

SALVAGED EMAN

SYNOPSIS:

Emmanuel Agapito Flores Lacaba (1949-1976), or Eman, was among the countless youths who participated in the series of demonstrations that rocked Philippine society in the tumultuous first three months of 1970, which was to be encoded in history as the First Quarter Storm (FQS). Already a formidable poet in his own right at the time, he did not figure prominently in the protest movement of the new decade.

But he did -- in its aftermath.

On the third year of martial law, Eman set aside a promising literary career and left bourgeois Manila for the dissident guerilla war front of Mindanao where he wrote, among others, the immortal poem "Open Letters to Filipino Artists," its last part composed three months before his tragic death in 1976. He was 27.

The title *Salvaged Eman* is inspired by how his two books, *Salvaged Poems* and *Salvaged Prose*, have been titled -- because his works that made up the two volumes were salvaged from forgotten shelves and trunks, old clippings, and discarded files. *Salvaged Poems* and *Salvaged Prose* were published posthumously by the Ateneo de Manila Press, undoubtedly to honor one of the university's revered heroes who died in the struggle against the Marcos martial law regime.

Of course we know what “salvage” means: *to rescue, to save*. But during the Marcos dictatorship, “salvage” took on a fearsome meaning which was its exact opposite: “to execute summarily or kill extrajudicially.” Those who were “salvaged” were activists, Marcos critics and suspected rebels. And those who perpetrated the “salvagings” were commonly acknowledged as the state security agents.

On March 18, 1976, a team of the Philippine Constabulary and the paramilitary Civilian Home Defense Forces “salvaged” Eman and three of his companions, including an 18-year old pregnant woman, after they chanced upon the peasant hut in an interior village in Mindanao where the rebels were staying.

How they met their fate, as it were, was by itself a blood-curdling story; how Eman was killed was horrific. But Eman, the stories have it, remained stoic till the end.

The significance of *Salvaged Eman* does not lie in the horror and inhumanity of his murder and those of his comrades; in fact, Death would be just a moment in the whole play. *Salvaged Eman* shall dwell on Life -- how and why Eman came to be, in Ateneo’s hallowed Ignatian creed, “a man for others,” although not exactly in the theological spirituality of it all, but in the dialectical materialism of Philippine society in the grip of a dictatorship.

THE CHARACTERS:

Be not daunted by the long cast list. Other than Eman and Lalli, all actors, particularly the 12 students, could take on multiple roles.

EMAN LACABA -- dissident writer and poet, Lalli's comrade and husband, mid-30s

PROFESSOR --fFormal and strict, 40s (preferably female)

LALLI -- Eman's comrade and wife, a bit older than him

PETE LACABA -- Eman's elder brother, 70s

DEL -- young activist in the underground

SITO -- young activist in the underground

MARTIN -- a ratter NPA, Eman's killer

ROWENA -- a pregnant young NPA guerilla

JING -- youthful leader of the NPA

DOY --an NPA guerilla

CELIA -- an underground courier

NPA GUERILLA 1 and 2

STUDENT 1 to 12

DEMONSTRATORS

UNION STRIKERS

PC-CHDF SERGEANT

PEASANT 1 to 3

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AGENTS 1 and 2

PC-CHDF SOLDIER 1 and 2

VOICE OF MALE RADIO REPORTER

VOICE FEMALE RADIO REPORTER

VOICE OF RADIO NEWSCASTER

VOICE OF FRANCISCO TATAD (Marcos' spokesperson)

THE LOCATION SETTING/STAGE:

We are breaking away from a couple of established theater conventions and will, for instance, merge actors and acting spaces with audience members and where they sit to watch. The problem of location shifts could be solved by making the cast change costumes, put on accessories, etc. right where they are among the audience.

THE TIME SETTING:

Various moments from 1970 to 1976; and the present, 2019. The time shifts could likewise be remedied by doing most behind-the-scene chores right on the scene.

SCENE 1

The STUDENTS are preset in their designated spaces among the audience. The PROFESSOR is at the front, with a table and chair by her side.

STUDENTS

Invisible the mountain routes to strangers:
For rushing toes an inch-wide strip on boulders
And for the hand that's free a twig to grasp,
Or else we headlong fall below to rocks
And waterfalls of death so instant that
Too soon they're red with skulls of carabaos.

PROFESSOR

(To the audience.) “Open Letters to Filipino Artists” by Emmanuel Agapito Flores Lacaba, one of the most anthologized and studied poems in recent times... If we need to talk about the radical tradition in Philippine literature, “Letters to Filipino Artists” will surely stand out . . . especially considering how the poet had lived and died – which happens to be (turns to the STUDENTS) your assignment. And speaking of, how is your research going?

STUDENT 1

(To the audience.) Eman died young. He was twenty-seven years old.

STUDENT 2

(To the audience.) He resided in Pateros, Rizal, studied in the Ateneo. Wrote more in English than in Filipino.

PROFESSOR

Thank you two. Did the rest read Ed Maranan's review?

SOME STUDENTS

Yes, ma'am!

