

A BROKEN SISTERHOOD
Putusnya Tali Persaudaraan

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A BROKEN SISTERHOOD

On the Bank of Kapuas River

In the hinterland of Kalimantan there was a village called Uteh Village, which was said to be located not far from Melawai River, in such a scenic plain.

On the outskirts of the village, there was a simple house where an elderly widow and her two daughters lived. The eldest daughter's name was Tima, while the youngest one's name was Numa. The elderly widow's name was Ma Kili, or that was how the villagers called her.

Ma Kili used to be a beautiful woman, the only daughter of a highly respected figure. She had married a highly regarded man from an area on the other side of Kapuas River, who took Ma Kili with him elsewhere, soon after their marriage. The people assumed that Ma Kili had moved to her husband's village, but as time went by, the villagers did not hear about her anymore. When her parents got sick and passed away, Ma Kili and her husband did not show up either. All of her parents' wealth was spent for their medical costs.

Ma Kili's parents only left her a small piece of land and a house if she would ever return to the village one day along with a letter which they gave to the tribal chief.

Several years later, Ma Kili did return to her parents' village with her daughters, but without her husband. Ma Kili told her neighbors that she had been wandering around all of those years, following her husband, who now had passed away.

From then on, Ma Kili lived in her village again, in the house she had inherited from her parents. She earned their living by going around the village to sell whatever their orchard produced. When returning home in the afternoon, Ma Kili brought with her their daily food ingredients.

Both of Ma Kili's daughters, Tima and Numa, had now grown up into two beautiful young women. Nevertheless, anyone who saw the two girls would say that Numa was more beautiful than Tima.

Tima and Numa had different characters as well. Tima, as the eldest, often behaved in an arrogant manner and was always envious to Nurma's beauty.

This made her secretly hate Numa, while Numa herself was always gentle and polite, both to her own mother as well as to her elder sister Tima.

In front of their mother, Tima was always sweet to Numa, as if she truly cared for her little sister. But when their mother was not at home, Tima's sweet and affectionate behavior would change completely. She treated her little sister severely and even often bossed Numa around.

Numa was aware of her sister's evil character. Sometimes she cried when she could no longer stand how she treated her. Nevertheless, Numa still respected and loved Tima.

Tima always used her mother's words to oppress Numa. Her mother always said that the younger had to obey the elder. If Numa was not eager to work on certain days, Tima would immediately rebuke her harshly, "You do not respect me, Numa? Do you want me to tell this to mother?"

It wasn't that Numa felt afraid of her mother, she just did not want to add more burdens to her mother's already troubled mind.

The young men in Uteh Village were very glad about the arrival of Tima and Numa. They were like bumblebees setting their eyes on two blossoming buds. Of course, the one that was sought the most was Numa, the most fragrant flower.

Numa was like a diamond which did not cease to shine, even when it was covered with mud. Therefore, her beauty was not even lessened by the fact that her clothes were not as pretty as

Tima's. On the contrary, Tima always dressed up in her attempts to look better than her younger sister.

One day, Tima was expecting some guests and so she ordered Numa to go to the market to buy things when their mother was out to work. Numa was also asked to use her own savings to buy some food ingredients by her sister.

“Numa, tomorrow the young men who are the relatives of the tribal chief are coming here. So early morning, after mother goes to work, you have to cook delicious foods and drinks for them. Use your savings to buy the ingredients. When they arrive, I will serve the foods for them, since I know you would feel embarrassed to meet such honorable guests like them,” said Tima one afternoon, while putting more powder and lipstick on her face.

Numa, who was helping her mother cook, did not have any objection against her sister's request.

“Why do I have to use my savings to buy the ingredients?”

“Oh, My Dear Sister Numa! Have you forgotten that I have spent all of my savings?” said Tima with glaring eyes.

“Ehm, yes... alright. I will use my savings to buy what you need, Sister,” replied Numa.

The following morning, Numa was busy preparing the foods for Tima's guests. She worked really hard to make her sister happy. After that, Numa went to the river to wash her cooking utensils.

That was actually what Numa did every day when her mother was not at home. She worked hard while Tima was having fun with her friends.

One day, Numa unintentionally overheard a conversation between Tima and her friend. Apparently, her sister was telling a lie about her.

