

DRAMA

Anike

Wong Phui Nam

CHARACTERS

Anike

Yasmine, *sister of Anike*

Maniaka, *the Raja*

Nadim, *son of Maniaka*

Bendahara

Tok Seth

Watchman

Messenger

Court Elders

Courtiers

Boy, *Tok Seth's 'seeing eye'*

The Raja's fighting men

Crowd

Place and Time: Merang before the arrival of Islam

PROLOGUE

It is the early hours before dawn. Anike is in a room in her house waiting for Yasmine. She sits on the floor by several dimly burning oil lamps but gets up several times to pace about impatiently. Before long, Yasmine enters looking pale and very badly shaken. As soon as Yasmine sees Anike, she cries out, happy to find a reassuring figure in Anike. She hurries to embrace her, letting go her emotions and sobbing in relief. Anike gently leads her to the place where she was sitting before Yasmine's arrival and comforts her.

ANIKE

It's alright. It's alright now.

I'm here.

YASMINE *(Trying to tell something about Sirat)*

Sirat... Sirat... Anike...

ANIKE *(Anxious herself, she tries to calm her)*

Shhh... Come, we're safe here.

(As they sit down) Sit a little closer here.

(In a sombre voice) Yes, Sirat is dead, I know.

YASMINE *(Still incoherent)*

Sirat... Wira... Wira killed ... *(Struggling to get her words out.)*

ANIKE *(Keeping control of herself)*

Slowly, Yasmine. Take a deep breath ... *(Pause.)*

You are safe here. Now, slowly ...

YASMINE *(Calming down a bit)*

You have to know, Anike.

ANIKE

Yes, I'm listening.

YASMINE

He ... he hung him from a tree.

Feet up, Anike. And Kana told me,

from rib cage to belly.

cut him open

ANIKE (*Anguished*)

What devil...

What devil drove him to it?

YASMINE (*Tearfully*)

Anike, he sliced his face

till Sirat is no more the Sirat whom we know.

ANIKE

Oh, mother of mercy!

She buries her face in her hands.

YASMINE (*Softly*)

I am frightened, Anike.

ANIKE (*Bitterly*)

That Wira ... He was almost a brother.

YASMINE

It was Tuanku,
it was him, Anike.
He ... He ordered Wira.

ANIKE (*Continuing in her bitter vein.*)

Tuanku *would* do that.

YASMINE

What will he not do next?

ANIKE

I had warned Sirat time and again
not to trifle with a man like Tuanku,
but he would not listen.

YASMINE

What will he do to us?

ANIKE

Calm down. Tuanku has got what he wants.

YASMINE

Still, we never know what...

ANIKE

He should be content now.

YASMINE

You really can't be sure.

ANIKE

Let it rest, Yasmine.

Don't forget, Sirat is still out there.

YASMINE

With Tuanku like this, what are we to do?

ANIKE

We just can't sit here and cry.

YASMINE (*Nervously.*)

There are sure to be guards there, Anike.

No one can get close.

ANIKE

We will think of something.

YASMINE

Do... Do we then talk to Tuanku?

ANIKE

No Yasmine.

Tuanku will not let go of him.

YASMINE

Tuanku will not be too harsh on you.

ANIKE

Tuanku is enjoying this.

We can't go to him.

YASMINE

Tell Tuanku Sirat's execution
accords with the law. After all,
Sirat kicked him down the palace steps.
Placate him. Then...

ANIKE

You don't know what you are saying.

YASMINE

Wouldn't you consider
letting the matter rest for a day or two?
We'll see what happens.

ANIKE (*Becoming impatient.*)

Rest a day or two? Can't you see
what will happen in a day or two?
The mess of flesh and entrails
sticking on drying black bones
will be what's left of our brother?
It will sweat pearls of maggots

in the heat of our sun. Can't you
already smell a rising stink?
It will gag and drown the city.
and people will curse us.
Think. Think of the humiliation,
the shame to us, to Sirat, to *our* nenek moyang.

YASMINE (*Still persisting*)

There may be a way...

ANIKE (*Ignoring her*)

There is still time before daybreak.

YASMINE

Surely you are not...

ANIKE

Yes, cut him down and bury him.

YASMINE (*Rises to her feet. Takes one or two paces and turns around. Her voice disturbed.*)

I hear you as in a dream, Anike.

ANIKE

You know what has to be done.

YASMINE

Now you too?

Didn't you mean Tuanku will not harm us?

Now you want to enrage Tuanku once more.

ANIKE

I understand that you are afraid.

You are just not ready.

I understand. So, you don't need

to blame yourself

if you do not go with me.

