



THE LOVE LETTERS OF ALEXANDER RAJAGUGUK
(*Surat-surat Cinta Aleksander Rajaguguk*)

Gerson Poyk

Translated by Mary Lou Wang

Note on the Writer

Gerson Poyk is an Indonesian poet, writer, and prize-winning free-lance journalist. He was born in 1931 on the tiny island of Roti, which belongs to the chain of islands to the west of Bali. For centuries, navigators have referred to this chain of islands as the Lesser Sundas. From 1956 to 1963 Gerson Poyk taught public high school in the islands of Roti and Halmahera, which are part of the Moluccas, formerly the fabled Spice Islands. He began writing poetry and fiction during that period of his life less than a decade after the Republic of Indonesia received its independence from Dutch colonial rule. Sometime in the mid-'60s, Gerson left the Outer Islands for Jakarta, the nexus of Indonesian culture, and became a journalist. In 1970 he was the first Indonesian participant to the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In 1985 the Association of Indonesian Journalists awarded him first prize for serialized works. He is widely published in his own country and has been translated in Germany and Australia.

Mary Lou Wang, 1987

THE LOVE LETTERS OF ALEXANDER RAJAGUGUK

There is a mansion or an opulence bathed in neon light. And a two-lane boulevard goes right by it. And there is a greenway or a roadside embankment covered with vegetation; it lies opposite to the mansion, on the other side of the two-lane boulevard. It also supports another form of growth, dubious and wild. Out of control, angles careening, regular forms overturned, the shacks have sprouted and flourish on the greenway. And their builders are as rank, as weedy, as obdurate as these impromptu yet persistent structures, for they neither possess official residence permits nor any permanent forms of occupation.

But Alexander Rajaguguk has something going for him, which of course isn't tantamount to a bright and promising future ahead of him, but he has a kiosk. It is cuboid, slightly longer than a human body; it's got two wheels and a third appendage stuck to its side; a stick, that's what it is. And with this stick, the kiosk gets ambulated, pushed somewhere; then it stands up again, propped up on the stick. However his kiosk-on-wheels doesn't like to stray from its place; that's the spot directly across from the grand mansion. The wheels attached to the kiosk are rarely if ever put to use. Now once, just

once in a while, the two little wheels strain and groan and acquire sufficient momentum to revolve and bring the kiosk to a spot behind one of the illegal shacks on the greenway. But not for too long; the moment the typhoon is over, the moment it has rushed through the boulevard and dissipates--the wailing of the military motorbikes leading the motorcade of the foreign guests of the state elsewhere in the city--the moment the atmosphere settles back to normal, the little kiosk-on-wheels gets trundled back to its spot.

Kiosks and hawker stalls that cater to the *becak* drivers, and which do not have the advantage of wheels, these suffer whenever a Typhoon Guest-of-the-State is coming through the neighborhood; everything has to be cleaned up, put to rights by the street-protocol team in preparation for the welcome. Spic and span but for a while; the filth returns, always. Spotless then dirty, then nice again, but oh back to the filth, that's way it is for the designated route. The typhoon comes, the typhoon goes, and that's the way it is for kiosks and hawker stalls minus wheels. So it did seem that Alexander Rajaguguk alone was blessed by Fate.

Ah, Alexander Rajaguguk! What a name, not a bad sounding name at all, rather pleasantly imposing. He is another one of those young men who came to Jakarta to cast their nets into the sea of life and try their luck and maybe make enough to eat. Good boy. Sensitive, kind, and what's more, very bright.

He graduated from the high school in his little Sumatran village. He registered at the veterinary college at Bogor. But what a pity nothing came of it; he had to scrap his plans. How could he go on when his pockets were turned inside out for the last coin and his own stomach growling and cavernous? He quit the student life. He was never going to be a smart good-hearted animal doctor bravely saving animal lives; he just had to face up to reality.

So he bummed his way around Jakarta for a while. Finally he got an O.K. sort of job unique to Jakarta. He became a jobber. And then Alexander joined the ranks of the scalpers and hucksters and shysters of the world.

