

PUTI BANDUIK

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Sungai Tolang is a *orong*, a village, in Minangkabau. Beyond *orong* is *nagari*, the district. Orong Sungai Tolang is a part of Nagari Tareh in Limopuluah Kuto Regency, West Sumatera Province. The native people of Limopuluah Kuto Regency belong to a cultural group called Minangkabau.

Minangkabau people are proud that they are ‘people with culture’ and that their land is ‘a land of culture’, the culture of Minangkabau. They are proud of the tradition, culture, and social rules employed in their land since thousands of years ago. One of the social rules stipulates how male and female should interact.

Male and female should never interact in the same place, unless they are husband and wife. For instance, at home, at local stores and market, or at parties, male and female should always be separated. Boys and girls, even though they are siblings, should never share a bedroom. Communal bath places, such as the rivers, are separated. Men use one side of the river and women use the other. Markets and stores are places for men. Women should only visit such places for a short period of time, and only in an urgent situation. At parties, the host dedicates two separate places for male and female guests. Men can only mingle with

men and women with women. In some instances, the host even arranges different visitation time for male and female guests.

The separation is intended to honor the ethics and social convention so that no one will be tempted to do unethical things. It is designed to keep order in the society. Anyone who breaks the rules would be sanctioned. The sanctions and punishments are decided by the cultural leader called *penghulu*. *Penghulu* usually also holds the title of *datuk*, an elder. Once the sanction is decided, all people in the land will carry it out. That is why Minangkabau people follow their social conventions and traditions very strictly. They know that traditions and conventions make a better life for everyone. They also know that punishment will be inflicted on anyone who breaks the rules, without exception.

In Jorong Sungai Tolang, there are three human-shaped rocks. The locals call them Batu Puti Banduik. Legend has it that the origin of the three rocks was a violation of social convention. A boy and a girl, who were siblings, once violated the rules of interaction and that violation had brought misfortune to them, turning them into rocks.

Once upon a time, there lived a family in Jorong Sungai Tolang. The family consisted of a mother and her two children. The father of the children had passed away when they were little. The widow was called *Etek* Bainar by the people in the village. *Etek*

meant ‘aunt’. The people called her *Etek* because she was a middle aged woman. She only had those two children. The boy was named Sutan Lanjuangan and the girl Puti Kasumbo. The word *Lanjuangan* meant ‘limitless’, while *Kasumbo* meant ‘bright red and very attractive’. *Etek* Bainar named her children thus as a prayer, hoping that they would be what their names meant. She also deliberately added the word *Sutan* and *Puti* in front of their names. Those were honorable titles. Even though they were common people, *Etek* Bainar believed her children were no less than sons and daughters of kings and royalties.

“Sutan Lanjuangan is handsome, strong, and muscular. Puti Kasumbo has a fair skin and beautiful face. No one in this land can match their beauty. I doubt that even the princes and princesses of foreign lands can.” That was what *Etek* Bainar always said to praise her children.

“Don’t even try to imitate how they dress and act. You are just common people and my children are way more than that. Besides, you can’t afford to dress like them. It requires a lot of money. Thank God I have enough wealth for that,” *Etek* Bainar bragged about her children’s appearance whenever anyone asked. It was because they always dressed in the best luxurious attires.

Actually, the villagers of Sungai Tolang thought that *Etek* Bainar spoiled her children too much. They were as common as other people in the village. The only difference was that *Etek* Bainar

was wealthier than everyone else. People often talked about *Etek Bainar* and her children behind their backs.

“*Sutan* and *Puti* my foot! They have no drop of noble blood in them. *Sutan* and *Puti* from what kingdom? The kingdom of Sungai Tolang?” A villager whispered to his friend.

“Yes, a royal family from the mud of the hill, floated down here with the river stream,” the other man replied.

“Ha ha ha . . .” they all laughed merrily, making fun of *Etek Bainar* and her precious children.

