

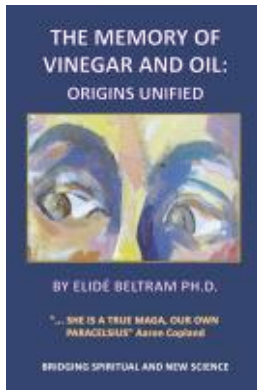
# THE MEMORY OF VINEGAR AND OIL: ORIGINS UNIFIED



BY ELIDÉ BELTRAM PH.D.

"... SHE IS A TRUE MAGA, OUR OWN  
PARACELSIUS" Aaron Copland

BRIDGING SPIRITUAL AND NEW SCIENCE



*In this fictionalized work, Dr. Elide Beltram, a scientist and psychologist, searches for the meaning of life, death and love in her anthropological journeys to Mongolia, Morocco, Borneo, Italy, Spain and Greece. As she delves into the ritualistic cultures of each country, Elide discovers she has more to prove than her scientific theories. She must help her loved ones with alcoholism, bipolar disorder, homosexuality and suicide and must also look at her own oppressed past.*

# **The Memory of Vinegar and Oil**

## **Origins Unified**

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**THE MEMORY**  
**OF**  
**VINEGAR AND OIL:**  
*Origins Unified*

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First Edition



## **BORNEO - ORANGUTANS, HEADHUNTERS AND TORAJALAND**

*The difference between humans and animals? Humans don't learn as fast.*

*When they do, they rise to a higher level of consciousness.*

"Supina, Peggy, Mr. Ed, Bruno, Shekeila, come to eat...come on down...come on...here is your food...hello...hello..." A rustle of branches and squills coming from trees, rushing of feet on the boardwalk, running and tumbling...that was my first experience of the Bornean Orangutans.

We arrived in Kalimantan on the island of Borneo on a blue *klatak*, a small wooden boat. It carried our research team, Prof. Galdikas, lots of bananas, and bags of rice and tea. The *dyak* with a cowboy hat was steering the motorboat with his bare feet. Others dyaks looked at us like we were rare beings. We were looking at them, admiring their faces, hair and mannerisms, which were all very open. We connected with their beautiful black eyes. Their teeth were misaligned, showing signs of neglect. I remembered from my anthropology classes that their ancestors shrank the heads of enemies.

"Neglect," said Audrey, my friend from Connecticut. "Neglect is cultural. They see it as a natural thing that teeth grow like this."

She showed me her immaculate white teeth aligned by many sessions with the dentist.

We were all tired, hot and dirty. It was dusk, and the piercing sounds of the insects frightened me. Back home they would be called "tree frogs," small delicate frogs with suction cups that timidly accompany the evening in rural America. Here in the virgin forest everything was bigger, louder, more intense and dangerous.

Hesitantly, we walked up to the different orangutans: Supina, mother of Bruno; Mr. Ed, the alpha male and Peggy and Shekeila, ex-patriots who were at the camp to be retrained on how to survive the wild.

"They were brought here by poachers, when the kidnapping of orangutan for circuses and private use was still allowed. Usually the babies were killed, but through my political efforts we can save some 50 every year," said Prof. Galdikas, the world-renowned orangutan primatologist. She carried a baby orangutan around her neck like a fur stole. "So I put up camp

here. We fed and nurtured the babies and trained them to climb trees, eat on their own and socialize with their own kind, so that we can free them and they will be able to survive in the wild.”

We met other team members in the “longhouse.” I noticed that it was framed by chicken wire and had no windows.

We grabbed some bananas and rice. Soon enough night descended on us. We were in the virgin jungle, out of reach of any motorized vehicle, airplane, telephone, and electricity. In case of an emergency, a dyak would have to travel by klatak to Kalimantan and attempt to call somebody 250 miles away, who then could only access us by small river.

