

The Sanchezes of Old Manila

Melanie V. Talag

*A historical novel
set in the 1890s*



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The Sanchezes were in a quandary —

"Governor Cornejo," Isabel finally found her voice, "I came here tonight for only one reason—to find out why you've arrested my brother Salvador."

At her words, the official was taken aback. Involuntarily he moved away and settled into the cushioned recesses of his chair. He studied the woman then swiftly lit himself another cigar. "I see—" Cornejo replied crisply, "I see."

A variety of expressions flitted across Isabel's mobile face . . . She locked glances with the Governor whose features had once more settled into their hard planes. Esteban Cornejo shook his head jiggling the gray curls crowning his bony forehead.

"Amazing," he finally confessed saluting the girl with a curt nod. "Amazing to find a woman of spirit in such a backward country as Filipinas . . . Look at me—" Cornejo commanded roughly.

Unwillingly, Isabel raised her head. The man's eyes were unbearably naked, his thick eyebrows raised significantly. Isabel drew in her breath. *He couldn't mean it—she thought wildly to herself.*

But he did —

CHAPTER 1

At the prow of the ship Salvador studied the shore rising imperceptibly up to meet them. Boca Chica lay behind, the narrower northern passage to Manila Bay, whose gray blue waters parted in great waves as the laboring steamship negotiated the swells.

Salvador, garbed in a Hongkong-made tweed suit acquired while waiting passage for the Philippines in the Crown Colony, held fast to the railing as waves rocked the ship sending spume bursting up its sides wetting him with a fine drizzle of salty water. He hardly felt it. Absorbed by the long unseen sight materializing before him, he hardly noticed the rising clamor of the ship as both crew and passengers scurried about readying for the landing.

The bastioned and battlemented Old City assumed more concrete form with each passing minute. Red-tiled roofs, church spires and other bulky shapes floated above the great, gray engirding walls staunchly shadowing the green sward that was the Luneta. In the distance wraith-like violet mountain ranges brushed the cloud-enmeshed heavens while lower ranges flanked both sides of the bay.

With a start Salvador came to his senses snapping out of his reverie, realizing the commotion on board, the imminence of the anchorage scarce 500 yards away and the disorder of his room with half his clothes and gear unpacked.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Eyes alight, clutching his bowler to his crown he cast about for the Captain or some officer. Spying a likely looking chap bearing down on him he hurried forward.

"Señor—" he accosted the white-uniformed personage, "I've got some

baggage down in the hold—seedlings and some agricultural machinery—could I ask one of your crew to bring them topside? ”

“Señor Sanchez, isn’t it? ” saluted the immediately attentive man, “I’ve seen you with the Captain at mess, sir. Certainly I’ll be happy to get someone to bring your cargo on deck. And your luggage, Señor? ”

“*Santa Barbara*. Two trunks, my good man, back in my room not even ready. Send him to my room afterwards will you? Here are the papers to identify the stuff. They’ve been numbered and have my name on them.”

Not even bothering to examine the white sheet, the petty officer bowed briefly and left to enlist some overworked fellows for the job while Salvador raced down the companionway to his quarters.

It was noon and blazing, an October day hot and still with hardly a breeze stirring. After the ship shivered and ground to a halt by the massive anchorage, the temperature suffered more. Like a suddenly incapacitated beetle thrown on its back and swarmed over by foraging ants, the *La Paloma* was quickly besieged by smaller vessels—open and covered launches, roofed *cascos* and *bancas* of all sizes.

Salvador, frenziedly putting two open trunks and one valise to rights, darted hither and thither depositing clothing, books and vari-shaped boxes and parcels into the proper container. He decided to carry a feminine-looking round box sashed in striped red and white ribbon and a tall narrow crate the size of a vase, which it was, in fact, a Sevres vase purchased from the famous French factory, for his mother. Inside the lightweight rotund package was a frivolous Parisian creation to be worn on the pretty head of his sister Isabel. He smiled recalling the *pasalubongs* for his family which were calculated to wring ohs and ahs from each of them.

