Black Sun
Red Moon

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A Novel of Java

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Seventh Citadel

Black Sun, Red Moon: A Novel of Java

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Translation of the Imperial Rescript announcing acceptance of the terms offered to Japan at the Potsdam Conference quoted from *Reports of General MacArthur, Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area. Volume II, Part II.* Washington, DC, 1966.

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Come to Java, Official Tourist Office, Weltevreden, 1923.

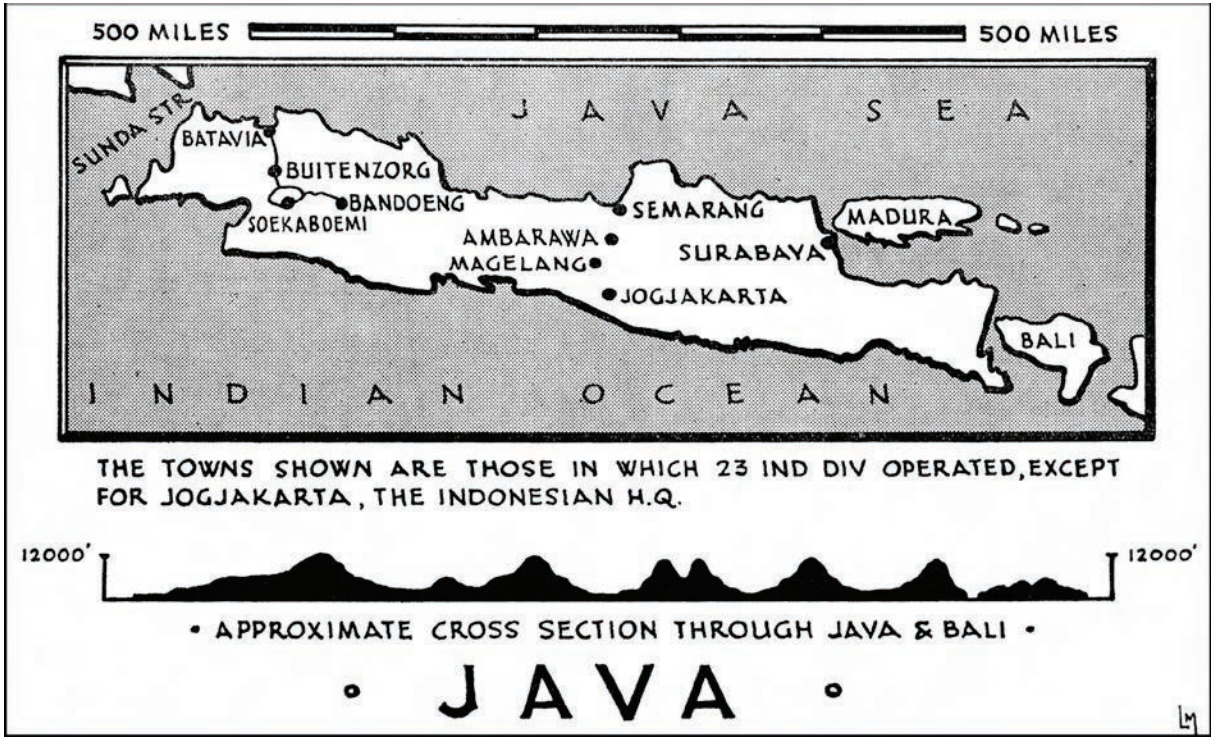
Wirid references are from *Wirid: The Mystical Teachings of the Eight Saints* by Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita; translated from the Javanese by M. Mansur Medeiros. Jawi Kandha/Albert Rusche & Co., Surakata, 1908.

For my parents;
Recipients of the General Service
Medal, 1945-46 with
Clasp for 'South-East Asia';
and
Two Gentlemen of Tokyo,
Who made me welcome.

Names of Characters

Historical fiction often requires reference to actual people and events to give context. Thus the suggestion of someone other than Lord Louis Mountbatten as the head of South-East Asia Command (SEAC) would be odd, so in my story Mountbatten is given (brief) dialogue with a mixture of both historical and fictional characters. In the same way, Sukarno and Dr Mohammed Hatta, key figures in Indonesian history, are not disguised and are given dialogue. My guideline for changing or disguising characters in 'supporting roles' was if there was a danger of taking an historical character beyond a 'reasonable assumption' of dialogue. For example, the characters of Dutch colonial and military officers invented here are creative combinations of dozens of officials whose comments and actions are on record. Other changes were made reluctantly. Official files are full of the names of many men whose service and deeds deserve to be better known. Yet attempts to honour (or vilify) them by using their real names in a work of fiction risk their actions being inaccurately depicted. Most of the names used in this story are therefore disguised.

I also confess to the creation and 'importation' of names that are easier for a native speaker of English to read. In the case of Japanese names, many were chosen randomly from friends and acquaintances. Indonesian names were more problematic, since many Javanese and Sumatrans have only one name, often rather long. Consequently, I invented names. In so doing, unintended syllabic combinations might have occurred. Similarly, relatively few Indian and Dutch names are familiar to, or can be read easily by, the non-native speaker. There were many instances of surname duplication among the 80,000 Dutch and Eurasians interned in camps in Java. For this reason I also used names of Dutch acquaintances, names I read in the KLM Airlines in-flight magazine, and also the Amsterdam and Maastricht telephone directories. I also created combinations of given and family names in memoirs of wartime Java. Fairly late on in the writing I stumbled upon a photograph album of a family by the name of van Damme (a not uncommon Dutch surname) living in Surabaya in the 1930s. I decided, however, not to change the names of my characters because of this coincidence.


500 MILES
500 MILES
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SUNDA STR.
BATAVIA
BUITENZORG
BANDOENG
SOEKABOEMI
SEMARANG
MADURA
AMBARAWA
MAGELANG
SURABAYA
JOGJAKARTA
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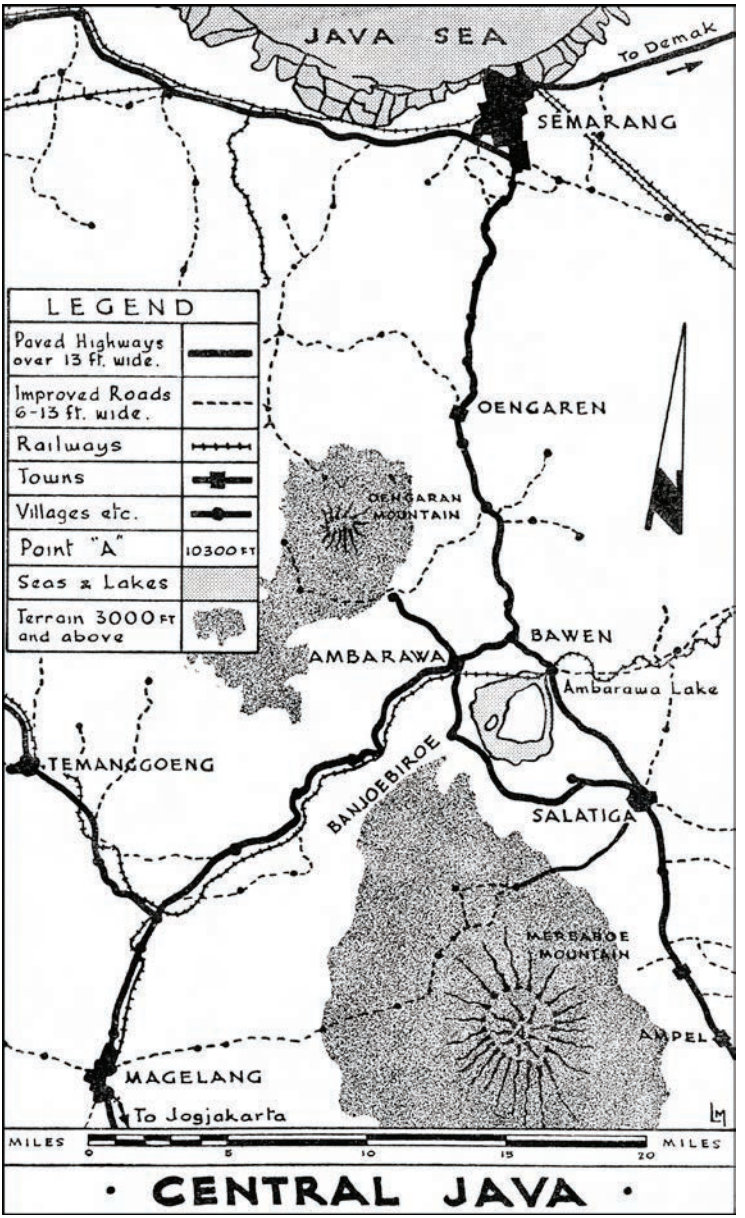
I N D I A N O C E A N
THE TOWNS SHOWN ARE THOSE IN WHICH 23 IND DIV OPERATED, EXCEPT FOR JOGJAKARTA, THE INDONESIAN H.Q.
12000'
12000'
• APPROXIMATE CROSS SECTION THROUGH JAVA & BALI •
• JAVA •



· CENTRAL JAVA ·

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal,
And, lo, there was a great earthquake;
And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,
And the moon became as blood…

Revelation 6:12
The Geneva Bible, 1599.

