

“Tapusin na natin ito...”

Senior Jail Officer 4 Ahmad Sukarno, the Assistant Municipal Jail Warden of the Sinsuat Municipal Jail found himself humming along with the born-again Christians who were conducting a bible study session a few yards away from where he sat in his office. He was tapping his foot lightly, following the beat of the lively music that he had gotten used to hearing every weekend. The group has been holding bible study sessions in the prison regularly for the Christian prisoners. And even if he was a Muslim, he has learned to appreciate the efforts of the group, at times even listened to and observed their sessions.

“Ahmad, everything set for Ali’s transfer to the Provincial Jail tomorrow?” asked his superior, Jail Chief Inspector Adib Osman.

“Yes, sir, I have made the necessary arrangements,” he replied.

Ali was, perhaps, the most prized inmate at the Sinsuat Municipal Jail. After all, he was a confirmed high ranking member of the dreaded Abu Sayyaf gang. He was said to be one of those responsible for the LRT bombing last December where dozens were killed and more than a hundred others injured. Ahmad and his colleagues captured



him two weeks ago after months of surveillance. And now, he was scheduled for transfer to the maximum security compound of the Provincial Jail. Eventually, he was to be flown to Manila for the trial concerning his involvement in the LRT bombing. Intelligence reports had it that his Abu Sayyaf comrades were planning to assault the Sinsuat jail to free him from his captors. Upon hearing this, his superior immediately made plans for the rebel's transfer to the Provincial Jail of Maguindanao.

Ahmad felt a little relieved. He knew that they were undermanned to ensure the safekeeping of a high profile prisoner like Ali. The rebel, who, up to this time has refused to speak to anybody but him has become some sort of a friend. Many times, he would caution himself about exchanging too much word with this dreaded rebel. Perhaps, he still saw him as a Muslim brother, albeit, one who has chosen to take Allah's teachings from a perspective that differed from his.

Ahmad could tell that Ali felt at ease with him. While the rebel would hardly say anything to anyone even during his questioning, he would talk freely with Ahmad, convincing him of their "cause".

"You are a Tausug, too and you know well how badly we've been treated by these Christians. How could you side with them?" he asked.

"Ali, my brother, since I was a child I have witnessed how people would get killed and maimed because of this senseless war. I have seen too many of them," he would answer, "I would not dream of seeing more."

"Then, why did you join the police force? What does it give you, if not the power to kill more. Kill more of them, not more of us," he taunted.

Their conversations always ended this way, with Ali taunting him for joining the police force. He would walk away, thinking that it is senseless to explain to a hardcore rebel like Ali. Having been born and raised in Sulu, a known hotbed for terrorism, he grew up with an obsession to be part of a peacekeeping force. There was too much bloodshed, too much anger, and too little peace in his land.

Shouts and screams of terrified people, followed by a single gunshot broke his reverie. He rushed outside his office and nearly ran against a member of the born-again Christian worshippers. "*May hinostage dun, yung kasama namin!*" [One of our members has been taken hostage!] shouted the man. JCI Insp Osman followed a few steps behind him.

Arriving at the scene, Ahmad saw Ali pointing a gun at a woman's temple. Beside them was a bleeding policeman who lay

crumpled at their feet.

“Sanchez, what happened?” shouted Ahmad as he ran towards the wounded officer.

“Don’t come near!” warned Ali, “let the bastard die.”

“Whatever it is you want Ali, please don’t hurt that lady. She only came here to pray with our inmates,” pleaded Ahmad softly. The middle-aged woman looked pale, as if ready to faint any second.

“*La hawla wa la quwwata illa Billah!* [There is no power or glory except for Allah’s!]” shouted Ali.

Ahmad tried to pacify the agitated Muslim. “Ali, no one contests your beliefs here. You are in prison because of your involvement in something that has killed many people. This is not a Muslim-Christian thing.”

“You are a Muslim, Ahmad. You should serve your fellow Muslims well. Set me free or this woman will die with me,” answered the defiant rebel.

“Well, at least let me get my wounded colleague. I can’t allow him to die like this,” said Ahmad.

“No! He deserves it. He treated me badly,” shouted Ali.

JCInsp Osman tapped Ahmad on the shoulder and whispered something to him. “This cannot go on,” he said, “We better do something fast before word gets out. It will cost us much embarrassment.”

“What do you want me to do, Sir?” Ahmad asked.

“Shoot him. Shoot him immediately but try to save the woman,” said Osman. “I will get the other men to help you.”

“Sir, let me negotiate with him. Perhaps I can talk some sense into his head,” said Ahmad.

“*Bismillah* [In the name of Allah], Ali, let us resolve this peacefully. Let me help you,” pleaded Ahmad.

“*Allahu Akbar!* [Allah is the greatest!]” shouted Ali.

Ali was getting more agitated every minute that passed. He was mouthing words in Tausug. He was quoting phrases from the Qur’an. Ahmad was getting nervous. He remembered the order of JCInsp Osman. He knew that if he bungled in this, he would get the flak and his citation for helping capture this man would be for naught.

He kept trying to convince Ali to free his hostage. Ali, in turn kept taunting him to bring honor to the Tausugs by setting him free and leaving the police force. The woman hostage, sensing futility of the negotiations began muttering prayers. Osman arrived with the other jail guards, their firearms aimed at Ali. Ahmad stood between them.

“Move away, Ahmad. Let us finish this,” barked Osman.

Ahmad stood thinking what to do best given the situation. How could this be resolved without anyone compromising his principles and beliefs?



Quo Vadis, Pulis?

“If I leave the police force, where will I go? And what will happen to my family? This is the only job I know. So even if I need to cover-up the mistakes and illnesses of the government, I have to do it or else they will kick me out of service. I can’t afford to lose the only source of my income. I can’t think of anything else to support my family. That why I need to obey my superiors always, even if I know they are asking me to do the wrong thing. But definitely, no policeman wants to become corrupt.”



“Even our ‘schooling’ is a dilemma. We know that schooling is important for our careers. But we feel it is a waste of money. It is a financial burden to us and our family. We think twice, even thrice before we take the qualifying exams, which is already expensive. Once you pass the exam, you are pressured to go on with your schooling, or else it will be forfeited. So, in order to get to the next rank, which means you have to go schooling, which in turn means you need money, you have to go to your loanshark. Or you make *diskarte*, which is, technically, illegal and unethical.”



Eaten by the “System”

“I have had bad experiences with senior ranking police officers who make life difficult for junior officers like me. They want to appear clean before the powers-that-be, the politicians. After you do the dirty job for them, you become dispensable—you are assigned to an undesirable post, you are put on a floating status, your promotion is put on hold. The principles you promised to uphold while in the Academy become blurred. The discipline becomes a thing of the past. Your idealism loses its attraction and your enthusiasm wanes. You start to learn your ‘lessons’. You bend your principles, you compromise your idealism. You learn to kowtow and sugarcoat your words . Sometimes, without your knowing it, you are eaten by the ‘system’”.