

REVENGE

Pramoedya Ananta Toer*

(Translated by Ben Anderson)

This is a series of events that happened during a single week. It's a story that really happened--a story about the faint-heartedness¹ of a human being. And that human being was I myself.

This tale² is so simple, and very likely not worth anyone's hearing. Simple! As simple as a tattered rag or a cat's carcass in the middle of the road. But for faint-hearted human-beings--for me myself --it was a series of events that formed the first milestone in the history of their lives.

November 1945.

Like other pemuda and pemudi,³ I too caught bullet fever. So it's no surprise that I too enlisted as a soldier. I was accepted. Like other new recruits, I too had not yet received my ration of rank. Hey, why rank? Rank! Like bullets, rank had its value, a value just like Owen-guns! Having no rank made a soldier have no role whatever in anything at all, from battle, through "security" duty in town, to the field of love.

Four hours after being stationed at Base X, the first thing that intoxicated my heart was a company of footsoldiers presenting itself at unit headquarters. They stood in line along the highway. Paying no attention to the thin drizzle. The spectators⁴ too took no notice of the light rain. Dusk. No one spoke to anyone else. Each was absorbed in his own preoccupations, the soldiers correcting the positioning of their weapons, and the spectators carefully watching their spectacle. At each soldier's waist were attached hand-grenades from a variety of factories. On an average there were two carbines per squad.

*Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia's best known and greatest modern prose writer, was arrested more than twelve years ago, and since August 1969 has been imprisoned on the Island of Buru. *Revenge (Dendam)* is one of the most remarkable of his tales from the Revolutionary period and is the second to be published in *Indonesia*. ("It's Not an All Night Fair" ["Bukan Pasar Malam"] appeared in *Indonesia*, 15 [April 1973].) Several of his tales have been translated into English by Harry Aveling in *A Heap of Ashes* (St. Lucia, Q.: University of Queensland Press, 1975).

¹*Kelemahan perasaan*--a phrase too difficult to translate without some facultative idea of feeling, as one finds in old-fashioned English terms like stout-hearted.

²*Dongeng* has almost exactly the connotations of "tale," faintly archaic, fabulous, and for children.

³Activist young men and women during the Revolution of 1945.

⁴*Penonton*--spectator at sports events, dramas, and so forth. The root word *tonton*, is, as we shall see, a key-word in *Revenge*.

Each section had one machine-gun. Otherwise all were armed with bamboo spears. There was only one mortar. And the faces of the soldiers were sunk deep inside their metal helmets.

The poor⁵--with rank or without--formed the roadside audience. I too, as a recruit. And those soldiers who were off duty too. It was at that moment that my feelings⁶ flared high. Pride in my nationality has crossed its bounds towards intoxication. And, to be honest, I was intoxicated to see my own armed forces, even though only a handful and then not fully armed. Every few moments all the hair on my body stood on end. And I knew that it was the same with the others there too. It was no secret that T Company was to occupy a sector of the defense-line that had been pushed forward 7 kilometers. But where the defense centers were only a few people knew. All that everyone knew was that the front was seventy kilometers from Base X. At the station, a formation of railway cars facing west was already prepared. On the open wagons, four trucks, two sedans and a jeep had already been loaded.

The faces of the soldiers, all equally young, appeared gloomy--with the gloom of facing departure for the front, the field of death.

And this was quite normal. They were conferring with the imaginings of their own minds; their fantasies anticipated the battle against their enemies. But once the base was left behind and the bullets were whistling in the air, with a sound like the hiss of frying soy-bean cake, all this gloom would vanish. Vanish completely, as *dendeng*⁷ vanishes into the mouth of a blackmarketeer. Small things would disappear. And big things too--even sexual desire or the safety of one's own life. Once the fighting began and hearts were beating fast, only one focus of the mind's attention would remain: Aim! Then: Fire! Attack! Kick out! Seize!⁸ And finally: return to base happily singing songs of victory.

The rain drizzled on. Dusk dimmed into night. Kinsmen left behind prayed long. Prayed that their soldiers would not be pierced by the enemy's bullets. And far over yonder⁹ in the country of the enemy, men also prayed, beseeching God to preserve their kinsmen who were liberating the people from terrorism.

And God, who, they say, is unique and indivisible, was asked to give victory to each side as it slaughtered the other: the peak of

⁵*Rakjat djelata*--untranslatable phrase born from the nationalist and revolutionary movement: the-People-as-the-poor.

⁶*Perasaanku*--hard to translate into a language which speaks of "people" having "feelings." *Perasaan* is the feeling faculty.

⁷*Dendeng*--thin slices of meat, seasoned with sugar and spices, and dried in the sun. Extremely delicious, and high-priced in times of scarcity and revolution.

⁸In the early Revolution, when much of the real fighting against the Dutch was carried out by improvised irregular forces, there was as yet no standardized terminology for basic military orders, such as "Attention!" or "At ease!" The words here form an improvised revolutionary sequence. "Kick out!" [*Usir!*] means "Drive the enemy from their positions!" "Seize!" [*Rampas!*] means "Seize the arms or terrain that the enemy has abandoned!"

⁹I.e., in Holland.

human folly! What was clear was this: victory, defeat, death or wounds, it is always human flesh that suffers it. Prayers, no matter how long drawn out, never give certainly to human life. And all their lips moved in together at once. Their hearts were anguished by a few words that they imagined to themselves. Above all the girls whose sweethearts served in these ranks.

Once Captain T, the company commander, had received his instructions from the unit commander, and had expressed his hopes to his men, the company marched heavily off to the station. And in front of the marching ranks drums thudded and trumpets sang.

Amidst all the small anxieties there still appeared on the faces of the soldiers and their audience a certain pride: confidence in their own strength. And my own feeling¹⁰ dissolved and mixed with theirs. And I became itchy-hearted to join. What was wrong with a bamboo spear! In irregular fighting it was unbeatable.

Civilians joined in escorting the marching ranks from behind and alongside. And children shouted and cheered in admiration. And girls gazed at their sweethearts, their sweethearts-to-be, and their would-be sweethearts too. And the Chinese followed the procession with their slanted eyes. Behind those slanted eyes spread out a thousand different thoughts: between money and blood.

