

LOVE IN MANDANGIN ISLAND
Cinta di Pulau Mandangin

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LOVE IN MANDANGIN ISLAND

King Bidarba sat on his throne and coughed, one hand over his mouth. For the last few months, a putrid smell wafted and lingered in the air around the palace. The smell became worse and worse every day. As the air smelled worse, the palace of Madura Kingdom became more restless. A lot of people who lived or worked in the palace began to feel uncomfortable.

The King himself spent more time hunting outside the palace these days. Delegations from other kingdoms also visited Madura less frequently. This condition was embarrassing and worrying the King because it affected the relationship with other kingdoms and gave a bad image to both allies and enemies. The King often stayed awake late at night, trying to find a way to get rid of the bad smell. He finally decided to take a measure that he believed would restore the kingdom to its former state.

In one of the many rooms in the palace, Princess Ragapadmi laid down on her bed, unmoving. She was weak with fever. Her temperature was off the chart. Every inch of her body was covered with rash and red boils. Bangsacara, an officer of the court, was sitting at her feet. He carefully applied traditional ointment made of various leaves to her skin, taking great care not to pop the boils. It had to be done so carefully because it would

sting if the boils popped, and it would leave a mark on the Princess' skin.

Bangsacara still remembered how beautiful the Princess was before she contracted this strange illness. Her brown skin was smooth and glowing. Her long jet black hair would reflect the sun rays and created a beautiful halo around her. Every one admired her beauty. However, it was all gone, now; hidden under the strange rash and red boils. Putrid, awful smell wafted up from those boils, making anyone cringe. Nowadays, nobody remembered Princess Ragapadmi's captivating beauty, save for Bangsacara.

As he spread the ointment, Bangsacara thought back to the day before when the King called him to his study. The King had given him a difficult task.

“Bangsacara, I cannot take this smell anymore. It's not entirely personal, though. The smell has negatively impacted our kingdom.

Lately, no other kingdom wants to visit us and our reputation has gone downhill ever since this whole stinky business began. I have thought long and hard to handle this matter and I think I finally find the solution. I want you to take care of Princess Ragapadmi at your home.”

“Me, Your Majesty?” Bangsacara asked. He was in extreme

disbelief.

“Yes, you. I want you to take the Princess home and take good care of her. The whole kingdom is restless with this stink in the air. Personally, I love my daughter, but I begin to feel uncomfortable. For the sake of everyone in this palace, and the sake of our kingdom, I command you to continue taking care of the Princess at your home.”

“I hear and obey, Your Majesty. But forgive me, Your Majesty. I don’t mean to be impudent, but my house is a just a small hut, unworthy for such an honor. How can a princess stay in such a humble place?” Bangsacara said.

“Don’t worry about that. All you need to concern with is how to provide the best care to Princess Ragapadmi. I put him in your full responsibility until she gets well. When she does, I will come and take her back to the palace,” the King concluded.

“Yes, Your Majesty. I will assume this responsibility as best as I can. I will take good care of the Princess until her health returns,” Bangsacara promised the King.

With a direct command from the King himself, Bangsacara felt responsible to try his best to return the Princess to her former state. He would take the Princess home tomorrow. He tried to imagine how his mother would react when he arrived home with a princess who was ill and causing such an awful smell. Would she

be alright and help him taking care of the Princess?

The next day, Bangsacara had been preparing since the dawn. There was no entourage to follow them. It would be only Bangsacara, the Princess in a sedan chair, and four strong soldiers who would carry the Princess. When the sun was a quarter way up in the sky, the small group set out to the village where Bangsacara lived. It would take a long time to reach the village. They might arrive there the next day.

Along the trip, Bangsacara kept thinking about how his mother would react. It had been years since he last come home.

His mother would surely be glad to see him. However, he could not imagine what she would say about Princess Ragapadmi. He could only hope that she would accept the Princess' presence in the house.

The following morning, Bangsacara and Putri Ragapadmi arrived in the village. Bangsacara's heart beat furiously as they got closer to his home. His palms were sweaty. His steps became slower, as if it was hard to put one foot in front of the other. The group stopped in the front yard. Bangsacara slowly walked up to the front door and took a deep breath.

He knocked and called his mother, "Mother! It's your son, Bangsacara. Mother!"

No answer came from the house.

“Mother! Mother!” Bangsacara called a little louder.

Slowly, the door creaked open. An old woman stepped out of the house.

“Bangsacara, my boy!”

“Mother!” Bangsacara quickly knelt down and kissed his mother’s hand.

Bangsacara’s mother cracked a wide smile. She was so happy to see her son again. She held Bangsacara in a tight embrace because she had been missing him so much. However, her expression changed when she saw the sedan chair on the front yard. She frowned in confusion, wondering who it could be inside the sedan chair. Bangsacara had seldom brought his friends home.

