

saddened you as one came lace to face with Nature in the raw... pure prayer ascending to Him as one remembered Kilmer's... "poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree."

Cccrrruunhchch. **Old Faithful** grated, then stopped short without ceremony. The man on my left jackknifed at the impact. The sudden jolt took the wind out of me and alas, shook my reverie to pieces. I jumped down along with the others — to investigate. Two meters farther away was a stream that was swelled by mountain brooks. Not deep, two or three feet. But the bottom was stony. The ground, loose. We removed the fan-belt to prevent water from spraying the distributor. Then we cut into the river. Water entered the truck. The carban struck a big stone and remained there. The sullen driver tried to bring **Old Faithful** up the bank but the wheels only churned the water. No grip. Broken ejaculations filled the air... a battle of saliva ensued. A chronic clown quipped: Who is Who in midstream — that is the \$64 dollar question. Someone laughed his sides out, another grunted. Monsignor took the driver's seat and ordered all hands to push the Ford while he, himself, steadied her to high ground. No more breath was wasted. Everybody lent a hand. Satu, dua, tiga!! (one, two, three) **Old Faithful** burred like a freezing denizen. Again. Satu, dua, tiga!! Keep smiling, I whispered in a conspiratorial tone to the man at my right. I have here an affidavit assuring us that guardian angels are standing by. He snickered, his eyebrows went up. Satu, dua, tiga!! His Excellency pressed on the starter... coaxed the steering wheel to position and up, up, up went **Old Faithful**. People from a nearby "kampong" saw the Bishop inside the truck. They broke into smiles. Some whooped like Apaches and swarmed around **Old Faithful** where we were drying her. It took the better half of an hour to rescue her from a prolonged bath.

Once abroad again, spirits seemed more buoyant. Ten miles up the road, we were swallowed by the woods. Coming out finally, we found ourselves looking at rolling hills. Farther away in the east, giant mountains stretched, their unimaginable grandeur rising out of the plains. On our left, the Keo volcano emerged high, sharp and rugged against a lonely sky, smoke

trailing towards the heavens as often seen in watercolor landscapes. His Excellency pointed the volcano to me as we rounded a bend. Father, do you see that volcano? That at least, is one item the communists cannot claim to duplicate. I looked at Monsignor, then at the volcano. They dare not, Monsignor, I bantered. His Excellency smiled back and nodded — his eyes doing an ellin dance. Desultory talk... punctuated now and then with staccato laughers... the man on my right, wearing denim pants was whistling "St. Louis Blues". Good heavens, where in tarntion did he pick up that tune — not in this neck of the woods!

As we rolled along, people by the roadside, more often than not, recognized Monsignor and always, they gave him a sweeping bow. Most of them knelt, making the sign of the cross. Young and old, women and children... walking or astride a horse... his christians knew him and they knelt down in awesome reverence and respect and love. His Excellency inclined his head to them in fatherly greeting and raised his hand in blessing. We passed lots of children — many of them looking sickly, undernourished. They were dressed in a manner that makes one conclude they are miniature facsimiles of old father Adam and old mother Eve. They would stop their games whenever they saw the truck coming. And when they spotted His Excellency, they flew into dizzy delights, shouting their greetings: **Bapak Ukup! Bapak Ukup!** (Father Bishop! Father Bishop!) You'd think His Excellency was some Royalty visiting poor relatives... or a playmate of theirs gone truant, purposely absenting himself from play. They looked so, so infinitely precious in their articulate display of pure devotion. Ah life, how sweet is thy morning!

Whenever we came to children groups I always prayed that the Bishop would not have the mind and the mood to stop. You see, I had been told by people that His Excellency has the bad habit of extending a three-hour trip to a five-hour one, that is when he, himself, goes a-driving in his jeep. He would stop at every inhabited place along the line to converse with village folks, christians and pagans alike — on subjects even more trite than the weather... or he would assume the role of examining board by taking to task the school children on their subjects,

## TWO

### 1. Beats

*Stars are bottom-views of stalactites  
clinging to your sky  
(like needle-points in my brain)  
taciturn above the nocturnal concert  
of frogs*

*Unlike rainclouds showering applause  
to stoic roofs of a city goined  
by sleep,  
Was it yesterday? Last June?*

*(My fingers were once breeze through  
your perfumed hair... once trembling  
twanged to color contours of your  
cheeks)*

*Yet who cares for tenses... or tears?*

*Our hearts were metronomes beating  
time  
to animate a lump of flesh.*

by ALFREDO AMORES

cajoling them, rewarding them with religious pictures... or would give a housewife bound for the market a lift in his jeep. On this trip, I was awfully glad because Monsignor "behaved" and caused us no unnecessary delays. I always breathed a sigh of relief when the truck slowed down and he only waved his hand vigorously to them, his children. Loud resounding cheers went up... these kids, they reminded me one of the bobby-soxers, the bleacher-teenagers back home who shout themselves hoarse rather than for their basketball or football idols. Children will be the same everywhere. With the hand of their Father Bishop poised in the air, their cheers were loud and solid, reverberating on the mountainsides, until **Old Faithful**, Father Bishop and cargo moved to a definite past tense.

