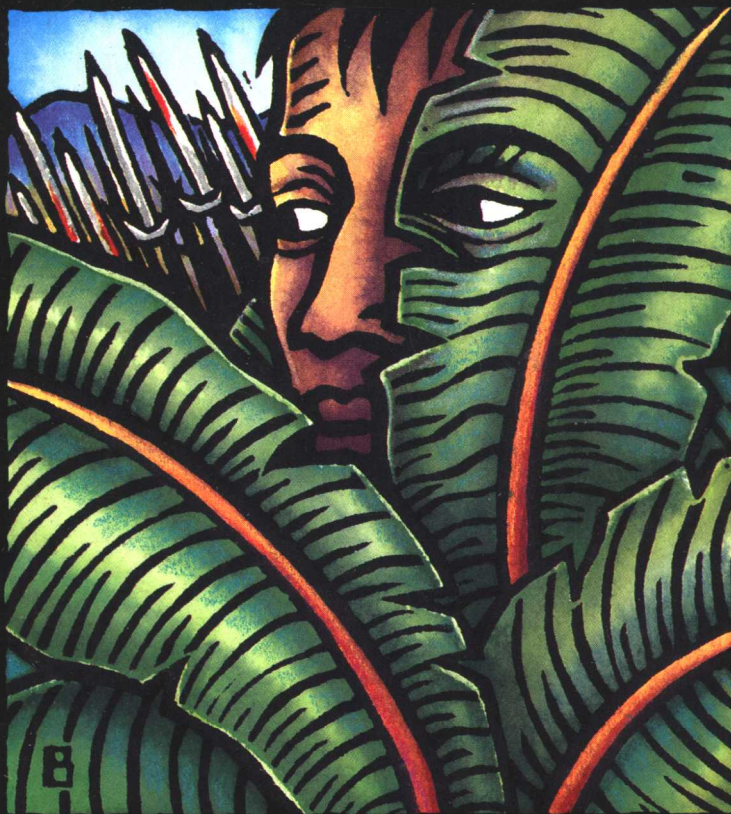


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The story is gripping, one that haunts the memory."
Martin Booth, Washington Post Book World

-THE-

SALE

FUGITIVE



**PRAMOE DYA
ANANTA TOER**

Translated by Willern Samuels

THE FUGITIVE

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THE FUGITIVE

PRAMOEDYA
ANANTA TOER

Translated by Willem Samuels

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First published in Indonesia in 1950 under the title *Perburuan* by Balai Pustaka Publishing. Reissued in Indonesia in 1954 and 1959.

AVON BOOKS

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The Hearst Corporation
1350 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019

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Cover illustration copyright © 1990 by Bascove
Inside cover author photograph by Susanna Baird
Published by arrangement with William Morrow and Company, Inc.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-28396
ISBN: 0-380-71496-5

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First Avon Books Trade Printing: October 1991

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Printed in the U.S.A.

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Translator's dedication
For my father:
a fighter and a thinker, too

Note to the reader

The story of *The Fugitive* is set in the East Javanese town of Blora on the evening before and day of Japan's capitulation to the Allied Forces in World War II. Hardo, the main character, and his friend Dipo are fugitives from the Japanese military with which they had previously allied themselves in an effort to force the Dutch colonialists out of Indonesia and gain independence. Their rebellion against the dictatorial occupation forces six months earlier was doomed to failure when Karmin, the third conspirator, withdrew his support from the coup at the last minute. After months of being on the run, each additional hour brings the young men closer to capture and execution.

The novel begins with Hardo's attempt to visit his fiancée, Ningsih, on the day of her brother's coming-of-age celebration. Dressed liked a wandering beggar and

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half-starved from a self-imposed fast, Hardo will not reveal his identity to anyone, even his own father, for fear of endangering them and risking betrayal. Hardo's relationships with both his own father and the father of his fiancée form an important element in the book; the ambiguity of their relationship, a balance of love and cruelty, is a recurring theme in Pramoedya's writing.

