

November 1942
Semarang, Central Java, The Dutch East Indies

The dawn light awoke Ayu early, her dark room softened by the pale glow behind the faded curtains. She knew it was about five a.m., and that the full brightness of the day would show itself in the next half hour. Mama had offered to make darker curtains for the window facing Ayu's bed, but she didn't mind the light that filtered through the thin plaid curtains.

She reached for her watch on the bedside table; it was 4:53. Five a.m. had been her normal time to wake up for school, before the Japanese arrived. Her parents said the country might be running on Tokyo time — two hours later than Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, and the same time zone as Semarang — but even now, nine months since the Japanese invasion and Dutch capitulation, the clocks in their house hadn't been changed.

Sixteen years old, the Javanese teenager remembered as she viewed her watch about today's school delay — the students to arrive at noon instead of nine a.m. They had been told to wear old clothing because they'd be cleaning the classrooms and hallways.

In seventh grade, in science class when she had studied the equator, for Ayu's project, she'd charted the time of sunrise for several months, carefully jotting down when she saw first light every day in the blue cloth-covered notebook Papa had bought her; after she'd handed in her project, she continued to chart the sunrise for the next year, curious about the variations where she lived, so near the equator. She knew the sun rose between 4:48 and 5:29 a.m. year-round. The sun still rose at the same time regardless of Japanese orders; according to them it was 6:53, but Ayu's body knew the true time. She had quickly become used to adding two hours to the clock's time so that she wasn't early or late for school.

She stretched, feeling the hot and humid air. Rainy season was still to begin in earnest; today began as another sticky day that threatened rain. She felt under her pillow for the Lucky Strike tin. The smooth metal was pleasantly cold under her fingertips, and she worried her fingers back and forth over the small dent in one corner, the smooth borders of the tin, the raised lettering of the words. Ayu hadn't shared the tin with anyone, the same way she'd kept Mac to herself. She'd seen Mac, an Australian soldier, the day the Japanese dropped Japanese-Indonesian flag from planes, a few weeks before the invasion. Dutch, Australian, and British troops all marched through the city during this time, working together to fight against the presumed Japanese invasion. She'd been watching her older brother Taufik and his friends play soccer when suddenly Japanese planes overhead had begun dropping bundles, bundles that turned out to be flags. Australian soldiers had been marching by the soccer field and one of them — he later told her his name was Mac — had pulled her into a ditch by the side of the field, worried they were under attack. Taufik run after the falling flags, the first of his friends to grab one and unfurl it to display the Japanese red sun on one side and then Indonesian red-and-white stripes on the other.

Ayu had seen Mac from afar in the market a few days later, — he'd caught her eye and smiled at her but she'd been too embarrassed to go over to him — and met him in earnest, by accident, when she'd gone foraging for edibles in Ungaran Forest a few months after that. She knew when she saw him up close that there was something there, between them: a bond, an excitement, a feeling in her throat and chest that moved down her body, a deep knowledge about him. He'd given her a duck that day, one that he'd caught and had tied near the river. Ayu brought it home, claiming it as her own discovery. She had given him cloth and he gave her the tin, then he'd disappeared, into the forest with two other Australian

soldiers, destination and task unknown. Mac was one of the Australians who had continued to fight the Japanese, hiding in the mountains, long after the Dutch gave up. The Australian soldiers were known as fierce and wild warriors, living in the jungles, emerging for battles, then vanishing. After Yoshi, the Japanese ice cream seller, had attacked her, intent on raping her but waylaid by one of Papa's friends, she didn't want to know what Mama and Papa would think if they knew about Mac. Upset after the Yoshi incident, they'd be surprised to learn not only had she met an Australian soldier, but she had some sort of relationship with him.

She inspected the tin, admiring the tin's design — the green background, the red logo surrounded by yellow, the black lettering, the name Lucky Strike with wording "It's toasted" below — then secreted it again under the pillow. What did "It's toasted" mean? She pulled her notebook out of the drawer and added the words to the List for Mac, of things to ask him. There were English words and sayings, questions about him and his life in Australia, thoughts about him that weren't necessarily for him. She'd been carrying him with her for so long, so profoundly within her, it seemed — since the day he'd pulled her to safety from the field as the flags dropped, even though she hadn't known at the time he would enter her life again and again.

