

HOW MY BROTHER LEON BROUGHT HOME A WIFE

Manuel E. Arguilla

LA UNION, PHILIPPINES:

The *Province of La Union* (literally: The Union), is a province of the Philippines located in the Ilocos Region or Region 1 in Luzon, whose capital is San Fernando City and borders Ilocos Sur to the north, Benguet to the east, and Pangasinan to the south, to the west of La Union is the South China Sea.

La Unión, in Spanish, was formed in 1850 when the Spanish colonial government of Governor-General Antonio Maria Blanco merged the southern towns of Ilocos Sur province, the northern towns of Pangasinan, and the western towns of Benguet to the east.

Economy. The economy is diversified with service, manufacturing, and agricultural industries spread throughout the province. The Port of San Fernando operates as an increasingly active shipping point, and the former American airbase, Wallace Air Station, having been converted into a business and industrial area, helps to facilitate such commercial activity.

Tourists often flock to the beaches of Bauang, or to the more secluded ones further north for snorkelling, surfing or other water sports; the more northerly beaches near San Juan specifically cater to both local surfers as well as portions of the world surfing circuit.

People and Culture. Ninety-three percent of the population is Ilocano and is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. There are communities of Pangasinense in the south, Igorots in the Cordillera foothills, and Tagalog people in the city. La Union is highly literate, with San Fernando City as the administrative, educational, and financial center of the region.

Throughout the entire 152 year-history of La Union, several sons and daughters have contributed to the evolving national history. Some of these names have a familiar ring to us today: Diego Silang, patriot and hero; Camilo Oasis, senator and educator; Francisco Ortega, Speaker pro-tempore; Alejo Mabanag, senator; Mariano Madriaga and Enrique Sobrepeña, religious leaders; Manuel Arguilla, author; Angel Anden, journalist and academician; Nicolas Zafra, historian and educator; Laureana Novicio - Luna, mother of the illustrious Luna brothers; Magnolia Antonino, senator and businesswoman, Manuel Cases, parliamentarian; Epifanio Castillejos, bureaucrat; Joaquin Ortega, lawyer

and assemblyman; Jose Aspiras, congressman and ex-secretary of tourism; Juvenal Guerrero, ex-justice of the Supreme Court; Victor F. Ortega, congressman and constitutional convention delegate and now governor; Fortunato Abat, soldier diplomat; Artemio Tadiar, an officer and a gentlemen; Sixto Domondon, jurist; Melchor P Aquino, noted ambassador and columnist, Justo O. Orros, Jr. Ambassador to Mexico.

These are just few of those who have contributed unselfishly through their individual skills, talents and leadership, towards La Union's development and that of the nation. For indeed, La Union's richest resources are its people. It is through them that the province contributed to the unity, progress and prosperity of the nation.

Attractions. *Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, Agoo, Agoo-Damortis National Seashore, Agoo, Museo Iloko, Agoo, Bauang Beach, Bauang, San Francisco - Canaoay - Pagudpud Beach, City of San Fernando, La Union Botanical Garden, City of San Fernando, Heroes Hill, City of San Fernando, Macho Temple, City of San Fernando, Marcos Park, Pugo, Pindangan Ruins, City of San Fernando, Shrine of Lady Namacpacan, Luna, San Juan Beach, San Juan, Tomb of the Unknown soldier, City San Fernando, Moro Watch Tower, Luna, Welcome Arc, Rosario, Gateway to Ilocandia, Baguio City and Pangasinan*

Bauang, La Union. Bauang, La Union is the hometown of Manuel E. Arguilla and Bauang originated from "baoang" (garlic, but Spaniards changed the letter "o" to "u"). The word "uang" also means "river split into two" flowing into the sea (a Delta divides Bauang River into two).

In 1590, Bauang started as a settlement. Spanish Friar Agustin Mino was appointed its first minister. In 1765, it became a town and formed part of Pangasinan. Don Francisco delos Reyes sat as its first gobernadorcillo. With the creation of La Union in 1850, Bauang became one of its twelve towns.

