

The Root of All Magic

One-Act Play / English Division

Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature 2019

SYNOPSIS

Bringing nothing but a small flashlight and a pilfered bottle of alcohol, three young boys—two brothers and their cousin—sneak off into the large, forested clearing behind their Mount Makiling guesthouse in the dead of night, ostensibly on a ghost hunt. To pass the time, they banter, become tipsy for the first time, and relay stories about the guardian deity of the mountain, Mariang Makiling. They determine the goal of the hunt: to acquire a special relic of hers for themselves.

But there is more to the scenery than meets the naked eye, and it becomes increasingly difficult to navigate. Moreover, tensions grow as the boys get lost, clash on their beliefs, and touch upon the shared past of the adults in their lives. One boy may hold the key to understanding the forest's mysteries—but will all three cousins emerge from their hunt unscathed?

Characters

- STEPHEN** 13 years old, cousin to IGO and brother to BIBOY. Tall for his age; a bossy, outspoken, and confident daredevil type.
- IGO** 12 years old, cousin to STEPHEN and BIBOY. Has a somber disposition. Wears a necklace with a gold pendant; its design is of a husked flower protruding from a root.
- BIBOY** 12 years old, brother to STEPHEN and cousin to IGO. Chubby; the nerdy type; loves books and trivia. He is easygoing, but gets the jitters easily.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

Setting

The play takes place in the mountainous area of Lalakay, Los Baños, sometime in the early '00s. The setting is a lush, wide clearing outside of a rented guest house. The clearing sprawls for some kilometers before leading to a heavily forested area in Makiling. All that can be seen in the background is tall grass and tree foliage. Ambient sounds, such as rustling and the calls of forest animals, can be heard (but there may be something more).

Lighting is sparse, as the cousins' family members have declared "lights out" and gone to sleep. All nearby establishments in Lalakay have closed for the night.

Time

It is late in the evening, and very dark outside.

The scene begins just as STEPHEN, BIBOY, and IGO have successfully enacted an escape through the back fire exit of the Lalakay guest villa that their families are staying in for the night.

LIGHTS ARE OFF *when the three boys first begin talking.*

STEPHEN

Everybody here? Biboy?

BIBOY

Here, Kuya.

STEPHEN

Cousin Igo?

IGO

I'm here.

STEPHEN

Great. And now our hunt can begin. Biboy, where is it?

BIBOY

I got it. Hang on. Let's test it out.

Biboy procures a small flashlight from his pocket. He switches it on and off. The flashlight sputters a few times, indicating that some of the battery may have been depleted.

BIBOY offers the flashlight to IGO.

BIBOY

Here, you wanna try?

IGO duly takes the flashlight and tests it as well. After a few tries, he wordlessly hands it to STEPHEN.

STEPHEN flicks the switch a couple of times. He keeps the light off for a few seconds, leaving the stage in darkness.

He sneaks up behind IGO and exclaims loudly as he shines the light in IGO's face.

STEPHEN

Bulaga!!!

IGO

(yells and fends off his cousin) Hey! Don't! Cut it out!

STEPHEN

Are we so easily scared now, cousin? A forest expedition into the great unknown—you were the one who was so gung-ho about the idea.

BIBOY

(snatching the flashlight back) Kuya! Be careful! That's the only light source we have! I didn't expect it to be... well... this dark.

STEPHEN

Of course it's dark, silly, there's almost no life here past 8:00PM. There—let's go over there. Out of this shade. You can see the moon shining better from that spot.

The three boys gradually make their way to a spot with minimal lighting available. LIGHTS SLOWLY BRIGHTEN.

BIBOY

We better be quieter, too. We can't cause a ruckus. What if anyone finds out we're not in our room?

STEPHEN

Nah, don't worry. That's not going to happen. You know how they all are when they get a chance like this. I mean, did you see how toasted they all were in the living room? If you didn't see it, you could definitely hear them, couldn't you? Everyone is either

passed out drunk or passed out and asleep. They were so distracted, they didn't see me get *this*.

STEPHEN *draws something from one of the cargo pockets of his pants—a small bottle of clear liquor.*

IGO

Alcohol...?

