


Fiction

BLOOD OVER THE LAND

by Carlos G.
Platon

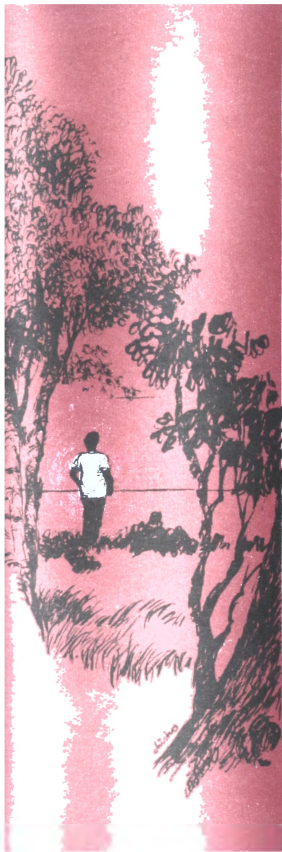


THAT NIGHT, his wife told him the baby she bore was not his. He wanted to scream. In fury, he slapped her twice and she fell to his feet. She rose and he slapped her again. This time she remained weeping on the floor. He wanted to kick her in the face, in the belly; he wanted to spit at her. But he felt weak and he walked away.

He came back at near-morning and found her at the stairs waiting for him. He looked at her and he sensed pity at the sight of her swollen eyes. He entered the house.

"Nonong," he heard her voice from behind. It was clear and soft. "Nonong," she repeated.

He turned to her. But he did not speak.



"Forgive me, Nonong," she said.

He looked at her in the eyes. They were misty and red against the light. "You're a bitch," he cried, and walked toward the room. He heard her faint footsteps trail behind him and he slammed the door against her.

When he woke he felt a rock inside his head. He was hungry. He fumbled for cigarettes in his pockets and started to smoke.

"Marina!" he called from the bed. Everything was still. He rose and went out of the room. Marina was asleep on the chair. He walked past her and disappeared into the kitchen. At the cupboard he found a pot of rice and what was left of the dried carabao meat they had the previous night. He started to eat.

MARINA was still asleep when he left the house for the fields. He stood before the wide expanse of blackish earth and his eyes traveled from where he stood up to where the river started to run. The field was starting to turn green with tiny blades of palay.

Many months ago, the field was wild with talahib and weeds. His father left it to him before he died.

"This land is now yours, Rafael," the old man said. "Take good care of it. Love it as I have always done."

He was in the field wondering

how he could rid the land of weeds when Marina appeared with a bundle of clothes from the river.

"You work too hard," he said.

"I need money," she said, "and the Americans at the camp pay well for the cleaning of their clothes."

Everyday she was at the river and at sundown he came to her and walked her home.

"Your land is full of weeds," she said, pointing to the field.

"Yes, but someday I'll clean it and grow palay."

"When?" she asked, giggling.

"Soon," he said. "I still have a dozen cavanés of rice from my father's last harvest."

Summer slipped away and Rafael turned twenty-five. You are ripe for marriage, his Tiyo Andoy told him. The idea stuck in his mind. That night he saw Marina.

When the planting season came they got married and settled at a cottage overlooking the land. He had promised a half-dozen cavanés of rice as payment for the cottage. Now it is time to work, he told Marina, and he walked out into the field and started to clean the earth of weeds with his hand.

Marina still laundered for the soldiers at the camp and every sundown they walked together home and talked of the land. Soon, he told her, the seeds I sowed will sprout. He imagined



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the golden stalks of palay swaying in the wind and the sun. He held her hand.

"Our children will have plenty to eat," he said.

RAFAEL stared at the greening field. But now he no longer cared. The birds and the wind could uproot all that grew from the earth and he did not care.

"Now, be careful, Marina; the baby is three months inside. My, Rafael must be anxious. What will you name it?"

Rafael pushed the door open and looked at them. It was Nana Sabel talking. "Rafael, I was telling your wife here to take good care of herself. My, you must be a happy man."

Rafael looked at Marina and she looked away.

