

# Encantada/

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## SHE WAS SAID TO HAVE COME

with the Waling-Waling wild orchid (found only in the fastnesses of the Sierra Madre) and was now, if the information of lowlanders was reliable, sole mistress of the old Rigodon Mansion. This was high and deep in the Philippines' Mountain Country, approximately fifty kilometers north of Manila.

When she arrived (time: early evening, half-moon and prime month for necromancers), it was commonly accepted that ghekkos listed, that an indefinable chill gripped the lowlands. Mercifully, the bombing of Baguio City had ceased this hinaryear of 1945. Filipinos were gradually coming back to life and could devote more time to phenomena other than war. As with Pearl Harbor, the community was not prepared for the events that transpired, scarcely had they adjusted to the peace, such as it was.

So she came. There were those who could itemize down to the last palpitative second how conspicuously she announced her presence.

Consider the legend—and its variations are legion—which would require a St. George for extermination and the Vatican for a rationale. One must also appreciate the efficacy and dimensions of rural reportage that can, in the chrysalis of folklore, dilate hookworms into pythons. There is an unquashable perpetuity in old wives' tales whose natal simplicity inherits the hybrid of interpretation. Coincidence and hysteria are not intended for mutual cohabitation. Between these two poles stand unimpeded rhythms of such relentless paranoia which—given their highly combustible properties of verisimilitude and vulnerability, and owing to some macabre dictate that bids them adore and annihilate each other—ultimately detours from ambivalence to anarchy. In the last analysis, no one may distinguish between semi-fact and credible fiction who the natural father is. Though religion may rant and recoil, a rhubarb so inconsequential, so isolated can expand into infinite gyrations of the absurd and the morbid until it becomes that most prevalent of exaggerations: a cult.

Therefore The Myth of the Dalaga.

How disregard eyewitness accounts of her supernatural powers? A sitio celebrated for its goldburst maiz and strapping womanhood had recently been laid low by maledictions ranging from influenza to epilepsy. One morning, the corn just died; women were paralyzed. Mothers' milk turned acidic, babies contracted diarrhea. Pollution, pestilence, panic. Medical diagnoses were supplanted by conjectures and speculations. In Puerto Dolor female devotees of The Virgin Mary en route to the plaza were attacked singly by Satanas incarnate—half-

woman, half-goat. As the kapitan del barrio reported it: at Campo Charlie where American infantrymen were throwing a party, forked lightning struck twice; tidal foliage inundated lower slopes, and The Dalaga made her appearance at the foot of a knoll, incandescently regal in toga, ghastly in laughter with bared fangs and bosom heaving. Surrounding her was a retinue of fiends: the nuno sa punso with his trailing white beard; the capre, titanic and toothless; and a platoon of aswangs, midget and colossus, brandishing palm fronds and scepters of thorn. Such a revue of oddities, explained the kapitan, had so frightened the American merry-makers they fled their toldas, many nude and apoplectic, others so irretrievably unnerved they dove bottoms first into their fish fry. At dawn the parish priest had loftily ignored counsels and precautions to exorcise the demoniacal syndrome. Father Arristio had stared sin in its malevolent orb and had, with inquisitorial fervor and flourish, refunded its wages: he reformed the profligate, he nursed the syphilitic. If ever a disciple of Christ was born for the halo alone, if ever sinew tempered with softness resided so gracefully in one man, then these baptismal absolutes, these icons of the homo sapiens were instantly recognizable in the homely-heroic attributes of Father Arristio. Let it not be said that only the silver spoon of laity had nourished him, for the redoubtable father had partaken of gall to the dregs; his travails and tribulations were innumerable: that liveness unto frailness, those pathetically uncoordinated shanks lent testimony—as were the rest of him one major vessel of canonical pain. Now with font water and evangelical wrath he set out to cleanse this pestiferous bog, and discovered in his benign albeit blustering conquista a wasteland of decaying gourds and bluish ashes. Evidence of Lucifer was manifold, the peasantry was mesmerized. That notwithstanding the parish priest rallied his parishioners to the Rigodon Mansion for the confrontation, since he had been forewarned that the cortege of the reigning mulatto was therein sequestered. What happened afterward was a fit right out of Apocalypse. The triumphal trek to the “den of iniquity” had been accomplished with accelerating-decelerating degrees of pomp and alarum. Grateful GIs were tempted to sanctify on the spot the reincarnated Lion of Judah and his Galvanic Gospel of Reformation. The countryside hummed with the crusade of this pious avenger from Santander whose soutane clung to him like the breastplate of St. Ignatius de Loyola. Suddenly, crash! bang! ouch! an abysmal groan rumbled from St. Peter’s Basilica down to Nero’s amphitheatre. That very same night the priest boarded the next bus for Manila. Ah, but how bereft, how wretched he looked! Some unutterable terror was etched permanently in his countenance; his pupils, now bleary with remorse, and reflecting every nuance of The Debacle, were drained of that rapt, holy-oiled, we-shall-overcome spontaneo that had ignited a procession. In his bony hands were clenched dislocated beads of his rosary as if he had grated them back to their mineral substances beyond recognition and beyond relevance in expiation of the sainthood that got away.

But now the Rigodon Mansion must pronounce its view.

