

LET me see—this happened such a long time ago that I really should not be blamed for not remembering very clearly. I was about forty, then—no forty-three, and my brother was in his early thirties. I am eighty now—yes, I am that old. Let me see.—Perhaps if I try hard enough, I can go back to that day in June when I visited my brother for the last time.

I had great difficulty in obtaining permission to visit him, but I finally did, and I was given such a number of restrictions that only my desire to see him again made me go on. I had my little daughter with me. Yes, there she is, the one with the baby. She was not ten years then, and I had quite a hard time before I could persuade them to let her come with me.

"A child is such protection," I told them, "and besides, where shall I leave a growing girl in these unsettled times? I have just come from the bedside of my little boy. I do not expect him to live..." He did not, and I was away when he died. But that is neither here nor there.

They put us in a small freight boat that was stinking with the odor of bagoong and dried fish. There were less than twenty of us. My daughter and I were the only passengers. The others were sailors gathered from different parts of the islands: Ilocanos, Tagalogs, and Visayans eager to visit their homes and working their way back there. I cannot now recall whether the ocean was smooth or calm. I was not concerned with the weather nor the ocean then. Every morning I asked the captain, "How soon do we get there?" and always he would reply, "Soon, soon."

The boat was stopping at Dapitan especially for me, and every one in the crew was curious with a respectful curiosity about my business there. I think no one believed I was there only for a visit. They thought perhaps that when I returned to Manila, my brother would be with me, for there was not one among

them who did not know and love my brother and would not be unwilling to smuggle him if need be.

My first sight of this out of the way island did not reassure me. I remember feeling a sense of desolation as the outline of its shore first greeted my eyes. But it is all sand and rock, I said to myself. Where could he live? I am only an ignorant woman, and perhaps I was prejudiced, but I hated the island at first sight and I never have been able to remember it with affection.

The boat put us down near a

ramshackle boathouse which smelled strongly of oysters. Though why this should be is beyond explanation, for not a single oyster was in sight. My daughter and I went with a man who said he knew where my brother lived. It was not long before I found out that almost everyone in that place knew where my brother lived, as he maintained a sort of school where children and old people alike could go for instruction. And then, you see my brother had not been idle, and he practiced his profession even there, curing this ill and that with such suc-

The Exile

A Page From History—As Etched in a Woman's Heart—

(A SHORT STORY)

By

L. V. REYES

cess that magic powers were attributed to him. As I was saying, we went with the man, and we walked about a mile to get to the home of my brother.

The place of his exile was not really a bad place. Signs of toil could be seen everywhere. There were fields and homes which looked neat even to my disapproving eye. The people seemed infinitely serene after the turmoil of Manila, and the sight of the everyday tasks being pursued with indolent calm almost won me over. Heaven forgive me for hardening my heart against a town which had never hurt me nor mine, but in those days, my sorrow had made me unreasonable and I prayed that such a place be forever blotted from the map of the islands.

But to go on... the man took us to what appeared to be the center of the town. It looked like any of our lesser southern towns, and I can not remember anything distinct-

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THE EXILE

(Continued from page 17)

typical one of its small nipa houses. I was trembling when we approached it, and I held my daughter so tightly that she protested. I looked at the house very keenly, trying hard to see it through my tears. I wanted to shout, to cry and rave, but I did not. I can remember that with pride. We went up bamboo stairs, and I suddenly felt a fear that my brother might not be home.

"Apong Jose," my guide said softly, and with those words the house seemed to stir to weary life. From the small bedroom, we heard the creaking of an iron bed, then the faint, "Come in, come in, what is it?" which made me rush forward.

He was sitting on the bed, his body thinner and longer than I had known it, his face sharply thin but patient, a smile awaiting whoever had come to see him. At sight of me, he went terribly pale, and his eyes glared in an unbelief that destroyed whatever courage was left in me. I sobbed with grief and joy. All my brave intentions to pretend, to seem gay and courageous, vanished, and there I was shaking and weeping like any woman. You must remember I had not seen him for four years and my son was dying in Manila.

"Sansé," he said, "Sansé," while he patted my arm clumsily. We are an undemonstrative family and he was ill at ease in the face of my sorrow.

"Why didn't you write..." he started to ask, then he remembered that he could not receive any letter from the outside world, and he stopped. He placed a chair for me, the only chair in the room, then he sat on the bed. He looked steadily at my daughter, not attempting to touch her, knowing with that great understanding of his how embarrassed the child felt.

"Let me see," he said, "this is Andeng, is this not? Or is this Narda? She was the baby the year I went abroad."

"This is Andeng," I said,

and I looked at him as calmly as I could manage.

"You are thin," I observed. "That is because I have been ill. You came at a time when I had barely recovered from a fever. I was very stout before this, but I had to be on a strict diet, and now look." And he raised an arm which looked like a shade of his formerly powerful arm. The veins seemed sick beneath the skin, and I quickly took my gaze away.

"Do you sleep well?" I asked, and he nodded his head. He could not speak the lie. I asked him about his food.

"Mostly chicken," he smiled. "We have very little fish here."

"You are better off," I said, but I did not mean it. No Filipino could get along without fish.

