THE TRAM WAS PACKED WITH PEOPLE, baskets, empty and filled containers, goats and chickens. The day was hot, and the people and animals were soaked with sweat. The tram stank from sweat and terasi. The window ledges were speckled with the tomato-red stains of betel juice.

Breathing was difficult in the tram, but people smoked just the same — to overcome the stink of sweat and shrimp paste. A young woman, a Eurasian, took out her handkerchief, small as a lempur wrapping leaf, and put it to her nose. “Who on earth brought that terasi on the tram,” she complained, “You’d think they would know better. This is first class, after all.”

A Chinese man, fat as Churchill, retorted angrily: “Oh, shut up. It’s ‘co-prosperity’ time now, not just for the Dutch.” He then bent over and took a small packet from his vegetable basket. “Here’s the terasi!” he said, shoving the packet towards the woman. “Now what are you going to do about it?”

An old woman, stooped and thin, whose blouse was so full of holes that it looked like a lace bedspread, was being berated by the conductor: “This is first class. What are you doing here? Move to the back! If you don’t, you’ll have to pay the extra.”

“But it’s too crowded back there,” the old woman begged, “There’s no room for me, sir.”
"If you don’t move you’ll have to pay the extra," the driver insisted.

The old woman retreated slowly to second-class. Looking back at the conductor she muttered angrily, "Look at the airs he puts on! He gets a little power from the Japs and this is the way he acts! With an old woman, he acts tough. But you can bet if I were Japanese, he’d be bowing and scraping. Well, piss on him!"

A muscular man, who was wearing no shirt, stood up. "Shut up and sit down!" he snapped.

The tram came to a halt at a tram stop. Outside the people crowded around. "Disembarking passengers, get out, first!" the ticket seller began to scream. "Come on, hurry it up!"

For a brief moment, the people inside could breathe, but a second later the tram was packed again. And then, from outside, came the strident voice of a Japanese: "Let me through, you idiots!"

The crowd jammed closer together to make way for the Japanese.

A younger man looked at the Japanese and frowned: "It doesn’t matter if you’re first or second class. They still treat you just the same — like animals!"

But when the Japanese came to stand next to him he suddenly had no more to say and looked away. When the Japanese put his arm up to hold on to the leather strap attached to the ceiling of the tram, from his short-sleeved shirt there came the distinct smell of shrimp paste. The young man took out his handkerchief and covered his nose.

Midway down the line the tram suddenly stopped. Perplexed, the passengers thought for sure the tram had broken down or there had been an accident. Everyone looked out and there they saw, in the middle of the tracks, three Japanese holding up the tram. Afraid of losing his own head, it seemed, the tram driver
had stopped the tram.

The three Japanese boarded the train, scratching the passengers’ arms and hands with the hilts of their sword as they pushed their way in. Once inside they released a laugh of victory.

The tram started off again, squeaking like a rusty pulley. On the curves the people swung to the side. A young woman landed on a young man’s lap. As if it happened all the time, the young man hugged the woman around her waist and hoisted her to her feet—but he didn’t give up his seat.

By this time the smell of sweat had become intolerable and everyone had begun to complain.

“Makes one remember the old days…” said an Indonesian man in a finely-made shirt who, every so often, would brush the dust from his shirtsleeves.

No one responded to the man’s comment; it seems his words were commonplace.

At the next stop, a young man and woman got on. Their faces were red from the heat but they laughed and gabbled in Dutch. “Hmm, it’s really nice in here,” the young man said, “just like in a chicken coop!”

“Still, it’s better than walking,” the woman said as she took her handkerchief and clapped it over her hooked nose.

“What time is it?” the man asked.

The woman raised her left arm to look at her watch. She tried pushing up the sleeve of her kebaya, but it wouldn’t move. When she looked again, her watch was sticking out from a hole in the sleeve. “It’s 1:30,” she said, embarrassed.

The conductor walked through the coach. “Tickets, any more tickets?” he called while passing by the old woman in second class.

The woman watched the conductor pass and when his back was to her she stretched the side of her mouth to the right. “Look at that monkey,” she muttered.
The other passengers found themselves staring in surprise at the woman’s mouth.

At the Harmoni Building the tram stopped again. From Kota Station to Harmoni, it had taken twenty minutes.

An Indonesian man wearing Javanese headdress and English-made shoes looked angrily at his watch. “It used to take only fourteen minutes!” His voice was shrill, like the rustle of old coconut palm leaves. “Everything’s gone to hell these days.”

“Why don’t you get rid of those people on the running board,” he complained to the ticket seller. “Aren’t there any rules any more. You should tell them that it’s forbidden, that they’ll fall off.”

The ticket seller stared at the man in astonishment, then contemptuously turned his back on him and blew his whistle.

“Wait!” a number of passengers yelled, “We want to get off.”

The tram, which had already begun to move, suddenly stopped and the shoving started again. People were still trying to get off.

The man in the headdress and English shoes grabbed the ticket seller by the shirt. “What are you doing?” he screamed. “Do you do whatever comes into your head? Look before you start blowing your whistle.”

The ticket collector grew more astonished. “Who does he think he is?” he mumbled under his breath. He turned away again, but this time not contemptuously. Who knows? Maybe the man was a member of the legislature.

The tram started again. There weren’t so many passengers now and only a few remained standing in the aisle. In first class, there wasn’t a single Japanese.

A fat woman, who was short like a Japanese, wiped the sweat from her neck. “If I didn’t have to, I wouldn’t ride the tram at all,” she grumbled. “But they took my car, and still haven’t paid for it. Why don’t they just admit that they’re thieves. At least that would be more honest.”
They argued, but the Japanese refused from laying a hand on

Ministry of Interior

"And you, sir, where do you work?" he asked. "I work at the

size of a Japanese cloth after washing, he still didn't want to give in.

Though inside, the Indonesian man's heart had shriveled to the

"Tell a Japanese what he can't do."

be roared at the Indonesian, "Where do you work? How dare you

The Indonesian man kept on climbing in and once inside the train,

"Stop!" That's no way to get in. You shouldn't climb in through

continue. "There's no way to get in. The other passengers, he plucked up the courage to

front of the other passengers, he plucked up the courage to,

he'd just yelled at was Japanese, but now, being humiliated in

The Indonesian turned scabert, suddenly realizing that the man

maneuvered.

Climbing in through the window like that! Have you any

One of the passengers yelled at the man, "What are you doing?

One was a Japanese in civilian clothes.

Near the train stopped in front of the theater. More

Better not to talk like that or you might be sorry later.

A man in dirty shorts leaned toward the woman and whispered,

"Two cents, too, but not like now."

momentarily then sighed, "Times are hard. It was hard in the

been in the out house a long time ago. "The woman paused

What? Be patient! You say? If I weren't patient, I would have

will come. "The words came as easily as sweat drops on skin.

The man laughed in understanding. "Be patient. The great day

who?"

woman inquired.

Who took your car?" the man who was seated next to the

FROM KOTA TO HAMOMI
The policeman then said a few words in Japanese to the Japanese civilian. His words seemed sharp and angry. He then turned to the Indonesian and said ingratiatingly, “I’ve reprimanded him. After all, he was in the wrong.”

The Indonesian felt immensely pleased for having won a glorious victory.

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS JOHN HUDAK