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PROLOGUE

PAIR

Arcen, northern Limburg, December 1947.

In the busy shopping street, a tremendous bang is heard. Johan looks up and sees that a truck has hit a horse-drawn carriage. The front of the car is badly damaged, there is blood on the grill.

On the street lies a large black horse, its hind legs stiffened in the air. The animal is breathing heavily and trying to lift its head. Its eyes turn panicked in their sockets.

Some onlookers stand looking horrified. No one is helping.

John's legs move as if by themselves. He kneels by the horse and feels the heartbeat.

Both front legs broken, by the looks of it,' said a bystander. Someone calls for a veterinarian to be fetched.

The horse's skin is steaming with heat. The forelegs bloom violently. The animal tries to work itself upright. In vain.

Johan takes the head firmly in his hands and slowly strokes the horse's forehead and muzzle.

'Shhht... Calm down boy. Shhht...'

The horse snorts and the nostrils twitch restlessly.

As Johan continues to stroke with one hand, he rolls up his pant leg with his other. He brings out his pistol and places it gently and purposefully against the horse's heart area. It seems to calm down slightly.

Then he pulls the trigger.

The bystanders recoil. People begin to scream and run away, a few remain standing stiffly.

Soon Johan is the only one left with the horse, lying lifeless on the cold stones.

Then he stands up, the gun still in his hand. He looks at the sky, tucks the weapon back under his pant leg and continues on his way.

Someone had to do the dirty work.

WAR CRIMINALS

Rotterdam, November 1947.

Rippling sea water. Almost no sound, only the occasional splash. Wisps of fog and clouds. A seagull flies low over the water.

A large, steel transport ship moves forward in a colorless world. Young men crowd each other on the deck.

'So, do you see anything yet?'

'Yes, what do you see? Say something or give that thing to me.'

Binoculars pass from hand to hand. Breathing clouds in the cold air.

'Don't you have it the wrong way around? Then it seems even further away, doesn't it.'

You know that, right?'

If you keep your mouths shut for a while, I can concentrate and maybe I'll see one of your sisters standing on the dock in her bare cunt.'

Laughter.

'The first white chick I see, I jump right on top of that. So tell all you mothers to get off the dock.'

'Say that again with your big mouth, and I'll punch a few teeth out of your mouth so your mom won't even recognize you when I'm done with d'r tonight.'

The bow of the ship moves slowly through the fog.

What do you see? Do you see the harbor yet?'

'The whole harbor is full of naked broads, isn't it?'

'No, all I see is a little boat. Some kind of sloop.' 'Do you hear that guests! A boat full of whores!'

Johan stands a little further away. He feels at the bandage in his side. The wound is still painful. Tensely he stares at the quay. Over the water, rhythmic sounds and unintelligible shouts can be heard.

Binoculars pass from hand to hand. 'Hey, is that some kind of brass band or something?' 'Maybe. Or something else...'

'Yes, it's a sloop. They're coming this way. It's some kind of welcoming committee,' shouts a soldier.

'It's a sloop full of beer and steaks! I'm sure!' 'Steak!'

'It's the Red Cross sisters, isn't it?'

Johan is silent and tries to smile. Then he looks ahead again.

'No ya,' shouts another, 'they're just civilians.' And they have banners and drums. But I can hardly see anything through that stretched fog.'

'Do you hear that? Quiet down everybody!

'What's that drumming?'

He slowly rises above the binoculars. 'No, it's not a brass band at all....'

Half lost in thought, Johan keeps his gaze on the boy with the binoculars. Suddenly he sees him startled and flinch backwards, up against his mates. At that moment they hear a loud bang. It is the sound of glass shattering against the side of the ship. The boys take frightened cover.

Goo drips off the bow.

'Goddamn, what is that?'

Another blow, a little farther away.

'Paint, it's paint. A bottle of paint.'

Johan crawls to the tip of the bow and looks carefully through one of the anchor holes.

'They are protesters, in a sloop,' he shouts.

Pats! A third bottle bangs against the hard steel of the boat.

Johan sees about ten meters below him a sloop with a group-you people his own age. They are holding up banners. One of them starts shouting, "Moor-the-wards! Moor-the-wards!