YASMINE

You have forgotten Nadim.

What if you die? You know

what it will do to him.

ANIKE

Ask Tuanku this. He is the father.

YASMINE

(Rising on her knees ready to leave.)

You still don't seem a bit afraid.

ANIKE

What if I am? I have to do

what I have to do

YASMINE

I am afraid for you, Anike.

ANIKE

Go now! Go! Leave me to mourn
as I prepare to go out to bury my brother.

The girls rise to their feet. Yasmine embraces her sister and takes her leave. Anike then takes out a shawl from corner of the room, throws it over her shoulders, and leaves.

SCENE I

It is morning. By now people have gathered before the palace steps. The front doors of the palace open. A palace official accompanied by several other fighting men emerges from within.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

I don't see Wira here. How come?

MAN IN THE CROWD II

You won't see him.
He may be somewhere, watching.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

Now we are being watched?

At this point, the central door opens and Maniaka enters with Bendahara and elders. The crowd moves forward closer to the palace steps on seeing him.

PALACE OFFICIAL *(Announcing Maniaka's entrance)*

His royal Highness Raja Maniaka of Merang.

PALACE OFFICIALS, AND CROWD

(Shouting repeatedly)

Daulat Tuanku! Daulat Tuanku! Daulat Tuanku!

As the shouting dies down Maniaka goes slowly with as much dignity as he can muster down the long flight of steps to address the crowd, they talk among themselves.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

Does he know or even care
what the people think?

MAN IN THE CROWD II

Look at him. Looks like
he forgot that day Sirat kicked his
backside down these steps.

MAN IN THE CROWD III

Sure, he won't forget Otherwise
why he wants us to be here.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

How can he forget?
Just listen lah. He is going to say
what he will do some more to Sirat.

MAN IN THE CROWD II

What he did to Sirat
is already too much lah.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

If Sirat kicked your backside
and chased you out of your own palace
you don't want to kill him ah?

MAN IN THE CROWD II

Sirat did it for his friend.
To teach that old bargger
not to mess with his bro.

Maniaka raises his hand for silence from the murmuring crowd.

MANIAKA

I am pleased to announce
that about two hours to sunset yesterday,
at the marketplace,
Sirat was duly executed on my order
by my most loyal fighter, Wira, whom I sent for
from exile. He further carried out
my order to hang the traitor from a tree
to swing by his heels for all to see.
That is due punishment *Pauses.*

MAN IN THE CROWD III

Shameless old fart,
now he calls back the man
he wanted to kill to do
his dirty work.

MAN IN THE CROWD I

Kill, for what?
Just because some jealous courtier
whispered in his ear
that Wira had a thing going
with his favourite concubine?

MAN IN THE CROWD II

That was too much for Sirat.

Maniaka proceeds to make his proclamation, putting on a face as stern as he can manage and surveys the gathering.

MANIAKA *(Continuing)*

I now decree that Sirat's body
shall be left to rot there.
Any man who attempts to cut him down
and remove him shall be hung
by the heels with the traitor
from that tree. This is my edict.
It is therefore law. That is all.

ALL PRESENT

Daulat Tuanku. *Semoga* Tuanku selama bertakhta

As Maniaka turns to re-enter the palace, Watchman rushes in from the left. Hurries up the steps toward the Raja. Performs the sembah. He avoids as much as he can looking directly at Maniaka.

Watchman

Ampun Tuanku! Beribuan ampun, Tuanku! *

I... I... I... I do not know how to begin.

I am not believing it myself.

MANIAKA

Believing... Believe what?

WATCHMAN

I did not do it, Tuanku. I did not let it happen. I swear by Lord Murugan. It is the others.

MANIAKA

What did you not let happen?

WATCHMAN

I beg Tuanku not to punish me. The dead man... The dead man...I do not know how to say it.

The watchman fumbles for words.

Sirat He is not there

MANIAKA

Not where?

WATCHMAN

Not hanging from the tree.

Maniaka shows no reaction.

Someone cut him from the tree.

Long Pause. Maniaka remains deadly calm.

MANIAKA

Who is the man who did this?

WATCHMAN

I donno Tuanku. The morning watch came. The older one pointed to that tree. There, the tree, aiyo, no hanging corpse. We saw only that heap of dust. The body... A foot was not covered, and a knee. The knee... sticking out. Kadavalai, there was so much shouting among us. We pointed at each other, “adeh, adeh” we all can only say. One man saying loudly another man not himself did it. One thing for sure, Tuanku It was not me. I y-am not knowing who did it. Believe me Tuanku, it was not me.

