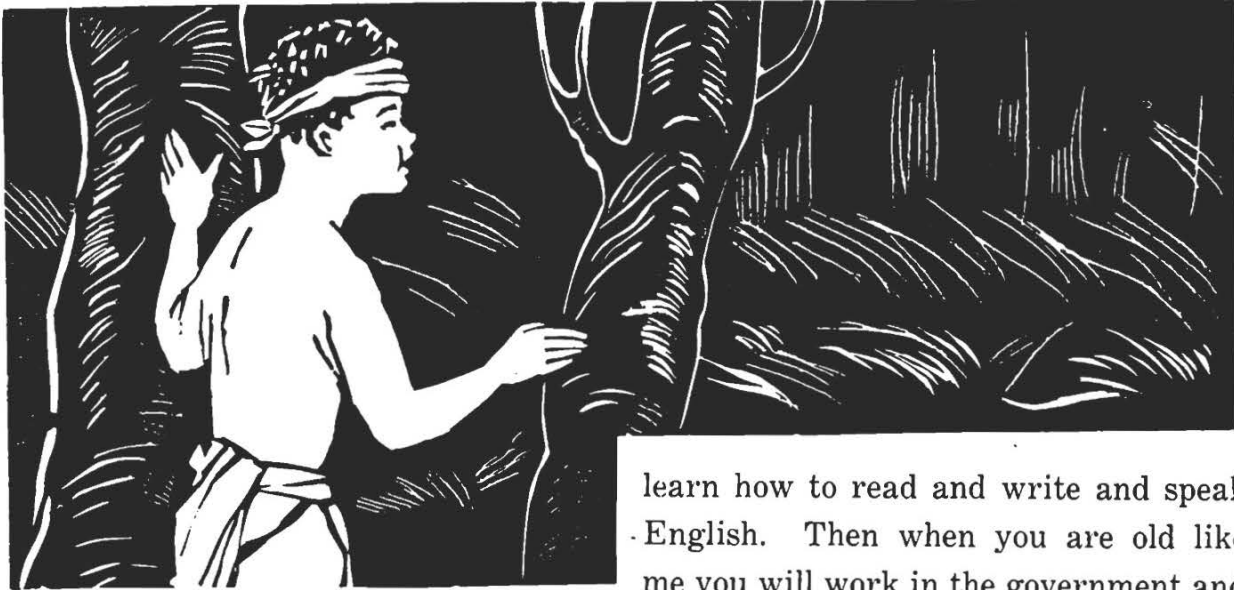


THE SON OF TAKIAWAN

By LORETO PARAS-SULIT



ODOY was the son of Takiawan, the hunter. It was his great ambition to be a mighty hunter like his father, to bring in like him at sunset slung across his shoulder a fine deer or a huge wild hog and throw these on the ground for his mother to roast for supper. Secretly, when by himself, he would practice walking with the cautious steps and watchful eyes of his father. His little round Bogobo face, so brown and serious would then become alive with excitement when he imagined how he would fell a deer with a well aimed spear. Oh, to be grown up like his father.

But his father often told him these days, "Next year I will bring you to that school in the barrio where you will

learn how to read and write and speak English. Then when you are old like me you will work in the government and perhaps be a *Capataz*." No, no, he shook his head stubbornly when by himself, never! He did not wish to stay in school nor help build roads like those dirty, sweating men working near their home. He wanted to be a great hunter.

When his mother dressed him in his gay red pants and shirt embroidered with glittering shell sequins and tied bands of little bells around his arms and legs so that he walked with a tinkling musical sound he would run away and take off all these silly things. He kept only the colored handkerchief tied about his head and the spiral-wound leaves of the buri stuck in the holes in his ears. You would frighten animals away if you walked with jingling, tinkling noises.

Once summoning all his courage he asked his father if he might go with him hunting. Takiawan looked at his son seriously and did not say *No* nor *Yes* but answered only, "The weather is not good. It might rain today." Odo's little eager heart beat painfully with its bitter disappointment and he never asked his father again. When he went to play with his brothers and sisters, he whipped them angrily.

A strong desire to see his father hunt grew in him. He would wake up while it was yet dark and from his mat watch his father leave silently. In the evening, Odo waited for his father to return, for it always gave him a thrill of pleasure to feel the still warm body of the slain deer. On moonlit nights his father went out to hunt returning home at early dawn.

One such night when the moon was like a white basin of light in the sky, Odo decided he would follow his father into the forest. His eagerness conquered all his fears of the dangers he might meet on the way. When he saw his father go outside the hut to get his spear and sharp bolo, Odo crept noiselessly outside on his fours like a big cat. Odo saw his father walk straight ahead looking neither to the right nor to the left nor behind him. Odo breathed with thankfulness when he saw he was not noticed and he followed cautiously behind.

Soon they reached the edge of the

forest. The full bright moon enabled the boy to see that his father had squatted under a tree waiting for his game. Odo hid behind another tree. Not a sound broke the stillness of the forest. The cold pierced the boy's thin clothes and he longed for his warm mat and his sleeping brothers, but he stayed on. Then a slight rustling sound came to his ears. Takiawan had stood up, his head bent forward to trace the sound.

Odo crept forward and came to what he thought was a fallen log among the grasses. He was about to fall across this log so that he might watch securely hidden his father, when something made him look down at the fallen tree. It moved slightly and the light of the moon falling on it made it gleam. He followed its length and what he saw seemed to turn him into a stone so great was his fright.

To the keen ears of the hunter came that little broken gasp of horror and he ran swiftly to his son, leaped across that gleaming log, and with one mighty blow of his sharp bolo cut the huge sleeping snake into two. Then as swiftly he lifted his son into his arms and ran towards their home.

"Father, did you know I was following you? Was that a *sawa*?" To Odo's questions Takiawan's answer was only a short grunt. "That was a *sawa*," declared Odo hoping for a contradiction, but Takiawan merely grunted again and held his son in a tighter, fiercer embrace.