

BATIKS

for Jenny

I. Kintamani, Bali, Indonesia

Along the road to Kintamani,
the Balinese glide,
graceful and small,
carrying all
in baskets balanced on black-haired heads.

The road to Kintamani scoops
through island trees
and, climbing,
twines its lava loops
past Hindu shrines
and paddy fields of the Balinese.

The bus to Kintamani jolts
to a high hill shy
of the sulphurous smoke
solfataras choke
up, belching, blotting the Balinese sky.

The slopes near Kintamani hold
villages rolled
in a lava grave;
but Balinese vendors, mobbing the hill,
oblivious, spill
colorful snares
of hand-crafted wares.

Children rave, "Postcards, Madame!"
women wave ("Madame, Madame!")
bold batiks bled from the hunched of Java
whom bosses and their pittance enslave.

The mountain thunders and the children rave.

From Kintamani a road descends,
weaves and bends
through the countryside.

Dignified,
small,
smiling all,
brown Balinese,
balancing burdens with ancient ease,
glide by hedges of coconut trees.

II. Jogjakarta, Java, Indonesia

Jenny told me I had to feel
Java congeal
in Jogja's fray
and tight suspense
to sense

Indonesia in decay,
better to appreciate,
accentuate,

Bali's utter difference.

A woman wrapped in a black sarong
hurries along,
bent by the baskets bulged on her back,
and navigating the glutting throng,
propels frantic feet,
deftly dodging the beat
of bullocks lugging a wooden cart
(how long
have the tiny men jogged alongside?
Why don't they ride?
Where did they start?)
while beves of becas and bicycles spin
past her, panting, pedalled by thin,
shirtless men—
then
she crosses the street
(whose human factories huddle and squint
through shadows rank with dust and heat,
taking infinite pain
with filigree silver and batik print)
to disappear down a steamy lane
jammed and stained with Javanese
aching for breeze,
straining for patches of shade and squatting
by open stalls
where produce sprawls
close to piles of refuse, rotting.

Java spreads as the city thins.

Rice farmers bathe in brown rivers
and herd geese single-file on small green ridges
between paddies.

Prambanan's temples to the Hindu trinity
and Borobudur's bell-jarred Buddhas
attract more tourists than do Jogja's mosques.
Ask the blind beggars.

The streets of Jogjakarta pulse,
convulse,
clot, and squeeze
juggling, jostling Javanese
through Java's curious cultural heart—
my Kintamani couterpart.

Karen Marguerite Moloney

Notes for BATIKS

1. A solfatara is a volcanic vent issuing sulfurous gases.
2. A beca is a pedal trishaw.