

AN UNEXPECTED CHRISTMAS GIFT

By Antonio C. Muñoz

IT was Christmas eve. The parlor of a big house was well lighted. In the center stood a Christmas tree beautifully decorated. Toys of all sorts hung from its branches. Around the tree was a group of children. Each one was busy selecting the toy which soon would be given to him by the kind-hearted hostess. Seated near the sides of the parlor were older people, the parents of the children whom Miss Reyes, the principal teacher, had invited to the entertainment.

On the street in front of this house there was a small crowd looking at what was going on inside. A little boy was among that crowd. His whole attention was on the Christmas tree and the children around it.

Not even once did his eyes turn from that happy company inside.

At last he muttered to himself, "Oh, if I only had enough!" Then with a sigh he turned around and left the place.

An old gentleman in the crowd outside noticed the boy's eagerness to be one of the happy children inside. He knew how that poor boy felt and he wanted to do something for him. He followed the boy and when he overtook him, he asked, "Where are you going, little boy?"

"Home" was the only answer.

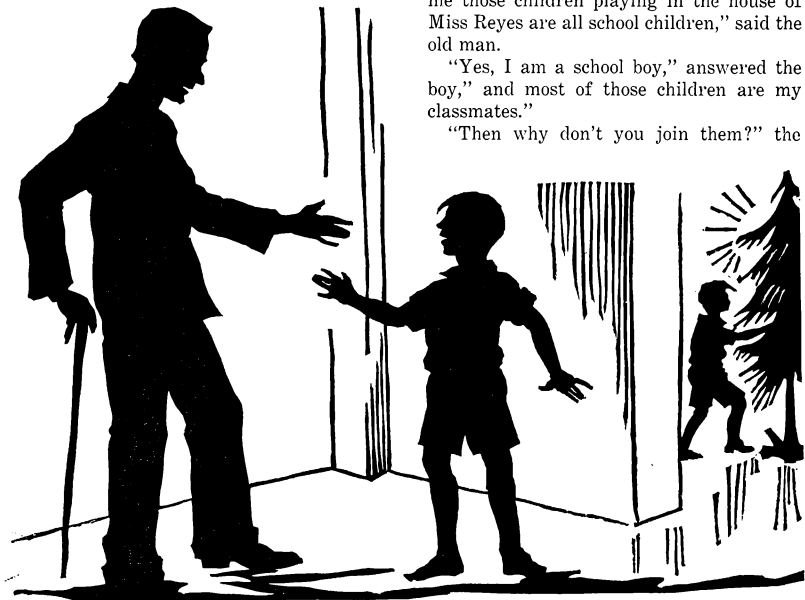
"Don't you wish to join those happy children inside?" he asked again.

"With all my heart, I wish I were with them," the boy replied.

"Aren't you a school boy? It seems to me those children playing in the house of Miss Reyes are all school children," said the old man.

"Yes, I am a school boy," answered the boy, "and most of those children are my classmates."

"Then why don't you join them?" the



old man asked again.

"Oh, you see, I simply didn't have enough, the boy told him.

"I've heard you twice saying that you didn't have enough. What do you mean by that?" the old man was now interested.

"Miss Reyes, our principal teacher," said the boy, "told us on the first day of December that beginning that day we should all save whatever amount of money came into our hands for a Christmas uniform. She told us to report to her on December 20th so that we could all go with her and buy the materials together. 'We shall have a party at home for all A-1 children on Christmas eve,' she said, 'but all must wear uniforms. After the party, each one will receive a gift. Do not tell your parents about this for I will invite them and give them a surprise. Remember, the money for the uniforms must be earned by you.'

"There are twenty-four A-1 children in our school and I am one," the boy went on with his story. "We all worked very hard in order to be able to attend the party and to receive a gift. We sold vegetables, fetched water, gathered fuel and sold it, polished shoes, ran errands, and did many other things just to be able to earn enough and through our efforts, each one of us earned a little more than the amount needed for the uniform."

"Unfortunately, my father fell ill on the day I was to report to Miss Reyes with my money. We had no money at home except the little amount I had for my uniform. My father needed medicine. All my mother could do was to sit down and cry. I could not bear to see my father suffering and my mother crying. At last I put into my

mother's hand—all that I had. My mother was, of course, surprised for she did not know anything about our plan. I told her everything. She wanted to return the money to me for she said she would just borrow some from a friend. I told her that father needed the medicine very much and he should not suffer any longer. With tears rolling down her cheeks she kissed me and said, 'Joe, you are a good son. I am proud of you.'

"She gave me the remainder but it wasn't enough for the materials of the uniform. Now, you see, I simply didn't have enough, but I am glad, very glad because my father is now well," he concluded.

"This is my house, sir," the boy said pointing to a small nipa house. "Won't you drop in?"

"No, thank you," replied the gentleman. "I have engagements tonight. By the way, what is your name?"

"My name is Jose Dizon but everyone calls me Joe," answered the boy.

"Good night Joe, I wish you a happy Christmas," said the old gentleman.

Before Joe could return the greeting, the old man was quite too far to hear him.

(Please turn to page 323)

