

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

The Stories of Alejandro R. Roces

Arturo G. Roseburg

Philippine Studies vol. 6, no. 2 (1958): 139–154

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

The Stories of Alejandro R. Roces

ARTURO G. ROSEBURG

ALEJANDRO R. Roces was born in Manila on 13 July 1924 of a prominent family that has been connected with newspaper and magazine publishing for many decades. The Roces family is the country's biggest publisher of newspapers and weeklies in several languages and dialects. Lately two of the author's brothers have entered politics. Roces finished high school at the Ateneo de Manila, after which he went to the United States to take up engineering at a New England university, but for reasons of health he went west and took up liberal arts at the University of Arizona.

Roces became a writer by accident. While an undergraduate at Arizona he kept telling stories to his American roommate, who happened to be a writer, in the hope that the latter might use them as material for his stories, but the American told him one day to write them up himself. Roces did. His first attempt, *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers*, won a literary award from the University of Arizona. Since then he has won five other awards from his alma mater. His stories have been published in several American magazines: *The Arizona Quarterly*, *Southwest Review*, *New Mexico Quarterly* and the *Pacific Spectator*, being the first Filipino writer to break into the pages of the last mentioned magazine. In a nation-wide short-story contest sponsored by the *Writer's Digest* in 1950

Roces won second prize in competition with American writers. Two of his stories have been included in Martha Foley's *Best Short Stories of the Year*. His other stories have been republished in local publications and included in anthologies.

Since his return to the Philippines after his studies abroad, he has revived his brother's column in the pre-war *Tribune* ("Thorns and Roces") with the reverse title of "Roses and Thorns" currently appearing daily in the *Manila Times*. At present he is head of the English department and dean of the institute of arts and sciences of the Far Eastern University. In spite of a busy schedule he tries to find time for writing, which is his first love. As soon as the "Cocks" series of stories is finished, he plans to write a collection of stories about American G. I.'s in the Philippines, of which *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers* is the first installment.

His stories have not yet been collected and published in book form. He has written eight so far, all of them humorous. We shall examine here seven of them.

"WE FILIPINOS ARE MILD DRINKERS"

When T. D. Agcaoili's *Philippine Writing* appeared in 1953, Willis Knapp Jones, who reviewed it in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, said that Roces' *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers* "is the only really funny story in the whole collection." Martha Foley listed it as one of the distinctive stories of the year. It was first published in 1947 by the *Arizona Quarterly*. Since then it has been reprinted and anthologized several times.

It is a simple story with a simple plot based on a single incident. It is about a friendly drinking bout between an American G. I. whose unquenchable thirst has made him drink anything brewed by man and a barefoot Filipino farm boy who does not drink whisky because it is too strong for him. When the G. I. keeps asking the boy where a drink can be had, the boy, out of traditional hospitality, accommodates him because there are no bars in town. So together they have a few rounds of *lumbanog*, a native-brewed liquor of tremendous strength, at the boy's humble hut. The drinking has some disastrous ef-

fects on the G.I. but none at all on the boy. When the boy brings the plastered G.I., slung upon a carabao's back, to the barracks, the friends of the soldier, in a gesture of thanks, offer him some beer which he politely declines by saying that Filipinos are mild drinkers.

The story has to be read to appreciate its humor, for no amount of discussion can do it justice. The story unfolds in an easy leisurely way—each sentence and each drink gradually mounting to a terrific climax of hilarious understatement like bricks laid gradually one on top of another till a mansion takes shape.

It can safely be said that this is the best story so far about the liberation period in the Philippines. Its humor, incidentally, is more American than Filipino, if it is possible to say exactly what Filipino humor is. The humor of the story is the humor of exaggeration, of bigness like the tall tales about Texas, although the exaggerated humility of the farm boy is perhaps Filipino. It is also characteristic of American humor to play up the underdog at the expense of the big and strong fellow. In any case, it is exaggeration; and exaggeration of any kind is characteristic of American humor, though it is also found in the humor of other nations.

