

Raden Mandasia Si Pencuri Daging Sapi — nukilan

KETIKA aku dan Loki Tua sampai di Alun-Alun Selatan, dua pesakitan sudah dibawa ke atas langkan setinggi tiga puluh kaki.

“Sabadu, kau mengakui kesalahanmu?” tanya bintangara kepala kepada si terikat yang berbadan tegap.

Pertanyaan itu tak butuh jawaban benar-benar rupanya karena si bintangara langsung memerintahkan Sabadu diseret ke pinggir langkan. Bila tadi kulihat ia hampir menangis, sekarang tangisnya sudah pecah menjadi-jadinya. Aku pernah melihat pria-pria tegap menangis sebelumnya tetapi tidak meraung seperti ini.

“Aku tak salah apa-apa. Aku hanya diminta berdiri di luar tembok,” kata Sabadu di sela tangisnya. Dagunya berusaha menunjuk kawannya yang kurus hitam jangkung. Tapi dagunya hanya berhasil memutar sepertiga dari yang ia inginkan karena langsung dihajar oleh batang tombak seorang prajurit.

“Pencuri macam kau mana mau mengaku?” kata prajurit pemukul membentak.

“Aku memang pernah mencuri, tapi aku hari ini tidak salah apa-apa,” kata Sabadu terus meratap.

“Lempar,” kata si bintangara.

Perintah itu tidak dipatuhi sebagaimana mestinya karena prajurit yang memukul tadi malah menendang punggung Sabadu. Akibatnya sama saja, Sabadu melayang sejenak di udara. Benar-benar sebentar karena teriaknya pendek dan tubuhnya segera menghantam tanah.

Orang-orang memanjangkan leher mereka. Terdengar suara erangan Sabadu.

“Ia masih hidup,” kata prajurit yang berada di bawah langkan.

“Bawa ke atas, lempar lagi,” kata si bintangara.

Aku menelan ludah mendengarnya. Sebelum memasuki Kotaraja Gerbang Agung, Loki Tua sudah mewanti-wantiku dan Raden Mandasia mengenai kegemaran orang-orang kerajaan ini menghukum mati pesakitan mereka. Caranya bermacam-macam, seringkali jauh lebih tidak aduhai ketimbang seperti yang kami saksikan sekarang ini: ada orang hukuman yang ditaruh di dalam patung banteng besi yang kosong di bagian dalamnya lalu di

bawah patung itu dinyalakan api, ada yang direbus di kuili dengan api kecil, ada yang ditarik oleh empat kuda sehingga tubuhnya terpisah-pisah, ada yang diumpangkan pada anjing-anjing yang sebelumnya sudah sengaja dibuat kelaparan, ada yang kepalanya dibuat remuk dengan cara rumit yaitu dijatuhkan kura-kura yang sebelumnya dibawa terbang tinggi oleh elang yang dilatih khusus—biasanya yang menjumpai ajal seperti ini adalah pelawak yang tak sanggup membuat raja dan pembesar istana tertawa dalam jamuan negara, dan ada pula yang ditelanjangi dan diikat di tiang lalu digigit sampai mati oleh setidaknya tiga budak katai yang selalu diperintahkan mengincar buah zakar terlebih dahulu. Untuk yang terakhir ini aku tak bisa memastikan mana yang lebih bernasib malang, si calon mayat atau para algojo.

Tubuh Sabadu yang berdarah dan patah di beberapa bagian dibawa lagi ke atas. Tanpa menunggu lebih lama, Sabadu kemudian dilempar, kali ini diarahkan ke batu bulat besar di bawah sisi kanan langkan. Suara telak dari leher yang patah menandakan Sabadu tak bakal menangis lagi.

“Gila,” kataku, “memang dia salah apa?” kataku.

Rupanya suaraku terlalu keras. Bukan hanya Loki Tua yang mendengar tetapi juga orang-orang yang berada di dekat kami. Mereka langsung menatap kami tajam.

“Kau temannya, ya?” tanya seseorang.

“Bukan,” kataku cepat-cepat.

“Tak percaya,” kata seseorang. Ia kemudian memanggil prajurit. “Tuan, orang ini mencurigakan,” katanya.

