

A Comfortable Death

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Prologue

Lisa was a tiny child, weighing only four and a half pounds at birth. She was more fragile than any of her five sisters or two brothers. When her aunt, Floriza, saw Lisa for the first time she said to her younger sister "Dolly, that child will cause you more anguish than all your other children put together."

"What a terrible thing to say about such a tiny, innocent child, Flor. Why do you say that?"

The older woman frowned, as if trying to choose her words carefully.

"It is in her destiny. I can see many troubles surrounding her. You'll lose everything you have - land and possessions - as a result of her actions."

Floriza claimed to have clairvoyant powers, but Dolores did not believe anyone could see what the future would hold.

"You know I don't believe in such things, Flor. Only God knows our destiny."

Floriza was a large woman and, in a gesture of indignation, raised her considerable bosom in parallel with her chin.

"It matters not whether you believe me. I tell you now, that she will be trouble. So much so, that, in time, you'll regret having given her life."

Dolores was deeply hurt by her sister's insensitive comments.

"I don't want to listen to any more of this. I've got work to do."

Her sister continued, "Just look at the day she was born, Dolly. The thirtieth of December nineteen sixty five. The very day that Ferdinand Edralin Marcos became President of the Philippines. Now there is a man who I do not trust at all. He puts on a face of caring, but it is a false one. He cares for nobody but himself. He may have been acquitted of murdering his father's opponent in 1938, but I have my doubts about his innocence."

Dolores became visibly agitated. "You'll get us all in trouble if anyone hears you saying such things. Now, please, Flor, I don't want to hear any more."

With that, she picked up a bundle of wet clothes and disappeared outside to hang them.

The laundry would be dry in a few hours with the intense power of the sun. It was a relief to escape from these hurtful, caustic comments. Floriza had been right with her prophecies in the past, and her predictions about Lisa upset her. She did not want her sister to see the tears running down her cheeks. Dolores loved the tiny, frail Lisa as much, if not more, than her other children, but she feared the worrying predictions might come true.

Chapter One : The birth of an Asian

Another mouth to feed, another child with needs.

Dolores Tiguelo did not expect to give birth for a few more weeks, but now, the infant was lying in her cradling arms, only minutes into her new life. Thin and fragile legs kicked the air, free at last from the confines of the womb. Big, beautiful, but as yet uncoordinated eyes looked, as though in wonderment, at the strange sights surrounding the wriggling bundle. The short, staccato cries of a newly born baby were a familiar sound to Dolores, as it was her eighth delivery. This had been the easiest pregnancy yet, without sickness or fatigue. Dolores continued working as normal, hand-washing a heavy load of clothes only hours before her labour started. It had taken only two and a half hours from the start of her pelvic contractions to the emergence of a new life in the family.

Nelia, the closest midwife in the town of Marbel in the Philippine province of Cotabato, was due to help, but the baby did not wait. There were no telephones in this poor remote community, which meant that Pedro, Dolores' husband, had no choice but to run the mile and a half to seek Nelia's assistance. It was nearly midnight when he started his journey down the narrow dirt paths through the forest. Pedro was exhausted from the sweltering heat and the effort of running. It was frustratingly difficult for him as he picked his way through the coconut trees, heavy rain turning the uneven ground into a quagmire, slowing his progress. He reached a clearing, where the rain pounded noisily on the roofs of the few buildings. Pedro hammered frantically on Nelia's door and was relieved when the midwife appeared. If she had been attending another delivery, there would have been nobody else to help Dolores.

"Nelia, come quickly," Pedro had to pause for breath. "It's Dolores. She's in labour."

"I didn't think she was due yet, Pedro."

She knew him, as she knew most people in the village, having delivered all his other children.

"Dolores was surprised, herself, when the contractions started, but she is certain that it

will soon be born."

Nelia peered through the dismal darkness of this wet night. It was December and the rainy season was living up to its name.

"It's very late and heavy with rain. I'm sure she will be alright without me." She was tired and didn't want to venture out into the wet night.

"But what if something goes wrong?"

"But, I've no transport and the ground is very bad."

She was searching for excuses to return to her bed.

Pedro became agitated, fearing the worst.

"Listen, Nelia, if it will make any difference, I'll try and borrow a carabow and trailer to get you there. Please help Dolores."