Guard continues, not noticing the Raja’s rising anger.

Then someone said, better tell Tuanku. We stared at the ground and looked at each other. Then I said we draw lots. Kadavalai, I was the unlucky one who drew the short straw. So here I y-am, Tuanku.

MANIAKA (*Exploding with anger, shouts*) Stop!

(*To the watchman*) You, come over here.

You can’t even do a simple job.

Kicks the watchman.

You must have been sleeping.
Or somebody or bodies have paid
you all to close your eyes.

WATCHMAN

Aiyo-yo Aiyo-yo. Tuanku *tolong*. Paining lah. Tuanku is right, angry at person or persons unknown to be committing this crime.

Looks fearfully at Maniaka and quickly looks down.

Ampun Tuanku, forgive me, if I say you are ne...ne ... not just being so angry with us. You a ... a ... are accusing us because ... because no one say he committed the crime.

MANIAKA (*Kicks watchman again.*)

This wretch presumes to lecture me
on what is just and what is not.
Bring me the man behind all this
or you will confess yourself
you committed the crime.

Maniaka re-enters the palace followed by his retinue and many of the fighting men. After everyone has left, Watchman peers to the right and then the left to ensure that no one is still around to hear him.

WATCHMAN

Bi-i-ig trouble is coming. I better get out quickly. If I don't find your man. Celeka!
If only I can catch the man Tuanku is wanting. One way or another, Tuanku, I y'am not here again.

The Watchman runs off farting in fear.

As the lights dim Bendahara enters.

BENDAHARA (*Spotlight on him.*)

Tuanku appears to have succeeded
in quashing all dissent. He has forced
the people to acquiesce to his edicts
being declared as law. But he did not hear
the whispered disdain of this morning's crowd,
was blind to its barely concealed derision.
But the dead man has ties,
ties of kinship and loyalty, and these ties
draw in other victims by extension
What form of dissent will they take,
what action? I have a sense
the consequences that unfolded
from actions Tuanku took on the calumny
whispered in his ear will not end here.

SCENE II

Later in the morning. A few people are still hanging around at the steps of the palace. The Watchman enters the palace front court dragging Anike with him up to the steps. The Bendahara, having been told by a palace hanger-on that the culprit who buried Sirat's body had been caught, emerges from the palace and comes down the steps.

BENDAHARA

Why have you dragged this woman here?

Have you lost your senses?

Don't you know who she is?

WATCHMAN

Anike slouches and hangs her head looking at the ground.

I got her. I got her. She was trying to cover the rotting corpse. Where is Tuanku?
I bring him the “man” he was wanting me to find.

Maniaka emerges from the palace with more courtiers and fighting men following and stands on the upper levels of the flight of steps.

BENDAHARA

Tuanku is here now.

MANIAKA (*Surprised, shouts*)

What is happening here?

(*To Watchman*) You! Unhand her.

Why is she in such a wretched condition?

Where is the man

I told you to bring me?

WATCHMAN (*Holding onto Anike*)

You want the “man”?

Here is the “man”, Tuanku.

MANIAKA

You brought me a man, you *kelda*?

WATCHMAN

I got her. It was I who got her. That is why I bring her here. She was alone. Trying to bury the body. This shows we are not taking bribes.

MANIAKA (*To Anike*)

Is it true what the man says?

You buried the body?

ANIKE

Yes.

MANIAKA

Oh! I cannot believe it.

(*Turning to Watchman.*)

Tell me. From beginning to the end,
exactly what happened.

WATCHMAN (*Watchman lets go of Anike and walks a few paces away from her and addresses Maniaka.*)

I went back. I wanted to tell the others what you are wanting. But I saw the others, they already were dragging the body We all together pulled it up the tree. The dead man's flesh aiyo smelled very bad. We vomited all we were eating this morning – tosai and all. But we still were having our arms around him, and we pushed his body up. Then we went to a stream to wash. Then we went back to that tree again and the body was not there.

He turns and points at Anike.

Then I saw her. She was kneeling. In the mud, Tuanku. She was not frightened. I went first to catch her. She kicked and scratched. She was not wanting to run away. Angry because we hold her. Tuanku, she buried Sirat. We are not to blame.

MANIAKA (*To Anike*)

Is all this true?

ANIKE (*Not looking at him*)

Yes.

MANIAKA

You deny nothing then? That you are alone in this?

ANIKE

I deny nothing. I am alone in this.

WATCHMAN

You see, Tuanku.

MANIAKA (*To Watchman*)

You may go.

WATCHMAN

Manyak terima kasih. Thank you Tuanku, thank you.

