

● **First Prize Story**
in the
1952 UNIVERSITY DAY
Literary Contest

SUMMER was running out when Tatay Juan came to the city unexpectedly to take me home for a short and belated vacation. I was beginning to feel afraid that it would be like the previous year. I had eagerly waited for his coming but he did not come. Now that he had come I scarcely knew how to tie securely the worn-out buri bag wherein I had hastily packed my clothes for I always felt that crazy bubbling excitement whenever I go home to the barrio.

The country air was crisp and I felt its cool playful sting on my cheeks. The bustling hubbub of the city was gone. The refreshing earthly smell filled the atmosphere as the sun steadily gained along the rows of gaunt acacia trees. As if bidding me welcome, the hillsides were shaking with ripe yellow corn. The even rows of the newly sprung upland rice seemed to join in the gleeful welcome, too. I had missed these sights the previous year and even before that; I had missed the peace of the hills and the quiet security the mountains give. My heart yearned not only for the happy times I had with my parents but also for the gay treks up and down the hills with Josefina.

quacious and quick in making hers. She just loved to draw conclusions at the spur of the moment. Come what may later. I guess we simply got along together and that was all there was to it.

The oldest red tile-roofed house in the small barrio of Katipunan belonged to Iyo Talyo, Jo's grandfather, a wealthy, unassuming landowner and a widower. The big house was safely enclosed in high stone walls topped with broken glass firmly embedded in concrete. For several years Iyo Talyo had been chosen unanimously as *teniente del barrio* until his rheumatism got

son had never amounted to anything except lead a lazy man's life. Andres and his fashionable family lived on the pensions Iyo Talyo tolerably sent them. Perhaps it was more of an extra sense of duty than genuine fatherly love which prompted him to do so. He had promised his wife on her deathbed to look after their only son as best as he could. Many times he had gotten his son out of one scrape after another.

One day he received a letter from Andres saying that he had got married. It meant more money, and
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WATER *With Her* **WINE**

Her mother had called her Josefina, Inday Pina was her father's favorite pet name for her, but when he was in an angry mood he would grumble harshly: Josefina! I called her Jo for short. She said I was being short but sweet about it; besides, she liked it because it had a touch and gloss of novelty in it. I have always wondered why we were such good friends when I was what she called a lady of few words and one who made such slow and calm decisions while she was lo-

the best of him and he had to resign from his highly esteemed position. That was the time he wrote his son, Andres, who stayed in the city with his family, to come home and keep him company, at least for the remaining years of his life. Besides, there was no other heir. His

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Spiritual directors handling their fate, need wide understanding, encouraging them to meditate even if the help of a book be necessary. Recommending an intimate union with God will often bear great fruit. Others belong to this class who are influenced by secondary reaction. More balanced and lasting such characters are generally termed the **passionate**. Dante, Goethe, Caesar, St. Augustine, Bernard, Teresa and John Bosco number themselves in this class. Haughtiness constitutes their chief danger.

Directors succeed the best by keeping them in the spirit of fraternity, by having them meditate upon the realities of the spirit including the fragility of the human soul.

Such are but a few of the many possible character combinations in the total range of the human makeup. The sum-total comprises a vast garden of varieties, each of which call for respect and consideration. Their observation and understanding offer one condition to bring the inherent goodness of each youth into bloom. By tuning his deep unshakeable ideal with his own temperamental stuff, its image will penetrate the whole man, will become more appealing, assumes more value, and releases more power.

Over and above the means awakening the appeal and love for an ideal through the director himself. An effective medium to redirect the love of our youth, calls for more than a doctrinaire, nay even more than conveying the fruits of past experience. In the last analysis it is the impact of his personality upon the person directed. Formation or education in this sense, as Father Van Zeller maintains, is a personal affair or it is nothing. It needs be a personality whose vital relationship serves to bring Christ to his charges. Nay, I dare say, not that he brings Christ to others, but rather that he permits Christ to give Himself through his direction, a Divine Ideal transmitted only in the measure in which the director lives the Christian life himself.

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increase in the ceaseless flow of enormous pensions. At times he would rave about his son's irresponsibility and dependence, he had even caught himself cursing his son for betraying his standards of human decency, but he would remember his wife and his promise. Andrés was his son. . .