Three stories of colonial baroque, each floor featured a Cuarto Numero Uno and its auxiliary chambers. Erected nobody knew when either by a disenchanting gobernadorcillo or a psychotic tycoon, the edifice purported to be a multi-

pronged tribute to the succeeding Establishments before the Philippine Islands became a republic. Its conceptual vanity negated architectural denouement . . . no wizardry of execution could have matched beam for beam the Utopian gleam in that housebuilder's eye. Instead, a smattering of whimsey, a montage of embellishments: Mongolian Primitive foreshadowing Malayan Ethnic, Gothic-Spanish thwarted by Pioneer-American. A run-through of the Kamagong Room on the first floor, for instance, would unravel a collision of cultures in its indecisive Filipiniana. Secluded in an inlet of the antebellum wing, the Kamagong was painted brown; its walls still unreconciled to some house-painter's color-blindness which may have slopped a desultory craft over resilient panels and in eventual chagrin applied it with rueful reverence among the more genteel of appurtenances—roccoco extending to Regency. Sepia smudged into mocca on one section emerged an indistinguishable rust on another. Briefly the brush splotched a third rectangle with what appeared to be mahogany varnish. How a simple mixture of paints in the buckets produced such a weird mishmash of hues remained a mystery. For a while Rigodonites were under the delusion that the lumber used by the carpenters must have been hewn from separate far-flung timberlands.

Decor in the Galleon Room on the second floor altered radically. A guest might wend cautiously against feathery knick-knacks and sturdy appointments, not wishing to disrupt their ancestral gloom. If one were to peer out a casement, there was to behold and disbelieve that coppice of tile which clashed violently with the Moro cotta and the Bejuco lyre chairs inside. A Ming vase shed a fragmented violet sheen, bestowing upon the cupboard paneled in mother-of-pearl a rhinestone wink. No illumination would ever again come from the Carroza lamp; it had been decades since a human hand had touched it. A niche in a wall adorned with Chinese ceramics bemoaned the negligence of fickle hostesses long buried. A carved inlaid dresser was draped in a Lepanto fabric with a fleur-de-lis pattern, a lingering rebuff to the Maranaw costumes in the closet; also spoiling the impact of the Morion gong and mask strung with chains around the bas-relief of a Negrito goddess. One fancied that an interior decorator must have run berserk here . . . the bamboo papag was incompatible with that hint of damask on the aparador. This was somehow redeemed by the highland plaid that cloaked one of the upright plaster saints. Then there were those pumice stones wombed like dehydrated Easter eggs in an amethyst-tinted urn. As for the third floor and its Dewey Room, not much was known. Rigodon experts were agreed it was an unfinished—or still to be continued—story. Others claimed it had been sealed off due to the eagles flapping in its belfry. There was even a popular belief the Dewey was the communal grave of all those intrepid sailors and eye-patched corsairs slain at Manila Bay. . . .

In this realm of mists and narra, woodcraft emblematic of one antechamber was anathema to another; the water mains and power lines had long been in disrepair. Too, the domicile used to be a beaterio: listen to the screeching of the Sacred Species, listen to the Matins of the Virgin. Crusty villagers complained that apparitions stalked the environs—visions of a dour mutya marauding in the habit of the Mantelatas. Ghosts were abroad, shrieking under corporeal punish-

ment, keening in penitential ecstasy. Transformed, the Rigodon Residentia became an Anchorite in Pasig, a Benefaction of the Recollets. See supplicants in their hairshirts, watch them flagellate themselves . . . whips and whimpers, ayyy! Will you trespass on the Tertiary of the Dominicans? Chalk-white maidens traipsed angelically by candlelight, sewing Carmel scapulars and altar cloths. They were anitos, souls of ancestors dancing the hudhud at the wake of inhibition, now turned pagan with sacrifices for the harvest with its tribal dongla, reddish-green leaves mingling with ivy. Cavorting: the altitudinous nations of the Igorot—Kalinga, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kiangan, Ibaloy, Mandaya impinging on patios in scattered mementoes, even as the Muslim South subverted Christendom on the parapets. And the trees barked out their rootage in flagpoles withering with moss: casuy, morado, achuete, naranjita, flor de caballero, balimbing and citron. Liveried gardeners had planted these acres with saffron and ginger, betel palms and rosebushes. Check the mildewed calendario for los santos. The almanac forecasted eclipses, movements of tides and stars, shifts in season. In here dwelt Masons, spiritists, thaumaturgists, the combative Merlins of four centuries. Over the siesta pavilion hung the blue coil of Cordillera and the reverberative chant of the Aetas.

Witchcraft, the Rigodon termites. . . .

#### AND ON THE FIRST DAY

they informed Private First Class Jeremiah Krum of the U.S. 37th Division that the visitant of The Mansion was more than a woman: she was a witch.

Beware Satan's bride who feasted on flesh and libated with blood. Mountaineers had only espied her from a distance. With what contagious awe they spoke of her uncanny faculty with the summer wind (it was April): how it blew, gale-strong, sundering the saplings, grinding the grass. Transcribing her face in its diurnal cameos, they shuddered this way and that, for it was bizarre, *hindi, hindi tao*. Such eyes, such lips: devouring both in contour and sensuality. What of her waist-touching tresses, not unlike flotsam in the Black Sea? When they breached her body, it was to cross themselves, to beseech the heavens . . . was it not serpentine? Expositions on her in the daylight resounded with adjurations and masculine discriminations. Here was one bruja whose clandestine affairs with the devil, jeered they, could freeze the tropics. By subtle gradations their high-noon virility bent to the demon dusk as the wench grew more formidable, not from their illimitable presumptions but from the equatorial proximity of the heathen.

