

## Selamat Tinggal Hindia

Chevrolet tua yang kutumpangi semakin melambat, sebelum akhirnya berhenti di muka barikade bambu yang dipasang melintang di ujung jalan Noordwijk. Sebentar kemudian, seperti sebuah mimpi buruk, dari sebelah kiri bangunan muncul beberapa orang pria berambut panjang dengan ikat kepala merah putih dan aneka seragam lusuh, menodongkan senapan.

“Laskar,” gumam Dullah, supirku.

“Pastikan mereka melihat tanda pengenal wartawan itu,” bisikku.

Dullah menunjuk kertas di kaca depan mobil. Salah seorang penghadang melongok melalui jendela.

“Ke mana?” tanya orang itu. Ia berpeci hitam. Kumisnya lebat, membelah wajah. Sepasang matanya menebar ancaman.

“Merdeka, Pak! Ke Gunung Sahari. Ini wartawan. Orang baik,” Dullah, dengan raut muka yang dibuat setenang mungkin, mengarahkan ibu jarinya kepadaku.

“Turun dulu baru bicara, *sontoloyo!*” bentak si kumis sambil memukul bagian depan mobil. “Suruh bule itu turun juga!” sambungnya.

Tergesa, Dullah dan aku menuruti perintahnya. Dibantu beberapa rekannya, si kumis mengeledah seluruh tubuh kami. Sebungkus rokok Davros yang baru kunikmati sebatang segera berpindah ke saku bajunya. Demikian pula beberapa lembar uang militer Jepang di dalam dompet. Seorang laskar lain masuk ke dalam mobil, memeriksa laci, lalu duduk di kursi sopir, memutar-mutar roda kemudi seperti seorang anak kecil.

“Martinus Witkerk. *De Telegraaf*,” si kumis membaca surat tugas, lalu menoleh kepadaku. “Belanda?”

“Tidak bisa bahasa Melayu, asli dari sana,” sergah Dullah. Tentu saja ia berdusta.

“Aku tanya dia, bukan kamu. *Sompre!*” si komandan menampar pipi Dullah. “Teman-temanmu mati kena peluru, kamu ikut penjajah. Sana, minggat!” ia mengembalikan dompetku sambil menikmati rokok rampasannya.

“Terima kasih, Dullah,” kataku beberapa saat setelah kendaraan kembali melaju. “Kamu baik-baik saja?”

“Tak apa, Tuan. Begitulah sebagian dari mereka. Mengaku pejuang, tapi masuk-keluar rumah penduduk, minta makanan atau uang. Sering juga mengganggu perempuan,” sahut Dullah. “Untung saya yang mengemudi. Bila Tuan Schurck yang pegang, saya rasa tuan berdua tidak akan selamat. Mereka suka menghabiskan orang Eropa yang mudah marah seperti Tuan Schurck. Tidak peduli wartawan.”

“Jan Schurck memang pandai membahayakan diri,” aku tersenyum. “Itu sebabnya majalah *Life* memberinya gaji tinggi.”

“Tuan yakin alamat si nona ini?”

“Ya, seberang Topografisch Bureau. Tidak mau pergi dari situ. Si Kepala Batu.”

Kepala batu. Maria Geertruida Welwillend.

Geertje! Ya, itu nama sebutannya.

Aku bertemu wanita itu di kamp internir Struiswijk, tak lama setelah pengumuman resmi takluknya Jepang kepada Sekutu.

Waktu itu, di hotel Des Indes, yang sudah kembali ditangani oleh manajemen Belanda, aku dan beberapa rekan wartawan tengah membahas dampak sosial di Hindia seiring kekalahan Jepang.

“Proklamasi kemerdekaan serta lumpuhnya otoritas setempat membuat para pemuda pribumi kehilangan batas logika antara ‘berjuang’ dan ‘bertindak jahat’. Rasa benci turun-temurun terhadap orang kulit putih serta mereka yang dianggap kolaborator, tiba-tiba seperti menemukan pelampiasannya di jalan-jalan lengang, di permukiman orang Eropa yang berbatasan langsung dengan kampung pribumi,” Jan Schurck melemparkan seonggok foto ke atas meja.

“*God Almachtig*. Mayat-mayat ini seperti daging giling,” Hermanus Schrijven dari *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* membuat tanda salib setelah mengamati foto-foto itu. “Kabarnya, para jagal ini adalah jawara atau perampok yang direkrut menjadi tentara. Sebagian rampasan dibagikan kepada penduduk. Tapi kerap pula diambil sendiri.”

“Bandit patriot,” Jan mengangkat bahu. “Terjadi pula semasa Revolusi Prancis, Revolusi Bolshevik, dan di antara para partisan Yugoslavia hari ini.”

