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## **"RATTAN STRIPS"**

*(For the third part: summary of the foregoing...)*

*(an Ifugao Detective Story)*

*Tuginay, who had been killed and beheaded in the forest of northeastern Ifugaoland, was believed to be the victim of a revenge expedition, which presumably had started from Chupak, the abode of the Ifugao's hereditary enemies. They brought Tuginay's body home and there, performed the special rites, with cursing and bangibang dance, wholly in accordance with custom. After the buria all the relatives of Tuginay and of his wife were present at the rite which was to point out whom*

*the gods wanted to take the lead, later on, in a revenge expedition toward the village of their enemy. It was Bindadan, a famous go-between, who was designated. Yet this very Bindadan was not so sure that the crime had been committed by those of Chupak. He, nevertheless, offered a sacrifice to call the curse of the war gods upon them, but secretly asked the Harasser-deities to help him discover the Ifugao who had cut off Tuginay's head.*

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A few days later, when the taboos, that bound the performant of the rites and sacrifices of that kind, had ceased to keep him in his house or on his houseyard, Bindadan went to the house of Oltagon. He stuck his spear in the ground and went up the ladder. Seeing no one else than his nephew's wife, he squatted down in front of her and asked, "Oltagon, did you not tell me before that your husband had planned to bring along with his firewood a bundle of rattan strips? Did you not tell me so on the day that you called on me and asked me to go with your brother to the forest to find out if something evil had happened to your husband?"

"I did," replied Oltagon, "but what's the use of it, since he was killed and brought nothing home, neither firewood nor rattan stripes!"

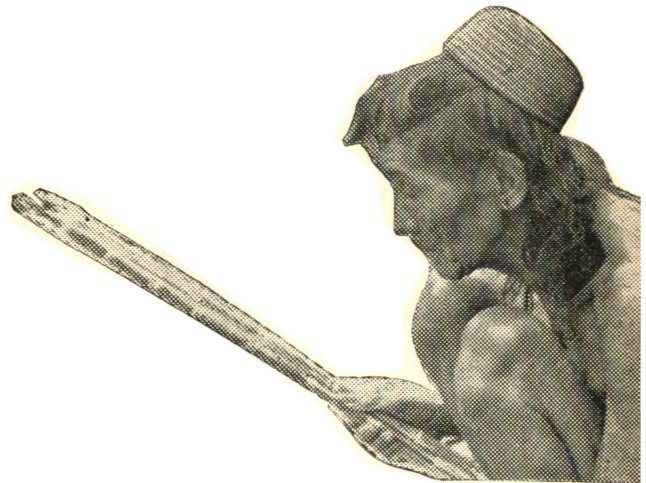
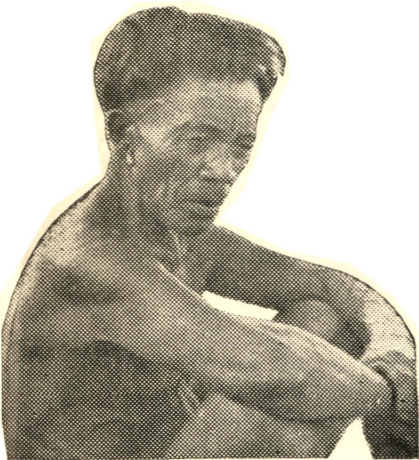
"Maybe, it's all useless," answered Bindadan, "but anyway tell no-

body that I asked you that".

After Bindadan had chewed for a time his betelnut chew, he took up his hip bag, pushed its brass ring and handle under his geestring, stood up and went his way, straight to the house of Bantiyan.

Bantiyan was, in those times, the well known sorcerer of the community of northeast Ifugao land. He was but a poor old man, with no descendants, no rice fields, no house, living in a small hut, he had been allowed to put up in the corner of the rich man's houseyard. Every day he he had the same problem to solve. How to get his meals? Wherever a sacrifice was offered he was there, not to perform the rites, for of all that he knew nothing, but to do the cooking, which gave him the best opportunity to serve himself copiously and to fill his hip-bag with a good break-

*Bantiyan was in those times the well known sorcerer of the community of northeast Ifugao land and everyday had a problem to solve....*



