



The Mystery of the Rattan Strips

Foreword:

No one who reads this story should think that something of this kind can happen in our present days...The Ifugaos themselves would bitterly blame the author if he should venture to insinuate it, and rightly so.

The times in which headhunting expeditions with all their ritual performances and customs occurred, belong entirely to the past.

The Ifugaos, indeed, have embraced the Christian religion in great number, and even though the missionaries shall have to work hard for many years before all of them will be converted and civilized they will never witness any more such performances.



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AN IFUGAO DETECTIVE STORY
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Tuginay, a young Ifugao living with his wife, Oltagon, in the north-eastern valley of Ifugaoland, was the victim of murder. The fact that an Ifugao was killed was not in itself an extraordinary event in those days be-



Tuginay, so they tell, had gone out one morning to get a bundle of firewood from the forest.

Before he had started he had told his wife that he would get, along with his firewood, a small bundle of rattan strips, and would therefore have to climb the mountain farther upwards. His wife, however, had tried to dissuade him from going so far, all alone; she, indeed, alleged that the prey bird had snatched away one of their chicks a couple of days before, which foretold an evil of some kind, but he had answered that this didn't happen near their house since the hen had gone a little too far with her chicks, and that they were in need of some rattan, with which he would mend their sifting-basket.

fore the establishment of a regular government in the various valleys inhabited by headhunters, for killings and headhunting expeditions were then a common occurrence, yet the murder of Tuginay created much excitement, not only during the days of revenge rites and burial, as was usual, but also a month or so later, because of the findings of Bindadan, a famous and clever go-between of great prestige among his people. But let us begin at the beginning.

So he had gone; and when he didn't return in the evening nor the following morning, Oltagon had called on her brother, Bindadan, the uncle of her husband, and a couple of their neighbors, and had asked them to go to the forest and find out if something had gone wrong with him.

These four men had started without delay, even though the sun was already midway in its course, and after a not too long ascent they had come across Tuginay's body. It lay

somewhat hidden by ferns and a bush at a distance of but two steps from the path where they walked. A horrible sight! A corpse without head, a deep wound in the belly made with a spear! They had doubted at first it was Tuginay's body, but they recognized his geestring, his hip-bag and his belt. The knife was gone!

It appeared at once that he had not been killed there, for there were but some traces of blood on the ground, and no signs that showed a struggle; evidently the spear's thrust had not killed him right away, and the head had been cut off when he was either already dead or at least unable to defend himself.

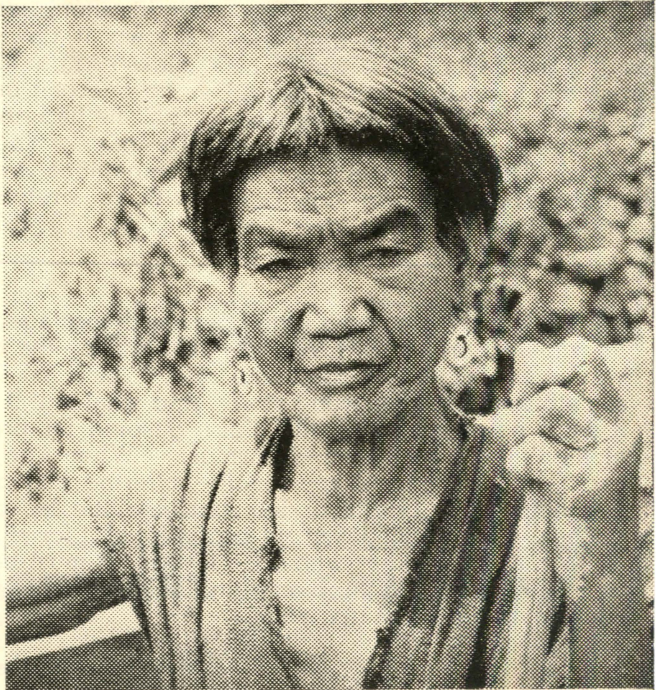
They supposed that he at least had made an attempt to return a blow with his double edged knife.

They had then explored the surroundings. Soon, Bindadan, had found a spear, an improvised one made of bamboo, at a short distance higher up; seemingly it had made the wound in the belly. He had then called his companions who had continued searching all around. They had found also a knife, Tuginay's double-edged knife; evidently the murderer had used it to cut off the head. Yet they saw no traces of blood on the path,

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THE DETECTIVE

PHOTO AERTS



but clearly saw that the body had been dragged downward. They had then continued upward a short distance and arrived at a small open space, a "lamagan" as the Ifugaos call it, a place where they put down their load and rest for a while. There it was that Tuginay had been killed; beyond all doubt, for there also lay his bundle of firewood, a small one indeed, and the sticks of it loosely lashed with a rattan thong, and, moreover some traces of blood, although it seemed that the murderer had made quite an attempt to do away with the blood for he had scratched the ground and presumably had thrown away the earth soaked with blood.

But from where had he made his attack? "Look there," had exclaimed Bindadan, "how the canes, and

herbs, and grass have been pushed and throdden down! Look from here to there! Inakayang! and yonder also! They must have been at least five or six!

They then had decided to go home. While the young people were making a kind of litter to put the corpse onto and carry it homeward, Bindadan had walked a little distance, higher up, along the path, looking for other traces of blood; he had not been thoroughly convinced that the people from the other side of the mountain, the home of their hereditary enemies, were responsible for the killing of Tuginay. His companions had already drawn this conclusion, as the most obvious one, but he was not so sure of it, until he noticed here and there a drop of blood on the path, proving that the head of Tuginay had been carried that way, therefore toward the homes of their enemies. "Did they go that way?" his companions had asked, when he had come back. "Yes," he had replied, "for I saw some drops of blood. They took Tuginay's head to Chupak, and perhaps they are now busy celebrating their victory and per-

forming their sacrifices to induce the Sun god to make us forget all about it; but we shall not yield, we shall curse them, we shall make the Sun god curse and condemn them, and when the time of revenge shall have come we shall send to them the 'Harassers' to mislead them and lead them into the path of our spears."

And yet, even though Bindadan had spoken the language of revenge and hatred against the hereditary enemies of his tribe, he was puzzled. That bundle of firewood! It seemed so strange that those sticks were so loosely lashed together.

Before he left, while the others were tying the beheaded corpse on the litter, he had hurried back to that bundle of firewood, and had lifted it up, as it was, and had tried to put it on his shoulder, but immediately had thrown it down, as some firewood sticks slid out and fell to the ground. "No one can carry a bundle as this one" he had exclaimed, "neither did Tuginay." Then he had joined his companions and had hurried home with so wretched a burden.

(to be continued)

A few years ago a little boy was dying, aged nine and a half. His mother, broken-hearted, was kneeling by the bedside. "When you go up to heaven, son," she said, "you'll ask Our Lord to send something to mother, won't you? And what will it be?" There was a short pause and then the child, gasping for breath and holding mother's hand, managed to murmur: "When I go up to heaven, I'll ask Our Lord to send you much—suffering and pain! "Of course the mother was dumbfounded, but the little lad continued: "Yes, mother. I've noticed that He kept a lot of it for Himself, and gave a lot to His own Mother whom He loved. It must have a great value then. If He couldn't find anything better for His Mother could I ask Him anything better for you?"

—Father Robert Nash