

THE PEARL FROM INDRAGIRI
Mutiara dari Indragiri

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THE PEARL FROM INDRAGIRI

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Mutiara dari Indragiri



CERITA RAKYAT DARI RIAU

Ditulis oleh
Marlina



MUTIARA DARI INDRAGIRI

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Foreword

Literature work is not only series of word but it also talks about life, both realistically and idealistically of human. If it is realistic, the literature work usually contains life experiences, good model, and wisdom which have been added various style and imagination along with it. Meanwhile, if it idealistic, the literature work contains moral lecture, good character, advices, philosophical symbols, culture and other things related to human life. The life itself is very diverse, varies, and full of various problems and conflicts faced by humans. The diversity in humans life also affects to the diversity of literature work because the contents are inseparable from civilized and dignified humans life.

The literature works that dealing with life utilizes language as medium of deliverance and imaginative art as its *cultural land*. On the basis of the language medium and imaginative art, literature is multidimensional and multi-interpretative. Using language medium, imginative art and cultural dimension, literature deliver messages to be reviewed or analyzed from various perspectives. The outcome of that perspective depends greatly on who is reviewing and analyzing with various socio-cultural and knowledge background. There is a time when a literary reviewer reviews from the point of view of metaphor, myth, symbol, power, ideology, economy, politics, and culture can be refuted by other reviewers who see from perspective of sound, referent, or irony. Even so, Heraclitus said, "However opposite they work together and from different directions, the most beautiful harmony emerges".

There are many lessons that we can get from reading literature, one of which is reading folktales that are adapted or reprocessed into children's stories. The results of reading literature always inspire and motivate readers to be creative in finding something new. Reading literature can trigger further imagination, open enlightenment, and add insights. For this

reason, we express our gratitude for the processors for the story. We also express our appreciation and gratitude to the Head of the Coaching Center, Head of the Learning Division, and Head of the Subdivision of Modules and Teaching Materials and staffs for all the efforts and hard works carried out until the realization of this book.

Hopefully this storybook is not only useful as a reading material for students and the community to foster a culture of literacy through the National Literacy Movement program, but also useful as an enrichment of our knowledge of past life that can be utilized in addressing current and future life developments.

Jakarta, June 2016

Regards,
Prof. Dr. Dadang Sunendar, M. Hum.

Preface

The Pearl from Indragiri is adapted from the Indragiri Hilir (Riau) folklore entitled "The Youngest", which is taken from a collection of folktales entitled Oral Literature; Collection of Indragiri Hilir Folk Stories. The pearl of Indragiri tells the story of a girl who lived with six of her siblings in a rural village of Riau. This beautiful girl named the Youngest has a noble character and morals. Diligently helping his parents, the youngest was loved by his parents. This was what caused jealousy in the hearts of her six sisters. The youngest often get bad treatment from their sisters. However, Youngest is never felt any resentment or heartache. The youngest stayed good and forgave her sisters.

This story contains moral values that we should not do evil to others especially to our own siblings. In addition, we should not have vengeful nature and always forgive others mistakes. Doing good and loving each other will make life more beautiful.

The retelling of this book cannot be accomplished without the help of various parties. For this reason, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have helped so that I can complete this folklore. Hopefully, this story will be useful for elementary school students throughout our nation.

Riau, April 2016

Marlina

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THE PEARL FROM INDRAGIRI

1. Bungsu and Her Six Sisters

The sun had just risen. The morning light spread all over the land, chasing away the darkness of night. Its soft rays were warm, touching the leaves and trees along the banks of Indragiri Hilir River. Cool breeze blew around a peaceful small village. Birds got out of their nests and hopped on the branches. Some flew on the top of the trees, chirping merrily.

In the middle of the village, a modest wooden house was bustling with activities. Its inhabitants had woken up and welcomed the morning with joy. Seven girls and their parents were sitting on a pandanus mat. They had just had a hearty breakfast of sweet potatoes. After drinking lukewarm water, they began to put away the plates. The seven beautiful girls then got ready to take a bath and do the laundry in the river.

“Bungsu, are you going to the river, too?” the mother asked, holding the youngest girl’s hand compassionately. They called the youngest girl ‘Bungsu’ because that word meant ‘the youngest child’.

“Yes, Mother. I’m going with sisters to the river,” Bungsu replied cheerfully.

“But you just got well, Dear. Don’t you think it’s better if you stay home and rest more?” Mother asked. She was concerned because Bungsu had been ill for some time.

“It’s alright, Mother. We’ll take care of her,” the eldest girl said. She clutched a clay pot to bring water home from the river.

“Yes, Mother, it will be fine. Sisters will look after me,” Bungsu assured her mother.

“Very well, then. Please be careful, Bungsu,” Mother said, letting Bungsu go. Bungsu nodded and skipped along, following her sisters.

“We’re leaving, Mother,” the second daughter said before went out the door.

“Don’t be too long, I’m home alone,” Mother called.

“Yes, Mother, we won’t be long,” they called back. The seven sisters walked together to the river. Mother smiled. She watched them walking away until they disappeared in the distance before closing the front door. Soon, Mother was busy cooking in the kitchen. She wanted to finish cooking before her daughters returned from the river.

All seven girls had pretty face and smooth light skin. However, Bungsu was the most beautiful. She was kind, polite, and diligent.

She was never reluctant to help, especially helping her mother with the chores.

This had made the girls' parents love the youngest more. Her six sisters were often jealous of that. They felt that their parents paid more attention to Bungsu than to them.

It did not take long for the girls to arrive at the river. The Indragiri Hilir River had calm and clear water. Grass grew along the river bank like a long green fence. Trees provided shades in the place where the girls took bath and washed the clothes. The seven girls changed, wrapping long cloth over their body, from the chest to the knees, and quickly got into the river.

“Bungsu, could you wash the clothes? We are going to scrub each other, first,” the eldest sister said, pushing the basket of dirty laundry to Bungsu's hands. Bungsu received the basket gladly.

“Sure, Sis. Let me do the laundry. You go ahead and have your bath,” Bungsu said. She then washed the whole family laundry while her sisters scrubbed each other's back. Then the sisters dived in the river, swam a while, and played in the water. Everyone looked happy. Taking bath in the river was one of their favorite activities. Bungsu smiled when she glanced at her sisters. She was glad to see they enjoyed themselves.

When they had enough, the girls walked back to the banks. They dried themselves and changed to clean clothes. They waited a

while for Bungsu to finish doing the laundry. Bungsu took a quick dive and swam a little. She could not stay in the water for too long because her sisters were ready to go home. She did not want them to wait up too long.

“Come on, Bungsu, be quick. The sun’s going to be too high soon,” the second sister called.

“Yes, Sis. I’m done. Let me change, first,” Bungsu replied and quickly got out of the wet long cloth and put on clean clothes.

Soon, they were leaving the river, walking in line to their house. The sun had begun to feel a little hot. It was almost at the top of their heads. They did not realize that they had been in the river for a while.

Bungsu felt a little under the weather. A few days before, Bungsu had a fever and she had not been fully recovered. In addition, she had to wash quite a lot of clothes this morning. She felt her body ached all over.

Her vision began to get blurry. Bungsu forced herself to walk home even though she began to see stars. Meanwhile, none of her sisters realized that she was not in a good shape. They chatted and joked among themselves along the way home. No one looked at Bungsu who was walking behind them.

As soon as she stepped in the house, Bungsu could not take it anymore. She fainted and fell on the floor. Bungsu's sisters were shocked when they saw Bungsu on the floor.

“Mother . . . Mother . . . Come quickly. Bungsu's fainted, Mother,” the fifth sister cried. Mother ran out from the kitchen.

“Bungsu . . .!” Mother cried when she saw her youngest daughter was slumped by the door.

“What happened? What got you, Bungsu? I've told you not to go to the river, but you wouldn't listen,” Mother rambled and sobbed.

“Come on, help me take her inside. Don't just stand there!” Mother snarled to her daughters. They picked Bungsu up from the floor and put her down on the bed. Mother checked Bungsu's temperature, pressing her hand lightly on Bungsu's forehead. Mother was surprised to find that Bungsu was burning up.

“You said you'd take good care of her. What did you do? You have made her ill. You all know she is in recovery. She shouldn't have gone with you,” Mother grumbled, telling the girls off. The six girls just exchanged furtive glances.



“Why are you angry with us? It’s not our fault that she wanted to go to the river,” the eldest girl whined. She felt that Mother always blamed them for whatever happened to Bungsu. Her sisters nodded, supporting their eldest sister.