The troops marched on along the narrow road behind the station. The soldiers stooped under the burden of the heavy loads they bore: packs, metal, leather, and their own thoughts.

Most marched barefoot. And most of those who were shod wore rubber boots.

Quite calmly the troops marched in time into the station. Now the muddy earth beneath their feet had been passed over.

At the station the spectators separated themselves off, standing in confused ranks on the platform. Trumpets and drums were dumb. And the company climbed onto the train in silence. Suddenly the atmosphere changed with a speed of its own. The girls waved their handkerchiefs at their sweethearts and any other willing soldier. The soldiers' gloom vanished. They waved back through the windows with bayonets, with bamboo spears, with heads, shirts, *pitji* or their noses. And something alive stirred. Not something alive between the soldiers about to leave for the field of death and the girls on the platform. Nor something alive between two sexes that tended towards a synthesis. No! This: A feeling on unity not to be shattered even by giant cannon.¹¹

The soldiers' cheerful singing resounded still more loudly. Those who had escorted them joined in the singing too. The station officials bustled up and down in an energetic and friendly manner. And a moment

¹⁰Literally, this would go something like "my feeling-faculty would liquefy and dissolve into their feeling-faculty."

¹¹Literally, mountain-cannon (*meriam-gunung*). I am told that this was a folk-term of the period for heavy field-guns.

later the station was filled with the thunder of cheers answering cheers. Why the cheers? I had no idea. I only felt an intoxication, deep, seductive and urgent. With the rest it was the same. All cheered. All felt intoxicated. They cheered for the sake of cheering. Cheered to intoxicate each other.

Every eye sparkled, and every limb trembled. Then the station bell sounded--ting-tong, ting-tong. The whistle followed. The train moved off slowly to the west. The singing and cheering grew more and more exhilarated. Hands waved more and more frantically. Now the train had left the station. The dying of the singing could still be heard, but finally froze still--vanished into the blue night.¹² The people on the platform fell silent and headed home dumbly. And the girls walked on with heads bowed--without a word.

I just stood there gazing towards the west. Thither the train had just departed--the train that carried off the pemuda to the field of death. By politics they were cruelly torn away from the safe circle of their families. They would pass through a broad zone where the inhabitants slept happily--like babies cradled in their mothers' arms. And these soldiers were being torn cruelly from the cradling arms of mother nature--torn away from the release of deep slumber. And they were willing to shed their blood, while newly-weds on their honeymoons enjoyed their peaceful intimacy; and while other human beings amused themselves at movie-houses, and restaurants, and plays, and testing their hands in gambling-dens, and wallowed in hovels of prostitution. They were willing. But later, if they returned to the base bearing defeat, people would say, with ease: "*Peujeum* soldiers."¹³ And if they came on stretchers and their flesh had begun to decompose, with the same ease people would lift their lips, and say "national heroes" with a little reverence. . . .

Slowly I returned to the barracks for recruits with my head full of thoughts. The time would come, the time that I was awaiting; and then I too would leave for the field of death. That night I slept without dreaming.

The third day. Dusk.

I left for the station in my soldier's uniform: a green shirt, much too large, long pants of the same proportions, a pair of shoes that was too narrow and pinched my heels, with laces far too long. And I was proud of my green uniform made in Tjipinang prison. I was also proud of my rank: a private without stripes or rank. Proud too of my hair: for two months it had gone unshorn. Proud! And so I

¹²One of Pramudya's typical coinages. The word used here, *sajup*, has been invented from the adverbial phrase *sajup-sajup*, meaning "indistinct," "faint," "in snatches."

¹³*Peujeum* is a Sundanese word for fermented cassava dessert--something sweet, mushy, and delicate. When the Sundanese youth allowed Bandung to be retaken by the Japanese in the coup de force of October 10, 1945, youths from other parts of the island of Java sent them women's cosmetics and coined the term "*peujeum*" as a pejorative adjective meaning "soft" or "cowardly." Later this Sundanese term was used throughout Java without reference to ethnic group. It may be one of the rare Sundanese words to enter Javanese in modern times.

went to the station. The station was the center of Base X. And precisely because of this station, X had become a little town with a big name. This station too was the place to which the pemuda were herded by the objects of their pride: green uniforms. And still prouder if they had fire-arms; and of their most personal property--their faces.¹⁴

For the same reasons I too went to the station. And why not? Forever and always men love to show off their superiority. Specially if the naked reality is dressed in a bit of fantasy: I was a revolutionary pemuda. But all that pride was only truly felt when a lovely eye paid it some attention. Especially when the night-train from Djakarta came in. And if the heart were lips, without question one would hear that fantasy shouting: "Look! I too am a patriot." A bit later, when the night-train disappeared, the pride too would disappear; the heart would grow empty and the head vacant. Such was my initial experience these last three days. Once the tumult died down, this heart asked questions as it pleased. Hey . . . what have you surrendered for the struggle? I didn't know. The others didn't either. Nor the devil himself. It seems that men are houses of secrets to themselves. . . .

Yesterday four of my co-recruits underwent shooting practice on the front line--practice for real with metal bullets. Here, bullets were extremely precious. And here the training was merely aiming, opening the safety-catch, pulling the trigger, crawling, and running.

But on the front, the training was for real, shooting men dressed in green from behind the rubber trees, and creeping through the bush to throw grenades at green trucks.

And this station would put an end to the frustration in my heart at not yet being thought ready for combat.

As I walked up and down on the platform like someone with too much on his mind, a troop of heavily-armed soldiers appeared from the road behind the station. The troop was followed by civil guards and local notables. The long file spread out along the platform. I did not know what they were about to do. It was clear only that they were not about to be sent to the front.

Shortly after the station bell sounded ting-tong, ting-tong, a special train came in from Djakarta. When it came to a halt, it became apparent that in addition to passenger cars, there was also a Red Cross car. The armed troop moved alongside this Red Cross car. Orders could be heard. The whole troop stood to attention. The armed squad held their carbines at an 80 degree angle over their shoulders. Salvo, three times.