Watchman bows and sembah repeatedly as he leaves.

MANIAKA (*Turning back to Anike*)

Did you not hear of my edict?

ANIKE

I did.

MANIAKA

Did you expect me to make you an exception,
counting on my son?

ANIKE

No ...

MANIAKA

Then why did you do it?

ANIKE

I did it for my brother.

MANIAKA

You say you heard my edict.

Yet you defy me.

ANIKE

Your edict is not just.

MANIAKA

It is law.

ANIKE

It is not.

MANIAKA

Do you understand what law is, girl?

ANIKE

To my simple understanding

law has a simple basis.

Have you forgotten the teaching?

Do not do unto others

what you don't want others to do unto you.

MANIAKA

Hahahaha! You are simple, child.

ANIKE

All real law prevents you

from doing harm to others.

It prevents others to do harm to you.

MANIAKA

So I have broken the law, killing Sirat.

ANIKE

No.

MANIAKA

Ha! Why?

ANIKE

That is lawful punishment.

MANIAKA

So I have not done harm to Sirat?

ANIKE

Just in killing him, no. It tells the people
Sirat has done harm violating
the security and order of Merang
by assaulting the ruler's person.

MANIAKA

Then why do you still defy my edict?

ANIKE

You have sunk from law
to inhumanity by mutilating Sirat
in such a savage way
to satisfy your sadistic appetite.
Your edict can no longer be law.

MANIAKA (*Having no answer*)

That's your opinion.

ANIKE

Besides, it has done harm to Sirat.

MANIAKA

You presume to teach me law
because you think I will let you off
for Nadim's sake?

ANIKE

No.

BENDAHARA

This is a woman from a wilful
and rebellious stock. We knew the father.
He once slapped me in a rage,
and when he did not get his way
with the old Tuanku, he dared
to turn his back on him and walk away.

MANIAKA

This is a woman who has much to learn.

Pauses as a new thought comes into his mind.

Ah, Yasmine also must be part of this.
Go, you, you, you, and you, arrest Yasmine.
Bring her to me. What a nest
of vipers have I stumbled on.

COURTIER I (*Whispering*)

See how power justifies itself.

COURTIER II

Shh. Not here.

ANIKE

Yasmine has nothing to do with this.

MANIAKA

Anike, you are totally alone.

No one will speak for you.

BENDAHARA

Here comes Yasmine.

Yasmine enters under guard. Appears changed in demeanour.

MANIAKA

You too, Yasmine. Were you not in with her?

YASMINE (*Unexpectedly*)

Yes.

ANIKE

No, Yasmine! No!

YASMINE

I knew what you were about to do.

I did not stop you and I said nothing.

ANIKE

You cannot help me.

YASMINE

I was too frightened and distressed then

by what Kana told me.

I understand now you had to do it.

And I too had to do it.

Forgive me Anike.

ANIKE

No, Yasmine, no. Save yourself.

MANIAKA

Look at these two girls.

One has lost her mind.

As to the other,

I do not know that she has one.

YASMINE

She is your son's fiancée.

MANIAKA

She never has been.

YASMINE

Poor Nadim, how your father wrongs you.

MANIAKA

Enough, there will be no pointless talk
about my son and marriage.

BENDAHARA

You will deprive him of this girl?

MANIAKA (*Ironically*)

Do I have to hear such stupid questions?

(To Guards) Take them away and guard them well.

You know what I will do if you come back
with any nonsense about a missing woman or women.

Anike and Yasmine are led away under guard.

As the lights dim Bendabra enters.

BENDAHARA (*Spotlight on him*)

Tuanku sees his edicts as law
as he takes total unfettered power
as his natural right. All his edicts
cannot be questioned as law.
So sure of his rights, he does not see

in so cruelly punishing the woman
who denies his claim to his edicts
being law and, by it, his rights
as absolute ruler to break her will
he will also hurt his son.
This will not augur well for him.
I cannot foresee any possible outcome
that will favour him, any possible outcome
that will not end in grief and lamentation.

SCENE III

A room in the palace. A couple of court elders enter deep in conversation.

COURT ELDER I

Have you noticed that Tuanku
is not as harsh on the two girls
as we expected?

COURT ELDER II

Something in them must have touched him.

COURT ELDER I

I think he knows he has gone too far with Sirat.

COURT ELDER II

Still Anike disturbs him.

COURT ELDER I

After all she will be the wife
and his successor, Nadim's queen.
He respected her father
and was actually a bit in awe of him.

