

Home is where by
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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The girl sat tensely on the edge of the Consulate bench, her face carefully devoid of expression. The bird-of-paradise pattern was gaudy on her aloha shirt, the thong sandals looked slovenly on her feet, and on her head, riding the loose curls, was perched a big hibiscus flower. Her hands were tightly fisted in the pockets of her old jeans as she listened to the older woman seated before the passport clerk's desk. She looked at the woman, then at the clerk, with one eyebrow slightly raised. Too many movies, the clerk thought amusedly as he listened to the older woman talk.

He smoothed the passport application that she handed him and read: Benita Medina Sales, born in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, in 1908. On the back, in the space for names of persons to accompany the passport applicant, he read: Lucille Sales, born in Wailoku, Maui, Territory of Hawaii, on June 14, 1931. 'Your daughter is going to the Philippines with you, Mrs. Sales?' the clerk asked. 'Of course she is going with me.' The woman said, turning to the girl on the bench. The girl looked back at her, and the two locked stares for a long moment while the clerk fidgeted with the papers.

She gave these to the clerk and the latter leafed through them with some interest. He glanced quickly at the woman as a copy of divorcedecree appeared in the batch. He checked the names on both documents, then studied the remaining papers. A frayed certificate showed the old Philippine Commonwealth seal, and next to this were two thick photocopies of the girl's birth certificate. 'You can see I was born here,' the girl spoke up. 'I am an American citizen. I cannot go to the Philippines. I will not go!' 'Oh yes you are going,' the mother's voice shook a little. 'You are coming home with me.' 'This is my home,' the girl said. 'I am an American citizen. I will live here

all my life. ” “ You are a Filipino,” the mother’s face flushed, then paled. “ Your father and I are Filipinos. You and I are going back to our country.

We are going home. ” Home, the girl thought, and her hand moist inside her pockets. Where was it? For her it was here, where the roads wound between the mountains and the sea, where the breeze was cool while the sun was hot, where flowers grew by the roadside and never seemed to die, such was the continuity of the earth’s richness. The sea was gentle, the lawns were smooth, and the people . . . At the thought of her friends, the girl’s young face worked a little. She did not know what the Philippines looked like. She had no idea of the people. Her mother said that they were her own people, but she felt no kinship. “ I will not go,” she thought desperately. “ I will not go to the Philippines, I am an American citizen.

The Philippines is so far away, and those who come from there have such terrible things to say about the war. I won’t go. My mother can’t make me go. The woman looked at the girl, and a dull ache began to throb in her temples. What an unnatural child, she thought sadly. She seemed to feel no love of home at all. She herself never stopped thinking of it: fields of rice glistening to the sun: tobacco plants maturing in the heat: nipa houses hidden in bamboo groves. The people talked her language. They ate the same fresh fish from the creeks and cooked carabao meat in the animal’s blood. They worked in the fields. At night they gathered about the looms, the women weaving and listening to the talk of the men.

That was home, where one could belong and not feel like a stranger who, just passing through, must leave a trail of toil and heartbreak, then pass over

still more foreign roads. The clerk looked first at the mother, then at the daughter wondering idly what thoughts kept them silent. " How long have you been here? " he asked the woman. " Nineteen years," she replied. " I came with my husband in 1928. He worked for an experimental station. " " Did you live in Maui just before Lucille was born, sixteen years ago? Why are you going back to the Philippines now? The clerk asked with some interest.

The woman clasped her handbag. She glanced at her daughter, then turned to the clerk, her paler face flushing a little in embarrassment. " I have always wanted to go back," she said softly. " And now that my husband and I . . . Besides, I have the money. . . " The clerk nodded understandingly. He took up the batch of papers before him and examined the divorce decree. Extreme mental cruelty, it said, and a smile almost escaped him. The phrase somehow seemed absurd. He looked at the woman with overt interest, wondering what type of a man she had married.

Perhaps a man with some education, for it was plain that the woman had schooling. He noted the sureness of the handwriting on the application form. Her speech, too, was not the pidgin English that most plantation folk employed. " The women here. " The woman burst out, as though in spite of herself. " Ah the women here . . . " Her face showed her disdain. She remembered with acute suffering the young bride who had accompanied her husband to this land fo promise, and the almost unbearable homesickness which had made adjustment not only to a new husband but to new surroundings so pitifully difficult.

She recalled to the loss of first one child and then another and at the coming of Lucille. Lucille was her last child, the only one who had lived. Staring at the divorce decree, she thought of her husband's infidelities. She thought of them not too much as separate experiences but as haziness piled upon haziness in protective merging. Through many years of such unhappiness, she had clung to one bright hope -the hope of going home some day. It might take five years, she told herself then, or ten -even twenty. But eventually she would go home.

And now here was this child frustrating her. This was a strangeling she had nourished in her bosom. She spoke a jargon which she, her mother, barely understood. She dressed like a boy, behaved like a hoyden. She chewed gum all day long, sang and danced without restraint, went to endless movies. And now she flaunted her American citizenship as though that were important. Her nose was short, her hair was black, and her skin was the clear brown of her mother's and her father's skin. The mere fact of birth in a strange place did not make her a citizen of that place. Or did it?

This is not your country, she had told her again and again. You were only born here. I shall take you at last to the place to which you and I belong. A country like this and yet not quite like this. You will see, she had said, you will notice the difference when we get there. Sometimes she thought the girl was interested, but then something would happen -a glimpse of the sea beyond the park perhaps, or a plumeria tree in full bloom -and the girl's jaw would set in stubborn resistance and she would say that here, in Hawaii, she had been born and here she would remain. This is my home," she would repeat, " I am not going away. " The same resistance was in her daughter's

eyes now. The line of her jaw was hard, and her lips, carelessly rouged, were pressed together. " How long will it take before I get my passport? " the woman asked, turning to the clerk. " Oh, perhaps two hours," the clerk replied, checking the papers. " we need three copies of your pictures. Oh, here they are," and he detached the pictures from the sheaf of papers. He smiled and looked at the girl.

The fighting, stubborn expression had been caught accurately by the camera. " You still want your daughter included in your passport? " he asked the woman, more to tease the girl than to get an answer. " Of course, she is coming with me -if I have to drag her aboard ship! " " I won't go," said the girl, raising her voice, the line of her jaw taut. " You can't make me go. I will go back to my father. He will not send me away and I. . . " She stopped as her mother rose from her seat and took a step toward her.

Defiance hardened in the girl's eyes as she stared up her mother, " I am an American Citizen, I tell you," she said, breathing hard, flinging her words sharply against her mother's anger. She opened her lips to say more when a slap, ringing swift, fell across her mouth. " You! " the woman cried, her face so pale it was frightening. " You, you. . . " she repeated, her lips trembling so that the words couldn't take shape. She raised her hand once more, then dropped it, slowly crumpled in her chair, sobs suddenly and tearfully shaking her body. The girl stared at her mother aghast. She could not -she would never -understand all this.