PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER

ALL THAT IS GONE

Translated from the Indonesian by
WILLEM SAMUELS

HYPERION
EAST
NEW YORK

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THE LUSI RIVER skirts the southern edge of the city of Blora. In the dry season, its bed of stone, gravel, mud, and sand heaves upward to expose itself to the sky, leaving scattered shallow pools. But when the rainy season comes and the forested hills are covered by clouds and the sun refuses to shine for forty to fifty hours, the river's greenish water changes to a mud-clotted yellow and rises to a level of twenty meters or even higher. The peaceful current becomes a crazed torrent. The river, swirling through its course, clutches at and then rips out clumps of bamboo from the banks like a child pulling weeds. It fells the levees and sucks into itself the bordering fields. So suddenly, the Lusi transforms itself.

* * *

From my home one can see groves of bamboo, blackish green in color, the tops of which weave and twist gently when the wind blows. When I was a boy, the dance of the tips and the whistle of the staves as the wind rushed through them never failed to frighten me. I can recall running in terror to my mother, burying my head in her lap, and starting to cry. Even now I can still hear her chiding me, "Whatever are you whining for?"

Her hands, no longer the soft hands of a girl, stroke my thin cheeks. Between my sobs, I gasp, "The bamboo is crying, Mama!"

Taking my head in her hands, she pulls me to her lap and tries to reassure me, "No, my baby, it's not crying. It's singing to you."

And then she starts to sing, something soothing and sweet, a folk song perhaps that rocks me, sways me, and then finally drowns my fears. Often it is her gentle voice that lulls me to sleep. Sometimes, as she sings, I run my fingers through her wind-tousled hair. I play with the lobes of her ears and the diamond-studded earrings that adorn them until finally, I hear her calm, sweet voice: "Come now, you're sleepy. I'll put you to bed." Hearing that, I open my eyes as wide as possible, hoping to persuade her to continue the song, but more often than not I find myself unable to keep my eyelids raised. But all that is gone now, vanished, along with the riverbanks and the clumps of bamboo that the high waters of the Lusi drag away.

* * *

Once, during an afternoon nap, I dreamt I found a one-cent piece, and when I awoke I clenched my fist for fear of losing the money I had found in my dream. I jumped out of bed and ran to find my mother. "Mama, Mama!" I called to her in joy, "I found a one-cent coin!"

She smiled at me, taking pleasure in my delight. "Wherever did you find it?" she asked. "Where is it now?"

I stuck out my fist and yelled, "Here it is! Right here in my hand!" But upon opening my fist I found my hand completely empty.

"Where did you say it was?" my mother asked me softly.

I stood there, dumbfounded by shock and disappointment. I wept as a great feeling of emptiness entered my chest.

My mother laughed and coaxed me gently: "You were only dreaming. You're awake now. Don't cry . . ." But I continued to sob.

My mother lifted the edge of her blouse to dry my tears. "Hush, be quiet now . . ." From the fold in her waistcloth, she took out a half-cent coin and handed it to me. I played with the coin in silence, as I tried to repress my lingering disappointment.

"It's late," my mother told me. "It's time for your bath. Nyi Kin will help you."

I removed myself from Mother's lap, but when I didn't immediately make my way toward the bath, her features darkened and her voice—no gentleness there now—grew stern: "Go on, off with you!"

Her tone, harboring no room for protest, made me reconsider an appeal. Slowly I walked away to look for the servant.

* * *

I can still see Nyi Kin quite clearly. Like so many women in this world, she had been forced to marry a man she didn't even know. And all that the marriage gave to her was syphilis, an illness that left her with an intense dislike of men. The disease destroyed her relationship with her husband and caused them to divorce. It robbed her of one of her eyes, wasted her beauty, and caused deterioration in one of her hip joints. When she walked she dragged her leg.

During the day Nyi Kin had little time to bemoan her fate; chores took up most of her attention. But when night came and her painful weariness made it difficult for her to sleep, it was then she mourned her loss.

Nyi Kin's arranged marriage, illness, and divorce had taken place before she came to work at our house. Perhaps it was because she had no children of her own—the syphilis had eaten her womb—that she showered so much attention on me. Even now, whenever I think of her, no matter where I am, I can feel her love and affection.

Sometimes Nyi Kin would stroke my cheeks as if I were her own child. When carrying me, she'd hide her face behind the long scarf she always wore around her neck, but then suddenly pull it away and pucker her lips. "Boo!" she'd say.

No matter how many times she did this, I'd always break out in giggles. Such pleasure that little game gave me. And she too would laugh with delight, but then just as suddenly stop the game and refuse to show her face. When I finally succeeded in pulling the scarf away, I'd find her staring vacantly. The precarious nature of her existence seemed to emanate from her reddened eyes. Hastily she'd pull my face against her own and hold it there for a long time; I imagine now that she was dreaming of the children she longed for but would never bear.

Nyi Kin always set aside part of her wages to buy snacks, most of them going to me. It wasn't until later that I learned my mother paid her just 80 Dutch cents a month.

Like my mother, Nyi Kin was always telling me stories, but they were different from the ones that Mother told, which were about Asian war heroes. Nyi Kin's stories were about talking animals who had created for themselves kingdoms in the jungle. I can't recall how old I was when she told me these tales, but I do remember that she would remark how good the people of yore must have been to be able to understand the speech of animals. People these days, she said, are too sinful. They're cruel and unkind to one another, which is why, she also told me, they can't understand what animals say.

She talked about her own experiences as a girl and about an incident that had taken place when she was only a few years older than I was at the time. That particular story I would ask her to repeat again and again. She never refused, and each time I listened with surprise and awe. This is how the tale went:

> *"I was just a girl at the time and the* bupati *who governed the Blora regency was Ndoro Kanjeng Said. One year, for some reason, our area experienced a double rainy season. The Lusi River rose over its banks, and our safe and peaceful city was soon buried beneath the muddy floodwaters. Because the city square lies on high ground, that bit of land became an island in the midst of a large sea. All the people in the area were herded by the rising waters to the square. They brought their children, their buffalo, and their cattle with them. Those who didn't leave their homes quickly enough risked being swept away to the river's mouth.*
>
> *"Down and down the rains came, and soon even the regent's home was jammed with people. So then what he did was he went*

out of his house with a whip in his hand, and walked to the water's edge, which was already lapping at the city square. He lashed the water with his whip and said a prayer. And slowly, very slowly but just as surely, the waters began to recede and finally retreated to the banks of the Lusi."

