

Clay pipe by marcel m. navarra essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

She had already built a fire, but instead of putting the pot on the earthen stove, Malta, who sat crossed-legged on the steps, continued to be restless. Keeping in her mouth a clay pipe that was empty except for the ashes left inside, she related blankly at the bright flame seeing only the coldness, the emptiness and the anxiety. 2. She was not worried about herself or her husband and two children.

They could still endure till noon to fill their stomach with whatever little food they have left. The truth was they had grown used to eating twice (sometimes only once) a day. And they were not the only one suffering. It was wartime and the people had to face all kinds of hardships. Malta was thinking of the seven soldiers guarding the cliff. While she was building the fire, she had suddenly remembered that today was her turn, together with six of her neighbors to provide breakfast for the soldiers.

For ever since the Japanese boat had landed in Lepta (according to the rumors she had heard, the “ bow-legged ones” were forced to seek shelter on the rocky shores of Lepta to hide from the American planes already crisscrossing the skies of Zebu) the prominent seaside of the barrio has requested a guerilla leader in Circa to assign some soldiers to guard the cliff so that in case the enemies would land again, it would be easy to wipe them out because of their strategic position.

The guerilla officer (they call him lieutenant Imaging) readily agreed but on the condition that the resident of Lepta would be responsible for feeding the soldiers 3. The noise of the coconut shell dipper banging against the railing of the window shelf diverted Malt’s attention to Amok spitting out the water

with which he had gargled. Naked except for worn pants made out of fiber sack, Amok did not seem to mind the cold damp air of the early morning 4. “ By the way, Malta, where are Turf and Talon? ” Amok asked as he walked away from the window towards his wife. . “ L sent them out early to the sea just in case they could find something to bring home which we could barter for corn or some rootstock. “ She removed the clay pipe from her mouth and husband. 6. “ L wonder if they have pastured the cow’ 7. Had better do that yourself, Amok. I sent them away in a hurry. And hey, Amok, what breakfast should we prepare for the soldiers? You know it’s our turn today. ” 8. “ Why, it’s all up to you... Why not roast a pig? ” 9. “ Be serious, will you? WSDL you not be ashamed if we were the only ones unable to send food for the soldiers? 10. “ Why should we be ashamed? We don’t even have anything to eat for our own breakfast” 11. “ But it’s our duty to help them” 12. Amok scratched his head, he was about to say something, but did not go on. It was not safe to speak carelessly these days. Once your tongue slips to state some bitter truth, you would surely end up screaming 13. “ Suppose I borrow just one bowl of cornmeal, Mock? 14. “ It’s up to you, Malta. ” 15. Malta went down the stairs and walked hurriedly towards the house of Terror- Sepal. She found her sweeping the yard.

She greeted her, sat down the steps and waited until Sepal stopped sweeping. But Malta was unable to state the purpose of her evils immediately because Sepal was already chattering away. When Malta finally “ But Malta” Sepal found it hard to make excuses. “ It’s true we still have some cornmeal mixed with a little mayo’s, but it is enough for our breakfast. It would be alright if we had some bananas so we could grind the little corn

we have left” 17. Can’t you spare me even Just a small amount? Please, Sepal, have pity on me. Spare me one bowl enough for one soldier to eat.

As soon as I’m finish with my cooking, I will run to Peel to barter my two chickens for corn. I’m sure I can pay you back by this afternoon. ” 18. “ However said that you could not pay me back, Malta? I’m only thinking of Terror, who, since he began to lose sleep standing guard with the soldiers every Tuesday evening, has been complaining of gas pain. I don’t care if my children and I subsist on bananas, but I want Terror always to eat well-cooked cornmeal so his ailment could not worsen. If only the soldiers have not oblige the volunteers to keep watch with them at night, nothing would have happened to Terror.

According to him, this is the first time he has experienced so intense pain” 19. “ I don’t think it is possible not to keep the soldiers company at night. Who would be left on guard while the soldiers sleep? It would also be impossible not to expect them to get some sleep, for they might not have enough strength to fight in case the Japanese do land here. ” 20. “ This is a bitter life we lead, Malta! Just one bowl, ha, Malta? ” 21. “ Malta was in high persist as she walk towards the cliff. She was carrying a fishing creel wish contains two small pots placed one on top of the other.

The pot at the bottom was the smaller one she had used in cooking the cornmeal she was able to borrow; the one on top contains vegetable soup. On the plate she used as cover for the pot were two hard- boiled eggs. In her other hand, she clasped a rolled tobacco leaf, the only one left of what she had received in exchange for her Santa salt. The other night, one of the four

soldiers who had gone up to their house to drink tuba requested Malta not to forget to bring him a roll of young tobacco leaf when her turn to provide food.

Malta did not forget his request, and although there are volunteers assigned to gather and deliver the food to the soldiers, Malta took it upon herself to bring them her share so they could personally hand the tobacco 22. Malta first caught sight of three soldiers outside the hut used as a guardhouse. One of them swollen-faced and wearing only short pants made out of a flour sack, was being given a haircut by a soldier wearing hempen pants. The third with a big scar on his forehead, was leaning against a coconut tree, cleaning his gun. 23. Malta put down her creel and squatted. 24. Why did you bring that yourself, Nag? ” asked the one cleaning the gun. 25. “ I just wanted to” answered Malta, twisting around to find a more comfortable position. “ The volunteer was taking so long, that I decided to bring it here myself” 26. “ Who of the volunteer is in charge of collecting food today? ” called out another soldier from the inside the nip guardhouse where he was leisurely plucking his beard. 27. “ Amok, my husband, has his turn every Saturday’ Malta clarified 28. A long silence allowed, Malta took a chip from the burning wood and putting it in her clay pipe, went back to squat.

