

A TALE OF PEGO
Kisah Si Pego

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A TALE OF PEGO

The Unfriendly Fire

The wooden raft moved slowly upstream Sungai (River) Kandilo. Small hands rowed the raft with long bamboo poles vaulted on the shallow bottom of the river. The hands belonged to a boy with fair coloured skin and hair falling apart on the shoulder. His body was not a large and well-built one, neither did he seem too powerful to steer the raft. The boy's name was Pego. Like most children living on the forest edge and river bank, the little Pego was familiar with the strong current of the stream and the thickness of jungle. River plays an important part in the life of children living in the hinterlands. To them, river is a place to play, work, and learn simultaneously. River is their school and teacher, teaching them how to swim and to survive. He held a spear, lifted it high backwards. He took away the tip of the spear from the water surface, but his slanting eyes were sharp spying on the movement of fish swimming underneath the surface. At the right moment, he quickly threw the spear into the water which made the fishes surprised and disperse, but one could not escape because the tip of the spear had penetrated its body.

“Father and Mother must be very happy with my catch today,” muttered Pego happily as he got so many fishes that day. The

house where he lived was not far from Sungai Kadilo. As with other houses at the outskirts of the forest, the house of Pego's family had a roof made from reed wicker in thick layers which made the house safe from heavy rain or blazing heat of sunshine. Walled with wood, the house stood on stilts, provided with a kind of stair.

"Father, Mother, I am home. Look, I catch big *gabus* fish today," said Pego showing his handsome catch.

"Great, Pego. My son has to be skillful in hunting and catching fish," said Pak Kutoi caressing Pego's head.

"I've grown up, Father. I have to be independent and help Father and Mother," said Pego. Pego did not know that Pak Kutoi and his wife were not his real parents. When Pego was still a baby, he escaped the fire burning his house.

His father saved him, but he entered the burning house again to save his mother. Unfortunately, they were trapped inside and could not get out from the unfriendly fire.

Little Pego was orphaned. The disaster which struck Pego's family had arisen sympathy among the villagers. It was Pak Kutoi, who was regarded the leader in the village, who adopted him his son.

“I promise to bring you up well, son, like your real parents would,” promised Pak Kutoi, witnessed by the grieving villagers.

The Meeting

Pego was brought up in the family of Pak Kutoi. He got the love and care of Pak Kutoi, shown in the way he educated Pego. Pego learnt everything regarding the communal life and necessary skills among the people living in hinterlands. Hunting, farming, and catching fish are among the skills which must be mastered by boys. They need those skills for their future. Besides, mutual assistance and cooperation in the community were also emphasized in Pego’s lessons of life. Pak Kutoi was very proud of Pego. He never heard Pego complain when he took him to work on the field or go hunting. Pego would not stop working with his machete to clear the weeds hampering the growth of Pak Kutoi’s crops.

“Let’s have a rest first, Pego. The sun is getting higher, and we need to eat and refresh our energy,” said Pak Kutoi.

“All right, Father, but very few work remains. I’m almost done,” said Pego while continuing his work with his machete.

“If you’re done, join me in the hut for meal and rest, will you? I’ll be waiting,” said Pak Kutoi shaking his head seeing Pego’s high enthusiasm. The field that Pak Kutoi gave to Pego was at quite a distance from the village. It took several days to reach the field by

rowing upstream towards the headwaters of Sungai Kadilo. Providing a field where Pego could work was a form of trust that Pak Kutoi had for Pego as well as a sign that Pego was regarded mature.

Pego had to cultivate the land for his own future. The farming outcome could be used for organizing a wedding for a youth like Pego. Pego should not be dependent upon Pak Kutoi, his foster father, anymore. Pego, Pak Kutoi, and the other villagers were accustomed to leaving the village for days to work in the fields which were normally far from the village.

“This is your field, Pego. In the future, you will cultivate it. Save your harvest for your future needs. I can just give you this for your future’s provision,” said Pak Kutoi as he took Pego to visit their field.

