

Eric Buvelot



Murder in Uluwatu

Translated by Diana Darling

Glossary

Alang-alang – A hardy local grass used for roof thatching

Bahasa Indonesia – The Indonesian language

Balé banjar – Village community hall

Bandung – A city in West Java

Bemo – Minibus for public transportation

Besakih – An important temple complex on Mount Agung

Bukit – A limestone peninsula making up the southernmost part of the island of Bali

Bulé – Indonesian term for a white foreigner; literally, albino

Bypass – A major divided highway in southern Bali

Dalang – Priest-puppeteer in Indonesian shadow theatre

Dayak – Ethnic group in Borneo, formerly head-hunters

Double Six – A nightclub, usually written 6x6 but pronounced Double Six

Dukun – Healer, shaman

Gado-gado – A culinary specialty; also the name of a restaurant and discotheque

Jalan – Street, road

Kaja – A cardinal direction meaning ‘toward the mountain’; realm of the benign.

Kalimantan – The Indonesian part of the island of Borneo

Kampung – Village; urban neighbourhood

Kebaya – Traditional Indonesian blouse for women, often in lace.

Kelod – A cardinal direction meaning ‘toward the sea’; realm of demons

Kris – Sacred dagger

Krupuk – Chips

Lipovitan – A brand of energy drink

Losmen – Small, inexpensive lodgings or guest house

Padang – A city in Sumatra renowned for its cuisine

Pak – Mr

Pancasila – The official five principles of the Indonesian state

Pariwisata – Official Indonesian term for tourism

Penjor – A decorated bamboo pole raised on religious occasions

Ramayana – Revered Hindu epic

Rumah makan – Restaurant

Sari – Essence; the inner character of things

Sayang – Darling, dear

Tokay – Gecko

Tuak – An alcoholic drink of fermented palm sap

Ubud – Small town famously associated with Balinese culture

UNTAC – United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

Waringin – Giant fig tree, held to be sacred

Wartel – Telephone office

Warung – Small shop or stand selling refreshments and daily necessities

CHAPTER I: AT THREE IN THE MORNING, PEOPLE SLEEP

THE SECOND BLOW OF THE BAMBOO HITS HER ON THE LEFT TEMPLE. A dull noise resonates along the entire hollow length of this improvised weapon. The young woman falls to her knees. The impact is very violent, and a black veil invades her eyes. She feels herself losing consciousness. Her slim body, which had been so alert and strong, topples forward and her face plunges onto the damp earth of the garden. The twenty-two-year-old woman falls into a deep coma.

Her attacker had struck hard, with precision. He had seized the heavy length of bamboo while she had her back turned to him and hit her on the skull twice. At the first blow, at the very moment he let himself be overwhelmed by violence, she was in tears. These tears had provoked in him a certain excitement. Then rage did the rest. To crush her, to kill her, to annihilate her, to destroy her, to deny her—this became his only impulse.

It had been blind fury, and now that the young woman is lying on the ground, panic begins to grip him. “Fortunately, at three o’clock in the morning, people sleep,” he murmurs, dazed, trying to gather his wits as he stands over his victim. In a nearby alleyway, stray dogs are snarling over a trash can. The barking in the night brings his mind back to order. This is not the time to falter. He briefly invokes divine help and crouches over the inert young woman. The tattoo on her right shoulder glares at him. He turns her over onto her back. A slight breath escapes from her nostrils. He is determined to do away with her, but not here.

He has to think. He wants to kill her; it’s his right, isn’t it? But he has to be smart about it. He thinks of God’s judgment and feels reassured. His victim is no saint. Her beauty is satanic. *How can one wear such an indecent dress?* he thinks as he glances at her slim legs, exposed up to the groin. Her silver thong emits a halo of light in the dimness. A low, threatening moon observes the scene. The man is strong; he lifts her onto his shoulders. An unconscious moan escapes the young woman’s mouth. The cerebral oedema is growing, pressing the brain against the skull’s walls. As he walks the alleys of the *kampung*, the man keeps an ear cocked for any approaching sounds.

Everything seems deserted. Only the noise of the dragon fruit leaves disturbs the nocturnal stillness as they brush against his legs.

