

Standing Above Pajaro

A Filipino-American Imagined One-Act Play
Inspired by the 1930 Watsonville Riots

By Conrad A. Panganiban

Contact:
conradap@gmail.com
conradpanganiban.com
@consplayspace

This script is copyright protected and may not be reproduced, distributed, or disseminated
without the prior written permission of the author.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Melissa Anne Crawley: 40s. Female. Owner of the Watsonville General Store. An intelligent and strong-willed widower and mother.

Celestino Tobera: 20s. Male. Filipino migrant field worker. Well-read dreamer disillusioned with his vision of the American Dream.

Bobby Crawley: Late teens. Male. The son of Melissa Anne Crawley. Takes after his late father's short-temper trying to defend his town and Country against outsiders.

TIME

The play takes place in "real time" between 4:10am and 4:30am on **January 20, 1930**.

PLACE

The play takes place inside the Watsonville General Store.

SCENE 1

Lights up to dimly light up the interior of the Watsonville General Store. A calendar with a picture of a bright red Ford Truck is on the back wall reading January 1930. A wooden rolling pin is hanging next to the calendar. Several cans of all shapes and sizes line the shelves. A working clock is on the back wall saying that it's 4:10 a.m. A round table and two chairs are placed near the door. In front of the main counter are three round bushel baskets with three kinds of fruit – one of them being apples.

On one of the sides of the stage, we see a window that is left slightly ajar. A hand is seen pushing the window open. CELESTINO TOBERA, a Filipino farm worker in his early 20s, slowly struggles to get through the window. After one last push, he lands on the store's wooden floor. He is obviously tired and very hurt as he clutches his leg. He turns toward one of the baskets of fruit and takes one of the apples and devours it. After hearing some voices come from the outside, he quickly closes the window, and scurries behind a counter. After a beat of silence, he goes to the window to check if the coast is clear. Realizing that it is, he takes a breath of relief and backs into a display of cans causing some of them to fall.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

A light from upstage is turned on and CELESTINO searches for a place to hide. MELISSA ANNE CRAWLEY, a woman in her 40s and the owner of the Watsonville General Store, enters wearing a nightgown. Her hair is up in a loosely made bun, and she is holding a rifle. She reaches over to one of the walls and flips on a light switch to fully reveal the store. MELISSA scans the store cautiously to see if anyone else is inside. She sees a can on the floor, picks it up and places it on a counter. She still doesn't see Celestino but as she gets closer to finding him, CELESTINO deftly moves around in the opposite direction. As he moves behind another counter, a box accidentally falls – he ducks, she raises her rifle.

MELISSA

Get up! I saw you!

CELESTINO slowly rises from behind the counter with his hands raised. He's dressed in a McIntosh suit, which is usually pristine, but on this morning, his slacks are dirty, a sleeve is torn and his face is bruised and bloodied.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Good God.

CELESTINO

Not tonight.

MELISSA

What do you...? Get out.

(Pause.)

GET OUT!

CELESTINO shakes his head saying, "No."

MELISSA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Can't you speak English?

CELESTINO shakes his head to say, "Yes."

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Then you can understand that when I say Get Out, I meant, GET! OUT!

CELESTINO

I can't. My feet are frozen, mam.

MELISSA

They weren't frozen when you... how did you get in here?

CELESTINO points to the window.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Impossible. It's closed.

CELESTINO

That's because I closed it.

MELISSA

Don't get smart with me!

CELESTINO

No, mam. I was just trying to tell you that the window was—

MELISSA

I don't care.

CELESTINO

But I didn't have anywhere to go.

MELISSA

And you still don't have anywhere to go.

CELESTINO

Mam, please. People are trying to kill me.

MELISSA

Why should I care?

CELESTINO

It's happening all over Watsonville. Your men are trying to kill us!

MELISSA whirls her rifle around the store.

MELISSA

Us? There's more of you in here?

CELESTINO

No. No. Just me, mam.

MELISSA spins back pointing the rifle at
Celestino.

CELESTINO (CONT.) (CONT'D)

I came inside because there are people trying to—

MELISSA

I said, I don't care.
Bobby! Bobby Jr.! Get down here!