“You have sacrificed so much for me, Father. You have taught me so many things. I can’t repay what you have done to me, but I promise one day I shall. You have cared for me and brought me up sincerely,” said Pego while hugging Pak Kutoi. Pak Kutoi was moved by Pego’s attitude which seemed more mature than his real age. Pego still remembered the field which he and Pak Kutoi visited when he was still a boy. The large rock on the river bank was the sign. Pego pulled over his boat to the river bank near the large rock and dragged it to the land so that the boat would not be carried by the river stream. He unloaded all provisions and

working tools for clearing the forest and the bush from his boat. Firstly he made a hut for shelter while he worked in the field. He made a hut from tree logs available around him. He arranged them so they could provide a shelter for him from the rain and the sunshine.

Pego's hardwork had been fruitful. The field had been cleared from bushes and big trees, and all was done by himself. He felled the trees and cut the trees into logs and firewoods which he put next to the hut. When he finished, he decided to have a rest in the hut. Everyday, Pego worked hard and by the end of the day, he felt very tired which made him sleep soundly every night. He was unaware that he had guests coming to his field. He was still snoring in his sleep when seven birds perched on the tree branches across his cleared field.

“Older sister, look at the result of this shameful human's deed. Our playing ground has been destroyed, all the trees where we used to play have been felled,” said one of the birds.

“We must give him a lesson that he may think twice before logging and destroying our forest. How pitiful the condition of our fellow creatures is! They lost their nests and loved ones because the trees where they had their nests have now been felled.”

“I agree. It seems that the culprit lives in the hut. What should we do to drive him away?” said the others.

“Calm down. The heavenly power will scare the wit out of him tomorrow morning and he will surely run away,” said one of them which seemed to be the most esteemed by the others. In a matter of seconds, the field which had been cleared by Pego changed.

The field which had been ready to be cultivated was bushy once again as the weeds grew very quickly. The trees also grew fast. The cleared field was no more. It was once again a bush and a jungle. Pego was stunned by what he saw the next morning. Weeds had crept around the hut and entered the cabin where he had slept. He jumped from the bed as the hut was getting bushy with weeds. When he got out of his hut, he was all the more surprised. There was no more cleared field he had prepared the day before. He looked at the river and his boat to ensure he was on the right place. Yes, the rock and the boat were still there. True, it was the same spot, but his field had changed. Big trees had grown tall like before.

Unperturbed by what had happened, Pego took his machete. He started working on the trees and the bush. He felled the big trees and cleared the bush. Before dusk, he had finished his work. The big trees seemed easier to fell. Then he continued with the clearing. When night came, he entered his cabin to have a rest. His tiredness overtook him and he slept soundly undisturbed until

morning broke the following day. He did not realize that his field had turned into jungle again while he was asleep. The seven mysterious birds had changed the field into forest again. When he woke up, he was stunned to see all his work the day before was in vain once again.

“Whose work could this be? How dare he to challenge Pego! I’ll find out the culprit,” said Pego shaking his head. Once again he cleared his field while thinking hard how he would find out who thwarted his hardwork. After clearing the bush, when night came, Pego deliberately stayed up around the hut. He covered himself by green leaves so he would not be seen by anyone coming around. He waited for quite a while inside the heap of green leaves. His keen eyes watched over all corners of the field under the moonlight. Exactly at midnight, a flock of beautiful birds descended upon the field where Pego had prepared during the day.

“How strange! Why are there birds still at large at this time of night? Shouldn’t they be in their nests from dusk?” wondered Pego.

But he kept watching the birds and what they did until they regrow all the trees in seconds. Pego was sure that the field turned back into forest because of the birds, especially now that he witnessed them with his own eyes. He now thought hard how to get rid of the birds which kept disturbing his work. When he

worked the following day, he did half the work of clearing and prepared traps for the birds.