“You should have told her not to go, instead of promising that you would keep an eye on her. You shouldn’t have stayed in the river that long,” Mother snapped. She went to the kitchen and came back with a pot of cold water. With a piece of wet cloth, Mother wiped Bungsu’s neck and arms. Bungsu still did not open her eyes. Mother sobbed even more.

“That’s not fair, Mother. You know we always enjoy our time in the river. We have been swimming and playing there every morning. What’s so different this time? It’s not our fault, Mother,” the third sister tried to argue.

“Enough. Don’t say another word against me. From now on, don’t you ever take Bungsu with you again; not to the river, not to the forest, not anywhere. Bungsu cannot leave this house ever again.” Mother warned her six daughters. She was genuinely worried about Bungsu. The girls got up and left Mother to take care of Bungsu in the room. They were upset. Clearly Mother cared more about Bungsu than about the rest of them.

After lunch, the girls played in the yard beside their house. Bungsu had come to half an hour ago but Mother still stayed by her side. Father, after coming home for lunch, had gone back to the field to work on their crops. The girls played together until the afternoon. They climbed a tree, braided each other’s hair, and picked wild flowers on the bamboo fence around the house. Even though they lived at the edge of the village, quite far from other villagers, they never felt lonely. They always enjoyed each other company. Seven young girls playing together were never bored.

In the afternoon, Father returned from the field. The girls’ afternoon chore was putting the chickens and ducks to their coops. They chased after the hen and chicks, driving the cute little animals into the coops. Bungsu, who had felt a little better, sat by

the window and watched her sisters running all over their yard. Bungsu smiled. Usually, she would join them chasing the chickens and steered the ducks to their respective coops. She always enjoyed that chore. However, since she still felt lightheaded, she could only watch her sisters.

The family satisfied their own daily needs. They kept chickens and ducks for meat and eggs. They planted several types of vegetables and fruits in the field. On their backyard, Mother planted chili and tomatoes. They did not need to buy their daily needs from the market. In fact, they had more than enough and were able to sell some eggs and crops in the market every weekend.

Mother and Father always told the girls that their house was quite isolated. Thus, they had to rely on themselves to find food. They had to be able to grow their own needs. During harvest time, the girls would go with their parents to the fields to pick vegetables and fruits. They would bring home chilies, tomatoes, green beans, watermelons, bananas, and many others. The girls always waited for harvest day because they could enjoy the fruits and vegetables to their hearts' content.

2. Gathering Firewood in the Forest

Morning was always a cheerful time for the seven sisters. The morning sun was warm, the cool breeze caressed their skins; it was very comforting. This morning, they were going to gather firewood in the forest. After breakfast, the sisters got ready to go to the forest near their house. Bungsu wished she could come with her sisters, because they told her that they always pick delicious fruits along the way to the forest.

Unfortunately, Mother did not allow Bungsu to go. Since the incident when she went to the river, Mother had not allowed her to leave the house. Mother was still worried that something bad might happen to her. However, Bungsu really wanted to go. It was tedious staying home without her sisters.

“Mother, I’m alright now. I’m fine. Please, let me come with sisters, Mother,” Bungsu begged, clutching her mothers’ arm.

“No, Dear. You should stay home. You can help me prepare lunch,” Mother said, hugging Bungsu’s shoulder.

“Mother, just let her come. She can learn how to gather good firewood. When she’s grown up and married, how she can take care of her family if she doesn’t learn?” the fifth sister said.

Mother considered that for a while. She calculated the benefit and the risk. She knew that her daughter had a point, but she could not

help feeling worried about Bungsu. Finally, she decided to ask her husband for second opinion.

“What do you think, *Abang*?” she asked her husband. Although *abang* meant ‘older brother’, it was a common way for a wife to address her husband.

“Whatever you think best,” her husband replied.

“Please trust us, Mother. We will keep a close eye on Bungsu. She will return home safe and sound, this time. I promise,” the eldest sister tried to convince their mother.

“Very well, Bungsu can come with you. But remember, you have to take care of her.” Mother reluctantly let Bungsu follow her sister. The girls were excited.

“Please be careful. Don’t come home too late. I have prepared your lunch, share it well. Remember, I won’t forgive you if the incident happens again. Take care of Bungsu!” Mother said sternly.

“Yes, Mother. We’ll do all you ask. Don’t worry. Trust us. We’ll take care of her,” the eldest sister said. She wanted her mother to believe them.

The sisters then went to the forest. As usual, Mother stood in the doorway, watching her daughters walked away. She was still worried, but she felt sorry seeing Bungsu being bored at home

alone without her sisters. She could not bear to see her sad. That was why she allowed her to go with her sisters. When she could no longer see them, Mother went in. Today, she was going to help her husband in the field.

The three sisters played games all the way to the forest. They chased after each other, sometimes stopping to pick fruits and ate them directly. When they arrived in the forest, the six older sisters told Bungsu to cut the trees around them. They pointed at small dry old trees because they knew very well that they could not cut down any healthy trees. They had to take care of the forest.

Bungsu gladly did as she was told. Bungsu felt that it was just right that she did the works because all this time, it had been her sisters who did them. Bungsu was so innocent.

She never presumed that her sisters had bad intentions towards her. Bungsu had no other friends except her sisters. That was why she loved them very much.

When Bungsu had cut down all the trees that her sisters pointed, they told her to cut the woods into smaller pieces. It would make it easier for them to take the wood home. Bungsu quickly did that. Meanwhile, her sisters began to open their lunch and ate it. They unpacked the rice, which smelled very nice, and fried *silais* fish with red chili. They quickly finished the meal, leaving nothing for Bungsu. They only left her a bottle of water.

“Bungsu, come and drink this water. You cannot eat because there’s nothing left,” the eldest sister said.

“Yes, Sis, thank you,” Bungsu replied. Bungsu gulped down the water quickly. Her thirst was gone, but her stomach was still empty. However, Bungsu said nothing. She sincerely accepted her sisters’ treatment. Bungsu could sense that her sisters were jealous of her. She did not want to provoke them.

Bungsu sat beside her sisters and leant on a tree. The seven sisters rested, enjoying the cool breeze caressing their faces. It was very cool in the forest. They spotted some monkeys hanging and jumping on the branches above them. The girls smiled because they felt it was very nice to see other creatures in the forest. They were not alone, after all.

The cool breeze and their full stomach made them drowsy. The sisters dozed off under the tree. The birds chirping around them, as if singing lullaby. Bungsu, who was exhausted, immediately fell asleep. They rested for almost an hour. Then, one by one got up and prepared to go home. Bungsu was told to tie the firewood together.

It was mid-afternoon when Bungsu finished collecting the firewood and tied them into tidy piles. There were scratches on her arms and legs, however she ignored the stings. She tried to be cheerful and enjoying the walk home, even though her sisters

were unfair because they asked her to bring the largest pile of wood. With quite a struggle, Bungsu took the pile of wood home.

Their mother was waiting for them at home. She was worried because it was almost dark. When she heard her daughters' voices, she quickly ran out and welcomed them. They had put the piles of firewood beside the house. She embraced Bungsu tightly.

“How are you feeling? Are you alright?”

“I'm fine, Mother. Sisters did a good job taking care of me. I truly enjoyed our trip to the forest,” Bungsu lied. She did not want her mother to know the truth. She did not want her to scold her sisters.

“Oh, I'm glad to hear that,” Mother said with a smile. Bungsu's sisters were startled when they heard what Bungsu said. They never expected Bungsu to lie to their mother. The six girls smiled and thought that Bungsu had to be afraid of them. “Why else would she lie to Mother?” they thought.

Bungsu hid the scratches and cuts on her arms. She did not want her parents to find out what happened. Before she went to bed, Bungsu prayed, “Oh, God, if my sisters had done me wrong, please make them aware of their mistakes. But if it was me who did them wrong, punish me.”

The next morning, the seven sisters went to the river to take a bath. This time, they did not have to persuade Mother to let Bungsu go along. Bungsu's recount of the previous day had convinced Mother that the sisters could take care of their youngest sister. Mother began to trust Bungsu's sisters. Under the morning sun, the sisters walked towards the river. They sang happily, chasing each other all the way.

When they reached the river, each of them changed into the long cloth and wrapped it around their body. Bungsu cringed because the cuts on her arms felt raw. They stung. Bungsu stepped into the river carefully. She thought it would hurt if the water touched her wounds.

