

Father... We are hungry!

By OSCAR de ZUÑIGA

IT WAS already noontime. Tasio still lingered around the Tuban Station where he had gone early in the morning to buy rice. But neither rice sellers nor the gang of boys who used to bore holes through rice sacks at the depot had been around since his arrival.

He paused for a while: should he go home or not? But his wife, and his two children. He couldn't go home emptyhanded, for there was not a single grain of rice at home.

Perhaps if he stayed a little longer, a rice seller might come his way. Besides, there was a train scheduled to arrive at one-thirty.

Tasio selected a shaded spot on the sidewalk and sat down. Were his legs tired! He stretched them out for a while, then encircled them with his arms. There were many people coming and going, and he could not have his legs outstretched for long without somebody stepping on them.

Closely, he watched the faces of people. Some seemed hurrying home for lunch; others, merely walking leisurely as if on an afternoon stroll. Their faces interested him. Was the hungry look visible on the faces of some of them as clearly defined on his own? He rubbed his face with the palm of a hand, as if to erase from it traces of any such a look.

"Perhaps, they are also looking for rice," he told himself. Not a few were carrying bags or *bayongs*. The thought recalled him to his mission, and he thrust his hand into his pocket to make sure that he had not lost his money. Carefully, he fished it out and counted—for the nth time—six ten-peso bills. Enough for three gantas of rice, at twenty pesos per.

With more care, he put the roll

back into his pocket.

A whistle sounded: the one-thirty train. Eagerly, Tasio stood up, and joined the crowd which rushed to meet the new arrivals. Surely somebody in the train had some rice for sale. Not a few bring rice to the city and not for home consumption, either.

"Rice?" Any rice for sale " he kept on asking. But the answer was invariably the same: "None."

It did not take long the station to be cleared of people. "This must have been a red-day for rice vendors," he muttered bitterly to himself, as he kicked an unsuspecting pebble on the road.

He sat down on the sidewalk again. Was the world whirling?

He wiped his forehead with his none-too-clean handkerchief. Cold beads of sweat were beginning to form. His stomach murmured in angry protest when he bent forward to press his face against his knees in an effort to drive away the dizzy spell trying to get the better of him.

Slowly, Tasio stood up, and walked towards the Chinese store opposite the station. The food displayed on the counter did not look very appetizing, but what wouldn't a hungry man give for them.

What food could he buy with one peso? he asked the Chinaman.

Only one plate of rice, was the polite reply.

Well, it was something, he thought, and was about to order the rice. But then, what about his wife and children? Could he

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swallow the food, knowing that his folk at home had nothing to eat? If he spent the peso, his money would not be sufficient for the three gantas of rice that he had in mind to buy.

Wearily, he turned away. A drink of cool water from the street faucet could appease his hunger anyway.

He espied a cigaret butt, its smoke curling up invitingly. Unhesitatingly he picked it up, Three long puffs were all he got out of it, but he felt sufficiently strengthened to continue his vigil for a rice seller.

The heat was getting oppressive, so Tasio retreated once more under the shade. The wait was long and weary: still he sat under the shade. For how long, he did not know.

Late in the afternoon, he noted some people rushing to a spot in front of the station where there was a commotion. There was a fight going on, somebody shouted.

Tasio stood up. Curiosity made him join the crowd, and soon he was among those elbowing into the thickness to get a better view of the combat. Those around him kept jostling and pushing, till he felt himself being squeezed in on all sides.

Then Tasio heard somebody shouting, "Police! police!" And the crowd dispersed as speedily as it had formed.

Once more, Tasio looked around in search of rice, inquiring from some bystanders where he could secure some. But nobody could

give him any idea as to where rice was available, and finally disheartened, he decided to go home.

With head bowed, he turned to a side street which was a shorter route to take him home. He had gone but a short distance when he came upon a gang of boys each carrying a *bayong*.

"Rice" he asked eagerly, his alight with hope.

"Yes, sir," the leader replied. "Want to buy some?"

"How much a ganta?"

"Fifteen pesos."

"That's too much," Tasio said, although within him, he felt elated that it was cheaper than he had anticipated.

"You can't find any cheaper," the leader replied shrewdly.

"All right, give me four gantas."

The boys told him they'd barrow a ganta from the nearby house, and Tasio followed them. The rice measured exactly four gantas and about two handfuls.

"You can have it all for sixty pesos," the leader of the boys told him.

"Thanks," Tasio said, as he dipped his hand into his pocket to get his money, thankful too that he had not spent a single centavo. But his pocket was empty!

He looked in his other pockets,

although he was sure he had not put it away in any other than in the right side pocket of his pants.

"Sorry, mister," the boys said, when they noted that their customer had lost his money.

Tasio eyed the group ruefully as they walked away.

How could he have lost his money? He looked up, as if to inquire from the clouds, which was fast gathering. Then he remembered that he had joined the crowd during the fight. Yes, that was it. Somebody must have picked his pocket when he was hemmed in from all sides.

And with the thought of his loss, of the hungry mouths waiting for him, he felt like crying. Slowly, he walked on, unmindful of the rain which had started to fall, blind to the lightning flashes, deaf to the peal of thunder. All that he seemed to see was the reproachful look in his wife's eyes; all that he could hear, his children's voices crying... "Father, we are hungry!"

Set Quota For Flour Imports

Local flour importers have recommended to the association of U. S. export flour millers a minimum of 4,000 short tons of wheat flour monthly, representing the tonnage that can be handled efficiently by Philippine ports under present conditions.

De la Paz Scores One On Com-

Congressman Emilio de la Paz, who is under investigation by the Committee on Interior Government of the House of Representatives won a respite on the first day of the investigation by challenging the right of the Chairman of the Committee to sit on the same and, for that matter, to have a seat in Congress. De la Paz claimed that Congressman de los Santos Committee Chairman, was appointed to the bench by President Quezon and acted accordingly as Judge of First Instance of Iloilo. The Constitution provides that no member of Congress may occupy any other position in the Commonwealth Government without forfeiting his seat in the Legislature.

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