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BURY MY POOR BELOVED UNDER THE COCONUT TREE

Bahrizal's Collection of Short Stories



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**Lembaga Pengembangan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi
(LPTIK)
Universitas Andalas**

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Hak cipta dilindungi Undang-Undang. Dilarang memperbanyak sebagian maupun seluruh isi buku ini dalam bentuk apapun tanpa izin tertulis dari penerbit kecuali demi tujuan resensi atau kajian ilmiah yang bersifat nonkomersial.

Preface

2017 witnesses the 35th anniversary of Faculty of Humanities (Fakultas Ilmu Budaya) of Andalas University, Padang, Indonesia. To commemorate its birth, the faculty created a number of academic programmes such as seminars, public lectures, various Olympics, public services and publication. For publication alone, the faculty expected 35 manuscripts to be published. The programme, which accommodates all manuscripts from its faculty members, lasted for one year. During this period the writers submitted their manuscripts either anthology of poems, short stories, articles, modules, or reference books.

The main objective of the publication programme was to challenge and inspire regular and emerging writers to produce literature by focusing on providing them with opportunities to write, share and disseminate ideas among friends, colleagues and readers. This book represents an answer to such a call which could be realized a year later.

At the start of this book project, we started with some aims: among them, is to bring beginning writers to surface. Mr Bahrizal used to retell and write a number of stories, which aim to express his feelings about Minangkabau people in English. These stories were just kept in his laptop and some even got lost. Suggested by some friends of his and half-forced to hand them in to others to be edited and collected, he finally subdued to such wish. After three attempts, he submitted his scattered stories to me. From then, the project began.

It gives me much pleasure and pride to announce that nine of Mr. Bahrizal's stories were offered places on this book. The stories were among stories he has written for about the last ten years of his teaching and talking both on campus and elsewhere. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him for his writing achievement. I am convinced that this prestigious chance will further enrich his stories to come and offer wider prospect for his writing career.

I would like to extend my thanks to Universitas Andalas Press for this opportunity and for their commitment to disseminate the works

of beginning writers. My deep gratitude also goes to Dean of Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University for his support on academic atmosphere and all those who have worked editing and putting this collection together.

Padang, 8 March 2018
Editor,

Drs. Ferdinal, M.A., PhD

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1 | Bury My Poor Beloved under the Coconut Tree

Bury My Poor Beloved under the Coconut Tree

The best weeping-group in the town, Subarang Padang Crying-Chorus, was invited by an unidentified member in the family to help guide the mass chorus of weeping of our mourning family on the second day of the death of my beloved aunt, the day she was supposed to be buried as all adopted-children and brothers and sisters and those who were considered the most immediate in our extended family, and thus should be waited and given the last chance to bid a most sincerest farewell, had, as confirmed by the ad hoc committee, indeed arrived from various places where they were wandering as *Minangkabau* persons.

Amidst the buzzing of weeping, heart-breaking noises of mourning and condolence visits and remarks, my uncle, Utiah Mantiko, repeatedly, quite excessively, whispered to me, his favorite nephew, in his sobbing melody: Bury her, my poor wife, under the bla, bla, bla tree. Ask your friends to help us to dig the grave under the bla bla bla tree. Driven by our so special relationship - uncle and nephew hot-line plus some tacitly-understood bonus-lines, I tried my very best to lean to him the closest possible in my traditional '*selo*-sitting' in my effort to get his message more clearly. Still, I failed to get the word after under - his handing me a hot envelope full of some sexy notes while murmuring the desperate whisper - detracted my attention. Instinctively, I snapped the bulging envelope from his left hand and thus could barely miss his message and instead could catch the following utterance: *...the money for you and your gang friends who will dig the grave*. And, before I could listen to his sobbing whisper one more time to get the message more clearly, I was gently pulled by my eldest aunt, Teta, who softly dragged me to the kitchen wherein she said: "Make sure the grave is dug properly in the driest spot. It is now a rainy season. Under the banana tree is perhaps the most ideal point. She has suffered more than

enough." I quickly nodded my head which was replied by my aunt by the same gesture."

I asked Panjek Rundo, the vice informal leader of our gang, to dig the grave in the best west point of the family cemetery, one which is the most dry so that the dead body would not suffer in the wet as feared by my Aunt Teta. At the same time, I quickly slammed-dung the envelope from my uncle into a pocket of his shoddy and shabby shirt, the same envelope that has carefully been reduced to the most minimum but still within tolerable limit among gang friends and said: "Make sure everybody in the gang gets his share to buy some cigarettes so that there will be no complain whatsoever like that of last month". "It's gonna be all right." He said so assuringly while nodding his head.

Some time before the dusk on that day, my aunt was buried, and one by one those family members, immediate and distant relatives and neighbors, and friends at last bade farewell to my now buried poor aunt. I went home with my gang buddies feeling tired but proud having rendered a revered task of digging a grave and burying the dead body of a beloved family member. Quite naturally, I was expected to be given some kind of appreciation by my uncle whose beloved wife we have buried safely and honorably in the thank-you-dismissal of the ad-hoc committee who have rendered all their sincere participation in the undertaking of the burial activities. To my surprise and heart-breaking dismay, I was given such an obvious the-go-bye gesture by him, something that never happened before.

He did not even mention my name as the chairman of the youth group who had done all the labor of burial services. And when every guest had gone home, instead of giving an avuncular patting on my shoulder, he gave me such an unfriendly look and body language that reminded me of his attitude toward one of our neighbors who once ran over his best hunting dog and whom he never forgave in spite of a handsome compensation. Those big eyes of his glared aggressively and wildly like those of the police when trying to

maintain order during such riots as staged up by hooligans in football matches.

He maintained this enemy-style of body language in his attitude toward me after the death of my aunt in the next few days. He kept all the keys to his cars and motor cycles in his room and did not bother to ask me of my studies or research paper or whatsoever as he used to as my uncle to whom I have been entrusted. And, he did not bother to invite me to go fishing with him any more - an activity that he would prefer to cancel without me being an accompanist before the death of my aunt. Also, he kept all his newspapers now in his room all for himself in spite of knowing that I badly needed them for my research paper. When this unfriendly attitude of his to me lasted for five days, I began to sense that something had gone wrong, something serious had happened between us.

As our relationship used to be so close and quite special, this unhappy relationship with my uncle had taken my mind off the death of my Aunt Tuti who had nurtured me like her own son. I began to meticulously trace back where the mistakes had been. I could not figure it out. I tried again and again. Still I failed. And the discouraging attitude of my uncle toward me continuous even more intensively: He simply did not bother to talk to me after the death of my aunt, boycotted all his avuncular subsidies that used to be run through various channels such as the soft lending of car and motorcycle, newspaper and books and, yes, quite a number of small and minor things.

Never mind all these avuncular subsidies! I could go on without this stuff now. Now, I was dying to know why he treated me like this after the death of my aunt Tuti. Having introspected myself again and minutely examined all my communication with him, I began to assure myself that I did not do anything wrong to him before and after the death of my aunt Tuti. All I could recollect had been the fights and the quarrels and the bickers between him and Aunt Teta; they had been like that since I moved in to stay with Uncle Mantiko. To my eyes, they seemed to have been borne to be archrival by

destiny. Reasonable or not, things led them to endless, yet so mysterious and so puzzling quarrels. I kept wondering, though, why they had just been like a jealous cat and a hungry dog. As to me and Uncle Mantiko, My reminiscence showed all the healthy and happy bilateral relationship between us – There was nothing wrong before the death of aunt Tuti as far as our relationship was concerned. And, I was quite sure of that.

Feeling so sure that I did not do anything wrong to him and thus should not be treated as I was treated then, one night I braved myself to confront him and started to break the ice. “I feel something has gone wrong between us. What was it actually? Would you please tell me?” I was surprised by my own questions to him. I have never talked to him that straight as in my culture, a nephew is supposed to pay an extra respect to an uncle who, in the old time was supposed to be the more responsible than one’s own parents. “It’s okay, nothing goes wrong. I am just mentally tired”. He said without looking at me.

His so unfriendly a reply and body language hurt me even more as I was quite sure that there must have been something wrong between us and that it was quite obvious he was trying to hide it and continued to play a puzzle. I tried to play patience and concentrated on the completion of my research. But his keeping his more aloof attitude toward me in spite of the fact that we were living under the same roof, really put me into some hot unbearable water. I just could not take it. I used to live and bear such unfriendly and discouraging atmosphere or circumstances when I was young and I used to just suffer it patiently like those who did their time in jail. But now I was quite an adult and something in me said: “I could not take it anymore. Either I decipher this mystery and get back to where we used to be as a nephew and uncle, or I just moved out and lived with my aunt Teta whom I believed would be very happy to welcome me”.

Thus on one clear afternoon, when he was reading his newspaper on one wing of his big and luxurious house, I again

braved myself to confront him and started to talk: "Excuse me! I need to tell you something. I guess I would be able to complete my research paper earlier if I stayed with Aunt Teta in Pasar Baru". I said so convincingly. "I've contacted Aunt Teta and she would welcome my staying with her. So I'll start to pack up tonight and leave tomorrow. Thank you very much for all your kindness during my stay here with you for, I guess, more than years and years". I said in a very trembling voice, for, at the same time, my heart kept whispering so loudly: "You have so much sweet memory in this house with him and your late aunt and thus you could not just leave all them behind in a dry and blunt farewell like this"

He looked at me deeply and said: "Only last week your aunt passed away after a long ordeal of illness. I guess she would be very sad to see you leave now. Don't you think so? Give your Aunt and yourself a little more time!" I was really confused by his reply as I expected that he would agree to my moving out, as he did not show any gesture of friendliness after the death of my aunt. And, now he spoke in a different mood and different tone. I thought I had to disclose the mystery and thus said:

"Stop all this contradicting game! On one hand you keep showing me your aloof attitude while now asking me to stay some more. Be open please. Tell me why you kept so far a distance from me after the death of aunt Tati".

"Okay, Okay" He said. "Now that after a week of her death let me tell you all the truth." He spoke in a very low voice as if fearing that somebody would listen to his confession:

"Look!" He said, while glancing again around the internal of his big house seemingly making sure that nobody is around hearing our heart to heart conversation. "Please don't take me wrongly. You know, I am sure you know more than I do, that my wife was sick for more than five years during which I rendered her all the best care that a husband can afford to render."

"Yes, I said. I was, and am up to now the very witness to it all."

"You know that I promised her never to marry again in spite of whatever going on about her illness and development. The promise that I hoped would put her at ease and give her a piece of mind, and hopefully a miracle of recovery."

"Yes, you both told me that."

"But look, she was in consumption. It is openly called a terminal illness. She was thirty-nine when she contracted the illness. And I was forty-six. We were still childless by then and I was told by the doctor that our effort to have a baby was positively negated by the complication of her illness." He stopped for a moment and showed in her face a very deep regret and grief. He looked down and continued again:

"No one, not even the best doctor in the world, could actually tell the end of the tunnel of all this. But I gave her all the best care that I could afford. I tried to be the most altruistic husband a human could afford to be to. And, as you see, I did go in my commitment to the limit, and I perhaps pushed a little more. So far did I stretch it all that, unbeknown to me, I became so drained, mentally drained. I did not realize that I had been in the giving end far too much and far too deep. I began to realize it; however, when something in me smoothly uncoiled, and softly urged me, and reminded me that to be a healthy man I, too, needed to be in the receiving end so that I could function socially and psychologically as a human. That thing in me whispered in the most solemn voice: No matter how hard you try and push, no matter how sincere or religious you can be, every natural creature, be it animal or human, has to obey the law of balance. One way or another, every emptiness needs its natural filling or at least some kind of soft compensation."

There was some moment of silence in which I was trying so hard to understand what he said, what to me sounds like a philosophical lecture. Then, after glancing again around the

big living room of the house seemingly making sure that nobody overheard his narration, he continued:

“Thus, unbeknown to no one, I instinctively picked up a shadowy poor friend under the most subtle and religiously tolerated license that they called *mut’ah*. And thanks to heaven’s kind understanding of my situation and condition, everything went so well up to two months before the death of my most beloved wife, that was when I was reminded by my shadowy significant other that the kid that we were entrusted by heaven had been six years old and had to be registered for school and therefore needed to produce a birth certificate for which we had to show the authorities our legal and formal paper of our total and ultimate commitment. We started to race with the time and life began to be a little bit stressful since then.” He stopped again and looked at the plain picture of his wary-smiling wife on the wall. After taking a long breath, he continued again:

“I am used to living in a stressful life as I was born and brought up during the civil war and I have been living twenty years of my stressful life as a lawyer and the member of legislative. And most of these cases that I handle have been those of the criminal and bitter family feuds, which are extremely stress-laden and sometimes threat-ridden. I could manage all these office-related stressful stuff in my job and continue to be cool, calm and confident at home. It was my commitment that my wife never should read nor sense all these job-related stresses. But when it came to the time when I was racing with the time having to produce a birth certificate and having to declare at his school that the poor six year old boy was mine, by all means mine, my stress was quite immense, internally swelling, and thus might have gradually been sensed by her basic instinct as a wife that seemed not to have been affected at all by the terminally illness that she had been suffering. And the intensity of such lead to a suspicion, and in its turn to an assumption, if not yet a conclusion, that some part of the fidelity of our holy commitment knot had been breached, broken or perhaps at least twisted. Harder and harder I tried to play it cool, and did all the very best to

hide it all from anyone's attention." He stopped again and showed a more serious face. Then he continued in the slowest speed and the lowest tone of speech:

To my most horrible horror, the night before she passed away, she whispered to me that her end was felt so close and that she wanted me to tell the truth in her last minute, to give her a peace of mind and thus a peaceful passage for her and for me as well. She told me that she had indeed smelt some elusive aroma from my unusual nervousness that night that awoken her instinct, that I had indeed hid something from her in relation to our holy knot of togetherness. She softly pushed me to the point that I could not sway the way I have successfully and beautifully been swaying and gliding as the best lawyer and the longest Member of Parliament from three different political parties in the town for more than twenty years. My experience and my proven skillful juggling dexterity just could not cool down her curiosity.

"Tell me the truth." She said. "If you do, I will beg God to let me go in peace this very night and thus open the way for you to have it all the way that every healthy couple needed to have to live in peace in respect and in decency. So that you do not need to hide in the gray any longer." She said, seemingly concluded her accusation one sided like an experienced prosecutor in a court session.

"Tell me the truth, only the truth." She said so charismatically. "I assure you my forgiveness as you have rendered me all the tenderness and sincerity and dedication that I found so consistent and so devoting and so unselfish. And you have indeed played it all so successful with that so perfect pretension that I did not see any slightest sign of drama. And thus, I was never hurt. Please tell me the truth! So that I could sincerely leave you in a piece of mind and that you have nothing to repent. Please tell me the truth. Only the truth, my dear."

In her so weak intermittent-breathing, smilingly still, she continued pushing me to tell the truth, a kind of truth that would pass any test of lie detector. At that very moment, I was

not able to look at her so weak but determining eyes. Thus, I closed my eyes and touched her hand instead. And when I opened them again, I saw in her very eyes, quite clearly, the smile of my shadowy son going to school with his over-size birth certificate. I never could tell why, suddenly I burst into a confession very much like a kid who was baited by the promise of the sweetest chocolate bar.

“Yyyyes, I do. I do have a shadowy significant other. She is”

She pressed her so very weak forefinger strongly to my lips, seemingly asking me to stop there. Right there. It was so convincing and assuring. In a wider smile she asked me to give her a hug, and a kiss on her generous and understanding and so very cold forehead.

“I forgive you, I forgive you,” She said, even in a wider smile. “And, as a bonus to all my forgiveness, I would like you to give all these gold accessories of mine to the shadowy other of yours”. And that very night, as she promised, she did return to Eden so peacefully. And her last sincere smile clearly let me know that she too truly rejoiced in my new life with the other significant other. I was crying in pain for my infidelity and for my failure to cover it all from a dying beloved significant other. But most of all I was crying for all the regret that all had to be disclosed in the very last minutes of her life. On top of all, however, I cried for my freedom from a drama play, that I had played far too long to survive all these so very painful complications. Oh! Finally it comes to a relieving end. In my so very relieved breath taking in the morning on the day she passed away, my conscience cried out the most silently: Free, free, body and soul. No more painful game of pretension. And thus, I cried that morning more intensively than the members of *Ratok Subarang Padang* that I had invited the night before. Both for losing my beloved sincere wife and for my freedom from the trap of playing a drama that sometimes were so painfully unbearable.

I did not fully understand what My Uncle was trying to explain to me, what to me seemed to be a jumble of complicated description or narration that I could not make the end nor the tail out of. And most importantly I did not, to the slightest, see any relation and relevance of this all to his not-so-friendly attitude to me anymore after the death of my aunt. Instead, I began to understand why our country continued to be in a deeper and deeper mess. Undoubtedly, those members of the representatives are the main troublemakers of it all. They are truly the most responsible of this all mess. Even my uncle, the most intelligent one among them, never did answer a simplest question that I asked so clearly and openly.

“Then what has it got to do with your not being friendly to me any more after the death your wife” I said quite impatiently.

“Okay. Let me make it clear. I asked you to bury her under the coconut tree and gave you more than sufficient fund to carry it out”. He said in a charismatic voice.

“I see.” I said. “But I could not hear your instruction clearly enough as you invited the best crying chorus in the town. At times, to my very best, I tried to catch it, but I failed as aunt Teta kept disturbing me too with so many trivial orders. I swear, God is my witness, that I did not hear the word ‘coconut’. We were all overwhelmed by the chorus of cries, sobbing and lamenting. Not to mention the late handing of the envelope from you”. I said so convincingly. “Anyway, but why does it bring so much fuss and difference when indeed she was now buried peacefully under the banana tree? What is it all about in the difference of the two trees?”

“Look! I am afraid you did not listen to my case seriously enough. That is why you often misunderstand me”.

“I do”. I listen so seriously. “Maybe too serious, and that’s perhaps why I failed to understand, or perhaps I misunderstood all this. But look! It seems that you talked

more to yourself. And honestly I doubt the whole truth in your narration. Has it all the truth, only the truth that you have been telling me? Your narration is like that I find in some novels or short stories. They are so neat and well plotted. Did it really happen like that? Honestly, I grossly doubted it.

“Oh my god! How can you be so suspicious? I lost my beloved wife just last week. And I was all a stand-by service for her for as long as she was sick. Could a poor man in this mood of time be capable of telling lies still? How come you become the most negative attitude all of a sudden? Come on! Where is your positive thinking character that you are proud of and that you teach to all your students?” My uncle spoke in a very pity-inviting tone and with such a pathetic mimicry. I could not be easily influenced by all this make-faces of my uncle, though, as I have been so used to all his cleverly hidden tricks and mysterious maneuvers.

“Okay, then. Please tell me what it has got to do with all your aloof-standing and cold mood to my presence around you since the death of your wife. You have talked far too much and far too far, but the main question is never answered. Most important of all what has it got to do with your request to have your beloved buried under the coconut tree. Please tell me. It’s high time to call a spade a spade”.

“Okay!” He said and looked around again seemingly to make sure that nobody around that could eavesdrop. “Look! I told you that I now have got a child from my shadowy significant other who is now six years old. He will be registered at some school this coming semester. He needs a birth certificate and I need to be declared as his old man”. He looked around again and pushed his chair even closer to me. Then, in a lower whisper, he continued:

“I have to legally marry my shadowy other to produce a legal paper that is needed to produce the birth certificate for my son who will be registered this coming semester which is only a few weeks from now. Do you get my point? And the time was getting closer. It was in a race with the deterioration

of my wife's health and at last her leaving us all that would mean the opening for the legalization of me and the shadowy significant other and the application of the birth certificate of the poor boy without which he cannot make his school registration".

"I am confused. I am more confused. Now that your wife is dead you can remarry and execute all those things that you seemed to have been waiting for quite some time. I do not see any relevance of this all with the banana and the coconut tree." I said more impatiently.

"Oh! Come on. Do not express it that way. Put some euphemism to make me look good in public. Remember I am a member of the representative. And, do not give me a bad impression before all these family members and relatives. We need to play a careful public relation move. A very civilized socialization. I need a good passage as much as your aunt needed one in her last minute. Make everybody understand and happy." He said in a lower voice in spite of his growing impatience, too.

I am more confused. Now that she is gone, you can just do all what you seemed to have long planned to do. Why do you make all these complications? I do not see any logic in all this jumble explanation that you gave me. Do it now. I will help and give you all what you need in my possession and control to make it happen. And I will accelerate it if you could give me some down payment as the follow up of the memorandum of understanding. You know I never failed you. I am a stand by bodyguard of honor. I have given you an untarnished loyal service like those Buckingham palace guards". I assured him so convincingly with all my sincere and sweet smile.

"Oh, how pathetic you are! You were brought up in Jakarta, no wonder you lost your culture of Minangkabau. Don't you know that"

"Wait a minute! Are you going to lecture me again about some complicated philosophical cases? Please get to work, get

to the project. What am I supposed to do now in this next round of drama? I give you my real words; as soon as the down payment is here the job will get done in no time. There will be no delay and hesitation. Stop lecturing me! Hand me the job description and seal it with an envelope of intent!"

"When will you ever change? Be patient. It won't all work to our expectation if the plan is not well planned. Look! In Minangkabau culture, upon losing his wife one is not ethically allowed to remarry until the soil of the grave has turned black. I know very well the color of our cemetery soil in every corner of it as, as a young man, I used to dig thereon for worm for fishing. That's the reason why I asked you to dig the grave of your aunt under the coconut tree. The soil is black down there".

"I see," I said. But why did not you make it clear and speak it out loud so that I would have understood and executed the plan as you wished?" I said impatiently as I thought that it was not fair of him to punish me for the wrong execution for which I was not given a clear instruction. I was still hot in defending myself when suddenly a crowd of relatives came from our hometown, seemingly intending to pay a very late condolence visit. He went to the front door and served those guests and belled the maid to prepare some drink for them.

"It would not cost a fortune to blacken the soil of the grave." I said to myself. I still keep some money from the condolence envelope I'll just use it to carry out the holy plan. Anyway, he will surely compensate it when the job gets done. I called Kuciang Miao and Udin Karanggo, two most trusted members of my gang to buy some asphalt and residual paint. In the darkest darkness of one night, together we poured this mix on top of the grave of my beloved aunt. We poured it all and all to make sure it became the blackest grave soil under the moon as well as under the sun.

Without delay, I reported to my uncle the next day all what we had done and asked him to carry out his plan to remarry; hoping that the money used to buy residual paint

and asphalt could be immediately compensated, hopefully handsomely. Again to my surprise, he did not approve it the way I expected it. He did not look happy as I naturally expected in spite of the fact that that all had been done as he wanted. Slowly, he said to me: "Look! You did it without my consent and you did it before I gave you the job order. This project should come in one packet. Blackening the grave soil is not the main point of the project. He said. There is more to this. Now listen"

"What a minute! I interrupted. What else is there to this all? Another lecture on your 'bulshitology'? You told me crystal clear that the sooner the grave soil got black, the sooner you could get remarried. Now go ahead! Stop all the lecture! Prepare your marriage and tell me what I can do for it and seal it with a more friendly and bulging and generous envelope. Get to work! As you always told me. Do not start another lecture".

"There you go again. You were brought up in Jakarta. You seemed to have totally lost your Minangkabau norms and mores. Look I cannot initiate to make it happen all by myself".

"There you go again. You are the one who will get married. Why should somebody else take initiative? It just does not make sense. Where does the theory come from? I have never heard of this before. Why don't you just get to the point and stop all this theoretical framework. Marry your hidden lady and get out from your hidden café".

"Okay. Okay. He said patiently. Now cool down. This is the reimbursement for your paint and asphalt. And this is another envelope for the next step of the plan that I will give to you as soon as you understand the system and procedure of the whole game". He handed me one envelope and put another on the table and immediately slammed a book on it. "I tell you what, in Minangkabau, a man in my situation and condition should not initiate his remarriage. A close family member is supposed to make a hint of some kind or another suggesting that I am in need of a partner to replace my deceased wife. If I

do it all by myself, then I would not look a gentleman in Minangkabau norms as my wife has just passed away. I would be looked down as a man who does not consider the feeling of my in-laws and relatives of my wife. Two weeks is regarded as too early unless we have a very strong justification”.

“Oh my God. There you go again. You make it more complicated than it should be. Another lecture for an extra short semester? Come on! Just tell me what to do”.

“Okay! Keep this other envelope so that you can cool down and understand the next episode of the whole game. As I said earlier, two-weeks is too early unless someone in the family could come up with a strong justification. A reasonable justification to cut the waiting period – until the grave soil has turned black- should come up from some member of the family like you. As you are the most trusted by everybody in the family you could not be more than perfect.” I smiled broadly feeling flattered by my uncle’s compliment while snapping another envelope and flashily put it into my special pocket. “Go on! I said. “I begin to understand all your explanation now. It does not look as complicated as before. It is indeed quite comprehensible.”

Smilingly my uncle continued: “Look we will have a seventh-day condolence gathering in a few days from now to send a special pray for your deceased aunt. You will be the co-director of the whole drama. You gently whisper to everybody that I am indeed in a heavy stress and in the process of losing my sanity”

“What! Could you repeat it again? Are you trying to ask me to tell them all that you have turned insane? Why do you make it complicated again?”

Yes. You got it. Don’t tell it openly. Whisper it to them all those immediate relatives. That I am obviously in the process of losing my mind from the heavy stress of losing my wife and that it seems that I need to have a partner as soon as possible

before it is too late. Before I really lose all my healthy thinking”.

“But, how? And would they believe me?”

“Listen!” He came even closer to me. Glancing around again making sure that nobody is around ears dropping, he whispered it, this time loud enough for me to hear: “You tell them that you often found me fishing alone now, very much alone, without anybody else. You tell them that I sat hours and hours and that my rod goes without nylon, without nylon. ‘Without nylon,’ repeat this phrase several times, the phrase ‘without nylon’ and say it in very convincing voice and that during the fishing hours that I spent, I kept talking to myself. And having caught the most serious and chorus attention that you could afford, tell them that you get the feeling that I am losing my sanity. And most important of all, tell them, assure them, that I perhaps I can only be cured by having somebody by my side to unselfishly take care of me twenty four hours.

“Okay, okay. But will you write it down clearly so that I will not make another mistake for the second time? I will rehearse it as many times as I need to make sure that my role in this drama will be well played. By the way, what is that envelope? Is it the bonus for your team, I mean your success team?”