To answer her curiosity, Bangsacara’s mother asked, “Who is it in the sedan chair, Son?”

Bangsacara replied, “Forgive me, Mother. This time I do not come alone. I come here with Princess Ragapadmi. She is ill. The King has instructed me to bring her home and take care of her here, until she is better. I’m sorry I did not tell you first. I hope you are okay with this.”

Bangsacara's mother smiled and said, "I understand, Son. You are only following orders. Don't worry, I will help you taking care of the Princess."

Bangsacara smiled, feeling relieved. His worry turned into a great happiness because his mother was willing to take Princess Ragapadmi in their house.

Bangsacara would spend the night at his childhood home and return to the palace the next morning. All day, Bangsacara watched his mother tended to the Princess's boils and rash. He admired how patience and caring she was, ignoring the stink emanating from the Princess. Her motherly love was apparent in the way she wiped the Princess and applied the ointment all over her body. Bangsacara was content. He could leave the Princess at home with his mother without worry. He was certain that his mother would be able to treat the Princess until she recovered.

The next day, Bangsacara said farewell to his mother. He had to return to the palace and report to the King that Princess Ragapadmi had arrived safely at his home, and that his mother would take very good care of her. He promised his mother that he would visit frequently to check on the Princess.

As Bangsacara left, there were only his mother and Princess Ragapadmi in the house. Bangsacara's mother took care of

Princess Ragapadmi as if the Princess had been her own daughter. Every day, she wiped the Princess with wet cloth and dried her with a clean one. Then, she applied traditional ointment made of various leaves and roots from her back yard on the boils and rash. As days went by, the Princess' skin began to return to its normal hue. The boils and rash gradually disappeared. Under Bangsacara's mother's care, the Princess skin became as smooth as it had been and the two women grew to be very close. Bangsacara's mother loved Princess Ragapadmi like a daughter. She could not help but imagine that her son would be a perfect companion for the Princess. However, she quickly dismissed such thought, because no matter what, there was a huge gap of social status between the two. Bangsacara was a common man, while Ragapadmi was a princess. There was no way the two of them could get married.

Time flew so fast. It had been a year since the day Bangsacara took Princess Ragapadmi to his house. With constant, careful, and sincere care, Bangsacara's mother managed to heal the Princess. The Princess' brown skin had returned to its healthy, beautiful state. Stinky boils and rash were gone. The Princess seemed to be so happy to live in the village. She did not mind helping Bangsacara's mother doing the chores. She cleaned, washed clothes, gathered fire woods, and cooked.

She considered Bangsacara's mother as her own. Not once did

she ever miss her old life in the palace. She preferred the peaceful surroundings in the village. The Princess decided that she would never go back to the palace.

One day, when the Princess was sweeping the floor, she heard horse's hoofs clip-clopping outside. The sound seemed to get closer to the house and Princess Ragapadmi became curious. She went out and was startled to find a handsome young man on horseback stopped right in front of the house. She felt that his face was familiar, although she did not recognize him. The man looked at her with awe. He was Bangsacara.

"She is so pretty. Who is she? She looks so familiar," Bangsacara thought. "Could she be Princess Ragapadmi?"

"He is so handsome and muscular. I feel like I knew him, but I cannot remember," the Princess thought to herself.

At that very moment, Bangsacara's mother came out of the house.

"Bangsacara, my boy! Oh, it has been so long. You finally return," Bangsacara's mother cried and embraced her son. Princess Ragapadmi's face immediately lit up. She smiled. There was twinkling in her eyes when she realized that the man was Bangsacara.

"Mother! Please forgive me. I have been so busy in the palace that I did not have time to come home," Bangsacara said,

kneeling down and kissing her mother's hand.

"It's alright, Son. You are here, now, aren't you? I'm so glad to see you. By the way, you haven't greeted the Princess," Bangsacara's mother said, glancing at the Princess, who was blushing. Her cheeks were beet red.

"The Princess? The Princess have been healed?" Bangsacara asked in disbelief.

"Please accept my apology, Princess," Bangsacara knelt down again. He was in awe seeing how beautiful Princess Ragapadmi was.

"Yes, I have been cured, Bangsacara. I thank you and Mother who has taken care of me very well. I will never forget what you did to me. I remember you used to tend to my boils and rash back in the palace. When everyone avoided me, you were always there. You never said anything about that awful smell. I cannot thank you enough," Princess Ragapadmi said with a radiant smile.

"It's our duty to you, Princess," Bangsacara replied.

"Well, now we are together. You must be tired, Bangsacara. Come in. I will cook your favorite dishes," Bangsacara's mother said.

