



Tales from the *Coral Triangle*

PHILIPPINES



Tales from the
Coral Triangle

PHILIPPINES

Tales from the Coral Triangle

PHILIPPINES





Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 IGO license
(CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO)

© 2016 Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City, 1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444; Fax +63 2 636 2444
www.adb.org

Some rights reserved. Published in 2016
Printed in the Philippines.

ISBN 978-92-9257-499-4 (Print), 978-92-9257-500-7 (e-ISBN)
Publication Stock No. ARM168162-2

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) or its Board of Governors or the governments they represent. By making any designation of or reference to a particular territory or geographic area, or by using the term “country” in this document, ADB does not intend to make any judgments as to the legal or other status of any territory or area.

This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 IGO license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/>. By using the content of this publication, you agree to be bound by the terms of this license.

This CC license does not apply to non-ADB copyright materials in this publication.

Notes:

In this publication, “\$” refers to US dollars.

Corrigenda to ADB publications may be found at <http://www.adb.org/publications/corrigenda>

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) - funded Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) Coastal and Marine Resources Management in the Coral Triangle - Southeast Asia (TA 7813-REG) operates in the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion, specifically in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (or the CT3).

The project works with communities and local leaders to help them better manage their resources, become better prepared to face climate change effects, and to adopt environment-friendly and sustainable livelihood options.

The project also aims to address natural resource degradation, poverty within coastal communities, and weakness in coastal and marine resources management policy implementation.

The project has three main outputs:

- Supporting CT3 governments in establishing an enabling environment for sustainable coastal and marine resources management;
- Addressing constraints to sustainable fisheries management and economic development in the coastal zone, such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, overfishing, and natural habitat destruction, among others; and
- Establishing a project management system to ensure effective project implementation.

CONTENTS

Foreword	viii
Acknowledgments	x
Introduction	xi
Tuking, the Mischievous Whale Shark <i>Acean Mae D. Abis</i>	1
Mangrove Friend <i>Noahbelle L. Academia</i>	9
The Changes In Elma's Family <i>Elnah T. Basala</i>	15
The Haydara <i>Kathleen L. Conde</i>	22
Leo's Incredible Experience <i>Roozie Quea Elkanah I. Idlana</i>	32
Kyle's Smile <i>Jirene Samuelle C. Tabujara</i>	40
Pilang Pilandok and Ping <i>Munawara G. Salleh</i>	47
Dagayday Island <i>Isabella S. Marilag</i>	57
Christine's Dreams <i>Essence A. Panolino</i>	65
Ende Finally Learns <i>Shaima I. Hunaini</i>	73
Some Protected Wildlife Found in the Coral Triangle	81
Live Better: Ideas on How to Care for the Planet	86
About the Authors	88
About the Mentors	90

FOREWORD

The Coral Triangle is one the most diverse marine ecoregions on earth. Spanning the waters of the Western Pacific Ocean, this “Amazon of the Seas” boasts dazzling natural features, unique flora and fauna, and a rich tapestry of colorful cultures. It is home to:

- more than 600 or 37% of the world’s reef building corals,
- over 2,000 coral reef fishes,
- six out of seven of the world’s marine turtles, and
- 27 marine mammals, including the largest living animal in the world, the blue whale.

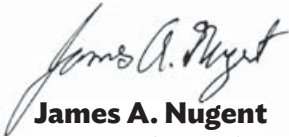
More than 120 million people living along the coasts of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste depend on the Coral Triangle’s bounty. Yet despite its picturesque backdrop, climate change, pollution, and unsustainable fishing methods pose a growing threat to the ecoregion, and to the families and communities who depend on the sea for their livelihoods and sustenance.

This storybook features 10 winning entries in the “Our Seas” story writing contest for high school students in Palawan, Philippines. The young authors employ fantasy, humor, and drama to highlight the importance of protecting their ocean. One writer from the Molbog indigenous group shares the story of a life-changing event experienced by her family, while another student from Balabac describes a special friendship that develops between a woodcutter’s son and a talking mouse deer, one of the most threatened animals on the island. Another story centers on a town struck by a powerful hurricane, stirring memories of typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines in 2013. The other contributors’ tales are also infused with creativity and imagination, highlighting the importance of preventing environmentally destructive practices in their communities, such as illegal fishing, mangrove deforestation, and wildlife trade.

The stories demonstrate these young authors’ keen awareness of the interconnection between people and the environment, and the vital role of conservation and environmental protection in ensuring the well-being of the human race. It is inspiring that every story drives home a message of hope—that people can indeed mend their ways, protect their environment, and learn

to work together for the common good.

Through this publication we hope to inspire and encourage young people, especially those from Coral Triangle countries, to become vigilant environmental stewards and passionate advocates of natural resource conservation. We congratulate these young authors, and extend our heartfelt thanks for sharing their voice, talent, and vision, and for taking us on this rewarding journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James A. Nugent". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Nugent" clearly legible.

James A. Nugent

Director General
Southeast Asia Department
Asian Development Bank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This storybook was made possible with the significant contributions of the authors and mentors from several national high schools in Balabac, Taytay; and Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, Philippines, especially:

- Balabac National High School,
- Busy Bees National High School,
- Canique National High School,
- Central Taytay National High School,
- Sicsican National High School, and
- Western Philippines University - Agricultural Science High School.

Sincere thanks to the Department of Education – Palawan, Science Secondary for coordinating with the participating schools and supporting the “Heroes for the Environment” campaign.

Thanks to the editorial team headed by Raul G. Roldan with Dana Rose J. Salonoy, Lourdes Margarita A. Caballero, and Angelo Jose B. Lumba for the book review; Karize Michella O. Uy for the translation; Hannah M. Manaligod for the cover art and illustrations; and Dana Rose J. Salonoy for the design and prepress production.

INTRODUCTION

The Coral Triangle is one of the most beautiful and ecologically abundant coastal areas of the world. Regrettably, poverty, unsustainable fishing practices, resource extraction, and environmental degradation are putting severe and growing pressure on the region's natural resources. In coastal communities throughout the Coral Triangle region, some community members children look to for guidance may also be among those involved in these environmentally damaging practices. Collective efforts are needed in communities to stem the tide of environmental degradation, and provide sound guidance to new generations.

Recognizing a valuable opportunity to raise awareness on environmental issues including climate change, Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) Coastal and Marine Resources Management in the Coral Triangle – Southeast Asia (TA 7813-REG) supported the launch of the “Heroes of the Environment” campaign in two project sites in Palawan province. The Asian Development Bank and the Global Environment Facility financed the campaign, implemented in partnership with the Department of Education of the Philippines and selected national high schools. It supported youth camps teaching students about coastal resource management, climate change, and simple lifestyle changes they can adopt to reduce their own carbon footprint. The camps also featured school-led projects addressing local environmental issues such as deforestation, shoreline degradation, and lack of community awareness about protected marine species. Training was provided for science teachers on the same topics, to encourage the integration of key concepts in their classroom programs.

Participating schools planted several hectares of propagules in denuded mangrove areas, and cleared waste from long coastlines. Buoyed by their success, students and teachers of a national high school in the Taytay municipality, Palawan, initiated a complementary watershed reforestation activity, making the school's environmental program a good model for integrated coastal management. Another component of the campaign was a story-writing contest in select areas of Palawan to tap young persons' creativity, and raise awareness of environmental issues. A large number of entries were submitted touching on diverse themes such as wildlife trafficking, turtle poaching, climate change impacts, and illegal fishing. The winning entries are presented in this storybook. It is our hope that by sharing these young persons' stories with other Coral Triangle countries, more youth will be inspired to take similar action in catalyzing change in their communities.

TUKING, THE MISCHIEVOUS WHALE SHARK

Acean Mae D. Abis

Tuking is a *butanding* or whale shark that lives in Tubbataha, a marine kingdom in the middle of the Sulu Sea, well-known for its vast coral reefs and breathtaking beauty. Tuking did whatever he pleased as he was bigger than all the other fishes and animals in the kingdom. Not a single day went by without the naughty whale shark causing trouble in Tubbataha.

One day, Tuking found an old rubber tire that must have come from the shore. Using his large tail, he playfully flung his new toy all around which disturbed the other creatures as it often hit the coral reefs.

Peace and order is strictly enforced in Tubbataha so everyone considered Tuking a real nuisance. One day, the ruler of the kingdom, King Octus, summoned Tuking to the Court of Mischief.

“I heard of the troubles you’ve caused in the kingdom,” began the king.



“Do you know that the damselfish are afraid of you? You have harmed many of their young while some families have even relocated to the neighboring kingdom.”

“It was not my intention to damage some reefs or disturb the fishes, Your Majesty.”

“These were all accidents. I simply wanted to make the fish come out of their hiding places so they can play with me. I knocked on their houses a little too strongly, that is all,” reasoned Tukung.

He was actually quite clueless that he was being reprimanded and even felt proud that the ruler was speaking to him.

“Don’t you know that you are putting this kingdom at risk?” asked the King.

“If one of us ceases to exist, may it be a coral or a fellow fish, everything will be affected. Remember that we are one of the very few pristine kingdoms left in this world.”

Tuking could not keep himself from laughing at what he heard from King Octus which he thought was mere nonsense.

“What’s so special about my birthplace anyway? Why should it be preserved? The sea is incredibly vast and there are so many creatures everywhere. What is there to worry about? It’s better to just swim around and have fun!”

The thought that one small fish or coral actually mattered made him laugh even harder.

The king became furious at Tuking’s reaction.

“As punishment for the damage you have caused, you are banished from the reefs for a week! I also forbid you from playing with your rubber tire,” said the king. There was nothing Tuking could do when the soldiers took away his toy.

“You need to be taught a lesson. Now go!” added the king.

Tuking realized that King Octus was not intimidated by his size. He also thought that the reef fishes would not be scared of him anymore because of this. Feeling angry and hurt, he decided to swim far away from the kingdom to cool off.

After a few hours, Tuking came across a school of sardines in a state of panic, frantically swimming in different directions.

“What is happening?” asked Tuking.

“Look above you!” a sardine hastily replied.

The bottom of the sea grew dark as a large ship casting a fine mesh net passed over Tuking. He wondered if this was the reason behind the disappearance of fishes he had heard of. Even small, young fish wouldn’t be able to escape from such nets quickly enough, he thought.

Tuking swam away as fast as he could toward the shallow waters for fear of being caught. He noticed that there were very few fishes living there. This made him remember Tubbataha and made him realize how fortunate it was compared to other kingdoms.

His thoughts were interrupted when he almost accidentally swallowed something black and disgusting which was slowly sticking to his skin and gills. To avoid it, he swam away once again and hid behind some large rocks.

“Hey!”

Tuking was startled. Apparently, he was not alone.

“Hey, giant fish, I’m here!”

Tuking looked around but could not see any creature.

“Here in the sea grass.”

Tuking peeked at the sea grass and saw a sea horse swimming toward him.

“Hello! I am so glad to finally have a companion here. I am Elo, by the way. And you, giant fish?” asked the sea horse.

“I am Tuking, and I am lost,” said Tuking, looking bothered.

“What is this black fluid and why are there no fishes around?” Tuking asked, his confusion growing.

Elo suddenly became serious. “It is the humans’ fault.”

“This kingdom once flourished but they slowly destroyed it when they arrived. They even built their houses along the coast and dumped their garbage directly into the sea. That black fluid is oil coming from passing ships.”

“More people are also capturing creatures like me all the time. That’s why many of us who live in shallow waters have to look for other places to hide,” explained Elo.

Tuking was saddened by what he heard.

“I am beginning to understand now. But why are you staying here?” he asked.

“I am waiting for my wife. She was captured by humans and I was hoping she would escape and return to our home,” answered Elo.

“What happened to you and your kingdom is tragic. But if you stay here, you will surely die from the poison in the water or be caught by those nets,” Tuling said.

The two creatures fell silent, pondering their situation.

“Ah, well, I have to leave now and find my way back home,” said Tuling.

“You have a kingdom as well! Where is it, Tuling?” asked Elo.

“Yes, I do! I come from the kingdom of Tubbataha, which is very beautiful and clean. Elo, would you like to come with me?”

Though he was hesitant at first, the sea horse agreed to come along. Elo knew he had to leave his home or he would be in grave danger. They asked fishes and turtles they came across for directions.

On their journey to Tubbataha, Tuling told countless stories about how wonderful the place is. He realized that he actually loved his home after being away for several days. Upon arriving, however, Tuling and Elo were shocked by what they saw. Some of the reefs had been destroyed and many fellow sea creatures could not be found.

“What happened here?” Tuling asked Ali, a crab he saw.

“The humans attacked us. They came from the surface and pounded the reefs with heavy rocks to drive out the fish. They also used deadly poison to capture the groupers and damselfishes,” explained the frightened crab.

“Where is King Octus?” asked Tuling.

“He was among those captured. He used his ink to escape but the humans caught him just the same,” Ali said.

“But they haven’t gone too far. If you swim very fast, you might be able to see their boat. Hurry now, Tuling! Please rescue our King and the other sea creatures!” begged the crab.

Following Ali’s directions, Tuling quickly headed toward the boat that carried King Octus and the fishes. He struck the side of the boat with all his

might. He struck again and again until the boat capsized. Tuling swam around the upturned boat opening his mouth to frighten the humans. In fear, they swam as fast as they could away from the boat.

Tuling was able to release the fishes but could not find King Octus.

“Go on, my friends, swim back to our kingdom. I will look for our king,” Tuling told the fishes. Tuling searched the whole area until he noticed a large plastic bag floating in the water. He took a closer look inside the bag and saw King Octus. He looked very weak.

He quickly brought the bag with him back to Tubattaha.

“Ali! I need you help!” cried Tuling. “Punch a hole in the bag to release King Octus!”

The tiny crab quickly plunged his sharp pincers into the plastic bag which allowed their king to escape. Although still weak, the king was filled with relief and gratitude.

“Thank you, Ali! Thank you, Tuling! You two are heroes for saving me and our kingdom!” exclaimed the king.

“We only did what was right, Your Majesty,” Tuling shyly replied. For the first time in his life, he was called a hero, instead of a disobedient, mischievous, and naughty fish!

“I would also like to ask for your forgiveness for all the damage I have caused. You were right, Your Majesty. We are much more fortunate than others for still having beautiful coral reefs.”