“Oh, come on! This is for financing the celebration of seventh-day death of your aunt, on the night of which you will whisper to them all that I am on the brink of losing my healthy-thinking. Give it to your aunt Teta and please do not puncture the envelope as usual so that she has enough funds to make the gathering successful. Tell her that I am not so well today and thus cannot meet her myself. I don’t think I could see her in a situation and condition like this. We cannot afford another bicker and scratch. You know that we actually are never in good terms”.

“Okay, okay. But will this task carry bonus? And if so, can I take some down payment to it now?”

“There you go with your *fait accompli* move. This, take it. This is just ten percent of the bonus, so make sure that it will be a success, a great success”.

Sure. Sure. I said. Everything becomes so crystal clear now. In fact it has never been clearer,” I said assuringly. But I guess it is wise of me to go now before another session of lecture

“Damn it. Damn it. Get your going!”

“The seventh day celebration of my aunt’s death was very solemn and religious. The crying chorus of the day of the death has all been replaced by the reading of the holy book. My uncle looked the most excessively subdued among those in the crowd. Time after time, he fixed his large, protruding and watery eyes so deep in his face. Time after time, his face contracted and distorted and twisted. And often he looked blank and numb and mysteriously sleepy. In such a big solemn crowd of family members and relatives of some and every kind of blood and law-relations, he looked totally lonely and helpless, and hopeless. And when he became to be noticed by those in the crowd, he became more and more serious with all those make-faces, mimicry flickering colors and variations. His condition at last got a chorus attention and sincerest pity. Unanimously all agreed that he was not all himself anymore. “The toll of all this has taken on him” They were whispering one another and everybody nodded their blacky-capped head to give a unanimous agreement. I minutely noticed all the moves that my uncle made and started to get ready with my piece of whisper. But, alas, the intensive and serious rehearsal of the specifically designed whisper had suddenly been overwhelmed by the intensity of the holy book reading and chanting. Not to mention the tremendous success of my Uncle Mantiko’s make-faces.

To my horror, I forgot the line and the phrase of the very special whisper that Uncle Mantiko had taught me and that I had rehearsed hundred times. I sweat so heavily in panic, and

in the deepest worry of losing the promised bonus, out of the blue I made a whisper of my own: "Uncle Mantiko seems to be on the edge of losing his mind. He sometimes walks naked in the house in the evening hours carrying a burning candle. I believe somebody should take a special care of him twenty-four hours seven. I whisper it to those family members and immediate relatives several times. Motivated by the bonus, I did not stop the whisper until the crowd showed a so serious chorus attention. It did. There went the buzzing whisper of sympathy the crowd as the domino effect of my magic whisper. It worked. The soonest the religious gathering dismissed, they had a more serious meeting that night discussing ways to persuade Uncle Mantiko to remarry as soon as possible so that the process of his losing his sanity could be prevented. Some members of the meeting even proposed several candidates they thought worth considering. I swear! Never in all my love have I seen a more serious mood of meeting before. Pretentious or sincere, everybody participated in it.

I did not know what brought me there, all of sudden I found myself sitting right by the puzzled door of Uncle Mantiko's room when the decision was unanimously made and immediately declared. Unbeknown to anybody in the crowd, who looked gravely serious about the pathetic psychological condition of Uncle Mantiko, from behind the curtain door, I was handed by him a bulging envelope of the bonus that seemed to have been carefully prepared and extra-padded. And so serious was the crowd then, that they did not either notice the slightest sight of it, not even the silhouette of it, the shaking of my hidden left hand with that of Uncle Mantiko's behind the same curtain of his room door. Would you see it if you were there?

The innocent but delayed success of Uncle Mantiko's plan made him more generous than I thought he would be capable of. I had seen him in his most generous mood on those days closing to *Lebaran* when he philanthropically distributed presents of clothes and money as if he had just won a national lottery, but this time he went to a higher height of generosity I

had never seen him before. Coming home rather earlier on that so bright a day, he smilingly handed me a huge and colorful and burst envelope containing colorful printed forms that turned out to be airplane tickets.

“They are your tickets to Jakarta,” He said smilingly. You are bound to leave tomorrow. I have already booked your stay at West Sumatera Representative at Matraman Raya.” I can assure you they are all duly confirmed.

“What is it all about?” I asked wonderingly.

You once told me that the Library of the University of Indonesia kept all those archaic documents that you need to study to finish your thesis and paper. Every dog has his day. Now, hurry up. Pack all your clothes and stuff and get ready for your flight to Jakarta morning.

“But, but, but,” I said stammeringly.

Save your butts, Get ready for tomorrow flight. Your stay at West Sumatera Representative is for a full week, but you could extend for as long as you need to complete your field and library research. And this is for your transportation and other costs in Jakarta.

Before I could say anything else he hugged me so tight and I could only see his blurrier and more mysterious face in the mirror behind him.

One good luck led to another. My data collection was running so smoothly and my staying in the library of the University of Indonesia acquainted me with an extraordinarily friendly professor who had done an ample of research on Minangkabau. Our discussions and his lending me of those data that he once collected brought my thesis almost to the point of completion.

I was all smiles and true happiness when sitting at the Cengkareng Airport waiting for my flight back home to

Padang. "Thanks to Uncle Mantiko's kindness" I said in my heart. Suddenly I thought of Uncle Mantiko and his remarriage, the thing that had suddenly been erased completely from my mind since I was sent by him to Jakarta. I was wondering who the unlucky woman was who got a yellow card to marry my uncle who was full of unbelievable tricks and thus would be the next victim of his unscrewable naughty games from time to time. I was so deep in my thinking of my Uncle Mantiko when I was nudged and elbowed by somebody next to me quite obviously. "Oh no! Here he is, the very man I have been thinking of. With somebody! But not the one that I did not know before!" I could not believe my eyes when I saw my Uncle Mantiko sitting with the lady I never imagined he would be able and capable of holding in a way I saw him holding her now right in front of me. It was my very aunt Teta, the one who had been for so long all his fights and his bickers and misunderstandings in our extended Minangkabau family. I was completely speechless for some time, and before I could bombard him with the most interrogating questions on all these mysteries, he mischievously blinked his left innocent eye, which I could quickly read as a tacit gesture of his naïve request for a total silence. Between an uncle and nephew, who had played it all and scored some hat tricks in good time and bad time.

In my astonishment, I, too, replied his sign, instinctively or genetically perhaps, with a kind of blinking that I never knew before I was capable of making.

But wait! To my more and now most surprise, My Aunt Teta, too, slowly and somewhat lastly blinked and twinkled her beautiful eyes, yes both of them, at me, and then at him. But what, what does it mean? The blinking and the twinkling of her both eyes! Could you decipher it with the help of their aroma as newly married couple? Again, the so many suspicion-based questions that arose in my mind were calmed down by another full envelope that got to my front pocket of my jacket. This time, though, it was slumped dinged by my aunt Teta who simultaneously put her mysterious and intriguing pointing-finger to my not-anymore so-naïve lips.

I felt, then, the acquisition of the basic skills of reading dilapidated mysteries of indirect communication of Minangkabau began to develop in the very inner of me, me, a trickle of the *Bending* Padang's blood.



2 | The Shouldering of *Lamang Angek*

The Shouldering of *Lamang Angek*

Did you ever see a bodyguard who instinctively and spontaneously jumped so very high to cover his leader's vulnerable body upon seeing a sniper's ready-to-shoot gun aiming at the latter and then got himself killed or seriously wounded? I once saw an incidence of this altruistic sacrifice as a war paramedic in a humanitarian mission in East Timor war in 1977. And yes. I was so very tremendously moved in witnessing the quivering, dying bodyguard asking still, in such a trembling voice, about his leader's safety in the very last minutes of his breathing his last, so moved that I was totally unaware that my clothes had all then been soaked by my tears and splashing blood of the bodyguard. Comical as it may sound, but it softened the inner me to the point of such that the same reaction from me would be invoked so naturally and automatically each time I watched movies depicting incidences of this kind. Yes, the memory left in me such a deep impression of true friendship and thought that such an altruistic sacrifice by a true comrade in a setting like that that I personally witnessed and indeed got involved in would be hard to match. I kept my overconfident assumption quite proudly until one day when I was told by an honest, down-to-earth acquaintance how he was repeatedly helped and saved by his cousin – the description that I had to acknowledge, though it involved no single drop of blood, no physical contact and the like, to be more altruistic than that of mine. Yes, it softened my heartstrings to the more and to the most. I would like to share it with you in the hope to improve our understanding of human kind, friendship and most importantly to sharpen our conscience (if conscience, indeed, needs to be sharpened). With the spirit of maintaining its truth-based originality, the description of this true story should be reported as truly as follows:

“I belonged to the group they called the select few-plus in the widest sense of human's expectations and/or valuations”

He said so confidently. "The description of my life-tract would not only incite jealousy in people on the street but also in those who emerged from the exclusive class called the rich or the jet set. It would even incite jealousy from those who claimed to come from high-ranking families such as the mayor and the governor and even the minister - the kinds of people whose privileges in Indonesia nearly equaled those of the absolute kings in the past. Yes, they could easily match or excel me in most materialistic factors. There was something in my track, however, that would incite a tremendous jealousy in them. I was born with a shiny golden spoon in my mouth, the spoon that was extra-ordinarily well-guarded up to a certain point in my life time" He paused shortly and then continued in humble voice "As a student of basic syllogism, I would like to describe it in a simple logical sequence":

Firstly, my mother's rice field was there, in my hometown, in every direction, as far as the eyes could see, some even stretched farther than what the eagle's eyes could see, in fact it always there, in golden yellow color at every point of the year. Her cornfield was there too, as far as our village ran, some even encroached into those territories of our neighboring villages, always there, and always ready for harvest. And in between her rice and her corn there grew always her chili, pepper and the likes. Rarely had a day passed in my village without seeing my mother's harvest of rice or corn or chili and the like. In addition to that, her village banks, in our village and in some villages around ours were awarded by the provincial government as the best rural banks in the province several times. They nicknamed her '*Induak Ameh*' (literally translated the Mother of Gold) for their amazement of her good luck path of life.

Secondly, a successful farmer turned trader and turned village chief, my father eventually became a member of our provincial legislative. His string of success seemed to keep running quite endlessly, so endlessly that he began to believe, despite his academic and religious attitudes, that he was accompanied by the 'lucky shadow' of his grandfather who died in Mecca on his tenth pilgrimage. His solid addiction to

success and his ambitious parental true love for me had driven my father to frantically do anything to ensure my brightest future possible – his preparing his special nephew who was my shadow cousin to accompany me all out and escort me all in had only been one of such preparations and precautions.

Thirdly, all the advantages that I enjoyed partly by virtues of birth had been rightly responsible for my success in my academic and semi-academic studies, and in my career too later on. Yes, my shiny luck had taken me to those highly-heralded universities and countries and, most importantly, I witnessed myself, in solid confidence and pure amazement, how the sun rose there in those overseas countries casting my lucky shadow longer and more colorful than those of Caucasians', and Africans' and other Asians'. Like that of my parent's, my string of successes seemed to keep running quite endlessly in my course of life, so endlessly that I began to believe, despite my academic and scientific achievements, that I was escorted by the 'lucky shadow' of my great-great-grandfather who died in Mecca on his eleventh pilgrimage. All in all, this series of successes had put me so high on a certain pedestal of confidence wherein I started to genuinely believe and confidently felt that I could achieve some stars that were hanging and dangling there in the blue sky. Yes, I grew such a confidence in me that I felt it running in my blood and creeping into my every bone. All this perhaps, as said by Kong Hu Cu, could only be told to those who had been dogged by a long series of good luck as I had been then. Likewise, thanks to the support of almost unlimited resources to my actually little-bit-above-average-intelligence, I too excelled in many sport competitions. Thus, continuous celebrations of appreciation merrily colored my childhood path. The appreciation and celebration which were also followed by a series of trophies and medals and the like did not only color and swell the walls of my bed-room, but also my physically wide chest and quite handsome a face. I was often told by the girls who adored me that I closely resembled Tom Cruise in his first movie "Far and Away" (Watch it! if you have not)

Fifthly, in addition to the almost unlimited privileges in my childhood, I was brought up with an always stand-by somebody who was actually my distant-cousin and who was my very immediate next-door neighbor – I could see his window from mine and a branch of a well seasoned Guava tree growing in between our houses allowed me to climb from my window and freely slot down to his private room as his house was quite lower than mine. Several reasons had cemented his sincere status as my stand-by somebody: First, he was a boy of my father's Minangkabau sub-clan called Chaniago. Thus, by culture and custom, he was my father's clan-base nephew. And as his own father died young, my father had to play a full-swing uncle to him as lined by Minangkabau custom: *Your children are to be carried fully, your nephews should be led by hands, and your villagers are to be duly considered.* Several other reasons had solidly been established by the courses of our lucks, his and mine, for the peculiar roles that we had to culturally play as cousins. Second, as an older cousin of the two, he was supposed to play a ground loser to me, accompany and protect me in those playgrounds wherever we played together. It was such a coincidence, however, that my cousin himself was an extra ordinarily jolly fellow who found great satisfaction in helping and pleasing others. For so many long years in our relationship as cousins, I could see so clearly that he naturally did not need any extra efforts to play a ground-losing role to me as an elderly cousin in Minangkabau's expectations. He was obviously born with a built-in instinct to get satisfaction from helping and pleasing others. He smiled his proudest smile when he could magically let me win and/or open the ways for me in many situations and conditions during our shadowy half-sibling relationship in so many settings. My cousin, Buyuang Panamuah, indisputably was the truest altruist to my lifetime wonder and regret.

The series of my lucky premises in my early life, however, had substantially been responsible for the maximum growth of some potential peculiar attitudes in my personality. Strong. So strong. I felt them. Right here, in the deepest part of my psychological and physical chore, I was born with the basic

instincts and senses of primitive men – to win every contest in life. And so solidly, these instincts and senses were tempered and developed by the inspiration and the obsession that I acquired from watching those vivid depictions of the victorious Spartan Heroes. Soon, I became passionately fond of participating in those competitive sports where victory brought every kind of deeper and deepest euphoria. And soon I became addicted to the sweet taste of glory and triumph and victory. Yes, so much addicted had I become to it at some points that I would, instinctively and spontaneously, find every way to achieve such fleeting pursuit of happiness. My animal instinct to win every game and competition grew to the point of no compromise that it had slowly and then totally blanketed my conscience and thus eventually blinded me from realizing the importance of observing the limit of tolerance and sacrifice and ground losing of others.

Kite flying, an innocent childhood contest, had been the most unforgettable and thus ever-lasting witness and memory to the altruistic favor rendered by my cousin Buyuang Panamuah to me. It was such a mystery, unbeknown to me up to now, how all these had been prepared - several twin and even triple kites whose interchangeable threads came to my control and to him and to me again alternately during the contest. Thus, as one cut-off or cut loose flying kite of ours, for one reason or another during the contest, had been automatically replaced by another, I turned out to be still the winner in the end of the contest and party. Threads and scales and balances of these winning kites must have been so cleverly knotted to be extra portable and highly mobile and, most important of all, so very interchangeable. But how could they, all these innocent tricks, be smuggled and operated in such a high altitude amidst the unlimited possible changes of the wind and the cloud? And what would happen should the tricks were disclosed somewhere down the line of the game? His clever maneuvers and body language and everything that he did in the field well assured me that I was well covered up and thus it could be concluded that: For all these, the risks were all for him to face and the credits were all for me to collect. And amidst all these, the winning streak kept on

running. And later on I learned that the magic power that he exercised was called *akuan* (an invisible spirit which helps to win and protect). And I was so moved to learn that my cousin Buyuang Panamuah started to learn all this from his early years with the only intention to help me to win these childhood games that we went to play together and to stand strong and tall in the adult life. I was moved to learn that to acquire this power to the level we needed to win kite flying, Buyuang Panamuah had to go through a long and so lonely retreat wherein he had to go through an and arduous sessions of fasting. But my addiction to and thirst for victory was much bigger than the whisper of my conscience. My cousin's sacrifice was just taken for granted and thus forgotten as time went by.

Domino, a very populist tandem game in Minangkabau, became the next medium of altruistic favors that My Buyuang Panamuah did for me. And, yes again, his favors had significantly contributed to my winning streaks. And the mysteries of his favors for me to win in the games grew more undecipherable. Yes, in our domino competition games, I found out, to my naïve but ambitious awe, where the impossible odds turned out surprisingly right to our favorable points and credits, and where many wrong twin mixings or twin combinations of tile numbers of ours eventually turned out to our favor and advantageous one mysterious way or another. Simply said, no matter how unlucky the tiles numbers had been in the early going of the set, down the game line something mysterious had slowly turned the tide to our lucky side in some mysterious way or another. And the changes of places during the breaks had only accelerated the faster turning of our lucky wheels. Our winning over the best player in the province, however, had knocked off the last nerve of my curiosity. I insisted on his explaining to me the reasons of our victorious marching in domino contest that had far gone beyond my actual ability and thus my expectation and that seemed to never reach the anti-climax. Much to my surprise, my cousin demonstrated to me how deftly and quickly and sharply he could pass and hide the shadowy twin or triple domino tiles and invisibly marked numbers of each

of it on and under the table. All these, he said, had been made possible by some shadows of the spirits of our great grandfathers, he said in a voice so deep in a solid faith. For all these, the risks were all for him to face and the wins were all for me to collect. Thus, the winning streak kept on running and marching. I shuddered to think of dangers that we would face though, if those tricks of playing with the twin or triple numbers of tiles were to be found out by the opponents against whom we often played for money as well as for contest. To assure me of my safety, he smilingly explained to me, in some language that went a bit beyond my logical domain - that he could actually guess those twin or triple tile numbers of mine and those of the opponents or read them through the reflection of my or their eyes balls and long or short breath, or even 'piercing them all, these tiles' by half closing his innocent eyes, and thus made them look more visible to him than to me and to them, our opponents. Thus, one way or another he could somehow help me win by means of those so complete of tricks and strategies and psy-war of domino game and contest. So the winning streaks came so natural and sound and square. Again I was moved to learn that my cousin Buyuang Panamuah, in his efforts to assure our continuous winning streak, had also advanced his *akuan* power and those of telepathy to the degree that he needed to always open the way for us to win in domino. I was more moved to learn that to acquire these powers to the level we needed, Buyuang Panamuah had to go through a longer and more lonely retreat wherein he had to go through a more arduous sessions of fasting. Yet, the addiction to glory in me had had grown much bigger. It had wiped out such an impression of sacrifice. His dedication and devotion was just taken for granted and forgotten as time went by.

Thus, one win followed another. The winning strikes of childhood and adolescent games readily and happily invaded every sector of our real life that we, as adults, treaded together, including those of academic and business and politics. It had me so high on a pedestal of success that I felt I almost touched some degree of eternity. It would undoubtedly, as I said so very convincingly in the early going

of my retelling, incite jealousy in every level of people in our society in our province. I was promoted “Datuak” in my clan at the age of 8, got my Ph.D. at the age of 26. I became the member of our local parliament at the age of 27 and the strongest candidate in a gubernatorial election in my town at the age of 28. I became all the shines, a rising star. And the history recorded clearly that in every win that I enjoyed, there had always been a tremendous sincerest share of my altruist cousin Buyuang Panamuah. I was shocked and moved when I learned that my cousin Buyuang Panamuah had advanced his *akuan* and telepathy power to those skills for the making of decoys, masks, camouflage, undercover, and subtle maneuvers that he needed to open the way for me to continue winning every game in my adult life especially that of politics and all trades of life that we treaded. I shuddered to the back bone of mine upon learning that to acquire this power to the level he needed to win all these Buyuang Panamuah had to go through a much longer and much more lonely retreats wherein he had to go through an arduous sessions of fasting. And more riskily, in addition to that, he had entered a black contract with some shadowy black spirits - he had to sacrifice some of his years and health to the realm and assets of that of the devils’ that practically meant that he had to cooperate with them for their interest and goals. Simply said he had sacrificed the most precious part of his living to me in order for me to keep on winning every game. Still the euphoria of triumph and the thirst for more of it had blinded me from stopping him to just think of my interest. His dedication and devotion was somehow taken for granted and forgotten as time by.

Still, to strengthen our entourage to ensure the continuation of my winning streaks, out of the blue Buyuang Panamuah introduced to us a couple of angels in the middle of our fiercer and fiercest struggle in our real life situation. Excelling in beauty but mediocre in head, the twin angels, to my astonishment, played their all in roles in between the two of us without any obvious signs of breaking the local mores and norms which happened to be quite conservative in Minangkabau land. The success of their roles had perhaps

been made possible by the fact that they were so closely similar in look and personality and taste and style. In fact, we could not tell one from the other. In fact, we were too busy to learn to tell one from the other. And what was it for knowing one from the other as they were there, and always there to serve us so sincerely and so indiscriminately. In no time they became our true cheerleaders twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week coloring what seemed to be our unstoppable streaks of wins. And most importantly, they played their roles to the degree of superb conformance and compliance as guide lined by Buyuang Panamuah. Although each of the twin had been given a quite clear list of job descriptions and assignment that is to accompany and escort one of the two of us, me and Buyuang Panamuah, both had actually but in so intelligent a disguise shadowed us, me and Buyuang Panamuah synchronously and simultaneously, in the light and in the twilight without making anyone's eyebrows raised in any of our relatives and peers and the enemies. Again unbeknown to me up to now, how all these had been prepared and executed - the twin angels seemed to have been knotted with some kind of well-prepared intelligent threads that could come to me and to Buyuang Panamuah and to me again (to the advantage of winning those games of life, of mine seemingly, yet invisibly) alternately during the holy course of our life. Thus, as one angel got to periodically temporary leave down the line, for one clear or blurred reason or another, had always been replaced by the other to assist, somebody mysteriously turned out to be still the clean winner in the end of the game and party. Threads and scales and balances of the angels must have been so cleverly knotted to be extra portable and highly mobile and so very interchangeable. Again, Buyuang Panamuah, in his altruistic smiles and so friendly and uniquely grinning had rest assured me that all the risks were for him to face and all the credits were for me to collect. Trapped in the boiling blood of my youth that led to the unstoppable addiction for more victories to satisfy the enjoyment of euphoria, my conscience, its development, had been neglected and thus remained underdeveloped. Thus, Buyuang's dedication and devotion to me, his cousin, were just taken for granted. The show must go on and the glory was

to be pursued even more. And now too, in addition to all these, victories were gained and enjoyed amidst the euphoria of sniffing of the more than the most fragrant perfumes, amidst the elixir of drinking too much of sweeter than sweetest honey, of those more crispy and more tender of chocolate out of God's unlimited inventory of blessings.

Along the way, as naturally expected some instinctive drives and feeling, mine that was quite clear and Buyuang's that was quite blurred and loose, had quite instinctively grown for the twins. The frantic pursuance of victories and success in our modern and capitalistic life, however, had delayed and postponed our knot-tying with the twins all in sine die. Thus, Buyuang Panamuah and I and the twins were hanging in the semi-engagement and semi married status for quite some time. And although each of the twins had been given a quite clear semi-ownership declaration and assignment that is to accompany and escort one of the two of us separately, me and Buyuang Panamuah, both had actually but in so intelligent a disguise shadowed me more and most in the light and in the twilight. And thus if, in addition to their fixed salaries and fringe benefits, some natural types of down-payment or advance-payment had been silently cashed in or transferred quiet mysteriously to the twin angles by me amidst the hustle and bustle of the pursuance of one glory over another, then these extra payments had to blame on the black-outs that so frequently happened in our town, Padang. Yes, the blackouts had to be blamed for my innocent groping in the dark for the so invitingly shiny and so colorful round numbers carried by the twin cheerleaders. One night and more nights and many nights, the blackouts, which were firstly blamed, were later on welcome through some holy and mysterious whispers. They were warmly welcome as the periodic groping had so naturally recharged and refilled the fire to continue the pursuance of glory and happiness. The addiction for the euphoria of glory had now not only overshadowed my conscience, it had somehow overtaken it and blinded it to the point of total perfection. So blinded had I been that I totally forgot the looming risk and danger of having too much of all good things.

Some strong brotherly insistence and reminder and persuasion from close relatives and true friends had finally pushed me to make my final decision to tie the formal knots with one of the innocent twins. To my surprise, I found family raising and parenting a truly wonderful and meaningful thing in my life as human. I enjoyed it more than that of pursuing victory and inhaling euphoria. I regretted the delays which all had been caused by the stupidity of pursuing fleeting victory ephemeral euphoria. And just as some true values of commitment and keeping a family started to grow so seriously in me, to my dismay, I lost my significant other, my choice of one of the twins, along with my only son, in an airplane accident. I was totally crushed. The coming of the first defeat had hit the hardest in the area that I thought was the most valuable thing in my life ever. It came at last, after a long streak of victories and euphoria. Darn Atun. Darn Magek. Indeed, it hit me so perfectly well. It was only a few days before when I was playing racing car with my only son who resembled me so much in so many ways. And when I was in limbo, crying and lamenting the loss of my only beloveds, my wife, Atun and my son, Magek, and regretting all these years of blindness and unreasonable delays, I woke up that one morning only to again find my beloved naïve Atun and innocent Magek sleeping right beside me. What a delirious joy and what a horror! "Oh my God, have I had just resurrected from my grave?" Repeatedly, I hit my chest so hard to find out if it were only a dream. Yes, it was a reality. I found myself again with one of the sweet twin angles, seemingly resurrected from her short-time death, along with an offspring as close in everything as the one that I had just lost. My short resuming again to the victory and tremendous happiness that always came along with it had been overshadowed by the shock that I had.

Upon my strict interrogation, the innocent angel on my right, right then admitted that they had alternately served and attended to me to the point of no reserves and returns. The flash of all those glorious wins in those games or contests, in kite flying and dominoes and elections and all the rest came

into my confused mind. And that in her so sincerest and so naïve confession she said that they had never attended to Buyuang Panamuah. Nobody else but me. And that they only tried to conform to and comply with the job descriptions and the rules as given by Buyuang Panamuah. And that they had sometimes disappeared into the blue to clean and cleanse the holy dust and the blessed brunt that accidentally happened due to my blind carelessness and their blind obedience and that it had all been secretly arranged by Buyuang Panamuah. And that she was actually one of the triplets, not of a twin. And that the boy sleeping on my bed now was only one of the happy bonuses of such naïve carelessness. And that this very boy was not the only bonuses in fact. There are more gratifications for me to see – eighteen of them actually, for, yes, they were not delivered by a couple of twin mothers, but actually by a triplet mothers. And yes, I met them later, to my horror or happiness, in my reality-based nightmare or maybe day-in-a-mare, true mare but yet on that very day, I found them, in almost countless number of such cute off-springs, and amidst in such a pseudo-heterogeneity state, I could but clearly tell that they were mine. All mine. Clearly mine, with all the signs of my so very natural birthmarks of any kinds.