The three of them went in. That evening, Bangsacara's mother served so many delicious food for dinner, with Princess

Ragapadmi's help. At dinner, they ate together like a true happy family. They chatted until it was so late. During those conversations, Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi felt that their admiration towards the other grew stronger. The two of them became closer.

"Bangsacara, Mother, I would like to repay all your kindness to me," Princess Ragapadmi said in serious tone.

"There's no need, Princess. We only help a little," Bangsacara said.

"That's right, Princess. This is nothing. It is our fortune to have the opportunity to take care of a Princess," Bangsacara's mother added.

"Please, don't call me Princess. Just call me Ragapadmi. We are not in the palace. Besides, His Majesty had sent me here and, if memory serves, my father said that I was your responsibility, Bangsacara. Do you remember?" the Princess asked.

Bangsacara replied, "I remember, Princess. His Majesty the King put you under my care. His Majesty did say that you were my responsibility."

"That's right. I'm your responsibility. To repay your kindness, I want you to take me as your wife, Bangsacara. That way, I will truly be your responsibility."

“What?” Bangsacara and his mother uttered in unison. They looked at each other, could not believe their ears.

Princess Ragapadmi smiled and continued, “I owe you my life. To repay that debt, I’m willing to be your wife, Bangsacara. This is what I want. Please give us your blessing, Mother.”

“Umm... err.... Are you sure you want to marry my son, Princess?”

“I am sure, Mother. When I was ill and alone in the palace, Bangsacara had taken good care of me. I know he would be a good husband. Please give us your blessing, Mother.”

Bangsacara’s mother smiled and replied, “Of course I will bless you. But it depends on what Bangsacara will say.” Bangsacara’s mother threw a glance at her son, who was stupefied.

“Well, Bangsacara? What do you say? Will you take me as your wife?” Princess Ragapadmi asked. “His Majesty the King had commanded you to take care of me. He had put me under your responsibility,” she added.

Bangsacara beamed with happiness. He said, “Yes, Princess. With the blessing from Mother, I will take you as my wife.”

The three of them smiled happily. Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi were overjoyed that they would get married. Their close interaction when the Princess had been ill had sparked their

affection. Bangsacara's mother was glad that she would soon have a kind, beautiful, and caring daughter in law.

A few days later, they got married. The wedding ceremony and reception were held at Bangsacara's house. Their neighbors came to congratulate the bride and groom. Everyone admired the couple, the man was handsome and the woman was stunning. Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi smiled and laughed all day. They were very happy that they finally were together as a married couple, ready to face the world together.

After the party was over, they began their new life as a couple. Bangsacara worked hard to provide for his wife and mother. Princess Ragapadmi never hesitated to help her husband in the field. She also kept doing the chores at home. She never thought of herself as a princess, anymore. Now, she was a wife, and a daughter in law, in a simple and humble family. The three of them lived in harmony and were always grateful for their happy life.

Meanwhile, in Madura Kingdom, King Bidarba was wondering why his loyal officer, Bangsacara, had not returned yet. Bangsacara had taken personal leave to go home. He wanted to visit his mother and check on Princess Ragapadmi. However, he had gone for far too long and there was no news of his return. The King needed Bangsacara in his court. He also could not wait to hear about his daughter, Princess Ragapadmi.

The King then called his minister, Bangsapati. *Patih* (Minister) Bangsapati was the King's right hand man. He was loyal to his king.

He would do anything the King commanded without question. His only drawback was that he did not get along with Bangsacara. *Patih* Bangsapati had always been jealous of Bangsacara because the King seemed to favor the later.

"*Patih* Bangsapati," the King said.

"I am here, Your Majesty," *Patih* Bangsapati replied.

"It has been a while since Bangsacara left, and there is no news at all about him. I granted his request for personal leave to visit his mother and Princess Ragapadmi. He promised to return soon and report to me. I am wondering what takes him so long. I cannot wait to hear about my daughter. I want you to help me, *Patih* Bangsapati."

"I hear and obey, Your Majesty. I will do whatever Your Majesty command."

"I want you to go after Bangsacara. Go to his village, find his home. Find out what is happening, what held him back there. Also, find all you can about Princess Ragapadmi and report back to me as soon as you have the news."

"I hear and obey, Your Majesty. I will leave immediately. As

soon as I have news about Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi, I will return to report it.”

“Go on, then. I put my trust in you,” the King commanded.

“Yes, Your Majesty. I take my leave now,” *Patih* Bangsapati said before leaving the room.

That very day, *Patih* Bangsapati set out to Bangsacara’s house. He wanted to get there as soon as he could. He needed to report it immediately. *Patih* Bangsapati regarded the King’s command as a token of trust that he should not waste. This was the perfect opportunity for him to gain the King’s favor.