Pedro's thick, black hair was matted, the rain trickled lazily down his tired face and his teeth glistened in the light of Nelia's candle. He had been quite good-looking in his youth, but years of neglect and addiction to tobacco had taken their toll. Prolonged exposure to the damaging rays of the sun had roughened his skin, made to look even worse by several days of beard growth.

Seeing the anxiety in his face, she relented. "Oh, okay, Pedro. You don't need to get the carabow. We'll walk. Just let me get my umbrella and bag, and then we'll go."

He breathed a heavy sigh of relief. "Thank you so much, Nelia. Thank you."

Nelia was a big woman and puffed noisily as she tried to keep up with the slimmer, younger Pedro. "Now, don't you run out of my sight, Pedro. I'm not as fit as you and it's not safe for a woman to be on her own, at this time of night."

"Sorry, Nelia. I wasn't thinking." Pedro skilfully picked his way back along the muddy path. Large drops of water fell steadily from the canopy of the jungle, even though the rain was easing. He was not only trying to avoid deep troughs of water, but also looking out for poisonous snakes. A momentary lapse in concentration could be fatal. They were accompanied by the sound of crickets, making their incessant rhythmic noises from the depths of the jungle. When Pedro reached his Nippa hut, he rushed into the room where Dolores lay with his new child.

"You have another daughter, Pedro." Dolores lifted the sleeping baby to show her exhausted husband.

He smiled and tried to catch his breath. "Are you okay, Dolly?"

"Yes, I'm fine. That was the easiest, shortest labour of any of the children." Dolores smiled and looked down at the infant with obvious pride and, even though they already had two

sons and five daughters, she would love them all the same. She was a woman of inner calmness, not beautiful, yet attractive through her character. Her once-long hair had been cut short for the sake of practicality. Years of poverty and hard work had made the twenty nine year old woman look many years older, but she was still thankful to God for giving her a family to be proud of. Dolores assured Pedro and the midwife that she was comfortable. Nelia checked delivery of the afterbirth, then took hold of the baby and attended to the umbilical cord. The infant cried loudly, at this intrusion. When Nelia was satisfied that everything was in order, she offered the tiny wriggling bundle to Pedro. He cautiously took hold of his daughter, as if she was a delicate piece of china, and made gentle noises to soothe the disturbed child.

"I'll be going now, Pedro. That will be fifty pesos, please."

Pedro just managed to gather fifty pesos together, with a mixture of notes and coins. He was a poor man and, since the baby came early, he hadn't had time to save enough money. Nelia knew that this was probably all they had, but did not offer to reduce the burden. She, like everybody else, had difficulty making ends meet. Stuffing the money into her pocket, she said her farewell and disappeared into the wet night. Pedro changed into some dry clothes, wrapped himself in his blanket and settled down to sleep. Beds for Pedro's family were simple mats, made of hundreds of small, interwoven leaves, laid out on the rough, wooden floor. These mats reduced the draughts from beneath the floor. Since all the family slept, fully dressed, in the one room - mother, father, seven children and the new baby - none of them had much rest that night.

The Tiguelo family home was one of half a dozen or so small timber shed-like buildings called Nippa huts. These primitive dwellings huddled together in a narrow clearing in the thick forest vegetation. Some had electricity, but Pedro, with his large family and small income, could only afford bottled gas canisters for lighting. The hut had a food preparation area using sticks of wood within a rough stone shell for cooking. When the burning wood was wet from the heavy rain, clouds of choking, acrid smoke would fill the tiny house, permeating everyone's hair and clothes. There were just two other rooms, which Pedro furnished with rudimentary benches made from thin tree trunks.

Next morning, Pedro dug a small hole in the ground, close to the wall outside his home. Into this, he placed a small parcel containing the placenta and brushed the soil back over the top. This was an ancient superstition that would ensure good luck for the family. He performed his ritual without ceremony, although it was against the doctrine of the Catholic Church, to which Pedro, his family and most people in the Philippines belonged. Early pagan superstitions and Christianity lived, uncomfortably, side by side in this simple country. Dolores was feeding the baby when Pedro walked back into the house. "I've buried the inunlan, Dolly. When the baby's

pusod falls off, I'll put it in the roof." Another superstition was to wrap the umbilical cord in a triangular piece of material and place it in the spaces between the timbers of the roof. There were already seven little packages in the roof of the Tiguelo's shanty residence.

