

AKI BALAK
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AKI BALAK

Once upon a time, there lived a man named Arbain and his wife Masniati. They lived in a simple shack in the middle of a jungle, where a variety of plants and animals could fulfill their life necessities. Fruits that dropped as it ripened, tubers to be boiled and eaten, fish in the river to be caught and cooked into side dish.

Arbain lived with his family in that jungle. Their house felt cool because it was surrounded by myriad large trees. They grew and multiplied for many years. So, it certainly was different from the vegetables or grains that grew in the farmland or fields and lived for a season only. The trees were also varied, with an upright trunk and leaves of different shapes. Arbain and Masniati had one son. Their son was named Matonandow, which meant the sun. His birth had been long-awaited. Matonandow was like the sun, the source of life for the humans. Its presence was always anticipated. Without it, this world would be dark. It was how important Matonandow was for Arbain and his wife. Matonandow made the family happy.

Matonandow lived happily with his parents. His house, which was made of wood with stilted floor, was surrounded by trees. The house was constructed that way to protect against animals in the jungle. Fence was built around the house with tall, wooden

beams. Matonandow's mother grew various seasonal plants for their everyday meals such as tomatoes, chili, spinach, and eggplant which thrived. Eggplant was a type of vegetable. The plant originated from India and Sri Lanka, had broadleaves and grew as an annual. It also grew in the jungle. Half-wild eggplant could grow taller with broader leaves. The trunk was usually spiked. The flowers were ranging from white to purple, with yellow stamens.

Tomato plant was a shrub that could grow up to about one-meter high. The plant only had one growing season, and withered immediately once they bore fruits. Tomato had a soft and moist stem with triangular-shaped leaves. The fruit was green when young and changed to yellow or red when ripe. Matonandow's mother used them for condiments, in salads, or ate them raw. She also grew water spinach which flourished in Matonandow's house yard. She planted two types of water spinach, morning glory that grew on dry soil and swamp cabbage that grew in wet, mucky soil.

Swamp cabbage had larger leaves and stems compared to morning glory. The plant could be pulled out directly or the leaves plucked off and the stem left out. Once it was cut, the plant could grow back and the leaves plucked off again.

Near the fence there was a pole used to support growing vines. The vine plants that was grown by Matonandow's mother were

called peria or bitter gourd. Peria was a fruit that was long and tapered at the ends and had serrated surface. It had unpleasant smell, and grew by creeping or climbing along the surface with its much-branched, spiral-shaped tendrils. The fruit was elongated and round, dotted liberally with wart-like bumps, tasted bitter, green in color but changed to orange when cooked. Matonandow's mother also planted chayote squash. Not only the fruits were edible, its tender shoots could be used in a vegetable dish too. The plant grew by creeping on the ground. It bore fruits that hanged on stalks. The leaves were triangular in shape with hairy surface. The squash should be boiled until tender to remove the sap. After being boiled until tender, it could be consumed with chili sauce as a *lalap* - assorted raw vegetables or tossed into a clear spinach soup or vegetable stew with thin coconut milk gravy. Its leaf buds could be boiled or stir fried.

The houseyard was in fact used by Matonandow's mother to grow edible plants. Near the entrance, she planted a Hummingbird Tree. The tree was useful as a canopy. It produced red and white blooms that could be consumed after boiling. Its fruits look like long beans, the unripe ones could also be eaten raw. In their backyard was a bamboo tree. Young bamboo shoots sprouted from the ground at the base of the cane. It tasted delicious and so was categorized as vegetables. Bamboo shoots grew at the base of the cane and were usually covered in coarse hairs. It was cone-shaped. The edge of each segment had a part that looked like the

tip of a bamboo leaf, but brown in color. Bamboo shoots could be used to treat phlegm cough and fever. Matonandow often helped his mother working in her yard. The plants should be watered and tended daily. Grass that grew around the plants should be plucked out. As Matonandow and his mother worked in the yard, he liked to observe the forest near his home. There were big trees there. The trees created a special habitat and environment that was different than on the outside.

When you were in, it was like entering into a warm and humid room, unlike the surrounding air in the rice fields or farmlands. The scenery was also different, which meant the plants and animals were different too. His father had told him that the forest could be seen from parts above ground, on the surface, and underground.

Matonandow listened to his father talking while looking at the trees around him. Matonandow's father said, "Look, it's called a tree because it has hard woody stems and branches. The tree has a main upright stem and green leaves to make its own food. The bottom parts of the tree that grow underground is called root."

"Why is it called root?" Matonandow asked his father.

"It was called root because it was the core, originator, base, or cause. Roots become part of the plant that are usually embedded

in the soil as support, they absorb water and nutrients for the tree.”

Matonandow and his father studied the trees in the forest. For plants, roots were a substantial part in addition to their stems and leaves. Roots would grow deeper underground. They absorb food and water from the soil for the plant, fueling the plant to grow bigger. Matonandow observed more closely. He pulled out some young plants nearby. The shapes of roots of one plant and another were different. However, their parts were almost similar, consisting of root cap, root tip where the growth takes place, and root hairs.

