

THE LOST ONES

WHEN THE bell rang a second time, Ben gathered up the notes he had been lecturing from on the religious institutions of the Ifugaos and thrust the sheaf of papers into a manila folder.



By S. V. Epistola

"Does anybody have a question?" he demanded, looking at his students scattered about the classroom.

They had already put away their notes and closed their ring binders and gathered together

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books and things. No one a hand.

What? Not even one question? he insisted smilingly, looking from face to face. A group of the girls on the front row smiled and shook their heads. From the back of the room, a boy spoke up, "None,

"Very well, then," and Ben picked up his folder from the table. He looked about the room once more. "Good night," he said and strode out into the amber sunshine of the afternoon.

He stepped into the hall and plunged himself into the flow of still disputing students. He felt the stream when he reached the end of the hall and turned one into the Anthropology civilization. Half-way up the stairs to the staff office, he started fumbling in his pockets for the door key, certain that the others had already locked up and gone. But when he emerged from the stairwell, there was white fluorescent light spilling out the half-opened door into the hall which the thick bougainvilleae vines already shielded from the sun.

It was Paz still in the room, and when he stepped inside she looked up from the book opened on the reading stand before her and smiled up at him.

"Don't work too hard, Paz," he said as he passed her desk.

"I'm not really working," she said, and when he had reached his desk on the farther side of the room she added, "I'm just reading."

"Reading what?"

Paz picked up the book on her reading stand and held it over her head, its covers spread-eagled towards him. He readily recognized the translation the German scholars at the Innsbruck Institute had made of the monograph he had done on the beads.

"You went into too much trouble reading that," and he let himself down into the armchair behind his desk.

"I had no trouble at all, really," she maintained, laying the book aside on her desk.

"I wrote that thing long ago, and it's not even entirely mine."

"But nothing's ever entirely ours."

BEN GOT UP from his desk and with the folder of lecture notes he crossed over to his bookcase. Paz went on speaking, but he was not listening anymore. Quite automatically, for remembrances of that summer among the Ifugao villages in the highlands had already begun to fill his mind, Ben unlocked the bookcase where he kept his notes. He saw himself again as he was, a young student out on his first field trip with Dr. Garcia. Then he per-

ceived Ellie, very scientific and competent in shirt and jeans, showing him how to do his work properly, talking very seriously to him of myths people had already stopped believing in.

Paz had stopped talking, and she was looking up at him quizzically when he turned away from the bookcase to go back to his own desk.

"Anything the matter, Ben?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

"Why?" he asked back, wondering as he faced her what could have brought on the question.

"I think I've made you angry," she said. "I really should've asked before taking your monograph, but I'm sorry, Ben. Truly, I am."

"Give it no further thought, Paz," he said lightly, breaking into a smile. "I was going to ask you to read that paper anyway."

He crossed back to his desk and seated himself on the armchair, facing Paz on the other side of the room.

"You did a very good job, Ben," she said seriously.

Ben laughed. He rose from his desk and walked over to the armchair in front of Paz. Then, as he drew the armchair closer to her desk, he asked, "You've seen the beads themselves?"

She nodded and, pulling back the top drawer of her desk, lifted out the soiled cloth bag in which Ellie had handed the beads to him one evening once upon a time. He watched Paz, her fingers steady and strong and confident, undo the knot stopping the bag's mouth, wondering the while if this could not really be Ellie all over again. He quelled his thoughts and reminded himself again that only the Intellect mattered.

Paz finished untying the knot, and the bag was open. Hold-



ing its other end, she spilled the string of beads on the glass top of her desk, where it lay loosely coiled.

"They're very lovely," she said admiringly as she looked up at him with a smile.

"That was the very thing I said the first time I saw those beads."

"They must have cost their first owner a fortune."

"He could not have minded, I'm sure," he told her, laughing. "You see, this string of beads was meant for his bride."

Paz only smiled.

HE TOOK the beads into his hands. The jade glowed dully in the fluorescent light as he turned the string this way and that among his fingers. Then, turning toward Paz, he went on to explain, still winding and unwinding the string of beads among his fingers, "Fortune gave much to that marriage, and when the eldest son reached the age for marrying, the old lady gave him the beads to give his bride as a wedding present." Ben stopped talking and, putting down the string of beads on the table, stood up and moved away. He stopped before the window, watching the sprinkler sending jets of water revolving over the grass below. Then he faced about, speaking as he walked back towards her, "But this marriage

proved fruitless, and as was the custom they had to separate. The girl married again, and it was her new husband who sold the beads to Ellie."

"And then you bought these from her?" Paz asked, picking the beads off the table as she turned to look up at him.

"No, Ellie just gave them," he said in a voice which was almost too soft for her to hear. Then he plunged on, "It was also she who supplied the leads I followed in that paper you read. That's why I told you it's not entirely mine."

"But there's no mention of her in the paper."

"That's because she refused. I asked her many times to let me put her down as co-author. She refused each time. She did not even want her part acknowledged."

"That's unreasonable, I think."

"Not really, perhaps. She must have had her own reasons. I must have failed her in some way. I don't really know. But for a long time we had both believed we would do great things together. We could have, too. Who knows? But in the end she got married, and that was the end of all that."

"I didn't know, Ben. I shouldn't have asked. I realize . . ."

"No, you did not ask," he cut in. "I told these to you."

"Thanks," Paz said.

He settled himself in the armchair and watched her gather up the string of beads into the bag. Then, pulling out the drawer, she dropped the cloth bag inside without as much as raising her eyes.

"I guess, I have to get going now," and he rose from the chair.

"I'll stay a while longer," she said, finally pushing in the drawer.

"Well, good-bye then."

"Goodbye," he heard her say as he strode out of the room.

THE LIGHT had already gone from the upper branches of the acacias lining University Avenue when Ben emerged from the University College building, but it was not quite night yet for the street lamps to be turned on. Only in some of the rooms in the science pavilions were the lights already ablaze, casting white fluorescent-light patches on the lawn under the windows, and as he walked past the Physics Pavilion, he caught the words *rectilinear motion on an inclined plane* before the voice paused. It did not start again until he had reached University Avenue, but then he had gone too far already and he did not recognize any of the words spoken.

He continued to the cement sidewalk under the trees, and the voice was soon lost to him.

