEAT

“You’re doing fine,” she says, “relax. You’re well into your stride now. Follow your instincts and everything will be just swell.”

Smart as new paint, but not drying entirely consistently.

**SCENE 44**

Ahrianna comes to the hospital room, she doesn’t appear to be angry or jealous; clearly, she’s learned the Youngster is the one who pulled me out of the fire and everything is entirely civil, at the present. The Youngster politely leaves us to talk. She’s incredibly in tune with what I need. She steps out into the hall, has a word with the nurse and the nurse glances at us and seems to agree. The nurse will let her know if there’s any hanky-panky.

“I’m just a wreck,” I say.

Ahrianna frowns. “Of course, you can’t let Culver City down, but what is the rush?” she says.

“You’re not helping.”

“Be quiet and let me think,” Ahrianna’s default position.

The Youngster would NEVER tell me to be quiet, she always listens and feels... and that’s important.
I was about to say something clever, but I didn’t. “Go on.”

“Once the Americans get here, you’ll feel better.”

I’m tired of hearing everyone speak to me in truisms. What a waste of time; who in their right mind will argue we all won’t feel better when the Americans arrive.

“That would get those idiots off my back, granted.”

“The idiots? You mean the Japanese?” She speculates.

“No, the three CAF idiots…”

“You need to relax. Finish the Selznick movie after the Americans arrive.”

“We might all be exterminated. Yamashita said.” I remind her.

“You should suspend the American film (and the CAF bullshit too), it would be a pity to be caught at this late date. All that work making what? Half a film? Only to lose your head?”

“No, I can’t do that.”

She didn’t know, but I needed to get the Japanese film done and to the Nikkatsu Corporation in Tokyo before the Americans arrived in Manila. And she can’t ever know that since she is in three of the four flix. And four actors (all from the Backlot) are in all four projects... if only they figure it’s all one big (really big) American film.

“You are one stubborn prick,” Ahrianna might be right.

“When do you think the Americans will be here?”

“Don’t you listen to the radio?”
“Been too busy.”

“Why me? Politics, that’s a man’s job.”

“But I thought you can vote now...”

“You are plenty smartass, but now you need my help?”

“Well, when do you think? This might be life and death.”

LONG BEAT

“This city’s crawling with actresses.” Ahrianna wanted to agree with me.

What she means is that Manila is crawling with spies. Obviously, with Americans on the island, the Japanese are on the defensive and might become interested in him, them, in executing the entire race. The more Ahrianna thinks about it, the more I feel nervous. The Nikkatsu Corporation might send the military or police around to secure their investment, half a film. Studios have done that before.

Ahrianna’s finished thinking.

“The Japanese Army isn’t unimpregnable, you know.”

“Please don’t,” I beg.

“Leave it with me,” she says. “I’ll arrange everything.”

“No, for crying out loud, don’t do that.” I was about to jump out of bed, but I remembered I was sick and I’d have grabbed her but the nurse was eyeballing me not to.

“You’ll go blundering in and give the whole show away.”

“I can be very discrete,” she insists.
“Look. The Japs think I’m making a movie for them. You probably noticed a few scenes we shot were for Japanese consumption, right?”

“Give me credit for a little common sense,” Ahrianna said, cool as the Kitanglad mountains.

“So I have it covered. See?” I try to reason. It doesn’t resonate with her.

“I’ll ask around, discreet inquiries; nobody will know it’s me asking. Obviously, you think I’m stupid or something.”

SCENE 45

As soon as the sun rose the next day, I made a miraculous recovery, wrapped my neck in bandages, for which thanks were duly given. With all the top nuns doing their stuff, I was back in the director’s chair, only there wasn’t actually a chair. We might need to be able to get out of there quickly.

“It’s all fixed,” Ahrianna said. “I’ve arranged it.”

What counts as a virtue in one performing art isn’t necessarily a good thing in another. On the stage, it’s a nice asset if your voice can be heard on the back row, but on a movie set, it can be murder. “For God’s sake, Ahrianna,” I shushed her. “Keep your voice down.”

“You don’t need to know the details,” she carried on casually, “but an invitation will be issued; just you and him, face to
face, time and place to be agreed. Finally, we’re getting somewhere."

“What have you done?”

“What we agreed. Or have you forgotten?”

I don’t want to talk to her anymore, but she is full of it. The buzz. She’s going on and one about something... vague and like a fairy tale. Food, cloth, chairs, and invitations. I’ve seen it plenty before, and I’m a bit nauseated. Brides... about to be married and talking nonstop and it is repulsive for me to watch and listen.

“Of course, we need to figure out exactly how we’re going to pull it off,” she goes on, “but there’s plenty of time for that. I’m going to the Backlot to brainstorm with the girls. I’ve been thinking. He’ll do it but he’s NOT going to want to do it in a Church!”

SCENE 43

I was on my way from a Nikkatsu shot (the one mentioned above) to a bar setup; some drunk Nip kids were supposed to have their brains bashed in and they needed me. The mafia made sure I never traveled the same way, it was always a different bar a Japanese had been lead to or discovered. A runner thought this might be a three-for; three drunk Nips are standing at a bar, the lights are up and waiting for my word. I always used the same
actor/driver, always the same two mafia lieutenants, one in the back with me, the other in the front with the driver. The Americans have been bombing for weeks and after that happened, you can’t hardly tell where you are anymore, but I guess we are somewhere in Sampaloc, because we’ve just passed what looks like Santo Tomas. Note: the clock tower over the main building, that stood dead center of campus.

As far as I knew there weren’t any dorms there; the Japs probably have segregated men and women, and jammed them into classrooms, halls, basements and offices. The shanties tell me it’s crowded inside. I guess they liked the concrete walls and iron gates and that’s why they chose it as a prison. Founded in 1611, the Dominican school had educated its first students twenty-five years before Harvard, making it the oldest university under an American flag. Boy not anymore; I realize there are starving foreigners inside, all waiting for MacArthur, living off pigeons, rats, and weeds, everyone said.

I remember thinking, “Hello, why are we stopping?”, and then there is this terrific something smash through the windshield and the guard, who always sat beside me, his head and torso flies out the back onto the trunk and the guard from the front is now beside me; shattered glass and blood everywhere. And even more blood.
The driver in front of me isn’t moving. “What’s happening?” I shout at him, then I see that the thing that had punched through the windshield is one of the new light poles, and it has gone right through both guards.

I thought it must be some sort of bizarre accident. I reach up to touch the driver, to get his attention. Then my door wrenches open and someone climbs in. I assumed it was another driver or passerby who come to help. “He’s hurt,” I start to say. I can’t see the man’s face because it is dark. “I’m all right but he’s…”

He has a knife.

Just when you think you understand, something always happens to prove that you don’t. Four thousand people had prayed for my health under my hospital window, and now someone is trying to kill me.

There is a voice in my head, faint, but perfectly clear, my dad’s voice. This is the way you go about taking a knife from someone. I was eleven or twelve. We practiced it a few hundred times. I am now glad he’d taught me.

I took the knife away from him. Thanks, Dad. He tried to take it back. I stuck it in his eye, as far as it will go. Twist it. First time I’d ever done anything like that. Let’s not go there.
SCENE 44

They are foreigners, Hemenez tells me later: four Germans. No papers on them (blondes in bespoke suits made in Berlin). The Port Master down at the dock makes us a list of all the ships they could have come in on. Allies with the Japanese, of course, but Germany is a long way away. We’re guessing, Hemenez says, that someone hired them to do it. And for that, we were gonna give him hero status?

“What we don’t know,” Enriquez said, “is whether they were hired by the Nips or someone in the mafia. Could be either, there’s no way of telling.”

To that list I add, Cruz or the Americans. No; it couldn’t be any of those… Everyone in Manila would have done it themselves and not hired the Germans. Unless maybe it was the Youngster’s father. He’d not smiled quite so happily as he had before last Sunday and he was supervising a ton of my/our (my and the Youngster’s) money.

