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Trending Before You Die

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Foreword

Every death leaves behind sorrow. But not all deaths leave behind mysteries.

"Trending Before You Die" is a story about the traces left behind after a life is taken too soon—and too suspiciously. The novel depicts the death of a young diplomat who suddenly goes viral, not for his services, but for the mystery surrounding his death.

In the digital age, truth is no longer pursued solely by the law—but by likes, retweets, and public scrutiny. When the law is silent, social media speaks. When authorities are slow, netizens act. But who can be trusted?

As a writer and lawyer, I want to raise a big question through this story: Will justice only come if the public demands it? Or will it come even if no one cares?

This novel isn't just a work of fiction. It's a reflection of the times. It's about how a single life can become a trending topic, yet still lose its voice. And how a lawyer—our protagonist—fights through the fog of manipulation, conspiracy, and injustice, only to prove one thing: that truth must never die in silence.

Happy reading,

May every page make your heart beat faster — not out of fear, but out of compulsion to think.

Muhammad Ari Pratomo (MuhammadAriLaw)

Advocate, Writer, Songwriter

*Speaking out for justice for the silenced — through law, music,
and writing*

CHAPTER 1

The Light Behind the Stage of Diplomacy

The Jakarta sky that afternoon was gray, but Arka's heart was bright. In his hand he clutched an official, enveloped letter bearing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs logo. His hands were trembling, not from nervousness, but from the dream he had been chasing, finally arriving without warning.

"Congratulations, Arka. You've officially been promoted. Your assignment is overseas. Your name has been included in the Ministerial Decree. You'll be leaving next month," said the Director of International Politics, patting him on the shoulder.

Arka Mahendra, 31, a young diplomat often considered too idealistic for such a pragmatic world. He is known not for his connections, but for his hard work, his incisive writings on human rights, and his courage to speak out on issues often censored by protocol. Now, he is assigned as a diplomat in a Southeast Asian country—a country known for being “investment-friendly” but also a hub for transnational organized crime syndicates.

But the promotion came with conditions.

“This isn’t just a regular diplomatic deployment, Arka,” the director continued, more quietly. “We’re asking you to discreetly monitor... the alleged human trafficking and online gambling networks that allegedly involve our citizens. The latest data shows a surge in human trafficking cases, and

we've lost access because all formal doors are closed. We need an idealist like you... who can get in unnoticed."

Arka fell silent. Not out of fear. But out of realization: this was no ordinary promotion. This was a reconnaissance mission, not through the prism of intelligence, but through the sensitivity of a diplomat wielding two weapons: words and conviction.

"Will I have protection?" he asked quietly.

The director glared at him. "You'll have a diplomatic passport. But not many will know your true mission. You yourself must be careful. This world isn't a world of seminars or conferences. It's a world where lives are risked for money and power."

Arka returned home that night with his head full of questions. On his desk lay a draft report on the misuse of Indonesian migrant worker visas in their destination countries. He had just realized: all the clues were there. He just hadn't realized that the threads would soon drag him into a pit he couldn't escape.

Outside, it began to rain. And when his phone's notification rang—an email with the subject line "Mission Initial Step Instructions"—Arka knew his life would never be the same again.

Three weeks before departure, Arka's routine changed drastically. He was no longer just attending embassy meetings or drafting diplomatic notes. Now, he was being privately trained by two members of a special unit—not from the military, but from a unit not even officially registered with the

ministry. They taught him how to read signals, recognize transnational crime patterns, and basic self-protection techniques if surveillance turned into an escape.

“Never trust anyone there, not even the local staff. Especially if you stand out,” his coach said. “You’re not a spy. But you’re not a typical diplomat either. You’re the middle ground—and that’s the most dangerous part.”

Meanwhile, Arka began collecting preliminary documents: declassified intelligence reports, complaints from Indonesian migrant workers who failed to return home, and data from NGOs reporting the existence of "digital labor camps" hidden behind grand buildings. Some of the victims were identified as victims of human trafficking, ensnared through job advertisements on social media, then forced to operate online gambling sites and defraud others using false identities.

The more he read, the tighter his chest became.

How is it possible, in this supposedly transparent global era, that so many people have disappeared without a trace, without justice?

But Arka knows that justice can't just be written. It must be fought for—even if secretly.

The day of departure arrived. The diplomatic terminal was deserted as usual. There was no send-off ceremony. There was only one suitcase, one carry-on bag, and a red passport with Arka Mahendra's name on it.

His mother didn't accompany him. Since his father's death, his mother had always worried whenever Arka went abroad. But this time, Arka simply said it was a "regular placement." He didn't want her to know that in the next few months, he might be living among criminals who could kill him simply by asking the wrong question.

An airport official escorted Arka to a special waiting area. In his hand, Arka held a piece of paper with a small map and a single, cryptic sentence: **"What looks legal, is not necessarily clean."**

He didn't know who sent it yet. But he knew the puzzle had begun.

As the plane took off, Arka closed his eyes. He knew he wouldn't just be representing his country. He would be representing the voices of those who had been unheard. And perhaps he would face things he couldn't officially report.

The plane landed just as night was falling. The city lights lit up like thousands of man-made stars, welcoming Arka to a new country—one he had previously known only from diplomatic reports and human rights seminars.

But as soon as he set foot in the airport, Arka immediately felt a different atmosphere. Too calm. Too clean. Too... controlled. It was as if all the immigration officers' smiles were part of a long-memorized script.

An embassy car had been arranged to pick him up, but Arka politely declined. He chose not to stay in the diplomatic compound, preferring to integrate with the migrant

community, especially Indonesian migrant workers. His primary target was the gray zone—a place where law and crime often coexist, almost invisible.

After days of trawling through apartment rental signs written in a mix of foreign languages and digital script, Arka finally found a small unit in an old building—three floors with no elevator, no security guard, but filled with Indonesian sounds that couldn't be masked by the aroma of spices from the small kitchen in the narrow hallways.

This is where he began masquerading as a "representative office administrative worker." His last name was shortened. His neat attire was replaced by casual attire. His diplomatic laptop was ditched, replaced by a small notebook and a phone without apps.

The first three days passed uneventfully—just small talk on the stairs, the cries of migrant children, and the laughter of mothers cooking over video calls. Until the fourth night, when someone knocked softly on her door.

A young woman, her face gaunt, her eyes sunken, and her appearance as if she hadn't slept in days, was Maya, 26, from Sidoarjo. She worked as a cashier at a fast-food restaurant and lived one unit below Arka's apartment.

"Sorry, bro... I just wanted to let you know. Be careful at night," he said, his voice trembling.

Arka turned his head, wary. "Why?"

Maya swallowed hard. Her eyes scanned the empty hallway behind them, as if worried someone might be eavesdropping.

"In the past two months, four Indonesians have gone missing in this block. All of them were men. Two worked in online gambling customer service, one was a runaway migrant worker, and the other recently moved. There were no police reports. No one was looking for them. That's it..."

Arka remained silent. Listening, assessing. But his heart began to beat faster.

"Some say," Maya continued, now half whispering, "...they're being sold. Their organs. Kidneys, lungs, even hearts. They say there's a syndicate that works with an illegal hospital on the outskirts of town. But who can prove it? The police here turn a blind eye. If an Indonesian citizen goes missing, they just say: they probably ran away. But..."

Maya couldn't continue. Her eyes started to water.

Arka nodded slowly, trying to calm himself. But his mind was already wandering to the map he kept under his mattress—the locations of trafficking hubs, the syndicate's movement points, and now, this apartment had to be marked red.

"Maya, if anything strange happens... please let me know first. Not anyone else."

Maya nodded, then disappeared into the dark hallway. Arka closed the door slowly, then stood staring out the window.

The streets looked deserted. But he knew, beneath the layers of neon lights and flashing advertising banners, something was moving silently. And that night, Arka noted one important thing:

They don't just traffic in humans. They trade bodies that are still warm.

This mission wasn't about gambling or forced labor anymore. It was a matter of life and death. And he had just gotten in too deep.

The night was drawing to a close. The city wasn't asleep yet, but Arka chose to draw all the curtains. Her apartment was lit only by a table lamp, which illuminated the photocopied files of migrant worker reports she had previously sent to government representatives. Several of the complaint letters looked the same: missing friend, no news, inactive number, last seen picked up by a dark car.

Arka's chest felt heavy. This was all real.

Just as he was about to turn on the laptop, a "click" sound was heard from the front door.

He turned his head. Silence.

No knock. No sound.

He approached slowly. The doorknob wobbled slightly, as if someone had just touched it.

Without turning on the main light, he peeked through the small hole in the door. It was empty.

But as he bent down to check the gap under the door, something seemed to have slipped through...

White envelope. No name. No sender.

He quickly took it and closed the door tightly. His hands trembled slightly as he opened the contents.

Inside there is only one photo, blurry print.

A photo of a man lying on a metal bed with large stitches on his stomach. His face was pale. His eyes were open... blankly.

And one sentence behind the photo: "Don't interfere. Go home before your body catches up."

Arka stared at the photo for a long moment. The man's face was familiar. He reopened the documents he had brought from Indonesia. Name: Ferry Hartawan. Age: 24. Indonesian migrant worker missing two months ago. Last known location: this apartment complex.

Arka's throat felt tight.

His phone suddenly rang. An unknown number. No name.

He let it go. But it rang three times—and stopped each time he tried to pick up. It was as if the caller just wanted to say: I know you're there.

Arka decided to put away all his documents and change his clothes. He needed some air, or more precisely, he needed to check if he was being followed. He went downstairs in a hoodie and a medical mask, pretending to take out the trash.

But as he crossed the ground floor hallway, he heard the sound of rapid footsteps—then silence.

He stopped.

The back door of the apartment closed slowly, as if it had just been opened by someone who didn't want to be seen.

Arka didn't pursue. He was all too aware that in a war like this, the first to be aggressive could be the first to be killed. He returned upstairs, his chest tight, but his eyes wide open.

That night, she slept without closing her eyes. The curtains were drawn. The bathroom light was on. A small kitchen knife was tucked under the pillow. The bedroom door was locked double-sided.

He realized this mission had already claimed victims. And now, the next name could be Arka Mahendra.

The Light Behind the Stage of Diplomacy

Dawn slowly came, but Arka wasn't asleep yet. His eyes stared at the ceiling, his breathing slow, his heart still not fully calm.

Beside the bed, a photo of Ferry's corpse still lay. He had cut out half of the image. He didn't want to look into his eyes for too long. It was too real. Too close.

Outside, the sound of an old motorbike passed slowly, then disappeared.

Arka opened the laptop. He created a new folder: "DOCUMENTS – NAMELESS DEATH"

He began writing an internal report, coded in diplomatic language. But before he could finish, a notification from his social media account—which he used solely for monitoring—came through with a soft sound.

Someone just uploaded a video.

He clicked on the link. Blurry image. Shaky voice. Hidden camera. A young man was being dragged into a black van by two masked men. Faint cries could be heard: "Please... tell my mother..."

