

**CIKAL**

*Cikal*

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## CIKAL

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## CIKAL

### 1. Night at the *Pendopo*<sup>1</sup>

The fog had begun to set on Hargamulya Hamlet. The hamlet at the foot of Menoreh hills looked as calm as it had always been. During the day, most of its inhabitants worked on the fields on the hillside. Therefore, the hamlet got to be rather quiet during this time. Meanwhile, those who did not work in the farm earned their living by working as coconut pickers.

The atmosphere changed when at every certain night the villagers sat together in the *pendopo* of Hargamulya Hamlet. In that place, they listened to gamelan music and practiced playing the instruments. Most Hargamulya people worked as farmers. However, the hamlet was also known for its dancers and gamelan artists.

Not surprisingly, on that particular night the atmosphere in Hargamulya Hamlet was festive. The melodious sound of gamelan could be heard from a distance. The night breeze that was cold to the skin sometimes faded the melodious sound of the instruments out, making the music seem to ebb and flow. After

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<sup>1</sup> A Javanese traditional building, commonly used for gathering

several songs were played, the gamelan stopped temporarily because the art elder had finally arrived.

“Tonight we will learn and practice *tledhek* dance as usual,” said Ki Mangli, the elder of arts of Hargamulya Hamlet.

Hearing Ki Mangli’s voice, the people who gathered in the *pendapa*<sup>2</sup> felt like they were serenaded with a beautiful song. The voice of the elder was heavy and dignified. The gathering people just remained silent, hanging on to his every word. Ki Mangli was well-built, and his sharp eyes made him look authoritative.

“We must continue to preserve *tledhek* dance. Therefore, we must continue to search for new seeds,” Ki Mangli further said, “Our ancestors have left us with a very precious heritage.”

The people of Hargamulya Hamlet knew very well who Ki Mangli was. Aside from being a *tledhek* dance artist, Ki Mangli was a veteran dancer. He was actually a descendant of a family of famous dancers in the days of the Hindu Mataram Kingdom in Kedu. In the Kingdom’s glorious days, Ki Mangli’s ancestors were often invited to the palace to entertain the people there with their dance.

However, Mataram Kingdom eventually collapsed. Seeing the signs of the Kingdom beginning to fall apart, Ki Mangli’s

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<sup>2</sup> An alternative spelling of *pendopo*

ancestors and their whole family then left the capital of the Hindu Mataram Kingdom. His ancestors were really worried if the chaos and *pagebluk* (famine and epidemics) would take the lives of their family.

After some contemplation, Ki Mangli's ancestors finally left the capital of the Hindu Mataram Kingdom. His ancestors did not only take all of the family members along, but they also brought their gamelan instruments. *Tledhek* dance and gamelan were like the moon and the sun. The two needed each other.

The ability to dance and play gamelan was not the only inheritance left by his ancestors. Ki Mangli was also left with abundant wealth.

To make sure that they did not squander their wealth, Ki Mangli and his wife, Nyi Pangesti, always lived frugally. Although they led a frugal life, Ki Mangli and his family loved to help others in distress.

Ki Mangli's gamelan became a witness to the move of *tledhek* dance artists from Hindu Mataram in Kedu to Menoreh hills in the western end, precisely in Hargamulya Hamlet.

“You must know, before learning to dance, you also have to learn about the gamelan,” Ki Mangli said before the people of Hargamulya Hamlet who loved the gamelan and the dance. “This

gamelan, though not made of bronze, is still good, because it is made of special iron.”

“Yes, Ki<sup>3</sup>,” Ki Redi, Ki Mangli’s younger brother who was the head of Hargamulya Hamlet responded with delight and said, “it is through this gamelan that we can still enjoy the beauty of *tledhek* dance and the melodious sound of the ancient gamelan of our ancestral heritage.”

“Learning gamelan is learning to live together like a family,” Ki Mangli said.

“Ki Mangli, please explain what do you mean by that to the young like us,” said a young man as if representing his peers.

Before responding to the young man’s request, Ki Mangli stared at the young man and the other young men present. He seemed to want to explore the hearts and minds of the youth through his eyes. Although that night the light emitted by the *ublik* (a kind of lamp made of resin) was not as bright as the sun during the day, Ki Mangli could clearly see a glimmer of curiosity in the eyes of Hargamulya Hamlet’s youth.

“You need to know that gamelan is music that requires togetherness,” Ki Mangli started.

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<sup>3</sup> An address for the male elders or teachers (who are made role models)

The explanation further aroused the curiosity of those who wanted to hear more from Ki Mangli.

“Let me ask you. Have you ever heard *kendang*<sup>4</sup> being played alone, without the other instruments?” Ki Mangli asked.

“Never, Ki. It would be funny and unpleasant to the ears,” replied one of the young men sitting in front of Ki Mangli.

“You are right. It has never been played that way. *Kendang* in gamelan will be accompanied by other instruments when played. The goal is none other than to create a melodious sound. Similarly, other gamelan instruments must be played along with the others.”

“Oh, I see. I never thought that far,” said the other young man with full admiration.

“So, that’s the meaning of the gamelan as an ensemble of several instruments,” added another young man.

“The meaning of the gamelan is very beautiful, isn’t it? The gamelan only sounds nice when all the pieces are played together. The sound produced is not melodious if it is played alone or separately,” Ki Mangli further explained.

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<sup>4</sup> Two-headed drums played by striking them with hands

The people in the hamlet's *pendopo* did not feel the cold night air, even though the wind blew strongly and began to penetrate into the skin.

“Likewise, as members of society we must live in togetherness. Peace and serenity will not be achieved if people do not get along. Instead, our hamlet will be in chaos, won't it, Redi? ”

Ki Redi, the head of Hargamulya Hamlet, nodded at Ki Mangli's question. “Ki Redi, whom you assigned to be the head of the Hamlet, will not do his job well if you do not support him in the task,” Ki Mangli continued.

“That's right!” replied the audience almost simultaneously.

“The same is true for you Redi, my brother. Even if you are good at leading the hamlet, but if you are arrogant, it will be fruitless. You will only be a problem for the people you lead. So, you need to sincerely take the people as a part of your life. Only then your life will be beautiful. A beautiful life will in turn give birth to serenity and peace, just like the sound of the gamelan.”

Ki Mangli continued to teach more about the gamelan to the people of Hargamulya Hamlet. Everyone was happy because the teaching was very useful to them. They were not only entertained by the melodious sound of the gamelan, but they also gained enlightenment.



Once Ki Mangli finished with his explanations about the gamelan, the gamelan practice was resumed.

After that, Ki Mangli called the female dancers who had been eagerly waiting to start their practice from behind the *gebyog* (a kind of wooden wall) of the hamlet's *pendopo*. Most of them were teenagers, but there were also more mature dancers.

