

FILIPINO KARATE KID

Written by

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Based on many true moments

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1

INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - DAY

1

A 26-inch long rattan Arnis stick spins in focus. The fighter swinging it is blurry in the back. The stick comes smashing right towards camera.

CUT TO BLACK.

2

INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - CONTINUOUS

2

A young woman lies on the floor surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. Her dark hair and short stature make her seem local to the Philippines, but when she lifts her head to reveal her face, she doesn't look like a typical Filipina.

NIA CARLOS KOCH, 25, Filipina-German, struggles to get up. Her face is scrunched up in pain from the blow she just took. Her clothes are glued to her body with sweat. A new University of the Philippines shirt contrasts her worn-out kickboxing shorts. Nia rubs her head, she's bleeding. She pushes herself up. Camera tracks her upward motion.

Top view of the location: A martial arts gym in Manila. Afternoon sun floods the room; ceiling fans twirl hot, humid air. Nia stumbles to the centre of a circle formed by a crowd. Everyone wears uniform fighting gear from the Kababayan Filipino Martial Arts team; except Nia.

She faces her opponent: MALIC CALINAO, 27, Filipino, wiry build and round face, his bare upper body shines with sweat. Though strong, Malic is slightly hunched like a beaten dog. Still driven to win, Nia frantically swings her sticks.

NIA

Ha!

The crowd cracks up. Some comment "She's crazy" in Tagalog.

Malic stands still, waiting for Nia to come into range. Once she is, he swiftly blocks and disarms her. Nia reaches to fetch her stick from the ground, but Malic flips his stick to smack her arm. She groans in pain. Glaring at Malic, she holds the injured arm and swings the other stick. Malic blocks, hits her leg. Nia howls in pain. In flowing movements, Malic is next to her. He has both sticks enclosed around Nia's neck, drawing them apart into a choke. Nia sinks to her knees. She struggles like a ferocious animal, but can't break free. Everyone laughs. We see different faces in the crowd. Some mock in Tagalog "That's how they fight in America?", "She doesn't know any Arnis."

ANGEL BAUTISTA, 43, owner of the gym, claps her hands twice. Malic instantly lets go of Nia.

ANGEL (O.S.)
Show's over. Everyone back to work.

Reveal of a tiny fighter leaning against a boxing ring.

ANGEL (CONT'D)
(to Nia)
If you can't do *Filipino Martial*
Arts you can't make the team.

As everyone disperses, Nia is left lying defeated on the mat. She watches the FMA team walk away in unison. They lock arms, laugh or shove each other playfully. She hears snippets of conversations in Tagalog, "Lunch at kuya Dom's. Who's in?"

3 EXT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM, PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 3

Nia storms out of the gym door. Malic follows after her.

MALIC
Hey, wait!

Nia spins round, her face flushed with embarrassment.

MALIC (CONT'D)
(points to her bruise)
Sorry about that. Angel doesn't
like us to hold back.

Malic holds up a bag of ice. Nia brushes him off.

NIA
It's fine.

She doesn't look fine. Malic takes her in.

MALIC
Where are you from?

NIA
Here.

MALIC
So your heart is Filipino? Ha. I
meant which country are you from?

NIA
Philippines.

Beat.

MALIC
Ha. You don't look Filipina.

NIA
Do you teach?

MALIC
Me?

NIA
Yes, you. Who else? I do know
kickboxing, but *that* was different.

Nia points back to the gym with her lips. Malic looks in the opposite direction to where his team mates walked off to.

MALIC
What do you need *my* help for.

Nia reaches for her bruise. There's dry blood on her fingers.

NIA
Teach me what you know.

4 EXT. QUEZON CITY, STREET - DAY

4

Crowded streets, traffic and smog, people on dirty sidewalks.

Nia is dressed like everyone else, simple tsinelas (flip-flops) and a t-shirt with a sweat-towel tucked in the back. Yet, she stands out; tall, white-passing, walking on foot.

NIA (V.O.)
Try-outs are next month. Maybe I
can still make the team.

MALIC (V.O.)
Might be tight. What about Angel?

NIA (V.O.)
She doesn't need to know.

Nia brushes hair into her face to appear more Filipina.

5 INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - NIGHT

5

Only the centre lights above the mats are on, the rest is dark. Malic and Nia practice Arnis drills with padded sticks.

MALIC (V.O.)
(in Tagalog)
FMA arose from a need to survive.
Anyone can throw a hit. We focus on
defence first, then counter-
offence.

(MORE)

MALIC (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Ending the fight as quickly as possible increases the chance of survival.

6 INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - CONTINUOUS

6

Malic demonstrates a disarm move. All dialogue in Tagalog.

MALIC
Got it? 1, 2 and 3. Now you!

