

The Man whom Nobody Noticed:

Warren Blake.

Jonathan came to my notice, in his characteristic way, ever so gradually.

My Schooner was lying to a mooring buoy close-to the reef on Bunaken Island, off Manado, in Sulawesi, where the coral wall plunges vertically to hundreds of metres, no place for a vessel to anchor.

I was roused from a late afternoon siesta by a hail, "Captain Warren!" It was Petrus from the Trident Dive Resort on the mainland. As usual, he was in his wetsuit, at the tiller of an outboard boat, with a group of sodden divers aboard. Unusually, Petrus' habitually cheery face was drawn tight in concern.

He came instantly to the point, without the customary Indonesian greetings, "We have lost a diver, I went in with ten, and now we have.....nine!" he said with a tremor in his voice, running round the group with his finger to count again. I mentally followed his moving finger and concurred.

"Where?" I asked, and Petrus waved an unhappy arm in an arc to seaward.

Now the South face of Bunaken is not a good area to misplace a diver. The currents near Springs race along the walls, and out to the open sea, and there are sometimes "down-wellings", currents which have been said to take frightened divers down the wall to considerable depths against their best efforts. And late afternoon is no time to lose a diver in strong currents, with dark coming on.

"I'll go aloft for a quick look around, then I 'll get in my Launch to help you search!" I shouted as I started to scramble up the ratlines of my mainmast. Half way up I paused to catch my breath, and glanced down at Petrus' boat and its passengers, a beautifully slender and symmetrical local hull, with neatly spaced pairs of yellow dive tanks down each side on the backs of divers....equal numbers of yellow tanks on each side?...I counted them, ten tanks, ten divers!

"You have ten divers!" I shouted. "How many did you say?"

"No! No! Nine divers!" Petrus shouted, back, turning to count again.

All of the faces had been looking up at me, I could see they were all Asian faces, Chinese looking, with one or two appealing feminine ones amongst them.

Now they all looked around at their companions, and started counting themselves. Some reached the same conclusion as Petrus and shrugged shoulders. But one of the girls started expostulating in rapid Cantonese, and even I could understand her repeated "Sap! Sap!", meaning ten.

I climbed down and by the time I had reached the deck there was much laughter, and Petrus was being ribbed, in English, "Why? Cannot count, Man!"

Just to be sure I counted heads...Good Heavens!...nine plus Petrus and his assistant Jusuf, where was the tenth tank I saw from aloft? I counted tanks...ten! I forced myself to look closely in each face as I mentally numbered each one...ten, indeed, and now I noticed that one face was not Chinese, it was a man, a small fellow with hunched shoulders, a markedly Caucasian nose, and a resigned expression. Ten!

Petrus, cheerful now, but smarting under the continuing repartee, shrugged his shoulders, started his engine and waved goodbye. I was thankful that no one was missing, but still a little confused...

Later that evening I anchored off the Trident Resort, where the owner, Petrus' father, my good friend Dr. Hany, had decreed I was welcome to stay for week or two. I went ashore for the excellent dinner that was always on the tables. Petrus came down to the jetty to take my line.

"You are sure you brought all your divers back?" I asked, laughing.

"Yes, of course! Thanks!" he replied, grinning, and then with a frown, "I think so!" I thought at that moment he was just continuing the joke.

The Hong Kong group were all at one table, and hailed me as a hero. "Sit down! Sit down! Take rice with us!" they demanded.

I sat down, and to display my cosmopolitan grasp of Asian languages, I started to count heads, in Cantonese, with a pretence of serious concern. I got as far as "Chet! Bat! Kau!..," seven, eight, nine, thereby virtually exhausting my entire vocabulary, when all of the faces abruptly looked quite concerned, and peered about them in confusion.

There was a long pause of indecision.

"I am here" said a quiet, resigned, very English voice amidst the awkward silence around the table. The strange voice had seemed to come from the very end far end, where the deep shadow of a magnificent Strangler Fig overhung the sea-side balcony. In the embarrassed pause which followed, I was reluctant to peer too obviously into the shadows, or indeed to enquire further.