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fast for the hungry day that might follow the feast. Whenever an Ifugao died and was put on the death chair, he went thither and earned his meals with a broom, keeping the flies away from the corpse; besides, he had his extras when he was called to exercise his profession. He had, indeed in his bag a small rod with which he could find out if a sick person would die or not, if a man under suspicion of theft was truly a thief or not, for he could induce the spirits to make him sleep and then have dreams which enabled those, who had engaged him, to decide what kind of sacrifice they had to offer in order to chase the life of their sick

body; sometimes even under extraordinary circumstances and in difficult cases of illness, he would call on his favorite spirits to take possession of him, in which case he would then tremble all over his body and let the spirit speak through his mouth and reveal whether he wanted a pig or a hen to release the soul of the sick person he had taken hold of. Now and then, it is true, his mysterious revelations or predictions turned out the wrong way, but, all in all, he had been lucky or skillful, enough or was he supernaturally enlightened and empowered, as they all believed? Hence, he had won his reputation of being the best witchman of his community. He only deplored that they didn't need his services more often, for each of his performances won for him the wage of at least two square meals and a share of the victims that would be offered because of his revelations.

When Bindadan had entered his hut, Bantiyan at once knew that something special would be asked from him. He took up a small jar and placed it in front of his visitor. He put a coconut cup in his hand. He slowly took off the cover of the jar and looked: "Hm," he said, "I thought they had not drunk it all", and without more ado took the jar away and back to its corner, he himself had emptied its contents, of course he had, and he knew that Bindadan thought so, but he ought



*Bantiyan  
called to  
exercise his  
profession.*



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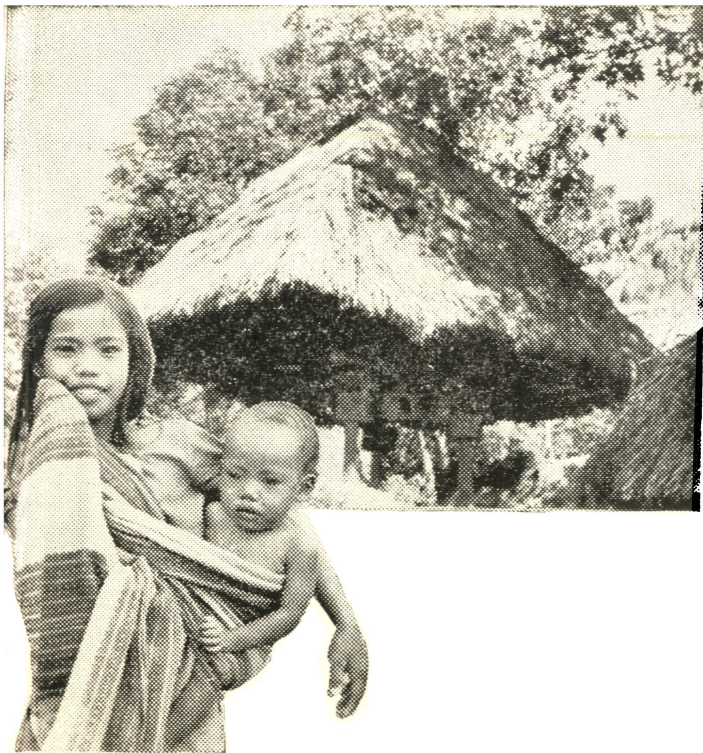


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to receive his guests in the same manner as others do, lest they would say with contempt: "When Bantiyan has a visitor he offers him no rice wine."

So, having shown his respect, at least by his good will, he squatted down, asked a portion of Bindadan's betelnut and a chewing leaf with some lime, and, while he performed the operation of crushing the betelnut ingredients with a nail in a small "ad hoc", he listened to his serious, yes, and mysterious interlocutor.

Bindadan, however, didn't give any explanation. He just invited Bantiyan to come to his house in the afternoon of that same day, before the people would return from their work in the rice fields, just then in order to avoid possible comments about his coming. He should not

tell anybody either. It would be a nightly performance. He should take with him magical rod and, for the rest, not worry about his supper and breakfast of the following morning. So, Bantiyan had but to answer, "Yes"; in fact he didn't even say "yes", but with an air of the most accomplished indifference nodded and pointed with his lips, behind which he savored the betelnut chew, in the direction of Bindadan's house-yard, as he didn't want to give the impression that he understood why Bindadan needed his good services, and that he thought the affair had something to do with the murder of Tuginay, for, if the result of his performance would not exactly be the one his visitor expected, his magical ability might then be questioned to the great detriment of his reputation.

*(to be continued)*

*Be it ever  
so humble  
There's no place  
like home  
There's no place  
like home  
Oh...  
There's no place  
like Home.  
(Payne)*





*The Smiles that win, the tints that  
glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
A heart whose love is innocent.*

*Lord. Byron.*