“So Numa is not your real sister? Who is she, then?” asked Tima's friend in a curious tone.

“Actually she was adopted by my mother, who found her when we were wandering about. Well, it was actually a tough decision for my mother, since she would just add our family's burden,” said Tima with a sneering tone.

“Oh, who would've thought about that! Who are her real parents?” asked Tima's friend again.

“We don't know either. We found her when she was very ill.”

“What kind of illness?”

“I have no idea, but it was a deadly sickness.”

Having heard her sister's story, Numa felt as if her heart was stabbed. When Tima's friend had gone home, she asked Tima about herself being their mother's sickly adopted child.

"You're making it up, Numa. I did not say such a thing," denied Tima, acting like an innocent person.

"I heard it clearly. Very clearly!" said Numa with tears flowing from her eyes.

"You took it the wrong way! I was not talking about you at all. My friend and I were discussing another thing which has nothing to do with you."

Numa sobbed sadly.

Tima scolded her. "Stop crying and go back to work!" barked Tima with arms akimbo.

Numa wiped her tears away. She then stared at Tima with hollow eyes, as if she would like to say something, but her words did not come out.

"Why are you still here?" chided Tima.

Numa left her sister with a saddened heart.

A Carried Away Mandau

It had been raining cats and dogs for several days, pouring down on Uteh Village, which was flooded with knee-high waters. Fortunately, all of the houses there were built on stilts, quite far from the ground.

The water puddle was a great obstacle for their daily activities, in particular for Ma Kili who usually walked around to earn her living by selling her orchard's crops. She had to stay at home now, waiting for the waters to subside significantly.

Tima was not happy with the fact that Ma Kili now had to stay at home, because that way she could no longer act as she wished. She had to help out with the daily chores that Numa usually did, as if she had been accustomed to doing them. However, when she could no longer stand it, she pretended to be sick.

“I can't work like I usually do, Mother. I am sick. My body feels weak and my head is spinning around,” said Tima, acting as if she had been really ill.

“Take a rest then, let me finish your chores,” said Ma Kili.

“Are you alright, Sister?”

“My body feels weak and my head is spinning around, Numa,” said Tima. “Numa, could you please help me?” asked Tima while she lied down on her bed.

“How could I help you?”

“Please wash my dirty clothes, will you?”

Numa wondered why her sister had to ask, since she usually washed them without being asked anyway. However, Numa did not want to say it out loud. She just took Tima’s dirty clothes and went to the river.

“Be careful, Ma! I think the river must be overflowing by now. Take care of yourself,” said Ma Kili when she saw Numa heading for the river.

Ma Kili’s words turned out to be true. The river was overflowing. Numa’s usual washing spot was inundated that she had to look for another one.

While washing Tima’s clothes, Numa saw several things carried away by the currents of the river, such as pieces of woods from a broken boat and some parts of small utensils.

“There must be a broken boat!” thought Numa, while trying to finish her work faster.

When she had done with the laundry, all of a sudden Numa saw a body floating among those pieces of wood. She cried for help because the body was still breathing. It moved slowly, and a pair of eyes stared at her hopefully.

Numa had no idea what urged her to act so audaciously to try to help whoever it was. She jumped into the river and swam towards the floating body. It was so difficult to swim against the swift currents that she had to exert all of her strength to carry on and not let her body be carried away.

It turned out to be a young man, with a critical condition. His body was wounded, and his clothes ragged. He was just floating on the river's surface. Numa helped him lean on a big chunk of wood.

She managed to reach the young man and hauled him rapidly to the bank of the river. Her hand pulled too hard that his head bumped against the supporting wood.

“Ouch!” groaned the young man, before passing out a minute later.

For Numa, an unconscious man was a lot easier to pull to the bank of the river. She did her best to fight against the currents while still holding the young man's body. Her cries for help

remained unheard since the river was located far away from the house of the villagers.

Using the remaining strength, she had, Numa finally made it to the bank of the river, where she too fainted next to the young man shortly after.

At her house, Ma Kili was worried and anxious, since Numa had not come back yet from the river. She then decided to check on her by going to the river herself, where she found Numa in a dangerous condition.

Numa regained her consciousness when her mother showed up. Then she told her about the young man she had helped, who was still lying there unconscious.