STUDENTS

But patient guides and teachers are the masses:

Of forty mountains and a hundred rivers;

Of plowing, planting, weeding, and the harvest;

And of a dozen dialects that dwarf

This foreign tongue we write each other in

Who must transcend our bourgeois origins.

PROFESSOR

So! What does Ed Maranan have to say about Eman's poem?

STUDENT 2

According to Mr. Maranan, "Open Letters to Filipino Artists," is a passionate testament of a bourgeois intellectual who had transcended his class origins.

STUDENT 9

Wow, that is heavy!

PROFESSOR

Ahoy there, Mr. Heavy! Would you care explain?

STUDENT 9

Eh, ma'am, it sounded real heavy I could almost nosebleed.

PROFESSOR

Some tissue for the nosebleeder.

Giggling.

PROFESSOR

Anyone?

STUDENT 2

(To the audience.) Eman Lacaba was able to remold or change himself.

PROFESSOR

Yes! And just exactly what it means is what I want to hear from you!

STUDENT 3

Ma'am, Eman raised himself to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole, quote-unquote.

STUDENT 9

Arrgh! I could die just hearing all that!

PROFESSOR

(To STUDENT 9.) Mister, I understand what you feel. But keep your frustrations to yourself, please. (To the STUDENTS.) Theory of historical movement... Taken from?

Nobody answers.

PROFESSOR

Anyone?

STUDENT 4 raises hand.

PROFESSOR

Yes, my dear!

STUDENT 4

Karl Marx, ma'am.

STUDENT 10

(Surprised.) Karl Marx? Of Marxism-Leninism?

STUDENT 4

(To STUDENT 10.) What else! Have you not read the assignment?

STUDENT 10

But are we talking about Karl Marx now?

PROFESSOR

Do we have a problem with Karl Marx, guys?

STUDENT 3

The Red-taggers have a problem, ma'am!

Laughter.

STUDENT 5

Ma'am, Lorraine has a problem with Marx!

STUDENT 6

(Upset.) What? Why me?

STUDENT 5

It's not you! I mean another Lorraine!

PROFESSOR

You mean, that Lorraine who hijacks TV shows to force through her kind of logic?

STUDENT 5

Yes, ma'am! That Lorraine!

STUDENT 6

Clear it up, *oy!* I am not *boba* like her!

Giggling.

STUDENT 5

Sorry na.

STUDENT 7

Then there's that troll who is actually an army general! He also has a problem with Karl Marx!

STUDENT 8

And that intelligence officer who peddles fake news and passes them off as artistic expression! LOL!

STUDENT 1

Really . . . what do they know?

STUDENTS

You want to know, companions of my youth
How much has changed the wild but shy young poet
Forever writing last poem after last poem;
You hear he's dark as earth, barefoot,
A turban round his head, a bolo at his side,
His ballpen blown up to a long-barreled gun:
Deeper still the struggling change inside.

PROFESSOR

Ed Maranan also says that Eman Lacaba's "Open Letters" is considered as . . . what?

STUDENT 2

A literary benchmark, ma'am?

PROFESSOR

In what aspect?

STUDENT 2

In . . . form and content, ma'am?

PROFESSOR

Are you asking me?

STUDENT 2

Literary benchmark in form and content, ma'am!

PROFESSOR

In the form and content paradigm, yes! In Eman's poem, he has achieved the unity of form and content!

STUDENTS

Like husks of coconut he tears away

The billion layers of his selfishness.

Or learns to cage his longing like the bird

Of legend, fire, and song within his chest.

Now of consequence is his anemia

From lack of sleep: no longer for Bohemia,
The lumpen culturati, but for the people, yes.

PROFESSOR

Ed Maranan also cites critics who say that "Open Letters" is the ars poetica of the radical tradition in Philippine letters."

STUDENT 9

Ars poetica?

PROFESSOR

Who is that?

Meekly, STUDENT 9 raises hand.

PROFESSOR

It's you again. Did you read, or did you not read, the assignment?

STUDENT 9

Did not read, ma'am.

PROFESSOR

If you only did, I am sure you would have met ars poetica.

STUDENT 9

(To seatmate.) Then I am right, after all! Ars poetica is some person!

PROFESSOR

(Strikes forehead in exasperation.) Write it down! Two words, A-R-S, first word.

Second word, P-O-E-T-I-C-A. Ars poetica! Look it up! And tell me what kind of animal it is!

The STUDENTS do as told.

PROFESSOR

In the lines of Eman Lacaba resonates the world outlook of the Third World poets, like Otto Rene Castillo of Guatemala . . . who wrote the famous?

STUDENT 3

“To the Apolitical Intellectuals”!

PROFESSOR

Thank you, Sandra. That poem by Otto Rene Castillo is another tutorial for progressive writers and poets. Please find time to learn from it. But let us go back to Eman’s poem.

STUDENTS

He mixes metaphors but values more

A holographic and geometric memory

For mountains: not because they are there

But because the masses are there where

Routes are jigsaw puzzles he must piece together.

Though he has been called a brown Rimbaud,
He is no bandit but a people's warrior.

As the STUDENTS recite this last part of the poem, they gather at the center.

PROFESSOR

We are tribeless --

STUDENTS

And all tribes are ours.

