

The Other Door



Kanti W. Janis



The Other Door

Kanti W. Janis

Optimist **b**

The Other Door

By Kanti W. Janis

Copywriter Vanessa Kowara

Cover Design by Kanti W. Janis

©Penerbit Optimist +, CV Boelat Makmur

Sejahtera

Jl. Prof. Dr. Soepomo, SH, No. 55 B,

Jakarta Selatan 12810

Indonesia

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Penerbit Optimist +

Jakarta, Oktober 2012

To Arka...

The Other Door

Year 2002

Destiny brought me to this socialist country. And destiny herself led me into this tiny room. The room was part of a small house. The house had no living room. No gate.

My room had direct access to the bathroom, although I wasn't the only one using it. Since last week, this house welcomed an additional tenant. Someone whose face I have yet to see, whose voice I have yet to hear.

The bathroom could be opened from both sides. To make sure no one was there, I always knocked, and so did he.

I knew he was a 'he' from the sound of his cough. And from the obvious leaving-the-toilet-seat-up routine. His cough is heavy and thick, and based on it I deduced that he would be around 50 years of age.

I could hear him shower, brush his teeth, and perform other regular activities a man usually does in the privacy of a bathroom.

As I mentioned before, destiny brought me here. To this foreign country whose language I do not speak. I was stranded on this land.

I once was a happy enthusiastic person. But one incident changed my whole life. I burned down my family house. The fire spread so fast, until it burned down the entire block. All due to a single cigarette bud. Mine.

My parents were scared that the people would kill me. Before anyone could pinpoint the source of the fire, my family sent me to Vietnam. An old friend of Bapak* lived there. This man has a Vietnamese citizenship. To avoid complicating the visa process, I married Bapak's friend to gain his citizenship.

Even though it seemed like such a drastic move, in truth we were really short of options. That uncle promised Bapak, that we would only be married for status. He would never touch me and Bapak trusted him.

Everything happened so quickly, I hardly remembered the process. The one thing that remained on my mind was Bapak's last message: *do good things, even in your hardest days, and the world will take care of you.* Time just flew so fast. Now I have been in Vietnam for almost two years.

I no longer lived with Bapak's friend. Maybe you are wondering why? Well, how can I

explain it? I no longer live with him, because he wanted my eyes. Yes, my precious pair of eyes!

That uncle was Bapak's childhood friend. During the Vietnamese war he migrated to Vietnam. Bapak told me that, that uncle was a very sensitive person, and he always wanted to become a pacifying part of war. He always talked about peace. He sought it in every corner of his life. He would always fight for it. That's why Bapak entrusted me to him.

Uncle and I lived in Ben Tre, a small town that stretched along the Mekong Delta, about 1,5 half hours bus ride from the city. There was nothing much to do there. In the first few months of living with him, he constantly talked about how human have to give up everything in order to achieve real peace.

Well, he could say anything he liked. I didn't care as long as he kept his promise of not touching me. Moreover he talked about the five human senses, mentioned they were the source of greediness. Greediness was the source of unhappiness. Among those five, eyes were the biggest source and ears were the second.

By seeing, we always want something we don't need. By hearing, we always want to hear compliments, thus, we will try to do everything to cope with other's expectations and standard. On and on he talked about the same thing.

To be honest, I did see the virtue behind his words. If I couldn't see, I wouldn't want my hair to look in certain way, nor would I want a pair of beautiful purple shoes like the ones Sani, my rich cousin, has.

If I couldn't hear, my heart wouldn't be jealous when Tomi, my crush, gave compliment to Ratna, my best friend. Nor would I be infuriated by my parents because they couldn't afford to buy me a plane ticket to Singapore, as everyone said it was a modern and loving country. I wouldn't dare to light up my first cigarette if I didn't let my ears turn red when my friends called me a coward. Those senses caused me to do many things I didn't actually need to do.

That uncle lived in a modest house with no wife (before I came) or children. He worked as a carpenter and handy man. He didn't care how much money he would get; he just did what he did.

The first day I arrived in Ben Tre, Uncle cooked me a rich delicious dinner. The dinner was composed of deep fried prawn, a lot of steamed vegetables, a bowl of beef soup, spicy shredded chicken, and fried tofu. He also served me a glass of hot soya milk. I felt content.

