

---

# FIRST LOVE: THE OPENING OF SOETJIPTO'S *DJALAN SAMPOERNA*

Benedict R. O'G. Anderson

## Introduction

In 1992, there appeared in Djakarta an unusual book entitled *Jalan Hidupku, Autobiografi Seorang Gay Priyayi Jawa Awal Abad XX* [The Course of My Life, The Autobiography of a Gay Javanese Priyayi at the Beginning of the 20th Century], edited by the diligent *peranakan* folklorist Amen Budiman, and published by the Penerbitan Apresiasi Gay Jakarta. It did not last long in Soeharto's "public sphere," since it was quickly banned as immoral by the Attorney General.

In his brief introduction, the editor said he had come across the typed document in the Malay Manuscript Section of the National Library, noting that it formed a double-entry (ML 512 and ML 524) in Prof. Dr. R. Ng. Poerbatjaraka's *Indonesische Handschriften* catalogue.<sup>1</sup> Its value was, he believed, very high, both for the serious study of "gay history" in colonial Indonesia, as well as for students interested in the local customs and institutions of colonial East Java. Especially important was the fact it was the first detailed autobiography by an Indonesian gay. Amen was frank about how much editing had needed to be done. The 460-page text was far too long and contained much of little interest to students of gay history. It was written in an old-fashioned, idiosyncratic Malay infused with (East) Javanese. Some of it was even unintelligible. So the published version contained only 201 pages, used the New Spelling instituted in the early 1970s, and read quite smoothly in a 1990s manner.

It was only after Soeharto's fall that I had the opportunity to visit the National Library to inspect and photocopy the original document. It quickly became obvious that almost everything in the published version's title was either wrong or misleading.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. R. Ng. Poerbatjaraka, P. Voorhoeve, and C. Hooykaas, eds., *Indonesische Handschriften* (Bandung: A. C. Nix, 1950), p. 180.

The original title was “Djalan Sampoerna,” almost impossible to translate, except very clumsily as “The Perfect Path,” an allusion to the traditional Javanese mystical idea of life as a search for Truth. The author, identified only as “Soetjipto,” did not describe the work as an autobiography, and it would be hard in any case to call it that, since it must have been composed at the beginning of the 1930s when he was in his early twenties.<sup>2</sup> Soetjipto was not a *prijaji* by any normal standards. His father claimed he was a *radèn*, the lowest Javanese aristocratic rank (but ambitious commoners often pretended to be *radèns*), and worked as a lowly bookkeeper at a sugar mill near Surabaya. He divorced Soetjipto’s mother—for another woman—when the boy was still a small child, and later went to prison for embezzlement. Soetjipto never saw him again, and evidently had no desire to do so. His mother eventually remarried, this time to a rough Madurese who disliked his stepson. At the age of about fifteen Soetjipto ran away from home, and from then on, in abject poverty and isolation, lived by his wits in the lower depths of urban East Java. Nor, of course, was Soetjipto “gay.” He wrote with remarkable frankness about his sexual experiences, all with boys or men, but, unsurprisingly, in a language of desire rather than one of identity. Furthermore, these experiences, though important to him, both positively and negatively, make up only a fraction of the manuscript as a whole.

It was also apparent that Amen, surely with the best intentions, had done enormous violence to the text: massive cuts, sentimental rewriting on a large scale, the insertion of invented “chapter titles” not acknowledged as such, skipping of difficult passages, elision of idiosyncrasies, and so on.

Amen also either did not know, or was uninterested in, how the manuscript entered the Central Museum, later transformed in part into the National Library. It is a curious story. Soetjipto’s work, which probably was not intended for publication, but was rather a means for making sense of his extraordinary life to himself, and to a few friends (whom he addresses as “reader/s”), was found among Hans Overbeck’s papers.

This is not the place to go into detail about Overbeck’s career, but a brief sketch is surely warranted.<sup>3</sup> He was born in 1882 (twenty-eight years before Soetjipto) in Bremen, to an old and successful Hanseatic merchant family, and had the best Gymnasium education available. Perhaps because his father had worked in Southeast Asia and had been German consul in Rangoon, upon finishing high school, in 1904, Overbeck went to work for a German trading house in Singapore at the age of 22. Up till World War I, he traveled back and forth to the Netherlands Indies for his company. When the war broke out, he was interned at Tangling Barracks and then was moved to rather lax internment in Australia, where he deepened—autodidactically—his amateur

<sup>2</sup> Soetjipto tells the reader that he was born in 1910. At the end of the first half of the text there is a penciled-in note in his handwriting saying that he finally met and made peace with his mother in January 1933. The latest he could have written the manuscript would have been 1932, when he was just twenty-two years old.

<sup>3</sup> For the following material on Overbeck, I have relied on Ulrich Kratz’s *Nachwort* to the posthumously republished edition of Overbeck’s *Malaiische Chronik—Hang Tuah* (Düsseldorf: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1976), pp. 344-53, entitled “Hans Overbeck’s wissenschaftliches Werk: ein Bio-Bibliographischer Versuch”; and Wilfried Wagner, “Hans Overbeck—ein früherer Kunder malaiischer und javanischer Identität,” in *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Ingrid Wessel, ed. (Hamburg: Abera Verlag, 1998), pp. 123-31. My thanks to Joss Wibisono for locating these texts for me.

romantic interest in pre-colonial Malaya. Shortly after the war was over he published his great edition of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. During the 1920s he wrote many articles—in English, Dutch, and German—on Malay literature and folklore, including a celebrated collection of *pantun*. At the end of the 1920s he retired from business to devote himself to research and publishing, increasingly now on Java, and lived quietly in Jogjakarta. After Hitler came to power, he never returned to Germany. His interests were characteristically those parts of Javanese culture least “spoiled” by contact with the imperial West, especially folklore, children’s songs, popular theater, and so forth. (He was also an expert entomologist and had a number of new species named after him.) Not being Dutch, he had no vested interest in Dutch rule, and was cautiously sympathetic to the aspirations of the nationalist movement.

When Hitler overran Holland in May 1940, German males in the colony were interned. After Pearl Harbor, and the lightning advance of the Japanese military into Southeast Asia, it was decided that these internees, who included the painter Walter Spies, should be shipped to India. The vessel that carried them, however, was sunk by Japanese airplanes off the coast of Nias, and most of the internees, including Overbeck and Spies, were drowned. Overbeck was sixty years old. Most of his papers and collections were initially put in Jogjakarta’s Sonobudojo Museum, but much was scattered during the Japanese Occupation.

On the connection to Soetjipto, only reasonable speculation is possible. Overbeck never married, and it is probable that he was homosexually inclined. But nothing happened to him during the notorious anti-homosexual *hetze* of 1938–39, which brought about the arrests of Spies, the Balinologist Goris, and hundreds of others. Nonetheless, he assembled a large collection of Javanese erotica, as well as a huge collection of photographs of popular Javanese performances, all of which disappeared into Japanese hands during the occupation and were probably shipped back to Japan. Overbeck’s shift of interest from Malaya to Java coincided fairly closely in time with the completion of Soetjipto’s manuscript. At the end of the text, Soetjipto speaks of a kindhearted “white man” who encourages him at a particularly hard time. It is quite possible that this was Overbeck, or a friend of Overbeck’s who later passed on to him word about the value of the manuscript. One can imagine why he would have liked it: Not just for its occasional eroticism, but its “purity” from a cultural point of view. Soetjipto lived at the “bottom” of colonial society, and his formal education ended at the primary level. He knew a little Dutch, but his worldview was absolutely not “Western.”

But what is “Djalan Sampoerna’s” value? Here, I think, three things can be mentioned. The first and most important is exactly what Amen missed: though an autodidact “rough diamond,” Soetjipto was a naturally gifted writer. He was an acute observer of the society around him, all the sharper because he lived mostly in its under-belly, without illusions, but with plenty of healthy resentment. The text shows him crossing most of the typical lines of colonial vertical and horizontal classification, finding the good and the wicked among Muslims and Christians, Dutch, Madurese, and Javanese. Soetjipto’s prose brings all these milieux, and their open and hidden interactions, into vivid life. Yet one of the most striking aspects of the work is the near-complete absence of any reference to politics or the nationalist movement. Was he just uninterested? Or does this absence suggest the social shallowness of the movement at

the beginning of the thirties, after the suppression of the communist rebellions in 1926 and 1927?

Second, Soetjipto was, without being self-conscious about it, a subtle psychologist. The book is full of ruminations about his own emotional problems and dispositions, and deft psychological sketches of the main characters in his story.

Finally, one finds in it something analogous to Dr. Soetomo's *Memoirs*, written almost at the same time, and concluding when the author "is" eighteen or nineteen years old. A tremendous difficulty in the late-colonial era, perhaps especially for a Javanese, was finding a way to live a "true" life in the midst of the social, economic, cultural, and political upheavals of the time. Both texts end at the point when the writer believes he has found the right way to live. Nothing could be more different from the typical "success story" autobiographies of Indonesian generals, politicians, technocrats, diplomats, student leaders, and assorted crooks that are so commonplace today.

To give readers a feeling for this remarkable man, Soetjipto, about whom we know nothing except what he tells us in "Djalan Sampoerna," and the power and freshness of his work, I have translated here the first sixty-four pages of the manuscript (fifty pages in Amen's version), which cover the initial thirteen years of his life. They include the destruction of his parental family, the boy's quite pleasurable experience in a colonial elementary school, vivid descriptions of pilgrimages to holy tombs, semi-rural observances of Ramadan, and the peculiar celebrations in 1923 of Queen Wilhelmina's twenty-fifth anniversary on the imperial throne. But the centerpiece is Soetjipto's poignant first love affair—at the age of thirteen—with an older boy in a neighboring school. I can think of nothing in Indonesian literature that matches its youthful freshness, humor, intensity, pain, puzzlement, and color. It may well be that Soetjipto was helped by the fact that he had absolutely no models to imitate or from which to draw. Romances between boys and girls, men and women, were already routine in Indonesian popular literature, but there was then no precedent for a romance between young boys.

I have tried to be as faithful as possible to the original manuscript, above all else to its atmosphere, to avoid "making it contemporary" in the manner of Amen. There are passages that are hard to understand—perhaps because Soetjipto was not writing in his native Javanese. I have not deleted them, but shown their difficulty in the footnotes, in the hope that some readers will help explain them. Soetjipto divided his book into a small number of huge "*bab*," which seem to me without clear structures, and therefore a little indigestible. Following Amen's example, I have therefore subdivided much of the first two "*bab*" into fairly short chapters, each with its own theme, and given them my own invented, simple titles. I have kept distracting footnotes to a minimum, and where I found words especially difficult to translate, have included the original Indonesian in parentheses inside the translation itself.

## Chapter 1 — First Years

I am writing this book from a feeling that the course of my entire life on this earth has been very ODD.<sup>4</sup>

According to what I heard, my ancestors originally came from Purworedjo (Kedu, Central Java). That being the case, I am obviously a real Javanese, without any infusion of foreign blood.<sup>5</sup>

The story goes that, around 1913, when I was three years old, I lived at Balong-bendo, in the *ketjamatan* of Krian, part of the region of Surabaya. My father was then working as a bookkeeper (*kasir*) for the local Balong-bendo sugar mill. I was very happy then, because I was bound up with (*tersimpoel dengan*) both my parents. Day in, day out, I received nothing but their love. Any time I cried, they immediately cooled my heart, so that I fell still. More than that, they quickly gave me anything I desired. I cannot repay with pen and ink on this sheet of paper the love of my father and mother,<sup>6</sup> but my readers will themselves have felt how much parents love their children. This happy life lasted until I got a younger sister.<sup>7</sup> But she was not long for this world, and died.

