

VIVERE PERICOLOSAMENTE

Tjalie Robinson

Translated by Winniefred Anthonio

Translator's Note:

Jan Boon (1911-1974), better known under his pseudonyms Tjalie Robinson or Vincent Mahieu, was born in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, but grew up in the former Dutch East Indies in the city of Batavia. He began work as a journalist and became famous for his *piekerans* (ponderings) for Dutch newspapers in the Indies. These pieces were later published as *Ponderings of a Streetloafer* (1953). Like many Dutch Eurasians, he left Indonesia after the country gained its independence and in 1954 settled in the Netherlands. He there became well known for his Dutch Eurasian magazine *Tont-tong*. Unwillingly, he became the spokesman for the Indo refugees who tried to start a new life in a cold and hostile environment. Proud of his dual heritage, he sharply criticized the Dutch for their treatment of Indos and Indo culture. He encouraged Indos to preserve their unique culture, even though many felt that the only possible way to survive in the Netherlands was by total assimilation. This controversial stand brought him many enemies and divided the Indo community. Nevertheless, he stood firm in this conviction until his death of a heart attack in 1974.

Tjies (1958), in which "Vivere Pericolosamente" appears, was his first collection of short stories published under the name Vincent Mahieu. He received the literary prize of the city of Amsterdam for the collection. On the back cover of the 1978 edition, Robinson explained the hunting term "*tjies*" as follows (my translation):

Tjies is the nickname and pet-name given to the first firearm full-blooded Eurasians received upon finishing elementary school and entering society as "first-class citizens." Even though this *Tjies*, the cal. 22, is the smallest firearm, it is a deadly weapon. Holding life and death in his hand, to the maturing youth, from this time on, life does not consist of "sweet talk" any more, and however unbelievable it might seem to the ethic-embracing city person, life becomes indeed even more subtle. Toughness makes way for hardness, cruelty for mercy; with the power to kill, the young man learns to spare life. There is an extremely profound difference in character between the young man living in the city, with libraries and slaughterhouses, and the young man in nature, a vulnerable

individual with scanty needs, scanty demands, but with the highest physical and moral efficiency.

With the *Tjies*, the consciously awakening human being learns what life is really about.

VIVERE PERICOLOSAMENTE

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How many people lead double lives? For how long. When do these lives clash? How do they begin? Sometimes from the two lives of the European house itself. Something one would never guess. Indeed such living structures exist; their respectable facades faced a respectable street, but their backdoors vile slums. How many affairs erupted through these little backdoors? And how much misery and ruin caused in return! In the old Indies, those things usually remained secret. To be European carried status. The annexes built in the back of the houses and anything beyond remained, as a matter of fact, "terra incognita." Affairs, referred to as "naughty little things," were kept a secret, tucked away or at the most whispered about over drinks. Like *yarns*. But how was it still possible for the most concealed secret to come out in the open even if no European had seen it? Ah. One hears about it by snooping around and beyond the annexes. Eyes see, ears hear and thus mouths speak.

Along the Tjiliwoeng,¹ in the center of the city of Batavia, existed such houses leading two lives. Naturally, those houses did not officially stand along the Tjiliwoeng. The Tjiliwoeng flowed behind them. No one saw anything of the river except by crossing her bridges, even then one would only notice tiny little chunks in such short units of time. And since Europeans never row in the Tjiliwoeng—don't even mention swim—no one knew what the other life of the houses would be like. Their fronts were inhabited by referendaries,² government officials, and academicians, while the other life in the rear of these houses was as obscure and unknown as it ought to be. From the river, one would only see the stern, soiled, and dusty enclosures of the annexes with their stiff, round, eye-shaped ventilation holes, with vicious pieces of glass on the top of the walls; sometimes even a weathered and half way mouldered door, with a corroded lock. Behind the doors, narrow passages were so cluttered up with piles of trash, that an intruder could not come in even by forcing the door. Occasionally, brittle pieces of soil covered with weeds leading a deprived life in the midst of smashed bottles, broken china, and rusted cans tossed over the wall in anger, extended from those walls to the river bank. The only people who occasionally set foot on these little pieces

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¹ Flowing through the city, the Tjiliwoeng river was and still is the most important source of water for the people living in Jakarta.

