

The
Rimutaka Singularity

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Prologue

Epic. Or at least epic-ette. Or, for a four year old toddler, the best aunt any child can wish for.

She came to visit for my birthday. We gathered in a tiny suburban post-war backyard garden. What an arrival! She looked like an exotic princess, and even sixty years later I remember the kohl-rimmed eyes and fiery red lips. And she smelled of longing, of faraway shores, of lust and desire.

Best of all, she brought birthday presents that no-one else would every have thought of. A real wigwam, and the real dress of Nscho-tshi, Winnetou's sister. As I erected the tipi and started dancing around my camp, tapping my mouth and exclaiming 'ooh-ooh-ooh', tante Rikste sat on a windowsill, lit a funny smelling cigarette and sipped a gin. A year later, celebrating the advance of technology that was a new window on the world stirred by Rikste, I hopped around our brand new Philips television in my genuine Apache dress, waving my plastic tomahawk and brandishing my bow and arrow. The war dance ended with me sticking the bamboo arrow violently up my mouth's hard palate, subsequently nearly bleeding out. Ah – adventure!

Rikste returned only once or twice, and we visited her once in her extraordinary home in Wassenaar, where she maintained a boudoir draped in batiked fabric and larded with scary statuettes of garudas, wayang puppets, and an astonishing collection of knickknacks. No wonder she had once, in a distant and evaporated past, put an oriental spell on my father. She made him long for a life as a colonial in the Netherlands East Indies. But the other women in my dad's life, his mother (Rikste's sister) and my mum, had stopped these ludicrous ambitions. As they had forbidden him to be too close to that perilous woman.

"Oh, she was dangerous, darling," my mother would whisper when I made the slightest suggestion we dwell on Rikste's life and times, "she would dance naked for her brother-in-law. When she was in her fifties!"

"Well," my dad would make a feeble attempt, "dangerous not exactly. She was declared a black sheep by your grandmother. And I don't think it was naked dancing. It was a silken satin scarf performance inspired by Javanese court dances."

"Oh stop it, you fool," my mother routinely replied, "it was all very sexual, very suspicious. As was her dark and deplorable life. She lived with women, too!"

I thought that was not much of an untoward accomplishment. Personally, I thought this was quite a desirable situation. In my Apache dress with an aunt continually busying herself with sleek shawls.

The Middle

1 The Courant

They sat awkwardly at the steel table. The little lieutenant, with all his might attempted to project authority and expertise. He placed his hand on the small mound of manila folders as if to absorb the mysteries that laid within and transform their contents into Intelligence. Of course he had been, virtually endlessly and faintly systematically, shuffling and fingering the personnel records. Touching the newspaper clippings, birth, marriage and death documentation, passenger manifests and witness accounts. The archive smelt of decaying cardboard with a whiff of tobacco and tropical spice. Not unpleasant, but now that he sat down at the steel table with his palm on a life he realised that there was only obscure opacity. He looked up to face Rikste.

She gazed back. It was an unfamiliar encounter. A debrief – of what? She had dressed her best and made sure patchouli mixed with clove and ambergris formed a shield that Mr. Krupp might have been jealous of. Or rather, of course, Shōwa Steel. Talking about steel – gently she placed the sole of her blue satin-clad stiletto pump against the leg of the table and pushed. Welded in place, she decided, not even just bolted. Oh frigging frogs, she then thought, get on with it! “Very well, let’s just start at the beginning,” he stated.

“Which beginning?”

“When you first left the bourgeois environs of...”

“I think it would be better to start at the real *beginning*. I was the middle one you know, and it’s true what they say about the middle one.”

“I am not aware of any significant pronouncements on being the middle one, at least not where I come from.”

Rikste shifted her balance, stretched, lunged at the table and took a cigarette. She started playing with it between her bony fingers. Twirl, roll, twist, it seemed we are in for the long haul as the smoke isn’t lit.

“Ah! That’s because you are from that horrid country. Dreary. Arrogant. Exploitive. Anyway, the middle. Margaret – or Margaretha as she always insisted,” Rikste made an effort to aspire the H, “ – was the eldest. Stupid woman. Henry was the kid, you know that he joined the Nazis eventually, didn’t you.”

It was not a question but an observation. Harry had joined the Nazis. The interlocutor took it on notice, checked his notes. Yes, it was known. It might be part of a separate line of the debriefing inquiry. This conversation, here, in this mirrored room away from fresh air and daylight, was to remain focused. We aren’t concerned with national-socialists at this point. No Nazis to be discussed here.

“Please continue.”

Rikste twirled, rolled and twisted the cigarette in one hand, then took a heavy Zippo lighter and caressed the brushed chrome, following the lines of the engraving. She sighed and stared at the incendiary device.

"You know, this was a gift from Beatrice..." She moistened the chrome with a hushed breath and polished the battered but evidently precious army issue lighter. "I'm sure you know this, too, she gave it to me on the Rimutaka, for Christmas. Not a very romantic present obviously but we sat on deck, Valletta was shining beautifully because the blackout was lifted, they had their first Christmas kind of in peace. You must know Valletta, uhrm," she started to produce an oft practiced and proven effective cynical wink, "Malta was such an important part of the Empire, no...? Yes I know it's a cheap lighter but she comes with so many memories. Beatrice would've exclaimed something like '*Oh Golden Gomorrah*' now." She flipped the lid with a dance-like move of her fist, fired up the lighter and stared at the flame.

"Ms. Meyer, please, we were starting at the very beginning. You were the one in the middle."

"Ah well, what is there to say, with the pedantic bitch above me and the little brownshirt-to-be below, what else was there for me than chart my own course? And my dad encouraged me. He was a violinist at *Musis* and he allowed me to tag along – I guess he may have sensed my being tuned to drama. In fact, my earliest memory is that he took me in an automobile to that concert hall, that must have been around... let's see, 1906. There was the major spectacle of a full blast philharmonic orchestra playing, he was an important man I understood, and afterward we had a lemonade in *Grand Hotel du Soleil*. Of course at the time I did not know it had that name, but Grand it was. Hasn't survived the war, naturally, because of your people. In fact the rubble was used to plump what used to be a fine inland harbour. What a shame. But Dad loved me, gave me a taste for adventure, I guess. Where we lived I could easily disappear into the woods, too, in the distance you could hear the lions roar, very exciting!"

"Lions? No embellishments please, I thought, I mean we know, you lived in..."

"Yes of course, haven't you done your research? There's a famous zoological garden in the woods there, magnificent. The sounds and the smells! The tropics were obviously beckoning from an early age, too. I wanted adventure, and my daddy understood that all too well. In fact, he got me the job at the paper toward the close of the war. Oh – *The Courant*." Rikste expelled a sigh of delight and her eyes drifted back to the offices where she typed up the news for the notoriously republican outlet. What an environment, the paperboys and journalists running around hunting for news, The Chief behind the venetians of his office seemingly

pulling and sensing the strings of world events, filling everyone with anticipation. The moment that the paper was sent downstairs to the printers who hung around the presses, in eager indolence smoking Bastos cigarettes. Tobacco and the smell of ink, the soft clunking of the metal when set on the Linotype, the excitement building, every day. Then The Chief would call downstairs, 'run 'er up!' or even more exciting 'hold press!'