“That one is called a bush,” his father said again, pointing to a plant nearby. Matonandow nodded.

His father added, “Bushes are creeping herbaceous plants with short stems and only a few centimeters tall. Try comparing them with trees.”

“Well, the one near the bush is called a shrub. Shrubs are a group of trees with small trunk less than six meters tall,” continued Matonandow's father with his explanation to Matonandow.

Matonandow wanted to prove his father's words. When he saw the part aboveground, he could see trees, woody stems, and small plants. On the surface, there were a variety of bushes, grasses, and duff. Duff was a carpet-like material spread under a tree that

contained fallen stems, branches, leaves, twigs, flowers, and fruits. Duff was a source of humus, the fertile topsoil layer. It was also the home of insects and various other tiny critters. Among the big trees there were small trees called bush. Matonandow looked at what his father pointing at more carefully.

The house they lived in was built using the trees they took from the forest. The roof covering the house was made from nipah tree leaves. The fence surrounding the house was also taken from the forest. The family also took advantage of the fruits that grew in the forest. There were plants that dropped their fruits when ripe and tubers that could be boiled and eaten. In the forest, there was a crystal clear river. Matonandow often bathed in the river. The water refreshed his body. Maybe it came from the center of the forest. The water passed through tree roots so it felt cool and fresh to the touch. In fact, Matonandow drank the river water whenever he was nearby.

The river was originated from a meeting between several major tributaries, namely Kayan, Sesayap, Sembakung, and Sebuku Rivers. Its waters flew northward through the valley to the swampy delta section of the lowlands. This river eventually emptied into the Pacific Ocean. His mother often caught river fish to make side dish for Matonandow. The boy was very fond of eating the fish that his mother caught with boiled or roasted tubers.

Matonandow's mother also regularly plucked the leaves of the bush that thrived amidst the trees in the forest as vegetables. The jungle could supply the family with enough food. Matonandow grew healthy in the middle of the wilderness. Arbain did not rely solely on forest products. He caught wild fowls with traps. Matonandow helped his father catch a pair of male and female wild fowls and caged them. Sometime later, the fowl they captured started to lay eggs, lots of them. Matonandow took the eggs each time they were going to have a meal.

Matonandow often observed the fowl that was sitting on its eggs. He also heard many stories about eggs from Arbain, his father. When he was having lunch with his parents, Matonandow asked about the origin of the chicken and egg. After finishing their meal, his father told him the story. Once, there was a kingdom with a very rich king. The king kept chickens in his palace. One day, when he saw his hens lay eggs, the king smiled. He called the guards to announce to the people that the kingdom would be holding a contest that was open to the general public.

The contest had one easy question, but it required a right and reasonable answer. Anyone who can answer the question would be handsomely rewarded with a purse full of gold coins. But punishment awaited those who could not answer the question.

A lot of people wanted to take part in the contest, especially the poor. Some of them were eager to participate, but changed their

minds once they thought about how severe the punishment would be. Unsurprisingly, only four participants registered. One of them was Abu Nawas. The competition had two rules. First, the answer should make sense. Second, the participants must be able to answer the King's rebuttal himself. On the predetermined day, the participants took the stage. The King sat on the dais. He called the first participant. He stepped forward, trembling. The king asked, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

"Egg," answered the first participant.

"What is the reason?" asked the King.

"It was not possible for the chicken to come out first because chicken hatched from the egg," the first participant explained.

"Then what laid the eggs?" said the King.

The first participant went pale. His face suddenly turned white as a sheet. He could not answer. He was immediately put in jail.

Then, the second participant stepped forward. He said, "Your Majesty, actually the egg and the chicken were created at the same time."

"How could it be created at the same time?" asked the King.

"It was not possible for the chicken to come first, because chicken hatched from the egg. If the egg came first it was also impossible

because the egg could not hatch without being brooded,” said the second participant firmly.

“Is a hen able to lay eggs without a rooster?” the King challenged.

The second participant got confused. He was thrown into prison. Then, it’s the third participant's turn. He said, “Your Majesty, actually the chicken was created before the egg.”

“Explain your reasoning,” said the King.

“In this servant’s opinion, a hen would be the first created,” said the third participant convincingly.

“Then, how could a hen breed if there was no rooster?” said the King, tested him further.

“A hen could lay eggs without a rooster and brood the unfertilized eggs. Then, male chicks would hatch from the eggs, grew up to be adult roosters and mated to their mother hen,” the third participant tried to explain.

“What if the hen died before an adult rooster could mate with her?” said His Majesty King again. The third participant could not answer him back. He was also put into jail. Now it was Abu Nawas’s turn. He said, “It is certain that the egg came first, then the chicken.”

“Try to explain it in a way that makes sense,” said the King curiously.

“The chicken knew about the egg, but the egg did not know about the chicken,” said Abu Nawas briefly. The King pondered for a while. This time His Majesty could not refute Abu Nawas’s reasoning and had to reward him with a big amount of money. Matonandow, enraptured by his father's story, stared at his rooster for a long time.