I was totally overwhelmed and horrified, upon seeing those best cuts of mine – a peculiar feeling, kind of a mixed and confusing feeling, wherein the delight and the horror had been mixed so perfectly blended, yet in such a disharmony. I was all the confusion. Yes, I was driven to the craziest state amidst the feeling of joy and horror, by all the naturally naïve moving of theirs, so innocent look of those offsprings of mine. All of sudden that pain crept to the deepest inner of me, the pain I believe I would carry up to the end of my life and even up to those days after, thinking and worrying how I would be able to love them all, all at the same time equally and fairly and heartily. And how I could assure myself that I could bring them up to that degree of preparation where they would be able to survive, if not to excel, in this so competitive world of modern human. For they were all actually twenty-four altogether and were in fact in a series, so close to each other. In fact some of them came in twins and triplets and

quadruplets. What a horrible number of gifts of glories and triumphs. Not to mention still, those gracious princesses, my shadowy significant others who too, as I realized so well, need attention, love and indulgence. Yes, they all put me to a state of a total numb. I was so helpless and scared by the all these too much of a good thing and by the thought: What it would be like if it had to continue? Oh, Boy! They should not all be mine! Glories and triumphs and wins and, what else do we human call them and wish for them? They should not be seized more than we human can afford to take. Just like a hen should not be blessed with more than eggs it could hatch, a human should not be blessed with the number of glories it could handle. No, I can't take them all, as I am not able to love them all, all at the same time, equally and fairly and rightly. I can't! I can't! I can't! For God's sake, no!

Thus, my conscience bled, crashed, and rebelled. It totally refused to tolerate any more. Immediately in so very mixed feeling, my basic conscience screamed to the sky that these threads and scales and balances of all these should not have been knotted to be like that of dominoes and kites and of any human's games. They should not have been made interchangeable by any means for any reasons whatsoever. Never, I confronted Buyuang Panamuah and frantically asked him to stop all this total devotion of a cousin, which had lead to a tragedy of bending, twisting, and breaking every rule of religion and the custom of Minangkabau. Again, his altruistic smiles and so friendly and uniquely grinning tried to rest assure me that all the risks were for him to face and all the credits are for me to collect. This time, though, unlike in the contest of flying kites and or domino, and those many others in our real life, his smiles and grinning did not look as naturally sweet as they used to be to me. They looked peculiarly overdone. Yes, overdone. Far overdone, it did not assure me of anything then. Instead, it had only rung an unmelodious chore in the built-in balance of my conscience. He read my so unappreciative, deeply contorted face. In a deeper contortion, his face turned whiter than the shade of any the palest. Seemingly, he was so stunned to be denied his service as he had promised to my father who was his only

beloved uncle since the early going of our predestined life. With his exuberantly moving fingers, he frantically tried to explain some dangers, which were beyond my logical comprehension. I had never heard a voice more trembling and pleading and apprehensive than that. I said no. No more. And I explained to him that he had carried more than enough *lamang angek* than anyone could have taken and that the continuation would be highly intolerable in terms of religious and customs, And of course beyond the limit, far beyond the limit to what I could take of so very, very much of a good thing or sweet thing. I stressed and convinced him that we had indeed twisted, bent and broken some God's un-bargain-able rules and guidelines – the so much unpardonable ones. His face turned the whitest a human face could be. He was staring at me with his mouth agape, and face turning whiter than anything the whitest. He was stuttering but nothing was heard. In a deepest silence he turned his back and left. I turned mine too, instinctively, knowing that I could not bear seeing him leaving me in such a mixed and complicated feeling after all the beautiful memories in our childhood's and teenager's and the twenty some things' and all his altruistic sacrifice to me. I wished I could see him again in another setting of life, wherever it could be, wherever it could be, where there was no drive for the pursuance of victory, glory, and triumph, and most importantly to me, where I could repay him all what he had done to me in the ways that would not again be in conflicting with those words of God."

My new friend, in his so honest tell tale of a face, ended his recollection in a way that I could not explain quite easily. It seemed that it had indeed returned him again to the feeling that he actually had when he separated with an altruistic cousin of his. He had reached a level of sadness where, instead of bursting into tears, one got to a numb and stunned to a stone. More to himself rather than to me, he barely said, "I don't care if it will still incite jealousy in any people. The regret was indeed too much and too heavy for me to carry"

In my numb and stunt, I honestly have to admit that, in spite of the fact that his recollection had no trace of gun

shooting and blood shedding, his version of altruistic true story was much more moving than mine. What do you think? Or, have you heard or experienced anything more moving than his?

If you do, share it with me that I was not aware (which I later on found out) that at some certain points one of the two angels, quite alternately perhaps, had been taken to an asylum by Buyuang Panamuah for them to clean the brunt. And, if the brunt could not be cleaned and cleansed, the fruits were tenderly and sincerely saved and kept and given the safest asylum by Buyuang Panamuah. So blind had indeed I been that I was not aware at all that these had actually taken place in front of my so bare everyday life quit a number of occasions.



Source: airliners.net

3

**His Holy *Hijrah* from His Sinful
Bulging Sarong**

His Holy *Hijrah* from His Sinful Bulging Sarong

Who will you tell it to if you don't have a friend? So sang one of my favorite troubadours, Lobo, in his masterpiece back in the 1960's. "The song is too old, Dad, like you. Come on, change the disk, please!" So I am often mocked by my children when I take them to school in my brand new Innova. Always surrounded by their inseparable gang friends in their Ninja masks, they repeatedly renew and strengthen sworn membership loyalty by sharing *Silver Queen* chocolate. I really did feel the truth of that song lyric though, when my closest old friend Budi, who was actually my former lecturer to whom I owed so much during my studies at Andalas University, evaded me completely. And I just could not believe that Padang could swallow a man of Budi's stature, not to mention the fact that he, like most lecturers in Padang, used to teach in every private university in every town in the province. The song always brings me back to the trip I made recently to Padang, West Sumatera, my beloved hometown that I actually seldom visit due to my rootless matrilineal family tree, the trip that disappointed me the most, and almost cleansed my twisted Padang blood.

Minangkabau International Airport, Padang's freshly ribbon-cut pride that was once bombastically endorsed and predicted to be the catalyst for the acceleration of the development of the economy of West Sumatera, did not look anything special whatsoever to me. In fact, I found the luggage conveyor belt ran too slowly. And the belt itself, looking worse than half-processed dark black rubber of ex Lam Kiauw factory in Simpang Haru, seemed to have been wrongly designed so that it broke some of my luggage, which was full of various gifts and colorful doughnuts. To make it worse, I was warmly welcomed by the riot between the taxi drivers and those of the airport buses that created a two-hour jam.

There went all my nerves and patience. I started to swear to the sky. Had it not been for a kind and soft reminder by Pak Parto, the Javanese driver from the Party office, I would have shouted at those demonstrating drivers who seemed to be so selfish and uncaring in blocking the access road. The thought of meeting Budi and other old friends in Padang, however, calmed me down. Yes, I could not wait to see those who used to sometimes overtly and openly underestimate the odds of my political career in Jakarta in spite of their consistent wish and sincere prayers for my success. I could tell others, of course, of my landslide success, but it just wouldn't feel thorough and rigorous if it were not told to the so-called *asphalt*, groovy friends of mine. Especially the thought of meeting Budi again, my best old friend, brought my memory back to the time when we used to get together and sing our favorite friendship anthem during the resting hours of the weekend. Unbeknown to me, I hummed the same old song again:

Nothing Compares to Old, True Friends

*Nothing compares to them, old friends
And none so sincere and so true;
We hug them when we meet them
As blooming flowers welcome the dew;*

*No other friends could be dearer ones,
Though cloned from kindred mold;
And while we idolize the new ones,
We appreciate more the old.*

*Nothing compares to true friends
Standing by us in frequent fears,
Nothing compares to true friends
Dancing with us in glorious years,*

*That's why we wish our old true friends
Were always by our side
And we always long to meet them,*

Though they may wait on the shadowy side.

“To Pasar Baru, Pak Parto, the way to Unand Campus”, I told the driver while offering him my pack of G.P. “Keep the rest Pak, I’ve got another pack,” I told him assuringly. “It’s right in front of Bank BRI training center. I’ll appreciate the best and the safest speed you can make,” I explained quite impatiently.

Budi’s house did not look at all the same as when I had left Padang ten years before. Obviously, it had been totally renovated. A new unfriendly fence was there, standing about two and a half meters high almost totally blinding the passers-by. I was told by a neighbor that the house had been sold to a Chinese who had moved down from Medan a few weeks after the death of his long-ailing wife. My heart sank upon hearing the news. I gave the house a long, long gaze, and all of a sudden a strange feeling began creeping inside me. Clenching my mouth and shaking my head, I murmured something in disbelief that reminded me of my grotesque and lonely feeling when I gazed at what I was told were the remains of the house of my late daughterless and sisterless mother. And I heard again the buzzing whisper then that slashed my flesh and tore its way into my very inner being as a Minangkabau: “Poor him, he has got neither aunt nor sister. No one will inherit his traditional *Rumah Gadang*. He’s gonna be *punah*.” I closed my ears and asked Pak Parto to immediately start the engine.

Straight away, we headed to the house of Budi’s only adopted son in Siteba, an area, in spite of its obvious development projects, that had not lost much of its mysterious and unpredictable atmosphere. It was once bushy farming land with a thinly spread population where the notorious pickpockets of Padang, often referred to as street footballers, enjoyed their safe hide-out while outwitting the naïve police of the town.

“Oh come on *Cindapir*! How come you don’t know where your father lives? This is Padang, man, everybody knows

everybody,” I said crankily to Budi’s adopted son who was an employee at the Governor’s office.

“I would tell you if I knew. I know how close a friend you are to my father and how deadly important it is for you to tell him all your success in Jakarta,” he answered and continued, “He tried to sell the house as soon as my poor mom died. With deep laments and complaining, he kept telling me he could not stand living there as it reminded him of the long suffering of my ailing mom. So much did those depressing and stressful memories haunt him that he decided to move downtown contracting a room for himself and pushing me to look after his house during his vain and frantic attempt to sell it. I did not see any reason whatsoever for all the rush and the fussing about the house all of a sudden. I was bewildered to see him frantically offering the house to all his friends on campus and those in Padang at such a bargain of a price. Fancy, such a huge fourteen-room, two-storey house, on a one thousand-meter square site being offered at only five hundred million! Still nobody seemed to be interested in buying it for the first three months and that seemed to depress him so much. Guess what, God suddenly blessed him after some three months of restless waiting. He could sell it at 1.5 billion to a Chinese who might have been haunted by the tsunami threat. Having deposited his money at a Muamalat Bank, he left for Jakarta to arrange his early retirement. Since then, I’ve never heard of him anymore. My instinct, however, tells me that he is still in Padang.”

“But look! Padang is so small a city. No one can hide himself here,” I emphasized again.

“Right, but this is the reality. He calls me sometimes, and from the number I know he is still very much around. He would not give in to any requests for his address. He seemed to be so adamant to keep himself to himself. God knows for what reason.”

I looked deeply into his eyes and I could tell that he honestly meant what he said.

“All right,” I said, “If you find out any clue though, do please give me a call immediately. I beg you.”

I wondered why he tried to avoid me after all those ten great years that we had shared so mutually and peacefully. We shared everything, the house, the cigarettes and the pipe, the shoes, the socks and even the maid's services. In fact, we were once so close like true brothers, more than real brothers, even more than what they call blood brothers, I could assure myself. I stayed with him, with his family for quite a long time, for as long as my studies at the university and more. I respected him so much and not only for all the help that he had rendered me through my stay with his family. And not only for the money that he off and on 'half gave and half loaned' me when I needed a bail out during my studies. And I was not the only student then that he provided asylum and licked into shape. A bunch of us, most of whom gradually turned out to be some kind of adopted sons rather than just fleeting room renters. And all of us, thanks to his feeding us into his research project mills on economics that exposed our shoulders and asses to the rugged realities of life, have survived and become somebody in some walks of life.

Again, it was not only for all those good deeds during my stay with him that I respected him. Rather I liked and loved his way of treating me in our conversations that ran into so many topics. He treated me like a sparring partner. He needed me, of course, because I congratulated him on everything he earnestly achieved and proudly compared him to his contemporaries. I congratulated him and here and there, sent a hint and sign that he was better than all his peers. Most of all, however, I earned his respect and heart for my complimenting him for his truly devoted love to his childless better-half whom he so very carefully took care of after such a tragic triple stroke. Yes, I am the very living witness of his devotion to his ailing wife. Quite often, I saw him carefully tip-toeing, like Roger Moore, when she was in her sound and innocent sleep so that every small move he made around the house would not wake her up. “Oh! What a devoted husband!”

I often whispered to myself and of course sometimes pronounced to him openly. And I was deadly sure it was not meant by him as a way to pay back all he owed her during his studies in Gajah Mada. I was told by them both directly and indirectly that as they decided to tie the knot during his early years of studies, it was his true-hearted, blue-blooded working wife who bore all the matrimonial expenses in the early years of their marriage.

"I am the witness of your sincere spousal dedication to your significant other," I used to say as his alter ego.

"If the angel wrongly puts you in hell, I'll be the first to defend you as I strongly believe that your unselfish and careful care of her should grant you a wild card to paradise," I added smilingly.

My innocent and sincere jokes were always celebrated by hearty laughter and half-smiles and tacit grinning especially when the maid came to our shared table to routinely clean the always full and wet, double pipe-laden ashtray. Then immediately, after the death of his long bed-ridden wife, he so secretly slipped into the darkness. He hid himself so very far away from all his friends, especially, it seemed, from me.

I was so happy to spot Chingkunat along the way to the market, another room mate in Budi's house who was later helped by Budi to get a job at the university. He must know Budi's whereabouts, I believed.

"He retired and disappeared into the cloud," Chingkunat answered warily. "I've never seen him since then. Just shoot me if I know," he desperately convinced me. "I know how much you want to see him after all those years of your being away, not to mention your desperate need to describe to him your landslide success in Jakarta as a member of the house of representatives. I tell you what, once I bought him a shirt of his favorite color and model to incrementally pay back what he had done for me during my years in his house. Hoping to see his childish smile and cynical grinning when putting it on,

I exerted all my best efforts to find him, harder than you now, but in great despair; I had to give up my fruitless search. And you know what, every time I am eating in the University cafeteria, I often wish he would just appear from somewhere and sit by my side so that I could treat him to the best menu of Uniang's, to return the so many hundreds of free meals he gave me during my stay in his house. And every time I remember my mom, I remember too how he prepared a special room and the best food he could afford for my poor mom when she came to Padang to visit me."

I saw some mist in Chingkunat's eyes before he covered his grimacing face with his hands. He was so close to tears, when a cat, chased by a dog, ran wildly past our table. Then there were some moments of silence during which I tried to soothe Chingkunat, for I remembered that his mom had passed away before he could afford to take her to his so much awaited graduation and to the best Pizza restaurant in the town, as he had always wished. "It looks like he has been swallowed by the earth," Chingkunat talked half to me and half to himself.

"Oh Lord," I said. "How could it be? Nobody knows his whereabouts in a tiny place like Padang?"

"So it is, and like others, you have to accept it. Those who once shared his kind heartedness seem to have to accept it. We simply can't pay him back anything whatsoever in return. Anyway, isn't it the way it should be? Good deeds have their own virtues; they do not expect to be repaid. We shall go on with the memories of his benevolence though," he said and sighed.

"Yeah!" I nodded heavily. "Let me be the first to be notified by you should you find any lead to his whereabouts. I am dying to see him to reminisce about those hellish but beautiful years I peacefully spent with him"

I couldn't get through as the road was almost totally blocked in front of what turned out to be a mosque. I was right

to insist that Padang is a small city. There he was, the religious Salman Lantera, another old friend, who ambushed me and half forced me to join the Friday service.

“Come on! Where the hell else are you going? It’s Friday, Bro. You’ve got to perform your *Jum’atan*. Your dead father would regret seeing you missing our religious weekly obligation. Don’t you know that he always can see you from up there?”

“Oh yes, yes, sure” I replied quite nervously. “I am just struggling, trying to find a parking lot.”

Into the mosque I went, after a long and frustrating day of hunting for my true old friend, Budi. I realized I was quite an early mosque goer as I found myself sitting in the front row. I sat down and reluctantly shook hands with those to my left and right. As soon as I sat down, the question of my old friend Budi’s whereabouts started to nag me again.

“Why does he avoid me? Have I done something wrong? Have I offended him? What has actually happened that he is avoiding me?” Reminiscing deeply, I could eventually recall the traces of our last conversation before I left Padang that involved some heated debates about Budi’s forecasts of my odds of success should I try my political career in Jakarta.

“You simply won’t make it,” Budi said tartly. “You just can’t make it merely by your Minangkabau multi-twisting and poly-wagging tongue. Look Bro, it takes much more than that at the present time. Not to mention the money which is now claimed to be the god of most people. Hey, look! You have not even paid all the overdue rent of your room in this house. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Hey just kidding man”. He chuckled and twinkled his avuncular, funny but tricky right eye. Then he started to make so serious a face again and continued.

“What is more is the fact that you do not have any link and network whatsoever in Jakarta and, sorry to mention it honestly Pal, the data of your family tree shows that you do

not have any roots. Your late father is just a *wali jorong*. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Hey I'm just kidding. Therefore, I'd rather recommend you to get a stronger base in Padang for another five-year period. You may lose all your foundations if you prematurely push your luck in Jakarta. Come on, stay some more with us, strengthen your base and platform. At 28, you are still young. Time is on your side, so they say," Budi emphasized his points.

"I'll prove that you are wrong," I said so laconically and emotionally. "I've arranged my strategies as taught by Tsun Zu. A political arena is just like a boxing arena to me. They are both my playgrounds. I have one life to live and I take it as a boxing ring. The sooner I fight for the title, the better it is for my career, to see if I have the blood of a champion or just another journeyman," I added vehemently but quite unconsciously. "We'll wait and see," he replied, twinkling again his left eye at those who sat at our table. "My feasibility studies can forecast, I'd rather just say foresee, only your failure. I hope you are not offended. As a true friend though, I wish you good luck and may God always be with you." Yes that was the very last word Budi uttered in our modest farewell meeting. I can still clearly hear the echo of that very phrase, "God be with you."

"God be with you." The solemn religious greeting of the Friday preacher broke my retrospection.

"The topic of our service today is *hijrah*," the heavily bearded and moustached preacher continued. "Hijrah means moving away from one place that is not favorable for our faith to another one which is favorable. It was first done by our Prophet Muhammad. He moved from Mecca to Medina because he was threatened to be killed by those who strongly opposed his teaching. He decided to move as he was actually ordered by God to save his followers and most importantly the teaching that he abode by and tried to inculcate. And this *hijrah* tradition is for us to continue when our faith is endangered or contaminated by whatever it may be. Psychologically, even the trail of the memory of such

contamination should be rinsed off our mind to the best of our ability.”

The preacher continued the service in a deep and emotionally persuasive voice.

“The *Hijrah* can be costly and heart-breaking. It may cost us all that we have achieved and retained in our hometown. It means leaving behind us all the good will and foundations that we have accumulated. Also it means to leave behind us all those relatives and neighbors,” the preacher said sadly and sympathetically.

“Not to mention old friends,” he added and looked in my direction mechanically.

I could not quite catch what the religious teacher meant to say as I was disturbed by his crystal clear voice that sounded faintly familiar to me.

“Whose voice is it that is similar to his?” I said to myself and tried so hard to recall.

I tried again but failed to fully recognize it. I swore in my heart and condemned this damaged memory of mine which so often failed me when I needed it most.

“Damn it,” I said loudly in my heart.

“It’s time to join the Friday prayers, Sir.” A man’s voice woke me up from my pondering.

The man reminded me again and touched me on my shoulder as I was a bit late to respond to his kind reminding.

“Oh yes, yes, yes, of course,” I replied stammeringly in a nervous and guilty voice. “Thank you for reminding me, Sir”

I could not perform my mass prayers solemnly as the voice of the preacher who was leading them kept nagging in

my mind. Instead of saying all those verses that I had to in my prayers, I again tried to recall another voice that was similar to his.

“Whose voice is it that is similar to his?” Suddenly I thought of Budi.

“It is his voice that is close to it. But Budi never talked about religion in a sympathetic manner.” In fact, as far as my memory could recall Budi always made peculiar jokes about religion. Some of those jokes are still fresh in my mind.

“I’ll buy you a lottery ticket,” he cracked a joke one day. “And you buy me one in return. If my ticket wins the first prize, I’ll share it with you. And if yours wins, you’ll share it with me, won’t you? And later, when the angel at the door of heaven stops and blocks us from entering paradise and accuses us of having bought a lottery ticket and sharing the prize, we’ll deny it. We’ll argue with the angels and convince them that we did not buy the lottery ticket for the sake of winning the prize, but rather for the sake of strengthening our friendship which is at the core of religious teaching. I bought you one, and you bought me one in return. You are happy and I am happy. That’s what we meant to try to achieve. We did not mean to win the prize. The angel will be confused. And after a short and nervous consultation with his friends by the crowded, hustling and bustling door of paradise, the second angel will whisper: ‘Just let them in. This case is not recorded in our Pentium one computer, besides it’s getting more and more crowded at this gate.’ Thus we enter paradise victoriously.”

Budi continued the joke in a very non-believing voice and laughed in a sound worse than that of a devil’s smoky breath. Such was one of Budi’s popular jokes going the rounds in those days. The joke was told from mouth to mouth and modified to celebrate the glory of the spirit of the mischievous among us on campus and everywhere else. But then, how could this voice start to preach on the deepest meaning of *hijrah*, one of the most fundamental teachings of Islam? Is it

Budi or not? Can it be Budi? How can Budi change this much and this far?

Recalling the speech and voice in the Friday service I had just attended, I could clearly bring back the message delivered by the preacher:

“We hope we all can draw some meaningful lessons from this tradition of *hijrah* in this short Friday sermon. Also we hope we can continue this tradition when our faith is endangered or threatened. *Hijrah* will surely take us to the glory that is blessed by God the Almighty. The preacher ended the sermon in his most persuasive tone of voice.

And this last voice of his made me more suspicious of his being Budi, my old friend whom I’d been desperately looking for. I struggled to get the best view of him as he closed the holy book and walked down from the podium. The heavily bearded and moustached preacher looked at me lightly and then seemingly seriously. I saw a glimpse of mystery in his face but I couldn’t really believe and convince myself to decide if the preacher was Budi or not. Surely I wouldn’t let him go before I got the chance of talking to him to answer the puzzle. Because of this too, I could not say my Friday prayers solemnly. I could not take my eyes off his back. I tried to size up his back and recall and compare it to that of Budi’s that I used to know. If he were the same Budi, he looked so much skinnier and smaller than he used to be. But after a gap of ten years, all these physical changes could be taken as very natural. So deep was I in thinking and talking to myself that I did not realize that the prayers had come to an end. Not until I was reminded by the same man who reminded me to start the mass Friday prayers, did I learn that the sermon was ended. Soon I chased after the preacher and tried to get a chance to talk to him.

“Could I have a word with you, Sir, before you leave the mosque? I would like to ask you some quick questions about your preaching on *hijrah*. It was a great sermon. I am impressed,” I told him earnestly and persuasively.

"Sure!" he answered in a friendly manner.

"Could you wait a second, please? I need to wash my hands," he answered nervously.

"Okey, okey!" I agreed hesitatingly.

I saw the man who reminded me twice of the moment to start to pray and asked him if he knew anything about the preacher's curriculum vitae.

"Have you met this preacher before? Have you attended his services? Do you have any idea where he comes from?" I bombarded him with questions.

I was so disappointed to hear that he had never met him before and that it was the first time for him to attend the preacher's religious service. I was informed the same by other mosque goers.

Ten minutes had passed and the preacher had not yet returned. Unable to play patience, I rushed to the bathroom and tried to find the preacher again. He was nowhere to be found.

"Oh boy", I complained to myself. "Why did I let him slip away? I have been so stupid."

He must be Budi then. But why did he disappear and avoid me? "Oh please is there anyone out there that can help me undo this mystery!"

A little child met me and handed me a small envelope. I quickly took it and without bothering to ask who it was from, opened it and read it. The message in the envelope read:

"God be with you.

I'm sorry I have to leave earlier than I planned. I need to attend to an unexpected call. It would be nice to have some discussions on my sermon if we could meet again some other day. Oh yes, you reminded me of an old friend of mine. It would be nice to see you and him again on the same occasion. I am looking forward to the sweet reunion.

God be with you"

I was very disappointed indeed. I was shaken by the regret of letting him go right in front of my very nose. My ego was so painfully hurt. I clenched my right fist and hit my left palm repeatedly. I hit my head and slapped my face. I felt so exhausted. After some time though, I stopped blaming myself. "Give yourself a clear head, blaming will not help find him," I said to myself as an instructor of [A.M.T.](#) Just then, I saw a cafeteria in the distance. Someone was waving at me frantically right in front of it. It was Am Grembes, another childhood friend. "Oh! What a relief to meet a friend like him when in this level of desperation," I said to myself. Into the café I slipped quite unthinkingly.

"I hear you have been looking for Budi like crazy. Every corner of Padang talks about it. What's up, man? Is it your desperate need to tell him about all your success in Jakarta? Forget it. Everybody has read in the Padang newspapers about your being a member of the legislative assembly. Now forget him. It's not your fault any more as you have done your best to look for him. Why don't you let me taste your Jakarta money that you earned from bulshitting people, ha.ha.ha. It's your treat now. Come on! It's for the sweet old times."

It's too hard to say no to an old friendly buddy like Am Grembes. Into the glass I dipped and sank. I started to drink like in the old times. I guessed it wasn't so long before Budi came to me smilingly and handed me the tape of the tale.

