

BELIEVE

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**UNIVERSITAS KATOLIK
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*Dedicated especially
to*

*THOSE OF YOU WHO FEEL DOUBTFUL ABOUT
YOURSELVES.*

Motto:

*Break the limits you set, because those limits hinder
you from growing.*



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From the editor

What has he written? I'm sure that some of you may turn out to be just like me. Once you read his first lines, you'd want to read on and on to find out what will be his next lines. I only helped with some fill-ins and grammatical issues – but the rest was originally Aryo's.

I'm very excited to exclaim that I have just witnessed the birth of a very talented short story writer! Congratulations, Aryo!

May you have more and more beautiful magical stories to come your way to make you enthusiastically write and tell the world about the precious lives God has provided for us all!

Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut

Prolog

I woke up from my long night's sleep. Tears flowed down my face without me realizing it as I awoke from last night's dream, for no apparent reason, and these tears fell down my cheeks. I wiped away the tears, unsure of the reason they were on my cheeks. My eyes were still blurry, and the morning sunlight indicated that it was already morning.

I am twenty-three years old, and this is the recollection of the events of the past five days, the clearest memory of my twenty-three years of life. I woke up from my bed, trying to remember the events I experienced yesterday. I went through an incident that could have almost taken or threatened my life.

I have never experienced such an event in my life, and even among all the bad incidents that have happened to me, the recent one was the most terrifying I have ever experienced. This is the first time I feel incredibly grateful that I still have a second chance to live my life, whether due to luck or divine intervention. However, I believe that I am still alive because of the intervention of a higher power.

I woke up from my bed, trying to find my phone and paying attention to what time it was. I took a quite deep breath because I still couldn't believe that until now, I could still live to face days that felt bland to me. I have never felt such a deep sense of gratitude as I do now; I am sure that a few days ago was a very unfortunate thing for me, where I had to face a situation that could endanger and threaten my life.

I almost couldn't survive and continue my life. On this bed, while looking at my phone to see what time it is, I still can't believe the recent incident, which was so terrifying and left a lasting impression on my memory. As I, who had awakened, looked at my entire body in the mirror, almost every part of my body had scars from the incident a few days ago. I could still feel the sensation and

pain at that time, which could be proven by the many wounds on my body, from my face to my arms, chest, and even my legs. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries that would have required me to be hospitalized because if that had happened, my parents would have been very worried about me.

My father always told me to always move forward and think about the tomorrows that I would face, which can be said to be visionary. I thought about my father's words and how I would face tomorrow if I had given up at that moment to survive. Even though my survival skills were sufficient when I was still in school, I participated in Scout activities and nature lover organizations. So, instinctively, I must have the experience and skills to survive in challenging conditions.

I walked down the stairs, where my room was on the upper floor, and tried to go to the dining room, even if only to sip water, but for me, that was already enough. I looked at my reflection in the living room mirror and thought about always fighting, no matter what my condition and situation are, because I believe that God will not give a test and trial beyond the capacity of His servant.

Chapter 1

Three days after the incident I experienced, I was sitting on my bed, observing the fish and aquarium that were quite numerous and neatly arranged in the room I always occupied. At the age of 23 this year, I was observing the movements of each of my fish in my room, inside an aquarium measuring twenty-five centimeters in length, fifteen centimeters in width, and twenty centimeters in height. I looked at each of my fish and their movements one by one, then realized that one of them had quite peculiar movements, making me think.

"Are you okay?" I said to my fish. "Do you feel unwell?" I continued.

Those were the sentences that always came out when I found that one of my fish didn't seem well. Meanwhile, my physical condition wasn't good for me, as I had experienced a terrifying and unimaginable ordeal five days ago. Until I found out that there was only a thin wall separating life and death, between extraordinary beauty and shocking darkness of the heart, mind, and body. Between a beautiful location in the daytime and a frightening one at night. Between bright and beautiful weather and dark and ominous weather. At one point, my life seemed perfect, but perfection is not always present at all times.

My name is Awan, the first child of two siblings and also the oldest grandchild of my late grandparents from my father's side. I turned my feet to see the soles of my feet, which had quite severe wounds from the dark event five days earlier. Although it still hurt when touched, I could only smile as usual, as if nothing had happened.

"What am I thinking right now?" I asked myself in my mind. "It seems I have to go downstairs and apply medicine to the wounds on my hands," I continued in my mind.