CELESTINO

Shhh... Mam. Shh... Please. I will pay you. Mam. My money.

CELESTINO digs into his pockets and pulls out
a few dollars and some dance tickets and throws
them on the table.

MELISSA

Get your hands out of your pockets!

CELESTINO

Here. Please take it-

MELISSA

I don't want your money.

CELESTINO

-so I can stay here. Just until morning.

MELISSA

This isn't a hotel.

CELESTINO

Then until the sun rises. Please.

MELISSA

I heard what you people do to our women.

CELESTINO

What we're doing? You're the one holding the gun!
Please, take this. This is all I have left.

MELISSA

A couple of dollars and... what are those?

CELESTINO

They're dance tickets.

MELISSA

I'm not aimin' to dance with you!

CELESTINO

No. That's not what I meant. Those tickets are from the Palm Beach Club.

MELISSA

That's where you dance with our girls, ain't it?

CELESTINO

We're just using the few hours we have off from the fields for for for companionship. To
to dance... To feel... To be human.

MELISSA

Then you should go home for that.

CELESTINO

This is our home.

MELISSA

No. Home is where everyone around you looks the same. You people are the ones
invading our land.

CELESTINO

Invading? My brother and I were hired to come to here because we are hard workers.
Something you Americans aren't able to do.

MELISSA raises her rifle at CELESTINO.

MELISSA

Watch your mouth, boy!

CELESTINO

Celestino Tobera. That is my name. Not boy.

MELISSA

Dead. That'll be your name if you keep talking like that.

CELESTINO

No offense, mam. But I was just trying to tell you my story.

MELISSA

“No offense, mam.” I know you didn't learn that from picking the Strawberries.

CELESTINO

Mr. Hartendorp.

Before we came here. In Manila. I learned English from the books he assigned us to read.

MELISSA

What? Mary had a little lamb? Or somethin' like Humpty Dumpty?

CELESTINO

Hamlet. Moby Dick. The Tempest.

MELISSA

“Is this a rifle which I see before me,
The handle in my hand?”

CELESTINO

Ah. The Scottish Play. One of my favorites.

MELISSA

I'm not up at four in the morning to talk about Shakespeare.

CELESTINO

Then what about poetry?

MELISSA

You gotta be kiddin' me.

CELESTINO

AMERICAN mouth-songs!

Those of mechanics — each one singing his, as it
should be, blithe and strong,

The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank
or beam,

The wood-cutter's song — the ploughboy's, on his way
in the morning, or at noon intermission, or at

(MORE)

CELESTINO (CONT'D)

sundown.

The day what belongs to the day — At night, the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, clean-blooded, singing with melodious voices, melodious thoughts.

Come! some of you! Still be flooding The States with hundreds and thousands of mouth-songs, fit for The States only.

That poem kept me afloat as our ship left from Manila Bay to Hawaii. From there to California's San Joaquin Valley to Alaska and back to Stockton and finally to here... Watsonville. I chased after the meaning of that song which Walt Whitman writes about. But now. Now, I wonder if that version of his American had ever existed.

MELISSA

It does exist but only for those who inherited this country for themselves and their offspring could live. For those who put in the work for the *American Dream*.

CELESTINO

Look at my hands.

(CELESTINO takes a step towards
Melissa.)

LOOK AT THEM!

These are the hands of a person who has worked to be a part of that dream!

CELESTINO moves in an attempt to take
Melissa's rifle. But in one step, he falls and cries
out in pain.

MELISSA holds the rifle at Celestino.

MELISSA

That's the last time you try anything like that.

CELESTINO

Go ahead and shoot!

(He tries to get up and falls.)

What are you waiting for! Shoot! Me!

Why don't you kill me. Put me out of my misery already! You're just as bad as your son!

MELISSA

Bobby Jr.?

CELESTINO

Who do you think did this to my leg? You don't remember me, huh? I come in here with Mr. Murphy I see your Bobby Jr. behind the counter looking at me like I shouldn't even be in here and...

MELISSA

He did that to you?

CELESTINO

Not only him. Five other people too. Taking turns punching... kicking... and laughing. You don't know what it's like.