"Listen. I said no embellishments please, and no confabulations. Long after the war you were repatriated and our records show you were debriefed in Camp Valkenburg. Incompletely and incompetently, obviously, otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here right now, but let's be very clear: you did not have a newspaper job during the war."

"My dear boy," she finally lit the cigarette, "obviously I was talking about the first one, the Great War. *Your* Great War. The beginning of the end. For me, evidently, the end of the beginning."

Crackling, a little grey box next to the mirror sprung to life. It pinged. Rikste considered whether somewhere, somehow, someone was instructed to ting the triangle. Or was it a piano? The hissing morphed into a British voice: "Lieutenant Morwell, a moment please?" The lieutenant raised his finger toward Rikste gesturing 'not a word more, not - a - single - word - until - I have - returned' but the people behind the mirror saw how vain his attempt was. After an instance, Morwell shared their sentiment, lowered his finger and said "Stop. I'll be back."

"My dear young man. In my time a gentleman would apologise."

"I'm sorry," and with that Morwell stepped out of the room.

"What?" he snapped at the team that turned away from the mirror and their sight of Rikste smoking with glee.

"She worked at The Courant in the Great War!"

Morwell sighed, "yes, she just told me. Why the hell did you interrupt!? We finally, she ultimately, we reached a moment where we eventually started going and then you idiots stopped me!"

The tall, slender woman in her late forties looked at the interrogator. She walked over to him, stood uncomfortably close and whispered loudly into his ear "Have you not heard of the classified Annexes to the *Van Deman Memoirs*?"

2 Neutral

When the Von Schlieffen Plan was put into motion and the guns of August started rumbling, the Lowlands narrowly escaped annihilation. The Dutch themselves put it down to cunning diplomacy and the need for the opposing blocks to have access to a neutral minor power with trading capacity. But the realists in The Hague knew that this, essentially, had been a lucky case of laying low and looking inconspicuous. By the middle of the 19th century the German poet Heinrich Heine had quipped '*When the end of the world comes make your way to Holland. There everything happens fifty years late!*' and the casual observer would claim that seven decades later the situation had not amended. The Kingdom of The Netherlands was neutral, mostly because it was grey and invisible. The merchants that traditionally ran the country, however, saw vast opportunity.

Anthony Fokker, the aviation pioneer who only years earlier flew his *Spin*¹ around the St. Bavo Church in Haarlem now was building an air fleet for the Germans, and simultaneously sold his aerodynamics knowledge to the Britons. Neutrality does not mean sitting still, Anthony realised. Neutrality means giving everyone what they need, or at least, making everyone believe that they got what they want. A bit of opium shipped East, some timber going South, a shipment of rubber across the Pacific, inuendo whispered to the North, and intelligence and intrigue were rife.

The Netherlands itself seemed to have come to a stifling standstill, surrounded by the war juggernauts on land to its South and East, and off the coast in its own North Sea. The reality, though, was a seething maelstrom of fiery magma fuelled by trade and information, and information on trade. Or, as Ralph Van Deman – an until then otherwise rather unremarkable military man - had realised with shrewd acuity, the trade of information.

The American Civil War had been momentous for the noble trade of spying. It saw the establishment of Secret Services on all belligerent sides, and intelligence gathering became a legitimate pursuit in government and industry circles. The war and its resolution also stimulated radical industrial change and social mobility. All of a sudden the United States of America could assert itself as a significant power, and industrious types were not just galivanting around the globe because there was a world to be discovered, but because knowledge more clearly than ever before was power. In its geo-political ambitions, the US exploited this position. Ralph Van Deman was navigating these wonderful currents, in the

¹ *Spider* – for its obvious appearance.

shadows and in the sun, at night and at day, with dexterous joy. Cunningly, he saw an opportunity for fame, fortune, and patriotism during the Spanish-American War. Like a proto-globalised whirlwind he collected information on the military capabilities of Spain in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. He had access to the White House centre of military operations and was able to direct military resources half way around the world with the mere suggestion of knowledge, and sheer inference of fact. When Spanish-American peace broke out he felt his job wasn't over. He set off to Cuba and Puerto Rico to collect cartographic data. He was reassigned to the Philippines in April 1899 as aide to Brigadier-General Robert Patterson Hughes. After two years he was promoted to Captain and was moved to the Bureau of Insurgent Records in Manila, which he helped transform into the Philippine Military Information Division. Van Deman was astutely aware of the importance of securing critical infrastructure and continued access to resources. His intelligence gathering made subtle use of naïve ambitions of locals, little battlers and street corner industrialists, constantly playing with their indigenous, Spanish and American loyalties (and any other that he could discern...). Ralph was an ambitious man, but knew that a rapid rise through the ranks too precipitously would be detrimental to his intelligence reach.

As a reluctant major he returned to the US and its War College Division in July 1915. To his enormous frustration he found that in the armed forces there was a general apathy about intelligence-gathering. Military intelligence had virtually disappeared from the Army and Navy rank-and-file, and he considered leaving the service and engaging in more private intelligence operations. He wrote a history of the Military Information Division detailing its beginnings in 1885, its rise in 1903, and fall in subsequent years. He wrote his alarming assessment, and sent dozens of copies to military top brass and friends in Congress because he was convinced that the Army must have a coordinated intelligence organization if it were to avoid defeat in the near future. Eventually Van Deman was able to get an audience with the Secretary of War to present his case. The time was ripe, and Van Deman impressed by gushing a relentless repertoire of little known security facts and gossip. A crucial element in him instituting an intelligence establishment was his vast network of global connections, his mastery of the most modern communication technologies, and a filing system that bordered on the obsessive-compulsive. He was a champion morse operator and it was rumoured he had a private cable in his house – wherever he was stationed.

As the result of these efforts the Military Intelligence Section, War College Division, War Department General Staff, was formally created on 3 May 1917. The

designation was merely a ratification of the network Van Deman and his friends had established informally in the years since he was active in the Philippines.

As well as military intelligence gathering, MID was also tasked with preventing sabotage and subversion by enemy agents on US soil. Short of manpower, Van Deman relied on private groups which he organized into the American Protective League. He also provided security to government offices, defence plants, sea-ports, and other sensitive installations. He created a field organization in eight US cities which employed mobilized civilian policemen to perform security investigations. In France, MID provided operational intelligence to the American Expeditionary Force, and Van Deman created the Corps of Intelligence Police - recruiting fifty French-speaking Sergeants with police training. Thus, within a few months, he had created an intelligence organization that could support both domestic and tactical intelligence requirements.

Van Deman's Dutch Branch had all started with the journeys of latex across the oceans. When the war broke out in 1914 global trade was compromised, just at a time that the United States were exploding with innovation in automobility. The voracious need for rubber was ever mounting, especially in the automobility industries. The Brits had their own plantations on the subcontinent and they found it hard enough to keep it flowing to Albion themselves. The Americans first looked at Brazil for alternative suppliers, but their Dutch middlemen in the Caribbean smoothly steered them toward the never-ending reliable stream of caoutchouc from the Netherlands East Indies. There, on the island of Java between Surabaya and Jogjakarta, they found their latex motherlode in the estates connected to the NV Rubber Cultuur Maatschappij Amsterdam. Its Dutch planters had enthusiastically embraced the new trade opportunity and established vast plantations of *Hevea Brasiliensis*, interspersed for good measure with *Coffea Canephora*.

