

INTAYA

(Continuation)

XV

"My father will bring Sachi with him, and, Sinaicha, the day after tomorrow they will be here."

"Yes, Severino, it will be quite a change of life for him; the old man will be happy with us, and his present happiness will make him atone for the sad past."

"Dear me, it will certainly be a change for the better after that rough, inhuman life in the mines! I know from other people, who also worked in the mines, what is really going on in those places. They say that they were well paid, but all their earnings were spent in drinking and gambling; no, that's no place for poor Sachi, your father."

"Once he is with us in our peaceful Padok, he will no longer be tempted to gamble; he will have plenty of time to ponder on his past life, and by and by his heart will know and enjoy the calmness of a good conscience. But, what a surprise it will be for him to see Oneo, your father coming to take him away from Tujakaab!"

"Yes, Sinaicha, if only he is willing to leave."

"Of course, Severino, he will be willing to leave such an ugly place. Your father will know how to convince him. Who in the world can resist the kind words of an Oneo? Not my father!"

"I believe you are right, Sinai-

cha."

The bright, blue sky hung over Padok; here and there in the softly waving green around the hut a bird twittered and chirped; the wind carried the healthy scent of pine-incense and the fragrance of wild flowers over hut and fields; the silvery mountain stream down below gaily splashed its pure water against the rock, and under the dark mango-tree, close to the hut, the cattle lay leisurely chewing their cud.

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Sachi lay in the Hospital of Baguio, and Oneo sat at his bedside. Blood and dust had been carefully washed away from the sufferer's head and face, the wounds were skilfully dressed, but neither Oneo nor Sachi were aware of the doctor's verdict: Sachi would be blind for the rest of his life.

"Oneo, please," said Sachi, "warn Sinaicha.....Go and tell her how it all happened — and that I long to have her near me."

"I go right away, Sachi, and Sinaicha will be here very soon."

"How kind you are, Oneo! Ai, salamat apasia, how can I ever thank you!"

"Biangto, you have not to thank me, Sachi, I go right now, but, please, while I am gone think of your soul and of Our Saviour's mercy."

Oneo felt how Sachi grasped

his hand, and heard him repeating: *salamat, salamat, thanks, thanks!*

Oneo first went to tell the news to the chief of Kolos, then he hurried to Agpai where he spent the night. Early the next morning he and his wife Tagaina left for Padok to prepare Sinaicha for the sad tidings.

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In the meantime Father Valerio visited the Hospital, and Sachi had a long conversation with the priest.

"Now that you have made a good confession," said the priest, "leave everything to God's mercy."

"Yes, Apo," answered Sachi, "I will do what you say. But, Apo, am I to die of this?"

"No, Sachi, there is no question of dying, you will live; but the doctor asked me to warn you that your eyes are badly wounded. Yes, the doctor has some hope to save them, but it will take time...."

"May this little hope come to realize! Apo, it is terrible to be blind!"

"Certainly, my good man, it is a frightful thing to think of. But, why not hope for the best? Do not trouble yourself about it, just now. Cheer up, and be a brave man. Surrender yourself entirely to God's Holy Will: His Will is the source of peace for your heart, Sachi. Tomorrow I see you again, and never be afraid telling me if you are in need of something."

The priest had left, and again poor Sachi lay as if alone and abandoned in the midst of dark-

ness, with an intense pain in his eyes. Of course, he knew he was not alone in the big ward; he heard the nurses going to and fro, and was fully aware of the kindness doctors and nurses were bestowing on him. Nevertheless, the darkness gave him a feeling of complete loneliness, and his only consolation was that soon Sinaicha would be at his side. The thought of his daughter brought afresh the whole past of his sad life before his mind. Ai, the wrong he had done to others, his gambings, especially that last gambling, and then the crushing end, it all stood like menacing phantoms before him! But then, yes, appeared to him the smiling face of good Oneo, he heard again the words full of mercy and hope of the priest, and he soothed his aching heart saying to himself that his sins had been forgiven, that God being just was above all a loving and merciful Father..... "Uleitoka, Apo Chios," he prayed, "do with me as you please, my my God! I commit myself entirely in your hands." Then he said aloud as if awakening from a dream, "When is Sinaicha coming?" A nurse had heard his groaning appeal and understood; she approached him and softly whispered in his ear, "A little more patience, dear, and she will be here." Sachi smiled and at once became perfectly quiet.

