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## Malakas *A Story of Old-time Philippines*

By JOSE GARCIA VILLA

**H**AI! I have heard the songs of the wind, the songs of the young lush moon, the songs of tall, strong trees. And I have heard, too, the wisdom in all these songs—but the greatest of all wisdom is in the song of love, when man and woman love. For this I tell you: There is wisdom in love, for love is wisdom. *Hai!*

And this more I tell you: The love of man is stronger than the love of woman. The love of man is a great red flower with a blue-white heart, and it is a heart that is hard yet big. And so, when man loves, he is cruel—even to himself.

And this yet have I to say: A love that is not cruel is dead. *What is alive, hurts.* A mother that loves her child punishes it when it has done mischief. A snake that is alive stings. A rose on the plant tears with its thorns. I say, *a love that is not cruel is dead.* It is not love. *What is alive, hurts.*

And so love stings. And in its sting there is wisdom. For all love is wisdom. *Hai.*

\* \* \*

And now let me tell you the story of Malakas.

Full twenty handsome years was he when the river Pasig yet was young, when cool, green clumps of bamboos arboresced its soft, sandy banks. Tall and big and wide of breast was he like a young gorgeous god; brown his skin, hard his muscles, fleet his feet. Thick were his wrists as the wild free bamboo, and his hands not soft nor hard, but the hands a woman would like to have twist her wrists when a man is jealous of her. And when he walked, young dreamful eyes of women followed him—yearned for him, for the warmth that lay in the enclosure of his brawny

arms, for the male firmness of his young full lips. Ah, the women that looked after him, how fast beat their hearts, how wild became their blood with song, with cruel silent desire.

They said of him that he was bewitched—for love had not yet found his heart, for Mabi, who was but fifteen, had already loved and wedded, for something in Malakas' eyes was deep and faraway and hungry of dreams, and he would not marry yet.

His father had told him: "Hath thou no desire to see the son of thy son, or even yet thy son's son's son? Then why doth thou not marry yet? Many are the young women gladly would have thee for a mate."

And he had replied: "Father, I do not mate—I *love*. I shall love."

"Marry then the woman you love."

"I dream of her yet."

At night, when the moon was a thin silver smile on the face of the night, the young women, unable to sleep, said aloud to themselves: "Why can he not love me? Are my eyes not dark enough for him? Art my lips so pale they cannot awaken his? Are my arms so short they cannot curve round his neck?" And they were not ashamed to say these, for they were not afraid to love.

And those with whom Malakas had played when he was a child, when his arms had not yet become long and strong and his hair not so dark,—these girls now grown into women, when they thought of him, wept. For he was so handsome and his lips were bare of sweet words. He sang to them no songs nor even touched their hands. He looked at them but the look in his eyes was not the look they wanted. The look he gave them was blank, meaningless—passive, tame. What a woman desires in a man's eyes is the look of possession, the look of the master, the look of defiance, the look that exclaims to her, "You belong to me, only to me. *See if that is not true!*" Malakas could not

understand, did not heed, the call in their eyes. And when other young men came to them and told them honeyed words and sang to them of their love, they sat silent and looked abstractedly at the night. Yet they married these young men whose tongues were glib and soft, whose arms were not shy to hold a woman.

And the years glided past until Malakas was twenty-two. Handsomer he had become, wider his breast, thicker his arms, and his eyes both dreamful and happy.

For of the children of a few years ago, a new crop of women had emerged. One of them was named Maganda. A gentle brown was her face, ruddy were her cheeks, her lips a soft red bloom. Her eyes were not black but the color of wild red roses scorched to death. Full was her bosom and slender her waist, and her voice the voice of women in dreams.

And with Maganda, Malakas fell in love. There blazed in his eyes the first fires of love—long, tender flames that sent their golden glow as streams of languid music, caressing, holy, to every fiber of him, adding more dreams to his dreams, more hunger to his soul. And his lips became warm and full of poems; he told her words so sweet the bees, too, could understand them:

“And my heart is a little blue boat on the breast of a blue, blue river. Come, O my beloved, I am waiting for you.”

Sweet were his phrases as the first taste of nectar to the young, young bee, as the morning dew is sweet and cool to the eyes.

“Of many silver dances were you born, of many soft winds, of the attar of many lovekist hearts of flowers.”

And she did not understand him, she was yet so young. She let him go on talking, cooing his love to her, while her thoughts were of Bayani, the youth who had grown up with her, played with her, who had one day, on the banks of the Pasig, prisoned her in his young lusty arms. She had

felt nothing for Bayani *until* this Malakas talked, Malakas, whose lips said words sweet and tender, beautiful words that Bayani's lips did not know—words that revealed to her she was *not* so young, that she *did* understand—Bayani—loved him, not Malakas.

She told him: "Close thy lips, Malakas. I love another. I love Bayani."

