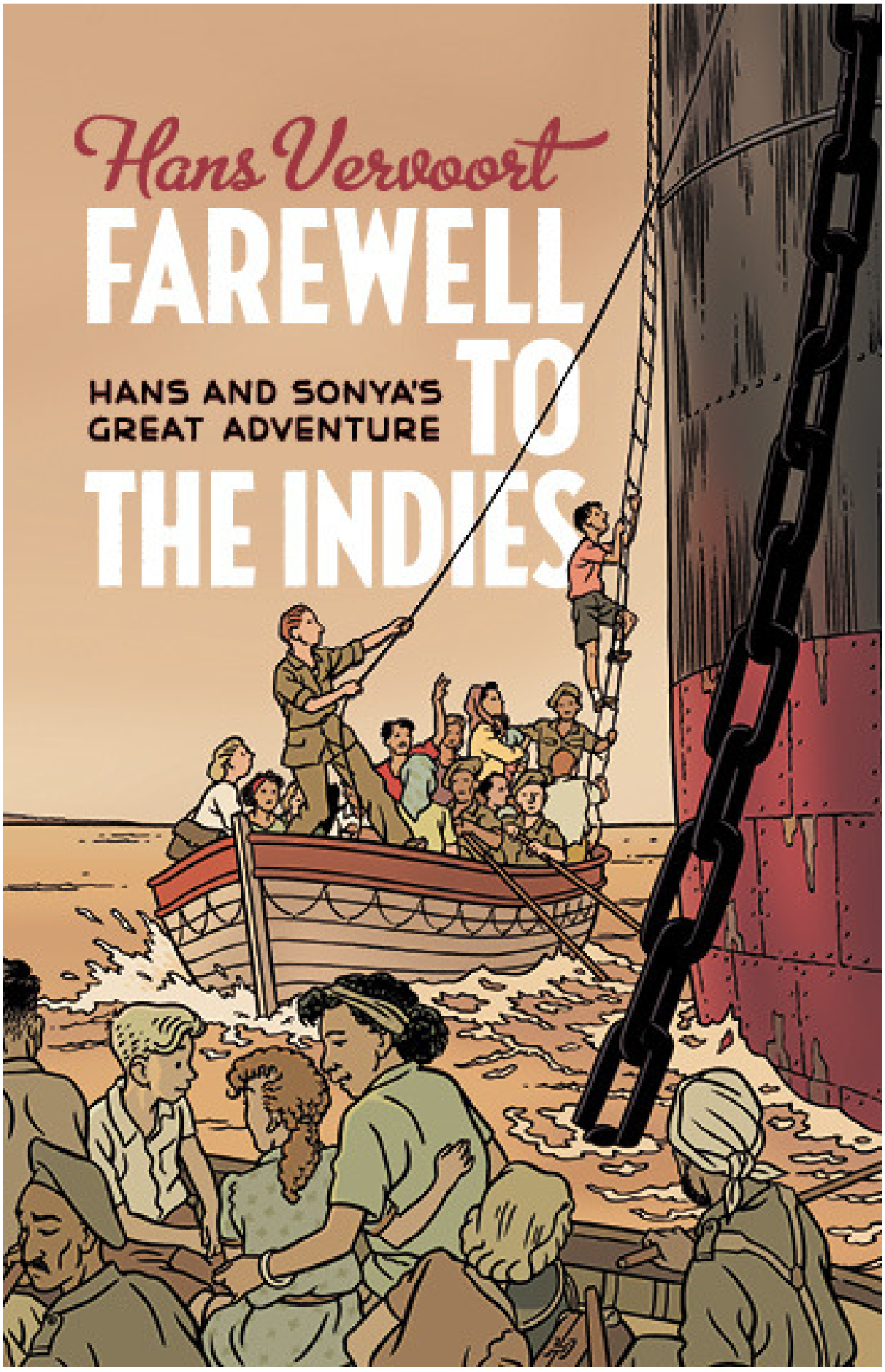
Hans Vervoort
FAREWELL TO THE INDIES
HANS AND SONYA'S GREAT ADVENTURE

FAREWELL TO THE INDIES

Hans and Sonya's Great Adventure

by Hans Vervoort

Translated from the Dutch by Michele Hutchison

For all ages from 10 years upwards.

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For my brother Rob (Magelang 1938 –Ambarawa 1944)

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Chapter 1 – In Which An Airplane Brings A Message And Hans Learns Two Words Of French

The sound, which Hans couldn't place, had been going on for a while already, but he didn't feel like getting up and seeing what it was. The gnawing hunger had left him weak and he had spent the entire morning lying on his bed.

But then Sonya came running in. 'An airplane!' she shouted.

'Under your beds!' Granny Van Soest ordered from a few bunks further up as she groaningly led the way.

'Wait, they're not dropping bombs. They're dropping bits of paper.'

'What?'

Curiosity won out and cautiously, as nervous as cats, they went outside. Granny Van Soest came out from under her bed again. 'Don't go far!' she called out after them.

Outside, a whole crowd of people were already looking up in silence. A small airplane was flying through the sky, a few hundred yards up. You could see the pilot looking down and from time to time a cloud of dust fell from a hatch in the airplane's belly. When it got lower, the cloud of dust turned out to be colourful pieces of paper. There was a gentle breeze, the bits of paper blew past the camp and landed far away. The fencing around the camp made it impossible to see where exactly they landed. No one was tall enough to look over the fence.

The last cloud which fell from the airplane was better placed and Hans saw that some of the pieces of paper landed in the roll call yard. This was an empty bit of ground where the entire camp's population had to stand in long rows to be counted each day. You weren't allowed there outside of roll call. Nobody dared go now because one thing was sure: the Japanese guarding the camp's entrance could see the roll call yard and would come and beat you. But the Japanese were looking up at the airplane nervously and some of them had even raised their guns onto their shoulders to shoot it down. But no shots were fired, they could sense that it was too far away to hit. A waste of bullets. The airplane dipped each of its wings in turn, as though waving to the crowd below.

Hans saw a couple of boys running like the wind along the camp enclosure and picking up a few of the papers in the furthest corner of the roll call yard before disappearing quickly behind the kitchen buildings. It was Harry and Tys, the daredevils of the camp, eleven years old already, a year older than Hans. They had almost disappeared behind the buildings when one of the Japanese guards looked over and shouted. But at the same time Mad Jannie

ran into the yard. She had once been a teacher but had gone mad in the camp. She regularly forgot to greet the Japanese in the proper way, by bowing, and would get a beating or worse. Sometimes she had to stand in the sun for hours. It made her even more crazy.

No one would have dared to openly go out into the yard and get one of those papers, but that didn't stop Mad Jannie.

The Jap sent a help soldier after her with a short command. These were Korean soldiers, employed by the Japanese, but since they weren't completely trusted they didn't have real guns but wooden fakes. Still, they could deal out hard blows with them.

Just a few minutes later, Mad Jannie was on her knees in the sun next to the sentry post and for heaven knows how long.

But she had distracted the Jap long enough for Harry and Tys to escape and very soon everyone in the camp knew what was written on the red, white and blue pieces of paper which had blown down. 'Keep your spirits up. Je Maintiendrai.'

'What is that, je mentiandry?' Hans asked his mother later when visiting her in the sick bay.

Usually he didn't have anything to tell her, so little happened in the camp, but this was Big News and he'd made quite a story of it.

Mother listened with a happy smile, the malaria had made her so terribly thin he dreaded going to see her. But the smile made her look a bit more like the mother he knew.

'It means, "I will stand my ground,"' she said. 'It's French. It's our queen's family motto.'

'Why does our queen speak French?' Hans asked.

'It's an old saying,' his mother said, 'a long time ago all the nobility spoke French to each other. You'll learn it at school later.'

School. Hans knew what it was, he had been to school for almost two years before the war, when he was six and seven, a long time ago. He had learned to read and write and do sums there. But then the war came and the Japanese had forbidden anyone from teaching the children in the camp.

Only Mad Jannie had been allowed to for a while, for the little ones, a nursery class. But that was before she went mad, of course.

Hans had gone to watch once. Around thirty infants were sitting on the floor and Jannie was standing in front of them, conducting as they sang: '*Got lame hands, got lame feet… cannot walk along the street…*' They lifted their legs and flapped their hands as they sang along at the top of their voices. The nursery class was a success. When it got a bit rowdy

he saw Jannie put up her hand and they quietened down at once. The children all started staring at her and Hans didn't have to wait long to find out why. Jannie deftly pulled her top teeth out of her mouth and then her bottom teeth and made the two parts of the set clap together. Tick tick tick you heard, a dry sound.

A couple of children screamed as Jannie advanced forwards, clicking the false teeth.

Her cheeks had sunk in and because she involuntarily moved her own jaw along, it looked as though she was making her teeth go up and down by remote control. Hans found it terrifying and he knew about false teeth. Imagine how frightened the infants were, seeing something like that for the first time!

When he told his mother what he had seen later in the day, she gave him a surprised look.

'That's crazy,' she said, 'I'll put a stop to that.' Before she became sick, Hans's mother had been a determined woman and she told the camp elder that Jannie was frightening the children. That was the end of the nursery class and the beginning of Jannie's increasingly loony behaviour.

When he returned from the sick bay he saw her still kneeling in the burning afternoon sun at the Japanese sentry post.

But Mrs. Anema, the camp elder, was already talking to the guards and she usually managed to get someone being punished set free after a couple of hours. And of course the Japanese had also come to realize that Jannie was as mad as a hatter by now.

Chapter 2 - In Which Hans Remembers How it All Began

Hans could still remember the time before the war very clearly. He stored the images in his mind like snapshots and studied them from time to time in his thoughts.

In the morning you walked to school with your friends. School began at half-past seven and by then the sun was already strong. It finished at half-past twelve, then the children had to go straight home because that was when their hot meal was served. Rice, of course, with always a few different vegetables and kinds of meat. It was called a 'rice table'. After that, Mum and Dad would go to sleep, which was normal in the Indies because it was too hot to do anything in the afternoon. The children were supposed to sleep then too, though they couldn't of course. Staying quiet was enough. Hans always lay on his bed reading or did his homework. By three o'clock in the afternoon everyone was awake and *kokki**[1] Mina would bring tea and something sweet she'd made. Every household in the Indies had a couple of servants to do the laundry and keep the house clean. And a *kokki* for the cooking. The Netherlands was the boss of this territory, that was why it was also known as the Dutch East Indies. You call that a colony: a country with another country as its boss. The Indies were a long way from the Netherlands, in the tropics. Three hundred years ago, Dutch boats had landed there and conquered it. The Dutch lived in stone houses, the native population lived in bamboo huts on the edge of the city or in the countryside. They grew rice there or worked on the Dutch-owned plantations, or they were servants. They called themselves Javanese or Balinese or Madurese after the islands they lived or were born on. The whole of the native population were sometimes referred to as Indonesians. They were smaller than the Dutch, brown-skinned and mainly thin. They smiled a lot and were very helpful.

Hans's family was lucky to have *kokki* Mina because she was a brilliant cook. She always brought a plate of *kwee-kwee* with the afternoon tea. *Kwee-kwee* means biscuits. But they could be made of anything: sweet black rice with coconut sauce, or *kwee talam*, that was a kind of pudding. Or *roti koekoes*, that was a warm, steamed cake. They were all really delicious, the things *kokki* Mina made while everyone slept. Father and mother always thanked her kindly for her trouble and Hans said '*terima kassi*' or 'thank you very much'. Once they'd satisfied their hunger, father and mother usually went to sit on the veranda to read. And Hans hurried off to search for neighbouring friends to play with: marbles, kiting or badminton. Or hide and seek, of course. They were happy times and now that Hans was so hungry in the camp, he often thought back to all those treats. Like the mothers in the camp,

[1] Words in *italics* are explained at the back of the book

who always talked about good food and exchanged recipes. Strangely enough you felt less hungry when you thought about a nice meal. It was one of the reasons Hans still thought about those happy times a lot.

And they had lasted until the news suddenly came that the Netherlands was at war with Germany. There was a war in Europe, a big war. Germany against the rest of Europe and maybe even the rest of the world! The Germans had lost the first world war, a long time ago, and were still very angry about it, Hans's father explained. And they had worked hard for years to get the best weapons and the best-trained army, so that they could take revenge. And now, in 1940, their army was strong enough. They wanted all of Europe and maybe Africa too.

The newspapers were full of it and you heard the news on the radio too. Hans's father listened every day and his face became more and more gloomy. Neighbours dropped round to discuss what was happening in the motherland. The German troops were no joke, half of Rotterdam had been destroyed and they'd occupied the whole of the Netherlands in just a few days. And they were working on Belgium and France too. Only England was too far, there was a sea in the way. The Dutch queen had fled to England with her family. Some neighbours thought they were cowardly to escape, others thought them sensible. From England, they could encourage the Dutch to stay strong. Everyone was happy that the East Indies were so far away, the Germans couldn't get there, even though there were German submarines in every ocean. But a submarine couldn't capture a country. Luckily!

Still, Hans noticed that his parents were worried. Why?

Japan, a country near to the Indies, began to make threatening noises and had allied itself to Germany. Because Japan was an island which had gradually become too full of Japanese. They wanted to capture more ground and for years they had been busy training a large army and building airplanes and warships. Now that Germany was conquering Europe, those countries couldn't protect their colonies because they needed their armies to fight off the Germans. In some places, like in the Netherlands, the armies had already surrendered to the Germans. Now Japan could try to occupy their colonies. The Dutch East Indies was on their list because the Dutch had turned it into a thriving colony and it had a plenty of oil under the ground. Japan really needed oil for its ships and airplanes.

Nevertheless, the people in the Indies weren't really afraid of a Japanese attack.

'My father says those Japs are incredibly squinty-eyed,' Ronnie Eekhof, Hans's best friend at school told him, 'there's no way they can shoot straight.' It could be true, a Japanese photographer lived in the area and Hans had seen how slanted his eyes were.

‘And their tanks are made of tin,’ Ronnie continued, ‘you can dent them by just pushing on them. And their ships sink long before they get here.’

But things turned out differently.

One day, Hans’s father came home in completely different clothes than he normally wore. He had on a green uniform and a helmet. Only his glasses were the same, they had round lenses and black frames. His father always looked a bit surprised, Hans thought, but it could be because of the glasses. His mother ran to his father and kissed him longer than she usually did. They talked in a huddle for a while, so quietly that Hans couldn’t hear anything they said. But at last his father came over to him.

‘Son,’ he said, ‘your father’s going to fight the Japanese. Don’t be afraid, I’ll be back in a few days. And maybe they won’t even land on Java.’

‘Can I have a helmet too?’ Hans asked.

‘Well, ask *kokki* for an iron pan,’ his father said. ‘Listen, Hans, while I’m away, you’re the man of the house. Look after your mother and don’t be difficult or naughty. And listen to her! Do you promise?’

Hans nodded. He went to *kokki* Mina and asked for a *wadjan*. That was a deep, round frying pan with two handles. Mina had several and the smallest fit over his head. With an elastic tied around both handles and under his chin, the *wadjan* stayed firmly on his head, if he walked normally. If he ran, he had to hold onto it with his hand. But it was a helmet, Japanese bullets couldn’t go through it. Japanese bullets just burst apart when they hit metal, Ronnie had told him.

He'd been wearing the pan on his head all day but took it off to say goodbye. His father ruffled his hair. Hans hadn't been keen on kisses for a long time, having his hair ruffled was still just about alright. Afterwards he put the *wadjan* back on his head and solemnly held out his hand to his father. Mother walked along with father and Hans heard her sobbing when he turned around again and waved.

* * *

'Have you heard? The Japanese have landed!' Ronnie cried a few days later. 'Our army lost!' 'Are they dead?' Hans asked. In all the books he read about knights and knaves, the knights fought until they were dead or had killed the others. He didn't dare think his father might be…

'No, they surrendered,' Ronnie said. 'My father said they're cowards. Scaredy cats. If he wasn't so ill, he'd teach those slitty eyes some manners. My father said. But well…'

Ronnie's father had suffered a malaria attack on the day he'd been called up to be a soldier. Hans knew malaria could make you very ill, because everyone in the Indies got it from time to time. It came from the mosquitoes that flew around everywhere and bit you wherever you went. Then something got in your blood and made you sick. Headache, nausea, Hans had already had it.

That was why he found it a bit strange when Ronnie's father was just sitting in the garden reading his paper a day later when Hans went to call on his friend. Was Ronnie's father really ill? But as soon as he saw Hans, he dropped his paper and called out in a weak voice: 'Oh, Hans, could you fetch me a glass of water? I'm trying to read the news about the war, but I can't with this terrible headache.' And when Hans had fetched water for him: 'Could you read out this bit? My eyes hurt.' He was wearing pyjamas and squinted at Hans through screwed-up eyes. Ronnie's father was a small, skinny man with thinning hair. It was hard to believe he had once been a boxing champion, but Ronnie swore it was true.

Hans took the paper and read the front page headline: 'The attack on Java has begun. Enemy in Krawang area. Our army expected to launch counter-attack.'

'Oh,' Ronnie's father said, 'never mind. Old news. The Japanese tanks are already heading our way, to Soerabaja, I heard it on the radio. Go and find Ronnie.'

Hans found Ronnie in the backyard making a catapult. You needed a small stick with a V-shape at the end. A strong piece of elastic fixed around it and you could fire small stones.

'If you go and find some stones, we'll have a weapon against those Japs,' he said.

‘Why stones? I’ve got some marbles,’ Hans said. He was good at playing marbles and had lots of them.

Ronnie looked up. ‘That’s a good idea,’ he said, ‘ but don’t you think it would be a waste of marbles?’

‘Not at all, when you’re ready I’ll go get them.’

A few days later they were sitting behind the wall in the front garden watching the Japanese enter the city.

They walked in two rows behind each another, guns on their shoulders, green uniforms and green caps. The men were short, even shorter than most locals, and *they* were already shorter than the Dutch. A Japanese carrying a flagpole walked up front. The flag was white, with a red ball on it.

The long row stopped, maybe they needed to ask the way. In any case there was some loud shouting and the Japanese soldiers stood at ease.

Some of them yawned, others stretched. They talked amongst themselves, but it sounded more like shouting than talking. It was a hard, ugly language.

They saw a woman who lived a few houses further come outside.

She walked up to the Japanese and asked something.

The soldier bowed slightly and gestured to her: bow!

The woman shrugged and turned around. The soldier remained in his row, but a higher ranking one came along. He stopped the woman and hit her on the face with the back of his hand.

She started screaming and he barked a few words of Japanese at her.

Only once she’d made a slight bow did he let her go.

‘Did you see that?’ Ronnie asked, but Hans didn’t reply. Of course he’d seen.

Ronnie got out his catapult, aimed at the Japanese and strung it.

Hans knocked Ronnie’s hand just in time for the marble to fly over the Japanese and into a tree. You heard a soft tap and then the marble fell down. The Japanese picked it up and put it in his pocket. He looked around but Hans and Ronnie didn’t wait for him to spot them and ducked quickly behind the front garden wall. Ronnie hurriedly hid the catapult in the sand. The din made by the Japanese soldiers was silenced by an order. After that they heard the sound of boots marching and sighed with relief.

‘You’re so stupid!’ Hans cried to Ronnie, ‘what made you aim for that man? Those people have got guns!’

‘You’re right, I didn’t think,’ Ronnie said. He was still pale from the fright.

Chapter 3 – In Which Hans and His Mother Go On A Journey and Make New Friends

The arrival of the Japanese brought changes. They chose a few houses for their soldiers to live in and the families the houses belonged to had to seek shelter wherever they could. They did manage, because everyone wanted other people around them now that nobody knew what was going to happen. All the men had been called up for the army and taken prisoner after the surrender. Hans's mother had no idea where his father was imprisoned, although they had received a letter from him saying simply that he was fine. It was a printed letter and other women in the street received exactly the same from their husbands.

Only the name at the bottom was different. And the address, of course.

In Hans's city, Soerabaja, there were only women and children now and most mothers didn't like the idea of living alone in one of those big houses. There was a risk a Japanese man might come in and not mean well, so two and sometimes three families moved in together and more and more houses stood empty. Ronnie and his mother moved in with Hans and his mother, Ronnie's father had disappeared without a trace. 'Oh, he's got a few friends in the *kampong*,' his wife told Hans's mother, 'from his boxing days. He's going to live with them until the war's over.' The *kampong* was where the local people lived, crowded next to each other in tiny houses made of bamboo. Dutch people didn't go there but Ronnie's father wasn't bothered by that. He was Indo or *Indisch.* These were words for people who had a Dutch father and a native mother. Or the other way round. They weren't as brown as the locals and not as pale as the Dutch, an in-between group. They did have better houses and better jobs, but the Dutch were given the real preferential treatment. Because his father and mother were Indo*,* Hans's friend Ronnie was also Indo and a bit browner than Hans was. Hans had always been a bit jealous of the Indo children in his school class: they were faster and more agile than Dutch cheese-heads like him.

Then a message arrived that everyone who had more than 50% Dutch blood in their veins had to report to be imprisoned in an internment camp. You had to prove that you had a lot of native Indonesian blood if you wanted to avoid it. Darker Indo people could stay in their homes, the Dutch and the lighter-coloured Indo people had to report to the camp.

This was how Ronnie and his mother came to be happy with their darker skins for the first time in their lives. 'If you want, I'll come with you,' Ronnie said bravely to Hans, but when his mother said, 'No question of it,' he didn't protest.

‘Well, no one knows where the best place is now,’ Hans’s mother said, ‘if the Indonesians side with the Japanese, you might be in trouble too. I hope not, of course.’

Hans understood what she meant. Even though he hadn’t done any history at school yet, his father had told him a lot about the colony’s history. He knew that the Netherlands had conquered the East Indies thanks to their fast ships and their canons and guns. You had the island of Java, where Hans and his parents lived – that was the most important island, and next to it, the island of Bali. Apart from that there was Borneo, Sumatra, the Moluccas, hundreds of islands, more than you could name. And all of those islands together made up the Dutch East Indies. The local population resigned themselves to it, it didn’t make much difference to them if they had to obey their own king or the Dutch one.

But now the Japanese had arrived and promised the native population that they’d get their country back, as part of the great Japanese Empire. It would be called Indonesia. The older people, like *kokki* Mina, didn’t believe a word of it, but you never knew, others might. And then they’d want the Indo people’s good jobs and the Dutch would be kicked out of the country completely. Was this the start perhaps?

* * *

Hans and his mother packed their clothes into a suitcase and reported to the railway station. The *baboes* and the *djongos* had already returned to their own *kampong* with tears in their eyes, but *kokki* Mina stayed with them and had brought a *rantang* of food with her, so they wouldn’t go hungry on their journey.

A *rantang* consisted of a few small pans which fitted neatly on top of each other in a holder. That way you could carry an entire meal with the rice, vegetables, meat and a pudding all separate so as not to make a stew.

They were surprised when they arrived at the station: a whole crowd of women and children were standing there ready for departure. But how could they all fit into that small train? It had eight carriages at the most; third class carriages with wooden benches. A few Japanese soldiers were busy getting the crowd into the train.

They were carrying guns with bayonets at the end – a kind of blunt knife, which they poked the women with. One after the other climbed the steps and disappeared inside.

‘*Soedah tjoekoep*,’ (it’s already full) one of them cried finally, before trying to get back down the steps. But the Jap jabbed her in the bottom until she just got back in. Hans

found himself laughing involuntarily, it was so funny to see that fat Dutch lady being jabbed in the bottom.

The soldier's gaze fell on his smiling face and Hans saw the Japanese grow angry: he thought he was laughing at him. The soldier took a few steps towards him and Hans quickly scuttled away to hide in the crowd. From behind the backs of a few nuns deep in discussion, he saw the soldier turn back and carrying on prodding along the women and children.

When it was his and his mother's turn – they were amongst the last – the carriages were already full to bursting. The wooden benches had been occupied first, the next load of mothers and children had settled in the aisle, but when even more people were pushed into the carriages, everyone had had to stand up. Hans and his mother held onto the doorpost and hung half out of the carriage. They had strapped their suitcases to their backs beforehand with a piece of rope *kokki* Mina had managed to conjure up.

The Japanese soldier tried to close the carriage door, but as long as Hans and his mother were hanging out of the opening, he couldn't. Suddenly Hans felt a jab in his bottom and it startled him so much he found the strength to push forwards. And when his mother cried out, he understood she'd been pricked too. At the same time he heard the metallic sound of the door sliding across. They were in.

'Goodness, tinned sardines are better off than this,' Hans's mother said to the woman in front of her. 'Well, look on the bright side. At least we're alive – those sardines aren't,' came the reply.

‘Is that your *kokki*?’ she asked, nodding at the door. Through the window they could see *kokki* Mina arguing with the Japanese soldier and pointing at the *rantang*. It must go with them, it was food for her mistress and Hans.

The Japanese became increasingly impatient and when Mina tried to open the carriage door again, he grabbed the *rantang* out of her hands and threw it along the platform. The pans spilled and as the train slowly began to move, they saw the treats *kokki* Mina had wanted to give them: rice with vegetables and braised meat, and boiled eggs in curry sauce. Hans’s mouth watered. Mina ran alongside them for a few feet and they saw her tearfully calling out something.

It was probably ‘*Selamat djalan*’ – have a good journey.

‘If this is the way they want to curry favour with the locals, the future doesn’t look too dark,’ the woman said and because it looked like they’d be forced to stand next to each other for the whole journey, she and Hans’s mother introduced themselves. ‘I’m Gré Duivendrecht,’ his mother said. ‘Ali Bakker,’ the woman replied. This was how Aunty Al came into Hans’s life, along with her daughter Sonya. Sonya had reddish hair and freckles and she was half a head taller than Hans. Mrs. Bakker had light brown skin and might have been able to stay out of the camp because of her Indo appearance. But Sonya with her pale skin and red hair would have stood out too much outside of the camp, so it was logical for them to report together. Once they’d got used to the carriage, people stowed their luggage in the racks and that gave them a bit more room. There was a bench in the middle of the carriage and with a bit of pushing and shoving, everyone could finally sit down. They sat there, women and children all crammed together, and looked at one another. All the windows had been covered up with paper on the outside and a strange subdued light came in through it. Nobody spoke, the train’s chuck-a-chuck was the only sound you could hear. It was around midday, the hottest part of the day, and after a short ride, the train frequently stopped for long periods. The curtains were closed on the door’s windows too, so no one could see where they were.

Where were they being taken to?

No one could answer the question.

‘How long do you think it will take?’ Hans’s mother asked her new friend.

‘I can’t imagine that they’ll transport us for more than an hour or two in a third-class carriage,’ Ali Bakker said, ‘unless they want to carry us off on stretchers and I can’t see them doing that.’

The thought of those little Japanese men unloading fat white women from the train on stretchers made Hans laugh.

‘Good,’ Ali Bakker said, ‘there’s no such thing as too much laughter. You can call me Aunty Al.’

She politely shook Hans’s hand. In the Indies, you didn’t need to be related to someone to call them uncle or aunty, you could do that as soon as you got to know an older person and liked them. And Hans liked Aunty Al.

It soon got hotter and hotter in the carriage, with the sun blasting down onto the metal roof. Everyone sweated and all the water they had was soon shared out and drunk. They had to arrive in an hour or two, everyone still thought.

But the hours went by. From time to time the train drove on for a bit and then stopped again. And it got hotter and hotter in the carriage. Worse still, because they’d drunk, some of them needed to pee. They found a chamber pot in the corner of the carriage and from time to time you’d see a mother or a child wringing their way through the crowd. The boys could pee standing with their backs to the others. The girls and women held up a sheet while they squatted. Hans was relieved he didn’t have to go, but after a few hours he saw Sonya whisper in her mother’s ear. Then she set off towards the potty.

‘It’s already full, dear,’ said a woman halfway, but Sonya didn’t let this stop her. Hans saw her reach the potty and wonder what to do. Then she looked up.

The train had stopped and there was a high window with a screw opening. The window had been covered but when she reached for the knob and turned it, the pane slid down smoothly, paper and all. Sonya picked up the potty, stood on the bench and resolutely cast the contents outside.

There was swearing and everyone understood at once what had happened: the window opening had attracted a Japanese guard’s attention and he’d been unfortunate enough to get a full load of Dutch pee on his head. Suddenly a bayonet came poking through the window but because it was high up, the short Japanese man could only aim it diagonally upwards where the blade couldn’t touch anyone. Sonya quickly wound the window shut and the bayonet retreated.

‘Oh, oh!’ one of the mothers said, but apart from that, the carriage remained totally silent. They were all frozen with fear. They heard someone walking along outside and fumbling with the carriage door. Then the door was pulled open, a Japanese face appeared for a fraction of a second, then the door was quickly closed again.

Ali Bakker began to laugh. She held her hand in front of her mouth to make sure no one outside would hear. Tears trickled down her cheeks. Hans’s mother couldn’t control herself either.

‘Did you see his face?’ Aunty Al said once she’d got her laughter in check, and Hans’s mother nodded. The others in the carriage gave them a questioning look.

‘He pulled a dirty face because of the smell,’ Aunty Al said, ‘we stink so badly, the lot of us, he didn’t dare come in.’

But they didn’t feel safe again until the train had set off and it wasn’t until then that Sonya dared to pee behind the sheet.

The journey lasted ten hours in total. Then the train stopped in what must be a station. You could hear people talking outside and shouting orders.

It still took another half-hour for their carriage to be opened. ‘*Lekas, lekas*!’ the Japanese soldier shouted as he opened the door with a look of disgust. It was the first word spoken by a Japanese that they’d understood. It was Malay, the language the locals spoke, and it meant: quick, quick!

It seemed to be the only Malay word he knew, because he kept on shouting it, despite the ‘*plan-plan*’ (take it easy) that the mothers called back while looking for their suitcases.

Hans and his mother were the first out of the door, together with Aunty Al and Sonya, and so they were the first on the station platform. Where were they?

‘Pandakan,’ Aunty Al said. That was a big city, Hans knew from the big map in his school classroom. It must be nearly 200 miles from Soerabaja.

The platform was packed with mothers and children from carriages which had been opened before theirs. Everyone looked tired and crumpled. Here and there, a small child was crying.

But the orders from the Japanese soldiers and officers were louder than anything. No one had a clue what they were shouting. They felt like sheep, herded together by barking dogs.

Where did the Japanese want them to go?

One woman was brave enough to go up to a soldier and ask, ‘This way? Or that way?’, pointing to either end of the platform. The Japanese understood and pointed.

‘That way,’ the woman called out, indicating where they should go. The procession slowly set off.

‘That’s Mrs. Anema,’ Hans heard Aunty Al say to his mother, ‘the mayor’s wife. Big woman.’ Hans laughed, he looked at Mrs. Anema’s rear and saw how fat she was.

‘No, that’s not what I meant, Hans,’ Aunty Al said, ‘even though she could lose a few pounds. The camp will be useful for one thing, at least. We won’t exactly get fattened up there.’

On the way, they saw a few railway employees in uniforms. The white railway personnel were already long imprisoned, but a few Indo civil servants were still working. They looked at the passing crowd of women and children and one of them greeted them by tipping his cap. A passing Japanese soldier who saw it, hit the man with his rifle butt and they saw blood appear on his nose and mouth. He disappeared quickly into the office.

'There's manners for you,' Aunty Al said drily.

Soon they were outside the station and there, on the station square, a number of trucks were waiting, their tailboards down. They were open trucks, without roofs.

'*Lekas, lekas*,' the Japanese yelled and now it was clear what the intention was: they wanted to cram as many women and children as possible into the trucks.