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Oneo and Tagaina arrived in Padok; they found the door of the hut closed, and knew by it that



**Rice terraces at the foot of the mountain;
they graduate up to the top of the mountain in Banawe.**

Severino was somewhere in the mountains gathering firewood and that Sinaicha would return from the camote field only toward evening.

"O, father, my father is back home!" jubilated Sinaicha's heart when she trotted down the trail and recognized Oneo standing at the door of the hut. Blue smoke curled from the roof of the hut and kept hanging there in long lines. No doubt, someone was in the house. She even heard the noise of pounding rice. "How good," she laughed, "Father is already busy preparing the rice! Indeed, our Lord is merciful towards us!"

She hurried down the trail, with the heavy load of a basket full of camotes on her back, and stopped before Oneo, happily smiling at him. Thrilling with joy, she pointed in the direction from where the sounds of pounding rice came, and exclaimed, "Oneo, is father there?"

"It is Tagaina, child, please, put down your kayabang, dear."

She deposed the load on the bench and wiped away the drops of perspiration from her brow. And then, with anxiety in her voice:

"And why is father not here, Oneo?"

"Father could not come, child... But, he wants to see you and to talk with you."

"Did father refuse to come with you, Oneo?"

"Not at all, Sinaicha, on the contrary, he is very willing to

come here. But he wants to see you and to talk with you first. I promised him that you would comply with his request."

Tagaina had heard the voice of Sinaicha, and, stopping her work, she came to greet her. The girl was exalted seeing her mother-in-law. She tightly grasped Tagaina's hands and exclaimed: "How nice of you, mother, that you also came to Padok! How do you do, my dearest mother?"

"Thanks to the Lord, Sinaicha, everything is all right with us. And how are you and Severino?"

"Caasi nan Apo Chios, Ina... By God's mercy, mother, we too are all right. Is it a long time you have been waiting for us?"

"No, child, we just arrived a few hours ago, just in time to do what you see. The sun was already rising above the mountains when we left Agpai."

"Oh, mother, I am so happy when you are with us! And Severino, how glad he will be, the good boy! But, mother, let us first prepare the meal, and then we have the whole evening and night free to chat and to prattle as long as we like."

"Right you are, child," chuckled Oneo, who felt much relieved knowing that in the meantime Severino would come home and be present when he had to break the sad news. He took the hatchet and started splitting wood for the nightfire.

The women cleaned and washed the rice, put it in the "canchiro" and hung the iron kettle above

the open fire. Then they peeled the aba-stems, the much liked "piching" peppered with "sili." While they were all busy, they heard the voice of Severino greeting his father from the trail. They heard him throw down his load of firewood in the yard. Oneo gave a sign to Severino, took him by the arm, and together walked a few steps away from the hut. In a low voice Oneo whispered to Severino what had happened to Sachi, who lay, wounded and blinded, in the Baguio Hospital. "And now, keep quiet," insisted Oneo, "I will reveal the sad news little by little. Then you stand by to speak comfort to Sinaicha. Tommorrow she will go with Tagaina to Baguio; if you want to, you can go with them. I will remain here until you are back."

While they were eating, Sinaicha asked, "Is father still in the mines of Tujakaab?"

"No, replied Oneo, "he is no more in Tujakaab. I met him there, but for the moment he is in

Baguio waiting for you."

"In Baguio? What is he doing in Baguio? Whom does he know in the city?"

"The fact is, my child, that, when I arrived in Tujakaab, he did not feel well. O, he was so glad that I had come and was near him! We brought him to the Hospital, and I remained with him. Then he asked me that I should go to Padok and tell you to go to Baguio to see him."

"And of what disease is he suffering, Oneo?"

"It is not exactly of a disease that he is suffering, Sinaicha. When I arrived at Tujakaab, I heard that there had occurred an accident on the road, that they had carried your father to a nearby shed of the camp...But, do not worry, child, he is now in the Baguio Hospital and doctors and nurses are taking great care of him. Only question of time to be cured of his wounds."

(To be continued)

