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# FLUNKY + MAID (DJONGOS + BABU)

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From the time of Jan Pietersz. Coen, the blood of slaves flowed down through this family. These weren't half-hearted slaves; they were faithful to their fingertips. Maybe not even from the time of Coen. There is a real possibility it was ever since Pieter Both or the time when Houtman wandered through the archipelago. No one knows for sure. What's clear is that this family was known well before Coen became the statue the Japanese swept away from the front of the Finance Building.

The family is first known because it was noted in the big book with Latin characters—native sergeant. . . . x no. . . . At that time the rank of sergeant was something. With such a rank a man could multiply. And that family generated forty children. Who knows from how many wombs. No one knows. Things like that aren't allowed into the big book.

Second generation—also a slave, a plain sergeant!

From then on with each generation the rank of these slaves descended as well. Lower and lower. Finally, in 1949, it got to the point of Sobi and Inah—their final degree of slavery. A year earlier they were still slaves of the state. The two of them did not know: danger hung over their heads. Their degree of slavery would descend one more level—slaves of the Federal-District of Batavia! Sobi as a flunky, Inah as a maid.

If God were still as full of pity as before, willing to extend these slaves for another generation, the thirtieth generation certainly would no longer be human; it would be—worms crawling inside the earth. And this would be only logical.

The face of this family as it descended also has a story.

From the time of the sergeant, the faces of everyone in the family were awful. They never changed. After so many dozens of generations, Empok Kotek was born. Thanks to tuberculosis she had a shining beauty. And she was called beautiful.

Empok Kotek was faithful to her tradition—she was a thorough slave. Faithful to her fingertips. So one time, even though she was a maid, her tuan said, “Tomorrow the missus has to go to Kopeng for a rest for a month. And njai will stay in the house with tuan. Ja?”

She did not understand why he said “njai” just then. She only understood when the tuan came back after having escorted his wife. And later—a moment that was less than good—she let something fall. And that thing could cry. People called it her child. She almost did not understand it was so easy and so pleasurable for humans to come into being. She was astonished! But the child was already there. And it had clear chocolate-colored eyes. She did not waste time with regrets—as a slave she had real discipline.

Rodinah was born into the world. Even with chocolate eyes she was a maid too finally. And in Rodinah’s hands the golden age of descent opened its gates. Rodinah was the same as Victoria for the British empire. Her skin was less chocolate in color. She had a pointed nose. Her eyes were wide with lashes that curved upwards. Her lips were thin, top and bottom. Her body was like a guitar which was not yet second-hand, not yet used goods.

Astonishingly, this revolution in looks had no effect on the history of her tradition—blood and bones, she was still a slave. If by chance she had any sort of ambition, Rodinah certainly would have steered the course of later generations. But no such ambitions arose. And no one regretted that. What’s the point of life if not for enjoyment and taking pleasure in what is the right of the flesh? Ambition only upsets mankind. For that reason she stayed a maid.

Rodinah, like ordinary humans, eventually grew up. One thing happened which she could not forget. Once someone proposed to her. The man was a foreman for the state police, an old man whom people buried four years later. Of course she refused. This had become her right. So she held on to the tradition which withstood its tests. So too her body whose prettiness shone as it grew.

An historic moment arrived. Suddenly. Like a meteor falling from a star. No one could calculate the time when it fell. Her tuan called Rodinah “Dolly.” She was indeed like a Japanese doll. The name “Rodinah” was erased from history. She became “Dolly”—and a real doll through and through.

Dolly did not know the politics of “divide et impera.” But as white-skinned maid she knew that Ambonese with dark skins had to be seen as white. She had her own strategy and it worked: divide and surrender herself. She really put this strategy to work. What’s more she still disciplined herself to follow the tradition—faithful to her fingertips. Always tying herself to slavery. But she divided too! With this strategy she plucked the most glittering fruit. No differently than Victoria got Africa. This was her victory: her first child was born with silvery curly hair. From the power of her strategy, greater than she was capable of understanding, came Si Sobi, son of tuan Hendrik. Or the son of the neighbor of tuan Hendri, tuan Klaasen. Or the son of tuan Giljam from France. Or the son of tuan Koorda. Or the son of tuan Harten. She did not know. She

never bothered her head with it. What was evident was that she had a fifty percent share in the making of Sobi. And she was never aware that God had something to do with the creation of children.

Dolly was certainly faithful to her strategy. By being so she successfully got them to act honestly and acknowledge Sobi as their child. There was a thick curtain drawn between one and the other father.