So what was she like? nagged the soldier, spitting on his dogtags.

It was nearly six o'clock, and darkening. The braggarts companionably huddled about the white warrior dwindled by the telling. Ooooh, they wagged fingers ringed with faded opals and lustrous portents—ooooh! Abandoning the American on an arroyo tumultuous with castanets, and flamenco.

A witch? They had to be kidding.

Advancing in the direction of The House, he pumped his mighty arms; his biceps were all there and he did a short jig. Fifty paces north atop a gnomish

hill squatted the cortex of Circe. Involuntarily he began to whistle a snappy tune.

Two boys ran apace, then ahead of him, sporting the most scairdy-cat expressions he'd ever seen. He spat contemptuously. Ambush-savvy, shrapnel-nicks, smelly underwear and a rabbit's foot (physical rhetoric of the veteran) rattled joyously like an African witch doctor's bag of bones conjuring for the sahib in the alphabet of prognostication dire appareants of misfortune; and recommending to the appointed savior a code of behavior by which all tyrannies of the unknown may be quelled—Bwana's Blitz! Mr. Cavalry charged Ye Big Teepee (I'm comin', Clementine!) in that rare and glorious interim when a man's engine siphons that crucial leak of adrenalin upon whose foundation he may comfortably lay his manhood on the line. If before his gunbearers and safari sambos, if before the rampaging rhinoceros the Great White Hunter has no alternative other than to fortify the length and breadth of his reputation, then equally no such alternative could exist for Private Krum within gossip range of these hicks in Asia and before the galloping fauna of Philippine embryology.

He tried to convince himself he was merely engaging in YMCA gymnastics. Ahem, why was his sweat so yellow-damn cold? Tarawa hadn't been that bad, actually. Least ways, it was logical in the bitter logic of combat wherein a guy learned to anticipate the prospect of death as the biggest tax deduction of all, as the final installment in the short-term insurance. This was something else again—hopscotch in a terrain mined with ballyhoo or authentic voodoo.

Wise money was riding on Scalphunter Krum at Baker Company. Handicappers had pegged Krum The Ladykiller to lay the broad, pawn her amulets, and wipe out the Rigodon Clip Joint. If anyone could swing it, it was Krum: The Slick Operator, The Nylon Stocking Romeo, The Bidet Bombardier.

Hun-two-three-four! Hun-two-three-four!

A figure darted away from a porthole in The House. It was she, she was baiting him. He sprinted forward as if catapulted willy-nilly from a huge slingshot. Perspiring, hellburned, the definitive GI Joe.

And now on the first day, the señorita (he heard) was with novio as she whispered to the gringo in fluent Castilian: Don Jeremiah, say hola to my Magellan. While the señor imposed upon her the continuum of amor. . . .

Baby! Private Krum cried under the balcony. Oh, Baby!

#### AND ON THE SECOND DAY

they briefed Agent Krum on the "psychic emanations" in the Rigodon Planetarium. They were the palmists and numerologists, the dowagers and dragoons of occultism who had survived World War II on jackfruit and astrological charts. Scientia intuitiva, they asserted, was founded on seasonal digressions of the vernal equinox. And the order of constellations, as revealed by a chicklet-chomping swami, boded ill. The Aquarian Age, it was observed, would surpass the Piscean Age, measure for measure. For Exhibits A-Z, there were the rumblings of fossilized tusks and reindeer ulna from the Paleolithic Period, talismanic membranes in the Rigodon Museum. Look around you: mark the truncheons of Dionysos, the equestrations to the lunar cycle. Remember also: Mercury will not col-

late with Saturn; Venus will not converge. Duplicate symptoms that accompanied the plague during 17th Century Europe!

Private Krum sniggered: What bunk!

En famille they confided into his ear: Scorpio was in the ascendant, doomed was the Western Hemisphere—it was foreordained. Consult Ptolemy's *Detrabellos*, confer with other astromancers. Follow the fluctuations: rejoice in Leo, exult for Aries, balance with Libra, cushion Capricorn. They will guide you, prodigal son and knight errant. We are brethren to the Chaldeans of the Babylonian Empire. . . .

Bullshit!

Following that and by virtue of a week-long pass, he poached a skimpy beachhead a hundred yards from the Rigodon Bunker. By way of creature comforts he had two canteenfuls of ale, a carton of K-rations, plenty of cigarettes and some prophylactics. His bivouac was competent, even inspired: a Navajo-type wigwam rigged with two javelins, one rifle and a box of ammo pilfered from GHQ. A sportsman he would never be; on the other hand, Boot Camp had conditioned his instincts for the outdoors.