After saying that to myself in my mind, I stood up and tried to walk away from my room, slowly descending the stairs of my house, and taking cautious steps due to the wounds on the soles of my feet and the bruise on my left thigh. I felt complete with the wounds on my body, but fortunately, there were no internal injuries to my vital organs.

I arrived on the ground floor, slightly hobbling to bear all the pain in my body, continuing my journey to reach my dining room. Once there, I sat and leaned on the chair in the dining room. When I was about to take some water to drink, I noticed a glass already on the dining table, indicating that someone had just used it. Immediately, my thoughts turned to my younger sibling since today. He is my younger. Only he and I were staying at home.

I try to look around, thinking that my younger brother might be outside, engaged in some morning activity. It is quite a coincidence that he is willing to do activities in the morning, unlike the usual routine, where he only becomes active when the sun is high above. Honestly, I don't care much about what he does because my brother and I rarely interact.

At my dining table, I ponder and lean slightly against it, feeling the cold iron surface of my dining table. The dining room of my house has hardly changed for several years, although I'm a bit bored with it, and as I get older, I feel a sense of boredom with the somewhat dull atmosphere of my home. This room only seems to feel more cramped to me.

I am surprised when I daydream and don't realize that both of my parents have come here. "Why are Mom and Dad here so early?" I asked my parents.

My parents responded, "Dad heard that you had a quite dangerous incident a few days ago," said my father. "Mom is also a bit worried and apologizes if we could only come here just now to see you, dear," added my mother.

"Ah, this is not a matter of great significance to me; all of this is something an adventurer might experience," I replied to my parents.

"Have you had breakfast?" my father asked me with a slightly soft tone.

"Of course not, Dad. I just woke up ten minutes ago," I replied

"Well, then what would you like to have for breakfast? We'll buy something for you," my mother continued.

"I don't know what I want for breakfast, maybe a bowl of chicken porridge with a sliced egg and extra chicken pieces would be enough, plus a cup of warm tea for me, would be heaven, for me, thank you," I replied with smiling to my parents.

"All right, we'll buy that for you shortly. By the way, where is your brother? I haven't seen him today," my father said. "I don't know; maybe he went out to play or buy some snacks at the minimarket," I answered.

After a few minutes of conversation, my parents finally leave to buy breakfast for me, and possibly for my brother as well. However, I am sure it will take them quite a while because they will probably have breakfast there and bring it home later. In essence, my relationship with my parents is not particularly harmonious, especially with my mother, who always demands perfection from me. For example, at the moment, I am pursuing a bachelor's degree in Language and Arts at one of the well-known private universities in my city.

However, I have told them before that since I was in high school, I planned to start working immediately after graduating, as I have always believed that high education and degrees are merely formalities in this era. To be honest, my thoughts, heart, and soul are swaying in an uncertain and confusing situation. My heart says I should continue to ensure that my parents' efforts are not in vain, but my mind suggests otherwise. I think it would be better to start

working right after high school. Back then, during my internship, I even received a job offer from the company where I interned. If I had submitted my job application and portfolio to the HR department, I would have been accepted, and I wouldn't have felt pressured to attend college, especially now that I am at the end of my academic journey. There's not much time left to complete my studies, and honestly, I feel very bored with attending college. Despite all that, there's still a feeling deep within me to resolve the issues with the challenging physical and mental strain caused by my studies.

After waiting for some time, my parents finally returned home, bringing a bowl of warm porridge that would be delightful to eat while still hot.

"Come on, eat the porridge while it's still hot," my mother says to me.

"All right, let me get a bowl and a spoon first," I reply to my mother.

After I grab my eating utensils, I also take a glass of water for myself. The porridge's velvety texture and the warm temperature make it a delicious experience as it passes through my throat. The yellow spice mixture in the porridge enhances the flavor, combining salty and savory tastes with different textures, creating a perfect blend. The roasted peanuts as an additional topping contribute a distinctive aroma, and when eaten with the porridge, they add a crunchy, nutty flavor. The seasoned chicken pieces and tofu are also well-prepared, creating an advantage in the overall enjoyment of the meal at the dining table with my parents, who are busy watching television.

