

WHAT PRICE IGNORANCE

A STORY

By Antonio Muñoz

IN the year 1920, an electric light plant was installed in a certain town. As it was the first time that the people in that town saw electric light, it was not strange to find a crowd of people around a lighted bulb gazing at the wonderful light and quarreling about how the light got there.

Once a man named Andres who was considered wealthy in his barrio came to this town to shop. At about 5:30 in the afternoon, he went to visit a friend who happened to be the municipal secretary of that town. The two were sitting at a table when all of a sudden a flood of light overspread the space about them. Andres was thunderstruck. He looked at the lighted bulb in dumb astonishment. His face was the picture of fright. The superstitious belief common among barrio folks seemed to be taking hold of him at that moment. He looked at his friend. The latter was smiling. Surely he was amused. The expression on the secretary's face, however, relieved the frightened Andres.

"What is that?" the latter asked. "How did the light get there? I saw no one approach that round thing. I'm afraid it's the spirit, and, believe me, something is going to happen. Yes, something is going to happen!"

"Oh, that is our light here. We do not use the bulky lamp any more. At six o'clock every evening, it lights itself," explained the secretary.

"Where do you put the petroleum?" asked the puzzled barrio man. "I see no container there."

"That kind of lamp does not need any oil," said the secretary. "Once it is hung, there is nothing else to do. The light comes out at six o'clock every evening."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Andres. "Where did you buy it?"

"In that store," replied the secretary pointing to a Chinese store.



"Friend, please let me have your lamp. I'll pay more than what it cost you," begged Andres.

"I have another," said the secretary, "and you may have it."

Then he got the bulb and the socket which he wanted to use in his room. There was already a long piece of silk cord attached to the socket.

Andres did not ask any questions. As soon as he had the bulb and the socket, he went directly home. On the way he planned how he would surprise the barrio friends.

Early the following morning, he hung the bulb in the sala of his house. Then he went out to invite his neighbors and friends to a supper that night. "I have a surprise for you all," he told them, "but you must be at my house just before sunset if you want to witness the most wonderful event."

"Yes, we'll surely be there," his friends assured him.

After dinner that day, Andres killed a pig and some chickens. He told his wife, Maria, to cook enough rice for the guests. He also ordered three jarsful of tuba.

At 5:30, everybody was there. The chairs were so arranged that they formed a circle around the hanging bulb under which stood a table covered with steaming meat and rice.

"Friends, look at that thing," said Andres pointing to the bulb. "That is very

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that that fruit is poisonous. She said that the leaves or the green barks are used for plasters. They can cure stomach-aches or sprains. No, don't eat the fruit."

"But the seeds taste like peanuts, and peanuts are not poisonous," insisted Maximo.

"And I can feel the oil on my fingers. See! (holding up her hand)," remarked Lolita, the little girl in the group.

"Leave Rodrigo alone! Let the rest of us feast on the fruit," threatened Florencio.

All the children present, except Rodrigo, began to eat the *tuba* fruit. Rodrigo could no longer resist the temptation of the voracious spirit of his companions. Disregarding what his mother told him about the fruit, he joined the party and ate a few seeds.

After a certain length of time when the children had resumed their game of kicking empty cans, some began to complain of head-aches and dizziness. They all went home.

Not long afterwards, news in the neighborhood was passed from house to house. This was the news, "The children who were playing together a while ago are suffering from nausea (dizziness and vomiting)."

Some of the children confessed to their mothers that they ate the fruit claimed by Rodrigo's mother to be poisonous. The parents knew that it must be the fruit of the *tuba* growing in their neighborhood.

An ambulance was sent for, and the suffering children were taken to the hospital.

Now, the children are well, are back in school, and are more careful than ever not to eat what they do not know without their elders' permission.

Other children may profit from the experience of those children who ate the *tuba* fruit by examining the sketches on page 201.

Note: *Tuba* is sometimes called "talang-tangan" or "tangan-tangan tuba." The tree grows from one and one half to about three meters high.

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wonderful. Without any petroleum or oil, without the aid of a match, without even touching it, light will appear inside that round thing immediately after the sun sets this evening."