The following year my father was tempted by another woman. In the end, driven by the treacherous force of desire, he divorced my mother forevermore. After that, she returned to her mother's home in Waru, in the same district. Because I was still very small, I did not understand what had happened. All of a sudden, I was turned over to another woman, my stepmother, who had not borne me in her womb. My life was completely different from what it had once been, as different as the mountain is from the sea. Besides that, my father's love for me completely disappeared; all he did was get angry and beat me. There was no longer the slightest trace of love for me on his face.

When I was five, I was sent off to the European Primary School in Modjokerto.<sup>8</sup> There I studied very hard, and was a favorite of my Teacher. But did this new life of mine last long? Oh no, for my fate was INSCRIBED ON MY BODY.<sup>9</sup> After only three years of school, my father ran into trouble. He was arrested for embezzling money from the sugar mill.

<sup>4</sup> Soetjipto uses the word *gandjil*, which can also mean "strange, not normal."

<sup>5</sup> My thanks to Arief Djati for pointing out the distinctively Central Javanese vocabulary that Soetjipto often uses.

<sup>6</sup> Soetjipto always refers to fathers by the Central Javanese polite term *rama*, and to mothers by *iboe*.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, there is no way to know from the term *adik* whether the younger sibling was a boy or a girl. I have arbitrarily decided on the latter to avoid the clumsy construction "brother/sister."

<sup>8</sup> ELS—Europeesche Lagere School. The elite element in the colonial system of elementary schools, teaching the children Dutch.

<sup>9</sup> Capitalized in the manuscript, as *TOELISAN BADAN*. This idea seems to come from Sufi tradition, and means that one's fate is decided from the moment one is born. Compare Fitzgerald's famous stanza in the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*: "The moving finger writes, and having writ/Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit/Shall lure it back to cancel half a line/Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

One day, on returning from school, I was waiting for my father to come back from the office. But to no avail. I questioned my stepmother again and again, but all she would say was "He's not home."

The next day, when I had dressed for school as usual, my stepmother shouted at me: "Where are you off to?"

"To school," I answered softly.

"Oh, to school? Who do you expect to pay for you now? Me? Out of the question. Now listen to me! Take off your school uniform. From now on, you're not going to school." So she spoke, going up to me and threatening me with her index finger.

I was so scared that I didn't say a word, but went into my room (*bilik*) and changed.

After I dropped out of school, I had nothing to do except play with the neighborhood children. No one cared, no matter where I went. So as time passed, the more I was enjoying myself, the more my stepmother hated me. And gradually what I had learned in school was lost.

After three or four months of this, my grandmother from Waru came to get me, and I moved there to be with her.

## Chapter 2 —A Mother's Love

Not long thereafter, I was brought to my mother, who was now living at Pandji in the District of Situbondo (Besuki). The moment we met, Mother hugged me so tightly that our faces touched. She kissed my head over and over, as if she would never stop. And my own face became wet from her tears, which poured down without ceasing. But I just stayed still, because I wasn't sure I recognized her.

After she grew calmer, she said: "My child, what was it like for you there? How much you've changed! You're thin, your face is sad,<sup>10</sup> and your skin darker than ever."

Because my own heart couldn't bear it, my tears flowed down as I thought of the life I had lived thus far. I couldn't utter a single word. Only my tears responded to what my mother had said.

Some months later I was put into elementary school in Situbondo.

\*\*\*

One evening, it so happened that there was no one else at home, just me and my mother. As I was sitting drawing something or other, my mother called me over for a talk.

"My child," she said. "How did it go for you between the time I left Balong-bendo and we met again here? Come, tell me everything."

On hearing these words my heart began to thump. I was lost in thought, recalling the time when I was with my stepmother. But it couldn't have taken long, I think, before I had related all my experiences from the moment my mother left me to when

<sup>10</sup> The text has *koesoet*, used in the Javanese sense of "sad."

we were reunited. The whole time I spoke, my mother seemed never to hear enough. Sometimes she looked distressed, but sometimes also she laughed at the way I told my tale—like an actor recounting a story.

When I had finished, my mother sat still for a while, deep in thought. What she was thinking, I had no idea. Not long after that, she said: “My child, listen to me. I hope you will accept your situation here and never have regrets. You have to remember that here you are with your stepfather. If he puts you in an elementary school, you mustn’t be disappointed.<sup>11</sup> Mother is just a woman, so she has no power whatsoever. As you know, she has to follow the wishes of her man.<sup>12</sup> I am only thankful to God that I have been able to get this man.

“My child, if only you knew what my life was like after I was divorced by your father. But, of course, you were still a baby, with no thought for the morrow. So it’s not at all your fault, because you were then too little to understand.

“Leaving your father, I went to grandmother’s place in Waru. Not long afterward I joined your uncle (your mother’s brother) in Buduran. I stayed there about three months. Then your uncle was transferred to work as a surveyor at the sugar mill here. So I followed him. All the time I was with your uncle, I was like a bought slave. How could I ever have the pleasure of a good sleep or a tasty meal? Such was my fate. At four o’clock every morning I had to get up and sweep the yard. At five, boil water, make coffee, and so on. I couldn’t sleep in the evenings because I had to watch over your uncle’s little baby. I could only close my eyes at one in the morning, or half past one. And then only for moments, because the baby would wake up frightened and start to cry. The daytime was even worse. I had to carry him on my shoulders all the time, so it felt as though they would break. Such was your mother’s life for three long years.

“That is why I say a thousand thanks to God for introducing me to your present father. Even though he’s Madurese, he has pity for me. Though he has no title, he does not cause me any suffering.<sup>13</sup> Not like your former father. Even though he was a *radèn*, it was as if he had no brains at all. After all, when you think about it, it was absolutely not right to have the heart to divorce me the way he did, because even though he is not my husband any more, he’s still my relative, one of my cousins.

“My child, remember what I am saying. It is only tonight that I can talk with you at length, because we have a rare chance to be alone together, and the purity of our hearts lets us speak openly to each other.

“You must realize that your life now is most unfortunate. I don’t mean that it is the most unfortunate in the world. But it is by comparison with all your relatives. Bear this in mind. 1. You have no brothers or sisters. 2. You have no skills. 3. All your relatives dislike the sight of you because of your father’s behavior. The only reason they hate you is because of what he has done. They see you as stained by his rottenness (*boesoek*).

<sup>11</sup> She means an ordinary elementary school for “natives,” taught in Malay.

<sup>12</sup> She uses the word *laki*, village style, rather than *soeami*, which one could render as “husband.”

<sup>13</sup> She says that the Madurese is not a *radèn*—lowest rank of the Javanese nobility.

"So remember my advice to you and remember your fate. Don't expect your life to be a fine one like your cousins'. All your uncle's children are getting high-class educations: medical school, H.B.S., M.U.L.O., and so on.<sup>14</sup> They're all better than the school you are in. How could you possibly have their luck? After all, everything has already been fated by God.

"My child, I already told you that I cannot raise you high, because I am only a woman, and know only that I must follow the wishes of my man. That's why you mustn't expect me to hold you high."<sup>15</sup>

As Mother was speaking, I could see her face reddening. Gradually her eyes filled with tears, which now and again trickled down her cheeks. Finally, she fell silent. Then, throwing her arms about my neck, she started sobbing uncontrollably. And I too could no longer hold in my feelings. My own tears came pouring out.

As soon as Mother realized that I, too, was very sad, she took my face in her hands and turned it up toward her own. "Don't cry, my child. Go to sleep. Your father will be home any minute." Taking hold of my shoulder, she lifted me up from where I was sitting, and led me to my bed. Then she told me to go to sleep. Only after that did she return to her chair with a devastated heart (*hati jang hantjoer*).

That night it was hard to get to sleep. No matter how tightly I screwed up my eyes, I still couldn't fall asleep, because I was haunted by thoughts about my fate. From when I was still a baby I already felt my mother's love, but I was too small to sense it fully. Only now did I understand how deep a mother's love is for her child, a love that cannot be matched by anything there is in this world.

### Chapter 3 — Our Meeting

Not long after the pleasure of sinking into a deep sleep, I woke up with a shock, as if I had been struck by lightning. I could sleep no more. After sitting up for a while, I heard the cocks crowing in chorus. From that moment my eyes refused to close, even though it was still very early. "What time is it?" I said to myself. For a long time I sat waiting for the clock to chime the hour, but no sound came to my ears. Then, a little later, I heard the clock strike four. "Hey, it's still very early in the morning," I said to myself. What was it that had so shaken me? After wondering about it for a time, I recalled all that I had been dreaming. According to Javanese *èlmoe*,<sup>16</sup> of course all dreams have a purpose. But what was the meaning of my dream? It was very strange. I felt that I was walking in a huge, empty plain. All I could see in every direction was

<sup>14</sup> She is referring to Dutch-language institutions: the Training School for Native Doctors, the Hoogere Burger School (an elite high school for Dutch children and privileged natives and Chinese); and the Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs, a tier of extended primary schools for natives, designed to prepare them for good high schools.

<sup>15</sup> She uses the words *mendjoengdjoeng tinggi*, which are not easy to interpret. It could be that she is saying that because he is the son of a *radèn*, she ought to, as a commoner, by Javanese tradition, treat him with respect, but she cannot do so in the house of her Madurese husband. Arief Djati, on the other hand, suggests that she is telling her son that she has entered the world of the Madurese, who do not share the Central Javanese passion for the niceties of hierarchy, and that she sees in him a maturity that will make him able to live his life as an independent adult.

<sup>16</sup> Mystical knowledge.



grass. I kept walking, on and on, but the grass never disappeared from view. Finally, out of sheer exhaustion, I fainted. When I came to, suddenly there was a mass of thick clouds covering the sky, and it was as if they were drifting earthward. The clouds drew closer and closer. When they reached me, gradually they turned into an Ancient, an old man with a very long beard.<sup>17</sup> At that moment, I sensed that all that was visible was his face. Then very slowly, the face of the Ancient turned into a fist clutching a lidded box (*tjoepoe*). I felt as if the box was then placed in my lap. Suddenly it exploded, with a sound like a thunderbolt. I was so shaken that I woke up.

I thought over my dream for a long time. While I was wrapped up in my thoughts, out of the blue the clock struck six times. “How quickly the time has flown! It’s already six, and I still haven’t finished thinking.” Luckily it happened to be Friday, so classes ended at eleven. I got down from the bed very quietly for fear of waking my younger brothers.<sup>18</sup> In that house I had two brothers—the first the child of my stepfather and his first wife, the second of my stepfather and my mother. After that I went to bathe, put on my school clothes, and left.

My school in Situbondo was about two miles (*pal*) from my home in Pandji. The older of my two brothers attended a H.I.S., which actually wasn’t far from my own school.<sup>19</sup> But he always went with his friends in a pony-cart (*dokar*), which they paid for monthly. That’s why he’d get up later than I.

On the way to school, I would almost always pass by the Alun-alun,<sup>20</sup> as it was my habit as well as the shortest way. But when I reached Situbondo, it was still so early that I decided to take a different route, passing by the market and then turning left along a line of shops. The view was nice at that hour, since the shops were just beginning to open. Only then did I reach the Alun-alun, but on the southern side. I walked by the front of the Regent’s<sup>21</sup> residence, intending to keep going past the railway station. But only a few steps after I passed the Regent’s residence, a young fellow suddenly stepped out of an alley. He looked to be about twenty years old, but was still in school, judging from the schoolbag that he, like me, was carrying.

The second our eyes met, my heart started to pound. I felt as if the blood was hissing (*berdesir-desir*) through my body. “Hey, why is your heart thudding like that?” I asked myself. Never in my life had it pounded so. And at that moment I lowered my head, puzzling over the beating of my heart.

