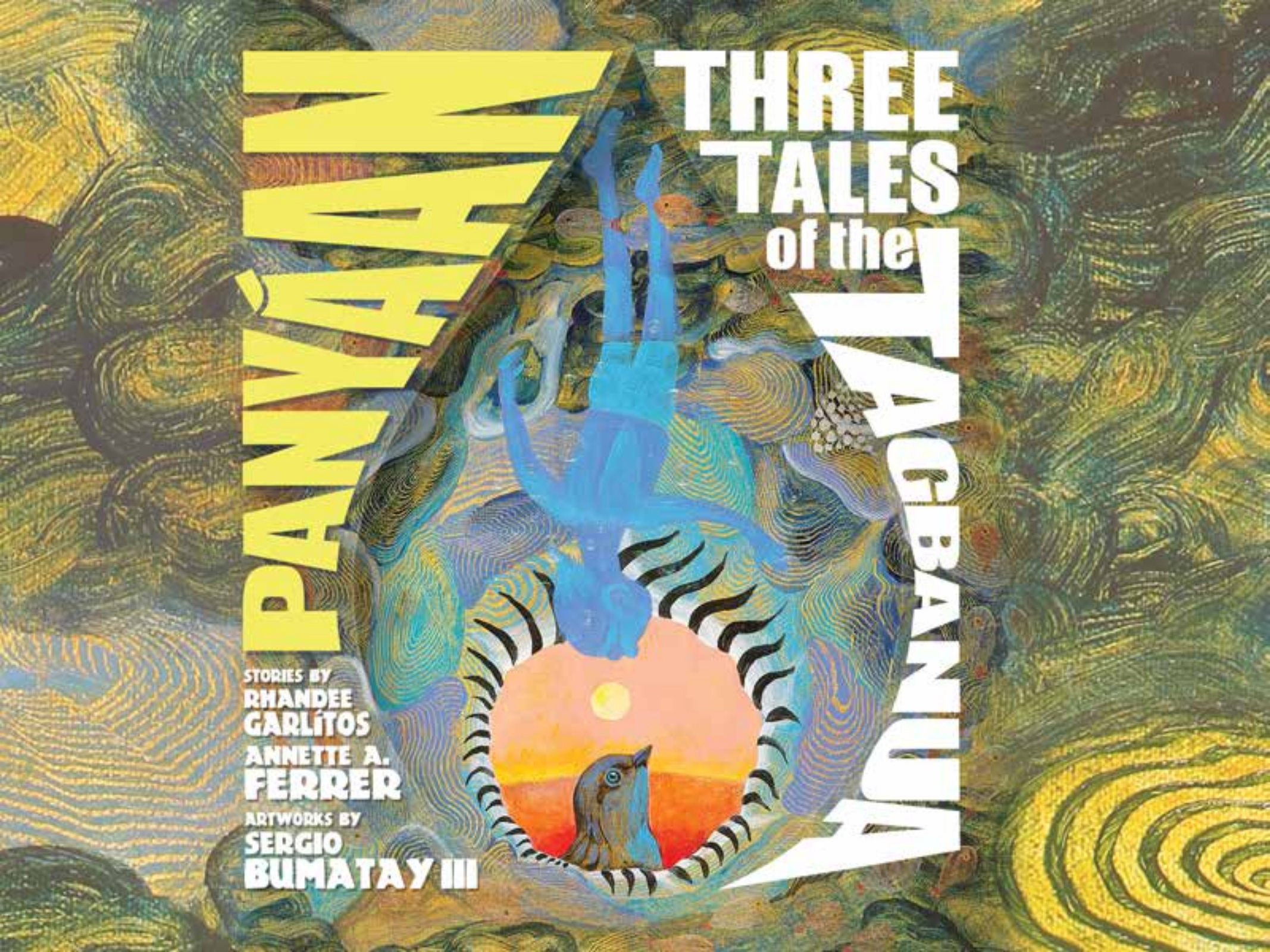


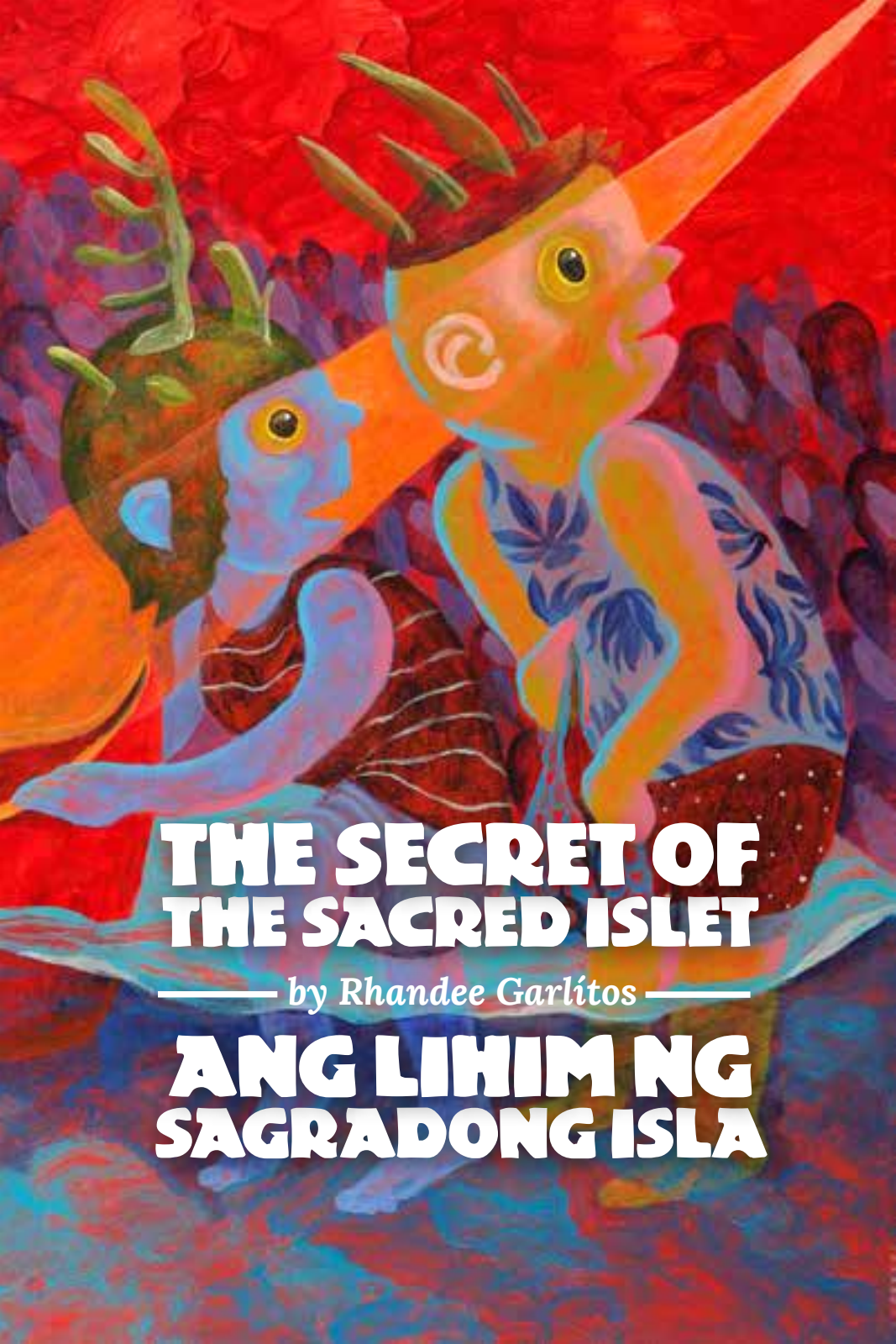
PANYAN

STORIES BY
**RHANDEE
GARLITOS**
**ANNETTE A.
FERRER**
ARTWORKS BY
**SERGIO
BUMATAY III**

**THREE
TALES**
of the

TAGBANUA





THE SECRET OF THE SACRED ISLET

— by *Rhandee Garlitos* —

ANG LIHIM NG SAGRADONG ISLA

“Don’t you want to see the giant octopuses?”
Noli pleaded.

“You know the rules, Noli,” Marlon answered.
“We’re not even supposed to be here! If your father
were to catch us...”

“But don’t you want to see the giant octopuses?”
Noli repeated, his eyes shining with youthful
excitement.



Marlon could only sigh. “You win. But we’d better
not get caught by your Tatay or the elders.”

“You mean, we’d better not get caught by the
manlalabiyot,” Noli laughed as they made their way
to the shore.

Noli and Marlon lived in the coastal barangay of Banuang Daan, on the island of Coron. The reef they were headed to was part of an islet and was the best place for swimming. Gentle on most days, its pristine waters were home to large schools of colorful fish.

But it was also a *panyáan*, a sacred place. The people of Banuang Daan believed that it was protected by the *manlalabiyot*. Gigantic and fierce, these were supernatural creatures said to have the heads of octopuses and the bodies of humans.

The elders always warned that any person caught by the *manlalabiyot* in the *panyáan* would never be seen again.

“Look, how brilliant the waters are!” exclaimed Noli. The waters transformed from hues of blue to bright luminescent green as they neared the islet.

“I can’t wait to see the fish down there!” Marlon agreed. Both boys jumped from the boat and dove towards the reef. They marveled at the sight of so many different corals and fish. The colors glimmered like gems under the water.





