

ASEAN 20TH CENTURY LITERATURES
SELECTED POEMS and SHORT STORIES
from the
PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION

MODERN PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

by Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera

Modern Philippine Literature is written in many languages, in English and Spanish and in native Philippine languages, principally Tagalog (now called Filipino, officially the National Language). Writing in English and Filipino makes up the greater part of published literature today.

Tagalog poetry has a long history that dates back to pre-colonial times. The Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, that Filipinos produced literature in that language. When the United States of America took over from Spain as the colonizing power in 1898, English was made the language of instruction in the school system set up by the Americans.

The examples here presented are taken from the literature produced in English and Filipino. An early example of English writing is the poem *FIRST, A POEM MUST BE MAGICAL* by Jose Garcia Villa who wrote under the influence of early young modernist American poets. The poet was also a critic most vocal about his advocacy of writing purely for the sake of art. The fictionist Nick Joaquin wrote about upper-class Filipinos who aspire to recover their link to the culture of the past in spite of their Hispanized upbringing. This is dramatized in the clash between husband and wife in *THE SUMMER SOLSTICE*.

THE DAY THE DANCERS CAME is Bienvenido Santos' story of a diasporic Filipino in America and his longing to re-connect with the culture of his native land. Francisco Sionil Jose's *THE GOD STEALER* touches on an aspect of the indigenous culture of an Igorot Filipino in the story of a young man who sells to a foreign tourist an object sacred to the tribe, and how he had to compensate for his transgression.

In Rogelio R. Sikat's story, TATA SELO, a peasant murdered his oppressive landlord, and an investigation of the crime reveals that he killed not only to protest his eviction from the land he has been tilling but mainly to avenge the dishonor the landlord had brought upon his family by sexually violating his teenage daughter who worked as a maidservant in the landlord's home.

English poet Edith Tiempo writes about a woman's passion to preserve mementos of loved things in her BONSAI. Among the poets writing in Tagalog, Alejandro G. Abadilla pioneered in modernizing Tagalog poetry by introducing free verse. In AKO ANG DAIGDIG (I am the Universe), he celebrates the poet as creative artist who embodies in himself the real and the imaginative, the very poetry he creates.

Amado V. Hernandez was a political artist who suffered incarceration for championing the cause of labor in its contention with capital during a peasant rebellion. ISA DIPANG LANGIT (An Arm's Stretch of Sky) expresses the anguish of the imprisoned activist longing for freedom. The holocaust that came upon the city of Hiroshima is the subject of Rolando S. Tinio's ALAALA NG HIROSHIMA (In Memoriam Hiroshima) gives a graphic account of the atomic bombing that reduced the Japanese city to a hell on earth. Virgilio S. Almario in his poem SA PANGUNGULILA (On Loneliness) releases a train of ideas and imagery as his persona meditates on the impact of melancholy on his sensibility.

In the history of Philippine Literature, social realism has been the strongest strain. This is particularly observable in the classics of Tagalog writing but somewhat toned down in the works of English writers. The educational system which uses English as medium of instruction has exerted the influence of Western models on writers who learned their craft in the academe. The nationalist movement in the 1960s gave Tagalog writing impetus which broke down traditionalism in subject matter and form, resulting in the entry of modernism in both poetry and prose works without quite abandoning the social

realist tradition started by the novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* of the National Hero Jose Rizal.

POEMS

Alaala ng Hiroshima by Rolando Tinio

Ako ang Daigdig by Alejandro G. Abadilla

Isang Dipang Langit by Amado V. Hernandez

Bonsai by Edith Tiempo

Sa Pangungulila by Virgilio S. Almario

ALAALA NG HIROSHIMA

by Rolando Tinio

Shu Jesusu, awaremi tamai!

The bomb itself was an effective force tending to end the bloodshed, warning Japan to surrender and thus to avoid total destruction...

Da ist nichts zu machen.

Una'y ang payapang paghingalay ng hangin
Sa nakalatag na luningning ng araw.
May madalang na humahakbang
Sa alikabok ng Agosto sa daan.
Anyong wala sa sarili, nananaginip
Hanggang marating ang paanan ng tulay
At huminto, at tumunghay sa tubig.

Pagkatapos.

sa isang hudyat.

May sumibak sa langit na walang ulap
Labing-walong daang talampakan sa itaas:
Asul-dilaw-puting palag ng dagitab
Na nakaduling, nakabulag sa lahat.

Pagkatapos.

Isang patlang

Sa tik-tik ng oras.

Pagkatapos.

Ni walang dagundong,
Biglang bumulusok ang hangin
Tila sambundok na bakal na dumagan
At gumiling sa libu-libong katawan

Sa dakong kanluran.
Bumalong nang bumalong
Ang pagkalaki-laking ulap—
Lumaganap at umakyat
Hanggang bubong ay bumulwak
Humilig at umunat.

At parang sa pakikipagtaguan.
Tumiklop ang lungsod sa hugis abaniko.
Dumapa sa lupa ang puno at simbahan.
Lumundag ang ospital sa estero.
Natapilok ang templo at ang pabrika.
Nagtago sa lungga ang kuwartel at restawran.
Naihi ang tulay na bakal at bato.
At ang buong mundo ng mga bangkero,
Mga kosturera, siruhano, at militar,
Mga magkatipan at mga magkaaway,
Naging pagkalawak-lawak na liwasang
Apat, limang milya kuwadrado.
At naghari ang sumusubong katahimikan

Sa alikabok na umaalimbukay,
Nagdilim nang nagdilim ang araw:
Biglang takipsilim sa kabila ng
Alas otso'y kinse sa silangan.

Sa walang apoy na pagliliyab ng umaga,
Naagas ang mika sa lapidang granito,
Naging karbon ang posting *Cryptomeria japonica*.
Nalusaw muli ang tisang kulay-abo.
At nakintal sa granateng pader ang anino
Ng pintor na nagsasawsaw ng brotsa.
Naging retablo sa tulay na bato ang magkakarintong
Nakaamba ang latigo sa kabayong nag-aalma.
May limang lalaking natupok sa anyong
Pagkakalas sa bangkang nasalabit sa sanga.

At nagsimula ang mga pagdurugo,
Pag-agwasa sa bibig at tumbong
Ng tila malabnaw na alkitran.
Mga pisnging nilamukos at inihaw.
Mga matang nahugot, lumawlaw sa bungo.
Mga bibig na nagmistulang bakokang.
At naglobo nang naglobo ang mga tiyan.
At pumuti nang pumuti ang dugo.
At nag-antak ang mga sugat,
Tumikom-bumukad, tumikom -bumukad
Parang malalaswang bulaklak.

At marahang nagprusisyon ang mga nahubuan.
Parang mga komang, nakaangat ang bisig
Sa nanang tumatagas sa kilikili at tadyang.
Sa balat na namintog at nagkagutay-gutay.
Naging agiw na nagsibit sa leeg, dibdib, tiyan—
Parang magkaisa ang lahat na magbihis-basahan

Upang ipagdiwang ang araw ng
Pambansang Panginoon ng Karalitaan.
Lungsod ng dalawangpung laksang pulubi!

May dalagitang lalabing-anim ang gulang,
Halos di matakpan ng naagnas na salawal.
Upang makubli ang nasiwalat na kasarian.
Namaluktot sa isang tabi.
Pinagdaop ang nag-uling na kamay.
Humingi ng habag sa uling na kalawakan.

At kumpul-kumpol
Langkay-langkay
Pausad-usad
Marahang-marahan
Mga manyikang di-nakuwerdasan
Sa entabladong di-nasabitan
Ng anumang telon, tanyagan
Pagtatanghal sa kalian wawakasan
Bangungot na paano kagigisnan
Pagsulong na walang tutunguhan
Lawak na walang palatandaan
Walang doon-pa o nariyan-lang
Walang delantera o looban
Mundo walang lagusan
Sanlibutan ng uling at aso
At nasalulang pagkatao

At napasalansan sa pampang ng mga estero
Na baka magpasingaw sa uhaw

At pagbabaga ng mga buto.
Patung-patong na katawang
Hindi mawatasan kung ano—
Parang bagong uri ng nilalang
Na inanod ng Ilog Ota
Mula sa burak ng karagatan—
At hindi bihasa sa ganitong alinsangan.
Isa-isang nanlumo, nahandusay,
Umunat.

naging bangkay.

O dakilang kabuti ng kasaysayan—
Dagok sa matindi pa sa dalawampung
Libong tonelada ng dinamita—
Punong-katawang isinalaksak
Sa matris ng Hiroshima—
Dagtang walang patawad—
Parang mga tulisang
Nagkuta sa pinakaliblib
Na yungib ng buto—

Parang hukbong sumalakay
Sa mga selula ng laman—
Nagpasabog sa mga pader—
Lumusob sa nukleyo—
Lumansag sa saligang-batas
Sa lahat ng organo—

At nahindik ang sangkatauhang
nagmamasid sa mga palko

Nagbilang ng salanta at patay
nagdusa at naghibikan
Nagsisihan at nagdasal
nagmatuwid at nagtalo
Naglimbag ng mga panayam
nagsingilan at nagsuklian
Nagtirik ng mga monumento
nagtatag ng mga kapisanan
Nagdagdag ng bagong katuturan
ng katarungan sa diksiyunaryo
At nang
--sa isang pang paghihimala—
Biglang bumalot ang mahiwagang tagsibol
Sa lungsod ng pitong estero,
Gumapang ang *morning glory* sa mga linya ng telepono,
Sumulpot ang liryo sa mga siwang sa ladrilyo.
Namukadkad sa bangketa at daang-bakal ang krisantemo.
At parang lungtiang kumot ang sariwang damong
Tumakip sa dilat na bangkay ng Hiroshima—
Isa-isang nagbalikan
sa kani-kanilang
Maliit, malalaking
pakikipagdigmaan...

AKO ANG DAIGDIG
by Alejandro G. Abadilla

I

ako
ang daigdig

ako
ang tula

ako
ang daigdig
ng tula
ang tula
ng daigdig
ako

ang walang maliw na ako
ang walang kamatayang ako
ang tula ng daigdig

II

ako
ang daigdig ng tula

ako
ang tula ng daigdig

ako ang malayang ako
matapat sa sarili

sa aking daigdig
ng tula

ako
ang tula
sa daigdig

ako
ang daigdig
ng tula
ako

III
ako
ang damdaming
malaya

ako
ang larawang
buhay

ako
ang buhay
na walang hanggan

ako
ang damdamin
ang larawan
ang buhay
damdamin

larawan

buhay

tula

ako

IV

ako

ang daigdig

sa tula

ako

ang tula

sa daigdig

ako

ang daigdig

ako

ang tula

daigdig

tula

ako....

ISANG DIPANG LANGIT
by Amado V. Hernandez

Ako'y ipiniit ng linsil na puno
hangad palibhasang diwa ko'y piitin,
katawang marupok, aniya'y pagsuko,
damdami'y supil na't mithiin ay supil.

Ikinulong ako sa kutang malupit:
bato, bakal, punlo, balasik ng bantay;
lubos na tiwalag sa buong daigdig
at inaring kahit buhay man ay patay.

Sa munting dungawan, tanging abot-malas
ay sandipang langit na puno ng luha,
maramot na birang ng pusong may sugat,
watawat ng aking pagkapariwara.

Sintalim ng kidlat ang mata ng tanod,
sa pintong may susi't walang makalapit;
sigaw ng bilanggo sa katabing moog,
anaki'y atungal ng hayop sa yungib.

Ang maghapo'y tila isang tanikala
na kala-kaladkad ng paang madugo
ang buong magdamag ay kulambong luksa
ng kabaong waring lungga ng bilanggo.

Kung minsa'y magdaan ang payak na yabag,
kawil ng kadena ang kumakalanding;

sa maputlang araw saglit ibibilad,
sanlibong aninong iniluwa ng dilim.

Kung minsan, ang gabi'y biglang magulantang
sa hudyat - may takas! - at asod ng punlo;
kung minsa'y tumangis ang lumang batingaw,
sa bitayang moog, may naghihingalo.

At ito ang tanging daigdig ko ngayon -
bilangguang mandi'y libingan ng buhay;
sampu, dalawampu, at lahat ng taon
ng buong buhay ko'y dito mapipigtal.

Nguni't yaring diwa'y walang takot-hirap
at batis pa rin itong aking puso:
piita'y bahagi ng pakikilamas,
mapiit ay tanda ng di pagsuko.

Ang tao't Bathala ay di natutulog
at di habang araw ang api ay api,
tanang paniniil ay may pagtutuos,
habang may Bastilya'y may bayang gaganti.

At bukas, diyan din, aking matatanaw
sa sandipang langit na wala nang luha,
sisikat ang gintong araw ng tagumpay...
layang sasalubong ako sa paglaya!

Bartolina ng Muntinlupa

Abril 22, 1952

FIRST, A POEM MUST BE MAGICAL

by Jose Garcia Villa

First, a poem must be magical,
Then musical as a seagull.
It must be a brightness moving
And hold secret a bird's flowering
It must be slender as a bell,
And it must hold fire as well.
It must have the wisdom of bows
And it must kneel like a rose.
It must be able to hear
The luminance of dove and deer.
It must be able to hide
What it seeks, like a bride.
And over all I would like to hover
God, smiling from the poem's cover.

Bonsai
by Edith Tiempo

All that I love
I fold over once
And once again
And keep in a box
Or a slit in a hollow post
Or in my shoe.

All that I love?
Why, yes, but for the moment-
And for all time, both.
Something that folds and keeps easy,
Son's note or Dad's one gaudy tie,
A roto picture of a queen,
A blue Indian shawl, even
A money bill.

It's utter sublimation,
A feat, this heart's control
Moment to moment
To scale all love down
To a cupped hand's size

Till seashells are broken pieces
From God's own bright teeth,
And life and love are real
Things you can run and
Breathless hand over
To the merest child.

SA PANGUNGULILA

by Virgilio S. Almario

Maraming himaymay ang pangungulila
Bagaman iisa ang kulay ng ugat at lasa ng bunga.
May pangungulila sa isang naglaho,
Nawaglit, nawalay, nagtampo, lumayo;
May pangungulilang tila iniipit
Ng apat na pader, ng lupa at langit;
May pangungulila habang lumulutang sa agos at bulwak
Ng sangkatauhan, makina't dagitab;
May pangungulilang kapara ng luhang banal at tikatik
Na sa bawat patak, may nakakalabit
Na bagting ng subyang
Sa dibdib at bagang.

Parang isang dasal ang pangungulila
At dasal na walang makapa ang dilang kaluskos ng letra.
Ang pangungulila'y tila pangsusubo
Ng uod sa matang may marka ng pako
Habang sumasagap ng mga rekwedong mapakla't malabo
Ang sutlang antenna ng bituka't bungo.