² A referendary (*referendaris*) is a department head of a specific branch of the colonial government.

of soil were fishermen who cleaned out their casting-nets. But too many thorns, pieces of broken glass, and too much filth prevented one from having a good time there. Also, there were often snakes. Once in a great while, a naughty boy would climb over the wall to nose around there, but after those vicious pieces of broken glass cut his bare feet his Mom definitely put an end to those wanderings. Perhaps, at one time, a long time ago in fact, people really made use of those pieces of soil. Otherwise, how could one explain the presence of barbed wire marking the compounds' boundaries, extending at times even deep down into the river? Nobody asked questions because nobody noticed it.

Except *one*. That was Mister Barkey. Actually Mister Barkey was an *Indo*, a Dutch Eurasian, evident from his name, according to insiders. But he was indeed of a conspicuous kind. He belonged to the type endowed with all the necessary characteristics to be successful: a white one. With his blond hair, blue eyes, and fair skin, many Europeans regarded him a *totok*, a native Dutchman. Perhaps that's why his career had been so successful, because, in spite of his 34 years and only fourteen years of service, he was a department head. He didn't associate much with his brown-skinned colleagues who envied his success and accused him for denouncing his own race.

Mister Barkey was childless. He had a sociable, corpulent wife whom he early on called Moesje,³ because of her motherly appearance and nature. But also Pompelmoesje,⁴ because she was so fat. They led a contented life. Mrs. Barkey was four years older than her husband and well on her way to turning into a matron. Mister Barkey, who had married when he was only nineteen, quite early on lost interest in being a ladies' man and *amant* ("lover"). That always happens when "you get a day older." You don't long for anything extraordinary, anyway nothing that requires energy.

Mister and Mrs. Barkey, unacquainted with anybody in the neighborhood except by appearance, quietly consumed the flame of the candles that measured their lives. To keep themselves occupied like contented children, they had their novels, their book-dispatch box,⁵ their petty daily tasks at home, and their trivial hobbies without getting in each other's way. Mrs. Barkey had the habit of reading in bed long beyond midnight, which she compensated for by sleeping for a considerable long stretch in the afternoon like a water buffalo, like an ox; starting at one thirty, immediately after the usually abundant *rijsttafel*,⁶ until five o'clock. Mister Barkey, on the other hand, never slept during the afternoon hours. Perhaps because he always slept in his office. Indeed proof that he wasn't at all a man driven by ambition. When his wife was asleep, he rummaged through the house; his ready hands always found something to do, such as fixing the chicken coop, the electric wiring, working

³ Moes, Moesje, Ma, or Maatje are all Indo equivalents for Moeder in Dutch.

⁴ The Dutch *pompelmoes* stands for "grape-fruit." The nick-name Pompelmoesje is a play on words.

⁵ To keep up with the events in the West, many Europeans had a subscription for a book-dispatch box containing Western journals, magazines, and newspapers. Some of the magazines were the *Wereld Kroniek* [World Chronicle] comparable with *Life Magazine*; *De Lach* [The Smile] which focused on movies and lives of movie stars; *Sports in Beeld* [Sport Images] which gave an account of sports events in Europe; *d'Orient*, another news magazine; and *La Vie Parisienne*, a cultural magazine, which was written in Dutch in spite of its French name. Because a subscription to a book-dispatch box was rather costly, many Indo families shared one subscription. One usually kept the book-dispatch box for a week or two; then it was picked up and replaced with a new supply. All this information comes from my father and my mother's cousin.

⁶ To Europeans, the highlight of the day was the *rijsttafel*, an abundant meal served after the man of the house came home from work. The *rijsttafel* is in fact a colonial fabrication out of the *selamatan*, the indigenous ritual meal consisting of cooked rice and lots of side dishes. A complete Dutch *rijsttafel* consists of cooked rice with side dishes including beef, fish, shrimp, and poultry besides vegetable dishes.

in the garden, the *goedang* ("storage room") all kinds of petty, insignificant repairs of petty useless things.