The other seven Tiguelo children, aged between two and ten, already found difficulty living in the cramped space of their two-roomed house as they were constantly tripping over either objects or siblings. Pedro was a farmer with several pigs, goats and numerous chickens on the small plot of land adjacent to their house. The year had been difficult with very little earned from selling the livestock he had reared. He could only afford to send his two boys, Antonio aged ten and Enrico, nine, to school. The girls helped their mother care for the smaller children, and assisted Pedro with his animals.

Apart from being very small, Lisa was not much of a problem to them. She slept soundly at night and only cried during the day when hungry for her mother's milk. The whole family accepted Lisa and showed special care for the new infant. Dolores was a devout Catholic and insisted that they all attend Mass regularly at their local Church and was looking forward to the Christening, but it took six months before Pedro could raise enough money.

The small, always overcrowded, neighbourhood Church was a very basic, timber building and did not have the facilities for a christening, making it necessary for family and relatives to travel to another church three miles away in an outlying area of Marbel. Dolores' mother, Gloria, made the journey from her home in Balamban, a tiny province of Cebu city, to be at the christening. It took her 24 hours by ferry and a rough journey by bus, but Gloria wanted to be there as it was her first chance to see her new grandchild. A small fleet of tricycle taxis carried the family members, including Lisa's brothers, sisters and Pedro's father, Allan to the ancient Church.

Dolores was closer to Floriza than any of her other two sisters, even though she did not like her premonitions. Floriza was pleased that Dolores asked her and her husband, Alfredo, to be Godparents, as she had a great affection for her new niece. Her voice was as big as her bulk and she spoke with a much deeper, slightly nasal sound than Dolores. She squeezed her bulk into the limited space of the tricycle with great difficulty, leaving little room for her much slimmer husband. The driver looked on anxiously as his vehicle looked in danger of tipping over. The Philippine tricycle is a bicycle with a lightweight, metal sidecar attached to the frame and it was the cheapest form of transport in the country. Floriza and her husband managed to take their place without upsetting the balance, but the driver had to use considerable effort to get the pedals moving. Once he had built up enough momentum, he needed less effort and was thankful the road was fairly level along the route. The brightly coloured canopy over Floriza

provided shelter from the blistering midday sun as she sat proudly, like a queen surveying her loyal subjects. By the time they had reached their destination, the driver had earned every one of his twenty pesos. Alfredo, a slightly built man, helped his wife out of the tricycle seat, an equally difficult operation as getting in.

The group entered the impressive, ancient stone-built Church and made their way to an ante-room, where an elderly nun greeted them. Her duty was to hold a short seminar for the parents and Godparents to be instructed in their obligations to the child. Then the family joined other worshippers for mass, after which Dolores, Pedro, Lisa and the Godparents, went to the front of the Church for the baptism. Lisa did not think much of having water and oil on her head and expressed her feelings loudly. Floriza was holding the infant and, with her broad, rough hands, caressed Lisa's head in an effort to calm her. It took a few minutes for the ritual to be performed, but it held great significance to the proud parents. Floriza brought some candles, which she lit to celebrate the christening, before saying a quiet prayer for Lisa.

The journey back was, again, by tricycle taxi, but Floriza's driver, not surprisingly, was nowhere to be seen. Her husband, Alfredo, in his usual quiet way, organised alternative transport back for him and his sizeable wife. It didn't take long for the collection of vehicles to return home where everyone was greeted by the mouth-watering smell of roasted pig. Rosita, Pedro's cousin, was helping with preparation for the celebrations and was slowly turning the bamboo spit over a charcoal fire. At first light that morning Pedro killed and halved a three month old pig from head to foot with his machete. Pedro and Rosita filled the stomach with onions and spices, before stitching the two halves together, with the spit in place. The slow spit roast method of cooking the pig produced tender, succulent meat. Lisa's christening was a fine excuse for a feast and before long many relatives and friends arrived.

Dolores' three older girls handed portions of hot pig and boiled rice to each guest. There was just enough crisp, dark brown crackling to go round. The women chatted together while the men sat in a group, smoking and drinking tuba in great quantities. Tuba, the strong local wine, was made from the fermented juice from young buds of the fruit of coconut trees.

Allan, Pedro's father showed a special interest in the newly-christened infant. For some inexplicable reason, he felt a closer affinity with his new granddaughter than with any of the others. Allan was an energetic 52 year old and a widower, who owned a mango plantation about three miles from Pedro's house.

"May I hold her for a few minutes, Dolly?"

