

# The Rescue

by  
Marina F. Diño



ELISA looked at her time piece. She was thirty minutes late. She hurried with her footsteps and gripped her umbrella tighter. She did not bring any books this morning. She thought the moment she arrived, she would lose no time making her lesson plan. Mr. Vasquez, the supervisor, might come for a surprise visit.

She had been late many times before. That was one thing nice about her job. Being the only teacher in the barrio handling the first two sections, she could come and go as she pleased. No one in the barrio would report her. They were very good to her.

She remembered the first time she had been there, her first look of the barrio. She hated Tabis on sight — barren, lonely, so utterly lonely she could hear the crickets in mid-afternoon, and only a few houses were here and there. There were no movies, no friends, and when she wanted to read her fa-

vorite magazines — Love Comics and True Life Romances — it was agony in the flickering light of one candle.

The people all but idolized her. Since she came, their concern had always been for her. Everyday there was something for teacher — bananas, bibingka, jackfruit, macapas. Sometimes one pupil would bring her two or three eggs, another, a hen. When she had a headache, one of the parents would bring her some hot coffee or a steaming bowl of hot soup. Everyone, old or young, knew her and called her simply, "Ma'm."

But Elisa hated the people as much as she hated her work! She was filled with nausea if they came to her with mud in their feet, foul-smelling from their work, and smeared with chewed tobacco. She did not like their rowdy manners, raucous voices, harsh laughter.

She even hated the children. They were as dirty as their parents,

and as ignorant. They could not distinguish a radio from a piano. Each day was endless misery for her — teaching them to read the alphabet, showing them to scribble their names on paper. When she took her practice teaching, the children were not as restless and dull as these. After she graduated from college, she thought she could teach in the Surigao Central Elementary School. Her qualifications were high. But there were many applicants, and when at last notice came for her to teach, she was assigned in the barrio.

It was revolting! The place, the people, the children, and this — this walk every morning to school — across swamps, in open corn fields, across the Magcasa river. She heard the rapids of the water now and closed her umbrella putting it under her arm. She raised the end of her skirt and waded. Ugh! The water was particularly cold and very swift. Instinctively she looked up at the sky. It was going to rain.

When she neared the schoolhouse, no one was about. The children must have gone home, thinking she was not coming. The moment she was at the doorway, however, a loud chorus of "Good morning, Miss Piamonte" greeted her. The children were all clustering around Ingco Doro, father of one of the boys. He was explaining something in a book to them.

"I told them to wait a while for you," Doro said by way of greeting, "I was afraid they might stray far so I told them to sit quietly on their seats."

Elisa barely nodded. She did not smile. She only looked at the mess inside the room and her eyes told the children, "You all deserve something for this."

She went to the table and began to write on her lesson plan. Ingco Doro merely smiled his good humour to the children and went out the door catching Miss Piamonte's words through the window, "If you don't want to be whipped, don't make any noise. I don't want to

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be disturbed. I have a headache."

Towards mid-morning no Mr. Vasquez arrived, and Elisa decided to dismiss her class early. She would go home and take a nap. She lacked sleep because of the barriada dance last night. The supervisor might come in the afternoon. So she told the class, "Everyone should come early this afternoon, ha?" There was a warning note in her tone. The children nodded.

She was awakened by the clapping of the window panes against the sides of the house, and by rain dripping from the leaking roof. Manding Meona, her landlady, was busy patching the roof in the kitchen.

"Sounds like a storm, a heavy one, too," Manding said. "Sus, I hope Polen is no longer out in the field. What time is it, Lisa?"

Sleepily, Elisa looked at her watch, "Two-thirty."

She suddenly sat up. The children. They were waiting for her this time, trapped inside the dilapidated schoolhouse in the storm. She felt her hands grow cold and like one dazed, she got up to dress.

Manding Meona asked faintly from the kitchen, "Where are you going?"

Elisa did not answer. With trembling hands, she tore at the zipper of her dress and groped for her old shoes. She put a sweater on top of her head, and ran down the bamboo stairs almost tripping.

The winds were very strong. Elisa had a hard time keeping her feet on the ground. With lowered head, hands gripping her sweater, she followed through the haze the torn-beaten path to the schoolhouse. The coconut trees shook violently, swaying to and fro no longer beautiful and caressing but deadly. She ran blindly on.

The rain fell in torrents now, making the way doubly hard for her. When she reached the corn field, she stumbled many times along the slippery trail. And every time she thought she would stop and just lie there. But something urged her on! Was it fear of the consequences? Supposing, supposing, — oh, God, let her not think! She got up dazedly, the angry wind lashing against her cold, wet body.

The wind, the rain, and the mud made progress very slow for her. She got a stick of old bamboo in the corn grass to help her across

the way.

