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PRINCESS IN THE FOREST

Witaru Emi and Umahyuma



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Princess in the Forest

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Head of Center for Book Affairs

Supriyatno, S.Pd., M.A

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CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING OF AN ADVENTURE

Neo pulled his blanket up to his neck. Mornings in Samosir Island are really cold. Neo went back to sleep. A while later, something tickled his feet. His eyes opened slightly. Something furry was standing by his bed.

“Whoa!” Neo threw the blanket towards the furry face.

He could hear laughter under his bed. Neo looked down and saw a girl laughing. She was holding an Orangutan doll.

“Mbak* Nara!” cried Neo, feeling annoyed. Nara laughed even harder. Neo turned away and tried to go back to sleep. However, Nara had another plan and pulled his arm.

“Let’s get up! An adventure is about to start.”



**Mbak is an address to refer to an older sister*



Neo was dressed neatly, carrying his favorite backpack and wearing his favorite shoes. He smelled something really good.

“Whoa, nasi goreng* made by chef Papa,” said Neo running to the kitchen.

Nara put her favorite polaroid camera in her bag. She then put a binocular around her neck. Beside her, Mama was packing similar equipment, only they were larger and more professional.

Mom was an ornithologist, a researcher who studied birds. This time she was assigned to research the birds on Samosir Island. Nara and Neo joined her because they had a school holiday. On Samosir Island, they stayed in a house that belonged to a forest ranger called Pak* Binsar.



A bald man walked in carrying mist nets. He was smiling. That's Pak Binsar.

“All of the materials and equipment are ready, Bu*,” said Pak Binsar. Nara glanced at the mist nets.

“Pak Binsar, are you going to catch birds?”

Pak Binsar chuckled, “Today I’m going to catch a big bird that says moo moo moo.”

Nara laughed, “Is it a bird or a cow?”

Pak Binsar liked to tease the kids. Nara thought that Pak Binsar was funny although sometimes he liked to brag.

Papa showed up from the back, carrying lunch boxes.

Neo helped Papa carry the drink bottles. Mama smiled at them. They were ready to go.



* Nasi goreng is a special Indonesian dish i.e. rice sautéed on a pan with spices.

* Pak is an address to refer to an older man.

* Bu is an address to an adult woman.



A little while later, they walked on a pathway between rows of trees. The magnificent lake Toba stretched wide down below.

This place was great for Nara who liked to explore nature and take pictures. Unlike Nara, Neo actually liked to spend time at home. He preferred to help Papa cooking rather than hiking in faraway places. Neo also preferred reading books.

Nara and Neo were fraternal twins. They were so different in looks and character. A lot of people did not realize they were twins. Although they were different, they took care of one another.

During the journey, Nara often stopped to take pictures of lakes, flowers and butterflies. Neo often looked back to watch over his sister.

Mama pointed to a clearing in the forest, “We will set up the mist nets there.”

Mama and Pak Binsar would catch some birds using the mist nets. But, Mama would not harm the birds. Once Mama identified, measured, weighed, and took notes about them, the birds would be released back into nature.

Neo looked back but he didn’t see Nara. He thought she must still be on the pathway, so he went back to look for her. He was right, Nara was looking up high above a tree top in front of her. She was looking at something with her binoculars. Neo was going to say something, but Nara quickly put her index finger in front of her mouth. Then, she pointed up.



“Look, there’s a woodpecker,” she whispered. She took her camera and pointed it towards the woodpecker. Click! A picture instantly popped out from her camera.

She smiled brightly while taking out a big book from her backpack. It contained the pictures that she had taken along the way. Most of the pictures were of plants and animals.