STEPHEN

Yeah. This is the one with the Russian name. There are so many of these on the counter. Trust me, they won't know what's missing.

Come, let's drink! A toast, for our courage. I'll go first.

STEPHEN *takes a swig. The alcohol doesn't go down easily, but he pretends to like what he is drinking and makes a loud swallowing sound.*

All right! To the success of our ghost hunt! Cheers!

STEPHEN *hands the bottle to BIBOY. BIBOY takes a swig. For the most part, he keeps a straight face.*

BIBOY

Cheers. To uh... to our trip? To time well-spent with cousins? (*chuckling*) To getting back here in one piece.

STEPHEN

Hey, don't jinx it like that! (*takes the bottle from BIBOY, hands it to IGO*) How about you, cuz?

IGO

Uhhmmm... I don't know. (*pauses, presses a hand to his chest over something bulging out underneath his shirt*) To this forest? Makiling's forest. Sorry Steph, I really can't think of anything.

STEPHEN

(*narrows his eyes at IGO, but he decides to let it go*) ... Pssshhh. Bo-ring. Anyway—
drink up!

*IGO drinks, but coughs and nearly retches
from the burn.*

IGO

(*making a disgusted face*) This is gross! I don't know how anyone can drink this!

STEPHEN

But the adults drink it all the time.

BIBOY

Maybe you just need to get used to the taste.

IGO

I couldn't. If we ever drank what they used to clean pipes and sinks, it would probably taste like this. So unnatural.

STEPHEN

Hey, if you hate it that much, give it to me. I'll hold it. *(takes the bottle back)* And let's not get carried away. We're on a mission after all.

BIBOY

A better way to spend a Saturday night, out of the gray and noisy city. And not just locked up in a cramped guesthouse room.

IGO

But like I said a while ago... wouldn't it be good to have a goal, a real goal? I mean, we're not just here to while the time away?

STEPHEN

Oh, sure. If we haven't, let's make one! Let's see... wouldn't it be good to get proof of our adventures? A token, a memento. A relic to say that we crossed paths with—

BIBOY

The deity herself, Mariang Makiling?

STEPHEN *and* BIBOY *chuckle*. A *pensive* IGO *clutches his chest again*. *This is not something that escapes* STEPHEN, *although again, he chooses to let things go*.

IGO

So where should we be headed...

STEPHEN

To the edge of the forest. Or way, way beyond.

IGO

And we should be looking for—

STEPHEN

Yeesh, this is the most demanding you've ever been, cousin. You didn't want to do anything at all with us when we asked you, at the last family reunion two years ago.

BIBOY

But he has a good point, Kuya. We said this was a ghost hunt, but how would we know if we saw a ghost? Or... whatever lives here—*diwatas, aswangs*? What should we keep our eyes peeled for? *(He fiddles with the flashlight.)*

IGO

Why not with the lore that begins here? The stories of Makiling.

STEPHEN

Stories—

BIBOY

A great idea, cousin! And as far as Makiling stories go... they're so common, I'm sure that each of us has one. They taught me one version in Sibika class, and the upperclassmen told different ones in the Recreational Club. And then there's the version in my *Philippine Myths and Legends Book*—

STEPHEN

(to IGO) Yeah, he's so proud of that book. A rare prize from our dad, for him winning a storytelling competition.

All right, champ, then maybe you can start. Which one's the version you know?

BIBOY

(beaming) Okay. Okay. Let me try to remember. I once aced an assignment like this. And hmmm, can you guys come closer? In case it gets darker... at least we can hear each other's voices... and we won't stray too far.

Let's see... let's see.

BIBOY clears his throat. His storytelling style is animated and theatrical; he plays around with the flashlight, encircling tree branches, patches

of grass, and other parts of the setting with its light beam.

BIBOY

Mariang Makiling is said to be the patroness of this mountain's forest. As we can see here outside... every tree, every blade of grass, every droplet of water flowing from a mountain creek is blessed by Mariang Makiling's magic.

Her healing touch can make a barren wasteland grow green again. Just one command from Maria (*snaps fingers*), and a wild boar will stop in its charge. A vicious snake will retract its fangs. It's no wonder that the early human settlers at the foot of the mountain began to ask Maria for help in making their crops prosper, guiding them to clean water, even interceding with God himself.