He prepared nooses and put sap on almost all branches where the birds might perch. He only had one hope: the disturbing birds would be caught and he would not be disturbed anymore.

“It seems that the human has been very tired that he now destroys only some parts of our playground,” said one of the birds.

“Let’s work again on the area. I’m sure, tomorrow he’ll be running out like crazy before he gives up and leaves this place,” said the smallest bird.

“All right!” said the others in agreement.

“Come on. Be quick. Before dawn, we have to return to the kingdom of heaven,” said the oldest bird.

“Ahhh ... Help! I’m trapped,” said one of the birds.

“Blimey! The human has set traps. Be careful! I’m sure there are many more traps around,” one bird warned the others. They flocked around the poor bird and tried to help release her, but all their efforts were in vain. The sap had been stickier and stuck all around her body that she could not fly.

“The dawn is imminent. Go back to the kingdom of heaven,” said the trapped bird submissively.

“We have no other choice, sister. We have to return to the kingdom of heaven,” said one of them sadly. Pego was happy when he saw the bird in his trap, although it was only one bird. The bird which he regarded as the trouble maker had been caught. Pego took the bird and put it in a cage.

“This is the result of your disturbing me,” said Pego as he put the bird into the cage. After clearing the field and ensuring that the birds would disturb no more, Pego decided to go back to his village. He took the bird with him. He rowed the boat following the stream which helped him row faster, and before long, he had reached his village.

He tied his boat to a tree beside his house. He unloaded the boat and put everything in the house, including the bird in the cage, which he hung on the exterior wall. Pego put his clearing tools back in their place and checked if anything needed mending. Pego was a hardworker.

Without staying idly for long, he had gone hunting. He did it for his daily needs. If he got a big catch, he would distribute it to his foster parents and the neighbours. That afternoon, Pego got a quite large *payau*. He took it home to share it with his villagers. As he entered his house, he was surprised to find everything neatly arranged and meal had been ready. He looked around but found nobody.

“Perhaps my mother has come around and prepared the meal,” muttered he. Pego went to Pak Kutoi’s house. He did not forget to bring the *payau* meat for his foster parents as a token of gratefulness to them.

“You don’t need to bring me food, Mother. I am no longer a child, after all,” said Pego to his foster mother.

“Bringing you food? I’ve never come to your house, son!” said his foster mother in wonder. Then, Pego told his foster parents what he found in his house.

“That must be a loving and caring person to you, son. I’m sure she must be very kind and beautiful. Introduce her to us and we’ll give you our consent,” said his mother teasing him. Pego was curious about the person who had prepared the meal in his house. Everytime he came home in the afternoon, he always found rice and dish prepared for him. To find out who had done it, one day he pretended to go to the field, but he did not go far. He watched his house from a distance to see who came to his house. After hiding for half a day, Pego decided to return to the house as he saw nobody coming to his house. But he was surprised to see that the bird was no longer in the cage. The cage was empty. He only found a feather lying on the ground under the cage.

“All right. Perhaps this is not your place after all. The open air will be a better place for you,” muttered Pego as he picked the

lying feather to keep it safe. He entered the house slowly and carefully, and saw a womanly figure working in the kitchen.

“Who are you?” asked Pego surprising her. The woman was flabbergasted. She tried to run, but the only door had been obstructed by Pego. She stepped backwards a few steps.

Bending her head as she dared not look at Pego’s eyes, the woman said, “I am Kejora. I’m a transformation of the bird in the cage. Please forgive me, and let me go!”

The woman stepped outside. Pego was stuck where he was standing. He was just silent looking at the woman looking for something outside the house around the cage.

“Where is my feather? Only the feather can take me to the kingdom of heaven. Please return my feather,” pleaded the woman while keeping in search for the feather. Pego pretended not to know what she was looking for. Finally, Kejora gave up and surrendered her fate to Pego. Pego told her what his foster mother told him. Kejora agreed and then Pego married the beautiful heavenly woman.