The king was pleased with Tuling.

“I am very happy with the bravery and humility you have shown, Tuling. I can certainly say that you’ve changed a lot, in a good way. Therefore, I shall return your rubber tire but be careful that you do not cause any more harm to the reefs,” said King Octus with a wink.

But Tuling no longer felt like playing with the rubber tire. Instead, he gave the tire to the fishes that lost their homes. He was proud of himself and felt all grown up. This time, he would be ready to do his share in protecting Tubattaha and its denizens from danger.





- The Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park is a protected area of the Philippines in the Sulu Sea. It was declared a World Heritage Site in 1993.
- The Sulu Sea is found in the southwestern area of the Philippines.

MANGROVE FRIEND

Noahbelle L. Academia

Oh, how beautiful it is to watch the sun rise at Sitio Lapac in Barangay Busy Bees! The seaside is quiet except for the sound of gentle waves. The wind is fresh and the sky is golden. It's as if the new day is bringing the promise of hope to all of creation.

This is the birthplace of Bakaw—the largest and oldest tree in the entire mangrove forest. One day, Bakaw was talking with Kasay, a small kingfisher, who was his best friend. While chatting, the bird was hopping to and fro among the tree's leafy branches.

“Bakaw, my friend, why do you seem sad? I have been chirping here for a while. Do you not find my voice beautiful?” asked Kasay.

“Don't worry, Kasay. Your voice is lovely as always,” Bakaw softly replied.

“Then what's troubling you so much?” Kasay once again asked.

“Haven't you noticed that my fellow mangroves by the shore are disappearing?” said Bakaw.

Kasay looked around and fell silent.

“Are you not afraid that you might lose your home one day?” Bakaw calmly but seriously asked.

Kasay thought about what his friend said and felt fear, realizing it was likely to happen. All of a sudden, a voice came from his left.

“Indeed, my friend Bakaw. My family and I will also lose our home if trees like you are gone,” Maka, a female macaque said. She hung from one of Bakaw’s branches as if she were in a circus. She was also looking around the thick undergrowth for something to eat. Foraging around Bakaw’s roots was Dighay, a monitor lizard.

“I, too, am afraid of the mangrove cutting that the humans are doing! And I sure would not like to end up as their appetizer!” Dighay fearfully exclaimed.

“Just look around us, there is so much garbage and the food is getting scarce!”

The animals turned silent as they contemplated their future.



The nights in Sitio Lapac are very serene. When the moon is hidden behind the clouds and the breeze is gentle, it is delightful to look at the few remaining trees as they are illuminated by thousands of fireflies. Male fireflies put on a dazzling show and compete with each other to attract the females.

“My friend, Bakaw, in my explorations around the mangrove forest, I saw the destruction humans did,” shared Kulitap, one of the fireflies.

“There are barely enough trees here for us to stay.”

“Almost all of the mangrove trees in the nearby villages were cut down. It is only in our sitio where trees are still left standing,” the firefly complained.

“You are right, my friend, and I’ve been growing weak because of it,” Bakaw replied.

The next day, Kasay set out to find something to eat when he heard a

disturbing buzzing sound. Even though he felt scared, he followed the sound to find out from which animal it came.

Kasay was astounded when he discovered that it was not an animal but a large truck filled to the brim with garbage, including containers with used oil and household chemicals. It was headed toward the shore where it later dumped all the trash. He flew away hastily to let everyone know what he had witnessed.

The next morning, Bakaw felt worse as he was having a difficult time breathing. The trash polluted the waters around the mangrove forest and clogged the pores in the trees' roots and trunks from which trees breathe.



One day, Dighay, Maka, Kasay, and Kulitap visited Bakaw and noticed how weak he had become.

“My dear friend, you look so pale and sick!” said Dighay with much concern.

“Our home is so polluted now. I used to be able to filter the harmful substances in the water but I can hardly do that now,” Bakaw replied feebly.

The animals sympathized with their old friend. They understood how much he was suffering because they were also affected. They wanted so much to help but did not know how.

Bakaw felt his friends' sadness.

“I thought of a way for all of you to be saved. Leave and find another place far away that's cleaner and has more trees like me,” he said.

The animals were saddened by Bakaw's idea.

“But what about you? You cannot uproot yourself and leave this spot!”

Bakaw smiled upon hearing this. He truly appreciated their friendship.

“Don't worry about me. The important thing is that you and your families will be saved as soon as possible!”



Although they were hesitant at first, they all knew Bakaw was right. With heavy hearts, they bid their old friend goodbye.

The old mangrove watched with sadness as his friends departed for a better place.



Many months passed and the humans continued to dump their wastes along the shore. They cut mangroves and burned huge piles of wood to make charcoal in the middle of the forest, further polluting the area. People remained indifferent to the effects of their activities on the environment and even on themselves.

One day, however, a very strong typhoon hit Busy Bees. The winds it brought were strong enough to knock down small trees. The angry crashing of the waves could be heard from afar and the heavy rain was relentless. The people, especially those living close to the shore, feared for their lives.

But Bakaw and the remaining mangrove trees in Sitio Lapac became a shield against the typhoon's might, protecting the houses and people along the coastline. The waves and wind weakened as they hit the trees, greatly reducing their destructive force.

The other barangays were not so lucky because there were no mangroves left to protect them from the typhoon. The strong winds toppled many houses, and the rain and waves flooded the villages and farms. Many lost their homes, their livelihoods, and even loved ones.



Sometimes, it takes a bad experience or a painful loss for people to open their eyes and change their ways. After the disaster caused by the typhoon, the residents of Sitio Lapac and nearby barangays decided to take action.

“Let us stop cutting mangroves!”

“Let us plant propagules to bring back our mangrove forests!”

“Let us stop throwing our wastes along the shore!”

The townspeople and village leaders of Sitio Lapac, united to bring back

their mangrove forests. The school children, their teachers, and their families held regular planting activities in denuded areas where there used to be healthy mangrove stands. The barangay council issued resolutions strictly prohibiting cutting of mangroves, and dumping of garbage and wastes along rivers and the coastline. They also started a waste management program that included a monthly cleanup drive. It was easy to convince people to participate as they had experienced firsthand the destruction caused by the typhoon.



Kasay, Maka, Dighay, and the fireflies received news of the changes that happened in their old home. They remembered their old friend Bakaw and decided to visit him. It had been many years since they left Sitio Lapac and when they arrived, they were amazed at what they saw.

The mangroves were back! The water and shoreline were clean. People were carrying sacks and picking up trash brought by waves from other towns. They saw many birds, monkeys, and other wildlife that made the mangroves their home. The friends were delighted with all the wonderful changes in Sitio Lapac.

They looked everywhere for Bakaw, calling out his name, but not one of the new trees knew him.

“He is the tallest and oldest mangrove in the whole village,” Kasay described his friend. An old *talisay* tree was listening nearby. Finally he spoke.

“Bakaw lost his life during the big typhoon. He stood strong against the huge waves and wind but he was already weak. He died the morning after.”

The friends were deeply saddened by the news.

“Bakaw, you are truly a hero and a kind friend. We will never forget you,” Kasay said as he and his friends offered a quiet prayer for Bakaw.



- A *sitio* is usually an area in the Philippines that forms part of a *barangay* or village.
- *Barangay* is a Filipino term for a village or barrio.
- The *talisay* (*Terminalia catappa*) is commonly known as the tropical almond.

THE CHANGES IN ELMA'S FAMILY

Elnah T. Basala

I am Elma, an ordinary Molbog native from the island of Balabac.

My family and I are accustomed to a very hard life, always toiling away like a carabao. My father, Abi, is a fisher. My mother, Puring, works at a farm and takes care of all of us. Being the eldest, it is my duty to help my mother tend to the farm and look after my younger siblings.

Even though both of my parents strive tirelessly, we struggle to make ends meet. In fact, my father is busy with hook-and-line fishing every day but sometimes, even one kilo of fish is hard to catch.

Despite our difficult circumstances, we are still happy. Inay and Itay do not argue—even though we are, at times, short of money.

But a big change soon took over our lives. I can still remember when it began—that time when Itay suddenly brought home an abundant catch of fish.



“Elma, fetch the big basin, will you? Your father has a large catch!” shouted Inay. I quickly went down the five steps of our stairs and ran toward them.

“You caught all of these, Itay?”

“There’s more under the boat’s stern, haul them all in!” shouted Itay, as if he had not heard my question.

“Oh, I hope our good fortune continues, Abi,” whispered Inay to Itay, who did not reply.

Abi is my Itay’s name, but he is better known as “*Bapa Abi*,” which means “Uncle Abi.” He is one of the most respected residents in our town. People often come to him to ask for his advice in solving their problems. Though he does not hold any office in our town, he is generous in offering his assistance, especially to those in need.

“Ah, these are very large fish, Itay!,” I cheerfully declared. Still, he ignored me. Perhaps he was tired from the long day of fishing. Though we lacked wealth, our parents showered us with affection. That’s why my father’s silence made me wonder.

“*Is Itay hiding something?*” I asked myself.

Since that fateful day, I noticed Itay acting in a peculiar way. He would often go out to sea in haste, and would bring with him some equipment I had not seen before.

“What are you holding, Itay?” I asked when I once came to hand him his oar that he almost forgot to bring.

“Ah, this is my fishing gear,” he replied, as he quickly hid it from my view.

“I get to catch a lot of fish when I use this. You and your siblings are going to school next term, and so I need to earn more money. The traditional way of fishing with hooks is not enough anymore. No more questions now, alright?” Itay quickly left to go to his boat by the shore.

“*Are there other methods of fishing? What method was Itay speaking of? Is he in danger?*”

The questions in my head vanished as I heard laughter and happy

voices behind me. I turned around and saw my good friends Siti, Merlina, and Pika. They took my hand and we walked merrily along the beach. We came across a few small, round things scattered on the sand. They looked like little white balls. They were soft too.

“*Naku*, these are the eggs of the *pawikan*!” declared Merlina.

“I have seen these before. My brother took home some and my sister boiled several of them. They taste very delicious!”

“Really? Come, let us take some and cook them!” said Siti.

“No!” I instantly replied.

“These must have been left behind by gatherers last night. Let us dig a hole and cover them with sand instead. Let them hatch on their own, so there will be more *pawikan* in our area.”

“You’re such a killjoy, Elma,” the girls chimed.

“Wait a minute, where is Pika?” we all asked at once.

“I’m here!” came a voice farther down the shore.

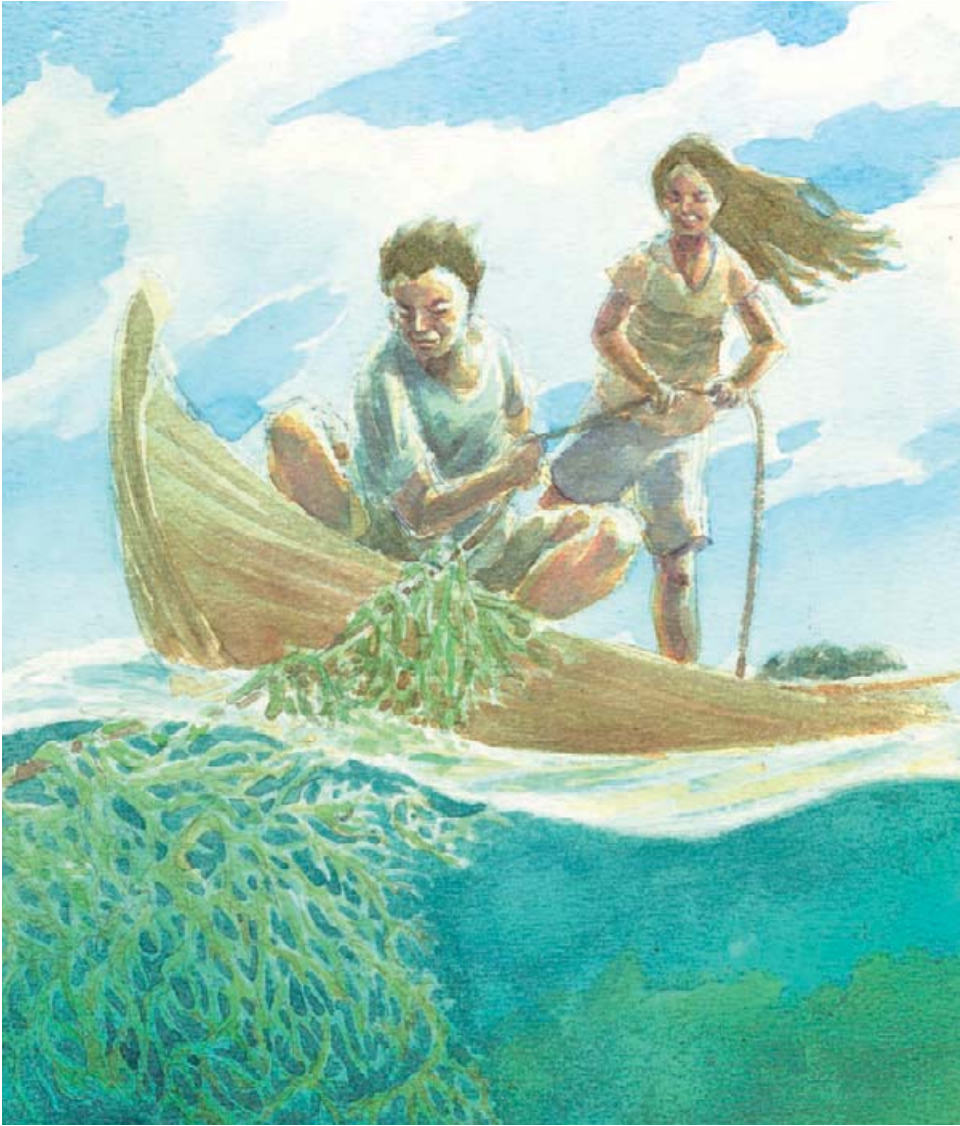
“The shells are beautiful over here, o! We can use these for our Hekasi project,” said Pika, referring to our project about the scenic spots of the Philippines.

“You are right! We will surely be given high marks for using indigenous materials,” I replied.

