

# LOYALTY'S LABOR LOST

(A Short Story)

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Miss Reyes hurried to school early that crisp morning in November. Word, confidential news, had been relayed to their school that the DS would be coming to visit them the next day and she realized that she had so many things to make up and do. Her lesson plans had some vacant blocks yet unfilled and they were supposed to have been lessons taught in the past days. She had taken so much interest and time in developing her pupils' skills in the Physical Education and Extra-curricular Activities that she always almost forgot that lesson plans should be taken care of every-day.

Take Monday, for instance. The minute she started the sway balance steps and zamba steps (the latter had been taught the teachers at a Physical Education Conference but some teachers failed to hear that they should not extend it to the pupils) groups of people came to take a look and watch the proceedings. With great pride and satisfaction in knowing that her teachings were much appreciated, she had prolonged the period and it was quite dark when she went home exuberant and highly elated but feeling so hungry with a parched throat and aching limbs. (She was demonstrator and musician all in one.) After supper she was too tired to do any more work or lesson planning so she readily went to sleep.

Then last Tuesday, the San Roque softball team came over. Mr. de Guzman, the head teacher, was one of the umpires; Miss Cruz, one of the teachers, was one of the scorers; while Miss Reyes was leader of the cheering squad. The rooters were most active during the whole of the first five innings when the home team was taking the lead with a score of 15-28. "Hey San Roque, talo na!" "Hey San Roque, talo na!" sounded and echoed between blasts of "O-o-o-o-o-o," "Run," "Safe," "Out," and "Play first" until the tide of the game turned at the end of the sixth inning when the score became a tie. It was then that Miss Reyes believed that one of the umpires was becoming partial and Mr. de Guzman too soft and yielding. There was a long-heated discussion which almost came to fisticuffs if the rain which was hovering for quite a time did not so providentially fall. There was a scamper for cover and the game ended. That night Miss Reyes was too shaken and exhausted to attend to her lesson plans.

Wednesday, that was yesterday, there was a wedding in one of the best families in the barrio. At ten-thirty a jeep parked in front of the school to fetch the three teachers. There was plenty of food and guests. It was one of those exciting and long remembered experiences in the life of every barrio and small-town teacher, for next to the new couple, the three were

the most popular in the gathering. It was two o'clock when they returned to the school. What with the "lechon" and other delectable dishes it was so difficult to resist the urge to sleep. Teaching had to drag along. Miss Reyes sat herself on one of the chairs in front and proceeded with "Read the part—," "Next," Next."

That afternoon the Principal in the Central school had relayed the confidential information and now they were all agog. In the evening Miss Reyes tried to write some of her back plans but she felt so tired and sleepy she had to stop without finishing them.

And now this morning as she hurried to school a bright idea flashed across her hard-pressed mind. Why it was just the thing and so easy! She almost ran but she recalled "teacher's dignity" being jeopardized. Immediately she reached her room she just opened the window near her table and hurriedly turned the pages of her lesson plan. She began to write "Same as yesterday," "Same as Sept. 10," "Continued," "Same," "Continuation of yesterday" on the vacant blocks. Within a short time she was through. She inspected the class Register. She was shocked. Ye Gods! She always forgot to ask the birth date of her pupils. She got a pencil and tentatively placed some dates. "Nora Tigas must be ten years old now. Let me see, she must have been born sometime in 1937." She wrote 4-10-47. She computed the other ages in the same manner. "I can still change this after the visit. As it is now it is up-to-date"

Some pupils had arrived and had opened the other windows.

"Clean the room children," she instructed. "Our Division Superintendent is coming. Ana and Martina, get

rags and wipe the floor. Nora, sweep the walls and the ceiling. Rita, the porch."

She looked out of the window. "Boys, pick up the pieces of paper. Mario, sweep the ground. Who has nice potted plants at home? Pedro and Juan. Alright, you two run home quickly now and bring your potted plants here. You will also take them home this afternoon."

"Oh, hello! Miss Cruz, I didn't see you come. Are you ready?" she called as she saw the other teacher also giving last minute instructions to her pupils.

"I'm scared," Miss Cruz replied. "I just do not know what to do. What time do you think will they be coming?"

"I do not know. I hear they will be in the Central for lunch. They may be here in the morning before that time or in the afternoon," Miss Reyes answered.

"Who will be with the DS?" the other asked.

"I hear the Academic Supervisor and our District Supervisor. Maybe the Principal is coming along."

"I wonder," Miss Cruz said, "what else we need to prepare or do. Oh yes! Did Mr. de Guzman tell you if we shall prepare anything to eat?"

"No, let us ask him."

They walked quickly to where Mr. de Guzman was supervising the last minute planting of "espada plants" along the borders of the sidewalk and laying of lines of stones beside these for support.

"Mr. Guzman," Miss Reyes approached. "We were asking each other if we are to prepare anything to eat."

"God!" Mr. de Guzman exclaimed. "I forgot about that. Now, let us see, what do you suggest?"

"Ice cream," Miss Cruz suggested.