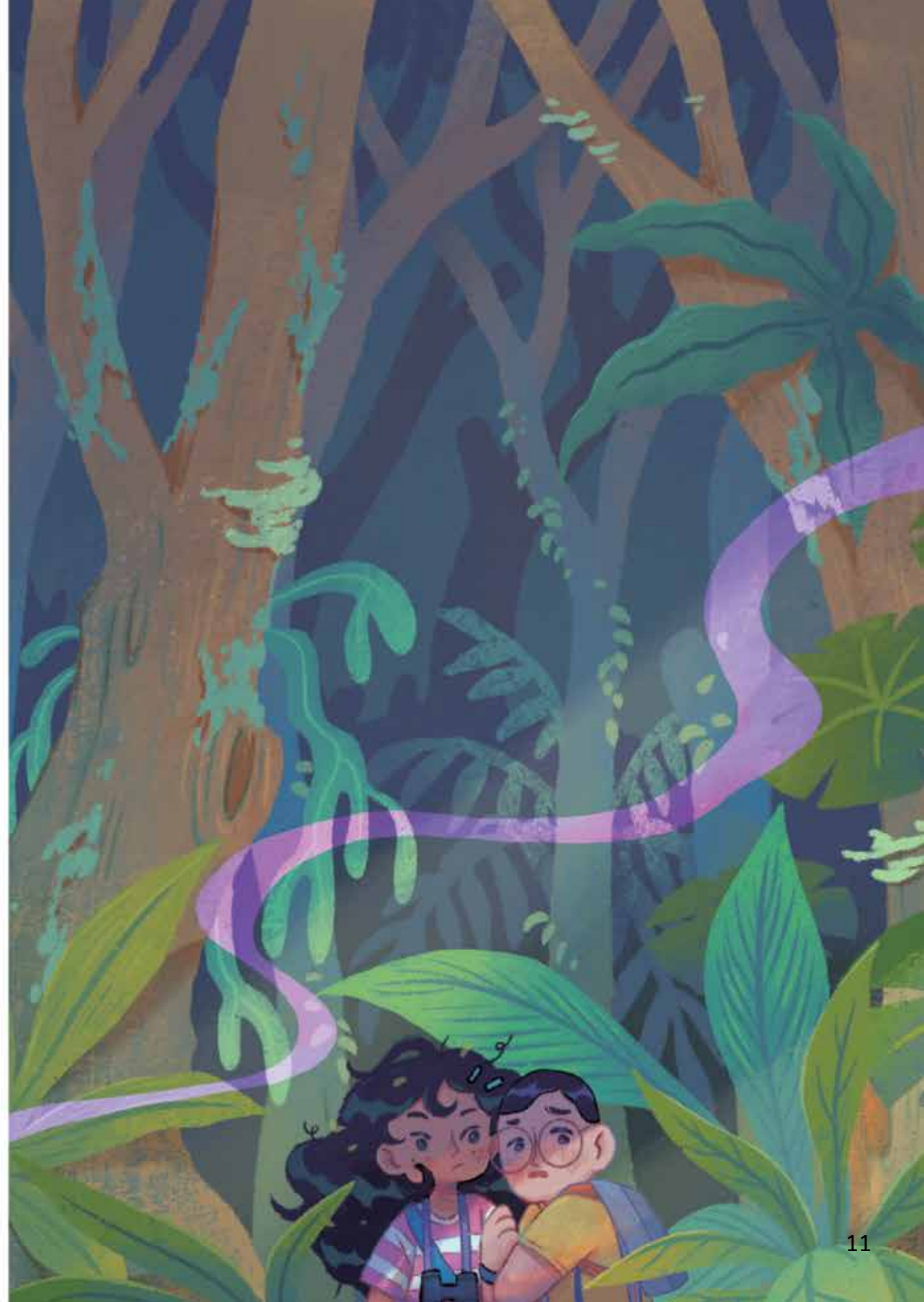
Nara also wrote small notes underneath each picture to remind her when and where she took the picture. She added information about the pictures from the internet or based on her mom’s explanations. Nara called her big book an encyclopedia.

“Neo, let’s go to Mama,” said Nara after she put the picture of the woodpecker in the book and put the book back into the backpack.

Neo didn’t answer. Nara was curious and turned to look at Neo who stood in shock. He was looking down and his body was trembling.

“Hey, what’s wrong with you?”

Neo grabbed Nara’s arm and whispered, “Mbak Nara, I’m scared.”



BAB 2

AROMA MISTERIUS

“Why are you scared? There’s nothing here,” said Nara. Neo trembled even more.

“Do you smell anything?” whispered Neo.

“Did you fart?”

Neo sighed, feeling annoyed, “No. Don’t you smell it??”

Nara lifted her face and sniffed the air.

“Hmm, it smells good,” said Nara. The scent was a bit strong with a little puff of sweetness to it. Nara was wondering why Neo was scared of the scent.

“The smell is similar to the smell around Mbah Kakung*’s house in Java. Do you remember when we had a walk with Lek* Supri?” asked Neo. Nara tried to remember. Neo was becoming impatient.

“Lek Supri said” Neo approached Nara then whispered, “If there’s this kind of smell, it means there’s ...” Neo stopped. He gulped.

“There’s what?” Nara asked curiously.

“There’s a ghost,” said Neo very softly.

Nara squinted.

“So, did you and Lek Supri see a ghost after you smelled this kind of scent?”

Neo shook his head, “Not really. But ... “



**Mbah Kakung is a calling for grandpa in Javanese.*

**Lek is a Javanese address for an uncle who is younger than someone’s parents.*

“What if we look for the source of the scent?” said Nara.

Neo was shocked at the idea. Before he could say no, Nara was already pointing towards the smell. “The scent is coming from over there.”

Nara walked towards the smell. She didn’t let the ghost story scare her.

“Mbak Nara, let’s just go to Papa and Mama.”

Nara completely ignored Neo and kept walking. Neo was confused. Suddenly, the smell of the scent came again. This time it was stronger. Neo shuddered. He ran to catch up with his sister.

“Hey look,” Nara pointed out.

They found a pathway. The smell was even is stronger.

The pathway was clean and tidy; which meant it must often be used. That’s why Nara was brave enough to walk there.

Nara’s head turned to the left and right. Meanwhile, Neo walked behind her, gripping the corner of his sister’s. A couple of times, Neo stepped on the back of Nara’s shoes.

“Neo, stop it. You’re going to make to trip.” Neo just smiled nervously. He let go of Nara’s T-shirt. But, when Nara starting walking, Neo reached to hold his sister’s hand.

The farther they walked along, the pathway got wider, leading toward a house with a big front yard. In the middle of the front yard was a wooden house, with the doors and windows tightly closed. The house looked like Pak Binsar’s house. People in the local area called it Rumah Bolon.

“Let’s go back, Nara” whispered Neo.

“I’m sure the scent comes from the inside of that house.”

Nara kept walking toward the house. She moved her head, looking at the surroundings. Suddenly, they heard a window opening.

It made a creaking sound.

“Whoa. Run!” screamed Neo.





“Neo, wait!” called Nara. She pulled Neo’s arm to stop him. They ran off of the pathway and hid behind a tree. Neo leaned on the tree and tried to catch his breath.

He was so scared that he didn’t realize he had lost one of his shoes. Nara was also busy catching her breath. She wiped sweat from her forehead. Some of it dripped into her eyes, which stung.

Crackle crackle.

Both Neo and Nara turned to where the sound came from. Neo jumped toward Nara and held onto her arm, “Whoa, the ghost is following us.”