"You watch and enjoy it. It's the tape of the years that we spent together as true friends who shared everything and everything." He tried to assure me smilingly. In an extra large screen I watched all those things that I had gone through with Budi. We shared such great times. Together we played so many kinds of sports. We were in tennis, badminton, and jogging. But it was in ping-pong that was refereed by the maid that we enjoyed the most happiness. Ping-pong in our friendship seemed to have been a quite unique combination of the realities of our life. We shared the ball quite fairly and yet we tacitly laughed at each other's stupid failures in catching

the spun or chopped balls as we took turns to hit and cheat to score. I could watch too, even more clearly now, the flip-flop partiality of the referee, in her swaying calls of the games. These more often than not seemed very much based on the brand-newness of the secret presents which were exchanged under the darkness of the clock-ticking of resting hours. Thus, the tacitly tolerated sweet cheats were exchanged not only between the ping-pong players, but also the referee. And thus, with the twinkling and the blinking of the eyes at one another, the three of us exchanged so many possible meanings amidst so many ambiguities in the forest of words and body codes of the universal language. It did not matter who cheated whom. It did not matter who scored in the game. We just enjoyed it in a group of three, so naturally. Nothing is wrong when friendship is right. So our united triangle of hearts proclaimed the glory of our brotherhood shared in the loudest whisper amidst what could be declared by us as a holy adventure. All came into play and peacefully and harmoniously developed our peculiar friendship. "Oh, If I could ever relive it again," I whispered quite unconsciously.

Yes, we sincerely shared everything like true brothers, may be more than that. And the tape revived it all. We peacefully shared ashtrays and cigarettes, shoes and socks and of course the maid's innocent-refereeing services. It was so clear that I felt I could touch anything and anybody there. More clearly now, I watched too, in the shadowy background of Budi's house, the hanging cage of the three singing and chirping birds of the same feather that perfected the unique decoration of the house of shared unity. And the female one, who was waltzing like a sexy cheerleader and standing between the two smiling and grinning males, softly and passionately and extra-indulgently cleaned and cleansed the innocent feathers of the latter two, one after another, one after another, left and right, left and right, using her pretty and sleek and shiny beak. "Oh, how beautiful our life was!" I again whispered quite unconsciously.

A short part of the tape though seemed to have been intentionally deleted so that I could not see what was actually

going on. I became so curious. I closed my eyes and tried hard to concentrate to see, to penetrate and reminisce. Slowly and painfully, I could barely decipher that misty bathroom again. It was the moment when I carelessly pushed the unbolted emergency bathroom door, after my unscheduled return home, and watched Budi frantically covering himself in a large bulging sarong, trying to conceal something that was quite obviously a funny moving thing. I instinctively pretended not to see Budi. "A half-significant other," I carefully whispered to myself as I did not want Budi to hear. Quickly, I left him with his mouth agape but still, perhaps from his basic ping-pong instinct to automatically counter a startling smash, I thought I heard him say seemingly more to himself, "*Our* half-significant other". His desperately low but lightning instinctive retort struck the back of my black jacket. I could not help turning back. And as the sarong was lifted up a little bit higher by his frantic counter-attack, I saw a glimpse of the silhouette of the referee's anklet which I had secretly bought in Bukit Tinggi for so special a present. A shade of pale regret crept across my face. Then, in a squirrel-like sprint they left me with my mouth agape. Luckily, the phone rang by my side. I answered it and told his bed-ridden wife to call again in a while. "He is in the middle of his deepest yoga meditation," I said politely and softly in what could be the most innocent and plain tone of a shy child, imitating her Javanese *kromo inggil* soft and melodious accent.

"Wake up! Wake up!" Am Grembes shook my shoulder so hard and so rudely. "Sorry dude, you only drank a few glasses but look! You got a hell of a kick like this! You are not a third of the man you used to be".

"Where is Budi? Where is the tape he gave me?"

"What! Budi? The tape?" Am Grembes replied puzzlingly. "I told you he disappeared. And he does not want to meet us all and, it seems, you especially".

Oh yes? He did not give me the tape? I whispered quite loudly to myself.

I rubbed my blurred eyes and slowly began to unfold the mystery of why Budi does not want to resume his friendship

with me. And I started to regret again, I mean of accidentally seeing him in that sarong with the half-significant other. At the same time though, I slowly began to comprehend why that unintentional accosting of him in that bulging sarong was not in harmony with his new and holy career in his pension years. It seemed so essential for him to find a way of redemption and forgetting that he needed to make a total *hijrah* from any slightest traces of such stigma.

“Look at you, pal. What a mess. Let me drive you home”. Baldy Cimporong, another old cafeteria friend, offered me his sincere favour. As I had not yet gained a clear head after Am Grembes’s treat, I nodded my head at the offer and handed him the key to the car. With a cloudy head I told Cimporong about all my efforts in searching for Budi which had ended in vain. And that Budi was not only my true friend but also my last and distant cousin from my mother’s line in what will be my *punah* matrilineal family. Cimporong slowed the car down and eventually stopped it. He shook his head. He seemed to have listened so attentively with his understanding as a Minangkabau man who was brought up in a small village with the traditional and matrimonial sentiment. The disappointment was mounting so that, quite unconsciously, I told Cimporong all those things that might have been the reasons why Budi had avoided me so resolutely. In detail, I described to Cimporong all that I had watched in the tape that Budi gave me. None was filtered. He seemed to listen with more sympathy and empathy. This time, though, he could not shake his over-sized and balding head. He drove the car even slower and listened to the detail of my naive confession with his gaping mouth and thick, protruding lips. Some moments of silence followed before Cimporong could comment in what can be likened to the deep tone of a preacher:

“Simply concluded then, you are the shadow of his unforgivable sin, the very trigger of the sinful memory that you shared with him. For this you and your shadow have to be totally avoided. Oh, how pathetic! ” Cimporong said while blowing his G.P’s smoke. “Stop searching for him and take us to Pizza Hut again before you leave for Jakarta,” he added

even more seriously, now in his Padang tricky accent and tone, while resuming his driving to the normal speed.

The disappointment was so choking that it put me to the deepest pondering in my stream of consciousness. My main and pure objective to come to my beloved city Padang seemed to have fallen apart. It was true that I wanted to prove to Budi that his foreseeing of my future before I left Padang for Jakarta was wrong and that the odds had turned out so well for me, but my need to meet him was actually motivated more by another plain but stronger drive. As I always honestly feel in my labyrinth of solitude, my very inner being as a Minangkabau needs Budi to get to the only distant root of my bloodline because he is the last cousin of my clan as told by a reliable colleague in Jakarta. And as for the success that I achieved in my political career, I would like to confirm to him that it has been so much to his credit, as I often modeled my political tricks and maneuvers on many of those that he secretly demonstrated to me in taking such care of his beloved better-half and a shadowy one under the very same roof for ten great successful years.

After some moments of silence though, much to his delight, I could pronounce my reply to Cimporong's wise comment. "You are right, Bro. We'll just search for other old, asphalt friends in Sate Laweh and Nam Yan." Then, I heard a repetition of charismatic whispers in my crystal clear heart that slowly developed into a strong foundation of commitment. "I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace. I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace." My chanting turned to such a solid faith that I was not in the slightest tempted by the sudden and mysterious appearance of a passing lady with the sparkling silhouette of an ankle. Walking hand-in-hand with her was the living and moving copy of a ten-year-old memory who resembled a mixture of familiar shadows, Budi's and his true friend's. I ignored them adamantly, although I could see them as clearly as they walked right beside me in my slower-and-slower moving Toyota Camry, holding the key to the secret memory that I had been desperately hunting for. Thus, the ray and the

shadow of the memory which I had at first hunted for so frantically, were then just let go, enveloped and followed finally by the whispering of my chanting: "I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace. I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace." I increased, and again increased the intensity of my oath, chanting while clenching my mouth and shaking my head. I, like Budi, needed to perform a holy *hijrah* from the memory that provided me a spring-board for much of the achievement in my political career but that seemed to have given Budi an everlasting unforgivable blemish that pained his. Under the shadow of my lodging, Cimporong stopped the car softly, and smilingly handed the key to me, amidst the more intensive chanting of mine: "I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace. I have to leave Budi alone to *hijrah* and preach in peace."

Note: The story is based on the description of a heart to heart confession of a friend of mine. According to his confession, the regret that he suffers most is that he continues to use the cheating strategies (that he developed in cheating his sick wife for ten years), in his more and more successful career as a member of the legislative assembly.



Source: airliners.net

4 | The Curing of the Beloved Insanes

The Curing of the Beloved Insanes

(April 9, 1954: In a notary office)

I have to make it the soonest. I have to give away ninety percent of my hardest-earned assets to the orphans and the needy.

What? Ninety percent? Are you kidding? I have prepared the papers for those like you quite often. The highest number up to now has just been a thirty percent. He gave it away to the charity. I met him again after some time and he seemed to be in such a deepest regret a human could plunge into. But ninety percent is a number that would startle the angels from all angles of beliefs...

Yes, read my lips. Ninety percent.

I guess you should think it over. Why don't you give yourself a clearer head?

Did you not hear in the beginning of the conversation that I have to make it the soonest? I want to have my one piece of mind again. I have performed a special prayer *Istigharah*. I am quite sure I have made the best choice.

Well, well, may I suggest that you should reconsider it as you have two children and a wife? They are, as I observe, have been your lovely very immediate family members. We haven't seen or heard of them disappointing you to the point of no return. Please reconsider it. I insist on this as a friend.

Well. You fail to read me. Now I am talking to you as client. You either prepare the papers or I will go and see another notary. (While standing and collecting his hat)

(Sitting still, seemingly being so dumbfounded)

Ok. Then. Will you pronounce your decision before I take my leave?

Well, I'll, I'll, I'll arrange the papers tomorrow.

Ok. Make sure you do not contact my wife behind me. Those certificates are on to my name. You do not need to contact me. She will never understand it at all. It will burn all her nerves and lament all the regret of marrying me, which is exactly the opposite of all things in her love letters to me.

(The next day. April 10, 1954)

These are the papers that you need to sign. My secretary will read them to you all so that you are fully aware of this very sensitive legal process in which you disinherit your family members ninety percent of your fortune. Once you sign it you are in the process of losing ninety percent of your assets that you described meticulously clearly in these papers. You still have time to change your mind before the court sign all these papers. And that will not happen before Thursday afternoon. Immediately call me direct to this personal number of mine should you change your mind.

She can read it in the corner, if she has to read it. I'll just listen to it all the while we talk about some other more interesting topics.

But you have to listen to it attentively.

Look! I am listening. I pretend or not, it's my choice. And she does the reading as the legal procedure. Make it easy please. I am tired of all these humpty dumpty red tapes.

Okay, Okay Sir. As you wish. Rina, please start the reading in that corner. Read it a bit loud so that it is still within our hearing distance.

Now, listen. I appreciate your quite natural attention to my case. But I will appreciate you more if you could kindly

separate it from our personal relationship. Treat me as your client professionally! Then I will appreciate all your services the most.

Okay, okay. I won't ask you no more to reconsider it. I apologize for not treating you professionally. I condemn myself for being too mellow as a friend. Sorry. Sorry.

Good. Now I'll appreciate you even more if you hasten the procedure in the Justice Office. I shall pay you ten fifty percent bonus from the total cost.

Okay, Sir. Okay, Sir.

The reading is done, Sir. (Rina the secretary)

Okay. Thank you. Good job.

Thank you, mom.

(April 14, 1954)

Here are the copies of the papers. Other original sets are kept by the Dept of Justice and another set by my office.

Now, that I have concluded all my services to you, and there is nothing that one can do now to change the decision in the papers, shall we resume talking as a friend again?

Sure. Thank you, Tambi. I appreciate everything you have done for me. Now what is it that you want me to talk about?

I would like to ask you as a friend why you decided to give away ninety percent of your wealth to the orphans and the needy? I am dying to know what's behind it all.

Yes, but not now. I hope you do not talk about one's death of curiosity when it comes to friendship and relationship. I'll break the spell of the secret. I'll let you know all the truth

there is to it before a cruel kind of death pick us apart. However, wait 'till things have cooled down enough. I know that my wife had come to see you several times. And I highly appreciate your professional ways of making her understand it all. She has just turned all her back to me totally since then, though. There is no more good night kisses. It's the hardest part of it all. However, I'll go to Mecca to perform my secondary pilgrimage. I'll break the spell after that so that there is no more, no such as dying or death of curiosity to the mystery between two childhood friends.

April 9th, 1955. (In the Minangkabau International Airport, after 2 months elapsed)

Fancy meeting you here. So we'll fly the same flight. Now that there is a considerable delay and it has been two months since we last met, would you keep your promise to a friend to break the spell of the mystery? Let's go to the Executive Lounge. Break the spell as you once promised. Treat your friend in a professional way. I am dying to know all there is to it. Look! You look even more confident and cheerful after all these things.

I am quite surprised that you still remember the case of mine. Well, so many things have happened, you see. A long the way I had quite changed my mind not to tell anybody of this mystery. For a friendship that started from a childhood root, however, I would break the oath to break the spell as I promised you. But why don't I charge you for this? You have been charging me all the treats in our friendship, perhaps overcharging me for all the legal services that you have done for me. It's not that I have gone poor since I gave away ninety percent of my fortune to the orphans. You know what? The gains that I got from some shares that I bought had replaced the financial dent of my giving away to the charity. They just grew insanely, as insanely as the insanes could be. I am almost as rich as the man I used to be when I gave away that amount last year. All investments have just grown so very insanely. My wife e has started to kiss me again since then. Now even more passionate. You see my pimples grow again at this age of

fifties. It suddenly reminded me of your popular say about the maximum depth of a woman's love to her husband.

Okay. Good for you. I am waiting for more business then when you plan to invest in real estates and others. But now as it has been a year of waiting, why don't you just start it, tell me all there is to it behind the giving away of ninety percent of your wealth to the orphans last year!

All right Bro. You know that I started my career as a paramedic. I am sure, though, you have forgotten it all as you are more interested in the business that I gave you since I became an automotive trader and some diversifications of this all.

Yes. Bro. Honestly I forgot so much of your historical background, your education and the beginning of your career. Anyway, that you reminded me, I remember you once studied in the Paramedic School in Jati. It's where I sometimes picked you up by my old scooter for our ride to Padang's Beach.

Right. But you did not come to pick me up by Scooter. You came to borrow my scooter. The scooter belonged to me. It was given by my adopted father, Adek Kedoh, the king of the street boys in Simpang Anam.

Okay. Sorry. Bro. That's right. It belonged to you. And it was a great factor in the development of our childhood friendship.

Good. Now the recording is corrected. I hate your twisting all these childhood points that we shared so sincerely.

Now. Where will you begin to break the spell? Why did you give away ninety percent of your damned fortune to the orphans?

Perhaps you have forgotten it that the soonest I graduated from the Paramedics School, I started work for the Mental Hospital in Ulu Gaduik.

Yes. It came quite fresh to my memory again.

It began from this point. From the Mental Hospital in Ulu Gaduik. I learned a very horrible as well as a very illuminating point of life and insanity. I saw a very close relationship of the two and a very sincere one indeed. I do not know how to explain the relationship of the two in a simple way. I guess I need a syllabus or a curriculum or a lesson plan. I will try to explain it though in a simple manner so that we two can understand it clearly.

I am confused why your donating ninety percent of your assets have to with to do with insanity. And why the hell do you need a syllabus, a curriculum and a lesson plan. Are you trying to imply that you are in the process of losing your mind as the effect of your services in Gadut Mental Hospital? Anyway, I will try my best concentration to understand your explanation. I hope it is not mixed with your fantasy. So what's next?

I said I learned a very horrible but a very illuminating relationship between life and insanity. But I do not how to explain it a simple way. Let me just go on anyway, any which way and hopefully we together will understand it along the way.

Okay, okay, what's next? Make it quick and easy.

I learned a very horrible fact that the most frustrating and stressful thing in life is having somebody in your family losing his or her mind. It is far higher than losing one's job, than losing one's spouse, than whatever. You name it, it is higher than that. Than anything. It puts you to the most breakable point of your nerve. It makes you feel so helpless and so hopeless and so worthless. It just shuts up all your happiness to all hell points of life. Everything seems to be so heavy and dizzying and killing. That's what I see in the sufferings of those who go through this unluckiest course of life luck – having someone in your family losing his or her mind.

What's the dickens do you mean by these so long an explanation? I cannot imagine if it is put into a curriculum and syllabus and a lesson plan. It would be more impossible to comprehend. Can you just explain it in an easy and plain manner?

Okay. I am telling you that I saw the father, the mother, the brother, the sister and the cousins and the immediate and even the distant relatives of the insane who were hospitalized in Ulu Gaduik hospital during my service there bearing the all the unbearable pains. They looked the most miserable humans in the world. They looked much more miserable than those insane under the therapy themselves. They looked much more miserable than those despairing psychiatrist, psychologist and all those involved in the therapy. They looked so very blank and hanged and horribly worried and anxious and upset and so on and so forth. I guess we need to invent more words to describe their psychological sufferings.

I see. It's quite reasonable and very understandable. I see some insane doing the strip tease on the open road and climb the wall too at the same time. Yes, they are very stressing. I could imagine how stressful the parents and the relatives can be.

The immensity of the suffering that the insanity brings, the certainty of its horrible growing, the strangling of all the worries and the shames and the anguish that it causes, made all family members numb in despair, not to mention the fact that insanity is actually incurable and irreversible. Worse comes to worst, all brought the beloveds into unbearable pains of all kinds. Pains that inevitably force them to surrender, at last to despair. Despair, yes all despair. To the degree that I see their faith in themselves crumbling so instantly. In a way, it can be likened to flying kites swept by heavy stormy rain that come so suddenly and unexpectedly. I see even their faith in God crumbling so tragically very much like the collapsing of sand castles on the beach as swept by the moon waves. To top their feeling of despair, they learned that

there was no cure whatsoever to the insanity of their beloveds. They were shaken to the deepest root; suffering to a degree like never before as their beloved insane, relatives or family members, caused them endless embarrassment, so deep indeed, so deep to the point of no return. No angles of happiness, no soothing, no solace of any forms or kinds that can ease the pains of this all.

I have seen an insane whose father was in the army who had been to those wars in Aceh and East Timor. He had beheaded several enemies and seen heads of his friends sent to him by the enemy in a bag. He had tortured some enemies slowly to death and was once himself tortured by the enemy so close to death. Still, he came home with an intact piece of mind. He was still capable of describing those atrocities of the war he went through with all glorious smiles in his face. As if those things happened just naturally. He described these atrocities with even some vainly arrogance in his tone of voice. Yes, the stress of war did not break his nerves. What a tough guy. But when his only child lost his mind and had to be sent to my mental hospital, he was crumbling like a wet, wet, thread. He was so pathetic. There seemed to be no sign of toughness in his character any more. He was all lost. You see, I saw that having an insane somebody in one's family is capable of killing all the strongest nerves to the root. May God always place insanity far away from us all. Amen!

Then there was an insane whose father was the most popular religious teacher in the town. People from all walks of life, from all faiths in the city acknowledged his degree of faith in God. It was totally unshakeable. So, they said. Once, the father experienced such a tragedy in which three of his six children got killed along with two sons in law. Five dead bodies were lying in the middle of the house. Amidst the so many people who came to pay condolence, however, the father, instead of shedding tears as expected in most cases like this, started, resumed and continued to give what seemed to be a longest religious service in a condolence gathering. He was performing an unshakeable faith that should be recorded in the Guinness Book of Record. However, when his daughter

lost her healthy thinking and had to be sent to my mental hospital, He crumbled like a yellow bird got shot in its head. Soon he was seen to have missed his mandatory five-time prayer a day. He was seen to have cursed God for giving him such a test – having a child who lost her mind. Yes, he said all these profanities of the street too. Oh, may God always place insanity far away from us, all. Amen!

Then, there was an insane whose father was the most revered professor in the town. He taught syllogism, mathematics, and arithmetic. He was also considered the most logical consultant in the governor office and in the municipality office. He had been acknowledged by a number of universities at home and overseas for his logical thinking. Honoris Causas are running uncountable. When his most beautiful wife turned insane, however, he looked the most miserable a human can be. And he started to behave like an idiot. He was all the illogical. He lost all his faith in the logic of medical science and other sciences to the degree that he started to frantically visit all the paranormals, all the alternatives, all the quacks of magic in the country to get helps to bring his beautiful wife back to sanity again. He started to blame syllogism and then God for creating two polar of human minds namely sanity and insanity. He, too, lost his mind eventually. May God always place insanity far away from us, all. Amen!

Every sector of life has a tricky angle of its own. So horrible is the reality of having someone going insane in the family, and so discouragingly complicated has the challenge been to cure the insanity, the actual problem to this all is quiet easy to solve indeed. I saw an opportunity to make a fortune in this all. Yes, what has been a so much terrorizing pain to them all was looming to me as the most potential gold mine of mine. I was all smiles when one morning I was waking up with the idea of putting them, the insane, to sleep, to the deepest sleep, to the real sleep.

Moderate-intelligence and huge of kindness and ground-loosing attitude of my two partners, a doctor and a chemist

became a huge factor in my hospital establishment. With them besides me, I opened my mental hospital and have some intensive and progressive commission-basis agents in Ulu Gaduik Mental Hospital to move some of their insane to mine, to my program the so called the saving and the total curing of the insane. The richest, the most desperate, the most irreligious, the most disturbed by the insanity of the beloved patients. They were the most prospective customers. The agents told them I was the best choice. They could never do any better. In a month, my hospital rooms were outnumbered and the waiting list started to swell like that of the dance of the newly possessed insane. I need to use a very tight and rigorous and tactful system to project the timely coming of the deepest sleep of my patients. The terminal depends on some carefully weighed factors, the calculation of which had to be so very best carefully made as no slightest mistake is allowed to come into being. It's the reading of the feeling, emotion, anguish, worry, degree of despair, faith in God and some other sensitive factors that can only be read by a certain sets of combination of gauges. It is to my amazing talent, my mind could read them all so accurately. The combination of gain and risk and the balance of it. The timing, too, is a significant factor in the whole game. The plan and the execution have to be made so carefully so as to save every one's face and conscience.

Thus I thought so hard on this simple point of solution to what I said the most stressful thing in life. I mean to sing them, the insane, to sleep. To lure them, the insane, to sleep. Because after all, to sleep is an easy door to escape from this most misery of life - going insane. And the key to a complete success in this so sincere of a game is to get the insane into deeper and deeper and at last the deepest sleep. With a smile on the lips at the last minutes of the innocent look of the insane so that everybody who has some stakes in the venture has a reason to conclude: He is happy to get to the deepest sleep. He goes with a smile. Nothing to regret. No one to blame. This is the best decision from God. Business as usual. The show must go on, with, or without you.

So I put them to sleep. My lucky VIP patients. First I indoctrinated them to love just one thing – to sleep. I find all the lullabies that work. I find the best lyrics that put the insane into the deeper and deepest sleep. I improved them with the help of my musician friends. Of course, I have a very well graded curriculum and syllabus. I firstly put them to a moderate degree of sleep by means of some innocent and naïve lullabies. The following is one of them:

My friends, my friends
Better you listen to me,
I have a better song for you
Life is just a dream, often ain't so happy.
Sleeping my friends, is more friendly
As it gives us all the dreams, all so merry

So, into sleep we get, together,
Deeper and deeper,
Until someday, we get to its end
Where we sleep forever
And all the dreams are better and better
Into a deep sleep we go,
Into a deeper sleep we go,
Into a deepest sleep we go,
Till the worries are no more

To my surprise the lucky insane in my hospital learned to sleep so well and so fast. They must have broken a number of Guinness Book of Record should all these had been openly recorded. They all went to a sound sleep. They all slept so long and so soundly. Some slept on the couch. Some slept on the floor. Some by the toilet door. Some on the chair and on the table as well. It does not matter where. They slept and slept as we all planned. I helped them to make it deeper and deeper. And when they did not sleep, they sang the song.

Into a sleep we get,
deeper and deeper.
To put all the pain away, as
Life is merrier deep in there.

Life is merrier deep in there,
In the sleep that we sleep away.
There will surely be a hideaway
Where all the worries are shied away

The song was so solemnly sung in chorus and recorded in the best means of professional recording. They were carefully played for the parents of the lucky patients when they came to visit their beloved blood lines. They were so happy. They laughed to tears. Could they be made happier? They were not only saved from the worries that killed. They were amused too.

Next, the idea of singing together was combined with the idea of customer's focus and customer's satisfaction. I called the father or the mother, or the uncle or anyone who is the most concerned with the insane patient, the ones who had been paying the hospital bills and who was willing to sacrifice more and more. I called each one of them very periodically and regularly. Thus, instead of them calling me, I called them. I called them in the right times, in the most strategic times. Firstly, I called them before they went to bed so that they could get to the deepest sleep, so well and so soundly so that they could perform the best the next days. Secondly, I call them in the morning of Saturdays, so that they could enjoy their week-ends to no limit. Sometimes I called them when they are away on duty trips so that they could meet their shadowy others, short or periodical ones, with the fullest concentration to take away all the stress of life and forgot all the interfering disturbances from insides and outsides in any forms and looks. I gave them calls and calls that always put all their worries to sleep. Yes, the calling of them by me telling them that they were all rights. They were so fast asleep. A very nerve-soothing sleep for us all. A very great relief for us all.

He sleeps so soundly like forever. What do you think?
He sleeps so soundly like a very healthy newly born baby,
He sleeps so soundly as if nothing happens,

He sleeps so soundly to the point they do not know where the border of sleep and death,

He sleeps so soundly as if they are already in paradise,

Then, we all sleep so soundly in the evening so that we can continue all the business of the ephemeral life. Yes we all can sleep as soundly as the all stresses and the anguish are gone.

The call that varies in styles to suit each customer but that kind of deliberately calls that whispered quite clearly: "Stop all kinds of worries. He is now in a deep sleep. You can be back to your normal life and get the most of every angle of it" Never was a call made to convey an emergency, or anything that would ruin or disturb their routines of the day, the week and the month.

And me, too, I slept so soundly, tired after counting and calculating the crazy coming flow of payments, presents, tips and bonuses, and all the thanksgiving cakes and chocolate.