"Now, look," Nana Sabel turned to Marina. "Every morning you walk with your husband to the field. It's a good exercise. Besides," then she rose and spat out of the window her *buyo*, "besides, won't you want to see how the palay has grown? I passed by there this morning on my way to the river and saw the beautiful land."

Marina rose from her seat.

"Nonong," she said, as she walked toward the kitchen. "I'll get your lunch." She came out of the kitchen with plates in her hand. "Nana Sabel, won't you join us?" Marina asked.

"No, Marina," she said. "I had

already mine." She turned to Rafael. "And what will you name the child?"

Rafael stared at the rice. "Let's eat," he said.

"No, no, I must be going," the old woman said, rising slowly. "Remember, Marina, what I told you. Take carabao milk every morning. And have enough exercise. My, my, won't it be a handsome baby?" She closed the door behind her.

Rafael ate his lunch in silence. Just a few days ago it was different. When he came home he told Marina everything about the land. He spoke of the palay and how many cavares of rice they would get from the harvest. And they talked of the baby.

"It's going to be a boy!" Rafael would guess.

"A girl!" Marina would reply.

Rafael sorted the meat from the bones of the fish. She sat beside him at the table and he felt her eyes on his face.

"Who is the father?" Rafael asked. Marina did not answer. She started to rise but Rafael caught her by the arm and pushed her back to her seat. "Who is the father?" he cried. He drank his water. Then he stared at Marina. She was pale.

"Bob," she said. Her voice was weak.

HE REMEMBERED Bob, the American soldier at the camp whose clothes Marina laundered.

He was a lanky man with blond hair and blue eyes. He used to come to the cottage in a battered jeep. Whenever he came he had with him boxes of canned goods and packages of cigarettes.

"You're very kind," he told the American once. "We Filipinos will never forget the things you have done for us."

"We are friends," Bob said. "We must help each other."

Every weekend he came in his jeep. He talked of Rafael's land.

"Your land is very fertile," he said. "The earth is black and the plants are green."

"Is your land in America fertile, too?" Marina asked.

"I come from New York. You won't find plantations there, but instead, rows and rows of factories and skyscrapers." He paused and lighted his cigarette. "But America is so darn big, you see, and in the south we have vast spreads of land. We grow cotton and wheat there and many things."

"Is it bigger than our land?" Marina asked.

"Gosh, it is! It's a million times bigger."

"That is why I say you're very kind," Rafael said meekly. "Your land is so big and you are rich yet you make friends with us. I don't know how we can repay you."

"Aw, skip it," Bob said. "We're friends and we must live together in peace and friendship."

ONE MORNING Bob came with a sullen look in his eyes. On his shoulder he carried a big box.

"Our troop is leaving for the States tomorrow," he said. "Here," laying the big box on the table, "I brought along some canned goods," he said. "Got cigarettes here, too; yes, sir! Genuine American cigarettes!" He put an arm around Rafael.

Rafael looked at him. He was speechless.

"By the way," Bob said, drawing his arm away from Rafael, "I got something here for you." He went out and came back with a gun. "We call this Caliber 45," he said. "Here, take it." Rafael did not move. He stared at the gun. "Now, c'mon," he urged, "keep this; you can shoot the crows and the wild animals that pester your land."

Rafael gripped the gun in his hand. "The bullets are in the box," Bob said. "Here, I'll teach you how to use it." He took the gun from Rafael's hand and walked to the window. He looked out. Then he raised the gun into the skies and Rafael heard the shrill sound of something breaking echo in the land.

The American turned to them. "See?" he said. "Well, guess I'll be going now." He patted Rafael at the back and shook Marina's hand. "I hope to see you again someday, folks," he said, blinking an eye.

"You're very kind," Rafael said. "You'll be with us for the rest of our life."

The American waved his hand and they followed him to his jeep with their eyes. The engine roared and the jeep moved with a start. Bob waved his hand again and soon the jeep disappeared into the cloud of dust.