Subalit madalas,
Ang pangungulila ay isang pagtakas,
Kapag ang paligid ay basa ng lisol
O kaya'y ni walang baog na bulaklak sa inyong ataul
At hubad na hubad ang katotohanan
Sa mga larangang hindi mo matalos ang dulo't hantungan;

Hila sa kaliwa ng pagsasarili't mithing mapag-isa;
Humukay ng iyong sariling libingan,
Tumuklas ng iyong sariling libangan;
Pumili ng iyong sariling sapatos,
Sariling sepilyo, sariling pustiso't sariling kubyertos,
Sariling kabinet ng buhay at lihim,
At sariling kumot sa mga magdamag ng hamog at hangin.

Gayunman, pagdalaw ng mga sundalo ng pangungulila,
Di mo mapipigil ni matututulan ang tinig na lila,
Kung minsa't himbing ka ay saka bubulong
Ng mga katagang sisilab sa taynga gayong walang apoy,
Magsisigaw ka ma'y walang makarinig
Hanggang masiwalat ang sugat ng dibdib.
Ikakadena ka ng kanyang alagad
Saka ipipiit sa ulilang silid na batbat ng rehas,
Doon, kapiling mo'y isang mahiwagang bombilyang pundido,
At isang likmuang pandak at masurot gayong aluminyon.

Doon, uupo ka maghapo't magdamag
Habang tumutulo ang dugo sa sugat...
At kapag said na ang lihim ng buhay
At malat ka na rin sa pagtagulaylay,
Ay saka lilitaw ang pangungulila
Na mistulang isang berdeng engkantada,
May ngiting banayad subalit masuyo
At pangako'y pangarap sa sugat ng puso.
Aawitan ka n'ya habang umaawit
Ay pabago-bago ang samyo at kulay ng suot na damit,
Naroong karbungko, pilak at tumbaga, saka esmeralda

Hanggang maidlip kang may sapot sa mata.
Ngunit pagsapit mo sa katanghalian ng pananaginip
Muli, bubuksan n'ya ang sugat ng dibdib,
Ito'y hahapustin ng dayap at asin
Hanggang sa tubuan ng perlas na itim.

SHORT STORIES

The Day the Dancers Came by Bienvenido N. Santos

The Summer Solstice by Nick Joaquin

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THE DAY THE DANCERS CAME

by Bienvenido N. Santos

AS soon as Fil woke up, he noticed a whiteness outside, quite unusual for the November mornings they had been having. That fall, Chicago was sandman's town, sleepy valley, drowsy gray, slumberous mistiness from sunup till noon when the clouds drifted away in cauliflower clusters and suddenly it was evening. The lights shone on the avenues like soiled lamps centuries old and the skyscrapers became monsters with a thousand sore eyes. Now there was a brightness in the air and Fil knew what it was and he shouted, "Snow! It's snowing!"

Tony, who slept in the adjoining room, was awakened.

"What's that?" he asked.

"It's snowing," Fil said, smiling to himself as if he had ordered this and was satisfied with the prompt delivery. "Oh, they'll love this, they'll love this."

"Who'll love that?" Tony asked, his voice raised in annoyance.

"The dancers, of course," Fil answered. "They're arriving today. Maybe they've already arrived. They'll walk in the snow and love it. Their first snow, I'm sure."

"How do you know it wasn't snowing in New York while they were there?" Tony asked.

"Snow in New York in early November?" Fil said. "Are you crazy?"

"Who's crazy?" Tony replied. "Ever since you heard of those dancers from the Philippines, you've been acting nuts. Loco. As if they're coming here just for you."

Tony chuckled. Hearing him, Fil blushed, realizing that he had, indeed, been acting too eager, but Tony had said it. It felt that way--as if the dancers were coming here only for him.

Filemon Acayan, Filipino, was fifty, a U.S., citizen. He was a corporal in the U.S. Army, training at San Luis Obispo, on the day he was discharged honorably, in 1945. A few months later, he got his citizenship papers. Thousands of them, smart and small in their uniforms, stood at attention in drill formation, in the scalding sun, and pledged allegiance to the flag and the republic for which it stands. Soon after, he got back to work. To a new citizen, work meant many places and many ways: factories and hotels, waiter and cook. A timeless drifting: once he tended a rose garden and took care of a hundred year old veteran of a border war. As a menial in a hospital in Cook Country, all day he handled filth and gore. He came home smelling of surgical soap and disinfectant. In the hospital, he took charge of row of bottles on a shelf, each bottle containing a stage of the human embryo in preservatives, from the lizard-like fetus of a few days, through the newly born infant, with its position unchanged, cold and cowering and afraid. He had nightmares through the years of himself inside a bottle. That was long ago. Now he had a more pleasant job as special policeman in the post office.

He was a few years younger than Tony-Antonio Bataller, a retired pullman porter but he looked older in spite of the fact that Tony had been bedridden most of the time for the last two years, suffering from a kind of wasting disease that had frustrated doctors. All over Tony's body, a gradual peeling was taking place. At first, he thought it was merely tiniaflava, a skin disease common among adolescent in the Philippines. It had started around the neck and had spread to his extremities. His face looked as if it was healing from severe burns. Nevertheless, it was a young face much younger than Fil's, which had never looked young.

"I'm becoming a white man," Tony had said once, chuckling softly.

It was the same chuckle Fil seemed to have heard now, only this time it sounded derisive, insulting.

Fil said, "I know who's nuts. It's the sick guy with the sick thoughts. You don't care for nothing but your pain, your imaginary pain."

"You're the imagining fellow. I got the real thing," Tony shouted from the room. He believed he had something worse than the whiteness spreading on his skin. There was a pain in his insides, like dull scissors scraping his intestines. Angrily he added, "What for I got retired?"

"You're old, man, old, that's what, and sick, yes, but not cancer," Fil said turning towards the snow-filled sky. He pressed his face against the glass window. There's about an inch now on the ground, he thought, maybe more.

Tony came out of his room looking as if he had not slept all night. "I know what I got," he said, as if it were an honor and a privilege to die of cancer and Fil was trying to deprive him of it. "Never a pain like this. One day, I'm just gonna die."

"Naturally. Who says you won't?" Fil argued, thinking how wonderful it would be if he could join the company of dancers from the Philippines, show them around, walk with them in the snow, watch their eyes as they stared about them, answer their questions, tell them everything they wanted to know about the changing seasons in this strange land. They would pick up fistfuls of snow, crunch it in their fingers or shove it into their mouths. He had done just that the first time, long, long ago, and it had reminded him of the grated ice the Chinese sold near the town plaza where he had played *tatching* with an older brother who later drowned in a squall. How his mother had grieved over that death, she who has not cried too much when his father died, a broken man. Now they were all gone, quick death after a storm, or lingeringly, in a season of drought, all, all of them he had loved.

He continued, "All of us will die. One day. A medium bomb marked Chicago and this whole dump is *tapus*, finished. Who'll escape then?"

"Maybe your dancers will," Fil answered, now watching the snow himself.

"Of course, they will," Fil retorted, his voice sounding like a big assurance that all the dancers would be safe in his care. "The bombs won't be falling on this night. And when the dancers are back in the Philippines..."

He paused, as if he was no longer sure of what he was going to say. "But maybe, even in the Philippines the bombs gonna fall, no?" he said, gazing sadly at the falling snow.

"What's that to you?" Tony replied. "You got no more folks over 'der right? I know it's nothing to me. I'll be dead before that."

"Let's talk about something nice," Fil said, the sadness spreading on his face as he tried to smile. "Tell me, how will I talk, how am I gonna introduce myself?"

He would go ahead with his plans, introduce himself to the dancers and volunteer to take them sight-seeing. His car was clean and ready for his guests. He had soaped the ashtrays, dusted off the floor boards and thrown away the old mats, replacing them with new plastic throw rugs. He had got himself soaking wet while spraying the car, humming, as he worked, faintly-remembered tunes from the old country.

Fil shook his head as he waited for Tony to say something. "Gosh, I wish I had your looks, even with those white spots, then I could face every one of them," he said, "but this mug."

"That's the important thing, you mug. It's your calling card. It says, Filipino. Countrymen," Tony said.

"You're not fooling me, friend," Fil said. "This mug says, Ugly Filipino. It says, old-timer, muchacho. It says Pinoy, bejo."

For Fil, time was the villain. In the beginning, the words he often heard were: too young, too young; but all of a sudden, too young became too old, too late. What happened in between, a mist covering all things. You don't have to look at your face in a mirror to know that you are old, suddenly old, grown useless for a lot of things and too late for all the dreams you had wrapped up well against a day of need.

"It also says sucker," Fil answered, "but who wants a palace when they can have the most delicious adobo here and the best stuffed chicken... yum...yum..."

Tony was angry, "Yum, yum, you're nuts," he said, "plain and simple loco. What for you want to spend and spend? You've been living on loose change all your life and now on dancing kids who don't know you and won't even send you a card afterwards."

"Never mind the cards," Fil answered. "Who wants cards? But don't you see, they'll be happy; and then, you know what? I'm going to keep their voices, their words and their singing and their laughter in my magic sound mirror."

He had a portable tape recorder and a stack of recordings, patiently labeled, songs and speeches. The songs were in English, but most of the speeches were in the dialect, debates between him and Tony. It was evident Tony was the better speaker of the two in English, but in the dialect, Fil showed greater mastery. His style, however, was florid, sentimental, poetic.

Without telling Tony, he had experimented on recording sounds, like the way a bed creaked, doors opening and closing, rain or sleet tapping on the window panes, footsteps through the corridor. He was beginning to think that they did. He was learning to identify each of the sounds with a particular mood or fact. Sometimes, like today, he wished that there was a way of keeping a record of silence because it was to him the richest sound, like snow falling. He wondered as he watched the snow blowing in the wind, what took care of that moment if memory didn't. Like time, memory was often a villain, a betrayer.

"Fall, snow, fall," he murmured and, turning to Tony, said, "As soon as they accept my invitation, I'll call you up. No, you don't have to do anything, but I'd want to be here to meet them."

"I'm going out myself," Tony said. "And I don't know what time I'll be back." Then he added, "You're not working today. Are you on leave?"

"For two days. While the dancers are here." Fil said.

"It still don't make sense to me," Tony said. "But good luck, anyway."

"Aren't you going to see them tonight? Our reserved seats are right out in front, you know."

"I know. But I'm not sure I can come."

"What? You're not sure?"

Fil could not believe it. Tony was indifferent. Something must be wrong with him. He looked at him closely, saying nothing.

"I want to, but I'm sick Fil. I tell you, I'm not feeling so good. My doctor will know today. He'll tell me." Tony said.

"What will he tell you?"

"How do I know?"

"I mean, what's he trying to find out?"

"If it's cancer," Tony said. Without saying another word, he went straight back to his room.

Fil remembered those times, at night, when Tony kept him awake with his moaning. When he called out to him, asking, "Tony, what's the matter?" his sighs ceased for a while, but afterwards, Tony screamed, deadening his cries with a pillow against his mouth. When Fil rushed to his side, Tony drove him away, or he curled up in the bedsheets like a big infant suddenly hushed in its crying.

The next day Tony looked all right. When Fil asked him about the night before, he replied, "I was dying," but it sounded more like disgust over a nameless annoyance.

Fil has misgivings, too, about the whiteness spreading on Tony's skin. He had heard of leprosy. Every time he thought of that dreaded disease, he felt tears in his eyes. In all the years he had been in America, he had not had a friend until he met Tony whom he liked immediately and, in a way, worshipped, for all the things the man had which Fil knew he himself lacked.

They had shared a lot together. They made merry on Christmas, sometimes got drunk and became loud. Fil recited poems in the dialect and praised himself. Tony fell to giggling and cursed all the railroad companies of America. But last Christmas, they hadn't gotten drunk. They hadn't even talked to each other on Christmas day. Soon, it would be Christmas again.

The snow was still falling.

"Well, I'll be seeing you," Fil said, getting ready to leave. "Try to be home on time. I shall invite the dancers for luncheon or dinner maybe, tomorrow. But tonight, let's go to the theater together, ha?"

"I'll try," Tony answered. He didn't need boots. He loved to walk in the snow.

The air outside felt good. Fil lifted his face to the sky and closed his eyes as the snow and a wet wind drench his face. He stood that way for some time, crying, more, more to himself, drunk with snow and coolness. His car was parked a block away. As he walked towards it, he plowed into the snow with one foot and studied the scar he made, a hideous shape among perfect footmarks. He felt strong as his lungs filled with the cold air, as if just now it did not matter too much that he was the way he looked and his English was the way it was. But perhaps, he could talk to the dancers in his dialect. Why not?

A heavy frosting of snow covered his car and as he wiped it off with his bare hands, he felt light and young, like a child at play, and once again, he raised his face to the sky and licked the flakes, cold and tasteless on his tongue.

When Fil arrived at the Hamilton, it seemed to him the Philippine dancers had taken over the hotel. They were all over the lobby on the mezzanine, talking in groups animatedly, their teeth sparkling as they laughed, their eyes disappearing in mere slits of light. Some of the girls wore their black hair long. For a moment, the sight seemed too much for him who had but all forgotten how beautiful Philippine girls were. He wanted to look away, but their loveliness held him. He must do something, close his

eyes perhaps. As he did so, their laughter came to him like a breeze murmurous with sounds native to his land.

Later, he tried to relax, to appear inconspicuous. True, they were all very young, but there were a few elderly men and women who must have been their chaperons or well-wishers like him. He would smile at everyone who happened to look his way. Most of them smiled back, or rather, seemed to smile, but it was quick, without recognition, and might not have been for him but for someone else near or behind him.

His lips formed the words he was trying to phrase in his mind: Ilocano ka? Bicol? Ano na, paisano? Comusta? Or should he introduce himself---How? For what he wanted to say, the words didn't come too easily, they were unfamiliar, they stumbled and broke on his lips into a jumble of incoherence.

Suddenly, he felt as if he was in the center of a group where he was not welcome. All the things he had been trying to hide now showed: the age in his face, his horny hands. He knew it the instant he wanted to shake hands with the first boy who had drawn close to him, smiling and friendly. Fil put his hands in his pocket.

Now he wished Tony had been with him. Tony would know what to do. He would charm these young people with his smile and his learned words. Fil wanted to leave, but he seemed caught up in the tangle of moving bodies that merged and broke in a fluid strangle hold. Everybody was talking, mostly in English. Once in a while he heard exclamations in the dialect right out of the past, conjuring up playtime, long shadows of evening on the plaza, barrio fiestas, misa de gallo.

Time was passing and he had yet to talk to someone. Suppose he stood on a chair and addressed them in the manner of his flamboyant speeches recorded in his magic sound mirror?

"Beloved countrymen, lovely children of the Pearl of the Orient Seas, listen to me. I'm Fil Acayan. I've come to volunteer my services. I'm yours to command. Your servant. Tell me where you wish to go, what you want to see in Chicago. I know every foot of the lakeshore drive, all the gardens and the parks, the museums, the huge

department stores, the planetarium. Let me be your guide. That's what I'm offering you, a free tour of Chicago, and finally, dinner at my apartment on West Sheridan Road--pork adobo and chicken relleno, name your dish. How about it, paisanos?"

