



# Rita's Lullaby (Part 2 of War Trilogy)

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by Merlinda Bobis

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EXTRACT

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*In the dark, we hear the creak and squeak of a swing and a see-saw, and the occasional laughter and hushed murmur of children. These sounds are interspersed with the tolling of a church bell. The sounds conjure an idyllic scene, a playground beside a church, but, as the lights come on, a different tableau is revealed.*

*The PRESENT is a midnight scene in Manila, a children's park at the right half of the stage, which is lighted by a street lamp. Occasional sound of traffic suggests this is the heart of the city, but it has an air of grim isolation. In the background, shadows of trees. Their leaves gash the bodies of two children playing. A bored RITA, permed, be-ribboned and incongruously attired in a sequinned vermilion mini-skirt with matching shoulder bag and schoolgirl's shoes and socks, is playing on a metal swing at downstage right. She has her back to the audience. She faces upstage where JAY, in shabby clothing and whom we see only in profile facing right, sits high up on the left end of a see-saw. This extends horizontally towards the middle of upstage, where he is desperately trying to push his seat down with the weight of his body.*

*The left half of the stage is a militarised village, where it is forever dawn. Parallel to RITA is her past self, BELL GIRL, under an old church bell. Back turned to the audience, she tolls the bell, in rhythm with the swing at the other side, while facing upstage. Here, there stands a blackened wall, a remnant of a burnt village church, parallel to the see-saw. The wall has a hole where we see the hands of JAY's past, CHURCH BOY, clutching at the rubble. Lighting is dawn-blue, shadows soft, but eerie.*

*The faces of the children are shadowed and indistinct. Most of the time, their backs are to the audience. This gives an impression of, paradoxically, both distance and intimacy. Without a face, these children are strangers like those whose faces are blurred on TV news, in order to protect the victims; thus the audience can "sympathise distantly" with them. However, it is their very facelessness that also makes both the voyeur and the "worrying parent" in the audience desire to see them.*

*Often, even as the four characters interact in dialogue, they hardly look at each other, as if they were all alone and wrapped up in themselves. This attitude heightens the sense of isolation. Throughout the play, there is a constant shifting between past and present, sometimes both scenes overlapping and interweaving. These shifts are signalled by the sound and lighting.*

*PRESENT light up. As the giggling RITA makes one vigorous swing towards upstage, action in the past is halted. Its light dims. BELL GIRL and CHURCH BOY freeze. A jeepney revs past in the present, blaring out the MacDonald jingle: "It's Mac Time, with MacDonald." RITA and JAY echo the jingle and giggle. The call of a balut (cooked eggs) vendor is heard: "Baluuuuut! Baluuuuut!" They echo this call, too, and laugh again.*

RITA                      *Gaya-gaya, puto maya! What a copy-cat, you! (giggles)*

JAY                        *What a copy-cat you — too! Arog-arog — ! Hey, what time is it?*



JAY                                    Is it really — good — *masarap ba talaga?*

RITA                                    You never had — ?

JAY                                    We-e-ell, not really — I mean — of course, I know hamburgers, but, Macdonald — *alam mo naman* —

RITA                                    MacDonald — ? (*cackles very loudly*) Never had MacDonald — *Dios mio! Ay, poor, poor Jay ... (sings a playful folk lullaby on food in a taunting manner as Jay makes sounds of protest)*

<i>Katurog, katurog</i>	(Sleep, sleep
<i>Idarang kong sulog</i>	I'll roast you a hen
<i>Pagmata, pagbangon</i>	On waking, on rising
<i>Ibakal kong hamon</i>	I'll buy you ham)

*Katurog, katurog*  
*Idarang kong sulog ....*

*PAST. BELL GIRL tolls the bell, while remembering happy times. In the background, her mother's voice is singing the food lullaby as well. She sings over RITA, who continues to hum in the present where light dims slightly. BELL GIRL calls out to her mother in a whisper.*

BELL GIRL                            *Mamay ... Mamay ...*

*Mother's shadow suddenly looms over the church ruin, as if it were cradling and singing it to sleep. Overjoyed, BELL GIRL stops tolling and stretches her arms towards the shadow who speaks with her.*

BELL GIRL            Can't sleep, *Mamay* ...

MOTHER                Sssh, *halo daw*, we must be very early tomorrow, your big day at church, remember?

BELL GIRL            And my white dress is ready?

MOTHER                *Siyempre, kaya ... (continues lullaby)*  
"Katurog, katurog ..." *hhmmm ...*

BELL GIRL            But I can't sleep, even if I shut my eyes very tight — see, *Mamay*?

MOTHER                Sssh ...  
*Hhmmm ... "Idarang kong sulog ..."*

BELL GIRL            *Ay*, I love chicken, *siyempre* —

MOTHER                "*Pagmata, pagbangon ...*" *hhmmm ...*

BELL GIRL            You'll really roast one tomorrow? For me, *Mamay* — *talagang-talaga*?

MOTHER                    To celebrate your First Communion, *kaya* —  
                                  "*Pagmata, Pagbangon*  
                                  *Ibakal kong hamon ...*"

BELL GIRL                *Aysus, I love ham, too — siram sana ... good to dream,*  
                                  *ano, Mamay? (mother's shadow disappears) Mamay?*  
                                  *Mamay ... ?*

*As RITA begins to sing the lullaby, in a taunting manner again, past freezes and its light dims. Up PRESENT lighting. JAY angrily protests that he does not like ham anyway.*

RITA                        *Katurog, katurog*  
                                  *Idarang kong sulog*  
                                  *Pagmata, pagbangon ...*

JAY                        (*claps, then in a mocking tone*) Ladies and gentlemen,  
                                  presenting — *ta-dahhhh!* Miss Rita Reyes!  
                                  *Ri-ta! Ri-ta! Ri-ta — !*

RITA                        (*giggles coyly*) Thank you-thank you-thank you. So  
                                  what song would you like, sir, chief, daddy ... *mmmmm*  
                                  ... (*makes a big smacking kiss, then sings the lullaby*  
                                  *again*) ... *Katurog, katurog ...*

JAY                        But before you sing, tell me first, Miss Rita, how old  
                                  are you?