“Anak-anak haram revolusi,” aku menimpali.

“Aku benci perang,” Hermanus membuang puntung rokoknya

“Warga Eropa tidak menyadari bahaya itu,” kataku. “Setelah lama menderita di kamp, tak ada lagi yang mereka inginkan kecuali selekasnya pulang. Mereka tak tahu, si Jongos dan si Kacung telah berubah menjadi pejuang.”

“Kurasa banyak yang tidak mendengar maklumat dari Lord Mounbatten agar tetap tinggal di kamp sampai pasukan Sekutu datang,” Eddy Taylor, dari *The Manchester Guardian*, angkat bicara.

“Ya. Dan para komandan Jepang, yang sudah tidak memiliki semangat hidup sejak kekalahan mereka, cenderung membiarkan tawanannya minggat. Ini mengkhawatirkan,” Jan menyulut rokok, entah yang ke berapa.

“Bisa lebih buruk. Tanggal 15 September kemarin, pasukan Inggris tiba di Teluk Batavia,” aku menunjuk peta di meja. “Sebuah *cruiser* Belanda yang menyertai pendaratan itu konon telah memicu keresahan kalangan militan di sini. Bagi mereka, hal itu seperti menguatkan dugaan bahwa Belanda akan kembali masuk Hindia.”

“*Well*, ini di antara kita saja. Menurut kalian, apakah Belanda berniat kembali?” Eddy Taylor menatap Jan dan aku, ganti-berganti.

Mendadak pembicaraan terpotong teriakan Andrew Waller, wartawan Sydney Morning Herald, yang setia memantau perkembangan situasi melalui radio: “Menarik! Ini menarik! Para mantan tentara KNIL dan tentara Inggris pagi ini memindahkan para penghuni kamp Cideng dan Struiswijk.”

Tak membuang waktu, kami semua berangkat pergi. Aku dan Jan memilih mengunjungi Kamp Tawanan Struiswijk.

Mayor Adachi, komandan Jepang yang kami temui, menyambut gembira upaya pemindahan massal ini.

“Patroli kami kerap menjumpai mayat orang Eropa yang melarikan diri dari kamp. Tercincang dalam karung di tepi jalan,” katanya.

Aku mengganggu sembari mencatat. Tetapi sesungguhnya matakku terpaku pada Geertje yang berjalan santai menenteng koper. Bukan menuju rombongan truk, melainkan ke jalan Drukkerijweg, bersiap memilih becak.

“Hei, Martin!” teriak Jan Schruck. “Gadis itu melirikmu sejak tadi. Jangan tolak keberuntunganmu. Kejar!”

Aku memang mengejanya, tetapi segera menerima kejutan besar.

“Aku tidak ikut,” Geertje menatapku tajam. “Truk-truk ini menuju Bandung. Ke tempat penampungan di Kapel Ursulin. Sebagian lagi ke Tanjung Priok. Aku harus pulang ke Gunung Sahari. Banyak yang harus kukerjakan,” katanya.

“Maksudmu, sebelum Jepang datang, engkau tinggal di Gunung Sahari, dan sekarang hendak kembali ke sana?” tanyaku.

“Ada yang salah?” Geertje balik bertanya.

"Ya. Salah waktu dan tempat. Pembunuhan terhadap orang kulit putih, Tionghoa, dan orang-orang yang dianggap kolaborator Belanda semakin menjadi. Mengapa ke sana?"

"Karena itu rumahku. Permissi," Geertje membalikkan badan, menentang kembali kopernya.

Aku tertegun. Dari jauh kulihat si keparat Jan menjungkirkan ibu jarinya ke bawah.

"Tunggu!" aku mengejar Geertje. "Biar kuantar."

Kali ini Geertje tak menolak. Dan aku bersyukur, Jan bersedia meminjamkan motornya.

"Hati-hati sinyo satu ini, Nyonya," Jan mengedipkan mata. "Di Nederland banyak wanita merana menunggu kedatangannya."

"Begitukah? Panggil 'nona', atau sebut namaku saja," sahut Geertje.

"Oh, kalau begitu panggil aku Jan."

"Dan ini Martin," aku menebah dada. "Apakah kau tak ingin membuang bakiak kamp itu?" tanyaku sambil melirik kaki Geertje. "Bukankah para tentara di sana menyediakan sepatu untuk wanita dan anak-anak? Mereka juga membagikan gincu dan bedak. Kalian akan kembali rupawan."

"Belum terbiasa bersepatu lagi, jadi kusimpan di koper. Di kamp, aku mahir berlari dengan bakiak," Geertje tertawa, meletakkan tubuhnya di jok belakang.