PROFESSOR

We are homeless --

STUDENTS

And all homes are ours.

PROFESSOR

We are nameless --

STUDENTS

And all names are ours.

PROFESSOR

To the fascists we are the faceless enemy

Who come like thieves in the night, angels of death:

The ever moving, shining, secret eye of the storm.

STUDENTS

The road less traveled by we've taken –

And that has made all the difference:

The barefoot army of the wilderness

We all should be in time. Awakened, the masses are

Messiah.

Here among workers and peasants our lost

Generation has found its true, its only home.

Lights out.

SCENE 2

LALLI, obviously tired, is at the center space. She is stuffing a big bag with clothes.

Another big bag lies beside her. EMAN enters carrying children's clothes.

EMAN

The last of the children's clothes.

They help one another finish the chore.

EMAN

(Seeing how LALLI is.) Why don't you grab some sleep? C'mon, let me finish this!

LALLI

You really think I could fall asleep?

EMAN

Are you excited more than I am, my dear!

LALLI

Concened, scared... Eman, Mndanao is a strange land.

EMAN

Lalli, I come from Mindanao, you know that. I was born in Cagayan de Oro. I was raised there.

LALLI

Until you were seven. Then your family moved to Pateros. You grew up in Pateros, not anywhere else... Tell me, if you had learned Bisaya as a kid in Mindanao, do you still speak it now?

EMAN

Okay, fine. Now, tell me, why are you scared?

LALLI

(Sighs.) Many comrades have gone to Mindanao ahead of us.

EMAN

And we are seeing all of them there! Isn't it a happy thought?

LALLI

How do you expect to see Lita? Or Leo, your brother-in-law? They are gone! Died in Mindanao! And who else that we know could have died in Mindanao?

EMAN is speechless.

LALLI

I fear for our children.

EMAN

Lalli, we've settled that, right? We've agreed to take Miriam and Egay with us.

LALLI

Because there's no way we can leave them behind. Miriam is four years old. Egay is three.

EMAN is silent again.

LALLI

(Sighs.) And then there's thing about their names.

EMAN

What about their names?

LALLI

Look... It's martial law. Your children carry activist names like they were some badge of courage – your courage. One is Mendiola, another is Egay.

EMAN

Miriam will simply be Miriam. She is dropping Mendiola.

Gun shots rend the air. DEMONSTRATORS scamper. Two of them throw pillboxes, causing two loud explosions and a stream of thin smoke.

DEMONSTRATORS

Mendiola! Sa Mendiola! Regroup tayo sa Mendiola! Mendiola! Mendiola! Mendiola!

(They exit as quickly as they entered.)

MALE VO ANNOUNCER

Johnny, the reinforcement from Camp Olivas has arrived! I can see troopers of Task Force Lawin of the Philippine Army! It doesn't look good! Battle-hardened soldiers versus youthful activists! The assault has started, Johnny! At Gate 4 of Malacañang, the demonstrators have abandoned the firetruck that they earlier hijacked! They are fleeing to all directions! But it looks like they are trapped here in J. P. Laurel street! And they cannot pass through Mendiola Bridge! The bridge has been occupied by the PC Metropolitan Command!

We hear successive gun shots and explosions.

MALE VO ANNOUNCER

But Johnny, they are running right smack to Mendiola Bridge! This is going to be some battle at Mendiola Bridge!

DEMONSTRATORS

(Again, entering and exiting.) Mendiola! Mendiola! Mendiola!

FEMALE VO ANNOUNCER

As of this hour, three o'clock in the morning, January 31, the police have confirmed four fatalities, all killed by gun shots. They are Felicisimo Roldan of San Beda College, Ricardo Alcantara of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Fernando Catabay of Manuel L. Quezon University, and Bernardo Tausa of Mapa High School.

LALLI

Okay, we drop Mendiola. It is just going to be Miriam... How about Egay? Full name, Emanwelga Fe.

Defiant UNION STRIKERS appear bearing a huge streamer on which is painted "Welga kami!" and signed Progresibong Kaisahan ng mga Manggagawa. They form a barricade as we hear the sound of motor vehicles.

UNION STRIKERS

Welga! Welga! Welga! Igalang ang welga ng mga manggagawa! Bawal ang pulis at eskirol dito! Welga! Welga! Welga! Welga!

UNION STRIKERS get into a tableau in defense of their picketline, and freeze.

LALLI

I was heavy with Emanwelga Fe when you and the union strikers were arrested in Pasig.

EMAN

And I was teaching in UP at the same time.

LALLI

Just days after you were all released, Marcos declared martial law!

EMAN

Can you imagine? Had we been still in jail, we could be languishing there until who knows when!

The UNION STRIKERS exit. We hear static radio sound as a prelude to the following.

VO OF FRANCISCO TATAD

This is Secretary Francisco Tatad. Tonight at seven o'clock, the president of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, will address the nation. Meantime, I shall read to you the full text of Proclamation Number 1081 Proclaiming a State of Martial Law in the Philippines duly signed by President Marcos, commander-in-chief of all the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

EMAN and LALLI are almost done with the bags.