He was a dignified man, renowned for his politeness. Many women admired him and tried their best to become close, some even proposing marriage, but he always remained faithful

to his dead wife.

"Of course, you can, Tatay."

She lifted the baby and carefully placed her into Allan's welcoming arms.

He sat down and gently rocked, backwards and forwards, caressing Lisa's head with his long, slender fingers. To Dolly's surprise, the often restless Lisa was comfortable in his care and made happy, satisfied noises. Her big, innocent eyes looked into Allan's, as she seemed to listen to his every word.

"Now you just have a good sleep, my beauty. My, you are tiny, aren't you? I don't think I have ever seen such a tiny baby, but God sometimes puts the best gifts into the smallest parcels. I know that there is something very special about you and I'm sure that we will have some good times together."

He held her for some time and talked to her constantly. Dolores smiled as she listened to her father-in-law in a lengthy conversation with the unusually content child. He kept hold of her until it was time for her feed and handed her back to Dolores.

"I'll be going home now, Dolly."

"So soon? Are you not going to stay a while longer, Tatay? You know you are welcome to stay as long as you want."

As he stood up and faced Dolores, she noticed a moistening of his eyes. She could not remember seeing him openly showing his emotions before and wondered why. He always appeared so calm and in control. This change worried her.

"Are you okay, Tatay?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm fine, Dolly. Just feeling a little tired. I'll be off home, now, if you will excuse me."

"Of course. Thanks for coming today. Take care, won't you?"

She gave him a reassuring hug and watched as Allan's tall, slender frame disappeared into the jungle. She sensed a feeling of sadness in Allan's demeanour, which puzzled her, since he always smiled and joked with everyone. Dolly wished that Allan's wife could still be alive. Pedro had only vague memories of his mother as he did not remember seeing her after the age of five. Dolly decided not to say anything to her husband.

The older children amused themselves playing simple party games, but remained close by for Dolores to keep a watchful eye on them. During the celebrations Lisa slept through the noisy chattering, occasionally accompanied by the usual crowing of cockerels, which went on into the night. She was the picture of innocence in her long, flowing white christening gown. Everyone who saw her admired her delicate features and agreed that she would be a beauty as

she matured.

Dolores' mother, Gloria, held the sleeping infant for a long time, her expression showing great satisfaction with her new granddaughter. Dolores had inherited her looks and calm nature from her mother. Gloria, at fifty-one, was a strong, yet slimly-built woman with a strength and determination, characteristic of so many women in the Philippines. She had been a widow for the past six years, after her husband died in a fishing accident, but had been determined to stay in Cebu, even though Dolores and Floriza had wanted her to move to Marbel to be closer to them. Gloria's four daughters had a happy, and strongly-religious upbringing, where discipline played an important role.

Gloria intended to stay at Floriza's house, which had more space than Dolores, for at least two weeks, as she rarely travelled the long way from her home in the southern region of the Philippines. Although Gloria and Dolores kept in touch by letter, they had much to talk about. It would be a few years before they were able to see each other again.

The bond created between Lisa and her Grandfather was to remain with her all her life. Allan visited whenever he could and, as Lisa grew older, her favourite treat was to visit him at his mango plantation. Shortly after her fifth birthday, she visited Allan and this time was a special occasion. For the first time she was allowed to stay overnight. When Allan called to collect Lisa, she ran excitedly to him. As a mark of respect for her elders, Lisa took her grandfather's right hand and touched it to her forehead.

"Lolo! I'm ready. Shall we go now?"

The old man laughed. "Soon, Lisa, soon. Give me chance to say 'Hello' to the rest of your family."

Dolores came out of the house and gave Allan a welcoming hug. He insisted on greeting all the children and brought each one a small present. Allan was very much aware that he paid more attention to Lisa than her brothers and sisters. There was some rivalry between them, but his gifts of colouring books and crayons helped to placate them.

Dolores looked down at Lisa. The little girl was impatient to leave and waited with a sense of great importance, clutching a bag containing a few of her possessions and a change of clothes. Dolores bent down and kissed her daughter.

"Now, you be a good girl for Lolo, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, Nanay. I promise to be good. Lolo will send me back, if I don't behave."

"Please take good care of her, Tatay."

Allan embraced her warmly. "Don't worry, Dolly. I shall take the greatest of care with her."

"And don't be too soft with her. You are always spoiling the child." She smiled and gave a wink, as she continued, "Make her work hard, won't you?"