*Mijn God.* Tawa renyah dan lesung pipinya. Betapa ganjil berpadu dengan sepasang alis curam itu. Wajah yang sarat teka-teki. Apakah wanita ini masih memiliki keluarga? Suami? Tapi tadi ia minta dipanggil 'nona'.

"Gunung Sahari sering dilewati Batalyon X. Mereka menjaga permukiman Eropa. Tetapi tentu saja tak ada yang tahu, kapan serangan datang. Coba pikirkan usulku tadi," dari kaca spion, kutengok Geertje. Ia tampak ingin mengatakan sesuatu, tetapi suara motor Jan teramat bising. Akhirnya kami membisu saja sepanjang perjalanan.

Di perempatan Kwitang aku meliuk ke kanan, meninggalkan iringan truk berisi wanita dan anak-anak di belakangku. Ah, anak-anak itu. Riu bertepuk tangan, menyanyikan lagu-lagu gembira. Tidak menyadari bahwa kemungkinan besar tanah Hindia, tempat mereka lahir, sebentar lagi tinggal kenangan.

"Depan empang itu," Geertje melambai.

Aku membelokkan motor. Rumah besar itu terlihat menyedihkan. Dindingnya kotor. Kaca jendela pecah di sana-sini. Anehnya, rumput pekarangan tampak seperti belum lama dipangkas.

“Sebentar!” kuraih lengan Geertje saat ia ingin berlari ke teras. Dari tas di belakang motor, kukeluarkan belati yang tadi dipinjamkan oleh Jan. Kudorong pintu depan. Terkunci.

“Masih ingin masuk?” tanyaku.

“Ya,” jawab Geertje. “Singkirkan belatimu. Biar aku yang mengetuk. Semoga rumah ini belum diambil alih keluarga Eropa lain.”

“Atau oleh laskar,” sahutku.

Geertje mengetuk beberapa kali. Tak ada jawaban. Kami berputar ke belakang. Pintunya terbuka sedikit. Saat hendak masuk, terdengar langkah kaki dari kebun. Seorang wanita pribumi. Mungkin berusia lima puluh tahun.

“Nona!” wanita itu meraung, memeluk kaki Geertje.

Geertje menarik bahu si wanita agar berdiri.

“Jepang sudah kalah. Aku pulang, lyah. Mana suamimu? Apakah selama ini engkau tinggal di sini?” tanya Geertje. “Ini Tuan Witkerk, teman saya. Martin, ini lyah. Pengurus rumah tangga kami.”

lyah membungkuk kepadaku, lalu kembali menoleh kepada Geertje.

“Setelah terakhir menengok Nona, rumah ini diambil Jepang. Tempat tinggal para perwira. Saya memasak untuk mereka. Tidak boleh pergi. Itulah sebabnya saya tidak bisa menengok Nona,” lyah kembali terisak. “Mana Tuan, Ibu, dan Sinyo Robert?”

“Mama meninggal bulan lalu. Kolera,” Geertje mendorong pintu lebih lebar, lalu masuk rumah. Aku dan lyah menyusul. “Papa dan Robert, dikirim ke Burma. Sudah kuminta komandan kamp mencari berita tentang mereka,” lanjut Geertje.

“Barang berharga disita. Foto-foto di dinding musnah. Diganti bendera Jepang. Tapi belum lama ini mereka buru-buru pergi. Entah ke mana. Banyak barang tidak dibawa,” kata lyah. “Saya ambil alat-alat masak dulu di gubuk. Sekalian ajak suami ke sini. Sejak jadi koki Jepang, saya pindah ke gubuk belakang. Setelah mereka pergi, saya tetap tidak berani tinggal di sini. Tapi setiap ada kesempatan, pasti menengok, membersihkan yang perlu.”

“Ajak suamimu. Kita bangun rumah ini. Kalau bank sudah berjalan normal, mungkin aku bisa mengambil sedikit simpanan,” Geertje membiarkan lyah berlari ke luar, lalu meneruskan memeriksa rumah. Meja-kursi tersisa beberapa, juga lemari. Tetapi tak ada isinya. Sebuah kejutan kami temukan di

ruang keluarga: Piano hitam yang anggun. Cukup mengherankan, Jepang tidak menyita atau merusaknya. Mungkin dulu dipakai sebagai hiburan.

Geertje meniup debu tipis, membuka penutup tuts. Sepotong irama riang menjelajahi ruangan.

“Lagu rakyat?” tanyaku.

“Si Patoka’an,” Geertje mengangguk, lalu bersenandung menimpali ketukan tuts.

