

-Balod-

A few days later.

Balod waded, waist deep in the water, towards the boat moored on the shore. On his shoulders, he carried a bundle of coconuts, fish—both smoked and fresh, gourds of rainwater, and other provisions for their journey. But on his chest, he carried a heaviness that made him pause to breathe.

He looked at his face reflected in the water. Distorted by the undulations of its surface, at times, it'd warp into a smile, at times a frown, and at times terrified.

“Do you think we'll find them?” he called out.

“I don't know.” Standing on the edge of the prow, the girl cupped her hands over her head, looking out towards the seas.

He swept his gaze over the horizon. Not a single grey patch, nor a cloud blocking the sun. It was as calm and peaceful as a mirror's surface. “What if we don't?”

“We will.”

He climbed up. Their boat had been one of the few that survived the storm, seaworthy enough with just a few patches. Before, he'd trust this boat with his life. But now, he didn't know.

“Are you ready?” she said.

He hesitated. That night had been just like a dream. His hair rose on end as he remembered the howling gale, dragging his tribe up towards the sky. He gritted his teeth, looked back at her. The deity's words rang back in his head.

They are still alive. Follow the Bakunawa, the voice of the wind.

“I am not sure of anything,” he growled. “How can you be so calm?”

“You don't seem to trust the deity?”

“No, I've never met one before.”

“Then you should trust yourself.”

Balod took a deep breath and sighed. He stored the food and the water inside the hold, before climbing back up. He stared at the girl, her back turned to him. Who was she and how can

she believe the deity so easily? As she moved, the *malong* slid just enough to reveal the head of a serpent wrapped in lines of fire, obsidian black on the edges of her shoulder.

“Do we have enough?” she asked.

“I don’t know how long the journey will take. But this should be enough.”

“Then have you figured out where we should go?”

Balod swept his gaze away. Half a frown rolled across his face.

“There is an island. A few days from here. It is always the first to get hit by the storms. Always raining, always windy.” Balod said. “Perhaps we will be able to find something there.”

“What about what *Magwayen* said. Can you hear the voice that deity spoke about?”

“I ... don’t know.”

The other half of his frown flit past. How could he know? He was not some shaman who could hear the whispers of a monstrous creature beyond his understanding. He had only grown up with the sea, and sung with the waves. He had only wanted to live a quiet life.

“What about you? You can turn into a—” *monster*, Balod bit his tongue, drowning the word back into his throat. “...a bird. Can’t you hear it? Can’t you do something?”

“I don’t understand it either.” She shook her head and waved her hand away. “Don’t think too much about the deities’ words. They may be true, but they will not help you.”

“It is better to learn by yourself.” she said.

“You’ve met the deity before?” Balod asked.

She turned away, but he could see her grip on the rail tighten. The tattoos on her skin quivered, lines coming to life, flaring across her skin. He stepped back.

“The deities are not evil.” Her mouth stumbled from a grimace to a bitter smile and she exhaled a draft. She leaned back into the edge. “From what you said of *Magwayen*, they will not mean your tribe harm.”

He mulled over her words. They had long celebrated *Magwayen*, the deity of the ocean. He did not know what to make of the songs. *Magwayen*, a father during the day, and a mother during the night. They cared for the tribe, provided them with the fish to eat, the water to drink. But they also made the waves, and blew the wind, and their anger could claim their boats and their people.

But the girl in front of him? How can she control the wind, why did she have powers?

“You.” Balod said. “Who are you really? Are you also a..?”

She chuckled, “I am just me. Liwayway. Nothing else.”

“The journey is long.” Liwayway smiled. “If you’re ready, we should get going.”

Balod nodded. It didn’t matter who she really was. She was here to help. All he wanted was to save his sister and his tribe. He removed the line tying the boat, and the wind thrust them forward.

ACT I END