VO OF FRANCISCO TATAD

Whereas, on the basis of carefully evaluated and verified information, it is definitely established that lawless elements who are moved by a common or similar ideological conviction, design, strategy and goal and enjoying the active moral and material support

of a foreign power and being guided and directed by intensely devoted, well trained, determined and ruthless groups of men and seeking refuge under the protection of our constitutional liberties to promote and attain their ends, have entered into a conspiracy and have in fact joined and banded their resources....

LALLI moves to exit as Tatad's voice fades out. EMAN, carrying the two bags, follows her.

EMAN

Ready to go!

LALLI pauses and turns around to look at EMAN, her face wrought with much concern.

Light out.

SCENE 3

In the center, LALLI is busy with the typewriter. EMAN enters. He has come from his job as a bus conductor, a towel hanging by his neck and a small bag slung across his chest. DEL, carrying a fairly big backpack, is with him.

EMAN

(Busses LALLI.) Pasensya na, akong hinigugma, nagabhan ko.

LALLI

(Amused.) What?

DEL

How are you, 'Day?

EMAN

Hey, I just said, "*Pasensya na, mahal ko, ginabi ako*" to you.

LALLI

(To DEL.) Your friend is trying to impress me, Del! How does his Bisaya sound?

DEL

Hmm. Sounds unnatural.

EMAN

Two weeks! Give me two more weeks!

LALLI

Take your time, honey!

EMAN

How are the kids, honey?

LALLI

Slept early. They got bored waiting for you.

EMAN

(Takes out a paper bag.) I told them I'd bring a surprise.

LALLI takes the paper bag.

EMAN

Lalli . . . do you think Del here could spend the night over?

LALLI

Hmm, yes, but we need to inform the owner of the house. (To DEL.) I am sorry, Del... but as you know, we are just sharing space here.

DEL

I understand.

LALLI

But Alice will not say no.

EMAN

Del only needs to kill time. He leaves early morning.

DEL

(Taps his bag, speaks in a low voice.) I am going to the zone!

LALLI

Is that right?

DEL

I have long waited for this -- a long journey on foot, across rivers and mountains!

LALLI

(Feels DEL's backpack.) Looks like you're staying there for some time! Or is it for good?

DEL

Nah. Just a couple of weeks.

LALLI

Then why this huge luggage?

DEL

These are mostly requested stuff – requested by pleading women, your kind.

LALLI

How is that?

DEL

Elisa and the rest!

EMAN

They all begged Del to buy them --?

DEL

Lots and lots of sanitary napkins!

LALLI

(Laughs.) You have to understand, men! t's not easy getting used to the coarse and messy *pasador*. In the olden times, however, my kind had no problem with the *pasador*.

(Laughs.)

EMAN

By the way, Lalli, I might have to quit my job. I plan to inform the manager of the minibus company, the sooner the better.

LALLI

(Intrigued.) Why? Is there a problem?

EMAN

Well, in the first place, I have already learned the ins and outs to the city. No way we can get lost.

DEL

Your husband has a knack for directions, 'Day! Amazing.

EMAN

Put up an honor roll for bus conductors and I bet I'd be in the top 5, even as I speak lousy Bisaya.

LALLI

Then why resign? We need what you earn. Tides us over, for the groceries, you know.

EMAN

This morning, one passenger kept staring at me, gazing at me. He looked familiar, like he'd been with us in our Manila-Rizal committees. I suspect he used to be with District 4. He could be the ally who helped us in the workers strike in the printing press in Mandaluyong.

LALLI

Is that so..? But did you shake him off?

EMAN

Yes. Perhaps he convinced himself that I couldn't be a bus conductor in this part of the world..! But what if a passenger got into my bus who was an Ateneo student or some friend from Katipunan? One who really knows me up close?

Silence.

EMAN

I am looking for another job. One that won't expose me to crowds, and will not be too tiring.

LALLI

What job would that be?

EMAN

Well, I spotted a sign for a job opening in the karate club, near the church.

DEL

What? You are going to teach karate? Now I really have to believe how amazing you are! Superb in English, in writing, too. And now, a karate instructor!

EMAN

Janitor. The job opening is for a janitor in the karate club.

LALLI

But he really knows karate, Del!

EMAN

(Performs a convincing stance.) Not much, but yes, I know a little.

DEL

(Amazed.) Oh, look at that!

Somebody calls offstage.

SITO (OS)

(Harried.) *Ayo! Ayo!*

They wonder who could it be.

EMAN

It sounds like Sito! (Steps out.)

LALLI

Let me do it! (Exits past EMAN.)

She returns with SITO in tow.

DEL

Sito! Ayaw ingna naay problema!

SITO

Naa gyud... Celia, our courier who is supposed to accompany you to the zone, went missing for most of the day.

DEL

What do you mean?

SITO

It's complicated. Anyway, at six o'clock this evening, she finally appeared in one of our posts, a store. But she looked different, weird. She was pale like a corpse... And she wore what looked like new clothes. She had company, two men who kept a distance. Our man in the store wanted to greet her but she kept a stern face, her eyes glaring. She didn't smile one bit. We all know Celia. She had that smile plastered across her face. This time, she was on the verge of tears.

LALLI

What does it all mean?

