



*"Next week?" Sugeng shouts in English at their backs.  
"Next week you choose Bisu and Sugeng. Okay?"*

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BISU AND THE MISSIONARY'S DAUGHTER

*Palembang, Sumatra, 1965*

The caddie boys grunt, leaning into the bumper, pushing the jeep from behind. Bisu steers carefully, one hand on the wheel, the other on the handbrake, his right foot poised above the brake pedal on the floor. His left foot holds the door propped open, so that he can follow the mud marks in the flattened grass as the jeep rolls down the bank toward the waterhole. When the axle disappears underwater, the boys bang on the bumper, and Bisu brings the jeep to a halt. He climbs through the window and, crouched on the hood, begins to rub at the windshield with a wet rag.

Hannah watches from behind the hibiscus hedge that curves with the road to the club-house. The caddie boys aren't supposed to wash cars in the waterholes. They do it for extra cash Saturday afternoons after Samsudin, the golf pro, who is also the caddie boss, has left, and the Americans from the oil camp on the other side of the river have gone home. She turns away and begins to walk to the top of the road, where she is supposed to be waiting for Yusef's opelét. She looks over her shoulder again. Stares harder, but Bisu won't look back. Hannah breaks the stem of a flower away from a branch, and crushes the stamens between her thumb and forefinger, staining her skin with purple hibiscus dye. And then Yusef's opelét is approaching. She tosses the flower into the gutter and runs to meet the car.

"Masuk, non'." Yusef speaks brusquely through the rear view mirror, motioning for Hannah to hurry. "Jepat." The clubhouse road

is a private road. The Americans have no need for an opelét. The Americans have drivers of their own. He has explained this to her many times.

Hannah pulls the back door closed and brushes her hands against her shorts. Two of the women seated inside the opelét live in Hannah's kampung. Hannah greets them, but moves quickly to the bench behind the driver's seat so that she can talk to Yusef through the divider.

"They work for the Muaya family, those two. Ya?"

"Ya."

"Are they going to tell on me?"

"What they going tell? They only like watch. Everyone know I go your father church. Everyone know this is why you ride with me."

Hannah likes Yusef. She likes his gold teeth. The smell of the cigarettes he smokes. The black sunglasses he wears. Once she told him he looked a little like a painting of President Sukarno she had seen on a billboard wearing them. It was one of the few times he had smiled at her openly.

When he works, Yusef wears one of two shirts: a black jersey that looks like somebody's father's golf shirt, or a yellow dress shirt. Black one day. Yellow the next. Meticulously washed in between.

The shirts are from the collection box. He has asked Hannah to tell him whenever a new box arrives at the mission, and she has. He won't wear just anything.

"You think Pak Sukarno would wear a shirt like this?" he sometimes asks her, handing it back. "Maybe your jongos like wear this shirt while he dust the furniture," he says, shaking his head, exaggerating the word for houseboy. "Give it to him if you like."

Sometimes Yusef smokes Kréték and sometimes he smokes Kawung. Today it is Kréték. She smells clove in the smoke rolling over his shoulder, and, from the shelf overhead, the skin of green fruit.

The kampung where Hannah lives isn't far from the golf course, but if she wants to ride with Yusef, she must travel his route all the way to the ferry landing and back through the center of the city.

Yusef drives slowly through the maze of winding streets and stalls of Pasar 16 Ilir, searching the crowd exiting the marketplace for passengers in need of a lift. Each time he comes to a stop, a cloud of exhaust rolls over the window sill. Hannah lifts her hair away from the back of her neck. A fine red powder of dust coats her arms.

As the benches fill with passengers, the air inside the opelét grows dense. Hannah covers her nose and mouth with the palm of her hand to escape the sickening perfume of hair oil, the raw odor of fish. The opelét jerks to a start. Hannah looks to the long purple spears of sugarcane, bundled together like javelins on the shelves overhead and, beside them, the sharp-textured skin of the green durian. The burlap sacks of rice. The strange bright skin of the rambutan, bristly with soft red shoots. Coffee. Black tea. Yellow bars of Sunlight soap tied together with a rough length of string.