Like other towns in the province, Bauang also had its share in the devastating invasions of Moro pirates ("tiron") made series of invasions in Bauang, hence, the rise of watchtowers (baluarte, by the Gobernadorcillo Don Juan Mallare). In 1890, Bauang

“revolucionarios” led by Remigio Patacsil and Mauro Ortiz ousted the Spanish colonizers (“cazadores” or Spanish soldiers) and the “revolucionarios” (Filipinos).

In 1913, however, Bauang barrios were given to San Fernando: Pagudpud, Pagdalagan, Sevilla, Bungro, Tanquigan and Sibuan-Otong. In the Japanese war, heroes of Baunag fought in its beaches, in Lingayen Gulf, Bataan and Corregidor (as USAFIP-NL). The Japanese executed Manuel Arguilla, poet and journalist, including Major Alberto O. Fenit (USAFFE) and Bauang Mayor

Ambrosio Rimando. A town plaza monument today honors these Bauang heroes.

Bauang is known as the Beach Capital of the Philippines (1970, the shorelines of Baccuit Sur to Pagdalagan Sur). Bauang has a treasure: Research Reef (a dive spot for local and foreign scuba divers).

Bauang regularly hosts the South China Sea Regatta (led by the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR (Manuel E. Arguilla):

Manuel E. Arguilla (1911 – 1944) was born on June 17, 1911, an Ilocano writer in English, patriot, and martyr, from Nagrebcan, Bauang, La Union, who used the local color in his writings. Because he spent much of his childhood in the province, his portrayal of Ilocano life is unsurpassed. He is the son of Crisanto Arguilla, a farmer, and Margarita Estabillo, a potter. Their mediocre living was not a hindrance for Manuel to attain his dreams especially in literature.

When an author uses *local colors* in certain writings, he or she brings to life the language that appeals to the surrounding of a particular place and time and uses the sights and sounds of a particular people.

He is known for his widely anthologized short story “How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife,” the main story in the collection “How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife and Other Short Stories” which won first prize in the Commonwealth Literary Contest in 1940.

His stories “Midsummer” and “Heat” was published in the United States by the Prairie Schooner.

Most of Arguilla's stories depict scenes in Barrio Nagrebcan, Bauang, La Union where he was born. His bond with his birthplace, forged by his

dealings with the peasant folk of Ilocos, remained strong even after he moved to Manila where he studied at the University of the Philippines where he finished BS Education in 1933 and where he became a member and later the president of the U.P. Writer's Club and editor of the university's Literary Apprentice.

He married Lydia Villanueva, another talented writer in English, and they lived in Ermita, Manila. Here, F. Sionil José, another seminal Filipino writer in English, recalls often seeing him in the National Library, which was then in the basement of what is now the National Museum. “You couldn't miss him”, Jose describes Arguilla, “because he had this black patch on his cheek, a birthmark or an overgrown mole. He was writing then those famous short stories and essays which I admired.”

He became a creative writing teacher at the University of Manila and later worked at the Bureau of Public Welfare as managing editor of the bureau's publication Welfare Advocate until 1943. He was later appointed to the Board of Censors. He secretly organized a guerrilla intelligence unit against the Japanese.

In October 1944, he was captured, tortured and executed by the Japanese army at Fort Santiago.

CHARACTERS:

BALDO.	He is the one who narrated the story and the brother of Leon.
LEON.	He is the one who brought home a wife, responsible, caring, gentle, and a loving husband.
MARIA.	She was born in the city, the wife of Leon, supportive, creative and a loving wife.
FATHER.	The one who instructed Baldo on what he will do while he is on the road together with Leon and Maria. He made an ingenious way to find out if Maria is really worthy to live in a rural place.
LABANG.	The hardworking cow.

INTRODUCTION:

Have you heard about a *provinciano* whose girlfriend is from the city? How do you think will this man present his loved one to his family in a *barrio* whose culture and traditions are different from hers? How will the man's family react to this situation?

The story explains some ways on what is the meaning of true love and how this true love can be shown. Values are also included in the story or attitudes that each character possessed like the obedience of Baldo, being supportive of Maria, being responsible of Leon and the hardworking Labang.

