“Sinyo? The son of a bupati? What sort of business?”
“Perhaps also because I’m not the son of a bupati,” I replied.
“What business are you in?”
“Top-class furniture, Mama.” I began my propaganda. “The latest styles and models from Europe. I go to meet the ships bringing newcomers from Europe. I also visit the houses of the parents of my school friends.”
“And Sinyo’s progress at school? You’re not left behind?”
“Never, Mama.”
“Interesting. For me, those who really endeavor are always interesting. Does Sinyo own his own furniture workshop? How many tradesmen?”
“No, I only sell the furniture. I carry pictures with me.”
“So you came here to sell furniture? Let’s see your pictures.”
“No. I came here without bringing anything. But if Mama feels it necessary, I will bring them another time: wardrobes, for example, as in the palaces of Austria or France or England—Renaissance, baroque, rococo, Victorian . . .”
She listened to me carefully. Twice I heard her smack her lips, I don’t know if in praise or as an insult. Then she said slowly:
“Happy are they who eat from the products of their own sweat, obtain pleasure from their own endeavors, and advance because of their own experiences.”
The tones sounded as if they had come out of the chest of a priest in a wayang performance. Then she called out:
“Fantastic!” She was looking up at the head of the stairs.
“Ah!”
Down those stairs descended the angel Annelies, in a batik kain and a traditional laced kabaya blouse. Her sanggul bun hair-style was a bit too high, revealing her long white neck-.Her neck, arms, ears, and bosom were decorated with a pattern of green-white emeralds, pearls, and diamonds. (Really, I didn’t know which were diamonds and which were the others, what was real and what was fake.)
I was entranced. She must have been more beautiful and arresting than Jaka Tarub’s angel in the legends of Babad Tanah Jawi. She was smiling nervously as if embarrassed. The adornments she was wearing were somewhat, indeed definitely overdone, too extravagant. And I knew she had dressed up for me and me alone.
And for a countenance and presence as beautiful as that, there was no need for any adornment. Naked too, she would remain beautiful. How foolish of us to think that the beauty bestowed by the gods does not always triumph over the inventions of humans. With all those adornments from the sea and the land she looked alien, while the Javanese clothes, which she was not used to wearing, made her movements like those of a wooden doll. Everything about her seemed somehow pretentious. But it didn’t matter—what is beautiful stays beautiful. It was up to me to cleverly ignore her extravagances.
“She has dressed up for you, Nyo,” whispered Nyai.
Annelies walked up to us while still smiling and perhaps with a thank you readied in her heart. But before I could get in my compliment, Nyai got in first:
“From whom did you learn to dress up and adorn yourself like that?”
“Ah, Mama!” she exclaimed, prodding her mother’s shoulder and glancing at me with her big eyes. She was blushing.
I was embarrassed to be listening to such a conversation between mother and daughter: too intimate to be heard by a stranger. Yet near Mama I felt I ought to be resolute. I had to leave behind an impression of being a man who was resolute, interesting, dashing, an unappeased conqueror of the goddess of beauty. In front of the queen I think I would also have had to exhibit the same attitude. That is the cock’s plumage, the deer’s antlers, the symbol of virility.
I knew what was proper and I did not involve myself in the affairs of mother and daughter.
“See, Ann, Sinyo was ready to go home. It’s fortunate we stopped him. Otherwise, he would have really missed out on something!”
“Ah, Mama!” Annelies said again, in her sweet, spoiled manner, and prodded her mother. Her eyes glanced at me.
“Well, what about it, Nyo? Why are you silent? Have you forgotten your own custom?”
“Yes,” added Nyai, “fit to become queen of the Indies, isn’t she, Nyo?” and she turned to me.
The relationship between mother and daughter seemed strange to me. Maybe it was the result of the illegitimate marriage
and birth. Perhaps this is the atmosphere in the homes of all nyais. Perhaps even among modern families in Europe today and among Indies Natives far in the future. Or perhaps it wasn't right, but abnormal. Yet I liked it. And luckily the mutual praising finally ended without having led anywhere.

The light began to fade. Mama talked on. Annelies and I just listened. There were too many new things, which my teachers had never mentioned, that proceeded from her lips. Remarkable. And I was still not allowed to go home, although:

"Dokar?" she said, "Out at the back, there are many such carts. If you like you can even go home in a carriage."

A young boy began to light the gas lamps. I still did not know where the mains were located.

The servants began to prepare the dining table.

The two Roberts were summoned into the back parlor. Dinner began in silence.

Another servant entered the front room, closing the door. The back-parlor light, covered by a milk-white glass shade, shone dimly. No one said a word. Eyes just moved about from plate to bowl, from bowl to dish. Spoons, forks, and knives clinked as they touched the plates.

Nyai lifted up her head. The front door could be heard opening, without any knock, without announcement. I looked up at Nyai. She looked vigilantly toward the front room.

Robert Mellema glanced in the same direction. His eyes shone with pleasure and his lips had a satisfied smile. I also wanted to glance behind, to where their looks were directed. I held back my desire; it wasn't polite, not gentlemanly. So I glanced at Annelies.

Deliberately, I stopped my spoon in midair and focused my hearing on the area behind me. Shoes walking, scraping along the floor. As time passed they became clearer, closer. Nyai stopped eating. Robert Suurhof did not put the food in his mouth; he put the spoon and fork down on his plate. I heard the steps coming closer, drowning out the tick-tock of the pendulum clock.

Robert Mellema continued eating as if nothing was happening.

Finally Annelies, who was sitting beside me, also glanced behind. She blinked open her eyes, startled. Her spoon dropped with a clang to the floor. I tried to pick it up. A servant came running and took it. Then the servant quickly got out of the way. Annelies stood up as if she wanted to confront this new arrival, who was getting closer.

I placed my spoon and fork on the plate and, following Annelies's example, stood up and turned around.

Nyai also stood in readiness.

A shadow, splayed out by the front-room lamps, became longer and longer. The dragging steps became clearer and clearer. Then a European man emerged—tall, big, fat, too fat. His clothes were rumpled and his hair in a mess, who knows if really white or gray.

He looked in our direction. Stopped a moment.

"Your father?" I whispered to Annelies.

"Yes." Almost inaudible.

Looking straight at me Mr. Mellema, dragging his feet, walked towards me. Towards me. He stopped in front of me. His eyebrows were bushy, almost white, and his face was frozen like chalk. For a moment my eyes fell to his shoes, which were dusty, unlaced. Then I remembered what my teachers had taught me: Look those who want to talk to you in the eyes. Quickly, I lifted my eyes and offered my greetings:

"Good evening, Mr. Mellema," in Dutch and in a quite polite tone.

He growled like a cat. His rumpled clothes were loose on his body. His hair, uncombed and thin, covered his forehead and ears.

"Who gave you permission to come here, monkey!" He hissed his sentence in bazaar Malay, awkwardly and, in accord with its contents, crudely.

Behind me Robert Mellema coughed. Then I heard Annelies holding back a sob. Robert Suurhof put his shoes into action and stood up also to extend his greetings. But the ogre in front of me paid him no heed.

I admit it: My body shook, although only a little. In such a situation I could only await words from Nyai. I could expect nothing from anyone else. Indeed she was silent.

It was going to be a disaster for me if she stayed silent. And indeed she was silent.

"You think, boy, because you wear European clothes, mix with Europeans, and can speak a little Dutch you then become a European? You're still a monkey."
"Close your mouth!" shouted Nyai loudly in Dutch. "He is my guest."

Mr. Mellema's eyes shifted dully to his concubine. And must something happen because of this uninvited Native?

"Nyai," said Mr. Mellema.

"A mad European is the same as a mad Native!" Her eyes burned with hatred and disgust. "You have no rights in this house. You know where your room is." The nyai pointed to a door. And her pointed finger was clawed.

Mr. Mellema still stood in front of me, hesitant.

"Do I need to call Darsam?" she threatened.

The tall-big-fat man was confused; he growled in answer. He turned and walked, dragging his feet, to a door next to the room I had just occupied, and disappeared behind it.

"Rob," Robert Mellema said to his guest, "let's go outside. It's too hot in here."

They went out together, without excusing themselves to Nyai.

"Trash!" Nyai cursed.

Annelies was sobbing.