I too stood to attention. The civilians took off their hats and bowed their heads. Then, very slowly, eleven corpses wrapped in the Red-and-White¹⁵ were lowered from the Red Cross car. And from the

¹⁴The Javanese have the idea that the face is the special pride of a person, his or her most precious possession. Javanese may spend hours in front of mirrors without any social opprobrium being attached. Uniforms, weapons--these are cosmetics to show the face off to its best advantage.

¹⁵The red and white striped flag of the Indonesian Republic.

other carriages descended soldiers of T Company. Not a mouth-hole made a sound. Silent. And when the corpses had been laid out on the platform, another salvo. The entire unit filed off to headquarters.

I followed along. No trumpet or drum sounded as they had when the men had left for the front. Defeated troops are always silent. All that was audible were the sounds of hearts screaming in remembrance. And everyone listened to them with reverence. In the abandoned station, the zinc roof was now full of bullet-holes.

The fallen heroes were seen as having fallen in the Holy War, and so their corpses could be buried without purification, complete with their service uniforms. Such was the word that spread in every direction. That night tales about the defeat were many indeed. Sergeant-major D, a medical student, had also fallen. And people passed on this story as smoothly as stories of a rise in the price of rice. The sweet-scented name of this soldier, resounding past the boundaries of the Residency, was now like the deliciousness of restaurant food. Once the food has passed through the throat, a man quickly forgets its true taste.

And now people forgot what the sweet scent of the student's name was like. What they knew was only this: he had fallen--just like a moviehouse when the show is over--and his flesh would be scattered and swallowed up by the earth.

That night the only subject of discussion was the defeat of T Company. The topicality of medicine for venereal disease was edged out by this defeat. And Captain T had all at once lost his prestige which till then had demanded their blood and sweat and his own brains. People naturally pin labels on men as they please. And in their secret hearts they groaned with disappointment: "Peujeum commander." Only because he did not return as a carcass. But you can imagine, supposing he'd been killed, they'd be saying: "A true hero." And far away across the demarcation line,¹⁶ the victorious troops would be cheering in their own language and their own way--"We managed to kill eleven terrorists"--just like the housewife who brings her neighbor the glad news that "I've managed to catch eleven rats."

And that night too, while I lay, uneasily, on the mat, half-asleep, there came to me the first astonishment of my life--"How simple are creatures' lives." And each man tries to confuse this simplicity like the confusion of dry-season garbage swirled around by the wind. And because of their confusion, men kill one another. Suddenly the astonishment became louder: the military isn't the place for me. Yet perhaps this grew out of my fear of an unquiet death. And my desire swelled to leave the military. But the document thrust before my eyes constantly reminded me: "Those accepted as soldiers--even though as volunteers--are bound by a promise, unwritten and not made binding by contract or oath, that they have entrusted their lives to their country." So I had to stay here and wait. Possibly till death.

¹⁶An anachronism for November 1945, when Dutch and British troops were barely beginning to establish footholds in Djakarta, Semarang and Surabaya. The well-known demarcation-line which emerged later, after the first Dutch-Indonesian "clash" of July-August 1947, was the so-called Van Mook Line, formally separating Dutch and Republican territory.

That night there was no sound of patrols singing songs along the streets. No sound too of bullets being fired at night training. The town of X was silent and deserted. Men were faced with the problem of their own deaths.

The seventh day. Dusk.

After going through the drill of crawling, crouching, aiming and using a machine-gun, I washed away my fatigue with a bath. Then I too went to the station. It was by now seven o'clock. The station was very busy. Too busy. Just like a night fair without rain under a full moon. Soldiers, whether with rank or not, with weapons or not, were constantly growing more numerous. In two hours the night-train to Modjokerto would arrive. Here and there troops from T Company walked to and fro on guard. And at the gate the Barisan Srikandi, better known by the name Barisan Djengkerik¹⁷--and I didn't know why it got that name--was more active in its searching than usual. Perhaps there would be an arrest like yesterday: a woman from Djakarta had been found bringing in three and a half million in Japanese currency. Base X had to be defended not only against attacks of arms, but also from attacks of money. A rice-bowl must not be allowed to change its nature and become a Japanese currency-bowl.¹⁸ People had now learned from bitter experience: cash can't be eaten. Cash is not all-powerful at all times.

Rice was all-powerful now: 1945. People could deny it. But the proofs were many. The breath of human beings left over from the Japanese could be considerably deepened¹⁹ by handfuls of cooked rice. Rice! Rice! And rice increased the popularity of the little town, alongside its military fame. X was continuously flooded with human beings. The reason: Djakarta was under blockade. Rice was banned from entry into Djakarta. And since the inhabitants of Djakarta were Indonesians too, the blockade was operative only on paper. The inhabitants of Djakarta could breathe deep with relief. That too was the reason why the strictest inspection guard was at the station.

The station bell rang ting-tong, ting-tong. The rice train from Djakarta was about to arrive. This train was always stuffed to the brim with thousands of rice-traders. I jumped up from the platform

¹⁷It is almost certain that Pramudya's disclaimer is ironic. The term Barisan Srikandi is highly honorific, a reference to Dewi Srikandi, wife of the *wayang* hero Ardjuna, famed for her military skills. Djengkerik has two connotations, both negative. First, as the word literally means grasshopper, it implies something lightweight, insignificant, even if noisy. Second, *djengkerik*, or more commonly *djangkrik*, is a common euphemism for *di-antjuk* [fuck!], along the lines of "fugging" in certain World War II novels.

¹⁸The area where this tale is supposed to take place is Krawang-Tjikampek--one of the most fertile rice-growing areas in Java. In late 1945, there was a severe currency crisis in Java. The Dutch had not yet been able to create an acceptable currency of their own. Nor had the Republic. Japanese currency, left over from the Occupation, was not only worth very little by the time the Japanese surrendered, thanks to horrendous inflation, but became even more problematic after their surrender.