Breaking the Promise

The wedding of Pego and Kejora was a merry one. All villagers were invited and Pego’s parents were especially happy with the presence of Kejora beside Pego. The clean and white-skinned

Kejora looked a perfect match to Pego. Not more than twelve fullmoons had passed before the happy couple were bestowed with a great bounty. What all families expect from their marriage was present among them. Yes, the coming of a new member, a cute baby, added up to their happiness. Pego's foster parents were also happy with the birth of their grandson. They had prepared for the coming of the newborn baby. Pego's foster mother taught Kejora how to take care of a new born baby. Kejora, who was weak since she gave birth, was happy with the presence of her mother in law.

"Thank you, Mother. I have burdened you," said Kejora trying to rise.

"Not at all, dear. Just take rest. You are still weak. I'll prepare everything for you," said her mother in law. Time went by. They returned to their own activities. Pego's foster father and mother had returned to their home, but they occasionally came to visit to quench their longing. Pego, Kejora, and their son, Datun, also often visited Pak Kutoi and his wife, bringing their field produce and Pego's catch from hunting.

Pego's child, Datun, was very active moving here and there. Little Datun had been able to walk despite his inability to keep his balance. Besides, he also started to learn to talk from his tender age.

He tried to talk to everyone he met although they did not understand most of his words, but they were amused with his way of speaking and behaving. One afternoon, as Kejora was preparing dinner for her husband and son, who was playing beside the house, she suddenly heard Datun's cry. Kejora rushed outside to see what was happening.

“What's up, son?” asked Kejora.

“Huaaa ... huaaa ... huaaa ...,” Datun kept crying.

Kejora tried to calm her son while trying to figure out what caused him to cry. A few minutes later, Pego came from the forest. He was frowning, for not a single animal came into his trap. *Payau*, mouse deer, and hog seemed to be able to perceive the trap that he had set up.

“What's happening?” asked Pego when he saw his son crying.

“I don't know. I was preparing dinner in the kitchen when he suddenly screamed and cried,” said Kejora.

“All right. Come here to Daddy. Let Mommy prepare our dinner,” said Pego. Kejora left them, stepped up the stairs and disappeared behind the door. Datun was still crying despite Pego's efforts to comfort him. While crying, Datun mumbled unintelligible words.

“How noisy you are! You tweet like a small bird!” said Pego losing his patience.

Pego was unaware that his words would result fatally for his life. He did not realize that he had broken his promise to Kejora to avoid calling their child 'small bird'. Kejora herself did not realize that Pego had broken his promise. She was still preparing the dinner when she suddenly saw soft feathers starting to grow on her hands and feathers kept growing throughout her whole body.

“No ... no ... nooooo ...!” she screamed from inside the house. She stepped back to find a water container to look at her own reflection in the water. Her cry broke as she saw a beak appeared on her reflection.

“My dear husband, what have you done to our son? Have you forgotten your promise to me?” she cried while running out of the house.

“Forgive me, my dear wife! I have committed a mistake. Please don't leave us, for the sake of our child. I'll do anything to compensate for my mistake,” said Pego while trying to hug his wife.

Kejora could just shed her tears. She felt heavy to leave her family, but she could not help her hands, which had turned into wings, flapping, ready to leave her husband and child.

“My dear husband, find me in the kingdom of heaven,” said Kejora before she flew higher and higher. Pego was dumbfounded while tears rolled down his cheeks.

He embraced his child who was still calling his mother, who could not say anything and kept looking at them until they disappeared from her sight.

The Search

Without further waiting, Pego started packing that very night. He put everything he would need for the journey inside a *lanjung* (a piece of cloth set up like a carrier bag). Before he left the village, he took his son to take leave from his foster parents and told them what had happened. He tried to restrain his tears and sadness in front of them.

“Calm down, son. Wait until the sun rises. Let your mind be clear tonight. Think about your son if you take him out this midnight, moreover your mind is disturbed,” advised Pak Kutoi.