MAIN STORY:

She stepped down from the *carretela* of Ca Celin with a quick, delicate grace. She was lovely. She was tall. She looked up to my brother with a smile, and her brother with a smile, and her forehead was on a level with his mouth.

"You are Baldo," she said and placed her hand lightly on my shoulder. Her nails were long, but they were not painted. She was fragrant like a morning when *papayas* are in bloom. And a small dimple appeared high up on her cheek.

"And this is Labang of whom I have heard so much." She held the wrist of one hand with the other and looked at Labang, and Labang never stopped chewing his cud. He swallowed and brought up to his mouth more cud and the sound of his insides was like a drum.

I laid a hand on Labang's massive neck and said to her. "You may scratch his forehead now."

She hesitated and I saw that her eyes were on the long curving horns. But she came and touched Labang's forehead with her long fingers, and Labang never even stopped chewing his cud, except that his big eyes half closed. And by and by, she was scratching his forehead very daintily.

My brother Leon put down the trunks on the grassy side of the road. He paid Ca Celin twice the usual fare from the station to the edge of Nagrebcan. Then he was standing beside us, and she turned to him eagerly. I watched Ca Celin, where he stood in front of the horse, and he ran his fingers through its forelock, and could not keep his eyes away from her.

"Maria –," my brother Leon said.

He did not say Maring. He did not say Mayang. I knew then that he had always called her Maria, and that to us all, she would be Maria, and that to us all, she

would be Maria; and in my mind I said – "Maria" – and it was a beautiful name.

"Yes, Noel."

Now, where did she get that name? I pondered the matter quietly to myself, thinking father might not like it. But it was only the name of my brother Leon said backwards and it sounded much better that way.

"There is Nabrebcan, Maria," my brother Leon said, gesturing widely toward the west.

She moved close to him and slipped her arm through his. And after a while, she said quietly, "You love Nagrebcan, don't you Noel?"

Ca Celin drove away, *hi-yi-ing* to his horse loudly. At the bend of the Camino Real where the big *duhat* tree grew, he rattled the handle of his rattan whip against the spokes of the wheel.

We stood alone on the roadside.

The sun was in our eyes, for it was dipping into the bright sea. The sky was wide and deep and very blue above us; but at the saw-tooth rim of the Katayaghan Hills to the southwest flamed huge masses of clouds. Before us, the fields swam in a golden haze through which floated bug purple and red and yellow bubbles when I looked at the sinking sun. Labang's white coat which I washed and brushed under the lamplight and his horns appeared tipped with fire. He faced the sun and from his mouth issued a call so loud and vibrant that the Earth seemed to tremble underfoot. And far away in the middle of the fields, a cow lowed softly in answer.

"Hitch him to the cart, Baldo," my brother Leon said, laughing, and she laughed with him a bit uncertainly, and I saw that he had put his arm around her shoulders.

"Why does he make that sound?" she asked. "I have never heard the like of it."

"There is not another like it," my brother Leon said. "I have yet to hear another bull call like Labang. In all the world there is no other bull like him."

She was smiling at him, and I stopped in the act of tying the *sinta* across Labang's neck to the opposite end of the yoke, because her teeth were very white, her eyes were so full of laughter, and there was a small dimple high up on her right cheek.

"If you continue to talk about him like that, either ii shall fall in love with him or become greatly jealous."

My brother Leon laughed and she laughed and they looked at each other and it seemed to me there was a world of laughter between them and in them.

I climbed into the cart over the wheel and Labang would have bolted for he was always like that, but I kept a firm hold on his rope. He was restless and would not stand still, so that my brother Leon had to say "Labang" several times. When he was quiet again, my brother Leon lifted the trunks into the cart, placing the smaller on top.

She looked down once at her high-heeled shoes, the she gave her left hand to my brother Leon, placed a foot on the hub of the wheel, and in one breath, she had swung up into the cart. Oh, the fragrance of her! But Labang was fairly dancing with impatience and it was all I could do to keep him from running away.

"Give me the rope, Baldo," my brother said. "Maria, sit down on the hay and hold on to anything." Then he put a foot on the left shaft and that instant, Labang leaped forward. My brother Leon laughed as he drew himself up to the top of the side of the cart and made the slack of the rope hiss about the back of Labang. The wind whistled against my cheeks and the rattling of the wheels on the pebbles of the road echoed in my ears.

