

LITERARY SECTION: FICTION

AGCALAN POINT

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Editor's note

Written 35 years ago, in July 1975, "Agcalan Point" is the one unpublished short story of Jose Y. Dalisay. It won him his first Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Award, one of two second placers, in 1975. The author has chosen to preserve his younger voice in the printing of this story in this issue of *Kritika Kultura*.

About the author

Dr. Jose Y. Dalisay Jr., or Butch Dalisay as he is known among his colleagues and his students, is the author of the first novel by a Filipino (*Soledad's Sister*) to be short-listed for the prestigious Man Asian Literary Prize. Early this year, Dalisay was one of eight internationally acclaimed authors at the main event of the Fifth Annual PEN World Voices Festival. With him on this event were major international writers such as Salman Rushdie (India/USA), Raja Shehadeh (Palestine), Muriel Barbery (France), Narcís Comadira (Spain), Edwidge Danticat (Haiti), Péter Nádas (Hungary), and Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua).

Dalisay writes in both English and Filipino. Prior to *Soledad's Sister*, he had previously published a novel, and fifteen other books of short fiction, plays, and essays. Five of these have received the National Book Award from the Manila Critics Circle, and several have been awarded the prestigious Don Carlos Palanca Award for Literature. He has received several international writing grants, and has been invited to deliver papers and handle lectures in the US, the UK, and Australia. He continues to teach English and Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, currently heading the UP Institute of Creative Writing.

APPROACHING Ginbulanan harbor from the west, as it is the only entry the sea leaves open short of tearing your craft apart with its sunken teeth, the traveler meets Agcalan.

From afar you perceive a decrepit Spanish fort more than a thousand feet above the bobbing horizon, thickly overhung with clouds in the month of August. From that crown Agcalan plunges madly downwards into jagged slivers of gray sandstone into the sea, carpeted by a fine silken spray.

Treachery lurks but a fathom below; ships passing this point must have crews of redoubtable courage. So far from the open sea, so near to land – and there the danger lies, to founder on some ill-anchored reef or be crushed against the immutable cheek of Agcalan.

Agcalan has always been there, and you have only seen it now. It has seen everything, and you know nothing, a speck of flotsam in time and space, and you are overwhelmed. There is majesty in the primeval, some godly attribute magnified by the prism of the transparent mind, and it is here.

The rudder strains mightily against the current; now you fear it to snap, as may the muscles of the crewman who pulls hard and tells you to take your place belowdecks. You fear, and yet cannot heed his words. At this junction the sailboat must veer a little out to sea, in a circuitous but entirely reasonable manner, if it is to reach port the one and same vessel you boarded five islands away. Beyond that point, your eyes and rising spirits say, lies the happy resolution – Ginbualan harbor, quaintly and quietly returning your senses like a garland on your neck. Houses of native brick and straw front the harbor one-deep; lights from a dozen Coleman lamps mark your berth, shielding you, to the final step, from the caprices of nightfall. You smile and disembark and do not care to notice the boys who scurry for your baggage. You have survived Agcalan Point. And soon quickly forget.

* * *

AGKAL-ANG sank below the bushes, waiting for the buck to emerge from behind the rock and underbrush. He had pursued the chase for the last hour and it had to end soon. The profile of the deer's rear darted into view and Agkal-ang's fingers tensed on the arrow. No, not yet. It was no way to shoot a buck. It was also his next to the last arrow. He would wait. Sweat dripped from his brow and his loins ached in their posture. The arrow was a good one, oiled with pig fat and its tip honed to the utmost. The rear vanished. His eyes followed the flick of the antlers.

The buck, gleaming in the afternoon sun and too lately aware of coming death, arced upwards in an effort to leap and abruptly sank as Agkal-ang let loose. The arrow had cut deep at a point just below the deer's neck, and he knew it had torn through the heart. Agkal-ang rose, rubbed the grease off his palms and knelt beside the hoarse-breathing animal.