¹⁹An Indonesian idiom difficult to translate: "long breath" means to sigh with relief, but with the breath drawn in rather than exhaled.

bench. So did the other soldiers. Eyes had to be wiped--to find new sights, even though my pride was not what it had been earlier. I was no longer so proud of my uniform and my hair. But our harshly one-sided way of life demanded the greatest possible change of scenery. And Indonesian women, even though litre-grade rice-traders, are not all ugly to look at.

Noise and confusion at the station. And people more or less lost control of themselves. Everyone was on the move. No military police to be seen. That year they were only in the process of being formed. The huff of the train began to be audible. Ever more clearly. Just like the wooing of a pemuda, soft and slow, but sure--every second drawing closer.

And now the train had arrived. People's movements became still more wild. And every hair quivered. The train came to a halt. The sound of the locomotive steam drowned out the shouts and yells in every throat. People leapt down past each other onto the platform.

The passengers crouched on the roofs of the cars climbed painfully down the carriage-walls.

The troops on duty were busy. The Barisan Srikandi lined up and searched the women queuing up to get out of the station, searched them right to the haircoil, and to other parts of the body. And I too was busy--busy hunting about for something I did not seek.

With my mind a blank, I watched the line of male passengers waiting their turn to be searched. It was then a thick yellow turban caught my eye. Below it: a frightened face with wild eyes. Still lower down: a white shirt belted in by a sarong with purple, red and yellow checks. And he was constantly looking for shadows to hide his face.

Here and there the inspection guards were getting their cut: Philips Morris, Capstan, Zipper, cheese, bread. Sometimes too a pinch on a pretty cheek. Or still better: a promise uttered very quietly. This was rice's turn of the wheel.²⁰ Rice had power. And the passengers were rice-traders. And rice-traders had to know their place when faced with station guards.

When a guard got close to the thick yellow turban, he shouted out loudly: "This is the one!"

And the hadji panicked, his face ashen. But quickly he managed to recover, and smiled. Other soldiers came up and crowded around him. I too. Then the hadji was dragged out of the line. He still clutched his bag in his left hand. He was dragged into the office of the station guards, close by the stationmaster's office. And the 100-watt lamp lit up his face which was quite wrinkled.

I was a soldier without rank--without any kind of role in any kind of activity whatever. And so I stood by the office window watching

²⁰The meaning, very Javanese, is that the world is a wheel; everything has its turn at the top, and at the bottom. In late 1945, currency (money) was almost worthless, while rice was invaluable.

what was about to happen to the bearer of the thick yellow turban. What I saw was the guard commander standing up quickly from his chair. With long strides and bright red face he approached the prisoner, who had been made to sit down on a wooden bench.

He screamed angrily, "English dog! So you've been caught at last, you swine! I could never forget your face! I know you."²¹

And the captive panicked again, and his ashen face glowed greenish in the lamplight. He bowed his head gently like a girl being wooed. "No, pak," he said.

The soldiers outside screamed terrifyingly. "That's him. That's the one. That's right, pak."

For a moment the captive scanned the thick-crowded window and door, then bowed his head again.

The guard commander blazed with rage. And more and more people jammed tightly into every aperture. One or two officials of the railway service came to look in, but immediately departed. Officials of course are not soldiers. And soldiers must have the courage to act under all circumstances.

The commander, arms akimbo, snapped accusingly: "You're a spy!" he charged.

For a moment the hadji stared at his accuser, then quickly bowed his head again. "No, pak," he repeated. His voice was low and fearful.

"You English pig! Admit it!" And the commander nodded his head quickly up and down. Then his voice softened slightly: "Come on, be honest." The prisoner did not answer. And once again the commander's face grew black-red with anger. "Admit it," he roared harshly.

"No, pak," the prisoner repeated. And he remained with his head bowed.

"Admit it or else . . ." and his fist darted. And the thick yellow turban flew off into a corner of the office. His head was bald, and glistened under the lamplight. Suddenly there came a change. The hadji stopped his trembling. He straightened up his head. And his eyes flickered sharp.

Then the blows rained down, on and on without stopping. I turned my face to one side. I couldn't watch something like that. I didn't know why. Perhaps simply because I was a new recruit. Perhaps, too, I was more cowardly than I had thought. I didn't have nerves of steel, the first condition for being a soldier. I had to leave. I couldn't take it. Yet there was something that held my purpose back: the urge to know.²² So I just stood there by the window.

²¹Here and in all the dialogue that follows, the language used is the Djakarta dialect. I have made no attempt to match this stylistic shift in English.

²²*Keinginan mau tahu*--a phrase often used to translate the English word "curiosity"; but here, I think, the author intends a desire of a much narrower scope.

Beside me stood a soldier who never stopped gnashing his teeth from rancor.

"What did he do?" I asked him.

"What did he do? Ziih!" He hissed as though driving a dog away. He looked at me. "A pig of a hadji." Then he bowed his head and carefully spat by his shoes--insultingly. "An English spy. He mustn't get off. Just think," he said quickly, "while our men were on guard at the front, hey, the English attacked, just like that, right through the middle of our defenses. So our men were scattered in disorder." He pointed to the hadji and added, "There he is, the spy. What kind of hadji's that! Only his turban's thick."

"How do you know!" I asked emptily.

"How?" he answered quickly. He looked at me as if he were a teacher. "I know the whole story. It was like this, one day he came and asked to be our cook. We took him on. Then what happened? Pig of a hadji! He ran away. Then he came back screaming 'Pak, the enemy's coming . . . the enemy's coming.' We all ran out of our fox-holes. And what had happened? We'd been surrounded. Ziih! what a pig of a hadji. But he'll get a taste of my fist in a while. I'll teach him. You wait and see. Just imagine, we fought back our hardest and still got the worst of it. And we went crazy. . . ." He glanced savagely at the hadji, and then continued his story with full concentration. "Once they'd taken over the strategic points, we got pushed back and back. We were damn lucky to be able to escape. They grabbed one machine-gun. Two trucks. One car belonging to the front commander. Eleven dead. Fifty uniforms burned." He gnashed his teeth. "Iiihhh, no way he should get off," he said fiercely. He wanted to smash that glistening skull into pieces.