Roces is well versed in American humor. He knows its every nuance and characteristic, what to emphasize and where to lay the stress. The opening paragraph of the story illustrates his knowledge of humor effect in every sentence climax:

We Filipinos are mild drinkers. We drink for only three good reasons. We drink when we are very happy. We drink when we are very sad. And we drink for any other reason.

The first two reasons for drinking, of course, cover the whole gamut of drinking, but it is the superfluous third reason that gives it the humor punch. American humorists have exhausted this technique and exploited all its possibilities in their ceaseless search for humor effect. Roces is merely following in their footsteps.

What is sauce for the goose can also be sauce for the gander, so sometimes Roces turns the table on the Americans and uses their method on them. In the selection that follows,

observe how the old Occidental claim that all Orientals look alike is used by the Oriental in his observation of Americans:

When the Americans recaptured the Philippines, they built an air base a few miles from our barrio. Yankee Soldiers became a very common sight. I met a lot of G.I.'s and made many friends. *I could not pronounce their names, I could not tell them apart. All Americans looked alike to me. They all looked white.* (Italics inserted)

Students of American humor can readily see the strong similarity in Rocés' story with Bret Harte's *The Heathen Chinese*, a burlesque in rhyme of two Western gamblers trying to fleece a guileless Chinese who, it turned out, was scarcely as innocent as he appeared. People generally laugh when the so-called "smart alec" or "wise guy" is outsmarted by the little fellow because such a situation provokes in them sympathetic laughter for the underprivileged. People identify themselves in him. They laugh at the fall of a bully.

Rocés' story is easy reading. The sentences are simple and short. Structurally, it is neat, compact. There are no loose ends, no superfluous word or sentence. Told with extraordinary simplicity, the story has a totality of effect from beginning to end. Nothing deviates from it. It is just long enough to cover the subject matter. It is the kind of story, from the point of view of structure and execution, that Edgar A. Poe would heartily approve of. It is a good example of what a short story should be, and should be a model for local short-story writers.

"THE DURIAN"

When Rocés was still a student at the University of Arizona, he sent some manuscripts to his brother in Manila for safekeeping. Thinking that there would be no harm in having some of them published, the brother chose what he thought was good and sent them to local editors. One of those bought by the *Philippines Free Press* was *The Durian*, which it published in 1950. This was unfortunate because the stories were not yet ready for publication. They needed polishing and rewriting. *The Durian* suffers from this hasty publication. Actually the manuscript bought by the *Free Press* was only an imperfect

draft of the story that Roces had already published in the *Southwest Review* in 1947. This fact must be borne in mind when passing critical judgment on the story.

The durian, as every Filipino knows, is an odoriferous fruit that "smells like hell but tastes like heaven." It thrives abundantly in Southern Mindanao and in other tropical countries. The comic possibilities of such a paradoxical fruit are tremendous.

It is the story of a boy, a basket of fruit and a priest. The boy dislikes going to church, but when ordered by his mother either to go to church or leave home, he decides that the first is the lesser punishment. Being the season for durians and wanting to make a good impression on the barrio priest, the boy goes to church with a basket of durian as an offering to the priest. His good intention is rewarded by his being thrown out of the church. He vows never to go to church again after that.

The humor of the story is the humor of situation, augmented by good timing of speech with action. As it appeared in the *Free Press* the climax was as follows:

When I entered the church, the priest was giving a speech in support of the Tenth Commandment. He noticed me as I walked down the aisle. I waved at him and gave him a big smile. Going to church was not as bad as I had imagined. All the back seats were taken, so I had to sit in front. I sat next to a man who had his fighting rooster on his lap, and placed the basket of durians under my feet.

The people around me started to sniff and move away. After a while Father Mola sniffed and said:

"Where does that smell come from?"

"From here," I said, lifting the basket of durians.