Bungsu's sister watched her going into the water. It was hard to read their expressions. They saw how deep and red the cuts on Bungsu's arms. They cringed when Bungsu put her arms in the water. Closing her eyes tightly, Bungsu wiped her arms slowly. Strangely enough, she did not feel any pain. Bungsu splashed more water on her arms. Her sisters watched in astonishment when all the cuts and scratches disappeared. They did not even left scars. The water had healed Bungsu's wounds.



Bungsu's sisters wiped their eyes in disbelief. It was truly an amazing sight. Bungsu herself was amazed. She smiled in relief. She remembered her prayers the night before.

God had answered her prayers. "*Alhamdulillah,*" Bungsu praised God. The sisters were soon immersed in fun games. They swam back and forth. They had a contest of who could hold their breath the longest in the water. They clapped happily when the eldest sister won. As the sun was getting higher, they got out of the water and got ready to go home.

3. Helping Father in the Field

This morning, they woke up earlier than usual. Father and Mother had told them that they would harvest the vegetables and fruits in the field. The girls were happy to help. Bungsu was busy helping Mother in the kitchen, preparing breakfast and packing their lunch.

“Mother, is there anything we can help with?” the eldest sister entered the kitchen.

“Here, please take this and put it on the mat. I’ve made your favorite fried rice and scrambled eggs,” Mother said, handing a big pot of fried rice to her eldest daughter. The delicious smell of fried onion filled the kitchen.

“Hmm... it smells so nice. This must be delicious,” the second sister came over. Mother smiled. She was glad that her daughters liked her cooking.

“Come on help your sister. Bring these scrambled eggs out, and take the plates too,” Mother said. She was busy frying some salted fish for their lunch. Bungsu was putting some rice into lunchboxes. They would bring their lunch, fried salted fish, eggplants, and shrimp chili paste, to the field.

Everyone lent a hand in preparing breakfast. By the time they finished serving the breakfast, Mother had finished making lunch.

They had a hearty breakfast. Father, who was sitting outside and enjoying his morning coffee, came inside after Bungsu called him. They ate breakfast and chatted happily.

After breakfast, everyone cleared the plates. Bungsu had prepared their lunch. After everything was ready, they left to the field. Before they went, Mother locked the front door and Father went to the backyard to open the coops. The chickens and ducks quickly got out and spread all over the yard.

Bungsu put several pans filled with chicken and duck food on the ground. Father had prepared the food earlier. It consisted of rice husks, chopped cassava, and heads of salted fish, mixed together with a bowl of water.

The chickens and ducks immediately walked towards the pans. Bungsu always enjoyed seeing them running all over each other to get to the food.

“Bungsu, come on. We have to leave now,” the second sister called her. Bungsu turned around and ran towards her sisters. Father and Mother walked side by side behind them.

“Here, Mother, let me bring the food,” Bungsu said.

“That’s fine, it’s quite heavy. It’ll just burden you,” Mother said.

“Then, let’s share the load,” Bungsu insisted. She did not have the heart to let her mother bring all the food alone. Mother smiled and

let Bungsu put her hand on the package. They walked side by side, holding the food together.

The morning sun was warm and refreshing. Bungsu always liked the morning air in their village. They walked under the rows of rubber trees on the side of the road. Those trees had been planted by Bungsu's grandparents years ago. Now her parents enjoyed the output. Near the field, the trees changed. *Matoa*, guava, and lanseh trees grew here and there. Nobody planted them, they just grew naturally.

Matoa tree was currently in season. The seven sisters jumped to reach the lowest branches, picking the fruits hanging from them. They enjoyed the sweet taste of *matoa*. There were many *matoa* trees on this side of the forest. Father and Mother stopped for a while, giving chance for their daughters to pick the fruits. Once they were content, they continued walking. It was not long until they arrived in the field.

There was a small hut in the middle of the field. They put the provisions there. Father got bamboo baskets and handed one to each girl and Mother. They would put the harvest in the basket.

“Father, I want to harvest the green beans,” the fifth daughter said once she had the basket.

“Sure. But be careful not to break them,” Father said.

“I want to get the tomatoes,” the second daughter informed them, walking towards the tomato field. Father just nodded. Each of Bungsu’s sisters chose what crop they would like to pick.

Since nobody chose to harvest chili and watermelon, Bungsu and Mother went to chili field. Father would harvest the watermelon. They worked hard because Father always rewarded them with money after all the harvest was sold in the market.

They were allowed to use the money to buy anything they wanted. Usually, the sisters spent their money to buy an assortment of trinkets. Only Bungsu who was sensible enough to save her money. Father had made piggy banks for each of them. They were made from bamboo and each of them was carved with the girls’ name. Of the seven piggy banks, Bungsu’s was the only one that was full. Bungsu wished to buy a cow for her father with that money.

Their baskets were almost full. The sun was climbing higher and higher. Soon, it would be right above their heads. By midday, Father called them over to the hut to have lunch.

“Girls, leave your baskets. Let’s rest and have lunch,” Father called loudly, taking his full basket to the hut. He put the basket on the ground and walked towards the eldest sister. The girls left their baskets and walked towards the hut. Their faces were red

under the hot sun. They quickly washed their hands and entered the hut.

Father picked the baskets one by one and brought them to the hut, setting them down near his watermelon basket. Bungsu and Mother stopped picking the chili and went to the hut.

The baskets would be picked up by merchants from the market. Father had contacted them before. The merchants would come to the field later this afternoon and pay Father for the harvest.

Once everyone had washed their hands, they sat in a circle inside the hut. Bungsu helped Mother serving the lunch. The delicious smell of the food made their stomachs rumbled. Mother prepared rice for each one of them. Mother always handed the plates in a certain order, from Father, the eldest daughter, all the way down to Bungsu.

Everyone ate in silence. They were starving after a hard day of work. Mother's cooking was always delicious. Mother was glad that they finished all the food. It proved that they enjoyed her cooking.

With a full stomach, and the warm breeze around them, the girls felt drowsy. One by one, the sisters fell asleep.

“Why don't you sleep, Bungsu?” Mother asked.

“Maybe later, Mother. I’m not that sleepy,” Bungsu replied. Her hands expertly gathered the plates and glasses. She put them in the corner.

“Go on sleep, Bungsu. I and your father will pick the cucumbers,” Mother said, getting out of the hut.

“Let me come with you,” Bungsu replied and quickly followed her mother. Mother smiled and stroked Bungsu’s head. Mother was glad because Bungsu was different from her sisters. Bungsu never let her mother worked alone. She was always ready to help her parents.

The three of them then picked the cucumbers. They chose the good cucumbers to sell, the straight and medium sized cucumbers went to the basket. The small and curved cucumbers went to a small basket for them to take home.

After harvesting the cucumbers, they went to the eggplant field. They put the eggplants in the same basket. In the afternoon, the merchants and traders came. Father gave them the baskets of vegetables and fruits and they paid for them directly.

By that time, Bungsu’s sisters woke up. After the merchants left with the harvest, Father distributed the money. Everyone had the same share.

“Thank you, Father,” they said in unison. They were happy to receive money for their hard work.

“Father, will you go to the market tomorrow?” the third sister asked.

“Yes, I will. I and Mother will go to the market tomorrow morning to buy our needs,” Father replied, wiping the sweat from his forehead with a small towel.

“Hurray! Can we come?” the girls asked.

“Sure. We’ll go early in the morning,” Father smiled. Everyone was happy because they would be able to buy things. They wanted to buy talc, combs, sandals, wallets, and a few other things.

“Let’s go home now. It will be dark soon,” Mother said, collecting the plates and glasses and put them in a basket. Father took the baskets of fruits and vegetables that they did not sell. They all walked home with satisfaction.

At home, their chickens and ducks were waiting behind the fence. It was time for them to get in the coops. Even though they were tired, the girls quickly did their chores. Some went to get the clothes their mother hung on the clothes line. Others went to open the coops door and drove the chickens and ducks in.

Then, everyone went in the house and sat down on the floor. They stretched their tired legs with satisfaction. While the sisters rested, Bungsu and Mother worked in the kitchen, washing the dishes and preparing dinner. Mother cooked the vegetables they had just harvested. She also fried some duck eggs.

Mother sometimes felt sorry for Bungsu. Bungsu always helped her even though she was as tired as her sisters. Mother never asked Bungsu to do so, but Bungsu never let her mother did everything alone.