She felt different this past week. Alive, changed, and almost dare she think it, happy. So much had happened: Yoshi murdered by a person or person unknown; the execution of three innocent Javanese men in retaliation; Taufik's return from a month away on a road crew, without the wages promised by the Japanese; Mama and Papa's disclosure about their work in the underground and her new involvement in it; and underneath and behind and above all of this, there was Mac: her thoughts consumed with him — his smell, his touch, his crooked

smile, his eyes. “I will find you,” he’d said. She believed him, despite not knowing how it would be possible.

There were reasons for Ayu to be fearful and anxious, but she felt her mind opening, her world expanding. She truly understood now about the huge risk she’d taken by trying to negotiate with Yoshi to prevent her brother from being forced to join a work group, to no good end. Yoshi was dead now and others died because of his death. Ayu had learned she was braver than she’d ever imagined but also naive with the perilous move she had taken when she approached Yoshi. Her courier work at the bicycle shop where Mama worked made her feel valuable even as she was unaware of what messages she might be carrying. She was contributing as best she could, another thing to carry secretly within her, known only to Mama, Papa, and Taufik.

Mama was making breakfast when Ayu emerged from the bedroom. Ayu stood in front of the living room wall mirror, and brushed her long, glossy hair. She started to braid it in two plaits but heard best friend’s Tedja’s voice in her mind saying, “Little girls have two braids, Ayu, don’t you think it’s time you changed your style?” She finished with one long braid that hung midway down her back, her solemn reflection staring back at her. She reconsidered, undid her hair, and fashioned her customary two plaits. Safer to be thought a little girl than a woman.

“Morning, Ayu, here you go.” Mama placed a cup of tea and a plate with stuffed tofu in front of Ayu. A treat made for Taufik’s return from the road crew, it was also one of Ayu’s favorites. Mama had sliced the tofu open, scooped out some of the inside, stuffed it with diced carrots, bean sprouts and spices mixed with the soft tofu innards, then deep fried it. It puffed beautifully — delicious hot or cold.

“Wow, Mama, for breakfast?” Ayu said. She wanted to savor the food but Mama had other ideas.

"Go to the market now, before everything is gone. Get chicken if possible, salt, tempe, onions. Then go to Pak Lim's and pick up his flat tire and drop it off at the store. I'll be there by the time you get there, I imagine." Mama retreated to her bedroom to get dressed for work.

The delayed school day meant Ayu had time to do errands beforehand. Mama usually left the house by 8:15, for she had to switch buses to get to the bicycle shop by 9, where she had managed the books for years. Ayu had worked at the store since she was fourteen, making deliveries and pick-ups after school.

Mama patted Ayu's shoulders and smoothed her freshly braided hair. "It looks nice." Ayu had noticed her watching Ayu undo then redo her hair; she appreciated that Mama chose not to comment further.

Ayu retrieved her bicycle, a black Dutch Gazelle with a removable basket and special curved seat for women, from the back of the small house. It had been a gift for Mama one year from Papa's boss at the post office, Mr. Kummeling, a Dutch man about Papa's age. Mama wouldn't ride it — she was too frightened. Papa had suggested Ayu use it. He gave her lessons on their street until Ayu mastered riding it and she rode it proudly. Every year he scraped off the rust and gave it another coat of shiny black paint. The patched tires had been repaired numerous times. Ayu rode it everywhere and most mornings picked Tedja up and brought her to school.

The *belimbing* tree in the backyard in bloom, she pulled a few of the yellow star fruit from the branches, stopping to rinse them at the back faucet. She put them in the patch

pockets of her faded blue gingham dress, grabbed the cloth market bag, and pushed the bike through the side gate.

"Stop by Tedja's house and get her. I don't like you going alone," her mother said as she waved from the front door. Papa had already left for the post office; Taufik was sleeping in late.

