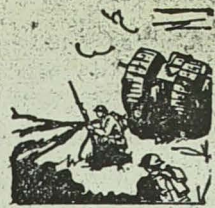


"I am still able to write this," writes Mr. Faigao from Cebu, "because I am a teacher."

"KODOMO . . . SENSE-I . . ."

(Short Story) By C. FAIGAO



I collected my thoughts and surveyed my surroundings. There were about twenty people, virtual prisoners, in the kitchen. There was a young, flat-nosed, Nippongo-speaking Chinaman who acted as interpreter. There was Akoy, a neighbor of ours, a tall gangling Ichabod Crane of a man, who was now attending to the cooking. And there were three women, one of whom, I recalled, was a young girl who used to come to our house to buy *pinokpok* from my brother.

I helped in the slicing of the gabi leaves—I did not like the tall, tattooed Jap to see me doing nothing.

Between slices, I thought and imagined hard. In the afternoon they would march us to the town—we would be staggering beneath heavy burdens—many days in a dark cell perhaps—hard labor under the heat of the sun—and then oblivion. Then I thought of my frail wife who had escaped to the other side of the brook. Having seen the look of lust in the eyes of the soldiers, she had run away, leaving our seventeen-day old baby on the floor of our house.

I began thinking of means of escape.

The Chinaman promised to help, but I waited until after dinner. A hungry Jap, like any other hungry man, would not be in a mood to listen.

The next minutes sped nervously away—the movements of the frightened women—the young girl with the look of annihilation and doom on her face. Where was my wife? And was my child still on the floor?

Three more jabbering Japs came up—and I saw more loot: the few clothes I had left from so much running, our silver and china, and a small basket

that contained the baby's diapers.

"You must eat," I told the other captives. "We may not eat again in many days. We may never eat at all anymore." Inside the house, the Japs devoured hunks of boiled chicken swimming in gabi broth.

After the meal, I pleaded with the tall, half-naked savage of a Jap. "I must go," I said, "I have children." I dangled a pass before his eyes, the one I had got from the town the day before and the one I had brought with me all the way from Cebu. I was not a soldier, I said. *Watasi wa sense-i deshita Cebu ni*. Lucky I had picked up a few words and he understood somehow.

Now I knew I should have run away like my brother instead of trusting on those slips of paper.

The Japs were adamant. *You go town. No go town... houses burn... tomorrow no go... patay.*

"Oke, oke," I said. "I go." An hour before that, on the yard of my house, I had seen death gleaming from the tip of a Batangas *ballsong*. "*You sordier Manira?*" For reasons written only in heaven, the *ballsong* did not descend.

"I go, *san?*"

"Oke, oke."

You can have all the mountains of Romblon all to yourself, I thought. And you can have the whole darn Co-Prosperity Sphere all to yourself; but I am a free man again.

That night we escaped farther into the mountains—in the total night, in the half-rain.

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This account should end right here, but I am not writing a short story. I am putting down a personal record of fright and fear and an ideal.

Three days later, way farther up in the mountains of Lagting, Romblon, I had time to collect my thoughts again and put my feelings in order.

The tall, evil-looking Jap was a member of the murder gang of Toyama. What had melted his heart to set me free?

In a few more days his name was to spread throughout Romblon Island like a syllable of terror. In a few more days he was to spill blood on the uplands. In a few more days the live body of the young girl was to be thrown into the flames of her own burning house. In a few more days the tall Jap would be called *Pika*—his body was tattooed—

and would spread terror even to the surrounding islands.

What had softened *Pika* towards me?

Then I remembered. An hour before I was set free, he had come up the house with the other soldiers, jabbering in Nippongo. I was able to pick up two words: *kodomo... sense-i... kodomo... sense-i...* child... teacher. And the stern look had vanished from his eyes and he was smiling.

There are little things in life that can break even the hardest man. Did *Pika* way down in Japan have a child of his own? Did he remember the slow, quiet teacher of his childhood days in a little Japanese prefecture?

In these days of comparative peace, sometimes I can hug the idea that I am still able to write this because I am a teacher.



TWO PROBLEMS

FRANCISCO A. ESQUIVEL
Batangas High School

This is not to belittle the choice of the delegates to the Representative Assembly, but rather in the performance of such heavy duties we are faced with a problem! How far can our present Board of Directors carry through our objectives? We must only remember that the members of Congress are wise politicians and the influence of politics often times spoil big plans and honest objectives. The task ahead is heavy and numerous and unless those entrusted with these duties and responsibilities are wiser politicians too, and unless we teachers have a strong backing in Congress, our dreams and objectives will be far from realization. A Congressman from the ranks of schoolmen is the need of the hour.

Another obstruction we have to consider in the progress of the association is the possible lack of support of the community. The organizers of the association have anticipated beforehand to be able to create a better understanding and good will between teachers and the community. The Association is not secure unless we have the full support of the people, and its success depends very much on the success of Parent-Teacher Associations.