Prajurit itu mendekat. Aku menaruh tanganku di atas kerambit yang tersembunyi di balik sabuk kain. Anjing, bikin perkara adalah hal terakhir yang kami inginkan tetapi bila terpaksa apa boleh buat, senjatakु siap kucabut.

“Kau orang asing?” tanyanya.

“Kami pelancong,” kata Raden Mandasia. Tangannya menahan tanganku agar tak membuat gerakan lebih lanjut. Sejak kapan ia berada di dekatku?

Sikap tenang Raden Mandasia membuat prajurit itu segan dan berjalan menjauh. Tapi, keributan kecil ini ternyata menarik perhatian si bintang kepala. Ia menuruni tangga langkan dan berjalan ke arah kami. Matanya naik turun melihatku dan Raden Mandasia. Ia tampaknya bukan jenis orang yang gampang mundur, terlebih saat berhadapan dengan orang asing.

“Kau,” kata si bintang kepala sambil menunjuk hidungnya, “wajahmu mirip Bugalu.”

“Siapa?” kataku tak mengerti.

“Hoi, bawa ia turun,” kata si bintangara.

Ternyata Bugalu adalah pesakitan yang satunya lagi. Dari jarak lima belas kaki sudah terlihat jelas bahwa wajahnya sama sekali tak mirip denganku, kulitnya pun lebih gelap daripada kulitku yang sebetulnya sudah sawo kelewat matang, tapi tinggi dan perawakan kami memang hampir sama. Tak urung aku menyeringai. Tapi, si bintangara tak mau melepaskan kami begitu saja.

“Bukan teman kalian?” tanya si bintangara.

“Baru melihat hari ini,” kataku.

Si bintangara masih memutari kami bertiga sebelum ia berhenti di depan Loki Tua. Tangannya meraih sebutir telur rebus yang belum terkupas dari kantong yang dibawa Loki Tua. Telur yang dibeli Loki Tua di pasar pagi tadi adalah telur angsa jambul perak, hewan asli Gerbang Agung. Telur ini istimewa karena dipercaya orang-orang Gerbang Agung memiliki khasiat yang berbeda-beda tergantung musim saat telur dihasilkan. Syaratnya, telur mesti direbus-- terserah mau dibikin telur asin atau telur pindang atau telur rebus biasa saja-- tak boleh didadar atau diceplok. Telur rebus angsa jambul perak yang didapatkan pada musim panas seperti yang barusan dicomot si bintangara diyakini bisa menerbitkan rasa gembira dan semangat bertanding. Telur musim gugur diyakini mendatangkan perasaan kehilangan dan keinginan mengubah lagu-lagu sedih. Telur musim dingin dipercaya menyalakan hasrat beranak-pinak. Telur musim semi paling dihindari karena sekalipun jika diasinkan bagian kuningnya niscaya akan menjadi sangat masir dan enak tak tertahankan, pemakannya akan merasakan semangat mencederai, bahkan sampai timbul nafsu membunuh, utamanya kepada saudara sedarah.

“Bukan teman kalian?” kata si bintangara mengulang pertanyaannya. Kami menggeleng. Tapi, ia masih bertanya lagi, “Yakin?”

Kami tak menanggapi dan ia juga tak membutuhkannya karena ia langsung memerintahkan Bugalu diikat di sebuah tiang pancang. Bulu kudukku mulai meremang ketika si bintangara itu mengambil jarak sekitar lima belas kaki. Saat melihat tangannya menimang-nimang telur rebus yang diambil dari Loki Tua, aku punya firasat tak enak tentang apa yang bakal ia lakukan berikutnya. Betul saja, setelah melirik kami, tangannya dengan cepat melemparkan telur itu ke arah Bugalu.

Plaak!

Si bintangara itu pelempar yang sangat jitu. Telur rebus bukan benda keras, tapi karena menghantam tepat mata kiri Bugalu, mata itu langsung berdarah. Teriakan kesakitan Bugalu, yang baru kudengar pertama kali sejak ia diseret tadi menyulut orang-orang sorai bersorak.

“Mati! Mati! Mati!”

Paras Bugalu memucat. Luntur sudah keangkuhannya yang tadi. Setidaknya, ia tak meraung seperti kawannya.

