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ANG DYIP NI MANG TOMAS

MANG TOMAS AND HIS JEEP

Written by
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Paintings by
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English translation by Heidi Emily E. Abad

My father's aging jeepney was the first jeepney to ply the streets of Barangay Pastol. It is said that no one who is from Pastol would fail to recognize or ride Tatay's jeepney.

Children from our place who were baptized and sweethearts who had met and married would have been driven to church in Tatay's jeepney. School-children from Barangay Pastol would have been brought to school in Tatay's jeepney.



My father's jeepney has been witness to those who have left and have come back to Pastol, has heard the hearty laughter of friends meeting again after a long while, and has listened to the cries of families left behind by those working abroad.





My father is a skillful driver. The people of Pastol say that they prefer Tatay's smooth driving to the reckless way that others drive. They are sure to reach their destination safely and soundly. Tatay does not blare his horn unnecessarily nor too loudly, nor does he brake suddenly when driving.

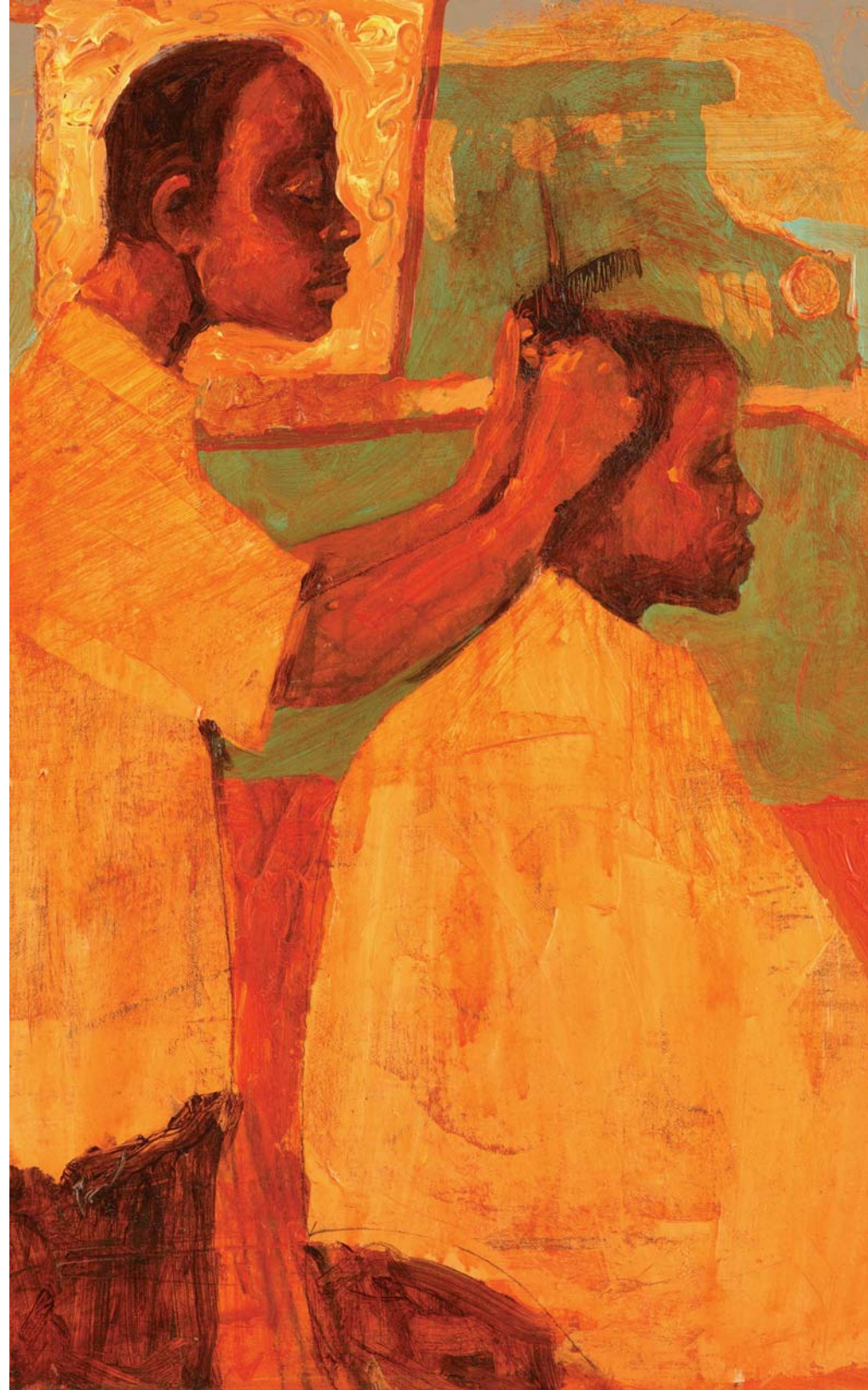
He can go through the narrowest streets with nary a scratch or dent. I haven't seen him lose his cool when driving. Thus, Tatay became everyone's model of a good driver in Barangay Pastol.