Ben stepped off the curb at the corner where the cement sidewalk ended, and he crossed the street to the waiting shed. The place was empty and, resigned to a long wait, he sat down at the very end of the long wooden bench placed there, as a plaque attested, by Class 1950.

No bus had shown up yet when the lamps went on among the trees all along University Avenue. A cluster of students came to the waiting shed. But they remained standing off to one side, disputing noisily about some *unknowns* in Qualitative Chemistry. Ben listened to their arguing until he heard a shy, "Good evening, sir."

Ben turned from the chemistry students and found a girl standing near his end of the bench. In the garish light of the naked electric lamp overhead, he recognized the face, remembering it from an introductory course in anthropology he had offered in a previous semester. But the name eluded him. Nonetheless, he smiled to her. "Hello," he said.

She sat down beside him, resting her books and things on her lap. "Sir," she started diffidently, casting her eyes down upon the books on her lap. "I'd like to shift to another course sir."

He remembered the name then. Rosario Sanchez. She was the girl who always came to

him during registration, invariably with the request to shift major courses. Feeling expansively tolerant, he asked, "Again, Miss Sanchez?"

She nodded, though she kept her eyes down. She pulled from a pocket length of red and black beads strung together, and she started playing with it. Ben waiting for her to go on speaking as he watched her twining and untwining the string of beads among her fingers. Then, as though she were unsure of the propriety of having spoken to him, she continued, "I've already shifted too often before, sir, and I'm really ashamed of this now."

"We all knock about for some time, Miss Sanchez."

"Thank you, sir," she said, still without looking at him. "I thought you would be angry, sir, that's why I went to see the Dean first."

"What did he say?"

"He said I could shift to another course, sir, provided my adviser had no objections." Now she lifted her head to face him. "It's all up to you, sir."

"Well, what course is it this time, Miss Sanchez?"

"Anthropology, sir."

"I'm afraid you'll find that boring."

"No, sir, I don't think I would," this with the finality of statement. Ben thought of saying that she was surely trying

to be funny, but when he saw the serious eyes the girl had turned his way, he said nothing. "Please, sir, don't say you disapprove," she said earnestly. "I shall not shift again, sir. I promise."

"Well," and he smiled, "seeing how determined you are, why not?"

"You're letting me shift, sir?" and in her eagerness she leaned over and put a palm lightly on his arm.

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir," and taking away her hand, she sat back on the wooden bench beside him. "Thank you so much, sir," she repeated when he turned sideways to face her. Her eyes were shiny in the harsh glare of the electric bulb, but she was smiling. "I'm so glad, sir," she said, jumping up from the bench, her books and things clutched to her breast. "Thank you, sir, thank you," and she hurried off, half-walking, half-dancing. She stopped after she had gone some distance and turned around. "Good-bye, sir," she called back, waving her free hand at him.

Ben raised his hand over his head and waved back. She was smiling when she turned away once more, and he watched her hurry up the gravelled path towards the girls' dormitory in that half-walk and half-dance gait of hers.

"Who's that, Ben?"

THE VOICE surprised him, and Ben twisted around. He found his friend Phil towering over him. "One of my students," Ben said.

"I hope you hadn't been too hard on her, the poor girl."

"No."

Ben stood up when he heard the familiar racket the big bus always raised whenever it turned into University Avenue. The students were still talking hotly about their *unknowns*. With them, Ben watched the pale headlights of the oncoming bus grow brighter in the twilight. The bus stopped before the waiting shed, and while the students milled around the door, some girls loaded with brown shopping bags and packages stepped off the bus.

"We'll take my car," Phil said when Ben started towards the waiting bus.

The chemistry students climbed aboard, and the conductor called out once more, "Manila, derecho."

"Let's go, my car's on the other side of the street," Phil said when the bus started down the avenue. Together the two men crossed University Avenue as the big bus disappeared around the first corner.

"But what took you out of your air-conditioned office on a hot day like this?"

"You."

"Why me?"

"I came to fetch you," Phil said when they reached the car. "That is, if you've got nothing doing tonight," and he flung the car door open.

"Oh, no. Not again."

"Don't you worry. We're not going to the same places tonight," and Phil laughed. "We're going down to Davis Park."

Ben guessed what for and he smiled. "Jenny?"

"Yes," and Phil motioned his friend into the car.

Ben faced him. "You sure you want me to?"

"Why do you think I drove all the way out here to find you?"

Ben got into the car and waited for Phil to get in behind the steering wheel. "It's a good thing you found me," he said when Phil had slammed the door after him.

"There was really no trick to it," and Phil smiled, swinging a sidelong glance at Ben who had turned to face him. "Paz told me up at your office I might still catch you here if I hurried, and I hurried, and I found you here with that student of yours."

"That girl's one of my problems, you know," Ben said.

"Just like us, huh?"

"I guess so," Ben said and Phil released the hand brake. But her troubles are really

troubles. Ours never really were, Phil."

"Yah?" and Phil started the car.

"The whole lot of us were just lazy and shiftless."

The engine caught, and Phil shifted gears. The car rolled forward, and he steered off the curb. "Why, what seems to be the trouble, Ben? Boy-friends?"

Ben ignored the remark. "Her parents are divorced, and it's the trust division of a bank that's looking after her now."

PHIL SAID nothing. He drove down the length of University Avenue without speaking. He shifted gears again to slow down when they got to the check point at the main gate into the campus. Someone came out of the guard house and waved them on. Phil raised his hand and waved. Then he shifted to high gear, speeding on towards the highway.

"What's she shifting to?" Phil asked after he had settled into a fast steady clip.

"Anthropology."

Phil let out a dry chuckle, and Ben demanded, "Why?"

"Anthropology's a very neat way of throwing one's self out of life's running," Phil said. "All you guys, from old man Garcia down to you, Ben, you all potter around buried villages where life has died, and

here life's just begging to be lived."

Ben smiled out of amusement. He knew what Phil would say next, and to beat him to it, Ben said, "I know, why don't I get married?"

"Yes, why don't you? What's wrong with that Ph.D. in your department?"

Ben had not counted on this turn the conversation had taken. He did not want it. He would not encourage it any further, and he answered drily, "Nothing."

But Phil was not to be denied. "Then why? You still carrying the torch for Ellie?"

"Let's just say I enjoy being a bachelor and that I see no point in getting married to that Ph.D. or to anyone."