A few moments after finishing my breakfast, I immediately cleaned up and washed the utensils I used for the meal. Afterward, I return to the front porch, where I immerse myself in contemplation. Even I don't know why I'm daydreaming; I just remain silent, lost in thought for quite a while, gazing at the numerous fish in the aquarium on my porch. I wonder what I'm pondering until something crosses my mind.

"Should I continue and finish my studies within this short timeframe?" I asked myself.

"But I'm not sure about this; I doubt my abilities," I mutter in my heart.

"Can I accomplish it?" I ask, uncertain.

"But where should I start? I don't even know where to begin," I continued.

"I don't know where to start; everything always overwhelms me, leaving me confused about what to choose," I cried out in my heart.

At that moment, I began to wonder if I should ask my friend for advice first. I decided to inquire if he had some free time today.

"Pal, do you have some free time?" I asked my friend Naufal.

My friend, whose name is Naufal or whom I often call Nopal, has a slightly chubby or maybe overweight body. According to me, he's a bit chubby, with a weight approaching eighty kilograms. Despite his somewhat peculiar and reserved nature, he exhibits a high level of solidarity towards his friends. His curly hair and glasses on his face also suggest a strong sense of fellowship with his friends. Although he can be annoying at times, in any case, we have built a friendship for about six years. Six years is not a short period, and surely both Nopal and I have come to understand each other's personalities.

"What's up with you asking me this early in the morning?" Nopal replied.

"Do you have some free time this afternoon or evening?" I responded.

"I have plans from afternoon to evening, but maybe I can make time for tonight," he replied in the chat.

"What's going on?" he continued in the chat.

"I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed today. I want to go somewhere, be it a noodle shop or a street-side eatery; it doesn't matter. I also want to talk about the issues I'm facing right now," I explained.

"All right, I'll try to come to your place tonight, maybe around eight or nine," Nopal responded.

"Okay, then," I continued.

"Okee," he replied.

After informing him through the chat, I go back up to my room, where I observe the animals in my room. There's a lot I need to do, from tidying up my room and cleaning the aquarium that houses my fish, to even small tasks. I'm confused about where to start. Whether I start by cleaning my room or cleaning the fish tank, it doesn't matter much, as the result will be the same.

"Sigh....., all right, I'll start by tidying up my room first," I said to myself.

I began tidying up my bed, starting with taking my two small pillows, the teddy bear left by my ex-girlfriend, and folding the blanket I use every night when I feel cold. After that, I swept my bed using a broom made of coconut twigs, vigorously tossing the broom outside the bed to get rid of any dirt on my bed. Once that was done, I moved on to organizing the equipment for taking care of my fish. I arranged everything neatly to make it look tidy and pleasant to the eye, placing each tool in its designated spot. From the fish food bottle, which should be under the storage cabinet, to the aquarium crevices' covers, I arranged and organized everything neatly. Additionally, I cleared away all the debris that entered through my room's window, originating from the rambutan tree next to the house. Technically, the tree doesn't belong to my family but to the large neighboring house, which is rented out by its original owner. However, people in my house often take its fruits when the tree starts bearing ripe fruits. We think it's better to take the fruit rather than let bats eat them. I'm not entirely sure about my family's motives and reasons for taking the rambutan

fruits from the tree next to my house, because honestly, I don't care much about it. I'm not a fan of rambutan fruits, but I know my mother loves eating them.

Once again, I tidied up my room, which resembled a shipwreck. After organizing my fish equipment, I swept the floor using the broom outside my room. When I was about to pick up the broom, I noticed in front of my room a flock of birds gathering to find food. Within the group, I saw a small bird. Instantly, I envisioned what it would be like if I were a bird, free to fly around without hindrance and the cumbersome and irritating laws of humans. These questions have often crossed my mind. On one hand, I desire to break free from this world, and the thought of ending my life has crossed my mind. However, if I die now, I won't ever see the joyful parts of my life that God promised me when I was in the spiritual realm. This belief is part of the religion I adhere to, where before we are born into this world, while still in our mother's womb, the angels ask us the same question seventy-seven times. But before posing this question, they show us glimpses of our life during our time on Earth, displaying our experiences and happiness. After showing us everything, they ask this question:

"Are you sure you want to be born into this world?" the angels would have inquired of us.

