

Subversive Lives

A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years

Contents

The Family	vi
Foreword	vii
VICENTE L. RAFAEL	
Preface	xv
Acknowledgements	xix

PART I

In the Shadow of the Palace

1 Lantern Parade	2
SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
2 Little Brown Brother on the Rise	7
SUSAN F. QUIMPO, NORMAN F. QUIMPO, AND EMILIE MAE Q. WICKETT	
3 538 Second Street	18
SUSAN F. QUIMPO, NORMAN F. QUIMPO, ELIZABETH Q. BULATAO, NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO, AND LILLIAN F. QUIMPO	

PART II

Winds of Change

4 The First Activist in the Family	30
NORMAN F. QUIMPO	
5 Watching the Storm	45
NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
6 Nothing Like Having Two Good Legs	59
DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
7 A Christian's Choice	68
NORMAN F. QUIMPO	
8 A Radical Activist at an Elite University	81
NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
9 Fallout at Cervini	106
NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
10 Mother Inviolable	111
SUSAN F. QUIMPO	

PART III

Clear, Present, and Grave Danger

11 Paper Shredders	118
SUSAN F. QUIMPO AND NORMAN F. QUIMPO	
12 UG Life, Interrupted	128
NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	

13	People's War	141
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
14	Choral Singing Behind Barbed Wire	149
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
15	In the Glare of Photo Lamps	157
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
16	Fugitive	164
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
17	A World Apart	170
	EMILIE MAE Q. WICKETT	
18	The <i>Doña Andrea</i> -FB <i>Elvie</i> Affair	176
	NORMAN F. QUIMPO	
19	Lillian	191
	SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
20	<i>Awit sa Kasal</i> (Wedding Song)	196
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO AND MARIA CRISTINA PARGAS-BAWAGAN	

PART IV

Outside Manila: White Areas and Guerrilla Fronts

21	White Areas	208
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
22	<i>Sunog!</i> Wildfire!	215
	LILLIAN F. QUIMPO AND SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
23	Hot and Cold	226
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
24	Last Rites	240
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO, DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO, AND SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
25	In the Cult of the Father	249
	EMILIE MAE Q. WICKETT	
26	Where's Jun? Where's Jan?	255
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
27	Letters from the Red Zone	265
	SUSAN F. QUIMPO, MARIA CRISTINA PARGAS-BAWAGAN, AND JUN F. QUIMPO	
28	Reality Check	278
	EMILIE MAE Q. WICKETT	
29	Diwa	290
	SUSAN F. QUIMPO	

PART V

Escape and Defiance

30	Departure	306
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
31	A Warm Davao Welcome	318
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
32	Pondering Insurrection	326
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
33	Globe Steel	343
	SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
34	Like There Was No Tomorrow	352
	SUSAN F. QUIMPO	
35	Asylum	363
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	
36	Boycott Unless	371
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
37	<i>Welgang Bayan!</i> (People's Strike!)	379
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
38	Press Conference in a Guerrilla Zone	395
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
39	<i>Puto Bongbong</i>	406
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	

PART VI

Endgame

40	<i>Debate</i>	417
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
41	An Encounter with the CIA	422
	NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO	
42	The End of a Revolution	439
	DAVID RYAN F. QUIMPO	

Aftermath	449
THE SIBLINGS	

Acronyms and Abbreviations	464
Annexes	467

PART I

A decorative flourish consisting of three wavy, horizontal lines that curve upwards at both ends, positioned directly below the text 'PART I'.

IN THE SHADOW
OF THE PALACE

Lantern Parade

1



SUSAN F. QUIMPO

December 1981

I HAD TO GO to school. I clutched thick folders to my chest, wrapping both arms around them. There was no need for my notes that day, but I felt I had to hold on to something, even if it was only folders stuffed with notes for a test I had taken days ago.

It was the last day of school before the three-week Christmas break. A few exams were scheduled, but these were the exception. Even the faculty were lenient, for they too were excited about the biggest university event of the year, the evening's Lantern Parade.

The college theater group I belonged to had a good shot at winning first prize. Ramonlito, the group's artist, had designed a six-foot lantern; its thick cardboard frame was to take the shape of a pyramid, or in keeping with the season, a Christmas tree. But as always, the group was bent on making a statement, and the well-attended Lantern Parade was the perfect venue.

