

THE TYPHOON

From midnight on it lashed the house. Of course it lashed the whole town, and no doubt, the countryside in all the provinces nearby. But your thoughts were homebound, it raged against your home; and when morning came, there was all the havoc, and the storm still blustering about. But the sun made brave effort too; rain would keep up all day, and the storm renew at gusty intervals, but the worst was over: there would be no more 60-mile winds weighted with sheets of rain. You could take stock.

A bus got along the street at 6 o'clock, not good daylight that tardy morning. But folk were already abroad, young men and young women especially, all in gala groups, often with an older man or two along, gleaming what the storm had harvested. Poles leaned low, trees uprooted lay everywhere, loose wires dangled at the many breaks, but the power had gone off at 4 o'clock, by someone's good sense, and so there was no danger—beyond the ardent glances shot from every side at the comelier girls among the waders.

There is a Malay exclamation that can't be spelled. But it translates into "Lady, God bless you. Your charms are gracious!" It is just one word, drawn out from a bashful murmur to a bold shriek. Up and down the street it sounded; for as the sightseeing groups passed, the young bucks, already hacking the fallen trees into firewood, knew enough to glance up and spell themselves. Their banter pretended to be from one to another, across the littered street—but it was all intended for burning ears. The vicariously complimented girls tossed their heads and laughed.

Then the banter was livelier than ever. The lissome form of Malay young womanhood, clad in dress the rain and wind turn into a colorful integument—in truth a bit of beauty. And at times the sun would shine, and everything, jeweled by the rain, which presently would come hard again, would have a sheen about it. What a magnificent holiday!

The houseboy came early, bolo in hand, to make firewood for himself of all the trees he knew must have blown down in the yard. Soon the gardener joined him. It was true, five or six huge acacias were to be cut up. Two, blown down in the neighbor's yard, had fallen into our yard. They were ours, too—by customary law. All day long, there was no quarrel over the wood anywhere: customary law takes care of such things with utter preciseness. In the street, a fallen tree is the property of the first man who strikes bolo into it; and if he wants help with it, he bargains as an owner. In your yard, the fallen trees are your servants' property; and if they want to bargain off some of the wood, for help in cutting it, this is their business—the trees were made their property by the storm. Of course, if you too burn wood, they share and share alike with you.

Typhoons are the poor's friends. Their huts of thatch are usually in sheltered places, but if they blow down, they are soon up again; they are light and cheap and everyone helps with them. But think of all that happens to the rich! What lawful plunder there is for the poor! So the peasants are busy and happy, and even the smallest children can carry home bundles of light branches, good tinder when the sun shall have dried them.

It wasn't so easy about the pomelos, a large basketful of ripe ones blown from the tree. The houseboy and the gardener insisted that at least the smaller ones were theirs. Well, what does any small household want of a whole basket of pomelos at one time? Quick compromise and an end of it. Back the boys go to their chopping. You think it nothing, that every male domestic in Manila is instantly a skillful woodsman when a typhoon brings the occasion? It is indeed something, it is earnest that the peasants' love is still with the land. And what are their dreams? Why, of a hut, a field, a wife and a bevy of children. Observe these things, they mean much.

One case for the supreme court, that is, the pronouncement of the gardener, was that one of our trees had blown down over a peasant's rice field. The flood, he said, had probably ruined his rice and all his work would have to be done over, but the tree, fallen over his land, was his. What say you, Justice Gardener? Yes, that is true—the tree is the peasant's. Now remember, Justice Gardener is very poor and works for a pittance; and besides that, he is lately married and his wife has intervention in all things relative to property, and he must take everything home that is possibly his. Moreover, the peasant who farms the rice field is a stranger to him. But law is law, and windfalls, windfalls—without question the tree is the peasant's.