Noli was chasing a school of fish darting among the corals when suddenly, he saw a pair of eyes glowing in an underwater cavern. “The *manlalabiyot!*” he thought to himself. All hesitation was easily overcome by the boy’s natural curiosity, and Noli swam quickly toward the deep and dark hole.

He was now close enough to see the creature’s head and what he thought to be its round mouth, crowned with what looked like a pair of sharp beaks. Without warning, the creature lunged at Noli with great speed, and Noli was suddenly enveloped by pitch black water.

Noli felt true fear as the tales of the elders flashed in his mind. His hands and feet paddled in all directions. He could not tell up from down, and he wanted to scream as his panic rose.





Then, just as quickly, he felt a pair of arms around his chest. Marlon was pulling his cousin upward.

“What happened to you?” Marlon asked when they surfaced. “You were just spinning and swimming aimlessly. I thought you had cramps or something.”

“I saw a *manlalabiyot*! It attacked me!” cried Noli, eyes wide with fear and wonder.

Marlon stared at his cousin and did not say anything. After a few seconds, he simply said, “Let’s go home.” Noli gave Marlon a strange look, but remained silent. They climbed back up the *banca* and began to paddle silently back to shore.



Finally, Noli couldn’t stand it. “What’s the matter? Did I do anything wrong?” he asked Marlon.

“I don’t know what to believe,” Marlon replied. “But if you did see a *manlalabiyot*, then why are you still here? You know the stories. What if it had caught you?! How would I face your Tatay and Nanay?! And the rest of the elders?”

Hearing those words, Noli felt a slight chill. Maybe the encounter with the *manlalabiyot* had indeed been a close call. He saw the worry and concern on Marlon’s face, so he just said, “Don’t worry. It didn’t get me. Let’s just go home.”