All the while, his eyes never left my face. It is true he was a young man, but the sight of him would melt anyone’s heart, especially an adult’s. Even I, still a little boy, felt happy looking at his face and his expression. There is no point here singing the praises of his handsomeness, for it would have no meaning. Besides, it wasn’t just his looks that were so attractive, but also his manner.

<sup>17</sup> *Orang Toewa*, meaning less an “old” man than one with mystical power.

<sup>18</sup> Actually the gender is not here made clear, but later in the narrative it transpires that these two children are boys.

<sup>19</sup> Hollandsch-Inlandsche School, Dutch-Native School, second-class state-provided elementary school.

<sup>20</sup> The open square in the center of traditional Javanese towns.

<sup>21</sup> Soetjipto calls this official by the Dutch term “Regent,” rather than the Javanese and Malay *Bupati*.

"Why is he staring at me so long? Does he know me? No, it's impossible. I've never met him even once." So I kept on walking, and after I passed by him, he started follow along behind me.

Thinking it all over, I took out my penknife, pretending to cut my nails. But because it was so fated by the Almighty One (*Maha Esa*), a handkerchief that was in my pocket along with my penknife dropped to the ground. All of a sudden, the young man was at my side, with the handkerchief in his hand. "Little Brother,<sup>22</sup> here's your handkerchief," he said, with a smile on his lips that made my heart feel giddy. Out of embarrassment, I took the handkerchief from him without saying a word. The minute he noticed my expression, he seized both my arms, turning me to face him. And once again my gaze met his. I started to lower my head. But before I was done, he took hold of my chin, so that once again he could see my face. When my eyes met his for the third time, my heart felt like glass shattered on a stone.

For a long time we stared at one another. At first he looked at me with a face wreathed in smiles, but gradually his eyes filled with tears. Finally, he lowered his head. When I noticed this, I turned my head away. Nonetheless, at that moment my thoughts and memory were a blank.

Then just as I started to turn my body away from him, he pulled at my arms to face him once again.

"Where's your school, Little Brother?" he asked. I just kept silent, because I felt more and more abashed that he asked about my school. Finally he lost patience with my long silence. "If I'm not mistaken, your school is right next to mine. Will you be my friend?"

As he spoke, he walked along slowly without ever letting go of my hand or taking his eyes off me. A little later, his hand moved up to my shoulder. Although I had not the least idea of what was on his mind, when I saw how gentle he was, my heart was filled with desire. As far as I could remember, I had never met anyone with a manner like his. The further we walked the closer he pulled my body to his. This made my passion grow stronger by the minute. So it was, till we parted at our schools.

That day, I could not pay attention in my classes. All I could think of was the meeting that had so shaken my heart. "Where does he come from? What is his name?" It was only natural, after all, that I didn't know where he came from, since we had never met before. And besides, when we were walking together, I never learned his name, since the whole time his eyes were fixed on me as if they could never be satisfied.

Classes were almost over when Teacher said to us: "Boys, put down your pens for a moment. There's something I want to say to you all." The minute the boys heard these words, they stopped writing and folded their hands on their desks in an orderly manner, waiting to hear what Teacher would say.

<sup>22</sup> We never learn the name of this boy. He calls Soetjipto *adik* (younger brother) from the start, while Soetjipto replies—at this stage of their relationship—with the neutral "Malay" *engkau* (you). As their friendship develops, this term will be replaced by the intimate Javanese *kanda* (elder brother). I have decided, perhaps mistakenly, to use Big and Little Brother instead, both to make sure the reader does not think they are actually brothers, and because those terms, to me, sound closer to the teasing tenderness of their schoolboy attachment as it deepens.

"Starting tomorrow morning, school is closed for four days. Tomorrow is Saturday, so come back to school next Wednesday."

The children broke out into happy chatter at the news. When my teacher heard the cheerful noise, he banged on his desk and said: "Do you know why school is going to be closed?"

Immediately the children fell silent. Not a single one answered. All were waiting for my teacher's next words.

"The reason is that we're honoring the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dutch Queen's coronation.<sup>23</sup> Tonight in the Alun-alun there will be a celebration.<sup>24</sup> I'm sure you've all noticed how during these past few days the place has been fixed up to accommodate all the shows that will be put on. There will also be big celebrations at the homes of our leading officials. Aren't you all happy?"

"Listen to me! I want to explain further what I have in mind for you. Not all of you in this class are of the same mind. Some of you enjoy studying hard, but there are others who only want to have fun, and wait eagerly for the holidays. Remember that this kind of attitude is absolutely not permissible. You are now in the fourth grade. So you must realize you are in a different situation from when you were in the lower classes. Besides, if you make it to the fifth grade, that will of course mean that your school days are over. From that time on, you will have use of the education that your spirit (*djiwa*) can provide for you.

"While you are still in school, it doesn't mean that you will automatically add to your knowledge. On the other hand, once you have left school behind, it doesn't mean automatically that you will be worse off. Do you all understand what I am saying?"

"You must understand that everything in what is called life depends on what you have inside you. Even if you go to school, if you don't use your intelligence, you won't get anything from your lessons. On the other hand, even if you have left school, provided you are serious about using your mind, you will add to your knowledge, perhaps more than what you have learned in school.

"This is the reason why you must truly understand that it is not just in schools that we human beings get our education. If one uses one's brains, one can learn anywhere and at any time. That's why the Malay maxim says 'Thinking is the Lantern of the Heart [*Pikir Itoe Pelita Hati*].' The only thing to add is that one shouldn't use one's brains simply to follow one's heart's desires.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelmina, born in 1880, was only ten years old when her father died. Her mother, Emma, ruled as Regent until Emma reached her majority. Her coronation took place on September 6, 1898. Hence, the celebrations described here would have taken place on and after September 6, 1923.

<sup>24</sup> A quick look at a couple of East Java newspapers for September 1923 indicates that the official celebrations in the province began on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> and lasted through Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>. The teacher is speaking on Friday the 7<sup>th</sup>, when the children get out early for Friday prayers. In accordance with tradition, the *pasar malam* with all the shows should have happened on Saturday night. But Soetjipto, as we shall see, suggests that the big night for him is Friday night.

<sup>25</sup> I take this to be an allusion to the Muslim idea that Allah provides human beings with the power of thoughtful reason (*akal*) to control the passions (*nafsu*).

"In short, one must keep thinking as long as one is alive. In other words, before one takes any action, one ought to think carefully whether the act is good or bad. That's what people mean when they speak of those who live by thinking."

Even before Teacher had finished, we could hear the hubbub of children in the next-door classroom, who were already out and on their way home. So Teacher stopped what he was saying and sent us home, too. Actually, in my heart I was not satisfied, and wished that he would go on. I really did not want to leave the classroom. On my way home, I kept thinking over all that Teacher had said. Though the sun was very hot, and the road home very long, I was completely unaware, because my heart was pleasantly lost in my own thoughts.

By the time I reached home, Mother had already prepared food for me, so I sat down to eat. A little later my mother came up to me, looked me over carefully, and said:

"My child, why the expression on your face? Because the walk home was so hot? I don't think so. For four years now you've been used to walking about hither and yon, and you've never had this look on your face before. Did you get scolded by your teacher?"

"No, Mother. That's not the reason. It's just that I've been thinking a lot. Thinking over what Teacher said to us!" With that, I told her everything my teacher had explained. When I was finished, Mother nodded her head, and said:

"Your teacher is a fine man. My child, if you are hungry, Mother can help by getting you food. But in such matters, Mother can offer you no help at all. Everything depends on you yourself."

"You're right, Mother. Of course I'll keep what Teacher said in mind, till I understand it all. Starting tomorrow morning, we get four days holiday in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dutch Queen's coronation. Tonight there's going to be a lot going on in the Alun-alun. There will also be celebrations in the residences of high officials. May I go and watch?" I asked, studying the expression on her face and trying to guess what was in her heart. Would Mother grant my request?

"All right, but be careful, there's a lot of traffic. Now you'd better go sleep at the back of the house, so your father doesn't find out. When you wake up, do your duty and finish your housework. Once everything is done, you may go and watch."

"Very well, Mother," I answered, my heart full of joy.

## Chapter 4 — Coronation Night

In the Alun-alun a big crowd had already gathered to watch the performances. They were wearing their nicest clothes, in the local style. All kinds of shows were being staged, including *pentjak*, *wajang kulit*, *wajang orang*, *saronan*, and many more.<sup>26</sup> In the

<sup>26</sup> Martial arts display; shadow-puppet theater; or staged performances using the *wajang* repertoire, but with live actors. *Saronan* is more commonly *serunen*, a type of Madurese music, with a singer accompanied by drum, gong, and the special Madurese flute, often played at the famous Madurese bull-races, or *kerepan sapi*. Also, by derivation, it is the name for a Madurese style of stage performance. Probably Soetjipto means the latter. My thanks to Arief Djati and Ronny Agustinus for this information.

residencies of the Assistant Resident, the Regent, the Patih, and other high officials there were celebrations as well.<sup>27</sup> Coffee-stalls and vendors of food, cakes, and fruit were doing a roaring business. So the spectators could satisfy all their different desires to their hearts' content. The players performed with extra beauty, and the high officials displayed their grandness.

Seen from a distance, Situbondo seemed a town ablaze. The sound of the gamelan felt loud enough to cleave the earth. Everywhere, as far as the eye could see, there were only smiling, happy faces. And it was just the same for other peoples, like the Chinese, the Arabs, and the Dutch. Each held their own parade according to their national customs back home.

I wandered about here and there as my heart fancied. By now I had circled the attractions several times. Gradually I started to feel tired. Besides, I had seen everything I wanted. Just after the clock struck ten, I decided to watch the *wajang orang*, with no interest in anything else. The performance was being held in the *pendopo* [traditional wall-less audience hall] in front of the town jail.

After an hour or so, my body started to feel hot. The sweat streamed continuously down my body, to the point that I got tired of mopping it. Suddenly there came a violent wind. All the vendors' oil-lamps blew out, while the gas and electric lamps swung wildly to and fro, as if on a ship breasting gigantic waves. The food-stall vendors were in a tumult, trying to fend off the trouble that had befallen them. The spectators clutched their hats to their heads for fear they would be whirled away by the wind. The actors couldn't go on comfortably with their performance in the face of the gale. In the homes of the high officials, it was just the same. Not long after the gale sprang up, it began to rain cats and dogs. The uproar was anything but an act. Soaked to the skin, most of the spectators fled in every direction in search of shelter. All the while the wind blew ever stronger, and the rain pelted down more heavily. It was as if the happy tumult in the Alun-alun had been swept away. All the performances stopped, because the players could not keep going. If earlier the place had been full of cheerful noise, with lamps burning brightly everywhere, now, in a twinkling of an eye, everything had fallen silent and the place was completely dark, except for the glimmer of lanterns in people's houses nearby.

I had taken shelter in the *pendopo* where the *wajang orang* was playing. But because the *pendopo* was now jammed with people seeking shelter, the performance itself had eventually to be stopped. Once this happened, the place fell dark. I crouched by the edge of the *pendopo* where the gutter-pipe from the roof came down. It was now so crowded that I felt I couldn't move my body at all. A little later the gale roared even more violently, and my whole body was soaked from head to toe by the in-blown rain. So I moved back, edging my way between people as I could. Because my body was so small, I managed this without trouble. However, before I could reach a good spot, I was forced suddenly to stop. In front of me stood someone lighting a match for a cigarette. Because I stood so close to him, it seemed that the light of the match illuminated my face. Once his cigarette was lit, I started to head off once again. But before I could move a step, I felt an arm around my shoulders.

---

<sup>27</sup> The Assistant Resident was the Dutch official who "guided" the local native Regent; the *Patih* was the Regent's deputy.

"So you've been watching the show, Little Brother?"

