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Chapter 6: I Found Myself

Mia Bustam

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One day after midnight, Rino had a very high fever. He was gasping for air. I panicked and became very anxious. I woke Tedja up to go as soon as possible to the student's boarding house in Tentara Pelajar next door, to ask someone to take me to the doctor on Diponegoro Street.

Soon, a few men showed up. Dik¹ Harto, a student at *Akademi Gula Negara*,² was to take me there, while the others would accompany the children at home. I did not think to wake up Mother, Minah, or Mbok Pawiro. I was too confused seeing Rino like that. At that time, he was eight months old.

Doctor Tan checked him immediately, saying Rino had pneumonia and advised me to take him straight to *Panti Rapih* Hospital. Doctor Tan refused to take the fee from me even though I came in the middle of the night with a patient while he was asleep. As I travelled to *Panti Rapih* in the rickshaw, Rino was constantly gasping for air; his body heaving up and down. I held him close, and covered him with my body. My frantic mind thought that by doing so the angel of death would not see him, and would not take him away because he was so small. When we arrived at the hospital, the nurse on duty gave him oxygen and his gasping stopped. The nurse made sure I calmed down, telling me that I did not need to worry; so then I left for home with Dik Harto.

The next morning, Tedja made an inter-city call to his father, and Mas Djon flew over that afternoon. That late afternoon Mas Djon and I went to see Rino. He was placed alone inside a cubicle with glass walls. Seeing us, he cried so hard, his arm reaching out to us, as he tried to stand up. But he was being tied to his bed so he could not move much. Poor Rino! The nurses cared about him very much. They called him *Abang*.³

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After ten days of hospitalization, he could return home. One month later, he had a fever again, and this time with seizures. I did not want to take the risk, so I took him to *Panti Rapih* straight away. After being examined by the doctor, he had to be hospitalized again. This time we did not tell his father. After being hospitalized for three days (only for observation the doctor had said), Rino was well again and he could return home.

When Rino was around one year old, he saw in the shops many rocking horses and horses on wheels that were as big as a goat. The fur was real goat's fur. One time when Mas Djon came to Yogya, on his way home, he saw the rocking horse in the *Liong Wing* shop. When he arrived home, he promised Rino that he would buy him a toy horse.

"Later you can ride on it, yes, son?" he said.

But the promise was never realized. Was it because he was in Yogya for such a short time, or was his mind already full of promises to Rose? The promises to his children were often forgotten.

One late afternoon, Rino had a high fever and seizures. I tried to reduce the seizures by rubbing his upper arm folds with coconut oil mixed with red onions.

"Father, father,...horsey!" he said. It looked like he remembered his father's promise to buy him a "*jaran*", which is horse in Javanese.

Actually, I could just buy it for him by myself, but I did not want to get ahead of Mas Djon. Because Rino's fever did not come down, and he kept on calling for his father, Tedja made an inter-city call to Mas Djon. This time I did not want to wait for Mas Djon anymore. I asked Cicih and Athuk to go to *Liong Wing* shop as soon as possible to buy a rocking horse, which I had once seen on the shop counter. When his aunties entered the room pulling on a horse with four wheels, he exclaimed with joy.

"*Jayan! Jayan!*"⁴ he said while holding out his hand.

"Yes, son," I said, "Your horse, yes. Come, Rino ride..." I sat him on the horseback. Athuk pulled him here and there. Rino was very happy. Amazing! His fever came down, and after a while, it became completely normal. The next afternoon, Mas Djon returned. At that time his son was not having a fever anymore.

"Turns out the boy is alright," he said in surprise.

"Yesterday he had such a fever and kept calling for you. So I thought he wanted to see you." I was defending myself. Mas Djon kept quiet. Maybe he did not believe me, and was regretting that he had come back but 'nothing happened'. In my heart, I was grateful that I was brave to break Mas Djon's promise to his son. I did not have to wait in hope for Mas Djon's role anymore.