When it got chilly he gathered kindlings in the forest and built a crackling fire outside his tent. Meals he cooked in the open air over a grille fashioned out of barbed wire; he had a thermos for cocoa. Occasionally he went fishing with a makeshift rod and reel. Not that there was anything special in the creek three kilometers away . . . some scrawny milkfish, a few unappetizing crabs, and when the timing was right, a pailful of tiny frogs. Whatever he caught was invariably roasted on spits whittled from his hunting knife; and if the fare was not exactly gourmet, it tasted strangely succulent, too. Such were the possibilities before him that he often neglected his guard detail. In the afternoons children in festive apparel would come riding by on carabaos to bring him fresh water in a ewer and shellfish from a pond. By twilight arrived the Malayan gypsies, aging Lotharios roaming the hillside to court babae. They were swarthy, pug-nosed men long on serenades, short on sense. Some passed themselves off as guerrilleros waiting for the backpay; others preached vagrancy as the last polka of democracy. Day to day they subsisted on alms and petty thievery. A pendant had lately paid for their meriendas. All things being equal Foreman Krum and the wastrels immediately took to each other. Whenever he could, the GI gave them a helping of tuna or the back of his hand. Once a military tribunal had been established, jokingly but firmly, the laconic clownish association settled down to a kind of sleepy rapport. For the grinning bravos always liked to sing. Their harana was quite tortured, very romantic. Crooner Krum was in a tizz getting their passacaglias down pat; later, he learned to approximate the stretchy, amorous harmonizings and would even join in with cribbed Spanish and much gusto. Being mainly a bugle man it was not easy for him to relate to their intricate guitar refrains. So much ardor and fanfare to everything they did! However, he was picking up the dulcety choruses like a native. Forget the witch, they teased, and come with us to Villafranca. We shall drink and make love!

Sure, Comrade Krum nodded, scratching his crotch.

Even with the foraging and the gratis from the youngsters his provisions were less than sufficient. During a snack he realized he had little left except cigarettes and contraceptives. Perhaps he should have gone touring with the Cassanovas. On to Villafranca, with the wine and the jousting and the eve of whoopee. And what about the poltergeists? the invocations? He jogged towards The Mansion and saw nothing astir. The Witch was still hibernating. Now he was inclined to pull up stakes and hike back before taps and poker-by-flashlight. Enough already.

As he was frying his supper (scrambled egg on salmon), there was a quaking in the ricefields. Quickly he snatched up his Garand and bolted for his objective. A lantern was flickering from an upstairs portico.

Who goes there? he yelled.

Taurus + trauma = Rigodon - Krum . . . .

The pagoda blinked out . . . mincing footsteps. Recalling divinations by the council of the oracles, he pivoted, glanced up at the quarter-moon. From afar, a muted clapping, as if from a rickshaw. He shivered and hugged the rifle tightly.

Yikes, not two days on patrol and him off his rocker. Inextricably hooked, he retreated to his tent and ducked under the flap. In his mind pranced goblins, warlocks, vampires. He was perspiring profusely again.

Thirty minutes; an hour. With a start, he rolled to his spears. Outside scarecrows sighed and stirred like disembodied zombies arrested by the elements in gargantuan tiptoe; or they might have been the cream of a Panzer Korps punished by the gods of war to forever take the giant step and never budge an inch. A collage of cumulus spires dissected by skeletal lampposts was aforming in the east. Sequined in sibling peaks around the central plateau were carbide-lit prefab shacks which, even now, could be debunking Private Krum's operations in Morse C. It was rumored that faun and boar still gamboled in the green principalia, lest that cacophony of animal mating was the caterwauling of phantoms. By some eerie configurations of nature, pyramids of dust would billow up in the flinty air and there in the space of a gasp hang malignantly in a bloated fresco of Ethiopian kings, then in fluid arabesques dissolve again like lava spun out of its crater. After the famine and devastation of WW II this primeval country would regenerate itself from the plunder of outsiders; its survivors would cannibalize the leavings. Yes, a vestigial holocaust was sweeping across Northern Luzon. Deforestation had set in; its momentum was skinning the traditionally lush dales and valleys, its mania scaling the Upper Delta. Loggers with saws and axes trimmed the scarred land for pines that would restore the Infant Jesus to the manger of Manila's Christmas trees. A commerce of locusts was in the offing; its bastard produce was the euphemism known as cottage industry. While Hiroshima and Nagasaki smoldered but four months in the world's memory, fire and brimstone of quite a different import was razing the kaingins of hacenderos, erosion cut a circumferential swath of histoplasmosia on the elevations.

Venison vanished from the hunter's table, sweet potato lay stillborn, antlers became back-scratchers; moreover, the also-runs and etceteras of virgin preg-

nancy might as well have been aborted in the root than be burned in effigy. It would not be long before the Mountain Province, once the hermitage of the haunted, once the heritage of the hermit, adapted the melancholia of a cloister in reverse; for might not a swooping hawk peck at those crests and hillocks balding like monks? And those ashen basins, could they be the parched lips of a guru? Indeed the rainmakers had been systematically deposed by colonizers and entrepreneurs who (always charmingly, always charitably) fertilized the earth for opportunity. Acorns were grafted, bets were placed, the deal was on—Eden majored in economics, effendi. It was: boom or bust. But tread softly still. In Asia, so goes the proverb, no cone does not mean no more volcano, yes? Or eruptions to that effect.

Confronted with the ambiguity of the sneer between the smile, the viper beneath the bouquet, the flame behind the fireflies, the American leatherneck allowed, somewhat grudgingly, that the Philippines might just have more moxie than a rice paddy.

Hell-oooo!

Private Krum straightened up, chop-chop, tripped on the tent pole and fell on his jaw.

Loooo!

