

CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP SECTION

THE BEGGAR'S STORY

By PELUCIA Q. MARIO *



CARMEN was the only child of Mrs. Quirino. She was eight years old, very pretty, and industrious, too. But she had one bad trait, laughing at the misfortune of others.

Near her home lived an old lame woman. Carmen always stopped from her work to molest her whenever the old woman passed by. She would make funny remarks about the poor woman's dress that was untidy and had patches in several places. If the woman would not mind her, Carmen would go down to tease her and sometimes pull her dress. This made the poor woman very sad indeed.

The little girl's mother was greatly worried about Carmen's conduct. Mrs. Quirino always told her not to trouble the old woman. She would at times

whip her when she lost her temper. But Carmen always seemed to forget her good mother's counsel and would tease the old neighbor again and again.

One rainy evening while Carmen was at supper with some of her cousins, there was a voice at the door. "Apo," it said, "please let me in."

Carmen ran to the door, and, finding an old, bent, blind beggar, she demanded in a haughty voice, "Who are you? and what do you want?"

"I am very hungry and cold," said the beggar.

"Go to another house," spoke the haughty girl, closing the door with a bang.

Her mother heard Carmen's harsh and unkind reply. "Let him in," Mrs. Quirino commanded. "It's raining and very cold outside."

"But, Mother," protested Carmen, "he is just one of those blind beggars."

"Not another word!" Mrs. Quirino said sharply.

After supper the children gathered around the old man. "Do tell us a story, Apo. They say that old folks know a lot of stories," one of the children said.

"You may tell us about yourself," another spoke.

The beggar coughed and cleared his throat. "I was once a strong, good-looking boy," he began. "But in my young days there was no sport I like better than to laugh at those who were less fortunate than I. Near my house lived an old man named Adiong who was blind in one

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eye. It amused me very much to steal behind his back and slap him with anything I had at hand. Many times he tried to catch me, but how could he get hold of me when I had fast, strong legs, and he was already tottering with old age? Besides, his one good eye was becoming dim. Once, I made him so angry that, for the first time, he shouted, "O boy, you will pay for your unkindness—some day."

"I only laughed in return and gave him another slap on his thin underpants. And then I ran away and joined my friends who were exchanging stories under a *sampaloc* tree. "Boys," I suggested, "let's climb the *sampaloc* tree and see which of us can climb the highest."

Perhaps tired of telling and listening to uninteresting stories, the boys thought my suggestion was a good idea. And so climb the tree we did, each one trying to outdo the other. Pretty soon, by climbing on the back of one boy and stepping on the shoulder of another, I found myself ahead of the boys. And a few minutes later I was on the topmost branch, shouting triumphantly to my companions.

"Just then, one-eyed Apiong was passing by. I hurriedly clambered down from my high perch to be in time to tease Apiong again. In my hurry, I stepped on a dead branch and down I fell to the ground with a frightful thud. My spinal column and three ribs were broken, and my eyes striking something became useless from then on. You can read the story of my life on how I look now," the old man concluded with a pathetic gesture of his thin, dirty hands.

The children were silent as they looked at the ungainly figure of the old

AN OLD FORT . . .

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Moro Barandia, the Spaniards loaded all the cannons on a scow, took them out to sea, and sank them there. Then they left the fort and sailed for Iligan, presumably to surrender to the Americans.

The ruin of Fort Almonte, as it is today, is not especially attractive, as you see in the photographs. It is just another ruin in a forgotten place. But when one stands before it in meditation, or goes about and examines the moat about the stone fort, looks at the cells where Maranao prisoners were kept, sees the concrete oven where the soldiers baked bread, walks over the parade ground where the soldiers drilled, or climbs to the top of the small hill where the soldiers and the *señoras* looked at the landscape, then one will be intensely interested in this once important but now forgotten fortification. Fort Almonte is now only a ruin, but this historic ruin still brings to mind the Spanish attempt to bring about peace and order in the Philippines.

beggar. Carmen trembled with fear and misgiving, for she could see a clear picture of herself: an old, dirty, wrinkled woman, bent double, groping herself with a crooked stick because her eyes were useless, begging from house to house under the sun's heat and in the rain, dogs barking at her—and being teased and laughed at and molested by a young pretty girl . . .

SOME QUESTIONS

1. What kind of girl was Carmen?
2. What was good in her? bad in her?
3. Did she listen to and obey her mother's advice?