“Whoever he might be, we have to help him. His body is full of wounds, we’d better take him home,” said Ma Kili, after checking on the young man’s condition.

Numa and her mother then brought him to their house, where she took care of his wounds and gave him some concoction. Two days later, the young man came around, though his wounds were not yet completely healed.

“Thank you for your help, Ma’am, and...” said the young man, shifting his gaze at Numa.

“Her name is Numa, my youngest daughter,” said Ma Kili.

“Thank you for helping me, Numa,” said the young man.

Numa just bowed her head in embarrassment. Her heart skipped a beat when she heard the young man’s voice.

“Young Man, who are you? And what had happened to you that you were carried away by the river’s currents?” asked Ma Kili.

“My name is Mandau. I am a hunter, Ma’am. I come from a little village at the bank of Kapuas River upstream area. My village was destroyed by the flood and many of its inhabitants were killed in the disaster, including my whole family. I managed to escape at first with my boat, but then it was also destroyed by the waters. But then, I was carried away. Oh, if only Numa had not helped me....” said the young man who claimed himself to be Mandau.

“How can I repay your kindness?” continued Mandau, while looking at Numa tenderly.

“Don’t worry about it! We only did what we should to care for other human beings. It was just a coincidence,” said Ma Kili.

Since that day, Mandau lived in the house of Ma Kili. He was taken care so well by Numa that he fully recovered in just a few days. He got along with her very well, like two good friends who

had known each other for a long time. On the contrary, Tima seemed to resent Mandau's presence in their house.

"It looks like the young man is now healthy enough to go back to his own home," said Tima, full of hatred, to Numa.

"What's the matter if he likes to live here? Furthermore, he won't bother you, Sister," replied Numa.

"What would people say if they knew that a young man with unknown origins is living here with us?" said Tima, making up an excuse.

Tima never showed any respect to Mandau. She always sneered at him and showed her hatred when Ma Kili asked about the reasons of her attitudes towards him.

"He is a good-for-nothing, Mother. In addition to his unknown origins, he doesn't have anything to be proud of. His presence in our home will only add our burden," said Tima angrily.

Numa's opinion was totally different when Ma Kili asked her about the same matter. She said, "He has nobody, Mother. His parents are gone. If you feel any compassion for him, please let him stay here with us. With Mandau here, I feel as if now I have a brother."

Ma Kili got confused. Both of her daughters had expressed their contrary opinions. Which one should she listen to?

When he had recovered completely, Mandau begged Ma Kili to let him stay in her house.

“I would like to repay the kindness that you, Numa, and Tima have shown me. Therefore, please let me live here, even though only as your helper!”

Ma Kili did not know how to answer. Tima curled her lip in disgust, while Numa remained silent with a bowed head.

“I see that you have an orchard, Ma’am. Allow me to cultivate it well so that you will get more crops. I will build a hut in your orchard where I can live, if you don’t mind,” said Mandau, with an imploring tone.

“That is such an excellent idea! I totally agree, Mother. I hope he will truly increase our orchard’s crops!” blurted Tima out of the blue. Numa looked a bit unhappy with Tima’s words. Ma Kili finally accepted Mandau’s request.

“Thank you so much for your kindness!” said Mandau.

Tima's Claim Against Numa

Time did fly as day after day passed into months. Now Mandau had been living and working so hard in Ma Kili's orchard for four months. Whatever he planted always thrived so the crops increased significantly.

Ma Kili was happy since family burden was now lighter, thanks to Mandau, who was not only good at cultivating the orchard, but also at selling the crops.

"How did you sell those crops that you earned so much, Mandau?" asked Ma Kili in awe.

"I am still young, Ma'am. I can walk really far, until the trading center at Nangapinoh. I could sell your crops at a good price there," replied Mandau.

"Nangapinoh? What is that?" asked Numa.

"Nangapinoh is the name of a kingdom, Numa. It's always crowded over there."

"Just pray that someday we will have an opportunity to get there."

"Did you walk all the way there?"

"Of course I did not. I asked for a lift from one of many boats passing the downstream area of Melawai River."

The relationship of Mandau with Ma Kili got much closer, just like a son and his own mother. Likewise, Mandau, who was several years older than Numa and Tima, treated them as his own sisters.

