

**TEAR OF  
THE  
OCEAN**

a fiction

## 1.

The sun, a molten orb, descended beneath the watery horizon, painting the skies of Tawi-Tawi with a warm, golden hue. Eleven-year-old Lani, a Bajau girl with eyes the colour of the deep ocean, sat serenely on the rocky shell of Toto, her ancient tortoise companion of ninety-nine years. Toto, a cherished member of her family for generations, bore witness to the enduring bond that connected her lineage to the boundless sea.

With her jet-black hair caressed by the salty breeze, Lani epitomized the essence of the Bajau, known as the "Sea Nomads," a tribe inseparable from the vast ocean that cradled their remote islands.

Year by year, Lani had grown nearer to the sea, her soul entwined with its every undulation and rhythm. Here, at the juncture of land and sea, she whiled away her days, allowing the soothing cadence of the waves to cleanse her spirit. This was where she felt closest to her mother, a connection unbroken by the boundaries of mortality.

Lani's mother had departed when she was but a child, succumbing to the unforgiving rigors of life on these secluded islands. Lani clung to fragments of memories, like seashells strewn along the shore: her mother's melodic laughter, the intricate braiding of her hair, and lullabies that lulled her to sleep under the shimmering moonlight.

Tears welled in Lani's oceanic eyes as she recalled those irreplaceable moments. Her mother's absence weighed heavily on her heart, and the sea became the only place where she could feel her mother's presence. In the gentle embrace of the waves, she heard her mother's voice, whispering words of love and encouragement.

The Bajau people, proud and resilient, possessed a history inseparable from the ocean that enveloped them. Renowned for their extraordinary free-diving skills, and breath holding capacity, they sought pearls and treasures beneath the ocean's surface, each descent a communion with

the abyss, a dance with the currents, and homage to their ancestral traditions.

Lani's family, like numerous others in the tribe, depended on the sea's treasures for their sustenance. Her father, Ramek, a respected member of their community, was renowned for his prowess as a pearl diver and his unwavering devotion to the Bajau way of life. Yet, behind his standing lurked a sorrowful yearning for the wife he had lost and the responsibilities he bore alone.

With the evening tide's arrival, Lani tenderly stroked Toto's ancient shell, a conduit to her forebears. She knew that her great-grandfather had been a legendary pearl diver, a man who had plumbed the depths with grace and fearlessness.

In the twilight's embrace, Lani confided in her silent companion, "Do you think I can be like him, Toto? Can I become one of the greatest pearl divers in our tribe?"

Toto, his eyes seemingly holding the wisdom of eons, remained wordless, yet his unwavering presence served as a reassuring affirmation. Lani sensed the weight of tradition, the expectations placed upon her as a Bajau girl, and the murmurs of those who believed pearl diving was an exclusive domain of men. Yet, her heart, like the unyielding waves, refused to be tethered by convention.

With a sigh, Lani dismounted Toto and drew nearer to the water's edge. She knelt, dipping her fingers into the cool, beckoning sea, as if the ocean itself whispered secrets, urging her to chase her dreams, no matter how audacious they seemed.

In that moment, with the sea spreading before her and her mother's memory enveloping her, Lani silently pledged to herself. She would embark on a daring journey to demonstrate her spirit's boundlessness, the worthiness of her dreams, and the adaptability of her tribe's traditions in the face of evolving destiny.

As the sun vanished from sight, casting elongated shadows over the rocky shore, a figure emerged from the gathering dusk. It was Ramek, Lani's father, a respected Bajau member and a candidate in the upcoming chieftain election. With each step, he bore the weight of tradition, leadership, and the aspirations of his people.

Ramek possessed a dignified presence, his robust physique weathered by countless plunges into the deep blue, in pursuit of pearls and treasures. His salt-and-pepper hair bore witness to the wisdom he had gleaned from the sea, while his obsidian eyes mirrored the depths of his soul. Always a mentor to Lani, he imparted the ocean's wisdom and the tribe's traditions.

Beneath his rugged exterior dwelled a father who had lost his beloved wife and found himself torn between his daughter's dreams and the customs that had shaped their tribe for generations. He carried the burden of leadership, provision, and protection, a burden that weighed heavily upon him.

"Lani," Ramek spoke softly, his voice a blend of warmth and concern. Lani turned to her father, her eyes reflecting the ocean's profundity. "Father," she replied with a tender smile.

Ramek knelt beside her, his weathered hands resting on his knees, etched with the stories of countless dives. He gazed at the boundless sea, his thoughts a turbulent undercurrent beneath a placid surface.

"You spend so much time by the sea, my daughter. Why?"

Lani nodded, her eyes never leaving the waves. "I feel her, Father. She's a part of me, just as Mother was."

Ramek's chest tightened at the mention of his late wife. He missed her deeply, and the ache of her absence was a tempest that never truly subsided.

