

SOMETHING
STRANGE
IS
HAPPENING

PILOT: "THE DEBUT"

Written by

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EXT. MACTAN ISLAND - PHILIPPINES - DAY

GENTLE WAVES nudge against the shore. Bird CAWS. It's a serene and calm day until -

The WAVES begin to increase in their intensity, disrupted by a ship as it docks, its WOOD CREAKING. An anchor PLUNGES into the water. As MEN (20-30s) walk down a wooden walkway, we hear INDISTINCT VOICES speak in SPANISH.

NARRATOR

As Spanish explorers docked their ships, those native to the island of Mactan in the Philippines watched on, inside them rage and fear growing, as if in that very moment, they could foresee what the colonizers would do. What they did. As the Spaniards took root, they created new monsters in the community, born of Filipino and Spanish cultures pitted against each other.

We hear the sinister laugh of a DUENDE (elf) and the PITTER-PATTER of its steps, the SORROWFUL CRIES of a WAILING WOMAN.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Others say the creatures of Filipino folklore took on traits of the Spaniards, seeking to conquer, oppress, and kill. Like the Batibat, a vengeful demon who penetrates the depths of your mind and plants the most frightful nightmares. And the Aswang. A shapeshifting evil creature, often in the form of a beautiful woman, that feeds on the blood of men, drinking them dry.

We hear the sound of an ASWANG sinking her teeth deep into flesh.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

While locals fought to preserve their culture, and won many battles,

(sound of VIOLENT
FIGHTING)

they never regained their pre-Spaniard identity. We never regained.

EXT. PIER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA - DAY

The GENTLE SPLASH of water at a pier. SEAGULLS in the air.

A ship DOCKS. But this one brings hope, new beginnings. We hear the sound of FOOTSTEPS making their way down a CREAKING walkway.

NARRATOR

In the early 1900s, generations after the Spaniards first landed, a group of Filipino immigrants left their home country, looking for a new life, a fresh start in California. In Los Angeles, they founded what is now known as Filipino Town.

We hear the sound of a BUSTLING TOWN and indistinct, happy CHATTER in TAGALOG.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The founders believed they were leaving the demons of a blended-culture far behind, oceans away, and that here, they would rebuild their community as they intended.

The VOICES STOP. Complete, uncomfortable SILENCE.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Have you ever sensed something wasn't quite right? The times when you got goosebumps for no reason. The eery feeling that you weren't alone, even when you were. The scary stories that you heard as a kid that always felt a little too real.

The founders left their country behind, bringing their language and their culture. But there's one thing they miscalculated - they brought their monsters, too.

We hear a melody of childhood ghost stories: a door CREAKING open, sinister WHISPERS.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 And now those long-forgotten
 horrific creatures, those evil
 spirits, are intent on making us
 remember who they are - and who we
 are.

CUE THEME MUSIC.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 Something strange is happening.

INT. BALLROOM - DREAM - NIGHT

A lively ballroom full of guests, UPBEAT POP MUSIC plays.

JOHN PAUL (20), a lovable goofball, walks up to JASMINE (18),
 equal parts superstitious and sweet.

JOHN PAUL
 There she is. She turns 18 and now
 she doesn't have any time for her
 big brother.

JASMINE
 Shut up.

JOHN PAUL
 It's cool. I know why you've been
 avoiding me.

JASMINE
 And why's that?

John Paul TAPS his champagne flute with a butter knife.
 CLINK. CLINK. CLINK.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 J.P., stop!

Guests cheer. The music stops. J.P. speaks into a mic.

JOHN PAUL
 Ladies and gentlemen. Titos and
 titas - the real ones and the fake
 ones. If you haven't noticed, my
 baby sister, or as some of you may
 know her, Jasmine, has just turned
 18 -

Guest shout with excitement.

(MORE)

JOHN PAUL (CONT'D)
 - and we couldn't end the night
 without a speech from the birthday
 girl -

JASMINE
 (whispering to John Paul)
 I'm gonna kill you.