His mouth bleeding from the fall, he streaked out, Garand leveled at high-port.

Where are you?

Loooooooo!

And now on the second day, the courtesan (he suspected) was with another lover as she lisped to him in pidgin Chinese: Ji-ree-may-yae, trade with my Limahong! While the mandarin was her spasmodic brigand in their musical four-poster this Year of The Tiger. . . .

Wait for me!

He was competing in the hundred-meter dash and blood was coagulating on his chin. The breeze still wafted the looooooing as he sped and spilled and sprang up again from split sod and prickly vines, rushing the echoboom in the Yangtze River.

#### AND ON THE THIRD DAY

Pilgrim Krum had infiltrated the gazebo and pinpointed her to a massive steel portal where she was bolted from the inside. Through a crack of the door she permitted him to slip her a sprig of *dama de noche*. Its aroma lingered in the giving; and, as some undulant ego in The Mansion would have it, slyly permeated the wall in that humorously reversible manner of garlic afterthoughts warding away fungi of the occult.

Blooms exclusively at night, she said.

So do you, heh-heh.

Pero nada. His gambit was casually deflected by her off-limits spell. The charades palled considerably and he was testy. Elsewhere, buddies on furlough were shooting crap, guzzling moonshine, squiring doe-eyed daughters of Pinoy's Finest. Poon-tang and clap for all! Nuts, he certainly had his job cut out for him.



This ignorance was sturdier than acacias; the superstition of the townsmen was carved out of solid oak. Lordie, how long, how long would it take? Would it last till his embarkation papers came through? Why, for chrissake, when he could be wrecking a dozen saloons in Liberated Manila, was he hanging around here? Was she even pretty? What she was, he had the vaguest notion. Rats, he could not vacate the premises and would be beating a path to her doorstep come sun-up. If she wished anything of him (and she hadn't quite admitted otherwise), why didn't she speak up? Cash, cosmetics, chocolate, other charms: he showered them at her leisure like offerings to a holy man. Unfortunately she had not weakened, had favored only one gift, the wreath . . . he liked her hand . . . slender and breathtakingly feminine. Was his way then through forget-me-nots? If that were remotely feasible, he would scour orchards, ransack cemeteries, go on sorties around the archipelago for extinct, particular blooms. Exotica he would uproot by the bushel. As long as they exuded a perfume. He would even desecrate sepulchres, blaspheme chapels . . . if that was what she desired. She had but to ask.

Don't do it.

Huh?

What you're thinking—don't. . . .

He could feel shirt-damp loosen goose-pimples on his torso. That icy sweat engulfed him—shoulderblades, navel, spine.

It was (again) close to the witching hour. Still restricted outside Her Door, quite mystified and distressed. What could a man do in such cases, in such nocturnal extremes when the woman was veiled and was perpetually, frustratingly a decibel based farther than Radio City? If only he had a hint, an aura, a reflection in meadow brook. Rather than being stranded on Filipino Deserta—derailed and dismembered. He could batter down defenses. Besiege the castle. Storm the battlements. Under tactical conditions he understood, wouldn't ordinary barriers crumble? He would capture her singlehandedly, parade her in the pueblos: the booty, the trophy of his campaign. What would he be then? For weeks he had not written mother and sweetheart. By the bulk of their mail he could intimate they were just one letter minus total hysterics. Apple strudles had been replaced by fatter, heavier envelopes; then by censored cablegrams consequently spelled out through channels. Mommy was certainly pushing her Prussian strain to the limit. Ditto from Irene, tons of tedium: translatabe in terms of endearments, enticements, and, he would stake his serial number on it, probably post-scripted with her birth-mole (trajectory: upper left calf) that could twitch itself into a molehill under duress. Now the lone wolf screened from all martial alliances, lamented by Stateside frills and fudges, he had wandered and frittered away, abusing his gray matter for hair-trigger solutions as how to lure this bacon into the pan.

What does it mean, day-ma-dei-not-chez?

Even her voice multiplied the fragrance: Flower of night.

Golly, that's neat. . . .

She must be about sixteen, he reckoned. Sixteen was dame-and-the-rest-of-it, you abided for sixteen. In the words of a Baptist minister in Yuma: innocence hath no repercussions.

Eat something, honey.

No, replied the flora of night.

(Spare the altars and the waifs of weddings!)

Meanwhile he glared at the poblacion honeycombed below. Patient, cunning dwellers would weave a strand of hearsay about GI Jeremiah and The Natchez Gal in cafes perking with peepshow pablum, to be savored along jars of preserves and kept in cellars whispery with minor myths. Replay to Mama, ricochet to Irene, both of whom would begin to comprehend the anatomy of his affliction: hexed in cartomancy on these 7,000-plus catacombs MacArthur loved.

Hey, wanna be my steady?

For answer, only the cicadas. Their communication lines snafu'd. So used to it by now was he that he sat numbly there, fingering incoherent plots in his head. There had to be a gimmick, some swift irrepressible gimmick to flush her out of there.

All of a sudden, a mounted brigade seemed to be hoofing across an invisible Pampas inside her room; cannons roared, muskets crackled, stallions neighed, lancers groaned, as she scampered in the dunes chased by bandits and Berbers, and from the barricade Sir Krum bellowed: Who's in there with you?