Berlin is in ruble and occupied itself and I’ve not received any film offers at all, never. I’ll admit I have sent Riefenstahl letters (various pitches for films), but naturally, she never responded. No, this Germany link is a total mystery.

I kill the one that opens my door, the driver gets two more and the fourth runs away, is chased down half the alleys in Sampaloc and drops dead on the steps of the college, would you

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believe, of heart failure. Now why was he running to a gate? Going to the Japanese for help? Who and what the devil.

I had a boy watch the wheelbarrows. Internees are starving at a rate of three or four per day; they are wheeled from the camp in pushcarts for everyone to see, a grim reminder that anyone (not just foreigners) could be next. After three days, the kid reported he’d not seen anything leaving the college but skeletal bodies. No healthy Aryan bodies, he said.

In case you study these things (I do), they came at us with a modern-day jousting contraption. A Japanese truck with a light pole lashed to the front. They rammed the front passenger-side of my car with the pole, hoping to take out everyone inside. Bombs, grenades, rifles, and pistols, all abundant everywhere in the world and they want use a light pole lashed to a truck?

“Amateurs,” Quiocho says, and I agree with him. Not the way my dad would’ve gone about it, or the Japanese (swords), or the Americans (bombs). No, only a German would over-think an assassination with a make-shift medieval lance.

And someone went to great lengths to import Germans. Rather than find local talent, there are plenty of locals willing and able, they go with outsiders. Which doesn’t get us any further trying to figure out who was behind it.

I point out that whoever it is, they have known I am in that particular vehicle, on that particular street, at that
particular time. Quiocho says that doesn’t help much either; that Manila is crawling with enemy spies, who probably know more about what goes on than we do. “Though if I were you,” he adds, “I’d think carefully about that girlfriend of yours. She knows all the arrangements, obviously.”

I think he was talking about the young Filipina.

“She would never...” I began, and then realized he was talking about the other actress. Ahrianna. Fortunately, I remember to vouch for her absolutely, and why I couldn’t tell them about well, ANYTHING.

“We’re keeping a lid on this,” Enriquez says. “We don’t want riots, but if the two German freighters in the harbor are firebombed... It might not be such a bad thing. If word gets out someone tried to kill you, it could provoke a premature revolt.”

Keeping a lid on it? Bless his naïve soul. Premature revolts? Riots? A couple of burned ships; dead Japanese soldiers and sailors? After about what must add up to twenty or thirty million dead and indiscriminate destruction of property, this joker’s worried that Manila might jump the gun and enter the war, prematurely?

The three stooges only think this way because they have yet to actually enter the war. Nice to know the CAF is being so cautious with the lives of their countrymen. Next, they will
argue the time to strike is ten minutes after the Japanese
leave. Hide and watch if they don’t.

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

I wake up and there are five bayonets pointed at me, five
Japanese soldiers and a fat Colonel. “On your feet,” a Sergeant
screams.

The soldiers have rifles in their hands, but the nearest one
has a sword. I get out of bed, look for my slippers; I presume
they’ve been kicked under the bed, presumably by the intruders.
I don’t bother to bend over looking for them.

The fat man leads the way down the staircase to the office
where I meet clients. Lately, I’ve been talking to the CAF
schemers or just waiting around there. There are four more fat
officers there waiting for us. The entire occupation army is
there it seems. The officers find two chairs (one a crate), plus
the couch. I stand. The enlisted soldiers stand, weapons
pointed.

“That’s him?” asks one of the officers. The Colonel nods.

“Funny,” said another. “He’s not as short as I thought he’d
be.”

“Oh, that’s him all right,” said a third.
“What’s going on?” I asked.

One of the fat officers hadn’t spoken yet. He wasn’t the fattest, or the tallest, or even the best dressed, though they all seemed pretty damn keen, in a grim sort of way. But he was clearly the boss. “Do you know me?” he says.

No, I was about to shake my head, but then something clicked. Yes, some street corner comedian I’d seen, try to impersonate him. “You’re Kotani,” I say.

He smiles. “Colonel Kotani to you,” he says. “Number two to General Yamashita. Unlike you, you see, I have a real job in this town.”

All over, then. I’d been found out. I was dead.

Before I could say anything, Kotani goes on, “These gentlemen are representatives of the new Southern Expeditionary Army in Manila. We’ve formed a coalition to befriend the Filipino people.”

My jaw drops, I’m sure. He pauses. That’s nice, I don’t say. Couldn’t really see what business it was of mine, if I’d been found out, it wouldn’t matter anyway.

“There’s been a change of policy,” he continues. “The military officers who committed the recent atrocities are back in Japan, and we are here to make sure it doesn’t happen again.” He grins.

A politician. There is a Japanese politician in my office and I don’t have the heart to tell him, he’s wasting his time, I
will never vote in a Japanese election. This fat Colonel's smile is... You know the war is over, when the Japs make like they're running for Congress.

“So, you guys are new?”

“Ready to make a valuable contribution to the wellbeing of this city and it’s population,” remembers one of the other fat men.

Kotani turns his head, nods, turned back to me. “The attempt on your life,” he says, “has given us the pretext we needed. Obviously, there was a conspiracy, to overthrow General Yamashita, but the Kōdōha have failed. But there’s no need to panic. The conspirators have been apprehended and are in custody, and the Army is in charge again, all the while making sure there are no more atrocities.”

“So, you caught them?”

Why were they lying? It occurred to me that maybe I hadn’t been found out after all.

“Do you know you have rebel instigators hanging around outside,” the Colonel said.

Enriquez and Quiocho and Hemenez maybe? They liked keeping an eye on things.

“No, I wasn’t aware. Are you sure?”

Kotani beams at me. “Would you like to see them?”

“Sure.”
He nods, stands up, walks to the window, opens it, points. I look where he was pointing. I see two decapitated heads and down the street twenty meters, the matching bodies.

“The American deserter with dark skin (Hemenez) wasn’t at home when we called,” Kotani expains, “He may escape. Do you know how many caves this island has? And the Americans are causing so much chaos.”

I move away from the window.

So, I reason. If they thought I was Marcos, well, I’d already be dead. If they thought I was Go, they might want some film work done. I can’t abide with negativity and doubt. So…

“I’m not Marcos,” I say.

There was a dead quiet moment. “What?”

“I’m not Marcos,” I tell them.

“Who said you were?”

“Uh, okay. I just wanted to avoid any confusion.”

“I’m a filmmaker, I look a little like Marcos. The CFA hired me to make a film... Here, wanna see some of it?”

I gestured to the editing machine. They decline. So, I try to explain.

“Marcos was killed by an American bomb, weeks ago. Enriquez and his gangsters made me pretend to be him. They told me if I didn’t, they’d kill my mother. It’s true. Everybody knows me in the industry, they’ll confirm it.”
“We know who you are, Mr. Go,” Kotani clarified things.

“They hired me to make a film…”

“About how heroic they’ve been?”

“As a matter of fact…”

“I hear you’re making a killing.”

“I have several cameras.”

“You have every motion picture camera in the city and all the film as well.”

“Naturally. I’m a serious person.”

“Mr. Nakamura, of the Nikkatsu Corporation, highly recommends you.”

“You need film work?”

“You’ve got a choice,” Kotani continues. “Join us, or we were too late to save you and you were cruelly murdered by the traitors before we had a chance to get to them. No skin off our noses either way.”

LONG BEAT

“Mr. Nakamura, he likes me?”

Then Kotani laughed.

“You know,” he says, “you had me going there for a moment about Marcos.”

“It’s true,” I pleaded with him.

“You don’t know? He’s been striking targets all night over Manila. You’ve been tricked.”
“I’ve been in an American jeep and at the hospital as Marcos.”

“Some sort of a ruse. We know he’s still in Manila.”

BEAT

“But he won’t be hard to find, he leaves a trail of dead Japanese soldiers behind whatever bar he visits.”

Another fat man, maybe an intelligence officer. “I’d like to see the film,” he says, and he stands up.