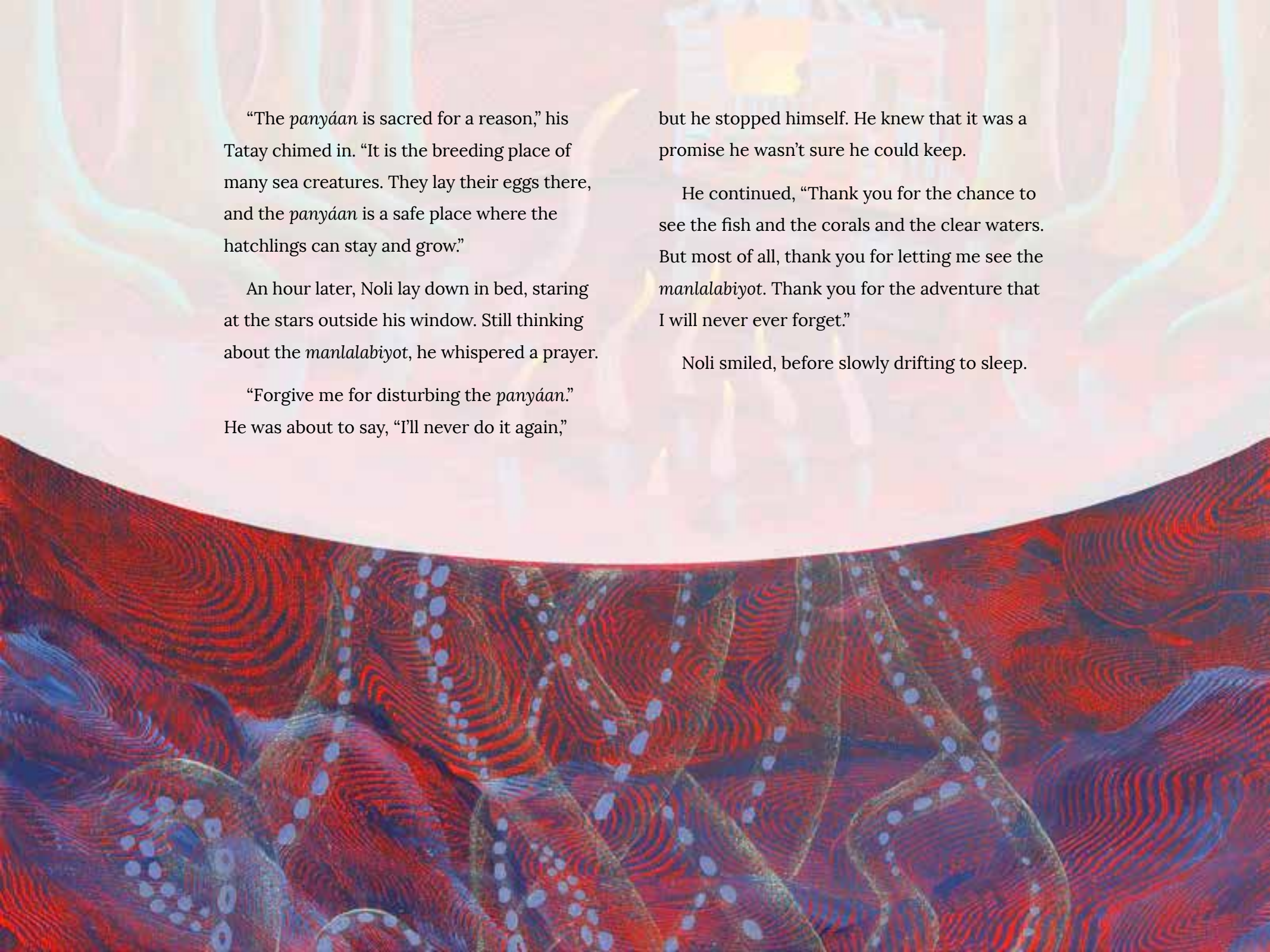


That evening, while Noli was having dinner with his Tatay and Nanay, he decided to confess. He told them about his dramatic encounter.

“I think the *manlalabiyot* cursed me, Tatay. Its black fluid was all over me,” Noli said, his head bowed down to avoid his parents’ eyes.

His parents glanced at each other. Each gave the other a knowing smile, then looked at Noli, faces serious once more.

“I think,” his Nanay gently said. “It just reminded you not to come near.”



“The *panyáan* is sacred for a reason,” his Tatay chimed in. “It is the breeding place of many sea creatures. They lay their eggs there, and the *panyáan* is a safe place where the hatchlings can stay and grow.”

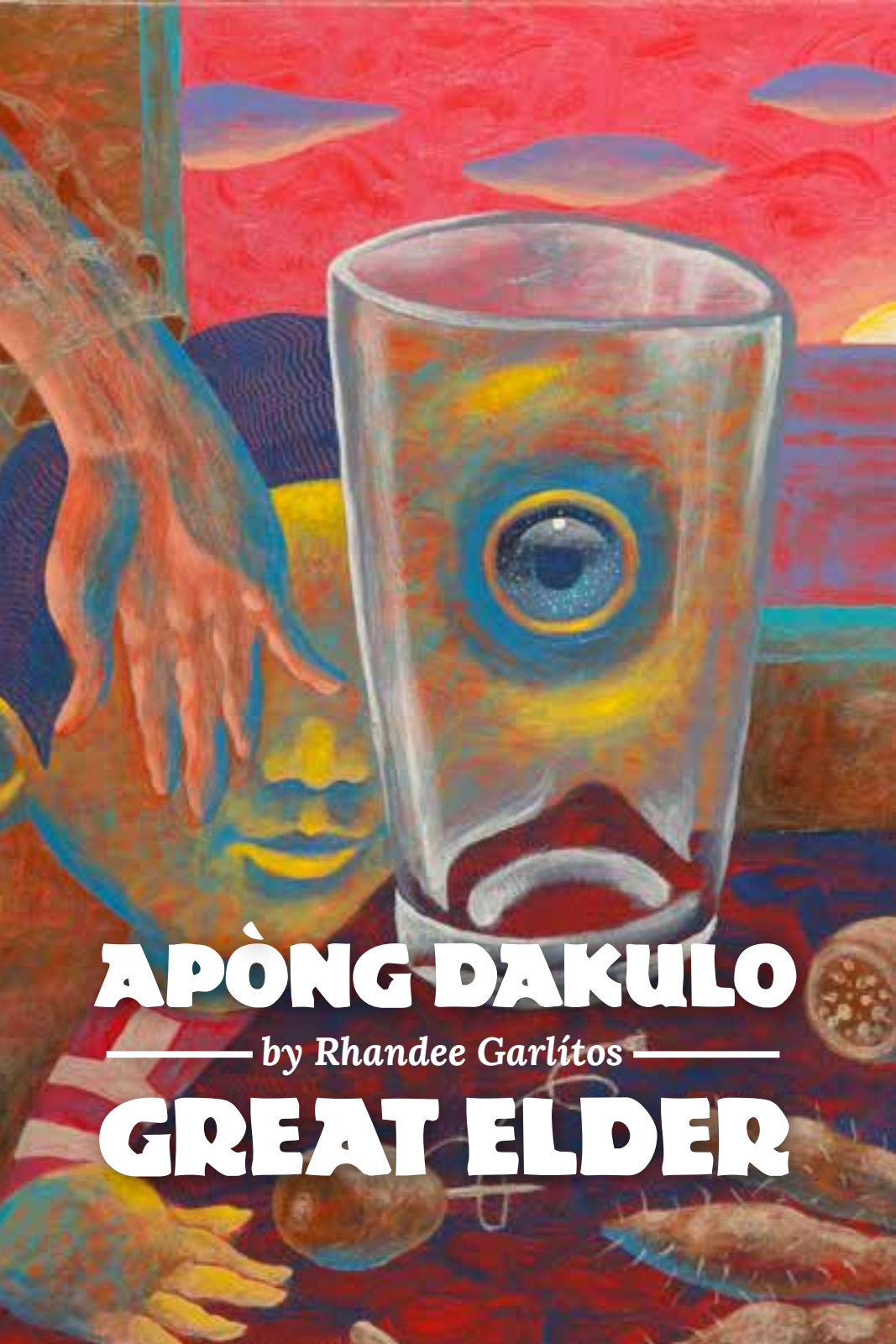
An hour later, Noli lay down in bed, staring at the stars outside his window. Still thinking about the *manlalabiyot*, he whispered a prayer.

