



SHALL WE MEET AGAIN?

(Short Story)

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We walked along the beach of Dewey Boulevard. The sun, about to set, lay wearily over the sea. Leisurely, I sat on one of the boulders facing the sea, and she, beside me, sighed.

"Fe," I called, "it was years that I haven't seen you. I followed your marriage in the papers like one who craves to know, even if knowing pains me."

"That was eight years ago. You were in States then. Weren't you happy to know the truth?"

"Of course, in a way, yes. Truth is beautiful even if it hurts," I countered.

"You have a right to know—but on second thought, it would be futile. Marriage, like thunder or earthquake or love, seldom comes, it just happens. I felt it was better that way for you and me. At least the suffering is short and the agony is brief."

"But if I no longer deserve that love, of all things, why deprive me from knowing how it all came about? I should at least understand."

"Well—perhaps, I would never know how to make you believe. And if I should succeed, you would not admit that I could be a woman with so fickle a heart. How could I make you understand that I got sick with typhoid fever, and that if not for his timely medication, I would have died? How could I make you believe that with those services and sacrifices given, my parents could not turn away his love? Perhaps you would only think that I am acting, making a good defense for myself," Fe explained.

"At least I have the consolation of knowing the truth from you. The truth is beautiful."

"Even if it hurts? Your heart would be bruised, I know. Then, perhaps, you would wish for death and death would not come! At least, I spared you that mental torture—the agony of—shall I say, of being brutally frank?" Fe continued.

Soon silence descended upon them with brooding wings as they watched before them the sun that gradually disappeared beyond the horizon. I lit a cigarette, and in silence, curled the smoke upward trying to capture my lost thoughts.

"Well," I broke out, not knowing what to say.

"Well," she sighed.

"What was done cannot be undone, but we can make things a little bit better. Don't you think so, Fe?"

"Maybe—but we cannot be born again and start life anew."

"Of course not. Surely, I do not mean that. I mean, if you excuse me for being rather personal, are you happy with the way things have turned out?" I asked.

"I am and I am not. Of course, happy for giving peace and satisfaction to my parents for consenting to this marriage and thus saving me life from death. At least, I have been trying to be so these eight years. But happiness as you picture it to me now, perhaps, I cannot have it."

"Why not?" I asked. "All you need is to desire happiness and you will have it. Happiness like love or hate, is relative."

"But how? Just now, my one happiness is to forget you, to close my memory to the past. And yet, I could not be happy."

"In which case," I answered, "you cannot be happy. In any formula for seeking happiness, first of all, one has to face reality. The moment you evade it, you fall off the tangent of this universe, and you cease to be a cog, a part of it. Things to embody happiness must be real, and the realities to be happiness must be true. The act of trying to forget is difficult. Forgetfulness has plenty of vigor and therefore harder to achieve. You may force yourself to forget what you dare not remember, but eventually the more you forget, the more you remember."

Fe smiled and with eyes half closed said, "Maybe you are right. But you cannot deny that. I accepted reality in obedience to my parents who, like the rest of them, desire their daughter to be with them, forever. But fate is irrational, and we are helplessly tossed about to suit its whims. Fate is not kind to us, and maybe it is better that we were not."

"But, what is fate compared to our will? The will is both free and not free as the fate is. If you fling a dead leaf into the air, it is carried hither and thither without vilotion. But if you toss a bird upward, the wind may hamper its flight and dash its brains against a rock, but while life persists, it will struggle hard to fly; its will modifies the wind's will. The average man is a leaf tossed hither and thither, but he who has lifted the veil from the face of life resembles the bird. He cannot dominate but, within limits, may direct his fate.

"But," Fe replied, "although endowed with life, the bird has no conception of boredom! she rapturously sings the same note forever. She has no purpose beyond existence. But our lives—must not one's life have a purpose?"

"Yes, of course. The purpose to seek happiness, the real glory of life. When we attain that, then we live, we do not simply exist—but live."

"Some happiness are not attainable. That much I have tried only to be disappointed in the end. If happiness for one is possible or attainable, then there will be no sorrows in this world. It will be a perfect heaven for all. But such is not the case."

"But," I returned, "happiness is relative. The difference between one's happiness and another's becomes finer and finer until it disappears. All things are possible in this world. That which may be found is worth the seeking. Seek—and perhaps you shall find. Who would ever dream, for instance, that I shall find you here, now, after all those eight years? But I have faith in seeking."

"I thought, it was our good luck to forget."

"How could I, Fe? To forget is just just to remember. Quite incredible but true. In truth, if I may confess—I still love you in spite of all. Now that I have found you, I am relieved, relieved of this anxiety and despair. And upon my soul, I shall not stop seeking until I find my real happiness with you."

She shook her head and gave me a sharp look, "No, no! That must not be!"

"Why not, Fe? Are you not willing to face reality?"

"But there is a gap between us now."

"Even then. We are predestined to be for each other. We have so many things in common, bound by one race and one fate—forever."

"Perhaps—in the same way as two parallel lines are drawn very close to each other—so close indeed that no third line, however thin, could be drawn between them."

"Will the two parallel lines ever meet?"

"Yes, of course. In infinity."

"But, dear me, how shall a man live when his heart is being crushed like iron upon an anvil? Here we are—I,

adoring you as my love—while you— you will not want to face reality and yet all the time seeking for that happiness and truth.”

“Do you forget that I am married, a mother of two boys and one girl? If my love for you was blasted, shall I still crumple the love of a mother to her little ones?” she returned doggedly.

I was silent, lost, wondering, not knowing what to say. And she continued. “Of course, you understand. You must understand!”

“But, Fe” I returned, “what has life in store for me? Like the good playmates that we were, we have grown together and played together until I left the Philippines. I have been used only to your ways. Believe me, without your care and love, I shall perish, I shall die.”

“We have to take life as it is. Two

ships that meet but cannot hail. Two figures on the coin that are always together but cannot face each other. What a life indeed, but still, there is beauty and satisfaction in self-discipline.”

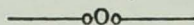
I was silent and she continued. “It is getting late. I must go and join my company before they look for me.”

I held her hand and asked, “If you must go, shall we meet again?”

“Next Sunday, perhaps, at the same time and the same place.”

Away she went and disappeared in the crowd at Luneta.

I was left alone. I passed from doubt from elation to profound depression—and always at the end, I rejected everything, as if I had been pouring sand from one hand to the other, spilling a little each time until nothing remained.



KAHIT AKO'Y BATA

(Tulang Pambata)

JOSE G. KATINDIG

Kahit ako'y munting bata
Ay mabait sa kapuwa;
Lubos akong naaawa
Sa inabot ng sakuna.

Pag may batang nagugutom,
Inihahati sa baon;
Ang hangad ko't laging layon,
Sa kapuwa'y makatulong.

Bilang tubo't pakinabang
Sa ganyan kong gawa't asal,
Daming batang kaibigan
Na sa aki'y nagmamahal.