Soon she reached the bank of the river. She saw in the confusion of her mind that the river was almost impossible. The rapids were now one curling, swirling torrent, bringing in its wake twigs, boulders and tree trunks. But Elisa was unmindful of this. She only saw a vision of crying, frightened tots around each other's arms shouting, "Incy! Incy! Itzy! Itzy!" Lord! Let them be so afraid that they won't venture out, that they hadn't ventured out! Elisa twitched involuntarily. At the same time she put her feet in the water. The current almost carried her away! She regained her balance and planted her feet firmly into the sand. She moved one step, two, and fell. The wind and the whirling waters were too much for her. She clutched at a big boulder. Half dragging, half carrying her body, she moved on to the next boulder. She was now in the middle of the stream hugging the boulder tightly when she saw the danger. A big log, almost the width of the whole river, was coming her way! She tried to get up, to run the remaining distance, but it was like running in quicksand. She could not even drag herself up to await what was coming.

Manding Meona was worried sick. She cursed herself for a fool! Why had she never thought Elisa would go out? She must have been gone full thirty minutes while she was in the kitchen. Elisa must have tried to save her books and her lesson plan! These teachers! When her Candida grew up, she would never let her become a teacher.

There was panic in her voice as she shouted to her nearest neighbor, "Tasyo! Tasyo!"

Tasyo, who was putting a prop for his house, cried, "What is it?" "Ma'm Piamonte has gone out in the storm! Perhaps to get her books in school!"

"Susmariose! Sepa, Sepa!" Tasyo called his wife. "Call Tonio to finish this. I'm going after Ma'm Piamonte."

On the way, Tasyo met Polen and Teban soaked to the skin. He told them about Elisa.

"I was at Ingco Leon's for sometime after the storm broke," Polen explained. "Else I would have seen Elisa in the field. Quickly, double your pace. She always passes this way."

When they reached the bank of the river, they saw no one.

"Teban, you go downstream," Polen directed. Teban ran all the way. "Tasyo, up the river. I'll try to cross somehow. Perhaps Elisa is in school by now." But as he looked at the hungry, slashing waters, he doubted it.

Presently, Teban was shouting, "There she is. Hurry!"

Polen and Tasyo ran. They saw her, barely hanging on the big log, her face partly hidden in the water. She was still conscious.

"A rope, quick!" somebody cried. Polen uncoiled the rope at his side with nervous fingers. He had to hurry. When those currents take Elisa further downstream, it would be too late.

"Lisa!" Polen shouted. "Lisa! grab the rope!"

With the first throw, Lisa's limp hand could hardly reach the rope. Polen tried again, while the waters carried Lisa down, down — The men ran ahead and Polen threw the rope with all his might. The rope landed at arm's length of Lisa.

"Grab it!" The three men shouted simultaneously.

Elisa heard that about as if from a dream, so faint it was. Through blurred, stinging eyelids, she saw Ingco Polen, Teban, and Tasyo excited, signing her to hold something. A rope. Yes, she saw it and took hold of it. But she was so tired and she wanted to sleep. She closed her eyes. She heard the men again. Why were they shouting and why was she in the water? She looked around her — at the raging elements. And she saw the log she was hanging on to, and she remembered. Strength surged through her whole being! The kids, those innocent kids, must not suffer on account of her! She held the rope tighter and felt it tugged hard.

When Elisa awoke, there was no more echo in her ears, no more swishing and snarling. And she was no longer cold. She was in her own room covered with thick blankets, and when she opened her eyes, Manding Meona was bending over her.

"Drink this hot ginger, dear," Manding said.

But the children — Elisa tried to get up. Manding held her down gently. "It's all right, it's all right. Drink this first."

## Manila Calling Cebu

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Manding did not seem to understand. She must get up and ascertain if, if — she sank her head into the pillow.

"It was one awful storm," it was Doro's voice in the veranda. "When I recalled that Ma'm Pamonte had a headache, and might be late, I went to the schoolhouse, fearful that that naughty lad of mine would wander off with the rest of the kids. The rain blew harder instead and the winds shook the trees terribly, that I decided to stay till after the tempest was over."

"The children," somebody asked, "did they not cry all over you?"

"Oh, no. They thought it was fun. We even played hide and seek."

There was general laughter.

"Some parents came to take the children away," Doro continued, "but I advised them to wait till the storm subsided."

"Say, Doro, how clever is your boy?" one of the men wanted to know.

"Huh? As clever as I am. Says two plus two is live. Isn't that cute?"

Elisa smiled in spite of herself. These people — these dear good people — serious, gay, human, all human. They gave her back her life and with it, another chance. The tears came, and she buried her face in her pillow.

"What is it, child?" Manding asked.

"Nothing," Elisa whispered.

Manding touched her forehead and stroke her hair tenderly.

