

A Ring and A Ring

By Dionisio J. Rivera

HELLO, is this Attorney Fernandez?" "Yes," answered the man at the other end.

"This is Mr. Nicanor speaking. Could you come to my office right away, please? I have an important matter to speak to you about."

"Very well. I shall be there in an hour. Good-bye."

As Mr. Nicanor hung up the receiver, he leaned against his big office chair, and sat there motionless, staring at a check which he had in his hand.

Mr. Nicanor was about fifty, and his gray hair betrayed the worries which the man had encountered during the many years he held the position of manager of the East Side Jewelry Store. He had met with so many troubles of the company, that he had grown extra-cautious about little matters concerning it. In fact he was so careful now, that his fellow-businessmen said that, if anyone tried to deceive Mr. Nicanor in any business, he would have to be extremely clever.

As he sat motionless, still staring at the check, a man opposite him, who likewise appeared to be an old timer, broke the silence:

"Well, Mr. Nicanor, what do you think of this matter?"

The questioner was likewise of considerable age, though a little younger than Mr. Nicanor. He had, for many years, been the Company's cashier, and whenever he encountered any trouble of a nature similar to the one in question, he would seek the manager's opinion about it. As he put the question before the gray man, he paced the room to and fro, with his hands behind his back, waiting for an answer.

Presently the manager had laid the check on his desk, and was now looking at the cashier. After a few seconds he answered him:

"This looks like the usual case, doesn't it?"

"Indeed it does, Sir," returned the other.

"Anyway," put in Mr. Nicanor, "whether it does or not, we had better wait till we hear what our attorney says, before taking any further step in the matter."

"Very well, Sir." And he took his leave.

Half an hour later the office boy announced:

"Mr. Fernandez to see you, Sir."

"Show him in, sonny," responded the manager.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Nicanor," said the visitor, as he came into his office, hat in hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fernandez," answered the other. "Take a chair."

"Thank you."

Mr. Fernandez had the reputation of being a very clever man, and of possessing excellent discernment in the chamber practice of the law. He had been the company's lawyer for several years, and it seldom happened that his cases were not of a nature demanding payment of some article bought from the company in installments which the buyers had neglected to pay. But his fame did not come of these petty cases which he often brought to court, for besides being the company's attorney, he had cases apart from this company's which gave him his high reputation with the public. The company's cases, he considered almost "natural," and would call them mere trifles, though some demands went as high as ten thousand pesos. In fact, they were so common to him that, he took very little trouble, if it could be called trouble for him, in preparing his cases for the court. Such was the man who had arrived.

When he had been comfortably seated before Mr. Nicanor, he inquired in the same old way:

"Well, Mr. Nicanor, what's up this time? Nothing very serious I hope."

"No, not serious," answered the man, "but rather a peculiar case."

"Peculiar," repeated the other, somewhat curious as to what Mr. Nicanor's statement meant. "What is it then?" he finally asked.

After a few seconds' pause, Mr. Nicanor began:

"Well, Mr. Fernandez, the case is this: This morning at about ten o'clock, a man came into the store and asked for me. He was shown in here, and inquired if he could have a few words with me. I answered him he could, and after he had been seated, he told me that he wished to buy a ring from us, and wanted to know if I would accept a check in payment for it, as he did not have enough money with him at the moment. As I saw that the man was sincere and honest, and seemed an educated man, I accepted his offer. Besides, you know, I didn't want him to lose his confidence in the company.

Mr. Fernandez nodded as he listened attentively.

"So, he bought a ring; a diamond one," continued the manager. "We charged him one thousand pesos."

"And he issued the check?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes," said the manager, at the same time handing it to him.

"Dominator Relucio", read the signature.

"Proceed, Mr. Nicanor".

"At about half past two this afternoon, I got a telephone call from a man who wanted to know if it was true that Mr. Relucio had really paid one thousand pesos for the ring he bought. I asked the man why he wanted to know, and he answered me that it was being offered to him for that amount."

"You mean this Mr. Relucio was selling the same ring this afternoon?" asked the lawyer.

"Exactly," returned the other, "and I can't make head or tail out of it," he concluded.

"Neither can I but let me see; who was the man who called you," he asked.

"I don't know," answered the gray man.

"Don't you think it was Mr. Relucio himself?" inquired the lawyer.

"I don't think it was," said the manager, "because, this man had quite a different accent. In fact I guess it was a Chinaman," concluded the manager.

"Do you think so?" asked Mr. Fernandez. Mr. Nicanor nodded.

There was silence for a few seconds afterwards, during which both were absorbed in deep thought. Then Mr. Nicanor asked:

"What do you think of the matter, then?"