The young man paused in his movements for a moment. Past, present and future merged in that moment—the three years spent in Europe still vivid in recollection teeming with memories, warm or otherwise, the present confusion and the future reunion. He thought the lazy, listless weeks on board the ship would rearrange his senses for the return but his mind still roamed the Continent. By the saints, he could still feel the fine Paris spring drizzle on his upturned face the times he walked the Bois, taste peaches and champagne on his tongue, smell violets in the air. His country, Filipinas, was the amorphous mystery, the shapeless mass to meet and become reacquainted with.

Loud banging on the wooden door snapped Salvador’s reverie. He leapt to his feet quickly stuffing the last bundle of clothing into the overflowing trunk. He hurriedly scanned the crammed interior for anything he might have missed. In two giant strides he reached the door and yanked it open to reveal two sturdily built seamen clad identically in striped shirts and white duck pants.

"Your baggage, Señor Sanchez. Officer Petaña sent us down. Your crate and pots are already above."

"Two minutes, my good men," Salvador beamed then flashed them a comradely smile, silently congratulating himself on having bumped into the right man. "A quick look around for anything missing before strapping down the luggage. The smaller one and those two I'll carry myself."

Most of the passengers had already departed ship by the time the perspiring trio gained the upper deck. Wedging his smart Malacca cane in his armpit to leave his arm free for Isabel's hat box, Salvador started forward. He had barely covered a few feet when he heard his name being called. Eyes darting about, he beheld a smartly dressed lieutenant who looked vaguely like his brother Leandro making his way towards him through the thinning group of people left on board. At the man's elbow stood a prosperous merchant attired in a brown coat wearing a black top hat, an expensive cheroot stuck between his strong teeth. He, on the other hand, resembled Capitan Tangco, his father's great friend—a vastly affluent Filipino highly respected in all circles, be it European, Peninsular, creole, mestizo or native.

Stopping before him, he finally realized they were indeed his brother and the estimable Captain. Unable to move because of the objects that burdened him, he allowed himself to be hugged and back-pounded by the two. Divested of his valise and the hat box he began to move normally, embracing the two in turn in a frankly emotional manner.

"Let me look at you. Let me look at you . . ." Leandro commanded striking a pose before his younger brother, the long slender fingers of one hand tapping his chin as he appraised Salvador. "My God . . ." he declared, "but you've become a man. Hasn't he Capitan?"

The older man—a florid faced, stolid-looking character who looked on Tiburcio Sanchez's family as his own—concurred wholeheartedly. "*Si . . . si . . .* Dadong, your saintly mother will not recognize you. You wear no mustache or goatee but it's there all right on your face."

"Rubbish—" Salvador parried good-humoredly wondering where his father was and why he had not come to meet him. His enthusiasm over the orange seedlings he had brought home and the piece of machinery that would enable them to clean the rice harvested in Laguna without ferrying it all the way to Manila, was boundless and he was eager to lay it before the feet of his father.

"Where's Papa? Didn't he come with you?" He sounded Leandro who, ever the efficient military man, was instructing the sailors to lower the trunks and cargo over the side to the large launch waiting.

"Papa," he remarked ruefully, "is on his way home from the Calamba fiesta. He'll probably be there when we arrive. You know Papa, his weakness

is the fiesta circuit where he can fight his cock and sweep the gambling tables. Whew, its hot. Capitan Tangco, let's go or we'll be broiled alive under this sun."

Propelling them to the narrow stairs leading down to the boats, Leandro took over Salvador's arrival. An hour and a half was spent steaming up the sluggish Pasig bordered by the two long piers extending into the bay marked at one extremity by a small fort and at the other by a lighthouse. This was followed by a cursory inspection at the *garrita* where Leandro's uniform cued the soldiers' actions. Lastly, came the ordeal at the customs house packed, smelly and evilly hot. That edifice was as warm with carabao-driven carts, dogs and ponies nosing for droppings from earthenware *pilones* of *muscovado* sugar, all kinds of citizens and a horde of barefoot, bare-torsoed *cargadores* carrying commodities to and fro. By the time they had taken leave of the Captain and boarded their coach Salvador Sanchez was hot as a chili pepper, tinder-mouthed and completely exhausted.

With two hands he propped the trunks piled on the adjoining seat. Thank the Good Virgin, Simon, the coachman, who was almost rendered speechless at the sight of his young master, had raised the carriage's leather cover. The heavier baggage had been left behind to be brought by carabao cart by one of the house servants who had waited for them at the customs house.