As Yusef inches his way out the city on Jalan Jenderal Sudiman, Hannah's attention shifts to the women boasting about the prices they bartered with the shopkeepers. They nod their heads and sniff at their palms, the more modest to seem. One of them unwraps a brown paper bundle and those sitting nearest lean closer to admire the kain songket, a startling fabric, indigenous to Palembang, embroidered with bits of gold or silver thread. Sometimes the women stare at her. Hannah reminds herself that it is natural for people to wonder why a white girl is traveling alone in an opelét.

It is after five when Yusef brings the opelét to a stop in front of the high yellow wall that surrounds the Baptist mission. Hannah opens the gate at the back of the compound. She walks the length of the breezeway, past the room she and her brothers use for their schoolroom on the end of the belakang, past the servants' rooms, to the water faucet and concrete wash basin in the courtyard outside the kitchen. She slips her feet out of her rubber slippers and uses the

handle of a spoon standing in the empty powdered milk can beside the sink to scrape the mud from the rubber soles.

She opens the back door, catching the screen with her heel before it slams, and enters the kitchen. The walls are green, and somehow this makes it seem the coolest room in the house. She pushes through the swinging door that leads to the dining room and sees that the houseboy has already set the table for dinner. The water has been poured and a white tablet the size of an aspirin has been placed on each of the five plates. Malaria pills. She asked her father once why they had to take them. "The Americans across the river don't, why do we?" "Because we don't live on an oil compound, Hannah. No one sprays our street with DDT." She crosses the floor and has almost reached the staircase when the door to her father's office opens.

"Hannah?"

Hannah touches the black pipe bolted to the wall that is meant to serve as a banister. "I'm home," she says, one foot on the bottom step, her stained hands clasped behind her back.

"Hannah?"

"Yes?"

"I don't want to see you wearing those shorts again."

She meets her father's eyes.

"Do you understand?"

Hannah looks at her legs. These are the shorts she always wears to the golf course. "Why?"

"Because they are provocative, Hannah. When you wear them, it appears as though you are asking with your body for attention. Go upstairs and change your clothes."

Hannah closes the door at the top of the stairs and looks at her room. There is nothing on the walls but a mirror. When she told her mother that she wanted a mirror of her own now that she was thirteen, her father was against it, quoting from his chair at the head of the dinner table something from the Bible about the fate of a proud woman.

But her mother had taken her side. The next day they'd waited for Yusef's opelét on the corner. That night her brother David pounded a nail into the plaster, and Hannah had a mirror on her wall.

She turns around to see how they look from behind. Even the youngest American girls at the golf course wear their shorts this tight. It's the style. She slides the elastic waistband over her hips, steps out of the shorts and pushes them to the back of her underwear drawer.

Outside she hears a scraping sound. On the other side of the room a glass door opens onto a flat roof. The latch is loose and, sometimes when it rains, the door blows open. She smells something burning. Grass. Rubbish. Over the edge of the roof she can see the gardener standing with a rake in his hands looking up at the roof where she stands at the door. *What is he doing? There aren't any leaves on the ground.*

Yusef's day begins at 5:30, so Hannah is already at the golf course when the Americans pull up in their air-conditioned cars. She sits with the girls on a bed, a make-shift couch pushed against a wall inside the ladies' locker room, while their mothers change into their golf clothes.

Hannah watches the careless way the women sling their sleeveless dresses onto hangers and leave their shoes on a rack for the maid to clean. They spend a long time at the dressing table, facing the mirror on the wall that extends the length of the room. Wearing only their brassieres and underwear, they study themselves in the mirror, adjusting their hair, reapplying lipstick, before they step into their golf shorts and clank over the tile in their cleated shoes to the patio where the caddies they've chosen are waiting with their trunks of clubs.