Bounciness! Rubber and coffee made the area of Bogo Kidul and the Dutch colonials a new centre of globalisation. The Americans set up trade connections with the shipping companies in Surabaya and Tanjung Priok, arranging freighters to shift the waves plied from the Philippines to The Indies. Before long, the increase in trade volume became of interest to the Dutch masters in the home country. Was it possible to negotiate guaranteed volumes and prices? Such talks, obviously, had to take place at Head Office. And so, in August 1916, a delegation from the Goodyear Company did not set sail from Akron (Ohio) to Batavia, but to Amsterdam.

Van Deman had some gentlemen informers in place in the Lowlands, already. In fact, connections between the two nations were, as a matter of course, cordial

and went beyond the Dutch lineage of Presidents Van Buuren and Roosevelt or magnates like Vanderbilt, all with trustworthy lowland credentials. Van Deman's ace was Nicholas, 'Klaas', Penn. Penn, the great-great-grandson of statesman William Penn (indeed, the Penn of the woods) had returned to his roots², so to speak. He had taken up a position as a Professor in Botanica in The Netherlands's oldest and most esteemed university in Leiden. Its Botanical Gardens and global stature in the study of biology were unrivalled. The Dutch knew Nicholas as Klaas – an almost archetypical Netherlands given name. When engaging with his friends at the embassy, or international colleagues down in the tavern on Rapenburg, Penn proudly flirted with his Dutch ancestry and his flawless, even leaning toward the local dialect, Dutch. And now Klaas was tasked with entertaining the rubber barons.

The ambassador of the US, Van Dyke (a man with an equally proud Dutch legacy), immediately thought of Penn when the arrival of Goodyear's chief purchasers and negotiators was cabled through. Professor Penn had specialised in Hevea cultivars and travelled widely. He obviously knew much more of this booming business than Van Dyke's own agricultural and industrial attachés. Time to throw a cocktail party and have some civilised conversation with the learned. When Klaas Penn received the invitation to attend an informal get-together at the legation in The Hague he was, of course, not surprised. His old friend Ralph Van Deman had already signalled the arrival of the industrialists, and suggested that the neutrality of both the USA and The Netherlands might end quite soon. "Time, Klaas," he had cabled to Leiden, cunningly ingratiating the Dutchness of the effort, "to prepare ourselves for improved trades in knowledge and rubber." In fact, Penn was excited. Here arose an opportunity to show off his intimate connections with everything Hollands. He would take the Goodyear fellows for a trip around the country to prepare for their meeting in Amsterdam. He'd take them to the colonial planters' school in Deventer, and – wait! – they might be interested in a visit to a Dutch rubber factory... which one, then? Obviously there was Vredestein. Close to his hometown of Leiden, in Delft. Convenient for arranging travel. Bit boring if Penn wanted to show off his Lowlander qualities. But if he'd take them to Deventer anyway he could renew his acquaintance with Dirk Frans Wilhelmi. Yes! What a brilliant plan. Klaas would benefit from the bonhomie of good old Dirk, and impress the Goodyear men. He cabled back to Van Deman: "Will take Goodyear to Wilhelmi Rubber Factory. Great innovator. Stop" and started preparing a file for Ambassador Van Dyke.

² William Penn's mother Margaret Jasper was born in Rotterdam (the Dutch Republic), 1624

Penn found Wilhelmi much more of an adventurous innovator than the other Dutch rubber baron, Vredestein's Emile Schiff. Schiff, boringly, just produced rubber tyres. He invested in the further development of vulcanisation methods to optimise his tyre business. Penn, as a botanist, wasn't interested. Wilhelmi, on the other hand, was a visionary! Bounciness and flexibility – what a motto, Penn found. Why limit oneself to tyres? The lurid latex, he agreed with Wilhelmi, knew no bounds! Gloves, suits, household items and coverings, boots and shoes, coucho was the future of human evolution and joy. Wilhelmi embraced the same vision with social entrepreneurial enthusiasm and extended the sticky bouncy nature of the material to his every endeavour. Earlier in 1916 he had announced he'd build a model factory village to lift up the workers, invest in social and economic productivity, emancipation of young, old, men, women, and all people of all abilities: Heveadorp³ on the banks of the river Rhine would be a shining light for social innovation in rubber. *That*, Penn considered, would impress the Good-year bunch.

³ Rubbertown

3 The Dunkley

Morwell straightened his back, plucked an imaginary speck of dust off his lapel, and re-entered the room. He tried to smile. "My apologies for the interruption," he sighed again.

Rikste very carefully extinguished her second cigarette, squeezed her mouth to ascertain that the gloss she had applied was ever more evenly reddening her still sensuous lips, leaned back, and said "My boy, I'm as ready as ever to continue the story."

"Alright then. You joined *The Courant* as a typist, you said."

"Indeed. Lovely times, without that job I would have been nowhere." She squinted at Morwell. He squinted back, trying to signal a premonition he knew he couldn't – yet – deliver on. He cleared his throat.

"Right. Do you remember Heveadorp?"

Rikste cooed in delight.

"Did you want to share with me what happened? And how?" Morwell inquired.

Rikste shifted in her seat, swallowed another slight instance of melodramatic signalling, theatrically raised her left arm and studied the cheap watch that dangled off its wrist. "I think it is time for a drink, don't you?"

The wily woman behind the mirror mimed *damn her* and gestured *roll in the fucking drinks trolley* to the minion that sat in the corner. The contraption came to life with a happy clinking of glassware and bottles.

"And there we are!" Rikste observed, "a G&T please, but if you allow me I'll have it with an *Ouwe Bols* and not your flimsy colonial distillate." Morwell complied as he also poured himself a straight *Ouwe Bols* shot glass and tipped it down the hatch while he served Rikste her G&T.

"Heveadorp," he repeated.

"So. What happened was this. The Chief must have received a cable that those Americans were coming. In 1916 mind you! Your Great War was raging all around us, we were neutral but oh so stifled, I don't think anyone dared to lean East or West, and here the Americans were coming to visit that extraordinary hamlet that Wilhelmi was building. So The Chief storms out of the office and points to Uncle Sietse and says – *Unc you'll go down there and write up what they want. Americans!* Oh I should say that Uncle Sietse decidedly wasn't the star reporter of *The Courant*, but he had a motor bike. He could get there, to Heveadorp, on the bike. You know where Heveadorp is, and the social innovation the rubber guy there was pursuing?"

Morwell nodded. He had been handed another file and had just scanned the evidence.

“Did you know that at The Courant we actually never used proper names? To be honest I have a hard time recalling the family names of The Chief and Uncle Sietse, now. We were strange, those days, don’t you think?” she sipped her drink. “But they always called me ‘miss’ ... Anyhow, I heard The Chief instruct Uncle Sietse to head down to Heveadorp and investigate the Americans, and I don’t know what came over me, but I started jumping up and down and cheered and begged and told The Chief that I would be *soooo* helpful for a good story as I did speak some English don’t you know?” Rikste embraced the glass, stuck a middle finger in and squeezed the bit of lime that until then had been floating aimlessly in Bols’ brew. “I’m sorry,” she said, “I got carried away a bit. Also – I so much wanted to get into the sidecar of Uncle Sietse’s bike. For a seventeen year old, that seemed like the ultimate in adventure, then.”