Walking toward the Daihatsu minibus, he hears a motorcycle roar past on the main road. He is sweating. He can feel the young woman's flimsy brown and white printed cotton dress sticking to his skin. This sensation strangely reminds him of putting on a sweater to face the chill of Mount Agung, the island's great volcano. The young woman's long black hair hangs in front of him, catching his arm like the tentacles of an octopus. Demons lurk in his wake, mocking him, mocking his human ugliness. His wits are leaving him. He has to pull himself together. At last, he sees the chrome grille of the minibus. He opens the rear door of the Daihatsu and dumps the young woman onto the rubber floor mat. In the violence of the movement, the thin strap of her dress tears. A magnificent full breast appears, still pulsating faintly with life. This excites the man. A crazy idea seizes his faltering reason. But now God's gaze is not sympathetic. He quickly starts the engine. The small Japanese motor wakes up gently and idles. A few seconds later, the minibus has joined the main road, heading to the south of the island.

At that time of year, Balinese nights are soft and cool. The thick humidity of the year's end is a distant memory. The trade winds come from the east with unwavering constancy, making kite-flying easy. The sky is dotted with them. Day and night. The beauty of the game is to hook them to an updraft so they can carry their message to the gods. What a pleasure in the morning to find them vibrating in the azure sky! Bali is the land of these artificial birds, made from scraps with great ingenuity. They sometimes fly at the end of a 1500-foot string, seeming to float forever. Bali is the garden of immortals. But tonight, a man is about to end a young woman's life.

The Daihatsu's engine growls as it enters the Kuta flux. The traffic on Jalan Legian is always heavy, even late at night. Hordes of tourists swarm—European, American, Australian, Japanese. A perpetual procession, never interrupted. Cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians perform this strange ballet to the sound of engines, horns, and the powerful music pounded out by bars and shops. The man needs to disentangle himself from

Kuta as quickly as possible. The mirage city. The town that has attracted millions of tourists for years since the small fishing village was discovered by hippies. Kuta is the vast caravanserai, with its stalls, shops, *losmens*, but also its international hotels, restaurants, *warungs*, bars, prostitutes, cosmopolitan clientele, nightclubs, and street vendors (numbered and taxed by the administration), drug dealers and food peddler carts, all dangerously mingling with the traffic. Kuta is the realm of the demonic.

The Daihatsu makes a sharp left near the famous Yanies Restaurant, known for its Australian food. The man is determined to reach the highway leading to Nusa Dua as rapidly as possible. He goes down Jalan Tunjung Mekar, turns left again, passes the Pertamina fuel storage, then turns right and finally finds himself on the Bypass, the modern road that races toward the southern tip of the island. The man relaxes. He adopts a leisurely cruising speed and holds the steering wheel with the tips of his fingers to let the air coming in through the window dry his sweaty hands. The moon is so bright that he could turn off the headlights. In a matter of minutes, he's alone on the road. The unconscious young woman in the back rolls with the smooth curves of this recently constructed highway. The man lets his thoughts drift. Here, the earth often shakes. Mounts Agung and Batur, the two ominous volcanoes of the island, have been active at intervals for millennia. The torrential rains at the year's end caused countless landslides, and seismic tremors are so frequent they go uncounted. But this new road is like a pool table.

The minibus comes to the Tuban intersection and then follows the sign for Nusa Dua, a complex of luxury hotels on the Bukit peninsula. Suddenly the car bounces over a pothole; the strained suspension makes a clanking noise. The young woman's head strikes the metal feet of the rear seats, and she lets out an involuntary groan. The man is seized with dread. What if she regains consciousness? What if she opens the door? What if she escapes to report him? What if she gets up and hits him from behind?!

He stops the minibus on the roadside. There is nothing about except mangrove. The man decides he must seat his victim in the front passenger seat. The manoeuvre requires him to get out, open the rear door, and carry the young woman to the front. No passing cars disrupt the operation. He

has some difficulty positioning her. He reclines the seat to provide some support, then tugs at the bottom of her dress and tries the best he can to cover her naked breast. He feels more secure if he can keep an eye on her. He implores God to give him the strength to see this through.