Arka stared at the screen without blinking. He knew that face. Ferry. His last clothes. The location of this apartment. The time of recording: two months ago. But what was most chilling was the caption of the video upload:

"WHY IS THE STATE SILENT? HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE HAVE TO TREND BEFORE THEY DIE?"

Within ten minutes, the post had been viewed 12,487 times.

First comment:

"Maybe this is the work of an organ trafficking syndicate..."

Second comment:

"I know him. He's a coworker of mine. He went missing last month!"

Third comment:

"Tag the official account! Let it go viral!"

And then, slowly, the phrases started appearing in the comments, one by one, repeating themselves like an unstoppable digital mantra:

#TrendingBeforeDeath

#TrendingBeforeDeath

#TrendingBeforeDeath

Arka closed his laptop. He knew one thing for sure:
This secret mission won't last long. The world is starting to notice.

And if the syndicate sees this reaction, then Arka won't just be a target... He could be the next victim.

CHAPTER 2

Trending Before You Die

That morning, the online world was more noisy than usual. A video of Ferry, a young man who had previously disappeared without a trace, was now circulating on thousands of mobile phone screens. Not through mainstream media. Not through an official announcement. But from an anonymous account, with a searing caption:

"The country is too slow. Netizens are faster. Before he dies, make him trend." #TrendingBeforeDeath

Arka stared at his phone screen from the corner of his cold apartment. The digital clock read 7:04, but his stomach had been in knots since dawn. He knew that after this, everything would change. His secret mission had been indirectly leaked—not by him, but by the public, who were starting to speak for themselves.

He reopened the video, frame by frame. He zoomed in on the background. There was a faint mural on the wall where Ferry had been dragged. The writing was in the local language, the graffiti almost erased. But it was enough for Arka to recognize the area—an empty industrial block outside the city, known as a black zone by migrants.

His phone vibrated.

Domestic number, disguised. Not a random number.

Arka answered. "Yes?"

The voice on the other end was firm, matter-of-fact. "Are you still following protocol, or are you playing the media game?"

Arka was silent for a moment. He knew who was speaking: a high-ranking official in the ministry, the man who had asked him to investigate secretly.

"I haven't spread anything. But this case has gone viral. If we stay silent, everyone will talk uncontrollably," Arka replied.

"That's precisely why you should be quiet," the voice replied. "Remember, Arka. You're not a journalist. You're not an activist. You're a diplomat. And you're outside the protected zone. One wrong move, and no one will be able to help you."

Click.

The phone was hung up. Firmly. Coldly.

Arka took a deep breath. He knew he was in the middle of two worlds: one world of slow and careful bureaucracy, and another world of digital thirst for truth in any form, as quickly as possible.

At 11:32, someone knocked on his apartment door.

Three times. Slowly. Hesitantly.

Arka opened it cautiously. Outside stood a fat man, wearing glasses, a motorcycle helmet, and the smell of cigarette smoke lingering on his jacket.

"Arka, right? I'm Dimas. A journalist," he said, quickly pulling his ID card from his jacket pocket. "I got this address from a fellow migrant worker who reportedly spoke with the victim. I don't want to bother you, but could I talk to you for five minutes?"

Arka hesitated. His instincts screamed: don't. But his eyes caught something in Dimas's hand—a real photo of Ferry, not the blurry version from the video.

"Enter."

They sat in the cramped living room, which had only room for two chairs and a table. Dimas pulled out several photos, screenshots of Ferry's conversations before he disappeared, and one detail Arka had never seen before: the last GPS coordinates from Ferry's phone, sent to his girlfriend before the signal disappeared.

"Why do you care?" asked Arka.

"Because I used to work odd jobs too. I know what it's like to be lost and have no one looking for you. If we don't look for you, who will?"

Arka stared at him. Silently, he considered. This man was dangerous... or could be the key.

"If I can help, but without being named, and without a digital footprint—we can work together," Arka said quietly.

Dimas nodded.

And from there, everything started moving. Quietly, but surely.

That afternoon, the hashtag #TrendingBeforeDeath became number one in several Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia.

Ferry's family finally spoke out. International media outlets began contacting the local Indonesian Embassy. Foreign human rights organizations began naming the country where Arka was—though no one truly knew what was happening behind the silent walls of that warehouse.

And while all the spotlight was on him, Arka started to creep down.

With Dimas's help and Maya's guidance, Arka began to map out the pattern of the Indonesian citizens' disappearances: pick-up times, delivery locations, and even the illegal clinic where the alleged blackmail operation took place. But at the same time, the threat grew more real. Strange stares in the apartment hallway. Footsteps that stopped when he turned around. His phone suddenly restarting itself.

And a message came in that night, with no sender name:

"Trending is good. But remember: what goes viral the fastest... is also the fastest to be buried."

Arka looked at his cellphone screen, then closed the window curtains.

The world is watching.

But behind the spotlight, someone was waiting for Arka to let his guard down.

That night, the power suddenly went out in Arka's apartment. Not just in his unit, but on the entire floor.

Soft sounds could be heard outside: hurried footsteps, anxious whispers from behind the door, and one sound that seemed deliberate: three soft knocks, then silence.

Arka stood upright in the middle of the room, a kitchen knife in his right hand, his cell phone in his left—illuminated by a small flashlight. He knew this was no coincidence. This was a form of terror.

"Test... one two..."A voice came from his Bluetooth speaker. Arka turned his head. He hadn't turned it on. Then the voice came again—from the recording. "If you can hear this, you've gone too far, Arka Mahendra."

Arka's body stiffened.

"Ferry wasn't the first victim. And you won't have time to save the next one. Look out the window."

Her hands shook as she pulled back the curtain. Downstairs, a black van with no license plates stopped in front of the building. Its lights flashed briefly, then went out. No one got out. No one got in. But the message was clear: We know where you are. We know you're snooping.

Arka quickly turned off all the electronic devices. He began to realize: this apartment was no longer safe.

He exited through the emergency stairs, sneaking down a back alley. A few minutes later, he was at a 24-hour cafe frequented by migrant workers. The connection was slow, but enough to send a single encrypted message to Dimas:

“Need to change locations. I'm being followed. We'll meet at point B now.”

Dimas replied quickly:

"On the road."

Thirty minutes later, they met in an open parking lot near the cargo port. Dimas was riding an old motorcycle, wearing a helmet without a visor. Arka hopped on the back seat without asking.

“Is this place safe?” Arka shouted against the night wind.

“No. But it’s safer than your apartment!” Dimas replied. “They use a local system. They know which power lines they can cut to panic you. You’re already on their radar!”

“We have to hurry. Before the next victim falls.”

"Us?" Dimas asked quickly. "Mr. Arka... you're a diplomat. I'm just a journalist. But now we're both being hunted by a murder syndicate. Are you sure you want to continue this?"

Arka didn't answer. But his gaze pierced the night mist.

They arrived at a new hideout: an abandoned wooden house belonging to a migrant volunteer who had returned to Indonesia. The location was remote, far from the city center.

Here they turned on their outdated laptop, projecting maps, data, and the anonymous messages that began to arrive more frequently.

"Look at this," Arka said, pointing to a point on the map. "The four locations where Indonesian citizens have disappeared are all within a three-kilometer radius of the illegal call center."

"And this," Dimas added, "is a small, unregistered hospital with a practice permit. That's most likely where the organs were harvested."

Arka stared at the screen. All the data began to come together. All the puzzles began to form the face of a horrific crime.

And the names of those lost aren't just numbers. They're human beings. Like Ferry. Like dozens of others.

Arka typed one last message into the Ministry's central system, with priority: red.

"The investigation has crossed the line. I request permission to enter the premises. There's no time."

But the reply came three minutes later. Cold. Firm. Uncompromising.

"DELAY ALL STEPS. RETURN TO THE EMBASSY COMPLEX. NOW."

Arka hit the table.

"Even when the evidence is there, they still choose to play it safe!" he snapped.

But Dimas looked at him warily. "Sir... it seems like it's not just a matter of caution."

Arka narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean?"

Dimas took a deep breath. Then, in a low voice: **"I suspect... someone's playing inside. This isn't just a criminal network. It's a collaboration. And they probably know all your moves... because one of them is in your own circle."**

Arka stared at Dimas, his eyes wide. There was a traitor. Within the ministry. Within the system. And now, Arka wasn't just being chased by the syndicate. He was also hiding from his own government.

The early morning sky was still gray when Arka awoke to the faint ringing of the satellite phone he used only in emergencies. It was an unknown number. It wasn't registered in the system.

He hesitated to answer, but finally pressed the green button.

"Arka Mahendra,"The voice on the other end of the line. Flat. Full of control. **"You're not the only one who smells a corpse here. But if you keep digging, we won't hesitate to dig your grave first."**

Click. Connection lost.

Arka gripped the phone tighter. His eyes were sharp now. The threat wasn't empty bluster. He knew how to speak. The tone. The short sentences. Like... a military man.

Dimas appeared from the back room carrying a glass of coffee and a worried face.

"Sir, we have to move again."

"It's too late," Arka said quietly. "They know we're here."

And it was true.

The next second, the roar of a car stopped a few meters from their wooden house. Headlights shone inside, cutting through the darkness. The shadows of footsteps—three... four—moved outside. The sound of guns being cocked.

Dimas panicked. "Rear window! Now!"

They squeezed through the narrow window and into the bushes. Arka's breathing was labored, but his mind was still working fast. They ran to the small stream behind the house and followed the stream as far as they could.

The footsteps of their pursuers could still be heard—not far behind. But they couldn't stop. One mistake... and their story would end tonight.

After an hour of hiding in an old sewer, they managed to escape.

Drenched and shivering, Arka opened his waterproof backpack. Inside was one item that could be a turning point: **black USB drive** with a blurry logo—an object he had secretly taken from Ferry's room before leaving for abroad.

He hadn't had time to open it yet.

Now, in a new makeshift hiding place—the basement of an empty cafe owned by a fellow diaspora—Arka plugs it into his laptop.

The first file is named: “DONOR_DKI_PROJECT_FINAL.nxd”

Dimas stared at the screen. “That’s... a hospital system file in Jakarta?”

Click.

The contents of the file shocked them: a list of transplant recipients in Indonesia... whose organs matched those of an “unidentified foreign donor.” And more than half of the donor names... came from a database of Indonesian migrant workers.

Organs are taken from Indonesian citizens abroad and brought back to Indonesia to save officials, businesspeople, and important figures. The system is clean. Undetectable. Covert. And run by the hands of two countries.

Arka closed the laptop, his body trembling not because of the cold.

“This isn’t an ordinary syndicate, Dim. This is... a state project.”

Dimas couldn't say anything.

Arka stared up at the sky through the gap in the broken ceiling. "If we upload this now, we could be gone before morning."

"If we don't upload this, more people will die," Dimas replied quietly.

And there they sat. Two people—a diplomat fed up with the system, and a journalist with nowhere to go—staring at each other. They knew: there was no going back.