Among them, there was a dancer who was beautiful and very flexible. Her name was Sekargunung. Her name suggested that she was a beautiful teenage girl from a highland (*gunung*, which means mountain/hill). Sekargunung was none other than Ki Mangli's daughter. Besides Sekargunung, there was also Sriyanti, the daughter of Ki Reksaka. Ki Reksaka was the one who helped Ki Mangli take care of art affairs in his hamlet.

“Although currently *tedhek* dance no longer thrives in the capital of the country and the palace, its prominence as a dance art must be maintained,” said Ki Mangli to those present in the *pendopo*.

“That's not a problem for me, Father. I still feel proud of this dance. I don't care whether it originated from the hamlet or the mountain,” said Sekargunung excited.

“As your father, I am proud of your answer, my daughter.”

“I also agree with Mbakyu<sup>5</sup> Sekargunung, Ki,” said Sriyanti, not less excited than Sekargunung. Sriyanti always added an honorific of “Mbakyu” when addressing Sekargunung, as she was younger than Sekargunung.

“Well, that’s how a dancer should be. You all have to take the same attitude. A dancer, albeit coming from the mountains, must have a sense of *sawiji*.”

“What does it mean, Ki?” inquired the other dancers.

“*Sawiji* means that you should always be true to yourself. Say it is true that you are not a daughter of a *priyayi*<sup>6</sup>, but your heart must remain noble to others. In addition, you all must have *greget*. Do you know what that means?”

“Please explain, Ki!”

“That is, you must be able to restrain yourself from violence. Furthermore, you also have to be *aja sengguh*. That is, although you are good at dancing and have a beautiful face, you shouldn’t be arrogant,” explained Ki Mangli.

“We must always be humble. Right, Father?” confirmed Sekargunung.

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<sup>5</sup> A Javanese address for an older female

<sup>6</sup> Javanese term for noblemen

“That’s how humans should be, including all of you. Just look at the valleys around our hamlet during the day, don’t you see their beauty?”

Hearing the question, Sriyanti immediately answered, “Very beautiful, Ki Mangli. Although they lie below the mountains, the valleys are no less beautiful than the high mountains.”

“You’re smart, Sriyanti. Reksaka is very lucky to have a child like you. I hope you and Sekargunung will be able to demonstrate your ability to dance to the people. I hope the same from the others.”

After sufficiently giving understanding about the noble values of *tledhek* dance, Ki Mangli ordered the *niyaga* (gamelan musicians) to beat the gamelan to accompany the dancers who began their practice.

In training the dancers, Ki Mangli was not alone. He was assisted by his wife, Nyi Pangesti along with Ki Reksaka and his wife, Nyi Ladi. Under their care, the dancers from Hargamulya Hamlet gained their fame. Every time the neighboring hamlet had a celebration, the *tledhek* dance group of Hargamulya would certainly be invited to perform. Therefore, *tledhek* dance and the gamelan could support the life of some inhabitants of Hargamulya.

The night was getting late, so the practice ended. Ki Mangli did not want to make the people of Hargamulya Hamlet too tired to do their next morning activities because of practicing the art.

## **2. The Flapping Wings**

Time kept changing. As the rainy season changed into dry season, the lush trees began to shed their leaves. The hamlet on the Menoreh hills, though not very fertile, could provide life for its inhabitants. The farmers could do their farming, those looking for forest bees' honey could taste the sweetness of the honey, and those who planted fruit trees could reap the fruits. However, the beautiful picture gradually faded. The long drought that took place in this dry season was worse than it had been in the previous years. The water spring that could initially serve as water reserve during the drought was now dry. The songs of the eagles frequently heard in the daytime were also no longer heard. Life became difficult.

The effect of the harsh season was also felt by Ki Mangli. To find the solution to the problem, he summoned Reksaka, his assistant.

“Is there anything I can do, Ki?” Reksaka asked.

“Do you often observe the situations in our village?”

“Of course, Ki. Why do you ask?”

“Has anything changed in the past few months?”

“Yes, I believe so. The forest has begun to wither, and it has been increasingly difficult to find water. In fact, some of the main springs in this village are already drying up. Many of our neighbors are in great trouble.”

“Trouble? What is the trouble, Reksaka?” Ki Mangli asked.

“Because water and food are getting scarce, many people have begun to evacuate to other villages,” Ki Reksaka replied.

“Evacuated? Where did they go?”

“Yes, they went looking for a better place. As a result, this beloved hamlet is beginning to dwindle in population, Ki.”

Hearing Reksaka's statement, Ki Mangli turned silent. His mind floated, imagining the impending hardship. Ki Mangli remained silent for such quite a long time that Reksaka who was sitting in front of him looked confused. With a little courage, he asked Ki Mangli, “What are you thinking about, Ki? You have been silent for quite a while, Ki Mangli.”

“Well, I’m thinking of our hamlet. What if our hamlet became deserted because everyone left to search for a better life? Is this the end of our place?” responded Ki Mangli, as if asking for the opinion of Reksaka, his assistant.

“Of course not, Ki. Maybe once the situations improve, they’ll come back to our hamlet.”

“I hope so,” Ki Mangli said, looking sharply at Reksaka, “Can you please call Redi to come here.”

Hearing the order, Ki Reksaka immediately left the house. He headed to Ki Redi’s house not far from Ki Mangli’s. Years of serving Ki Mangli made Ki Reksaka readily understand that there ought to be an important issue to talk about if his master asked Ki Redi to meet him.

“Excuse me, Ki Redi. Your brother asked you to see him in his house,” Ki Reksaka said respectfully.

“What is it that he would like to talk about?”

“I don’t know, Ki, but it seems to be something important.”

“Something important? What can it be?” Ki Redi asked curiously. After that, along with Ki Reksaka, Ki Redi went to Ki Mangli’s house. In his walk to the house, Ki Redi wondered about the important matter his brother wanted to convey to him. He hoped if there was indeed a problem, it would not be something complicated.

“Redi, my brother,” Ki Mangli said to Ki Redi, “I am very concerned with the hardship of the people of Hargamulya Hamlet because of this harsh season.”

“You are right, Kakang<sup>7</sup>. This prolonged drought makes life difficult.”

“I believe you can do your job as head of the hamlet here just fine.”

“What do you mean, Kakang?”

“Redi, my brother. It is with a heavy heart that I tell you this.”

“With a heavy heart? What is it that you are going to say to me, Kang<sup>8</sup>?”

Hearing his brother’s question, Ki Mangli could not immediately answer. He looked uneasy. From where he sat, Ki Mangli could be seen wringing his hands. Time and again he took a deep breath and exhaled it strongly.

“Don’t make me worry, Kakang,” Ki Redi said, impatient to hear his brother’s words.

“I really did not want to make you worry, my brother,” Ki Mangli said hesitantly.

“Then why don’t you say it soon?”

“I want to be like an eagle that can fly in that free sky.”

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<sup>7</sup> A respectful address to an older male

<sup>8</sup> A shortened form of Kakang

“An eagle? What’s with the eagle that flies freely in the sky?”