The people could not afford to cross *Etek Bainar* directly because she was the richest person in the village. They often had to borrow something from her during the dry season. When their farms dried up and their fields did not produce, or when their harvest failed, they would come to *Etek Bainar*’s house. She never failed to loan them whatever they needed, rice, meat, or whatever provisions they required to survive the draught.

“*Etek*, please let me borrow some rice. I will pay you the next time my field yields a sufficient harvest,” a middle-aged man said to *Etek Bainar*.

Even though she sometimes received the people with a bitter expression, she always lent them whatever they needed. She was a smart woman. She knew it was impossible to manage her

properties alone. She needed the villagers to help her. Giving them loans was one of the ways to ensure that they would help her.

“Go to the back, see my servant. Ask him to give you as much rice as you need. In return, I want you to repair my barn, the old one next to this house,” said *Etek* Bainar.

This kind of altercation profited both parties. It also ensured that no one dared to criticize *Etek* Bainar directly. The villagers could only talk behind her back. Whatever inappropriate thing she did, they could only comment from afar.

“Watch out! Move! The king’s children, Sutan and Puti, are visiting our humble *lorong*,” a boy said to people around him when Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo went on a walk with their mother one afternoon.

Such cynical comments were often heard mainly because *Etek* Bainar always spoiled her children, treating them like royalties or noblemen. And it was more than just their names. Since they were little, Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo were forbidden from playing with other kids. *Etek* Bainar kept them in the house and never allowed them to play outside. *Etek* Bainar did not want Sutan and Puti to mingle with common folks. She believed no one was good enough to be their friends.

“Ros, take good care of my children. I’m going out. Don’t let

them play like common kids. Don't take them out of the house. The sun, wind, and dust might harm their smooth skin. Sutan and Puti cannot play with other kids, not even in this house. I can't bear to imagine my children playing with kids with mucus-stained faces, dirty hands, and disgusting bodies.

Remember, Sutan and Puti are different from other kids. My children are special," *Etek Bainar* told *Etek Ros*, the babysitter who took care of Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo.

Thus, ever since they were little kids, Sutan and Puti never socialized with other people, save for their mother, servants, and *Etek Ros*. The villagers only knew their faces, never interacting directly with them. In fact, the villagers only saw Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo from afar, or when they visited *Etek Bainar's* house. Day after day, week after week, and year after year, the two children spent most of their time inside the house. On the rare occasion that *Etek Bainar* took them outside, they were carefully protected.

"*Etek Bainar's* children are indeed handsome and pretty. Of course they are different from our children. The sun never burned their skin. They always wear clean and beautiful clothes. We can't compare them to our children. Ours are village kids, poor village kids," a mother said with jealousy when she saw Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo.

An elder of the village once said, “Our people in Minangkabau have a saying for what Bainar does to her children; ‘*menyukat terlalu penuh*’. It means she overestimates her own children and underestimates other people.”

The three members of the family loved each other very much. They were very close, very intimate, and very dependent on each other. Puti Kasumbo was particularly close with her brother, Sutan Lanjuangan and he cared about her very much. *Etek* Bainar always showered Sutan Lanjuangan with motherly attention and things. Whatever he wanted, he would get. However, as her properties and wealth grew, it was harder for *Etek* Bainar to spend time with her children. That was why she employed *Etek* Ros to take care of them.

One morning, Puti Kasumbo whined to her brother, “*Uda*, I’m hungry. Let’s eat. I don’t want to eat alone.” *Uda* meant ‘big brother’ in Minangkabau language.

“I’m not hungry, actually. But if you want to eat now, how can I refuse? Let’s ask *Etek* Ros to prepare some food,” Sutan Lanjuangan said.

“You both go ahead and eat. I have to go to Jorong Tapuang Kadok. It’s time to harvest our field there. I have to supervise everything. Sutan, take good care of your sister, okay. I’ll bring you your favorite sweet sticky rice when I get home,” *Etek* Bainar

told her children and prepared to leave.