Her eyes wandered to the soldiers inside the hut. The soldier who had requested the roll of tobacco was at the far end of the hut playing dam with a frowning soldier. Malta was tempted to go to him to slip the tobacco into his hand, but she remembered her tattered sash which smelled of urine. She knew she would not be able to avoid passing by the messiest sergeant who was reading a small together. She was scared of his fierce eyes. Malta

recalled that the moment this Spanish looking sergeant arrived in Lepta, he had immediately looked for a volunteer to look for rice.

He had said that he was not used to eating cornmeal, and he had a weak stomach and poor digestion. Fortunately, one of resident in Lepta, a tenant at the Hacienda Someone, had a share in a rice field in Bas and was able to stock some sacks of play. This tenant assured the people of Lepta that he would send three giants of rice to the outpost every week so long as they would not bother him with other provision for the soldiers. The barrio folk were happy and grateful to him for loving the sergeant's problem. 29. Malta was startled by the sudden firing of a gun.

When she turned her back, she saw that it came from the soldier who was a while ago, had been cleaning his gun. Aiming it towards the sea, he pulled the trigger again and another shot was heard. Malta looked in the direction of the sea and saw a sailboat far away. 30. Malta wanted to protest the firing but was afraid for the sailboat. Malta carefully chose her words. 31. " Do you think your bullets can hit the sailboat? " 32. " Of course it can" snapped the one who fired. 33. " But might it not hit those in the boat? 34. " If they get hit, too bad for them" 35.

Malta felt her flesh turn cold. 36. " Nag" called out a soldier who was mending his denim pants. 37. Malta turned to him " what do you want, Dong? " 38. " What is the name of that charming and friendly girl? " 39. " To whom are you referring? " Malta knitted her eyebrow. 40. " To the one with the round face and full cheeks who lives in an unfinished house of plywood covered with thick poisonous vines" 41 . " Nearing, the daughter of Killing-

alba. Why do you ask, Dong? ” 42. Miss, why indeed, Debate? ” butted in a soldier who was whiling away the time smoking a lack plum leaf cigarette. Are you in love with her? ” 43. Nerd much so! Does she have a sweetheart, Nag? ” 44. “ I don’t think so, although her action have often been misunderstood, she hasn’t answered any of her suitors yet. Ask anyone from this place if I am lying. ” 45. “ If only I can get to know that girl better, there’s no telling that... ” 46. “ Is she a good catch? ” the sergeant joined in. 47. Miss, sir I think I will request to be left behind here. I have been in too many places, but I haven’t seen one that can surpass the beauty of Lepta” 48. “ Aha! ” snapped the one cleaning his gun.

Just because you haven’t tasted boiled rootstock for a long time now, just because your stomach is always full here, you now say that this place is beautiful when no matter how you look at it, Lepta is covered with sharp rocks and thorny manage plants. ” 49. Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the three volunteer carrying heavy baskets. The haircutting was over and the barber was using a piece of coconut husk to brush the neck and shoulders of the one who had his hair cut. The soldiers who asked for the rolled tobacco leaf emptied the basket of their contents.

And it didn’t take long before everyone was gathered around the food. 50. Malta who stood up and leaned against the coconut tree the moment the soldiers started eating, surveyed the different kinds of food laid on the table. There were many varieties of corn... Yellow, violet and white, the good quality mixed with the poorer grains. The dishes were of many kinds – Malagasy soup, smoked fish and fish broth. 51 . Mimi, Beret” the barber remarked. Mimi have been bragging about that you are rich in your

hometown, Raga, but I'm sure you have never tasted as many kinds of food as we have here" 52.

Keep quiet, brood" The one called Beret found it difficult to talk because of the big mouthful he had just taken in. 53. The sergeant was the last to eat. He did not mix with his subordinate. His rice was placed where he had been resting earlier while one soldier waited on him. While the rest ate with their hands, their leader used a spoon. The head should always separate himself from his men, Malta thought. 54. "Come and join us" the sergeant winked at the three volunteers. He turned to Malta and invited her. "Eat with us, Nag" 55. "Thank you, but we have already eaten" the three volunteers chorused.

Malta was about to say the same thing, but remained silent. 56. Malta's mouth watered at the sight of one soldier who was heavily perspiring as he sipped soup of Malagasy and smoked fish. There were times when one can afford to forget hunger, but at this moment when Malta stared at the abundance of food shared by the soldier, the hunger pains she always felt became even more acute. Last night, their food for supper was cassava, and the left over were all they had for breakfast. It had been almost a year now since the couple, Malta and Amok, had tasted cornmeal.

They had gotten used to Malagasy leaves mixed with bits of knags and banana blossoms, young comate leaves, raw papaya soaked in vinegar which they ate together with scraped coconut meat – food they had used to feed their pigs. The condition of Malta and Amok did not differ much from that of their neighbors and many others in Lepta. But in spite of this, they were still able to find ways and means to find food for the men who were

willing to die for the freedom of their native land. 57. The men finished eating and took turns filling the dipper with water from the bamboo container that was leaning on a log lying crosswise in the hut.

One of them whose loud burps were answered by the burping of the others, said, Mimi should have eaten with us... ” And winked at the volunteers. 58. “ Are you going to throw away your left over? ” Malta asked as she swallowed her saliva. 59. “ Feed them to the dogs” said the frowning soldier. 60. “ Give them to me so I can take them home for our dogs” begged Malta. 61 . “ Go ahead and wrap them up” the sergeant urged. 62. Malt’s heart was pounding fast as she hurriedly gathered and wrapped up the left over. In her mouth was the clay pipe which had nothing within except ashes.