After collecting our shells, we decided to swim out to sea. We did not even notice how hot the weather was, with the sea being so clean and clear. It reflected the blue sky, and we could see the fish happily playing in the water, as if trying to block each other from passing through, like in a game of *patintero*. We could also clearly see the coral reefs up ahead with all their vibrant colors.

I was delighted to witness such a beautiful view and I told myself how fortunate our island was. Certainly, this was a blessing from God. My friends and I had a very wonderful time until it was time to return home.

Time passed by quickly since that day. I continued going to school. Although Itay’s behavior toward us had changed, our family’s condition had



greatly improved. Itay could now buy all our family's necessities. Going out to sea and fishing also became easier for him, since he bought his own motorboat.

There was a week or so when Itay did not go out to fish. I wondered about it, especially because he repainted his boat even though it was newly painted and brand new, without a trace of wear and tear. I wanted to ask him, but I recalled what he told me: "No more questions now, alright?"

One day, as I was walking along the beach, I overheard some of Itay's friends talking.

“Ah, it seems Bapa Abi cannot go out to sea.”

“He has to bide his time before he can do fish again, rather than risk another encounter with the Sea Patrol. It is not easy to go to jail because of illegal fishing.”

“Not just that, he would also be fined.”

“Was it true that Itay was almost caught by the Sea Patrol? And why did he have to risk his life?”

I remembered what our teacher had taught us on why we must protect our natural resources, such as our sea.

“It is likely that all the abuse we humans have done to our environment will come back to harm us,” our teacher warned.

I went home as quickly as possible to tell Itay about what I heard. When I arrived at our house, I found Inay sobbing.

“This family is what’s important to me, Puring!” shouted Itay.

“There will always be fishes in the sea, and I will be more careful next time!”

“But, Abi, what if something terrible happens to you? What if you get caught next time?” Inay said as she continued to cry.

That was the biggest argument my siblings and I had witnessed between our parents.

The next day, our teacher had an announcement at school.

“Class, we will have visitors tomorrow from the Environment Watch team, and the Sea Patrol. They want to look around our island and see how they can help us protect it. I expect everyone to be present tomorrow, along with your parents.”

Our teacher was still speaking when we were all startled by our neighbor, Tutong, who rushed inside our classroom. He was out of breath, but his words hit me like sharp arrows.

“*Naku*, Elma, hurry back home! Your father was brought to the hospital in the next town. A *bungbong* exploded on him!”

Shocked, I collapsed to the floor. I knew this was what my Inay had been afraid of when they last argued.

“What will happen to Itay?” I felt my tears well up as my classmates helped me get back on my feet.

It took a while for my father’s arm to heal from the explosion. From what he told us, the bomb exploded just as he was about to toss it into the sea. The doctors had to amputate his forearm.

I know that deep in his heart, Itay was remorseful. Though he could not go back in time, I know that given another chance, he would not engage in illegal fishing at all.

Itay still continues to fish to this day, but is now back to using traditional and legal methods. We also started planting seaweed as additional livelihood. Our family suffered greatly because Itay couldn’t work for many months. But with Inay, my siblings and me working together to earn a living, we slowly recovered from our hardship. My siblings and I continue to go to school, and we have enough food on the table every day. Most of all, Itay does not have to risk his life anymore for our sake.

Itay has also been encouraging others to help protect our sea. He now volunteers with the Sea Patrol as one of the fish wardens.

I am now in the eighth grade. I understand that life can be tough, and so I will do what I can to finish my education and help take our family out of poverty. The changes that our family went through—especially Itay—were difficult but these turned us into better persons and more responsible members of our community.



- A *carabao* is a type of domestic water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) and is the Philippines’ national animal.
- *Inay* and *itay* are Filipino words for mother and father, respectively.
- *Pawikan* is the Filipino word for sea turtle.
- *Hekasi* is a subject in grade school classes similar to Social Studies; acronym for “Heograpiya, Kasaysayan, at Sibika” (Geography, History, and Civics).
- *Patintero* is a traditional game in the Philippines.
- *Bungbong* is a type of homemade bomb often used for illegal fishing.

THE HAYDARA

Kathleen L. Conde

Do you believe in folktales?

I do not. In my opinion, they are just like the superstitions of our elders.

I am Ramil. I grew up in the city and was accustomed to fast food and speedy vehicles. The stench of garbage and thick smoke from buses were common to me. It was not paradise, but I still loved the city because it is modern, has many attractions, and all the conveniences anyone would need.

When I was 15 years old, my Papa made the big decision to leave our city home and bring our family back to his hometown. He had a very difficult time convincing me to come because of my attachment to the city. He kept on saying that this move would be best for our family.

“But what will happen to me, Papa? All of my friends are here!” I complained to my father.

“Ramil, son, don’t fret. You will have new friends there. Look, before we

move, we will first visit so you can see how beautiful the place is,” he told me.

I gloomily counted the days before our visit to my Papa’s hometown. When the day of our departure finally came, my dismay was apparent, even though we would only be visiting for a week.

During our trip, I glanced back repeatedly as we went farther and farther away from the city. Gradually, the buildings were replaced by large trees, and the busy streets by rice farms. As I rolled down the car window, I smelled the freshness of the air.

After many hours of travel, our car turned toward a narrow road with a sign that said “Sitio Bunkangen.” After a few minutes of driving along the dirt road, I heard the sound of crashing waves and the chirping of birds atop long rows of coconut trees. We came to a stop in front of a small store and my father got off the car.

“Anybody home? *Babu Nora?*” called Papa.

Before long, an old woman came out of the store.

“*As-salamu alaykum,*” greeted Papa.

“*Wa-Alaikum-Salaam.* Welcome back, Abdul. It’s good that you visited,” replied the woman.

“I have not returned for so long, Babu. I am very eager to meet our other relatives,” my father happily said.

Papa told us to come out of the car and introduced us one by one.

“Babu, do you remember Sarah, my wife? And these are my children—Roweda, Al-Yaser, and Ramil.”

“*As-salamu alaykum,*” we greeted in unison.

“*Wa-Alaikum-Salaam,*” she answered.

Fishes were drying under the sun in her backyard, not something you would normally see in the city. Upon entering Babu’s house, we were delighted to see a table laden with food. There were fish, crabs, shrimps, and seaweed! We ate our lunch heartily as we seldom had fresh seafood back home.

While we were eating and talking, there was a sudden knock on the door. A man wearing a *camisa de chino* and carrying three plastic bags full of fish came in. He was with an elderly man, who I presumed was the husband of Babu Nora.

“*As-salamu alaykum*,” said the guest.

“*Wa-Alaikum-Salaam*,” answered Babu Nora.

“Babu Hamid!” my father said as he stood up and embraced the old man. Papa was overjoyed seeing his family again.

After the meal, I left the house and walked around. The air was fresh and cool, my surroundings lush, green and full of life. I had to admit to myself that I was beginning to like the place.

While walking along the seashore, I saw a young girl sitting on a rock, seemingly staring at something far away. She looked serious and upset.

“Hello. What are you looking at?” I asked her.

“Oh, hello. That!” she said as she pointed to a boat.

I then saw a fisher throw a bottle which blew up when it fell into the sea.

“Was that dynamite?” I asked the girl in shock.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Isn’t it sad? The fishers are destroying the very thing that provides their needs.”

As she turned toward another boat in the distance, I noticed a mark on her nape that looked like a shell.

“What is your name, by the way?” I asked.

“Ligaya,” she responded.

“I’m Ramil. Nice to meet you, Ligaya,” I said.

At that moment, I closed my eyes to feel the waves on my bare feet and hear the soothing sound of the sea. After a short while, Ligaya stood up and started walking. I followed her.

“Have you heard stories of the Haydara here?” asked the girl.

I told her that I was only visiting and, hence, did not know much about the place. She continued walking and I kept on following her.

“According to the stories, the Haydara are nature spirits who were forced to hide in a mysterious place because of the harmful things humans have done,” she shared.

“Many also say that as revenge, the Haydara would abduct children who, in turn, can never return to this world.”

“I don’t really believe in such hearsay,” I replied.

“Are you sure you want to follow me around?” she asked.

I sensed hesitation from Ligaya but I was determined to explore the place.

“Yes, I might discover other beautiful places here,” I answered.

She stopped in front of some nipa trees and asked me once again if I was sure of my decision to go with her. I nodded and assured her that I was.

“There is another paradise behind the trees,” she said.

I almost laughed at how strange these words were but she suddenly pulled me toward the nipa forest. As we ran further in, I closed my eyes while Ligaya continued talking.

“Many of those who came here have been unable to leave. I really hope that that will not be your fate.”

When I felt us coming to a stop, I opened my eyes and saw a truly wonderful place. The sea was a dazzling, vibrant blue. I noticed that the houses were made of nipa and bamboo but they shone like gold in the sun. There were flowers, birds, and butterflies of brilliant colors. The people who were passing by gave us friendly smiles and I noticed they had marks resembling shells on their hands, legs, and foreheads—just like the one on Ligaya’s nape.

“Where are we, and where are we going?” I asked her.

“Do not worry. This is a safe place,” she explained.

“Let us go and meet our leader.”

While walking, I noticed young people about my age who also had marks of shells but were wearing typical city clothes. When we arrived at their leader’s house, I was offered to take a seat and eat *kamunsil*.

“Ligaya, who is he?” asked the leader.

“He is Ramil, Ka Emira,” answered Ligaya.

“I met him while I was resting at the beach.”

I was surprised at what Ligaya said next.

“He was the only one who saw me and had the courage to come along, even though I tried to dissuade him several times. I think he might be the one foretold in the prophecy.”

“But you said the same thing last month when you brought another young man. Humans who cannot return to their world are growing in number here,” reasoned the leader.

“I really think he is the one who can help us. I can feel that he is special,” explained Ligaya.

Feeling very confused, I quickly walked away and left.

“*What am I doing here? Did I do the right thing by following Ligaya? Will I ever get out of this place?*” I asked myself. After a while, Ligaya came to talk to me.

“I’m sorry that I did not prepare you for this. Our spirits are intertwined with nature. Our kind thrives on the balance that exists between all living things that you see around you. However, every time mangroves, forest trees, and coral reefs are destroyed, we get weak and our life force diminishes,” explained Ligaya.

“I was born at the same time our old leader passed away. Before he died, he foretold that I would meet a young person who would help prevent our home’s destruction. I believe that person is you, Ramil!”

“Only the person in the prophecy can leave this place. The young people who came before you will be able to return to your world only if you can go through the doorway in the nipa forest again.”



“Who are you, really? And what is this place?” I asked her.

“I am one of the beings they call the Haydara and this is our home. We have lived here in peace but now face a grave danger. A pearl farm and resort will be constructed soon so all the mangroves and ancient forest trees sustaining us will be cut down. The rapid destruction of the reefs by humans is also bringing us closer to extinction.”

“You must understand that once the Haydara disappear, nature’s balance will be destroyed and your own world will also cease to exist.”

I started thinking. Even if I could not fully comprehend the situation, I felt like I had to do everything in my power to try to help the Haydara. At that moment, I did not feel like a 15-year-old boy but a young man with a mission.

Ligaya gave me a glistening cowrie shell as my key to the magical doorway. Together with the other Haydara, Ligaya watched me nervously. *Would I succeed when all others before me had failed?*

With the shell in my hand, I took a deep breath and stepped inside the thick nipa forest. I was enveloped by a shimmering light and in an instant, I found myself back on the exact spot in Sitio Bunkangen where Ligaya and I stood before we crossed the doorway. I said a silent prayer, grateful I made it back safely.

Everything seemed like a dream. But when I felt the cowrie in my hand, I realized that all of it was real.

I noticed that behind me were the young people who had been trapped in the Haydara’s world. They no longer bore the shell mark and did not seem to remember anything about their magical adventure. All they wanted was to return to their homes and families. Somehow, I was able to transport them all through the doorway.

I quickly ran to Babu Nora’s house to tell them what happened.

“Pa, Ma! The Haydara—they need our help!” I shouted.

“What are you saying, Ramil? The Haydara is a mere folktale,” Babu said.

“But I saw them! They live on the other side of the nipa forest. There!” I replied, still out of breath.

“Ramil! Where have you been?” asked Papa.

He told me I was gone the whole afternoon although I could only recall spending a few minutes with the Haydara.

“Pa, if all the coral reefs and mangroves are destroyed, the Haydara will vanish forever!” I explained.

“Ramil, the Haydara is only a folktale. Come inside and get some rest. It’s almost night time!” Papa said.

I repeated my story but my family dismissed everything I told them. But when everyone was asleep, Babu came to talk with me.

“Did you really see them?” she asked.

“The Haydara? Yes!” I answered with conviction.

“Helping them will be a difficult task. Those magical beings have been erased from people’s minds along with concern for the environment. It will be hard for them to remember, my grandson. But I will help you, though I am old. We shall gather people who will believe and support us,” suggested Babu.

In the next few days, Babu and I met with her close friends to convince them to go against the construction of the pearl farm and resort. For several days, I was unable to visit the Haydara as we were busy going around talking to the other villagers.

One morning, I was awakened by a loud roaring sound. I got up from my bed, quickly looked out my window, and saw two huge bulldozers near the shore. From a distance, I could hear the whirring sound of chainsaws cutting big trees in the forest. The day Babu and I feared had arrived.

“They are here!” I shouted to Babu who was in the kitchen.

We hurried to the beach and saw villagers marching toward the shore where the bulldozers were. I ran to the nipa forest, tightly held the cowrie in my hand, and rushed inside the Haydara’s world to warn them of the danger. While the other nature spirits retreated in fear, Ligaya decided to return with me to Sitio Bunkangen to see how she could help.

A few moments after we stepped out of the doorway, the ground started shaking. The roaring bulldozers were deafening. I felt terrified until I saw some

people blocking one of the bulldozers. Among them were my parents and Babu. They stood in its path and did not move despite the angry calls of the workers.

“Come, Ramil! Your people have found the strength and courage to stand against the destroyers. But we must stop those who are cutting the forest trees!” Ligaya told me.

Looking back, I should have avoided the path we took. I should have foreseen the danger. I watched in horror as I saw a large tree fall on Ligaya who was running ahead of me. I rushed to her side to pull her away to safety but was too late. I realized that her life force had already greatly weakened because of the damage done to all she loved and protected. With the help of several villagers who saw us run to the forest, we lifted the heavy tree to free her lifeless body. I lifted Ligaya and carried her to where the bulldozers were.