They all crowd around the editing machine and I run a reel of the Nikkatsu film forward to a good part.

Kotani asks to freeze the close-up. “That’s make-up?” he says.

“I have people that can do that,” I say.

“That’s you?”

The fat men shake their heads. “That’s a nice scar,” Kotani says.

“When was this shot?”

“Three days ago,” I answer.

“Can’t be done. That’s Marcos. I told you he is still alive.” One of the officers argued.

“For crying out loud,” I say. “Do I sound like Marcos?”

“Don’t know, never spoke with him before,” a fat man said.

“Now then,” Kotani says, “that’ll do. Why are you pitching this idea to us?”

“What idea?”
“We’re not here for that. You had a good crack at it, fair play to you, but it didn’t work. So let’s get back to business, shall we?”

I think maybe they want me to impersonate Marcos and surrender. But evidently, they aren’t interested.

“Fine,” I say. “How can I help you?”

Kotani leans back in his chair. “Just now, I offered you a choice,” he says. “Cooperate with the IJA or we’ll shoot you here and it may look like your friends did it. We know you’re only a filmmaker, and during the early days of the siege, you did absolutely nothing, but this hero business is picking up now. Fine, we have no problem with that. You can be ‘our’ filmmaker as well, and it’ll make life easier for us both after the war. Otherwise, we say you collaborated and were murdered by the CAF, and the people will be very angry and terribly sad, but sooner or later, they’ll get over it.”

“In case you are wondering,” he continues, “the American are knocking on the door, and Cruz’s guerillas will be looking for us. All we want is for you to film a wedding. I imagine you can manage that, can’t you? It’s what you’ve been doing for the last seven years, after all.”

Suddenly I had to know. “Was it you who tried to kill me?”

“Like I just told you,” the Colonel went on, “it worked out very well for us, expediently well actually, but it wasn’t us.”
“So I would agree to film your wedding?”

Bewildered silence, just for a moment. “Good God, no,” Kotani says. “Why would I need to get married?”

“You just said…”

“Oh, it’s not my wedding. It’s Yamashita’s.”

LONG LONG LONG BEAT

“He hasn’t told us what he wants to do yet,” the Major points out. “I think we need a decision, don’t you?”

I couldn’t help laughing. “Between doing what you tell me to and having my neck severed?”

“The CAF doesn’t chop necks. But, yes.”


The Colonel gives me a weary look. “Don’t call him that anymore,” he says, “We’re looking out for ourselves.”

SCENE 2

In the Manila film industry, there’s a legend. There is a ghost script, that we all know is floating around out there; it’s called the haunted screenplay. There’s this creepy peasant (who uses a shitty typewriter) and he comes around once every year (more or less), always pitching it under a different title, and it’s one of the best scripts ever written. It has it all: great dialogues, fantastic parts, character arches off the
charts, wonderful can’t-miss cameos, the best comic relief ever, action, but it never gets made, and do you know why? It’s haunted. There’s the all-time greatest strong kick-ass female lead in this movie, and nobody will ever make it.

The story goes that the actress who won the part in the original production was poisoned by her director the night before shooting began (he changed his mind and wanted to go with his younger mistress); and with her dying breath, the mature actress put a curse on the script. Anybody who plays the part thereafter will be taken over by her, become her; see with her eyes, remember her memories, rehearse the part exactly how it is written, and will film it true to script, if she’ll only be given the chance. Seven times, Filipina actresses have taken the role only to die as she died, poisoned. Great story. For years, lonely school teachers from the provinces have been pitching it to me, but for some reason, nobody wants to touch it.

Some self-appointed expert from Mindanao told me it is only a superstition and I told him it wasn’t that everyone in Manila believed it and when there are that many people that believe it, then it ceases to be superstition.

SCENE 3

The Kōdōha, better known as the Imperial Way Fraternity, dates right back to the earliest years of the Japanese Empire, or the
Shōwa Restoration as it was called back then, and the same one hundred and sixteen families have had the monopoly on it all that time. It was bullshit about a rival faction trying to assassinate me; and the Kōdōha would never hire foreigners to do the work they so relish. We’d disposed of the German bodies in the bay (best feed sharks in the world), except for the heart attack (best to let sleeping dogs lie). No one was in custody like the fat man claimed. Fat men!

When Jimmu Tennō became the first emperor, back in the year 600 BC, he had the most ornery lords dragged in front of him in chains (a tradition), and one of them, head of the oldest and proudest of the hundred and sixteen families, and this lord tells the new king he is nobody, human refuse, and that Jimu doesn’t even know who his own father is. Quite true, Jimmu said. But my family begins with me; yours ends with you. Then, to show his magnanimity, he spared all their lives (again tradition), and they hounded and harassed Jimmu the rest of his reign. The moral? Don’t neglect an opportunity to get rid of your opponent for the sake of a mediocre one-liner.

SCENE 4

They will deny it to their death, but will bet you anything, the fellows in my office were Kōdōha. Quite a safe bet, actually, since the Kōdōha are hopelessly and inextricably
placed, like large-leaf mahogany growing up through siam weed. So every Jap officer is everyone else’s loyal fraternity brother. For me, they were pretending to be Kaikaku-ha (reformists). Whoever Yamashita is, he and Kotani definitely have a lot of qualities in common: pride, enough arrogance to hire me for a wedding, and a big fat chunk of raw ignorance.

There is more to Kotani than just that, however, as I find out fairly quickly. The Japanese never bother themselves to dispose of a body and there are two in my street.

They bring me to the Intramuros. I spent a troubled couple of hours in a room with guards on a locked-from-the-outside door, and I’ve come to the conclusion that my only chance of staying alive was to find a way to make myself useful. How I was supposed to do that? Was I going to have to shoot a wedding?

SCENE 5

Kotani has parked himself in the Comandante’s office of the Cuartel de España – so-called because the building was the home of the old Spanish garrison. At four AM, before the city wakes up, you can still hear the Spanish being spoken, or so the story goes. Me? It is an eerie place at night, so I listen. I can’t hear shit. But, since half the population believes in ghosts and vampires, maybe it’s not surprising that people believe that. The blood-sucking ghosts who used to run things under the
Spanish, simply will never leave us. Years after this building is gone, maybe this will be a park, Filipinos will still hear the Spanish.

The Philippine commander had been on the last truck headed for Battan, and he hadn’t been missed; in the intervening three years. The rest of the barracks was overrun by spiders and dusk, but Kotani’s office was immaculate. There are some rather fine stained-glass windows (perfectly clean), and some austere, utterly magnificent, furniture.

Kotani is sitting on a narrow, high-backed, comfortable-looking chair made from rosewood, which I’m given to understand is the most valuable material in the world that isn’t stone or metal. The only other seat in the place is – I recognize the pattern straight away as a classroom chair, low, wobbly and prone to fall over backwards as soon as you try and sit. I tried a school where the chairs were like that. But it wasn’t like this, because the school I felt I could always leave; a Kōdōha Colonel’s office was quite different.

He looks up at me. “Sit down,” he says.

I considered the chair. “It won’t take my weight.”

He grins. “You’ll be surprised. That chair was made for a school. They have to be tough; kids are tough on furniture.”

I sit down. Solid as a rock. “You want some film work done?”
He contemplates me for a moment, as if I was a mathematics problem, maybe the dying empire’s last theorem. “My brothers and I have been talking about you,” he says. “In the end, we took a vote. Three votes to two.”

“I’m not sure I liked the sound of that. What was the motion?”

“Is this man Marcos (the terrorist) or Go (the filmmaker)?”

“Okay,” I say. “Who am I?”

“Three votes say you’re Marcos.”

“That’s not good. Which way did you vote?”

“Oh, they always vote for execution,” obviously exposing the lie they were reformists.

Kotani goes on, “Everybody in the Intramuros believes you’re Marcos, so even if you really are a filmmaker, it wouldn’t matter a damn in practical terms. And we don’t care because, regardless of who you are, you’re going to do exactly what we tell you to, or we kill your lady friend.”

