

THE GOLDEN IMAGE

By ALICE FRANK

(Continued from



THE river, now that it was about to enter the sea, was deep and quiet, and had only a moderate current. The boys, although they did not know it, were about thirty miles north of Pablo's home on a part of the seacoast that was very thinly populated.

While they were still about a fourth of a mile from the road, which at that point ran along the shore, they followed their path around a curve and found themselves face to face with a group of Moros!

These Moros wore exceedingly tight trousers and red fezzes, except for one who wore a fringed turban to show that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and should be addressed as *Hadji*. In their belts were Kris of striking design.

Some of them were on the shore, the others in their *vintas*, or outrigger canoes, in which they had sailed up from the Sulu Islands.

These Moros are often called Sea Gypsies, because they live mainly on the water. Most of the year they had spent in their boats in the channels of the swamps of southern Mindanao and the Sulu Islands in quest of *casalote* bark,

which is used in the manufacture of tuba. Now that the weather was settled and calm they had sailed northwards to sell this bark. And under the bark they carried something more precious—cans of opium that had been smuggled up from Borneo.

These Moros were now very happy, for they had sold the last of their valuable cargo. They had much money and were ready to start home.

But their ancestors were pirates, and they still have the instincts of pirates. So when they saw the boys, one of them said in their own language, "Let's catch those boys! They don't look as if they belong to anyone."

"Your suggestion is good," replied another. "My grandfather was stolen as a boy from this very coast."

"We will gain the favor of Allah by converting them to the True Faith," said the Hadji, "We will do them the favor of saving their souls, and we will get us some slaves. It is all good. After we catch them, we will gamble to see which of us will get them."

So they started after the boys looking very fierce and blood-thirsty. Pablo and Ulan sprinted away along the path as fast as they could go. Their muscles were hard and firm; and they could run faster than the Moros, whose muscles

OF SRI VISAYA

LIN BRYANT

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were flabby from sitting so constantly in their boats.

As soon as they had gained a lead of a hundred yards on the Moros, Ulan pulled Pablo into the forest, and led the way as fast as he could in spite of the thick vegetation. Their pursuers also left the path and turned into the jungle, but the boys were getting a little farther head.

Soon they reached a cliff and started to skirt its base. They had gone along it only a short way when Pablo stumbled and tried to keep from falling by catching a vine and throwing his weight against the side of the

cliff. But, greatly to his surprise, he fell through the vines right into the cliff, or, as it turned out to be, into the entrance to a hole or cave in the cliff. Ulan heard the fall, quickly jumped in after Pablo, and with lightning speed rearranged the vines over the entrance so skillfully that no one would imagine there was anything but solid stone behind them.

Just then the Moros, panting, passed so close to them that they could almost

have stretched out their arms and touched them. The boys crouched, holding their breath until after the Moros had passed, then relaxed and looked about them.

They were in a small, uninteresting looking cave. By the dim light filtering through the vines they could see what appeared to be a hole in the far end.

Pablo, always inquisitive, just had to explore this hole. When he had groped his way into it only a few yards, there was a great squeaking and fluttering, and he suddenly emerged.

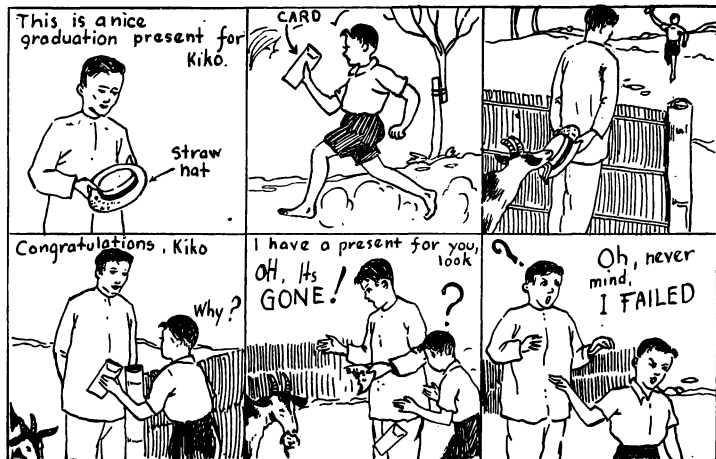
"It's just bats," he said to Ulan, a little angry with himself for having been so startled. "But I can just barely see a little coming from the other end of this hole, and the hole is bigger after you once get into

it. Perhaps there is another way out. Come on and let's see."

So the two boys started into the hole, which promptly became quite a passageway. They felt carefully ahead of them before taking each step for fear that they might fall into a hole or chasm. On their left they felt rather than saw a large high cavern opening onto their passageway, and from some place within it they heard the trickle



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of falling water.

But they kept walking toward the atom of light which Pablo had first seen; and now their passageway became light enough so that their eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, could see tolerably well, and they did not have to feel their way along. And soon they came out into a huge cavern. But the center of the top had fallen in—part of the rocky debris was still there in a pile in the center of the room. It was through this hole in the roof that the light entered.

The boys were at once interested in what they saw. The

room in which they stood was almost perfectly round, and the roof seemed to go up into a kind of a dome. The hole, which acted as a skylight, was just slightly to one side of the center, and it was small in proportion to the size of the room.

"Say, Ulan," said Pablo. He paused startled by the echoes that came back to him, and then continued in a lower tone. "This is a *great* place. If I were a pirate and had any treasure to hide, I surely would hide it in here. Do you suppose anyone ever *did* hide anything here? Let's look around thoroughly."

They started to go around the large room, looking carefully along its sides, but they

had not finished their exploration when daylight began to fade. The cave at best was only dimly lighted, so the boys had to end their search and pass the night just where it found them. Bats flew over them and out into the world above. Soon a star shone through their skylight. It seemed to connect them in a way with the outside world, and they felt cheered at sight of it.

And well they needed some cheer and comfort, for the poor boys had had nothing to eat since morning, and had had the two narrowest escapes of their lives.

(To be continued)