“Are you happy now? You have brought only destruction and tragedy along with the progress that you claim to bring. We do not need you here!” I shouted to the machine operator.

Filled with guilt, the foreman signaled for the bulldozers to pull away. He used his radio to instruct his men to stop cutting the trees and leave the forest. The villagers watched intently as the trucks and bulldozers carrying the workers and their machines left Sitio Bunkangen.

Grieving and still filled with guilt, I laid Ligaya’s body on the sand, but no sooner had it touched the ground when it vanished and in its place was a huge swarm of brightly colored butterflies. The gentle creatures flew gracefully among us for a moment before flying off to the forest. Looks of amazement and disbelief were on the faces of all.

I returned one last time to the Haydara’s world to see Ka Emira. She was happy to see me and said that Ligaya’s sacrifice, my bravery, and the courage of the village folk saved Sitio Bunkangen and the Haydara’s world. I took out the cowrie from my pocket to return it but she quickly put it back in my hands.

“Keep it, young man. It will keep you safe from dangers you may face in the future. Remember that your world and our world are linked, and will need protectors like you.”

Fifteen years have passed but the memories of the Haydara linger in my mind. When I hear grandparents telling stories about Haydaras and nature spirits to their grandchildren, I smile to myself, thinking that folktales do have some basis after all. I have grown to love Sitio Bunkangen as my father does

and I have launched many programs to protect its forests and marine waters. Wherever they may be, I know that my Haydara friends are happy.



- A *sitio* is usually an area in the Philippines that forms part of a *barangay* or village.
- *Babu* is a word used to address an elder.
- *As-salamu alaykum* is a greeting meaning “peace be unto you,” and is considered the equivalent of “hello” or “good day.”
- *Wa-alaikum-salaam* is a greeting meaning “unto you be peace,” and is a common response to “As-salamu alaykum.”
- A *camisa de chino* is a type of collarless undershirt. It is often worn under a *Barong Tagalog*, which is an embroidered and lightweight top considered as the Philippines’ national attire for men.
- The *kamunsil* or *camachile* (*Pithecellobium dulce*) is commonly known as the Manila tamarind.
- *Ka* is a term used to address both male and female elders.

LEO'S INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCE

Roozie Quea Elkanah I. Idlana

Before the break of dawn, the sea turtle hatchlings were already feeling very excited. After more than 2 months in their nest beneath the sand, they could finally glimpse the outside world. The hatchlings clambered over each other until they finally reached the surface. They began to race against each other toward the sea. Even though the waves washed them back to shore, they refused to give up.

“The sea is calling us,” they said.

“Let us swim faster!” urged Dan, the biggest among the hatchlings.

“This is the way to swim faster!” said Timmy, as he swung his small flippers in a clumsy fashion. His siblings laughed at him and followed.

The hatchlings swam along a school of anchovies.

“Be careful, little turtles! We swim as a group to avoid danger,” said one of the anchovies.

“Our shiny scales also protect us. With the help of the sun, we use them as camouflage from creatures that want to eat us,” the fish explained.

“Maybe it’s better if we also swam together,” suggested Dan, who was in awe of the anchovies.

It was almost sunrise and the hatchlings would soon be easily seen by crabs, large fishes, and birds that could have them for breakfast. The swim from the beach to the open sea is a very dangerous part of their lives.

All of a sudden, a large creature from the shore swam in the middle of the hatchlings. An old sea turtle had just finished laying her eggs. Her fatigue was noticeable but the strokes of her flippers were still strong.

It was at this moment when a man in a boat suddenly threw a net over the old turtle to catch it. He also grabbed some turtle hatchlings swimming nearby.

“Uncle, we will gain a lot of money from this, for sure!” Carding said, after he managed to haul the large turtle into the boat. He was accompanied by two other fishers, Carlos and Leo.

“Definitely! The sun has not risen yet and blessings have already arrived,” answered Carlos, Carding and Leo’s uncle.

“Carding, maybe we can release the small turtles back into the water,” suggested Leo, who pitied the hatchlings.

“There you go again, cousin. You’re letting your sensitive heart affect you too much,” said Carding.

“Surely many children in town will be excited to see these!”

“Please, Carding, they will not be sold anyway,” pleaded Leo.

“They will just die if you bring them to town.”

“You complain too much, Leo! Are you also not benefiting from the sea turtles we catch?” answered Carding. The cousins looked at each other with growing tension.

“You two better stop arguing,” said Carlos, trying to calm down his nephews.

“Let’s just finish our hunt and then head home.”



Somewhere in the distance, a *sirena* or mermaid was watching intently. She was filled with sadness for the turtles and was angry at the fisher. The boat with the three men turned in her direction so the mermaid swiftly dove into the water to hide.

Leo caught a glimpse of the mermaid just as she completely entered the water.

“Wake up! You’re just imagining things!” Leo shook his head repeatedly to clear his mind. He convinced himself that he was just too tired from the long day’s work.

The mermaid decided to see the *diwata*, or nymph, living in the mountains. She immediately went to the secret place in Pandanan Island where they usually met.

The *sirena* watched over the waters while the *diwata* was the guardian of the mountains. The two would often talk about what was happening around them. Upon her arrival, the *sirena* sat on the shore to wait and after a while, the *diwata* appeared.

“The humans have gone too far! Their desire to catch and harm the animals seems to have no limit,” the *diwata* angrily said.

“I have witnessed the horrors they have done. Even our *pilandok* and *katala* friends, whose numbers have been greatly reduced, are still being caught and sold,” she added.

Even if the *sirena* wanted to console the *diwata*, she could not bring herself to do so as she was too distraught over the incident she just witnessed at sea.

They bid farewell to each other but in their minds was a desire to get revenge on the humans to teach them a lesson.

Leo stared at the sea from inside his house while his wife and children

were preparing their early supper. The image of the mermaid would not leave his thoughts.

It was several days since he last heard from Carding and Carlos. His wife told him that many fisher had disappeared since the previous week. Leo did not pay much attention to the stories and explained that his uncle and cousin might simply have sailed to a distant fishing ground, as they sometimes do.

“They will come back soon,” he assured his wife.

While buried in his thoughts, Leo noticed someone waving at him from the sea. He was startled since that part of the water was deep.

“*Maybe that person is in danger,*” Leo told himself.

Leo rushed to the sea to rescue the person but when he got closer, he was shocked to see that it wasn’t a person at all but the mermaid!

“I know you have a good heart and are not like your companions. Do not be afraid, come with me,” the *sirena* said before extending her hand to Leo.

He took the magical creature’s hand with hesitation but Leo knew in his heart that she would not harm him. She then put an enchanted *kulapo* or brown seaweed in his hand and told him to eat it so he could breathe and see underwater.

Leo swallowed the *kulapo* and it was unlike anything he had ever tasted. He followed the mermaid as she swam toward Pandanan Island. He was amazed at the abundance of fishes and giant clams, as well as at how colorful and diverse the coral reefs were.

“Splendid, aren’t they?” asked the *sirena*.

“These coral reefs are home to fishes. Much of the marine wildlife rely on them,” she went on.

Leo saw many sea turtles in the sea grass beds. Some of them were grazing, while others were simply swimming to and fro.

“The sea turtles keep the sea grass meadows healthy,” explained the *sirena*. “Without them, the sea grass will not flourish and much of the marine life will be affected.”

Leo glanced at the sea turtles because of their strange behavior. Their eyes were full of fear and sadness.

“Don’t you recognize your friends, Leo? These are Carding and Carlos,” the *sirena* said while pointing at two large sea turtles approaching Leo.

“Help us, Leo! We sincerely regret what we’ve done. Please make an appeal to the mermaid on our behalf. We want to be humans again!” said the two.

In a short while, Leo heard more pleas. He realized that all the sea turtles surrounding him were the fisher who had gone missing from their village. Leo was completely shocked.

“If you want them to return to their human forms, you must bring all the sea turtles you captured back to the sea,” said the *sirena*, before saying goodbye and leaving Leo on the shore.

A beautiful lady suddenly appeared before him. It was the *diwata*.

“Were you pleased to see your friends?” she asked.

Leo remained silent.

“What have you learned?” she continued.

“Please forgive us humans. We have been greedy and negligent!” Leo said.

The *diwata* smiled.

“It’s good that you’ve realized this. The sea surrounding the island of Balabac is home to many sea creatures and–”

She was interrupted when the mermaid suddenly came out of the water, looking very distressed.

“I just saw about a hundred sea turtles being carried to a large boat. I have a feeling they will be sold to foreigners. It’s despicable!” said the *sirena*.

The beautiful *diwata* was enraged.

“The humans are never satisfied!” she said.

The wind and the waves started getting stronger. Heavy rain fell and then



the *diwata* disappeared. The mermaid, on the other hand, slowly swam away.

“Please give us another chance!” shouted Leo. But no answer.

Leo climbed inside an old boat and paddled through the strong waves. He kept calling for the *sirena* and continued his pleas when a large wave crashed and toppled his boat. He desperately tried to stay afloat but the sea was too violent. As he was starting to lose consciousness, he heard the *sirena* whisper beside him.

“You still have one chance, human.”

The *sirena* placed a small piece of *kulapo* in Leo’s mouth. Leo opened his eyes and saw that the boat containing the captured sea turtles had also capsized. The crew struggled against the waves while many sea turtles bound by ropes sank into the sea. Leo did not know how to rescue them for he was alone.

Just when all hope was lost, Leo noticed several large turtles swimming toward him. Among them were Carding and Carlos.

“We will help you rescue them!” Carlos said.

Leo held on to Carding’s shell as they swiftly swam toward the helpless creatures. Carlos, Carding, and the other bewitched turtles began gnawing on the ropes while Leo cut them loose using a small knife. Although they were able to save most of the turtles, a few were not fortunate and sank into the deep sea.

Leo felt himself losing consciousness from severe exhaustion. He said a short prayer, closed his eyes, and allowed the waves to carry him away.



Many months have passed since these events happened. Leo was found on the shore, unconscious, together with Carding and Carlos and the other missing fisher. Their families were filled with great relief and happiness upon seeing them come back home safely. This incredible experience was more than enough reason for the fisher to stop their illegal practices and protect their environment instead.

One afternoon while Leo was fishing at sea, the *sirena* and the *diwata* appeared before him once more.

“*Mabuhay ka*, Leo! You have done so much to change the attitude of the people in your village,” said the *diwata*.

“The poaching of turtles and catching of endangered animals have stopped.”

“But more challenges lie ahead as there are people from other places who are still greedy and indifferent,” she warned.

“Please accept this offering as a token of gratitude,” the mermaid handed a bundle of the enchanted *kulapo* to Leo.

“With these, you will surely be safe from harm at sea at all times.”

“Thank you very much for your trust. I will do everything in my power to defend the seas,” promised Leo.



- The *pilandok* or the Philippine mouse deer (*Tragulus nigricans*) is a solitary and nocturnal animal found only in Balabac. It is also known as the Balabac chevrotain. The *pilandok* is listed as an endangered species under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The *katala* or the Philippine cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*) is listed as a critically endangered species under the IUCN Red List. Their population has dwindled because of illegal wildlife trade and loss of habitat. It is protected under Republic Act 9147 or the Philippine Wildlife Act.
- The *kulapo* or brown seaweed (*Sargassum* spp.) is prohibited to be collected, harvested, gathered, sold, and exported under the Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) 250 series of 2014.
- *Mabuhay* is a Filipino greeting that can be translated as “long live” and is similar to “viva” or “cheers.”

KYLE'S SMILE

Jirene Samuelle C. Tabujara

My eyes were brimming with tears as I stared at the different colors of rocks, shells, and glimmering sand inside a small bottle. It was fascinating and so beautiful to see, with the rays of the setting sun shining on it. Every time I looked at it, I would remember those cheerful days when we were together and made promises to each other. Our conversation along the beach was still fresh in my mind.

“Iselle, remember, friends forever, okay?”

“Of course! That is a promise! Do not forget, too.”

My recollection was disrupted when I heard Mama’s voice.

“Iselle! Come inside now. It’s your first day of school tomorrow and you have to sleep early.”

I quickly went inside our house. After supper, I went to my room to draw and plan for my class the next day. I noticed that it was already 7:00 in the evening and I immediately got up and went out of my room.

“Mama, can I go outside for a while? I just want to see the fireflies,” I asked my mother.

“But Iselle, you have classes tomorrow.”

“Just for a little while, Mama,” I begged her, hoping I could change her mind.

“Okay, but. . .”

She had not finished speaking, yet I already jumped for joy and embraced her.

“Are you sure you are going to be okay by yourself?”

“Yes, Mama!”

Using the small boat and oar that Papa made, I went to the mangrove forest and out to the shallow river.

“If you use a motorboat, you will surely disturb the wildlife living in the mangrove forest,” I remembered Papa’s advice.

I happily recalled watching fireflies with my childhood friend, Kyle. The tiny insects were like dazzling, twinkling stars brightening the darkness of the evening.

“I am so grateful that I can see you again,” I whispered to myself.

I was dismayed when I arrived at my favorite corner. Many large mangrove trees had been cut and the fireflies we were so fond of had also disappeared. It was not like before. The place looked desolate and gloomy.

The memories with Kyle quickly rushed back.

“Iselle! Look to your left! There are so many of them. And there! They are like stars!”

The wonder in Kyle’s eyes was very apparent.

“Yes! They are so beautiful!” My smile was so wide that it seemed to match Kyle’s.

“How delightful those memories are,” I thought.

The next day, I woke up early and walked along the beach on my way to school. I brought with me the bottle filled with stones and dried seaweeds. I noticed a styrofoam container filled with small dead fishes. Without a doubt, dynamite fishers left it behind. This scene reminded me of what happened 2 years ago.

I was walking toward home from school when I heard Kyle's familiar voice. He was shouting in anger. I hid behind the nearest tree to listen.

"But *manong*, you cannot cut down these mangroves! You also cannot take sand from the shore nor the *pawikan* eggs!"

"And who told you that? Do you own this place that you can forbid us?" shouted the old man.