When *Patih* Bangsapati arrived at Bangsacara’s village, he urged his horse to move faster towards Bangsacara’s house. There, he saw a beautiful young woman was sweeping the yard. She looked familiar, but *Patih* Bangsapati could not remember where he had seen her. Since Bangsacara was not around, *Patih* Bangsapati decided to watch the situation from afar and wait for him. Bangsacara was probably working in the field.

While waiting for Bangsacara to come home, and watching the house, *Patih* Bangsapati tried to find information about Bangsacara and the young woman. At the end of the road leading to Bangsacara’s house, *Patih* Bangsapati found a food stall. It was the perfect place. He could still see the house from afar as well as gather information from the locals.

After ordering something to drink, *Patih* chatted the stall owner.

“Excuse me, Ma’am, do you happen to know *Bangsacara*?” he asked.

“Why, yes. *Den Bangsacara* is kind and diligent. He works hard in his field,” the woman replied.

“Does he have a sister, Ma’am?”

“No, Sir. He is the only child. There are only him and his mother in the house.”

“Then, who is that lovely young woman in her front yard, Ma’am?” *Patih* asked casually, cocking his head towards *Bangsacara*’s house.

The woman looked at the direction of the house for a moment before answering, “Oh, that’s *Bangsacara*’s wife.”

“*Bangsacara*’s wife?” *Patih* exclaimed in surprised.

“Yes, that is his wife. They just got married a few months ago.”

“Oh, I see. I guess she is a local, isn’t she?”

“Well, you are wrong. She is not from this village. Rumor has it, the girl was sick and taken to *Bangsacara*’s house. His mother took care of the girl until she recovered. It was a strange illness, her body was covered with numerous boils and rash. Even

stranger, the boils smelled really bad. Thank God Bangsacara and his mother succeeded healing her.”

“What?” *Patih* was taken aback. “That woman is Princess Ragapadmi. No wonder she seems familiar. But, how come she married Bangsacara? This cannot happen. I have to report this immediately,” *Patih* Bangsapati thought.

After paying for his drink, *Patih* Bangsapati rode his horse as fast as it could run. Along the way, he pondered about this turn of event.

“If the Princess is healed, Bangsacara should have reported it to the King so that the King could take the Princess back to the palace. Instead, he married her. This is treason. He had betrayed the King’s trust. Oh, the King would not like this news,” *Patih* Bangsapati thought. As soon as he arrived at the palace, he reported his finding to the King.

“Ah, *Patih* Bangsapati. That was quick. Do you return with Bangsacara?” the King asked.

“I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. I come bearing ill news.”

The King wondered what it might be.

“What is it, *Patih*?”

“What is it, *Patih*? Is something happened to Bangsacara? What

about Princess Ragapadmi? Tell me,” the King said urgently.

“Please forgive me, Your Majesty. I...” *Patih* could not continue.

“What is it? Tell me quickly!”

“Bangsacara is fine, Your Majesty. But...”

“But what?” the King snarled impatiently.

“But he has got married, Your Majesty,” replied *Patih*.

“Got married? So that’s the reason why he did not return. Hahaha...,” the King laughed.

“There is another news, Your Majesty. A bad one.”

“What is it? Speak!”

“Princess Ragapadmi has been cured, Your Majesty.”

“What? She has been cured? Are you sure? Why is it a bad news? If she has recovered, why didn’t Bangsacara report it to me? Are you lying?” The King did not believe the news.

“I wouldn’t dare, Your Majesty. The Princess is up and well. Bangsacara did not report it for a reason. Please believe me, Your Majesty. I’m telling the truth,” *Patih* tried to convince the King.

“Why? Why did Bangsacara not report to me that the Princess has been cured?”

“It’s because he..., he married the Princess, Your Majesty. Princess Ragapadmi is now his wife.”

“What? No way! Impossible!” The King yelled furiously. His hand balled in a fist. “Are you sure, *Patih*?”

“I am sure, Your Majesty. I witnessed Princess Ragapadmi sweeping the front yard of Bangsacara’s house. There was no boil nor rash on her skin, Your Majesty. There was no awful smell coming from her body.”

“Bangsacara! How dare he married my daughter! How dare he did not report her condition to me! He had betrayed me!” The King was beyond furious now. His face was red and the veins on his forehead was visibly pulsing.

The King then ordered *Patih* Bangsapati to bring Princess Ragapadmi back to the palace.

“*Patih*, ride right away to Bangsacara’s house and bring the Princess here. If she is cured, she has to return to the palace,” the King said.

“I hear and obey, Your Majesty.”

