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*-Liwayway-*

Liwayway broke through the surface with a splash. She sputtered, gobbling up the sweet, intoxicating air. It tickled the insides of her starving lungs - she coughed at the sensation. Then laughed at the beauty of the reefs, at the myriad schools of fishes, in their rainbow colors and blurred patterns, streaming in and out of the shoals and occasionally bumping into her as she swam.

She clambered into the boat and lay on the deck. The sun stared at her as she unfolded her fist, revealing a single pearl held in her palm. She rolled it in her hands, waiting. The tribe of the sea had told her that distant people, traders, would take these pearls in exchange for goods in the *Harana*. She didn't understand, what could a pretty trinket possibly do?

Ngi-ngi and the others remained under. Liwayway could only wait for them - they could dive for as much as ten full breaths of hers.

*You reek.*

She jumped. A faint voice flowed into her head. It sloshed around, reverberating, resonating, rising and falling in intensity with the waves as if it were being carried from a great distance.

*What is someone with the taint of flames doing here? Are you here because of the 'gift' of your homeland?*

"Who are you?" She growled.

It chuckled.

*I am the ocean.* Stillness filled the air, yet the water moved, undulating with every syllable.

*Tell me, how is Lalahon, has she finally broken free? Or not, since you seem to have taken a part of it.*

"What are you saying!"

She gripped the edge of the railings with such force the wood shattered. Splinters buried themselves in her hands. Blood trickled down, but she ignored the pain. She closed her eyes shut,

her breath coming in bursts, jaw clenched, teeth gritted, but the burning forest showed itself once again.

Hot ash filled her lungs and she choked. The stench of charred meat assaulted her. Her saliva turned bitter. The obsidian black deity with rubies for eyes walked towards her, leaving a trail of lava.

The lines etched on her skin moved. The tattoo of the eagle shook away its slumber, spread its wings, and soared up her shoulders and her neck and up to cover her face. The wind picked up in anger, engendering waves that tussled and tossed the boat around. Her hair thickened, forming into needles, that then bloomed into a crest of brown and white feathers.

She opened her eyes.

They had turned blue; cerulean as the sky and as sharp as the rays of noon sun.

“Show yourself.” she said. Beads of sweat dribbled down from her forehead, gathering on her chin to drop down on the deck.

*Why don't you come to me? I'll tell you something, something you might want to hear.*

The voice tempted her.

She held up her hands, morphing into wings, staring at the blood flowing. Painful, it cleared her mind. The pace of her breath lulled. She spat the bitterness away.

A pair of dolphins breached the surface. They looked at her, beckoning her to follow.

She hesitated. Should she?

Was this even a question? Hadn't she left her homeland to look for answers? She unfurled her wings, talons poised on the deck, and with the gale on her, took off after the dolphins.

Her wings grabbed the wind and pulled her upwards. She bathed in the feeling of flying, of soaring. The boat turned into a speck and disappeared into the distance. Then she spotted it.

A throne, grown of corals and seashells, rising to the surface on a small islet of sand that should have been claimed by the waves. A man sat on it, petting the dolphins who had led her there. They snuggled against his hands, chattering while he stroked their snouts.

Liwayway landed in front of him. The man looked at her, the hint of a smile on his face. Water crept up around him in defiance of gravity. It swirled up to his chest, in deep blue and seafoam, as if he were wearing the ocean like a robe.

“Who are you?” Liwayway asked.

“My, my, so much anger.” He shook his head. A crab climbed up his body as he spoke, then skittered through, disappearing into the folds of water. “Didn’t I tell you already? I am the ocean. But if you prefer another name, then call me *Magwayen*.”

Notes:

Monkey eating eagle – also called the Philippine eagle, is the inspiration for the imagery in this work.