"But why, why?" Phil insisted.

Ben sat back, crossed his arms over his chest and wished to God Phil would stop talking, but because he felt that an answer had to be given, Ben replied, "The life of ideas that's the only life that interests me." He swung his eyes towards Phil, expecting to catch him laughing, or smiling at least. Instead he found him hunched over the steering wheel, looking seriously ahead. But he was unprepared for Phil's next words.

"Why, Ben," he began slowly, "you have thrown yourself out of life's running."

Phil spoke this gently as though he had been softly shocked. Almost, as Ben imagined, as a woman would have said, *Why, darling, you have hurt yourself.* Phil drove silently for a long time. Then he nudged Ben with an elbow and waved towards the countryside beyond the window. The lights of Davis Park had emerged from the darkness. But Phil did not speak and Ben only nodded after throwing a glance at the bright bobs in the distance.

Then there was the billboard, announcing under white fluorescent glare, Davis Park. Phil slowed down and made the turn, and for a while they drove down a narrow roadway between tall trees that loomed darkly over them on each side till they came to the check point. A uniformed man stepped out into the strongly lit edge of the roadway and waved them on into the Park. The trees fell away behind them, and Phil wound leisurely past open lawns that swept up to neat, well-lighted glassed-in bungalows. Phil stopped at the end of a long line of automobiles in front of one of the bungalows where lights of many colors had been strung out from the house over the terrace and the lawn down to the street gate.

Up in the house, somewhere, an orchestra struck up a Glenn Miller dance piece. For the first

time Ben noticed the people dancing on the terrace and he turned on Phil, "You did not tell me."

"You didn't ask," Phil said airily as he stepped out of the car.

"But I'm not dressed at all," Ben said, seeing that his friend had a white coat over his black pants.

"You're all right as you are."

"Let me use your car, Phil. I got to change," Ben said, feeling very conscious of his *barong Tagalog*.

"You're all right as you are, come on," Phil repeated. "Look, here's Jenny now," and he walked off to meet her.

Ben slipped to the other end of the seat behind the steering wheel and waited for Phil. But it was Jenny who peered into the car. "Hi, professor," she smiled.

"Hello, Jenny."

"Well, come on up to the house, Ben."

"But—"

Phil joined her at the car window. "Fellow wants to drive home, Jenny, says he isn't dressed."

"Oh, but he is, can't you see?" she laughed, looking around at Phil, and Ben joined their laughter. "You look all right, Ben," she said reassuringly. "Come on, Ben, don't be difficult now," she coaxed.

"Oh, okay then," and Ben

slid out of the car, pushing the door open before him. The two turned towards the house when he stepped off the car to the curb. Ben slammed the door behind him and hurried after them. He caught up with them at the gate. "I've got to tell you people that I'm still in my working clothes."

"Isn't that just terrific, Phil?" Jenny said. "At long last here's a man who works."

"Really terrific," Phil said.

Ben fell in step beside Jenny as the two walked towards the house holding hands. "You people've not changed a bit," he said to match their light talk. "And your jokes, too, they've not changed at all."

With her free hand, Jenny started pummeling his arm.

"Even your reactions are the same," Ben laughed.

"All right, all right, if you must go about insulting your friends," she said, and Phil admonishingly put in, "We're still your friends, you know."

THEY REACHED the porch laughing. The two went on to the terrace still holding hands. Ben detached himself and looked about for anyone he knew. He saw Jenny's brother Jim hurrying towards him with a grin lighting up his young face. They shook hands vigorously with much laughter, slapping each other on the

shoulders and back.

"When'd you get back, Jim?"

"Couple of months ago. But dammit I missed you in Paris."

"My concierge told me about you. You should've stayed longer though. I would've liked to show you around Montmartre."

My damned classes, that's why."

"But I heard you did quite well all over the Latin Quarter."

"It became a matter of national pride, you know."

"No doubt," and the two began laughing loudly.

They soon spent themselves, and Jim took Ben's arm. "Now, you must come and meet the girls," Jim said, pulling Ben along into the house towards the girls clustered about a sofa just beyond the door. Jim introduced him all around, speaking the names of the girls clearly, but Ben got none of their names. "Ladies, this is Bienvenido G. Cortez," Jim said. "He teaches at the State University." Then, when Ben started to pull him, he quickly added, "But don't let that fool you, ladies. He's been to Paris."

The girls smiled as they turned to look up at him. Ben smiled back, trying not to feel too conscious of himself under their scrutiny.

"He lived there a long time," Jim went on.

Ben tried to pull him away.

Jim shook him off and went on talking enthusiastically. "Ben's really been all over," he said. "Why, he used to write me from everywhere in Europe. Even from San Marino." Then he paused and looked from face to face. "Ever heard of that place before, ladies?"

The girls smiled and shook their heads, and Jim told them triumphantly, "That's the principality in the south of France."

Ben tugged at Jim's elbow again, this time much more insistently.

"Well, you'll have to excuse us for now," Jim said, starting to move away. Ben had succeeded. "But we'll be coming back."

"Please do," said the girl in the pink evening dress at the end of the sofa.

The rest of the girls smiled back, they even nodded, looking very pleased. He drew Jim along, away from the sofa and the girls.

"What's the matter with you, pushing and pulling like that?" Jim demanded when they got beyond hearing of the girls.

"I just wanted to get away."

"Get away?" Jim said, exploding in a hoarse whisper. "And just as Nellie was beginning to sit up? A fine fellow you are!"

"Who's Nellie?"

"That's the girl in the pink dress."

"Oh, well—"

"Man, you do not know Nel-

"But who is she?"

lie?"

"The only daughter of Don Hilarion Francisco."

"Oh."

"And do you know what that means?"

"What?"

"She inherits the Francisco millions, that's what."

"But, Jim, I thought you're already engaged to that Spanish girl in Barcelona?"

"Yes, but I'm not thinking of myself, I'm thinking of you."

Ben laughed.

"I'd like to see you married before I die."

"And you've decided it's going to be Nellie."

"She's really a bright girl, Ben. Truly worthy of your talents and intellectual stature."

They stepped up to the bar. Following Jim's example, Ben got on one of the high chromium stools and rested his arms on the brightly polished hardwood counter. The white-jacketed bartender moved over to them. "Good evening, sir."