"Oh, yes. She will be kept very busy while she is staying with me. Right, little one, let's be going. Do you want me to carry you on my shoulders?"

Boldly, she replied, "No, thank you, Lolo. I am five now and can walk many miles. Bye-bye, Nanay."

She skipped and danced along as they began their journey. Dolores watched and gave an occasional wave as her daughter gradually disappeared through the trees. Allan's plantation was about three miles away and he was not surprised when Lisa's initial burst of energy soon petered out, as her feet felt heavier. It was hot, even though there were three hours before the midday sun.

Lisa kept going as long as she could, but, eventually said, "Do you think I could ride on your shoulders, now, Lolo?"

He smiled. "Of course, Lisa. You have walked about two miles, which is a long way for such a little girl."

He bent down, placed his hands under her arms and lifted her high. She giggled happily as he tickled her. Lisa liked to ride on his shoulders, as she could see more from such a height. After a short distance, Allan felt her playing with his hair.

"What are you doing, child?"

"It's alright, Lolo. I'm just trying to cover your bald patch with the hair you have left."

She giggled again, knowing that her grandfather did not like to be reminded that he was losing his hair.

Allan laughed. "Lolo is growing old, Lisa. That's why my hair is getting thin. A few more years and it will all have gone."

Allan was forced to stop several times during their journey to let his many friends and relatives see Lisa. They all remarked on what a beautiful girl she was. The sculpture of her face, her large innocent eyes and her long, silky, black hair were so perfect, that she almost seemed unreal. Her full lips and glistening, white teeth made her smile so special that it could melt a heart of ice.

At last, they reached Allan's house. It was a large timber building with several rooms and had the luxury of electricity. In comparison to Lisa's ramshackle hut it was an extremely comfortable home. Once inside, they had a cool drink of mango juice. Lisa was eager to help her grandfather and hurried him to show her round the plantation. The heavy, sweet smell of mangoes, ripening on the trees, was enough to make Lisa's mouth water. Allan had three

workers helping him. The two women, Melissa and Ivy, were high in the trees picking fruit, while Ricky moved heavy cartons of mangoes, preparing them for future collection by market traders.

Lisa wanted to climb the ladders to pick fruit, but knew she would not be allowed, as it would be too dangerous. Instead, the women showed her how to inspect the fruit for quality and ripeness, then wrap each mango in paper to protect the skin and finish the ripening process.

It was almost midday and the sun's fierce rays could turn a Filipino's usually pale skin black. Aware of this danger, everyone on the plantation kept in the shade of the trees or the house, whenever they could.

Allan had a maid, Marlyn, who cleaned the house and prepared all the meals. She was 30 and had worked for Allan since the age of 16. When the smell of freshly boiled rice started to waft through the window openings, Lisa felt hungry. Although she was very slim and petite, Lisa had a healthy appetite and always looked forward to meals. Today, the exertion of her long walk and running through the trees made her even hungrier. When Marlyn called that lunch was ready, Lisa ran to the house, eager to satisfy her appetite. The table was on a small terrace at the side of the house. It was a cool, sheltered area covered by the roof, and open at the sides to allow the gentle breeze flow.

Everybody took their place at the table and, after Allan said a short grace, they all ate heartily. Lisa enjoyed the small pieces of fried pork with boiled rice and a glass of fruit juice. It was especially enjoyable because she felt she was being treated as a grown-up, eating with everyone else. Best of all, she did not have to compete for attention with her brothers and sisters. She chatted happily with everyone and made them laugh with her innocent, naive responses to their questions. A transistor radio played music in the background, but nobody paid any attention to it.

"What shall we do this afternoon, Lolo?" Lisa, her stomach now full, was eager to continue.

"First, we shall have a short rest. It's too hot to go far just now, but, later, we shall sell some fruit to the traders and then, we'll visit a friend of mine, who has a pineapple plantation."

Although the heat, humidity and her exertions had made her tired, Lisa had difficulty sleeping, as they wrapped themselves in blankets on the floor. Allan, who did not have such problems, was almost asleep, when Lisa asked yet another question.

"How far is the pineapple plantation?"

"Not very far. Just ten minutes walk."

"Why don't you grow pineapples, as well as mangoes?"

"Because I don't have enough money to own enough land to grow both fruits. And mango is my favourite fruit."

"Yes, they are mine too."

Allan's eyes closed again, but the child's questions continued.

"Do you have a friend with a papaya plantation?"