“Thank you, Father. I’m leaving tomorrow morning,” said Pego accepting his foster father’s advice.

“Take rest here so that you feel fresh tomorrow morning,” said his foster mother.

“Yes, Mother. We’ll have rest here. And please let me bring my son tomorrow to find his mother in the kingdom of heaven,”

replied Pego. His foster father could not keep Pego from going to find his wife.

“Well, if that is your determination, we cannot force you to leave Datun here. Be careful on the way. Take care of Datun,” said Pak Kutoi. Thank you, Father. Thank you, Mother,” said Pego hugging his foster parents. The morning sunlight strayed through the thick leaves of the untouched jungle. No human seemed to have been there. Pego was very careful in his walk, keeping his balance lest he slipped and fell. Datun was still asleep in the *lanjung* on his back. He just walked without any certain route, he only had a destination: the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven was a place he had never known, nor did he have any idea what it looked like. Time kept passing. Days and nights followed each other, accompanying Pego’s steps in his search.

Only sincere love for his wife and child kept his paces steady. As if understanding his father’s affair, Datun did not behave unduly during their journey. He slept most of the time in the *lanjung* on his father’s back. Little Datun was his father’s spirit in their quest for his mother. The sun was on its zenith. No more thick green leaves sheltered Pego’s figure and his son’s.

The green leaves had turned yellow and fell, blown away by the winds. Springs were scarcer. Pego had to dig the sands between the rocks on the dry riverbeds to find some water. Pego’s two hands dug the sands skilfully. Initially only dry sands, but then

the deeper he dug, the wetter the sands got. Unmistakably, the sands still kept water under the riverbed. However, Pego had to wait for a while to get clean and adequate amount of water. He took enough water to continue the journey. Food provision was still sufficient for several days ahead. The peak of dry season seemed to last a bit longer; hence, Pego and Datun had to consume water very economically for the rest of their journey. Under the scorching sunshine, Pego continued his iourney with Datun in the *lanjung* on his back. Before going very far, they heard a cry for help.

“Help! Please help me, sir!” a faint voice was heard from behind the rocks.

Pego rushed to where the voice came from. He saw a mouse lying as if facing imminent death.

“Please help me, Sir!” pleaded the mouse.

“What can I do for you, little mouse?” asked Pego looking at the little mouse.

“I’m very thirsty, sir. I haven’t found water for several days around here,” replied the little mouse in pain due to intense thirst. Pego understood the mouse’ difficulty although he himself did not have much water, but he gave the mouse some water to drink.

“Thank you, sir. I can’t do much to repay your kindness. I only have this incense. If you have difficulty, burn this incense and I will come forth to help you,” said the mouse while handing over the incense to Pego. After handing over the incense, the mouse disappeared behind the rocks. Pego and Datun continued their journey. The sun was getting lower on the west horizon. Pego looked for a good place to rest and prepared a fire to warm their body at night. Besides, the fire could also keep away wild animals which roamed around looking for their preys. As he was preparing their bed, Pego heard another cry for help.

“Help ... help me!” The voice was not far from where he was setting their bed. Pego walked towards the place where the voice came from. He saw a faint light and the cry for help came from there. It was a firefly. Pego approached it and asked, “What can I do for you?”

“Help me, sir. I got trapped in this spider’s web. If I can’t get out of here, the spider will eat me, and what will happen to my children if I die?” pleaded the firefly earnestly. Pego felt pity for the firefly and he set it free from the spider’s web. The free firefly flew away from the web around Pego.

“Thank you for your kindness, sir. I’ll always remember it. As a repayment, please accept this incense. If you find a difficulty, burn this incense. I’ll come forth to help you,” said the firefly handing over incense the size of a grain of rice to Pego. Pego took

the incense and kept it safe. Before leaving, the firefly flew around Pego several times before it disappeared into darkness. Pego and his child had still to continue their journey to find the kingdom of heaven. He kept asking everyone he met on the way, where the kingdom of heaven was, but nobody had any idea, either.

