

Title: Filomena Domagas v. Vivian Layno Jensen

Facts: Filomena Domagas, the petitioner, initiated a forcible entry complaint against Vivian Jensen, the respondent, with the Municipal Trial Court (MTC) of Calasiao, Pangasinan, on February 19, 1999. Domagas claimed she was the registered owner of a parcel of land from which Jensen had forcibly taken possession by building a fence. The complaint sought restitution, damages, and fees. The summons and complaint were not personally served to Jensen, as she was out of the country, so they were received by her brother, Oscar Layno. Without Jensen responding, the MTC ruled in favor of Domagas. Jensen, upon learning of the case, filed for annulment of the MTC decision with the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Dagupan City, arguing improper service of summons due to her absence in Norway and questioning the MTC's jurisdiction over her person. The RTC decided in Jensen's favor, a decision affirmed by the Court of Appeals (CA), which led Domagas to elevate the case to the Supreme Court through a petition for review on certiorari.

Issues: The central legal issue was whether there was valid service of summons on Jensen, which hinges on whether the forcible entry action was in personam or quasi in rem.

Court's Decision: The Supreme Court denied Domagas's petition, holding that the MTC's decision in the forcible entry case was null and void due to lack of jurisdiction over Jensen's person. The Court clarified that a forcible entry case is considered an action in personam, which aims to enforce personal obligations against a specific individual. Since Jensen was out of the country, proper service required either personal service outside the country with the court's permission or any mode deemed sufficient by the court, neither of which was done. Substituted service on Jensen's brother was deemed invalid as there was no evidence he resided at Jensen's property or was a suitable representative. The Court emphasized strict adherence to rules on the service of summons to establish jurisdiction over a defendant.

Doctrine: An action for forcible entry is considered in personam, focusing on personal obligations and requiring proper service of summons for the court to acquire jurisdiction over the person of the defendant. Strict compliance with the modes of service established by the Rules of Court is essential for the validity of substituted service.

Class Notes:

- An action in personam aims to enforce rights or obligations against a specific individual, requiring jurisdiction over that person.

- Substituted service of summons is valid only when strict requirements are met, including that the recipient is of suitable age and discretion and resides at the defendant's dwelling.
- Jurisdiction over the person of the defendant is fundamental for the court to validly try and decide a case.

Historical Background: The case underscores the judiciary's strict interpretation of procedural rules, especially regarding service of summons essential for establishing jurisdiction. It reflects the legal system's balancing act between efficiently resolving disputes and ensuring due process by safeguarding the defendants' right to be properly informed of legal actions against them.