Patih immediately set out to Bangsacara’s house for the second

time. This time, when he arrived, he saw Bangsacara was sitting on his veranda. As *Patih* Bangsapati approached, Bangsacara's two dogs barked furiously. Bangsacara looked up and was startled to see *Patih* Bangsapati.

"*Patih* Bangsapati?" Bangsacara snarled under his breath. "This might mean trouble," he thought.

"Bangsacara!" *Patih* called.

"*Patih*," Bangsacara replied, bowing to show his respect.

"I come here under the order of His Majesty the King to see you and to escort Princess Ragapadmi back to the palace."

"Escorting the Princess back?" Bangsacara asked, making sure he had not misheard *Patih*.

"Yes. I know Princess Ragapadmi has been cured. As you promised the King, it is time for her to return."

"How... How do you know she is healed?"

"That's irrelevant. Where is she? I should escort her to the palace immediately."

Princess Ragapadmi and Bangsacara's mother had been eavesdropping the whole conversation from behind the door. When she heard that *Patih* Bangsapati was there to take her

home, Princess Ragapadmi went out to see him.

“I am here, *Patih*.”

“Princess,” *Patih* said, bowing respectfully. “Please forgive my rudeness. I am here to escort Princess home.”

“I don’t want to go back to the palace. I will stay here because I am Bangsacara’s wife now.

“My apologies, Princess. Your Highness cannot do that. His Majesty the King had ordered me to escort Your Highness back to the palace.”

“But I don’t want to, *Patih*. Tell His Majesty the King that I refuse to go back.”

“But, Your Highness, Bangsacara had promised His Majesty that he would return Your Highness when Your Highness had been healed. If Bangsacara breaks his promise to His Majesty, it is a treason,” *Patih* said. Then he turned to look at Bangsacara and added, “You have promised His Majesty the King, haven’t you? It’s time to fulfill your promise.”

Bangsacara fell silent. He felt guilty because he had broken his promise to the King. However, he gathered himself to ask, “We love each other, *Patih*. We also have got married. If His Majesty could find it in his heart to bless our marriage, I will do anything His Majesty commands.”

Princess Ragapadmi smiled, then added, “It is true, *Patih*. We got married because we love each other. We will do whatever His Majesty wants us to do to obtain his blessing. Could you think of a way to turn His Majesty around? If you were the one to suggest it, His Majesty would surely listen, *Patih*.”

Patih felt pity in his heart. He thought hard to find a middle ground. He wanted to give them a chance but he also could not disobey the King’s order. “How can I take the Princess back to the palace? What should I do to Bangsacara? They are clearly inseparable. I have to find the right way,” he thought.

Then he told Bangsacara and the Princess, “Very well, please give me one day to think, Princess. I may find a solution that will work for us all.”

“Thank you, *Patih*. We will wait for the good news,” Bangsacara replied.

Patih then left. He was looking for a place to stay for the night. In his rented room, *Patih* stayed awake all night long and considered all possibilities to bring back Princess Ragapadmi to the palace without breaking the marriage. All he wanted was to gain the King’s trust. By dawn, he arrived at a solution that he thought might work.

Patih returned to Bangsacara’s house in the morning. Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi had been waiting for him.

Patih said, “Well, I have found a way that might make His Majesty to bless your marriage. His Majesty loves deer hunting. If you are able to hunt and present three hundred deer for His Majesty, I believe it will touch His Majesty’s heart. I will give you a week to do that. What do you say? Can you do it?”

Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi looked at each other. They did not expect this at all. However, they realized there might be no other way. Bangsacara nodded and smiled at Princess Ragapadmi. The Princess nodded back.

Bangsacara then said, “Very well, *Patih*. We will do it. I will go to Mandangin Island to hunt three hundred deer for His Majesty.”

“I will come with you, Dear,” Princess Ragapadmi said.

“Don’t. You should stay home and take care of Mother. Besides, it will be easier for me to hunt alone. Don’t worry, I will bring the dogs,” Bangsacara replied to his wife.

“Alright. I will wait for your return,” the Princess said.

“Very good. Since you have agreed, I will wait for the result. See you in a week,” *Patih* said before leaving.

Without further ado, Bangsacara went to Mandangin Island. Mandangin was the island where hunters went to hunt deer because there were simply so many deer there. Considering that there would be many other hunters in the island, Bangsacara

should prepare himself very well. It was not an easy task to hunt three hundred deer. He took his bow and arrows and his knife. He also brought along his two hunting dogs. He believed they would be real help on the island. Princess Ragapadmi stayed home. She hoped her husband would be able to complete the task quickly.

