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Writing 181: Writing Studies

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Hold No.4:

In 1951, in a CIA facility at an undisclosed location, an agent tortures a man, demanding that he give a report of events on November 13th, 1939. The man tells the agent that “people like you don’t deserve to know!”, as his mind flashes back to that day. On November 13th, 1939, the U.S. Navy support vessel *Northern Passage* is on a routine patrol near the Solomon Islands, when she suddenly receives an S.O.S. message, stating: *“*SOS from the steamship Orang Medan. Beg ships with shortwave wireless get touch doctor. Urgent.*”* They soon receive a second message :*“*Probable second officer dead. Other members crew also killed. Disregard medical consultation. SOS urgent assistance warship.*”* A third one, incomplete, soon comes: *“Crew has…”* This is concluded by a fourth, and last, chilling message: *“I die”* The same message is received by several British and Dutch outposts.When the *Northern Passage* finds the *Orang Medan* disabled and drifting,, they discover the bodies of the crew at their respective posts, mouths wide open as if screaming, eyes wide open as well, hands outstretched, and, frozen in fear. The ship’s dog died with its teeth clenched, while the radio operator is found dead in his chair, with his finger on the telegraph. As the Americans explore the ship, they feel cold chills around them, despite the temperature being higher than 100 degrees Fahrenheit outside the vessel. (The chills were most evident in cargo hold No.4). The petrified American crew decide to tow the ship to port for investigation. But as soon as they attach the line, a fire from cargo hold No.4 rapidly spreads through the vessel, causing her to explode. The *Ourang Medan* is thrown out of the water for several seconds, before finally sinking to the bottom. The *Northern Passage* crew escapes, having managed to un-attach the line. The scene returns to 1951, where the CIA agent asks the man to tell him the cause of the tragedy. When he refuses, the agent asks for his last words. The man whispers, “Long live the Netherlands”, before being electrocuted to death.

In the present day, American college freshman Michael Brown is getting ready to go to the Netherlands for his history class project. Joining him are his classmates Sofia Moreno and Agung Adytia. Michael wanted to cancel, but decides to go, due to his great crush on Sofia. When they arrive, they learn about the recent death of chemist Ludwig Jansen, supposedly in a laboratory accident. While accidentally passing by Jansen’s funeral, Michael notices a photograph falling out of the back pocket of man’s suite. He wants to return it to him, but upon seeing a freighter on it, with the inscription *Orang Medan* on the back, he realizes he has found something major, and takes it with him. The next few days go by well, but on the third night, Michael receives a call with a voice saying: “Whether or not you think it is true, the Man from Medan is coming for you.”. Terrified, he tells his friends about the situation, but begs not to tell the professors, and not to call police. Several phone calls later, they decide to go to a maritime historian to tell him about their discovery, and ask what to do. The historian seems astonished, but tells them they might be in danger. They have several more meetings with him, and continue investigating the case, to the great dissatisfaction of Agung. They find out that a ship called the *Northern Passage* disappeared on November 14, 1939, in the area of the incident. They learn that lights and voices were never in the original versions of newspapers reporting the incident, and were added as the legend evolved. An elderly lady admits her fiancé was on board the *Medan*, but she has never spoken of it. The group promises her to find the truth, but she worries for them. One day, the historian is found dead, in the same condition as the *Orang Medan* crew died. Returning to her hotel room, Sofia finds the same phrase Michael had heard on the phone written on the wall. Terrified, they decide to finally call the police, who promise to monitor the trio. Meanwhile, they are also interrogated by American Forensic Toxicologist Adam Richter, and Michael accidentally tells him about their meeting with the historian. Astonished, Richter admits that Ludwig Jansen was found dead in the same way. He agrees to help the group, and promises to notify U.S. authorities. Agung gets in an argument with Michael, accusing him getting them into danger. Sofia is also mad at him, and Michael is afraid he is losing her. Despite this, they keep the ship’s photo in their room, and continue investigating. While returning from a city excursion, Agung follows a man who looks like their professor, causing them all to go after him, and get abducted by a group of men. The men, speaking with a German accent, torture them, demanding that they return the photo. They are rescued by MIVD Colonel Daan Smit, and his special team. He seems like a good man, but keeps looking at Sofia in a weird way. At the MIVD headquarters, they are told that they crossed paths with the Pure Defenders, a secret fascist group aimed at preserving the Aryan race. They are responsible for many secret “accidents”, such as the death of Ludwig Jansen. Jansen had discovered that the *Orang Medan* had been transporting their secret chemical weapon, NPS-149, also known as “Devil’s Chill”. The weapon, a nerve agent capable to kill in seconds, was to have been released in the U.K., but from planes loaded in Costa Rica. For this task, the Indonesian freighter *Orang Medan* was chosen. Her crew was planned to later be worked to death. During the voyage, the substance leaked, releasing fumes that killed the crew. A day later, the *Northern Passage* was bombed from air to hide all evidence. All relatives of those involved were taken into mental asylums or disappeared. They then propagated the story in a Dutch-language Indonesian newspaper. They knew that humans were gullible, and they let the story be turned into an urban legend themselves. Eventually, details changed. The number of rescue ships increased to two, the completely irrelevant *Silver Star* was added, followed by the change of the years, the addition of lights and voices. Smit explains that, now that they were discovered, the Pure Defenders plan to release the gas in Paris, France. He lets them know that a counterstrike by MIVD, CIA, BND, DGSE and BIN, is planned, but because the organization is massive, it will take many steps. Adam Richter is also with them. On the way to a safer location, their convoy is destroyed, and their car is thrown into the Amstel river. The others are rescued by a fishing boat, but when Sofia starts to drown, Smit jumps and rescues her, embracing her and crying hysterically. He later admits that he lost his 15-year old daughter, who drowned in a lake three decades ago. Meanwhile, the wreck of the *Orang Medan* is located by specially dispatched Dutch Navy divers. Arriving at the secure location, they discover an ambush, and are captured by the Pure Defenders. Meanwhile, on the U.S. Mainland, Michael’s house is raided by the CIA, who are looking for any connection of him to the fascist group. At the same time, the Pure Defenders hold Sofia’s parents hostage, and force them to watch the live streaming the group’s execution, mixed with horrifying images of the *Orang Medan*’s dead crew. All besides Smit are led into a small container, which they realize is a gas chamber. The leader of the Pure Defenders reveals himself to have been an officer on the *Orang Medan*, who wore a modified gas mask, and survived to tell the story to “headquarters”. He offers Smit the option of becoming an informant, since he, too, is “pure”. Smit replies that he has “some Indonesian blood” in him, before motioning to a team, who has been concentrated outside, to raid the compound. Smit is shot by the leader, and the group is devastated, but freed from the gas chamber, while having terrible convulsions and hallucinations, their body temperatures having decreased significantly. Meanwhile, similar raids are happening in Indonesia, Germany, and France. In Paris, a squadron of F-16’s force the planes with the gas to land. In the hospital, Michael apologizes to Agung for being so selfish, and then professes his love to Sofia. She accepts, and together, they watch the news, showing the members of the Pure Defenders being arrested around the world. Their former leader is posthumously charged with war crimes.

Two weeks later, all of them, including the recuperated Smit, attend a mass funeral for several fallen agents, as well as the release of 26 wreaths for the *Orang Medan* crew. Michael, Adam, Daan Smit, and Sofia talk about how behind every legend there is a certain amount of truth. Smit asks their parents if he can visit the families, as he is 72 and plans to retire. They tell him he is now part of them. In the final shot, we see the elderly lady from before, who, instead of a wreath, puts a red rose into the water.