Nara walked toward the trees. She thought that it might not be a ghost. It could be an animal needing their help. Neo was still holding on to Nara. When they arrived in front of the big tree, suddenly someone jumped towards them.

“BOO!”

Nara and Neo held onto each other, screaming, “AAAAA!”

They could hear someone laughing. Neo and Nara turned when they realized they recognized that voice.

“Pak Binsar!”

“What are you doing here?” asked Pak Binsar. Neo approached Pak Binsar and whispered, “I smelled a sweet scent and thought it was a ghost.”

Pak Binsar’s face changed. This time his smile was gone.

“You have to be careful of the scent.”

Neo and Nara looked at one another.

“That scent can invite ghosts into the forest. You know what? They don’t like children. They will catch children and put them on top of a hariara tree.”

“Hariara tree?” said Neo and Nara together.

Pak Binsar pointed to a tree. Neo and Nara saw a big tree similar to a banyan tree. The tree looked like a giant with multiple long arms. If you were stuck on top of it, it would be difficult to climb down. Imagining it made Neo shiver.

“By the way, where is your shoe?” asked Pak Binsar.

Neo looked at his feet. He realized he only wore one shoe.

“Oh, no! What should I do? I’m too scared to go back there.”

“Let me find it. You both can go home.”

Neo and Nara looked at each other and walked home.



CHAPTER 3

A GIRL WHO RETURNED A SHOE

It was late in the afternoon. Papa was busy cooking dinner. Papa was very good at cooking and he liked exploring new recipes. Neo and Nara were sitting on the steps in front of Pak Binsar's house. Neo was enjoying his book. Nara was sticking pictures in her big book.

"I should have taken pictures of hariara tree," she said.

"Sshh, don't talk about that tree," hissed Neo who didn't even glance away from his book.

"Are you still scared?" teased Nara.

Neo was annoyed.

"Hi!" said a voice from down below.

Neo looked down. It was the girl with the long hair they saw in the window, wearing a flowy white dress. Neo's eyes narrowed.

"Hey, isn't this your shoe?" said the girl.

Nara saw her too, and immediately went down. The girl waved the shoe when Nara approached her. Her hair was far neater now. Actually, she was not very scary. She had a nice smile and her eyes were bright.

"I must have startled you earlier. I'm sorry, my hair is always messy when I just wake up."

"Neo, come here. She's not a ghost." Neo slowly put away his book and went down.



“Pak Binsar said you are a real ghost!” said Neo from behind Nara’s back.

“Don’t listen to *Tulang**. He likes to tease children.”

The girl laughed. Then, she explained that Pak Binsar was actually her relative. *Tulang* means uncle. Then, she mentioned that her name was actually Mora Sihaloho.

But people called her Butet, which is a Bataknese word that means daughter. Nara offered her hand and Butet shook her hand.

“I’m Nara and this is my brother Neo. We are twins.”

Neo peeked out from behind Nara’s back. “Hi,” he said.

Butet squinted her eyes in disbelief, as if she wasn’t convinced that Neo and Nara were twins. Nara just smiled and explained that she went to Butet’s house in the morning to look for the source of a mysterious scent. Butet nodded her head.

Tulang is a Bataknese address for uncle.



“The scent comes from the princess,” said Butet. Nara and Neo were surprised. They didn’t know there was a princess living there. They hadn’t even seen a castle. so, where did the princess live?

“She has lived in the forest for a long, long time,” said Butet.

Nara and Neo were even more curious. What would a princess do in the forest? Maybe there’s a big castle hidden in the forest. Nara’s heart raced. She really wanted to see her. But how?

“My Oppung and I are going to see the princess tomorrow. Do you want to go with me?” offered Butet.

Nara nodded her head excitedly.



“These are the best grilled ribs I’ve ever had,” said Mama, smiling happily. The grilled ribs sat next to *sambal andaliman**. Papa got the recipe from a spice seller at the market. Unlike Nara who always avoided chillies, Neo liked sambal andaliman even though it’s super spicy.

“Early tomorrow morning I will go to the forest with Pak Binsar to observe hornbills. Some people reported that they know where their nests are,” announced Mama.

Nara has always wanted to see hornbills. So far, Mama had only told her about them. It was difficult to find their nests because their number is decreasing. Mama says, hornbills are an endemic or native animal that is close to extinction. Their thick beaks and crowns are so expensive that they are highly sought after by hunters.

**Sambal andaliman is a type of Indonesian spicy dish.*



“It’s too bad that you can’t come with us. Pak Binsar says the track is too difficult, but I will bring a lot of pictures for you,” she continued.

“Tomorrow you can spend time playing with me,” said Papa while cleaning the table. Neo nudged Nara to get her to ask for permission to go with Butet tomorrow morning. Nara slowly told her parents about Butet who lived near the where the mist nets were set up.

“Butet is Pak Binsar’s relative. She said that Pak Binsar is her *Tulang* or uncle,” said Neo.

“So, can we play with Butet?” asked Nara.

Mama looked at Papa to get his approval. Papa nodded, agreeing.

“Okay, you can play at Butet’s house tomorrow.”

Nara squealed with joy.



After breakfast, they got ready to go to Butet’s house.

On the way, Neo complained a lot.

“I still don’t believe there’s a princess living in this place.”

“Yes, there is. That’s why we have to go there to prove it.”

They walked into the front yard. The windows were open, but the door was tightly closed. Nara knocked on the door. A little while later, the door was opened. An old man showed up at the door. He was big and tall. He looked grumpy with a frown on his face and squinty eyes. Neo shuddered when he saw him.

“Good morning,” said Nara in a very soft voice.

He didn’t reply. He growled.