Immediately the whole group begins to chant along. There is no escape from the piercing noise. Fanatically, tarpaulins are waved back and forth on which is written in red and black paint: 'murderers! Nazis!'

One protester catches sight of Johan spying on them through the an- kergat.

'Hey, dirty Nazi! What are you sneaking peeks over there!'

When Johan pulls his head back and looks through the next an- kergat, he sees that there are more sloops floating around.

A bottle of paint smashes right next to his head. His face is covered and he feels shards of glass on his neck. Dazed, he lowers himself onto the deck.

War criminals! Dirty bastards! How dare you still come home!'

John's hand instinctively grabs for his weapon, but he grabs the air. Slowly he wipes the paint from his eyes.

Confusion and despondency beset him. How did he ever think he could erase one war by stepping into another?

WELCOME TO INDIA

DUTCH GO HOME!

Jakarta, March 1946.

Johan stands at the ship's edge, docked in Jakarta harbor. The gangplank is almost unrolled and the young, white-skinned soldiers are crowding each other to leave the ship. Johan is among the first batch of volunteers who signed up for the liberation of the Dutch empire. For this moment, the 3,500 soldiers sailed on this boat for a month. Saying goodbye to his mother at the bus station in Arcen feels like a memory from a past life.

Leaning on the board edge, he thinks back to the past few weeks. After Prince Bernhard had bid farewell to the troops in England, they had sailed past places that for his ancestors were nothing more than fairy-tale names in adventure books. Gibraltar. Algiers, with its sailing merchants. The coast of Tunisia. Port Said. Suez. On board, he took Malay lessons and attended church services.

Tirelessly, the colossal ship had propelled the boys forward. Blood heat and storms alternated. They played dice and cards on deck. And each time he found himself looking at the "map of the Dutch East Indies," which was suspended on the upper deck. In the center of Jakarta was a picture of the leader of the Indonesian terrorists pasted with the text: 'Soekarno, we are coming to get you.'

After Aden, the sea became wider and the weather more turbulent. During a church service on the upper deck, the mission chalice nearly blew overboard. Most of the boys wrote adrift letters about the precarious conditions on board.

Johan didn't, he had no one to write to.

The toilets were permanently broken; many boys preferred to do their needs overboard. Passing the equator, one of them fell into the sea and drowned. The ship slowed down, a search party was set up. A day later, Johan held his breath when the

body of the dead was entrusted to the sea with a splash. After nearly three weeks of sailing, the coast of Ceylon became equally visible. Sharks made swimming impossible. From time to time, news about the situation in the East Indies sounded from the loudspeakers of the ship's radio station "Het Kraaiennest": Surabaya was said to be in Sukarno's hands. On all decks, loud boos rang out from countless throats. At the incoming va-
running from the port of Jakarta, they spontaneously sang the national anthem.

Johan is startled out of his daydream by excited shouts. The ramp gate swings open. He walks down the boat, searching and looking around, only now feeling how brightly the sun burns on his white Dutch skin.

On the wharf, soldiers and *coolies* are busy transporting goods from the ship. A small gamelan orchestra is playing the Wilhelmus. It sounds lifeless to his ears, very different from earlier on the ship. At the bottom of the gangplank, a soldier stands and thrusts a pack of cigarettes into his hand.

Welcome to India. Welcome buddy!

Johan lets himself get carried away with the great flow and ends up at a row of tables with card indexes behind which soldiers are sitting. With a handkerchief, he wipes the sweat from his forehead and looks at the pack of cigarettes he has just received. Highway is written on it.

'Homesick,' he hears someone say behind him.

He turns and sees a boy of about eighteen standing there, with dark hair and the same stature as himself.

'What?'

'Homesickness.'

Johan looks at him non-comprehendingly. 'Who is homesick, me or you?'

The boy laughs.

'That's what they call those cigarettes here. The cook on board smoked them too. Heimwee cigarettes.'

Johan looks at the package again and grins. As the line shifts up- the boy holds out his hand.

'Mattias, nice to meet you.'

'Johan.'

'I'm from Leiden. What about you?'

'From Arcen. That's in northern Limburg, near Venlo.'

'Go on. There was good fighting there, it was full of those gore
nsbers.'

