

LAST BATTLE CHAPTER 1
Pertarungan Terakhir Seri 1

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LAST BATTLE CHAPTER 1

Heading for Siguntang Hill

Being a swordsman without fighting is dead!

The wounded swordsman collapsed and stared up at the sky. His eyes always accidentally met with the white clouds that looked like sitting cross-legged, with a wide blue background that stretched out. No breeze dared to move the position of the cotton white objects. The nature was silent. Between the blurred vision and the unfailing consciousness, Serunting's eyes saw the clouds resembling the human body that was doing *semedi*. The longer Serunting stared at the clouds, the more he felt his soul flew between them, then sat cross-legged with them in the sky, soothing the inner wound deeply upon the betrayal of his wife and brother-in-law.

"Stupid Rie Tabing!" shouted the man.

"He has nothing. Killing me or banishing me from Semidang, will make him alone against his opponents. How many people do not like Rie Tabing and his family? I am very respected in Semidang. Yes, I hold the Jurai Semidang heirloom, Tata Renjune, a gift from Majapahit then I am the rightful leader in Jurai Semidang! Killing me will not make Rie Tabing the head of the *jurai*. Really

insolent bastard! A *jurai's* head must be the descendants of the previous *jurai*!

As Serunting cursed, the clouds drifted away so that the direct sunlight sting his body. Serunting blinked his eyes. He tried to tilt his body so that his eyes did not glare. Unfortunately, the more he moved, the more pain he felt.

"I am now betrayed by my guardian, my brother-in-law! My wife too! She is too weak, easily instigated by her brother. The abstinence of my power, she, with that bastard!"

Serunting closed his eyes. Blood on his left arm and chest began to dry out. However, there was a very sore in the left abdomen. The white clouds that had drifted away still looked like they were meditating. Serunting tried to imitate the cloud-style *semedi*. He calmed his mind. But the shadow of the fight filled his mind; the fight that began with a dispute of field.

"Brother, my land is full of gold! Hahahaha ... how is your field? Grass bushes? Cieh hh, how unuseful! Hahahaha ...!" Serunting never intended to hurt his brother-in-law even though he was very upset with the banter every day, every time. The ridicule did not work in front of Serunting, Rie Tabing heated up Melur, his older sister who married Serunting.

The fight should have been won by Serunting. Less than ten strokes, the swordsman who mastered the Semidang would surely be able to bring down Rie Tabing.

"Serunting, you'll be finished! I will replace you as an unparalleled swordsman in Semidang! "

The spear of Rie Tabing hovered fast, directed at the plant of weeds, the possession of Serunting that always swayed even though not being blown by the wind. Along with the spear that stuck in the center of the weeds, Serunting collapsed wounded in the chest and stomach. Before Rie Tabing drew his spear into Serunting's chest, the hapless swordsman ran away.

"I did not think that my own wife expounded my secret." The poor swordsman sobbed. He could not do meditation. He kept sobbing as he stared at the white clouds in the sky with so much suffering that he was too tired and fell asleep with a dream: he saw himself walking toward Siguntang Hill.

Pendekar Mata Empat, The Four-Eyed Swordsman

The owner of the universe had drawn long river lines, winding, flowing through the estuary into the sea. Later from the stories, everyone would know that life seemed to begin around these rivers. The river, which was more than two hundred meters wide, invited large ships from across the ocean to transport pepper, camphor, ebony and eaglewood, and unloaded the supply of rice,

salt, and woven yarn. The harbor had an iron chain where the ships made of solid wood were tied up. The rectangular bulges binded the boards with the fiber binder inserted into the borehole. It was said that this tradition was the same as the boats of Southeast Asia which was called the boat with tie-board technique and the *kupingan*-binder. The ships from the open seas were single outriggers, some were double outriggers. In the open ocean, they spread magnificent triangular sails floating in the wind.

No one knew who was the real name of the man called the *Pendekar Mata Empat*, Four Eyed Swordsman. No one knew where he came from.

He often visited the banks of Musi River, Kalubar Village, observing the running water, small boats of local fishermen, large ships from Java, Celebes belonging to the Bugis, and people from China, Siam, Cambodia, Semenanjung, and Patani, all of whom went and stopped at the dock, while sitting in a stall enjoying a cup of coffee or occasionally in floating stalls. The porters were very reluctant to the man who liked to dress nicely like the Indian merchants. He was absolutely not seen as a powerful warrior. The eyes on his face were not four which would seem odd and scary to those who saw him. However, people were very curious about why he was called *Mata Empat*. There was a rumor that another pair of Mata Empat were on the back of his head.

The Four-Eyed Swordsman was an ordinary man who lived somewhat inland, but not far from the port at the Musi River. He had a wife and children. His daily work was farming and raising chickens and goats. He also had a *kanuragan* school with a considerable number of students. The Four Eyed swordsman not only gave his disciples physical training, but also the inner science for virtue, and taught them to earn a living from farming and stock raising.

Mata Empat at a glance was not the same as other people who also lived on the banks of the Musi River, who worked as fish fishermen. The skin was darker even though the river fishermen were also black because of the abundance of sunburn. The size of Mata Empat was bigger and taller with long hair touching his shoulder, black and bushy. He looked like migrant from Gujarat, with wide black eyes and a sharp nose. People could only surmise that the Mata Empat came from across the western sea who once had come to southern Swarnadwipa region. Though not a fisherman, Mata Empat looked remarkably more agile in controlling his boat compared to the Musi shore fishermen.

A fishing boat that docked seemed busier than other boats that were unloading. Mata Empat sharpened his vision to know something that interested him. Some residents approached the busy boat. Soon, they seemed to be helping the ship owner lift something from the ship. Mata Empat soon learned that the

fisherman found someone drowning or drifting in the river. Furthermore, he was not moved to follow the people who approached the boat. He sat there, waiting for the news of what had happened, who was found, whether still alive or dead.

"Who? Our people? "Asked the owner of the coffee shop to the new fisherman who stopped by the shop.

"No. He was injured when he met Bahrin in Lematang. He joined Bahrin boat, he said he wanted to go to Siguntang. However, he was not strong to continue the journey because his injuries were too severe. He had walked away from Semidang, he said. He fainted in Bahrin's boat. "

"Oh, someone from Semidang...," said the owner of the shop.

"Take him to Tabib Sentani. Other Tabib around here are expensive," said Mata Empat, joining in.