Numa was very happy with Mandau. She helped him diligently in the orchard. Sometimes she even made him his favorite snacks and they enjoyed eating together in the orchard while chitchatting joyously.

On the contrary, Tima always looked down on Mandau and would not even want to talk to him, let alone be friendly with him.

Sometimes Ma Kili got upset when Tima's attitude towards Mandau became out of line. She tried to make her daughter aware that those behaviours were not commendable.

“Oh, so I should act like Numa? I should respect that young man we don't know anything about? Sorry, Mother, but I am not that lowly. Let Numa be the one who acts that way!” replied Tima sharply.

“Can't you see that my burden became lighter since he came to live with us? I am already old now, and I no longer need to go around the village to sell the crops. Mandau brought us a lot of

fortune in only one single trip. He ended up becoming our breadwinner.”

“Oh, get real, Mother. I cannot change my opinion about that young man who has won your heart. You’d better watch out, because I see that he and Numa got more intimate lately, more than just two ordinary friends!”

Actually what Tima had said was not completely wrong. Numa and Mandau were always seen together. However, Ma Kili did not have any objection to it since Mandau always showed respect to everyone.

Lately it was getting rare to see Tima at home because she often went out to meet her friends. However, a rumor was spread about Tima being seen alone with a man a lot of time. When Ma Kili confronted her about that, Tima could not deny it.

“His name is Kiban, an experienced large-scale merchant. I will introduce him to you tomorrow evening because he has promised to come here,” said Tima with a big smile on her face.

“Where does he come from, and where did you meet him?” asked Ma Kili.

“He will explain everything to you tomorrow evening, Mother. He might not be here for only a visit, but he might even directly propose to me.”

“Tima, are you sure that you will get along well with that man? You won’t regret your choice?” asked her mother in a stern voice.

“I never pick a wrong person, Mother, unlike Numa who has chosen that Mandau boy.”

“Tima, watch out your mouth!”

The following evening, the man named Kiban did come to Tima’s house, bringing with him various gifts. He claimed to come from Nangapinoh. His visit, just as Tima had said, was not only to get to know her family, but also to directly propose to her.

Ma Kili suspected that Kiban had an ulterior motive beyond his words and how he stared at them. His attitudes and behaviors did not look sincere. Actually Ma Kili did not like Kiban. But Tima insisted that her mother approve of Kiban’s proposal to her.

At the end Ma Kili had to accept Kiban’s marriage proposal to Tima and they set the wedding date later on. They would only hold a simple reception, due to Ma Kili’s limited economic ability.

The wedding of Tima and Kiban was indeed very simple, but it was still held according to the customs and traditions of Uteh Village, attended by the tribal chief. After the wedding, Kiban immediately took Tima with him to Nangapinoh.

It was very hard for Ma Kili to say goodbye to Tima. She did not know why, but her heart was so heavy because of it. However, Tima looked very happy.

Several days after Kiban took Tima away, Ma Kili got sick. Numa took care of her with a troubled heart, assisted by Mandau. The sickness of Ma Kily got worse as days passed by.

Mandau tried to look for a shaman to heal Ma Kili. Her condition grew worse, as none of the shamans was able to heal her.

Amidst her bout of sickness, the delirious Ma Kili kept calling for Tima. Numa was very sad and asked Mandau to look for Tima.

“Could you please go to Nangapinoh? Try to find Tima and her husband and ask them to come home for a while. I think my mother’s condition will get worse if they do not come here anytime soon,” asked Numa.

Mandau was willing to look for Tima dan Kiban in Nangapinoh. However, as he was preparing to depart, Tima showed up out of the blue. Strangely, she was not accompanied by Kiban.

“I will not stay for a long time here because I have an urgent matter to deal with. I want to talk to mother,” said Tima when Numa welcomed her.

“Mother is very sick, but thank God you have come to visit us!” said Numa with a great relief.

Tima did not look surprised nor show any pity when she saw her sick mother. She immediately came near to Ma Kili who was lying there in a weak condition, and sat down at the edge of her bed.

“Tima, you’re home. Where is your husband?” asked Ma Kili with a feeble voice.

“My husband is busy, Mother. And I won’t be staying long. I need your help,” said Tima without looking worried at all about her sick mother.

“My husband is in a great need of additional capital, Mother. Therefore, I hope you would be willing to sell this house.”