He was a busman's jobber screaming the bus route at the top of his lungs, scrambling on and off the bus to wheedle, shout, cajole, and hustle in the passengers. Fortunately he moved up and became a bus conductor himself. Well, he was on his way now. In that capacity, he was able to save six hundred rupiahs, and this became the start-up capital for a new line of work, cigarette vending. By scrimping and saving and patiently counting it all up, the vending business which he had started with a small tray of cigarettes grew into what he now possesses, a portable kiosk. There he does business; there he sleeps at night. And in the beginning, he used to sleep alone. Eventually he acquired a very nice companion. They slept together in the kiosk. But yes indeed, how nice and cozy; what else when his companion grew to understand him more and more--though of course, in the beginning, his companion was unlettered, untutored, and totally ignorant about everything except the finer intimacies of communion such as sitting on his lap, caressing each other, and kissing each other.

Then one day, Alexander Rajaguguk met a young lady from Surakarta. She was a *jamu* peddler who had gotten caught in the rain. She sought shelter at his kiosk. Naturally, quite obviously, she could not be accommodated in his little kiosk; the way things were going, it was a tight squeeze already for the two bits of Creation in there. Luckily the kiosk was equipped with a plastic awning, and beneath the plastic awning, there was a bench. So it was that the

Maid of Surakarta who peddled *jamu* sat herself down under the plastic awning and waited out the rain.

"*Jamu*, would you like some?" she asked Alexander Rajaguguk with downcast eyes and a kittenish reticence to her posture.

"Yeah. One glass," Alexander said.

"Will that be with an egg?" the Maid of Surakarta asked.

"Make it with an egg. Yeah. And pepper and honey," Alexander said.

He took several gulps of the concoction and gave the rest to his friend and companion who refused it and actually glared at her. "Oh, it's all right . . . Yeass . . . it's all right . . . that's right," Alexander Rajaguguk crooned as he stroked his Beloved.

And the rain, it always comes pelting and hard when least expected. And then just as suddenly, it changes, becoming a tender veil of tears. It was then that she started to put away her mysterious potions. Languidly showing off her breasts and hips, she smiled and said, almost in an undertone, "Well, I feel I must thank you now."

"What? Do I feel well now? How could I not be feeling fit and ready for anything with your *jamu*, egg, honey, and pepper? With that sort of drink in Alexander Rajaguguk, he wouldn't wimp out on you!"

Hearing that she just smiled. She stood up, wrapped the basket of mysterious bottles onto her back with one fluid motion of her long scarf and left him.

"Hey, come back tomorrow, all right?" Alexander said.

But she didn't come back the next day nor did she come back the next several days. But one night, when the rain was drizzling, and the kiosk had been closed earlier in the evening, and Alexander and his friend were lying down inside, and he was singing the plaintive songs in his boyhood *Tapian Nauli* dialect, there came a knocking on his kiosk. "Who is it?" the master of the house demanded.

There came the soft reply, "I'd like to buy some cigarettes."

"What kind?"

"Open up first, please."

"I don't have anything called "Open-up-first," Alexander snapped sharply as he opened up his kiosk.

Then he saw that it was her. His eyes widened. The lovely *jamu* girl, all glistening from the fine rain, was standing before him again. Alexander lost his nerve; there she was again, but he had to act fast. He got the awning down and pulled out the little bench. Then the two occupants of the kiosk came out; and yes, there was the woman, soaking wet.

She asked him, "Will the dog bite?" She was referring to his friend and companion, a German Shepherd of an intelligent and faithful mien.

"He's not a brute. Well, . . . only to people who want to hurt his master."

"How can he tell the good from the bad?"

"He senses it."

"Yes, I know. Dogs have *instinks* but they can't feel as humans do."

Alexander looked up at his guest. She was something special, he could tell; no way would a common run-of-the-mill *jamu* peddler know that word, "instinct," so he thought. Usually these girls were either complete illiterates or at best girls who had forgotten their letters. And then there were the ones who spoke in a sort of Indonesian all shaken up with a generous infusion of Javanese dialect. But this particular lady peddler, she had come, soaking wet owing to a fine rain come to moisten Earth, she had come, bringing with her that "instinct" and everything else of hers. Alexander, who was only a callow youth of twenty-five, watched her intently.