I was completely taken aback, thinking that nobody there knew who I was. Because the fellow's face was still obscured, I turned back and asked: "Who are you?"

"Your new friend," he answered softly, pulling at my arm so that I couldn't help coming close to him.

"I'm soaked. Don't come close," I said, the minute I felt my body almost touching his.

"It doesn't matter," he answered. "Come back with me to my house. There you can change into warm clothes. But be patient for a little while. The rain is still coming down cats and dogs."

I didn't utter a single word. My heart was moved as I listened to him invite me to his house. In my heart I said to myself: "How can I get home now? It's already half past midnight. But if I sleep at his house? After all I barely know him, we met for the first time only this morning. He'll surely think that I am not really a schoolboy, and don't have any parents, since I have managed to watch the performance so far into the night."

But in view of his courtesy, I hesitated. Would he really have such thoughts about me? I hadn't yet finished thinking this over properly, when I heard him softly reciting this *pantun* into my ear:<sup>28</sup>

Cordials are made from candle-nut  
No thorns the corals wear  
I sought him everywhere, and found him not  
But now he has come near

"Hey, there are a lot of people around. Aren't you ashamed to sing *pantun* here?"<sup>29</sup>

"Of course, sweetheart (*sajang*). Otherwise I'd keep on singing," he replied.

Gradually the rain eased up, till it only drizzled. Some of the people taking shelter in the *pendopo* hurried off, too impatient to wait any longer, and thinking all the time about their families. As I watched them scurrying off, one after the other, he said: "Come on, let's go. My home isn't that far. The rain is so light now that you won't get really wet."

"All right," I said. "As you wish."

Before I had a chance to get tired, we reached his home, located behind the Regent's Residence. He opened the door and told me to go inside.

"No, I can't," I replied. "I'm scared your parents will wake up and be upset."

<sup>28</sup> *Pantun* is a traditional Malay verse-form, containing four lines. The first two are usually elusive and evocative, while the third and fourth usually convey a message. The charming original here goes: *Boewah kemiri boewatken djamoe/Batoe karang tijada doeri/Koe tjari-tjari tijada bertemoe/Tapi sekarang ia kemari*. "Ia" is genderless, but normally in *pantun* it refers to someone of the opposite sex to the singer. Alas, the English language forces the translator to choose between a male or female pronoun, so, given the context I have opted for "he" and "him." With the help and inspiration of Dalih Sembiring, I have tried to reflect the *pantun*'s rhythm and rhymes, here and later on.

<sup>29</sup> *Pantun* are often delicately erotic.

"Don't worry. Mother and Father have gone to Bondowoso, for a party at the home of one of our relatives. Come on in."

I went in slowly and fearfully, because I had never done anything like this before. Right away he got out a singlet and a sarung, handed them to me, and told me to get changed.

"No, thank you," I said feeling very embarrassed.

"You don't need to talk that way," he said, "after all, we've become friends."

So my embarrassment began to lessen. I believed in the sincerity of his heart. When I had changed, he told me to lie down on the bench (*bangkoe*), which was fairly wide.<sup>30</sup> It had pillows arranged on it too.

"Shall I put out the light or not?" he asked with a smile.

"Yes, it's all right, put it out," I answered.

Once the light was out, the house became pitch-black. Yet the bed itself was illuminated by the moonlight coming through the windowpane. After putting out the light, he drew close to me. "Are you happy sleeping here? What's your name? Where do you live?" he asked, taking hold of my hair and caressing it over and over. His words immediately made me stop and think for a moment. Yes, he had every right to ask my name and where I lived, for he had become my friend. So I frankly told him my name and where I lived. As we lay there side by side, I felt my blood in turmoil, because my body was touching his.

"Have you been here a long time?" I asked.

"No. Just a couple of months. I used to live in Kediri. But when my father was transferred, I joined him here, to continue my schooling."

"What grade are you in?"

"Grade seven," he replied.<sup>31</sup>

"Did you like it in Kediri?" I asked.

"Of course. I used to be a lot happier there than here. But now that I've met you, Little Brother, I feel happier here than there." So he replied, turning his face toward me, and resting his thigh on mine.

At this my blood surged (*berserai-serai*) harder than ever. Gradually my desire was aroused, though I struggled as hard as I could to resist the feeling, thinking how ashamed I would be if he found me out. In my heart I was astonished that I could be so aroused, since up till now I had never had this feeling before, only the desire of a little boy. But now it was quite different, like the desire of a grown-up, even though actually at that time I was far from grown-up.

"Will you be my friend?" he asked, pulling my body into his arms.

<sup>30</sup> Probably what is meant here is a *balai*—a low, wide piece of furniture used either for sitting or sleeping. Below, Soetjipto calls it a bed.

<sup>31</sup> The second grade in middle school.

It was getting harder and harder to resist my feelings. In the ordinary way of things, sleeping next to a friend shouldn't arouse any shame or desire. But now, for me, it wasn't like that at all. I felt my chest ready to burst. And because his arms were around me I was very afraid that he would hear my breathing, which was heaving like the devil's (*saitan*). So I turned my face and laid it on his chest. I could hear his heart beat and the short gasps of his breath.

"Why is he like this?" I thought to myself. I was sure that his desire was awakened. But why was I, too, aroused? Unmistakably, it was because his body was really amazing. Wherever I laid my hand, his skin felt so smooth and soft. Even though he was another boy, at whatever part of his body I looked my desire and passion grew stronger. Especially if I looked at his face. If I didn't quickly lower my head, my desire would surely explode. I would surely lay my head by his. I longed to nibble at his lips and kiss them. His body was like silk to my touch. "Even this morning when I first met him, my heart was already pounding, as if something was beating inside my chest. All the more so now that I am in his arms. So it's no surprise that now I have such passion and desire for him," I said to myself.

While I was reflecting on all this, he tightened his embrace, to the point that my head on his chest began to hurt. In spite of that I hugged him tighter back.

Shortly thereafter, he said: "When I first met you, as I was coming out of the alley from my house, I was completely stunned by the beauty of your face. In class, I couldn't stop thinking about you. And it was just the same after I got home. The minute the sun went down, I started hunting for you among the shows, but I couldn't find you anywhere. I only ran into you when the rain started to fall. I thank God for the rain, which brought me such happiness. I'm sure it was the will of God: if it hadn't rained, maybe I wouldn't have found you. How miserable I would be if I hadn't seen you tonight. For the past four days I never had the chance to look at your face, which I kept seeing in my mind's eye."

"Ah, don't talk nonsense," I said. "Why would you miss me so much? After all, I'm not a pretty girl." These words simply came blurring out of my mouth. The truth is that, as I listened to him, my heart became bright. Up to that moment, I was afraid that only I was filled with longing. But now it was clear that our longings were intertwined.

At that moment he replied: "It's not like that, Little Brother. I'm drawn to your face, which for me is more beautiful than any girl's."

"Have you ever slept with a girl?" I asked.

"Not even once," he replied with a smile. After a while, he went on: "Listen, I want to tell you something. Now you've become my special friend, you don't need to feel ashamed. Some years ago, when I was still in Kediri, and your age, someone fell in love with me. He had a job as a native doctor. At that time, like you right now, I didn't understand. To my way of thinking, only a girl could satisfy a man's desire. But when I got to know him, he told me about many things. Eventually, he explained to me that a man can satisfy his desire with another man. We became lovers, until he was transferred. After he left, I did with others what he had done with me. I was attracted to handsome boys, and in the end found a good friend, whom I had to leave when I



came here. It was the same with my friends. Many of them liked doing it this way. But beforehand, I never imagined that they would do so."

"How does one satisfy one's desire?" I asked him with a smile.

He answered not a word, but began kissing my cheeks, while his hands caressed my body. At that point I could no longer control my desire, so I forgot myself and responded with kisses of my own.

"This is what I've been waiting for for so long," I said to myself. Then gradually he took hold of my thigh, and inch by inch lifted up my sarung, till finally his hand touched my....

"It seems you like me, isn't it so, Little Brother?" he said with a smile, and kissed me again. By this time my desire had become indescribable. If I hadn't struggled to resist with all my might, I would certainly have bitten his lips as hard as I could. And because he too could no longer control his desire, he slowly laid his body down on my chest.

"This is what I've wanted for so long," he said, as with trembling body he climbed on top of me.

So it was that finally he satisfied his desire on my chest. Afterwards, he slipped off me while kissing my cheeks without stopping for a minute. ... Then he satisfied my desire with his hand. "Is this how it feels?" I asked myself, once my desire had been satisfied. But although it had been satisfied, it would be aroused again later.

"Do you want to go to sleep?" he said.

"Yes," I answered. "I'm really tired from all that walking."

"Very well," he answered.

Then he held my hand and said, "You won't forget me, will you, Little Brother? When classes start again, come to me. After all, your school is quite close to mine. You will, won't you? I'll be waiting for you behind my school."

"No," I replied. "I'm afraid you'll be ashamed to be friends with a boy from another [lower-status] school."

"Not at all," he replied. "Nothing like that ever entered my mind. Let's make ourselves a promise now. You'll never forget me, and I'll never forget you. Let the moon now shining on you be our witness." [Then he sang:]

May The One God be praised on high  
The quill, the ink are paired together  
We two have made a promise, you and I,  
The moon be our witness, forever<sup>32</sup>

So I replied:<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> The *pantun* goes: *Toehan jang Esa boleh di poedji/Lidi kalam denganlah mangsi/Ini kedoetwa soeda berdjandji/Itoelah Boelan mendjadi saksi*

Leaves fall into the river bright  
 Even on coral, do not hesitate  
 Composing *pantun* is your delight  
 But we must sleep, for it is late

The next morning the sun was already high by the time I woke up. It was about eight o'clock. Quickly I went to bathe. My heart felt very sad. I was scared of being scolded by my stepfather. After bathing, I changed back into my own clothes. Meantime, my friend, too, had woken up.

"Hey, the sun's already high in the sky," he said.

"That's right. Hurry up and take a bath. I want you to take me home."

"Don't be impatient. I'll take you on my bike." After bathing and changing his clothes, he went to get his bike and pushed it outside.

"Well, shall we go to Pandji?" he said.

"Let's." And after we both got on the bike, he pedaled off.

"Can you hurry up a bit?" I said.

"What's the hurry?"

"I'm scared my father will be angry."

"In that case, let me handle it, I'll make sure you aren't scolded," he said, patting my back. He pedaled away very fast. In less than fifteen minutes we reached the village of Pandji. Before we got to my house, he got off the bike and I followed suit.

"Take it easy," he said, as he helped me down. "Is this your house?"

"Yes. It seems you already know it."

"No, I was just guessing," he said, clutching my arm. "Remember what happened last night. Don't forget me. I promise I will be friends with no one but you."

When he said this, my heart melted. All the time we were bicycling, I could think of nothing but that he would forget me, since he acted so different from the previous night. That is why I never expected that when we got near my house he would say something like this. But when close to my home, these were the words that fell from his lips, and this was the promise that he made. "Like a basket when it gets a lid" says the Malay proverb. Meaning that it was as if our hearts were one.

When we got home, it turned out that my stepfather was not in. I had no idea where he had gone, since he too had the day off. So I headed for the back of the house.

"Stay here for the moment."

And I met my mother.

---

<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, boys and girls, when flirting or courting, replied in kind when on the receiving end of an amorous *pantun*. The boy Soetjipto replies tartly with: *Banjak daoen djatoeh di kali/Baik di karang, djanglanlah oendoer/Engkau berpantoen soeka sekali/Tapi sekarang marilah tidoer*

"Where did you spend the night?" she asked. "Weren't your clothes soaked through?"

"No, Mother. I slept over at a friend's place. He's just brought me home."