Everybody fell asleep on their small airbed, while I attempted to go to the hothouse. The silence was sudden. The deepest silence was rarely experienced by people. It almost hurt the ears, like being situated up high on the Swiss Alps. The darkness hurt my eyes too, forcing me to feel one with it. It all devoured me. I felt breathless without a sense of space, time, of where I was. I gained courage and with the help of a small flashlight and descended a wooden peg ladder like a blind person with no sense of reference other than what I was touching. Slowly, I sensed everything, seeing nothing or too much, imagining too much, breathing unfamiliar smells of the deep jungle, the virgin forest of Borneo. I tried to stay centered as not to lose my mind or lose a sense of self.

I imagined anacondas hanging from trees or angry mother orangutans seeing me as an enemy, or maybe a headhunter wanting my head...everything was so magnified in Kalimantan--even the moths were as large as my foot. I reached the last peg and did not want to leave it, as it was my only familiar object in that dark space. I could feel chest pains, my adrenaline surge. I was having a panic attack, and I knew there was no way that I was going to do what civilized

people do: look for the loo. Warm urine trickled down my leg. I feared that I might be marking my territory for my enemy, so with frantic energy, I climbed the steep long-pegged ladder and found my blanket and mosquito net. Then I checked that snakes hadn't slithered under my blanket in my absence, a habit formed from memories of sleeping in my uncle's hut in the Swiss Alps during the summer and finding vipers in my bed.

I survived the night. Sleep saved me from another panic attack. I was awakened by a long kissing sound next to me. I looked at the chicken wire surrounding the longhouse and found an orangutan with open arms and legs looking at me and repeating the kissing sound.

"She is sending you raspberry kisses," Audrey said. "Monkeys give these sometimes."

We had different chores every day. I chose to follow the research team while Audrey cared for and trained the babies in the nursery. We trudged through deep mud and virgin jungle. The heat and humidity intensified. Our guides were sons of headhunters, students hired by the professor who spoke some English. We carried a lightweight hammock, a headlight, water, some protein bars, our notepad and pencil, a camera and pocket knife. We were to find an orangutan and take descriptive notes of every movement it made.

Sometimes we walked for hours to find a free-range orangutan. Once found, we followed it until nighttime. This morning we were blessed with a young mother and baby, probably 1-year-old. It was like having a good friend looking at us from high up in the trees. She hugged and groomed her baby. Their faces were sweet and nonthreatening with their big round eyes and smiling mouths. I felt the mother orangutan was doing research on us rather than us taking data. When they were stationary for nursing, we would hook



up the hammock to two trees and relax while having our companions above us. The dyak would sing a song, or smoke a cigarette. They loved hearing about us Westerners, our culture, Elvis Presley.

All of a sudden, I heard a rush of leaves and broken branches. Before I knew it, the female orangutan plunged on me with speed and agility. I was paralyzed with fear. She came on my hammock and tried to undo the knot. We looked at each other. To me, I was looking inside a whole universe with memories of other beings and spheres. I was listening to a musical chord with its resonances that connect one with something bigger, something more universal and sacred.

Since her baby was reaching for me, she snatched my protein bar and disappeared in the tall trees with speed and elegance, swinging from tree to tree. For a moment, I forgot to take scientific notes, because I was caught up with the poetry of the event. I wrote: *11:35 female approached me with baby, eye contact, attempt to untie knot of hammock, took my protein bar, offspring extending right arm toward me, 11:36 ran to tall trees with oral sound, 11:37 offspring made oral sound.*

The headhunters giggled. They told me in poor English that it was very unusual to see an orangutan in the wild and be able to follow it. They continued to chatter the whole day as I took notes of nursing, mother eating when and what, defecating and urinating.

Meeting a male orangutan interested me for the purpose of understanding the reason for their large ears. Unlike their female counterparts, the males had fleshy ears extending the length of the side of the face, and the actual hearing canal was behind the ear. My hypothesis was that they have these large cheek flaps to claim their territory by capturing the sounds in front of them acoustically and to hear the forest

behind them. Since they are solitary animals, they need long, loud sounds to keep out intruders or call females. Their call could be heard a mile away.