MELISSA

(to herself)

I wish I didn't.

CELESTINO

And I still can see that bat.

MELISSA

Well, I'm sorry that happened to you, Celestino.

CELESTINO

Thank you, Mrs...?

MELISSA

Crawley. Melissa Crawley.

CELESTINO

Thank you, Mrs. Crawley. And if you're really sorry, could you please find it in your heart to let me stay here. Just until morning.

MELISSA

I... I can't. I'm sorry.

CELESTINO

You can't... or won't.

BOBBY JR. (O.S.)

I TOLD YOU THAT I HAVE TO GET SOMETHING FIRST!
WHAT?

MELISSA

That's him.

With great effort, CELESTINO gets up and grimaces as he starts to make his way back up the hall.

CELESTINO (CONT.)

There's a back door, right? Right?

With no response, CELESTINO leaves up the hall with MELISSA pointing the rifle at him, but doesn't shoot. The sound of a door shutting is heard.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3

Suddenly, the sound of the front door unlocking causes MELISSA to spin around towards the door with her rifle raised. BOBBY, a young man in his late Teens enters holding a baseball bat stained with blood.

MELISSA

Bobby?

Bobby! Where did you go? I called down for you earlier.

BOBBY

You're supposed to be asleep, Ma.

MELISSA

I heard some rustlin' outside.

(Noticing his bat)

Is that blood?

BOBBY

Could be.

BOBBY walks past Melissa and goes over to a shelf to open a bottle of whiskey. He gets a glass, pours the liquor and takes a drink.

MELISSA

You said that you'd be back before nightfall.

BOBBY

Just a little huntin' with the boys.

MELISSA

Sounds like a little more than hunting.

BOBBY

Why do you have to be such a nag, ma?!

MELISSA

I told you, I heard some rustlin' out there.

BOBBY

We're taking back our town from them goo-goos.

MELISSA

What did the Filipinos do now?

BOBBY

Mel told me that Regina was dancing with this Filipino boy –

MELISSA

What does this have to do with Regina?

BOBBY

She told me that she wasn't gonna be there!

MELISSA

Where?

BOBBY

At that place out in Palm Beach. So, a bunch of us went over there to get her, and the Locke-Paddon boys and even Sheriff Sinott start pointin' their guns at us.

MELISSA

I told you she was trouble.

BOBBY

No! Them goo-goos are the trouble and those brothers and the Sheriff are protectin' them.

MELISSA

They're just tryin' to protect their land.

BOBBY

This *is* our land and I can't believe that they're defending those savages.

MELISSA

Savages?

BOBBY

Luckily, we spotted a couple of them on San Juan Road and chased 'em to the bridge. But when they got there they just they just stood there. Right above the Pajaro looking for a fight or something. We got in some licks, threw a couple of 'em into the river and a couple of ran off.

MELISSA

I guess that explains the blood.

BOBBY holds up the bat to glorify the blood stains on it.

BOBBY

The great American pastime.

BOBBY takes a look at the clock, finishes his drink, and goes to one of the shelves, pulls out a gun, and begins to exit.

MELISSA

Where do you think you're goin'?

BOBBY

We ain't done yet.

MELISSA

Maybe they ain't, but you are.

BOBBY disregards Melissa's words and moves to exit. MELISSA places her hand on his chest to stop him.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

You can't go around shooting all of them, Bobby. No matter what country you're in, it's wrong and if you're caught... I just don't want to lose you too.

BOBBY

It's called self-defense.

MELISSA

But you're the one chasing after them.

BOBBY

Are you on our side or theirs?

(BOBBY lets out a sigh and pulls out a chair.)

Sit.

MELISSA sits in the chair.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Mama. Can't you see that all we're doin' is defendin' our land. Our families. Our way of life. Remember when Daddy was alive and we had no troubles with anyone in the valley? It was because everyone respected us and our store. We kept everyone fed.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

We kept everyone in the light at night from the oil they bought from us. Everyone in this town needed us. We provided goods and a service. We gave this town balance. And ever since those foreigners started to cause a ruckus about wanting to get paid what they think they deserve or breaking the law by trying to marry our women or spreading their diseases. Don't you see that this town needs us more than ever to keep that balance? Ma, what we're doing is the right thing. I promise. Everything will be balanced come morning.

