

A novel by

AMANDA
SMYTH

FORTUNE

"A thriller, a page turner, an adventure story and a tense love story all in one, I couldn't put it down."

MONIQUE ROFFEY

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ONE

Somewhere between Gasparillo and Chaguanas on the Southern Main Road, Eddie felt the engine slipping and gasping as if catching its breath and every now and then he heard a pop-pop and he hoped it would hold out, at least until he got to Strong Man. But there it was, broken down with smoke gushing out of it. He knew it wasn't gasoline and he knew he had water. The fan belt, maybe, or even the piston rings. No point looking under the bonnet until it cooled down.

He lit a cigarette, wondered how he could get a message to his uncle. A white sun punctured the sky, and there was a hard glare; some clouds low over the central hills. Not a good time to be stranded. No matter, somebody would come along at some point. He'd passed at least two cars heading this way, a buffalo cart full of coconuts and he'd almost stopped the old Indian man because his mouth was claggy, and then thought better of it. The cart would catch up eventually, unless the man had turned off the road already.

Glad of his hat, Eddie rolled down his sleeves and walked a little up the bank. A samaan tree offered some shade and from here he could see the direction he'd come from and think what to do. The land around was crispy and dry, hills scarred with black marks and drifts of pale smoke. He'd seen it too often, a bottle thrown, a careless cigarette, and next thing the whole hill was roasting like a side of meat. He spotted a brown dog with its belly bloated poking out of the grass. Just yesterday he'd hit a stray when it ran out into Coffee Street. He got out to check the bumper – surprised to find it there and hollering, its back leg jerking uncontrollably. Two children were playing marbles on the side of the road so he gave them each five cents for a soda and

when they'd gone, not wanting it to suffer, he drove over the dog and crushed its head.

Eddie finished up his cigarette, and went back to the truck. He lifted up the bonnet and peered inside; nothing looked out of the ordinary. He checked the sky and saw vultures floating high like black stars. It occurred to him, it could actually be hours before anyone came by; he might as well set off on foot. He made his way down the other side and the road was blurred. From his hip flask he took a gulp of warm rum and it swooshed easily down his parched throat. He put his bag on his back, checked his watch and set out towards the capital. He'd be there by nightfall if he was lucky.

As he walked along the edge of the cane fields, his face poured with sweat, his feet were hot and swollen in his cracked boots. Cicadas were clacking and droning, a loud, unnatural, mechanical sound, as if something mighty was about to explode. And the thought came to him: none of this mattered, the heat, his thirst, the broken-down truck; what mattered was his meeting this morning with Sonny Chatterjee. He could hardly believe what he'd seen.

Over the years, rumours of black puddles appearing on the land had drawn oil men to Sonny Chatterjee's estate. Buried deep in South Trinidad, Kushi was a cocoa plantation of fifty acres; it had belonged in the Chatterjee family since 1905. Seen pooling at the foot of a tree, swirling on the skin of the Godineau river, there was talk of oil running free like honey along the path to Sonny's door. But Sonny Chatterjee had a reputation as a difficult and ignorant man. So far, no one had persuaded him to let them test the land, let alone drill on it.

Eddie had been watching it for a while now. The first time he turned up, Chatterjee shooed him away.

A week later, Eddie came back with a crate of pineapples.

'You again?'

Chatterjee's eyes were bleary from sleep.

'Yes sir, there are things to talk about.'

'I just wake up. You can't see that?'

'It won't take long. But if you'd prefer, I'll come back another time.' Eddie left the crate on the ground, and went back to his truck.

A couple weeks later he returned. 'I knew your father, Madoo,' Eddie said, as he walked towards Chatterjee, sitting outside the house in his white dhoti. It was late afternoon. 'My uncle owns Mon Repos.'

Chatterjee narrowed his eyes. 'Which Madoo?'

'Old man Madoo with the short foot.'

Eddie hadn't forgotten the sight of Madoo's crooked figure on horseback; one leg longer than the other, a birth defect. Some years ago, Eddie had heard that Madoo was electrocuted by a falling cable outside a pharmacy in San Fernando.

'Your uncle own Mon Repos?'

'I used to see your father when I was a boy, riding through fields of citrus shouting orders.'

'That's him,' Chatterjee said. 'He like to play boss,' and he told Eddie how his father sailed from Calcutta to Trinidad on the *Golden Fleece*, then after years of working at Mon Repos, traded his return passage to India for \$5, and a piece of land. He planted cocoa trees. He'd offered loans to the villagers with high interest rates. He'd made a small fortune.