"Be quiet, Ann. Forgive us, Minke, Nyo. Sit down again. Don't make a racket, Ann. Sit down in your chair."

We both sat down again. Annelies covered her face with a silk handkerchief. And Nyai still kept an eye on the just-closed door.

"No need to be ashamed in front of Sinyo," Nyai said without looking at us, still in a rage. "And you, Nyo, you may never forget this. I'm not ashamed. Sinyo shouldn't be shocked or feel ashamed either. Don't be angry. I've done exactly what I had to. Just pretend that he doesn't exist, Nyo. Once I was indeed his faithful nyai, his loyal companion. Now he is only worthless garbage. All he is good for now is shaming his own descendants. That is your father, Ann."

Satisfied after her outburst, she sat back down in her seat. She didn't resume her dinner. The look on her face was hard and sharp. Calmly, I looked at her. What sort of woman was this?

"If I wasn't hard like that, Nyo—forgive me that I must offer a defense for myself in my humiliation—what would become of all this? His children... his business... we would be reduced to destitution. So I do not regret acting this way in front of you, Nyo." She lowered her voice as if pleading with me. "Don't think me insolent and rude, Nyo," she said, continuing in her beautiful Dutch. "It is all for his own good. I treat him the way he wants. This is what he wants. It is the Europeans themselves who have taught me to act this way, Minke, the Europeans themselves." Her voice pleaded with me to believe. "Not at school, but in life."

I was silent. I nailed every one of her words into my memory: not in school, in life! Don't think me insolent and rude! Europeans themselves have taught me this... .

Nyai stood up, walked slowly towards the window. And behind the door she pulled a cord that ended in a bunch of tassels. In the distance a bell could be heard ringing indistinctly. The servant girl who had just vanished reappeared. Nyai ordered her to take away the food. I still didn't know what I was supposed to do.

"Go home now, Nyo," she said.

"Yes, Mama, it's better I go home."

She walked up to me. Her eyes had their original motherly gentleness.

"Ann," she said still more softly, "let your guest go home now. Wipe away those tears."

"Forgive us, Minke," Annelies whispered, holding her sobs back.

"It's nothing, Ann."

"When holiday time arrives later, come and spend the vacation here, Nyo. Don't hesitate. Nothing will happen. What do you think? Agree? Now Sinyo must go home. Darsam will escort you in the cart."

She walked again to the door and pulled that cord. Then she sat back down in her seat. She was amazing, this nyai: The people and everything around her were indeed in her grip, and I, myself, too. From what school had she graduated that she appeared so educated, intelligent? And she was able to look to the needs of several people at once, with a different manner for each. And if she did graduate from a school, how was she able to accept her situation as a nyai? I couldn't understand any of this.

A Madurese man arrived. He was approaching forty, shirt and pants all black, and an East Javanese destar headband on his head. A short machete was fastened at his waist. His mustache was twirled up high, pitch black and thick.

Nyai gave him an order in Madurese. I didn't catch all of
what it meant. She was probably ordering that I be escorted safely home in a dokar.

Darsam stood straight. He didn’t speak. He looked at me with searching eyes—as if he wanted to memorize my face—without blinking.

“The young master is my guest, is Miss Annelies’s guest,” said Nyai in Javanese. “Take him home. Don’t let anything happen on the way. Be careful.” Apparently this was only a translation of the earlier Madurese.

Darsam raised his hand without speaking and left.

“Sinyo, Minke,” Nyai confided, “Annelies has no friends. She is happy that Sinyo came here. You, of course, don’t have a lot of time. I know that. Even so, try to come here often. You don’t need worry about Mr. Mellema. I will look after him. If Sinyo would like, we would be very happy for you to live here. You could be taken to school each day by buggy. That’s if Sinyo would like.”

Such a strange and frightening house and family! It’s no wonder they have such a sinister reputation. And I answered:

“Let me think about it first, Mama. Thank you for such a generous invitation.”

“Don’t refuse us,” Annelies said. There was rebuke in her voice.

“Yes, Nyo, think about it. If you have no objections, Annelies will look after it all. Isn’t that so, Ann?”

Annelies nodded in agreement.

The carriage could be heard coming along beside the house. We walked to the front of the house and found Robert Suurhof and Robert Mellema sitting silently, looking out at the darkness. The carriage stopped in front of the steps. Suurhof and I went down the steps and boarded the carriage.

“Good night everybody, and thank you very much, Mama, Ann, Rob!” I said.

And the carriage began to move.

“Stop!” ordered Mama. The carriage stopped. “Sinyo Minke! Come down here first.”

Like a slave I was caught in her grip. Without stopping to think for a moment, I climbed out and approached the steps. Nyai descended one step and so did Annelies, and Nyai said slowly into my ear:

“Annelies has told me, Nyo—don’t be afraid—is it true, you kissed her?”

Even a flash of lightning would not have startled me so greatly. Anxiety crawled through my body, down to my feet, and my feet tripped.

“It is true?” she insisted. Seeing I couldn’t answer, she pulled Annelies and drew her to me. Then, “So it’s true. Now Minke, kiss Annelies in front of me. So that I may know that my daughter does not lie.”

I trembled. Yet I could not resist her command. And I kissed Annelies on the cheek.

“I’m proud, Nyo, that it’s you who kissed her. Go home now.”

I was unable to say a word all the way home. I felt as if Nyai had cast a spell over my mind. Annelies was indeed gloriously beautiful. Yet her clever mother subdued people so they would bow down to her will.

Robert Suurhof didn’t speak either.

And the carriage rattled as it went on grinding the street pebbles. The carriage’s carbide light split open the darkness relentlessly. Our carriage was the only one on the road that night. It appeared that everyone had streamed into Surabaya to celebrate the coronation of the maiden Wilhelmina.

Darsam escorted me to my boarding house in Kranggan. He stayed until he saw me enter the house before he left to escort Suurhof home.

“Ai-ai, Master Minke!” Mrs. Telinga, my talkative old landlady, called out. ‘So young master doesn’t eat at home anymore? I’ve just put a letter in your room. I see that you still haven’t read the earlier letters either. The envelopes haven’t even been opened. Remember Young Master, those letters were written, were given stamps, and were sent to be read. Who knows if there may be something important in them? They all seem to come from the town of B——. So, Young Master, what about it? Tomorrow there’ll be no shopping money left, eh.”

I gave a few coins to the garrulous, good-hearted woman. She said thank you over and over again, as usual, without it needing to come from her heart.

There was hot chocolate ready for me in my room. I drank it...
down quickly. I took off my shoes and shirt, jumped onto the bed, and started to reflect upon all that had happened. But my eyes fell upon the portrait of the goddess near the oil lamp on the wall. I got out of bed, studied it well, then turned it over. And I climbed back into bed.

I pushed aside the Surabaya and Batavia papers, which were, as usual, placed on my pillow. It had become my custom to read the papers before sleeping. I don’t know why but I liked to seek out reports about Japan. It pleased me to find out that their youth were being sent to England and America to study. You could say I was a Japan-watcher. But now there was something more interesting—that strange and wealthy family: Nyai, with her power to grip people’s hearts as if she were a sorceress; Annelies Mellema, who was beautiful, childlike, yet experienced and able in managing workers; Robert Mellema with his sharp glances, who cared about nothing except soccer, not even his own mother; Mr. Mellema, as big as an elephant, sullen, but powerless over his own concubine. Each like a character in a play. What sort of family was this? And myself? I too was powerless before Nyai. Even as I turned over on the bed her voice still called: Annelies has no friends! She is happy Sinyo has come here. You, of course, don’t have much time. Even so, try to come here often . . . we would be very happy if you were to stay here . . .

It felt like I had only been asleep a little while when there was a commotion outside the house. I lit the oil lamp in my room. Five o’clock in the morning.

“There is a package. For Young Master Minke”—I heard a man’s voice—“milk, cheese, and butter. There is also a letter from Nyai Ontosoroah herself.”
It felt as if I hadn’t been asleep for long. Nervous knocking on the door jolted me awake.

“Minke, wake up.” It was Nyai’s voice.

I found Mama standing at the door, carrying a candle. Her hair was a bit of a mess. In the morning darkness the tick-tock of the pendulum clock reigned over the room.

“What’s the time, Mama?”

“Four. Someone is looking for you.”