JOHN PAUL
 (whispering to Jasmine)
 Love you, too.

Jasmine GULPS. She speaks into the MIC.

JASMINE
 (nervously)
 Hi, everyone, this is a special
 night for me, and it means so much
 that you would be here. And a big
 thanks to my big brother for making
 this all happen. You're a jerk most
 of the time -

A few LAUGHS in the crowd -

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 But I know -

As Jasmine continues, we hear a TOOTH CRACK.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 Ahh -

She talks like her MOUTH IS FULL of something -

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 I know you always have my back.
 (realizing something is
 off)
 Thank you.

GUESTS
 Cheers!

Glasses CLINK as guests celebrate. The MUSIC RESUMES.

We hear another TOOTH CRACK. And then another. Jasmine WINCES
 in pain.

JASMINE
 Ahh, fuck.

JOHN PAUL
 Are you alright?
 (beat)
 Oh my God, your mouth. You're
 bleeding!

Another CRACK. Jasmine SPITS.

JOHN PAUL (CONT'D)
 Oh, shit. Is that your -

JASMINE
 (as if without teeth)
 My teeth. My teeth are falling
 out...

In the background, an eerie melody of spirits and monsters
 seeps in, surrounding Jasmine.

JOHN PAUL
 (frightened)
 Jas, I don't...

JASMINE
 Help me, please. Someone!
 (sobbing)
 Why are you all just staring?!

A HOWLING WIND blows by.

WOMAN
Panahon na. It's time, anak.

Jasmine SCREAMS, and as she does, it bleeds into SCREECH of
 an evil spirit.

INT. JOHN PAUL'S CAR - DAY

The engine HUMS as John Paul drives. RAIN beats down on his
 car. WIND SHEILD WIPERS move back and forth.

JOHN PAUL
 Ugh, this rain is trash. Don't
 sweat it though. It will not ruin
 your debut (de-boo).

JASMINE
 Yeah...

JOHN PAUL
 What's up? You're mad quiet back
 there.

JASMINE

I dunno. I'm feeling a little
nauseous.

JOHN PAUL

I get it, it's a big day. But it's
gonna be fun. And Tita Lily's
making her fire-ass lumpia. Give me
all the rolls!

JASMINE

Uh-huh.

LOLA (70s), full of wisdom and sass, interrupts.

LOLA

You never miss an opportunity to
call your kuya "little fatty."

JOHN PAUL

Hey!

LOLA

Tell me what's going on.

JASMINE

Nothing.

LOLA

18 years to practice and you're
still a terrible liar.

JASMINE

Lola, you hate liars.

LOLA

I do, but the truth is we need them
for the world to function.

Jasmine SIGHS, gives in.

JASMINE

Fine. Last night, I had a
dream...that I lost all my teeth.

JOHN PAUL

Gum life. Gross.

JASMINE

I think you mean terrifying.

LOLA

You ate chocolate before bed, no?

JASMINE
I'm not little fatty.

JOHN PAUL
Again?

JASMINE
Look, all jokes aside, everyone knows if you lose your teeth in a dream, something bad is going to happen. And probably to someone you know...someone that you really care about. The last time I had a dream like this, mom and dad -

The car SCREECHES to a halt as J.P. slams on his brakes. Jasmine lets out a tiny scream.

JOHN PAUL
Oh shit!

A MAN (30s) HITS the hood of his car. The RAIN beats down more. Cars zoom by.

MAN ON STREET
Watch where you're going, asshole!

JOHN PAUL
He came out of nowhere.

Jasmine catches her breath.

JASMINE
Next time, I'm driving.

LOLA
Anak, sometimes dreams are just dreams.

JASMINE
Yeah, when you dream about flying on a turtle through space or something.

LOLA
So you do eat chocolate before bed.

JASMINE
Lola, I'm being serious.

JOHN PAUL
Jas, that's just some old wise tale. Or is it wives' tale?

(MORE)

JOHN PAUL (CONT'D)

My point is - it's as real as you flying on a turtle through space. You wanna know something that is real?

