



## Under the Java Moon: A Novel of World War II

**Heather B. Moore**

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In Heather B. Moore's illuminating novel *Under the Java Moon*, a Dutch family is sent to a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp.

Inspired by a woman who lived in Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia) when she and the women in her family were interned at the Tjideng Camp, this novel introduces the Vischer family: Rita, a bewildered child; Rita's mother, Mary; and Rita's father, George, a Dutch naval officer whose battle aboard a minesweeper results in a treacherous ordeal to remain afloat with the remaining crew. As their Dutch colonial life faces sudden interruptions, their vivid, interlocking views convey their apprehension in unadorned, matter-of-fact terms.

Once at Tjideng Camp, Rita and her family members endure hunger, roll calls in the heat, illness, and the expectation that they will show deference to the conquering Japanese army officers. So-called insubordinate women face brutal punishments. They don't know what's become of George, either—nor does he know what's become of them. Tensions simmer, even as the women form supportive friendships and attempt to stay humane.

The Vischers, like other Dutch families, prove helpless against the Japanese occupation of the island. The Indonesian people desire independence, and people's resolve deepens as the story continues. Their fears are conveyed in matter-of-fact terms; generalities are avoided in favor of startling wartime details.

Though the war takes an unpredictable path for the Vischers, they also enjoy rare reprieves. And George leans into divine providence while facing harsh conditions. All parties find a way to endure, while interspersed quotations from Dutch survivors reveal the war's impact in broader terms too.

The solemn historical novel *Under the Java Moon* does the valuable work of reviving the lesser-known stories of WWII's Dutch internees through the story of a loving family that faces an unthinkable plight.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2023)

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