None of them knew the role of the other in the making of Sobi. From these six fathers Dolly was able to build a masonry house inside of which were: two radios and a gramophone. Night and day these three objects sounded off one after the other! Along with the din her heart reverberated: "This is Dolly's masonry house! Who can compete?"

But her secret remained locked up in the corner of her heart. It was this: the strategy of divide and surrender herself.

She also had the intention to start a life like a free person—a private person. She tried. She married five times the way people usually marry. That is, with the legitimacy conferred by the mosque. But never for long. The longest was two months. Her sharp thinking always brought catastrophe to legal marriage. She was able to guess the sharpness of these husbands: they did not want to hand over to her their good earnings. Just the contrary in fact: they wanted to deceive her, wanted to use her. Finally she let her intentions sail away with this stern wind.

Her slave's spirit did not allow her to live quietly at home. So she became a maid again—in a different area. She put her strategy to work again. And it worked—Inah was born into the world. And, as before, she took a fifty percent share in the making of this new creature. She couldn't be precise as to the father. There were more than nine. It was only the money she got that she could count.

Time went quickly on. Quite suddenly white people were no longer agreeable in her eyes. And quite suddenly she could smell their odor at the distance of a yard. Before she never paid attention to their smell, even from as close as a tenth of an inch. And the smell; what staleness! Because now it was Japan which was delicious to her tastes. How happy she would be if she could have a child with slanted eyes. And why not? The sixteen dads of her second child nowadays didn't have ten cents to buy themselves a cigarette.

This world keeps turning. If mankind is not careful, all of a sudden he is going to be shocked, his body is no longer going to respond to his mental commands. Without warning he feels old and useless to the world which no longer pays any attention to him. So it was too with Dolly. No one knew what sickness attacked a person as pretty as that. Not even the two radios and the gramophone understood. And one unhappy day people buried her. Just before her moment of death she had her eyes wide open and she was surprised that death was so close, so fast and so easy. But she died leaving her creations, fifty percent of Sobi and fifty percent of Inah.

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Like their ancestors, these two got the instincts of real slaves, nothing half way, faithful to their fingertips. As flunky and maid of the highest quality, these two felt tortured if they had no orders. And their lives were happy when they got orders.

The two of them were on the right—not revolutionary, not, that is, flunky and maid who liked to steal forks-knives-spoons and get out quick. Not at all! The two of them regarded themselves as faithful to their duties. Who knows, maybe there would be eternal slavery for another three generations. So they set up boundaries in the districts of their lives. Just like Renville set up the status quo for the life of the Republic.

After Dolly died, Sobi became a flunky in the office of the Dai Sanka—the office of the Japanese navy spies. His latest ambition was to wear a cap with a yellow star, a white uniform with a samurai-sword with a gold handle with a patent leather sheath. These ambitions were never realized. The Japanese never gave him the chance. And he was happy when he could yell “keireit” when the Dai Sanka colonel got out of his car. Like others at the time, he hated colonialism; that is, Dutch colonialism. What colonialism was he didn’t know. But, damn it all, he too hated it. Whatever came out of the mouth of Japan was the voice of truth. And everyone had to believe it. Fortunately he could believe it. If not, his rank of flunky would disappear like the lives of the forced laborers.

Inah too worked there as laundress. But at that time she was just twelve. So her chest was still flat and no one was attracted to her. She had no chance to play a role.

The path of history is never straight. Japan was defeated. The English came. Indonesians went amok. And these two, the brother and sister, had to lay low. Eventually they were brave enough to come out again. Sobi gave himself the courage to chase the Japanese and take their clothes. But this situation did not last long either. It was the turn of the English to run amok. White men were sovereign again in Jakarta. And the two of them, brother and sister, suddenly were disgusted with Japan. The two of them felt tricked as did others, even though the two of them did not know just how the trickery was practiced. And people with white skins were again high in their esteem.

The sound of shots ceased to be heard. What upset things every day was: distribution! People were fed up crying out and clenching their fists. Even those who earlier were called pioneers. Even those who had sat in the councils of government. Why not Sobi and Inah? This was why Sobi became a flunky again—a flunky for a white person who during the days of the Japanese was valueless, worth less than fingernails. And he now was able to pride himself in front of other flunkies who had Indonesian bosses. He learned to hold himself aloof from flunkies who worked for Chinese and Indonesians. He learned to sing, “yua olwees in mai haat” in a soft, indecent voice. This slavery gave him the greatest happiness of his life. Especially when he was able to suggest something for the better order of his boss’s house—it was the high point of happiness for a flunky.