Prologue

Burma, April 1943

Alun MacDonald hated the Chindwin River because he knew that when he came to cross it the Japanese would try to kill him. Sighing, he leant back against the trunk of the large Indian laurel tree that had been supporting him for several minutes. He was tired and dejected. It was four o'clock in the morning but the heat was already building. Soon, though, the monsoon would break and it would get even worse. He would be trudging around knee-deep in mud, risking trench-foot. As if malaria, typhoid and dysentery were not enough, there were poisonous cobras and kraits, ants the size of a sixpence and spiders as large as soup plates.

Ten yards from his position ran the great river. It was the widest he had ever seen but he knew that beyond the Chindwin, deep in Japanese-held territory, was the Irrawaddy, which was even bigger. Everything about Burma seemed big: its vast, murky rivers; dark, towering teak trees and seemingly endless scrub vegetation. A few days before, from the crest of the jungle-covered hills now a few miles to his rear, he had glimpsed nothing but a rolling monotony of green that swept onwards as far as some low, ragged hills on the horizon.

Again he scanned the dark canopy of foliage above him, hoping for a sign of the dawn that would signal the end of his penance. All he could see was cloud or the mist that rolled across the surface of the river. In truth, he could not discern

where mist ended and cloud began. His ears were filled with the nagging whine of mosquitoes. He jerked his head and blew up sharply over his face to try to keep the tenacious insects from his nose and eyes. Pieces of fine mesh cut from a mosquito net were wrapped around his hat and hands. It was not regulation issue but he didn't care. As far as he was concerned, if the Army could set the rules for the war against the Japanese, he could set his own for his smaller, constant and frustrating battle against the insects that thrived in the vast, sub-tropical compost heap that was Burma.

'Bastard mozzies! Bastard Burma!' he hissed.

On his last night 'stag', he had finished his watch with thirty-four bites on his face. That wasn't anywhere near to the record held by his friend, Archie Ferguson. One night a weary Archie had come off stag and had nodded off after going to the latrine. One hundred and three bites and a severe bout of malaria later, 'Archie's Arse' was already legend in the 1st Battalion Seaforth Highlanders.

A distinct but by now familiar splash came from the river. For the first two hours of his watch, every jumping fish had sent him rushing for cover ready to jerk on the log-line that would alert the next sentry along the Seaforths' defensive perimeter. His Lee-Enfield rifle raised, he had waited tensely for the Japanese patrol he imagined was crossing the river. His nervousness had left him exhausted. Now the splashes barely registered and the line was a few feet away from him, draped over a bush. His rifle stock rested on the ground in front of him, and he held the barrel with both hands. He felt himself falling asleep but the pinch of another insect bite roused him. Wearily he pushed away from the tree and stretched in an attempt to keep awake. He scratched absent-mindedly at a louse on his scalp. Time for another cigarette, he told himself. It would at least help keep the mosquitoes away. He should have had company but the battalion was stretched with many

men down with malaria, despite the daily dose of mepacrine that had given their skin a yellow tinge.

Heat, bites, sores, and solitude were not MacDonald's only complaints. Four weeks before he had been one of a hundred men who had gone down with dysentery. For almost a week he hadn't dared move more than a few yards from a latrine. Extra ones had been dug but queues had still been too long and often the stricken Seaforths had no option but to relieve themselves where they stood. Flies had swarmed and feasted as the mess and stench was tramped all over the camp. Before long, infection had claimed the rest of the battalion. Eventually medical officers from Field Hygiene had ordered a new camp set up a mile away and then burnt their uniforms and underwear. After that episode MacDonald had promised himself that when he got home he would never leave Scotland and flushing lavatories again.

Above him he noticed a slight greying above the treetops. Dawn was not far off. At last, he thought, even though it meant the sun would bring the oppressive, sticky heat.

'Not long, now, Mac lad,' he said aloud to himself.

Idly, he glanced down at his boots. Protruding from a lace hole was what looked like a short piece of black string. He bent quickly, catching the leech and squeezing it hard between his finger and thumb trying to burst it.

'Bastard leeches!' He snarled, threw it down and stamped on it. At least he had seen that one, he thought. Instinctively he brushed the backs of his trousers.

If he were lucky he'd get two hours sleep before breakfast. Night stag always left him miserable, he thought. But guarding this place! The top brass had to be joking. As far as he was concerned, if the Japs wanted this godforsaken greenhouse they were welcome to it! After all, the bloody Burmese weren't making the British feel welcome. Apart from the hill tribes, most of them had sided with the Japanese after a quick

promise of independence. Ungrateful sods! Absentmindedly he kicked at a twig then farted loudly. His contempt jumped effortlessly to the generals who had ordered the Seaforths to the banks of the Chindwin. Mac had no doubts they were safe, clean and over-fed back in India. 'Wankers!' he spat vehemently.

'Who's that then?'

Mac jumped, bringing his Lee Enfield rifle around. Before he could make half a turn a slim rattan cane forced the barrel downwards. A mouth was at his ear and a hand was pressing lightly on his shoulder.

'Easy there, I'm on your side!' The voice was a good-humoured whisper. Mac stood stock-still, his face ashen, staring at a young officer.

'Sorry to make you jump like that! I'm Lt Miller, Princess Mary's Own. Relax; the thing is we've got a couple of chaps coming back across the river from a "tiger patrol". We don't want you taking a pot shot.'

Mac felt a bit giddy. Christ! If it had been a Jap…. Miller stepped away, blending into the bushes.

'It took me a while to find you until I heard and then, well, smelt the beans!' Miller chortled. 'Then you talked to yourself. That really marked your spot. Good job I'm not Johnny Jap!'

'Yes, Sir,' Mac said nervously. He fumbled for his tin of cigarettes wondering if Miller was enjoying his discomfort. Again the shadowy figure admonished him.

'I wouldn't light up just yet. The mist is lifting and there might be snipers about.'

Mac glanced towards the river. A narrow sandbar was now visible in the mass of grey water. He decided the cigarette could wait. He moved nearer to Miller. His mouth was dry.

'Right, Sir. Blimey! I never heard you—I can hardly see a thing!'

'Hmm,' replied Miller preoccupied. He raised an arm and signalled briefly into the bushes over Mac's left shoulder.

Mac glanced quickly behind him but saw no one.

'Should be a doddle,' Miller went on encouragingly. 'But if the Nips open up, give covering fire but not to the left of that sandbar. Remember, you've no foxhole, so change position after each shot. They'll be watching for muzzle flash. Let's hope they haven't rumbled our chaps and try a raid themselves!'

Mac was about to ask what he should do if he did see Japanese when a shrill bird-call sounded from further up the riverbank. Miller gave another quick signal then merged with the bushes.

'Oh shite!' Mac moaned, feeling very alone. Suddenly his hands felt numb and he squeezed his rifle stock to try and increase the blood flow to his fingers. He waited, his stifled breath roaring in his ears.

When the bird-call came again it was much closer, almost directly opposite him on the river. Mac's heart began to race. Miller had said the Japs might try something. What if they knew the signals and the crossing place…?

Fifteen yards out into the river the mist was still a dense, grey wall. Mac's eyes began to play tricks on him. Several times he was convinced he saw wading Japanese soldiers only for the shapes to dissolve into swirls. 'Steady now,' he whispered trying to calm himself.

Over to his left he thought he saw something dark amidst the grey, moving very slowly, against the current. Mac raised his rifle to his shoulder praying it was only a water buffalo. Nervous sentries, more attuned to the nocturnal sounds of urban Glasgow, had shot several of the unfortunate beasts.

As the lower mist thinned to wispy fingers he saw it was not an animal but a small rubber boat. Two paddles were dipping noiselessly, leaving barely a ripple. He could not see

the paddlers. A gun barrel was protruding over the boat's front but to his dismay he could not tell if it were a British Lee-Enfield or a Japanese Arisaka.

Gradually the boat drew nearer and he made out two small, hunched figures in dark, soaked shirts. Their heads were still hidden in the mist. Furiously Mac tried to remember the pocket placements on Japanese field dress. His mind was a blank.

Then the men stopped paddling and the boat's momentum stalled as though it were unwilling to leave the clinging protection of the mist. Mac swallowed hard. Wiry brown arms and slender hands held the paddles.

A pang of dread shot through him as he realised he had left the log-line out of reach. He had to warn the others! Then he realised a shot would do just that. Idiot! He told himself to calm down and take his cue from Miller. But what if Miller couldn't see them? What if more Japs had already landed downstream and were closing in? His right biceps trembled and he pulled the rifle stock more firmly into his shoulder.

For a few seconds more the boat drifted and then the paddles began dipping once again. As it came closer the Asian features of two men became clear.

