

-Liwayway-

Two massive shadows loomed on both sides of the horizon, baring jagged teeth as big as boulders that raced across the waves. The winds turned into shrieks of raving madness that tore into Liwayway's ears. She leapt for Balod, but the jostling waves threw her hard into the deck. She groaned. A viscous warmth flowed down from her head and the world spun in circles. Her body wouldn't move.

In that last second before she lost consciousness, she gathered all the spirits within her.

The surroundings changed alternating from glimpses of darkness and water tumbling, to the open sky, the sun above and the wind streaming under her wings. She soared above her homeland, the familiar sight of towering trees and landed on her village. Her father stood outside, clad in bearskin and the earthen robes of a *Lakan*, roasting the thigh of a deer above an open flame. He looked up to her.

"You're back."

She nodded, breathing in the sweet aroma of meat and charred wood. Her hand shook slightly and her gut squirmed. She sat in front of her father in silence. Her gaze wandered around to the familiar sights, their village of wood and stone, bereft of other people. The river running beside it greeted her with the sound of roaring water.

"It is beautiful. Was I wrong to run away?" she asked.

"When we hunt, the deer will run away from us, and we chase it. When we are hunted by the beasts of the forest, we too run away." Her father smiled at her as he turned the deer over the fire. "Perhaps there is no right or wrong, only action or inaction. What is it that you are doing now?"

Liwayway took a deep breath.

"I...I...something happened. I think I got swallowed by an evil spirit." She couldn't help but laugh, leaning back on the ground to look at the infinite sky of her memories. "Maybe I overestimated myself, but I only wanted to save the people who helped me. But I think I failed. Is it that I'm already dead?"

Her father smiled at her. She frowned, her brows coming together in question. She concentrated and the wind picked up, her tattoos flaring to life and her eyes turned sharp and deep blue as the sky. Her father had disappeared.

"It... isn't?" her question rang unanswered.

She stared at the village one last time, then closed her eyes, focused her will and roared.

The surroundings blurred and turned dark. Her eyes snapped open. The world came in shades of flickering orange reflecting off grey walls. She was lying in some sort of cave.

“Where am I?” Liwayway groaned as she tried to sit up. It was cold and dark. A headache ran like a crack on her skull, and the side of her chest burst with pain everytime she drew air.

“Careful!” the warm touch of soft skin on her forehead forced her to lie down. She turned towards the speaker, and her eyes widened. The name left her lips in a whisper.

“Ngi-ngi?”

-Balod-

Waters tossed him around in the darkness as Balod lost all sense of direction. The helplessness stretched on forever. Nothing to hold on to but formless, shapeless water and rushing air. Tumbling, sometimes falling, sometimes rising.

Then it all stopped. He lay somewhere hard and damp. Water ebbed and flowed at his side. He couldn't breathe; water in his lungs. He coughed and sputtered, then howled in pain, every part of his body protesting. He opened his eyes. Where was he?

The darkness answered with notes of droplets dripping down and bursting, echoing around like a string being plucked. He sucked in a greedy lungful of musty, stale air and thought about what to do.

But he had been eaten. Panic gripped his throat and seized his chest into long quick breaths. He was still alive, but for how long? The massive shadow in the sky swooping down to consume them remained etched in his mind.

“No!” He shouted hard into the empty air.

“No! No! No...” it bounced back and forth, resonating. Every echo struck him hard. He couldn't save his family, he even tried to run away, but in the end he failed at everything.

He did not mean to give up on them. He truly didn't. It was just, he didn't have the strength to do it. How could he not leave? The matters of the deities were not something he wanted to be a part of. He...he was just too weak. No. He shook his head, he was too afraid.

The thought coursed through his chest and he wept. He cursed himself for being too afraid. He thought about Liwayway, the girl with the eagle on her skin. Despite all her powers,

she also couldn't save them. Yet, she still moved, still tried to find a way. She was better to them than their own brother.

Something broke his train of thoughts, a faint familiar melody, flowing to where he was. A cold chill crept up Balod's back. He lay there, deciding what to do. The song continued, carrying notes of loss and grief to his mind.

Finally, he stood up. He stumbled across the mushy ground, his hand on a wall to the side as he followed the sound. He entered deeper, and the tunnel he was in turned into a massive cavern.

Silver light, glowing from pearls under, illuminated a woman, waist deep in a pool. She held something he couldn't quite see from the distance to her lips, from which the song came. Her hair lay strewn into long messy locks and her clothes were rags, bleached white and torn into threads. Something else floated in the water in front of her, which she would look at from time to time.

Balod stared at her askance, but his footsteps rippled around the cavern, and the woman looked up from her melancholy.

She smiled at him.