One time, Mas Djon was at home because of recess time. We accepted two invitations for Bung⁵ Karno's talk in Gedung Agung. One to Mas Djon, and

one more to me privately. Actually, I was startled; suddenly I was seen as an individual, distinct from the persona of S. Sudjojono. It has always been one invitation, addressed to “Mr. and Mrs.” or “Mr...and Wife.” This time was out of the ordinary.

I was happy, of course I will go listen to the talk by Bung Karno—*bapak* and idol to me. Mas Djon was reluctant to go.

“I will go by myself then!”

“Are you going alone? You cannot!”

“Why not? I have accepted my invitation!”

“You cannot go,” he repeated with a sullen face.

“No? We will see, I will go or not,” I said calmly and immediately got ready to go.

I saw Mas Djon watching me in disbelief. I didn’t care, and I went straight away to Gedung Agung.

Back when we loved each other, I was always willing to accommodate my wish with his wish. Without questioning, I took off all the jewelry that I got from my *Eyang*⁶ because he was anti-jewelry. Once upon a time! I always wore clothes that were not see-through, because Mas Djon got jealous and did not like it when I did that. I became very shy and meek among other men because of his jealous personality.

And now? All of that has passed. He has already turned his love away from me. Why do I still have to adjust myself to his wants? I still “love him”. Maybe because he was the father of my children. That love is hopeless. Now I want to be free from that “love” that only tortures my heart.

To amuse myself, as well as to make a statement of my existence, I constructed a real temple, only a small one though. This temple was to be built in the front yard, and was not like what I had made before, at the back, which was small and just so-so. I asked for help from a junior at SIM⁷ who was from Bali, his name was Mangku. He always brought along his friend, Pariawan Inggas, who was also a SIM student. Then there was another young Balinese man, a medical student from *Gadjah Mada* University staying in the boarding house across the street; his name was Oka.

Before starting the work, Mangku asked me to make five types of flower offerings, as a requirement for him and his two friends to read a devotional prayer so that the temple building process will work out well. Of course all of that I provided, and also all the building materials that were needed. They did not use the cement dough to stick the brick together. Those bricks were rubbed on all sides, becoming sleek and smooth. Once the form took shape, they arranged it according to plan. I went to the store, *Linggarjati*, to buy three “Arrow” shirts for them. When I gave them the shirts, they said:

"*Bu*, we do not expect anything from you. We are happy enough to see you satisfied. Besides, we enjoy the work."

"We want to cheer you on," added Mangku. "This is only a token of love, *nak*, as keepsake," I said. In the end, there the temple stood: tiny and beautiful.

With continuous mental pressure, my nerves became tense every time Mas Djon returned, and this inevitably affected the state of my health. I did not fall ill but I became so skinny. I felt there was always wind in my chest. I always felt cold. On one occasion when Mas Djon came back, I insisted he come to a decision with the future ahead.

"*Mas*," I said. "Rather than me constantly tormented like this, we should just get a divorce, so I do not have to think about you." He refused my idea.

"*Jeng*," he said, "I still love you. Please trust me. Be patient. I will find a good solution."

Again I had to stretch my patience as I waited and waited for the solution that he promised. While waiting for the promise that never came, I remember the words of Mas Djon a couple of times, that I am talented in painting. Right or wrong, I think it's good if I can learn to paint at the *sanggar*⁸ SIM. Perhaps by doing so, the tension in my mind can relax a bit. When I suggested the idea to Mas Salam, he immediately accepted it enthusiastically.

"Just start right away, *Jeng!*" he said. I did not want to enter just like that. I have to go through the regular procedure like other students. I will sketch for the entrance test. I brought Tunggul along as the model. Just to myself, I thought the sketch was so good. Not only did it look alike, but there was Tunggul. Her lips, her beautiful eyes, her tiny nose, and her arms like "*nggendhewo pinenthang*".⁹ I was amazed myself. Turned out I could also make a portrait, and not take a long time. This sketch I made was like the way Mas Djon had done it. Not only with few lines, but also with all the shading on the face, hair, and Tunggul's clothes. Later I made sketches of the children's faces in a few minutes. "Wow, *Jeng Mia* really has talent," Mas Salam commented happily. "Of course you can become a SIM student. You can enter without the test!"