A person was sitting on the settee in the gloom. The closer Mama’s candle came, the clearer the person became: a police officer! He stood up out of respect, then immediately spoke in Malay but with a Javanese accent:

“Tuan Minke?”

“Yes.”

“I have an order to take Tuan with me. Straight away.” He held out a letter. What he said was true. It was a summons from the police station at B——, a town near the town of my birth, approved by the police station at Surabaya. My name was clearly stated there. Mama too had read it.
"What have you been up to, Nyo?" she asked.
"Not a thing," I answered nervously. Yet I began to have doubts about my own actions. I searched and searched my memory; I lined up everything I'd done over the last week. I repeated, "Not a thing, Mama."

Annelies came. She wore a long, black-velvet gown. Her hair was a mess. She was still bleary-eyed. Mama approached me:
"The officer hasn't said what you've been charged with. It's not in the summons either." And to the police officer: "He has the right to know what is the matter."
"I have no such orders, Nyai. If it is not stated clearly in the summons, then indeed no one may be told, including the person involved."
"It can't be done like that," I retorted. "I'm a Raden Mas, I can't be treated in this way," and I waited for an answer. Seeing that he didn't know how he should answer, I resumed, "I have forum privilegiatum, the right to be tried under the same laws and in the courts of the Dutch."
"No one can deny that, Tuan Raden Mas Minke."
"Why are you doing things in this manner?"
"My orders are only to fetch Tuan. Even the person who issued the orders would not know anything more, Tuan Raden Mas," he said, defending himself. "Please get ready, Tuan. We must leave quickly. We must be at our destination by five o'clock this afternoon."
"Mas, why do they want to take you?" asked Annelies, afraid.
"He won't say," I answered briefly.
"Ann, fix Minke's clothes and bring them here," ordered Nyai, "Who knows how long they will detain him. He can bathe and breakfast first, can't he?"
"Of course, Nyai, there's still a little time."
He allowed half an hour.
I found Robert watching the event from his room at the back. A yawn was his only greeting. Once in the bathroom, I began to mull over the possibilities: Robert is the cause of this trouble, passing on false and fanciful reports. He didn't appear for dinner last night or the night before. One by one his threats came back to me. All right, if it's true you are the one who has caused all this disturbance, I will never forget you, Rob.

On my return to the front room I found coffee and cakes ready. The police officer was enjoying his breakfast. He looked more polite after receiving his food. And he didn't appear to have any personal enmity towards us. On the contrary, he chatted to us, laughing all the time:
"Nothing bad is going to happen, Nyai," he said finally. "Tuan Raden Mas Minke will return, at the very latest, within the next two weeks."
"It's not a matter of two weeks or a month. He's been arrested in my house. I have a right to know what it's all about," pressed Nyai.
"Really, I don't know. Forgive me. That's why I'm fetching him so early in the morning, Nyai, so no one will know."
"So no one will know? How? You had to meet with my watchman before getting to see me, didn't you?"
"Then arrange so that your watchman doesn't talk."
"You can't do this to me," said Mama. "I'm going to ask the police station for an explanation."
"That's a good idea. Nyai will get an explanation quickly. And it will surely be a truthful one."

Annelies, who was standing holding my suitcase, approached me, unable to speak. She put the suitcase and bag down. She grabbed hold of my hand and held it. Her hand trembled. "Breakfast first, Tuan Raden Mas," the officer reminded me. "Maybe there won't be any breakfast as good as this at the police station. No? Then let's leave now."
"I'll be back soon, Ann, Mama. There must be some mistake. Believe me."

And Annelies wouldn't let go of my hand.
The police officer picked up my things and carried them outside. Annelies gripped my hand tightly as I followed him out. I kissed her on the cheek and freed myself of her hold. And she still didn't speak.
"Hopefully all will be well, Nyo," Nyai prayed. "That's enough now, Ann; pray for his safety."

The carriage that awaited us proved not to be a police carriage but a hired one. We climbed aboard and left in the direction of
Surabaya. The officer was taking me to B——. And in the early morning dark I conjured up in my mind all the buildings I'd ever seen in B——. Which one among them was our destination? The police station? The jail? An inn? It didn't even occur to me to think of private houses.

Our carriage made up the only traffic on the road. Oil wagons, which usually started moving out of the D.P.M. refinery at dawn, twenty or thirty in a row, were not yet to be seen. One or two people were carting vegetables on their backs for sale in Surabaya. And the agent kept his mouth closed as if he'd never, in all his life, learned to speak.

Maybe it was true that Robert had slandered me. But why was B—— our destination?

Our oil lamps were reluctant to pierce the darkness of the misty early morning. It was as if only I, the policeman, the driver, and the horse were alive upon that road. And I imagined Annelies crying unconsoled. And Nyai confused, concerned that my arrest would give her business a bad name. And Robert Mellema would have reason to cackle: See! Isn't it true what Suurhof said?

The carriage took us to the Surabaya police station. I was invited to sit down and wait in the reception room. I wanted very much to ask questions about my case. But I got the impression that in the misty, early-morning air no one was in the mood to give explanations. So I didn't ask. And the carriage still waited in front of the police station. The officer just left me there alone with no orders.

It was a long time. The sun still hadn't risen. And when it did rise, it was unable to dispel the mist. Those gray particles of water reigned over everything, even the inside of my lungs. The traffic in front of the police station was beginning to get busy: carriages, carts, pedestrians, hawkers, workers. And I still sat alone in the waiting room. The officer just left me there alone with no orders.

“Let's go, Tuan Raden Mas,” he invited, in a friendly manner. We climbed back aboard the carriage and headed off to the railway station. Once again it was he who carried my bags, and unloaded them and escorted me to the ticket window. He pushed a letter inside and obtained two tickets—first class. This was not the time for the express train. We were traveling on a slow train too. Yes, it was true, we climbed aboard that boring train on the western line. I'd never been on a train such as this. I always went by express if there was one. Except, yes, except from B—— to my own town T——.

The officer returned to his state of muteness. I sat next to the window. He sat facing me.

There were just a few passengers in the carriage. Besides the two of us, there were three European men and a Chinese man. They all seemed bored. At the first stop two passengers got off, including the Chinese man. No new passengers came aboard.

I'd traveled that distance dozens of times. So there was nothing in the sights along the journey that interested me. In B—— I usually stayed at an inn until the next morning, when I would continue the journey on to T——. This time I wouldn't be heading towards my usual inn. Most probably I would end up at the police station.

The view became more and more dreary: barren land, sometimes gray, sometimes a whitish-yellow. I fell asleep with a hungry stomach. Whatever was going to happen, let it. Ah! This earth of mankind. Sometimes a tobacco plantation would appear, shrink, and disappear, swept away in the train's acceleration. Appear again, shrink again, disappear again. And paddy fields and paddy fields and paddy fields, unirrigated, planted with crops, but no rice, almost ready to be harvested. And the train crawled on slowly, spouting thick black and dusty and sparking smoke. Why wasn't it England that controlled all this? Why Holland? And Japan? What about Japan?

The touch of the police officer's hand woke me. Laid out beside me were the things he'd brought with him: the wrapping cloth was opened out as a kind of tablecloth. On it was fried rice shining with oil, adorned by a fried egg and fried chicken, plus a spoon and fork, all in a banana-leaf container. Perhaps it had been specially prepared for me. An agent would think twice about serving food like this for himself—it was too sumptuous. A white bottle containing chocolate milk—a drink not yet widely known by Natives—stood beside the banana-leaf container.

And that gloomy town, B——, finally, as the time approached five o'clock in the afternoon, appeared before our eyes. The agent still didn't speak. But again he carried my bags. And I
didn't stop him. What was the significance of a police officer, first-class, compared with an H.B.S. student? At the most he might have been able to read and write a little Javanese and Malay.

A carriage took us away from the station. To where? I knew those white, rocky streets that were such an eyesore. Not to the hotel, not to my regular inn. Also not to the B— police station.

The town square looked deserted with its brownish grass carpet, balding and tattered in places. Where was I being taken? The hired carriage headed for the bupati’s residence and stopped a distance from its stone gate. What was the link between my case and the bupati of B—? My mind began groping around madly.

And the police officer alighted first, looking after my bags as before.

"Please," he said suddenly in high Javanese.