One day he repaired the corroded lock of the useless rear door. With a bundle of keys, coconut oil, and a screwdriver, he managed to get the lock in perfect working condition without paying any attention to the *kali*, the river, behind the house. After all there was indeed nothing unusual about the river. He became quickly aware of this when, after finishing the job, he took a well-deserved break, and looked out over the river smoking a cigarette. He did not see anyone either on his or on the other side of the river, where a desolate banana tree garden seemed to be. Further on, down the stream at the curve was a *kampong* ("village") invisible through the dense growth of trees, but evident from the bamboo raft in the river, where women washed clothes. But that was indeed far away. Therefore, Mister Barkey could stand in his underwear without getting embarrassed.

He was always dressed in underwear⁷ of a really ridiculously old-fashioned cut. But Pompelmoesje was still old-fashioned and thus made old-fashioned clothes. Underpants made of strong cotton with a delicate red stripe running through, and with tight legs reaching below the knees. And with a *kolor*, a cotton string, that's one of those cords to draw pyjamas tight before the invention of the elastic rubber band. Mister Barkey wore undershirts with short sleeves, a high round neck, two buttons, and a pocket on the stomach⁸ to keep *tepak*,⁹ his tobacco, and a lighter. Mister Barkey in underwear was in fact Mister Barkey "sec-and-clean" ("the real Mister Barkey"). The dressed up office-Mister Barkey was a gentleman, a civil servant, a kind of office-upholstery. That's why Mister Barkey felt most comfortable in his undergarments.

Leaning against the door-post, Mister Barkey looked at the river drifting by brown and lazy and cool. The filthy *kali*, in which rubbish floated around and bodies of dead animals and lumps of human feces. To Mister Barkey the *kali* was also the symbol of everything that was low and vulgar in the Indies. Not that Mister Barkey was conscious of it at that moment. The *kali* was just the *kali*. He sat down and looked contentedly at the *kali*. He really had nothing to do with it. Perhaps because of her contrast to Mister Barkey's backyard that demonstrated such perpetual indifference with dead things, the active *kali* became actually attractive, even lovely. Perhaps also because of the primitive clutter of crumbly edges and wild vegetation on the river banks in contrast to all the civil neatness inside Mister Barkey's house, that made him look with interest at the river. In any case, Mister Barkey became captivated by the *kali*, even intrigued in an unexplainable way. Drawn by something incomprehensible, he carefully walked over to the river bank on his wooden slippers. He took off a slipper and put his foot in the water which was not brownish-yellow at the edge but almost clear, yet hazy and romantically transparent.

Standing solidly on one leg like a heron, Mister Barkey played with his toes of the other with the cool water. There were *djoeloeng-djoeloeng*, little fishes with pike-like little pointed

⁷ Europeans would not walk around in their underwear at home but in their pyjamas.

⁸ Mr. Barkey's underwear resembled both the pyjama and the *tjelana monjet*, literally "monkey suit," also called *hansop*, the traditional playsuit for Indo children. Usually made out of sturdy cotton, the *tjelana monjet* was a kind of jumpsuit, but without sleeves or long legs. Based on Robinson's description, Mr. Barkey's underpants were a variation of those of a pair of pyjamas, but the legs were shorter; they reached below the knees. Similar to pyjama pants, a *kolor*, cotton string tied around the waist, kept his pants from falling. The top of his underwear had, like the *tjelana monjet*, a round collar, two buttons, and a pocket sewn on the front at the height of his stomach to keep his tobacco and his lighter.

