

SEVENTH DIVISION

[CA-G.R. CV No. 101410, November 28, 2014]

SPS. BENITO DE BELEN AND MAXIMINA DE BELEN, PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS, VS. SPS. CRISANTO MARZO AND NORMA DE BELEN MARZO, DEFENDANTS-APPELLEES.

D E C I S I O N

INTING, S.B., J.:

For consideration before this Court is an *Appeal*^[1] which assails the Decision^[2] dated May 27, 2013 of the Regional Trial Court of Balayan, Batangas, Branch 10, in Civil Case No. 4537.

The Facts

Culled from the records, the facts of this case are as follows:

On August 4, 2006, spouses Benito de Belen and Maximina de Belen (*appellants*) filed a complaint for "Cancellation of Title No. TP No. 3030 and Assessment of Real Property No. 044-00344 and Reconveyance"^[3] against spouses Crisanto Marzo and Norma de Belen Marzo (*appellees*) with the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Balayan, Batangas, docketed as Civil Case No. 4537.

In their Complaint, appellants alleged that on April 21, 1982, Benito de Belen was awarded a free patent covered by Original Certificate of Title No. 473; that at first, Norma de Belen Marzo convinced her father, Benito de Belen, that she will apply for the reclassification of the property into residential lot; that without their knowledge, however, Norma Marzo had caused the subdivision of the said lot into four (4) parcels, one of which is covered by TP No. 3001; that sometime in 2005, they discovered that TP No. 3001 was cancelled by TP No. 3030 which was registered in the name of herein appellees; that the Register of Deeds of Nasugbu, Batangas issued a certification that the documents of transfer from TP No. 3001 in the name of Benito de Belen to TP No. 3030 in the name of Sps. Crisanto and Norma de Belen Marzo are not among the records available on file in their office; that they did not remember having executed any document conveying the said lot to the appellees.^[4]

For their part, appellees countered that Norma de Belen Marzo had not in any manner convinced her father that she will apply for the reclassification of the property into a residential lot, nor had she any participation in the subdivision of the same into four (4) lots; that they purchased the said lot now covered by Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) No. TP-3030 from herein appellants for valuable consideration sometime on October 13, 1999; that they had no participation whatsoever in the preparation of the Deed of Sale; that it was their agreement that their father will be the one to handle the preparation of the Deed of Sale and other documents relative to the transfer and registration of the title in the names of the

appellees; that upon full payment of the agreed purchase price of the lot in question, title to the same was delivered and registered in their names; that they have been in possession of the property for a period of seven (7) years from the time they purchased it; that appellants remained silent and had not disturbed the possession and ownership of herein appellees over the said lot, nor had appellants asserted any adverse claim over the same until they filed the instant complaint on August 9, 2006; that they are purchasers in good faith and for value, thus, their title in the lot in question can no longer be voided or cancelled; that TCT No. TP-3030 has been registered in the names of the appellees since October 22, 1999, and considering that more than one (1) year had already elapsed from its registration, the said title is already indefeasible and imprescriptible against the whole world, including the appellants herein.^[5]

The RTC Decision

In its Decision^[6] dated May 27, 2013, the RTC dismissed the complaint for lack of jurisdiction. The RTC stated that since the main objective of the appellants is the recovery of ownership of the lot described in TCT No. TP-3030 with an assessed value of P2,890.00, the case falls within the original jurisdiction of the Municipal Trial Court. The RTC further added that even assuming that it has jurisdiction over the instant case, the appellants failed to prove that the appellees succeeded in registering the said lot in their names through the employment fraud.

Hence, this appeal.

The Issues

In their Brief, appellants ascribe the following errors^[7] to the RTC:

I.

THE TRIAL COURT GRAVELY ERRED WHEN IT RULED THAT THE PRESENT ACTION IS CAPABLE OF PECUNIARY ESTIMATION.

II.

THE TRIAL COURT GRAVELY ERRED IN NOT RULING THAT THE CONTRACT IS NOT VALID.

The Court's Ruling

The appeal lacks merit.

Whether a court has jurisdiction over the subject matter of a particular action is determined by the plaintiff's allegations in the complaint and the principal relief he seeks in the light of the law that apportions the jurisdiction of courts.^[8]

The appellants claim ownership over the lot in question because according to them, they never transferred ownership of the same to the appellees. They contend that Norma de Belen Marzo, through fraud, convinced Benito de Belen to sign the contract by making it appear that what the latter was signing was a document to