No. That would be a foolish thing to do. They would laugh at him. He felt a dryness in his throat. He was sweating. As he wiped his face with a handkerchief, he bumped against a slim, short girl who quite gracefully, stepped aside, and for a moment he thought he would swoon in the perfume that enveloped him. It was fragrance, essence of camia, of ilang-ilang, and dama de noche.

Two boys with sleek, pomaded hair were sitting near an empty chair. He sat down and said in the dialect, "May I invite you to my apartment?" The boys stood up, saying, "Excuse us, please," and walked away. He mopped his brow, but instead of getting discouraged, he grew bolder as though he had moved one step beyond shamelessness. Approaching another group, he repeated his invitation, and a girl with a mole on her upper lip, said, "Thank you, but we have no time." As he turned towards another group, he felt their eyes on his back. Another boy drifted towards him, but as soon as he began to speak, the boy said, "Pardon, please," and moved away.

They were always moving away. As if by common consent, they had decided to avoid him, ignore his presence. Perhaps it was not their fault. They must have been instructed to do so. Or was it his looks that kept them away? The thought was a sharpness inside him.

After a while, as he wandered about the mezzanine among the dancers, but alone, he noticed that they had begun to leave. Some had crowded noisily into the two elevators. He followed the others going down the stairs. Through the glass doors, he saw them getting into a bus parked beside the subway entrance on Dearborn.

The snow had stopped falling; it was melting fast in the sun and turning into slush.

As he moved about aimlessly, he felt someone touch him on the sleeve. It was one of the dancers, a mere boy, tall and thin, who was saying, "Excuse, please." Fil

realized he was in the way between another boy with a camera and a group posing in front of the hotel.

"Sorry," Fil said, jumping away awkwardly.

The crowd burst out laughing.

Then everything became a blur in his eyes, a moving picture out of focus, but gradually, the figure cleared, there was mud on the pavement on which the dancers stood posing, and the sun throw shadows at their feet.

Let them have fun, he said to himself, they're young and away from home. I have no business up their schedule, forcing my company on them.

He watched the dancers till the last of them was on the bus. The voices came to him, above the traffic sounds. They waved their hands and smiled towards him as the bus started. Fil raised his hand to wave back, but stopped quickly, aborting the gesture. He turned to look behind him at whomever the dancers were waving their hands to. There was no one there except his own reflection on the glass door, a double exposure of himself and a giant plant with its thorny branches around him, like arms in a loving embrace.

Even before he opened the door to their apartment, Fil knew that Tony had not yet arrived. There were no boots outside on the landing. Somehow he felt relieved, for until then he did not know how he was going to explain his failure.

From the hotel, he had driven around, cruised by the lakeshore drive, hoping he could see the dancers somewhere, in a park perhaps, taking pictures of the mist over the lake and the last gold on the trees now wet with melted snow, or on some picnic grounds, near a bubbling fountain. Still taking pictures of themselves against a background of Chicago's gray and dirty skyscrapers. He slowed down every time he saw a crowd, but the dancers were nowhere along his way. Perhaps they had gone to the theater to rehearse. He turned back before reaching Evanston.

He felt weak, not hungry. Just the same, he ate, warming up some left-over food. The rice was cold, but the soup was hot and tasty. While he ate, he listened for footfalls. Afterwards, he lay down on the sofa, and a weariness came over him, but he tried hard not to sleep. As he stared at the ceiling, he felt like floating away, but he kept his eyes open, willing himself hard to remain awake. He wanted to explain everything to Tony when he arrived. But soon his eyes closed against a weary will too tired and weak to fight back sleep--and then there were voices. Tony was in the room, eager to tell his own bit of news.

"I've discovered a new way of keeping afloat," he was saying.

"Who wants to keep afloat?" Fil asked.

"Just in case. In a shipwreck, for example," Tony said.

"Never mind shipwrecks. I must tell you about the dancers," Fil said.

"But this is important," Tony insisted. "This way, you can keep floating indefinitely."

"What for indefinitely?" Fil asked.

"Say in a ship... I mean, in an emergency, you're stranded without help in the middle of the Pacific or the Atlantic, you must keep floating till help comes..." Tony explained.

"More better," Fil said, "find a way to reach shore before the sharks smells you. You discover that."

"I will," Tony said, without eagerness, as though certain that there was no such way, that, after all, his discovery was worthless.

"Now you listen to me," Fil said, sitting up abruptly. As he talked in the dialect, Tony listened with increasing apathy.

"There they were," Fil began, his tone taking on the orator's pitch, "Who could have been my children if I had not left home-- or yours, Tony. They gazed around them

with wonder, smiling at me, answering my questions, but grudgingly, edging away as if to be near me were wrong, a violation in their rule book. But it could be that every time I opened my mouth, I gave myself away. I talked in the dialect, Ilocano, Tagalog, Bicol, but no one listened. They avoided me. They had been briefed too well: Do not talk to strangers. Ignore their invitations. Be extra careful in the big cities like New York and Chicago, beware of the old-timers, the Pinoys. Most of them are bums. Keep away from them. Be on the safe side--stick together, entertain only those who have been introduced to you properly.

"I'm sure they had such instructions, safety measures, they must have called them. What then could I have done, scream out my good intentions, prove my harmlessness and my love for them by beating my breast? Oh, but I loved them. You see, I was like them once. I, too, was nimble with my feet, graceful with my hands; and I had the tongue of a poet. Ask the village girls and the envious boys from the city--but first you have to find them. After these many years, it won't be easy. You'll have to search every suffering face in the village gloom for a hint of youth and beauty or go where the graveyards are and the tombs under the lime trees. One such face...oh, God, what am I saying...

"All I wanted was to talk to them, guide them around Chicago, spend money on them so that they would have something special to remember about us here when they return to our country. They would tell their folks: We met a kind, old man, who took us to his apartment. It was not much of a place. It was old-like him. When we sat on the sofa in the living room, the bottom sank heavily, the broken springs touching the floor. But what a cook that man was! And how kind! We never thought that rice and adobo could be that delicious. And the chicken rellenito! When someone asked what the stuffing was--we had never tasted anything like it, he smiled saying, 'From heaven's supermarket' touching his head and pressing his heart like a clown as if heaven were there. He had his tape recorder which he called a magic sound mirror, and he had all of us record our voices. Say anything in the dialect, sing, if you please, our kundiman, please, he said, his eyes pleading, too. Oh, we had fun listening to the playback. When you're gone, the old man said, I shall listen to your voices with my eyes closed and you'll be here again

and I won't ever be alone, no, not anymore, after this. We wanted to cry, but he looked very funny, so we laughed and he laughed with us.

"But, Tony, they would not come. They thanked me, but they said they had no time. Others said nothing. They looked through me. I didn't exist. Or worse, I was unclean. *Basura*. Garbage. They were ashamed of me. How could I be Filipino?" The memory, distinctly recalled, was a rock on his breast. He grasped for breath.

"Now, let me teach you how to keep afloat," Tony said, but it was not Tony's voice.

Fil was alone and gasping for air. His eyes opened slowly till he began to breathe more easily. The sky outside was gray. He looked at his watch--a quarter past five. The show would begin at eight. There was time. Perhaps Tony would be home soon.

The apartment was warming up. The radiators sounded full of scampering rats. He had a recording of that in his sound mirror.

Fil smiled. He had an idea. He would take the sound mirror to the theater, take his seat close to the stage, and make tape recordings of the singing and the dances.

Now he was wide-awake and somehow pleased with himself. The more he thought of the idea, the better he felt. If Tony showed up now... He sat up, listening. The radiators were quiet. There were no footfalls, no sound of a key turning.

Late that night, back from the theater, Fil knew at once that Tony was back. The boots were outside the door. He, too, must be tired, and should not be disturbed.

He was careful not to make any noise. As he turned on the floor lamp, he thought that perhaps Tony was awake and waiting for him. They would listen together to a playback of the dances and songs Tony had missed. Then he would tell Tony what happened that day, repeating part of the dream.

From Tony's bedroom came the regular breathing of a man sound asleep. To be sure, he looked into the room and in the half-darkness, Tony's head showed darkly, deep in a pillow, on its side, his knees bent, almost touching the clasped hands under

his chin, an oversized fetus in the last bottle. Fil shut the door between them and went over to the portable. Now, he turned it on to low. At first nothing but static and odd sounds came through, but soon after there was the patter of feet to the rhythm of a familiar melody.

All the beautiful boys and girls were in the room now, dancing and singing. A boy and a girl sat on the floor holding two bamboo poles by their ends flat on floor, clapping them together, then apart, and pounding them on the boards, while dancers swayed and balanced their lithe forms, dipping their bare brown legs in and out of the clapping bamboos, the pace gradually increasing into a fury of wood on wood in a counterpoint of panic among the dancers and in a harmonious flurry of toes and ankles escaping certain pain--crushed bones, and bruised flesh, and humiliation. Other dances followed, accompanied by songs and live with the sounds of life and death in the old country; Igorot natives in G-strings walking down a mountainside; peasants climbing up a hill on a rainy day; neighbors moving a house, their sturdy legs showing under a moving roof; a distant gong sounding off a summons either to a feast or a wake. And finally, prolonged ovation, thunderous, wave upon wave...

"Turn that thing off!" Tony's voice was sharp above the echoes of the gongs and the applause settling into silence.

Fil switched off the dial and in the sudden stillness, the voices turned into faces, familiar and near, like gesture and touch that stayed on even as the memory withdrew, bowing out, as it were, in a graceful exit, saying, thank you, thank you, before a ghostly audience that clapped hands in silence and stomped their feet in a sucking emptiness. He wanted to join the finale, such as it was, pretend that the curtain call included him, and attempt a shamefaced imitation of a graceful adieu, but he was stiff and old, incapable of grace; but he said, thank you, thank you, his voice sincere and contrite, grateful for the other voices and the sound of singing and the memory.

"Oh, my God..." the man in the other room cried, followed by a moan of such anguish that Fil fell on his knees, covering the sound mirror with his hands to muffle the sounds that had started again, it seemed to him, even after he had turned it off.

Then he remembered.

"Tony, what did the doctor say? What did he say?" he shouted and listened, holding his breath, no longer able to tell at the moment who had truly waited all day for the final sentence.

There was no answer. Meanwhile, under his hands, there was Tony saying? That was his voice, no? Fil wanted to hear, he must know. He switched dials on and off, again and again, pressing buttons. Suddenly, he didn't know what to do. The spools were live, they kept turning. His arms went around the machine, his chest pressing down on the spools. In the quick silence, Tony's voice came clear.

"So they didn't come after all?"

"Tony, what did the doctor say?" Fil asked, straining hard to hear.

"I knew they wouldn't come. But that's okay. The apartment is old anyhow. And it smells of death."

"How you talk. In this country, there's a cure for everything."

"I guess we can't complain. We had it good here all the time. Most of the time, anyway."

"I wish, though, they had come. I could..."

"Yes, they could have. They didn't have to see me, but I could have seen them. I have seen their pictures, but what do they really look like?"

"Tony, they're beautiful, all of them, but especially the girls. Their complexion, their grace, their eyes, they were what we call talking eyes, they say, things to you. And the scent of them!"

There was a sigh from the room soft, hardly like a sigh. A louder, grating sound, almost under his hands that had relaxed their hold, called his attention. The sound mirror had kept going, the tape was fast unraveling.

"Oh, no! he screamed, noticing that somehow, he had pushed the eraser.

Frantically, he tried to rewind and play back the sounds and the music, but there was nothing now but the full creaking of the tape on the spool and meaningless sounds that somehow had not been erased, the thud of dancing feet, a quick clapping of hands, alien voices and words: in this country... everything... all of them... talking eyes... and the scent... a fading away into nothingness, till about the end when there was a screaming, senseless kind of finale detached from the body of a song in the background, drums and sticks and the tolling of a bell.

"Tony! Tony!" Fil cried, looking towards the sick man's room, "I've lost them all."

Biting his lips, Fil turned towards the window, startled by the first light of the dawn. He hadn't realized till then the long night was over.

THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

by Nick Joaquin

The Moretas were spending St. John's Day with the children's grandfather, whose feast day it was. Doña Lupeng awoke feeling faint with the heat, a sound of screaming in her ears. In the dining room the three boys already attired in their holiday suits, were at breakfast, and came crowding around her, talking all at once.

"How long you have slept, Mama!"

"We thought you were never getting up!"

"Do we leave at once, huh? Are we going now?"

"Hush, hush I implore you! Now look: your father has a headache, and so have I.

So be quiet this instant—or no one goes to Grandfather."

Though it was only seven by the clock the house was already a furnace, the windows dilating with the harsh light and the air already burning with the immense, intense fever of noon.

She found the children's nurse working in the kitchen. "And why is it you who are preparing breakfast? Where is Amada?" But without waiting for an answer she went to the backdoor and opened it, and the screaming in her ears became wild screaming in the stables across the yard. "Oh my God!" she groaned and, grasping her skirts, hurried across the yard.

In the stables Entoy, the driver, apparently deaf to the screams, was hitching the pair of piebald ponies to the coach.

"Not the closed coach, Entoy! The open carriage!" shouted Doña Lupeng as she came up.

"But the dust, *señora*—"

"I know, but better to be dirty than to be boiled alive. And what ails your wife, eh? Have you been beating her again?"

“Oh no, *señora*: I have not touched her.”

“Then why is she screaming? Is she ill?”

“I do not think so. But how do I know? You can go and see for yourself, *señora*. She is up there.”

When Doña Lupeng entered the room, the big half-naked woman sprawle across the bamboo bed stopped screaming. Doña Lupeng was shocked.

“What is this Amada? Why are you still in bed at this hour? And in such a posture! Come, get up at once. You should be ashamed!”

But the woman on the bed merely stared. Her sweat-beaded brows contracted, as if in an effort to understand. Then her face relaxed, her mouth sagged open humorously and, rolling over on her back and spreading out her big soft arms and legs, she began noiselessly quaking with laughter—the mute mirth jerking in her throat; the moist pile of her flesh quivering like brown jelly. Saliva dribbled from the corners of her mouth.

Doña Lupeng blushed, looking around helplessly, and seeing that Entoy had followed and was leaning in the doorway, watching stolidly, she blushed again. The room reeked hotly of intimate odors. She averted her eyes from the laughing woman on the bed, in whose nakedness she seemed so to participate that she was ashamed to look directly at the man in the doorway.

“Tell me, Entoy: has she had been to the Tadtarin?”

“Yes, *señora*. Last night.”

“But I forbade her to go! And I forbade you to let her go!”

“I could do nothing.”

“Why, you beat her at the least pretext!”

“But now I dare not touch her.”

“Oh, and why not?”

“It is the day of St. John: the spirit is in her.”

“But, man—“

“It is true, *señora*. The spirit is in her. She is the Tadtarin. She must do as she pleases. Otherwise, the grain would not grow, the trees would bear no fruit, the rivers would give no fish, and the animals would die.”

“*Naku*, I did not know your wife was so powerful, Entoy.”

“At such times she is not my wife: she is the wife of the river, she is the wife of the crocodile, she is the wife of the moon.”

