

WANA

Sitting on their stripped mattress, still in her white and red school uniform, Wana watches her mom pack their belongings into the duffle bag, coughing lightly all the while. The school was out super early that day, they said they're leaving the village soon and they all have to get ready.

The air feels so heavy on her little chest, making her wheeze and snuffle, making her eyes water. Wana blinks her eyes to try to soothe them a bit, before bending to rub them up. Mama glances at her, if Wana squints, she can almost see her dark eyes behind the lenses of her mask.

"Put on your mask, sweetie." Mama said, voice muffled by the muzzle of her mask.

Wana whines, fingering the strap of her own mask. She does not like the masks. They're big and clunky, and they don't look cute at all. It's also hot underneath the filter.

Mama sighs at her as she kneels in front of Wana.

"Wana." Mama says, drawing out her name in the way Wana knows she's close to being in trouble.

"I don't like it, Ma.. it's hot.."

"I know, but you know it makes you feel better, right?" Mama pinches her cheek.

Wana pouts. Mama was right. Wana does breathe better with the masks on. Wana hasn't been able to breathe properly these days. Her chest tickles a little bit too much, her breaths won't seem to fill her little lungs enough. And everything is scratchy and heavy from the smoke.

Mama holds the mask onto her face, beckoning her to hold onto it while she makes sure it fits Wana's eyes, nose, and mouth properly. Then Mama fiddles around to adjust the strap, untangling Wana's pigtails away.

Wana blinks, running her fingers onto the lenses, wiping the dust away, it ends up smudging them even further. Mama chuckles and uses her sleeve to clean them as much as she can. Wana can finally see her again.

"Isn't it better?" Mama asks.

Wana takes a deep breath. It does feel better. She nods. Mama pets her head and rises up to put the last of their stuff into the bag.

As she pulls the zipper close, Papa appears on the doorway, a big backpack slung onto his back,

"Are you done?" He asks Mama.

"Yeah. We're good." Mama swings the duffle bag onto her shoulder and pats Wana to get off the bed.

Papa whistles at her, "Wow! Now we all match! That looks so cool!" He squats down to Wana, swiping away her bangs and moving closer as usual when he wanted to kiss Wana's forehead.

The muzzle of his mask clangs with the top of Wana's.

"Oh no! I can't kiss you this way!" Papa laughs, "Whatever am I gonna do?" He pulls Wana into a hug and starts banging the muzzle against her forehead again and again, making the same noise over and over. Mama started laughing loudly at the sight.

"Stupid Papaaaa!" Wana giggles and wiggles around, trying to get away from Papa's hold. Suddenly, the air doesn't feel so heavy anymore.

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The sky currently has an odd color, Wana thinks. It is not blue or white or gray, but it is oddly yellow, almost like the color of the sunset. But different.

The villagers are gathering at the square, along with their stuff, bundles of clothes, luggages, bags, even bird cages are piled up under their feet. Their murmurs and whispers sound like a buzzing noise to Wana's ears.

All of them are sporting the masks, making them all look the same.

Wana tries to make a game out of it, trying to guess who was who. She recognizes the granny next door's floral night dress, and the village head's curly gray hair and big belly.

The kids are still wearing their uniforms as well, as most of them were told to go back home early like Wana was. Some of them are like Wana, huddling under their parents' legs, some are wandering around, trying to see if they can find their friends somewhere in the crowd. Nearby, a little boy a little older than Wana runs after his older brother, who is wearing a white and blue middle school uniform.

On the road, some buses and other vehicles are lining up, ready to take them all away.

Papa is talking to a uniformed man, Wana does not recognize him. Maybe she does, but the mask makes it impossible to know.

"Can't they just stop the work? Is it really worth it to move this many people from their villages just to continue this?" Papa asks.

The man in uniform looks up from his papers and sighs, "There's really nothing we can do, as long as there's money involved, they can do whatever they want."

Papa hisses, he seems like he wants to continue arguing, but stops himself, "So, are we leaving anytime soon?" he continues.

"Yes, as soon as everyone has gathered, we'll start the evacuation process."