It was terrible, our talking about amenities when we

wanted to say so many other things. I knew he wanted to ask me about home, but I was sparing for time. I could not tell him about Mother, steadily going blind and asking always for him. I could not tell him about the rest of our family. How could I tell him that Cuya had been taken and with what close guard the *Guardia Civil* observed our every movement? Within the four years of his exile, our little world had crumbled, and we were but scattered remains that breathed with life through the will of God. I could not speak of the smallpox and the pest, and the worse scourges that were wiping off all our courage and our faith in relief to come. Those days of the late eighties....

At last he was asking me, and I was telling him all the things that I thought I could

not tell. I poured out all the bitterness, all the suffering which injustice and spite had placed in our way. I was warning him about those rumors of definite action which a government mad with fright contemplated taking against him.

"They are not content," I cried vehemently, "with throwing you here like so much rubbish. They have not finished with you! They need you there to pile things upon, to ease themselves of the burden of fear. *They will take you back!*"

My brother sighed. Weariness seemed like an enchantment upon him. It made his face more deathly pale. He passed his hand through his hair, then he looked at me. I looked away, embarrassed somehow.

"Tell me more," he urged. "We are afraid. Everybody is afraid. There are so many whispers in the air. At any moment now, *they* say, something will break out, worse than we have now, a revolution."

"But that is folly. We are not ready. We must wait. We can gain nothing by rashness. I wish *they* would admit that."

"But they cannot bear it any longer. We cannot bear it any longer," I protested.

Jose said nothing for a long time. Then he turned to the child who stood near the window.

"Ineng," he called, and Andeng approached. "Do you know how to read? You must learn. No man is poorer than one who cannot read. And you will be a mother someday. Will you remember what I shall tell you now? Teach your children never to lie, to love God and country always, always."

Then he started talking about his life among the strange people of the islands. He was happy, he said, and fairly content. He said, "If only we could have seasoning for our food." For they had no tomatoes, no tamarinds for their *sinigang*, no spices to season their food. My distrust of the place was confirmed. No place, I thought,

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HAVE YOU READ:

been done by men. We are likely to forget that there were women and children among the Vikings as well as long-moustached warriors of superior height. Sigrid Undset in her book-of-the-month, "Kristin Lavransdatter" focuses the attention on a Viking woman and her life among her people. This study of the life of *Kristin* is described as "one of those astonishing achievements which an artist can carry out only in a long-sustained white heat of imagination and which he can never repeat." The book tells a story of a winsome child and the pride that her father had felt about her. How she humbled this pride and broke the heart which bred it comprise one of the most human episodes in the story. *Kristin* is presented as a woman, loving, sinning, bearing many children,—a woman like any woman of this, our time, faced with the ageless problems of womanhood.

THE Commonwealth of the Philippines by George A. Malcolm? This is the first authoritative and comprehensive book published after the inauguration of the commonwealth. Its author, formerly Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, covers a vast period in Philippine history. He writes about the past, the present, and the future of the Philippines with an understanding of the problems which accompany them. His account of people and places are vivid and interesting, and oftentimes, merciful. A great friendliness for the Filipino nation and its people can be felt throughout the book. He pays due attention to the historical background. His descriptions of the roles played by China and Japan in the progress of trade in the islands are based on intensive study.

were left out in the book. We, however, deplore another, more important fact—that little mention has been given of the achievements of the women who undoubtedly had done more than their share in the development of the nation.

This, however, is but a passing observation and has not stood in the way of the greatness of the book. In spite of certain disagreements which the reader might feel about the author's handling of personalities, the fact remains that the book is a great one, as comprehensive and valuable a book as has ever been written about the Philippines, and one which outdates any other book that had been written about this country.

Those of us who have read about Vikings, or any reference to them, labor under the misconception that all the most striking things have

One reviewer points out the fact that both Villamin and Moncado

based its foods. spices

I was there for only three hours, and the boat would be coming back for me. Think of that—three hours! And I had not seen him for four years!

Two hours passed swiftly, and soon frenzy was upon me. I was leaving soon, and we had not started to talk, to say half the things that we could say.

"What are you to do?" I broke through his story-telling.

"Do?" he echoed. He clasped his head between his hands. I gazed at those artistic hands of his, as though seeking an answer from those pallid fingers. I let my eyes wander once more through the little house, noting the bareness of it, sensing unbearably the loneliness he must have felt within it.

"Do?" he said again, then he looked at me as if to ask, Why must you expect more? I'll just wait.

But I kept seeking for an answer, ignoring the mute reply he gave me.

He shook his head wearily, "I am so tired," he said very softly, "I want to rest."

Suddenly I was up. Rest? I thought. Why must you rest? Your work is not done. There is so much you must do. We have suffered so much. You cannot stop now. You are the only one who can do something—and you must do it.

But he looked so ill and worn that I could not say a word.

I am glad I did not. That was the last time I saw him. They would not let us see him again. When he was shot, I stayed in the house, but the sound of the guns seemed to reverberate in my brain, and I was almost crazy.

You know what happened. When the revolution broke out and hell was let loose on the streets the sound of the shooting seemed to leave my brain. Something stronger seized it—something louder, more triumphant. He had done it, I exulted. He had done it! And triumph was bitter in my mouth.



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