When Mas Djon came, I showed those sketches to him. He observed them for a long time. I saw his eyes became wet. "Tunggul," he said softly. "She is such a beautiful kid. Yes, this is Tunggul. Keep practicing, *Jeng*. You can definitely become a painter later."

I have also sketched Rino when he was around nine months old. I feel this sketch was a success. He was sitting in the garden chair while trying to spoon his food from the plate. He looked so cute with his hair growing out from the center in circles, and making a vortex point. Also his chubby feet and the folds on his thighs. That was actually the only portrait of Rino when he was a baby because after that, there were no more "photo taking" events. Too bad those

two sketches perished in the year of the disaster in 1965 along with many other things.

After my “offense” on Rose’s “territory”, Mas Djon still returned to be with the family. All that time he still slept next to me. One night I really missed his touch. I could not hold out my desire, and I hugged Mas Djon while he was snoring. He opened his eyes, and smiled for a while, then he turned his back on me... Oh, how embarrassed was I. Shame, shame, and shame! I had acted like a despicable beggar. I had thrown away my dignity!

My mind became dark. I rose to open the medicine cupboard. I took four tubes of quinine pills, and I swallowed I don’t know how many pills. Mas Djon quickly seized those small bottles from my hand, but many had already entered my stomach. A few moments later my ear buzzed loudly, and my head got dizzy. Mas Djon locked the medicine cupboard and hid the key under his pillow. I lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes, it turned out to be noon already. I saw Athuk and Cicik sitting next to my leg. Jeng Salam and Zus Wik were near the bed. Mas Djon was already dressed.

“Mas Djon has the heart to leave Mbakyu Mia like this?” I heard the voice of Jeng Salam faintly.

“Today there is an important assembly, *Jeng*. I have to go back.” Mas Djon’s answer sounded certain.

I saw the faces of both my best friends looking at Mas Djon with a disapproving look. But I didn’t care anymore. Again I sank into unconsciousness. When I opened my eyes again, both sisters and the children had already left for school. Jeng Salam and Zus Wik had also left. I saw Mas Salam sitting in the chair near me. Seeing me open my eyes, he cried. From his mouth, some words were spoken that I could not hear clearly. He took my hands.

“*Jeng, jeng*,” I heard his voice.

My heart that had been frozen suddenly melted. Then I too cried together with him. “Jeng Mia has to remember the children. Poor them. All this time we saw how tough Jeng Mia is. Do not do such reckless things again, *Jeng*...”

Hearing those words made my brain clear. My mind is no longer messed up, and my heart has suddenly bloomed. Yes, the children! I have eight children! Let Mas Djon pass through my life, as I still have those children. How can I forget about them last night!

Two weeks later, Mas Djon came again. He came with the decision on our relationship. It was suggested that we “*scheiding van tafel en bed*”,¹⁰ which means that we separate our table and bed. For a year we did that. During those times he would not come to Yogya anymore. I agreed, mustn’t I be patient? He added: “If after a year I can leave Rose, I will come back to you. If not, we will get a divorce.”

That night when he was going to sleep, I showed him the couch in the eastern room.¹¹ And in our room, I locked it from inside. Not because I was worried that Mas Djon would come in, but as a symbolic action to close my life door at him. I am here, he is there...