Suddenly, a screech of an animal broke through the silence, a strong gust of wind blew and with it the thick smoke that has been their daily occurrence these days. The haunting sound of fire overpowers the buzz of people's murmurs. Animals are running out of the trees and bushes. The sky fills with birds and bats, all running away from the forest. From afar, clouds of smog are looming over the forest, engulfing the sky.

“The wind changes here! We have to go now!” Someone screams and with him the rest of the villagers join.

People start moving. Before she knows it, Wana is pushed around by the sheer amount of people around her. Legs, feet, boxes, bags, hips, she’s not sure what exactly knocks her down, and along with it, her mask pops away from her face. When she comes to, Papa and Mama are not beside her anymore.

Wana’s coughs violently erupt from her chest, “Mama? Papa?” she tries to weakly call out. Her surroundings are covered by the heavy, smoky, fog.

“Wana!” She can hear Mama’s scream, she sounds terrified. “Wana!!!” Papa’s shout rang out.

People are still hitting her from all around, and Wana starts to feel very weak. She can’t breathe and her coughs worsen. “Mama... Papa...”

Next thing she knows, she’s surrounded by darkness.

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Silence fills the air. The smoky fog rolls around in the air, swirling into circles as they are being pushed around by the weak wind, the air too dense for them to dissipate completely.

Wana stands in her lonesome in the middle of the deserted square. At least what’s left of the square.

Something feels odd. She’s looking down and sees herself. She is lying face-down on the ground, still in her uniform, hair a mess, arms out, her mask cast away just a little bit out of her reach. But Wana is standing up, so how can this be? She must’ve been dreaming. What an odd dream.

She raises her hands up to her face and gives them a glance. They look odd too. She can still see the Wana that is lying down through her fingers, and it changes shape by its own when she waves them. They disperse into little puffs of smoke that floats around before gathering again to form the shape of her fingers. Wana’s fingers.

She doesn’t like that. What’s going on?

Wana looks around, trying to figure out what exactly is happening, she’s sure Papa and Mama are somewhere around. They’ll tell her what’s going on. They will help Wana.

“Papa? Papa Mama, where are you?” She tosses her head around, hair flying out of her loose pigtails. The smog around her grew thicker, but she was too busy, too scared, to notice that the smog was coming out of herself.

“Papa... Mama... Wana’s scared... Papa... Mama?”

Nobody comes to her rescue. Nobody answers to her calls. And at that time, her face is wet with tears that she can’t wipe away. Wana drops down onto her knees, sobbing and wheezing, fighting for breath. For just a second she thinks of needing the mask her Mama put on her, but then she realizes even though it’s hard to breathe, she doesn’t feel suffocated. She doesn’t feel like her chest is heavy with the dirty air

that was usually causing her so much pain. In truth, she doesn't feel like *anything*. *She doesn't need to breathe. Not anymore.*

For some reason it makes the pain in her chest even worse.

Wana screams.

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Kapindra emerges from the scorched ruins of his land. Swarga Loka¹ lost a sizable amount of territory again with the last incident. He can feel the primordial power within him weakened again. But it shouldn't bother him too much, for this kind of loss should be nothing for a being as ancient as him. Should be.

Swarga Loka used to be a vast area of land, the home where he and his brethren were born and lived. His lush and fertile land chock-full of life. The ancient forest blessed by the warmth of the earth and the rain of the heaven itself. Sadly it has well-passed its prime, the human-made fire and chasms have tapped into the core of his realm, sucking it almost dry, and with it, Kapindra's might.

His great fist lands gently onto the dried land, giving a bit vitality to it each time they touch the ground. Behind him, with each step he takes, little green buds sprout out of the midst of debris and soot. His presence pushes away the thick smog that is shrouding the air.

There is something peculiar with the smog in front of him. It isn't produced by the fire the humans lit as usual. Though quite weak, Kapindra can sense it is made with something supernatural in nature. Something sentient. It has a smell of fear and sorrow mixed in with the thick fog.

With that, the god of the jungle treks through the land, pinpointing the source, feeling that he's close.