Continuing with my task of tidying up my room, after grabbing my broom and observing the flock of birds foraging together, I drifted into thoughts and fantasies of things I occasionally desire to experience and enjoy. I swept the floor of my room with the wooden broom I was holding, relishing in the swaying motions of the broom. I hummed a small tune while moving the broom back and forth, stepping carefully to each corner of my room that felt dirty and worthy of cleaning. I gathered the dirt from every corner of my room to one spot, near the door of my room. Then, I stepped outside and grabbed a trash bin to collect the dust and dirt that I had finished sweeping from my room. I carefully placed the dirt into the trash bin, being cautious not to let the dust scatter and create a mess. Once this sweeping task was completed, I casually descended downstairs, strolling toward the

bathroom located on the lower floor to fetch the mop equipment I intended to use for cleaning the floor of my room upstairs.

I move back and forth with the floor mop in my hand, still engaged in my activity as I did when sweeping the floor of my room. I hum softly to myself, unaware of the specific tune but thoroughly enjoying what I am doing. Before I finish mopping the floor of my room, my phone rings, indicating a notification from the WhatsApp application installed on my phone.

"Let's go fishing," said Riko.

"Huh, where?" I replied.

"Just at the reservoir to avoid spending too much money," he answered

"When? Now?" I asked.

"Yes, do you have bait and a hook at your house, right?" he inquired about the necessary items.

"Yes, but what size of hook do you need, and what bait are you talking about?" I asked.

"We'll use a two-size hook and just use insects as bait; I'm looking out to catch Bader fish," he responded.

"Alright, but we should go when it's not too hot. Right now, the sun is scorching, and the air is incredibly hot. Even though it's supposed to be the rainy season, it still feels like summer," I explained.

"What time, then?" Riko asked.

"How about half-past four in the afternoon?" I suggested.

"Okay, just drop by my house later, wait for me on the porch," I told him.

"Sure, see you later," he replied, concluding our chat conversation.

A little information about my friend Riko... his full name is Gerickho, but I often call him Riko. He has a relatively stocky physique, though compared to Nopal, Riko's body is slightly leaner. He also has a scar on his nose from an accident last May. It has been a while since the accident, but the scar is still visible on his face. Riko has slightly long hair that he usually ties back in a modern hairstyle. He is a kind person willing to share, even though sometimes he lies about not having fuel in his motorcycle tank when he does. I can understand it because he no longer works at the fried chicken restaurant.

I have known him for quite a while, perhaps two or three years; I'm a bit forgetful, but I distinctly remember him coming to my house for the first time when he wanted to buy one of my fish to use as a decoration, in his aquarium. It's not a fancy ornamental fish that ordinary people usually have; instead, it's a predatory fish scientifically known as Channa. This fish is still related to the snakehead fish, which is often consumed by humans due to its nutritional content and protein in its flesh. The protein and nutrients are believed to accelerate the healing process of wounds after surgery or other injuries. A bit more information that I know about the fish we plan to catch with Riko, this fish has the scientific name *Barbonymus Balleiorides*, often referred to as the red-finned tinfoil barb or bader fish, depending on the region, as different areas have different names for this fish.

It turns out that Riko invited me to fish for this particular fish because I also need it to complete my collection of fish under the *Barbonymus* genus. It is still related to the Kaviat fish because, as I mentioned earlier, this fish still falls under the *Barbonymus* genus. I don't really mind who will catch this fish first because I honestly just want to have it alive to display it in the aquarium on the front porch of my house. I suppose from here, you understand a little bit more about me, now, who is one of those fish enthusiasts.

Anyway, after finishing mopping the floor and receiving a chat notification from Riko, I quickly rushed to take a shower and prepare the equipment I would bring later. Although there is still a bit of pain in the wound on my body, it doesn't deter my enthusiasm

for activities that have been my hobby since childhood. Honestly, it stings a lot when the still-open wound comes into contact with water from the tap in my bathroom, but what can I do? This is the pain I have to endure, perhaps as karma for the bad things I've done in my life.

After the shower, I put on a black T-shirt with a fish design on the back. It is one of my favorite shirts because I got it for free from buying fish from an online store installed on my phone. I also wear shorts on top of my underwear for comfort, in addition to putting on my long pants just in case something unwanted happens and asks me to be with my shorts on. After putting on these clothes, I walk casually out of my downstairs room.