Mac mouthed a silent 'Fuck!' Bile rose to the back of his mouth at the thought of a human target. His throat burned as he swallowed. Though he had never seen action he had been well drilled. The wooden stock felt solid against his chest. He eased the safety catch forward. Then slowly and carefully he took the slack out of the trigger. The man's chest filled his front and rear sights. It was an easy, certain shot.

'I'll have you, Tojo!' Mac croaked softly. The smell of gun oil filled his nose. He exhaled and began the final squeeze. Just then the paddler's head dipped and he saw the distinctive 14th Army slouch hat.

Mac flicked his finger away from the trigger, his stomach churning. Jesus, I nearly shot one of ours! Why didn't Miller tell him they were Gurkhas! He lowered his rifle from his trembling shoulders.

Now the boat was moving speedily towards the shelter of the sandbar. The Gurkha in the front was staring directly at Mac's position. As the bird-call sounded again he looked away, then the two men hopped out and waded quickly ashore. In a moment they were lost in the dense foliage.

Mac inhaled deeply. A clammy, cold sweat soaked his back.

Slight movements in the bushes to his left announced the approach of Miller and the Gurkhas. There were six in all.

'A "milk run", as the RAF boys like to say,' Miller chortled. 'What's your name?'

'MacDonald, Sir.' He looked sheepishly at the Gurkhas. 'Rather them than me.'

Miller smiled and nodded. 'Well done, MacDonald. By the way, Lance-Naik Rai here's worried you've got a touch of malaria. He saw your rifle shaking. You do look a bit pale. Perhaps you should see your Doc?'

Embarrassed, Mac turned to look at the man he had very nearly shot.

Rai was short and wiry, not much over five feet tall. His arms were dotted with leeches yet he seemed oblivious to any discomfort. He grinned at Mac who towered above him. '*Shabash,* Jock!'—Bravo!

Mac managed a nod.

Miller spoke quickly to Rai. 'Let's see what you got.'

Rai squatted and Miller did the same. With Mac and the others looking on, Rai, still grinning, delved inside his shirt and brought out a waterproof pouch. He tipped out some frayed and dark-stained pieces of cloth.

Mac realised they were Japanese rank badges and that the stains were blood. He looked at the Gurkha with even more respect. There were also documents. Miller flicked through them, speaking with Rai in Urdu. 'Good show! You can show me their positions later over a brew.'

The Gurkhas straightened and gave Miller textbook salutes that he returned equally smartly. Rai and the others moved off. In seconds they had disappeared.

'He's the best we've got at *shikar*,' Miller said proudly.

Mac frowned. 'Sir?'

'It means "the hunt".'

Behind them the loud swishing of branches, swearing and heavy footfalls announced the approach of Archie Ferguson, who was Mac's relief.

'Mac, where the fuck are you?'

'Password?' Mac challenged half-heartedly.

'Och, yer bugger! I've forgotten the bloody password!'

After the whispers of Miller and the Gurkhas the words sounded blaring. 'Over here,' replied Mac, trying to keep his voice down.

Miller shot him a reproachful look then he, too, was gone.

'Hurry up, Arch. For God's sake keep quiet!' He really needed a cigarette.

Two days later and to his utter dismay, Mac was in midstream on the Chindwin, trying to keep to a steady paddling rhythm with Archie. They were both loaded with kit in a two-man boat and Archie was splashing him with every stroke.

The crossing was going at a snail's pace and, worse, the morning mist was lifting quickly. Visibility was already way too good for Mac's liking. Safety, a sloping, sandy bank, was still a good thirty-five yards away. Any second now, he thought grimly, and the 'Woodpeckers'—the Japanese Nambu heavy

machine guns—were sure to open up. Caught in the open, he and Archie would be sitting ducks.

In the stillness, a half-stifled cough from behind them sounded like a shot. Mac jumped. Archie swore softly and began paddling faster.

Mac fixed his gaze on his paddle. Time seemed to stand still until suddenly a helping hand was pulling the boat ashore. He rushed up the bank, bent double behind Archie and sank down panting. Back on the river a line of rubber and canvas boats of various sizes was snaking out of the mist.

Mac's platoon was on a joint patrol with the Gurkhas, with Miller as the officer in command. He had been introduced to the Seaforths the night before. Miller's news that a few months previously a British force of three hundred jungle commandos had crossed the Chindwin and moved deep behind enemy lines had surprised, and cheered, them all.

According to Miller, the commandos, called Chindits, had tried to cut the Mandalay railway and disrupt the Japanese lines of communication. It was the first time since the retreat from Burma that any infantry attack had been made on the Japanese. But all was not going well.

'They are in a bit of a spot,' Miller had told them. 'They've had some bad run-ins with the Japs and have been split into small groups. Now they are heading home. Some have already made it but the Japs have got their backs up and have sent their 18th Division after those still on the other side of the river. The 18th was at Singapore….'

Miller had let the last word hang for effect. The quick fall of the 'Fortress City' had been a huge, embarrassing shock to the British.

'These Chindits are in a sorry state and need a bit of help,' Miller had continued. 'They've been short of food and medicines. What's required is a diversion to allow them to cross the river up stream before the net closes. There are

enemy observation posts nearby, so the idea is that we give them something to report in this area. At Tonmakeng there are five hundred Japs. We want to keep them distracted.'

That night Mac had hardly slept a wink. But the reality was worse than he had even imagined. Progress through the dense vegetation on the far bank was painfully slow. Razor-sharp leaves and spines swiped them at every step. Steaming heat and ferocious flies adding to their overall misery. They slid repeatedly in piles of elephant dung or tripped on tree roots, exhausting themselves as they pulled each other up. For Mac the bizat bushes were the worst. Tiny white spores that covered their leaves worked down his shirt and boots to rub and itch. Under his collar his neck was red raw.

Eventually Miller led them inland and they hit upon a narrow trail. As the ground became drier and the jungle thinner they made better time. Yet it wasn't long before the twelve Scotsmen were in need of a rest and Miller called the first water stop.

Mac sank down next to Archie. Both of them were soaked in perspiration. They unslung their canvas chaggles and took quick, grateful gulps of the brackish, chlorinated water.

'Jesus,' groaned the older man, 'we've only been going a couple of hours and I'm knackered. It's like wading through a hot bath!'

Mac laughed, his own breathing laboured. 'It's only been forty-five minutes! You'll be a right fit bastard at the end of this ramble, Archie.'

'Quiet back there!' hissed their sergeant, Munro.

A Gurkha carrying a Thompson sub-machine gun trotted past them. Suddenly he turned and gave Mac the thumbs-up and a wide grin. It was Rai. Mac returned the gesture. The Gurkha sped off, picking his way easily through the slumped Seaforths. Tucked into the belt on Rai's back Mac saw the

heavy, curved *kukri* dagger that the Gurkhas preferred to the bayonet.

'How d'you know him?' Archie asked.

'He's the one I told you about. Scared the shite out o' me!'

'That I can imagine. Did you see him? Fresh as a fucking daisy!'

'Good thing they're on our side, eh?'

'Aye, laddie. That's for sure.'

Two hours and six more brief water stops later they came to a small clearing. Miller gathered them round. His instructions, delivered in the now familiar hushed tones, were matter of fact.

'Absolute silence from here on. There's a Jap post about three hundred yards to the south. There should be no more than four of them, so we're going to give them a surprise. In and out before they know what's hit them.'

Archie and Mac exchanged uneasy glances.

'Prepare your weapons now,' said Miller calmly. 'And fix bayonets.'

To Mac the rasping of rifle bolt-actions and the clicking of ammunition clips sounded raucous. He reached for his bayonet and snapped it into place on his second try. Embarrassed, he looked around. No-one had noticed.

Miller was speaking again. 'Follow and watch the man in front—ten feet apart. No noise! We'll take positions to the south-west, shoot them up for a couple of minutes then withdraw. Remember, we only need to rattle their cage!'

Despite his nerves, Mac was impressed. Miller came over like an old Tayside gillie at the start of the salmon season.

They moved off as instructed but just minutes later Miller called a sudden halt in another small clearing. Two silent minutes passed, then five. Mac sat back against a fallen log and strained his ears but all he could hear were birds and the

occasional chattering of monkeys. His gaze settled on an inch-wide column of ants marching over one of his boots.

A vaguely familiar bird-call made him start. He looked up to see Rai and another Gurkha scurrying back. They whispered urgently with Miller who then waved the platoon in close.

'We're unlucky,' Miller said almost casually. 'A small Chindit group is coming directly for us and there's a Jap patrol right behind them.'

Mac's throat went dry.

'They'll be here any minute,' continued Miller urgently. 'We can't risk hailing them because the Japs are too close. Our chaps are bound to be twitchy, but we daren't backtrack in case they hear us and delay. We're going to have to hide and let the Chindits pass. Then we'll ambush the Japs.'

Miller eyed them confidently. 'I know some of you have not seen action before. Just remember the drill and you'll be fine. If the Chindits suspect something and start shooting, for god's sake don't fire back. Keep down and shout "British! Don't shoot!" That should do the trick.' He glanced at Rai. 'As soon as the last Jap has come past, Naik Rai will toss a couple of grenades. We'll reply with more at the other end to box them in. That's when you open fire. Sweep everything in front of you. Those with Stens, use short bursts. Try to pick your targets but get them all.'