“But how can they still believe such things?” demanded Doña Lupeng of her husband as they drove in the open carriage through the pastoral countryside that was the *arrabal* of Paco in the 1850’s.

Don Paeng darted a sidelong glance at his wife, by which he intimated that the subject was not a proper one for the children, who were sitting opposite, facing their parents.

Don Paeng, drowsily stroking his moustaches, his eyes closed against the hot light, merely shrugged.

“And you should have seen that Entoy,” continued his wife. “You know how the brute treats her: she cannot say a word but he thrashes her. But this morning he stood as meek as a lamb while she screamed and screamed. He seemed actually in awe of her, do you know—actually *afraid* of her!”

“Oh, look, boys—here comes the St. John!” cried Doña Lupeng, and she sprang up in the swaying carriage, propping one hand on her husband’s shoulder while the other she held up her silk parasol.

And “here come the men with their St. John!” cried voices up and down the countryside. People in wet clothes dripping with well-water, ditch-water and river-water came running across the hot woods and fields and meadows, brandishing cans of water, wetting each other uproariously, and shouting *San Juan! San Juan!* as they ran to meet the procession.

Up the road, stirring a cloud of dust, and gaily bedrenched by the crowds gathered along the wayside, a concourse of young men clad only in soggy trousers were carrying aloft an image of the Precursor. Their teeth flashed white in their laughing faces and their hot bodies glowed crimson as they pranced past, shrouded in fiery dust,

singing and shouting and waving their arms: the St. John riding swiftly above the sea of dark heads and glittering in the noon sun—a fine, blonde, heroic St. John: very male, very arrogant: the Lord of Summer indeed; the Lord of Light and Heat—erect and godly virile above the prone and female earth—while the worshippers danced and the dust thickened and the animals reared and roared and the merciless fires came raining down from the skies—the vast outpouring of light that marks this climax of solar year—raining relentlessly upon field and river and town and winding road, and upon the joyous throng of young men against whose uproar a couple of seminarians in muddy cassocks vainly intoned the hymn of the noon god:

That we, thy servants, in chorus

May praise thee, our tongues restore us...

But Doña Lupeng, standing in the stopped carriage, looking very young and elegant in her white frock, under the twirling parasol, stared down on the passing male horde with increasing annoyance. The insolent man-smell of their bodies rose all about her—wave upon wave of it—enveloping her, assaulting her senses, till she felt faint with it and pressed a handkerchief to her nose. And as she glanced at her husband and saw with what a smug smile he was watching the revelers, her annoyance deepened. When he bade her sit down because all eyes were turned on her, she pretended not to hear; stood up even straighter, as if to defy those rude creatures flaunting their manhood in the sun.

And she wondered peevishly what the braggarts were being so cocky about? For this arrogance, this pride, this bluff male health of theirs was (she told herself) founded on the impregnable virtue of generations of good women. The boobies were so sure of themselves because they had always been sure of their wives. *“All the sisters being virtuous, all the brothers are brave,”* thought Doña Lupeng, with a bitterness that rather surprised her. Women had built it up: this poise of the male. Ah, and women could destroy it, too! She recalled, vindictively, this morning’s scene at the stables: Amada naked and screaming in bed while from the doorway her lord and master looked on in

meek silence. And was it not the mystery of a woman in her flowers that had restored the tongue of that old Hebrew prophet?

“Look, Lupeng, they have all passed now,” Don Paeng was saying, “Do you mean to stand all the way?”

She looked around in surprise and hastily sat down. The children tittered, and the carriage started.

“Has the heat gone to your head, woman?” asked Don Paeng, smiling. The children burst frankly into laughter.

Their mother coloured and hung her head. She was beginning to feel ashamed of the thoughts that had filled her mind. They seemed improper—almost obscene—and the discovery of such depths of wickedness in herself appalled her. She moved closer to her husband to share the parasol with him.

“And did you see our young cousin Guido?” he asked.

“Oh, was he in that crowd?”

“A European education does not seem to have spoiled his taste for country pleasures.”

“I did not see him.”

“He waved and waved.”

“The poor boy. He will feel hurt. But truly, Paeng. I did not see him.”

“Well, that is always a woman’s privilege.”

But when that afternoon, at the grandfather’s, the young Guido presented himself, properly attired and brushed and scented, Doña Lupeng was so charming and gracious with him that he was enchanted and gazed after her all afternoon with enamored eyes.

This was the time when our young men were all going to Europe and bringing back with them, not the Age of Victoria, but the Age of Byron. The young Guido knew nothing of Darwin and evolution; he knew everything about Napoleon and the Revolution. When Doña Lupeng expressed surprise at his presence that morning in the St. John’s crowd, he laughed in her face.

“But I *adore* these old fiestas of ours! They are so *romantic*! Last night, do you know, we walked all the way through the woods, I and some boys, to see the procession of the Tadtarin.”

“And was that romantic too?” asked Doña Lupeng.

“It was *weird*. It made my flesh *crawl*. All those women in such a mystic frenzy! And she who was the Tadtarin last night—she was a figure right out of a flamenco!”

“I fear to disenchant you, Guido—but that woman happens to be our cook.”

“She is beautiful.”

“Our Amada beautiful? But she is old and fat!”

“She is beautiful—as that old tree you are leaning on is beautiful,” calmly insisted the young man, mocking her with his eyes.

They were out in the buzzing orchard, among the ripe mangoes; Doña Lupeng seated on the grass, her legs tucked beneath her, and the young man sprawled flat on his belly, gazing up at her, his face moist with sweat. The children were chasing dragonflies. The sun stood still in the west. The long day refused to end. From the house came the sudden roaring laughter of the men playing cards.

“Beautiful! Romantic! Adorable! Are those the only words you learned in Europe?” cried Doña Lupeng, feeling very annoyed with this young man whose eyes adored her one moment and mocked her the next.

“Ah, I also learned to open my eyes over there—to see the holiness and the mystery of what is vulgar.”

“And what is so holy and mysterious about—about the Tadtarin, for instance?”

“I do not know. I can only *feel* it. And it *frightens* me. Those rituals come to us from the earliest dawn of the world. And the dominant figure is not the male but the female.”

“But they are in honor of St. John.”

“What has your St. John to do with them? Those women worship a more ancient lord. Why, do you know that no man may join those rites unless he first puts on some article of women’s apparel and—“

“And what did *you* put on, Guido?”

"How *sharp* you are! Oh, I made such love to a toothless old hag there that she pulled off her stocking for me. And I pulled it on, over my arm, like a glove. How your husband would have *despised* me!"

"But what on earth does it mean?"

"I think it is to remind us men that once upon a time you women were supreme and we men were the slaves."

"But surely there have always been kings?"

"Oh, no. The queen came before the king, and the priestess before the priest, and the moon before the sun."

"The moon?"

"—who is the Lord of the women."

"Why?"

"Because the tides of women, like the tides of the sea, are tides of the moon. Because the first blood -But what is the matter, Lupe? Oh, have I offended you?"

"Is this how they talk to decent women in Europe?"

"They do not talk to women, they pray to them—as men did in the dawn of the world."

"Oh, you are mad! mad!"

"Why are you so afraid, Lupe?"

"I afraid? And of whom? My dear boy, you still have your mother's milk in your mouth. I only wish you to remember that I am a married woman."

"I remember that you are a woman, yes. A beautiful woman. And why not? Did you turn into some dreadful monster when you married? Did you stop being a woman? Did you stop being beautiful? Then why should my eyes not tell you what you are—just because you are married?"

"Ah, this is too much now!" cried Doña Lupeng, and she rose to her feet.

"Do not go, I implore you! Have pity on me!"

"No more of your comedy, Guido! And besides—where have those children gone to! I must go after them."

As she lifted her skirts to walk away, the young man, propping up his elbows,

dragged himself forward on the ground and solemnly kissed the tips of her shoes. She stared down in sudden horror, transfixed—and he felt her violent shudder. She backed away slowly, still staring; then turned and fled toward the house.

On the way home that evening Don Paeng noticed that his wife was in a mood. They were alone in the carriage: the children were staying overnight at their grandfather's. The heat had not subsided. It was heat without gradations: that knew no twilights and no dawns; that was still there, after the sun had set; that would be there already, before the sun had risen.

“Has young Guido been annoying you?” asked Don Paeng.

“Yes! All afternoon.”

“These young men today—what a disgrace they are! I felt embarrassed as a man to see him following you about with those eyes of a whipped dog.”

She glanced at him coldly. “And was that all you felt, Paeng? embarrassed—as a man?”

“A good husband has constant confidence in the good sense of his wife,” he pronounced grandly, and smiled at her.

But she drew away; huddled herself in the other corner. “He *kissed* my feet,” she told him disdainfully, her eyes on his face.

He frowned and made a gesture of distaste. “Do you see? They have the instincts, the style of the *canalla!* To kiss a woman's feet, to follow her like a dog, to adore her like a slave —”

“Is it so shameful for a man to adore women?”

“A gentleman loves and respects women. The cads and lunatics—they ‘adore’ the women.”

“But maybe we do not want to be loved and respected—but to be adored.”

But when they reached home she did not lie down but wandered listlessly through the empty house. When Don Paeng, having bathed and changed, came down from the bedroom, he found her in the dark parlour seated at the harp and plucking out a tune, still in her white frock and shoes.

“How can you bear those hot clothes, Lupeng? And why the darkness? Order

someone to bring light in here.”

“There is no one, they have all gone to see the Tadtarin.”

“A pack of loafers we are feeding!”

She had risen and gone to the window. He approached and stood behind her, grasped her elbows and, stooping, kissed the nape of her neck. But she stood still, not responding, and he released her sulkily. She turned around to face him.

“Listen, Paeng. I want to see it, too. The Tadtarin, I mean. I have not seen it since I was a little girl. And tonight is the last night.”

“You must be crazy! Only low people go there. And I thought you had a headache?” He was still sulking.

“But I want to go! My head aches worse in the house. For a favor, Paeng.”

“I told you: No! go and take those clothes off. But, woman, whatever has got into you!” he strode off to the table, opened the box of cigars, took one, banged the lid shut, bit off an end of the cigar, and glared about for a light.

She was still standing by the window and her chin was up.

“Very well, if you do not want to come, do not come—but I am going.”

“I warn you, Lupe; do not provoke me!”

“I will go with Amada. Entoy can take us. You cannot forbid me, Paeng. There is nothing wrong with it. I am not a child.”

But standing very straight in her white frock, her eyes shining in the dark and her chin thrust up, she looked so young, so fragile, that his heart was touched. He sighed, smiled ruefully, and shrugged his shoulders. “Yes, the heat has touched you in the head, Lupeng. And since you are so set on it—very well, let us go. Come, have the coach ordered!”

The cult of the Tadtarin is celebrated on three days: the feast of St. John and the two preceding days. On the first night, a young girl heads the procession; on the second, a mature woman; and on the third, a very old woman who dies and comes to life again. In these processions, as in those of Pakil and Obando, everyone dances.

Around the tiny plaza in front of the barrio chapel, quite a stream of carriages

was flowing leisurely. The Moretas were constantly being hailed from the other vehicles. The plaza itself and the sidewalks were filled with chattering, strolling, profusely sweating people. More people were crowded on the balconies and windows of the houses. The moon had not yet risen; the black night smoldered; in the windless sky the lightning's abruptly branching fire seemed the nerves of the tortured air made visible.

"Here they come now!" cried the people on the balconies.

And "Here come the women with their St. John!" cried the people on the sidewalks, surging forth on the street. The carriages halted and their occupants descended. The plaza rang with the shouts of people and the neighing of horses—and with another keener sound: a sound as of sea-waves steadily rolling nearer.

The crowd parted, and up the street came the prancing, screaming, writhing women, their eyes wild, black shawls flying around their shoulders, and their long hair streaming and covered with leaves and flowers. But the Tadtarin, a small old woman with white hair, walked with calm dignity in the midst of the female tumult, a wand in one hand, a bunch of seedling in the other. Behind her, a group of girls bore aloft a little black image of the Baptist—a crude, primitive, grotesque image, its big-eyed head too big for its puny naked torso, bobbing and swaying above the hysterical female horde and looking at once so comical and so pathetic that Don Paeng, watching with his wife on the sidewalk, was outraged. The image seemed to be crying for help, to be struggling to escape—a St. John indeed in the hands of the Herodias; a doomed captive these witches were subjecting first to their derision; a gross and brutal caricature of his sex.

Don Paeng flushed hotly: he felt that all those women had personally insulted him. He turned to his wife, to take her away—but she was watching greedily, taut and breathless, her head thrust forward and her eyes bulging, the teeth bared in the slack mouth, and the sweat gleaning on her face. Don Paeng was horrified. He grasped her arm—but just then a flash of lightning blazed and the screaming women fell silent: the Tadtarin was about to die.

The old woman closed her eyes and bowed her head and sank slowly to her knees. A pallet was brought and set on the ground and she was laid in it and her face

covered with a shroud. Her hands still clutched the wand and the seedlings. The women drew away, leaving her in a cleared space. They covered their heads with their black shawls and began wailing softly, unhumanly—a hushed, animal keening.

Overhead the sky was brightening, silver light defined the rooftops. When the moon rose and flooded with hot brilliance the moveless crowded square, the black-shawled women stopped wailing and a girl approached and unshrouded the Tadtarin, who opened her eyes and sat up, her face lifted to the moonlight. She rose to her feet and extended the wand and the seedlings and the women joined in a mighty shout. They pulled off and waved their shawls and whirled and began dancing again—laughing and dancing with such joyous exciting abandon that the people in the square and on the sidewalk, and even those on the balconies, were soon laughing and dancing, too. Girls broke away from their parents and wives from their husbands to join in the orgy.

“Come, let us go now,” said Don Paeng to his wife. She was shaking with fascination; tears trembled on her lashes; but she nodded meekly and allowed herself to be led away. But suddenly she pulled free from his grasp, darted off, and ran into the crowd of dancing women.

She flung her hands to her hair and whirled and her hair came undone. Then, planting her arms akimbo, she began to trip a nimble measure, an indistinctive folk-movement. She tossed her head back and her arched throat bloomed whitely. Her eyes brimmed with moonlight, and her mouth with laughter.

Don Paeng ran after her, shouting her name, but she laughed and shook her head and darted deeper into the dense maze of procession, which was moving again, towards the chapel. He followed her, shouting; she eluded him, laughing—and through the thick of the female horde they lost and found and lost each other again—she, dancing and he pursuing—till, carried along by the tide, they were both swallowed up into the hot, packed, turbulent darkness of the chapel. Inside poured the entire procession, and Don Paeng, finding himself trapped tight among milling female bodies, struggled with sudden panic to fight his way out. Angry voices rose all about him in the stifling darkness.

"*Hoy* you are crushing my feet!"

"And let go of my shawl, my shawl!"

"Stop pushing, shameless one, or I kick you!"

"Let me pass, let me pass, you harlots!" cried Don Paeng.

"*Abah*, it is a man!"

"How dare he come in here?"

"Break his head!"

