May Day Eve

By Nick Joaquin

Submitted by:

Conui, Daniul Jonn P.

BS Med. Tech.
Elements:

Setting: Intramuros, Manila, and its author, Nick Joaquin, wrote it after WWII.

Characters:

- Badoy (the devil)
- Agueda, (the witch)
- Anastasia
- Agueda's daughter
- Voltaire (the grandson)

Theme:

- Life is always full of regret, for we always realize what we have when it is gone.
- Love was blinded and it turned into hatred
- Love cannot be based on passion alone.

Conflict:

External conflict, Man vs. Man

We can see that Agueda and Badoy after having a bad married life with each other, used to regret the past that they've been together and it is revealed with their hatred for each other and how Agueda used to describe the devil to her granddaughter as if it was Badoy and same way as Badoy describing the witch in the mirror to his grandson as if it was Agueda.
ANALYSIS:

Agueda and Badoy’s unpleasant marriage all began on that May night. Agueda and Badoy are two, completely different people. Agueda is a girl ahead of her time. She is bold and liberated unlike most girls her age. She stands out from the broad range of followers of her era. The tragedy is when Badoy’s heart forgets how much he felt for Agueda. The tragedy is how both were not careful enough to mend their failing marriage. Both Badoy and Agueda saw their marriage to be a taste of hell. Instead of acknowledging that they saw their spouses in the mirror, they claimed that it was the witch/devil they saw for that was probably how each of them was to each other during their life together. Their contrasting personalities perhaps were what brought them together. But it could also have been the root of the bitterness that ended their relationship. Badoy heeded back to the time of the girl who had flared so vividly in a mirror one wild May Day midnight, long, long ago and refreshed his memory of how she had bitten his hand and fled which surprised his heart in the instant of falling in love with Agueda. But it has been a while and time has healed the wounds of their relationship. The old love that was blinded by hatred and bitterness which brought pain has now resurfaced. The tragedy is that it is too late. It is good that Badoy can live in the sweet past he and Agueda had, but it is sad that Agueda never found out how much she really meant to Badoy all this time. She died not knowing that what she and Badoy had was real. The love didn’t go away. It was just covered up in the dust of time.
CRITIQUE:

Reading Nick Joaquin’s May Day Eve brings back memories of the stories told us as children. However, reading it at the second time, while paying close attention to the details, will not only reveal Joaquin’s fine craft but his condescending ideas as well.

May Day Eve is the magic night, proper time to perform oracles, hold séances. Certain rites and runes are supposed to empower you at midnight to behold in a mirror the face of the person destined to be your love.

The plot may be simple enough. In one part, Joaquin intends to present the circumstances of Aqueda describing her encounter with the devil in the mirror to her young daughter. The child is keen. In fact, the child sees the identity of his father to the devil as being described by her mother. The vagueness of Aqueda weeping towards the end renders countless possibilities.

In yet another part, Joaquin is more determined to show the circumstances of Don Badoy Montiya’s recollection of seeing a witch in the mirror. With tears on his eyes, he recalls to his grandson that he saw standing before the mirror the witch.

Some have been guilty of looking at the story as a simple tale for little children, but Joaquin aims at something grander. His attention to present a man and a woman holding on to love until the death of them is worthy of note. His intention to exhibit the hazy romance of the old world, the quiet consummation of their love, itself an elevated thought, is a result of his great imaginative power.

Initially, one is propelled to feel connection especially if one has been told of age-old ritual, but it is even true that you will at once be enthralled by it at first reading. The beauty of Joaquin’s language at once moves you.

Joaquin generously employed the figures of speech. Many a times, he chose to repeat for amplification. This he intends to produce familiarity. He writes the following lines to begin the story so as to suggest a mood of the old world.
“…looked out upon the medieval shadows of the foul street where a couple of street-lamps flickered an a last carriage was rattling away upon the cobbles, while the blind black houses muttered hush-hush, their tiled roofs looming like sinister chessboards against a wild sky with clouds, save where an evil old moon prowled about in a corner or where a murderous wind whirled, whistling and whining, smelling now of the sea and now of the summer orchards and wafting unbearable Maytime memories of an old, old love…Guardia sereno-o-o! Alas dice han dado-o-o!”

He repeats exactly the same description of the foul street towards the end of the story to encourage the reader to remember the mood and promote further transport. The story should leave an impression that last even after the story has been put away.

Also note his asyndeton, his rapid flow of words with occasional stops.

“The ball had been in their honor: and they had waltzed and polka-ed and bragged and swaggered and flirted all night and were in no mood to sleep yet-no, caramba, not on this moist tropic eve! Not on this mystic May eve! – with the night still young and so seductive that it was madness not to go out, not to go forth.”

May Day Eve immediately brings transport. His choice and striking words wonderfully attracts and enthralls.

“Mirror, mirror, show to me her whose lover I will be.”

Nick Joaquin’s phrasing not only used the words most striking, but gives life into what seem to be non-living and giving his marvelous ambiguity and double meanings.

“She bewitched me and she tortured me. He ate my heart and drank by blood.”