



"Tiga Citra" (Three Figures) painted by Dewi Candraningrum (Acrylic on 50x60 Cm Canvas).

Kaplug

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THE WOMAN said nothing. There was no color of regret that sliced her brownish eyeballs. Life was unfair for her. Too often life ridiculed her. Insulting. It always took the side of men. Did it think that women were not living creatures? They were easily dragged, drowned, and cut into slices as it liked. And even more than those,

they were chopped up! This time, the woman promised to herself. Life must apologize to her, to the rules believed in by human being. The rules, that only favorable to the creatures named: men!

THE SOUND of river water throwing up its fluid washed Ni Luh Nyoman Kaplug's brownish body. The village maiden looked prettier, with her long hair touching the rippling river water. The sun did not dare to let its shine fall upon Kaplug's body. The village maiden was so enchanting when naked. The scent of her body made the trees around the river got shadier and more enchanting. Nothing's more beautiful than Kaplug. The little girl that day by day was growing up to be a woman. The real woman, the woman that had all beauty on the earth. Maybe even God also fell in love with her. No villagers dared to annoy her, because of a story handed down from generation to generation, which the villagers would never forget. Day by day the story had been expanding. It got scarier and even got longer and its ending got vaguer.

It started with Ni Wayah Kenyem, a rich woman liked by Dutch officials. She was a famous concubine then. All officials, and even the king fell in love with her. Kenyem enjoyed her life as a concubine, or whatever its term was. She felt she did not harm anyone, and did not hurt anything. Those cheese skinned people came, felt lonely, and needed women. What was wrong if she offered her body to the people from distant countries and in return received land, and a variety of goods which would not be used up until her hundredth descendants? Kenyem had a dream, someday she would establish a respected family clan. A family which would be reckoned in her birthplace. A family which would make people look and stare at her in an astonished manner. She did not want her descendants would share the same fate as hers. Lived poorly by being a servant who had to work hard and not get properly paid for her labor.

Now, with hectares of paddy field, abundant harvest yields, and also clove, coffee, nutmeg, and coconut plantations, Kenyem could become a respected Queen. No one dared to insult her. The villagers

came to her to ask for help. The woman felt her life was getting more perfect.

“No one will obstruct your dream. Luh. Life can collapse and fall down because we ourselves step to the wrong direction. Life is a game, and occasionally we may be deceitful. But it has the rules of the game. You must pay what you have taken. Nothing is free in the world. All things need careful calculation. You should be sharp in observation and crafty,” those are the words Luh Wayan Cobeg remembered. Her mother was always firm and calculating.

“Maybe you grow up without the figure of Bape, a father. Trust me that you will be still alive without men. When I was young, I have done many things. I never harm others. I never regret to be born as a village woman named: Kenyem. A woman who used to have no future and value. Rubbish.” It was as if Cobeg heard those words yesterday afternoon.

Was it wrong if as a woman Cobeg wanted to know the man who had sown his seeds onto her mother’s body? Was it wrong if she longed for a man figure? Another being that never lived in her mother’s home? A figure she respected, not as a servant that was always ready to serve her?

“You want to know your *Bape*. What for?”

“*Meme*, don’t you long for a man’s embrace?”

Kenyem cynically laughed. A man? What else was the type of man she wanted? Was there any figure that made her hungry? A figure she dreamt of? A figure that made her crazy? Since her body dripped blood, Kenyem felt the Life had shown her a way and an idea to run away from her sorrow. How could she fall in love with a man? While her father frequently beaten her mother. And even when the woman she called mother was pregnant. A dozen times Kenyem saw her mother almost going died due to severe bleeding. The woman tried to decry the name of his husband. But the man just cynically looked at her and rudely left her. So the little Kenyem tried to pull her mother’s body. She bathed her mother, and called the village midwife to forcefully take the babies from her belly as the babies had died when her father kicked them.

One night she woke up to pee. She saw her father drag her mother, undress her and greedily suck her body. After the man had been satisfied, he went back to his room. He snored soundly like a big wild boar!

Her mother walked wobbly, wiping off the blood that swiftly dripped from her groin. Kenyem knew if her father had inserted his male body into her mother's, the woman would get pregnant. It was terrifying to be a woman like her mother. It was strange that no voice heard from her mouth. The man could freely consume her mother's body anytime he wanted. He even did it when her mother was busy cooking.

How could Kenyem fall in love with a man? When a Dutch woman had her clean her house, she learned a lot about life there. The way the cheese skinned men looked at her made Kenyem not want to be a servant anymore. She must be the one who arranged her own life. All started from her body....

Then, Kenyem sold her body to any men who would pay her with the highest price. She enjoyed it so much, since she was fifteen, and hundreds of men had made her getting richer. Until she felt it was enough and she stopped it. Suddenly she felt a change in her body. She had eaten a variety of leaves. But the fetus in her belly gripped its roots stronger every day. Kenyem even believed that the fetus in her body frequently raged. When the fetus in her body got bigger, she felt something strange flow in her mind. She felt all sorrows, and loneliness which she bore for years when she served men were suddenly cured.

Kenyem had a friend. The woman started refusing to serve her body and then she stopped it. The creature grew in her body was like a friend that understand how to read various seasons that raged in her mind. Eleven months had passed. Kenyem poured out her fetus, a brown skinned girl was served in front of her eyes. She was so enchanting.