"Take those stinking fruits out of here!" he yelled.

"They are for you," I explained. "I brought them for you."

Perhaps he did not hear me. He kept bellowing:

"Get . . . out of here!"

I had never seen him so angry. His face was red as a tomato and his paunch vibrated like a balloon about to explode. Before I realized the situation, two sacristans grabbed me by the arms and threw me out of the church quicker than you can say: "Susmariosep."

This is supposed to be humorous, but it is not. The situation lacks plausibility, and even the similies are sophomoric. It is difficult to believe by any stretch of imagination that a

priest would shout inside a church and profanely order a member of his congregation out no matter what the provocation might be, or that sacristans would eject anybody out of church like bouncers throwing a drunkard out of a bar. And "red as a tomato" and "his paunch vibrated like a balloon about to explode" are figures of speech redolent of undergraduate compositions.

In Rocés' other (and better) version, the priest (there called Padre Quezada) has an argument with the boy about the origin of the durian and the possibility of its being the original "forbidden fruit" because of its heavenly lusciousness. When reminded of its repulsive odor, the Padre says that when the fruit was in the Garden of Eden it had a supernal scent that matched its celestial flavor. It lost it only after the fall of man and acquired its contradictory character because God had damned the durian.

The durian incident inside the church in the completed version is presented below for comparison with the *Free Press* version. Just as the boy was entering the church,

Padre Quezada was addressing the congregation. "... by their fruits you shall know them..."

He noticed me as I walked down the aisle. I waved to him and gave him a big smile. Going to church was not as bad as I had imagined. All the back seats were taken so I had to sit in front. I sat next to a person who had his combat rooster on his lap and placed the fetid fruits under my seat. Then I listened to what Padre Quezada was saying.

"... Saint Augustine many centuries ago declared that in the acknowledging of benefits, computation was not made as to the 'gift' but as to the 'fruit.' A gift is the donation itself. The fruit is to do this in the name of God..."

Meanwhile, the people around me began to sniff. Then they started to sidle away. Some had their handkerchiefs covering their noses. Others were vigorously fanning the air in front of their faces. Mosquitoes molested everyone in church. But the durians kept them at a smelling distance from me.

"... with fruit was Elijah fed by the widow, who knew that she fed a person of God, and on that account fed him; but by the raven was he fed by a gift. With fruit—(sniff!)—with fruit—(sniff!! sniff!!)—with fruit—" Here, Padre Quezada stopped his homily altogether to ask:

"Who brought those pestilent fruits in here?"

"I did," I said.

"Take those damned fruits out of here!" he yelled.

"They are for you," I explained. "I brought them for you."

Perhaps he did not hear me. He just kept bellowing:

"Get the devil out of here!"

This version is much better than the first. It has a sense of completeness and a fuller range of humor. And the timing is good, such as the boy's entrance with the durians and the Padre's words: "by their fruits you shall know them." From then on everything builds up to a hilarious climax. Incidentally, Rocés got the idea of the story from an account mentioned by Mark Twain in *Following the Equator*.¹

Rocés tries other devices to make the story humorous. He resorts to picturesque descriptions and catchy phrases. For instance (somewhat irreverently):

Padre Mola was a fat Spaniard. He was the biggest amount of person that I have ever seen. He looked as if he were economically carved out of a cube. I cannot describe him except in terms of solid geometry.

While there is no intention of irreverence in *The Durian*, some readers may object to that part of the story where during a confession the boy overheard by accident a girl telling her confessor that in spite of her working many hours a day she still did not have enough to eat because the *cacique* kept most of the rice she had produced.

"If this keeps on," she said, "I may have to go to Manila and become a prostitute." Whereupon Padre Mola half jumped from his seat and asked the girl what was that she had just said. And when she repeated what she intended to do in Manila, the priest said:

"A prostitute! Oh, a prostitute! You scared me, child. I thought you said, 'Protentant'."