“Oh...!” Ma Kili was shocked and lost her consciousness.

Numa screamed and hugged her mother tight, while Mandau instantly went out to look for a shaman for help.

“Numa, you’d better go out of the room for a while. Let me talk in private with mother!” said Tima.

“Sister, don’t you have any feeling at all? Mother is sick. Instead of coming here to see her, you dared to ask her such an impossible thing! Oh, don’t you have a heart at all?”

“Get out of here, Numa! Or should I force you to?”

“Sister, she has passed out, so...”

“Get out! Get out of this room!” Numa then went out of the room with a heavy heart.

Tima shook her mother’s body. Her mother came round but with teary eyes. Once again Tima asked her mother to sell their house.

“Tima, if this house is sold, where shall Numa and I move to?” asked Ma Kili with a choked voice.

“Ask Mandau to make his hut in the orchard bigger, Mother!”

“Tima, are you aware of what you’re asking?”

“Of course, I am, Mother. You have to feel pity for me. Don’t you want to see my husband’s business grow? He promised me to make you a bigger and prettier house than this one, Mother, when he earns the profit later.”

“Tima, I am sick now. Can’t you wait until I get better?”

“I don’t have much time, Mother. And then my husband has already offered this house and someone is interested in buying it. They already agreed on the price, Mother.”

“Tima?”

Tima did not respond.

“Numa, get Mandau to make his hut bigger. And then, move our mother there! Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow at the latest, the potential buyer of this house will come. He said this house will be occupied by his employees,” ordered Tima.

“Sister Tima? Mother is sick. You’d better...”

“Shut up! I don’t want to lose face in front of the potential buyer of this house. Tomorrow, this house shall be emptied out.”

“What Tima said is right, I’d better move immediately to the hut in the orchard. Hasn’t Mandau made it bigger already?” asked Ma Kili.

“Mother!” cried Numa while hugging her mother sadly.

“What are you waiting for, Numa! Are you now deaf and did not hear what mother has just told you?” asked Tima.

Numa hugged her mother again while sobbing sadly.

“Well, that’s why I came here. Now this house is being sold. Therefore, it should be empty by tomorrow,” said Tima.

She then left without looking back, without caring for her mother and younger sister who were hugging each other in tears.

A Shattered Hope

Tima’s words were proven true. The following day, a harsh-looking man came along with his several servants. They claimed to have bought the house and asked Ma Kili and her family to empty the house as soon as possible.

Numa cried when she heard their statement. However, Ma Kili calmed her down tenderly, despite her sickness. Mandau could not do anything since he was only a care-taker of their orchard.

“It’s alright, Numa. Maybe this is our fate. Let us move to the hut in our orchard,” said Ma Kili.

With great effort, Numa and Mandau carried Ma Kili together to the hut carefully. Then, they also moved their few things out of the house.

As far as Ma Kili had remembered, the hut was small and simple. However, now the hut was quite big, clean, and neat.

“Who has built such a beautiful hut?” asked Ma Kili. “This does not even look like a hut, but in fact it is not quite different than our house, only a little bit smaller.”

“Of course it was Mandau who built it, with a little bit of help from me,” replied Numa with a beaming face. “I hope you like it here, Mother.”

Ma Kili was very happy. Her lips formed a cheerful smile.

The hut was made of materials gathered around the orchard. It was constructed on logs of wood and bamboo which were neatly arranged into a clean and comfortable home. The air in the surroundings was also fresher than in their previous house, which had been sold by now.

“I’ve never thought that Sister Tima would have a heart to do such a thing. Oh, maybe she has been influenced by her husband,” said Numa to her mother one day.

“Let it go, Numa. The most important thing is that we have a new place which is more comfortable to live in,” said her mother tenderly.

Numa bowed her head sadly. She could no longer keep her tears from falling.

“Where did Mandau go?” asked Ma Kili.

“This morning he left for Nangapinoh to sell the crops from our orchard there, Mother,” replied Numa.

“Did he? I hope he’ll get to see Tima and her husband.”

“Yes, I hope so too.”

Ma Kili scrutinized Numa carefully, as if she had never seen her before. She examined Numa meticulously from head to toe.

Numa wondered why and asked, “What’s wrong, Mother?”