Arka grabbed the satellite phone again. This time, he called his last trusted contact. Someone within the country. The person he had once saved from a major scandal.

"You still remember what you owe me?"

"Yes."

"Now it's time to pay. I'll send you the file. But don't share it. Wait for my signal. Because once this file goes viral... we're all on the execution list."

Connection lost.

And with that...

Trending Before You Die... is no longer just about going viral. Nowadays, life or death is truly determined by who is trending.....and who dies first.

the fire of resistance was burning.Arka can no longer run. He must choose: sacrifice his life for the truth—or allow the system to continue preying on his own people.

CHAPTER 3

The Coffin and the Lost Signal

Three days have passed since Arka and Dimas escaped the siege that night. They now live in a small, hidden house in the hills—far from the city center, undetectable by GPS, and cut off from the outside world. There, internet and phone signals appear only intermittently, like an illusion.

But it was in that place that Arka discovered the truth that had been buried all this time.

Using offline data access from a black flash drive they'd kept under wraps, Arka discovered suspicious coordinates—an old pharmaceutical factory that was said to have closed. But recent satellite imagery revealed something odd: vehicles were regularly entering and exiting the building, and the building's temperature appeared cooler than its surroundings.

“That's not an old factory,”Dimas muttered. “That’s... a cooling facility. Maybe... a storage area.”

Arka didn't answer. He knew full well that such places were often used for illegal organ transplant operations.

Without further ado, they set off that night. They took back roads, disguised as distribution workers, and eventually made it into the factory area, which turned out to be guarded by lightly armed thugs in medical security uniforms.

Inside... they found a basement.

And in that room...

Rows of refrigerated crates labeled with Indonesian names. Not all of them were empty. Some held young bodies—their faces serene as if asleep. But their skin was pale, scars from surgery still visible.

Arka held his breath. This was no longer an investigation. This was a slaughterhouse.

Dimas found a digital list on the wall panel.

There's an organ transfer code. There's the name of a hospital in Indonesia. There are also the names of the recipients, complete with their positions: businessmen, wives of officials, members of parliament, and even a former minister.

"This is broader than I thought," Arka whispered. "This isn't just human trafficking. This is a network of death distribution—legal but bloody."

As they were copying the data, the sound of footsteps approached.

They rushed into one of the cold rooms and shut themselves in.

Silence. Darkness. The heartbeat was clearly audible.

From the gap in the door they peeked: two foreigners speaking the local language, carrying something on a gurney.

When the stretcher was opened, Dimas bit his lip to keep from screaming.

On top of it lay the body of Ferry—her neighbor in the apartment, the only one who knew the initial secret. Now, his body was exposed. No kidneys. No corneas.

"Late," whispered Arka.

Shortly after the two men left, they slowly exited. But just as they were about to send all the data via the satellite laptop network, the signal was lost.

It's not just a weak network. The signal is completely blocked.

"Do not tell..."

Arka opened his manual signal scrambler. The red light flashed.

They are being tracked.

From outside the factory, the sound of approaching vehicles could be heard. Dimas peered through the gap.

Black SUV. Three. Fully armed.

There is no way out through the front.

Arka pulled Dimas toward a narrow ventilation shaft that led to the old sewage system. They crawled. The stench. The darkness. But it was the only way in.

As they were about to leave, a scream was heard from inside the facility. It was unknown who it was, but it was clear another intruder had been caught.

Arka wanted to turn back—but Dimas stopped him. “This isn’t the time to be a hero. If we get caught now, all that data will be lost. Everyone died in vain.”

Finally they managed to get out and enter the forest. But something changed inside Arka.

He doesn't just want to leak data.

He wanted to expose everything. In public. In a way that couldn't be silenced.

But for that, he needs a network. He needs connections.

And the signal.

The forest they emerged from was not what Arka had imagined. It wasn't a quiet, safe place. Instead, the deeper they walked, the more they discovered tire tracks from heavy vehicles—indicating regular activity. There were also power lines leading to tall poles in the distance. It was as if the syndicate had access to the country's infrastructure.

Dimas checked his laptop again. Still no signal. But he managed to open an audio file that had been automatically saved via a hidden microphone while in the facility.

"The unit is ready to depart. A VIP patient from Southeast Asia is waiting. Send one with clean, young blood. Don't send the wrong one again."

Arka felt goosebumps. That voice... he knew it.

The voice of someone from the Ministry headquarters.
The person who had asked him to "take part in this secret mission."

Someone who also... once told him to shut up.

"If he's really involved, we can't trust anyone in the office,"
Arka said. "Maybe... this is all a trap."

Their steps stopped when a spotlight suddenly flashed in the distance. A small drone was circling in the night sky. Searching. Sniffing.

Dimas hurriedly covered the laptop with an electromagnetic wave shield. Arka crouched down, pulled up his hoodie, and blended into the darkness of the forest.

The drone was getting closer. His voice was whistling.

Suddenly-

BLEEP.

The drone stopped directly above them. Its buzzing sound turned into the sound of a camera recording. A spotlight dazzled Arka's face.

Dimas reflexively threw a stone at the drone.

BRANG!— the drone wobbled, then fell to the ground.

But at the same time, gunshots were heard from a distance. They were found.

Dimas pulled Arka and ran towards a small, dark river. They jumped into it, letting the current carry them far—too far—until their bodies hit rocks, logs, and mud.

After nearly two hours of drifting, they washed up on the side of a small river on the outskirts of town.

Body trembling, clothes wet, data intact. But time was running out.

On a cold night, they finally found a small food stall. The owner, an elderly Indonesian woman, greeted them suspiciously. But as soon as Arka mentioned a name from the list of missing people, her expression changed.

“That’s my daughter,” he said quietly. “Three months ago, she said she was working at a salon. But she never came home. Her number was switched off. Once I got a message: ‘Don’t look for me.’ But I knew that wasn’t her style of speech...”

His hands trembled as Arka showed photos of the victims' bodies.

He pointed to one. Her eyes were glassy.

“That’s... my daughter.”

Arka held the woman's hand. "Mom... can I use your cell phone for a moment?"

The woman nodded. Dimas connected his device via the old phone's hotspot.

The signal appears.1 bar.

Arka immediately uploaded some of the data to an encrypted server.

50%... 65%... 82%...

But suddenly...

"Sorry, the server is not responding. Signal lost."

The phone is dead.

Arka stared at the screen, his breath held. Failed. Again.

But at the same time, a final notification appeared in the corner of the screen:

"1 File successfully sent: LOG-TPPO-ARKA001.zip"

They looked at each other.

"One is enough," said Dimas. "We have preliminary evidence. Now it's just a matter of who will care."

Arka looked up at the sky. He knew the answer.

Public. Cyberspace.

Because in a corrupt world, sometimes one small truth... can move big waves.

CHAPTER 4

The Diplomat's Digital Footprint

Arka's footsteps echoed through the seemingly calm hallway of the Indonesian Embassy, yet they held a wave of unexplainable tension. The cold air from the air conditioner couldn't calm his tight chest.

He's back. But not as an ordinary diplomat.
He came back as someone who knew too much.

After all the escapes and data he'd gathered, Arka now had to play his old role again—a neat tie, a formal smile, as if nothing had changed. But his mind couldn't escape the voice recording he'd once heard:

“VIP patients from Southeast Asia are waiting...”

The voice was none other than Ambassador Rudita, his own superior.

From the moment he was first assigned, Arka was suspicious. He was sent to a foreign country under the pretext of strengthening diplomatic relations and "observing social issues," but without official backup, no team, and no proper intelligence procedures.

And now, through metadata analysis of Dimas's audio files, everything is becoming clearer. The last IP address of the person uploading the fake migrant worker documents came from... Rudita's office.

Arka opened the secret laptop he had recovered. He connected to the Indonesian Embassy's internal Wi-Fi network using a private VPN known only to three people, including himself.

The “Assignment_AK01” folder opens.

Inside, dozens of fake investigative reports were found, all signed by him. However, Arka never wrote any of them.

“I was exploited,” he muttered. “They used my name to cover up a crime.”

The more he dug, the more disgusting the truth became.

There are documents documenting fund transfers from fictitious charities to the accounts of shady medical companies. There are diplomatic memos canceling the deportation of international fugitives—and the memos are in Arka's name.

And the most surprising thing...

One video file was accidentally downloaded automatically.

The video is 1 minute and 23 seconds long. The image is blurry, but Arka can still recognize his own face.

He was sitting in a press conference, but the video was manipulated—as if Arka was making a statement that he supported a humanitarian project that turned out to be a cover for human trafficking and organ syndicates.

They're building a scenario. A scenario to make him the scapegoat.

As night fell, Arka sat alone on the third-floor balcony of the Indonesian Embassy. Below, the streets of the illusory city were still bustling, seemingly unaware of the corruption lurking at the heart of diplomacy.

He opened his phone. Dimas sent an encrypted message:

"Be careful. Your digital footprint is being monitored. I detected your IP being traced back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

Arka typed a quick reply:

"I know. But I won't be silent. If I have to trend before I die, then I'll be the one to light the fire."

The next morning.

An unusual email arrived in his inbox. The sender was anonymous, only the name "Orion_23."

It contains one sentence:

"If you want to reveal everything... open the door to the old archive room. The password is: DUAWAJAH."

Arka stared at the screen for a long time. The old archive room was a place that hadn't been used for years, located in the basement, locked, and without cameras.

What's inside? Who is Orion_23? An ally or a trap?

The answer awaits in the depths of that building. And perhaps... bring Arka closer to the truth.

Or... to the end of his life.

Arka's footsteps down the stairs to the old archive room felt heavy—not because he was tired, but because his instincts were screaming that something dark was waiting for him down there.

The hallway lights flickered, and the air in the basement was stuffy. Dust clung thickly to the old metal shelves, and the smell of damp paper mingled with the smell of rusted metal. He turned on the flashlight on his cell phone.

The iron door of the old archive room stood silently like a guardian of the secrets of dark history. On it was written in an old script:

“To the authorities.”

Arka took a breath, then typed in the password given by the anonymous sender: DUAWAJAH

CLICK. The digital lock creaked... and the door opened slowly with a sharp, hair-raising squeak.

The room inside was dark. Silent. But as soon as the flashlight swept inside...

...the walls are covered with photos. Hundreds of them.

The faces of the migrant workers. Some have been marked with a red cross. Some are accompanied by the date they disappeared, and the last location they were found.

Arka froze. A large board at the end of the room displayed a map of the distribution of organs to various illegal hospitals around the world—including the country he was currently in.

But the most surprising thing... In the middle of the room, there was a table. On it, a photo album.

Arka opened the album. The first page showed a photo of Dimas. The second page showed a photo of himself.

And under the photo it says:

“Next target. If you can't silence them, eliminate them.”

The sound of something falling made Arka turn his head quickly.

Someone outside the room.

Arka immediately turned off the flashlight, slid behind a shelf, and held his breath. Heavy footsteps echoed down the hallway outside.