The HongKongers, in a rush to change the subject, insisted on telling me about their diving experiences of the day, in quite un-Chinese volubility. With a slight feeling of unease I cooperated in an apparent effort to forget the existence of the strange little man who seemed to insist on hiding himself from view. What had the man done?..I wondered, briefly. After a couple of bottles of Bintang Beer, and after some of my own diving stories, I forgot about him too, as the two Chinese girls followed my tales with apparent interest.

Next morning at breakfast the sight of my Chinese friends at their long table reminded me of the Anonymous Stranger, and so I looked for him...not at their table, all Chinese...but no!..a prominent Western proboscis was just visible, between two burly Hongkies...the Stranger was at breakfast with his dive group! So he had not been ostracized; whatever tension had developed between him and his unlikely companions had not yet festered into an open split. To get my breakfast cereals I walked past their table, and exchanged greetings of a decidedly more sober, more Asian, nature. The Stranger did not look up, but prominently displayed on the table in front of him, standing out more sharply than its owner, was a red volume: "Learn Bahasa Indonesia" So he was a student of the local language, unusual amongst the casual visitors to the Resort.

After a hurried breakfast, the dive group busied themselves with the task of collecting their damp gear, and in loading their boat. I watched carefully. The Stranger carried out his part dutifully, methodically, like a cog in a machine, with no more interaction with his fellows than that, while they jabbered away in the mix of Cantonese with a smattering of English typical of their mother city. Petrus' assistant diver, Jusuf, a habitually polite and reserved young man, actually collided with Jonathan when they were both carrying tanks, forcing the latter to stumble and drop his tank on the ground, whereupon Jusuf just brushed past him without apology, a most uncharacteristic display of rudeness. Both men

were bare-chested, and in wet-suit trousers, but the physical contrast was stark; the young Indonesian, brown, broad-shouldered and muscular, and the pale young Englishman, hunched, with pudgy, flaccid flesh.

When the boat returned in the afternoon, it was the same scene of indifference repeated. I began to suspect it was the man's perfect anonymity, something in his character, or lack of it, that was behind his detachment, rather than some unwelcome perversion he had inflicted on their women, as I had imagined in my more uncharitable moments.

That evening after dinner a queue developed at the coffee pot on a side-table, while a harried waitress struggled with opening it to replenish the contents. My turn had seemed to come, I leant forward, only to brush against something...someone...a small figure backed apologetically out of my way...Good Heavens, I had not noticed the Stranger standing beside me! It was a very minor brush and I was able to recover with dignity, motioning him forward.

He took a great, visible swallow as if anything so radical as filling a coffee cup required a metaphorical girding of the loins, and stepped in front of the waitress.

He held his cup firmly against his chest, took another swallow, and addressed the girl in a short, stammering sentence. She understood nothing, but my proximity allowed me to follow his attempt at communicating in her language. Rendered into English he said something like, "Please can I have some coffee? What is your name?", but with the tones of England, even London, in his vowels that made it intelligible only to a native English speaker with some acquaintance with the local tongue.

"My friend asks what is your name?...and can he have some coffee, please?" I offered, with somewhat more fluency, putting what I imagined was the important bit first. The girl brightened instantly, flushed a little, placed her right hand rather theatrically on her chest, and replied, "Saya Yanti!" while looking directly at the Stranger for the first time.

I looked at him, and to my great surprise, he murmured his thanks, "Terimah Kaseh, Yanti!" with the vowels just a little less Anglicized, and her name perfectly rendered.

There was no need for me to translate, Yanti understood, and offered the coffee jug to the man with an encouraging air. He appeared to stand transfixed, with a surprised grin on his face and his cup still clutched to his chest, until Yanti nodded her head towards it, when he thrust it forward with reckless enthusiasm.

It occurred to me at that moment that this inscrutable man was becoming less so, but perhaps more easily engaged if conversed with in a foreign tongue, so I asked him his name, in Indonesian. Very quickly, he produced a very intelligible "Saya Jonathan!, Jonathan Riley!" and put his hand clumsily, whoops!..the left one, the wrong one, to his own chest, while looking solely at the girl with an avid expression.