Thus, fragile and ephemeral the relief could be, the regained confidence was there again, in those parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters and the relatives of the insane. The pressure of the stress from having somebody insane was slackening bit by bit. However ephemeral and fragile it could be, they all could again function socially. They could work and enjoy their life in almost every factor all there is to it. They had their mind in one rounded piece again, what a relief! Of course some credit-in-silence had to be very carefully given to my retired-turned-active chemist Inyiak Ureh, the best chemist in sleeping pill shadowed home-industry. Some degree of success was due to his cold hand that could grade the dosage of all kind of naïve sedatives, so smartly to the degree of insanity of each patient and the planned pace to at last put them to a real deepest sleep. More credits, perhaps, had to be given to him regarding the difficulties of measuring the degree of the insanity of each beloved patient that is badly needed to accurately determine the dosage. All these factors that contributed to it had been as significant in the making of the whole game as success. They could make it, a very

concentration was given on medical efforts to put to the lucky patients to the well-programmed and constructive sleep with clear objective as stated in the silent memorandum of understanding, tacit or proclamatory – a clear objective in line with syllabus, curriculum and each detailed lesson based on the most sophisticated theories of medical science. So all these insane things had to be explained objectively and scientifically in some seminars, if they had to take place, to those peaceful devils that were standing by our side.

All the success achieved was paid off so very immediately. The hospital income came in an insanely bigger flow, much bigger than my totally naïve and sincere expectation. In a much bigger flow of calculation in my feasibility study. Simply said, huge income flew wildly and insanely into my account. Still, money has its most insane evil that drives us human to the point of non-stop, a kind of no return race. I became greedier. A surprisingly package of bonus from a group of totally relieved parents and relatives of a most lucky patient who had been put to the deepest, the last terminal of a peaceful sleep triggered my grabbiness for more and more money. A more insane plan came to brain. A double flow of income: A maximum bonus from putting a patient to the deepest sleep and the coming-in of a new more prospective patient. Then, I carefully and deliberately, in the sound of silence, suggested to the parents or the most concerned family members of the lucky insane a most logical solution. I made them begin to kind of think how nice it would be if we totally get rid of the insanity of having the insane, and of the insane as well. We started to tacitly understand each other that the best ways to put things to sanity again is simply putting the insane to deeper and deepest sleep. Another more insane push to gain more income came from the swelling of the waiting list which all joins the insane drive of the greed in me. They all pushed me think the hardest and to utilize all my potential in creating every trick to achieve the ambitious dream to get the double income target I had to use a very tight and rigorous and tactful system to project the timely coming of the deepest sleep of my patients. The terminal depends on some carefully weighed factors, the calculation of

which had to be so very best carefully made as no slightest mistake is allowed to come into being. It's the reading of the feeling, emotion, anguish, worry, degree of despair, faith in God and some other sensitive factors that can only be read by a certain sets of combination of gauges. It is to my talent, my mind could read them all so accurately. The combination of gain and risk and the balance of it. The timing, too, is a significant factor in the whole game. The plan and the execution have to be made so carefully so as to save every one's face and conscience.

My talented brain in the whole game was endowed and bestowed with the ability to calculate the most potential patients. First it is to be measured in terms of the degree of desperation of the caring parents and the financial sacrifice they seemed to be willing to tender. In some conversations, initiated by me, of course, we exchanged what seemed to be some tacitly understood messages that yes it would be better if the beloved insane were put into some deep sleeps. Some real sleeps that are close to the so called sincerely persuaded sleeps like those of a mother who sang sweet lullabies for her baby to sleep. Or even some sleeps that will put them or accelerate their journey to the beautiful ends that will open the door to the simple but normal life to the insane himself/herself when there is no more horrible happening related to that of being or having somebody insane. Everybody would welcome that kind of thing to happen.

Thus I learned the most workable strategies to send the holy message to solve their insanely-driving stress from having an insane somebody in their family. Messages that have to be delivered in a very in indirect, tacit, condoning, permissive, shyly welcome and expected for, shy wish, Give us the exit that will not only make anybody feel guilty, rather it will make them feel yes they have done their best to cure the beloved insane and there is nothing else they can do. And that thing is carefully helped to happen, yes they will welcome it shyly and so very carefully not to show an overtly happiness out of the relief.

Yes, the dream came true. The income did not only double in return. It tripled and even more than that. It went like it did not set any limit to the possible growth. To my horror, all things gradually got into some kind of insanity too. Whatever investment I put into, this insanely-earned money grew so insanely well. They grew beyond all logical calculation of growth. They grew so insanely well that I did not know how to handle it as I am not well prepared to handle the ever increasing number of money that grew so much to almost unlimited directions like that.

The land I bought turned to be the one chosen by the foreign investor on which they will build their office and a communication tower. Its price sky-rocketed up to two hundred and fifty percents. The dollar that I bought at the rate of two thousand five hundred rupiah was hit by the national recession that catapulted its value fifteen thousand in just two months. The mixed shares that I bought gained sixty percent in just two months. The medical school that I established was bidden by a foreign investor at the price that would allow me to gain as much as I would like to offer them. All in all, those investments turned to be insanely grew to the point of almost no limit in the history of business of investment. Yes, all turned to be very successful venture of any kinds. My business consultant, himself, could not fully comprehend all those gains that I made in a relatively short time.

From this point on, however, I was haunted by the insanely growth of my investment. I ran into all kinds of business diversifications and money laundry to hide my richness and the ever-keep growing feeling of guilt. To my most astonishment, the investment continued to grow like crazy whirlwind. It grew so much to the degree that I could not handle it and eventually fearing it might turn me to insanity. My family members began to fight like those who started to lose their sanity. Once, as you knew it, I gave away 90 percent of it. The rest however, seemed to get into some kind of insanely growth of circulation. We are now being watched for any suspicious money laundry. I have been given several calls by the Corruption Watch Agency on the insanely

growth of my income and assets. I could not come up with any sane idea to explain all these insane growths of my income. I began to feel like a hunted racketeer, a hunted corruptor, a hunted fugitive of any kind of any type of criminal in any forbidden business activities.

The uncontrollably and insanely growth of the money invested in the insane hospital did not make me daunted. Its negative side effect to uncontrollably insanely growth of disharmony among us in the family did not make me daunted either. An invisible power gave me another warning. I started to dream that horribly nightmare in which I and the members of my family were lying in deeper and deeper sleep in my mental hospital where I put all the insane into real sleep, the sleep of eternity. The hospital that gave an insanely growing investment that made me whirlldindly richer and richer. To my horror, those patients that we had put to the deepest sleep became the doctors and paramedics. The nightmares came in rapid repeat, so intensively that I had to take more and more tranquilizers of any kind to help me gain my one piece of mind. I woke up in such a heavy sweat.

I was told by my wife that in my sleep I was singing some strange, very funny but familiar songs. Almost immediately, I horribly suspected that I sang all those songs that I taught to my insane patients. I asked her to record the songs that I sang during my sleep. To my horror, I heard the truth that, yes, all those songs I sang resembling all songs of the insane that I put into sleep. I was saved by the bell. Something happened out of the blue, I was advised by a friend, who was mildly insane from studying religion too deeply, that the only to stop all this headache was to give it away to the charity as much as possible when the number grew reach uncontrollable or unmanageable level of fortune. Having done that, soon we, in the lucky family, stopped accusing each other of turning into insanity. It was clearly felt that the insanities that tortured us immediately abated like that when a storm has passed through a certain area. Then I began to be religious. I began to fight it all. To my best I was struggling to negotiate with my

logic-dominated mind to reform and set a more religious and docile trend in facing realities of life.

Thanks God, the most Merciful and the most Compassionate, in this new trend of mind-set, I have established and helped improved quite a number of mini-mosques and orphanages. I earnestly hope that I will be forgiven for all the sins that I have committed in all this game of life. In my introspection, I have been carried away as a weak human in the blind drive to get richer and richer. I have been the victim of the concept of capitalism. I am now trying to make up for all my wrong doings in the past. Smilingly often, I think it is quite funny to see the fact, though, that when in most cases in the history of human being, people have been pushed to be religious by the threat of becoming poorer and poorer, I am pushed to be religious by the unbelievable growing and growth of good luck. Please come to my religious study group every Thursday. I hope you too will be forgiven. So we two as naughty childhood friends will be tendered a ticket to paradise.

Everybody from our hospital rained the insanes' most concerned family immediates, the parents and the brothers and the cousins, with all news that they were in shape, and on the way clear way to the expected cure. They slept well and did not at all show any danger to the people around. They informed the immediates regularly and periodically. They convinced them that they could then continue the show of life whatever they wished to do in their pursuance of happiness.

The insane were happy too. But one. The ghost visited me. I stop him. I stop the venture. My business proves so crazy.

The father could again visit the shadowy other and enjoy the best music the instrument could afford to play.

He gave away all his wealth to charity.

His confession.

The helpless and the hopeless. Even the most logical. The most religious.

I open my personal clinic. I target the richest and the most desperate parents. My market segmentation proves to be so very worth doing.

Is it a diary or a just a note? Do you want to keep it?

I do not think so. I do not think I need it. But wait! What is it about? Would you read the first page for me?

Look! It is started with the date. What's the hell is it?

Let me have a look! Oh, yes. I want to keep it. It has some unforgettable memory.

He was my childhood friend. He gave away ninety percent of his fortune to the charity when I was his notary.

May I read it here tonight? I am all alone. And I have got nothing to read to pass away the cold night.

Sure, on one condition that you would keep it a secret till the end of your life.

You have my words. I will be cursed by God should I do not keep my words.

We cannot read the very last page. It is so very unclear. What's the hell is it? Could you recall the content of this very last page? You are well-known for your photo-copy memory. Please tell me what happened to him then? Could he handle all the crazy development of this all insanity?

He seemed too slowly but surely lost his healthy-thinking, his intelligence and tricky-maneuvers as he was haunted by his never-ending nightmare. In his dream he was one of the patients in a mental and he was put to sleep by the exactly same lullabies and slowly given gradual sleeping pills. Those lullabies, having written and choreographed and memorized so solemnly by his inner him could not be taken away from his mind. They were embedded so deeply in the labyrinth of his

consciousness and sub-consciousness. They all came to him in a series of nightmares.

He was driven into a unique way of drifting into insanity. He lost his mind eventually. All of them. He and his wife and his children slowly turned insane too. They were hospitalized in one cell. One night another a group of invisible insane came from nowhere and set the hospital on fire. No one could stop it. They got killed in fire. All of them

To my bigger surprise too, when I could at last duly put them to a real sleep. The deepest sleep. They secretly transfer to me a much bigger number of thank you transfer. They truly appreciated all my hard work and dedication and attention and caring for their beloved ones. The money is hot. The cooling down of the money that has to be done by giving it away for the charity. I turned religious in a so very lucky course. When some people were forced to be religious after some threat of getting poorer and poorer, I was threatened by the threat of becoming richer and richer in an insanely speed of twister.

Tendered in a very subtle and well-masked proposal and shyly and tacitly okayed in a kind of doubtful-step of communicative dance in which we see more retreat than forward steps when, ironically, one actually and really need to say yes in a not-so-conducive circumstances. All to be read with some so very sensitive antenna of instinct and intelligence and heart. All have got to come in the right mix. And in the right proportion, too.

Thanks God, the most Merciful and the most Compassionate, I have established and helped improved quite a number of mini-mosques and orphanages. I earnestly hope that I will be forgiven for all the sins that I have committed in all this game of life. In my introspection, I have been carried away as a weak human in the blind drive to get richer and richer. I have been the victim the concept of capitalism. I am now trying to make up for all my wrong doings in the past. It is quite funny to see the fact, though, that when in most cases

in the history of human being, people have been pushed to be religious by the threat of becoming poorer and poorer, I am pushed to be religious by the unbelievable growing and growth of good luck. Please come to my religious study group every Thursday evening if you want to take advantage from my intensive religious studies. You do not need to share the cost of it all.

The curing of the insane is back in the very end of the story.

Until one day one of them in his off and on sanity and insanity fluctuation saw what I did to them. I put him to his real and eternal sleep after I convinced him that eternal sleep would be better for him. Then I saw his spirit roaming the house at night and threatening me. I closed the hospital.



Source: youtube.com

5

The Sixth Sense of '*Garak*'

The Sixth Sense of 'Garak'

We have been sold a cat inside a bag. The rest of us have been cheated by the central government more than any idiots can take. We, Minangkabau people are not fools. We can read the light in the dark and dark in the light. I have done my best of the best in PRRI battles and war, hoping so sincerely that what I have done in my guerilla strategies will remind the central government that the republic will disintegrate if they again betray the people from the twenty four provinces. (My Uncle, Tambi Tando, when telling me his cause in fighting the civil war of 1957 in West Sumatera)

It was in the beginning of nineteen sixties in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatera. The ammunition smell of the civil war, called PRRI, was still hot in the air in the province. That was the war between the central government of the Republic of Indonesia and the people of West Sumatera, culturally nicknamed Minangkabau. The resuming smell of the war was the hottest in a palace called Parak Ino which was neighboring with a military compound called Tarandam Military Dormitory. An advanced level of guerilla war was yet to begin here. A proverb in Minangkabau says: *When the mission could not be launched in open water, it should be sniped in a dessert.* I never could fully understand the meaning of those Minangkabau proverbs as much as I had no idea whatsoever why my uncle, Tambi Tando, insisted on finding a house to rent in Parak Ino which was only a stone-throw away from the most feared military compound.

In my logical opinion, My Uncle's choosing Parak Ino as a place to stay would only be fatal suicide. Those soldiers from the central government who had been assigned to fight the rebels in PRRI were mostly accommodated here. They were still in the trigger-happy syndrome for having lost quite a number of friends in the ambushes in the very last minutes before the cease fire was signed. Their look, their language and their body movements all showed that they were so

angry. Any small misdeed in the side of the local people had already triggered them to act cruelly and brutally and inhumanely. So Parak Ino was the hottest point in the cooling down period of the PRRI civil war.

So, I thought it would be safe for My Uncle to choose any other places quite a distance from the military compound, not to mention the fact that he was actually one of the remnant fugitives of war who was so very hotly hunted by the military from Java. Indeed, he was on the very top list for his reputation in several bloody ambushes in several points in Solok and Pesisir Selatan areas. The ambushes took place during the cease-fire periods and had caused quite a considerable casualty in the side of the central government army. He was so elusive. Several attempts to catch him had been all shameful failures in the enemy sides. Several times, his hideout was found in the very last minutes of his escape in the witnesses of the still-burning fire-wood and his wet and oversized under-wear hanging by the top of the door. Five million was offered for his head – live or dead. The price that had blinded his friends and thus offered some hints to the central military for some rewards and other privileges. Betrayed by his jealous friends of his oversize popularity and mandom trade-mark, he was so close to be captured a few times. Very close indeed. In spite of his having been cordoned so closely, however, my uncle managed to escape and caused quite a heavy dent in Java Army side. They could smell his odor as his oversized underwear was there. It was there in each escape. It was always hanging there with a special smell. They were so anguish in anger. No one dare to imagine how they would treat my uncle should he be caught by them by then. Yet, he escaped and again escaped so many times. For this fact, he was said to have mastered the sixth sense of reading the steps and maneuvers of enemies, which in Minangkabau was called 'Garak'. He would know it by mere instinct when the enemies were getting closer, and in the very last minutes, he escaped by a hairbreadth leaving his wet oversized underwear hanging somewhere there for the enemy to smell and sniff to find out how long ago he actually escaped from the spot.

They were wondering why he always left his wet underwear there in the spots where he was almost captured several times until some day a brigade of Gurkha, mercenaries from a place in Nepal used some herder retrievers to capture him. The commander of Gurkha brigade who was promised ten million rupiahs was so embarrassed by the fact that the very well-trained dogs he used to retrieve my uncle had been perplexed and dizzied by the smell of my uncle's underwear. Instead of going forward to find out my uncle's next whereabouts, it had gone backward to find out where my uncle had been before. Any attempts to push them to retrieve again was responded by their uncooperative body language and pathetic groaning that seemed to send a signal that this human target being hunted was above and beyond their ability and capacity. No matter how hard the Gurkhas tried again to persuade them, they just did not budge. Thus the hunting for my uncle by using the well-trained herder retrievers had been disrupted by the smell of my uncle's stinking oversized underwear to the point of tremendous embarrassment, not to mention the fact that the dogs were specifically trained by the Scotland Yard in England and had actually earned several awards from the queen of England. And the commander of Gurkha mercenary himself had been in Vietnam on several contracts, awarded several medals for his merits in saving a number of American armies and causing a considerable damage to the Vietnamese. The Ghurka found his better match in my uncle who cheated him several times in a guerrilla tactics in which he thought he was second to none. 'I have seen it all in every guerilla war in every country' He said arrogantly. I have been to Vietnam. I have been to that guerilla hot beds of African countries.' How can I be beaten by a local boy from this unknown place called Air Dingin. I will get him eventually. It's now me and him. It's my ego and all the medals of merits that I have earned. They are all at stakes. I do not care anymore how much I will be paid. I shall get him to get even for all those embarrassments that the Ghurka unit have suffered. Wait for me Tando Tambi! I shall return and get you. I promise the sky and the earth and all the devils in hell. He said while hitting his wide and formidable chest.

More for arrogance and haughtiness that resulted in stupid carelessness, the commander of the Gurkha mercenary extended his shameful failure in executing his vain mission. To the contrary and to his horrible finding, he was the one who was at last trapped by my uncle in a hide and seek game, more precisely one-to-one human hunting game. He was in the hole of pig-trap for three days when my uncle came to pull him out. A prisoner of all but fatigue, still he was treated by uncle in line with the Geneva Convention. A very special underwear, which had carefully been prepared by my Uncle, was gently put around his head and another piece was softly wrapped around his mouth. The poor Ghurka died in such a peculiar way. Not because of anything that my uncle did as he did not do anything to him other than tying his hands up and wrapping his head and his mouth with his best oversized underwear. The doctor's diagnose informed them, however, that what his retina recorded the very last thing before he died was the shadow of someone's natural and original mandom-trademark, the size of which had perhaps embarrassed and shocked the poor Ghurka, as it indeed it was much bigger than his, even bigger than the one that was announced as the winner in his hometown Nepal. In addition to that, as confirmed by the chemist, the antique smell of My Uncle's underwear had contributed quite significantly to his peculiar but horrible death. His face contorted in such a way reflecting the anguish and the anger from the humiliation of having been capped by underwear that had the most offensive smell. Thus the sighting of the extra size natural manhood trademark had just been the trigger to the conclusive toll of his pathetic death.

What's the hell of a smell had there been in my uncle's underwear? No one ever broke the spell. The facts recorded, however, that it had helped my uncle survive one attempt after another of the enemy to capture him. Later, I was told that his power of the sixth sense to read the enemy's steps and maneuvers was all originated from his underwear and its unique smell that confused the enemy to the degree of desperation. The look of his oversized home-made

underwear, not to mention its antique smell, had at least provoked the enemy to the point of highest anger and highest anguish and highest irritation, of course. Consequently, it had made them unable to think logically and smartly. Their taking some time in their being bewildered and being provoked by the oversized underwear had been intelligently used by my uncle to silently sneak out his way into some point in the forest behind our village which was actually his play-ground where he had been raised since he was born.

I am quite confident to say that the so many hat trick escapes that my uncle made in the enemy's attempts to capture him in real battles would have embarrassed Rambo in spite of his ever soaring popularity in his action movies. I have read those adventures of Fidel Castrol and Che Gue Vara in their guerrilla activities in some parts of Latin America. They are not much of a comparison to those escapes made by my uncle in his guerilla moves which were all executed by himself. He was all alone. I could never imagine until now how my Uncle could survive the so many attempts by the enemy to capture him. And how he, amidst the so tight cordoning for his head, could get to our pathetic looking folks' huts in not so hidden points in our village quite periodically and frequently to collect some food and some coconut oil and kerosene and of course oversized underwear to survive in such a huge forest around our village. If not for the power of *Garak* that God bestowed him, so people in my village Aie Dingin said, he would have been captured and of course tortured to death by the enemy. Actually, he did not only cheat the enemies, he had cheated deaths as well, so people in Aie Dingin strongly believed. Seeing the so hot and so intensive pursuance by the enemy for his ass, the villagers had foreseen his being captured and tortured. This thought had traumatized his relatives and loyal friends.

The so many ambushes that my uncle made and the so many escapes that he could manage had made the enemy so very angry. Not to mention the embarrassment from having to sniff and smell the still-wet underwear of his again and again in the trail of his successive escapes. Not knowing what to do

after some series number of tremendous embarrassment, they cowardly kidnapped my aunt and eventually killed her along with their only child. Actually, my uncle offered to surrender himself for the exchange of my aunt's release. The Central Army did not keep their promise as they planned to kill two birds with one bullet – they killed the two in the last minutes of my uncle's process of surrender. Sensing what actually had happened behind the screen of the enemy's pretension; my uncle again beautifully escaped in the last minutes and managed still to drop his wet, oversized underwear.

He was so shattered by the death of his beloved wife and the only child. But to my surprise, he did not shed any single tear as naturally expected in most cases like this. It was to his extra-credit and bonus that my uncle was also bestowed a very strong faith in God. After a quite long brooding in silence, he slowly shook his head and said so solemnly that they do not actually belonged to him. They belonged to God, The Almighty. Anyhow, they would have suffered more seeing me being chased and hunted by those army from the central government. Their thought of seeing me one day being captured and tortured would have given them more painful pain than that of death they have gone through. After all, we all belonged to God, the Almighty. What comes from Him will eventually return to Him. It's only matter of time. We ll be back to Him too when our numbers due. He said. And in spite of his successive spectacular wins in the guerrilla battles, he keeps saying that we, humans, are so ephemeral and weak indeed. My winning streaks in this hide and seek game with the central government army had all been possible for the approval of God. I would not be captured if He did not approve that to happen. Other than the power of *Garak* and the unique smell and size of my underwear, that God bestowed me, he said, we are just the same.

The death of the commander of the Ghurka brigade, the very highly heralded mercenary, and the so many wins of his in hunting games in the forests with the enemies and the so many years in the war, however, had made my uncle so

addicted to this primitive human game called battle and war. I was perhaps born to fight endless wars. He said, while looking at his face, where fatigue and confidence were more often than not in a unique combination, in the mirror one day. I might have been destined to die in one of those battles, maybe, someday. Honestly, I just could not sleep well enough when there goes no challenge of war in my life. Now they have signed the cease fire. They said the war is over. To them, of course, it's over. They are all cowards. To me, it is just the beginning of me realizing myself that I have another war and some series of battles to win to prove to myself that I was born to fight more and more wars and battles in my own way in which I am talented and gifted with some so special, so natural equipments and resources. Thus, to me the war with the enemy is never over. As we had failed to push the mission in the water, I will push it in the dessert all by myself. I never fully understand what my uncle really meant by all what he said in some points of my going along with him. It would have been more sensible if he said he was adamant to continue to wage his war for the sake of taking a revenge on the death of his wife and his only son. To me, however, he was a living legend. A living hero in our homeland who had given us some pride to remember in spite of the fact that we actually lost the civil war in that nineteen fifty seven.

You are my special nephew, my uncle said. You are the line that inherited the symbol of pride of our ancestor blood that is bestowed by the best size of heart as much as the best size of manhood. Real symbol of manhood, indeed. I saw you fighting those children of the soldiers of the central government army. You beat them so intelligently so many times. And when you thought you would lose, you escaped in such a very intelligent way. You are my nephew. You are my pride and we are of equal size in heart and in manhood mark. Yes, the symbol of Minangkabau wisdom in assessing the war and the battle. Minangkabau fight with their wit and wisdom and the reading of *garak*. We would not continue the war in its course if we do not see any sign of glory in its end. So now, you would not ask me more than once why I chose Parak Ino to start a new life with you. I will teach you and train you and

give you opportunities to live a life of a trader that can survive and grow in hard situation and condition. As to my wife and son, they are now in the best hands of God. His place is the best place in all measurements and meanings. We should not cry too long as it will weaken our heart to resume the fight that never ends – the fight to retain back the glory of our family and homeland.

So, uncle and nephew, we started to trade vegetables and rice in a small market called Pasa Tarandam about two meters from the military compound to the south and about two hundred metres from Parak Ino to the east. Getting out from the forest of guerilla war, my uncle did not have any single cent to his credit. In another factor of life, however, his working capital was immense. Those traders from Alahan Panjang trusted him more than they trusted the religious people who taught them religion. They offered anything my uncle would like to try to trade. He was allowed to pay the next time they met. My uncle kept a business note which was perhaps as good as those kept by the Hollanders' traders. His paying them on time and his so clean a record in his business deals had earned him even more credits from those traders from Alahan Panjang who gave him merchandise and even working capital. His business prospered in quite amazing pace. Soon he was offered another more prospective place to trade in other markets and other cities.

To my surprise and dismay, my uncle refused their sincere offers blindly and perplexingly. Why did not my uncle respond to bigger opportunities and more prospective business? Instead, He said: Pasa Tarandam is enough of a place for me train you to trade and learn this real life. After all, I have got no other responsibilities to shoulder. You are the only nephew that I have now. Honestly I do not have that capitalistic drive to grow bigger and bigger. As once you set your target on that basis, you will never find a resting place to stop. It's exactly like a motorbike race, once you start the race on the track, you have to drive faster and faster. You will for sure crash at some point as you race with the drive of greed to be faster and faster. To be richer and richer. You will push

yourself beyond your limit. And down the line on this track you will trade more valuable human values with those we call profit, gain, money, growth, and wealth. You will get lose amidst all this hunting for more and more. I have been told of so many stories of my Uncle's struggle in the battle of his civil war. I have not been told that he was also a very wise man. Still I was disappointed by his attitude in and about business.

There was quite a long silence before My Uncle continued. I am not for this kind of trading race. I have seen it all what would happen in the end of the race. I am trading to kill my residual time and to be of some use and benefit for those who come to buy my stuff. That is what father and grandfather taught and instilled in me in my early years. To be useful to the people around me. Things that will never be taken away by any other principles of life philosophy. My grandpa taught me to dedicate myself to the dreams that I am set. And he insisted on me to do something in a very thorough and rigorous way. The war is not yet over. The glory and redemption have to be regained and thus have to be fought for. I told you that to me the war is never over until we get even. This trading is my way to realize my duty, as an uncle, to teach you a way of life that will help you survive in respectable ways. Tarandam is the only place where I can perform it all. To continue my war and to teach you a way of life to survive in respectable and honorable ways.