"Throw the animal out!"

"Throw him out! Throw him out!" shrieked the voices, and Don Paeng found himself surrounded by a swarm of gleaming eyes.

Terror possessed him and he struck out savagely with both fists, with all his strength—but they closed in as savagely: solid walls of flesh that crushed upon him and pinned his arms helpless, while unseen hands struck and struck his face, and ravaged his hair and clothes, and clawed at his flesh, as—kicked and buffeted, his eyes blind and his torn mouth salty with blood—he was pushed down, down to his knees, and half-shoved, half-dragged to the doorway and rolled out to the street. He picked himself up at once and walked away with a dignity that forbade the crowd gathered outside to laugh or to pity. Entoy came running to meet him.

"But what has happened to you, Don Paeng?"

"Nothing. Where is the coach?"

"Just over there, sir. But you are wounded in the face!"

"No, these are only scratches. Go and get the señora. We are going home."

When she entered the coach and saw his bruised face and torn clothing, she smiled coolly.

"What a sight you are, man! What have you done with yourself?"

And when he did not answer: "Why, have they pulled out his tongue too?" she wondered aloud.

And when they are home and stood facing each other in the bedroom, she was still as light-hearted.

“What are you going to do, Rafael?”

“I am going to give you a whipping.”

“But why?”

“Because you have behaved tonight like a lewd woman.”

“How I behaved tonight is what I am. If you call that lewd, then I was always a lewd woman and a whipping will not change me—though you whipped me till I died.”

“I want this madness to die in you.”

“No, you want me to pay for your bruises.”

He flushed darkly. “How can you say that, Lupe?”

“Because it is true. You have been whipped by the women and now you think to avenge yourself by whipping me.”

His shoulders sagged and his face dulled. “If you can think that of me –”

“You could think me a lewd woman!”

“Oh, how do I know what to think of you? I was sure I knew you as I knew myself. But now you are as distant and strange to me as a female Turk in Africa.”

“Yet you would dare whip me –”

“Because I love you, because I respect you.”

“And because if you ceased to respect me you would cease to respect yourself?”

“Ah, I did not say that!”

“Then why not say it? It is true. And you want to say it, you want to say it!”

But he struggled against her power. “Why should I want to?” he demanded peevishly.

“Because, either you must say it—or you must whip me,” she taunted.

Her eyes were upon him and the shameful fear that had unmanned him in the dark chapel possessed him again. His legs had turned to water; it was a monstrous agony to remain standing.

But she was waiting for him to speak, forcing him to speak.

“No, I cannot whip you!” he confessed miserably.

“Then say it! Say it!” she cried, pounding her clenched fists together. “Why suffer and suffer? And in the end you would only submit.”

But he still struggled stubbornly. “Is it not enough that you have me helpless? Is it not enough that I feel what you want me feel?”

But she shook her head furiously. “Until you have said to me, there can be no peace between us.”

He was exhausted at last; he sank heavily to his knees, breathing hard and streaming with sweat, his fine body curiously diminished now in its ravaged apparel.

“I adore you, Lupe,” he said tonelessly.

She strained forward avidly, “What? What did you say?” she screamed.

And he, in his dead voice: “That I adore you. That I adore you. That I worship you. That the air you breathe and the ground you tread is so holy to me. That I am your dog, your slave...”

But it was still not enough. Her fists were still clenched, and she cried: “*Then come, crawl on the floor, and kiss my feet!*”

Without moment’s hesitation, he sprawled down flat and, working his arms and legs, gaspingly clawed his way across the floor, like a great agonized lizard, the woman steadily backing away as he approached, her eyes watching him avidly, her nostrils dilating, till behind her loomed the open window, the huge glittering moon, the rapid flashes of lightning. She stopped, panting, and leaned against the sill.

He lay exhausted at her feet, his face flat on the floor.

She raised her skirts and contemptuously thrust out a naked foot. He lifted his dripping face and touched his bruised lips to her toes; lifted his hands and grasped the white foot and kiss it savagely - kissed the step, the sole, the frail ankle - while she bit her lips and clutched in pain at the whole windowsill her body and her loose hair streaming out the window - streaming fluid and black in the white night where the huge

moon glowed like a sun and the dry air flamed into lightning and the pure heat burned with the immense intense fever of noon.

TATA SELO

by Rogelio Sikat

Maliit lamang sa simula ang kulumpon ng taong nasa bakuran ng munisipyo, ngunit nang tumaas ang araw, at kumalat na ang balitang tinaga at napatay si Kabesang Tano, ay napuno na ang bakuran ng bahay-pamahalaan.

Naggigitgitan ang tao, nagsisiksikan, nagtutulakan—bawat isa’y naghahangad makalapit sa istaked.* “Totoo ba, Tata Selo?”

“Binabawi niya ang aking saka kaya tinaga ko siya.”

Nasa loob ng istaked si Tata Selo. Mahigpit na nakahawak sa rehas. Maputi ang kanyang buhok at may nakaalsang putok sa noo. Nakasungaw ang luha sa malabo at tila laging nang may inaaninaw na mata. Kupas ang damit niyang suot, may mga tagpi na ang siko at paypay. Ang kutod** niyang yari sa matibay na supot ng asin ay may bahid ng natuyong putik. Nasa harap niya at kausap ang isang magbubukid, ang kanyang kahangga, na isa sa nakalusot sa mga pulis na sumasawata sa nagkakaguluhang tao.

“Hindi ko ho mapaniwalaan, Tata Selo,” umiiling na wika ng kanyang kahangga, “talagang hindi ko mapaniwalaan.”

Hinaplos-haplos ni Tata Selo ang ga-dali at natuyuan na ng dugong putok sa noo. Sa kanyang harapan, di kalayuan sa istaked, ipinagtutulakan ng mga pulis ang mga taong ibig makakita sa kanya. Mainit ang sikat ng araw na tumatama sa mga ito, walang umiihip na hangin at sa kanilang ulunan ay nakalutang ang nasasalisod na alikabok.

*Istaked. Galing sa Ingles na stockade, salitang dinala rito ng mga Amerikano. Pagkaraan ng giyera naganap ang kuwento.

**Kutod. Hanggang tuhod na salawal.

“Bakit niya babawiin ang aking saka?” tanong ni Tata Selo. “Dinaya ko na ba siya sa partihan? Tinuso ko na ba siya? Siya ang may-ari ng lupa at kasama* lang niya ako. Hindi ba’t kaya maraming nagagalit sa akin ay dahil sa ayaw kong magpamigay ng kahit isang pinangko** kung anihan?”

“Hindi mo na sana tinaga ang kabesa,” anang binatang anak ng pinakamayamang propitaryo sa San Roque, na tila isang magilas na pinunong-bayang malayang nakalalakad sa pagitan ng maraming tao at ng istaked. Mataas ito, maputi, nakasalaming may kulay at nakapamaywang habang naninigarilyo.

“Binabawi po niya ang aking saka,” sumbong ni Tata Selo. “Saan pa po ako pupunta kung wala na akong saka?”

Kumumpas ang binatang mayaman. “Hindi katwiran iyan para tagain mo ang kabesa. Ari niya ang lupang sinasaka mo. Kung gusto ka niyang paalisin, mapaaalis ka niya ano mang oras.”

Halos lumabas ang mukha ni Tata Selo sa rehas.

“Ako po’y hindi niyo nauunawaan,” nakatingala at nagpipilit ngumiting wika niya sa binatang nagtapon ng sigarilyo at mariing tinapakan pagkatapos. “Alam po ba ninyong dating amin ang lupang iyon? Naisangla lamang po nang magkasakit ang aking asawa, naembargo lamang po ng kabesa. Pangarap ko pong bawiin ang lupang iyon, kaya nga po ako hindi nagbibigay ng kahit isang pinangko kung anihan. Kung hindi ko na naman po mababawi, masaka ko man lamang po. Nakikiusap po ako sa kabesa kangina. ‘Kung maaari lang po sana, ‘Besa,’ wika ko po, ‘kung maaari po sana, huwag naman ninyo akong paalisin. Kaya ko pong magsaka, ‘Besa, Totoo pong ako’y matanda na, ngunit ako po nama’y malakas pa.’ Ngunit...Ay! Tinungkod po niya ako nang tinungkod. Tingnan po n’yong putok sa aking noo, tingnan po n’yo.”

Dumukot ng sigarilyo ang binata. Nagsindi ito at pagkaraa’y tinalikuran si Tata Selo at lumapit sa isang pulis.

“Pa’no po ba’ng nangyari, Tata Selo?”

*Kasama. Tenant; magsasakang walang lupa at pinapartihan lamang ng may-ari sa ani.

**Pinangko. Isang bigkis na ginapas na palay.

Sa pagkakahawak sa rehas, napabaling si Tata Selo. Nakita niya ang isang batang magbubukid na nakalapit sa istaked. Nangiti si Tata Selo. Narito ang isang magbubukid, o anak ng magbubukid na maniniwala sa kanya. Nakataas ang malapad na sumbrerong buli ng bata. Nangungulintab ito, ang mga bisig at binti ay may halas.* May sukbit itong lilik.

“Pinuntahan niya ako sa aking saka, amang,” paliwanag si Tata Selo. “Doon ba sa may sangka.** Pinaalis ako sa aking saka, ang wika’y iba na raw ang magsasaka. Nang makiusap ako’y tinungkod ako. Ay! Tinungkod ako, amang. Nakikiusap ako, pagkat kung mawawalan ako ng saka, saan pa ako pupunta?”

“Wala na nga kayong mapupuntahan, Tata Selo.”

Gumapang ang luha sa pisngi ni Tata Selo. Tahimik na nakatingin sa kanya ang bata.

“Patay po ba?”

Namuti ang mga kamao ni Tata Selo sa pagkakahawak sa rehas. Napadukmo siya sa balikat.

“Pa’no po niyan si Saling?” muling tanong ng bata. Tinutukoy nito ang maglalabimpitong taong anak ni Tata Selo na ulila na sa ina. Katulong ito kina Kabesang Tano at kamakalawa lamang umuwi kay Tata Selo. Ginagawang reyna sa fiesta ng mga magbubukid si Saling nang nakaraang taon, hindi lamang pumayag si Tata Selo. “Pa’no po niyan si Saling?”

Lalong humigpit ang pagkakahawak ni Tata Selo sa rehas.

Hindi pa nakakausap ng alkalde si Tata Selo. Mag-aalas onse na nang dumating ito, kasama ang hepe ng mga pulis. Galing sila sa bahay ng kabesa. Abot-abot ang busina ng jeep na sinasakyan ng dalawa upang mahawi ang hanggang noo’y di pa nag-aalisang tao.

Tumigil ang jeep sa di kalayuan sa istaked.

“Patay po ba? Saan po ang taga?”

Naggitgitan at nagsiksikan ang pinagpapawisang tao. Itinaas ng may katabaang alkalde ang dalawang kamay upang payapain ang pagkakaingay. Nanulak ang malaking lalaking hepe.

*Halas. Maliit at mababaw na hiwa ng dahon ng palay o ng ibang damong matalim.

**Sangka. Kanal

“Saan po tinamaan?”

“Sa bibig.” Ipinasok ng alkalde ang kanang hintuturo sa sulok ng bibig, hinugot iyon at mariing inihagod hanggang sa kanang punong tainga. “Lagas ang ngipin.”

“Lintik na matanda!”

Nagkagulo ang tao. Nagsigawan, nagsisikan, naggitgitan, nagtulakan. Nanghataw na ng batuta ang mga pulis. Ipinasiya ng alkalde na ipalabas ng istaked si Tata Selo at dalhin sa kanyang tanggapan. Dalawang pulis ang kumuha kay Tata Selo sa istaked.

“Pinaupo ng alkalde ang namumutlang si Tata Selo. Umupo si Tata Selo sa silyang nasa harap ng mesa. Nanginginig ang kamay niya nang ipatong niya iyon sa salamin ng mesa.

“Pa’no nga ba’ng nangyari?” kunot-noo at galit na tanong ng alkalde.

Matagal bago nakasagot si Tata Selo.

“Binabawi po niya ang aking saka, President,” wika ni Tata Selo. “Ayaw ko pong umalis doon. Dati pong amin ang lupang iyon, amin po, naisangla lamang po at naembargo—“

“Alam ko na iyan,” kumukumpas at umiiling na putol ng nabubugnot na alkalde.

Lumunok si Tata Selo. Nang muli siyang tumingin sa alkalde, may nakasungaw na luha sa kanyang malabo at tila lagi nang may inaaninaw na mata.

“Ako po naman ay malakas pa,” wika ni Tata Selo. “Kaya ko pa pong magsaka. Makatwiran po bang paalisin ako? Malakas pa po naman ako, President, malakas pa po.”

“Saan mo tinaga ang kabesa?”

Matagal bago nakasagot si Tata Selo.

“Nasa may sangka po ako nang dumating ang kabesa. Nagtatapal po ako ng butas sa pilapil. Alam ko pong pinanonood ako ng kabesa, kay po naman pinagbubuti ko ang paggawa, para makita niyang ako po’y talagang malakas pa, na kaya ko pa

pong magsaka. Wala anu-ano po, tinawag niya ako at nang ako po'y lumapit, sinabi niya, makaaalis na ako sa aking saka pagkat iba na ang magsasaka.

“Bakit po naman, ‘Besa?’ tanong ko po. Ang wika’y umalis na lang daw po ako. ‘Bakit po naman, ‘Besa?’ tanong ko po uli, ‘malakas pa po naman ako, a.” Nilapitan po niya ako. Nakiusap pa po ako sa kanya, ngunit ako po’y.....Ay! tinungkod po niya ako nang tinungkod.”

“Tinaga mo na no’n,” anang nakamatyag na hepe.

Tahimik sa tanggapan ng alkalde. Lahat ng tingin—may mga empleadong nakapasok—ay nakatuon kay Tata Selo. Nakayuko si Tata Selo at gagalaw-galaw ang tila mamad na daliri sa ibabaw ng maruming kutod. Sa pagkakatapak sa makintab na sahig, hindi mapalagay ang kanyang maputik, maalikabok at luyang paa.*

“Ang anak mo, na kina Kabesa raw?” usisa ng alkalde.

Hindi sumagot si Tata Selo.

“Tinatanong ka,” anang hepe.

Lumunok si Tata Selo.

“Umuwi po si Saling, President.”

“Kailan?”

“Kamakalawa po ng umaga.”

“Di ba’t kinakatulong siya ro’n?”

“Tatlong buwan na po.”

“Bakit siya umuwi?”

Dahan-dahang umangat ang maputing ulo ni Tata Selo. Naiiyak na napayuko siya.

“May sakit po siya.”

Nang sumapit ang alas-dose-inihudyat iyon ng sunod-sunod na tugtog ng kampana sa simbahan na katapat lamang ng munisipyo—ay umalis ang alkalde upang mananghalian. Naiwan si Tata Selo. Kasama ang hepe at dalawang pulis.

*Luyang paa. Malapad na paa, ang daliri’y tila luya dahil hindi nagsasapatos.