“If you hire Mang Tomas’ jeepney, you won’t have anything to worry about,” I overheard some people talking.

“As long as Mang Tomas is the driver, I am willing to go. Any other person’s driving makes me nauseous,” said Lola Kadyang.

“If you’re not familiar with the place you’re going to, just ask Mang Tomas. He has the memory of a map!” exclaimed my barber.

A number of couples even believe that Tatay’s old jeepney brought them good luck in their early years of marriage.





Tatay's jeepney is very well-maintained. Although it is an old jeepney, it is surely better than even the most expensive or latest model of vehicle. Tatay can tell what needs fixing just by listening to every squeak and clink that it makes. He also makes sure to clean and wash his jeep every Sunday.

“This jeepney is our lucky charm,” Tatay told me while he was polishing the bumper of the jeep.

“Without this jeepney, do you think your Ate would be able to finish school? Do you think I would be able to send your Kuya to study in Manila? So, make sure to study well. A good education is the only legacy I can give you and your siblings,” Tatay said.



“A newly-washed and polished jeep looks sturdier and seems faster,” Tatay would always tell me.

“It is a handsome jeepney, ‘Tay,” I once told him.

“But of course! Where else would it get its good looks but from us?” Tatay joked.

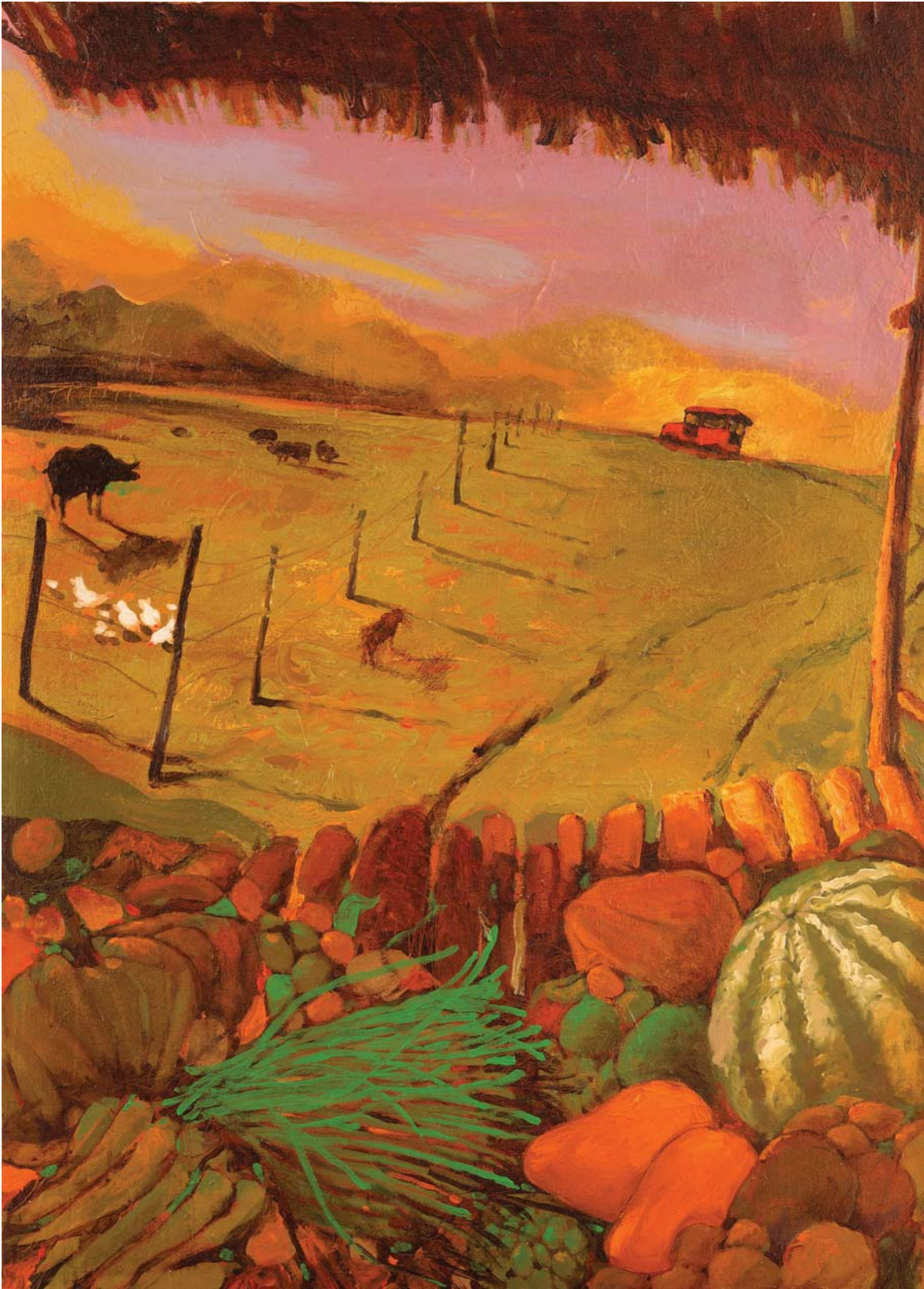
It seemed like our laughter would never end.