“Forgive me for disturbing the *panyáan*.” He was about to say, “I’ll never do it again,”

but he stopped himself. He knew that it was a promise he wasn’t sure he could keep.

He continued, “Thank you for the chance to see the fish and the corals and the clear waters. But most of all, thank you for letting me see the *manlalabiyot*. Thank you for the adventure that I will never ever forget.”

Noli smiled, before slowly drifting to sleep.



APÒNG DAKULO

— by Rhandee Garlitos —

GREAT ELDER

“Mopyang temprano, apó ko!” (Good morning, my grandchild.)

Every morning, Lolo Filemon wakes me up from sleep and I accompany him to the beach to wait for the sun to rise from the sea. Lolo raises both his hands, and prays, “Let us give thanks to Father Sun, for giving us a new day.”

Then, he and I would go home where a hearty breakfast awaits.

Upon reaching home, I immediately take the hand of Lola Rosa to make a gesture of *pagmamano*. “Mano po, Lola,” I tell her as I kiss her hand. I would then go around and do the same for my parents, uncles and aunts.

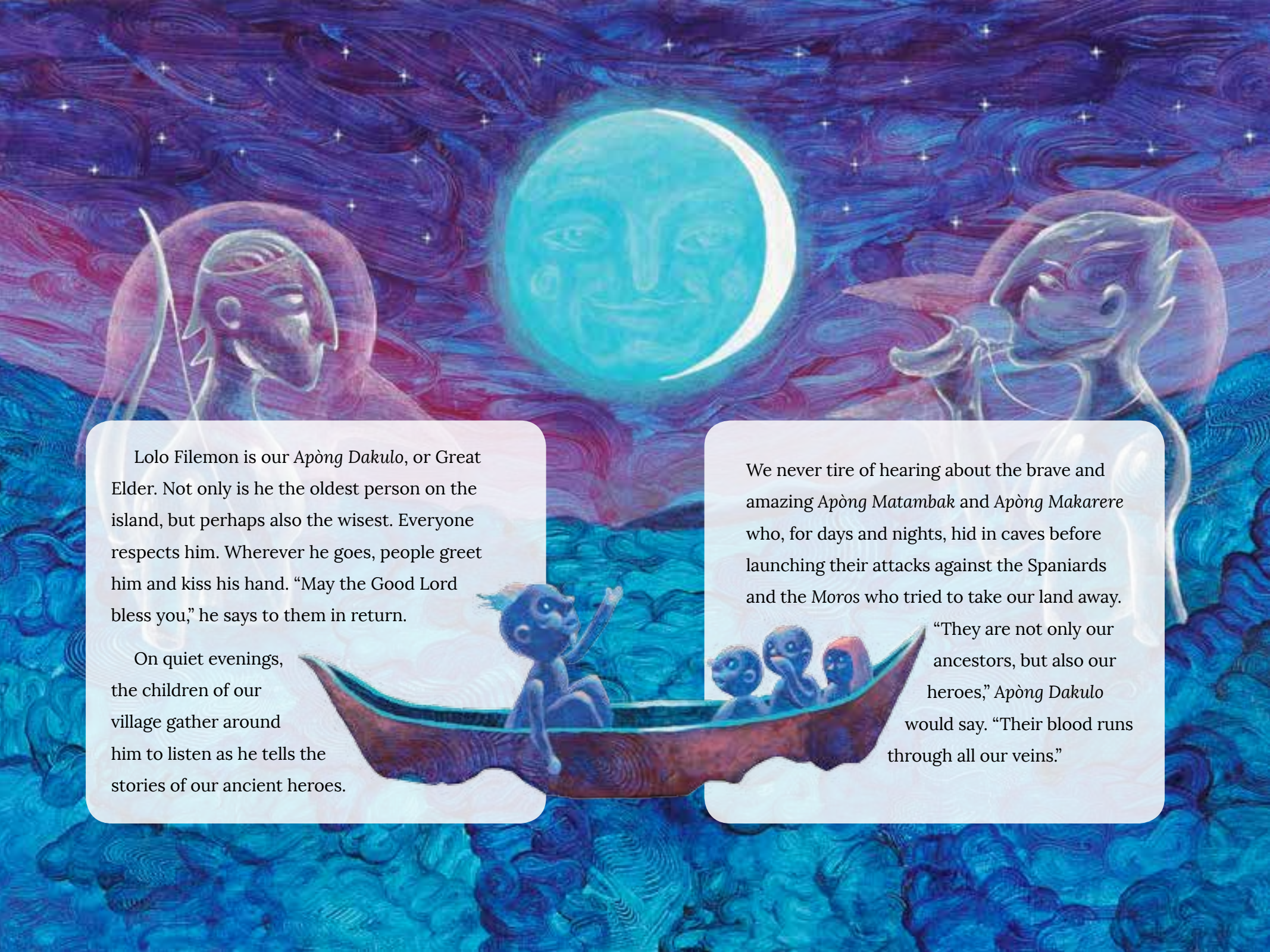
Out of the corner of my eye, I would see Lolo smile. “I taught him that,” he would proudly say.