"Where is he now?" asked my mother in surprise.

"In front of the house."

Immediately she went to the front of the house. It looked as if my friend was very respectful to her. They talked together, but I didn't hear what they said. After changing, I performed my usual household duties. When school was out, my two brothers were never home. That day they'd gone to play at the house of my uncle, my mother's brother. They'd only be home by seven thirty in the evening. My situation was very different. Every day I had to do my household chores—filling up the water container in the bathroom, sweeping the yard, cleaning the lamps and refilling them with kerosene, watering the plants, and so on. That was how different my position was from my brothers'. Not long after I'd finished my chores, I heard my mother calling me. When I presented myself, she said, "Your friend is leaving. You should thank him before he goes." Then Mother went back to the rear of the house.

"You're leaving?" I asked.

"Yes, Little Brother." As he spoke, he drew close to me. He held my hand for a long time, as if unwilling to let it go. All the time, his eyes stayed fixed on me. I felt as if something held my mouth closed, so I had no strength to say a word. I could see from his face that he really hated leaving me. I could only utter a few broken words. "Never mind, Big Brother. When school reopens we'll see each other again," I said hesitantly.

At that moment his expression changed, like a sick man suddenly made well. With his head down, he replied: "Yes, Little Brother, don't forget what I told you to do." Before I had a chance to respond, he turned around, with his head still bowed. He did not look at me for a moment. When he reached his bike, he climbed up onto it. I was left standing there, lost in thought about his love for me. And in my heart too, I loved him very much.

## Chapter 4 — Fathers

As I was thinking all this over, my stepfather arrived home, looking at me with an angry expression. Not long afterward, he said: "Where have you been?"

In a frightened voice I replied: "At the performances. Then the rain came down so heavily that I couldn't get home last night."

Angrily he replied: "So you were just watching the shows, and forgot all your chores! Can shows put food in your mouth?"

Immediately I turned away and left, since I knew from past experience that if I didn't I would be beaten and kicked. My heart was full of boundless resentment, because I felt so hurt. In front of Mother, his words to me were always sweet, but if she was absent he would show his anger, even if I had done nothing wrong. That was how my stepfather was. Naturally, because I was so young, I still couldn't master my

feelings. Especially when I saw his angry expression, I really hated him, and I thought, "It's better to turn my face away, not look at him, and so be done with it."

One could say that my relationship with my stepfather was like that between a dog and a cat. Wherever he ran into me, he was always angry. If I complained to my mother, he got even nastier. If he had had any sense, he would have felt sorry for me for being caught in the rain while watching the performances. But instead, because he couldn't think straight, he uttered these words: "Can shows put food in your mouth?" It is absolutely inappropriate (*patoet*) to direct this kind of question to a child.

Every time I was scolded by him, I felt my heart's anger rising, to the point of thinking some improper thoughts. But finally I remembered what my mother had said to me that night—that I was an ill-fated child. Only when I remembered her words did my burning anger dissipate. What could I do? Such is the fate of any child who has to follow a stepfather or stepmother.

It's true that by custom (*adat*) married couples too often get divorced. But it is the very worst of customs, because those who suffer are not just the parents, but also the children.

No matter how kind a stepmother is, she cannot be the same as one's own mother, who has carried one in her womb for nine months. In the same way, no matter how kind a stepfather is, how can he be like one's real father who has cradled one in his arms since one was a baby? How happy is the child who sees his father and mother together under one roof! As I have observed, most of the really miserable children are those who cannot bear to live with their stepparents, and so run away. I myself have experienced both the bitterness and the sweetness of this.

Everyone knows that these things happen simply because a parent gives in to the desire for pleasure (treacherous desire).<sup>34</sup> If [my father] really felt that he hadn't yet sufficiently enjoyed the pleasures of this world, why did he rush to get married, and in the end get tempted by another woman? Didn't he realize that once a man marries, he will have children, and then have to bear in mind the situation of these children? But it seems he never really thought about this. Not merely his children, he didn't even really think about himself. All he thought about was his own pleasure, running off to other women, so that he got married two or three times, and divorced his wife two or three times too. This is the most corrupt (*boesoek*) kind of life imaginable. He never thought about the feelings of the women he divorced, or about the feelings of his children who were forced to live with stepfathers. All he thought about was his own pleasure, making marriage simply a game.

It is good for a man to get married, but only after he has exhausted his passion for earthly pleasures. He should remember that once married he will have children. So he should think about the future of his children, not just about his own body, which has already tasted to the full the pleasures this world affords. Such is the man whom they say has a Perfected Spirit (*Boedhi jang Sampoerna*), who has had the strength to reject a Corrupted Spirit (*Boedhi Keboesoekan*). Otherwise, he cannot give lessons to himself, let

<sup>34</sup> Here and elsewhere, Soetjipto uses the odd-looking word *sianat*. I take this to be a Javanized form of the Malay-Indonesian *chianat*.

alone his children. That is the experience of children like myself. Yes, but remember: a person's fate is inscribed on his body.

## Chapter 5 — How To Live?

That night I couldn't quickly fall asleep, because I kept turning over in my mind what happened the previous night. I also remembered what my teacher had said when we were about to go home from school. After that, I thought back to the moments when I caressed my sweetheart<sup>35</sup> (my new friend). It was as though he was still kissing my cheek, and his warm arms were still about my neck, to the point that my desire was satisfied.

The more I remembered what had happened, the fiercer my desire became. The more I tried to cast it aside, the closer it came to me. The more I tried to get rid of it, the more clearly the picture of it rose before me. Over and over I tried to forget it, but all in vain. And because I could no longer resist my desire, slowly I grasped my.... I said to myself: "Well, then, I'll try to copy what he did last night ... with my own hand." In the end I felt.... And at that moment my desire was SATISFIED. My body felt weak. "Hmm," I said to myself. "So that's how it is," I said in my heart.

Then I recalled what my teacher had said: "One should always think over carefully what is best." I couldn't stop thinking over these words.

At one time my friend, too, had not understood. Just like me. Then he learned from the doctor who loved him. Ah, why would a doctor, with plenty of money, not feel like marrying? Other men would certainly have married a beautiful girl. But he didn't want to because he wasn't used to an attachment to women. The other thing was that I had no idea why he didn't go for women. Perhaps he was the kind of man who... And it was the same with my friend. He was accustomed to being attached to other boys. That was why he said to me: "I'm drawn to your face, which for me is more beautiful than that of any pretty girl!"

If this was so, then life meant following what one was accustomed to. If a man is used to eating, he will get hungry if he doesn't eat. If a man is used to sleeping, he'll nod off if he doesn't get his sleep. If a man is used to reading, and doesn't do so, he will feel unhappy. It is the same with everything else. If a man is used to going with girls, he won't feel good, and will have no desire, if he goes with a boy.

I myself still had no habits. Yet the proof that I liked boys was that my desire erupted. So I had to accustom myself to going with boys, since this was best for me. All the more so once I had become used to satisfying myself. This shows how compassionate the Almighty is toward His creatures. No matter how much evil there is in this world, He gives us the weapons to make it good. How true is the Dutch proverb that goes: *Een uur van onbedachtzaamheid kan maken dat men jaaren schreid*. This means: If for even one hour a man does something without thinking about its good or evil effects, for years he will weep, and regret what he has done.

It's not that I hate women. It's just that I am not attracted to them, not used to them, because I'm afraid of making trouble for myself.

---

<sup>35</sup> The word Soetjipto uses here is *kekasih*koe.

I hadn't long been lost in these thoughts when I heard the *kentong*<sup>36</sup> sound three times. According to Javanese tradition, this meant that somewhere close by my village something deadly was afoot. "What can the danger be?" I thought to myself. After a few moments, lights coming through the window illuminated my bed. I groped my way to the window and opened it, to find out what was going on. I could see a crowd of people on the main road, with flaming torches in their hands. Some of them were carrying the body of a man, soaked in blood. "Wah, another fight. Maybe they're taking him to the house of the District Officer [*wedono*]."

The truth is that in my village such fights happened all the time. Almost every day people came to blows with fists and knives, sometimes resulting in death. The reason? Simply competition over women. And that is how it ends. Never mind that in most cases the woman they are fighting over doesn't love either of them. I often heard stories to this effect: one man has died, the other is in jail. Meanwhile, the woman they were fighting over doesn't wait for the man in jail to get out, but goes off with someone else. So it is with someone with the habit of betrayal.

This is what I thought in my heart: "No, I don't hate people like that, but I don't want to follow their path, because I know what happens, and what will be the consequences. One should not hate anyone, because human beings are like that, each person has his own way of thinking. If some are good, naturally others will be evil. So in this world one must have judgment [*timbangan*]."

## Chapter 6 — Happiness

After four days at home, I went back to school on the fifth, a Wednesday. All I could think about along the road was how to find a way to fulfill my friend's desire that we meet behind his school. But by the time I arrived, I still hadn't succeeded. Besides, I hadn't met him on the way to school because I took a different path from his. In class, too, I couldn't study with a calm heart, because all I could think about was this problem.

During a fifteen-minute break (around 9:00 a.m.), while my classmates were busy finishing a mathematics assignment given us the previous Friday, Teacher asked: "Who's finished?" I looked around, and it seemed that no one else was yet ready. So I put up my hand, since I felt I had really finished my homework.

"Good! Come here!" said Teacher, summoning me. When I stood before him, he said: "Give this letter to the Headmaster of the H.I.S. Ask him to sign it, then bring it back here."

I was really startled by what he said, for I never expected to hear the words H.I.S.

"Very well, Teacher," I replied as I accepted the letter.

So I left. "Such is the power of God," I said to myself. "In all the time I've been at this school, I've never been sent to the H.I.S. But suddenly, now, it has happened."

---

<sup>36</sup> Usually a suspended hollow piece of wood used as a kind of alarm drum in Javanese villages.

Once out of the classroom, I looked at the letter; it was some regulations from Batavia.<sup>37</sup> I kissed the letter. I felt like someone who wants to enter a locked house—and here was the key. When I reached the H.I.S., I looked carefully at each of its doors, and noticed one with a signboard on it, reading, in capital letters “HEADMASTER.” Below the letters there was a “7” written on the door. At the sight of this number, my heart began to beat like anything, because this was the classroom for Grade Seven.

Controlling my feelings as best I could, I went into the classroom. After presenting myself to the Headmaster, I gave him the letter with my head bowed. He stared at me for a moment, then took the letter and read it. Then I cast my eyes across the whole classroom. At that instant my blood seemed to surge through my body. It was as though I had no strength to stand any more, because I saw his smiling, blushing face, which all along I had pictured in my mind. Immediately I bowed my head again. In my heart I felt ashamed. A little later, he left the classroom. “Perhaps he is waiting for me outside,” I said to myself.

When the Headmaster had read the letter, he signed it and handed it back to me.

“Take this back to your teacher,” he said.

“Of course, Headmaster,” I said bowing my head.

“Tell your teacher that he has my thanks.”

“Yes, Headmaster.”

“You too,” he added, patting my shoulder. When they saw what the Headmaster was doing, all the pupils burst out into loud laughter.

“Why are you all laughing?” asked the Headmaster, without letting go of my shoulder. Not a single student replied.

“So that’s what they call Grade Seven pupils,” he said. “You’re happy to make fun of a boy from another school, but you don’t realize that by doing this you’ve simply made yourselves ridiculous. As the saying goes, it is like *SHOWING YOUR BEHIND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ALLEY*.<sup>38</sup> The saying refers to people who want to humiliate their enemy, without realizing that everyone is looking at their bare behinds. That’s what you all are like. You’ve reached Grade Seven, but your brains still aren’t working. I warn you, some day you’ll be punished for opening your mouths without thinking beforehand.” So he spoke, while turning his gaze back on me.