He thought about the story, and asked his father.

“Father, in your opinion, which came first, the egg or the chicken?”

“I think the chicken should come first,” his father replied.

“Why is that?” asked Matonandow.

“Well, it’s because a long time ago, everything on the earth was completely covered in water. At that time the prophet Noah believed in God’s command to bring along pairs of animals before the flood came. So, when the water had receded from the earth, only pairs of male and female animals remained, including the chicken. After that, I think that whenever people asked which came first, the egg or the chicken, I would say chicken,” replied Matonandow's father. Matonandow listened to what his father had

said. He was sure that the chicken came first on this earth. His father said again, “Want to hear another story about chicken?”

“Yes, yes, Father!” Matonandow answered as he immediately sat beside him.

“Well, it is a story from China that I’ve heard before,” his father said next.

Then, he began the story. Once upon a time, there was a landlord who called one of his helpers as he rested in front of his house.

He said, “Please find me some rooster’s eggs within three days, if you cannot get it within that time, I will punish you.” At that time, a landlord was someone harsh and strict, who thought that a servant could be punished at whim. The servant went home. On the way back he kept thinking, “Is there a rooster that can lay eggs? This is the first time I heard a rooster lay eggs.”

Arriving at home, he said nothing. He refused to eat. He was not hungry. He had no desire to eat or drink. He was silent the whole day. At night, he could not sleep and still he said nothing.

The servant’s wife saw her husband suddenly acting strange. He was quiet and restless in his sleep. The wife was very worried about her husband’s condition. She approached her husband and said, “What is it, are you having a problem?”

“Yes, I do. Master has ordered me to find rooster’s eggs in three days. If I could not find it, I’ll be punished.”

So, the servant’s wife said, “I’ll find a way to solve your problem. In three days I will go visit your Master. Do not fret yourself.”

When the third day arrived, she went to visit the landowner's house where her husband was working as he stayed at home. She hurriedly met the landlord at his home. When she arrived, the landlord was actually waiting for the servant. He was astonished upon learning that a woman came to see him. It was his servant’s wife.

“Where’s your husband? Why do you come instead?” asked the landlord.

“Pardon, My Lord,” the woman replied, “My husband cannot come to see you.”

“Why is that?”

“He just gave birth.”

“What? Who ever saw a man giving birth,” cried the landowner.

“You did, My Lord,” bravely the woman replied, “Who ever saw a rooster laying eggs?”

The landowner could say nothing. He was aware of his wrongful conduct. He had asked his servant to find eggs from a rooster.

Finally, the landowner apologized to the servant's wife and tried to change his behavior that often brought trouble to other people. Matonandow listened to his father's tale.

He was proud to have a father who could explain many things. That afternoon Matonandow was happy. Their deep gratitude to God who had blessed them with happiness was shown through their joyful countenance. After that, Matonandow took a night rest. Before going to sleep he prayed so that God would protect his family. Tomorrow morning, he would be going with his father into the jungle to get food for their family.

He often followed his father to the field where his father grew vegetables for their family. It was wonderfully fun to be there. The field was located in the middle of the forest. Before, the field was overgrown with bushes. Matonandow's father had to clear up the bushes and trees so that it could be used as a farmland for growing vegetables and other crops. Matonandow helped his father by cutting bushes with his *Mandau* sword. His father cut down small trees, left them to dry, and burned them. After clearing, the field was planted with dry-land rice, corn, eggplant, chili, and so on.

Arbain had planted all kinds of plants in the field for 2-3 years. When the field was going to be abandoned or by the end of a seasonal crop, Arbain would plant perennial plants on the edge of the cultivated field. They were generally fruit trees such as durian, rambutan, duku, and coconut. In addition, he also grew commodity crops such as cat's eye resin and rubber. These perennials grew together with the shrubs that grew wild in the plots they previously used for farming. After a few years, that section of the forest was cleared again by Arbain and replanted with food crops. Residents of the village where Arbain and Matonandow stayed called the growth period from when the land was abandoned until replanted as fallow or rotation period. The area was left in a fallow period to recover by itself naturally. A few years later Arbain and Masniati would replant the area again. For Arbain and his family, all they knew in their lives were the jungle with its large trees and undergrowth vegetation. They also considered pristine forests as abandoned fields where various types of plants such as durian, coconut, tengkawang and rubber trees flourished. Pastures (grasslands) were abandoned fields that were overgrown with weeds. Among these three types, according to them, the best and most favorable type for cultivation was the jungle. It was where Arbain and his son went to every day. They made the best of their living in the jungle.

All day, Matonandow busily helped his father tending their fields. Afterwards, he went with his father to look for swiftlet nests.

Swifts had a habit of leaving their nests early in the morning to feed and returned in the afternoon to roost or feed their children. Matonandow observed their daily routine. Swifts could grow strong and produced saliva in excess. Matonandow's father Arbain often told stories to his son. He told him about the swifts, small insectivorous bird that was dark colored, could fly fast, and has narrow, scythe-shaped wings and very tiny legs. Its beak was also tiny. Swifts never perched on a tree. They had a habit of dwelling in caves or houses that were rather damp, located in dim to completely dark area, and stuck their nest to the cave ceiling to roost and breed.