"It seems so," said the fisherman, his eyes fixed on the back head of Mata Empat, whose hair was blown by the wind. The fisherman was very curious to see with his own eyes the residents' rumors about a pair of eyes on the back head of Mata Empat covered in hair.

"The swordsman does not want to see the situation?" asked the owner of the coffee shop. Mata Empat seemed to think, and then he replied, "This man is deeply wounded, very badly. When it

turns out that he lives a long life, I'll meet him." Mata Empat stood up, then paid his coffee and excused himself to the coffee shop owner on the bank of the Musi River.

Clinic of Tabib Sentani, The Physician

"How long have I been unconscious, *Tabib*?" asked the man with a pale yellow face. "More than one full moon," the *tabib* replied very calmly as he saw Serunting's consciousness grew. Previously, he had exerted all his inner power to give strength to Serunting's body, then gave him a *sadingin* leaf stew to lower the fever due to an injured body infection on the inside.

"One full moon? Yes, Gusti ... thank you, I am alive. Thank you, Tabib, you have treated me. Who brought me to you? "

"A fisherman. He said that you were going to Bukit Siguntang and wanted to join Bahrún's boat that went home by way of the Lematang River to the Musi River."

"Ah, yes, yes, I remember now, Sir. I was injured then."

"You're very badly injured, son. Your stomach almost broke like it was destroyed, but not because of puncture or disease. Did you have a fight?" said Tabib Sentani.

Serunting nodded.

"If you are not a person who has been trained for a long time with the science of *kanuragan*, you are already dead. My medicines only help heal, the rest is your own strength and the will of the Almighty. " Serunting nodded apologetically.

"Please accept my sincere thanks, Tabib for having taken care of me."

"Never mind, son. What is your name and where are you from? "

"Serunting, Sir ...," replied the man. Then, he told the beginning of the dispute with Rie Tabing that ended in a fight until Rie Tabing tried to kill him. Serunting felt the creeks flowing from the top of his still-limp eye.

"Yes, be patient, Serunting. Your suffering is heavy because your wife and brother-in-law have betrayed you. Human behavior is not always good as expected. Inside a man, lust is also implanted which at times can be out of control and bring anger of wrath. Actually, the toughest enemy in our lives is ourselves, son, in controlling our lusts. " Serunting listened to the advice of Sentani Tabib with tears.

"Now rest a week in my hut, son. Later after you are really healed, you may continue your journey to Bukit Siguntang."

"Fine, Tabib. *Pisang emas dibawa berlayar, masak sebiji di atas peti, utang emas boleh dibayar, utang budi dibawa mati.* You are

so kind, how great is your love to me even though you do not know me yet, and I have not even known your name."

"Oh, do not worry, Serunting. Returning a favor is not necessarily to me directly. Do good things to others, but do not expect others to repay you. Forward this message so we are among those who spread goodness. " "Yes, Tabib. May I know what your name is? I can only remember your good deeds. "

"My name is ... oh ... Sentani."

Pahit Lidah, the Bitter Tongue

Siguntang Hill was just three kilometers from the northern edge of the Musi River, west of Palembang. The little hill was less than fifty meters above sea level. Cool air crept into the pores of Serunting as soon as he started to climb the hillside.

People said that Bukit Siguntang was sacred because of the many tombs of important people who had ever been magical in the State of Palembang. Serunting had often heard stories of warriors who studied with meditation on that hill. Many of them descend with results, but not a few returned only with empty, even insane thoughts. For Serunting who mastered the science of lightening the body more than just good, climbing the height of less than fifty meters took only less than fifteen minutes. However, the man wanted to relax, walking like the common people when climbing the hill while observing the lush trees. He did not know

exactly when to mention the names of all trees. He only knew that he loved bamboo with its creaking sound that created magical atmosphere when blown by the wind.

He once saw a skilled human hand picking a bamboo pole, making a few holes at the top, and blowing the bottom hole, and then there was the most beautiful voice in this world that Serunting ever heard, the sound of a flute or *serdam*. It was said that when a young man blew it wholeheartedly, the melodious sound of the flute could move the hearts of an angel to descend to the earth. He had also seen people write letters of *mantras* on the surface of bamboo blades. The mantra was useful for anything in everyday life. Serunting had also been taught to write a letter called Surat Ulu on the surface of bamboo blades about martial arts following its mantra.

The lush Siguntang hill was not only overgrown with bamboo, but also the *nibung* tree, a kind of palm, which had tall, erect, and slender stems about twenty-five meters. This trees grew in groups just like bamboo. It had hard-textured woods that were used by the villagers as a mixture of house buffers for swampy areas. The flowers could be used as a fragrance of rice. The leaves were used as the roof of the house, and could also be woven into household furniture. Nibung wood was stronger than bamboo, but the bamboo's splendor was unbeatable by any hardwood, even when

it was hit by the wind. The resilience of the bamboo tree inspired Serunting in processing the martial arts.

The other tall tree was *kemuning* with a very bright and smooth color of wood bark. Serunting caressed the bark, which reminded him of her beautiful skin color, even though pretty, but it seemed to be meaningless. In the world of swordman, *kemuning* wood was made into a *keris* handle.

The breezy wind dropped *kemuning* flower from a height of up to six meters. Serunting picked it up, brought the flower to his nostrils, and found a reassuring fragrance.

Watching the trees, Serunting looked for the safest and hidden place for meditation. He watched the fragrant bushes. There were *pandan* leaves that were often used by women to rub on their shirts. In addition to the usual grasses, Serunting also saw bush plants with very hard leaves and fragrance flower.

"Oh, this is apparently a plant used to polish weapons from ivory and kris," said Serunting while recalling the name of the leaf, which he once heard from Ki Tapak Sakti, his teacher in the past from the land of Banten. Serunting did not want to lull in the hills of Bukit Siguntang that stored the wealth of trees. He intended to ask permission to the ancestors who were buried in the sacred hill. He felt that he had no right to enjoy the natural abundance of the hill, and moreover directly meditated without honoring the

ancestors. The ancestor was Dapunta Hyang or Jyestha Dapunta Hyang, the founder of Sriwijaya Kingdom, who was buried in Siguntang Hill. The people of Palembang named him Gentar Alam. He was buried close with the two tombs of his bodyguards, Panglima Bagus Kuning and Panglima Bagus Karang.