“Go back to your school. You, too, should understand what I have just said to my pupils.”

“Yes, Headmaster,” I replied with bowed head.

On stepping outside I was startled to see [my friend] summoning me with a wave of his hand. When I reached his side, he said to me in a scared voice: “Let’s go behind the school, Little Brother. Then you can go back to your own school by cutting across the vacant lot.”

<sup>37</sup> It is not clear to me what *oendang-oendang dari Batavia* means, or why a signature from the H.I.S. headmaster was required.

<sup>38</sup> *MEMBOEKA PANTAT DI TENGA LORONG*. I was tempted to translate *pantat* as “ass,” which is appropriately coarse, but it seemed too contemporary and too America-specific to work.

But when we got behind the school he put his arms around my neck, and said: "Little Brother, you've really touched my heart. This is the best place for us to meet in the future. None of the boys ever comes here because there's nothing for them to do."

"All right, Big Brother, but let go of my neck. I have to go back to my school. I'm on an errand for my teacher," I said with a smile.

He didn't reply, just bowed his head. It took a while before he finally spoke. Pointing to an abandoned orchard,<sup>39</sup> he said: "Over there's the roof of your school, you can see it from here. You can keep going by following the line of bushes. If I'm not mistaken, you'll come out behind your school."

As he spoke, his eyes never left the abandoned orchard, puzzling how I might make my way along the bushes.

"You're right. From here I can make a shortcut and none of the boys will be the wiser," I said, barely containing the joy in my heart. Nonetheless, hardly had I begun to take the shortcut when he clutched my arm. Then slowly he put his arms about me.

"Little Brother, how about meeting me here after class? Remember your promise!"

As he spoke, he started to caress my thighs, while his eyes never left my own. Finally, he lowered his sweet lips to my mouth... Because I couldn't contain my desire any longer, I quickly withdrew my lips from his kiss. Then I jumped away, taking the shortcut back to my school. I only turned my head back when I was quite far away. He was still standing there looking at me, till I reached my school. Only then did he seem to move away.

When I got to my classroom, I gave the letter back to my teacher.

"What did the Headmaster say?"

"After he signed his name, he told me to convey his thanks to Teacher," I answered formally.

"Good," he said, inspecting the Headmaster's signature.

Not long afterward Grade Five's bell sounded for break. But it so happened that the H.I.S. boys hadn't yet been let out. I went to the toilet at the back of the school, to see whether any of my schoolmates was standing there, or going into the toilet. My gaze switched back and forth from the abandoned orchard ahead to my rear, just in case one of the boys was coming up to me. For an instant or two I looked over to the H.I.S. In this way my eyes were constantly on the move.

As I stared at the abandoned orchard, my eyes lit on a *kajoe tindoeng* tree with its full foliage,<sup>40</sup> and around it shrubs taller than a man.

I thought to myself: "Let's go and have a look. It might be a good place to wait till he comes. If I stay waiting where I am, I won't feel easy, as some of the other pupils are

<sup>39</sup> Soetjipto uses here and later the phrase *keboen kosong*. A *kebun* can be either a garden or an orchard, but, as will be seen later, this one contains a big tree—so I have opted for orchard. *Kosong* literally means "empty," which seems only to make sense if interpreted as "unused, abandoned."

<sup>40</sup> So far I have been unable to identify this tree, or to feel sure that the phrase *daoennja berkoeroeng* really means "with its full foliage."



bound to come by from time to time.” So I moved off quickly toward the tree. Luckily, not one of the boys noticed what I was doing.

When I got near the spot, my heart was completely turned upside down. It was so much nicer than I had imagined. Actually, it wasn’t *that* nice. But for me it was like a meeting-place (*Madjelis*).<sup>41</sup> From the base of the tree, many roots protruded from the ground, long and straight like the slats of a bamboo bed (*balai*). The space was about two and a half square [meters], and all around there were high bushes. With my penknife I cut up some dry grasses (*alang2*) and interwove them with others, to make it comfortable to sit down. “What a beautiful spot this is,” I said to my heart, over and over.

Not long afterward the H.I.S. bell sounded. I immediately turned my eyes toward the school. Within a few minutes I noticed someone hurrying towards the back of the buildings. But when he got there, he seemed to hesitate, as if lost in thought. Then he turned his gaze toward my school. “Ah, it’s him!” I said in my heart. “Now what should I do?”

Shortly thereafter, I had a good idea. I took the handkerchief out of my pocket and attached it to a piece of kindling lying nearby, making a kind of flag. After that I waited for a while, in case his gaze turned to the abandoned orchard. When he looked that way, I immediately started waving my flag. But he didn’t notice. Only when I waved it several times did he finally catch on. At first, he looked startled, or so it seemed to me from his expression. He just stood there looking at the flag for a long time. But in the end, he began to head my way. So I undid the handkerchief from the piece of kindling and stuffed it back into my pocket.

Even though I awaited him for what seemed a long time, he still hadn’t reached me because he was walking as if in no particular direction. So I took the handkerchief out of my pocket again and waved it with my hand. When he noticed the hand, he glanced left and right, just in case any of his schoolmates could guess what he was up to. Only then did he set off again in my direction. I stopped waving my flag, waiting for him to arrive. When he reached my side, he was completely surprised.

“Hey, Little Brother, when did you make this meeting place (*Madjelis*)?” he asked.

With a smile I answered: “This meeting place is God’s gift to me. Look for yourself! How could human beings make roots so perfectly shaped?”

“You’re right! It’s a magical place,” he replied. “How did you manage to find it, and fix it up like this? How could it be so perfect for the two of us?”<sup>42</sup> It is really a miracle,” he said, shaking his head.

“It is indeed a miracle. Just look over there at your school. From here you can see all the boys playing. It’s the same with my own school, too. But I’m sure it’s impossible for any of the boys in either place to see me here. And here, too, the school bells sound very clearly,” I replied from the depths of my heart.

<sup>41</sup> Soetjipto capitalizes this word, but I do not know why. “Meeting room” seems inadequate, but I have not found anything better.

<sup>42</sup> I am not sure if this is really the meaning of “*bagai mana bisa tempat ini menjediani engkau dengan saja?*” I follow the suggestion of Dalih Sembiring.

At my words, he said happily: "Can you really hear the bells from here? Amazing. In that case, I needn't stir till I hear them ring!"

"Big Brother, calm down," I answered, smiling. "Don't be like water with a fire beneath it. It bubbles along, and before you know it, it's boiled away. Right now, the two of us have received a blessing. So we must be grateful to Him and give Him thanks. And now that we have received this blessing, let's not just run round and round from joy."

"Ah, Little Brother, what a clever little tongue you have," he said, laying himself down with his head on my lap, while one arm embraced me.

Pretending not to notice, I took hold of his arm and gradually removed it from my neck.

"This arm of yours is really electric. If you put it on my neck, my chest starts to burn," I said.

He didn't reply, but instead bit my lips so hard that that they throbbingly stung.<sup>43</sup> Because it hurt, I tried to get free of his biting kiss. But just at that moment I collapsed in a heap, and after that, we found ourselves lying side by side.

"You see what happens when you say that my arms are electric. The truth is that what's really electric are your lips," he said, kissing my cheeks over and over again.

I made no reply, because I said to myself, "Hey, how can it be like this? I thought it was I who had fallen in love with him. But now I see that his love for me is even greater than mine for him." In the midst of these thoughts, I noticed that his face was now sad. After a moment or two his eyes filled with tears. Finally, the tears flowed down.

The minute I saw this, I said: "Big Brother, what's the matter with you?"

With sadness he replied: "Listen to me, Little Brother. My love for you is like nothing else in this world. If I try to hold it back, I feel my heart dissolve. But if I give it rein, my heart is in turmoil [*risau*]." So he spoke, sobbing, with his face by my chest.

As the moments passed, my desire for him grew stronger and stronger. So strong that I started to caress his thighs with a feeling of dread. My body trembled in a way I cannot describe. Then I slowly lifted up the bottom edge of his sarung till I could see his thighs, which seemed to me like pearls. It's true I had seen them once before, but they didn't look as beautiful as now. Then they had only been illuminated by the moon, but now, in broad sunlight, I could see every inch as clear as day.

In the midst of my happiness, the school bell rang, warning the boys it was time to go back to class. When I heard the bell, I felt my heart shatter, like glass dropped upon a rock. I loosened his arms from around my neck and tried to calm my heart.

"Big Brother, be calm. Don't follow blindly the desire of your heart or you will suffer at the end. When the fire is hot, don't touch it, or your hand will be burned."

---

<sup>43</sup> Soetjipto's language here is confusing: *ia laloe menggigit bibirkoe, jang dengan sekeras-kerasnja sampai berketoet-ketoet rekatan giginja*. Ronny Agustinus informs me that in modern language *berketoet-ketoet* would be *tjenoet-tjenoet*, the special periodic throbbing pain one gets from a tooth- or headache.

He didn't answer a word. He simply embraced me again, and covered my cheeks with kisses without end. But I put a distance between us, as I had to hurry back to study.

"Let me go. After all, we can be here together another day," I said as I stood up.

I left our place and walked back toward my school. I could see that he hadn't moved, perhaps because he hadn't yet exhausted the sadness in his heart.

Love ... (*tjinta ... kasih*)

That was what I experienced from that time on. There was nothing else but love and pity that guarded over us. If his parents happened to be away, he would invite me to his house. And I did just the same. There's no point in going on and on about how we loved each other.

But could such love last forever? No. How happy I was when I was at school and could meet with him. But once I got home, I was always filled with sadness because of the way my stepfather tormented me. In this book there is no way I can describe this torment. The reader can picture it more clearly in his imagination. It was like one human being simply hating another. All the more so, in that I was in my stepfather's power. No matter what I did, I was always in the wrong.

## Chapter 7 — The Fasting Month (*Boelan Poewasa*)

The fasting month had arrived. Everywhere the native (*Boemipoetra*) schools were silent and empty, and not a single pupil could be seen studying. The dry-field farmers were not working their land. It was the same with the ironsmiths, who usually raised a deafening din. Their forges were so silent that even a drop of water falling was audible. All the shops were closed, and no one was selling. No smoke rose from the village houses, since no one was cooking. Everyone was required to stay still, to perfect their inner beings, following the Prophet Muhammad's instructions for the fasting month.

In East Java most people kept steadfastly to the customs of the fasting month. All the more so in Situbondo, where I was living. The whole place was utterly silent, as though it had no inhabitants, because everyone stayed at home, and not a single person went to work. This is very different from West and Central Java, where the people aren't as strict, and so go on working to their hearts' content.

When the sun set, about six o'clock in the evening, the drum (*tamboer*) began to thud, signaling to those fasting that they could now eat.<sup>44</sup> Naturally, a wild hubbub then broke out.

Around eight o'clock, crowds of people poured out of their houses to get rid of their [mental] fatigue by tiring their legs. Some walked along with their wives and children, while the young men met up with their friends. The girls followed suit, as did the grandfathers, while not abandoning their prayer beads. On every face one could see cheerfulness, after a full day of suffering from their fasts.

<sup>44</sup> Probably what Soetjipto means is actually the *bedug*, a special, huge drum kept in mosques. The date must be April 21, 1924, half-way through the fasting month, when the moon is full.

It so happened that the moon was full (it was the fourteenth day of the Javanese month). Along the road, people ceaselessly crossed each others' paths, everyone happily chattering. People from our village went to visit other villages, and people from those villages came to visit ours. What they were all seeking was a change of scenery.

Not a single cloud veiled the moon, a sign of their respect for humanity. The stars twinkled as if in response to one another, as if they were chatting with their friends. A soft breeze blew at the trees, making their branches sway and their leaves nod, as if engaged in a back-and-forth with their comrades. Such were the various blessings that God granted to all His creatures.