“Arka?” a deep voice called out. It wasn’t one he recognized. “We know you’re in there. Don’t make this difficult.”

The door began to open slowly.

Arka accessed the cellphone, activated the emergency broadcast feature to Dimas.

“I’VE BEEN FOUND. OLD ARCHIVES ROOM. THERE’S EVIDENCE. NEED HELP—NOW.”

But the signal disappeared. Her phone suddenly went dead. It was as if a jammer had been activated around the room.

Footsteps in the room grew closer. Someone was carrying a metal bat.

Arka pulled a tactical pen from his pocket, the only survival tool he had.

“If I die tonight,” he whispered, “then the world must know why.”

In the silent night, Arka paced quickly through the narrow hallway behind the archives building. His breath was ragged, his shirt torn, and there was a gash on his left temple. But what was most disturbing was the silence around him—not because it was calm, but because everything he knew was beginning to change.

He realized: this was not just a diplomatic mission. **This is a trap.** And he had gone too deep.

He managed to send some important data to a backup server before his cell phone signal died. But the one thing that terrified him most was the fact that:

Someone within the ministry was involved.

Someone he should trust.

Meanwhile, the anonymous post on the account @SuaradalamGelap continued to spread. Arka knew he didn't have much time before he became a full-fledged target.

That night, he didn't return to the apartment.

He stayed in a secret place, locked himself away, and wrote a final note in case anything happened to him. He also saved a copy of the evidence on a flash drive and hid it behind an old stone wall in a narrow alley behind the market.

"If I die before it's all revealed," he murmured softly as he recorded the sound, "at least my digital footprint will speak for itself."

And before he fell asleep from exhaustion and a fear he had never felt before, a notification came in on his spare satellite phone.

"We know you're not dead yet. But if you keep investigating, you'll be trending... before you die."

The phone screen goes black.

CHAPTER 5

#JusticeForArka

The news spread fast. Too fast.

That morning, in one of the Indonesian migrant worker community Facebook groups, a striking post appeared that immediately invited hundreds of comments:

"A young Indonesian diplomat was found mysteriously dead in the alley behind the Block C Buruh apartment. WITH HIS MOUTH DUCT TAPE #JusticeForArka."

A photo of Arka's face accompanied the post—his face looked pale, with a scar running down his temple. Some of the blood was blurred out, but the effect was even more terrifying. The caption clearly stated that he was dead. Yet...

Arka is still alive.

Not dead yet.

But the public doesn't know.

In the darkness, Arka sat leaning against the corner of the room, his breath shallow. He read the netizens' comments, which had already begun to condemn him and formulate conspiracy theories.

"He must have been murdered because he knew about a big scandal." "The state is silent. Indonesian citizens are missing, diplomats are dead. Who's next?" "If his mouth was taped

shut, that means he was carrying a big secret.” “Strange, why did the foreign media pick up this news first?”

His hands trembled as he opened the digital surveillance video he had recorded two nights earlier—it showed a black car with no license plates stopping at the end of the apartment alley. Four men got out carrying large suitcases. Shortly after, two men in T-shirts that read "cleaning service" joined him, lifting something from behind.

From the video clip, Arka knows one thing: he is being hunted by people who can fake death... even kill reputations before the body dies.

Arka turned on his phone camera. The blue light illuminated his tense, sweaty face.

"If you're watching this video, it means they've succeeded in making me disappear completely. But don't believe the rumors out there. I'm still alive. And I have data—data that could shake not only the syndicate, but also... our own government."

He didn't upload the video. Not yet. There's still time. There's still a little room to maneuver.

Suddenly-

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Three soft knocks sounded from the outside door.

Then... a very familiar voice:

“Arka? It’s me. Open the door. Now. They know you’re not dead...”

A woman's voice. Soft, but anxious. Is that... Salsa?

Arka stood up slowly, taking a metal object from under the bed. The apartment lights were starting to dim—or maybe that was just his feeling.

As he approached the door, a notification appeared on his phone screen.

TRENDING #1: #JusticeForArka

TRENDING #2: #IsArkaStillAlive?

The world has spoken. But who is really listening?

Click.

The doorknob vibrated. The sound of a lock being pried from outside. And Arka realized, this game had just begun — and the stakes weren't just lives, but the entire truth he was trying to bury alive.

The doorknob kept moving, as if time was being forced to move faster than it should.

“Arka, it’s me... Salsa. Open the door! Please!”

Arka fell silent. His mind was a war of relief and suspicion. The name wasn't random. Salsa was a former civilian intelligence officer under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a woman

who had once been a part of Arka's past—both in covert operations and... in his heart.

They briefly had a relationship before a mission in South Asia caused Salsa to vanish into thin air. Arka never knew if she truly left that world or was forced to disappear by the same network that now targeted him.

“Arka! They know you’re not dead! I’m the only one you can still trust!”

Arka quickly scanned the small CCTV camera he'd installed in front of the door. The image wasn't clear, but the face was unmistakable: Salsa. Her hair was shorter now. Her eyes were sharp but tired, as if she were being chased by time and guilt.

Arka opened the door—slowly. Just a slight gap. Enough to meet your eyes. Enough to ask silently.

“How do you know I’m still alive?” Arka whispered.

Salsa handed me a mini memory card covered in insulating plastic.

“Because I prevented them from mutilating your body and replacing it with a fake one.” His breath hitched. “Because I still owe you. And... because I’m being hunted too, Ark.”

Arka pulled Salsa inside. He locked the door. Behind the thin walls of the cheap apartment, the voices of migrant workers could still be heard faintly—but tonight it was quieter than usual. As if they knew something big was going on.

Salsa sat down, opened her small backpack, and took out two important documents:

1. A print-out of an investigative document bearing the logo of the Foreign Ministry of State Security, with Arka's name highlighted in red highlighter and the handwritten text "SUBJECT TO REMOVAL."
2. A photo: the body of an Indonesian citizen, its abdomen cut open, its kidneys missing. At the bottom of the photo is the barcode of a private military hospital in the country where Arka now lives.

Salsa looked at Arka with a sharp gaze.

"This isn't about you anymore, Ark. This is bigger than human trafficking and gambling syndicates. This is about... the human body as a global commodity. And you, without realizing it, almost dig too deep."

Arka stared at the photo. The world felt like it was spinning. His mind wanted to escape, but his heartbeat only intensified.

"If I'm trending before I die," Arka muttered, "then now is the time to make the truth go viral before I'm killed."

Salsa nodded.

And that night, two ex-lovers, both scarred by the country's wounds, prepared to ignite an information war — for the victims who could no longer speak, and for the newly begun #JusticeForArka.

The early morning sky hung gloomily, as if watching two souls who were tired but did not want to give up.

Arka stood in front of the narrow apartment window, staring out into the darkness of a strange city that no longer felt familiar. Behind him, Salsa sat leaning against the wall, hugging her knees—carrying the burden of both the past and the future.

“If this world were fair, I would never be trending for dying,” Arka whispered softly.

Salsa turned her head, her voice soft, almost like a prayer, “But maybe... it is precisely because this world is unfair that we must be a voice for those who are silenced.”

Silence enveloped the room.

On the screen of the phone lying on the table, the hashtag was still echoing:

#JusticeForArka

Cracks in the truth were beginning to appear behind the diplomatic stage. But Arka knew this was just the beginning. They hadn't responded. They hadn't shut up. And he hadn't revealed everything.

His hands clenched into fists. His breath was deep.

He's dead... on the news. But not yet in reality. And now, he lives with one mission: to make every lost life heard before it is silenced.

The chapter closes not with certainty, but determination.

Determination to survive.

Determination to fight.

The determination to live... even after being declared dead.

CHAPTER 6

Last Message from Unknown Number

At 3:19 in the morning.

Salsa was asleep, but Arka wasn't. Before him, the laptop screen displayed several encrypted files and evidence he'd been compiling since the afternoon. Digital traces, the results of his covert investigation, and one name he hadn't dared to say aloud: Salsa.

Suddenly, his phone vibrated. An unknown number. No name. A single text message appeared.

"I know who will be trending next. You."

Arka froze. His heart was beating fast. He immediately checked the message details, hoping it was just a prank. But technical data showed it was sent from within the consulate's internal network.

Arka's lips went dry. If that were true, it meant someone on the inside was involved. And not just one. Perhaps the entire system was controlled by the network he was hunting.

A few seconds later, a second message arrived. It contained a link to an encrypted file, and one additional line:

"Open it if you want to know who Salsa really is."

Arka shifted his gaze to Salsa, who was still sleeping, her body still weak from the previous night. His mind was in turmoil. He

wanted to believe her. But this message was too precise, too immediate, and too dangerous to ignore.

With trembling hands, Arka opened the file.

One photo appears.

Salsa stands in front of a familiar building. It belongs to a shadowy organization once identified in intelligence reports as a distribution channel for the transnational organ trade. In the photo, Salsa is smiling. She's dressed formally. The timeframe is two years ago.

Arka took a deep breath. Time seemed to stop.

Suddenly, the laptop screen went black. The room lights went out. The cell phone signal disappeared.

Then, from behind the slightly open kitchen window, footsteps rang out. Heavy. Steady. At least three people. Armed.

He got up. Grabbed his backpack. He wrenched reality from his already overcrowded head. Then he woke Salsa, quickly and gently.

"We have to go now," he whispered coldly.

But as they headed for the door, Arka's phone suddenly lit up once more. A new message appeared. It was just one sentence:

"Your next trending will be broadcast live."

Arka swallowed hard. They weren't just after data. They were after lives. And it all... had probably started the day he arrived.

The bedroom door shook. Once. Then twice.
Arka stared at the door handle as it slowly turned.

He pulled Salsa behind the closet, grabbing a pocket knife from his bag pocket, his only means of defense that night. There was no time for rational thought—just survive, or die.

A deep voice sounded in the hallway outside.

"The target is inside. Prepare the signal suppressor. No one is to leave alive."

Salsa covered her mouth. Her hands were shaking. She didn't fully understand what was happening, but she knew they were both being hunted. And they weren't just ordinary people anymore—they were targets.

A strange device began buzzing from behind the door. Arka recognized the sound. It was a signal breaker and a voice tracker. Used only by special forces. But this was no official operation. There was no procedure. No warning. Just execution.

Arka reached into his jacket pocket. He still held the red flash drive—containing evidence of human trafficking reports, illegal organ trafficking, and a list of Indonesian citizens declared "missing." Including... a voice recording of someone from within the diplomatic institution.

He knew one thing: this thing was enough to bring down the global network, but only if it got into the right hands.

“Through the ventilation,” he whispered to Salsa.

They opened a small vent above the bathroom, just enough to sneak into the back hallway. The sound of the main door being broken down began. Seconds were running out.

Salsa went up first, followed by Arka.

BOOM!

The bedroom door was broken open. A flashlight shone into the room. Someone shouted, “It’s empty! They’ve escaped!”

But Arka and Salsa had already crept into the narrow passageway leading to the roof. Their steps were quick and silent, like mice aware of the snake's presence. Sirens wailed in the distance. But strangely, there were no police officers. Only vehicles without license plates and people in uniforms without insignia.