Serunting began to sit cross-legged with his head bowed. His palms were cold. The atmosphere around the sacred tomb made him feel as a small human being.

"Yes, the ruler of Bukit Siguntang and those who had ever been glorious in Swarnadwipa up to across the sea...your Honour, Dapunta Hyang Rajasa Jayanaksa, I thank you for your past hard works, raising the name of our land ..." Serunting exclaimed. Serunting's tears began to unravel. Serunting imagined Dapunta Hyang struggling to establish Sriwijaya and expand its territory. For that purpose, Dapunta Hyang along with twenty thousand soldiers performed *siddhayatra* or a sacred journey from Minanga to Matajap by boat.

"My lord, give me a courage and strength like You ... let me take the power on this Siguntang Hill. Allow me to learn" As a warrior, Serunting relied not only on physical strength. He also studied the history of his country like any other ordinary people.

After visiting the tomb of Dapunta Hyang, Serunting prayed in front of the Buddha's statue on the hill. He did it a moment, but

solemnly. Then, he got a protected place to meditate. The *meranti* tree attracted his attention. With a single jump he had been on a *meranti* tree as high as thirty meters (there were *meranti* trees that reached sixty meters tall). He sat cross-legged on the intersection of branch of the tree. As he darted, the nesting birds were startled and flew.

When the swordsman just sat motionlessly the birds returned to the nest. Serunting only occasionally went down to eat. During meditation, he only ate the leaves and fruits around the hill. When he descended from his meditation, he imitated the *meranti* fruit movements that were detached from the mother plant, flying like a dance whirling and falling wherever according to the wind blow. As he fell, Serunting's feet were right on the ground with an upright position. In his hands he had clasped *cempedak*, young coconut fruit, bananas, and fern leaves that he grabbed while floating down from the meditation.

It had been more than a month that he meditated. He felt that he was not getting anything new. Riding up and down above the heights was not a new skill to him. He had mastered the skill of lightening the body for a long time. Although his inner strength had recovered, Serunting felt he had not gained any new power. He tried to meditate again, but this time he did not go up and down to find food at all. Exactly on the third day, he heard a whisper from the universe.

"Serunting, if you want to gain supernatural power, meditate under the bamboo trees until your body was covered in the shade."

After the sound disappeared, Serunting jumped straight down under the bamboo trees. Without eating and drinking altogether, Serunting meditated for so long. Without his awareness, the bamboo shoots around him had already thick, rising, and covering his body. Serunting himself looked almost like a bamboo boy if someone else ever saw him.

After exactly thirty-six full-moon Serunting felt something very painful on his tongue. He could usually hold out while in the meditation. However, this time his tongue was very painful and bitter unbearable. It was so painful that Serunting body became stiff, then twitched. He almost collapsed. The sky was blackened. The wind blew very hard slamming Serunting body from the bamboo clumps. Serunting fell cross-legged. The bamboo creaked. Serunting felt to hear the wind whistled, but like a human voice.

"Serunting ... Serunting ...!" The swordsman not only shuddered, but also felt his body temperature was very cold.

"Serunting ... your tongue is dangerous ... be careful...!"

Serunting increasingly shivered. He caught the voice, then fainted.

Martial Arts Training Center of *Mata Empat*

Like other people's homes, the Mata Empat swordsman's house was also home on stilts. However, the house of Mata Empat was not made of wood, but from bamboo, while the roof was made of fibers. In the vicinity of the main house, there were other smaller buildings that were made of the same material. The main house faced east. The walls were fine black bamboo bars arranged vertically as tightly as a fence. The floor was made of fine wood. The small stage houses around were the homes of the students and the neighbors of Mata Empat. One building behind the main house was used as a barn to store various crops. Not far from the barn, there was a livestock pen. In the middle of the yard was a non-insulated stage building used as a meeting hall. The vast grounds around the houses were overgrown with plants, such as bamboo groves, *petai*, coconut, *duku*, and durian trees.

The village only inhabited by eighteen families was close to a river that was most likely the tributary of the Musi River. In the river villagers washed utensils and clothes, bathed, and performed other activities.

The training center of Mata Empat was never deserted. Body training with discipline done every afternoon was handled by five senior students. Five senior students had their own schedules to train the body work in turns. Those, who were not training, did the daily job of managing the sale and purchase of agricultural

products they worked with. Nevertheless, at night the senior students kept practicing on their own using weapons according to their individual interests. Among all of the students, there was one student who was allowed out to gain knowledge from other teachers or apprentices. Besides, there was also one student who was required to do hermitage.

The teacher, Mata Empat, had just taken guests. This time the guests were not regular traders taking the agricultural product and the big family farm, but four strangers. They came by riding horses. Mata Empat and the four guests were talking in the main house, not at the meeting hall. It indicated that they did not want anyone to listen to their conversation. From his clothes, one of the guests seemed more respected than the three other guests, dressed in uniform, but not yet clear from what corps and where.

Nevertheless, the guests were very respectful to the Four-Eyed Swordsman who never dressed formally as the guest's attire, but was so dapper in the eyes of the inhabitants compared to other swordsmen. One of the characteristics of Mata Empat was his style of dress.

Most Malay men put on brightly colored sarongs that were slung across the shoulders or wrapped around the waist with a *keris* belt. However, Mata Empat never used a sarong, but the scarf he

threw on both shoulders. Malay men liked to use sleeveless vests. However, Mata Empat did not. He liked the clothes used by the Indians. After the arrival of the unusual guests, in the evening Mata Empat called his senior students. They gathered in the main house, sitting on the porches of the houses on stilts.

"Who among you three have heard of Rie Tabing, our guest this afternoon? Have you seen him?" Asked Mata Empat. The three senior students looked at each other.

"He confessed to come from Semidang," said Mata Empat, opening up the possibility of three of his disciples who might have heard of the guest.

"What on earth does he come a long way to where we are, Master?" asked Pucung, a senior student of Mata Empat who had the highest body.

"I'll tell if there is one of you have any news about him." Reka, the student who was in charge of training his fellow students seemed like to tell him something, but looked doubtful.

"Reka ...? What do you want to say?" asked Mata Empat

"Me, Master. I do not know for sure if he is the same person as the one once told by our brother, Batara, who is now wandering around. Brother Batara once sent me a letter telling me about his journey. "

"Hmm ... what's in the letter? Where is the letter? May I read? Did it have anything to do with the guests who came this afternoon? "

"It was two years ago, Master. Brother Batara visited his parents in Rejang when you allowed him to wander. At that moment, he heard the news of a powerful swordsman from Semidang who was almost killed by his own brother-in-law.