Chatterjee put out his arms, 'Bhap come here with nothing; he make all this.'

Eddie told Chatterjee how, like him, he'd lost his father; how it turned him quickly into a man.

'When your father pass, you can't stand in the shade.'

'Yes,' Chatterjee said. 'You must walk in the hot sun.'

Eddie called in to see Chatterjee every couple of weeks. He made the excuse that he was visiting his uncle nearby. He brought oranges, or mangoes, or bananas; whatever was falling off the trees. Chatterjee didn't thank him but he took what he brought. At first they stood by the truck and smoked a cigarette. Then after he had visited a few times, Eddie was invited to sit in the porch with the broken-down wall, where a warm breeze blew. They never ventured beyond here; the rest of the estate was out of bounds. Eddie was desperate to see it.

While they talked, Sita brought tea or juice, and she looked at Eddie from the sides of her eyes. She wore her hair in a plait, and her face was set, as if she had eaten something sour.

Eddie was sure that Chatterjee knew why he was there. Once

he said, 'If you come for oil, you may as well leave right now.'

Eddie kept quiet.

Chatterjee seemed exhausted; dark rings under his bloodshot eyes. He was only thirty-seven, but he looked twenty years older. Everything at Kushi looked tired. Walls needed paint, the yard was full of junk and there were buckets everywhere ready to catch rain when it fell.

Eddie asked, 'You have water?'

'We have tanks but no pump.'

Then Chatterjee told Eddie about the strange mushrooms he'd found clinging to the branches of his cocoa trees. He'd lopped off the diseased branches, cut away the rotten pods.

'From Brazil to these islands, millions of cocoa trees are dying. It's not just Kushi, Sonny. The whole of Trinidad is the same thing.'

'They say put oil, sprinkle flour. Scorch the trunk until it black and they fall off. I try all that. I get on my knees and pray.'

Eddie wanted to tell Chatterjee: forget cocoa, it's finished, but he figured Chatterjee wasn't ready to hear it. He'd wait.

Then the moment came when Chatterjee asked Eddie what was inside the bag he always carried. Eddie opened up the cowhide satchel. He brought out a folder with papers, documents, photographs.

'This, sir,' Eddie said, picking through them, 'is Beaumont, Texas. And this is where I once leased a piece of land, this land here with nothing on it.' The photograph showed about an acre of grass and a small shed. Eddie was standing next to it alongside another man, their eyes squinting in the sun. 'My partner, Michael Callaghan.' There was another photograph of this same land with a tall structure, and a metal pick.

'This cable tool, here, goes into the ground.' Then, 'This is what happened.' Eddie held up the photograph.

Chatterjee leaned in, pointed to the black mark on the image.

'That's oil coming out of the ground. It's called a gusher.'

Eddie had cuttings of newspapers showing pictures of cars, trucks.

'It's the future, Sonny.'

Chatterjee looked away at the early blue light sifting through

the leaves of the immortelle. Mist hung in the bush giving the place a dreamy look.

‘Cocoa’s in serious trouble,’ Eddie told him. ‘You might save some of these trees, but chances are they’ll take years to produce. You have something much more valuable and you’re sitting right on it.’

‘So they tell me,’ Chatterjee said, lolling his head. ‘Apex, Texaco, Leaseholds, all of them. They say I could make a few dollars.’

‘I’m not talking about a few dollars. I’m talking plenty money.’ Eddie held his hand high from the ground.

‘Money to send your children abroad to study, buy yourself a new car; fix up your house. Buy your wife a diamond ring or a herd of cows. Pay a doctor when you need one. Apex won’t tell you how much money is under your feet because they want it for themselves.’

All the while Chatterjee looked into the darkness.

‘You understand? You’re not dealing with a person; you’re talking to a corporation. They don’t care about the small man. Believe me, Sonny, they’ll try to convince you that you’re a small man.’

He didn’t tell Chatterjee that just last week he’d been to see Charles Macleod – Apex’s senior operations manager, to talk about employment. Macleod had spoken of oil on Chatterjee’s estate. He’d called Chatterjee a ‘coolie fool’.

The pay was as good as anything else Eddie might find in Trinidad, but there was something about Macleod that made his skin bristle, the strange force of the man, his bloodless complexion, eyes twitchy like fleas. Could you dislike someone because his eyes twitched? It would seem so.

And while Eddie kept quiet about Macleod, Chatterjee didn’t tell Eddie that Charles Macleod had been to see him two days ago, and offered him a holding fee of \$1000.

