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-Balod-

Tonight, Balod was the moon's lover. Under the cover of darkness, he sat on the deck, and, as she peeked from above, in her balcony of clouds, he pressed his *kubing* to his lips and whispered her a sweet serenade.

The stars twinkled at the sight, mischievous eavesdroppers were they. Slowly, the twanging of bamboo strips coaxed the moon out of hiding. She glowed bright, but gentle. A pearl in the sky. Revealing blurred lines and forms concealed under the water; shadows of reefs and hills and ridges and cliffs.

A blotch appeared in the waves, a silhouette growing larger than the turtle-boat. Balod's world bobbed and tilted but he remained unperturbed. A pair of flukes breached the surface, splashing him with sea foam in greeting.

They sang together with him. Like old friends. Whispering how close he was — if it were daytime, he might've already spotted sandy beaches glittering in the distance. But no matter. Balod liked the night, and he wasn't one to look forward to the *Harana of Magwayen*. He preferred the quiet solitude of the ocean to the ceaseless noise of land. The expectant gazes of others on him. So what if he hasn't got a woman? He has his family.

Footsteps from behind makes him pause. He sets aside his *kubing* and glances back, seeing the girl wearing an eagle on her skin.

"Did I disturb you?" she spoke. "I heard you were the one who pulled me out of the waters, I wanted to thank you."

"It is nothing."

A momentary pause. Whale song kept the quiet at bay.

"It was a nice melody." Liwayway said.

"Ngi-ngi told me you came from the land over the ocean." Balod studied her, a human from a life unlike his own. "Those lines on your skin, what do they mean?"

"They are the marks of a warrior, our connection with the spirits"

"A warrior huh," Balod said. "We weren't always at sea, once we too were warriors of land, - at least that's what the elders tell us. But one day, a storm came and, in its fury, swept our

tribe's treasure into the waves, and we set out to find it. Since then we have taken to the waters as nomads, too ashamed to ever return."

He looked around, gazing at the ocean in its tranquil slumber. "It is a tall tale, but good for me. The sea is peaceful, and there is no need to be a warrior, for I am not very brave." Balod chuckled, amused at his own tale while Liwayway listened. "You told us where you are from. But you didn't tell us where you are going."

She kept her silence.

"Perhaps it is not my place to pry," Balod said. "I doubt what you are looking for is something in our tribes. But there are traders from distant shores that will come to the *Harana*, you might find what you are looking for there."

Then he started to play the *kubing* once again.

-Liwayway-

Morning. The sun rising lazily above the horizon. A puff of air escaped from Liwayway's lips at the chill as she lowered the tips of her toes, then her ankles, and up to just below her knees, down into the water. The waves wobbled, crest to trough, and her feet swayed in kind. The coolness crept up, while a wild breeze blanketed her and she shivered.

The ocean was much more vast than she imagined. Bigger than a hundred *Pinawas* put together. She swung her feet back and forth, and the waters protested with froth and spray that splashed back at her.

Ngi-ngi's head emerged from the waves, wet hair splayed across her face and a wide smirk on her mouth. "Come with me! I want to show you something!"

"What is it?" Liwayway asked. Ngi-ngi giggled, before grabbing her feet and pulling her down. "Hold your breath!"

The waters come crashing around her. She opened her eyes and looked at Ngi-ngi, who motions with her hands. *Down*. Her gaze followed. And there everything was.

A forest; of red, and orange, and pink, and green, and yellow and fish for birds and animals, of all sorts. They swam through crevices of rock, and under the canopies of such unusual plants that had no leaves instead full of spines, nubs, ridges and shells. Her eyes widened

and Ngi-ngi gave her a spin and descended. She followed through, and in that moment, she forgot everything.

Notes:

Kubing (from Wikipedia) - a type of jaw harp, traditionally used as an intimate instrument, for loved ones, and for courtship for males.

To see the *kubing* in action, here is a youtube link: <https://youtu.be/dB1EwiIufkg?t=160>

Harana - traditionally, a serenade