"Here, let me hold that," Leandro offered amiably. "Why don't you get out of your coat?"

"Immediately, brother, immediately." And he struggled out of his smart Hongkong coat now worn and crumpled. Loosing his cravat he dug out a white handkerchief and mopped his glistening face. Removing his bowler, he attempted to seduce a breeze from the airless cauldron. "Madre, but its hot. I'd almost forgotten how murderously hot it can be in the tropics. Simon, hasn't it started to rain yet?"

"Si, Señorito," the driver bobbed his head and sneaked a backward glance to assure himself that Salvador was finally in their midst. "Already we've had two typhoons, but, you know how it is . . ." he shrugged fatalistically.

"It'll probably pour this afternoon, you'll see." Studying the cloud-heavy sky Leandro assured them out loud as they negotiated the three-lane wooden bridge in the San Miguel district leading to the Sanchez villa.

Turning to his older brother, Salvador took his first good look at him. "Well, Leandro, tell me all about them. How's everybody?"

Earlier, he had the sights of the city—the glimpses of the Cathedral, the Ayuntamiento, the Puente de España that led to the Escolta teeming with carriages and pedestrians and parts of Ermita—to titillate his mind but now,

nearing home, he was ready for the briefing that would finally link him to the present.

The carriage wheels and horse's hooves beat a hollow staccato on the left lane of the bridge as they crossed. The right lane was empty of vehicles going the other way as was the middle lane reserved for pedestrians wishing to cross the Pasig. It was nearing two—Manilans had sought and reaped the largesse of the dinner table and now slipped into the customary afternoon siesta. Even horses and other animals had retired to the shade relinquishing sovereignty of the road to the terrible sun. The broad yellow Pasig was almost devoid of water vehicles except for one or two hemp or copra-laden dug-outs heading for some Chinaman or mestizo's *camarin* poled by brawny, sun-baked natives, their muscles straining and bulging underneath lightweight native shirts, their heads shaded by *salakots* or straw hats.

The carriage had turned into the shaded calzada de San Miguel. In a few minutes they would be home.

"Everybody is fine—doing splendidly," Leandro assured him urbanely flipping his small mustache with one hand as he restrained the trunks from slipping off the seat with the other as the wheels encountered a deep rut in the road. Several layers of pulverized stone had gone into making city roads navigable but a single storm wrought sorry havoc creating holes, depositing mud and silt from adjacent banks, etc. Then a fleet of prisoners from Old Bilibid would be dispatched by the city engineer to restore the roads to some semblance of navigability with their spades and tools.

Great two-story white houses, some of them still roofed with nipa, others with red tiles or zinc sheets could be seen through the rows of fences consisting of simple iron poles and square concrete columns. Some houses stood near the street, others were set a little further back framed by wide spreading acacias and *arboles de fuego*, stands of feathery green bamboo and other tropical vegetation.

Salvador silently watched the scenery as he listened to Leandro. While he had caroused in Europe, mainly Spain, France and England, he had also learned the trade and been educated in the intricacies of business. He had met his father's business associates on the Continent who imported the bulk of the coconut oil produced in the hacienda in Laguna. This valuable product was used in making soap. Leandro had stayed home, drilling with his troops in the Walled City, going on forays and skirmishes in the provinces, flushing out *tulisanes* holed fast in their mountain stronghold or treating with the fierce Macabebe warriors settling their disputes with the Tagalog tribes who were their mortal enemies.

Leandro had been to Europe after graduating from military school but exposure to the Old World only fanned his military bent—the sight of brass

cannons in alcazars and walled cities like Carcassonne and Avila stimulated him more than the Venus de Milo or Notre Dame. When he got to the Ruhr and beheld the bellicose creations of Friedrich Krupp of Essen he was positively dazzled and couldn't wait to get home to regale his fellow officers with descriptions of the marvelous munitions forged by the Teutonic sons of Mars. An open, uncomplicated man with few interests other than military, he was the most readily understood member of the Sanchez family and rarely caused trouble. His younger brother was another matter entirely.