Matonandow's father told a story that once upon a time, there was a phoenix which was really adept at building nest. The nest it built was very sturdy and neat. Phoenix was a mythical hawk-like bird that flew in the sky in a glowing fiery red color. Phoenix was said to come from the sun. Phoenix was a mythological bird of fire from ancient Egypt, depicted as a bird that died and reborn from fire. It was usually described as having gold and red feathers. At the end of its life, it was told that the phoenix would build a nest of cinnamon sticks that would later burn out. The bird would perish by fire, but then a new young phoenix would emerge from the same fire. It was believed that the phoenix lifespan could reach from between 500 to 1,461 years old. It was believed that its tears could heal wounds. In time, other birds got interested to learn from the phoenix on how to build a nest.

Matonandow's father said that one day an owl, a hawk, a swift, and a sparrow were looking for a lesson from the phoenix. After being persuaded, the bird finally agreed to share its secrets with them.

"In making a nest, the most important factor is the location, so choose a good tree," said phoenix, as it began explaining.

"Ah, if so, I already knew," thought the owl to itself. It flew away and left the phoenix because the lesson was an ordinary one.

"In addition, you need to find good branches to build a durable nest," the phoenix continued.

"The nest I make always uses good branches. Everybody already knew about it," thought the sparrow. The bird flew away.

"When weaving the nest, we must do it meticulously so that every branch is intertwined nicely," continued the phoenix.

"Only this? I already knew everything," thought the eagle. The bird then flew away. The only one remained was the swift. It carefully listened to what the phoenix taught.

"It is not sufficient to build a good nest with just the conditions I mentioned before. The most important thing in building a nest is to not expose it to rain or direct sunlight. Look for a shaded area like under the roof of a house. Then, layer it with grass to make your nest warm."

Finally, the swift that listened to the phoenix's explanation until the end understood about how to build a nice nest. According to his father, it was why the swiftlet nest was expensive because only the bird listened to the phoenix's explanation until the end. That day Matonandow went together with his father to the field with a *kelangkang* on his back. *Kelangkang* was a woven bamboo filled with offerings consisting of brown rice, white rice, yellow rice and green rice, grilled chicken, banana, and tobacco. It was normally placed on the edge of the field. It took two hours for Matonandow and his father to reach the field on foot. Matonandow was pleased though, because his father told stories along the way, adding to his knowledge.

Matonandow had a best friend named Markus Ilun. Incidentally, Markus Ilun's field was located next to Matonandow's father. That was why Matonandow was happy as he went to the field that day. Their field was located across the river. They always crossed over with *ketinting* boat to get to the field. Matonandow especially loved the time when they were about to cross. They had a boat that was placed in the bushes on the bank of the river. *Ketinting* could slide smoothly against Malinau River current. The word Malinau itself was said to be unique. It was originally meant making food from enau fruit. According to the story, Malinau used to be called Sasak. Malinau was a portmanteau of two words 'Mal' and 'Inau'. Mall meant 'to make' and inau meant 'food originating from sago or a kind of enau', which if the two

combined, meant people are cooking food from sago. It was said that several centuries ago, a group of merchants returned home from trading as they passed through a kampong at the mouth of the Sasak River (now Malinau River). They asked several people who were in the middle of making food from the sago.

“What do you call this place, Sir?” the man asked one of the middle-aged men who were working there. “What is the name of the river?”

Due to language differences, they mistook the question as what you are doing, so he answered “Oooh ... heheh ... malinau ... malinau,” the old man answered while pointing at what he had been doing. The man meant malinau as making food. Then, the merchant, who was also not familiar with the language he used, mistook the meaning and thought that Malinau was the name of the region and the river. Once satisfied, the merchants resumed their journey downstream. And every time people asked where you have been, they always answered Malinau. Since then, the name spread out and stuck until now. Arbain and other villagers worked as farmers. They had been working as farmers for generations. Agriculture formed one of the oldest civilizations on earth. Arbain and other people cultivated the land with tools such as hoes, machetes, crowbars, or spades to till the soil. He lived his life by tilling the soil and planting it with a variety of plants that he could eat to survive. Farming *was an occupation that was*

closely linked to nature. Arbain once told Matonandow that land was their most precious possession. Dayak indigenous peoples believed that the land was a link between people in the past and in the present. To manage the land, Arbain said, Matonandow must become *menteng ueh mamut*, which meant a strong, brave and courageous man who was resolute and determined. Matonandow wanted to become what his father had wished for him as he grew up.

He watched his father plant different kinds of plants. Matonandow's father normally planted rice, cassava, chili, and other crops on a rainfed field. Usually, after pulling out the weeds, Arbain would cut off dead branches from the trees around the field. Matonandow gathered up the dried sticks to a bundle and used a strip of bark to hold it together and brought it for his mother's firewood kitchen. It was difficult to get water around the house, except from the river. So, Matonandow's father tried to dig a well in order to supply their family with water, but only cloudy water came out. The water could only be used after it was filtered with a new cloth. For bathing and other purposes, they relied on the river. The animals also drank from the river water.