The lantern's black frame would be scored into a template of cutout human forms, and red cellophane would be stretched underneath this cardboard scaffold. It was to be mounted on bamboo poles and lit from within, casting crimson shadows of quivering human forms. From top to bottom, the lantern would be covered with faces of society's underprivileged as though they were trapped in the pyramid cage. The overall effect was meant to be disturbing—weary creases on a farmer's face, gaping mouths uttering silent screams, hate clenched in fists, and eyes gawking, questioning the morality of Yuletide celebrations void of Christian charity. Ramonlito's Christmas tree was to be wrapped in blood and garnished with rebellion.

It was the season for reconciliation, however temporary. Employers gave gifts of fruit and honey-laced ham to workers they exploited all year. Seasoned protest marchers refrained from converging at Malacañang, the presidential palace, to burn the American flag and Marcos effigies. And members of the communist militia, the New People's Army, came down from the hills to visit kin while the government troops pretended not to notice. Even at the university, differences were dismissed as moneyed

sorority girls joined the most militant activists for the Lantern Parade.

I should have been excited, wanting to help piece together Ramonlito's lantern for the competition. But joining the day's festivities was hardly the reason I left for school that day.

My sister-in-law Tina had visited the family residence the night before. The fact that she came was a surprise. After two raids, it was safe to assume that our apartment was under military surveillance. It was deemed "too hot," taboo to anyone even remotely suspected of having links to the communists, forbidden to Tina so recently released from prison.

"Visiting so soon?" I chided, partly reminding her of the risk she was taking. Tina did not smile. It was unlike her not to exchange the usual greetings. Her voice was calm but her face was pale with anxiety.

There was news that her husband, my brother Jun, had been killed in a barrio called Kalisitan in Nueva Ecija, a province three hours north of Manila. That was all that the "courier" said. Even he did not know the details.

Jun had often alluded to his death, and half jokingly requested that his wake be held at his alma mater, the University of the Philippines. UP was his refuge, and it had become mine too. It offered an asylum to those weary of the statutes of martial law. Within its walls was freedom—freedom to organize, discuss, and protest, at least for a few hours a day. UP became the breeding ground for activists and soon-to-be revolutionaries. Jun had thrived here; Jun had changed here. And if he were to die, it was only fitting that he come "home" here.

Early the next day, my sisters made the trip to Nueva Ecija. I stayed in Manila, assigned to go to school and arrange a wake for a brother I wasn't even sure was dead.

The Catholic chapel at UP had always been modest. Even at Christmas, the star lanterns and paper cutout trimmings hardly changed its homely appearance. The prayer pamphlets from the morning Mass lay uncollected on empty pews. I made my way to the chapel's administrative office, not really knowing what to say.

"I'd like to arrange for a wake."

"When will you bring the body?" the clerk asked, her voice crisp, almost uncaring. Secretly, I thanked her; I could not have dealt with mock sympathy.

"I don't know. You see, I'm not even sure he's dead." I took a deep breath and fumbled for an explanation. The clerk's reaction was one of blunt realism. She turned to a colleague and remarked that it was yet "another student killed by the military." Only a couple of weeks before, this same chapel had played host to the body of a slain student activist.

I walked to the Palma Hall Annex where I knew my friends would be. It was cool, the skies were clear, and the weather was perfect for the

night's festivities. I stared at the road, pacing slowly, as though counting the spots where the asphalt caved in, where gravel and dirt basins caught the monsoon rains. In me, there was no room for reconciliation.

The night before, the family had tried piecing together a description of Jun—scars, moles, birthmarks, anything that would be distinguishable should his corpse be badly bruised or mutilated. It was hard to remember how he looked, and even harder to remember who he really was.

FOR THE LAST SEVEN years, I saw little of Jun and my other siblings. It would be simple to blame their absence on their avoidance of military raids, imminent arrests, and detention. But I knew that my family had drifted apart long before the political persecution began. I was the passive observer who for 10 years witnessed the heated exchanges at the dinner table. My parents could not understand why their children would want to organize and join street demonstrations and risk losing scholarships. What was remotely wrong with acquiring a good college education to ensure for oneself a comfortable future?

My siblings reasoned that the dictates of the times were different. The protest marches were indicative of a national movement demanding significant change. The hopelessness of the common man's poverty, the corruption in government, the monopoly of power by the oligarchy, the effects of neocolonialism, and the age-old conflict over land ownership—these problems had now come to a head. And though to some the debates were little more than youthful rhetoric, my siblings spent evenings poring over Marx, Lenin, and Mao in search of answers. For them, to ponder self, family, and material comfort amidst pressing times was an indulgence they couldn't afford.

THE PALMA HALL ANNEX was bustling with activity. Even the stairwells were teeming with students piecing together oddly-shaped lanterns. My friends blocked one of the corridors, littering the floor with sheets of cellophane and craft paper. Our lantern was far from done.