The catch was a good one as he had hoped for in those parts, big, and as it was, made wily by a dozen encounters, pursuits and evasions. Up in the buck's hindquarter Agkal-ang's forefinger surveyed a hairless lump – the scar of a previous battle. Truly they came about too rarely now. Men had hunted hard for days and had to be content at times with a wild boar or two, either suckling or aged enough to be good only for their fat. There was less of even such game now.

The deer would bring smiles upon him in the village. There would be food for some time. Malay-on would be waiting. And Kaliwas.

Datu Kaliwas. The people loathed him, Agkal-ang foremost. The white men had come and bought peace with Kaliwas, and gave him a new name, doing the same to his wife Lintag. The demon that guided Kaliwas' hand caused the death of Duldul-og. And Agkal-ang, now twenty-three and a full man by his elder's count, could not forget that. It was written on his brow and that of Malay-on, his mother, waiting in the house of Duldul-og.

Agkal-ang pulled thongs from his waist and tied the buck's feet. Kneeling, he seized the antlers and heaved the blood-caked neck over his shoulder. It was a fearful burden but could not be left even for a night in the wilds. The forest's parasites hungered for a feast, as did Kaliwas' men. He would reach the village just after nightfall. He was not to be seen in these parts.

MALAY-ON's hand danced expertly across the buck's body with a thin knife in its firm grip. Agkal-ang sat on the mat spread over the earth floor, chewing nuts Malay-on gathered and kept in a jar.

"The whole village saw you come in," Malay-on said, not looking up.

Agkal-ang spat out a fibrous wad. "So they did."

"Kaliwas must know you are here."

"I do not fear him. He fears me."

Malay-on looked at him briefly. "It would be better if you were gone soon. He does not want you here."

"I have done nothing to be banished. The elders know it."

His mother cut open the buck's haunch. "They are afraid of Kaliwas. The datu has the friendship of Ma-alnak. Even the Spaniards are afraid of Ma-alnak, so they let Kaliwas rule for them."

The demon. High above the cliff that fell treacherously behind the thick growth of trees in the forest, Ma-alnak lived in mist and legend. His hair was of reddish gold, and his eyes blazed like the green stones that lit the sea like flickering tongues at night. It was said, too, even by those who had not seen him, that his body was layered with scales of stone, that no arrow nor spear could pierce this armor. Only the datu had met his awesome countenance – and indeed, only those who had done so and come out alive became datu of the village. Thus even in the people's fear and despise of him, Kaliwas was held in a

certain esteem. Duldul-og had failed, setting out in the forest to the kingdom of Ma-alnak. The demon willed him over the cliff – and favored Kaliwas, who knew how to parley with his god and kept his secrets, to reign.

“I have been in Ma-alnak’s forest. There are only trees. And this deer.”

Malay-on’s hands froze. “No!”

“We need food. The other lands are barren.”

“Kaliwas will have you killed.” She began weeping, covering her face with hands bloodied by the buck.

“No one saw me. I was alone.”

“Ma-alnak will tell. Ma-alnak knows all, sees all. You cannot escape him.”

“I did not see him. He did not see me. He cannot be wiser than the deer.” Agkal-ang rose to pick up a knife and fashion shafts from a pile of rough branches.

“Kaliwas forbids it. No one can hunt in the land of Ma-alnak. No one goes there.”

“Someone has. The deer has scars. Look.”

Agkal-ang pushed over the carcass to reveal the lump.

“He must have been punished terribly.”

“Mother, whose body was it was picked up last on the rocks?”

Malayon’s eyes fell. “You know. Your father’s.”

“Yes. When I was a boy. And this deer can be no older than the son of Duldul-og. Someone goes there, and has come back unpunished.”

Limply, Malay-on’s hand resumed their work on the buck, stripping meat from bone. “Ma-alnak must favor him.”

Agkal-ang cracked a nut with his teeth and smiled.

“No, mother. Kaliwas favors himself.”

THE MEAT was cut and dried in the sun, hung in strips outside Agkal-ang’s hut even before the sun rose. The grass was damp with a fresh coat of dew. But Agkal-ang heard the feet coming and rose.