She must have felt his scrutiny for she started to explain to him, "I'm afraid that I'm disturbing you tonight. The reason is I've a question which I've been wanting to ask you. Do you think it's safe to stay open till the middle of the night?"

Before answering Alexander sucked in his breath and said to himself: so that's what she wanted to ask; a fleeting thought in him. But what he said was "Yes, it's quite safe. Remember that this city has at least several hundred sharpshooters in the police and in the military. They make the rounds. They'll be on the lookout for any kind of low-life. So I wouldn't worry. But may I ask why you want to sell *jamu* so late at night?"

"Yes, well, along with the *jamu* I could be selling food and drinks like rice and side dishes, and tea, and coffee, toast and everything else," she answered.

"Not a bad idea, but it sounds pretty difficult to pull off by yourself. Do you have any family?"

"I have lots of friends, *jamu* peddlers from Surakarta, street hawkers from Tegal who can make *bakso*, fried rice, and noodles, fried or in broth."

"Are you married?"

"I was widowed when I was twenty-two years old. My husband died a year ago. He was a high school teacher. Oh, I've been a *jamu* peddler for a long, long time."

Alexander sucked in his breath. That was probably how she got "instinct," Alexander thought, when her loved one, the high school teacher, was still amongst us. And he said to her, "Of course we can share this space. You could open your food stall under that tree, the one about two hundred meters over there, and I could be selling cigarettes right here. Uh, aren't you, uh cold in those wet clothes? If you are, uh, you could go inside and borrow my shirt and sarong."

"Thank you, but I can stand the wind and rain because I regularly take *jamu*."

"Oh yeah, it's quite safe hereabouts. So when do you think you'll open your stall?"

"Tomorrow. I've got everything ready. I have the bamboo poles and the waterproof canvas for the tent. And I can take it apart easily when the foreign guests are coming, and the street cleaning begins. And I saved up from my *jamu* business and bought the cooking and serving things."

This information astounded Alexander; he was impressed, and he studied the young widow from Surakarta. She had sopping wet hair. What a delicate profile: the amiable slope of her forehead, thinly arched eyebrows which harmonized with her forehead and her aquiline nose, and those perfectly generous lips set off

by the curve of her chin. How she kept biting her underlip. Her teeth were pearly and even, how wonderful! Alexander Rajaguguk's heart quickened in appreciation of all that this lady was bringing to him in the fine rain.

"Well. I should really go. Thank you for the advice." And she got up and left him.

She was maybe only five or six meters away; Alexander Rajaguguk followed after and pulled her back. "Wait, you'll catch a cold tonight. Sleep with me. I have a dry sarong and you can use my shirt."

She resisted his advances; they began a tug-of-war in the shimmering rain. "I'm sorry, but I am not that kind of woman; I am not a prostitute!" And hearing her rebuke, he stopped short. He let her go and watched her disappear into the dark.

The rain drizzled on right through the night. Alexander slept very well. So well he never noticed that a burglar had come like a rodent chewing through the wooden kiosk to steal his radio and his wristwatch. The radio had disappeared before he could wake up at dawn, so who else but her, she, and her cohorts? Some packs of cigarettes had also been snagged and taken away. Well, he was firm in his opinion on last night's visit in the rain: a reconnoitre. That's just the way it is in Jakarta; there are young women around casing the joints for them. "God damn it!" he could only grumble. Yet he was still lucky, and "Lucky, lucky, lucky!" he was shrieking at the top of his lungs in the inner sanctum of his heart. Yes, he was lucky, because the money was still in the pocket of his boxer shorts; the burglar had not taken a razor blade and ripped apart the seams.

Quickly he thought, yes, with the money, he could bring his dog to SWAT headquarters where they train police dogs. Yes, it would be great to live with a dog that had been trained by the police. So that very day, Alexander closed up the kiosk and left with his dog.