The wounded Serunting then disappeared nowhere to be found. In fact, when Serunting married Rie Tabing's sister, the man got a job as a *penggawa* in Semidang."

"Hmm ... hmm ... swordsman of fortune, then became a *penggawa*, now he was the head of *jurai*, but almost killed the person who has raised his status. The head of the *jurai* has a vested interest ... hahahaha. Now he wants to increase his spiritual power by making me his teacher in order to become ... commander, I guess hehehe. He seems to be ungrateful man. "

"Who, Master?" asked all three simultaneously.

"I do not want to just pick him up as a disciple like you. However, he had been begging yesterday afternoon and seemed to be coming back in a few days. I will invite him to be a guest student as Batara who is a guest student in his current adventure. Rie Tabing will stay with us by setting up a cabin in the yard starting two weeks ahead."

Back to Hometown

Serunting had been in Siguntang Hill for more than two years. Semidang experienced some changes. The market was not as crowded as it used to be. People did not seem so passionate about the buyers. The buyers also seemed desperate with the expensive prices. Serunting had suspected his brother-in-law, Rie Tabing, took over his *kerie* job in Semidang. Serunting felt guilty to his people if the people of Semidang became the victims because of the problem. The swordsman suspected the market to become quiet due to the high taxes and high prices of goods because agricultural product was likely to be bought by certain parties, then sold again in the market at the price they liked.

Serunting cancelled his wish to open the bamboo fence of his house when he reached the road in front of his yard. He thought of other changes that had occurred since his departure. He did not know whether the house he built with his wife in the past would still be kind to greet him. In front of the house there seemed to be a man standing guard, but not a familiar bodyguard. His happiness and homesickness, suddenly turned to bitterness. His forehead frowned. Something heavy was resting on his chest. He felt to have no right anymore to go back to stay, or even to visit the house.

"Maybe Rie Tabing and Melur already thought that I'm lost or dead. Maybe Melur remarried with a rank warrior." The man who looked slim and showed the alertness of the motion preferred to stay at the inn for a few days without telling anyone that he was Serunting, the powerful swordsman from Semidang. In fact, Serunting did not want to tell his children and his extended family.

From morning to dusk he wore disguises so that people would not be aware of him. The incognito was advantageous for Serunting because then he could get information about his family. He decided to sell the fabrics from Palembang, the cloth he originally bought at the Port of Musi as a gift to his wife and relatives.

From morning to evening Serunting opened a stall in a corner near the square adjacent to his house. Serunting traded under the shade of *angsana* tree. His long waist-length hair had been cut to the nape and his head was wearing a turban cloth like a Gujarati merchant. His mustache and sideburns have been cleaned off. His body became thinner after meditated for two years. His skin was brighter. Now Serunting could make sure no one would ever recognize him.

"Are you new merchant?" asked the guard who was ready to stand guard at the house, seeing Serunting's movements,

"Yes sir. I just came from Palembang. Ah, this is a gift for a handsome young Master! " The young guard smiled happily. His hands immediately received a nice cloth given by the merchant. "Are you still on duty or done today?" Serunting asked. "On duty." "Oh, I am a new man here, a traveler who will walk south through the west coast while carrying this cloth from Palembang. May I ask? Whose house is it? "

"The house of Putri Melur, wife of Penggawa Setangkai, the rich man from Rejang who moved to Semidang and was able to become a penggawa because he was befriended with the Young Prince." Serunting nodded, confirming his allegation that his wife had remarried over the blessing of his brother-in-law who was now the head of *jurai*. "Maybe they have considered me dead." Serunting tried to tolerate his wife's decision.

"Well? Is the village safe? I see the people are calm ..."

"Of course safe. No more robbers dare to come here. Rie Tabing as a very firm *kerie* punishes anyone who dares to fight. "

"Rie Tabing? Who is he? "

"Younger brother of Putri Melur."

Serunting nodded again. Within two years Semidang had changed quickly in the absence of Serunting.

"Thank God Semidang is safe. Many merchants would love to stop here. This village will be crowded, it's good for the progress of Semidang. "

Serunting really could convince the guard that he was a merchant. Soon people got interested in Serunting stall. They began to bid cloth sarong brought by Serunting from Palembang City. Serunting intentionally did not sell out the cloth that day. He saved for the supply of Princess Melur who might hear tomorrow about the new stall in the corner of her house, then she would buy.

The afternoon sky still glowed yellowish red as a group of women accompanied by three soldiers seemed to be entering the house of Putri Melur. From a distance Serunting had recognized one of them.

"Come on, come on! Palembang fabric for sale ... will soon be sold out!" shouted Serunting, deliberately looking for attention. The women immediately headed for the Serunting stall. They were very happy to buy the fabrics.

"How much is this?" Melur asked.

"The face of this woman has not changed, still beautiful with a more striking makeup," thought Serunting.

"You do not need to buy it, *Tuan Putri*, the wife of wealthy *Tuan Setangkai*. I have the best for you," Serunting replied.

Serunting pulled out the most beautiful red sarong, embroidered with gold threads. People called it *songket* cloth. Melur's face twisted in disbelief. The other women screamed hysterically and looked at Putri Melur with a jealous face.

"Is this really for me?"

"With all my heart, Princess. I purposely bought this as a souvenir for you."

The women looked at each other.

"Take this! Send my regard to my brother Rie Tabing," said Serunting while giving the cloth with a smile. In the depths of his heart he was even already willing to part with Melur.

Melur's face was suddenly pale. Her hands received the sheaths with trembling.

"Dear Serunting... You still"

"Yeah, I'm still alive. Never mind, let gone be bygone. I left the children to you and take care of them well. I will come to meet them someday."

Serunting packed up his stall. All the fabrics had been sold out. He would go back to the inn first, then thought about where he was going. Melur was still sculpting. Her whole body felt cold. "The money and possessions are all yours...?" said Princess Melur in a trembling voice.

"I have some. Take it for the kids," Serunting replied calmly and smiled.

"Come in ... I'll leave soon."

"Where are you going to? Where will you stay? "

"Thank you for your attention ... don't think about that. I am a warrior. I know what to do. Come into your house," begged Serunting with a moving heart. Melur bowed her head, then walked into the bamboo fence of her house that was also owned by Serunting in the past.