The guard commander's fists struck on and on. Left. Right. Left. Right. Exactly like the coupling of a locomotive's wheels. And the hadji's head jerked about in every direction. Suddenly the commander leapt to the door through the crowd. Pain was limned all over his face.

Outside, on the platform, his barracks-brat mouth shouted curses. "Bastard. My hands hurt like hell." Then he disappeared from view.

Now it was his deputy's turn to enter. And the soldier beside me hissed like a cat. "That pig, he doesn't deserve any pity." Then he shouted into the guard room: "Just finish him off, pak."

But the corporal, the deputy guard commander, paid no attention. Politely he sat down on the wooden bench beside the hadji and spoke woefully. "Don't be angry with the commander, pak hadji. You see, he's very angry about the losses his section took four days ago. Forgive him, pak hadji."

And the hadji smiled with happiness. And his bald glistening head fell and rose forgivingly like a pigeon billing with its mate. Then he gazed at the spectators with pride. I breathed in deeply with relief.

"After all, I know you well too, pak hadji. Weren't you our cook a while ago? Right?" The hadji nodded in agreement. The voice of the

corporal continued, gentle and seductive to the heart. "Round here we're short of soldiers, pak hadji. Perhaps you'd like to join up?"

The hadji's eyes shone. "Of course," he said happily.

"But, we're very much afraid of spies."

"Don't be afraid," the hadji spoke with arrogance. "If I'm allowed to join up--no need to worry about anything! I'm ready to be your spy."

"Really?" the corporal asked elatedly. "In that case, perhaps you've had some experience in that line of work?"

"And why not?" came the reply with rapid ease. "Once I broke up a whole company. . . ." Suddenly he fell silent, taken aback. For a moment he looked closely at the corporal who had coaxed him, with suspicion.

Calmly the deputy commander took an iron hammer out of his bag. His lips smiled coldly. He spoke calmly. "You mean the company that was at the front a few days ago?"

The hadji coughed, once. Made no reply. He bowed his head. He was conscious--that he had been tricked.

"Pak hadji, where do you think this hammer was made?"

The hadji's startlement was gone. He raised his head. And his eyes kept careful watch on the hammer. "The trademark is. . . . German," he answered jovially.

Whereupon a crack was heard, and the hammer was swung up and back to strike an eyesocket for the second time. And my vision darkened. Yet still in the memory loomed that bald head swallowing for a moment after its left eyebrow was struck.

And from beside me could be heard a shrill, high moan, "Paaaaak! Let me finish him off!!!"

When my eyes regained their sight, I saw . . . I saw, the hadji was unwounded. He was still sitting on the wooden bench. The smile had returned to dance calmly on his lips. I saw no blood. I heard no groan. And I was astonished. Perhaps it was he who was the first invulnerable man that I saw in my life.

And the soldier standing beside me never stopped moaning his rage. "That's the pig who killed my elder brother." Without waiting any longer for permission he jumped through the window and hit the hadji with his fists. Once again that bald head jerked back and forth in every direction. And the prey continued to smile comfortably. There was no mistaking it any longer--he was smiling with happiness. A moment later the soldier leapt back through the window and stood beside me. Whimpering in shame, "My God, my hands hurt." And when his two hands were inspected by the window sill, they appeared red as if they had been struck by iron. And he looked at me with shame. "Perhaps he's invulnerable," he said to hide his shame.

At that point the soldiers crowding in front of the door and window struggled with each other as they flooded into the guard room. And in a great tumult the hadji was attacked with fists and feet. A riot. Crazy cheers. I remained along with just a few others. I hid my face in the shadow of the shutters. The astonishment came again to confuse my spirit:²³ this is no place for me. Then another astonishment arose in answer: I've promised to pledge my spirit to my country. If love exists, I love my country. And if love exists, there is certainly something that I love more than country. This is not my field. I must abandon the military. I must get away from weapons. And while the hadji was jerked back and forth by the blows of fists and feet, I too was jerked back and forth by these astonishments. I could not bear to watch. Yet I wanted to, I wanted to know. Perhaps my heart was already roaring. Perhaps too my mouth was screaming, but my ears heard nothing. War is indeed war, it's the same everywhere--men torturing and murdering each other. Even though with slogans as lofty as coconut trees. This was not my place. But my promise! In truth, there loomed before me a moral test. Or was there still perhaps a drop of humanity within me? Were these the feelings of a raw recruit? I didn't know.

And in the interstices between those bodies yeasted with intoxication, the figure of the hadji momentarily flashed and vanished. He was smiling still. Not a trace of pain was etched on his face. Why was he smiling? Was he smiling scornfully at all these angry men? Or was he recalling his wedding night, and his bride, fearful--timid--eager--bashful at his approach? Or was he thinking of the Land of Dates when he was on the pilgrimage, and the many pleasures that he had been able to enjoy there? All were possible. Don't men on the point of death sometimes remember their first love?

Perhaps the hadji was not guilty. Perhaps too he had admitted his guilt because he wanted to become a soldier--wanted to have the chance to defend his country. Perhaps. But I didn't know. War is indeed war. Turn and turn about men exterminate each other. And a tree does not stir of its own; only if something stirs it. And men do not become savage on their own; only if there is something that makes them savage. War! And men make weapons to kill their enemies. And the enemy is everywhere. But rare are those who are willing to understand . . . this: the first and utmost enemy is one's very own self. It is a small part of savagery everywhere.

Suddenly an officer entered. All the troops stepped back. Outside the station it was dark. And the officer shouted at the top of his voice, "That's him!" Fierce desire²⁴ blending with joy, like a sailor getting a kiss on an embankment, he shouted once again, "You damed English spy!" Rapidly he drew his pistol. With the barrel he struck the temple of the victim.

And the hadji remained quite calm. Finally he laughed in a strange way: challengingly. "You laugh? Pig!" the officer cursed in

²³*Djiwa*--"soul"--too Christian? "spirit"--too Victorian?