⁹ *Tepak* is the Indo jargon for the Dutch word *tabak*, tobacco in English.

heads, swimming in the water. And tiny, golden flat-headed fishes with bright stars on their heads. Weeds and algae twirled and whirled gracefully in the soft current. Myriads of tiny golden *ting-a-ling-a-ling*¹⁰ sailed through the water. Mister Barkey proceeded to stand with both legs in the shallow water. Immediately his legs looked shorter, yet whiter but nevertheless more beautiful. It was very odd. He noticed a kind of sand bank with small, smooth, round stones, and smoothly polished white pieces of glass and small chunks of red brick. Gradually the sand bank declined but dropped sharply towards the middle. So he noticed. In spite of the afternoon heat, the water was cool beyond description and refreshing. She was in fact cleaner than one would assume. The water snuggled up against his legs, refreshingly tinkled against the hollows of his knees and smelt pleasant like fresh dirt. All of a sudden Mister Barkey sat down.

It wasn't until an hour later that he went back inside the house, after a whole hour of playing like a child, acting like a rascal, swimming like a man. This was still during the time that there were no swimming pools in the city of Batavia. Thus Mister Barkey never swam. He didn't even have a bathing-suit. But it didn't matter whether he swam in his underwear. Here was no one anyway. The game in the *kali* had all the sweetness of something forbidden and the spell of something completely private. Who of the department heads would swim in the *kali*? Not even a third *commies*.¹¹ It was so exquisite and so private, that Mister Barkey didn't tell his wife about it. He bathed thoroughly using lots of soap to get rid of the *kali*-smell. He succeeded in keeping his secret for months.

Every afternoon when Pompelmoesje was asleep,¹² Mister Barkey plunged into the *kali*. He denied the impurity of the water based on evidence that water only in very close proximity to filth—up to one centimeter at the most—was contaminated by that filth. He rejected the insanitary state of the river based on medical doctors' evidence that the enormous radiation of the sun's heat completely decontaminated the upper layer of the water. And even if that wasn't true, so what? During the following weeks, Mister Barkey changed into an unbelievable *branie*, dare-devil. He swam to all the protruding points of the *kali* bank that drew his attention. At the other side of the river, he sank deeply into the slimy muddy banks, went ashore between bramble-bushes, kept on swimming when a snake crossed the *kali*, even plunged into the water when the *kali*, swollen by rain, flowed faster. For a whole hour even in the midst of swiftly flowing water, he would fight the current by swimming vigorously without giving in one inch. Swiftly swimming in the strongest current, he could get ten meters ahead. He could dive minutes at a time. He purposely played with danger and loved it. Mister Barkey was well on his way to becoming a different person. It was only so slow because for the rest of the remaining twenty-four hours he successfully managed to force himself into the hypocritical strait jacket of the typical government official.

Mister Barkey had only *one* fear. That *one* time would be the last. Like any other seemingly infinite daily pursuits, above all the pleasant ones, one would be the last. It wasn't that Mister Barkey was afraid of the possibility of a sudden accident; therefore he had become too intimate with the *kali*. Mister Barkey was not afraid of the cause for such a loss, but of

¹⁰ *Ting-a-ling-a-ling* is onomatopoeic, imitating the sounds of little bells. In this context it means all kinds of little nothings.

¹¹ The rank of third *commies* was the lowest among clerks.

¹² Mister Barkey acted like many Indo children when their parents were asleep in the afternoon. After lunch, people usually took a nap, including the children. But as children, we often could not sleep and sneaked out to play outside. Even though we were punished if our parents caught us, often with a week's house arrest, we took the risk.

the loss itself. It also seemed as if the *kali* gradually was getting to know him and to love him. Time and time again, she smiled cheerfully welcoming him. Also the *kampong* inhabitants further along the river had become used to that queer, swimming *blanda*, the white man. The first couple of weeks children had gathered together on the bamboo raft, but that curiosity quickly wore off. Also the European Barkey had become a *kali*-phenomenon, similar to other bathing people, similar to floating garbage, dead animals, and lumps of human excretion.