Miller paused and looked at the anxious faces. 'One last thing; finish off any wounded Japs. It's a nasty business but they won't let themselves be taken alive and they'll take you with them if they get half a chance!'

The Seaforths exchanged grim glances. Mac saw that a few had turned pale under their jungle tans. Miller began directing them.

'MacDonald, you partner Rai. You,' he pointed to Archie, 'and Limbau with me. Remember, not a squeak!' Miller

turned and headed back down the trail, positioning men off it at intervals.

Across the clearing Rai beckoned to Mac. He began threading through the bushes parallel to the trail. Bent double, Mac followed as best he could.

Soon they were some three feet in from the edge of the trail beside the opening to the clearing. To Mac's right, just visible through the low branches, lay Rai. He was totally still, his ear to the ground.

Mac tried desperately to slow his breath, certain he sounded like a running motor. Stinging sweat ran down his forehead into his eyes. Then he saw Rai's nostrils flare. Seconds later Mac heard slow, laboured footsteps, then panting only yards away. He caught a strong whiff of bowel. Oh God, he thought in consternation, someone's farted. It'll give us away!

A pair of badly worn British jungle boots came into view. Their rubber soles had split from the canvas uppers and had been wrapped with a length of tree creeper. Tucked into the boots was a pair of ripped, green trousers. The Chindit's legs, lacerated with leaf cuts and pocked with oozing sores, were little more than skin and bone. Foliage hid the man's upper body.

With alarm, Mac noticed the smell was even stronger now. As the Chindit walked on, Mac saw that his buttocks were exposed. Brown stains ran down the backs of his legs and trousers to his boots. Suddenly Mac understood. The man had dysentery! For the sake of speed he had cut out the seat of his pants. Mac wrinkled his nose in distaste. The Chindit was leaving a pungent trail. If Rai had smelt him at twenty yards so would the Japs….

Mac thought of his own recent experience with dysentery. At the time, he could imagine nothing worse than queuing round the clock with fifty other ill men, sharing four latrines

and struggling to dig more. But now he could: having the shits and the Japs after you as well. The poor bastards!

Five more Chindits trudged by in silence. They were obviously exhausted by sickness and the long march. Two had cut the seat of their trousers like the first. Another lay on a makeshift bamboo stretcher carried by men who themselves were stretcher-cases.

Mac wanted to jump up and help but he knew he could not. Miller was right. The Chindits would shoot at anything that moved. Silently he urged them on. At last their sounds faded but the natural noises of the forest—the bird-calls, the monkey chatter—did not resume.

The Japanese were under two minutes behind them. Mac's first indication was an olive-green, sock-like canvas shoe treading noiselessly on the trail directly in front of him. Above the ankle the leg was wrapped to the knee in green puttees. Mac held his breath, watching the scout pass by, stepping with the patience of a hunter who knows his quarry is near. Seconds later the rest of the Japanese patrol came through in silence. Mac counted eight pairs of puttee-wrapped legs.

Twin booms from Rai's grenades merged into one, shattering the forest stillness.

Mac ducked, his ears ringing. Beside him, Rai was already firing. Vaguely he was aware of shouts and screams as two more blasts sounded and the rest of the platoon opened fire.

A sudden flash of olive-green darted into the bushes to Mac's left. He stayed prone, watching the Japanese slither quickly through the undergrowth in order to get behind them. Mac swung round anticipating the man's direction and readied for a shot. His enemy did not oblige. In the clearing the firing had already become sporadic. Mac scanned left and right frantically in the short, eerie silences. His heart began to pound. He'd lost him!

Shots from a Seaforth to Mac's left resulted in movement. His enemy had been waiting for a target. Quickly, Mac re-aimed at a narrow gap in the foliage a few feet from him. As an olive-green cap filled his sights he pulled the trigger. He saw the head jerk up and then drop. Mac watched but the figure lay still.

'Cease firing!' Miller shouted.

Cautiously, Mac moved back out on to the trail. He had to make sure of the Japanese he had shot. Ahead he could see others lying sprawled in the clearing. Miller, Rai, Limbau, Sergeant Munro and Archie were going through their pockets.

A low moaning stopped Mac in his tracks. Directly in front of him, hidden from the others by a tree stump, was a wounded Japanese. Below the knees his legs were bloody stumps. The man was semi-conscious.

Remembering Miller's instruction about prisoners Mac slowly brought up his rifle. Then the Japanese began to wheeze. Blood frothed in his mouth. Mac lowered his gun. 'Not my job,' he muttered. Instead, he placed the dying man's rifle out of his reach, then worked his way back into the vegetation. He found the body lying face down.

Mac needed to see his enemy's face. This man, he knew, would have killed him without hesitation. He felt strange, not guilty—it was war after all—but somehow unclean. Other men, politicians and generals, had decided that Alun MacDonald would have to kill. This was the result.

He wrestled with this thought as he rolled the corpse over. Flies buzzed above the matted blood that caked the cropped hair. Brown eyes, now dull, stared sightlessly. Mac guessed he was in his early twenties, like himself. A pair of cracked, round-rimmed glasses lay in the undergrowth. For some reason he put them in the man's tunic pocket.

The dull boom sent him diving for cover. Even as he moved he sensed that he was not the target. A short burst of

machine-gun fire in the clearing was followed by shouts then silence. Suddenly uneasy, Mac headed back, increasing his pace and ignoring the leaves and branches that slashed his legs and arms. He burst into the clearing and almost ran on to the barrel of Limbau's rifle. He stood awkwardly, realising just how close he had come. Shaking their heads, the other men lowered their weapons. Limbau kept his weapon trained on Mac long enough to make his point.

Only then did Mac see Archie lying on his back, his face covered in blood. His chest had been blown open.

'Archie!' He stared in disbelief. Beside his friend lay the mangled body of the Japanese Mac had spared.

Miller was looking away sympathetically.

'One of 'em wasn't dead,' Sergeant Munro explained. 'He had a charge wedged in his armpit. When Archie went to search him the bastard let it off.'

Mac felt the cold horror of guilt envelop him. Tears ran down his cheeks as he sank to his knees. 'Oh, Archie I'm sorry! Oh, Jesus Christ, I'm so sorry!' He began to retch.

Magelang, Central Java, March 1944

'Isogi!'—Hurry! *'Isogi!'* The young Japanese officer, a captain in the *kenpeitai*—Military Police Corps—was in a rage.

Marianne van Dam, kneeling on the polished-teak floor of her well-appointed lounge, rushed to comply, snapping shut the suitcase lid. She rose and stepped back to stand with her husband and teenage son and daughter. Two Japanese soldiers pushed the family roughly out of their way.

Anxiously the girl took her mother's hand in hers. 'Mum, what will happen to us?'

'It's all right, Kate,' said Marianne softly and squeezing her hand. 'Just do as they say.'

Other soldiers began rummaging through cupboards and upending drawers. One of them found the drinks cabinet and called to his captain. The bottles were taken outside.

Marianne tensed as she saw her sixteen-year-old son glaring balefully at the soldiers. 'Kees!' Marianne hissed. 'Stop it!' Sullenly the boy obeyed, glancing at his father.

Pym van Dam's face was taut as he watched the hobnailed boots gouge the floor. Marianne slipped her arm inside his. He smiled at her reassuringly.

It had been two years since the Japanese had invaded and conquered the Netherlands East Indies in just nine days. Over the subsequent months most of the Dutch colonists had been interned. On Java, the skills of a few score specialists like irrigation engineer Pym van Dam had still been needed. By agreeing to co-operate with the invaders they had kept their families out of squalid, overcrowded camps.

Pym had worked conscientiously on the vast agricultural estates, maintaining the water supply for the vital rice crops that helped feed millions. He had also trained local staff. That morning he had been told his services were no longer required. He and his family had been given thirty-minutes' notice to pack one suitcase each. Twenty minutes later the Japanese had come.

'Isogi!' The captain pointed to the door.

Slowly the van Dams picked up their suitcases. For the last time, Marianne's gaze swept over the furniture, rugs, books and ornaments they were leaving behind. Most distressing to her were the empty photograph frames left askew on the mantelpiece.

Pym led his family out of the room in a dispirited single file. As Kate passed the sideboard her hand darted out and she grabbed a small, red, cut-glass tulip.

Outside, a captured Dutch army lorry was waiting for them. In the back, three other family groups sat in grim

silence on an assortment of cases and mattresses. Marianne stopped, she had not thought about mattresses. A Japanese soldier shoved her forward. It was too late.

Some yards away stood a Javanese couple and five children. Their few belongings—rattan chairs, pots and pans and rugs—were stacked on a bullock cart. Tethered to the back of the cart was a goat. Pym stared disdainfully at the former assistant who had taken his job and who was now taking his house.

Marianne stifled a sob. 'Oh, Pym, our lovely home….'