After I finished my meal, that uncle asked me, about the taste, whether I liked them or not, and of course I said, "the dinner was marvelous,"

he smiled at me, and told me that everything I just ate was made of vegetable. "I am a vegetarian," he said. I never knew before that vegetarian food could be so delicious and the taste could be so similar to the real meats.

That uncle grew his own meals in his small backyard. When I lived with him, I had no choice besides being a vegetarian as well. He taught me how to cook delicious vegetarian meals, the skill he learned from the Buddhist monks. He also taught me some useful Vietnamese words.

He made me wake up very early in the morning, right when the first sunray hits the earth. We would only go to bed after the sun sets in the West. Well, I actually never saw him sleeping. No telephone, no TV, no gossip tabloids. It was like living in a monastery where everything was kept orderly and modestly. It was a tough life for a girl who used to live in a bustling big city. That uncle caught me crying several times.

After a few months, I started to enjoy my quiet life, although I still cried missing my home sometimes. Until one day, he started to blindfold his eyes. I asked why. At first he said I made him suffer. I asked how? He didn't answer, but he said it was a practice before he got his eyes blinded. At that time I didn't understand what he meant. He started to walk with a cane, did everything in the dark. His bizarre behavior scared me, moreover

because eventually he asked me to do the same thing. He even handed me a blindfold.

He assured me that by doing so, I won't shed another tears missing my life back then. Furthermore, the act would help free me from mundane temptations. I took the blindfold, but never wore it, though.

At one dawn, I heard him scream. I sneaked out to see what was going on. I witnessed such horror. I can't even bear to tell you the details. There was fire, and there was an iron bar. You should get the picture.

At that point I decided to run away. Far, far away from him. I only had little money, some clothes, and what my parents had given me; a wrist watch with golden chains, which was the only precious thing they had.

I rode on a vegetable truck to Ho Chi Minh City. After I arrived there, I tried to find a job as a cleaner. Equipped with my limited Vietnamese, I knocked on every door and said I'd do anything for a place to sleep and some food to survive on. I slept in Le Van Tam Park for days.

Despite of everything that had happened to me, I still considered myself lucky. In my Javanese root we are always taught to find the bright side of every dark side. For example, although I had to sleep in the park, I was lucky for not being harassed as a woman. And when my family lost

everything in fire, Bapak said thank God we still had each other.

Le Van Tam was a beautiful and lively park. I saw many lives there. In the morning, many people came for a morning work-out sessions. In the evening, old people came to dance with their partners. I also saw many young lovers, kissing and hugging-sometimes even further-under the tree's shadows. There were also some homeless people who needed a place to stay for a night or two. Just like me.

But Le Van Tam was not always the safest place for the homeless. One night, while I was sleeping, somebody shook my shoulder hardly. She told me to run, because there was a police night patrol. Everyone was all over the place, trying to escape. They climbed the fences, and so did I. The unlucky ones had to spend their night in the cell.

It was four in the morning, and I had no idea where to go. I just walked, walked and walked, and I suddenly heard a soft voice of adzan. I tried to follow the voice, even though I thought it was only my hallucination. It was probably the most beautiful adzan I had ever heard. The adzan voice came from a narrow alley. I kept on following the alley, and there, I saw a mosque.

“Nak sembahyang subuhkah?” I was surprised by an old lady. She spoke to me in a familiar language; she asked if I want to do the morning pray. Later I knew that the lady was actually speaking in Malay. The Malaysian government gives many scholarships to Vietnamese Muslim. Therefore, it’s a common thing to find a Vietnamese Muslim speaks fluent Malay language.

Bapak told me that Vietnam is a communist country, because, Communist party is the only party they have. Meanwhile in Indonesia, communist is a forbidden word, mostly since the assassination of the eight generals in September 30th, 1965. The tragedy was known as G30S PKI. The Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was blamed for the assassination by the New Order Regime. It was one of the darkest tragedies in our revolution history.

Thus, every year before the fall of Soeharto in 1998, the propaganda movie about the PKI’s atrocity and how the Indonesian army defeated them was a staple every September the 30th, to commemorate the massacre.