A few weeks ago, the American women were sitting at one of the rattan tables on the verandah, in between nines, smoking and gossiping and drinking gin jeruk, which Hannah knew was limeade and

gin because she and one of the girls were sitting at the bar drinking plain air jeruk, and she had watched the barman add the gin. Hannah had just taken a bite of the candy bar her friend Elizabeth had bought for her when she heard one of the women mention her name in a lowered voice.

"Last week, she was standing in the shower stall next to mine? She asked if she could borrow my towel. Said she'd forgotten to ask the babu for one. Well, I've already used it, I said to her, but she didn't seem to mind. She stepped out from behind the curtain to take it, and I thought to myself, my lord, the girl has breasts."

"Well, how old *is* she?" another woman asked.

"Oh, *I* don't know. She might be twelve. She could *pass* for fifteen. I'll tell you another thing. Do you know that girl hasn't got a tan line? She's as brown as any one of the caddie boys. And I mean," the woman lowered her voice further, "*all over. I think it's peculiar. There's not a bit of difference between the color of that girl's rear end and the backs of her legs.*"

Hannah peeled the green and white wrapper from the candy bar she was holding in her hand. Dry powdered sugar fell into her lap as she pulled at the layer of silver paper underneath that had stuck to the wafer. "I have to go now, Elizabeth."

"What time?" Hannah asks, when Yusef stops to let her out of the opelét.

"Today, 1:30."

"What time is it now?"

Yusef turns his arm over so she can see the gold face of his watch against the veiny underside of his wrist.

As soon as Yusef turns the corner, she cuts through the hedge and runs down the embankment toward the tin shed. The shed is a garage for the maintenance machinery, but the caddie boys use it for their clubhouse while they wait for the Americans to arrive in the morning, or when they stop at the bar between nines. The ones who

aren't hired spend the morning there doing odd jobs for Samsudin, the caddie boss.

Hannah leans her head through the open door. It smells nice inside, cool like damp clay, and the floor is swept smooth. Several rattan tables are gathered on one side of the room, surrounded by a few bar stools and folding chairs, most of which are broken in one way or another. On one of the tables a tin can for cigarette butts, a pack of cards, and a tray of empty glasses are arranged. She thinks the place is empty until she hears a tool drop and sees Samsudin lying on his back under the front of a yellow tractor on the other side of the shed.

"Di mana Bisu, Pak Samsudin?" Hannah asks.

"Bisu?" A man in a white singlet and long khaki shorts slides out and stands up, slowly straightening his back. "Aduh!" he winces. "Too old, me, for this work." The shorts, which are several sizes too large for him, are cinched high on his waist with a belt.

"Do you know where Bisu is, Pak?"

"Bisu? I think today he work for Mr. whatchacall, Mr. I don't know. Get green Dodge."

"Someone picked Bisu to caddie today?"

"Something funny about that?" he asks.

"Usually he never works."

The old man spits on the ground. "Usually he only sometime work. Try wait beside number nine green. They come, bum'bye."

Hannah walks around the sand trap at the edge of the green and sits on the bank of the waterhole. She is examining the water lilies floating on the surface of the brown water when she hears the splash. The second ball seems to fall more slowly. She follows the arc as it falls from the sky, hits the ground, and rolls quietly across the green. In the distance, she sees Bisu and Sugeng running down the fairway ahead of two white men.

The large leather trunk of golf clubs Bisu is carrying over his shoulder bounces against his back and the backs of his legs as he runs. When he reaches the edge of the waterhole, he drops the golf bag to



the ground, pulls his shirt over his head, and dives into the brown water. In a little while he surfaces, treading water above the tangled stems that dangle down, before diving underwater again. When he comes up for air, he is rubbing his eyes with his fist, looking at the white ball he holds in his hand. He throws it in Hannah's direction and dives under again.

By the time the man in the madras shorts whose ball has landed on the green arrives, Sugeng is holding the flag beside the hole. The white man plants the weight of his tan legs over his cleated shoes and sinks the putt easily. He pats Sugeng's back and gives him a kind of salute.