I managed to pull Ramonlito and a few others away from the crowd. Calmly, I excused myself from helping with the lantern and briefly explained my predicament.

"My family received word that my brother was killed. I still do not know the circumstances." I pretended not to notice their baffled faces and retreated for a solitary lunch. I did not want to be consoled.

"Hello, Lulu? It's Susan." Lulu was our devoted housekeeper. Constantly aware that our phone may be bugged, she had the good sense to keep conversations short.

"No news, *Ate* Susan. In fact, no one has called."

MARTIAL LAW. No two words had a greater impact on my life. I grew up on a street called Concepción Aguila, a fifteen-minute walk from Malacañang. With the onset of martial law, our neighborhood turned into a garrison. First came the 24-hour shift of palace guards manning wooden road blocks. Soon the roadblocks were replaced with heavy iron barricades densely warped with barbed wire. Then the rickety wooden police outpost at our street corner was torn down, and solid concrete stations, complete with toilets and telephones, were built. During curfew hours, the army trucks would often come and empty their hulls of soldiers. Police cars with squawk boxes joined the party. Residents needed special car passes to enter the area. Soldiers randomly checked pedestrians for IDs certifying they lived in the district. Like prisoners, we needed the military's permission to enter our own homes.

Then the military raids began, at first to ensure that the homes around the palace were stripped of civilian-owned firearms. But as years passed, our apartment was singled out, and this time the raiding teams were bent on making arrests.

Ferdinand Marcos adamantly denied the existence of detention camps. "We have no political prisoners," he often repeated to the foreign press. Yet, while my high school peers spent their weekends attending family picnics, I spent mine packing cooked rice in foil and powdered milk into empty tins, and helping Dad deliver these rations to siblings in three cramped "rehabilitation centers." On Monday mornings, my classmates would ask what I did for the weekend. "I stayed home" was my usual reply.

IT WAS NEARING DUSK and the students now hauled their lanterns of various shapes and sizes into the street facing Palma Hall. Masked by nervous giggles, they spied their neighbors' lanterns. In hushed tones, comments of awe and ridicule were exchanged. A few sang Christmas jingles, many to the tune of popular TV soap commercials. I decided to momentarily join the crowd to satisfy my curiosity.

"Susan! We're here!" a member of the theater group called above the growing throng. I watched and smiled; in jest, my friends swore as they took turns trying to suspend the lantern from bamboo poles. "It's far too heavy, I warned you this would never work. Watch the lamp; it'll set the cellophane on fire!" The lantern wasn't perfect, but it was done.

I wove my way into the group and took my turn at badgering the lantern bearers. It wasn't long before a few friends called me aside. To my horror, they said in all sincerity, "We heard about your brother, our condolences."

"No, no one said he was dead!" I snapped, more upset than angry. I turned away and again retreated.

Martial law forced the open opposition movement underground. When military repression ensued, the call for armed rebellion was justified. Almost overnight, the label “student activist” was no longer apt. The newspapers were quick to christen the members of the underground movement with new names: subversives, communist insurgents, terrorists, guerrillas, rebels. Yet my personal lexicon remained unchanged; in my mind, they were simply family.

Though I was baffled by my siblings’ continued loyalty to the “revolution,” their courage had won my respect. What I could not accept was that this movement, the revolution, had the power to draw its members away from their lives and their families, yet could not care for its own.

Where were the *kasama*, their comrades-in-arms, when my brothers Jan, Nathan, and Norman were arrested and maltreated by their military captors? Where were the *kasama* when Jan’s head was repeatedly immersed in a commode filled with urine, when water was injected into his testicles, when his feet were doused, then jabbed with live wire? Our family did not hear from the *kasama* when Nathan was stripped naked and clubbed until he was nearly unconscious. No assistance was offered when my sister Lillian was missing for weeks and Dad made the rounds of prisons in search of her. Does one cease to be a comrade upon his or her capture? This revolution had stripped my family of any semblance of normalcy. It had promised victory, yet it brought only separation, torture, and now possibly Jun’s death.

“Lulu, I’ll be home in an hour.” It was my nth call to Lulu; she still had not heard from my sisters who had ventured to Nueva Ecija. I refused to worry about their safety; to do so would only add to the day’s futility.

It was nearly 10 o’clock when I arrived home. I was exhausted, though I had spent most of the day idly walking around the UP campus. As usual, Lulu had dinner waiting for me. She said my sisters were not back, nor had they called with news.

“Did anyone bother to call?” I asked in total resignation.

“Ay, *Ate*, someone did call. I can’t recall his name, but he said your group won first prize at the Lantern Parade.”