The steep figure of Itneg emerged. Agkal-ang muttered an oath, loathing Itneg. He was Kaliwas’ chief spy and henchman. Itneg grinned, revealing blackened teeth, and tapped the meat.

“Good catch you have here.”

“I hunt well. You do nothing but watch and beg. What brings you here? The smell of food?”

Itneg held up a hand. "Don't be annoying so soon. Kaliwas sent me."

"Yes, he always does." Agkal-ang dipped a ladle into a clay jar and washed his face.

"You must pay tribute," Itneg said, looking desirously at the strips.

"Pick up your tribute and leave us." Itneg proceeded without further prompting to select the six best cuts. Agkal-ang's hand arrested Itneg's after the fourth.

"Enough." Itneg turned and lifted Agkal-ang's hand. His grin soured.

"Don't try my patience. We need tribute. Are you against that?"

"You take too much."

"We need much. Two parts for Kaliwas, two for Ma-alnak and two for the white god."

Agkal-ang snorted. The last was a new addition, and he in truth expected it.

"We have so many gods to please."

Itneg stuffed the meat into a straw pouch. "You should be grateful, in your ignorance about the gods. They please us in many ways." He turned and left, having fulfilled his bounden duty.

Itneg was gone from sight when Malay-on rose to find Agkal-ang chipping stone furiously for his arrows.

"We have just been visited by the gods' collector, mother," Agkal-ang said, nodding at the sparse strips left.

"It is our duty. The gods protect us." Malay-on stoked the ashes of last night's fire and prepared new firewood.

"From what? Why do they take everything away?" He cursed, hitting the sliver of flint hard.

"Do not question their ways."

"Soon there will be more of them than will be left of us. Do you not see that day coming?"

"We can do nothing. Ma-alnak will be displeased, if he is not already, and I fear for you." Her voice trembled slightly.

"Ma-alnak – pah! If he is a demon, why do not the Spaniards fight him? Why does not Kaliwas lead them to Ma-alnak? Surely their fire-weapons can defeat Ma-alnak."

"Speak lightly! Ma-alnak is too powerful. Kaliwas has told them so. They must believe him."

Agkal-ang held up an arrowhead against the sun, breaking its ascendant circle in two.

"I do not think so. They are playing with him, and will sooner make peace with Ma-alnak themselves."

"Hold your tongue, Agkal-ang. You have not seen the wrath of the gods, as your father did."

Agkal-ang rose.

"There are no gods who would destroy what good we do, who take away what we need to live. No, mother. I do not believe in the strength of Ma-alnak, nor in this new white god even Kaliwas has not seen, much less in that old boar himself. Their power rests on our assent, and it is time to withdraw it. The village must know this."

Malay-on gasped, in grief and disbelief. She seized his broad shoulders and dug her hands deeply.

"No, Agkal-ang. You must not say that! You will be put to death! Ma-alnak will punish you!"

"And the truth will emerge! Do you not see that, mother? You must live for it. I will fight Ma-alnak and end this foolishness."

"It will be your end, too." Malay-on wept, and Agkal-ang went inside the hut.

Some distance beyond, where Malay-on and her son would have seen bushes, Itneg lifted his elbows from the dust and hurried off. Let Agkal-ang have his way, he thought, and let out a high-pitched laugh.

THE CORDS Kaliwas' men had made of vines were tough. All tugging was useless, Agkal-ang realized and soon stopped. The binds had loosened enough for the barest movement. Perhaps it was best this way. He would have his day with Kaliwas and his gods.

It was night-dark inside the hut, although the sun was baking the earth dry outside, and even the straw roof could not keep the heat from seeping in. Presently the door creaked and opened slightly, unleashing a shaft of light onto his bent body. Itneg peered into the room.

"Feeling warm?" The goatlike face taunted. Agkal-ang did not answer.

The door parted wider and Itneg strode in.

"Playing brave and wiser than the gods, are you? Let's see what they have to say about you." He tugged the prisoner's cords sharply.

