

## • THE WONDERFUL ORGAN •

By FELICIDAD DANI \*



Gift - Sr. Pambogin of

FATHER CRUZ looked long and carefully at the old church organ. He shook his head. He could not quite believe the tale that went with it. But the organ was there. The old stone church had been rebuilt three times. The organ had remained as good as new. The years had turned its deep, red color to almost black, but the birds and flowers which were carved on its two sides still looked very real. The beautiful, bright colors still clung to the wood. They were as fresh as ever. And the music that it gave, especially on Christmas mornings, was the sweetest that was ever heard. Indeed, every year, people came from all parts of the country to hear the old organ played.

Father Cruz smiled, then turning his eyes toward the image of the Son of God nailed on the cross, the smile died slowly on his lips. "God," he muttered, "one of God's wonders."

Benito was young. He was only fourteen years old. But in the whole town, no one could carve better than he. That was the only reason why the *alferez* had not turned him out into the streets. For, of all the slaves in the house, Benito was the most awkward and careless. When he washed dishes, he always broke either a plate or a saucer. When he waited at the table, he spilled the food on the guests' clothes. But he was most skillful with the knife. He could carve beautifully. That was what the guests of his master always said when they saw the furniture in the house. And his master was well pleased.

One evening, four days before Christmas, he was busy polishing the floor with banana leaves, when he heard a carriage stop in front of the house. The *alferez* had arrived. Behind him came four men who were carrying something heavy. It was wrapped in black, heavy cloth. They brought it to the sala, and then went away.

"Benito," called the *alferez*, as he uncovered it. "Do you know what this is? This is an organ for the church."

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"An organ for the church?" murmured Benito to himself. To him, it looked like a small piano. He saw a piano once in the house of the *gobernadorcillo*.

"Stop staring at the organ, you stupid boy," cried the *alferez*. And he gave him a box on the ear. "See this picture? I want you to carve it on the two sides of this organ. Do you understand? Finish the work on Christmas Day."

When his master had left the room, Benito passed his hand lightly over the surface of the organ. How beautiful the wood was! It was deep red, and very hard and smooth. However, the two sides on which the picture was to be carved, were very white and soft. Benito wished he could begin the work right away. To carve that beautiful picture on that wonderful wood was better than washing dishes, polishing the floor, cleaning oily lamps, or fetching water from the well. And then, he was never whipped when he was carving.

But carving was slow work, especially when one carved beautifully.

Christmas Eve came. One side of the organ was finished. It was beautifully done. But the master had said that both sides should be finished by Christmas Eve. Benito bent his head lower over his work. He knew what the *alferez* would do to him. He took a look at the corner of the room where the rattan whip hang. It looked harmless, but Benito knew how much pain it could give. Once, while he was carrying a basin of water to his master's room, he slipped, and the basin fell on the floor. The master, greatly angered, took the whip and struck him with it. It fell on his back. For more than a month, he could not sleep on his back neither could he fetch water from the well without feeling as if all the bones on his back would break.

"Benito," called the *alferez* loudly. Benito turned very pale.

"Where is the organ? Have you finished it?"

Benito answered not a word.

The *alferez* approached the trembling boy and looked at the organ. Benito wished he could run away.

"Not finished!" thundered the *alferez*. "Not finished! Did I not tell you to finish it on Christmas Eve?"

He took the whip. He swung it over his head. Then it sang in the air. Benito tried to ward off the blow with his right hand. But when the whip struck his hand, he quickly drew it away—his whole body twisted with pain.

"Finish it tomorrow morning. Do you hear?" cried the *alferez*. "Finish it, or I'll break every bone in your body."

Benito sat back to work. It took him about four days to finish one side of the organ. How could he finish the other side in one night?

He felt weary, very weary. His right hand was black and swollen. He looked at it and then at the organ that must be finished by the next morning. He held the knife in both hands, and began to work.

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The night deepened. Now and then, the silence was broken by sounds from firecrackers. In other houses, other boys like him were playing and having a good time.

"Good evening," someone called at the gate. "Will you give a tired traveller a drink of water?"

"Good evening," answered Benito, as he came down the house with the drinking bowl.