Her husband put his arm around her shoulders. His voice shook with anger. 'We'll get it back. I promise.'

Nijmegen, The Netherlands, October 1944

In the half-lit cellar, the silence between the barrages from the German 88mm guns was almost ghostly. Voices were hushed, as if savouring the quiet. Meg Graham felt she could be in a church…or a crypt.

Candles flickered, casting an orange tint on the faces of the tired, tense, young men around her. They also illuminated the specks of falling dust that was coating everything and everyone in the damp, brick-lined basement. Clouds of cigarette smoke hung in the air. She took one last drag on her own then stubbed it out.

'Here you are, Ma'am.'

Meg turned. A soldier in his late teens was offering her an open tin of processed ham and two tack biscuits. He held the tin by its rim, claw-style, in an attempt to keep off some of the dust. Meg accepted it gratefully. She managed to remember his name. 'Thanks, Matt,' she said. 'Say, where are you from?'

'Memphis, Tennessee, Ma'am,' he replied proudly.

'Less of the Ma'am,' she told him smiling. 'Meg will do just fine.'

'Yes, Ma'am,' he replied automatically. Matt grinned and went back to the portable cooking stove.

Meg had been sheltering in the cellar with the platoon from the 82nd Airborne Regiment for nearly thirty-six hours, sharing K-rations and the odd 'liberated' beer. Operation Market Garden, the joint British-American attempt to seize the German-controlled bridges over the Meuse and Waal rivers at Arnhem, Eindhoven and Nijmegen had stalled. Both sides were exchanging regular artillery bombardments while they regrouped. Each day Meg had watched the patient residents of Nijmegen sweep their roads clean of glass and rubble, leaving neat piles on street corners.

At first the young veterans of the Normandy landings had been polite but a little sceptical of the attractive brunette suddenly in their midst. Yet they were fascinated by the idea of a woman war correspondent and almost as much by the fact that Meg had studied in France and Germany in the mid-1930s.

The paratroopers had been taken aback when they heard that 'their' war was not Meg's first. Blank looks had met her tales of fighting in Spain, China and Finland. Above all, the news that there was another dictator in Spain had left them dismayed and perturbed.

'I'll sure be glad to leave this rat hole,' said one soldier to no-one in particular. 'Maybe have a look round the town.'

Meg saw he was flicking through a copy of the *Blue Guide to Holland and the Rhine*. She had one too. Now that the small town of Nijmegen was the front line she wasn't sure how much of it there would be left to see.

Conversation ceased as a dull, distant boom quickly became a roar and then a shriek. Meg tensed and covered her ears. The shell came down no more than fifty yards away.

More dust fell, coating her ham and biscuits. Seconds later the Allied big guns replied in kind.

Twenty minutes later the shelling stopped. During the lull, Matt wandered over and sat down self-consciously beside her. 'Ma'am—I mean, Meg. Do you think they'll send us to fight this guy Franco when we've beaten the Krauts?'

Meg hesitated. A part of her had died with the International Brigade in Spain. For a second, the old republican flame flickered in her heart. Annoyed with herself, she doused it immediately in a wave of cynicism. 'No, Matt, I don't think so. Spain's minor league compared with the Nazis. It was ignored in '36 and you can bet it will be ignored in '46. Don't worry, you won't be learning any Spanish!'

Later, feeling a little guilty, Meg set her job aside and talked of other things. She knew how the men liked to hear a woman's voice, particularly an American. It was really such a simple thing and she couldn't begrudge it them when they were so far from home. She gave it her best shot and they sat entranced by her racy descriptions of the pre-war nightlife in Paris and Berlin. Afterwards she was pestered to write the addresses of some of her old haunts.

Eight hours later, the barrage halted and the soldiers received orders to move out. Meg left the basement an honorary member of the platoon and with a hasty promise that one day they would meet in Berlin.

Book One

Chapter One

Tjandi Internment Camp III, Semarang, Java, February 1945

As usual, gnawing hunger pangs and itching bites woke Kate van Dam long before the return of the women on the night watch who were supposed to rouse her. She lay quietly on the narrow wooden slats that had served as her bed for the last eight months and tried to close her mind to the snoring, coughing and occasional groaning from the other occupants of the crowded hut. The air was sweet with the smell of fresh blood spilled by the feasting bed bugs that infested the woodwork and thin, kapok-stuffed mattresses.

Dawn always seemed the worst time, she thought. It appeared to galvanise the bugs into taking one last bite. Still tired, she lay back and wondered if it were really so, or whether it was only because she was awake and could feel them biting. A sharp nip on her left arm reminded her that it really did not matter either way.

Automatically she brought her right arm over, sliding her hand up from her elbow to her shoulder and brushing at least two of the tiny, tenacious creatures off her. She let her fingers linger, feeling more bone than flesh and she frowned as she imagined herself in another year. In truth, she doubted whether she had got that much time. She was nineteen years old.

Still weary, she pushed herself half-up and felt a bed bug squash under her elbow. She pulled a face, knowing that the

pungent, sickly sweet odour would not leave her until it was scrubbed off. Not very long ago the smell would have made her gag but now it was bearable. Perhaps that was an improvement of sorts she thought cynically.

The woven-bamboo screen to her left ballooned towards her as her mother turned over and banged Kate's hip with her knee. Kate winced but fought the urge to push back. Her mother was ill and if she were sleeping at least she was not thinking about food.

Kate glanced upwards. Pinned to the screen was her precious red glass tulip. Its delicate green base had snapped off but now she treasured it all the more. Wistfully she ran her fingertips over the polished surface remembering happier days.

'No, we need it!' The shrill shout came from a few feet away. Kate recognised Annie Klomp's recurrent bad dream. Everyone in the hut knew the scenario: Annie finds her infant son throwing away a half-empty tin of rotten sardines, then she beats him while standing in a kitchen piled high with food.

Now for the crying, thought Kate, glad now that she had to get up. Seconds later the sobbing started.

'There, there, dear…it's only a bad dream,' someone said, trying the routine to calm Annie. But then the complaints started, as usual, even though they all knew Annie would not hear them.

'For God's sake, woman, not again!'

'Noisy cow!'

Soon the shouts woke the toddlers who cried from hunger and sickness every morning.

Kate put her hands to her ears. In the corner of her eye she caught a sudden movement. A small, yellow-green *tikjak*—a gecko—darted halfway down the screen and stopped inches from her face. Its light, leathery underbelly was pulsating in a fast, regular rhythm. *Tikjaks* were all over the camp. They reminded Kate of life before the war when she would watch

them cavorting on the ceiling of her bedroom while she lay under a mosquito net in crisp, clean sheets that had been tucked in by her mother. She had felt so comfortable and so safe then. Now it all seemed so distant and unreal that she was beginning to think it had been a dream. But that, she reminded herself sternly, was because she was living a nightmare.

Suddenly the *tikjak* was still. A large, shiny black beetle was heading directly for it. At the last moment the beetle saw the predator and tried to jump aside but it was too slow. In a flash it was held firmly between powerful jaws, its legs working uselessly. Remorselessly the *tikjak* pounded the beetle, smothering it in saliva, until finally it gulped down the crushed mass.

Kate sighed as she realised she was envious of a lizard's full stomach. Behind the screen to her right, her neighbour, Mrs Meer, broke wind loudly and then belched. Kate let her head drop, praying yet again for the Allies to come and end her misery. Dear God, she thought, what's taking them so long?

In September 1944 the camp had been thrilled by the reports of the Allied attack on Arnhem, thinking the liberation of the Netherlands would quickly follow and that afterwards Dutch soldiers would liberate Java. Every evening, nervous groups of women gathered, risking beatings and worse in solitary confinement, to listen to the BBC news on hidden radios, hoping to hear the names of hometowns. In the East, said the reports, the Japanese had been stopped in Burma; and the Americans, under MacArthur and Nimitz, were advancing. But more good news had not come and the weeks had dragged into months. They must come soon, she thought. They must!

Cheered a little by the thought of eventual freedom, Kate decided to get up and wash. She was on breakfast duty with eight others. In little over two hours, two thousand women and children would be expecting their breakfast and there

would be hell to pay if their tiny portions of rice were not ready.

She gathered her ragged sleeping shirt to her, shuffled down to the edge of the boards and circled her feet trying to find the tops of her *klompen*—sandals made from wood and strips of car tyre inner tube—at the foot of her bed. When she could not, she touched one foot down on the floor. Her toes slid in a gooey mess. Someone had not made it to the latrines in the night. That serves you right, lazy idiot! Kate chided herself. You broke the rules that will keep you alive—your own rules!

Briefly she toyed with the idea of walking barefoot to the wash block but dismissed it because she would risk cutting her foot. No, she would have to wear her *klompen* to the latrines and then wash it. The danger of infection was too great. Just a few weeks earlier a young girl had trodden on a rusty nail near a latrine pit. The child's mother had washed it as best she could but within two days the foot had swollen to the size of a coconut. Powerless to stop the infection without medicines, the mother and Lucy Santen, the only doctor among them, had watched helplessly as the dark lines of poison had spread up the leg. Eventually the Japanese had accepted their pleas for the girl to go to the nearby hospital but by then it had been too late.

