

PHILIPPINES

Five Men and the Carcass of a Dog

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They were all from the same village of Mainit in Bontoc. Five men, Ombac, Fangyaot, Kilong, Chugyoken and Isilen. A pall of mist and a thin drizzle had ushered earlier than usual the twilight of evening. They were past the city park and were rounding the bend of the road leading away from Baguio's downtown. They were on their way home. Suddenly . . .

"Look, a dog run over!" said Kilong. "It's dead."

"Indeed, let's pick it up," chorused the five. "It has not been dead long," observed Isilen, the eldest in the group.

The dog was lying in a puddle of blood on one side of the road. "It must have been bumped, it's not crushed," said Kilong again.

"Well, if we're picking up the dog, let us do so right away and not talk over it," Fangyaot chided his companions as he took off his army coat which was damp anyway and wrapped the carcass of the dog with it, swung it over his shoulder and trotted off, the other four men surprised following and admiring him approvingly.

"That's it," said Ombac. "It takes Fangyaot to get us going. So I always say."

They hurried. It wasn't that they were afraid to get caught picking up the dead dog. They knew the Christians of the city did not care and wouldn't touch it anyway. But they still had a distance to walk to reach home and the dead dog had to be disemboweled soon or its meat would begin to stench and sour.

At that, they were home soon. The drizzle had stopped. The sky was red overhead, promising of a moonrise tonight. Their wives and children gathered about the men come home as Fangyaot threw down the dog's carcass, then they built a bonfire, soon they were singeing its hair over the fire, the dead dog stiffened as its scorched hide tanned, and the smell of burnt hair abroad meant meat for tonight.

"How lucky we were to stumble upon it!"

"So I say," said Ombac.

"There," Fangyaot pushed the dog burned clean of its hair to Chugyoken, the biggest Bontoc in their group. "Take your turn to open it up and remove its entrails."

"Let me have it," said Chugyoken, bolo ready in hand, as he lifted by one leg the scorched dog to the lone water pipe in the midst of the clustered huts, squatting securely by assurance of the Congressman-elect who even had the city to extend the water pipe to the illegal settlement of fifty voters.

After washing the dog, Chugyoken slit it open from the sternum down, removed the entrails and passed the carcass on to the other men who were soon cutting it to pieces on a chopping board. Chugyoken cleaned the entrails after removing the liver, the lungs, the heart, the spleen and the kidneys. These were to

be roasted along with the lean abdominal shank for a preliminary feasting by the men.

In no time at all, there was meat in a cauldron of boiling water, the cauldron itself was set on an open hearth of three stones on the ground, as the children gleefully danced around, the wives bound infants with blankets on their backs, and rice was cooking in several pots.

Thereafter, men, women and children were eating, relishing dog meat with rice in plates set on the open ground, brightly lit by the bonfire and a newly risen moon.

The men were laughing. "Christian lowlanders do not know what meat they are missing, not eating dog flesh." They laughed aloud, and laughed some more, till they had devoured all the meat.

As the women took the empty dishes away, the men sat around the bonfire which they kept feeding with split pine wood, and the children went to sleep in the huts with their bellies full, as the men talked some more.

They were two years now in the city and so they even had to call for their women to come to join them. They built low squat huts with rusty GI's in an unwanted section of the city. Secretly, each Bontoc fellow was vying with the others in saving as much as possible of his earnings at odds and ends here and there in the city, so that he could build the biggest zinc-roofed house in all Mainit, their hometown.

Presently, they were engaged in gathering scrap iron lying anywhere in the city, or even in deserted logging camps on the hills beyond, and selling these pieces, however broken, to a Chinese dealer of second-hand goods in an obscure corner of Baguio's business section. They planned for tomorrow.

"We rise early. We need a pick, a shovel, a sledge hammer and a sack. Tomorrow, we break to pieces, a foot-wide, two meters long, soil pipe," Isilen, the leader of the group announced. "Let us retire now so that we shall be up by dawn. We have to have strength for tomorrow."