Maniaka enters accompanied by the Bendahara and several others in tow. Both the elders greet him with a great show of respect. Almost immediately after the elders' greeting of Maniaka, Nadim enters.

COURT ELDER I

Nadim is here.

MANIAKA

Ah, Nadim. Come on in.
You are not going to plead with me,
are you? Forget her.

NADIM

No, Pa.

MANIAKA

No, what?

NADIM

I won't plead for her.

MANIAKA

Well, that's good.

I hope you understand.

COURT ELDER I (*Loud enough for Maniaka to hear*)

Tuanku seems to be
in one of his rare moods.

NADIM

I have not seen you for a while.

Hope you are well, Pa.

MANIAKA

Well, stay for a while

We have not talked for more than ... than ...

NADIM

About two months, I think.

By the way, Pa, there is something,

I think you need to know.

MANIAKA

I know what I need to know.

Anyway, what is it?

NADIM

Has anyone here told you about Wira?

The people are talking. They whisper, Pa,

you told him to do what he did to Sirat.

MANIAKA

These rumours. You have to bring them to me?

NADIM

I want to believe these are just rumours.

But too many people have seen what happened.

MANIAKA

So?

NADIM

You proclaimed the edict to have

Sirat's body hung from a tree.

So, it is easy for the people to believe

you also instructed Wira to do

everything that he has done to Sirat.

MANIAKA

Do you doubt me?

NADIM

I don't want to.

MANIAKA

Then don't tell me the people say this,

the people say that about me. You hear?

NADIM

Yes, Father. (*Hesitantly*) But on this other matter ...

MANIAKA

You still want to talk about it?

NADIM

No, not really. Please hear me out.

MANIAKA

Make it short.

NADIM (*Cannot bring himself to say what he wants to say directly*)

It is not right Father.

MANIAKA

What is not right?

NADIM

To stop anyone burying their dead.

It is not our custom.

MANIAKA

It is the law now. So, it is right.

NADIM

Not me, Pa. But many say

your edict is no law.

MANIAKA

That woman did not commit a crime?

NADIM

I have not come to say that.

I said people said your edit is not law.

MANIAKA

Who are they to say it is not law?

NADIM

Your people. Your subjects.

MANIAKA

The people are to decide

what is law and what is not law?

Teach me how to rule?

NADIM

No, they just feel it's not right

after what you did to Sirat.

MANIAKA (*Raising his voice.*)

I did? You say I did to Sirat?

Anyway, whatever I did or didn't do

is covered by law. My edict is law.

The law is the law.

NADIM

I try only to tell you how things are.

MANIAKA

All your rumours, all what the people say,
you actually are trying to speak for her.

NADIM

No, Pa.

MANIAKA (*Losing control*)

You contradict me, your father, at every turn.

.

NADIM (*Beginning to get exasperated*)

Honestly, I do not.

MANIAKA

You have been taken in by that ...
that vile creature

NADIM

No, not by anything vile.

She is not vile.

And she is not a creature.

MANIAKA

You dare take her side?

Against me?

NADIM

I love her.

MANIAKA (*Raising his voice.*)

You *are* taking her side.

NADIM

I am sorry I have to.

But not because I love her.

I take her side because she is right.

And, Father, I did not come
to speak for her.

MANIAKA

I will make sure you will never marry her.

NADIM (*Alarmed*)

We shall see.

MANIAKA

Are you threatening me?

NADIM (*Losing patience*)

No, Father, I cannot threaten.

You don't hear. You don't see.

MANIAKA

You will not take that tone with me, boy

NADIM

I am sorry you take it that way.

MANIAKA

Now you want to be clever with me,
you love-struck fool.

NADIM

I'll talk no more. You just get
more and more angry.

MANIAKA

You ... You ... you watch it.

You had better watch it.

(Turning to guards) Bring the woman out!

(To Nadim) See if she still says she is right
and is not afraid of what I will do.

NADIM *(After hesitating whether to stay or to leave and thinking
that his father was just going to taunt by threatening Anike in front of him)*

Have your games, Father.

I am leaving.

Nadim rushes out.

BENDAHARA

Gone. Stomping out like that.

MANIAKA

Let him go.

COURT ELDER I

Are you going to punish both girls?

MANIAKA

No. Only the stubborn one who defies me.

COURT ELDER I

What will you do?

MANIAKA

Teach her a lesson.

I will have her taken

to one of the caves in the limestone hills

and leave her there for a day or two.

See if she will not admit

she is wrong to defy me.

I will make sure she will be provided for,

food, drink and warm blankets.

That she will not be harmed.

(Turning to the Bendahara)

Come, we have much to do.

