



Nicomedes Suller

ON DECEMBER 25, 1941, when a heavily armed Japanese contingent, supported by tanks, reached San Manuel, an inland town in Pangasinan, Nicomedes Suller, mayor of the town, tried to stop the invaders. He stood in the middle of the highway, a pistol in his hand and shouted frantically at the men, begging them to spare the town but they paid no attention to him; and the tanks rolled on, drowning the thump of marching feet.

This enemy unit was part of a main body of Japanese troops which landed off the gulf of Lingayen earlier in the month, and was now pushing its way relentlessly to the south. The town of San Manuel lay on its path. And on Christmas eve, the troops had reached the gates of the town, expecting no resistance. Under the circumstances, resistance was more than futile. It was suicidal.

Mayor Suller was aware of this. That was why he begged the men not to go on, for wherever they went, they left destruction in their wake. San Manuel was but a little town of less than 16,000 inhabitants, typical Filipinos, God-fearing and peace-loving. They earned their living, toiling daily on their farms, selling their produce at the market places, minding their own business, pursuing the even tenor of their ways with the pastoral simplicity characteristic of Philippine villages. As mayor, Suller had served them well, defending and protecting the interests of the town populace. This was his sworn duty, and he had never proved recreant to the trust reposed on him by the electorate. He would not be recreant now. That was what he was trying to do. That was what he wanted these men to see. But they spoke a different language, those men. That was why Suller was forced to talk to them in the only language they understood—bullets, although Suller knew that by doing this, he was going to pay with his life.

HE RUSHED RECKLESSLY TO THE NEAREST TANK, boarded it, and emptied his gun through the porthole of the tank. There were quick, answering shots, and the mayor's body, riddled with bullets, fell on the wayside not far from the municipal building of the town.

The young man died protesting. It was a simple protest.

"You should not come here, because we do not want you." It was as simple as the faith he held in the country he loved, and as steadfast, and so powerful he was willing to die for it.

It was as simple as the man himself.

"Nick," as he was popularly called, belonged to the masses. His parents were poor, but honest and hard-working. They worked hard to send their boy to the public schools, where he developed a love for the common man, for justice. Whenever a question arose, in which individual rights were involved, he always asked, "Where's justice in that?"

In school he learned that there were things more priceless than life itself; that there were things worth dying for, like freedom against tyranny and oppression, and justice for all. For these things he worked in his humble capacity as mayor of San Manuel.

FOR THESE THINGS HE GAVE HIS LIFE on that Christmas Day two years ago—an offering on the altar of freedom.

Everybody loved "Nick" for his integrity, for his courage to stand for the right. And surely it was not right for anybody to go marching through your town, getting at your vital provisions, destroying those who resist. "Where is justice in that?"

That was what he was saying when they killed him. This was the theme of his life of service as a public servant. He wanted justice meted out to all. He wanted justice for San Manuel. Justice for the Philippines.

He was a young man when he died; he was in his middle thirties like Jose Rizal. Like Rizal, he preferred death to slavery.

A wife and two children survive him. No citation has been awarded to Suller. No medal of honor has been given posthumously to his wife for her to show to her children sometime in the future when they are old enough to understand. But better than a citation is the loving reverence of the inhabitants of San Manuel, of the whole Filipino people who now live under the shadow of the conqueror, silently waiting for that day when the heroic dead like Suller, shall have been finally and fully avenged.