He protested. "He is only a boy—he is only sixteen."

"Never mind. I love him."

"Do you not care for me?" he pleaded.

"No. I love Bayani." But there were tears in her eyes, and she took his big wide hands in hers and patted them. "Do you care so much, Malakas?"

Malakas sobbed, so great was his love for her.

"Forget me, Malakas," she said. "I will give thee my firstborn, if she be a daughter, for thee to love," she promised, and ran away.

And Maganda and Bayani were married, Malakas lived alone. His eyes that had brightened once with love now lost their shine and grew dull. And though his lips had learned to be sweet, now they were silent again. In his heart lingered the face of Maganda, lingered it painfully there.

To Maganda there was born a daughter. Fair was she, this daughter of Bayani, and he called her Maganda after her beautiful mother.

Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, grew more beautiful each day. Each morn that passed softened the curves of her body and strengthened the rich fullness of her limbs. The sunshine, when it fell on her hair, goldened it with the gold of champaka flowers, and when the moonlight fell on it blued it with the blue of a sky after seven rains. Ah, fair was she, so fair Malakas gradually lost his sorrow and gladdened each time he saw her. Once again his eyes did brighten, his lips become full of poems, his soul ached with love.

"Rejoice, Malakas," said Maganda to him. "For the daughter I promised thee soon will be a woman. Then you can marry her if you love her."

"I love her, Maganda," he told her. "I love her, thy daughter, fair as thyself and yet more fair. I love her truly, Maganda, even as once I loved thee."

And in his eyes, in the tender passion of his lips, Maganda saw that beautiful was Malakas' love for her daughter. Great was her happiness that she should be able to offer her daughter's love to the man who had loved her so well. To Maganda, her daughter, spoke she about Malakas, words to plant love in the young heart, words fraught with the melody of many bygone years, of many lost songs found again.

"Love him," said she to her daughter, "for he knows how to love."

And Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, looked at her mother and asked:

"What is love?"

And by that Maganda knew that her daughter was not a woman yet.

More years passed. Malakas' father died, and the children with whom Malakas had grown up now had grandchildren and some already had grey hair. Maganda, Bayani's wife, was older now and no longer looked young; thin had grown her arms, her mouth drooped, her hips were wide. And the river Pasig was broader now, deeper, and the little bamboos of long ago now had grown so tall they stooped with their own weight. Yet to Malakas the years were not so cruel, for the love in his heart kept him young in spite of his seven-and-thirty years.

Then one day Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, reached her fifteenth year. She was so beautiful, so fair, she dazzled everyone's eyes. Everybody was proud of her, but proudest of all was Malakas, who loved her, who had waited for her these many years to grow up.

On this day, Malakas went to her and thrust his spear into her staircase. So strong was he the spear split the cane step and stuck deep in the ground. Many were the youths who tried to pull it out, but it resisted bravely until at last they retired ashamed. And Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, felt proud of Malakas.

Maganda's mother said: "If thou lovest my daughter, take her."

"I love her," replied Malakas.

To Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, he said:

"I love thee—have waited for thee these many years. Wilt thou have me for thy husband?" In his voice was a beautiful tremor that she caught and understood.

"Prove to me thy love," she said.

He held her in his powerful tawny arms, and she seemed so soft, so small, against his breast he was afraid to embrace her tighter lest he crush her.

"Is that the way of thy love?" she asked.

"That is the way of my love," Malakas answered.

And she understood: The strong man does not brag of his strength, he does not hurt every weak thing that is placed in his hand, for he knows he is strong—only the weak man is cruel to a woman.

"I will marry thee," said Maganda, the daughter of Maganda.

There was great rejoicing among the people of the village. There was much fishing, much hunting, and much singing. The young men began preparing beautiful gifts for the bride, and the young men dove deep into the bay for the bluest and whitest of seashells. And these gifts they kept hidden, a secret, until the day of the marriage. They were to be laid at the feet of the bride and the bridegroom amidst rice-throwing and well-wishing. And the music was the music of the young, for young would be the bride, young and beautiful and fair.

And the day for the wedding came. Oh, the joy and merriment of the day, the songs on the lips of old and young, the meaningful twinkles of gay young eyes, the clasping of old wrinkled hands. And in their midst stood Malakas, tall and big and wide of breast, his eyes aglow with love and hope, his heart wild with suspense.

The old, white-haired, bent woman who would marry them ran thin passionate fingers through the dish of white, uncooked rice, a long canny grin on her dried-up face. She called for the bride.

But Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, appeared not. Maganda and Bayani called for their daughter—but there was no answer.

Then Malakas called—and still she appeared not.

The guests called: "Maganda, O daughter of Maganda."

Yet she appeared not.

*Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, had eloped with a youth on the day of her wedding.*

Out of Malakas' eyes went the brief happiness he had known. He stood rooted to his place till all the guests had dispersed. Then huge sobs racked his big, sturdy body and he shook like one in mortal spasms, his hands hard on his face. And the great hurt, the great choking emptiness in his soul, made him thereafter like unto a man of stone.

One day, weeks after, Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, who had fled to the nearby woods with her young lover, returned to her people with her mate. He was so young, this boy whom she had mated, that the light of boyhood was not yet out of his eyes, the voice of boyhood not yet out of his throat, and the fullness of muscles not yet come. His step was that of a young wild deer, brisk and quick and light; his eyes dark and piercing, his lips bold and free,—he was all youth. Around Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, he had his long



tensile arm, and they wedged their way through the crowd that had gathered to see them, like a pair of idyllic lovers.

And of those who saw them come back was Malakas. And as he stood gazing at them he knew that Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, had done *right* when she ran away on her wedding day. He realized that for him there was no love in Maganda's heart—there had not been love—that love always had been for this boy who now walked beside her.

He kept on gazing at the beauty of the young pair till they were out of sight. And when he returned home he blessed them in his heart, wished them great happiness—while his own lips quivered.

When Malakas and Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, met again, she took him aside by a clump of dense bamboos, and said:

“Forgive me, Malakas. I have not done thee right.”

“I understand,” he replied.

“I will give thee my firstborn, if she be a daughter, for thee to love.” Then she went away.

To Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, a daughter was born. And Maganda, the young parents named her.

The years that passed put grey on Malakas' temples. A little stoop descended on his wide, thick shoulders, wrinkles lined his brow, deep sunk his eyes. Twenty-and-thirty years had Malakas now, waiting for Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, the daughter of Maganda.

And Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, grew into a woman. Fair was she, fairer than Maganda, fairer even than Maganda, the daughter of Maganda,—so fair she was like a dream. Black was her hair as the long voluptuous night, with the shadows of flowers mingled therein. Pink mellowed with brown were her cheeks, and in her eyes the light of hungry stars. A sea of sweetness were her lips, pink as the pink of guava seeds. As two lilies were her hands, and her feet as twin doves. Lithe and slender and small was she, a little golden princess,

a little dawn of roses, a flower of seven delicate fragrances.

Many were those that loved her, many the bold hearts that beat only for her, many those that desired her to be the mother of their children, but none loved her so well as Malakas—and Isagani. Isagani, the youth born under her same moon, the youth who had played with her, who dreamed of a nest with her, whose arms were measured for her breasts.

And when Isagani spoke to her of love, she listened—but her heart heard not. For in her heart she cherished the picture of one who was tall and big and wide of breast, whose lips moved seldom, whose eyes were wistful.

And when one day he came to her and told her, "I love thee," she did not say, "Prove to me thy love,"—but "I, too, love thee, Malakas."

They spoke no further words, they just looked into each other's eyes till they were magnificent with tears—and knew they loved each other, had always loved each other.

In her eyes he read: "Why did you not come to me sooner, my love? Why have you been so long in coming? *I have been yours always.*"

And in his she read: "Love has not been long in coming, beloved—it has always been in my heart. *I love thee so much.*"

The day of their wedding came. The house of palm-leaves and bamboos was filled with people. Songs were within and without.

"Why has he not come yet?" asked Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, the daughter of Maganda.

"He is preparing his best, maybe," comforted Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, her mother.

And they waited for him.

\* \* \*

He might have been a stone god, Malakas, standing tall and big and wide of breast, brown, immobile, a little grey on

the temples, looking lingeringly at the hut he was leaving. He might have been no man at all, but one celestial, hallowed, as he stood in the soft afternoon sunlight, impressing into his soul the loved details of the home he was leaving, a divine transcendent curve to his lips. And the small brown boy with the up-lifted face, the rapt, innocent face, standing before him, might have been no boy at all but his little loving worshipper, his young beautiful archangel.

Malakas' lips moved softly, slowly—pierced the wistful silence around with infinite tenderness.

“Go thou to Maganda, the daughter of Maganda, the daughter of Maganda. Tell her Malakas will not come—will *never* come. Malakas is not for her. She is a wisp, a fragrance, a delicate little flower—Malakas is a rock, heavy and old—his hands are clumsy. Malakas will not blight her—will not destroy her—he cannot do it—he loves her so. Tell her a youth awaits her—a youth that loves her—Isagani. Tell her to go to him. Malakas will not come—will never come.”

He might have been a stone god—he did not move—only his eyes were bright and dreamful and faraway.

\* \* \*

*Hai!* I have heard the songs of the wind, the songs of the young lush moon, the songs of tall, strong trees. And I have heard, too, the wisdom in all these songs—but the greatest of all wisdom is in the song of love, when man and woman love. For this I tell you: There is wisdom in love, for love is wisdom. *Hai!*

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And so love stings. And in its sting there is wisdom. For all love is wisdom. *Hai!*