“Uncle Sietse did not speak English and he yet got the assignment simply because he had a motorbike?”

“Well I reckon The Chief knew that Klaas Penn would be there and that he’d interpret. I don’t know. You should realise that in those days we really saw ourselves more closely related to the Germans, so everyone, well at least toward the East of the country, would speak a bit of German but hardly any English. It doesn’t matter. I spoke some, and I got to get in the sidecar. Oh I remember as if this happened yesterday – I’ve been driving cars and trucks and planes in my time, but that first trip in the Dunkley...”

“You did not know Penn, then?” Morwell interrupted, “You had no idea?”

“Nah.”

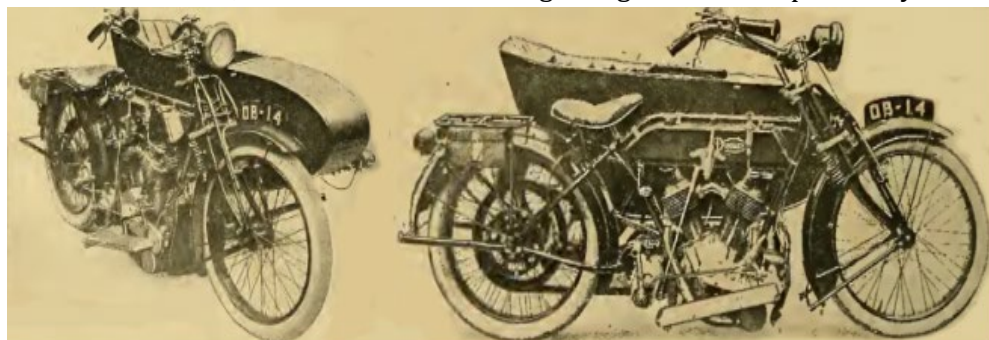
“And how about Van Witzenburg?”

“What?” Rikste grabbed her glass and got up. She walked to the mirror and stood so close to it that her breath misted up the surface in little contrails, then whispered intently and slowly “Van Witzenburg? In 1916? Witzje? The little Witz...” The tall woman behind the mirror recoiled as if she was suddenly looking into the eyes of the Queen Cobra.

“Yeah,” Morwell had also jumped to his feet, walked across the room and now stood uncomfortably close to Rikste. She could suddenly smell the bittersweet, sweaty and almost petrol-like aroma of the *Ouwe Bols* he had just swallowed. “Van Witzenburg.”

“They had nothing to do with the Heveadorp outing,” Rikste muttered, more to herself than to her interrogator or the team behind the mirror, “did they?”

“You tell us, Rikste. What was...” Morwell looked at his notepad to pretend he checked the name, “...Bram van Witzenburg doing in Heveadorp that day?”



Dunkley's new passenger model was described as a medium powered twin, but it was certainly flexible as its 5hp JAP twin drove via a four-speed Jardine gearbox. Equipment included Druid forks and drum rear brake. "Obviously this is a machine for rough work as well as for ordinary touring, and one regrets that circumstances prevent its debut in something as strenuous, say, as the Scottish six days trials."

The woman behind the mirror bent forward again, and as if she felt it, Rikste backed away from her own reflection. “If you are suggesting,” she started assertively, “that all of this, all of this...” she hesitated in contemplation what to badge her career, “this crazy life was the fault of the Van Witzenburgs, you are dead wrong. It was all my own doing, or at least, I was there when I somnambulated through the minefield, wasn't I?”

Lieutenant Morwell cleared his throat. “We agreed to start at the beginning, didn't we? I reckon Bram van Witzenburg was part of that beginning. Let's just relax and you tell us that story. We are not insinuating anything.” He quickly glanced at the mirror.

Rikste poured herself another G&T and sighed “OK – I'll tell you about the Heveadorp venture and then I want to call it a day. Also – I may have some records, old and crumbling photos you know, at home that I might want to consult. Snaps.” She drifted into a moment of contemplation, “Yes of course he was there, it *was* the beginning....” Somewhere she would have the issue of *The Courant* that had launched it all, and she recalled a grainy photograph – was the old man in it?

4 Tjikembang

The very same day that Rikste journeyed to Heveadorp, Dominique Berretty and his wife Irene also enjoyed an *Ouwe Bols*. But the young couple was half a world away, on the poopdeck of the steamship Tjikembang. The SS Tjikembang sailed for the Java Pacific Line, and may well have had a cargo of latex bound for Akron, from Surabaya via Manila, Hong Kong and Honolulu.

When the Tjikembang docked in San Francisco on the second of September, 1916, Berretty had already registered as a blip in Van Deman's files. The nature of international trade around the turn of the century was such that a good shipping company ran established routes with steady suppliers and buyers of a vast variety of goods. The Tjikembang took weeks, sometimes months, plying the waters between the Netherlands East Indies, American dominated Philippines, British Hong Kong, the US West Coast, and back. In each of those ports the company would have a network of representatives, stevedores, merchants, reliable and less reliable docks and dock workers, and officious government bureaucrats that for most of the time would be dependable allies in facilitating the legal – and occasionally illicit – movement of cargo, creatures and cognizance. In that vast and murky network of interested parties of the global trade there was always someone who was prepared to share some innocuous information with an American friend. Berretty's blip appeared in Van Deman's reports when Dominique undertook a side trip to Canton from Hong Kong.

If ever there was a melting pot of intrigue and an opportunity to trade anything that thought, walked, grew or could be pulled from the earth, it was Canton. From the 17th century, the Portuguese from Macau and Spaniards from Manila established trading posts and local residencies, as did private Arab, Armenian, and English traders. From 1699 to 1714, the French and British East India Companies sent a ship or two each year. Even the Austrian Ostend General India Co. arrived in the early 18th century, quickly joined by the Dutch East India Co. in 1729, the Danish Asiatic Co. in 1731, and the Swedish East India Co. the next year. Prussian and Trieste Company vessels regularly docked. The first independent American ship arrived in 1784 and the first colonial Australian schooner in 1788. By the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Canton was embroiled in the latest of a series of revolutions and civil wars that mostly played out on the edge of the field of the vision of the global colonial powers – until the Great War broke out and any asset might become a strategic advantage. Information, intelligence and conjecture leaked in and out of the ports of China, and Canton was a hive of filth, insinuation and opportunity. When Berretty sailed from Hong Kong to Canton, his little

voyage became of interest to the hungry filing system. Van Deman's man in the Pilot's Office in Hong Kong saw him board the steamer to Canton. A charming, indeed elegant man in a sharp, freshly pressed double breasted tropical costume among the hordes of Chinese families stood out as an Eifel Tower in the jungles of the remote Congo, he thought, and spent a quick telegram to the US on the phenomenon.