Tedja came out eagerly and smiled as she saw Ayu, pulled from the laundry by Ayu's arrival; such a tiresome chore with the soaking and rubbing the clothes together in the large bucket, then rinsing and ringing them out multiple times until no suds emerged, hands left red and aching. They both disliked doing laundry. Ayu laughed as Tedja dried her hands, then handed her a star fruit, which Tedja bit right into. She climbed onto the back rack of Ayu's bike and they headed to market. Ayu skillfully steered around a cart that suddenly stopped in front of them, then swerved to avoid three loose goats, their owner giving chase alongside the bicycle.

They rounded the corner onto the main street and approached Semarang Poncol Train Station, several long blocks to the north. As they approached the station, Ayu heard a load humming sound, with occasional higher piercing sounds. The sound grew louder as they got closer but remained indistinguishable. A crowd had gathered to the right of the entrance and spilled into the street, slowing down traffic. Smaller than the main train station, Semarang Poncol's Station's tracks were visible from the street, the white station building off to one side. Ayu loved the iconic building, so different from any other building in Semarang, the entrance bulging out in a sweeping curve towards the street with three curved, wide, and tall glass doors with wooden frames that had been placed into the stone blocks of the walls.

Tawang Station, the main station, was larger and grander, but Papa had told her the strange

Art Deco style of Poncol Station was special. A train stood on the tracks closest to the street, its last cars covered by the station roof, the front of the train far down the track, not visible. Horse carts lined the street, drivers ready to carry arriving passengers to their destinations. Military trucks and jeeps had prime spots close to the track, by the road. Japanese soldiers in uniforms of muddy olive-green stood as a barrier between the crowd and the train that was pulled in. The crowd moved near to one of the cars, with soldiers pushing back.

Unable to get through the jammed street, Ayu and Tedja dismounted, leaving the bike on the side of the road, and joined the crowd. The mass was mostly made up of Javanese men and women, but there were some small children, and older children already dressed in school uniforms. She heard chatter and whispered discussions all around her, the occasional characteristic tsk tsk sound of a woman — the clicking of a tongue on the roof of the mouth indicating aversion or distaste — sounding out. Ayu moved closer to the front; she wanted to see what everyone else was seeing, for she had no idea why everyone had gathered here.

A soldier yelled at the men with the horse carts. “Move, move!” he shouted, “We need space.”

Drivers climbed onto the carts, grabbed the reins and set the horses in motion, and slowly the carts moved further down the road. The crowd pushed out of the way to let the carts pass, then pressed back in until several soldiers blocked them.

Soldiers were unloading large baskets from the train — pig baskets no less, latticed rattan baskets taller than they were wide, larger than the similar kind of baskets used to transport chickens — and struggling under the weight. Ayu watched as two soldiers lifted a basket, staggered under its unwieldy shape and weight, and dumped it on the ground. She was slow to understand what she was watching. She knew the Dutch consumed pork, and she

assumed the Japanese did too, but to transport dozens of pigs in baskets by train, seemed excessive; but then again, these were strange times.

The humming sound that Ayu had noticed was louder here, and she realized it wasn't humming — it was moaning and low-pitched crying. Listening to snippets of conversation around her, she heard, “What are they doing,”; “Where are the pigs, I don't see pigs,”; and “People, my God”. Ayu looked closer, only to see that these weren't pigs in the basket, they were men. White men. It was pitiful. Visible through the large gaps in the sturdy yet loosely woven bamboo interlaced around long narrow rattan strips that provided support for the baskets, she saw the men's pale, dirty faces and bare chests. She noted the diamond-shaped openings that the criss-crossed bamboo formed an appealing pattern, yet hardly hid the ugly sight of captive men inside. They moaned and cried, "Water, please, water" — in English, Dutch, Indonesian.

At the same moment of Ayu's realization, Tedja clutched Ayu's arm and whispered, “Oh, Ayu, those are men.” Ayu nodded, silent in return. She was still taking in the situation, alarmed and confused at what was happening. Tedja leaned into Ayu's right shoulder and said, “I can't watch,” but soon she too, lifted her head and watched, along with everyone else.