It was just too much to bear for a man of his means; a radio and a wristwatch were real luxuries, he thought as he stumbled home. Then he saw it; about two hundred meters off in a corner by itself was a food stall. The cars and motor-bikes had already started to come; they were parked there and all because of the lovely proprietress who had rolled out the carpet, who once upon a time used to wear a murky-colored sarong and a country-style blouse. Now she was in a dress cut high up her thighs; wow, there she was ready for action, a hooker who spies for thieves in Jakarta. That was how Alexander had analyzed it in the inner sanctum of his heart.

His analysis of the situation, the accusation, based on the evidence of her arrival last night, became the indictment of the young widow. He didn't have legal redress, but he at least would have recourse to the psychological. That was what went through the mind of Alexander Rajaguguk.

And that was why each time he went for a drink at her stall he rarely failed to make innuendos and off-color remarks about the underhand ways of the low-life in Jakarta. He specially emphasized the criminal elements who can use a young woman to their advantage. Whenever he went to her place, he never ever ordered any of the unpackaged foods. He'd go carefully over the bottles of beer and soda pop lined up in the middle of the table and then pick one. And only his hands could touch the chosen bottle to uncap it. He wasn't going to be poisoned as well. The young widow just let him be. Maybe she was just dumb; or maybe she was being as cold as ice, impregnable.

For several months this went on. He would go over to her stall for a drink and never forget his insinuations, but she stayed just the same. The insinuations didn't penetrate her at all. In fact the young Maid of Surakarta grew lovelier and lovelier and ripened out more and more. The damn bitch, he shrieked deep in his heart. But what surfaced into thought and resentful mumbling was "what a dumb cow the bitch is."

But then came the day of his dog's graduation from the police-dog academy. It was therefore time for Alexander Rajaguguk's ruse. From the SWAT center he took his dog home and never let on to anybody what his dog had learned. And then he left his kiosk unlocked one night; and sure enough, things of his got stolen. First thing in the morning, he ordered his dog to track the thief down. His dog bounded out, sniffed along the roadside, and ambled over towards her food stall. It was her, right on the mark, and caught with the evidence; Alexander secretly rejoiced and followed his dog. The dog arrived at the now-deserted food stall. He sniffed the stools and benches, but of all the . . . the dog then proceeded to leave her place; it was loping and snuffling along to the bus-stop! The police-trained dog drew himself up at the bus-stop, snuffled around some more, and then trotted back to the kiosk for a snooze.

After that, Alexander began to suffer a change of heart. He was still suspicious, but he was seeing her in a different light. Alexander became a regular patron of hers. Yet he did not mean to fall in love once again like that first time he saw her in the drizzling rain particularly since he had witnessed her, the young widow, get into a car and head off towards Binaria Beach, trysting ground for the demimonde.

Days, weeks, several months passed, but Alexander and his now well-trained companion continued to live all by themselves. Wherever he went, the dog followed. Whenever he felt lazy or if it was raining, he ordered his dog to go fetch his meal. And the young widow made friends with the dog. She wrapped up his dinner in a banana leaf, tied the packet up with string; and the dog would bite down on the free end of the string and run back to his master.

One night it happened again, for real, in love again; he wrote a scathing missive demanding the reasons she went off to Binaria in a sedan.

The young widow from Surakarta quickly dashed off a reply to the cigarette vendor:

"On that rainy night when you tried to make me sleep with you, I told you I was not a prostitute. I am not one, and I've never been one."

The dog took her letter back home. The cigarette vendor read it, then he answered her:

"You don't fool me. I saw you with my own two eyes go off in a sedan, not just once but several times. I don't believe you. In Jakarta sedans are for wolves on the make."

The correspondence by messenger-dog was an interesting way to keep the dog in practice. It wouldn't do for him to forget all of his police-training. But wasn't it only two hundred meters from Alexander's kiosk to her food stall? Wouldn't it have been better for him to walk over himself?

But this was the scenario that followed; the two streetside merchants would eventually, and for real, fall in love. And they pledged their troth, not with rings on fingers, but with an infusion of capital from Alexander to the young

widow's venture. Her food stall grew larger; an old cigarette crate became the *saté* table. The rich odor of barbecued meats added to the food stall's allure. More and more people stopped in. The place got jumping. Sedans were parking there. Motorbikes were parking there. Casual passersby stopped in. Everybody in the whole city went to eat and drink at the young widow's place.