“Napatay mo pala ang Kabesa,” anang malaking lalaking hepe. Tumayo ito sa harap ni Tata Selo na nakayuko at di tumitinag sa upuan.

“Binabawi po niya ang aking saka,” katwiran ni Tata Selo.

Sinapok ng hepe si Tata Selo. Sa lapag, halos mangudong si Tata Selo.

“Tinungkod po niya ako ng tinungkod,” nakatingala, umiiyak at kumikinig ang labing katwiran ni Tata Selo.

Itinayo ng hepe si Tata Selo. Kinadyot ng hepe si Tata Selo sa sikmura. Sa sahig, napaluhod si Tata Selo, nakakapit sa unipormeng khaki ng hepe.

“Tinungkod po niya ako nang tinungkod...Ay! Tinungkod po niya ako nang tinungkod.”

Sa may pinto ng tanggapan, nakatingin ang dalawang pulis.

“Si Kabesa kasi ang nagrekomenda kay Tsip, e,” sinasabi ng isa nang si Tata Selo ay tila damit na nalaglag sa pagkakasabit nang muling pagmalupitan ng hepe.

Mapula ang araw na sumikat kinabukasan. Sa bakuran ng munisipyo, naiwan ang kalat nang nagdaang araw. Hindi pa namamatay ang alikabok, gayong sa pagdating ng buwang iyo’y dapat nang umuulan. Kung may umiihip na hangin, may mumunting ipu-pong nagkakalat ng maliliit na papel sa itaas.

“Dadalhin ka siguro sa kabisera, Selo,” anang bagong paligo at bagong bihis na alkalde sa matandang nasa loob ng istaked. “Doon ka siguro ikukulong.”

Wala ni papag sa loob ng istaked at sa maruming sementadong lapag nakasalampak si Tata Selo. Sa paligid niya’y may natutuyong tamak-tamak na tubig. Nakaunat ang kanyang maiitim at hinahalas na paa at nakatukod ang kanyang tila walang butong mga kamay. Nakakiling, nakasandal siya sa steel matting na siyang panlikurang dinding ng istaked. Malapit sa kanyang kamay, hindi nagagalaw ang sartin ng maitim na kape at isang losang kanin. Nilalangaw iyon.

“Habang-buhay siguro ang ibibigay sa iyo,” patuloy ang alkalde. Nagsindi ito ng tabako at lumapit sa istaked. Makintab ang sapatos ng alkalde.

“Patayin na rin ninyo ako, Presidente.” Paos at bahagya nang marinig si Tata Selo. “Napatay ko po ang kabesa. Patayin na rin ninyo ako.”

Takot humipo sa maalikabok na rehas ang alkalde. Hindi niya nahipo ang rehas ngunit pinagkiskis niya ang mga palad saka tiningnan kung may alikabok iyon. Nang tingnan niya si Tata Selo, nakita niyang lalo nang nakiling ito.

May mga tao na namang dumarating sa munisipyo. Kakaunti sila kaysa kahapon. Nakapasok sila sa bakuran ng munisipyo, ngunit may kasunod na pulis. Kakaunti ang magbubukid sa bagong langkay na dumating at titingin kay Tata Selo. Karamihan ay mga taga-poblacion. Hanggang noon, bawat isa'y nagtataka, hindi makapaniwala. Nagtataka at hindi makapaniwalang nakatingin sila kay Tata selo, na tila isang di pangkaraniwang hayop na itinatanghal.

Ang araw, katulad kahapon, ay mainit na naman. Nang magdadakong alas dos, dumating ang anak ni Tata Selo. Pagkakita sa lugmok na ama, mahigpit itong napahawak sa rehas at malakas na humagulgol.

Nalaman ng alkalde na dumating si Saling at ito'y ipinatawag sa kanyang tanggapan. Di nagtagal at si Tata Selo naman ang ipinakaon. Dalawang pulis ang umaalalay kay Tata Selo. Nabubuwal sa paglakad si Tata Selo. Halos bitbitin siya ng pulis.

Pagdating sa bungad ng tanggapan ay tila saglit na nagkaroon ng lakas si Tata Selo. Nakita niya ang babaeng nakaupo sa harap ng mesa ng president.

Nagyakap ang mag-ama pagkakita.

“Hindi ka na sana naparito, Saling.” Wika ni Tata Selo na napaluhod. “May sakit ka, Saling, may sakit ka!”

Tila tulala ang anak ni Tata Selo habang kalong ang ama. Nakalugay ang gusot niyang buhok, ang damit na suot ay tila iyong suot pa nang nagdaang dalawang araw. Matigas ang kanyang mukha. Pinaglilipat-lipat niya ang tingin sa nakaupong alkalde at sa mga pulis.

“Umuwi ka na, Saling,” hiling ni Tata Selo. “Bayaan mo na...bayaan mo na. Umuwi ka na, anak. Huwag, huwag ka nang magsasabi.”

Tuluyan nang nalungayngay si Tata Selo. Ipinabalik siya ng alkalde sa istaked. Pagkabalik sa istaked, pinanood na naman siya ng mga tao.

“Kinabog* kagabi,” wika ng isang nagbubukid. “Binalutan ng basang sako sa tiyan, hindi nga halata.”

“Ang anak, dumating daw?”

“Naki-mayor.”

*Kinabog. Ginulpi, pinarusahan.

Sa isang sulok ng istaked iniupo ng dalawang pulis si Tata Selo. Napasubsob si Tata Selo pagkaraang siya’y maiupo. Ngunit nang marinig niyang muling ipinapakaw ang pintong bakal ng istaked, humihilahod na ginapang niya ang rehas, mahigpit na humawak doon at habang nakadapa’y ilang sandal ring iyo’y tila huhutukin. Tinawag niya ang mga pulis ngunit paos siya at malayo na ang mga pulis. Nakalabas ang kanang kamay sa rehas, bumagsak ang kanyang mukha sa sementadong lapag. Matagal siyang nakadapa bago niya narinig na may tila gumigising sa kanya.

“Tata Selo. Tata Selo.”

Umangat ang mukha ni Tata Selo. Inaninaw ng may luha niyang mata ang tumatawag sa kanya.

Iyon ang batang dumalaw sa kanya kahapon.

Hinawakan ng bata ang kamay ni Tata Selo na umaabot sa kanya.

“Nando’n amang, si Saling sa Presidente. Wika ni Tata Selo. “Yayain mo nang umuwi, umuwi na kayo. Puntahan mo siya, amang. Umuwi na kayo.” Muling bumagsak ang kanyang mukha sa lapag. Ang bata’y saglit na nagbantulot, pagkaraa’y takot na sumunod.

Mag-aalas kuwatro na ng hapon. Padahilig na ang sikat ng araw, ngunit mainit pa rin iyon. May kapisaso nang lilim sa istaked, sa may dinding na steel matting ngunit si Tata Selo’y wala roon. Nasa init siya, nakakapit sa rehas sa harap ng istaked. Nakatingin siya sa labas, sa kanyang malalabo at tila lagi nang may inaaninaw na mata’y tumatama ang mapulang sikat ng araw. Sa labas ng istaked, nakasandig sa rehas ang batang inutusan niya kanina. Sinasabi ng bata na ayaw siyang papasukin sa tanggapan ng alkalde ngunit hindi siya pinakikinggan ni Tata Selo, na ngayo’y hindi na pagbawi ng saka ang sinasabi.

Habang nakakapit sa rehas at nakatingin sa labas, sinasabi niyang lahat ay kinuha na sa kanila, lahat, ay! ang lahat ay kinuha na sa kanila.

THE GOD STEALER

by F. Sionil Jose

Written fifty years ago, The God Stealer is the author's most anthologized short story. The story is a commentary on the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.

The Ifugao rice terraces in Mountain Province, built by primitive natives through the centuries, are considered by many Filipinos as the Eighth Wonder of the world.

-Philippine tourist folder

They were the best of friends and that was possible because they worked in the same office and both were young and imbued with a freshness in outlook. Sam Christie was twenty-eight and his Filipino assistant, Philip Latak, was twenty-six and was—just as Sam was in the Agency for International Development before he assumed his post—intelligent and industrious.

"That is to be expected," the official whom Sam replaced explained, "because Philip is Ifugao and you don't know patience until you have seen the rice terraces his ancestors built."

"You will find," Sam Christie was also told, "that the Igorots, like the Ilocanos, no matter how urbanized they already are, entertain a sense of inferiority. Not Philip. He is proud of his being Ifugao. He talks about it the first chance he gets."

Now, on this December dawn, Sam Christie was on his way to Ifugao with his native assistant. It was his last month in the Philippines and in a matter of days he would return to Boston for that leave which he had not had in years.

The bus station was actually a narrow sidestreet which sloped down to a deserted plaza, one of the many in the summer capital.

Sam could make out the shapes of the stone buildings huddled, it seemed, in the cold, their narrow windows shuttered and the frames advertising Coca-Cola above their doorways indistinct in the dark.

Philip Latak seemed listless. They had been in the station for over half an hour and still there was no bus. He zipped his old suede jacket up to his neck. It had been four years that he had lived in Manila and during all these years he had never gone home. Now the cold of the pine-clad mountains seemed to bother him. He turned to Sam and, with a hint of urgency—"One favor, Sam. Let me take a swig."

Sam Christie said, "Sure, you are welcome to it. Just make sure we have some left when we get to Ifugao." He stooped, brought out a bottle of White Label—one of four—from the bag which also contained bars of candy and cartons of cigarettes and matches for the natives. He removed the tinfoil and handed the bottle to his companion.

Phil raised it to his lips and made happy gurgling sounds. "Rice wine—I hope there's still a jar around when we get to my grandfather's. He couldn't be as seriously sick as my brother wrote. As long as he has wine he will live. Hell, it's not as potent as this, but it can knock out a man, too."

Sam Christie kidded his companion about the weather. They had arrived in the summer capital the previous day and the bracing air and the scent of pine had invigorated him. "It's like New England in the spring," he said. "In winter, when it really gets cold, I can still go around quite naked by your standards. I sent home a clipping this week, something in the Manila papers about it being chilly. And it was only 68! My old man will get a kick out of that"

"But it's really cold!" Philip Latak said ruefully. He handed the bottle back to Sam Christie, who took a swig, too. "You don't know how good it is to have that along. Do you know how much it costs nowadays? Twenty-four bucks."

"It's cheaper at the commissary," Sam Christie said simply. He threw his chest out, flexed his lean arms and inhaled. He wore a white, dacron shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

"I'm glad you didn't fall for those carvings in Manila," Phil said after a while.

"A Grecian urn, a Japanese sword, a Siamese mask—and now, an Ifugao god. The Siamese mask," Sam spoke in a monotone, "it was really a bargain. A student was going to Boston. He needed the dollars, so I told him he could get the money from my father. Forty dollars—and the mask was worth more than that."

Now, the gray buildings around them emerged from the dark with white, definite shapes. The east was starting to glow and more people had arrived with crates and battered rattan suitcases. In the chill most of them were quiet. A coffee shop opened along the street with a great deal of clatter and in its warm, golden light Sam Christie could see the heavy, peasant faces, their happy anticipation as the steaming cups were pushed before them.

The bus finally came and Sam Christie, because he was a foreigner, was given the seat of honor, next to the driver. It was an old bus, with woven rattan seats and side entrances that admitted not only people, but cargo, fowl, and pigs. They did not wait long, for the bus filled up quickly with government clerks going to their posts and hefty Igorots, in their bare feet or with canvas shoes, who sat in the rear, talking and smelling of earth and strong tobacco.

After the bus had started, for the first time during their stay in Baguio, Sam Christie felt sleepy. He dozed, his head knocking intermittently against the hard edge of his seat and in that limbo between wakefulness and sleep he hurtled briefly to his home in Boston, to that basement study his father had tidied up, in it the mementoes of his years with the Agency. Sam had not actually intended to serve in the Agency, but had always wanted to travel and, after college, a career with the Agency offered him the best chance of seeing the world.

Soon it was light. The bus hugged the thin line of a road that was carved on the mountainside. Pine trees studded both sides of the road and beyond their green, across the ravines and the gray rocks, was the shimmery sky and endless ranges also draped with this mist that swirled, pervasive and alive, to their very faces. And Sam Christie, in the midst of all this whiteness and life, was quiet.

Someone in the bus recognized Philip and he called out in the native tongue, "Ip-pig!" The name did not jell at once and the man shouted again. Philip turned to the man and acknowledged the greeting and to Sam he explained: "That's my name up here—and that's why I was baptized Philip."

Sam Christie realized there were many things he did not know about Phil. "Tell me more about your grandfather," he said.

"There isn't much worth knowing about him," Philip said.

"How old is he?"

"Eighty or more."

"He must be a character," Sam Christie said.

"And the village doctor," Philip said. "Mumbo-jumbo stuff, you know. I was taken ill when I was young—something I ate, perhaps. I had to go to the Mission hospital—and that evening he came and right there in the ward he danced to drive away the evil spirit that had gotten hold of me."

"And the doctor?"

"He was broadminded," Philip said, still laughing. "They withstood it, the gongs and the stomping."

"It must have been quite a night."

"Hell, I was never so embarrassed in my life," Philip Latak said, shaking his head. "Much later, thinking of it," his voice became soft and a smile lingered in his thick-lidded eyes, "I realized that the old man never did that thing again for anyone, not even when his own son—my father—lay dying."

Now they were in the heart of the highlands. The pine trees were bigger, loftier than those in Baguio, and most were wreathed with hoary moss. Sunflowers burst on the slopes, bright yellow against the grass. The sun rode over the mountains and the rocks shone—and over everything the mist, as fine as powder, danced.

The bus swung around the curves and it paused, twice or thrice, to allow them to take coffee. It was past noon when they reached the feral fringes of the Ifugao country. The trip had not been exhausting, for there was much to see.

Sam Christie, gazing down at the ravines, at the geometric patterns of the sweet-potato patches there and the crystal waters that cascaded down the mountainsides and the streams below, remembered the Alpine roads of Europe and his own New England—and about these he talked effusively. "See how vegetation changes. The people, too. The mountains," Sam Christie said, "breed independence. Mountain people are always self-reliant."

Then, at the turn of a hill, they came, without warning, upon the water-filled rice terraces stretched out in the sun and laid out tier upon shining tier to the very summit of the mountains. And in the face of that achievement Sam Christie did not speak.

After a while he nudged Philip. "Yeah, the terraces are colossal." And he wished he had expressed his admiration better, for he had sounded so empty and trite.

The first view of the terraces left in Sam's mind a kind of stupefaction which, when it had cleared, was replaced by a sense of wastefulness. He mused on whether or not these terraces were necessary, since he knew that beyond these hand-carved genealogical monuments were plains that could be had for the asking. "And you say that these terraces do not produce enough food for the people?"

Philip Latak turned quizzically to him. "Hell, if I can live here, would I go to Manila?"

Their destination was no more than a cluster of houses beyond the gleaming tiers. A creek ran through the town, white with froth among the rocks, and across the creek, beyond the town, was a hill, on top of which stood the Mission—four red-roofed buildings, the chapel, the school, the hospital and the residence.

