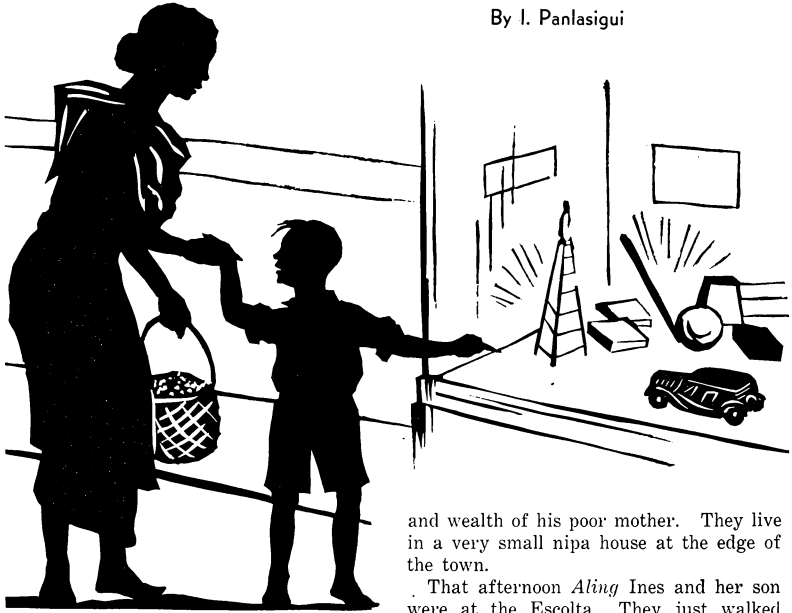


• RUFO'S CHRISTMAS GIFT •

By I. Panlasigui



IT was afternoon of December 24, 1934. Everybody in town, as was the custom, was busy preparing for the Christmas Eve when there would be a great rejoicing—music, dancing, singing, eating, and the midnight mass.

That afternoon *Aling Ines* and her little son, *Rufo*, like the other people of the town, were at the *Escolta*. She was not buying anything in particular for Christmas but she just felt that she should also go where people were going that afternoon.

Aling Ines is a widow. She earns a living for her and her son by washing. Most of her washing comes from *Mrs. Cruz*. She does not earn much; more often she earns so little that sometimes she and her son do not have enough to eat. Her son, *Rufo*, is only about seven years old, and being the only child of course, he is the whole comfort

and wealth of his poor mother. They live in a very small nipa house at the edge of the town.

That afternoon *Aling Ines* and her son were at the *Escolta*. They just walked around and looked at the many beautiful things on the show-windows; things that would make anybody happy—toys, candies, shoes, hats, etc. *Rufo* was delighted to see those things. He had been waiting for a long time for the prize that his mother had long ago promised to give him if he would be a good and an obedient boy. *Rufo* was very glad indeed for soon he was going to have the prize. *Aling Ines*, however, was sad in the midst of rejoicing because she knew that she could not buy a toy or anything for her son's prize.

"Mother, do you remember you promised to give me a toy for Christmas if I would be good and obedient?" asked *Rufo* of his mother. "Many times you told me I am a very obedient boy. Tomorrow is Christmas. Why don't you buy me the toy which you promised me?"

"Well, we shall just look around yet," answered *Aling Ines* in the hope that something might happen. She had no money to buy her son a toy but she did not have enough courage to tell him so. They walked on and looked around at the different good things for Christmas, things that only those who have money can have. *Aling Ines* did not care for anything for herself; she only wished she could afford even a ten-centavo toy at a Japanese store for her son. But she could not. She and her son walked on and looked around. Finally *Rufo* saw one little toy that attracted his fancy. It was a little automobile.

"Mother, there is the toy that I like," he said. "Let us go in, mother, and buy it."

Aling Ines looked at the toy. It was marked "30 centavos." But she had only thirty centavos for their supper that Christmas Eve. She did not even know where she would get their meals for the next day—Christmas day.

"No, *Rufo*. I am afraid we cannot buy that, nor any other toy because I have money just enough to buy our supper to-

night," finally *Aling Ines* told her boy. She did not want her boy to hope any longer for a toy which she already knew she could not give.

"But, mother, you promised me?" said *Rufo*.

"I know I did, son," agreed her mother. "You have been very obedient and good, but I am afraid you have to go through this Christmas without any toy."

"But, why, mother?" asked *Rufo*.

"Because we have no money," answered *Aling Ines*.

Rufo was going to cry, but he did not. Although he was yet very young he had already learned that when his mother said there was no money, nothing more could be done. Sometimes they have to go to bed without supper because there was no money. *Rufo* already learned the lesson to insist no more for what he wanted when there was no money.