The soldiers lifted the baskets from the train to the street side in front of the station. Some baskets were lowered gently, often the lighter baskets that contained only one man; others were dumped or unceremoniously dropped, the soldiers' feet kicking and rolling them into place. As the baskets piled up, the crowd moved back, pushed further into the street by the soldiers. Although still early morning, the sun was beating down on the dusty streets, the crowd, the men in the baskets, and the heat was oppressive already in its airlessness. The humidity and lack of breeze added to the heavy atmosphere.

The men were one or two to a basket. The baskets, about three feet tall, weren't high enough to accommodate most men's heights, even seated. Their hands tied behind their backs, their knees folded up against their bodies, their backs hunched over their legs, their faces pained as their contorted bodies strained within the confines of the lattice baskets. The occasional man had worked his hands free, and these men could be seen moving their hands through the diamond gaps of the baskets, large enough for a fist to fit through. Some of them wore pants or shorts, others were naked. They could hardly move, especially those crammed two to a basket. Many struggled to reposition themselves as their baskets were dropped onto the sidewalk; the Japanese didn't seem to care how they tipped or placed the men. These white men were filthy; some were bruised or bloody, some were no longer moving. Some of the men were tied back to back, others faced each other with no room to maneuver. Sweat dripped down their faces, their bare chests slick and glistening, their mouths parched. They looked out to the crowd, eyes large and pleading, and continued to beg for water. People looked away, unwilling to meet the men's eyes, yet unable to tear themselves entirely away from the situation.

Ayu recognized Piets Gallas, the inspector in Semarang for the Netherlands Indies Railways, as he walked out of the station's curved entrance. He must have been inside when this all began. His pace was brisk, his face tense. She'd met him once at Papa's office when Mr. Piets was visiting Papa's boss, Mr. Kummeling. A tall Dutch man, Mr. Piets always had been friendly to the locals and was well regarded. His brow furrowed as he approached the Japanese soldiers and Ayu heard him ask, politely and slowly, in English, if he could give the men water. What a brave man trying to help the moaning men while surrounded by Japanese soldiers in uniform. Ayu stood close enough to hear them talking, the murmur as the soldiers

discussed it, and finally the one in charge said yes, as long as Mr. Piets didn't talk to the white men.

Ayu remained frozen where she was, as was most of the crowd. More people arrived to watch, the increasing volume of chatter and talk mixed with the men's cries for water, the mass of bodies pushing Ayu closer to the front. She felt compelled to watch even as she wanted to flee. Tedja, still gripping Ayu's right arm, said, "Let's leave, Ayu," but Ayu didn't move — she couldn't move. She needed to see what happened even as she was disgusted by her impulse to stay.

Mr. Piets walked into the small station building and returned carrying a large white enameled coffee pot. He began walking down the line of baskets, pouring water into the mouths of the groaning men. There were thirty or forty baskets, and he tried to reach every one. He refilled the tin pot from a spigot outside the front door of the station building, returning time and again to fill up the pot. He began to throw water over the men's bodies as well as into their mouths. His pace picked as he walked quickly along the baskets, dozens of men crowded together, tens of men in the baskets. Beads of sweat dripped down the sides of his face. His clothing splashed with water and the exertions of his endeavor, it was difficult to tell what was sweat and what was water. The normally well-dressed man looked harried and messy, his tie flying, as he continued to race back and forth from the spigot to the pig baskets.

Ayu watched Mr. Piets, fascinated by his behavior, his selflessness under the watchful eyes of uniformed Japanese soldiers carrying weapons. She avoided as best as possible looking at the folded-up men inside the baskets, their suffering painful to contemplate and witness. Her braids swung back and forth as her head moved following Mr. Piets' actions. A commotion from one basket drew her attention. A man by himself in one of the smaller

baskets was yelling out, "You dirty mongrel monkeys, I've had a gutful of you nips!" Over and over he repeated himself; he was one of those who'd managed to loosen his hands, which stuck out through the basket holes, gripping the sides. He spit out the words with anger, unable to control his rage. A soldier approached the man, pulled a short sword from its hilt, and slashed the man's protruding hands. Blood began pouring out of the slashes; the yelling man withdrew them, crying, "You fucking Tojo!" She didn't understand these words but she understood the intent.