The future for the both of them looked bright, especially the way the food business was going. From the profits, Alexander bought himself two pumps for automobile tires and whatever else. They had to hire more help from her old neighborhood in Surakarta and his Tapanuli village.

"Sri (for that was what he now called her), when are we going to do it?" he asked as she was closing up the cafe and getting ready to go home.

"You mean when are we going to get married," Sri murmured demurely. "How about our money, do we have enough to start building the house?"

"I think there's enough. And we could always do the work in stages if we don't have it all saved up."

Beginning that night, they started planning for the house. They purchased two hundred square meters of land on a greenway. This roadside parcel had not been zoned for residential use. But they started building anyway and did it in fits and starts, all the while keeping themselves fully occupied with their respective businesses. Sri worked at her cafe day and night. Alexander supervised the construction of the house, and then he kept his kiosk open late into the night when Sri would go back to her rented shack to sleep. She would wake up at dawn to start the day's cooking. The betrothed couple were very busy, so busy that they were rarely together.

But the dog, his beloved friend and companion, was always by his side. And he had other things as well. He had bought himself a cassette player, second-hand, and cassette tapes of classical music, mostly Beethoven. He loved to play the Beethoven late at night and let it fill his spirit. Life by the side of the boulevard was making him very happy. If it wasn't too late, he'd bring the cassette player to Sri's place and turn it on, letting Beethoven sweep grandly over the patrons' heads as they munched on the house specials, like *saté*, washed down with beer.

And soon the dry season was at its peak; it was almost time for Lebaran. Sri Yektiati asked leave of Alexander to go home to her parents and the child she had by the late high school teacher.

Alexander Rajaguguk gave his permission. He was all alone again in his portable kiosk with his dog and his cassette tapes of classical music. He stayed open day and night. He lived within his means. His business progressed as before. Every day he was able to buy some more construction materials, like cement or terra-cotta roofing tiles, to continue building the house. He lived in the hope and with the hope that Sri would be coming back soon.

One day he received a letter from Sri, and thus it went:

A thousand times I beg your forgiveness. I do not think the Goddess of Love can come down and help us. A terrible thing has happened to me. I must be obedient though. My parents have not said that I should go back to Jakarta. What can I do? All I can say is that I give you my permission to please find another girl from my city for the house. But do not take just any *jamu* peddler.

Find a girl from Surakarta who is educated like you. Again, I would like to apologize a thousand times once more . . . Yours . . .

Alexander read the letter silently. He stroked his beloved pet, the German Shepherd trained by SWAT. Several days later, he sold the unfinished house and thereby increased his working capital.

It took him two months after that last letter before he started feeling in control of himself again. What can a man do? One has to resign oneself to one's fate even though someone you've loved has just walked out of your life. But that's life. The world couldn't be as fine and simple as a pine needle. Nevertheless there was a desolation inside him whenever he saw the wind gently shake the pines which stood in front of the mansion; and whenever the raindrops falling in a light shower formed a shimmering veil over the pines, this was sure to make him very sad. The moist pine boughs reminded him of Sri, her hair wet from the rain, who came to him uninvited and who left him, not by request.

One night the rain came again, light and drizzling, yet it oppressed his heart. Ah, Life, replete with the weeping rain that comes and goes. It is like a dream revealed in which his affair with the woman named Sri was the scar left behind in another dream. Now his eyes were open, and he was alert, ostensibly on the lookout for customers, who wouldn't be coming in the drizzling rain, but it was Sri who was on his mind, although it was unlikely that she would ever return from Surakarta. Then curiously the fine rain and the breaths of wind which feathered through the pines mingled with the passion of Beethoven! Alexander listened. He glanced down at his second-hand cassette player. Had he absentmindedly turned it on? But the machine was silent; indeed his ears were telling him that the Beethoven was coming from the mansion behind the glistening pines.

It is a two-story mansion. To reach the second story, there is an outside stairway and surely an elevator or at least another stairway inside. But who could tell? What's apparent to anyone outside is the fenestration and the door there gracing the veranda on the second story which could only be attained by a stairway gracefully swooping up from the garden. And the garden is barricaded by high walls.