The humor here is artificial and it is not original. This were better kept out.

"OF COCKS AND HENS"

With *Of Cocks and Hens*, which was originally titled *My Brother's Peculiar Chicken*, begins Rocés' series of stories

¹ Vol. II Chapter XIV.

which purport to show all the aspects of cockfighting. The author wrote these stories because of the perennial appeal of cockfighting to Filipinos, which is their national sport as bullfighting is to Spaniards or baseball to Americans. Cockfighting is on the wane in this country in spite of the efforts of some *aficionados* to revive it now and then in spectacular *pintakasis*. The sudden popularity of imported American games in the Philippines (like basketball that draws tremendous followers among young and old) and the many diversions of the movies, radio and television are factors in the decline of this once extremely popular sport in the country. Roces wants to make sure that in the event (which is remote) cockfighting becomes extinct in the Philippines, his stories at least will perpetuate the memory of this ancestral sport. In a literary if not historical sense, Roces' stories will do for cockfighting what Ring Lardner's did for baseball.

Strangely enough, Roces is not a *sabungero* (cockfighting fan) and has said to this writer that he has never seen the inside of a cockpit, but has learned a lot about roosters and cockfighting from the *aficionados*. Those who have read his stories have expressed amazement at the accuracy and realism of his descriptions. In a way this is not altogether unusual. It is often a paradox of literature that those who sometimes write realistically and well about certain things are nowhere near the scene and have not even seen it.

Of Cocks and Hens is based upon the fact that chickens sometimes change sex and that roosters also sometimes lay eggs. Kiko² owns a chicken, a peculiar chicken because of its indeterminate sex. This chicken looks like a hen but fights like a rooster, a fact that has all the barrio folk baffled as to its true sex till nature settles it for all concerned. The first to discover this peculiar fowl is Kiko and his brother. Kiko says it is a rooster, his brother insists it is a hen. When they cannot agree, they bring the chicken to their parents to decide the question for them, but they too end up in a quarrel. The

² He and his brother are the principal characters in this and other stories in the cocks series. All of the stories are told in the first person.

brothers then bring the case to the *teniente del barrio* who is supposed to know about such things as he is also the village philosopher and an old man steeped in wisdom, but the most that he can do is go into philosophical speculations to hide his ignorance. The controversial chicken is then brought to a certain Mr. Cruz, a man who has studied poultry raising in Los Baños and who owns a poultry farm. Surely he should be able to decide so simple a thing as whether a fowl is a hen or a rooster, but like the rest he also cannot tell. His suggestion is to kill it and examine its organs. Refusing to let him do it, the brothers finally decide to match their chicken in a cockfight. During the battle, nature asserts one of her irrevocable laws. The peculiar chicken, though matched against a formidable rooster, finishes its adversary by a single lunge of its spurs in the chest of its amorous foe because the other rooster, instead of making belligerent advances toward the chicken, makes amorous and gentle maneuvers believing that its opponent is a hen. By now Kiko has his skeptical brother convinced that their chicken is a rooster when suddenly it lays an egg.

The story is what Americans would call a "natural," meaning that it is made to order for humor. It cannot fail. It is also satirical in a gentle fashion. It satirizes man's pretensions to knowledge while in reality he is ignorant of the elementary facts of nature around him.

Roces said that he got the idea of the story from a cartoon in the *New Yorker* showing two Mexicans looking at a chicken whose sex they could not determine, and immediately he saw the possibility of a humorous story in it. He gave it a Philippine setting and thought of a suitable plot to work out the climax.