Salvador, in Europe, alternately soared to euphoric heights or plummeted to depths of despair depending on where he was. Sipping champagne at the famous Parisian outdoor dance palace, the Closerie de Lilas, he would revel at the scent of lilacs, the sight of cancan dancers in their hooped crinoline skirts billowing to show lace-edged petticoats, the whirling couples on the floor, the colored lights, the gay abandon of frivolous people out to drain the fountains of pleasure and he very willing to join them at it.

One foggy night in London he stumbled on the slum camp underneath the great arched London Bridge and was appalled by the sight of masses of destitute, disease-ridden, half-human creatures clothed in rags.

Previous to going abroad he was a rash, volatile, impetuous daredevil ready for any adventure available to free and favored young men in the Colony during the 1890s. He had been cut loose from paternal bonds and sent packing to Europe to dissipate some of his energies and maybe acquire some business sense with which to help his father run the family enterprise.

Now he had returned, an only partly spent human dynamo, with plenty of energy still lurking around as manifest in his round expressive eyes that kept darting restlessly to and fro on objects along the way as if trying to possess the terrain and make it his once more. He stared at the three-branched lampposts set at intervals, the occasional native store and restaurant hugging the side of the road, the bushes of jasmin and *dama de noche* drooping over an iron fence and the ever present tall and waving clumps of *caña* bending over the road, shivering delicately at the slightest breeze. He was still the same, but, again, he was not.

Leandro noticed it, the hesitancy despite the boisterous welcome. It was a certain reserve that had somehow sprung up in Salvador which he had not yet fully comprehended. He is trying to adjust himself to the country, the military man decided finally ignoring his brother's unlikely close-mouthedness—he hadn't spoken much about himself.

"Well, what was Europe like?" he asked finally as they approached their street a dirt road branching off from the main *calzada*. More than twenty years before Tiburcio Sanchez had cornered a goodly-sized piece of land near the water's edge and built a fitting villa for his bride, the aristocratic

Ana Infante. Later, the property sprouted a modest *bodega* by the Pasig, a landing and a bamboo pavilion where the children played.

Sitting up on the black leather seat, Salvador parried the question. "Europe—it was incredible, my good man, really incredible. But you were there yourself, you know what it was like—" He flicked his companion a side-long glance appraising his brother's whiskered and blandly good-humored face.

Leandro grinned, "I know but you always experienced things differently."

The carriage slowed down as it neared the ornate wrought iron gate. About 50 yards back beyond some stripling fruit trees, rose the hulking, wide-spreading two-story shape of his childhood and early manhood. Simon clambered down and pushed the iron railings wide. Even from afar, Salvador noted several heads dart out of the second floor windows, peer in his direction before waving ecstatically at the sight of the carriage. Flinging an arm overhead, he waved back though not sure to whom it was he waved.

"Tonito and Manuel refused to go to Ateneo Municipal today."

"Took an in-between holiday, did they? *Que pilyo!*" he guffawed in turn enlivened at the thought of seeing his scalawag younger brothers again.

Simon steered the two horses into the curving gravel driveway leading to the house. Lush salmon and fuchsia bougainvillea bushes lined the way. At that angle Salvador could barely discern the kitchen annex which was attached to the main house by a roofed passageway.

A frail, middle-aged woman appeared at the mouth of the dark cavernous ground floor which was always left open in the day time. It was Doña Ana. Waving a lacy handkerchief, she called out to Salvador.

"Dadong, *hijo*. It's really you!"

Before the vehicle had completely halted, the young man had jumped out and fallen into his mother's outstretched arms. Beyond her stood two fresh faced young women, Gunding, the *cucinera*, and Tonito and Manuel all waiting to greet him.

Sister Isabel was a sensuous faced young lady, two years younger than him and his carbon copy as far as wilfulness of temperament was concerned. She had turned 18 and been introduced formally to society while he was abroad. Now grasping her by the shoulders of her European-style skirt and blouse, he realized with a pang that there was very little left of girlhood on her well-moulded, high-cheeked, oval face.

"Dear Isabel," he smacked her on one cheek, "you've grown into a woman. Why," he examined her cursorily, "you'd give any Parisienne a run for her money."

Pirouetting gaily and rapping her fan on her wrist, the young girl

gushed excitedly, "Would I really, Dadong? Do you really think so? Or are you just teasing?"