The soldier replaced the sword in its hilt and moved to the man in charge. After a short discussion, they both motioned to Mr. Piets to stop giving the men water, which only increased the men's cries. Mr. Piets hadn't reached them all yet. The soldiers yelled, their faces distorted by anger.

Mr. Piets threw the remaining water out of the pot at the closest baskets, then dropped his arms to his side in defeat. The empty coffee pot dangled from his hand. One of the soldiers came over and pushed Mr. Piets, who stumbled but didn't fall or react. His clothing was wet with sloshed water, his face damp and marked by spots where the brown earth, kicked up from his tromping back and forth on the dirt street, clung to the dampness, and his breathing was ragged. He looked towards the men in the baskets and nodded at them, then slowly walked back inside the station. Ayu felt a pang of sadness as Mr. Piets retreated; he could do no more and there was no one else to help these men; but mostly she felt respect for him, making a stance while he could, and knowing when it was time to stop.

The Japanese man in charge ordered the soldiers to load the baskets into the military trucks which had now pulled up along the road near the baskets piled on the side, pointing and gesturing from the baskets to the vehicles. Pairs of soldiers lifted then heaved and tossed

baskets into the back of the trucks. The crowd murmured and tsked when the men in baskets yelled as they landed on the hot metal flooring of the trucks, the searing metal burning the flesh exposed by the hexagonal gaps in the baskets. Men drew their bodies back but had nowhere to go; those with shorts or pants did their best to adjust their clothing, even with tied hands, to little avail. Tedja let go of Ayu's arm when the first basket landed in a truck, her hands covering her mouth as she stifled cries. First one layer of baskets, then when each truck was full, the next layer was loaded on top of the first. The men in the bottom layer screamed as the weight of the baskets above crushed them — crushed from above, burned by the hot metal below. Baskets moved back and forth as the men inside struggled to reposition themselves.

Ayu felt she could take no more when she noticed an Australian slouch hat on one of the men in a basket. She hadn't considered who these white men were before this; she'd been immersed in the unfolding horror of what was happening. The characteristic hat, associated throughout Java with the Australian soldiers, immediately brought Mac to mind, and she quickly began looking into the faces of all these pig basket men, the faces she'd avoided looking at.

Japanese soldiers began to disperse the crowd, pushing back at them, displeased with the raised voices, the shrieking, and that the multitudes, fascinated with the pale captive men, had shifted closer to the trucks to watch the soldiers loading the baskets. Just as Ayu stumbled with the group, she noticed a piece of fabric wave briefly from a basket still on the ground. It was her *ceplok* pattern — the black, brown, and beige repeating geometric patterns of flowers and petals — the colors almost floating as the fabric waved, and the moment she saw it, before she looked up to see the man who moved that hand, she knew that this was her Mac —

the batik fabric she'd given him in the forest when they'd last met, waving to get her attention — and she didn't want to have to see this. She saw the fluttering batik and then looked up, to Mac's face, no longer the smiling face she'd last seen. He had bruised cheekbones and a cut on his nose, but his gray eyes still reached out to her with their unusual piercing lightness. Tied back-to-back to another man, Mac had worked his hands free; he was fortunately, or unfortunately, facing the crowd, the man he was tied to facing the train. She didn't know how long he'd been waving the cloth, how long had he known she was in the crowd watching.

The moment she knew it was him, saw him, Mac, time slowed down and enlarged, enveloping them. He nodded his head slightly when he met her eyes, giving her a tiny, rueful half-smile. She nodded back, barely moving her head, unable to pretend to smile. How was he captured, were his friends in these baskets as well, what would happen to him: the questions overloaded her mind as she forced herself to stay with Mac, her eyes locked into his. It was just the two of them, everyone else melted away. She knew it was fantastical and unreal, yet it was so.