Yanti chose not to notice the undiplomatic gaffe, and beamed at him, quietly whispering "Hello Jonathan." I felt quite left out, but appropriately so.

I turned to leave, with an empty coffee cup, but Jonathan was apparently eager to expand his circle of acquaintances. He addressed me in a long, and incomprehensible sentence in Bahasa Indonesia, but full of London vowels, while Yanti leaned over to fill my cup.

I motioned towards my solitary table, and Jonathan followed me there with alacrity. I rather felt he should have spent more time cementing his budding friendship with the girl, but...

From then on, I seemed to play a part in Jonathan's life, and a small part in his affair with Yanti, for better or for worse.

Jonathan confided in me later that my talking to him in a foreign language had truly broken the ice that habitually befrosted his relationships with virtually everybody. My use of Indonesian had set me, and him, apart from the ethnic group to which we both nominally belonged, the group that seemed responsible, in his eyes, for his life-long state of humiliation under the utter indifference of his fellow Britons. He had even sought out, and felt more comfortable in the company of his fellow divers from Hong Kong.

"Also," he added, "it seems easier to say something...one truly means...in a foreign language!" as his gaze strayed towards the slight form of Yanti on the other side of the room. I believe Yanti's difference, her brownness perhaps, was also a comfort to him.

His humiliation at what was essentially the inability of most people to even notice his presence had taken many forms, some of which sounded hilarious to my ears, but were recounted in such an earnest manner that I had to control the urge to laugh. After all, the incidents were all painful to him.

He always suffered in restaurants, especially in London. On one occasion, seeking to dine alone, as usual, he had waited interminably for a waitress to bring a menu, then again to take his order, after which his dinner had not appeared for another hour! On this occasion he exacted a measure of revenge by walking out after he had finished, unnoticed, and unpaying. Unfeelingly, I asked whether he had ever considered a career as a bank-robber, taking advantage of his...errr...anonymity, but Jonathan did not catch my point.. "Why commit crimes?" he asked, reasonably. This sense of honesty, a virtue that he actually called "my training as an auditor", had robbed him of all permanent satisfaction in the case of the Restaurant Walk-Out, and added greatly to his "feelings of invisibility". He had gone back the next day to inform the manager that he "had forgotten to pay", only to be met with a blank stare of incomprehension. Painfully, he insisted that he had sat at that table, ordered, and finally ate, pork chops with chips, and pointed out "that waitress!.." That Mistress of sublime Indifference merely shrugged, and denied everything. The Manager dismissed our invisible hero with the observation, "Perhaps it was a different restaurant, young man!"

His career at the giant London firm of Costs Slaughterhouse was equally demeaning. His Supervisor, Sykes, had very little idea how to "balance the books", a task he grandly delegated to his most Junior Auditor. Sykes did possess one extraordinary skill: any discrepancy or delay in the accounts was somehow Jonathan's fault, but, when after late night efforts on the part of the most Junior auditor, an accurate set of accounts was presented on time, it was Sykes who inevitably basked in the satisfaction of the "Fourteenth Floor"

Jonathan noticed the Ladies, even if they never knew he existed. Clarissa, in Payroll, wore extremely short miniskirts, and deeply plunging décolletages. Here Jonathan sniggered a little as he recounted how he would actually take advantage of his "invisibility" to stand beside Clarissa's desk, pretending to shuffle papers, and ogle.... "Her thighs were so...bright!" he remembered in a rare, lyrical flight.

One night, near Christmas, the Junior Auditor stayed late to sort out his Supervisor's misallocation of Operating Expenses as Capital Expenditure. Jonathan, disconcertingly, seemed to regard such technicalities as of equal fascination to his Listener as to himself,

and therefore as riveting as the brilliant Clarissian expanses of flesh. He had tidied up the discrepancies, describing them for me in unnecessarily fulsome detail, and emerged from the inner Auditors' cubicles to find the annual Office Party in full swing already.

Naturally nobody had told the most Junior Auditor about the party, and Jonathan found himself uneasily trapped, standing against the back wall of the Outer Office, and far from the glass doors, and his way home.

A sofa had been dragged out of some office, and was sitting, quite unoccupied, near him, against the back wall. Thankfully he slid into it, determined to watch for a bolt-hole that might open through the revelers towards the door and home.