But the humans grew greedy and cruel to Maria. At some point, they stopped saying thank you every time she showed them kindness. They took each act of supernatural kindness for granted, as if it were only to be expected. And this led Maria to grow bitter with humankind.

For effect, BIBOY switches off the flashlight.

At this point, some trees and tall stalks of grass subtly change their position on the stage, indicating a slight alteration of the path.

BIBOY

They say that one day, she'd had enough. She vanished without a trace. All of a sudden, the mountain hut that she'd made her home in Laguna was empty, like it had never been lived in. But they also say—

IGO

Wait.

IGO presses a hand on BIBOY's shoulder. It is BIBOY's turn to yelp with surprise.

IGO

Sorry. But did you hear that?

BIBOY

Hear what?

STEPHEN

I didn't hear anything.

There is a pause of about a few seconds before IGO speaks again.

IGO

Biboy. Could you turn the flashlight on again? Shine it ahead, to the right.

BIBOY *does as he is told. The boys quietly survey their surroundings. IGO furrows his brows.*

IGO

This doesn't look like the path we were following a few minutes ago.

STEPHEN

How would you know? It's really dark!

IGO

It just doesn't feel like we're going in the same direction—

STEPHEN

What, are you the best of the Boy Scouts now, Igo? That's out of the ordinary. Again, whenever we wanted to play with you outdoors, you'd always just stay in your room. And now suddenly you're asking us for tall tales and interrupting us when we tell them.

IGO

Steph, I'm serious about this. Biboy, did you notice anything different? Is it just me, or did you see anything happen?

BIBOY

(At this point, he is jittery.) N-no. I don't want to think about, honestly.

STEPHEN

Hey, what's gotten into you?

BIBOY

I just don't—

STEPHEN

Come on out with it.

BIBOY

Suddenly it feels like... an omen of sorts? *(He scratches his head, then chuckles nervously.)* I was just going to finish my story. Th-they just say that Maria's presence coincides with—with otherworldly presences that don't seem nearly as pleasant—

STEPHEN

And why's that?

BIBOY

For example, Maria manifests on Good Friday. It's the day Jesus Christ died, the day that Heaven was torn apart. And so, on such a day, otherworldly creatures like ghosts, ghouls, and four-legged monsters can roam the earth... and humankind can believe in them. Maria will sit very still on a rock by the riverbank, wearing an eerie white veil.

(shivers)

STEPHEN

Biboy! Can you hear yourself? You sound ridiculous. You've just made yourself imagine all those silly things.

BIBOY

I—I guess. It's just... a bit scary to think about, isn't it? Imagination is my strength, you know, and even I get surprised sometimes—about what my mind's capable of conjuring.

And, after all, this is Maria's forest. I suppose, if there's anyone powerful enough to do something, like—

IGO

To change the layout of the forest... to alter our path to her will...

BIBOY

Yeah. It would be her. It could be very well be her.

But anyway. Anyway. I should stop playing around, shouldn't I? I read in my other book, my *Field Guide*: the second you keep your eyes off a forest path—the second you get distracted, you're—

STEPHEN

Hey, relax. Really. Come here, have a drink. *(he offers the bottle to his brother)*

BIBOY

But is it safe—should we even be downing this stuff, we didn't even bring proper food or water—

STEPHEN

Well, this is liquid. Like water. If we're thirsty, it should get us by. It's not like we're going to be out here all night?

BIBOY shrugs and takes a drink. To his surprise, the liquid goes down easier on his throat than the first time.

He takes another sip, and a few more at random intervals, not knowing that the alcohol will betray him over time.

STEPHEN

You know, I've heard that Boy Scouts in America have it harder than this when they're up for promotion. And they're not too far from our age. Have you guys heard of the "three-feather" challenge?

IGO

What's that?

STEPHEN

It's a three-and-a-half-day challenge that helps you master the ways of the forest. First, you go a whole day without food... so what we're doing right now is peanuts compared to that.

Then, you go one full day without speaking. *(holds a finger up to BIBOY's lips)* Shhhh...

BIBOY

But I wasn't talking!

IGO

And the last one?

