



FIFTH INTERVIEW

(A Short Story)

by ANTONIO B. SANTOS

I

He was a big bull of a man behind a shining desk, and when he spoke, he growled.

"Those people keep sending teachers we don't need and don't send what we ask for. We don't need any more industrial arts teachers. What we need are janitors—more and more janitors." The principal was barking now. "They have not sent a single janitor since July!"

Mr. Velasquez, the new teacher, appeared perfectly at ease. If Mr. Getulio thought of scaring him that way...

"Unfortunately, I am not good enough to be janitor. I understand, janitors get better pay than teachers and even assistant principals, what with the bonus and all."

The bull of a man behind the shining desk raised a thick eyebrow. That was new—self-assurance, even cockiness in a new teacher. Usually, they came in with their teeth rattling.

"Well, Mr. Getulio? Shall I go back to the superintendent and tell him you told me I am a damned surplus?"

Later, Mr. Velasquez told Miss Samson about that first interview. They both had a good laugh over it.

"But you must stop telling it to others," said Miss Samson. "If Mr. Getulio hears about it—"

But it was too good a story, and Mr. Velasquez was not the type to keep it from the other teachers.

2

Mr. Getulio banged a fist on the closely-typed report.

"You write effectively, Mr. Velasquez," growled the bull of a man. "In fact, you write too effectively for your own good."

"I only write when I have something to say, Mr. Getulio."

"And so you wrote this—this appraisal of our vocational courses, including the way the program is prepared."

"That program, Mr. Getulio, has been prepared for the convenience of academic teachers. You forgot all about the vocational courses."

"I prepared the program myself, Mr. Velasquez."

"Nevertheless, it is a bad program, Mr. Getulio!"

"Do you mean to tell me that you can prepare..."

Miss Samson had a good laugh at him that afternoon when he had to stay late and get the program ready the next morning.

3

A minute after Mr. Getulio arrived at his desk that Monday morning, he shouted for Mr. Velasquez to see him right away. A few minutes afterward, when Mr. Velasquez pushed himself in, a torrent of abuse broke out.

"This—this insolent letter, did you write it?" The muscles stood like stout welts on the jaw of Mr. Getulio. He looked ready to jump out of his swivel chair.

"That looks like my signature," replied Mr. Velasquez calmly.

"Apparently, there are many things you still have to learn. Do you know what insubordination means?"

"I think I know. The *Service Manual* is precise about it. You just write a note to the superintendent, and zzzp! my throat is slit."

Now Mr. Velasquez was essentially a creative artist, so every retelling of that violent interview became more and

more elaborate and more and more biased. Only Miss Samson was scared. She was sure he would be dismissed soon, and what would he do for a job? She was becoming more and more concerned about his "security."

"And do you know what I told him? I told him, 'See here, Mr. Getulio, I am a teacher. It is my duty to uphold the teaching profession. Make me work like a teacher, and I'll wear my fingers to the bone. I'll go to your house and work on those built-in shelves of yours, but I go there as a teacher, not as a laborer. I have big boys. I'll bring them with me, and they will work for you, but they will be learning something. And I'll be teaching them. But I'll be damned if I work for you to help finish your house free.'"

4

"He must have heard about the strike," thought Mr. Velasquez as he pushed the door in answer to the urgent summons of Mr. Getulio. "Let him bawl me out, just let him." Whenever he entered that office, he always felt his muscles toned up for a fight.

"Sit down, Velasquez," said Mr. Getulio.

"I am teaching a class, Mr. Getulio. I have to hurry back."

Mr. Getulio reddened.

"Goodness, man, don't I know that?"

"Thanks, but that class is rough and noisy. If you don't mind..."

Mr. Getulio leaned back and creaked back and forth in his swivel chair.

"Why are you always so antagonistic, Velasquez? You have lots of talent, you know."

"Thank you, Mr. Getulio. It's a bad habit, I suppose."

"Are you like that to everybody?"

"Not to everybody, Mr. Getulio. Only to—to—people I don't like."

"Yes?"

"Yes, and to those who don't like me."

Mr. Getulio laughed.

"It can't be clearer said. Well, I don't suppose you will be glad to hear

it, nor do I expect you to be grateful, but now that Mr. Dacumos has been transferred to the General Office, I have recommended you to take his place... You don't seem glad. You make me almost regret having recommended you at all."

"But I don't understand, Mr. Getulio. I have been here less than a year. Besides, sir, there are others..."

Mr. Velasquez hated himself. He had suddenly lost his self-assurance. He was humiliating himself. He had even addressed that man "sir." And he had become suddenly apologetic!

"You have the confidence of the other teachers. They elected you president of the teachers' club. I don't see why you can't deserve my confidence, too."

As he walked back to his class, he realized to his horror that Mr. Getulio had recommended him only to put a stop to a petition requesting the removal or transfer of the bully. Very neat way of saving himself. Now, he was indebted to the bully. And, worst humiliation of all, he had slipped and called him "sir"! Just like any other at last, calling him "sir."

5

Miss Samson was so happy for him. It was she who lingered longest, defying the teasing to come the moment she reached the teachers' room. Mr. Velasquez sat down behind his desk without speaking for ten full minutes. Then with a decided move, he turned to the typewriter and quickly dashed off a letter. Without hesitation, he signed all four copies. Without a word, he gave a copy to Miss Samson. With three

YOUR WATCH SET RIGHT, BUT
WITH GOOD, GENUINE PARTS

By

Leoncio Cordero

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copies clipped neatly, he went to see Mr. Getulio.