Bangsacara sailed with several fishermen who were going towards Mandangin Island. When he arrived, the first thing he did was to find a place to rest and keep the deer. In the middle of the forest, he found an abandoned hut. After checking it thoroughly, Bangsacara decided it would be the perfect place. Its roof was made of dry branches, which should be strong enough to hold against the wind.

After resting for a while, Bangsacara began hunting. He was a trained hunter because he often accompanied the King on his hunting trips. By mid-afternoon, he had gathered twenty deer. His two dogs had provided tremendous help for him. Soon, the first day ended. The sky had darkened and it was time to rest. Tomorrow would be another day.

“I think it’s enough hunting for today. I should rest. Forty deer for a day is good enough. Hopefully I will get more tomorrow,” Bangsacara thought.

On the second day of hunting, Bangsacara willed himself to hunt

more deer than the previous day. He knew he should be quicker and better than other hunters. He depended on his two dogs to track the deer. By the end of the second day, he managed to hunt fifty deer. He was satisfied with the day's result.

On the third day, he began early in the morning. He was confident because he had managed to hunt almost a hundred deer in two days. He would be able to hunt three hundred deer before the week ended. Again, the two dogs helped him tracking the deer. They ran and leapt swiftly in the forest.

However, today was different than the previous days. By mid-day, Bangsacara only hunted fifteen deer, not even half of what he got before. He remembered that today was the beginning of hunting season. Bangsacara should move more efficiently because hunters began to pour to the island.

They used better weapons than Bangsacara, using bow and arrows, and spears to hit the deer from quite a distance. Bangsacara should work harder to compete with them.

With his two dogs, Bangsacara moved to a deeper part of the forest. He hoped to find more deer there. He walked quietly, trying to be more aware of his surroundings. While walking, he suddenly saw a deer resting near a tree. He crept slowly towards it. Silently, he took out his hunting knife from its sheath. He got closer and closer to the deer. Knife in hand, he prepared to jump

and catch the deer. One... Two... He jumped and stabbed the deer in the neck. The sixteenth deer for the day was in his hand. The day was young, there was still time to hunt more. He only had four days before the deadline.

Bangsacara worked until the sun had set. Today, he hunted around twenty deer. He had to hunt two hundred more in four days. Starting from tomorrow, he would hunt in the evening, too. That was the only way to complete the task.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth days passed by very quickly. Bangsacara was tired. He hunted from dawn to dusk, and continued in the evening. He barely slept these past few days. His body began to ache, his joints screamed with fatigue. The cold night air he faced every day had weakened him. He was so tired, yet he could not stop. He still needed to catch a lot of deer.

On the seventh day, he was so weak when he began hunting. He had spent all his energy in the last three days. By mid-day, he only caught ten deer. His hands were trembling. He could not move them as swiftly as the first days of hunting. His temperature rose rapidly. He had a fever. His lips became pale. His legs refused to stand. Before he collapsed in the middle of nowhere, he decided to return to the hut. He barely made it. Once there, he threw himself on a mattress made of leaves. It was not comfortable, but at least it had protected him a little from the cold hard ground in the previous nights. Slowly, his eyes closed.

He was shivering.

When the sun set, Bangsacara still had not moved. His eyes were still closed. His body was burning and shivering. Every so often, he talked in his sleep, calling Princess Ragapadmi. The whole night, Bangsacara did not wake up at all. He turned and tossed in his sleep, shivering and mumbling. The two dogs faithfully stayed beside him, guarding him from harm. Sometimes, they tried to nudge him, but Bangsacara did not respond at all.

The sun rose on the eight day. The weather was nice. The air was warm. Birds chirped happily on the trees. Leaves rustled beneath the breeze. It was a beautiful day. However, Bangsacara was getting worse. He was still lying on the bed of leaves, shivering the whole time. He called Princess Ragapadmi more frequently. The two dogs sensed that they could not just wait for him to wake up. They circled around Bangsacara. Suddenly, one of the dogs barked loudly. They looked at each other and continued barking, as if they were communicating. The two dogs suddenly stopped circling their master. They ran through the forest towards the coast and jumped in a boat. They tried to return to Madura.

When the boat docked in Madura, the two dogs quickly jumped and ran to Bangsacara's house, looking for Princess Ragapadmi. As soon as they saw the house, they barked madly. Princess Ragapadmi, who was waiting for her husband in front of the

house, saw the dogs. She smiled happily, thinking that Bangsacara had returned.

“Good boys! Have you caught three hundred deer? Very good!” Princess Ragapadmi talked to the dogs, scratching their ears.

“Where is my husband? Isn’t he coming with you?” Princess Ragapadmi said, looking around. However, there was no sign of her husband.

The two dogs bit the hem of her cloth and tugged at it.

