

# A Poor Boy and A Stranger

(A Story)

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Victor

It was recess time in a barrio school. The children were out of their rooms. Some were studying their lessons in the

shade close to the side of the school building. A few were eating fruit and candy on the porch. Most of the children were playing under a wide-spreading acacia tree. Two swings hung from two big branches—one for girls and the other for boys. Swinging seemed to be the only form of pastime enjoyed by those barrio children during their recess period.

On this particular day, a gentleman, a stranger, perhaps, in that barrio, sat on a bamboo bench placed close to the trunk of the tree. He was interested in the children at play. Among those who gathered around the swing was a boy who had never had the chance to set his foot on the board at the end of the rope. How could he? The other boys did not give him a chance. They would push him away whenever he went near the swing. At last, tired perhaps of waiting for a chance, the boy went to the bench and sat down. The school bell rang and the children ran toward the schoolhouse, formed their lines, and then marched into their rooms.

The thought of that poorly-clad boy, deprived of his chance to enjoy him-

self by those thoughtless, selfish boys, bothered the stranger's mind as he sat alone on that crude bench under the tree. In



Stranger

order to forget it, he left the place and went to a cornfield which was just a stone throw away. Men, women, and children were busy gathering the ears of corn. He watched the harvesters with interest but soon the scene under the acacia tree came back to him and his peace of mind was again disturbed. He pitied the poor boy very much. He wished he could do something for him.

Soon the school gong sounded and the children marched out of their rooms. One of the harvesters, a woman whose clothes were almost in rags, stepped out of the cornfield with something wrapped in banana leaf. She was going to the school building. On the way, a boy met her. The woman gave him the little package. Then she went back to the cornfield. The boy ran to the shade under the acacia tree.

"That's the poor boy and the woman is, no doubt, his mother," muttered the stranger. "That package is his lunch."

Without a moment's delay, the gentleman left the cornfield and went to the bench under the tree. The children, the same children he saw at recess, were there. They were not playing then.

(Please turn to page 134)

## A POOR BOY AND A . . .

*(Continued from page 117)*

They were opening their lunch packages. Benches around the acacia tree were all occupied by the boys. The girls were on the porch of the school building.

"Judging from their provisions and the clothes they wear, these are children of well-to-do people," the gentleman said to himself.

In some of the opened packages, he saw fried fish, fried chicken, bread, rice, candy, and fruit. In the others, there were simply rice and fish or rice and meat and banana.

He looked around for the poorly-clad boy. He was not among them. Where was he? Oh, yes, there he was. On a broad banana leaf on the ground just a few feet away from the meeting place of the sunlight and shade, the boy was opening his package. The gentleman was standing halfway between the boys on the bench and the poor boy on the ground.

The poor boy stood up and approached the gentleman. "Sir," he said, "we are very poor. My provision consists only of corn and dried fish. I think you are a stranger here for I have not seen you before. It is noon time and you must be hungry. You are welcome to a poor boy's dinner," he concluded as he pointed to the banana leaf on the ground.

"Thank you," the gentleman replied. "What is your name?"

"My name is Victor Carale," the boy told him.

"You are very kind, Victor," said the gentleman. "Oh, it is

not the food that counts. It is your thoughtfulness and hospitality. I am a stranger here and I am really hungry. I am sure I shall enjoy your meal just as I would if I ate a rich man's dinner."

Victor's face beamed with joy as he listened to the gentleman's kind words. The two then sat down on the ground and ate the simple meal on the banana leaf. Just before the meal was over, Victor ran to the teacher's house which was just behind the school building and soon came back with a glass of water. He offered it to the stranger who thanked him again for his thoughtfulness.

The other boys were just silent spectators of this unusual barrio scene. They were too astonished to make any remark. They could not understand why the good-looking gentleman ate on the ground with a clumsy-looking boy.

The gentleman tore a sheet off his memorandum book and wrote something on it. Then he drew out a bill from his pocketbook and folded it with the paper. He tore a piece of the banana leaf and wrapped the note and bill with it. Just then the school bell rang and the children ran to their lines.

"Wait a minute, Victor," the gentleman said to the boy. "Please give this little package to your teacher and thank you once more."

The gentleman went away.

Victor ran to the head teacher who was standing on the porch and handed him the little package. "This is for you from that gentleman," he said

pointing to the stranger who was heading his way to the provincial road.

The other boys laughed and the girls giggled as Victor handed the banana leaf package to the teacher. They thought that the gentleman was joking. They expected to see something funny inside of that package—a worm perhaps. Even the teacher was wondering what it could be. At last the teacher opened the package. There was no worm inside. There was nothing funny in it. Wrapped in that piece of banana leaf, was a note and folded with the note was a five-peso bill. The teacher read the note silently. His face brightened. Then with a smile, he addressed the children who were ready to march in.

"Here is something unusual," he said. "Listen to me while I read the message from that gentleman who has just gone away."

The note ran:

Sir:

*In my two-hour stay in this barrio, particularly on your school grounds, I noticed that one of your pupils, the bearer of this note, was not happy because his schoolmates would not play with him. Neither would they give him a chance to play on the swing. He is poor. I believe, but he is good and hospitable. He is the only boy who invited me to a luncheon. All your school boys' hearts put together cannot compare with the big heart of this poor boy. Please give him this five-peso bill. He has needs, I believe, which his parents cannot afford. please tell the other children to*