Since there was no one else they could play with, Puti Kasumbo always tried to get her brother's attention. Sutan Lanjuangan did not mind that at all. He was always happy to make his little sister smile. They were inseparable, particularly when their mother was out of the house to take care of her properties. Her fields, rice farms, cattle, and gold deposit had required her constant attention. The richer she got, the more often *Etek* Bainar left her children alone. Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo grew even closer as they got older. They were always together from the moment they woke up until the moment they went to bed. They did everything together, just the two of them, since they were little. Now that they were teenagers, nothing had changed at all in that house.

“*Uda*, why isn't Mother home? It's almost dark outside,” Puti Kasumbo said to her brother. Her face clearly showed that she was worried.

“I know, Puti. Just relax. Mother must have a lot of things to take care of.” Sutan Lanjuangan caressed her sister's head to calm her.

Puti Kasumbo put her head on Sutan Lanjuangan's lap and closed her eyes. Her brother's caress never failed to make her felt calm and relax. She fell asleep on his brother's lap and. Sutan Lanjuangan did not move a muscle because he did not want to

wake her up. He finally fell asleep with a hand on her head. When *Etek* Bainar came home, it was late. She smiled when she saw her two children slept soundly and peacefully on the couch. She was glad that the two always got along well with each other. Carefully, she carried the two of them to their bed, one at a time.

Days turned into weeks, weeks became months, and months turned into years. The two siblings were closer than ever. The bond between them had become so strong. The sister was so dependent on her brother, and the brother cared deeply about his sister.

Meanwhile, their mother became so busy that she was more often out than in. Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo were left to themselves in the house, with a couple of servants.

As they grew older, the love between the siblings gradually changed into something none of them understood. Their relationship and feelings towards each other had turned into more than brotherly love and they had no idea how to handle them. They did not even realize what they were doing.

They thought it was fine that Puti Kasumbo always clung into her brother and that Sutan Lanjuangan always catered to her every need.

One day, *Etek* Ros, who had been taking care of them since they were little, poured her heart out to *Pak* Apuak, the other servant.

“I’m worried about them, *Pak*,” she said. *Pak* meant ‘sir’ or ‘mister’. “I’m concerned because they behave like a pair of lovers, not like a brother and sister. They know no limit. They have no boundary. They have no shame, acting like uncultured people, like they are never taught religion. Where are their manners?”

She then added, “*Pak Apuak*, they are adolescents now. The law of the land clearly forbids a girl become so attached to her brother. It is inappropriate. I’m really worried, *Pak*.”

Pak Apuak replied, “So do I, Ros, so do I. Lately, I’ve been thinking about their behaviors. I once caught them taking a bath in the river. Together. It was almost dark and no one else was there. It is disgusting. It is inappropriate. I also saw them did unspeakable things in the house, more than once. I feel what you feel, Ros. But what can we do?”

“I often consider to tell *Etek Bainar* about this, *Pak*. But, what good will it do? Mistress will not listen to me. Everyone knows she thinks her children are gods. They cannot do anything wrong in her eyes. If I tell her, it is more likely that she will fire me,” *Etek* Ros said.

“No, Ros. Don’t do that! Let’s just wait and see how it all turn up. Saying any of this to *Etek Bainar* is like putting your head in a crocodile’s mouth. Caring about these children does not mean

you have to sacrifice your life. Have patience, Ros. May be it will all be alright in the end,” *Pak* Apuak suggested.

“I remember an old saying my mother used to say, *Pak*; ‘*habis geli karena gelitik*’. That saying is really applicable to these kids,” *Etek* Ros said.

“I agree,” said *Pak* Apuak. “The saying teaches us not to overdo things. If you tickle someone too much and too often, he will no longer feel ticklish. He will get used to it. That’s what the saying means.

If we do inappropriate things all the time, we will no longer feel ashamed or worried about it. It will become normal. Aren’t our ancestors clever? They always knew how to put these things into sayings. We only need to understand what they actually mean.”

After that, *Etek* Ros and *Pak* Apuak resumed their works. *Etek* Ros went back to the kitchen and *Pak* Apuak walked to the barn to get some paddy and process them into rice.