Out of the swirl came Clarissa, even more luminescent than usual. She slumped down beside Jonathan on the small sofa, belched beerily, scratched her crutch reflectively, and announced, in tones loud enough to reach Jonathan's ears but certainly no one else's:

"God!, I'm horny!"

In later, sober reflection on these happenings that were, admittedly, quite different from those of a usual day at Costs Slaughterhouse, Jonathan confessed that he strongly suspected that Clarissa from Payroll had not realized he was sitting there two feet from her glowing thighs, that her unguarded actions and statement had been encouraged by a sense of isolation from the partying throng. I tended to agree with his analysis, disappointing as this might have been. However, Jonathan also admitted to a few initial moments of wild turmoil as he struggled with the question of a suitable rejoinder...:"I have led a very sheltered life, you know..." at this point he went silent. I very nearly offered "Perhaps you should have just leant over and scratched...", but the impracticality of my suggestion was obvious, even to me.

Jonathan's sense of invisibility and inferior position in Life was confirmed, and sealed, a brief minute later. The junior Auditor had just managed to croak a feeble "Clarissa..." without reaction from the swooning sex-pot, when the Senior Auditor, Jonathan's Supervisor, Mr. Sykes, emerged from the dancers, with his shirt buttons undone and a smear of sweat on his face. Clarissa's abandoned attitude, and those incandescent thighs, caught his eye, and he paused to look down at her.

Clarissa murmured, "Oh, Bill!" up at him, Sykes bent down slightly, offered his arm, and together entwined they made a drunken sortie out through the party, and out through the glass doors at the front.

"I never even knew he had a first name!" lamented Jonathan, "let alone..."

Not all his tribulations had a dash of humour about them, even in my eyes. Jonathan's mother had died even before he finished his University studies (in Accounting, of course), and with her must have gone the only element of love and friendship that he had ever enjoyed. His father by all account, was contemptuous of everything about his son, "an eternal disappointment" even on his Graduation day, and had never sought him out, nor answered his calls..."He is a very busy Businessman!" Jonathan explained, in apparent mitigation. Just before his trip to Sulawesi, he had run into his father walking along Bond Street, with his blonde girlfriend on his arm. Jonathan was proudly framing a welcome, when the older man just walked straight past, without the slightest hint of recognition. This obviously had hurt more than even his transparent invisibility to pretty girls and London waitresses.

I tried to determine what particular physical attributes Jonathan possessed, or lacked, that made him near invisible to ordinary, careless observers. Apart from his small stature, a little over five feet and his hunched shoulders, there was perhaps a certain fuzziness, as if he were out of focus in a grainy snapshot...but nothing else to make him inconspicuous. I wondered if his colourless personality in some way enveloped him in an aura that acted like a black hole, absorbing light that fell on him...but his corporeal flesh was pasty pale, quite reflective.

Jonathan's affair with Yanti progressed ever so slowly. Given that Yanti too seemed to be of a shy and retiring nature this was not surprising. He always sat at my small table, Hongkies apparently forgotten, and Yanti usurped the job of Effie, my usual waitress, in order to wait on Jonathan. Yanti was a demure, somewhat plain little lady of perhaps twenty, and quite what she saw in him was not at all clear to me...somehow on that night at the coffee pot, each had seen in the other some common thread...of loneliness, perhaps?...that drew them together. Each would take longer than necessary over ordering food, or in answering, for the obvious benefit of the other, the questions that I occasionally interjected. His command of Indonesian rapidly blossomed to surpass mine, in a bookish sense, if not yet in colloquial terms, but the conversation would have lapsed many times, after the food was ordered, if I had not made small offerings that kept them going. In truth, I was becoming a little bored with chaperoning a courtship that seemed to be limited to the breakfast table.

Yanti seemed bright and happy in her friendship with Jonathan. The only time she seemed distant, even upset, followed what looked to be an argument, more a one-sided tirade, directed against her from Jusuf, the athletic young diver who helped my friend Petrus. This took place far enough away for me not to understand a word, but close enough to see the violent anger in his face, and to see his hand raised threateningly. Jonathan, seated with his back towards them, noticed nothing. I was later to remember this scene.