"That's where I first learned about Jesus Christ and scotch;" Philip Latak said. "They marked me for success." Another peal of laughter.

The bus shuddered into first gear as it dipped down the gravel road and in a while they were in the town, along its main street lined with wooden frame

houses. It conformed with the usual small-town arrangement and was properly palisaded with stores, whose fronts were plastered with impieties of softdrink and patent-medicine signs. And in the stores were crowds of people, heavy-jowled Ifugaos in G-string and tattered Western coats that must have reached them in relief packages from the United States. The women wore the gay native blouses and skirts.

The two travelers got down the bus and walked to one of the bigger houses, a shapeless wooden building with a rusting tin roof and cheap, printed curtains. It was a boarding house and a small curio store was in the ground floor, together with the usual merchandise of country shops: canned sardines and squid, milk, soap, matches, kerosene, a few bolts of cotton and twine.

The landlady, an acquaintance of Philip Latak, assigned them a bare room, which overlooked the creek and the mountain terraced to the very summit.

"We could stay in my brother's place," Philip Latak reiterated apologetically as they brought their things up, "but there is no plumbing there."

Past noon, after a plentiful lunch of fried highland rice and venison, they headed for the footpath that broke from the street and disappeared behind a turn of hillside. The walk to Philip Latak's village itself was not far from the town and wherever they turned the terraces were sheets of mirror that dogged them.

The village was no more than ten houses in a valley, which were different from the other Ifugao homes. They stood on stilts and all their four posts were crowned with circular rat guards. A lone house roofed with tin stood at one end of the village. "My brother's," Philip said.

"Shall I bring the candies out now?" Sam asked. He had, at Phil's suggestion, brought them along, together with matches and cheap cigarettes, for his "private assistance program"

Sadek, Philip's brother, was home. "You have decided to visit us after all," he greeted Philip in English and with a tinge of sarcasm. He was older and he spoke with authority. "I thought the city had won you so completely that you have forgotten this humble place and its humble people."

Then, turning to Sam, Sadek said, "I must apologize, sir, for my brother, for his bringing you to this poor house. His deed embarrasses us ..."

"We work in the same office," Sam said simply, feeling uneasy at hearing the speech.

"I know, sir," Sadek said.

Philip Latak held his brother by the shoulder. "You see, Sam," he said, "my brother dislikes me. Like my grandfather, he feels that I shouldn't have left this place, that I should rot here. Hell, everyone knows the terraces are good for the eye, but they can't produce enough for the stomach."

"That's not a nice thing to say," Sam said warily, not wanting to be drawn into a family quarrel.

"But it's true," Philip Latak said with a nervous laugh. "My brother dislikes me. All of them here dislike me. They think that by living in Manila for a few years I have forgotten what it is to be an Ifugao. I can't help it, Sam. I like it down there. Hell, they will never understand. My grandfather—do you know that on the day I left he followed me to town, to the bus, pleading with me and at the same time scolding me? He said I'd get all his terraces. But I like it down there, Sam," he threw his chest out and yawned.

Unmindful of his younger brother's ribbing Sadek dragged in some battered chairs from within the house and set them in the living room. He was a farmer and the weariness of working the terraces showed in his massive arms, in his sunburned and stolid face. His wife, who was Ifugao like him, with high cheekbones and firm dumpy legs, came out and served them warm Coca-Cola. Sam Christie accepted the drink, washed it down his throat politely, excruciatingly, for it was the first time that he took warm Coke and it curdled his tongue.

Sadek said, "Grandfather had a high fever and we all thought the end was near. I didn't want to bother you, but the old man said you should come. He is no longer angry with you for leaving, Ip-pig. He has forgiven you..."

"There's nothing to forgive, my brother," Philip Latak said, "but if he wants to he can show his forgiveness by opening his wine jar. Is he drinking still?"

"He has abandoned the jar for some time now," Sadek said, "but now that you are here he will drink again."

Then the children started stealing in, five of them with grime on their faces, their feet caked with mud, their bellies shiny and disproportionately rounded and big. They stood, wide-eyed, near the sagging wall. The tallest and the oldest, a boy of thirteen or twelve, Sadek pointed out as Philip's namesake.

Philip bent down and thrust a fistful of candy at his nephews and nieces. They did not move. They hedged closer to one another, their brows, their simple faces empty of recognition, of that simple spark that would tell him, Ip-pig, that he belonged here. He spoke in the native tongue, but that did not help. The children held their scrawny hands behind them and stepped back until their backs were pressed against the wall.

"Hell, you are all my relatives, aren't you?" he asked. Turning to Sam, "Give it to them. Maybe they like you better."

His open palm brimming with the tinsel-wrapped sweets, Sam strode to the oldest, to Philip's namesake, and tousled the youngster's black, matted hair. He knelt, pinched the cheeks of the dirty child next to the oldest and placed a candy in his small hand. In another moment it was all noise, the children scrambling over the young American and about the floor, where the candy had spilled.

Philip Latak watched them, and above the happy sounds, the squeals of children, Sadek said, "You see now that even your relatives do not know you, Ip-pig. You speak our tongue, you have our blood—but you are a stranger nevertheless.

"See what I mean, Sam?" Philip Latak said. He strode to the door. Beyond the betel-nut palms in the yard, up a sharp incline, was his grandfather's house. It stood on four stilts like all the rest and below its roof were the bleached skulls of goats, dogs, pigs and carabaos which the old man had butchered in

past feasts. He had the most number of skulls in the village to show his social position. Now new skulls would be added to this collection.

"Well, he will recognize me and I won't be a stranger to him. Come," Philip Latak turned to his friend, "let us see the old man."

They toiled up the hill, which was greasy although steps had been gouged out on it for easier climbing. Before going up the slender rungs of the old house Philip Latak called his grandfather twice. Sam Christie waited under the grass marquee that extended above the doorway. He could not see what transpired inside and there was no invitation for him to come up. However, Sam could hear Philip speaking in his native tongue and there was also a cracked, old voice, high-pitched with excitement and pleasure. And, listening to the pleasant sounds of homecoming he smiled and called to mind the homecomings he, too, had known and he thought of how the next vacation would be, his father and his mother at the Black Bay station, the luggage in the back seat, and on his lap this wooden idol he now sought. But after a while, the visions he conjured were dispelled. The effusion within the hut had subsided into some sort of spirited talking and Philip was saying, "Americano –Americano." Sam heard the old man raise his voice, this time in anger and not in pleasure. Then silence, a rustling within the house, the door stirring and Philip in easing himself down the ladder, on his face a numbed, crestfallen look. And, without another word, he hurried down the hill, the American behind him.

Philip Latak explained later on the way back to the town: "I had asked him where we could get a god and he said he didn't know. And when I told him it was for an American friend he got mad. He never liked strangers, Sam. He said they took everything away from him—tranquility, me. Hell, you can't do anything to an old man, Sam. We shouldn't have bothered with him at all. Now, tell me, have I spoiled your first day here?"

Sam objected vehemently.

"The old man wants a feast tomorrow night—my bienvenida. of course."

"You'll be a damned fool if you don't go," Sam said.

"I'm thinking about you. You shouldn't come," Philip said. "It will be a bore and a ghastly sight"

But Sam Christie's interest had been piqued and even when he realized that Philip Latak really did not want him to come he decided that this was one party he would not miss.

They visited the Mission the following day after having hiked to the villages. As Philip Latak had warned, their search was fruitless. They struggled up terraces and were met by howling dogs and bare bottomed children and old Ifugaos, who offered them sweet potatoes and rice wine. To all of them Sam Christie was impeccably polite and charitable with his matches and his candies. And after the initial amenity Philip would start talking and always sullen silence would answer him, and he would turn to Sam, a foolish, optimistic grin on his face.

Reverend Doone, who managed the Mission, invited them for lunch. He was quite pleased to have a fellow American as guest. He was a San Franciscan and one consolation of his assignment was its meager similarity to San Francisco.

"In the afternoons," he said with nostalgia, "when the mist drifts in and starts to wrap the terraces and the hills, I'm reminded of the ocean fog which steals over the white hills of San Francisco—and then I feel like I'm home."

They had finished lunch and were in the living room of the Mission, sipping coffee, while Philip Latak was in the kitchen, where he had gone to joke with old friends. Sam's knowledge of San Francisco was limited to a drizzly afternoon at the airport, an iron-cold rain and a nasty wind that crept under the top coat, clammy and gripping, and he kept quiet while Reverend Doone reminisced. The missionary was a short man with a bulbous nose and heavy brows and homesickness written all over his pallid face.

Then it was Sam's turn and he rambled about the places he had seen—Greece and the marble ruins glinting in the sun, the urn; Japan, the small green country, and the samurai sword. And now, an Ifugao god.

Reverend Doone reiterated what Philip had said. "You must understand their religion," he said, "and if you understand it, then you'll know why it's difficult to get this god. Then you'll know why the Ifugaos are so attached to it. It's a religion based on fear, retribution. Every calamity or every luck which happens to them is based on this belief. A good harvest means the gods are pleased. A bad one means they are angered."

"It's not different from Christianity then," Sam said. "Christianity is based on fear, too—fear of hell and the Final Judgment"

Reverend Doone drew back, laid his cup of coffee on the well-worn table and spoke sternly. "Christianity is based on love. That's the difference. You are in the Agency and you should know the significance of this distinction." Reverend Doone became thoughtful again. "Besides," he said, "Christianity is based on the belief that man has a soul and that this soul is eternal."

"What happens when a man loses his soul?" Sam asked.

"I wish I could answer that," Reverend Doone said humbly. "All I can say is that a man without a soul is nothing. A pig in the sty that lives only for food. Without a soul..."

"Does the Ifugao believe in a soul?"

Reverend Doone smiled gravely. "His gods—he believes in them."

"Can a man lose his soul?" Sam insisted.

"You have seen examples," Reverend Doone smiled wanly. "In the city—people corrupted by easy living, the pleasures of the senses and the flesh, the mass corruption that is seeping into government and everything. A generation of soulless men is growing up and dictating the future..."

"How can one who loses his soul regain it?" Sam came back with sudden life.

"It takes a cataclysm, something tragic to knock a man back to his wits, to make him realize his loss..."

"And the Ifugaos, they never lose their souls?"

"They are all human beings. But look at what is in this mountain-locked country. It is poor—let there be no doubt about it. They don't make enough to eat, but there is less greed and pettiness here. There are no land grabbers, no scandals."

Going down the hill, Sam decided to bare his mind to Philip who was below him, teetering on the slippery trail. He said with finality, "Phil, I must not leave Ifugao without that god. It's more than just a souvenir. It will remind me of you, of this place. The samurai sword—you should have seen the place where I got it and the people I had to deal with to get it. It's not just some souvenir, mind you. It belonged to a soldier who had fought in the South Pacific and had managed somehow to save the thing when he was made prisoner. But his daughter—it's a sad story—she had to go to college, she was majoring in English and she didn't have tuition money."

In the comfort of their little room back in the town, Sam brought out his liquor. "Well," he said as he poured a glass for Philip. "At least the hike did me good. All that walking and all those people—how nice they were, how they offered us wine and potatoes."

"You get a lot better in cocktail parties," Philip Latak said. "How many people in Manila would feel honored to attend the parties you go to?"

"They are a bore," Sam said. "And I have to be there—that's the difference. I have to be there to spread sweetness and light. Sometimes it makes me sick, but I have to be there."

Phil was silent. He emptied the glass and raised his muddy shoes to the woolen sheet on his cot. Toying with his empty glass, he asked the question Sam loathed most: "Why are you with the Agency, Sam?"

He did not hesitate. "Because I have to be somewhere, just as you have to be somewhere. It's that simple."

"I'm glad you are in the Agency, Sam. We need people like you."

Sam emptied his glass, too, and sank into his cot. Dusk had gathered outside. Fireflies ignited the grove of pine on the ledge below the house and farther, across the creek, above the brooding terraces, the stars shone.

After a while Philip Latak spoke again: "We will be luckier tomorrow, I know. You'll have your god, Sam. There's a way. I can steal one for you."

Sam stood up and waved his lean hands. "You can't do that." he said with great solemnity. "That is not fair. And what will happen to you or to the man whose god you will steal?"

"Lots—if you believe all that trash," Philip said lightly. "I'll be afflicted with pain, same with the owner. But he can always make another. It's not so difficult to carve a new one. I tried it when I was young, before I went to the Mission."

"You cannot steal a god, not even for me," Sam said.

Philip laughed. "Let's not be bullheaded about this. It's the least I can do for you. You made this vacation possible—and that raise. Do you know that I have been with the Agency for four years and I never got a raise until you came?"

"You had it coming. It's that simple."

"You'll have your god," Philip Latak said gravely.

They did not have supper at the boarding house because in a while Sadek arrived to fetch them. He wore an old straw hat, a faded flannel coat and old denim pants. He was barefoot. "The butchers are ready and the guests are waiting and Grandfather has opened his wine jar."

It was useless for Philip to argue with Sam who was all ready with his bag of candies and matches.

The hike to the village was not as difficult as it had been the previous day. Sam had become an expert in scaling the dikes, in balancing himself on the strips of slippery earth that formed the terrace embankment, in jumping across the conduits of spring water that continuously gushed from springs higher up in the mountain to the terraces. When they reached the village many people had

already gathered and on the crest of the hill, on which the old man's house stood, a huge fire bloomed and the flames cracked and threw quivering shadows upon the betel palms. In the orange light Sam could discern the unsmiling faces of men carrying walking spears, the women and the children, and beyond the scattered groups, near the slope, inside a bamboo corral, were about a dozen squealing pigs, dogs, and goats, all ready for the sacrificial knife.

Philip Latak acknowledged the greetings, then breaking away from the tenuous groups, he went to his grandfather's hut. Waiting outside, Sam heard the same words of endearment. A pause, then the wooden door opened and Philip peeped out. "It's okey, Sam. Come up."

And Sam, pleased with the prospect of being inside an Ifugao house for the first time, dashed up the ladder.

The old man really looked ancient and, in the light of the stove fire that lived and died at one end of the one-room house, Sam could see the careworn face, stoic and unsmiling. Sam took in everything: the hollow cheeks, the white, scraggly hair, the homed hands and the big-boned knees. The patriarch was half-naked, like the other Ifugaos, but his loin cloth had a belt with circular bone embellishments and around his neck dangled a necklace of bronze. To Sam the old man extended a bowl of rice wine and Sam took it and lifted it to his lips, savored the gentle tang and acridness of it.

He then sat down on the mud-splattered floor. Beyond the open door, in the blaze of the bonfire, the pigs were already being butchered and someone had started beating the gongs and their deep, sonorous whang rang sharp and clear above the grunts of the dying animals.

The light in the hut became alive again and showed the few artifacts within: an old, gray pillow, dirty with use, a few rusty-tipped spears, fish traps and a small wooden trunk. The whole house smelled of filth, of chicken droppings and dank earth, but Sam Christie ignored these smells and attended only to the old man, who had now risen, his bony frame shaking, and from a compartment in the

roof, brought out his black and ghastly-looking god, no taller than two feet, and set it before the fire in front of his grandson.