"Hush, Isabel—" Doña Ana chided her daughter softly, her beautiful luminous eyes fastened on her beloved son's face. "Come upstairs, *hijo*, your father has just arrived from Calamba; he's in his room changing his clothes. My, but you've changed." She caressed his face with two bony fingers. "Grown stouter, I would say, don't you think so, Pipay?" she called out to the young woman hanging back; her eyes cast demurely to the ground. After one quick look at the arrival she had stood dumb in the background.

"Pipay—" Dadong exploded, freeing himself from his mother's grasp to run to the girl. Grabbing her by the elbows he danced her about. "But I'm glad to see you. How is the Gelmirez family?"

Felipa, Pipay for short, was the eldest granddaughter of Mateu Gelmirez, a Galician who was a *deportado*, one of the those exiled to the Colony during a turbulent period in Spanish history. Sick and half dead, he cared naught for his life but a kind-hearted Laguna peasant brought him into her home and nursed him back to life and the living. Later, he married her and had a son, Santiago, who became overseer of the Sanchez lands in that province. During a visit to the hacienda, Doña Ana had taken a fancy to the young Felipa and brought her into her own city household to be her companion and playmate of Isabel, who was the only daughter.

Pipay was a quiet, sober individual with a grave, dignified manner reminiscent of her Galician ancestors. She had been a great friend to the irrepressible Dadong who would burst in on her at any hour of the day to unburden himself of his latest prank or escapade.

"They're all well, Salvador," her low musical voice assured him quietly even as her eyes danced.

"*Dios*, I have so much to tell you all I think I'll burst," Dadong blurted out passionately looking around, watching his baggage being unloaded by Julio, Gunding's husband, and Carlos, a native from Laguna who regularly brought provisions from the hacienda for the master's table. Carlos was a big, strapping fellow with a not unpleasant Indio face—broad, honest, thick-lipped and congenial.

Isabel, while arranging her skirts, straightened her torso allowing her full bosom to jut forward. With lashes lowered she followed the man's movements.

"Pipay, you know I visited your great Aunt Rosalia in Pontevedra while I was in Spain. She sent a letter to you and your father."

Doña Ana, determined to get the party up the wide stairs to the living quarters above, pushed her son inside the *entresuelo* where they were instantly engulfed by darkness.

"Come upstairs, you haven't eaten yet and those clothes, *Madre de Dios*," she sighed loudly indicating his thick clothing, "you must be dying of the heat. Come . . ."

Slowly Dadong's eyes focused on his surroundings. The walls leading up to the house were hung with several deer antlers and a large turtle shell, trophies of past hunts. They reached the landing tiled in a black and white checkerboard pattern where stood the statue of San Jose, his mother's favorite saint. A *bastonador* was flanked by two green porcelain Chinese pedestals bearing pots of palmeras. He slipped his malacca cane into the *bastonador* and deposited his bowler on a hat peg.

"Here, Mama," he shoved the crated vase into her hands, "this is my gift to you. Be careful, it's quite expensive."

His mother's finely chiseled nostrils flared a little in excitement. "A reliquary from Compostela, Dadong?" she asked tremulously. When the children had started growing up and leaving her knees for other places, Ana Sanchez, already deeply religious, became even more impassioned with her devotions. Her waking life had become devoted largely to house and church and, lately, even more to the latter.

"Mama," he chided her softly, realizing she hadn't changed at all, "also that but it's in the trunk. This," he tapped the object clutched in her hand, "is a lovely vase, one I'm sure will brighten up the parlor."

The Sanchez home had been built according to the style of house architecture prevalent in those days. The wide wooden staircase with elaborately turned balusters supporting heavy mahogany railings ran up to a large spacious and high ceilinged *caida* which was the drawing or receiving room. The latter was furnished equally with uncomfortable European armchairs upholstered in itchy material, Vienna bentwood chairs and divans with cane seats and backs and rattan lounging chairs. The wide curtained doorway leading to a smaller parlor was flanked on either side by heavy black commodes carved by native artisans in their idea of baroque. Tall mirrors, also sumptuously framed, rose above the commodes to reflect the room and give it added spaciousness. His parent's wedding portrait was placed above the arched doorway.