I accompanied him into the regency office situated diagonally across from the bupati’s residence. An office stripped of wall ornaments, devoid of appropriate furniture, without a single occupant. All the furniture was rough, made from teak, and unvarnished, with the appearance of not having been measured for need and without any plan of use, just thrown together. Coming from the luxurious house in Wonokromo into this room was like making a visit to a produce house. It was, you might say, just slightly more luxurious than Annelies’s chicken coop. This, presumably, was the interrogation room. Just some tables, a few chairs, and some long benches. On the other side, there were shelves on which were piles of papers and several books. There were no instruments of torture. Just ink bottles on all the tables.

The police officer left me by myself again. And for the second time I waited and waited. The sun had set. He still didn’t appear.

The grand mosque’s drum began its beating, followed by that sad call to prayer. The street lanterns were being lit by the lamp men. The office became darker. And those demonic mosquitoes, they ganged up and attacked the room’s only occupant. The insolence! I swore. Is this how people treat a raden mas and an H.B.S. student too? An educated person with the blood of the kings of Java running in him?

And I could feel my clothes sticking to my body. And my body was starting to stink of sweat. I’d never experienced such maltreatment as this.

“A thousand pardons, Ndoro Raden Mas.” The officer invited me to leave the mosquito-filled, dark office. “Allow your servant to escort you to the visitors’ gallery.”

Once again he carried my bags.

So I’m being brought before the bupati of B—! God! What’s it all about? And must I, an H.B.S. student, cringe in front of him and at the end of every one of my sentences, make obeisance to someone I don’t even know? As I walked along the path to the visitors’ gallery, already lit up by four lamps, I felt like crying. What’s the point in studying European science and learning, mixing with Europeans, if in the end one has to cringe anyway, slide along like a snail, and worship some little king who is probably illiterate to boot. God, God! To have audience with a bupati is to be an object of humiliation without being able to defend oneself. I’d never forced anyone to act like that towards me. Why did I have to do so for others? Thundering damnation!

Ah, see, it’s true! The agent was already inviting me—the impudence!—to take off my shoes and socks. The beginning of a great tyranny. Some supernatural power forced me to follow his orders. The floor felt cold under my bare soles. He signaled me and I went, step by step, to the top. He pointed out to me the place where I must sit, eyes towards the floor, before a rocking chair. One of my teachers had once said: The rocking chair is the most beautiful thing left behind by the Dutch East Indies Company after its bankruptcy. Oho! Oh rocking chair, you will be a witness to how I must humiliate myself in order to glorify some bupati I don’t even know. Damn! What would my friends say if they saw me traveling on my knees like this, like someone without thighs, crawling towards the relic of the company at the time it approached bankruptcy—that unmoving chair near the wall of the visitors’ gallery.

“Yes, walk on your knees, Ndoro Raden Mas.” The officer was herding a buffalo into a mudhole.

And I covered the almost ten meters distance while swearing in three languages.

To my left and right clam-shell ornaments were spread out. And the floor shone from the rays of light from four oil lamps. Truly, my friends would ridicule me if they could see this play, where a human being, who normally walks on his two whole legs, on his own feet, now has to walk with only half his legs, aided by his two hands. Ya Allah! You, my ancestors, you: What is the
reason you created customs that would so humiliate your own
descendants? You never once gave it any thought, you, my an-
cestors who indulged in these excesses! Your descendants could
have been honored without such humiliation! How could you
bring yourself to leave such customs as a legacy?

I stopped in front of the rocking chair. I sat, legs tucked under
and eyes towards the floor, as custom decreed. All I could see was
a low, carved bench and on top of it, a foot-rest cushion of black
velvet. The same velvet as Annelies’s dressing gown earlier that
morning.

Good, now I had sat down cross-legged before that damned
rocking chair. What business did I have with the bupati of B—?
None. Neither kith nor kin, not an acquaintance, let alone a friend.
And for how much longer would this oppression and humiliation
continue? Waiting and waiting while being oppressed and humil-
iated in this way?

I heard the creaking of a swinging door as it opened. Then, as
the seconds passed, the sound of footsteps made by leather slippers
became clearer. And I remembered the scraping footsteps of Mr.
Mellema on that other frightening night. From where I was seated,
the striding slippers slowly began to come into view. Above them
a pair of clean legs. Still further above a widely pleated batik
sarong.

I raised my hands, clasped in obeisance, as I had seen the court
employees do before my grandfather, and my grandmother, and
my parents at the end of Ramadan. And I did not now withdraw
my pose until the bupati had sat himself comfortably in his place.
In making such obeisance it felt as if all the learning and science I
had studied year after year was lost. Lost was the beauty of the
world as promised by science’s progress. Lost was the enthusiasm
of my teachers in greeting the bright future of humanity. And
who knows how many times I’d have to make such obeisances
that night. Obeisance—the lauding of ancestors and persons of
authority by humbling and abasing oneself! Level with the ground
if possible! I will not allow my descendants to go through such
degradation!

This person, the bupati of B——, cleared his throat. Then
slowly he sat down on the rocking chair, kicking off his slippers
behind the foot bench, and placed his honorable feet on the velvet
cushion. The chair began to rock a little. Damn! How slowly time
passed. Some object, by my reckoning fairly long, gently tapped
upon my uncovered head. How insolent was this being that I must
honor. And every tap I must greet with a sign of grateful obei-
sance.

After five taps, the object was withdrawn, and was now hung
beside the bupati’s chair: a horse whip made from a bull’s genitals,
with a shaft of thin, choice leather.

“You!” he addressed me weakly, hoarsely.

“Yes, I, my master, Honored Lord Bupati,” said my mouth,
and like a machine my hands were raised in obeisance for the
umpteenth time and my heart cursed for I don’t know how many
times now.

“You! Why have you only come now?” His voice now
emerged more clearly from his throat, which was suffering the
end of a bout of influenza.

It felt as if I had heard that voice before. It was also his cold
which prevented me from recalling the voice easily. No, no, it
could not be him! Impossible! No! I still didn’t know what this
was all about, so I kept silent.

“The honored government does not run a postal service for
nothing—capable of getting my letters safely to you at the proper
and exact address.”

Yes, it was his voice. Impossible! It couldn’t be! Impossible.
I was just guessing.

“Why are you silent? Now that your schooling is so ad-
anced, is it that you feel humiliated to have to read my letters?”

Yes, it was his voice! I raised my hands in obeisance once
again, deliberately lifting my head a little and taking a peep. Ya
Allah! It was indeed he.

“Father!” I cried. “Forgive me, your servant.”

“Answer! You feel humiliated to have to reply to my letters?”

“A thousand pardons, my father: no.”

“And the letter from your elder brother?”

“Forgive me, my father, a thousand pardons, I was not there.
I’m no longer at that address, forgive me, a thousand pardons.”

“So you were educated as high as a coconut tree to learn to
deceive?”
"A thousand pardons, my father."
"You think we're all blind, ignorant of the date you moved to Wonokromo? And do not know that you took with you all our letters still unread?"
The horse whip made from bull's genitals swayed to and fro. The hairs on my back crawled, ready to receive the whip as it fell upon me, as a rebellious horse.
"Do you still need to be humiliated in public with this whip?"
"Humiliate me with the horse whip in public," I answered recklessly, unable to stand such tyranny. "But it would be an honor if that order were to come from a father," I continued, still more recklessly. And I would show the same attitude as Mama did to Robert, Herman Mellema, Sastrotomo, and his wife.
"Crocodile!" he hissed angrily. "I took you out of the E.L.S. Dutch-language primary school at T——for the same reason. As young as that! The higher your schooling, the more you turn into a crocodile! Bored of playing around with girls of your own age, you're now holing up with a nyai's nest. What do you want to become of you?"
I kept silent. Only my heart shouted in anger: So you insult me thus, blood of kings! Husband of my mother! Good, I will not answer. Come on, let fly with your ignorance, little king.

"The only grounds for forgiving you are because you've passed and gone up a class."
I can go on up to eleventh class! I roared inside my breast, offended. Come on, let fly with your ignorance, little king.
"Don't you think it's dangerous to take up with a nyai? If her master goes into a rage and you're shot dead by him, or perhaps attacked with a dagger, or a sword, or a kitchen knife, or strangled... how will it be? The papers will announce who you are, who your parents are. What sort of shame will you bring upon your parents? If you haven't thought things through as far as that..."