All this was apparent, even in the drizzling rain. But more important than the swoop of the stairway or the curve of the veranda was Beethoven, who was coming to him in the fine rain and the wind-rustling of the pine boughs, and which was drifting out of the mansion and into his heart, the heart that Sri Yektiati, the woman from Surakarta, had broken and tossed aside.

The night was coming to an end; the fine rain kept on coming, impressing itself into the earth, turning it to mud. Some cars had gone dashing down the streets. But the Beethoven continued mellifluously from the mansion tightly barricaded by the steel gate with all those spikes on top.

All of a sudden Alexander Rajaguguk had a notion to do something whimsical, which perhaps just might alleviate the sorrow he was suffering. And what do you know, he took out a sheet of paper and wrote down a few lines of poetry evocative of the soft weepy rain:

Who are you?
 You give me
 Beethoven
 From on high
 Above fine rain

The pines
 Through the window
 Above weeping pines
 The garden wall
 The steel gate
 You have come to me:
 A man of
 The earth the sea
 Made one
 Indonesia
 A man with no land
 No piece of his own
 Except
 The tears
 Of fine rain
 The pines.

He folded up the poem and put it in a waterproof plastic bag, then ordered his dog to deliver the poem to the source, the mansion from which Beethoven was drifting out.

His dog left him, and he waited with a pounding heart. And how come; Sri Yektiati had upped and left him, now what would become of him if he lost his trained dog too?

He waited and was carried away by the piano sonata that drifted way above the fine rain and the pines. He waited while his heart was shaken, tossed, slapped down, and agitated by his intense anxiety over the possible loss of his friend and companion, the German Shepherd. And so Alexander Rajaguguk had stumbled and fallen head first into a rarified world of the beautiful, that is, he had begun to climb a tall mountain; a tall mountain, fear and anxiety, the burden of the mountaineer, but for every step upwards, spiritual infiltration of Nature's beauty and grandeur. And he felt a kind of universe composed of fractures and contradictions penetrate; because, to him, Beauty was coming to mean a heart full of fine rain that was like a heavenly curtain, diaphanous, fluid, shifting to and fro, or a heart full of the pine boughs, the pine needles gently shivering, shaking, nodding, lachrymal pines moving with the rain, and yet it was also in complete contradiction with the very substance of his self. He was agonizing over his beloved dog. He was waiting for his dog, the go-between who was taking a poem about himself to the unknown world of Beethoven. Alexander Rajaguguk had unconsciously become tangled up in an aesthetic conflict on a small scale: drizzling rain versus a dog.

He let his thoughts roam uncontrollably. Then his dog came home all wet. He paused at the doorway, shook the excess water off his fur, and went inside, wagging his tail. Alexander snatched up the letter the dog had in his mouth and opened it up. Clearly written on a piece of legal-size paper was a poem:

Ha! Who're you
 Talking
 By dog
 In the rain
 In the lonely rain?

Alexander Rajaguguk read this poetic reply and giggled gleefully. The dog got all excited and swished his tail to and fro, put up his forelegs, leaned on his

master, and licked his master's face. "Tell me, hmmm, was that person a man or a woman, old or young?" Alexander said, hugging his dog.

Naturally a dog wouldn't have any reply to that. So he reached for a packet of biscuits and fed his beloved pet a few pieces. And while the dog was busily chewing, he responded to the poem:

I am
 Alexander Rajaguguk
 One small particle
 On the earth's crust
 One, but humanity.
 I am
 Alexander Rajaguguk
 Of the proto-Malay
 Pure ancient Batak
 Race, of fine character
 I am
 On a pushcart
 In Jakarta
 In a sea of life
 Catch it
 If I may.

This poem pleased him. He chuckled over it; for certain, on a wet drizzling night, inspiration will grab hold of you and make something happen. He stroked his dog, spoke softly to him, and ordered him to deliver this second poem. With alacrity the dog trotted away. Again, Alexander's thoughts fell into disarray, not because he feared that his dog was going to get shot, but really because he was wondering in his heart of hearts about the identity of the other poet.