CHAPTER 4

THE PRINCESS' FAVORITE

“Good morning,” said Nara a bit louder. She smiled brighter even though she was a bit anxious.

He only made a noise, “Grmmph”

“Mbak, let’s go home,” whispered Neo.

“Wait,” said Nara. She turned to the old man; he didn’t look very nice. He stood big and tall, blocking the doorway.

“Excuse me, grandpa. I’m looking for Butet. Is she home?”

“We are her friends,’ Neo quickly added. “Butet invited us here.”

Butet suddenly showed up from behind her grandpa.

“Oh, you’re here,” she said cheerfully. Her expression was totally different from the grumpy grandpa.



“*Oppung Doli**,” said Butet. “I invited them here. They’re my friends.”

Oppung Doli’s hand and fingers made quick movements. Butet replied using hand and finger movements – a kind of sign language. The grandpa nodded and opened the door widely.

“Come in,” said Butet.

Nara got close to Butet and whispered, “That was sign language, wasn’t it?”

Butet nodded and told her that Oppung Doli was mute. He couldn’t speak since he was a child. In the past, their family often found it hard to communicate with Oppung Doli. But it all changed when her sister studied at a university and learned sign language. She taught Oppung Doli and all of the family members to communicate using sign language.

Butet got used to it faster than everyone else because she often spent time with Oppung Doli.

Oppung Doli is a Bataknese address for grandpa.

“Butet, is your grandpa grumpy?” whispered Neo in a low voice. He was observing grandpa who was gathering some equipment and putting it in a bamboo basket.

He was afraid grandpa would hear him.

“Oppung Doli looks grumpy, but he’s kind-hearted,” said Butet. She went to Oppung and explained using sign language that Neo and Nara were going to go with them to the forest to meet the princess. Oppung immediately waved his hand, showing disagreement. Butet tried to persuade Oppung by telling him that Neo and Nara could help.

“Which one of you can cook?” asked Butet.

Neo raised his hand, “I usually help Papa cook”

“Can you sing?” asked Butet to Nara, who immediately nodded her head. “Oppung wants to hear your voice,” Butet continued.



Nara proceeded to sing *Ambilkan Bulan, Bu** very solemnly. Her voice was soft and beautiful. Oppung was listening. He nodded. When Nara finished singing, Oppung was quiet and rubbed his chin. Nara, Neo and Butet waited impatiently.

“Grr,” grumbled Oppung, raising his thumb, indicating that Nara and Neo could join them.

“So, Neo can help *Oppung Boru** in the kitchen.”

“Oppung Boru?”

“My grandma.”

Neo was hoping that Butet’s grandma was not as grumpy as her grandpa. Meanwhile, Nara was wondering why cooking and singing were important.

“The princess likes food. We will also persuade The Princess with a song,” said Butet.

**Ambilkan Bulan, Bu is a title of an Indonesian song for children.*

**Oppung Boru is a Bataknese address for grandma.*

“What? Persuade? Is the princess so spoiled that we have to persuade her?” wondered Neo.

“I will explain everything when we arrive at the forest.” Butet took her new friends to the kitchen. She wanted to introduce Oppung Boru to them. Luckily, Oppung Boru was not grumpy. She looked like Butet who was cheerful and had a bright smile. Neo really liked her. Oppung Boru patiently taught Neo to cook. Oppung Boru always praised Neo who was skillful with the cooking utensils and was good at identifying spices.



Finally, they started their journey. There was a pathway that was clear enough for them to walk on. Oppung Doli brought a big bamboo basket, and Butet brought lunch boxes, Neo and Nara brought some seedlings. Oppung Boru could not join them because she had to work on the farm.

“I think we will plant the seedlings in the princess’ castle,” said Nara. Neo teased her. He still couldn’t believe there was a castle hidden in the forest. Nara had also been imagining that the princess’ dress might be as glamorous as Cinderella’s dress. A few minutes later, Nara spoke out loud wondering if the princess might wear kebaya and cloth. Neo sighed.

“You must be kidding! Isn’t it too troublesome to wear such clothing in the forest?” Neo said in disagreement. While arguing over the princess and the castle, they had walked a long time. Neo was tired. He kept asking over and over again, “Are we there yet?” Butet kept answering him with, “Just a little bit farther.”

All of a sudden, Butet who was leading the walk at the front turned back and waved her hand, “Quick, we’re almost there.”

“You’ve been saying that for a while now.”

“This time it’s for real. After the hill, we will be there.”

Neo’s eyes grew big seeing the long uphill road in front of him. Just looking at it made his legs sore! He sat under a tree.

“I will just wait here. I’m tired.”

“Really? You won’t get to see the princess.” said Nara.

“YOU want to see her. Not me.”

Nara shrugged and walked fast to catch up with Butet. Butet was wondering why Nara was catching up to her without Neo. She looked back and saw Neo sitting under a tree, fanning himself with his hand.



“Is it okay to leave him?” asked Butet.

“Relax, he will catch up with us soon.”

Neo took a drink of water. It was refreshing. From the side, there was a crackling noise. Neo became alert.

Suddenly, two scurrying squirrels emerged from the bushes and jumped onto Neo’s head.

“Whoa!” he screamed. He bolted and ran away. He ran so fast that he passed Nara, Butet and Oppung Doli easily.

“What did I tell you?!” said Nara laughing.

CHAPTER 5

MEETING THE PRINCESS

Oppung pointed to a very tall tree. Butet explained it to Neo and Nara.

“This is the Tobanese incense tree. In our local language, we call it *haminjon*. Oppung will sap the tree. But before doing so, Oppung will pray that he will get a lot of sap.”