“The eagles that inhabit the forest on the edge of the hamlet seem to never be as restless as I am. When they want to fly, they will just fly.”

“The eagle has wings and sharp eyes. He knows where the food is,” Ki Redi chimed in the parable of his brother, Ki Mangli.

“You are right. Though the eagles cannot talk like we do, they will not hesitate to scream loudly from among the clouds in the sky.”

“The eagles’ strength is that though they may also have their anxiety, they have their own way of expressing it. Could it be that my brother is currently anxious? Can you share your anxiety with me?”

Grabbing this perfect opportunity, Ki Mangli then expressed what had made him restless, “I want to flap my wings like an eagle. I want to fly with my family and friends.”

Hearing Ki Mangli say such things, Ki Redi gasped. His face showed that he never imagined such words would be coming from his brother’s mouth. He realized that his brother was a reliable man in the hamlet he led. His brother’s reliability in leading the art of gamelan and *tledhek* dance kept the people in Hargamulya Hamlet live peacefully. The art that thrived in his



hamlet helped the villagers to survive. However, the long drought this time had seemed to gradually erode the serenity.

“What will happen if you leave this place? Won’t this hamlet die?”

“That’s what exactly makes me anxious. However, I believe what I am worried about will not happen. Likewise, my departure will not make this beloved hamlet dead. You can take care of it.”

“I will be fully responsible for the people in my hamlet. However, if you go, Kakang, I’m afraid the other villagers will follow your step,” Ki Redi began to express his worries.

“Actually, I’m not going to leave this village forever.”

“How long will you be wandering, Kakang?”

“I don’t know, Redi.”

“But are you sure you will return to Hargamulya?”

“That’s what I can’t answer. If I finally do not return, there are two possibilities.”

“What are they, Kakang?”

“First is because I’m dead, either because I get devoured by wild animals or because I get sick. Hurdle always arises along the way, doesn’t it?”

“And second?”

“Maybe I will decide to stay somewhere else.”

“Then what’s the difference? You can also settle here. Haven’t you also already lived in a peaceful hamlet?”

“If I later settle in a new place, it should be because I’m the one who opens and builds the settlement. Like an eagle that always builds its new nest in a new place.”

Hearing the desires of his older brother, Ki Redi could only remain silent. He could not prevent his brother from leaving him. Everyone had his or her own desires and expectations.

“Don’t you worry. Some of our residents and relatives who are still staying here can still continue the art of gamelan and *tledhek* dance.”

“Yes, Kakang. Indeed, you have equipped some people in this hamlet with the ability to play the gamelan and perform *tledhek* dance. I’m grateful, Kakang, you can leave this valuable treasure to the people here.”

“Thank God. Since there are two sets of gamelan, I’ll just bring some of the instruments. It is impossible to carry a full set of gamelan,” Ki Mangli said.

“So, later you will only play the gamelan *cokekan* (the gamelan played with only a small part of the whole set of instruments), Kakang?”

“Right, brother.”

“So who will go with you, Kakang?”

“I will be leaving with my wife and daughter. Reksaka and his wife along with their children will be coming too. There is one more, Legiman, who will be the *pekathik* (horse caregiver).”

“So, there are seven people in total, right, Kakang?”

“Correct, and the wives, besides accompanying us, will also play the gamelan *cokekan*.”

“I appeal to God Almighty that your journey along with your entourage will be successful, just like an eagle that can flap its wings widely and gallantly,” prayed Ki Redi sincerely and emotionally.

*Selapan dina* (35 days) after the meeting, Ki Mangli and his friends left Hargamulya Hamlet to wander looking for a new life. The people in the hamlet gathered to see them leave. Some wept bitterly because the man who had been regarded as an art teacher left them. The seven art wanderers climbed the horses with their carriage. One horse was specially prepared to carry the gamelan instruments.

They wandered to seek a new life by demonstrating their abilities in the art of *tledhek* dance.

Gradually, the travelling art group from Hargamulya became increasingly popular in many *kadipaten*<sup>9</sup>. The names Sekargunung and Sriyanti seemed to be a strong attraction to people who wanted to stage the performance of *tledhek* dance group led by Ki Mangli.

They gained their fame not only because of their two dancers who performed the dance beautifully and gracefully, but also because *tledhek* dance itself was believed by many people to be a ritual dance. Therefore, Ki Mangli's *tledhek* dance was often performed for such traditional ceremonies as “*Bersih Desa*” (village anniversary), “*Wiwit*” (the start of rice-planting season), and the like. Furthermore, the performers were often invited by certain families to help the healing of the sick.

### **3. The Flowers Begin to Bloom**

Selagumelar village was unusually festive. The lush village on the edge of the forest was filled with joy. That afternoon, the loggers were forced to stop their activities for a while. Their eyes curiously followed a horseman stopping by the side of the road. Both the man and his horse looked mighty and strong. The man then climbed off his horse and approached one of the loggers.

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<sup>9</sup> Equivalent to a duchy

“I came from a distant place,” said the horseman politely, “I am a messenger from Kadipaten Wangen.”

“Excuse me, what is your intention coming to Selagumelar Village, *Kisanak*<sup>10</sup>?”

“Have you ever heard of Ki Mangli’s *tledhek* dance?”

“Yes. Coincidentally, the group is currently resting in our village. They came last night.”

“I need to find the house of the entourage. Can you show me which way is to the house?” requested the horseman.

“Is there something the matter with that famous *tledhek* dance troupe?” one of the loggers replied with a question.

“No, nothing. It’s just that Gusti Adipati<sup>11</sup> Prasangkara, our master, would like to see the beauty of the dance performed by Sekargunung and Sriyanti.

According to the news spread to distant places, Sekargunung and Sriyanti can hypnotize people with their dance. We would like to have them perform in our place.”

Having been shown the way to the house by one of the loggers, the horseman who was the messenger of Gusti Adipati

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<sup>10</sup> An address for a male stranger; roughly equivalent to Sir

<sup>11</sup> An honorific for the head of a *kadipaten*

Prasangkara immediately headed to the place where the *tledhek* entourage led by Ki Mangli stayed. Soon the man arrived at the destined place.

To Ki Mangli, the messenger conveyed the purpose of his arrival.

“Gusti Adipati ordered Ki Mangli and his entourage to come to Kadipaten Calapar,” said the messenger.

“My apology, Sir. What is his intention in inviting mountaineers like us to Kadipaten Calapar?”

“I don’t know, Ki. Perhaps, he wanted to see the *tledhek* dance performed by Sekargunung and Sriyanti. Are not they both known as great dancers?” praised the messenger politely.

“Ah, it’s only hearsay. What good do people like us have? We’re just wandering artists looking for a better life.”

“You speak very eloquently, Ki Mangli. You must be a descendant of virtuous artists.”

“We have always been taught by our ancestors that mountain artists like us should always maintain good deeds and words.”