When dinner was served, they ate with gusto. The fresh vegetables tasted delicious. After working so hard all day, everyone ate more than usual. Soon after dinner, they got ready to go to bed. Bungsu went into Mother's room and take the piggy bank with her name on it. Bungsu put her money in and held the piggy bank close to her chest. She prayed that she would have enough money to buy a cow for her father.

If Father had a cow, he would not be too tired carrying everything from the field to the house alone. He could use the cow to pull a cart and he would not have to carry things by hand. It would help him a lot. Bungsu closed her eyes and prayed. When she heard her mother approaching, Bungsu quickly put the piggy bank back into a wooden chest.

4. The King's Contest

The next morning, they set out to the market. As usual, they went there by foot. It was because there was no public transportation in their village. They walked for about an hour to reach the market. It was full of people and bustling with activities. Mother said that today was the big market day. That was why it was busier than usual.

Father told Mother that he would go to the tobacco shop. Father would usually sit down and talk with the owner for some time. Meanwhile, Mother and the girls would buy what they needed. Bungsu's sisters were busy trying to find all things that they wanted. They bought talc, perfume, combs, hair pins, sandals, purses, and other accessories. They spent most of the money Father had given them the day before. They put all their purchases in one bag. Bungsu only bought one blue hair tie.

"Is that all you want to buy, Bungsu?" Mother asked.

"Yes, Mother. It's all I need," Bungsu replied with a smile.

"Go on buy a purse or a pair of sandals," Mother felt sad seeing how thrifty Bungsu was.

"I don't think I want to. My purse and sandals are still good enough," Bungsu said with a conviction. Mother smiled. She knew that Bungsu would save her money as she had always done.

“Very well, then. Come and help me buy household needs. We need spices and herbs to cook and some detergent too,” Mother said. Bungsu followed her mother to their regular shop. Mother bought some oil, salt, sugar, salted fish, onion, and garlic. Bungsu helped carrying them. When they went out of the shop, they saw a gathering on one corner of the market. Bungsu was curious and quickly asked her mother to go and see. Apparently, Bungsu’s sisters had been among the crowd, too.

“The King is holding a contest,” the eldest sister whispered to her sister.

“Is that so? We have to join,” the second sister excitedly replied.

“Of course we have to. All of us will participate in the contest,” the eldest sister said.

“What is it, Sis?” Bungsu asked.

“The King is holding a knitting contest, Bungsu,” the third sister answered.

“Knitting?” Bungsu’s eyes glinted with excitement. Knitting was one of the things she was very good at.

“Mother, can I participate, please?” Bungsu whispered to her mother. Mother nodded and smiled.

“Of course you can,” she said.

“We’ll all participate, Bungsu,” the eldest sister said curtly. She was a little jealous seeing how compassionate Mother was to Bungsu.

“Good. It’d be nice if we all can go together,” Bungsu replied happily.

According to the announcement pasted on the walls in the market, the King would hold a knitting contest for the girls in Indragiri Hilir Kingdom. The King promised a huge reward for the winner. The contest was held because the princess wanted to own a handmade sweater. The princess would be the one who chose the winner.

The contest was in two weeks. They still had time to practice.

“Mother, we have to buy some wools and needle. We only have two weeks to practice,” the second sister said.

“Yes, let’s go to the shop over there. They sell knitting equipment,” Mother said to her daughters. They walked together to the shop.

Mother told them to pick two balls of wool of different colors and two needles each. She paid for their purchase from her own pocket. After that, they met Father at the market entrance. They told Father about the contest and that they would participate. Father smiled seeing that they were so happy.

At home, the girls put their purchases down without even looking at them. Usually, when they got back from the market, they would immediately take out what they had bought. This time, they ignored everything but the wools and needles. Each girl got their needle and wools and began to knit. Their mother was a good knitter. She had taught them how to knit.

For the next few days, they knitted at every chance they had. By the end of the week, they had produced various kinds of items such as a hat, a small purse, a shawl, and a handkerchief. Father and Mother were proud with the girls' works. They were beautiful. Bungsu had knitted a beautiful small dress for dolls.

"Wow, these are beautiful," Mother complimented them sincerely.

"Look, Mother, I made a cute hat," the fourth sister said. Showing her work.

"Yes, it is so cute," Mother said, stroking the fourth sister's head.

"What about my shawl, Mother?" the third sister wrapped her shawl on her shoulders.

"It's very pretty," Mother said. She was very proud with them.

"I'm sure the Princess will have a headache to choose which one of your works is the winner. They are truly amazing." The girls were happy. They were satisfied with what they had made.

It was the night before the contest, Bungsu's sisters were ready to go to bed. They were tired after practicing all day long. They could not wait for the next day. They would visit the palace. It was the first time they would set foot in the palace. They were a little nervous to be guests of the King and to meet the Princess. They slept soundly with a smile on their face.

Among the sisters, Bungsu was the most determined. She wanted to win the contest. She would give the prize money to her parents. She wanted to make them happy and this was her chance to give back to them.

Bungsu also wished to make her sisters happy. If she won, she would share some of the rewards with her sisters. Her determination had given her energy to keep practicing. When her sisters were asleep, Bungsu got up and returned to her knitting.

It was getting late. The sound of cicadas was loud in the quiet night. Bungsu was very familiar with that sound. It had accompanied her every night. In the cold night, Bungsu's sisters were fast asleep. The oil lamp in the house was getting dimmer. Bungsu was still awake, busy checking and refining her knitting. This was the last time she could practice. Tomorrow the contest would begin. Bungsu did not want to waste this last moment.

"Bungsu, go have some sleep," Mother sat beside Bungsu.

“Yes, Mother. I want to finish this first. I’ll go to bed soon,” Bungsu said. She did not get up from her seat. Her eyes were focused on the wool and the needles in her hands. The click-clacking of the needles was like music to her ears.

“Your sisters had all gone to bed. I think your knitting is very good, Bungsu. You don’t have to practice anymore. Come on, go to bed,” Mother said. “I believe you will be the winner,” she added.

“I hope so, Mother,” Bungsu said.

Bungsu was glad that her mother thought she would be the winner. She quickly finished her knitting and put away the needles and wools. She then went to bed.

“I’m going to bed now, Mother. You have some sleep too. Tomorrow we have to leave early,” Bungsu said and gave her mother a peck on her cheek.

“Yes, Bungsu. Now go to bed,” Mother said before going in her room. Bungsu laid down beside her sisters. After praying, she closed her eyes and soon was asleep.

5. The Knitting Contest

The day of the contest arrived. Accompanied by their parents, the seven sisters went to the palace. Right before the opening ceremony, they were ushered to a room to wait with other contestants. Their parents were not allowed to come with them. They had to wait outside the palace. In the room, there were many girls from all over the kingdom. They would compete against each other to knit the most beautiful sweater for the Princess. The Princess sat beside the King and the Queen in front of the girls. She was amazingly beautiful. The girls were astounded to see how elegant and pretty she was. Her smile was so sincere that it melted everyone's heart. The maids distributed wools and needles to each contestant. The Princess stood up when all contestants had received their equipment.

“My dear friends, I hold this contest to make new friends. I want to know you all. In addition, I want to have a new handmade sweater for the rainy season. Thus, I want you to knit me a sweater. The most beautiful sweater will win and you will receive huge rewards from my father, the King. So, please compete with the spirit of friendship. Be honest and do your best. Let's begin,” the Princess said.

The contestants sat on their assigned seats and began to knit. Everyone was so focused with their knitting. The room was so quiet you could hear a needle dropped. The Princess got out of

her seat and walked around the room. She looked at the girls' work. She was so happy because it was the first time she met girls from outside the palace.

They were all beautiful. All this time, the Princess had no friends of her age in the palace. She always felt a little lonely. That was why she had persuaded the King to hold this contest.

At midday, the girls were allowed some time to rest. Lunch was served in another room and they ate together with the Princess. The Princess was happy to meet and talk with all the girls. The King knew that his daughter was often felt lonely. Thus, he let her enjoy this special day with the girls from the villages. At one point, the Princess met Bungsu and her sisters.

"Hi, what's your name? Where do you come from?" the Princess greeted her. Bungsu was startled. She quickly bowed her head to respect the Princess.

"My parents call me Bungsu, Princess. I and my sisters live at the bank of Indragiri Hilir River," Bungsu replied politely.