And now on the third day, the adventuress (he sensed) was again with lover as she commanded the American in barbaric Mongolian: Jeremiah, be careful with my Genghis Khan! While the emperor ravished her in the oasis. . . .

The Door was inscrutable once more. A cue that their seance was over for tonight, that he would have to come back tomorrow. He trudged out glumly, wearily. Again the status quo, his batting average so dismally low. How terrible it all was, and how insanely precious.

#### AND ON THE FOURTH DAY

he serenaded her with his bugle. All and sudden blue: intimate demarcation between bleatings and bravado. The brass gleaming in his hand did not malingering in the psycho ward of adolescence and merely relapsed into: gratings from his puberty, from swinging on the bum, from assorted panhandle junctions and Salvation Army handouts, roger, the winters without a nickel in his jeans, and the hobo circuits, the Boys' Town baloney. On the instrument, they were singularly semenful and sad.

*Domani, caro, domani.* . . .

While they listened in absentia, shaking their heads in mystification. For this was a novelty, his anthology.

Head arched high, he fired for effect. Indulging her and her domain. For all its revels and rodents. Wasn't even jazz or anything as identifiable as that. Just himself and the extraordinary bad luck, the vicious spotty hustling on the thumb. Stinging and slurping, he recounted to her: pallbearing inventories, protesting genes, all the messed-up monotony of odd jobs with meager pay. Going gray, scraping tar, cruising to crimson, which was a mugging in Chicago maybe, afterwards switching to terminal jades and Mama maroons, which were eeee-yahhhh! Blueprints of Tin Pan Alley Saturdays when civilians were full-assed and gay.

Getting on, skulking forward or just Depression-stuck immobile, bayonet indigos sharper than Grandpaw's Mormon tongue. Toot-toot a la mode propagating a Memphis funeral.

No longer Fancy Dan with him. Had become rib to lung, molar to mouth: tearing longjohns out of latrine brawls, dungaree jockeys, condoms and mush—the episodic spew of testicles. By foot and on falsettos to Tijuana where the whores they were hotter than tamales and bullfighters were fairies. Ay, mescal and tequila!

Okay, bitch, gimme. She cackled atrociously in her banana plantation and his tonsils in turmoil and the hacksaw drooped a few millimeters as he lashed out at the war he had been drafted into since reform school.

Presto, presto, she encouraged coquettishly.

Her tremor he felt behind the partition while he exhaled tirades on the beast that glistened in his fist. Harangue and hate blistering his larynx, his insides blowing roller-coasters, timpani shelled from grudges, retreads of slime, granules of grenades, chow-belches, column-left bawdies. Adobe rotted, avocado wilted. Jazzbo Jeremiah of Harlem was shooting fungi with toads con molasses, ad infinitum.

Ciao! she sounded gross.

And now on the fourth day, the signorina (he was positive) was once more with lover as she addressed the American in incantatory Latin: Jeremiah, kneel to my Borgian Pope! While His Holiness taught her the blessed and the profane. . . .

So mercurial and menacing were her vocal transformations that he was incensed with jealousy. Was this cathedral or brothel? Who was in charge here?

If you get another man in there, I'll kill him!

#### AND ON THE FIFTH DAY

her nationality changed yet again; she was goose-stepping inside their Maginot Line, her soprano thickened into Marlene Dietrich Blue Angel, husky with Diaspora, Bundestags, V-2 rockets and crematoriums.

Is it raining ja? she asked.

No, it wasn't, he could see that. Though it seemed to turn opaque; the sky brooded upon him. Disputable the fact that three minutes ago he had ambled in a plain of arrogant emerald, a ripening of iris. Her mood (he felt) was attuned to the weather and would be dictating thunderstorms should he get reckless. As if to contradict her, a shaft of sunlight slanted across the floor, the manor glowed like a yolk of egg, then a lucre of gold. Cylinders of copper melting into butter and lapped by lemon before fermenting into the tang of pineapple, gobbled up by the vermilion monopoly—the ides of quartz. This day he had sworn off cigarettes, had resorted to peppermint—unholy transition! His nostrils entreated, his metabolism demanded abuse. . . .

You burned my country, she said.

Freak lightning glimmered on the cogonal, sending multi-colored slivers into pebbled rivulets. But no rain, not a drop of that injury in her tone. The tinc-

ture had washed off from shingle and shutter; a descendant ague seized him and he withdrew to his rear flank. April was turning the other cheek, April Fool. . . .

A tangle of sloth pinned him down, halting his arteries, impounding his corpuscles. Typhoon and she arrived almost simultaneously and took possession of his bones, prowled to their marrow; then curving, concentrating on his glands, constricting his inner fibers. Strutting by the door he cursed the bejesus out of his tormentor who was speechless. Shucks, he was wise to her style by now, her ambidextrous sorcery he knew to the tic. Unwilling to fold up and blubber in a corner, he wrenched out of fatigues, shucked off boots. Glisteningly naked he marched up and down the vestibule. His chest thumped with accumulated profanity, his tongue the wick and he lit it. Jowls twisted by invectives, his nasal inanities blasted the secret passages, the cobwebbed stalagmites of this mausoleum. Not for nothing was he nicknamed Hatchet-Mouth in Hell's Kitchen. Bile poured from him like moldy beer out of a vat; a putridness, a sniveling, gurgitating barrage like carbolics into cowdung. Yes, it had rained after all; he was its meow and growl. No mortal would be safe within two feet of him; he was stewing in argot, basso and deafening, calculated to topple the autobahn.