"No, I do not own this, but neither do you. My friends and I play among these mangroves. We also carve out our drawings on the sand and clean the shore. We watch over the *pawikan* eggs, too. But now you want to take all of these and destroy this place?" fumed Kyle.

I was shocked at his boldness and at how important this place was to him. To think that he was only 12 years old then.

I knew I had to help my friend but I could not move from where I was hiding. It was as if my feet were glued to the spot.

Along with the strikes of the *bolos* were the desperate shouts of Kyle, begging, pleading for them to stop. Still, the men showed no hesitation in cutting down the mangroves, as well as taking large quantities of sand and *pawikan* eggs. I winced every time I heard their tools strike. I could not explain the mix of emotions—fear, anger, anxiety.

Throughout the several hours that the men mercilessly destroyed our small paradise, Kyle did not stop pleading. After some time, I heard a motorboat roar, a sign that the men were about to leave.

It was agonizing to see the place ruined, but it was more painful to see Kyle in tears. Out of compassion, I ventured out and approached him.

"Iselle, the man is carrying our bottle! He accidentally brought it along with the sand they took!" he said when I came near.

"*Manong! Give us back that bottle!*" shouted Kyle.



“What do you care, boy? Didn’t I already warn you to shut up?” snarled the man.

“Please! You have no idea how important that is to us!” pleaded Kyle.

“Just give it to them,” said one of the other men.

“Alright, alright. Here, take it!”

To taunt Kyle, the man threw the bottle far into the water. All of a sudden, Kyle rushed to retrieve the bottle.

“*Kyle! Come back here! The water there is deep!*” I warned, but could not stop him.

I was afraid for him because the waves were strong that day.

“*Kyle! Come back here!*” I continued to shout but he could not hear me anymore. I saw that he was able to retrieve the bottle, but after some time I saw him sinking. I went after him into the water. But because I was not a very good swimmer, I could not swim very far.

“Help! Please help us!” I shouted. I was hoping someone would hear me.

I could not see Kyle anymore, and eventually I was sinking into the water.

“My God, please help us,” I prayed at that moment.



I woke up to the sound of my mother’s voice gently calling my name. I opened my eyes and saw that I was in a hospital room. My mother smiled and hugged me tightly, happy to know that I was alright.

“Where is Kyle?” I immediately asked.

“He went ahead,” she answered softly and looked away. I did not fully understand what she meant.

The nurse entered the room with two men who I recognized were among those on the beach with Kyle. My mother told me that they were the ones who saved me from drowning.

“We are very sorry for what happened,” one of the men said meekly. He then took something out of his bag.

“The bottle!”

I was delighted to have it, but wondered why my friend would leave it behind.

The images of my memories faded away when dried leaves from a nearby tree floated down on my feet. I was once more in the present. My mind returned to the horrible state of my surroundings. Everything that Kyle treasured was gone.

I glanced sadly at the bottle I was holding. That time when we started filling the bottle with things we cherished came back to me.

“My parents told me that the Lord wants us to be good stewards of all the things He created. That is why we should not neglect them,” Kyle said, while fiddling with a very round white stone.

“But what if we forget to take care of them?” I asked him, while filling the bottle with sand.

He stopped walking and gazed at the setting sun. He then sat down beside me.

“Close your eyes and think of all the things that are important to you,” he said.

I nodded and closed my eyes.

“Imagine that you are taking care of all the things that you treasure. Everything that you keep in a special place in your heart,” he told me with much seriousness.

I opened my eyes.

“What about you? What things have you thought of?” I asked.

“This place that is like paradise,” replied Kyle, while putting a small colorful shell inside the bottle.

“The gentle animals that live here,” he added, while putting in some dried seaweeds.

“My mother, father, and my siblings—and also our friends,” he poured sand in the vessel.

“And of course, our friendship,” he added, as he placed a shiny white stone inside.

“There! Let us take care of this bottle as if we are taking care of everything we cherish. This will serve as our reminder!” Kyle happily said, while lifting the bottle toward the rays of the sunset.



Two years have gone by since Kyle passed away, but I can still remember everything as if the events only happened yesterday. I will no longer allow to slip away any opportunity to defend the things that Kyle loved.

I sent a text message to the Sea Patrol reporting that fishers were using dynamite not far from where I was.

I imagined Kyle smiling at me from above because I did not forget our promise. Much has to be done to restore our paradise but it is a promise that I will keep to honor of my friend and the things we treasure.



- *Manong* is a Filipino term of respect, often used to address an older man.
- *Pawikan* is the local name for sea turtle.
- A *bolo* is a large knife, similar to a machete.

PILANG PILANDOK AND PING

Munawara G. Salleh

In the forest of Balabac, a small wild animal was walking around. He was amusing himself by watching a swarm of fireflies. He was Pilang, a mouse deer known locally as *pilandok*. Their numbers have dwindled because humans hunt them for food.

Pilang was fond of strolling along the beach. One night, he was surprised to see his friend, Tonyo, a small *tamilok* gasping for breath.

“My friend! What happened? Why have you packed up all your things?” asked Pilang.

“And how could I not? I am so bothered. The deafening sound of mangrove trees falling is driving me crazy!” replied Tonyo.

“Why? What is going on?”

“The humans are at it again. They are cutting down the mangroves! Well, goodbye!” said Tonyo, as he hurried away. He left behind his home, an aged mangrove tree.

Pilang went to his friend’s previous home and was shocked at what he saw. Many mangrove trees were felled and bird nests and broken eggs were scattered on the ground.

“Such a pity, indeed!” thought Pilang.

“What mother said about the cruelty of humans is true, after all. Where will we go if all the trees are gone and there’s no more food left to eat in the forests of Balabac?”

A small shadow caught Pilang’s attention. It was a boy wandering about the clearing.

“What could a child be doing in the forest, especially at dusk?” wondered Pilang.

Curious, Pilang slowly approached the child. He was startled when the child screamed.

“Don’t come near me!”

Pilang was surprised because he did not think that humans would fear wild creatures. He also wondered how a child could be afraid of the smallest mouse deer in the forest.

The child spoke again, “Hey! I said go away!”

“Do not be afraid of me, I am a friend,” Pilang said softly.

The child was amazed to hear the mouse deer speak. But he quickly regained his composure and looked at Pilang with pleading eyes.

“Can you help me? I got lost when I followed my father to this forest,” he explained.

Pilang suspected that the child was the son of one of the humans who cut down the trees. Pilang thought carefully if he should help the child.

“Come, follow me,” the mouse deer finally relented.

“Do you know where my father is? Are you really leading me to my father?” the boy worriedly asked.

Pilang did not answer but continued walking toward a part of the forest where there were a few trees.

“Why are you not speaking?”

“*This boy talks too much and does not stop asking questions,*” Pilang muttered to himself.

Pilang finally stopped walking and pointed to a place almost bare of trees.

“Who did this?” asked the child.

Pilang stopped himself from saying something rude.

“*You humans are the only creatures capable of cutting down trees in this forest,*” the pilandok thought. But not even a whisper came out of his lips.

When Pilang did not answer, the boy asked again.

“Do you think my father and his friends did this?”

Before Pilang could answer, he heard someone approaching.

“I will leave now,” Pilang quickly said and looked for a place to hide. From behind a dense bush, Pilang watched the reunion of the boy and his father.

“Ping, what are you doing in the forest? Did I not tell you to never follow me here?” the father shouted angrily.

“So, *Ping is his name.*” Pilang felt sorry for the boy who looked hurt and embarrassed.

“I only wanted to know what you are doing, *Tatay*. My classmates were right when they told me you are one of the men cutting down the trees,” replied the child.

“Go on, return home before it gets dark,” Ping’s father sighed heavily.

“And obey me this time.”



Ping hurried away. When he passed by Pilang's hiding place, the *pilandok* stepped out of the bush.

"Have you been here all this time? Did you overhear my conversation with my father?" asked Ping.

Pilang nodded.

"Would you like to go home now?" Pilang asked.

The boy shook his head and walked to a nearby river to wash his face. He tried to hide his tears.

"I am Ping, by the way. What is your name?"

"Pilang. Here in the forest, I am called Pilang Pilandok."

"Pilang, can you do me a favor? The sun is setting and I need to return home, but I do not know the way. Can you walk with me to the foot of this mountain? Our house can be seen from there," requested Ping.

"Of course! Come and follow me," answered Pilang.

Pilang was surprised at himself. "*Ah, I am becoming too kind to humans!*" he thought.

While the two were walking, Ping could not help asking. "Don't you like humans? Can we be friends?"

"I am sorry that my father cuts down trees in the mountains. This is the only livelihood that he knows. It is our only source of money for our daily needs. But do not worry, I will make up for the harm he has done," said Ping.

Before Pilang could reply, the boy repeated his question:

"Can we be friends?"

Pilang nodded his head, "Of course!"

Pilang realized that Ping was kindhearted.

"That is our house!" yelled Ping, pointing to a hut.

Ping waved his hand cheerfully, “Bye-bye!”

“Bye-bye,” said Pilang, as he attempted to raise one front leg and wave it, just as Ping had done. He did not understand what the gesture meant but was delighted to imitate his new friend. He watched as Ping entered the house.

“Ping, I sent you home a while ago! Why did you arrive just now?” Ping’s father asked him.

“I got lost in the forest,” Ping answered sheepishly.

“Ping, what I am doing is for our family. I hope you can understand that,” the father told his son. All Ping could do was keep silent.



On his way home, Pilang cheerfully ate from a *tubog* tree near the seashore. Once again, he looked at the area where there were no more mangroves. He noticed that the fireflies he was fond of watching also disappeared.

“Where have you been, Pilang?” asked his mother when he arrived at their burrow.

“The birds said that you had a human child with you. Keep away from that child. He may be among those who cut trees and trap forest animals.”

“Mother, my human friend is kind,” reasoned Pilang.

“Keep away from him because I do not want you to be in danger,” repeated his mother. “Listen to your elders.”

The young pilandok pondered over what his mother just told him.

“Is my human friend, Ping, really trustworthy?”

He also thought about the promise Ping had given him.

“How can one child make amends for the many wrongdoings the older humans have done, especially when his own father is a hunter and a woodcutter?”

The following afternoon, as Pilang was strolling, he heard faint singing from a distance. He quickly hid behind a bush but recognizing Ping’s face, he

excitedly ran to meet his friend.

“What are those, Ping?” asked Pilang, pointing his nose at the heavy bags Ping was carrying.

“These? These are my seedlings! I am very glad I grew them,” shared the boy.

“Did I not tell you that I would make it up to you?”

The *pilandok* smiled at the child.

“Come with me, Pilang! Plant these seedlings with me where the mountain is bare. I know the soil can erode and bury our town. A flood may also happen during rainy seasons. I would not like our town to suffer.”

“I will help you, Ping. You have a kind heart,” said Pilang.

“If I continue doing this, then the trees will not disappear so quickly. It is also possible that I can replace all the trees my father cut!” said Ping.

Pilang wondered.

“That would be impossible if only one person would be doing all the work, but this child really is delightful!”

After they finished planting all the seedlings, the two bid each other goodbye. But Pilang had not gone far when a heavy net fell on him.

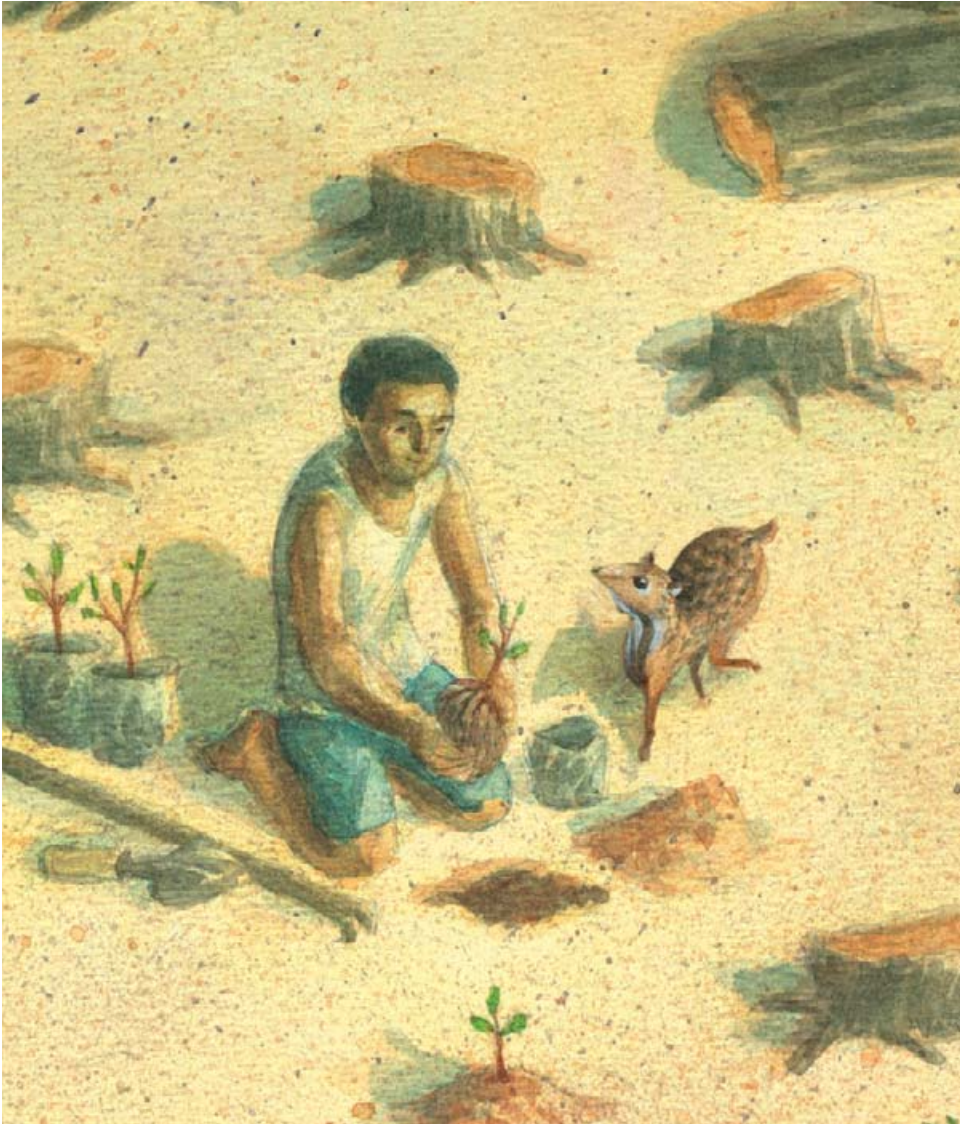
The young *pilandok* was terrified. In his confusion, he did not immediately notice that Ping was already by his side.

