

# THE INDIOS

A Novel

By

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## A HISTORICAL NOTE

Antonio de Morga, the first Spanish Civil Governor-General of the Philippines and a historian, wrote in 1609, "In every friar in the Philippines, the king had a captain-general and an entire army." Thousands of miles away on the other side of the globe, Spain had kept subjugated for more than three hundred years several million *Indios* (as the colonial masters called the Filipinos) with an armed force of just several thousand Spaniards.

The friars—who in the early years of Spanish colonization, had protected the natives from the abuses of the *encomenderos*, feudal Spanish landlords—had, over time, replaced them as de facto colonial masters. As curates of parishes, they controlled all facets of education, which they had successfully withheld from the natives until the last three and a half decades of Spanish colonial rule, by subverting educational reform decrees from the Mother Country. They censored speech and the press, certified to the moral character of residents of the parish, and had veto power over local political appointments and community activities. Through a variety of means, the religious orders had acquired considerable wealth and property, including whole towns and surrounding agricultural lands. Ignoring canon law, they had increasingly barred the predominantly native secular clergy from assignment to parishes. (Friar-curates controlled 77 percent of parishes in 1872 and 84 percent at the end of Spanish colonial and friar rule). And while governors-general and other colonial officials, civil and military, came and went (usually staying just long enough to amass wealth), the friars had come to stay. Thus, for most of the Spanish colonial period, the parish, especially in the countryside, was a virtual serfdom, with the Spanish-born friar as the lord of the manor.

The opening of the islands to international trade in the 1830s had created a small class of wealthy Indio families who sent their sons to Manila and/or Europe to study. And since 1869 when the Suez Canal facilitated travel, the number of young Indios who had gone to study in Spain and other European countries had increased several-fold. There, they were exposed to humanistic philosophy and the enlightened ideals of free speech, individual rights and equality, and to a lifestyle that was free from forced servitude, banishment from one's home, and arbitrary arrests and incarceration.

At the same time that these young Indios were awakening to the oppression of friar rule, increasing anti-clericalism in Europe, especially in Spain, drove the religious orders to seek haven in the colony. Thus, European steamers which brought back to the ports of Manila enlightened young Indios, also unloaded friars who joined the ranks of the religious orders which were determined to maintain the status quo in the colony.

The clamor for reform in the 1860s, however, was not initiated by the wealthy, European-educated Indios, but by the native clergy. Banned from membership in the religious orders and relegated to a position that was subservient to the friar, they advocated for the secularization of the clergy and for parity with the friars. The passage by the Spanish government of the decree of 1861 heightened tensions between the religious orders and the native clergy. The decree mandated that the Recollects relinquish to the Jesuits (who were expelled in 1769 from the colony and now allowed to return) the parishes in Mindanao which they had taken over from the Jesuits almost a century earlier. And to compensate the Recollects, the native secular clergy were evicted from their Manila parishes.

Following the overthrow of the Spanish monarchy in 1868, the new regime sent the liberal Governor-General Carlos María de la Torre to the colony. The new Governor-General treated the Indios with dignity and respect, so unlike the contemptuous treatment of them by the friars and by other Spaniards. And he immediately set out to implement the educational reform decree of 1863 which was enacted by the Spanish government. The decree required the colonial government to build primary schools, at least one for boys and one for girls in every town, and to provide free and compulsory teaching of Spanish. The friars, however, by using the time-honored practice among colonial administrators, civil and clerical, of *cumplase*, obey but not execute, had successfully contravened, until then, any effort to implement the reform decree.

The friars were particularly adamant in their resistance to the teaching of the Spanish language to the natives. They, from the early missionaries to the present religious orders, had made strenuous efforts to learn the local tongues, and had printed prayer and catechism books, heard confessions, and delivered sermons in the natives' language, probably except on occasions when a Spaniard happened to attend church.

The newly arrived Governor-General also actively supported secularization of the clergy. The *ilustrados*, college-educated Indios, heartened by the reforms and emboldened by a taste of newly acquired civil liberties, openly rallied to the native clergy's fight for parity with the friars. Moreover, students at universities and colleges organized to protest abuses of the friar-teachers.