Like Mama, I was ready to leave all my family, I roared louder inside, a family that burdens me with nothing but bonds that enslave! Come on, continue, blood of the kings of Java! Continue! I too can explode.

"Haven't you read in the papers that tomorrow night your father is celebrating his appointment as a bupati? Bupati of B——? Mr. Assistant Resident of B——, Mr. Resident of Surabaya, Mr. Controller, and all the neighboring bupatis will be present. It is possible an H.B.S. student doesn't read the newspapers? If not, is it possible nobody else told you about it? Your nyai, can't she read the papers for you?"

Indeed the civil service reports were something that never attracted my interest: appointments, dismissals, transfers, pensions. Nothing to do with me. The world of priyayi, Javanese aristocrats who became administrators for the Dutch colonial bureaucracy, was not my world. Who cared if the devil was appointed smallpox official or was sacked dishonorably because of embezzlement? My world was not rank and position, wages and embezzlement. My world was this earth of mankind and its problems.

"Listen, you renegade!" he ordered, a newly important official whose spirits were now aroused. "You've become absent-minded, looking after someone else's nyai. You've forgotten your parents, your duties as a child. Perhaps you're indeed ready to take a wife. All right, another time we'll discuss it. Now there is another matter. Pay attention. Tomorrow night you will act as interpreter. Don't shame me and the family in public before the resident, assistant resident, controller, and neighboring bupatis."
"Yes, my father."
"You're able and ready to be interpreter?"
"Able and ready, my father."
"Ah, that's better, once in a while please your parents' hearts. I'd begun to worry that Mr. Controller would be carrying out that task. Imagine how it would look at a party to celebrate my appointment, with all the important officials as witnesses, if there was a son missing? When should they start becoming acquainted with you? This will be the best opportunity. It's a pity you're such a renegade. Perhaps you don't understand that your parents are
clearing the way to a high position for you. You, a son, glorified as the cleverest in the family. Or perhaps you're more inclined towards the nyai than towards rank?"

"Yes, my father."

"This is how your road to high rank will be clear."

"Yes, my father."

"There, go to your mother. You indeed did not intend to return home. It was so shameful, having to ask the help of my assistant resident. You're happy, aren't you, being arrested like an unpracticed thief? No sense of shame at all. Go kneel before your mother, though I know you're resolved to forget her. Sever your relations with that nyai who doesn't know when she's already well off!"

Naturally, I did not answer. I just made the sign of obeisance again. Then, walking on half legs, assisted by my hands, I crawled off, carrying the burden of my indignation on my back, like a snail. Destination: the place I had taken off my shoes and socks, the place where this accursed experience began. There were no Natives in the bupati's building wearing shoes. With my shoes in my hands I walked alongside the visitors' gallery, entering the inner courtyard. The gloomy lanterns showed the way to the kitchen. I collapsed into a broken-down lounge chair, ignoring the things I was carrying.

Someone came to have a look. I pretended not to notice. I was served a cup of black coffee, which I gulped down.

If my elder brother hadn't turned up, perhaps I would have fallen asleep. Putting on a vicious countenance, he spoke to me in Dutch.

"It seems you've forgotten politeness too, and so have not gone quickly to kneel before Mother?"

I rose and accompanied him, a S.I.B.A. student, a future Netherlands Indies civil servant. He kept frowning as if he were the guardian whose job it was to ensure the sky wouldn't fall in and smash up the earth. Because his Dutch was limited, he resumed in Javanese his lecture about how I was a child who no longer knew proper custom. I, of course, didn't respond. We entered the bupati's building, passing by several doors. Finally, in front of one door, he said:

"Enter there, you!"

I knocked slowly on the door. I didn't know whose room it was, but opened it and entered. Mother was sitting in front of the mirror combing her hair. A tall oil lamp stood on a stand beside her.

"Mother, forgive me," I said, kneeling down before her and kissing her knees. I don't know why my heart was seized so suddenly by this longing for my mother.

"So you have come home at last, Gus. Thank God you're safe." She lifted up my chin, looked into my face, as if I were a four-year-old child. And her soft, loving voice moved me. My eyes overflowed with tears. This was my mother, just as before, my own mother.

"This is Mother's wayward child," I submitted hoarsely.

"You're a man now. Your mustache is beginning to come through. People say you like a rich and beautiful nyai." Before I could deny this, she continued, "It's up to you, if you indeed like her and she likes you. You're an adult now. You're no doubt ready to shoulder the consequences and responsibilities and not run like a criminal." She took a breath and stroked my cheek as if I were a baby. "Gus, they say you are doing very well at school. Thanks be to God. It amazes me sometimes how your schooling can go so well while you're in the power of that nyai. Or perhaps you're truly very clever? Yes, yes, that's a male for you; all men are cats pretending to be rabbits. As rabbits they eat all the leaves, as cats they eat all the meat. All right, Gus, you must do well at school, keep advancing."

Mother didn't fault me. I did not have to deny anything.

"Men, Gus, they love to eat. Who knows if leaes or if meat? That's all right, providing you understand, Gus, the more you advance at school does not mean the more you can eat other people's food. You must be able to recognize limits. That's not too hard to understand, is it? If people don't recognize such limits, God will make them realize in His own way."

Ah, Mother, how many pearllike words have you burned into my soul.

"You're still silent, Gus. What are you going to report to your mother? My waiting is not going to be in vain, is it?"

"Next year I will graduate, Mother."

"Thanks be to God, Gus. Parents can only pray. Why have you only come now? Your father was so worried, Gus, angry every day because of you. Your father was appointed bupati very, very suddenly. No one guessed it would be so fast. You, one day,
will reach the same heights. You surely must be able to. Your father only knows Javanese, you know Dutch; you are an H.B.S. student. Your father only went to a Basic People's School. You have mixed widely with the Dutch. Your father hasn't. You will surely become a bupati one day."

"No, Mother, I don't want to become a bupati."

"No? Strange. Yes, as you wish. So what do you want to become? If you graduate you can become whatever you want, of course."

"I only want to become a free human being, not given orders, not giving orders, Mother."

"Ha! Will there be a time like that, Gus? This is the first I've heard of it."

When I was a little boy, I used to tell her excitedly about what my schoolteachers had said. This time too. About Miss Magda Peters, whose stories were so interesting, about the French Revolution, its meaning, its basic principles. Mother only laughed, not refuting anything. Just as when I was a little child.

"Ugh! You're so dirty, you smell of sweat. Bathe, and with hot water! It's already so late. Rest. Tomorrow you'll be working hard. You know your duties tomorrow?"

I was not yet acquainted with the building. I went into the room prepared for me. An oil lamp was alight inside. It appeared that my brother was also in that room. He was sitting reading by the table lamp. I passed by to get my things ready. And my brother, who always exercised his rights as the firstborn, did not lift his head at all, as if I did not exist on this earth. Was he trying to impress me with his diligence as a student?

I coughed. He still showed no reaction. I glanced at what he was reading. Not printing: handwriting! And I became suspicious when I looked at the book's cover. Only I owned a book with a beautiful cover, hand-made by Jean Marais. Slowly I moved up behind him. I was not wrong: my diary. I seized it from him and I became enraged.

"Don't touch this! Who gave you the right to open it? Is this what your school has taught you?"

He stood up, staring at me wide-eyed, and said, "Indeed you are no longer Javanese."

"What's the use of being Javanese only to have one's rights violated? Perhaps you don't understand that notes like that are very personal? Haven't your teachers taught you about ethics and individual rights?"

My brother was silent, observing me in a powerless anger.

"Or is this indeed the practice given to trainee officials? Fiddling in other people's affairs and violating the rights of anybody they like? Aren't you taught the new civilization? Modern civilization? You want to become a king who can do as he pleases, like your ancestors' kings?"

My resentment and anger had spilled out.

"And is this what the new civilization means? To insult people? To insult government officials? You yourself will become one!" he defended himself.

"A government official? The person you're facing now will never become one."

"Come on, I'll take you to Father, and you can tell him that yourself."

"Not only tell him, with or without you, but I'm quite able even to leave behind this whole family. And you! You touch my things, violating my rights, and don't know you should apologize. Have you never been to school? Or have you indeed never been taught civilized behavior?"

"Shut up! If I'd never been to school, I'd have already ordered you to crawl and make obeisance to me."