I knew I wasn't going to encounter a male orangutan today since our young mother claimed her territory, and the male had no interest in her. Mating happened every seven years, since babies stopped nursing at seven. It was a calm day, following a calm mother, with silent headhunters who raised the sound level when laughing.

"Gold rain! Gold rain! Watch out!"

Our young mother was urinating right over us. That was the event of the day. She blessed us with her golden rain. We picked up the hammock because the mother was moving on then stopped. We heard the breaking of branches and leaves. She was building a nest for the night. In no time, both mother and baby were in their nest covered with fresh leaves and fast asleep.

"Watch out, lady! A leech. Look!"

They showed me my legs full of leeches. "What do you mean 'watch out'? They're already eating me up!"

"No, listen. Listen carefully."

And in the middle of the silent jungle the headhunters taught me to prevent the leeches from jumping on me by just listening to a minute sound they make when they're about to jump. *Incredible. I'll have to remember this walking the streets of New York City.*

Back at camp everybody had returned. Audrey entered with a huge grin, carrying a tiny baby orangutan wearing a diaper

"I taught him how to climb a tree," she said, handing him a milk bottle.

I joined the researchers in the dorms. I couldn't understand why blood covered the wooden plank floor.

"We are de-leeching ourselves. Look, like this." They showed me how to pull them off and burn them. It was a painful process that we had to endure every night prior to our daily meal of rice and bananas. Since there was no electricity, we were in bed by six o'clock.

The following morning everybody trekked to the river with soap and a towel to wash themselves or do the laundry. Wanting to be the first one down the long wooden plank, I forged ahead of the group, suddenly coming upon a huge figure in the mist a hundred feet from me. Quickly remembering what Prof Galdikas had said the night before, "If you are indisposed, don't leave the camp. If you do meet a male orangutan, don't stare him down, but go on the floor face down and don't move till he is gone."

In a flash, this adult male orangutan was upon me. I was face down, trying not to give out scents of fear. I could smell a strong musky odor. He patted my shirt and hair with his long curved fingers then left without a sound, probably more baffled than me.

After his departure reality kicked in, and I started to shake and cry silently. I almost crawled back to camp, but halfway through, I recaptured my senses and sat. I looked at the river, taking in that experience, which was so unique and terrifying yet so sacred. *It made me stronger. Yes, it did. I can walk New York City at night knowing my surroundings, feeling my boundaries and controlling my feelings.*

After that experience, I felt like Queen of the Jungle. I continued my research alone day after day. My mother and her baby slept on my hammock, eating my protein bar, rice and bananas. A gigantic anaconda crossing my path didn't perturb me. I belonged to the jungle.



*If you want to make God laugh, tell him/her your plans.*

At the end of the research, we were to go to the island of Sulawesi to visit the Toraja and observe their funerary ceremonies. The Toraja people lived on an unspoiled paradise northeast of Borneo. The single and most important ceremony for this culture was the funeral, the way they depart from their dead. They believed that the soul of the deceased travels to a southern land for eternity, needing requisites of everyday life, as if that person were still alive.

They had festivals lasting for years depending on the status of the deceased e.g. the wealthiest had more festivities and entertainment and more animal sacrifice to ensure eternal life. Buffalos and pigs represented status. The more elaborate cliff side graves prevented animals and thieves.

A village of longhouses was where the bereaved, their friends and families lived, socialized and carried on with the mourning.

Audrey and I arrived, traveling by van through the countryside of rice paddies, white buffalos tending to the rice culture, and mountains showing the geometry of the rice paddies. They were punctuated by square cavities lined up methodically on the stone cliffs. Some were open, some had been used. There was a certain peace pervading the island. We arrived and understood that this was where the action was. The driver suggested we buy a carton of cigarettes.

"What for? We don't smoke," Audrey said.

"Oh no, it's for donating to the families if you want to be accepted."

Carrying two cartons of Pall Malls, we entered the village. Young boys hauled pigs or buffalos—some white, some spotted, some pink—in the direction of the area where they were slaughtering the animals. A stench of blood, food, and poor hygiene made us doubt our purpose. In the center of each longhouse was a fully-clothed effigy of the deceased, matching the photo next to him. It was so eerie, I didn't know whether to smile or lean in.