Jonathan announced one morning that instead of leaving with the Hong Kong group, as planned the next morning, he had extended his stay by two weeks! Yanti flushed rosy under her brown cheeks, and I mentally planned to have meals on my balcony in future..I was hardly needed here!

That night a special buffet dinner was arranged out on the terrace under the palm trees by the beach to farewell the Hong Kong group. A full moon arose to silver the palm fronds and a string quartet played romantic melodies. Both Jonathan and I were cheerfully summoned to dine with his erstwhile group, demonstrating in my eyes that he had not offended in any way, that their lack of communication with him was just another manifestation of what we both had already described as his "invisibility". Because the dinner was from a self-service buffet, Yanti was not in attendance, an absence that alarmed Jonathan. "Perhaps she taken leave for two weeks...because I have planned to stay?" he asked anxiously. I pointed out the lack of need for waitresses at a buffet, and opined that she did not appear anxious to avoid him in any way, quite the reverse! He flushed excitedly.

The string quartet was composed entirely of elderly, dapper, Manado men in lounge suits that must have been stifling, despite the lingering sea breeze that ruffled the silver fronds above. They played very tunefully an endless selection of European sentimental melodies of the 1930's or 40's. I guessed that the group had developed their repertoire for performance in dance-halls and hotels of the Dutch colonial era, and imagined a scene where elegantly gowned imperialists and their husbands waltzed on the moonlit terrace while Joseph Conrad and I smoked pipes in cane chairs and swapped yarns.

The living audience however, grew a little impatient with the music. As the Bintang ("Star") Beer flowed, some of the Hongkie men started their characteristic "Yam Seeeeengggg!" drinking choruses, where one poor drinker has to empty his pot while the chorus continues. The women, as ever the arbiters of civil behaviour, shushed them up, whereupon the drinkers loudly demanded some "Manado songs!"

The musicians conferred anxiously together. "Yanti!" Bring Yanti!" they called. Sure enough, it was our favourite waitress who eventually appeared on stage, propelled by two grinning waiters, although her arrival was delayed by what seemed to be another distant argument offstage between her and Jusuf, the young diver. He appeared to be remonstrating, she merely shrugged several times. When she arrived on stage she looked quite tousled, and very shy, as if she had been dragged from her bed.

There followed a long, whispered consultation with the orchestra. The fiddles started a romantic melody, Yanti stepped demurely up to the microphone, took a deep breath, and...transfixed her audience.

That such a big voice could emerge from such a small person was astonishing. I had always imagined that operatic sopranos were enormous specifically because one has to have big lungs, or a big stomach, or whatever..for the job, but little Yanti had the power, the perfect pitch, and the rhythm of a jazz singer such as Ella Fitzgerald.

The Honkies sat immobile, not one attempt to Yam Seng, nor even to fill empty glasses. The rest of the guests were just as intent upon every one of Yanti's notes.

Jonathan could not take his eyes off Yanti's face. And as song followed melodious song, it became apparent that Yanti only had eyes for him, and finally that her words were sung for him alone. I almost expected her to belt out "Only youuu, Jonathan, youuuu!"

Johnathan sat there, ecstatic, through seven or eight lively Manado songs. He positively glowed in euphorium, his eyes shining, while he even seemed to swell a little in stature. I felt no doubt that he knew that Yanti was singing for him.

But all good things come to a end, they say, and after one last number, throbbing with emotion, the band put down their fiddles, Yanti bowed briefly to genuine applause, eyes still on Johnathan, and then departed across the verandah, past the guest bungalows, across the grass in the light of the moon and into a puddle of lamp light at the staff quarters, where she opened the door on the end, and vanished...into her room.

I looked at Jonathan. His face was still beaming in ecstasy, and I am very sure he had watched her every step to her room, as I had. I felt I had no need to offer any superfluous advice.

Jonathan's face, however, slowly subsided towards his habitual retiring gloom. After a long silence, he turned to me and asked, in a despairing voice, "Will I ever see her again?"