Bisu splashes up through the water again and grins at Hannah, this time holding a handful of white balls. As he climbs the muddy bank, Hannah stares at the shape of the balls bursting through the thin cloth of his wet pockets. He pulls them out and examines the logos one at a time. When he finds one like the ball the man has hit, he tosses it to the ground, squeezes the water from the hem of his shorts, and motions for Hannah to back into the cane grass. By the time the other white man arrives, Bisu is squatted on flat feet, facing the ball he has re-set on a tuft of grass, ten feet short of the green. He hands the man his wedge. When the man has finished his putt, he reaches into his wallet for a one hundred rupiah note, which he hands to Bisu, and waves the two caddies away.

"Next week?" Sugeng shouts in English at their backs. "Next week you choose Bisu and Sugeng. Okay?" The men, trudging up the slope toward the clubhouse bar, toward their salt tablets and gin tonics, do not appear to have heard.

Hannah pushes out of the tall grass holding up five fingers. "Five balls and one hundred rupiah for Bisu! Nothing for Sugeng! Ya?"

Sugeng grabs the muddy balls Bisu is holding. "This one, good. This one, no good." He throws them to the ground as he speaks. "This one no good too," he says, turning away.

Bisu pulls the golf bag onto his shoulder, and Hannah follows Sugeng to the maintenance shed where the rest of the caddies have gathered to watch them approach.

"Dua-dua-an," one of the boys calls out in a sing-song voice, making a nasty gesture with his fingers, insinuating that Hannah and Bisu are a couple.

Bisu is able to hear, but because he is unable to use words to speak, Hannah sometimes pantomimes what she wants to say to him. She points to the two trucks parked in front of the waterhole to be washed, and rubs at the air, as though she is holding a rag in her hand. "Are you going to wash cars today, Bisu?" she asks in Indonesian.

Bisu looks through the door of the maintenance shed where the other boys have disappeared.

"Are you going to come to my house tomorrow night? It's Sunday."

Bisu adjusts the weight of the trunk of clubs on his shoulder and walks inside the shed without answering, and then Yusef is pulling up in his opelét, and Hannah is running through the break in the hedge on the side of the clubhouse road.

"Who that?" Yusef asks Hannah in English when she is settled on the bench behind him.

"Bisu."

"Bisu?"

"One of the caddies."

"Sometime that boy come your house." Yusef looks at Hannah in the rear view mirror. "Ya?"

Hannah looks back at Yusef's face in the mirror. Sometimes she is glad she can't see his eyes through his dark glasses.

"Sometime when I bring your mother and father home in my car, I see him ride away from your house on bicycle."

"You have?"

"His name is not Bisu."

"Yes it is, Yusef. You don't know."

"Bisu is not a name for a boy."

"Why?" she asks.

"Bisu? Bisu mean someone who cannot speak. What you call that?"

"Mute. Some people say dumb. It's a phrase. Deaf and dumb. But Bisu can hear. He's not deaf."

Yusef keeps both hands on the wheel and his eyes on the road when he drives. "Only dumb?" he asks.

"I mean he can hear with his ears. He just can't speak with his mouth. Bisu means mute?" she asks.

One of Hannah's father's duties as Baptist missionary is to deliver a sermon once a week to the Protestants who live in the American oil camp on the other side of the river. The Catholic missionary conducts the Sunday morning service; Sunday evenings, the Methodist and Baptist missionaries alternate. When it is Hannah's father's turn, he and his wife hire Yusef to drive them to the ferry landing in his opelét.

Hannah sits alone at the dining room table, stabbing a fork into the edge of a crisp-fried egg which sits on a mound of rice on her plate. As soon as Yusef's opelét has pulled around the corner, Hannah is scraping her plate outside for the cat, and her two brothers are out the back door. The Wiromo boys down the street have a mouse deer in a rabbit hutch and a monkey on a chain in their mangga tree. They have been trying for weeks to build a tree house for it.