It took some time, but finally the trucks were loaded, the tailgates were raised and no one could move an inch. 'Children on the outside,' someone had shouted in the truck where Hans and his mother and Aunty Al and Sonya found themselves. And so Hans and Sonya stood next to each other at the front, without anything to hold onto. The vehicle set off and Hans felt the wind blowing through his hair and over his cheeks. Lovely. Next to him, Sonya's red hair was streaming merrily in the wind and they smiled at each other. Going on a ride like this was always a treat, however worn out they were. The trucks drove after each other in single file and that meant they couldn't keep to a continuous speed, but kept speeding up and braking to keep up with the others. At every bend, the first truck braked and then the second hit the brake a little sooner, and the third driver even sooner, and then the last truck had to brake sharply not to bump into the one in front. And Hans and his mother were in the last truck. The first time it braked, Hans felt the breath being crushed out of his body. The full weight of the thirty or forty people standing behind him and Sonya was pushed forwards, flattening them.

His mother, who was standing behind him, reached out her arms and pushed as hard as she could against the front, but she wasn't strong enough. The weight of the throng didn't swing backwards again until the truck accelerated. Relieved, Hans breathed in as deeply as he could and suddenly felt Sonya poking his side.

'What happened? she asked, 'I'm frightened.' It was the first time she had addressed him directly. 'We need to think of something,' Hans's mother said, behind him and at the same time he heard Aunty Al shouting out, 'Let me through.'

She was standing a few rows behind them, but pushed and shoved her way towards her daughter. She spoke to Hans's mother briefly and both mothers stuck their arms out with their hands against the front of the truck. And when the truck braked sharply again, that seemed a

good solution. By holding their arms completely straight they could hold back quite a lot of weight and so Hans and Sonya were protected by their mothers. Only the bends were difficult because then they all slid to the left or the right. 'I'll hold onto you,' Hans said to Sonya, wrapping his right arm around her waist. That way they stood on four legs which was a bit more stable than two each. The journey went on and on and though it was nice to be in the fresh air after the long train ride, some of them found it difficult to stay standing for so long. Two women fainted and lay on the base of the truck, a few others straddled them to prevent them from being trampled. But luckily, after two hours of driving, the trucks stopped and the sound of incomprehensible Japanese orders rang out again. And yes, once again it turned into '*Lekas, lekas*.'

Not long afterward they were stretching their wobbly legs on dusty red soil. 'Ambangan,' someone said, 'I recognize it.'

'Ambangan?' another asked, 'we could have got there by train though. There's a rail link from Pandakan.'

'The rails must be broken again. Or there's no staff left.'

It was six in the afternoon and night fell like a brick. Within fifteen minutes it was dark.

'I've heard we're going to an army camp,' Aunty Al said as she trudged along after the others in the dark. Hans didn't know where she could have heard that, maybe Aunty Al had bionic ears which allowed her to hear what was being said miles away. In *Bollie's Wide World,* one of the books he'd had to leave behind in Soerabaja, Frikkie, Bollie's dog, could prick up his ears and hear approaching wild boar from miles away. Then he would let out a gentle howl of warning, giving Bollie time to get out his gun and shoot the animal dead. That was the only thing people could do with wild boar, otherwise they'd attack you and wild boar could weigh up to 220 pounds!

Maybe Aunty Al had very acute hearing like that. He looked up furtively but it was too dark to see whether her ears were pricked. He did feel her hand ruffling his hair. 'Don't be afraid, Hans, nothing will happen to you as long as your mother and I are looking after you. Sonya, hold Hans's hand, then you won't bump into each other.' Soon Hans felt Sonya's warm hand in his own. It was a bit childish to walk along hand in hand like that, but it was dark so no one could see. They went through a gate where a Japanese soldier was standing in a sentry box, a rifle at his feet. And a little while later they could see houses by the light of weak lamps. No, not real houses, they were too long for that.

‘Barracks,’ Aunty Al said. They heard Mrs. Anema’s voice crying out about above the din, ‘Everyone to barrack 4! Follow me.’ The procession set off and they walked along a path past three barracks. On the front of each barrack, there was a decked walkway, a kind of access gallery, like many Indonesian houses had. Here and there, a small lamp hung from the ceiling and they saw women and children appear on the galleries. They had arrived earlier. They were scruffy and thin and observed the newcomers without smiling or waving.

‘Oh Lord, what a load of down-and-outers,’ Hans heard his mother say in a shocked voice.

‘Looks like they had very little time to pack anything,’ Aunty Al replied. ‘Just the clothes on their backs, by the looks of it. We’re better off, with our suitcases.’

The procession stopped at the fourth barrack and they went inside. A long row of beds lay waiting and by every bed there was a metal cupboard. There wasn’t anything else, no chairs, no tables. Only the beds and the cupboards. As soon as someone caught on, people began running to get a good place.

‘The four of us next to each other,’ Aunty Al said, ‘ and next to a door.’

She determinedly walked to where there were still three adjacent beds free and spoke to the woman who had taken the fourth. She pointed out that if she moved up a bed with her daughter, the four of them could be together. Hans saw Aunty Al get a packet of cigarettes out of her dress and give it to the woman. She gestured for her daughter and moved up a bed. ‘There we are,’ Aunty Al said happily, ‘see what a packet of cigarettes can do. I’ll be sorry later, but we’ve got a place. And next to the door!’

This was important in the Indies because the closer you were to the door the more chance you had of getting a bit of a cool breeze during the afternoon heat.

‘I think, the mothers on the outside and the children in the middle,’ Hans’s mother said and Aunty Al nodded. They plumped up the *bultzakken* on the beds. The mattresses in the Indies were filled with *kapok* and every time you’d slept on them there was a dip that you had to beat out.

These *bultzak* mattresses looked like people had slept on them without bothering to beat them out afterwards.

‘There must have been Dutch soldiers here,’ Aunty Al said. ‘Maybe even our husbands before they went to fight the Japanese. And now they’re god knows where, locked up. And maybe even—’

She stopped in time but everyone knew what she had wanted to say: maybe Hans’s and Sonya’s fathers were dead.

Now that they'd finally arrived somewhere, Hans realized how tired he really was. And how hungry. The last time he'd eaten had been early in the morning. Briefly he thought about the *rantang* which *kokki* Minna had tried to give them and which the Japanese soldier had thrown on the ground. His mouth watered. But tiredness won out and he lay down on the *bultzak*. In the distance he could hear his mother and Aunty Al talking, but before he knew what was happening he'd fallen asleep.

Chapter 4 - In Which Hans And Sonya Explore The Camp And Learn To Bow

The next day began with confusion because no one knew where they'd actually ended up.

Hans woke up and saw that he was in a long warehouse with endless rows of beds next to each other. It looked like a hospital. But Aunty Al said, 'This is a typical military barracks. A cupboard for your things, a bed to sleep in and a *koersi malas* outside in the gallery. Only the *koersi malas* have been taken away, we're not supposed to laze about.'

A *koersi malas* was a lounging chair, Hans knew. The kind of chair your mother and father sat in on the veranda while watching the sun set. The barracks did have a covered gallery along the whole length but it was completely empty. The girls would be happy with it because they'd be able to play jacks on the smooth tiles. That was a girls' game.

His mother held out a bowl of rice to him – breakfast. A little *sambal* had been added for flavour. It was the first food he'd had since the previous morning and he ate it with relish. The weak feeling in his legs disappeared.

'There's a trench latrine a bit further up,' Hans's mother said with a disgusted expression. 'I've been and it already stinks quite badly.'

'But I do need to go,' Hans said. And Sonya: 'Me too actually.

'I want to give it a try too,' Aunty Al said and the three of them set off.

'At the end of that short path,' Hans's mother called after them and indicated that they should walk to the end of the barracks and turn left.

And indeed, they found a row of cabins with half doors. They looked the most like the changing cabins you got at public swimming pools. But when they got closer they could smell that these weren't pool cabins. When Aunty Al tried to open a door, it was held shut from the other side. 'Engaged,' came the anxious response.

The next door opened: they peered into an empty cabin with a ditch running under it. Just in front of the ditch, there were two stone footsteps and it was clear what you had to do: you stood on the two stones, hung with your bottom over the ditch and did your business.

'At least it's flowing through properly,' Aunty Al said. 'But something's missing.'

'The *botol tjebok*,' Sonya said. In the Indies they didn't use toilet paper, you poured a bottle of water over your bottom and used your left hand to clean the poo off instead. No one offered anything to anyone else with their left hand there because it was considered 'impure' – dirty.

The bottle of water was called a *botol tjebok*. And it wasn't in the cabin. They walked past the cabins and saw a tap at the end with empty bottles under it.

'Oh, so that's how it works.' Aunty Al was relieved. 'Children, fill a bottle with water and look for an empty cabin.'

Not long afterwards, Hans was squatting with his bottom over the ditch. He was shocked when he saw a few turds float past from a cabin further up. 'I don't actually need to go that badly,' he decided, peed and quickly did up his trousers again. He was the first to finish and left the full bottle behind.

A while later, the three of them explored the camp. It comprised of ten barracks, the first four of which were now filled with mothers and children. A long, wide road connected the barracks and soon they heard what this was called: The Main Road.

The camp was screened from the outside world by a barbed wire fence. There were mountain slopes on all sides; the camp lay in a valley between the mountains.

They went past a kitchen which exuded a delicious smell of cooked rice and stewed meat. Hans heard his stomach rumble and they looked inside and saw a couple of Indonesian cooks stirring big pots and pans.

'Watch out!' they heard someone cry.

A woman in shorts and a tattered blouse hurried over to them in sandals. 'You're not allowed inside, it's forbidden,' she said. 'That's the Japanese's kitchen. We have to be grateful for a bowl of rice. Without meat in it. Our kitchen is there.' She pointed to another building.

She looked thin and ill-fed and walked along with them.

'Where are you from?' Aunty Al asked.

'Magelang,' she said, 'just near here. We've been here for a month now and as long as you have some money or jewelry you can buy food on the side. But I was unlucky, I happened to come along just when they were picking up the women and children and was made to tag along. I only had the clothes on my back.'

She looked longingly at their clean clothes.

'Come with me,' Aunty Al said, 'I've got some spares.'

'Typical of my mother,' Sonya said as the two women walked to barrack 4 and she and Hans explored the rest of the camp. 'She'd give away her last penny if somebody needed it.' But she sounded more proud than annoyed.

Apart from the barracks and the trench latrine, they found a washing area where a few women were busy scrubbing clothes. And in front of one of the barracks, a girl was boiling a pan of water on an *arangstel*.

Arang are small coals you can light and make glow by blowing or waving a *kipas* (a fan). They were mainly used in the Indies to grill meat, not to heat pans, people usually had an oil burner for that. This girl was doing her best, she was waving the *kipas* and blowing at the same time, but she didn't have enough coals to boil her water. 'Put a lid on it,' Sonya said to her.

'Aint got one,' the girl replied, 'we've only got a pan. The lid was stolen when I went inside for a minute,'

'Who would steal a lid?' Hans said.

'Who do you think?' the girl asked. She look up hostilely. 'Someone with a lidless pan of course!'

'Is it nearly ready, Wanda?' a woman called from the barrack.

'Almost, mum,' she called back.

Sonya and Hans left her to her impossible task and carried on. They came across a large open field which was empty. It was a grassy field, but the grass had been trodden down, as though it had been walked or run on a lot.

'What could this be for?' Hans asked.

'Parking maybe,' Sonya said.

They found out the right answer a few minutes later. A bell rang and suddenly the whole camp came to life. They stared in amazement at the crowds rushing past them. Someone saw their astonished gaze and called out, 'roll call, roll call.'

But Hans and Sonya had never heard those words before. They understood that something was going on and ran quickly back to barrack 4 where Aunty Al and Hans's mother were waiting for them with worried faces.

'We've just heard we need to go to the roll call grounds. A big field.'

'Oh, we know where that is!' Hans said.

They ran on ahead and joined the masses on the grounds.

Hundreds of women and children were already there and had formed a long queue.

'Barrack 4 here,' they heard someone call and yes, Mrs. Anema had taken charge again. There were already three rows lined up from the first three barracks, but barrack 4 had to form a separate row, at right angles to the others. They were the newcomers, Hans thought, that must be the reason they had to stand apart.

A uniformed Japanese stood on a crate in the middle of the square, waiting for everyone to line up. Next to him, standing on the ground, was an older Japanese not wearing a uniform but shorts and a short-sleeved white shirt. The Japanese soldier shouted a Japanese word and the man next to him called, '*Diam! Diam!*''

They knew this word, it was Malay for 'Silence!'

And there was silence. Hans had never experienced a silence like it. Wherever you were in the Indies, you always heard something: a dog barking, a cock crowing, a bicycle bell, a car horn. But the camp was in a quiet valley and Hans heard later that day that Indonesians were not allowed to come near it. At night they did and secret trading went on over the fence, between the camp's inhabitants and the local villagers: chicken's eggs in exchange for clothing. But during the day, the outside world avoided the camp. That was why it was so spookily quiet.

The Japanese officer gave a speech which was translated into Malay, line by line, by the Japanese man next to him. Hans didn't understand everything but understood they had to be grateful that the Japanese emperor in his infinite goodness had accommodated the worthless white people they had conquered in this camp. If they correctly followed orders nothing would happen to them.

Once he'd finished, the officer stepped down from his crate and walked away, his hand on his sword. Another Japanese climbed onto the crate now and shouted something that sounded like, '*Keirei*!'

The Japanese interpreter bowed. And Hans saw the row of women and children from the three other barracks bow too, as low as they could without falling over.

Hesitantly, barrack 4 followed. One after the other bowed, but a few women remained upright. The Japanese got down from his crate and marched angrily to the row for barrack 4. '*Keirei*!' he shouted again and they heard the interpreter in the distance crying, 'Bow!' This time in Dutch. From his bent-over position, Hans couldn't see whether everyone from barrack 4 was now doing it, but he saw the Japanese's boots march past him and heard a clap and a cry from Mrs. Anema who was standing at the end of their row and had been hit. A female voice called out from the other side: 'Bow, otherwise we'll be here for hours!'

The Japanese shouted something angrily in her direction, but he couldn't have seen who had called out. Nevertheless, thanks to her warning, barrack 4 now bowed properly and the Japanese marched back to his crate.

After waiting for what seemed like forever, they heard him cry, '*Naoré*.'

‘Get up,’ the interpreter called. Japanese people couldn’t pronounce the R, Hans’s friend Ronnie had told him before they parted, but that story about the Japanese turned out to be untrue as well.

The Japanese soldier shouted something else and again there was a translation, ‘Count.’

And then something amazing happened.

A litany of Japanese words began at barrack 1, to their left. The mother furthest to the left called out, ‘*Ietsjie*.’ The small girl next to her screamed as loudly as she could, ‘*Ni*.’

One after the other, they called out.

‘What are they doing?’ Hans heard his mother whisper to Aunty Al.

‘I think they’re counting to ten,’ she whispered back, ‘look, that Jap has got an abacus he’s keeping count on. Every time they’ve counted to ten, he moves a bead along the abacus.’

They didn’t have time to observe the scene any further because barrack 4 was marched off down the Main Road to their own barrack, where Mrs. Anema spoke to the Japanese in civvies and then called out, ‘Listen!’

They stood in a neat row facing the barrack and longed for the shade of the gallery and the coolness of the tiles. It was no fun standing there on the red sand while the sun beat down harder and harder on your head.

‘The camp commander has said we have to learn the orders and to count in Japanese!’ she cried out. ‘If everyone does their very best, it won’t take too long.’

But the sun was at its highest when finally, after endless practice, they had it down pat. Sweat was streaming down the Japanese interpreter’s cheeks too, but he had continued to repeat the Japanese words until they knew them. They had learned to bow and had to do that for every Japanese from now on. And they could count to ten in Japanese.

‘Keep on practicing,’ Mrs. Anema called out before issuing the command that meant they were dismissed and could stand wherever they wanted, ‘if it goes wrong tomorrow, I’ll be the one who gets hit.’

‘She won’t feel a thing through that blubber,’ Hans heard Aunty Al muttering to his mother, but in the afternoon and evening they checked if Sonya and Hans still knew the numbers: *ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, kyu, jyu*. Or: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Chapter 5 - In Which Sonya Puts A Curse on Someone

After a few weeks they were used to life in the camp. Every day, new groups of woman and children had arrived and now all ten barracks were full.

'Three thousand women and children,' Aunty Al said, 'in a space that's 700 feet across and 1,500 feet deep! You can't move an inch!'

It wasn't that bad, Hans thought. The camp was full, but it was nice to have so many people around. Wherever you went, children were playing. Some had brought jacks with them and sat on the tiles playing with them, others were playing cards. Everywhere you looked you saw hopscotch lines traced into the red earth, until the Japs forbade it and ordered the camp to sweep the dirt twice a day. This was a chore they took turns to do. There weren't any brooms in the camp, but they did have *sapoelidis*, palm sticks bound together.

You could get the earth nice and smooth with them, although you did see the stripes left by the sticks. They made a swish-swish sound that Hans liked to hear and he was always happy when it was his turn to sweep the dirt in front of barrack 4.

From time to time, he walked around the camp, you saw mothers and children hanging up the washing, water being boiled or games of tag. Next to the field where the roll calls were held, which they called the *Lido*, there was a large tree, a *waringin* with aerial roots which hung down from its branches.

A short distance from the tree there was an old, broken-down army vehicle.

This was the place where lots of children came to play. There was always a long queue waiting to swing on the *waringin* roots. There was another long queue by the army vehicle. Harry and Tys were in charge, everyone understood that: you could only climb onto the jeep if they said so.

Harry was a dark Indo boy, but because his mother was white, they'd ended up in the camp together. Harry was tall but also thin. He might not be very strong, but if he threw a child to the floor or hit him, it all happened so fast, you didn't know what you'd seen. Hans had seen him do it several times and tried to give him a wide berth. Tys was blond and broad and looked quite friendly at first. His mouth smiled, but if you came closer, you saw he had small, mean blue eyes which stared at you. In fact everyone was afraid of those two, maybe even their mothers.

When they'd first arrived at the camp, Hans and Sonya had queued to have a go in the jeep. The best place was behind the wheel, then you could go broom-broom-broom and pretend to drive and take a bend. But sitting in the back or in the passenger seat was fun too,

then you leaned to the left or the right as the jeep turned. All the children remembered what it used to be like before they were in the camp. Going in a car or a bus was always an adventure. And here, when it was your turn, you could briefly enjoy the memory.

Usually Harry and Tys sat in the front and you were only allowed in the back, but this time they were letting other children sit at the wheel.

When Hans and Sonya got to the front, Harry suddenly said, 'No women at the wheel. Women can't drive.'

He blocked Sonya with his arm just as she was about to get into the vehicle.

They hadn't noticed, but there were only boys in the queue for the steering wheel. 'Oh, but it's my turn,' Hans heard her say and she sounded very disappointed.

'Go to the back again, maybe next time round,' Harry said. Sonya obediently turned around and let Hans take his turn. Hans was allowed to get straight in, but it didn't feel right somehow. Wasn't it Sonya's turn?

'Watch it, *blauwe*' he suddenly heard himself say. *Blauwe* was a bad Dutch word for *Indo* people, and his mother had forbidden him to use it. Even when they called him a cheese-head. And Sonya was Indo too for that matter. But he'd struggled to think of any other swearword and it had just popped out. Harry gasped and before Hans knew it, Harry had him in a stranglehold on the ground.

'*Minta ampoen*!' Harry shouted, 'ask for forgiveness.' He sat on Hans's tummy, his knees on Hans's arms and he clutched Hans by the throat.

'Chch,' was the only sound he could make. If he lifted up his legs he could pummel Harry on the back, but that didn't help. And then everything happened at once. Sonya grabbed Harry from behind, put her hands around his throat and pulled him off Hans. 'Run,' she cried and shot off. She was bigger and faster than Hans and he could hear Harry's footsteps behind him when suddenly Sonya stopped and spun around.

She held up her hands to Harry, who stopped in surprise too. Tys came running up behind him, but paused when he reached Harry's side.

'Abracadabra...,' Sonya called out, 'waroom saroom handsoon.' Waving her hands, she raised them in the air and then continued in a threatening tone: 'The evil eye will be on you.'

'What's this?' Tys asked. 'What evil eye?'

Sonya let her hands drop and said in a normal voice, 'Don't bother me now, you booby. I'm busy putting a curse on you.' She raised her hands again and started afresh.

'Abracadabra…'

‘Nonsense,’ Harry said.

‘Oh yeah?’ Sonya asked. ‘Wait and see what happens when I put a curse on you.’

Hans saw that Harry was unnerved. The way she was standing there, her legs spread, her red hair and pale face and her hands flapping upwards, Sonya did look a bit scary. Tys was awe-struck too.

‘Oh, let them go, those two,’ he said. He turned around and walked back to the jeep. Harry hesitated but finally shrugged and set off back too.

Sonya and Hans walked to their barrack in silence, too excited to say anything. They had won, but they knew they’d never queue for the jeep again. You could fob off Harry and Tys once, but it wouldn’t work a second time. When they were lying on their beds in the barrack and Hans thought back to what had happened and pictured the surprised but rather frightened faces of Harry and Tys, he began to laugh.

‘What are you laughing at?’ Sonya asked.

‘That Harry!’ Hans giggled. ‘What evil eye? He said. And then you said, don’t bother me now, you booby. Hahaha!’

And Sonya couldn’t help laughing too.

Chapter 6 - In Which A Radio Is Found And A Bullet Shot Into The Ground

The camp had become a small village in which everyone knew their neighbours. It was no wonder, because now that 3,000 mothers and children lived there, all the personal space each of them had was his bed and the small space next to it. Thanks to the transparent *klamboes* hanging above every bed to keep away the mosquitoes and the flies, you could still feel like you were in your own hidey hole. But everyone could see you and you could see what the others were up to at least ten beds away.

Everyone knew everything about each other and you knew the others' snores and coughs. Granny Van Soest, five beds away, made the most noise at night. If she wasn't snoring she was grinding her teeth. If she was awake she complained about the heat and asked whether someone would fetch her some water.

She repeated it until someone finally called back, 'I'll go then.' Usually it was Aunty Al, sometimes Hans's mother. You heard them getting out of bed, bumping into a table or chair in the dark. 'Bother,' you heard when it was Hans's mother. 'Dammit' when it was Aunty Al.

Dammit was the same as 'boy oh boy' Aunty Al had explained when Hans asked about it. But when Hans said it when he hurt himself, his mother became cross with him. 'Hans, you can't say that.'

'But Aunty Al says it!'

'Aunty Al isn't a child anymore.'

Well, you see, a child could never win against his mother. When Granny Van Soest finally got her glass of water after all the blundering and cursing, she never said 'Thank you' but 'What took you so long?'

'Yes, boss,' you'd hear Aunty Al or Hans's mother say then peevishly, before finding their beds again in the dark.

After eight o'clock, the lights had to go out, because it was still wartime and the Japs wanted to make sure the enemy planes couldn't see anything of the camp.

Hans sometimes imagined what would happen if the camp was discovered. Maybe parachutists would jump out of the planes, lock up the Japanese guards and then have a party with all the mothers and children in the camp. Or would there be a big fight first with lots of shooting? And Hans, he was sure of this, would pull his mother to safety just before a bullet

hit her. He could hardly wait for this to happen so that he could become a real hero. Luckily the camp buzzed with rumours about the war every day. There was a radio in the camp, Mrs. Paumen's from barrack 3. She listened to the news on the radio and passed on what she heard. Everyone knew about it, except the Japs.

Until barrack 3 got inspected, that was. The camp commander turned up along with some soldiers who opened all the cupboards and threw their contents on the floor. They were looking for money, which was supposed to have been handed in, but everyone had kept a little back for the trading at night. The trading was called '*gedekken': gedek* was the word for the woven bamboo panels enclosing the camp, next to the barbed wire fence.

In the evening, you could try to trade with the locals standing on the outside of the fence with eggs, sometimes a whole chicken. If the Japanese caught you, you were punished.

Each barrack inspection yielded a bit of money for the camp commander, but this time a small radio fell onto the floor.

'Have you heard? Mrs. Paumen got caught!'

There was a punishment lock-up next to the guardroom, where mothers who had done something wrong were beaten and, if they fell down, kicked as well. After that they had to stand in the sun with their arms in the air, or they were shut in the red-hot shed next to the guardroom without food or water. The camp doctor or the barrack elder would go to the camp commander and ask for '*ampoen'*, that was 'forgiveness' for whatever the person being punished had done. And sometimes the commander would take pity and let the woman return to the barrack a few hours later. But if they had bad luck, he would get angry and the doctor

or the barrack elder would get hit. Then it could be a whole day before he ended the punishment. The women who returned to their barracks were looked after by their neighbours as well as they could, but sometimes it took them months to recover. And sometimes they were never themselves again, like Mad Jannie, the teacher who clapped her false teeth when her class was rowdy.

What would Mrs. Paumen have to endure now the radio had been discovered?

The camp buzzed with rumours. Her ears had been cut off, her tongue pulled out, she'd been made to eat the radio, bit by bit.

A day later, Hans and Sonya were standing by the guardroom when Mrs. Paumen and her daughter, Miriam, were taken away in the back of a jeep. You could see their faces had been badly beaten, but they smiled bravely to the camp fellows who witnessed their departure. Miriam even waved, until the driver reached back and hit her.

'We won't see them again,' one of the mothers who was standing watching with Hans and Sonya said.

'Yes, there'll be a trial and listening to a radio is a deadly sin,' another agreed.

Hans felt shivers running down his spine. The Japanese killed people with swords. They chopped their heads off. He mustn't think about it!

He had once seen somebody cutting a head off a chicken and the chicken had kept on running in circles for a while. Without its head! Terrifying. Would a person do that too?

'Gah, stop it,' Sonya said when he asked her, 'I don't want to hear it.' She clapped her hands over her ears. Even though she was stronger than him and could run faster, Sonya was still a girl. They couldn't cope with blood and guts.

Luckily, Mrs. Paumen and her daughter returned after a month. Prison had been hard and they were very thin and pale. But their trial hadn't gone ahead and they didn't know why. Then all of a sudden they'd been sent back to Bandangan.

Hans was happy for them, although these were the events that kept things lively. It was usually very boring in the camp. Roll call every morning, then a small bite to eat, then nothing for a long time, then a little bit more food and then more hunger until bedtime. Everyone had his place and no one dared do anything forbidden.

But there was one time when something did happen.

Outside of the camp there was a pond and if you climbed on someone's shoulders and looked over the *gedek*, you sometimes saw Japanese fishing in it. And when Harry was standing on his friend Tys's shoulders once, a Japanese soldier saw him looking and threw

him a fish he'd caught. They paraded around the whole camp with that fish before giving it to the nurse in the sickbay.

Hans had followed them and heard Harry say to the nurse rather pompously, 'I do hope you'll all enjoy this.' The nurse gave the small fish he'd laid in her hand a surprised look and replied, 'We'll do our best.'

Watching the pond in the afternoons became the custom for the big boys after that, you never knew if you might be thrown a fish. Girls joined in too. They carried a few chairs to the *gedek* and stood on them. Then they could just see over the fence.

But the soldiers didn't throw any more fish, they kept everything they caught for themselves. And one afternoon they got annoyed with the girls who kept calling out '*Minta ikan*' (Give me a fish, please).
'*Pigi'* they shouted back. It was supposed to be '*pergi'* (go away!) but the Japanese weren't that accurate with the language. Mrs. Tjakkes from barrack 5 told Aunty Al the story later that day.

'I was hanging out the washing and saw the girls fooling around there. I heard the Japs shouting '*pigi, pigi'* but the girls just ignored them and carried on having a laugh. Then I saw a stick flying over the fence. One of the girls, Maud Götz van der Vet, caught the stick and shouted back, '*Terima kassi banjak'* (thank you very much). I heard the Jap screaming and shortly after that a jeep roared into the camp. A small, fat Jap jumped out, ran to the fence and hit every woman he met on the way in the face. The girls didn't wait of course but ran away at once. He chased them, but couldn't catch up…'

She lapsed into silence and shook her head. 'Those little tykes… tykesses, I should say.'

She took a sip of water.

'Well?' Sonya asked. When Aunty Al realized that Sonya and Hans had their ears peeled, she said, 'This isn't a story for children. Go and play outside, kids.'

Obediently, they went outside. They already knew the rest of the story because Hans and Sonya had heard a racket and had hurried to the guardroom, like many other children. They saw Mrs. Anema standing there with an angry Japanese. Mrs. Anema was the camp leader by then and that meant that the Japs called on her to take responsibility for all kinds of things. Hans could still picture her as she'd entered the camp: red cheeks and her fat body in a flowery dress. The dress hung off her now, she had become thin and her cheeks were yellow from the malaria. But everyone admired the way she held her ground against the Japs.

This Japanese was a deputy commander. He was a short man but looked dangerous. You could see he was angry. '*Dimana ada nona*?' (where is that girl?) he roared and she answered tersely, '*Tidah tau'* (I don't know). He hit her in the face but Mrs. Anema was used to this by now and moved her cheek at the same time to minimalize the impact.

She had to promise that the perpetrators would be waiting at the guardroom the next day. The Jap turned on his heels and was walking to his car when he suddenly turned back again and shouted in Malaysian, 'Your country has been beaten, right?'

'Yes,' Mrs. Anema replied.

'And I'm number one here, right?'

'Yes.'

'And you are number two?'

'Yes.'

He nodded, pulled out his gun and shot a bullet into the ground right in front of her feet.

Hans and Sonya weren't alone, there were at least forty people watching. All of them started at the bang, but not Mrs. Anema, she just stood there like nothing had happened.

She was never admired more than at that moment.

The Japanese didn't show his disappointment at her composure, got into his car and drove away. He hadn't yet disappeared from sight when Mrs. Anema staggered over to the gallery and sank down onto the tiles to recover.

There was a lot of fuss that afternoon, should the girls give themselves up or not?

The mothers couldn't agree on it. Wouldn't it be better if a few hundred woman and girls turned up the next day? The Japs didn't have space to lock up that many. But what if that Jap got so angry he started shooting? Finally the girls made up their own minds and the next morning, ten of them gathered at the guardroom. The whole camp looked on and held its breath.

They'd been standing waiting for an hour in the sun when the Jap from the day before turned up in his car. He was calmer now, gave all ten of them a few slaps around the face and took Maud away in his car.

Fortunately she came back after a few days. She didn't look good but cried with relief when she saw her mother again. She'd had to sit in a cell and hadn't been given any food, only drink. The Japanese had come along twice and held the sharp edge of his sword to her throat and after that his pistol to her head. She'd understood she had to choose how she wanted to die. Both times she'd fainted in shock. But she hadn't been hit. That helped.

Earlier, ten girls of about twenty years-old had been taken away, big girls, who hadn't done anything at all. They'd been taken away in a bus and had never come back. Their mothers waved them off weeping and the other mothers in the camp talked about them as though something terrible had happened. But as soon as there were children around, they'd stop talking. Of course that made them even more curious so all the children tried to find out what had happened to the big girls. Hans and Sonya too, of course, but Aunty Al and Hans's mother became quite cagey when they asked about it and said things like, 'presumably they had to do something for the Japanese.'

But Sonya once overheard the words 'comfort girls'. That was when Harry and Tys were boasting by the tree that they knew the answer.

'They've become comfort girls for the Japanese,' Harry said to a girl of about ten years old who stared at him admiringly.

'Yes, I'd like to be consoled like that too,' Tys said. He screwed up his eyes in pleasure.

'Do the Japanese cry too then?' Sonya asked. 'I've never seen them.'

It was true, they only knew the Japanese as people who shouted very loudly, who hit the camp mothers and strutted around the camp like kings.

'No, of course not. Japanese can't cry,' Harry said. 'But they do want to be looked after, have their hair cut, their nails done. Have their heads stroked from time to time. And that's what those girls are doing now, my mother says. They get extra food for it.'

Having their heads stroked. Hans hated it when his mother did that to him. But maybe you liked it again when you were a grown-up.