Eddie said, ‘I’ve learned something, Sonny, we must set our sights on the future. There’s no point looking back; we’re not going that way. Sometimes you have to destroy the old to make way for the new. If you want me to help you I can.’

Then, this morning, after months of visiting, Chatterjee took Eddie by surprise.

‘You have money to get started here at Kushi?’

Eddie looked at him. ‘I need to speak to some people. But yes, there’s money around. We can do some tests, take a look at what’s there.’

‘Why not see what you can do.’

Chatterjee walked Eddie back to his truck, where his boys were sitting in front, twisting the wheel, thin as sticks. He clapped his hands.

‘Sons, show Mister Eddie what you find.’

They jumped down and ran off towards the forest. For the first time, Eddie was taken deeper into the estate. He followed the boys along a trail through semi darkness.

Eddie saw how the cocoa trees were bowed and wilted and rotting. He could see their spores, the marble patterning on their trunks; there was a smell of rot. Parts of the estate were overgrown, evidence that Chatterjee had long since given up. They climbed through ferns; high silver shrubs stalked up; dangling vines low like trip wires. They picked their way through until they found a clearing.

One of the boys found a thin pipe, and taking a heavy stone, hammered the pipe into the ground. Eddie watched a spurt of black liquid spit up and make a puddle right there at his boots.

He bent down, rubbed it between his fingers and held it to his nose: Mary, mother of God, he said to himself. The land was saturated. He wanted to jump in the air, wash his face with it, hold Chatterjee and shake him. Instead, Eddie said, and his voice was calm, ‘Let me see what I can do. Give me a few days.’

‘Doh take too long,’ Chatterjee said, and for the first time in weeks, Eddie saw him smile, though there was a tightness around the man’s mouth that made smiling look painful. ‘I might change my mind.’

Eddie was thinking of all of this, and he pictured Chatterjee as he sat in his porch with his hands around his belly, looking out at the dark yard. And while fixing his eyes on the hazy road ahead, black and lumpy with new pitch, he felt in his bones and in his blood that his life was about to change. For months he’d been trying to figure out where he should be, looking for a direction. He’d

found it this morning; yes, his fortune was no doubt buried right there in Siparia on Sonny Chatterjee's estate. This was what he had been waiting for, and he was so lost in this thought with the brutal sun hitting his face that he didn't hear Tito Fernandes' horn hooting until he was right there beside him, the Ford Model T car gleaming like a Christmas bauble.

'Hey,' Tito said. 'That was your truck?' He pointed behind him. 'They give a lot of trouble; I had one myself and got rid of it.' Then he said, 'Get in,' reached over and pushed open the door.

'Could be the belt,' Eddie said, 'I've felt it for a while, like a dog slipping a leash. If you could get me to a mechanic, I'll be grateful. This place is like a desert.'

Tito smiled. 'Everyone's in church and those who aren't probably should be.' Then he put out his hand and they introduced themselves.

Eddie climbed in, ran his eyes over the leather interior.

'Don't ask,' Tito rolled his eyes, 'If you made me choose right now – my dear wife or my car, I'm not sure which I'd pick. I know which is less trouble.'

Eddie stuck a cigarette in his mouth, cradled a small flame. He tried to figure out if he'd seen Tito before; his face was familiar.

'It's the future,' Eddie said. 'One day the roads will be full of them. And they probably won't look like this.'

'You've seen the Tourer?'

'Oh yes,' Tito nodded, 'in pictures. And the Bugatti. The Mercedes – a pretty, pretty car.'

On the left were rice fields and coconut trees. Tito accelerated along the Southern Main Road towards the Northern Range and the needle on the dial hit 46 miles an hour and it stayed and trembled there for five miles or so. The car rattled and shook; it felt like it was going fast because it was going fast. Eddie envied its thrust and power, especially after his slow drive that morning in Uncle Clyde's truck. Not bad at all. He could do with something like this. Yes, when he had some money, he'd buy himself a new car.

'Where you from, Eddie?'

Tito slowed down.

'I was born here. But I've been living in America a few years

now. California, Houston. All over, in fact. You can make things happen there. Chances are they've been done before. In Trinidad you can be the first, a pioneer. It's hard to get things done. But you can make your mark.'

'Is that what you want to do? Be a pioneer? Make your mark?'

'Yes,' Eddie said, and glanced at Tito, 'in some ways. Don't we all?'

