



FOR CHRISTMAS IS CHARITY AND FORGIVENESS

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DARKNESS LIMBERS UP from its lethargy, fighting in a half-daze a confused, shrieking array of colors, splashed upon the sunset by some careless painter of the skies. The biting cold of the evening wind drew two figures together to keep themselves warm. They were sitting in their tryst, Myrna and Rasul, watching the west turn to gray, and pondering what would happen to the golden days of their youth. When the sunset of their lives came, what then? No, the sunset will never come.

They had grown up together in play and in mirth. She was in full bloom now, this barrio lass who had been his companion since innocent childhood days. As the sunset glow turned to darkness, they sat together against the base of a mango tree, upon which Rasul, in his rustic way, had once carved their initials and the design of Cupid and his bow. She would always pass that way to the brook, and she would look at the letters and the design, and she would understand. Or he would send her a missive of love written on a tender banana leaf. Or he would write a line on the sand near the brook, and she would always see it when she drew water there to fill her earthen jar. Or he would sit on the root of the old mango tree and

play upon his reed of rice straw, waiting for her to come — to their young tryst.

In the congruence of their thoughts, they would understand meanings and symbols, even as he would offer to her a simple garland of sampaguitas. They had always played together, often until sundown. They would be at the beach, gathering the finest colored pebbles, counting them on their laps, or playing "cudo" until the dying sun had bequeathed its grandeur to the moon.

They would sit silently for hours, the silhouettes of their beings etched vividly with the lengthening shadows of the tall grass, meanwhile building castles or dreaming dreams.

"You have a nice smell on you, Myrna," Rasul would break the silence. "And there is warmth from you that sends my being a quiver."

"Oh you naughty boy, you smell the newly cut rice stalks and the breath of the newly plowed earth. The evening wind chills you a quiver." They would laugh aloud, but Rasul felt restless shivers run through his spine as he drew Myrna closer to him.

"Oh God, what an ecstasy, this being together! The smell, the warmth!" He would muse.

Man hungers for freedom, many freedoms, but mostly for freedom to release what he thinks or feels, or what sends him aquiver in moments of joy. The flowers thirst for the early April showers; the blades of grass thirst for more sunshine; man not only thirst; he hungers for love, for someone to feel the throbs of his heart.

Man's mind wonders at the vastness of nature, at the intriguing creations of God. The unfathomed mysteries in living things, the infinite treasures in the hills and forests and in the deep waters of the sea. The Unseen Hand that controls all; the Mind that sets the rhythm, the consistency, the eternal cycles, — these fill Rasul's mind with big wonderment. And he is amazed at the vastness of things and his own littleness. He tries to unravel the riddle, but he gives up in bewilderment. He knows so little of life. What is love? If one smells something nice, if he feels something warm, if his spine goes a-tingling, if his whole being goes aquiver, when he draws Myrna close to him, is that love? If he could but know! If Myrna could but feel! If he could but be sure of what Myrna felt and knew!

And so at last he had asked her.

"Myrna, this smell of yours, this warmth of yours, this ecstasy that I feel, this quivering feeling, when I am with you; this swelling of the spirit — is this love? If it is, then I love you, Myrna. Do you feel that way too?"

"Don't say those things, Rasul. It is better to feel them than to say them."

And Myrna would look away, so far away. And Rasul would be puzzled. But their eyes would meet again, and the world then becomes full of meaning. The universe is easier to understand then, if it was all bound up in the depths of Myrna's eyes.

Of an evening, Rasul would hide among the plants near Myrna's bedroom window. He would pluck a flower and throw it in the room.

"Who is there?" she would ask, knowing the answer.

"It is Rasul, my love," would come from beneath her window.

"Oh impulsive Rasul, they will see you. Run away before they do."

And Rasul would scamper away, past the winding brook, and Myrna would watch him get lost in the moonlight beyond.

Then she felt the solitude creeping upon her. She would gaze at the moon, knowing that through a veil of cloud, it would watch her too. As the clouds trailed the moon so did her thoughts trail the youth that had just gone.

She would sigh, "Oh moon, your beams came astray into my room. Have they brought with them the thoughts and the feelings of a vagrant youth that came stealing beneath my window? Now that he is gone, I have a great feeling of emptiness. Fill my room with moonbeams and drive away this feeling of being alone."