SITO

It was a warning that she wanted to convey! Then, instead of proceeding to the store, she walked past it. Walked away! Our man in the post sensed danger, acted nonchalantly, and left. From a distance, he turned back to see what's with Celia.

LALLI

What?

In another space, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AGENTS 1 and 2 restrain a struggling and weeping CELIA.

SITO

Celia was crying, struggling against two men who eventually forced her into land cruiser.

CELIA and the MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AGENTS exit.

LALLI

(Uneasy.) Do we pack up and transfer to another house again, Sito?

SITO

You stay put. Don't worry. Celia doesn't know about this place. She doesn't know much

about you and Eman. (Hands a small piece of folded and taped paper to EMAN.) Take this, Eman. I am told this is urgent... Del, come with me now.

DEL and SITO step out.

SITO

(To EMAN.) I will be back for your answer to that letter.

EMAN

All right.

SITO and DEL finally exit. EMAN untapes and unfolds the piece of paper and reads.

LALLI watches him, sensing something out of the ordinary.

EMAN

(After reading.) I am being advised to prepare to leave. The route to my area of assignment in the barrio has been secured. I am finally going to the zone.

LALLI

(Keeps still.) Eman... (Turns to look at EMAN, and turns away.)

EMAN

O?

LALLI

The kids and I are going back to Manila. To Pateros.

EMAN

What?

LALLI

That is the best thing to do . . . under the circumstances.

What follows is a heavily-laden repartee between husband and wife, not in anger or remorse, but compassion.

LALLI

We've transferred houses three times since arriving here.

EMAN

I didn't expect it.

LALLI

Our children have become unsettled, confused. They are strangers here, and they sense it.

EMAN

I know.

LALLI

And we know as well that our comrades are having a hell of a time making us feel at home and all that. And I appreciate it.

EMAN

They are doing their best –

LALLI

But their best is not good enough.

EMAN

Scouting around for allies who can take you and Miriam and Egay in when I am gone.

LALLI

I can adjust to that. But not the kids.

EMAN

You have your assignment here in the white area, remember. Are you going to abandon

--

LALLI

Listen to me... Miriam has been asking a lot of questions. I am having a hard time replying.

EMAN

I will talk to her.

LALLI

How can that be when you are no longer around? Write her letters? I will read them for

her? Not good enough.

EMAN is silent.

LALLI

Look kindly on me, Eman. You know me more than anybody else. We were together in organizing communities and the urban poor in Pateros, Pasig, Mandaluyong! We were together in the picket lines and protest rallies all over Rizal!

VOICES (OS)

*Marcos, Hitler, Diktador, Tuta! Marcos, Hitler, Diktador, Tuta!// Sagot sa martial law?
Digmaan, digmaan, digmaang bayan!*

LALLI

I am not playing difficult and problematic, you know that. It's not me. It's the situation.
(Turns to EMAN and hugs him.) Look kindly on me, Eman! Not for my sake, but for our children!

EMAN embraces LALLI. Lights out.

SCENE 4

The STUDENTS are back in their classroom setting, and the PROFESSOR, too.

STUDENT 4

Ma'am, if I may....

PROFESSOR

Yes, you may.

STUDENT 4

This research on Eman in Mindanao . . . has not been easy.

PROFESSOR

I warned you early on, didn't I? I said, the accounts available are sketchy and read like they came from only one source. How does one confirm, validate, them? That is the challenge in research.

STUDENT 5

Eman and Lalli's stint in Mindanao was brief, not even two years. They came there in late 1974 or early 1975. By March 1976, Eman was already dead.

PROFESSOR

Agreed. In any event, let us get to the bottom: Why did Eman and family go to Mindanao?

In the center space, STUDENT 1, 2, and 3 interview PETE.

PETE

You will have to excuse me, but I have no personal information about your research

topic. For the longest time, my brother and I were not in touch. I didn't even know how he turned activist. Then, all too suddenly, it was martial law. I went underground, was arrested, tortured.

STUDENT 2

Why did you go underground, Sir Pete? Was it because of your poem "Prometheus Unbound"?

PETE

I wrote that when I was already in the underground.

STUDENT 3

Then, was it because of what you wrote that was critical of the Marcos administration?

PETE

You can say that and more. I had also been a unionist... Anyway, when I was in detention, Eman visited me one rare day. It was late 1974, in Camp Crame.

STUDENT 1

Was he alone, sir?

PETE

He came with my mother.

STUDENT 2

Ma'am Fe. Her name was Fe, right, sir?

PETE

Yes.

STUDENT 3

There you have it! Eman's second child is Emanwelga Fe.

PETE

(Nods.) My mother never missed visiting me on weekends. Eman's visit was a complete surprise.

The STUDENTS await what PETE will say next.

PETE

He visited me because he wanted to see me before he went to Mindanao. It's some kind of goodbye.

STUDENT 1

Why Mindanao?

PETE

When Eman died in 1976, that was a difficult question to answer. Remember, it was only the fourth year of martial law. I had just been released. So I was evasive. "He went to Mindanao perhaps because he was doing research, collecting materials for his poems, novels, plays."

The STUDENTS remain quiet.