"Only a buffalo-brain would think that way about me. Illiterate."

And Mother entered, intervening:

"You meet for the first time in two years... why do you have to carry on like village children?"

"I'll fight anyone at all who violates my individual rights, Mother, let alone just a brother."

"Mother, he has admitted all his evil doing in his diary. I was going to present it to Father. He was afraid and went amok."

"You're not yet an official with the right to sell your brother just to obtain some praise," said Mother. "It's not certain that you are any better than he."

I picked up my things.

"It's better I return to Surabaya, Mother."

"No! You have received a task from your father."

"He can do it," I said, looking at my brother.
"Your brother is not an H.B.S. student."
"If I am needed, why am I treated like this?"
Mother ordered my brother to another room. After he had left, she resumed.
"You’re indeed no longer Javanese. Educated by the Dutch, you’ve become Dutch, a brown Dutchman, acting this way. Perhaps you’ve become a Christian."
"Ah, Mother, don’t go on so. I’m still the same son as before."
"My son of the past wasn’t a rebel like this."
"Your son didn’t know right and wrong then. I only rebel against that which is wrong, Mother."
"That is the sign you’re no longer Javanese, not paying heed to those older, those with greater right to your respect, those who have more power."
"Mother, don’t punish me this way. I respect what is closest to what is right."
"Javanese bow down in submission to those older, more powerful; this is a way to achieve nobility of character. People must have the courage to surrender, Gus. Perhaps you no longer know that song either?"
"I still remember, Mother. I still read the Javanese books. But those are the misguided songs of misguided Javanese. Those who have the courage to surrender are stamped and trodden upon, Mother."
"Gus!"
"Mother, I’ve studied at Dutch schools for over ten years now in order to find out all this. Is it proper that Mother punish me now I’ve found out?"
"You’ve mixed too much with the Dutch. So now you don’t like to mix with your own people, even your own family, not even with your father. You won’t answer our letters. Perhaps you don’t even like me anymore."
"Oh, forgive me, Mother." Her words had struck me sharply. I dropped to the ground, kneeling before her and embraced her legs. "Don’t speak like that, Mother. Don’t punish me more than my errors deserve. I only know of what Javanese are ignorant, because such knowledge belongs to the Europeans, and because I indeed have learned from them."
She twisted my ear, then knelt down, whispering:

"Mother doesn’t punish you. You’ve discovered your own way. I will not obstruct you, and will not call you back. Travel along the road you hold to be best. But don’t hurt your parents, and those you think don’t know everything that you know."
"I’ve never intended to hurt anyone, Mother."
"Ah, Gus, this is perhaps the fate of a woman. She suffers pain when giving birth, then suffers pain again because of her child’s actions."
"Please! For Mother to feel pain because of my actions is excessive. Didn’t Mother always tell me to study hard and well? I’ve done that to the full. Now Mother finds fault with me." And as if I were still a little child she caressed my hair and cheeks.
"When I was pregnant with you, I dreamed that someone I didn’t know came and gave me a dagger. Since then I’ve known, Gus, the child in my womb held a sharp weapon. Be careful in using it, Gus. Don’t you yourself become its victim."

Since early morning people had been preparing the place for the reception to celebrate my father’s appointment. The news was that the best and most beautiful dancers in all the region had been hired for the occasion. Father had brought the best gamelan pure bronze orchestra from T—-, my grandmother’s gamelan, which was always wrapped in red velvet when not being used. Every year it was not only tuned, but bathed in flower water.

With the gamelan came an expert tuner. My father wanted not only the gamelan itself, but the harmony too, to be pure East Javanese. So since morning, the pavilion had been buzzing with the sounds of people filing things into tune.

The administrative work of the bupati’s office stopped altogether. Everyone was helping Mr. Niccolo Moreno, a well-known decorator brought in from Surabaya. He brought with him a big chest of decorating tools the like of which I had never seen before. And it was then that I first realized that arranging decorations and ornamentations was a skill all of its own. Mr. Niccolo Moreno came on the recommendation of Mr. Assistant Resident B—-, approved of and guaranteed by Mr. Resident Surabaya.

That morning I too had to meet him. With his own hands he took my measurements, as if he wanted to make me some clothes. Then he let me go.
He had turned the pavilion into an arena whose focus was the portrait of Queen Wilhelmina, that beautiful maiden I had once dreamed after—brought from Surabaya, the work of a German artist named Hüßenfeld. I still admired her beauty.

The Dutch tricolors were hung everywhere, singly or in twos. Tricolor ribbon also streamed out from the portrait to all parts of the pavilion, and would later captivate the audience with its authority. The pavilion's columns were painted with some new kind of paint, made from flour, that dried within two hours. Banyan-tree leaves and greenish-yellow coconut fronds in traditional color harmonies transformed the dry, barren walls into something refreshing, and impelled people to enjoy their beauty. Eyes were drawn by the play of flowers' colors; yellow, blue, red, white, and purple—a saturating beauty—flowers that in day-to-day life stuck separately and silently out along fences.

The big night in my father's life arrived. The gamelan had already been rumbling softly and slowly for some time. Mr. Niccolo Moreno was busy in my room, dressing me up and adorning me. Who would have ever guessed that I, already an adult, would be dressed up by somebody else? A white person too! As if I were a maiden about to ascend the wedding throne.

All the time he was dressing me, he spoke in a strange-sounding, monotone Dutch, as if it came out of the chest of a Native. He obviously wasn't Dutch. According to his story, he often dressed and adorned the bupatis, including my father tonight, and the sultans of Sumatra and Borneo. He'd designed many of their clothes, and even now was often summoned by them. He said also that the costumes of the guards of the kings of Java were designed by him.

Silently I listened to his stories, neither affirming nor refuting them, although I didn't believe them fully either.

He had dressed me in an embroidered vest, stiff, as if made from tortoiseshell. I could never have bent over in it. The stiff leather collar dissuaded my neck from turning around. Indeed the intent was that my body should be straight and stiff, not turning around frequently, eyes straight ahead like a true gentleman. Then a batik sarong with a silver belt. The style in which the batik was worn truly brought out that dashing East Javanese character. That's what Father no doubt wanted. I suffered all this like a young maiden. A batik blangkon headdress, a mixture of East Javanese and Madurese styles, something entirely new, Niccolo Moreno's own creation, was placed upon my head. Then came a ceremonial sheathed short sword, a keris inlaid with jewels. Then a black outer upper garment like a coat with a cut at the back so the people could admire the beauty of my keris. A bow tie made my neck, usually active guiding my eyes to their targets, feel as if it were being snared. Hot perspiration began to soak my back and chest.

In the mirror I found myself looking like a victorious knight out of those stories of the legendary eleventh-century prince, Panji. From under my shirt protruded velvet cloth embroidered with gold thread.

I was clearly a descendant of the knights of Java, so I too was a knight of Java. But why was it a non-Javanese who was making me so dashing? And handsome? Why a European? Perhaps an Italian? Already since Amangkurat I in the 1600s, the clothes of the kings of Java had been designed and made by Europeans, said Mr. Niccolo Moreno. I'm sorry, but your people only wore blankets before we came. Below, above, on the head, only a blanket! His words truly hurt.

Whether his story was true or not, in the mirror I did look dashing and handsome. Perhaps people would say later: "a true Javanese costume," forgetting all the European elements in the shirt, collar, tie, and even forgetting the last and velvet made in England.

I considered my clothes and my appearance to be products of mankind's earth at the end of the nineteenth century, the time of the birth of the modern era. And I truly felt that Java and all its people were a not-too-important comer of this earth of mankind. The town of Twente in Holland now wove for the Javanese, and chose the material too. Village-woven cloth was left now only to the villagers. The Javanese were left with only batik-making. And this one body of mine—still the original!

Mr. Moreno went. And I sat down. When I became aware of the sounds of the East Javanese gamelan, which would cradle this evening's atmosphere, I awoke from my reflections, looked in the mirror again and smiled with satisfaction. In accord with custom, I would be Father's and Mother's escort as they entered the reception. My brother would lead the way, while my sisters had no public function. They would be busy out in the back.
The guests had all arrived. Father and Mother came forth. My brother was in front, I behind them. As soon as we entered the reception area in the pavilion the assistant resident of B—— came up, because that was the program.