'Trinidad's changed. There's money, sure, but drive around at night, and people half-naked sleeping on the streets of Port of Spain. They say trouble coming again.'

'Strikes?'

'Push people down long enough and they come back harder. The British 'fraid the blacks, they 'fraid Indians, now, too. They tell the government, send troops! Send marines!' Tito put his fist in the air. 'People done with poor wages, long hours. You can't blame them. But Cipriani changing things.'

'You like him?'

'Yes, I like how he's a racehorse trainer, a Captain in the army *and* he's a champion of the barefoot man! They love him because he speaks for the poor. If they don't listen to him, there'll be much more radical leaders coming up. But who knows, he's a colonial, they might turn on him, too. Trinidad not easy.' Then Tito said, 'My wife talks about emigrating. I tell her yes, sure, let's go to America, give it a try. But Trinidad is home; I never leaving here.'

Tito winked at Eddie, and accelerated towards the south quay where the sun was low and yellow as a yolk. A cruise ship was sailing into the wharf, *Benediction*, in silver letters along the starboard, probably from New York, taking a tour of the islands. By the gate, a small crowd of locals waited. A young black woman posed with a macaw on each shoulder: something for the tourists. As the ship docked, passengers would drop dimes in the water and watch the local boys dive down to find them. Eddie had seen it time and time again – all up the islands, and he didn't much like it.

The sky was softening now above the new railway station with its arched windows and impressive pavilions. Trains ran regularly from here to San Fernando, out to Sangre Grande, too. He'd heard complaints – the building was a colossal waste of money, unnecessarily ostentatious, especially now trams and automo-

biles were proving more efficient and cost effective. Good news for oil; good news for Eddie.

‘You have a wife, Eddie?’

‘Not yet, I want to make my fortune first.’

‘Don’t wait ’til you’re an old man like me. I was lucky to find Ada.’

‘Love at first sight?’

‘Yes, for one of us at least. We’re a team. Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.’

‘What’s the secret?’

‘Twice a week we go out for a candlelight dinner. Ada goes Tuesdays and I go on Fridays.’

Eddie grinned.

‘You don’t fight?’

‘Yes we fight. About where we go on holiday. I say I want to go to Paris, and she says she wants to come with me.’

Tito was feeling better, thanks to his new companion.

Around the savannah horses were cantering, their bodies shining in the dipping sunlight; clouds of dust, red as cinnamon, puffed out behind their legs.

Eddie thought about his uncle. He should get a message to him.

Tito rolled into the driveway at the Queens Park Hotel.

‘Let’s get something to drink before we both pass out. Something strong. I’ve had a long day. Maybe I’ll tell you about it some time.’

‘You sure I’m dressed right? I have another shirt in my bag, though it’s creased up.’

‘Don’t worry, you’re with me. I have shares in this place.’

They parked and walked through the lobby to a long bar: wooden shutters leaned out into a garden, sprigs of bougainvillea on the tables; a woman in a long gown was playing the piano. Behind the bar, a young black man stood to attention in a bow tie and flashed his china-white teeth.

‘Mister Fernandes. How are you?’

‘Thirsty like a donkey in the desert, but apart from that I’m alive.’

‘Glad to hear it,’ the man said, and he nodded at Eddie.

Tito ordered a half bottle of gin and a jug of coconut water. 'Look,' he said, 'we'll drink a little, and then head back and sort out your vehicle. A man needs refreshments in this heat. I keep telling my wife, you worry about vitamins but you must never forget to hydrate. Especially in this hell hole.'

He smiled and his fleshy cheeks dimpled like doughnuts.

They found a table by the window and away from the bar. There was a kind of splendour here that Eddie had forgotten about – the polished wooden floor, modern overhead fans and starched tablecloths. This was a place for wealthy white Trinidadians, French Creoles, and American tourists. Eddie knew of the hotel, but he'd never had a reason to step inside. He should wash his hands.

Tito said, 'So what's your business?' Then, 'Let me guess, you're a planter.'

'Not quite,' Eddie said, 'I get bored; agriculture's not for me. Everything takes too long. I like to move around.'

'Construction?'

'Closer. I'm a driller.'

Tito cocked his head. 'Okay. That fits. You can't be short of work.'

'There's plenty to choose from.'

While the light changed and hotel guests came and went, Eddie and Tito emptied the bottle of gin and jug of coconut water and when it ran out, Tito called for more. The cook sent slices of pork and peppered shrimps, and hot bread. Eddie hadn't realised how hungry he was until he started eating. While they ate and drank, Eddie told Tito about his Uncle Clyde, and how he'd come back to Trinidad to help him up at Mon Repos Estate.