"Where are we going?"

"The council is meeting. Get up!"

Agkal-ang struggled to his feet. The elders held council in a long hut at the center

of the village, seated before small clay bowls where their spit gathered, red with juice of the betel nut. In Kaliwas' presence and in their fear of Ma-alnak, Agkal-ang knew he could expect little.

"Come here." Kaliwas had grown old, but nonetheless wilier. Around him sat the elders, many of them so honored out of sheer age and now infirm, but all fearful of the gods to Kaliwas' liking. Kaliwas' hair hung in sparse, white-streaked strings. Glass beads framed his upper chest and a large yellow cross was tied to them – golden and the symbol of a new god's favor, adding prestige to the mixture of hate and awe he was held in. Outside the coconut trees swayed to gusts that blew in from the sea.

"Agkal-ang, son of Duldul-og and Malay-on: listen to what I have been told of you, and hear me well. You complain against the tribute we pay our gods. You dare dishonor the gods with a boast to do battle with them. These are very grave acts that defy the code of our people and our protectors. You know that the punishment for such crimes can be no less severe than death."

Kuti, among the eldest of the people, nodded. "It is a hard task upon us, Agkal-ang. We do not wish to do what we must with you, but you have called it upon yourself."

"I have said nothing untrue."

"There are witnesses against you," Kaliwas said.

"I do not fear their words. They speak rightly."

"Then you do not deny the accusations?"

"No. I will prove to you my words bear truth."

"Ah, then you must pray for your soul! You will die tomorrow," Kaliwas announced. Agkal-ang's eyes blazed.

"Let me speak! Hear me!"

Kaliwas clouded and the furrows showed deeply across his brow. He had wanted the proceedings done with.

"Speak? Your crimes are known. You have acknowledged them before us. You are condemned and must say no more."

"Then condemn me a second time, or a third as you wish, but I will speak! – " Agkal-ang breathed hard and shut his eyes against the sweat.

"You are cowards who have survived on ignorance and fear. You fear those demons only one man claims he has seen. The white man came and you feared their fire-weapons, and now you share their god with them, and pay them in fear of disfavor. Now you fear what I have to say, for I lead your minds to such thoughts Kaliwas would not have of you –"

"You are mad to be doing these things. The gods will not forgive you," Kaliwas cried.

"No. Kaliwas has kept you in fear of Ma-alnak while he thrives on the tribute we pay them both. Fathers and uncles, you must see what blind fools we appear, offering payment to gods whose favors only Kaliwas enjoys. It is him who has erred and must be punished, not I!"

"Insolent youth – you are truly fit to die. You dare test the fury of Ma-alnak?"

"Ma-alnak and the white god protect our datu. Kaliwas cannot be wrong!" Kuti said. "Agkal-ang knows nothing of the gods. Ma-alnak speaks with the voice of thunder. Ma-alnak will seize you with his hair and burn you with his eyes. When you have breathed your last, he will fling you against the rocks. Such is the power of Ma-alnak!" Kuti shrieked, the others nodding quickly.

"You have never seen him," Agkal-ang accused.

"The datu has, and shares his power."

"Ma-alnak is a demon. Kaliwas rules by evil."

"Ma-alnak is a good demon. He does harm only to those who deserve it," Kaliwas replied, thrusting a finger at Agkal-ang.

"And was my father, Duldul-og, so deserving?"

The datu winced. Kuti spat into his bowl and gazed at the slime, as if to divine some answer therefrom.

"Your father tempted what was beyond him." Kaliwas declared. "Ma-alnak was undefeatable. So I made peace with him."

"You lie! Kaliwas killed my father, envying him. Ma-alnak helped him."

Kaliwas sat mutely, speechless with rage.

"How do you know this? Can you prove your accusation?" Kuti asked.

"I cannot, as yet. But I will. I only tell you now what reason told me long ago."

"Surely you do not know everything. Tomorrow you die!" Kaliwas thundered.

"Kill me and be cursed forever!"

"The gods protect me," Kaliwas said, thumping his beads and these jangled.

