



Felgue and Bride

Never Say Goodbye

by Lourdes V. Jaramilla

Now that Connie is dead I realize that he exerted a stronger influence over my classmates and me than I did realize when he was alive. My mind can telescope back into a spiral of two and a half years, and I can remember details of many campus conversations which have played a part on the rocky road of my "growing up" (or "wising up" as he'd call it). One of his fondest hopes was to unite the literary-inclined students into a compact group, which he could guide and set aflame with his enthusiasm and ideas. The short-lived "writers' club" can attest to his efforts. The members, Junior Abao, Marietta Alonzo, Tess Abezamis, Demetrio Maglalang, Amorsolo Manligas, Junne Cañizares, Manuel Go, Jess Estanislao, etc., were willing, but after two meetings, the whole thing quietly folded up, because none of them had the same free time to attend the meeting. So he had to meet each one wherever he found them -- in the drugstore, in the lobby or those happy chance meetings in the library or in the campus. Intellectually keen, he was never afflicted by intellectual snobbery, the malady of most of our university "brains". It was fun to exchange those memorable barbs that were his specialty.

We can't help being interested reciprocally in someone who shows a personal interest in us, our failings and little triumphs. Twenty years from now, I'll still remember him saying, "You're young. I'm old. . . Make the most of your youth." And the casual lessons of life tossed over bottles of coke at the drugstore... to work hard at achieving **only** the best or cheat ourselves for-

ever... never to be petty about small things or to feel big about great things because everything is big and small at the same time, dimensionless as they say... to open our heart and eyes to all the beauty in the world, to wider worlds that will open if we have the sensitivity to be aware of the smallest movements: the fall of a leaf, the flicker of an eyelash, the deepening of emotion and the slight shift of mood in voice and expression of the eyes... the forgotten little miracles that are the many faces of one whole that we call life-one pattern of joy and loss, defeat and hope... but above all to love life... not only to face it but accept it too. Living on borrowed time, he must have loved life desperately, achingly-marvelous existence being measured out to him, hour by hour, as the days receded into months... marking time before the blue sky and the soft sheen of sunlight would be eclipsed forever in the eternal timelessness of an endless sleep.

"All men live forever and die forever... that death is the sweet

asylum of nothingness, is the cruel sick dream of the criminal and the suicide: of those who deny reality... of those who are afraid to live... of those who are often fugitives... of those who steal from consciousness... of those who are terrified by love..." He, who had to stand on the edge of eternity for months could have been referring to all these escapists. Life is the most precious thing on earth. What is death but only a transition from here to the hereafter. The pain of death is one of farewell, one of division but not finality. Not a conclusion. Death is but an interlude; it is only life that is endless.

That is why it was so important to him to concentrate on the young which he called the "seeds" and the "promises". He loved the young not only because he was young at heart but also because he realized how important it was to invest them with worthwhile ideals. He pitched in his own brand of "sales-talk", breaking down lonely kingdoms with humorless quips like: "you're bored and fine... well, I'm bored and not
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Felgue in a Filmed Interview

NEVER SAY GOODBYE

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fine." He was funny when he wasn't being funny and serious when he meant to be funny. Once, while we were writing a news report on the visit of a director of a mental institution, he pointed out the irony of launching a drive to help those unfortunates, when all the "mental cases" were right in the audience. Funny or not, we got the message all right. He was an exponent of the personal touch. He knew that no preaching can penetrate the proud shell of the blasé eighteen-year-old who can never be approached effectively except from his own level and by someone near to him. They say "in its innermost depths, youth is lonelier than old age." Perhaps that is why he succeeded where the others failed, because they have little sympathy for the twisting roads, the searching journey of many a pilgrim youth.