Someone called at the door and thrust to them a wooden bowl of blood. Philip Latak picked it up and gave it to the old man, who was kneeling. Slowly, piously, the old man poured the living, frothy blood on the idol's head and the blood washed down the ugly head to its arms and legs, to its very feet, and as he poured the blood, in his cracked voice, he recited a prayer.

Philip turned to his American friend and, with usual levity, said, "My grandfather is thanking his god that I'm here. He says he can die now because he has seen me again."

Outside, the rhythm of the gongs quickened and fierce chanting started, filled the air, the hut, crept under the skin and into the subconscious. The old man picked up the idol again and, standing, he returned it to its niche.

"Let's go down," Philip said. They made their way to the iron cauldrons, where rice was cooking, and to the butcher's table, where big chunks of pork and dog meat were being distributed to the guests. For some time, Sam Christie watched the dancers and the singers, but the steps and the tune did not have any variation and soon he was bored—completely so. The hiking that had preoccupied them during the day began to weigh on his spirits and he told Philip Latak, who was with the old man before the newly opened wine jar, that he would like to return to the boarding house. No, he did not need any guide. He knew the way, having gone through the route thrice. But Sadek would not let him go alone and, after more senseless palaver, Sam finally broke away from the party and headed for the town with Sadek behind him.

The night was cool, as all nights in the Ifugao country are, and that evening, as he lay on his cot, he mused. In his ears the din of gongs still rang, in his mind's eye loomed the shrunken, unsmiling face of the old Ifugao. He saw again the dancers, their brown, sweating bodies whirling before the fire, their guttural voices rising as one, and finally, the wooden god, dirty and black and drenched with blood. And, recalling all this in vivid sharpness, he thought he

smelled, too, that peculiar odor of blood and the dirt of many years that had gathered in the old man's house. Sam Christie went to sleep with the wind souging in the pines, the cicadas whirring in the grass.

He had no idea what time it was, but it must have been past midnight. The clatter woke him up and, without rising, he groped for the flashlight under his pillow. He lifted the mosquito net and beamed the light at the dark form which had paused at the door. It was Philip Latak, swaying and holding on to a black, bloody mass. Sam let the ray play on Phil's face, at the splotch on his breast—the sacrificial blood—and, finally, on the thing.

"I told you I'd get it," Philip Latak said with drunken triumph. "I told you I'd steal a god," and, staggering forward, he shoved his grandfather's idol at his friend.

Sam Christie, too surprised to speak, pushed the idol away and it fell with a thud on the floor.

"You shouldn't have done it!" was all he could say.

Philip Latak stumbled, the flashlight beam still on his shiny, porcine face. He fumbled with the stub of candle on the table and in a while the room was bright. "What a night," he crowed, heaving himself onto his cot "No, you don't have to worry. No one saw me. I did it when all were busy dancing or drinking. I danced a little, too, you know—with the old man. He is going to give me everything, his terraces, his spears, his wine jars. We danced and my legs—they are not rusty at all"

Philip Latak stood up and started prancing.

Sam bolted up and held him by the shoulder. "You'll be waking everyone up. Go to bed now and we will talk in the morning."

Philip Latak sank back into his cot. The air around him was heavy with the smell of sweat, rice wine and the earth. "He will be surprised," he repeated. "He will be surprised—and when he does he will perhaps get drunk and make a new one. Then there will be another feast to celebrate the new god and another god to steal..."

"You are lucky to have someone who loves you so much. And you did him wrong," Sam said sullenly. He sat on the edge of his cot and looked down at the dirty thing that lay at his feet.

"He did himself wrong," Philip said. "He was wrong in being so attached to me who no longer believes in these idols. Sadek—you have seen his house. It's different. And not because he has the money to build a different house. It's because he doesn't believe in the old things any more. He cannot say that aloud." Phil whacked his stomach. "Not while he lives with a hundred ignorant natives."

"It's a miserable thing to do," Sam said. "Take it back tomorrow."

"Take it back?" Phil turned to him with a mocking leer. "Now, that's good of you. Hell, after all my trouble..."

"Yes," Sam said. "Take it back." But there was no conviction in him, because in the back of his mind he was grateful that Philip Latak had brought him this dirty god, because it was real, because it had significance and meaning and was no cheap tourist bait, such as those that were displayed in the hotel lobbies in Manila.

"I won't," Philip said resolutely. "If I do, I'll look bad. That would be the death of my grandfather."

"I'll take it back if you won't," Sam said almost inaudibly.

"He will kill you."

"Don't frighten me."

"Hell, I'm just stating a fact," Phil said. "Do you think he would be happy to know that his god had been fondled by a stranger?"

"It's no time for jokes," Sam said, lying down. "That isn't funny at all." And in his mind's resolute eye there crowded again one irrefragible darkness and in it, like a light, was the old man's wrinkled face, dirtied with the mud of the terraces, the eyes narrow and gleaming with wisdom, with hate. He wished he knew more about him, for to know him would be to discover this miserly land and the hardiness (or was it foolhardiness?) which it nourished. And it was these

thoughts that were rankling in his mind when he heard Philip Latak snore, heard his slow, pleasant breathing and with his hand, Sam picked up the taper and quashed its flame.

At the time Sam Christie woke up it was already daylight and the sun lay pure and dazzling on the rough pine sidings of the room. It was Philip Latak who had stirred him, his voice shrill and grating. Sam blinked, then sat up and walked to the door, where Philip was talking with a boy.

"I'm sorry I woke you up," he said, turning momentarily to him. "My nephew," a pause. "It's grandfather." His voice was no longer drunken. "I have to leave you here."

"Anything the matter?"

Philip had already packed his things and the boy held them, the canvas bag and the old suede jacket. "My grandfather is dying, Sam. He collapsed—an attack."

When Sam found words again, all he could ask was, "Why... how..."

"Hell, that should be no riddle," Philip said. "The feast last night. The dancing and the drinking. It must have been too much for his heart. And at his age..."

"I'm sorry..."

"I'll be back as soon as I can, but don't wait, whatever your plans are."

After the two had gone, Sam returned to the room and picked up the idol. In the light he saw that the blood had dried and had lost its color. The idol was heavy, so Sam quickly deduced that it must be made of good hardwood. It was crudely shaped and its proportions were almost grotesque. The arms were too long and the legs mere stumps. The feet, on the other hand, were huge. It was not very different, Sam concluded lightly, from the creations of sculptors who called themselves modernists. And wrapping it up in an old newspaper, he pushed it under his cot near his mud-caked shoes.

The next day Sam Christie idled in the town and developed the acquaintance of the Chief of Police, a small man with a pinched, anonymous face

that gained character only when he smiled, for then he bared a set of buckteeth reddened from chewing betelnut. He was extremely hospitable and had volunteered to guide him to wherever he wanted to hike. They had tried the villages farther up the mountains. It was early afternoon when they returned and the mist, white as starch in the sun, had started to crawl again down into the town. The Chief of Police had been very helpful almost to the point of obsequiousness and Sam asked him to come up for a drink. After the Chief had savored every drop in his glass he declaimed, "Indeed I am honored to taste this most wonderful hospitality, which should be reserved only for important people..."

The party could have gone further, but it was at this moment that Sadek arrived.

Philip's brother did not waste words. "It's about my brother," he said. He looked down self-consciously at his shoes—they were a trifle big and Sam saw immediately that the pair was not Sadek's but Philip's. He saw, too, that the jacket which Sadek wore was Philip's old suede. And, as if Sam's unspoken scrutiny bothered him, Sadek took the jacket off and held it behind him.

"How is he?" Sam asked. He did not wait for an answer. "Come, let's have a drink." He held the Ifugao by the arm, but Sadek squirmed free from his grasp.

"I still have a half bottle of scotch," Sam said brightly.

"It's the best in the world," Sadek said humbly, but he did not move. "Nothing but the best for Americans."

Sam did not press. "When is Phil coming back?" he asked. "There was nothing we could do," Sadek said. He did not face the young American and a faraway gaze was in his eyes. "Our grandfather..."

"He is dead?"

Sadek nodded.

Sam took the news calmly. He did not find it, its finality, depressing and he was surprised even that the death of someone who was dear to a friend had not affected him at all. In the back of his mind he even found himself thinking that

perhaps it was best that the old man had died, so that his passing would seal, forever, as far as Philip Latak was concerned, the family's concern with the idol's dubious grace.

"And Phil?" Sam asked.

"He isn't going back to Manila," Sadek said simply, smiling again that meaningless grin of peasants.

"And why not?"

Sadek did not speak.

"Tell me more," Sam insisted. "Does his decision have something to do with the burial customs and all that sort of thing?"

"It's not a matter of custom, sir."

"I must see him."

Sadek faced the American squarely now. "Mr. Christie, you cannot do anything now. You must go back to Manila." And wheeling round, the Ifugao walked out into the street.

Sam followed him, riled by the unexpected show of rudeness. "I cannot leave like this, Sadek I'm sorry about what happened to your grandfather. In a time of grief I should at least be able to express my ... my condolence."

"You have done that already, sir."

Sadek paused again. "All right then," he said sharply. "Do come," then softly, supplicatingly, "Please, please don't think we are being unreasonable—and don't make me responsible for what will happen."

Sam Christie was now troubled. "How did the old man die?" That was the one question he wanted to ask and when he did it seemed as if the words were strangled from his throat.

Walking slowly, Sadek glanced at the stranger keeping step beside him. "It happened on the morning after the feast. He had a lot of wine."

"Of course, of course," Sam said. "I saw him gulp it like water. A man his age shouldn't have indulged in drinking like he did."

"But it wasn't the drink that did it, sir," Sadek said emphatically. "It was the loss of the god. It was stolen."

"It was not the god," Sam said aloud and the words were not for Sadek alone, but for himself, to reassure himself that he was not involved, that his hands were unsoiled. And a pang of regret, of sadness, touched him. "No," he said. "It wasn't the god. It couldn't be as simple as that. The liquor, the dancing, the exertion—these did it."

Sadek did not answer. They went down the incline and at the base of the terraces the path was wide and level again. Then, softly, "My grandfather always loved Ip-pig—Philip—more than anyone of us. He wanted to see Ip-pig before he died. He died in Ip-pig's arms."

Near the hill on which stood the old man's house Sadek paused again. "We buried him there," he pointed to a new digging on the side of the hill, "and we held another feast this morning. Two feasts in so short a time. One was a welcome to a youth gone astray, the other a farewell to him who gave the blood in us ..."

At the edge of the hilltop the open pits which had served as stoves still smoked and the dried blood of the butchered animals stained the earth. Sadek faced Sam. "My brother...he will not starve here, but he will no longer have the pleasures that he knew. Will that be good for him, Mr. Christie?" He did not wait for an answer and he droned, "As long as he works... but he is no longer a farmer and his muscles are now soft like a girl's. Me—my family, all of us will be all right, of course. We are not learned like him and we have never been to Manila. But my brother..." and, shaking his head as if a great weight had fallen on his shoulders, Sadek left the young American.

Now there was nothing to do but go up the Ifugao hut, this flimsy thing of straw that had survived all of time's ravages, this house that was also granary and altar, which had retained its shape through hungry years and was, as it stood on this patch of earth, everything that endured.

And as he approached it Sam Christie found himself asking why he was here among these primitive monuments when he could very well be in his apartment in Manila, enjoying his liquor and his books and, maybe a mestiza thrown in, too.

"Phil?" Sam Christie stood in the sun, crinkling his brow and wondering if he had spoken a bit too harshly or too loudly to disturb the silence within. "Phil, are you there?"

No answer.

"Phil," he repeated, raising his voice.

"I heard you," Philip Latak's reply from within the hut was abrupt and gruff.

"I thought you would forget. Remember, tomorrow morning, we are leaving. I've already packed and I was waiting. You didn't even send word. We will still shop, Phil. And that woven stuff and the utensils—do you know if we can get them before we leave tomorrow?"

"I'm not going back to Manila, Sam," Phil called. "You can do your shopping yourself. Isn't that idol enough?"

Now, from within the hut, came the sound of chopping and scraping of wood.

"You can't mean what you say," Sam said. "Come on, we still have many things to do. But if it's against the custom—that is, if you have to stay here for more time after the burial—"

The words exploded from the hut with a viciousness that jolted Sam: "Damn it. I'm not coming!" It was no longer Phil's voice. It was something elemental and distressing. "I'm not going back, do you hear? You can bring the whole mountain with you if you care. The god, my grandfather's god—isn't it enough payment for your kindness?"

The words, their keenness, their meaning, bit deep. "Let us be reasonable," Sam Christie said, his voice starting to quiver. "I didn't want you to steal the idol, Phil."

"You would have gotten it, anyway," the voice quieted down, "because you are always curious and determined. I could forgive myself for having stolen it, but the old man—he had always been wise, Sam. He knew from the very start that it was I who stole it. He wanted so much to believe that it wasn't I, but he couldn't pretend—and neither could I. I killed him, Sam. I killed him because I wanted to be free from these... these terraces, because I wanted to be grateful. I killed him who loved me most..." a faltering and a stifled sob.

"Don't blame me, Phil." Sam choked on the words. "I didn't want you to steal it. Remember, I even wanted to return it? Besides, I could have gone on searching until I found one I could buy..."

"That's it!" the voice within the hut had become a shriek. "That's it! You'll always find a way because you have all the money. You can buy everything, even gods."

His face burning with bewilderment and shame, Sam Christie moved toward the ladder. "Phil, let's talk this over. We are friends, Phil," he said in a low, anguished voice.

"You are not a friend," the voice within the grass hut had become a wail. "If you are, you wouldn't have come here searching for gods to buy."

"We are friends," Sam insisted, toiling up the ladder, and at the top rung, he pushed aside the flimsy bamboo door.

In the semi-darkness, amid the poverty and the soot of many years, Sam Christie saw Philip Latak squatting before the same earthen stove aglow with embers. And in this glow Sam Christie saw his friend—not the Philip Latak with the suede jacket, but a well-built Ifugao attired in the simple costume of the highlands, his broad flanks uncovered, and around his waist was the black-and-red breech cloth with yellow tassels. From his neck dangled the bronze necklace of an Ifugao warrior.

Philip Latak did not even once, face Sam. He seemed completely absorbed in his work and, with the sharp blade in his hands, he started scraping again the block of wood which he held tightly between his knees.

"Leave me alone, Sam," Philip Latak said softly, as if all grief had been squeezed from him. "I have to finish this and it will take some time."

Sam Christie's ever-observant eyes lingered on the face. Where had he seen it before? Was it in Greece—or in Japan—or in Siam? The recognition came swiftly, savagely; with watery legs and trembling hands, he stepped down and let the door slide quietly back into place. He knew then that Philip Latak really had work to do and it would take some time before he could finish a new god to replace the old one, the stolen idol which he was bringing home to America to take its place among his souvenirs of benighted and faraway places.