“Engkau menyatu dengan alam dan penduduk di sini. Mereka juga menyukaimu. Mungkin mencintaimu setulus hati,” kataku. “Tapi zaman ‘tuan’ dan ‘babu’ ini akan segera berakhir. Amerika semakin memperlihatkan ketidaksukaan mereka akan kolonialisme. Dunia luar juga mulai mengawasi setiap denyut perubahan yang terjadi di sini. Dan kehadiran kita selama tiga ratus tahun lebih sebagai penguasa negeri ini, bahkan makan jantung negeri ini, semakin memperburuk posisi tawar kita. Kurasa Hindia Belanda tak mungkin kembali, sekeras apapun upaya kita merebut dari tangan para nasionalis pribumi ini.”

“Bila api revolusi telah berkobar, tak ada yang bisa menahan,” Geertje menghentikan laju jemarinya di atas tuts. “Mereka hanya ingin mandiri, seperti kata ayahku dulu. Ayah pengagum Sneevlit. Ia siap kehilangan hak-hak istimewanya di sini. Aku sendiri seorang guru sekolah pribumi. Lahir, besar di tengah para pribumi. Saat Jepang berkuasa, kusadari bahwa Hindia Belanda bersama segala keningratannya telah usai. Aku harus berani mengucapkan selamat tinggal kepadanya. Dan apapun yang ada di ujung nasib, aku akan tetap tinggal di sini. Bukan sebagai ‘penguasa’, seperti istilahmu. Entah sebagai apa. Jepang telah memberi pelajaran, pahitnya menjadi jongos atau babu. Setelah kemarin hidup makmur, bukankah memalukan lari di saat orang-orang ini butuh bimbingan kita?”

“Orang-orang itu...” aku tidak meneruskan kalimat. Sunyi sesaat.

“Konon, seorang pemburu menemukan bayi harimau,” akhirnya aku menghela napas. “Dirawatnya hewan itu penuh kasih. Ia menjadi jinak. Makan-tidur bersama si pemburu hingga dewasa. Tak pernah diberi daging. Suatu hari, tangan si pemburu tergores piring kaleng milik si harimau. Darah mengucur.”

“Si harimau menjilati darah itu, menjadi buas, lalu menerkam si pemburu,” potong Geertje. “Engkau mencoba mengatakan bahwa suatu saat para pribumi akan menikamku dari belakang. Betul?”

“Kita ada di tengah pergolakan besar dunia. Nilai-nilai bergeser. Setelah berabad, kita menyadari tanah ini bukan Ibu Pertiwi kita,” jawabku. “Untuk ketigakalnya kuminta, pergilah selagi bisa.”

“Ke Belanda?” Geertje menurunkan tutup piano. “Aku bahkan tak tahu, di mana letak negara nenek moyangku itu.”

“Di kampung halamanku, di Zundert, ada beberapa rumah kontrakan dengan harga terjangkau. Sambil menunggu kabar tentang ayahmu, kau bisa tinggal di sana.”

“Terima kasih,” Geertje tersenyum. “Kau sudah tahu di mana aku ingin tinggal.”

Itu jawaban Geertje beberapa bulan lalu. Sempat dua kali aku menemuinya kembali. Memasang kaca jendela, dan mengantarnya ke pasar. Setelah itu, aku tenggelam dalam pekerjaan. Geertje juga tak memikirkan hal lain kecuali membangun rumah. Sulit mengharapkan percik asmara hadir di antara kami.

Lalu datanglah berita tentang pertempuran keras tadi malam, yang merambat dari Meester Cornelis sampai ke Kramat. Beberapa kesatuan pemuda melancarkan serangan besar-besaran ke pelbagai wilayah secara rapi dan terencana. Di sekitar Senen - Gunung Sahari, sebuah tank NICA bahkan berhasil dlumpuhkan.

Aku mengkhawatirkan Geertje. Sebaiknya wanita itu kujemput saja. Biarlah ia tinggal bersama kami sementara waktu. Semoga ia tidak menolak. Schurck sedang ke luar kota. Tak bisa meminjam motornya. Untunglah, meski agak mahal, pihak hotel bersedia menyewakan mobil berikut sopirnya.

“Di depan itu, Tuan?” suara Dullah membawa diriku kembali berada di dalam kabin Chevrolet yang panas ini.

“Betul. Tunggu sini,” aku melompat ke luar dengan cemas. Di muka rumah Geertje, beberapa tentara NICA berdiri dalam posisi siaga. Sebagian hilir-mudik di halaman belakang. Beranda rumah rusak. Pintu depan roboh, penuh lubang peluru. Lantai dan tembok pecah, menghitam, bekas ledakan granat.

“Permisi, wartawan!” sambil menerobos kerumunan, kuacungkan kartu pengenalan. Mataku nyalang. Kumasuki setiap kamar dengan perasaan teraduk, seolah berharap melihat tubuh Geertje tergolek mandi darah di lantai. Tetapi tak kunjung kutemui pemandangan mengerikan semacam itu. Seorang tentara mendekat. Agaknya komandan mereka. Kusodorkan kartu pengenalan.