"Your gods are worthless."

"Enough!" Kaliwas said. "The council does not agree with you. You must be punished."

Agkal-ang's wrists chafed, steeling against the bounds. "There is no justice one can expect of a murderer, a tyrant and yet a coward like you, Kaliwas."

A murmur rippled across the council, among whom a few looked away as children avoid lightning, and yet cannot escape thunder. Kaliwas stiffened. "Say what you will. But lest you believe that your blasphemies should soften my heart, you die when the sun lights the crown of Ma-alnak's mountain tomorrow. And still – lest you too believe that no merciful good remains with Kaliwas, I shall follow our customs of condemnation. The choice of what path you take to your death is yours."

Agkal-ang spat. "You cut my heart open with a lance, and now ask if vinegar or saltwater is to be poured into it."

"If you do not choose," Kuti warned, "we must leave you to the river-gods. It is a sad fate that brings you to this end, but such is the law against those who dare the datu and Ma-alnak. The peace is threatened."

"The covenant with the demon is broken! If I must choose, let me battle Ma-alnak!"

The datu rose, sprung like a tethered coil. "Fool! You are courting a fate worse than death. You will leave Malay-on with ragged flesh and bones to mourn. Choose another!"

Agkal-ang stared at Kaliwas, their eyes clinging, and his desires, hatreds and fancies welled in his chest, seeking resolution.

"No." His eyes fled past the room.

"Fathers and uncles, could it be that our datu, feeling ragged and bent now fears the son of Duldul-og to succeed him? To have his treachery revealed? What is Ma-alnak that he must now hide behind the skirt of Kaliwas? If he be truly great and powerful, let him dash me against the rocks and my questions will die with me!"

"I do not fear you. Ma-alnak favors only those who serve him." Kaliwas flexed his hands and rested them on his laps.

Kuti raised a hand. "If Agkal-ang so wills it, then let him die in the manner he pleases. There can be no worse death than that in the grip of Ma-alnak."

Murmured assent crossed the lips of the elders.

Kaliwas wiped the sweat off his brow. The veins shone brightly at his temples, bulging and throbbing as did his heart within, and he pounded the floor with his fist, crushing earth into dust. "Then let it be so! Let Agkal-ang die at the hands of Ma-alnak!" He looked at the hunter.

"You have said too much, knowing too little. You threaten the gods, and threaten me. Then let our power be tested against yours! Pray to your god, whomsoever he may be. Before the sun passes tomorrow, Malay-on's boat will bear your body from below the mountain of Ma-alnak."

"I have no god but reason, Kaliwas."

IN THE darkness of the hut, Agkal-ang squatted and waited for the day. He thought of Duldul-og with whom he had played and fished, learning how to catch food beneath the river stones.

And Duldul-og had told him of Ma-alnak, who made datu of men in rites so secret that only datu dead and the elders alive knew, the latter by fear and faith. It was the secret of power and rulership, its true meaning unknown even by the elders who kept alive the terrible vision of Ma-alnak in the minds of fathers and children, for it enhanced the datu's power.

Agkal-ang believed in Ma-alnak, and yet felt foolishly impudent enough to taunt him. He had gone to the demon's mountain, courting the wrath of Ma-alnak, and yet nothing had come about of it. And this no one knew but Malay-on. Perhaps not even Ma-alnak. And if it was so, Agkal-ang felt he could outwit him again on the morrow.

The palm leaves rustled outside. The village seemed asleep, and yet Agkal-ang knew its eyes were upon him. Malay-on would be weeping, praying Duldul-og's assistance to their son, and kaliwas would be renewing his pact with Ma-alnak.

Silently he thought of Malay-on. Mother – I will end this plague upon us, even if I must die. I shall catch a ray of gold from Ma-alnak's hair and weave it for your neck to wear. Of his eyes I will make a lamp, that the village may pass the nights without fear of evil shadows. Of his body I will make a shield, that no men may come again from across the sea and lay our warriors by my father's side. I know I shall prevail. Did not the sea open her wealth for Duldul-og and me, when we ventured forth to bring you food? Did not the sky favor us with a rainbow, when our pots were dry? There must be gods more powerful than Ma-alnak, and man's reason brought Agkal-ang into peace with them.