There was a midnight moon in the sky. Rasul and Myrna were again at their tryst beneath the old mango tree. They were watching the glimmering streaks of moonlight reflected in the placid

waters of the brook beneath their feet.

"I have to go away, Rasul. Will you be lonesome?" asked Myrna.

"You can't go away, my love. I want to marry you. Tomorrow, any day, we shall be wed." There was a frightened look in Rasul's face. Terror was gripping his heart.

"But you see, Rasul, my parents want to send me to the city to study. I will come back to you when I get through. Will you wait for me? It will take a few years, may be; but I must go. They want me to go."

"I am afraid I will lose you, Myrna. The City is cruel. People in the City are cruel. They will not care for you as I would. They will not care to know that you have left someone here who loves you more than anything else in the world."

Rasul was sad, and Myrna was sadder. They walked home in silence, knowing that wounds have been opened in their hearts, and there might be no healing.

At the parting, Myrna assured him, "Keep faith, my love, my dearest one. For youth is hope, and we shall be together again. If we truly love one another, nothing in truth can keep us apart."

And so to the City Myrna had gone. And the City took possession of Myrna, body and soul.

"Your smell, Myrna, and the warmth of your body, they send a thrill through my spines," said the City.

For she had met a man, a virile and persistent man. He was wise in the ways of the City; he was as smooth as its wiles; he was as

cruel as its crimes. And Myrna became intoxicated with the attentions and gifts that had been lavished upon her. She had been placed upon a pedestal, and she thought she had become queen. In delirious excitement, she had given this man her love, her being, and her soul.

"Your smell, Myrna, and the warmth of your body: they send a thrill through my spines," the man had said, and Myrna could not resist his virility.

But came the sad hour when she realized that her bloom had gone, and the man of many thrills and of great insistence had gone too. The promise she had made once before in her native hills and dales, the assurances she had given in return for the missives of love written on a tender banana leaf, in the sands of the beach, or carved upon the trunk of the mango tree,—these had come back to her now with the impact of her disillusionment. She realized, oh how so late, that she had become like the flowers in her native hillsides that had been blown off the twig by a strong wind, and now floating upon the brook, in restless wandering, perhaps later to wither and perish upon the swirling waters of the sea.

And the memories came with startling and painful reality," No, the sunset of our lives shall never come If you have faith and love . . . For youth is hope Ah Rasul, my beloved, the smell of my youth, the warmth of my body — they are gone; they are yours no more to send your whole being aquiver. I have sold them for brief, cheap, reckless moments of

excitement. The bloom upon my cheeks is gone. The sunset of my life has indeed come. The greying mists of the evening are upon me. Oh Lord, Thou who hast been borne this Christmas Eve, give me a few days to live that I may have the chance to atone for the sins of my wickedness. Give me the opportunity to tell Rasul that my love for him had never changed, but yet to tell him that I seek his forgiveness. His pure, great love I no longer deserve. Give me a chance to tell him so, and then, and then I shall be ready to go"

Rasul was there with her, on the way to church.

"Myrna, I am here. I came to spend my Christmas Eve here in the City. Aren't you glad? It is so good to see you, but what has happened to you? You have thinned so, the bloom of your cheeks is gone!"

"Rasul, go away. I shall only break your heart if I tell you. I lost my soul in the City; I had forgotten my promises to you. If you could but forgive me, that is all I ask. I do not deserve you and your love. I am going to ask God to take me with Him. The sunset days of my life have come."

"But, my love, whatever has happened to you in the City, whatever has passed, — that cannot be more important than my love for you. You could not have escaped the evil of this City, and so I have come to take you away from it."

"You do not understand, Rasul, I am no longer worthy of your love. I have been false to my promises. How can you ever forgive me?"

"This is Christmas, my dear. Everything is forgiven. For Christmas is charity; Christmas is forgiveness."

The Vernacular in the Schools

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THERE IS INCREASING interest in the proposition to make the vernaculars as the medium of instruction in the primary grades. The CETA (College English Teachers Association) in its last conference in Manila advocated through a resolution that the vernaculars be used as the medium of instruction in the first two Grades. It is very well known, of course, that the Iloilo experiment has been instituted

mainly to determine the feasibility and practicability of using the vernacular as medium of instruction in the primary grades. A phase of the Iloilo experiment, probably the most important one, was that of determining to what extent a functional knowledge of the vernacular would be a help to the learning of English. The hypothesis set up was to the effect that if a child learns to read and write