I did not have any hope that he would leave Rose. At that time I also knew, in the end, it has to be divorce. With that solution, I became calmer. Every time I predicted that he would arrive at around four in the afternoon, I no longer looked to the front of the house, expecting to see a rickshaw with Mas Djon inside it. I would not be tormented anymore seeing him around me, in the home that we had made together. During the second half of 1958, I do not remember exactly when, Tedja came home from the TP dormitory next door with a copy of *Harian Rakyat* (HR).¹² At that time I did not subscribe to HR anymore. If I was not mistaken, it was from the late Suwanto and Sutaji, the leftist young people. Their message was for Tedja to show me the news in the newspaper. In the end, CC PKI's¹³ patience reached its limit. On the front page of the last column, I read: "S. Sudjojono fired from PKI and held back as the member of DPR¹⁴. He is advised to resign himself from LEKRA¹⁵ and all *Lembaga Persahabatan*¹⁶ from socialist countries..."

But I knew for sure that this would not be regretted by Mas Djon. He would still behave as before. What he thought was right would be confirmed at all cost. And to love Rose was a truth for him, whatever the consequences for his family whom he had turned his back on, and whatever people said about him. For those who viewed it objectively, the truth was a fact that could not be denied. Maybe he felt, in his little heart, that his actions weren't right. This was evident from his confession to his friends at CC PKI Politburo¹⁷:

"...I am the wrong one..."

I waited for the final word from Mas Djon. Divorce or not. But I was sure, that the divorce would surely happen. In the meantime, I concocted the name that I would use after I would no longer be the wife of S. Sudjojono. Mia Bustam. Yes. Mia Bustam. Bustam is the name of my ancestor from my mother's lineage. I belong to the Bustaman family. So it is. From then on I started to get used to thinking for myself, not as Nyi Sudjojono, but as Mia Bustam.

I did not have to wait for a year. On 26 November 1958 Mas Djon came. I marked that event by starting to paint my portrait with the children. It is a pity, that painting, because of various reasons and situations, was never finished. Now it is even in a state of serious damage. On that very day I asked Zakaria to buy a ticket for me. I wanted to go to Surabaya the next day to take care of the SIM exhibition that was held there at the *Pik Gan* Gallery. So the story

went, at the train station, Zakaria met Mas Djon. Mas Djon asked, "Who are you going to buy a ticket for?"

"This is for *Ibu*, Pak Djon. She is going to Surabaya tomorrow." Mas Djon did not ask further, Zakaria told me later on. At night when the children were already asleep, Mas Djon started his conversation.

"*Jeng*," he said. "Turns out I cannot leave Rose. If I leave her, she will lose it, and I do not want that. So we will be separating. I know you are strong; maybe you will suffer for a while, but you will be able to overcome it, I am sure."

I smiled, and nodded silently. My heart was relieved. The long waiting period had ended. It's a shame that Mas Djon thought I would be suffering. Because the moment of suffering had already ended. Those moments of suffering, outer and inner, which I have lived for over two years. Then Mas Djon continued: "Although we are separated, the children are still our children. Yours and mine. If you face problems in bringing them up, keep up with the news. We will solve them together."

I was happy. That is what I had hoped for. So, even after the divorce, we would not be strangers to one another. Then, he added: "About the formal divorce, I will let you know as soon as possible."

"Okay, *Mas*, that's very fine. Now I have to prepare for my trip tomorrow. My train leaves at seven o'clock."

"Yes, for what reason are you going to Surabaya?"

"Oh, SIM is having an exhibition there. As a student, I also want to take part in it." Then I wrote "Mia Bustam" on a piece of paper.

"This is the name that I will use now," I showed it to him.

"That's a very good name. I agree." The next day I got ready to go. Mas Djon was still asleep. Zakaria came along to take me to the train station. I hesitated for a moment. Did I have to wake Mas Djon up? I decided that I had to. It is not good to leave without saying goodbye to him. I entered the eastern room where he was lying on the couch. I observed his face, his body. Then I touched his arm carefully: "*Mas*, I am leaving." He opened his eyes. Suddenly I impulsively bowed and kissed his cheek. He was smiling. His old smile. The smile that he had shown me from *Kunstkring* verandah, in the past... I ran outside like I was chased by a thousand ghosts.

