

MARCOS IN THE

(A Folklore Story)

By ANTONIO C. MUÑOZ

ONCE a boy was in a thick forest. As he walked he seemed to be looking for something. Sometimes he would stop and examine the piles of leaves and twigs on the way. Then he would go on, only to stop again to see if something lay under a big stone by the pathside. At last, tired and disappointed, he sat down on a log and cried.

"What ails you, my boy?" said a voice from behind.

Marcos looked around and just a few feet away from him stood an old man. His



hair was as white as abaca fiber. The white beard which hang from his chin partly hid his breast. Wrinkles covered his cheeks and forehead. A pipe of bamboo and clay stuck in his mouth.

"What brings you to this place, son?" asked the old man.

"Oh, kind sir, my mother is sick, very sick, and I am here to get something that will cure her," Marcos replied.

"Who told you to come here and how do you know that the medicine that will cure your mother is in this forest?" inquired the old man.

"My mother cannot move. She cannot even move her arms. I consider her a dead woman among the living," explained Marcos.

"Last night," Marcos continued, "I dreamed that somewhere in this forest I shall find the remedy that will restore my mother to her former condition. When I woke up this morning, I lost no time in coming to this place. But I am discouraged, sir, for I don't even know what it is that I'm looking for."

"Don't worry, son, for I can help you and I will help you," the old man assured him.

"Please, sir, help me," begged Marcos. "If my mother gets well, I shall be your servant as long as you want me to be."

"Do you see that rock?" asked the old man pointing to a big black rock a stone's throw away from them. "Behind it is the entrance to the Black Cave. The cave has the shape of a tunnel about two hundred meters long. At the back part, the cave opens to a garden. In the garden, there are many plants. One and only one of them will restore your mother back to health. Its leaves are red. The flowers are white. The bark that covers the stem is blue. One leaf, one flower, and a piece of its bark are all that you need. Will you go and get them?"

"I will," readily answered Marcos.

"From the mouth of the cave to the garden, you will meet many obstacles and dangers but you should not be afraid. Destroy everything that may hinder you. Take this package of root powder with you. A little of it in your mouth will make you very strong. Now go on and may all come out



BLACK CAVE

as we hope for," concluded the old man.

Marcos put the little package in his pocket and after promising the old man that he would follow all of his instructions, he proceeded towards the black rock. Just behind the rock, Marcos saw an entrance. While it was broad daylight outside, the interior of the cave was as dark as a gloomy night. Marcos loved adventure and with his desire to help his mother he did not hesitate to enter the Black Cave. At first he could not see anything inside due perhaps to the intense darkness. He stood there, undecided which way to take. Soon he could make out the outline of things in the cave. Opposite him at a distance of about two hundred meters, he saw a tiny bright spot. He was sure it was the entrance to the garden. He started for that place but hardly had he moved a step when something struck him. He fell down but he did not stand up for fear of another attack from an unseen foe. Soon he felt something licking his body. In a short time he was wet. Then he noticed that he was being swallowed and before he could do anything to save himself, he was inside the mouth of a huge snake. It was then that he remembered the root powder the old man gave him. With much effort, he succeeded in pulling the package out of his pocket. He put it in his mouth and bit it. As soon as a part of the powder touched his tongue, he noticed a change in his strength. At once he grabbed the tongue of the snake, twisted it, and broke it. Then he tore the



sides of its mouth and through that opening, he slipped out. The snake was dying but its tail was whirling in the air like the lash of a cowboy. A moment later it fell down and Marcos knew that the snake was dead.

He went on towards the light before him. After he had walked about fifty meters, something made a sound behind him. He looked back and as his eyes were now used to the darkness, he could see a tiger in the act of springing at him. Immediately he put a pinch of the powder in his mouth. The tiger leaped towards him but Marcos



caught its forelegs and whirled the animal about his head. Then with all the strength left in him, he struck it against the rocky wall of the cave. The tiger shuddered and died.

Marcos was now near the entrance to the garden. Just as he was about to pass through the opening, a huge hand pulled him back. He turned around to see what it was and there sitting behind him was a horrible giant.

"You will make a fine supper, my boy. It's many a day now that I have not tasted such a delicacy. I think that stupid old man outside for sending you here," said the giant.

The giant then pulled his knife and sharpened a stick. Then he built a fire. While he was thus occupied, Marcos took a mouthful of the powder and swallowed it.