I was then walking along the main road, too. But was my heart happy like everyone else's? No, it was in turmoil. I was waiting for my sweetheart (*kasih hatikoe*). That morning he had made me a promise. I was to wait for him on the main road. Every time a far-off bicycle lamp gleamed, I was startled, thinking he had arrived. But each time the bicycle drew near, it wasn't him. What was weighing on his mind when he begged me so seriously to wait for him? Now it was quite late, and he still hadn't come. Such were my thoughts from moment to moment.

Tired from walking up and down the main road, I sat myself down on a low wall along the bridge over a little stream, still by the roadside. Sitting there with my head bowed in thought, I was startled to hear him speak:

"Have you been here long, Little Brother?" he asked.

The minute I realized who it was, I stood up.

"Big Brother, why are you so late?"

"Have patience, Little Brother. Don't be upset [*djangan mengelos hawa*]. I had to get here from town on foot. Come on, let's go for a walk," he replied.

"Big Brother, aren't you tired from walking all the way from town?" I asked.

Gazing at my face, he answered, "Of course. But anyway, don't you want to go for a walk?"

"It's not that I don't want to. If I didn't, why would I have waited for you till this late? But let's stop off at my house first, all right? You can drink some coffee and eat some of the cakes your Little Brother has prepared for you."

"Very well. My Little Brother is very good at playing on a person's heartstrings. What if your parents are home?" he asked, gently pinching my lips.

"Mother and father are asleep. I already prepared the food late in the afternoon." At that point we set off, and upon arrival at my home, I went to the back of the house. "Wait here. But please bring the rattan chair from the front of the house around to the back," I said, pointing to the chair on the front porch. When I reached the rear of the house, I went in to fetch the coffee and cakes that I had ready on a tray.

"Where shall I put them?" I asked, as I came in with the tray.

"Here's best," he said, taking the tray from my hands and laying it on the chair. Once we had seated ourselves, I took the two cups on the tray and poured the coffee into them.

"Drink up," I said, handing him a cup. After we'd drunk some coffee, I opened a glass jar containing cakes. "These cakes are pretty good. Eat up!" He took a cake and ate it.

"Wah, it's really delicious," he said.

"My mother made them, to celebrate the new year."

"The coffee, too, is different from the usual around here," he said, lifting his cup for another sip.

"It's from my grandmother in Waru. Maybe she bought it in the Big City, Surabaya," I answered with a smile.

"Let's drink up. Finish your coffee. I want to go for a walk," he said, emptying his cup.

"What's the hurry? Where do you want to go?" I asked him in surprise.

"Anywhere. After all, tonight's no night to sleep or stay at home. Everyone else is on the road, no?" he remarked, with an unclouded (*djernih*) expression on his face.<sup>45</sup> After listening to what he'd said, I thought it over for a moment.

"You're right. Now's a good time to go for a walk. Let's climb to the Ulamas' graves [*pasarejan oelama*] up on the hill. During the fasting month, there's a constant stream of people going there to make offerings. All the more so now. The stream of people won't stop till morning."

"Exactly. That's just what I had in mind," he replied, clapping me on the shoulder.

Above the village there was a line of hills, and among the little peaks was one called Ulama Hill. During the fasting month, lots of people go up there carrying food for a *selamatan*.<sup>46</sup> After the *selamatan*, people recite from the Qur'an, meditate (*dikir*),<sup>47</sup> pray, and so on, as they choose. They only go back down in the morning. This hill was about one kilometer from my home, and around 300 meters high, so in the daytime it was easily visible from the back of my house.

After we finished the coffee and cakes, we set off; I did not forget to bring along my coat. I would often go up that hill, and I always took my coat with me to ward off the strong winds. I handed him a towel, thinking it would be enough to serve the same purpose. Even though the walk wasn't easy—we had to cross paddy fields and yard-gardens (*pekarangan*), ford a small stream, and pass by some graves—he and I walked on happily, with the same goal in mind. It was only when we began the climb that we started to feel tired.

"Do we still have a ways to climb?" he asked.

<sup>45</sup> *Djernih* usually means "pure." But this does not quite fit here, so I have tentatively used "unclouded."

<sup>46</sup> Ritual meal, intended to invoke blessings, and deepen social solidarity.

<sup>47</sup> The practice of repetitive recitation, usually of the names of Allah at the start of the Qur'an. In the Sufi tradition, it can be used to achieve a mystical state of being, or go into a trance. The spelling Soetjipto uses is Javanese, rather than the Arabic-derived *zikir*.

"It's about three quarters of an hour more, if we walk at our present pace." Soon afterward we caught sight of lamps glimmering from the hilltop.

"What are those lamps?" he asked, halting his steps.

"They're by the tombs that so many of the people here visit."

"Well, we're almost there," he said, turning to look at me. But then, still with his gaze on me, he seemed startled. "Wah, there are lamps, too, over there, quite high up. I'd like to go up that way."

"Yes, over there to the east is the Pelandangan Sea, and to the north the beach at Tandjung Tjina. But you can't yet see Panarukan itself," I replied.

"How beautiful the view is from here! How wonderful it would be if I could see the whole world here from an airplane," he added with a sigh.

"Yes! It's the same with an ant. I'm sure he thinks, 'If only I could climb as high as a human being can manage,'" I answered, walking on.

"I see you don't let a person say the slightest bit of nonsense," he said, hugging my shoulders and walking on...

When we reached the summit, we entered the cemetery, which was full of pilgrims. Some were busy reciting from the Qur'an, others were deep in *dikir*, while others were noisily performing the *selamatan*—everyone fulfilling the desires in their hearts. There was no end to the flow of people climbing up and walking down. Some of those climbing up were carrying *tumpeng* offerings:<sup>48</sup> rice, fish, fruit, coffee, and so on. Most important of all were offerings of flowers. On the other hand, those going back down were bearing flowers given them by the cemetery's caretaker, which they took as a sign that they had received the blessings of the ulama buried there. He and I wandered about, eager to see everything that was going on. If I ran into the caretaker, I'd pretend to be doing *dikir* very seriously. In fact, of course, I had no idea of what *dikir* was all about. Those who had finished *dikir* or reading from the Qur'an gathered with their friends, sitting on large stones, chatting and drinking coffee. In each group there would be someone explaining the reason for his or her pilgrimage to the hill. For example, one man said he'd bought a lottery ticket and had come up to ask for a special blessing. Another had come up because a child of hers was ill. If the child got well, she would bring him up to the cemetery. Another man asked for a blessing so that his wet and dry rice fields would stop being attacked by pests. There was also someone who prayed that his child would quickly find a marriage partner. Such were the various wishes of the graveyard visitors. As soon as the two of us felt satisfied we had seen everything, we stepped outside.

"You want to go back?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"Then where should we go next?" he continued. He stared at my face attentively, thinking perhaps I was getting sleepy.

---

<sup>48</sup> *Tumpeng* means a layered stack of different offerings.

"It's better we go back at four or four-thirty, along with most of the other people up here. It's only one-thirty now. Let's find a place to sit and admire the view," I said, gazing at him in turn.

"Good, exactly my idea, too," he said, clapping me on the shoulder. We hadn't gone far from the cemetery when we spied lights shining like stars in the distance.

"That's Panarukan harbor," I exclaimed, pointing with my forefinger.

"Hmm!" he said, smiling. "The view up here is really beautiful. I wonder what's it like in daytime?" He was looking right and left as if searching for something.

"Better!" I answered. "Why don't we come up here some time during the day?" I asked, gazing at his face. But when he heard my words, suddenly his face went white. Then the blood surged through my veins. He didn't say a single word in reply. I couldn't really see the changes in his expression, because the only illumination came from the moon. He then went over to a big stone, not far from where we'd been standing, and sat down. So I followed him there.

"Big Brother, what's the matter? Is there something that your heart misses and longs for?" I asked.

## Chapter 8 — Parting

After a long silence, he started to speak, with the tears pouring down his cheeks.

"Ah, my Little Brother,<sup>49</sup> the reason I told you to wait for me on the road was because I wanted to meet you. I had a special reason for our meeting. But ... ah ..." He stopped, as if he could no longer go on speaking. As though he couldn't hold back his feelings, he covered his face with his two hands.

"Big Brother mine, don't be like that. It's no good. What's in your heart should be expressed by your lips so that my ears can hear it. Then I can think it over. But if you stay silent like this, then what will happen? The pain in your heart will be for nothing." As I spoke, I gently parted the palms that covered his face. He stared at me with a distraught expression and with tears pouring from his eyes.

"My Little Brother, it's so difficult to get the words out of my mouth. It will hurt me so much if what I have to say shakes your heart. But if I don't speak, what then will happen? For sure, later I'll get something back from you that is rotten [*keboesoekan*]." As I listened to his words, I felt my heart shake. My thoughts grew dark, because I could not guess what was hidden in his heart. After thinking this over in vain, I said:

"Big Brother mine, don't go on playing with my heart. Tell me quickly, so things become clear to me."

"Then listen, my Little Brother!" he said, holding my chin and turning it until our eyes met. Then, as if deciding in his heart, he said: "The truth is I have been thinking

<sup>49</sup> From this point on, Soetjipto heightens his friend's tender grief as well as his own by adding *-koe* (my) to *Adik* and *Kanda*. "My Little Brother" sounds fine, but "my Big Brother" less so. Hence I have used "Big Brother mine," which has a nicely old-fashioned feel to it.

for a long time how to tell you, so that your heart is not sorrowful. But after all this thinking, I still couldn't find the right way, and even forgot about it. It was only after I listened to your words, which always make my heart long for you, that I remembered what I really wanted to tell you. My Little Brother, listen carefully now to what I have to say. Tonight's meeting is the last between us. It was this moon that shone down on you and me the first time we met; and it is the same moon that will separate us this night. When I first met you, the crowds of people were so happy, filled with a joy their hearts could almost not contain. And now, the same people are sorrowful as they carry out the commands of the Prophet Muhammad. It's as if they too feel sorrowful to witness my parting from you. Ah, my Little Brother, it's as if we are together in a NOVEL.<sup>50</sup> So far as I can remember, I have never loved anyone the way I love you."

Then he hugged me, and caressed my whole body, while his tears poured down. My heart pounded, and I felt a burning heat as if there were a fire within my breast, like a brazier of embers. My heart dissolved but did not change, beating as if in fluttering tatters, softening like tin melting over a flame. My thoughts whirled chaotically.<sup>51</sup> Everything went pitch-black, without color. I felt as if the blood no longer coursed through my veins. In short, I felt as if I was about to faint.

Then, when my chest felt a little relieved, and I could once again regulate my breath, I said to him brokenly: "Big Brother mine, calm yourself first. Then tell me what it is you want to say to me." When he heard my words, slowly he lifted his head from my lap, and gave a long sigh, as if he were just waking from sleep. With another long sigh, he said, over and over:

"It's soooo hard." He kept shaking his head as he spoke, while his palms held my hands tightly. "You're right, my Little Brother. This is no way to be. It's useless, too. But what can I do? But before I tell you all, make sure you do not harbor grief in your heart. If your thoughts are clear, you will see that it is pointless. Would it be possible that I be with you until old age? On and on? Surely it's impossible. One day or another we would have to part. My Little Brother, tomorrow I am leaving for Malang to continue my schooling in the M.U.L.O. there."

At these words, my breast immediately felt clear and bright, but then turned black, black like nothing else in the world. At that very moment I could see the eyes of my stepfather. It was as if I were falling to the ground under the blows of his fists.