²⁴*Gemas* (Javanese--*gemes*)--how to translate? It can mean "angry," but ordinarily it refers to an irresistible desire to touch something adorable--this touching taking the form of an often painful pinch. Adults may be "gemes" towards cute children, and pinch them black and blue. It may also have clear sexual connotations, as here.

his frustration. He screamed in anger, "You pig! You just try and make a game of me." And in a mass the men mobbed their prey.

Once again I hid my face in the shadow of the shutters. My scream roared once again--a scream without a voice. Do men have to be tortured? It's true, men have to die. The world mustn't get overpopulated. And when I looked again, the hadji had been tightly bound. His two hands were shackled behind his back. His neck too. People cheered tumultuously. He was led outside. Bamboo spears and bared bayonets at rifle tips escorted him--dozens of soldiers. The hadji did not resist. He yielded.

I did not want to look. But curiosity to know how it would all end led me to join the procession of the revolution. Before my eyes appeared the faces of the soldiers dark red with intoxication. There were also some women from the Barisan Srikandi who cheered at the tops of their voices, and their breasts, full of flesh and milk, swelled and subsided with exhaustion like fish on land. And at that moment I imagined: my whole family. What would I say if it happened that the one so treated were my own elder brother? And at that moment I felt rich because I still had a drop of humanity within me. And the refutation followed in due course. This isn't humanity. It is the weakness of a new recruit. It's because I haven't suffered treachery. And my arrogance evaporated.

For . . . if there had really been a drop of humanity, I would certainly have leapt into the midst of the procession and protected the hadji even if he were in fact a spy. But I did nothing. And I stayed silent. Only my eyes watched. This is not the way humanity works. I didn't dare. All I did was to shield my face with shadow. And now it was clear to me--I was a coward. I was a coward. And a coward is the same as a traitor. I shared in betraying the hadji. And in very truth, humanity has no use or value if it does not go hand in hand with courage.

A sergeant jumped to my side. His breathing was short with fatigue, "Aren't you coming along?" I shook my head and just continued slowly on my way. Scornfully he said, "Then you'd better wear a hair-coil."²⁵ And I stopped, to get away from him--several meters behind the procession. He threatened: "Watch out--if you're a spy. . . ." He did not continue. He ran ahead and rejoined the procession. The further from the guard room, the dimmer the light of the lamp. Finally, the procession passed out through the gateway of the station. I followed on from behind.

Men were getting more and more intoxicated. And the hadji was more and more jerked back and forth, pivoted on his thin behind, under kicks and blows. The cheering never stopped. And the small, quiet town of X was aroused by a spectacle of the revolution.²⁶

²⁵*Bekonde*--i.e., *berkonde*. The reference is to the elaborate bun composed of "wig" and "natural" hair, worn at the back of the head by Javanese women. The meaning is more or less "You sissy!"

²⁶The Indonesian is very simple--*tontonan revolusi*. But watch how English slides the possible connotations around:

a spectacle of a revolution

the spectacle of the Revolution

the spectacle of a revolution

a spectacle of the Revolution

More and more people crowded around. The hadji vanished in the swarm of intoxicated bodies. What appeared to me clearly was: street lamps, and trembling trouser legs, and shins and shoes and bamboo spear-tips fell and rose.

In front of the station the hadji's feet were tightly bound. He couldn't walk any longer so was stood up against a lamp-post. And the ends of the ropes binding his feet were tied to the rump of a small truck. Now every one knew: he would have to be offered as bait to the stone and the asphalt and the earth of the highways of his native land--by decision of a court of intoxicated men. And they struggled with one another for the chance: to hone their weapons in the hadji's flesh.

Now I could see his body quite clearly. He stood straight up leaning on the electric lamp post. His bald head no longer glistened, no light struck it. And I saw--I saw--I saw that he was completely unmarked. He was still smiling contentedly. Exactly like a girl who has had a sweet dream. Or did my eyes deceive me? Naturally, eyes can't be trusted in everything. But truly, the hadji was still unwounded. He was still unhurt within the circle of his judges and executioners.

A soldier leapt into the middle of the arena. A bamboo spear was in his two hands. He was readying himself to pierce the belly of the hadji. And he roared out solidly, like a Japanese bayonetting a sand-bag on Lion Square.²⁷ The tip of the spear flashed and disappeared, slipping into the hadji's belly. And I saw nothing more. My vision darkened. And without my being aware of it, I had clutched a post in the station fence, made from old rails. My eyes refused to be ordered to look. And this was the first time I experienced the senses refusing the orders of the brain-center. Dark. Dark. I saw nothing any more. And I heard something make a horrifying sound. The cheering died away, to my astonishment. Freeze. I could hear panting breath. When the cheering raged crazily again, my vision was clear once more. I saw the bamboo's tip piercing a white shirt--ripped open. Then: a sweet smile. Then again: a bald head. The bamboo was quickly pulled out. The cheering froze again. The bamboo's tip was slightly bent and still quite dry. I saw no night-blackened blood. I waited for his guts to gush out. But they didn't. He continued to smile patiently. And he was not wounded at all. He was still the hadji of a while back.

Cheering again. More tumultuous than before. The bamboo spears leapt up and down again as before. And at that point there was not a single God with the power to obstruct this act of sovereignty.²⁸ And

²⁷This must refer to one of the big squares in Djakarta, but I don't know which.

²⁸Pramoedya spells the word *pen-daulat-an*. During the Revolution, the old Malay-Arabic word *daulat* (sovereignty, kingship) acquired a revolutionary meaning by association with the word *rakjat* (people). In a sense, the idea of the Revolution was an idea of *kedaulatan rakjat* (people's sovereignty). But the most important manifestation of this new popular sovereignty was the deposition, imprisonment, and sometimes execution of collaborationist officials, aristocrats, and so forth. Hence the verb *mendaulat* was born, with the specific meaning of "to abduct," "to depose," or "to eliminate" enemies of the Revolution. *Pen-daulat-an* is the untranslatable nominalization of this verb.

the savage bayonets raged crazily. And the carrying-poles of the rice-traders. The hadji was tossed to and fro, trying to keep his body erect. I saw the tip of a bamboo spear pierce his eye and flee without leaving a trace.