His victim's beautiful oval face rests against the door, bathed in the pale light of the moon. She has a detached and serene look that contrasts with the tormented face of her aggressor. Mischievous Balinese demons dance in the Daihatsu's pedals. For a moment, the man thinks they're plucking the hairs on his legs. He regains his composure by glancing regularly at his passenger. Her brown and white cotton dress has slipped and again exposed her breast. The man can see the fullness of its form, the dark and silky flesh gently moving in rhythm with his driving. The brown nipple is unusually long and seems to point imperatively in the direction they're driving. The man chases away his impure thoughts as he sees the large curve that announces the next intersection. He turns right towards the south and downshifts into first gear. The road is now a narrow asphalt track that approaches the foothills of the tip of the island.

The Daihatsu struggles up the hill. The head of the unconscious young woman now leans back. The man is satisfied that two-thirds of the journey has been completed without any major issues. This boosts his confidence in what he now considers a sacred mission. The village of Simpangan appears in a matter of minutes. The Bukit peninsula, which forms the extreme south of the island, contrasts with the alluvial plain landscapes of the mainland. Here, pastures are the primary rural activity, and there are very few houses, often isolated. At nearly three hundred feet in elevation, facing the vastness of the Indian Ocean, the temperature has noticeably cooled. The man feels a sense of well-being and draws strength from it. He doesn't miss the sign for Pecatu, and, a few miles of winding road later, he breathes a sigh of relief when he sees the wooden sign, WELCOME TO ULUWATU TEMPLE.

The man takes care to pull over to the right to avoid the tourist stalls located a bit further down. Even though they will be closed at this late hour, he fears that a vendor might be sleeping inside. With the engine off, he decides to wait for a good five minutes in the Daihatsu before executing his partially improvised plan. The sound of crickets instantly fills the air, and in

the distance, gigantic waves thunder on the shore below an imposing cliff.

Uluwatu is one of the island's six major temples, although it is modest in architecture and very old. Among visitors it is known for its dramatic location, perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean, and also for the aggression of the macaques that inhabit it. The giant waves breaking over two hundred feet below test the island's surfers. Here Bali's generous vegetation has given way to windswept scrubland, rugged terrain pounded by the ocean. Tonight, the landscape has an eerie solemnity.

The man gets out of the minibus as stealthily as a cat, circles around to the front, and once again hoists the young woman onto his shoulders. He is familiar with the surroundings. The moonlight is fitful, providing uncertain light. At the end of the asphalt road, nearly facing the temple entrance, he turns right, taking a barely marked trail. The Indian Ocean roars louder and louder as they descend. After a long, difficult walk through thorny vegetation, the strange pair reaches the precipice. At this spot, there is no protective railing to keep the careless from a fatal fall. The daring builders of Uluwatu had constructed a low wall along the cliff edge on both sides of the temple. But here, about three hundred feet from the sanctuary, it comes to an end. The man gently places his victim on the ground, performing this act with tenderness, as if he wants to express one last futile gesture of affection. He cradles the comatose beauty's face in his hands, then places a chaste kiss on her forehead. Once again, he adjusts the strap of her dress.

To the left, the delicate silhouette of the temple stands out against the backdrop of the moon.

"God, give me the strength to act!" he begs.

Below them, the waves crash and froth. Caught between despair and madness, the man's breathing quickens. A small, red-eyed demon observes him from a thicket. He hurls a stone at it with all his might. A macaque flees, screeching. Panting, he pulls the young woman up by her wrists, encircling the unconscious figure with his arms. Her breath has become imperceptible. He positions himself behind her, still holding her by the waist.

He suddenly recalls a phrase he once heard from a devout Hindu: 'Human beings pass through Earth. They come from the ancestors' heaven

and return there before reincarnation'. He smiles and feels the power of a divine being. The victim's fine ankles, perched on high heels, wobble as she sways from side to side. Her head slumps forward. A gurgling sound reminds her tormentor that she is still alive. This supple body, so close to his, troubles him one last time.

"Now!" he shouts to set himself free.

His powerful arms push his victim forward. He doesn't even see her hit the surf, two hundred thirty feet below.

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