Also the last time, Mister Barkey cheerfully plunged into the water without any hesitation. It had rained heavily for the last two days, apparently also in the mountains. The swollen *kali* had even washed away the tiny pieces of the river bank behind the annexes. Nevertheless, Mister Barkey plunged into the water like a white sea lion, for whom the water could not present any possible danger but only delight. This time the *kali* was heavy with mud and dull brown with whirlpools that were almost black and rapids full of slime. Now even huge tree trunks floated along. Thus Mister Barkey enjoyed himself like never before. Roaring like a lion, he propelled through the water, unwilling to give the current one inch, even in the middle of the *kali* where the current was the strongest. He paid close attention to the filth drifting in his direction, skillfully avoiding branches and banana-trunks. But the danger took him by surprise in a humiliating way.

His *kolor* ("cotton string" to hold up his pants) suddenly broke and the strong current immediately stripped down his pants from his rear end. All of a sudden Mister Barkey became overwhelmed by a turmoil of sensations and by the water itself. Even under the transparently brown water, he felt himself shamefully naked, but in addition the crotch prevented him, particularly at the knees, from producing a powerful kick with his legs and at last he lost both direction and speed, because frightened he had grabbed his pants. He went head down, came up and went down again, swallowed enormous amounts of *kali* water and spun helplessly around. However, virtuousness always gets rewarded. Mister Barkey's struggle to pull his pants up prevented him from drowning. His mind stayed alert and his arms and legs automatically made movements, even though small, but just enough to stay above water. He got a hold of his pants when he was close to the curve and with a few powerful strokes managed to reach the bamboo raft.

Puffing and spitting he pulled himself up on the raft in a sitting position, with one hand he supported himself, with the other he kept his pants together. There were three women on the raft busy washing clothes and rinsing rice. They hadn't seen the swimmer and (thus) were completely taken by surprise when the white man suddenly rose out of the brown waters like in a spectacle. Unable to control themselves, they screamed and cackled like chickens, so Mister Barkey was forced to use his most stern authoritarian voice: "Shut up, damn it, shut up!" The women fell silent, trembled, calmed down, and giggled. Agitated, Mister Barkey pulled the *kolor* out of its seam, tied the ends together, strapped it around over the pants and wrapped the upper seam of his pants around the cord as tightly as possible. While he was doing this, he realized once more, but this time greatly alarmed, that his white underwear was quite transparent. He couldn't possibly get up like this without sending the women into fits of laughter. So his initial intention to stroll up-stream along the river and then to swim across to the other side, could not be carried out.

There was no alternative but to swim across starting at this point and to stroll back at the other side. It was true that some spots had pieces of barbed wire, but he could just swim around them. Mister Barkey plunged back into the water, lying in the spindle of the current, and swimming both slantwise and sideways to the other side. Again and again, he felt the *kali* boldly pulling at his pants and again and again he had to grab them quickly in order to

save his modesty. It was a tremendously tiring crossing and Mister Barkey was almost totally exhausted when he reached the other side, just at the spot before the barbed wire, so he thought. Then with dismay and anguish, he noticed that the wire also continued under the water. Somewhere his pants tore open and he got a nasty scratch on his leg. Furthermore, he had suddenly lost so much speed, that he drifted away and it wasn't until he reached the new curve that he was finally able to scramble ashore.

Just one look around him convinced Mister Barkey of the worst possible. Anyone on the bridge with its heavy traffic could see him. He did not even think twice and stumbled as fast as he could to the rear wall of the house and knocked on the back door. For Heaven's sake, I have to ask these servants to go to my house and get my clothes. Anyway no European would be awake at this hour of the day. He would get home regardless. And servants—who would talk to servants? While he was knocking on the door he prepared his short speech: I fell into the water and was dragged away (oh, what is "to be dragged away" in Malay—gesture); please help me.

The door opened and there stood the widow, Mrs. Aubrey. Mister Barkey looked at her with his mouth wide open. He only knew her by her name on the door-plate, had only seen her occasionally and had heard some things about her. Mrs. Aubrey looked at him with her mouth wide open too. But only for one moment. Startled she asked:

"Did you have an accident? Please come in, come in, come in." Mister Barkey stepped forward closing the door behind him.

"No," he said stupidly, "I was swimming in the *kali* and then, then. . . ." Mrs. Aubrey slyly smiled her famous seductive smile and twinkled her famous flirting eyes.