They were completely alone.

Reaching the rooftop, Arka looked out at the still-burning city, oblivious to everything. Meanwhile, below, one by one, the Indonesian immigrants living in the building were being forcibly taken away—pulled, shoved into cars, silenced.

Arka gripped the flash drive tightly. Then he said in a low but vengeful voice:

“If I die, make sure the world knows this was no accident.”

Salsa glared at him. "I'll make sure they pay."

In the distance, a blue light flashed. Drones began to fly around the building.

And in the shadows of the night, someone was watching their movements from a monitor screen... with a smile.

The roof of the building wasn't a safe place. But right now, it was the only option.

Arka and Salsa crouched behind a large air conditioning turbine. The night wind was piercing, and the drone overhead continued to whirr, spying with its thermal camera. If they moved too quickly, their bodies could be detected by the heat sensors. But if they remained still for too long, the hunting team below could swoop in at any moment.

Arka pulled out his phone—no signal. The network breaker was already activated around the apartment. But one thing stopped him: a single incoming message, appearing just before the signal was lost.

"DON'T TRUST ANYONE AT THE EMBASSY. THE EVIDENCE WILL KILL YOU. — L."

Arka froze. The initials made him shudder. Only one person in the human trafficking report used the initial "L," a woman who disappeared two years ago—Larasati, a former cyber intelligence analyst presumed dead.

Salsa grabbed Arka's arm and whispered, "We have to get down from this building. On the west side there is an emergency staircase that leads to the market hall."

Arka nodded. But just as they rose, the sound of heavy machinery roared below.

An armored vehicle crashed through the apartment gate. Troops entered.

"SPREAD ACROSS THE FOURTH TO SIXTH FLOORS! CAPTURE THEM ALIVE OR DEAD!"

They didn't have time. Arka put his phone on silent mode and plugged a red flash drive into the small port. Before the connection was completely cut off, he sent the file to an encrypted address known only to him and one other person—the email address of an Indonesian investigative journalist who had previously exposed the vaccine mafia.

Screen flashes: "Sending... 63%"

Suddenly, a shell hit a turbine near them. Metal shards hit Arka's feet. He fell with a loud bang.

Salsa let out a muffled scream, pulling on it. Blood began to soak the concrete of the roof. The sounds below grew closer. Footsteps, military orders, and the whirring of drone wings all blended together.

"Finish that upload!" Arka whispered breathlessly.

"Sending... 91%"

Salsa lowered her head, holding back tears. She knew that if they were caught now, the file would be lost. The truth would be buried. Arka grabbed her hand, glaring at her.

"If I have to die... make sure you run away."

"100% — Sent."

Screen is off.

And just then, the roof door burst open. Gunlight was pointed directly at their faces.

"HANDS ABOVE YOUR HEAD! NOW!"

Arka raised his hand slowly. Salsa trembled. But before they could be tied up, a loud voice came from one of the officers' earpiece:

"Hold on! Don't kill him yet. The boss wants to speak directly... from Jakarta."

Arka and Salsa looked at each other.

They are no longer just local targets. They are now an international threat.

Arka and Salsa were handcuffed behind their backs and forced to walk down the narrow apartment stairs with their heads bent. Each officer's radio voice sounded garbled, as if something was amiss.

"We haven't received permission for air evacuation yet—"

"The embassy has not responded. There has been... an information leak from within."

Arka realized something.

They panicked. Not just because of this arrest, but because the file—it's out. It's been sent. It's probably been opened. It's probably gone viral.

Suddenly, a burly man in a long coat and dark glasses appeared in the narrow corridor. All the troops stopped in their tracks. They saluted.

"Reporting, we have secured the target," said one of the commanders.

The man walked toward Arka. He didn't rush. His face was calm, but his eyes were cold. He stopped right in front of Arka.

"You're not as smart as I thought, Arka," he said flatly, without expression.

Arka replied with a sharp glare. "Unfortunately, you guys aren't as fast as I thought."

The man grinned slightly. "But we were quick enough to prevent this news from trending... before you died."

BANG.

Suddenly, gunshots were heard from outside the building.

Not one. Not two. But a barrage of bullets.

The alarm goes off. The hallway lights went out. The sound of gunshots now turned into small explosions. One of the troops screamed. The radio becomes full of interference.

“Unknown attack on the northern perimeter! Our troops are being hit by mortars!”

Salsa lowered her head, whispering, “Arka... it’s not just them.”

Arka turned his head slowly. Out there, other forces are moving. I don't know who, I don't know for whom.

But one thing is certain: this isn't over yet. It's just beginning.

CHAPTER 7

Fingerprint on the Second Page

In the basement archives of the Indonesian representative office, a young, undisclosed staff member is flipping through pages of documents from an internal investigation. Unbeknownst to him, the files he holds hold the key to Arka's pursuit and eventual death.

But there was one oddity: a fingerprint left on the second page.

Not Arka's. Nor is it the staff who compiled the report.

The fingerprints had been secretly identified by the internal security system. And the results... turned out to belong to a high-ranking official abroad who should never have touched the document.

The young staff member fell silent. He knew that if he spoke, he could lose his life. But if he remained silent, Arka's death would be in vain. He saved a digital copy of the file to a mini flash drive, tucked it under his shoelace, and left the room, breathing raggedly.

Meanwhile, elsewhere, Salsa managed to escape from detention. With a wound on her temple and her hands still half-bound, she crept through the dark passage of an old tunnel she discovered on Arka's ancient map. The tunnel was allegedly used by a syndicate to transport human trafficking victims.

Salsa's steps stopped when she saw the graffiti on the tunnel wall:

"Trending Before You Die isn't just a warning. It's a code."

He took a photo of the graffiti and continued walking. At the end of the hallway, a light flickered on. But before he could leave, his phone vibrated.

Another message. Unknown number. Again.

"You've gone too deep. Turn around or be buried with Arka."

Salsa stared at the screen, her eyes trembling. She knew there was no turning back. So she prepared herself. To unravel everything.

Including the one hiding behind the fingerprint on the second page.

Salsa's footsteps slowed as the hallway she was walking through began to feel narrow and damp. The smell of metal and rust merged with a scent she had long known: dried blood. But she continued walking, even though her knees were starting to shake. At the end of the hallway, the previously faint glow now formed a silhouette: an iron door with strange symbols etched into its surface.

He took out the small key Arka had given him before his death. "If I don't come back, you continue," Arka had said at the time. He had thought it was a joke, until now.

The key fits.

The iron door opened slowly, its creak piercing the silence.

The room beyond was empty. Only a rusty iron desk and a pile of old, partially termite-eaten files were left. But among the pile, his eye caught a fresh document—it hadn't been there long. He carefully pulled it out.

On the second page of the document, a fingerprint identification code is written — a code identical to that of a foreign official who has long been considered an ally of Indonesia in dealing with human trafficking.

Salsa couldn't believe it. The man had even been interviewed as a "Southeast Asian human rights advocate."

But what made his breath catch was the last sentence on the page:

"Arka has learned of the Donor's involvement. The execution was approved. Make it look like a suicide or labor conflict."

Her hands shook. She wanted to be angry, wanted to scream. But footsteps could be heard from outside the hallway. Fast. Orderly. More than one person.

Salsa hurriedly tucked the document into her jacket and turned off all the lights. She stepped back, pressing her body against the tunnel wall. Searchers—from whatever side—had already entered the area.

In the darkness, one of them spoke:

"If he finds the second page... kill him on sight. Orders from above."

Salsa didn't have time to think long. She held her breath. A few seconds later, the flashlight beam swept through the air around her. They were only a few meters away.

But suddenly, an alarm sounded from above ground — someone had broken into the representative office's security system.

The pursuers were distracted. Salsa used the moment to slip out, escaping through a narrow ventilation slit that even she could barely squeeze through. Her clothes were torn, and blood dripped from her arm. But she was free.

For the meantime.

Outside, the night air felt like punishment. But it was also the only proof that he was still alive. He ran toward the main road. As he crossed, his phone vibrated again. It was the same number.

New message:

"You have 48 hours before the second page is erased forever. If you want to know who the Donor is... look in the unburied coffin."

Salsa pulled over at an old, nearly crumbling bus stop, trying to catch her breath. Her body was still shaking, but she knew time wasn't on her side. Her cold fingers shivered as she dialed

a contact on her phone—a name she'd secretly saved at the request of Arka, the only person she could possibly trust.

ARYA – JAKARTA.

A waiting tone sounded. One second. Two seconds. Five. Then the line connected. The voice on the other end sounded shocked and anxious.

“Hello? Who is this?”

“Arya...” Salsa’s voice was barely audible. “This is Salsa. Arka’s friend.”

Silence. For a moment. Then Arya's voice turned tense. “Where are you? Are you safe? Arka— Arka... he's already—”

“I know. But Arka left a trail. It wasn't just about human trafficking... there was something darker. Bigger. I found the second page, sir. The document mentions 'The Donor.' They ordered Arka's death.”

“What?!” Arya’s voice rose, then lowered, as if realizing he wasn’t alone. “You have to send the data now. Use a VPN. Send it to the encrypted email Arka set up.”

Salsa glanced around, making sure no one was following her. “I can’t send it via regular email. I’ll find an internet cafe with the old system—one that’s been offline for a while.”

"Salsa, listen. If you successfully send that data, you have to disappear. I'll pass it on to the people who can suppress these

criminals from Jakarta. But you... you have to be careful. They could be anywhere."

Salsa stared at her phone screen. The battery was at 9 percent. She bit her lip.

"Arka believes in you," Arya added. "Now I will guard all his legacy."

There was a moment of silence. Then Salsa answered slowly but surely:

"I will make sure the world knows... Arka did not die in vain."

Connection lost.

And the night fell silent again — as if holding thousands of secrets ready to explode.

CHAPTER 8

Secret Meeting on the 17th Floor

Salsa sat in a corner of a deserted hotel cafe, staring at her phone, which was now disconnected from any network. She had been incognito for two days, moving from a cheap inn to a migrant worker shelter. All this to avoid people who were starting to realize she knew too much.

But today is different.

Today, Arya will come.

He wrote a short message: "17th floor. Don't talk to anyone. Don't bring anything. We'll talk there."

She sent it using the encrypted app Arka had used. Then she hurried up the old elevator, which sounded like the screech of old metal refusing to work. All the way to the 17th floor, Salsa's chest pounded. Either from fear... or from the enormous burden she was about to pass on to the only person who might understand.

The elevator doors opened.

The corridor was empty. The smell of dust and dampness greeted us. This floor had actually been unused for a long time—just a dusty room, with peeling paint and cables dangling like old tree roots. But to Salsa, this place was safe. No CCTV. No signal.

He sat on a rickety wooden bench in the corner of the hallway and waited.

Nearly an hour passed before rapid footsteps were finally heard. A sturdy man, wearing a black jacket and a medical mask, emerged from behind the hallway.