'I know what happened to those girls who were taken away in a bus,' he told his mother later that afternoon. That way she would know too.

'What do you mean?' his mother asked sharply. She looked shocked.

'They're comfort girls now. They cut the Japanese's hair and stroke their heads to comfort them. Now that they are so far from home, perhaps.'

'Oh,' his mother laughed, 'is that what they mean by comfort girl? Well, that's better than doing the washing for them, which is what I thought.' A little later he saw his mother talking with Aunty Al. They looked at him, smiled, and shook their heads.

Hans sensed it was about the comfort girls. Was there something else? Why would those girls' mothers cry so much if they were only comforting the Japanese? He never found out. Mothers always kept things from their children, you couldn't do anything about it.

Chapter 7 - In Which The Sun Gets Colder And Hans Happens Upon A Tasty Treat On The Ground

In the meantime, it was getting colder in Bandangan. When they arrived and he was still small, everyone found it hot in the camp. Every day the sun beat down and the *gedek* fence blocked out the light breeze which sometimes blew in the Indies. Actually, this hadn't changed, but because they were given increasingly less to eat, they all got thinner and thinner. The thinner you were, the sooner you got cold.

Just like everyone else, Hans always kept his eyes peeled to the ground when he walked around the camp. You never knew what someone might have dropped. A button or an elastic band was a godsend, they always came in handy. A piece of rope was a fine bonus. But what he found on the Main Road today made his head spin: someone had dropped a cabbage stump at the side of the road. He'd almost missed it, it was lying just behind a clump of earth, but as he walked on, something in the corner of his left eye cried out: *hey, there's something there.*

His mother, who was sometimes allowed to work in the Japanese's kitchen, had once come home blanched with pain: she'd hidden a bag of red-hot rice inside her blouse and carried it back against her bare skin. It was also how the kitchen workers took home the remains of the vegetables they'd cleaned and cooked for the Japs. The cabbage stalk might have fallen out of a dress or a blouse. Hans picked it up and held it in the palm of his hand so that no one could see it.

Where could he have a look at it without being disturbed? The washrooms were the best, but when he got there he discovered that the cleaners were busy cleaning the cubby holes. Aunty Al was there too, she pulled a face as she waved to him. No one had soap anymore, so the mothers scrubbed the clothes with sand or with a soapy substance they made from coal ashes from the kitchen. They rinsed it off with water from the basin in each cubby hole. Once that water was old, it began to stink and the sand and ash residue didn't smell nice either. That was why Aunty Al pulled a face.

Then to the toilets, Hans decided.

The trench latrine was a place where you could be alone and he made his way there. The smell which had made him nauseous in the early days at the camp now had something reassuringly familiar about it. Once he was in the cabin with the door shut, he opened his hand. The cabbage stalk was dirty on both ends where it had been cut off. Hans had chosen

the cabin where the water entered the trench to wash the turds away. Here, in the first cabin, the water was still clean, he squatted and let the water wash over the cabbage. The cut ends were almost clean and he took a bite without thinking. A delicious taste filled his mouth: a little bitter but also a bit sweet. He chewed on the mouthful of cabbage for as long as he could and didn't swallow until someone outside cried, 'Hey, when's this cabin going to be free?'

His tongue still rubbing the roof of his mouth to savour the taste, he opened the door and let in a girl who was hopping nervously from one leg to the other. Diarrhea, he thought. The word often came up in conversation because they all had it sometimes.

In the beginning they had been given rice, half a cup per person, two slices of bread and a tablespoon of vegetables each day. But that was a thing of the past. Now their food was mainly a starchy porridge, which was transparent and glassy.

Each week, all the mothers and children were given a few spoonfuls to take away. You had to add some water to make a porridge. And when you heard the shout 'get your hot water!' you'd run to the kitchen with a pan or tin. You had to queue for it.

'This is blooming wallpaper paste,' Hans's mother had cried the first time she'd received a ladle of warm water in her tin and had begun to stir. 'It's see-through!'

'And a bit of brown bean juice for flavor,' the server had said, following through. It helped a little, but really what you were eating was a mouthful of nothing. Your stomach thought: hey, I'm getting something. But it was just thickened water; it made some people need to pee, while others got diarrhea.

After each meal it was busy at the poop cabins.

As Hans walked back to barrack 4, he felt guilty: eating a bit of cabbage like that and not sharing it with his mother or the others was wrong. He simply hadn't stopped to think, he'd been so happy when he found it. He decided not to tell anyone. If he ever found something like that again, he wouldn't eat a bite and he'd give it to his mother and Sonya and Aunty Al as a present.

Of course they'd be amazed at his generosity and very grateful, he imagined. They would praise him and tell the entire camp how kind and good he was. He liked to dream about that kind of thing, not just when he was asleep.

But the next day he spent hours in the poop cabin and he didn't care if anyone outside shouted impatiently. He vomited and had diarrhea at the same time. How was it possible for so much to come out of his body when he'd hardly eaten anything? Except for that cabbage stalk.

Hans knew his mother would send him straight to bed if she noticed he wasn't feeling well. Now they were all so weak, it was easy to get sick. Malaria, dysentery, cholera, typhoid. Apart from malaria, he didn't know what they meant, but when the mothers talked about them, their expressions were so serious, they could be deadly.

But you didn't drop down dead from a bit of vomiting and diarrhea and he got through the day without telling his mother. When he didn't want to eat the starchy porridge that evening (he thought it would bring it on again), she felt his forehead to see whether he had a fever. She often did that, just to make sure. 'Hmm, you're a bit warm,' she said. 'Get an early night.'

He fell straight to sleep that evening. Usually he and Sonya lay there talking about the things they'd seen and done that day, but Hans was out in less than a minute. His dreams were muddled. A large waterfall with a stream several feet wide thundered down violently onto a pile of rocks, the water breaking up into tiny spatters. It looked just like mist and because the sun was shining, you could see the rainbow in it. His father walked to the waterfall, dressed as when Hans had last seen him, in a soldier's uniform with a helmet. Hans saw him from behind, but he recognized his father's walk: a little hesitant, as though he might trip at any moment. That had to do with his glasses, he'd once explained to Hans, his glasses helped him see a long way away, but everything close up was hazy. Now his father was walking hesitantly towards the large waterfall. Hans realized at once that it was dangerous. If such an enormous load of water came down on you, you wouldn't survive. Or would you? He wasn't sure. 'Dad,' he shouted at the top of his voice. But his father didn't hear him above the thundering sound of the waterfall. He walked further and disappeared into the stream of water. You'd expect him to be washed away, beaten down by the weight of all that water. But he simply disappeared and Hans felt a deep sorrow. He'd never see his father again. 'Dad will come back,' he suddenly heard his mother saying in his dream and it woke him up for a while and he saw her bending over him. She gave him a brave smile, but he could see fear in her eyes. Why? He continued to dream, muddled images. And every time he awoke for a moment, his mother's head would appear over his bed and at a certain point, he saw that the fear had gone from her eyes. She was smiling happily now.

'He's made it!' someone said. He recognized her as the nurse from the sickbay where all the children went if they had a cut or a graze. Sometimes when you got ulcers on the inside of your lips from the hunger, they'd treat them with iodine. That really hurt.

Was he in the sickbay then? He must be.

He saw his mother nodding. She ran her hand through his hair. ‘So, you’re back,’ she said. ‘God, lad, I was afraid I was going to lose you!’ She kissed him on his forehead, which really he was too big for. But he didn’t mind now.

‘Yes, those salt injections really help with cholera,’ he heard the nurse saying, ‘and Doctor Lud left behind precise instructions.’

At the beginning of their time in the camp, Doctor Lud had been the camp doctor. The children had made up a song about him: *Doctor Lud plays with mud, on the edge of the deep Red Sea.* When the doctor heard it in passing, he always gave a quick wave.

But he’d long been transferred by the Japanese to the old men’s camp, a short way off. Apart from iodine, there wasn’t any other medicine left in the camp, so he couldn’t do much for the patients. Thankfully cholera was still easy to cure with simple salt injections. It was lucky the nurse knew that.

Chapter 8 - In Which Hans Learns to Knit And 800 Women Commit A Sin

'Push in, through, around, slip,' Hans repeated to himself. He had been stupid enough to tell his mother he was getting bored in the camp. He and Sonya considered themselves too old for most of the children's games, and the hunger had made them too weak to run around. It was much quieter in the camp now, most children lay on their beds all day.

'You could learn to knit,' his mother had said.

Sonya had burst out laughing. Knitting was for girls, Hans knew that and that's what he said. His mother thought it nonsense: what do you mean, for girls?

If boys learned to cook and sew and knit, they'd be able to look after themselves and then the girls could finally get good jobs instead of looking after their husbands.

'I taught your father to look after himself straight away,' she said, 'and he'll be glad of it now. Wherever he is.'

She talked about his father a lot and at least once a day Hans looked at the photo they'd brought with them. In the early years in the camp, she'd taken Hans out to the gallery in the evenings where they'd look at the moon.

'I promised Daddy I'd look up at the moon with you every evening. He'll do it too and that way we'll stay in touch.'

Hans liked the idea and when they were looking at the moon in the evenings, he'd often get the feeling that his father was looking back through the round glasses he always wore and smiling at them.

'A song,' his mother would suggest and begin:

'*Oh mister moon, moon bright and shiny moon,*
won't you please shine down on me.'

Then she'd look at him and he'd sing along reluctantly. Thankfully, after a while she realized that it was a very childish song and he didn't have to sing it anymore. Hans's mother had a pretty voice and he enjoyed listening to her as he looked at the moon, sometimes imagining he could see his father.

'Could Dad knit too?' he asked now.

'Almost but not quite,' his mother said, 'and he'll be regretting it now. If you can sew and knit your own clothes you're less dependent on others.'

She took out two long needles and a ball of thread and taught Hans how to knit: in, through, around, slip. He soon mastered it and two days later, the ball of thread had turned

into a piece of material. The white thread was grey in places, from where Hans had forgotten to wash his hands before starting to knit.

He looked at the material proudly. It was too small to make anything from, he needed more thread.

'Well, there isn't anymore,' his mother said when he asked her for another ball.

'But I know what we can do,' she continued.

She took the scrap from his hands and before he realized what was happening, she had taken the last piece of thread, which still stuck out, and was pulling on it. The knitting easily came apart and she rolled the thread around her finger as she pulled. In no time, the piece of fabric had gone and she handed him a ball of thread.

'There you go. Now you can carry on knitting.'

Hans was shocked and angry. How could his mother do a thing like that?

'You wanted to learn to knit, didn't you?' she said, 'now you've got a ball of thread again. I can teach you a new stitch.'

But the fun had gone out of it for Hans. He picked up the two knitting needles and went out to the gallery. You could make drawings in the dirt with the needles. Or write something, your name for example. Hans Duivendrecht, that was his name. Whatever you drew or wrote you had to rub out really quickly if a Japanese came along, because the Japs wanted all the earth smooth. But then you had something to do for a while and brushing away a drawing or your name wasn't as bad as unraveling a piece of knitting. He didn't understand why, it was just like that.

One time he was busy drawing a *waringin* and just had time to wipe it out when two Japanese soldiers came marching up and asked for the barrack elder. She quickly stepped forward and bowed deeply to them. It wasn't Mrs. Anema anymore, she had become the camp elder and you couldn't be that as well as being barrack elder. It was Mrs. Assenderp, a small, sturdy woman. She bowed deeply for the two Japanese but stood up straight again before they'd said '*naoré'*, the command to straighten up. Hans saw one of the Japanese tapping Mrs. Assenderp's nose with his finger and saying: '*Kalau branie, boleh poekoel kembali*.'

Hans understood that, it meant, 'Hit me back if you're brave enough.'

Mrs. Assenderp reflexively balled her fists and held them up. The Jap gave her a tap on the cheek and one of her fists shot out and hit his chin. The Jap wobbled for a moment before smacking her back. And Mrs. Assenderp's fist made it to his chin again.

Hans watched in amazement. He'd never seen a mother fight back at a Japanese before. The second soldier intervened, spoke harshly to Mrs. Assenderp and then Hans saw

them walking towards the guardroom, Mrs. Assenderp in front, the Japanese behind her, his gun at the ready.

It all happened so quickly that only Hans had seen what had taken place. He told his mother and when she had fetched Mrs. Anema, he told her too.

And to everyone's surprise, Mrs. Anema got the barrack elder freed. She had been hit but she hadn't been killed or sent to prison.

'The Japanese commander admitted that the soldier had egged her on,' Mrs. Anema explained to the mothers from barrack 4, after they'd taken care of Mrs. Assenderp and laid her in bed. 'He tapped her nose and shouted: "*Kalau branie, boleh poekoel kembali*."'

And so that's what Mrs. Assenderp did. 'He couldn't deny having told her to do it,' Mrs. Anema laughted. 'So they had to let her go.'

But that wasn't the end of it, because the two Japanese had actually come with a message for barrack 4.

There had been some '*gedek* trading' and punishment would follow. The Japanese had arrested an Indonesian outside of the camp and he had admitted selling eggs to at least twenty women from barrack 4. They were to report to the guardroom right away, otherwise the entire barrack would be punished with no food for three days.

Everyone knew that the Japanese commander wouldn't hesitate to carry out the punishment. The reason they'd gone to the fence was because they'd had so little food for so long. No one could be responsible for the entire barrack going hungry for three days. So twenty women gave themselves up. Hans's mother was one of them. She'd spent the whole night trying to sell her wedding ring for some meat, but it hadn't worked. Hans had never seen his mother cry, but when he woke up that morning and saw her sitting on her bed all tired and sleepy, he saw that tears were running down her cheeks. 'It doesn't matter, Mum,' he said, without knowing why she was so sad. He sat down next to her and wrapped his arm around her. 'You've got so thin recently,' she said, ' so I thought I'd sell my wedding ring for some food. You father would understand. But there wasn't anything left to buy.'

'Now that I'm skinnier, I don't need so much food,' he replied. This seemed to make sense, and it was something Sonya had told him. His mother ran her hand through his hair and this time he didn't pull away. He knew it made her feel better.

Now his mother had to report to the guardroom even though she hadn't been successful. But twenty was twenty and the Japs wouldn't be satisfied with less.

Not long afterwards he saw his mother standing in the sun outside the guardroom, with nineteen other mothers, their arms held aloft. If just one of the women wobbled for a moment

or let her arms drop, one of the soldiers would approach, the butt of his rifle ready to deal a blow.

The women weren't allowed to return to the barrack until a few hours later, when the sun set. But the next morning they had to report to the guardroom again. Hans had waited close by the entire time, he didn't feel he could leave his mother in the lurch. He watched her proudly, standing there so upright in her dress with the big flowers, her head held high so that she could look over the heads of the Japanese, her arms raised. On the way back to the barrack she took his hand and he felt how hot it was.

'What's up, girl?' Aunty Al asked when they reached their beds, 'you're really sweating.'

'I feel quite weak too,' Hans's mother said, 'I barely managed it out there. Might be sunstroke.'

You could get that if you stood in the sun for too long, then your brains cooked and you didn't feel well, Hans knew.

'Seems more like malaria,' Aunty Al said, 'get straight into bed.'

The next morning, Hans's mother got up to report to the guardroom, but when she teetered as she tried to put on her dress, Aunty Al took over.

'I'll go,' she said. An hour later, Hans saw Aunty Al standing in the sun. She had put on his mother's flowery dress and none of the guards had noticed that a different woman from yesterday was wearing the dress. 'The Japanese all look alike to us, so we all look alike to them,' she'd told Hans's mother when she'd protested.

And Aunty Al was right. But when the punishment went on for more than two days, the barrack rose up in rebellion. 'We all do a bit of *gedek* trading from time to time,' Mrs. Assenderp, who had taken over the leadership of the barrack again, said, 'so let's all go and report. Then he won't know what to do.'

She went to the other barracks and the following morning, the Japanese could hardly believe their eyes: 800 women stood in long queues waiting at the guardroom. They were marched off to the Lido and ordered to split up into two groups: those who had traded at the fence and those who had only eaten something that had been bought at the fence. All 800 went to stand on the side of those who had traded. Hans and Sonya, who were watching the spectacle from a distance with a few other children, saw how one of the Japanese turned around and trotted off to the commander's house. A little while later he returned with the commander. Hans had to agree with Aunty Al – the Japs did all look alike, but the commander was a bit fatter and walked in a more dignified manner.

The commander gave a long speech in Japanese, and had the crowd bow down for so long that one of the women fell over. He walked over to her and kicked her in the shoulder. Then he turned around and walked in his dignified manner back to his house. Only then were the women given the '*Naoré'* order to stand straight again. Hans heard the creak of stiff bones. Not long afterwards, he and Sonya returned with Aunty Al to their barrack, where Hans's mother lay sick. Now she was delirious. 'But Albert,' they heard her saying, as she laughed. That was the name of Hans's father.

'We'll take her to the sickbay,' Aunty Al said. They wrapped Hans's mother in a sheet and carried her to the sickbay, where a nurse cast a glance at the patient and said, 'That's malaria, but she's so weak… let's pray she makes it through.'

'Pray? Don't you have any quinine left?' Aunty Al asked. Quinine tablets were the best thing for malaria, as everyone knew.

'All gone,' the nurse said, 'and the Japanese won't give us any more. Luckily we have much better food here than in the barracks. Most do make it through, you know. But it could take weeks.'

Reluctantly they left Hans's mother behind. Hans would visit her every day.

Chapter 9 - In Which Something Terrible Happens But Life Still Goes On

'Gré,' Aunty Al said, 'Hans is here.'

She gestured for him to come closer. Mum was lying on her back, her mouth slightly open. It looked like she was sleeping, but when he took her hand, he felt her squeeze it slightly.

'Hi Mum,' Hans said, 'I've come to say goodbye.'

Those were the words Aunty Al had used. 'Hans, your mother is asking for you, she wants to say goodbye.'

'Am I going away?' he'd asked in shock. A few months earlier, the Japanese had announced that boys of eleven or older were to go to the old men's camp, a few miles away. The old men needed taking care of and the older boys were to do it. Harry and Tys could be called up at any moment and Hans was nearly eleven.

'No, son. Your mother's not doing very well, you know that malaria can be serious and sometimes people die of it. Your mother won't, of course, but she wants to say goodbye, just in case. Then she won't have to worry about not having done that, if she does accidently die. Do you understand?'

Hans nodded, but it seemed odd to him. Why say goodbye to Mum if she wasn't going to die? But grown-ups wanted funny things sometimes and so he obediently followed Aunty Al to the sick bay. The nurse hadn't let him in for the past two days.

'Your mother's condition is critical, Hans,' she'd said, 'once the fever breaks, you can go and see her again.'

Now he could see her and he was shocked.

The skin on her face had taken on a yellowish hue, her cheeks were sunken, her hair which was always so lively, hung limply on the pillow. She had her eyes closed.

'Just say: bye Mum, I'll always think of you,' Aunty Al said. She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her dress.

'Mum. I'll always think of you,' Hans said obediently. He felt her hand squeeze his again and heard her breathing quicken. A soft sound came from her mouth. 'Darling,' she whispered. He saw two tears fall from her closed eyes, they rolled down her cheeks and came to rest against the sides of her nostrils. Aunty Al wiped them away with a corner of the sheet.

They stood around the bed until his mother's breathing took on a gentle rhythm.

'She's sleeping,' Aunty Al said, 'thank god, she's sleeping.'

An hour later, they were back in the barrack when the nurse came along. She was carrying a bowl and saucer. She spoke to Aunty Al briefly and Hans saw her wiping her eyes. An uneasy feeling crept over him.

'Hans, I have to tell you something,' Aunty Al said.

But he knew what was coming.

'Son, son,' she said and pulled him towards her. Pressed against her, he heard what he didn't want to hear. 'Your mother died in her sleep. But you're not alone, I promised her I would take care of you until your father can.'

Hans didn't like crying, that was for little kids. But he couldn't help it. He pictured his mother, the way she'd smiled and run her fingers through his hair when she was still well. Only a couple of weeks ago! And he doused Aunty Al's dress with tears.

Once he'd stopped crying and only let out the occasional sob, he felt the real pain. It was in his belly, a soft pain which you could only stop by crossing your arms and pressing your elbows deep into your belly. Over the following months, every time Hans thought about his mother, he did that. Arms crossed and the elbows facing in and pressing as hard as he could. It also helped with the hunger.

They were sitting next to each other on the bed, he and Aunty Al, when he did it for the first time.

'Hungry, dear?' she asked.

He nodded to stop her asking further.

She got up and fetched the bowl the nurse had brought. She lifted the saucer from it and a delicious smell wafted towards Hans. It made him forget his grief: what delicious thing did Aunty Al have in that pot?

'It's dog meat soup,' she said, 'all for you. Here's a spoon.'

It was bouillon, a word he knew from before the camp, a deliciously-scented bouillon. There were even a few slithers of meat in it.

He took tiny sips with the spoon, but even so it was all gone in a couple of minutes. He just remembered in time to offer the last spoonful to Aunty Al, but she shook her head resolutely.

'All yours,' she said, 'I deliberately sent Sonya away, so she wouldn't beg from you. It's the last thing your mother could do for you. And you shall have every last drop of it!'

And then Hans realized what the treat was. From time to time a dog would venture into the camp, attracted by the smells from the Japanese kitchen. Skinny bags of bones because even outside of the camp, in the local villages, there was little to eat, they'd heard

that in the camp. Sometimes they managed to catch a dog and butchered it at once. The soup they made from it was food for the sick for days on end. And now he had been given Mum's bowl, it was left over because she'd died before dinnertime. It was the last thing his mother could do for him, and had done. Again he felt tears brimming, but this time he could control himself.

'Thank you, Mum,' he said and looked up automatically, to the heaven where she must be. He knew other children who had lost a brother or sister, or had a dog that had been run over. But Hans had never lost anything important and he didn't know how to cope with the sadness caused by his mother's absence.

Over the following days, all the mothers he came across looked at him and stroked his head as soon as they got close enough.

'Oh, dearie dear,' one of them said.

'I'll pray for you and for your mother,' another said.

'Here's a toy for you,' another said, and gave him a small wooden top. If you held it between your thumb and index finger and gave it a spin it would turn for a while.

Not on the sand of course, but on the smooth tiles in the gallery. It kept him occupied for a whole afternoon, but the gentle sadness in his belly remained and he gave the top to Sonya.

She stayed close to him, even on the long walks he took, along the Main Road, around the barracks, past the Lido, past the trench latrine. And again. However tired he was, and however hard the hunger gnawed at him, he knew he could only bear the pain of his mother's death by staying on the move. If he lay on his bed he kept picturing her, sometimes with his father next to her, giving him an accusing look.

'Couldn't you have been a bit kinder to your mother, Hans?' he heard his father saying in his thoughts. 'If she hadn't had to keep looking for you, she wouldn't have been so tired. And then the malaria wouldn't have got her!'

His father didn't say it angrily, but sadly, and that was the worst.

On one of his long walks, Sonya was walking behind him and he heard her trip and fall.

'Hans,' she cried, but he kept on going. He was talking to his mother in his thoughts. He promised her that he'd keep looking at the moon every evening and sing the song she'd taught him: *Oh mister moon, moon bright and shiny moon, won't you please shine down on me.'*. Not out loud of course, he was too old for that, but in his thoughts. He hoped his dad could see the same moon at that instance and would sense something of it.

‘Hans,’ he heard Sonya call out again in the distance, and now he turned around and walked back. She was sitting on her bottom on the ground and crying the way girls cry, with drawn-out sobs. He bent down to her and looked to see whether she had any grazes. But no, nothing.

‘I’m so tired, I can’t go on,’ she said, her chest heaving.

‘But you don’t have to, do you?’ he said.

‘But you’re my brother now, Mum said. And I have to look after you. Make sure you don’t do anything silly, like with that Japanese soldier.’

Hans had almost forgotten. The day after Mum had died, he’d been sitting in the gallery when a Jap had come along. He had been so caught up in his grief that he hadn’t got up and bowed, as you had to for every Jap who came by. The Jap stood still and shouted something at him. But it didn’t get through to Hans. He’d looked at the Jap and just kept on looking
‘With those big eyes filled with sorrow,’ he heard Aunty Al telling a neighbour later, ‘and the Jap looked and Hans looked back. And then the Jap shrugged and walked on.’

After that had happened, Sonya followed him every step of the way, to make sure no harm came to him. The next Jap might get really angry and you never knew what might happen.

And now she was sitting there exhausted and crying on the ground.

‘Am I your brother now?’ Hans asked in amazement.

‘Yes, of course. You belong with us now your mother is gone. And I always wanted a brother.’

‘What about my dad then?’

‘Oh, he’s still your dad. Then you’ve got two of them, mine and yours.’

Two fathers. That was something to think about. For the first time in days, Hans had something to think about other than his mother’s death.

He pulled Sonya to her feet.

‘But then we won’t be able to get married, if we’re brother and sister,’ he said.

‘Oh, I wasn’t planning on marrying a lubberhead like you,’ Sonya said.

‘No, I know. You’re in love with Cap from barrack 5.’

Harry and Tys had got tired of the jeep and Cap van Lawick, another older boy, was now the boss.

He’d recently seen Sonya sitting behind the wheel of the broken vehicle even though it was nowhere near her turn. Hans had seen the way she looked at him.

‘No way.’

‘Are so.’

And they walked home. The sadness stayed in Hans’s belly for a long time, but it grew less over the months that followed. A new sister and a new mother had taken their place, even though he continued to call Aunty Al ‘aunty’ of course. She wouldn’t have wanted it any other way, she told him.

Aunty Al gave him the picture of his mother and father, which his mother had given her for him, just before she died. And in the evenings, when the moon was bright, he got out the photo, looked at it, and silently sung the moon song in his thoughts.

Chapter 10 - In Which Granny Van Soest Is A Cheat

Granny Van Soest had been in the sick bay for a couple of days.

'The poor woman is seventy-three,' Hans heard Aunty Al telling the neighbour two beds further up, 'I dropped in on her today and she's made peace with the fact she won't make it. "Then you've got a bit more space," she said to me.'

The neighbour laughed, but Hans saw her gaze involuntarily drop towards Granny Van Soest's bed. Space was tight since the Japanese had begun cramming more and more women and children into the camp. Camp 9, a mile further up, no longer had any water and last week 900 women and children from that camp had been brought here. They'd brought their mattresses but it had meant that everyone had to budge up. The distance between the beds was now just twelve inches.

And the galleries had been closed off, so that *bultzakken* mattresses could be laid down there too.

Later, after night had fallen and they sat together in the dark, Aunty Al broached the matter which had been bothering her since she'd visited Granny Van Soest.

'Granny wants to eat pea soup one last time in her life,' she whispered.

'That's sad,' Sonya replied in a normal voice. Why whisper?

'I still have a tin,' Aunty Al said so quietly she was barely audible, 'and it's got pea soup in it. I'm pretty sure. What do you think? Should I give it to Granny Van Soest?'

Aunty Al's tins had been a recurrent wonder in their hungry existence. When the war started she had bought six tins with the brand Jaco, filled with brown beans or pea soup, three of each.

She'd hidden the tins in a place that nobody knew and when the need was great, or for a birthday, she'd offered one up. The tins' labels had long since fallen off. No one could see whether there were beans in the tins or pea soup. Three years had gone by now in the camp and they'd celebrated five times. They still remembered each of those occasions and were sure that they'd had beans three times. The taste of the beans as well as that of the pea soup had been engraved on their taste buds. Both Hans and Sonya licked their lips in the dark at the memory.

Give the last tin to Granny Van Soest? So that she could die happy?

Hans found Granny Van Soest a sourpuss, she was always complaining about him and Sonya. That they were too rowdy, they made too much noise, they didn't always fetch water right away when she asked.

You could see that Granny Van Soest used to be chubby, fat even, because swathes of skin hung from her skinny body and her arms where previously there was flesh. During those hungry years, Granny Van Soest had eaten away at her own fat, you might say.

'I think it's a waste,' Sonya whispered now. 'But you should do it, Mum. If it makes her happy.'

'What about you, Hans?' Aunty Al asked.

'Of course,' he whispered.

And so it happened. The next morning, Aunty Al got out her last tin from under a loose tile in the barrack's gallery. Everyone could see, but that didn't matter anymore because it was the last tin. It had rusted a bit on the outside.

They could almost smell the pea soup through the can.

'I'll take it to the sick bay kitchen,' Aunty Al said, 'and I'll stay until Granny Van Soest gets it. Do you want to come?'

Hans and Sonya both shook their heads. Giving away a tin out of the goodness of their hearts was one thing, but standing there, mouths watering, while Granny Van Soest ate it? Rather not.

An hour later, Aunty Al returned, she had brought the empty tin, you never knew when it might come in handy.

'She found it delicious. Now I can rest in peace at last, she said to me.'

But the next day, Granny Van Soest was back in her own bed, completely better and complaining with new energy about the racket in the barrack.

'Did that pig know I still had a tin left?' Aunty Al said to Hans and Sonya later that day. 'It's quite a coincidence that pea soup was her last wish. And when I asked the nurse why Granny Van Soest was back home again, she said she'd only been taken in for a couple of days because of an ulcer on her foot. She wasn't dying at all!'

'It's the last time we do anything nice for anyone,' Sonya said firmly.

Hans and Aunty Al nodded dutifully.

Chapter 11 - In Which Sonya Becomes Champion Flyswatter and Koreans Hop-Hop-Hop Through The Camp

The worst thing about life in the camp was still the roll calls, every morning at half past seven. The sun was still quite low then, but by the time the 3,000 women and children had been counted, the heat was almost unbearable and everyone stood there squirming. A soldier had an abacus at the ready, moving one bead for every ten people. They had all learned to count to ten in Japanese: *ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, kyu, jyu.*

When they went through the roll call, the mothers bowed deeply, and quickly calculated what their number was and that of their children. They told each child what to shout when it was their turn. And then you heard the counting approaching from a distance: *ichi, ni, san, shi, go, ro…* It was more melodious that most of the Japanese words they heard the guards use. Those men always sounded as though they had a cold. But when the mothers and children counted, it sounded almost like a song. Every time you got to ten, you heard the clack of the bead as it was moved along the abacus. And then the next ten*: ichi, ni, san, shi…*

When it was your turn, you called out your number, loud and clear. If you hesitated for a second or said the wrong number, the Jap would come and give your mother a whack, so that she almost fell over. Now his own mother was gone, Hans stood next to Aunty Al and did his best to spare her a whack.

The counting often went wrong. Some people who had to be counted lay in the sickbay or had died, others were being punished at the guardroom. Sometimes the Japanese hadn't properly registered the number of women who had been brought to Ambangan from

other camps. And the abacus they used was very difficult. In short, it was a wonder when the numbers came out right. And they had to, otherwise someone had escaped.

When the counting was over, everyone could finally get to work. The team of cleaners swept the barracks, the kitchen team fetched water for the starchy porridge. A few women were allowed out of the camp to work in the Japanese's gardens, where tomatoes grew, and green beans and cabbage. That was a treat. With *patjols*, a kind of spade, over their shoulders, they'd leave the gates singing.

Of course they weren't allowed to take anything from the Japs' garden, but they'd hide something secretly in their blouses when they walked back, so they always had a few beans or a small tomato for the children. The *patjol* team was popular and the camp elder made sure that every mother got a turn.

There was work for the children too. They had to pull out the grass that grew on the Main Road. Boring work, and the next day you could start again, because the grass kept growing, particularly in the rainy season.

When a plague of flies came, each child had to hand in thirty dead flies at the end of the day. Flies spread illnesses and so they had to be stamped out. That was more fun than pulling out grass. But Hans wasn't very good at it and had only caught three flies in his hand and killed them when Sonya came along and showed him a glass jar that was quite full. He leaned in over it and sniffed.

'What are you doing?' Sonya asked.