I remember that story very clearly. Nyi Kin had about twenty-five tales that she would tell me again and again, but to me they always seemed new and I never failed to listen with rapt attention. She told me about babies crying in the rain and how courageous the regent had been, how willingly the people served him, and how they had bowed to him when he came out of the house to save them from the flood.

Her story put me in awe of the regent. By the time I was born, he was long dead and buried. Even so, the mere mention of his name, Ndoro Kanjeng Said, evokes a kinder world that still lingers in the memory of the people of Blora.

Other stories that Nyi Kin told were about the gods and cacodemons that roam the world by day and night in search of people who are not on guard. Or, when looking at the clouds, she would recant fantastic tales from the *Ramayana*—how Dasamuka had hidden behind the clouds in wait for Sita and about his struggle with the great *garuda* bird Jatayu, who tried to stop him.

She told me about the heroes of the *Mahabharata,* too. She told them in a simple yet beautiful way. I was able to understand some of what she told me and stood in awe of the greatness of people of olden days. Looking back now, I see that I was like many people, both now and then, who would rather think about the past than deal with the present.

* * *

Important moments in life are not easily erased from memory, even that of a child. Such moments remain until the end of one's life. I remember one time when it was dark in the house and I was crying. My home was far from the closest power line and when night fell, the house grew gloomy inside. I remember Mother taking me outside that night. The dew made my body damp and shiverish, but it also helped to assuage the emptiness I was feeling inside. Maybe I had just been hot, I don't know, but Mother kissed my chin and whispered softly to me, "Oh, my little darling, why do you cry so much? Don't you know your mother is tired from working all day? Go to sleep, my baby. Tomorrow the sun will bring a new day and with it a new sky and new air. Then you can play to your heart's content."

The timbre of my mother's voice helped to soothe my feelings. I embraced her and gave her breasts my tears. She held my head against her chest, and I listened to the beating of her heart. As she began to sing, my fidgeting eased. The night's cool air and the dew seemed to make her song all the more poignant. After that, I don't remember what happened; when I next opened my eyes the sun was high in the sky and outside was the new day my mother had promised. I had a new day, a new sky, new air, and a new song, too. But all that is gone now, vanished from sensory perception to live forever in memory.

* * *

I remember the time when Nyi Kin suddenly disappeared. "She's sick," the other kids told me, but even so, I couldn't understand why she had left without saying goodbye. I looked for her everywhere but couldn't find her. I started to cry. I must have cried for at least two hours. Mother tried to calm me by offering me a banana, but that did nothing to check my tears. I felt an incredible emptiness inside me. Mother kept telling me: "Nyi Kin's gone home, honey. She's not feeling well, and when a person's sick you can't be near her or you'll get sick, too."

Mother's words did little to fill the vacuum inside me either. I kept on crying until exhaustion finally forced my body to sleep. When I awoke, the emptiness was still there and I started to cry again. Tears fell from my eyes like the drops of liquid that used to seep from Nyi Kin's hollow socket, the one she would wipe with the tip of her scarf.

Gradually, the emptiness abated and finally disappeared. Other things came to occupy my mind. Even so, at times, when I suddenly remembered Nyi Kin, I would ask again, "When is Nyi Kin coming back?" But Mother's answer was always, "She's still ill."

At that age I didn't know that Nyi Kin's house was not far from ours, only six or seven houses away. It wasn't until years later that Mother revealed the real reason Nyi Kin had gone: Nyi Kin liked to take spices from the kitchen, she said, and my mother would not allow thievery of any kind.

* * *

Nyi Kin was replaced by a younger woman. I was three years old at the time and had a baby sister who was one year old. Because I slept with the servant, I always woke up at five in the morning. She had to rise early to cook the fried rice for my parents' foster children—who weren't really foster children, but children whose parents had placed them with us—before they left for school. The two of us would squat together beside the hearth while frying the rice. When any crisp rice stuck to the bottom of the wok, I'd ask her for it and eat it right there.

I can't remember the servant's name, but I do remember that she, like Nyi Kin, was very fond of me. She had been raised on a farm and had once been married to a farmer, but after their crops failed they had separated.

An incident involving that servant took place when I was three or four years old and is still remarkably vivid in my mind. One morning I asked her for the crackled rice, which I then proceeded to nibble on while sitting on my haunches in front of the hearth. Our kitchen was not in the house but in an attached structure, the roof of which was made of corrugated zinc with upturned edges that had been fixed to a set of stakes. Seen from the inside, the roof had a triangular-shaped hole at each end, and it was through one of those holes I saw the most amazing thing. At 5 A.M., the sky looked completely dark from inside the kitchen, especially when one was facing the fire. But that morning, while I was sitting there, I looked up at one of the holes and saw a big head peering inside. I could make out a beard, eyebrows, and a big white moustache, but the face of the creature looking at me was black, even blacker than the sky outside. I didn't do anything. I just sat there in the predawn light, looking at that big face as I nibbled on my crackled rice. I didn't say anything either and, in the days that followed, the face began to appear regularly.

Finally, one day, when seeing the face, I pointed at the window and said to the servant, "Look! There it is! I told you! There's a big black head peeking at us again!"

The servant raised her head to look at the hole beneath the roof and started to laugh at me. "Of course there is," she said dryly, "but *I* can't see anything."

"But I saw it," I told her. "I saw a head, a really big head."

"Well I didn't," she said with just as much certainty. "What did it look like?"

"It was black. I saw a black face."

"You're fibbing. There's nothing out there."

I was unable to make her believe me; and our little conversation died right there.

Once I told Mother about what I had seen, but she didn't take me seriously either. As a matter of fact, she frowned and looked at me as if she were angry. "Has someone been telling you stories about devils? Who's been telling you about devils?"

At that age I already knew about devils, and I asked her: "Do you think it was really a devil I saw?"

"Who's been telling you those stories?" she asked suspiciously.

"Nobody. I saw him myself, Mama."

"You mustn't lie. Who taught you to lie? Nyi Kin, or is it that new servant? Tell me."

"Nobody, Mama, I saw him myself."

When Mother went off to question the servant, she responded with what I told her: "Every morning he tells me he sees the devil out there, but whenever I look up at the hole, I never see anything."