You decent, Kraut? he hissed.

Seductively she thrust out an ankle, and his reflexes not being what they used to be, the door jammed on his fingers—yowwww!

His quota of the amuk. Sinking the Bismarck in the Atlantic, rubbling Berlin, digging up the scum of ghettos. Phlegm in the adenoids dispersing storm troopers on the avenues, cancerous octaves fulminating, the mustang in him ripped the swastika, demolished the Gestapo. Seething and retrenching and linking idiom to excreta, taking a breather, then gurgling out of the muzzle again, flaring and frenetic, his diatribes sank the Rhine.

I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your harem down!

With the initial broadside The House seemed to have wrapped its multiple lids about every board and gable: to plug in that abominable static.

Jawohl! she said, clicking her heels.

And now on the fifth day, the fraulein (he imagined) was still with lover as she declared to the American in guttural Austrian: Jerry, commune with Herr Marx! While the Hun and she were in congress, leading to spoliations, gestations, reformations. . . .

Zeig Heil!

The manure evaporated; satin and crystal stained and shattered.

Yes again: she was with another man.

#### AND ON THE SIXTH DAY

chopsticks, koto music.

Knock, knock, who's in the sack today?

Take shoes off, please.

What's your name now, baby?

Why American come again, ne?

To make the dragon, sister.

Oh, so sorry.  
Tea, she was brewing jasmine tea.  
You tell me about A-me-ri-ca?  
It'll be sleet back home. Then slush.  
You fight snowballs?  
Battle royals.  
How tall are poplars?  
Like skyscrapers.  
Were you in love, Joe?  
Wounded in love, princess.

(But he wanted to whine: Yesterday the C.O. who's an s.o.b. bawled me out 'cause I won't lick his ass/ The top kick snitched my clean socks/ Stand with your tail hanging between your legs before West Point goofs/ Come out of the depot and sniff Chinese cooking/ Manila moon is round like a vaselined cannonball/ I'll never play golf in no country club, nor marry a rich man's daughter/ I'm good for handouts, for Hershey bars to grimy kids/ I bleed in my udders when I see Little Lord Fauntleroy captains drive away in their jeeps with those laughing brown women/ I have no Purple Heart, it hurts like the dickens inside/ no one's going to kiss me in my casket)

Me Number One Girl, she tittered, twirling her parasol.

(Didn't say it: sloshing in steam back there, running a hash joint as Flapjack Frankie/ Seeing he wasn't tall or well-heeled, nobody knew that he cared/ About the godawful luses come to puke on his counter/ About the boozy street-walkers who stumbled into his place for cookies and conversations/ About the winos he kept alive with dimes and doughnuts/ And the really down-and-outs he fed with cream-soaked crumbs/ Nobody to tell anybody he was a poet of the pokey, doing a slow burn over buns and beans/ That he ached something bad where a thousand snotty women had slapped him down or stood him up/ Nobody told those ritzy dames he had class, too/ That he could woo them with vanilla-cool songs and slam-bang masseur hands/ The glamour boys got them all while he diced spuds at KP)

Beg pardon?

(Once more his gut extemporized in his head: And did you know, Dalaga, that the clink was grubby with itchy perverts and Bowery peons?/ I can tell you about lumbago and TB coughing through the rye bread/ A caravan of unemployed-unemployable on my stools/ For a bowl of chili and a toothpick/ And perhaps, when I was willing to give it: some corny penny regard/ Duchess, the dives those characters crawl out of every beat-up, mashed-in Monday morning/ The breakfasts their brats haven't eaten in a zillion belly-empty days/ Those two-bit sluts and their crazy dago pimps, too drunk, too hock-poor to lift a finger/ Got no watches on wrists, just pores and sores/ Sometimes, when they no longer have shame to cover it: some final creeping disease)

Me, Cherry Blossom. . . .

(Scorpions in their retina, sickness in their saliva/ Pay no heed to the re-

tired meatpackers whose kidneys are cleavered out because their platinum-dyed blondes done them wrong/ Nor to the washerwomen surfaced on cheap gin/ Because their Dirty Levis left one afternoon for the ironworks/ And came back pressed and folded on the last page of the evening paper/ I wish you better luck than the chickadee that came nightly to my eatery, asking for Rummy, her Mommy)

So Tokyo Rose sobbed in her *sake*.

Understand?

Hai, she wept, hai, hai.

And now on the sixth day, the geisha (he dreamed) was full with lover as she turned to the American in labionasal Japanese: Jeremiah-san, salute my Hirohito! While the Kempetai's sun-scorched lips swallowed hers on Mount Fuji. . . .

Had she committed *hara-kiri*?

#### AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY

he rested. Complexion ebbed from his cheeks; his eyeballs had a dull glint, he was over the hill. When he tried to speak, his twang was a croak. Doubled up, dispirited, he knelt at her door with a Thompson submachine-gun.

Him Number One Monkey—saw nothing, heard nothing.