I felt despair for him, and a slight feeling of irritation. No wonder he never...
“Jonathan!” I said, with a hint of exasperation, “that’s her room over there, her bedroom...”

“Yes, I see...” he replied, “but what...?”

Internally I felt a slight stirring of conscience which deterred me from framing specific, urgent, words in reply, but oddly, quite independently, my shoulders shrugged, my hand involuntarily gestured towards Yanti’s room in a movement that metaphorically propelled the slight figure of Jonathan in that direction.

Fright appeared in his eyes. “You mean...?” I could only nod, weakly.

“But!...” he wriggled in turmoil.

I turned to fill our two glasses from the antique green bottle of Bintang beer that had sat evaporating and warming while Yanti sang. I needed that moment to decide whether I should...interfere..in the life, the lives of two young people.

When I turned back to Jonathan with two foam-capped glasses, he had disappeared, even more substantially than his usual retreat into corporeal insubstance. I glanced swiftly towards Yanti’s door just in time to see it closing, and incongruously, but ever so politely, a pair of male boots sitting just beside the opening, as befitted any footwear upon entry to an Indonesian dwelling.

I sipped on my two glasses of beer, feeling a sense of relief.

I am bothered now with moral scruples about my part in thus initiating what happened thereafter. Of course a writer has to be able to recognize the problems of others...else where’s the story? Of course he must find solutions, or denouements thereto, for the misery of his subjects...his fictional subjects. But should he actively intervene in the misery of the real people, mere passers-by, that he observes on a daily basis? I doubt that many decent people, let alone degenerate writers, possess the necessary wisdom. Anyway, people with problems hardly ever accept well-meaning advice, do they? But I advised Jonathan, at least with a gesture, and he took my advice!...and I believe my advice was well-meaning...I think it was.

The guests dissipated towards their own beds. I retired, with my beer, to a little Pondok, or Gazebo, down by the water. The moon, well past its zenith, spread a silvery glow over the mirror-calm sea. My Schooner, at her anchor, was silhouetted exactly across the path of the moon. How grand she would have looked with all sails up, gliding along in the dark...red sails in the sunset, silver sails in the moonlight, although they would actually be black silhouettes... I must have dozed off.

I was awakened by the despairing cry of someone in my dreams, but looked anxiously around me nonetheless, dreamed fright carrying over irrationally into half wakefulness. I dreamed I saw a lithe, wide-shouldered figure, brown bareness above the waist, flit away across the sand, leap the rock seawall and vanish.

Then I heard the unmistakable sounds of a man vomiting a bellyful of beer, and a desperate, frothing, even bubbling intake of breath, the involuntary gasp that follows. I was aware that the disgusting sounds came from quite near, on the black sand beach, but I did not wish to look, to see who it might be, there are some things that should remain private. I averted my eyes.

The next act of the drama that seemed to be put on for my distraction, for me alone in my theatre box, took the shape of a swishing small figure, almost soundless, entering extreme right. It rushed with ridiculous concern towards the vomiting drunk, now visible in white and red shirt, on his back on the black sand. She came to a sliding, sitting position beside the man, and cried out his name in despair. I am sure that I recognized Yanti in the dark before she reached the victim, but it took her scream of "Jonathan!", and the terror in her voice, for me to realize that my friend was lying there...drunk??.and that Yanti was distraught, and finally that I should find out...

I was over the low rail of the Pondok, and across a dozen paces of beach, in an instant, my heart starting to bang.

Yanti was beside Jonathan, her hands on his shoulders, and he was lying flat on his back. In the moonlight I could see clearly first that he was smiling, his surprisingly white teeth displayed in the clearest sign of pleasure at her presence that I had yet seen. It took only another heartbeat to see that his shirt was badly stained with fluid...red fluid!...blood! He was vomiting blood! The necessary calm of even a half-trained medic allowed me to inspect closer. Jonathan's throat gaped open in a great dark gash, and the next desperate, bubbling breath was taken in through that gaping hole. His throat had been slashed!

Jonathan continued to smile into Yanti's eyes, even while he struggled for life. Yanti continued to mumble something, her lips close to his face. I struggled with the enormity of...a very serious wound, heavy bleeding, loss of blood...STOP THE BLEEDING! I wrenched off my shirt, and gently tried to pull Yanti clear.

