

KENJI TSUCHIYA

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The last time I met Kenji Tsuchiya was in Jakarta. Neither of us could bear the vacuous insistence of present day Indonesian culture or politics. What's more, he was having difficulty with *Imigrasi*. He was better able to put his rancor to one side than I was. He suggested we visit the Hero's Cemetery one afternoon. I was surprised to find that it had some of the peacefulness of the *kramat* cemeteries of Java. It was not the aura of sacredness, however, but the paucity of visitors and the vastness of its sunlit expanse that put it at a distance from the noise of Jakarta and made it tranquil. As we wandered through, a youth came up to us, seemingly from nowhere at all, and pointed out certain graves. Had I spoken first after the youth left us, I would have commented on his appraisal of certain heroes. I would certainly have reintroduced the jaundiced mood into which Jakarta life had thrown us. Kenji, however, merely remarked how often it was like that in Indonesia. Someone simply appears, usually a young man, makes a comment and then disappears.

I had been annoyed by the youth. For me, his appearance was typical of Jakarta experience; an unwanted interruption, one more person insisting on saying something of no significance, spoiling the little calm to be found in that third-world capital. Had I made a remark we would have been back in the Kantor *Imigrasi*, mentally at least. Listening to Kenji, however, I was surprised. I had not realized, even in the cemetery, how spectral certain appearances are in Indonesia. Kenji could hear how uncertain was the provenance of the youth's words.

I think that, like me, Kenji found the stupidity of Jakarta particularly upsetting. Stupidity is worse than the usual aggression—worse because one cannot answer it. But Kenji had a generosity which enabled him to take in even stupidity with patience and to find, behind it, a richness one would never uncover if one attended only to the content of usual conversations in Indonesia. Sometime after that incident we made a trip to Banda for a few days with the idea of escaping Jakarta. We wrote a short piece about that moment of escape. We had not planned to do so. It was an idea that came to me later. I found that in Kenji's company I was starting to hear as I imagine he heard. I could not resist taking notes. It was the effect of his generosity. One hears it in his writings, in pieces such as the one he wrote on Indonesia *indah*. It would be more of a loss than we need to bear if the modesty and calmness of his language were to hide the importance of what he has left us.

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