STEPHEN

The last one is... you spend exactly one day and one night in the forest... with nothing on you but a weapon. Maybe a knife.

STEPHEN slaps IGO on the back.

STEPHEN

So who do you reckon, among the three of us, would survive?

IGO opens his mouth to speak, but the boys are interrupted by strange sounds—as well as a gust of wind that seems faint, but carries an oddly musical after-note.

BIBOY

Don't—don't you think that sounds a bit like—

IGO

(places his hand over his heart) Someone speaking...

STEPHEN

(trying to come off unfazed) If not doing something else—

BIBOY

Kuya—!

STEPHEN

What if *we're* not the only ones sneaking around tonight and getting some action, eh—

BIBOY

Ugh. That sounds like the kind of joke our dad would make.

IGO

(Pauses) Not just your dad, to be honest.

STEPHEN

Hey, leave it be. Speaking of people getting up to no good, isn't it my turn to tell a story?

If we're talking about strange moans, clandestine whispers in the wind, it's like the

version I know—of Maria calling after the lover who spurned her.

STEPHEN *takes ownership of the flashlight.*

He, too, gestures animatedly as he tells the story.

STEPHEN

Yes, the version that I know—about what caused Mariang Makiling to be bitter, heartbroken, vengeful—is the story where she fell in love with a mortal man.

A handsome man entered the Makiling forest one day and got hopelessly lost, but eventually he found himself at the door of Maria's hut. It was love at first sight. For a time, neither wanted to leave each other's side.

But little did Maria know, the man wasn't happy. Day by day he became more impatient to go back to his human village. He begged her to lift the magic spell that kept him bound to the forest, and she in turn begged him to stay. In the end, she let him go and she gave him fresh fruit so that he wouldn't get hungry on his journey back. The only thing she asked of him was for him to stay faithful to her memory.

IGO

That was something the man couldn't do...

STEPHEN

Damn right. Something he couldn't do at all. He didn't thank her for the gift of the fruit and even let some of it go to waste, dropping it on the mountain path and stepping carelessly all over its sweet flesh. And as soon as he returned to his village in Laguna,

he got back around, he eventually married another woman. Somehow, Maria found out, and in her anger, she cursed the man and his descendants.

BIBOY

What was the curse?

STEPHEN

That no one should dare wander into the forest or else they will get hopelessly lost.

And no one is allowed to climb one of Mount Makiling's fruit trees and steal a fruit for themselves. Or else—

IGO

They would go insane?

BIBOY

(taken aback) How do you know that?

STEPHEN

You seem to know a whole lot.

IGO

Stories like these have always felt familiar to me somehow. They're among the few things my dad passed on from my mom—she was from Laguna too, do you know? But this is the very first time Papa and I have gone here since... you know.

The version of the story I know is not the one with the fruit. It's the one with the ginger.

STEPHEN

Ginger? As in... ginger root?

IGO

Yes, as they call it... the root of all magic. And it's not as far-fetched as one thinks, is it? Biboy, in your books. In the legends, or chronicles of folk cures. Don't they link ginger root to—

BIBOY

Healing... mystery... empowerment. *(he staggers a little)*

IGO

Exactly! And so... let me try to remember now... wasn't it that Mariang Makiling was very generous to the humans and cured them when they were sick? And one day this woman visited her and begged her to heal her dying mother.

Maria realized that the problem wasn't that the mother was sick, but that she was... suffering from hunger, possibly neglect. So she gave this woman a nugget of ginger and told her to keep it safe in her bag. She was not to open the bag until she'd arrived back at home—and then she would figure out how the ginger would be useful.

IGO pauses, stares straight ahead, and continues to tell the story as if he is talking to himself instead of his two cousins.

And then the woman opened her bag. And she discovered that the ginger that Maria had given her had turned... into solid, shining gold. Of course, the gold was enough to buy medicine or nutritious food for the mother. But the woman couldn't help squandering part of Maria's gift on herself.

BIBOY

Let me guess. Just like in the other stories... everyone in the woman's village found out about the gold? And demanded some from Maria?

IGO

And she gave and gave—her material belongings, the strength of her body, the very life of a soul that she felt she shared with humans—until nothing was left.