De la Torre, however, was recalled two years later and was replaced by Rafael de Izquierdo, who immediately reversed the policies of his predecessor. He also removed Indios and mestizos from civilian and military administration and replaced them with *peninsulares*, Spaniards born in Spain. He cancelled for native soldiers and guards at the Cavite arsenals the exemption from *polo y servicio*—forced labor for forty days by Indio males sixteen to sixty years of age. They mutinied in protest.

In the last days of 1871, three native priests—Fathers Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora—appealed to Spain and to Rome, in accordance with canon law, for the return of their parishes. They were accused by the colonial government of inciting the Cavite mutiny and were publicly executed. (Historians agree that the execution had awakened the *Indios*—separated by geography, language and ethnocentrism—to their common fate as an oppressed people).

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## Cast of Characters

Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964)  
Aling Epang  
Andres Bonifacio (1863-1897)  
Father Jose Burgos (1837-1872)  
Mama and Papa Burgos  
Edilberto Evangelista (1862-1897)  
Friar-curate of Calamba  
Imo  
Emilio Jacinto (1875-1899)  
Josefa  
Apolinario Mabini (1864-1903)  
Don and Dona Mendoza  
Placido Mendoza  
Benedicto Nijaga (1856-1897)  
Marcelo H. del Pilar (1850-1896)  
Mariano Ponce (1863-1918)  
Artemio Ricarte (1866-1945)  
Jose Rizal (1861-1896)  
Francisco L. Roxas (1851-1897)  
Don and Dona Sanchez  
Capitan Pablo and Doña de los Santos  
Ramona de los Santos  
Tibo  
Dr. Pio Valenzuela (1869-1956)

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EXECUTION

In the early morning hours of February 17, 1872, the Spaniards' exuberant shouts of "*Viva la España!*" occasionally rose above the *Indios'* murmured prayers and muffled screams as the procession of the three black-robed native priests slowly emerged from the dawn's shadows. As the *guardia civil* escorted the priests toward the makeshift stage where their executioner awaited them, a chorus of male voices announcing the arrival of the doomed priests suddenly erupted from lush branches of centuries-old acacia trees that, until then, had been silent witnesses to the unfolding drama. Like echoes, the words quickly spread through the multitude of *Indios* that filled the plaza, which extended from the banks of Manila Bay and several hectares of grass and dirt into the unevenly paved streets. Men, women, and children made the sign of the cross and dropped to their knees as the news reached them.

The *Indios'* recitations of the Holy Rosary, punctuated with exclamations of "*Sus-Mari-osep,*" Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the festive Spanish voices and the military band's animated rendition of a martial tune accompanied eighty-five-year-old Father Mariano Gomez, parish priest of Bacoor, Cavite and publisher of *La Verdad*, as he advanced with slow but measured steps toward the gallows. The padre blessed the crowd of Spaniards and natives just before the executioner wrapped a black shroud over his head. The music and the shroud masked the cracking sound as the elderly padre's neck broke, but soon his body dropped in a heap on the floor. Then the *guardia civil* escorted Father Jacinto Zamora, who was next in line, to the gallows. The youthful priest glanced blankly at the sea of white and brown faces that filled the grounds around the stage, and meekly walked to his death.

But Father Jose Burgos, doctor of canon law and parish priest of the Cathedral of Manila, struggled from the *guardia civil's* hold to face the Spanish dignitaries gathered just below the platform, as if to declare his innocence one last time.

The Spaniards greeted the priest's effort with boisterous laughter and hoots. They rose to their feet and broke into wild cheers as Father Burgos' body finally crumpled.

Heads bowed in prayer lifted at the sounds of merriment from inside the barricade that separated the Spaniards from the natives. Some exchanged looks that said, "You see? I told you this was all a hoax!" An old woman, bent-over with age, looked up from her rosary and wiped the tears from her shriveled cheeks with the edge of a ragged bandana that protected the back of her neck from the cool morning breeze. "Andoy," the woman, known among her neighbors in the slums of Tondo as Tandang Maria, Old Maria, called out to her grandson, "what is going on?" When she didn't receive a response from Andoy, Tandang Maria sought an answer from those immediately around her until she spotted two young men who, by their bearing and European-style suits and hats, were obviously wealthy college students standing a little closer to the barricade.