“Apa yang terjadi, Sersan...Zwart?” tanyaku sambil melirik nama dada tentara itu. “Korban serangan tadi malam? Di mana penghuni rumah?”

“Kami yang menyerang. Penghuninya lari. Anda wartawan? Kebetulan sekali. Kita sebarkan berita ini, agar semua waspada,” Sersan Zwart mengajak

berjalan ke arah dapur. "Ini tempat para pemberontak berkumpul. Banyak bahan propaganda anti NICA," lanjutnya.

"Maaf," aku menyela. "Setahuku rumah ini milik Nona Geertje, seorang warga Belanda."

"Anda kenal? Kami akan banyak bertanya nanti. Ada dugaan bahwa Nona Geertje alias 'Zamrud Khatulistiwa' alias 'Ibu Pertiwi', yaitu nama-nama yang sering kami tangkap dalam siaran radio gelap belakangan ini, telah berpindah haluan."

Geertje? Aku ternganga, siap protes. namun Sersan Zwart terlalu sibuk menarik pintu besar yang terletak di tanah, dekat gudang. Sebuah *bunker*. Luput dari perhatianku saat mengunjungi Geertje tempo hari. Kuikuti Sersan menuruni tangga.

Tak ada yang aneh. Warga Belanda yang sejahtera biasanya memiliki ruangan semacam ini. Tempat berlindung saat terjadi serangan udara di awal perang kemarin. Sebuah ruangan lembab, kira-kira empat meter persegi. Ada meja panjang, kursi, serta lemari usang berisi peralatan makan dan tumpukan kertas. Benar, kertas itu berisi propaganda anti NICA.

Sersan Zwart membuka kain selubung sebuah obyek di balik lemari. Pemancar radio!

"Warisan Jepang," kata Sersan.

Aku membisu. Sulit mempercayai ini semua. Tetapi yang membuat tubuhku membeku sesungguhnya adalah pemandangan di dinding sebelah kiri. Pada dinding lapuk itu, tergantung satu set wastafel lengkap dengan cermin. Di atas permukaan cermin, tampak sederetan tulisan. Digores bergegas, menggunakan pemerah bibir: 'Selamat tinggal Hindia Belanda. Selamat datang Repoeblik Indonesia'.

Aku membayangkan Geertje dan lesung pipinya, duduk di tengah hamparan sawah, bernyanyi bersama orang-orang yang ia cintai: "Ini tanahku. Ini rumahku. Apapun yang ada di ujung nasib, aku tetap tinggal di sini."

Sejak awal Geertje tahu di mana harus berpijak. Perlahan-lahan kuhapus kata 'pengkhianat' yang tadi sempat hinggap di benak.

Jakarta, 12 Oktober 2012



## Farwell to Hindia

by Iksaka Banu *Translated by Tjandra Kerton*

The old Chevrolet that I was riding in slowed down, before finally stopping in front of the bamboo barricade that had been erected across the end of Noordwijk Street. Soon after, like a nightmare, from the left of the building appeared several long-haired men wearing red and white bandannas and dressed in a variety of shabby uniforms, brandishing weapons.

"Local militia," murmured Dullah, my driver.

"Make sure they see my press identification," I whispered.

Dullah pointed to a piece of paper on the car's windshield. One of the men peered in through a window.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

He was wearing a black *peci*.

His bushy mustache split his face in two.

He glared threateningly at us.

"*Merdeka*, Sir! We are going to Gunung Sahari. This is a journalist. He is a good man," Dullah said, trying to keep a calm face, pointing his thumb at me.

"Get out of the car, then talk, damn you!" Mr. Mustache barked, slamming his fist against the bonnet of the car.

"Make the foreigner get out too!"

Hastily Dullah and I did as he said. Assisted by some of his friends, the Mustache searched us thoroughly. My Davros cigarette pack from which I had been enjoying a cigarette was immediately transferred to his shirt pocket and the same went for several Japanese military banknotes in my pocket. Another thug climbed into the car, searched through the glove compartment then sat in the driver's seat, spinning the steering wheel like a child.

"Martinus Witkerk. *De Telegraaf*," Mr. Mustache intoned, reading my assignment letter, then looked at me.

"You Dutch?"

"He cannot speak Malay, he's from Holland," Dullah interjected.

Of course he was lying.

"I'm asking him, not you, dammit!" the commander struck Dullah across the face. "Your friends have died from their bullets, yet you befriend the colonials. Get outta here, go home!" he returned my wallet as he lit up one of his stolen cigarettes.

"Thank you, Dullah," I said a few moments after we had started on our trip again.

"Are you ok?"