"Hello, Slimmy," Jim said.

"Make me a very dry martini, will you?" Then, to Ben, "Name your pleasure, man."

"What can one have?"

"Anything you like. Name it and you have it." Then, "That right, Slimmy?"

"That's right, sir."

"I'll have bourbon-on-the-rocks then."

SLIMMY nodded with a smile and turned to make the drinks. Jim shifted on his perch and faced Ben who had taken to reading the labels of the bottles on the shelf before them.

"She studied in Europe, too, did you know that?" Jim said, taking out his cigarette case from a coat pocket. He clicked it open and offered the spread of cigarettes to Ben who waved it away. "She was in Switzerland four years."

"That right?"

"Yes, sure, she was in a famous college in Zurich," Jim said, picking off one of the cigarettes.

"Studying what?"

"The humanities. You know, the arts. Literature, painting, architecture, music. You know, the arts—"

The bartender returned and put down their drinks on coasters before them.

"She'll make you a fine wife, Ben," and Jim stuck the cigarette between his lips. The bartender produced a match book, struck one of the sticks and held its flaming end to the tip of Jim's cigarette. "Thanks, Slimmy," Jim said, blowing out smoke through his nostrils. Slimmy put out the flame as he turned away, and Jim continued, "Yes, Ben, she'll be a

fine wife," he said. "You can be certain of that."

"Maybe," Ben said, picking up the glass before him. He clinked the ice around in the glass, then he took his first sip.

Jim took his very dry martini off the counter and, turning a wide grin on Ben, slipped off the bar stool. "Let's go talk to the girls then," and he winked at Ben.

Ben lifted his glass and took another sip, then he turned to Jim. "I'll join you later," he said.

"Come on, let's go," insisted Jim, tugging at Ben's arm.

"Let me sit here a bit," Ben said. "I'll join you in a little while."

Jim went away, and Ben turned about the stool, watching Jim make his way back to the girls. The orchestra struck up another dance piece just as he reached the sofa, and Ben saw him put down his martini on the low table beside one of the chairs and bend low before one of the girls. She stood up and gave her hand to Jim. They went out together to the terrace. Ben picked up his drink and, getting off the stool, hurried on to the nearest door, glad for this chance to escape. The door let out into the end of the terrace farthest from the orchestra and the dancing couples. He found Jenny sitting alone among the host of untenanted

wrought iron tables. She looked up with a wan smile when he stopped by her table.

"May I?" he asked, indicating the empty chair opposite her.

"Yes, sure," she said. "Only, I hope you're not going to ask me to dance."

"Why?"

"I don't feel like dancing."

"Good," he said, sinking into the chair. "I only wanted to sit anyway." Ben set down his drink before him and stared at Jenny's face. "Where's Phil?"

"Out, there, someplace, talking business with his friends," she answered, sounding cross and annoyed.

"Why be annoyed?" Ben said softly. Then, she continued to be silent, he went on, "That's his work."

"I used to think that," she said with a laugh. "But what's wanted is only money as though that were the biggest thing in the world."

"He just wants to be a husband you'll not be ashamed of, I think."

"I'm not getting married, Ben."

Ben raised his glass, gulped down a little of the bourbon, set down his drink again and stared at her. "You're serious, Jenny?"

"Yes, very."

"Why?"

"We won't be able to make a go of it, Ben."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Go back to San Simon, I guess. Teach again in the high school there."

"Would you be happy doing that?"

She did not answer that. Instead, she shifted around in her chair towards the people dancing at the other end of the terrace. "Look, there's Suzy." Ben turned to look. He found Suzy engrossed in the intricacies of the cha-cha. "That's my sister who married for security."

"What's wrong with that?"

"She's not happy."

They turned away from the dancing, and Ben said, "You mean you've decided she's not happy."

"Consider her family, Ben. Her husband gets home from the office, she meets him at the door, and as a matter of routine, he pecks at the mouth she holds up to him. He asks how the kids are and she tells them they're fine. He plays with them for a while, then he goes upstairs, changes into his lounging robe and comes down again for his usual martini. He drinks this while reading the newspapers or the market reports while she sits opposite him, knitting or crocheting. Then the maid announces dinner and they go in and eat. After the dinner

she did not prepare, they sit and watch TV with the children till it's time to sleep. Sometimes instead of changing into his lounging robe, he gets into evening formals and tells my sister that he's going to a party, he's coming home late and she must not wait up for him. Is that the life, Ben, for this sensitive sister of mine who once made you sit still and thoughtful with a story she once wrote?"

Ben picked up his bourbon again and very slowly took a long, long sip, tilting back his head to empty the glass. "I don't know, Jenny," he said, putting aside the empty glass. "What do you want out of life, anyway?"

"I just want to be happy like anybody else."

"But how does one get to be happy?"

"You remember my brother Leonie?"

"Yes, I do," and Ben told her about his stopping at San Simon the previous summer. "That brother of yours has changed the face of that old town. His buildings have made it look different."

"That's what I mean, Ben."

"Is that happiness?"

"He drinks a lot, I know. He beats his wife, hits her on the head sometimes. But they're happy."

"How?"

"Can't you see? They're alive, Ben, alive. He's doing something he believes in and she has stuck by him."

"And you think Phil is not capable of this?"

JENNY shook her head. "Phil has changed a lot since those days when you used to come here after school and play ping-pong with Leonie. It makes me sick the way he says *yes sir, no sir*, to my father," she said in the tone people change to when they have to speak about revolting things to their friends. "He has come to love luxury, very much, Ben."

"We all like luxury, don't we?"

"Yes, but not in the manner you and Nitong take luxury," she answered. "It has never become a drive in your lives. It has become that in Phil's." Then she forgot about Phil, and she asked about Nitong.

"He's living in La Palma de Mallorca I heard, but I have the address of a bar in Paris through which he can be reached."

"What's he doing there?"

"Writing plays, I suppose."

"He's happy, I bet."

"Well, he's doing something he feels important."

Jenny smiled. "I liked him a lot, Ben, I still do, I guess. I used to await his coming to our house in the old days with

great eagerness. Of course, you people only saw me sitting there in the sala, busy with something or other all the time. But I was only pretending really, so I could see him and listen to his tempestuous talk. We went out on dates eventually. Then one afternoon he told me, 'I'm not going to be a kept man,' and he stomped out of our house forever."