The New Order Regime banned communism. Every literature, even fiction, if contained a little piece of communism would be demolished, and the writers would be put in prison for life.

The New Order government under Soeharto, then declared that they carried the ideology of democracy. But I hardly saw the difference between democracy and communism in Soeharto's era. Both of them prohibited the freedom of speech. All mass media and reading materials were screened by the government. Those who dare to criticize the government would be silenced.

Moreover, we are taught, that communism is a no God ideology, no religion, demonic. Communists are heinous. They kill everyone, and they don't believe in God.

Hence, I was surprised to find a mosque in the city centre. And later on I noticed that there were churches spreading all over the city, and countless temples, also a few more mosques. I took the ablution water, and the lady lent me a set of praying attire (mukena). There, I was praying deep for the first time in my life.

Afterwards, the old lady who ran a food stall inside the Ar- Rahim mosque, offered me a bowl of steamed rice and ayam bakar (grilled chicken) with delicious sambal. When I put the steamed rice inside my mouth my tears were dribbling down to my cheek. It was the finest food I had ever tasted after for so long.

...

“Wake up Kid, wake up.” Apparently I fell asleep in the mosque for about 5 hours. Another woman woke me up. She told me that I can’t sleep in the mosque. So I raised and went out to thank the old lady, but she was nowhere to be found. Therefore, I continued my walk, looking for a job.

After I was done with my daily job hunting around the city, I returned to Le Van Tam. I sat on my usual bench, watching the birds chirp. I thought how lucky they were to have wings so they can fly everywhere they wished. Nothing could hold them back, and they didn’t need to think of a place to sleep every night.

Suddenly, a string of traffic accident appeared before me. Just in front of Le Van Tam, a motorbike stopped abruptly, he was trying to avoid a falling branch.

There was a car behind the motorbike. And behind the motorbike, there was another car, another motorbike, and another motorbike. It was horrible! It happened within one second. I stood up from my seat, ran to see the scene closer. The man from the first motorbike was wounded badly; his face was covered with blood and he was half conscious. People blamed him for the accident.

Finally the paramedic team arrived, but they were hesitant to help the guy since he had no id card. They were afraid no one would pay for his medical bills.

“Please just help him Sir, please,” I begged. “Please take this, this should be enough to pay the hospital!” There, I gave up my precious watch, my last resort of money. However, I was proud of myself, since I practiced what Bapak had told me, *always do good things, even when you are in your hardest days, and the world will take care of you.*

Maybe Bapak’s wisdom was right. One day after the incident, I got a job in a small vegetarian restaurant. They admitted me because I told them I was a vegetarian. Actually, I was only occasionally a vegetarian, but they did not need to know the fine print. I worked as hard as I could, from cleaning the restroom, washing the vegetables and scrubbing the bathroom.

The lady of the restaurant didn’t pay me a single cent, but she let me sleep in her kitchen with her dog after the restaurant closed for the day. She even let me eat the left-over food.

There was no shower room in the restaurant, so I had to use the sink to wash myself every day. It was a hard life. I couldn’t complain, and I never thought of anything else, I could only think as far as the day after today, never the future.

One ordinary afternoon, a Western man entered our restaurant. He was our first foreign guest. He tried to place an order with my colleague, but both of them were completely lost

in translation. Even my lady boss couldn't help. While I held my broom, I pulled all my courage and approached the man.

"Sir, is there anything I can do for you?" I asked. Thank God, English was my favorite subject back then at school. The man smiled, evidently relieved at having found an English-speaking person. My lady boss and colleagues stared at me impressively.

After that day, the guy became our regular customer. He brought along his friends, more and more customers. I was no longer scrubbing the bathroom or mopping the floor.

The lady boss trusted me to serve them, and asked me to teach my colleagues some basic English. I started receiving a regular salary. I even got to keep the customers' tips. I saved every penny I earned.

...

My boss was satisfied with my job. She raised my salary and made me the restaurant's supervisor. When my income became stable, I finally could move out from her kitchen, and rented a decent room.

I began to wonder about visiting my parents in Jakarta. If they were still worried about my safety, I could send money for their flight tickets. I began to calculate how much money I should save

every month to buy them tickets. It would probably take one year to buy one ticket, but maybe I could take another side job to earn more money. I had many plans for my future.