Thoughts of his dog's fate desisted as a car pulled up to his kiosk. A window was rolled down, and someone inside the car shouted for a pack of cigarettes and matches too, "bring them here." Alexander got up, did what he was asked, and returned to his kiosk, money in hand. That's how it goes if a man shrewdly watches out for business on a rainy night, people will come to buy, so he reminded himself. And then another sedan pulled up, and he had to perform the same service of selling cigarettes. He went back into his kiosk. Inside, the mosquitoes were singing in descant. His next performance was burning a coil of mosquito repellent.

The dog came back. Ahah, the dog was very excited. This made Alexander even more excited; he snatched up the envelope and quickly opened it. This time it was a longer poem in a more serious vein. Listen to it:

Oh Foreigner
 Oh Foreigner
 By classical music
 I know your name:
 Rajaguguk!
 By classical music
 You send me
 A dog who goes
 "Guk-guk!"
 Wow, oh, how did you
 Get this ferocious name?
 When in fact, you

Communicate to me
 In the rain
 Your heart, softly
 A poem or a bough
 Of pine in a dog's snout.

Alexander read it over and laughed hilariously, loudly, so much so that he nearly tipped the kiosk over. The dog listened and started to bark for him to turn over the piece of paper he was holding, Ahah, there was more; but this time it wasn't a poem but a kindly worded note:

Alex! Don't send anymore letters tonight. It's getting towards dawn, and the guards have woken up. They patrol in this drizzle, and I'm afraid for your dog. It might get hurt. Let's resume this correspondence tomorrow. The safest time is between 2am and 4am.

Alexander read the note and kept flipping the letter over and over, deep in thought. The dog cocked his head from side to side, trying to keep up. Alexander glanced down at his head wagging left and right, and he smiled. "Tell me, hmmm. Tell me if this person was a man or a woman; and if a woman, was she young and pretty or a wrinkled old grandmother; and if a man, was he a real man or homo?" Alexander said as he stroked his dog's head.

But the dog didn't have an answer for him. The dog fell asleep under the soothing massage.

On the following night, Alexander waited until the safe hours as noted in the letter. It was a clear night. Then he wrote this poem:

My heart,
 It's not my name
 Here goes my name, Guk-guk!
 Here's my heart, Coral Rock
 Firm in its place,
 Lonely though;
 So don't look just
 At my name and this
 Pigeon-coop-on-wheels
 But look at the dog
 Messenger of a heart
 That wants communication
 With humanity broken up
 Between a grand road,
 The motorcycles waiting,
 The police do it,
 And a stone building.

Rather cheerfully the dog took his master's heartfelt and hopeful missive. Alexander started singing to kill the time. Tired of that, he turned on his cassette player; tired of listening to his tapes, he began tidying up his kiosk; tired of this, he began counting the money earned during the day and the night. But his heart was not in this; it was across the street at the mansion. Then the sweet wildness of Beethoven started again. Ah, it was joy, what sincerely heartfelt joy.

Now was the time for Alexander to sit back, wait, and meanwhile luxuriate in Beethoven. He lit up a cigarette to add to the moment. Suddenly, bang! The explosion rent the air. It had come from the direction of the mansion. In

a brief instance, the blink of an eye, Alexander shuddered, his heart nearly convulsed, and all his sentiments drew in, concentrated, then were cast at the mansion. And then the dog was unceremoniously thrown over the steel gate; it fell with a thud into the ditch alongside the boulevard and rebounded, another thud. Alexander crossed over immediately to his beloved dog. His fury was undirected; it would not be unleashed on anyone. Calmly he jumped into the ditch, calmly he pulled his dog out, then he slung him over his shoulder and crossed back to his kiosk.

That same night, he called his pump boys together and said to them, "My friends, a man has just tried to communicate with another human being with the aid of a dog and Beethoven. Unfortunately these instruments have not brought about a true encounter. Therefore let us party the night away!"

When they barbecued the dog, the smell of singed dog hair filled up the night, the gentle breeze brought this over to the mansion, and the smell of it penetrated the mansion by way of the windows. Whereupon the sound of Beethoven welled forth from a window and yearned out towards Alexander and his friends.