A large clump of smoke covers a small area before him, so thick and dense it looks almost solid. The cloying smog breezes through his auburn fur, making them bristle with goosebumps. It reverberates with the noise that is ringing through the air. The noise is both familiar and unfamiliar to Kapindra's ears. Though it is a bit different, it is similar enough to a call Kapindra is accustomed with. The sound of the anguish of a young being.

Kapindra expels a deep rumble, building up his energy onto the vibration of his chest. With a mighty explosion, he lets out the great distinct high pitch hissing roar of a great orangutan onto the air. It shakes the land and air around him, blowing away the pesky smog. Immediately cleaning out his vision.

There, in the midst of the smoke, a young female human is curled up into a ball, crying. She is not alive, Kapindra notices. Not in a sense that matters to the worldly realm, but she is definitely there in spirit. Tiny and barely there, her presence is strong enough to affect the state of the air of his domain. Which means her emotions were strong enough during the event that led to her death for her to stay on earth.

As she is now, she might be dangerous. She is dangerous. She *will* be dangerous. And if Kapindra is thinking wisely, he should've driven her away from his land.

¹ Heavenly Garden

But alas, she is a *child*. A human child, but a child nonetheless. A child who was born, grew, and lived on the edge of his forest. So by that logic, she is one of his.

Kapindra glances at the former vessel of her soul, some time has passed since it was damaged. The land has started to take it back onto its hold, sharing its nutrients with the life that resides within. It's exactly how it is meant to be, a routine he has seen more than he can count during his long time of being alive. but he imagines, for such a young being, it is quite a blow to see yourself decaying back into the earth.

He moves slowly to the girl, picking up an object that has fallen nearby, just a couple of fingers away from her skeletal hand. He holds it up to his face, it is miniscule in his hand. Though he is unfamiliar with human devices, he knows enough what they use this object for. Eyeing the still sobbing spirit, he imbues his own natural energy into the object, knowing it will help in calming her down and holding back her volatile energy.

Her head is barely the size of his knuckle, so he tries as gently as he can to move away the hair that is covering her face with his finger. The human hitches up a gasp and looks up, surprised that she can even *feel* Kapindra's touch. Her eyes are wide and wet, nose runny, mouth quivering, sobbing the air she no longer needs into her little chest. The great ape wipes the tears away carefully with the tip of his nail.

The human-made object floats out of his grasp and flies down to the girl, who looks at it as if she is looking at a treasure, something so precious, so fragile, that it might break if she puts her finger onto it. Kapindra touches a finger on it to nudge it closer to her, finally beckoning her to hold it in her grasp.

"Put it on." His voice echoes around. "It will make you feel better."

Her eyes unbelievably widened even more at those words. As if remembering something that happened a long time ago. A fond memory of days gone by.

Once again, her cry rings through the air.

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Wana can hear the noises her big brothers are making even before she opens her eyes. Brama and Bayu must be bickering again, annoying Garuh who is just trying to enjoy a peaceful morning, and ends up escalating the situation into a full-on fight.

The yelling escalates into squawks of a bird and the roar of a tiger, and she can also hear the scratching of the earth and Garuh's deep groans in the background. Uh oh, this does not sound good. Nothing good will come out when his brothers get their animalistic side involved in their fights. It means it's time to wake up.

Having a tiger, a bird, and a rhinoceros spirit as her "brothers" means no day was a quiet day in this new life of hers. They would rather die than acknowledge each other as brothers, but to Wana, they are hers. They are officially known as Kapindra's generals, sworn to protect him and Swarga Loka, but to the residents, they're first and foremost seen as the children the Great Ape Lord has picked up somewhere along the way. Now that Wana has joined them as one of the ragtag bunch of misfits, it is just self-explanatory that she will call them as such.

Wana sits up from her nest made of soft leaves, they have mostly dried up, she'll have to replenish them soon enough, just as Kapindra showed her.

She yawns and subconsciously raises a hand to rub her eye, but she quickly remembers that her eyes are not itchy. Never again. And even if they were, she can never reach them with her mask over them. Wana stretches out her arms, letting her body crack in all the right places before swinging out her leg down onto the wooden floor. She pats away her white shirt and red skirt, trying to straighten it up as best as she can, after that, she moves on to try to neaten up her pigtails, combing away the tangles.