Well, Johan thinks to himself, he's pretty well informed. Fortunately, he doesn't have to respond, because it's his turn. He nods to Mattias, turns around and allows himself to be questioned by another soldier.

'Name.'

'Johan Leonard Maria de Vries, sir.'

'Number and part.'

'T-brigade, 4th regiment, Driebergen, sir. Date
of birth.'

'July 6, 1928, sir.'

'You're one of the youngest here.'

Johan relaxed and said, 'Learned young is done old, my
grandfather used to say that.'

The administrator squints his eyes. 'And you know what my
grandfather used to say? That you shouldn't keep goddamn other
people off work with those stories about your retarded grandfather.
'Are you finished De Vries?'

'Yes, sir. Johan bats his eyes.

'You go to Semarang, B division. Report to counter 15 for verde- re
equipment.'

Johan salutes to the soldier, but he is already looking at Mattias.

It is very busy on the quay. Johan makes his way through the
crowd of people, looking for counter 15. Behind the counters are
three open trucks with soldiers on them, throwing clothing
packages down.

'Tropical outfit. Shorts, long pants, two shirts, one short-
sleeved. Shoes. Two signatures at the cross.'

A tanned military man of somewhere in his twenties
punctuates everything, making sure it's all right.

'So, where are you going?' asks Mattias, who by now is standing behind Johan again.

'Semarang.'

'Me too. That does seem to be a quiet place.'

'Oh yes, as long as it's not too quiet,' says Johan. He can't hide his disappointment.

When the cart passes by and they want to throw their old clothes in it, a pot-bellied boy standing a little further away tries to pull their to- thought.

'Psst... don't throw your pants in there.'

Johan looks at him in surprise.

'You have to keep all your clothes. Semarang right? There's a tailor there who, for a pack of cigarettes, will turn your long pants into two shorts. And believe me, with this heat you're still going to need them.'

'How can you be so sure?'

'My brother has been in Semarang for months. He was part of the first batch.'

The soldier holds out his hand. 'Werner.'

Johan introduces himself and puts his old pants in his duffel bag.

Accompanied by Werner and Mattias, he walks to another shed, which is filled from bottom to top with wooden boxes. After naming their names, they are handed a rifle there.

'Lee-Enfield. Proven quality.'

The soldier adds two magazines and five boxes of cartridges. Then he throws three booklets on the table. Johan reads the titles: *Handbook Indonesia*, *Regulations for the conduct of the army* and *Combating venereal diseases*.

Tropical Handbooks. Read from front to back and know every letter. That reduces the chances of an early one-way ticket home in a wooden suit. Signature here and here. Read through them well, boys. Especially that last booklet. Condoms are expensive, so the best advice is: keep your eyes open and your fly closed! Next!

An hour later, Johan sits with hundreds of other soldiers in a gro- te shed. When a few soldiers walk onto the stage, the

it immediately goes silent. Everyone stands up. An elderly soldier with a slight belly walks up to the microphone and salutes the room. In one motion, the entire room salutes.

'At ease!

The boys sit down.

'My name is Major Penders. On behalf of Her Royal Highness Queen Wilhelmina, I welcome you to the East Indies.'

Briefly a loud cheer rises, then the room waits tensely for what is to come.

I also want to thank you on behalf of the brave Dutch people, who were left at home after five hard years under the Krauts and are currently working hard to get our country back on track. Many of you have had a long journey, full of inconveniences. I am glad you have arrived, because a great task awaits you here. A task whose fulfillment will make our country proud: the liberation of our Dutch East Indies. Many of you are here for the first time, but you will find that you will soon feel at home here. And that is because Insulinde and the Netherlands are one.'

A loud cheer rises.

'You are given the fine task of liberating this beautiful continent. Naive people will say that the Indies have already been liberated. After all, Japan has capitulated. But you know better. In Europe we kicked out the Nazis, but here they are still walking freely. The Jap planted his poisonous ideas in the heads of innocent Indonesians. The benevolent Indonesian is being ruined with ideas of self-government.'

Johan looks around. Hundreds of soldiers watch the major intently.

'A smart Indonesian would understand that his country needs at least another hundred years to stand completely on its own feet. But these so-called independence fighters are only sowing death and destruction. Their only method is terror. They not only target the defenseless Dutch in the camps. They also kill each other. And The Hague, meanwhile, does nothing but talk and talk.'