(The air around him seems heavy; he appears to remember something that he cannot place.) And yes, like in Biboy's story, she vanished almost without a trace. Though I'm sure other humans have genuinely sought her out—

STEPHEN

(interjects) But I think that's a load of crap. The ginger part doesn't make any sense. It can't be the ginger.

IGO

(firmly) It is!

STEPHEN

It isn't! Can ginger root even be found in the wild? Isn't it only grown in farms? And if it's buried all the way underground, how would you even find a trace of ginger root on a mountain?

IGO

It can, it *can* be seen on a mountain. You'd find the root if you saw this flower.

IGO reaches inside his shirt and reveals his necklace. On a string dangles a large and intricate gold pendant in the distinctive shape of a root.

BIBOY and STEPHEN gasp. They inch nearer to examine the details, STEPHEN shining the flashlight upon it.

IGO

Like this. Look at this pattern. This is the flower, it could be either white or a bright golden yellow in color. And these roots—they're deep and far-reaching.

BIBOY

So they are, aren't they? What a beautiful pendant.

STEPHEN

Hmmm. I didn't see this on you last time. I thought you were acting funny about something. Who gave this to you?

IGO

It was passed down to me. It was my mom's.

STEPHEN

(hands the flashlight to BIBOY) Can I look closer?

IGO carefully hands the necklace and pendant over to STEPHEN.

STEPHEN spends a few seconds seemingly admiring the pendant. But he then clasps it tightly and quickly swipes it out of IGO's reach.

IGO protests. STEPHEN casts him a taunting smile.

STEPHEN

Let me borrow this for the meantime.

IGO

Hey! No! Give it back!

STEPHEN

It's in my hands now.

IGO

Give it back to me or you'll be sorry!

STEPHEN

So will you if I accidentally *throw* this—

STEPHEN *pretends to toss the pendant, then dangles it in IGO's face, demonstrating that he is the taller and stronger one among the two.*

STEPHEN

Never mind. I won't throw it after all. Did you say that we can find ginger flowers like these somewhere on the mountain?

BIBOY

Kuya—

STEPHEN

If we went further ahead, would you be able to prove that these exist?

IGO

(in the most menacing tone possible) Stephen, give it back to me!

STEPHEN

Hold up. Hear me out, cousin. I say we make a bet. If we go deeper into the forest—over there, where the trees grow thick—and find anything that resembles this flower here, then I can give this back.

Yeah... yeah! Maybe that's where we can end our ghost hunt! To find, if not a forbidden fruit hanging from a magical tree—what Igo here says is the root of all magic itself.

(scoffs) How about you, Biboy? Do you *really* believe in magic?

BIBOY

(thoughtfully) I... I... I believe in this life... and an afterlife... and I guess, a natural, restorative order to things, if you can call any of that magic. Those are what I'd wish to believe in. And you?

STEPHEN

I don't. I believe in it as much as the spiritual stuff in religion—which is to say, not much really. It's all smoke, mirrors, and old wives' tales to me.

On some days I wish I could be proven wrong. But now Igo says that there could be magic on this mountain—and I'm *dying* to see things from a new perspective.

IGO

Be careful what you wish for. It's never wise to push the boundaries of forces that we can't see.

STEPHEN

And who can we trust to prove that such forces exist? If the word of your long-lost mother is *really* something to go by?

IGO

Steph, don't try it—

STEPHEN

Hey, hey, relax! I'm not here to pick a fight. We don't have to have one. It's just a matter of proving this one thing to me, Igo. This one thing, about magic in our midst.

To see is to believe—that will be enough for me.

(pocketing IGO's pendant, with the string hanging out) Come on then! Let's go further out. Let's look for the other magic roots like this one.

BIBOY

Steph... Steph. *(his breath and speech have slowed since he started drinking)* Is, is this a good idea? We're running on low power, and it feels like we've already been out so long. Don't you think that they'll—

STEPHEN

They? Who do you mean, the adults?

STEPHEN swipes the bottle back from BIBOY, takes a long drink, and mimics inebriated mannerisms that he picked up from his father: whooping, wolf-whistling, and coughing.

STEPHEN

Hhheeyyy, that's a low top and short shorts—a little *too* short if you asked me! Come here, sit on my lap. You've grown so big, you dress like a big girl. Won't you give your *tito* a big kiss?