“Ping! What are you doing? That is not the way to hold that mouse deer unless you want to release our catch!” one of the hunters said annoyed.

Pilang shivered as he remembered his mother’s warnings. *“Is this my final day here in this forest?”* Pilang asked himself.

To Pilang’s great surprise, Ping lifted the net, gave him a quick nudge and shouted, “Run, Pilang!”

Pilang bolted. He ran as fast as his nimble legs could carry him. The hunters chased after the *pilandok* but Pilang had disappeared into the forest.



“Are you mad, Ping? Why did you release it?” scolded one man.

“Uncle, you are cutting down trees already! And now you even want to catch the animals?”

The anger Ping was holding back could be heard in his every word.

Pilang arrived home, gasping for breath.

“You were with your human friend, weren’t you?” asked Pilang’s mother with a frown.

“Yes, mother,” he replied.

“My friend is a kind human being. In fact, he rescued me from danger just a while ago.”

“Really? Where? How, my child?” his mother looked very worried.

“I was caught in a trap laid by hunters but Ping helped me escape and I was able to run away quickly!” narrated Pilang.

“Thank goodness you are safe, my son!”

“And that is not all, mother. Ping and I also planted seedlings to replace all the trees his father cut down,” added Pilang.

“That child is certainly kind.”

Pilang was glad his mother was warming up to his new human friend.

Because of Ping’s heroism, all the animals in the forest soon learned to trust him. They taught him about the ways of the forest and showed him wonderful sights that very few humans had seen. This experience strengthened his love for nature and all its creatures.



Five years have passed since Ping and Pilang became friends. Pilang found a mate and has little mouse deers. But he still joins Ping in his planting trips in the mountains. Ping now has his trusted friends to help out and they have become Pilang’s friends as well.

“There is hope after all as long as people are kind and have good intentions,” Pilang said to himself with a smile.



- The *pilandok* or the Philippine mouse deer (*Tragulus nigricans*) is a solitary and nocturnal animal found only in Balabac. It is also known as the Balabac chevrotain. The *pilandok* is listed as an endangered species under the IUCN.
- The *tamilok*, also called mangrove wood worm, is an invertebrate that lives in decaying mangrove wood. It is a delicacy in Palawan.
- *Tatay* is a Filipino word for father.
- *Tubog* is a wild fig species commonly eaten by the Philippine mouse deer.

DAGAYDAY ISLAND

Isabella S. Marilag

I got off the jeep and looked around me. The blue sea in front of me was made more beautiful by the first light of the rising sun. I hurried toward an old man standing near a boat.

“Good morning, *po*! Do you know how to get to Dagayday Island?”

“You can ride a passenger boat. It takes an hour to get there,” he replied.

“Or if you want, you can ride with me as I am going there now,” offered the old man.

I accepted his offer and we rode the boat he owned. While crossing the sea, the cool wind lightly touched our skin. After a while, the old man broke the silence.

“I am Lorenzo. Many people call me *Mang Enzo*. What is your name, *iha*?”

“I am Julia Dominguez. I am a writer,” I replied as I reached out to shake his hand.

“Why are you here?” asked Mang Enzo.

“I want to write a story about Dagayday Island,” I said, smiling.

Although I really wanted to write about the island, this was not my primary reason for visiting. It has been 6 months since I began dreaming about this place where my grandfather was born and raised.

In my dream, I was standing on top of a lighthouse while the people below me were running away, crying for help. A giant wave was fast approaching to swallow the island.

This ominous vision kept coming back night after night. I was so disturbed that I was losing sleep over it. Because of this, I decided to visit the island.

As we approached Dagaygay, I noticed that the water was dark and murky, and not clear as I had expected. Garbage were also scattered along the beach.

“Here we are,” announced Mang Enzo.

My excitement to see the beauty of the island was replaced with dismay. I did not expect these dirty surroundings.

“Do you have a place to stay?” asked Mang Enzo.

“No. Do you know where I can rent a room for a few days.”

Mang Enzo scrunched his forehead, thinking hard.

“*Naku, iha*, nobody rents out their rooms here. I have a friend who has a hut which he does not often use. Maybe you can ask if he can rent it to you. It is also near our hut, so if you need anything, you won’t have to go far.”

“Is that so? I hope he will allow me to use it,” I answered.

On our way to meet Mang Enzo’s friend, I began wondering if this was the barrio I had dreamed about. Such was the disparity between my dream and this reality. After some time, we arrived at a big hut.

“Tiago, my friend, do you think you can rent out one of your huts to this young lady?”

“Of course! No one is using the one close to your hut, anyway,” replied Mang Tiago.

“Thank you very much,” I answered him with a grateful smile.

After they showed me my hut, I sorted out the things I had brought. I had enough food and clothes to last me a week. Mang Enzo bid me goodbye and wished me success in my mission.

“I hope so!” I cheerfully said. In truth, I was not sure what my mission was.

After arranging my things, I went outside and sat down on an old bamboo seat facing the sea. While I was looking at the beach, I saw a girl who seemed about my age. She was walking at a leisurely pace and was smiling at me.

“Good day!” I greeted the girl.

“A good day to you, too! Excuse me if I have disturbed you. I was just curious because we rarely have visitors here in our barrio,” she explained.

“Is that so? My name is Julia. I am not really an outsider because my Lolo Julian grew up here. But this is the first time I visited. What is your name?”

“Rina,” she softly replied.

I approached her to shake hands. She seemed shy.

“I will go ahead, Julia. Mother might be looking for me,” Rina said.

“Okay, I will see you soon,” I told her. I was glad to have made a friend on the island so quickly.

The next day, Mang Enzo came by my hut.

“Good morning! Would you like a tour of our barrio?”

“Good morning to you, too! *Opo*, I would like to go around. It will be good to start my research early,” I answered.

As we walked along the coast, Mang Enzo began telling me stories about the place.

“Did you know that Dagayday Island was known for its clear and pristine waters?”

I recalled the same details from Lolo Julian's stories.

"What happened then?" I asked Mang Enzo.

"Do you see that piggery over there?" Mang Enzo pointed to a large structure near the sea.

"That used to be a huge mangrove forest, but the trees were cut to build the piggery. The worst part is that all the dirt and manure go straight into the sea. The mangroves in other parts of the island are also being cut and made into charcoal."

"I remember my childhood friend, Julian. He was very much against the construction of the piggery because he said that all the fishes would disappear. We just laughed at him back then, especially when he looked so serious warning us. He said our grandchildren might not be able to see the beauty of this island. It is sad that everything he told us happened. My own granddaughter did not get the chance to enjoy the beauty of Dagayday."

Even though it was a sad story, I could not help but smile.

"You mentioned your friend, Julian. That is the name of my grandfather who was also a very brave man! Where is your granddaughter now?" I asked.

"She passed away almost 6 months ago. She had always been a sickly child but her condition became worse since the piggery and charcoal-making business were put up."

"I am very sorry for your loss," I told him.

We continued walking while Mang Enzo carried on with his stories.

"You know, we used to collect shells there," Mang Enzo said, as he pointed to the tidal flats.

"Back then, the sand was so white and clean, but now it is like mud because of all the wastes from the piggery and trash thrown by people," the old man said, shaking his head.

After a tiring trip around the island, we headed for home.

Throughout my stay, Rina was my constant companion. She would often share stories about the former beauty of Dagayday, and I was sad it had

turned into this dark and lonely place.

I wrote in my journal every night the stories Mang Enzo and Rina told me. Although it was not my intention to write an article about Dagayday, I knew that the experiences they shared were very important.



One evening on the island, I had another nightmare.

The sky was dark and there was a very heavy rainstorm. Without warning, monstrous waves engulfed Dagayday Island. In the aftermath of the deluge, the only sound heard was the weeping of those mourning for the loved ones they lost. All around was destruction and despair.

I woke up from that horrible dream, gasping for breath. I ran outside the hut, even though it was dark all around, and knocked on Mang Enzo's door.

"Mang Enzo! Mang Enzo!" I shouted while banging loudly on his door. Mang Enzo and his family came to the door, their faces full of concern.

"Julia, calm down. What happened?" said the old man.

"A disaster is coming to the island! We have to leave now! Please believe me. For several months, I have been dreaming of large waves that would swallow the entire barrio. A lot of people will die!"

"*Iha*, sit down and have some coffee first. It is only a dream," Mang Enzo said.

I was certain the premonition would come true, so I continued to convince Mang Enzo, but he only advised me to get some rest. I sat outside my hut, dejected. I was startled when someone touched my shoulder.

"I believe everything you said. Do not give up, Julia," Rina whispered.

"Thank you very much, Rina," I replied, comforted by her kind words.

We talked until I drifted off to sleep. When I woke up the next day, Rina was gone.

There were announcements on the radio that a typhoon was coming,

and the authorities advised everyone to evacuate to higher ground. However, many still did not take the warnings seriously as they argued that they'd gone through similar situations before.

I was afraid because my nightmare was about to come true. A super typhoon was about to sweep through the island. Mang Enzo and I knocked on nearly every door, begging the people to evacuate.

“We will go with you, Enzo,” said Mang Tiago.

Because of our persistence, half of the barrio's population came along with us to a gymnasium designated as a temporary evacuation center. We huddled in fear as the heavy rain and strong winds slammed angrily all night. It was the strongest they ever experienced.

The aftermath of the calamity was horrific—just like in my nightmare. But it was a wakeup call needed for the people of Dagayday Island to realize their mistakes. Everyone offered their help to restore the ravaged paradise.

The piggery that polluted the waters was shut down. A waste segregation system was initiated, and Mang Enzo started a planting program to reforest denuded mangrove areas. Drill exercises on how to respond properly to calamities were also introduced.

I was glad when I heard of the unity and cooperation of the people of Dagayday. Many months after the disaster, I visited the island again.

“I would not have thought that everyone would come together to rebuild this island,” said Rina.

“But in my heart I knew that in time the beauty of Dagayday Island would be restored. Thank you very much,” she added, handing me a glass of fresh coconut water.

Rina's smile was very sweet. I did not know this was the last time we would see each other.

I only had a few days before I returned to the city so I took the opportunity to go around Dagayday. The changes were indeed significant since I first came to the island. Once again, Mang Enzo escorted me back to the docks in his rowboat.

“Did you know that because of all that happened, my granddaughter's



wish will finally come true? The beauty of Dagayday Island will finally be restored,” he said.

“Do you think so? I am hoping for the same thing, Mang Enzo. By the way, what was the name of your granddaughter?”

“Her name was Rina. She was of the same age as you before she died,” answered Mang Enzo.

He took out his wallet and showed me her picture. I felt like cold water was poured over me when I saw the photograph. The friend who was my constant companion on the island was the spirit of Mang Enzo’s deceased granddaughter.

After 2 decades, Dagayday Island has become a very popular tourist attraction because of its rich coral gardens, lush mangrove forests, and ecotours that have become important sources of income for the residents.

Today, I still work as a journalist and reporter. I often write about the environment, travel and adventure, and, sometimes, the paranormal.



- *Po* is a word often added to indicate respect toward elders.
- *Iha* is the Filipino variant of Spanish *hija*, which means daughter.
- *Lolo* is the Filipino term for grandfather.
- *Opo* is a the Filipino term meaning yes, and is often used toward elders as a sign of respect.

CHRISTINE'S DREAMS

Essence A. Panolino

A group of *pilandok* or mouse deer gathered, consoling one of their companions who was wailing.

“Those heartless humans! My wife is pregnant, yet they still captured her,” cried the *pilandok*.

“Will we just allow ourselves to be captured? Our species is slowly dying out!”

“We mourn the loss of your wife,” said Pilango, the king of all *pilandok*.

“I know many of you are afraid, but we have to be strong.”

Brum-brum-brumbrum-brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!

The *pilandok* were startled by the noise. Before long, the largest tree in the forest fell. The monkeys ran away to avoid the crashing branches. Headed by King Unggo, they rushed to the huddled *pilandok*.

“The last of the most ancient trees in this forest has fallen! Only the young trees are left,” said King Unggo, panting.

“We fear that the trees here might all disappear one day!” he told King Pilango.

“King Unggo, we have gathered today to resolve the problems that the humans have brought,” began the king of the *pilandok*.

“It was only yesterday that the humans brutally captured some of our kind. Such is our sadness over the fate of our companions,” he added.

“I think it is time we teach these humans a lesson,” suggested King Unggo.

“Yes, we need to devise a plan. We can discuss these issues with our fellow leaders. We must carry out our revenge,” agreed King Pilango.

The animals from different parts of the forest convened. A little egret was tasked to announce the plan of attack to the animals living along the seashore. They agreed to strike during the next full moon—while all the humans were sound asleep.

And when the appointed time came . . .

“No! I beg you! Please don’t do this!” Christine shouted.

“My child, wake up! You are having a nightmare!” Nathalie shook her daughter awake.

Startled, Christine opened her eyes and embraced her mother.

“Mommy, I’m scared! The animals are planning to attack the humans. They want revenge very badly,” Christine looked distraught.

“Christine, my child, it’s only a dream. What did you do in school yesterday? Why are you dreaming such things?”

“At school, we talked about the importance of nature. I learned that every single thing in this world is connected—the animals on land and in the water, the plants, and the habitats in which they live. And there are also endangered species. Many animals are now at risk of extinction. Those are the same animals I dreamed about,” explained Christine.

“Don’t be afraid, my child. Come and get up now so you can get ready for school,” replied Christine’s mother.

“OK, Mommy. Where is Daddy, by the way? Hasn’t he come home yet since yesterday?”

“Not yet. You know how it is with your Daddy, always tied up with his business.”

Christine began preparing for school, but could not get her dream out of her mind.



One evening, while Christine was watching television, she saw a report about a person who was caught in the act of selling and transporting endangered species such as *kiyaw* or mynah bird, *balintong* or scaly anteater, and *pilandok* or mouse deer. The person was also involved in a large operation of capturing *pawikan* or sea turtles and selling them to foreign traders. In spite of this, the offender was immediately released because he was influential in his town. Christine was shocked to see the photograph of the alleged trader.