"Señor...Don..." she timidly approached Placido.

"Señor..." Tandang Maria repeated.

Placido Mendoza, at five feet nine inches tall, towered over almost everyone around, including his friend, Marcelo H. del Pilar, and had a good vantage view of the make-shift

platform. But he was oblivious to everything around him, his gaze on the scaffold, as if waiting for the three dark-clad figures to stand up and take a bow, as he had seen *zarzuela* actors do during a town fiesta. A seminarian, Placido remained steadfast in his belief that the friars, especially The Most Reverend Father Salvador Martin, Rector of the Colegio de San Jose, would never allow the native clergy, men of the cloth like themselves, to be executed by the Spanish civil authorities.

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From his perch, not far from where Placido stood, nine-year-old Andres Bonifacio, Andoy to his family and neighbors, watched as the Spaniards exchanged congratulatory handshakes and pleasantries. And he watched as they strode toward their carriages with the same fanfare and pomp that announced their arrival an hour earlier. He turned his gaze toward the stage and saw the *guardia* civil preparing to dump the bodies into a horse-pulled cart. "They've really killed the padre!" he screamed. The other boys and men in the tree were already scrambling down and no one paid attention to Andoy. "They've really killed the padre!" he said again, this time softly, as if to himself. He sat there until almost everyone was gone. Finally remembering his grandmother, Andoy wiped his tears on the sleeves of his shirt and came down.

"Andoy," Tandang Maria, too old to kneel, sat on a bench and beckoned to him, an extra rosary in hand. She always carried extra rosaries to make sure no one went to Purgatory because they didn't have a rosary at Angelus or other such occasion. She had prayed almost non-stop to the Virgin Mary and all the saints since the Cathedral's new friar-curate announced the upcoming executions from the pulpit at Sunday mass.

"Andoy," Tandang Maria called out again when her grandson did not make a move to take the rosary. "Let's pray for the padre's soul," she said, gesturing to the boy to kneel.

"What good would that do?" Andoy said, not taking the rosary. "God is white ... Jesus is white ... all the saints are white ... No Indio would get past San Pedro, priest or no priest."

"*Sus-mari-osep!*" Tandang Maria exclaimed and made the big sign of the cross—forehead to chest to left then right shoulder—then small crosses on the forehead, across her lips, then on her chest, and the big cross again. "*Bata ka! Child!*" she turned to Andoy when she finished, "do you want God to punish you?" She commanded her grandson to take the rosary and kneel.

Andoy, an obedient child, just stood there, looking alternately at the stage and at the departing carriages that were taking the Spaniards away from the plaza.

## CHAPTER TWO AFTER THE EXECUTION

The multitude that just an hour ago had filled the plaza, now began to scatter in different directions. Men hoisted wood benches on their right shoulders and rolled-up mats of braided palm leaves, on the other. Some women carried toddlers, straddled on their left hips. Some toted the remains of candles and food, leaving behind them all kinds of debris and banana leaves that they used to wrap rice cakes. Many, men and women alike, stopped to gulp down a cup of cocoa or *salabat*, a ginger root drink, bought from vendors who kept pots of them hot over makeshift stoves.

Before joining the departing crowd, more than a few of the men and boys trekked toward the platform on the mound, and kneeled and made the sign of the cross, as they would do in front of the altar.

"*Compadre*," Marcelo said, lightly tapping Placido on the shoulder. Until then, neither of them had moved, as if frozen on the spot, or said anything.

Placido, though startled, didn't take his gaze off the retreating North Star.

"*Pare...*" Marcelo looked around the crowd before continuing, almost in a whisper. "The Basas and the Regidores were deported yesterday to the Marianas. And Sevilla, Dandan, del Rosario, Apacible, others, are being held in Fort Santiago." Marcelo briefly scanned their immediate surroundings, including the rich foliage around and above them, before adding, "There are rumors about more arrests. Everyone in the Reform Committee is in danger."

Placido did not give any indication that he heard.

Marcelo, who had tried to give possible onlookers the appearance of two young men in casual conversation, faced his friend. His usually mischievous black eyes looked earnest, his bushy mustache partially masking sternly pursed lips.