"And then you thought, I'll just go and pay Mrs. Aubrey a visit. Shame on you. And above all in your undershirt and underpants!"

Crushed Mister Barkey cast down his eyes, became aware of his transparent pants, turned quickly around, discovered the hole in the seat of his pants and turned back half way.

"In God's name, Mrs. Aubrey, this is not a laughing matter!"

"Eeee! You're turning it into a laughing matter, hahaha. You're so naughty, Mister Barkey!" She kept her hand in front of her face, and only shook her index finger disapprovingly.

"What are you going to do now! I can see *everything*!"

Mister Barkey turned as red as a steamed lobster, he licked his lips and rolled his eyes. With both hands covering *himself*, he said urgently:

"Madam. Madam. Would you please help me!"

She could not help laughing. Again and again she folded double laughing. Keeping her kimono half closed with her left hand, she slapped herself on the thigh with the other. She walked away, saying between bursts of laughter: "Just come along." He walked behind her, bewildered, humiliated, and confused. She reached the bathroom and Mister Barkey quickly hopped right behind her into the bathroom and closed the door.

"What am I supposed to do with a man in my bathroom!" Mrs. Aubrey laughed, "a poor widow protecting her honor and virtue all by herself. And what's more, a man visiting in his underwear during the afternoon hours! I wouldn't even dare to call the police!"

Once hidden behind the bathroom door from those immodest female glances, Mister Barkey quickly regained his self-confidence.

"Mrs. Aubrey, I beg you. Please control yourself and help me. Would you please be so kind to go to my house - "

"I won't even think of it. Your wife will scratch my eyes out!"

"My wife is asleep. She will sleep for several hours more. If you go through the side-gate, which is always open, you'll see on the rear verandah, precisely at the end of the corridor of the main building ("Yees," she said mockingly interested, catching her breath coyly), an ironing board ("Yees") and on it a pair of underpants and an undershirt ("Yees"). In the yard, on the clothes-line hangs a pair of pyjamas and by the corridor's staircase are my slippers ("Yees"). Would you please get those for me?"

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Ooo! Yes, Mrs. Aubrey. I beg you, Mrs. Aubrey!"

"If I get caught?!"

"Oh, God! No, Mrs. Aubrey, nobody will catch you. After all nobody is up?"

"Well, alright. But it will take a while. First I have to change. And I still have to make you a cup of coffee to recuperate." Mister Barkey moaned.

"Madam. Madam."

She giggled and went away with her flying kimono, rustling in the corridor. She returned for just a moment.

"In the meantime, please feel free to take a bath, Mister Barkey."

"Yes, madam."

"Otherwise your clean clothes will get dirty again."

"Yes, madam (Oh, my God!)."

"Feel free to use my soap."

"Yes-yes-yes madam, please madam—eh. . . ."

"I'm going. I'm going!"

Out of misery Mister Barkey's knees almost gave up. But he quickly got a hold of himself. Hurry, hurry. Wildly, he looked around the bathroom, saw a few pieces of intimate underwear dangling from the clothes rack and embarrassed, quickly turned his eyes away. He took his sticky clothes off. Fortunately the scratch on his thigh wasn't too bad. Diligently, he began to pour the water over himself,¹³ then took a piece of soap out of the soap-dish. It smelled unbelievably delicate and seductive. It would be such a pleasure to use it. But suddenly he realized with awe that Pompelmoesje would smell it too. No soap. There was a

¹³ During this time, most European houses did not have running water, showers, or bathtubs. Built in the annexes, the bathroom often had a tiled floor and a tiled basin, a *mandi-bak*, filled with water. Usually one of the servants was in charge of filling the basin twice a day with water from the well, located also in the back of the house. To take a bath, one would simply throw water over oneself with a scoop made out of a coconut shell.

knock on the bathroom door. Already? She was a perfect sweetheart.—What?! She was—he cracked the bathroom door and got a glass of Dutch gin pushed against his nose.

“Drink this,” Mrs. Aubrey said firmly, “against catching a cold.”