"Well, you must not tell him stories," Mother warned her.

"Oh no, ma'am, I'd never do that."

"There's no need to scare him."

"Oh no, ma'am. I wouldn't do that."

After that I stopped telling people about the face I saw through the hole beneath the roof every morning. But then one morning something happened even more out of the ordinary: That day, I was in the kitchen and I saw the head peek inside and then, a moment later, a monkey almost as large as myself jumped down from the hole. It leaped at the servant, who took off running around the central hearth. In the firelight I could see fear distorting the servant's features, but for whatever reason she neither screamed nor called for help. As the monkey tore around the kitchen, it grazed against me but didn't stop to bother me. It seemed intent on catching the servant. The two of them ran around and around in circles, one playing the hunter, the other the prey. But then, all of a sudden, the monkey vanished—I don't know where it went—and the servant collapsed on her haunches completely out of breath. I stared at her in silence. When she finally stood, I saw that there was a plate-size puddle of water on the ground where she had been squatting.

"You wet yourself," I commented.

The servant looked down at the puddle shimmering with the reflections of the firelight. She tossed some ashes on the pool of urine and walked away.

This experience was so overwhelming for me, I felt that I had to tell someone about it. It made me excited just to think about retelling it. When the other kids awoke, I ran in to tell them, but seeing that my mother was also awake, the desire to do so suddenly vanished. I didn't have the nerve. I knew my mother would say I was lying.

Later, after my father and the other kids had gone to school, the house was quiet. It was then that the servant approached my mother. "Ma'am, I would like to quit today," she said.

"But why? Aren't you happy here?"

"It's fine here, ma'am, but . . ." She didn't continue.

Mother didn't try to make her change her mind, and that very same day the servant left, never to return. I wanted to tell Mother what had happened, but I didn't. So, for the rest of the household, the servant's departure left little impression at all.

A few years later, when I finally did tell my mother about the incident, she cleared up—or at least thought that she cleared up—the mystery: "That would have been the Suryos' monkey," she told me. "They used to let it run loose in the morning." Memories differ, it seems. Our neighbor, Mr. Suryo, did indeed once own a monkey, but as I recall, that was not until a few years later.

Wherever that monkey had come from, it no longer mattered. The monkey—the one with the big head, white eyebrows, beard, and moustache—that had chased the servant was gone. It vanished like the banks of the river and the groves of bamboo dragged away by the floodwaters of the Lusi.

* * *

My father was the principal of a private school, and in the morning, when I'd see him getting ready to leave, I'd ask him to take me along. He'd almost always say no and I would start to cry. I don't know why, but there was an emptiness inside me that always made me want to cry.

"When you're big, you can go to school too," my parents would tell me, in an attempt to get me to stop. That usually helped to cheer me up.

"Can I really, Mama? Can I, Papa?"

"Why of course. And you can go to college in Surabaya, or to Batavia, or maybe even to Europe!"

After I had calmed down, my father would kiss me on both cheeks and get ready to leave. Only then could he safely walk away. Even so, I'd sometimes run after him, forcing Mother to follow me out to the road to try to make me stop. When this happened, I would start to cry again. But if Mother again said no, and absolutely forbade me to go, I dared not protest.

I remember well the feeling of what it was like when my father was not at home. I had a paint can to which my mother had fastened wheels and a string, and I'd pull it behind me wherever I went. There must have been something inside the can, because it clattered and clanked as I pulled it behind me, but the sound it made seemed to soothe my fears and encourage delight. But that, too, is gone now, just like the riverbanks and the clumps of bamboo that are dragged away by the floodwaters of the Lusi.

* * *

Usually when Father returned from school he would be laughing and in a good mood. Coming into the house, he'd always call out my name first and then that of my one-year-old sister. Then and only then, after kissing me and seeing that I was well, would he change his clothes and sit down to eat with Mother at the dining table. I'd join them but I ate on my feet, standing beside Mother. She would take a spoon of food from off her plate and put it in my open mouth. Then I'd run around the room and not return to my place until the mouthful of rice or whatever it was had been chewed and swallowed.

"Tastes good, does it?" my father would usually ask. And I'd answer with a laugh, "Gr-e-ea-a-t!"

My father never ate very much, not more than half a plate. Very rarely did he eat all the rice that my mother served him. But before my father had finished and left the dinner table, my full stomach would have already made me start to yawn. That's when my father would say to me: "You're falling asleep on your feet. Off with you; it's time for bed!"

Only when he said that would I realize that I was drowsy, but that didn't make me want to go to sleep. Mother always had to trundle me off to bed and stay with me, patting me on the thigh, until I fell asleep. I could see her hazy shape through my half-closed eyes. A smile revealed her small but evenly shaped teeth; a glow of love and affection radiated from her almond-shaped eyes.

But that too is gone now, carried away long ago, leaving with me only memories and feelings of wonder.

* * *

My mother, whose father was a Muslim cleric, was quite devout. I have no memory of my grandfather or what he looked like, but I remember Mother praying each and every day, except for the times she was pregnant. With her body almost completely enclosed in a pure white robe, only her face and fingers were visible when she prayed. Sometimes she held a rosary in her hand. When she was praying, I wouldn't dare approach her. I always waited outside the room where she prayed until she finished.

"Why do people pray, Mama?" I once asked her.

"To obtain God's blessings," she told me. "You pray for those who have sinned, that they return to the good and proper way. You pray for safety and peace. When you're bigger you'll understand why. You're still little. It's better for you to play than pray."

As to why this was, I never enquired further.

On nights when my father wasn't home, I'd often be awoken by the sound of my mother reciting her prayers. With Mother's clear and lilting voice, her prayers were like songs for me that kept the dark and silent night at a safe distance. Whether she was singing or praying, her voice was a pleasure to hear. And in the morning, when I woke up, if my father wasn't home yet, she would still be in her room praying.

One time, in the middle of the night, when I was awakened by her prayers, I went to her room. "It's late, Mama," I said to her. "Why are you still praying?"

Taking my chin in her thumb and forefinger, she pulled my head to her lap. Not saying anything, she kissed me instead. I could feel the warmth of her breath as she pressed her nose against my cheek.

She then began to pray again, but now her voice was hoarse and shaky.

"How come you're still praying?" I asked again.

"To make sure your father is safe. To keep him away from temptation." She looked at me quizzically. "Shouldn't you be in bed?"