“That’s what I hear from so many people. Sekargunung and Sriyanti that are blooming like beautiful flowers always restrain themselves from despicable acts.”

“That’s what we always maintain, Sir,” Ki Mangli said.

“This is what distinguishes your entourage with other *tledhek* dance groups. You are not only looking for money, but also teaching the etiquette of dancing.”

“What’s the point of only making money? Noble art should not be used to earn money in ways that are not commendable.”

The deeper the conversation with Ki Mangli, the more amazed the messenger of Kadipaten Calapar was. He did not think that from the hilly and quiet area of Menoreh came an intelligent man.

“I didn’t think at all that an artist like you had such a deep insight into etiquette, Ki. I admire you,” said the messenger.

“What can be admired from us? We have neither wealth nor rank to be proud of. We are just people assigned by our ancestors to preserve the *tledhek* dance. Though our ancestors have been gone for decades, we feel they are still with us.”

The messenger from Kadipaten Calapar seemed be put in utter silence hearing the beautiful remarks from Ki Mangli’s lips. He became reminded of old stories. According to the stories, in the old Javanese days, it was in the hills and mountains that the centers of education were situated.

In the past, the masters and poets lived on the quiet hills and mountains to set up a *padhepokan*<sup>12</sup> for students to study. Perhaps, one of the people who to this date still inherited the style of *padhepokan* education was Ki Mangli.

Sometime later, Ki Mangli's entourage could be seen sitting before Gusti Adipati Prasangkara in Kadipaten Calapar. Ki Mangli and his entourage offered their salutation to the Adipati.

"Don't be afraid, Ki Mangli and the whole entourage," said Gusti Adipati Prasangkara in the *pendopo* of the Kadipaten.

Hearing the friendly greetings from the ruler of Kadipaten Calapar, Ki Mangli and his entourage were finally at ease. Before meeting the ruler, they did not exactly know the purpose of Gusti Adipati Prasangkara inviting them there.

"I have heard from my messenger who had seen you a few days ago that you are an artist with good manners and etiquette."

Hearing these words and compliments, Ki Mangli and his entourage blushed. They had never received such high praise, except from the messenger who met them yesterday and from Gusti Adipati Prasangkara. Ki Mangli could only remain silent.

"Anything wrong with what I said, Mangli?"

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<sup>12</sup> A traditional school in which students stay for a period of time to study from a master



Ki Mangli stammered in replying to the question, “There is nothing wrong. It is I who don’t know my place. My apology, *Gusti*<sup>13</sup>.”

“Your humility is indeed as beautiful as the valleys scattered on Menoreh hills, Mangli.”

“Thank you, *Gusti*,” said Mangli bowing his head respectfully.

“You know, Ki Mangli. I want to ask for your help.”

“Ask me, your servant, for help? I hope I did not mishear you, *Gusti*.”

“You heard it right. I want Sekargunung and Sriyanti to dance for my daughter, Sekar Pandan, who is sick.”

“But, *Gusti* . . .,” Ki Mangli did not have time to continue his words because *Gusti Adipati* cut them first.

“Yes, I know. I know you would want to say that a group of wandering dancers like you cannot do anything about it. Is that right?”

“Right, *Gusti*.”

“My daughter, Sekar Pandan, heard the news that Sekargunung and Sriyanti are beautiful dancers. Their dance is a feast to the

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<sup>13</sup> An address for noblemen

eyes. Once they are dancing, they are like flowers starting to bloom. The beauty of their dance is likened to the dance of the angels.”

Ki Mangli and his wife were thrilled to hear the flattery. The same was true for Sekargunung and Sriyanti. Ki Reksaka and his wife also took pride in it. They did not expect to be showered with praises by an *adipati*.

“My daughter has been ill for some time. Her body is getting thinner because she no longer has an appetite for food. It’s not clear what her sickness is. I’ve invited some healers, but none of them could cure her sickness. I feel like I have become sick myself. She is my only daughter and my only pride.”

“What does she complain about, *Gusti*?” Ki Mangli asked.

“She often said that in her dreams she sees two beautiful flowers on a rock. The flowers have beautiful colors. However, the whereabouts of the two flowers on the rock are unknown. Therefore, everyone gets confused. We all do not know the name of the flowers and on which mountain they are located. That’s why, please dance for my daughter. Who knows she will be comforted and finally recover?”

Hearing the speech of Gusti Adipati Prasangkara, Ki Mangli and his entourage were anxious. They could not imagine what would happen to their *tledhek* dance entourage’s newly gained fame if

they could not help cure the *adipati*'s daughter. People would surely make fun of them and abandon their dance group. It would mean the end to their source of living.

However, they also believed that if they sincerely wished and prayed for help, surely God the Almighty would grant their wishes and help them fulfil their duty.

“All right, *Gusti*. We agree to perform the dance for your daughter. What about you, Sekargunung and Sriyanti?”

The two prima donnas of *tledehek* dance from Hargamulya could only nod. The two teenagers were not really confident. However, they were determined to dance as well as possible in front of the daughter of Gusti Adipati Prasangkara.

The dance entourage was also given a nice place to rest. They were welcomed to rest for several days.

“Have some rest, so that you can show us your best performance. I hope on Wednesday *Legi*<sup>14</sup> night, which is one day from today, all of you will have been able to perform in this *pendopo*,” said Gusti Adipati Prasangkara.

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<sup>14</sup> The first day in the Javanese dating system called *pasaran* that consists of five days, namely *Legi*, *Paing*, *Pon*, *Wage*, and *Kliwon*

#### 4. Two Flowers on a Rock

Night came approaching. The owls could be heard singing in turn from far away. The stars scattered in the sky were twinkling bright. The atmosphere became very calm. Gusty wind greeted the ear. The peaceful state made people drowsy.

However, it was not the case for Ki Mangli and his friends. That night they were abstaining themselves from sleep. They no longer felt exhausted from the long and heavy trip from Selagumelar village to Kadipaten Calapar that started early in the morning and ended late in the afternoon. During their trip, the scorching sun of the dry season felt like burning Ki Mangli's entourage and the messenger of Kadipaten Calapar. Fortunately, riding the horse made the hot and dry air a little bit bearable. They let the horses they rode to walk at their own pace. The horses belonging to the *tledhek* art entourage were indeed not racehorses; they were more properly called load carrying horses or mules. Therefore, it was not possible for them to run fast.

"Now it's time for all of us to restrain ourselves. Let's ask God for guidance and strength so that we can properly do what has become our responsibility," Ki Mangli told his friends once they gathered in a place prepared for their stay, in the neighborhood of the *kadipaten*.

“I wonder why just because of the dreams Ndara<sup>15</sup> Sekar Pandan became sick. What do you think, Father?” said Sekargunung.

“This world is full of strange things, indeed, my daughter,” Ki Mangli replied, “but it is those strange things that often make the world beautiful.”