Dominique Beretty, it could be said without any exaggeration, was to be the William Randolph Hearst of the Netherlands East Indies. He was an 'Indo' – a person with a European father and an indigenous Javanese mother. He was ambitious, full of unstoppable curiosity and a love of modern technology. For a while he worked as a junior clerk at the Telegraph Office in Batavia and would have seen the raw power of facts, twisted facts, access to facts and lies, and the potency of everyone that could mediate and manipulate between the blips that came through the cable and the words that rolled out of the printing press. He joined the ranks of the young runners at *The Batavia News* newspaper in 1910, then moved to its competitor *Java Bode* in 1913 where he quickly impressed its editor-in-chief Van Heusden. In the racially conscious colony, a half blood like Beretty would not have had an easy time rising through the ranks – but Van Heusden had a plan: Dominique would be sent to the motherland and become the *Java Bode's* Chief European correspondent! This would qualify him with connections, a worldly perspective, and experience to take over the paper when the time came. However, another time came – that of the Great War.

The offices of the *Java Bode* were moulding and rotting away, like any other colonial establishment, in the water logged downtown area of Batavia. The staff more often was studying the growth of mould on the walls than banging out news. Or they pretended to discuss news potential. "Listen," Dominique bent in a conspiratorial gesture sideways to the desk of his friend Herman and lowered his voice, "The Chief wants me to go to America!"

"Bloody hell!" Herman nearly fell out of his chair and had to steady himself rolling backward against the wall. "America? Why!?"

"Technology, my friend, technology!" Dominique's eyes sparkled, "those Americans do everything bigger, better. They do things we can only dream of. Did you know that the San Francisco telegraph and telephone exchange apparently runs a hundred thousand connections – twice!?" He nearly knocked himself out slamming his forehead in mock bafflement. "Speed! Speed! Vitesse!" Beretty loved to exploit and embellish the Italian and French roots on his father's side, "Aeroplanes, incredibly fast automobiles! I heard a rumour that they even have a wireless voice connection so you can talk, without delay! from San Francisco to New

York!" For a moment Berretty saw a future for the 18,000 kilometres and 18,000 islands of the Tropic of Emerald where everyone was connected, where the Resident of Banda Atjeh could speak instantly with the Administrator of Merauke, and where the masses of hitherto simpleton Districts like Tumbit or Sumba would be enlightened by the daily news created by Berretty. "Imagine..." he suggested to Herman.

Herman had enough trouble coping with the daily challenges of getting to the office on time, so he had a hard time imagining a futuristically connected world. "But why you, Dom? You're just a simple fellow from Djokjakarta, an Indo with your roots firmly here on Java, you're dreaming when you'd believe you'd ever get out of here."

"Exactly, Herman, I am precisely dreaming of getting out of here and then returning to make our land part of that great big world beyond. Can't you see that the Indies are truly the centre of the world? Can't you see with all that innovation our nation will feed, nourish, power the future? We have petrol! We have tin! We have rubber! We have ore of any kind!"

"Dom, calm down. We just have spices, we have nutmeg, cloves, pepper and coffee. Do we have the intelligentsia to power the future? Do we have the energy, the people?" Herman waved his hands vaguely through the heavy, hot tropical atmosphere in the Java Bode offices as if gesturing to the gods of indolence and decay. "Nah!" In a way he was right, of course. The white Dutch colonial masters had never found it necessary to establish local higher education or a knowledge industry of any sorts – universities were located on the North Sea, not on the Java Sea, obviously.

"Oh my dear friend, how wrong you are," Berretty jumped up and started pacing, "we are creating a new world here, new opportunities. We just need imagination. Imagination!" The second time he pronounced the word *à la Française*. Herman thought the French version did indeed sound quite a bit more ambitious. "De l'audace!" Berretty added enthusiastically when he saw Herman's eyes glint. He slapped him on the shoulder.

"Right." Herman smiled, "I had forgotten about your ruthless audacity. But still I think it is really extraordinary that Van Heusden is going to send you on a trip to America. Have you booked, by the way?"

But Dominique Berretty couldn't leave his dream. "Imagine," he said, "when we combine all that's good from all people in this marvellous melting pot! The Chinese have been here for ages and look at them! Industrious little traders they are. Then the Malay who work the plantations so energetically, the Portuguese whom we don't really like do we," Herman and Dom shared a pathological contempt for

the erstwhile Catholic colonisers, “but they have festive rituals and good connections! And the best of the best is when you combine Europeans, the Dutch, the Batavians and the Friesians with the Javanese. Sprinkle some Latin spirit: the Indo is not inferior, the Indo brings out the best! Shepherded by a commonwealth that spans the world under one Queen we will forge that future! And no doubt the Americans will add a dose of healthy energy, too.”

“Look Dom we’ve had this discussion before, do you really think we shall forever be happy Insulinde, the pride of the Lowlands in the tropics?” Dom’s colleague purposely used the word Insulinde, the word that Eduard Douwes Dekker under his pseudonym Multatuli had coined for the Dutch archipelago in his magnum opus *Max Havelaar*. The literary work was an early Dutch *J'accuse* and stirred strong emancipation vibes. It was now also the name of a political movement in The Indies, interpreted by some to aim for independence of the vast and diverse scattering of lands.

Berretty shrugged. “Yes the tickets have been booked, and Irene is coming along! All that I can say is that Van Heusden must see my potential.” He made a little triumphal dance in the circle around his chair, hands in the air. “In fact, *I* see my potential! I will hone my trade, I will be a true correspondent, a war correspondent even! I plan to visit the battlefields of China...”

“Oh dear,” Herman shivered, “the battlefields of China....?” He had heard rumours about the wild backwaters of Hong Kong, the opium trade and piracy which he imagined might look like a multiplication of a bad day in Batavia’s Chinatown, Glodok. He wouldn’t come within smelling distance of Glodok on an ordinary day, let alone on a momentous monsoonal outburst of Chinese industry. Imagine *that*, and add a lethal dose of gunpowder, fanaticism and otherwise poisoned minds. A slaughterhouse of madness, clearly. And his friend Dominique cheerily reported he’d visit that misery. “What about Irene?” he asked.

“Oh I imagine she’ll stay in Hong Kong. Van Heusden told me he already made arrangements with his colleague newspaper tycoons in Manila where we’ll dock first, and then Hong Kong. We’ll dine with Tse Tsan-tai and Alfred Cunningham, you know those fellows that established the *South China Morning Post* a few years ago, and Van Heusden believes they’ll facilitate a safe trip to Canton.” In honesty, Berretty wasn’t really sure about exactly how safe the trip would be, but trusted his Asian instincts. He agreed with Van Heusden that the experience would surely benefit his standing and opportunities.



