

★ *The Little Patriot of* ★ ★ *Ybor City* ★

BY DALEN PANDO

EUSEBIO's venerable legs carried him hurriedly over the distance to the Calixto Lopez cigar factory. It was Friday, and payday, and he could not be late. In the warm late afternoon sun he raced along the dribbled sand and broken cement of the sidewalks of Ybor City. The aromatic odor of tobacco was a heavy element in the still air as he finally reached the oblong red brick building. He was on time; the workers were still inside! He stopped to rest against the banister of the steep flight of steps that led to the entrance. Ten years ago he, too, used to come through those big doors. That was before his enforced retirement, before his trembly old hands would no longer make cigars that were fit to smoke. Now he waited for the workers to emerge, feeling assured that those who were his friends or his good relatives would give him a little contribution. They did not treat him as a beggar; just as one of them who could no longer work. As he leaned there musing, the factory workers started coming

through the doors, all talking Spanish interspersed with English-sounding "okays" and "anyhows."

"Here, Tio Eusebio, fifty cents," said Paco Menendez, as he reached the bottom step, "but be careful; do not talk 'bolita' or Washington will send a committee to investigate you," he added laughingly.

The old man took the money, smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He knew he was being teased. Of course, one did not talk "bolita" since the Kefauver Crime Committee hearings took place. The committee's report, which he had read in the Spanish-language newspaper, certainly proved what he suspected and ignored: that Ybor City's "bolita" dimes and quarters united some policemen, most gangsters and too many politicians in a triad of crime. But one did win sometimes. And before the hearings he had discussed the numbers he was going to play and would offer to share his winnings with his benefactors. No, he was not going to talk now; he did not need Paco's admonition, but

he wished he could talk — it was so satisfactory to anticipate a winning by discussing one's good chances.

Down the factory steps came the procession of workers. The lovers, Armando and Teresa, separated from the throng to give the old man their weekly joint contribution. They were followed by many others. Then came Carola, who was in the midst of an excited group of girls. Though she was coated with the tobacco dust that masked them all, as usual the sight of her filled Eusebio's old heart with joy and affection. Her companions waited while she came to him. Bending toward him, she tenderly pressed her arm around his shoulder.

"Old darling, here is a quarter. And I have something very nice to tell you. We have placed your name on Sunday's program as one of the speakers. Your name and picture will be in all the papers," she said.

His old frame shook with pleasure, for he knew she was referring to the big event scheduled for Sunday at Vals Point Park. The occasion was Cuba's Independence Day, which the community was to celebrate. Many prominent civic leaders and city officials, as well as distinguished visitors from Cuba, were going to participate in the ceremonies. It was incredible that he, too, was going to be among them! But why incredible? Was he not a patriot? It was in the history books that many men sailed out of Tampa Bay trying to help the Cubans fight

for independence. And he could tell them how he and his friends in 1895 tried to get through the Spanish blockade; how some were captured; how he got through.

"Do you really mean it, Carola? I'm to be on the program with all those important people?" he asked, his voice tremulous with emotion.

"Yes, the Cigarworkers Committee wants you to retell your story; you tell it well. But do not make it too long, old one, as there will be many speakers." Then patting his arm, she left him and joined her friends.

His eyes were overflowing as he watched her graceful figure disappear in the crowd; he knew she was responsible for this honor to him. She was the ace cigar-bander of the Calixto Lopez factory and a spirited leader among the workers.

Others stopped to contribute and then the last toiler went past him. To each and everyone who paused, he breathlessly announced that he had a part on Sunday's program. His words rushed out to tarry the passing friend. But even as he boasted, overwhelmed with the honor, he was overcome with humility, for he was so shabby and poor that he could not fit in, he felt, with the well-dressed participants on the speakers' platform.

He started back, counting the money as he slowly walked on 19th Street toward Broadway. Five dollars and eighty cents. About as usual. Those eighty cents, distrib-

uted with luck among some good numbers, might hit the "bolita." He just had to have money. He could not disgrace Carola and stand there before all those people in cracked shoes. He would have to get new shoes, have his hat blocked, his suit pressed. The hat and suit he could manage out of the collections, but there was not enough for shoes.

As he discussed his problems with himself, he came to the door of Luis' café. He hesitated; then walked past it to rest on the outside bench. In spite of the investigations, Eusebio knew that anyone known to Luis could place a bet there. He did not know who the "bolita" bankers were now, and he had not known before, but he had known most of their old collectors. Many of these had given up. The new collector at Luis' was Manolo, the good-looking son of his friend Gomez. He recalled that Manolo, a high school graduate, properly had not considered working in the cigar factories. Unfortunately, his first job was with a third-rate furniture store which sold its merchandise on easy terms. When he refused to collect for collapsed furniture, he was fired. At least that was the explanation given by his good friend Gomez for the son's present employment.

TIO EUSEBIO got up from the bench and went into the gloom of the café. There were a few men scattered at the tables among the

shadows in the room. He decided to have a drink while he made up his mind whether to play; needing those shoes, he would have to play; just one number then — a good one. Even though it was no longer fun; even though there was such a furtive air to trying one's luck these days, he would decide on a number. It was different in the old days. Then one discussed with others the number of one's choice; it was shouted back and forth, or one went close to the number-taker and saw that it was written down properly, with no room for errors. Collectors always paid off then, if one won. Now some of the new ones did not pay, claiming that the police confiscated their pay-off money or that they were held up. He hoped Manolo was not one of these, a dishonest collector. Eusebio leaned against the bar, waiting for Luis to get to him.