I would often accompany Tatay on his jeepney route, especially on weekends or holidays. I would be in charge of getting the fare or giving the change of the passengers. While waiting for passengers at the jeepney terminal, I would never forget to place a piece of rock under the jeep's wheel so that it wouldn't roll off accidentally. I would also wipe the side mirrors and fill the radiator with water.

Thus, there are no delays or problems once Tatay plies his route. All our passengers arrive safely home. All get to their destination.



Because Tatay's jeepney is always so full that some passengers even choose to stand by the entrance-way at the back and cling to the handle bars, the people of Pastol also say that Tatay can bring good luck to everything that he touches.

I thought, no wonder our mangoes, santol, atis, caimito, watermelons, chico, and banaba thrive and always bear much fruit! We always get bountiful harvests of string beans, okra, ampalaya, and other vegetables! That's why our pets and farm animals, like the carabao, cows, goats, pigs, dogs, ducks, and chickens never get sick!



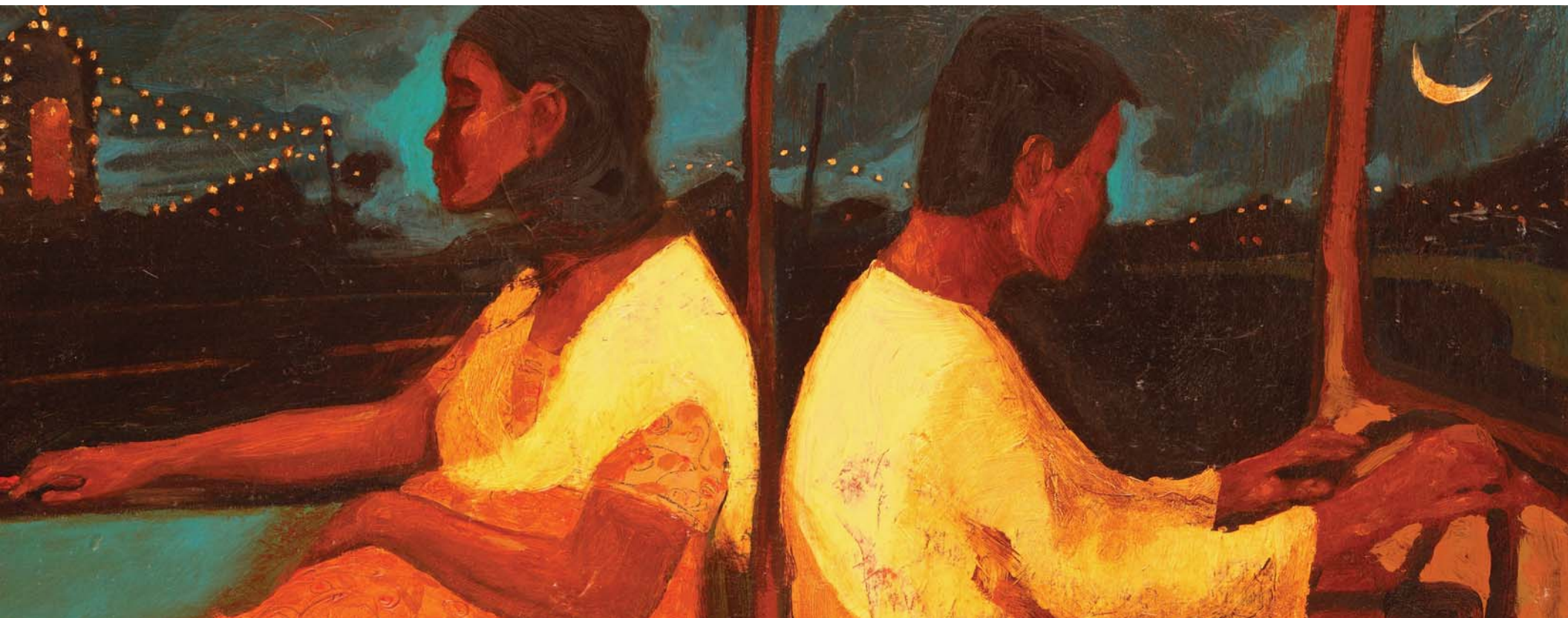
“Does Tatay have a magic touch? Why does everything he touch become productive? Why do all his plants bear much fruit? And why do all our pets and farm animals grow in number?” I would ask myself in wonder.