JASMINE

What?

JOHN PAUL

Your crush is gonna be there. Tonight. In the flesh.

JASMINE

(now even more nervous)
You invited Sunny?

JOHN PAUL

What? I thought you'd want him there.

Gravel CRUNCHES under the car's tires as J.P. parks the car. He cuts the engine off.

JASMINE

No.

(beat)

Maybe.

LOLA

Anak, is this about your parents?

JASMINE

(sincere)

Well, I have been thinking about mom a lot lately.

(beat)

How can I become a woman if I don't really even know what that means? I've never had an example, you know?

LOLA

I'm insulted. I'm a woman. You have me.

JASMINE

Yeah, but you've been old my whole life.

LOLA

(offended)

Putangina. (Your mother's a whore).

JOHN PAUL
Lola, language.

LOLA
Putangina to you, too.

JASMINE
I wasn't trying to be rude. I just wish mom here to guide me through this. And dad, too. My debut (de-boo) is a big deal and it feels weird to have such a big night without them.

LOLA
How you're feeling is normal, okay?

JASMINE
I guess so.

JOHN PAUL
(sincere)
Hey, I miss them, too.
(teasing)
But I take my responsibilities very seriously and I'll be in full surrogate dad mode tonight. I could even pull some Mrs. Doubtfire shit if you need it.

JASMINE
I say this with love - hard pass.

We hear the sound of the car doors open and close as the three exit.

INT. CORNERSTORE - DAY

BELLS RINGS as the door swings open. John Paul, Jasmine and Lola enter.

An old-school love song in Tagalog, "AKO'Y HINDI ANGHEL" by HOTDOG, plays on a radio in the background. It's soothing, but creepy.

JOHN PAUL
Why do we say debut (de-boo) and not debut? I mean, it's totally spelled like debut.

LOLA
That's because we left the "t" on the boat.

JASMINE

Can you guys get the cake? I want to...um...check on something.

John Paul and Lola's VOICES TRAIL OFF as they walk away.

LOLA

Okay, *anak*, but get some ginger root, too. It's good for your stomach.

Jasmine turns down another aisle. We hear her STEPS and the LOVE SONG eerily playing in the background.

The SHOPKEEPER (10) sneaks up on her. He's a precocious child with the wisdom and maturity of a 70-year-old.

SHOPKEEPER

Kamusta. How are you?

Jasmine jumps, GASPS.

JASMINE

Oh, I didn't see you there. Do you work here?

SHOPKEEPER

Monday through Friday, weekends off.

JASMINE

You, um, look a little young to work.

SHOPKEEPER

Time is relative, so is age. Something troubling you, my dear?

JASMINE

You could say that.

SHOPKEEPER

I thought so. Your energy is all over the place. I could feel it from two aisles over.

JASMINE

Oh.

We hear FOOTSTEPS as the Shopkeeper walks away.

SHOPKEEPER

Come this way.

Jasmine follows. They enter another aisle. The radio continues playing OLD SONGS in Tagalog.

SHOPKEEPER (CONT'D)

Ah, here we go.

JASMINE

What's all this?

SHOPKEEPER

Rosaries, oils, sage - of course. Some people would call these religious items. I like to think of them as "relationship tools".

JASMINE

Relationship?

SHOPKEEPER

Not that kind. I'm talking about the soul ties. Contrary to popular belief, the spiritual world isn't one-sided. They interact with us, and we can interact with them, too. Now, tell me, what happened in this dream?

JASMINE

(nervous)

Okay, kid, you're creeping me out.

SHOPKEEPER

(assuring)

I'm only here to help.

JASMINE

Right. Well, my teeth fell out. All of them. And I know what that means.

SHOPKEEPER

You were wise to come here. Something terrible is in the works.

We hear the Shopkeeper RUMMAGE through items on the shelf. He MUTTERS to himself as he searches for something.

SHOPKEEPER (CONT'D)

Here. Chew on this.

JASMINE

What is it?