Another silence came in between his speech. Anyway, he continued, you do not have to follow all my tracks of life that I have lived. Each one of us has one life to live and each one of us has the right to decide what track of life he wants to choose. You may one day take that competitive track of trading you suggested to me, if you choose to do so. Some time, soon, somehow you have to leave me when you feel fit to stand on your own. When you think you have learned enough to lead your own life the way you want it. Just tell me when that time comes; I will gladly let you go. But to me, Pasa Tarandam is my place to continue my war and battle.

What kind of war and battle? I asked? Quite regretful after such a question for I am not used to openly confront my uncle's opinion.

I don't see any battle to fight here in this small market. I continued perhaps motivated by so many boring and so long explanations.

He did not answer my question. Instead, he said: Maybe it won't be of any benefit for you to know it all from me about me. A long the way you will have to learn by yourself and learn the reality that there are things about somebody, even your own uncle, that you do not need to know.

Still, I was so sad and disappointed not to see my uncle's fighting spirit in business the way he so consistently showed it in his waging his guerilla war. I did learn a lot from my uncle, though, on how to succeed in business from the way how he served his customers. He treated all his buyers like those servants serving the king. He showed them meticulous dedication to the degree that makes them feel that there was sincerity, caring and even love in his services. He served them with full dedication and with some deep intent. In my later years I found those concepts in my studies such as customer service, customer satisfaction, and customer focus. I had already seen them practiced by my uncle.

Time went by so fast. On my first request, I was allowed by him to run a business on my own in Muaro Bungo a city about one hundred kilo meter from Padang. I was released by my Uncle with a very special smile of optimism and a whisper:

You have everything what it takes to be rich in your life as you always want so badly. I saw such a tremendous passion in your eyes when you are counting the *fulus*. I will not be surprised to see you one day becoming the richest Minangkabau trader. Just get concentrated in your course of life. Look for more friends and avoid enemies. There should be no enmity or revenge at all along the course of your life. For they will waste so much of your energy that you actually

need to achieve your objective and goal. Again, avoid enmity and revenge and learn how to compromise should there be any discrepancies and conflict along the way. You will make it. Go and get what you have been dreaming in your life as a Minangkabau!

I left him with some tears of pride and respect and love. I promised him to always keep in my mind all these dos and don'ts that he gave as an uncle. I know that he said all these so sincerely in his capacity as My Uncle who was so proud for me and for our having so much in common.

My uncle was right. My personal hunger for getting richer, my reading of book on capitalism, and my business blood as a Minangkabau hot boy pushed me to no limit in my pursuance to be one of the richest in the new market. I prospered almost immediately. I was so overwhelmed by the race of getting richer and richer that it was only after a year I could again make time to meet My Uncle in Pasa Tarandam.

As usual, I helped him count his *fulus* when that day market was over. My counting told me that his business did not prosper. It remained just the same. Yes, he was running in the same place. He did not grow at all. He was just like as when I left him. I witnessed that his business transaction actually grew in number. But he did not seem to make the profit the way he should have made it regarding the transactions number that that he actually enjoyed. There must have been something mysterious in the business setting he was trading in. One of the reasons perhaps, was because his so peculiar relationships with those women buyers who came to buy his stuff, especially those who came from Tarandam Military Compound. He gave them some overtly discount. My seventh sense of *Garak* read that some tenderness and softness have been used as the means to barter or at least a kind of compensation for the discount tendered and rendered. It was quite obvious then that my uncle had lost focus in his business.

It seemed that the worse was not yet to come. The next time I visited him, I did not see him in the spot where he used to sell agricultural produce with me. My heart was sinking to see the reality that somebody else was there. Before I could ask anybody as to where My Uncle's whereabouts, like the speed of flash I was taken by hand by a porter who used to help my Uncle during our days there. I was guided to a very lonely corner behind the public toilet only to be told that my uncle had moved to another place he did know where. And that my Uncle was chased by the so many husbands of the women buyers who lived in Tarandam Military compound. The finding of his trade mark somewhere there – peculiar oversized underwear - had sent the compound into a commotion of harbinger that was close to that of Pearl Harbour when suddenly attacked by the Japanese army. I was whispered by the power of my seven sense of *garak*: I, too, had to leave. Right now. This very second. Those soldiers who were hunting my uncle might kidnap me to get to where my uncle was. Thus, I left so very quickly to save my ass. I managed to take a small envelope from the porter in which I later found a letter from my uncle in a code that only we two, my Uncle and I, could decipher. I was informed his next address.

My seventh sense of *Garak* whispered to me that I might be followed by Tarandam Military Soldiers who might have smelt my coming back to see my Uncle. It was only after three months of all ears and eavesdropping, I went tiptoeing to the next address he told me in the secretly coded letter.

In the next address, I found him with somebody with a quite familiar face - one of the women buyers who used to live in Tarandam Military Compound. My uncle told me that he married the woman who actually was the wife of the soldier who kidnapped and killed his wife and his only boy. This very soldier died in a friendly fire prompted by his uncontrollable burst of anger having been sent a bulky envelope and having been refused a short leave to go home to find the owner of the oversized underwear that was coiling a smaller and softer one, so-very-familiar in flowerily-embroidered *patte4rn*. He

killed my wife. I married his. I even sent him my sincere and naïve trade-mark as a token of friendship. I sincerely have returned a bad deed with a good one. Still, I hope I would be forgiven by God for the sins that I committed before this. For, I actually did all these guerilla battles in the inevitable trap of war and revenge that came as its domino consequence. In my introspection, I feel I might have been carried away above the convention line as set by any standard of religion or other human norms. Thus, I do hope my marrying his wife and raising his only son would somehow gave the angels in charge a solid reason for them to grant me a ticket to paradise. After all, we are all the creatures of God. We are walking on the same earth. We live under the same sky. Not to mention the fact that we are actually sharing the same ancestor. He killed my wife. In return I married his. May God bless me. Now the war should be over.

I did not fully understand what my uncle was trying to explain. I thought that even at my best I would never be able to understand the so many funny things in my uncle's unscrewable brain. Besides, by then, I thought I should be more focused on the objective of my business in Minangkabau spirit – to wander everywhere to get home richest and proudest. After all, as my Uncle said, we have only one life to live in a very limited time. My Uncle has made his. Now, I have to make mine. I left my uncle while he was playing football with a boy – the shadow of his enemy. Yet, to my most surprise, I saw only a tremendous love in his eyes, a true love of a father who only had loved to give ahead in the so well hidden darkest past. True love. Nothing else. Nothing like that when he was fighting his guerilla battles. As the ammunition of war does not smoke anymore. I am so convinced of it. I can tell it from the sweetest smiling and hand clapping of my new aunt, Mbak Iyem seeing her only son, Toto, scoring the goal for so very bright tomorrow.

This very soldier died in a friendly fire prompted by his uncontrollable burst of anger having been sent from his wife's address a bulky envelope and having been refused a short leave to go home to find the owner of the oversized

underwear that was coiling a smaller one, which is flowerily-embroidered.

There are some group customers that he treated even more satisfactorily.

The spices, the complete spices. The aphrodisiac, the Aphrodite?

Lose and gain.

He married the wife of the soldier Aie Dingin whose husband died in a war in Aceh. They killed my wife. I married one of theirs. I returned bad indeed in good one. Hope I would be forgiven for the sins that I committed, for I actually did it all in the trap of war and revenge that came as its domino consequence. After all we are all the creature of God.

We are walking on the same earth. We are under the same sky. We are actually sharing the same ancestor.

He eluded and cheated death quite several times.

Why was my grandfather so happy to have a grandson that inherits his proudest God-gift?

Every woman will love him for the same reason.

The highest degree of climax is when we have one in the mission of taking revenge.

An uncle who was very famous for his guerilla strategies. Like that of Fidel Castro

My uncle did not accept the loss of the war. He continued his guerilla.

Escaping by hairbreadth from several ambushes by enemies as well as friends' betrayal

Dating and banging some wives of military members

The fall of the most intelligent *pandeka*.

Caught red handed by a very young nephew (the I). The too generous gift. His being caught in the act, with his pants off.

I was reading a book titled the Guerilla War of Fidel Castro. A friend of mine lent it to me. We were discussing it after a few days.

Time went by so fast. On my first request, I was allowed to run a business on my own in Muaro Bungo a city about one hundred kilo meter from Padang. I was released by my Uncle with a very special smile of optimism and a whisper: You have everything what it takes to be rich in life. I saw such a tremendous passion in your eyes when you are counting the *fulus*. I will not be surprised to see you one day one becoming the richest Minangkabau trade. I left him with some tears of pride and respect and love for my Uncle. I promised him to always keep in mind to always read *Garak* with head first then with heart. My uncle was right. My personal hunger for getting richer, my reading of book on capitalism and my business blood as a Minangkabau pushed to no limit in my pursuance to be one of the richest in the new market. I prospered. I was so overwhelmed by the race of getting richer and richer. It was only after a year I could again make time to meet My Uncle in Pasa Tarandam.

He did not prosper. His business became smaller and smaller. He was losing and losing. He did not seem to prosper as when I left him. The number of transaction actually grew in number. But he did not seem to make the profit the way he should make it in normal business setting. He seemed to be in so many peculiarly relationships with those women buyers who came to buy his stuff.

The next time I visited him, I did not see him in the spot where he used to sell agricultural produce with me. My heart was sinking to see the reality that somebody else was there. Before I could ask anybody as to where My Uncle's

whereabouts, I was taken by hand by a porter who used to help my Uncle during our days there. I was taken to a very lonely corner behind the public toilet only to be told that my uncle had moved to another place he did know where. And that my Uncle was chased by the so many husbands of the women buyers who lived in Tarandam Military compound. The finding of his trade mark there – peculiar oversized underwear had sent the compound into a harbinger that was only close to that of Pearl Harbour when suddenly attacked by the Japanese army. I was whispered by the porter at the market that I, too, had to leave. He feared that the soldiers who hunted my uncle might kidnap me to get to where my uncle was. Sensing the danger, I left so quickly to save my ass. The porter gave me a small envelope in which I later found a letter in a language that only we two, my Uncle and I, could understand. I was informed his next address.

The power of my seventh sense of *Garak* whispered to me that I might be followed by Tarandam Military Soldiers who might have smelt my coming back to see my Uncle. Thus, I did not immediately find the address of my Uncle as given in the envelope. It was only after a month I came to visit him in the address as informed in the secretly coded letter.

In the next address I found him with one of the women buyers who seemed to be quite familiar to me. I assumed that she used to live in Tarandam Military Compound. My uncle told me that the woman was the wife of the soldier who killed my wife and my only son in Aie Dingin. Her husband died in a war in Aceh. He killed my wife. I married his. He killed my son. I am now raising his. I returned his all bad deeds in good ones. I Hope I would be forgiven for the sins that I committed, for I actually did it all in the trap of war and revenge that came as its domino consequence. After all we are all the creature of God. We are walking on the same earth. We are under the same sky. We are actually sharing the same ancestor.

In the next address I found him with somebody with a quite familiar face - one of the women buyers who used to live in Tarandam Military Compound. My uncle told me that he

married the woman who actually was wife of the soldier who kidnapped and killed his wife and his only boy. This very soldier died in a friendly fire prompted by his uncontrollable burst of anger having been sent a bulky envelope and having been refused a short leave to go home to find the owner of the oversized underwear. He killed my wife. I married his. He killed my son and now I am raising his. I sincerely have returned all his bad deeds with good ones. Still, I hope I would be forgiven by God for the sins that I committed before this. For, I actually did it all in the inevitable trap of war and revenge that came as its domino consequence. After all, we are all the creatures of God. We are walking on the same earth. We live under the same sky. Not to mention the fact that we are actually sharing the same ancestor. May God bless me and us all! Now the war should be over.

I did not fully understand what my uncle was trying to explain. I thought that even at my best I would never be able to understand the so many sophisticated things in my uncle's brain. Besides, by then, I thought I should be more focused on the objective business of Minangkabau spirit – to wander everywhere to get home richest and proudest. After all, as my Uncle said, we have only one life to live in a very limited time. My Uncle has made his. Now, I have to make mine. I left my uncle while he was playing football with a boy – the shadow of his enemy. Yet, I saw only a tremendous love in his eyes, a true love of a father who only had loved to give ahead in the so well hidden darkest past. True love, nothing

My choice is now only peace. I regret all the revenge and the domino effects that followed behind it.

I even sent him the invitation to my being togetherness with his in a bulky envelope that contained my sincere and naïve trade-mark.



6 | The Stairway to Heaven from the Quake-Hit Ambacang Hotel (In Memoriam of Padang Earthquake)

The Stairway to Heaven from the Quake-Hit Ambacang Hotel (In Memoriam of Padang Earthquake)

We were in our English Conversation club. Every member, on their own initiative, told his or her personal experience in relation to the earthquake that had severely hit our town of Padang just three days before. I was deeply impressed by their indefatigable spirit to improve their English despite both quake fright and having been jobless for some years after their college graduation. But I was more strikingly amazed by their vivid recollections (despite my suspicion that they had trickily modified and beautified and marked them up). Having told theirs, these so young and so energetic and so ambitious club members sincerely pushed me to take my turn to tell my recollection. As an English motivator I seriously tried to narrate mine as exactly and precisely as I had experienced it.

It was precisely at 23.59.35 hours on September 30, 2009. A number of delayed 'sasses' frantically poured into my hand phones six hours after the 7.9 Richter scale earthquakes cruelly jolted my beloved city of Padang (the city that our peculiar Mayor and I shamefully failed to Guard and Defend). I felt relieved to find out though that none of my friends who were at the hotel before the tremor were instantly killed by the fallen slabs, columns, pillars and walls. Above all, I thanked God for saving my life as I was there about ten minutes before the earthquake which occurred at 17.16 on Wednesday. It was a mere coincidence that the regular sales lady who had promised to sell me some traditional sweet-smelling spices mysteriously failed to appear as promised.

The first sms reading 'It's me', came from my close friend Mantiko Pakang, a demonstratively happy member of the provincial legislative who was actually more aggressive in his

role as a sub-contractor for all kinds of government civil projects. I called him almost immediately in return:

For God's sake! Where are you actually?

We are at the hotel (in a child's voice)

Which hotel?

Ambacang (sounding guilty)

On what program were you there?

On our (?) round trip, spending the remainder of our socialization allowance. Wondering why we found ourselves at Ambacang Hotel negotiating with the perfume sales lady. Wondering why she let us sniff all her most valued perfume from her well-hidden and well-maintained collections and (?) assets. Wondering why the tremor was felt with double impact. The mixed persuasive smell had mesmerized us to the point of no return and it seemed that the fragrance had sapped our energy to the point of lowest ebb. Thus, we simply did not have enough power to sprint from the hotel when the building started to collapse. We are now buried, squeezed beneath some collapsed beams and columns and slabs.

Oh, no. For God's sake. So what can I do for you now?

Please go to my office tomorrow and delete all notes from my personal computer and those in the files under the heading of overlapping and interlocking data and pictures.

Is there anything else I can do now?

Pray for us to be found dead rather than alive.

Why? Why?

I am in an interlocking situation and condition with the perfume lady.

What do you mean?

We were also persuaded to practice an extended yoga number. The most exceptional one. The interlocking one. Alas, we are condemned to a dog's destiny, a kind of unbreakable lock with and to each other. So kindly please pray for us to be found dead rather than alive.

How could you be so sincere in your confessions?

We are at death's door.

Keep praying for the on-going rescue attempts.

Please, we would rather be found dead than alive.

Dead rather than alive? Dead rather than alive?

(No reply)

I was so very deeply bewildered when again another sms dropped into my cell phone. It was from my friend Mantiko Bulu, an exceptionally religious-looking judge, who was actually a super aggressive court-case agent commissioner.

It read: We are here!

I replied: Where?

(A quite long silence)

Being impatient, I called them immediately:

For God's sake! Where are you actually?

We are at Ambacang (sounding silly).

What were you doing there when the quake occurred?

I was negotiating some cases through some honey lady broker. (A long silence)

Then?

She mysteriously induced me to taste the honey before the agreement was okayed.

Then?

My epilepsy began. Too bad. I just did not know what actually was going on.

Epilepsy?

My dripping saliva wetted me. Soon, I became so greasy and clumsy. I just could not react quickly enough when the tremor shook us.

Pray to God earnestly so that you can be rescued.

I can't. My tongue just refuses to mention God's names.

Just pray whatever you can manage.

My tongue simply refuses to have anything to do with praying. It just does not budge to any persuasion.

Why?

It says it is tremendously ashamed before God and thus it does not want to have anything to do with praying any longer.

Why?

It says it has prayed far too much. And I never kept my promises to God to be a better human. I actually have been

saved and rescued by God from several disasters. My tongue refuses to have anything to do with God.

What can I do for you?

Pray to God for the saving of my face. Pray that I will be found dead not alive.

Why?

My position is so embarrassing. I am deeply drinking honey out of the holy but forbidden container.

Dead rather than alive? Dead rather than alive?

In a deepening bewilderment, wondering still why they all preferred to be dead rather than alive, another sms came to my hand phone. It read: We are here! We are here!

Finding the number of the phone, I pushed the call button:

Who are you?

We are a group of mobile cops, ex-members of your English Club too! (In a chorus)

Where are you?

We are at Hotel Ambacang. Buried beneath the debris of the collapsed building.

What sucked you in there?

Damn them, those candy girls. Their luring glare. We were sucked into their wild treacherous party. Damn them, a bunch of candy girls. It all began with the glaring of their ankle bracelets that showed some kind of short stairway to fatamorganic heavens. And their villainous valleys of necklaces that slowly turned handcuff chains even harder than those prepared in Guantanamo jail. We were sucked to

the point of no retreat or escape. We are too young to learn this so fragrant but poisonous side of life.

Weren't you trained to handle all kinds of battle or war?

We were trained to handle the rain, the heat of the day, the ruthlessness of all kinds of bandits. We were trained to cope with the thunder and the lightning. We have been trained in so hard a regiment. Harder than the Greek Spartan warriors in their time of glory. But we were not trained to handle the slippery and greasy luring of the softness and tenderness of seasoned candy girls. Besides, they are too soft and too innocent to be a subject of suspicion.

Haven't you ever been put into some training fields?

Sure, we have. A lot of them.

What kind of training fields have you been put into?

I said a lot of them. But our training fields have long been full of pests. Even intensified and increased when considered too lightly contaminated or polluted. The swimming pool, too, had long been full of slippery moths of all kinds. And the trainers, our trainers, always looked so exceptionally handsome and so demonstratively charismatic. But their breath smelt like that transcendently flying stuff passed on to them and to us generation after generation. Their ears, too, had all been blocked by the longest string of victories for very fleeting targets and nocturnal and ephemeral objectives.

(A deep breath of regret)

Thus, when we were thrust a handful of candies, so very sweet sweets, accompanied by some Swedish chocolates, we just accepted them all before the price was mutually agreed. Simply said, we could not refuse them at all. We seemed to have been carried away far too much. We were thrust all kinds of candies, the natural and the traditional, the hidden and the forbidden, all and all. We were offered in a fait

accompli. We tasted them so instinctively. We were so full and sleepy and exhausted. Consequently, we did not have any power left to grope in the light and in the dark when the tremor was felt.

(A long silence. A very long silence.)

It was after a long mysterious silence, those beneath the debris resumed the call seemingly in the last seconds of their battery andbreathetoo, of course:

All of us ... the member of legislative ... the judge ... and the young copswho all used to be members of your English Club are being moved and led now to the prolonged-promised territory we are being guided by the angels, taken to the stairway to heaven, slowly socialized to the extraordinary friendly environment we are being shown the true stairway to the other world that is superbly compassionate and mercifulwe are being given a tour guide I tell you what, the setting here looks so good and quite familiarin fact so cool, so calm, and so very peaceful exactly unlike what they keep telling.....

(A long silence)

and we have everything here Do you know the latest versions of Boldest Blackberry? Have you seen them? They are here too. Guess what, we can have them for free. And the latest version of Honda called Freed? Have you seen them? They are here too. And they are here for freefree for everyone here, so very free for everyone here.....so find a way to join us very soonit's a life so totally free from all the risks and the harbingers of corruption and uncertainty like those in your world so come and join us take the shortest way.....come and join uscome and join us.....

How could we join you? How could we join you all?

Those very happy five spices that help you to loosen up your mind! Loosen up ...all your mind!

Let us join them right now. Let us join them all before it is too late. We want that Boldest Blackberry and Honda Freed. We have been jobless here far too long. There is absolutely no hope here in our country. Everybody screws up everybody else. The police, the members of the legislative, the judges and all the other officials in charge of this country squeeze us, squeeze each and every opportunity for our future. Let us join them right now. Come on, come on, Sir! Tell us anything that we can use to loosen up our minds! So that we can join them right now. Tell us please! Tell us before it is too late. We want that Boldest Blackberry and Honda Freed. (They all frantically jumped at me and shook my legs, and my shoulder, and my head, so hard, and those who couldn't touch me, any part of me, climbed the wall, the cupboard and everything they could climb, whatever they could climb, climb, climb).

I was so very scared seeing the deepest blank in their clear but wild eyes. Eyes that had turned all white. Desperados. Instinctively I jumped out of the door and sprang to a sprint. I ran. I ran. I ran so very fast, faster than the fastest run I had ever doneas far as I could, from my class, that I keep insisting on calling clubthinking so suddenly if I, too, should join them in Hotel Ambacang.



7 | The Stingiest Padang: Their Tip and Their Bonus (Their Habit of the Heart)

The Stingiest Padang: Their Tip and Their Bonus (Their Habit of the Heart)

It was my last day at Pangeran Beach, the hotel I worked for in Padang. In my stalest boredom, I cleaned up my locker. I collected my shoddy and shabby old-stuff and other sorry-looking articles and the broken pages of those funny and odd but sometimes inspiring-magazines given me as additional or extra tips by the hotel Guests from overseas. Just when I was wondering whether to give away these peculiar, shiny and colorful magazines to Toni Orlando or some other friends or to keep them despite their insulting me after my hernia operation (which resulted in my total inability), someone approached me with an exceptionally friendly smile. In an air of a made-up formality, he shook my hands extra warmly and demonstrated some extraordinarily approving body language. Little by little, my mood changed to the warmer.

“I am from Padek Daily” he said even more warmly. “I would like to interview you on your last day here at this hotel, if you don’t mind”.

I was impressed by his friendliness but I doubted if anything about me or that happened to me would be worth interviewing.

“What would I tell you? My story won’t sell your newspaper, I am afraid” I said wearily.

“Beside I am now suffering from a partial amnesia caused by a hit to my head done by someone God knows who”

“But our paper has got an appointment with you. And m m m (smiling and grinning)

“Look” I said “My job had all been that cleaning and cleansing of any kind of dirty materials at the hotel’s Utility

Department. I managed some brigade of tired and sorry-looking janitors. All kinds of janitors. Nothing special at all, in and about them”.

“But, you were at every point of the hotel and, mmmm for sure at the Music Room every night of the week. You seemed to have a good time with everybody in every line of music and every kind of drink. We see you coloring the redder shade of rosy rose amidst the most hilarious twilight of flickering tricky shadow. All musicians seemed to cling to you like nephews to an uncle even before the first beating of the drum. Never see anybody more avuncular than you” He said all these so convincingly.

Again, he impressed me with his so overtly appreciating remark about me. As I was quite sure that there wasn't anything that I could tell him to help sell his newspaper, though, I convinced him again of the same.

“Well” He said “I won't take much of your time. I would like to ask only two questions that I hope would generate something worth reading and thus help sell the newspaper. As your good old friend, I guess I deserve some fraction of your precious experience, especially before you leave this hotel for good”. Get it on Bro. Don't waste our time”. He said while patting my heavy shoulder. Tell me one of the sweetest memories and one of the bitterest.

I smiled my friendliest smile for his shifting to the informal friendship jacket, for I just can't say no when it comes to being insisted by a friend, as friendship had indeed always been in the very fiber of my way of life. In fact, it had been my way to survive. Yes, friendliness had in fact driven me to make my every day in a big hotel like Pangeran Beach where humans are actually dehumanized as just factors of statistics and, worse still, avoided costs. And yes, it had also brought me a tragedy.

“Well” I said. Old style it may sound, my diary perhaps could help us to solve all this. Despite this era of computer, I

found it still a perfect asylum and thus have written in it so consistently. I hope this record, which is not much about me, could answer your two requests in just one memory as it is more about the records my poor janitors' experiences.

"Janitors, yes janitors. Come on Bro, It sounds so promising. He exclaimed. "They are always full of gossips in every hotel. Let's see if any record of them could help sell my newspaper"

"It's a kind of research, actually. A longitudinal in nature" I said in what seemed to be in a most scientifically shy voice.

"A research? Longitudinal? What kind of animal is that?"

"They collect the tip money from Padang guests in a big glass bottle ex 'Jengkolit' Cracker year after year. Several years, 22 years precisely. It was quite a long research".

"What do you mean by the tip money is collected? Is it too much?"

"The guests from Padang tip them" I said in my so naturally sad voice. "But the money can't be divided as it would hurt"

"Please, make it clearer. Most hotel guests tip don't they? And how would the tips hurt the janitors? They should be happy when they are tipped"

"Tips make them happy, when given by non-Padang guests. But tips hurt when given by Padang. You bet, be it in their most-drunken condition or in their deepest religious mood, they won't tip generously. They seemed to be born with their destiny - to be the stingiest creatures under the sun. In short, stinginess gets to deepest part of their back bone"

"What do you mean? You sound too exaggeratingly racist"

"I mean it stinks, it sucks, and it's too little. The most generous ever given by the Padang to our janitor in our research record never gets to Rp. 10.000.,"

"Mostly it comes in smallest changes, ranging from Rp. 100 to Rp. 1.000 something. Too small you know, it just does not buy anything, not even one piece of cigarette. Thus it hurts to receive it. And to make it worse, the notes and the coins given are so obviously the shoddiest and shabbiest"

"I see. But how do you know that they are given by the Padang?"

"You know it from their language. Padang is as obvious in their stinginess as in their funny accent in Indonesian, and even when you don't meet them you can tell it from the way they leave the tips: crushed or scattered carelessly"

"I see. So why are they collected then?"

"Upon lamenting on it to a religious teacher in a religious service, they were advised to just collect into a big glass bottle to be donated to the Moslem Sacrifice day called Idul Adha when animals are slaughtered to be given to the poor"

"Oh yes? Do they agree? How sweet of they!"