"Your mother was a remarkable woman, and her connection to the sea was unparalleled. But you must remember, Lani, our tribe has customs and traditions that have sustained us for generations."

Lani's visage dimmed slightly and she turned to her father, her eyes searching his for understanding. "I know, Father. But I can't help but dream of becoming a pearl diver, just like you and your father before you."

Ramek sighed, torn between his love for his daughter and the weight of tradition. He knew that the Bajau way of life was changing, that the world around them was evolving, and perhaps their traditions needed to evolve as well. But the fear of breaking with centuries-old customs and the risk it posed to his daughter's safety kept him rooted in his hesitation.

"Once upon a time," he started, his voice carrying the weight of memories and the ache of longing, "there was a girl like you."

Lani, ever perceptive, sensed the heaviness in her father's tone. She knew that Ramek had a sister, a sister he often spoke of with a distant look in his eyes, and a sister who was no longer with them. As Ramek's words trailed off, Lani decided to fill the silence with her own memories.

"You and that girl," Lani began, her voice soft yet resolute, "once were playing by the sea shore, and she was pulled in by the sea."

Ramek's eyes widened in surprise, caught off guard by his daughter's interruption. He had not expected Lani to know that particular story, a story he had kept locked away in the depths of his heart. His sister, the girl he missed more than words could convey, had been a victim of the sea's capricious nature.

'I read mama's dairy,' she answered thinking about the personal diaries her mother had left behind.

'How many times I have told you not to' in that moment, Ramek grappled with conflicting emotions. On one hand, he cherished Lani's spirit and the dreams that burned brightly within her. On the other hand, he feared for her safety, knowing the treacherous nature of the sea and the perils it held for those who dared to challenge its depths, "Lani, you're still quite young, and there might be things in your mother's diary that you won't fully grasp. I'm certain she wouldn't have wished for you to endure needless pain and distress," he was concerned, sooner or later Lani will question the unanswered, he knew.

As the evening breeze rustled through the palms and the sea whispered its timeless secrets, father and daughter sat in quiet contemplation, each burdened by their own thoughts. The orb of night began its ascent, casting its silvery glow across the water, and Toto, the ancient tortoise, remained a silent witness to the unspoken words between them.

In the depths of their hearts, they both knew that Lani's journey would be fraught with challenges, but the currents of destiny flowed with a force of their own. The sea, with its ever-changing tides, had a way of reshaping lives and forging destinies, and in that moment, it seemed to beckon Lani towards a path of courage and self-discovery.

As the first stars appeared in the night sky, father and daughter shared a bond that transcended words, a connection rooted in love, dreams, and the timeless embrace of the sea. Their journey had only just begun, and the ocean, like a silent sentinel, held their secrets close, waiting to unveil its mysteries.

## .2.

The late evening sky painted itself in a combination of tangerine and lavender hues as Ramek guided Lani and Toto homeward from the rocky shore. Lani, her small form seated gracefully atop the ancient tortoise, seemed to glide with an otherworldly grace. Toto, with each measured step, embodied the wisdom of generations, and together, they traversed the labyrinthine paths of the Bajau village.

The village, a network of stilted houses, was connected by floating bridges that crisscrossed the tranquil waters. These bridges were a testament to the ingenuity of the Bajau, facilitating their navigation of this aquatic world. Before each house, these bridges served as lifelines, connecting neighbours and reminding them of their shared bonds beyond blood and water.

As Lani and Toto neared their humble abode, a youthful figure emerged from the shadows to join their procession. It was Riko, a spirited nine-year-old, who sported attire echoing the romanticized image of a pirate. His shirt bore a patchwork of mismatched fabrics, and a bandana adorned his head, concealing a mop of unruly black hair. Around his waist, a belt jingled with a collection of trinkets that announced his presence to the world. He even wore an eye-patch; some thought he was mentally challenged, while others thought he actually might become a pirate someday.

Riko's father had been a pirate, a man who had ventured into treacherous waters in pursuit of the legendary Tear of The Ocean Pearl. It was a daring and perilous quest that had ultimately claimed his life and

those of his crew in a violent storm. Riko had been left orphaned, with only dreams of his father's legacy as company.

"Ahoy there, Lani!" Riko greeted in a playful pirate's growl, walking alongside Toto with the enthusiasm of youth.

Lani chuckled, her laughter reminiscent of tinkling seashells. "Ahoy, Riko! What grand adventures have you embarked upon today?"

Riko's eyes sparkled with excitement as he regaled Lani with tales of imaginary voyages, battles against mythical sea creatures, and the ever-elusive pursuit of the Tear of the Ocean pearl. To Toto, who had witnessed countless generations come and go; Riko's stories were pure entertainment.