Princess Ragapadmi began to get worried, “What is it? Why are you tugging at my cloth? Do you want to take me somewhere? Has something happened to my husband?”

The two dogs kept tugging. Princess Ragapadmi sensed that something was wrong. She quickly told Bangsacara’s mother that she would go.

“Mother, I’m going to Mandangin Island,” she said.

“What’s the matter, Princess? Are you going to meet Bangsacara?”

“Yes, Mother. I’m meeting him there,” the Princess said, trying to hide her worry. She did not want her mother in law to worry too.

“Alright, then. Be careful, Princess. Say hi to Bangsacara from me. I hope he succeeded hunting three hundred deer. Come home safe; both of you,” Bangsacara’s mother said.

“Yes, Mother. I will tell him.”

Princes Ragapadmi quickly followed the two dogs. They headed towards Mandangin Island. On the island, the two dogs ran swiftly towards the hut. Princess Ragapadmi tried to follow them quickly.

“Oh, Husband, where are you? I hope you are okay,” Princess Ragapadmi muttered to herself, trying not to lose sight of the dogs. In front of the hut, the dogs stopped. Princess Ragapadmi followed suit. She held her breath, trying to ready herself for whatever she might find inside. She then walked in.

“Husband!” Princess Ragapadmi screamed.

Seeing Bangsacara in such an awful state, Princess Ragapadmi quickly get to him, immediately crying.

“Oh, Husband, what happened to you?” She asked in between her sobs.

Princess Ragapadmi touched Bangsacara’s forehead. She felt him burning up. She looked around, trying to find anything to help her husband. She saw the flask that he brought. She grabbed it and shook it. It was empty. She quickly jumped and ran out of

the hut. She had to find some water. The two dogs followed her.

Princess Ragapadmi ran towards the beach. She was not sure she would find a stream or river in the middle of the forest. The beach was a safer bet. Close to the beach, she found a clean marsh at the edge of the forest. She quickly filled the flask and ran back towards the hut. It was a long distance between the hut and the marsh. She was tired. She put down the flask and walked around the hut, trying to find some leaves that could reduce her husband's fever. After collecting some leaves, she took a big rock she saw in front of the hut.

Princess Ragapadmi tried to force the water into Bangsacara's mouth. Then, she crushed the leaves on the rock. She poured some water to the crushed leaves and put them on Bangsacara's forehead. Soon, his temperature gradually dropped. He was no longer burning up with fever. Bangsacara had stopped muttering in his sleep, but he had not woken up. Princess Ragapadmi regularly forced him to drink some water and changed the leaves on his forehead. She did not realize that the sun had set.

Meanwhile in Madura, *Patih* Bangsapati had returned to Bangsacara's house. Today, the deadline ended. It had been a week and Bangsacara should bring three hundred deer to him. When he arrived, Bangsacara's mother welcomed him.

“*Patih* Bangsapati,” she said.

“Ma’am, where is Bangsacara? Where is Princess Ragapadmi? Why don’t they come out?” *Patih* asked.

“They have not returned from Mandangin Island, *Patih*.”

“Princess Ragapadmi went to Mandangin Island?”

“Yes, *Patih*. This morning, Bangsacara’s dogs returned without their master. Then, the Princess went with them to Mandangin Island.”

“What happened to Bangsacara? Why did Princess go there? They would not break the deal of presenting three hundred deer to the King, would they? Is it possible that they tried to run away?” *Patih* thought. He began to get suspicious.

“Very well, I will go after them, then,” *Patih* said to nobody in particular.

Patih and his guards went to Mandangin Island. He was worried. He thought about all scenarios that he might find. The worst case scenario was if the Princess and Bangsacara ran away. He had to bring the Princess back to the palace. If he failed, the King would be furious and he would suffer the punishment.

As soon as they stepped on the island, *Patih* and his guards went straight to the forest, looking for Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi. The dark did not dissuade him at all. He had to find them. In the middle of the forest, *Patih* found the hut. A small

fire was lit in it. *Patih* hoped that Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi was in there.

“Excuse me! Is anybody here?” one of the guards called.

A figure walked out from the hut. It was Bangsacara.

“Bangsacara!” *Patih* Bangsapati muttered. He climbed down his horse and walked toward Bangsacara.

“*Patih* Bangsapati,” Bangsacara said. He knew he would meet *Patih* soon to resolve their business.

“Bangsacara, are you alright? You look pale,” *Patih* said.

“I’m a little under the weather, *Patih*,” Bangsacara replied.

“I come after you because you were not at home. Today is the day. I hope you didn’t forget,” said *Patih*.

“No, *Patih*, I did not forget. Let’s talk inside,” Bangsacara invited them in.

Bangsacara and *Patih* Bangsapati entered the small hut. Inside, Princess Ragapadmi was waiting for them.