The Berrettys had very much enjoyed their trip, mostly. The excursion to Canton had been an onslaught on Dom’s senses. The stench, the chaos, the massacres,

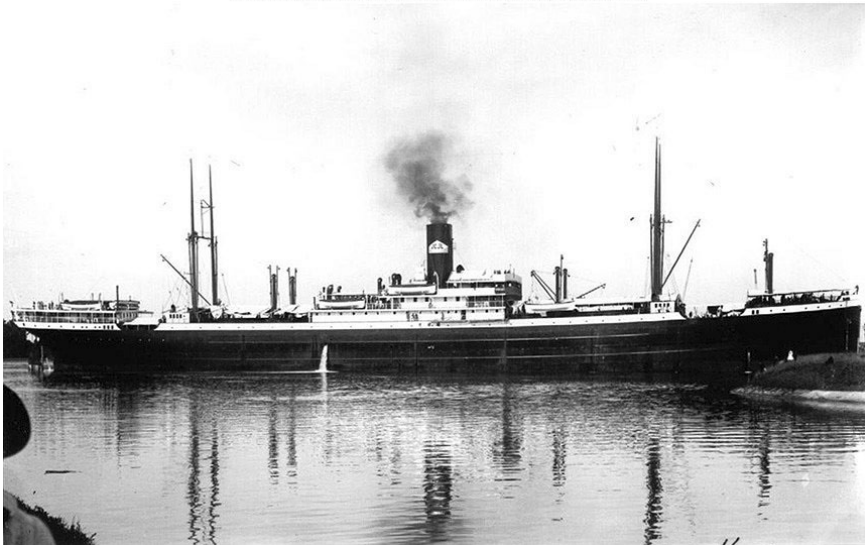
the civil war that raged around the city was a blood drenched hell of mud and gore. In his missives sent home to the Java Bode he attempted to describe the gloom of the city: *'Oh city of intense filth, cursed poverty and despicable overpopulation. A stench, an all-overpowering, suffocating, jaw-jerking stink wafts over this all, and maintains itself in the labyrinths of millions and billions of slums and alleyways where the pavement knows the sun only for a rumour'*⁴. But now Irene and Dominique sat on the poopdeck of the Tjikembang staring at a sunset over the north Pacific. "Oh darling," Irene said, "tomorrow your stellar career will really lift off. San Francisco!"

"Sweet parakeet," Dom replied, "my career started years ago in Djokjakarta. But I am very happy that we are sharing this. De l'audace, vitesse! Magnifique!" Irene smiled.



Herman van Witzenburg had volunteered to copy-edit Dominique's telegrams into his travel letters for the paper, before Van Heusden approved their publication. He was in awe of the ventures of his friend. Traveling around the world, gazing at Philipinas on a Manila sidewalk terrace one day, wading through Chinese blood the other, inspecting the Hawaiian pineapple plantations. But mostly he admired the love for Irene that seemed relentless. Maybe he should write home and ask his family whether they could identify his own Irene.

S.S. Tjikembang (Dutch, 1914), also USS Tjikembang (1918-19)



⁴ Dominique Willem Berretty, 'Canton', Java Bode, 29 September 1916

5 The Heveadorp heave

Lazily the little clappers started to rotate against the copper bells of the *Eurieult*. Bram van Witzenburg did not look up and asked his wife “Wilma, will you take that please?” while continuing his attempt to pluck a pea out of the nose of three year old Maartje.

Of course it was Wilma’s fault that this abomination was here anyway. He himself had insisted they invest in a Stromberg Carlson telephone. A superb American product, he had read, and the dynamism of the New World suggested these machines were better, faster than anything else. But then Wilma had pointed out that Stromberg Carlson was Swedish, just like Ericsson, and that yes, this Swedish-American axis would be fast and reliable, but not elegant. No! Wilma had exclaimed, in my house we will never have those ugly timber boxes. We shall have French brass elegance! And so a contraption produced by the elegantly named French firm *La Séquanaise Electrique* was installed. The village thronged outside their picket fence when the engineers arrived, and a short piece covering the event was published in *The Courant*.

“Bram,” his wife had analysed at the end of a rather nerve-wrecking day while she served boiled potatoes and a meatball – a treat after a week of *nasi goreng* and *babi pangan*, “you may have wanted an American device, but isn’t our *Eurieult* a beauty? I really think it’s a gem, there on the little side table in the hallway. And remember, I promise you it will good for the practice!”

Bram had shrugged. On the one hand, indeed, he would like to see himself as that dynamic America-loving modern man, but on the other – he had chosen a career in family medicine and eventually based himself in Oosterbeek because he thought it’d be a quiet enterprise. The kind people of the rather well-to-do small town off in the woods weren’t suffering from the modern scourges, they respected the wisdom of the medicine man, and generally walked at a calm pace to the practice that was surrounded by a gorgeous wildflower garden. The town found itself on a low wooded escarpment above the river Rhine, away from the bustle of the provincial capital but close enough to modern transport, including the railway. It was popular as a retirement residence of colonial planters upon their repatriation. Beautiful villas lined the alleys of oak and beech.

He stared at the meatball, thought of the modern communications equipment and reflected, yes, again this was Wilma’s doing. Exceptionally beautiful garden with those giant daisies, cornflowers, poppies, the colours of the House of Orange... But now with this telephone thing, that damned *Eurieult*, he would never again have a moment of rest, an instant of reflection, time away from the

onslaught of peas in noses. Particularly worrisome was the villagers' notion that the machine was a communal contraption and he had seen a slow increase in the number of connections from the City asking to run over to a family member, or worse, acquaintance, for a conversation. Wilma generally seemed to love it. He in fact started to believe she knew all the girls at the exchange already, and played her role as the Bringer of Tidings with gusto: "Oosterbeek 17, Arnhem 12 would like to speak to a Mr. Termorshuizen." and off she'd be, getting Gustaaf Termorshuizen.

Wilma walked back from the hallway. "Bram, this was Sietse on the Eurieult." He thought 'she just keeps using the bloody French elegance to rub it in', "He says jump on the bike and get to Heveadorp. It's an emergency. There's Americans!" "Ah!" his eyes lit up. Time for a quick solution. He irrigated Maartje's affected nostril, pressed the other gently closed and ask her to blow. The pea popped out. "There you are my darling!" he squeezed her ear and asked Wilma, "Will you take her back to her mum, then? And Americans, eh? On the bike, eh? I'd better be off!"

His heart cheered. He ran past the hallway side table with the French elegance, grabbed his leather jacket off the stand, dashed out through the wildflower garden, to the picturesque shed and threw open the doors. "My friend!" he whispered. It was as if the Harley-Davidson 1,000 cc HT was already whispering back. Whispering? No, Bram thought, if it did anything it would be purring. He kicked the machine to life, a loud feline whirr initiated that quickly changed in a roar when he sped off. "Americans," he roared too, "here I come!"



Sietse sped down Spoorstraat in Oosterbeek. Rikste tilted her head to the sun once more, put her fingers through her hair and let it flow in the wind. My god, she thought, freedom! Sietse slowed down when he was close to Bram's house at number 38, considering whether he should stop to see whether his friend had already left. He saw Wilma in the garden though, and with a broad smile she gestured they should keep going. Americans, he thought, here we come!

Down the hill it went, lovely cool air, and there it was, the former Model Farm that Wilhelmi was turning into the rubber factory, and a bit further down the road a construction site, piles of clinkers from the upstream clay pits and brickworks, and one house freshly painted. A bunch of cleverly suited men milling around.

"Mr. Sietse Jansen!?" one of them stepped out and opened his arms wide, "of The Courant?" Sietse considered that those Americans spoke Dutch awfully well. "My name is Klaas Penn, I sent your boss the telegram this morning!" Sietse parked

his Dunkley next to Bram’s Harley Davidson. Where is the good doctor, he thought, peering around. Rikste jumped out of the sidecar. “Hello Klaas,” she said with youthful irreverence, “you speak Dutch? I’m Rikste! Rikste Meyer!” “I do,” he smiled, taken by Rikste’s youthful exuberance and forwardness, “but they don’t.” He gestured to the Americans that were standing at a table with large blueprints clipped to it, and an energetic man pointing to the forest, the blueprint, the model farm, the pile of bricks, back to the blueprint and appearing to move an imaginary mound of sand across it, then to the finished house. The Americans smiled somewhat apologetically. “Nick, Nicholas!” one of them called, “We need your magic here...”