He pauses to let the threat sink in. I was supposed to wait for him to continue. “The truth is,” I say, “I am a filmmaker, and I can prove it if you want me to. And as far as Ahrianna’s concerned, there’s plenty more where she came from.”

“Is that her name? It’s also the name of Yamamoto’s fiance.”

“It’s a common name in the Philippines. He doesn’t have a wife at home?”

“She was killed in one of the bombings.”
“Well, that’s too bad, but I’ll be more than happy to film anything he has in mind.”

“Son,” he says, “I don’t trust you further than I can throw an elephant.”

“Likewise.”

That made him angry. But, “You’re lucky,” he says. “Between you and me, I trust my officers even less. They want to fight to the death. But, General Yamashita and I are realists. The Americans have won the war, but you personally have not.”

“A lot of truth in that, really,” I admit.

He frowns at me. “For the time being,” he says, “we need each other, that’s all that matters. Which is why I’m asking you to film Yamashita’s wedding.”

“I wasn’t aware?”

Kotani shook his head. “He’s decided to take a Filipina bride.”

“That doesn’t sound like him at all.”

“No?”

“To all intents and purposes, there is no sense in that.”

“We’ve got public opinion to think of.”

“The Filipinos hate your boss.”

“Maybe not hate.”

“You’re not leaving?”
“I shouldn’t be telling you this, but we have orders to remain and fight to the end,” Kotani divulges the entire plan in one short sentence.

“But the war is over, why take even more lives?”

He nods. “Japanese will never surrender. Goes to show just how stubborn we are,” he says. “They love the Emperor. But right now, the general and I need some political/legal cover.”

“So it’s a sham of a marriage.”

“No, I think he has some affection for her. She’s dynamic. And it’s all perfectly legal.”

“Okay, I see.”

He pauses for breath. “The Americans are well-known suckers for redemption. So, the narrative is, the general is in love with a Filipina actress and he’s had a change of heart. He wishes to escape execution after the war.”

“An actress?”

“Yes. What’s so odd about that?”

LONG BEAT

“Oh, nothing.

SCENE 6

I make films and so, yes, I’m very concerned with making the actresses look beautiful...
Five days after she started her work on the Selznick film, Ahrianna says to the Youngster, “Have you seen the rushes?”

The rushes are the previous day’s work.

She says, “Of course, I see them every day. I process them.”

And Ahrianna asks, “What do you think?”

And the Youngster says, “Ahrianna, you’re giving a marvelous performance.”

And Ahrianna replies, “I’m not talking about my acting. How do I look?”

“Ahrianna,” the kid tells her, “you look nice.”

“Don’t be funny!” she tells the Youngster.

Ahrianna races across town to the Backlot, and I am sitting there waiting with some people. And Ahrianna says to me, “Godis, you photographed me in those Vasquez-Prada films, didn’t you?”

And I say, “Yes, what about it?”

“Can’t you let the kid go and you film me like that?”

And without really thinking (my bad), “Ahrianna, you have to understand that I was seven years younger then.”

SCENE 7

So, later we have just filmed a delicate scene. When it’s done, I casually mention to Ahrianna I was kidnapped and brought to a fat Colonel’s office.
“Don’t act like I’m doing something wrong. Look what you’re involved in. You put every actor/crew at the Backlot, their life, in danger,” Ahrianna is in one of those moods.

I did think. Yes, maybe I had been cavalier and did bring this on us, and myself especially.

“Well, honestly, I’ve not made a film in seven years. And maybe I did get carried away, but this… look what you’re doing, it’s nuts.”

“They’re leaving,” she repeats that, twice. “They’ve been choking the life out of everyone and now they’re going.”

“Going? What’s that got to do with it. You’re marrying the most heinous commander in all of Asia, and maybe Europe too. It will be a total bloody disaster.”

“I think people will understand.”

“Are you crazy?”

“The opportunity to make a deal presented itself and it’s done, so stop harping on it.”

“They’ll label you a collaborator.”

“It’s not like I needed to fuck him. He’d have agreed without all that, I promise you that!”

“What? Do you have to put it that way?”

“How do you want me to say it?”

“Anything but that way, please. I’m still attached to you and it hurts my ears.”
“Okay, I’m not boinkin’ him anymore after tonight.”
“Okay, I’m not boinkin’ him anymore after tonight.”
“What? You’ve...”
“I’m just telling you the truth.”
“Well, maybe you could have put it a bit more delicately.”
“He only wants the wedding on film.”
“Yes, I know, so he can escape execution.”
“And I’ll tell you what, that’s fine so long as they leave, and not rape and murder everyone on the way out of town.”
“So you’re going to be the one to tame him?”
“It’s done. He’s agreed. And after the ceremony and he has a copy of the film, he’ll order the city be left standing and they’ll withdraw. I’ve seen the orders. He has them in his front breast pocket.”
“They’ll tear the city to pieces,” I’m real.
“I guess, it’s possible,” Ahrianna admitted.
I pitched her the idea that we just kill the fat Nip bastard. She obviously had access to him, she could poison him or leave a window unlocked. And, that I had people who could do that, they would enjoy it. It would pay their debt to the nation.
But she simply replied, “But you do weddings so well.”
I tried to explain she was wrecking her career.
I tell her, that most people will judge her harshly.
But she will not listen.
I tell her a story. A few years before the Japanese arrived, forever ago, I filmed a set of after-dinner speeches made by the Faculty of History at the University (the important one). It went well; I filmed the Chancellor and a few of the senior lecturers, one of whom came up to me afterward and truly thanked me, said it would make him ever so popular with the American academics.

Anyway, after that, I hung around for the free food, and I listened to a bunch of them, great scholars who know everything there is to know, discussing some complex question, something along the lines of whether Miguel Malvar or Manuel Quezon, rightfully deserves the title as the country’s second president.

One faction said there was good evidence (which they recited in detail) to say it was Malvar. The other lot brought equally good evidence to say it was Quezon. Then someone passed around a bottle of the really good Tennessee stuff, and when it was all gone, someone said, I know, let’s vote on it.

So that’s what they did. Nine votes for Quezon, seven for Malvar, and that’s how we know, as a matter of cold scientific fact, which man was actually the second president. And if you don’t believe me, look in the history books - the latest editions, of course, incorporating all the new advances in the sum of human knowledge - and you’ll see I’m right.
I try to reason with her. What, after all, is the belief but knowing something without actually being able to prove it? Hundreds of millions of people believe in God. And anything believed by so many must be true; and if you disagree, it can only be because you don’t quite understand the subtleties of the true definition of truth.

And it’s what’s true now that matters, sure as oysters are oysters. She opened her legs for Yamashita! Think about it logically. Unless you’re a bit confused in the head, nothing is going to save her.

And then, suddenly, she might understand.

“You won’t let this ruin my career,” she whispers in my ear.

The ground rushes up towards me, flat and hard. She expects me to rescue her from the impulsive mess she’s gotten herself into.

And, she says, “Legally, it doesn’t really matter anyway. Did I mention that I’m already married?”

SCENE 8

Ahrianna probably hadn’t mentioned it to Yamashita that she was married already. She tells me that Yamashita officers in Manchuria urged him to leave his wife in China where she would be safe, but he disagreed, instructing her to return to Japan, to the land of her ancestors. And now the wife is dead and he
feels really bad about it. There were tears in his eyes, Ahrianna claims, but who knows at this point.

Evidently, Yamashita had pointed out to Ahrianna that he wasn’t the emperor alone (out of all the Japanese) who could in theory not marry whoever he liked. But his wife was dead in Japan (bombed to death) and had no need to marry money, or rank, or an old and distinguished family. It seems that he needed only to extricate himself from this bad occupation (and the perception that he personally had killed about 100,000 Filipino civilians), he needed to get the hell out of Manila and survive the war, if necessary, in the hills.

“Yes, point taken,” Ahrianna said. “Where’s this leading?”