Ma Kili smiled at her. “You’re getting prettier, Numa, you have grown up a lot.”

“Oh, don’t tease me that way, Mother.”

Numa’s cheeks flushed, making her look even prettier.

“It’s time for you to follow the step of your sister, Numa.”

“What do you mean, Mother?”

“You have to choose soon. I mean, it is better if you get married soon. I am now getting old, and sickly as well.”

Numa remained silent, her head bowed. But her chest rose up and down, while her breath was getting heavier.

“I think you have made your choice, haven’t you?” asked Ma Kili a moment later.

Numa looked up for a second to stare at her mother, but then quickly bowed her head again.

“What do you mean, Mother?” asked Numa, still with a bowed head.

“Mandau is indeed a good man. I agree if you choose him, Numa. I can see that he is also fond of you. Isn’t he the one that your heart has chosen?”

“So you approve of it, Mother?” Numa found her courage to ask.

“If you have chosen him, of course I do.”

“Even though Mandau is not as great as Kiban? I mean, he is just the caretaker of our orchard.”

“You are the one who should answer that question, Numa. The decision is in your hand. I can only hope and pray that you do not make a wrong choice. But if you have already made up your mind, what else are you waiting for? You’d better get married soon, Numa!” whispered Ma Kili.

“Actually we are already planning it, Mother. However, we agreed to wait until you get better first,” whispered Numa with happy tears trickling down her cheeks.

“Why should wait until I get better, Child?” asked Ma Kili with a sad tone.

“We want you to rejoice with us in a good health condition.”

“Oh, Numa...Numa... I think there’s nothing wrong for you to get married without waiting for me to get better first.”

“Mandau kept insisting that you need to get well first, Mother.”

All of a sudden, they heard heavy footsteps outside their hut. The sound got clearer, approaching the hut’s door. Numa and Ma Kili stared at each other in wonder.

“Go and see who is coming,” said Ma Kili.

Numa wiped away her tears then hurried out of the hut. She was surprised to find several unfriendly men there.

“Is this the orchard that belongs to Tima and Kiban?” asked one of them with a severe face.

“Oh, no, it’s not. This orchard and its hut don’t belong to Tima, but to her mother. What is going on?” Numa asked them back.

“Ha ha ha ha ..., whatever belongs to the mother of course belongs to the daughter as well. Oh, you are so funny, Sweet Girl.”

An eerie feeling crawled down Numa’s spine. She was so terrified at the look in the man’s eyes.

“Why did you ask about our orchard and hut, Gentlemen?” asked Numa.

“Sweetheart, Tima and Kiban have sold this orchard, along with all the things inside it. We have bought it from them. Therefore, we will give you three days to empty it out.”

“Oh?” Numa was startled. Her mouth was agape and her tongue numb. She felt as if a thunderbolt had struck her head.

“Don’t be surprised, Sweetheart! We are not joking here.”

“But how could Tima and Kiban sell it? This orchard belongs to my mother.”

“Go ahead and check this land’s sale and purchase certificate. Read it carefully, it is clearly stated that we have bought this orchard and everything in it,” said the man.

“Oh, this is impossible! Impossible!”

“Of course it’s possible. We have the proof of its payment. Alright, as our master has told you, you have three days to empty out this place.”

“It is impossible for me to empty out this place! My mother has never sold it and she is also very sick right now!”

Numa cried out loud while rushing to her mother’s embrace.

“Oh, Mother.... how cruel Sister Tima and her husband are to us,” cried Numa while hugging her mother tightly.

Ma Kili had listened to the conversation of Numa and the man. Her lips quivered but did not emit any sound, only tears flowing down her cheeks. Numa was also sobbing sadly.

The Trip to Nangapinoh

Mandau came home, bringing with him a great amount of money as usual. The crops he had brought were all sold. He came home with a glad heart. However, he was very surprised to see the sad faces of Numa and Ma Kili.

His surprise turned into a great shock when Numa told him what had happened. He did not understand why Tima and Kiban had been that cruel to them. They did not even seem to care that Ma Kili was still sick.

“Mandau, right now I cannot think of anything. I entrust everything in your hands and I beg you to help us find a way out from this misery, Son,” said Ma Kili in tears.

“Where should we move out?” asked Numa.