"Oh, you are so pretty," the Princess said sincerely. Bungsu smiled. She was embarrassed and proud at the same time. Her sisters were clearly displeased. They wondered why Bungsu always attracted others' attention.

“Thank you, Princess,” Bungsu said. She was blushing. A Princess had just complimented her. She became more determined to knit the best sweater for the Princess. Bungsu no longer cared about the reward. She just wanted to present her best work to the Princess. She never knew that the Princess was a beautiful, kind, and friendly girl.

The Princess continued going around the room and greeting other girls. She felt so happy to meet so many new people. Moreover, the contestants were also kind to her. The Princess was grateful to have new friends.

After lunch, the contest resumed. The girls returned to their knitting. Like other contestants, Bungsu felt a renewed determination after her meeting with the Princess. She felt motivated to do her best for the Princess.

The room was quiet again. Only the click-clacking of needles was heard. Time passed quickly. By midafternoon, the contestants had another chance to rest. The contest would be continued the next day. Before dinner, the girls were allowed to play in the royal garden.



The Princess asked them to spend the night in the palace so that they could begin knitting earlier the next morning. The parents and companions were allowed to leave the palace and they could come back to pick up their daughters the next day.

Bungsu kissed her parents' hand with respect. She felt a pang of sadness. This was the first time she was truly separated from her parents. Bungsu's sisters also felt the same. However, after saying farewell, they quickly ran to the garden. They did not want to waste this precious opportunity. Bungsu stayed with her parents for a while. It was hard for her to let them go.

“Be good in the palace, Bungsu. We will come to pick you up tomorrow,” Mother said, hugging Bungsu tightly.

“Yes, Mother. You be careful on the road. If you are tired, just stop and rest for a while. Don't exert yourself,” Bungsu said. She was genuinely worried. Father and Mother was touched because Bungsu cared so much about them.

“Of course, we will be alright,” Father said.

Bungsu smiled, trying to hide her sadness.

“Hi, Bungsu, here you are.” The Princess suddenly appeared beside her. She was accompanied by her maids.

“Yes, Princess. I'm just saying goodbye to my parents,” Bungsu said quietly.

“Are you sad that they’re leaving? Come on, I’ll accompany you. Let’s go to the garden,” the Princess said. Bungsu’s parents were in awe because the Princess was so friendly with their daughter.

They were happy because the Princess liked their daughter.

“Very well, then. We’re leaving now, Bungsu. Go ahead and accompany the Princess,” Mother said. Mother and Father then left Bungsu and the Princess. They returned to their humble hut at the bank of Indragiri Hilir River.

Bungsu watched her parents sadly. The Princess quickly took her hand and half dragged her to the garden. Bungsu was amazed with the beautiful flowers in the garden.

This garden was like those in the stories Mother always told her. Today she could see it with her own eyes.

“Come on, Bungsu. Let’s sit on the swings,” Princess said. Bungsu was nervous. She did not know what to do. How could she sit on the same seat with the Princess? She was just a commoner.

“No, Princess. I’ll sit down here. You go on ahead,” Bungsu tried to refuse.

“Oh, come on. Don’t be like that.” The Princess took Bungsu’s hand and pulled her. Bungsu was forced to sit beside the Princess. She was nervous because it was considered rude for a commoner

to sit on the same seat with a royalty. The maids stood on either side of them.

“Bungsu, tell me about your village,” the Princess said. She was curious because she seldom went out of the palace.

“It’s just a small village, Princess. A small village on a river bank. There were many trees in my village. In the morning, the sun shone warmly. Birds flew from one branch to another. Their chirps always cheered me up. The cool breeze always felt refreshing.” Bungsu said with eyes closed. She pictured her village, a beautiful place.

“It sounded so beautiful, Bungsu. I want to go there,” Princess said cheerfully. Bungsu was taken aback.

“You shouldn’t, Princess. It’s so far from here and the palace is a thousand time more beautiful than my village,” Bungsu tried to convince the Princess.

“One day, I will visit your village,” the Princess said determinedly.

Bungsu did not know what to say. She could not imagine the Princess coming to her village, visiting her hut. Other girls were playing in the gardens, running from one garden to the other. Bungsu’s sisters did the same. They finally arrived at the swings

where Bungsu and the Princess were sitting. They were surprised to see Bungsu talking animatedly with the Princess.

They could not believe it.

“Hi, come here. Let’s play with us,” the Princess called them friendly. Princess was very happy because there were many girls her age in the palace. She felt like she had a lot of friends. In this respect, Bungsu was just like the Princess. She had also dreamed to have friends.

The afternoon turned into the night. The Princess took the girls back inside the palace. They had to be ready for dinner. After that, the girls would rest in a room that the maid had prepared.

6. The Contest Continued

Morning came. The palace was bustling with activities. The contestants of knitting contest were taking turns to take a bath. They had to be ready at seven for breakfast. At eight, the contest would resume. Bungsu had been ready because she woke up before everyone else. She woke her sisters up.

While waiting for her sisters to get ready, Bungsu sat down and prayed. She prayed that God protected her parents. She was so sad to imagine that her parents were alone at home. She also prayed that she could finish her knitting and that the result would please the Princess.

“Bungsu, I want to talk to you,” Bungsu’s eldest sister stood beside her.

“Yes, Sis. What is it?” Bungsu asked, smiling sweetly.

“Come with me,” the eldest sister took her hand and bring her away from other contestants. Bungsu just followed along.

“Bungsu, once we finished knitting and it’s time to submit them, you have to swap your sweater with mine,” the eldest sister whispered urgently. She looked at Bungsu with a menacing stare and grabbed her hands tightly. Bungsu was taken aback.

“Why?” she stammered.

“Stop asking stupid questions! Just do as I ask!” her eldest sister said with a threatening tone.

“Fine, I’ll do what you ask,” Bungsu said in defeat. Her eldest sister smiled in satisfaction.

A moment later, a maid called all contestants to enter the dining room. Breakfast was served. Every contestant took a seat on one of the two tables in the room. Then the Princess entered.

She was wearing a beautiful light blue dress. Her hair was beautifully braided. She sat on the chair at the head of the table. Everyone looked at her.

“Let’s dig in,” the Princess said. Everyone began to eat. Once they finished, the girls were asked to enter the contest room where they would resume their knitting. The Princess led them to the room and sat on her chair. She was not alone, today. The King sat with her to watch the contestants. When the clock chimed eight o’clock, the contest resumed. A few minutes later, the Princess left her seat and walked around the room. She looked at each contestant’s work carefully. The knitting began to take the shape of a sweater and they were all pretty. The Princess could not make up her mind.

Like yesterday, they had a lunch break at midday before returning to their knitting. At five that afternoon, the Princess told her maids to collect the sweaters from the contestants. While

everyone was busy submitting their works, Bungsu's eldest sister quickly swapped her sweater with Bungsu's. Bungsu could not do anything but let her do it.

The maids gathered the sweaters. They put a number on each sweater and wrote the contestant's name on a sheet of paper. The numbers on the sweaters matched the contestants' numbers on the list. After all sweaters were collected and labeled, the maids put them in a wooden chest. The Princess then stood up and made an announcement.

“My friends, thank you for your time and hard work. You will always be my friends. I will need some time to judge your works. So, you can go home. We will announce the winner of this contest the day after tomorrow. Please make sure that you are here during the announcement. I'll see you later,” the Princess said.

The contestants began to pack up their belongings. They then shook hands with the princess before returning home. Bungsu and her sisters walked quickly, leaving the palace. They wanted to arrive before nightfall. Even though the Princess had offered to host them for one more night, in case the contestants lived too far away, they chose to go straight home.

On the road, Bungsu's sisters could not stop talking about their experiences. They really enjoyed the last two days. Bungsu did

not utter a word. She was torn. She remembered the sweater she had knitted with all her heart. She had a good intention. If she won, she would give the prize money to her parents. Now she could not do it because her eldest sister had robbed her of that opportunity. Bungsu felt like she wanted to cry. However, if she cried, her parents would find out what had happened. She could not let that happen. She did not want to burden her parents. She also did not want her eldest sister to be scolded.

Before the last ray of sunset disappeared, the sisters arrived at their home. Father and Mother welcomed them warmly. In the two days that the girls were in the palace, the house felt quiet as a grave. They missed their daughters. Mother always worried about Bungsu. She was afraid that the sisters would pull pranks on Bungsu.