His clothes were now in tatters.

And then he fell backwards alongside the lamp-post. And a white *samurai*²⁹ danced busily over his head. The victim's body vanished from sight. What remained visible was only a back and legs darkened by shadows and wet with sweat. And the tips of bamboo spears which fell and rose in the air were now blunted. People roared with their own intoxication.

The roaring and cheering again fell silent. And the weapons died, no longer dancing. People moved in a circle round their victim. Eyes glittered focused below the lamp-post. Four or five men stood the hadji up against the lamp-post. Still not a single hair was harmed. He was now half naked. His clothes were in rags from the torrent of stabs. Only his leather belt remained intact. The cheers thundered up once again. Then froze.

I saw the hadji's smile suddenly vanish. The two hands tied behind his back stirred. And the rope that bound him, which had been half cut through in places by the samurai, broke apart. The intoxicated suddenly took thought for their own safety. On their faces fear was drawn. Slowly people edged backwards. The victim's two hands were now free. Frightened whispers could be heard.

Someone screamed out shrilly: "Start . . . the truck . . . truck . . . bro-o-o-ther!"

Silence, for a moment. The hadji's hands began to feel their way down his legs. And now he held the cord that bound his feet. People edged further and further away in fearful anticipation. Calm silence. One could see that the hadji was concentrating his strength.³⁰ And his eyes gazed fiercely on the earth beneath him. And then the whistle of the night-train from Djakarta to Modjokerto was heard as it pursued its course.

Suddenly the truck roared. In a flash the hadji's body flew up into the air, and then fell back to earth tossed over and over. The truck drove off full speed ahead. And the body leaped forward with the feet hauled upwards. It tumbled over and over dragged along on the asphalt of the highway. Shaking, people cheered once again. Violent handclapping accompanied the cheers. And the lamp-post continued to glow peacefully. He vanished into the darkness. And they ran helter-skelter in pursuit. I walked slowly on in their wake. There were now thousands at hand. What I felt was only an atmosphere of trembling intoxication. The truck passed the second lamp-post at the road's curve. It was now moving very slowly. Yet the hadji could not use his now

²⁹*Samurai*--a short Japanese sword--typically, it seems, used for ritual suicide.

³⁰*Memusatkan tenaga*--this refers above all to the hadji's spiritual or supernatural powers.

freed hands. And I was now close to the body that was being dragged along.

Torture was the only thing they could accomplish. Just like colonialists with their colonialism. And the pickpockets with their pickpocketing. And bush-lawyers with their tricky tongues. And cashiers with their deposits. And doctors with their cures. And this was the verdict of the court of men intoxicated with their intoxication--a court of men who hated the police who all along had never protected them and the *keibōdan*³¹ who had constantly seized their food supplies. For all that time they had not known the use of judges--in those times gone by. So now these were the types of judges: a court of men intoxicated. And the stupidity³² of men has its own history--a history of immense antiquity.

When the soldiers grew tired, civilians took their place. And in their intoxication they screamed "The king of the bedbugs must be exterminated."³³ I summoned up the courage to look from close up. The hadji was being tossed over and over.

Yet he still appeared completely calm. And he still had suffered no serious injury from the scraping of stones and asphalt of the highway. The soldiers moved forward once again. Once again their weapons danced about competing for a target. The escorting crowds moved steadily onwards. They no longer had any thought for the night train which brought foreign correspondents and beautiful city girls.

A soldier who had just arrived pushed his way through the throng with his hands.

And when we reached the railroad crossing, under the lantern, he shouted out, "Ai! That's him!" And while following the victim dragged along by the truck, he drew out a short samurai from his waistband: a Japanese sword for harakiri. In all its shortness, he brandished it back and forth before the hadji's face. And screamed again. "Remember this?"

The crowd's terrifying roar fell silent. Everyone stared at the hadji. And the hadji never for one second ceased smiling. His eyes blinked comically like those of an old man with whom a teenage girl falls in love.

The soldier was uneasy, and he yelled in anger while beating his weapon again and again against the earth. He screamed in anger "Back

³¹*Keibōdan*--Indonesian-staffed auxiliary police set up by the Japanese during the Occupation. They had an unenviable reputation for extortion.

³²*Kebodohan*--"stupidity," or perhaps "ignorance." It is normal in Indonesian to say "*dia masih bodoh*" which, translated literally as "he is still stupid," sounds queer in English. Indonesians do not share our ideas about "innate" stupidity.

³³"*Kutu mula harus dibasmi*." An obscure phrase. It is possible that *mula* is an Indonesianization of the Javanese *mulané* (and therefore), and the whole phrase should be rendered something like "As he's a bedbug, he must be exterminated." But I'm inclined to think that the idea is that a bedbug rapidly breeds others, so the "king of bedbugs" must be exterminated at once.

to earth!"³⁴ And the roar of the truck's engine stayed steadily on its beat. Then the short sword was swung upwards, held in his two hands.

Suddenly the hadji's eyes flashed in terror. The lines of his face grew stiff as wires. His eyeballs almost popped out. And I saw the mouth of the victim trying to groan. But every inch of his flesh was taut with fear. And before he could blink his eyes once again, the short samurai had found its nest down through his belly. For a moment the rigidity of his features melted, then vanished without a trace. His belly was sliced open. I saw his white intestines. And then the blood oozing out. Then the gaping flesh. A scent of decay wafted up through the air. Intestines and the contents of the stomach gushed forth. The truck's engine roared on ceaselessly. Short, hurried, gasping breathing could be heard, but then every sound and voice was drowned in the wild applause and cheering that thundered out.