SHOPKEEPER

Dogwood bark. Bite it hard. Show
your teeth are firm, unmovable, and
it will surely sway the
consequences of the dream.

JASMINE

Thank you.

SHOPKEEPER

Twice a day for good measure, okay?

JASMINE

Got it.

The SONG on the RADIO is interrupted by an ANNOUNCEMENT.

RADIO HOST

We interrupt your regularly
scheduled programming with an
update on an ongoing investigation
into a string of murders isolated
to the neighborhood of Filipino
Town, police are calling 'the beast
attacks'...

SHOPKEEPER

Strange things are always happening
if you pay attention.

JASMINE

Strange like what?

SHOPKEEPER

Keep your eyes open. And your ears,
too.

We hear the Shopkeeper SHUFFLE away, footsteps against a
linoleum floor.

JASMINE

Wait, little boy, do you have
ginger root?

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

In an empty hallway, Jasmine's words seem to ECHO. We hear
MUFFLED MUSIC from the party.

JASMINE

Father, please bless this, um,
wood. Let it keep my family safe.
Let it counteract my dream. Amen.

Jasmine CHEWS the wood.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
Ugh, God, this is disgusting.

Jasmine RETCHES.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
Okay.

Jasmine pushes through DOUBLE DOORS.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

A mix of conversation in English and Tagalog. UPBEAT POP MUSIC in the background. Guests greet Jasmine as she makes her way to a table.

JASMINE
God, this is just like my dream.
Please, bark, do your magic.

GUEST #1
Happy Birthday, Jas!

GUEST #2
Hey Jasmine, happy birthday!

JASMINE
Hi. *Kamusta*.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

AT THE TABLE:

Jasmine sighs and pulls out a chair. She takes her seat next to John Paul and his friend SUNNY (19).

JASMINE (CONT'D)
(bashful)
Hey, Sunny, J.P.

JOHN PAUL
Hey sis, you got a little something
on your -

JASMINE
Oh. It's...must have been something
I ate.

SUNNY
Is that jerky?

JASMINE
(trying to play cool)
What, um, no, of course not.

SUNNY
Too bad. I love a girl that eats
jerky.

JASMINE
Oh.

JOHN PAUL
What does that have to do with
anything? It's gross, bro.

SUNNY
It's pretty hot man.

JASMINE
Speaking of - does it feel warm in
here to you?

SUNNY
That's that island heat. Too many
Filipinos.

John Paul pours her some water.

JOHN PAUL
Here, have some water.

Jasmine gulps as she drinks.

JASMINE
Thanks.

JOHN PAUL
Feel better?

JASMINE
I kinda feel like I have a fever.

We hear MIC FEEDBACK as the HOST interrupts.

HOST
Alright, alright. For those of you
who don't know me, I'm Tito Tito.
And tonight we are celebrating
someone and something very special.
Our dear Jasmine is turning 18. So
let's give her a huge welcome!
We're going to kick things off with
a brother-sister dance. John Paul,
where you at?

The guests CLAP and CHEER.

JOHN PAUL
Hey! That's our cue.

INT. DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

A CHEESY POP SONG plays while John Paul and Jasmine dance.

JOHN PAUL
So, what was that?

JASMINE
Oh.

JOHN PAUL
I'm talking about the 'jerky'.

JASMINE
It's Dogwood bark. Thanks for not asking in front of Sunny.

JOHN PAUL
And what exactly was it doing on your mouth?

JASMINE
I got it from the cornerstore. The kid who works there said it would help with the feelings I'm having.

JOHN PAUL
What I'm hearing is a child talked you into eating wood.

JASMINE
Correction: talked me into chewing it.

JOHN PAUL
So minus the hot flashes, you're good?

JASMINE
I dunno. I still feel off.

JOHN PAUL
Growing pains.

JASMINE
But what if I'm not ready to grow up?

JOHN PAUL
You still have plenty of growing.

JASMINE
Yeah.
(beat)
I just can't help but feeling it
would be different if mom was here.
I'm changing every day and I know
she'd know what to say, what to do.
All Lola ever does is give me some
herbal tea and pray to a saint.