Then there it was, an episode of my life has been closed. An episode that started full of charm, passed in happiness, that had to end with disappointment. But the disappointment slowly dissipated. Gone with the coming of consciousness that the person I considered as a god, turned out to be just a human, like other humans, not a god. And when I thought deeper again, this one particular human, needed to be pitied.

If there are people, or maybe among them my children, who believe that I still love Mas Djon, they are wrong. Not love but the feeling of pity. Yes, pity. That is how I feel about him. Until the end of his life, it's only commiseration.

LAST WORDS

FINALLY, the decision has been made and conveyed to me by Mas Djon. I am just waiting for the official confirmation, that is, the divorce papers. The year 1958 passed. And then the month of January through to April passed, yet there was still no news about the divorce papers. I'm surprised, why does the process of divorce take months? Meanwhile, Tedja is already entering his teenage years and starting to be difficult to deal with. Based on the agreement between Mas Djon and I, I wrote a letter to Tedja's father asking for his opinion. The answer came not from Mas Djon but Rose. The letter was just short, saying "You don't need to write to my husband."

My goodness! Turned out Rose, based on her confession to Mas Djon in the past, was afraid of me. Afraid even of my shadow, that to her me writing to him is dangerous. What can we do about it? Presumably, the relationship between the children's father and their mother should not exist at all. But there was another time when I had contacted him and when I waited for Mas Djon's answer. This happened a few months after I finally received the divorce paper.

At the beginning of May, I was summoned to KUA – *Kantor Urusan Agama*,¹⁸ which was not that far from the house. I was told that there was a divorce paper from KUA Sawah Besar Jakarta, which included a letter from the Head of KUA Yogyakarta. He divorced me by dropping the first *talak*.¹⁹ This is not how I imagine the divorce process will be. What I imagine is that Mas Djon will write a letter to me first to inform me of the arrival of the divorce paper. This would feel more polite, sympathetic, and humane.

But never mind. I have already swallowed so much bitterness from Mas Djon, why not the last one? I said to the Head of KUA, it should not be only one *talak*, but all three at once!

The Head of KUA explained that with the first *talak* it left open the possibility of reunity. Whereas with three *talak* at once, that possibility would be closed, with no interruption by another marriage from my side. I shrugged my shoulders. One *talak*, two or three is the same for me. The main thing is "divorce". Period. There is no more coming back together.

Back home, I studied the divorce paper. There written on it was that the children would receive an allowance of Rp 2.000 per month. I will receive a divorce allowance (*iddah* money) for three months, Rp 750 each month. As a note, I have never received the *iddah* money. I showed the divorce paper to

Mas Salam, who presumably then told Mas Wikana and Jeng Sumilah. Sumilah, the wife of Hariyadi, came over with the details of allowance money for the children.

“See, Jeng Mia!” she said. “The boarding room money is usually Rp 400 a month, with the addition of 15 kg of rice. Yet with this, eight kids will only receive Rp 2.000; this means only Rp 250 for each kid per month?! How come? Just for boarding money alone this is not enough, and Jeng Mia, you still have to send them to school, and buy clothes with that money!”

I was flabbergasted. I have not thought that far. I admit I am not practical. I don’t or can’t think based on reality. I only think and behave based on my feelings only. I went to Mas Wikana, asking his opinion. Turned out he had the same opinion as Sumilah.

“Zus,” said Mas Wik. “Zus Sumilah is right. The total of Rp 2.000 for one month is very little. Zus Djon, (*that’s not my status anymore, just like how he is not in my heart*)²⁰ has to ask for more. The children should not suffer from all of this.”

“But Mas, to ask for an extra allowance will be very hard for me. I cannot do it.”

Mas Wikana shook his head.

“Zus Djon, don’t follow your own feelings. I can understand how Zus feels. But this is not for Zus. This is for the children. Zus Djon has to think about them.”

I am speechless. Yes, the children. Indeed! I have to think about them. I asked the opinion of Mas Salam and Jeng Milah. The same! They advised that I write to Mas Djon. I followed their advice but with a heavy heart. Some time later the answer came.

