



Full Text

THE POOR MAN WHO BECAME KING

A Christmas Story

Our story today, “The Poor Man Who Became King”, comes from the book, *A Child’s Treasury of Philippine Christmas Stories* published by Tahanan Books, written by Lin A. Flores and Anette Flores Garcia, and read for us by Fr. Joaquin Jose Mari C. Sumpaico III, S.J.

Ida lost her mother at a tender age and was brought up by her father. She simply adored him. She thought he was the most handsome, strong, and caring father of all. One cool evening in December, father and daughter sat at the bamboo table in their nipa hut by the sea.

“Guess what I heard in school? It's time again to choose people to play the Three Kings for our town fiesta. Itay, why don't they ever pick you?” Ida pondered out loud. Her father laughed. “I am a poor fisherman. Only the rich or important people are chosen.”

But the sea is often dangerous, and fishing is important, and you do it better than anyone here in our barrio...or the little islands of Gaspar, Melchor, and Baltazar...or all of Marinduque for that matter!” the little girl insisted.

“So long as I am a king to you,” her father said, chuckling, “that's enough for me!”

Ida spooned the maya-maya fish soup she had prepared into her father's bowl. A gingery smell rose from the clay pot. “Itay, I have this feeling that something wonderful will happen on the Feast of the Three Kings.”

“Doesn't something wonderful happen every year? Our sleepy town wakes up! More tourists come. There's a play in the plaza about the Three Kings. It has Herod in his palace, and the Christ Child in the stable. The play gets better and better every year! And the parade! The Three Kings on their white horses, the children marching to the band music, and people throwing coins and candies from their windows!”

"But, child," said her father. "I will not allow you to follow the Three Kings all around town like you did last year. You came home past midnight, remember?"

"If you were to be King, you wouldn't have to worry because I would be with you all the time," Ida said. "I wonder why I have this feeling that something special, really special will happen."

Early the next morning, Ida sat on the cool sand at the beach. She was on the lookout for her father's boat. When her father landed with his catch, she would sort the fish and help him carry the heavy baskets to market.

A child had been playing on a raft in the shallow water. Suddenly, Ida realized that the raft had floated out into open sea, into a place where she knew there

to be a powerful undertow. She looked around. There was no one else.

She ran into the water and furiously swam for the raft. Her father had taught her to swim with all her strength. Hurry, hurry! Faster, faster! she told herself.

The child started to scream. Ida was near enough to see the fear on his face.

She grabbed for the raft. It tilted as the child scrambled toward her. He slid into the water. She reached for his arm but missed as he thrashed about. Taking hold of his shirt, she lifted his head above water. She said, as calmly as she could, "I'm here. Now hold on to the raft, not my neck."

The undertow is close by, she thought. God help me! But now she was in control. Swimming with one arm, the other arm steered the raft ahead of her. She made it to shore!

The child's mother ran to them, crying, "Miguel, Miguel!" She clasped him to her bosom. "I told you never to go into the water all by yourself. You could have drowned!"

That evening the mayor came to their home just as Ida and her father were about to have dinner. "Your daughter saved my son," he said. "I cannot thank her enough, but I must try." He turned to the little girl. "Ida, what can I do for you?"

Ida could not answer.

"Please," the mayor implored. "Tell me."

"My father gives me everything I need," she said shyly. "But if you will let him ride as one of the Three Kings..."

And that is how a poor fisherman became King for a night and a day. With a red velvet robe on his broad shoulders and a gold crown on his head, he looked as though he had been born to be King Gaspar. Ida walked proudly beside him, clothed in flowing flow white, with flowers in her hair and angel's wings strapped lightly on her back.

Source: Lin A. Flores and Anette Flores Garcia, *A Child's Treasury of Philippine Christmas Stories*. Ilaw ng Tahanan Publishing Inc.

If you wish to purchase a copy of the book, please order online through www.tahananbooks.ph.

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