I no longer use my downstairs room for sleeping since I moved to the room on the upper floor of my house. My downstairs room is only used to store clothes and toys that my younger brother owns. There is a toy cabinet that my brother often uses to store toys or experiment results with insects.

My brother indeed has different hobbies from mine. Besides collecting Gundam toys, he also likes to raise reptiles and insects. From relatively common pets to tarantulas. It may seem strange, but to me, it's still acceptable because some species of tarantulas are non-toxic and not aggressive towards humans. However, my mother will never approve of this no matter what.

I walked out of my downstairs room and intended to check my fishing equipment. I looked and examined again to see if there were any damages to the fishing rod I was going to use.

"It seems there's no problem with my fishing rod," I answered in my thoughts.

After checking my fishing rod, I returned to my upstairs room and noticed that the aquariums were dirty and needed immediate cleaning. Looking at the clock, I estimated that I still had enough time to clean all the dirty aquariums in my room.

Without much thought, I immediately lifted each dirty aquarium in my room. I lifted and moved them to the lower part

because there was only an outdoor tap there. It was too far for me to bring them into the bathroom, especially since the space inside the bathroom was not as spacious as the area I got when cleaning them on the front porch of my house. Fortunately, this place existed, so I didn't have to bother lifting and moving my aquariums far to the bathroom of my house.

I brought down the aquariums from the shelf where I displayed my fish. I brought down an aquarium that was not too large for me. According to me, it was still a reasonable size to be moved around, but it required extra effort when cleaning the nineteen aquariums in my room directly. Therefore, I usually cleaned only three or four aquariums every five days. Even then, I cleaned the aquariums that, in my opinion, got dirty quickly.

I brought down the first aquarium, took out the fish inside, and moved them into a bucket filled with a little water. In a hurry, I wiped every side of the glass walls of my aquarium using a sponge soaked in glass cleaner. From my experience, it was very difficult to clean the crust that stuck to the glass of the aquarium if it wasn't treated with glass cleaner. If not given glass cleaner, the residue of the crust would not disappear permanently in the future; in other words, it would become permanent crust later on if not cleaned from the beginning.

After cleaning the crust stuck to the glass of my aquarium, I aggressively stirred the sand that served as the base of my aquarium. This method was quite effective in lifting the leftover food debris that the fish did not eat and removing the waste from the digestion of my fish. I stirred it aggressively and arrogantly, then poured out all the water from my aquarium. This method was more effective compared to the in-out system, which would consume a lot of water supply. It didn't take long to clean the remaining dirt in the sand because it only took three refills of the aquarium to make it clean again and ready to be filled with my pet fish.

After one aquarium was cleaned, I moved on to the second until the last aquarium that needed to be cleaned. After everything

was done, I also didn't forget to add Indian almond leaves that had been processed for a while to produce leaf extract that could dissolve in water. Indian almond leaves play a role as fish antibiotics. Besides being a natural antibiotic for fish, these leaves can also be used to slightly lower the water content, which can cause fish not to survive for long if the water's concentration is too high. Apart from being a natural antibiotic for fish, Indian almond leaves are also commonly used for fish treatment. This is particularly helpful for fish that have undergone a long journey, whether they have returned from competition or have just been purchased with a considerable distance and time spent in plastic packaging. After adding Indian almond leaves to the aquarium I just cleaned, I made sure to cover the top of my aquarium with cut glass pieces measured to fit perfectly as a cover. I closed everything one by one and observed the fish that, after I cleaned their aquarium, appeared to be happy and healthy. This could be seen from their behavior and swimming style, which seemed more active than before. After observing my fish, which seemed happier and healthier, I immediately took their food – a type of dried insect with added vitamins and color pigments to support growth and color development in the fish I keep.

Time passed quickly, and it was already past three o'clock. As I expected, my friend Riko messaged me that he was on his way to pick me up for our fishing trip at the predetermined location. It didn't take long for my friend to arrive at my house since our houses were not too far but also not very close.

"Is all the necessary equipment ready?" Riko asked me.

"Everything is ready," I replied.

"Okay, let's go straight away," he said, looking very enthusiastic.

I immediately grabbed my fishing gear and went up to his motorcycle to head to the location we had planned.

However, on the way, Riko asked me, "Why are there so many wounds on your hands and face?"

"Oh, these wounds are nothing. I'm used to them," I replied, deflecting the question. In reality, he only saw minor wounds that weren't as severe as the ones on my stomach and the sole of my right foot.