“What do you mean?” asked Nyi Pangesti.

“My wife, don’t you know? Have you ever seen the morning dew drops on the forest leaves that we often drink when we run out of water?”

“I surely remember that, husband.”

“There are only a few drops of the dew, right? However, when we drink the dew drops on leaves, our thirst is slightly appeased, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Isn’t that something strange to those who have plenty of water? Isn’t it strange for these people to see other people drink the fresh dew drops on the leaves? That’s one of the strange things that sometimes make this world beautiful and full of greatness,” Ki Mangli said as he fixed his *iket wulung* (a type of head accessory) on his head.

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<sup>15</sup> An honorific for a noblewoman

“It’s a simple but very useful thing, right, Father,” added Sekargunung.

“Yes. Something strange but very useful sometimes comes from something simple.”

“Then how should we carry out the order of Gusti Adipati, *Kang?*” asked Ki Reksaka who sat next to his wife, Nyi Ladi. These two people who were loyal to Ki Mangli and his family rarely spoke. They would only talk if there was something important.

“I myself am not exactly sure with the command of Gusti Adipati. However, I believe he was really serious about it.”

“How are you so sure, Ki?”

“Sometimes God uses certain unknown intermediaries when helping human beings. It could be that we are sent by the Almighty to help Ndara Sekar Pandan.”

Ki Mangli’s words were hard to understand. So, they just remained silent. Ki Reksaka and Nyi Ladi could only scratch their heads, while Nyi Pangesti copied what they did. Legiman, the horse caretaker, could only gawk.

“Father, can you please explain what you meant in a simpler way, so that we can understand. Don’t you agree, Sriyanti?” suggested Sekargunung.

“Alright. Do not refuse when someone asks for our help. Just do it!” he said.

“What should we do, Father?” asked Sekargunung curious.

“Aren’t you and Sriyanti great dancers? So, dance to your heart and use your feelings so as to wipe out the sorrow and pain of Ndara Sekar Pandan.”

“And then . . .,” urged Sekargunung.

“If you and Sriyanti dance emotionally and sincerely, you will definitely present a very beautiful dance. It is that beauty that makes other people very happy.”

“So, Uncle Mangli, *Mbakyu* Sekargunung and I have to devote all our souls?” Sriyanti clarified.

“Right, Sriyanti. That’s what you both can do.”

“Thank you, Uncle Mangli. *Mbakyu* Sekargunung and I will remember this. Right, *Mbakyu*?”

“Right, Sriyanti. We will offer a very beautiful dance for Ndara Sekar Pandan and everyone.”

The songs of *bence*<sup>16</sup> began to be heard that night. Those who were meditating that night could also hear the songs. Legiman suddenly shouted at Ki Mangli, “Isn’t the song of *bence* a bad omen, Ki?”

“Are you afraid? Many people have mistaken the bird for bringing bad omen.”

“Please explain what you meant, Ki!”

“For us, the bird’s song is a good omen, not a bad one. We are reminded to pray to God in order to get his blessings and to achieve success. We have to pray very sincerely. We cannot let ourselves get swept by bad thoughts. That’s what is foretold by the *bence*. Tomorrow, we have to perform a noble task.”

Thus, the entourage ended their meditation by taking a rest. In addition to praying to God, they should maintain their health.

With sufficient amount of sleep, the dancers would be able to perform their dance to the best of their abilities when the time came.

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<sup>16</sup> A type of bird that usually sings at night, typically associated with bad omen



## 5. At the Peak of Their Fame

Wednesday *Legi* night arrived. The *pendopo* of Kadipaten Calapar seemed to have been crowded by the *nayaka praja* (*kadipaten* clerks). They sat cross-legged, forming a half circle on the floor of the *pendopo*. Meanwhile, Gusti Adipati Prasangkara, his wife, and his daughter, Sekar Pandan, were at the end of the circle. The *tledhek* dance group members were getting ready to the right of Gusti Adipati Prasangkara.

The resin lights that were installed in several places showered the *pendopo* room with beautiful rays. Sometimes the lights were swept by a gentle breeze that they were twisted as if they were dancing.

“Tonight, together we will be watching the *tledhek* dance. This dance will be performed by the teen dancers, Sekargunung and Sriyanti. They are invited to dance here because my daughter, Sekar Pandan, wants them to dance for her,” announced Gusti Adipati Prasangkara.

The speech delivered by the leader of Kadipaten Calapar resounded throughout the *pendopo*. The attendees in the *pendopo* were silent, as if their mouths were locked with a large bolt.

“Hopefully these two dancers can bring joy and healing for my daughter. This *tledhek* dance that I have invited here is different

from any other *tledhek* dance. Anyone here is not allowed to dance except for the dancers.”

After the long speech was delivered, Gusti Adipati Prasangkara then invited Ki Mangli’s *tledhek* dance group to start. With the accompaniment of gamelan *cokekan* that they brought, Nyi Pangesti and Nyi Ladi sang some of the songs in turn as a stage opening. The songs were in the form of poetry pleading to be kept away from distress. In addition, they pleaded for the ultimate goal of the performance to be achieved.

With her beautiful, high-pitched voice, Nyi Pangesti seemed to dissolve in the poetry of *Pupuh Dhandhanggula*. Hearing the beautiful poem sung, Gusti Adipati Prasangkara shuddered with emotion.

The poem told about how parents would do the best for their children, even if they had to pass through mountains, ravines, and encounter other obstacles. With such great efforts, parents would surely find the way to realize their goals.

“May the two deer in the poem be Sekargunung and Sriyanti: Two people appointed by God to heal my daughter,” prayed Gusti Adipati Prasangkara in his heart.

The beautiful poems were finished sung by Nyi Pangesti. Not long afterwards, Sekargunung and Sriyanti’s *tledhek* dance was performed, accompanied by gamelan *cokekan* played by Ki

Mangli, Nyi Pangesti, Ki Reksaka, Nyi Ladi, and Legiman. Despite being incomplete, the gamelan's melodious sound could still penetrate into the ears and hearts. Moreover, that night, they were not just performing the gamelan and *tledhek* dance, but they were actually playing a piece of art upon a special request.

“Remember, my brothers and sisters. Tonight we must shun all the evil temptations that come to us. We are actually appealing to God Almighty for Ndara Putri Sekar Pandan to gain her happiness,” Ki Mangli told his friends before the performance began.

“We'll remember that, Ki,” Ki Reksaka responded, representing the others.

“The same applies for you two, Sekargunung and Sriyanti. Make the dance as beautiful as the two wild flowers on a rock in the princess' dream.”

Sekargunung and Sriyanti nodded their heads. In their hearts they both promised to dance with all their physical and spiritual might.

Both of them were true to their promise. In front of Sekar Pandan and the audience in the *kadipaten's pendopo*, Sekargunung and Sriyanti showed their dancing skills. The children of the mountainous village looked very serene as they moved their heads, hands, body, and legs in unison. It seemed as though they were not teenagers. What appeared in the eyes of Sekar Pandan

and the other spectators were two flower buds from a very beautiful mountain.