"*Pare*," Marcelo tried again. Although they met only in their first year at college, they quickly became very close, almost inseparable, despite their being so opposite in many ways. Placido was serious and lacking a sense of humor; he, Marcelo, was fun-loving, ready to see the humor in almost everything. And while Placido was blind in his devotion to the Church, Marcelo was irreverent, often exasperated at Placido's seemingly unshakeable belief in the inherent goodness and infallibility of the friars. He seemed to enjoy shocking his friend with his parodies of "Our Father," and "Hail Mary." Their friendship became even stronger when Marcelo, who played the guitar well and had a good singing voice, helped Placido serenade his childhood sweetheart, Ramona de los Santos, whenever they could visit his hometown of Calamba. The friends had pledged that they would be each other's *compadre*, to their first-born. They continued to call each other "*Pare*" although Placido had to give up his dreams of marriage to obey his mother's mandate that he should give up law and study for the priesthood instead.

"*Pare*, a steamer is leaving for Europe on March 15," Marcelo continued. "Emilio Santos, Jose de los Reyes, and several others have booked passage."

"I didn't even say goodbye to the padre," Placido said, still looking at the North Star.

"Nobody was able to say goodbye, not even their families," Marcelo said patiently. "The authorities held the padres incommunicado."

"I hope he knew that I...we...were here," Placido said, as if talking to the star rather than to his friend. Placido now wondered how long the three priests had been standing in the shadows, before the Spaniards arrived and took their places in front of the stage. "Maybe he had watched us standing here. He was so close."

His left thumb and index finger caressing his mustache, as he was wont to do when in deep contemplation, Marcelo gazed at the spot, not many meters away—now looking mundane and un-mysterious under the light of the morning sun—where the native priests must have waited for the Spaniards to signal that it was time for them to die. "At least he...they...knew that many of their countrymen prayed for them," Marcelo said after a while.

Placido suddenly realized that the priests were not given the last rites at the scaffold. "They probably received the Holy Sacraments at Fort Santiago," he said. He looked at his friend, as if for confirmation.

Marcelo evaded his gaze.

"What could have possessed the padre to get involved with those scoundrels?" Placido continued.

Marcelo looked at his friend, not understanding. The friends had discussed Father Burgos' writings and Marcelo had expressed great admiration for the padre. But Marcelo's skepticism of all those who claimed to represent God on earth had precluded their developing the kind of personal relationship that Placido had with the late priest.

"He had always preached about peaceful means of achieving reforms, about patience," Placido continued, not waiting for an answer. "He...they...would have prevailed eventually. They had canon law on their side."

"Yes," Marcelo agreed. "The friars knew that. And they also knew that the native clergy had led the struggle for independence in South America."

"He should have waited," Placido said softly, as if talking to himself.

"Don't you remember that Father Pedro Pelaez's petition to the Queen of Spain to nullify the decree of 1861 had remained unanswered?"

"The injustice of his parish being taken away from him must have clouded his judgment," Placido went on, as if to acknowledge that the decree allowed the colonial government to evict native priests from their parishes.

"There's no way for us to know what really happened," Marcelo said. "There was so much secrecy about the trial and the verdict was carried out immediately, without any chance for review or appeal."

"But even The Reverend Father Salvador Martin thinks the padre must have been driven to desperation—"

"You don't really believe that Father Burgos was guilty of the charges against him, do you?" Marcelo, wise to the ways of the friars, interrupted. "The Archbishop, himself, apparently did not think there was evidence to implicate the padres. That's why they were not defrocked."

Until then Placido had not given much thought to the fact that the padres were wearing their clerical robe and collar at the scaffold.

A commotion among beggars scavenging for scraps of food and combing the areas newly vacated by the crowd—now surging away from the plaza before the sun's light completely took away their anonymity—saved Placido from having to answer.

"Nanay, Mother, look what I found!" an un-clod young boy, probably five or six years old, his emaciated body covered only by an adult-sized, ragged undershirt that extended way down below his knees, shouted. He held up a silver medallion of the Holy Trinity in his right hand and a prayer book in the other. Other beggars scrounging around the plaza found various items of worship strewn at different places.