On some days, we go to the foothills and gather *kurut*. Hairy and white like *kamote*, these are root crops that we Tagbanuas eat. Lola Rosa and Mamang peel off the skin, and soak the slices in sea water for weeks to remove the poison. “Don’t even think of eating them raw,” Lolo Filemon always reminds me, “or your stomach will hurt and your head will get dizzy.”

On other days, we climb up the hills and enter the caves where *balinsasayaw* birds build their nests. There, we pluck the nests and gather them, so Papang can bring them to the market. I am always amazed that Lolo is still spry enough to climb, while I, young as I was, often have to stop to catch my breath.



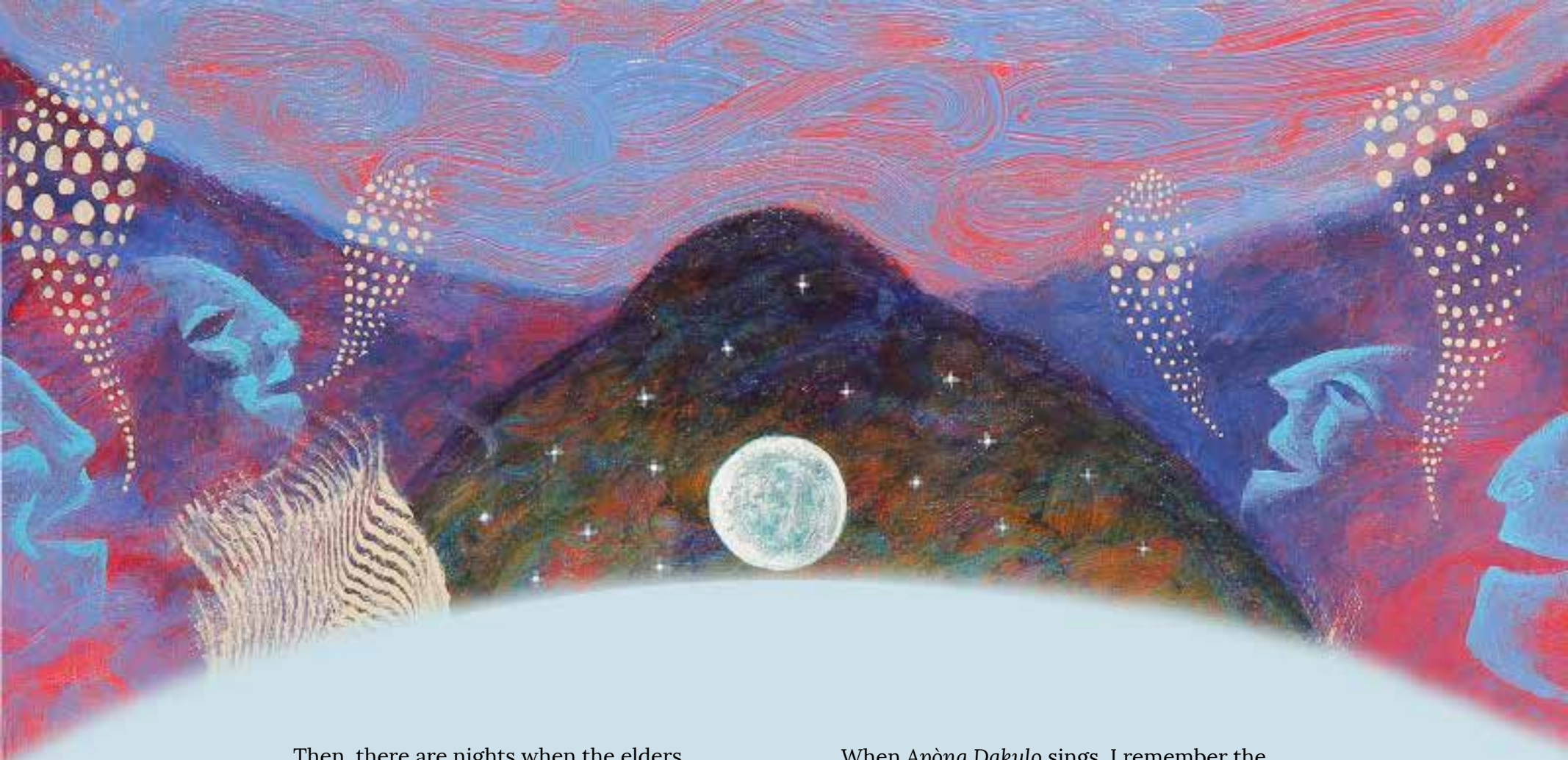


Lolo Filemon is our *Apòng Dakulo*, or Great Elder. Not only is he the oldest person on the island, but perhaps also the wisest. Everyone respects him. Wherever he goes, people greet him and kiss his hand. “May the Good Lord bless you,” he says to them in return.

On quiet evenings, the children of our village gather around him to listen as he tells the stories of our ancient heroes.

We never tire of hearing about the brave and amazing *Apòng Matambak* and *Apòng Makarere* who, for days and nights, hid in caves before launching their attacks against the Spaniards and the Moros who tried to take our land away.

“They are not only our ancestors, but also our heroes,” *Apòng Dakulo* would say. “Their blood runs through all our veins.”