His father would take him to bathe and Motonandow would soak himself in the river water up to his neck. The flowing water passed around his body made him felt clean and comfortable. Matonandow was not worried that the river would sweep him

away. It was said that in the river there was a bond between the current generation and their ancestors. His father once told a legend about their ancestors. His mother said, “It was the *tulang badi* oath.” In ancient times, there was a pair of brother and sister who lived in Malinau. The older brother was thinking about the fate of his much beloved younger sister. His parents used to have enemies. It was said that their parents had died at the enemy’s hand. They had been taken away and hidden by one of their relatives. But the enemy was still searching for them. To protect his sister from the enemy’s pursuit, the older brother asked her to go upstream while he stayed in Malinau around the Sembuak River. The older brother swore by *tulang badi*, which was similar to the Palapa oath taken by the Prime Minister Gajah Mada.

“No one will ever get into the river upstream to interfere with my sister’s life. This Sembuak River shall be the boundary.”

From that moment on, the younger sister lived in the river upstream with her descendants, while the older brother and his descendants lived in Malinau. In accordance with his oath, the elder brother guarded the river to prevent anyone from entering the upstream to harass his little sister. It was to the extent that no matter how big the backflow or flood might be, it would stop once it reached the mouth of the Sembuak River.

The brother and his descendants became the forerunners of Tidung tribe and his sister who settled in the river upstream

became the forerunner of Putuk or Lundayeh Tribes. Matondanow was a child of Tidung tribe. Tidung and Dayak Lundayeh tribes were animists. They believed in the mystical realm's supernatural power, and worshipped their ancestral spirits and spirits that dwelt in the sacred objects. To defend themselves or to seek new land for their livelihood, the people would not hesitate to have a *febunu'* (go to war) with other tribesmen. If a man wanted to be considered mighty, he would go to the enemy's camp to decapitate their heads.

That morning, Matonandow was heading to their field across the river. He and his father rode a boat to get to the crops they had planted. Matonandow saw another boat crossing. It turned out to be one of their neighbors who also had a field in the northside. Piang Irang, who was of the same age as him, was controlling it. The person who rode *ketinting* boat should be alert and watchful. If he or she were careless, the boat might hit a rock or large tree trunks drifting in the river. Hence, sometimes the boat might need to slow its speed.

As the *ketinting* approached the other side, Matonandow recognized the trees in his field from afar. Once he landed, he ran to help pulling on the rope and tied the boat to a gaharu tree. For Matonandow, gaharu trees were closely linked to the lives of Tidung tribesmen like him. The tree had spiritual values and it was also used in herbal medicine. In the past, gaharu became a

barter tool. In the forest, the area where the gaharu grew was a restricted zone. Matonandow's father said, not just anyone could enter the location. Tidung tribe also barred non-residents from taking woods in the forest. As they worked in the field that day, Matonandow's father told the origin of his ancestors. Matonandow's father said that he knew about a kingdom that once existed here from the Tidung tribe's oral tradition. The oldest narrated history among other narratives was the history of Menjelutung in Sesayap River with its last king named Benayuk. The era of Menjelutung Kingdom ended because of the calamities triggered by heavy storms and hurricanes. The catastrophe caused the nearby villages to collapse and drown into the rivers together with their inhabitants.

Benayuk was once known as a hamlet that was inhabited by people who never got old, sick or died. In the village was a tree that could revive the dead, heal the sick, and make old people young again. The people in Benayuk were always happy. They made big festivals. Once there was a celebration. All the villagers came to the venue. Food was served abundantly for the entire village. There were *tetabuhan*¹ accompanied by singing and dancing. The whole Benayuk village enjoyed the festivities. Many folk games were performed. They created an event of marrying a shark with a cat, which attracted almost everyone in

¹ Loud beating of drums during festivals

the village. People cheered and jumped in joy as they witnessed the event. Many shouted and laughed out loud. They were very happy. Everyone, man and woman alike, was almost out of control and lost themselves in raucous laughter. They forgot everything. The festival became even livelier in the early afternoon. Not long after, the calamity struck. The once sunny sky suddenly turned gray. Rolling black clouds that came from nowhere casted a shadow over Benayuk village. Then a sudden wind blew as the first raindrops fell. A heavy thunderstorm arrived. However, those who were busy marrying the shark with the cat still did not come to their senses.

Laughters and cries mixed with the terrible thunders. It was not until a heavy rain began that they got startled and ran for cover. The rain did not stop for days. Villagers were shaken by it, until at one time the elements went out of control.

Water inundated some part of the land. People were running around trying to save themselves. Suddenly, a deafening crack of thunder was heard. A flash of lightning split the sky. The people who fled to dry land turned into stones. And so, the village was destroyed and none of the inhabitants survived.