Not far from the two friends, a man about their age—but his eyes looked like he had seen much more than they had—glared at them and then at the beggars with equal degrees of contempt. His sunbaked face, red breeches and wide-brimmed hat of braided palm tree leaves, which he held between his left arm and armpit, tagged him as a *provinciano*, probably a sharecropper, or a small farmer. The man tore up his *cedula*, which identified him as Julian Baltazar from Urdaneta, Ilocos, and let the pieces drop from his hands. He then took a holy medallion off his neck and threw it toward the beggars, who gasped in horror and made the sign of the cross. No one made a move to pick up the medallion.

Placido, disgusted at such sacrilege, took a step toward the spot where the medallion lay but was stopped by his friend. Neither of the friends said anything as the *provinciano* approached them without the customary deference the poor accorded scions of wealthy families. Marcelo, well-built and strong for a man not accustomed to using his muscles for physical exertion, braced for an attack by a possibly deranged man. But the man turned and walked away before he got close to where they stood. Placido, still fuming at the peasant's behavior, followed the man with his gaze.

"Pare, several of our friends from school and other colleges, even Ateneo, are leaving for Hong Kong in a few days. And I know of others who're planning to follow," Marcelo continued their conversation as if nothing had happened. He knew that the Mendozas were just leasing their hacienda from the Dominican Order—which owned the whole town of Calamba and the surrounding agricultural areas—and was not sure if his friend's family was wealthy enough to send him to Europe.

"The authorities and the friars know of your association with the padre," he added. "It might be prudent for you to—"

"But if I leave, the authorities might take that as evidence of guilt," Placido interrupted. "I don't want my family to suffer, to be deported. What about you? What are your plans?"

"I'll stay as long as I can; I'd be more useful here than in Madrid." Marcelo looked pensively at the departing crowd, which reminded him of flocks of chickens at his family's plantation in Bulacan. "We have to generate support from the *ilustrados*, from businessmen, and *hacenderos*. It's up to us—who are able to do so—to work for reforms."

"Yes," Placido said, as he followed his friend's gaze.

"There's so much to be done," Marcelo, encouraged by Placido's apparent agreement, continued. "We need to—"

"Mama Burgos...I have to go to Mama Burgos," Placido interrupted, looking as if he had just been awakened from a deep sleep. The Burgoses had been his second family for many months while he boarded at their house in Binondo. Mrs. Burgos always treated him as her younger son, even after he moved to the Colegio de San Jose dormitory.

Marcelo did not press his friend and they hurriedly said their goodbyes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AT THE BURGOS HOME

During the late padre's tenure as parish priest of Manila Cathedral, the Burgos two-story house of concrete and wood—which dominated the landscape of Binondo—was a center of activities and festivities. Not a day passed when visitors from the neighborhood or from out-of-town were not gathered there. This morning the windows were closed and there was not a sound to indicate that someone was home. Only a fleeting whiff of the fragrance of *dama de noche* that grew wild alongside the house gave it a semblance of what Placido had considered, at one time, as a second home. Mama Burgos had always scolded men and boys who tried to urinate by the lampposts or the bushes. "*Animales! Barbaros!*" she would scream at them from the veranda, and the offenders would usually scramble away, sometimes in mid-stream. This morning the fragrance competed valiantly but futilely with the fetid odors of night-soil and urine undiluted by rain.

"*Buenos días,*" Placido called out from the street.

"*Buenos días,*" he tried again when no one answered. He just knew that Mama Burgos would not have gone to the plaza and was somewhere in the dark, silent house.

He was about to give up when someone peeked from the veranda and immediately disappeared. The servant, a young girl from the Burgos hometown in Ilocos, opened the door halfway and quickly surveyed the street below. Satisfied, she opened the door wide and let Placido enter the dark house.

"The señora is in the prayer room," she said in Ilocano and pointed before Placido could ask. He could tell that the young girl had been crying and guessed that the news from the plaza had already reached the Burgos household.

Mama Burgos, in her favorite beige *mestiza* dress—she wore European-style clothes, even at home—was kneeling before a statue of the Virgin Mary. She made the sign of the cross as Placido entered. He kissed her hand in greeting, like a son would, and helped her up.

Placido escorted his late mentor's mother to the *sala*. Mama Burgos had always been vibrant and lively. Placido guessed she was in her midfifties although, with her hair always carefully coiffed, she looked much younger than most women her age. She did not walk, she glided. Now she felt heavy as she leaned on his arm and dragged her beaded slippers.