It was leading to... Ahrianna explaining it. He pointed out, that he needed someone who was at least half Filipino and presentable. Someone who knew how to look good in public and on film. Someone very definitely of the people, but nevertheless with a touch of notoriety to marry. And someone who loved their country enough to make a deal.

Ahrianna then “supposedly,” asked him if their marriage would upset the Emperor. This is NOTHING like the Ahrianna I know, and I’m wondering if she or her people didn’t add it to the story later.

She says Yamashita answered that compared to the current national strife, the general’s personal lives were so far
beneath his notice that the wedding wouldn’t ever be discussed anywhere, unless there was a war-crime trial. What possible harm could it be to be careful and make a sentimental film? He would marry a native, stop the executions, and abandon the city – all part of the historical record.

Tojo had married a mathematician. Hata had married a milkmaid. Akira, the wife of Morikaza Amano, had been a geisha in the employ of his former chief of staff. The three generals most popular with the Emperor had married confused women. What harm could there be in a marriage to an actress?

That’s when Ahrianna allegedly negotiated the famous deal.

SCENE 9

“Aren’t you going to ask me who I’m married to?”

“Doesn’t matter,” I hear myself say. “Look, hasn’t it sunk in yet? We have a job to do. We are genuinely going to have our heads chopped off if we aren’t totally focused!”

“This is going to be a great wedding!” She answers.

“Read some history, for crying out loud,” I try to insult her. It’s the only thing I can think of to make her snap out of her bridal haze.

Of course, she doesn’t flinch. Brides to be, floating around like butterflies, never do.
SCENE 10

The question of her career is on us one last time before the bartender walks her up the aisle, between the rows of distinguished guests to a table, the salt, rice, fruit, vegetables, and sake. It was the rehearsal, so no such goodies appeared, yet. They would have to scrounge far and wide for what the Japs were claiming would be there for the wedding.

It goes without saying that the library on the ground floor of the palace is the most textured part (light bounces you know) of the palace complex and the room dates back nearly to 1750, and that the room is very, very long. Everyone speculates that Kotani chose it because it was the biggest space available and he wants, not only the film, but as many witnesses as possible.

I forget how many people will be crammed in there to see the bad theater. It will be well over a four hundred, all in their smartest dress uniforms, all turned out to watch the mighty Yamashita repent and marry the Filipina actress. It is alleged he’s fallen in love with her. All executions are postponed, and even a hundred prisoners are released. Some half-starved men will be put in baggy clothes and appear in the wedding film.

However; the choice of the hall was my idea. “What we need,” I also suggest that it be shot at night.

“Why would we want to do that?”
Because then, “to make it appear legitimate” to the American and British judges, especially the Americans. “They like as much controlled light as possible,” and maybe they’ll hesitate just a moment or so longer before they hang the bastard. I don’t say the bastard part, but “the legitimate light” seems enough to sway them.

“Good point,” they concede. So?

So, I say, the lights are easy. But the problem is setting the exposures; that I have a body double to set things up perfectly. And I have one. What I need is a spare uniform; loan us one of those for the rehearsal the night before. And don’t burn down the city as the fires would influence the lighting. Ha, again I don’t actually say the last part, but maybe they understand that.

Dead silence about the uniform. You could’ve heard a cat fart, as the half dozen or so Japanese officers present all contemplate a Filipino filmmaker with a Yamashita double and a dress uniform. Yes, it would be nice to have an imposter in the city, but that isn’t the plan. Then one of them, I think it may have been the Major, who says that isn’t such a bad idea. All right, said Kotani, let’s do that. I should have asked them for some Yen; they’d have paid it just to have this wedding out of the way.
I call this the “Nosferatu” sequence. And it is done with perfection. My mafia friends work for cash, no end credits for them on this one; they attack the palace with spears, slingshots, and small caliber pistols. Nothing serious, but they have been told to keep it up until they see the bright lights go off in the library. And it is made perfectly clear that I will withhold all pay if they end the attack prematurely. A solid business practice.

When the attack begins, every single Japanese soldier, including Katoni, rushes from the library to repel the attack. The worst thing imaginable would be for the attack to end early and Kotani and his officers return to see the camera’s rolling and Yamashita’s double (make-up and all) sucking the blood from poor Ahrianna’s neck.

I’m not a self-serving man; I like my film work to speak for itself. I’ve not spoken anywhere about my craft or the craft of my beloved cast and crew, but F.W. Murnau struggled for months with the scenes and it finally bankrupted the studio. Yes, I do understand that was 1922 Germany, but this is 1945 Manila. They had only one camera and I have six, but coordinating what we pull off during the twelve-minute attack is miraculous. And I did it at a cost of two-hundred and twelve US dollars; that includes the makeup and blood, two wedding gowns, and the crew’s labor expenses. The Nikkatsu donated the film. And Ahrianna
worked for free; I told her it was the least she could do given I was pulling her bacon from the fire.

By the way, that figure also includes the six petrol bombs, fourteen bullets fired and the petrol used by the six light trucks as they raced back and forth down Jose Laurel to make it look like there might be hundreds involved in the attack.

With the exception of this true account, I’ll not speak on it anymore. Let the critics say what they will. Yamashita’s wedding is a matter of historical record now.

I expect you probably made a note, I lost money on the shoot. Yamashita and Kotani (my clients) contributed nothing.

When the soldiers return to the hall, from the fighting outside, there is a bit of the simulated blood on the floor, my heart jumps an inch at least, but Kotani walks right over it and tracks a bit of it on the bottom of his shoes.

SCENE II

It had been my idea to have the Makati and Santa Cruz bosses give the bride away. Needless to say, they nearly come to blows at the rehearsal over which one of them would walk her down the aisle. What was I thinking?

I tell them to toss a coin for it; the Santa Cruz boss won. The Makati boss says that isn’t acceptable and predicts the gutters will be running with blood before nightfall if his mafia
is insulted and left out of the con. Fine, I say. Santa Cruz gets to walk her down the aisle but there will be a clear and convincing shot of the Makati boss sitting in the front row with the actress we have hired to play Ahrianna’s proud mother.

Of course, there is ANOTHER near gunfight when it comes down to who will thrust the wooden stake through Yamashita’s heart. I argue that I’ve already compromised on continuity too much; that one will walk her down the aisle and the other will occupy the front row of seats with the bride’s tearful mother. It normally would have been okay (people overlook a lot), but the men are diametrically opposite physically. One mafioso is tall and skinny and the other is short and fat.

I offer that we can film both, and whichever turns out best, that’s the shot we will use. The blood man ixnayed that idea and it was Ahrianna who pointed to her watch and points out there won’t be time for two stakes through the heart.

The two mafias can not agree, so I bring in a priest; not a real priest, of course. It was a Shinto wedding, but a hired actor in a collar will spring from the audience and slay the vampire.

In all, it works out well. Losing the “stake in the heart” scene appears to have taught the mafiosos to stop bickering. You bitch in this business, you lose. Ahrianna then takes to lecturing them; that everyone there is a film professional
EXCEPT them and they need to shut up and listen. And if they don’t, their unique place in film history might be lost.

**SCENE 12**

Ahrianna has a lot of range as an actress; she can play anywhere from an urban Hepburn to a rural Rogers. I don’t know how Ahrianna figures out her walk down the aisle, but however she did it, she got it absolutely spot on.

So down the aisle, she walks; and that’s one of the really important things Ahrianna learned making films, how to walk. A walk can be so many things, a waddle or prance, or a strut or a pace; she can do all of those and a hundred more. Ahrianna can tell you who she is (Katherine Hepburn, Veronica Lake, Bette Davis, Joan Crowford, but especially Ginger Rogers) without saying a single word, just by the way she put one foot in front of the other. To her, it comes naturally. Some of the lesser actresses have to think about it and practice for hours in front of a mirror. And it’s a good thing we have Ahrianna, because we don’t have time for a lot of foolishness.