On the day the girl died it had been Kate's turn on burial detail. No formal services were allowed. Because bodies decayed quickly in the heat the Japanese insisted on immediate burial. In the end, a few of the mother's friends had managed to say a quick prayer and sing a hymn out of earshot of the guards. Wood was too precious as cooking fuel, so a large straw basket served as a coffin. Bamboo poles pushed through the front and rear served as handles for Kate and the other bearers. The cemetery was about half-a-mile from the camp. As the basket swayed from side-to-side, a

yellowish, foul-smelling liquid had dripped from it, leaving a snail-like trail. The little girl was not buried alone. Kate had made three more journeys that day.

Yawning, she reached for a drawstring bag containing her day clothes and sidled carefully between the rows of sleeping women and children towards the door. Thirty-two people were living in the former classroom. Washbowls, bottles, food bowls and other bits and pieces cluttered the ends of each sleeping space. One or two people sat up, worried in case she pocketed anything.

'Good Morning, Mrs Kepple,' she said to a middle-aged woman who lay watching her like a hawk, cradling a few Red Cross food tins.

'What's so good about it?' The woman scoffed. Her eyes were red with lack of sleep from fear of someone stealing her treasure.

Kate moved on. No-one made any attempt to greet her. Even after eight months in the camp she and her mother were still regarded with suspicion by some. There were many who thought the van Dams had had it easy while they had suffered.

Outside the sky was a light grey but the first faint glow of red was visible above the row of lontar palm trees to the east. She was glad to be out in the fresh air. There was a slight breeze from the north, carrying the faint scent of the sea from Semarang harbour and she paused to savour it. Once the sun came up, the air would be still and heavy until the late evening.

Before the war, Tjandi had been an affluent suburb. When the Japanese decided to intern the Dutch civilians, they had simply cordoned off entire streets using large bamboo fences. Men and women had been separated. In all, the three Tjandi camps were home to nearly eight thousand women and children crammed into houses, shops, schools and other buildings. Kate's father and brother had been sent to a men's

camp in Magelang. Every two months they were permitted to exchange postcards.

Kate and her mother had ended up in a former private school for boys. Its main building was an imposing, four-storey structure with twin central towers and wings off either side. When they arrived, all the rooms in the main block had long been claimed, so they had been quartered in one of several classroom huts in the grounds. Sudden deprivation and the shock of new surroundings and new rules had hit them hard. Their time in Tjandi had been thoroughly wretched.

Kate looked around her. Only a few of her neighbours were also up and about. Across the compound three familiar figures emerged from the latrines and started back towards the huts. Kate had known the Harwigs before the invasion. Mr Harwig had worked with her father, and his wife had been a stalwart in the local church choir, as well as secretary of the golf club. Now their two daughters, one fourteen and the other twelve, were half-carrying, half-dragging their barely conscious mother. Their father was already dead. After the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and then, just days later, sunk the British warships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* off Malaya, there had been panic. Fears of air-raids led to a local defence corps being formed, and Mr Harwig had been among the first to volunteer. One night, driving home in the black-out after a training exercise, his car collided with a water buffalo. At his funeral, family friends had encouraged his widow and children to go to Australia, but the Indies Government, desperate to maintain morale, had forbidden Dutch residents to leave.

As the Harwigs drew near, Kate tried to keep looking at the girls but her gaze was drawn to their mother's oedema-swollen stomach and the oozing tropical ulcers on her shins. She saw the tell-tale bloodstains and brown streaks on her nightshirt. Kate shuddered. Dysentery literally drained the life out of its victims, especially those already weakened by hunger and

malaria. Lotte Harwig was one of many mothers who could not bear to see her children go hungry and had shared her own meagre food ration with them. Warnings from others that her children needed her alive were ignored. Kate had seen dysentery often enough to know the girls would be orphans in less than a week. From the look in their eyes she could tell they knew it, too.

Outside the latrine block Kate washed her foot and sandal beneath a rusting tap. A threadbare but wriggling sock was tied over the end of it to filter out the larger worms. She filled her tin washbowl, took a deep breath and went inside. Quickly she lowered her frayed shorts, trapping them behind her knees as she squatted over the open trench. Since she was eating so little it didn't take long. Using the water from bowl, she washed between her buttocks native style, using her left hand. Then, lungs about to burst, she rushed out into the fresh air. Each day it took her longer to recover. She was getting weaker….

To banish that unwelcome thought, Kate began to anticipate the pleasure of a soak in the school bathhouse. Early morning was her favourite time because it was not crowded and she could use the *mandi* tubs rather than the outdoor showers that were overlooked by a guard tower. The bathhouse abutted the rear of the main school building. Once the blue-and-white patterned tiles on the walls and floor must have glistened. Now they were dull and streaked with black mould. Kate did not care. It was still one of the cleanest places in the camp. Eight large *mandi* tubs about six-feet long and three-feet wide were spaced around the room. Most were just half-full of discoloured scum-topped water. At intervals along two walls were rusting pipes, showerheads and controls. They had not worked for as long as Kate had been in the camp and she ignored them. Two women were leaving as she arrived

but there was no-one else inside. She was delighted. It had been days since she had enjoyed even five minutes by herself.

Kate undressed quickly and as a matter of routine peered carefully along the open drain channels running around the sides of the baths. She found real treasure, a sliver of soap caught in a crevice. Gleefully she squeezed it on to her own tiny bar of soap. She soaped herself outside the *mandi* and rinsed by dipping her bowl into the water. After her wash she could not resist the temptation to soak. She eased herself into one of the tubs and lay back with her eyes closed, enjoying the cooling effect, no longer bothered by the hairs, dead flies and dirt suspended in the water. Her thoughts drifted to her old home and her lovely bedroom at the top of the dark, teak staircase. She imagined herself wishing her smiling parents goodnight and then climbing the staircase to her soft, welcoming bed. Then another, much more powerful memory, replayed itself.

Christmas 1941 had been a tense time in Java. Determined to celebrate despite fears of war, Kate's parents had held a large party at their home on Christmas Eve. Among the guests had been Mr and Mrs Muiden and their son Peter, who was a year older than Kate.

Kate had a secret crush on Peter but did not know him well. She had hardly said a word to him all evening when, to her great dismay and embarrassment, her mother had decided it was her bedtime. Her protests had been to no avail and dejectedly she had climbed the stairs. Peter was waiting for her on the landing. Without warning he had pulled her to him and kissed her on the cheek then on the lips. She had been stunned and thrilled. Time had seemed to stand still. Peter continued to kiss her, and then he began stroking her back. His hand had slipped down to the tops of her buttocks. Her heart had raced as his other hand had moved to her front, sliding up over her ribs. His lips had parted on hers and she

had felt the moistness of his saliva. She had stood mesmerised, leaning against him. His hand had risen higher and his fingertips were brushing the base of her breast when the loud, deliberate cough had startled them. Peter had jumped away and scurried down the stairs. Stern-faced, her father had said nothing.

Kate often thought of Peter and the feeling his kiss had awakened in her. A sharp, squeaking clang of the changing room door brought her back to the present as three younger, chatting girls appeared. She climbed out of the tub.

Like many of the younger women in the camp, Kate dressed native-style with a sarong around her hips and a *kembang*—a long, narrow strip of batik—wrapped around her chest, leaving her shoulders uncovered. Both of her garments were shabby and frayed.

She was slightly late for her kitchen shift and the other cooks were already in the little courtyard rinsing pails of rice, paring half-rotten vegetables, or scraping tiny pieces of beef and pork off almost bare bones. They worked outside because the school's ovens did not work. As a last gesture of defiance the retreating Dutch army had blown up Tjandi's gas mains. The Japanese had seen no reason to restore the supply. Consequently all cooking was done on wood or charcoal fires. Breakfast alone required a small mountain of rice and took almost two hours to prepare.

Chalked on one of the courtyard walls was a faded menu: 'Restaurant Tjandi as featured in Java the Holiday Paradise. Breakfast: Arjana Watercress Gruel, Lunch: Savoury Corn Royale, Dinner: Spiced Porridge à la Tjandi'. The joke had worn as thin as the gruel for the fare had been unchanged for weeks.

A lithe, dark-haired woman chopping some badly discoloured tripe gave Kate a playful wave. 'Good afternoon,

Kate,' Juliette Giroux joked sarcastically. Her French accent was very heavy. 'So glad you could join us today!'

Juliette was twenty-seven and a professional dancer. She had been stranded by the Japanese invasion. Despite her protestations, the all-powerful *kenpei* police had ignored her Vichy France travel documents and interned her. Once incarcerated, she had accepted her fate stoically and had soon fallen in with the camp routine. Twice a week she helped teach French in the camp school, and her dance classes were very popular. Kate went to them as often as she could.