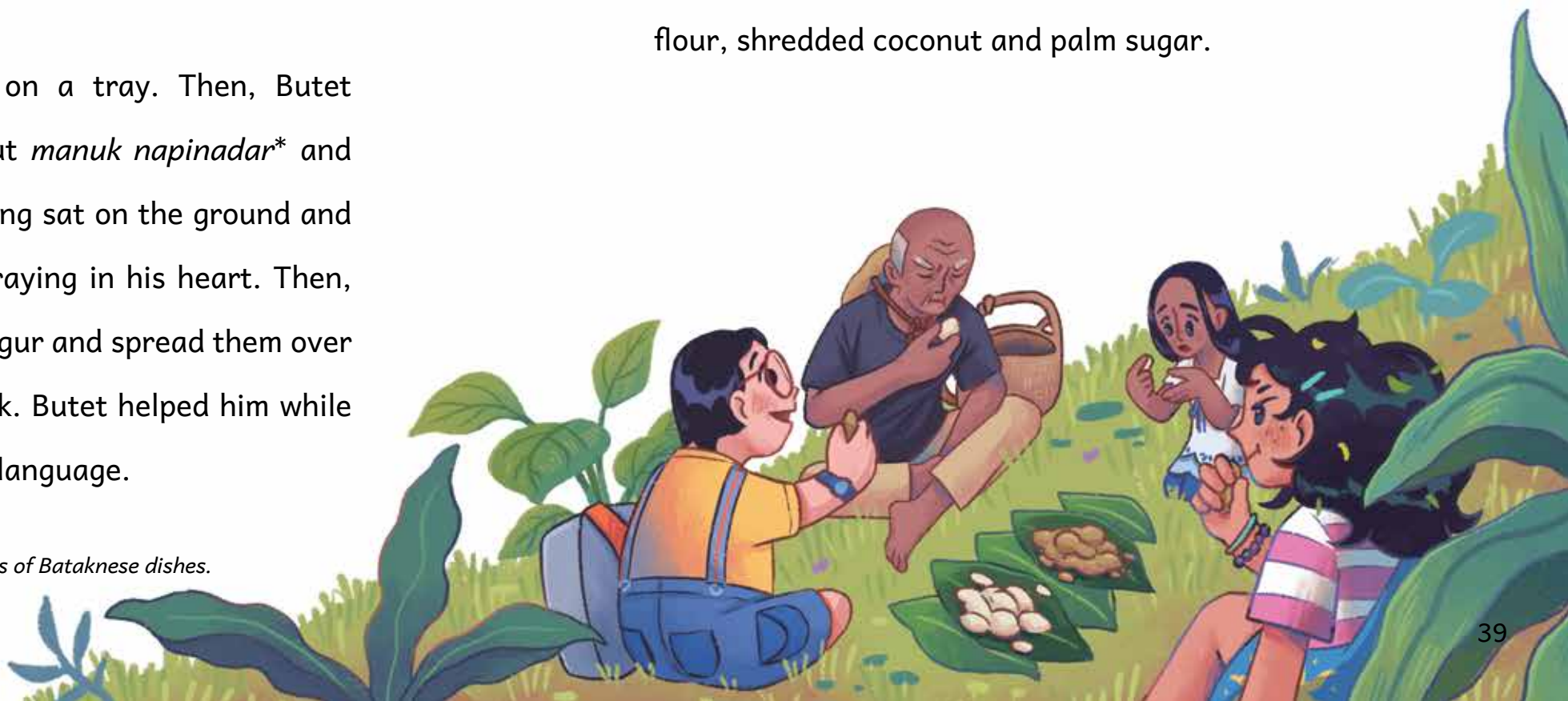
Oppung spread big leaves on a tray. Then, Butet opened the lunch boxes and put *manuk napinadar** and *itak gurgur* on the leaves. Oppung sat on the ground and raised his hands. He started praying in his heart. Then, he took two handfuls of itak gurgur and spread them over the Tobanese incense tree trunk. Butet helped him while chanting a prayer in Bataknese language.

**Manuk napinadar* and *itak gurgur* are names of Bataknese dishes.

“Before working, we must eat,” said Butet after Oppung finished his prayers.

Nara and Neo cleaned their hands using the water from the water bottle. Neo took a piece of chicken and ate it. His eyes grew big, “Wow, this is the most delicious chicken I have ever eaten.” Oppung Boru said that the chicken was grilled first after it was cut into pieces. After that, it was marinated in many kinds of spices and andaliman. Sometimes Bataknese call it *ayam gota*.

Nara took some itak gurgur. It tasted like a Javanese snack called *putu*, only a bit softer. It was made from rice flour, shredded coconut and palm sugar.



“Manuk napinadar symbolizes health and strength. On the other hand, itak gurgur symbolizes a great sap harvest” explained Butet.

After eating, Oppung took a sickle and cleared the bushes under the Tobanese incense tree. When it was all clear, Oppung took a dagger. It looked like some sort of a potato peeler, only a bit bigger. Oppung then cleaned the trunk.