As their whole body wriggled to the rhythm of the gamelan and lyrical poems sung by Nyi Pangesthi, Sekar Pandan saw the two dancers as flowers that were being swayed by a gentle mountain breeze.

Suddenly, Sekar Pandan became ecstatic. Excitement stirred inside her. All the pain she had endured so far seemed to vanish. Her body became light.

The illness that had attacked her body seemed to disappear, swept away by the beauty of the two flower buds currently dancing before her and exhilarating her. Sekar Pandan felt as if she was seeing the two flower buds on a rock that had been bothering her in her dreams. Now, she saw that Sekargunung and Sriyanti were actually the embodiment of the two flowers in her dreams. The image of two flower buds on a rock was a symbol of Sekargunung and Sriyanti who originated from the rocky Menoreh Hills.

She did not know how this happened. However, Sekar Pandan believed that it had all been the will of Almighty God. Sekargunung and Sriyanti were only intermediaries used by God to heal her.

“Father . . .,” Sekar Pandan whispered to her father.

“Yes, Sekar?”

“I have recovered, Father. My body feels good now. What had been bothering me now has vanished.”

“You are healed?” asked Gusti Adipati Prasangkara in disbelief.

“Right, Father.”

“Oh, God. I thank You for this miracle.”

The dance performed by Sekargunung and Sriyanti was still going on. The gamelan *cokekan* and the songs of the *pesinden*<sup>17</sup> together waded through the night in the *kadipaten*'s *pendopo*. When the dance was finished, the sound of hands clapping and praises of admiration reverberated throughout the *pendopo*.

“My dear people of Kadipaten Calapar, this is a great night for all of us. You need to know that my daughter, Sekar Pandan, has now recovered from her illness,” said Gusti Adipati Prasangkara.

Hearing the announcement, the attendees seemed to be in disbelief. However, now they all could see with their own eyes Sekar Pandan standing with a happy face. They saw Sekar Pandan walking towards Sekargunung and Sriyanti.

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<sup>17</sup> A Javanese term referring to gamelan singers

“Sekargunung and Sriyanti, stand up and come closer to me,” pleaded Sekar Pandan to the two *tledhek* dancers who were now sitting with their art group.

The two *tledhek* dancers stood up and walked closer to Sekar Pandan.

“These two dancers are the ones who can give the answer to the mystery that has bothered me all this time. The unsolved mystery has made me sick. For weeks I have been overshadowed by the dreams of seeing two very beautiful flowers. However, I did not know where the flowers were. Now I find the answer. Now I feel I’m back to normal.”

To express his gratitude and joy, Gusti Adipati Prasangkara then awarded an honorable position to Ki Mangli and his entourage. However, the good intention was gently rejected by Ki Mangli.

“Thy servant is only a wandering artist. The position is too high for us. Besides, we have to continue our journey, *Gusti*.”

“Is my gift not to your liking, Mangli?”

“It’s such a great honor for us, *Gusti*. However for us, honor means maintaining our good name. That is sufficient. We are already satisfied to be able to help other people,” Ki Mangli replied politely.

Because of his determination, Gusti Adipati Prasangkara could not force Ki Mangli further. However, before the group left Kadipaten Calapar on the next day, they were given a gift in the forms of clothing and money.

Since then Sekargunung and Sriyanti were like on a high mountain peak. They became increasingly well-known. More and more people staged their dance. Every time they entered a new hamlet or village, they always received a warm welcome. They always received a request to perform. Money and supplies for their tour were no longer a problem. With the money and supplies, the wanderers had not yet decided to return to Hargamulya Hamlet, where they came from.

“There may be other plans from God Almighty for all of us. Let us keep wandering while making people happy,” said Ki Mangli, encouraging the members of the *tledhek* dance entourage.

## **6. A Lesson from the Flood**

As the *tledhek* dance troupe from Hargamulya gained their fame, the season began to change. The long dry season had ended, followed by the rainy season. The rain that had been long awaited for by peasants and everyone else had finally come. Many people believed that rain always brought blessing. However, this rainy season the rain poured endlessly, as if compensating for the previously long dry season. Water became abundant to the extent

that it was excessive. Even areas that were usually arid with low precipitation now seemed to have an unlimited abundance of water resource.

The endless rainfall eventually caused great floods in various regions. The great floods were disastrous to everyone. Not only rice fields and dry fields that got damaged by the floods, but many homes were also destroyed and property was lost or washed away by the floods. In fact, not a few villagers were lost, carried away by the floods. They disappeared without any trace, either carried away by the swelling river water or buried by the falling cliffs, hills, and mountains. The great power of nature ended up causing human suffering.

“At first, I thought this rain would bring joy to many people,” said Sriyanti.

“What do you mean, Sriyanti?” Sekargunung snapped.

“Does not water flow to the rice fields and dry fields? If rice fields and dry fields are inundated with water, it means that farmers will be able to grow rice or other crops and the yields will be abundant,” said Sriyanti.

“Yes, that’s right. An abundant harvest makes people happy. Is that what you mean?”



“Because of the abundant crops, some of the results of the harvest will be sold to pay for our performance, right?”

“That’s enough. Everyone is being sad,” said Nyi Pangesti stopping the talks between Sekargunung and Sriyanti. Ki Mangli’s wife did not want to make passers-by near them offended by Sekargunung and Sriyanti.

The tragic incident also greatly affected Ki Mangli’s entourage. They never imagined that the rain that everyone had been waiting for would cause suffering.

“Why should such a disaster happen, Father?” asked Sekargunung to his father, Ki Mangli, when the group was resting in a remote hamlet.

“Who can predict the will of the Almighty, Sri?” Ki Mangli replied with bitterness.

Hearing the leader of the entourage speaking with grief, all of the followers of Ki Mangli were just silent. They remembered in their journey they saw many people who appeared to be totally helpless and hopeless. People were busily fixing their house and cleaning the yard from the trees carried by the floods.

Elsewhere, not a few villagers were busily cleaning the roads from mud with hoes and other equipment when they passed. Ki Mangli and his entourage dared not bother them. The villagers

were immersed in sadness. The timing was not right for the dance group to perform. In fact, the group of wandering artists helped the people they met with the gift from Gusti Adipati Prasangkara they received a few months ago.

“We need to help our brothers and sisters who are affected by the disaster. Don’t you agree?” Ki Mangli asked his entourage.

“Yes, Father,” replied Sekaragunung quickly, as if speaking for the other members of the group, “let’s give some of our earnings throughout our journey to those who need it.”

“I’m so glad to hear what you said, Sekargunung. Our wealth is useless if we don’t use it for good purposes.”

“Right, Ki. The fame we have gained so far is also thanks to their help,” Ki Reksaka chimed in. “Think about it. It is because they have invited us to perform that we can continue to live, isn’t it, Legiman?”