One afternoon, Tatay told me a story.

“Do you know why our jeepney is a lucky charm? On December 16, 1999, at four o’clock in the morning, a healthy baby boy was born in our old jeep.”

“Really?” I exclaimed.

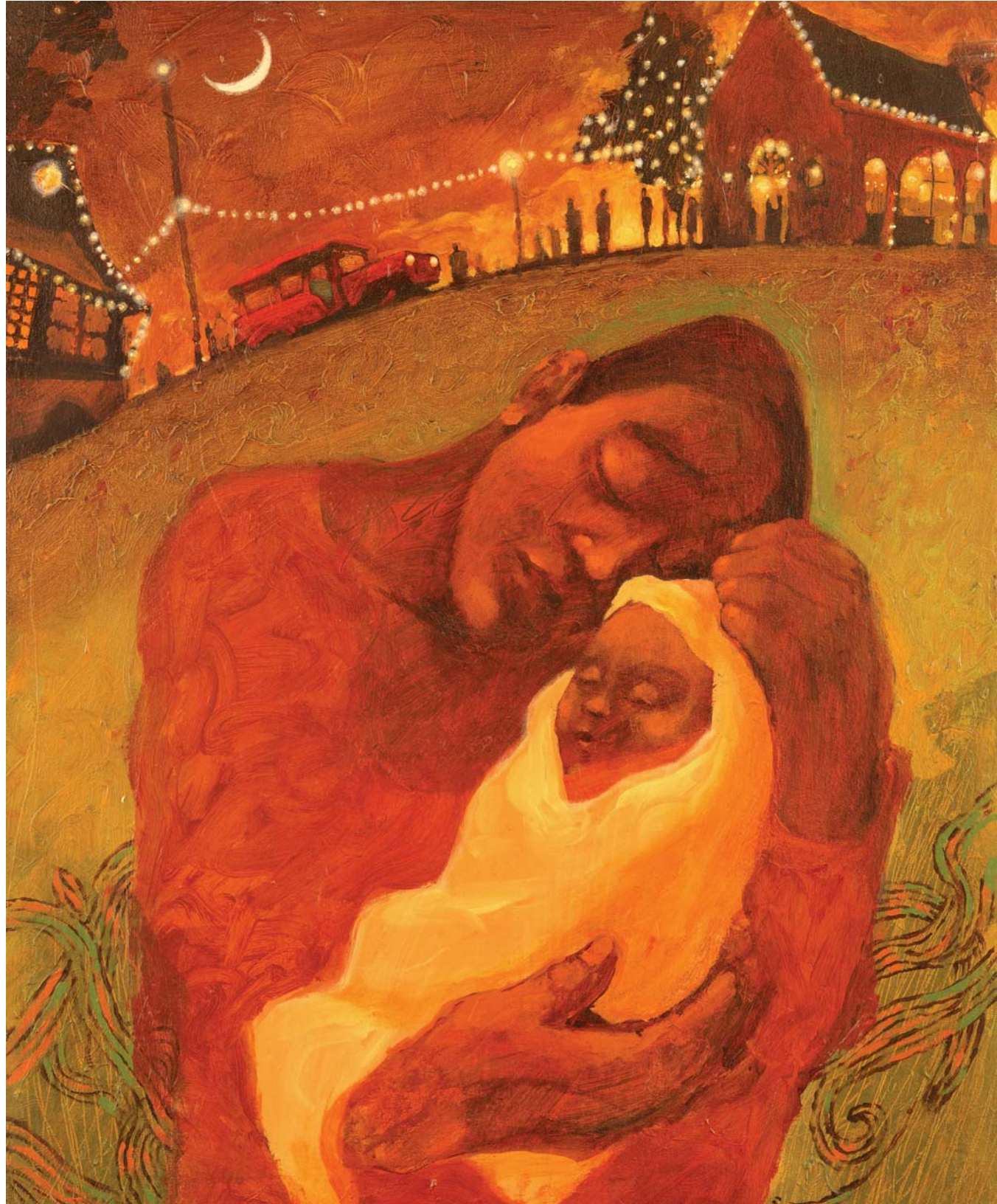
“Yes. It was the first of the dawn masses before Christmas. We were on our way to church when this woman began to feel her birthing pains. The baby was born before we could reach the hospital. So, it was the cry of a newborn that I heard that early morning,” Tatay narrated.