He lifted the batik to his face and sniffed it, a gesture of caring, of love. How did he know this, it was the way the Javanese expressed love — sniffed each other's cheeks instead of kissing, a gentle restrained gesture that said so much more than larger actions ever could. But it didn't matter how he knew, what mattered was how he delicately held the cloth — her gift to him — and stayed present with her, as she stayed present with him. She wished she'd brought the Lucky Strike tin with her, to show him how she treasured it, to hug it to her chest, but she also knew she didn't need it. He knew. She smiled with her eyes — it was the least and the most she could do — and put her hands into the prayer position and pulled them to her face, sniffing her fingertips while nodding back to Mac. It was the best she could think of

in such a controlled situation, maintaining her emotions while telling him everything with her eyes. He shifted his right hand, still clutching the *ceplok* and laid it flat to his heart; she could feel his heart beating, the beats emanating from him to her, waving through time and space into her; and then the spell was broken.

Two soldiers lifted the basket, Mac's basket, one of the last to be loaded, and they heaved it onto the second layer of a truck in the middle of the line, hopped inside, and then the trucks took off. Time sped up again and Ayu had to chase both time and the trucks. The crowd scattered, the show over, and people began walking and riding to wherever they had been going before they heard and saw the men in pig baskets.

Ayu mounted her bike, telling Tedja to get on.

"Ayu, the market is the other direction," Tedja said from behind, her voice eaten up by the wind created by the bicycle's motion.

"I have to see where the trucks are going, I promise we'll go to the market after."

"I don't think you want to see this, I know I don't. Can you stop?" Tedja said, then dismounted from the bike. "Wasn't that horrible enough? And I think this is ...kind of dangerous...You're acting so strangely, Ayu. I'll walk to the market, meet me there afterwards."

Ayu placed the money Mama had given her into Tedja's hand and said, "Buy whatever you can with this. And if I'm not back by the time you're done, can you bring the food by my house and tell Mama I've gone on to Pak Lim's to pick up the tire?"

Tedja nodded and Ayu rode off. She could always count on Tedja, her first friend, and closest friend. They would do anything for each other without explanation.

The trucks moved faster than she could pedal. The expanding distance between her and the trucks created the illusion she wasn't following them. The convoy headed towards Tawang Station, the bigger station, leading Ayu to wonder if the baskets were to be loaded onto another train to an unknown destination. But as the trucks neared the Tawang train tracks that led into the station, they continued north instead of turning in. North meant towards the harbor. At times the trucks slowed, due to congested traffic, and Ayu caught up; other times she followed from a distance. She could no longer tell which truck Mac was in, and of course he had no idea she was following behind.

Ayu stopped her bike on a small hill overlooking the harbor, and watched the trucks entering the harbor area, the snaking line of vehicles not far below. She caught her breath. The journey had been strenuous. The convoy had traveled several kilometers from the train station to the harbor. The tall structure of the Sriboga Flour Mill stood in the near distance, partway down the wharf. She dismounted next to a tall banyan tree, and watched as the trucks pulled up close to the factory. Maybe the men would be working there in the factory, but putting them in baskets didn't make sense. She didn't know what had possessed her to follow the trucks; she didn't feel courageous, but overtaken by an inability not to see what would happen next. She felt responsible for Mac, somehow, and she needed to know where he was being taken. Close enough to the harbor to see but far and high enough from it that she was hidden by the shade of the tree, she watched and waited.

Ayu heard voices clearly, as it was a windless day and the voices were carried upwards — the Japanese commander giving orders, the white men, Australians and British and Dutch yelling "Please help," "Let us out," "and that one lone relentless voice saying, "You yellow dogs." Pairs of soldiers unloaded the baskets and hauled them to the edge of the

wharf, placing them in a long line. The factory loomed behind the baskets and the trucks. The tide was going out and the water was several feet lower than the top of the docks that jutted out from the wharf. Ayu looked desperately for the piece of *ceplok*, where was her Mac — and where were they sending the pig basket men. She wondered where the boats were that the baskets would surely be loaded onto. A large ship at the far end of the harbor didn't move; were the baskets being readied for easy loading while waiting for the ship to come in closer? The Japanese commander shouted out an order, and the soldiers moved towards the baskets and pushed and tipped them one by one into the ocean.