Maniaka leaves with the Bendahara, elders, and the hangers-on.

As the lights dim Bendahara enters.

BENDAHARA (*Spotlight on him*)

Nadim should be awaiting her,
at their bridal chamber,
not at this gaping mouth in the face
of a sheer precipice. The groom
that awaits her there is unending night
whose whispers in her ear
will be the hissing of eyeless snakes.
She should not go in that hole like this,
but to their chamber with Nadim.
Tuanku himself should be here
to give his blessing to their union.
Instead, he would force their union apart.
Now she goes alone into that black hole
to stumble about in darkness and the cold.

SCENE IV

Late afternoon. A few court elders and fighting men are already at the cave where Anike is to be taken there. One of them speaks openly of his feelings to a couple of other elders present.

COURT ELDER I

Just a girl, she should not be here.
She should not forced in like this
to stumble about in total darkness,
stepping on what insects we

don't know in among damp stones.
And to sleep with water dripping
all night onto bedsheet and on her head.

COURT ELDER II

Can we hold back the tears?

As the elder speaks, Anike, attended by guards is seen coming up to the cave.

ANIKE

Stay a while. Let me feel the sun
and this breeze blowing the call of hornbills
from across the valley. How fresh it is.
In the dark, hold on to the clear stream
running down the slope we climbed
where the grass makes so green
and cool in this bright bit of day.

Turns to the Elders.

Thank you all, honourable Elders,
for being here. I am a little less afraid
already of going into the dark.
Let the world know what has happened here.
If you cannot say it aloud, I understand.
Speak or whisper it to those you trust.
Say I stood by all that I said and
I did not fail Sirat, family, and just law.

She speaks to herself.

Oh, how my hands shake.
Must hide them in my sleeves.
I must appear defiant and calm.
Wish Nadim were here to hold me.
Only two days. Only two days.
Tuanku told his courtiers.
But on release, I must take back
all that I said about doing right
by Sirat, and about burying him
I did not break the law. I have
in addition, to say to the people
his edict is law, the law of Merang.
But I cannot betray myself, Yasmine,
and the people who believe in me.
If I give in, Merang will be a poorer country.
What then do I do? What then do I do?
After this, perhaps I will meet Sirat
and say to him how sorry I am
that he has suffered so much
indignity and shame.
I defied Tuanku, but I failed.
only in the public eye, but in reality
you know that I have not failed you.

COURT ELDER I

She *has* to be afraid,

but she is not pushed,
stumbling or dragged by her arms
crying into that hole.
I have seen no other woman like her,
facing who knows what she will find in the darkness.

Maniaka with his retinue of hangers-on arrives at the cave.

MANIAKA (*Angrily to Guards*)

Why have you not shown her yet
into the cave? Get going at once
and place there on the floor
those baskets of fruit, and dried meat,
and the water jar.

COURT ELDER II (*Court Elder I*)

Anike seems to stand up well.

MANIAKA

Enough! Guards, what are you waiting for?
Move, pile up the stones.

The lights are gradually dimmed to suggest a great gloom has overtaken the scene. The sound of low distant thunder is heard.

COURT ELDER I

We did not speak.
We too are complicit in our silence.

As the lights dim Bendahara enters.

BENDAHARA (*Spotlight on him.*)

Maniaka smiles that now he is in control.
Anike will be sent to the cave,
and in two days she will take back
all she said about doing her duty
and doing right according to law.
Nadim will reconcile with him
and will marry her. And the people
will see that he has acted justly.
And Sirat's humiliation? It will be
wholly Wira's doing, and Wira's crime.
That is the reality in his mind.
But reality is not what one wishes for.
It is intractable, it just is.
Tuanku will find out reality is in consequences.

SCENE V

Elders, courtiers, fighters, and other hangers-on standing around him. The air is sombre. Tok Seth, a blind seer, enters. He is led by a boy. He and the boy walk up to Maniaka.

TOK SETH

I cannot see the world that you see,
but I 'see' signs and they are not good.

MANIAKA

Do I know you?

TOK SETH

Your father did.

MANIAKA (*Patronizingly.*)

Do you expect anything from me?

TOK SETH

No.

MANIAKA

Then why do you want to see me?

TOK SETH

To warn you.

MANIAKA

Warn me? Of what?

TOK SETH

Of what comes of what you do.

It can destroy you in a way

you do not intend.

MANIAKA

Why would it concern you?

TOK SETH

Should misfortune befall you
your people would also have to bear it.
Already there is great unease among them.

MANIAKA

You concern yourself
over people you do not know?