When the story ended, Matonandow was told by his father not to harm the animals and plants around him. Everyone must learn from the calamity that befell the people in Benayuk. Matondanow with Markus Ilun and Pian Irang lived with nature. They were

smart and wise. They remembered that there was a man living on the bank of the river near their field. The boy had a very lovely goose. Matonandow, Markus Ilun, and Pian Irang took pleasure from watching it as they headed up the river to get to their vegetable fields. One day, Matonandow's father told a story about a boy who had a goose just like what Matonandow and his friends saw whenever they went to the field.

His father said that long ago, people also crossed the same river to get to their fields. Every day they saw a boy feeding a goose that was laying eggs in a cage. One day they accidentally saw gold sparkles from the goose eggs. One of them took one egg and brought it to market for sale. That person became rich because the goose egg turned into gold. He became greedy. He thought, "If I cut the goose open, maybe there will be more golden eggs that I can get from its stomach."

One day, he carried out his intention by cutting the goose open. However, not a single golden egg was found. The precious goose was dead. The man was remorseful and often sat brooding by the river bank. After his father finished telling the story, they continued their work in the field. In one abandoned field that already turned back into a forest, they approached the resin trees planted by his father. Its wood and sap were very useful. To climb the tree, a woody rattan was tied over it to suspend their bodies. They used holes in the tree for their footing to climb to the top.

To collect the sap, they made several small, triangular incisions in the bark as it would stimulate resin production. However, they must wait at least two weeks for the sap to dry. For better results, they had to wait for a month.

One day, Sako who owned the neighboring field went to the forest to look for resin too. Suddenly, thorns pierced his foot. He was in pain and had to be helped by Matonandow's father to return home. Arriving at home, his injured leg was being treated by his wife with a poultice made of forest leaves. Days later, instead of getting better, the injury got worse. The wound got bigger and pus leaked out, giving off an unpleasant smell.

Because the wound would not heal, he could not do his usual activity, which was going to the forest looking for resin and firewood. His wife and daughter had tried to treat Sako's foot. But the injury still did not heal. Could not endure it anymore, Sako's family placed him in a separate room. His food and drink were placed on a table at the far end of the room. The house that was usually lively with conversation and banter became quiet. Sako's condition deteriorated. His whole body stank. His family member did not approach him anymore and he hardly came out of his house. His house looked quiet and empty.

Before he got sick, if not going to the field or to the forest, he often visited the neighbors' house even though their houses were far apart. Or, he would sit on the stairs before dusk.

By noon, Sako would busy himself with splitting firewood in the yard. At times, he could be seen fixing the roof of his house or replacing any detached or worn out woven wall panels. The neighbors saw Sako's activities every day. However, they had not seen his face for a while and began to ask each other about what had happened to him. As Sako was no longer seen, it raised the concern of several villagers whose curiosity had been piqued and it drove them to visit his house. The wound on his leg that was caused by thorns had developed into festering ulcers. Ulcers were a type of disease that could cause enough pain in the area of the skin where the wound was.

Sako's family had tried to treat his wound with medicinal herbs, including *senggugu* leaves that grew on the edge of the forest, since it could treat weepy sores by draining the fluid in the ulcers. First, they washed the leaves and boiled them 'till the water turned green and reduced to about three-quarters or half of the original volume and strained the water. Once the water had cooled down, they used it to rinse the wound. Usually, within one to two days, the fluid oozing out would be reduced and the wound dried out. Supposedly, with such a treatment, the sores should be able to heal soon. However, instead of drying, the sores festered even more and produced unpleasant stench. Sako's condition shocked the whole village. Some of them came to visit and smelled the foul odor from Sako's leg. One by one they came out while covering their nose. Some of them just couldn't stand the

smell and threw up in the yard. Since then, the villagers dubbed him as *Aki Balak* because of the open sores on his leg.

The locals looked at Aki Balak's leg and assumed it was an infectious disease that should be avoided. Several villagers proposed to have Aki Balak expelled from the village. Matonandow's father also wanted to find a way to solve Aki Balak's problem.

Then, a village meeting was held at the elders' house to discuss what happened to him. They agreed to have the meeting at the Baloy House – Dayak Tidung's traditional house. The traditional house was made from ironwood. The house was built facing north, while the main door facing south. Inside, there were four main chambers commonly called *ambir*. The left chamber (*alad kait*) was to receive people who wanted to raise their case or a matter related to traditions and customs.

The middle chamber (*lamin bantong*) was for the tribe elders to meet and decide on a case pertaining to their traditions or customs. The right chamber (*ulad kemagot*) was a resting area or a place to make peace after a case had been decided. *Lamin dalom* was the throne room of the Great Tribal Chief of Dayak Tidung tribe. The villagers gathered at the Baloy House to discuss what had happened to Sako who was also known as Aki Balak. Afterwards, the elders discussed it more seriously. They reached an agreement and intended to evacuate Aki Balak so that the other

villagers were not infected by the disease. Aki Balak's family was finally called in the meeting.

"Dear Mother and Daughter," said an elder, greeting Aki Balak's family.