I answered her question with one of my own: "How come Papa isn't home?"

Once again, she answered my question with a kiss that she pressed firmly on my cheeks.

"Where is Papa?" I asked again.

"Working," she finally said.

"But why is he working so late?" I asked.

"Because he has lots of work to do."

"When is he coming home?"

"When you wake up, your father will be home. Come now; it's time to go back to sleep."

She took me back to my bed and sang me a lullaby. When I woke up she was still praying, but her voice had now regained its clarity. To my ears, her voice didn't seem to be human at all; it was the sound of purity itself. I wanted to ask her whether my father had come home, but I didn't have the energy to get up, and I fell asleep again. I dreamt of my parents and my little sister.

In the morning when I awoke again I ran to find Mother. "Where's Papa?" I asked her.

"Your father has gone to school."

"Did he come home?"

"Yes, he did and before he left he looked in on you. He kissed you and then went off to school."

"Why doesn't he stay home and play with me?"

"Because he has to make a living so that he can buy clothing for you and food for the family."

I stopped pestering her, but late that day, when my father came home, I ran up to him and asked him, "Why didn't you come home last night? When I woke up last night, you weren't here."

My father laughed, but his laughter seemed hollow to my ears. On his face was a look of false cheer. My mother sat motionless in her chair, her head bowed.

"Mama stayed up all night praying!"

My father's laughter died immediately.

"Why don't you stay at home and play with me?"

Father laughed again. This time his laugh didn't sound false, but he still wouldn't answer me. We went to the dining table, and while we were eating I asked him, "Papa, can I go out with you at night?"

My question caused him to chuckle. "You're still too young," he said. "When you're big you won't have to go out with anyone at all. You can go anywhere you want, all by yourself."

I suddenly marveled at the miracle of age. His promise made me jump with joy.

"And can I go to Grandma's alone?"

"Of course you can. But not just yet. You're still too small."

"That's enough," my mother said in reprimand. "Stop asking your father so many questions. He's tired and wants to take a nap. And you should take one too."

That conversation, that incident, that too is gone, carried away and not likely ever to return.

* * *

In my mind's eye I can see clearly a day when I was afraid to approach my mother. It was a Sunday morning, and my parents' foster children had all gone off to a picnic site where the young people in our small town liked to gather. The house was quiet. Father was gone; only my mother, my sister, and the servant were at home. Feeling lonely, I went to find my mother and found her lying beside my sister on the bed. My sister was asleep, but my mother was staring up at the mosquito net that hung over the bed.

"Mama!" I called to her.

She didn't answer me; she didn't even move. With a great deal of effort I managed to climb up and onto the bed, and then I saw that my mother's eyes were red. Now and again she would wipe them with the flannel of my sister's blanket. I didn't know what to say. I sat there, silent for quite a while. I was frightened. Finally, with my voice trembling, I asked, "Why are you crying, Mama?"

It was only then that she looked at me. She pulled me to her side and hugged me.

"Why?" I asked again.

"It's nothing, my baby."

For some reason, right at that moment, I remembered a time, a beautiful time, when we'd gone to Rembang by train. There, looking out to the sea's horizon, we watched the ever restless and ever pounding sea whose every wave roared as it rushed to the shore. The horizon's base was a deep blue, almost black in color; closer to the shore it was a lighter blue; and at our feet, where the water tickled and rippled as it licked our skin, it was yellowish with churning sand.

"When can we take the train again?" I asked her. "When can we go to Rembang and look at the sea?"

My mother said nothing. It was as if she too were suddenly feeling the rush of the wind singing through the pines that line the Rembang shore.

My grandparents, my mother's parents, lived in Rembang, and upon hearing the name of her hometown Mother started to cry. Not knowing why, I asked her yet again: "Why are you crying?"

She sat up and kissed me repeatedly. Her tears felt cool on my cheeks. She spoke slowly as if attempting to control her voice: "We're going to leave Blora, my darling, and stay in Rembang forever."

"Why forever, Mama?"

"Don't you like the sea?"

"I do, Mama. Sure, I'd like to live by the sea," I consented happily. "When do we move?"

My happiness seemed to make my mother cry even harder.

"Soon," she said.

"When, Mama?"

"I don't know, I just don't know, but you'll be happy there, won't you?" My mother wiped her tears with my sister's blanket.

"Sure I will. Papa's coming too, isn't he?"

My question startled her. I saw that she was staring straight ahead, not even blinking or looking at me. I don't know why, but the look on her face suddenly made me afraid, and I started to bawl. My mother kissed me again and said softly: "Hush, don't cry . . ." Then my sister, startled by my shriek, also began to cry. Mother immediately put her to her breast. For a time, as she nursed my sister, she said nothing more, but her eyelids trembled and her gaze flitted from one place to another.

Finally, she told me, "Your father will be going to Rembang too."

"That's good," I told her, "because if Papa doesn't go, I don't want to go either. I'd rather stay here. Where is he, anyway?"

"Papa's at work."

I then repeated the question I had once asked her: "Why doesn't Papa ever stay home and play with me?"

"Because he has a great deal of work to do."

"But he's always working, Mama."

"Yes, he is," she said flatly.

When hearing her say that, I felt something grab me inside but could not quite figure out what that something was.

By this time I had stopped crying, and I asked, "Why were you crying, Mama?"

Not answering my question, she instead asked me listlessly, "Have you eaten?"

"Yes, but when Papa comes home I'll eat again. I like eating with you and Papa. It's so late and he's still not home . . . He'll come home tonight, won't he? Won't he?"

"Probably. He'll probably be home tonight."

"Did he come home last night, Mama?" I asked her.

"Yes, he came home last night, but you were already asleep. You didn't hear him, that's all. He even went to your bed and kissed you four times."

I laughed with pleasure.

"You were praying last night, weren't you, Mama?" As I asked that question, I heard, somewhere in my memory, Mother's prayers from the night before.

"No," she said, contradicting me. "I spent last night darning. You were asleep and Papa was reading. The other kids were asleep, too. And now it's time for you to sleep."

"If Papa comes home, wake me, Mama. You'll wake me, won't you?"

My mother coughed. I asked no more questions. I watched her finish nursing my sister, after which she stretched out silently and stared upward toward the top of the mosquito net. I still didn't say anything. I saw that her eyes were red, but I didn't say anything more. Then I too fell asleep.