Flunkies, indeed, come in several classes. There are flunkies who understand politics. There are those who understand commerce. And there are even flunkies who understand diplomacy. There are those who can shoot. But Sobi was the lowest degree. He was quite happy never hearing about politics. This was because he vaguely felt that

politics meant all sorts of sins. His tuan often said as much. And everything the tuan said was law (*wet*)—no different than the law made by the government. The voice of tuan was the voice of the Lord (*Tuhan*).

Inah now was an adolescent. She was no longer a maid for Japanese. Nowadays she had become a maid in the battalion's barracks. But after no more than a week she left without asking. Not because she wanted to leave her tradition behind her—not at all. It's just that she got nervous taking orders from people who were not genuine tuans—who didn't have white skin.

Her eyes were clear blue. And about this she was content. There were no Indonesians who had eyes like she had. For that reason, Indonesians had no right to give orders to anyone of her type. [*karena itu orang Indonesia tak berhak memerintah matanja.*] And she had a pointed nose too. She was really pretty. And for her, prettiness was women's capital. She did not know arithmetic. But she could evaluate her prettiness. And this capital she was going to use to take charge of her future. She had a plan. Because it was not only Russia who had a five year plan. Inah had one too. Dolly's strategy—her mother's—had ripened in her heart.

Once she became a maid. But her tuan, even though he had white skin, was as poor as she was herself. So she left. Her tuan made her lots of promises which raised her hopes. But she was also clever. She wasn't going to exchange her prettiness for promises.

*So the day arrived*

There was a room with woven straw walls. From this room there occasionally could be heard a soft, insinuating singing, "yua olwees in mai haat." It was rather dark there. A wooden bedstead filled half the space. The two young ones were sitting on it.

"Are you happy working here?" Inah asked sadly.

"Yua olwees in mai haat" stopped. Then the answer was audible.

"Very happy. I'm at home here. I mean, Miss Mari is grown up and studying at high school. I mean, in the afternoons, lots of white kids come. It's noisy. Very noisy all the time."

And the face of this handsome man glowed—Sobi!

"There's lots of work," Sobi went on. "But when the white kids are back, I can expect it to be exciting."

"You are happy to be a flunky here," Inah interrupted jealously.

"Even more when tuan and the missus go to the movies Miss Mari always calls me. I have to massage her—and there's no more talk about what I have to massage—I'm proud."

"For a flunky that's really lucky. But me, I'm sad." And Inah's beautiful blue eyes were overcast. Here pretty face was upset. "I still haven't got the right tuan." She looked down. In a slow voice, as though praying, she went on. "I really want to have a child with eyes bluer than mine."

"That's not right," Sobi reprimanded her. If you try to choose you won't get anything. You know the Jakarta goats (*kambing betawi*)? The big fat ones? Not the sheep! The Jakarta goats who can even eat leather sandals. Then they're even more proud. Just think! It was only a week ago I started work. I saw that Miss Mari was already grown up. But in the house there is a small child with slanted eyes. I don't know whose it is. It's always kept locked up in a room. Three days after that tuan and the missus went to the movies. Miss Mari called me to her room. You see what I mean? She told me to give her a massage. My God . . . everywhere! Then she said, 'Can you get rid of that kid?' 'Sure, miss,' I said and was allowed to do more than massage."

Then he sang with his soft insinuating voice.

Inah pondered sadly. She pressed her lips together and looked vaguely out through the window.

"I learned to sing from Si Husin. It's great, Miss Mari really likes my singing. When I sing she has to get close and compliment me, 'How nice your voice is,' she says. I can sing yua olwees in mai haat. And Miss Mari is mad about my voice," said Sobi in a strong voice. Then he smiled, full of hopes. "Pretty soon I'll have to study Dutch. Si Husin is really good at Dutch."

Inah kept looking sadly out the window. "But me," she said later, "me—Ah, the tuans today aren't like they were when I was small."

"Stop already, don't be choosy. Just follow my advice," Sobi went on. He looked at his sister who was riddled with anxiety.

"Yesterday I went to three houses in Menteng. At the first one I met the tuan. Brown eyes. And did he smell!" She sighed. "The other two—I was met by the missus. They both said nearly the same thing."

"What did they say?" Sobi said attentively.

"They said, 'I don't need a young pretty maid with blue eyes.' What do you think of that?"