'Smelling it. Nice!'

'Gross. What kind of person smells dead flies?'

An acrid smell came from the jar. Hans couldn't help it, he liked the smell.

'How come you're so good at catching flies?' he asked.

Sonya said, 'Don't tell anyone else, though. If everyone knows how to do it we'll run out of flies. And then we'll have to pull up grass again.'

Hans nodded and she stood close to him and whispered in his ear, 'Flies can only see in front of them. So if you approach from behind you can kill them with a single swipe.'

She showed him, there was a fly on the ground and Sonya crept closer and put her hand over the fly from behind. And then showed him: a dead fly. 'Number twenty-eight,' she said happily, 'almost done.' Under her guidance Hans learned quickly. You had to make sure the fly didn't see the shadow of your hand coming over it because then it flew away at once. Flies weren't stupid.

Together they soon became champion flyswatters. And finally they helped other children who were struggling. Some of them just ran after the flies, which didn't work, of course. When a girl began to cry because she was so exhausted, Hans told her the secret. And Sonya told others too. After that the plague of flies was soon over, there wasn't a fly to be seen in the camp. And then they had to pull out grass again.

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One afternoon, when Hans and Sonya were lying on their *bultzakken* tired by the hunger, all of a sudden a hop-hop-hop-hop came from outside and it was getting louder. They jumped off their beds and ran outside. They were just in time to see a group of soldiers approaching at a double-quick march. They shouted something that sounded like hop-hop-hop with every step. The ground vibrated under their boots. In their right hands they carried wooden guns. These were Koreans, help soldiers, who were only half-trusted by the Japs and so weren't allowed real weapons.

Korea was a country near to Japan, which Japan had conquered, Hans had learned from Aunty Al. And although the Koreans were now helping Japan to conquer other countries, the Japanese and Koreans didn't like each other.

Only last week, a Japanese had hit a Korean soldier in the face with the flat side of his saber because he hadn't carried out an order fast enough. He had done that during roll call and the look the Korean had given the Japanese showed how deep that hatred was.

'This looks like an uprising,' Aunty Al said, she was standing next to Hans and Sonya now. 'Look, they've got their guns in their hands instead of over their shoulders. As though they could shoot with them.'

The bunch of hobbyhorses ran past, hop-hop-hop, and through the gate. There were shots and not long afterwards they came running back again.

But no longer as a group. They spread out over the barracks. There were two in barrack 4. They crawled under the beds and held their fingers to their lips if anyone saw them.

'I'm not happy about that, one of those chappies under my bed,' Granny Van Soest said.

'Psssst,' she said and waved her arms around under her bed. The Korean realized that this lady wasn't going to protect him and crawled under a different bed. But he was chased away from there too, until he ended up under Aunty Al's bed. She took pity on him and threw

him a dress which he covered himself with. Now he looked like a pile of old clothes rather than a Korean.

But if a Jap came to look for him here, surely he'd realize that nobody in the camp had enough old clothes to make such a big pile.

Just to be sure, Aunty Al slept in Sonya's bed that night and when they woke up the next morning, the Korean was gone.

What was going on? Nobody knew exactly, but Mrs. Anema, the camp elder, had heard that Korean help soldiers had rebelled against the Japanese all over Java.

They were fed up with being treated so badly. But by now, they'd already been beaten and even the Koreans in Bandangan had given themselves up. The next day, they were working shifts at the guardroom near the gate as usual, their wooden guns over their shoulders. You could see that some of them had received some heavy blows from the Japs.

Chapter 12 - In Which War Is Over But Freedom Doesn't Come

And then, from one day to the next, the war was over. They'd been hoping for it since the airplane had flown over the camp and dropped pieces of paper with 'Keep your spirits up.' But that was already six months ago and since then things had only got worse. Hans's mother was not the only one who had died: the hunger and all kinds of sicknesses had carried off a lot more.

But on that day, Friday 24th August 1945, everyone who could still walk was called to the Lido. There wasn't a roll call, nor was there a single Japanese to be seen. In the middle of the field, Mrs. Anema was standing on a crate. There was nothing left of her fat body, she was just as skinny as everyone else in the camp. Luckily there was hardly ever any wind in the Indies, a strong wind would have blown them all away.

Mrs. Anema was wearing the same flowery dress as when she had entered the camp, but now the dress hung off her like an oversized sheet. She spoke loudly and clearly.

'People! I have received word from the camp commander that the war is over. The war is over! The Netherlands was liberated three months ago and now so are we!'

There was silence, the surprise was too great for them all to begin to cheer at once.

Then the sound began: muttering, talking, mothers flying into each other's arms. Some were crying. Hans thought about his mother and father and looked up at the sky. But there was no moon, he wouldn't be able to tell his father until tonight.

And all of a sudden Mrs. Anema began to sing the Dutch national anthem.

'*Wilhelmus vahan Nahassouwe, ben ik van Duitsen Bloed…*'

You could just hear her above the noise of the others and everyone looked at the singing woman on the crate. A second voice joined in, and a third. And within a few seconds, three thousand women and children were singing along.

Hans knew the tune from before, but he couldn't remember the words. He turned 'fatherland' into 'father's hand' and '*blijf ik tot in den dood'* became '*blijf ik vanzelf zo goed*'. But as they continued to sing, it came back: '*Dehen prinsen van Oranjen ben ik vrij onverveerd*.'

And then: '*De kohohohohohoning van Spanje heheb ik altijd geëerd*.'

If his mother had been standing next to him, he would have asked her what that last sentence meant: 'I've always revered the King of Spain'. She would have known for sure. But

Aunty Al knew a lot too. He decided to ask her as soon as he got the chance. Now she was celebrating with the other mothers. It was party time. The war was over.

One of the women had such a loud voice that she could shout out above the clamour. She cried out, 'When are we allowed to leave the camp? Join our husbands?'

Everyone heard the question and it became quiet again at once. They all looked at Mrs. Anema, who was still standing on the crate.

'We have to wait,' she said, 'the commander told me that there's trouble outside the camp. Indonesian rebels have risen up and taken control. We have to wait until the English army arrives at the camp.'

'When will that be?' asked the woman with the loud voice.

'I don't think it will be long,' Mrs. Anema said. You could see she didn't have the faintest idea. 'The commander told me that the English have ordered him and his men to protect us.'

'Protect us? From who?'

'From the Indonesian rebels,' Mrs. Anema said. 'They want to kick all the Dutch out of the country. They don't have many weapons but they do have *klewangs* and *bamboe roentjings*. Let's just wait. We are safe here.'

The Lido emptied out, the mothers talking amongst themselves as they walked, the children following.

Aunty Al wrapped her arms around Sonya and Hans and walked back to barrack 4 with them.

'I hope the people outside the camp are alright,' she said. 'If the Indonesians are rebelling, the Indo families will be the first to get it. They don't have any protection.'

Many Indo families had entered the camp but if you could prove you were at least half Indonesian, the Japanese let you stay outside the camp. The people who stayed outside were called '*buitenkampers*' in Dutch.

Hans thought about Ronnie Eekhout, his friend from before the war, who didn't have to go to the camp. Would he be in danger now because he had Dutch blood? But Ronnie's father had friends amongst the Indonesians, and so his family might be alright.

'What's a *klewang* again?' he asked.

'It's one of those machetes a lot of Indonesians have. You can do everything with them, open coconuts, chop heads off chickens.'

Hans shuddered, he remembered now.

'And a *bamboe roentjing*?'

‘That’s a cane which they sharpen to a point with their *klewangs*, a very sharp point. They use them to hunt wild boar. You throw it like a spear.’

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A few days later the excitement had died down.

‘What a palaver!’ Sonya said. ‘War over at last and still we can’t get out!’

Here and there, parts of the *gedek* had been pulled down, there was still the barbed wire fence behind it of course, so it didn’t help much. But at least you could see the landscape.

‘Lovely,’ Aunty Al said. She looked at the blueish mountain in the distance and at the *sawas* which practically came up to the foot of the camp. Hans knew the *sawas* from before, rice paddies through which water was channeled in a complicated manner. Once the paddy was properly wet, you’d see women planting young rice plants in the mud. They were doing that now too.

If you watched them, the way they bent over and pushed the plants into the ground with quick movements, you could almost feel the mud between their toes. They had pointed hats on their heads against the sun. You could hear them talking to each other in the distance. About their husbands who would rather lie around napping than get their hands dirty. About their sons, who had grown up so fast. About their daughters, how they’d ever find husbands for them.

The *sawas* were different colours because they were planted at different times. You saw a patchwork cloth of various shades of green nestling against the mountainside.

A cackling sound came from the distance. It got closer and they saw a row of geese climbing over the ditch between the sawas. They walked in a neat line, followed by a boy of around ten, the geese-keeper.

'*Ajo, boeng*!' (Keep at it, boy) Sonya encouraged, but he didn't look up or around.

'*Apa kabar?*' (How's it going?) she tried again. Now he stopped, turned to them and slowly drew his hand across his throat. The gesture was quite clear: I'll cut your throat.

After that he walked on with his geese, away from the camp.

'Oh Lord,' Aunty Al said from the bottom of her heart.

'What is it, Mum?' Sonya asked.

'Yes, Aunty. Why did he do that?' Hans asked.

'The Indonesians have founded their own republic,' Aunty Al said, 'they want all the Dutch people to leave as quickly as possible.'

'Why?' Sonya asked. 'Haven't we been good to them? Warti and Oddah cried when we had to go to the camp.' They were their servants before the war, Hans knew, and he was reminded of *kokki* Mina who had loved him and his mother and father, hadn't she?

'We were,' Aunty Al said, 'but of course there are other Indonesians who think we have kept their country under occupation and should leave. Just like the Germans have been driven out of the Netherlands, luckily.'

Hans wasn't happy about this. Of course he understood that white boys and girls like himself were different from the rest of the population. But the Dutch had ruled the Indies for so long, some families had lived there for more than two hundred years! Why should you have to leave?

And what about the Indos? Like his friend Ronnie Eekhout, and Aunty Al and Sonya too? They had a Dutch father and an Indonesian mother. And that was alright, wasn't it?

Wouldn't that be the solution? If every Indonesian married a Dutch person and made an Indo family that belonged in Indonesia?

'If I marry an Indonesian woman and we have children, would I be allowed to stay then?' he asked.

Aunty Al smiled.

'It won't get as bad as that,' she said. 'Of course the Indonesians have a right to their own country. But they'd be mad to just throw out all the Dutch people. Who would manage the plantations? Who would keep the trains running? Who would build the cities? They can't do any of those things themselves.'

Hans nodded, he felt reassured.

Chapter 13 - In Which The Gurkhas Arrive And Bullets Fly

They'd already heard a strange whistling sound a few times, as though a bird was flying over the camp screeching.

'Hear that? The Gurkhas are coming,' Hans heard Cap van Lawick say to Sonya.

'What are Gurkhas?' she asked.

'Indian soldiers,' Cap said. His real name was the very respectable Hugo, but everyone called him Cap because in the early years at the camp he'd always worn a cap. Underneath it his head was shaved because his mother was afraid he'd catch lice. He was still bald but the cap had long since disappeared.

'They made soup from it,' Harry and Tys had once said and Hans thought it might be true. You could make soup from everything, so why not from a dirty, greasy cap?

Cap was half a head taller than Sonya and as skinny as a rake. He always dominated the conversation when Sonya was around. It was his way of trying to impress her and Hans saw that Sonya liked him. When he wrote 'Sonya 4 Cap' in the sand to tease her, she'd bundled him to the ground and swept the sand clean. Well, it was clear then. But Hans was happy with Cap because he could stand up to Harry and Tys and now they no longer dared to bully Sonya and Hans. And Cap knew lots and that was nice too.

'The Gurkhas are Red Indians?' Hans asked. 'How did they get here?'

'No, not Red Indians. Red Indians live in America. No, Indian soldiers, from India. That's a country not far from here, an English colony. The Gurkhas come from the Indian mountains, from the state of Nepal actually, and they bite their enemies' throats!'

A shiver ran down Hans's spine. Yikes, biting someone in the throat. What did you do with all that blood that poured into your mouth? He saw Sonya shivering too.

'I heard,' Cap began solemnly, 'I heard that the Gurkhas are shooting over our camp at Fort William. The Indonesians are there, the rebels. And they are shooting back with weapons they got from the Japs. Listen, there goes another one.'

They heard the shrieking sound flying over the camp at great speed.

'What is that?' Hans asked.

'A mortar,' Cap said. 'A tank grenade. Their tanks are blasting the Fort to smithereens. Don't worry, the mortars are flying high above our heads. But the Indonesians firing back are not as accurate. One of theirs might just fall on the camp.'

Aunty Al came hurrying along from another barrack she'd just visited.

‘They’re shooting with mortar grenades,’ she cried, ‘the camp leaders told me. If shots are fired, we’re to hide under our beds at once. Hurry to your mother, Cap!’

‘Yes ma’am.’ Cap waved to Sonya and left.

They left a *bultzak* lying on the middle bed and used the other two to block off the sides where the grenades were coming from. That way they were shielded. Across the entire barrack, people lay under their beds, listening anxiously to the whistling sound of the grenades flying overhead. Hans didn’t know what a mortar grenade looked like, he thought it must be an enormous metal bullet with a whistle attached to it somewhere to make that horrible, scary sound.

A grenade hit their barrack on that first day already. There was a thundering noise as bits of the roof fell in. They lay under the beds as quiet as mice, the mattresses protecting them. Aunty Al lay on top of both of them so that she could use her body to protect the children too. ‘Help, help me then,’ he suddenly heard the voice of Mrs. Bieltjes calling, a woman without any children who slept ten beds further along. Aunty Al crawled off them and stuck her head up above the *bultzakken*.

And then Hans saw a pool of blood for the first time in his life. It was as though a tin of red paint had been spilled, blood ran over the tiles to where they were lying, ten beds along. It looked as though there were air bubbles in the blood. Aunty Al, who’d already crawled half out from under the bed, crawled back again when she heard that Mrs. Bieltjes was already being helped by her neighbours. ‘Hand me that sheet,’ someone cried, and ‘as tight as you can!’

Two neighbouring women helped Mrs. Bieltjes to get up and supported her as they left the barrack, presumably on their way to the sick bay. As they came past, Hans saw her pale face, drawn by pain. The sheet tied around her waist was already red with blood.

‘Stupid woman,’ Aunty Al said, shaking her head, ‘she stayed on her bed to write a letter to her husband. Now she might not make it. And now she’s putting her neighbours at risk too.’

Since they’d heard that the war was over, the mothers who still had some paper had started writing letters to their husbands. Not long now and you’d be free and you could let your husband know. And Mrs. Bieltjes was so happy about this, she’d forgotten to stay safe.

‘Crikey, look what I’ve found,’ Aunty Al said all of a sudden in a surprised voice. She held up a sharp piece of metal. ‘This is shrapnel from that mortal grenade. Went all the way through the *bultzak*, but then it ran out of speed. We got off lightly!’

She was so grateful the shrapnel hadn't hit her, she gave Sonya a kiss. And Hans had to suffer it too. Aunty Al's kisses were all wet and Hans quickly wiped the spit from his cheek. He loved Aunty Al but not her kisses.

Thankfully Mrs. Bieltjes returned a few days later, the wound to her stomach had cost her a lot of blood, but not her life.

When only an occasional mortar had flown high over the camp for a few days, almost everyone crawled back out from under their beds. You couldn't stay under your bed forever.

A few days later, Hans and Sonya were walking to the toilet cubicles when they heard that whistling noise above their heads again. It was closer than they were used to. Right above their heads in fact. They paused in shock and a moment later heard an explosion in the camp, a few barracks further.

It was as though everyone in the vicinity held their breath. Then there was screaming and cries for help coming from the children's tree, a hundred and fifty yards away. 'Come on, let's help,' Sonya said and they ran to the place the sound was coming from.

But thirty yards before the tree, one of the barrack elders stopped them. 'Go back!' she shouted. 'Back to your mother!'

'But we want to help!' Sonya cried. More people came running up, but the barrack elder stopped them all from going through. 'The doctor's there already,' she cried, 'you'll only get in the way.'

Looking past her, there indeed was Doctor Lud and a few nurses, bending over a few bodies – four bodies. A week previously, the doctor had returned from the men's camp and had already been able to help quite a few patients with the medicine the Japanese had withheld, which had been discovered in the store cupboard. Would he be able to save the wounded children? In the distance they saw him opening his doctor's bag and taking out thick wads of bandage which he pressed to one of the bodies.

Sonya said out loud what Hans was thinking, 'As long as Cap isn't one of them!' Cap was nearly always by the tree, he would say whose turn it was to sit at the wheel of the jeep. As they tried to make out whether Cap was there, they heard Aunty Al's voice behind them.

'Oh, thank god,' she cried, and then angrily, 'Why didn't you return to the barrack right away to let me know you were still alive? You should have known I'd be terrified!' She gave Sonya a box around her ears and if Hans hadn't avoided her hand he'd have taken a hit too. But they knew Aunty Al meant well. And she was right, they should have run back to their barrack rather than to the children's tree.

'Many dead?' Aunty Al asked the barrack elder who was keeping everyone back.

She replied to Aunty Al so quietly that Hans and Sonya couldn't hear what she was saying.

'Cap too?' Hans heard Aunty Al ask.

Hans saw the barrack elder shake her head, no, not Cap.

'Luckily,' he heard Sonya say.

They walked back with Aunty Al.

'Harry and Tys,' she said, 'and two younger children. Badly wounded all four of them.'

Later on, they heard that both Harry and Tys had been killed instantly when the grenade had hit. The two little ones had lasted half an hour longer. The whole camp mourned along with the mothers. Dying from sickness or hunger was a common occurrence, but dying from a grenade was new. And so sudden too, one moment you were alive and the next second you were gone.

When Cap dropped in on barrack 4 later that day, Sonya ran up to him, pulled his head down and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He smiled shyly.

'So, Cap,' Aunty Al said, shaking his hand, which she never did usually, 'you were lucky.'

'Yes,' he said, 'my mother needed me, otherwise I'd have definitely been at the tree.'

There wasn't much left of the jeep and the trunk was so damaged it was a wonder the tree was still standing. The next day a Japanese soldier threw a rope into the branches and he and two other soldiers began to pull on the rope. The tree moved and you could hear a creaking sound, but it didn't fall.

The Japanese looked around. Now they'd lost the war they didn't dare given anyone orders anymore and they were too proud to ask for help.

Then Cap went up to them. He took hold of the rope and gestured to the others who were standing watching. Of course Hans and Sonya were there too, if there was anything to see they were always part of it.

The ten of them, the three Japanese, Cap, Hans, Sonya, two mothers and two more children managed to pull the tree down. It fell creaking to the ground.

'Finally enough wood for the fire in the kitchen!' one of the two mothers said.

That was the end of the children's tree. And no one felt like playing in a place where four children had died either.

Chapter 14 - In Which Hans Sees Two Eggs Disappear Into Granny Van Soest

Now that large sections of the *gedek* had been taken down (and burned in the camp kitchen) trading was stepped up. The Indonesians mostly needed clothes because all the factories had closed down during the war and no clothing had been made at all. The inhabitants of the camp had taken as much clothing with them as they could when they went to the camp and now they thought: we'll be going home soon anyway, let's sell our spare clothes. But then for food, because hunger hadn't gone away. And however worn the clothes were, the Indonesians were still happy to give a few eggs for them.

You could also use real gold to buy food. Unfortunately Aunty Al had already traded her wedding ring the year before and the children's clothes had been cut up again and again to dress the growing Hans and Sonya. They had to take potluck on what the camp had to offer and that was still lean pickings, although somewhat better now they could use the Japanese's rations. Since losing the war, the Japanese obediently did what the English victors told them to: protect the camp against Indonesian attack. They stood on guard, ready to shoot if an Indonesian gang should try to enter the camp. Luckily that hadn't happened yet, although the Indonesian mortar grenades that flew over the camp were pretty dangerous. When the Japanese weren't on guard, they didn't parade along the Main Road like they used to do, but stayed inside their own houses. No one had to bow for them anymore and when it was time to eat they stood in the queue with their plates just like the camp's inhabitants.

One afternoon as he was wandering along the gallery, Hans saw Granny Van Soest eating a hard-boiled egg. He stood and watched.

She was sitting in a rattan armchair which she'd managed to wrangle from its real owner early on in the camp days with a big sob story. Hans watched jealously as she discreetly peeled the egg. From a distance of at least thirty feet, he could smell the egg's odour escaping, a whiff of food paradise. She took her first bite and Hans tasted it in his mind.

It was a long time since he'd seen a boiled egg, let alone eaten one, but the smell and the taste effortlessly rose up in his memory. My oh my, wasn't it delicious!

When Granny Van Soest put the rest of the egg into her mouth with a big bite, a sigh of disappointment escaped him. He would have taken much smaller bites.

The noise he made startled Granny, she shot up in her chair and looked around searchingly. When she saw him, she sank back into her relaxed position, reassured.

'That was really delicious, I guess?' he said and came a few steps closer.

‘Sonny boy, you can’t believe what you’re tasting,’ Granny replied with a smile, ‘it does an old woman good.’

Hans saw a second egg lying in her lap and his mouth watered. Would he dare to ask for a bite? Sonya would have just dived in, but he was too shy for that kind of thing. Maybe she’d offer him something if he hung around?

He squatted down next to her. *Djongkokken* that was called, squatting on the ground with your feet flat and your arms folded over your knees. A nice, relaxed position, you could stay like that for hours.

Granny picked up her second egg and tried to break the shell on the arm of the chair. It wasn’t easy, rattan wood bends and you have to tap an egg on something hard to break its shell.

‘Shall I break it for you?’ he asked, starting to stand up.

‘No, don’t worry,’ she said quickly and curtly, ‘I can do it myself.’

And she tapped the egg so hard against the edge of the chair that it broke into pieces in her hand. This egg wasn’t completely hard-boiled and now she was left holding a mixture of snotty egg white and yolk.

‘Hell’s teeth,’ Granny said, ‘don’t hurry me so.’ She carefully ate the egg out of her hand, eggshell and all. Hans heard the shell crunching between her teeth.

‘A bit of chalk won’t do any harm at my age,’ Granny said and Hans watched as she ate the mess and finally licked her fingers.

‘Fetch me some water,’ she said finally, handing him a mug.

How often had he made that trip for her over the past few years, taking the mug to the tap, a hundred yards away? And then back again without spilling anything. And she'd never even said thank you; he never got more than a nod out of her.

He took the mug from her and put it on the floor next to her. Then he walked away.

'You naughty little rascal,' she called after him, 'I'm going to tell your aunty.'

But Hans carried on. He was sure that Aunty Al wouldn't be angry about his behaviour when he told her about the two eggs.

Chapter 15 - In Which They Are Freed At Last And Get Ice-Creams

It was November 1945, three months since Japan had lost the war and peace had been declared. All that time they hadn't been allowed to leave the camp and a week ago, the Indonesians had tried to get in, screaming and shooting. Hundreds of Indonesians. But the Japanese had fired back and luckily that had stopped them. And now finally the Gurkhas came!

On 3rd December, twenty trucks drove into the camp. There were four Gurkhas on each truck, two facing forwards and two facing back. They had their guns raised when they drove in, but let them drop when the vehicles stopped. They jumped from the trucks, opened the latches to lower the ramps and gestured to the camp inhabitants to climb aboard. They'd drawn straws to see which of the barracks could leave first and barracks 3 and 4 had won. The mothers and children were ready and waiting, including Aunty Al with Sonya and Hans.

The Gurkhas were short but muscular and their shoulder emblems were of two crossed machetes. You could see real machetes sticking through their belts. As the women and children climbed onboard the trucks, Hans saw one of them pull out a knife and begin to play with it.

He made chopping movements in the air as fast as lightning and Hans saw that what a deadly weapon it was. You could slit someone's throat in a single move. Cripes!

He ended up in the last truck together with Aunty Al and Sonya. They sat on the hard wooden benches that had been placed along the length of the truck, around thirty women and children. The Gurkhas pulled a canvas roof over the top and closed the sides with a tarpaulin. That way you couldn't see whether the truck was full or empty from the outside.

Without anyone explaining it to him, Hans realized that this was for safety. Outside the camp, armed Indonesians were waiting to shoot white people who went past.

'We're going to Semarang,' Aunty Al explained, 'it's safe there. It's about 25 miles away. We'll be there in an hour.' Once everyone was seated, the four Gurkhas got back in position, you heard the roar of the engines of the twenty trucks and slowly the procession set off.

When they drove out of the gate, waved off by the people staying behind, Aunty Al heaved a sigh of relief.

'Children, children, it's finally over,' she said, pressing Sonya and Hans to her.

The truck was completely covered, but the Gurkhas sitting on the corners of the benches stuck their guns through peepholes. Through one of those holes Hans could see that the trees along the roadside were on fire. What if one fell and landed on their truck?

Or in front of it? Then you would have to stop.

Periodically, the convoy stopped for a minute or two. Sometimes they heard a few shots and there were shouts from one truck to the next asking what was going one.

'Does anyone here speak English?' one of the mothers asked.

'I do a bit,' Aunty Al said.

'Ask that Gurkha what's going on then.'

Hans heard Aunty Al ask something and the Gurkha say something back to her.

'He doesn't know either,' Aunty Al translated, 'but he said "OK", meaning it's alright.'

Still she looked worried.

'Maybe we should sit on the floor of the truck,' she suggested. 'Then if they shoot at us, they'll shoot over our heads or against the sides.'

They put all of their possessions on the benches and sat down in front of them. There wasn't much space, and it was a while before they worked out how to make the most of it, which was all of them behind each other, legs wide, facing the back of the truck.

'Don't tickle,' someone cried but it happened anyway, you could tell from the laughing. But the laughing helped, it made the fear go away. From time to time, they heard

shots and bullets clattered against the metal sides of the vehicle. A few times a bullet penetrated the canvas. But no one was hit.

The journey lasted more than an hour. It was already late in the afternoon, around three, when they arrived in Semarang. They jumped off the truck, one by one, and stood with their possessions under their arms looking around.

'Barracks again,' Hans heard a woman say in a disappointed tone.

They found themselves in a camp again, a few barracks on red ground. No trees, no grass, everything empty and cleared so that there was nowhere for snakes or other vermin to hide.

There was a piercing sound. An English soldier with a moustache and short trousers had blown a referee's whistle. There was silence and then he shouted something in English.

One of the women stood by his side and translated what he said.

'The second barrack is for us,' she shouted. 'At the entrance there's a pile of *tikars*, you know, sleeping mats. Take a *tikar* and look for a spot. First come, first served.'

She hurried off with her two daughters, the soldier watching her go in surprise. She was quickly followed by the group of mothers and children.

'You two get the *tikars* and I'll find a spot,' Aunty Al, already running, cried out to Hans and Sonya.

She'd taken good note of the situation, because soon there was chaos by the pile of tikars, as mothers and children tore sleeping mats out of each other's hands. When they'd finally got hold of three mats, they went to look for Aunty Al.

The barrack was a long, open space in which everyone laid their mats next to each other. But Aunty Al was nowhere to be seen. Finally they found her, right at the end.

Aunty Al had managed to get hold of a little room! It was actually a storage cupboard, no more than six feet across. Next to each other, their three *tikars* fit in perfectly and by the door they had a little bit of space left. It wasn't much, but they had a room to themselves. A luxury. They were so happy with it, it was hours before they noticed that the room didn't have a window.

When their stomachs began to rumble, Aunty Al sent out Hans to see whether there was any food going. But now he realized that having a separate room also had its disadvantages. They hadn't heard that it was dinner time and they'd missed the food being served. The enormous pans were empty. Putting on his most pitiful face, he managed to beg some crusty rice, which an English cook scraped from the bottom of the pan onto a metal plate for him. They had to make do with that, but they'd experienced worst in the past.

Still, that night they could hear each other's stomachs rumbling. And the little room got very stuffy.

The next day, a determined Aunty Al set off and came back with a large hammer.

She whacked the wall with it. White chunks fell off and behind them the brickwork appeared. 'Now your turn,' Aunty Al said, after panting away at it for a while, and passed the hammer to Hans.

He hit and hit and still more of the wall came loose. But only when Sonya took over from him did the first brick fall outside.

A glimmer of sunlight entered the room. Taking turns, they worked a few more bricks free and all of a sudden they had a window. A gentle breeze blew in through it.

Satisfied, they sat on their *tikars* and looked outside. In the distance, a group of soldiers were performing a roll call. They repeatedly heard the officer call out a name and then someone would answer, 'Aye.'

There was a barbed wire fence around this camp too, they soon noticed, but there wasn't a Japanese to be seen, and the gate at the front stood open, though two English soldiers stood on guard.

The whole camp belonged to the English and their Gurkhas. Outside each barrack, there was a tank which looked quite threatening. Luckily there was always a friendly male face looking out of the hatch.

When Hans and Sonya walked past and raised their hands, they always waved back.

'*Houw doe yoe doe'* they'd quickly learned to call out, and when they were asked '*wats yoer neem*', they had to give their names. Sometimes a soldier would throw down a chocolate bar, that was a treat.

Aunty Al wouldn't let them go any further than the street at the front of the camp, because although the Indonesian rebels had officially been driven out of Semarang, they might still be hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood. Luckily not everyone hated the Dutch. You could see that from the dozens of *baboes* who gathered at the gates each day and shouted out the names of their bosses from before the war.

'*Pandépenter*,' an old woman with a shrill voice called out for days on end. Indonesians have trouble pronouncing Dutch f's and v's and turn them into p's. She carried on shouting it, '*Pandépenter'* until the camp elder told her there wasn't a Mrs. Van Deventer in the camp. '*Dari mana*?' (where are you from?) Mrs. Anema asked her, because naturally she was the camp elder here too. '*Dari Djokja*,' she replied and they were able to help her

with the name of a reception camp on the other side of Semarang where the people from Djokja were housed.

'Look at this, the English soldiers gave me a mug and Granny Van Soest just gave me a load of money for it,' Aunty Al told them on the third day. 'We can use it to buy something outside the camp.' She had a wad of cash in her hand.

'I'll take you to the ice-cream man,' she said and not long afterwards they were walking out of the gate. Of course they didn't go far, they stayed within sight of the guards. On the other side of the street there was a *waroeng*, a stall, which sold ices.

That was where Aunty Al was headed. Hans and Sonya would have their first ice-creams since the liberation. Hans still remembered how delicious ice-cream was from before the war, particularly that white ice-cream. Vanilla ice-cream in one of those round glass bowls – he'd had that on his sixth birthday. He pictured Mum and Dad's smiling faces and tears welled up inside. But he pulled himself together and watched Aunty Al bartering with the ice-cream man. But she wasn't successful.

'He won't take Japanese money, kids,' she said at last and looked at the wad of notes which she'd offered the vendor. 'I would have been better off offering him the flipping mug. Granny Van Soest got one over me again.'

'Why doesn't he want any money, Mum?' Sonya asked.

'It's Japanese money, child. The only money that's in circulation. But now the Japanese have been beaten, it doesn't seem to be worth anything anymore. He's giving away ice-cream in exchange for food or clothing now, not money.'

Hans nodded gravely, it seemed logical.

They politely said goodbye to the ice-cream man and were just getting ready to return to the camp when he called them back and handed Aunty Al an ice-cream.

He'd felt sorry for them, they realized.

Aunty Al hesitated for a moment, she was actually too proud to accept a gift like that. But Sonya quickly stuck her hand out and said '*terima kassi banjak'* (thank you very much) and not long after that they were walking back happily, passing along the ice-cream as they went.

It was an *es lilin*, a kind of sorbet on a stick, as sweet as honey. It was delicious!