From her room, Hannah can hear her brothers picking through her father's tools in the work shed next to the church and, on the belakang, the rise and fall of the servants' voices, the sound of pots and pans banging against a wash basin. The faint smell of coconut oil frying makes Hannah think guiltily of the plate of food she threw away. She returns to her room and, without really planning to, reaches in her underwear drawer for the shorts hidden there. She pulls them

on under her shift, then lifting the dress over her head, enters the bathroom. The walls are spotted with patterns of mold and the air smells dank. In the corner, a concrete tub built into the wall is filled to the brim with water. A tin can, which has a wooden handle nailed to the side, stands on the ledge of the tub. Beside it, a bar of yellow soap. The soap is large in her hands and takes a long time to lather. She rubs her soapy hands through her hair, then, standing over the drain in the floor, dips the can into the cistern and pours cold water over her head until her hair is soaked clean.

In her room, she sits on the floor in front of her mirror to braid her hair. Seeing her reflection, she remembers something else she has hidden at the back of her underwear drawer. A gold metal case one of the American women left in the ladies' locker room. She removes the cap and turns the base until the dusky pink tip of a lipstick, worn into a slant, rolls into view. She daubs at her lower lip with it, then slides it across the wings of her upper lip.

She turns her face from side to side and glances from her mouth to her nipples, which are nearly the same color as her mouth, coated as it is with the lipstick. She pushes her breasts together slightly. They are large enough now to fill her hands and, pretty enough, she supposes, though she has never much liked her nipples. She touches one. It reminds her of the eraser tip at the end of a pencil, except that her skin there is very soft. She turns around to look at her back. She likes her back. She likes the points of her wings and the swirl of white beneath her shoulder blade that is her birthmark. And then the glass in the door is rattling.

It is Bisu. She ducks into the bathroom where she has left her shirt hanging on the doorknob, pulls it back over her head, and lets him in.

Bisu leaves his rubber slippers outside and steps inside Hannah's room, his fingers still wrapped around the doorknob.

Hannah pulls him inside by the edge of the notebook he is holding in his hands, drops it on the floor, and motions for him to follow

her downstairs. In the kitchen she pours cold tea from the aluminum pot on the counter into two glasses and opens the cupboard. There is nothing but a tin of powdered milk, a tin of flour, and a tin of dry rice. Sometimes there are cookies, but not tonight. She shrugs. Bisu follows her back through the swinging door and up the stairs, holding the glass of tea carefully in both hands.

They sit on the floor, their backs against the edge of Hannah's bed. Bisu opens his notebook to the page of handwriting he has completed. Hannah turns to a new page and begins to write. He smiles when he sees that she has written the word Bisu.

"But Bisu isn't your real name," she says sternly in Indonesian.

Bisu's top lip curls under. He bares his teeth and gums at Hannah, puts his hands behind his ears, and moves his head from side to side. He has had his head shaved since the last time she saw him at the golf course and it makes his ears, which are already large, look larger.

"What is your real name? Bisu isn't a good name for you. Yusef told me."

The boy stands, pulls his shorts down low on his hips, and walks around the room, his hands tucked inside the waistband, imitating the caddies who have given him the name. He points to a spot in the room which Hannah understands is meant to be him and bends over to laugh. Hannah is worried the servants are going to hear.

"Maybe they are laughing at something else. Sugeng was only jealous yesterday because you found so many golf balls. I don't laugh at you. Just tell me your real name."

He shrugs. Shakes his head no.

"Then what do you want me to call you, Bisu?" Out of habit, she says the word anyway.

He sits beside her on the floor and writes Bisu on the next line.

"I can't call you that," Hannah says softly.

The room is nearly dark, lit only by the light the lamp beside her bed casts across the floor. Hannah hangs her head. She has covered

her eyes with one of her hands and doesn't see Bisu, who is sitting cross-legged beside her, reaching for her face.

He touches her mouth. Then he slides the tip of his finger back and forth across her lower lip and holds it up for her to see.