Whatever it was he needed to do, he could not. The Orient was worming in on his turf, the tropical sun was scalding. Still resisting this crawling lethargy, he swung around for a poke at the door. Wrong move. He froze. Fathoms deep in his training a battalion hollered. Tanks steamrolled him, tramps guffawed and stomped on his prostrate form, sauce and spaghetti dribbled over his forehead, cops billied him silly, the subway stretched miles and miles ahead with cadavers of pus and vomit. A coma was zeroing in and he would not be conscious when she opened the tollgate. She shouldn't vamoose! He'd sic the dogs, he'd alert the MPs, he'd take it to Washington, D.C.

First, goalie must peel eyes for the puck. She was tricky with that stick. . . .

. . . The center hauled down the rebound, lobbed the pigskin for a fast break. . . .

. . . Twinkle-toed tackle snagged it, was running the broken field. . . .

. . . Third relay was slashing for the tape. . . .

Time out! called Klondike Krum who was concurrently umpire, playing coach and general manager of the Bermuda Braves. He sidelined the visiting Amazon with a technical for infractions that would have qualified her for The Hall of Infamy. Having nullified her elimination-round points, they would have to play in his own ball park now—Geronimo! She sulked a bit, carried on some, repaired to the lockers, waltzed out of the dugout in jersey and cleats, league-mean and manic-aggressive in that classic stance of the tyro out to show the pros: homer or odyssey?

Bottom of the ninth, 0-0.

Hazy mound. Couldn't draw a bead on the batter. A lefty? Retire her with a knuckleball. The catcher signaled: Right in the mitt, Dizzy. Still he fussed in his windup and flashed the relief hitter a double-whammy. The Hussey wasn't having any, no thanks, just crouched low over the plate like she knew his slider (reputed for its cuckoo combinations of dipsy-doodles) was a revolution less perfection and that she could clobber his ego out of the stadium before the sugar in his gum was half chewed. Let's get cracking, snarled Yogi. The gallery was booing, statisticians were glued to their typewriters, fans were craning their necks for the hero on the make, everything was riding on the record-book curve that had taken four score and seven years to master in the sandlots, haughty in head, horrendous in heart, hot in hand, all the curl, churl, contracts and convolutions, plus the zing of its armory, the maneuverability of its design, the intimidation of its technique, the totem of its career, the ballistics of its couching, the salvo of its pride, the swish of its delivery, and rat-tat-tat! he hurled this grab-bag of his balls and buffoonery, but whaaaack! she connected as the door her bat swung open and conked him smack in the kisser, flop!!! he crumpled like a sack of wheat, foreign aid grazed the canvas, the maya arced crazily in the stratosphere, the diamond reeled in consternation, Baker Company hooted in the stockade, the slugger caromed off the plate, the stands rocked with delight and despair, the miler framed between the centerfielder's lyrical lunge and the inaccessible zone, the rocket-launcher electrified in defeat at the slate, the Peruvian horse thundered across the bases in the climactic immemorial lap of photo-finish, the bullpen taunted and bawled, the corrida pelted with lotuses and laryngitis, the solitary regatta breasted the waves for the banner of victory, the swallows of Capistrano peed on the disconsolate pitcher, the Mexican jumping bean she was over the fence, the Spartan lass lit the Olympic dome with her torch, sizzzz-booom-bahhhh! Niagara Falls caved in on all fours, the Gettysburg Address droned through the referee who counted going, going, gone, the Mardi Gras was *kaputt, finito, terminado, tapos* and over, better believe it—viva, Filipina, viva!

And now on the seventh day, the dalaga (he could not see) was jilting her last lover as she cooed to her Americano in biblical slang: Jerky, I am sick of thee! While he dozed and he dreamed that he was drowning in Coca-Cola. . . .

#### FREE AT LAST

of her amorous liberator the girl stepped gingerly over the fallen Krum and his spent Thompson glimpsed the walls pocked with bullets. Armageddon had commenced on a note of ribaldry, had cruised the currents of eccentricity before resolving itself in Rabaleisian parody. Whatever else had been defiled or left undefined, the mountebanks in the eaves and darkloom of the Rigodon Mansion were purged. A serenity weaned from combat fatigue and a history of echoes would soon (if not delicately, then devoutly) smoothe out the kinks and ruffles of expectation. Let this idolatry pass on to celebrators who will plant it in the soil to raise more incense. The siege was lifted, the veil had excommunicated the woman while it anointed the witch. Meanwhile back in old Christianity 60 kilometers removed from Waterloo, the chastened priest was nursing a well-de-

served nervous breakdown in that lonely stupor of mystics just a screw away from beatification. In an oblique sort of way Manila's chaos afforded some therapy for the griefstricken and a balm to the beaten. After all, the excesses of an Occupation Army and its generic poltroons stem primarily from energy. Yet Father Arristio tossed in his seminary pallet, assailed by nightmares that invaded his cell with reptiles and wretches galore that splashed down from the teeming cauldron of his brain. His complex (and the guilt of martyrs can be a litany) was, being gored in battle, he doubtless had stained the reservation, and sooner or later the enclaves of darkness would pick up the scent and track him down to the last shade of his sabbatical. Truly this agitation of the prey had the baying of the coyote to sustain it, for even while the convalescent father was genuflecting away the vultures in his demented dreams, the bus that had delivered him once was stealthily approaching the big city halfway home via highway, bearing that girl who, having botched her witchhood and now inescapably locked in a sweetly profound, temple-bound swoon, languorous still from the rage and rapture of the rigodon, was longing for a nativity, looking for her icon-maker.