"Wonderful!" they all exclaimed.

Soon the sun set. It was getting dark inside the house. All was still. With beating hearts, they waited for the wonderful event. Five minutes passed. No light. Ten minutes, twenty, half an hour, one hour—still there was no light. It was dark, very dark for the lamps in the house were thrown away that morning. They would not be needed. Andres relied upon the wonderful light of the bulb.

Then one by one the guests slipped out of the house each carrying a portion of the food on the table. At about eight o'clock, Andres noticed that his friends were all gone. Still he hoped to see the light coming forth.

A man passed by carrying a torch of dry coconut leaves. Its light reflected on the side of the bulb. As Andres's attention was wholly on the dim outline of the bulb, he did not notice the light from the torch outside. Up he jumped when he saw the reflected light on the side of the bulb and exclaimed, "It's coming! It's coming! Call the neighbors, Maria. Call them all."

But when the man with the torch disappeared, the reflected light on the bulb also vanished. He sat down again shaking his head. He was downhearted and went to bed that night without any supper.

In the morning, he went to the town with the bulb.

"This is not good and I'm through with it," he said to the secretary. "I had a big company at home last night and the stupid thing didn't give any light at all. Take it back. I have no need for it. The worst part of the game is that I have thrown away all my lamps and now I have to buy new ones."

The secretary laughed and told him why it did not give any light. Then he pointed to the wire which extended from

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day. You yourself must not forget to make the sign of the cross and say the names "Jesus, Maria y Jose" before you leave the house."

"I do, Lolo. And I repeat my prayer even in the street."

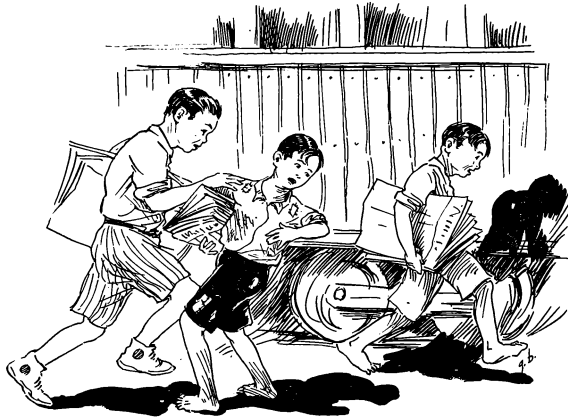
"That is right, my boy." After a pause, he continued, "If you would only carry my

he could have done better. But his Lolo was glad. He saw that he had not been mistaken in the boy.

The following week, Tonio did much better. He started his rounds very early. A number of early office goers had learned to depend upon him for their morning news.

Tonio always finished his stock of newspapers. There was something in his voice and his manners which made it hard for people to turn down his offer.

At noon when there were no papers to sell, he carried his shine-shoe box and offered to shine people's shoes while they smoked and dozed. For five centavos, he rendered a piece of excellent service.



cane with you! I believe it is possessed of luck-bringing powers."

"Perhaps I do not have to carry it around, Lolo. Any way we have it in the house."

During his first week, Tonio made three pesos. He was not satisfied, for he thought

In less than a month, his Lolo was convinced that Tonio could earn enough for both. They did not have to draw upon their savings. On the contrary they could lay by a little sum every day for the opening of the school, which was only a month off.

Will Rogers and Wiley Post Killed

The world famed American humorist, Will Rogers, and the round-the-world flier, Wiley Post, were killed instantly when the airplane in which they were flying crashed to earth in Alaska.

It is said that the boys and girls in the United States and in other countries were deeply grieved to read of the tragedy that befell their screen friend and the greatly admired flier.

It was, indeed, a shock to people throughout the world.

The bodies of both men were brought by airplane from Alaska. Will Rogers was

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his house to the electric plant which was close by. He took Andres to the plant and showed him the machine. He explained how the light would go to the bulb.

"Oh, I see!" he murmured. "I should have questioned a little more yesterday. I was really very hasty. I have learned a good lesson. Yes, I should think well before I do a thing. Haste really makes waste. Good-bye," he said to the secretary and went away.

buried in California and Wiley Post in Oklahoma.