“Daddy?!”

She was both sad and angry.

“So that is why Daddy is always not around! That is what his work is!”

When her father came home, Christine overheard a serious discussion between her parents.

“Nathalie, my business cannot lose money. There is a lot of cash here and the profits come fast. That is why I cannot let go of it,” said Francisco to his wife.

Christine was sad as she went to her room, but she was not discouraged. She had to do something to make up for her father’s mistakes.

She became the leader of the YES-O in her school and began to talk with her classmates and teachers about the problem of illegal wildlife trade and the need to protect endangered animals.

As weeks went by, Christine’s commitment to the club grew stronger.

Francisco was deeply bothered because he knew he was guilty of the crimes that his daughter and her classmates were fighting against.

“I need to regain my losses due to my arrest the past month. A lot more money will be lost if I stop now,” he said to himself.

Bringing along some clothes and equipment, Francisco went to a dense forest to again collect protected wildlife from his favorite suppliers. He saw among the frightened-looking animals, a *pikoy* or blue-naped parrot and a mynah. There were also a *binturong* or bearcat, a *balintong*, and a very rare white squirrel. The four-legged animals were quickly put in separate cages while the birds were put inside carton boxes pierced with holes.

A day after completing his transaction and packing the animals, Francisco headed home, accompanied by two other traders. Riding a jeep, they traveled down a zigzag road carved on the mountainside.

Maybe it was the slippery road or faulty brakes but the driver of the jeep suddenly lost control and the jeep slammed straight into a tree. The collision was so strong that Francisco was hurled forward from the front seat. The last thing he remembered before he passed out were the loud cries of the animals.



Francisco woke up to a gentle, soothing touch on his forehead. In front of him, he saw an old lady treating his wounds with a poultice made of ground leaves.

“It is a good thing you regained consciousness. Do not worry—you are in our hut,” the woman said.

“A few hours ago, my daughter and I were walking back home when we heard a small voice shouting, ‘Help! Help!’ Such was our surprise when we saw that it was a mynah calling out.”

“We found you unconscious so we brought you here to treat you,” she explained.

“We saw the accident site and knew from the different animals in the cages that you are a trader. I reported the incident to the authorities. Some of the animals were rescued, but unfortunately, most of them did not survive. One of your companions passed away while the other one was brought to the police station.”

“Thank you for saving my life,” Francisco muttered weakly.

“You are welcome. But I hope you realize that what you have done is wrong. The authorities are aware that you are here and will be back within the day,” the old woman said.

After a while, there was a knock on the door, and two policemen entered.

As he was still weak, the policemen had to assist Francisco to their vehicle. His mind was not on the pain or the fear of being imprisoned but the thought that it was a bird that helped him have another chance to live. It was a miracle and he was filled with remorse for the wrong things he had done.

When the police notified his family of his arrest, Francisco’s wife and daughter immediately went to the police station.

“Francisco, what happened to you? You have been gone for several days, and why do you have so many wounds and scratches?” Nathalie asked her husband worriedly.

“Nathalie, Christine, please forgive me. I was greedy and too dazzled by the money.”

Francisco told them of his trips to Palawan forests. He shared in detail how he purchased animals from the locals, his many transactions with traders in Manila, the recent accident, and the mynah’s call for help that brought the old woman and her daughter to him.

“You were the only people I thought of ever since the accident. I do not know what will happen to us now,” Francisco said.

“Francisco, the important thing is you are still alive. We still have hope,” replied Nathalie.

“Daddy, it is not yet too late. God has given us the chance to change,” Christine added.

Even though Francisco was imprisoned for a short time and had to pay a huge fine, he thereafter fully supported Christine’s environmental projects. He also abandoned his illegal business.

Along with her classmates and teachers, Christine formed a mini-wildlife rescue group in their barangay. Their members shared their knowledge



on threatened wildlife, how to care for them, and which offices people should report illegal activities to. The local Department of Environment and Natural Resources office in their area supported them.

“Mommy, I’m tired because of the room-to-room talks we did a while ago, but I’m happy to know that there are new students interested in joining the club!” said Christine.

“That is good, my child! Come now and rest. Let’s also tell your daddy everything you have been doing at school. He will surely be delighted!” replied Nathalie.



“My fellow animals, do you see what I see?” asked King Unggo.

“Yes. People are planting trees, patrolling the forests, and cleaning the river,” noted King Pilango.

“It’s about time the humans learned the error of their ways.”

“We no longer need to go to war against the humans,” a sea eagle said.

Christine suddenly woke up from her dream. But instead of being afraid, there is a smile on her face. She knows that the animals are now happy because people have learned to respect and protect their environment. She closes her eyes once more, grateful to be part of that change.



- The *pilandok* or the Philippine mouse deer (*Tragulus nigricans*) is a solitary and nocturnal animal found only in Balabac. It is also known as the Balabac chevrotain. The IUCN Red List assessed the *pilandok* as an endangered species. It is protected under the Philippine Wildlife Act 9147.
- The common-hill mynah (*Gracula religiosa*) is a popularly traded pet in Asia because of its ability to mimic speech. It is protected under Administrative Order

No. 48 of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix II. Its population has declined mainly because of local trade.

- The *balintong* or the Palawan pangolin (*Manis culionensis*) is an anteater endemic to Palawan. It is heavily hunted for both local and international trade for its meat, skin, and scales. The *balintong* is listed under CITES Appendix II and assessed as endangered under the IUCN Red List. It is protected under the Philippine Wildlife Act 9147.
- YES-O is the acronym for Youth for Environment in Schools' Organization.
- The *pikoy* or the blue-naped parrot (*Tanygnathus lucionensis*), is also known as the Philippine blue-crowned green parrot. It is listed under CITES Appendix II and assessed as near threatened under the IUCN. Its population has declined because of bird trade and loss of forests.
- The *binturong* is also known as bearcat (*Arctictis binturong*). It is hunted for the pet trade and assessed as vulnerable under the IUCN Red List. It is protected under the Philippine Wildlife Act 9147.
- The white squirrel is found in Biton Island, Taytay municipality in Palawan. It is distinct from albino squirrels and is locally called *puting bising*.
- *Barangay* is a Filipino term for village or barrio.
- DENR is the acronym for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.
- NGO is the acronym for nongovernment organization.

ENDE FINALLY LEARNS

Shaima I. Hunaini

“Ende, wake up! Come and help me. Your *amá* just arrived from the sea!”

Ende jumped out of bed and quickly tidied herself to go to the beach. She ran toward her *indu* who was preparing containers for the fish caught by her father.

“Wow, this is a huge catch, *Amá!*” she excitedly greeted her father, who was busy putting away a long hose.

Samuel’s catch had been abundant for the last few months and their lives were slowly improving and becoming more comfortable.

“Indu, will you not buy me new clothes and a pair of shoes? All my classmates have new clothes and shoes all the time, but mine are already old. And one more thing, Indu, will you buy me a mobile phone so I can keep up with everyone else in school?” pleaded Ende.

“Alright, alright. When I go to town, I will buy all the things you want just to keep you quiet,” said her mother, smiling fondly at her.

“But make sure you study hard and get good grades!”

“Yehey! Thank you, Indu! You are the best!” Ende shouted happily. She smothered her mother with hugs and kisses.

With her new phone, new clothes, and fat allowance, Ende was the envy of her classmates. She began to skip classes to join her group of close friends for picnics by the beach or fun treks to the mountains. Life was good to Ende!



Like a magician, Samuel slowly swirled a milky liquid inside a plastic bottle. It was a mixture of poison and sea water that can put fishes to sleep.

“Let us go farther this time,” he suggested to his two companions. Among the three of them, Ende’s *amá* was the most skilled diver.

This particular operation was a difficult one. In the past, Samuel alone would dive in the shallow parts of the reef. But now, he would need a fellow diver to descend to the deeper parts of the sea. This was because the shallow reefs had already been destroyed.

“Here we are,” said Samuel as they reached their destination.

He wrapped the long plastic hose around his waist and put on his flippers made of plywood and a makeshift goggle mask. He bit into one end of the hose, which would provide him some air, so he could stay underwater for a long time. Everyone was ready.

As he was the *timonero*, Samuel dove into the water first, followed by his assistant.

They squirted the poison on the corals, stunning the fishes hiding among the coral branches and crevices. They found several *sunu*, a very expensive fish, and quickly put them in a net. The *sunu* were still young and had not reached the desired size but the divers were forced to catch them anyway because this fish was becoming increasingly rare. Because of the poison, there was a chance they would die during transport.

“I hope you can still make it to Manila,” whispered Samuel. The fishes’ journey would be long, all the way to Hong Kong, China, where they would be served in the most expensive restaurants. People say fishes coming from the Philippines are the tastiest.

After an hour, Samuel felt sick and signaled his companion. He quickly swam to the surface. The younger diver followed soon after.

When he got on the boat, Ende's *amá* started feeling dizzy.

"Did it hit you?" the fisher who stayed on the boat to operate the compressor asked nervously.

Unable to respond, Samuel felt his chest tightening slowly, until he lost consciousness. Terrified, his two companions quickly turned the boat back to shore.



"*Áma*, what happened to you?" Ende's mother cried while holding the unconscious Samuel. The fisher looked very pale, and his whole body was rigid.

"I think it's because he was underwater for too long," said one of Samuel's companions.

Miraculously, after several hours, Samuel regained consciousness, but felt very weak. He told his family about his experience.

"I suddenly felt dizzy while underwater and when I surfaced and got on the boat, I felt that my chest was about to explode."

Fishers who practice cyanide fishing can die but Ende's father miraculously survived. However, half of his body became paralyzed, from the waist down to his toes. He could not fish anymore, and Ende was forced to stop schooling because of lack of money.

The prosperity they had experienced for a short while was replaced by a nightmare.

Ende had to help her mother earn a living by selling wild fruits and shells that they gathered along the shore. It was a difficult life! It was heart-wrenching every time she would look at her *amá*, unable to walk and looking helpless. She decided to go to an old *bolyan* who lived in a faraway village to ask for advice.

"Upú, I want to help my *amá*. Is there a cure for his paralysis?" asked Ende.

"You need to find the Ginoo," answered the *bolyan* softly.

“Who is the Ginoo, and where will I find him?” Ende asked.

“You will find the solitary old tree in the thick forest. Pray that the woodcutters have not yet cut him down,” replied the old man.

“Take some bark off of the Ginoo’s large roots and ask him for some of his flowers. Bring these to me and I will make an antidote for your *arña*.”

Ende’s mission was extremely difficult. According to legends, the Ginoo is a sacred being, and it is prohibited to injure it. Aside from being very tall, its flowers bloom only once in 8 to 10 years. But Ende was determined to help her *arña*.

At daybreak, Ende combed through the forest, carrying a *bolo* and a glimmer of hope. It was already noon but she had not yet come across the Ginoo.

Exhausted, Ende sat down on a boulder to rest. After a while, a stranger passed by.

“Sir, would you know where the Ginoo is? It is a giant tree but I cannot find it,” said Ende.

“I go to the mountain before daybreak to gather honey and from a distance I can see a very tall tree that is different from the rest. Maybe that is your Ginoo.”

“Please show me how I can reach that tree, sir,” Ende asked the stranger.

“Follow that stream until you reach the foot of the mountain and use the trail to get to the other side,” he explained.

“There you will see a giant tree from afar but you will have to walk a long way to reach it.”

“Wait, child, have you had lunch? Here, have some honey and bread,” offered the man.

The honey was sweet with the bread and Ende regained the strength she badly needed. She thanked the man and continued her journey.

Ende walked for hours and it seemed her legs were getting heavier with every step. The hope that her *arña* could be cured was the only thing that pushed her to continue. She saw many felled trees along the way and she

prayed that the woodcutters did not get to the Ginoo first.

She finally reached her destination and was glad to see there were still many large trees around. But a particular tree caught her attention.

Majestic and proud, it stood out because of its massive size. A cockatoo flew up toward its tall branches and Ende saw that the tree's canopy was filled with golden flowers. She did not expect the tree to be in bloom at this time. Ende was thrilled. She knew this was the Ginoo.

But as she was staring up at the golden flowers, her excitement turned to worry. The tree was almost 70 meters high. How could she reach the flowers?

"Please allow me to gather some flowers and peel off some bark from your roots," Ende looked up pleadingly at the tree.

"For my paralyzed *Amá*," she whispered.

She lifted her face to the tree, looking for a sign that it was alright.

Then a mysterious thing happened. A strong wind blew and golden flowers gently fell around Ende. Ende gathered the flowers, and scraped some bark from the tree's roots with her *bolo*.

She gave a nod of thanks to the Ginoo and journeyed back to the old *bolyan*.



Could two miracles happen in one person's lifetime?

Because of the antidote and daily exercise, Ende's *amá* gradually recovered his strength and the use of his legs.

When he fully healed, Samuel joined the very group that used to chase him—the Sea Patrol. News of his experience quickly spread across their town and convinced many fishers to turn away from their illegal practices.

Ende's search for the Ginoo taught her a valuable lesson: that no challenge is insurmountable if your faith is strong. Nature, through the Ginoo, helped give her *amá* back to their family and for that she will forever be grateful.





- *Ende* is the Ubian term of endearment to a young female, especially for daughters.
- *Aña* and *indu* are the Ubian terms for father and mother, respectively.
- *Gamot* is literally translated as medicine although in this story is used to refer to sodium cyanide.
- *Timonero* is a local term for captain.
- *Suno* is a local name for coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*). It is also known as the leopard coral trout or red grouper.
- The bends, or decompression sickness, is a condition experienced by divers, especially those using compressors. Nitrogen bubbles build up in the tissues and bloodstream when a diver ascends to the surface rapidly, resulting in pain, numbness, nausea, and paralysis.
- *Bolyan* is the Ubian term for healer.
- *Upu* is the Ubian term for grandparent.
- The *Ginoo* is the local name for a large tree commonly known as *tualang* (*Koompasia excelsa*). The name *ginoo* is used in Palawan while in Sulu, it is referred to as *manggis*. It is one of the tallest trees in the Philippines, reaching as high as 75 meters. *Ginoo* is also the Filipino word for sir.
- A *bolo* is a large knife, similar to a machete.
- The *katala* or the Philippine cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*) is listed as a critically endangered species under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Their population has dwindled because of illegal wildlife trade and loss of habitat. It is protected under Republic Act 9147 or the Philippine Wildlife Act.