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The giant examined the pointed end of the stick and with a snap of his tongue, stood up to get Marcos. The latter was prepared. He seized the giant's wrist and pulled it hard with a jerk. It broke. The giant was mad. He tried to seize Marcos with his left hand but that, too, broke. He lifted his right foot to crush Marcos, but before it landed, the latter had already twisted it and it fell back useless. He seized the giant's left foot and pulled it hard. The giant fell down. His head hit a big rock and he died shortly after.

Without a moment's delay, Marcos ran towards the entrance to the garden. Great was his disappointment when he discovered that all plants in the garden had the same color. Where was the plant with red leaves, white flowers, and blue bark which the old man told him about? He sat down and cried.

"Why are you so sad?" asked a high-pitched but sweet voice above him.

Marcos looked up. On the branch of a tree sat a bird with beautiful plumage. Its tail was white. The feathers that covered its body were red. Its legs were blue.

"Why are you so sad, my boy?" the bird repeated its question.

"I'm looking for the tree with red leaves, white flowers, and blue bark. An old man told me it is here but no such plant grows in this garden," Marcos replied.

"I believe you are a good boy. Nobody comes to this place unless he is good and unless he is a friend of the old man you have just mentioned. The tree you are looking for is in this garden but you cannot see it because it is a magic tree. I am the gardener here and I allow only good people to see it or make use of its charm to cure diseases or destroy evil. Now watch this tree while I sing a song," said the bird.

As the bird sang, the tree on which it sat began to change color. The leaves gradually turned red. The bark which was brown was becoming blue in color. At the end of the song, the leaves became dark

red and the bark, sky blue. Then out of the leaves sprang white flowers.

"Take what you want, my good boy," said the bird.

Marcos plucked a leaf and a flower. He also broke a piece of the bark. Then he thanked the bird and ran as fast as his legs could carry him towards the entrance. As soon as he was out of the cave, he went directly to the place where he met the old man. The latter was not there any more. In his stead was a handsome young prince leaping on a magnificent white horse. Another horse was near him.

"Can you tell me where the old man is?" Marcos asked the prince. "He was here when I left for the cave."

"I am he. A few months ago, a giant stole me from my father's palace. He brought me here and changed me to an old man. You killed the wicked giant a short time ago. His death broke the spell and now I have regained my former self. I thank you very much for helping me. Now I'm going back to my father's palace which is on the other side of this forest," the prince explained.

"Before I go," went on the prince, "let me give you this horse as a souvenir. You will find him very useful. Tied to the saddle of the horse, is a bag of gold coins. That is yours also. Don't worry about your mother for she is well now. She is waiting for you. You had better go. Good-bye."

They took opposite directions.

When Marcos reached home, his mother was at the door. She had no idea, at first, that it was Marcos who came on horseback. Marcos alighted and then beckoned his mother to go to him.

"Mother," he said, "please help me carry this bag to the house."

In the room, they opened the bag and poured its contents on the mat. The glittering gold coins dazzled their eyes.

"Where did you get all of these. Marcos?" asked the astonished mother.

Marcos related the whole story

VACATION DAYS

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may go to picnics; we may see the movies; we may fly kites; we may go to the farm; and we may do many other things that we would like to do.

b. We must work to help our folks at home. Of course, during the long summer vacation we should not play all the time. We can help our mother, father, brothers and sisters daily. Perhaps the girls can give mother some vacation. During vacation they can let mother rest, they can do all the work in the home—cook, sew, wash, and tidy the house and the yard. The boys can help the father in his work—in the farm, in the stores. They can give father a vacation.

c. We must work to earn some money. Perhaps during vacation we may be able to get some job to earn some money to buy what we need for the next school year—books, papers, pencils, etc. We can sell newspapers and magazines, flowers, vegetables, candies; we can shine shoes; we can drive, we can do errands, and many other things which will bring us some money for the next school year.

d. We must continue to study. Vacation should not make us stop studying. We may stop reading our school books but there are many things that we can study which are not found in our school books—birds, flowers, trees, insects, and many other things. We can read newspapers, magazines and stories for our recreation in the evenings.

During school days let us study well our lessons so that we may not be delayed in our school progress. During vacation we must play, we must work to help our folks and earn some money, and we must continue to study.

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and when he was through, the mother said, "Yes, it was only about an hour ago that I regained my strength. Now, Marcos, my good boy, we shall be happy as long as we live."

Marcos kissed his mother on the forehead and ran downstairs to take care of his magnificent horse.