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He was very sad, but his mother was very much sadder. Little Rufo had to enjoy his Christmas only by looking at the toys displayed on the show-windows. He could only look at, and wish for them; but he could neither touch nor have them.

It was already getting dark, when the mother and the son returned home. Rufo was sad but glad at having seen the many things that he saw which he knew he could never have for Christmas.

"Mother," said Rufo, "next Christmas I shall have some toys. I shall try to earn some money to buy that automobile."

"Yes, you shall have it, son," said his mother.

They ate their supper which *Aling Ines* was able to buy with her thirty centavos. Rufo was very tired so he ate with great appetite.

Before going to bed, however, he told his mother,

"Mother, I wish some fairy would bring me something while I am sleeping. I don't care what it is, mother, just so it is a toy."

Aling Ines did not say a word. She pretended not to hear her son. She started to work in order to prevent the tears from flowing from her eyes. But when Rufo was already asleep, she began to cry not for herself but for her little son. She cried for sometime. Gradually she began to be aware of the fact that within her small nipa hut she was crying and very unhappy while outside the whole town was in full merriment—music and gladness. She could not be happy even if she wanted to because her little Rufo, now sleeping, could not have the toy which his little heart had desired.

She was still crying when she thought of Mrs. Cruz. Mrs. Cruz had always been very kind to her. Why couldn't she help her now? Why did she not think of Mrs. Cruz during the afternoon? She could have borrowed thirty centavos from her to buy that toy for her son. It was not too late yet. Perhaps Mrs. Cruz was not yet in

bed and the stores were still open.

Before she knew what she was doing she was already in the street, more running than walking, and soon she was at the house of Mrs. Cruz. She was very glad because Mr. and Mrs. Cruz and the children were still wide awake decorating their Christmas tree.

"Why, *Aling Ines*, why are you here?" asked Carmelo, who first saw the night visitor.

"Come in," said Mrs. Cruz. "Has anything wrong happened to you and Rufo? Why come so late?"

"Nothing wrong has happened. Mrs. Cruz. I just came to ask you if you could advance me thirty centavos to buy an automobile toy for Rufo," *Aling Ines* told Mrs. Cruz. She told her also about her promise to her boy, and their walk at the Escolta.

Mr. and Mrs. Cruz knew how good a boy Rufo was. He had been an obedient boy and a great help to his mother. Carmelo liked him so much that he and Rufo often played together when he and his mother come to get the laundry.

It was Carmelo who spoke first when *Aling Ines* finished her story.

"Mother, do you remember that automobile toy I got from school last Saturday? It is exactly like the one Rufo likes to have. Why don't I give that to him?" Without waiting for an answer from his mother he went to get the automobile. Soon he returned.

"Here, *Aling Ines*, give this to Rufo for his prize."

Aling Ines could hardly believe her eyes seeing the toy and her ears hearing the words of Carmelo. She remembered the words of Rufo as he went to sleep about some fairy that might give him the toy. *Aling Ines* thought she was dreaming. For a while she could not talk.

"Yes, *Aling Ines*. Take it and give to your boy," said Mrs. Cruz. "And tomorrow you will come here to get a Christmas dinner for you and your son."

Aling Ines was very happy. She thought she was the happiest mother that evening because she knew that

THE ELDEST OF EIGHT

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Of course, she loved her mother, but she nursed in her heart a deep resentment at the joylessness of her life.

On the Friday before Mothers' Day, Sioning, with two other girls, was asked by her teacher to call on a classmate who had been absent. Lolita Ruiz was the richest girl in Sioning's class. She went to school in a big car. Her dresses were always distinctive and her purse was always full of "just pin money."

Sioning and her companions hesitated to knock at the gate. The big house, so quiet and imposing, was set far from the street. The gardener admitted them into the grounds. Another servant opened the door to them and conducted them to a beautifully furnished bedroom.

"It is so kind of you to visit me," Lolita said as the girls timidly entered the room.

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Rufo would be the happiest boy when he woke up in the morning. She took the automobile and after thanking Carmelo and Mrs. Cruz and after greeting them with a "Merry Christmas," she left.

Rufo was still sound asleep when *Aling Ines* arrived. She looked at the little boy and she looked at the toy. Her face beamed with happiness.

She woke up earlier than her little boy. She placed the toy on the pillow in such a way that when the sleeping little boy opened his eyes, it would be the first thing he could see. She could hardly wait to see the happiness of her boy when he would see the toy. Soon Rufo opened his eyes and saw the automobile. He took it and showed it to his mother.

"Mother, I dreamed that there was a fairy who brought me this toy. She told me it was my prize for being a good and an obedient boy."

"Yes, Rufo, you have been a good and an obedient boy, that is why the fairy, God, and Carmelo