

Katas ng Jueteng

If you know how to play along, you will be as rich, perhaps even richer, than he is.”

The words of the old man whom he jogged with regularly every morning kept playing over and over in his head. Police Superintendent Leoncio Garcia has just been appointed as Sta. Fe’s newest Chief of Police. Many of his colleagues envied him.

“It’s the juiciest assignment that anybody can get,” said a colleague who had a knowing smile on his face.

“I know you will make a difference in that sleepy town. You just have to know where you stand,” said his closest friend in the police force.

He just kept his fingers crossed. Sta. Fe was known as the *jueteng* capital of the Philippines. The town was run by a Mayor whose husband was Dodong, the famous Jueteng King. The couple was well known to be generous with their friends and allies but dangerous and unkind to their enemies and opponents.



When Supt Garcia first heard of his new assignment, he was half-elated and half-worried. Certainly, this new assignment would be a challenging one for him. Now, barely a month into the juicy position, he could see why. Every morning, he and his newfound jogging buddies pass by a three-storey house that is surrounded by a high, concrete fence. Nobody could see inside except for some instances when a White Pajero or a Black Expedition would enter or leave through the open gate. Then, he could steal a quick glance at the landscaped garden.

“*Katas ng jueteng* [That’s ‘juice’ from jueteng],” uttered the old man Jovencio. “He was the Chief of Police before. He is very rich now. Bata kasi ni Dodong [He was Dodong’s man]. He has retired from the force and spends his time shuttling to and from Europe to transact business for Dodong,” whispered the man. The he added, “If you know how to play along, you will be as rich, perhaps even richer, than he is.”

Supt Garcia just smiled but Jovencio’s words bothered him. He thought of his family in the far-flung town of General Malvar in the South. They lived in a simple, semi-concrete house in a compound that belongs to his wife’s family. His three children who were all in elementary were studying at the nearby public school. His wife tried to augment his meager income selling cross-stitched wall decors. Like everybody else, they dreamed of good luck befalling them someday. So, Supt Garcia and his wife Gina never failed to cast their lot in every lotto draw. “Then, I could have an early retirement and we could live in the city and enroll the kids in a private school,” he would tell Gina.

“Is this the opportunity that God has given me?” he asked himself.

His first few weeks in the office were uneventful. Sta. Fe was, indeed, a sleepy town and peace and order was not a major problem. Not long after, Bogart, Dodong’s right-hand man visited him in the small house that he was renting. He was carrying with him a bulging brown envelope.

“This is for you. *Parte mo* [Your share],” he said. “A gift from Dodong.” Bogart did not wait to see his reaction nor hear his comment after handing him the envelope. He left unceremoniously. Supt Garcia’s hands trembled as he opened the envelope. Inside were bundles of cash, in P500 and P100 denomination. He took out wads and wads of bills. These could easily amount to a hundred thousand pesos, he told himself. These could buy a lot of things for my family, he thought.

Early the next day, Supt Garcia came to see the Mayor. She

was not yet in. He waited along with the others who were waiting to ask for favors from her. He, on the other hand, was bringing with him the envelope-full of money. He was a little nervous as he waited for her.

Mayor Vina smiled at her as she saw him. Within minutes, he was ushered by the Mayor's secretary into the receiving room. The Mayor took no time in asking him if there was any immediate problem. He smiled and shook his head. He thrust the brown envelope-full of money to the Mayor.

"Bogart came to my house and gave me this," he said. "What is this for, Ma'am? *Masyadong maaga yata ang bonus natin* [It's too early for my bonus]," he said.

The Mayor smiled widely. "Supt Garcia, that is really intended for friends like you. Take it," she said, "It is an early Christmas gift."

Supt Garcia hesitated. Then he remembered his family in the province. He blushed and scratched his head as the Mayor shoved back the envelope in his hand.

"Remember, Garcia, you are a most valued friend and partner. There will be more to come," she said graciously.

That night, Leoncio Garcia could not sleep. He kept rolling around on his bed. He was not sure if he did the right thing. But he knew the amount would be a big help to his family. But how would he return the money without insulting Dodong and his wife, the Mayor?

Not long after, a shooting incident happened in the town of San Fernando, three towns away from Sta. Fe. Dodong's bodyguards were tagged as the triggermen. The victim was the right-hand man of Dencio, a rival *jueteng* lord from that town. He died on-the-spot but his companion saw the killers and he knew their identity. The police chief of San Fernando contacted Supt Garcia. He was asking for a meeting. Police Chief Inspector Ed Ramos came with his junior officer. They wanted to coordinate with him for the resolution of the shooting incident. "Could you extend us some assistance?" they asked, "Dencio is very angry. He wants to take revenge. He wants the head of his buddy's killers. We need to invite them for questioning."

Supt Garcia did not know what to say. He felt his face turning red. "What do you want me to do?" he asked in an unsteady voice.

"Convince Dodong to produce his man and get him out of hiding."

"Then, what happens?" asked Garcia.

Supt Ramos looked straight at him with a meaningful stare. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Two hundred thousand pesos from Dencio. Is that enough?" asked the junior officer while Ramos continued staring at his face.

"All you have to do is to produce the killers, then we will do the

rest,” added the junior officer.

“Can’t we talk this over, Pare?” he asked in return.

“Do you want more? We can tell Dencio to give you more,” retorts the junior officer.

Supt Garcia looked at CInsp Ramos and his young companion. He could not believe what he was hearing. He only managed to shake his head. He remembered his family in the province. He remembered the certificates and citations hanging proudly on the walls in their small sala. He remembered the brown envelope that he got from Dodong. He imagined the wads of bills that he could lay his hands on if he gives in to these men’s request.

What is a low-paid, overworked public servant like him to do in this situation?



Collateral Damage

You and your SWAT team just received an intelligence report that the bank of a big mall would be hit by a robbery-holdup gang. According to the information, the holdup would take place during the transfer of the moneybags from the bank to the armored van outside the mall. The information is very reliable and very detailed—the number of robbers/holduppers, the weapons they would be using, the time of the delivery of the moneybags, etc. The holdup would be timed during a “sale” when hundreds of people would be inside the mall.

You call for a coordinating conference among the different police units who would be involved in the operation. Your team discusses all possible options and tries to anticipate the consequences of each option. You agree, however, on one thing: to minimize, if not totally avoid, collateral damage. You do not want any shootout inside the mall. Your collective feeling is expressed by one team member who said, “*May tatlo akong maliliit na anak. Bilang tatay, hindi ako makapapayag na may mga inosenteng madadamay.*”

You call your superior officers to inform them of your team’s decision—strong police visibility to deter the commission of the crime. But they do not agree. You are given a direct order. Your team will assault the holduppers as they move on the guards. You are warned, however, to avoid shooting civilians.

You are the team leader. What will you do?