A *silya mesedora* or rocking chair stood to one side, his mother's favorite piece of furniture. On a round table beside it lay, even now, her embroidery ready for her when she had the leisure time.

Several bedrooms and sitting rooms along the outer perimeter of the salon opened up to the wide gallery where everybody usually ended up at one time or the other during the day. Capiz windows running the length of four sides of the square house were thrown open the whole day to let in the air and most of them remained so during the night. Here were the stiff,

straight-backed, wooden *gallineras*, more rattan lounging chairs and a great deal of greenery to soothe the eye.

The kitchen and servants quarters were located a short distance from the main house connected to it by a two-story passageway. The kitchen, where Gunding reigned supreme, was on the ground floor with the laundry and ironing room located at the other end of the annex. Comfortable quarters on top housed the maids' rooms and the rooms of the cook and her husband. By the water's edge stood the warehouse, a goodly distance back almost completely covered from view by the ancient stand of trees growing there, the bamboo thickets and clumps of banana and coconut trees.

Between the main house and the *bodega* was located the coach house and stables. Male servants occupied rooms above the stables.

A smooth grassy knoll started from the house to the river's edge broken solely by rows of half grown *palma brava* rooted near the embankment ensuring the Sanchezes some degree of privacy from boats navigating the Pasig at all times of the day and night. Stalks of red and yellow *bandera española* and crisp white *camia* flowers grew wild here and there.

"Where is he? Where is he!" a deep masculine voice boomed from afar. Shortly afterwards Tiburcio Sanchez charged through his bedroom door to welcome his second son and gather him to his fatherly chest. "Hungry?" he studied Salvador's peaked face, "of course you are. It's almost 3. Gunding! !" he hollered as they all trooped to the long narrow dining room almost filled by an equally long and narrow wooden table, a four-square *aparador platero* and two sideboards. A five-branched chandelier of opaque glass in the shape of tulips hung overhead.

Through a crocheted doorway leading directly to the passageway that led to the kitchen came the cook bearing a steaming tureen of chicken *nilaga*.

Though lunch was over everybody found a place at the table to watch Dadong wolf down the food and listen to his stories. Isabel and Pipay had retired momentarily to their bedroom to examine the contents of the box presented earlier. Dadong restrained Tonito and Manuel from ransacking his trunks then and there for their homecoming presents. Later, he promised them.

"Papa—" the young man shouted tearing off his tie and picking up a silver spoon monogrammed by a Binondo silversmith with his initials. He attached the bowlful of chicken, cabbage and *petchay* ladled out by Gunding. "I've brought home some Valencia oranges for you and—" he tapped his father's arm covered in white sheeting, "a rice cleaner."

Instantly the other was attentive. He was so for the next half hour. This was followed by a marathon gab that lasted till the Angelus bells were

heard tolling faintly from the churches inside the Walled City. Even then Dadong had not exhausted his stories nor his listeners their curiosity.

Lounging in a rattan chair in the *galleria* surrounded by members of the family who were hanging on to every syllable uttered about the wonders of Paris, its astonishing architecture, the dashing French trains and the holidays by the seashore, the gay frivolous women, etc. To his father, puffing a cheroot at his side, he whispered information about a beautiful, doll-like dancer at the Moulin Rouge who wore lavish costumes draped with ropes of pearls and how half the male population was besotted by her. Don Tiburcio chortled under his breath thinking of certain guileful women with similarly lethal attractions whose acquaintance he had known.

To his mother serenely drawing silk through a piece of embroidery, he reported on his pilgrimage to Compostela in Asturias and other shrines. Gruesome had been some sights that met his eye like that of coffins filled with the ivory bones of skeletons and other relics but he was careful to mention only the magnificence of the cathedrals.

The presents had all been distributed—a velvet Norfolk smoking jacket and a bowler for his father, a matched set of pistols for Leandro, train models for his younger brothers, the hat for Isabel already worn and admired, the reliquary and vase for his mother, shawls for Isabel, Pipay and Gunding and Toledo daggers for the menfolk. For himself he had gotten a small watercolor bought one rainy afternoon in the Montparnasse at a certain rustic cafe whose walls had been literally covered with similar strange but vibrant works. It was that of the shimmering facade of a church, barely recognizable because of the artist's unusual technique. He would keep it in his bedroom. It would remind him of his sojourn in the city of lights.

