

# BAD BOY

(A Short Story)

By CESAR S. TIANGCO

Principal, Muntinlupa High School

Looking out of his office before the bell rang and overhearing Lupu boast of his experiences to a group of boys gathered just below the window, Mr. Santos shook his head. Talk of violence and brutality was bad enough but the real danger lay in the false values he had developed out of those experiences. To him brute strength was god, and to be strong and ruthless was to be worshipped. Indeed, the look of awe and wonder in the eyes of his listeners could not but strengthen the boy's belief in that value, and he basked in the frank admiration he received from them.

In a little card in his drawer, Mr. Santos kept a record of the boy's offenses. It was a long list and two or three of the offenses had been serious. On one occasion, he had whipped out a knife and chased another boy around the schoolyard and might have killed him had not the male teachers intervened. In both cases, he "found extenuating circumstances."

That Lupu had possibilities Mr. Santos soon found out. Mr. Santos liked to tell about an incident: One morning a boy's father appeared in his office and asked him whether it was true that in the past ball in school his son had got drunk and thrown a glass of water at a group of students and teachers. Mr. Santos knew only that somebody had committed such offense but had not been able to find out who had done it. He called the boy for questioning. The boy refused to admit anything. Mr. Santos called witnesses. Two witnesses said they had seen the boy throw the glass of water; two others were certain somebody else had done it. Balked by conflicting evidence, Mr. Santos faced the class and said he expected the real of-

fender to put up his hand and tell the truth.

It was Lupu who raised his hand. "I did it," he admitted.

Later on, after the matter had appeared settled, Mr. Santos learned that Lupu had not done the offense in question but had taken it unto himself to save another boy, his friend, from beating. Mr. Santos called him to the office. "Lupu, you know you deserve to be expelled, and I ought to expel you." The boy was defiant. "But I am not going to have you expelled. I believe that you will change and someday be a source of pride to this school. You have fine qualities I'd feel sorry to see going to waste. Toughness, courage, strength should be used to good purpose only, just as you did for your country as a guerrillero. It is for you to know what those good purposes are but exhibiting your physical prowess by quarreling with other boys and daring your teachers is not of them. I would regret very much if you get expelled from this school because of misconduct. I consider you and all the others like my own sons."

A frank look of surprise appeared on the boy's face. He had expected the worst—expulsion. This was something different. His code of violence did not apply here. The boy did not utter a word, but Mr. Santos knew he had touched him—inside.

Since the incident, the boy had formed a habit of hanging around his office or engaging him in conversation about anything at all. Though the boy took much of his time and distracted him—he was a glib talker, conceited and unabashed—Mr. Santos did not discourage him.

For a while, the boy did not cause any

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outbreak, and Mr. Santos believed that he had made a good start in his reformation. He hoped Lupo would continue showing good signs. It would take time certainly for him to shake off the perverse influences of misguided childhood, of unwholesome environment, of bad company, of the brutal years of war, all too well manifested in his vulgar language, insolence, and violent temper. Particularly was Mr. Santos concerned about the last, that predisposition to violence which was not only bad but dangerous. It would take more than talk and sermons to remove that danger. It would require something decisive, even tragic and violent.

After classes one afternoon, Mr. Santos called the participants in his play, "The Moon Goddess," which he intended to stage at the closing program of the school.

A slim, dark girl sat on the throne. Before her, six boys who were supposed to be warriors squatted.

"Music," Mr. Santos called, and boys, the vocal orchestra, intoned a weird dance air. The warriors rose slowly and danced the tribal dance of invocation.

Thus, the rehearsal progressed from scene to scene and with few hitches now and then that got promptly smoothed out. It was at last concluded with the moon goddess coming down from heaven amidst thunder and lightning to expose an impostor, the queen. There was clapping of hands.

"Now, once more," Mr. Santos said. "We'll do it without mistakes now. This will be the last. We shall not rehearse anymore until the actual performance."

The queen took her place on the throne again. The warriors squatted before the throne—all but one who remained seated on a desk.

"Go to your place now," Mr. Santos called to him.