In the morning, the five trooped to a former U.S. naval reservation in the city. There they had discovered an abandoned sewer line with one remaining soil pipe a foot in diameter, which they were now to dig up, break into pieces, stuff in the sack, and cart to the Chinese dealer. The effort would net them twenty pesos. They thought there was nothing wrong with what they were doing as the United States had given up the reservation to the Philippines, and the sewer pipe long not in use was buried and forgotten.

But a patrolman cruising in a police car saw the men on the grassy hillside at great labor and with a loud noise breaking the soil pipe, and he thought they were robbing government property, so he arrested the Bontoc fellows.

At the police station where they were brought, the five men were grilled, and with prodding by the investigator, confessed to taking public property, and so complaint was filed against them, they were detained in jail pending their trial, then they began to get alarmed and called for a lawyer.

"Let us call for Attorney Samadang, our *casaud*,¹ who is married to Impon, our teacher-townmate," they all agreed.

The men had been in jail for three days when their wives approached Atty. Samadang, their in-law. The women were carrying babies bound to their backs with colorful native blankets. Their men had been missing at home because they were in jail for three days now, and unused, the children had been crying for their absent fathers, the women reported.

"What are they accused of?" the lawyer inquired.

"Of stealing sewage pipe," the women chorused.

¹ *Casaud*—*In-law*

Atty. Samadang almost laughed, he could not understand what ignorant natives would steal a sewage pipe for, and he repeated sewage pipe, muttering under his breath, but he promised he would go to see the men in jail and look into their case.

"Please do," the women pleaded, "for our townmates in the mines have even heard of the wholesale arrest of our men-folk, and they're raising money to pay a lawyer, and they will come on the day of the trial. It would be deathless shame for Mainit if our men get convicted of stealing sewer pipe."

The Bontoc women were satisfied as their lawyer in-law at once went to his car outside and drove away upon hearing that the townmates of the accused were raising funds for a defense lawyer.

At the city jail, interviewing the accused and the arresting officer, Atty. Samadang found out that the Bontoc fellows had dug up an abandoned soil pipe in a former U.S. naval reservation, broke the cast-iron into pieces, intending to sell it to Singwa, the Chinese second-hand dealer.

"Why accuse them of theft?" Atty. Samadang turned to the officer.

"They stole public property, sir," the zealous policeman answered.

"There is no case of theft here," the lawyer said emphatically enough to impress his clients, townmates of his wife.

"Why, of course not, *Casaud*," the men pleaded innocence. "We would not think for a moment of stealing government property. (Fearful respect for the law and the government.) But for our digging it up, the pipe would lie buried and forgotten forever."

"We'll see about all this on the day of the trial," the lawyer promised. "It will be the day after tomorrow. Send word to your townmates in the mines," he carefully instructed his clients, remembering what the prisoners' wives had told him shortly before.

Meanwhile, the lawyer hastened to get a certificate from the superintendent of city utilities that the soil pipe in question did not belong to the city, much less the Republic of the Philippines. Having obtained the certificate, Atty. Samadang had the defense of his clients clearly outlined in his mind. He was noted in the local legal circle for his flair for dramatics in trials.

That same day, he saw the city attorney. He saw the judge of the municipal court. Both were his friends. He convinced them that there was no theft, that the soil pipe was *res nullius*, abandoned property. The Bontoc fellows should be set free.

"But there is rampant thieving nowadays. The public should be taught a lesson. Pretty soon, these fellows will be stealing private property, finding no junk around," the judge had demurred.

"They are not the criminal type," the lawyer had reasoned. "Judge, they are innocent natives who are only trying to make an honest living."

"But the soil pipe is public property," the city attorney had also interposed. "When the reservation reverted to the Philippines from the U.S. Government, all property inside the reservation went along with it."

"It is abandoned property, I tell you," Atty. Samadang had explained. "The soil pipe had long been out of use and has unknowingly been lying there, abandoned, buried. Who would ever have discovered it but for these fellows?"

"All right, if it is not theft, they must be fined for some other crime," the judge relented. "You must also help the city. It has no money. My court has to earn its keep. What crime shall we charge, Fiscal?" the judge turned to the city attorney.

"If it is not theft, I would not know what other crime right now," the public prosecutor replied.