"Idiot," Sobi said angrily. "The first one was already very good. What do you think you are doing, trying to choose? What's the matter with chocolate-colored eyes? And don't pay any attention to the smell. I mean, don't you know you stink of piss yourself? Who are you kidding? You're too sloppy. Of course those two misses didn't want you. Much too much style. Wait a while. Wear old clothes at first. Once you're in, right, then it's easy. Once the missus is out of the house, then you dress up. Who wouldn't fall for you? It's too bad you're my own sister." And he spat on the floor.

"But listen, the tuans these days are all poor. They just look rich. They aren't really marvelous like the old days." Inah groaned out these words.

"Who knows?" Sobi said regretfully.

"Listen, if I had a baby, even if its eyes were bluer than mine, without some green stuff coming in, who would take care of things? I myself would be in real trouble. You? You've already got your miss; you aren't going to pay attention to me. You're really lucky. Even more so if you get a baby with blue eyes."

Sobi pondered quietly. Then, slowly, he said, "I'd have to think of my sister. If I could marry Miss Mari I could become Dutch. Then I'd ask the governor-general for a car. Me and Miss Mari would go to Tjilintjing and go naked on the beach."

"But your skin is pocked from scabs and pimples. Wouldn't you be ashamed?" his sister asked.

Sobi laughed and laughed.

If someone becomes Dutch, Sobi said, full of self-assurance, the old marks of scabs and pimples have to go away by themselves. When were there ever Dutch with pimples? It's only Indonesians who have scabies. Us people.

And Inah understood. She asked further: "But the Dutch are making war now. Aren't you afraid to die?"

Sobi laughed some more. He said, "You really are stupid. When did the Dutch ever fight themselves? It's mainly Indonesians who are the soldiers. They're paid to die for the Dutch, see? When I become Dutch I'll just sit at a desk and order around the coolies."

"How could you ever become someone important," sighed Inah, confused.

And Sobi himself smiled happily at the beauty and grandeur of his fantasy. But Inah was even sadder. Even more jealous. She got off the bed. She took the broken mirror stuck in the woven wall. She sat down again next to her brother. She looked carefully at her face. She smiled happily. Suddenly she frowned. Then smiled again. And Sobi sang again in his soft and insinuating voice. Then he went near the window.

Inah said to herself: "I really am pretty. If you compare me with. . . ." She was quiet. She looked at her brother.

"This is the way it goes," Sobi interrupted without looking at her. "In a little while we'll be out of this rat's nest. I'll have my own building. When you get hold of a tuan," he looked at his sister, "just be careful not to be disappointed. At first just give in. Then later ask for gold things. They're easy to put away. And clothes—they're easy—they'll come by themselves." He paced again. Sat down next to his sister.

Inah asked, her hopes raised, "You've already found a tuan?"

"Tuan Piktora is coming here. Careful how you talk, ya?"

Inah quickly looked in the mirror. Smilingly. Then she inspected her teeth. Looked at her brother and asked, "What time is it?"

"Six. Four more hours."

"What are his eyes like?" she asked, half with fear, half with hope.

"Oh, I guess they're yellow. I don't like yellow eyes. Yellow eyes and a smell," said Inah happily. Her two hands wrapped themselves around her chest—tightly. And

both her feet stiffened as though she had a cramp. Out of nowhere she asked, "Aren't you going to work?"

"It's only two o'clock. Another half hour."

"The bath isn't filled."

Sobi paid no attention.

"I'm not going home. You'll have to take care of it."

"This room has to be cleaned and straightened up."

He sang some more. Then he went out.

She looked at herself in the mirror again. Whispered, "How blue my eyes are. Just like Miss Jetti's eyes. Sobi's miss's can't be as blue as mine. But why aren't I Dutch? What a shame. But my body is just as good as a Dutch woman's, right? Look, I've got a pointed nose. My skin isn't so white. But it's not pockmarked. If it's too white it's easy to get blackheads."

She put the broken mirror back into the wall and stood up next to the window. "I want to be a *njai*. I want to have a child with blue eyes. Who knows, maybe my child will become Dutch, right? It's for sure I would live well. I would have a maid—ah, she'd take away my *tuan*. Just a flunky. And I would ride in a car. I'd go to Tjilintjing. But I'd be ashamed to go naked."

"Oh, I can't speak Dutch. I can't read or write. What would I say when the *tuan* asked me to read that thick newspaper? Sobi can sing." She didn't know what to think next and went back to the bedstead.