Chapter 16 - In Which Sorrow And Happiness Alternate

Post had arrived in the camp for the first time and Aunty Al was crying. She had received word that her husband Henk was dead. He had died at sea right at the beginning of the war. Hans had never met Uncle Henk but on the photo that Aunty Al always carried with her, and that Sonya often wanted to look at, he had a sturdy square-shaped head and smooth combed-back hair with a razor-sharp parting on the left-hand side. His hair looked blond on the photo but it was ginger, Sonya always commented. Just like hers. The head had a broad grin, laughter lines at the corners of the eyes, Uncle Henk was a happy person. This was how Aunty Al described him to Sonya and Hans too. He was a sailor, always sailing somewhere on his ship, but when he was home, he cheered up the whole neighbourhood.

Hans imagined Uncle Henk as a big strong man with a booming laugh, who could lift up Sonya and maybe even Aunty Al too, as though they were both feather-weights. And spin them round, of course.

His own father was different: thoughtful, he always had his nose in a newspaper. He was a bookkeeper, not an exciting profession. He wasn't big either, he was a small skinny man with glasses. But he was a brilliant storyteller and Hans often thought back to the stories his father had told him when he lay in bed in the evenings.

Stories about the grandpa who lived in Utrecht and worked as a decorator. Grandpa was colour-blind, but didn't realize it until he was almost fifty. For years he'd been recommending wallpaper in colours that people didn't want but ended up taking because grandpa was so convincing.

'Sitting rooms all over Utrecht are hung with the most disgusting colour schemes,' his father told him, laughing. 'And when he finally discovered he was colour-blind, grandpa went round to all of those people to apologize. But everyone was happy because none of their neighbours had such unusual colours in their homes.'

Dad also told lots of stories about the history of the Indies. How in Java, a brave Dutch functionary had fought against the local Javanese governor who exploited the population and pinched their cows for feasts for his extended family. Things didn't turn out well for the functionary, he was banished from the Indies, never to return. But he had written a book about the conflict that was still read by lots of people, even though it was more than eighty years-old. Father had also told him the writer's name, something like Multitulio.

And Dad could also tell stories by a French writer called Shool Vern. About a world in the centre of the earth, for example. Hans sometimes laid his ear to the ground and knew that

it was true: there *was* life under the ground. People who lived their entire lives by lamplight and had no idea that there was a sun above them.

Well, he hoped his father would come back from the war. Every day he went to the gate where there was a list of the names of the people who had sent letters.

But his father's name was never one of them.

'No news is good news, as the saying goes,' said Granny Van Soest, who had walked to the gate leaning on Hans. She was hoping for a letter from her son, but his name wasn't there either.

'So news is bad news then?' Hans asked.

Granny Van Soest laughed. 'Let's hope not,' she said.

Life in the new camp was a drag.

Aunty Al lay on her *tikar* all day, too upset to get up. Sonya had cried too, but her father had been away so often, she didn't remember much about him. She wanted Aunty Al to tell stories about him and she was happy to do that. Sonya mainly hung around her mother, made tea and fetched food.

Hans was left to his own devices. The children from the neighbouring families were all younger than him so he spent his time catching little fish in the ditch just outside the gate. If you held a jam jar in the water long enough a little fish would swim into it, and if you quickly pulled the jar out of the water it was usually still in there. They were mainly little grey fish with tiny staring eyes. Once he caught a bright green frog which froze and then suddenly jumped out of the jar using its muscular back legs.

It disappeared into the ditch with a soft splash.

'Get away from there,' a mother shouted at him one day, 'that ditch is dirty. You'll catch a disease.'

Hans didn't want that so he got bored instead, just like in the Japanese camp. He drew a house in the sand and wrote his name underneath it. He practiced the 16, 17 and 18 times tables out loud, as he'd learned to do at school, before the Japs came. One times sixteen is sixteen, two times sixteen is thirty-two.

All of a sudden, he heard a retching sound. Not as loud as a person, quieter.

It was coming from a stray dog standing a short way off and stretching its throat. It sounded as though it had a bone in its throat which wouldn't come out. Hans watched. Suddenly, a sausage came out of the dog's mouth, a pale sausage, still in its skin.

The retching carried on and a second sausage appeared, and then a third, and a fourth. They were attached to each other, forming a sausage chain. After the fourth sausage, the chain fell on the ground. That was the lot, nothing else came out.

The dog sniffed at the sausages and turned away. Gently wagging its tail, it trotted off.

Were the sausages off? Hans briefly considered picking them up and smelling them. But when he got closer and saw the slime on the sausages, he didn't feel like it anymore. He poked the sausage chain to the side with a stick so that the ants could have it. There were big red ants here, you could hardly see them on the red soil. Tomorrow he'd be able to see how far they'd got with biting off and carrying away the pieces of meat to the ants nest. They could be amazingly fast. He'd noticed that a week earlier when he'd seen a dead bird by the side of the road, next to the tree where it had fallen out of its nest. The insects had picked it off in less than a day. Only the bones and a beak was left.

He would remember the story of the dog and tell it to Aunty Al when she had got over her sadness. How long would that take?

He often thought about his mother himself, but the pain had lessened. He was becoming worried he would forget what she looked like and how she had sounded.

Then he'd get her picture out of his clutter box where he kept it along with pieces of rope and elastic bands.

And once he'd spent some time looking at the picture, she'd come back, Mum, and he'd hear her gentle voice singing to him like she had every evening.

'Oh mister moon, moon bright and shiny moon,

Won't you please shine down on me?'

After Mum's death, he sometimes sung it silently inside his heart in the evenings. And he'd look at the moon at the same time. But something had changed. He used to feel that his father was looking at the moon at that moment too, but that feeling had gone.

Maybe Dad was dead too, everyone was getting letters, but nothing came for him or his mother.

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'We can go back to Soerabaja,' Aunty Al said. After two weeks of mourning, she had got up out of bed and taken control again. From time to time, she'd sink into her thoughts and fail to react to whatever Sonya or Hans said or asked. But apart from those instances, she began to seem more like the old Aunty Al again: always busy, always optimistic.

Soerabaja. Hans remembered the city. He had been born there and before the war he'd been to school for almost two years at Theresia primary, a convent school.

Aunty Al and Sonya came from Soerabaja too, from the marine area of the city, the houses by the harbour.

'How will we get there?' Sonya asked. 'Can we walk?'

'Hardly, it's on East Java and we're in Middle Java,' Aunty Al said, 'it's about a three-hundred-kilometre drive. But a convoy is going there tomorrow and we can go with them. Then at least we'll be back in our old place. And your mother had an agreement with your father that they'd both try to get back to your old home. In the Slametstraat, right Hans?'

'Slametstraat 10,' he said. Amazing he still knew the number.

A convoy consisted of a group of trucks which drove in a line and carried soldiers for security. This convoy was mainly transporting food and bullets to the English troops in Soerabaja. Aunty Al and the two children were the only passengers. Each truck had eight Gurkhas carrying guns, though.

It was a long, long journey, each time the convoy got shot at, all the trucks stopped and the Gurkhas jumped off to look for the shooters. A while later you'd hear a few bangs and then they'd come back.

'It takes a lot of time, but it makes the route safer,' Captain Radstake explained. He was a Dutch soldier who'd come with the English to prepare for the return of the Dutch soldiers from captivity. He had arranged for them to join the convey and would also accompany them to Hans's old house.

When they finally drove into Soerabaja, the city looked deserted. No cars on the street and only a few people. It seemed calm and quiet, and Hans suddenly recognized where they were: the Pasar Malam Square. It was called that because once a year there was a big market in the evening with conjurors and fireworks and other fun things. *Pasar* meant market and *malam* evening. The Indonesian language was quite easy, really.

Hans knew that they used to live just near to the Pasar Malam Square. He pulled on Aunty Al's arm.

'This is where we used to live!' he said. 'In the Slametstraat.'

Aunty Al knocked on the back of the cabin. Captain Radstake opened the side window and looked out.

'Can we get out here?' Aunty Al asked. 'We know this place!'

'That's good,' Captain Radstake said, 'it seems quiet here. But I can't come with you right now, we have to deliver the load to the English camp first.'

‘We’ll find our own way. But does it seem safe to you?’ Aunty Al asked.

‘Oh, yes, the English have Soerabaja completely under control, I heard.’

‘Then we’ll risk it.’

They got out and Hans led them to the street where he used to live, with his father and mother.

The Slametstraat was a narrow street with smallish houses in a row. The front gardens were small too. Most of the people who lived here were Indo functionaries and office-workers. Hans father’s salary as a bookkeeper had been modest and he couldn’t afford a large house. It was also more fun here amongst the Indo families than with the Dutch people who lived in posher streets. Hans hoped he would see his old school friend, Ronnie Eekhout, who lived just a bit further up. At least, he used to.

But now there was no one to be seen on the Slametstraat. The houses were empty, doors had been removed, you could walk in everywhere. Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse! They walked into the house at number 10, where Hans had lived.

Everything was gone: the furniture, the beds, the photos which had hung on the walls, the pans, the spoons, the forks. There was nothing left in the house! And not only the front door, but all the doors had been removed.

‘Used as firewood, I guess,’ Aunty Al said. ‘In the camp we burned everything we could too. To use in the kitchen.’

They walked around to the back garden. A small tiled path led to the kitchenette where *kokki* Mina used to cook. Aunty Al counted the tiles and then squatted down.

‘Your father and mother agreed to leave messages for each other here,’ she said. She pried one of the tiles loose. There was a biscuit tin under it. Aunty Al took it out and opened the lid.

There was a little book inside. A book with photos, they saw when Aunty opened it. ‘For you, Hans,’ Aunty Al said, handing him the book. ‘These are family photos your parents buried for after the war. If your father had been here, he would have taken them and put a letter in their place to tell you where to find him. But he hasn’t been here, we know that now for sure.’

She took a letter from the pocket of her dress and placed it in the tin. Then she put the tile back over it.

‘A letter for your father from your mother,’ she told Hans, ‘she wrote to him when she knew she was seriously ill. I’ve added to it that you’re with me and Sonya now. If he comes, he’ll know where to look for you.’

Hans nodded, it hadn't all completely sunk in yet. He gripped the photo album tightly and they walked on further to Ronnie's house. That was empty too. As they walked and looked, they began to feel a little afraid of the silence and emptiness of the Slametstraat.

Where were all the people?

Stone houses such as these had always been for white and Indo people. Of course there were rich Indonesians and Chinese. They lived amongst them. But most Indonesians were poor and lived in the *kampongs*. They had bamboo houses, usually single-roomed, with narrow walkways between them. Hans had accompanied *kokki* Mina home on a few occasions.

Kampong Peneleh, lane 5, number 12. It was jam-packed with people who all lived in close proximity. It was cozy but turned into a mud pit when it had rained. Might she still live there? What about going to *kokki* Mina's house?

'Let's not do that,' Aunty Al said. 'That seems just a bit too dangerous to me.'

Undecided, they walked back to the large square of the Pasar Malam.

At last they came across someone, an Indonesian walking along in a big hurry. Aunty Al approached him. He didn't seem eager to talk to her, but they exchanged a few words nonetheless. '*Terima kassi, pak*,' they heard her thank the man.

When Aunty Al turned around again, Sonya and Hans saw that she was anxious.

'That man said that it's dangerous here,' Aunty Al said. 'Soerabaja is full of armed *pemoedas*, young Indonesians who want to get rid of us. All the whites and Indos are in Camp De Wijk now, guarded by English soldiers. We should get the hell on over there. Damnation! To think that Captain Radstake didn't know that.'

'Where is the camp?' Sonya asked.

'The entrance is on the corner of the Reiniersz Boulevard and the Coen Boulevard. I know approximately where it is,' Aunty Al said.

'I know exactly!' Hans said. 'We need to go this way. But it's a long way to walk.'

'We could have taken a *betja* before the war,' Aunty Al said, 'but I don't think there are any left. I've no idea how we would pay, either.'

The word *betja* brought back happy memories. They were bicycle taxis, with a bench up front and the cyclist behind it. The betja-man took you wherever you needed to go.

'I've got a bar of chocolate to pay the *betja*,' Sonya said and Hans gave her a jealous look. He had never been able to save a chocolate bar, he always ate them straight away. But Sonya had learned something from her mother: '*wie wat bewaart, heeft wat*' which meant something like 'waste not, want not' in Dutch.

‘A bar of chocolate?’ Aunty Al repeated. ‘Let’s see how far we can get with that.’

They walked down HBS-straat, turned right onto the Ondomohenweg and then left onto the Palmenlaan. This was a broad street which used to be full of cars and cyclists and betjas, sometimes even a *dogkar* – a horse and cart, but now it was empty.

All the houses seemed deserted, yet still they felt watched from every angle.

Suddenly a group of men came running out of a side street onto the Palmenlaan carrying spears in their right hands. They were singing something at the same time.

Aunty Al quickly pulled them behind a bush, so that the gang wouldn’t catch sight of them.

‘Those are *pemoedas*,’ she explained, ‘young men who want to take over the country. They are letting their hair grow until all the Dutch have left. They’ve already killed quite a few white people and Indos, I heard, in Semarang. But I thought the English had restored the peace. Blimey, what a carry-on! How are we going to get out of here?’

Hans saw that the running group were going the other way, they weren’t in any direct danger.

All of a sudden, a *betja* stopped beside them. ‘*Masoek sadja*,’ (Get in), the driver ordered, ‘I’ll take you.’

They quickly got in and he closed off the front of the *betja*, so that they weren’t visible. Where to? They heard the betja-man panting slightly as he pushed down on the pedals to gather as much speed as possible. They heard themselves driving through a busy part of Soerabaja. There were voices, the ringing of bicycle bells and sometimes they heard the roar of a car. *Betjas* only drove with the front and top closed when it was raining, so they would stand out.

‘*Orang mati*,’ (a dead body) they heard the betja-man reply whenever he was challenged along the way about what was hidden inside his vehicle, ‘*koeboeran’* (graveyard). A dead body he was taking to the graveyard, that was a clever idea.

They had begun to breathe a little more easily when they heard a loud ‘*Berhenti*’ (Stop). The *betja* braked, it made a grating sound. They had been stopped by a group of *pemoedas*, they realized. The betja-man told them he had to take a dead white woman to the English camp so that she could be buried.

It was a strange story and they only half believed it.

‘*Akoe maoe lihat*,’ (I want to see) they heard the leader of the group say and they waited with trepidation for the moment when he would tear off the front of the *betja* and see

them. Would they be able to run away? Or would they get spears thrown at them? But the driver cried out, '*Awas, sakit menoelar*!' which meant: watch out, infectious illness.

They heard the *pemoedas* talking amongst themselves, but they didn't understand what they were saying. They held their breath. Then the *betja* drove on, the lie had worked.

And finally they arrived. The *betja* stopped, the driver opened the front and said, '*Lekas, lekas*.' He pointed to a guarded gate where a Gurkha stood holding a gun at the ready.

'*Terima kassi banjak*,' (thank you very much), Aunty Al cried to him and Sonya quickly gave him the bar of chocolate. '*Kembali!*' (you're welcome) he said, looking at the chocolate in surprise. They ran to the gate and the Gurkha let them in without a word.

Captain Radstake was in the guardhouse by the gate talking to an English solder. He seemed relieved when he saw Aunty Al come in.

'You made it!' he cried. 'I was just asking John whether I could have a jeep and some Gurkhas to drive to the Pasar Malam square and fetch you.'

'You wouldn't have been in time,' Aunty Al said, and told him what had happened.

'Yes, Soerabaja has got very dangerous over the last couple of days,' the Captain said once she'd finished. 'Thank god there are still some decent Indonesians left. You'll be safe here.'

'Let's hope so,' Aunty Al said, 'up to now, it's been one nasty shock after another.'

Chapter 17 - In Which Hans And Sonya Gain A New Friend And Set Out To Sea

Camp De Wijk consisted of normal houses, it wasn't actually a camp, but a residential block.

There was a barbed wire fence around it, but that was only to keep the *pemoedas* out of the camp. Gurkha soldiers patrolled the barbed wire fence, their guns at the ready, so they could shoot at once if a *pemoeda* tried to climb into the enclosure.

Of course all of the houses were occupied already, but Aunty Al ran into some acquaintances and they knew of a good place for them: a big old house where three families lived, but which still had a large room free. Together with another family, they had a toilet and a bathroom with a real *mandibak*. You had those in every house in the Indies. They were big tiled troughs built from bricks, filled to the brim with water. The tap over the trough was always left on a bit so that the water was constantly refreshed and never stagnant. A *gajoeng* stood on the edge of the trough – a small round pan with a handle. You took the handle, filled it up from the *mandibak* and poured it over yourself. The water was always tepid, but slightly cooler than your body. It felt deliciously refreshing and you couldn't get enough of it. You poured *gajoeng* after *gajoeng* over yourself. Wonderful!

Only a minute after they arrived, Hans was standing in the bathroom pouring a *gajoeng* of lovely cool water over himself. He saw a cockroach crawl out of the drain – this was normal in a *mandi*-room too. He wasn't scared because he knew that cockroaches were just a large kind of beetle, they didn't hurt you, they just scuttled around. Hans didn't know what they ate but it had to be something dirty. You only saw cockroaches around drains and rubbish bins.

Just then he remembered what he used to do to cockroaches. You needed a bit of soap foam. Luckily there was a soap dish with a red soap in it on the edge of the *mandibak*. When he smelt it the name came to him straight away: Lifebuoy. They'd had the same soap in the *mandi*-room in the Slametstraat. It had such a nice phenol smell. He was reminded of his Mum and Dad for a second, but didn't want to feel sad. Quickly doing something else usually helped. Chasing the cockroach would be an idea.

He smeared some soap into his wet hair and then rubbed it with his hands until his whole head was covered in foam. He took a bit of foam in his right hand and threw it at the cockroach.

Missed! The cockroach was too fast. But the second foam ball hit and Hans saw the cockroach disappear quickly down the drain.

'Good riddance,' Hans shouted after it. 'Filthy beast'.

Someone knocked on the door.

'Hurry up, won't you, Hans!' he heard Aunty Al cry. 'You're not the only one who wants to use the *mandi*room!'

He quickly rinsed his hair and wrapped a towel around himself before going outside.

There was Aunty Al waiting for her turn.

'Don't you need to dry yourself first?' she asked.

'No, I like it like this. I'll dry off naturally!' Hans said.

'Mmmm, you smell lovely.'

'Lifebuoy soap!'

'You're kidding! I'm going to use it right away.'

Aunty Al hurried into the *mandi*-room.

Once Hans had put on clean clothes, he walked to the house's veranda.

Sonya and another girl were playing knucklebones. Knucklebones was a girl's game so boys were supposed to look down on it. But he liked to watch, it was a difficult game in which the girls repeatedly let a small rubber ball bounce on the ground, and before catching it again, they had to move the knucklebones, or turn them or collect them in their hand. It all went in a particular order and got increasingly difficult. If you didn't catch the ball in time or didn't move the knucklebones properly you were out and it was someone else's turn.

Sonya was good at it, but the other girl was much better. The ball and the knucklebones were hers so she'd been able to practice much more than Sonya.

'What's your name and which camp were you in?' Hans asked when the game was over and they were drinking squash together. Yes, they had lemon squash here, they could hardly believe it.

'I'm Maja,' the girl said, 'and I wasn't in a camp. We just lived here.'

'She's one of the one's who stayed outside,' Sonya said. 'Did you get very hungry?'

'Quite often. My mother sold our chairs and tables to buy food. We ate on the floor and that was fun. And she knitted socks for the Japanese. And sold biscuits on the street.'

'Did you really manage not to eat them? The biscuits?' Hans asked. His mouth was watering. Might they have biscuits in this camp? He hadn't eaten one in so long!

'My mother swapped them for rice or eggs. She said that was healthier,' Maja replied, 'my mother's a nurse.'

‘What bad luck,’ Hans said. Eggs and rice were nice but biscuits were much nicer!

‘When the Japanese got beaten and the English came,’ Maja continued, ‘my mother got a job at the Red Cross clinic and there was a lot of food there. I even had milk, yuk!’

Maya had round glasses which made her eyes look bigger than they were. She was a little shorter than Hans and had shoulder-length black hair. Her skin was light brown.

‘Do you live in this house with your mother too?’ Hans asked.

‘Not with my mother,’ Maja said.

‘Maja’s mother is in prison,’ Sonya explained, ‘picked up by the *pemoedas*. And her father died before the war. Car accident.’

Hans looked at Maja. The corners of her mouth trembled, she was upset.

‘Who are you with now then?’ he asked.

‘My aunt. She’s really nice to me. But I’m worried I’ll never see my mother again.’

‘Things will get better,’ Sonya said, encouragingly. She sounded like Aunty Al when she wanted to keep spirits up.

‘Do you think so?’ Maja asked.

‘Of course,’ Hans chimed in, ‘the Gurkhas will make sure she is freed.’

It was quite natural that Maja should become their new friend, and the duo became a trio.

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A young Gurkha has taken them under his wing. He came along every day after his shift. Sometimes he brought fruit and other times meat that Hans could smell from a long way off, it was so old and rotten. But Aunty Al accepted it with a smile and steamed it for hours on an oil-burning stove. Then it smelled a lot better and thanks to the soy ketchup that Aunty Al had been able to get hold of, it tasted like *babi ketjap*. They didn’t suffer from real hunger in this camp anymore but the portions were still small.

‘Look how fat they are themselves,’ people would sometimes grumble in the queue as they stood waiting with their food bowls. And it was true, the English cooks who prepared the meals were pretty fat.

‘That’s from old left-overs.’ Someone always tried to keep the peace. You didn’t get enough, but compared to the camp, the food was extravagant.

The food the Gurkha gave them came in handy, nonetheless. He had a very complicated name but suggested everyone just call him Johnny. He'd asked around the camp who could play chess and Aunty Al turned out to be quite good at it. Every evening, she'd play a game with Johnny and even though he usually won, Aunty Al beat him too from time to time. Then a second game would be played quickly and Johnny would win. After that his honour was saved. The Gurkhas didn't like to lose, that's why they were such good soldiers.

Johnny was married and had two daughters, he often brought out photos of them. They lived in Nepal, which was where he came from too. He hadn't seen them for four years. They were the same age as Sonya and Maja, he'd worked out, and when they played knucklebones he'd watch the girls with a tender look in his eye.

'Johnny says it's not going well in the city,' Hans heard Aunty Al tell a neighbour.

'The *pemoedas* murder every white or Indo they see walking about. The English are trying to get us to Singapore as quickly as possible.'

'Oh, thank god,' the neighbour said, 'I can no longer sleep for all the noise.'

Outside the camp every evening there were shouts of '*boenoeh orang belanda'* (death to all whites) and hard banging on pan lids and against lampposts. The noise wasn't that bad, but the fact that hundreds of *pemoedas* outside the camp were keen to murder you made everyone in the camp quite frightened.

The days went by slowly, there wasn't much to do. Sonya, Hans and Maja went around the camp together and spent a lot of time at a stream that ran right through it. It was actually more of a ditch than a stream, but the water was clear and if you looked for long enough, you could see little fish in the water. Little fish swimming against the current, sometimes they'd let the water carry them for a moment, only to swim back upstream afterwards. Once, when Sonya found an empty tin someone had thrown away (very dangerous because if you were walking around barefoot like all the children there, you could easily cut yourself on something like that), she tried to catch a fish. They took turns to hold the tin under water. Hans was the one who finally managed it. They triumphantly carried the tin home, and Hans put it on the little wall around the veranda. 'What do you think it eats?' Sonya asked Aunty Al.

'No idea,' she said, 'try a few breadcrumbs.'

They did and the fish began to pull and rip at them and you could see that some of the bread was ending up in the fish's body. It was so transparent you could see inside.

Proud of their catch, they went to look for other tins and jars so that they could catch more fish. But they didn't have any luck, no one had any spare tins or jars. When they returned after an hour, the first thing Hans did was to check how the fish was doing.

He saw at once that something was wrong – it was floating belly-up in the water. Motionless. Dead. A feeling of sadness overwhelmed him, what had gone wrong?

There was a nasty smell coming from the tin, the dead fish has already begun to stink.

'The water probably got too hot,' Aunty Al said, 'flowing water is always cooler than when you keep a creature like that in a tin. I wouldn't catch any more.'

They threw the fish as far as they could into the garden, it landed somewhere amongst the balsam flowers.

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The camp had got much fuller, they heard when Captain Radstake came along to find out how they were doing.

'Each week we take a few thousand of you to the harbour where there are boats waiting to take you to Singapore. It takes about two or three days. That's where you really find peace! Then you'll be able to get a proper night's sleep again at last.'

'I heard that the journey to the harbour was quite dangerous,' Aunty Al said.

They saw Captain Radstake hesitate for a moment.

'Yes, it sometimes goes wrong,' he admitted.

'Why don't you go and play outside for a while,' Aunty Al said to Hans and Sonya.

'Do we have to?' Hans asked.

'Yes, you have to.'

They reluctantly left the room. Father and mothers and sometimes aunts and uncles, never wanted children to know what was going on. Once they were outside, Sonya and Hans crept up to the open window. If they listened carefully, they could still hear what Captain Radstake and Aunty Al were saying.

'I heard that a transportation of women and children on their way to the harbour was attacked by *pemoedas* and that all of them were murdered.'

'Well, not all of them,' Captain Radstake said, 'but a lot. It was terrible. A large crowd blocked the trucks. About a thousand strong. The Gurkhas fought as best they could, but were all killed, as well as many of the women and children from the trucks. But there were some decent Indonesians around and they managed to hide some of the women and children in

neighbouring houses. About three hundred of them. Yes, that was the Goebeng transport, terrible, terrible. But it has calmed down since, you know. We are employing more Gurkhas and travelling at top speed.'

'And is it true that the Japanese have armed the *pemoedas*?' they heard Aunty Al ask. Just after that she closed the window and they couldn't hear Captain Radstake's answer.

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Before they knew it, it was their turn to take the transport to the harbour. An English ship was waiting there to take them to Singapore. A row of trucks stood ready in front of Camp De Wijk.

Soerabaja harbour was a long way away, Hans knew that from before. You had to go through the whole city and then it was quite a while before you reached the naval base.

Their truck was more than full, twenty women and children were sitting on the floor. The metal sides of the truck offered some protection, as long as they bent over.

Aunty Al put Sonya and Hans in front of her and wrapped her arms around then, so that if there was shooting, she had the greatest chance of being wounded. 'But then you'd get hurt!' Sonya gasped, 'and what would we do then?'

'They won't shoot at a monster like me,' Aunty Al joked. They accepted it but were relieved that Johnny was one of the six Gurkhas who got onto their truck, guns on their shoulders. He sat down next to Maja and her aunt.

The journey lasted an hour and they were regularly shot at on the way. You heard the hard rap of bullets against the side of the truck. Or all of sudden there would be a hole in the canvas.

Some girls cried in fright and Hans smelled that someone had wet their pants. Probably from fear. He didn't feel that frightened himself, thanks to having Aunty Al's arms around him. Johnny kept a sharp look-out and fired a shot from time to time.

All of a sudden they heard a great big, deep sound in the distance, as though a hundred trumpets were being blown at once. 'A ship's horn,' Aunty Al said, 'we're nearly there.'

They sat up, happy. Johnny noticed and gestured to them: keep your heads down.

He look outside for a brief instant and that was fatal.

A shot rang out and he gripped his chest and slowly sank down. Maja and her aunt made as much space for him as possible. He lay on his back with his knees up. Aunty Al crawled over Hans and Maja to get to him.

‘Oh my god, Johnny,’ she said. She bent over him and tore open his shirt.

They saw a wound that was bleeding heavily, as his chest heaved up and down. He tried to say something, but blood came out of his mouth.

‘He’s been hit in the lung,’ Maya’s aunt said. She tore up the shirt to staunch the wound.

A Gurkha standing at the back of the truck whistled very hard on his fingers and the vehicle slowed down. The Gurkha opened the canvas, jumped out, ran to a tree and shot up into the branches. A man fell out of the tree and the Gurkha grabbed his knife and cut his throat. Hans could see it through the opening in the canvas. He saw it from a distance but he know he would remember it for the rest of his life.

The Gurkha who had killed the sniper, jumped back into the truck and they quickly drove on.

‘Hang on in there, Johnny,’ Sonya cried out, she gripped his hand and he squeezed hard back.

A few minutes later they had reached the harbour and when they were ordered to leave the truck everyone pointed at Johnny: him first. Two Gurkhas carried him off and only then did they drop down out of the truck.

Hans remembered the harbour from before the war. People regularly moved to another Indonesian island or went to Holland on leave. And they went by boat. When a ship set sail, lots of friends and family members would come to the harbour to wave off the passengers. They called that *afduwen* in Dutch – pushing off. First everyone came on board to chat a bit more. Then the ship’s horn would sound three times, a very loud noise which made everyone jump. It meant: we’re about to sail and anyone not travelling should leave the ship now. Then the leave-takers would disembark and get out their handkerchiefs and wave the departing ship off from the quayside.

At first it would seem like nothing was happening. Then you suddenly noticed that the ship had moved a few inches away from the quay, then feet and then it sailed away. And then the leave-takers would go home again.

Back then, the harbour was always busy, but now it was quiet and empty. Apart from themselves and the Gurkha guards there was nobody to be seen. The trucks which had arrived early were parked a little way off, they were already empty.

A small boat was moored at the quay, not much bigger than a large sloop.

‘Do we have to go to Singapore in that?’ Sonya asked in concern.

‘No, don’t worry, that one just takes us to the ship,’ Aunty Al said. ‘Look, it’s out at sea. I think the harbour has become too shallow for such big ships. They won’t have done anything about it over the past four years.’ Hans looked and yes, there was a big ship anchored in the distance.

They joined the queue of waiting women and children.

Aunty Al had asked the Gurkhas whether they knew how Johnny was doing but they had shrugged. With heavy hearts, they got into the sloop. The ship that would take them to Singapore got visibly larger as they approached and turned out to be colossal when they were close. They had to climb a ladder and were helped at the top by English officers in shorts. Dormitories had been set up in the belly of the ship. This was called the hold.

They were given bunks in section 4 of the hold. The whole room was full of bunk beds which were bolted to the floor, otherwise they’d slide around in a storm. There was more than a foot’s space between each bed and that was a lot more than they were used to in the camp.

Announcements were made over the Tannoy, first in English only, and then all of a sudden in Dutch. ‘Should I speak into here?’ they heard a female voice say. ‘Alright then… Ladies and children, this is Marion Vanderstap from Banjoebiroe camp speaking and I’ve been appointed ship’s elder. They have asked me to explain to you what is going to happen. You now have the opportunity to wash and get changed. After that we will eat on the deck in groups. That will be in two hours. I’ll announce each time which section’s turn it is to eat. Until then.’

In section 4 a woman was appointed as elder and she indicated whose turn it was to wash. There was a washing area at the back of the room, where thick streams of water gushed out of big taps.

First the boys went, then the girls, and finally the mothers.

Hans was standing under a tap rinsing himself off when he took a sip of water and spat it right out again. It was salty. That’s why so much water came from the taps, it came from the sea and emptied back into the sea again. But salty or not, it did get you clean.

Freshened up, they went to the deck where long tables stood ready and a kind of porridge-like stuff was served, with meat that had been cooked tender and a dark brown sauce. Hans had never eaten anything like it before. ‘This is mashed potato,’ Aunty Al said, ‘with *stew*. Real Dutch food. English food, I mean.’

Hans tasted it cautiously. It was delicious and it just slipped down so easily. *Stoo*, he should remember that.

The ship had set sail without them noticing it. They could hear a constant muffled stamping noise. ‘That’s the ship’s engines,’ Aunty Al explained, ‘they drive the propellers under the boat, That’s how we move forwards.’

She wiped her sweaty forehead with her wrist.

‘When are we going to bed?’ Hans asked.

‘As soon as we’re told to, of course,’ Sonya said. ‘Everything here happens on command. Get up, wash, eat, sleep. Isn’t that right, Mum?’