SOME PROTECTED WILDLIFE FOUND IN THE CORAL TRIANGLE



Whale Shark
(*Rhincodon typus*)

FUN FACTS

- Whale sharks are found in all tropical and warm temperate seas excluding the Mediterranean.
- These gentle creatures are the biggest fish in the ocean. They can grow up to 20 meters (m) long and reach an average weight of 19,000 kilograms (kg).
- Being filter feeders, they only eat small fish, shrimp, and plankton.
- They are not whales and they are not dangerous to humans.

IMPORTANCE

As filter feeders, whale sharks improve water quality by directly removing particulate matter (plankton) within the water column and along the coasts. This improves transparency and increases the capacity for photosynthesis, a vital process in the marine food chain necessary to support life.

CURRENT THREATS

- Whale sharks are still hunted for their fins, meat, and liver oil.
- Pollution in areas where they feed.
- Whale shark tourism practices which include swimming with and feeding by tourists and operators may cause injury and disrupt their natural behavior.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Considered Vulnerable by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Version 3.1, Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), and Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) 208.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Report to local authorities illegal activities that may harm whale sharks.
- Avoid feeding whale sharks. The feeding interaction with this creature can be a great experience but such an action may lead them to associate humans and boats with food. This makes them prone to getting injuries from boat propellers and getting caught in fish traps or nets.



Green Sea Turtle
(*Chelonia mydas*)

FUN FACTS

- One of the seven species of sea turtles found worldwide. Five of these species are either endangered or critically endangered in the IUCN Red List.
- Turtles that reach maturity may live up to 80 years in the wild.
- While juveniles eat plants and other organisms such as jellyfish, crabs, and worms, adult greens are strictly herbivorous.
- Their common name, Green Sea Turtle, comes from the usually green fat found beneath their carapace or shell.

IMPORTANCE

Being one of the few animals that feed on sea grass, they help maintain the health of sea grass beds by cutting the grass short. Sea grass beds, along with coral reefs and mangroves, are part of a very important life support system for many species of fish, crustaceans, and other marine animals. Unhatched turtle eggs also provide nutrients for shoreline or beach vegetation. At the same time, turtle droppings serve as nutrient-rich fertilizer for sea grass.

CURRENT THREATS

This creature is classified as endangered because of climate change and human-induced threats such as turtle hunting and poaching, egg harvesting, pollution, entanglement in fishing nets, and ingestion of plastic debris.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Considered Endangered by IUCN Version 3.1, CITES, and FAO 208.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Be aware of sea turtle nesting areas and do not build camp fires in these sites. Artificial lights disturb nesting turtles and hatchlings.
- Help clean up trash on the beach.
- Report illegal activities that harm sea turtles to local authorities.
- Don't buy products made of sea turtle shells.



Dugong
(*Dugong dugon*)

FUN FACTS

- This marine mammal can be found in the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean.
- Its name is derived from the Malay word *duyung*, which means “lady of the sea.”
- A dugong’s average length is 2.4 meters (m) to 4 m while its average weight is 230 kilograms (kg) to 400 kg. It can live up to 70 or more years in the wild.
- It is completely herbivorous and consumes seagrass and marine algae.
- Similar to dolphins, dugongs use a variety of sounds such as chirps, whistles, and barks to communicate.

IMPORTANCE

The grazing activity of dugongs contributes to nutrient cycling and energy flow as they stir up sediment in sea grass beds. Their fecal matter acts as fertilizer which keeps the sea grass healthy.

CURRENT THREATS

The dugong population is threatened by hunting for their meat, oil, and hide. They can easily get entangled in fisher’s nets, which causes drowning. Sea grass beds where they mostly stay and feed are being destroyed by illegal fishing practices and pollution.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Considered Vulnerable by IUCN Version 3.1, CITES, and FAO 208.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Do not let go of that balloon. Balloons that descend to the ocean contribute to pollution and may get eaten by marine animals and cause premature death.
- Support organizations that aim to protect the oceans and its resources by participating in their campaigns and activities.
- Report to local authorities illegal activities that harm dugongs.



Triton’s Trumpet
(*Charonia tritonis*)

FUN FACTS

Found throughout the Indo-Pacific Ocean, it is a species of very large sea snails which can grow to over half a meter (20 inches) in length.

IMPORTANCE

They are one of the few natural predators of the destructive crown-of-thorns starfish which feeds on live corals.

CURRENT THREATS

There is continued collection of their shells for decoration and other purposes. Although protected in some countries, trading still continues in souvenir and online shops.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Catch and export of this species is decreed illegal by FAO 208.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Be familiar with the appearance of Triton’s Trumpet’s shell and report cases of illegal trade to local authorities.
- Do not buy products derived from the species.
- Help spread the ecological importance of this species as well as the conservation instruments that protect it.



Humphead Wrasse
(*Cheilinus undulatus*)

FUN FACTS

- A species of wrasse widely distributed on coral reefs and inshore habitats throughout much of the tropical Indo-Pacific region.
- Its name comes from the prominent bulbous hump that forms on its forehead.
- They can grow up to 6 ft (2 m) in length and can weigh up to 191 kg (421 lbs).
- Like many reef fishes, the humphead wrasse changes sex as it matures.
- A number of dive sites have their “resident” humphead wrasse because of the creature’s tendency to be sedentary.

IMPORTANCE

It is one of the few predators of the crown-of-thorns starfish, a species that can destroy large sections of coral reefs.

CURRENT THREATS

- The species is heavily exploited in Southeast Asia, particularly in key supply countries for the live reef food fish trade in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.
- Habitat destruction due to illegal fishing practices such as cyanide fishing also threatens its survival.
- Due to its sedentary nature, it is easily caught by spearfishing by divers using self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA) or compressors.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Considered Endangered by IUCN Version 3.1, CITES, and FAO 208.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Report illegal fishing activities to local authorities.
- Support organizations that aim to protect the oceans by participating in their campaigns and activities.
- Continue to learn more about endangered marine animals and share information with others.



Giant Clam
(*Tridacna* sp., *Hippopus* sp.)

FUN FACTS

- The largest species of mollusks on Earth.
- The average lifespan of a giant clam is over 100 years old.
- They are known to reach a length of 1 m and can weigh more than 200 kg.
- After a giant clam picks a place to live, it can never move because it attaches itself to the surface.
- What appear to be their multicolored lips are actually called a “mantle” and contains algae that are one of the giant clam’s sources of nutrients.

IMPORTANCE

Giant clams are efficient filter feeders and clean the water of excess nutrients that can harm corals. They produce large amounts of calcium carbonate that help in building coral reefs. Their discharge of feces, gametes, and live zooxanthellae (a symbiotic algae living in their tissues) serve as food for other reef animals. They also act as indicators of reef health being the first to react to environmental change.

CURRENT THREATS

- Giant clams are hunted for their meat.
- They are harvested for the aquarium trade.

CONSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

Considered Vulnerable by IUCN Version 2.3, Appendix II of CITES, and Republic Act (RA) 8550 or the Philippine Fisheries Code.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Help spread the ecological importance of this species as well as the conservation instruments that protect it.
- Do not buy products that are made of giant clams.

LIVE BETTER: IDEAS ON HOW TO CARE FOR THE PLANET

Caring for the planet is easier than we think. Here are practical tips on how we can start change in our families and communities.

1. **Slow down climate change.** Earth's rising temperature affects everything and everyone around the globe including land, water, plants, animals, and humans. It's not just the temperature that has changed, but we've seen more extreme weather-related disasters, like drought, typhoons, and storm surges. We might think that we don't contribute to climate change at all. But we still move around, use gadgets, eat, and buy things. These activities contribute to climate change in many ways. To help slow down climate change, we can:

Plant a (mangrove) tree.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Plus, mangroves absorb carbon 100 times better than inland trees.

Drive less, walk more.

Bike or carpool. These activities are good for your health and for the environment.

Go paperless.

Opt to receive bills through e-mail. Think before you print or use both sides of a paper if you really have to print something.

2. **Save resources.** There are 7.4 billion people on Earth and as our population grows, there is greater pressure to produce more food, more electricity, and more infrastructure. We might just run out of resources unless we decide to live with less. To save Earth's resources we can:

Use less airconditioning.

Open the windows or use a fan if it's hot. If the weather is cold, wear thick clothes.

Turn off lights.

Unplug appliances that are not in use.

Save water.

Turn off running water when lathering soap while washing hands. Shorten shower time. Tighten taps.

3. **Use reusable bags or containers.** Plastic is usually used once, gets thrown wherever, and ends up in the ocean. There are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic trash in the ocean and from that, 269,000 tons float on the water surface (<http://www.theoceancleanup.com/problem.html>). That's as heavy as 15,000 buses! Many marine mammals mistake plastic for food which causes untimely death. Plastic also disintegrates into very small particles called microplastic which is swallowed by the fish that we eat. To use less plastic we can:

Reuse water bottles.

Reuse water bottles before getting rid of them or buy reusable water bottles.

Bring reusable bags.

Doing groceries is even better with our own bag.

Pack lunch.

Use reusable containers instead of wrapping food in plastic or buying food for take-out.

4. **Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** The things we use and throw every day pile up more and more. To become more responsible with our garbage, we can:

Recycle at home.

Ask our parents to help us find old plastics, tin cans, and electronics such as batteries and appliances.

Recycle at school.

Challenge our schools to recycle. Tell our teachers about it and invite everyone to participate.

Start a compost.

Collect fruit and vegetable peelings and help fertilize gardens with a compost pit.

5. **Love Earth.** It's easy to take living in the blue marble for granted. At times, we actually forget to enjoy the blue sky, the pretty sunsets, and flowing rivers. To show our appreciation for Earth, we can:

Throw trash in bins.

Be responsible for your own garbage.

Drop gadgets.

Go offline for a while and take in the sceneries.

Go outside and enjoy.

Play with friends and families outside or take a nature walk together.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Acean Mae D. Abis, author of “Tuking, The Mischievous Whale Shark” is 17 years old and loves to dance, model, and sing. She does not consider writing as hobby but is passionate about the environment. She wrote her story when she was a student at Canique National High School. She is now a first year student at Palawan State University in Puerto Princesa City.



Noahbelle L. Academia, author of “Mangrove Friend” is 15 years old and is a 10th grade student at Busy Bees National High School. She likes to read, draw, and write stories. She wants to be an educator in the future.



Elnah T. Basala, author of “The Changes in Elma’s Family” is 17 years old and a student at Balabac National High School. She loves math even if it is a difficult subject for her. Her story is based on true events in their family and is the first story she has written.



Kathleen L. Conde, author of “The Haydara” is 16 years old and a student at Western Philippines University - Agricultural Science High School. Her favorite genres are historical fiction and science fiction. She hopes to be a published author someday and win a Pulitzer Prize for her work.



Shaima I. Hunaini, author of “Ende Finally Learns” is 16 years old and a 10th grade student at Balabac National High School. She lives near the sea and loves to swim. She dreams of becoming a teacher in the future.



Roozie Quea Elkanah I. Idlana, author of “Leo’s Incredible Experience”, is 17 years old and a student at Palawan State University. She was a student of Balabac National High School when she wrote the story. She likes to write stories, essays, comics, and poems. She considers it an honor and an unforgettable experience that her story was published.



Isabella S. Marilag, author of “Dagayday Island” is 17 years old and an accountancy student at Palawan State University. Her hobbies are reading books, drawing, and playing chess. She was a student at Sicsican National High School when she wrote her story.



Essence A. Panolino, author of “Christine’s Dreams” is 17 years old and studying at Palawan State University in Puerto Princesa City. She was a student at Canique National High School when she wrote her story. Her mother, a secondary school teacher, helped develop in her a love for books at the early age of five. In “Christine’s Dreams”, she wanted to tell a story about a family that cares for nature.



Munawara G. Salleh, author of “Pilang Pilandok and Ping” is 17 years old and a student at Palawan State University. She was a student of Balabac National High School when she wrote her story. The youngest of six children, she loves to joke around and tease her friends in a good-natured way. She says eating is her big hobby.



Jirene Samuelle C. Tabujara, author of “Kyle’s Smile” is 15 years old and a student at Central Taytay National High School. She wants to grow up to be an animator, author, or scientist. She likes to be surrounded by friends because she is an only child.

ABOUT THE MENTORS



Solita B. Bacomo teaches Filipino at Balabac National High School. Her hobbies are reading and watching movies. She wrote for *GLIMPSE*, a Palawan State University publication.



Gretchen G. Cayabo, is a social studies teacher at Busy Bees National High School. She grew up in Roxas, Palawan and is a BS Education graduate of Palawan State University.



Christina P. Cuarrio is a Filipino teacher at Central Taytay National High School and has been the school paper adviser for more than 6 years. She is fond of writing short stories and essays.



Kathleen Faith P. Evina likes to draw, and play basketball. She used to teach at Western Philippines University - Agricultural Science High School. At present, she is a graduate student at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. She believes natural resources are important to a country's economic growth, and supports sustainable development.



Araceli B. Katon was a math teacher at Balabac National High School. At present, she teaches math and music, arts, physical education, and health (MAPEH) at Brooke's Point National High School - Mary Edwards Venturanza Extension. She grew up in El Nido, Palawan where she enjoyed scriptwriting for a drama club when she was a student.



Berlito S. Lopez is a science teacher at Canique National High School. He is an adventurous man who loves the great outdoors. As an educator, he believes it is important to raise awareness on climate change. He is thankful to be one of the mentors to the authors.



Ariel I. Matchico is a Filipino teacher at Sicsican National High School and a Doctor of Philosophy student. He is a poet and writer of short stories.



Ten young authors from Palawan in the Philippines weave tales about how children, adults, and indigenous communities interact with creatures in the forests and seas. They take us to whimsical worlds where mouse deer talks, humans meet nymphs, and families battle fierce storms. Every story's message is of hope: that children can lead change, people can become more conscious about environmental challenges, and everyone can work together to protect the world we live in.