PETE

I learned about Eman's death from General Ramos himself, on the day that I was to be released from prison. Before he handed me my release papers, he inquired, "By the way, are you related to the Manuel Lacaba who was killed in Mindanao?" So it was frontpage stuff on that day.

Silence.

PETE

"There are Lacabas all over Mindanao, General Ramos. My father was Mindanaoan. We were born there, in CDO."

STUDENT 2

You did not confirm that Eman was your brother, sir?

PETE

I did not, because the name that he mentioned was Manuel, not Emmanuel. Manuel was what was in the news. But I strongly suspected that it was indeed Eman.

STUDENT 3

So, Sir Pete, why did your brother go to Mindanao?

PETE

(Looks at his interviewers straight in the eye.) To join what was called as the highest

form of struggle, the armed struggle. People's war.

The STUDENTS remain silent, looking at one another.

PETE

Hippie, occultist, Bohemian, athlete, consistent scholar. Award-winning writer. He turned his back against all that, against a professional career, endured separation from his own family. Joined the New People's Army.

The STUDENTS fall silent, hearing a solemn mantra.

PETE

Why do you look as if it's the first time you're hearing it? This is not the first time, is it?

STUDENT 1

No, sir. We've heard it before.

PETE

So?

STUDENT 1

We are trying to find the connection, the context, that makes sense of the past and the present.

STUDENT 3

They are demonizing the likes of Eman, nowadays especially.

STUDENT 2

They say that the youth are abandoning their future --

STUDENT 1

Their schooling and family.

STUDENT 3

They say we let ourselves be deceived by agitators --

STUDENT 2

Turning us into terrorists, enemies of the state . . . only to end up in prison.

STUDENT 1

Or in unmarked graves.

PETE

Like Eman?

The STUDENTS agree.

PETE

(Smiles enigmatically.) They will never know my brother as I knew him. (Smiles, finding solace in the company of the young people with him; then he looks afar.)

The STUDENTS warmly shake PETE'S hand. Lights dim. PETE and the STUDENTS exit.

PROFESSOR

The road taken by Eman was the same road taken by the martyrs and heroes in our people's continuing struggle for freedom, democracy, and progress. They are far too many. But let me offer you one fine example from way way back, Emilio Jacinto, your age -- eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old. Emilio Jacinto was a student at the University of Sto. Tomas, was taking up law. He set aside his dream of becoming a lawyer, even disregarding his family . . . for what? For membership in the Katipunan. For participation in the people's armed struggle. For the revolution. Was he deceived or did he allow himself to be fooled by Andres Bonifacio and the leaders of the revolutionary movement? Or did he embrace a social cause that was far greater than personal interest..? Now, how about Eman? Or Edgar Jopson? Or Maria Lorena Barros? Eugene Grey? Billy Begg? Lt. Crispin Tagamolila? Andrea Rosal..? They are far too many. And there will be more.

Light out.

SCENE 5

The PROFESSOR continues to hold class.

PROFESSOR

Let us deconstruct the poem, identify the outstanding imageries. What does the poem want us to behold, to feel, to think about.

In another space, JING, DOY, and pregnant ROWENA enter (they are among the STUDENTS who now play their second roles). EMAN is with them. They are all armed. EMAN sports a turban of native cloth, a bolo tied round his waist. They traverse the peaks and valleys of the wilderness.

ROWENA

I could imagine Eman as he traversed the wilderness.

DOY

I could feel the danger, the fear, and the excitement, too.

ROWENA

City-bred Eman bore all this.

DOY

Like what he said, with a mere misstep, you fall to your death among the bones and skulls of carabaos.

They meet PEASANT 1.

PEASANT 1

(TO ROWENA.) *Anak*, how can you, in your condition, withstand all this marching and exhaustion?

ROWENA

(Clutches tummy.) Surprise, *kasama!* I can manage. Just taking it easy, one step at a time.

PEASANT 1

If this were just a level field, yes. But this is all ups and downs... Anyway, come, let me show you a shorter route. (Leads the pack.)

ROWENA

Just as Eman said, the masses are patient guides and teachers.

EMAN and company thank PEASANT 1 who stays behind as they continue their trek. They meet BLAAN 1 and 2, and NPA 1 (from among the cast of STUDENTS). Warm greetings. EMAN tries hard to understand and communicate with gestures and signs.

NPA 1

Eman does not understand the Blaan language. But it does not deter him from interacting with them... In less than two months, he could already speak it... He learned the native language, and more of the Blaan. The natives also learned a lot from him.

JING

By this time, Eman had assumed another name, Popoy.

BLAAN 1 and 2 exit. PEASANT 2 enters. They greet one another again.

PEASANT 2

Maayo siya. Kanunay dunay ginabuhay. Usahay magdrowing siya. Mora'g komiks. Usa lang ka ban peyper, ginatupi. Unya drowingan niya'g mga tawo nga nag-istoryahay.

JING

He was kind. And always kept busy. If not helping out in the chores of the folks, he was drawing images. Like in a *komiks* pamphlet. He folded a piece of bond paper then drew people talking in frames.

