

• THE LOST LOCKET •

By PACIFICO BERNARDO

ELENA was very happy that day. And who wouldn't be happy? It was the last school day of March. She had just received her card, and she learned that she was promoted to the Fifth Grade, with the highest honors. Besides, a week later was to be her tenth birthday. On that day, her father promised to give her a birthday present if she would pass. What the present was, she didn't know, but she was told that it would be something she would be proud to wear on her birthday. And here, she had the card to show her father that she deserved the birthday present he had promised to give.

Mang Pedro, her father and Aling Maria, her mother were also very happy when they learned that Elena was to be in the Fifth Grade the following June. Father and Mother planned how to make her birthday a joyous one. Elena was busy thinking how she would celebrate it and what present her father would give her. Just on the eve of her birthday, Mang Pedro came home with a cute little box tied with a pink ribbon.

"Come here, Elena," he called out. "I have a surprise for you."

Elena came running to her father. "What is it, father?" she asked.

"This is your birthday present from me," he said as he gave her the nice-looking box tied with the pink ribbon.

"I am very happy" she said. She opened the box quickly, anxious to find what was inside. And what do you think she found? Inside the box a yellow object greeted her eyes. It was a necklace with a golden locket.



"What a beautiful necklace!" she exclaimed. "I can wish for no better present, Father," she added. That night she was so happy that she dreamed about her birthday party.

The next morning she woke up early. She helped her mother prepare for her party. She was busy the whole morning, cleaning the house and preparing the table. Just before her guests arrived, she put on her new dress, which was given to her by her mother, as another birthday present. She wore also the necklace which was given by her father. "And oh! how lovely she looked" she thought, as she looked at herself in the mirror.

Pretty soon her friends began to arrive. There were Anita, Naty, Rogelia, and Amelia. These four girls were her best friends in school and they came in a group. The last one to come was Carmen, a new friend of Elena. Each one greeted her with "happy birthday." There was also a work of admiration for her necklace and locket, from every one. There was talking, laughing, and singing. In school they were always together. So on that day they were again as happy and as noisy as they used to be in school.

But Carmen was the most silent of all. She was not in the crowd. True, she was a friend of Elena but Elena's friends were new to her. Besides, she was by nature timid and shy. While the others laughed out loud and giggled, she only smiled at Anita's jokes, who was the clown of the group.

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Dinner was served and all enjoyed the "pansit", "lumpia", and jelly which Aling Maring had prepared. There was also ice-cream at the end of the meal. They were so jolly while they ate. When dinner was over, the children went out in the garden under a mango tree. There was a swing, where the children played for hours. Later, when their stomachs were lighter, they played games such as Jump the Spine, Skipping Rope, and Running Around.

While the rest were having such fun, Carmen was but an onlooker. She was content to sit on a swing and watch the others play. She wanted to play with the other girls but her timidity kept her away from them. Suddenly Elena stopped playing. She became pale and silent. She was holding her necklace which was hanging on her neck and was looking around.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Anita.

"Why, what happened?" the girls asked.

Elena was speechless for a moment. Then she said, "I have lost my locket."

"When did you lose it?" Naty asked.

"I must have dropped it here while we were playing," she answered.

Everybody began to look for the locket. They went all over the garden where they had been playing and running around. All the while they were looking for the locket, Carmen was still the silent bystander. She watched them uncomfortably undecided as to whether she should help or not in the search for the lost locket. They went over the garden three or four times, looking for it among the grasses and under the swing, but it was nowhere to be found.

It was only then that they noticed how indifferent Carmen had been. Anita began to suspect that

Carmen might have seen it and kept it for herself. She called the other girls and whispered something into their ears. Then the rest cast side glances on Carmen. Each looked suspiciously at Carmen. Carmen understood their looks, but she knew she had done nothing wrong. She had nothing to be ashamed of. Embarrassed by their attitude, Carmen told Elena that she was going home. And she did.

When she was gone, Amelia said, "You see, that girl is ashamed. She would not have gone home if she did not take it."

"Yes, I think she has it. She didn't even help us," echoed Rogelia.

Soon Aling Maring learned that Elena's locket was lost. She wanted to join them in looking for it but it was getting dark.

The children told her of their suspicion on Carmen, that she had kept herself away from the group, and that she didn't even help in looking for it.

"Don't be so fast in your judgment. Don't think that because she did not help you she had it," continued Aling Maring. "I know her to be a perfectly good child. She is honest. If she found it she would have given it to Elena," she added. "Perhaps it is still in the garden, but you did not see it."

"I don't think Carmen got it," Elena spoke as in defense of her friend. "If she found it she would have given it back to me. Once when I lost my fountain pen, she returned it to me," she explained.

The other girls said nothing more. Elena was a great favorite among them and they dared not displease her.

"Well, it is getting dark," Aling Maring broke the silence. "You may go home now, and I shall look for it in the morning."

The children parted and went home, but each of them still believed that Carmen got the locket. They promised to come back the next morning and help Elena look for her locket. That night Elena

could hardly sleep because of her loss.

Very early the next day she was up with her mother. The first thing they did was to go to the garden. As Aling Maring swept the dried mango leaves she heard something roll with a ringing sound. And what do you think she found? The lost locket was there as bright as it was the day before. It seemed to say "Did we not play hide and seek?"

Elena was full of joy. She got her locket back and would have reason to tell her friends their great mistake.

"You were right mother, I knew when you said that Carmen did not get it," Elena told her mother.

"My friends made a foolish mistake in suspecting that Carmen got it."

Soon the other children arrived. "Here's the locket, children. I found it among the dried leaves," Aling Maria told them. "You made Carmen very unhappy yesterday by thinking that she was not honest. It is wrong to suspect anybody until you are sure of your suspicion. Go and tell Carmen that you were sorry for what you have done."

The other girls were very much ashamed of what they had thought and said about Carmen.

Following her advice, the children went to see Carmen.

"Good morning Carmen," the children said.

"Good morning," was Carmen's reply.

"We have done you a great wrong," Anita spoke.

"We are all sorry for what we have said," the girls chorused.

"Can you forgive us?" asked Amelia.

"Certainly, I will," answered Carmen smiling. "I knew you would soon find out your mistake."

From that time on they became friends. They learned to love Carmen because of the good lesson they learned from her.