

KIDNAPPED

By Amparo C. de los Reyes*



TODAY you read of sons of rich men being kidnapped by gangsters for ransom, but how would you like to read of a little boy who was kidnapped by "a matanda sa punso" because the *matanda* took a liking for him?

The little boy was named Mariano. He lived in the country, in Tiaong, Guiginto, many years ago way back in the 1880's. He was my mother's uncle.

One afternoon his father sent him to fetch their carabao home from the pasture. He went away before sunset; but the angelus bell had rung, the evening prayers had been said and their supper had cooled on the *dulang*, yet Mariano did not show up.

His father became uneasy. He went to his cousin's house to inquire if he had seen Mariano pass by. No, they had not seen him. He went to another cousin's house—Mariano might have stopped there. They had not seen him either. He went still to another cousin's house, to an uncle's, then to an aunt's and pretty soon, the whole barrio knew that Mariano was missing.

In those days if a boy was missing, one did not notify the police. Instead all the

men turned out to search for the missing person with lighted torches held high to lighten the gloom of the night and with glittering bolos strapped to their hips.

That evening there must have been at least fifty men in the searching party. The town crier was with them beating his huge drum and stopping once in every while to call Mariano's name. They had gone through the woods and around it twice; shouting "Hu! Mariano-o-o-o-o-o-o!" till they were hoarse but still there was no sign of him.

At midnight, weary and disheartened, they came slowly back. Mariano's father, however, lagged behind, thrusting his torch into the deep shadows, scanning every ditch into which the boy might have fallen.

They had passed the last clump of bamboos that crouched like a high shadow by the roadside and were turning into the village when they heard a sudden glad shout.

Mariano had been found. He was imprisoned in the clump of bamboos, wedged in so tightly that he could move neither hand nor foot. Mariano's father wept with joy but to their surprise when Mariano had

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been extricated from his person he struggled and would have broken away.

"I want to go with my grandfather!" he cried. "I must follow him or he will leave me behind. Let me go! Let me go!"

Then they knew that he had been bewitched. All the way home he kept trying to escape. He bit them, he scratched them, he scolded and cried; begging his unseen "grandfather" who seemed to be following them to rescue him.

When they reached home he did not recognize even his own mother. Instead he kept calling his grandfather, jumping up and down and behaving like a mad person.

Finally they had to tie him. They made him swallow a drink made from potent herbs that was said to be an antidote against witchery. They dressed him in *saya't baro* to disguise him from the *nu-no*. When these did not avail, they called the village priest. The reverend old man prayed over the bewitched boy and sprinkled holy water over him.

Towards morning, the boy stopped his mad cries and fell asleep. When he awoke, ten hours later, he was cured.

Then he told a strange story. He said he saw his grandfather sitting on a low mound under some bamboo trees. His grandfather had taken him upon his back and they had climbed a *duhat* tree. The *duhat* was not in season then, yet he claimed that they had gathered large, luscious berries better than any fruit he had ever eaten.

Afterward they went across the sugar cane fields. His grandfather, still carrying him on his back, had walked lightly on top of the sugar-canes and not even a leaf stirred or fell away.

His grandfather, he said, promised to show him many wonders when they reached his home but just then they heard the drum and saw the torches flaring through the

trees. So they hid in the Clump of bamboos, his grandfather cautioning him to keep quiet lest these "tulisanes" catch them.

"That old man was not your grandfather," they told him. "It must have been the 'matanda sa punso' who lived in a little mound guarding, so they say, priceless treasures below it. If he had taken you to his home, you might have seen those treasures. They should be worth seeing, yet who knows whether he would ever have let you come back?"