Her brother reentered. Inah pushed over next to him on the bedstead and bothered him with, "What should I do? I can't sing like you can?"

"But you can sing *jali-jali*. You just call it out."

"But Dutch people don't like it, no?" Inah sighed.

"Is that right? I'd forgotten. But it's real easy," Sobi said, trying to make her feel better. "Women don't have to do anything. If you're pretty the way you are, it all comes easy. *Tuan Piktör* is classy. It won't need anything from you. He has a car. He doesn't have a wife. He's rich—they say he works in some business office. Just a while ago he said to me, 'Can you find me a *njai*?' And right away I came back with 'I have a sister. . . .'"

"Really? Really?" Inah asked, happy again.

Inah was struck silent, astonished as she pictured her ambition.

"I don't have to sing like Sobi," she thought. "*Tuan Piktör* has to have a radio. Maybe he has six radios. How nice it would be to line them up in a row next to each other. Then lots of people would come to the front of the house to look. And I would stand on the porch. For sure they would whisper, 'Wow, Inah really has become Dutch now.' And they would all be envious. For sure, they would have to envy me. It's their own fault; why do they have dark skins and noses you don't know where the holes are? My skin isn't too dark—it's light and my nose has class." She smiled, satisfied.



"So we'll be equals, just as high up, just as low. You'll have a car, I'll have a car too. . . ."

"But I don't want to go naked in Tjilintjing. I'd be ashamed."

"Stupid," Sobi insulted his sister. "When we are Dutch we can't have shame. We have to have the courage to be naked. We have to be able to get drunk. We have to be able to be curt with people, to tell them 'god damn it all.' And we have to always say, 'The Japanese were really beasts, really terrible.' My tuan does all that. All of this I've studied and memorized. It seems easy enough to be Dutch. If someone is clever enough like me to pay attention and mimic, in a week he can be Dutch." Sobi quietly watched his sister who was charmed by his explanation.

"But a Dutch woman isn't the same as a Dutch man, no?" Inah asked seriously.

"Of course not. Dutch women are like this—" Sobi explained. Suddenly he was quiet and regretful. "Ah," he whispered, "you can't ride a bicycle yet." But his pleasure returned nonetheless. "But Tuan Piktora has a car. Dutch women aren't supposed to say 'Goddamn it all.' It's enough to twist the dial on the radio. You can already do that. And you can sew. And your face. . . . it's something."

And Inah smiled happily. She heard a bell from the office. The sign of closing time. Sobi leaped up. On the threshold he stopped. Looked at his sister. Ordered her, "Be careful when you speak to the tuan. . . ."

"Yah."

Inah too leaped up and went to the window. She took out the broken mirror and went back to studying her face. "You are really pretty," she whispered. Then she put her cheek next to the mirror. Looked at herself again. She said, "In a little while you will be Dutch. Aren't I an old Batavian? (*orang Betawi*) I'm not Indonesian. Mother said so. She even said during the Japanese days that Sobi and I were at least as noble as the Japanese. Ah, how nice it is to be Dutch."

Suddenly her face crinkled up. She sighed, "I don't know why the Dutch now are all so poor." And suddenly the crinkles disappeared. Her voice rose as she said, "Sobi knows better than I do. There are no poor Dutch. If there are poor Dutch it's because they mix too much with Indonesians." And she was happy again.

She put the glass back into the wall. She stood up and looked at the room. Still four more hours. Later I'll clean up.

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"Is this Sini's place?"

Inah jumped up toward the door. Her face paled. Victor[y] was in front of her. Trembling, the girl answered, "Yah, tuan. . . ."

And the tuan came in and sat on the bedstead. Inah was confused. Her first thought was to sit on the floor and bow her head.

"You're his sister?" asked the white-skinned tuan. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Yah, tuan." And Inah trembled even more.

"Don't sit on the floor. Sit here next to me." And Inah did not have the courage to move. The tuan came closer. Gently he picked her up and placed her on the bedstead. And Inah did not resist. . . .

And later. . . .

In fact there are secrets between men and women which are not secrets. It can happen that women's arrogance and pride can take flight. And she consciously surrenders herself to a certain man. And this happens in every world and century, to all nationalities and moving creatures. How simple life is. As simple as this: people are hungry, they eat, they are satisfied, and they defecate. Between hunger and defecation is where the life of mankind is located. Other life comes after this. It goes on without stopping until the decay of the world. And not one head feels it is tedious. If he feels it is tedious, he kills himself.

*Bukitduri Prison, 1948*

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