One morning, as I was just a few steps away from the restaurant, Quyen, my colleague and friend, suddenly approached me and warned me not to come to the restaurant.

She told me to hide. She quickly told me that the money box was empty. One staff accused me of stealing the money. At first my boss didn't believe her, but then two or three other staffs started saying the same thing. They were all accusing me.

"Ayu, I will try to explain to our boss that you are innocent. Everything is a scheme planned to kick you out of the restaurant. It was all Linh's idea. Don't come back to your house, they will try to find you there. Go to my house, now!" Quyen said. From the distance I could see how mad my colleagues and my boss are. So I ran.

Quyen hid me at her place for a couple of days, and brought my stuff from my rented room. She knew that I was innocent, because she knew everything had been planned before. Almost everyone in the restaurant was jealous of me, and they didn't like me because I was a foreigner.

Unfortunately, I couldn't stay longer in her house, as she lived with her family. So, she found

me this room. Quyen told me to stay in this room until everything was calm.

I lived a very lonely life and was very much in fear. I had trouble sleeping. Quyen said the police were still looking for me. Every time I went out to buy food, I had to cover up my face. I tried to speak as less as I could, because people would notice my foreign accent.

Since I had nothing much to do, I wondered a lot about who's behind the other door. I would listen carefully every time he entered the bathroom. Sometimes he whistled in the morning, a familiar song, it was not a Vietnamese one for sure. I tried to remember the song, but I couldn't figure it out.

Once when I was inside, I heard another guy entered the room. Both of them were conversing tensely, but I didn't understand the conversation. I heard some yelling though. And it seemed like one of them left the room, because I heard the door was slammed. While I was still putting my ear against the bathroom door, the doorknob turned suddenly, "A moment!" I said. That was the first time I said something to him. He didn't reply, though.

After 'the communication' he always left the bathroom neatly. I never found the toilet seat up again. And the bathroom always smelled good, his cologne I supposed. Whenever he was inside, he

would run the tap water - therefore I couldn't hear clearly what he was doing.

I had been living in seclusion for two months now; shortage of money began to strike. I began to eat very little. My body was getting weaker and weaker.

One afternoon, I entered the bathroom to find the other door completely opened! I couldn't hold my curiosity, I walked a step closer, a step closer and closer, *voila* I was inside his room.

There was a big contrast between our rooms. Mine was almost empty, while his was full of things. His was twice the size of my room. His was furnished with a comfortable bed, desk, big wardrobe, small couch, and a TV. Mine only had a floor mat and some clothes. It had been a long time since I heard news from the outside world, so I turned on the TV.

I rested my back on his bed while watching the news. I was enjoying the soft mattress, until I saw something terrifying: my case was on the news along with my face. What a bad coincidence, and such an embarrassment for Indonesia. I needed help, I was innocent, but I couldn't defend myself.

Suddenly, I heard footsteps were approaching, that must be my mysterious neighbor! I jumped off the bed, ran into the bathroom and locked the door while my heart

pounded. I put my ear against the door; I could hear the doorknob twisted. I could hear his breath. I was hoping he didn't suspect anything. What he was doing at this time? He should have not been at home. I kept on listening, until he knocked the bathroom door. I returned to my room immediately.

The next day, at about the same time like yesterday, I entered the bathroom. Once again, he had left the door open. Now, I saw a bowl of rice, fried chicken, and a glass of water on his desk.

They seemed to be prepared for someone. I haven't been eating properly for a couple of weeks. My natural instinct to protect myself took over, and in hunger I consumed them all. I promised myself that I would repay him later.

The morning after, I wanted to shower, and again, the door was opened. There were bread and milk. The bread smelled so good, I couldn't resist.

And then it became routine. Every one or two days, he left his door open with food on his desk. He made me feel less lonely. I really wanted to repay his kindness, so I cleaned his room every day. Strangely we never saw each other's face. I found no visible pictures in his room. I didn't want to be rude and run through his things.

After some time, I gathered my courage to put a Thank You note on his desk. He never responded back, but I didn't mind, as long as he

knew how grateful I am to him. Maybe he wasn't that old, I saw his jacket and some of his clothes. They were too young for a fifty-something guy. Could I fantasize further, that he was perhaps the one for me? But then I looked at my reflection in the mirror. I was only a too-skinny and pallid girl; I couldn't recognize myself, who would fall in love with an ugly girl like me?

