



devotion, or pious images tricked out with paper lace. It was all folly and mummery, that which he used to tell her as which he in turn had heard from his grandfather.

And when he tried to tell her about the gatherings to which the old man had taken him, and the talks he had heard, she would stop him contemptuously, and declare that such folks are drunken sots. Bitterness would creep into their talk. They would get talking about

• Short Story •

their relations. They would recount the countless things her stepmother and his grandfather had said about each of them. They uttered uncalled for remarks against each other; this they managed without difficulty. They indulged in coarse gibes. But Rita was always the more malicious of the two. Then he would go away. When he returned, he would tell her that he had been with other girls, and how pretty they were, and how they joked and laughed, and how they were going to meet again next Sunday.

She would say nothing to that. She used to pretend to despise what he said. Then she would grow angry, and throw her crochet work at his head, and shout at him to go and declare that she loathe him. And she would hide her face in her hands.

He would leave, not at all proud of his victory. He longed to pull her thin little hands away from her face and tell her that it was not true.

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But his pride would not suffer him to return.

One day, Badoy was with some other boys — newsboys like him. They did not like Badoy because he used to hold as much aloof from them as possible, and he never spoke at all, or talked too well in a naively pretentious way like a braggadocio. That day, he began

HE WAS twelve or thirteen, and was always ill. For some months passed, she had been on her back with hip disease, with the whole side of her body done up in plaster, like a little Daphne in her shell. She had eyes like a hurt dog's, and her skin was pallid and pale. Her head was too big for her body, and her hair, which was very soft and very tightly drawn back made it appear even bigger. But she had an expressive, sweet face, a sharp little nose, and a childlike expression.

Rita and Badoy were friends. They had seen each other every day since they were children. Of course they were neighbors. But to be quite accurate, Badoy only rarely ventured to enter the house. Rita's stepmother, who was a religious horror, used to regard him with an unfavorable eye as the grandson of an unbeliever, and as a horrid little dwarf. He was very ugly indeed.

But Rita used to spend the day on a sofa near the window on the ground floor. Badoy used to tap at the window as he passed, and flattening his nose against the panes, he would make a face by way of a greeting. Sometimes he would stop and lean his arms on the window sill which was a little too high for him—and they would talk. Rita did not have too many visitors, and she never noticed that Badoy was hunchbacked. Badoy who was terribly afraid and mortified in the presence of girls made an exception in favor of Rita. The little invalid, petrified, was to him something in-

longible and far removed, something almost outside existence.

He was grateful for his friend's infirmity. With her, Badoy could give himself airs of superiority. With a little swagger, he would tell her things that happened in the street, and himself always in the foreground. Sometimes in a gallant mood, he would bring her a little present: fruits in season as lomboy, lanzones, santol, or fried peanuts; or borrowed comic books. And she used to give him some of the multi-colored sweets that filled the two glass jars in the shop window, and they would pore over the comic books and picture postcards together. Those were happy moments. They would forget the pitiful bodies in which their childish souls were held captive.

But sometimes they would begin to talk like their elders. Politics and religion. Then they would become as stupid as their elders. She would talk of miracles and the nine days'

to talk of politics and the day when he himself would rise to power. He waxed enthusiastic and made a fool of himself. One of his comrades brought him up sharp with these brutal words:

"To begin with, you won't be wanted. You're too ugly!"

That brought him toppling down from his lofty eloquence. He stopped short—dumbfounded. The others roared with amused and malicious laughter. All that afternoon, he went about with clenched teeth. Evening came, and before all his newspapers had been sold out, he hurried home to hide away in a little corner, alone with his suffering.

He met his good friend, Iyo Dading, a fatherly, middle-aged bachelor whom Badoy had always sought out for sympathy and understanding, usually after a good thrashing from a brutal grandfather whose bark was worse than his bite. Iyo Dading was struck by his downcast expression. He guessed that he was suffering.

"You are hurt. Why?"