**SCENE 13**

Now the day of the actual wedding, there is more of a fright (for me) than the previous night. Earlier, the guards do not come back until the exposures were made, Ahrianna and the double
gets out of their costumes. But the bridal gown is ruined. I had warned the special effects man (the blood man) not to overdo it. But there was a war on (he was accustomed to lots of blood), and naturally, he overdid it. So there is a mad rush to get the stain out and finally, the actresses of Manila (a group effort) gave up and began searching for a replacement gown.

The next day, the gown Ahrianna wore isn’t a match from the rehearsal. However, Kotani and his staff, nor the soldiers seem to notice.

And it is done. Well, there is some tricky editing. Yes, you probably can guess; there are now two Yamashita films -- the “Marriage” reel (clearly marked) and the “Nosferatu” reel (marked “Yamashita’s Wedding”).

Both reels are in position in the Grand Theater’s projection room. The “Marriage” reel in the projector. And the “Nosferatu” reel in a case, ready to leave town with the Japanese.

And as agreed to by Yamashita and Ahrianna, and stipulated to by Kotani, they meet in her theater and if the film is judged worthy by Yamashita, then he will formally withdraw from the city and order it not leveled.

Naturally, the “Marriage” reel is judged adequate (of course); I’m a professional. And when Kotani walks up to the projectionist’s booth, I hand him the “Nosferatu” reel and wish him luck in the hills.
SCENE 14

Of course, I’m not finished, I have two movies to film. There won’t be any more Japanese drunks to waylay outside of bars. The mafia has gone back to their old “peaceful” activities.

Hememez is off hiding in a cave, his two friends I think, their heads lay there in the street at least two days. I go back to my office to develop and edit the Yamashita reels and notice there is an unusual number of flying insects still buzzing around, so I think the bodies and severed heads have only recently been removed.

Despite the wedding’s success, I can’t rest of my laurels; Culver City and Nikkatsu still expect their films.

SCENE 15

The Japanese know my name, but I need some people to know my business. My blind ambition (dumbassness) is causing me to break a very good rule; you never tell your occupier your real name. Once the Japs know your name, friend or foe, you are screwed. And as far as that goes, even the CAF, if they know your name, they might disappear you as well. Yes, they can be killers, but they’re OUR bloody killers. I grew up in Manila; I’ll talk with anyone. In fact, everyone knows my name.
Yamashita and the Japanese Army are gone; the Navy is now in charge of Manila. Ass Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi is apparently charged with blowing up piers, warehouses, and bridges in advance of MacArthur’s arrival.

The man stands just five feet three inches and weighs maybe 130 pounds. Clearly, he’s compensating for his lack of physical stature. I mean, the general is a portly dignified fellow. This navy jack-ass would make a terrible vampire; people would think it’s a comedy and laugh. He has no plans to leave and he’s instructing his marines to fortify the city.

They’re blowing up bridges. I can see them burying ammunition and food. I wish Enriquez and Quiocho were still alive, I’d send them out to dig some of it up. And what in the devil are they doing using satchels of rice in place of sandbags, when the city is starving? Creative with the rice satchels but it probably won’t save them; but, still they persist.

The Nips are dragging culvert pipes inside, covering them with half-inch steel plates and stacking sandbags on top of that. They’re gonna hid behind desks, chairs, and bookcases. Big demand for concrete. Trenches connecting buildings. Jap troops are building these staggered walls, four feet thick and seven high. They are using baseballs to practice throwing hand grenades over these walls. I’m walking right by them. They see
that I can see what they are doing. That damn wedding scared the hell out of me, and now it was for NOTHING!!!

Anyone with a brain can see what is happening with Iwabuchi. Compared to Yamashita, who is a proven mad-dog leader on the battlefield, Iwabuchi’s history in command ended in disaster. In the Solomon Islands, his ship is sunk and Iwabuchi is rescued, though in this culture a skipper is supposed to go down with his ship; his survival proves an immense shame (more compensating here in Manila). This all could have been avoided if he’s shown a little dignity. The navy later packed him off to a desk in Japan, an insult to any self-respecting Japanese and now he’s back to make up for his shame?

The Japanese have commandeered the White Dove Café at the corner of Taft Avenue and Vito Cruz, absolutely sacrilege to touch it. They’ve transformed the ice cream parlor and soda fountain into a gun embankment surrounded by sandbags. And next day is a concrete bunker.

But what irks me to no end. This shrimp of an Admiral thinks he’s elegant and wears a pencil-thin moustache, trimmed so that it curled around his upper lip, much like Clark Gable. What an insult to dapper. He knows he’ll never be Clark Gable and that’s why he has no plans to leave peacefully.

Anyway, Iwabuchi seems to see Manila as his redemption. This time, however, he had no intention of abandoning his ship
(Manila). He probably wants to go down with the ship. And don’t even tell me it will make a great film. Sick Quixotic bastard; I finally managed to look it up.

I’m watching them move an airplane bomb, in the back of a horse-drawn cart!

I never heard so many rosaries.

All this chaos and there is a lost journalist sitting in front of me. A Japanese girl from Kingu magazine and she has on a hat jammed with pink silk hydrangea that are jiggling up and down as she nods. They are so distracting that I want to yank them out of the dark purple ribbon around the brim.

“Do you agree with me?” I ask the reporter, as my young girlfriend hands her over a steaming porcelain cup of tea. The Japanese reporter compliments her on her outfit but especially her shoes. The youngster compliments the Japanese woman on her hat.

What was this Japanese woman’s name? Chiemi? Chigusa? Chiharu? Or is it Chiho? She looks like a Chiho. More to the point, she looks like an anime character than a real person.

“Oh, yes!” Probably-Chiho replies. “This last great stand by our Emperor is just the beginning, don’t you feel?”

“Quite so.” I sip the Happy Lemon tea and steal a glance at the clock. The costuming people will be here soon with that glorious uniform. Had I not taken a chance and mailed that
letter to the Nikkatsu, she wouldn’t be sitting here interrupting our filming.

I have an answer for everything, “Who says that the phoenix can’t arise from the ashes. Filipinos can be directors and producers. This is still the cheapest place on earth to make a film. Until Japan recovers and rebuilds their movie studios, shouldn’t Japan take advantage of the friendship they’ve made and make their films in the Philippines? Temporarily, of course.”

The anime character twittered like the Philippine Bulbul that I notice recently taking up residence in one of the centuries-old trees in Paco Park.

“And that shall be the thrust of my article. Filipino filmmakers remaining loyal in these unique times.”

“I would be proud to see my photo next to a headline like that.”

I was confident the disguise I was wearing would suffice.

“However, I do need to counter all these — well, I wouldn’t call them rumors. Speculations, perhaps.”

“About what?” I ask.

“It’s just that ever since the lies about the Bayview Hotel began, Manila has changed, as I’m sure a smart man like yourself has noticed.”
“Given the shocking exaggerations that the American press serves up on a daily basis…”

“And not just the American press. Australian and British newspapers also lie. Thanks to Elpidio Quirino’s wife and two daughters and Patrick Kelly, John Lalor and that dreadful professor (Nicanor Reyes), reporters falling over each other in the rush to print ever more outrageous headlines!”

I frowned like an over-educated professor who objects to everything. “I want to film Marcos to remind us all that justice still exists. Even with all the bombs falling (the Americans are bombing us too, you know), you would think we will maybe get lucky and one can fall on Marcos.”

Anime-Chiho blinks and she’s trying to comprehend my logic. “But isn’t Marcos the one who is leading this rebellion in the hills?”

“He’s moved into Manila to contaminate our water. The water here was once so pure. Yet, most of it remains uncontaminated, like a flower struggling to bloom with a bunch of aphids clinging and chewing. It’s my belief that Filipinos today ought to be reminded that they have Japanese films to thank for pushing glory and invincibility themes. I want to inspire them to believe that maybe this time we shall reach parity with Tokyo. It’s worth striving for, if only for a short time, don’t you think?”
Cartoon-Chiho places her teacup on the table next to us without making a sound, then shifts forward an inch or two. “Can we speak of your cast and crew? I don’t mean to pry...” which meant that she did “...but can we clarify the issue of Ms. Ahrianna Dixson?”