A skinny and toothless Toraja woman led us to the home of one of the deceased. She removed the bottle beet nut from her teeth and took the cigarettes. She joined the other members of the family to feed, wash and cloth the defunct. I asked our driver to ask if he had just died, and they replied that he died four years ago. Audrey and I looked at each other.

"Yes, they are injected with formaldehyde to conserve the body while all the friends and family from all over the world

arrive and till enough money has been accumulated to pay for the festivities and animals.”

“Hmm,” I said to Audrey. “This is a new way to become rich.”

“I just found out that they have 25 banks in the village alone. More than your hometown probably has,” Audrey said.

Everybody was chewing on bottle beets, an anesthetic to numb the pain caused by poor teeth. It created a foul smell and colored their mouth area red. Meanwhile, they stared at Audrey, who was a tall, thin blond with pale blue eyes, perfect teeth and a pinched nose.

The people escorted us into one of the longhouses with one of the effigies. Everybody conversed with him, touching him or fixing his clothes, offering drinks and food. Below us was the slaughtering place; sometimes the people slaughtered three or four buffalos here. I could almost hear the buffalos’ laments, screams and screeches. They used a long sword with one exact hit in the middle of the occipital area, like how bullfighters killed their bulls. Some would collapse, spilling red hot blood all over; some would take a few steps before dying. Ten dead buffalos lay around, waiting to be cut up.

Audrey looked away. The Toraja passed around fresh pieces of meat. They offered cookies and other unrecognizable treats. I went behind the longhouses on the grass with Audrey to reclaim our strength. We were both pale in the face.

After a while, I said, “What the Toraja are doing is connecting with the profane and holy, intending to obtain a blessing from some mystical power. They make room for improvisation and creativity with the intent to incorporate new meaning or bring purpose.”

"Yes, it's a little bit like Carnival in the West, a role reversal."

"Exactly. In the Bantu tribes, where the women dominate the men, men are subjected to various taunts one day of the year. Women do the men's jobs and wear men's clothing."

"Yeah, we have that in Switzerland, the famous Fastnacht with the gender reversal. But what is the purpose of the reversal here?"

"I don't know, Audrey. All I know is that I'm noxious. Rituals for sure have a cathartic component, an emotional outlet, a way to help to maintain the existing order."

We looked for our driver. We sat as if we had a catharsis and stared at the cliffs. Hanging from the cavities were thin rope ladders, and on them were two men carrying a body, partly in a coffin, partly draped.

We looked away.

I felt empty. Each breath provided us with revived circulation. "I don't want to eat meat for a while," she said and laughed. "Actually, I have a craving for French fries, can we stop here?"

We stopped at a local eatery in search of vegetables and starch. Somehow it seemed all they had was meat.

"Where are the French fries?" Audrey asked with a smirk.

"You can have fried rice," a deep voice behind us said.

We turned around, astounded to hear a person like us.

"Hello, I'm Strad. How are you?"

'Well hello, aren't we happy to see you? Yeah, fried rice sounds good."

"You must've come from the Funeral Festival. Did you enjoy it?"

"Enjoy?" a pale-faced Audrey said. "Would you like to join us?"

"Sure, I haven't spoken to a Caucasian in months. I'm an anthropologist doing field work in social sexuality."

I interrupted, "Trying to follow in Margret Mead's footsteps?"

He laughed.

"Hi, I'm Elide and this is Audrey. We just came from Kalimantan working with Prof. Galdikas with the orangutans."

We wanted to order, but Strad suggested he do it for us, since Audrey was about to order Manadonese, a stew of bat and cat.

"We'll have Perkedel Milu and Tinutuan with some Sagner."