"Meme, don't you want to know who my Bape is?"

"What for, Luh?"

"For me!"

"Isn't Meme enough for you? I can be both a man and a woman, can't I? Where in your life do you feel insufficient? Don't you think, Luh? Compare your life to the women's of your age. You can eat as much as you like, and you have expensive clothes. Isn't it useless to have a man in this house? If he will beat me then. Maybe he will take pleasure from you...."

"Meme!"

"Am I wrong to say these things? What is the advantage of knowing the man who had made me pregnant? What if the man has had a family? We will hurt them. I won't do that!"

Kenyem sharply looked at the eyes of her daughter. The young woman bowed her head. She always felt defeated when she stared at her mother's eyes. The woman named Ni Luh Wayan Kenyem looked very charismatic indeed. What the villagers said was true. There were no other women who could compare with the charisma of this middle-aged woman. Day by day she looked more beautiful and more enchanting. And yet she was almost fifty.

Cobeg took a deep breath. "Tell me now, Luh. What happened to you? You come in the middle of the night without I Wayan Dogler, your husband. What has made you upset?" Kenyem tried to ease her mind. She wondered what kind of sap that dropped into her daughter's blood. Why was the woman that once grew in her womb so fragile? Kenyem felt day by day her only daughter had turned into a very sentimental and disgusting woman.

Whose blood had flown into the blood stream of her daughter? Kenyem remembered that shameful incident. Cobeg got pregnant, by a man she said she loved so much. A man who gave a meaning to her life. An unemployed man. Kenyem was convinced that the sturdy man would not be able to give her daughter three meals a day. How could Dogler make Cobeg devoted her life to him?

Kenyem took a breath. She tried to remember which man that was able to go through her womb? In vain? There was no face that passed from her brain labyrinth.

"Where is Dogler?"

"You'll get angry if I tell it?"

“Did I get angry when you begged to be married to him? And yet I don’t like Dogler. Now tell me! What else has happened in your life? I have told you. Life can be defeated if we stand firm against it. We dare to resist and challenge it! You always let the direction of life ruin your life, Luh. And you never try to resist. Yet you follow the stream and the wind direction decided by life itself!”

“Meme!”

Luh Wayan Cobeg cried. Kenyem couldn’t understand. What was wrong with the forming of her daughter? How could she turn into a woman that did not understand the wind direction? She even did not know her own wishes. How could a woman like this one live and survive? From her granddaughter, Kaplug, Kenyem learned that her daughter’s marriage went poorly. Eventually, Kenyem knew why Cobeg’s eyebrows looked strange. Kaplug told her, that her father hit her mother with a crowbar. She received seven stitches on her forehead. Kenyem took a deep breath. How could her daughter fall in love with a man who had cut and sliced up her body? What did her little woman want from Dogler? Moreover, since Kaplug was a year old, she had been entrusted to her. Kenyem was the one who taught her. The little girl who looked alike her when she had been a child. She was different from her mother who was easily broken and hurt.

Kenyem knew for sure, because of the blood of Dogler, who was rude and brutal. Kaplug would turn into a more courageous woman than her. Or...

YOU know how I love my Grandma, that I call *Odah*. A wonderful old woman. An old woman who understands that life that has treated us rudely and inhumanely needs to be defeated!

My Grandma named me: Kaplug. I am sure the wonderful woman intentionally gave me a name that once I hated. An odd and old name. But, the more mature I am, the more I understand that my name is the summary of my whole life. I know it for sure. Just like Grandma’s name, Kenyem. It means: smile.

Grandma’s life is so wonderful; I have heard the whole story of her

life's journey. The more mature I am, the more I understand why my grandma does not need men because she had tasted all types of men.

When my mother died: committed suicide (she was found with her head broken on the first floor) or killed by my father. My grandma did not seem hurt. She also did not want to know if her daughter died because she committed suicide, got slipped and fell, or was killed.

"A woman that can't show her firmness and express her own wish will be broken and fall down. She will never be a perfect woman! To be a woman, you have to be distinct; what you have chosen is what you have to believe."

"Odah... It's enough. Let Meme rested in peace." I tried to stop her words.

"She'll never be in peace because she was never contented with herself. Your Meme was a woman that never knew the wind direction. She also never knew where she would go and what she would do. You see, her life was so chaotic. As a woman, you need to learn a lot. You may make a mistake, but not the same mistake. If you make the same mistake, you are: stupid!"

I said nothing. For her mother, my mother had no place. For my father, her death made him free to wander with women, because my grandma had left my mother's house to my father: Dogler. The man I never knew closely. He even looked at me with a strange look. He once peeped me when I took a bath in the river.

I threw a knife. Now, he still drags his feet when he walks. They say his big toe was cut off and rotted. I felt satisfied hearing the news.

My name is Kaplug. I am the granddaughter of a woman I admire. The woman who is aware of the meaning of being a woman. The woman I never see shed her tears. The woman I love very much.

There is only one thing I never dare to say to my grandma. I also do not dare to tell her. Is it wrong if I, Kaplug never get aroused when I see men. I only get aroused when I see: women.

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