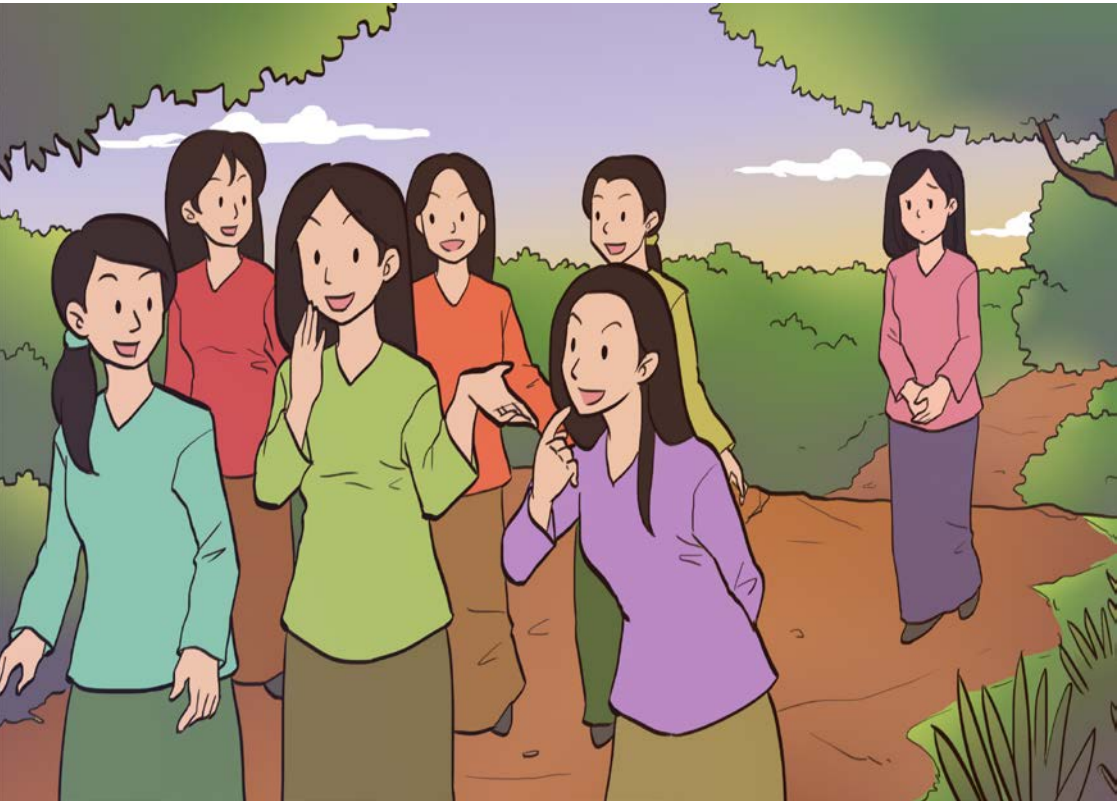
“Are you alright?” Mother greeted them one by one.

“We are fine, Mother,” the eldest sister said.

“Thank God,” Mother said.

“Bungsu, are you alright?” Mother asked, holding Bungsu’s face close to her face. Bungsu seemed different.

“I’m fine, Mother,” Bungsu said, forcing a smile. She tried to avoid Mother’s suspicion.



“But there’s something in your eyes. It tells me that something happened,” Mother investigated. The eldest sister shot a sharp glance at Bungsu. Bungsu looked at her feet.

“Maybe it’s because I’m exhausted, Mother,” Bungsu said, trying to convince her mother.

“Mother, let’s go in. We’re starving,” the third sister said and went in the house. Everyone followed suit and sat on the floor.

“I have prepared *baung* fish, cooked with spicy sour soup. Let’s eat,” Mother said and went in the kitchen. Bungsu followed her.

Even though she was exhausted, Bungsu still could not let her mother did everything alone. She helped bringing the rice, plates, glasses, and water jug to the front room. A few moments later, every bit of food had gone to their stomachs. The three sisters laid down on pandanus mat. Their eyes felt so heavy. They only want one thing; sleep soundly until morning.

Mother let her daughters sleep. She knew how exhausted they were. They had come from the palace by foot. Soon, everyone was fast asleep.

Mother and Father smiled happily, watching their daughters. The girls looked so beautiful and peaceful when they were sleeping.

7. The Winner

The day that the contestants had been waiting for finally arrived. The front yard of the palace was packed with people. They came to see who won the contest. The contestants sat in a row of chairs in front of everyone. They were nervous. They could not wait to hear the announcement. Bungsu felt the same as the other girls. Even though her sweater had been swapped by her eldest sister, she still felt nervous. Her heart was beating fast. Meanwhile, her sisters were confident that they would be chosen as the winner. The eldest sister smiled with satisfaction. Bungsu kept her head down.

“If I win, I will buy gold necklaces, bracelets, and rings,” the second sister daydreamed.

“If I win, I will buy pretty dresses like the ones the Princess wears,” the third sister said.

“I will buy a house in the city. I don’t want to live in our quiet village, if I win,” the eldest sister said. Her sisters all whispered what they wanted to do with the money if they won. Behind them, other girls did the same. Only Bungsu who kept silent. She had lost hope since her work had been swapped.

The voices died when a gong sounded. The King, the Queen, and the Princess entered the yard. The King took his seat. The Queen and the Princess sat on his sides. Every eyes were trained to the

Princess. Wearing a pretty pink dress, her beauty shone in the bright morning. Her hair was braided again. A small pearl necklace hung on her neck. She smiled sweetly to everyone.

A guard then stood in front of the people. He held a white scroll. After receiving a signal from the King, he opened the scroll and began to read.

“With all due respect to Your Majesty the King, the Queen, and the Princess, let me announce the winner of the knitting contest.”

“The Princess has chosen one very exceptional work. The knitting was very beautiful and very neat. The Princess believed that the contestant poured her heart in making the sweater,” he continued. The guard then stopped for a moment, building suspense. The contestants were nervous.

“The winner of knitting contest is the contestant with the registered number of twenty one!” the guard announced loudly. Bungsu was startled. It was the eldest sister’s number.

“Contestant Number 21, please come forward to receive the reward from His Majesty the King!”

The voice sounded so far away for Bungsu. Her head spun, but she tried to compose herself. Her eldest sister went forward with confidence. Everyone gave her a loud applause. Bungsu’s parents

were proud of their eldest daughter. They could not believe that she had won. Mother could not hold back her tears of joy.

“Your Majesty, here is the winner of our knitting contest. Please present the reward,” the guard said. Bungsu left the venue quietly. She could not bear to see her work be claimed by her sister. She was heartbroken.

Bungsu walked alone, away from the palace. Tears streamed down her cheeks. She ignored everything around her. She just wanted to come home and sit by the river. She always found peace whenever she sat by the river. She could pour her heart, let out all her sadness and disappointment, to the river.

Meanwhile, in the palace, the ceremony continued. The King presented a huge amount of money to the eldest sister. She was elated. Her heart jumped in happiness. Her dream would soon come true; a house in the city, beautiful dresses, gold and diamond jewelries, everything would be hers. She smiled proudly.

“Congratulations. Your work was exceptionally beautiful. I love it,” the Princess said, shaking the eldest sister’s hand.



“Thank you very much, Princess,” the eldest sister said, bowing her head in respect. The King and the Queen shook her hand. She felt so overwhelmed by joy. It all felt like a dream.

“Tonight, we’d like to invite you to have dinner in the palace. Take your sisters too,” the Princess said.

“Thank you, Princess. We’ll be there,” she replied cheerfully.

As soon as the eldest sister went down the stage, the other contestants swarmed her. They all wanted to shake her hand. Her sisters hugged her tightly, congratulating her. The six of them

hugged each other. They had made a promise that anyone among them who won the prize would share it with the others.

“Sis, don’t forget our promise,” the third sister whispered.

“Of course I remember,” the eldest sister whispered back. She clutched the money bag tightly.

“The Princess invites us to dinner tonight. Let’s go to the market and buy some dresses.” She asked her sisters to get away from the other contestants.

“Oh, my daughter... congratulations! I’m proud of you.” Mother said when they reached her.

“Thank you, Mother,” she hugged her. Mother stroked her head with love. Father stood beside her with tears of joy on his eyes.

“Mother, Father, go on home without us. We’re going to the market to find some dresses. The Princess invites us to dinner in the palace tonight,” the eldest sister said.

“Very well. But, where is Bungsu? Why is she not with you?” Mother just realized that Bungsu was not there.