"Sit down, Velasquez."

Mr. Velasquez smiled and sat down. For the first time in two years he sat down in the presence of Mr. Getulio.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he said and lighted a Chesterfield.

Mr. Getulio gaped.

"You are assistant principal now, Velasquez."

"Thank to you, Mr. Getulio."

"And as part of the administration, you should uphold all rules—including that on smoking."

Mr. Velasquez laughed and blew a big ring of smoke across the desk.

"I don't mind confessing a few things to you now, Mr. Getulio," he said. "You see, whenever I entered this place, I always hated myself because I was uneasy and self-conscious. But I have always managed to fight that sneaking fear and kept my self-respect. Now, I am glad to tell you that I have at last liberated myself from fear."

Mr. Getulio laughed.

"That's a new one," he said. "And I thought you are the only one in the school who has never been afraid of me."

"In a way, I was. And I hated myself for it. I hated my work. I hated the whole thing because I suspected I was beginning to be afraid."

"Well, I'm glad you are a human being, after all."

"Especially, the last time I came here, when you told me you had recommended me to be assistant principal, I had gone down so low as to grovel at your feet."

"You were merely being polite, Velasquez."

"I called you 'sir!'"

"You were merely being polite."

"I'll tell you something now. We were going to petition against you. We had parents' signatures, too. I was to

be their spokesman. I got myself appointed assistant principal instead."

Mr. Getulio burst out laughing. Mr. Velasquez did not laugh. He stood up and laid the letter on the glass top of the desk, facing Mr. Getulio.

"My letter of resignation, Mr. Getulio, effective now."

Mr. Getulio could not follow.

"But why? Why at this time, of all times?"

"There is no more opportune time."

"But what will you do?"

"What will I do? It's a poor vocational teacher who can't even get a job for himself, Mr. Getulio."

"But I don't get it. Now of all times, when you have already got out of the classroom, when your upward rise has begun..."

Mr. Velasquez laughed.

"I don't think you will ever understand it, Mr. Getulio. I'd rather not explain. You see, I came here two years ago and all this time I have not learned to be at ease with you. Instead, I learned to be afraid. I have seen, too, that you are afraid of the superintendent, even more afraid than I am of you. And I suppose the superintendent..."

"You have to have discipline," said Mr. Getulio weakly.

Mr. Velasquez shrugged his shoulders.

"As a teacher, I felt free. At least, I did not care if I lost my little job. Now, I am beginning to be afraid. I have to be careful. I am now on the up and up. How nice. My ambition will keep me from opening my mouth and saying the things a free man should say."

Mr. Velasquez got up and went to the door. He turned back.

"I'll have to get my clearance ready," he said.

At the door he paused a moment. It needed more nerve to face the woman he knew was waiting there. He pushed open the door.

Presidential . . .

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must be exchanging hands in connection with the purchase and sale of surplus property and other commodities. There is plenty of money around, and yet there seems to be very little of it for teachers. Do you remember the Ancient Mariner who sailed where there was water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink? Do you remember Tantalus and how he was tantalized to death? This nonsense should be put a stop to. You and you and you—let us do our part to put a stop to starvation in the midst of plenty!

16. We have written letters to the President of the Philippines, to the President of the Senate, and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, asking them to sponsor a pension bill for teachers. We indicated that our best teachers are leaving the government service to seek "greener pastures" elsewhere, that fully 75% of our teachers have had no professional training, and that bright young people are not being attracted to prepare themselves for teaching. Teaching is losing; education is losing; the future generation is being doomed by neglect or purblindness or something else.

17. On the first week of May the *PPSTA Practice Tests* will come off the press. Those who send their ₱2.00 before May 10 may get their copies postpaid. Those who order copies and pay after May 10 should add 20 centavos in stamps for postage. We are putting out only a limited edition, just for service, so the sooner you make paid reservations, the better chances you have. The book is being printed with the courtesy of the Arellano High School Teachers' Club.

18. By the way, we do not hear enough from you. Can't you shout a

little louder? The Educator is your loud-speaker, remember that.

19. We have plans to go on the air over KZFM, most powerful radio station in the Philippines, so we can chat with teachers in Mindanao, Batanes, etc. Lend us a helping hand—only P1 annually—and you can get enough entertainment from your admission fee.

20. We have received some nominations for Executive Secretary-Treasurer. Division Associations should send in their nominations before the end of April so these can be taken into consideration by the Board of Directors.

B. Bills in Congress (introduced in the first session but not yet acted upon)

8. Congressman Camacho of Bataan: H. No. 4, fixing the minimum basic salary for public school teachers at P100 in the provinces and P120 in the chartered cities.

9. Congressmen Tait of the 1st district of the Mountain Province, Albano of the 2nd district of Ilocos Sur, and Samonte of the 2nd district of Ilocos Norte: H. No. 23, fixing the basic monthly salary of public school teachers at P100 in the provinces and P120 in the chartered cities; P150 for district supervisors, and P170 for subject supervisors in the chartered cities.

10. Congressman Barretto of the 1st district of Laguna; H. No. 97, fixing the minimum salary for public school teachers at P100 a month in the provinces and P120 in the chartered cities; provided, that every five years of continuous, efficient, and faithful service entitles teachers to an automatic increase of 10%.

11. Congressman Nietes of Antique: H. No. 109, fixing the minimum salary of P120 for elementary school teachers in the chartered cities, and P100 for teachers in the provinces and municipalities; provided, that Philippine Normal School graduates who are civil

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