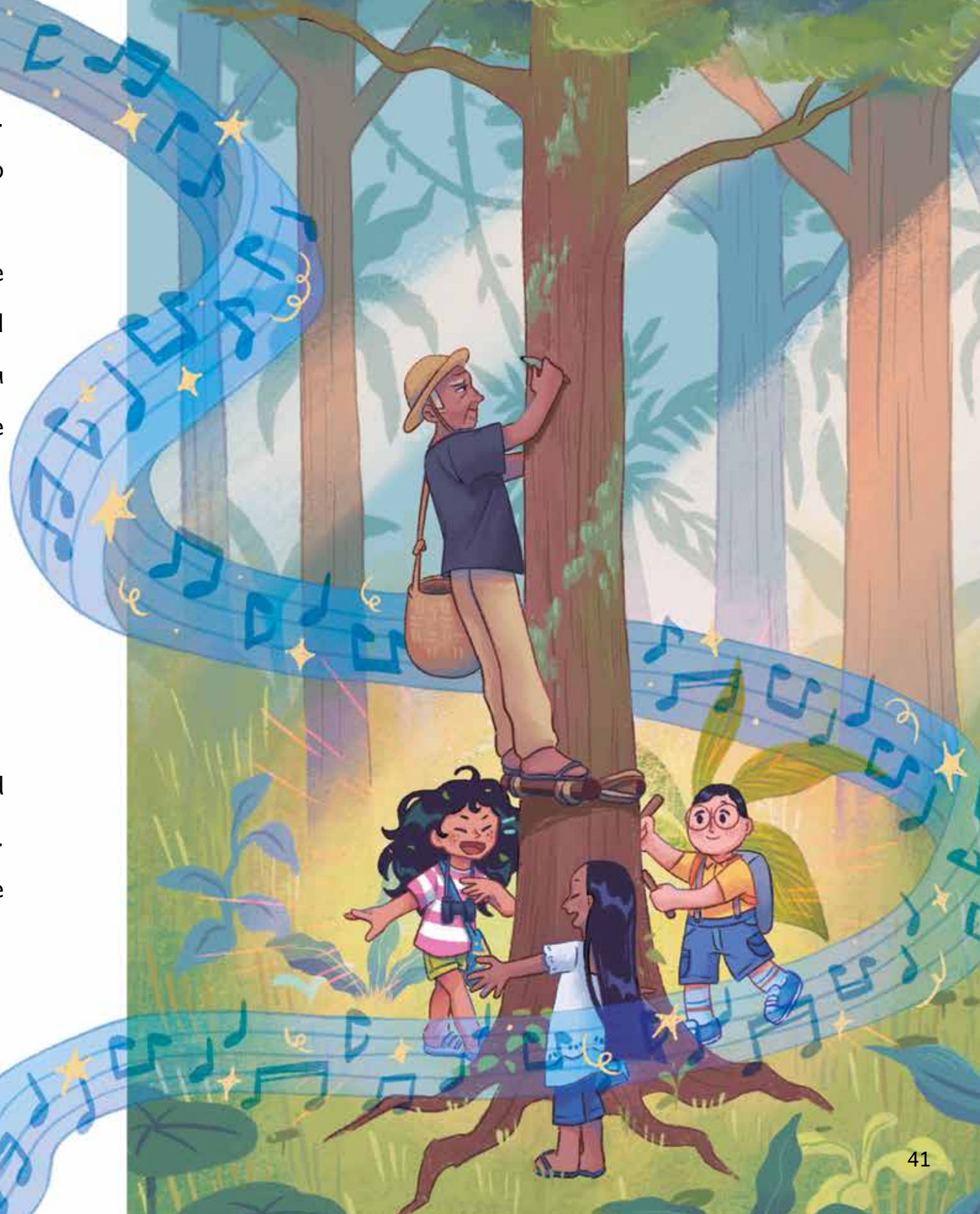
“That’s to avoid mold,” said Butet. Nara nodded.

Ding-dong, ding-dong ...

Oppung tapped the tree trunk using two sticks.

“It’s time to persuade the princess,” said Butet.

“Parung Simardagul-dagul ... Sahali mamarung, gok apanggok bahul-bahul.” Butet sang the song followed by Nara, reading the song lyrics from a piece of paper. Their voices were beautiful. The tree tapping followed the rhythm of the girls’ song.



Oppung offered the sticks to Neo who immediately tapped them onto the trunk.

Meanwhile, Oppung took the dagger and scored the bark. A thick, white sap flowed from the scoring line.

Nara sang even more excitedly, and Neo tapped the tree trunk happily. They thought surely the princess would come in a little while. They looked to the right and to the left. Which direction would the princess come from? North, south, right, left?

But, the princess never came. Neo was tired. Nara was also tired of singing. It seemed that the princess couldn't be persuaded to come.

"Ugh my arms are sore," sighed Neo. "I told you there wasn't a princess deep in the forest."

"What's wrong?" asked Butet.

"We are tired, but the princess is not coming."

"But, the princess is already here."

Nara and Neo looked at each other, "Where? We don't see her."

Butet tapped on the tallest Tobanese incense tree, "This is the princess."

"But that's a tree!" exclaimed Nara.

"Butet, you're playing a trick on us." said Neo.

Butet went on to explain that the local farmers called the tree The Princess. Interestingly, they treated the trees like their daughters. It was a common belief that when a farmer had an argument with their daughters during the harvest period, the incense tree wouldn't release much sap.

"Have you ever heard the history of the Tobanese incense tree?"

Nara and Neo shook their heads. Butet smiled and sat under a tree. She patted the ground next to her.

"Come and sit here. We can take a rest. I will tell you a story."

Neo opened his backpack and took out a water bottle and gave it to Nara. They sat near Butet.



“Once upon a time, there was a very beautiful girl. She was a kind hearted girl with a beautiful voice. Everybody loved her. Her name was Boru Nangniaga.”

Butet suddenly stood up and gave a curtsy like a princess. Her hand waved elegantly toward Neo and Nara.