The Fate of the Tiger

At the lodge, Serunting performed a *semedi*. No one was not sad facing farewell with a family he loved. However, Serunting was now a different figure from the Serunting two years ago. The meditation at Siguntang Hill for a long time had provided him with a new powerful skill, the supernatural power of the tongue. However, the miracle certainly had a weakness or restriction that caused the magic was lost. The first experience, his weakness was

known by the opponent so he lost fight with Rie Tabing. Now he was not afraid of losing his supernatural power anymore.

Serunting was afraid that his tongue could be too easy to harm many creatures simply because of his impatience when he saw something contrary to his conscience.

The next day Serunting left Semidang. He went to the northeast by riding a *pedati* cart owned by a farmer who was traveling to Pasemah. Along the way Serunting heard the owner of the *pedati* talked incessantly about the development of Semidang, including the appointment of Rie Tabing which many people did not like. However, Serunting just paused.

“After killing his brother-in-law Rie Tabing occupied the position of the head of the *jurai* now. His widowed sister was then married to Rejang man who used to work in a gold mine. He was a close friend of the Young Prince”

Serunting responded to the story that he had heard from the guard just by sighing. He refrained from saying that he was the one that was considered dead.

The journey took half a day. The *pedati* began to enter the wilderness. Suddenly the cows pulling up the cart stopped and started bellowing incessantly. The farmer immediately went down to check on the cattle. Serunting vigilantly watched. His ears heard the breath of a four-legged beast. His hearing was right, just

about a second after the farmer went down to check the cow, a roaring tiger jumped from a bush attacking the cow and the farmer. As fast as lightning Serunting blocked the cows and the man from the savage beast. The fight between Serunting and the tiger was fierce. The tiger looked less interested in tearing Serunting. The tiger repeatedly looked for opportunities to pounce on the cow. With a very fast movement the tiger moved to attack the cow and managed to tear the cow's leg. Serunting was very angry.

"I challenged you a good fight, but you're after something else. You prefer to choose the helpless. You just die as a rock!" shouted Serunting with high inner power. The sky became cloudy suddenly. Strong wind rocked the trees. The ground where they stood was shaking like an earthquake. The tiger roared loudly. Its body turned stiff. Serunting and the farmer hardly believed their own eyesight. The tiger was on fire, but not until it became ash. It turned to a statue with scorched skin and died into a stone.

The First Encounter of the Two Swordsmen

Serunting was building a new life in Pasemah, in a valley on the banks of the Enim River. He built a small bamboo stilt house with the walls that he weaved himself. In order to be artful he painted and refined the bamboo weaving by using varnish. Varnished bamboo were not only used for the walls of his house, but also for

the poles, window frames and doors, floors, ceilings, and roof frames.

When he was in Semidang, Serunting had studied weaving and making handicrafts from bamboo, including bamboo flute. His daily work in Pasemah was making chairs, walls, and other crafts for sale. He selected all kinds of bamboo, except the yellow bamboo. Although he loved the yellow color, he should not choose it because when he was meditating at Bukit Siguntang, he was awarded the supernatural power of the tongue with a taboo that his body would never be hit by yellow bamboo.

Although the house was small, Serunting provided a spacious veranda as a living room for people visiting his house. The people with good intention and wanted to learn martial arts would be really accepted as students. However, he did not intend to establish a martial arts training center, he just trained those people in his yard. After practicing, Serunting freed them to live anywhere, not necessarily around his home. The news of the supernatural power of a swordsman named Serunting who could condemn living beings into stone quickly spread everywhere, including in Semidang, where Serunting originated. The news that Serunting had a fight with a tiger in the forest on the way to Pasemah brought curiosity of people who loved strange and horrendous news, as well as the swordsmen who just heard a weapon in the form of tongue. In the swordsmen world there were

two groups of warriors, namely white swordsmen and black swordsmen. White swordsmen were warriors who used their supernatural powers for good and to crack down on evil, including crimes committed by black swordsmen or rulers who acted arbitrarily. The black swordsmen were warriors who established themselves as robbers or warriors who helped the arbitrariness of the government in a unity, from the most elite level to the village level.

Serunting was one of the swordsmen who did not care about the division of this class. His experience in the world of government as a chief of *jurai* in Semidang showed Serunting that the black and white group of warriors were not much different, and turned gray when faced with power.

The originally good swordsman, when appointed as an officer in the army, became arbitrary and only concerned with the wealth for himself and his family. They became afraid of losing their position and property. On the contrary, there were some warriors of the black faction, whom Serunting once met, who were very kind to the people and helped others. Such a swordsman was black because he followed the teaching of his teacher, but actually disagreed with his teacher on some decisions. However, he had been educated by his teacher since childhood and considered as his own child.

Serunting became more and more wanted by the warriors since he had a new supernatural power and was called *Pahit Lidah*. They just wanted to talk to him or tried his power. However, Serunting was not a swordsman who liked to show his strength. If he knew that the opponent just wanted to try his power and the opponent was not comparable with him, with a humble attitude he chose not to face the challenge. Serunting used his tongue's supernatural power only when his heart was touched.

The warriors, both black and white, could no longer restrain their curiosity to hear the name of Serunting, called *Pahit Lidah*, the Bitter Tongue. Secretly and openly they often invited *Pahit Lidah* to fight by sending messages or intercepted Serunting while on the way to Semidang to visit his children every full moon. To attract the attention of Serunting, the black warriors often made trouble in the villages where Serunting had stopped.

Siapa menabur badai, akan menuai angin 'Who sowed the storm, would reap the wind', it was the proverb that suited to describe those who often looked for a commotion at the expense of the helpless people in the village, they finally ended with death and became a stone because of the *Pahit Lidah*'s curse.

The warriors of white faction had different ways to try out Serunting supernatural power. They did not want Serunting to get amok with the curse then they tried to fight in the safe lane. They only often invite to compete agility, but secretly often looked for

the weakness of Serunting in order to defeat him one day so it would be considered as a top swordsman in the martial world.

Batara had returned from his wanderings and lived in *Mata Empat* training center. Meanwhile, Rie Tabing who had learned self-defense for six months with a pause per two months came back to Semidang to fulfill his duty as *kerie* to replace Serunting. When Batara returned, Rie Tabing was in Semidang.