"In Paris he once asked me about you."

"What did he say?"

"He asked if you were well, if you had gotten married, if you were still painting. He asked a lot of questions."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him you're fine, that you're engaged to Phil who has become affluent."

"And then?"

"He said nothing more. He left. Walked out on me. Just like that."

"That's just like him."

"I heard later that he went to the theatre and sat through a rehearsal of his latest play without speaking to anyone."

Ben looked up. Jenny was smiling at something far away, and he found himself thinking again of old Dr. Hans Kepler back at the Innsbruck Institute. In this recollection the old man was smiling genially, a long letter in his hands telling him about his students making important contributions to the un-

derstanding of myths. For Dr. Kepler the smile marked the vindication of a trust, the sharing of a task's rewards. But Jenny's was only of the kind one accorded distant mountains. Ben broke off his thoughts and faced away.

The orchestra stopped playing dance music, and the people started filing into the house, clapping their hands. Then the orchestra began playing dinner music.

"Ben, you go ahead have your dinner," Jenny said after a while.

"And you?"

HE SAW her try to smile. Her lips quivered but she managed a smile. Embarrassed, Ben stood up, took his empty glass and hurried into the house. He left the glass on the bar counter and headed for the table that had been set in the dining room. Somebody handed him a paper plate and silverware, and he took his place at the tail of the line, behind a girl. She faced about and smiled at him when he stopped behind her.

"Hello again," she said in a pleasantly modulated voice.

"Hello," he answered, remembering her face from Jim's introductions, but he could not think of her name. She was the girl in pink. As though this could make up for his truant memory, he decided to speak

with her. Seeing her fix the folds of her dress, he said, "That's a perfectly stunning dress."

"Thank you," Pinkie said in the same carefully modulated voice. "But I'm sure you've seen more stunning dresses in Paris."

"Yes, but never as becomingly worn as now."

"Thank you," and she smiled again. "If that had not come from you, I would've called this the most outlandish line I've ever heard."

"I wouldn't dream of handing you a line." Now he knew he had started a game, and deciding to keep it up, he said, "One hands lines only to old women, never to lovely young ladies."

Her cheeks dimpled, flushing lightly, and Ben walked slowly behind her as the queue moved on. Ben kept his little game going as they progressed down the length of the table. Pinkie told him about the Filipino dishes laid out before them, suggesting which to pick at and which to get, and dutifully he followed every suggestion till they reached the end of the table where they were handing out the desserts. "Take *nata de piña*," she said in a whisper. "I'll take *nata de piña*," he told the waiter, and the man handed him a small crystal bowl of this delicacy.

Her friends came up when they turned to leave the table. "Ah, there you are, darling," they said in a strident blabble of noise. "Certainly, you don't intend to keep the Professor to yourself, darling," someone teased.

"But I do," Pinkie teased back, stepping closer to him till their shoulders touched.

"Now, now, that's not fair."

"Oh, well—"

"Good, that's sweet of you, darling," they chorused. "You'll come and join us then, professor?"

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "I'm sorry, but I promised to sit with someone I hadn't seen in years," he said, marvelling at the ease with which he had lied.

"How sad!"

"But I'll join you later, ladies."

"That's the same thing you told us a while back, remember?"

"We'll be waiting then," they said, and Ben excused himself.

He hurried back to the terrace, but Jenny had gone. The table was empty, and when he looked around he found no sign of her anywhere. The orchestra was still playing dinner music over the unmistakable hum of dinner conversations at the tables scattered about under the many colored lights. Ben turned his back on these and walked

to the untenanted tables on the other end of the terrace. He set down his plate of food on the wide top of the balustrade and started nibbling at a stem of celery which Pinkie had suggested as a very good appetizer. Below him was the flower garden and beyond were the trees standing darkly over the colored lights strung over the lawn and flower beds. It looked quiet down among the flowers, and Ben looked about for the stairs. He found a short flight of steps that descended to the lawn, and he was about to take his paper plate down when he heard someone clear his throat loudly behind him.

"Here, have another one, Bienvenido."

DON JULIO emerged from the half-light, holding a glass out to him. "It's bourbon-on-the-rocks."

Ben accepted the glass and, seeing the old man empty handed, he asked, "But what about you, sir?"

"I can't really drink anymore," he said. "But in my day, even if you do not ask, I could outdrink the best of everybody. Now, I can't even drink a cup of coffee without my daughters. But you've had a full share of everything, sir."

"That's what I like to think, especially when I remember I first came to Manila with fif-

teen centavos in my pocket and a parcel of cow hide my father had given me. I peddled that to the Chinese on Calle Gandara and I made eight pesos."

A servant patted up with canvas lounging chairs which he set down on the highly polished tile floor behind the two men. Don Julio sank into the chair behind him, indicating the other one to Ben. "Sit down, my boy."

Ben angled the chair so he could face the old man without losing sight of the garden trees beyond the balustrade. "Thank you, sir," he said, taking the chair. The servant pulled one of the flat-bottomed steel chairs to Ben's side and laid down the plate of food there.

"Go ahead, eat your dinner, Bienvenido," and together they faced towards the garden. "Looks good from here, huh?"

"It's all very fine, sir."

"It will look even finer very soon," the old man said. "I'm putting a swimming pool out there. I didn't have the money for it last year, but business has been good this year."

"That's all very good, sir."

"Yes, but I've had to work like a carabao all these years."

"But that's how it is, sir," Ben said, opening the folded paper napkin on his lap.

Don Julio laughed, his chair creaking under him, but he did not say anything, and because

he could not think of anything to say Ben pretended to be busy with the food on the plate.

"I heard from Jim that you were in Paris for some time," the old man said after a while.

"I was studying sir," Ben said, looking up from the food on his lap.

"And what're you doing now?"

"Teaching anthropology, sir, over at the State University."

"That's the one that's got to do with primitive societies, no?"

"Yes, sir, that's right," Ben said, trying to tear off a leg of the squab with knife and fork.

"And you're also doing research, I suppose."

"Yes, sir," Ben said. The leg would not come off under the slashing strokes of the knife. He gave up trying and laid the silverware aside. He tore off the leg with his fingers. "There's a whole lot we still have to learn, sir."