Then, there are nights when the elders meet. Their meetings always end with a drink, and *Apòng Dakulo* would start chanting his *tablay*. *Tablay*, he explains, means “to cross hills and mountains,” in Tagbanua. So the *tablay* is supposed to be sung when one is on a journey. But now, it is also a celebration song to express whatever it is that comes from the heart.

When *Apòng Dakulo* sings, I remember the winds gently rustling the leaves of trees, as if to join in the melody. Then, as each elder takes his turn in singing their own *tablay*, it seems that even the crickets join with their chirping. These are magical moments.

One of the elders of the village, *Apòng Santiago*, passed away. *Apòng Dakulo* and I go to his house for the wake.

But instead of crying and mourning, people seem to be happy. There is plenty of singing to the beats of a drum that we call *tambur*. Everyone shares stories about *Apòng Santiago* as we all celebrate his life.

Then, *Apòng Dakulo* starts to tell the tale of the *Dumarakol*, a Tagbanua epic recited only at night, especially during wakes and when the moon is full. The *Dumarakol* is a very long story about a powerful Tagbanua man who defended his town of Bukalawan from the hands of invaders.

We listen to my Lolo all night.

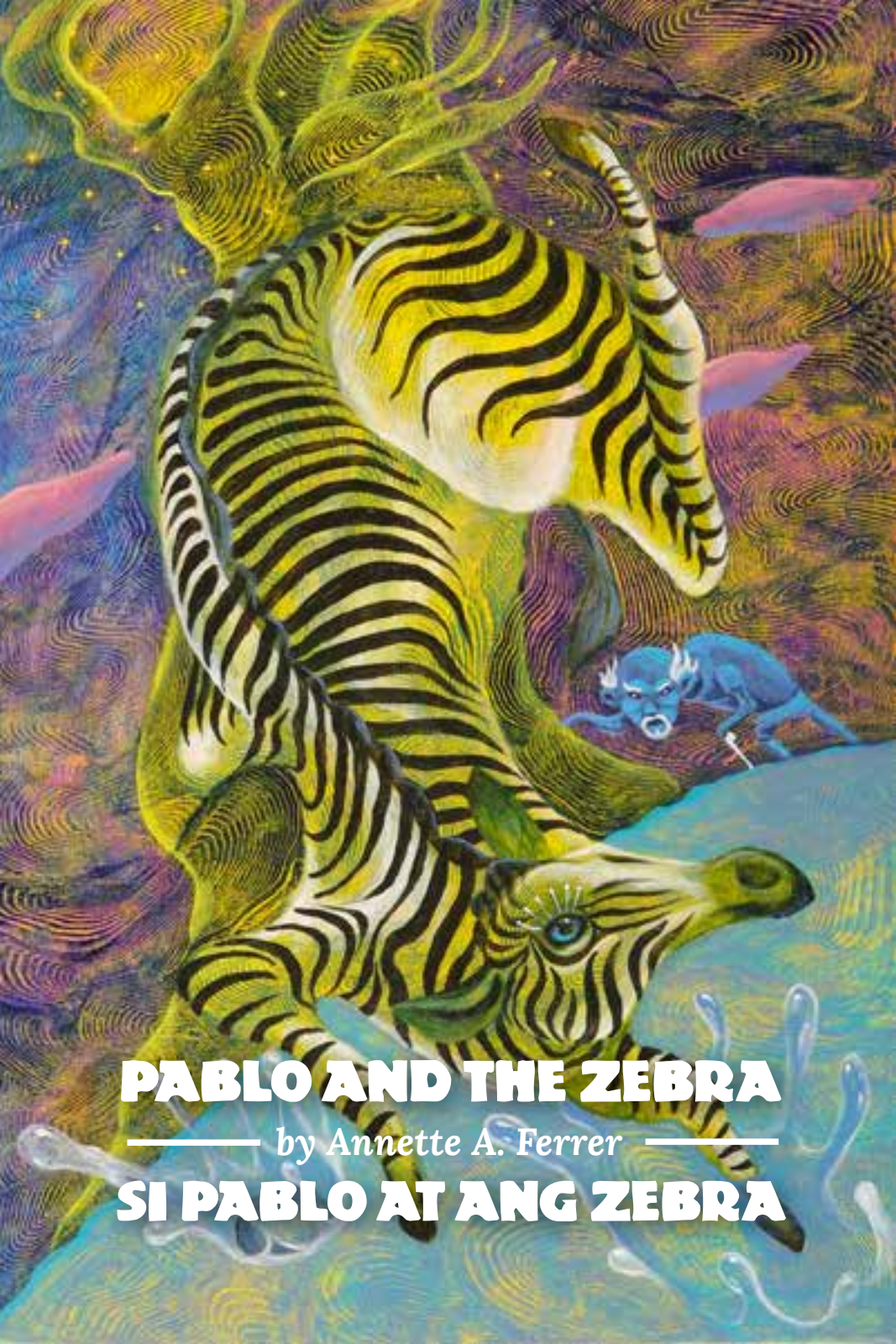


“It means a lot when your Lolo sings it,” my Papang tells me that night. “It makes us feel proud to be Tagbanua. We may have a simple life, but we have a rich history. Remember that, Ramon.”

The following morning, at the beach with Lolo, I ask, “Lolo, can you start teaching me the *tablay* and the *Dumarakol*?”

“Yes, my *apó*. I’ll be very happy to teach you,” he replies with a smile. “Let’s start with this *tablay*,” he says, as we face the morning sun and the gentle, endless blue sea beyond our shores.





PABLO AND THE ZEBRA

by Annette A. Ferrer

SI PABLO AT ANG ZEBRA

Nine-year-old Pablo watched his grandfather throw rocks at the zebra. He could never understand his Lolo's rage at the animals.



Lolo would fill his pockets with rocks, ready for any zebra, giraffe, or any other animal that made the mistake of coming too close.

Unlike Lolo, Pablo loved the animals of Calaut. He especially loved how gracefully the giraffes reached up to the trees to pick bundles of leaves with their tongues. He also loved the black and white stripes of the zebra. "If only I could ride them someday," he always wished.

One day, he asked his mother. "Mama, why does Lolo hate the animals so much?"