TOK SETH

To what end would my life
of meditation and abstinence be
when I “see” impending suffering
and it does not concern me.

MANIAKA

Well, if my father listened to you,
I suppose I must listen too.

TOK SETH (*Ignoring Maniaka's tone.*)

Be prepared to listen then.

MANIAKA

Well?

TOK SETH

A clear aura of evil has grown about you.
I see it now. I see much grief and sorrow,

if you persist in what you do.
All will be caused by yourself.
You cannot control what will come
of what you do. But you can avoid
doing that which will cause them.
Free the girl now. Bury Sirat.
Change. Treat your subjects justly
Find out often what you can do
for their well-being. It is not too late.

MANIAKA (*Disquieted but persists in being stubborn.*)

You plead for those who defy me?
And those who assault my person?

TOK SETH

You are not listening.

MANIAKA (*Hiding his disquiet*)

And I will cause all this misfortune?

TOK SETH

Yes, unless you relent and change.

MANIAKA (*Not sure of himself.*)

Relent? I, change?

I, Maniaka, Raja of Merang?

TOK SETH

Let go of all your pride and anger.

Be kinder to yourself.

In time, you'll be happier with yourself,
and be kinder with your people.

MANIAKA

What does that do for me?

TOK SETH

You are not well, Maniaka.

MANIAKA

Look to yourself, Tok.

TOK SETH

It is a grievous thing
to see a king like this.

MANIAKA

You are forgetting your place.

Be careful of what you say.

TOK SETH

You are forcing me to say things,
terrible things you will not want to hear, Maniaka.

MANIAKA (*Raising his voice*)

Say them. Say them.

TOK SETH

Pay attention then.

MANIAKA (*In a show of bravado*)

Go ahead. Frighten me.

TOK SETH

Take what I say to heart.

There will be two dead,
one of your flesh and blood.

It will be the end of your line.

And the end of order in your city.

You yourself will be so cast down
in pain and sorrow. you will have
nowhere to turn to find relief.

(*To boy*) Come, child,
pick up my cane and lead me out of here.

Tok Seth and boy leave.

BENDAHARA

Tok Seth is gone.

I have known Tok all my life.

I have not known him
to have misled a king.

MANIAKA (*Badly shaken by all that he heard.*)

Have I slighted that old man unnecessarily, Bendahara?

BENDAHARA

Then listen to his warning.

MANIAKA

But how can I go back on my own edict,
break my own law? And just let the woman go?

BENDAHARA

Trust your better judgment,
Tuanku, remember that Tok spoke
of certain misfortune if you do not relent.

MANIAKA

What shall I do?

BENDAHARA

Take the men and hurry
to free Anike from the cave
and send for the priests
to prepare for Sirat's burial.
There must be no delay.

MANIAKA

You will have me do this?

BENDAHARA

You do not have much time.

If Anike is harmed, the curse will work
to destroy you.

MANIAKA (*Still hesitant*)

Can I really believe that old man?

BENDAHARA

He is a holy man. Better believe him.

MANIAKA (*Putting up a bold front*)

I, to believe him?

BENDAHARA (*Urgently*)

Tuanku. We are out of time!

MANIAKA

Perhaps you are right, perhaps you are not.

BENDAHARA

Tuanku, we really are out of time.

MANIAKA

Perhaps I should hold you responsible
if we were deceived.

BENDAHARA (*Exasperated*)

Take your chance, your Highness.

Tok really came to warn you.

MANIAKA (*Finally sensing the possibility of ruin*)

Tell me to believe that old man.

BENDAHARA

Then don't delay any further, Tuanku.

MANIAKA (*Reluctantly*)

Alright. Alright, I will do it.

He is still sitting and looking doubtful.

BENDAHARA

Tuanku, you have no more time!

MANIAKA (*Still reluctantly*)

Alright I will do it.

(*To Guards*) Go, get together the men,
and go to the cave, and have the heap
of stones pulled down to let the woman out.
Go before I change my mind.

The guards leave.

BENDAHARA

You have to go yourself, Tuanku,
to make sure the entrance to the cave
is cleared and see to it the woman is safe.

MANIAKA (*Considers for a few moments Bendahara's words.*)

(*To guards*) Gather twenty men
and follow me. Every man carry
his parang or his axe with him.
On the way cut strong poles
from the jungle for prying loose
the boulders from that cave.

These are evil times, Bendahara.

A king faces ruin upholding the law,
while a woman, in breaking it,
earns the blessing of the people.

Maniaka leaves, followed by the Bendahara, elders, fighters, and hangers-on. Before the palace steps where the courtiers and hangers-on are gathered, a few fighting men are idling about. Curious members of the public have also come by. A messenger sent from the cave comes running in and hurries towards them.