But the boy did not move. "I am tired, Mr. Santos. Please excuse me. I don't want to participate in the play anymore, sir."

"Why not?" Mr. Santos asked. The boy made no reply but instead stood up and turned to go.

Lupo, who was seated on a desk nearby, stood up and blocked the way.

"Go head," he told him. "Come on. Will you put Mr. Santos in a fix about the play? Go 'head.'"

"Mind your own business," the other retorted.

"Oh you'll fight?" Lupo challenged him. "You'll fight, huh?"

Before Mr. Santos could intervene, there came a quick and furious exchange of blows. Mr. Santos and the bigger boys present tried to break them apart. They succeeded in holding one away from the other with great difficulty and only by force of number.

"Take him out," Mr. Santos motioned to the boys holding Lupo's opponent.

"You'll pay for this!" Lupo shouted to the other and he laughed aloud suddenly and queerly as though it was all some great fun.

But his face was bleeding. Blood gushed out of an ugly cut above his left eye and streamed down his face and shirt.

"Better go to the dispensary and have that cut fixed up," Mr. Santos told him.

"Oh, this is nothing. Just a scratch. His nail... Nobody has drawn blood from me before... not even in the mountain," he said meaningfully. He turned to go out.

Mr. Santos held him by the shoulder. "I know what is on your mind," he told him. "You got into trouble on my account. I should thank you for that. But I want you to do something else. I want you to forget this fight and let him alone."

Lupo looked at him with an expression of surprise, even pain. "Nobody has ever drawn blood from me before," he said.

"You told me once that am your friend."

"Yes," Lupo said. "I have come to regard you as my own father—even more."

"If you do, then you will do what I am asking you to do. Promise."

"I cannot promise," he said and, without another word, walked out with that swinging, manly gait of his.

As he rested on a chair by the window after supper, Mr. Santos had a worried look. He was thinking about Lupo's case. It had grim possibilities—a boy like him and a gun. He had used it before with less provocation, as rumors went.

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he failed to hear the knocking at the door. But it came again, this time much louder.

When he became aware of the knocking, he knew who it was. "Come in," he said and stood up.

Lupo stood before him. A gun and a big-hunting knife were in his hand. Tape crossed over his brow, and his face had

been wiped clean. The characteristic appearance of bizarre gentleness and languor was more noticeable than ever.

"Mr. Santos," he said quietly, "I have come to hand you these."

"I am going away," he continued after a long, speechless moment. "I know of a place where I can get a job. I'll study in the evening."

"You don't have to leave," Mr. Santos said. "We—we have learned to like you here. The boys will miss you." The curious thing is Mr. Santos meant every word of it.

"Oh, I've been a source of so much trouble in our school," he said. "Good night, sir. I—I have learned to like this school, too. That is why it is so hard to leave."

The boy turned and left. Mr. Santos stood there for a long while holding the gun and the knife. In his mind, he was following the career of the boy as he strode forth in the dark with new plans and resolutions warring in his breast.

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could be defiant against methods that no longer work...

If only we had a Flores whose youth is the only barrier toward the fulfilment of his brilliant, if unorthodox, dreaming...

If only we had an Alvaro L. Martinez (writer, once a teacher, now a Y.M.C.A. general secretary) whose mind teems with ideas of organization and attraction, who is always working out ways and means of harnessing mass psychology for mass benefit...

If only we had an Osias whose oratory, mass-magic, and clear thinking in the midst of the most gruelling intellectual battle might be coupled with less national renown that sometimes weans a great man from the people that he loves...

If only we had an Imay Pecson whose social graces and charming feminine sympathy could be coupled with less preoccupation with the comforts of the great so that the well-being of the disinherited may have a chance to be remembered...

If only we had a Cayco whose soundness of educational thinking and whose firmness of conviction makes fun of the illiterate compliance and orthodoxy even among nationally-known leaders...

If only we could telescope all of them and make an eclectic Executive Secretary-Treasurer, what could we not do with our PPSTA! What could we not do with 57,000 teachers all solid for education and themselves! What could the country do against so vast an army of educated and determined and ORGANIZED men and women!

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