“Do you know who that woman was? And who the newborn baby was? Don’t you notice anything about the birth date of that child?” Tatay asked in succession.

I was enthralled by Tatay’s story.

“You were that baby who was born in our jeep. You were given to us by God on the first dawn mass.”





No wonder I shared the same birthday as the baby in Tatay's story.

"However, it was a difficult pregnancy for your mother. Although she knew of the risk to her health, she wanted you to be born. You are the best gift that we received. On that day the Lord gave you to us, He also took your mother. She made me promise to take good care of you," Tatay said as his voice began to break.

“There is a belief that if a child is born in a vehicle, that vehicle is blest. Because a new life was born in it, the passengers of that vehicle will have long and safe lives. You, my son, are the lucky charm of our family.”

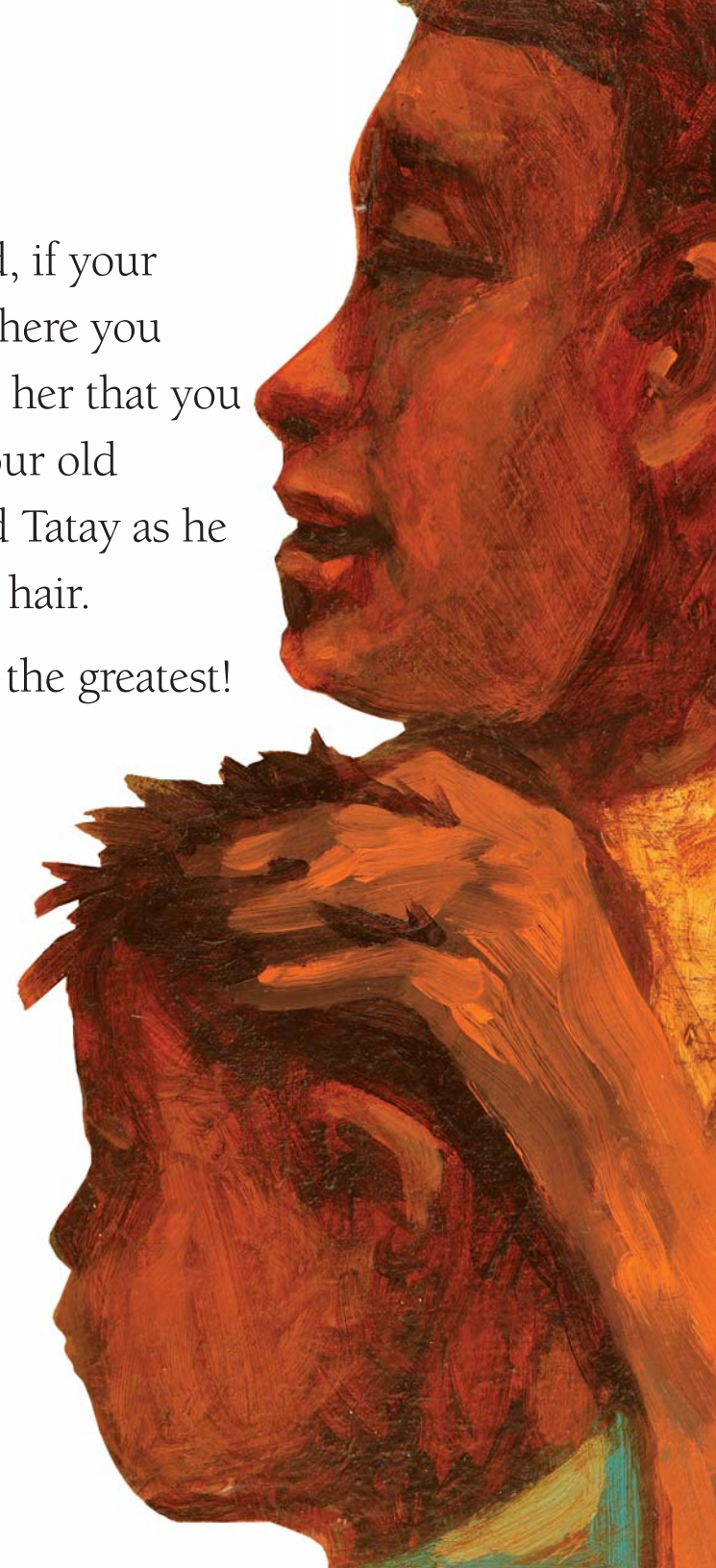
I then understood why Tatay took great care of our old jeepney. For every day that he drove it, it brought us food on our table, a good education for my siblings and me, money to buy books for Ate Perla and Kuya Nonon, and just enough party food for a modest celebration on each of our birthdays. That’s why we always have a good harvest. And that’s why our farm animals bring abundance. And, that is why I have felt no absence of a mother’s love — because Tatay had always taken good care of all of us.