The Angelus turned out to be a hiatus for Dadong; his mouth was parched anyway. Retiring early, foregoing dinner and following a cursory examination of his trunks only partly unpacked, he tore out of his uncomfortable clothes, climbed into the mat-covered, mosquito-net shrouded four-poster and fell asleep immediately.

CHAPTER 2

An orange moon trailed blue white veils that pulsating October night. In her room Isabel peered out the window whose capiz sashes had been thrown open to admit the faintest breeze. She couldn't sleep and because of the heat didn't bother to wear a wrap over the thin white night dress she wore. Perspiration stained her face, neck and chest. Every now and then she would brush the back of her hand over her upper lip to wipe the beads of sweat there. She gripped an anahaw fan listlessly moving it in front of her. Finally, she was unable to endure the spot where she stood experiencing strange restless sensations.

Standing up she snatched the multi-colored shawl from a cane-seated divan. Dadong was even then snoring peaceably in the room across the hall. Pipay shared the same bedroom with Isabel but she hardly stirred as that flighty miss slipped out and ran down the wooden corridor to the passageway that led to the kitchen. Down a back stone staircase almost completely shrouded by violet convulvus she went slipping out finally into the still humid night. Gripping the shawl over her bosom which heaved tremulously, Isabel made for the woods stumbling on the gravel path which wound through the trees to the coach house and *bodega*.

What she wanted to do, what was uppermost in her mind was to slip naked into that small cove adjacent to the landing dock and cool her fevered body. A creature of nature, she was more like her father than her mother having inherited his passionate nature like Dadong and unlike Leandro, who seemed as aloof and dispassionate as Doña Ana. Isabel had done it before, made a midnight excursion to the river and she had never been caught yet.

As she hurried past the stables she failed to note the oil lamp still burning in one of the rooms. Carlos, unable to sleep, had been fanning himself with his sombrero by the window when the girl scurried past. Noting her white figure heading for the river he swore softly to himself.

"*Madre de Dios* and what can she be up to at this time of the night?" Hurriedly getting into his pants, not bothering to pull on his shirt, he made his way down the stairs. As he strode after the girl he heard a soft splash in the distance hardly discernible amid the slight swishing of the bamboo, the chirping of insects in the undergrowth and other nocturnal sounds.

When he got to the bank he carefully parted a screen of hibiscus bushes not wishing to scare his young mistress. In the three years that had elapsed since he became official boatman for the Sanchez family, Carlos had become familiar with the members of his master's household to a certain degree. Now Salvador he hardly knew because he had been away all that time but Isabel, Isabel he had gauged perfectly. She was a minx, a flirtatious imperious female who was, apparently, rarely disciplined. Her mother couldn't control her. Neither faints at her unladylike conduct nor trembling admonitions did. Her father, who doted on her nearly as much as he did his pet cock was clay in her hands. About the only persons who could contradict Isabel's willful wishes were Gunding who had raised her and, consequently, took no lip from her and Pipay.

In the half light Carlos at first couldn't make out the creature swimming in the water. When he finally discerned the bare figure gliding like a fish in the rippling waters obviously in her element, he sucked in his breath in stunned surprise. Simultaneously he felt a tightening in his throat as his eyes discovered the female form flashing in and out of the waters. She seemed to have been swimming for hours and Carlos, rooted to the ground, had been besieged by a wild desire to tear off his pants and plunge naked to join her in her primeval bath. As he shivered at the thought the vegetation about him swayed tremulously. Quickly Isabel stopped swimming and faced the bank from where the noise emanated. Her eyes raked the area.

"Who's there?" came her cold arrogant voice and to Carlos' amazement, it held not the slightest note of fear.

Deciding to reveal himself the boatman strode manfully out of the bushes.

"It's only me, Señorita. I saw you from my window and followed you. I thought I better watch and see that nothing happened to you," he explained nervously in a low voice noting the curve of her bare shoulders as she tread water scarcely five feet from where he stood his bare feet planted in the sand. The water barely concealed the swell of her breasts which were slickly wet. Her long hair lay plastered on her head. In the pale moon-