When I awoke, Mother was still beside me, silently staring at the mosquito net. Her eyes had lost their redness. Before getting out of bed, I asked her, "Is Papa home?"

My mother's body twitched slightly. She turned over to look at me.

"No, he's not, honey. But you slept for a long time, didn't you? That means you must be in good health. Now get out of bed and ask the servant to give you a bath, okay?"

I wanted to see my father and would not put off seeing him any longer. I refused and began to whine. "No! I want Papa. Where's Papa, Mama?"

"He'll be home soon, honey. Take your bath. When you're clean, he'll come home."

When I still didn't budge, my mother spoke more firmly: "I said call the servant to give you your bath."

This time I didn't care about the harshness of her voice.

"I want Papa!" I demanded. "Where's Papa?"

"He's working," she said stiffly. "Now take a bath!"

When I ignored her, her resoluteness suddenly disappeared. Kissing me affectionately, she got up and lifted me from the bed. She placed my feet on the floor, and after kissing me on my chin, spoke to me lovingly. "Papa will be home soon. But you have to take your bath. When you've had your bath, Papa will play with you. It's getting late. When Papa comes, I'll call you. Now go and take your bath."

The affection in her voice softened my rebelliousness, and slowly I stumbled off to find the servant.

After my bath, when I found that my father still wasn't home, I felt that familiar emptiness and began to cry again. This time I brushed off my mother's promises and bribes of food. I refused her coaxing and pleading.

The night grew later and later and still my father didn't come. With that feeling of emptiness welling inside me, I cried and would not stop. I screamed and felt as if I could go on screaming forever. My mother took me outside, but even the cool night air had no effect on the emptiness I felt. I knew that my crying upset my mother, but I wasn't going to be assuaged by her display of patience and care. She spoke softly and lovingly, but I continued to call out for my father. Even when her voice grew angrier in tone, I still continued to wail. The night deepened.

Between my outpourings of tears and screams I heard my mother invoke the name of the Most Powerful and beg for His forgiveness. But I continued to cry and to call for my father. It was pitch-black outside. When I cried, Mother never tried to threaten or frighten me; she attempted to ease my heartache with kind words and swaddle me in her affection. But this time it was of no use.

Finally, in desperation, my mother called for Dipo, one of my foster brothers, and told him to find my father and bring him home.

"Where should I look for him?" Dipo asked.

"I don't know. Just keep on looking until you find him. Tell him to come home, that his son is having a fit."

My mother, with the weight of my body in her arms, went back into the house. My tears began to subside, but after a time, when my father still hadn't returned, I began to scream and wail again. Then, I remember—it's like seeing through a fog now—my mother carrying me into the front room. She also carried a lantern, which she held up to the clock on the wall.

"It's three o'clock in the morning," she said, perturbed.

With the lamp still in her hand, she went to the back room.

"Papa! Papa!" I screamed again.

"He'll be home shortly, my baby. Now go to sleep!"

But my father still didn't come and I cried again, sometimes sobbing, at other times screaming.

Finally my father did return, with Dipo trailing behind.

"Papa, Papa!" I screamed. I don't know how many times I called for him.

My mother went to my father and without saying a word handed me to him. She then walked silently off toward her bedroom.

"Papa . . ." I sobbed again.

My father held me to his chest. His clothes, cool from the night air, felt damp to the touch. Slowly but surely, my tears subsided and then, finally, were gone, leaving small shudders that racked my chest. Walking with me in his arms, my father said to me: "My boy, my boy. Don't cry. Papa's here, isn't he? Now go to sleep. Sleep. It's late. Listen. Isn't that a rooster?"

I listened carefully and, sure enough, I could hear the crowing of a rooster.

"It's almost dawn," he said slowly.

The morning felt so silent. The heaving of my chest subsided and finally stopped. My father carried me to Mother's bed. I heard her crying faintly, her head buried beneath the pillow. Even as my father stroked her hair, she continued to cry. My father said nothing; my mother was speechless too. The only sound was my mother's sobs, which caused my own heart to tremble. Moving silently and with great care, my father left the room, carrying me outside and into the cool early morning light.

"Why must you cry so much?" he asked me.

"I waited for you and you didn't come home," I said half in tears. "Mama said that when it got dark you would come home, but you didn't come."

"But I'm home now, aren't I?" he said softly. "So now it's time for you to sleep. Come on . . ."

My father sang slowly. His deep voice was both soft and soothing. After that I don't remember what happened, but when I awoke I found my father asleep beside me. A short while later, sleep robbed me of consciousness again.

When I next awoke, the sun was high. Because it was a holiday, my father hadn't gone to work. I found him and my mother sitting, facing each other, in the front room. After the servant had given me my bath, I ran back into the front room. "You're not going away again, are you, Papa?" I screamed at my father.

My mother looked at my father, who laughed and chucked me under the chin. "No," he said, "I don't have to work today. You're not going to cry again, are you?"

"Mama was crying again yesterday," I told him.

My father looked at my mother, but she didn't say anything. He said nothing either. I began to shout and scream happily as if nothing had happened between them and nothing were happening around me.

"Mama said we're going to Rembang," I announced.

My father looked at my mother again but still said nothing.

"I'm going, and the baby, too. We're going to see the sea. You'll come with us, won't you, Papa?"

Once more my father turned toward my mother but then turned back to me. "Of course I will. When do we leave?"

I looked at my mother and asked her coyly, "When are we going to Rembang, Mama?"

She didn't say anything. She seemed incapable of answering.

Her almond eyes reddened and glazed. A moment later they were pools of water, but just as a teardrop began to fall, she quickly wiped it away with the hem of her blouse. Not understanding what was happening, I began to scream and cry again. Something felt wrong inside, and when my mother rose from her seat and left the room, I began to scream louder. I ran after her and pulled on her sarong.

"Why are you crying, Mama?"

My mother picked me up, rocked me slowly in her arms, and then carried me away. But still she said nothing. She carried me to my bed and there laid her face on my chest. My father stayed where he was.

Yes, that incident too stands out clearly in my mind. But that part of my life—like the riverbanks and clumps of bamboo swept away by the Lusi River—is now gone.

* * *

Every year at Lebaran, at the end of the fasting month, Father would buy a load of firecrackers. He'd also give me and my sister and my mother and the foster kids a set of new clothes and some spending money. We'd set off the firecrackers on the ground in front of the house and all the neighbor kids would come running over to watch them explode.