"Yes, Honorable Elder," replied Aki Balak's wife representing her family.

"We, the elders, have agreed that we need to keep Sako away from his family and this community because the disease is considered contagious," said the head elder. "We apologize, but now he is called Aki Balak because of the chronic wound. The villagers fear that it may be transmittable."

"I will convey what the elders have decided later at home." Sako's wife said. Upon the village's decision, Sako was finally evacuated to the forest far from the village where he used to live. He was given the new name Aki Balak because of his chronic illness. Sako's wife returned home and informed him of the elders' decision.

"Husband, I'm sorry I could not defend you to stay at home," said Sako's wife when she got home.

"Then so be it, I have readied myself to be placed far from home," Sako replied calmly.

“Right, it’s because the elders and villagers said that your disease is dangerous, it may spread to the other villagers,” explained the wife.

“Yes, I understand. I also feel sorry for you and the children because of my body’s foul odor,” he said.

“I don’t want to be away from you, Father,” his daughter said, sobbing.

“In any case, we have to do it for the sake of the common good,” he replied.

“Is there no other way? Maybe there’s a medicine that can cure Father,” said his daughter again.

“Tis fine, Child. Father still loves you. My love will not be broken just because of this pain,” Sako replied.

“In that case, I will prepare everything you need when you’re away from home. We will send food every day,” said the wife.

“You need not trouble yourself, I can take care of myself,” he answered.

“Father, the elders and other people now also called you Aki Balak,” explained Sako’s daughter.

“I’ll accept it with poise. Whatever the name they used to call me, you’re still my daughter,” Sako replied softly. Aki Balak was finally evacuated to the forest far from the village where he had lived. Before moving out, the villagers made him a shack to live in. He finally fulfilled the villagers’ wish and was willing to live in the forest alone, without the company of his wife and children. Actually Aki Balak’s family wanted to stay together in the forest to accompany him. However, he refused. Aki Balak felt bad for his wife and daughter who must bear the burden of shame and suffering because of his illness.

“I apologize for my situation, do not be troubled because of me,” Sako, which was now known as Aki Balak, said to his wife and daughter.

“Let me accompany you in the forest, Father,” answered his daughter.

“No, Child. There’s a long life ahead of you. You are still young. Father will keep praying for you,” said Aki Balak. Since then, he lived alone in the forest. For his daily meals, his daughter always delivered food to the shack where Aki Balak lived. He spent his days by staying in the shack. One day he decided that his daughter should not visit him anymore. When she came over to bring his meal, he said, “I’m leaving. Don’t deliver food for me anymore.”

“Where will you go, Father? Why?” his daughter asked. The girl was Matonandow’s playmate. She was very sad to see her father living alone in the middle of the forest with no one to accompany him.

“I’ll go find a cure for my foot,” said Aki Balak.

“Where are you going to get the cure, Father? Can I go with you? But where to?” asked his daughter again.

“Someone has already helped treating my illness,” Aki Balak said to his daughter, “Tell your Mother that I’m fine and someone was already taking care of me. So your mother doesn’t have to worry about me anymore.”

The child ran home to tell her mother immediately. The mother was at home cleaning the rooms. After that, she went down into the yard to pick leafy vegetables and pull out weeds that grew among the plants in the yard since the yard was already full with tall, overgrown grass. Weeds disrupted the growth of their vegetable crops in the yard. Aki Balak’s wife was actually very saddened by the unfortunate circumstance that befell her husband. She was also slightly embarrassed with her neighbors. She buried the sadness in her heart by keeping herself busy from early morning until late afternoon by cleaning the rooms at her house, and cutting off grass in the yard. When she was busy pulling out

the weeds, her daughter whom she had asked to deliver food to her husband came.

“Mother, why did Father say that I should not deliver food for him anymore?” asked Aki Balak’s daughter. “Why? What did your father say, Child?” asked her mother anxiously. “Father said that tomorrow I don’t have to send food anymore. He is leaving. Someone has treated and healed him. Father must leave with that person,” the child said.

“Why did your Father say that?” said the mother pensively. “Tomorrow, try to deliver food to your father again,” the mother instructed as she went upstairs into the house. That night, Aki Balak’s wife could not sleep. She recalled what her husband had said to their daughter. What’s wrong with Aki Balak? She could not find an answer until she fell asleep in exhaustion. The next day, the child was back to deliver food for her father. However, upon arriving at her father's dwelling hut, the girl did not find him.

Bewildered, she went into the woods to look for him. She remembered that when she was little, she was often warned against entering the forest.

“There are many dangerous entities in the jungle, Child,” his father said.

“What’s in the woods, Father?” the child asked. “In the forest there is another realm, unlike human realm,” Aki Balak told his daughter. The girl recalled what his father had told her about the forest.

Once upon a time, a few years ago a group of native Borneans left their village for the jungle. Walking in the direction of the rising sun, along the way they gathered edible fruits and leaves from the jungle to stave off their hunger. To quench their thirst, they squeezed the water from layers of moss attached to the tree barks. They were fleeing from the enemy’s attack. As they passed through the jungle, a terrible incident occurred. Their children disappeared one by one.