Mandau racked his brains. After a while he said, “There is no other way than to leave this place, and move to a surely better place, where mother will be able to get the best medication.”

“Yes, but where?”

Mandau was quiet for a moment. He stared deeply into Numa’s eyes, and then shifted his gaze to Ma Kili’s pallid face.

“Your mother has trusted me to find a way out of this difficulty. How about you, Numa, will you trust me too?”

Numa nodded expectantly, without a slightest doubt.

“We’re leaving tomorrow morning. I hope you will not ask me about where I am taking you and your mother, Numa. Trust me, I am bringing both of you to a better place.”

“I trust you, Mandau,” replied Numa, squeezing his hand warmly.

The following morning, Mandau carried the sick Ma Kili out of the hut in the orchard which was full a lot of memories for him.

“Didn’t you sell the crops in Nangapinoh yesterday?” asked Numa while walking beside him.

“Yes. Why did you ask?” Mandau asked back.

“Did you see my sister Tima and her husband?”

“I would have loved to see them. I have looked for them in Nangapinoh, but Nangapinoh is such a big area. It is impossible to look for someone without a clear address.”

“Is it? Is Nangapinoh that big, Mandau?”

“You will see it for yourself, Numa.”

“Hmmm,” Numa mumbled, not convinced with the answer.

They kept walking along a path which led to a jungle. Mandau walked carefully because he was carrying Ma Kili with him. Finally, they arrived at the bank of Melawai River upstream area.

It was Numa’s first time to see the surroundings of Melawai River upstream area. She was startled and awed to see a lot of boats passing by, all big and beautiful. Those boats kept moving upstream and downstream the river, and vice versa.

“I had to spend all of the money from the crops sale yesterday to charter a boat,” mumbled Mandau.

“Do as you think fit!” replied Numa while leaning her head on Mandau’s shoulder.

“There are more passing boats the more we go down the river. The bank of the river is also more crowded with a lot of houses and buildings I have never seen before. Oh, it is so interesting to watch,” said Numa.

“Later in Nangapinoh, you will see more interesting things, Numa,” commented Mandau.

“In Nangapinoh? Are we going there to look for my sister Tima and Kiban?”

“Oh, it will be very difficult to find them. I am taking you and your mother Nangapinoh to change our life, Numa.”

“What do you mean, Mandau?”

Mandau explained that in Nangapinoh he had an acquaintance who worked as the king’s servant. His house was big and always empty because he lived in the king’s palace to accomplish his duties.

“He once invited me to live in his house, as long as I want to. I thought there would be nothing wrong to accept that kind offer. We can live in his house and for sure mother will be able to get

good medication. As for me, I will look for a job. I will do anything, as long as it is not illegal,” said Mandau.

“While you’re out looking for a job, I will stay at home to care for mother,” interrupted Numa.

Mandau touched Numa’s shoulder tenderly. Then he said, “That friend of mine has quite an influence in the king’s palace, Numa. He told me that the King is now looking for young women like you.”

“Oh? What for? To be made the king’s concubines?” asked Numa with a furrowed forehead.

“Oh, no, not to be made his concubines, but to be adopted as his daughters, because he has not gotten any daughter since he married the queen. He would love to have some daughters in his palace, albeit adopted.”

“They’re not looking for village young women, or noble or rich young women, Numa. The King and his Queen are looking for smart young women with good characters.”

“And for sure they should be pretty as well, right?”

“You are very pretty, Numa.”

“Mandau, I have never set my expectations too high. You should know that I am already content to be by your side. I am quite proud just to be a village woman like I am now, Mandau!”

“Our life will not change if we do not try to change it, Numa. Why don't we give it a try? Trust me, you will not regret it!”

“But what if I fail?”

“You would not have anything to lose since you are just a village woman anyway.” “But I ... oh, it's such a daunting task. I don't think I can do it, Mandau!”

Ma Kili, who was lying in a cot inside the boat, called for Numa out of the blue. Numa's conversation with Mandau was interrupted because she had to hurry inside to talk to her mother. “What's the matter, Mother?” asked Numa.

“I heard what you and Mandau were talking about, Numa. I think Mandau was right when he said that our life would not change if we did not try to change it ourselves.”

“So you agree if I become a candidate of the king's adopted daughter, Mother?”