Riko, with a spirited gleam in his eye and a theatrical flourish of his hand, regaled her with his vivid tales of adventure. His voice took on the cadence of a seasoned pirate as he recounted his daring escapades.

"I found meself on the Stormbreaker, a ship that I had built with me own two hands," Riko declared, his words filled with swagger. "She be a beauty; she be, with sails as black as a moonless night and a figurehead that could strike fear into the heart of Davy Jones himself!"

Lani and Toto, familiar with Riko's storytelling flair, listened with rapt attention, their imaginations sailing alongside the young adventurer's words.

"And there, on the treacherous seas, I encountered a beast of legend, a two-headed serpent sea monster!" Riko continued, his gestures mimicking the ferocity of the battle. "The waves were as tall as mountains, and the winds howled like the ghostly wails of lost souls."

Ramek, who had heard his fair share of Riko's tales, couldn't help but crack a smile at the boy's exuberance. He decreased his walking speed to pay attention to Riko's words, savouring the entertainment.



"With cutlass in hand and courage in me heart, I faced those monstrous heads," Riko declared, his eyes shining with excitement. "We battled beneath the raging tempest, and the sea itself seemed to join the fray, as if it recognized the epic showdown."

As Riko's story reached its climax, he paused for dramatic effect, his hand resting on an imaginary hilt. "And then, me hearties, with a mighty swing, I struck down both heads of the sea serpent, and they yielded their treasure—a legendary pearl of unmatched beauty!"

Riko's animated storytelling had transported the Lani to a world of adventure and wonder. "And with that pearl," Riko concluded, his voice lowering to a hushed tone, "I embarked on a quest to find me father, lost to the treacherous depths of the ocean. For I knew that the Tear of the Ocean held the key to unravelling the mysteries of the sea and reuniting me with the blood that courses through me veins!"

Lani's eyes sparkled with excitement as she leaned in closer to Riko, her voice filled with determination. "I want that pearl too, Riko. I want to be a part of your quest, to join you on this adventure."

Riko, known for his adventurous spirit and love for tales of the sea, didn't hesitate for a moment. With a grin that matched Lani's enthusiasm, he declared, "Aye, Lani! What's me is yours, and together, we'll find that legendary pearl and bring me father back from the depths of the ocean!"

The two friends sealed their pact with a solemn nod and a hearty handshake.

"Aye, Toto, ye be an ol' sea turtle with wisdom aplenty, don't ye think?" Riko grinned, leaning closer to the tortoise. "Do ye reckon we'll ever lay eyes on that fabled pearl?"

Toto, as always, remained silent, his ancient eyes seemingly amused by Riko's youthful exuberance. Lani and Riko shared a laugh, their innocence adding a note of joy to the tapestry of their lives.

Upon reaching home, they were greeted by the mouth-watering aroma of a lavish feast. Sahiya, Lani's elder sister and a widow, was orchestrating a seafood banquet that could tempt the most discerning palates. Her slender fingers moved with a practiced grace as she skilfully handled ingredients, performing a silent symphony of culinary expertise.

Sahiya was a quiet presence; her eyes often cast downward, avoiding direct gazes. The life of a widow in the tribe was one of solitude and solemnity, steeped in strict adherence to tradition. Rarely did a smile grace her lips, for her heart bore the weight of her past and the understanding that her role within the tribe was one of service and support.

As Lani and Riko settled at the dinner table, they were inundated by the irresistible scents wafting from the sumptuous spread before them. Plates of freshly caught fish, marinated in an intricate blend of spices and herbs, beckoned with their rich, tantalizing flavours. Prawns, plucked from the ocean's depths, gleamed in a savoury sauce that hinted at the mysteries of the sea. Crabs, their shells a kaleidoscope of colours, awaited eager hands to crack them open and reveal their succulent treasures.

Riko's eyes widened in delight, and he couldn't contain his excitement. "By the stars, Sahiya, this be the finest spread I've seen in me nine years on this Earth!"

Sahiya, though typically reserved, allowed a hint of a smile to grace her lips—an understated acknowledgment of Riko's unbridled enthusiasm. She served each dish with meticulous care, an expression of her devotion to her family.

Amidst the feast, Riko couldn't resist the urge to indulge in a one-sided conversation with Toto, the ancient tortoise nestled in a corner of the room. His pirate persona came to life as he spun tales of daring escapades and legendary treasure hunts, as if Toto were his trusty first mate.

"Arr, Toto, me hearty! Have ye ever heard tell of the Tear of the Ocean? The most coveted pearl in all the seven seas, they say! One day, I'll find it, mark me words! What say ye?"

Toto, as ever, remained stoic and unresponsive, his sagely gaze fixed on the flickering candlelight. Lani and Sahiya exchanged knowing glances, understanding that Riko's conversations with the tortoise were more for his own amusement than any hope of a reply.