He spoke about his good friend Michael Callaghan and their search for oil in New Mexico. Their near success in Beaumont, and how they were scuppered by the owner of the land who turned out to be the biggest crook since Al Capone. He explained how he'd got caught up in the Teapot Dome in Wyoming, found the site on the edge of a football pitch and drilled down with a cable tool, and a pump. He and Callaghan had drilled the patch for five weeks. The well came in at 550 feet, one of the largest wells in history. Meanwhile, in New York, the owner was subpoenaed on four counts of bribery and corruption. He had no choice but to walk

away without a cent. His nose was keen; he'd been unlucky. He'd learned his lessons. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

Eddie found himself telling Tito about his father, who had died in a volcano in St Vincent.

'They tell me he was on the mountainside when a stone fell next to him. Then the stones fell thicker, one or two were big, too big to be thrown by anyone's hands. Then he must have seen it was the mountain – pitching stones at him. He ran towards the sea bawling for help, ash and steam pouring out. Lava trickled down and buried the crops and houses. The volcano came like that, and no one knew. It spewed for days.'

He explained how his mother died soon after because her big heart was torn right out of her and there was nothing inside to keep her alive. At fifty-five years old, she fell asleep one evening and didn't wake up.

It occurred to Eddie that he was talking to Tito like he hadn't talked to anyone in years. It felt good, like putting down a heavy suitcase he'd been carrying.

'Mother was full of tears. Nothing worse than dying when you're alive. I'm glad in some ways she's gone.'

As he said it, Eddie knew it wasn't true. A day didn't pass when he didn't think about his mother.

Tito listened and nodded. 'Dying while you're alive is a terrible thing. A lot of people live like that.' He told Eddie he was brave. 'You're a fighter, you'll do okay. Most people live their lives like a sentence; you know what you want. I'm sure you'll get it.'

'I know what I want – I died twice.'

'You died how?'

'Malaria when I was eight. Then my plane crashed in Carcassonne. I saw angels come around.'

'Angels?'

'I don't know what they were but I figured they were angels by the light they brought. I thought that was the end. Everyone was dying. It was the war.'

'Were you afraid?'

'Of what, angels?' Eddie laughed. He took out another cigarette and lit it. 'I'm still here; there's no time to be afraid.'

'I like to think I have time.' Tito leaned back in his chair.

‘There’s nothing wrong with a little self-denial. I’d rather glance at things from the sidelines.’

‘Sure, each to his own. It’s just a different view.’

Tito raised his glass. ‘To the angels.’

By now the air was thick and still. The waiter pushed back the shutters and there was a little breeze and Eddie saw that evening had come. Fireflies glittered in the darkness; he had never seen so many at once. His head was tight, and he felt good in himself. He felt a new charge and it wasn’t just the liquor. He called through a message to his uncle; he would try to be there by lunchtime. He didn’t mention the truck; he would pick that up tomorrow. Tonight he would stay in Rattan’s hotel – it was cheap, familiar, a little on the rough side.

‘I know Rattans. My low-life brother used to stay there; it’s where all his friends hang out. He’s another story altogether. I’ll save that for next time.’

Tito apologised, he hadn’t meant to keep him back. ‘We could go and get my mechanic right now, he’s there in Belmont.’

‘No sir,’ Eddie said, ‘it can wait.’

Music started up. The song was a familiar, lively tune and a couple got up and started to dance, a slow, quick-quick step. They probably imagined they looked like film stars; their eyes never left each other.

‘Love like dove,’ Tito said.

Then, heady with liquor, Eddie was saying, ‘There’s a man called Chatterjee, he owns a big cocoa estate down in Siparia. It’s full of oil.’

‘All down there has oil – Fyzabad, Brighton, Point Fortin.’

‘This is different. Chatterjee’s place is floating on it. You can smell it in the air.’

‘It’s one thing to have it on your land; getting it out is another thing altogether.’

‘No sir, not at all. Look at those twin brothers in Los Angeles – the Applegates; they drilled on the corner of Glendale Boulevard and Harman Drive using the sharp end of a eucalyptus tree. Two years later they have eighty wells and they’re millionaires.’ Eddie leaned in, ‘Chatterjee’s oil is so near the surface you could suck it up with a straw.’

‘Then why doesn’t he?’

‘Because he doesn’t know how. He only knows how to farm and his cocoa trees are dying.’