Whenever I met any of my classmates who knew him, we still talk about him as though he never really went away. If people really understand each other, they never say "goodbye" but that is hard to explain. We remember the things he said, the subtle humor uniquely his

own and our writings which he'd estimate for their mediocrity or hypocrisy. Good writing always stirred him yet stumbling undisciplined writing still interested him like nothing else could, for he was optimistic about the latent promise and inherent beauty in a piece of writing, in a confusion of seemingly sensible words strung together illogically but poignantly. The world of writing was his great passion, and it was in us, the young, that he hoped to fulfill many of his hopes.

We are still young and alive... still unsettled in our shaky ideals... with the years stretching out before us, awaiting the harvest of our gleanings, our contributions to life that will stamp us with our truest identity. He is gone, Connie, our friend, our confidante, our teacher. We are left... the promises still left to be seen... the seeds groping for life and purpose and their own souls. We are still here, we are not dead and we are the promises, the seeds. He left us a very big order to finish... and it staggers our minds knowing how important it must be to him that we must carry on... #

ONCE I HAD A TEACHER

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eyes to beauty. He had special talent for uncovering to us the beauty of nature and the beauty of the printed word. He rhapsodized over the incomparable colors of the sunset, the matchless brilliance of the moonlight. We learned that beauty was everywhere but that it was the reward of the man who painstakingly searched for it. He recounted to us how once he woke up at dawn to steep himself in the beauty of a sleeping city as he walked through the empty streets. The poet in him occasionally had to burst out in exclamations of undisguised admiration of some new beauty or some rediscovered old one. He read poems in our literature class without the afflicted pose of the reader aware of the effect he is producing on his

audience, but with the easy naturalness of a true lover of poetry. He encourage us to commit beautiful lines to memory by quoting them himself. "Ah," he would say, "I know not what soft incense hangs upon the boughs" when some delightful fragrance filled the air.

Such was the teacher Faigao.

With his characteristic humility, he told me, two months before he died, "I'm afraid, when I have to go, my hands will be empty."

What I would have given just to have seen the look on his face when another Teacher bade him welcome with the words, "For he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." #

VILLA'S FOOTNOTE . . .

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as an impersonal force, relentless and powerful to which men are but as pawns? Must one feel extremely sad and sorry for him who wants to be young, who wants to love and to live? Life is ceaseless suffering, Villa wails. Or else a terribly grim joke. In the story *The Fence*, the notes of the girl's guitar floated in the moonlight... too late. And when Aling Biang announced "The Lord is born" on Christmas midnight to her son Iking, Iking died.

While Villa glories in the songs of the wind, the songs of the young lush moon, the songs of the tall strong trees, he nevertheless opens his story *Malakas* with a sigh "Hail". And in the same breath he says: "What is alive, hurts."

Kamya, for all its sensuous beauty, *Given Woman*, *Resurrection* harp on the same theme of futility. The symbols are empty. The characters are either draped in black or wrapped in mists — but still one can see right through them. They are all sick with neurosis.

Reading the volume is no doubt an experience, though hardly enriching. The experience palls, almost harrows. One seems to live in a vague misty world where reality though as hazy as a dream is nevertheless as overpowering as the heavy smell of faded or fading flowers, a chill comfortless world pervaded with a withering sense of solitariness where one meets lonely people of only two dimensions, disillusioned searchers, desolate figures wrapped in uncertain light like faces in some impressionistic painting.

As one closes the book it is inevitably with a sigh and with regret. Villa is not what he ought to be or what he might be, so we think. His rebellion is too obvious, his anger too made up, and one immediately thinks of a poseur. His pride is arrogance. His obsession with impotence and frustration chorused by heavenly mockery and keyed by human loneliness indubitably harrows his art. If he could but bend his will... now. If he could but grasp the essence of the Christian spirit... now. And not just the veneer. But he glories in his loneliness. So he writes in *Walk at Midnight*, "I had no playmates. I swam no river. I climbed no trees. I was alone."

Where are the playmates of him who is alive only to himself? Deserts have no rivers and trees.

Villa is indeed alone. #