

THE BOOT-BLACK

By GONZALO B. IGNACIO *

TWENTY-SEVEN centavos! Only twenty-seven centavos and it was eight o'clock in the evening! Kikoy's face took on a look of despair as he counted the money over, and slowly put it into his pocket.

What should he do? He knew that if he went home with only twenty-seven centavos, his good-for-nothing father would beat him. Only last week he had been beaten by his drunken father because the money which he had earned by shining shoes was not enough for the father to take to the gambling table.

Kikoy had thought many times of leaving his miserable home. But he could not. Who would take care of his mother, sick in bed? No, he would not leave his only comforter—his dear mother

who always sympathized with him. Never would he leave his mother in the hands of that drunken, worthless father.

With a heavy heart Kikoy started homeward. The boot-black's box on his shoulders seemed to weigh him down. His eyes filled with tears as he thought of the beating he would get that night. Kikoy began to cry.



Presently he came to his wretched home. As he neared the house, he saw that several of the neighbors were there. He entered, and the look on the faces of those present told him what was the matter. His heart froze within him. Poor Kikoy knew that his dear mother was breathing her last.

"Mother! Mother!" cried the terror-stricken boy as he knelt at her bedside.

"Don't leave me, dear mother. Please don't leave me."

The poor mother looked at her kneeling boy. Her lips formed the words which she could not utter. "Goodbye, Kikoy. Always be a good boy." And then the poor woman was no more.

Kikoy remained kneeling and motionless with bowed head.

Presently he felt a kindly hand on his shoulder. He looked up. It was Mr. Romero, the wealthiest man in the village—a man who was known far and wide for generosity.

"Come, Kikoy," he said. "You are going to live with me and be my boy now."

And Kikoy went away with Mr. Romero.

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