Once, when they came to a dry river, Pego saw a fish fluttering on the dry riverbed. The long drought had dried the river and evaporated its hollows. The fish trapped in the hollow could not go anywhere, and the hollow got drier and finally there was no more water in it.

“Please help me, sir. I will die here because this place is going to dry up very soon,” said the fish.

“All right, fish. I’ll help you, but I also ask you for a favour,” said Pego.

“Don’t worry, sir. I’ll surely help the one who helps me,” said the fish.

Then, Pego looked for places with sufficient water for the fish to survive longer. When he found a spring, he moved the fish to it.

“Thank you, sir. As I have promised, I’ll help you out of your difficulty,” said the fish.

“Can you tell me where I can find the kingdom of heaven?” asked Pego.

“I’m really sorry, sir. I don’t know the place, but I can only give you this incense,” so saying, the fish handed over a piece of incense. Pego just looked at the incense. Then the fish said, “If you find a difficulty, sir, just burn the incense so that I can find where you are. I’ll come forth to help you,” said the fish.

“Thank you, fish,” said Pego. He kept the incense safe and continued his journey. Time went by, and the dry season had passed, replaced by the rainy season. Light rains turning into heavy rains made them wet.

“Let’s find a shelter first, son,” whispered Pego to Datun. They looked for a big tree to get a shelter from the heavy rain. The river started flooding. It seemed that the dark clouds covering the area on the upstream had started pouring rain. Flood started to inundate the area. Dry logs from the upstream were carried away by the floods towards the downstream area. Suddenly there was a cry for help from a twig passing near Pego’s place. Apparently, there was an ant on the twig. The twig was the only means of surviving for the ant. Pego took the twig and saved the ant.

The ant looked very tired. It was very weak and trembled.

“Take it easy, fellow! Now you are safe here,” said Pego to the shivering ant.

“Thank you, sir! I owe you my life,” said the ant as the rain started to cease.

“Don’t mention it, ant. I help anyone who is in need, because we need to help one another. And I don’t expect anything in return,” said Pego.

“You’re right, sir. We have to help one another in difficulty. As a token of gratefulness, please accept this small incense. If you find a difficulty, burn this incense, and I will come forth to help,” said the ant lifting the incense high with its front legs. Pego took the incense and kept it safe. Now Pego had got four pieces of incense from his new friends. He kept them very carefully. The journey to find the kingdom of heaven had not shed more light. Pego kept maintaining friendship with everyone he met on the way. He never kept away from helping other people, although his own situation was also in a great need of help. The sun had not been too high, but Pego and Datun had been deep into the jungle. His steps were still light as they had already had enough rest. Suddenly they heard a cry for help from a big tree. He saw a giant bird up the tree with a wing stuck between broken branches.

“Please help me, sir. My wing got stuck. Please release me,” said the giant bird.

“Poor bird! Let me help you out of the broken branches,” said Pego and started climbing the big tree. After a hard and careful

climbing, Pego set the giant bird free from the trap of the broken branches. The bird expressed his gratitude to Pego.

“Thank you, sir. Hadn’t you come to help me, I would have died, sir. When I got stuck up there, I promised myself, I would serve the person who helped me.

Now that you have helped me, I’m ready to serve you. I’ll take you wherever you wish to go,” said the giant bird while bowing his body in front of Pego.

“Ah, what a coincidence! My son and I are going to the kingdom of heaven to find my wife, the mother of my son. Do you know where it is, o giant bird?” asked Pego.

“Of course, I do, sir. I know where it is, and I’m ready to take you there,” said the giant bird flapping his two wings. “Please get mounted on my back, sir. I’ll take you to the kingdom of heaven,” said the bird lowering his back.

Without further waiting, Pego and Datun mounted on the back of the bird. The bird flapped his wings, flying high and far to the kingdom of heaven.