"I'm ok, Sir. That's what some of them are like. They say they're freedom fighters, but they invade people's homes, asking for food or money. They also frequently harass the women," Dullah replied, "Lucky I was the one driving. If Mr. Schurck had been driving, I think that neither of you would have been safe. They tend to kill Europeans who are quick to anger, like Mr. Schurck. It doesn't matter to them if you are journalists."

"One thing's for sure, Jan Schurck is good at getting himself into dangerous situations," I said, smiling, "That's why *Life* pays him so well."

"Are you sure of this young lady's address?"

"Yes, across from the Topography Office. She doesn't want to leave. Miss Stubborn."

Stubborn.

Maria Geertruida Welwillend.

"Geertje".

Yes, that's what people called her.

I had met this woman in the Struiswijk internment camp, not long after the official announcement of Japan's surrender to the Allies.

At that time, several journalist colleagues and I were discussing the social impact of Japan's defeat on the Indies at the Hotel Des Indes, which had been returned to Dutch management.

"The Proclamation of Independence and the collapse of the local authorities have made the indigenous youth forget the line between 'freedom fighter' and 'acting in a criminal manner'. Long festering hatreds towards white-skinned people and those who were considered collaborators with the enemy suddenly seemed to find their outlet on empty streets, in the residential areas of Europeans that bordered directly onto villages," said Jan Schurck, throwing a photo down on a table.

"God almighty. These bodies are like minced meat," exclaimed Hermanus Schrijven from *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, making the sign of the cross after he'd looked at the photos, "I heard that these butchers are the villages' so-called champions or thieves who had been recruited into the army. Some of the spoils were divided up amongst the community. But they took a lot themselves."

"Patriotic bandits," said Jan, shrugging his shoulders, "It happened during the

time of the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and it's still happening among the partisans in Yugoslavia today."

"Illegitimate children of the revolution," I replied.

"I hate war," said Hermanus, throwing away his cigarette butt.

"The European community does not realize the dangers," I said, "After suffering for a long time in the camps, they wanted nothing else but to go home. They don't know that their servants have been transformed into freedom fighters."

"I think many of them didn't hear the message from Lord Mountbatten to stay in the camps till the Allied forces arrive," said Eddy Taylor from *The Manchester Guardian*.

"You're right. And the Japanese commanders, who don't have the will to live after their defeat, are inclined to let their prisoners leave. It's worrisome," said Jan lighting yet another cigarette.

"It could get worse. On 15 September, the British forces arrived in Batavia Bay," I said, pointing to a map on the table, "A Dutch cruiser that was accompanying the landing has caused considerable consternation among the militants. This seems to strengthen their assumption that Holland will return to the Indies."

"Well, just between these four walls, do you think that Holland intends to return?"

Eddy Taylor looked from Jan to me, and back again.

The discussion was suddenly interrupted by a cry from Andrew Waller, a reporter with the *Sydney Morning Herald* who had been closely following developments on the radio.

"Interesting! This is interesting! Dutch and British soldiers moved the occupants of the Cideng and Struiswijk camps this morning."

Without further ado, we all hastened to leave. Jan and I chose to visit the Struiswijk Internment Camp.

Major Adachi, the Japanese commander whom we met there, was pleased at this mass evacuation.

"Our patrols have been seeing the bodies of Europeans who fled from the camps. Smashed to bits inside sacks on the side of the road," he said.

I nodded as I made notes, but my eyes were actually drawn to Geertje who was walking leisurely along carrying a suitcase. She was not going towards the trucks, but towards Drukkerijweg Street, preparing to get into a becak.

"Hey, Martin!" called Jan Schruck, "That girl has been eyeing you for a while now. Don't squander your chances. Go after her!"

I did go after her, but got a shocking surprise.

"I'm not going," said Geertje, looking at me sharply. "These trucks are going to Bandung. To a shelter at the Ursuline Chapel. Some are going to Tanjung Priok. I must go home to Gunung Sahari. There is so much I have to do," she said.

"You mean to say that before the Japanese came, you lived on Gunung Sahari, and now you wish to go back there?" I asked.

"Is there something wrong with that?" Geertje asked.

"Yes, there is. The wrong time and the wrong place. More and more whites, Chinese and those considered collaborators with the Dutch are being murdered. Why are you going there?"

"Because that is where my home is. Excuse me," said Geertje, turning her back on me, and picking up her suitcase once again.

I was stunned. From afar I could see that bastard Jan give a thumbs down.

"Wait!" I ran after Geertje. "Let me take you there."

This time Geertje did not refuse. And I was grateful that Jan was willing to lend us his motorcycle.

"Be careful with this young lad, Madame," said Jan, winking. "In Holland many unfortunate women are waiting for him to return."

