



## Full Text

### VOLCANO OF LOVE AND DEATH

Brought to you by Areté at Ateneo Basic Education in partnership with Tahanan Books, *Volcano of Love and Death* from the book, *The Termite Queen and other Classic Philippine Earth Tales*, written by Sylvia Mendez Ventura, published by Tahanan Books and will be read to us by Jenny Jamora.

Once upon a time, in a province known as Albay, a baby girl is born to Chief Makusog and his wife, Dawani. They named the baby Daragang Magayon, which means “beautiful maiden.” Dawani died soon after childbirth, leaving her daughter in the care of her father, the tribal chief of Ibalong.

Daragang Magayon was so lovely that young men from all over the province tried to win her heart. One of the most insistent suitors was the famed hunter, Chief Pagtuga of Iraga. He courted Magayon by giving her father gifts of gold and precious stones. But the princess wasn’t interested in any man, least of all the powerful Pagtuga.

Reports of Magayon’s beauty reached Ulap, the handsome warrior son of Chief Kaliraya. He traveled all the way from the Tagalog region just to see her. He often watched her strolling to the Ravis River for her daily bath together with her ladies-on-waiting.

One morning, on the way to her bath, Magayon tripped over slippery rock and fell into the river. “Help! Help!” she screamed, as she was swept away by the current. Ulap dived in and carried her safely to shore.

From that day on, Ulap and Magayon spent many happy hours together. He told her that her people are called Tagalogs because they were taga-ilog, meaning “from the river.” This explained why he was an excellent swimmer. He could even dive from the top of the highest waterfall in his region.

Magayon told Ulap about life in Ibalong. Every morning she woke up to the sight of birds perched on coconut palms. Her favorite bird was a homing pigeon that pecked grains of rice from her hand. She trained the bird to deliver letters to her friends in other villages.

One evening Ulap went to Chief Makusog's house and thrust his spear into the staircase. This meant that he was asking the chief for his daughter's hand in marriage.

The tribal chief thought that the two lovers were well-matched. You have my blessing," he told them.

Ulap returned alone to his faraway village to announce his engagement. His parents were overjoyed with the news.

Ulap's rival, Pagtuga, was outraged. He felt that the Chief Makusog had betrayed him and vowed to avenge himself.

The next day Pagtuga set a trap in the forest where Makusog usually went hunting. He took pair antlers from a dead deer and fastened them to the branches of the bush. Underneath it he dug a deep hole and covered it up with leaves.

The next morning Makusog went to the forest alone. He spied the antlers among the bushes. Suspecting that a deer was hiding behind the bush, the chief tiptoed forward and fell headlong into Pagtuga's trap. Pagtuga stepped out of his hiding place and laughed at the helpless Makusog. Pagtuga ordered his men to tie up the prisoner. They slung Magayon's father onto a bamboo pole and carried him back to the village. There they locked him up in a cage just big enough for a dog.

Then Pagtuga sent Daragang Magayon this warning: "I have your father. Marry me, or I'll chop off his head."

Daragang Magayon cried tears of fear and sorrow. She imagined her poor father's head rolling off a cliff. She wrote to Pagtuga: "Yes, I'll marry you. Please don't hurt my dear father."

And to her beloved Ulap she wrote this sad note: "My dearest Taga-ilog, we must break our engagement, or my father will die. But I shall love you always."

Pagtuga gleefully set about making wedding plans. He told his servants to decorate his palace with white blossoms. He ordered two village weavers to use a special fabric for Magayon's bridal gown and headdress.

Meanwhile, Ulap received Magayon's message from her homing pigeon. In anger and bitterness, he banged his fist on a table, splitting it in half. He lost no time sending the homing pigeon back with his reply: "I will not give up the woman I love. I'm coming to save you."

Ulap immediately set up for Iragawith his warriors. They arrived just as the marriage ceremony was about to begin. The wedding hall was crowded with guests. Pagtuga held his bride's elbow in a tight grip while she looked away with tears in her eyes.

"Stop!" thundered Ulap from the doorway.

"You fool!" Pagtuga shouted back. "Get out before I kill you."

The hall quickly turned bloody as both enemy tribes battled one another with spears and bows and arrows. Ulap managed to dodge Pagtuga's spear many times, but Pagtuga was not as nimble. Ulap's spear struck him in the forehead, killing him instantly. Wedding guests screamed and scampered out of the hall. Only Magayon dared stay behind. She ran to embrace Ulap.

Alas, arrows were still flying in the air. One of them struck Magayon in the heart.

She collapsed in Ulap's arms.

Ulap bent over Magayon and desperately tried to breathe life into her dead body.

He became an easy target for Linog, Pagtuga's henchman. Linog charged at Ulap from behind and drove a spear through his back. Ulap crumpled to the floor.

Meanwhile, Magayon's father, Chief Makusog, had managed to escape from his cage. He rushed to the battle scene and hacked Linog to death with his bolo.

The battle ended. There were no victors.

Makusog laid Magayon and Ulap in a grave, their arms locked in a loving embrace. He buried gold and precious stones with the bodies. These were the gifts he received from Pagtuga. He covered the grave with a mound of soil in which he planted plants and ferns.

One day, while laying flowers on the grave, Makusog noticed that the mound was growing. At first it swelled into a roundish hill. In a few days it grew into a rumbling mountain. Red-hot lava erupted from the peak and cascaded down the mountain slopes. Rolling boulders toppled trees and houses in their path.

The mountain rapidly shaped itself into a perfect cone. Then it stopped growing. "A most marvelous grave!" exclaimed the people. They named it Mount Magayon, after the beautiful maiden buried inside. Some years later they shortened the name to Mayon.

From time to time Mayon Volcano erupts, spreading death and destruction throughout the countryside. The people of Albay believe the eruptions are caused by Chief Pagtuga, helped by his henchman Linog. The furious Pagtuga shakes the volcano to get back the gifts that Makusog buried with the lovers. Pagtuga is a Bicolano word meaning "when the volcano erupts." Linog means "earthquake."

Bicolanos also believe that whenever Mayon Volcano's peak is covered with clouds, Ulap is kissing Magayon. Ulap means “cloud.” And when rainwater flows down the mountain slopes, it is Ulap weeping for his beloved.

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Source: Volcano of Love and Death. The Termite Queen and Other Classic Philippine Earth Tales. Sylvia Mendez Ventura. Ilaw ng Tahanan Books. 1997

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