The Test from the Kingdom of Heaven’s King

Pego, Datun, and the bird started to fly higher. The thick jungle was green and the river slithered, splitting the green jungle far below them. “What a perfect beauty of nature,” mumbled Pego as

he saw the spread of green trees. Pego tightened his hold on the back of the bird. A feeling of fear started to engulf them. The feeling of admiration and fear mixed into one, admiration for the natural beauty and the fear of flying to such a height. Their journey had been unimaginable. The green plain below them had disappeared. They just saw untouchable whiteness all around and felt coldness blanketing them. The whiteness around gradually turned into darkness. Nothing could be seen but deep blackness. The darkness was still around. Suddenly lightning flashed around them. Pego tightened his grip on the bird's back for fear of falling. But something invisible had hit them. Pego screamed in fear while tightening his hold on the neck of the bird.

A few moments later, dark fogs around them started to get thinner. Gradually, Pego could see places which did not look similar to the places he had known.

“This is the kingdom of heaven, sir. May you find your wife here,” said the bird.

“Thank you, my friend. I'll never forget your kindness,” replied Pego. He jumped off the bird's back and continued the journey to find his wife on foot. A few minutes later, he met someone.

“Who are you? What is your business here? You don't belong here and you're not supposed to be here. Go away before the security of the kingdom capture you,” said the person.

“I am Pego. I come here to find my wife, the mother of this son of mine,” said Pego. Then he narrated how he first met Kejora until Kejora left them.

“Do you know where my wife, Kejora, lives?” asked Pego.

“It seems that Kejora is one of the inhabitants of the palace. I will take you to the king of heaven. I hope he will allow you to meet Kejora.”

Pego believed what the person said, so he followed him to the grandest building.

“This is the palace of the kingdom of heaven, where the seven birds which you saw on earth come from. They must belong to the palace,” said the person.

Pego observed the situation of the palace. The king, who had been informed of Pego’s coming, had waited inside.

“Allow me to introduce myself, Your Majesty. I have come here to find Kejora, my wife and the mother of this son of mine, Datun,” Pego started the conversation by introducing himself and his son.

“Kejora is one of my daughters who used to play on the earth. She has told me much about her earthly husband as she could not return to heaven due to losing her feather. You may take her to the earth if you pass my test, but if you fail, I’ll punish you and

you will have to leave the kingdom of heaven without Kejora,” said the king.

“I will do everything for the sake of my life for my wife and my son. I will face the test,” replied Pego.

“You will have to pass several tests. Firstly, you will have to punch a wood log through to the other side. The log has been stuck to the ground of the palace square so that everyone may watch you doing your first test,” said the king while pointing to a log with a diameter of more than two hand spans standing in the middle of the palace square. Pego was perplexed by the first test.

He had a thought that he would not be able to pass the test. He was sad for he would not be able to unite Kejora, Datun, and himself. But suddenly he remembered his friend, the mouse. So he looked for the incense given by the mouse. Without further delay, he burnt the incense that very night. The mouse came forth.

“What can I do for you, sir?” asked the mouse.

“I have to pass the test from the king. Tomorrow morning, I have to show my power. I have to punch a tree log through to the other side by a single punch,” said Pego.

“That’s a piece of cake for a mouse, sir. You just need to hit the middle part with a mark tomorrow morning. Tonight, I will invite my fellows to work on it,” said the mouse and disappeared in the

darkness. That night, Pego could not sleep. He was still thinking about the test that he had to pass the following morning. In the morning, the people of heaven gathered on the palace square to see Pego doing his first test. Pego, who was not quite certain about the work of the mice, stepped towards the tree log in the middle of the square. As he got close to the log, he observed it to find the mark. When he found it, he bowed his head and prayed first. He braced himself for gathering his strength on his fist. In a wink, Pego launched his fist hitting the log hard on the middle part, and the hard log broke apart by Pego's punch. The spectators cheered and applauded in admiration for Pego's strength. The king summoned Pego for the next test.