Unbeknownst to them, the two teenagers had been involved with each other too far. They forgot that they were siblings. The isolation, the prolonged intimacy, and the lack of attention from their mother had brought disaster to them. Puti Kasumbo was pregnant. When they found out, they tried to hide it from everyone, especially their mother. *Etek* Binar had no idea what happened in her house. She did not realize the changes in her

daughter's body. She was too occupied with her work. Besides, she loved her children too much that she refused to believe they could do something bad.

As days passed, Puti Kasumbo's pregnancy began to show. Everyone who ever came to the house noticed it and talked about it. As the saying went, "you can close the mouth of a cave but you'll never close a man's mouth." The news spread all over the village. Only *Etek* Bainar was oblivious to it. Mainly because no one dared to tell her.

People were getting more and more curious. They wanted to ascertain whether or not Puti Kasumbo was pregnant. They wanted to prove it was not just a nasty rumor. Every day, when *Etek* Bainar had left, one or two villagers would come to the house, trying to get a glimpse of Puti Kasumbo.

"There's no doubt about it. Puti Kasumbo is pregnant. Look at her pale face. She is skinny, but her stomach has gotten bigger and bigger," a woman said to another woman. They came to *Etek* Bainar house and were lucky to get a close look at Puti Kasumbo.

Feeling their eyes on her, Puti Kasumbo quickly scurried away to her room. She began to feel ashamed. She knew they were talking about her and her stomach. She cried and told her brother. Sutan Lanjuangan just kept silent. He did not know what to do. He had no idea how to handle this matter. Her sister was carrying

his child.

“*Tek Ros*, does *Etek Bainar* know her daughter is pregnant? What do you say about it, *Etek Ros*?” People asked *Etek Ros* every time they saw her. They thought *Etek Ros* had to know something. She was the one taking care of the children, after all.

Etek Ros felt reluctant to see the villagers, let alone answering their questions. She did not know what to say to them. She was also worried that *Etek Bainar* would get mad if she babbled about Puti Kasumbo to outsiders. *Etek Bainar* would surely yell at her, or even kicked her out, if she knew. Considering the possibility that she might lose her job and her only source of living, *Etek Ros* was convinced that it would be better to shut her mouth, no matter what people said. Poverty had made *Etek Ros* very afraid of and obedient to *Etek Bainar*.

Puti Kasumbo and Sutan Lanjuangan adopted the same policy, keeping their mouth shut. Ever since the pregnancy showed, they kept to themselves even more. They never walked out of the house anymore. Lately, they even did not walk out of their shared room. The two teenagers had almost lost their spirit. A lot were going on their mind. They were afraid, worried, and confused. They did not know what to do. Both had become gloomy and broody kids. Puti Kasumbo even lost her appetite. Every day, she just sat in her room, lost in thought, and then cried her eyes out. Every time they heard footsteps around the house,

they became rigid with fear. They were ashamed if anyone saw them.

Amidst all this, *Etek* Bainar was still unaware of what happened to her children. Every day, she was busy managing her properties and wealth. She went here and there, checking everything. Here, the fields were ready to be seeded; there, the irrigation needed to be repaired; in another place, it was time to harvest the paddy. In addition, she had to handle her trading businesses every week. As an old saying went, *Etek* Bainar experienced “the paddy was ripe, the corns were blooming”, which meant that money and wealth came to her from every corner. *Etek* Bainar was occupied every day, from dawn to dusk, with her wealth. She only saw her children when they were asleep. She went out of the house when her children were still sleeping and she came back late at night, when they had gone to bed. She did not have the slightest idea of what was happening under her roof. She was oblivious to the problem her children were facing. Furthermore, no one dared to tell her about all that.