Near noon the car is got out and way is made downtown, low-gear and slow through the deeper flooded places. At the Rotonda is decision to make, calle Aviles, or calle Legarda? Young men here, chilled to the bone in water knee- and waste-deep, and they in shorts and undershirts, work in gangs and earn tips pushing stalled cars. Nevertheless, they say to take calle Legarda—it's the better chance of getting through. It is accordingly the route, and the car gets through—the good Samaritans earn no tip that time: they could have said to try calle Aviles, and in that way earned their tip—the car would have stalled along with all the rest that tried that way.

Downtown there was nothing to do. Stores were closed, services out of order. The typhoon had paralyzed the city, even banks were closed. Half a dozen steamers were aground,

ACACIA TREES UNSUITABLE

The more serious aspect of the typhoon is that its damage to Manila was enormous, as such losses go here. It counts in millions of pesos, it involves heavily two of the service corporations on whose regular use industry and comfort depend, the electric and the telephone services. It is estimated that the cost of repairing the electric service will exceed ₱200,000. The telephone service will hardly fall of spending at least ₱50,000 on its repairs. Rates can't be raised, this extraordinary loss must be borne by the companies; that is to say, more accurately at least, by holders of their securities. Both companies began repairs at once, restoring service with surprising quickness.

What caused nearly the whole of this loss, besides costly shut-downs of factories and business throughout town, were the trees that blew down and broke the service wires; you only saw poles down where nearby trees pulled them down. But trees were down by thousands. They were acacias almost without exception. The typhoon occurred in the earliest hours of the day the new city government was inaugurated. This government faces the challenge of rebeautifying the city with trees—but choosing trees, if possible, that can be trimmed and managed within the height of 20 feet, wires being at 25 feet. At a late day prior to press, the question must be treated thus briefly. But brevity sacrifices, none being so blind but to see that practically the whole damage is the guilt of the acacia. The new government, if it can, should designate a substitute or substitutes, for this comely tree—for all the new planting, public and private, that should be done at once.

Also, whatever the tree, annual trimming should be enjoined in park and private ground alike. There is a place in Pasay that may be observed on this very point. One owner regularly trims his acacias in May, and lost none in the typhoon. Neighbors either side of him don't trim their acacias, and practically all of theirs went down. It would be simple justice to beautify the city with trees with practical regard to safeguarding the public services from huge damage provoked by falling trees during severe typhoons. And it would seem entirely possible, too. Some say, place wires and cables underground. With so much of Manila not a meter above sea level, and monsoon rains had the year, this is a poser for science and economy to solve—with nothing done that thorough test doesn't prove feasible. It is doubted that it can be done at all, but certainly the sort of trees to plant and when and how to trim them to safe height can be effected, and then controlled. In general, too, Manila is a city of low horizons; trees of low height would fit the common scene.

—W. R.

up and down the foreshore. Movies were closed, Nature's decree had made a holiday even for business.

Half after 1 o'clock effort was made to start the car and drive home. Useless, but as soon as definitely proved useless, there were young men about, an elevator operator, a doctor's doorboy, and friends of theirs loafing with them, ready to give any aid called for.

"Push them! *Taluk!*" They pushed with a will, but nothing came of it; and so a chauffeur came along and said he would push the car along with his car, to a garage where it would be dried out and got going. This he did.

"Thank you, mighty nice of you."

"You are welcome, sir."

Calle Echague was tried, running into calle Solano and then into calle Aviles; for at noon calle Legarda had been barely negotiable, and here, nearer the river, in spite of what the young men at the Rotonda had said, the flood might be lower. No use, however, at Plaza Anti-imperialista, opposite Malcañang—and what ruin there! trees flat all over the lawns, and everything, in the glow of a new moon the evening before, ideal outdoor tropical beauty!—the turn-around for calle Legarda had to be made after all.

All went well, too, on calle Legarda, though the flood was higher. But a push crew mounted for ready duty, and took hold when the mechanism flooded and the car stopped on calle Santa Mesa beyond its juncture with calle Trabajo. Instantly the volunteers dismounted and pushed the car forward, and warned not to try to start the engine because, besides water in the carburetor and the distributor, the muffler was under water a foot or so. But clear way was got at the railroad, and fortunately the engine would start; the men with the cold-quivering chins and lithe taut muscles could be paid, thanked and let go.