“*Patih*,” the Princess greeted him.

“Here I am, Princess,” *Patih* replied.

“Please, sit down, *Patih*,” Bangsacara indicated the mattress of

leaves for his guest. “Please forgive me for not preparing better seat for you,” he added.

“It’s alright, Bangsacara,” *Patih* said and sat down. Bangsacara and his wife sat in front of him.

“Well, I cannot stay long because I have to head back to the palace and make my report to His Majesty the King. So, how is our deal, Bangsacara? Did you caught three hundred deer as I asked?” *Patih* asked.

Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi exchanged meaningful look. The princess then bowed her head and stared at her fingers. She was clearly worried. Bangsacara took a deep breath and said, “I’m sorry, *Patih*. I failed. I only managed to catch around two hundred deer, still far from the promised three hundred.” Bangsacara looked down, feeling defeated.

“Hmm... Very well. As agreed, Princess Ragapadmi should come with me to the palace,” *Patih* said.

“I’m sorry, *Patih*. I cannot come with you. I am Bangsacara’s wife. I will follow my husband, wherever he goes.

Please tell His Majesty the King about my decision,” Princess Ragapadmi said, glancing at Bangsacara.

“Excuse me, Princess. I received direct order from His Majesty to bring Your Highness back to the palace. I have given

Bangsacara a chance, but he failed. There is no reason for Your Highness to stay here. A deal is a deal,” *Patih* said.

“Still, *Patih*, as a wife, I have to stay beside my husband,” Princess Ragapadmi insisted.

Sensing that he would not win an argument against the Princess, *Patih* Bangsapati turned to Bangsacara, “What is your decision? What will you do? Will you return to your village?”

“I admit my defeat, *Patih*. To pay for that, I vow never to return to the village. I will stay in this forest forever. However, I love my wife with all my life. I cannot bear to be separated from her. Please have pity and let us live the rest of our life in this forest,” Bangsacara replied.

Princess Ragapadmi smiled and added, “It is the truth, *Patih*. We cannot be separated. I will stay here with my husband until the day I die. I hope you understand. Please be honest in your report. I believe His Majesty the King will understand.”

Patih could not say anything. He returned to the palace to give his report. He knew what would happen to him once the King heard the report. The King had been waiting for a long time in the palace. He was worried because he had not heard from *Patih* for a week. He hoped *Patih* succeeded in bringing Princess Ragapadmi back. When *Patih* finally entered the room, the King was so glad. He was sure that Princess Ragapadmi had returned.

“*Patih!* Finally! I’m so happy to see you. So, how did it go? Did you bring the Princess back with you?” the King asked.

Patih knelt down on the floor and lowered his head, saying nothing.

The King asked again, “*Patih*, where is my daughter? Did you bring her?”

“I beg your forgiveness, Your Majesty. I deserve your punishment,” *Patih* Bangsapati replied softly.

“What are you talking about, *Patih?* Why should I punish you?” the King said.

“I beg Your Majesty to forgive me because I have failed.” “What? You failed? How come?”

“I beg your pardon, Your Majesty.”

Patih then recounted the whole story, from his deal with Bangsacara, Bangsacara’s failure, to Princess Ragapadmi’s decision to stay with her husband. The King was furious and sad. In the end, all he felt was regret.

“What did you say? No! No way!” the King yelled.

“I apologize, Your Majesty,” *Patih* said repeatedly.

“How could my daughter choose to live with a common folk in

the middle of the forest over living in this beautiful palace with me?” the King could not comprehend any of this.

“I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. Princess said that she was Bangsacara’s wife now. And as a wife, Princess would not be able to live apart from her husband. That was why she chose to stay in the forest,” *Patih* Bangsapati tried to explain.

The King finally nodded and took a deep breath. He said, “I should not have ordered Bangsacara to take my daughter. I should have taken care of her here, in the palace. I should have blessed their marriage. Oh, I should have...” the King could not finish his sentence. He lowered his head in sadness. Tears began to fill his eyes. He regretted everything that had happened because of his decision.

Now, the King lost his only child. It was a payback for his own mistake. He realized it all began with his selfish decision, abandoning the princess and gave her to Bangsacara. He regretted all those selfish decisions. The King decided to let *Patih* Bangsapati go without punishment. After all, it was all the King’s fault. He appreciated *Patih* who had done everything he asked and commanded.

The King finally let Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi live in the forest. He felt that he deserved this fate for abandoning his daughter. After all, it was he who decide to give Princess

Ragapadmi to Bangsacara. Bangsacara and Princess Ragapadmi lived happily in the forest for the rest of their life. Their graves in the middle of the forest in Mandangin Island were the proof of their love.