"Is that so? Call me 'miss,' or just my name," Geertje responded.

"Oh, in that case call me Jan."

"And I'm Martin," I said, slapping my chest.

"Don't you want to get rid of those wooden camp clogs?" I asked, eyeing Geertje's feet, "Didn't the soldiers provide shoes for the women and children? They also gave out lipstick and powder. You'll all be beautiful again."

"I'm not used to wearing shoes, so I'm keeping them in my suitcase. At the camp, I got to be really good at running in clogs," Geertje explained with a laugh settling herself behind me on motorcycle.

My God.

That husky laugh, those dimples.

What an odd combination with her severely plucked eyebrows.

A face of mystery.

Did this woman have a family? A husband?

But she had asked to be called 'miss'.

"Battalion X often passes through Gunung Sahari. They're guarding the

European residences, but of course no one knows when there will be an attack. Do think about my suggestion?"

I looked at Geertje in the rear view mirror.

She appeared to want to say something, but Jan's motorcycle was extremely noisy. In the end both of us were silent for the rest of the journey.

At the Kwitang crossroads I turned right, leaving the line of trucks with their load of women and children behind me.

Oh, those children.

Boisterously clapping, singing happy songs. Not realizing that the land of the Indies, the place where they were born, would most likely soon be just a memory.

"In front of that pond," said Geertje, waving.

I turned.

The large house was in a pathetic state.

Dirty wall.

Broken window glass scattered here and there.

The strange thing was, the grass in the yard seemed to have recently been cut.

"Wait a moment!" I said grasping Geertje's arm when she attempted to run to the terrace. From my bag on the back of the motorcycle I took out a stiletto knife that I had borrowed from Jan. I pushed at the front door.

It was locked.

"Do you still want to go in?" I asked.

"Yes," Geertje replied, "Put away your knife. Let me knock. I hope the house hasn't been taken over by another European family."

"Or by the militia," I responded.

Geertje knocked several times.

There was no answer.

We went around the back. The back door was slightly open. We were about to go in, when we heard footsteps coming from the garden. Coming towards us was an Indonesian woman. Fifty years old maybe.

"Miss!" the woman cried, hugging Geertje's feet.

Geertje pulled at the woman's shoulders to get her to stand.

"Japan has been defeated. I am home, Iyah. Where is your husband? Have you been living here?" Geertje asked, "This is Mr. Witkerk, my friend. Martin, this is

lyah. My housekeeper.”

lyah bowed to me, then turned back to look at Geertje.

“After I came to see you the last time, the house was taken over by the Japanese. It was made into a residence for the officers. I cooked for them. I could not leave. That is why I could not visit you,” lyah broke into tears again, “Where are your father, your mother, and young Robert?”

“Mother died last month, from cholera,” said Geertje, pushing the door open wider, and then going inside. lyah and I followed. “Father and Robert were sent to Burma. I’ve asked the camp commander to search for news of them,” she continued.

“Everything of value was taken. The photos on the walls are all gone. They were replaced by the Japanese flag. But not too long ago they left in a hurry. I don’t know where they went. They left many of their belongings behind,” lyah said, “I took the cooking utensils in the store room and asked my husband to come. After becoming the cook, I had moved to the storeroom in the back yard. After they left, I didn’t dare stay on. But I come and do what I can to keep the place clean every chance I get.”

“Ask your husband to come. We can rebuild this house. When the banks are open again, maybe I can take out some of my savings,” Geertje let lyah run outside, and then continued with her inspection of the house.

Some tables and chairs as well as cabinets remained, though they had been emptied of their contents. There was a surprise in the family room: an elegant black piano. It was most surprising that the Japanese had not taken it, or damaged it. Perhaps they had used it for entertainment.

Geertje blew away a thin layer of dust, opened the keyboard cover. A joyful blend of notes filled the room.

“A folk song?” I asked.

Geertje nodded, “Si Patoka’an.”

She started playing.

“You seem one with nature and the people here. They like you too. And their love for you may be pure and genuine,” I said, “But the era of the servants will soon be over. America is increasingly showing their dislike for colonialism. The outside world is also monitoring every beat of change taking place here. And our presence for more than three hundred years as the ruler of this country, some might say eating the heart of this country, is worsening our bargaining position. I don’t think the Dutch East Indies will ever return, however hard we try to take it back from the indigenous nationalists.”

“Once the fires of revolution have started, no one can stop them,” said Geertje, the piano keys now silent under her fingers, “They just want to be independent, as my father would say. My father was an admirer of Sneevliet. He was prepared to forsake his special rights here. I was a teacher of the indigenous students. I was born and raised amongst the indigenous people. When the Japanese were in power, I realized that the Dutch East Indies with all of its aristocratic ways, was finished. I must have the guts to say goodbye to it. And whatever fate befalls me, I will remain here. Not as ‘one in power,’ to use your term. I don’t know as what. The Japanese taught us a lesson, how awful it is to be a servant. After living prosperously, wouldn’t it be shameful for us to run away at a time when these people need our guidance?”