"Mas Arya?" whispered Salsa.

The man took off his mask. Tired, sharp eyes stared at her. "Salsa?"

Salsa nodded.

Arya immediately sat down across from her and took a deep breath. "Please tell me everything. From the beginning."

And Salsa began to talk. About how Arka lived in a neighborhood with migrant workers, hearing stories of residents mysteriously disappearing. About Arka's covert investigations into human trafficking and online gambling networks. About encrypted folders, digital documents called "Page Two," and the names written inside.

And about Arka's body which was found in the back alley, with his mouth taped shut and his hands broken.

Arya clenched his fists. "He knows too much... But why didn't he tell me from the start?"

"He wants to protect you," Salsa replied. "And Arka knows—if he fails, you're the only one who can carry on this."

Arya fell silent. Then, from his bag, he pulled out a burner phone and a flash drive. "I brought the equipment. We can copy all the evidence and send it internationally. But Salsa... if we start this, there's no turning back."

Salsa looked into his eyes. "We've already lost someone too precious. If we stay silent... he truly died in vain."

The wind blew through the cracked window on the 17th floor. And two people who had originally been strangers now sat across from each other, putting together the pieces of a secret that had almost been buried.

A secret that is ready to shake power.

A secret that might... make them the next target.

Arya stood up and began to walk down the corridor. He didn't like this place. It was too quiet. There were too many gaps. But this was exactly what was needed for a conversation of this magnitude.

"How much data do you have?" Arya asked without looking up.

Salsa answered quietly, "Forty-two names. Some officials, some businessmen. They're all in the documents Arka keeps on the backup server. But I can only access some of them... the others use an encryption code that hasn't been cracked yet."

"Where is the server?"

Salsa stared at Arya intently. "Not in Indonesia. Arka keeps everything in a private data center owned by a Japanese expatriate living here. But he also said later—there's a physical backup. In a place he says only the people he trusts most know about."

Arya frowned. "Me?"

"It could be you," Salsa replied quietly. "Or someone else we haven't met yet."

A moment of silence.

Then, from his jacket pocket, Arya took out a small, worn memory card, with a small sticker that said: "Page2 - ArkA"

Salsa immediately stood up. "You've always had that?!"

"I found this in a drawer in my apartment. Two days after Arka... died." Arya's tone dropped. "He lived there for a month when he was an intern. I thought it was just a damaged card. But after hearing from you, I double-checked. And the contents... are the same as what you mentioned."

Salsa fell silent. The next second, her eyes burned. A mixture of relief and anger.

Arya sat back down. "There's one name that's keeping me awake."

Salsa held her breath.

"The name of our ambassador is here."

The salsa froze immediately.

Arya continued, "If that name is really in the network, then it's not just us who are in danger. Everyone connected to Arka—his family, coworkers, even his followers—could be targeted."

"Including me," whispered Salsa.

Arya nodded slowly.

They stared at each other. Deep in that gaze, they both knew: what they were facing was no ordinary crime. It was a system. It was a massive octopus.

And Arka... is the first piece of this.

Suddenly, Arya's burner phone vibrated.

Incoming message. No name. Just a photo.

Photo of the 17th floor corridor... from the end of the hallway where they were sitting.

"Run!" Arya shouted immediately.

Salsa didn't think twice. They ran down the old hallway, down the creaking emergency stairs. Below, the sound of heavy footsteps and faint screams echoed from the lobby.

Arya and Salsa don't have much time. But they do have one thing: the untold truth.

And tonight, things started moving faster than they expected.

That night, in the darkness of the flight home to Jakarta, Arya sat frozen in his seat, his heart beating erratically. In the black shoulder bag that never left his lap, he held a small object that now held the key to everything—a worn memory card marked "Page2 - ArkA," and a flash drive containing backups of Arka's encrypted messages.

Salsa didn't come. It was too risky.

He remains in that strange land, moving in the shadows, searching for any remaining shreds of evidence—and perhaps also seeking refuge.

Before they parted, Salsa looked at Arya with tired but shining eyes. "If I get lost, you know where to send this data."

Arya nodded. "To all the media, all the human rights organizations, and the one person who always believed in Arka."

Salsa grabbed his arm. "And don't die before you do that."

Arya hugged her briefly, then disappeared behind the departure door.

Jakarta, 04.12 WIB.

Arya landed in warm air, a stark contrast to the cold night in the foreign country. The airport looked ordinary. Too ordinary.

But he knew that his every move might now be watched.

He slipped out not through the main door, but through a special passage he had used as an evacuation volunteer. Not many people knew about that door, except a handful of people.

In the rental car waiting for him on the outskirts of the airport, Arya opened his burner phone and sent a single message:

"The goods are on me. A-17 was killed. They were closer than we thought."

He didn't mention Arka by name, only the initials they used in the secret group.

The car sped north of Jakarta. Arya had only one goal tonight: to meet a veteran investigative journalist who had often helped Arka uncover major cases.

But as the car approached the journalist's house, his eyes widened.

Police line.

Crowd of people.

And behind the yellow line, an old man lay stiff, his face covered with newspaper.

Arya got down. His steps were shaky.

"The victim... he said he was a journalist," muttered a mother from behind the fence.

Arya stepped back slowly.

In an instant, his breath became short.

One by one, the people who could be trusted... began to fall.

He pressed the phone button. He dialed a number he hadn't called since Arka died.

Someone spoke on the other end. A deep voice, Indonesian mixed with a foreign accent.

"This is Arya," he said simply. "I have what they're looking for. And I need protection before it's too late."

"Come to that place," the voice replied. "But remember... from this moment on, you are not just a fugitive from them. You are a living witness... to the state's crimes."

Arya hung up the phone.

His eyes stared ahead.

Jakarta's skies are still dark. But the data is now live.

...The car started moving again, this time heading for a temporary hideout in an old rented house on the outskirts of town. Arya sat quietly in the back seat, the window only slightly open to allow some air to escape the suffocating anxiety.

He looked in the rearview mirror.

One...

Two...

The black car that had been two lanes behind him continued to follow. Turning in the same direction. At the same speed.

Arya narrowed his eyes. His heart was starting to feel restless.

He told the driver to take a detour, through the small alleys he used to pass through as a student. But the black car remained. It reappeared. As if it knew where he was going.

Her hands began to sweat as she tightly gripped the bag containing the evidence. Her breathing was heavy. The street seemed empty, but it felt crowded with worry.

Then the phone turned on.

"Be careful, Arya. Don't go home. Someone is waiting."
—Message from unknown number.

Arya was silent.

His eyes stared out the window.

The shadow of a man stood in the corner of the alley, wearing a black hoodie and a mask. He remained motionless, but stared directly at the car as it passed.

And in that moment, Arya knew—whatever she was carrying, she could no longer hide it. They knew she was alive. They

knew she was carrying something. And they wouldn't stop...
until she was buried with the truth.

CHAPTER 9

Fake Account, Real Life

The sky was gray as Arya set foot on the top floor of the old tower of his former campus—a place that had once been a silent witness to his struggles as a student activist. Now, it was the only place he could trust to be free of cameras, unsupervised.

He gripped the flash drive, wrapped in plastic and taped tightly, and slid it into the broken ventilation hole beneath the water tank. Arya's hands trembled, not from the wind, but from a nagging feeling: "Your time is almost up."

For a few minutes he stood on the edge of the roof, closing his eyes, letting the wind brush against his face.

His cell phone rang.

One notification from an anonymous account he didn't recognize.

"We know you're there. Now it's your turn to trend before you die."

Arya took a step back, his eyes searching for the faint sound of footsteps coming from the iron stairs.

Then everything went dark.

That afternoon, the news spread quickly across various social media:

"BREAKING: Young diplomat, Arya Wiratama, was found dead on the roof of campus X building. The initial suspicion is suicide. A cell phone was found near his body, with the last message: 'I'm tired.'"

The hashtags #JusticeForArya and #NotSuicide started trending.

But not everyone believes it.

Salsa, who read the news, immediately screamed. "Arya won't commit suicide. She's too afraid of heights..."

And amidst the grief that erupted across timelines, a new account appeared. Nameless, faceless. But it posted one final photo: a hand with claw marks, and a flash drive wrapped in black duct tape...

News of Arya's death rocked news feeds. Media headlines erupted like wildfire:

"Suspected Suicide, Arka's Close Friend Jumps from City Center Tower"

"Sudden Death of Law Student: Is It Linked to Diplomat Case?"

"Arya's cell phone hasn't been found, and it's strongly suspected to contain sensitive information."

That's what makes it all even more absurd.

At the scene, Arya's body was found wearing a black hoodie, standing on the edge of the tower before finally falling —

reportedly recorded by a single grainy CCTV that is claimed to “not have full footage.”

However, when the forensic team examined the scene, they didn't find Arya's personal cell phone. Everyone knows: Arya never goes anywhere without his phone. Moreover, in his final days, he was reportedly holding "important data" that Salsa had sent him from abroad.

One officer told the media:

"We haven't been able to find the victim's electronic devices. His cell phone and flash drive were not found on his body or at the scene. We can't determine a motive without these items."

That's enough to make the public uneasy.

Then, the night after Arya's death, his Instagram account became active again. New posts appeared, even though his family had confirmed that it had been deleted.

The contents of the post seem to suggest:

"If I die, don't cry for me. Cry for those who are still living in lies."(Photo: An open filing cabinet with a red folder labeled “SUBJECT 88 – Echo Project: Indonesia”)

Less than five minutes later, the account disappeared without a trace.

But for Salsa who received a voicemail that night from an unknown number— this was no coincidence.

"Salsa, if you want to live, don't open that file."

And when he dared to open the encrypted folder Arya had sent him before her death, only one word appeared on the screen:

"LATE."

The signal was lost. The room lights went out for a moment. And from the direction of the window, footsteps could be heard. As if someone who knew had just opened the door to the same death.

Salsa stared at her phone screen with trembling hands. The last words from Arya's voicemail before his death kept repeating in her head:

"If I don't have time to go home... look in the 'Red Echo' folder. But be careful... some people would rather kill than be tracked."

Her voice sounded broken, as if there was some kind of interference. But what made Salsa's hair stand on end was the background sound: it sounded like someone was forcing open a door.

And then... silence.

Television news showed a video of the reconstruction. A young reporter stammered:

"The victim was found in a terrible state... but police concluded there were no signs of violence. No other

fingerprints were found. However, what was odd... the victim's cell phone was missing, and..."

He paused for a moment, then looked nervously at the camera.

"...according to an internal source who wished to remain anonymous, there were encrypted files on the victim's laptop that had been professionally deleted, as if by someone who knew exactly how to cover their tracks."

Some netizens are starting to doubt the suicide narrative.

Anonymous account @NarasiBayangan wrote:

"Arya didn't commit suicide. He knew too much. #RedEcho is no ordinary name. Anyone who knows anything about Arka and Arya will be silenced. This isn't theory—it's protocol."

And the account immediately disappeared from the platform an hour after the post went viral.