“One day, her father’s business was struggling. He had to borrow money from a member of the royal family. Unfortunately, he couldn’t make a profit, and his business completely failed. He didn’t have money to pay his debt. The royal family was willing to forgive Nangniaga’s father’s debt on one condition. The prince wanted to marry Boru Nangniaga. Boru Nangniaga’s father refused. He loved Boru Nangniaga too much to trade her for his debt.”

Butet walked away, looking sad. She looked restless and her hand wiped her seemingly teary eyes. She was playing the role of the father.

“The father went home, feeling brokenhearted. He called Boru Nangniaga and told her everything. Boru Nangniaga felt sorry for her father.”

Butet then ran in place. This time she played the role of Boru Nangniaga.

“In the evening, Boru Nangniaga ran to the forest. She cried there. Then, she sang. The sound of her beautiful voice was heard all over the forest.



Her song was so sad that everyone in the forest was mourning. The leaves wilted, the bushes bowed down, the birds were reluctant to chirp.”

“What song did Nangniaga sing that everyone in the forest was mourning? asked Nara, out of curiosity.

“The song was a prayer to *Debata** so that she could become something useful and noble. Her song eventually reached Debata. Nangniaga’s tears and sincerity touched Debata.”

Butet took a twig and waved it in front of the tree, as though she was casting a spell using a wand.

“Debata then changed Nangniaga into a very tall tree. Boru Nangniaga came to her her father in his dream and told him to come to the forest. She said he would see a very tall tree. The sap of the tree was valuable and worth money.

When the father got up, he went to the forest. Her father sold the tree sap and was able to pay off his debts. However, he was heartbroken because he had lost his beloved daughter. Therefore, he treated the tree, which is called haminjon, as his own daughter. That’s the story.”

“Oh. I feel so sad about Boru Nangniaga,” said Neo.

“Is the sap worth a lot of money?” asked Nara.

Butet explained that in the old days, the price of Tobanese incense was equal to the price of gold. Tobanese incense was considered a valuable commodity sought after by the traders.

Oppung climbed down the tree and approached the kids. He made movements with his hands and fingers. Butet turned to Nara and Neo. Her eyes were bright.

“Do you want to know about the princess’ tears? It’s time to harvest them.”

**Debata is a Bataknese way to call God.*

CHAPTER 6

THE PRINCESS' TEARS

Oppung asked them to go to the other side of the forest. There, they saw Tobanese incense trees being sapped, releasing lumps of sap. It looked like wax.

“It’s hard,” said Neo when he touched the lump of sap.

“Because it’s been left there for four months,” said Butet. She took the sticks to tap on the trunk. Butet also took a rope.

“Please hold on to these sticks,” said Butet. Neo and Nara held on to the sticks that had been set across the tree trunks. Butet tied them tightly. She left some parts of the rope to use as steps. Oppung checked on the rope and raised his thumbs. Butet smiled.



“Oppung will harvest the top part. We can pick the ones at the bottom.”

Neo and Nara nodded their heads excitedly.

Oppung climbed up the tree using the sticks tied to the trunk. He picked the incense sap using a dagger and put it into his bamboo basket.

“The small lumps of sap can be picked with your fingers,” said Butet.

Nara and Neo tried it. But, suddenly Nara squealed. Her finger was bleeding.

“Oops, I got a splinter,”

Oppung looked down. He climbed down and saw Nara’s finger. He took a lump of sap and burned it using a lighter.

The sap melted like wax. Oppung rubbed the melted wax onto Nara’s finger. It smelled really good. The blood stopped at once. It turned out that the incense was useful for healing wounds.

“So the incense was not burnt to invite ghosts?” whispered Neo.

Butet laughed, “Oppung sometimes burns incense at home. He says it kills germs and bacteria. Today the scent of the incense brought you, instead of ghosts.”

Neo and Nara laughed too.



“This incense is also good for making perfume, aromatherapy, and medicine. My sister used to say that the incense was also used in mummification. Tobanese incense is famous for its great quality.”

“Wow, that’s really interesting.”

“Now we are going to plant the seedlings that you brought.”

Oppung dug a hole in a clearing. Neo put his seedlings into the hole and Nara put hers into another hole. Oppung made a special motion with his hands.

“The seedlings need to be planted near a big tree because it will protect these seedlings. That’s why Tobanese incense trees only grow deep in the forests.” explained Butet.

“The song that we sang before means that when we give our best, we will also receive the best.”

Butet patted the big tree and explained that the big trees would do their best to protect the seedlings. The seedlings would also give their best by growing into big trees. In the end, humans would enjoy the results. That’s why humans need to give their best to nature.

“We can do it by taking care of the forests, right?” said Neo.

Oppung Doli and Butet put up their thumbs at the same time. Neo was amazed to see Oppung Doli smile for the first time.



“Oppung said that these seedlings are like you two. These seedlings are three months old. Count the leaves. They are exactly the same. I think these seedlings are twins like you,” said Butet. Nara and Neo laughed when they heard that.

“Now, Oppung Doli will continue his work to harvest the Tobanese incense. I will take you home. It’s getting late now.”

They walked along the clean pathway. Butet said that the pathway was regularly cleaned by Oppung Doli so that Butet wouldn’t lose her way when she went home on her own. Suddenly Neo stopped. He looked to the left and right.

“Did you hear that?”

“What?” whispered Nara.

“The sound.”

Nara tried to listen. She smiled.

“The sound is coming from that direction. Let’s walk slowly.” Nara held her camera tightly. A big black bird was perched on a tree branch.

Its beak was white. It looked thick and hard.

“Whoa! Finally, I can see a hornbill,” whispered Nara while taking a picture with her camera. The hornbill was a male one, of a local species called black Kangkareng. Female hornbills of this type have black beaks. The male hornbill must have been looking for food for the female who was incubating the eggs.