The arrival of Batara was greeted with a small party by his fellow students. Reka was the busiest of the other students who welcomed his friend at the same time elder fellow student. That night Batara met the teacher and recounted his experiences during the odyssey.

"What news are you bringing, Batara?" asked Mata Empat to his senior student.

"As you can see Master and my friend, I am fine due to your prayers. The most interesting experience I noticed in the world of martial arts during my wandering was meeting with various characters of swordsmen and living in the middle of society. I also learned from other swordsmen, but I did not dare to go to the black swordsman. Just like Master Mata Empat teaches, fight with opponents, both black and white, is also part of learning of *kanuragan*, learning from the opponent!"

"Who is the most capable swordsman you've ever faced, or did you just hear the news?" asked Mata Empat directly at the main information he wanted to know.

"I heard that you took Rie Tabing as a student here?"

"Hey, young man! How comes ... you answer my question with question? Rie Tabing business is my business, now your job is just tell me who are the warriors out there!"

"Right, Master. I once accidently fought with Rie Tabing. I did not know if Rie Tabing has been appointed as a fellow student here.

"Can I say the truth, Master?"

"Do not apologize. Continue?"

Batara seemed hesitant and uncertain as to why Rie Tabing was appointed as a student at the respected Mata Empat training center in the world of swordsmen.

"Yes. Don't be afraid of making mistakes"

"I was staying in Batuputih village on the banks of the Ogan River when suddenly Rie Tabing and his soldiers came asking for money and crops. I did not know if the village area was under his control so he felt entitled. In the first meeting I chose silence." after I investigated, it turned out that the village was not under the

authority of Rie Tabing, but it became the territory of Pasemah, though precisely on the border.

When Rie Tabing came for the second time, I could not keep quiet. I defended the villagers who could not do anything. I got into a fight with Rie Tabing soldiers and wounded two of them. Rie Tabing was angry and threatened me, that if he saw me someday he would kill me. "

Mata Empat sighed.

"He also once almost killed the powerful swordsman from Semidang slyly who was said to be his own brother-in-law," said Mata Empat, wrinkling his eyebrows.

"Yes. Currently I heard that Serunting learned a new martial art in Bukit Siguntang. He has returned to Semidang and even now he has the power feared by the top swordsmen. "

"What power is that?"

"Wahhh!" "Hahhh!"

"His tongue can kill and turn an opponent to stone in one call." "I just heard this power," said Batara's younger fellow students noisily. They sat closer, increasingly curious about the powerful Serunting. Mata Empat fell silent, sat cross-legged, and focused his mind. He ignored the continued story of Batara about the swordsman who was called *Pahit Lidah* and whoever the warriors

who had fought and eventually lost and turned to stone. "Have you ever met *Pahit Lidah*?" asked Reka and the others were very enthusiastic. Batara shook his head.

"Do you think *Pahit Lidah* will punish and repay the treatment of Rie Tabing?" asked Reka who did not like the existence of Rie Tabing in their institution because it can defame the training center.

"Hopefully"

"Hmmm ... shut up will you!" ordered Mata Empat.

"He obtained his knowledge by meditation in Bukit Siguntang. I was not far from him when he was very weak and almost died from injury. He was assisted by the physician, Tabib Sentani, before recovered and meditating at Bukit Siguntang. Is that the swordsman you mean, Batara. Serunting, who nearly died beaten by Rie Tabing. " Batara was surprised that the teacher had received more information.

"I want to meet him. Write my message and send it to him in Pasemah, Batara!

Batara leaned forward. "Your wish is my command, Master."

Batara was very fortunate to be given the task of delivering a letter to Serunting by his teacher. His round, crystal-clear eyes lit up. Thus, the letter was the reason for him to be able to meet

directly with the famous Pahit Lidah. He heard that the warriors were very difficult to meet with Serunting. Since the news of Serunting's power spread everywhere many swordsmen deliberately looked for trouble to meet and fight with Pahit Lidah. Now Serunting lived more often with fights that eventually generated a lot of grudge and curiosity among white and black group swordsmen if one of their friends or colleagues was defeated, especially if they were cursed to stone.

Batara was now face to face directly with Serunting. His heart was beating fast. He looked down on his face even though he was eager to observe as much as possible Pahit Lidah and his gestures. That's all what Batara wanted. There was no desire at all to try out the power of Serunting. Of course he felt absolutely not an opposite of Serunting. However, he hoped Pahit Lidah would fight with his teacher, Mata Empat, and he wanted to see the greatness of both. According to Batara, the fight would not only be very exciting, but at the same time beautiful.

In the eyes of Batara, Serunting was a handsome swordsman, far more handsome than his teacher, Mata Empat. Serunting had an oval-face countenance with high cheekbones, round eyes, and a pointy nose. He was tall, not as stocky as most warriors, tended to be slim, but looked nimble. His skin was bright though as a swordsman he traveled a lot under the sun. He had a usual-

looking with headband in his curly hair, a buttonless vest, and a black-eyed stone necklace.

Serunting smiled reading a letter containing the challenge of a game paddling a boat on the Musi River. The bearer of the letter, a good looking young man, was resting in the chamber provided by Serunting for distant guests.

“I, the Swordsman of the Mata Empat training center on the banks of the Musi River, Palembang, invite the Honorable Master Serunting or Pahit Lidah to play the boat at the closest tributary of Musi River in Palembang.

I am very grateful if Mr. Serunting is pleased to be present at two full moon after I send this letter. Thank you very much.

Tabik, Sincerely Yours! Mata Empat”

The letter on the tree bark with Ulu letters was kept. Before sunrise, he felt he should write a reply soon. Serunting had heard the name of Mata Empat, a swordsman who had the advantage of seeing things faster, because he was four-eyed. Mata Empat was also famous for the Mata Empat Martial arts training center with farming persistence. Mata Empat belonged to the white swordsman. However, the past life of this swordsman was swarming with brutal combats. Empat Mata was very cruel to kill his opponents in order to find who was the most powerful swordsman in the whole Swarnadwipa. Serunting saw the goal of

Mata Empat swordsman in the past was to master martial arts and became the king of warriors. His very ambitious goal caused most of his life to run out for a fight, but somehow Mata Empat then changed. Serunting never heard any more about the swordsman blindly in the fight. The change made Serunting amazed. From the story of Batara, Serunting concluded Mata Empat had now become one of the wise warriors.