II

The first rain of the season came at midnight and Rafael woke up to the noise of the river. He looked out the window. The rain was strong. He yawned and stretched his arms and felt the emptiness of the bed. He remembered the nights he and Marina shared the bed together. Since that night she told him the baby she bore was not his, he had not touched her; not even her hand. He could not remember how long it had been; two months or so, he guessed. But he was not sure. It seemed to be so long ago, like years and years.

There was a time he came home and found her sleeping on the bed and he drove her out of the room with a push. He could still hear her voice, asking to be taken in again. She was afraid to be all alone in the sala, she said, and besides, it was so chilly there. She pleaded. This time he gave her a stronger push at the back and she cried.

He felt thirsty. He rose and wiping his eyes with the back

of his hand, he walked out of the room.

It was darker at the sala. His eyes traveled the floor and paused and the dark, sprawling figure of Marina. He snickered and walked into the kitchen.

He returned to bed, pulling the blanket to his chin. Outside, the rain continued to fall. Shivering with cold, he started to sleep again.

The rain was gone and the sun was all over him when he woke up in the morning. Marina was not in the house. He called her repeatedly and he cursed her name. He looked into the field. In the distance he saw Marina approach in haste as she trailed the narrow path along the paddies. A native bag dangled from her shoulder. He stared at her belly as she came nearer. It was already big.



She was panting when she appeared at the door. "Where have you been?" he asked. He sounded impatient. "To another lover?" He snickered.

She stared at the bag in her hand. "To Nana Sabel," she said. "I asked for dried meat in exchange for a ganta of rice." She walked and disappeared into the kitchen.

That afternoon, he went into the field. The sun was already gone, leaving in the skies only the traces of its golden blaze. He looked at the land and saw the palay wave at the slightest puff of the wind.

Along the narrow path that led to the town a group of boys shouted and screamed as they chased each other. One of them banged against him and he hit the boy at the head with the back of his hand. He fell and

cried. Rafael pulled his belt and cursed repeatedly. The children stared at him in fright and started to run.

It was already dark when he reached the town. He walked along the rugged street, past little stores where young men huddled and laughed. In the air, he sensed the smell of wine. Soon he disappeared into a dark alley. He appeared again at the other end of the street. He crossed and paused at the stairs of a house. Looking about, he went up and knocked. He heard the faint sound of footsteps and the clatter of bolts. The door swung open and he closed his eyes against the glare of the light. An old woman stood before him.

"Is Meding in?" he asked.

"Meding!" the old woman called. "Rafael is here." Her voice trembled softly. "Come in and sit down," the old woman said. "She will be out soon."

He stared at the door to Meding's room. He tried to recall that afternoon he saw her at the river with a group of girls. They were having a picnic, they said. He accompanied them to the town and Meding invited him to her house. She was from the city, she said, and she used to work at a club. She was a different girl, he told himself once. She laughed a lot and she did not care what was going on outside the house. Sometimes she danced to her songs and the sight



of her whirling around the room made him feel light.

"You're a nice boy, Rafael," she told him once. "Very nice." And she danced again.

Every evening he came to her and they talked until midnight. She talked about herself in the city. "I hate it there," she said, "the city is full of noise. I like it here Rafael; it's peaceful. Quiet. I'm tired."

She asked about him and there was a time he nearly told her about his wife and the baby. But he held his tongue in fright. He had been wanting to tell someone about it but the fear that the people in the town would know and laugh at him sent a shiver all over him. But Meding knew he was married. She did not care.

He heard the opening of a door and he turned around. Meding appeared. He caught the scent of perfume as she approached toward him. She sat by his side. She wore a flimsy gown and her face was red.

"That lod woman," Rafael said, "does she know?"

"Yes, honey," Meding said.

"Won't she tell?" He was cold with fear.

"No," she said, "she won't."

He felt her hand on his. It was warm. "And what if she does?" she said, smiling.

Soon the midnight birds started to call in the hills. They looked at each other. Meding rose

from her seat and walked into her room. Rafael trailed behind.