"I know," Atty. Samadang came up with a bright idea. "They can be charged for excavating rocks and soil inside the city without a permit, a violation of an ordinance punished by a fine."

"A ten-peso fine?" the judge looked at the lawyer.

"Make it twenty pesos," Atty. Samadang at once generously offered.

So, the outcome of the case, except for the shouting, was by now all arranged. The next day, the wives of the detention prisoners came again to the house of their in-law, anxious to know. One wife brought a bundle of split pine wood. Another a bunch of bananas. Another a handkerchiefful of edible mushrooms. These were all handed to Impon, their townmate married to the lawyer.

The wives were seated one on each step of the tall stairs at the top of which Atty. Samadang appeared.

"The trial is set for tomorrow," he announced. "I will fight that they be set free at once. They may pay only a fine of twenty pesos though, which you must have ready."

"Yes, *Casaud*, thanks to you," the women were profuse with their gratitude. "How helpless indeed we are before the law," they lamented, "but for you, our in-law," they consoled themselves.

"But you must bring my fees along too. Send word immediately to your townmates in the mines to make good their promised aid to your husbands or your husbands will remain in jail," the practitioner mockingly threatened the wives. "One sack of silver money," he hinted.

"Yes, *Casaud*, our townmates will come," the women assured their in-law. "Meanwhile, we have come to clean your yard and weed your garden, as your wife, our townmate, has asked us."

Which they did, till late in the afternoon.

Now in the morrow, the trial of the Mainit men took place. Quite early, the wives of the accused, in colorful attire, were spread on the stone steps of the City Hall. They were later joined by their townmates from the mines. That day, the court-room was packed with Bontocs of Mainit, as though the whole village itself were to be on trial.

Atty. Samadang, with dramatics, rose equal to the occasion, seeing how many were the townmates of the detained natives. His refutation of the charge of theft of public property was convincing and eloquent.

"To be charged with stealing public property is, for these villagers from the hinterland, the height of ignominy," the lawyer's plea concluded. "Far from being accused, they should be commended. Where but in this instance do you find such industry as theirs? At a time of unemployment in our country, these unlettered natives do not just sit back and wait but hustle to find ingenious ways of gainfully occupying themselves. They have dug up wealth which but for them would lie years buried and forgotten."

The public prosecutor, as arranged the day before, was ready with an amended information, charging instead illegal excavation without previous permit, to which the men pleaded guilty, and for which they were fined twenty pesos, also readily paid in open court.

"The case against you for theft is dismissed. But you are fined for violation of an ordinance prohibiting excavation in public property without previous permit," the judge carefully explained to them, who nodded approval. "You are fortunate you have a good lawyer," the judge hinted heavily, looking at Atty. Samadang.

After the order for the immediate release of the accused was issued and the judge had called for the next case, the Mainit audience trooped out of the court-room to the grounds of the City Hall, led by their hero-counsel. There, behind a tree trunk, a thick wad of bills was handed to Atty. Samadang with the profound gratitude of a whole village tribe.

Soon processed for release, the accused joined their townmates outside the City Hall, and there was rejoicing over the vindication of Mainit honor which would have been shamefully tarnished by conviction for theft of a sewage pipe. Just the same, each erstwhile detainee must slaughter shortly a pig or fowl to wash off the stain of the experience. The Mainit folk were proud of their in-law whom they considered a legal luminary.

The released natives could afford to laugh now. Isilen, the eldest in the group, observed, "The carcass of that dog we picked up has brought us bad luck." The five laughed over this.

Meanwhile, in the courtroom, the session was recessed. The judge, seeing the native crowd still outside, worshipping the lawyer, looked out the window. He saw Atty. Samadang taking leave of his clients.

"Sammy," the judge called out the nickname of Atty. Samadang. "We'll see you at the officers' club in John Hay Air Base tonight, shall we?"

"Sure, Judge," Atty. Samadang responded, patting his hip pocket.

Now, more than ever, the native crowd was convinced of the high esteem with which their in-law was held officially, or why would a judge be addressing their lawyer intimately? They were overjoyed indeed, Mainit honor was vindicated.

