

The Dream She Forgot

By MERCEDES GRAU-SANTAMARIA

SHE STOOD AT A BLACK-ened arch of what had once been a framework of a beautiful doorway and gazed with saddened eyes at the pile of ruins that lay before her. More than a year had passed since, embittered and rebellious at the fate that with a single blow had deprived her of husband and home, she had abandoned the old homesite and sought peace and forgetfulness among friends, who, like the good Samaritans of old, had extended to her the gracious hand of friendship and welcome. Strange, but she found it hard to believe now that those same ruins represented what she had once proudly called home—that the blackened stones that met her gaze had once supported an ultra-modern edifice which had offered to the world an indubitable testimonial of her good taste and wealth.

"Villa Aurora" her husband had called it, naming after her, but her friends had immediately dubbed it "Aurora borealis" upon beholding the splendor of its interior, and the name had stuck. For it was a veritable paradise of lights with all the lighting effects that modern ingenuity and electricity could devise, enhanced greatly by the expensive multi-coloured glass windows that she had lavishly ordered to be used everywhere. So that even in broad daylight, one got the effect of night,

especially since air-conditioning had also been utilised. Here in this palace of lights she had reigned supreme and many were the gatherings she had held in it; for her husband was proud of her beauty, and desired above all things to exhibit it in the precious setting he had provided for it. Children there were none, for neither had desired them, and each had been free to seek pleasure at all times anywhere.

Time passes quickly when one has no worries and cares, so that, before she quite realised it, five hectic years had passed. And, suddenly, war, swift and unexpected, had descended upon them. She could never, for the rest of her life, forget waking up that fateful morning of the eighth, still half dreaming of a wild party she had attended the previous night and receiving with a jolt the terrible news of war. There had really been no time to prepare or at least develop an attitude towards this frightening thing called war. She had most of her life planned her activities and carried them out in her own sweet time; but this war—she had not even reckoned the possibility of such a calamity affecting her directly. Even in the face of hurried evacuations and frenzied shopping for prime commodities among her friends, she had remained calm—not because she felt calm but because she could not

quite accept the idea of war and her mind mercifully refused to assume the burden of worry.

Besides, there was her husband, calm as the Pacific Ocean when Balboa must have first beheld it, and she reacted according to his attitude. Until Pasay was raided and she found herself suddenly without home and husband, so that she could no longer ignore the horror of war and she had taken flight as an easy means of escaping from it.

A year! Much can happen in a single day. How much more in one whole year! She had lived among friends—not those who had shared parties with her but friends who belonged to an earlier era. Friends who had remained true to oldtime customs and traditions and had unconsciously given her an entirely new outlook. She had lived their simple life and shared their common everyday experiences, so that she had come to forget the horror of war and had furthermore attained a new sense of values. And she had come home to see what she could build out of the ruins of the former life and start life anew with the strength and courage that her stay with her friends had invested her.

And now she was back--back in the old homesite where she had known a different happiness and, for a swift moment, sorrow, bitter as gall, enveloped her soul. So that she felt too weak to stand alone and she leaned against the blackened framework and closed her eyes while she lived through the agony once more—the agony that had been hers after the tragedy that had occurred which had destroyed her husband and her home.

Then a soft breeze was mercifully wafted to her, bringing the sweetish scent of mango blossoms; and, keeping her eyes still closed, she let the welcome breeze play over her features. Then as though touched by

a magic key, the gates of her memory slowly opened while from the innermost recesses of her mind emerged little scenes she had long ago forgotten and which had formed together one sweet, beautiful dream.

A tiny stream running through the quiet town of San Rafael, Bulacan, and a tiny nipa hut beside it, with a trim "gumamela" hedge perennially bearing its red flowers and a huge mango tree old as the ages perfuming the air with its sweet blossoms in early summer time and gladdening the eye with its luscious yellow fruit in May. A rustic swing hung from its wide-spreading branches. Many were the times she had sought refuge under its welcome shelter and whiled the lazy hours away, setting the swing in motion with one foot the while she wove day-dreams that fitted through the tiny spaces of the lacy pattern formed by the over-hanging leaves and lost themselves in the fleecy clouds that lazily drifted by to join at leisure those that had gone before to form one long interminable voluminous chain.