She put on the light. It was a small room but neatly decorated. He followed her with his eyes as she dropped herself on the bed. "I'm tired," she told Rafael. He sat by the bed. He felt her hand on his arm. He gripped her hand. Then he moved his hand from her knees to her thighs. They were soft and warm. "Rafael, honey," she said, "put out the light."

He returned to the cottage at noon the next day and found Nana Sabel in the sala with Marina. When he appeared at the door, Nana Sabel turned to him.

"Ah," she said, "here comes our proud father." She wiped her mouth with her hand. "Why, Rafael," she continued, "I've never seen you so thin and haggard before. Why, you're growing thinner everyday." She rose and spat her *buyo* out of the window. "Am I not right, Marina?"

Marina looked at her but did not reply.

"Why, you should be happy; imagine, two months from now you'll be the proud father of a handsome boy." She dipped her hand into her pocket and put some more *buyo* into her mouth. She started to chew. "And the land, my, I saw it this morning and just look at the palay. I'll never speak again if you don't get at least fifty *cavanes* of rice this harvest." Then she turned

to Marina. "How do you feel?" she asked.

"Fine," Marina said.

"And the carabao milk? Do you take them every morning?"

"Yes," she said.

Rafael knew she was lying. He had not given her any money in the past months and he knew she could not afford a bottle of milk. Sometimes he wondered where she got the fish and the meat he found at the kitchen.

"Good!" Nana Sabel said. "And the exercise? Do you have any exercise?"

"Yes," Marina answered.

"Good!" she said again. "These eggs I brought you," she said, pointing to the native bag on the table, "these eggs, take them every morning."

"Thank you, I will," Marina said.

"Rafael," she said, turning to him. "Rafael, two months from now you will see yourself and Marina in one piece."

Rafael stared at her. He wanted to scream in anger. Inside him he felt something burn. He felt hot in the face. He did not reply but turned and started for the room.

"Rafael," Nana Sabel called, "don't leave now. What will you name the child? Tell me. Will you name it after you?"

Rafael stopped and turned to her. His hand landed suddenly on her face and she twisted and

fell to the floor. Marina stood with a start and helped Nana Sabel up. She was silent. Nana Sabel looked at her. She was silent, too.

III

That month the last rain of the season came in torrents and the days turned more crisp and gray. From the window, Rafael viewed the land. Now the palay bowed to the earth with golden stalks of rice. His Tiyo Andoy had suggested to him that it was time for harvest, but he did not reply. During the past months, he had wished that all the rain in heaven would fall and wash away every grain of rice from the field. He did not care anymore.

Everyday he locked himself in his room, trying to sleep. He had learned to hate the sun because whenever he came, it bared Marina's bulging belly and he felt a deep agony inside. And so he closed his eyes all day and wished all the time that it were night again.

There were many times when he wanted to run to the town and shout to the people all the hatred and loneliness in him; but he was afraid. He imagined the people talk about him and his wife. Already he felt hot with shame.

Every night he went to Meding and they often made love in her room. He had always told him-



self that only Meding mattered to him now. And he wished Marina would die. He could start all over again, he said to himself. He could sow the field anew with palay and he and Meding would sit by the window and watch it grow.

He looked at himself at the mirror. He had grown thin and the tiny lines around the hollows of his eyes had become more defined. The bones in his cheeks were now starting to show and he felt afraid. Lately, he had been feeling pain inside his breast and one time he saw blood when he spat at the floor.

Outside, he heard the voice of Nana Sabel. She still came to the cottage, only it was much oftener now. He heard the old woman tell Marina that she would come every other hour, lest Marina would give birth to the baby while alone.

He lay on the bed again. Then he heard the roar of an engine outside the house and he knitted his brows. He looked down from

the window. It was an army jeep. He rushed to the sala.

An American appeared at the door. He was dressed in a neatly pressed khaki uniform. Tiny buttons glistened on his shoulders and breast. "Good afternoon," he said. "I'm Keaton. Major Keaton."

Rafael stared at the American. The first impulse he felt was to jump at him, strangle him and spit at him. But he had lost all his strength and he only stared at the American. Inside him, he felt weak.