“Puti, my dear sister. I regret what we have done. I’m very sorry for what you have to go through. But I don’t know what to do, Sis. What can we do to solve this problem? I am your brother, you are my sister. We once lived in the same womb. What we did is a great sin, few are greater than that. Sooner or later, people will kick us out of the village. We have brought shame to

our family, to our society. We have violated the rules of both tradition and religion,” Sutan Lanjuangan said, regretting everything. He ran his hand to his hair, messing it up, again and again. It was what he always did when he was confused and frustrated. He looked at the floor, slumped against the couch. Beside him, his sister sat quietly. She was as messy and sick-looking as he was.

“What should we do, *Uda*? Where can we go? I am afraid. The villagers will never allow us to stay here anymore. *Uda*, I am scared, *Uda*.” Puti Kasumbo began crying again, holding her brother’s hand tightly.

They both cried. Only *Etek* Ros and *Pak* Apuak knew what they were going through, but there was nothing the two servants could do to help. They could only share the teenagers’ pain and sadness. The house became more and more gloomy every day. Everyone in it wore a sad face. Puti Kasumbo never laughed anymore. There was no smile in Sutan Lanjuangan’s face. *Etek* Ros tried hard to busy herself. She needed the distraction. Meanwhile, *Pak* Apuak drowned himself in his work around the house. Every time a villager passed by the house, *Pak* Apuak quickly went away, avoiding them. He did not want to talk to them because he knew what they were going to ask.

As the saying went, “*sesal dahulu pendapatan, sesal kemudian tiada berguna*.” It was good to realize a mistake early, but there

was no use crying over spilled milk. That saying could not be truer. Everyone should think about what they would do before they did it to avoid bad consequences. It would be too late to cry if the consequence had happened. Of course one could regret it, but it would be of no use. What happened had happened, and it could not be undone. Puti Kasumbo and Sutan Lanjuangan could not turn back time and undo what they had done. They had spilled the milk and they had to face the consequences.

One day, some of the villagers could not hold themselves any longer. They decided that they had enough and that they had to do something about this matter. They went to *Etek Bainar's* house to see the two problematic children.

They wanted to ascertain that the news was true. They needed to interrogate Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo.

“Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo, come out here. We want to see you,” a muscular man stood in front of other men and women at the steps of *Etek Bainar's* house. Apparently he was the leader of the group. They represented all people of Jorong Sungai Tolang.

Seeing a mob standing in front of the house and calling his employer's children, *Pak Apuak* quickly went to the back of the house to find *Etek Ros*.

“Ros, take Puti Kasumbo and Sutan Lanjuangan somewhere else.

Now! They won't make it facing those people. Quick, Ros, quick!" *Pak Apuak* whispered to *Etek Ros* urgently.

Shaking with fear, *Etek Ros* quickly went to look for *Puti Kasumbo* and *Sutan Lanjuangan* in the house. The two teenagers were hiding behind a huge pillar in the middle of the house. They both were crying, hands clamped tightly on their mouths, trying to stifle the sound. They were utterly afraid. None of them gave a fight when *Etek Ros* pulled them up and ushered them out of the back door.

When they were out, *Sutan Lanjuangan* and *Puti Kasumbo* decided to run away. They ran hand in hand towards *Bukit Tolang*, a small hill at the far end of the village. A wave of fear and shame ran over them, especially because their mother was not there to protect them. *Etek Ros*, who had intended to help them, could not keep up. She was quickly left behind. She could only cry seeing the children she had helped raised all these years run away into the night. *Etek Ros* was broken-hearted. She wished she could do something, anything, to help the two teenagers. *Sutan Lanjuangan* and *Puti Kasumbo* ran like bats out of hell towards *Bukit Tolang*.

"O, God, please protect those children. Have mercy on them, Gracious God. They are just kids. They don't know any better. Please, don't punish them. I beg you, please . . ." *Etek Ros* fell on her knees and raised her hands in prayers.

Etek Ros was really worried about Puti Kasumbo and Sutan Lanjuangan. She saw them running away from the safety of their home because they were afraid and ashamed. *Etek* Ros could not imagine what other challenges and hardship they would face.