For the younger women, the well-travelled Juliette was a link to the sophistication of Paris and the glamour of New York. Juliette did her best not to disappoint them. She kept her dark hair short and was never without a wide-brimmed sun hat. As usual, that morning she was wearing two pairs of long earrings, a jewelled black choker and a long pearl necklace. Her necklace was tucked down a skimpy, home-sewn halter-neck top made from a red sports bib scavenged from the school's gym store. Four inches of pearls dangled over her bare, bronzed midriff. A holed sarong, knotted at her hip, reached only to her knees.

Juliette was not alone in wearing jewellery. Most of the women were draped in a mismatched collection of pendants, necklaces and bracelets. Trust, like everything else in the camp, was in very short supply and they all knew that a hungry child could soon turn a loving mother into a desperate thief. There was a ready market for valuables among the guards and Javanese camp administrators.

Kate mouthed a smiling 'Sorry' to Juliette then looked for Mai, the Chinese matriarch who ran the kitchens and who would assign her jobs for the day. As she did so, she saw her friend, Marja Schreurs amidst a cloud of flies, her mouth and nose masked by a handkerchief. On the table in front of Marja were several bloody pigs heads from which she was peeling off

strips of cheek. Kate waved and grimaced to her at the same time. Marja merely raised her eyebrows dejectedly.

'Good morning, Miss Kate.'

Kate turned. 'Morning, Mai,' she replied pleasantly.

Mai was middle-aged, bubbly and industrious. Her straw coolie-hat, plain blue-cotton trousers and blouse were offset by spectacular green-jade bangles on each wrist. She spoke almost no Dutch and very little English. Her husband, a former cook for the Netherlands Indies Army, was interned a few miles away.

Before Mai had taken over, families had cooked for themselves on small braziers. Since many of the Dutch women had relied on servants before the war, their efforts had been poor. Firewood had been wasted, food spoiled and badly or wrongly prepared. Worse, it had been unfairly distributed or stolen. Squabbling and fighting had been so frequent that in despair the camp commandant had ordered that all cooking be done communally. Even then, problems had continued with rotas until the day Mai and some of her Chinese and Eurasian friends had marched into the kitchen and evicted all Europeans in what Juliette called the *'coup de cuisine'*. Everyone agreed, some grudgingly, that Mai had worked magic. Immediately the food had tasted better and, incredibly, had seemed more varied. No-one dared ask her where she got the extras but most people presumed that her relations outside the camp were smuggling them. After making her point, Mai had accepted a few of the younger European women back for 'training'. She ran two kitchens: one for the internees and another for the camp administrators and guards.

Mai pointed to a trestle table set up under an awning in the far corner of the courtyard. A lone Japanese guard stood beside it leaning lazily on his rifle. 'Today, Japan kitchen, please,' she said busily.

Kate beamed at Mai. Cooking for the Japanese brought perks. She went over to the awning and bowed courteously to the guard. *'Ohayo gozaimasu.'*—Good morning, she said politely.

The guard raised his head fractionally then studiously ignored her.

Excitedly Kate stepped up to the laden table. Under a muslin cloth lay thick pieces of fresh pork, fish and vegetables as well as salted radishes, noodles and spiced meats from the local kampong or village. There were also coconuts, bananas and papayas. Her mouth watered and her stomach rumbled loudly. She looked at the guard, knowing that if she were careful she could palm a few vegetable slices and bits of meat for her mother. Kate would eat later, openly, in front of the guards who were always afraid of poisoning and insisted the cooks tasted everything first.

Behind her a door-hinge squeaked. She glanced around to see a tousled-haired youth emerge from a storehouse, rolling an empty oil drum over to the fire. Jans van Basten often helped with the heavier chores like scraping off the burnt rice from the bottoms of the drums. In return, he was allowed to eat the scrapings. He wore shorts, *klompen* on his feet and no shirt. His underdeveloped muscles strained as he half-filled the drum with buckets of water.

At nearly thirteen, Jans was the oldest male in the camp. The day after his next birthday he would be sent to join his father in a men's camp. Kate knew she would miss the good-looking, cheerful Jans. To her secret embarrassment she often caught herself looking at him. She watched a little jealously as Juliette went over and pinched his biceps. 'You're getting stronger, Jans,' she teased. 'A real man now!' Jans flushed but it was obvious the youth was pleased.

As Juliette hefted a sack of rice under her arm, her scanty top slid to one side, fully exposing one of her breasts. Kate's

laugh died in her throat as Juliette made no move to cover up. Instead, Juliette continued to pour the rice into the drum, ignoring Jans, who stared, his face a deep red. Only when the sack was empty did Juliette casually cover herself.

Kate glanced around quickly. Nudity was commonplace in the camp but Juliette's attitude troubled her. She noticed two older women exchanging disapproving looks. Kate busied herself with her work.

A little later Juliette came by. 'Make the most of it,' she joked, 'see you at the class.'

Kate was left unsettled. Not long after she had joined Juliette's dance group her mother had warned her not to socialise with 'the dancer'.

'But why?' Kate had complained in dismay. 'She's such fun and has been everywhere. She learnt the tango in Argentina!'

'Enjoy the dancing but don't become friendly,' her mother had replied sternly. 'She's not a good example.'

It was not until weeks later that Kate discovered the reason for her mother's dislike of Juliette. Kate had been enjoying a late-night soak in the *mandi* with some of the other girls. With the bathhouse to themselves they had lolled one to a tub. Conversation had turned, as it often did, from fantasy recipes to clothes, and then to boys.

'At school I used to be in love with Pete Muiden,' confessed Anna Veersteeg, lying back in the tub, trying to float. 'I was so jealous of you, Marja!'

Kate reddened and glanced at Marja, who had affected surprise. Marja was a year older than Kate.

'Pete?' Marja shrugged. 'Oh, he was all right, I suppose,' she had said casually, picking at her single long plait of mousy hair. 'Until we came here and the *danseuse* got her claws into him.'

'You mean Juliette?' Kate said taken aback. 'What happened?'

Marja looked around with exaggerated caution, hamming the conspirator. 'Do you really want to know?'

Anticipating scandal the girls had rushed to gather in or around Marja's tub. She had let their curiosity build. 'Remember that at first the Japs allowed boys to stay here up to sixteen? Well, they say some of the older women went with them. Juliette was one!'

'Eh? Surely not!' Kate exclaimed, her hand over her mouth.

'Yes, it's true!' Anna cut in shrilly. 'I heard Mother talking about it with Mrs Harwig once. Married women were doing it too. They said boys used to wait outside their huts at night!'

Marja was not to be outdone. 'That's not all,' she hissed. 'They say Juliette's still at it with Jans!'

There had been a chorus of indignant gasps as the gossip was devoured. 'No!'—'With Jans?'—'The dirty bitch!'

Rukmini Kuupers was sitting demurely in the tub, arms clasped around her drawn-up shins, her chin on her knees. She had the striking good looks common to the offspring of Europeans and Javanese. Her hazel eyes, honeyed skin and waist-long, raven-dark hair contrasted vividly with the brunettes and blondes around her. 'That must be why the Japs keep sending the older boys away,' she had sighed.

To the distress of the mothers in the camp, the Japanese had lowered the age limit for males first to fifteen, then fourteen and down to thirteen.

Kate, now more embarrassed than ever, had wondered if the rumours were true. After all, she was fond of Jans herself. But for Juliette to actually….

'Oh, how could she!' Lisa Hahn spat the words out.

'I think I know,' Rukmini had whispered.

The others gaped. 'Ruki!'—'What are you saying?'—'Oh, shame!'

Rukmini had blushed. 'No, I mean—I can understand she…' her voice was soft, almost despairing, '…that she

doesn't want to be lonely. I don't want to…to die a virgin like Lizzy and Emma. Do you?'

Faces had blanched and heads dropped in stunned dismay at their taboo word. Kate had shivered as she thought of their friends who had died only two weeks apart. For several seconds no-one spoke. Then one by one, avoiding each other's eyes, they had dressed and left separately. But that night and every night since, Kate had asked herself Rukmini's question….

'Miss Kate!' The shout made her jump. 'Cabbage thick!' Mai was at her shoulder, correcting her grip on the chopping knife. 'Cut thin, thin!'

'Oh, sorry, Mai. I see,' Kate said guiltily.

Mai pulled a face and gestured to a two-foot high woven bamboo screen leaning against the school wall some thirty yards away. 'Mrs Larman make bread. Want pee-pee.'

Kate could see Marja's head and shoulders above the screen. A few feet away a blackened jerry can stood on bricks over a fire tended by Bertha Larman. 'Again?' Kate asked lightly.

'Yaah!' Mai shuddered. 'No like bread before. Now never eat bread forever!'

Kate giggled as Marja rose from behind the screen pulling up her shorts. She emerged holding a rusty tin and poured the liquid contents into the jerry can. Bertha waved to Kate then pointed at the tin.