BOBBY moves towards the door to exit, a creak on a wooden floor and knocking is heard.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

What was that?

Pause.

MELISSA

Mice.
More of them coming in from the field.

BOBBY

No. That was more than a mouse.

MELISSA

Well, Bobby, if you were here more often, instead of...

BOBBY

What?

MELISSA

Nothing.

BOBBY

Instead of WHAT?!

MELISSA

Instead going off with your friends and getting DRUNK all the time like your father!

BOBBY strikes MELISSA causing her to fall.

BOBBY then takes out his gun and points it at MELISSA and pulls its hammer down.

BOBBY

I swear. If you weren't my...

After a beat, BOBBY uncocks the gun and holsters it. Then he helps MELISSA get back up and puts her into a chair.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Everything will be back to normal, Ma. When we're done, I'll be back to get rid of the mice. I promise.

BOBBY exits.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 4

CELESTINO, still in pain, re-enters the General Store from the hallway limping.

CELESTINO

Is he gone?

Noticing MELISSA slumped in the chair, CELESTINO goes to her.

CELESTINO (CONT.) (CONT'D)

What happened, mam? You're bleeding.

MELISSA quickly gets out of her chair, gets the rifle and points it back at CELESTINO.

MELISSA

What did you do to my son?

CELESTINO

What did I do? Your son was the one who tried to kill me.

MELISSA

Then you must've done something—

CELESTINO

I swear—

MELISSA

Regina Bell Halsey.

CELESTINO

Regina?

MELISSA

Short girl. Brunette. Always wears a pink bow in her hair.

CELESTINO

What about her?

MELISSA

So it was you who was trying to steal her from Bobby?

CELESTINO

She's the one who didn't want to leave me.

MELISSA

Then that's why he hates you so much.

CELESTINO

Then the feeling is mutual. She told me about him and about the bad things he did to her. Maybe you should be asking him why he hates women. Does he hit you too?

MELISSA uses the butt of the rifle to knock CELESTINO down to the ground. MELISSA then cocks the rifle and points the barrel of it at his head.

MELISSA

I do all I can to raise Bobby on my own. You don't know what it's like.

CELESTINO

I don't. But my mother does. She raised me and my brother alone too.

MELISSA

And where is she?

CELESTINO

She's passed away.

MELISSA

Then you can join her.

CELESTINO closes his eyes and begins to pray.

CELESTINO

Hail Mary, full of grace
The Lord is with Thee
Blessed art thou amongst women,
And Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb Jesus.

MELISSA lowers her rifle.

CELESTINO (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners.

MELISSA AND CELESTINO

Now and at the hour of our death.

CELESTINO

Amen.

Pause.

MELISSA

So much for being savages.

CELESTINO

My brother, Fermin, taught me that. And he learned it from my Inay. My mother. One of the only things I have left from her.

MELISSA

I was left on the front steps of this store with that Prayer pinned to the torn blanket I was wrapped in. The only thing I have left from my mother too.

(Pause)

Get out of here before the light comes up.

CELESTINO nods his head in understanding. He begins to head over to the door and stops to make sure the coast is clear and exits.

MELISSA sits down in a chair to recover from everything that's happened that night. And just when things begin to feel "normal"...

END OF SCENE

SCENE 5

Get in there!

BOBBY (O.S.)

The store's door opens with BOBBY JR. pushing CELESTINO inside. MELISSA stands up.

Stand over there!

BOBBY (CONT.) (CONT'D)

BOBBY goes over to the window to check if someone saw them. Turns back, draws out his gun and aims it at CELESTINO.

You really think that you can run from me again, boy? Remember my bat?

CELESTINO

Hail Mary, Full of Grace...

BOBBY

Blah blah blah blah blah.

MELISSA

Don't do it, Bobby.

BOBBY

Do what? I'm shooting the person who's breaking into our store. Self-defense.

MELISSA

But he didn't break in. You pushed him in.

BOBBY

That's not what I saw. And that's not what you saw.