JOHN PAUL
I think if mom were here, she'd be
proud that you're the kind of young
woman who would eat -

JASMINE
Chew -

JOHN PAUL
Who would chew bark on the off
chance that it would protect her
family.

JASMINE
You think so?

JOHN PAUL
You're more like her than you
realize.

JASMINE
Well you and - ahhh.

A PIERCING RING shoots through Jasmine's ears, our ears.
Jasmine flinches.

JOHN PAUL
What's wrong?

JASMINE
Nothing. I was just saying you and
Lola are all I have. I'll always
look out for you.

JOHN PAUL
You're gonna be a great woman.
Already are.

JASMINE
Thanks, J.P.

JOHN PAUL

You bet.

The song ENDS. The HOST jumps in:

HOST

Let's give it up for our debutante
and her big brother.

Everyone CLAPS and CHEERS.

HOST (CONT'D)

And now it's the time you've all
been waiting for - the buffet is
open!

JOHN PAUL

That's my cue. Fire-ass rolls, here
I come!

INT. BALLROOM - TABLE - NIGHT

Jasmine sits down next to Sunny.

SUNNY

Feeling better?

JASMINE

I think so.

SUNNY

I bet somebody in this room has
some Vicks - if you needed it.

JASMINE

Thanks, Sunny.
(working up courage,
timid)
And thanks for coming to my party.

SUNNY

Of course, wouldn't miss it.

JASMINE

(surprised, happy)
Really?

SUNNY

Yeah, really.

JASMINE
 You know. I am still feeling a
 little warm. You wanna get some
 air?

SUNNY
 Sure.

8 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

8

The sound of DOUBLE DOORS opening. The JOYOUS PARTY fades.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 You look really beautiful tonight.

JASMINE
 Oh, thanks, I -

Another SHARP RING -

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 Ahhh.

SUNNY
 You okay?

JASMINE
 Do you hear that?

SUNNY
 No, what?

JASMINE
 Maybe it's the music. My ears are
 ringing.

Jasmine OPENS A DOOR.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

The door closes behind them. Our ears fill with soothing
 sounds of the night - crickets chirping, a calm air.

JASMINE
 I saw this patio on the way in.
 It's nice, right?

SUNNY
 It's nicer with you.

Jasmine blushes, chuckles nervously.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Here, give me your hands. I know a little trick for your ears.

Sunny grabs Jasmine's hands.

JASMINE

Oh...okay.

SUNNY

Now close your eyes and just breathe. In and out.

JASMINE

How is this supposed to help?

SUNNY

Don't knock it. Just breathe.
(beat)
In and out.

Jasmine breathes in and out.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

How you feelin'?

JASMINE

Better, I think.

SUNNY

It's a little something my mom taught me. Supposed to help get your mind and body in sync.

JASMINE

Thanks for showing me.

SUNNY

I've got one more thing that might help.

JASMINE

Yeah?

Sunny leans in. We hear them KISS. Sunny pulls away.

SUNNY

Ahh - your lips are on fire.

JASMINE

(mortified)
What?

Another piercing RING. But this one doesn't stop.

Jasmine screams.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

Ahh -

We hear a familiar sound - A TOOTH CRACK.

And then ANOTHER.

As Jasmine speaks, it sounds as if there are two of her now.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

What's happening to me?

SUNNY

(scared)

Hold on. I'm, I'm gonna get help!

Sunny dashes to the door. He pulls door handle, but it's LOCKED.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Shit, it's locked!

Jasmine's body twists. A BONE CRACKS as she cries for help. Her FLESH TEARS OPEN.

JASMINE

Shit, what the fuck is happening!

The FABRIC of her DRESS RIPS. Her breathing becomes HEAVY. She's transforming into a beast.

SUNNY

Help! Somebody help!

Sunny keeps pulling at the door -

SUNNY (CONT'D)

What the fuck!

The creature that is now Jasmine lunges at Sunny. Jasmine GROWLS.