Legiman, who had been nodding sleepily, was surprised to hear the question from Ki Reksaka, “What, Ki? Why was my name mentioned?”

Everyone in the *tledhek* dance troupe was laughing and smiling, except Legiman. They found it funny how Legiman stammered while trying to respond to Ki Reksaka’s question. The innocent

and simple-minded Legiman sometimes created laughter because of his behaviors, of which he himself did not realize.

Because the question was not immediately answered by Legiman, Ki Reksaka finally answered it himself, “It is time we help the villagers who are suffering.”

“Right, Reksaka. We have been working for months and leaving our hamlet far away behind. All this is not merely with the goal of accumulating wealth, but also to alleviate the suffering of others. With the gamelan and dance of Sekargunung and Sriyanti, those who watch are entertained. Now, with our possessions, we must help those in need,” Ki Mangli highlighted Ki Reksaka’s remarks.

They were not worried that their wealth would dwindle. They believed that anything sincerely given would be replaced by God some time in the future.

Therefore, throughout their journey, the *tledhek* dance troupe never hesitated to provide aid with their money and whatever they had. In fact, Nyi Pangesti and Nyi Ladi would alternately sing entertaining songs to those who were in despair. Their melodious voices with the accompaniment of the gamelan *cokekan* seemed to be solace to the suffering people.

Like that night, without the *tledhek* dance, Nyi Pangesti and Nyi Ladi sang *Pupuh Sinom*<sup>18</sup> alternately in the *pendopo* of a village hall. Many villagers came to comfort themselves.

Nyi Pangesti and Nyi Ladi could be heard alternately singing some songs that were like great magic. The villagers who listened to the songs did not speak at all and move from their seat. This continued to happen until finally all villagers dispersed themselves back to their respective homes.

“Uncle Mangli, can you explain what the songs mean?”

“The songs appealed to all of us to be good human beings. Humans should not just pursue the glory of the world if it is only for the pleasure of self, Sriyanti,” Ki Mangli explained.

“Then what was Mother’s intention singing those songs in such a grievous situation, Father?” Sriyanti asked.

“Your mother wants to remind us all to care about others, dear.”

“Oh, so the songs allude to those who are stingy or miserly, Uncle?”

“Yes, they can be interpreted that way. What if none of us is willing to help others in distress because we are too stingy? What

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<sup>18</sup> Traditional Javanese songs containing certain advice for humans to lead a good and balance life

is the meaning of our wealth if it is only for ourselves? A real human would not shut himself up from other people who suffer.”

“So, artists like us also have the task of reminding people, right, Father?”

“Sekargunung, my daughter. Actually it’s not just artists, but everyone. We as an artist, whether with our melodious voice, or with our beautiful body movements, or with our gamelan, should not be selfish.”

“That’s right, Ki,” Ki Reksaka, who had been quietly listening said, “what does fame mean when we are blind to the suffering of others? The glory we achieve becomes meaningless.”

“The songs sung by Pangesti and Ladi are works of ancient poets. The poets created the songs not only for their own fame or glory, but also to teach us all.”

The exhaustion and the cold night wind finally made the wandering artists close their eyes. With a blanket of tangled cloth, they were lulled into their dreams. Their faces were calm, indicating how their physical exhaustion was already removed in their sleep that night.

## **7. The Broken Branch**

As they were really sincere in helping those in need, they did not realize that gradually their wealth was depleted. The joy of

helping others had really made them oblivious of their own interest. Ki Mangli and his entourage never hesitated to share their wealth. This went on until finally they realized that their supplies were depleting. The floods that struck many areas turned out to have caused tremendous damage to the people. They no longer had anything valuable to pay for the wandering artists to perform their great art. Day and night the entourage of wandering artists and their horses could be seen coming in and out of villages looking for people who were willing to stage their performance. It had been months since they did not receive any offer or get invited to perform their dance. Finally, they really ran out of supplies.

“My brothers and sisters,” Ki Mangli said, “it seems that we have to stop for a while somewhere. Our supplies are already thinning.”

“That’s right. What is left is actually only enough for our meal today. We don’t know if we still can eat tomorrow,” continued Legiman in more detail.

“Yes, Legiman. I’m thinking exactly about that matter.”

“Ki, we are now in the middle of fields overgrown with weeds and woods. How are we supposed to find food for tomorrow?”

Ki Mangli then decided that the journey should be continued. Alas, when the group crossed an old bamboo bridge, the bridge suddenly broke. Truly, indeed, bad luck could never be predicted.

Sekargunung, the prima donna of the *tledhek* dance from Hargamulya Hamlet fell into the river. She happened to be at the very front of the group.

“Help!” exclaimed Sekargunung, still sitting on the horse that continued to be rolled over by the river’s waves.

Hearing the cry, everyone who was behind Sekargunung was really confused at first. Their exhausted minds and bodies could not readily digest the terrible event happening to Sekargunung. They felt as if the cry for help from Sekargunung ripped their heart out.

Nyi Pangesti, Sekargunung’s mother roared to summon Sekargunung and her horse that were no longer visible from the top of the river bank. She wept unstoppably.

Without more ado, Legiman took the initiative to help. He swiftly plunged into the river that was actually deep enough. Legiman, the horse caretaker of the wandering artists, was the cleverest in swimming. Swiftly, he continued to dive in search of Sekargunung. While diving, he prayed that Sekargunung would soon be found alive.

Although the river was not that wide and the current was not that swift, the spot into which Sekargunung fell directly was a *kedhung* (a channel, the deepest part of a river). Therefore, Legiman seemed to have difficulty to find the position of Sekargunung. Several times, his head popped to the surface to take a breath.

“How is it, Man? Why haven’t you brought my daughter up?” Ki Mangli shouted from the river bank. He seemed to have lost his mind.

“I’m sorry, Ki. The river is deep enough. Just pray for me, hopefully I can soon bring *dhenok* (Ms.) Sekargunung.”

Without further ado, Legiman immediately dived into the river again. Mustering all his ability to swim and dive, he managed to find Sekargunung and her horse a few moments later. Legiman quickly lifted her up. However, since she had been drowning for some time and could not breathe, Sekargunung could not be saved anymore.

Seeing Legiman dragging the body of Sekargunung towards the sloping riverbank, Nyi Pangesti screamed loudly, breaking the silence of the place. Nyi Pangesti and the others immediately ran to the place where Legiman lay.

Ki Mangli did not seem to accept the fact that Sekargunung was already frozen and soaking wet. He immediately performed



rescue breathing by flowing air from his mouth into Sekargunung's who was lying on the edge of the sandy river. Ki Mangli did that repeatedly, but Sekargunung remained lifeless. Ki Mangli felt as if he was seeing a broken branch.

Seeing the very heart-wrenching incident, all members of the group sobbed. Now they realized that Sekargunung had left them forever.