"Take a seat, Pablo," she answered, "and I will tell you the story."

Not too long ago, this country was ruled by a powerful king. He had a son that he loved very much.

“What can I give my son for his twentieth birthday?” the king, one day, thought.

“I know! I’ll give him a playground filled with animals that he can play with, chase around, and even hunt!” the king exclaimed. “It will have giraffes, zebras, impalas, and gazelles! And none of the dangerous animals like lions and tigers – my son could get hurt.”

And so by decree, our island was chosen as the prince’s royal playground. But first, the king had to deal with the people who were then living in Calait.

“Make them leave!” he barked at his soldiers.
“The prince must have his playground.”

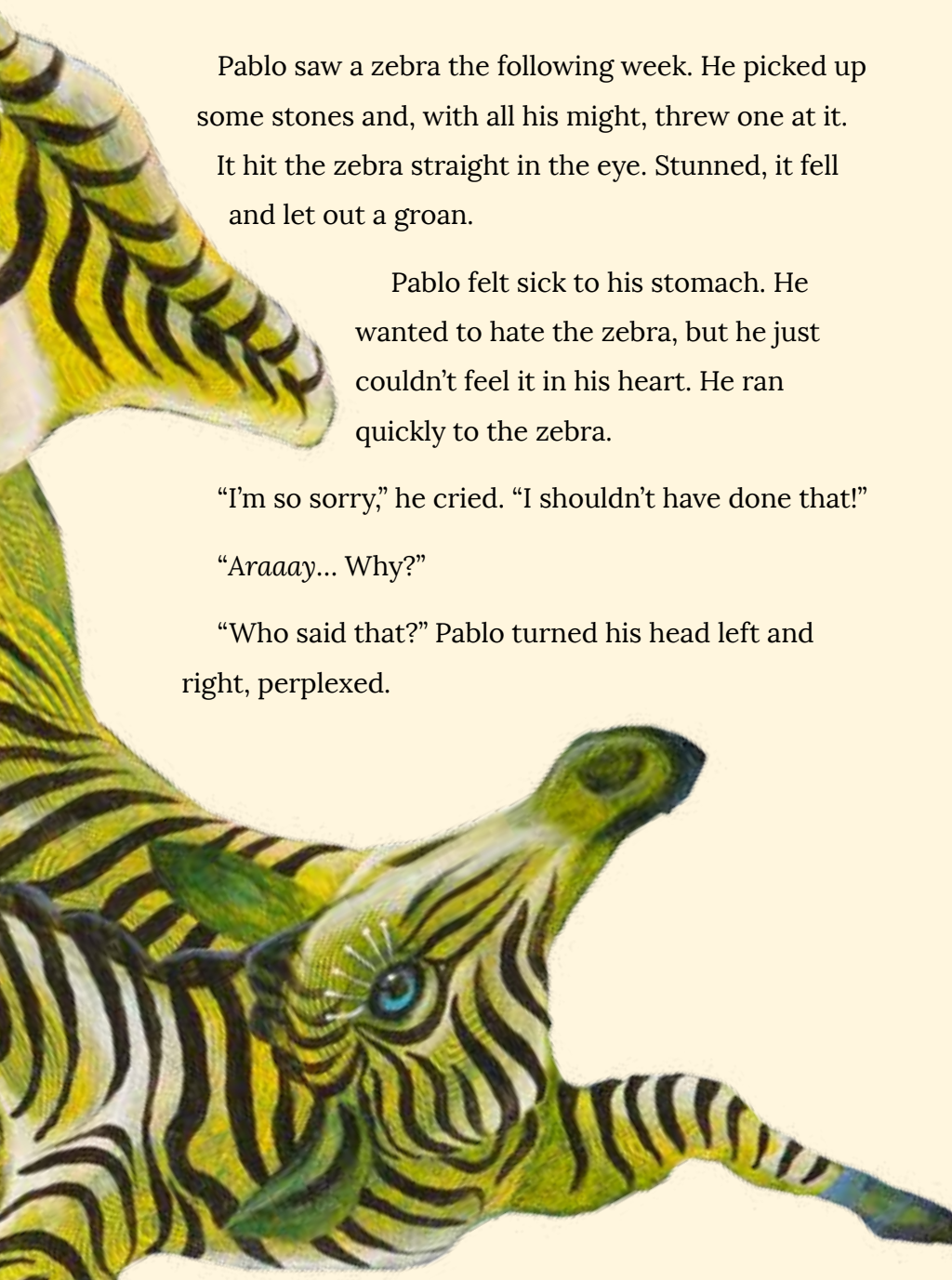
“Leave this place!” soldiers barked in turn at the Tagbanuas, all 200 families of them.
“And take your things with you! It is the king’s word, and no one can complain.”

The Tagbanuas had no choice. They had to leave. They were brought to the island of Culion and if anyone tried to return to Calait, the soldiers would beat them or bore holes in their boats.

“It took us ten years to get our homes back, Pablo,” Mama told her son. “Your Lolo did not see many of his friends and relatives again. This is why he is resentful, my son. He blames not just the king, but also the animals brought into Calait.”







Pablo saw a zebra the following week. He picked up some stones and, with all his might, threw one at it. It hit the zebra straight in the eye. Stunned, it fell and let out a groan.

Pablo felt sick to his stomach. He wanted to hate the zebra, but he just couldn't feel it in his heart. He ran quickly to the zebra.

"I'm so sorry," he cried. "I shouldn't have done that!"

"Araaay... Why?"

"Who said that?" Pablo turned his head left and right, perplexed.



"I did," said the zebra. "That ..." he sighed, "hurt!"

"You can talk?" Pablo said, eyes wide in disbelief.

"Yes, we can. But it took us a while. No one speaks Swahili around here," the zebra replied.

"Come quick, you must hide," Pablo whispered.

"If Lolo sees you, you will be worse off." He pushed the dizzy zebra into the thick bushes as fast as he could.

Pablo returned everyday to bring the zebra *kamote* tops, squash blossoms, and okra from their family's vegetable garden. Their friendship blossomed.

