



SUMANDAK

By: Amil Jaya

Biodata

AMIL JAYA, whose real name is Datuk Ismail Abbas was born in Kampung Pirasan, Kota Belud, Sabah, on 5th November 1939. Amil Jaya writes novels, short stories, poetries and essays. Two of his outstanding novels are *Cerah* (1976) which won second prize in the Sayembara Menulis Novel held by Badan Bahasa Sabah (1973), and his second novel, *Ngayau* (1979) won first prize in a competition in 1977. His short stories, "Lintah", became the text to be studied for the APM literature elective, and "Tragedi" became the KOMSAS

text for Form 5 students. He received the 1990 Sabah Director's Award and the 1992 S.E.A. Write Award.

THE PASSAGE of love between us has gone far enough. The intimacy truly solid. In fact that love is enough to give us happiness. The declarations that we vowed are truly strong and enduring. Too strong and enduring to unravel or come awry. Why then do you suddenly request this separation. I do not understand and I become confused. "Why does it end like this, Sumandak." Jarbin put forward the question, after succeeding in containing the turbulence of sorrow and anger within him. Sumandak was silent for a rather long time. On her face is a glimpse of sadness, melancholy, and bewilderment and in fact, the pain of her grief is quite apparent. She too warred with the tumultuous sorrow of her emotions. Deep in her heart is scattered the pain of her sad emotions. In fact, sadness is boiling over. The words Jarbin uttered reached her hearing clearly. What is implicit in the words uttered she could understand. She was in a dilemma. What she heard touched her unbearably.

"Then, we were really young, I was *sunti*, a maiden, you were a youth. Our love felt really sweet and made us so happy as if there could be no unhappiness to mar it. In that love everything went smoothly and sweetly. We will be together. We vowed to fulfill our promises and my whisper of love filled my heart. We were determined that eventually the tie of our love will become a love knot, husband and wife. We did not see that there were obstacles to that love. Everything went easily, well, and smoothly. Really easy and the difficulties of obstacles never

even crossed our minds. We were really positive and sure. We will reach the peak of that love in a peaceful and harmonious marriage. We had no idea there would be difficulties and obstacles." Sumandak spoke lucidly in a soft sweet voice.

"And the sweetness of that love we should preserve forever to enrich our hearts. Its passion we should enjoy together. You are true to the words I uttered telling you to keep intact the intimacy of our love and affection. I hope Sumandak is still like before, true to our hearts." Jarbin uttered the words hopefully. His eyes were on Sumandak's face, which looked sad.

"No longer like that Jarbin, my love. My *sunti* had become *sukad*. Knowing has stretched an obstacle before us; the sweet promises we uttered turn out to be not as lovely. The strength of our promises is not really solid. We only deluded ourselves. Now we are mature. That maturity is what made me look into myself. That inward self scrutiny made me realize that I am not as free as imagined or hoped. There are subtle ties that shackle me. When we were at university, we were really free and hedonistic. We seemed to have emerged from a cocoon which shackled us to the culture of our ancestors. We were free to mix, we were free to enjoy, we were free to act and we were free to do whatever we dreamed. We really forgot about integrity and purity and the cultural boundaries in the ups and downs of our life. It appears that the joys of life are not without its crushing waves and turbulent sorrows." Sumandak uttered the words gently but firmly.

"But now we are in the situation of getting to know the realities of life. There are people by our side, there are eyes watching our actions and a culture that constrains our reactions so as we do not forget the culture of purity of our ancestors." Sumandak presented the result of intellectual scrutiny on the ending of her *mandak*.

"I am bewildered and confused. What do you really mean Sumandak?" Jarbin asked. He is restless. Listening and after comprehending what his sweetheart had brought up.

"Let us stop whatever we have been doing up till now. We stop our revelry and freedom at once. We have violated so many of the customs and mores of our people. We were aware that there was a really sturdy barrier ahead of us. We had not taken the easy road really. There was an endless row of obstacles in front of us." Sumandak said as explanation. She seemed devoid of emotions. She has emptied the emotions from her heart.

"YOU MEAN we end our love and loyalty here?" Jarbin cut her short. He was seething with impatience.

"Yes, that is what I mean. And I can sense that you are beginning to understand."

"Your excuse for requesting the intimacy of our love be terminated

here, about your having a good enough excuse. Can you give excuses which will enable me to think about their substance?" Jarbin added.

"We are of different religions and different cultures. We did not think about the thing that is really significant in our lives. Your religion is Islam, I am a pagan. Something so concrete separates us. Our faith becomes a reason concrete enough for me to come to a decision."

"Paganism is not a religion. It is only a way of life and a culture." Jarbin explained.

"True, in our reckoning as educated human beings, paganism is just a culture but to our ancestors and their tribe, paganism is a religious belief. I cannot undo this fact. It exists and is so intimate and entrenched in the belief of my tribal race." Sumandak presented her arguments and the concept of religion to the tribe she belongs to.

"Sumandak, why is it only now do you tell me of your life principles. All those threaten our love. That love will be in conflict." Jarbin looked regretful.

"Then I was *sunti*, a maiden, a virgin, now I am *sukad*. I am an adult now and I know what it means now. Now I know the meaning of life and living based on my socio-culture. Socio-culture is enough to have a hold on our social life," Sumandak again put forward her thoughts.

"Even though you are a graduate?" Jarbin asked, reminding Sumandak.

"Yes, even though I am a graduate. In fact, being a graduate is what had matured my mind and my way of thinking." Sumandak admitted.