IGO

(turns his head away in embarrassment, as if he knows just what STEPHEN is talking about)

BIBOY

(his face falls; he speaks in a defeated tone) It's-it's not so bad...

STEPHEN

With those charms of yours, you must be reveling in their attention! Hhhey hheeyyy! You got a boyfriend yet? Look at my sons. Biboy's fat, but he's got an earnest face that any girl's mother would love. And he's responsible—unlike me, he'd make someone a fine husband someday.

And look at my older boy Steph! Not as behaved, but he's good at getting what we wants! And he's tall and big-footed, if you know what I mean—

(makes a disgusted noise) Magic spells. Enchantment. Otherworldly charms.

Otherworldly love affairs. As if any of those fix our hang-ups in the real world?

STEPHEN *finishes the contents of the small bottle and drops it on the ground.*

STEPHEN

As if magic can save what's it been like for our parents. *(looks at IGO and sneers)* As well as for *yours*.

IGO

(quickly snaps his head forward) Why, you—

STEPHEN

What, am I lying to you? Does your dad sugar-coat things if he tells you anything at all? Because I don't feel I need to.

IGO *tries to make another move on STEPHEN, but he dodges.*

STEPHEN

So you believe in something that I don't... and it looks like you'd do anything to show us this "root of all magic" that you speak of.

If things go your way, we'll find the root and—

IGO

You'll give back my necklace.

STEPHEN

Of course. I'll give back your necklace.

IGO

And then you'll lay off. You'll leave me alone.

STEPHEN

Sure, I'll leave you alone.

BIBOY

And everything... after this... will be back to normal...

STEPHEN

Everything will be—

While the boys argue, the configuration of the forest shifts again slightly. The view of a darker, more thicketed area becomes apparent.

The strange forest sounds, with the note of a human voice, recur.

BIBOY

(uneasy) I... I don't feel so good. Can you let me go ahead? If I need to puke... I'll just find a spot. Let me walk ahead. When I get to safe ground, I'll shine the flashlight back on you two.

BIBOY staggers forward at a quick, but erratic pace.

STEPHEN

Biboy! Don't walk so fast!

BIBOY

It should be okay. We should be okay. We're almost there, where we want to be. *(forces a smile)* Just beyond... are our answers...

BIBOY moves on ahead in the direction that he indicates. With the pace that he keeps, he is soon out of sight [OFFSTAGE].

From some distance, the beam of the flashlight can still be seen. But gradually, the strength of the light fluctuates—indicating that the battery has indeed started failing in earnest.

*Consequently, it grows darker on the stage.
The configuration of the greenery shifts once
again.*

*BIBOY tries to retch, but something unseen
agitates him. The last that is heard from him is
a gasp of shock, and then a suffocated cry.*

*Near-total darkness consumes the stage.
There is absolute silence for several beats.*

STEPHEN

What's happened? What's happened? ... Biboy? Biboy!

IGO

Biboy! Can you hear us?

STEPHEN

Biboy? *(desperately)* Biboy! Where are you! Why aren't you answering!

*STEPHEN and IGO continue to call out. They
hear nothing in response.*

*STEPHEN grows frantic and increases his
volume. IGO also continues to call, but the
moment he and his cousin bump into each*

*other, he discreetly tries to swipe at the string
dangling from STEPHEN's pocket.*

STEPHEN, *caught off-guard, is enraged by his
underhandedness.*

STEPHEN

You—!

IGO

Steph, I need it back. If I wear it again, maybe I can—

STEPHEN

How dare you, you selfish little bastard, pulling a fast one on me like that?! Igo, Biboy's gone! What if something's happened to him? Don't you give half a shit that he might be in danger?

IGO

Steph, it's not that, we can find him, I just need to—

STEPHEN

(grabs IGO and shakes him roughly) Need to what? Chant a magic spell? Close your eyes, wait for an apparition from heaven?

STEPHEN *strikes IGO and sends him reeling
to the ground.*

STEPHEN

You think you've got it better than we have? This whole time suddenly acting like a nature boy, as if you've grown some special sixth sense—and as if, I don't the hell know... as if you've found out you're the long-lost son of Mariang Makiling?! You think you've a mom who's more special than ours—well, at least our mom stayed!