"OF COCKS AND KINGS"

Of Cocks and Kings, which appeared in 1956 in the *New Mexico Quarterly*, a publication of the University of New Mexico, is based upon the legendary origin of roosters and why people get up when the roosters crow in the early morning. The

legend is found in Dean Fansler's *Philippine Folk Tales* on which Rocés based his version. As retold by the author the legend is as follows:

Chiliads before the conquest, there lived a kind, powerful King who had twin sons. When this king died, both twins claimed to be the rightful heir to the throne and they grappled for the King's crown. This so incensed Bathala that he cursed them. And upon being damned, their bodies burst with bright feathers. Then their arms changed to wings and their legs shrivelled as their knees shifted to their backs. Scales encrusted their legs and their feet turned to claws. Their noses and chins met into a hard beak and their eyes slipped over to where their ears had been. And as the ultimate punishment, they were crowned with their own flesh. Bathala had transformed them into the first roosters!

But so potent was the power of this old King that up to the present time we feel his great influence. For when roosters crow, everybody—from the president down—has to get up from bed. And to this day, the descendants of the King are still trying to peck the crown from each other's heads.

Aside from this legend, there are also two other stories woven into Rocés' story. Many consider this story his best.

The story begins with an episode. It is about a rooster made invulnerable by *anting-anting* but which lost in a cockfight because of its very invulnerability. It may sound strange at first how an invulnerable gamecock should ever lose, but the fact is that when the rooster was matched in a game pit, it turned tail after it had cut its opponent into two with one stroke because it thought it had two opponents. The cleaved cock remained, but the invulnerable rooster ran away and thereby lost the fight. The rooster was invulnerable but not invincible.

This episode serves only as an introduction to the main story. After he has heard about the legend of the origin of roosters and the King of them all, Kiko, inveterate cocker that he is, starts looking for a splendid specimen of gamecock. At long last he finds one which he is sure is the King of Cocks because it has a crest that looks like a crown. After persuading his gullible brother to place a wager on it in the coming cockfight, Kiko starts training and grooming it for the big day. Kiko is sure he has a winner this time, for how can a King lose?

When the big day comes the King is matched with a decrepit, half-starved looking fowl that is certainly the common type of gamecock, beneath the contempt of Kiko's regal-looking rooster. But a match is a match, and so the fight is on. As usual the unexpected happens. The excess weight of Kiko's rooster's crown proves its undoing. "When the blow came, the King failed to weave its head in time. The gaff went right through the crown into its royal head. Heavy, indeed, is the head that wears a crown." As the losers trudge disconsolately back home, still dazed at the unexpected turn of fortune, the brother asks Kiko:

"I thought you said that this was the King of cocks?"

"It was," Kiko said.

"Then why did it lose?"

"For God's sakes," Kiko said angrily, "don't tell me that you still believe in the divine right of kings ...?"

"OF COCKS AND KITES"

Of Cocks and Kites was published in the *Philippines Free Press* in 1954 under the title of *Of Cocks and Men*. The story shows how "kites" or "sharpers" (people who prey on others) operate their nefarious game on unsuspecting victims. In this case Kiko is the "kite." Roces told this writer that it was his ambition to write a Filipino version of Mark Twain's famous *Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, which established his fame as a humorist. In the story Roces acknowledges his debt to the American humorist and begins it with Kiko who, after having read the story of Jim Smiley's frog, decides that what can be done with a frog can also be done with a rooster, namely, that if two spoonful of quail shots can pin down a frog in a jumping contest, likewise can a rooster be made so heavy as to render it vulnerable. The more Kiko thinks of it, the more he is convinced that it is a capital idea that cannot fail.

So Kiko, against his brother's advice, goes ahead with his plan. His problem is how to fill a rooster with lead pellets enough to slow it down but without making the fact too obvious. After months of experiment with all sorts of fowls he

finally succeeds in devising a safe method of stuffing a cock's crop with shots. On the big cockfight the brothers match their stuffed white rooster with a bloody-heeled *talisain*. They place a nominal wager on it and a bigger one on the *talisain*, secretly of course. Kiko is sure to make a "killing" because his rooster is heavily loaded with lead shots and cannot possibly win.