"You really like your work, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do very much," Ben admitted, wondering if he should also confess that he had long since decided to give his lifetime to his work in anthropology. He considered the question as he picked the bone of its flesh, but the old man continued to speak, and Ben left off thinking about this question.

"I wish you could work for

us," the old man said.

"I don't see how, sir," and Ben laid down the cleaned out leg bone on the edge of the paper plate. "I know nothing at all about business, sir," and he picked up the glass of bourbon-on-the-rocks the old man had brought out to him.

Don Julio let out a laugh sharply. He put aside his drink and, drawing up his feet higher, clasped his hands around his knees. "But consider this, Bienvenido," he said, "when I started out I had very little of everything you people have at your finger-tips. I had very little money and no education. Now I have this house in this nice neighborhood. I belong to a lot of exclusive clubs, and I get driven around in my limousine by a uniformed chauffeur. I have a business worth two million pesos a year, and I started with almost nothing."

"But you had the talent, sir, the feeling for your work."

Don Julio smiled. "Yes, I suppose you're correct there," he said. "But those are no longer necessary. They're even superfluous now. I've built up the business, it's stable, but it has got to grow. For that an educated man is needed."

"But you already have Phil, sir."

"He's all right, he knows the business," and releasing his clasped hands, the old man

stretched his legs before him. "You see, my boy, a corporation grows only as long as it serves society, and it takes a man, educated as you have been, to see to that. That's my point."

"I still don't see how I can fit in, sir. As I said I know nothing about economics."

"Economics is the job of the technical staff."

"And what's to be mine, sir?"

YOU'LL BE the guy who's going to see what ordinary businessmen cannot see or will not see," and Don Julio turned his eyes gravely on Ben. "But I suppose you'd rather be working on those primitive peoples, huh?" and then he smiled. "Anyway, I wish you'd give this serious thought," he said as he rose to his feet.

"Yes, sir, I will do that," Ben said, rising after the old man.

"Good," Don Julio said, tapping Ben on the shoulder lightly. "It's a position worth ten thousand pesos a year at the start. Remember, my boy, it's a stable business."

"Yes, sir, I will."

"Good," the old man said, "I got to go now and see what the boys are doing out there," and he walked away.

Ben picked up his drink and watched Don Julio make his way to the other end of the terrace where the people were. Then Ben raised the glass to

his lips and drank off a little of the bourbon slowly. The dinner was over, and the orchestra had resumed playing dance music. Ben lowered his drink and watched the couples dancing as he clinked the ice around in his glass. Then he drank off a little more, taking the bourbon vrey slowly into his mouth.

Where was it he had learned to prefer bourbon? This preference which had been thought so funny in Paris. Don Julio had once upon a time burst in on them in the bath house after a hard game of tennis. "Here," the old man had said, thrusting the bottle of bourbon at them. "There's no drink like bourbon for tired men," he said. They had accepted the bottle and Leonie had uncorked it. They had passed it from hand to hand among Nitong, Jim and himself till it was empty. But many years had gone since then. At that time there was only a wooden frame house with a porch in front. They were also younger then. Leonie was still running after the girl he had since married. Jim was a freshman in the University College, and Nitong was still around with his deeply glowering eyes, writing poetry which nobody understood. Suzy was majoring in English and publishing her stories in the Sunday magazines. And Jenny was still in the high school department of a convent

college, sitting about whenever Nitong was around. What had they made of their lives which had glowed with such bright promise in those days?

Then remembering what he had in his hand, Ben lifted the glass again and finished off the bourbon in a quick gulp. He put down the empty glass on the table and walked away, bothered by the feeling his remembrances had awakened. He saw himself again in the late afternoon sunshine, squatting beside the chief of an impoverished mountain tribe, listening to exciting tales of prowess and vitality in the past told in a tired old voice. "Our magic has lost its power," the old chief had said tiredly without bitterness. "In the beginning the gods gave our tribe a bowl from which we could draw strength and life, but terrible things have befallen my people. Our magic does not work anymore. We give our young men the old beads to give their women that they may bring forth an abundance of children, but the children do not come anymore. The bowl is broken and inverted on the ground."

THE TIRED old voice faded out when Ben stepped into the house. He was heading for the bar when he felt the light tug on his sleeve. He turned to look and found himself looking

at Pinkie's pleasantly smiling face. "You promised, professor, remember?" she said.

Ben managed a smile. "Yes, of course," he said, "but I hope you'd cut out that professor stuff."

"Yes, but what shall we call you?"

"My friends call me Ben."

"It's Ben then," she smiled.

They walked together towards the sofa where the other girls were. They pushed an armchair forward, and he sat down facing Pinkie who had taken the place the others had made for her on the sofa.

"Well, I've done my part, girls, but you'll have to cut out that professor stuff," she said, and Ben stared at her face, wondering what could be afoot. "I promised we'll not call him professor."

"But what shall we call him, Nelly?" the girls asked in chorus.

Ben shot a glance at her. So that is Nelly, he thought, smiling back when he saw her smile at him.

"He's to be called Ben," Nelly said, and she introduced him to the girls anew. He got back on his feet and, in the manner he had picked up on the Continent, took each one's hand with a bow from the waist, repeating her name. First, there was Chitang beside Nelly, then Nan and Lulu on the sofa, and Glo

over at the armchair.

"I am deeply enchanted, ladies," and he sank back into his armchair. "But let's not be formal at all," he added after a while when no one would speak.

"Yes, let's not," Nelly agreed brightly.

"Okay, but it's his own fault," Chitang said, "shaking hands like that, like some horrid Frenchman."

The others laughed, and Ben said, managing a smile. "That's only because I feel so thoroughly disconcerted, ladies. I beg your indulgence, ladies. You see, I've never sat with *colehialas* before."

They laughed heartily at this. "Really, Ben," Glo said, bending a little towards him, "we're not really monsters."

"I'm only beginning to find that out now," Ben replied, smiling back at them. There, I've started another game, he thought. The same game of ping-pong all over again. And he played the game until the party started to break up, returning every remark they made with the skill he had learned from his classmates in Paris. Glo was first to go. Ben got up when her father came to fetch her, and she introduced him, "Father, this is Professor Cortez."

"How do you do, sir?" Glo's father said.

"How do you do, sir?" Ben said, stepping forward to shake the hand the older man had offered.

"He teaches at the State University, Papa," Glo said.