"What will it be, Eusebio?" asked Luis, dispensing with the affectionate "Tío."

"A double sherry," he answered, and then in a conspiratorial tone added, "while I decide on a good number." Luis poured a glass of wine, but ignored the companionable words. The old man was embarrassed. Ashamed of his slip into the old free-spoken ways, he quickly picked up the wine glass and walked toward a table near the door.

As he gazed into the street, there appeared before his eyes a strange sight indeed. Two figures, two

figures dressed in black, were coming out of the distance. He hurriedly left his chair and stepped outside for a better look. Yes, it was a pair of nuns! Nuns were seldom in that vicinity. Two nuns meant number 55 was indicated. That, of course, was the number he would play!

He returned to Luis' counter and gave him half a dollar.

"All of it on 55 for the first prize," he whispered, "and should I win, I'll be here tomorrow waiting for the money," he added firmly, so that Luis would know that he was not to be cheated. By listening to the winning numbers of the Cuban National Lottery, announced over the radio, he would know whether his selection was a winner. If the last two digits of tomorrow's grand prize in Cuba equaled 55, he would win \$35.00; truly a bonanza! He would have new shoes on his feet and money in his pocket come Sunday. But supposing he did win and the collector would not pay. He could not bear to think that he would be a victim of such dishonesty. There had been so many stories following the investigation of collectors' doing people out of their rightful winnings.

The wine and his unhappy thoughts dimmed the vision of himself standing proudly and well-dressed before the crowd of people at Vals Point Park. He probably would not be lucky and would lose his fifty cents as he had lost so many other half-dollars, and quarters, and

dimes. He slowly shuffled off to his room.

SUNDAY was a beautiful day. The multitude in Vals Point Park seated before the bandshell were canopied with a brilliant blue sky. The waters of the bay were rippled by an occasional warm breeze. The men and women of the Latin Colony and the other townspeople interested in the event filled the benches while their children frolicked in the aisles. The hard-working young musicians of Ybor City's "Estudiantina," the young people's band, filled the air with overstrained music. The crowd had happily applauded the speakers who in either English or Spanish made patriotic references to the great day. Carola, looking cool in a pale yellow dress, now stepped forward from the group of people who in the wings of the bandshell conducted the event, and stood before the microphone.

"We of the Cigarmakers Committee bring to you with pleasure our very own Eusebio Frias, beloved citizen of our community, who will tell us his story of those brave men who left this port one night in 1895."

From among the seated speakers and dignitaries the old man stepped forward, resplendent in his pressed beige suit and new brown shoes with perforated nylon tops. There was a slight bulge on the right side of the suit, such as might be made by a roll of bills in a trouser pocket. As

he waited for the electrician to adjust the microphone to his small stature, he glanced heavenward and then down toward the front row where sat his friend Gomez. He had been sent a fortunate portent and his friend had an honest son.

Tio Eusebio gently cleared his throat and in liquid oratorical Spanish began:

"Humble and grateful for the privilege of standing here before you, dear friends and compatriots . . ."



» In his autobiography, G. K. Chesterton calls H. G. Wells "one of the best men in the world with whom to start a standing joke; though perhaps he did not like it to stand too long after it was started." Chesterton says he shared with Wells the credit for inventing "the well-known and widespread national game of Gype." Together with their contemporary men of letters, they promoted Land Gype, Water Gype, and Table Gype. The latter was called "a game for the little ones," for which Chesterton himself cut out and colored pieces of cardboard of mysterious and significant shapes. They even talked of Gype's Ear, a disease which might afflict the overzealous player. In a report on the publicity they gave the game of Gype, Chesterton confesses: "Everything was in order and going forward; except the game itself, which has not yet been invented."

By
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LABOR *and* EISENHOWER

THE little, bespectacled fellow in the doorway to the hotel suite doffed his well-worn hat.

"I'm Harry Truman," he announced, with the hesitancy of a stranger not certain he'd come to the right place at the appointed hour. "I'm supposed to pose with a poster . . ."

The words drifted off. There were stilted pleasantries from the second-echelon political leader assigned to greet Franklin Roosevelt's running mate. The photographer put a white frosted bulb into the camera holder and I satisfied my editor by making "contact with that fellow running with FDR," who had come to the political headquarters in New York to stand up and be photographed with one of the few campaign posters which mentioned his name. The poster was paid for by local labor leaders.

That was the first time I met Harry S. Truman — so I knew him when a few months later he came in for a prize fight and was taken over to a local beanery on 51st Street. There the proprietor, a burly chap by the name of Toots Shor, generously put his hulking arm around the

newly elected Vice President and said:

"Hang around, Harry, we'll make a national figure of you here."

The last time I talked to the President personally was eight years later, the night of the Democrats' Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner. My chest had been nearly caved in by a Secret Service man who thought I'd got too close to the dais. As I picked myself up, Jimmie Petrillo, who shoots a faster gag than Bob Hope, hurried over.

"If you want to talk to the President, lemme know," Jimmie snapped. "That Truman is a member of my union. Heh, Mr. President, aren't you?"

Truman laughed.

"But I haven't paid my dues, Jimmie," the President chuckled.

"Don't worry," Petrillo retorted, "after what you did for us, you got a lifetime membership."

Jimmie had gone to the trouble of issuing Mr. Truman a gold membership card in the American Federation of Musicians. And, though other unions hadn't gone through similar formalities, there was no doubt that in his last years in the