"No! No!" she pleaded, to me? or to Jonathan? "No!" croaked Jonathan, "thanks!" his eyes briefly turning to mine, and then back to hers.

"You..noticed..me!" he bubbled, spitting dark froth almost in her face.

"Yes, Jonathan! Oh, yes!" Yanti said softly. His smile came back, his teeth white and spotted in the moonlight., but I do not think he breathed again. I do believe I watched a man die happily that awful night.

The Polisi came shortly after the sun rose in vivid red, the first time the colour of the dawn has upset my stomach. After some polite questioning, they went away, carrying, in a black plastic rubbish bag, the bloody parang, a great jungle knife, that neither Yanti nor I had noticed on the black sand. Some medics came later for Jonathan, still lying on the beach, covered under a stained white tablecloth from last night's dinner..

Yanti left early that morning, "to be with her family" explained a distraught Petrus.

Jusuf, the young diver, had disappeared from the resort.

I never mentioned to anyone the bare-torsoed figure that I had dreamt I saw fleeing away in the dark...from the scene of the crime? I remembered vividly the anger that Jusuf had directed at Yanti on two occasions. If the fleeing, lithe figure had indeed been Jusuf, I felt I should leave it to Yanti to decide what to say. I had interfered enough. I vowed to be just an observer from then on.

When I sailed away from Manado, a day later, there had been no more police interest shown, no more questions, no checking for fingerprints. They did not even ask for Jonathan's possessions. It seemed to me almost as though the Polisi were, in their turn, trying to avoid admitting that Jonathan had ever come to their notice. Petrus gave me his

bag, with some clothes, his toothbrush and shampoo, and his red “Learn Bahasa Indonesia”.

“You were his only friend,!” Petrus said, sadly, as he handed me the bag, omitting any mention of Yanti...had he not noticed...?

On my way to the jetty I noticed a pair of boots still sitting, in mute and patient etiquette, outside of Yanti’s deserted room. I picked them up. I am fairly sure they were Jonathan’s boots, he certainly wore something similar, and they looked his size...although I did wonder what size shoes Jusuf wore? Quite certainly, I recalled, Jonathan’s body, on the sand, had been bare-footed...they had been sticking out from under the table cloth in mute nakedness.

I felt slightly furtive as I stuffed the boots into Jonathan’s bag. I felt that I was interfering again, but...I justified it with the thought that perhaps I was “protecting Yanti’s reputation”. I sailed away, never to hear anything more about the case.

On a visit to London a year later, I carried along Jonathan’s meagre belongings, imagining that I could find the father through his son’s place of employment. The telephonist at Costs Slaughterhouse put me straight through to “Mr. William Sykes”. “No”, he replied, “I do not, and never have had a Jonathan Riley working here, it must be Claude Rowley, do you want to speak to him?” I explained that Jonathan would have worked for him more than one year ago, for at least five years...and received a similar, somewhat irritated denial.

During the previous year I had sometimes begun to question whether Jonathan had really existed...after all, all I had was a non-descript bag of anonymous belongings, and some disturbing memories, or were they all part of a vivid dream? My suspicions surged at Syke’s denials.

“You do have a girl called Clarissa...in Payroll?” I demanded.

Sykes bristled instantly, in jealous possessiveness? “And what’s it to you if I do?” he demanded. “Anyway, she has moved to Auditing...she’s the Junior Auditor. ” he added. I apologized and hung up.

Sykes and Clarissa existed, Jonathan was denied. Clarissa had usurped Jonathan’s alleged position!...what was going on?

I looked in the telephone book. There were seven J. Rileys, one John Riley. I called John, he answered and I asked if he had a son of the same name, with short shrift.

There were three pages of Rileys, little chance of tracing Jonathan’s father.

I still wonder what really happened. I will doubtless sail back to Manado some day, and visit my friends at the Trident Resort again. I wonder if they will remember Jonathan? Will I meet Yanti again? Will she remember Jonathan? I dread the thought that she might be happily attached to Jusuf! What then could I possibly say....?