Suddenly, my door was knocked very hard, breaking my trains of thought. I heard a guy in Vietnamese ordered me to open the door. He said that he was a police officer. My heart was beating so fast, could this be the end?

I hesitantly opened the door. There were some police officers and Quyen. The officer grabbed my wrist, pulled me out of my room rudely. Even with my limited Vietnamese, I could see that Quyen wasn't defending me at all. On the contrary she was accusing me.

After all this time, she made up the whole story about the other jealous colleagues. It was her, the one who planned everything to set me up. Without any trials, they threw me in jail. It was the filthiest place I had ever been in. They locked me in a small cell with 3 other girls, all Vietnamese.

After three days in detention, I lost my appetite. My body started rejecting the food. I got very ill. After I was very very sick, they sent me to

the hospital, and put me in Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

You would have thought that things were better in the hospital, but you were wrong. They handcuffed me to my bed, and I was with five other people in the room. They inserted the needle harshly. They cleaned me roughly. They treated me as if I was already dead.

I felt that this was the lowest period of my life, that I might not survive. I didn't want to go on with my life anymore. There was nothing left, and no one could help me. I couldn't contact Bapak or Ibu**. I left my passport in that uncle's house. I had no friend, and I was a convict. Only death would free me.

During that period, I was thinking about my parents all the time. I remembered how we lived happily together in the village, although we didn't have much money. We grew our own food, fed ourselves and our neighbors.

Everything changed when my uncle-Sani's father- came back from Jakarta. He brought a lot of money, microwave and other good things we had never seen before.

He treated everyone in our village; he bought Sani beautiful dresses and shoes. He said that he built his own outsourcing company, and moreover talked about how great it was to be working in the capital city. He said his legs didn't

need to be covered in mud, no more backache from shoveling the soil.

Those 'success' stories made Bapak consider moving out to the city. His motive was to give his children a better life. I too, couldn't wait to move to Jakarta! So we sold our field, and used the money to go to the capital.

When we finally lived our dream, life wasn't easy at all. My uncle was bragging about all the greatness. In reality, he owned a clandestine organizer that organized women and children beggars. No one knew, not even Sani. He offered my father the same job, but my father wouldn't do such scam.

To meet our needs, Bapak had to eventually work two jobs. He worked as a janitor for an office in the morning and as a delivery man at night. Ibu took up some work altering clothes. We traded our 1 hectare paddy field with 40 meter square land in a crowded neighborhood.

My parents had to work ten times harder for rice. How naïve we were. Life was getting tougher, as I grew up into a rebellious teenager. I smoked cigarettes, sometimes weed. Skipped the classes, never satisfied with what my parents had provided.

I felt terrible now, I felt sorry for my misbehavior. If only I could turn back the time. It's too late to fix anything now; I didn't know

how long I would survive for, I could die tomorrow. All I could do was pray, hoping that my little sister wouldn't be like me.

But, even death had disappointed me. After a week in the ICU, I got better, and they moved me to a normal room. The day when I fully recovered, they told that they would send me back to the prison. I would rather die than to go back.

I refused to take my medicine. Refused to eat. Refused to sleep. They knew my motive, so they forced me to take my medicine. They fed me through my nose, and they sedated me. They did everything to send me back to prison.

On one blurry day I almost gave up trying. Awoken from my sleep, I saw Bapak and Ibu standing in front of me. I must be dead by now, I thought.

How happy I was to see their smiling faces again. My folks, how I have missed you. Everything seemed so real, they pulled me up from my bed, and they pushed me to the open door. I looked at them, they nodded. I rose from my bed and walked to that door. Everything was surrounded by light, I literary couldn't see anything.

"Ayu, wake up," I heard a man's voice calling my name. My sight was blurry, I could only see his bald feature, which reminded me of that uncle! I was so frightened, I covered my face

with the blanket. Eventually, my sight returned. I could see his face clearly, he was not that uncle. I was at ease.