"Indeed, how nice," he said. "I studied there myself, LIB., 1932. I hear the standards are still tough."

"We try to keep it that way, sir."

"Yes, it's really a tough school," Glo's father said. "Why, I distinctly remember, we used to—"

"Come on, Papa," Glo said, pulling her father away.

"Well, so long, sir," he said. "We should meet again," and he walked away with his daughter.

Then only Chitang and Nelly were left.

"Did you go to Madrid, too?" Chitang asked after Lulu and Nan had gone.

"Yes," Ben said.

"When?"

"Four years ago in summer."

"Why, Mama and I were there that very summer," she said. "Funny, we never met."

"I would have missed you anyway among all those *Madrileñas*." Then he glanced around at Nelly. "Isn't that true, she looks so much like a *Madrileña*, Nelly?"

Nelly smiled, nodding her head.

"And all that time I was dy-

ing to meet another Filipino again," Chitang said.

"You would've been disappointed," she told him.

"Chitang does not speak it at all, Ben," Nelly said.

"I've tried to learn it, though. But I can't seem to get the hang of it, Ben. Papa speaks it beautifully, but he never talks to any of us in Tagalog. Only to the servants and to the driver. But it's a beautiful language, they say."

SO WHEN her father came Ben decided he would speak to him in Tagalog. "*Kumusta po kayo?*" Ben said as he stepped forward with his proffered hand.

The man's pleasant look changed into a glower. He stopped some distance from their group, staring unsmilingly at Ben. Nelly rose from her seat and joined them.

"Dr. Almario, this is Professor Cortez," Nelly said pleasantly.

"How do you do, sir," the doctor said levelly in English.

"Papa, Professor Cortez teaches at your alma mater."

"Very interesting." Then he turned to his daughter, "Well, shall we go, Chitang?"

"I'm ready, Papa," and she picked up her stole from the back of the armchair beside her.

"Well, if you'll excuse us, professor," Dr. Almario said in

the same icy tone. "We have to go, sir, good-bye."

Chitang took her father's arm, and together they walked away towards the door.

"He surely looked irritated," Ben said as he returned to his seat.

"You shouldn't have spoken to him in Tagalog, you know."

"I'm sorry for that, but just the same it's been a very nice evening, don't you think, Nelly?" She nodded, smiling back at him. "I guess I'll have to see about getting home myself now. It must be quite late already."

She glanced down at her wrist watch. "It's still early, not quite one yet really."

"Tomorrow's a working day, you know."

"I work too."

"Still that doesn't make us even." Then he launched himself upon a deliberate lie, the words coming easily to his lips. "I still have an exam to prepare for my eight o'clock class in the morning."

"Well, let's go look for Phil, then," and she held her hands out to Ben. "I heard him say he'd drive you back to the University."

"What about you?" pulling her up. "You coming too?"

"No, I'm staying with Jenny tonight."

Ben picked up her brocade wrap and helped her get into

it. They crossed to the door together, coming out at the farther end of the terrace where there was nobody. The orchestra was still playing dance music, and there were a few couples still dancing. Ben felt her hand brush against his fingers. It was warm. Tingling darts shot up the length of his arm, and he thrust his balled fists into his pockets as he sidestepped away from her.

"Let's go look over there," Ben said, indicating the other end of the terrace when he sensed her heading for the wide steps that led down to the garden.

"Yes, let's," and they walked off in the other direction.

They met Phil at the edge of the dancing area. "Where've you been? I've been looking all over for you," Phil said.

"Why, talking with Nelly here."

"All right," Phil said. "Let's go if you're ready."

"I'm ready all right," Ben said, and all three started towards the street gate.

"I was afraid you'd scold me again," Phil said.

NELLY walked with them down the gravelled path across the lawn. Ben stopped when they got to the gate. "Well, it's been a distinct pleasure getting to know you, Nelly."

She gave him her hand, and he took it in a tight grip. "Well, good-bye, Ben," she said, taking back her hand finally.

"Good-bye, Nelly," and he turned about, hurrying after Phil who had plunged on to his car which was now standing alone a little way down the curb. Phil was already behind the steering wheel when Ben got to the car. Phil reached over and unlatched the other door. Ben got in, drawing the door shut after he had seated himself comfortably. "Jenny not seeing you off?" Ben asked when Phil started the car.

"No."

The engine caught, and Phil steered away from the curb, driving slowly down the windings of the road towards the gate into Davis Park.

"We had a big fight," Phil said after they had left the Park's main gate.

"Over what?"

Phil did not answer, and nobody spoke again till he stopped the car in front of Ben's apartment house on the campus.

"Thanks for everything, Phil," he said as he let himself out of the car.

"Okay."

"Come out sometime for dinner. I still have a bottle of bourbon we can get merry on," and Ben shut the car door.

"Yah, thanks, Ben, I'll come out soon's I get a few things straightened out," then he turned away from the window and started the car.

"See you then," and Ben waved a hand at his departing friend. He stayed on the curb in front of the darkened apartment house till the car had rounded the corner at the end of the block. Then he turned about and climbed the short flight of steps to the door. He let himself in and pulled the door gently after him.

The landlady had left the stair-light on and Ben lingered among the mailboxes beside the stair landing. He found a couple of letters in his box and a folded piece of note-paper tucked under the steel frame of his name plate. He took the paper and climbed on to the second floor, unfolding the note as he mounted the steps slowly to his room.

It was from Paz, apologizing for having to importune him about anything, but would he be good enough to bring his other notes on the Ifugao beads to the office in the morning? There was something she would like to look up.

Ben folded the note and slipped it into his pocket. The two letters had foreign stamps. One had been air-mailed from Germany. He tore this open. It was a former classmate, writing

in congratulation for a paper Ben had read at the last anthropological congress in Rangoon. He smiled. Now, the other letter. It had come by surface mail from a town he had never heard about in North Africa. A letter from Nitong. He stopped at the head of the stairs and read the letter in the light released palely by the single electric bulb over the landing.

NITONG was fine. He had gone to this town, because he had heard he could live there more cheaply than he could in Paris during the winter. No, he had not gone by buying passage on any of the ships plying between Marseilles and North Africa. He had worked his way on a tramp steamer to this town. Fine place, too. Everything so cheap. No newspaper he knew how to read. Very few Frenchmen outside of the legionnaires. No real conversation then, but plenty of wine. The ideal place, the beautiful life. He could live there forever. And he had already finished a passel of plays. Maybe these will get produced the very next season, or they might even get to be published. Who knows? And now could Ben, his friend, the one friend remaining in the whole wide world, a brother really, not send a few pesos? A hundred maybe? It could go a long way. Then an address

was mentioned.