"Let me think," said the lawyer reviewing the facts in his mind.

A minute passed and neither one spoke. Then Mr. Fernandez broke the silence saying:

"After all these things that have happened, don't you think we should be careful about this check? It looks like a bluff, doesn't it?"

Mr. Nicanor just nodded.

"Yes. That's our trail," added the lawyer. "We will follow up this check and see where it leads us to."

"By the way, did you inquire from the bank if Mr. Relucio has any account?"

"No. I can't," said the gray man. "To-day is Saturday, and banks close at noontime on Saturdays.

"You are right at that," returned the other. And he paused to think. But Mr. Nicanor was very anxious about their next move. He felt it a great mistake in accepting the check of a man whom he did not know, and was now wishing that this lawyer would do something to prevent the loss. Presently the lawyer had concluded his reasonings and was ready to state his next move.

"Well," said Mr. Fernandez, as he stood up and started pacing the room, "I think the best and safest thing that we can do for the present is to ask the police for information about this man, and see if he has any record with them."

"That is a good idea," said Mr. Nicanor, who was glad to hear the suggestion.

"Well, then," said the lawyer, "I'm going down to the Police headquarters and see what we can find out."

"I leave it all to you, Mr. Fernandez," said the gray man as the lawyer left the room.

Upon inquiry at the Police Headquarters, it was found that about seven years ago, Mr. Relucio had been accused and found guilty of

an estafa case, though he only got a light sentence for it. Upon further conversation with the Chief, he was persuaded that it would be a safe thing to have the man in the hands of the law against the time when he should be needed. So, taking the matter into his hands, and suspecting that his man might give the slip overnight, he asked for the arrest of Mr. Relucio.

Monday morning found Mr. Nicanor himself before the paying teller, cashing the check, expecting of course that it would be returned with the mark: "Refer to Drawer", but to his utmost surprise he was not only paid the required amount but upon further inquiry found, that the said Mr. Relucio had still a little over ten thousand pesos in reserve.

So great was the shock to Mr. Nicanor, that for a time he was speechless. When he recovered from it, he hurriedly left the bank, returned to his office in quick time, called up his lawyer, and related everything that had happened. Within half an hour, both the manager and his lawyer were before the desk of the Sergeant, asking for the release of Mr. Relucio. In a few minutes they were face to face with the man himself, who looked as if nothing had happened; calm as ever! No sooner had they met than both men begged his pardon and offered all their apologies in the most gentlemanly way, and which could not have been more sincere than in such a case.

"You owe me no apologies at all, gentlemen," said Mr. Relucio as soon as both had finished offering their explanations. I would have played safe and done likewise, had I been in your place."

But such a return after causing the poor man to pass two nights in a police station, was too mild to believe. How could a man be so composed after being treated the way he had been? Wouldn't anyone feel angered, if the same thing were done to him, and without any cause whatsoever, as had been done to Mr. Relucio? Indeed one would. But such was not the case here. Mr. Relucio took this affair coolly, so coolly indeed, that both the manager and his lawyer said to themselves: "This is too good

to be true." And it really turned out *Too Good*, and after a moment, Mr. Relucio slowly and distinctly said:

"Gentlemen, my sleep in this cell, is all forgiven; nay forgotten, but mind you, the wrong that you have done to me is not small. I have a reputation. You have also one. And you would not like it marred how little soever. And here you are, staining my little reputation without any cause whatsoever. So, I'm putting two alternatives before you," and he paused.

Both the manager and his lawyer held their breath, hoping that the alternatives would not be too difficult to choose between.

Then Mr. Relucio placed the matter before them.

"You see, gentlemen" he said, "I could sue you for damages, and come out with it, but your reputation then would be at stake, and it is not my wish to humiliate you before the public. So it is up to you to decide whether I shall sue you or fix the matter among ourselves privately. What do you say about it; gentlemen?" he concluded.

The manager and his lawyer exchanged meaningful looks, and at once decided to patch up matters privately rather than in court. Anyway if the case were brought to court, it would be almost impossible to prove their innocence, and they might have to make reparation after all. So it was agreed upon that Mr. Relucio would be paid five thousand pesos for the offence committed against him.

That evening as Mr. Relucio was sitting in his library, smoking a cigar and reading the evening papers, he broke into a smile and with a feeling of satisfaction exclaimed:

"Oh Wu!"

"Yes sir," answered his Chink servant, as he entered the library.

"You have the evening all to yourself, and this into the bargain," said Mr. Relucio, handing him a ten-peso bill. "You deserve it."

"N. n. . no, Sir, th. . tha . nk you sir," answered the happy Chink who after taking the offered bill, retired—to celebrate.