Andrés' family constituted only Nita, his city bred wife who drank, smoked, and was as spendthrift as her husband, and Josefina, their only daughter who had her mother's dark and attractive eyes and her father's haughty bearings coupled with an unbridled temper. I cannot forget the day they came home to the hacienda for it was my birthday. I was wearing my new red poplin dress that Nancy Rita bought from the "tabo-an." Tatay Juan was Iyo Talyo's *encargado* and the day Andrés and his family arrived, he was busy preparing for the day's entertainment and seeing to it that the food would be enough for everybody. It was Iyo Talyo's delight to greet every homecoming of his son with a merry celebration and a sumptuous feast.

I was helping my mother spread the newly cooked rice to cool off on the wide green banana leaves when Tatay Juan came over to us. Beside him was Josefina, neatly dressed in white and with a red ribbon smartly perched on her curly hair, looking so young and childish, "Show her around the hacienda," Tatay Juan had said. "She had been only a tiny mite the last time she was up here. I'm sure she will enjoy it and like it enough to stay here for keeps." And Tatay Juan left us.

We became fast friends. She would wake up early in the morning when the mists were still clinging to the sleepy hills and come to our small cocon-roofed house. Nancy Rita was certainly amused when Jo told her that she liked to walk to and fro in our tiny sala because she could hear her feet sing. It was really our creaking bamboo floor. Out of embarrassment, perhaps, Tatay Juan with a simulated nonchalance said that he had wanted to replace them with a new bunch of young bamboo but Nancy Rita objected. Both Nancy Rita and I knew that he was lying, of course, but we understood. It

was he who strongly refused to have the old and shiny floor changed as he would lie down on its coolness every noon after meals and doze off for a few minutes before going to Iyo Talyo's house or to unhitch the carabao from the fields and lead it off to a cooler and greener grazing land.

Nancy Rita would offer Jo some hot chocolate but she would refuse and say that she never failed to

Water with

take a sip of morning stimulant before coming over to the house. I would catch a whiff of wine from a distance and once I was about to say something about it when I had looked up and saw the look on Tatay Juan's eyes; the words died in my lips. Jo had to watch me feed the pigs and throw big corn grains to the chickens before we could go on our daily morning treks to the wide grasslands and near-by hills. We would go up to the top of the hills, sprawl lazily on the green-carpeted earth and get a view of the wide expanse of Hacienda Cirila, named after Iyo Talyo's wife who died when Andrés was born. We could see the vast plains and the green fields spattered conspicuously with clusters of nipa and cocon-roofed houses huddled close to one another. We would feel the cool morning air start whinnying across the land and watch the gray-white smoke curling out from among the stoic mountain foliage which shyly hid some of the huts.

Up there I would try to inhale as much as I could of the cool freshness of the mountain' air and bask with delight at being a witness to such an untruffled serenity. Jo would talk endlessly on the wonders and comforts of the city, the loneliness and monotony of country life, the thick clinging mud during big rains, and seeing nothing but green all around. As the sun struggled higher, she would suddenly get up and say, Come, dreamyhead, I'll race you downhill. And off she would vanish like a deer who has sensed a hunter in sight. We would rest beneath the gentle shade of the guava tree,

which was getting old and gawky, and start laughing. But hers was a taunting laughter. At times it seemed repulsive. The country scene and all it could offer to the eye or ear had lost its appeal. Every scene or object seemed dull and dark to her. . .

The shrill whistle of the conductor shrieked and the sudden screech of the bus which pulled sharply to a stop gave me a violent jolt. Tatay

Her Wine

Juan carried my buri bag and we started on our one-kilometer trek home. We had passed the big red tile-roofed house and through the closed iron grilled gate I caught a glimpse of a lady on the porch. I was sure it was Jo. I wanted to ask Tatay Juan about her but I had noticed that he had been unusually quiet during the whole trip. Perhaps he was just tired and the afternoon sun was making him sleepy or it may have been the silence which comes with the years. So I just trudged on silently beside him in the warming sunshine.

