



PHOTO C. AERTS

# DULANTE

*By*

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Awful is the roar of thunder in the mountains, and lightning strikes to death. Heavy rains swell the mountain streams which, joining each other in the ravines, rush down in angry torrents, carrying rocks and other things in their wake, till they reach the lowlands.

Such a storm had just been raging, but now it had somewhat abated. Doors and windows were opened a little, and anxious eyes peered out to the rain that still fell heavily outside. Lightning still tore the skies here and there, though the thunder sounded already far away to the south, above Pangasinan.

At the entrance of the convento Tacio, the son of Bineian, stood waiting. He was shivering, his shoulders hunched under his kalabdyaw. He leaned backward, sheltering himself from wind and rain, waiting for the priest who would hear his father's confession and help him die a good death. Soon the priest came and said, "Come, Tacio".

Both signed themselves devoutly, and with bowed heads, made their way in the stormy blasts to Kalamai. Above Sawili streaks of lightning still flashed to view.

God is never so near as when we are in sorrow. Believe me, Bineian! You were a God-forsaken pagan, but He wants you back. God wants you back with Him. And now that suffering is come upon you, accept it as your penance.

Bineian moaned! Old Dulante listened to the rain which was falling in heavy drops without. He opened the window and looked at the dark clouds torn apart in some places by the fierce winds. The rain drove through the thick pine trees, sending the fragrance of their branches inside the homes.

"Dulante"!

"What is it, Bineian?"

"Do not leave me alone, Dulante; not even when Tacio comes home. I am afraid. There is someone staring at me from that corner—someone I do not know. Close the window, Dulante!"

... Dulante, why do those eyes stare at me so somberly? O Dulante, come very near to me; I am afraid. Look at that corner, Dulante; do you not see anything? It is the devil waiting for me!"

.....  
Bineian, man, your soul is sad as hell, and black as night! But the priest will soon be here. You will make a sincere confession and Sairo, the devil, can never harm you.  
.....

"O, look, look, Dulante! Do you not see those fixed, fiery eyes coming nearer to me? O, hide me, help me, Dulante!"

Binayan moved restlessly from one side to the other. Dulante took the cold trembling hand in his and helped the suffering man make the sign of the Cross. "In the name

....."  
The door opened and the rain blew in, as the priest and Tacio entered. The latter closed the door hurriedly, and turning, saw his father, like a helpless child, in the arms of the old Dulante.

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Weeks later, I saw Bineian after his return to God. We sat at the door of his hut while I listened to the story of his conversion. His face was pale and thin, but it was calm and serene, as his eyes rested on the distant landscape. There was peace in the valley; there was peace in the huts that studded the rice-fields, beyond which the dark mountains of Pawai rose majestically, with fog hanging heavily over its ravines.

His story ended thus:

"Yes; there was no other human being I made suffer more than Dulante. I caused the loss of the last of his cattle. I drove him away from my land where he had his little hut. Once he came to me with deep sadness in his face, and he said only this: "You should not have done that Bineian; but, may God pardon you."

He left, very sad; and all the people prophesied: "God will punish Bineian! And indeed they had uttered truth! My dark soul sank deeper into misery. I wasted all my money in drink. I was like a landslide, taking everything down with me to the depths.

"Everybody knows how Dulante saved me in a storm at Asayang and how he took care of me for weeks. Only then did I realize how good man can be. And one day I said: "Dulante, why are you so good to me? To me who am so bad? I am a condemned soul, Dulante."

"He approached me, knelt beside me, and took my hands in his. O, how his hands trembled while he whispered very softly, "God died

for you too, Bineian, so that your soul will not be lost. Why should I not imitate Him, and be good to you too, Bineian?" "

At this remembrance Bineian bowed his head and hid his face in his hands. I knew the old man was weeping, not only for his past evil deeds, but also because he had witnessed the love of God in the merciful person of his neighbor.

When the human heart comes in touch with God's goodness and love, then he dares not look up anymore. He hides his weeping eyes lest he betrays that endless longing for God that hangs above the quiet abyss of the soul—that longing for Him Who alone can give him peace and happiness for all eternity.



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