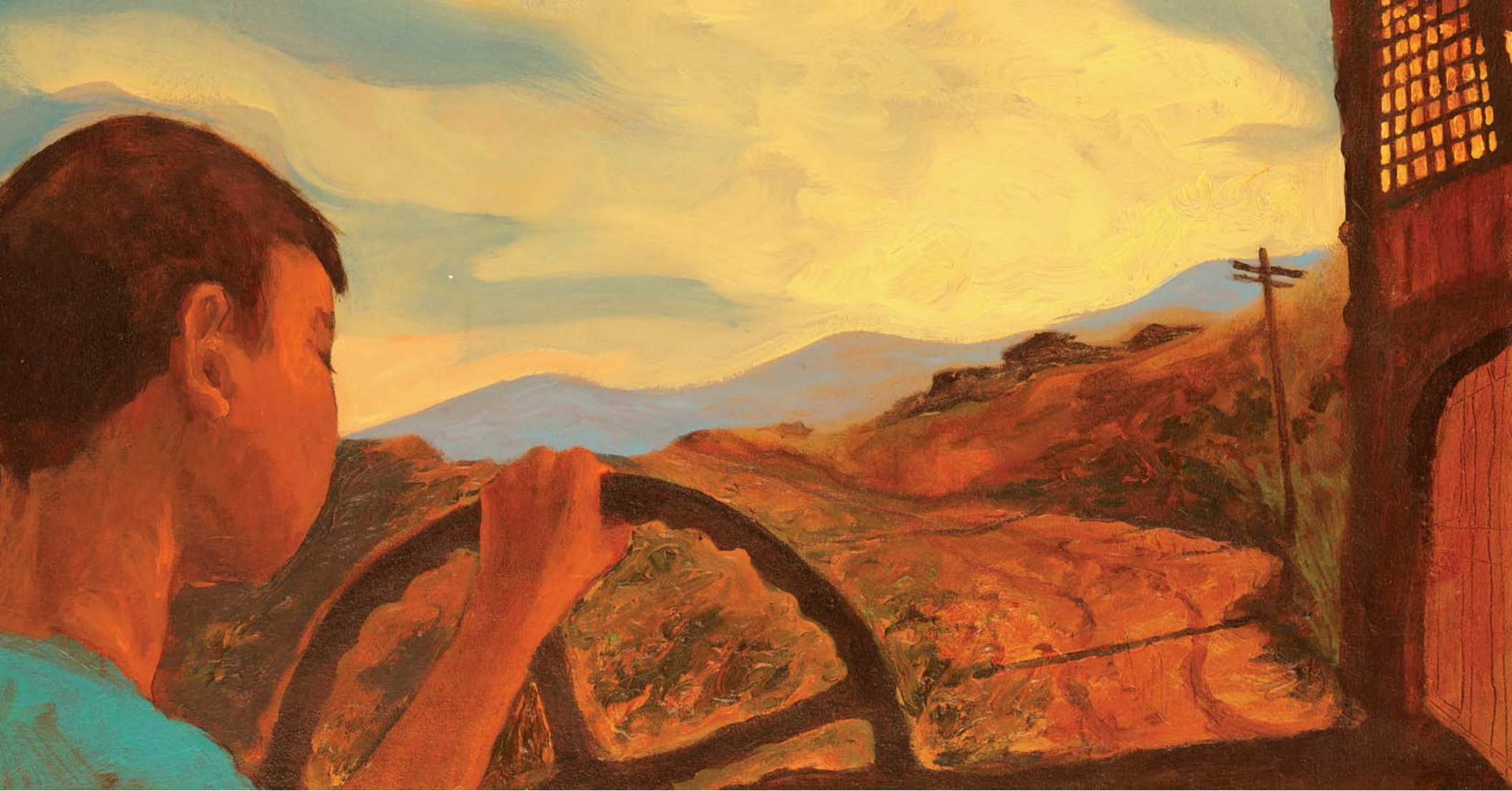
So, my child, if your teacher asks where you were born, tell her that you were born in our old jeepney,” joked Tatay as he ruffled up my hair.

My father is the greatest!



One Saturday, Tatay's rest day, I rode our old jeepney. I sat on the driver's soft seat and pretended to hold the steering wheel as if I were driving. I honked the horn. I steered to the right, then to the left. I honked again and glanced at the side mirror. Stepped on the brake pedal. Parked.





When I am grown-up, I want to be a great driver like Tatay.

I want to bring people to their destinations.

I want to fetch those who want to come home to Barangay Pastol.

I want to welcome those returning from abroad.

I want to listen to the animated talk and laughter of folks who have not seen each other in a long time.

I want to go to far places, swiftly yet safely.

I would like to continue witnessing all the happy occasions, like weddings, baptisms, graduations, and more — while driving Tatay's jeepney.





I held on to the jeepney's steering wheel. I wished for all of my dreams to come true. Then I felt as if I had indeed traveled far.

As I gripped the steering wheel and settled comfortably in the driver's seat, I felt as if Tatay were holding my hand and as if Nanay were hugging me tightly. It was a warm and secure feeling. I felt very safe.

I knew that I would always be guided in every path I choose to take.



(For my beloved father,
Mang Tomas, the best driver in
the whole world.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GENARO R. GOJO CRUZ grew up in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan. He earned his degree in Social Science from Philippine Normal College, and has won numerous writing awards, including the Palanca Award, Gawad Ka Amado, Gawad Collantes sa Pagsulat ng Tula at Sanaysay, Ninoy Poetry Writing Contest, and the PBBY-Writers Prize.

He presently teaches at Philippine Normal College, while pursuing his masters degree in Philippine Studies as a scholar at De La Salle University in Manila.

During his spare time, Genaro tells stories to, and teaches street children in Binondo, Manila.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

ANTHONY E. PALOMO graduated from the University of the Philippines with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts. He also completed certificate programs in Advertising at Maryknoll College and in Electronics at the University of Santo Tomas.

Recognized as one of the best watercolor artists in the country, Anthony was a member of the legendary Grupong Salingpusa. His work is also influenced by four years of work as an overseas Filipino in Malaysia.

Anthony's artworks for "Ang Dyip ni Mang Tomas" were showcased at the prestigious Ayala Museum in Makati City, Philippines.

