

An Excerpt From

THE LEGEND OF THE DYING WANTON

by Nick Joaquin

There lived in Manila in the year 1613 a certain Doña Ana de Vera, one of the principal ladies of the country **at** that time and a woman of great **piety**. This Doña Ana and her son, who was an official of the government, were from Madrid. At the court and Villa **they** had enjoyed the patronage of Don Juan de Silva, in whose **retinue** – on de Silva's appointment as governor-general – they had come to the Philippines. Señor Vera had tried to dissuade his mother from coming along – she was over fifty and rather **fragile** of health – but Doña Ana had mockingly feared he would **degenerate** into a savage in three days if she were not there to keep house for him. So, across two oceans and half the world she had come, one of the many **spirited** women **who**, hard on the heels of the conquistadores, sailed forth with kettle and skillet, with fan and mantilla, **devoutly** resolved that even in the heathen of the wilderness **the** rites of the altar of the hearth should be performed with as much elegance as the court itself.

Now there was stationed at Manila at that time a wild young soldier named Currito Lopez who **was** as evil as Doña Ana was good. This Currito was a lost soul, his every action being so public a scandal even decent people knew who he was and **shunned** him like a leper. Riding **around** the city in her carriage, Doña Ana often saw him in the streets; swaggering **insolently** if sober, reeling **and** howling if drunk – but his swart bearded face of a Lucifer never struck her with terror. Alone, **perhaps**, in all the city, she knew another side of this man's character.