“We don’t know, Mother. Before the announcement, she was sitting with us. After the announcement, we did not see her again. She probably had gone home by herself,” the second sister said.

Mother was worried. She was wondering where Bungsu would be. If she went home alone, why didn't she tell her?

"Well, I and your father will be going now. We have to catch up to Bungsu," Mother said and quickly took father away from the venue.

"Don't worry, Mother. Nothing will happen to Bungsu. She's big enough to handle herself. Don't make a mountain out of a mole hill," the eldest sister yelled to her mother. Mother ignored her and walked more quickly. Father followed her. Her maternal instinct told her that something bad was happening to Bungsu.

Meanwhile, the six sisters walked to the market. There were a lot they had to buy.

"Remember, you can only buy one dress each. You cannot buy jewelry," the eldest sister said.

"No way! You promised to share. It should be fair! We will get whatever you get. Remember, Sis, we know your secret," the second sister said. The eldest sister was taken aback. She never suspected that they knew what she had done. Her five sisters looked at her menacingly.

"Fine... Fine... you'll get whatever I get." The eldest sister gave in. There was nothing she could do. They held her biggest secret.

“But promise me you will keep this secret. If it gets out, all of you will share the punishment because you’ve hidden the truth.” The eldest sister threatened them back.

“Of course. Trust us. Your secret is safe,” the third sister said. The six-sister smiled to each other.

8. The Truth Was Out

It was still dark. The cold wind blew and sneaked through the window. The whole house was asleep, except Bungsu. She was in the kitchen, boiling water and cooking rice. Bungsu had forgotten her sadness and disappointment. She had let all of it go. She tried to be patient and accept that her sister had taken her work. She was happy enough to see that her parents happy. Moreover, her sisters had come home with such a big smile on their face. They had brought a lot of things from the market.

The sun began to rise in the east. It turned the sky orange. Bungsu and Mother had finished preparing the breakfast. They quickly woke everyone up.

“Rise and shine, girls. Breakfast’s ready,” Mother called the sisters and opened the window. The cool morning air caressed the sisters’ sleepy face.

“Mother, it’s too early. I’m still sleepy,” the eldest sister said.

“Come on, wake up. After breakfast and bath, you can return to sleep,” Mother said.

“Come on, wash yourself. We’ll have breakfast now,” Mother insisted. She took out the plates and glasses while Bungsu brought the food. Father was enjoying his coffee. The three of them waited for the sisters to have breakfast. Soon, the house was

filled with their voices, talking about the dinner in the palace a few days ago. They joked and laughed merrily. Bungsu laughed along with her sisters.

After breakfast, Mother told all her daughters to take the dirty dishes to the kitchen. They happily obeyed. It was probably because they were in a good mood. Bungsu was glad to see her sisters helping out in the house.

“Bungsu, this is for you. We bought you a dress, I hope you like it,” the eldest sister handed her a package. Bungsu gladly received it. She opened it immediately and gasped when she saw a beautiful blue dress inside.

“It is so beautiful. Thank you very much, Sis,” Bungsu said sincerely. Bungsu tried the dress. Her white skin seemed to glow under the dark dress. Mother saw them from the kitchen and shook her head. Bungsu looked so beautiful.

“Bungsu, you are so beautiful in that dress,” Mother said. Bungsu’s sisters smiled seeing how happy their youngest sister was.

“This is a beautiful dress. It’s too bad I won’t ever have a chance to wear it,” Bungsu said.

“Don’t think like that, Bungsu. There will be a time when you can wear this amazing dress,” Mother replied and embraced Bungsu.

“Keep it well, Bungsu,” Mother said.

“Let’s go to the river,” the eldest sister said loudly. The seven sisters then prepared to go to the river. Bungsu took the dirty laundry and quickly followed her sisters. Today, she wanted to swim to her heart’s content. Bungsu’s sisters did the laundry together and let Bungsu swim and play in the water. They went in the water after they finished the laundry.

By midday, they walked home. Mother had been waiting for them.

“Get ready. Quickly. The Princess invites you to the palace. A soldier was just here with the invitation,” Mother said, taking the basket of laundry from her daughter’s hand.

“Go on get ready. I’ll dry the clothes,” Mother continued.

“Do you know why the Princess invites us to the palace, Mother?” the eldest sister felt a pit in her stomach.

“She wanted another knitted dress. She wants the winner of the contest to do it,” Mother said happily. She was glad because one of her daughters would work in the palace. The eldest sister choked.

“But, Mother... we have just come back from the palace a few days ago,” the eldest sister said. She sounded like she objected to the idea. Mother was a little confused. Her daughter should be

happy that the Princess wanted her to make another dress. It might open certain doors to her to work in the palace.

“Just do as the Princess asks. You might get into trouble if you disobey her. Besides, you can take your sisters too,” Mother tried to console the eldest sister.

“I cannot go, Mother,” Bungsu said and walked inside the house.

“Bungsu, you cannot do that. You have to come with us,” the eldest sister said nervously. She went after Bungsu.

“Sis, the Princess only wants the winner and you are the winner of the contest. It’s you who should go, not me,” Bungsu said.

“Come on, Bungsu. Let’s go together. Besides, what will you do alone at home?” the second sister tried to persuade Bungsu.

“Bungsu, didn’t you see how happy Mother is? At least come with us for her,” the third sister said.

“Please, Bungsu. For Father’s and Mother’s sake, come with us,” the eldest sister begged.

“Fine. I’ll come with you,” Bungsu gave in. The eldest sister cried triumphantly.

“Mother, we’re going,” the eldest sister said.

“Good. You have to go,” Mother said.

“But Mother, who will take care of the chickens? Who will help you?” Bungsu said. She was concerned to leave her mother alone.

“Don’t worry. I used to do all the works. Besides, Father is here,” Mother replied. “Go on, now. Don’t waste time,” she added.

“We’re leaving now, Mother,” the eldest sister said. They took turn to kiss their mother’s hand. Bungsu was the last. She embraced her mother tightly.

“I’m leaving, Mother. You take care of yourself. Don’t exert yourself,” Bungsu said.

“Don’t worry about me. Just enjoy yourself. I’ll be fine,” Mother kissed Bungsu’s forehead.

“Take care,” Mother called to them. The seven-sister walked to the palace.

When they arrived, they were taken to a room where the Princess was waiting. It was a beautiful room. Bouquets of jasmine were beautifully placed in the corners. The floor was covered with a plush carpet.

“Good, you have come. All seven of you. I’m glad that you’re here,” the Princess welcomed them.

“Thank you, Princess. We’re glad that you invite us back here. Is there anything we can do for you?” the eldest sister asked politely. The Princess smiled.

“Next month is my birthday. I will celebrate it with the girls near the palace. I want to wear a knitted dress and I want you to make it,” the Princess said.

“Very well, Princess. I will make it for you. Can I do it at home?” the eldest sister stammered.

“No. You have to do it here. You can stay in the palace while you’re working on it,” the Princess said softly. There was no way to say no to her. The eldest sister tried to find a way.

“I want the arms exactly like those in my sweater. The threads made a bracelet, connected to the wrist,” the Princess explained what she wanted. The eldest sister panicked. Her heart was beating fast.

“Yes, Princess. I will do it. But, can I ask for a favor? I want my sisters to stay with me too. We have been together forever, and I cannot bear to live without them,” the eldest sister begged.

“I don’t see any problem. All of you can stay here until my dress is finished,” the Princess replied. The eldest sister sighed a breath of relief. Her sisters were glad. It would be nice to live in the palace. Bungsu was the only one who seemed worried. She

remembered her parents. If she stayed in the palace, who would help them home? Bungsu wanted to come home and stay there, instead.

“Thank you, Princess,” the eldest sister said. She was grateful because her plan could be done.

“Here are the wools and the needles. You can use this room as you please. If you are bored, you can play in the garden. The maids will handle all your needs, just tell them,” the Princess said before leaving.

“Thank you very much, Princess,” they all said. The Princess nodded and smiled. She then left the seven sisters.

“Bungsu, quickly, make the dress,” the eldest sister told Bungsu in a whisper. She gave her the wools and needles. Bungsu was doubtful.

“Come on! We don’t have much time. The sooner you finish it, the sooner we can come home. Aren’t you worried about Mother and Father?” the eldest sister played Bungsu. She knew bringing their parents up would weaken Bungsu.