Major Penders waits a moment and looks around the room.

'But you ... you are going to erase that shame. And starting today.

With your coming, the tide will turn. You will help separate good from evil. You will help separate the malevolent Indonesian from the benevolent farmer plowing his rice field in peace. You will be the instrument with which we guide a small but hard-nosed segment of the population back to the right path. You will help correct the thinking error of the Indonesian.'

Hundreds of soldiers' faces absorb the words, which feel like the beginning of a new era. Penders lets another short silence fall.

'I welcome your coming. You do not belong to a warring people, but are the bringer of peace and security. You are going to have great times ahead. You will learn much. You will know setbacks. Refrain from actions that cannot stand the test of criticism. Know that your comrades, your commanders, your Queen and God will guard you on your path. Long live the Kingdom and long live the Konin-gin!

Loud cheers among the boys. Slides are shown of Dutch soldiers giving medical aid and distributing food to children in *kampongs*. Johan looks at Mattias and nods at him.

TITS LIKE TANGERINES

Mattias gives Johan a poke.

"Look at that, right there!"

They ride in a convoy of three open trucks down a bumpy road, and the deep potholes require them to hold on with both hands to keep from being thrown out of the car. It looks like the landscape has been on fire. Broken buildings and burned-out army jeeps pass before their eyes. At an intersection, they slow down. Along the side of the road stands an elderly man, with whom Johan tries to make eye contact. But the man turns his eyes away and Johan cannot make out anything from the wrinkled face.

'There, on that fence!'

'dutch go home!' reads Johan in blood-red letters.

'And a little further on: indonesia never again the life-blood of

any nation! 'And: 'hey Dutch soldier, what are you actually dying for?'

The boy next to Mattias grabs his jacket and offers cigarettes.

Original Lucky Strikes! Where did you get those?'

The soldier holds out his hand: 'Well... I know someone who knows someone in the port of Jakarta. One pack costs two fifty. Three for five guilders.'

The boys light a cigarette.

The soldier continues in a strong Amsterdam accent: 'Hey Johnny Weissmuller, a big guy like you must be very hungry, right? 'He lifts a backpack and shows a couple of cans of American corned beef. 'Get it? 'Two cans for a guilder....'

Werner shakes his head.

'Just wait, after two months of eating nothing but rice you'll squeak differently. And the library is just open, too. 'The soldier shows a magazine with a naked American girl on it.

The trucks travel over a bridge whose beams are all loose on the span. The vibrations demand the maximum from the suspension. Left and right, children jump off the bridge into the ri- four.

Werner, meanwhile, stood up and held on to a steel truss of the cargo box. 'Not bad after all, for a farmer's son from Gorssel. Who would have thought! Until three months ago I had never been out of our village.'

Johan and Mattias have to laugh.

'Otherwise, I would have been shoveling manure out of the barn by now,' Werner says.

'Go ahead,' says Johan, 'a man of the world!'

Now Mattias is taking a stab at it. "I signed up for the army two days after the liberation. I wanted to march with the Americans to Berlin and drive into that city in a tank while we were shooting at the last remaining Nazis. Instead, I heard nothing at first for six months, until I got a letter saying I was needed here. By now I should have been in the Führer's damn bed next to a Tyrolean girl with such big breasts.'

The boys laugh.

'I can tell you right now that you can find a lot in this country,' Werner intervenes, but a girl with big breasts is not among them. My brother says all the chicks here are two peas high, with ties as big as tangerines.'

"Well, I do like tangerines," says the soldier with the Amsterdam accent.

With his hands he gestures as if he is holding small breasts. There is laughter in the box. Johan also laughs along.

Suddenly, Werner jumps up. He gets on the bench and shouts in the air, 'We're coming to get you, dirty bastards!' Johan looks up at this crazy farmer from Gelderland. He likes him. As Werner launches his battle cry once more, more boys in the wagon stand up and shout along. Johan and Mattias. 'We're coming to get you, dirty bastards!'

'Andne ... we're coming to eat all your tangerines!'" adds the Amsterdammer. He holds out his hand: Charlie. Sjaak Rondhuis is actually my name, but everyone calls me Charlie.'