“I speak English, too,” said Rikste and held on with one hand to Klaas, pulling Sietse with the other. Oops, she thought, am I supposed to do this, be so frank? Both Klaas and Sietse grinned happily, though, and Klaas laughed, “Youth!” They walked to the table with the blueprint. “So,” Wilhelmi said, “if you look just down the road, there, you see an anchoring. This little bend on the Rhine is a small natural harbour, has been so for centuries, and there’s a little brook here that flows down from the rim, the crispest water you can imagine, and the model farm over there is just perfectly suited to set up the industry of the future.”

Klaas gently pushed Rikste and Sietse into the group. "Friends, these are the journalists of The Courant. Rikste and Sietse. And these world travellers are Bill Valorme, Seamus O'Leary and Samuel Wilson of the Goodyear Company. And the centre of all our attention is Dirk Wilhelmi, rubber magnate!"

Rikste had grown half a foot since she got out of the sidecar. All of a sudden she was a journalist, and speaking to Americans and a rubber magnate. She stretched and strode forward. "Mr. Wilhelmi," she said in Dutch, "shall I interpret?" Dirk nodded, and she winked at Sietse, "you'll just take notes!"

A flood of construction and innovation information ensued. Rikste and Klaas operated in perfect tandem, charming and eloquent. With youthful exuberance and over-confidence Rikste threw herself into the conversation, asking questions on behalf of the Goodyear men, replying before Wilhelmi could consider the implications of a query. After a good bout of fast exchanges Rikste thought she knew everything there was to know about latex harvesting, rubber transport and processing, about model villages and health and well-being of the worker. "And now!" Wilhelmi cheered enthusiastically, "Drinks!" and ushered the group into the fine thatched Director's Villa. At this point Dr. van Witzenburg ambled around the corner of the Model Farm/Future Factory. When earlier he had pulled up on his motor bike he saw the group of Americans – he assumed – and suddenly felt out of place. He had decided to walk around the site a bit. He knew of the medieval Duno, a large fortification laid down by Adela van Hameland, a noblewoman, a thousand years ago, just outside the Wilhelmi property. He decided to explore. He liked fierce women. Not just Wilma and her fanciful French aesthetic.

6 Letters

Leiden, August 27, 1916

Dear Major,

On Thursday 24 August 1916 I had the pleasure of accompanying the delegation of the Goodyear Company to a very special rubber production outfit in Holland: Heveadorp.

In attendance were the esteemed gentlemen guests Bill Vallorme, Seamus O'Leary and Samuel Wilson of the Goodyear Company (Akron, Ohio), mr. Dirk Wilhelmi, owner and entrepreneur of the Hevea Rubber Factory, mr. Sietse Jansen and ms. Rikste Meyer of the daily newspaper The Courant (Arnhem), and a late blow-in, Dr. Abraham van Witzenburg, family doctor (Oosterbeek).

As I have briefed you in an earlier missive, I have a personal interest in the rubber plant and its production, and have taken a more than usual interest in the operations at Heveadorp. Mr. Wilhelmi has many highly novel ideas about the rubber production process and the way he can stimulate the workers and their families to enhance the quality of the products. He is building a garden village – you may be aware of similar efforts in England, eg Letchworth, and in our own country, eg Forest Hills Gardens in New York – to accommodate his new factory. It very much breathes the spirit of an enthusiastic communal enterprise and worker families live amongst their superiors as equals (albeit with superiors having loftier and airier dwellings). The Goodyear men were quite impressed.

I also indicated in my earlier note that Mr. Wilhelmi's rubber products are of a diverse and ever changing nature. He has moved from tyres to also produce rubber boots and gloves. I asked him whether he has received any orders from the warring parties and he was understandably hesitant to speak. But upon impressing him that he was among neutral friends and same-spirited industrialists he confided in me that the German Imperial Army had inquired about the production and delivery of gas masks. It appears to me that this is a development that deserves further monitoring.

I wish to make another observation about ms. Rikste Meyer, and I should admit that I am somewhat inspired by the romantic exploits and performances of her countrywoman Wilhelmina Zelle, also known as Mata Hari. I am certain that you are collecting information on the latter. A wonderful entertainer, and welcome guest in the highest circles. I had an opportunity once to see her Oriental inspired dance and it was a delightful experience. The fiery nature of her spirit I saw reflected in the energetic expression of young ms. Meyer.

I am recommending that we keep a tag on ms. Meyer and, when necessary, involve her in our information collection pursuits. I believe she has a fulfilled life ahead of her that might take her to places of interest. I would be willing to engage with her as per pertinent instructions.

Yours truly,

Professor Nicholas Penn



Oosterbeek, 2 September 1916,

My dear son,

We miss you so much.

Dad is still thinking to go back to Insulinde to open the practice there. It is an ongoing dream. He has inquired about a posting in Bandoeng which, as you know, has a climate that is amenable to his asthmatic constitution. Maybe you would have time to travel to the District if you have time? We hear the city is quickly becoming a pleasant location with good shops, and we like the Preanger. Such cool air there. Do you remember when we took you there for the holidays when you were a boy? We went to Tangkuban Prahau, the volcano. I remember how fascinated you were with the stink! Our babu came along and cooked us eggs in the volcanic springs.

We understand why you had wanted to go back to the Indies, and hope you are well. We are so pleased to read in your last letter that you landed a job as clerk and assistant news boy with the Java Bode. In your next letter please send us some clippings of articles you have written. Especially your father thinks it is very exciting to go out at ungodly hours and cover crime and fires and such. You know of course that when he needs to get out of bed in the wee hours it's normally because of some menial domestic disaster that he needs to address. You'd be in a different role we expect. You must enjoy it.

We had been a bit anxious that with the new telephony machine we had installed, the Eurieult, there would be more work – and excitement Mum adds – but largely things have remained rather calm. Maybe the most notable difference is that we see various neighbours more often, as they ask to contact family further afield and use the machine.

Well your father wants to write about some excitement that the Eurieult did cause.

Herman, my boy, you know that the War keeps us subdued quite a bit. Our Government is very careful to not bend too far to the Germans or too much to the Brits, and we feel very much as if we are in the eye of the storm. Should we move too much we might get caught up in that terrible hurricane, and most of your

countrymen here attempt to sit still as much as they can. But a few days ago there was great enthusiasm. Sietse – you remember him from the football; he also is a journalist, at The Courant, and I think you should meet when you are back on furlough – gave me a call on the Eurieult that I had to hurry down to the Duno. You know that the model farm there has been bought by one Dirk Wilhelmi who is turning the place into a rubber factory. A good connection to Insulinde! He is also building a new village there, following the newest principles in garden cities, and very embracing of modern principles of emancipation and suffrage! He is calling the village 'Heveadorp' – very clever. And so it happened that Sietse called to report that some Americans were visiting. I should scoot down on the Harley Davidson to see them, he said.