Badoy refused to answer. Iyo Dading pressed him kindly. The boy

The boy listened, nodded his head and said:

"Yes, but I've got to face this: that I shall always have to live in this body of mine!"

"Not at all. You will quit from it."

"How do you know that?"

The boy was aghast. Materialism was part and parcel of his grandfather's creed. He thought that it was only the priest-ridden prigs who believed in eternal life. Iyo Dading held his hand and expounded at length his idealistic faith, the unity of boundless life that has neither beginning nor end, in which all the millions of creatures, and all the million, million moments of time are but rays of the sun, the mighty source of it all.

But of course he did not put it to him in such an abstract form. Instinctively, when he talked to the boy, he adapted himself to his mode of thought: ancient legends, the material and profound fancies of old cosmogonies. Half in fun, half in earnest, he spoke of metempsychosis and the succession of countless forms through which the soul passes and flows, like a spring from pool to pool.

He was sitting by the open window. The boy was standing by his side, and their hands were clasped. They realized that it was nightfall before Christmas. They grasped its beauty and meaning only now. The bells were tolling. The dim sky was smiling above the city. One by one, the little twinkling stars darted through the shadows. The boy held his breath and listened to the fairy tale his man-friend was telling him. And Iyo Dading, warmed by the eagerness of his young hearer, was caught up by the interest of his own stories.

light of undiscovered eternity hidden in the boy's deformed body as in a battered lantern. He understood none of Iyo Dading's abstract conceptualizations, nor his arguments. But the legends and images which were only beautiful stories and parables to Iyo Dading, took living shape and form in his mind, and were most real. Christmas lived, and moved, and breathed all around him for the first time.

And the view framed in the window of the room, the people passing in the street, rich and poor, little boys and girls singing Christmas carols, lanterned windows and tartanillas, noisy street cars, rooftops drinking in the shadow of the twilight, the pale heavens where the daylight was dying... all the outside world was softly imprinted in his mind, softly as a kiss.

It was but a flash of a moment. The light died down. Then he thought of Rita. His dear little one... How cruel it is to laugh at people because they had weak eyes, as because they were hunch-backed. And he thought that Rita had very pretty eyes. And he had brought tears into them! He could not bear that.

The boy went home through the familiar streets. Iyo Dading's words were ringing in his head. He turned and went across the shop. The window was still open. He thrust his head inside, and called in a whisper:

"Rita!"

She did not reply.

"Rita, I beg your pardon."

From the darkness came Rita's voice:

"Beast! I hate you."

"I'm sorry," he said.

He stopped. Then, on a sudden impulse, he said in an even softer whisper, uneasily, shamefacedly:

"You know, Rita, I believe in God just as you do."

"Really?"

"Really."

He said it only out of generosity. But as soon as he had said it, he began to believe it.

The world stood still. They did not speak. They could not see each other. Outside, the night was so fair, so sweet.... The little cripple murmured:

"How good it is to die! For as we die each day, we begin to live a little longer."

He could hear Rita's soft breathing.

"Good-night, little one," he said. Tenderly came Rita's reply: "Good-night!" ‡

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persisted in his silence. But his jaw trembled as though he was at the point of weeping. Iyo Dading took his arm and led him back to his room.

"Someone has hurt you?"

"Yes. Not one. Many."

"What did they do?"

The boy laid bare his heart. Iyo

DEN ETERNITY

Dading appeased him with his gentle and comforting words, and a simple story of the ugly duckling who was turned into a beautiful swan. He told him that everything in this world, every being that is good radiates a quality of beauty all its own. "Think of all the beautiful things to be seen, and loved all around you..."

There are decisive moments in life when, just as the electric lights suddenly flash out in the darkness of a city, so the eternal fires flare up in the darkness of the soul. A spark darting from another soul is enough to transmit the Promethean fire to the waiting soul.

On that beautiful evening, Iyo Dading's calm words kindled the