He explained that he ordered corn fritters with rice, noodles and pumpkins and drinks made of palm tree water. We sat in the corner of this small room, where flies hung from sticky ribbons from the ceiling, a fan blew around hot air and children's curious faces peeked out from behind the beaded curtains, giggling and teasing. Dogs lay around everywhere, unperturbed on the dusty and dry dirt road. Aromatic coffee roasted, cheering us up.



Audrey seemed uncomfortable in the presence of Strad and said, "I'll trade the smell of blood for coffee anytime." She paused, taking a deep inhalation of the coffee, and asked, "Where are you from?"

"I'm from Down Under, but I've been here on different Islands for a while, Sumatra, Java. I did some field work in Flores, Irian Jaya and now I'm heading for Moluccas."

"Which did you find the most fascinating?" I asked.

"I think the Mentawaiian marriages of west Sumatra were the most intriguing from the cultural and sociological point of view. They dated back to third millennium BC where alliances with neighbors were established by friendship and marriage ties. The bride-givers always enjoyed a higher status than the bride-takers, as the former provided for the continuity of the latter. But this led to an asymmetrical marriage system in many regions: one group would receive brides from another superior group, and in turn would get their brides from a third group where the relationship would hence be subordinate. Because such relationships could not be turned around quickly, one would be superior and subordinate at the same time. A pattern of marriage relationships arose between all communities in a certain area, creating constant threat of conflict."

"Is this still going on today?" Audrey asked.

"Yes, some tribal groups still show variants of circulating wedlock."

I was anxious to know about his studies on social sexuality, so I asked, "I remember reading Margret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* where she demonstrates that sexual behavior varies from culture to culture?"

"Absolutely. If you look at the attitude toward homosexuality, masturbation and bestiality in different cultures differ strikingly. Sex with animals is common in many countries, like in Papua New Guinea, for example, or Sudan and Madagascar to name a few."

Uncomfortable with the conversation, Audrey invited the young boys to come in.

"In some countries homosexuality is even institutionalized, where boys must receive semen from men in order to grow. In Kaluli they believe that semen has a magical quality that promotes growth and knowledge. They even make an infusion of ginger salt and semen to enhance their ability to learn a foreign language."

Fascinated, I added, "Prof. Galdikas at the Leakey Camp spoke of orangutans masturbating and engaging in homosexual behavior, molded potentially by the environment and by reproductive necessity. But Strad, don't you think that in our society socially disapproved sex acts are more widespread than people admit?"

"Yes, indeed."

As children wreaked havoc around us, we ordered more Sager. It was a sweet and refreshing drink that made us forget our "bloody" afternoon, as Audrey called it.

"Rules, systems, laws, religions. They are meant to control what we don't understand. So why magic, why supernatural beliefs and practices? Do you think they're also meant to reduce anxiety?" I asked.

"Yes. Anything that fills us up will reduce anxiety," Strad said.

To such a simple statement, I responded, "Of course, it makes sense. From where I come from, anything is meant to fill the void, the mind, the body. From birth we have this love affair with milk, later by needing love, then we need to know, then we want more and more and more. We want sex, hallucinatory drugs, money, power, alcohol to fill up, to feel more, to connect more, but then we lose it all, because it's only an illusion. Look at the Toraja people, they can't let their deceased go, they have to keep them here for years, cloth them, wash them, feed them. They kill thousands and thousands of bulls and pigs in order to appease the gods. It's all an illusion; all religions are a fantasy meant to keep us busy. Strad, can you imagine being in front of a flower that slowly opens up in front of you, that maybe shows symmetry and coordination in color and shape? Where you can just be with it and not do?"

Strad slurred, "Well then, what would you do with your feelings of evil and greed that we all experience?"

It was getting harder and harder to make sense. We had filled ourselves up with Sager.

"Good point, what would we do with that? Do you know that evil's existence is rationalized as science?" I mumbled.

"And as religion..." he added. "That why we need religion and science to rationalize evil."

We laughed, half-drunk. The fans on the ceiling rattled, the flies buzzed faster, the dogs in the street barked and the room spun.