PEASANT 2

Ginapabasa niya sa amo. Usahay siya pa ang magbasa kundili kamao mobasa ang kaatubang niya. Maayo baya. Mga kwento sa among inadlaw-adlaw nga kinabuhi.

JING

He asked us to read it. At times, he himself would read if the person didn't know how. Stories of our daily lives were the topics he illustrated.

EMAN, ROWENA, JING, and DOY bid goodbye to PEASANT 2. They resume their journey.

PEASANT 2

This guy Popoy, he was writing tirelessly. If there was no paper, he looked for cigaret wrappers and wrote poems, his experiences, old folk song that he'd infuse with new lyrics.

DOY

He put a premium on remolding himself, not in the physical sense –

ROWENA

But in the values, in the world-view, in his standpoint and trust in the masses.

DOY

Till the end, Popoy, or Eman, never wavered in the belief that the masses would free themselves and the country.

JING senses danger. Could there be enemies? He makes a hand command.

Everybody takes cover and readies their weapons. Seconds later, JING takes back his order with another hand command. Everybody moves to resume the trek. Soon they feel a drizzle, followed by a roll of thunder in the sky. It is going to rain. Lights out.

SCENE 6

In the peasant hut, EMAN, JING, ROWENA, and DOY, now wearing another set of clothes, enjoy their morning coffee. Nearby, their wet attire and shoes hang by a clothesline. A cock crows.

JING

I used to be a student activist. I belonged to the organization called Khi Rho. When martial law was declared, we took to the hills. It was time to wage armed revolution to deter and win against fascist violence.

ROWENA

I worked in a biscuit factory. We formed a union and wanted to negotiate with management for better working conditions and terms. Management didn't want anything to do with us. We declared a strike. The fascist police assaulted us. I was mauled once, twice.

DOY

I come from a peasant family. My ancestors were peasants way back and all the way to the present. Small wonder that I, too, am a peasant. It's fine. I love tilling the land. But if the land that peasants nurtured, working to death, would forever be somebody else's, how could any peasant be freed from the bondage of the land?

JING

Good question! Now, Popoy, here's another one! Are we really coming out *bida* in the stories that you have been writing?

ROWENA

Listen up! I don't want to be in the *komiks*, but in film, in the movies! Who is playing me, Popoy? Should be a popular *artista*!

EMAN

(Laughing.) Take it easy, people! Don't pounce on me! It's *komiks* first because that's what we could manage to produce right now, assuming that my requisition for paper and assorted ballpens arrive. Let us hope there's going to be black, red, blue, green ink, you know!

JING

In the camp where we are going, there are lots of office supplies.

A nervous PEASANT 3 enters.

PEASANT 3

Mga kasama! I have unpleasant news! The residents have spotted a military patrol!

EMAN and company pick up their rifles.

PEASANT 3

They are coming by the farmland! They'd be here in fifteen-twenty minutes. Thirty at

the most.

JING

How many are they?

PESANT 3

Just five-six. A civilian is with them. Team leader is a sergeant.

EMAN and company look at one another.

JING

That kind of patrol, if we go by our experiences, has no definite target. It's a cursory patrol they do now and then. They will not intrude into houses.

ROWENA

Don't we need to go somewhere else? Take cover?

JING

Only a few know we are here. If we move out, word could get around. We are safer staying put. (To PEASANT 3.) Ka Pedring, I'd suggest you leave us here for the moment. If something happens, you are out of danger.

PEASANT 3

If you say so, *mga kasama!* Take very good care, all of you!

EMAN, JING, DOY, ROWENA

Thank you, Ka Pedring! We'll be fine!

PEASANT 3 exits. EMAN and company pick up their coffee while holding on to their rifles. JING takes a peep. Meantime, in another space, MARTIN leads the way for the SERGEANT and the PC-CHDF on patrol. When he sees the clothes and shoes hanging by the hut, he dives to the ground. The SERGEANT and the PC-CHDF follow suit, rattled.

SERGEANT

What the hell, Martin? What was that for?

MARTIN is unable to speak.

ROWENA

My god! Our clothes and shoes out there! They are going to see our clothes and shoes!

They freeze, jolted by the realization of their deadly mistake. JING moves quickly to retrieve the clothes and shoes.

DOY

Jing! No! They will see you and we will all be gonners!

They prepare for the worst.

SERGEANT

(Crawls to MARTIN.) Idiot, what's the matter? What is it?

MARTIN

They are there, Sarge! In that hut!

The SERGEANT eyes the hut.

MARTIN

That hut?

MARTIN

Yes! Do you not see the clothes and the shoes?

SERGEANT

I do!

MARTIN

Well, those are theirs! Didn't it rain last night? They are drying them up! They are there in that hut!

The armed men fix their sight on the hut.

SERGEANT

Are you sure?

MARTIN

Yes, Sarge!

The SERGEANT makes hand commands. His troops maneuver to advance closer to the hut. And then:

SERGEANT

Fire!

Lights out. What we see are sparks of guns firing in the dark, minus the sound.

Darkness follows.

PROFESSOR

Author Alexander Martin Remollino noted that newly-minted activist Eman often employed in his poems the image of Icarus, the Greek mythological character who flew dangerously close to the sun. He burned his wings, perished, and fell to the ocean. That is what happens to personages pursuing lofty but deadly ideals.