All stood in respect. Mr. Assistant Resident walked straight to Father, offered his respects, bowed to Mother, shook hands with my brother and me. Only then did he sit beside Father. The gamelan played a song of welcome, flaring up and filling the reception area and people's hearts. And the pavilion was packed with people, their faces shining with pleasure and the light of the gas lamps. Behind them in the compound, on woven mats, sat rows of village heads and village officials.

The master of ceremonies, the bupati's chief executive assistant, the patih of B——, opened the program. After a moment's hesitation, the gamelan became silent, as if controlled by some supernatural power.

The Dutch national anthem, "Wilhelmus," was sung. People stood. Very few joined in singing. Most, of course, couldn't, only one or two Natives. The others just stood gazing, perhaps swearing at that strange and aggravating melody.

Mr. Assistant Resident B——, as the representative of Mr. Resident Surabaya, began to speak. Mr. Controller Willem Ende came forward, ready to interpret in Javanese. Mr. Assistant Resident shook his head and waved his hand to prevent it. He indicated that I should be interpreter.

For a moment I was nervous, but in a second I regained my character. No, they are no better than you! And that voice gave me courage. Carry out this task in the same way as you take on your exams!

I came to the front, forgetting to bow and stand with my hands clasped before me, according to Javanese custom. I felt as if in front of class. Wherever my eyes wandered they collided with the eyes of the bupatis. Perhaps they were admiring this Javanese knight in his half-Javanese, half-European clothes. Or perhaps they were indulging their antipathy towards me because of my not showing respect towards them.

Mr. Assistant Resident finished his speech, and I finished putting it into Javanese. He shook hands with Father. And now it was Father's turn to speak. He didn't know Dutch, but that was still better than the other bupatis, who were illiterate. He spoke in
the new dancer. He took the crystal glass and swallowed down three quarters of its contents. The glass with the remaining liquid he pressed to the lips of his dance partner, who drained it down only after trying to resist while still dancing. Then she bowed down her head in extreme embarrassment.

The gathering cheered in glee. The village chiefs and officials stood and contributed to the hubbub.

"Drink it, sweetie! Drink, hoséeéééé!"

That handsome dancer with her bare, firm, shining, langsata-fruit skin took the glass from the official’s hands and placed it on the silver tray.

Mr. Assistant Resident nodded with pleasure, clapping gleefully, and laughed. Then he returned to his chair.

Now another dancer came and offered the sash to Father. And he danced with her beautifully. And that dance too ended with liquor from a silver tray.

Following this, the assistant resident went home. The bupatis too then went home, one by one, each in his own grand carriage. The village chiefs, district officers, police constables, charged the pavilion, and the tayub dance continued until morning with the shout of hoséeéééé after every swallow of liquor.

I only found out the next morning that in my bag there was a small bundle of silver coins. Wrapped in paper, with Annelies’s writing: "Don’t let us go for long without hearing news from you. Annelies."

The money totalled fifteen guilders, enough for a village family to live for ten months, even twenty months if their daily budget was kept at two and a half cents a day.

That morning I set off to the post office. The postmaster, I don’t know his name, an Indo, shook my hand and praised my Dutch at the previous nights’ reception as being excellent and very exact. All the office employees stopped working just to listen to our conversation and to take in what I looked like.

"We would be very proud if you would work here; you are an H.B.S. student, yes?"

"I only want to send a telegram," I answered.

"There’s no bad news, I hope?"

"No."

The postmaster attended to me himself and gave me the form.
The assistant resident rose from his garden chair, as too did the two young women beside him. He got in his greeting first.

“This is my eldest daughter,” he introduced her, “Sarah. This is my youngest daughter, Miriam. Both are H.B.S. graduates. The youngest went to the same school as you, before you, though, of course. Well, excuse, me, I have some unexpected work to do,” and he went.

So this was what the honored invitation rocking B—was all about. I’m introduced to his daughters and then he goes. Probably Sarah and Miriam were older than I. And every H.B.S. student knew with certainty: Seniors seek every opportunity to put on airs, to strike a pose, to insult and to topple upside-down any poor junior.

You be careful now, Minke. See, Sarah is starting: “Is Miriam’s Dutch language and literature teacher, Mr. Mähler, still teaching? That crazy, talkative one?”

“He’s been replaced by Miss Magda Peters,” I answered. “No doubt more talkative still and with only a kitchen vocabulary,” she followed on.

“Do you know for sure that she is a Miss?” asked Miriam. “Everyone calls her Miss.”

And Miriam giggled. Then Sarah too. Truly, I didn’t know what they were laughing about.

I answered hotheadedly and recklessly: “I think she has more than just a kitchen vocabulary. She is my cleverest teacher, the one of whom I’m most fond.”

Now they both laughed, giggling, while covering their mouths with their handkerchiefs. I was confused, not knowing what was so funny. For a moment I saw shining glances coming from my left and right.

“Fond of a teacher?” teased Miriam. “There has never been a Dutch language and literature teacher whom people have liked. Castor oil dispensers, all of them. What do you get from her?”

“She can cleverly explain the Dutch eighties style and compare it with the contemporary style.”

“Ohoh!” cried Sarah. “If that’s the case, try declaiming one of Kloos’s poems, so we can see if your teacher really is so great.”

“She is clever in explaining the sociological and psychological background of the works of the eighties,” I continued.

“Very interesting.”

“What do you mean by psychological and social background?”

Sarah and Miriam burst into a fit of giggling again.

Now I was beginning to become annoyed with their giggling. I moved across to the assistant resident’s chair to avoid their glances. Now I faced them directly. And they came over as Pure-Blooded girls who were adroit and not at all unattractive. Yet a junior could never relax his vigilance with seniors.

“If you do indeed require an explanation of that,” I continued, putting on a serious countenance, “we would need to look at actual literary texts.”

Seeing me get more and more into a corner, their giggling escalated and they glanced at each other knowingly.

“Come on, when has there been a Dutch language and literature teacher who talked about social and psychological background? It sounds a lot of hot air to me! What does she want to become, this Miss Magda Peters? At the most she’d be able to present the Dutch Eighties Generation writers who barked at the sky destroyed by the factory smoke, the fields blasted by the din of traffic, under assault by roads and railway lines.” Miriam, who was more aggressive, attacked. “If she wants to discuss social background she shouldn’t be talking about that sentimental generation, she should be talking about the writer Multatuli . . . and the Indies!”

“Yes, that’s when you’re really talking about noble literature, where mud has fostered the growth of the water lily.”

“She’s also spoken about Multatuli,” I answered resolutely. “Ah, come on, how could Multatuli be discussed in school? Stick to the truth. He has never been mentioned in any textbook.”

Miriam continued her attack.

“Miriam’s right,” Sarah confirmed. “If one wants to talk about social background, Multatuli is indeed a typical example.”

Then she glanced at her sister.

“Miss Magda Peters not only put Multatuli forward as a typical example. She went so far as to elucidate his writings.”

Sarah and Miriam burst into a fit of giggling again.

“Elucidate them!” cried Sarah unbelievingly. “An H.B.S. teacher in the Indies elucidating Multatuli! Could that happen in the next ten years, Miriam?” Miriam shook her head in disbelief.

“Or have you changed your textbooks?”

“No.”
“Your teacher is truly puffed up. You’re only her pupil,” Sarah tormented me.
“No.”
“Then your teacher is really daring. If what you say is true, she could get into trouble.” Miriam began to get serious.
“Why?”
“How simple you are. So you don’t know. And you need to and indeed are obliged to know.” Miriam continued. “Because if what you say about your teacher is true, maybe she is from the radical group.”
“There’s nothing wrong with the radicals, is there? They’re bringing progress to the Indies.” By this time I felt really stupid.
“But good doesn’t necessarily mean right, and progress might not yet be appropriate. It could come at the wrong time and place!” pressed Miriam.
Sarah cleared her throat. She didn’t speak.
“Come on, tell us which of his writings she is enthusiastic about?”
They were becoming more and more annoying. And a junior, I don’t know who started the rule, must always show respect. So:
“The main work is of course Max Havelaar or De Kolonie­vellingen der Nederlandsche Handelsmaatschappij—The Coffee Auctions of the Netherlands Trading Company.”
“And who do you think Multatuli is?” Now Sarah was launching an assault on me.
“Who? Eduard Douwes Dekker.”
“Excellent. You must also know of the other Douwes Dekker. That’s obligatory.” Sarah continued her attack.
This mad senior was getting worse and worse. And why was she attacking me like this, glancing at her sister too, lips trembling as she held back her laughter? They’re playing out a drama, playing around with a Native slave. They were going too far.
“So you don’t know,” Sarah said insultingly. “Or you’re in doubt?”
Miriam burst into a fit of uncontrolled giggling.
Very well, I would confront this satanic conspiracy. So this was the value of the honored and sensational invitation from the assistant resident. Very well, because I didn’t know, I answered as reasonably as possible.
know as much about your own country. Perhaps. True? I'm not wrong, am I?"