After hours of driving, they approach the military camp. Johan sees a high raised fence with barbed wire. The sentries look stern and check wagon by wagon. When the gate opens and the truck drives in, Johan feeds his eyes. Immediately behind the gate are large signs with instructions on what to do if the camp is attacked. The truck stops at a barracks and the boys jump off.

'Gay boy!

A sturdy boy comes running toward them, shouting loudly. His tanned skin betrays that he has been in India for some time.

'Gay boy!

Werner smiles and quickens his stride. Tinus! 'Tinus, man, how did you get here?'

They immediately begin to frolic.

Johan and Mattias laugh. When Werner finally lies on the ground, Tinus sits on him triumphantly.

The barracks are busy. People are building additional barracks and a group of soldiers are running laps around the square. Tinus leads the way. 'You are in Barracks 4, that thing is still completely new. You should be happy with Barracks 4, because when I came here there was nothing and we could start with a roof over building our heads. Those pussyboys had demolished everything.'

Johan takes in the terrain. Small groups are dragging crates, doing repair work, writing letters. Further on, there is shooting. He hears English-speaking commanders giving instructions on rope climbing. Clothes are washed in old oil drums.

'Other than that, three things are important. One is shitting. Back here on the left are the latrines. If you have to shit, do it before ten in the morning. In the afternoon it is sometimes fifty degrees in those shithouses. Some guys have already gone off their sticks and woken up with their heads in shit. Another option is to go outside the compound into the bushes, but then again you run the risk of being stabbed in the ass by a *pelopper*. Seems to have happened to a soldier just outside Priok. They found his body two days later, headless but with a *kris* fifteen centimeters deep in his ass. His pants were still on his knees. How do you find those? Other danger is that the guard thinks you're a *rampokker* and mows your head off with a Bren. Only advantage of that is that you'll never have to poop again.'

'It's already fucking dangerous to just shit in this country,' Charlie says.

'Absolutely. Second thing is washing. Twice a day. Otherwise you'll have rashes and worms everywhere in no time. Our white bodies are not made for these temperatures. Well, at least not to work hard in them. Did Werner tip you off about shorts?'

The boys nod.

'Top. The uniforms here are a hotchpotch of second-hand scraps. There would even be German stuff among them with the bullet holes still in them. And some jackets were made for Scottish winters.'

Tinus lets a silence fall, and when he has his full attention, he says, "But the third thing is the most important thing of all: don't trust anyone here. Those blacks here would rather lose us than be rich. Thanking us for coming here to solve their problems? Not at all. They stand in front of their house smiling at you as you walk by, but as soon as you are out of sight they continue working on the bomb they put under your jeep at night."

Johan takes everything in well. On the center court are two guns of considerable caliber. The barrels stand straight up and die like poles between which a volleyball net is stretched. A group of sweaty soldiers is playing a game.

Johan looks at it in amazement. "Hey, are those guns sometimes flak anti-aircraft?"

"Someone here has done their homework," says Tinus.

"Are those things broken?"

"No way, nothing wrong with it. Top material, rock solid Nazi stuff. The gentlemen from The Hague gave it to us on the boat. Only we didn't need them at all."

Johan looks at Tinus in amazement.

Because here we are fighting peasants with machetes and mid-century carbines. All we can shoot out of the air is the arrogant idea that these monkeys can govern this country by themselves."

Tinus turns to the group and says in the same breath: "Ver- geet everything, really everything you have learned so far. It is very different from what you have been told by the army information. Not like in the booklets."

Johan is full of questions, but keeps his mouth shut.

RESISTANCE FIGHTERS HAVE FIRST CHOICE

It is six o'clock in the evening and already almost dark. The Indian scheme- ring falls in early. The boys search for their sleeping places. At four empty seats next to each other, they throw their duffel bags on the ground.

"Ladies, these beds are reserved. So beat it!"

Johan looks up. A gruff-looking fellow, with three follies around him, stands before him.

'Who says that?' asks Mattias.

'I say that, Eddy is the name. Resistance members have first choice here.'

Johan clamped his jaws together. Would it show on him? Eddy points to the three stripes on his sleeve. 'What does this mean, ladies'

'Um... three stripes, what's that again? I lost it completely for a moment.' Charlie said slowly.