She sat up straight on the bottom of the cart, legs bent together to one side, her skirts spread over them so that only the toes and heels of her shoes were visible. Her eyes were on my brother Leon's back; I saw the wind on her hair.

When Labang slowed down, my brother Leon handed me the rope. I knelt on the straw inside the cart

and pulled on the rope until Labang was merely shuffling along, then I made him turn around.

"What is it to you have forgotten now, Baldo?" my brother Leon said.

I did not say anything but stickled with my finger the rump of Labang; and away we went – back to where I had unhitched and waited for them. The sun had sunk and down from the wooden sides of the Katayaghan Hills, shadows stealing into the fields. High up overhead the sky burned with many slow tires.

When I sat Labang down the deep cut that would bring us down to the dry bed of the Waig which could be used as a path to our place during the dry season, my brother Leon laid a hand on my shoulder and said sternly: "Who told you to drive through the fields tonight?"

His hand was heavy on my shoulder, but I did not look back at him or utter a word until we were on the rocky bottom of the Waig.

"Baldo, you fool, answer me before I lay the rope of Labang on you. Why did you follow the Waig instead of Carmino Real?" His fingers bit into my shoulders.

"Father, he told me to follow the Waig tonight, *Manong*."

Swiftly, his hand fell away from my shoulder, and without a word, he reached out for the rope of Labang. Then my brother Leon laughed, and he sat back, and laughing still, he said:

"And I supposed Father also told you to hitch Labang to the cart and meet us with him instead of with Castano and the *calesa*?"

Without waiting for me to answer, he turned to her and said, "Maria, why do you think Father would do that now?" He laughed and added. "Have you ever seen so many stars before?"

I looked back and they were sitting side by side, leaning against the trunks, hands clasped across knees. Seemingly but a man's height above the tops of the steep banks of the Waig, hung the stars. But in the deep gorge, the shadows had fallen heavily and even Labang's white coat was merely a dim grayish blur. Crickets chirped from their homes in the cracks in the banks. The thick unpleasant smell of *dangla* bushes and cooling sun-heted Earth mingled with the clean, sharp scent of *arrais*

roots exposed to the night air and of the hay inside the cart.

"Look, Noel, yonder is our star!" Deep surprise and gladness were in her voice. Very low in the west, almost touching the ragged edge of the bank, was the star, the biggest and brightest in the sky.

"I have been looking at," my brother Leon said. "Do you remember how I would tell you that when you want to see stars you must come to Nagrebcan?"

"Yes, Noel," she said. "Look at it," she murmured, half to herself. "It is so many times bigger and brighter than it was at Ermita beach."

"The air here is clean, free of dust and smoke."

"So it is, Noel," she said, drawing a long breath.

"Making fun of me, Maria?"

She laughed then and they laughed together and she took my brother Leon's hand and put it against her face.

I stopped Labang, climbed down and lighted the lantern that hung from the cart between the wheels.

"Good boy, Baldo," my brother Leon said as I climbed back into the cart, and my heart sang.

Now, the shadows took fright and did not crowd so near. Clumps of *andadasi* and *arraais* flashed into view and quickly disappeared as we passed by. Ahead the elongated shadow of Labang bobbed up and down and swayed drunkenly from side to side, for the lantern rocked jerkily with the cart.

"Have we far to go yet, Noel?" she asked.

"Ask Baldo," my brother Leon said, "we have been neglecting him."

"I am asking you, Baldo," she said.

Without looking back, I answered, picking my words slowly:

"Soon, we will get out of the Waig and pass into the fields. After the fields is home – *Manang*."

"So near already."

I did not say anything more, because I did not know what to make of the tone of her voice as she said her last words. All the laughter has seemed to have gone out of her. I waited for my brother Leon to say something, but he was not saying anything. Suddenly, he broke out into song and the song was "Sky Sown with Stars" – the same that he and Father sang when we cut hay in the fields of nights, before he went away to study. He must have taught her the song because she joined him, and her voice flowed into his like a gentle stream, meeting a stronger one. And each time the wheels encountered a big rock, her voice would catch in her throat, but my brother Leon would sing on, until laughing softly, she would join him again.