"Good, but where can we get ice now?" Mr. de Guzman remarked.

"I know," Miss Reyes hit upon an easy one. "Let us have *nilugawang manok*. We will request Ka Iliang to cook now. If they do not come this morning, it can be heated this afternoon."

"Yes, yes," echoed the two.

"And Mameng made *puto* today."

Mr. de Guzman went to Ka Iliang while the other two went to Mameng.

At eight o'clock the classes had started, although some pupils were still in the yard—some sweeping, others fixing the stones, and a few picking up the bits of sticks and other dirt.

The regular classroom routine was dispensed with so that the pupils could be given last minute instructions on how to greet the visitors, how to stand, how to walk, how to pass in and out, how to hold the book when reading, how to speak, how to behave when a visitor enters the room, who would recite often when a visitor observes, what to answer to certain questions, and so forth. The pupils were made to stand, their hair combed, their hands and feet inspected—those with dirty limbs were sent out to wash, their books and other room equipment were re-arranged.

Recess time came and still the visitors had not arrived. So after the pupils had entered there was again the picking up of pieces of paper, candy and cake wrappers, cleaning of the floor, and fixing things.

Again the recall of last minute instructions on behavior when the visitors should arrive.

When the pupils were dismissed there was a loud whoop and Miss Reyes became pale for at that moment a shiny automobile was stopping at

the gate. The crowd of pupils converged at the gate and suddenly paused. A chorus of 'Good morning, Sirs' filled the air. The crowd opened and the beaming faces of three respectable-looking individuals appeared. The three teachers easily recognized Mr. Lopez, the Principal, and Mr. Flores, the District Supervisor. The third person was not known to them. Perhaps he was the DS, but a fourth man appeared and so they could not be certain of their conjectures. Meanwhile, the children had surrounded the new car to touch and feel its streamlined smoothness.

For a few seconds the visitors stood still and surveyed the general view of the school. Mr. de Guzman took advantage of this situation to approach the group, although he was most disturbed for he remembered that not one word was said to the pupils about not touching or drawing finger lines on the smooth sides of the new car. The two lady teachers could not at once decide whether to go and send the children away or just ignore the situation. They decided on the latter and hoped the DS didn't notice.

"Cleaners," Miss Reyes and Miss Cruz called in agitated tones. "They are here. Clean quietly and fast and when they enter our room, stop cleaning and say, 'Good morning, Sirs!'"

It was a most impressive moment for the three new teachers. Mr. Flores presented them to the Superintendent. The fourth man was the Division Academic Supervisor.

After a brief inspection of the grounds and rooms, the Division Superintendent called them together at the porch and said, "Mr. de Guzman, I want to congratulate you, Miss Reyes and Miss Cruz, for the great achievement you have made in this school. The improvements you have done are so evident."

Mr. Flores told them that they could not stay long for the "merienda" for it was almost lunch time and the Central teachers had prepared for that.

It was only when the visitors had left that the three teachers again found time to express the thoughts foremost in their three minds.

"Do you think he had noticed that the children touched his car?" Mr. de Guzman asked.

"Those idiots," Miss Reyes exclaimed. "I shall teach them tomorrow. Look!" and she pointed to two pieces of rags left in the middle front of the room. "Do you think those were there when the DS entered?"

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struggle, the nations losing out and feeling eventually the pinch of hungry stomachs are the ones which start trouble. If it were possible to establish an Economic Commission for the World in which there are no filibusters but only statesmen who are truly and sincerely interested in obliterating the economic demand and supply so that all mankind will be equally benefited, maybe something will have been started to remove once and for all the source of all wars—the empty stomach. Ah, but we are asking for the millennium; and we are only teachers, not world economist; not even ECAFE kibitzers!

7. What strikes us as ironical in this business of the UNESCO is the fact that the countries which should be the subject of UNESCO's solicitude are not in the UNESCO. Which probably means that while the UNESCO nations are working so hard for peace, those outside the organization cannot be reached by their efforts. In other words, we are trying hard to promote peace among people who are already peace-loving, and our efforts do not reach those who are bent on creating trouble for the world. Are we really getting anywhere?

8. And talking of peace reminds us of the General who is in the UN as representative of the Philippines. He has made a name for the Philippines and for himself (himself, mainly), in his efforts to help the world seek and fashion the instruments of peace. Would it not be a good idea to ask him to come back here and try his skill at the job which certain generals of the army and the Great Guerilla Supremo himself have bungled so well? We might yet be convinced that the tongue is mightier than the bazooka.

9. In the meantime, we teachers must do our job. We must keep on preaching that the surest road to peace is an intelligent understanding of the lives and labors of other peoples and of cultivating a genuine love for them no matter what their creed, color or conscience. International brotherhood is a lofty and far-way ideal, but there is nothing else more worthy of our efforts as mentors of the citizens of tomorrow.

If we cannot say FINIS to atom-bomb manufacture, the bomb will finish us! Before that happens, and while we have this chance to say so, let us wish one and all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!