Johan looks at Charlie thoughtfully, lets out a silence, then turns his gaze to Eddy, "At least it doesn't mean you get to just pick a bed. Let alone that you have to act like a horse's asshole.'

Eddy and his helpers now come to stand menacingly around the newcomers. 'I'll give you exactly five more seconds to fuck off. Two of his henchmen are already rolling up their sleeves.

Werner sits on the edge of a bed and slowly turns his head toward Eddy.

'Comrade, you'd better walk on if you and your girlfriend of- night still want to sleep under the same blanket.'

Eddy squeezes his eyes together. 'Get up and say that again. Come on!

Somewhat annoyed, Werner stands up. He is a head taller than Eddy.

'I said, you better walk on if you and your girlfriend of- night still want to sleep under the same blanket.'

Johan looks hopefully at Werner. Some pushing and pulling ensues. Eddy wants to lash out at Johan, but misses.

At that moment, Camp Commander Mulder and his adjutant, Lieutenant Hartman, enter the room. The soldiers immediately stand at attention and salute.

'Gentlemen, there is no fighting here. You've had a long day, so I'll keep it short. Welcome to camp Matjan Liar. This is a new camp, therefore a clean camp, and I want it to stay that way. Just because India is a dirty country doesn't mean we have to live in it dirty. Avondschaft is at nineteen in a moment. After that there is

still free time until twenty-one o'clock and then the lights go out. Good sleep is much needed tonight, because tomorrow morning jul- lie will begin patrols in three groups. These patrols are very important because they reassure the local population: we are here to protect them and rebuild the country together with them.'

From a side door, a huge crate is dragged in. Lieutenant Hartman takes the floor. 'Prince Bernhard personally saw to it that your mail would arrive by plane this morning. Don't get used to that.'

Mulder and Hartman salute tightly and leave the room. A sol- date throws open the lid of the mailbox and looks at Werner.

'The Fall, Werner. 'A package of letters lands on Werner's bed.

Cohen. 'A stack of letters for Mattias.

Reluctantly, Johan mentions his last name.

The post soldier searches in vain through the stacks. 'Maybe sent to the wrong camp, it happens often,'the sol- date says. Johan arranges his clothes and is silent.

The dining hall is in the middle of the camp grounds. It is really nothing more than a roof on stilts - a place to gather, a *kumpulan*.

Night has fallen and the boys sit facing each other at four long tables. In front of them are untouched plates With nasi goreng. Werner looks at it with a disdainful expression.

'Are we going to have this for seven hundred days?'

'Shhh!

A man at the head of the first table clears his throat and takes the floor. Under his green army jacket, the white collar of a preacher is visible. 'Boys, I am your chaplain here. My name is Janssen. Because our mission is protected by God, I will lead in prayer every meal.'


That too,' Werner whispers in Johan's ear.

Who smiles, but still continues to listen to the chaplain.

He folds his hands and closes his eyes.

'Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven....'

Slowly Johan opens his eyes. Without moving his head, he turns his eyes. He sees dozens of bowed heads. Here sit




them then, with hundreds of soldiers in a land that is foreign to everyone. What do they know about this wonderful land? And now they sit here praying, as if they were at home. In uniform!

Could he have thought this a year ago? Back then, his future was still a black hole. But anything is better than being at home with mother. Anything is also better than the obligatory weekly visit to his father. Every week those guards with their disapproving looks. Every week the search for words. The endless waiting for father's case to be heard.

'Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' And so we stand here today before You and ask You for strength for the task we have been given and accepted as Christians. Amen.'

Johan let his thoughts go over the words. Has he been given a task? From whom then? No, it is he himself who has taken on this task: oww, war volunteer. His own choice. Clean ship. From now on, no God, no father will tell him how the world works.







The Special Forces Depot in South Celebes,
Pete Hidskes, bottom row, second from right, probably January 1947.





Captain Westerling (center) among senior commanders at the conclusion of operations in South Celebes. Camp Matoanging, March 3, 1947.





Cemetery and memorial Galung Lombok, where at least 364 people were indiscriminately shot on Feb. 1, 1947. Madjene, Sulawesi.





Author in conversation with Pak Adam. He was nine years old when both his parents were shot dead in front of his eyes. Madjene, Sulawesi, 2018.