He slipped the letter back into its envelope as he walked on to his room down the corridor. Then he started to laugh soundlessly. The letter struck him as extremely funny. Earlier at the party he had persuaded himself that money had no real value, that Nitong alone had decided on the one life really worth the try. And all the rest of them, waste. But now here was the letter and the plea for money. The freeman, a beggar.

Ben stopped at his door, still chuckling, and turned the key in the lock which gave easily with a slight click. The door sprung free, and he pushed his way noiselessly into the darkness inside the door. He had been mistaken about Nitong, about life. He felt under the drapery for the electric switch. It had been wrong to yield so easily to Jenny's dark arguments, and he decided to call her the next morning. He would tell her she was wrong, and with a resolute flick of the wrist, he threw the switch. The overhead light came on, dazzling and sudden, over every part of the room. Again, the familiar artifacts of his bachelorhood: the sofa standing in motionless intimacy with the chairs and the low coffee table; then beyond,

by the shuttered windows, his old wooden desk and its attendant armchair; and beside the stiffly unmoving curtains, the glassed-in bookcases and open shelves, mounting the tiered disarray of books and bundled magazines and manila envelopes and papers, so like some construction in an esoteric idiom, abandoned before completion by its ambitious builders.

Ben crossed to the desk and, unpocketing the folded note from Paz, dropped it with the letters under the flaring cowl of the reading lamp on the table. Then he went on into the bedroom, leaving the door ajar behind him. He undressed in the light that flooded through from the other room, chuckling to himself again when he thought of how wrong Jenny had been. He went over her dark arguments as he changed into pajamas with unminded skill born of ingrained habit. She was certainly very much mistaken, he thought, switching on the bed-light. Of course, it had all looked correct then. But he had too much bourbon-on-the-rocks, he chuckled, and he was himself feeling depressed. Anyway, she was mistaken. Of that he was certain, he kept telling himself as he walked out of the bedroom and even while he

went about locking up his apartment for the night.

He put the night-latch on the outside door, turned off the ceiling light and made his way to the bedroom by the feeble light from the bed-lamp. He went over to the bedroom windows and threw open the glass panes to the cooling night breezes. "Well, tomorrow's another day," he said lightly and, putting down the mosquito net over his iron bed, crawled inside. He pulled the switch chain above his head and the light went out. For a while he stared at the unrelieved darkness, then he closed his eyes, yielding himself over to sleep with the final thought, *Tomorrow's another day.*

But his eyes refused to stay shut, and when the muscles started to twitch in protest, he opened his eyes again. He was still wide awake. He turned on his side, seeking sleep. Then, he knew not how, he was staring at the darkness, thinking. Jenny's gently serious face materialized out of the darkness. She was asking about Nitong and he told her again. *He's happy, I bet.* He could not forget the way she had spoken these words, and now in his mind he was hearing her say them again. Ben cut her off. He pressed his eye-lids together

tightly and turned on his back.

After what seemed a long, long time, he opened his eyes again to test his drowsiness. But he was still awake and unsleepy. Ben gave up trying to sleep. He tugged at the switch chain, and the lamp over the head-board loosed its steady beam on the darkness. He flung the netting aside and sat up, throwing his legs over the side of the bed as he did so. He probed with his toes under the bed for the slippers, then he shuffled off on slippered feet to his desk outside.

But suppose she was right after all? Then what? he thought as he pulled the arm-chair closer to the desk and sat down. He switched on the bronze reading lamp and picked up the letters on his desk.

IN THE end he picked out a pipe from the rack before him and tamped tobacco into its bowl from the brass humidior beside him. Certainly, he had deserved this treat. He left his desk and lit his pipe with the ornate silver lighter he kept on the coffee table for his guests. He took his pipe out to the little porch over the carport at the end of the second storey hallway.

It had been a clear day and now the moonless sky was span-

gled all over with stars. He drew slowly on his pipe as he roved the heavens with his eyes. Almost inevitably he found himself thinking back to one evening in his youth when he first discovered stars. When was it? It seemed embedded so deeply in archeological times. And almost as carefully as he would reconstruct the histories of old societies, he conjured that part of his youth. He pieced memory with memory, matching snatches of conversations, fragments of gestures, filling in the breaks with shattered bits of shared intimacies, and he had the whole patched up and complete, like the Ming vases he had worked on once upon a time with Ellie. Through the patchwork, he perceived Ellie's face again: remembered sunshine lighting up a remembered smile, a remembered nose crinkled in remembered playfulness. Ben felt the old emotion sweep feebly within, where once it had surged wildly, pounding with almost lethal turbulence.

He stopped roving among the stars, remembering the tribal chief in the highlands of his youth. The old man had been right, the bowl was broken. Vitality was lost forever.

But nothing really matters, he protested. There is still the life of the mind. Only the life

of ideas matters. The Mind.

Yes, but was that not the same thing Nitong had told him the first time they had met in Paris? They had shaken hands on that in glee and to celebrate this mutual confirming of beliefs, Ben had bought a bottle of the very best champagne in France. This, he remembered clearly, but he felt none of the elation which had surged up his breast then. Yet had he not said the same thing to Phil in the car as they were driving out to the Park? Ben repeated the words to himself, but his remembering brought nothing of the confidence out of which the words had sprung. At the party, while he was watching the people strutting about in their imported finery, while he was listening to the alien rhythms of their speech, was not this life of the mind the obvious thing to believe? Yet, as Phil had put it, this is but a lifetime consecrated to pottering around buried villages where life had died. "And here's life just begging to be lived," he had added. Yet how was life to be lived?

Surely, he thought, there must be an answer. A lifetime has to be lived out to its end. And searching the coldly twinkling stars dusting the heavens, he only found the Milky Way. It

was a faintly luminous trace where the bowl inverted above him had cracked.

Ben found himself stopped, his steps barred. He had at last come to the edge of the porch.

He reached down and gripped the railing. Below him, the University's experimental farms edging the campus stretched on and on till it blended into the darkness far away.

* * *

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