That is what I did, there were no patients and I could close the practice. And so I rode down the hill to the village. But when I got there I saw the Americans – very smartly dressed people I tell you, maybe a tad too informal – but no Sietse. I found it a bit awkward to just walk up to them Americans, so killed some time exploring the medieval walls where we used to play when you were a toddler, remember? A thousand years old and built by a Noblewoman, you were as much thrilled by that idea as I still am.

When I returned to the village Sietse had arrived – he had parked his Dunkley next to my motorcycle, and I saw the small group of people moving into the one big house that was already finished, hence, quickly I waved and whispered loudly 'Sietse!' He gestured for me to just join the party, so that is what I did, and I walked in with them, Sietse introducing me to an American who spoke Dutch absolutely flawlessly. Klaas Penn, a professor in Leiden.

Yes I must admit the Americans were worth the trip. They were rubber barons from Ohio. Amazing they made this long trip, but they needed to because they want to purchase latex in bulk from the Indies – again what a serendipitous event! The Rubber Cultuur Maatschappij Amsterdam, as you know, has several plantations on Java and the Goodyear Company wants to buy in bulk from them. For your work perhaps you could visit Bogo Kidul and write an article about the rubber trade! Possibly those same Americans will visit and we now have introductions.

But this was not the pinnacle of exhilaration. There was a girl journalist!

I did not catch her name then, but later called Sietse and he told us she's called Rikste. Oh my dear boy, you should have been there, she was like the balance wheel in a watch, oscillating between the Americans and Wilhelmi and Sietse, and back, and forth, speaking Dutch, English, Dutch again, and then of course there were drinks that fuelled even more excitement. She charmed, chirped, she

whirled, and all those men were entirely bewildered by her. Then she danced! In a very alluring way, she danced and spoke English and twirled herself around the room. I don't think the drink intoxicated her – I am giving a physician's opinion here. I believe her very own personality carried her away! Fortunately Sietse stepped in and made them leave.

Anyway my son here is a girl you MUST meet. Someone who can appreciate your trade, an adventurous soul, and of course a good Dutch girl. Whether it is during your furlough or elsewhere or some other time, you need to get in touch. I suggest you write a fine letter to her, and send it to me. I will hand it over to Sietse who will see whether she might be interested reading about the Tropic of Emerald.

And now it is back to your Mother again, my dearest. Will you take good care of yourself please, boy? Eat well, please! Are you visiting Uncle Herman and Aunt Tjitske in Bogor regularly? Your cousin Herman in Semarang does well – do you hear from him? And tell us are you making better friends than that Indo boy Dominique you wrote about?

Stay safe, pet, and write, do write!

Mum & Dad

7 Overwhelmed

"In retrospect, I'm a bit embarrassed, to be honest" Rikste pretended, "I just got so overwhelmed, I was so full of..." she contemplated what precisely had filled her, "exhilarated happiness I think would be the best way of describing it. I had been in the sidecar of the Dunkley, buzzing through the freshness of the forest, wind in my hair. Then those Americans. It was breathtaking, all of a sudden I was the centre of attention, and Professor Penn, Klaas, just pushed me to the brink, didn't he?"

Morwell for a moment assessed whether he could imagine what such exhilarating happiness would feel like. Arousal, he thought, yes, uncontrollable lust, perhaps. Sex. But breathtaking bliss....? It seemed a bit peculiar. He raised an eyebrow and curled the corner of his mouth, rather than verbalizing the question.

"Well," Rikste continued, "Klaas just kept smiling at me, nodding, encouraging. I was..." she sighed, "I guess for the first time in my life I realised I was a woman and that somehow I could exert power over these fellas. They all stood there, gazing, smiling. They *wanted* me, I had never felt something like that. God, Lieutenant Morwell, I believed I had discovered a new musical instrument. I could play these men any which way I wanted!"

"And did you?"

"Ah, isn't that a good question! Of course I did, but this was only my very first amateur experience in the philharmonic of lust and satisfaction. In hindsight it was so good of Sietse to take me outside and almost throw me in the sidecar, and then rush me home. At the time, of course, I was furious. Here I was, all efflorescence, glowing, ready to explode in many things beyond delight... Delicious Delilah and all that, you know?"

Morwell thought, yes - arousal I know. I feel it right now, even perceiving this elder woman. But efflorescence? "Did you reflect on it? I mean - at the time, this newfound power... What did it mean for you?" he asked instead, "Did you realise a new galaxy, perhaps even universe, had just manifested?"

"Naturally!" Rikste exclaimed, "yes of course, I started doing what every young girl does, I reckon. Prince on white horse etcetera, fairy tale wedding, roses...." She paused for a moment and tried to strategize her next move, "But my longings were all rather more, uhrm, promiscuous in nature. In fact, Morwell," she squinted, "I believe you would like to hear my fantasies, wouldn't you?" She couldn't help herself.

"Lieutenant Morwell!" the loudspeaker crackled, "a moment please?"

Jesus Christ, he thought, just when things become interesting... "Hold that thought," he summoned Rikste, "we like promiscuous. We need to hear all about promiscuous. Promiscuity may well be our core business. But later, when we come to chat about the Rear Admiral, eh?" He walked to face the wiry woman through the mirror. "Keep her focussed," she bit into him, "you'll get your fantasies later. She's trying to play you. Steer her back to the recruitment, if you can, please." Interesting, he thought, that the words came through the loudspeaker, all there for Rikste to hear. Yet, the wiry younger woman now sounded like the hiss of a serpent, jaws gritted. Morwell shrugged and turned.

"Alright then. Nicholas Penn."

"Oh my dear little lieutenant, I was holding an entirely different thought..." Rikste winked, saluting the warnings from the mirrored observer with a jaunty two-fingered recognition.

"Nicholas Penn," Morwell repeated, thinking hard of the acrid cold coffee that had kept him awake during lonely nights and away from licentious drifts, "the fantasies can come later, right now I want to hear about Nicholas Penn."

"Yes of course, Klaas!" Rikste pretended to give in to the need for a functional recording of the facts. "Obviously you know all this already, but he was really deep into the rubber business. Of course primarily he was a botanist, but rubber was his passion. And he also allowed me that intriguing glimpse into the dynamic modern world that America was creating."

"We went over that fateful day when you visited Heveadorp pretending to be a journalist."

"Oh no, I never pretended to be a journalist! I was a typist with The Courant. The men there, Sietse, Dirk, they were so happy that I spoke my languages. I think it was Klaas who pretended I was the journalist! Also - I loved that feeling, all of a sudden, of being a career woman. In those days that really was an exhilarating idea, very few women pursued a career of any sort. But you know that, you had your own suffragettes, didn't you?"

Morwell briefly felt a bit faint, feeling the weight and lift of the revolutionary upheaval of the last half century and two world wars. Here he sat, opposite a woman who might have witnessed most if not all of it, touched the change, was part of it, maybe created some of it... And he felt tiny, microscopic indeed, in that cosmos of social change. "Yes," he confirmed, "suffragettes. But you weren't one of them revolutionaries, were you?"

Rikste smiled a broad, genuine smile. "Ah you're such a dear, my little lieutenant! Who knows - maybe Klaas turned me into an American revolutionary, eventually. But no, that early autumn day I was no ideological radical. I felt very much a