People jumped up and down and danced insanely. The procession wheeled to the right. The railway line had now been crossed. And what I seemed to hear was: his breath, deep, short, rapid. And his lips trembled with a voice that was inaudible: water, water. A voice of despair. And in my vision there appeared: flesh, blood, intestines, and the contents of a stomach. Even though I hid my face in shadows and the darkness of the night. I followed on without stopping for a moment, followed on by the roadside--I was afraid of being spattered with at the roadside--I was afraid of getting spattered with the blood and contents of the stomach which daubed the asphalt. And above, the stars twinkled peacefully. Every weapon took its turn in eradicating that body: from the face of the earth, from the memory, from the motherland, from the struggle. I no longer knew what feelings swirled inside me. I did not understand. Only this was certain: the hadji was at the point of death. Then he would be united with the soldiers he had betrayed to their deaths in the bowels of the earth.

Dead now was the victim. And his body which had once roamed half-way round the globe was now dragged on and on. Far over yonder, in a hut was a mother waiting for her husband to come home with rice and salted fish. And their children were sleeping soundly on a bamboo cot full of bed bugs.

I only came to when a soldier spoke to me. "How come you're so quiet? Are you feeling sick from the sight of blood?"³⁵ I nodded. He went on, full of pride. "It was me that finished him. If you've only just joined up, you always feel sick at first. I was just the same. But once you've been around, you get used to it."

³⁴"*Kembali djadi tanah.*" This is clearly a *mantra* or spell of exorcism. Javanese beliefs about invulnerability are many. All, however, contain the idea that an invulnerable person can only be killed by someone who knows the special secret of his invulnerability. It appears here that the ritual breaking of the hadji's invulnerability requires a short Japanese sword to be struck repeatedly on the ground with the recitation of the *mantra* "Back to earth!"

³⁵Indonesian uses the same word *mabok* to cover what we mean by "drunk," "intoxicated" (both literally and figuratively), and "nauseated," "on the verge of vomiting." This double (or actually single) meaning embraces both the crowd's delight in the hadji's torture and the narrator's revulsion from it.

He wiped the blade of his short sword with some wrapping-leaves he'd picked up from the roadside. "If you'd seen how our comrades were butchered . . . it felt good having our revenge." He fell silent and leapt ahead, vanishing into the procession.

The hadji's body was still dragged on and on. By now he was no longer a human being. Let alone a citizen of a democracy--absolutely not. He was a beautiful plaything. As beautiful as the word-play of the colonialists to their natives. As beautiful as a rubber ball to a cat. And in the great office-buildings far behind the demarcation line, this was called fascist behavior or nazi terror or the legacy of the Japanese. What was clear: the hadji, his judges, his butchers, and I myself were stupid. The worst of it is that everyone likes to play judge. And a stupid judge is the most disastrous thing imaginable. It was this same stupidity that had killed Socrates, and Giordano Bruno, and Galileo, and Jesus.

The reason--judges are very fond of what they love. And the judges here loved their country very much. And *revenge* in a time of revolution bites very *deeply*. They were convinced, of this: their service to their country.

By the time the revolutionary procession had reached the main Djakarta-Tjirebon highway, the spectators had grown still more numerous. From each dark alleyway men and women emerged.

Lust always plays a role in every place. Including the lust of the eye. The women immediately fled when they saw that tortured human being. The children cheered and beat on empty cans in the wake of the procession. And the weapons danced joyfully on and on.

As the time passed movements and voices grew fainter. The procession thinned away. By the time it reached the recruits' barracks, people were exhausted. The rope around the hadji's carcass was untied, and the truck, which bored on heedlessly, returned to its sty: it had carried out its duty of dragging along a human being whose family awaited him. And the carcass--lay there in shreds, alone, in the middle of the highway.

That night the station at Base X was deserted. The night-train caught no glimpse of officers and irregulars swarming about on the platform. And the hadji's woman over yonder still waited for her man to come home with a bit of good luck in his pineapple-fiber bag:³⁶ rice and salted fish.

It must have been ten minutes that I sat on the crossbeam of the barracks fence, gazing at that abandoned carcass--stark naked. And the night steadily deepened. The moon began to rise. People coming in from the west, when they reached the spot, stopped short for a moment, jumped back and fled. They didn't get to continue their journey to the market. Encountering a carcass on the way would mean bad luck in business. They went straight home. Now the curfew sounded. Base X was silent and deserted.

³⁶During the Japanese Occupation, shortage of jute and sisal forced people to make sacks and bags out of the fibers in pineapple leaves.

Slowly I went into the barracks. My comrades were sleeping soundly from exhaustion. Faintly came the hiss of the locomotive's engine as it entered its stable. And willy-nilly what had just happened raged in my memory. That astonishment came again: this is not the place for me. But my promise . . . hemm . . . the lesson I had now learned was this: a promise binds for ever. The dark time loomed up before me: what would I do if I got an order to kill someone? And that someone was someone I loved very much? I was afraid. I had to leave. This was not my profession. In truth, these were not the thoughts of a soldier. They were thoughts of a human being. And every human being wants freedom, in his mind as well.

And at that moment, for the first time in three years, I prayed: that such a thing would only ever happen once. I fell asleep.

What I dreamt in that slice of night I don't remember. The barking of dozens of dogs woke me up. It was now three thirty in the morning. Slowly I walked out of the barracks with a cane to drive the beasts away.

The moon was now high and illuminated the roof tiles of the houses of the Chinese along the highway. In those days none of the barracks in Base X yet had guard-posts, and guard-duty hadn't been started. The wind was dead. Nature was dead. As I drew near the barracks' fence I saw dozens of dogs barking frenziedly. Most of them had their noses to the ground, while the rest stared at the moon. And in the midst of these animals: the hadji's carcass.

Now for the first time the dogs of the Chinese were eating human flesh.

At top speed I fled from the gruesome tableau³⁷ staged by nature. I went back into the barracks. I hid my face under the pillow on the mat. Then the barracks-bell began to ring, on and on. All the soldiers woke up and hurried to put on their uniforms. Running. Roll-call in front of the barracks. Announcement: we were leaving for the front right away. I shivered.

Now for the first time I too was leaving--leaving to be killed, leaving to kill. My hair stood on end for a moment. Fifteen minutes later the unit departed. And the killing marched on.

³⁷The word is *sandiwara*, which normally means a whole play. The important thing, however, is the fact that Pramoedya again uses imagery from the theater.