‘Well, I hope we get some say in it too,’ Aunty Al replied.

Once everyone had eaten, most people went straight to sleep on their bunks in the hold. But Aunty Al took Hans and Sonya back up on deck. A deliciously warm breeze was blowing there. It had got dark, but when they hung over the railings and looked down, they could see the waves beating against the side of the boat. ‘Look at the front of the ship,’ Aunty Al said. They saw white foam where the prow cut through the water. They hung over the railings for a long time. There was something peaceful about the throbbing of the ship’s engine and the rush of the waves. The noise repeated itself continuously but sounded different every time.

Many mothers and children had come onto the deck, just like them, to enjoy the wind and the freedom. Some had brought the thin mattresses from their bunks and were preparing to spend the night on deck.

An English officer came along and chatted to one of the women who had put her mattress on the deck.

‘He’s a big cheese,’ Sonya said, ‘look at the stripes on his sleeve.’

They waited patiently to see what the conversation would lead to. Would the officer send the woman back into the hold with her mattress? No, he saluted and walked on, while the woman set her mattress down in a corner of the deck.

Aunty Al went over to her. ‘Was he alright with you sleeping here?’ she asked. ‘Yes, but not too close to the railings because sometimes water splashes over it. And there are flying fish. And it rains sometimes too, he said. But he doesn’t think it will tonight. Just look at the stars.’

Hans only understood half of what she said. Flying fish? Didn’t you call those birds? Maybe the woman hadn’t understood the officer’s English properly. Flying fish indeed!

And how could you see from the stars whether it was going to rain or not?

‘That means there aren’t any clouds, idiot,’ Sonya said when he told her the kind of nonsense the woman had come out with. But she found the flying fish strange too.

Giggling, they went downstairs with Aunty Al to fetch their mattresses.

Once they were settled on the deck, they fell asleep almost immediately.

The next morning they were woken up by friendly English sailors who wanted to set the tables for breakfast. They brought large pans of steaming porridge onto the deck and this time they didn't rotate by sleeping area but everyone who was hungry could eat when they wanted.

Very soon there was a long queue impatiently waiting until the people eating breakfast had emptied their bowls and got up. The same bowl was then taken by someone else, washed under a large running tap that gushed salt water and held out to the sailor who was serving up the porridge.

'Oatmeal porridge,' Aunty Al said, 'it's a long time since I've tasted that. You can't get healthier, Hans and Sonya. It's good for your bones.'

Hans found it hard to empty his bowl. The porridge was tasty but the back of his throat kept narrowing, making it difficult to swallow. He had to gulp and gulp to get the porridge down. He was still sitting there struggling with his food when everyone else had finished and the sailors came to scrub the tables so they could fold them up and put them away again.

The sailor doing his table gave Hans a friendly box around the ears and gestured that he should keep on eating.

Some way off, there was another child eating really slowly and when Hans had a better look he recognized her. It was Maja. He waved and she waved back. When they'd both emptied their bowls at last, they went off to look for Sonya, who was further up the boat, hanging over the railings.

'Hi Maja,' Aunty Al said, 'where did you end up?'

'Maja's in section 5, with her aunty,' Hans said. 'Her mother isn't back yet.'

The smile vanished from Maja's face. 'Yes, my mother isn't here,' she said. 'I miss her so much.'

She put a brave face on it but still had to rub her eyes for a second.

'Did you bring your knucklebones?' Sonya asked.

'Yes, of course, they're in my case,' Maja said.

'Let's fetch them!' Sonya cried and they ran off together.

'How awful for that child,' Aunty Al said to Hans. 'You shouldn't mention her mother again.'

Chapter 18 - In Which Maja Gets A Wonderful Gift And They Go On The *Tegelberg*

They arrived at Singapore harbour at night and didn't realize it until the morning, when they woke up. The mothers and children were picked up by buses which took them to the next camp.

It was called Camp Wilhelmina and it looked quite like the old De Wijk camp. This one consisted of normal houses too, but luckily it didn't have a fence around it. At last they began to feel like they were free, that they could come and go as they wished. Maja's aunt had found herself a different place, but didn't mind Maja sleeping next to her friend Sonya. The four of them were given a large room and after they'd been there a week a miracle occurred.

One afternoon, they were lying on their beds for the afternoon siesta when someone knocked, opened the door a chink and asked, 'Does Maja Indorf live here?'

'Mum!' Maja cried and rushed to the door. Her aunt was standing there with a woman Hans didn't know.

Maja's mother was small and slight and had Chinese eyes. She hugged Maja and they both sobbed with happiness. Sonya, Hans and Aunty Al looked on.

'Would you fetch some tea for Maja's mother,' Aunty Al said to them, 'And get some for us too.'

Hans and Sonya fetched six mugs of tea from the kitchen and when they had returned and given everyone a mug, they looked at each other.

'Welcome, Mrs. Indorf,' Aunty Al said, 'we were worried about you. I heard yesterday that a lot of people had escaped from the Werfstraat prison in Soerabaja. Is that where you were? Do tell all!'

Maja's mother was not a very good storyteller, they could see that, but she did her best.

'I was walking home from the Red Cross clinic where I worked when I was picked up by the *pemoedas* for not having a red and white badge on. Red and white, like the Indonesian flag, you know. They'd made the badge compulsory that same day, but I didn't know. So I had to get into the truck along with lots of other Indos who'd just been arrested. We were unloaded at the entrance to the Werfstraat prison and there was a crowd waiting there and they called us names and kicked us and hit us with sticks and *klewangs*. Thankfully I'm small and I was in the middle. And of course the men protected the women. So I got through it OK,

but most of the men had been badly beaten and their heads were bleeding. In the prison, the men were separated from the women. Twenty-two women and two children had three cells of four by four between us and we had it good. The men were crammed twenty into a cell and couldn't even lie down to sleep. The food they gave us was rotten and we only got one bowl of water a day. Oh, it was terrible. But well, at last we got freed. It was quiet one night and then we heard some loud shots. The Indonesian guards ran into the courtyard but it was an ambush. A few Gurkhas had got into the prison. And those Gurkhas…' She trembled visibly for a while. 'I don't need to go into that. I'm grateful to them for rescuing us. One tank with Gurkhas and a Dutch officer had blown a hole in the wall of the prison. And we all escaped through that hole.'

'There were 2,400 prisoners!' Aunty Al said, 'at least that's what I heard. And that Dutch officer is called Jack Boer. A hero! An operation like that with just ten Gurkhas and a tank!'

'The Gurkhas did kill all the *pemoedas*. Even the ones who surrendered. I don't think that was necessary. But they had treated us really badly, mind. You know, boys ganging up, egging each other on and then doing things they'd never do if there was just one of them.'

Maja's mother pronounced her words very carefully, Hans noticed and he asked Maja about it later.

'Yes, her father sent her to an aunt to learn proper Dutch,' Maja said. 'Her father is Chinese and her mother is half Chinese and half Indonesian. So they didn't speak any Dutch at home. But that aunt, she'd been to a Dutch school and spoke it well. She spent almost all her childhood there, it was a strict aunt. That's why my mother never raises her voice to me, she doesn't want me to grow up like she did. She's very sweet.'

Hans found Maja sweet too. She was a little shorter than him and slight, just like her mother. She often wore a ribbon in her hair and had a gentle but clear voice.

She could look terribly serious, particularly when she was really focused on something, but when she smiled her whole face lit up. Her eyes weren't Chinese like her mothers, but large and dark. And when she had her glasses on, they were even bigger.

Hans thought the prettiest thing about her, the little finger of her left hand. All her fingers were normal but that little finger was much smaller than the one on the other hand. It was as though her fingers had a little brother.

When Maja was playing knucklebones, her little finger joined in enthusiastically, just as younger brothers try to do. Hans liked to look at Maja but he made sure Sonya didn't

notice. He was conscious of his own behaviour, that's why he deliberately bowled Maja over as he ran past sometimes, once so hard it made her cry.

He would have liked have gone back to comfort her, but he knew that would look very odd. Boys were supposed to bowl over girls sometimes. But later on he gave her a piece of chocolate he'd got from an English soldier and her quick glance and the smile she gave him showed he'd been forgiven.

This was how the days went by, until all of sudden a message came: we're sailing to Holland!

They had to pack up their belongings from one moment to the next and get into trucks which would take them to the harbour. Maja, her mother and her aunt weren't on the list but when Aunty Al spoke to the English officer who was arranging everything, they were able to take the place of a family whose mother was still too sick to travel.

They made sure they all stayed close together so that they'd also be able to sleep near to each other in the ship.

When they arrived at the wharf, their mouths fell open.

This ship was as long as a street and they had to queue for a long time before they could climb the stairs onto it.

'You get two thousand people on this!' they heard a woman behind them say.

Aunty Al turned around.

'What's it called?' she asked.

'The *Tegelberg*,' the woman said, 'it's a Dutch ship. Once we're on board, we're already on Dutch soil.'

As they stood waiting, a group of around forty Japanese soldiers commanded by a Japanese officer came marching up and after a brief order, began to load basic supplies via a different staircase. Big sacks of rice, large tins of vegetables, crates of live pigs and chickens. The small soldiers carried everything up. Their green uniforms were soon dark with sweat.

'Got their just desserts,' Hans heard someone say and there were nods of agreement.

When they were finally on board, they had to walk past a couple of men and women dressed in white. One of them said to Hans, 'Open your mouth, would you?'

He obeyed automatically and they looked in his mouth. Next he had to show his hands. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw that Aunty Al, Sonya, Maya and her mother were all being checked in the same way. After that they were allowed to go through.

'What was that about?' he heard Aunty Al ask Maja's mother, 'you're a nurse.'

‘If I didn’t know better, I’d say they were checking us for foot and mouth disease!’ she said, laughing. It was the first time that Hans had heard her laugh.

They all stood on deck waiting to be assigned a place. Hundreds of woman and children and also some men were standing there, but inch by inch they moved forwards. Until they arrived at a young officer who looked at their papers and said, ‘D Deck.’ He showed them the arrows pointing to the different sections. They hurried because if they’d learned anything over the past years it was that you always have to be quick. Otherwise the best places were taken and the best food already eaten.

They were unlucky because there were already at least a hundred women and children on D Deck, claiming a hammock or bunk bed with their bedclothes.

They hurriedly took bedclothes from the pile at the entrance and Sonya, who could run the fastest found three still unoccupied berths right at the back. They quickly threw their bedclothes onto them and saw two more free places a little further up. But in the meantime a big boy had claimed two beds on top of each other for himself and his mother. His mother lay on the bottom bunk with her eyes shut and he sat next to her looking around defiantly. He had white-blond hair and blue eyes.

‘Oh, do us a favour would you and move along a bit,’ Aunty Al said.

‘No,’ he said, ‘this is our place.’

‘But it doesn’t make any difference to you,’ Aunty Al argued, ‘just a bit further along, then we can all be together.’

The boy stood up. He was a head taller than Hans, he could have been fourteen or fifteen years old. He was still very skinny from the camps, but his balled fists were large.

‘Maja and I will go further up,’ Maja’s mother said. She didn’t want a row.

‘That’s pathetic of you,’ Sonya said to the boy, ‘let me and my friend sleep next to each other.’

Her voice sounded shrill and the noise woke up the mother. She sat up and asked, ‘Is something the matter?’ Aunty Al explained it to her.

‘Of course we’ll move up,’ she said, getting up. She was even smaller than Maja’s mother, but she was the boss over her son.

‘Jack!’ she said and obediently, he carried the covers further up. Jack’s mother came over to them and said, ‘He got like that in the men’s camp. Everything had to be fought for there. The poor boy doesn’t know any better.’

‘Yes, those boys had it tough,’ Aunty Al agreed.

‘He had to leave when he was eleven, now he’s fourteen. He doesn’t talk about it much.’

Hans knew what they were talking about. In Ambangan too, the older boys had to go to the men’s camp. All the healthy men were taken to the work camps, where they had to work on the railroads or in the Japanese mines. That left only old and sick men in the men’s camps, and the older boys who were taken from the women and children’s camp.

‘They had to nurse the old men and wipe up after them,’ Jack’s mother said, ‘and there was diarrhea all over the place. They had dysentery. Or cholera. And when they died, the children had to dig holes and throw them in. Do you know what the worst thing was?’

‘No,’ Aunty Al shook her head.

‘When Jack returned after liberation, he still had the same clean clothes in the suitcase he’d taken with him. All those years he’d just worn the same outfit. He didn’t have a clue about washing!’

A tear rolled down her cheek and Aunty Al wrapped her arm around her. Jack stood in the distance giving them an angry look. He didn’t like his mother being so friendly with these strangers. Jack reminded Hans of a large growling dog. He hadn’t yet bared his teeth but it wouldn’t take much.

Sonya, Maja and he would have to make sure they didn’t get in Jack’s way.

There were clearly loudspeakers in the boat because a trumpet sounded and a loud voice said, ‘Ship’s drill, ship’s drill! A Deck is requested to make its way to lifeboats numbered 1 to 6 up on deck now. Right away please!’

It was an hour before it was D Deck’s turn and all that time they sat on their beds waiting.

‘If only we had some playing cards,’ Aunty Al said to Maja’s mother, ‘then we could play Hearts, or some other game.’

Maja’s mother nodded. Before the camp, Hans had sometimes seen grown-ups sitting round a table playing cards. The cards had looked colourful, some had a king drawn on them, or a queen. Others just had numbers, three, or five, or ten, and then the same number of, for example, hearts, drawn on them. Ten of hearts meant you had ten hearts on your card. But what else could you do with them? He had no idea.

When it was D Deck’s turn and they were up on deck, they each received a life jacket. If the ship sank during the crossing you could float in the sea wearing the jacket. A sailor standing on a chest showed them how to put it on. It looked very simple, straps over the shoulders and a strap around your waist, but it turned out to be much more difficult than they

all thought. The captain, a hefty man in a big cap, turned up to help everyone with the buckles.

'A bit tighter,' he said to Hans and pulled so hard on the straps he had to gasp for breath.

Someone pointed out which lifeboats they should get into in an emergency. From close up, the boats were large and they had to be, because thirty people needed to fit into them.

'You'll remember, won't you, ours is boat 13,' Aunty Al tried to impress on Hans and Sonya.

'The unlucky number,' Sonya said in alarm.

'If we have to get into that boat, the bad luck will have already happened,' Maja's mother said smiling. 'And this boat will save your lives!'

'That's right,' Aunty Al said. Hans saw that Jack had pushed forward and pulled his mother to boat number 11.

'Luckily we won't have them in our boat,' he said, nodding at the pair.

Once everyone had had a turn at the ship's drill, the deck was opened up to all. It was soon full of people standing chatting or hanging over the railings. There was also a pile of deckchairs which were hastily opened and immediately occupied. Their lucky occupants drifted off with happy expressions on their faces. Sonya was amongst them. 'Why don't you go off and explore some more,' she said, 'we can swap places in a bit.'

The *Tegelberg's* loud horn was blown three times and Hans and Maja, who were standing by the railings, saw the forty Japanese and their officer go down the steps. They had finished loading and were staying in Singapore.

The stairs were pulled up and the four thick ropes holding the ship to the quayside were untied. A few people staying behind waved to the ship as it departed. It wasn't long before they were on the open sea. They could still see Singapore in the distance, but around the ship were only blue waves.

Hans and Maja went off to explore.

A few children were standing on the quarter deck with a home-made kite. The sea wind blew so hard that they didn't even have to try to get it up. Once in the air, it stayed in the same place, as solid as a rock. Nothing to it, really, Hans soon thought. Even though the children carried on shouting 'Look' enthusiastically to everyone who came past, he could see that they were a little disappointed too. In the Indies you had kite-fighting. He had been too young before the camp to join in, but had watched older boys doing it. You asked your mother

for a couple of old light bulbs and pounded them until the glass had become a kind of powder. You mixed that powder with glue and then ran your kite string through it. You hung the string between two trees until the glue had dried and then you had glass-coated thread. You got your kite up in the air with that string and looked for an opponent who was flying his kite at the same time. You could make the kite dive and then go up and then dive again. If you saw a chance to let your kite dive over the opponent's string, your glass thread would cut through his. You saw right away if that happened, the other kite would drift about out of control and then come down. Everyone in the vicinity would start to run, because whoever caught the kite could keep it. Those were the rules.

But often a kite would end up in a tree. Then it was nobody's and would hang there until the wind and rain had battered it to pieces.

Yes, kite-fighting was very different from this, a kite that just hung in the same place, all taut and stiff. A boy showed how simple it was by bending a piece of cardboard and tying a piece of string to both ends. This shot right up too and hovered in the same place.

'This isn't real kite-flying, it's a parody,' Hans said to Maja who had joined him to watch. He had learned the word from his father a long time ago and it had stuck in his head.

'Do you know what a parody is?' he asked. She shook her head.

'Something is a parody when it makes the other thing look ridiculous,' he explained. 'By exaggerating it,' he added.

'Oh, so you're a parody,' she said.

He looked at her. Was she joking? Her big dark eyes looked at him seriously, but the way she pursed her lips gave him the impression that she was teasing him.

'Only when I exaggerate,' he said. 'Come, let's go on.'

But there really wasn't much to see. A few large taps about the place, which floods of sea water came out of until a sailor came along and turned them off and began to scrub the deck. And a few enormous cylindrical tubes which sucked up stale air from inside the ship and blew it out on the deck. They were surprised by the stuffy smell that came out. Then they walked past a tube blowing out a faint biscuity smell.

'Lift me up a mo',' Maja asked. Hans wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her up. She sniffed at the smell in delight. 'Let me down again,' she said and he lowered her back down.

'Oh, that was delicious,' she said, 'shall I pick you up now?'

'No, I'll jump,' Hans said. There was no way he'd ever let a girl pick him up. He jumped as high as he could and sniffed at the same time. Maja was right, it was delicious.

They were making biscuits unlike any he'd ever tasted. The smell promised a delicious taste. 'We'll have to try to find out where the bakery is,' he said.

They went down the iron staircases, towards where the biscuit bakery must be. But each time they got confused because the stairs descended in a spiral and when you got to the bottom you had to concentrate to figure out which way was left or right. Maja was better at it than Hans and with some reluctance he left things up to her. Three staircases later they found the bakery. The hot air flowed out to meet them, the door was open and they saw four sailors at work.

They were wearing cook's hats and had checkered aprons around their wastes. One of them was giving orders. 'Jan, don't forget the butter, you moron!' he cried and then looked in their direction. He was bald and fat and his forehead was covered in beads of sweat.

'Shove off!' he gestured to them. Hans turned around but heard Maja say, 'You are very good at making biscuits, sir. We can smell it right up on deck. What kind of biscuits are they?'

She had put on her sweetest voice and looked at the baker with big eyes. He hesitated, but then a proud look appeared in his eyes.

'*Speculaas*,' he said, 'to go with tea later.'

'Spe-cu-laas,' Maja repeated, 'we don't have that in the Indies.'

'No, it's typically Dutch. Even though the spices come from the East. Have you never tried it?'

No, Maja shook her head.

The baker walked over to an enormous open drum and took out a handful of biscuits.

He showed one to Maja and Hans, who approached curiously.

'Look,' he said, 'you can pour them into all different kinds of shapes. This one is a Dutch windmill.'

They saw a brown biscuit with a picture of a windmill on it.

'Take one. You too,' he said to Hans. They put the biscuits in their mouths and they were just as delicious as they smelled.

'Lovely,' Maja said. 'Thank you very much, sir. I will tell my mother we're getting something delicious at teatime.'

'Take some for her,' the baker said and gave Maja all the biscuits he had in his hand. He had large hands that could hold ten biscuits.

Maja carried them in both hands but gave half to Hans when they had to climb the stairs again. Hans went first.

They didn't meet anyone until they had reached the top staircase. There was Jack, the mean neighbour. Presumably he had smelled the biscuits too and was looking for the bakery.

'You have to pay a toll to get past,' he said.

Hans realized that he and Maja stood little chance. Jack was bigger and stronger than he was, and now he was standing at the top of the stairs he could kick too and there was little they could do back.

'How much is the toll?' he asked.

'Everything you've got in your hands,' Jack said, 'then I'll let you through.'

'The baker gave us these for our mothers,' Hans heard Maja say behind him, 'if you take the biscuits from us you'll make the baker angry. And he is big and strong.'

Jack thought for a moment.

'I don't care,' he said finally. 'Give me that stuff. I'm hungry.'

They were saved by a sailor who appeared behind him, wanting to go down the stairs.

'Going up goes first,' he said to Jack and pulled him back, 'let those children climb up first.' Hans and Maja ran up the stairs as fast as they could and when they'd set foot on the deck, they heard the sailor say, 'And now you go down, I'll follow.'

Looking back, Hans saw the sailor pushing Jack on, down the stairs. Had he known that Jack's intentions weren't good?

They didn't wait to find out and raced as fast as they could to Sonya's chair. The three of them together could take on the boy. Sonya had swapped with Aunty Al in the meantime. She was sitting next to her on the deck and on the other side sat Maja's mother. The little group enjoyed the delicious *speculaas* biscuits together.

Chapter 19 - In Which Hans Gets A Sailor's Uniform And They Hear A Very Sad Story

For days on end they saw only sea but then land appeared in the far distance. And before they knew what was happening, the ship had anchored in a harbour.

'This is the Adabia wharf,' the captain's voice said through the loud speakers. 'You can get off here and take a train ride. At the end of the ride, there's a surprise in store. The Red Cross has a post in the town of Ataka. You'll get fine foods. There are clothes. There are toys. And at the end of it you'll return here and we'll sail on. Have fun!'

There were cheers. They really needed to get out, after so many days on board, constantly tripping over other people's legs.

'How funny it feels,' Sonya said as she walked along the quay, 'as though the earth is moving.'

'That's because the ship's movement has got into your legs,' Auny Al said, 'I happen to know that from other trips. When you go onshore, your legs carry on anticipating the ship's movements. But it soon wears off.'

And indeed, by the time they had arrived at the waiting train, the ground felt strong and motionless again.

'I don't really dare get into the train,' a woman behind them said, 'remember that train journey from Bandung to Djokja? On the way to the camp? We were packed into closed carriages for twenty hours, without water or toilets. It stank! And people threw stones at the train the whole time!'

'I asked the captain, Miep,' the person she was talking to replied, 'it only takes fifteen minutes to get to Ataka. Come on, just give it a go.'

Aunty Al turned back to the woman.

'Each carriage does has a window,' she said, 'for fresh air. And if you need space you can stand on the balcony outside. Look.'

They climbed onto the train and Aunty Al was right, there was enough room, and light fell into the carriages. The journey took a quarter of an hour and when they got out, they saw a big sign saying WELCOME. There were a few open warehouses in the distance.

In the first warehouse, you could get a plate and fill it with all kinds of pastries.

But the children were quickly ushered through to a second warehouse which was full of playground toys. Swings, slides, climbing ropes, tricycles, anything you could think of and they had it.

And luckily there were lots of men wearing Red Cross uniforms to hold Jack back, because he ran around like a savage, shouting out what he could see: 'Look, a swing! Look, a slide!'

He jumped onto a swing and then off again and pushed children off the slide so he could get his turn as fast as possible.

'Is there something wrong with that boy?' Hans heard one of the Red Cross men ask another.

'Take him to the confectionary section,' the other man answered and soon Hans saw the man hauling Jack away by his arm, towards the first warehouse with all the sweet stuff.

Later, when the adults were on their way to the third warehouse where you could get clothing, the other children were taken to the pastries. Jack was sitting there on a stool, his whole face covered in icing sugar.

When they'd eaten all the pastries, the mothers came back with kit bags full of new clothes.

'What a score,' Aunty Al said to Maja's mother, 'I found a lovely jacket and dress in my size. Did they have anything for you?'

'Only in children's sizes,' Maja's mother replied. 'In childish colours. Well, anything is better than nothing. Those Dutch people are all so massive.'

'You could have got something bigger and taken it in,' Aunty Al said.

Maja's mother slapped her forehead, 'How stupid of me,' she said.

'And I've got clothes for you too,' Aunty Al said to Sonya and Hans, 'a pretty sailor's jacket and long trousers for you, Hans. And a pleated skirt and a jumper for you, Sonya.'

They walked back to the train which was waiting patiently for them.

'Have a nice trip,' Hans read on the back of the banner that said 'Welcome'. How handy that was, a banner that said 'Welcome' on one side and 'Have a nice trip' on the other. He should remember it.

An hour later, back on the ship, they showed each other their spoils of the trip to Ataka.

Sonya was wearing a white skirt and a pink jumper. 'And new underwear,' she said proudly.

Maja had on a red dress with puffed sleeves. And a pair of shiny black shoes. It suited her, Hans thought, but of course he'd never say something like that to a girl.

For the first time in his life, Hans had long trousers, in a grey colour. The legs were slightly too long but Aunty Al had turned them up on the inside. If he didn't walk too fast, they stayed in place. On top he was wearing a white shirt and a dark blue jacket with copper buttons and three white stripes at the end of each sleeve. It fit nicely, but he didn't feel comfortable in it. Wasn't it too gaudy? In the camp he'd learned that you should always try not to stand out. Otherwise the Japs would notice you and if you did something wrong, like forgetting to bow, your mother would be in for it. He felt better in the torn, worn-out clothes from the camp than in these clothes which still smelled so new.

'You look like a coxswain on a big ship,' Sonya said.

'How many coxswains on big ships have you seen then?' Hans retorted.

'Just one,' Sonya said, 'you.'

Walking on deck with Aunty Al, they bumped into the captain. He was strolling around in a white uniform covered in braids and stripes and a big white cap.

'Well, well,' the captain said, 'I've got competition. What a lovely uniform you have. I'm terribly jealous.'

'I've got three stripes,' Hans said. He had no idea what to say to an important man like that and this just popped out of his mouth.

'I can see . Well, if you're a good boy, you'll get another stripe too,' the captain said.

He saluted Aunty Al and walked on.

Hans decided not to wear the jacket again until it was really necessary – in Holland when it was cold and he didn't have anything else. But for the time being, he could do without a jacket. This was much too swanky, as though he was an important seaman. Well, he wasn't and he didn't want to be either.

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'We'll be sailing through the Suez Canal soon,' Aunty Al said, when the boat had unmoored from the Adabia wharf.

'What's the Suez Canal?' Sonya wanted to know.

'Oh, I know that,' Maja said. 'I learned it at school.'

No education was allowed in the camps, but Maja and her mother had stayed outside and a few teachers had given children lessons at home – in writing and maths and even geography.

‘In the olden days, boats going to the Indies had to sail all the way around Africa. But it was such a big detour, they decided to dig a channel at a point where ships could sail right through to the Indian Ocean. It’s called the Suez Canal.’

It sounded like she’d learned it off by heart.

‘Very good, Maja,’ her mother said.

‘Yes, we know that too,’ Hans said, ‘but how long is it going to take?’

‘Oh, a whole day the captain said,’ Aunty Al said.

The ship had stopped. In the distance they could see a city.

‘That’s Suez,’ Maja knew, ‘the city at the start of the Suez Canal.’

A boat came chugging up and the gangplank was lowered. A little while afterwards, a short brown man wearing a khaki uniform with large buttons climbed up. A white cap on his head. He had a little moustache and a little beard and bared a row of white teeth when he smiled and shook the captain’s hand. They walked over to the bridge, the highest part of the ship and soon the anchor was being pulled up with a lot of clattering and the ship sailed slowly on.

The Suez Canal was pretty boring, Hans and the two girls soon thought. On the one side an expanse of sand and on the other side the same. Egypt, which the Suez Canal went through, was mainly desert. Sometimes they saw a few camels walking along the road next to the canal, loaded down, their riders on their backs or walking next to them.

‘Those are camel trains,’ Maja said, ‘camels have got two humps in which they can store a lot of water. That’s how they can walk through the desert in this heat.’

Hans thought she was quite a know-all, but on the other hand, she did know a lot of useful things.

It was boiling hot here, quite a lot warmer than in the Indies, but also a different kind of warmth. A dry heat, which hurt your skin.

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The ship soon became their playground. They knew the way to the ‘engine room’ where a couple of sailors in shorts watched over the engine and gave it a squirt of oil from time to time. Engine-man Harmen Voorburg was the boss. He was happy to explain how the engines drove the three propellers and how fast the *Tegelberg* could go – seventeen knots an hour.

‘What’s a knot?’ Hans asked.

‘We don’t talk about miles or kilometres at sea,’ the engine-man said, ‘but nautical miles or knots. One knot is 1,852 metres, a little more than a mile. So seventeen knots an hour is almost twenty miles an hour. That’s faster than you can run, boss,’ he said to Hans.

‘Certainly over water…’ Sonya said.

There was a short pause then the engine-man burst out laughing.

‘You are a piece of work,’ he said, opening a drawer in his workbench. He took out three bars of chocolate, one for each of them. ‘And now scram, upstairs the lot of you,’ he said grinning, ‘passengers aren’t actually allowed in here.’

Another adventure took place on deck. They were playing shuffleboard when they suddenly heard a woman screaming on deck. She was sitting in a deckchair and pointing at a fish which was thrashing around violently. A sailor who came running, heaved up the fish and threw it over the railings. But not long after, another fish jumped onto the deck, and another and another.

‘It’s raining fish,’ Hans said to Sonya and Maja in astonishment.

They looked up but the fish weren’t coming from the sky.

‘They’re flying fish!’ the sailor shouted to the couple of dozen people who had come running to investigate the screaming. ‘They don’t bite!’

He walked to the railings followed by our trio. And as they looked out to sea, they caught their breath.

Dozens of silver fish were shooting over the water, their tails hanging in the water. And then, all of a sudden, they all hovered, their fins spread out like wings. As they came nearer the boat, most of them hit the sides and fell back into the water. But some were so high up they fell onto the deck.

By the end, ten fish were lying there gasping for breath.

‘Poor thing!’ Maja cried, running over to one of the fish. But each time she tried to pick it up, it slid away out of her hands.

‘Leave it.’ The sailor had picked up a fishing net on a stick. If he cast the net over a fish, its thrashing would get it stuck and he could lift it over the railings and into the water.

‘Can’t we eat them?’ Aunty Al asked.

‘No,’ the sailor said, ‘they say they’re more bone than meat. And they go off while you’re watching.’

‘Ugh,’said Aunty Al, pulling a face.

‘The fish fly when something frightens them,’ the sailor said, ‘they escape into the air. The chances are high we’ll see a school of dolphins that were chasing them. Dolphins eat fish.’

They kept on looking over the railings and yes, there in the distance, if you looked hard, you could see dark grey bodies rising out of the waves. Only when they saw a large fish doing a somersault over the water were they sure: a dolphin. They soon came closer to the ship and swam along next to it. There were around ten of them. They easily kept up, sometimes swimming ahead, then letting themselves fall back again, doing somersaults, and playing tag with each other.

‘They must be asking themselves what kind of big fish we are,’ Maja said, ‘because of course they don’t know that ships exist.’

‘They think we’re some kind of whale,’ Sonya said.

‘A whale with people on its back,’ said Hans.

They stayed by the railings until it was almost dark and the bell rang for dinner. After eating they went back for another look, but it was so dark you couldn’t see the dolphins anymore.

All you could see was the broad white stripe the ship left behind in the waves.

As they were walking back to their berths, they passed a lifeboat.

‘Hey, the tarpaulin is loose,’ Hans said, ‘we can get in, I think. Give me a leg up.’

Sonya knew what he meant. She linked her hands together so that Hans could use them as a step. Then he could get up.

But before he’d had a chance, Hans heard a noise coming from the boat.

‘Shhh,’ he said, putting his finger to his lips. He pointed at the boat and cupped his hand around his ear. The three of them listened in. They heard the noise again. It sounded like a sob. And then another one.

‘Someone’s crying in there,’ Maja said.