Eight boys vanished without a trace in eight days. The group was overcome with fear. They frantically thought, who on earth did it? Was it the ruler of the jungle that they inhabited? Or was it a beast? They did not feel at ease staying in the jungle, especially at sundown. The men spent the nights with little to no sleep to guard their families. Little children were gathered in one place. They made a nest on top of large tree branches. Once the night passed, they got drained and fell asleep one after another. However, even while sleeping in the trees, they still had to deal with gnats biting and sucking their blood in addition to fear of being attacked by beasts. They lived desperately, couldn’t eat and drink enough. Weariness from having to constantly walk plus the terrifying

situation that they encountered were beginning to take a toll on them.

They thought that there must be a way out of the situation. After discussion, they decided to set a trap. They used animal sacrifice to avoid losing more children. Some of the men went hunting for the sacrifice. The rest prepared traps around the spot that would likely be passed by someone or something which had caught the children. Some times later, one group of hunter returned. They managed to capture a deer, which was then tied up and hanged over the water on the river bank. In the jungle, there flowed a wide river. It was a deep and meandering river. At the time, heavy rain fell. It was as if the sky could not stop their tears from falling. From a hideout, with anxiety and palpitation they witnessed a terrible event. The river water suddenly churned violently.

All the people stared wide-eyed at the rise of a large, limbless creature from the water that instantly swallowed the deer in one gulp.

Some people called the creature a giant serpent. Others called it a dragon. After that, they followed the snake back into its den. There were three of them, two adult snakes, each as big around as an oil barrel and the other one was still small, only the size of a coconut trunk.

The men became angry and started attacking the beasts, cutting off two adult snakes, and keeping the younger one alive. By agreement, from then onwards snakes and humans would not kill each other and would spend their own lives separately. Even now, they were sure that the dragon was still around them. The story that Aki Balak had told made his daughter afraid to look for her father in the jungle. She did not dare to cross the river. The shadow of the serpent dragon in the story made her tremble. Her friends then came over. They asked about what they could do to help. They also asked why Aki Balak preferred to leave the place that had been built by the villagers for him. Aki Balak's family explained as much as they could about the things they knew. Aki Balak disappeared and he was nowhere to be found. Her friends then helped her to search Aki Balak around the hut in the forest. Matonandow also told his father about the disappearance of Aki Balak from the hut where he had lived previously. The whole village finally went out to search for him, but Aki Balak was nowhere to be found.

His daughter yelled, calling for his father. "Father, Father!"

"Aki Balak! Aki Balak!" "Father, where are you!" "Aki Balak!"

However, only silence greeted them. The girl decided to wait for her father until the afternoon. However, Aki Balak did not return to the hut either. Dissappointed, the girl finally returned home. A few weeks later, Aki Balak came back. He met his wife and

daughter. His wife and daughter were really surprised to see the condition of Aki Balak who looked healthy as before. There were no cuts on his feet and no pungent stench came out of his wound. He told his wife and daughter that he was now different than before. He said that he was not ill. It was just that his family and the villagers saw him that way. People knew that Aki Balak had come back. They flocked in Aki Balak's house to visit him. The villagers were shocked and could not believe their eyes as they looked at the now healthy Aki Balak without the slightest cut and scratch on his legs. There was no visible sore on his leg. No offending smell that made them retch either. Aki Balak also said that he was not the same person as before. He could no longer live with his family since he had married to another person. Someone who had made him sick also healed his leg.

Aki Balak said too that he must leave immediately. His wife and daughter were very surprised then as Aki Balak suddenly vanished without a trace. The house where Aki Balak lived was built on a low hill. Incidentally, the house was directly facing the jungle. In front of his house were several rows of coconut trees. And in front of the trees there was a downward slope to the valley. The ground was too steep for planting trees. Hence, wild plants and trees forming a small forest at the front. The valley itself was full of tall, massive trees, tropical insects and other vegetation. Everyday, Aki Balak would wake up at 5 am. He would walk to the door and open it. Air came in from the open

door. He looked at the trees in the wilderness and started working. Since his first week there, he realized that on certain days as the sun set there was always a sound of beating drum in front of the house. The beating sound always began at exactly 6:30 pm for half to one-hour time, and suddenly stopped just like when it started. He thought maybe a ceremony or celebration was being held there. When he asked to himself what it really was, he couldn't answer. Over time, Aki Balak was getting more familiar and accustomed to the sound.

He had lived in the forest for a while, and became more comfortable with his condition. So his curiosity about the sound of beating drum was piqued. As far as he knew, the valley in front of his house had no building or house. But on certain days, he always heard the sound of beating drum from there, close enough that it seemed to come from the valley itself. Until now, whenever an old man appeared in the forest, some people believed that it was the incarnation of Aki Balak. Matonandow and his friends believed that. They felt safe staying with nature that had protected their life so far. If they got lost Aki Balak would have helped them to find their way home. Aki Balak became the protector of the villagers there.