The hornbill looked at the kids and moved its wings.

“Look! It’s flying away,” said Neo.

Nara clapped her hands in joy, “Let’s go home. I can’t wait to show this picture to Mama and Papa.”

“We are lucky. We got to see the princess, and a hornbill, as a bonus,” said Neo.

Butet and Nara laughed. They continued their journey home happily.





DID YOU KNOW?

- Tobanese incense, or any other incense, is one kind of spice that is usually dry, with a strong scent, and can be used for medication.
- For 5000 years ago, incense has been a famous commodity known worldwide.
- Incense trees grow well with other trees in Java, Bali, Kalimantan and Sumatra.
- Tobanese incense is known to have the best quality in the world because it contains strong resin and scent.
- Incense contains anti-bacteria, anti-depressant, and cineol as an anti-virus.



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Witaru Emi is an author, specializing in children and teenage literature. Ruwi, as she is usually called, was born and raised in Yogyakarta, a city rich with cultural values which have influenced her work. Among her popular works are *Topeng Dadak Merak* (2018), *Saat Banjir Datang* (2019), and *Misteri Hutan Batu* (2022).



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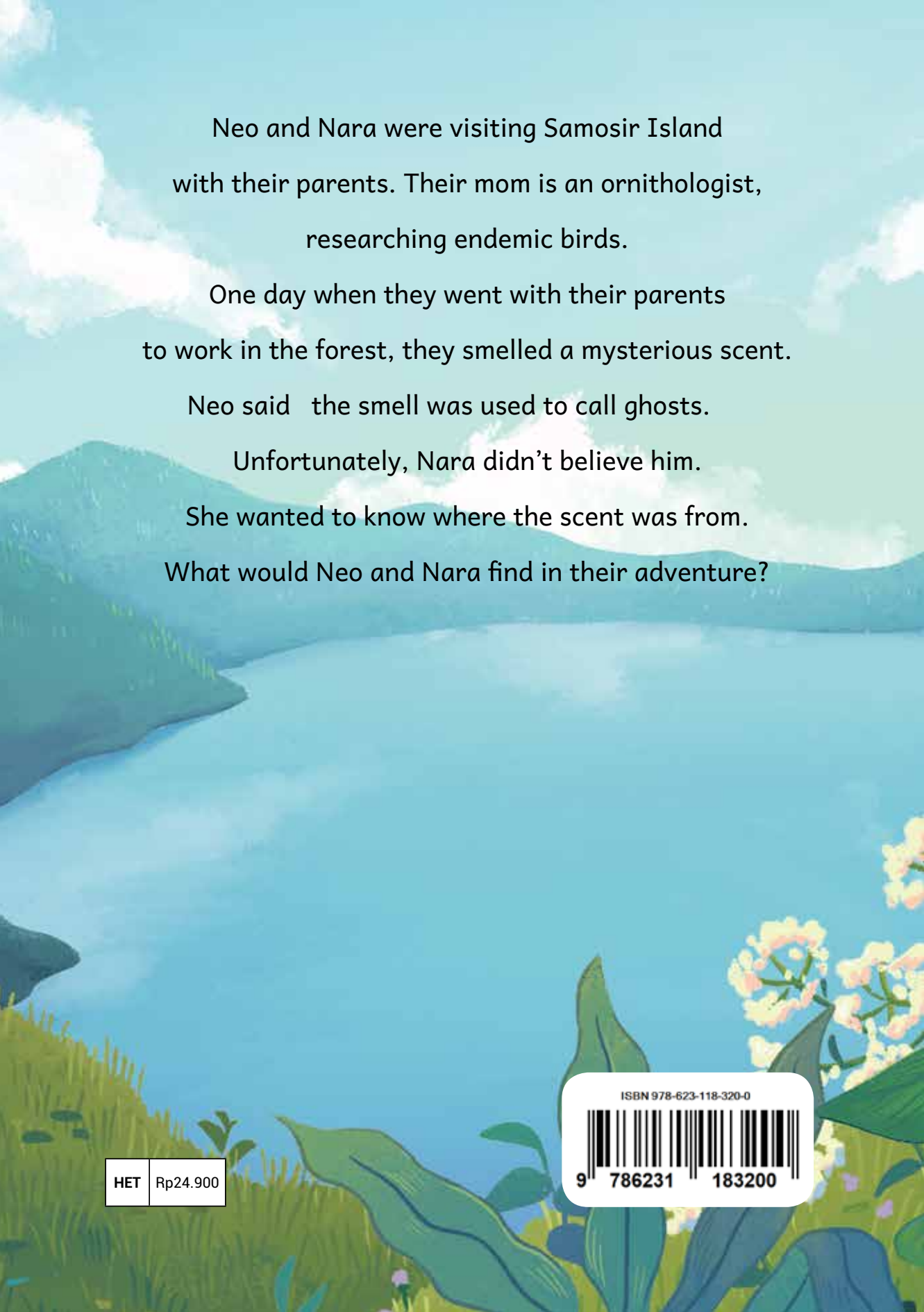
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Marett Gunawan is a graphic designer who loves the world of children. Today, she works for a major publisher where she has contributed to designing hundreds of children's books. To get to know her better, visit her Instagram account @marettgunawan.



Neo and Nara were visiting Samosir Island
with their parents. Their mom is an ornithologist,
researching endemic birds.

One day when they went with their parents
to work in the forest, they smelled a mysterious scent.

Neo said the smell was used to call ghosts.

Unfortunately, Nara didn't believe him.

She wanted to know where the scent was from.

What would Neo and Nara find in their adventure?

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