It was the wisdom that what Serunting was looking for so he was lazy to face the challenges of warriors. He counted that in the last few full moons he had killed many lives by cursing them to stone. Every time he traveled, there were always events that touched his feelings, which made him angry and finally his powerful tongue curse came out. Serunting took a deep breath. He remembered an event he regretted maybe to death. He hoped the challenge of Mata Empat fight did not make Serunting angry and obliged to utter his curse.

Serunting began to write a reply letter on a bamboo. The Ulu letters carved on the bamboo proved the skillfulness of Serunting's hand. He had practiced well the power of his wrists to play weapons, such as swords and machetes. He trained the strength of his heart to decide something. His sturdy, stable shoulders and arms could support his wrists so that the writing was never erroneously written in one piece. On the third day of Caitra's moon, as the torrent of the rainy season and the current

that will flow, Serunting determined when the game would take place.

During his stay in the chamber provided by Serunting, Batara had intended not to close his eyes. He wanted to see what the warrior did after reading the letter from Mata Empat.

In order not to be considered working like a spy, Batara decently observed Serunting occasionally while reading the books of daily mantra written on the wood bark given by Serunting.

"Who are your parents, Batara?" Serunting asked from the living room after he finished writing a reply to Empat Mata. Though the chamber was closed, Serunting could tell that the young man had not gone to sleep. Batara choked. He hurriedly opened the door and met Serunting on the front porch.

"Rie Kencana from Rejang," said Batara while nodding, then sat next to Serunting.

"Oh, you're from Rejang. You are skillful in writing Ulu. "

Batara nodded.

"Here's my reply. Tomorrow you should meet your teacher".

Batara nodded again and slightly bent back.

Before sunrise, Serunting packed with makeshift necessities. The book from the wood bark containing the daily mantras was given to the young man by Serunting as a gift. Batara did not get a word of attention from the powerful swordsman, Pahit Lidah, although at first glance the book was not special. Batara spurred horse lent by the teacher very quickly. He headed northeast, then down the Enim River, Lematang River, until he met the Musi River. Despite riding the horse, he chose a path that was in line with the flow of the river. The challenge he encountered was the roads of cliffs, ups and downs. His usual skill in riding a horse actually made the journey of Batara much slower than if he chose to ride a river fisherman's boat. However, Mata Empat had other considerations when lending the horse to his disciple. He did not want Batara to meet many people on the streets who would broadcast the meeting plan of Mata Empat and Serunting. Mata Empat did not want other warriors to know early and inhibit this special occasion.

Batara did not force himself to keep spurting his horse as night began to arrive. He immediately searched a village for the night. Batara estimated that he would reach the nearest village, namely Kampung Tanjungraja just at sunset. Just as he entered the village and asked one of the residents to give him an inn, Batara felt that he had been observed by some strangers. He immediately went into the house of the villager, chatted briefly and received a perfunctory dinner, then immediately excused himself to rest.

Batara sighed. Suddenly the door of his room was knocked. His hand reached for the door handle and had not seen the face of who knocked on the door, Batara's hand had been pulled hard, beaten several times, and forced out of the house. The host villagers of where he stayed the night were frightened, unable to do anything.

"Who are you guys? I do not have any treasure, "shouted Batara who was dragged by some people and didn't know where he would be taken to. Batara rebelled by kicking a heavy hand that locked his hands.

"Shut up! Do not fight! I'll take you to someone. "

"Who?"

Batara took out his moves. The two burly men fell.

"Come on, we're fighting like a man and do not kidnap! Who ordered you? "

Two sturdy men agreed to swarm over Batara. The fight did not last long because one of the attackers was wounded by Batara's *keris*.

"Come on! Now just you. Tell me, who wants to kidnap me and for what? Tell me or I will hurt you too with my *keris*."

The injured man whistled loudly. A band of knives armed troops then came to gang up Batara. The young man fought back fearlessly. He, one of the senior student of Mata Empat, was never afraid of armed beatings.

Batara martial arts was high enough. The fight went on longer with none of the attackers mentioned their leader. Apparently they were only ordered to capture Batara. One on ten for Batara, at least there would be three to be hurt. However, after two people were hit by his *keris*, an arrow was shot. The concealed archer ensured that the arrow would hit the young man's back. However, the arrow was apparently captured by a man's hand before touching Batara's body who had not been able to escape.

"You coward! Here I return your arrow"

The swordsman with his inner power, without the use of a bow, darted the arrow toward the grove of trees with a single swinging hand.

"Awhhh! Bukkkk!" Came the sound of screams and thumps of body that fell from the tree were heard.

Pendekar Pahit Lidah!" exclaimed Batara with a surprised face. The attackers were shocked and retreated.

"Who told you to gang up on this young man? He's my guest!"

All fell silent. You are mercenary swordsmen. All right, we don't have to fight, but if nobody wants to say who pays you, the fate of your friends who might have died under the tree would be...."

"Rie Tabing!" Shouted the men. They finally confessed out of fear.

"Who?"

"Be the stone of your friend under the tree!" Said Pahit Lidah in a thunderous voice. The ground where they stood rocked like an earthquake. The archer's body that had fallen from the tree was steaming. He became a rock.

Batara was dumbfounded with a face as white as a corpse. The gangsters were stunned with weak legs. "This is a gift for Rie Tabing who never gets bored to be a trouble maker!"

When a full moon before the game paddling the canoe started, both Serunting and Mata Empat had prepared the best and strongest boat according to them.

Mata Empat ordered a boat made of *rengas* wooden beams hollowed in the middle, then was given small beams of *slumer* wood called *buayan* which were useful as seats. Just in a week Mata Empat's boat was already completed with the thirty fathoms length and three span. The oar he ordered was three fathoms and the leaves were five cubits of *merawan* wood. He made two oars.

Mata Empat was sure that the boat would be strong enough to be seated by two rowers who would row a boat, but in opposite direction

The *pancalang* boat used by Serunting to practice was leased from the boat owner that was often used as a transport that brought merchants and their goods from the hinterland downstream to the Musi River. He rented the boat on the condition that, if the boat was damaged, Serunting would replace it.