Strange how Victor had always figured in those dreams. Victor it was who had been her constant playmate and later companion until Marcial came and swept her off her feet with the ardour of his wooing. Victor it had always been when in picnics and dances she had picked out her favourite partner so that everybody in San Rafael took it for granted that they two would marry some day and settle down in the old hometown, and perhaps raise a child or two by the placid stream where they themselves had played many a prank on each other. She herself had more than accepted the idea, and long before Victor could summon sufficient courage to broach the subject, she had hugged close to her bosom the picture of someday being his wife. Sweet, sweet

dream! Doubly sweet when she remembered that she had asked for nothing then but to be his wife so that she might cuddle him and spoil him, and wait on him hand and foot, forgetting all thought of self in the desire to serve him and minister to his wants. All she asked and desired then was his love, his complete, overwhelming love. But Marcial had come before Victor had spoken. And he had tempted her with his offer of riches and an exciting life she had not known, so that she had closed her heart to the pleading that was in Victor's hurt eyes and—she had married Marcial.

Marcial had given her little cause to regret her choice. He had been easy to live with, and proved to be a generous provider. And if the war had not come, they might have drifted along together and remained friends to the end of their lives. But now that he was gone, she realised that something had been locking in their relationship, that she had been relying too much on his generosity, and had taken too many things for granted without giving much in return herself. And having failed to give, she had little of memory to fall back on; and now she felt so useless, so useless and unneeded.

Until she remembered that brief encounter at the plaza with the Victor of her dreams and the surprised look he had given her in response to her brief nod of recognition. They had had no chance to speak but she liked to think now that he had been glad to see her. She had not seen him since her shameless desertion; and she had had no news of him save the fact that he had chosen to remain unmarried and was making good in his profession as an engineer. Perhaps he was holding the torch for her, hoping she would turn back to him someday. Or—dared she herself hope?

Strange mood she was in to be

thinking and dreaming of Victor again. She had pushed his memory away from her when she chose Marcial but now the breeze, and the mango blossoms, and that pleasurable encounter had brought all the past back. Useless to try to recall her life with Marcial. It was Victor, Victor who intruded into her thoughts and refused to be ejected for the second time. She felt him so near her that she smelled the faint aroma that she always associated with him—the mingled scent of fresh Reuter soap and mellowed tobacco—so that she closed her eyes more tightly that the dream might persist and she might feel the all-enveloping comfort of his presence more strongly.

She was conscious of a new courage born in her—a courage to take up the broken threads of her life and start all over again. No longer did she feel despair in her heart nor bitterness in her soul. With a sureness that the memory of Victor's past devotion and tender solicitations gave her, she knew that he was still hers and that her dreams were something still possible of realisation. She would build the house she had dreamed of having right here in the very spot where Villa Aurora had stood. Only it would be no "villa" but a modest nipa hut with a trim "gumamela" hedge and a big mango tree beside it, and perhaps rows and rows of banana plants behind it, while hundreds of tiny, odorous flowers would scent the air with their varied perfumes at night.

And in that humble hut there would be children, sober, sensible children who shall grow up in an atmosphere of affection, moderate pleasures, obedience and respect,—nothing of the gay and empty festivities meant to feed human vanity and to cover up the hollows of an empty, pointless existence. Christ-

mas, of course, would be observed; but even this, in a modest way, so as not to lose its essence. From now on there would be a future—not right away while the nation is at war which seeks to give meaning and depth to a superficial life,—a future of peace and of fruitful effort in this nipa hut, in this beautiful sunny land which God hath given them...

And on moonlit nights, she and Victor would stand side by side at the window and inhale the sweet fragrance they used to know together in Bulacan. He would not

need to speak, for now she knew that his was a love that needed no words with which to express itself.

The ecstasy of her dream at last became too great to be borne so that she opened her eyes to end the dream and face the reality. But the dream persisted, for she found herself looking into a pair of soft brown eyes moist with emotion and felt her hand held gently in a warm clasp she knew so well. And this time she made no attempt to end her dream, for those dear eyes looking into her own spoke a language her heart could at last understand.



A Way of Dignity, Peace and Liberty—

HON. JORGE B. VARGAS, Philippine Ambassador to Japan: If we had a war aim in 1941, it was the preservation of the opportunity for independence opened for us by the United States in the Tydings-McDuffie Law. Even in 1941, we were haunted by the spectres of social disorder and political isolation which would attend any independence that we might win through American victory. And looking beyond this dream of victory we sought, even as we sought in the years of peace before the war, for some natural and reasonable solution to our dilemma of freedom without security or without freedom. We groped in the darkness for a way out, a way of dignity, honour, peace and liberty. By some paradox of destiny, it was through our seeming defeat and disaster of 1942 that we found that way out. The magnanimous Empire of Japan, tolerant in war and generous in victory, invited our country and our people to cooperate in the establishment of a free union of East Asians, a Co-Prosperity Sphere where the nations of this region of the world which we inhabit might co-exist and collaborate for a common good on the basis of liberty, equality and reciprocity.