‘Well, let’s go on then,’ Hans said and Sonya nodded.

‘But you don’t just walk away from someone who’s unhappy, do you?’ Maja said. ‘Help me up.’

Maja was the smallest and lightest of the three and when she put her foot in Sonya’s folded hands, Sonya could even lift her up. Maja disappeared over the rim.

‘Now you,’ Hans said to Sonya, linking his hands. He was able to pull himself up on the rim and tumbled into the boat. It was dark inside.

‘Bugger off,’ they heard a voice say. They recognized the tone, it was Jack.

‘But you’re crying,’ Maja’s voice said, ‘are you sad?’

There was silence. ‘You can tell us,’ Maja said, ‘we won’t tell anyone.’

Still silence.

‘Otherwise we’ll tell everyone you’re a cry baby,’ Hans heard Sonya say.

That hit the mark.

‘If you do that I’ll give you a big slap.’ He almost sounded like the Jack they knew.

‘Tell us what the matter is,’ Maja repeated.

Then they heard a repressed sob and Jack began to talk.

‘I was in the men’s camp and sometimes I can’t stop thinking about it. All those sick old men, they were so horrible to us. The Japs made us wash them and feed them and they shat themselves all over the place and stunk to hell. And they swore at us when we didn’t empty the potties fast enough. They had dysentery, they had the runs the whole time. There was blood in their shit. I had a mate, Pieter, and the two of us made it through together. We got through the whole camp time, beaten by the Japs, cursed by the old men.’

‘Yes,’ said Sonya, ‘but luckily that’s all behind you now. Isn’t it, Jack?’

But now he had started, Jack felt compelled to tell the whole story.

‘And then we were freed. My mother had given me a suitcase of clothes, but I’d never worn then. Be a pity to use your spares. The war might go on a *lot* longer. Right? Then we were freed and Pieter and I decided to sell the clothes for food. There was a *kampong* in the neighbourhood, you could swap clothes for rice and eggs there. But it was dangerous, we’d heard there were *pemoedas* in the *kampong*. With *bamboe roentjings*. He went off and I waited at the gates for him to come back.’

There was a pause, but now they waited patiently for Jack to continue.

‘And suddenly I heard shouting and saw Pieter come running up, my suitcase still in his hand. And behind him a gang of *pemoedas* with *bamboe roentjings*. Pieter was a very fast runner, that’s why he’d gone rather than me, but you could see that the suitcase was holding him back. When he got closer, the Japanese guard picked up his gun and fired shots above the *pemoedas* to frighten them off. But they kept on coming. I shouted ‘drop the case’ as loud as I could, but Pieter didn’t hear me or he was too stubborn. They gradually caught up with him, but he thought he’d make it to the gate. And when he was really close, the Japanese guard shot down the *pemoeda* who was the closest to him. He hit him in the leg, because you saw him start limping. And as he limped he threw his *bamboe roentjing* as hard as he could.

Towards Pieter. And he got it in the back. He fell through the gate and the Japanese guard slammed the door.'

Again Jack lapsed into silence. They couldn't see him, but they could hear him snorting. Then Jack carried on with his story.

'Pieter fell onto the ground just in front of me, on his belly, and the Jap pulled the spear out of his back. Pieter looked up at me and I saw blood coming out of his mouth. "Didn't manage it," he said, and then his head fell forwards.'

Again Jack stopped talking.

'And was he badly wounded?' Maja asked. Again there was a sniff and they could hardly understand Jack when he said, tearfully, '"Never mind," I said to him, but he was so still, I rolled him over. And then his eyes looked at me. But he was dead. He was dead.'

He sniffed uncontrollably.

'You two go, I'll stay with him,' Maja said. You could tell she was a nurse's daughter, she sounded so resolute.

They obediently climbed out of the boat and waited on a bench a bit further up for Maja to reappear. It took so long they had just decided to go to bed when they saw Maja crawl out of the boat, followed by Jack.

As they came closer, Hans and Sonya saw that Jack was looking normal again. His hair was messy, but apart from that he was the same surly boy they knew.

'If you ever tell anyone, I'll kick the living daylights out of you,' he said. And they could see he meant it.

'It's fine to be sad about a friend who has died,' Maja said. 'But we won't tell anyone, will we, Hans? Sonya?'

'As long as we can use the lifeboat,' Sonya said.

'Alright,' Jack said. 'Enough lifeboats about the place!' Now it seemed like a proper deal.

Jack hurried off at his usual fast pace and the three closed up the boat again. But they made sure the knots were still easy to undo. And every afternoon, when the adults were sleeping, they crawled under the boat's tarpaulin. They were out of the wind there and Maja and Sonya could play knucklebones on the floor of the boat, while Hans watched. Things changed when the ship sailed through the Bay of Biscay. There, near Portugal, there were always storms, the captain had warned them beforehand, and it was true.

The wind howled around the ship, which groaned and rocked from left to right and then from right to left again.

‘Passengers are requested to stay below deck,’ commanded the Tannoy and everyone obeyed. But if you stood at the top of the staircase leading to the deck, you could see the upper deck through a porthole and the deckchairs were sliding around as though they were dancing together. Hans couldn’t get enough of it.

‘Man overboard,’ the loudspeaker suddenly announced, ‘passengers stay inside.’ The ship’s engine pounded even more loudly than usual and Hans understood that the ship was trying to reverse.

Through the window, he saw a number of sailors going on deck and tying themselves to the railings. From there they cast a few life buoys out to sea. They were fastened to ropes, so that if the person in the sea grabbed onto a buoy, they could hoist him up.

And this was what happened too. It took a while before the ship had backed up, but Hans saw three sailors pulling on a rope together and a few minutes later Jack’s head appeared over the railing. For a moment it looked as though he’d pass out, but then he opened his eyes and smiled weakly.

‘He just jumped overboard,’ Aunty Al said later to Maja’s mother, ‘someone on the bridge saw it and cut the engines at once. That boy’s not right in the head. I pity his mother.’

They didn’t see Jack for the rest of the journey. He lay in the sickbay where they kept a sharp eye on him, his mother told them. She was still sleeping near to them. ‘Jack is so confused! He flies at everyone’s throats! And he used to be such a sweet, quiet little boy. They’re giving him pills now that make him very sleepy. They hope it will cure him.’

It wasn’t until they had reached Holland and were sailing up the North Sea Canal, past IJmuiden, towards Amsterdam, that Jack appeared on deck again, a sailor standing next to him.

He waved at Hans, Sonya and Maja and they waved back. He seemed less angry and malevolent than at the beginning of the journey. They hoped he would be alright. But they didn’t mind that he’d been out of the way for the past few weeks. It had meant they could have a pleasant journey.

Chapter 20 - In Which They Become Acquainted With Shiverland

The journey through the North Sea Canal from IJmuiden to Amsterdam took a couple of hours and all that time, the rails of the *Tegelberg* were packed with passengers eager to get a view. Was this Holland? There wasn't much to see. Fields, a house here and there, in the distance a factory issuing thick white clouds.

'The Hoogovens,' someone said. It was drizzling – very fine droplets of rain.

There was a road next to the canal, it had cyclists on it. They were all wearing long raincoats and hats and cycled as fast as they could to get out of the rain. It didn't look much fun, and the sun was invisible behind the thick cloak of clouds.

'It's raining moths,' Maja said, she was standing next to Hans and Sonya at the railings.

'What do you mean, *moths*?' Hans asked. There were very small droplets of water on his arms. Why would you call them moths?

'No, you're saying it wrong, Maja,' her mother, who was standing behind her, said. 'In Dutch you call that gentle rain '*motregen'* which does mean moth rain, but not like that.'

'If you've got *motregen*, it's raining moths, isn't it?' Maja said. She was right, Hans thought, and Maja's mother must have thought so too because she didn't say anything else.

'A moth is a very small butterfly that likes wool. In Holland, they store their woolen clothes with a bit of camphor, because the moths don't like that. That's how they make sure they don't get holes in their jumpers,' Aunty Al said. She sounded like a school teacher.

Hans felt dizzy. Moths and camphor, all kinds of new things. And why would you call tiny droplets moths? There was a lot to learn here in the Netherlands. At last they arrived at a large open stretch of water where lots of boats were sailing around.

'This is the IJ!' Aunty Al said, she had been swatting up. 'This is Amsterdam's harbour.'

Hans saw a boot which had words painted on the side: '*Gooit niet uw vuil in de grachten*.' – Don't throw your rubbish in the *grachten*. That was a new word too, *grachten*, what could it mean?

The rubbish boat was filled with a muddy substance. A few bikes stuck out of it.

But before Hans could get too engrossed, the *Tegelberg* was moored to the quay and there was an announcement that passengers should prepare to disembark.

'Disembark means get off the boat,' Aunty Al explained.

They looked at each other, the three children and the two mothers. Would they be able to stay together in Holland? Or would they end up in different places? They were called ‘repatriates’ and that meant people returning to their fatherland. Not that Holland was their real fatherland, but now that Indonesia had become independent, they had to consider it their fatherland. And once you set foot on shore, the government would make sure you had somewhere to live. That could be anywhere in the Netherlands, you didn’t have any say in the matter.

‘Let’s say goodbye just to be sure,’ Maja’s mother said, ‘then it can only be a nice surprise. And we’ll stay in touch, won’t we?’

‘We’ll stay in touch,’ they promised each other, as they hugged. But they all knew it was nothing more than a promise. In the Indies, nobody lived in the same place for long because they had to move around for their jobs or were sent to the Netherlands on leave. You were always saying goodbye to people. ‘We’ll stay in touch,’ they’d cry as they drove off or sailed off and they’d wave and the people left behind would wave back. But nothing ever came of it. You lost the address, or you forgot their last names. And there were soon new friends or neighbours in their place.

But here, in this strange fatherland, perhaps the promise could be kept. When Hans shook Maja’s hand, he promised her they’d stay in touch and she nodded as though she believed it.

They went down the stairs to their bunks and collected the suitcases containing all their belongings. They didn’t have much, especially not now they’d put on their Dutch clothes. Hans was wearing the navy blue sailor’s jacket which he’d got in Ataka. But when he saw the stripes he complained so much that Sonya had cut them off with a small pair of scissors. Now it just looked like a normal blue jacket, although you could see where the stripes had been.

Aunty Al had told Hans that he didn’t have any relatives in Holland anymore, apart from his Grandfather, the colour-blind decorator. So she was going to ask whether she could adopt Hans if his father didn’t come back from the war, and whether she could be his foster mother until that time. The ship’s captain had telegrammed ahead to the Netherlands and had heard back that that would be alright.

‘So now you really belong with Sonya and me,’ Aunty Al said, and the three of them had danced around in a circle. Of course Hans kept on hoping that his father would still return, but if he didn’t, he definitely wanted to stay with Aunty Al and Sonya.

The chance that they'd end up in the same place in Holland as Maja and her mother was slim, because the Dutch government wanted to spread out all the people arriving from Indonesia as much as possible over the country.

Carrying their suitcases, they walked in a line to the *Tegelberg's* upper deck, Aunty Al leading the way, then Maja's mother and then the two girls and Hans. Upstairs there was a long queue until it was their turn to walk down the gangplank. And then they had to go into a large warehouse, with long tables where men sat with piles of papers in front of them. The passengers were divided alphabetically across the tables – people with surnames beginning with A had to go to the first table, B surnames to the second table and so on and so forth. It was busy at the B for Bakker, as Aunty Al was called. They saw Maja and her mother standing at the I for Indorf; there the queue was very short. They soon reached the front and were taken by other men to the busses you could see waiting further up. Maja waved back to them and they waved too.

An hour later they were in a bus too. At the exit to the warehouse they'd each been given a round green fruit. 'Now this is an apple,' the woman said as she handed them out from a large basket, 'you can eat it right away.' They sniffed at the apples, Hans liked the smell.

'We're going to Hilversum,' Aunty Al said, 'to a boarding house, a kind of small hotel. There are some here that have rooms for repatriates. The government pays them four guilders per person per day for food and accommodation. We have to pay it back later, you know, it's not charity. Which is better, otherwise we'd have to be grateful. And I hate being grateful.' She was talking more to herself than to Sonya and Hans. They'd been eating their apples and found the fruit delicious. Only the very middle bit with the pips was quite hard, they'd really had to chew on that. No one had told them that you called this bit the apple core and that you were supposed to throw it away. They only learned that later.

Now they sat in the bus next to each other and looked out of the window at Holland. How different it looked from the Indies! Not a mountain to be seen, only flat grasslands and the occasional farm.

'Look, cows!' Sonya cried out and Hans saw them. They only knew cows from the pictures in children's books. There were almost no dairy cows in the Indies, it was so hot there milk went off immediately, and for meat, they'd had *sapis*, a kind of cow, but still a bit different. A *sapi* had a lump on its back and a large flap of skin hanging around its neck.

From time to time, the bus passed through a village and they saw the Dutch houses. Three or four storeys high, some of them! And often built of red brick. In the Indies, most of

the houses were bungalows with no upper floors and they were always painted white to keep out the sun's heat.

The bus would generally stop when it reached a village and drop off a couple of the repatriates. Once they had got off, the bus would open its hatches and they could get their cases. After that you saw them walking to the door of the hotel, slowly, as though reluctant to get to know the new place. Sometimes they just stood where they were and waved until the bus had driven off.

The bus was almost empty by the time they reached Hilversum and before long, it stopped in a wide street.

'Bakker family,' the driver cried out, 'final stop.' He helped them get their cases out of the storage space and said, 'You're lucky – what a lovely villa!'

They saw a large house that almost looked like the houses in Indonesia. It was broad and had a veranda at the front. The house was also painted white, as they were used to back home. But it did have two floors. They rang the bell and a woman in a white apron answered. 'Welcome to Hilliger House!' she said. 'I'm Janny, the maid.'

Chapter 21 - In Which They Teach Marbles And Have To Eat Dutch Food

Mrs. Hilliger welcomed them at the foot of the stairs and accompanied them upstairs. She was wearing a long multi-coloured skirt, it looked very fancy, like for a night out. She talked in a loud, lilting tone and her pronunciation was very precise, 'So, now you can recover from the discomforts of the journey. About time too. What a lot of trouble you've been through!'

Once upstairs, she showed them Aunty Al, Sonya and Hans's new quarters. A large room, with two beds in one corner and a table with three chairs in front of the window.

A lamp hung over the middle of the table and Mrs. Hilliger clicked on the light. 'Rather snug, isn't it?' she said.

'Well, it's a lot better than what we had in the camp,' Aunty Al replied.

'Yes, you were really packed in there, I heard,' Mrs. Hilliger said, 'but at least you had some sun. When I think back to the Hunger Winter here… my god, what suffering. No, you were in paradise. In comparison, that is.'

'Well, um…' Sonya began, but Aunty Al frowned at her and she let it drop.

'I've got a separate room for the boy,' Mrs. Hilliger said. They set down their suitcases and followed her down the corridor and up a flight of stairs to the attic.

'It's actually a storage room,' she said on the way, 'but we've made it quite pleasant, I think.'

She opened the door to a small room which was almost completely filled up by a bed. A bare light bulb dangled overhead. 'I still need to find a lampshade for that,' Mrs. Hilliger said, 'but light is light, right? And take a look at what Janny, my maid, has made here!'

Next to the bed there was about a foot and a half of space left, here a plank of wood had been attached to the wall on hinges so that it could be lifted up. Mrs. Hilliger showed them that you could put a pole under it so that the plank functioned as a small desk. You could sit on the bed and then put a book or textbook on the shelf to read or write in.

'For when you have to do your homework,' she said, smiling at him. 'But of course you can do that at the table downstairs too.'

'Yes, I saw there were three stools,' Aunty Al said.

'Pity there isn't a window,' Sonya said, 'you'll always need the light on here.'

'I wanted to have a word with you about that,' Mrs. Hilliger said, 'electricity costs money and I would really appreciate it if you wouldn't turn on the lights until after dark. Like around now. Janny, the maid, turns on the electricity at the mains after sunset each day and

that's when the lights can go on. Not before. And please do turn your light off when you leave your room. Can we agree on that?'

'That seems reasonable to me,' Aunty Al said.

'Then I've got a cup of tea for you downstairs,' Mrs. Hilliger said.

Shortly afterwards they were sitting in the drawing room on the ground floor. Janny filled the cups. She was a sturdy woman with red hair fixed up in a bun at the back of her head. A few loose strands hung down. Her face was covered in freckles and when she glanced at Hans he saw that one eye was half closed. That gave her face something unreliable, as though she might do something mean at any moment. When she walked past him, Hans smelled sweat.

'Sugar is still rationed,' Mrs. Hilliger said, 'so if you don't mind, just one spoonful.'

They politely obeyed but Hans saw Mrs. Hilliger take two spoonfuls herself.

They had already heard on the *Tegelberg* that after the war there were shortages of lots of things in the Netherlands: for example there wasn't enough sugar, or butter, or coffee. In order to share it out equally, everyone had been given vouchers to buy the provisions. If you ran out of vouchers, you had to do without. Everyone was very thrifty with the vouchers.

'Lovely tea,' Aunty Al said, 'but I would like to know where the *mandi*-room is.'

'*Mandi*-room?' Mrs. Hilliger repeated.

'Oh, I mean the bathroom,' Aunty Al said.

'It's here downstairs,' Mrs. Hilliger said, 'you can use it on Saturdays . Let's say from two to three in the afternoon, I'm always rehearsing with my choir then anyway. I'm a conductor.'

'We can only bathe on Saturdays?' Aunty Al asked.

'Yes, I don't know what you were used to in Indonesia but here we're very economical with hot water.'

'I understand,' Aunty Al said, 'in Indonesia we washed twice a day. You couldn't in the camp and you soon smelled it. After liberation, we washed in the mornings and evenings again – lovely, lovely. But of course you sweat more there. How do you do your daily wash here?'

'In the sink of course. You've got one in your room.'

'We'll manage,' Aunty Al said, 'our noses will be too blocked to smell ourselves here anyway.' Hans and Sonya laughed and Mrs. Hilliger joined in politely.

Every morning they cleaned their faces, neck and armpits with a wet flannel. The water that came out of the tap at the sink was cold, bitterly cold.

It was hard getting used to life in the Hilliger boarding house. Aunty Al swept the room every day and then had nothing else to do. She sat at the window and searched the newspaper for positions vacant. She had been a nursery school teacher and now that the war was over, the Dutch were suddenly having lots of children. The government called it a 'baby boom'. In a couple of years, the children would go to nursery school and then there would be enough work for Aunty Al. But now the children were newborns and no one needed nursery teachers in Hilversum. The government paid for the boarding house and Aunty Al got some pocket money too. But they'd have to pay it all back later, they knew, and the sooner she found work, the smaller the debt would be.

For Hans and Sonya a new adventure was beginning: they had to go to school.

At the Godelinde School they had to show the headmaster what they could do. One day at the end of the afternoon they went to the school with Aunty Al. It was a big building with a lot of windows, they saw. Lessons had already finished for the day so the school was quiet and empty. They went in through the big door and were met by the headmaster, a tall skinny man with a bald head and a large moustache. A strict man. He didn't smile, not even at Aunty Al even though she did her best to praise him and the school. 'What spacious classrooms,' she said. And, 'What a beautiful playground.'

But the headmaster accepted the compliments as though they were only natural. Oh, those people from the Indies aren't used to any of this, he must have thought. He had Hans sit down on a bench in one of the classrooms, Sonya next to him. They were each given an exercise book.

'To start with write your names on the book,' the bald teacher said.

'What with?' Hans asked.

'With that pen of course,' the teacher said.

Hans carefully picked up the pen and began to scratch his name into the label on the book.

'With ink of course,' the teacher sounded impatient. 'Here,' he pointed to it, 'you dip your pen into the ink and then you write.'

Now that Hans saw it, he recognized it from earlier, from when he'd been to school in the Indies. A long time ago. In the top part of the desk, there was a hole with a glass pot suspended in it, filled with dark ink. He dipped the pen in, and then put it onto the paper to start to write. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Sonya dutifully copying every move he made.

The pen scratched and ink droplets splattered from it, but after a few letters he remembered not to press so hard. Not as hard as with a pencil, just hard enough to leave some ink behind on the paper.

'And open your book now and write: a is for apple, b is for ball, c is for cat,' the teacher said.

They obeyed meekly.

'Give that to me,' the teacher said and took their exercise books.

He showed them to Aunty Al, shaking his head.

'This doesn't look good, Ma'am,' he said, 'ink spots all over the place and they've never heard of thick and thin lines by the looks of it.'

'Sir, in the camp they could only write with sticks in the sand,' Aunty Al said, 'we had almost no paper and no dip pens either. The Japanese didn't even allow us to write.' The headmaster didn't seem to notice, but Hans and Sonya saw that she was very angry. Her nostrils would always go up and down when she was. 'And after liberation, we only had pencils to practice writing with.'

'Certainly, certainly,' the teacher said, 'but that's not the way we do things here. We write with dip pens and make the upward strokes thin and the downwards strokes thick. You must have learned it that way yourself?'

Aunty Al sighed, she couldn't deny it.

'I'm sorry,' the teacher said, 'they can skip the first class, but I can't place them in the fourth or fifth yet, where they should be according to their age. We'll try the second class, with a few extra lessons. The school year started a few months ago, so it will be tough at first. At the end of the year we'll see where to go next. Agreed?' He gave Aunty Al a frosty look.

'If needs must,' she said, 'but if they do well, I'll hope you'll put them in the fourth year as quickly as possible.'

The teacher nodded. 'Fine, then I'll see you at school at nine tomorrow morning,' he said to Hans and Sonya.

The second year! That had children who were eight, while Hans and Sonya were now eleven. Every morning they walked for a half hour to get to school and then sat on the back row together, feeling like giants. They soon realized they couldn't have any kind of meaningful exchange with the younger children. The little ones just chased each other around the playground in the break and then slumped exhausted on their benches, where they recited their times tables obediently: three times four is twelve, four times four is sixteen.

While Sonya sat next to him chanting along in an over the top way: five times four is TWENTY, Hans refused to open his mouth and was regularly given lines. He had to write all the tables out as punishment: three times six is eighteen. He did it, anything was better than singing along so ridiculously.

When he came out after finishing his lines, Sonya would be waiting patiently for him and they'd walk home together complaining. Mrs. Hilliger didn't allow her boarders to use the front door so they had to walk around the side to the kitchen door. It was almost winter and when they got home from school, it was already dark. Janny would be cooking dinner for the boarders in a haze of cooking vapours and complaining about her employer's stinginess.

'And what does she want now?... Bake the three left over potatoes from yesterday's meal! And water down the gravy!'

Janny didn't like cooking and she wasn't good at it. Wet strands of her red hair hung down over her cheeks as she ran around with pots and pans and the humidity in the kitchen got even worse. In the early weeks they would eat without complaining the small rock-hard meatballs she served to every guest, accompanied by a few potatoes and carrots or beans cooked to death.

'Janny can't cook,' Aunty Al said after a few days and offered to help her. Delicious braising steak appeared on the table. But Mrs. Hilliger complained at once: Aunty Al used *much* too much butter when she cooked. That was too expensive, and by the way, didn't they know that butter was rationed too?

'Yes, but we give you our coupons, don't we?' Aunty Al retorted.

'I'm sorry, I don't want you in the kitchen anymore.'

The friendliness that Mrs. Hilliger had shown in the beginning had soon disappeared once they had settled in. Mrs. Hilliger turned out to be sensitive to every sound and hated hearing footsteps above her head. Hans and Sonya had long stopped monkeying around, certainly since Mrs. Hilliger had looked at them with a frown and said to Aunty Al, 'For shame! Children of that age rolling around together. Surely you can't allow that?'

They had stopped immediately, but Mrs. Hilliger had other things to complain about.

'I'm sorry,' Janny apologized one day to Aunty Al, 'Mrs. Hilliger asked me to tell you that too much toilet paper is being used. It's too expensive. You use a roll a week between you.'

This was too much for Aunty Al, 'Tell Mrs. Hilliger that we'll buy our own toilet paper from now on.'

Janny nodded, relieved that Aunty Al had taken it so well. ‘She’s a real cow,’ she said all of a sudden and it was as though the flood gates had opened. It all poured out now, she told them how Mrs. Hilliger made her work for a pittance each month, how she skimped on food for the boarders. And that she’d had German officers in the house during the war and had barely escaped punishment after the war was over.

‘She’s a cow. You won’t tell her what I’ve said, will you?’ She had shocked herself with everything she’d said about Mrs. Hilliger.

‘Of course not,’ Aunty Al said and to Hans and Sonya, ‘and the two of you will be as quiet as the grave, alright!’

They nodded, immediately liking Janny a bit more. But it didn’t make the food any better.

A couple of times a week they were given extra tuition by the bald head teacher – Van Genderen was his name. He wanted to cram them so that they could skip the third year and go into the fourth next year. Then they would be with children a year younger and with children who’d had to repeat a year and were the same age.

One day, one of the fourth years brought marbles to school and from one moment to the next, the marbling season had broken out. Sonya and Hans were amazed by the way they played marbles in the Netherlands. The children flicked the marbles from their closed fists using their thumbs so that they rolled towards the marble they wanted to hit, but it wasn’t very accurate.

‘Could I have a go?’ Sonya asked a girl from the fourth year who wasn’t having much luck and had lost nearly all her marbles.

She cast the marble in the Indonesian manner, not with her thumb but using the fingers of both hands.

‘Wow, how did you do that?’ the girl asked and Sonya demonstrated it until she could do it too.

Gerda, that was her name, became playground champion in the shortest time and after that, she and Sonya spent a lot of time together. Hans was often alone in the break and saw that the little boys from his own class where being bullied by the fourth year boys. When they walked past they’d be pushed so that they fell. Sometimes a fourth year would quickly bend down and untie a second year’s shoelaces. Hans thought it childish and when it happened close to him one time he gave the boy a shove.

‘Don’t bully the little ones like that,’ he said.

The boy looked at him and weighed up his chances. Hans and he were about the same size, but Hans was thinner. The boy balled his fists and held them up to his face. ‘Come on then,’ he said. Hans realized he meant it and balled his fists too.

At school in Indonesia he had seen the older boys fight from time to time. If they fell out in class they’d say. ‘Just you wait, I’ll see you at twelve thirty.’

School was out at half past twelve. All the children would gather in the playground in a circle. The boys who’d had the argument would start to fight in the middle.

Well, fight, they danced around each other and made the occasional punching move with their fist. A fake fight really.

Sometimes the boys would dance around each other for half an hour, encouraged by friends who would shove them towards their opponents. Then they’d make contact for a moment, but quickly spring back to carry on their threatening dance. Of course a teacher would always come up to the group and take the pair by their ears and lead them back into the school, where they’d have to stay behind for an hour.

Hans hoped it would be the same here in the Netherlands – he was afraid of being hit. But when he began to dance around his opponent, he realized that the game had different rules here. The boy just walked up to him and punched him in the face. Hans was so shocked he held out his arms to protect himself. ‘Ouch, what did you do that for?’ the boy cried, holding his hands to his face. ‘You stuck your finger in my eye!’

Another boy came over. ‘Watch out, Tom,’ he said, ‘that boy’s from the Indies. He probably knows jujitsu.’

‘What’s going on here?’ The head teacher had appeared.

‘I got sand in my eyes, sir,’ Tom said. He didn’t want to tell tales.

‘Oh, come with me, I’ll rinse them for you,’ Van Genderen said.

He took Tom off, who looked back and stuck his thumb up at Hans. It was the start of Hans’s first friendship in Holland. Tom and he would play football together every break, just like Gerda and Sonya who were always together too. And what jujitsu was he discovered later on in the comic books about Dick Bos, a detective who felled his opponents using martial arts. In the library he found a book about jujitsu, with an illustration that looked just like the way he’d accidentally poked Tom in the eye.

When they’d become friends, of course he told Tom he didn’t know a thing about jujitsu. But the other children at school didn’t know that, so Hans didn’t ever have to fight again.

Chapter 22 - In Which Aunty Al Lets Someone Else Do The Ironing And Hans And Sonya See Clouds Coming Out Of Their Mouths

Aunty Al had found a job at the post office and sat at the counter behind a window serving clients every day. Sonya and Hans would often drop by after school and give her a wave. She worked long hours and was usually tired in the evenings. On top of it someone from the government would regularly come round to tell her how people lived in the Netherlands. Aunty Al had been born in the Indies and had never been to the Netherlands. Life here took some getting used to, of course.

For Hans and Sonya it was quite a transition too. The strangest thing was all the closed doors. In the Indies the houses were open to let in every gust of wind. This helped with the heat. It meant you could just walk right into someone else's house. Not that you did, you would stand in the door opening and shout '*Spada*!' (Is anybody there?). But even in the shops in Holland, you first had to open the door before you could go in. It wasn't very inviting. In the beginning, they thought the shops weren't open yet and waited in front of the closed doors. Until another customer arrived and walked straight in.

The government had decided that all the people who'd come to the Netherlands from Indonesia should get help from the DMZ, the *Dienst Maatschappelijk Zorg* – social services. They had got used to Mrs. Scholtema from the DMZ calling on them twice a week. Aunty Al was taught how to wash plates, use a hoover, and sometimes Mrs. Scholtema would take her off to learn to shop. Of course they only went into the shops the DMZ approved of.

'Do you know how to iron clothes?' they heard Mrs. Scholtema ask one evening.

'Iron clothes?' Aunty Al asked. 'What would you want those for?'

'No, I mean iron with a flat iron. I'll show you next time.'

And indeed, a day later, Mrs. Scholtema turned up with an ironing board and a flat iron. She was quite small and had a round body which Hans always looked at with amazement. The dark grey dresses she wore were always tight around her body, as though the dresses were holding her together. 'Why doesn't Mrs. Scholtema ever burst out of her clothes?' he asked once after she'd gone.

'She's wearing a corset,' Aunty Al said, 'it's a kind of elastic band, but then a really thick once, maybe twelve or fifteen inches wide. And that's around her stomach, as tight as possible. It holds her in.'

‘And how are we feeling today?’ was Mrs. Scholtema’s opening line as she came in, and Aunty Al always replied, ‘Same as yesterday – too much.’

‘Haha,’ Mrs. Scholtema laughed, ‘you’re not too much for me, you know.’ Only to burst into complaints about the ungrateful Indos billeted further up in the big boarding house on the Overweg, who insisted on cooking their own food and had turned down her lessons in Dutch cuisine. And the stench of it! That spice that smells like rotten prawns!

‘Oh, that’s *trassie*,’ Aunty Al said with a sigh. ‘Oh how I’d love to smell that again. They must have brought it with them from the Indies, you can’t get it here.’

‘Well, I hope they run out of it soon. The landlady is about to throw them out, I had to talk the hind legs off a donkey so that they could stay. And are they grateful? Absolutely not! No, I’d rather have you. Come on, I’ll teach you how to iron.’

And soon she was busy with the clean laundry that Aunty Al handed her with a smile.

Occasionally Aunty Al was allowed a go, but as soon as she missed a crease Mrs. Scholtema would take over again. Her face became red from the exertion and from the warmth of the iron. Hans could smell her sweat. *Trassie* was nicer than that, he thought.

After an hour all of their clothes were neatly ironed and Mrs. Scholtema gratefully accepted a cup of tea which Aunty Al had fetched from Janny.

‘She’s a meddler, that Mrs. Scholtema, but not a bad person,’ Aunty Al said after she had left. ‘And I’m happy she’s done the ironing for me! Of course I know how to do it, I just hate it so much!’

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They had arrived at the beginning of September and winter had begun to set in now. In the early weeks they hadn’t noticed the weather much. ‘It’s warm for the time of year,’ Aunty Al said, ‘at least, according to Mrs. Hilliger. That’s why we aren’t allowed to use the heater yet.’