"Here is some Sulawesi coffee," said Audrey, waking us up the next morning. We had fallen asleep right in the eatery. The divine scent of Sulawesi coffee roused us out of our

stupor, and we laughed and looked at each other with guilt and shame. My body ached from sleeping in a chair all night long.

"Why am I ashamed"? I wondered.

"Because of our culture, if we were headhunters, we wouldn't know what shame is. We wouldn't even have a consciousness," he said.

"Do you know that they don't cut and shrink heads out of evil, but as a trophy?"

"That's interesting, let's ask the cook," Audrey said, stopping us from making fools of ourselves. She murmured, "There's nothing like an alert drunk."

"Yes, there are two alert drunks." We broke into hysterical giggles. We paid the bill and stumbled toward a taxi, a small green carcass of metal on wheels. Audrey told him where to go, but since Strad forgot where he was staying, we all went to the same pension nearby.

The pension was part of a series of longhouses overlooking the rock graves, the final destination of the deceased. I could clearly see what they were. Each member had its own grave carved in the rock. There was an order to it; the graves were square and aligned over a long balcony also carved in the rock with a wooden rail in front of it. Leaning were *tau tau*, wooden dummies or effigies representing the diseased family. They were clothed and supposed to resemble the person in the square grave above it. Some balconies represented a family of seven with their skulls positioned haphazardly. It was a morbid photo gallery, a family album for reflection.

I sat in contemplation of such a site, comparing it to our cemeteries, our funerals. I could see how appealing it would be to become a Toraja.

There were miles of cemeteries back home, some with mausoleums, some defined by a cold stone with a stylized engraving with a name and numbers. Some have poems, some have small photos, some old plastic flowers, rarely a tree, a spark of life. After my divorce, I found out I was never included in the family plot.

I was shocked. I felt left out, abandoned. So I began my lone search for my last destination, my own plot. To my dismay, all the cemetery directors would ask the same questions: *Are you Jewish? Are you Christian?* I felt the rage of having to be something, categorized, my body being less than others. They asked me to show proof of my religion. What proof? A stamp, a sign on my forehead, a name on my passport or removal of my body parts?

I swallowed a bad taste in my mouth, feeling disgust for societies, especially mine for needing to be united by separating from others. Just like the New York skyscrapers, tall, in clusters with mirrored walls, were separated. You see yourself walking by a building rather than being included. People walked with cell phones at their ear, which served as a soft blanket. They were connected to the one they chose, but so disconnected to what was being offered in front of them.

After a long search for my grave, after understanding the politics and systems of Western burials, I found a nondenominational cemetery. I was so excited when I found it that I rushed there to visit. I fell in love with its brown stone chapel at the entrance and large pine trees coasting the curvy driveway. I noticed things shining and moving—color, plantings, small sculptures, wooden benches. Life existed

there. People visited and decorated the home of their loved ones, feeling close to them.

I met the receptionist, who greeted me in flip flops and a pink Mickey Mouse tee shirt saying, "LOVE YOU." We walked around the garden, my garden, reading wonderful poems on wooden planks, admiring decorations hanging from trees and shrubs. One had a bird cage; one had a phone sitting on a child's stool. It was a magical day that day. Mary led me to different locations. "There's a nice location here under this old oak, or you can choose one next to Nabokov, the famous writer. Over there, if you want, you're near the children's quarters, where you see the teddy bears and toys."

"I'll take the one under the old oak, and I'll want my children to put a swing on it saying 'She did it all' and on that large stone, I want 'MOM.' I also want a wooden bench made of twigs next to it."

I gave Mary \$1000 and left the cemetery, happy and lighter. I had a home. I was free.

It was hard to transition from this lovely reverie, but Audrey said that she didn't want to walk with me and would go upstairs to write. So I roamed around accompanied by the droning chant of the funeral festivities. It was a low, soft, almost monochromatic form of chanting with muttered words, which didn't disturb the effect, unlike other chanting where words were meant to be heard and manipulate.