“Sister²¹ Mia,” he wrote. “If you cannot take care of the children with Rp 2,000, here we can. Just send the children here, so we will raise them appropriately with that amount of money.”

I felt slapped in the face reading those words. Was it not right my reluctance to write to Mas Djon about the extra allowance? I immediately went to meet my best friends. I showed the reply by Mas Djon that hurt so much.

Mas Wikana was speechless. Mas Salam only shook his head. Only Jeng Milah spoke.

“Of course they can! Money as little as Rp 2.000, especially in Jakarta, would never be enough for eight kids! If the kids are there, they can just increase the amount until it’s enough, Jeng Mia wouldn’t know anyway!”

I am amazed by Sumilah’s thinking speed. If I had the skill to think logically, and the speed to act like that, my children would not be suffering for that long. This is my biggest weakness. Moreover I was not skilled at “juggling” the

existing money so that it will multiply even if I was to use all the tricks available to me.

Yes. My children can and should regret my attitude. So I leave all this to my children, for them to know, understand, and value.

CODA

In the end, Mas Djon came, he asked for my help to take care of the Letter of Transfer to Jakarta. For a few days, I went to *Kemantren*²² Jetis. The officials there accepted me kindly. They all know about Mas Djon and are familiar with him.

“Why do you take care of the Letter of Transfer, *ta mbakyu*,”²³ said one of them. “Later Pak Djon will come back again, for sure!” He added. I shook my head smiling.

“No, *dik*. Pak Djon will not come back again. It has already become our decision.” So the Letter of Transfer was completed. I took it home, and I sent it straight to Mas Djon in Kemayoran.

NOTES

- ¹ The use of Indonesian honorifics vary according to the formality of the occasion and the relationship between the speaker and the person spoken to. Listed here is an overview of the translated honorifics used in this chapter: *Dirk* (Younger brother in Indonesian), *Mas* (Sir/Brother in Javanese), *Bu* (Ma'am in Indonesian), *Jeng* (Younger sister in Javanese), *Zus* (Sister in Indonesian), *Mbakyu* (Sister in Javanese), *bapak* (Father in Indonesian), *Pak* (Sir in Indonesian).
- ² Sugar State Academy.
- ³ "Brother" in Malay, but in this context, it is more like "little brother".
- ⁴ "Horsey! Horsey!" In Javanese.
- ⁵ Understood as 'brother', it is a term that was used during the revolution period by Sukarno to mean "kamerad", brother in the time of revolution. This word was also popularized by painter Affandi and poet Chairil Anwar such that everyone (old, young, rich, or poor) called each other "bung".
- ⁶ "Grandfather", in Javanese.
- ⁷ Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Artist).
- ⁸ "Studio", in Indonesian.
- ⁹ "To stretch like a bow", in Javanese.
- ¹⁰ In Dutch.
- ¹¹ Jogjakartans and the Javanese culture have a particular way of addressing orientation based on the direction of the wind (*Lor, Kidul, Kulon, Wetan*: North, South, West, East). They also use this in addressing places and homes.
- ¹² *The People's Daily* paper, the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) official newspaper.
- ¹³ Central Committee *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (CC Indonesian Communist Party).
- ¹⁴ *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (The House of Representatives).
- ¹⁵ *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, Institute for People's Culture associated with the Communist Party.
- ¹⁶ Friendship Institute.
- ¹⁷ Political Bureau.
- ¹⁸ Religious Affairs Office.
- ¹⁹ In Muslim marriage, for divorce process to be completed, the husband needs to say *talak* three times to make them official with no turning back.
- ²⁰ This is an inner dialogue that is directed to Wikana.
- ²¹ There was a shift from "Jeng Mia", a term of endearment from a husband to his wife, to "Saudara Mia" used here in the letter, which is much more formal.
- ²² A unit of governance in Yogyakarta *kraton* (palace) which is as big as a district.
- ²³ "Dear sister", in Javanese.