Sunny SCREAMS and we hear a loud THUD as they fall to the ground.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

No, Jasmine, stop, it's me!

We hear a STRUGGLE as Sunny tries to fight Jasmine off.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 Ah, fuck, your teeth! You're
 hurting me!

She SINKS HER TEETH into his neck.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 My neck...

Sunny's cries become faint.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
 Jas...

Jasmine GUZZLES his blood, GROWLING as she feeds.

Sunny's cries become fainter and fainter until they stop
 completely. He's gone.

We hear the sound of Jasmine transforming back.

Night sounds seep in, so peaceful and serene it's almost as
 if the bloodshed that just occurred never happened.

After a beat -

Jasmine gasps, comes up for air.

Her voice changes from double to normal as she talks and
 transforms back to herself. Jasmine looks takes in what she's
 done -

JASMINE
 Sunny?
 (beat)
 What have I done?

Jasmine sobs.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 Sunny, please come back. I'm so
 sorry, I'm so sorry.

She buries her face into Sunny's chest and cries alone.

After a beat, we hear a DOOR OPEN and FOOTSTEPS slowly
 approaching. Jasmine looks up -

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 Lola...

LOLA
 Come with me. *Halika*.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

A DOOR open.

JASMINE

Lola, we can't just leave him there.

LOLA

It's too late for him, *hija*. Come, we must clean you up.

JASMINE

I don't know what happened. Something took over me and I, I killed him.

LOLA

It's okay. It's okay.

JASMINE

It's not okay, Lola. Sunny is dead.

LOLA

Come here. Come here.

JASMINE

I'm a monster.

LOLA

Never, never say that about yourself.

A door swings open. John Paul walks out and addresses them.

JOHN PAUL

Hey, I've been looking all over for you guys. The party's still going.

Jasmine sobs.

JOHN PAUL (CONT'D)

What is that on your dress? Is that...blood?

(beat)

Are you hurt?

JASMINE

(sad)

No.

JOHN PAUL

Then who's blood is this?

LOLA

Anak, come help me clean your sister.

Jasmine cries.

JOHN PAUL

What is going on?

After a beat -

LOLA

The debut is a special time for a young woman, and especially young women in our family. We are descendants. *Inapo*. Children of the Aswang.

JOHN PAUL

The Aswang? Are you expecting me to believe my sister's a monster?

LOLA

(correcting)

An Aswang. Like her mother, and her mother before her. It is our birth right. And John Paul, now you have a great task: you must be her protector.

Jasmine sobs.

We hear one final HOWLING WIND.

EERIE MUSIC seeps in.

NARRATOR

It looks like Jasmine was right, after all. Her family was keeping a deadly secret that no potion or prayer or preparation could help.

Like our clairvoyant shopkeeper says, strange things are always happening if you pay attention, and in the unsuspecting neighborhood of Historic Filipino Town, they are about to get even stranger. You see, in this town, monsters and evil spirits are just as contagious as the flu. And once you've been exposed, it's likely that you're next.

CUE THEME MUSIC

On the next episode, we'll see one of Jasmine's friends battle a monster - a giant - of his own. Let's hope he'll be luckier than Sunny.

And if you're out there listening, know this: the things that make your hair stand on end, the bumps in the night that jolt you awake, that deep, eerie feeling that you just can't shake. It's all real. And it's waiting for the right moment to manifest. We may not know who's next or when it will happen. What monsters are lurking right behind us, or right within us.

All we know for sure is: something strange is happening.

OVER THEME MUSIC:

CREDITS

Something Strange is Happening was created, directed, and produced by Tessa Bartholomew and Christina Kingsleigh Licud.

Narration by me, Tessa Bartholomew.

Written by Christina Kingsleigh Licud.

Sound design and editing by Paola Magrans.

Original music by Francois Comtois.

With performances by: Calum Aranda, Francis Lansang, John Logan, Cynthia San Luis, Juan Miguel, Thelma Sugay, and Jay Sugay.

END.