

MY MOTHER'S CHOOSING

S. DE MARTE

Friday morning, the day before commencement! I was busy fitting in my cap and gown when I was handed a registered letter from Mother. I had been expecting her to arrive any-time that day to be present at my graduation. I knew both of us had looked forward to the completion of my course. Varied feelings of apprehension seized me as I tore open the letter.

"My dearest Nenita:

"I greet you with my warmest kisses on this your greatest of days. At last you'll receive the honor that you have worked for years.

"In my previous letters I had told you that I would attend your graduation. I knew I would then be the happiest mother, for our dreams would come true.

"Perhaps you would be happier, Darling, if I could be there, but I finally decided to stay at home and wait for you. What would home be without me? You and I will be happier and my kisses warmer, when I shall be at the door to receive you with your diploma, the scroll delicately lettered to express the distinction you have always worked for and studied hard.

*"Cheer up, Darling. I greet you once again with my warm kisses.
Mother"*

I read and reread Mother's letter, trying to find out between the lines the reason why she had changed her mind the last hour. "Could there be something Mother won't confide in her only daughter?" I thought.

At that moment I decided to cancel all my engagements for that day, as I began to prepare for home. When I was packing up my books and magazines, the stationery box containing by Mother's letters fell and the contents lay sprawling on the floor. She had written to me every week during the two years I was in college. Reading them once more was like living over again my life since childhood. In her letters she wove the fabric of her love for me, of her own work and sacrifices, and of the life that bound the two of us together. And those emotions sprang to life again as I read:

"Nenita, you kept in your heart your ambition to continue with your studies. You feared I would be unhappy for being left alone at home. You preferred to stay here and teach for five long years for my sake. It's really true that I had wished you would stay with me, but not for the reason you had supposed. Neither did I express my reason to you, until you had reached the age of twenty-eight. Darling, before you reached that age, I did not want to let you go out alone into the world. You were not quite ready to know that a woman's heart is frail before she has been seasoned with age. I couldn't then let you go alone, being my one and only joy in this world.

"City life seems teeming with freedom and happiness, but many a young person unknowingly becomes a victim of the fast and carefree life in the city. When you reached twenty-eight, I became confident that you then knew how to take care of yourself and I knew you would not be-

tray my trust. I wish to remind you again something about men: They're all the same; they are all expert at the subtle art of hiding their deceitful intentions. I do not have to go far to seek an example. We would have not gone through years of ordeal and affliction had not your own father been true to type. I am telling you to be careful, as men are all the same."

I wept silently after reading this letter. What an unfortunate one I was, with no one to attend my graduation day!

"Darling, you denied yourself the wants and the pleasures of a girl of your age so that you could provide adequately for your college education. What you have saved, however, was too meager. Providence opened the heart of your uncle, Julian, who seems to be different from ordinary men. Julian was insistent on my staying with you in the city and on my living with the family, but who would stay here and keep our home?"

By this time the telephone rang. Uncle Julian told me that Manuel was calling.

"Uncle, please answer him. Kindly tell him that I am indisposed," I requested.

"Why, Nenita?" queried my uncle.

"I cannot I can't"

"But he is insistent to talk to you," he replied.

I was speechless. I stood before him staring blankly at the wall. He looked at me, perhaps wondering about my sudden reaction and changed countenance.

"Why child, I do not understand!" he said in a fatherly tone.

"Mother can't come for my graduation. And I've to go home after the program tomorrow morning. I'm now packing up my things."

"Won't you talk to him? He said he has to hurry home."

I broke into tears. My uncle walked slowly to the telephone and took the receiver. I went back to my room. I stood for awhile by the window and stared at the busy street below. Busses, cabs, taxis, and people presented a blurred picture.

Commencement morning! What distinguished guests! My heart leaped with joy. I felt as a cloud floating in the air. Dreams and more dreams came in a fantastic array as I sat there on the platform. But when our beloved president pinned a medal on me, my countenance changed suddenly. Tears rolled down my cheeks, as he clasped my hand with fatherly warmth.

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Saturday afternoon. Sundown! Then home!

"Mother! Mother!" I ran upstairs with the bouquet of Benguet lilies in my hands. "Mother, I'm home!"

Mother was not at the door waiting as she had written to me. Instead, Dr. Manuel Villaflor met me.

"She's asleep, Nenita. Please"

"I have to see her."

"Yes, but be quiet."

I did as instructed. Mother's face shone like an angel's. I placed the lilies in a vase at her bedside. I looked at her again. Her breast heaved a sigh. Mine heaved, too. Then her breast heaved more and faster. I felt terrified. But soon she began to stir. I knelt beside her and kissed her fondly. She opened her eyes as if awakening from a dream.

"Darling!" She kissed me. Her lips were yet feverish; perhaps from the full warmth of a mother's love.

"I'm home, Mother."

"At last, Darling."

Doctor Villaflor entered the room. Mother looked at him as he stood at her left side. Her face beamed with joy.

"I'm not really ill, Manuel," suddenly said my mother.

"Perhaps," the doctor said, "the excited anticipation of Nenita's graduation."

"Nenita, I got excited upon reading your letter and the program."

"And she broke down thereafter," continued the doctor.

"Was it her heart again, doctor?"

"Perhaps so, Nenita."

Mother suddenly sat up without assistance. Dr. Villaflor was surprised.

"It's not really my heart." She smiled. "Had you not come home last

Friday, Manuel, I might have had a relapse."

Manuel looked at me. Then at Mother. I began to understand things.

"I wanted to tell Nenita about you, when I was at the Tutuban waiting for my train last Friday afternoon. But I could not. She, too, was indisposed; her uncle Julian told me.

"So you were ill, too, Nenita."

I looked at mother with tears in my eyes and answered her in a low voice, "When you . . . couldn't come, Mother, I felt slightly ill."

Mother smiled. "Don't cry, darling. You are now at home."

She looked at Manuel and me. A glow of light much like that of an angel's shone on her face. Then she looked at the wall intently and with deep emotion, as Manuel looked at me. I wanted to tell something to mother about Manuel and me, but my words were lost in my throat as tears rolled down my cheeks.