"Yes, and they empty the big bottle a few days before the sacrifice day, count the money together only to be hurt even more"

"How come! I guess it is time to be religiously happy as they will sacrifice an animal for the poor who seldom eat the meat all the yearlong"

"Yes, they should. But the money they collect the whole year long always fall short to buy a cow. Even not enough to buy a goat, the smallest animal to be slaughtered. So they become disappointed and start to grow some hard feeling

toward the stingy character Padang. Some get traumatic by Padang's stinginess"

"Oh God! How come God create such a stingy clan on earth. Padang seemed not to be equipped with a soft X string of human heart. By the way, what do they do to compensate the short?"

"It is added by the money collected by the Bandung music band players also originated from Padang guest's mini and meager tips.

"Oh how sweet and how bitter! And now, do they have enough to buy a goat to sacrifice?"

"Yes, it barely is though. But it hurts them even more as their goat came to be the smallest and the skinniest. And you know what, no one knows why in the few days leading to the sacrifice day their lonely single goat continues to become skinnier and slimmer despite being given some extra fattening additives"

"I guess the goat instinctively knows it is bought by the money from the stingy Padang who do not tip the janitors and the music players as sincerely and generously as tips should be given"

"I tend to agree with you. And the deepest hurt takes place when the goat is killed. Yes it hurts him the most, I mean the janitors' representative who witness the slaughtering. The poor goat is so skinny that it barely has any meat to give away to the poor. Thus they become a laughing stock on such a holy day once a year"

"Oh, no. How bad!"

"But, you know what, this yearly tragedy is nothing compared to what actually happened one day to one music band lead singer in the hotel. This very one happening demonstrated the ultimate stinginess of human being called Si

Padang. And yes in addition to that, it brought me a bonus, a perfect disaster”

“Please tell me”. My journalist friend became a bit exited by some comments that to him do not look relevant. “I don’t care if it will help sell my paper or not. Tell me what happened to the lead singer one day and how the incident is related to the minimum tip from Padang, the Stingy Corn, and how it brought you a bonus of a perfect disaster”

“She was the happiest singer that I ever saw in the Hotel in my twenty seven years working here - a true darling of the Music Room. In her so sincere efforts to give everyone a good time, she sang so heatedly that she frequently swung her so very long and shiny hair, so high that it almost swept the short ceiling of our music room. I myself was always impressed by the way she, in between melodies of her songs, repeatedly applied some baby lotion to her already super shiny and extra clean legs and her natural melon-shaped necklace during her singing her numbers. In addition to that, she dressed so naively generous that, as whispered by diligent frequenters, all kinds of headaches and stresses and hard feeling voluntarily vanish either step by step or immediately. Likewise, other music band players, all of them, in the spirit of togetherness tried their best to give guests the best evening they deserved. Despite all this, they failed to open the softest part of Padang’s heart to tip. I guess such door of generosity is not found in the built-in-system of their heart or in its design”

“Cut the crab short, Bro! Tell me how they relate to one another: The stinginess of Padang, their meager tips, the incidence of a lead singer and the bonus that brought you a perfect tragedy. I haven’t seen any relationship whatsoever of each and to each other. Now amidst all this cloud of un-clarity, you brought in other irrelevant factors to all this: the absence of the softest part of their heart and the door of generosity. Come on, cut the crab short”

“Ok, Bro. My Diary records that it all began at 9.10 o’clock on Saturday evening on July 5th 1996. She just completed the

first song when suddenly she asked for a break. She showed me an sms that reads: Dani got a traffic accident. Now in the hospital, waiting 2b operated. Send 5 million the soonest for the cost" I haven't seen any one as desperate as she looked then - her reddest shiny lipstick could not hide her whitest and trembling lips. Her apprehensive manner was unobserved by the audience though as the other singer sang "Don't worry Be Happy"

"So what's the point? Come on! It gets less and less relevant. How does the sms relate to the ultimate reflection of Padang stinginess? Hard to see if there could be any relation whatsoever". I told you to cut the crab short!" I haven't seen any one so vehemently impatient.

"Be patient. Bro. The sms came from her sister who read as follows: Dani got an accident now 2b operated in the hospital. Rap. 7 million needed soonest"

"Ok, then? Make it quick and do not add more factors to this already complicated plot of story"

"Obviously, she became very anxious and worried as she did not have the Rp. 7 million to her credit. She did not have any idea whatsoever how to cover the operation cost"

"So, what happened then?"

"Sometimes my empathy burst into a bit crazy of an idea. I did not know why, I suddenly I said: Don't worry we will have an auction. We will fetch the amount in this so merry and so young Saturday night"

"What will I sell in the auction?"

"Fetch anything from your room and locker. Anything that you think can fetch any amount of money. Whatever, whatever, take them here now while Linda is doing her numbers?"

“Ok, whatever” She repeated in what sound to be the saddest but most obedient voice.

The soonest Linda, another singer, completed her numbers, I picked up the microphone and announced that during the break we would have a humanitarian auction to fetch some amount to cover the operation cost of Euis’s son, Dani, who got an accident in Bandung”

In a shy humming, the crowd started inquiring whatever the hell to be on the auction table. I explained that they would be Euis’s personal belongings of any kind and of course to be displayed on the auction table.

To my naive surprise, the crowd responded quite optimistically and challenged the auction to be held even earlier. They demanded that every item sold to be followed by one song as a bonus. The request for the earlier auction had perhaps been caused by the fact that she was then the darling of the hotel music room. It was on this motive that the music room frequenters proposed that the band contract be extended three times and as the request was approved which was the record at Pangeran Beach hotel”

“Ok. But how is it related to the Stinginess of Padang. Nobody bought the items offered?”

“All sold but they were bid and paid based on the used priced list in the view of Padang’s total stinginess. The bid prices even went lower and lower despite my sincerest and pity-bidding reminders that they money fetched was purely meant to cover the hospital bill in relation to her son’s surgery. Still, the bidding figures went lower and lower despite the sweeter and hotter music and dance and cheers. Si Padang just did not bid with their heart instead they bid with the intention to make profit from selling the items again. What a heart breaking scene to see Euis in pain of anxiety and feeling of embarrassment to have her very private items offered on the table and yet bid still in such inhumane prices. In my spirit to fetch a higher price, I even waved one item

after another, but still the decreasing trend of the price just did not budge. Tipping is simply not the habit of Padang's heart. I felt deeply guilty seeing Euis's so anxious and so embarrassed a face. Anyway, all auctioned items are sold at last".

"What's next, then?"

The counting of the money, another hurting session. It was so silent when the money was counted. They fetched Rp. 1.375. 000 which was far below Rp. 7.500.000 the amount needed to cover the hospital bill".

I announced the meager amount to the crowd who did not show any slightest feeling of guilt or uneasiness. I repeated quite several times that the amount was far below the needed budget to cover the cost of the surgery. I announced that we expect some tips on the music tonight to cover the deficit. Yes, tips came like drizzles but then again in so small notes and changes. It was quite obvious then that the needed amount was still far away". Where is the softest string of Padang's Heart?

Discouraged but not given in, Euis disappeared in a short while and came back with a lovely grandma's tandem hanky. Wondering what she was up to, she took the microphone and started to sing "The Embroidered Tandem Hanky of Grandma" while waving the holiest hanky like fans of football players.

The crowd roared like insane and started to sing and dance to the sweet music. Some tried to touch the tandem hanky being waved by Euis. And when the song was finished the tips again drizzled but then again in small notes and small changes. Nothing changed, the embroidered tandem Grandma hanky failed to play Padang's softest string of the heart. Thus again the amount was still far away from the targeted amount. My heart sank seeing Euis's even more discouraged a face.

"Auction the Embroidered Grandma Hanky!" said a grim-looking man sitting on the darkest corner.

I looked at Euis who slowly and painfully nodded her so small yet still beautiful head”

“Come on” another guest shouted from a table the closest to the Drink Counter. “Auction it right now!”

“In the spirit of friendship” I said “Please bid generously this time so that our beautiful Euis can pay her only son’s surgery cost. Please bid generously”

“A solid million” I said, starting the bid in a new spirit more perhaps for my sympathy for Euis’s situation and condition”

There was a quite long silence. The crowd seemed to be surprised by what they thought was so high a bid and I myself by my shocking regret for bidding much above my financial status then.

“Who bet one million? Euis asked me in a bit of a happier voice?

“Me” I said amidst a growing regret and worrying should there be no other higher bid.

“Rp. 1.1 million” shouted a man with a set of menacingly protruding teeth. Never seen a man looking at me with such a tremendous unreasonable hate in his eyes. His higher bid comforted me though as I just realized that actually I barely had Rp. 1 million in cash to my credit”

So intuitively and instinctively, in my sincerest spirit to thank him, I went to him and shook his hands so heartily and sincerely (for following the increasing trend of bidding that I set and thus for saving my ass as I actually did not have the financial preparation to pay for the bid thing). But he squeezed my hands harder than it should. I felt so much pain which soon diminished though as the thought of being saved by his higher bid came to naïve mind. In my efforts to let go

my hands I got a close look at his face. How horrible! I was so shocked by the look of his face. The grimmest and the ugliest indeed with some consistent bursting of saliva when speaking. In addition to that, he's got the worst breath a human could have. Still, I could forgive him for the way he shook my hands and his so daggering a look he gave me. The way he looked at Euis, however, reminded me of a neighbor, a military corporal, who blindly terrorized my aunt who refused his proposal to marry her some time in my childhood.

"1.2 million" I said. Wondering if my higher bid was motivated for my dislike of the man's extra-ordinarily protruding teeth or my motive to ever increase the bid to get to the target as expected by Euis. Yes, I was in a limbo of mixed feeling. Was it my friendship-based passion to help Euis? Or my childhood trauma-basis hatred toward Mr. Protruder? Despite all this happening on the music room floor, a peculiar thought came into my sometimes a naughty mind: Never seen a human creature of this terrible disharmony in a physical casing; horribly queer eyes, unpleasantly queer nostrils, and terrible shape of mouth. All this come in wrong shape and wrong proportion. And yes, the protruding teeth which constantly burst bad-smelling saliva through the irregularly-shaped mouth had been the crown bonus to this ugliest look of a face ever created on earth. What is the intention of God creating this so disharmonious face? I guessed Darwin would be happy to find Mr.Protruder to fill the missing-link that stagnated the development of His Theory. And what a contrast his look is as compared to Euis's who has been blessed by such a well- chiseled nose, mini-slit mouth, and ever-shining eyes! They are all in such a harmonious shape and proportion and color. Other than the height for which Indonesian are destined to be always in a disadvantage position, I dare to bet all my fortune that Euis is more beautiful than any Miss Universe ever crowned.

"I am afraid your story deviates again" My journalist friend again retorted quite impatiently. "But it's ok. Just go on! I want to listen to this. As for my report I will change the style

of this all. Go on Bro, but be concentrated on the topic sentence and the main idea of the story!"

"And yes, we humans are so strange creatures. Despite our scientific progress in every discipline, we often harbor dislike and hatred from the first time we meet a stranger as much as we may fall with each other in love or sympathy at first sight. I wonder what made me hate him in this first meeting of ours – me and Mr. Protruder. The same thing seemed to be in his mind which I can tell from the way he looked at me. I may look like someone who once was an enemy of his past, God knows. Looking back at all this I could never answer myself up to now and I was quite shy to ask others on my naïve attitudes as I could tolerate Mr. Protruder's look and even his hatred toward me for the sake of trying to get the target for the hospital bill. And the perfect disaster started from here.

"I strongly recommend that you consult a psychologist or a psychiatrist the soonest possible as I see quite clearly the flow of your mind goes everywhere unpredictably. But it's okay for now. Just go on Bro. By the way where do the disaster and the bonus get related? Could you focus on that? "

It started from my over excited-showing during the auction when oftentimes I had to negotiate with some very closed friends who were standing by me as I actually did not have enough cash. My excitement and worries were noticed by Mr. Protruder who happened to be an exceptionally sharp lip reader in Padang language. Moreover, he had paid an extra serious attention to my sometimes negotiating with Euis concerning the items to be auctioned. The excitement and the worries over the potential of the auction had indeed made me quite overacting in my language and even more in my body language.

"Come on, what's next. Get concentrated on the story do not add more irrelevant stream of consciousness"

“Rp. 1.3 million” Again Mr. Protruder over bid me in a more disgusting voice and look.

“Rp. 1.4 million” Again I countered the bid. Instinctively but still in my wondering if it was for my hatred for his constantly bursting saliva each time he opened his mouth or my trying to constantly put the bid to the level as expected by Euis.

All of sudden Mr. Protruder stood up and walked to me over-confidently. He shook my hands, again stronger than the average-hand-shaking and whispered to me threateningly: “Come on!” He said more arrogantly. “Stop all this drama or whatever you call it. I know all your strategies. I know why you started the bid from Rp. 1 million. I know exactly that you do not have enough to pay the winning bid whatever it is should you ever win it” And next he repeated so accurately all what I said to my friends and Euis in the most vulgar Padang language. I was all shock. Gone all my Padang tricky-debating strategies, the threat was very real that the auction could fail to fetch the target.

Before I could recollect myself, he added: “Now look! He said even more arrogantly “I am gonna pay whatever amount to compensate the shortage to the target. He came so close and whispered: “But I will only pay it on condition that I be given a special bonus, you know Or else I withdrew all my biddings”

I was horribly threatened by the development of the auction. Yes, I was really worried if Mr. Protruder withdrew all his biddings for I realized that I did not actually have the money to pay the winning price should I ever won it and that it is true that I actually bid the way I bid only to create a racing trend of the bid price in the hope that the price would fetch the targeted amount.

I told Euis what happened and she apprehensively asked me what Mr. Protruder meant by the bonus.

I whispered to her what it was in the sweetest euphemistic vocabulary that I could afford.

Her face turned whiter than shade of pale and she said that she already informed her sister that she had already got the money and thus told them to proceed with the surgery. It was underway. She simply had no choice at his point she said. She was nodding a softest ok for the bonus delivery when her tears burst out in most tragic pieces like crying kid in a cartoon story.

I never knew exactly what made me say the following statement: "I ll take the winning price without the bonus I said"

Mr. Protruder came so close to us and asked in a cool but menacing look and body language: "So, what is her decision?"

I said to him in a daring spirit I never knew I had: "She took my price that goes without the bonus".

He was grimacing in a degree of such menacing anger which I never saw a human could show before. Simply said he looked more terrible than a mad gorilla. I am confidently right that Darwin's theory would have all been in the glory side ever if this man had been found by him to fill the concept of his missing-link series. Yes, he was all a threatening figure in look and more so as he spoke out all Padang market language. Furiously, he said all the profanities which as peculiar Padang enjoy saying: "Profanities that even a hungriest dog can't eat" The happy mood of the auction turned to such an uneasy and chaotic state.

What a great relief! Andy, a local security friend in civilian wear tried to cool down the atmosphere by taking a microphone and started to sing a Padang song titled : "Yes, It is a Shake of the Shaking Horse" The music room floor again turned to its holy frenzy as a music room floor should be like. And it was to my greater relief by then that Tomy, an old friend who was clearly motivated by true-friendship spirit,

came to tap my shoulder and said: "I'll pay your old Supra X motorbike at Rp. 7.5 million and you can transfer any amount from this as much as you want to Bandung from my account tonight. I saw Euis hugging him like a childhood friend she never met for a long time. Tomy saved us all, my ass from public embarrassment, Euis's son in Bandung, and the spontaneous true spirit of friendship as said in the old wise word : A friend in need is a friend in deed"

We saw Mr. Protruder leaving the music room. He was all insanely crazy, grumbling, cursing and shadow-boxing. He never stopped pointing his middle finger at me.

We transferred the money that night to a hospital in Bandung as guided by Euis. Our chests were swelling with pride having put a smile on Euis's relieved face. We felt like truly heroes. And the next thing I know was that I was lying on a bed in the Provincial Hospital on By Pass Road for my own head surgery.

Remotely, I heard: "Oh praise God. He comes to at last. He was in a coma for more than two weeks". Then, a few days after that, a friend explained to me what actually happened to me that night that I was hit with a piece of wood by somebody who was driving an RX King. I was found lying on the road by a patrolling policeman that night and taken to the hospital where I was now lying. I did not understand anything explained to me as I could not recall any thing that happened to me before that. A doctor gave me some intensive test and positively declared as suffering from a total amnesia.

Then, in their research on amnesia, a group of Amnesia Specialist from some international-standard universities and a big class of medical students took me as a subject. Intensively, they struggled in a team to help me to regain my memory as it used to be. They could not do much however as after 3 months of medical treatment and using several kinds of therapy and medicine, I did not recover at all. It was declared as a permanent amnesia and there was not any help available so far today. "Only a miracle from the most Forgiving

and the most Merciful God could help him. Such a miracle could be motivated by a delivery of true sincerity” A still religious specialist whispered to my friend that day

“Then how could you describe all this so vividly? I don’t see any slightest sign of your amnesia whatsoever. And in fact you do not read anything anymore out of your Diary. Are you creating a truly imaginative short story? Come on! How can I change it all into a journalist kind of reporting? Did all this really happen as you told me or is this all your own creative bullshit?” My journalist friend spoke so vehemently and of course angrily.

“If you do not trust your living friend in real life as we share now then who else should you trust? Will you trust someone who is dead?

“Ok, then. For the sake of completing the story I trust you. But tell me how you regained your memory, a crazy and deviation-prone memory as I see now which I guess quite beyond help to realign. And from now on make sure you concentrate on the perfect disaster and the perfect bonus as you started the whole thing from the early going and again make sure you do not create more irrelevant stream of consciousness or stream of unconsciousness, whatsoever they call it in literary writing. They truly make the readers confused. And most important of all, please cut the crab really short” My journalist friend complained more vehemently and impatiently.

Ok. I promise you truly now, more truly than ever before. One night I was visited by Euis who was all smiles when describing to me the success of her son’s surgery and his better condition. She showed me a picture of her smiling son keeping the toy that I bought for him her sincere thank-you expression reopens the clogging in my memory tube. Yes, her so sincere thanks and sympathy for me instantly reinstalled every memory system to the right design capacity. “Oh I forgot to bring you a special bonus that I thought would pay off all your sincerest help to raise enough money for my son’s

operation. It's my son's embroidered toy case that was given by his Grandma. He said the case should be given to you as a bonus so that you can keep your most precious thing in there" She said in a smile I never thought she had in her natural inventory as a woman.

And yes, that night, in a mesmerizing move and sincerest spirit, she delivered the bonus that she thought should be sincerely given though it was never promised. I tried the hardest I could to explain that I was not in any physical and mental position and not in any fit for any delivery of whatever to be delivered – promised or not. I begged her to understand that I did not have anything to keep in the toy case she would like to give me. Yes, I was all in the frantically refusing side. I said that all my favors for her were done for the sake of friendship gesture and that it brought its own reward and thus should never be returned. Yet, she was all the blindness and the deafness. I did not know what actually happened but I felt like being forced to take the pill by my Aunt in my childhood. Then, I heard the mosquito-killing lizards sang in chorus: "Put off the light and sing the most condoning song to persuade the angels to put this note off-the-record. We have never seen an un-promised bonus delivered at this level of sincerity" They sang such a chorus in so high a tone that I came into another coma which I suspected had totally cured my amnesia.

And, when I came to the next morning with my freshest memory ever, I was again, as I used to be, woke up and warmly greeted by my truly little brother who came back from a long wandering as a stingy and tricky Padang. He apologized to me in tears for just leaving me alone when I underwent a hernia operation which turned out to be a fatal malpractice. He spoke in a guilty tone as and to my surprise it was physically approved by Euis's body language which might want to honestly signal "Your apology is well taken, never met two natural brothers performed in such a team work" Then I saw Euis giggling in a shy voice.

Oh, yes? The journalist said in a series of pretending nods. Your brother? And where is the perfect bonus? Up to know you have not told me. You are stingier than the stingiest Padang.

It even reactivate my holy other system which all had been in the dormant due to the malpractice in hernia operation. In fact turned the whole perfect disaster into a realization of a promise which involved an un-promised bonus.

It was totally cured. All this must have been caused by the delivery of a bonus which was completely un-promised. The delivery of which had all been so sincere. All sprang from a so spontaneous human empathy. Thanks

Yes he rescued me, saved my ass. In a most sincerest friendship

The drummer Mr. Protruder was a Padang and he was an exceptionally excellent lip-reader. He knew exactly what I talked about with my Padang friends around the table. He knew that I actually did not have the cash.

I shall pay all the short on condition that I am given the bonus

My wife was so disappointed to hear the case and went hometown by a travel which had an accident that killed every passenger.

Agreed to pay with the bonus

Thus, out of unreasonable and mysterious hatred and despise for each other, we over bid each other in a most unreasonable way. At some point, unable perhaps to bear his hatred toward me, he suddenly shouted at Rp. 4.7 million at last despite the fact that I did not actually have the amount.

Despite my sincere passion to help Euis and my hatred toward Mr. Protruder, however, I had to stop over bidding out

there. Besides, I was reminded by a close friend, Edi Pangeran, who actually knew my actual financial status and shape.

Asking for a bonus. Or else cancelled the bid.

I was about to close the auction and knocked the table twice when Mr. Protruder stood up and said : “Rp. 5 million cash now, on condition that it be added by a little special bonus, to be arranged later” He looked at me if I could over bid his bid again and looked at Euis. Knowing that I did not have any more money to over bid him, I remained silent.

I whispered to Euis that I actually had Rp. 2 million to my credit. And that

“What is the bonus? I asked though.

He came to me and whispered something which was more disgusting than his stinking breath combined with his saliva bursting which almost filled up my ear before he finished his sentence.

I whispered the message to Euis in my best euphemism to. He turned paler than the shade of pale

Oh, God how come Thou create such a stingy clan on earth”

Fat Padang with protruding teeth with consistent saliva bursting that smell '*jengkolish*'

Tears pop out

I can hear the cries of her conscience “Just a second b4 she nodded, I whispered something that I would regret all my life. I said let it be to cover the rest without any bonus.

No matter how I explain, Mr. Protruder refused it before I finished the sentence, he refuted my reasons during the saying of the sentence, and he even refused my explanation before I said the sentence. Arguing in a fierce arguing fire with the protruding teeth

Her determination to deliver the un-promised bonus, her eyes scared me to the most, no matter how I explained. How sweet and how bitter.

Their sincerity goes beyond the cloud; I heard the mosquito-prayer lizard said: This bonus is delivered in the most sincere rendering, let us switch off the light. Sad to know that it's the only thing we can do to contribute. The light is moved, understand and so are the angels.

Let it go unrecorded, this one. Let it be redemption of Padang stinginess.

The guess is treated like king, but the janitor is treated like a machine

The driest in tipping.

Even in their drunken condition – where others may lose some controls in some areas of conduct, but the Padang do not lose control in their financial flow. They even become thriftier.

Leaving room, Rp. 160. Rp. 50.

It was embarrassing

It was not enough for the cigarette

Every member of music band

Most of them from Bandung, the friendliest

Being music players, they were forced to be superbly friendly

Selling all the rings

Asking for the bonus ring

They did not pay the actual price

Some bad debt was there

Even in the rental exchange of the most traditional ring they bargained, they did not pay as agreed in the beginning

That the music band players, janitors, and room boys survive from guest's tips never cross the mind of my friends

from Padang. No matter what, economic calculation must be strictly done to economize the spending

The auction. He music the crowd. The ring. Wanting 4 the bonus. He came to save her honor. All my saving were gone. The bonuses, coming so voluntarily, in jumping and in dancing, cried for themselves for more and more.

It hurts them to tip and it hurts the recipients more when they do tip. They give away the most unwanted smallest changes they hate to keep. Kind of the shoddiest, shabbiest. The stinkiest.

All collected in a bottle intended to be given to charity of sacrifice on Moslem's sacrifice day on Idul Adha. It is not enough to buy one goat to sacrifice.

The tips range from Rp. 100 to Rp. 750 coming in smallest changes, changes that are shabbiest, shoddiest and stinkiest.

The influence of alcohol

The natural smell of the half-matured papaya as a bonus

The tricks of flickering lights: You feel the papayas jumped and bumped at your face



8

A Qishash with its Peaceful Solution

A Qishash with its Peaceful Solution ***(For all my buddies at Fac. Of Letters and*** ***PT SP)***

Everyday reality shows us bare facts that in most occasions and settings, most neighborhood relationship remains mostly distant, aloof, and limited. Simply said, nowadays, due to our becoming more and more hectic schedule of pursuance of happiness and frantic escaping from life-stresses, we seldom see happy development of neighborhood relationship. Yet, no one can ever tell what kind of relationship two neighbors can develop as they brush shoulders day in and day out. For some mysterious reasons or others, some relationships might grow into some kind of family-like ties that they can hang on to in difficult moments and, of course, cherish or rejoice in good ones. And when a neighborhood relationship survived some episodes and flourished in some unexpected manner and course, it could grow into some peculiar but interesting development. Still it can be more peculiar and amusing and even shocking when the neighbors have to socialize or interact in couples in fenceless and windowless and doorless setting.

I closely witnessed such a development of neighboring relationship as a young boy who was asked to attend a glassware shop by my uncle. As glassware business did not run well then, I had quite an ample of time to witness a quite peculiar development of relationship between *Sate* Seller and *Martabak* Seller in Banda Buek market who, perhaps for the sake of practicality and economy, both ran their business with their spouses. And it was such a coincidence that both couples were newly married. At some point along the line, I was told that they were both matched by their uncles for the sake of strengthening their family tree and preserving their family pride.

As they ran their business right in front of my uncle's glassware shop under some simple portable tents, I could see the development of their relationship much clearer than those so called 'sinetrons' on Indonesian T.V channels. In the beginning, it was quite boring to see the two couples running their business right in front of my nose every day. As I did not much business to attend to, however, I was kind of forced by the setting and then attracted to pay quite an attention to their everyday interaction that was showing some peculiar acting and phenomena from the outset. The first peculiarity came with the fact that the two couples were given very contrasting physical casing by God, The Mighty Creator: *Sate* Seller and his wife were both quite fat and quite dark in skin whereas the *Martabak* Seller were both quite skinny and quite straight and had heavy albino complexion. I guess, we scarcely come across these two contradicting and disappointing physical variations moving together in disharmonious rhymes of life.