Eddie pulled on his cigarette, swirled the smoke around his mouth and blew it out.

‘So how come Apex not in there?’

‘Apex come and hassle Chatterjee to lease the land. Chatterjee says no.’

‘Why?’

‘Who knows? Macleod, the manager, has the charm of a cockroach. Maybe Chatterjee can’t stand colonials. He doesn’t want them on his land. Maybe he’s honouring his father. He came on a boat from Calcutta fifty years ago and made something of himself. Chatterjee might not have any business sense, but he doesn’t want foreigners. He prefers dealing with the ordinary man.’

‘An ordinary man like you.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘So you want him to let *you* drill?’

‘Of course.’

‘And why would he let you but not Apex?’

‘Because I give a better rate. They only want to lease the land for a small fixed fee. I offer a percentage. I wouldn’t need more than a dozen men. I’d treat his land with respect and keep costs low. I’ll make money – money for me, money for him. I’ll turn us into millionaires.’

Tito nodded. He looked impressed. ‘Have you spoken to him?’

‘When you picked me up, I was on my way back from his house.’

‘In Siparia?’

‘I drove down there last night and met with him.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘If I can get the money, he’ll consider it.’

‘Then you can buy your Bugatti.’

‘And find me a wife.’

Eddie laughed and Tito laughed, a deep huwah-huwah that came from low in his belly. They drained their glasses and Tito called for brandy.

‘I should go. I don’t want to get you in trouble.’

‘Yes,’ Tito said, ‘but I’m already in trouble. She knows where I am. I haven’t laughed like this in a while. I’ve had a tough day, another time I might tell you about it.’

By now the girl on the piano had left, and the bar was filling up with a new crowd: visitors from the cruise ship, Americans, the beautiful people. They looked like they were enjoying themselves, as was Eddie. It had been a long time since he’d kicked back and spent time in a place like this. Not since he was in New York with Callaghan. He could get used to it.

‘So how much do you need?’ Tito leaned in, looked straight at Eddie. ‘Name a figure.’

‘Around ten thousand dollars, I guess, initially, to clear the forest, bring in water, build roads, equipment. It doesn’t have to be new. I can make do.’

‘Maybe I can help.’ Tito’s eyes held steady. ‘Maybe I could find some money for you. Enough to get you started. We should talk.’

Tito got up and went to the bar to pay the bill; short and blocky from behind; a solid little man. Eddie wondered how drunk he was. They’d been here since after four and it was gone midnight. The last couple hours they’d slowed down, and Eddie was tired now, not drunk. But then he could take his liquor. He barely knew Tito Fernandes but he, too, seemed sober enough.

‘Look,’ Tito said, putting on his hat, feeling that he needed to lie down. ‘We’re having a party at my house on Saturday, why don’t you come? You can meet my wife. There’ll be music; the great and good will be there. We can talk some more if you wish.’

‘Sure,’ Eddie said. ‘I’d like that.’

‘Come as you are. You’ll be a novelty with the ladies. Now, if you don’t mind, you can drop me home and bring my car back on Saturday. In the meantime I can walk to the office.’ He patted his chest. ‘My wife tells me it’s good for my ticker.’

Outside, the moon was low and full. Eddie drove Tito back to his home in Broom Street, and took in the pale, brightly lit house, with a curved driveway in front and on either side of the gateposts two large sculptures that reminded him of figures he had seen in the Tuileries, in Paris. The front door was open, and he watched Tito walk slowly up the steps to the entrance where

a woman appeared in a white dressing gown, and put her arm around him.

The woman was striking, with dark hair pinned up, and in the strange moonlight her face took the shape of a locket, oval, shining. Her mouth was wide like a singer's, dark eyes reaching – trying to see who he was.

‘See you Saturday!’ Tito bellowed above the engine. ‘8 pm.’

Eddie caught himself, waved goodbye, and drove off into the night.

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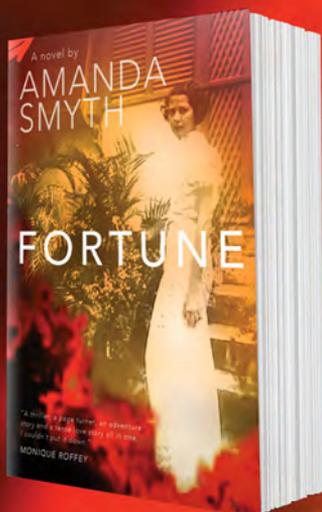
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