

**D**EAR LITA: It is December again, and, perhaps, the road to Carmela is now arrayed with flowers which you, taking advantage of my ignorance of floral names, called White Stars of Bethlehem. So attractive, they were the first to delight me for I thought I had ill luck when the conductor said, I'm sorry; the machine won't work anymore. What else could a stranger bear in his mind under such circumstances. According to some of the passengers, we were yet two kilometers from the town and no other bus was traveling that hour of the night, young though it was.

We all got off one by one and stayed on the roadsides for a while like a group of noisy picnickers. I was the only one who was quiet, and as you later told me, I stood there smoking in the moonlight as merrily as a gangster in a movie. Then, every one started to go on the journey to the town on foot. I could not act at once; I looked around wanting to find some one who would be friendly enough to say, What about you or Come along. I saw you. You smiled at me, and smiling, I slowly approached you.

"Waiting for the airplane?" you said. "Ha? No," I said. "The airplane is here already, but I'll get into it as soon as your taxi arrives."

"You're a gentleman?"  
"So, take me for a keepsake."  
"I'm going now." You blushed and picked up your basket.

"May I carry it?" I tried to take the basket from your hand.  
"Thank you. Don't. I..." You held it firmly, but when I touched your hand you let it go.

We walked on in silence, until it became embarrassing and I had to croon *White Christmas*. In the middle of the refrain, I forgot the wording of the song.

"I was being fresh, wasn't I?" I said stupidly.

You did not say anything. Apparently, you wanted me to be definite.

"When I told you to take me for a keepsake," I added.

"It was all right." There was forgiveness in your voice; in fact, it seemed that you had passed it over before I thought it was improper of me to say it. "Please, go on singing."

"I have lost the lyric. By the way, do you live in the town proper?"

"Just so. Near the church."  
"A friend of mine requested me to have my Christmas Eve there. I hope it won't take me long to locate him."

"What's your friend's name?"  
"Eddie Fabros."

"He is our neighbor. When we get there, I'll point their house to you." You were very kind.

"Thank you in advance."  
"Let me have that basket. Perhaps, you're tired of it now?"

"No. Leave this to me. Anyway, this is not heavy. And I won't be at ease walking with a lady carrying a big basket, while my hands are dangling conspicuously empty."

The road was a big uphill now, but instead of inching along you ran ahead of me and stood where the moon hung so low that your shoulder would have pushed it up if you jumped.

"Why did you do that?" I said illustrating the motion of a breeze blowing towards you with my left hand.

"You think I'm childish, don't you?" you said, somewhat worried.

I shook my head. "You, if you were that, when I asked you, would have made a face at me and simply said: By gosh, to have some fun. No, You're not childish. You're a child yourself."

"If one can both remain a child and grow to age, has he not the heart of things which is life?"


"I don't know. I don't believe in the magic circle of timelessness of human beings."

"Oh, don't be so dull, old man."  
I paused beside you and took a deep breath of the healthy country air. Then I looked around and was suddenly struck with fascination.

"There is Carmela," you said raising your hand. "And the sea. And those are the lighted bancas of the fishermen."

"I like you. You don't embroider it," I said. "Beauty like this should be left entirely naked to the mind, minus the adjectives and high coloring."

"Godness, you sound sublime."  
"And what a night! I won't forget this till the day I die."



It takes an honest heart  
to know that love is dispassionate  
free from affectation, and  
tender as the ...

# N I G H T

illustrated by  
A. R. MANLIGAS

"I pity you."

"Your reason? How sad it is to see one affording consolation to another when it is neither needed nor expected."

"Listen. You appear to have never seen any starry night at all. For your information, almost all the nights are like this."

"Is that so?"

"Some people have a silly conception of the night; they take it only as a period for sleeping. They don't consider it at all, or gaze at the evening sky. They are them as are perpetualy missing half the lives."

"Goodness, you sound sublime!"

"You defeat me with my own weapon."

"Okay, let's not be serious any more."

"It's funny. We pretend to be wise people."

"We really are."

"Hush. Some one might hear us elevating ourselves."

"Who? Our companions are far away already. They march like soldiers. Say, why do you talk to me like this, so intimately? And why do you walk with me in the first place? Are you not afraid of, of me?"

"It's your inquiring that frightens me. Well, perhaps, it's because you looked helplessly lonely and g... harmless. And still perhaps, it's because I'm not a misanthrope."

"Do you have a garden?"

"A small one. Why?"

"These flowers along the road. Maybe, you grow a lot of them. What are they?" I stooped to pluck one. I smelled it and gave it to you.

"Oh, we don't plant them. They just come during December. Aren't they lovely?"

"They have starform. And they are pure white! What do you call them?" They had awakened in me an interest in flowers. In all kinds of flowers.

"You're very particular in names. They are... White Stars of Bethlehem."