As the lights dim Bendahara enters.

BENDARAHA (*Spotlight on him.*)

He will ask for easeful forgetfulness
in death but will find that denied him.

He is at the point

where all that had mattered,
matters not at all.
What has been done is done.
No more can be done but endure.
The days that will dawn after tonight
will dawn. He has not received
what he had wished for
but given what he did not intend;
an end that is not quite an end but pain,
and end that is not quite an end but grief,
and end in its finality – a nothingness.

The time is approaching sunset. Bendahara with members of the court who are not at the cave enter by way of the central door. As they talk among themselves, a crowd begins to gather. Messenger enters.

BENDAHARA

You are back early.
We see bad news on your face.

MESSENGER

I have come back to tell you,
Nadim and Anike; they are dead.
Tuanku is in shock.
We tried to calm him
But he did not see or hear us.

COURT ELDER I

How could this happen?

MESSENGER

Nadim went into the cave with the men.

He found Anike.

But she was already dead.

Then he took his own life

BENDAHARA

How clearly Tok Seth saw it all!

And Tuanku?

MESSENGER

We followed Tuanku to free Anike

and found the men standing in twos and threes

staring into the hole they had opened up.

From its depths someone was heard

howling inconsolably.

The elders and bangers-on murmur among themselves and exchange uneasy glances.

When Tuanku heard it, he became agitated.

And he turned to me,

'Run. Quickly. Go in there.

See for me and tell me

what is going on".

But inside the cave I found Nadim.

He was holding Anike in his arms.
She had hanged herself
with her own shawl slung across
an overhanging spur of rock.

BENDAHARA

Oh, you, foolish young ones.

MESSENGER (*Continuing.*)

Then Tuanku came into the cave.
When he saw his son and Anike
he was too shocked
for a few moments to cry out
Then he burst out,
"Oh, Nadim!" And he rushed to Nadim,
He cried, "What have you done?
What have I done to you?".
Then touching Nadim tenderly,
"Let me take a look at you"
He looked at Anike and cried bitterly,
"Foolish girl, didn't you know
I did all I could to ensure no harm
would come to you from this?"

Maniaka now a broken man appears with his men in train bearing Nadim and Anike on makeshift stretchers. Attracted by the procession of men, a crowd gathers.

COURT ELDER I

Here is Tuanku.

MANIAKA (*Muttering to himself.*)

Too late. Too late.

Why did I doubt that old man?

I did not think all this would happen.

(*Sighing*) I wasted too much time.

I just wasted too much time.

BENDAHARA

Tuanku, we are here.

We all share your grief.

MANIAKA

All should have worked out well.

It should have. (*With emphasis*) It should. (*Groans*)

She could have just said she was wrong

and that my edict was the law of Merang.

(*Veemently*) Why? Why? Why?

I only wanted to teach her a lesson,

yet she would have to thwart me.

BENDAHARA (*Telling the Courtiers milling around.*)

Make way. Make way for Tuanku.

MANIAKA

How clearly Tok Seth saw it all

He stumbles and falls.

BENDAHARA

Tuanku, please rise. Your people are watching.

MANIAKA

You too, Nadim. (*Accusingly*) You took her side.

You have the heart to leave me,
your old man, all alone behind?

BENDAHARA

This way Tuanku.

MANIAKA

Yes, why not? You have a fool for a father.

Hahaaha! Who would want a fool for a father?

BENDAHARA

Be strong Tuanku. We are with you.

MANIAKA

Fool, fool, fool, fool.

Lead this fool in.

The Bendahara moves to help Maniaka up the palace steps.

BENDAHARA

You are the Raja. Show the people.

You are Maniaka, Raja of Merang.

MANIAKA

Lead me in, Bendahara.

I can smile now when I meet death face to face.

BENDAHARA (*To Elders I and II*)

Please lead our Tuanku in and attend to his needs.

He looks like a man who already looks to his end,

being sick from longing for evasive death,

in which he is not assured of final pace.

Maniaka enters by the central door led by the elders followed by various hangers-on. Then the bearers, carrying the bodies of Nadim and Anike arrive, accompanied by a few fighting men ready to enter.

You see there the crushed hope
of a restored Merang of law and justice,
of order and peace where no one need fear
the wrath of a roused vindictive king.

You see the flower of Merang's youth,
turned bitter fruit before their time.

Yet in its seeds is the promise of new flowering,
as Anike will be, with Nadim,
in the spirit of the people of Merang.

House lights down.