The fight goes on according to expectation. Kiko's cock can hardly move, much less fly on account of its extra weight, while the *talisain* keeps on delivering blow after blow until one of them rips the chest of Kiko's white rooster. To the brothers' horror, the exposed crop is ripped so wide open that the shots come running through the hole. And the more the combatants scuffle, the more shots drip out for all the spectators to see. As the pellets roll on the floor pit, angry voices start gathering momentum in vociferous protest. Meanwhile the brothers, realizing the predicament they are in, pray fervently for their rooster to win. Luckily for them, Kiko's rooster is game. When all the pellets have run out the cock is restored to its original fighting weight and carries the war to its adversary and comes out the winner. The brothers lose the bet even if their cock is the winner, but they are able to leave the cockpit not only alive but unharmed, which is indeed very lucky for them.

Roces utilized Mark Twain's story only to a point. In Twain's story, Jim Smiley is the inveterate gambler who bets on anything, but is not a crook. He is outsmarted by the stranger, who is the kite. In Roces' story, Kiko, who is supposed to be the counterpart of Smiley, is the kite who outsmarts himself.

In building up the story, Roces follows closely Mark Twain's method of characterization of Jim Smiley. Deviating from his usual way of story-telling, which is mostly dialogue from start to finish, Roces goes into a lengthy analysis of Kiko's character in expository prose. The reader is allowed to see the workings of Kiko's mind and what makes him such a confirmed habitué of the cockpits. For instance, the reader may be surprised to learn that Kiko has no love for any kind

of chicken whatsoever, that his attachment to roosters is pragmatic and based solely on the hope of monetary returns.

"OF COCKS AND BATTLE COCKS"

Of Cocks and Battle Cocks was first published in the *Philippines Free Press* in 1956. Its theme is the breeding of gamecocks from the egg to the pit. This time Kiko, in his ceaseless endeavor to produce a sure cockpit winner, abandon's cocklore superstitions for science.

The story begins with Kiko trying to explain to his brother why they have been consistently losing money on their gamecocks no matter what tricks they employ. In his own words, "it's because we have been invoking superstition when we should have been applying science in the cockpits." He elaborates by saying that a scientifically-bred gamecock, one that is engendered and groomed strictly for combat, cannot lose. "Our roosters always lose," he argues, "because they are not genuine gamecocks, but if we breed them ourselves we can be sure that they are thoroughbreds." And to convince further the skeptical brother, Kiko points out that any investment put into the enterprise will be worth it. Good gamecocks, he says, sell for as high as one thousand pesos. The offspring alone can easily sell at five pesos apiece. But his argument falls on deaf ears. The brother has had his lesson, and no amount of convincing, scientific or otherwise, can make him put again a centavo on a gamecock. So Kiko goes ahead with his project alone.

The first step is to start a breeding farm. He selects his brood cock, a ferocious white rooster with fabulous courage. Then he chooses a suitable mate for it. It takes him some time before he finds one to his satisfaction. It is a good white brooder—he makes sure that both of them have white feathers—a crowing Partlet with long pointed spurs. Kiko isolates them in a white coop to make certain that his mother's leghorns do not mix with them. The breeding program begins, then Kiko waits for nature to do the rest. A few months and many chicks later, he selects the finest specimen from the lot and grooms it into fighting form, scientifically of course,

for this time he has made certain that nothing has been overlooked.

When the cock is ready, Kiko and his brother bring it to the cockpit for the big fight. The white rooster is matched with a black one, an ominous sign which Kiko's scientific mind has erroneously misinterpreted. It is a battle between darkness and light, Kiko says, black standing for all the erroneous ways of raising a gamecock; white the embodiment of correct, scientific method. And so darkness and light clash, but when the titanic clash of spurs and the tumultuous roar of the mock heroic struggle have subsided, darkness triumphs over light. Science has suffered a terrific setback. Kiko's rooster has lost as usual.