He looked like a normal Vietnamese guy. He was in his early thirties. He spoke in English. He told me, that I was safe now. I still didn't understand what was going on, or who he was. But, I felt so relieved, and I knew that I was no longer in the hospital. I didn't want to care about anything else. I just wanted to sleep. Finally a sleep in peace.

Maybe I had been sleeping for about two hours. When I opened my eyes, he was sitting next to me. I could see a long scar across his right temple. Seeing me awake, he then handed me a brown envelope. I opened it. My passport.

"Who are you actually?" I couldn't stop myself from asking.

"Look around," he said. And in instance I realized that I was in that guy's room!

"You are the other door guy," I said. "Why are so nice to me?" I asked again.

"I was the stranger that you helped out the other day," he said. But I still couldn't figure who he was. What stranger? Which day?

"Look deeper into the envelope," he said again. My old watch! Now I remembered, he was that guy I saved from the traffic accident.

“My name is Long. I have always wanted to return your favor. I could’ve probably died if you had left me on the street. After I recovered, I tried to find you. I came once in a while to the restaurant where you worked. I was there when the money was gone. And then I lost you for a moment, but I finally found you again in this house. Do you remember the day when I turned the bathroom doorknob and you were inside?”

“Yes, I remember,” I blushed, because it meant that he knew that I was eavesdropping at that time.

“I asked the previous tenant to give up his room to me,” now little by little everything started to make sense. “He refused at first. I kept pushing him, and eventually after I promised to pay him double, he agreed. Since then, I was your neighbor,” he said.

“Why you had to move here too?” I asked.

“I stayed here to make sure everything was fine with you. And I am terribly sorry for letting you go into jail. But at the end I am so happy to help with your release and to help dprove that you are innocent,” he smiled. “I know that you wanted to go home, and you can now,” Long told me, and I couldn’t be happier to hear that.

Oh God, everything was so surreal, I was grateful. The world really took care of me. I wanted to go home. I called my parents, but after

trying several times, it said the number was no longer available. So I decided to fly home as soon as I could. Long helped me a lot, but he had to stay in Vietnam.

It had been more than two years since the last time I saw Jakarta. The city was always beautiful from the surface. You could feel its glory at a glance and instantly feel its deterioration by riding on its poor public transportation, breathing the heavy polluted air, and seeing the children begging everywhere – even sadder because I know it was all scams.

Before I went to Vietnam, skyscrapers were emerging everywhere, and now the sky was even more crowded with them. I could hardly find my house, the road was getting narrower. I couldn't find my house! Not even the alley.

I covered my face. I was afraid to be recognized by my old neighbors. I asked around, and the answer was, there was no such alley anymore, it had been replaced by some giant mall two years ago, not so long after I burned down the whole block.

I really had no clue where to find my parents and my sister. I only had one thought: they would have probably returned to our village. I rushed to the train station and bought the earliest train ticket.

It took twelve hours to reach my village. I arrived on the next morning. How I have missed my homeland, where rows of paddy fields stretched along the village and herding ducks could be seen everywhere.

Where the sky was so blue and the air was so fresh, you could smell the wet fertile soil and the villagers would exchange smiles. This was heaven on earth, why did we leave it in the beginning?

I remember, Bapak had sold our old house, so I had no idea where to find them. I just walked and walked. The sun was getting hotter, until I saw a bunch of lady farmers with straw hats. I approached them, "Excuse me, do you know where the Himarwan family live?"

"Yes, we know, and who are you young lady?" One of them asked.

"I am their daughter." Once I answered, they shot me a sympathetic look.

"We'd like to send our deepest condolences, your father had passed away a few days ago." I almost fainted.

"Could you please take me to their house?" I begged. After they gave me water, one of them took me to my family's house.

We walked for 15 minutes before I saw a couple of houses.

“We are almost there,” said the lady. “That’s your house,” she pointed at a wooden dark house.

“Thank you for your kindness, I’ll be fine,” I said, letting her return to her friends.

“Excuse me, is anybody home?” The house had no sign of life.

A man wearing a straw hat from the house next door came out. “No one’s at home, the house is empty,” he said. “Ayu, Ayu? You are Ayu, right?” He called my name and took off his hat.

“Bapak!!!” I literally jumped into his arms. I couldn’t believe my eyes. Ibu also came out and joined the happy reunion. My little sister was still at school.