A surge of strength ran through his body, though he had not eaten. Not it had come, the supreme trial, to pit all the sharpness of human skill, guile and courage against the secret forces of Ma-alnak. He would become datu, and share not power with the demon, but with his people. That was just. Let Ma-alnak come. Let him come. Sleep fell upon Agkal-ang.

RELEASED at the edge of the forest, where the mountain touched the flat earth with its feet, Agkal-ang breathed deeply and took stock of his complement.

He had a bow and some arrows, and a flat sword that had once been Duldul-og's. They would be enough. Perhaps they would even be of no use. He counted on his wits to drive the demon into his own grave.

He wondered where Kaliwas had gone. It was known that when a new datu made peace with Ma-alnak and gained his favor, he who had ruled before would at the same time vanish – perhaps plucked by Ma-alnak’s hair – and be found, in various parts, strewn on the rocks at sea. That was the way of succession. And the new datu would return home jubilant, speaking broadly of Ma-alnak’s power and their agreement. But it was not so certain for everyone who aspired to rule. Was it, now? Kaliwas had served Ma-alnak well, Agkal-ang could not deny. Too well. Ma-alnak would favor the old man still.

Agkal-ang sped into the forest only he among his people, apart from the datus, had come to know well. He had been there before. It was now for Ma-alnak to catch him.

When Agkal-ang had passed through the woods for a half-hour, finding little but tracks of boar and wild fowl, he knelt beside a stream to cool his face. Did Ma-alnak know he was coming?

From a corner of the forest, Agkal-ang did not see where, Ma-alnak came. His eyes turned too late to catch sight of the arrow flying, but he heard it cut through the air and bury itself a finger’s length from his bent head on the stream bank. He whirled. Nothing. He inspected the arrow. It was unusual, with the plumage of a strange bird trailing behind its shaft. Reddish-gold. Perhaps this was Ma-alnak’s fabled hair, that caught one where he could not see.

“Ma-alnaaak!” Agkal-ang cried to the nearby trees and rocks, the sound echoing, quavering and fading, but no answer came. Agkal-ang rose.

Another arrow sped towards him, this time nicking him on the shoulder, and it was the same as the first. The blood welled on the wound’s surface and began to dribble. Agkal-ang clamped a palm around it and looked about. The arrow had come from a different direction. Ma-alnak was either so huge, as to straddle his environment and toy with him as it was amusing, or perhaps – perhaps Ma-alnak, like him, moved.

Then came the sound, round and hollow, winging back and forth among the rocks, hemmed in by the trees. The voice of Ma-alnak.

“Agkal-ang – you have come!” It was the voice, but no one, no god, appeared.

“Why do you hide? Emerge where we can fight like men!” The hunter turned about him. The woods shuddered with Ma-alnak’s laughter.

“Fool! I am Ma-alnak. I am a god! Before me your arrows are nothing. Go back or you die!”

The terrifying peals of laughter broke out again, rushing into that forest space like a cataract unleashed, and Agkal-ang knew he was in Ma-alnak’s lair. The sound was not

itself so awesome. It was the creeping fear that he had overstepped his bounds that seized Agkal-ang and made his head whirl to escape the holler of Ma-alnak.

Before him through the trees the sun broke. And Agkal-ang was to know this the first time. The sun's rays seemed to sear the treetops as it seethed into view, and the next moment the trees split the sun's brilliance into arrows of light, spreading in many directions. Where they caught two twin rock tips the light bent back into Agkal-ang's eyes, and lingered, and was gone. Yes, two emeraldine bursts from the face of the armor rock, and in that instant Agkal-ang roared. Ma-alnak was here, and he was no god.

"Agkal-ang! Now you know my secret, but you will tell no one. You will die!" The voice thundered but Agkal-ang would not listen, his ears picking up the rustle of snapping twigs instead, and his arrow was in its place.