When supplies of yeast had run out even Mai had been unable to obtain the precious ingredient. They had made do with much reduced amounts of flaky, unleavened bread. Months later, a smuggled message from another camp had explained how to produce yeast from urine. Sceptical but desperate, they had boiled and disinfected fresh urine as instructed. Then they had mixed the liquid with dough that, to their delight and astonishment, had risen perfectly with no

unpleasant taste. To keep the yeast supply going, Bertha was constantly seeking 'donations'. Still laughing at Mai's horrified expression, Kate went to do her duty.

The next morning was cloudless. Kate was up much earlier than usual. She had done the washing and was taking it to the many lines strung between the backs of the huts and the former sports field that was now divided into small vegetable plots. Most of the residents tried to grow some additional food, as did Kate.

Two months earlier, Marianne van Dam had contracted beriberi and then she had developed tropical ulcers on her legs. She had been in and out of the camp infirmary. Most of the time she was too weak to move from her bed. Dr Santen did not have the medicines to cure her. Every extra scrap of food Kate could find, work or trade went to her mother. For the past week Kate had harvested a tomato daily from her plot. Marianne's condition had improved slightly and Kate was convinced it was due to the fruit.

As she neared her plot she was pleased to see that three small tomatoes had ripened on her spindly plants. A little happier now, she began to peg out the small pile of clothes that represented most of her and her mother's wardrobes. As the line filled it blocked her view of the camp fences. The expanse of clear sky prompted her to hum the 'Blue Danube'.

Familiar voices made her turn. It was Marja and Anna, also carrying washing. Kate had an idea and quickly pegged out a red bib, a pair of her mother's white knickers and, just as the girls reached her, a royal blue blouse.

'Attention!' Kate chortled, saluting the homemade Dutch colours. Marja and Anna saluted as well. Then the three girls burst out laughing. Kate's gaze travelled up to the former guesthouse beyond the fence. A young man was watching her from an open window. He was bare-chested and holding a

razor. For a long moment their eyes met and held. Kate caught her breath. His gaze was penetrating. A deep, sensual tingling ran through her. Her lips were forming a shy smile when she realised to her horror that her admirer was Japanese. Shock, guilt and then dread gripped her.

Kate's first thought was to warn her friends who were still joking, unaware of their audience. Her face pale, she was about to speak when two guards entered the garden. Automatically, all three girls bowed low, suddenly very afraid. Any display of the Dutch flag was punishable by a beating and solitary confinement. Kate was contrite. It was her fault! They waited, holding their waist-level bows and staring at the earth as the guards walked on chatting and oblivious to the homemade Dutch bunting.

Trembling, Kate braced herself for the shout to the guards. The Jap had seen everything—how could she have been so stupid! Seconds passed but there was no reprimand. One by one the girls came out of their bows. Kate glanced quickly up at the window. The young man had gone.

She unpegged the blue blouse while Marja and Anna watched the guards.

'Oh, Kate look!' Marja whispered urgently.

Kate turned. One of the Japanese had stepped onto her plot and was picking the three ripe tomatoes. He popped one into his mouth, threw one to his companion and pocketed the other. Then the two guards walked away.

Stunned, Kate walked over to her plants and slumped down on her knees. Anger surged through her. She looked up again at the guesthouse. The young man was back at the window and wearing the short-sleeved khaki shirt and insignia of a Japanese officer. His face was expressionless. Despite knowing the consequences Kate stared at him with brazen disdain. For several seconds he held her gaze then turned away, drawing a curtain. She started to weep.

Chapter Two

Sadakan, Central Java

The elderly figure standing in the centre of the village square looked frail. His best white shirt was now too large for him and his green silk sarong billowed past his ankles. A mane of unruly grey hair set off his black, pot-shaped *pici* hat as he preached to his respectful audience drawn up in a crescent before him. His name was Maralik and he was the headmaster of the local *pesantren*, the Islamic school.

Maralik's voice had a deep, relentless rhythm that held the villagers as he called upon God to guide and protect the young men graduating that day. Behind him the sun was a low, red ball falling quickly in an orange- and purple-tinged sky. Soon it would drop below the tops of the dense green tree-tops that ringed the village. Dusk would be short. Already the heat was lifting and the bleached, woven palm-leaf roofs of the huts reflected a golden tint. He noticed that his elongated shadow had almost reached the feet of the children clustered in the first row. It was time to finish. He raised his hands, pausing slightly, for emphasis before ending his sermon. 'There is only one God, Allah, and Mohammed is His Messenger.'

Immediately and enthusiastically his attentive audience repeated the profession of faith. With a slow nod of his head, Maralik signalled that the formalities were over. People

dispersed quickly and noisily as they moved to chat with family and friends. Many of the men lit *kretek* cigarettes and soon the fragrant scent of cloves swept the square. Women and girls emerged from the doors of the huts carrying steaming, foot-high rice-cones on palm-leaf trays and bowls of meat, fish and vegetables. Giggling, half-naked children came trotting after their mothers or clung to their brightly patterned sarongs.

Excitement was palpable. It had been months since the residents of Sadakan had enjoyed a *slametan*. Today, since boys from two neighbouring villages were also graduating from Maralik's school, three communities had been able to pool their meagre resources for the festival. The young guests of honour were sitting on smoothed log seats next to the headmen of the villages. Unused to fuss, the graduates clowned or fidgeted self-consciously, smiling with embarrassment in reply to shouts of congratulation from relatives and friends. Among them, one youth sat pensively. Lamban's thin, soft features were impassive and he barely acknowledged the shouts of well-wishers. He was relieved when the food appeared because it meant he and the others were no longer the centre of attention.

'I want to eat,' said Karek who was sitting beside him. After the food shortages of the past few months, the smell of the delicacies was mouth-watering. Karek's family lived in the next village. Like Lamban, he had just turned eighteen.

'Be patient!' Lamban growled, annoyed that his friend could be so carefree when he was wrestling with important decisions. 'If you stuff yourself, you'll be sick.'

Chastened, Karek became serious. 'Have you changed your mind?'

Lamban's expression hardened. 'No. I am leaving for Djakarta in a week,' he said determinedly, using the new name the Japanese had given their capital.

Karek looked away in disappointment. Lamban made another try to convince him to go with him. 'Why don't you come too? Even Maralik says things are changing. By the grace of God, Indonesia will soon be independent!'

A half-smile escaped Karek and Lamban pressed him. 'Don't you want to be part of it? You can tell your grandchildren how you helped make the country free!'

'But Lamban,' laughed Karek shyly, 'the Japanese have already promised us independence. It's the Jayabaya Prophecy coming true at last! Why can't you just wait?'

Jayabaya, a twelfth-century warrior king of Java, had prophesied that the island would be set free from oppressors when a conquering power from the east would expel 'white men' and then leave after the life-span of a maize plant.

Lamban's patience snapped and he gripped his friend's arm tightly. 'That's your mother talking, not you! The Japanese are losing the war. Their promises are worthless!'

'But the Dutch are gone!'

'You're a fool if you think the Dutch won't try to come back. They ran from the Japanese but everyone says they'll sneak back with the Americans. If we let them, we'll be slaves again! We can stop it! We'll be famous. But only if we go to the capital and help Sukarno.'

Sukarno was the leader of the pro-Japanese National Movement for Independence and the most popular of the Javanese nationalist politicians.

Karek had no answer. Lamban waved his arm disdainfully at the scene in the square. 'Look around you! Today we have full stomachs but tomorrow we will be filling up on stale sago again. We can best help by going away. In Djakarta we can be useful. Maralik has taught us to read and write, and we have our training in the Youth Corps. Come with me! If we all join together the Dutch will never defeat us! We'll be heroes!'

Karek's eyes were bright now. He was clearly wavering. 'Will we really be famous? I'd—'

'And while the hero's away who will help his father and brother meet the next rice levy?' Behind them the familiar voice seethed with anger. Lamban looked down, while Karek turned sheepishly. 'You'll be heroes all right,' Karek's mother hissed. 'Just like the dead boys at Kediri!'

Not long before, the Javanese militia in Kediri had mutinied. Rumours had spread that the Japanese had crushed it mercilessly and that many had been killed in reprisals.

Karek's mother set down a leaf-tray laden with roasted fermented yam, sweet-and-sour fish, roast chicken, satay and goat-meat kebabs. Karek could not meet her gaze. As she walked away she shot a cold glance at Lamban.

'Let's eat,' said Karek.

Lamban saw the fire had left Karek's eyes. He knew then he would be travelling alone.

It was several hours later, sitting and watching the traditional *wayang kulit* or shadow-puppet plays, before Lamban finally began to enjoy himself. Adults and children alike cheered and shouted themselves hoarse as the pierced buffalo-hide silhouettes of the gods, ghosts and heroes of the *Ramayana* and *Panji* sagas flickered across the improvised, bed-sheet screen.

Attracted by the light from palm oil torches, moths and other winged insects settled on the stretched cloth. It was a balmy, windless evening and above them, clove-cigarette smoke formed thick, pungent clouds. Behind the screen, the *dalang* or puppeteer worked furiously, reciting from a scroll in ancient Javanese, mimicking different voices and swapping puppets at a frenetic pace. His narration was punctuated with mallet strikes cueing the accompaniment