“Can you see the dry ponds of fish over there? Your task is to fill them with water from the river, but I will provide you with the container to take the water,” said the king while showing a bamboo wicker basket. Pego was stunned to see the basket which he would have to use to fill the ponds. The baskets had gaps among the wicker. He was sure that the water would have all gone through the gaps before he reached the ponds, but he had to do it for the sake of his wife and his son. Pego remembered the fish which had given him incense. So he summoned the fish by burning the incense. Pego told the fish about his worry about the task that he had to accomplish. The fish promised to help him and told Pego that he need not worry about it.

“Put the basket into the river water tomorrow. Let my fellows do the work for you,” said the fish. The following day, Pego had the second test. Pego filled the fish ponds with the basket which was initially designed not to contain water. The spectators shouted and cheered when they saw Pego accomplish the task.

They were unaware that the fishes had covered the gaps in the wicker basket with moss and their body mucus the night before. Pego had passed the second test. The king admired Pego’s zeal in accomplishing his task.

Despite his knowledge that the gaps in the wicker had been covered by moss, the king was not angry. Instead, he appreciated Pego’s hard work to fill the ponds by working hard from morning until dusk.

“Pego, your third test will be to find five seeds of mustard in the large palace square. You have to find the five seeds or you fail. Do not try to play any trick by bringing seeds from outside. The five seeds have special marks on them,” warned the king. Pego had passed two tests, and he felt sore muscles due to the hardwork, filling the ponds with water which he had to do all day. Now he thought hard, how he would pass the next test. Suddenly he remembered his friend, the ant, who had also given him incense. He summoned the ant by burning the incense.

“What can I do for you, sir? You look depressed and tired,” said the ant. Then Pego told the ant about the test that he had to do the next day, finding the five marked seeds of mustard scattered in the palace square.

“Don’t worry, sir. I’ll involve my fellow ants to find the seeds for you. As soon as they find them, they will gather around the seeds so that you will find and pick them easily,” convinced the ant. Pego smiled and thanked the ant. The following morning, Pego prepared himself early in the palace square. As soon as the sign was given for him to start his search, he carefully observed the ground to see where the ants gathered. As soon as he found a gathering of ants, he approached them, picked the seed and lifted it high. The spectators shouted and cheered every time he lifted his hand. It was before midday when Pego had successfully gathered all the five seeds.

The king summoned him, “Pego! The last test is you have to be able to recognize your wife among forty women in a dark room. You have to recognize her to prove your love. Remember! If you fail, you will be severely punished,” said the king. Pego nodded his head. He had no other choice but to accept wholeheartedly. He should not fail the last test for he had passed the previous ones successfully.

Finding Kejora among forty women in darkness was surely not an easy task. But suddenly he remembered his friend, the firefly,

who would help him when he needed a help. So he burnt the last incense to summon the firefly, who came forth.

“What difficulty made you summon me, sir?” asked the firefly, as if knowing Pego in trouble.

Pego told the firefly the last test that he had to face. Hi did not want fail in recognizing his wife among forty women in the darkness. The failure would mean losing Kejora for good.

“All right, sir. This is a piece of cake for fireflies. I will find Kejora and I will perch on her hair. You just need to find the woman with a twinkling light on her hair. That will be Kejora, your wife, sir” said the firefly comforting Pego’s restlessness.

“Thank you, firefly. I’ll always remember your kindness,” said Pego happily. So the last test was given. Forty women entered a dark room. Pego was told to find his wife in the darkness among the other women. Without any difficulty, Pego recognized his wife from the firefly light on her hair, took the hand of his wife, and led her outside the room.

“My dear wife, please forgive me,” said Pego.

“My dear husband,” said Kejora, losing her words. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

“My daughter, Kejora. Your husband has shown his love to you. You deserve to unite without ever separating again,” said the

king, who was also moved by the sight of the loving couple. Pego's hardwork in proving his love and caring for his family had not gone in vain. The king of the kingdom of heaven consented and blessed their relationship.