Again, she doesn't really need to do this, her state as a spirit means that she stays as the way that she was the day she died, simple as that. If she wants to, with a little bit of energy, she can make it so her white shirt would look as neat and pressed as that day, her skirt would stay as red, and her hair would remain the same length.

But even so, Kapindra would always spend some time once a day to sit her down, his gigantic fingers unbearably gentle working on undoing her hair ties, combing her hair slowly, looking for all the non-existent fleas on her until he's satisfied. All the while he'd tell her stories about the old days, about the glory days of Swarga Loka, about the antiques Garuh, Bayu and Brama had been through when he first took them in. Then he'd redo her pigtails back before sending her on her way.

That's Wana's favorite part of the day. In that way, she feels like she's alive, she feels a bit more human. It reminds her of the way her Mama does her hair every morning back then. The stories remind her of the stories her Papa would tell her about his work. It's been quite a while since Wana lost Mama and Papa. Or, more correctly, since they lost *her*. She tries not to think about them too much, after all, while she's unable to be with them anymore, she has gained a new family since the day Kapindra took her in.

Wana walks through the leaves of their tree house, dreading what kind of mess awaits her from the result of her brothers' squabble, that's when the opening to Kapindra's chamber catches her eyes.

She turns the other way to have a peek on Kapindra's throne. The giant orangutan is asleep, eyes closed, his breaths deep and powerful, vibrating the very air around her. Wana frowns.

Kapindra is unwell.

He hasn't been well for a while.

Kapindra is strong. Very strong. His power is the very thing that keeps Swarga Loka safe all these years, even what little is left of it. But his power is not unlimited.

Kapindra's power and life are tied to Swarga Loka itself. The more territory they lose to outsiders, the weaker he gets. Before, Kapindra can still spend most of the day with them, patrolling the forest and interacting with the animal residents before having to return to his lair to rest. But lately, even getting up early to greet them is taxing on him, and it takes so much more out of him to stay awake longer.

The noise behind her dies down as Bayu flies in through the leaves, a pure white bird with a bit of bright blue bare skin around his eyes. Bayu is a Bali myna bird spirit. His kind is rare in their area, non-existent even, but how he got there was an entirely different story altogether. One that is not Wana's to tell. He was still squawking irritably when he noticed Wana standing in front of Kapindra's chamber.

The bird lands himself onto her head before a hand appears to pet her hair. Bayu has transformed into a beautiful young man with long white hair. Wana glances up to him, her brother looks down to her with a smile, the blue marking around his eyes, a reminiscence of his bird form, creases with it. He ruffled her hair affectionately, undoing her hard work in tidying it up before.

“*Blī*² ah...” She whines.

“What is it?” He asks lightly, “Why are you pouting like that?”

Wana shakes her head to get away from his hand, “Who says I’m pouting? You can’t even see my face” she answers, hiding the fact that under her mask she is indeed, pouting.

Bayu shakes her head, “Yes, yes, not pouting, not pouting.” He looks up to observe Kapindra’s sleeping form, “What’s wrong? Worried?”

Wana looks back to Kapindra before replying, “He’s been asleep for quite a while...”

Bayu doesn’t answer her right away, but in a moment, he finally says, “It’s okay, *Kar*³ Kapindra is just tired, he’ll be fine after a good, long nap.” He smiles down again at her, though this time Wana tries not to notice that it doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Yes.” She says, agreeing with him.

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Bayu walks with Wana to their living room. Wana calls it the living room, but it is just a big open area of their great tree where they like to hang around. Garuh is sitting on the edge, looking into their amazing high up view of Swarga Loka, feet dangling down, looking very bored while Brama is beside him, still spouting his rapid-fire nonsense, most likely bad-mouthing Bayu.

Brama turns to them, his fiery orange hair wild from the wind blowing through it, he squats down to Wana’s eye level and starts to rant, “Wana! Listen to me! That bastard-”

“*Bang*⁴... I think it’s your fault.” Wana cuts him off, just as Bayu instructed her to do. On the side, Garuh exhales loudly, the only thing that signals that he is holding back laughter in his otherwise expression-less face.