"So what is the conclusion and what the decision about our love affair?" Jarbin asked. The tone of the question is no longer that emotional.

"Stop that feeling of love right here. We end it and we start, we begin again a new love in our lives." Sumandak spoke gently.

"How simple is Sumandak's reckoning. Are there no emotional backlashes for you?" Jarbin asked. He seemed surprised.

"Sorrow. But there is emotion in the grief. My heart is turbulent and I am crying inside to come to this decision. The pain is extreme." Sumandak appeared to be trying hard to contain the sobbing in her breast.

"What have you realized and what is the sorrow?" Jarbin asked swiftly.

"It is not easy for me to leave my pagan faith. I will be deemed abnormal by my tribal race if I left my pagan practices. They will protest against my action all life long."

"As to my feelings or the emotions I am experiencing. I just want to be free of overwhelming emotions." Sumandak made clear her attitude.

“Great, you are really great, Sumandak. You did not lose to your feminine emotions. You could contain the pain and your sorrow. Truly, you are an extraordinary woman. You could contain the smouldering and the pull of your love. You are really great. Sumandak.” Jarbin expressed his feeling of admiration for Sumandak.

“Thank you. High praise indeed.” Sumandak replied. Her emotions showed not a ripple. She was calm.

“How about the request to part, Jarbin?” Sumandak asked. She watched Jarbin’s face. She wanted to see the change in expression on her lover’s face.

“No choice. You have rejected me. I accept your rationale. I borrow your words and expressions. As a defeated and rejected lover. There is nothing I can do. I do not want to plead further. I know your heart is resolute. Your decision is final and absolute. Further pleas are useless. I am by way of the defeated party. I accept your rejection. The punishment made me realize that human beings are extraordinary. We can only propose. God disposes. I accept your request for separation. I know I shall be grieving for some time. But I am sure I shall recover from the calamity that has struck.” Jarbin groaned his resignation. He was in despair. This is the reality.

“Congratulations.”

“For what?”

“Your courage and strength in containing the tempest of love and sorrow.”

“Why do you not follow in your brother’s and sister’s footsteps?” Jarbin asked.

“You mean?” Sumandak interjected. Her eyes meeting his sharply. She stared at him for a long while.

“Your sister Dora is now married to Leong Ah Kun. She is sure to have left her pagan ways. Your brother Alfred left paganism because he married Lucia. There is no reason for you not to follow me and leave paganism. Even in your immediate family precedence has been set. They left their pagan ways.” Jarbin argued. He made a final attempt to make Sumandak capitulate.

“How come when it comes to my turn you make a decision which is so drastic.” Jarbin added.

“DRASTIC? That is your perception. To me it is a normal thing. Usual. You take my feeling of love too seriously. Like the love of old timers. They could lose their sanity because of love. Will kill, kidnap and abduct other people’s children because of their love. In our era, we should not be like that. We should be open. In love there should not be coercion.” Sumandak tossed the idea which was based on the rationale that she had thought out. “To meet, to love, to marry is normal in man’s life, that is a normal aspect. So many experience, it.”

Sumandak added.

“Sumandak feels nothing. Are you not pained by this parting. A love that we have nurtured for years. Is there no hurt in your heart?” Jarbin asked as he watched her face closely.

“I held on to the rationale. No, you did not, did you?” Jarbin pressed.

“Yes, when I was *sunti*. No, not when I am *sukad*.”

“Why so. Your action is so drastic Sumandak!”

“To you maybe, but to me it is not drastic. It happens all the time. It is normal. Jarbin, you take your feelings of love too seriously!”

“You?” Jarbin interjected again.

“Nothing unusual. Meeting and parting is normal. So many experienced it,” Sumandak explained.

“Sumandak does not feel anything? Are you not sad about the love that has gone on for years?” Jarbin repeated. His emotions were boiling over.

“No, I feel nothing at all.” Sumandak answered without emotion.

“You are great Sumandak. You are really great. Your emotion and your love you can control. You are extraordinary, my Mandak!”

“Thank you. That is high praise. Thank you.”

“Actually you have been able to distance yourself from the turbulence and the tempest of this love. I reckon you now can accept the realities of this life.” Sumandak praised Jarbin’s words.

“Yes, you have taught me to be resigned. Deep in your heart you have checked my existence. I realize that you have rejected me from your heart. Why should I plead for the sympathy of your love when you have stated that your *sukad* has awakened you to past mistakes. Never mind. I can accept this fact. I will look forward. This life is full of unhappy turns. Yes, I am ready now to accept this separation. I pray you are strong enough. Forget me. Our love ends here!” Jarbin said, extremely sad. But he hid it, not willing to show it in front of Sumandak.

Sumandak kept silent. Head bowed. Her tears could not be held back any longer. The clear water flowed down her cheeks.

“You cry Sumandak. What happened?”

“I do not know why I feel such pain. You are a true gentleman, can accept the fact of this parting. I did not expect you to have such strength and resilience. Congratulations, my mighty man!”

“Thanks for the compliment. What can I do when we are not destined for each other? Your heart has made a resolute decision. I must accept the fact of this parting.”

“Yes, forget me Jarbin. That is how life goes. If it is not destined, then there will be no marriage for us. We each will be waiting for our destiny. Pray we will be strong enough for this ending.” Sumandak

said sadly. "Good-bye my sweetheart."

"Farewell my lover!"

Jarbin and Sumandak parted and went their separate ways. They accepted the separation with their individual emotional strengths.

(Translated by Hasnah Ibrahim)