With their own boat Serunting and Mata Empat were now more frequent and routine in the river, rowing, swimming, and soaking in the swift currents, even practicing to drift in the current. Serunting lived in a hilly area on the edge of Enim River in the Barisan Mountains within Bengkulu region. Daily life in the river made him familiar with the steep, rocky, and fast-flowing river. Serunting was accustomed to facing the whirlpools and the rapid and decreasing flow of water, which was unpredictable and very dangerous. He was well acquainted with strong changes of wind pressure and cooling temperatures that signaled rain. He understood that if the hillside was thick, cold, and the clouds in the air above the mountains darkened, the rain would fall, causing the volume of water in the river to increase and the flow would be more rapid.

Mata Empat lived near the mouth of the Musi River. The rivers of the estuary were wide, sloping, slow-current, and calm. In fact, from the observation of Mata Empat and the local river fishermen, they were very aware of the Musi River had current upstream and downstream in turns at certain times. The calmness of the Musi River showed its depth. Like the Musi River, the character of population around the river who were born and raised there had their own elegance. People looked calm, but had a sweeping power.

The alternating current toward the upstream and downstream showed the opposite character, visibly gentle on the surface, but could react violently beyond expectation.

The habit of interacting with the natural surroundings would make these two warriors have their own advantages and disadvantages in rowing. The large Musi River could be sailed by many ships. Meanwhile on the land line vehicles, like carts, were crowded so that one must be careful. Rowing on a river crowded by other ships also required precision in looking at the directions of other ships. In addition, one should be careful to control his own boat to avoid crashing and being hit by other ships, nor to be rolled up by the waves caused by the speed of large ships.

Rowing competition was held in Musi River tributary around Palembang. *Mata Empat* was more used to wading through the river than Serunting. In the middle of the month before the game

was held, Serunting with two fishermen who owned the *pancalang* boat immediately went to Palembang by sailing the River Enim, meeting Lematang River, until arrived at Musi. He still had two weeks to practice in the tributary of Musi River around Palembang.

The second full moon of the agreed promise brought Serunting and Mata Empat to the Musi River which passed through Kampung Gumay. The river was tide, they met before the full moon rose above the head. The two warriors faced each other for the first time. Both bowed their backs.

"My name is Serunting. Nice to meet a great warrior like you, Mata Empat!"

Mata Empat smiled broadly.

I am grateful to you, Serunting, for willing to meet this old warrior. Hahahhaha ... I really did not expect to meet the most feared warrior, Pahit Lidah for his curse. It is said that many swordsmen from both white and black groups are looking for you to try out the curse hahahhahaa ... and they can never meet you. Even If they meet you, they cannot tell anything to his friends because they have turned into stone! Hahahhahah"

Ever since I lived in Semidang, I have heard Mata Empat's fame. Sometimes it ever crossed my mind that I wanted to be your

student. *Ahai*, apparently the opportunity came at last. Hahahah
...."

"Hahahhahahhahahahahahha"

The two swordsmen laughed. Their voices that intended to do a magic fight while rowing the boat, could be felt by various aquatic animals that were immediately aware about themselves and got out of the way.

"Let's get started," invited Mata Empat with increased enthusiasm.

The two warriors went down to the river.

"We're rowing in one boat," said Mata Empat.

The two guys on the banks of the river brought by each warrior became the witness to the match. "Well, now you can choose where you're going to paddle, Mata Empat? Downstream or upstream? "

"You can see for yourself, Serunting, the river flow is very heavy. For ease you just paddle downstream with the current, while I choose upstream, against the current," said Serunting with a small smile. Mata Empat probably pretended not to know, even Serunting was used to fighting the rushing stream of rivers.

"Alright then. To me upstream or downstream is the same, no problem," Serunting said. Mata Empat sat on the upper part of the boat, while Serunting sat on the opposite part. Before the signal began, the two paused. Mata Empat bowed his head to see the bottom of the clear river. Serunting looked up into the sky to see the perfect full moon, the clear sky, and the bright stars. After that, the game began.

Simultaneously their paddles fell into the water. As it was already guessed by the spectators, two fishermen brought by Serunting and two students of Mata Empat, Batara and Reka, the sound of their paddles that drain away the water would cause a very deafening sound. The cleaved water soared as high as *rengas* tree. The four spectators hurriedly escaped, climbing to the highest point. Soon all the banks of the river were flooded with towering water like a muddy yellow flood. Reka and Batara, who climbed up to the top of the river bank, could say nothing. That was the first time in their life to meet with such high water caused by the power of two mighty human beings.

"I will not forget this game for the rest of my life, Reka."

"Me too, Brother. This game will be told to my grandchildren. The two swordsmen were tough and incredible. I would not bet if you asked me to bet to guess who wins among them"

"Yes, that's right, Reka. I think soon a lot of villagers are coming to see what happens. If they show up, we have to remind them, do not get close to the river."

"Right, brother."

The four spectators could not see their boat again that has united with the waves. They wanted to get closer, but were afraid that the floods returned to the land any time. The continuous touch of the paddle and boat created a continuous rumbling sound like the sound of giant waves that descended from the mountains or from the sea up to the land. In the water the boat was not moving at all, either upstream or downstream, as if fixed at the bottom of the river.

Mata Empat with the senses of a pair of eyes in the back of his head watched if Serunting were off guard. However, Mata Empat realized that Serunting was not a swordsman who was easily off guard. He had not only the great inner power, but the calmness of facing the opponent was so mature.

The match would never finish. But everyone who were present suddenly heard the thundering sounds coming from upstream and downstream. The tributary of Musi seemed to be split when an object glided fast with the water on the left and right of the boat and all the directions of the water current. The only visible thing was the light splitting the boat into two. Part of the boat that led

upstream was thrown upstream and the part that led downstream was carried away into the sea. The river water then became calm.

The incident was too soon and could not be captured by ordinary eyes, even by Batara accustomed to speed. Both warriors should have been equally bounced along a boat that broke or drifted into the river. However, both were still seen swimming toward the edge of the river with the same win face. In their minds they kept the same question, what objects have been thrown out of the sky and split their boats. Who had that much power to stop the two swordsmen match that would not be able to end if there is no greater force that stopped the game.

Serunting and Mata Empat were again face to face with each other under the full moon with a drenched shirt.

"Well, the tough *Mata Empat*, if you are not satisfied, I wait every time to compete again. Whatever will be contested, I receive with all due respect."

"That was the will of the heart, never abstain to retreat, nor even abstinence. Our destiny as is already outlined to continue to meet again. I believe that, Pahit Lidah."

The two bowed their backs before they both left the arena. Mata Empat headed east, back to his *padepokan* or somewhere. Serunting headed west.