Such an immeasurable sense of delight those holidays gave me, but that same sense of delight was not always evident in the look on my mother's face. The holidays seemed to be a sad time for her, especially after my father began to spend less and less time at home.

Gradually, I grew used to my father's absences and no longer threw a fit every time he left. Mother no longer was forced to send one of the boarders out to call him home. For a very long time I didn't know where my father went when he was not at school. My mother never asked him where he went. She never said anything at all when he left and never greeted him when he returned. It seemed like whenever my father left the house Mother was off somewhere working, in the kitchen, the back room, or the garden.

I, too, rarely asked my father where he went. When I did ask him, his answer was always, "Work." And if I followed that question with another, such as, "Can I come along?" he wouldn't even turn to look at me as he answered me: "No, you may not. When you're older, you can go out by yourself. Now go and play with the others." Then he walked quickly away.

On the Lebaran holidays my mother would watch us kids setting off firecrackers from her chair in the front room. She never said anything, but her lips moved constantly as a rosary passed through her fingers. Once when I did approach her she told me: "You should not play with firecrackers on Lebaran. Our religion forbids it. Firecrackers are used for Chinese celebrations and have no place in Muslim ceremonies."

Regardless of my mother's opinion, my father continued to buy us firecrackers for Lebaran, that is until one of the kids got hurt. After that, he never bought them again.

Then, one day, something really important happened. My grandfather, my mother's father, died and my father rented an automobile to take the family to Rembang. I don't really remember what happened there, but after our return to Blora, my mother was different. She seemed to droop, to lose all her strength. She mourned the loss of her father, I knew, but I also sensed there was something more. In the week after her father died my mother cried continuously.

"Everybody has to die sometime," I heard my father say in an attempt to calm her. "That's what life is about."

But Mother wasn't ready to receive that kind of solace, and her bouts of crying grew worse. I see now my mother must have felt that she had lost her last refuge, the only real place she had to run to outside of her religion.

A week went by, and if at that time I could have better expressed myself, I'm sure I would have said that Mother had finally surrendered herself to some greater force. When Father left the house at night, she never said a word. She acted as if nothing were wrong. At the same time, she seemed to grow even closer to us children. In the end we had become her refuge.

In moments of solitude—not when the world outside was quiet but when her own heart was still—my mother would take us for a walk. We'd hike one or two kilometers from the house, and she'd tell us stories about the things she saw in the world outside. She'd tell us about the birds, and their habits and food; about the waters of the Lusi as we crossed the bridge above it; about the fields and rice, and the insects that devoured both the farmers' crops and their hopes; about the wind and clouds and the sun and the stars; and almost always about the lives of the poor. The knowledge I found as a child was increased greatly on these walks.

In the evenings my mother would gather us together around the bench in the garden and tell us about plants, the clumps of bamboo swaying in the wind, about fruit trees and ships and trains and automobiles and bicycles. My mother was a good storyteller, and sometimes she'd tell us about cities she had visited and about her own family or her studies and teachers in school. And even though we were just kids, she'd tell us about politics and Indonesia's colonization by the Dutch. I can still remember her stories about people who had been active in the political struggle for independence and had been jailed or exiled as a result. But like all the other things, those times too have been carried away to disappear from the realm of our senses.

* * *

My mother's real mother—not her stepmother in Rembang—lived near my hometown of Blora. She had moved there after remarrying, and sometimes she'd come to the house with fruit. She sold vegetables to make a living. Early in the morning she'd stop the farmers who were on the way to the market with vegetables and she'd buy their produce to sell to the city's *priayi*, the "gentry" as it were, or those people who liked to think of themselves as *priayi*.

My grandmother's husband made his living by selling roasted skewers of chicken at the market. About the only time he came to our house was to borrow money. He had once been a farmer, but for some reason his crops always failed. The people of my hometown believed that a man who fathers a child out of wedlock will forever experience misfortune. I didn't hear about this until I was older, but when I did, I began to wonder if that is

what had happened to my step-grandfather. Whatever the case, I never had the nerve to ask whether it was true.

Sometimes, when my mother's stepfather came to the house, she'd get a look of intense irritation on her face. Once she spoke to me about him, though somewhat indirectly: "You must never do what is forbidden," she advised. "Just look at your grandfather and you'll see the consequence! Everything he does fails. It's pitiful. His prayers and hopes are wasted."

With my limited mental grasp, I didn't understand what she meant, and I asked her more directly, "What about Grandpa, Mama?"

"When you're older, you'll understand," was all she had to say. I never asked again.

My mother liked to work in the garden and, if I weren't off playing, I would follow her there. As she worked, stories flowed from her mouth—instructive tales mostly, stories with morals to teach us to respect nature, to be proud of what we do, and to work hard. In my young boy's mind I wasn't always able to grasp what she was trying to tell me, and in numerous instances it was not until years later that I came to understand what she had been saying.

"People live from their own sweat, and when you're an adult, that's how it will be for you too. And anything you obtain, if it doesn't come from your own hard work, will not be right. Even the things that people give to you."

But like everything else, that is gone now, never to return, forever to reside in memory and the mind.

* * *

The waters of the Lusi flood and ebb; they rise and fall, become shallow and deep. So too with everything that took place in my childhood days.

"You can do whatever you want with the things you justly earn, even your own life and your own body. Everything," my father once told me, "everything you justly earn."

How long does it take to speak a sentence? The sound of his voice was but for a few moments. A momentary tremble of sound waves, and then it was gone, not to be repeated. Yet, like the Lusi that constantly skirts the city of Blora, like the waters of that river, the remembered sound of that voice, coursing through memory, will continue to flow—forever, toward its estuary and the boundless sea. And not one person knows when the sea will be dry and lose its tide.

But all that is gone, gone from the grasp of the senses.

INEM

AMONG THE GIRLS I knew, Inem was my best friend. She was eight, just two years older than me, and much like the other girls I knew. If there was anything that distinguished her, it was that she was much prettier than the other girls in my neighborhood. She lived at my parents' home, where her family had placed her. In return for her room and board, she helped in the kitchen and looked after me and my younger siblings.