MELISSA

Let the Sheriff handle this.

BOBBY

The Sheriff's not interested in helping us. I told you that already!

CELESTINO

Mam, help me! Please! Mrs. Crawley?

BOBBY
 What? How'd you know...?

BOBBY turns and points the gun at MELISSA.

BOBBY (CONT.) (CONT'D)
 How do you know him?!

MELISSA
 Put the gun down, Bobby!

CELESTINO
 I was in here earlier.

BOBBY spins back to pointing the gun at
 CELESTINO.

CELESTINO (CONT.) (CONT'D)
 I was looking for / help

BOBBY
 SHUT UP! I wasn't talking to you! Ma, was he in here earlier?

MELISSA
 No.

BOBBY
 This is what you get for lying, boy!

MELISSA
 Stop! He was in here! He was in here!

BOBBY
 Don't lie for him!

MELISSA
 Celestino came in a bloody mess and I couldn't turn him away.

BOBBY
 Celestino?! When?

MELISSA
 Just before you came in for that gun. But he left right when you—

BOBBY
 And you didn't do anything—

CELESTINO

I didn't want to cause her any trouble—

BOBBY gives CELESTINO a whack in the back of the head. CELESTINO falls.

BOBBY

I wasn't talking to you!

(to MELISSA)

And you! How could you lie to me like that? You had him in here?! Do you know what he could have done to you?

MELISSA

Nothing. Nothing happened. He just needed a place—

BOBBY hits MELISSA, but she doesn't fall.

BOBBY

Get out. I'll deal with you after I'm done with Celestino here. GET OUT!

MELISSA doesn't move.

BOBBY (CONT.) (CONT'D)

GO!!!

MELISSA starts to make her way up the hallway where Celestino went earlier to go to the bathroom. BOBBY stands over CELESTINO pointing the gun down at him ready to pull the trigger. Just as he's about to fire, MELISSA re-enters the scene, grabs a rolling pin and hits BOBBY in the back of the head stunning him and causing him to fall.

MELISSA

Get up! Get out of here!

CELESTINO

Come with me. He will kill you if you stay here.

MELISSA

He won't. I know him.

In mad mixture of confusion and fear, CELESTINO runs out the door.

BOBBY regains some of his senses and starts after CELESTINO out the door.

BOBBY (O.S.)

Get back here!

Almost without thinking, MELISSA grabs the rifle, and standing in the open doorway, takes aim and fires a shot! And then another one! In a daze, she backs away from the door and slowly points the rifle down.

Silence.

CELESTINO runs from off-stage to the door and immediately stops and slowly enters with his hands raised in the air.

CELESTINO

Mrs. Crawley, he's...

MELISSA is still in a daze as CELESTINO moves towards her. After taking her rifle and placing it on a counter, he pulls out a chair for her to sit in.

CELESTINO (CONT'D)

Sit here. Everything will be... Thank you for... Is there anything I can get you, Mrs. Crawley?

MELISSA finally makes eye contact with CELESTINO and rises from the chair and goes to the counter, takes out a box and the money inside it.

She goes back to him and gives him all the money.

MELISSA

Take this. Get your brother and get out of Watsonville.

CELESTINO

I can't take this.

MELISSA

Yes you can and you will. You have to.

CELESTINO

What about you? And what about...?

MELISSA

This doesn't concern you now.

CELESTINO

I can't leave you like this. Come with us.

MELISSA

No. It's best I stay here. It would only raise suspicion about Bobby if I went with you.

CELESTINO

I don't know what to say.

MELISSA

Say, "Goodbye".

CELESTINO

I'm so sorry things had to end like this.

MELISSA

The sun is starting to come up. You don't have much time.

CELESTINO moves to exit out the door.

MELISSA (CONT.) (CONT'D)

I know that America isn't everything that Walt Whitman wrote about, but I need you to not lose hope. You know what this country is supposed to be like... more than some of the ones who were even born here. We *need* more people like you.

CELESTINO

"I can no other answer make but thanks;
And thanks."
Goodbye, Melissa.

CELESTINO exits.

Lights fade out.

END OF PLAY