Though *The Fugitive's* structure follows the general outline of the traditional Javanese shadow-puppet play, it is nonetheless a novel of contemporary and nationalistic spirit.

Pramoedya wrote *The Fugitive* while at Bukit Duri Prison, a forced labor camp, where he was imprisoned from 1947 to 1949 for his active role in the Indonesian revolution that followed the end of World War II.

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ONE

The final sounds of the gongs of the bronze orchestra faded in the evening air. That morning the son of the subdistrict chief of Kaliwangan had been circumcised. Guests had gone home and now came the murky light of twilight. The only visitors remaining were a band of beggars looking at the area where the shadow play had earlier been performed. The beggars, men and women both, were almost naked. The men covered only their genitals. While some of the beggars squatted on the ground, others leaned against the pillars that supported the roof of the three-sided pavilion where the festivities had taken place. The floor was only two centimeters higher than the ground.

Among the group of beggars was a young man

whose ribs and breastbone, like those of the other beggars, stood out like the keys of a xylophone. His arms were thin, his stomach shrunken, and his legs little more than a pair of walking sticks. Yet he was different from the other beggars. Unlike the others his eyes did not roam the area but remained focused on the newly circumcised boy who sat lounging on an antique settee. The young beggar remained completely motionless, his body as rigid as a nail. With his bony left arm, he clung to one of the pillars. His only item of clothing was a loincloth.

Whenever someone from the main house came out to the pavilion to clean or pick up, a chorus of moans erupted from the beggars' mouths. Even so, the pallid choir failed to attract attention, and no sooner had a servant completed his task than he would leave again. The young beggar's mouth remained firmly closed. He stood stiffly, with his left hand clutching the pillar.

The circumcised boy at whom the beggar stared sat alone, the lower part of his body covered in a brown sarong. The smile on his face gave him the appearance of a primary school student who had just passed his final exams. But when his eyes caught sight of the beggar's stare, their light faded. The small pine branch, a switch that he held in his hand, moved incessantly as if he were trying to shoo away flies. The boy's eyes moved from the beggar to the silent orchestra and the frozen row of shadow puppets standing before the dark screen.

No lamps flickered in the dusk. In Blora the poor people generally kept their lamps burning very low. The red light of the sun floated in the deep blue sky and the two colors finally mixed into one. The dark green wrappers from sweets that lay scattered on the ground turned to gray. Yellow banana peels became brown and young coconut leaves took on an ochre cast.

An older woman emerged from the house and ap-

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proached the circumcised boy. She spoke to him affectionately. "Would you like anything, Ramli?"

The boy shook his head silently but pointed his fir branch at the beggars. The woman looked to where he was pointing. "Why don't you give them something, Mother?" he asked her. "Why do you let them stand there, waiting?"

The boy's mother glared at the beggars, who had gathered in search of handouts. "These days, there are thousands of them around. They're like ants. And if you pay them any mind at all . . ."

The boy stopped to lay the branch on his lap. "But if you're not going to give them anything, why do you let them wait there?"

"Why not? They'll tire soon enough of waiting and leave by themselves," she told him. The boy played with his fir fan, now black in the evening light. He stared at the ground and tapped his feet. "Don't move your legs," his mother reminded him. "It'll take longer to heal." She then left him and walked to the edge of the pavilion.

As she stepped in front of the beggars, the woman stopped and puffed out her chest. She stood there watching them, pulling her body straight and thrusting her narrow chin forward. Wisps of hair fell across her temples. Her nostrils flared as she raised her arm and jabbed her finger through the air. In a voice almost loud enough for a scream she began to shriek: "You bunch of monkeys! Get out of here! Go! You stink to high heaven. Go on, get out!"

As she spoke, there rose like a church choir the sound of both male and female voices. "Ma'am, ma'am, take pity on us, ma'am."

The choir soon broke into a litany of separate cries. The beggars blinked as if just waking from sleep. As if they were Japanese, they bowed their bodies before her.

Seven pairs of skinny arms reached upward. Flies buzzed around their scabby skin. The one beggar remained motionless, not moving and not saying a word.