“Oh, my God!” Mister Barkey groaned closing the door, but her small high-heeled shoe was stuck in-between.

“Drink this, Mister Barkey. And stop hurting me.”

“Madam,” Mister Barkey pleaded, “Madam.”

“Sir,” Mrs. Aubrey said, while standing outside the door, “if I help my fellow-men, I like to do that well. I won’t allow you to get sick in my house. You—drink—this—first.”

“But I never drink!” Mister Barkey argued.

“You drink this now,” she said resolutely.

“And above all a cognac-glass!” Mister Barkey shrieked.

“Aaaah. You indeed recognize a good drink, don’t you, Mister Barkey. *Ajo*, to your health!”

Blindly Mister Barkey grabbed the glass, took a swallow and gagged, almost choked, coughed and heard Mrs. Aubrey say:

“Don’t you dare to throw that away! Drink it!”

Mister Barkey drank like Socrates. He pushed the glass into her hands and shoved the door closed, staggered backwards and sat down on the edge of the *mandibak*, almost slipped over it, regained his balance and his somewhat hazy consciousness.

However, that consciousness was so shaken that he hardly recognized himself. The fact that he was alive at this very moment, was totally absurd. But his living, naked body was the evidence. He started to bathe again. The cold water refreshed him and calmed down his nerves. No soap, but certainly Mrs. Aubrey’s towel. It was a soft, lavender-colored thing, unlike the well-known large, rough, white pieces of cloth with the small stripe, he and Pompelmoesje always used. It smelled pleasantly of light perfume and was confusingly scented with something completely different. Fiercely, Mister Barkey began to rub himself dry with his back facing the clothes rack. Suddenly at the left of him, he saw a huge mirror where he saw himself completely from head to toe. It embarrassed him a bit, but it also did him good. Quite pleased, he looked closely at his big, robust body, which undoubtedly had become broad and strong due to regular swimming. Close to his head he saw those two insignificant pieces of clothing hanging from the clothes rack. He sniffed at them. He looked at them. He touched them. They were silky and caressing and delicate, not at all like those coarse cotton jackets Moes used. Not with those big, wide pieces of trimmed lace, but with a very fine flimsy of spiderweb.

Mister Barkey closed his eyes and Mrs. Aubrey’s image appeared before his eyes in the way men who knew her talked about her. Well, what would you expect of a merry widow, a jewel of only twenty-two carat gold. She hooked anybody she put her eyes on, whether young or old, of high or low status, married or unmarried. But without any serious intentions. She just took advantage of life, that was all. He thought of her the way he had seen her at times with that sudden twinkling flicker in those dark eyes and that sophisticated, evoking smile around the lips, that always shook Mister Barkey up, and made him look straight in front forgetting quickly. And he thought of her the way she had stood before him, just a

short while ago, unable to control her laughter, that was true, but also with such open admiration in her eyes. Once more he looked in the mirror. He did what he hadn't done since he was eighteen. He tightened up his biceps and was satisfied. Suddenly, he saw a small sunspot in the *mandibak*: the sunrays penetrated at an angle through the air hole in the wall. What time was it? Mister Barkey was suddenly at his wit's end again. Where was she in God's name? Suddenly he heard her clicking heels in the corridor and opened the door half way.

Like a hungry animal, he grabbed his bundle of clothes. He slammed the bathroom door shut again and started to put them on, fumbling and muddling hurriedly, but still listening to Mrs. Aubrey's voice:

"Shaaame on you! To seduce me into sneaking in like a thief. To steal clothes, then to sneak out like a thief. Actually, I must have been really out of my mind to have done that."

"You are indeed very kind-hearted!" rebutted Mister Barkey full of fire, "I'll never forget you!"

"Neeever? Really neeever?" she asked him teasingly and naughtily. There was an arousing, insinuating intonation in her voice. Confused, Mister Barkey remained silent.

"Please tell me, Mister Barkey, why is there a set of underwear ready waiting for you, over there in the back of the house?"

"I get dirty from swimming, don't I," Mister Barkey explained sheepishly. For a moment she remained quiet, thinking.