### EVERYTHING I HAVE . . .

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last lines of dialogue and oratorics, including the ad libs (which would clinch things — I thought).

I couldn't wait for the weekend to come last enough. When finally it staggered in, I was feeling like a knight going into a pitched battle with ten dragons and a row of windmills after that. Dressed and perfumed like any lovestick, gibbering adult-lescent (that's a combination college sophomore, wallflower and deadbeat), I sallied out to where the trucks were parked waiting for the excursionists. If I could only manipulate things so I could sit beside her, I thought... she knows by now: it shouldn't be difficult to begin... well, she smiled at me last week, maybe there's

sor, NIMIA DOROTHEO, who is going to kiss her Cebu days goodbye by enrolling in a Manila university come June... DELIA SAGUIN, snooping around for Campusrats... LUZ MANCAO SANDIEGO, here to do the Fair-way... MIKE CELDRAN, an intern at the PGH... JIMMY DUMON, plodding out of Quiapo, heaping with bundles... Mrs. SALUD SANTOS, walking down the Elizabeth's gangplank... EMMA DEL ROSARIO, LUDY AND ROSE MORALES, Central Marketing, Shinbusters DE JESUS, POMAR, QUINO, BALLESTEROS, VALMAYOR, et al. of William Lines XI... 1950 USC ROTC Commandant, Major JUAN, on duty at FT. MCKINLEY...

No tour of Manila would be complete without a trip to Balara. Traipsing around the place, we caught glimpses of JUAN TANATO, a Society of St. Paul seminarian... ROSITA TY, USC campus cynosure... Miss BUENCONSEJO (we're ashamed to admit her first name escapes us for a moment), an ex-USC ROTC kaydette gal... CAMILO DEJORAS, playing bings with relatives... SOCRATES PILAPIL, a C. E. Junior at MIT. Esquiring the GURUXANI sisters were GEORGE ARCILLA, BRAULIO ARRIOLA, DOMINGO ZABALA, EMETERIO ALLEME — all sporting the Ft. McKinley army cut. They say they've got quite a team in camp, spearheaded by "cover-boy" SAGARDUI, DIONALDO, RUBI, and ARRIOLA. Watching passers-by from the Baby Quezon Terrace were MOMMY CAMACHO and her kid, CAROLINA.

To escape the Manila summer heat, we boarded a BAL bus for Baguio. Within an hour, the Central Plains lay sprawling before us. Luzon's sore spot was peaceful enough, what with BCTs at every

hope... by golly, it's now or never!

They were there already. They were chattering and laughing, expectant, eager — and perfectly at ease. It would be quite a day! Then the teacher arrived. Miss Roberta O. Dil, with two sisters, a cousin, a maid and about a half dozen invited friends (what, no pet dog? I mused). And we went off — all but Helen.

She didn't come along.

turn of the road. In Bulacan, we passed orchard after orchard of mangos and towering bamboo grooves. The smell of burnt sugar cane engulfed us when we hit Panganga. Next stop was Tarlac, CPR's home province. Upon crossing the Florida Bridge, longest span in the Islands, we knew we were already in Pangasinan, the beyaco province. From here, we began the slow climb, zigzagging our way to the Pines City. The air gradually became cooler and cooler. One-lane bridges, down-to-earth road signs like "Drive like hell and you'll be in hell," and flagpoles in multi-colored outfits fleeted by. A few minutes more and then, we were in the heart of the Simla of the Philippines — truly the cleanest city this side of the globe.

From the Kennon Hotel where we roomed during our stay, we lost no time in trekking to the SVD quarters at Sunnyside. Lady Luck must have been with us for all the SVD Fathers then on vacation were in, it being dinnertime. Because they were on retreat, we merely got passing nods from FR. WROCKLAGE, FR. CREMERS, FR. LAZO, and FR. FLORESCA. But FR. SZMUTKO and FR. TSAO lorsook their chow if only to be able to say howdy to us. In the course of our tee-a-tee, we learned that Atty. AURELIO C. FERNANDEZ and FABIAN VILLORIA were recent visitors, that LOURDES DEJORAS is a member of the Canonesses of St. Augustine order. Taking a bus back, who do you think sat beside us? Former USC Rector, Fr. DINGMAN, who stunned us when he called us by our given name. Gosh, after these years! With Mrs. E. C. MORALES, we dropped by the convent of the Most Blessed Sacrament to call on NELLIE PATALINGHUG. She's a Pink Sister now, whatever that means. Downtown, we met Atty. MAX MACEREN, whose job with the Court of Appeals keeps him headquartered in this city.

Well, we've travelled many a mile, seen all sorts of people and places; yet, for us, Cebu is still the best place there is. Come dust, bugs, flies, and what have you, it will always be home — and that spells all the difference.