The woman's feet stayed firmly rooted on the ground. "Get out!" she barked as she jabbed her index finger at them again.

The voices of the weak choir rose again. "Take pity on us, ma'am, please . . ."

The one beggar did not move. For a moment he stared wanly at the woman but then let his eyes search the room until they rested once more on the circumcised boy. The beggar's thick black hair fell below his shoulders. His eyes hung deep inside their hollows. His eyebrows were bushy and unkempt.

"Mother," the boy called from his place on the divan.

"Get out of here, all of you!" the woman roared again before she turned around and walked back to the boy. "Yes? What is it?" she asked sweetly.

"I want you to give them something," the boy said weakly.

The woman hesitated. "Is that going to be your gift today? Is that what you want?"

"Yes, that's all I want." The boy paused for a second before continuing. "When is Hardo coming back?"

"Shhh! You're not to mention that name around here," his mother warned as she returned to the main house. "I'll get something for them," she said as she disappeared behind the shadow screen.

At the edge of the pavilion the beggars hovered together as before. With the sun setting in the west, the pavilion was growing dark. The night wind began to blow softly, and from the outdoor kitchen beside the house came the sound of people cooking. The palm branches that decorated the doorways and the paper

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streamers that climbed through the air from the rafters to the roof of the pavilion swayed gently back and forth. A gecko lizard called twelve times.

"Mother," the boy called to his mother as she appeared with a basket of cakes in her hand. "Mother!" he said more insistently.

"What is it, Ramli?" the woman asked as she approached.

The boy pointed at the solitary beggar. The woman's eyes followed her son's hand. "Who is that?" he whispered.

"What do you mean, who? You ask the strangest questions sometimes. Who else if not some lazy bum from the back woods?"

"But he looks like . . ."

"Who does he look like?" she demanded.

"Like . . . Hardo."

The boy's comment angered her as the tension in her body returned. "Stop imagining things," she hissed under her breath. "If someone were to hear you, you could get the whole lot of us in trouble." She walked to the edge of the pavilion with the basket hanging from the crook of her left arm. With her right hand she divided the cakes among the beggars. "Now, once and for all, go away," she warned them.

In return for her alms she received a chorus of muted thanks, but the one beggar remained still and silent. Not raising a hand to accept the offering, his deep-set eyes stared at the woman in front of him. One by one the other beggars left and soon he was standing alone.

The woman looked at him with surprise. "What is it? Why don't you take this and go?" she muttered.

He didn't answer.

"Mother," the boy called from his chair. She turned her head to look at him. "He looks like Hardo."

The woman's brow furrowed as she looked again at the beggar in front of her. "Go!" she insisted, stamping her foot. Her eyes studied the beggar from his feet to his forehead. He took his left arm from the pillar and the woman noticed on the back of his right arm a long thin scar lighter in color than his skin. She blinked rapidly. Her body stiffened as she screamed, "Hardo!" before she slapped her hand on her mouth. As she stood transfixed, the beggar suddenly bowed and left.

Evening's darkness had come quickly. The air felt clean once more. Swallows flitted back and forth on the currents of the gentle wind. Here and there, across the landscape, the dim lights of kerosene lanterns grew brighter, like stars in an ashen sky. The night air filled with the sound of drums in mosques—it was time for evening prayer—and small children crying.

The beggar walked listlessly, his eyes on the ground before him. Ten, then fifteen houses retreated behind him. One foot forward, then the next; his bone-thin arms hung weakly at his sides. He arrived at the village road that led to the city. Stretching out on either side were rice fields which now, between seasons, had been planted with other crops.

"Karmin, Commander Karmin, where are you now?" the beggar whispered to himself, and then fell silent. Head bowed, he continued on.

The moon had yet to rise and stars flickered calmly above a procession of clouds. Kaliwangan, a village on the outskirts of the small city of Blora, was peaceful. The rutted twilight road was almost empty. Save for the beggar, there were only one or two other people about. There were no cows or buffalo. He walked forward, following a straight path, in the direction of the city. Crickets began to trill their song, the only song they