“I agree.” Garuh says flatly.

“See, *Akang*⁵ said so too.” Wana finishes.

Behind them a loud “HA!” rings through as Bayu laughs, full of vindication.

² Balinese word for “big brother”

³ Word used in Kalimantan to call a male elderly person.

⁴ Malay/Indonesian word for big brother, used widely in Sumatra through to Java.

⁵ Sundanese word for big brother.

Brama's eye twitches, his face red, almost as fiery as his hair that Wana is worried he might spontaneously combust.

"You didn't even hear what I was going to say you Brat!" He turns to Bayu with murderous intention in his eyes, "You! You told her to say that!!" He shouts before reaching over to try to throttle Bayu while the latter is still toppling over in laughter.

It is at that time that Kapindra's familiar hissing sound echoes through the air. Kapindra is awake and he senses something is wrong.

Instantly, every one of them falls into a practiced routine, Bayu transforms into a pure white bird and flies off to pinpoint the location of the intruders. Meanwhile Brama and Garuh leap off the tree, transforming into respectively a tiger and a rhinoceros before speeding off through the jungle.

Wana stays where she is, waiting for a signal from Bayu to the where about their enemies are, when a loud shriek rings through the forest, as she can see her brother's bird form flying around in a circle near the eastern edge of Swarga Loka.

The little girl reaches out her hand, the tip of her fingers sways around in the wind and breaks off as clumps of smoke. It dances around her round and round, forming a thick fog that would suffocate anyone unfortunate enough to get stuck within. And with a quick movement of her arms, she sends through the fog onto the area Bayu indicates, blanketing it, making sure those people won't be able to escape the wrath of her brothers.

In just a little while, loud screams can be heard throughout Swarga Loka, Brama and Garuh must've arrived to where the poor sods are. Wana takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. She hopes they'll take care of them quickly. She doesn't want the noise to disturb Kapindra's rest.

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Kur sits on the protruding roots of a tree, knees up, looking around him as the men prepare themselves for their trek through the rainforest. He wipes the sweat forming on his forehead, the forest is so humid, his body is working so hard to sweat out the heat that it feels taxing just to do anything. He was just helping out to carry the cages and equipment out of their speed boat onto dry land. Now he has a bit of time, he can finally rest a bit while they're still busy doing whatever it is they're doing. He does not know the group well, only one or two people he recognizes as his brother's friends.

He grumbles as he picks a stick to mess around the dried leaves that are scattered around him.

It's all his brother's fault he's stuck here.

Come with me, his brother said. I got a great job opportunity, his brother said. To hell with job opportunities! He got roped by his brother to fucking hunt wild animals!

Not hunting, his brother said on their way here. They are just going in to find cute monkeys to sell. The broker said his client would pay big money for some *owas*⁶ and *bekantans*⁷. The younger and cuter the

⁶ Gibbons

⁷ Proboscis monkeys

better. Even better if they can score some orangutans on the way. Some monkeys! For money! How fantastic is that! Easy peasy!

Kur is glad he stopped himself to chime in that owas and orangutans are not monkeys. They're apes. Surely his brother would kick him off the boat if he said that in front of his rugged and manly 'friends'.

He is not glad that he did not stop himself from asking if they're not here to hunt, why do they need rifles. He was met with howls of laughter from the men. His brother groaned and swung his arm around his neck, spelling it out like he was a small child.

"Eh boy, how do you think we gonna get the babies ah? When they all are sitting up in the air in the trees?" His brother tsk-ed at his dumbfounded expression. He let go of Kur and mimicked the act of cocking a rifle and a bang as he imagined shooting an imaginary target.

"You shoot the mama and the baby falls with her lah! Stupid you!" He smacked Kur at the back of his head while the men erupted with laughter once again.

A cold sweat shoots through Kur's back remembering that.

He is not a little boy anymore, he just turned 15 the other day. He knows jobs are hard to come by. He knows how struggling people are. He remembered those bad days years ago when he and his brother had barely enough to eat. When they were displaced from their village, separated from their parents, and put into the new settlements. Seen as burdens by the other refugees, unwanted by the residents of the established new village.