“Fine. I will do it,” Bungsu finally said. She had no choice, even though she did not want to. The eldest sister had cheated her again. Bungsu made the dress with her utmost attention. Bungsu respected and loved the Princess as a friend. The Princess had

always been so nice to her. Bungsu wanted to give her the best dress she could make.

Bungsu worked on the dress all by herself for days. Her sisters only stayed in the room to keep their secret.

If they heard a knock on the door, the eldest sister would take the needles and pretend to be working. Sometimes, the Princess herself visited them to chat. Most of the time, it was the maids who were serving them meals.

At night, the six sisters would sleep soundly. Bungsu stayed awake to finish the dress. She fought off her wariness because she wanted to go home as soon as possible. It had been days since the last time she saw her parents. She missed them. Bungsu was worried because her mother had to take care of the house alone. She had to do the laundry, do the dishes, and take care of the animals. Bungsu bit back her tears.

It had been exactly a week. The dress was almost finished. Bungsu believed that it would be ready the next day. They had just had dinner and her sisters were ready to go to bed. Bungsu was sitting comfortably to continue working on the dress. She was immersed in the work that she did not realize that the door was open. The Princess suddenly burst through the door. Her face was red with anger. They never expected that she would come without knocking. She had always knocked before coming in.

Bungsu's hands hung in the air. The eldest sister could not move. Her legs felt like jelly. The other sisters looked at each other and feel afraid. Nobody made a sound.

"I knew from the beginning that the sweater was your work, Bungsu," the Princess said coldly. There was no warm smile on her face. The sisters held their breath.

"During the contest, I watched everyone. I remembered every inch of your works. The one thing that stuck in my mind was the thread that made a bracelet but still connected to the wrist. It was so beautiful. And I knew Bungsu was the only one who made it," the Princess continued. The eldest sister felt all sorts of emotions; fear, embarrassment, and worry, made her cheek blush. She looked down at her feet.

"I invited you back to the palace and asked you to make a dress with one hope. I hoped you would confess everything.

I wanted you to tell the truth so I could forgive you," the Princess added, clenching her teeth. She was furious. The eldest sister began to sob. She was afraid that she would be punished. She shivered with fear. Bungsu also cried because she could not bear to see her sister in such a state. Bungsu slowly put down the nearly finished dress and knelt before the Princess.



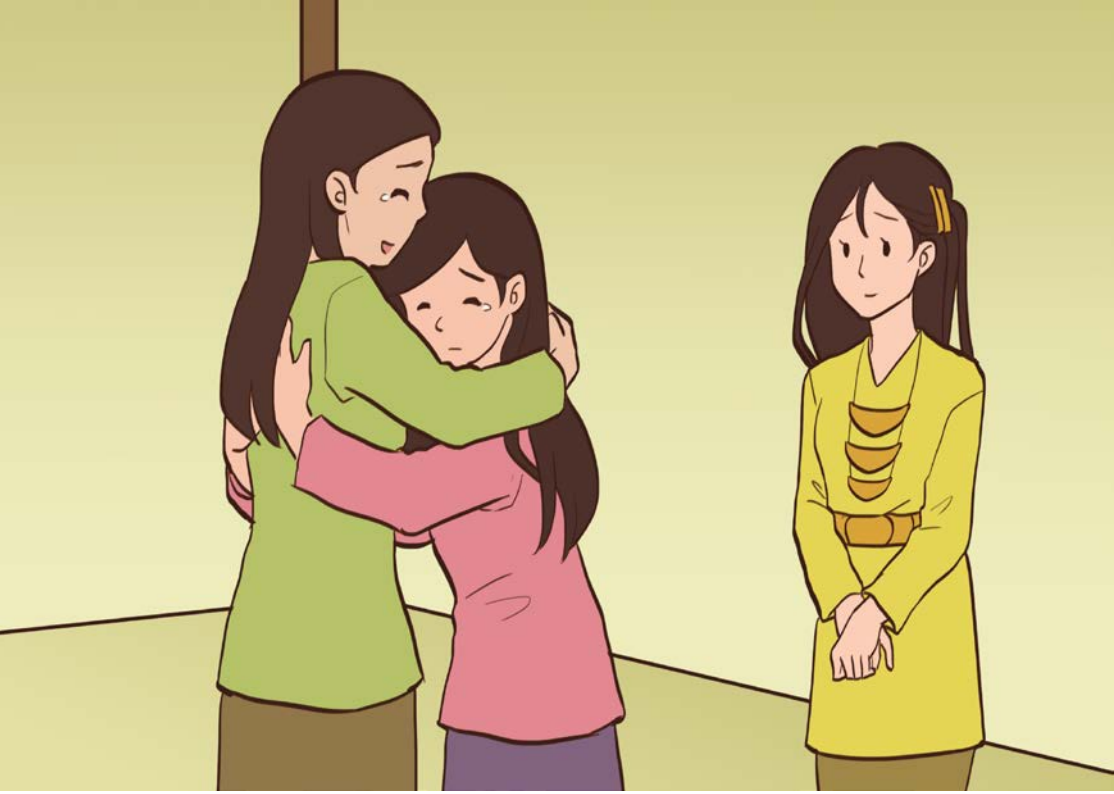
“Princess, please forgive my sister. She had made a mistake. But in her defense, she did it not for herself,” Bungsu said in between her sobs.

“Bungsu! Why do you still defend her? She has cheated you. She has to be punished. She has lied to everyone, to me, to the King. The King will not forgive her,” the Prince snarled.

“Princess, if someone should pay for this, please punish me instead. Let my sisters go home. My eldest sister was the one who always takes care of our parents. Please, Princess, I beg you,” Bungsu begged. She did not have the heart to see her sister being punished. Her sisters were surprised. They never expected Bungsu to beg like that. The eldest sister crawled towards Bungsu and embraced her.

“No, Bungsu. Let me take the punishment. I deserve it. I have done you wrong, but you still want to defend me. I’m ashamed. Please forgive me, Bungsu,” the eldest sister sobbed. Bungsu had forgotten all the bad things her sisters did to her. She never stopped loving them. They were her sisters.

The Princess was touched seeing such a display of love and compassion. She touched Bungsu’s and her sister’s shoulders.



“This is all I wanted,” the Princess said, “I want you to own your mistakes and apologize to your sister. Very well, I will forget all this. I will not tell on you to the King. Let this be our secret. I don’t want you to be punished, to be honest. I have considered you as my friends,” the Princess said. Bungsu and her eldest sister was startled. They never expected that the Princess would forgive them.

“Thank you, Princess,” the eldest sister said with a shaking voice. She took the Princess hand and kissed it. Bungsu did the same, thanking the Princess over and over. She was relieved that the Princess would not punish her sister. “I only ask for one thing,”

the Princess added, “You have to return the reward to Bungsu after you come home.”

“Yes, Princess, I will. I will give all the money to Bungsu,” the eldest sister promised. Then, the Princess left them. She was satisfied because she had succeeded in turning Bungsu’s sisters around. Bungsu and her sisters embraced each other. The sisters realized their mistakes and promised to treat Bungsu better. They apologized to their youngest sister. They promised to not be jealous of her anymore. Bungsu had taught them a lesson; a lesson on sincerity and humility.

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Judul Penelitian dan Tahun Terbit (10 tahun terakhir)

1. “Penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia dalam Naskah Ujian Nasional Bahasa Indonesia Kelas IX SMP tahun ajaran 2006” (Jurnal *Madah*)

2. “Orang Aneh Menunggu Setitik Cahaya: Kritik Terhadap Perilaku Calon Pemimpin” (Jurnal *Madah*).
3. “Novel Jembatan Karya Olyrinson: Perspektif Sosiologis” (Jurnal *Madah*).
4. “Ketertindasan Melayu dalam Cerpen Suku Pompong Karya Fedli Azis dan Cerpen Rumah di Ujung Kampung Karya Hang Kafrawi” (Jurnal *Madah*).

Informasi Lain

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Lahir di Bandung pada tanggal 1 Mei 1976. Pernah terlibat dalam penyusunan Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia edisi IV, Kamus Pelajar, Tesaurus Alfabetis Bahasa Indonesia, Tesaurus Tematis Bahasa Indonesia, dan Glosarium Bahasa Indonesia. Lebih dari 5 tahun ini, juga terlibat dalam penyuntingan naskah di beberapa lembaga, seperti di Mahkamah Konstitusi dan Bank Indonesia. Selain menyunting, saat ini ia sedang disibukkan dengan kegiatan konservasi dan revitalisasi bahasa-bahasa daerah di Indonesia.