“Why not? Becoming an adopted daughter of the King is not a disgrace. In fact, it would be such a big honor.” Numa contemplated it with a confused look.

“Why are you still confused about it?” asked Ma Kili.

“Well, it’s not that I don’t want to do it, Mother. But I am afraid that I will have to be separated from Mandau,” replied Numa sheepishly.

“But isn’t it the idea of Mandau himself? I think he also feels the same about you. But he does not think only with his feelings, but he also uses his mind, and that’s why he encourages you to try to change our life.”

“Mandau is such a smart young man,” praised Ma Kili, convincing Numa.

The Wedding of Numa with The King’s Son

Upon their arrival in Nangapinoh, Mandau took Numa and Ma Kili to a beautiful big house. Numa was so impressed she kept looking at all the beautiful things inside the house in awe.

“Don’t be surprised, this acquaintance of mine, the owner of this house, is an influential person in the King’s palace,” said Mandau. “I will explain more about it later, Numa. Now, we’d better take a rest. We also have to put mother in the best bed in this house. God willing, tomorrow some traditional healers will come here to take care of her.”

On her first night in that house, Numa could barely close her eyes. She was so stunned by all the beauty inside that house.

The following day, several traditional healers came and immediately checked on the health condition of Ma Kili. They worked without saying much, but they explained that they had received a direct order from the King himself.

Mandau did not show up in the house throughout the day and nobody knew where he had gone. Numa waited for him anxiously. Later in the afternoon, several court servants came to see her. Numa felt so awkward since she did not know what to do to welcome them properly.

“Someone named Mandau gave us a clue that here lives a young woman named Numa,” said the leader of the court servants.

“I am Numa, Sir,” replied Numa with a throbbing heart. “Why are you looking for me, Sir?” “We would like to take you to the palace, Miss Numa.” “To the palace. Oh, what did I do wrong?”

“You did not do anything wrong, but you shall be educated in the palace. You shall familiarize yourself with the customs and ways of life of a princess in the palace.”

“Oh, have I been selected as a candidate to become the King’s adopted daughter?”

The court servants smiled and nodded their heads.

“Go with them, Numa. Try to change our life for the better!” whispered Ma Kili when Numa asked for her approval. “I will always pray for you.”

Thus, from then on Numa lived in the palace. She received strict trainings from several court servants to get to know the ways of life in the palace.

Mandau never came to visit, but he wrote her several letters to encourage her.

Ma Kili recovered fast, but she had never seen Mandau either. However, she was allowed to visit Numa, who was not permitted to come home. She had now become a young woman of the palace, even though she still did not lose her village characters. Having been educated for almost three months, Numa was then summoned by the King.

I must've been chosen as the King's adopted daughter, thought Numa with a strong conviction. But where is Mandau? Why hasn't he come here? Numa was also sad because she did not know where her mother was.

Several months later, Numa had been transformed into an impressively attractive and elegant princess with a new name, Princess Nirmala.

King Nangapinoh later expressed his desire to see Princess Nirmala marry his son, Prince Pinoh. Princess Nirmala actually wanted to say no because she did not know Prince Pinoh at all. But it turned out that Prince Pinoh was actually Mandau, the man who had always helped her.

Prince Pinoh or Mandau had indeed left the palace in quest for his future wife. He finally found the right one. He had chosen Numa, whom he met for the first time when he was carried away by the river's currents, after sailing on Melawai River.

Prince Pinoh and Princess Nirmala lived together happily. Several years later, they were crowned King and Queen, replacing King Nangapinoh who had passed away. Ma Kili was so thankful to the Almighty because she too had found her happiness.

Tima, on the contrary, was found neglected in a village. Kiban, who turned out to be a gambler and drunkard, had sent her away from their house. She begged for Numa and Ma Kili's forgiveness and was allowed to live in the palace, together with her younger sister and mother.

Ma Kili was happy with the fact that she could be together again with Numa and Tima. Numa was still her meek and humble daughter, even though now she had become the King's princess. She even allowed Tima to live in the palace with Ma Kili.

“I am proud to have a daughter like you, Numa. Your heart is like a diamond, which keeps shining brightly even when it's covered by mud. Even though Tima has broken the relationship between you two, you did not change a bit. You remain a younger sister to her, by showing her your patience and kindness.