"Ah, who else will be my medicine [*obat*], when I am sick," I sighed to myself, and I was silent for a long time. My lips felt heavy, as if turned to iron, so very difficult to open. Over and over he turned his eyes, full of tears, upon me, fearing that my heart was full of grief. Nonetheless, I did my utmost to compose my face, so as not to reveal the sorrow in my heart. Too impatient for a response from me, he continued:

<sup>50</sup> The words Soetjipto uses are *tjerita ROMAN*. Probably the older boy is referring to the dime-novels in Malay that became very popular from the start of the new century. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the boy can imagine their parting in these terms.

<sup>51</sup> This is an exceptionally difficult passage. The text reads: *Rasa berdebar-debarlah di dalem hatikoe, lagipoen panas tijada terhingga, seakan terletak api di dalem dada lajiknja. Panas boenja ipi, rasa hantjoer tapi tida berubah, berdebar-debar seakan ada kitirannja, piloe sebagai tima terdjoempa dengan api; demikianlah rasa jang terkandoeng di dalem hatikoe. Pikiran berpoeter-poeter tijada karoewan...* With hesitation, I have translated it as if there were a serious typing error in the original, i.e., it should really read: ...*Di dalem dada. Lajiknja panas aboenja api, rasa hantjoer...*



"My Little Brother, why do you say nothing in reply? Don't you remember what I said to you just now—don't keep sorrow in your heart?" I was so terribly afraid to let him see the turmoil in my heart that I forced my lips to open, even though I couldn't check their trembling.

"Big Brother mine, yes, maybe it's meant to be just this..." I couldn't go on. My tears started to pour down. I felt that if I didn't do my utmost to control myself, my chest would explode. But because it was so hard, my head fell onto his lap, and I burst into sobs.

"Come now, my Little Brother, it's better that we talk, so that I can take my leave of you in a good way." As he spoke, he lifted my head from his lap, took a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped away my tears until they were dry. "Ah, my Little Brother, I will always be dreaming of your face, which is the drawstring of my heart. Tell me, when we are parted, what will you miss of me?" As he spoke he kept mopping my tears with his handkerchief.

"Big Brother mine, what will be my fate if you leave me? There is no one else who can be the medicine for my fate [*obat nasipkoe*]. Ah ... my fate ... " I said, bursting into tears once again. Immediately he laid his cheek on mine, while his eyes, too, filled with tears.

"Don't think that way, my Little Brother. It is no good, really no good. Listen to me. Truly my eyes cannot leave your face unless I summon all my strength, like a rider dragging back his horse's bit. But if I don't do so, it will bring us more grief in the future. I have been thinking about this for the past month, but I never said a word to you, just kept it to myself. Yet all that time I could not forget the face that grips my heart so tight. But what is the use? I have to develop my capabilities.<sup>52</sup> Maybe we will meet again some future year. My Little Brother, you may think I can leave you without second thoughts. No, never! [As the saying goes] 'Lost to the hand, held in the heart.'<sup>53</sup> I promise I will never forget you, to the end of my life. So calm yourself. Don't cry any more or my heart will also be full of sadness."

"So be it, Big Brother mine, it is my fate that I can only be with you this far," I replied, feeling more calm.

"Everyone knows, my Little Brother, that a man can only feel the feelings of his own heart. God does not give him the power to feel what's in another's heart. So it is that you do not know the true feelings in my heart. It is truly so hard for me to leave behind your face. But how could we go on the way we are? If I did so, I would suffer for it later. So let us both pray to God that we will be fortunate enough to meet again. As I said just now: 'Lost to the hand, held in the heart.' Trust me, believe me, and never think that this is just talk."

While he was speaking, his hands never stopped caressing my thighs. My desire surged up again. Wrapped up in the passion of this desire, I forgot all the sadness that oppressed me. "So this is my last moment of happiness with him," I said to myself.

<sup>52</sup> Soetjipto uses the phrase *menambahi kepandaiankoe*, which could also mean "add to my skills," "increase my knowledge," or "further my education."

<sup>53</sup> *Poetoes di tangan, pegang di hati*. That this is a popular saying is signaled in the text by its insertion within quotation marks.

"Very well then, Big Brother mine, I will do as you say, no matter how hard it is, for only you are the medicine for my fate." As I was speaking, my eyes never left his face. After listening to my words, he kissed my lips.

Without another thought, I undid his sarung, and caressed his...

"This is my last night to hold it," I said to myself as I looked into his eyes. And at that moment, he in turn undid my sarung, as though he wanted to swallow my ... like... So it was that he and I found our satisfaction together. As soon as we came to our senses, I remembered again all the sadness that was oppressing me. He, too, remembered, and said:

"My Little Brother, don't fail to come to Sumberkolak station tomorrow morning. Before nine thirty! So I can see your face once more. Oh, if you have one, can I have a photo of you as a keepsake?"

"It's a pity, but I don't. All I have is one with my mother, my father, and my baby sister. If I gave it to you, there would certainly be trouble," I replied, lost in thought.

"Don't worry. You can always get one made later on and send it to me. But in any case, don't ever forget to write to me," he said, gently caressing the palm of my hand. I didn't reply. All I could think of was what it would be like when he truly left me...

The next morning, well before nine thirty, I was at Sumberkolak station. I didn't have to wait long before he arrived, stepping down from the buggy he shared with his parents. As soon as he caught sight of me, he walked over and shook my hand. "Mother," he said, "this boy here is my friend, whom I love very much." I bowed my head respectfully to his mother.

"Yes, my child, he's going to continue his education at the M.U.L.O. in Malang. Just pray that he studies successfully," said his mother pointing to her son.

"I will, ma'am. May God have mercy on him, so he can study easily, without running into any obstacles. May it also be so with me, your child, who will stay here."

When his mother heard my words and observed my behavior, she asked who my parents were. I answered straightforwardly. For a long time, I chatted with the three of them, each with something to say. And all the while I was chatting with his mother, my eyes never stopped playing with his, and his with mine. What he meant was that I should stop chatting with his mother so we could talk alone together. But it was very difficult, since his mother went on and on, and I had no choice but to keep up with her and respond. Soon afterward, we heard the whistle of the train he was going to take. Then the swirl of its smoke came into view. The train came closer and closer and finally stopped at the station.

"Where's your father?" asked his mother.

"He's talking with the stationmaster," he replied.

"Run and call him! Let's all get on the train," said his mother in a hurry.

Now his parents were already inside the carriage, but he remained on the platform.

"Mamma, keep me a seat. I want to talk with my friend for a few moments," he called to her. "My Little Brother, steel yourself," he said, taking my hand.

"Big Brother mine, don't ever forget me," I said, gazing at his face.

"Never, my Little Brother. I already promised you last night. But, sweetheart," he continued softly, "for now we can no longer extend the tie between us [*menjamboeng tali rasa lagi*]. Last night's kisses, it seems, were our last."

As he spoke, I bowed my head. I was afraid I would break down if I looked at his face. Suddenly the station bell rang three times, signaling that the train was about to depart.

"My Little Brother, look at my face. Let it be the last of me that you see," he said, taking my chin in one hand. When the conductor's whistle sounded, he tightened his grip on my hand till it hurt.

Only after the train had begun to move did he climb on board. Then he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and waved it, while his eyes never left my face. I could see it was the same handkerchief that had first brought us together—in front of the Regent's mansion, when it dropped from my pocket as I took out my penknife. Remembering that moment, my thoughts were in a whirl. But as he went on waving, I took another handkerchief from my pocket and waved it back at him. Not for a second did my eyes leave his face. The train moved off into the distance, and finally disappeared from view. All I could see now was its smoke, coiling up into the air. Only when the smoke, too, had vanished did I stop waving my handkerchief. Then, just as I was about to put it back in my pocket, my heart turned over: I realized that it was the same handkerchief he had used the previous night to wipe away my tears. For a long time I stood there, lost in thought, forgetting completely that I was standing in the railway station.

Ah, handkerchief

There it ended

Here it began ...<sup>54</sup>

After he was gone, my heart was sad both day and night. I always saw his face in my mind's eye. "So this is what it is to be in love. It's hard, so very hard," I would sigh to myself from time to time. Before, I had always been so happy at school. But now my happiness was gone. Every time I saw the big shady tree in the abandoned orchard, the longing in my heart deepened. At home, my sadness was indescribable, especially whenever I encountered the sour face of my stepfather.

My love was not merely a matter of satisfying my desire. He had steadied my tormented heart, increased my knowledge, and healed my spirit, so that I could forget my fate. After he left, I was like a nestling bird abandoned by its parents, cheeping without pause. But because I was a human being, of course I couldn't cheep with my lips, only in my heart, calling out his name over and over again. When I slept and dreamed of him, on waking my heart was always in turmoil. Whenever I went to bed, I always imagined his face before me. When I remembered what had happened between us, my desire was often aroused. Often, too, I could not contain my desire, so I had to satisfy my ... on my own. Only then could I feel restful and fall asleep.

<sup>54</sup> We can now see that this schoolboy romance lasted for longer than seven and a half months, between the first meeting and kiss on September 7, 1923, and the final parting on April 21 or 22, 1924.

Mother would often question me when she noticed how sad I looked. But I always answered that there was a difficult lesson facing me at school. She also often asked why my body had got so thin, and I answered the same way, since I couldn't think of anything better. Mother's face would sometimes show clearly that she didn't believe me, but what was I to do? One night, about three months after he left, I felt I could no longer bear the turmoil in my heart. "*Love*"—how hard it makes one's life. As the days passed, his image came before me more and more. I tried to forget him, but far from succeeding, it made my longing for him still deeper.

When I thought about it rightly, what I was going through was no good. That my stepfather hated me did not matter, for it was just my fate. I had to steel myself this year, as I wanted to complete my studies. But to stay longer at home was no good, for my stepfather's expression was always sour. Yet I couldn't stop wondering: Why was it possible for a boy to fall in love with another boy? ... But since it was so, it meant that love existed in many different forms, no matter whether it was love for a child, a wife, a friend, or anybody at all. However, the source of this love was nothing other than one's own body. So it became clear to me that love was of no use (*tijada bergoena*). Many are the Dutch sayings that show this plainly:<sup>55</sup>

Liefde is vondervol!  
 Liefde is verschrikkelijk!  
 Liefde is zacht!  
 Liefde is brutal!  
 Liefde is wreed!  
 Liefde is heeld!  
 Liefde is vuur!  
 Liefde is ijs!

And there are many other sayings that show how love can strangle those who fall into its toils. For love, many lose all their possessions. In some cases, even their innards leave their bodies.<sup>56</sup> To say nothing of those who spend years and years in prison. And missing all of this because of the treachery of love. There are so many who spend their lives in misery, confusion, and suffering because their path is that of love. So it was clear to me that love was no use. For myself, there was now no room for love, for I had my own medicine (*obat*) for satisfying my desire. Even if I didn't get married, it wouldn't matter ... I'd be like my friend, or the doctor in Kediri.

Of course there were many other ways to suffer. But if my sufferings were like the branches of a tree, this one was the biggest of them all.<sup>57</sup> Now it's over. Such—then—was the feeling in my heart.

<sup>55</sup> "Love is wonderful! Love is terrifying! Love is soft! Love is brutal! Love is cruel! Love is happiness (?)! Love is fire! Love is ice!" I have so far been unable to find *heeld* in a Dutch dictionary, so "happiness" is guesswork.

<sup>56</sup> A strange expression—*sampai ada jang keloevar tah peroet*. Arief Djati suggests to me that the phrase refers to the murderous Madurese institution of *tjarok* where, for revenge or over a woman, a man stabs another in the stomach, so that the victim's guts gush out.

<sup>57</sup> A difficult passage: *misi ada banjak lagi djalan bagai kesoesaan; tetapi oempama ranting pohon, ialah jang sebesar-besarnya*. My thanks to Dalih Sembiring for the translation.