“Ayu, how’s the communists treated you? Did they torture you?” Ibu asked me right away.

“No, Ibu. They are no different than us. They also have mosques, churches, and temples there.” I laughed. “See, I told you, right. Your Ibu thought that I was crazy to send you to Vietnam,” Bapak looked at Ibu.

“*Alhamdulillah*, if everything was alright and you are here now. Let’s have lunch together,” Ibu said.

After we sat down for lunch, I understood that it was Sani’s father who had passed away. He and Bapak carried the same family name since they were brothers.

It was all a tragedy. Sani's father organization was uncovered. He eventually couldn't pay his debt. He had to sell everything he had. He couldn't bear the humiliation of returning to our village, at the end he committed suicide. Sani never returned from the city, maybe those ladies from before thought that I was Sani.

"That's for the bad news, but we also have good news," Bapak said.

"What is it?" I waited impatiently.

"You are not guilty for the fire."

"How can that be possible?!" I asked.

"Did you see the big mall on our old land?" Ibu asked, and I nodded.

"Actually some time before the fire, there were agents who already asked us to sell our houses. They were offering compensations. But we rejected them. And not long after the fire, some bureaucratic people approached every one of us to sell our land. So even if their compensation was small, we had no option but to accept their offer." Bapak told the rest.

"But, my cigarette butt was found close to the fire source,"

"Don't worry about that. An investigation team came and clarified that your cigarette butt was burning because you threw it into the petrol which had been set up before by someone," Bapak said. "It was just bad luck," Bapak added.

“A very bad luck,” I exhaled, if only they knew what I had been through these past two years.

“We are going to do class action,” Bapak said.

“I want to be part of it Pak**,” I said.

“But we are so relieved, that you came back in good health,” Ibu smiled. “We are sorry to put you through so much trouble,”

“It’s okay, I learned a lot and can’t wait to tell you all the details. I think I met a good guy,” now I smiled.

“So, you will come back to Vietnam?” they asked.

“Yes, I will, I have to settle my divorce with Bapak’s friend, haven’t I?” And we all laughed to the irony of the world.

The End

Ho Chi Minh, 30 May 2012- Jakarta, 29 June 2012

**Bapak: To address a father in Javanese, also used to address an older or respected man in a formal way.*

***Ibu : To address a mother in Javanese also used to address an older or respected woman in a formal way.*

***Pak: A short for Bapak.*

Closing Remarks

This is my first attempt of writing English book from scratch. I've never planned on writing this story. I was actually trying to finish another book. But the inspiration was abundant, I couldn't stop writing it.

The idea came easily. I was staying in my en-suite room in Ho Chi Minh, but the public can also access the bathroom through another attached door. There, The Other Door story had been created.

I'd like to say thanks to God for all the blessings. Thanks to Donda, to always be there for me and for everything you've shared with me. Thanks to Vanessa, for shaping up the language, and for being crazy with me all the time. I'd also like to extend my gratitude to my family, to my extended family, and to my best friends for your endless supports.

The Other Door

This is a story about Ayu a young Indonesian girl. She accidentally burns down her entire neighborhood in the narrow ally of Jakarta. Her parents send her to a relative in Vietnam to avoid the angry mob. In Vietnam she lives with her father's old friend. That uncle-the way she addresses him- lives a very modest life, but one day that uncle asks Ayu to give up her eyes. Horrified by that uncle's request, Ayu run away from his house. She tries to live on her own, and life seems to get better for a while, until somebody accuses her of being a thief. Now she is a fugitive hiding in a small room. Her room has direct access to the bathroom, but in that bathroom there's another door linked to someone's room, and another story has begun.



KANTI W. JANIS is an Indonesian born writer. In 2007, she obtained her bachelor of law in International Law from Atmajaya University, Jakarta. The following year she earned her LL.M degree in International Law and Law of International Organization from Groningen University, The Netherlands. Kanti attended a creative writing summer course at Oxford University in 2011. Although she has law degrees, writing has always been her first love. Therefore in 2006 she encouraged herself to publish her first novel, and since 2010 she established her own publishing house, Optimiswww. optimist-plus.com

twitter: @kantiwjanis
kanti@optimist-plus.com