Strad chatted with some locals. I went off on my own, like I always do when I travel. I looked up to the longhouses made of bamboo roofs slanted upwards like Napoleon's hat. The houses rested on stilts and had elaborate front entrances. They looked like the face of the buffalo. In my studies, I read the Toraja house represents a cosmic symbol with three structures each representing the underworld, the earth and

the upper world. To the gods, the place of sacrifice is the triangular front gable, which reminded me of the buffalo horns, a place where the soul supposedly left the house.

I followed the scent of spices and vegetables to the market. Women with bamboo hats on their heads and heavy baskets on their back lugged the market goods and chewed on bottle beets. Some only wore half a sarong, from the waist down. Men wore colorful cloths on their heads and carried goods on a pole over their shoulders, while others carried alcohol inside decorated bamboo containers. The women sat together on a cloth, selling pepper, cloves, rice and mounds of coffee.

A young man observed me admiring the coffee being roasted. In poor English, he said, "It very good." He handed me a few grains. It was good, like I never tasted before. "We sell to America, you buy Sulawesi coffee?"

"No, I don't," I said, surprised that I didn't know my brands of coffee.

"My name Losok. I can be your guide. You want to see Toraja dead people, or the cock fights?"

"No thank you, I saw that yesterday. You can explain to me the meaning of the carvings of wood maybe."

"Good, lady, go here." He gestured to climb on his rickshaw, which I did.

Passing by our pension, Strad saw us and yelled. I told him to come with me. Somehow we fit in the small bamboo seat. Nobody was fat in that part of the world, especially since I had just spent five months in Borneo sharing what the orangutans ate—rice and bananas.

"I like your straw hat. I apologize, but I was pretty drunk last night. What's your name again?" Strad asked.

"Elide, which is not Eliade, like the known anthropologist."

"Ah *Eliade*, what brings you to this part of the world?"

"I'm going for my PhD and I'm finishing my studies in psychoanalysis."

"Where do you live, may I ask?"

"Back East, New York."

"What does it take to be a psychoanalyst?"

"You have to have your basics in how the mind works, know about the unconscious, have a large objective view of people and the world, and basically know that we're all alike."

"How so?"

"Nobody wants to be alone," I said.

"Everything comes from that—all the greed, wars, conspiracies, rape and bloodshed come from that?"

"Yep. We don't want to separate. You see it everywhere, here and in even more sophisticated cultures."

"Whatever that is."

"Right."

Strad asked, "So what kind of body of work have you done throughout your life?"



We were interrupted because Losok had stopped the rickshaw. In front of us was a magnificent view. The sun was rising behind the hills, the multilayered rice paddies reflected the sky in their water, the lush grass and vegetation awakened with sounds of squawking birds and monkeys swinging from tree to tree. Some farmers tended to their fertile soil. A group of women bent over in the water and tended to the rice sprigs with their babies wrapped in cloths on their backs. White buffalos tilled the soil. I inhaled the scent of exotic flowers mixed with the toasted coffee.

We sat for a long moment, taking in the beauty, immobile as if in the presence of God.

I said in a low voice, "It all started when I was walking along the Seine in Paris at 17, hungry because I was hitchhiking through the country. I had a few pennies left and saw an old book in German with a big title on it. FREUD. I bought it, can you believe, not knowing the language and not knowing Freud at all. I still bought it. That book stayed covered with dust for many years in my trunk. Earlier when I was studying in a Swiss convent and the lake was frozen, I would skate over to a house on the water where an old man with a pipe would look out the window and smile at me. I found out later on that was the famous Karl Jung. Because I had a different kind of intelligence, I had to pursue things my way, through the back door."

"How so?"

"I wrote music and taught languages, but after my second son got married, I felt lost. It was a demarcation, an ending and a beginning, and the beginning was scary. So I called the Museum of Natural History in New York City and asked to sign up as a volunteer expecting to sell scarves or origami. Well, imagine when I was escorted to the fourth floor, where a

scientist was head of the Comparative Psychology Department.”

“You must be kidding, from scarves to monkeys?”

I laughed. “But she was a mean, old white-haired lady who looked like a witch. She told me that she was studying monkeys and rats and told me to sit down with paper and pencil and observe the white mice for a few weeks. You can imagine how excited I was, a new path opening to me.”