“I don’t understand,” mentioned the zebra one day. “Why do your people hate us so much?”

“Well,” Pablo sighed, “you animals stole our homes.” He then told the zebra about Lolo’s story.

When he had finished, the zebra bleated, “But we didn’t steal your homes! You took us away from ours!”

“What do you mean?” A very confused Pablo asked.

“Take a seat,” the zebra answered, “And I will tell you my lolo’s story.”

One morning, many years before I was born, my Lolo was eating fresh grass next to his mother and father. That was the last time he saw them.



All he remembered was that he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his thigh and became sleepy. When he woke up, he was in a big crate with a few other young zebras.

Many days later, his crate opened and he was here!

It was a beautiful place. But for my Lolo and all the other zebras he had travelled with, it was only a scary place because it was totally strange.

It was not their home!

But that wasn’t the worst of it – many of the animals that came with my Lolo are no longer here. Your people hunted them down for sport!





“So you see, Pablo,” the zebra explained, “if there’s anyone who should be angry, it should be us! Your people took us away from *our* homes!”

Then, after a pause, he added, “But, to be honest, I’m not really angry with you. I like it here. Despite all of this, it’s the only home I’ve ever known.”

“Come,” Pablo then urged the zebra. “It is getting dark and we should wait no longer. We must tell Lolo what you told me.”

There was a rustling of dry leaves and the snapping of twigs. “Who goes there?!” demanded the old man, his hand clenching a rock as he squinted in the darkness.

“Lolo, it’s me, Pablo!” The boy lifted his hands in the air and he stepped into the glow of the lamp. Lolo then saw the suspicious shadowy figure behind his grandson. “Who’s that with you?!” he shouted.

“Please, Lolo, don’t throw rocks,” the boy begged. “This is my zebra friend.”

The zebra stepped into the light. Slowly and hesitantly, the zebra faced Lolo and Mama who were standing at the porch.

That evening, Pablo, Lolo, Mama and the zebra exchanged stories for hours. Lolo looked at Pablo, and then gazed into the eyes of the zebra.

“I am very happy that you and Pablo became friends. I hope you can forgive me,” said Lolo.

“I now understand, that we—the people and animals of Calait—are all Tagbanua.”

“And tomorrow,” Lolo continued, “the council of elders will know that as well.”





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

RHANDEE GARLÍTOS fell in love with the Tagbanua people and their culture during his journeys to the Calamian Islands as a travel writer, and the stories in this anthology are the fruit of those journeys. A children's book author, journalist, poet, travel writer, editor, translator and educator, he has earned awards for his writing, which include the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, the Philippine Board on Books for Young People – Salanga Prize, the *Gintong Aklat* Award and the International Board on Books for Young People Diploma for Excellence.

This is his 15th book for children and his 2nd book for CANVAS (after *The Cat and the Bat and Other Fables*, illustrated by Elmer Borlongan, 2013). He also translated some of CANVAS's children's books like *Nadia and the Blue Stars* (2012), *The Triangle Man and the Flightless Diwata* (2015) and *Here Be Dragons* (2015). He currently resides at Novaliches, Quezon City, in a house full of books, with his family and a good number of cats.

ANNETTE A. FERRER once dreamt of documenting vanishing cultures through the lens of anthropology. A freelance copywriter, proofreader, and editor, she holds a degree in AB Social Sciences, Minor in English Literature from the Ateneo de Manila University. She is happiest surrounded by her three cats, cooking, and learning Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

This is her first book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Children's book illustrator, painter, and book designer **SERGIO BUMATAY III** is best known for his engaging surreal and conceptual illustrations with multilayered meaning. This approach garnered him multiple awards locally and internationally, including the prestigious Peter Pan Prize in Sweden. He is also a member of *Ang Ilustrador ng Kabataan* and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of the Philippines-Diliman.

He hopes to one day build a magical museum dedicated to local picture books, and he is eager to hear from you through sergiobumatay@yahoo.com.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 2016, CANVAS sent a team of writers, photographers, and artists to Palawan to learn about and document the culture of the Tagbanuas of the Calamianes Island Group. Introduced by the ECOFISH (Ecosystems Improved for Sustainable Fisheries) Project, and hosted by three local communities for a week, the CANVAS team listened and probed as elders and leaders of the Tagbanuas shared their history, culture, dreams, hopes, and everyday lives.

“Panyaan: Three Tales of the Tagbanua” is the fruit of this creative partnership between CANVAS and the ECOFISH Project. The three original children’s stories that make up this book, while fictional, are all based on the traditions, surroundings and heritage of the Tagbanuas.

The artworks that brought them to life are similarly inspired by the patterns, colors and feel of the gorgeous islands, waters and communities of Palawan. Each tale is different, and yet all are rooted in stories that have been handed from generation to generation of proud Tagbanuas.



The ECOFISH Project is a joint project of the Philippine government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve the management of important coastal and marine resources that support local economies. It seeks to improve fisheries and related livelihoods in eight marine key biodiversity areas, one of which is the Calamianes Island Group, using an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management to achieve social, economic and ecological sustainability.

The Center for Art, New Ventures & Sustainable Development (CANVAS), a nonprofit organization, works with the creative community to promote children’s literacy, explore national identity, and broaden public awareness of Philippine art, culture and the environment. CANVAS also runs the Looking for Juan Program which explores the use of art to encourage reflection and debate on selected social issues, particularly free expression, technology and culture, and national identity.



CANVAS' 1 Million Books for One Million Filipino Children Campaign aims to inspire in children a love for reading by donating its award-winning books to public schools, hospitals, and disadvantaged communities throughout the country.

A child that reads is a creative, empowered, and imaginative child who will learn independently, envision a brighter future, and ultimately lead a productive and meaningful life.

You can help us!

For more information, visit www.canvas.ph, email info@canvas.ph, or find us on Facebook: **Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development**.

CANVAS, a non-profit organization, works with the creative community to promote children's literacy, explore national identity, and broaden public awareness of Philippine art, culture, and the environment.