NIA
Really? A disarm? That's it?

She tries to replicate what she just saw, but it's all gone.

MALIC
(smirking)
That's it.

Nia tries the move again, and again: She gets caught up with the sticks, drops her own stick, hits herself in the head, hits Malic without disarming him; all the ways to fail. Malic has her in a bind each time. She can't get out.

MALIC (CONT'D)
Tap out when you're defeated.

Nia clenches her jaw, reluctantly taps out.

7 INT. CARLOS' HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

7

Nia and her mother, MARIA, 55, sit next to each other on a couch. In a corner of the living room, childhood pictures of Nia are assembled like a shrine. Her German father and a younger Maria, next to baby Nia, look unhappy.

Maria wriggles her chic dress into a more comfortable position but moans as she fails to find comfort. Despite her perfectly blowdried hair, her fading tattooed eyebrows give an air of desperation. Maria side-eyes Nia.

MARIA
You need to put on more sunscreen.
You look dark.

Nia checks her reflection. She doesn't.

NIA
Sorry, I forgot.

MANICURE GIRL(O.S.)
She's pretty, ma'am. Is she
your daughter?

MANICURE GIRL(O.S.)
Maganda siya, ma'am. Anak mo
ba?

Reveal to show two ladies doing manicure for Nia and her mom.
Both stare at Nia. Maria flicks her hair back.

MARIA
We look like sisters, right?

MARIA
Parang kapatid kami, di ba?

The ladies nod politely. Nia watches her mom rejoice. She
decides to lean her head on Maria's shoulder. Maria turns to
smell Nia's hair and scrunches her nose.

MARIA (CONT'D)
You didn't shower!

Sighing, Nia lifts her head back up. Maria notices the dried
blood in Nia's hair. She jumps up. The manicure girls halt.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Oh my god! What's that?

MARIA (CONT'D)
Ay na ko! Ano ba 'yan?

NIA
It's nothing. I started training
with this FMA team -

MARIA
F-M-A? Uh no - your fighting thing.
You could do anything, Nia! You are
so blessed. Then you do that!

NIA
You're still on about this?

MARIA
Men don't like that!

NIA
What?

MARIA
Aggressive women.

NIA
Oh my god, mom -

MARIA (CONT'D)
They'll laugh about you.

Nia remembers the others mocking her. She gets up to leave.

NIA (CONT'D)
I'm training in the morning.

MARIA
So I won't see you again *all day*?

NIA
I didn't say 'all day'!

MARIA
Finish your manicure first.

The manicure girls look at Nia, then Maria and back. Nia reluctantly sits back down. They continue in tense silence.

8 EXT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM, PARKING LOT - DAY 8

Early morning, Nia hurries onto the empty parking lot. She searches for Malic, then tries the gym door. Its open.

9 INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - CONTINUOUS 9

Malic emerges from the shadows in gym gear.

MALIC
I think you're late.

NIA
I was on Filipino time.

Malic smiles. He holds half a coconut in his hand. Behind him, Nia notices a makeshift bed with a thin mattress in a corner. To distract her, Malic throws the coconut her way.

MALIC
Here, catch!

Nia looks confused.

Montage over several weeks:

- Malic shows Nia the movement: One foot on the inverted half, sweep in a circular motion. Nia shrugs.

- Nia polishes the gym floors with the coconut halves. Malic observes occasionally while cleaning other gym equipment.

- Malic shows Nia how to slide out of range from a hit using the same circular motion. Nia gets it.

- They train a new sequence sliding around on coconuts. Nia tries to push Malic over both sliding on coconut halves.

10 INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - DAY 10

Malic shows a disarm trapping Nia's stick. She imitates. All dialogue in Tagalog.

MALIC

Slow down! Wait for me to pull away first. This isn't kickboxing. FMA is more subtle. If you pull too soon, you're giving away what you're doing -

He positions his hands but doesn't move.

MALIC (CONT'D)

Leverage your disarm at the right time.

When Nia tries to free herself, she basically disarms herself.

NIA

Ha! So cool.

11 INT. KABABAYAN FMA GYM - DAY 11

A few hours passed. The pair circle each other, sticks clicking. Nia flows through the disarm. It works!

NIA

Hey! Don't let me win!

Malic raises his hands to the air to prove his innocence.

12 EXT. CARLOS' HOME, MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT 12

Nia in a sweaty Mindanao inspired sports top and shorts twirls her sticks. A large number of shoes are gathered by the door but Nia is too immersed in her practice to notice.

13 INT. CARLOS' HOME, MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT 13

As Nia enters she hears several ladies screech. Then she is hit by a flood of them grabbing her wrists, squeezing her arms, shoulders, pinching her waist and cheeks. The TITAS.