Just another mouth to feed, they said. He remembers.

He knows this job will settle them to live comfortably for some time. Maybe enough for them to travel and get out of the shanty town they currently live in. He knows.

But of all the jobs, does it really have to be this one?

The men are almost done with their preparation, their loud and noisy chatters tapering down into small talks as they are readying themselves to conquer the bush. And at that time, a small movement caught Kur's eyes.

Up on a tree, just a bit further, an orangutan is swaying on the branch. It is small, a young one. Probably just barely out of its mom's protection.

Kur has to stop himself from gasping.

The little orangutan looks at him, its eyes big and round, mouth opening into an O shape. Little and cute. Just as the client has ordered.

Kur's head is pounding, what should he do? What should he do? Should he tell his brother and the men? Should he let them have this little creature as their first catch of the day? What should he do??

The orangutan blinks at him without moving, seemingly caught between fear and curiosity. Shit. Why isn't this baby moving? Go! Run away! What the hell??

Finally, Kur decides to grab a pebble near his foot and throws it to the branch the orangutan was on. The creature lets out a tiny shriek and jumps away, disappearing into the foliage. Kur sighs in relief. At that time his brother turns to him, asking,

“Oi Kur! Watchadoing man? What was that?” He squats next to him.

“No-no-no! Nothing nothing! I was just a bit bored!” Kur shakes his head rapidly.

“Well, if you’re bored, it means you can work! Come on move your ass and grab something up! We’re going!”

—

At noon, they managed to track down a family of *bekantans*. The men’s excitement rises up, up on the trees, there they are. It seems they just had new babies too. Tiny newborns, suckling onto their mothers, little young ones playing around the branches as the adults groom each other. The males’ prominent noses hung down proudly as they scout the area carefully, protecting their troop. They look so unusual, so fascinating.

Kur’s stomach drops. He feels like he’s about to throw up. Is this it? Are they really going to do this?

The head of the group readies his rifle, aiming a large female with a baby cradled gently in her arms.

Kur closes his eyes. He does not want to see this.

And at that time suddenly everything is covered up with smoke. Kur knows this kind of smog, he’s survived it before. But how can it be? There’s no fire around this area today! Even so, the weather was so clear with no wind blowing whatsoever! What is going on??

His brother and the men who were just squatting next to him before disappeared from his view. As if they all got separated far away from each other. And soon, the noise starts. Oh God, the noise.

The men were *screaming*. Kur has never heard such screams of fear and pain coming from such grown men before. It is as if they’re being ripped apart alive. Kur can hear the roar and growls of wild animals. What is being done to the men, he doesn’t know. And he *doesn’t* want to know.

The worst part is, he can hear the voice of his brother. He is close. He’s asking for mercy. He’s calling for help. He’s calling for Kur.

Kur musters all the courage he has to rise up from his knees, “*Kak?? Kakak⁸!* Where are you??!” He coughs, trying to reach around his hands to find his brother. His hand finally touches something, and he recognizes his brother’s curly hair. He pulls it towards him and finds himself toppling back as he catches his brother’s quivering body.

He’s injured and panting, but alive. Kur pulls his brother close, saying thankful prayers for his safety, and looks up, and there in front of him, is a sight he did not expect.

⁸ Indonesian call to your older sibling.

A young girl is floating in the midst of the smog that is surrounding them. She is small, if Kur has to guess, around seven to eight years old, still clad in the iconic red and white uniform of an elementary schooler. Long black hair tied up into cute pigtails that sway in the wind.

But the most striking part is her face. Her face is covered with the state-mandated gas masks that were distributed to the refugees on that god-forsaken day they had to move away from their village.

The girl moves along the smog like she is a part of it, or rather, it is part of her, seeing that the smog moves alongside her in harmony with her lithe limbs. She floats down to them, hands up towards their faces, and with it a small clump of smoke appears, perfect size to suffocate them both.

Kur closes his eyes and tightens his hold onto his brother. He is held in return. If they're going to die here, they'll die together.