Before my uncle and my cousin Nelia had sent for me to help them run their sari-sari store in the city, Jo had already left for Manila with her mother who had made the least household trifle sour her temper; hence, having an excuse to go away from the hacienda and go to the big city. Jo had come to say good-bye to us. I had wished her luck and hoped that she'd remember us in the country and perhaps visit us in the future.

"I won't forget you and your family but I don't think I'd want to come back here. Life in a rural region may be appealing to you; it's terribly boring for me. I want a life of excitement, not dullness, just as Mama wants, too." Jo sounded so confident. So far away.

"Just the same, I hope you'll remember to visit us someday. Perhaps when you get tired of city life."

"I'll never tire of it. It's what I want and where I want to be. Mama and Papa always take care that I get what I want. They even think for me, so why should I

worry. Mama does a lot of things for me; she shampoos my hair for instance. Papa is a real darling; he foots the hills. He's quite liberal, too, in his ways. I feel that we really do not belong here."

"But this will be yours someday."

"Yes, I know. But I can sell it if I would want to; I don't belong to this kind of life. It's like the way I take my wine — straight, no water, no nothing. It's more stimulating, more fun that way. That is what my life is going to be."

Tatay Juan and I were now following the familiar narrow trail and before long came alongside the little brook where Jo and I used to wade in and across was the stumbling path leading to the top of the hills where we had chased small yellow twin butterflies. The trees had turned deeper green; the beds of reeds where we played hide-and-peek seemed to have grown taller and thicker. I had to ask Tatay Juan about Jo. So I did.

We stopped to rest on a big boulder slumped against a big protruding root of a caimito tree. Tatay Juan took his handkerchief and wiped his damp forehead before he spoke. Something had happened to Jo and the family. The August rains were just over when Andrés received a telegram from Manila. From Jo. Her mother had died of heart failure.

"I did not read the telegram, of course, but I am sure Andrés was not telling the truth. Josefina's mother must have died of excessive drinking. In the short length of time that they had stayed in the hacienda I had keenly observed how that woman took to wine."

I still remember Tatay Juan coming home one dusk from Iyo Talayo's house muttering about Andrés' wife living on wine and nothing else. "Hush, Juan!" Nanay Rita had sharply cut in, "if those people from the city drink much, let them." "But it's so disgusting to see a woman drink the way Nita does, it's simply unbecoming." Tatay Juan retorted but Nanay Rita had gone down the back stairs to give the corn grits to the squeaking pigs.

"Andrés went to Manila immediately," Tatay Juan continued. "After the burial he took Josefina home to Hacienda Ciria, a good move Andrés had ever taken considering the casual approach that daughter of his had for her studies. It has been well over a year now that Iyo Talayo died; he wanted to have his son take over his place. Unfortunately, Andrés does not have the excellent virtues and excellent executive abilities his father had possessed. He has gone back to his old vices, gambling and women. His father's wealth is fast dwindling; all the good things his father had built slowly and with care seem to have no meaning at all to Andrés. The group of household hands are gradually ebbing, either they are not paid or they are merely afraid of Andrés' terrible temper."

"What about Jo?"

Josefina has greatly changed. She sits at the porch all day and gazes at the distant hills. Since she came nobody has seen her cry or laugh. Just like Jo. She won't pay anything with weeping or sorrow. The cold haughty look is still there. But will Jo still have the grit to go on in spite of the tragic things that are happening? Poor Jo, so unprepared for the unexpected, trying to alter the fixed pattern of our borrowed existence but was never made aware of the whims and fancies of time and life that would stealthily creep on one and burst out all of a sudden like a thunder-clap; thus, leaving one like Jo dumb with futility. "It won't be long now, Tatay Juan said clearing his throat, "when Josefina's brother will have to go as her mother did."

A black storm was fast gathering in the sky and a cold wind started blowing. We started on our way once more, through aimless rivulets, through the wind-stirred corn and rice fields, along the rows of caimito trees and the towering coconuts. . . all, in some strange way, enmeshed in twine of song. I keenly felt how great a part they have become of me. And I resolved that my life shall be like these vast green fields and hills. . . calm and far-reaching, giving a sense of peace and fullness.