It didn't take us long to reach our fishing destination. I got off his motorcycle and, taking the initiative, he brought his fishing rod. He also brought a box and bait that we would use for fishing our target fish.

As we walked along the trail to our usual fishing spot, a pain in my foot and the right side of my stomach suddenly became intense, making me grit my teeth to endure the pain. Step by step, I carefully tread while enduring this pain until we reach our destination for fishing this evening. However, an unpleasant sight awaits us, where the river, which serves as the home and habitat of our target fish, is being used for swimming by children. Not only are they swimming, but they are also fishing in the middle of the river. Although the river is not very deep, only up to the thighs, once it is entered by children, it becomes questionable if there are still any fish left in that area.

Feeling disappointed and somewhat desperate, Riko and I try to stay positive.

"Look, these kids are using it to swim and fish right up to the middle," Riko said with a slightly annoyed tone.

"What else can we do? But let's give it a try; maybe some miracles will happen to us, hahaha," I replied in a joking tone to lighten the mood.

After Riko and I set aside the unused equipment, we proceeded to bait our fishing rods with insects. Five minutes have passed since we cast our first bait, but still, there's no sign of our target fish. With a slightly grumbling and loud voice, I intentionally say,

"If fishing like this is how it's done, I'm sure many will get angry," hoping that the kids fishing and playing in the middle of the river will hear.

Since we're quite fed up, finally, Riko and I decide to move to another side of the lake. However, just as we were about to change locations, my phone rang, indicating a new chat message.

"At home, bro?" the person asked.

"I'm currently outside fishing. What's up?" I inquired.

"I want to come to your place to buy fish, bro," he replied.

"Ah, it's better to do it tomorrow. I'm fishing with my friend right now," I continued.

"Alright, then," he replied, ending the chat.

I knew that the person asking about my location was one of my regular buyers who had frequently purchased a considerable quantity of fish from me. Every time he buys fish, he usually purchases between eight to twenty fish in a single transaction. Although it falls into the category of a relatively low price, it doesn't bother me because "It's better to make a small profit every day than a large profit that doesn't come every day." That's one of my principles to survive in the current fish price decline era, which started about a year ago. This phenomenon is something I've experienced several times, and it doesn't surprise me at all. Since I've faced such challenges before, I've been prepared for months to maintain my presence in the fishery industry.

Returning to my activity with my friend Riko, he and I immediately moved to another side of the reservoir. One, two, three, and countless throws later, we still didn't manage to catch any fish. In the silence, boredom crept in, prompting me to open my phone and check Facebook. It turns out that right after I opened the Facebook app on my phone, I saw someone selling the fish we were trying to catch today. Without wasting time, I quickly added the seller's phone number to my contacts.

"Excuse me, are you the person selling Red-Finned Tawes?"
I asked the fish seller.

In less than three minutes, the fish seller promptly responded to my message.

"Yes, I am selling Red-Finned Tawes. My prices range from five thousand to twenty thousand, and the sizes I have vary from ten centimeters to thirty centimeters," the seller replied to me.

"Can you send me the location? I will come there directly to buy it," I replied to inquire about the location.

"Here is my location. I'll be waiting for your arrival," the seller replied.

Without much thought, Riko and I packed up our fishing gear. Once everything was ready, we hurried to the location provided by the fish seller. I was eager to go there because I was happy to find fish at a relatively low price with a decent size. Upon further consideration, the seller's prices seemed more reasonable compared to the current market prices. Therefore, without much hesitation, I wanted to meet the fish seller right away. However, before going to the person offering me the fish, I decided to return my fishing equipment first. I asked Riko if it was okay to return home first to drop off all the fishing gear. I did this to avoid inconvenience later if we had to carry the purchased fish. It would be quite a hassle to transport the fish along with the numerous fishing equipment.

"Riko, let's go to his place right away," I said.

"Is it far from your house?" Riko asked, making sure.

"Well, it's probably ten to fifteen minutes from my house," I replied while checking Google Maps.

"Alright, let's go straight away because it's already late in the day, and I haven't put away the pets I've been drying since this morning," Riko suggested.

After that, Riko and I hurried to buy the fish we had agreed upon with the fish seller.

During the journey, Riko asked me, "At what price did you get this fish?"