“Were you always that impulsive?” Strad asked.

“Yes, things always came to me that way. I always knew from my music education there are no mistakes, just detours.”

“I think Buddha said that.”

I smiled. “To make a long story short, the scientist taught me how to think objectively and creatively, which is something I always had naturally. She got me to attend her college classes, and I eventually found out what in those times was “learning without walls,” which was designed for adults who have a lot of life experiences. We even went to research orangutans at the Wichita Zoo, and eventually she gave me permission to observe the monkeys at the Central Park Zoo. My husband was horrified. His wife, the wife of a doctor, at the zoo?”

“Ah, this is fascinating. More please.”

“After that I went to study the dolphins and mongooses in Hawaii. That was fascinating. I learned how to teach language to dolphins, until one day I woke up and knew that studying animal behavior was leading me to academia which I didn’t want.”

"I agree with you. It's hell."

One morning I was sitting at my desk and asked myself: "What do you want to do?" I opened the yellow pages of the phone book and pointed my finger on 'Psychoanalytic Institute' and the day after, I was admitted to their four-year program."

"You don't say! Just like that?!"

"Just like that. I'm now undergoing my personal psychoanalysis, 500 hours of it, twice a week. It's not easy."

"Why do you need to be psychoanalyzed, may I ask?"

"To obtain what you do, as a scientist, you need objectivity. Since we, as psychologists, are dealing with other people's feelings, we need to be able to have firm boundaries without projections."

"Ah projection. Look at that rice paddy with the water being the sky."

"Right and the sky not being the water."

We laughed. We took in the sights, smells, colors, sounds, the mood, ourselves. We put it on our canvas of the soul and memories.

"This will feed me for a while," I whispered.

"What?" asked Strad.

"This moment," and I added, "And this is where God is when we are in the moment."

"Hmm."

The sun was changing the reflections of the sky in the water. We left with the dilemma of how come the sky does not reflect the water.

Strad and I had touched each other's soul, each other's heart. We would return to our longhouse changed, transformed, if even for a day.

"Who needs all the stuff that we do? Us humans?"

"I don't know, Elide. I don't know."

For the first time, I noticed his Australian accent.

"You know, you have an accent, where do you come from?" Strad asked.

"Funny, I was thinking the same thing about you..." Gazing at the distant sun, my thoughts turned to God again. "So this religion thing? Shall we call it synchronicity? Connection? Shall we put a flower in front of a statue, or donate some money to the church, or chant for hours, or go into a trance, or kill a few bulls?"

"Or have some Hashish, pot, Ecstasy?" Strad said, offering his hand to descend the rickshaw.

Audrey was sitting in front of the longhouse writing. She looked at us with relief and curiosity.

Walking up to her, I said, "We just went to find God in the rice paddies."

Strad added, "And we found it."

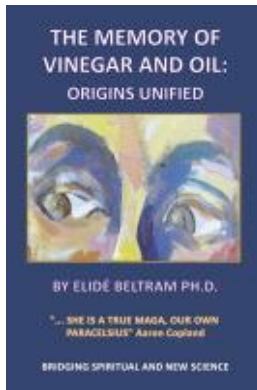
Our expedition was coming to the end.

"I miss my little Bruno. I wonder who is helping him to climb the trees and feeding him today?" Audrey asked.

"That's the purpose of not allowing the same caregivers to tend to the infants so that they don't get used to them..."

She shrugged.

"Ah, the push and pull of life."



*In this fictionalized work, Dr. Elide Beltram, a scientist and psychologist, searches for the meaning of life, death and love in her anthropological journeys to Mongolia, Morocco, Borneo, Italy, Spain and Greece. As she delves into the ritualistic cultures of each country, Elide discovers she has more to prove than her scientific theories. She must help her loved ones with alcoholism, bipolar disorder, homosexuality and suicide and must also look at her own oppressed past.*

# The Memory of Vinegar and Oil

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