"You know, his father and I sent Pepito to San Juan de Letran to study law," she said suddenly, as she eased herself into a sofa. "But no, he wanted to be a priest. He..." her voice broke and she could not continue. Being from Ilocos, a province about three hundred kilometers north of Manila, Mama Burgos didn't speak Tagalog. She spoke to him in Spanish with a smattering of Ilocano. She was quite proud of her fluent Spanish and had made no effort, during the two years she had lived in Manila, to learn the language of her son's native

parishioners, and Placido's. Even the newly arrived friar-curate of Manila Cathedral spoke better Tagalog.

"Where's Don Burgos?" Placido asked, to change the topic. Somehow, he never could bring himself to call the patriarch of the Burgos family "Papa," and he suspected that the old man would be embarrassed if he did.

"He has not returned from the..." She started to cry but quickly collected herself. "You look tired and hungry," she said and ordered the servant to serve Placido breakfast.

Mama Burgos disappeared into a room while Placido ate *pan\_de\_sal* and drank hot cocoa at the dining table that could comfortably seat twelve. She came back holding a white baptismal dress in the palms of her hands, like an offering. She ordered the servant to dust one side of the table and gingerly laid the dress on it.

"Did you know Pepito's godfather was the Governor of Ilocos, Don Jose María Calderon?" she asked as she caressed the baptismal dress.

He shook his head. It was not until then that Placido realized that the padre and he had almost never talked about personal matters during their many months of friendship.

"We tried to contact the Governor during the trial..." she paused to examine one sleeve and then the other of the finely woven *piña*. "The last news we had about him was that he had returned to Spain," she continued, without once taking her gaze off the dress. "He would have helped my Pepito."

"The trial was over very quickly—"

"If only my Pepito had listened to us and became a lawyer, as we had wanted him to do," she continued as if she didn't hear him. "My Pepito was not a disobedient son, but he could be headstrong sometimes," she said, looking as if she would start to cry again. But she didn't.

Placido exerted every strength of his being to quell the temptation to ask Mama Burgos if she thought the padre was headstrong enough to have done what the authorities claimed he did.

"Pepito's father wanted him to come home and manage the hacienda," Mama Burgos went on, unaware of the inner struggle in Placido. "But I persuaded him to let Pepito stay at the *colegio*."

Placido, sensing Mama Burgos' need to talk, listened quietly.

"If I had not done that..." She couldn't go on.

Placido asked the servant to bring the señora a glass of water and said, almost inaudibly, "It's God's will."

Mama Burgos peremptorily gestured to the servant to put down the glass on the table and looked at Placido. He could not read the expression in her eyes. He thought he saw a flash of anger. But she didn't say anything and, almost immediately, again turned her attention to the baptismal dress. The two sat in solitude, lost in their own thoughts.

"He's so intelligent. His grades were never below excellent." Her voice broke the silence. "Did you know my Pepito competed for a parish even before he was ordained and won over full-blooded Spaniards?"

Placido said 'yes' and nodded although Mama Burgos was not looking at him.

"Some of those Spaniards were *peninsulares*, born and bred in Spain," she added, looking at Placido, as if to see if he was properly impressed by her son's accomplishment.

Placido met her gaze and nodded.

"And did you know that Governor-General de la Torre himself toasted my Pepito just a year ago?"

Before Placido could answer, the servant returned from the kitchen with a plate of sliced ripe papaya, then started to clear the side of the table close to where the señora sat.

"Don't touch that!" she shouted when the servant picked up a tray of sweet rice cake.

"The authorities won't even let us see Pepito on his birthday," she said to Placido.

"They won't even let us give him the rice cake. I made it myself. It was his favorite." Placido had noticed the plate of moldy cake on the table. "And I embroidered these handkerchiefs for him," she continued, reaching for the neatly-folded white linen handkerchiefs lying next to the rice cake.

She sat silently as she traced the embroidered initials with her fingertips, seemingly oblivious to Placido's presence. Placido, not wanting to intrude, did not tell her that he, too, had tried to see the padre on his birthday.