Si bintang menghampiri lagi Loki Tua dan kali ini mengambil semua telur rebus beserta kantongnya. Satu per satu telur ia tembakkan ke wajah Bugalu. Semuanya kena sasaran. Orang-orang berteriak senang, wajah si bintang itu pun terlihat sangat girang. Ketika telur di tangannya habis, ia berseru, “Tunggu apa lagi?”

Tanpa diperintah dua kali orang-orang yang membawa telur rebus melemparkan sekuat tenaga makanan yang seharusnya menjadi santap siang mereka. Ketika tak tersisa lagi telur di tangan, mereka memunguti batu di lapangan dan melemparkannya ke pesakitan yang celaka itu. Di tengah kemeriahan itu kami menyingkir dan mengambil jarak yang aman untuk mengamati. Ketika kepala Bugalu terkulai, kami sudah berlalu dari Alun-Alun Selatan.

Pada hari itu, lahir ungkapan baru di Kerajaan Gerbang Agung: suguhan telur rebus. Bugalu tewas oleh lemparan batu dan mungkin juga rasa malu, tapi sampai kemudian hari orang-orang masih menyebut kematiannya tersebut oleh telur rebus. Istilah ‘disuguhi telur rebus’ kemudian dipakai orang untuk menyebut hukum rajam sementara “beraroma telur” dipakai untuk menyebut seseorang yang sebentar lagi bakal dimampuskan. Orang-orang yang berselisih pun sering memasukkan telur rebus dalam gertakan mereka, seperti, “Mau kuberi telur rebus sekarang juga?”

Prince Mandasia The Meat Thief — an excerpt

When Old Loki and I arrived at South Square, the two prisoners had already been dragged onto a thirty-foot ledge.

"Sabadu, do you confess to the crimes you've committed?" the chief officer asked the burlier of the pair.

Evidently his question required no answer, because the officer immediately ordered Sabadu dragged to the edge of the overhang. Just a moment ago he'd seemed on the brink of tears, but by now he'd lost all control. I'd seen big men cry before, but never like this.

"I didn't do anything wrong! I was just supposed to stand outside the walls," Sabadu said between sobs. He pushed his jaw accusingly toward his lean companion, but was stopped mid-course by a blow to the face from the butt of a soldier's spear.

"Why should we believe a thief like you?" barked the soldier who'd struck him.

"I've stolen before, but not today—I haven't done anything wrong," Sabadu wailed.

"Toss him," said the officer.

The command wasn't carried out quite right. The same soldier who'd hit Sabadu a moment earlier now gave him a kick from behind. But it had the same effect: Sabadu floated for a moment in the air—no more than an instant, really—just long enough for him to let out a short cry before his body slammed to the ground.

People were craning their necks to see. Sabadu's groans below were still audible.

"He's still alive," a soldier called from below.

"Bring him back up, throw him again," said the officer.

At that, my tongue went heavy in my throat. Before arriving at the Kingdom of Gerbang Agung, known as the High Gate, Old Loki had already warned us about the penchant they had there for executing prisoners. Their methods were varied and often far more unsavory than what we saw that day: some were sentenced to be locked inside the hollow of an iron bull that was then set over a flame; others, brought to a boil in a cauldron over low heat; others, dragged by four horses to rend their bodies to pieces; others, fed to

dogs that had been deliberately starved for days prior; still others had their heads crushed by a rather complex method wherein turtles were dropped from great heights by eagles trained specifically for this purpose (such an end was usually met by jesters who failed to entertain the king and his court at the royal banquet) and then there were others still who were stripped naked and tied to a stake, where they were then bitten to death by at least three dwarf slaves, whose orders were always to start at the testicles. When it comes to this last one, I can't decide whose luck is worse: the corpse-to-be, or his executioners.

Bloody and broken, Sabadu's body was carried back up. With little delay, Sabadu was thrown once more, this time aimed at a large round stone below the right side of the ledge. At the sound of his neck breaking, it was clear that Sabadu would never cry again.

"This is insane," I said. "What did he do?"

My voice was apparently too loud. Old Loki wasn't the only one who heard me—so had some of the people standing near us. They turned on us with piercing glares.

"You're a friend of his, huh?" one asked.

"No," I rushed to say.