I forced down a mouthful of tea. “Clarify?”

“I’ve been told that she recently stormed off the set and ran into the Spanish Embassy. Is that true?”

This drawing of a woman was sharper than I bargained for. Magazines like Kingu have a lot of pages to fill each month and generally rewrite whatever press releases the publicity people hand them, and intermingle that with polite interviews. But this vixen was looking to make a name for herself out of the rubble. Some women will try that, you know.

Here is what happened. I am in the middle of filming Marcos and Marguerite’s love scenes — an intense situation in the making of any motion picture — when Ahrianna storms off-camera and confronts the young Filipina, my camera operator, and admittedly, also my lover.

“I’m out!” Ahrianna points over her shoulder to the Spanish Cultural Attache, hat in hand. “I’m done. I’m finished. I’m through.”

Ahrianna is furious.
“I don’t know why you need him,” she’s talking to the Youngster.

“He’ll only use you, like he used me.”

How low can you get and after what I’ve done for her? She is talking about me, to the young daughter of my lawyer.

SCENE 16

I had thought of all the times I’d snapped at Ahrianna for no reason, the constant filming and retakes without ever explaining why and without letting her know what she’d done wrong, but also how often she had shown up on the set drunk on wine or cappuccino rum.

When Ahrianna flips her wig, we are filming a delicate scene fully clothed, of course, but still these love scenes are always complicated. So, when Ahrianna says she is leaving, the young Filipina, my loyal Filipina, straightens up, not quivering a bit, and she replies, “Fine.” And she shrugs.

“What? You have the right to vote and all you have to say is ‘fine’?” More about voting; Ahrianna likes that argument.

There was a lot I wanted to say. But look, don’t I seem smart enough to stay out of an actress’ way, on her way out?

I want to remind Ahrianna that ours wasn’t the first convenient relationship in history. Nor was it the only one in Manila. Or the longest lasting one. That she had benefited from
me being her paramour, and she had gotten more than a role or two out of it. And that she’d received THIS role on his charity. Young Filipina or not, we could continue the arrangement. Nothing had changed as far as I’m concerned. I want to say all that but I’m not sure that it would have done the film any good.

BACK TO THE INTERVIEW

“Why did she flee into the Spanish Embassy?” the reporter asks.

“Why does anyone run into an Embassy? For protection,” I respond.

“From who?”

“Can this be off the record?”

“If you insist.”

“Look, we are making a movie for the Japanese people. I’ve been threatened. She’s probably received the same threats. Maybe she just cracked?”

So, with the interview over, I roll it over in my head.

I am sad that the beneficial arrangement is ending and so publicly. I can feel myself growing surly and resentful that I gave her the part. If I hadn’t trusted her with that money... Last time that happens. No; correct that, the Youngster’s father has even more of my money tied up... God help me if I cross his precious baby. It will be cheaper to keep her, for certain.
At the set, before the love scene, all I do is whisper into the Youngster’s ear what I’ll probably do to her later that night on the table in the film lab. She giggles; what is the big freaking deal? Young girls do that; they giggle!

But I have seen this coming from rehearsing the lines with her earlier. I am actually relieved. I know I’m an ass with women. I never mean to be, but it just happens. I think it’s some deeply concealed Neanderthal tendency to shop about. See in caveman days, there isn’t the Asian three generations living in the same house helping one another. In caveman days, everybody we are accustomed to being around are dead. The infants aren’t living like they do now, and a man needs four or five babies so one can survive to take care of him when he gets old and can’t hunt any longer. And a woman can only have one kid a year, if you’re lucky and she doesn’t die. So, I don’t blame myself. I blame the Neanderthals, they started it.

SCENE 17

Unsure how to respond to Ahrianna, I say nothing, which only antagonizes her further. She spins from the Youngster back to me. “Oh, you lying, cheating, SOB? You have your movies almost in the can and you can’t stop flirting. You have this everyday of the week PLAYMATE,” she gestures to my young camera operator. She says the “playmate” word with a harsh sneer “...and it’s all
flirt, flirt, flirt. And I get to play the whore? Well, I have my pride too, you know, and I cannot abide!"

"Tell me, Ahrianna, what exactly is it that you find so intolerable? Tell everyone here how you were cast in this picture."

I am bluffing; I don’t truly want her to answer. However, we are a patriarchal society and half the Backlot Bar will side with me (the man) and half of the remainder will tolerate my behavior just to keep their place at the table.

"How I was cast in this picture?" Ahrianna juts out her chin. "Oh, yes. Thanks for that. Now I’m known as an actress of a failed picture. That’ll look terrific on my résumé, won’t it?"

If only she hadn’t said that. If only she hadn’t stooped so low. And if only I’d chosen to ignore the taunt. But the idea of failure jabs me in the eye.

I imagine I make a face and Ahrianna throws a camera lens at me. It hits me in the heart, making her wish she’d walked to the seamstress’ table and grabbed the scissors instead.

"You ungrateful! You egotistical, sad, little bastard!" She screams. She picks up another lens but the young Filipina, always on her toes, grabs her arm and she is prevented from throwing it.

That brings to a TOTALLY NEW LEVEL OF HYSTERICS.
“PAUL!” She screams his name with the full force of the vocal projection drilled into her since childhood. It was the Spanish Attache and stamp collector who took the second lens from her grip and places it calmly back on the table.

“He’s younger. He’s more handsome. And he’s sure as hell more dynamic in bed. And that just kills you, doesn’t it, Mister Go? Go? You never took me anywhere. You’re a pathetic chicken killing lover!”

That doesn’t seem enough, so she pauses to think up a good lie to scandalize me. But it is a closed set, the hardcore Manila film professionals, and not one even bats an eye. Heard it all before I guess.

“Go asked me to have a threesome with this girl!”

There is a loud matter-of-fact from an electrician in the back, “Well, ya. Of course!”

Ahrianna is a good improvisational actress, but it throws her and she pauses just long enough for her to look guilty, and then she never really denies it. As far as the crew understand things, the threesome is true and it did happen.

“Are you okay with your so-called director behaving like that? Sick perversion. That’s what this dramatic exit is about, and don’t bother to deny it,” Ahrianna trembles in anger.

I suddenly feel five inches taller, eighteen again, and really quite proud! You have no idea how important a threesome makes a
filmmaker in this town, just the allegation of a ménage à trois, Japanese occupation or not. Emboldened, I simply told her, “You’re free to walk out any time you like”

“The hell it does!” she’d shot back. “You have one more scene with me and I’m not gonna do it. I’ll wreck your movie! Watch me!”

I bluffed, “Anticipating this, not only have I added a useless and expendable scene to your script. And not only that, if I decide to go ahead and do it, there are two young women from the Backlot who can do you in a pinch.”

“Bullshit!” She exclaimed.

“Tomorrow, you can do it if you want or not. Otherwise, that’s a wrap.”

“Screw you AND Selznick!!!”

“You’ll do it. And you’ll like it.”

“And if I don’t?”

“There goes your screen credit.”

“You’ll hear from my lawyer.”

“Great. My agreement with you calls for you to be available for the duration of shooting. If you renege on that, you’ll hear from MY lawyer.” I wanted to laugh.

As far as I’m aware, I have no lawyer. Nor am I inclined to hire one, why spend money when the mafias (and the Cruz’ guerillas) are willing to do whatever I need done. Cruz has
taken over the filming of what WAS the Enriquez, Quiocho and Hemenez short. And we are slowly adding legitimate fighters into the storyline. No one knows where Hemenez is, but Cruz will do whatever I ask him to do; but with only a few days left to go, the fewer favors I have to call in the better.

“Come on, there’s only one more scene.” I give her finally a chance to be reasonable.