Change had to be made. The man at the right window, who was the boss, took a 2-peso bill to the tienda at the corner and bought a package of Philippine cigarettes, fetching back correct

change. They were just the thing, these dhobis, for the domestic tobacco they are made of draws freely in a pipe during typhoon weather, when real pipe tobacco gets too damp and goes over to the side of the match trust. Cigarette? Have a cigarette? None of the young men would have a cigarette—far from salubrious on a chilled wet stomach. As they had pushed the car along, one at the rear had several times argued that they should stick for a tip of 2 pesos. His cupidity wasn't endorsed; all the others, and the boss—no doubt the oldest of this lot of brothers and cousins out making a lack of hard labor—held that nothing should be said at all, about pay; let the man pay what he will, and if he has nothing, nothing.

Among them they got a peso, and gave their polite thanks and stood by while the engine made several false starts and finally a sure one. Then they turned back, then their contract had been fulfilled—a contract over which not a word had been spoken.

It was now 4 o'clock, and the strollers were even more jocund than they had been during the forenoon. All day they had been chattering and thinking mischief up. They had been reminded of make-ups in the movie they had liked so well, the movie of a genre quite their own, Hollywood Review and its theme song, *Singing in the Rain*: under a narrow parasol, dripping away its color, were a midget pair aping Dressler and Moran. Ukelele Ike was their cavalier. Groups of four or five girls might have stepped out of that drippy chorus. Many wore their brothers' trousers. The banter was terrific, but the cavaliers were incessantly watchful. Storms the world over are times to play with fire. They have this in common with war, they touch the instinct of generation; they threaten life, the human heart would bravely respond with new life—for the race would live. Of course it is but fleeting fancy, the reaction to storm, and doesn't go on to realization, as in war; the Philippines have their merry wading in the rain, New England has its berry-ried rides after blizzards.

Nascent, all about you, during storm, are

racial anthems swelling in gay young hearts. The threat is there, Nature's overwhelming force, but Nature's mood changes and the threat passes. Deep chords that could sound stern defiance are merely lightly wakened, and the sun sent to hush them. Glorious then are storms.

On Santa Mesa a few houses beyond its juncture with calle V. Mapa, everyone had flocked to see the dead man. He was a Spaniard, it proved, about 60 years old. They thought he had tried to cross from calle Coliego. Anyway, peasants out in their dugouts trying to do something to save their flooded rice fields, had found him drowned and had brought his body ashore. It was all right to go and see. The dead are not really dead, leastwise in the East they're not; and he was old, and seemingly hardworking—now he was asleep, rid of the burden of his lot.

The peasants had made a bier of their dug-out, pulled it out of the water and got it across the road under shelter of a thorn, where its burden wouldn't startle passers-by, if they were driving fast. And they had sent for the police, who were getting things out of the man's pockets and trying to verify who he might have been. The peasants had done all kindly things to remove the marks of death and invite the attitude of seemly rest.

But none knew him, his papers told the police nothing. He was fotsam of the storm. Around him all this youth, able to give life, and around him the passingly merciless storm, taking his enfeebled life.

Not a foot of the street beyond was flooded at all, soon you were snug at home again with a day's ventures to tell of—and a thoughtfully procured extra candle for the reading you would do that night. Only after dinner would you tell about the drowned man, and then as gently as ever you could, but surely, too—woman's curiosity and sympathy will have things so. Such was Manila's typhoon Tuesday after Monday's midnight, October 16, 1934. The mending will be quick, in three months no one will be able to swear it happened.

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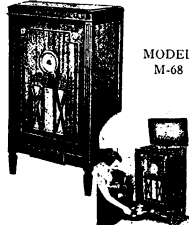
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