And then all of a sudden they noticed it getting colder and colder and sometimes it rained for days on end. Not like in the Indies when you’d have a heavy downpour and then sun again after an hour. No, it was gentle rain that just wouldn’t stop. There were different expressions for the different kinds of rain in Holland: *het regent dat het giet* (it’s pouring), *het regent pijpenstelen* (it’s chucking it down), *stortregen* (a deluge), *motregen* (drizzle) and *druilregen* (mizzle). ‘It’s raining cats and dogs,’ was something Hans had heard, though he didn’t know what it meant. It got darker earlier in the winter months too. There was something cozy about it, the streetlamps would go on and the shops would light up their

windows. But sometimes you got the feeling you'd spent the entire day in the gloom. Hans missed the bright tropical sunshine.

The winter also brought some minor miracles. One day they were walking to school when Sonya stopped all of a sudden and blew out hard. 'Look at that!' she cried and Hans looked. Steam was coming out of Sonya's mouth, he saw. It looked like a cloud, only transparent.

He tried to look down to see his own breath, and when he breathed out, gosh, steam was coming out of his mouth too. They kept on blowing out the whole way to school and even considered calling out to the other children on the playground and asking them, 'Can you see it too?'

They stopped themselves in time, realizing that the other children were used to it, of course – they'd grown up in this country. But for them it was brand new and it gave the day a special feeling of excitement. Maybe there would be snow and ice this winter too and they'd be able to learn to skate. They knew it from children's books, but of course they'd never tried it. When Christmas arrived and snow did fall from the sky, they celebrated with all the children from the school. They made a giant snowman and threw snowballs at each other. In the Hilliger boarding house they were allowed to help decorate the Christmas tree and Janny brought mugs of hot chocolate. Holland had become an enchanted kingdom.

Chapter 23 - In Which A Father Turns Up And Tells A Thrilling Tale

On a cold day in January, Janny came to say that there was a visitor for Hans.

'He says he's your father,' she said.

'It'll be Grandpa Duivendrecht,' Aunty Al said, 'he said he'd call on us.'

She said to Janny, 'Ask him to come up, would you.'

She glanced around the room quickly, was everything neat and tidy?

Shortly there was a knock on the door and when Hans opened it he saw a small, bald man, as skinny as a rake, dressed in a jacket and trousers that were much too baggy. An ugly scar ran from his cheek to his temple.

He stared at Hans, as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

'Yes, yes,' Hans heard him say quietly to himself and then in a louder voice, 'You might not recognize me but I'm your father, Hans.'

'Are you my dad?' Hans asked. The man was a stranger to him, but his voice sounded very familiar. Could it be true?

Aunty Al came over and the man shook her hand.

'I'm Albert Duivendrecht,' he said, 'Hans's father. I've spent so much time looking for you! Heavens. Excuse me!'

He took a red handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the tears from his eyes.

'Are you sure?' Aunty Al asked. 'We have an album of family photos belonging to Hans. And you don't look like his father. Hans, would you fetch the album, please?'

'That's right,' the man said, 'I've been patched up by surgeons. New forehead, new jaw. And a scar. But it's really me! I was in Manila for months, in hospital.'

Soon they were sitting around him in a circle as he told his story. And as he talked he became more and more like Hans's father. He had always been a good storyteller.

'I parted with Gré and Hans when the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies. I was called up for the army and sent to Madioen. But when I arrived the battle had already been fought and lost and we were taken prisoner. Before we really knew what was happening we were shipped to Burma to build a railway. That was awful, I'll tell you more about it another time. From dawn till dusk we had to cut down trees and make sleepers from them, and carry them to where the rails needed to go. In the middle of the *rimboe*, the jungle! My god, my god. Anyone who tried to escape died in the *rimboe* or was discovered and killed with a bayonet. People dropped like flies all around me. There was typhoid, dysentery, cholera. We

were emaciated by the time the railway was finished. And then they loaded us back onto ships to take us to Japan. On the way, the boats were bombarded by the English and Americans – of course they didn't know they were carrying prisoners. I had heard stories about ships going down, rats and all, because the prisoners were locked up in the hold. So I made sure I got a place on deck, then at least I stood a chance if the ship was torpedoed. One of the ships in front of us didn't make it, but the few prisoners who survived and swam around in the water weren't picked up by our boat. Only the Japanese were hoisted up, they just left the rest to drown. But well, we arrived in Nagasaki…'

'Nagasaki?' Aunty Al asked. 'Isn't that where they dropped the bomb?'

Dad, as Hans thought of him now, nodded.

'Yes, there were mines there and because a lot of Japanese were in the army, they needed people to bring up the coal or iron. And so they let us do that, the prisoners. Working in the mine was tough and we didn't get much to eat. A handful of rice, occasionally a piece of salted fish. And then you were expected to work fourteen hours a day on that! Your father couldn't get fat on that, Hans. I had a bit of a belly before the war started. Now there's a dent there.'

He laughed and his laugh was recognizable to Hans too. This man really was his father!

'But I have to say, the Japanese workers didn't have it easy in the mine either. One day, I managed to get hold of a Japanese's meal tin without anyone noticing. I hid it away and when we returned to the camp in the evening, I opened it. And do you know what was in it?'

He looked around the circle and Hans remembered that. He used to tell him exciting stories before too, though usually read out from a book. Dad liked to read and was good at reading out loud. When it got exciting, he'd look up and pause to increase the tension. He did that now too.

'And, what was in it?' Hans asked.

'Exactly the same as what we prisoners were given,' he said, 'some rice and a piece of fish. Nothing else. After that I didn't hate the Japanese as much. And especially after the bomb fell. My god.'

Janny came in with fresh tea for everyone and when Hans's father carried on with his story, she hung back to listen.

'The atom bomb fell in the middle of the morning, a few miles away. We were working in the mine as usual. Hacking out iron ore and loading it onto carts. But at a certain point no one was picking them up anymore. One Japanese after the other disappeared upstairs

to see what was going on, but no one came back. So after a while there were only prisoners left. I can still remember an Englishman making the decision. “Let’s go!” he shouted and we followed him. When we got to the exit, we couldn’t believe our eyes. An enormous mushroom cloud hovered over the city. And where the previous day there had been tall buildings, now you could only see rubble. Burning rubble. Our Japanese guards stood outside looking at it, they didn’t know what to do. “Let’s go and help,” someone cried and we all walked towards the rubble. What I saw there – ach, ach. Lots of burned people. And the smell of scorched flesh everywhere. The worst thing was that I enjoyed the smell. I was so hungry it was an involuntary reaction. But when you saw those people, skin hanging from their arms and legs… We had to help them, but we didn’t know how to. Most of them were already dead. Here and there, a few buildings were still partly standing and I heard someone calling from one of them. I went in with one of my fellow mates and that’s the last thing I can remember. Later I heard that the building collapsed and that they dragged me out of the wreckage. Broken arms, broken ribs and serious head injuries. I was unconscious. I only regained consciousness in Manila. Manila is a city in the Philippines, a country near to Japan. When the war was over, English boats came to Japan and took all the prisoners of war to Manila. They took me too. They patched me up there, gave me a new face. But due to the blow to my head, I’d also lost my memory. I’d forgotten who I was and the men with me who could have said so immediately had been sent on to an army camp just outside of Manila. They didn’t know where I’d been taken to. So no one came to visit me and my memory stayed blank. Until I got hold of a Dutch newspaper. I’ve no idea how that got into the hospital. But the newspaper saved me. I read that the Netherlands had been liberated and it also said that the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies had given themselves up. The words and pictures brought everything back. I remembered my name and the division I’d belonged to. And once my face had healed, I ended up with my old Dutch fellows from the mines. Of course I wanted to return to Java at once, just like them. Everyone wanted to see their families again. We heard there was an uprising in the Indies and that *pemoedas* were murdering the white and Indo women and children. We wanted to go and protect our families, of course. But the English didn’t have any boats left, so we had to wait impatiently. I couldn’t sleep for worrying about you. Finally we were transferred to Singapore. There they had a list of the camps where our wives and children had been taken. Gré was on one of the lists, along with a date of death and the name of the camp: Bandangan. Ach Hansy-pans, my lad, how you must have suffered. Come to me.’

He stood up, held out his hands and looked at Hans. His face was different from before, but his eyes were the same, Hans noticed.

He stood up too, walked over to his father and let himself be embraced. He smelled Lifebuoy soap, that went with his father too. Sonya came over to them and wrapped her arms around the two of them.

'I'll fetch more tea,' he heard Janny say. Soon afterwards, she returned with the teapot and poured everyone a second cup. She stayed in the doorway expectantly.

'And what happened after that?' she asked.

'Oh, yes,' Hans's father said. 'Well, so then I went off to look for Hans. Where could he be? He wasn't on any of the lists of the deceased, thank god. I suspected that another mother had taken him under her wing. But who? It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. As soon as boats started going to Java, I begged myself a place on one of the ships and finally arrived in Soerabaja. Gré and I had agreed to meet in our old home or what was left of it and I hoped she'd told Hans about it, or his foster mother. Soerabaja was very quiet by then, different from the time you went there. The *pemoedas* murdered an English general and that was the last straw for the English. They cleaned up the entire city, which cost a lot of *pemoedas* their lives, and now Soerabaja's back under army control. I went to our old house in the Slametstraat. A nice Indo family had been living there for a month, they let me stay there with them but didn't know anything themselves. I stayed there for a few days, wondering what to do. And then I suddenly remembered the photo album we'd hidden in a tin under a tile in the back garden. I found the tile and the tin, and saw the letter you'd left in the place of the album. Of course I sat there crying for a while when I read Gré's farewell letter, but I was happy too that I knew who Hans was with now. Hans was with Ali Bakker. I looked for Mrs. Bakker, but couldn't find anything on all those lists. Luckily you'd put a date on the letter too, so I could find out that you'd probably been taken to Soerabaja harbour by the English and then on to Singapore by ship. And then someone told me that hundreds of women and children had died on their way to the harbour. Shot down by *pemoedas* and hacked to bits. No one had a list with the names of the victims. I almost lost my way completely then, but it only lasted a couple of weeks. Then finally I found an organization, the Red Cross, who could trace Ali Bakker and her children for me. And now I'm here!'

He reached out to Hans again, but Sonya was quicker and jumped into his arms. Hans understood – Sonya would never see her own father again. And he was her father too now, a bit. Luckily Dad thought so too. He stroked Sonya's hair and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

‘But now for your story,’ father Albert said. And they told him all about the hunger, the roll calls, the illnesses. When they told him about Gré getting sick and dying it got too much for Albert. He put his head in his hands and Hans heard him sob. Just once. After that he recovered himself. ‘How did you get here in the end?’ he asked. They took turns to tell him the story. Then it was time to eat and Janny brought their meal. Three plates with a small hard meatball, just like every day. And a plate of beans and another of steaming potatoes.

‘No gravy this time,’ she said. ‘I spent so long listening to your stories, I ran out of time to make it.’

‘I guess I’d better leave,’ Albert said, looking at the number of plates. Clearly Janny hadn’t counted on a fourth guest. ‘I’ll come back after dinner if that’s allowed.’

‘Out of the question,’ Aunty Al said, ‘Janny, you can fetch an extra plate, can’t you? Then we’ll share the food. We’re used to sharing.’

Janny hesitated. ‘As long as Mrs. Hilliger doesn’t find out,’ she said.

‘We’ll take it to the grave, Janny.’

‘Alright then.’

Not long afterwards they sat around the table and shared the three meatballs, the vegetables and the potatoes amongst four plates. Janny had even fetched a fourth chair.

‘Is it just me or is the cooking really bad here?’ Albert asked.

They all answered at once and burst out laughing at their unison.

It ended with Albert moving into the Hilliger boarding house that very same evening. Next to Hans’s little room, there was another storage space which you could just fit a bed into. And that’s where Albert, his father, slept.

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It got late, that first evening, they had so much to tell to each other. Hans didn’t go to bed until eleven. His father’s room was next to his, and he went to sleep at the same time. In the middle of the night, Hans was woken up by screaming. A man was shouting out words he didn’t understand and it was coming from the next room. He cautiously opened the door and saw his father lying in bed kicking his legs and waving his arms about frantically. It looked like he was asleep.

He ran downstairs and shook Aunty Al awake, and she came upstairs in her nightdress.

She glanced at Albert and then grabbed his shoulder to shake him awake. After a few jerks, he opened his eyes and stopped moving.

‘Hey what?’ Hans heard him say.

‘Poor chap, you were having a nightmare,’ Aunty Al said.

She stood there with her bare feet on the linoleum and must have been cold in her thin nightdress.

‘Nightmare,’ Albert repeated as he sat up. ‘I dreamt I was on a Japanese transport ship and it was torpedoed. I was in the water and saw a lifeboat the Japanese had got onto. Dutch and Englishmen were swimming next to me and everyone tried to hang onto the boat. But the Japanese hit our hands away with the butts of their guns. God, I’m so glad you woke me up.’

He looked distressed.

‘Hans, why don’t you go down and sleep in my bed,’ Aunty Al said, ‘then I’ll stay with Albert until he’s fallen asleep and get into your bed. That way I’ll be nearby if it happens again. Otherwise we’ll have Mrs. Hilliger on our backs, she can’t bear any noise.’

‘I’m sorry for being such a burden,’ Albert said, but Aunty Al reassured him. ‘Of course you aren’t, I have horrible dreams quite often too and then Sonya wakes me up.’

She took the only chair in the room and sat down next to the bed.

‘There we are,’ she said, ‘you try and get back to sleep.’

‘Will you stay here then?’ he asked like a frightened child.

‘Yes, Albert. Until you’re asleep and then I’ll lie down next door.’

‘Oh, thank you.’

Aunty Al gestured for Hans to leave. Once downstairs he soon fell asleep in the still warm bed.

After that it became normal for Aunty Al to spend the night in Hans’s room so that she was nearby if Albert had another nightmare.

Hans and Sonya were happy they could sleep in two beds next to each other. That had been one of the nice things about the camp, sleeping close to each other, and being able to tell each other stories until one of them fell asleep.

The days flew by like this.

Chapter 24 - In Which This Story Gets A Happy Ending

During the day Albert was out and about a lot, looking for a position as a bookkeeper since that was his profession. And in the evenings they would all sit together. Albert would read books and sometimes he read out stories that were funny or sad. Aunty Al sat opposite him, knitting, and Hans and Sonya did their homework on the dining table.

'Look at this,' Aunty Al said. 'Mrs. Scholtema from social services who is teaching me how to live like a Dutch woman, left behind a sheet of paper with some advice. Because naturally we Indo people don't know how things should be done here in the Netherlands. Pay attention, Albert, because there are rules for you too. When visiting a restaurant the man should enter first. At every visit or meeting, the man should take off his hat and remove his hands from his pockets!'

'Oh golly,' Albert laughed, 'then I'd better hurry up and buy a hat. And what else does it say that could be to our advantage?'

'Well, it says here that when we move from the contract boarding house into our own homes, we have to take lampshades with us and not sit around under bare bulbs.'

'Show me that,' Albert said and read it in silence, a frown on his face.

'They really speak to you like you're a child,' he said, 'but here's something that might be useful: the housekeeping training programme in Hilversum has an excellent course on lampshades.'

'Do they teach you how to sit under a lampshade, then?' Sonya asked. 'How ridiculous.'

'No, you moron,' Hans said. 'How to make a lampshade. And *then* how to sit under it.'

If you didn't know any better you might have thought they were a family. A happy family even. Hans hadn't felt so safe and good since before the camp. The fact that Mum was no longer there hit home sometimes and then he'd bite his lip until the sadness had gone away again. But the fact that father Albert had come back made a world of difference. Even Aunty Al clearly enjoyed no longer having to be Sonya and Hans's sole support – now she had someone she could lean on.

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‘I’ve been offered a job,’ Albert said after a month. His voice shook slightly and the scar on his cheek was redder than usual.

‘Hooray!’ Hans cried.

‘I’m going to be a bookkeeper at Draka, a cable manufacturers’ in Amsterdam. They pay 600 guilders a month.’

‘It could be worse,’ Aunty Al said. ‘I don’t even earn half of that!’

‘They’ve offered me accommodation too. In Amsterdam-Noord.’

‘You should accept at once,’ Aunty Al said.

After the war there was a big housing shortage, many families shared their homes with others – having your own roof above your head was a great luxury.

‘I haven’t been able to look at it yet,’ Albert said. ‘Shall we go together? Maybe it will be big enough for all four of us?’

The next day they chugged along in a hire car to Amsterdam. It was late in the afternoon, and dusk was already falling.

Hans and Sonya couldn’t take their eyes off the view from the motorway, they hadn’t seen much of the Netherlands yet. To the left and the right, they saw endless stretches of grassland where cows stood grazing. You could see clouds of steam coming out of their nostrils.

‘Do they stay there the whole night?’ Sonya asked.

‘Yes, but they can handle it. They’ve got thick hides,’ Albert said. He didn’t drive fast, because driving on the right was a bit strange for him. In the Indies they all drove on the left and now he was at the wheel for the first time in five years, his reflexes were still set to driving on the left.

‘Will you warn me if I start driving on the left?’ he had asked before they set off in the pre-war Opel Kadett which he’d hired for the day. Aunty Al sat next to him in the front, in a neat skirt suit and hat. They’d never seen her look so smart. In the back sat Hans and Sonya. They didn’t have much leg room, but if they sat cross-legged they were comfortable. For the first few miles, they watched nervously to see whether Albert could keep the car on the right, but gradually they began to look around more. As well as the fields, there were also a few farms, surrounded by tall trees whose branches were now bare. This was new too, you never saw bare trees in the Indies, they didn’t have winter there. Here it looked like the trees and bushes died in the autumn. Most of them had leaves that turned yellow and then dropped off. They’d noticed that in Hilversum already.

Soon, in the spring, the trees and bushes would come back to life again and make new leaves. They were eager to experience this in a few months' time. Holland was quite an exciting country really.

'What's that glimmering in the distance?' Sonya asked all of a sudden. They could all see it. In the distance the light above the horizon was tinged pink, as though the sun was setting. But the sun had set an hour ago. 'I think I know,' Albert said, 'those are the lights from the big city you can see. That's Amsterdam! City of lights!'

And he was right. The closer they got, the more the darkness disappeared. 'That's how much light all those houses give off. And the streetlamps of course.' Aunty Al was feasting her eyes on it too, the Netherlands was just as new to her as it was to Hans and Sonya. Only Hans's father had grown up in the country, before moving to the Indies.

They didn't go through Amsterdam but drove around it, because they had to go to the north part, to Amsterdam-Noord. And that was on the other side of the IJ river. You could drive the car onto a boat and that boat was called a ferry. The ferry took the cars and anyone else who wanted to go – cyclists and pedestrians – to the other side. Then the cars drove off the ferry. After some searching they found the Meeuwenlaan, a very wide street with long terraces of houses on both sides which all looked exactly the same. They had three storeys and each storey had two white windows at the front. Downstairs you could see two doors next to each other, one for the downstairs flat on the ground floor and the other for the upstairs flat which had two floors. They had to go to the upstairs of number 199.

Albert had the key to the upstairs flat. They climbed the stairs.

'So, this is alright,' Albert said as they reached the first floor and looked around. There was a kitchen and a living room that looked out onto the Meeuwenlaan. And when they went up to the next floor, Hans saw that there were three bedrooms, a big one and two small ones. So Hans and Sonya would have to go in the big one, he thought and Aunty Al and Dad in the two small ones. Or if necessary, Sonya and he together in a little one and Aunty Al in the big one. Or Sonya and Aunty Al in the big bedroom and he and Dad in the little ones. He saw that Sonya was trying to figure it out too. The day before they'd talked about wanting to stay together. If father Albert decided that he and Hans should go and live somewhere else, they'd protest.

'You're my brother now,' Sonya had said, 'and don't think you're getting rid of me!'

'I don't want to,' Hans had replied.

And they stood together in the Meeuwenlaan hoping that Aunty Al and father Albert thought the four of them should stay together too.

‘How many square feet is it?’ Aunty Al asked. The coat of Albert’s winter jacket had sprung up in the car and as she walked past him, she folded it down again. It was a sign of familiarity that gave Hans a warm feeling.

‘Over three hundred,’ Albert said. And after they’d looked at the two floors another time, he asked Aunty Al, ‘What do you think? Should we look further?’

That sounded good, Hans thought and he saw that it had made Sonya happy too. Because it meant that in any case Albert was intending for the four of them to stay together. A few weeks previously, they’d decided that returning to the Indies was not an option.

‘It’s now a bit calmer than when you came out of the camp,’ father Albert had said. He read the papers every day, just as he used to. ‘But the Indonesians are still in revolt and the government is planning to send an army there to get the Indies back. I don’t like that. It’s their country, so we should let them have it, I think. Though I don’t believe Al agrees with me entirely.’

‘No,’ Aunty Al said, ‘Well, what do you expect? I was born in the Indies, grew up there, it’s my home. And now the Indonesians won’t let me be there anymore. I don’t think that’s fair. But Albert is right, you don’t gain anything by going to war. So we’d better just get used to Holland.’

And now they were in the Meeuwenlaan in Amsterdam. Was this going to be their new home?

‘I think it’s fine,’ Aunty Al said. Hans saw her and Albert exchange a glance. Then Albert spoke. He took Aunty Al’s hand and Hans saw her begin to glow.

‘I’ve been living with you for two months in Hilliger House,’ he said, ‘and the more Al and I get to know each other, the more we feel the four of us belong together. Al and Sonya have lost Henk and I will never be able to take his place. I don’t want to either. Hans and I have lost Gré and Al will never be able to replace her completely. And she doesn’t want to. But Al and I have realized that we have grown to love each other and we want to become man and wife. We want to get married. And our question to you is: will you be our children?’

Hans was struck dumb for a moment and Sonya clapped her hand to her mouth in astonishment.

And then the feeling of joy hit home.

Hans rushed to his father but remembered just in time that he wasn’t a little kid anymore. He stopped and help out his hand. ‘Congratulations, Dad,’ he said. And Sonya and Al hugged each other and after that Sonya threw herself around her new father’s neck. ‘He smells so nice,’ she’d said to Hans earlier, ‘almost as nice as my own father.’

‘Let’s celebrate,’ Albert said, ‘I’ve booked a table at restaurant Bali in the Leidsestraat.’

It was quite a trek from Amsterdam-Noord to the middle of Amsterdam. Sonya and Hans got out of the car on the ferry and looked at the harbour lights. It wasn’t that long ago that they’d arrived in the same harbour on the *Tegelberg*. So much had happened since then. A new school, Hilliger boarding house, Albert’s unexpected arrival. And now Albert and Al’s forthcoming wedding.

With a lot of tooting, Albert made his way through Amsterdam.

‘They never hoot their horns here,’ he said, ‘but it’s hard to stop. In the Indies people hoot all the time. It’s part of driving.’

‘Then you should just hoot a way off!’ Aunty Al said. She stroked his cheek. It was a big relief to be able to admit that she and Albert loved each other and now she dared to let that love show a bit more.

Both Hans and Sonya usually made vomiting noises if they saw people showing too much affection, but now they looked on from the back seat, touched. Mum and Dad. It would be a while before Sonya would be able to call her new father Dad, and Hans had spent so many years saying ‘Aunty Al’ that he would probably make the same mistake for a long time to come.

But they weren’t worried about that.

Bali restaurant was situated in the busy, narrow Leidsestraat which had trams and cars driving along it as well as cyclists. There wasn’t much space left for pedestrians and once the car had been parked with some difficulty along a canal, they walked cautiously through the crowds until they reached the restaurant.

‘Upstairs,’ Albert said, ‘I used to come here as a student.’

It turned out that the restaurant had a large room upstairs with as many as thirty laid tables where people were dining in their best clothes. They felt rather shabby in their Ataka clothes for a while, but the waiter who took them to their table appeared not to notice.

He was dressed in a white suit and had something on his head that looked like a knotted serviette.

When they were sitting down at the table and had been given the menus, Hans looked around. There were Indonesian waiters all over the place with that funny headgear.

‘What are those strange *topis*?’ he asked his father, half-laughing. *Topi* was the Indonesian word for things you put on your head.

Albert glanced around.

‘Yes, in Central Java you do see people from the chic families wearing those headdresses,’ he said. ‘Perhaps they have them in Bali as well.’

‘I’ve never seen anyone wearing that,’ Aunty Al said, ‘but it does suit them.’

They ordered a Bali rice-table and after ten minutes a convoy of waiters arrived to put the twenty dishes and side-dishes on their table.

Oh, how delicious it smelled!

The Indonesian fragrances almost made Hans faint, he hadn’t smelled them for so long.

The four of them attacked the meal as though they’d just got out of the camp, that hungry.

No one said anything, they just ate and ate and ate.

An obliging waiter brought a new dish of steaming rice once the first one was empty, and other dishes were refilled too.

‘Isn’t Indonesian food de-licious,’ Albert said when they’d almost finished everything. ‘This is quite different from Janny’s food, isn’t it?’

‘Remember those sprouts yesterday,’ Aunty Al said, balking at the memory.

‘Well, when we live in Noord, we’ll cook Indonesian food every day. Right, Al?’ Albert said.

‘I hope the neighbours don’t complain about the herbs and spices. Mrs. Scholtema told me that a lot of Dutch people living next to Indos turn up their noses at our food. They think it stinks!’

‘Then let’s give them the chance to taste it,’ Sonya said optimistically. ‘It would be a shame if we had to eat potatoes and meatballs every day.’

‘On the subject of neighbours,’ Albert said. ‘We’ve got another surprise. Did you see that the downstairs floor of our house is empty? You told me about Maja and her mother and at the Draka factory there was a list of the kind of people they are looking for. It said they were looking for a first aid nurse, for if anyone in the factory or at the harbour has an accident. Al and I managed to find Maja and her mother and because Maja’s mother used to work as a nurse at the Red Cross, the Draka factory was happy to take her. And she could get the house under ours. Just in time, it was the last company flat that was still free.’

Hans and Sonya shrieked with delight.

It was a few weeks before they’d bought all the house furnishings they needed. Beds, cupboards, plates, cutlery. And oh yes, a rug. And curtains of course. And lampshades. When they left the Hilliger boarding house, Janny waved them off with tears in her eyes. Mrs.

Hilliger had given them a wooden spoon as a memento, but she didn't go to the trouble of seeing them off.

When they arrived at the Meeuwenlaan, they saw that the downstairs flat was occupied. There were curtains and a light was shining. And when they began to unload the things from the car, the door flew open and Maja came rushing out to them.

Her mother followed, a bit more slowly.

It was a joyful reunion. That first evening they ate at Maja's house and told each other all the recent good news they'd had. Albert's job, Maja's mother too and Aunty Al would probably find work as a teacher at the school which Hans and Sonya, but also Maja, would attend.

The future looked bright, they all thought. But however happy they were, their life in the Indies was hard to forget. The next day Hans helped Aunty Al to unpack their belongings. 'Where should I put these handkerchiefs?' he asked and when he didn't get an answer he went off to look for her.

She was looking out of the kitchen window at the houses opposite and Hans saw tears trickling down her cheeks.

'What's the matter, Aunty?' he asked in concern.

'Oh, nothing, child. I look outside and see all those grey clouds and those roofs with chimneys with smoke coming out. And I miss the Indies so much. The sun, the banana trees, the smells. But we'll have to make the best of it, Hans. The Netherlands is a good country.'

And so it was.

THE END

Afterword

In order to write *Farewell to the Indies*, Hans Vervoort drew on memories of his own childhood and those of others who had experienced the war in the Dutch East Indies. Much worse incidents took place during and after the period of Japanese internment, but Hans Vervoort wanted to portray in *Farewell to the Indies* what the average Dutch person or Indo experienced in the war years and immediately after, and for that reason those excesses were left out of this story.

Hans Vervoort spent the war in Ambarawa camp 6, but also used the stories of children in other camps for this book too. This is why the camp in this story has the fictional name of Ambangan.

Hans Vervoort would like to receive reactions from readers of *Child of the Indies* in the guestbook on his website www.hansvervoort.nl or by email: brievenbus@hansvervoort.

A note on the English translation:

Many people who grew up in the Dutch East Indies emigrated immediately after the war during the Bersiap period, or when Dutch sovereignty was transferred to the Indonesian government in 1949. They left for the USA, Australia, New Zealand or elsewhere. Many of these emigrants and expats now have children or grandchildren who do not read Dutch. My book *Weg uit Indië (Farewell to the Indies)* might be useful in helping them tell their (grand-) children what happened in the Dutch East Indies during the Japanese invasion and the turbulent years after the war,. This is why I asked Michele Hutchison to translate it in English.

I am now offering it as a free e-book and PDF file, with especially in mind all those English readers with roots in the Indies, and their (grand-)children. And those without roots in the East are of course also welcome to read about what happened in that region during World War 2. The story is told from the perspective of a 10 year-old boy, Hans, and a girl, Sonya, who – like all children – accept life as it comes, and amidst hunger, illness and violence, keep a smile on their faces. Or as Indo-writer Tjalie Robinson said: *Poekoel Teroes* (keep on going

Glossary

The former Dutch-Indonesian spellings have been retained for historical accuracy.

Ajo, boeng – Go on, boy

Akoe maoe lihat – I want to see, I want to see it

Ampoen – forgiveness

Apa kabar? – How are you?

Arangstel – a kind of barbecue, lit with charcoal

Awas, sakit menoelar – beware, infectious disease

Babi ketjap – pork with ketchup

Baboe – maid, household help

Bamboe roentjing – a spear made of bamboo

Berhenti – stop

Betja – bicycle taxi

Boenoeh orang belanda – death to the white people

Botol tjebok – waterbottle for the toilet

Buitenkampers – Dutch word for the Indo people who didn't live in the camps during the war

Bultzak – mattress filled with straw

Dari mana? – where do you come from?

Dimana ada nona? – where's that girl?

Djongkok – to squat with the feet flat on the ground

Djongos – male servants

Es lilin – ice-lolly

Gajoeng – pan with a handle to scoop water from the *mandibak*

Gedek – a solid fence made of plaited bamboo

Gedekken – secret trading at the fence with Indonesians

Gracht – Dutch for canal

Ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, kyu, jyu – Japanese numbers from one to ten

Kalau branie, boleh poekoel kembali – hit me back if you're brave enough

Kampong – Indonesian village or district with small houses built close together

Kapok – A fibre obtained from the silk-cotton tree and as stuffing for pillows and mattresses.

Keirei – Japanese for bow

Kembali! – you're welcome!

Kipas – fan, used for the coal in the *arangstel*

Klamboe – mosquito net hung above the bed

Klewang – machete

Koeboeran – graveyard

Kokki – household cook

Koersi malas – reclining chair

Kwee-kwee – biscuits

Kwee talam – pudding

Lekas – fast

Mandikamer – bathroom

Mandibak - stone basin in the bathroom, filled with water

Masoek sadja – just get in, step inside

Minta ampoen – ask for forgiveness

Minta ikan – please give me a fish

Naoré – Japanese for to get up after bowing

Orang mati – a dead person

Pak – Sir

Pasar malam – evening market

Patjol – garden shovel

Pemoeda – young fanatical Indonesian revolutionary

Pergi (pigi) – go away

Plan-plan – take it easy, calmly does it

Rantang – three or more small pans stacked in a holder, in which food can be transported

Sapi – a kind of cow

Sapoelidi – broom made of palm twigs bound together

Selamat djalan – have a good journey

Soedah tjoekoep – it's already full

Spada – is anyone there?

Speculaas – Dutch spiced biscuits

Terima kassi – many thanks

Terima kassi banjak – a great many thanks

Tidah tau – I don't know

Tikar – sleeping mat

Topi – headdress

Trassie – prawn paste, used in Indonesian cooking

Wadjan – deep round pan with two handles

Waringin – large tree with aerial roots

Waroeng – street shop