"Yes. But that is a bit too far to walk, today. So many questions, child. Why don't you try to sleep?"

"Sorry, Lolo. I am trying." Allan smiled as he lay, waiting for the next question. It did not take long.

"Lolo, do you have many friends?"

"I seem to have."

"More than a hundred?" She persisted.

"I do know many people, but it is difficult to know, sometimes, if a person is really a friend or not." This answer seemed to give Lisa something to think about, giving Allan a chance to fall into a light sleep.

They rested for an hour. Lisa eventually fell asleep for long enough to regain her energy. It was time for the traders to start calling. Ricky had stacked cartons of mangoes for display. Lisa watched with curiosity as the buyers started arriving. Allan had a reputation for quality and fairness, which always ensured steady business. There was never much bargaining, as the traders knew that if they did not buy the fruit, others would pay Allan's prices. Allan had plenty of fruit juice for refreshment, which made the traders feel welcome and trusting. An occasional inspection of the mangoes was sufficient to satisfy the traders and soon, all the cartons were sold.

When everyone had gone, Allan and Lisa counted their takings. It was more money than the little girl had ever seen before and she carefully piled all the notes of the same denomination into neat bundles. "What do you do with all your money, Lolo?"

He laughed. "Don't think all that money is for me. It helps to pay the wages for Ricky, Melissa, Ivy and Marlyn. Then I have to buy food and clothes. And pay taxes to the Government. It doesn't leave much when all the bills have been paid."

Lisa looked disappointed. The reality of finance spoiled her simple, idealistic impressions. Seeing this, Allan continued, "Don't worry, Lisa. I have everything I need. And I manage to save some to last, if times should become difficult. The most important thing you must remember is that money can't buy you happiness. It just helps to make life a little more comfortable."

He gathered all the notes together, leaving just two ten peso notes on the table.

"You've missed some, Lolo."

"Have I?" He pretended that he could not see the two notes. "I don't think so."

"There, Lolo, there!" The little girl pointed at the money, not understanding her grandfather's ploy.

Again, he pretended not to see them.

"No, there's definitely no more of my money on the table. If there is any there, it must have come out of your pocket. So you had better put it away, before it gets lost."

Lisa's face lit up as she understood the game he was playing. She carefully picked up the two notes, folded them neatly and tucked them into the pocket of her dress.

"Thank you, Lolo. You are nice." Allan chuckled as she gave him a hug and a kiss.

"Right, now, come on. Let's go and see my friend, Francisco."

The two set out on the walk to the neighbouring pineapple plantation. Allan carried a bag of mangoes. It was a short journey and, as they arrived, Francisco, a short, well-built man about the same age as Allan, greeted them with a cheery wave.

He had been harvesting pineapples, but hurried across the huge plantation to Allan. He took hold of his hand and shook it vigorously, as though they hadn't seen each other for years.

"So this is the granddaughter you have been telling me about. Now, let me see, it's Lisa, isn't it?"

She nodded. Her soft, tiny hand seemed to disappear in the big, callused hand of Francisco, as he welcomed her. Although she had never met him before, she took an instant liking to him. He seemed a very jovial, friendly character. It gave her a shock when she noticed that the little finger on Francisco's left hand was missing. Without any embarrassment she asked, "What happened to your finger?"

The two men laughed at her question.

"I was cutting some old branches off trees on the plantation. My hands are so old and gnarled, that I mistook it for part of the branch. The machete cut clean through finger and branch alike."

The little girl stared, incredulously at the mutilated hand. "Really?" The smile on his face made her wonder if he was joking.

"It is true, Lisa", Allan confirmed. "Francisco is a man who has many accidents. Almost every week, something else happens, but he always just smiles and carries on with his life." Allan handed the bag of mangoes to his friend. "Here's something to keep you refreshed, Francisco."

"Thank you so much. Let's sit on the veranda and eat a little pineapple, shall we?" As they walked to the house, two teenage girls, busy cutting pineapples from the low-lying plants, waved and smiled at Lisa. She returned their smile and gave a little wave. The atmosphere seemed so pleasant and friendly, Lisa felt comfortable and happy. Once they were seated in the shade, Francisco went inside the house, soon to return with a large plate piled with slices of pineapple. Lisa ate the beautiful, sweet fruit. It was impossible to stop the abundant juice from dripping, but Lisa was careful not to spoil her bright orange dress. The three chatted for a while. Francisco told Lisa of some of the many accidents he had suffered. On more than one occasion he had fallen off a ladder, while doing maintenance on his house. Lisa laughed when he told of a time, many years earlier, when he had been working on a different plantation and was knocked almost unconscious as a large coconut fell out of a tree, hitting him squarely on the head. The time passed quickly and before long, the sky began to darken as dusk approached.