Meanwhile, in an empty building on the 12th floor—an old, abandoned office space—a group of men in gray uniforms without logos were going through physical files. On the table: Arka's passport, Salsa's CCTV photos, an unlabeled black flash drive, and a handwritten note that read:

"SUBJECT 88: Immediate elimination. Link leaked. Digital accounts wiped clean. Operations continue in Jakarta."

A large man lit his cigarette, then muttered:

“This kid is smart, but he trusts his friends too much...”

He closed the red folder with the seal: STATE SECRET – BLACK CATEGORY.

Salsa had no idea that while she was crying alone in the corner of her room, blaming herself for sending Arya back to Jakarta, someone had already hacked into her personal email system. The 'Red Echo' folder was now locked — and a notification appeared:

“Access revoked by Administrator. Your rights have been removed.”

Outside Salsa's apartment, CCTV cameras recorded a mysterious figure wearing a hat standing looking out of her bedroom window.

No one knows who. But the look in his eyes says one thing:

Arya is just the beginning.

CHAPTER 10

The Blocked Truth

At 2:13 in the morning.

The server where Arya's email account was stored suddenly underwent "unscheduled maintenance." None of the activity logs were accessible. His last email data was gone.

On the digital forensics computer screen belonging to a cybersecurity expert that Salsa had secretly requested, only a strange message appeared:

"File not found. Your access permission has been revoked by the system."

However, strangely, the system does not show who has the highest access.

"There's no way this could have been done by a normal hacker," the expert muttered. "It's like... there's an automated protocol to wipe out anyone who comes near that folder."

Salsa reopened Arka's old photo. On the back of the frame, she found a small piece of paper tucked tightly: coordinates that resembled a location. She tried to track it... but every time she opened the digital map app, the location changed.

Even the search history was immediately lost.

"It's as if something — or someone — is reprogramming our digital map of the world."

Meanwhile, in a dark room lit only by large screens, a sharp-eyed old man sat silently monitoring.

He saw traces of Salsa's activity. Then he opened a secret log panel and said into his headset:

"The female subject is getting too close. Activate level 3. Don't let her find File_ARKA. This isn't about Arka anymore. This is about the entire operation."

Someone on the other end simply replied:

"The last copy has been blocked. There is no way in."

That morning, Salsa received an anonymous package. Inside: a photocopied sheet of paper with a single sentence scribbled on it:

"What they call suicide...isn't death. It's erasure."

Beneath it, a small memory card was folded in cigarette paper. But when he tried to open it, the laptop's system immediately shut down. He took it to three different technicians. They all said the same thing:

"The motherboard wasn't burned... but it looked like it was deliberately turned off."

And one of them looked at Salsa, then said softly:

"I've seen cases like this... when I was freelance working on intelligence contracts. This... was 'shadow' work."

Fake accounts continue to appear online under the names Arka and Arya. Some post strange messages, such as:

“We are still here.”

“If you think the truth will win, think again.”

“Your hero is dead before the story begins.”

Each post lasts only two minutes, then disappears.

Salsa began to feel like the world around her wasn't the same reality anymore. She didn't know who was truly on her side. Friends, family, even the police—they began to feel like actors in a script she hadn't written.

He once thought that all of this was just about seeking justice for Arka and Arya.

But now, he realized... What he was facing was a system. And that system had one rule:

If you touch the truth — then the truth will touch you back.

At 03.06 WIB.

Salsa woke up to the sound of a notification on her phone. She had set it to silent since Arya's death. But that night... A WhatsApp message came in. It was from Arya's number. It was just one sentence:

“Don't trust anyone. Including me.”

He immediately sat up, shivering. The number was dead. It had been verified by the police, and it had been inactive since the day before Arya reportedly jumped from the top floor of the tower.

He tried to reply, but the status changed: “Only certain contacts can send messages to this number.”

And the next second, the number disappeared from his chat list. As if it never existed.

Salsa went to the police station, trying to ask again about Arya's investigation.

But there is something strange.

All the files he had previously viewed had now been censored. Photos of Arya's body had disappeared from the investigator's folder. CCTV footage from the scene could no longer be played—it said “format not supported,” even though it had previously been easily accessible.

One of the officers said:

"Miss Salsa, I don't know what you're looking for. But if you keep pushing, we can't guarantee your safety."

Three days later, a freelance journalist named Revan arrived quietly at Salsa's apartment, carrying a flash drive.

"I used to be Arya's colleague in Jakarta. He sent me a message before he died. I know this is too big for me to handle alone. But you, Salsa, you have something no other journalist has: personal reasons."

Salsa took the flash drive. Revan told her not to open it using a regular laptop.

"If you plug it into the internet, they'll know."

That night, while Salsa was looking for a place to check the contents of the flash drive, breaking news appeared on the TV screen:

"The late Arya's investigative partner was found dead on the side of the train tracks. Initial suspicion: accident."

Victim's name: Revan.

Salsa could only hold the flash drive tightly. Her body was shaking, not because of the cold... But because she knew one thing for sure:

Anyone who knows too much will be silenced.

And now, only he is left.

That flash drive... might be the only key. But opening it means inviting the shadow closer.

As night fell again, Salsa's phone lit up again. A note she hadn't written yet appeared on the screen, seemingly unrelated:

"It's not who killed Arka and Arya. It's what."

"And what it is is still there. Near. Recording. Resetting everything."

Truth cannot be erased. But it can be locked.

You just have to decide: Do you want to unlock it — or stay locked forever?"

CHAPTER 11

Hacking or Leaking?

Three days after Arya's death, Salsa lived in the shadow of paranoia. She turned off her GPS, deactivated social media, and even covered all the camera ports on her phone and laptop with black tape.

But one thing he couldn't stop: The thought that kept bringing him back to the flash drive.

He borrowed a laptop from a computer repairman acquaintance, which was air-gapped — not connected to the internet, never used before. And in the middle of the night, with only the bedroom lights dimmed, he plugged a flash drive into the USB port.

One folder appears: `/not_everything_is_true`

In it, there is only one 11-minute video file.

The title:
“The Truth Before It Was Blocked.mp4”

The video appears to be a secret recording. It shows a man—Arya—sitting in an unnamed cafe. He's wearing a dark hoodie and speaking to the camera as if delivering a final message.

“If you’re watching this... it means I’m gone.”

"I managed to gain access to the server where their data is stored. All of Arka's tracks, discussions about his case, and even the accounts that were silenced."

"But strangely, some of the data seems to be sent directly to me. I don't know who infiltrated it. I don't know if it was hacked... or an internal leak."

"I also got a CCTV backup. Not from the apartment, but from the tower upstairs. I don't know how it got into my personal backup email. It was like it was sent automatically."

Salsa's hands trembled. She paused the video and searched for another file on the flash drive.

And yes. There is a hidden folder with a random name: `._1973xvrg`

Inside... a dark CCTV video. Title: `"tower_17_final.avi"`

He turned.

Arya was seen standing on the balcony upstairs. But... he was alone. Behind him, there was another shadow. A figure whose face was unclear. Then Arya looked over, speaking, but there was no sound.

Salsa closed the laptop, her breath hitching. Her heart racing. The video changed everything.

He went to the police station, wanting to submit the video as new evidence. But in front of the investigation room, someone touched his shoulder.

"Don't come in."

Someone whispered. A middle-aged man, dressed like a staff member, but without any ID.

"If you hand it over, you'll be the next target. Even the police... aren't all clean. Some have been bought."

Salsa froze.

The man slipped a piece of paper into his pocket. It had only one IP address and the following sentence written on it:

"If you want to know who planted the evidence on Arya's flash drive, log in to this address. But not from a home connection."

Salsa holds the paper. The world around him suddenly fell silent.

Hacking or leaking? Was Arya trapped, or helped? Did Arka commit suicide, or was he silenced?

The question echoed again.

But one thing is for sure... The truth is starting to leak out. And those leaks can't come without a reason.

Salsa stared at the IP address written on a worn piece of paper. The writing looked like it had been printed with ink from an old typewriter, not handwritten, not from a regular printer. There was something odd about it. It felt... antique, yet precise.

He didn't dare open the address from home. Not even from the cafe.

Finally, he went to an old internet cafe on the outskirts of town. The place didn't even have a sign. Just a hand-written sign on the window: "Online 24/7 – Pay Upfront."

He rented room number 7. On the computer screen, he typed the IP slowly.

```
makefile  
CopyEdit  
175.44.107.41:8777
```

The page that appears... doesn't look like a normal website. Just gray text on a black background:

"WELCOME TO ARYA'S REPLACEMENT. ARE YOU READY TO ACCEPT EVERYTHING HE'S HIDING?"

[YES][NO]

Salsa hesitated. Her hands were cold. But she clicked YES.

The screen turns black. Then a folder appears named:

/ARKA_NOT_THE_FIRST_TARGET

And below it, it says:

"The download will automatically start in 13 seconds. If you don't disconnect now, you will be detected by their system."

He panicked. But his curiosity was greater than his fear.

A 92MB ZIP file begins downloading.

When it reached 78%... The computer suddenly shut down by itself.

The internet cafe's electricity went out only in booth number 7.

He left in a hurry. But before he could leave the internet cafe, the guard called out to him:

"Someone just called here... looking for you. Even though you never gave me your number."

The salsa froze.

"He only said one sentence... 'You're digging too deep, Salsa. Arya is stopped.' Then he hung up."

Outside the internet cafe, Salsa tries to turn on her phone. But the screen only displays the text:

Device locked by external command

Her phone was remotely locked. Who knows by whom. Who knows from where.

That night, when he returned to his boarding room, the ceiling light flickered twice. The window, which had been closed, was now slightly ajar.

And on her pillow... There was a brown envelope. No name. No stamp. But it felt warm, like it had just been placed.

Inside: A small SD card. And a note:

“If you give up, throw this in the river. But if you want to know who started all this, open the file inside. But be prepared, Salsa. Arya just opened the door. You will see the contents of his house.”

The floor creaked. The sound of soft footsteps seemed to come from the ceiling.

But when he opened the door and looked up... **There's no one there.** Only the moon shone too brightly that night.

And perhaps, something — or someone — is staring from the shadows.

CHAPTER 12

CCTV Without Image

Heavy rain poured down that night. Lightning cracked the sky, as if the universe itself was restless. In the security room of an unnamed building, a young technician named Dimas sat transfixed in front of a monitor. He had been instructed to check the CCTV footage from the top floor—the floor where Arya was last seen alive.

All cameras are functioning normally. The indicator lights are green. The cables are connected. The server is stable.

But when he played the recording from 2:13 to 2:46, the screen just went black. It wasn't like it was dead. It was like... it was hidden.

The file was there, its size was normal, and it hadn't been deleted. But its contents were completely dark. And when he tried to copy it to a flash drive, the system refused with a single warning:

"This footage is restricted by root protocol. Administrator unknown."

He tried to access the internal logs. But there it said:

"CCTV-17A: Disconnected manually by User: Arya.S"

Impossible.