“Explain it to me, Man. Why could not my daughter rise to the surface of the river?” Ki Mangli commanded in a very deep grief.

Legiman who was sitting on the edge of the sandy river took a breath and then explained, “When I circled the *kedhung* (deepest bottom) of the river, I finally found *dhenok* (Ms.) Sekargunung. She was no longer moving, Ki.”

“Why didn't she immediately come to the surface after falling into the river, Man?”

“After I studied the matter, it turned out that *dhenok*'s foot was tied to the saddle. Her body was also squeezed by the horse. It turned out the horse Sekargunung rode was already lifeless. Therefore, both Sekargunung and her horse did not rise to the surface of the river, Ki. I'm sorry, Ki, I could not save *dhenok*'s life,” said Legiman with his head bowed.

This heart-breaking event made the wandering group of artists lose their spirit. They never imagined they would experience such heart-rending calamity, while they were still bewildered by the lack of invitations to perform.

Ki Mangli understood the mood of his entourage. The leader knew that his daughter, Sekargunung, was the prima donna in his entourage. Besides, his poor girl was a great dancer.

“You do not have to continue feeling sad. We should not fill our lives with sadness forever,” Ki Mangli said.

“How can we not feel sad, Ki? Is not your daughter a reliable dancer in our group?” Ki Reksaka asked, as if asking for confirmation.

“You are right, but . . . well, it’s already happened. God has another will with the incident that happened to my daughter.”

“Don’t you want to commemorate your daughter here, Ki Mangli?”

“Certainly. I love her so much. From now on, I name the river that has taken my daughter’s life Kedhung Jaran. The name means a deep river channel that has claimed my daughter’s life while she was riding a horse,” Ki Mangli exclaimed to the entourage with confidence.

Then, the entourage buried the corpse of poor Sekargunung. In a separate place and somewhat distant from the grave of Sekargunung, her horse was buried.

They wanted the memories of the death of the *tledhek* prima donna not only to be remembered in Kedhung Jaran River, but also at her burial place.

“Remember, from now on, my daughter’s grave is named *Cikalan*,” Ki Mangli said after burying her daughter.

“Uncle, why is the burial ground of *Mbakyu* Sekargunung named *Cikalan*?” asked Sriyanti.

“You need to know that the name *Cikalan* is derived from the word *cikal*. *Cikal* means a seed or an aspirant. The girl is actually like a *cikal* (coconut shoot) that is growing into adulthood. Because Sekargunung is still a teenager, she is presumably the seed or an aspirant of a great *tledhek* dancer in the future,” explained Ki Mangli.

“Right, Uncle. *Mbakyu* Sekargunung is a great aspiring dancer with a bright future. Unfortunately, God has His Own plan for *Mbakyu* Sekargunung.”

“No man can refuse what has become God’s will. What happened to Sekargunung was the best for her. In order for her to live

peacefully in the realm of eternity there, let us remember the great aspiring dancer in our all hearts.”

## **8. A New Hope**

Once the funeral was over, the *tledhek* art travelers decided to rest in a place not too far from the grave. The group also intended to end their wanderings and settle around the grave that was located on the banks of Kedhung Jaran River.

“This is the place we choose to stay forever.”

“What do you mean, Ki Mangli?” Ki Reksaka asked.

“We will not wander again like in the past. Let us keep all our long journeys from Hargamulya in our memories.”

“Don’t you want to go back to our hamlet, Ki?”

“No. I want to rest. I’m getting older. I feel like I’m no longer strong to get in and out of hamlets and villages. We should also pity our horses.

They’ve been carrying us for months up and down the valleys and hills. Maybe the horses need some rest too.”

“Thinking about it carefully, what our leader said is right. Just imagine how far we have come from our village,” Legiman added.

“I once told Redi, my brother, that there are two possibilities that will cause me not to go back there. The first is because I am dead, and the second is because I decide to stay forever somewhere.”

“*Kakang* is alive now, not dead. However, *Kakang* did not go home. That means *Kakang* will stay here forever by opening a hamlet in this area?” asked Nyi Pangesti to her husband.

“Right, we will develop this area into a hamlet. That way, we can stay close to Sekargunung, our *Cikal*.”

“Right, *Kakang* Mangli. A child is the best and most precious treasure, and our only child has already preceded us to leave this world forever. I am determined to settle here,” declared Nyi Pangesti.

“I follow your words, Nyi,” said Nyi Ladi.

“My wife’s will is mine and my daughter’s,” Ki Reksaka said.

“I will just follow you all,” said Legiman firmly.

“Uncle Mangli,” said Sriyanti, “does this mean we are no longer playing the gamelan and the dance?”

“Of course not, Sriyanti. Dancing and playing the gamelan is our life. Surely we will not leave the art world, dear.”

“Oh, how glad I am.”

“The blood of art flowing in our bodies cannot be stopped by anyone and for any reason. We will not stop dancing because we are sadly left behind by Sekargunung or because we’re having trouble to get food for our meal, Sri.”

Ki Mangli’s words were not only ingrained in Sriyanti’s mind, but also in the mind of Nyi Pangesti, Ki Reksaka, Nyi Ladi, and Legiman. That night, the *tedhek* dance troupe was resting on the banks of Kedhung Jaran River. There, they built a kind of shack from coconut leaves that were abundant around the place where they were resting. The area they chose to settle was still uninhabited. The landscape was still natural and beautiful.

Large and small trees thrived. In addition, many wild edible plants thrived there. They all were glad. They would be not afraid of running out of food supplies.

Because the area was still pristine, at night they could hear the wolves howling. In fact, the sound of crickets and grasshoppers could also be heard, making the place livelier.

The reddish sunlight began to reveal its color. The members of the group were already awake.

“Look at the eastern horizon there, it’s already *tawang*. That is, the sky is bright. Therefore, I name the place we have chosen Kedhung Tawang. Tomorrow, when it has turned into a hamlet, we will call it Kedhung Tawang Hamlet. It is also to remind us all

that this new hamlet is near a river that has a *kedhung* (channel),” Ki Mangli told his group members.

Before beginning to open the area, Ki Mangli along with his entourage expressed their gratitude to God Almighty for having given them the opportunity to open a new hamlet.

They gradually healed themselves from the grievous events occurring to them. They were still hopeful they could turn sorrow into joy soon.

Ki Mangli and his friends were temporarily distracted by the construction of the hamlet and farms. As time went by, their farms began to yield crops. Food scarcity was no longer a threat to them.

Gradually, Kedhung Tawang Hamlet began to attract migrants. They considered the village peaceful and very good to live in. This was so, especially after they saw with their own eyes the authority of the founder of the hamlet.

The migrants believed that Ki Mangli was a man who was capable of providing protection from distress.

Finally, after Kedhung Tawang Hamlet could run like any other hamlet, Ki Mangli began to invite the new inhabitants to learn and practice the gamelan and *tledhek* dance.