And at that time, a mighty hiss rings through, the girl stops immediately, turning around. Kur dares himself to peek out, and there, in the midst of the thick smoky fog, a young orangutan is fist-walking towards them. He hears the girl gasp, as if torn between keeping her stance in preparation to finish them off or to turn away to run towards the orangutan.

Slowly, Kur realizes, the little orangutan grows in size, his body bigger, arms longer and defines, it's fur growing until it trails behind him. Cheekpads and flanges slowly sprouting out, changing from the cute little curious expression that Kur saw before into a wizened face of an ancient being. By the time he arrives by the girl's side, he is huge. Bigger than the biggest orangutan Kur has ever seen, towering so high up that Kur and his brother have to crane their necks up just to see a glimpse of his face.

"*Kai...*" The girl manages to let out, voice cracking as if she is holding back tears.

The great orangutan looks down at her with a gentle look on his face. He takes his gigantic hand and uses a finger to bring down the girl's still-raised arm, dissipating the clump of smoke she prepared before.

Though they can't see her face, they can see the girl is alarmed by this gesture,

"Wha-? But- they're-" She tries to protest but is silenced when that same finger pats her mask-covered cheek gently, softly tidying up her messy bangs. The girl inhales, again, she sounds like she was choking up with tears.

At that time, Kur can hear powerful flapping of the wings of a bird as a gust of wind clears away the smog surrounding them. Leaving Kur and his brother dumbfounded alone. Just the two of them.

Around them, the fallen bodies of their lifeless comrades are scattered about, painting the ground red. Up on the tree, the family of *bekantans* are looking down at them, still grooming each other in a lighthearted manner.

His brother is breathing heavily in his arms, Kur can feel the heat of his blood dripping down his arms. Breathing. Alive. His brother is alive. They're alive.

Kur's sob explodes as he buries himself deeper into his brother's arms, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Kak.. Kakak... Kakak..”

His brother returns his hug shakily, “Home. Come on. Let’s go home. Let’s get away from here.”

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Wana finds herself back at their great tree in Kapindra’s arms. The orangutan lets her out of his hold gently as usual, but unlike usual, Wana is agitated. She’s happy, and relieved, and angry, and confused. All at the same time.

For the first time in years, she feels that her breath is uncontrollable, as if no matter what she does she can’t get air to fill her lungs. Even though she knows she no longer has lungs to fill. No matter, it’s just that she knows that her chest is heavy and she realizes it’s because she’s upset. She’s upset by everything.

Upset that they managed to let such a group so deep into Swarga Loka. Upset that the group was targeting the *bekantan* family that she loves. Upset that they got so close. *Too close* to Kapindra. Upset that the one time in a while that Kapindra awakens, he has to deal with those people. Upset that Kapindra *forbids* her to finish them all off.

With a cry, she rips her mask off her face and throws it against the trunk of their tree. Her smog is all over the place, bubbling out of her limbs and shoulders, enveloping the tree with it.

“Oi Wana-!” She can hear Bayu behind her, flapping his wings trying to dissipate her fog to no avail.

Brama, who has turned back into his human form earlier, catches the bird and keeps him steady in his arms, looking down at him and shushes him noisily. Garuh stays silent as usual, he glances at Kapindra, as if asking him a question. Kapindra closes his eyes and nods.

“Come on,” Garuh nudges and steers Brama, and along with him, Bayu, away into the leaves of the great tree, leaving Kapindra and his littlest charge alone.

“Are you done?” Kapindra picks up her mask, the size comically small against his gigantic finger. He watches as the rate of smoke that Wana is producing slows down.

“Why?” Wana asks, her voice, though small in volume, is accusing in tone.

“Why what?” He answers back.

“Why didn’t you let me finish them off?” She shrieks, raising her voice. “They were there to hurt the *bekantan*! They were a danger to them! To Swarga Loka! To *you*!” The smoke grows even thicker each time she emphasizes her point.

Kapindra blows away the smoke near his face and easily fans it away with a swoop of his hand, “Those two were just children.”

“What children?!” She cries. “One was carrying a weapon! He was prepared to shoot!”