The stranger drank the water and said, "Thank you." Then he returned the coconut bowl to Benito. "Your hand is bleeding," he observed. The voice was soft and kind. No one had spoken to Benito as kindly as that before.

Benito looked at his hand and saw that it was, indeed, bleeding.

"I am working on the organ for the church. It must be finished by tomorrow morning," Benito said softly, as if he were saying his prayers.

"And will you finish it?" asked the stranger.

"If I can keep awake, I will try hard to finish it," Benito answered. "I am very sleepy."

"Let me tell you stories, then, while you work," said the stranger.

Benito looked around him. The house was very still. The *alvarez* had gone to hear the midnight mass. The other slaves were fast asleep.

Benito led the stranger upstairs. He sat on the floor in front of Benito. Then he told Benito stories. He told him about the fairy moonbeams that danced and leaped among the leaves of the trees and about golden fishes that played hide-and-seek among the corals under the deep, blue sea. He told him, too, about a land where the birds were always gay and the flowers never withered. As he spoke, the

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are very kind to you."

The little boy was very happy because of his new toy, and the mother was very happy because of the happiness of her boy. The mother and the son felt the joy of Christmas Day.

## LIMBAS

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Perto on the ground held the string of his kite with trembling hands. At first he had been smiling. But now he did not know what to do. The wind had blown harder and harder carrying his brave

lamp glowed more brightly. The room seemed to be flooded with moonlight. But outside, it was very dark. A sweet delicious scent hung in the cold, December air. And from afar, came the soft, sweet strains of an unknown song. The knife dropped from the young boy's hands. His head sank lower in his breast. The stranger's quiet voice had lulled the tired boy to sleep.

Then, all of a sudden, the stillness was broken by the ringing of the bells telling of the birth of the Saviour.

The Christmas morning was bright and cheery. When Benito awoke, the sunshine was streaming into the room through the windows. He remembered the organ with a start. He felt very much frightened. He took the knife right away and looked for the part which he had left unfinished. He could not find it. Both sides of the organ were done in the same beautiful way. More than that, they were beautifully painted. Benito did not know how to paint. Who had finished the organ and painted it while he was asleep?

Then Benito remembered the strange visitor of the night. He looked at the organ again. The flowers looked so fresh he knew they would never wither, and the birds looked so gay, he knew they would always remain so. He looked at the leaves. The moonbeams were still there.

Then he looked at his hand. It was completely healed.

For the first time in many years tears stood in Benito's eyes. But he was too simple and good of heart to be afraid. Lifting his eyes up to the sky, he murmured softly to himself, "God, I thank You for all Your kindness."

white kite up, up, higher and higher, although he tried hard to pull the kite down. The string was humming loud and he had all he could to prevent himself from being lifted up into the air. The white kite grew smaller and smaller and then suddenly, he fell back on the sand. The string had snapped broken and the "limbas" was gone sailing in the wind farther and farther away.

Perto sat on the sand sobbing. The "limbas" was fast disappearing, his dear, brave, little "limbas." He saw the broken half of the string gleaming in the wind and noticed that the little kite was flying lower and lower. Quickly wiping his eyes, he ran away in the direction taken by the "limbas."

Half an hour later, he found the "limbas" still flying over the roof of a nipa house. The string it carried had caught around a lamp post and the kite flew up and down as if trying to free itself.

Perto ran here and there looking for something. A policeman standing near the lamp post watched him as he ran. Perto found a long pole standing against the wall of a house. Without asking the owner any permission, Perto took the pole and went back to the street. He was about to reach the string caught around the lamp post when the policeman stopped him.

"Wait," the policeman said.

Perto wanted to cry again, but he stood still at the policeman's bidding. They saw the kite flying up and down. Sometimes it whirled round and round and then it would suddenly fall down again. As they watched the kite whirl again for the second time, it suddenly flew toward the wires. There was a hiss and a sudden light, and the kite burst into flame. The next moment it had turned into ashes.

"Did you see that?" asked the policeman.

Perto, pale with fright, nodded at the policeman. He would have died if he had touched the wires with the pole.