To be exact, there has been no clash at all. Adding insult to injury, Kiko's rooster does not so much as put up a fight. It turns chicken, to use a mild pun. It runs away without an encounter. Kiko naturally is not only puzzled but his pride is hurt as well. He cannot understand why. By all the laws of science his cock should win. Something surely must have gone wrong, but where?

Then suddenly a thought comes to his quick mind. He stops and exclaims to his brother:

"I've got it! I know what happened!"

"What?"

"You remember telling me that this rooster looked like a leghorn?"

"Yah, I remember."

So the two brothers decide to check up on their mother. It is Kiko who puts the question:

"Mother, have you ever mixed any of your roosters with my hen?"

"Yes," Mother said. "Why?"

"Oh, Gads!" Kiko said. "Then I'm right. It must have bred with my hen. And this rooster is a leghorn!"

"Don't be silly," Mother said, "I always separated them at night."

It was then that Kiko cried.

The humor here is obvious. The laughter is based on what is called "the dumb joke," or ignorance that is truth. Truth is humorous, and truth coupled with dumbness is doubly humorous.

"OF COCKS AND SUPERCOCKS"

One of the many mysteries of nature is the fact that twin roosters, for a still unexplained reason, do not fight each other except in playful mood. When pitted against each other for real combat they refuse to do so. They will fight their own fathers or their brothers but not their twins. That is if they both come from the same egg. Just how roosters know this is not known. What is known is the fact that they do not fight each other. This is the only known instance of kinship recognition among them.

The story opens with Kiko, in his usual articulate way, trying again to convince his brother that at long last he has discovered a rooster that positively cannot lose. This time he has completely forgotten the unfortunate episode about his scientifically-bred gamecock and says to him that now he has a rooster that is not only a supercock but a real killer as well, that can "knock the stuffings out of two roosters at the same time." But by now Kiko's brother has refused to believe anything his brother tells him about roosters, so Kiko gives him an actual demonstration of the fighting power of his white supercock. He matches it against twin roosters which it easily beats, with the twins scampering like mad as if pursued by a demon.

Persuaded by what he has just seen, Kiko's brother puts a substantial wager on Kiko's rooster at the coming cockfight. It is a fifty-fifty arrangement. Half of the winnings shall go to Kiko for being the rooster's owner, and the other half to the brother for supplying the money. But there is the rub. The brother has no money of his own. Kiko persuades him to borrow it from the government co-operative of which he is the treasurer. When he refuses to do so, Kiko tells him there is nothing illegal about it. It is just a temporary loan because the bet is a sure thing and none shall be the wiser. The brother

is finally convinced by Kiko's logic and the two brothers bring their super white rooster to the *pintakasi*.

Kiko's rooster lives up to expectation. It fights like one possessed, throwing blow after blow at its adversary with terrific rapidity. But the other rooster, though no match against its white foe, has a stout heart that refuses to be beaten. It keeps fighting though its blows are ineffective against those of its white aggressor. It hangs on in spite of terrific odds till Kiko's rooster delivers a mighty blow at its foe whose neck it had by its beak, but by an unexpected twist of fate, the white rooster's death blow lands on its own head instead of its adversary. As in a previous story, Kiko's rooster stabs itself on the head and falls dead on the pit. This time there is sting in the surprise ending. After the brother has paid his losses, a government collector waits for him to collect the co-operative's money.

To the uninitiated, the story may seem improbable. How can a rooster stab itself to death on the head? When asked about it, Roces said that it was based on an incident that actually happened. Though rare, he said, there have been cases of gamecocks stabbed to death by their own gaffs.

Probable or not, the story is a disappointment as far as humor is concerned. Its only saving grace is the excellent and realistic description of a cockfight.

The story appeared for the first time in *Transition* in 1956, the annual magazine of the Creative Writers' Guild of the Far Eastern University.

Roces is preparing one more story on cockfighting, based on a Supreme Court decision. Then he intends to turn his attention to the G.I.'s of the last war.