IGO

(under his breath) She was a woman with dignity and spine—

STEPHEN

But is what you think of her even real?!

And you... you think “coming back to your roots” here in some far-flung backwater Laguna forest while the adults lose their bearings—you think that will change that we're of the same blood?

(laughing sardonically) Can magic ever change what's ugly about human nature, cousin? Like how our dad treats our mom, and other women and children? And how he talks about *your* dad living the same way?

If that's the case—and if *you* yourself can be this underhanded, and this callous—and if, just if, your story is real... then it's no wonder your goddamned *diwata* mother ascended from the earth and abandoned you all! Leaving you crumbs like a necklace with a fake magic story as a sorry excuse for a fake memento!

IGO roars and punches STEPHEN in the face.

The boys start to trade blows. STEPHEN remains aggressive, but gradually, IGO begins to match his savagery. He lashes out with surprising strength.

They take to the floor. IGO feels around and finds the empty alcohol bottle. It gleams in the air. He gains the upper hand and begins to beat STEPHEN with it; his aim is sloppy, but he strikes with less and less hesitation.

At some point, STEPHEN cries out weakly and stops resisting. IGO manages to snatch the necklace from him.

IGO stands up and puts the necklace back on.

The forestry in the scene shifts again, for the last time. SPOTLIGHT on IGO is bright and stark.

IGO enters a trance-like state and begins to address the audience. He touches his pendant from time to time.

IGO

No one knows, but sometimes, this happens to me. I come to a point where I feel I'm... extending... way out... beyond myself. My strength, my sight, and my attunement to nature—I feel like I can reach the ends of the earth because I have a hundred eyes, a hundred ears, and a hundred long-reaching arms.

Like a snake. Or a spider. Or one of the mythic creatures in my cousin Biboy's stories.

(with a sinister expression) I don't know why they talk about magic as if it's so easy to understand.

As if it could only have one side to it. As if it's just an issue of achieving a clear, knowable, happy ending.

So maybe it's true that there's a dark side to my father—and that the apples didn't fall far from the same lecherous, poisoned tree. It's true that my mother left us. And there are precious few things I remember of her besides this necklace and the tales of Makiling he cared to tell me.

And when he gave me this pendant a couple years ago, when he said that I might as well have it—that I had *come of age*—and he told me the version I hold dear to my heart... I felt, not satisfied, but emptier—hungrier. As if there was more than what he said was the truth.

About me... about magic... about everything.

(after pausing, he raises his voice) You. You here. If you can hear me... if you can hear me... I came here to the forest with my own questions, looking for my own answers.

What if I could do away with the weight of *their* world? What if I had more of *your* power and *your* perception?

They said, to see is to believe...

Now, it seems that my path is clear.

Can you show yourself to me?

IGO closes his eyes, breathes in deeply, and grasps at his necklace.

A barrage of distorted noise—something akin to loud wind and the condensed buzzing of many mosquitoes—echoes for a prolonged time throughout the stage.

The last note in this gust of noise is unmistakably human. It is a low, ethereal, and feminine voice.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

YOU. WHO HAVE CHOSEN. WHO HAVE MADE YOUR WAY.

COME. COME HITHER. COME.

The stage goes completely dark. It remains so for a few beats.

LIGHTS COME BACK ON. *A faint beam is cast on STEPHEN, who awakens in delirium from his unconscious state. He wipes off blood from a gash on his forehead.*

IGO is nowhere to be seen.

STEPHEN

Biboy? Biboy? Can you hear me, little brother?

Are you okay? You'll be okay soon! The hunt is over! It seems... not too far from here...

I see something yellow, white, and gold—a flower... the flower we were looking for?

(wiping his brow again, grasping at the air) Igo called it... the root of all magic. And what magic—magic!—does it have in store for us?

Biboy... I'm coming toward it now! I'll pluck it... with my own two hands... it shouldn't be hard... it should be light as a feather.

Biboy? Can you hear me? Biboy! Biboy...

LIGHTS FADE OUT *on STEPHEN's exit as he continues, with heightening urgency, to call out for his brother.*

[END]