Hannah's eyes widen. She has forgotten the lipstick.

Bisu touches her lower lip again. And then he has pushed his finger inside. The base of his forefinger touches her tongue briefly then moves to her lower molars.

For a moment, Hannah lets him rub his finger back and forth against her teeth. Then she pulls away and stands up. "You have to go now," she says quietly.

Bisu shakes his head no.

"Go now," she says, her voice more severe.

Hannah walks across the room and opens the door to the roof.

When she turns around, Bisu is staring into the mirror at the long misshapen teeth inside his gaping mouth. And then Yusef's opelét is approaching.

They duck to the floor as the headlamps light up the yard. Hannah scrambles to turn off the light on her bedside table, and Bisu is out the door, crouching his way across the roof. Hannah watches him reaching through the leaves for the branches, lowering himself from one to the next until he is on the ground.

"Hannah?" her mother calls from the dining room.

Hannah lifts her hand to tell Bisu to wait, runs back to get his notebook, and drops it over the edge of the roof into his hands. He takes the handlebars of a bicycle propped against the wall across the street and pushes the bike under the streetlight. It isn't until he gives himself a running start that she sees the bicycle is much too tall for him to mount. Instead of throwing his leg over the seat, he juts it through the space below the bar and pedals hard.

The following week, Hannah tells her parents that she wants to go with them to the church service in the oil camp across the river. Her

father is drawing a finger across the palm of Yusef's hand, explaining something to him. Hannah pulls the gate closed behind her. She has just opened the back door of the opelét when she hears the keringg-keringg of a bicycle bell and the yelping sound of Bisu's voice.

She lifts her bare knee into the cab, and, as she does, her dress touches the mud-splashed siding. She curses under her breath, annoyed that Yusef has not thought to wash the opelét. She pulls the back door closed and sits on one of the wooden benches, and covers the side of her face with her hand.

Bisu circles the opelét on his bicycle, pushing the lever on the bell with his thumb again and again. His composition book is wrapped in plastic and clamped to the bike rack bolted to the rear fender. The opelét moves forward a few feet, but Bisu has pedaled in front of the vehicle, and everyone lurches forward when Yusef steps on the brake. Through his sunglasses, Yusef meets Hannah's eyes in the rear view mirror. Hannah stares through the window at the stucco wall that surrounds the compound.

Bisu races alongside the opelét, balanced on a slant, ringing the bell with his thumb until, finally, he catches hold of the rear view mirror attached to Yusef's door. Then he is sailing along with the opelét, moving his jaw as if he were eating the wind.

Yusef waves the boy off, and Bisu lets go.

"Do we know that boy?" Hannah's father asks. "Yusef?"

"I don't think so, Tuan."

When they reach the ferry landing, Hannah's parents walk ahead.

Yusef beckons Hannah to his window with an upside-down wave of his hand.

"What?"

Yusef reaches through the window and touches the back of her head. "Why you go Sungai Gerong with your mother-father tonight? Usually you never like go church with them."

Hannah lowers her head. "Some girls asked me to come."

"Girls from golf course?"

Hannah nods without raising her eyes.

"I thought you like play with caddie boys."

"I do. I do like Sugeng and Bisu. I do."

"You make agreement to meet with that boy tonight?"

Hannah shrugs. "You mean Bisu?"

"I told you already. Bisu is not a boy's name. You never yet learn his name?"

Hannah looks into Yusef's eyes. "He wants to be called Bisu."

"I think you have agreement to give this boy lessons when you stay home. No?"

"It's not really an agreement."

"No? Maybe *he* think you have agreement."

"Well, it wasn't a *spoken* agreement. Unspoken agreements don't really count. We never really say whether we're going to meet or not. Sometimes he comes, and sometimes he doesn't."

"All kind agreement count, non'. You must pray tonight. You must ask God to help you understand this."

"That isn't why he came today, Yusef. That isn't why he was following the car."

Yusef shifts to reverse. "You must pray." ■