They both had never lived outside their home. They had never had to do anything by themselves. Everything they needed was always given to them. They had no idea how to survive in this world. Yet, they were running towards the hill. Bukit Tolang was a wild area. Only hunters who had plenty of experiences with wild animals, plants, and damp air dared to explore the hill. It was impossible that Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo could survive out there. Thinking of that, *Etek* Ros cried and prayed even harder.

“Sepandai-pandai menyimpan bangkai, bau busuknya pasti akan tercium juga.” No matter how well one kept a carcass, the smell would always spread. That was a good saying for this situation.

What Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo tried to hide had finally come out. People of the village now know for sure that Puti Kasumbo was pregnant and they were furious about it. It was a cultural belief that if a person did something inappropriate, it would bring misfortune to the whole village. God would struck them all with punishment. It could be a crop failure, an outbreak of disease, or natural disaster that would destroy the society. That was why social conventions in Jorong Sungai Tolang stipulated

that the perpetrator of the inappropriate behavior should receive a punishment. He or she would be beaten by all villagers before being banished from the village. After that, the villagers would hold a ceremony of *Tolak Bala* to dispel disasters. It was believed that the ceremony would appease God's wrath and divert disasters from destroying the village.

It was fate that when Sutan Lanjuangan and Puti Kasumbo were running away, their mother arrived home. She saw the mob gathered in front of her house and called her children. When she looked around, she saw the shadows of her children running towards the hill. Without even thinking, she sprinted away after them. The people watched the three of them from afar. *Etek Bainar* called to her children, asking them to stop. But they kept running. Every once in a while they would glance behind and yelled back to their mother, saying that they would not come back. They kept running and their mother kept pursuing them, until finally they arrived at the foot of Bukit Tolang.

There, Puti Kasumbo slowed down to a walk. Sutan Lanjuangan followed suit. *Etek Bainar* quickly reached them. She begged them to come home. She knew that Puti Kasumbo was pregnant, but she did not see the problem in that. What had happened, happened.

Nothing they could do to turn it back. She just wished they would come home and return to their normal life. *Etek Bainar*

promised her children that she would take care of the situation and they would all be happy again. However, Puti Kasumbo just shook her head, insisting that she would never come home. Her shame was greater than her trust in her mother. No promise of protection could convince Puti Kasumbo to change her mind.

Knowing his sister, and hearing her decision, Sutan Lanjuangan seconded that. He promised to always follow and protect Puti Kasumbo wherever she went. *Etek Binar* cried pitifully when she heard them. She decided to follow them, even to the edge of the earth. Puti Kasumbo told her mother to go home. It was not her mother's fault. This was all her and her brother's doing. She wanted to face the consequences together with Sutan Lanjuangan, without involving her mother at all. However, *Etek Binar* refused to listen to Puti Kasumbo. Nothing they said would change her mind. She would follow her children until the end of time.

Hearing that, Puti Kasumbo raised her hand and pointed to the heaven. She cursed herself, "O, God Almighty, the King of the Universe, listen to me. Turn me and my brother into stones. Strike us with the punishment we deserve. We have sinned and we will face the consequences. Turn us into stones, now!"

Out of the blue, a single flash of lightning struck down, followed by a rumbling thunder. It struck Puti Kasumbo and Sutan Lanjuangan right on their chests. Suddenly, they both turned into

a pair of human-shaped rocks, standing still at the foot of the Bukit Tolang. *Etek* Binar jumped and hugged them tight. The moment her skin touched the rocks, she too turned into a stone. The three of them, a family, became statues.

This was an example of the old saying, '*tangan mencincang, bahu memikul*', which literally translated into 'the hands chopped and the shoulders bear the burden'. It meant that one's action would always bring consequences to that person.

The people of Sungai Tolang witnessed all this. They saw how *Etek* Binar, Sutan Lanjuangan, and Puti Kasumbo turned into rocks. The people decided to call the rocks Batu Puti Banduik. The word *batu* meant rock or stone; while *banduik* was a word play from *gonduik*, which meant 'potbellied' or 'pregnant'. Until today, the people of Minangkabau believed that the rocks were still there, at a hill in Jorong Sungai Tolang.