"The smaller one tried to protect me given the chance. And the other was his brother." Kapindra says calmly, his giant finger is combing through Wana's messy hair. It's been quite a while since he last saw her face.

"So?" she retorted, still obstinate. "They're dangerous! They're *humans!*"

Kapindra can't help but let out a laugh, "Wana is also human. Is she dangerous?"

That stops her from continuing. Her mouth gaped open and close, like a fish out of water. Kapindra uses his finger to gently push her chin up to close it.

"Wana's mother and father were humans. Are they dangerous?" He chuckles. "I'm sure they're not."

Defeated, Wana pouts at him, "That's not fair..." she whines.

"What's not fair?" Kapindra smiles at his youngest child, using the very tips of his finger to pinch her cheek a bit.

She looks away, mumbling, "Stupid *Kai*..."

"What was that?"

"Nothing!"

Like a balloon, she deflates in front of him, the air around her clearing up, the smog disperses itself into nothingness. Wana falls onto her knees, still with the air of petulant on her face.

Kapindra lowers himself and sits with a big thump. Glancing at her, his sulking child's lower lip protrudes even further into a deeper pout, but she slowly climbs up his leg and settles herself into his side, burying her face onto his fur.

Kapindra holds her close, "Did *Kai* worry you?"

Wana nods, still staying in position.

"Was Wana scared?"

Wana nods again.

"Then *Kai* apologizes, he was wrong."

The little girl pulls herself out of his hold, shaking her head rapidly, "It's not *Kai's* fault! It's never your fault!"

Her cry finally breaks as waves of fat tears fall heavily behind the cover of her bangs.

"It's just- it's just that..." She sobs and hiccups, trying to wipe her tears away to no avail, "Wana... Wana lost... *everything.*"

“Wana’s Papa and Mama. Wana’s house, toys, school, village. Everything.”

Kapindra stays silent, letting his child cry onto his arm, tears and snot wetting his fur.

“If anything happens to Swarga Loka, to everyone, to *Kai* Kapindra. Wana would have nothing left.” She wails.

Her cry echoes through Swarga Loka, for once so quiet, as if listening in to their little princess’s sorrow.

Kapindra pats her hair gently, the touch of his hand becoming a comfortable weight on her head, soothing her bristled feathers. As her hiccups subsides, Kapindra pushes her chin up gently, making her look up to face him.

“*Kai* has been on this earth for a long time, do you think he’d disappear so easily?” he asks with a smile. “Don’t just kill him off that quickly, silly child.”

Wana looks up, she rubs her eyes, her tears almost clearing up.

“Don’t you know? As long as the forest still stands, the ape will not disappear.”

“As long as Wana⁹ is still standing.”

Wana’s eyes widened, the words caught her breath. Behind them, the sun is setting.

—

Wana wakes up to the usual squabbling noise of her brothers. She does not quite remember what happened yesterday, but sometimes during the night, it seems that Kapindra moved her onto her leaf nest where she slept the rest of night away.

She reaches over to rub her eyes, only then noticing that her mask is not on her face, but is laid there neatly by her bedside. Most likely by Kapindra. She takes the mask in her hand.

For years, she’s been using this mask to comfort herself, to remind her of her parents, to hold back her emotions, to control her power. Kapindra did use it at that one time to calm her down, but he never actually told or made her keep wearing them. She was the one who was stubbornly keeping herself in control.

Wana rubs her thumb against the leather of the face mask gently.

She’d probably still wear it again later, probably would still use it if they have to go and fight intruders, probably would still have episodes where she’d need it again. But for now, for this morning, Wana chooses not to.

She swings her leg onto the wooden floor and runs out to greet her brothers. Brama is in a deadlock with Bayu on the floor while Garuh is lying sideways looking sleepy.

⁹ Wana’s name means ‘forest’ in Sanskrit.

“Oi Wana! Listen to what this bastard said this morning!” Brama shouts from where he is pinning Bayu down.

They look up to greet her and pause, realizing the little girl’s bare face.

Wana smiles,

“It’s probably your fault again, *Bang!*”

THE END.