“I’d rather go to hell and perform fellatio on the devil!” She turns on a dime and heads, arm in arm with the Spaniard, to an embassy vehicle.

She calls out to me, “Everybody in Manila and Hollywood will know that I’m the star, and what I’ve done to you, they’ll know that I am a force to be reckoned with.”

That awful confrontation was three days before the interview — enough time for Ahrianna to calm down. And more than enough time for her to realize if she didn’t complete the film, the American audiences would never see her.

BACK TO THE INTERVIEW

I lick the tea from my lips and decide that flattery would be the best tactic.

“Most people from movie magazines put as little effort into their job as they think they can get away with. But not you!” I pointed my finger at the toy-Chiho. “I respect someone who takes their job seriously.”
Probably-Chiho knew better than to fall for a cheesy line like that, but she did blush and square her shoulders. “So it’s true? You and Ahrianna Dixson have gone your separate ways?”

SCENE 18

I mess up after handing the “Nosferatu” reel to Kotani. The Youngster is standing right there and she nudge me (like she does) and tells me all the trickery and sleight-of-hand is making her hot.

After a wedding like that, I imagine Ahrianna thinks we’ll settle down and have a litter of puppies. I mean, it is a coup d’etat of sorts; does that mean you’re married to the lead. NOT EVEN IN MANILA does a little success on film mean you’re married to ANYONE!!!

Yamashita’s wedding is priceless; we both will be remembered. We’re not dead but we’re still working on two feature films. But remember Ahrianna is only aware of her appearance in the Culver City film. As far as I know, the only two that know about the Nikkatsu film are the Youngster and the Backlot bartender. Those two and whoever has the wherewithal to figure it all out.

Naturally, after fooling the most powerful (and dangerous) man in all of Asia, it is time to relax. So Ahrianna, after showing the Japanese (Yamashita and Kotani) out of her theater, she bounds up the stairs and into the projectionist booth and
catches the Youngster and I wrapped-up in the “Marriage” reel and in a position Ahrianna would claim she held dear and that I’d promised never to exercise with another woman. Not locking the door, that’s what screwed my career.

**SCENE 19**

What was I going to do? There was one scene in each studio film that I still needed from Ahrianna. I’d… or she’d pulled this just at the worst, or most opportune time. I publically, of course, blew it off like I didn’t need the shots. And let that be a lesson for young directors; always schedule the nonessential scenes the last week of a film. I guess I’m still learning.

Ahrianna cries to her actress buddies that visit her in the embassy. They all try to curry favor with me by pleading with her to return. Ahrianna tells them I “cheated” on her with the Youngster. Well, her friends don’t really care about that, they would rather work for me.

Please remember that Ahrianna’s well over thirty and she’d recently told me that she was married… to an unknown “assailant” (that’s how I think of him), whoever he is. She’s insinuated that she’s also been fucking Cruz (when Paraluman wasn’t), but to admit that would cause problems in the sorority. But not MacArthur; she adamantly denies that. On film, she married one
of the most murderous war-criminals in history AND we’ve been off and on (with and without meaningful breakup scenes) for just over fifteen years.

In the end, for a pile of US dollars and an apology, she agrees to come back. I don’t have to do much; sit and drink. It is all negotiated through Paul and the Backlot’s bartender (my only real friend) aside from the Youngster.

Ahrianna comes out of the Spanish Embassy and acts professionally, as nothing has ever happened. We finish both films... it is a little dicey there shooting the Japanese scene... and Ahrianna does ask why after the A-bomb are we still doing that alternative scene... that the Japanese weren’t going to stop the film after that. I blame Selznick, who I say wanted “options” for a possible release in Japan later. She did the scene.

Two weeks later, I brought both “clearly labeled” versions to the Spanish Embassy (one for Culver City and the other for Toyko). Paul tells me not to worry, that all the diplomatic relationships were still in perfect order.

**SCENE 20**

Urban “guerillas” (documented on film) Enriquez and Quiocho are executed in front of my office/apartment but it is Hemenez who finds Yamashita's gold.
It isn’t me, I swear. Rogelio Roxas is a damn kid and is one of the mafia runners that helped us kill Nip soldiers from the bars. He doesn’t find shit and I don’t either. How in the hell am I supposed to find any damn gold, making four movies and two damn good versions of Yamashita’s wedding?

Hemenez later tells me they fill two trucks with it and hauled it to a house he buys in Manila (the same house where I found the stamps); he comes to visit once a year and brings home (to the U.S.) a few bars. Now remember, he spent most of the war, listening to a radio, with his loser buddies, in an apartment on Herbosa Street in Tondo.

But he manages to finance a very successful career. Hemenez is a modest member of the U.S. House and from Arizona, not New Mexico. He always votes but never speaks from the floor and never brings attention to himself, except to portray Santa Claus in the Christmas parade in his hometown. He’ll probably serve in that office for forty years.

**SCENE 21**

There’s a saying in the movie business, as old as Hollywood; “everybody loves it until they see it.” Exactly. You get hold of a red-hot concept, and by amazing fortune, the exactly perfect cast walks into the bar. Soon as you start filming, you can tell you’ve got something really special on your hands – the buzz,
the thrill, and its not just the war. So you send out feelers to the
great wise men, the arbiters of good cinema, men who’ve
loved and studied film all their lives and know how and why to
make art, and they all tell you, don’t worry, the American
public will love it. And they say that Truman should see how the
mafia helped at the end.

And then the American Army sees it (the same people that
bombed Manila, Tokyo, Dresden, and then Herosuma) and they say
it's too much. Too graphic (sadistic Mafia killings of drunken
soldiers) and the Army says the public, not American nor
Filipino, should never see it. Well, the American homeland was
never occupied.

They come (military police) and confiscate my original copy.
And not only that, but they take ALL the originals (all my work)
- all four film projects and the reels from the wedding. The
only thing they missed was a sliver of film, my triumphant trip
in the Jeep down Rizal and the cheering crowds. Luckily, it had
fallen behind a filing cabinet.

SCENE 22

Next damn day and it was raining like a mother; steam is
coming up off the hot Manila concrete! I receive a letter, still
via the Spanish Embassy. It’s from Mr. Nakamura, the
Nikkatsu Corporation attorney. He states that Mr. Nagata is
“kindly requesting” the film I had promised to make where Marcos is now “heroically” killed in his wreckless run through Manila. They fell, given the outcome of the war and the bitter feelings, the film I have sent them will not be profitable in Japan. I pitch the letter in the trash. I’d love to straighten it all out but I can’t go to the Americans and request the Japanese film I’d made during the occupation.

And then Paul hands me a second letter, addressed to the embassy, care of me again. This letter is not so polite. This one announces that I am being sued for breach of contract; that Culver City had (instead of a heroic tale of guerilla fighters) received a piece of “Japanese propaganda” and that Mr. Selznick had taken a “personal” interest in the matter. The letter promised that I’ll be hearing from his representatives, which I figured might not be lawyers, but perhaps it will be hitmen.

There must have been some mix up in the embassy mailroom, but how likely is that? Ahrianna did finish the films without an ounce more of trouble or sass. She even wished me luck. And Paul, he is the consummate professional, a diplomat; I seriously doubt he would become involved in such a mess. Not, unless...

SCENE 22

And you know from history, later the Japanese Navy (all butchers and rapists) occupy Manila. It is only a short time
after the Army withdrew to the hills that the Navy comes ashore, against Yamashita’s expressed wishes. But we filmmakers, with cast and crew, certainly did everything we could to avert what happened.

It’s not much consolation after the Battle of Manila, but the Filipinos I know today do take consolation from what happened at Yamashita’s war-crime trial.

If you are curious, I finally gain a bit of international attention as a filmmaker (a few newspapers and ALL the trades). Selznick even sent me a note, “no hard feelings.”

SCENE 23

What will I do now? My young Filipina girlfriend has suggested politics. And that might work; after all, I AM Marcos. And I have a minute and forty-five-second reel to prove it.

FADE OUT