Two hours of pilgrim's progress... the sun staring down on us with merciless complacency. **Old Faithful** pulled... snorted as it kept up a perpetual jig, up now, down now, up now, down now till traffic came to an abrupt stop once more. A huge warigin tree, uprooted by

# POEMS

## 2. Signposts

*Rose stems rotting in a flower vase  
are signposts for heart dew-fresh  
as unsummer'd blades of grass  
for it can neither decipher hieroglyphics  
of a smile nor interpolate obscure  
muntissas of the eye (not till it can  
define sharp points of tangency where  
eyes meet sun and heart meets loneliness).*

*Feeling sheer sharpness of rose thorns  
retires  
to some pink cathedral of a dream where  
vapor trails of a smile wisp about  
its spires. But wake up brother!  
Dreams in the harsh impoliteness of  
reality are  
tinsels and cotton-snows on a month-old  
Christmas tree.*

by ALFREDO AMORES

strong winds and torrential rains, draped itself shamelessly ahead on the road. It meant just one word: Detour. We took one look at it then decided to defy conventional driving rules. We cut through the woods, all heads 'lo, in adoration falling'. Branches broke, brittle twigs snapped. We felt like the American pioneers of old, blazing a new trail — only, ours was a much more abbreviated one. In less than five minutes, we were on the right road again. The only casualty was a torn shirtsleeve. A little farther up the mountainside, we spotted herds and herds of fat cattle. The man who had entertained me hours before with his "St. Louis Blues" solo started off with "Home on the Range" in a lilting tempo. At this time, Monsignor called my distracted attention to the grazing herds. Those are ours, Father, he said. There must be 150 of them. We are now approaching Toda-Belu. Why, of course, I had already heard voluminous stories about the place from other Fathers. Toda-Belu. My blood stirred lazily from its sleep. I flexed my limbs. This now is the place I have especially longed to see for myself. I had been in-

formed that it is the sand-table exhibit of His Excellency. All drowsiness vanished. Everyone came to life. We were on a mountain ledge more than three thousand feet above sea level. The air was soothingly cool and invigorating — there was an exquisite stillness in this God's country. Down below us, nestling in the heart of a fertile valley, was Toda-Belu; Seminary buildings, red-roofed... lush plantations... peaceful pastures smiling under the serene skies. Farming this land of little water would have been impossible without the careful planning and community cooperation and technical skill of the Brothers and Fathers. Fearing no task, they had created a fertile paradise in a region other men thought God had forsaken. Here was a dream community in a dream garden.

About three miles before we reached the Seminary compounds, at the outskirts of the wide, corn and coffee plantations, another obstacle presented a trying ordeal. A farmhand had volunteered to us the information that there was a ford our Ford would not be able to cross. The mud, he commented, was deep. We would surely get stuck if we attempted a crossing. Period. Monsignor caught sight of a John Deere tractor ploughing its way at a nearby field some eighty yards away. He signalled the driver who limbered down immediately from the machine and came to where we were. I recognized him for one of the Brothers... his khaki shirt soaked in perspiration, his blonde hair gleamed in the sun. Except for the reverent kneeling down to kiss the Bishop's ring, the farmer hailed the latter in the style of one who remembered well a fox-hole "buddy". It was the most intimate stunt only a Brother and his Bishop can put up with impromptu on an outdoor stage, nature providing a true locale. The three of us joined in consultation concerning Old Faithful... get some ropes, suggested the Brother... those stout vines will do, he pointed to some coiled around the trunks of trees. Well, he remarked, you're going to Henry Ford's funeral today if John Deere does not cooperate and run true to form. His eyes glinted in mischief. His Excellency chuckled. I grinned, congratulating John Deere mentally. We hurriedly repaired back to the place where we left the Ford. The Bishop climbed the driver's seat for the third time that day. Brother backed the tractor to

the lord and vines were tied to the Ford's bumper. Deere was at the fore and the Ford at the rear. Tension was great as Deere strained at the taut vines. Monsignor steadied the Ford — his delt hands on the steer. Old Faithful felt abused. She coughed strenuously, provoked at Deere's audacity and persistent bullying and pulling. After long, tortuous minutes however, she began to kick dirt and mud until she finally chugged to the embankment on the other side, close to the trail of Deere. Once there, we hastened into the frantic business of repairing her make-up, reassembling her hurt dignity and pride... restoring her bearings and our wind. Within a quarter of an hour, we entered the Seminary compounds — trim lawns, immaculate white houses... vegetable and flower gardens... the place was simply bustling with activity. So, this was Toda-Belu! Here we took time out for rest, to refresh ourselves, stretch the limbs. It was no stop-over for His Excellency in the real sense of the word. As soon as people got wind of his presence they fell over each other in their eagerness to have a few words with him. Fathers, Brothers — a medley of them. Two, tall, important-looking Fathers approached him on problems concerning administration. By their serious mien and tenor, their problems must have been urgent with a capital U... a long-bearded one holding what appeared like parchment dropped by... would His Excellency please take a look at the blueprint of the building that would soon go up and kindly, give specifications as to materials and procurement? An old pleasant nun ambled towards Monsignor. Hers was the feminine approach... Has Monsignor had coffee... why, Monsignor was looking fine!... how about those badly-needed medicines His Excellency promised. Between gulps of hot, black coffee, I watched the Monsignor with the intensity of one who had had the aspirations for an exalted position such as his. (You upstart, I ridiculed!) I marvelled at his poise, his coolness... I left so rundown, it irked me somewhat. Made mental note to suggest to him later that, maybe, it would be best if he would bring along next time a tape recorder to register all the wails and woes of his flock. While he went on dispensing with advice and suggestions and solutions and smiles, an old-timer on whose white head perched gingerly a cute, straw

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