It's Maria's monthly mahjong night. In the background a table with a mahjong game in progress; cocktails, snacks and soft drinks are splayed out, too. Nia is surrounded. The titas outdo each other in commenting on her appearance in Tagalog.

TITAS

Wow, so pretty. So white her skin, beautiful. Oh, so sexy. Look at her hair! Oh gosh did she gain weight?

(MORE)

TITAS (CONT'D)

She looks big. She looks so American. Did she try suman yet?

MARIA (V.O.)

Nia! Change first.

Nia pushes through the crowd and escapes to her room.

14

INT. CARLOS' HOME, NIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

14

Back against the door, Nia's chest heaves. Maria pushes in.

MARIA

There's your outfit.

Maria points to a tight pink dress laid out on the bed.

NIA

They all think I'm white!

NIA

Iniisip nila na maputi ako.

MARIA

Yes, you are. That's good!

NIA

Why is that good?/ My outfit is fine.

NIA

Bakit maganda yun? / Maayos naman ang outfit ko.

MARIA

Jesus! What are you complaining about? Everyone wants to look like you! / It's ugly.

MARIA

'sus! Ano bang problema mo? Everyone wants to look like you! / Ay, pangit eh!

NIA

Because - it's not ugly -

Maria waves her hands in protest and turns to the door.

NIA (CONT'D)

Mom!

Maria halts as Nia glares at her through a mirror.

NIA (CONT'D)

I'm tired of being treated like a foreigner in my own country. Like I don't understand what they say about me. Like I don't know my own culture. When I behave or speak like a Filipina they think I'm imitating - and they laugh at me *every time*. Because of how I look I'm not Pinay? But you know what?

(MORE)

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Every space should be accessible to you, huh? You Americans are so entitled. Listen, I'll explain it one last time. This is a professional FMA team. I'm not interested in beginners.

NIA

I will train harder. I learn fast.

ANGEL

You didn't even beat our weakest member.

Nia throws a glance at Malic in disbelief. He looks away.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

We're preparing for nationals. I don't have time to waste.

(mumbles as she walks away)

Especially not for some white girl.

Nia grabs Angel's shoulder and spins her back round.

NIA

I am Filipina.

NIA

Filipina ako.

ANGEL

Take your hands off me!

Some fighters stop their warm-ups to watch.

NIA

(to Angel)

Please.

For a split-second, Angel's eyes and body soften. Nia reminds her of someone. But then, Angel closes right back up.

ANGEL

You only learn the hard way. Fine!

Angel walks to the mats, kicks off her shoes and raises her eyebrows expectantly at Nia. An eerie silence.

With shaky hands, Nia picks up some padded training sticks.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Use the real sticks.

The crowd gasps.

MALIC

I can fight her again, Ma'am Angel.

With one glare, Angel puts Malic in his place. She approaches Nia like a lioness enjoying her frightened prey. With ease her rattan sticks slice the air, swishing. Nia braces.

NIA

(to herself)

Defence is the best attack.

Angel strikes and Nia parries. Their sticks click quickly. Parry, counter, parry; Nia tries to find a flow. She uses the sweeping motion Malic taught her to evade a hit on her leg; then attempts a disarm. It works! Angel's stoic mask slips briefly. She then quickly moves into a disarm herself. Nia is caught off guard.

Both without sticks, Nia thinks the fight is over, but Angel launches her next attack. Nia panics. Tiny sweat beads on Angel's forehead reveal that she, too, is struggling. Nia tries to steady her breath. Quick, aggressive moves from Angel; she becomes increasingly vicious. Nia staggers back.

ANGEL (MOCKING)

Are you white Karate Kid now? Ha.

This dials up Nia's anger. She now launches her own attack. Angel shifts gears. She uses a style of FMA called *dirty boxing*, *panantukan*, and crushes Nia's biceps, then her thigh. Nia is first shocked at Angel's aggression, then at the pain.

Angel wraps an arm around Nia's head and takes her to the ground. Her arms press down on Nia's neck. Nia chokes, again. Angel watches Nia's face turn red. Everything becomes blurry.

MALIC (O.S.)

Nia! Tap out!

Nia realises she can't win this way: If Angel plays dirty, so will she. Resorting to use her kickboxing skills, Nia sweeps an elbow into Angel's chin. Angel releases her grip, stunned. She holds her chin in pain. Nia gasps for air, but gets up and quickly fires a combination of punches and kicks.

In her element, Nia spins around in a rotating kick. She stops her kick an inch away from Angel's face. Angel holds her breath, in awe from what just happened. From Angel's POV, we see Nia lower her foot to the ground. She locks eyes with Angel, raises her eyebrows in a very Filipino fashion and smirks.

THE END.