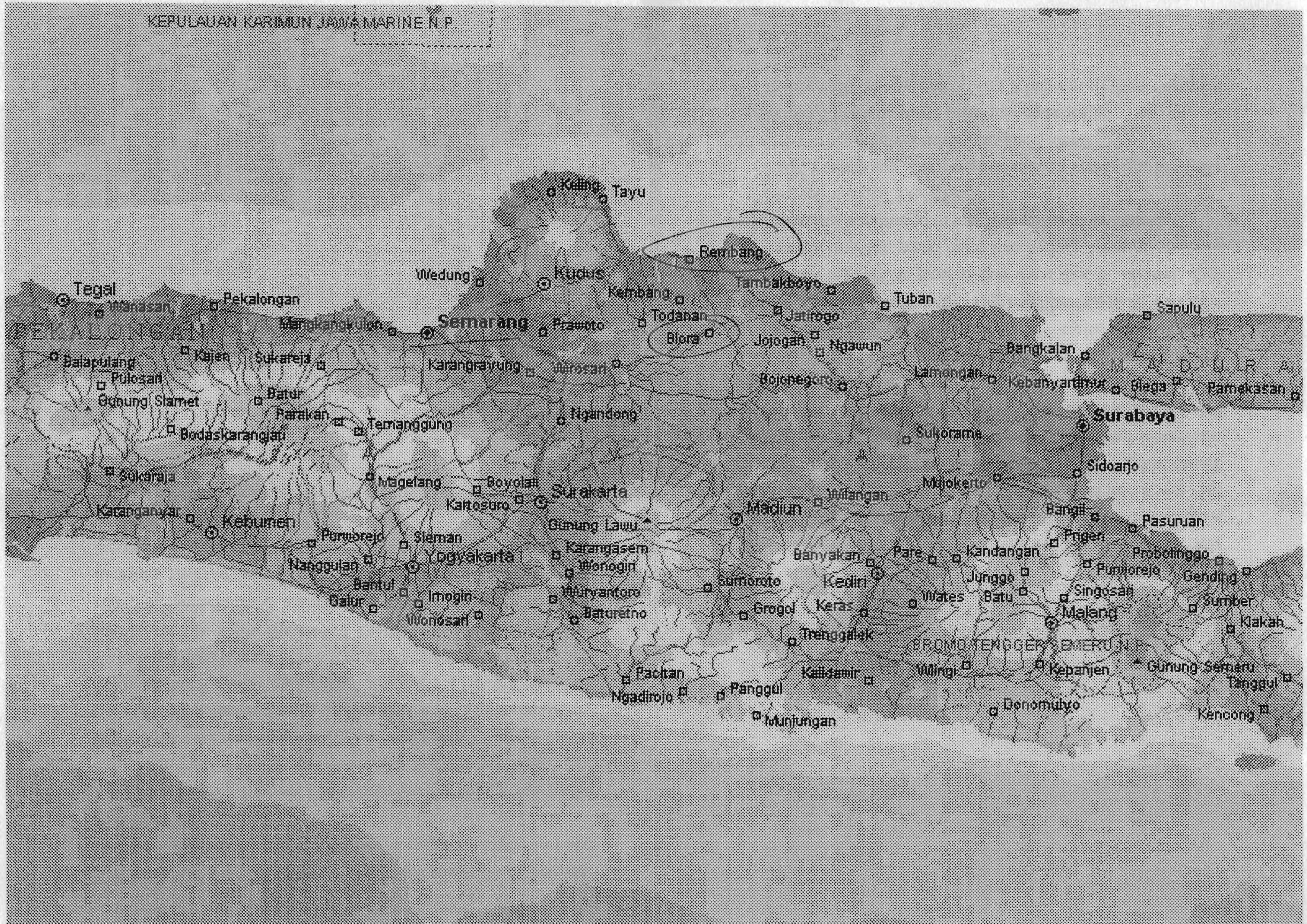
In addition to being pretty, Inem was also polite, clever, and hardworking—not pampered at all—traits that helped to spread her good name to adjoining neighborhoods as well. She would make a good daughter-in-law some day, it was said. And sure enough, one day, when Inem was boiling drinking water in the kitchen, she announced to me: "I'm going to be married!"

"No, you're not!" I told her.

"I am, I really am. The proposal came a week ago. My folks and all my other relatives think it's a good idea."

"Wow! That'll be fun!" I shouted ecstatically.

"It sure will," she agreed. "They'll buy me all these beautiful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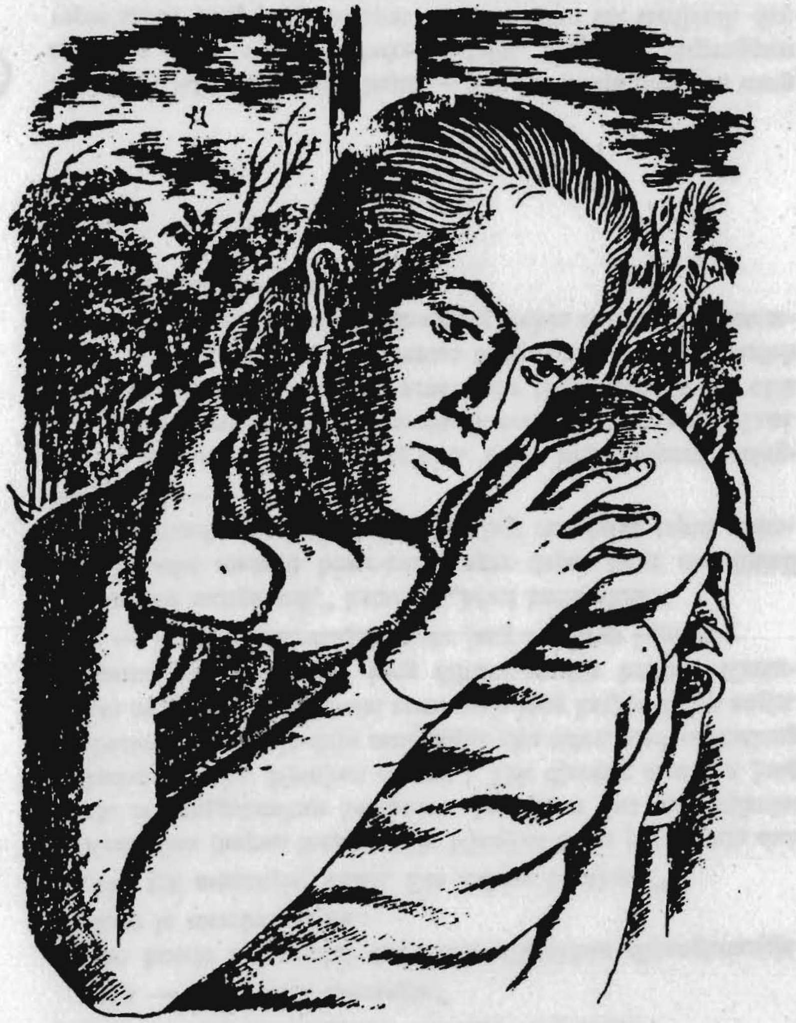