"Come on, Lisa. It's time for us to return home. Thank you, Francisco. We've enjoyed our visit, haven't we, Lisa?"

"Oh, yes. I like you, Francisco. You are funny." The honesty and innocence of the little girl's remark made the two men laugh.

"If I can bring a smile to your face, then I am happy. You are very welcome to come again, Lisa. Any time." Francisco had a bag of pineapples ready for them, as they prepared to leave. In an area where little of any significance happens from day to day, most people in the neighbourhood knew of Lisa's visit and were pleased to see the little girl. In a land where most families are large, the Filipinos loved young children.

But there were two individuals who were not as pleased as the rest. Alberto and Dominic, two workers recently sacked by Allan, lurked in the undergrowth by the path. Their gaze followed the happy youngster skipping and dancing around her grandfather as they made their way along the dusty track.

"Not yet, Alberto. Wait until the time is right."

Allan and Lisa arrived home to be greeted by the delicious smell of cooking. Marlyn prepared a dinner of chicken and rice. The chicken portions were covered in flour and fried in oil, making the skin crisp and tasty. This was a favourite of Lisa's, who hungrily devoured everything except the main bones. She chewed the smaller bones in the wings and breast along with the meat, leaving very little on her plate. All Allan's helpers lived at his house, since they were unmarried and would have had to travel too far each day to their family homes. With six people eating and talking happily, the atmosphere was festive and everyone was determined that Lisa's visit should be an event to remember. But it would not be remembered for happy meal

times.

After supper Allan, his workers and special guest talked together for a while. Ricky played his guitar and sang ballads. Everything seemed perfect to Lisa. A full, satisfied stomach, Ricky's gentle serenade, the full, bright moon lighting the darkened room. Lisa's eyes were heavy, but still she chatted and asked many questions.

As she was lying down to sleep, she asked, "Lolo, why haven't you got a wife?"

"I have, dear."

"Where is she?" Lisa asked with great curiosity.

"In heaven, with God. And one day, I shall be joining her, again."

"Do you miss her?"

"Yes, of course. Every day that passes, I think of her. Your Grandmother was a wonderful woman and meant everything to me."

"What was she like? Was she very beautiful?"

"Oh, yes, very." Lisa did not see the tears in Allan's eyes as he talked of his long-dead wife. His voice was a little shaky as he continued. "She had such beauty. And eyes with a sparkle that seemed to come from heaven. I have never seen such eyes until ..." A lump came to his throat, as he found himself unable to continue.

"Until what, Lolo?" The moonlight shone on his face. Large tears glistened as they ran slowly down his cheeks. "Why are you crying, Lolo?"

"I'm alright, child. Just the night air making my eyes water." He stood up and went into another room. Lisa lay, awake, wondering what Allan was doing. She knew that he had been crying. After a few minutes, he returned, carrying an old photograph. "This is a picture of Monalisa, your Grandmother."

Lisa sat up and, taking hold of the photograph, held it to catch the full light. Even to her immature eyes, it was now obvious why Allan favoured Lisa above all her sisters and brothers. The woman in the picture was in her early twenties and, even allowing for the difference in age, she and Lisa were identical. The shape of her cheekbones, lips, chin and forehead were the same as Lisa's, but most significant of all, were her eyes. That same sparkle Allan had described, made Lisa's beauty complete. Now the child understood everything, but said nothing, as she put her arms around Allan. No words could express her feelings.

They held this embrace for what seemed an eternity. The sadness of the moment caused Lisa's eyes to fill with tears. For a child so young, she understood that the old man was missing his wife. "Why did Lola have to die?"

Allan had been dreading this question. "I'm sorry, Lisa, I can't say. But, when you are

older, I'll tell you the full story. Now come on, you must try and get some sleep."

Obediently, she lay down and tried to sleep, but it was difficult. She had so many questions to ask her grandfather, but knew she must wait. Wait for how long? Why was she not old enough now? The mystery surrounding her grandmother's death intrigued her and she longed for the day when the full story could be told. The face in the photograph would always be in her mind, a constant reminder of the looks she had inherited.