Then we were climbing out into the fields and through the spokes of the wheels, the light of the lantern mocked the shadows. Labang quickened his steps. The jolting became more frequent and painful as we crossed the low dikes.

"But it was so very wide here," she said. The light of the stars broke and scattered the darkness so that one could see far on every side, though indistinctly.

"You miss the houses, and the cars, and the people, and the noise, don't you?" my brother Leon stopped singing.

"Yes, but in a different way. I am glad they are not here."

With difficulty, I turned Labang to the left, for he wanted to go straight on. He was breathing hard, but I knew he was more thirsty than tired. In a little while, we drove up the grassy side onto the Camino Real.

"You see," my brother Leon was explaining, "the Camino Real curves around the foot of the Katayaghan Hills passes by our house. We drove through the fields, because – but I'll be asking Father as soon as we get home."

"Noel –" she said.

"Yes, Maria."

"I am afraid. He may not like me."

"Does that worry you still, Maria?" my brother Leon said, "From the way you talk, he might be an ogre for all the world. Except when his leg that was wounded in the Revolution is troubling him, Father is the mildest tempered, gentlest man I know."

We came to the house of Lacay Julian and I spoke to Labang loudly, but Moning did not come to the window, so I surmised she must be eating with the rest of her family. And I thought of the food being made ready at home and my mouth watered. We met the twins, Orong and Polo, and I said "*Hoy!*" calling them by name and they shouted back and asked if my brother Leon and his wife were with me. And my brother Leon shouted to them and told me to make Labang so that their answers were lost in the noise of the wheels.

I stopped Labang on the road before our house and would have gotten down, but my brother Leon took the rope and told me to stay in the cart. He turned Labang into the gate and we dashed into our yard. I thought we would crash into the bole of the *camachile* tree, but my brother Leon reined in Labang in time. There was light downstairs in the kitchen, and Mother stood in the doorway, and I could see her smiling shyly. My brother Leon was helping Maria over the wheel.

The first words that fell from his lips after he had kissed her Mother's arms were:

"Father, where is he?"

"He is in his room upstairs," Mother said, her face becoming serious. "His leg is bothering him again."

I did not hear anything more because I had to go back into the cart to unhitch Labang. But I had hardly tied him under the barn when I heard Father calling me. I met my brother Leon going to bring up the trunks. As I passed through the kitchen, there were Mother and my sister Aurelia and Maria and it seemed to me they were crying, all of them.

There was no light in Father's room. There was no movement. He sat in the big armchair in the western window, and a star shone directly through it. He was smoking, but he removed the roll of tobacco from his mouth when he saw me. He laid it carefully in the window – sill before speaking. "Did you meet anybody on the way?" he asked.

"No, Father," I said. "Nobody passes through the Waig at night."

He reached for his roll of tobacco and hitched himself up the chair.

"She is very beautiful, Father."

"Was she afraid of Labang?" My Father had not raised his voice, but the room seemed to resound it. And again, I saw her eyes in the long curving horns and the arm of my brother Leon around her shoulders.

"No, Father, she was not afraid."

"On the way –"

"She looked at the stars, Father. And *Manong* Leon sang."

"What did he sing?"

"Sky Sown with Stars. She sang with him." He was silent again. I heard the voices of my Mother and my sister Aurelia downstairs. There was also the voice of my brother Leon, and I thought that Father's voice must have been like it when Father was young. He had laid the roll of tobacco on the window – sill once more. I watched the smoke waver faintly upward from the lighted end and vanish slowly into the night outside.

The door opened and my brother Leon and Maria came in.

"Have you watered Labang?" Father spoke to me.

"I told him that Labang was resting yet under the barn."

"It is time for you watered him, my son," my Father said.

"I looked at Maria and she was lovely. She was tall. Beside my brother Leon, she was tall and very still. Then I went out, and in the darkened hall the fragrance of her was like a morning when *papayas* are in bloom."

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