

THE ISLAND

by Nerisa del Carmen Guevara



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THE PACIFIC OCEAN

The island sits on the edge of the page of the brochure on the table. The rest of the page is water, the deep end of the shore. The island is only this: coconut tree, shore, woman. The rest is table, vase, and files against the laminate, padded cubicle, and shelf.

The island shimmers under fluorescent (was it just the gloss?). It shimmers on the shore, over the legs of the woman whose toes are perfectly manicured but hidden in the froth. One knee bent, foot pushing against the sand, or else she would be lost to the tide, the undercurrent on the other side of the fold. The front page is everything.

There is a hut on the other side of the fold, made of dried fronds and bamboo. A window blinks its one eye at the world. The world is flat. It says: TAKE A TRIP ABROAD in Sans Serif. The roses in the vase beside the files are as dry as cinnamon and have the lost smell of paper boats. When the brochure opens, the island rises. When it closes, night and a few stars. Crickets are called *kuliglig*. Their improvised trikes are called by the same name.



INFINITE GESTURES: DAGAT

The island loves no one but itself but it wants to be loved. For a few dollars a night, some place called Station Three has a long-stay homestay and a dog named Magaling. The dog is not on the brochure. No dogs are allowed on the beach. The woman stretches her body in an infinite manner. Her hair slicked back runs a black river into the waves. Her navel is a salt pool. Tequila body shots available. A contest on Saturdays.

YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME. Fan with a chain of ethnic beads dangles its precious history over the room. All rooms with hot and cold shower, mini fridge, and Wi-Fi. Free breakfast of eggs, toast, and local jams.

The woman might come and have breakfast one morning. She might stay for the night; the staff would not mind a guest. When it turns serious, that is another matter. Swim in the salt pool of her navel, the dunes of her buttocks, the coconuts that are her breasts. Her accent is as hard as cowrie shells. Her laugh frightens the dog.

M A S S A G E T H E R A P I S T
AVAILABLE SPECIAL DEAL FOR
LOVERS. The indigenous Hilot for
Two uses local volcanic stones and
runo reeds for feet.



UNFOLDING THE OCEAN DURING THE PANDEMIC

On the inner fold of the brochure, she sits in a sarong looking through the window of the hut into the beach. The red hyacinth tucked into her hair is as ruddy as her lips. She looks happy to be in the room with you. Maybe this can go somewhere.

GRILL WEDNESDAYS. MEET BACKPACKERS LIKE YOURSELF:

The world says on the other side of the brochure with a girl with brown hair and blue eyes who gets squeamish about the blood dish that comes with the roasted lemongrass stuffed pig and you like that. After the party, the rough drunk tumble of want, the twang of a state far from any shore. Her navel is clear of sand, her skin burns as red as yours in the sun for too long. You belong. She kicks the dog. Spent, you dream. The city creeps in. Siren sounds swoop like moths over the soft creaking of the kuliglig. The cubicle throbs like a broken heart. A cuboid monster with an ergonomic tongue licks your face.

The cubicle is safe every day.

The fluorescent bulb is warm to the touch but does not burn and shines a steady white light enough to get the job done. The city hums with progress and the same sentiments. The vase casts a long shadow. (the gloss is blinding). The island sits on the edge of the page of the brochure on the table. The number at the back is over the water so blue you can almost hear it.