In another space, a PC-CHDF man bawls out his orders to PEASANT 3 who carries bamboo poles and ropes with which to carry the two corpses.

PC-CHDF

On the double! *Ano ba! Bagal-bagal mo! Hindi ka ba kumain?*

In the dim light, the corpses of JING and DOY lie on the ground. ROWENA has a shoulder wound, while EMAN, a leg wound. MARTIN is dazed by the sight of his former comrades now suffering the brunt of his betrayal. On the other hand, the government troops take it easy, smoking and bantering among themselves. The weapons of EMAN and the rest have been collected, and so are their backpacks. PEASANT 3 and PC-CHDF arrive on the scene. They tie to the poles JING and DOY, and also bound the hands of ROWENA and EMAN. Meanwhile, from a distance, PEASANT 1 observes.

SERGEANT

Martin! How are you doing, Martin?

MARTIN gestures that he's OK.

PEASANT 1

Martin was formerly a member of Eman's group. Whether he had been arrested or that he surrendered is not clear. But what is clear is that it was he who confirmed to the government troops where Eman and his comrades had taken shelter, in a peasant hut. Eman and Jing and Doy and Rowena fought it out, but their fault had already defined their fate, so to speak.

PROFESSOR

In our history, there are a host of characters like Martin. There's Patiño who betrayed the Katipunan, Vicos and Becbec who murdered Diego Silang, the Makapili during the Japanese occupation.

As the PROFESSOR and PEASANT 1 speak, MARTIN assists EMAN, while another one assists ROWENA. Both the wounded are in pain. Dead JING and DOY, now tied to the bamboo poles, are carried by PEASANT 3 and the rest. They pull out of the area, carrying, too, the rifles and backpacks of the rebels. The wounded stall the march.

SERGEANT

Goddamit! Can't those two move any faster?

The PC-CHDF shove EMAN and ROWENA.

PEASANT 1

Details of Eman's last moments are hazy. But yes, his leg had been badly wounded.

Where Rowena was hit was vague.

PROFESSOR

At any rate, I appreciate that you've talked to sources.

PEASANT 1

Other than what Sir Pete shared with us, we were able to confirm this part of the story with an independent source.

PROFESSOR

Let us hear it.

PEASANT 1

A few kilometers to the town of Tagum, now a city, the Sergeant spoke out loud his thoughts.

The SERGEANT halts. The rest halt, too. They put down the corpses and all their baggage.

SERGEANT

When we reach Tagum in a while, we shall be obliged to take the wounded to the hospital. Which means we need to spend, and go out of our way to care for them. Such a bother. So, we might as well get rid of them right here, right now. Not one of these rebels shall survive! (Pulls out his .45.) Salvage them! Any volunteer? It's for the country!

Everybody looks unnerved. The PESANTS cringe at the impending acts of murder.

SERGEANT

Fine. You want me to set an example, fine. (Aims his pistol at ROWENA.)

PROFESSOR

We all know. "To salvage" means "to rescue" or "to save." During the Marcos dictatorship, however, the military perverted it and used it to mean the exact opposite: "to finish off," "to kill."

The SERGEANT pulls the trigger. A shot rings out. ROWENA stumbles lifeless.

PROFESSOR

I think there is a new term for that these days.

SERGEANT

EJKs. Extrajudicial killings –

PROFESSOR

One of the best practices of the Marcos martial law dictatorship that, until now, is carried out by the police and military – without having to declare martial law. That is how impunity has been encouraged and bred in our land.

SERGEANT

Martin!

MARTIN approaches the caller, who hands him the gun.

SERGEANT

Here. You do the honors this time.

MARTIN hesitates to get the gun.

SERGEANT

It's up to you, Martin! There's not much choice, however, between a rock and hard place.

MARTIN takes the gun and walks toward EMAN, but he still wavers to perform the job.

SERGEANT

(Yells.) What's with you, Martin? You are taking much of our time! Tagum is still kilometers away!

EMAN and MARTIN stare into each other's eyes.

SERGEANT

Fuck you, Martin!

EMAN

Go ahead, Finish me off.

MARTIN shoves the barrel of the gun into EMAN's mouth. He pulls the trigger. We hear a loud bang. EMAN collapses.

SERGEANT

Be sure he's dead! One more time!

MARTIN shoots the already fallen EMAN one more time.

RADIO NEWSCASTER

Four high ranking leaders of the New People's Army were killed in an encounter with the Philippine Constabulary last March 18 in Barrio Tucaan Balaag, Asuncion town, in Davao del Norte. Only one of the fatalities, Manuel Lacaba, has been identified so far.

Told of the report, President Marcos was elated and cited it as proof of the impending decimation of the communist movement in the country. Meanwhile, in other developments....

PROFESSOR

Do you have questions?

Silence. The death of Eman and the rest has impacted on the class.

PROFESSOR

Then that will be all for today. Thank you, class. I will see you next week.

With a heavy heart, the STUDENTS syep out trudge one after one another. The

PROFESSOR remains.

The poem, set to music, plays.

Lights out.

END