"Like hell you're not," said another. He called one of the soldiers over. "Sir, this man looks suspicious."

The soldier approached. I rested my hand on the kerambit I had concealed in the folds of my cloth belt. Damn it to hell—the last thing we needed in that moment was to make a scene, but if we had to fight, so be it. My weapon was ready.

"You're not from around here, are you?" he asked.

"Just passing through," said Prince Mandasia. He put his hand out to keep me from moving any closer to the soldier. How long had he been standing near me?

Prince Mandasia's composure seemed to make the soldier nervous, and he walked away. But even this minor commotion had attracted the attention of the chief officer. He climbed down the steps from the ledge and approached us, scanning me, then the Prince, with his eyes. He didn't strike me as the kind of man to back down easily, especially when dealing with strangers.

"You," said the officer, jabbing a finger at my nose, "You've got a face like Bugalu."

"Who?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"Hoi! Bring him down here."

It turned out Bugalu was the other prisoner. Even from fifteen feet away, I could already tell that his face looked nothing like mine. His skin was darker than the overripe sawo color of my own, though it was true our height and build were almost identical. Seeing him, I couldn't help but smile with relief. But the officer wasn't done.

"Friend of yours?" he asked.

"I've never seen him before today."

He circled the three of us before stopping in front of Old Loki. His hand reached for a boiled egg, still unpeeled, in Old Loki's basket. They were the ones he'd bought at the market that morning, laid by the silver-crested geese native to Gerbang Agung. These eggs are special, believed to retain different properties depending on the season they are laid. As long as, of course, the egg is boiled—whether for salted, hard-boiled, or plain boiled eggs—they mustn't be scrambled into an omelet or fried. When boiled, an egg laid by a silver-crested goose during summer, like the one in the officer's hand, is believed to bestow on those who eat it a feeling of pleasure and a competitive spirit. An autumn egg is believed to bring out a sense of loss and a desire to compose sad songs. A winter egg is believed to kindle the desire for mating. A spring egg, however, is best avoided; though the yolk is guaranteed to be exquisitely crumbly when brined and unbearably delicious, it can ignite an urge for violence in its consumer and even awaken an appetite for murder—in particular, the murder of one's own kin.

"No friend of yours?" the officer repeated for a second time. We shook our heads. Still,

he asked once more: "You're sure?"

We didn't offer a response, but he evidently didn't need one, because at once he ordered Bugalu tied to a stake. The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as the officer neared his target from about fifteen feet away. As I watched him weighing Old Loki's egg in his hand, I dreaded what would come next. Sure enough, after a glance back at us, a flick of his hand sent the egg flying straight towards Bugalu.

Plaak!

The officer was a good shot. A boiled egg isn't a particularly hard object, but since it had hit Bugalu straight in the left eye, his eye began bleeding at once. A cry from Bugalu, the first I'd heard since he'd been dragged up there, set the crowds roaring and cheering.

"Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!"

Bugalu's face went pale. His proud expression had faded. At least he wasn't howling like his friend had.

Again the officer approached Old Loki, this time helping himself to the whole basket of eggs. One by one, he fired them at Bugalu's face. Every single one hit its target. The people cried out in delight, and even the officer's face clearly displayed his excitement. When he'd exhausted his own supply of eggs, he shouted out to the crowd, "What are you waiting for?"

Without needing to be told twice, those in the crowd with boiled eggs on hand began to hurl with all their might the food that was supposed to have been that day's lunch. Once their hands were empty, they picked up stones from the ground and continued hurling them at the poor prisoner. Amid all the revelry, we slunk off to watch from a safe distance. By the time Bugalu's head began to droop, we'd made it out of South Square.

That day, a new phrase was born in the Kingdom of Gerbang Agung: "to be served boiled eggs." It was the stones, and also perhaps the shame, that was Bugalu's actual cause of death, but from then on people called it a "death by boiled eggs." The term "to be served boiled eggs" was thereafter used to refer to a stoning, while the phrase "egg-scented" was used to refer to someone who's soon to be killed. People began to use "boiled eggs" in their squabbles with one another, threatening things like, "You looking to get served some boiled eggs right now?"

* Co-translated by Yusi Avianto Pareanom and Laura Moser