The American fixed his eyes at Marina, then turned to Rafael. "Are you Rafael?" he asked. Rafael nodded. He walked toward Rafael. "I'm a friend of Bob's," he said. "I have a gift from him." Then before Rafael could speak, he turned and walked out of the door. He came back with a box. "It's American wine," he said, opening the box. "I hope you'll like it." Then he turned to Marina. "How are you, Lady?" he asked. Marina merely looked at him. "Fine I hope," the American said.

A few minutes later, he left.

At first, Rafael did not like to touch the wine. He had never drank before. One night he took a sip and he felt warm and itchy in the face. But that afternoon, he heard Marina moan and cry in pain and Nana Sabel scamper for the kitchen. He grabbed a bottle and started to drink. Soon he felt hot in the throat, in the breast, in the stomach. A haze

started to shield his eyes.

Marina was screaming now and he heard Nana Sabel's shrill and trembling voice console her. "It won't be long now," the old woman said. "It won't be long . . ."

Until late that evening he heard the groan of Marina. Rafael drank some more and started to laugh and dance around the room. He ran out of the room and through the haze in his eyes he saw Nana Sabel by Marina's side on the floor.

He remembered Meding and he staggered his way to the town. Soon he was knocking at her door. "Meding!" he cried. His voice was drawling. "Open up! It's Rafael! Open the door!" Meding came out of the door. Rafael stumbled into the house.

"You're drunk!" Meding cried.

"Who's drunk?" he asked. "Here kiss me," he said, twisting his lips. Meding tried to move away. There was fear in her eyes. Rafael gripped her skirt and pulled her down to the floor. She fell with a thud. "Kiss me, honey," he said again. Meding turned her face away. "Kiss me!" Rafael shouted. Meding did not move. In rage, Rafael hit her on the head with his hand. Meding cried. Rafael rose abruptly and cursing repeatedly, walked out of the house. He groped his way out of the alley and appeared at the main street where the lights were bright. He looked around.

All about him he saw faces and eyes. He laughed and he cursed and staggered his way out of town again.

On the way, he vomited twice and he felt a severe pain in his head. He cursed again.

He paused at the door. From where he stood, he heard Marina scream. He entered the cottage and found his way into his room.

He laid on the bed. He was feeling better now though the pain was still in his head. He heard Marina scream again and he cupped his ears. Then she became silent.

Rafael imagined her on the floor. Soon, he told himself, Bob's baby will come. The thought made him tremble. He wanted to cry. He rose and went to the locker. He pulled out a gun, then tucked it to his waist.

Outside he saw the field. It was dark. He heard the faint rustle of palay. He stared at the gun in his hand. Then he remembered Bob. He tried to recall that morning he came and



gave the gun.

He trembled when Marina screamed. He saw the baby in his mind; blond hair, blue eyes. He imagined the people talk at his back about him, Marina and the baby. He shuddered in fright.

He raised the gun to his temple. He heard Marina scream again and felt cold sweat on his neck.

He looked up. The skies were unmoving and dark. Over the land, the wind was still.

* * *

Blush Betrays Hiding of Truth, Report Doctor

A blush does not betray a sense of shame at the truth, but rather a feeling of shame that we have concealed the truth.

This interpretation of a red face was given to the American Psychoanalytic Assn. by Dr. Sandor S. Feldman of the University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, N.Y.

Blushing can be observed in both sexes and all races. In people of dark skin, the blush does not look red; it makes the skin darker. Blushing occurs in persons who live nude. And persons who were born blind blush like those with eyesight.

The blush is proof that there is a basic tendency for truth, Dr. Feldman said. If truth is hidden, it appears as redness on the face.

Children represent the truth and they are not ashamed. They begin to be ashamed and to blush when hypocrisy is imposed upon them and they are taught to conceal the truth.

Several decades ago, Dr. Feldman pointed out, women were expected to be bashful and to blush at the slightest violation of etiquette, but when men blushed it was considered a weakness. Today women are not expected to blush and when men blush it is considered rather charming.