



Full Text

THE SULTAN WITH A HEART OF STONE

A Christmas Story

Our story today, “The Sultan with A Heart of Stone”, 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 Missy Maramara.

Omar and his father, Abdul Qadir, arrived at the Maranao village before dawn. In the dimness, Omar saw houses on stilts at the edge of the lake where the great sails of the vintas rested. Inland, the pointed dome of the mosque soared to meet the half-lit sky. The bilal, the man in the minaret, was calling everyone to azan, to pray and give praise to Allah.

As the sun rose, Omar momentarily forgot the fear he had tried to hide from his father. He had not wanted to come, but his father had asked him to, and he loved his father very dearly.

A happy glow brightened the village. This was the great festival of the Eid'l Fitr, the end of the long feast of the holy month of Ramadan. This was a Joyous time of the year for gift-giving and sharing with the poor; a time for visiting loved ones; and a time when enemies forgave each other.

“Eid'I Fitr!” people greeted Omar.

The women wore new malongs, woven in patterns of the deepest greens, tangerines, fuschias, scarlets, and golds. The men were in loose white shirts and pants. Even the houses were newly painted, their outer beams carved in glorious scrolls, like the magnificent prows of boats.

So this is where the story began, thought Omar, the story his father and mother had told him over and over throughout the years, beginning with his fifth birthday. He

never tired of hearing it, for delightful bits were added with each retelling, and the ending changed now and then.

Once upon a time there lived a Muslim prince, the eldest son of the Sultan. Everyone agreed that he was all that a prince should be. He was kind and strong, and he was determined to learn all that a Muslim prince should know because, someday, he would be Sultan, charged with the care of his people.

He rode a horse as if he and the horse were one with the wind. He sailed a vinta as if he and the boat were one with the sea. He learned the Koran as well as anyone who was not an imam, or high priest, could.

His entire life had been planned for him. And a crucial part of that plan was that he was to marry a muslim princess. That was where he went astray, or so people said.

Like many of the young Muslim men, he was sent to study in Manila, far away from his Maranao home. There he met an enchanting Christian woman. He fell in love with her, and she with him.

"And so they were married " Omar's father and mother said, seemingly ending the story.

"And lived happily ever after?" Omar asked, for his question was part of the ritual of the storytelling.

"Yes, happily ever after." His father laughed and added: "And they had a son named Omar."

"Was the prince's name Abdul Qadir?" Omar asked. "And his wife's name Anna?" His parents nodded yes. Omar was delighted with the story of his own life.

Two years later his parents added to the story: "By marrying the Christian woman, the Muslim prince had made his father, the Sultan, very angry. One day

the prince would return to the village of his birth and ask for his father's forgiveness.

Another two years passed. Omar's parents still had more to add. "The prince's son, who had grown to be a fine boy, would be his father's messenger. Alone, he would go to his grandfather, the Sultan and with his father's plea for forgiveness. For it was known, far and wide, that the Sultan had the softest heart for children."

Inside the mosque, the prayers for the Eid'l Fitr were over.

"It is time, Omar," his father said.

"Why can't you come with me?" Omar asked, though he knew the answer.

"I hurt my father very deeply, Omar," his father answered. "By marrying against his wishes, he felt as though I had betrayed him. He has closed his heart to me. My father is a stubborn man, Omar. He will not listen to me, much less look at me. To him, I do not exist. But how can your grandfather still think my marriage a mistake when faced with such a fine grandson?"

Omar looked up at his father, and their dark eyes locked for a moment in understanding.

The Sultan sat imposingly on his throne at the end of a long, grand hall. Omar walked slowly, his head held proud under the kopya or fez, his shoulders broad under the long-sleeved white shirt, "a Maranao prince's shirt," his father had said.

It was quiet and solemn. The scent of spices came from somewhere within.

Omar was face-to-face with the Sultan. He felt fear well up inside him. For a fleeting instant, Omar wanted to turn around and run away. But he saw the Sultan's eyes. They were just like his father's. He took courage.

"I kiss your hand, Grandfather," Omar said.

"Who are you?" the Sultan rumbled.

"I am the son of your son, Abdul Qadir," Omar replied.

"I have no son by that name."

"My father begs to remind you that it is the feast of forgiveness."

"What do you know of the Eid'l Fitr? You know nothing of Islam."

"My father taught me that Islam means obeying the will of Allah; that there are Five Articles of Faith: belief in one god, belief in angels, belief in the Revealed Books, belief in Mohammed and his forerunners, and belief in the Day of Judgement. There are Five Pillars ... " Omar paused to take a deep breath "of Islam...."

With a wave of his hand, the Sultan stopped Omar. "Come closer," the Sultan commanded "that I may look at you."

The Sultan looked at Omar from head to foot.

“You have your father's eyes and bearing,” the Sultan murmured at last. “Tell my son, Abdul Qadir, to come to me.”

Omar's heart leapt with joy at hearing his grandfather's words. And the young boy dreamed of the day he would bring his mother to meet the Sultan. And from that day on, they would all live happily together as a family.

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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