Arya had died two days before this recording was made.

On the other side of town, Salsa tries to open the SD card she found in her room. Inside, there's only one file:

LOGLAST.rec

But the file couldn't be opened with any standard program. He eventually sent it to a friend in the digital forensics world, a man named Rehan. The usually calm expert now only replied with a short sentence:

“Are you sure you want to know what's in this file?”

Salsa didn't reply.

Because that night, he found something else on his small bedroom table: a torn piece of paper with letters printed on it from a matrix printer.

“There is truth to be broadcast. There are also things that can only be whispered about in graves.”

He began to feel that it was no longer about Arka. Nor about Arya. Maybe even... not about anyone. But about what.

A few days later, a short news story appeared on an online news channel, lasting only 9 minutes before being removed:

"An old building in the city center was found to contain a hidden room containing dozens of servers and active surveillance cameras. Sources say the servers are connected to..."(article disappears before it finishes loading).

Meanwhile, in a location undetectable by GPS, an old man with burns on his left hand stares at a large screen filled with footage of faces:

Arka.Arya.Salsa.And... someone else who has never appeared in the story.

He said softly:

“They’re always curious. But human curiosity...always loses to fear when it gets too close.”

Behind the man, the iron door opened slowly. A young woman entered, her face very familiar to all the names mentioned earlier.

Salsa stared at her laptop screen, which had suddenly shut down. The LOGLAST.rec file had simply vanished from the folder. It hadn't gone to the trash, nor was it left in recent files—it was as if it had never existed.

Her phone rang, an unknown number. She hesitated to answer, but her fingers seemed to move on their own.

“Don’t trust anyone. Not even yourself.” The voice was... unrecognizable, like a modulated voice, flat, but chilling to the bone. Before he could speak, the call ended.

Salsa looked around her apartment. Silence. Too quiet.

Then Salsa's eyes fell on a sticky note that suddenly appeared on her desk — she was sure it wasn't there last night.

There is only one sentence:

“If the recording cannot be seen, then whose eyes witnessed it?”

At that very moment, the power went out. The emergency lights glowed a dim red. And on the slightly foggy screen of her bedroom mirror, written in finger-drawn letters:

17A NOT FINISHED

Salsa was silent. She finally realized...

It's no longer about finding the truth. But about what happens to those who seek it.

And perhaps, the last two questions in his life were:

Who knew first? And... who's still silent?

CHAPTER 13

Virtual World Conference

The hashtags #JusticeForArka, #WhoKillsArya, and #Tower17 flooded social media. Every post, video clip, and conspiracy theory went viral faster than any clarification. Netizens debated, convened, and decided for themselves who was guilty and who was lying.

Meanwhile, a mysterious YouTube account named TheSilencer17 uploaded a 1-minute, 17-second video. It's silent, only a snippet of CCTV footage from the corridor, which has been proven to be missing from the official server. In the video, a man in dark clothing is seen carrying a suitcase on the 17th floor—two nights before Arya's reported death.

Comments exploded.

“That’s the suitcase Arya brought.” “No, that was before Arya went there.” “Why aren’t there any footsteps?” “Who owns this account?”

In Salsa's makeshift office, she stared at the screen, her eyes red from lack of sleep. On her desk lay an official summons from a law enforcement agency—not to testify, but to be questioned on suspicion of unauthorized dissemination of information.

“Funny,” he muttered. “People seeking justice are accused of destroying order.”

Salsa opened her laptop. She typed a name into the internal search bar of Arya's digital folder: RDH.

Several encrypted files appeared. But one file was unlocked because its password matched Arka's death date.

The contents of the file are a transcript of a Telegram chat between two pseudonyms: **Raven** and Delta17.

Raven: "Arka is too noisy. He still has the recording."

Delta17: "Then, the coffin... just validates the accident narrative."

Raven: "And Arya?" *Delta17:* "He's still alive. For now."

Salsa freezes the screen. Still alive? Arya?

Suddenly, an incoming message notification appeared from an unknown account: JustAFile sent one image:

Arya's photo. Indoors. Closed. Holding today's newspaper.

Salsa dropped her phone.

The virtual courtroom is getting rowdier, wild theories are getting crazier. But one thing is now clear to him: If the world only believes what goes viral, then the truth will continue to be buried by algorithms.

And Salsa knows, time is running out... to decide: Will she voice this evidence, or be silenced like her two best friends.

Salsa didn't know whether to believe it or not. The photo posted by the JustAFile account made her head pound. In the photo, Arya certainly looked alive, sitting in a chair with a blank stare, holding a newspaper with today's date. But the background was strange—no windows, no natural light, just dull gray walls and a blinding white lamp.

“Is this real? Or digital manipulation?” he wondered.

Salsa tried to reply to the message, but it never went through. The account disappeared shortly after the image was sent.

Netizens are twisting all possibilities. Some claim Salsa is behind all these deaths. Others believe Arya is still alive and is being used as a technological scapegoat, a leaked state surveillance experiment.

Several anonymous emails also entered his personal inbox. One of them simply contained the sentence:

“Only those who don't go viral are allowed to live.”

Her hands trembled as she reread the sentence. Was it a threat? Or a hint?

Shortly after, he received an unmarked package. Inside was a small flash drive and a piece of paper with the following inscription:

“You only know half of it. The rest is in this video. But if you open it, there's no going back.”

Salsa stared at her laptop screen, her hand clutching the flash drive. Her heart pounded like an alarm clock about to explode.

And before he inserted it into the USB port, the lights in his room suddenly went out.

The laptop screen flickered. A clicking sound came from the door.

Someone... just came in.

The lights came back on thirty seconds later.

But Salsa was no longer alone in the room.

The door was unlocked. The air felt colder. And on the table, the flash drive was gone.

He glanced quickly toward the window. There was no sign of external force. No sound. Just a silence too neat to be natural.

His phone vibrated.

Unknown Number.The message is just two words:

"Don't open it."

Salsa twisted around, her chest tightening. She knew that cyberspace wasn't just a stage, but also a silent execution arena. Out there, the world convened with speculation, judging without evidence, and burying the truth with commentary.

That night, the trending topics changed.

#AryaStillAlive

#ArkaSilenced

#SalsaInvolved

But the next morning, the account that first shared Arya's photo—JustAFile—disappeared from all platforms. It was as if it had never existed. All links were broken. All retweets were gone.

All that remains are screenshots from netizens. But every time they're shared, their accounts disappear. Even Google has begun to stop displaying full search results for the names "Arka" and "Arya."

"It's like the world is being reset."

Salsa, who had been trying to be a voice for those who couldn't hear, now felt like the hunted. She no longer trusted anyone—including herself.

The virtual trial continues. But there's no judge. There's no defendant. There's no end in sight.

And there will never be a complete truth.

In the middle of the night, the rain falls silently. On the roof of an old building, someone stares at a half-lit laptop screen. The remaining footage recovered from the 17th-floor CCTV appears for two seconds—Arya's face, sweating, trembling, holding his phone as he says:

“If I die, it won't be suicide...”

Then the screen goes black. Data corrupted.

No technician has been able to recover it. Even digital forensics programs have failed to trace the message's origin. All traces are locked away, encrypted by a system unknown to the public.

Salsa received the recording via a flash drive that was secretly sent to her boarding room, without a sender. Without a note.

Minutes after watching it, the power went out in his room. His phone was completely dead.

And in the window, reflected the silhouette of a person standing under the street lamp, staring directly at him.

The next day, the internet was abuzz again. A new hashtag dominated:

#TheTruthThatMustNotBeDisclosed
#TrendingBeforeDeath

But one by one, the accounts sharing the recording disappeared again, including Salsa's own account.

And like all stories that are too true to accept, the public eventually chose to forget it.

“Because in this world, sometimes the truth isn't meant to be known. It's meant to be hidden.” — Excerpt from an internal document that never made it to court.

CHAPTER 14

The Truth That Finally Trends

A week after Arya's death anniversary, thousands of posts flooded various platforms. Short video clips showing Arya's final recorded voice, blurry CCTV footage, and anonymous testimonies from netizens emerged like bubbles rising to the surface.

However, nothing is truly complete. Nothing is truly certain. And—nothing is legally followed up.

The forensic agency stated they found no solid evidence that Arya was murdered. Police called it a "closed case with suspected suicide." Arya's cell phone was never found. CCTV footage from the central server disappeared. The flash drive Salsa had been holding suddenly disappeared during an unreported raid on the boarding house.

Salsa now lives with a new identity in a small town far from the media. She can't trust anyone, not even herself. But she writes. Every night. About everything she sees. She hears. She feels. About Arka, about Arya, and about the truth that continues to be obscured.

And among the thousands of comments on the viral video, someone wrote:

"We don't need a court verdict to know something is wrong. We just need the courage to not be silent."

The sentence was commented on, shared, and saved millions of times. It trended for weeks. Even foreign media began highlighting the case as "the ghost case of modern justice."

But still... No names of the perpetrators. No clarity on who hid the evidence. No explanation for why the truth is so difficult to access.

It's as if...the world is more comfortable with neat lies, than messy truths.

However, from all this, one thing is a lesson:

Justice doesn't always come from the courtroom. Sometimes, justice comes from small voices online that can no longer be silenced. That trending can save, or it can bury. And that, when the law is silent, the public must not remain silent either.

There were no mourners in front of Arya's grave. Only the rustling wind and a crumpled piece of paper, handwritten on it from who knows where:

"Truth is not something that always wins. But it is the only one worth fighting for."

Netizens continue to debate. Some claim to know who the perpetrators are but are afraid to speak out. Others believe this is the work of elites, dark networks, or even politics. Still others are growing tired—and choosing to remain silent.

But from that silence, a silent resistance emerged: A movement of law students formed communities to support

victims of justice. Digital influencers began inserting legal education messages into entertainment content. Young journalists dared to reopen buried archives of similar cases. And a high school teacher transformed his students' final assignments into:

“Look at a legal case that didn't go viral, and tell us how you felt as a human being.”

The virtual world is no longer just a place for drama and sensation. It has become a space for reflection. A place where truth, even when censored, continues to find its own way.

Moral message:

Arya's death is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of the realization that:

- Truth is often defeated by power,
- The law can be silenced,
- But collective consciousness cannot be stopped.

It is not one person's job to uphold justice. But every voice, no matter how small, can be a spark that ignites silence.

Don't wait for something to trend to care. Don't wait for victims to act. Don't wait for complete evidence to ask questions:

What's wrong with our laws?

And in a dark, unmarked room, an old man stared at a laptop screen. He reread the news about Arya.

In his hand—a cell phone. Yes, the lost cell phone.

He didn't smile. He didn't cry.

He just said softly:

“It's not time for the truth to come out yet...”

THE END

Writer

About the Author:

Muhammad Ari Pratomo is an Indonesian lawyer who is also known as a writer and songwriter. He uses the power of words to voice justice, touch the conscience, and capture overlooked realities. His works are not merely meant to be read—they are meant to be reflected upon, living on beyond time and era.

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