"So, you swim every day?"

"Yes," Mister Barkey said with boyish pride.

"In that dangerous *kali*?" He didn't hear the teasing undertone.

"Oh, what dangerous *kali*!" he grumbled proudly.

"You know, Mister Barkey, I think you're really magnificent!"

"Ach," he said and stepped outside.

She looked at him with unfeigned admiration. Suddenly he felt awkward and loutish. He was getting ready to walk away quickly through the side-gate.

"No, no," Mrs. Aubrey said, "first you'll drink a cup of warm coffee. I insist, really." Stubborn, he shook his head.

"No, Mrs. Aubrey, I really can't. I'm indeed very grateful to you, but *that's* impossible."

"What do you mean?" She asked surprised as if there should be a special reason. He blushed.

"There isn't any time left," he said hurriedly, "now, I still get home unnoticed. I mean, my wife won't notice a thing."

"So nobody is supposed to notice anything?"

"But of course not, isn't that true? But not you, not you."

"But I don't mind that at all. I find it tremendously interesting and indeed quite a funny joke. I certainly don't mind telling it to everybody! Really! Well, anyway, I'll go back to bed."

Good-bye, Mister Barkey!" She said good-bye affectingly and seductively. Gracefully, she turned around and stepped lightly down the corridor, leaving Mister Barkey in anguish.

All of a sudden he trotted behind her.

"Mrs., Mrs. Aubrey! Please don't do that. No, please don't!"

Over her shoulder:

"Why not? Why shouldn't I tell about such a clumsy gentleman, who doesn't even want to sit down just for a little while ("I will sit down!") to drink a cup of coffee ("I will drink coffee!") while it will do him so much good."

"It is good for me!"

"So, that's better."

He sat in the little cozy verandah (it was just a pavilion where she lived) with the shutters intimately pulled down. It was cool but still comfortable. He blew on his steaming hot coffee and was aware of the sophisticated, exquisite surrounding. The chairs, the curtains, the mats, the gorgeous objects, the paintings with the provocative, proud nudes. These were all things from foreign illustrations. The center of this subtle but exquisite display was now lying on the sofa, enrobed yet simultaneously unrobed in a delicately thin, black dress, which confusingly contrasted against her ivory skin. Underneath that thin dress was that silky underwear from the bathroom with that dreamy fragrance. Mister Barkey forgot the coffee. He forgot the time. He was afraid and felt drawn to that object of his fear. Something about her was like swimming in the *kali*.

They sat silently for quite a while. Then she said:

"I'll promise I won't tell anyone, because I think you're very sweet." Confused, he searched for an answer.

"I think that's very nice of you."

"Just nice? Or also sweet?"

"Y—yes."

"Then give me a little kiss before you leave."

He couldn't get out of this situation and he didn't want to either. He walked over to her and hesitantly bent over. Her eyes were closed. She was so innocent, harmless, so serene and so lovely like the *kali* in the dry season. He kissed her lightly and trembled. He pulled his lips back, but her lips followed and he lost ground. He . . .

In short, he returned home a quarter of an hour later. Although nobody saw him, he had the feeling that everyone had seen him, was pointing at him. He felt even more absurd than a while ago in the bathroom. His head and body were completely in turmoil. He entered his house through the side-gate and went straight to the back verandah. He stood in front of the side-passage leading to the back door between bathroom and kitchen. He saw a small strip of the *kali*, brown, powerful, irresistible, enchanting, and gigantic. Behind him he sensed the dull lifeless things of the house, the passage leading to the main building, the peaceful back verandah, the rustling tranquility of the sleeping Moes, the quiet front room with the desk and all kinds of petty paperwork.

He walked over to the back door carefully closing it. He turned the key in the lock then

pushed it out underneath the door. He went to the *goedang* and pulled out two large top shelves from a packing-case. He took hammer and nails. Then with calm, well-aimed blows, he hammered the nails into the doorposts through the wooden shelves. Four at the left and four at the right. He shook the dust of his hands, slowly turned around, and went inside the house.

