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One Tilting Leaves, by Tiempo

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One Tilting Leaves. By Edith L. Tiempo. Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 1995.

One Tilting Leaves, the latest novel by Edith L. Tiempo, is set in Narra Alta, a town at the foothills of Sierra Madre. The plot centers on the life of Primo Gutierrez, chair of the Department of Biology of the Cagayan Valley Christian College.

Primo, an expert in environmental conservation, helps implement a bill that totally inhibits logging. He works closely with the Department of Energy and Natural Resources in this regard. As the novel unfolds, the other side of Primo's character is established. He is distant and reticent, a loner who has a secret. It happened when he was still eight years old, when he and his twin brother P2 killed Benvenuta, their father's Korean lover who was taking care of their bedridden mother.

One afternoon, the twin brothers inadvertently heard the lover's muffled voice raised in anger while she was having a quarrel with their father. It was then that they found out that she plotted to kill their mother by giving her an overdose of medicine. Out of rage, the two brothers attacked Benvenuta, who evaded them by running out of the house. The twin brothers tried to run after her, but before they could catch her, she accidentally stumbled against the edge of the well. She teetered, trying to regain her balance, but P2 pushed her. Primo then covered the well with the lid. Everyone took what happened as an accident.

Another thing that later fill Primo's mind is the desire to know who killed his brother P2 in the Manobo forest more than two years ago. When the classes end for the Christmas break, Primo goes back to Agusan. With the help of Lt. Benjamin Colnar, Primo locates the Manobo chanters who were thought to have witnessed the crime. He learns that the killer left something that the chanters kept since the murder, a memo book of the assailant on which was written General G. Bustos, one of the most powerful illegal loggers in Mindanao. Although he promises Lt. Colnar to leave the case to the proper authorities before he returns to Manila, Primo goes to the general and kills him.

The theme of the novel centers on the age-old struggle between good and evil. The novel does not only expose the reality of the struggle that happens outside of oneself, it also depicts the struggle within. The forest is a perfect metaphor for this.

Florge Sy, S.J.