① KALI LUSI MELINGKARI SEPAROH BAGIAN KOTA Blora jang sebelah selatan. Dimusim kering dasarnja jang dialasi batu-kerikil-lumpur-pasir itu mentjongak-tjongak mendjenguk langit. Air hanja beberapa desimeter sadja ditempat-tempat dangkal. Tapi bila hudjan mulai turun, dan gunung-gunung dihutan diliputi mendung, dan matari tak djuga muntjul dalam empatpuluh atau limapuluh djam, air jang kehidjau-hidjauan itu berubah rupa — kuning, tebal, mengandung lumpur. Tinggi air melompat-lompat tak terkendalikan. Kadang-kadang hingga duapuluh meter. Kadangkala lebih. Dan air jang mengalir damai itu tiba-tiba berpusing-pusing dan mengamuk gila. Diseretinja rumpun-rumpun bambu disepandjang tepi seperti anak ketjil mentjabuti rumput. Digugurinja tebing-tebing dan diseretnja beberapa bagian bidang ladang penduduk.

Lusi : Dia merombak tebing-tebingnja sendiri.

Dan didalam hidup ini, kadang-kadang aliran deras menjeret tubuh dan nasib manusia. Dan dengan tak setahunja ia kehilangan beberapa bagian dari hidup sendiri —

② DARI DEPAN rumah kami nampak putjuk rumpun-rumpun bambu jang hidjauhitam. Bila angin meniup mereka meliuk meraju-raju. Kadang terdengar mereka bersuling sunji diantara gerasakan angin. Dan semua pemandangan dan pendengaran itu sering menakutkan hatiku semasa ketjil. Segera aku lari kepangkuan bunda — menangis.

Hingga kini masih terdengar-terdengar olehku bunda bertanja :

„Mengapa menangis ?"

Dan tangannja jang tak lembut lagi seperti semasa gadisnja mengusap-usap pipiku jang kurus. Dan suara kanak-kanakku jang masih tjedal mendjawabi diantara sedu-sedan :

„Ibu — bambu itu menangis."

Dan bunda mengambil daku dan diletakkan dipangkuannja. Berkata ia memberanikan :

„Dia tak menangis. Tidak. Dia sedang bernjanji."

Kemudian ibupun menjanjilah. Njanjian halus jang selalu dan selalu menenggelamkan ketakutan, kesedihan dan kebentjianku terhadap sesuatu. Njanjian daerah ! Tak djarang suaranja jang lembutlunak mendaju-daju mengadjak aku tidur. Kadang-kadang waktu menjanji kubelai-belai rambutnja jang katjau ditiup angin. Kupermainkan kupingnja jang dihiasi markis berlian. Kemudian — kemudian terdengar suara jang menutup lagunja :

„Engkau mengantuk," katanja. „Mari kutidurkan."

Dan kubuka mataku besar-besar agar dapat terus menikmati njanjian bunda. Tapi aku tak kuasa lagi membuka tapuk mataku lagi — — —

Tapi semua itu sudah hilang kini. Telah lenjap seperti tebing-tebing dan rumpun-rumpun bambu diseret air pasang kali Lusi. Dan aku tak kuasa menahan arus besar jang disemburkan oleh alam pada tiap manusia itu. Terasa benar olehku betapa mudah manusia didamparkan oleh gelumbang waktu dari tempat ketempat, dari perasaan keperasaan.

③ SUATU KALI, aku masih ingat — aku bermimpi menemu uang satu sen. Dan waktu kubuka mataku, tanganku tergenggam rapat takut uang jang kudapat dalam impian itu terdjatuh dan hilang. Segera aku bangun dan mendapatkan bunda. Berseru riang :

„Ibu, ibu ! — aku menemu uang sesen."

Dan aku lihat djuga bunda tersenjum turut bergembirahati. Bertanja ia memperlihatkan perhatiannja :

„Dimana engkau mendapatnja ? Mana uangnja ?"

Kuatjungkan genggaman tanganku padanja. Teriakku senang :

„Ini ! Ini !"

Kemudian genggaman itu kuurai. Tapi tangan itu kosong sadja. Dan bunda menjusulkan suaranja jang manis :

„Mana ?"

Aku tertegun oleh kaget dan ketjewa — uang jang kutemukan dalam impian itu tak ada dalam genggamanku. Dan aku menangis. Suatu kekosongan besar melela dalam hati. Terdengar olehku bunda tertawa. Kemudian membudjuk-budjuk :

„Engkau baru bangun tadi. Engkau bermimpi tadi. Djangan menangis."

Tapi keketjewaan jang mendekati kekosongan itu masih djuga menggulung-gulung dalam dadaku. Dan aku meneruskan tangisku. Bunda mengusap airmataku dengan udjung kebajanja.

„Diam. Diam," katanja lagi.

Dikeluarkannja uang setengah sen dari lipatan amben dan diulurkan padaku. Dan aku diam sambil mempermain-mainkan uang setengah sen itu dengan masih ada setengah dari keketjewaan dalam dada .

„Sudah sore sekarang," kata bunda. „Sana mandi ! Minta mandi nji Kin."

Dan akupun berdiri dari pangkuannja. Tapi aku tak djuga pergi minta dimandikan. Aku lihat paras bunda tiba-tiba djadi keruh. Kemudian terdengar suaranja jang tak lunak lagi dan mengandung kepastian :

„Pergi !"

Kepastiannja itu membuat aku bangun dan berdjalan lambat-lambat mentjari nji Kin didapur. Dari belakangku terdengar suara jang memperingatkan :

„Tjepat ! Sudah sore sekarang."

Kepastiannja itu pula jang membuat aku tak berani menangis. Pelahan aku pergi mendapatkan nji Kin didapur minta mandi.