Ayu felt faint as she watched — forced herself to watch — while the first basket was pushed into the ocean, then the next, until none were left. The men screamed as they realized what was happening and baskets further down the line moved back and forth as captives tried to break free, tied up though they were, but in vain. The sudden wild churning of the water, the foam that quickly became red, the continued frenzied activity, pieces of loose bamboo flying into the air, and the occasional flash of a fin meant that sharks were in the harbor. The pig basket men drowned as the sharks attacked them.

She had no idea which basket Mac was in; she'd lost track of which truck he'd been in. She was too far away to see a hat or waving cloth or brilliant gray eyes, yet she owed it to him, and to herself, to stay and see him through this. The wharf now empty, the soldiers returned to their trucks and the convoy slowly left the harbor. She was the last one there, Mac's only witness, watching from above, sobbing as dozens of men died, as Mac died, a painful but perhaps mercifully quick death. She stayed until the sharks had swum away and the waters had stilled. She stayed until her sobbing had hushed and her tears had dried. She stayed because she needed to be there with Mac until the very end.

She picked up her bicycle, lying on its side behind the tree, and rode away as fast as her legs could pedal. No destination in mind, quickly out of breath, the goal to tire herself, exhaust her legs, make her mind a blank. What she had just witnessed was so shocking, so beyond anything she could ever have imagined, had ever even heard of that she felt that her brain would explode or she might go blind. Her thoughts were scrambled: the sounds and images from the train station to the harbor, the fluttering piece of batik, the look in Mac's eyes, all lingered and waited behind her efforts to make her mind blank — to forget. How could she go on living after seeing such a thing, after the man she had dared to dream about, to hope for a life with however preposterous that might seem, the person who had awakened her to life's possibilities, to the thought of life elsewhere or a future with someone so different from anyone she knew, how would she ever be herself again?

Despite these jumbled thoughts, she also had a rational stream of consciousness — that she couldn't be gone for hours, that she didn't have enough time to go to Ungaran Forest — the only place that would bring her solace; that Mama would worry if she didn't return to the shop with Pak Lim's flat tire, that she would somehow have to pretend to be that Ayu that she no longer was and would never be again. Her legs aching, sweat droplets on her face, upper body drenched with the prolonged physical effort, and thirsty, such thirst, the thirst finally bringing her furious ride to a halt. She looked around — where was she? Close to the Oude Stad, the Old Town. Without intending to, she'd arrived in Pak Lim's neighborhood. If she stopped now to pick up his tire, he or his wife would offer her something to drink.

She caught her breath, watching cars, trucks, bicycles, and pedicabs pass by. She heard the satisfying clop of horses' hooves as a cart rode by, the sound pleasing to her aggravated senses, even as the beasts strained under the weight of the carriages they pulled.

This was life, these people carrying on with their days; they had no idea what she had witnessed nor that she didn't know how she would go on. She slaked her thirst at Pak Lim's, drinking glass after glass of water.

"It's so hot...it was a long ride," she said in response to Mrs. Lim's questions.

The screams and frothing bloody water playing repeatedly in the back of Ayu's mind as she rode home. She struggled to fathom how Mac and all those others were so quickly gone, while at the same time she knew she'd have to act outwardly as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. It had happened so fast, yet lasted forever. Two hours, maybe three, had passed since she'd left the house this morning, yet a lifetime had also elapsed. The only way she could function, to drown out thoughts of Mac and the other ragged men, was to think of the forest — the birds, the ferns, the soft leaves underfoot, the stream, the beautiful young man with the tent who gave her a duck and a cigarette tin.

Papa had spoken to her about the importance of listening, of paying attention to her surroundings, reporting unusual activity but doing nothing. She knew she must tell him what happened to the men in order to obey his first instruction, but she also couldn't share anything of what happened after the railroad station if she was going to obey his command to do nothing. What was she to say? What was she to do? She practiced calling up the Ungaran Forest in her mind — where she'd last seen Mac; and where her grandmother had taught her to find solace in plants as a child — as a way to calm herself. Her pumping legs and increased breathing rate as she headed home helped to solidify, then bury deeply, the images from today in her mind: she tried to let go of what she'd seen and let only the green forest in.