The humiliation has now begun, I thought.

"Your ancestors," Miriam de la Croix continued, "—I'm sorry, it's not my intention to insult anyone—your ancestors, generation after generation, have believed that thunder is the explosion caused by the angels trying to capture the devil. It's so, yes? Why are you silent? Are you ashamed of your own ancestors' beliefs?"

Sarah de la Croix had stopped laughing. She put on a serious face, and observed me as if I were some mysterious animal.

"There's no need to single out my ancestors," I answered her. "Your European and Dutch ancestors in prehistoric times were no less ignorant."

"Ah," Sarah intervened, "just as I suspected. You two are going to fight about your ancestors."

"Yes, we're like cattle, Minke," Miriam continued. "Fight at our first meeting, but be friends afterwards, perhaps forever. That's right, yes?"

A very adroit girl! My suspicions began to subside.

"My ancestors may have been more stupid than your ancestors, Minke. Your ancestors were building paddy fields and irrigation systems when mine were still living in caves. But that's not what we want to discuss. Look, at school you're taught that thunder is only the clash of positive and negative clouds. Benjamin Franklin is now even able to build a lightning rod. Yes? While your ancestors have a beautiful legend—the story that I have heard—about Ki Ageng Sela, who was able to capture the thunder and then lock it up in a chicken coop."

Sarah burst into laughter. Miriam became even more serious, observing my face as twilight reached its climax. Then she let fly her puzzle:

"I believe you can accept the teachings about positive and negative clouds because you need the marks to pass. But be honest, do you believe in the truth of this explanation?"

Now I knew that she was testing my inner character. Yes, a real test. To be frank, I'd never asked myself such a question. Everything had just seemed to flow smoothly, requiring no questioning.

Now Sarah interfered:

"Of course I believe that you know and have mastered this natural science lesson. But now the problem is: Do you believe it or not?"

"I must believe it," I answered.

"Must believe it only because you've got to pass the exams. Must! So you don't yet believe."

"My teacher, Miss Magda Peters . . ."


"She is my teacher. According to her, everything comes from being taught," I answered, "and from practice. Even beliefs. You two would not ever have come to believe in Jesus Christ without being taught and then practicing to believe."

"Yes, yes, perhaps your teacher is right." Sarah was confused.

Miriam, on the other hand, watched me as if she were looking at her lover's portrait. "This year we've begun hearing a new word: modern. Do you know what it means?" The aggressive Miriam began again, forgetting all about the question of thunder.

"I know. But only from Miss Magda Peters."

"It seems you don't have any other teachers," interrupted Sarah.

"What's to be done? It's she who can answer your question."

"Then what does this fantastic teacher of yours mean by modern?" Miriam cut in.

"It isn't in the dictionary. But according to this fantastic teacher of mine it is the name for a spirit, an attitude, a way of looking at things that emphasizes the qualities of scholarship, aesthetics, and efficiency. I don't know any other explanation. She is a member of the schismatic group in the Catholic Church that's been expelled by the Pope. Perhaps there's another explanation?" I asked finally.

Sarah and Miriam stared at each other. I couldn't see their faces clearly. Twilight had arrived, though it had seemed ages in coming. And now they just sat silently, exchanging looks, and they began busily to eliminate mosquitoes getting overfriendly with their skin.

"These mosquitoes!" Sarah frowned. "They think I'm a restaurant."

Now it was I who burst into laughter.

"Ah, we've forgotten our drinks," said Sarah. "Please!"
And the tension began to subside. I began to breathe freely again. And I remembered the servant dressed in white who had put the glasses and cakes on the garden table a while ago. For the first time I smiled to myself. Not only because the tension was subsiding, but because I knew that they knew no more than I did.

"Do you know who Dr. Snouck Hurgronje is?" Once again Miriam attacked.

If the assistant resident turned up now, I would be saved from this torment. Where are you, my savior? Why don't you appear? And these children of yours are no less fierce than the twilight mosquitoes. Or did you deliberately invite me here so that your daughters, my seniors, could do me in? These thoughts suddenly made me understand: The assistant resident was deliberately confronting me with his two daughters as a test. He probably had some specific purpose in mind.

"How about if I have a turn asking a question now?"

Sarah and Miriam burst into laughter again.

"Just a minute," forbade Miriam. "Answer first. Your beloved teacher is indeed extraordinary. You, her student, are no less extraordinary. It's only natural you're so fond of her. Perhaps I also would be as fond of her as you are. Now, about my last question, perhaps your beloved teacher has spoken about him too."

"A pity, but no," I answered briefly. "Tell me."

It appeared she had long awaited this opportunity to come forward as a teacher. Skillfully, she told this story:

Dr. Snouck Hurgronje was a jewel of a scholar—daring to think, daring to act, daring to risk himself for the advancement of knowledge—and was an important adviser in ensuring a Dutch victory in the Aceh war. It's a pity he was now involved in an argument with General Van Heutz. An argument about Aceh. What's the meaning of this argument? There isn't any, said Miriam. The important thing is that he has undertaken a valuable experiment with three Native youths. The purpose: to find out if Natives are able truly to understand and bring to life within themselves European learning and science. The three students are going to a European school. He interviews them every week to try to find out if there is any change in their inner character and whether they are able to absorb it all, whether their scientific knowledge and learning from school is only a thin, dry, easily shattered coating on the surface, or something that has really taken root. This scholar has not yet come to a decision.

Now it was I who laughed again. These two misses were aping the scholar. And I was the guinea pig caught by them along the side of the road. Incredible! But they might be doing it on their father's orders, which were probably not ill-intended, so I restrained my desire to launch a counterattack. I continued listening to Miriam's story. Not as a junior, nor as a student—but as an observer.

All was still and calm. Sarah did not speak. Then:

"Have you heard about the Association Theory?"

"Miss Miriam, you are now my teacher," I answered quickly, avoiding the question.

"No, not a teacher," she said with a sudden humility. "These days it's only normal that there should be an exchange of views between educated people. Yes, isn't that right? So you've never heard about it?"

"Not yet."

"Very well. This theory comes from that scholar. A new theory. His idea is that if the experiment succeeds, the Netherlands Indies government could put his theory into practice. That's right, isn't it, Sarah?"

"Tell it yourself," said Sarah, avoiding the question.

"Association means direct cooperation, based on European ways, between European officials and educated Natives. Those of you who have advanced would be invited to join together with us in governing the Indies. So the responsibility would no longer be the burden of the white race alone. So there would no longer be a need for the position of the controller as a liaison between Native and white administrations. The bupatis could cooperate directly with the white government. Do you understand?"

"Keep going," I said.

"What's your opinion?"

"Very simple," I answered. "We Natives have read what you have not read: our chronicle Babad Tanah Jawi. Reading and writing Javanese has long been something our families have studied. Look, in E.L.S. and H.B.S. we are taught to admire the Indies Army's brilliance in subjugating us, the Natives."

"The Indies Army is indeed outstanding. That's a fact." Miriam defended her nation.
"Yes, indeed, it’s a fact. Do you know that the chronicles written by the Natives tell of how we withstood your attacks for centuries?"

"But were always defeated?" charged Miriam.

"Yes, indeed, always defeated." Suddenly the courage to continue my words disappeared. Instead I came out with a question:

"Why didn’t you come up with this theory three centuries ago? When no Native would have had any objection to Europeans sharing responsibility with them?"

"I don’t quite understand what you mean?" interrupted Sarah.

"I mean, this fantastic scholar, Doctor . . . what’s his name again? . . . he’s three hundred years behind the Natives of that time," I answered proudly.

And with that I excused myself, leaving those two annoying seniors sitting there.