Ma-alnak's arrow flew past him again. The bushes parted some distance beyond, and Agkal-ang struck back, instantly. The hunter rose in Agkal-ang's spirits and he knew the fight was even.

Agkal-ang rushed forward. Ma-alnak was gone, but blood spots on the matted leaves marked his trail. He would not be far beyond – the cliffs began where Ma-alnak sought refuge. A few paces more, Agkal-ang paused to pick up his arrow. Blood coated the tip. Ma-alnak was mortal, if not a man.

Agkal-ang drew his sword and cut a path before him, and shortly picked out a blood-specked leaf in a bush. Ma-alnak had passed here. He reached the tall trees that were said to mark the mountain's plunge into a cliff.

"Agkal-ang!" The voice was human. Agkal-ang turned.

It was Kaliwas, slumped against a tree and clutching a chest wound. Strung across his back, a shell-horn dangled. Ma-alnak and the demon's voice. Agkal-ang sheathed his sword and approached Kaliwas warily.

"You – you have won. The secret is yours," Kaliwas rasped. He groped for the shell-horn and flung it at Agkal-ang's feet. "Take that. You will find it useful. It is power. Ma-alnak is power!" Agkal-ang's arrow had torn a rough-edged hole, from which Kaliwa's life flowed fast.

Agkal-ang kept his distance. "No, Kaliwas. I have sworn to put an end to this. The people must know."

Kaliwas craned his neck to look into Agkal-ang's eyes. "Fool, still a fool. You are too weak to seize power." The old man laughed and grimaced from the pain of the effort.

"Power based on reason is strong, Kaliwas. The truth will give us power. More than you ever held."

"Ma-alnak favors you now. Use him!"

"Ma-alnak is no more."

Kaliwas forced a smile. "So you think you have killed Ma-alnak. No. You will meet him again, surely as the Spaniard will break his peace with us when he wills it. Ma-alnak will wear new robes of white, Agkal-ang ... and he will favor the new masters of the village. Use him now! Taste power while it lasts...."

"No!"

"Now I must go – " Kaliwas raised himself, pushing his weight against one tree, and the next. "I must be gone. The people must believe in – in the power of Ma-alnak...."

Agkal-ang's head throbbed, and faintly he saw the figure move. It was hard to understand everything clearly, and as quickly. He had prayed for this chance – to reason, to fight, to be the first of his village to know and let the truth be known. It was hard to be the first, easier to continue as before. Kaliwas had vanished.

"Kaliwas!" Agkal-ang's senses snapped awake. "No!" Agkal-ang rushed after the datu.

It was his last sight of him, bloody and struggling, tumbling over the cliff's edge. For a moment the sun caught the body in its light and then it was gone.

Panting, Agkal-ang returned to Ma-alnak's chose earth and saw upon it the shell-horn. This he picked up and in anger flung into the sea below, after he who had last used it.

"Ma-alnak! You are dead, dead forever!" Agkal-ang cried out, but the sea would not answer, would not listen.

Agkal-ang walked back down the forest among the trees and stones. Surely Ma-alnak was gone. His reason had won. He would teach the people reason. And they would use it, even if Ma-alnak lived again and wore robes of white.

But that was yet to come.

* * *

NOW THE drink flows freely in Ginbualan when the story of Agcalan Point is told. Is that all? What happened next? You ask, your rice-wine losing its potency so suddenly. The people shrug and yawn.

Why don't you run up there and visit the fort? If you want to see so much. But you won't see much, just a clump of moss-covered stones, a piece of a flagstaff. A few arrowheads, if the children haven't dug them all up yet.

Oh, our ancestors took that fort, they did, the people say. Once when they met and

swore to fight, and gathered with bolos and spears ... and the Coleman throws a dim light on their story, ever dimmer.

“But Ma-alnak, will I see Ma-alnak?” You cannot help asking, then feeling silly.

And the people laugh at you, the old toothless women and the children caught in their laps, even when the gas is gone.

July 1975