The first thing that caught my attention about them was that these two newly married couples did not seem to be in harmony. They never smiled at each other. Instead, more often than not, they exchanged cloudy reserved mood which could not be easily interpreted. Except for the sake of serving the customers, they never made close proximity as newly married couples were naturally expected to show out of honeymoon spirit. In each couple, exchanges of sweet words or even glances, as normally married couples were expected to make, were never observed. Simply said, they were not there. Instead, for one unseen reason or another, they sometimes exchanged some kind of cat-and-dog glances which mysteriously turned into rap-like conversations. Once in a while, the altercations and the bickering they made went quite obvious and thus increased the already cantankerous atmosphere of the market area. Had it not been for these unhappy pictures, I guessed, they would have sold better, as I had been a quite regular customers of theirs and thus I knew so well, and as I was also told by many, that both menus they sold tasted quite delicious. Some customers, however, did not seem to care their internal conflict. They simply came to fill

their empty, crying stomach and thus as long as they were served the food – *sate* and or *martabak*- they were satisfied.

To my tickling curiosity, I noticed that, when the fat *Sate* Seller passed some utensils of any kind to his spouse, it just, more often than not, fell mysteriously short. It just could not, for some mysterious reasons or others, quite reach her hand or when it reached it, it did not deliver firmly enough, and thus the passed utensil dropped to the ground, and in no time they started to get cranky with each other and there went another day of endless grumbling and lamenting. Whereas the wife of *Martabak* Seller, on the other hand, seemed to be hurt and quite in pain when the *Martabak* Seller handed something to her in a not so friendly a manner. He seemed to be so naturally incapable of delivering it in the way it should be to his wife. Instead, he thrust the utensil quite rudely that she would, though in silence, be in pain and in unpleasantness, and yet her husband seemed not to be aware of it as a husband was expected to. I kept wondering, even up to know, why such physical interactions between the two couples in passing the utensils often failed every time it took place. As time went by, I watched the episodes wherein they did not often pass the utensils anymore. But that did not decrease the occurrences of unhappy conversation in the internal sphere of each couple. Still I witnessed, off and on, in my closer observation, both husbands of the two couples, for no clear reason whatsoever now, would mysteriously go unreasonably cranky, complaining almost invariably that something had been neglected or misplaced or mislaid which actually of trivial or no importance at all. Once in while they smashed some utensils to the ground and some went into pieces and some ended up in damaged or dented shapes. The clattering and the tinkling of broken pieces of these kitchen utensils evoked those number of Mozart *the Tragedy of Civil War*, that is, if I am not mistaken, one of his early master pieces. Although those broken and the dented pieces of their glassware, the production of their unhappy interaction, always found the replacement in my glassware shop which helped my slow sales, it didn't compensate my feeling sorry for both couples who seemed to be wading so heavily and so

slowly in the thick and sticky cloud of unhappy interaction in front of my shop. Was there some kind of hidden grudge in each couple? How could it be? What was the reason? I felt deeply sorry for both couples. I wished I could do something about it. I was too young and inexperienced then, I just could not figure out anything to do about it, not to mention the so sensitive and the so complicated and the so private nature of marriage relationship that discourage most of us to put our nose into unless there are some signs of possible bloodshed or openly invited. I believe you all can read what I mean.

Another peculiar and tickling thing that I watched was that, once in a while, each of the wives of the two couples, in spite of the unhappy situation of their marriage, managed to steal some moment and slipped into my tiny shop for a short session of makeup. It seemed to me that to women, no matter how tough and rough and rugged things rolled, the beautifying instinct was always there. Nothing could take it away from them. And sometimes, by any chance or perhaps instinct (or maybe by necessity?), they regularly slipped into my tiny shop together now for a longer session of a makeup. They even exchanged their beauty kits in such a sweet and cooperative manner. Amidst the innocent chuckling and childish giggling, they even helped each other in their make ups, something that you can only see between two sisters in a wedding party of a spinster aunt in their extended family. Evoked in me, upon watching their beautifying crisscrossing fingers, was some numbers of nerve-soothing Classic Phil harmony as conducted Zubin Mehta whose concerts had been peacefully attended by so many religious and political leaders from different and various paths of beliefs and philosophies. Thus, I kept wondering why, in spite of their unhappy relationship with their husbands, the two poor wives seemed to be in such a harmony and managed to run some sessions of mysterious whispering and laughing on lady's stuff amidst the so many things to be done about their business. All these two women's oddities and those of their situation built up my curiosity in watching them even more. I felt that with all their natural playful naivety amidst their not so happy situation, they were more interesting to watch than those celebrities

who floundered and showed off all those expensive stuff on T.V channels that were too far from my meager income to afford. I felt that since then, I began to believe, and it is so solid in me now, that some cleverly hidden plans in human dramas enacted naively but trickily in their real life, are much more fascinating to watch and learn something out of. Do you agree with me?

Some more peculiar developments, however, began to show up when one of each couple went to China Town to buy the things they needed for the next day of business. The fat *Sate* Seller went by himself whereas the *Martabak* Seller sent his skinny wife to do the shopping. I often saw the errand goers took the same city bus, by accident perhaps, to get to China Town. The *Sate* Seller seemed a little bit relax and kept whistling in silence in his preparation to do the shopping for tomorrow. The thin wife of *Martabak* Seller managed to slip into my tiny glassware shop to put on some make-up when it was time to go shopping for tomorrow. Yes, the two errand goers looked a little bit lighter in their move when the time came for this shopping journey, an escape of so much routine long and day of business. And during their absence, for any unknown reasons or others, the selling of *sate* and *martabak* ran better. The thin *Martabak* Seller and the fat wife of *Sate* Seller were naturally carried into some mutual cooperation in the middle of selling activities which was conditioned by the need of their business - some eating customers of *sate* ordered *martabak* from *sate* stand and vice versa. These cooperative crisscrossing sales, however, were not something unusual in the business of Padang people. It was very common indeed and it gave its value added to both businesses. In these interactions, the temporary crisscrossing couples made some quite nice exchanges of jokes and glances which were only obvious to me as I now scrutinized them with detective-like curiosity. Thus I began to be attracted by the two different developments of their interactions. They were quite in contrast: when they were with their spouses and when they temporarily crisscrossed. And what made me more surprised was the fact that now, in temporary crisscrossing couples, the exchanges of the kitchen utensils

took place quite successfully. They never failed. They never fell short or any little bit too thrusting. And mysteriously the clattering and the tinkling of their kitchen utensils now evoked in me an old sweet song by Roy Orbison "When the right one Come Along" that he wrote and sang and got to the top chart in his early romantic years. Yet, when their legal couples came back, which happened to take place quite one after another in a smooth turn, they seemed to be able to detect it by instinct and one of them would instinctively and wisely beckon or silently whistle a little sign which abruptly ended their happy temporary crisscrossing interaction and exchanges.

Nobody noticed, what is more cared, the odd development of the relationship between the two couples in Banda Buek market as everybody was busy with their business day in and day out. People only pay attention to celebrities, don't they? In fact the government, after apologizing so sincerely to the people, had just increased the price of fuel oil from Rp. 2.500 per liter to Rp. 4.500 per liter. The increase fairly hurt every business equally not excluding those small ones like *sate* and *martabak*. After some time though, the people around were stunningly shocked to hear the news that spread so fast that the *Sate* Seller had disappeared mysteriously. And so did the wife of the *Martabak* Seller. Everybody at Pasa Banda Buek talked about it for quite some time and many of them wondered why the two disappeared at the same time. And it could be felt then that the heat of the news took their minds off the impact of the increase of the fuel oil price which hurt their business severely. After some time though, it was concluded by them that the two, for some mysterious reasons or others, had eloped and disappeared into the dark. I was not quite surprised to see the development though, as I watched it developing step by step. In fact, given the fact that I had observed the drama quite from the beginning, I kind of expect that such a peculiar thing could turn into a peculiar development. Yet, as I was unaware of the actual reason then, I did not expect the development could go that far and that fast in this land of the religious clan called Minangkabau that

do not at all tolerate any slightest breach of strict traditional moral rules especially that that has to do with the holiness and sacred status of marriage.

The abandoned couples, however, did not seem to accept the news in the way as most abandoned spouses would when such an embarrassing thing happened to them. In spite of the shocking news and in spite of the sudden absence of her husband, the abandoned wife of the *Sate* Seller continued her *sate* business as usual on the next day. And every time people asked where her husband had gone, she quickly answered that she did not have any slightest ideas. Sometimes she looked sad and sometimes she looked just okay. The *Martabak* Seller, too, continued his business as usual on the next day in spite of the news and in spite of the sudden absence of his wife. And when asked about his wife's whereabouts he quickly replied by shrugging off his thin shoulders. Sometimes he looked sad, yet sometimes he looked just okay. They did not seem to respond to the shameful incident as most, or perhaps all, couples are expected to do and show - Business seemed to run as usual. Alone and bound by the same fate, the wife of the *Sate* Seller and the *Martabak* Seller, seemed to keep the simple principle of survival of the fittest: "No matter what happens, the show must go on." And what a blessing in disguise! Their business ran even better and better. And the 'symbiosis' of their business too went even better and better. The exchanges of the kitchen and now cooking utensils became so surprisingly successful. They just could execute it so smoothly without looking at each other. *Sate* fills you well and gives you heat and then *martabak* gives you relief and comfort. They just could not complement each other any better. It just could not be any better. Business ran as usual and exchanges of glances and nice words continued in some peculiarly hidden manners. Nobody but me could notice such peculiar developments as most people were buried in their business to make enough earnings to cope with the negative effects of the increase of fuel oil. And if they wanted to watch others, they would do it on T.V programs - those starry celebrities. It seemed to me that to them, common people or

people on the street were never and not at all interesting to watch.

And after two weeks of the disappearance of the *Sate* Seller and the wife of the *Martabak* Seller, the *Martabak* Seller and the wife of the *Sate* Seller took a perfect and sweet revenge. Instead of showing some kind of sadness and frustration and disturbances by the insistent and nagging questions and the wondering and pitiful look of the people around, they bravely united their selling carts together and combined their business to create a maximum 'symbiosis' Alone but together now as bound by the same fate, they seemed to have declared more to themselves: Our fate is not our destiny, it's entirely our choice. And now, instead of having two separate washing-pans, they jointly bought a bigger one and put it in the middle of the borderless point where they shared the washing of the just used utensils that they had to quite periodically. Yes, now I saw them helping each other in washing the crisscrossing utensils that had just been used in crisscrossing transactions while exchanging sincere smiles and sweet words like those of music band players when their music play came to such a harmony that the audience got to their feet to applaud them. As I did not have any opportunity to go out of my Beloved City of Padang up to then, I witnessed that they both became more and more successful in their business in the city. I saw the proven fact that every business was like a living thing, it had its own soul and being, and it needs love and caring hands to grow. Their united business had the core of it now – sincere symbiosis and intensive mutual caring. They sold so well that they opened more outlets and even had franchises. What a blessing in disguise! They had turned a shameful threat into a golden opportunity. I think everybody should learn from their agility and toughness. Do you agree to my suggestion?

Nobody knew what happened to the peculiar couples since then. I stopped watching them as I was assigned by my uncle to another shop in Bukit Tinggi, another city about one hundred kilo meters from Pasa Banda Buek 10 years had passed quite silently. Many things happened to me in the

elapsed time and I was about to forget the crisscrossing couples, the street actors of my real life *sinetron*. But then, in my once-in-a-life-time trip to Jakarta after 10 years of what most would describe as a shameful incident of theirs, I was taken by my cousin to a yoga exhibition. And again what a coincidence! I came across the couples in that peculiar branch of half sport and half ritual in nature. Yes, both the crisscrossing couples peacefully competed in yoga exhibition in Jakarta and both became the so-called double champions of yoga models in their age category in the capital city of Indonesia. The outfit that they had showed quite evidence that they both made it in their businesses – *sate* and *martabak* and the crisscrossing of it. I witnessed that the *Sate* Seller who used to be so fat, perhaps because of his going along so well with the skinny ex-wife of the *Martabak* Seller had likewise turned quite slim and looked much better physically. The other crisscrossing couple had also experienced the same phenomena: the *Martabak* Seller who used to be thin had become a bit athletic and the ex-wife of the *Sate* Seller, who used to be heavy, had turned quite slim and looked much more happy and healthy. And I watched very clearly and concluded from the warm way they embraced each other that both the crisscrossing couples seemed to be so happy to reunite in a new and free setting. To my surprise, both couples seemed to have just come to a peaceful agreement to happily leave all the peculiar happenings behind them and showed a tremendous spirit to live happily ever after as true friends. And I kept wondering, until now, why after so many years of not seeing each other, I could by accident meet them and continue to witness such a peculiar development of the interaction to that happy ending. I kept wondering too, how *sate* seller and *martabak* seller and their crisscrossing couples could meet in a yoga exhibition after 10 years of the runaway incidence. And most intriguing of all, I kept wondering how the *Martabak* Seller and the wife of the *Sate* Seller did not show any grudges whatsoever after such an embarrassing incidence, having their spouses stolen, and could just come to peace so lightly when they met again after 10 years of absence. Had it not been for the peculiarly decorated cup that they were given as the double winners by the yoga committee,

the mystery of the peculiar development of their neighboring interaction that developed into such a smooth exchanging of partners would always have been a mystery to me 'till the end of my life. The cups were decorated by a traditional inscription of a couple of yoga athletes in a wrestling-like yoga number in which one of the athletes, who was quite slim, beautifully and tenderly coiled and physically but softly overwhelmed the other athlete, who was quite round and robust. The inscripitor must have been so very fine an artist that his or her inscription of in-pair-yoga athletes came so finely and innocently and naively perfect that the in scripted united couples became so very much unitedly one, and that as I looked at the inscription deeper, I could again see the reminiscence of those mysteriously cheerful faces of these ladies 10 years ago in Pasa Banda Buek during their mutual beautifying sessions in my tiny and hidden glassware shop. Also, I saw so clearly in the inscription, the shiny reflection of their so much yearning eyes when the washing-pan was sometimes shared in tacit and mysterious understanding. Again the echo of Zubin Mehta Phil harmony crept into the deepest part of my inner mind. This time though, the echo was harmoniously mixed with that hit number of Lobo "*In the Right Love*". Repeatedly and unconsciously, I nodded my head as I found the answer to the mystery of the peaceful revenge. "Sometimes *qishash* could by itself find its peaceful solution" I whispered so slowly to myself and again shook my head intermittently.

I am still shaking my head in disbelief when I am writing this piece, what I insist on calling a description of peculiar reality. I am wondering how simple chances and or accidents in everyday life could deeply affect and change human lives. And, I keep wondering too, until now, how such and such could develop out of human relationship and why I am the witness to the end of it. Have you ever witnessed something of some similar peculiar nature? If you have, take your pen or get to your P.C. or open your lap-top, if I may suggest, and start writing it before it is out of your mind. Maybe others could learn something out of it. Or at least, if some friends care to read your reality-based writing, it could somehow take

their mind off the killing effect and the frustrating impact of the increase of fuel oil that happens quite periodically in our beloved country Indonesia. Thus, they do not need to buy some kind of anti depressant drug, the price of which, instead of making them relieved, make them even more depressed. And by the way, if you happen not to believe or have any slightest doubt in this description of reality of mine, I would be more than happy and willing to take you to the *Sate* and *Martabak* Seller who are one of the two crisscrossing couples. Of course, before I introduce them to you, you have to promise me a treat of their *sate* and *martabak*. And if you insist on seeing the other couple, you'd better, at the earliest possible, book me a two-way ticket to Jakarta by Air Asia which charges you the cheapest fares. Any time bros, you are more than welcome to contact me. I am always here for you.

Coil
Sleuth
Writhing
Eel
Necessity is the mother of invention.

They are naturally naïve but something, that they have to do to survive, turns them to be mysteriously and peculiarly tricky.

Instantly inspired trickiness.

It is a wonder. I shudder to think. If lowly educated ladies are capable of doing this trick so hidden.

I believe in the power of Feminism.

Suddenly I am reminded of the whispering and I shudder to think.

Nobody knew what happened to the peculiar couples since then. I stopped watching them as I was assigned by my uncle to another shop in Bukit Tinggi another city about one hundred kilo meters from Pasa Banda Buek. Thus ten years

had passed quite away from the couples. Unlike my first assignment, however, this second shop drew more business; consequently, I was deeply absorbed by the hustle and bustle of hectic market life. As many things happened to me in the elapsed time, I was about to forget the crisscrossing couples, the street actors of my real life movie. But then, in my once-in-a-life-time trip to Jakarta after 10 years of what most would describe as a shameful incident of theirs, I was taken by my cousin to a yoga exhibition. And again what a coincidence! I came across the couples in that peculiar branch of half sport and half ritual in nature. Yes, both the crisscrossing couples peacefully competed in yoga exhibition in Jakarta and both became the so-called double champions of yoga models in their age category in the capital city of Indonesia. The outfit that they had showed quite evidence that they both made it in their businesses – *sate* and *martabak* and the crisscrossing of it. I witnessed that the *Sate* Seller who used to be so fat, perhaps because of his going along so well with the skinny ex-wife of the *Martabak* Seller had likewise turned quite slim and looked much better physically. The other crisscrossing couple had also experienced the same phenomena: the *Martabak* Seller who used to be thin had become a bit athletic and the ex-wife of the *Sate* Seller, who used to be heavy, had turned quite slim and looked much more happy and healthy. And I watched very clearly and concluded from the warm way they embraced each other that both the crisscrossing couples seemed to be so happy to reunite in a new and free setting. To my surprise, both couples seemed to have just come to a peaceful agreement to happily leave all the peculiar happenings behind them and showed a tremendous spirit to live happily ever after as true friends. And I kept wondering, until now, why after so many years of not seeing each other, I could by accident meet them and continue to witness such a peculiar development of the interaction to that happy ending. I kept wondering too, how *sate* seller and *martabak* seller and their crisscrossing couples could meet in yoga exhibition after 10 years of the runaway incidence. And most intriguing of all, I kept wondering how the *Martabak* Seller and the wife of the *Sate* Seller did not show any grudges whatsoever after such an embarrassing incidence, having their spouses stolen, and

could just come to peace so lightly when they met again after 10 years of absence. Had it not been for the peculiarly decorated cup that they were given as the double winners by the yoga committee, the mystery of the peculiar development of their neighboring interaction that developed into such a smooth exchanging of partners would always have been a mystery to me 'till the end of my life. The cups were decorated by a traditional inscription of a couple of yoga athletes in a wrestling-like yoga number in which one of the athletes, who was quite slim, beautifully and tenderly coiled and physically but softly overwhelmed the other athlete, who was quite round and robust. The inscriptor must have been so very fine an artist that his or her inscription of in-pair-yoga athletes came so finely and innocently and naively perfect that the inscribed united couples became so very much unitedly one, and that as I looked at the inscription deeper, I could again see the reminiscence of those mysteriously cheerful faces of these ladies 10 years ago in Pasa Banda Buek during their mutual beautifying sessions in my tiny and hidden glassware shop. Also, I saw so clearly in the inscription, the shiny reflection of their so much yearning eyes when the washing-pan was sometimes shared in tacit and mysterious understanding. Again the echo of Zubin Mehta Phil harmony crept into the deepest part of my inner mind. This time though, the echo was harmoniously mixed with that hit number of Michael Learn to Rock's "*In the Right Love*". Repeatedly and unconsciously, I nodded my head as I found the answer to the mystery of the peaceful revenge. "Sometimes *qishash* could by itself find its peaceful solution" I whispered so slowly to myself and again and again nodded my head intermittently.



Source: garisjelata.wordpress.com

9 | The Turtle and the Scorpion

The Turtle and the Scorpion

After several years of wandering, Mantiko Langek, a young and ambitious male scorpion, planned to return to the other side of Muaro Padang River where he belonged. He badly missed all his friends and family members. His home-coming instinct to get together with all his folks became more and more unbearable. It was triggered by the smell of *Lebaran* cakes and the sight of colorful Libran baskets that he saw along the road in front of the various food and fruit stalls. As he did not know how to swim, he thought hard about any living creature that could help him to cross the river. Suddenly, he remembered his next door neighbor, a sweet and cute turtle from Bandung whom he often saw roaming the river as her play ground. He therefore planned to ask her to help him to cross the river.

It took him quite some time, though, to collect all his courage to ask Miss Sweety Turtle to help him to cross the river. As a matter of fact, he had never talked to her or shown any gesture of friendship before this. To make the matters worse, he did not pay a condolence when her mother passed away the week before or help her extinguish the flames when her house caught fire the previous month. In truth, he was always preoccupied with his own business of collecting and trading scrap iron from village to village on his side of the river.

In the midst of his internal conflict and painful doubt, he consulted his only friend Mr. Monkey. He asked him if it would be all right to ask Miss Sweety Turtle to help him to cross the river in spite of the fact that he had never talked to her before. He also mentioned all the things that he had failed to do in relation to his obligation as her immediate neighbor. As soon as Mr. Scorpion finished describing his case, Mr. Monkey smiled broadly. Flashing across his mind, he saw the chance to swap his sincere consultation service for his long-delayed debt to Mr. Scorpion.

In a split second Mr. Monkey replied smilingly, “Easy, easy, and easy! No one can blame you if you start a friendship rather late with your neighbor Miss Sweety Turtle. My literature references about turtles show very clearly that they belong to a kind of species that enjoys and appreciates slow movement. In fact, her kind does not appreciate rushing. And every theory on friendship emphasizes that, like earth quakes, friendship can start anytime along the continuum of our life and interaction. Like an earth quake, you never can tell exactly when it will happen. It is common, and maybe perfect, that friendship should start from your immediate need to ask her to help you cross the river to meet your folks before *Lebaran*. It’s the right moment. Forget all your mistakes in the past and concentrate on your immediate need. Besides that, I know very well that this Miss Sweety Turtle is such an innocent, such a naïve and kind-hearted creature. She won’t remember all your mistakes and misdeeds in relation to your obligations as a neighbor. I’ll tell you the most workable strategy for asking a favor from her if you only agree to swap this sincere consultation with my long-delayed debt to you.” Without waiting for Mr. Scorpion to nod his head, Mr. Monkey continued hastily: “Smile the sweetest smile you can, and compliment the one whose favor you need to ask. Come on, go for it, concentrate and execute your mission. *Lebaran* is getting closer. You won’t fail, I can assure you. Come on! Come on! And make sure to note that my debt is wiped out by this piece of such important advice,” added Mr. Monkey with an even broader smile.

Having been told by Mr. Monkey of the natural innocence of the turtle and having seen it for himself in some close observations, and having practiced the sweetest smile that he could manage using a mirror, Mr. Scorpion plucked up all his courage to execute his mission. Now, he concentrated on his mission. He smiled his sweetest smile and started to speak to Miss Sweety Turtle exactly as advised by Mr. Monkey.

“Please help me to cross the river, Miss Sweety Turtle. You are said to be the most kind-hearted creature not only on

this side of the river but on this planet called Earth. I can't stand coming back hometown to meet my folks as I have been away for more than three years. I will never forget this favor of yours till the end of my life." The male scorpion pleaded for help in his full swing compliments.

"I would like to," she said. "You are my most immediate neighbor. I see you at least three times a day. Wise men say your next door neighbour is more important than your immediate relatives who are often far from you. They are the first to jump to help you in case of trouble or when you need a favor. I can feel what you feel about missing your folks at home after all these three years you have been away from them. And you are right; I was born with a golden heart. And helping you to cross this river is not difficult for me. It's nothing compared with my holy, philanthropic mission to spread my thousands and thousands of eggs to help feed the world for free. But my natural instinct screams in me that helping you to cross the river on my back could be suicide. You are so notorious for being the most stinger-happy being under the sun. You will surely bite and sting me as soon as you have the chance and I will surely sink to the bottom of the river before giving a million of eggs to help feed the world."

"Look, if I bite you I will surely sink with you to bottom of the river. You know that I can't swim at all. Come on Miss Sweetie Turtle! I have been missing all my friends and family so much after living on this side of the river for three years. I promise you my free and sincere service for two weeks when we get there. I will never forget your good deed to me". The scorpion spoke persuasively and softly somewhat like a boy to a girl on their first date.

"Will you promise not to bite me while crossing the river? I haven't spread a million eggs yet to help feed the world - my mission for being born here on earth". The female turtle spoke in what he said as the most serious and naïve of tones.

"I promise you, I swear. God is my witness," the male scorpion swore so earnestly and convincingly. "And I will be

your servant for four weeks on the other side of the river. My friends and family will also serve you like a queen". The male scorpion added some more bonuses to his promise so lightly and freely.

"If you promise this solemnly, then I can't say no anymore. Come on! Hop onto my back and cling to my neck! Hide in the little but holy crevice between my neck and back! Hang on tightly as I swim! You will surely be safe if you listen to me and keep your promise not to sting or do me any harm," The female turtle said so tenderly, sincerely and assumingly like a caring elder sister to a spoiled younger brother.

On jumped the male scorpion to the back of the female turtle and off the female turtle swam crossing the river and taking the male scorpion to where he belonged. Everything seemed all right until about five meters before the other side of the river. Then suddenly, the female turtle felt a strong and painful sting she had never experienced before. It was so painful that she instantly lost all her power. It was so painful that she could not continue swimming and thus started to sink. However, so keen was her curiosity that in the last minutes of her life, she managed to ask the male scorpion:

"I am dying for sure but I am anxious to know why you still stung and bit me in spite of so earnest a promise not to. How could you do it, knowing that you too would drown and meet your end? And not to mention the fact that you are now less than four meters from meeting all your folks at home." The female turtle spoke so curiously while sinking with the male scorpion down to the river.

The male scorpion could hardly reply. "It's not about the promise. It's not about the fact that I knew that if I stung you, I too would sink and die as I can't swim. It's not about missing my folks at home whom I have not seen for ages. It's about my true and incorrigible character. Honestly, the soonest I got into the soft and holy crevice of your neck; I tried my best to control myself so as not to bite and sting you. However, I couldn't resist biting and stinging your neck as soon as I touched and felt its incomparable softness. Look! Never in all

my life have I touched so soft and so tender a neck as yours. Besides, it smells so heavenly sweet. My true character has been triggered by all of this. Blame the whitener and softener or any other kinds of hope-selling cosmetics that you must have applied periodically. I apologize for this trouble I have caused you. Let me be your servant forever in whatever paradise we get to. Don't cry with regret Miss Sweetie Turtle. Kindly take my biting as a token of true love. I promise to truly serve you forever, till death join us together again in an inseparable unity".

In her last breath the naïve turtle could barely whisper, more to herself than to the scorpion: "Poor grandma is absolutely right in her wise words: 'Once a stinger, always a stinger'"

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