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From the dining room, Placido could see the veranda where he and Father Burgos had spent many evenings talking about Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau. "One can make choices only from knowledge, never from ignorance," the padre had said, as if to justify exposing him to these Church-banned philosophers. They had talked as well about the future of secularization in the colony, the political situation in the Mother Country, the American civil war and its aftermath, and a wide variety of subjects. But his favorite topic was education.

"We need to educate our people to prove to the Spaniards that we are worthy ... that we are not inferior to them, as they believe," the padre had said to him several times.

Placido remembered one evening when they had just returned from a reception at the palace of the Governor-General. It was shortly after the padre's ordination and appointment as synodal examiner for all the parishes of Manila—for which Governor-General Carlos María de la Torre had warmly congratulated him. "You'll be Archbishop one day," Placido said to him. And he sincerely believed it.

Father Burgos beamed but quickly turned to the subject of education. Like everyone else at the reception, the padre was heartened by the Governor-General's pledge to implement the educational reform decree which was enacted in 1863 by the Spanish government, to improve the state of education in the colony.

"Our children and youth must learn the same skills as their counterparts in Europe. They have to study mathematics and science," Father Burgos had said. His eyes were radiant. "Only then...and it would take time, a long time...only then can our society reach the level of development—"

The padre, Placido knew, was a firm believer in Comte's and Spencer's positivistic theories of progressive social change, and he thought that, probably, the padre's realization of how far the colony had to go to achieve the same level of development as Europe's made him stop.

"A big step toward progress has been taken, and there's no turning back," the padre continued after a long pause.

The euphoria and optimism of that evening turned to dejection and despair two years later when the most beloved Governor-General de la Torre was called back to Spain—when the short-lived Spanish Republic collapsed. But many in the colony believed that the friars had much to do with the recall. He was replaced by Governor-General Rafael de Izquierdo, who promptly nullified all reforms initiated or being implemented by his liberal predecessor.

"This is just a temporary setback," Father Burgos had said, still clinging to his belief in the inevitability of progress.

Placido had nodded in agreement although he did not share the padre's optimism. That was the last time he saw his mentor.

A commotion down the street announced the arrival of Don Burgos from the plaza. Placido sprang to his feet and rushed to the veranda, leaving Mama Burgos, who had visibly stiffened, but had made no move to get up from the table. He was disheartened, yet relieved, to see that Don Burgos, except for their houseboy, was alone in the family carriage—without the body. He quickly went down the concrete steps to escort the don to the house.

Like his wife, Don Burgos was always well-groomed and vibrant. This morning his thick, greying hair was disheveled and he looked many years older than the last time Placido saw him. He disengaged his hand from Placido's arm as soon as they reached the top of the stairs, glanced at his wife, who had not taken her gaze from the embroidered handkerchiefs, and walked into the bedroom.

Placido, realizing that he and Mama Burgos would not get any information from the don, ran down the steps to find out about the padre's body from the houseboy.

"The *guardia civil* took the padres," he said in Ilocano. Placido gathered from his meager understanding of the language that Don Burgos had begged the authorities to give him his son's body so he could have a proper Christian burial. The Spaniards refused the old man's request. "They won't even let the don follow the cart or tell him where the padre would be buried," he continued.

Placido went back to the house and took a chair next to Mama Burgos, who had looked up when he entered. Her gaze lingered at the open door, then she turned away, and covered her face with the embroidered handkerchiefs. Her shoulders shook violently, and despite her valiant efforts, sounds of her sobbing escaped through the handkerchiefs. Placido sat there awkwardly, not knowing how to console his friend's mother or share her grief.

The servant, who also was crying, approached and put several handkerchiefs on the table in front of the *señora*. Mama Burgos stopped sobbing. She dried her eyes and cheeks with a fresh handkerchief and stared at a chair across from her.

"Serve your master cocoa and pan de sal," she ordered the servant. She glanced at the young girl, then again closely examined the chair.

"Mama Burgos," Placido said after an interminable silence, "we have to order mass for the padre."

The *señora* looked at him, as if not comprehending.

"We have to order mass for the padre," he repeated.

She didn't say anything, staring now in front of her at nothing in particular, for what seemed to Placido to be a very long time. She then looked at him and nodded.

Placido took that as his mandate to make arrangements for the mass. He kissed her hand and said goodbye.