"You're kidding."

"Not in the least. They are White Stars of Bethlehem; that's why they only come with Christmas."

"White Stars of Bethlehem. It would be a nice title for a song or a poem. Maybe, you spend your Christmas Eve here too lively, otherwise my friend wouldn't be forcibly inducing me to come."

"How do you keep your Christmas Eve in your place?"

"We paint the town red! We go to night spots and dance and drink!"

"Just like that, eh?"

"What do you mean just like that. Do I have to mention the details of the excitement?"

"Tell me if I'm right... You also gossip on sundry topics."

"Of course."

"Laugh aloud, to your heart's content. And sometimes, you steal naughty kisses from your dance-partner." You halted.

"Yes. Er, yes." I would never admit that to any girl but you. I did not understand why it was hard to tell you a lie. You held to my shoulder for sup-

port, slipped off your shoe and poured out the pebble in it. You put it on and we continued walking.

"Then, you return home singing wildly, beseeching whatever god there is to guide the taxi-driver who is chasing the devil."

"As you say."

"And in the morning, you wake up very late with a hang-over, with a tiredness of body and spirit. You call up what had passed, and utter, It was a Night. Night spelled with capital N."

"Yes."

"You still have time to go back, and I think your friend won't hold you if you want to. You'll be disappointed. We don't observe Christmas that way. Any one can do those things any day of the year. Christmas should not be made an excuse for, for tomfooleries."

"TOOOOmFOOOOleries. If you had only tempered the tone of your voice, I'd say you are angry. Why don't you tell me how you commemorate Christmas here, instead of cooling me off."

"I don't discourage you." You were sincere. "If Christmas ever means anything to you, then keep it up. You'll soon see for yourself how we keep it up."

"How do you know all those things? The kiss-stealing, the drive-home, and all that."

## by JUNNE CANIZARES

"I have a cousin in the city. He used to write us about these doings. Mama says he's dissipated, and we've to pray for him, especially this Christmas."

"May I ask you a personal question?"

"Yes."

"Do you have a sweetheart?"

"Oh, we are now in the town!"

"You don't answer me."

I was saying *You don't answer me* for the second time, when the carollers played aloud their musical string-instruments and sang beneath the lantern-lighted window of a house beside the road. I could not guess whether or not it was because I was cut short that you laughed, but just the same I was pleased with it; it was a good laughter, clean and polite. We edged through children gayly playing on the streets, and since there were many groups of carollers resounding at the same instant from one house to another, I felt that it was the animated music that made us move. We passed the little restaurant where people were crowding around a group of dancers recounting the story of the Magi. Then we paced across the square where some lads and lassies were conversing.

"This is our home," you said unalteredly the gate.

"Oh," I said. The power of speech had gone out of me. I took a quick glimpse of the house. It was of regular size, painted ivory and beautiful. You reached for the basket and I handed it to you. You were still holding the White Star of Bethlehem I gave you.

"Thank you very much. Come in for a while and have some coffee." You became very formal that I doubted if we ever had familiarity talked to each other a while ago.

"How soon we arrive. Thanks."

"Is it you, Lita? Lita," a woman called from inside the house.

"Yes, ma," you replied. "Come on in."

"Not now. I think I've to go to my friend's house first."

"O! me!" You bit your lip and laughed. I laughed, too. "There, that house is your friend's."

"I see, I see."

"Are you sure you aren't coming in for a while?"

"I'll just come back. I'm, I'm Ric."

I looked at your adorable face closely.

"I'm Lita." You shyly smiled.

I watched you go towards the door leaving the gate invitingly open. You were so divine. Before you got inside the door you turned to smile at me. One could have easily knocked me down with a feather.

I did not know how long I tarried by the gate looking at the flowers in your

wide garden, but you did come out to catch me there. You had changed your clothes; you wore a well-pressed immaculately white dress this time.

"You are still here," you said. You were more glad than surprised.

"Yes," I said, breathless. "I like your flowers very much."

"I'm going to water the orchids."

"Do you water them at night?"

"No. I was not here this afternoon, and Ma forgot to water them. That's why I'm... Orchids must be well taken care of; they're delicate."

"I see. Well, I must be going now."

I keep on remembering that wonderful night through the months, till somehow it stops to be a mere memory. That night has become a part of the other nights.

It is Christmas again, and I shall come back to Carmela; I will put Eddie in a position wherein he cannot do anything but invite me again. I shall ride by night again. I wish the bus should get stalled at the same place and I would find you among the passengers, so that once more we'd walk together to the town. But there are new things that I have to say to you. For instance, I know now that the flowers along the road are ordinary wild flowers and that they are not called White Stars of Bethlehem. But just to both of us, they shall forever be called by that name.

And then, Lita, I must tell you why you are beyond forgetting.

(The Beginning)