“These people...” I could not go on.

There was silence for a few minutes.

“There was once a hunter who found a baby tiger,” I finally let out a sigh, “The animal was taken care of lovingly. It became tame. It ate and slept with the hunter till it was grown. It was never fed meat. One day, the hunter scratched his hand on a the tiger’s tin plate. Blood flowed from the wound.”

“The tiger licked the blood, became wild, and then attacked the hunter,” said Geertje, interrupting. “You’re trying to say that at some point the indigenous people will stab me from behind, right?”

“We are in the midst of a huge worldwide upheaval. Values are being pushed aside. After centuries, we realize that this land is not our Motherland,” I replied, “I ask for the third time, please go while you still can.”

“To Holland?” Geertje closed the piano, “I don’t even know where that is, the land of my ancestors.”

“In my village in Zundert, there are some reasonably priced rental houses. You can stay there while you wait for news of your father.”

“Thank you,” Geertje smiled, “You know where I wish to live.”

That had been Geertje’s response several months ago.

I did meet her twice more. I put some windows in, and I took her to market. After that, I became heavily involved in work. Geertje was also focused totally on rebuilding her house. It was difficult to imagine any spark of love between us.

Then the news came that there had been a violent battle last night, that spread from Meester Cornelis to Kramat. Several paramilitary youth groups staged major attacks on a number of areas in an organized and planned manner. A Dutch tank had even been taken over in the vicinity of Senen-Gunung Sahari.

I was worried about Geertje. I should really just go and get her. Have her stay

with us for a while. Hopefully she would not refuse.

Schurck happened to be out of town so I couldn't borrow his motorcycle. Luckily, although it was rather expensive, I was able to rent a car and driver from the hotel.

"Out the front, Sir?" Dullah's voice brought me back to the hot cabin of the Chevrolet.

"Yes. Wait here," I said, jumping out of the car anxiously.

In front of Geertje's house, several Dutch soldiers were standing on full alert. Others were milling around in the back yard. The veranda of the house was damaged. The front door had collapsed, riddled with bullets. The flooring and walls were torn up, blackened, the result of a grenade explosion.

"Excuse me, I'm a journalist!" I said as I pushed through the crowd, holding my press card. My eyes flew everywhere. I went into every room, a mass of mixed emotions, expecting to see Geertje's body lying in a pool of blood on the floor. But that terrible sight did not ensue. A soldier approached me. He seemed to be the commander. I showed my press card.

"What happened, Sergeant...Zwart?" I asked, glancing at his name on his chest, "Was the house a target of last night's attack? Where are the occupants?"

"It was us who attacked. The occupants have fled. You're a journalist? What a coincidence. We intend to spread the word, so that everyone is on the alert," Sergeant Zwart said, leading me to the kitchen, "This is where the rebels were gathering. We found a lot of anti-Dutch propaganda material."

"Sorry," I broke in. "As far as I know this house belongs to Miss Geertje, a Dutch citizen." "You know her? We will be asking a lot of questions. There is a suspicion that Miss Geertje, alias the 'Emerald of the Equator' alias 'Motherland', names that we've often heard over the illegal air waves recently, has switched sides."

*Geertje?*

I stood open-mouthed, ready to protest, but Sergeant Zwart was too busy pulling open a large trapdoor near the storeroom.

A bunker.

It had escaped my attention when I had visited Geertje some time ago.

I followed the Sergeant down the steps.

There was nothing odd about it. Sensible Dutch families usually had a room such as this. It was a place to shelter when there were air raids at the beginning of the war. A damp room, about four meters square. There was a long table,



chairs and a dilapidated cabinet filled with tableware and piles of paper. Papers that were indeed anti-Dutch propaganda material.

Sergeant Zwart unwrapped an object hidden by a veil behind the cabinet.

A radio transmitter!

“Something left over from the Japanese,” the Sergeant said.

I was struck dumb. It was difficult to believe all of this, but what made me really go cold was what I saw on the weathered lefthand wall, where a sink and mirror hung. There was writing on the mirror. It had been hurriedly scrawled, using lipstick: *‘Farewell to the Indies. Welcome, the Republic of Indonesia.’*

I saw in my mind’s eye Geertje and her dimples, sitting in the ricefield, singing along with the people she loved:

“This is my land. This is my home. Whatever fate befalls me, I will remain here.”

From the beginning Geertje knew where she would stand. Slowly I came to terms with this fact and the word ‘traitor’ disappeared from my mind.