"For five thousand," I replied to his question.

"And how big is it?" Riko asked me again.

"Well, maybe three or four fingers. He estimated it to be around that size," I explained to Riko.

"That's still cheap, in my opinion," Riko said.

"After this, which way should we turn?" Riko asked me because I was the one holding the phone to check the GPS.

"After this, turn right, then a few meters ahead, turn left. But then you can use your phone; my phone battery is only one percent left," I told my friend.

"Wait, I think I'm a bit familiar with this area. I often pass by here when I'm going to meet my girlfriend," Riko said to me.

"That's good if you know this area, so we don't need to bother looking at the maps on the phone," I replied.

Not long after our brief conversation, we finally arrived at the house of the person who offered me the fish. I saw that he had several types of fish, but the dominant ones were fast-flowing river fish. Upon closer inspection, I noticed he had an Apollo Shark. It was one of the fish with a straight elongated body, about twenty-five centimeters long. However, the fish looked unhealthy; I could see many scales peeling off, likely due to the presence of an alpha predator in the large aquarium. This alpha fish was called Hampala Macrolepidota, belonging to the genus Hampala and still in the Cyprinidae family, which, as far as I knew, was in the same family as the fish I was going to catch with Riko that afternoon.

"Bro, how much for one Hampala fish?" I asked the fish seller.

"I sell them starting from the lowest price at eight thousand up to the most expensive one at a hundred and fifty thousand," the seller replied.

"Sorry, I thought the fish you offered were bigger than this. If you said the size was three to four fingers, it should be larger than this," I said.

"Because, in my opinion, this fish is still around two and a half of my fingers. Did you include the upper fin in your calculation?" I continued with my question to him.

"Yeah, I also included the upper fin in the calculation. Is there a rule against doing that?" the seller responded and asked me.

"There should be no rule against it. As far as I know, measuring the size of the fish should use a standard, whether it's a ruler, a gas lighter, or anything else. You measure only the body or body only," I explained to him.

"Well, I just found out that measuring fish should only be done on the body. Thank you for the information," replied the fish seller.

"Will you still buy it then?" he continued asking for my decision.

"Of course, I will still take it. It's not possible for me, who has traveled quite far, to return home empty-handed," I said with a slightly playful tone.

"Okay, feel free to choose which ones you want to buy," the fish seller said to me.

"It's up to you, bro. For me, the sizes are the same. Can I buy two of your Masheer fish for twenty-five thousand for both?" I answered while asking him.

"You're not supposed to, but because I don't have change for your money, it's okay. Just take the two fish at the price you mentioned earlier," the fish seller replied, indicating that he agreed with the offer I made earlier.

"Okay, just wrap the fish. Moreover, it's already late, and I feel sorry for my friend here because his house is quite far from this place," I said to the fish seller.

Without much time passing, the fish I had chosen were finally put into plastic bags by the fish seller.

"Here, I'll give you an extra fish as a bonus since you bought in a large quantity," the seller said to me.

"Wow, thank you very much for the bonus fish you gave me," I said happily.

After all the transactions were completed, I immediately asked Riko to start his motorcycle and head home first because I was concerned about the fish. If they weren't taken out of the plastic bag soon, they might run out of oxygen and end up feeling lethargic, slowly dying due to oxygen depletion.

Unbeknownst to us, twenty minutes had passed, and Riko and I arrived at my house. Without hesitation, I opened the top of the plastic bag to release the fish I had just bought twenty minutes ago into my aquarium on the front porch of my house.

"After this, where are you going?" Riko asked me.

"If there's nothing else, I'll head home to secure my pet birds."

"Moreover, it's getting a bit cloudy now, I think it's going to rain soon."

"Alright, it's fine if you want to go home soon," I replied.

"Before you go, here's some money to cover your motorcycle's gas expenses."

"It's not good to ask someone for help with transportation and not reciprocate, right?"

"Hahaha, your words are true. Thanks for the money to cover my fuel cost," he replied with laughter on his face.

"If you want to go fishing again, let's choose a different place next time. I'm still annoyed by the reckless behavior of those kids playing in the middle of the swift-flowing river," he said with a visible hint of irritation on his face.

"Alright, next time if I have the time and budget," I said.

"Okay, I'll go home now," Riko replied and quickly left my house.

It was already late afternoon, and I hadn't taken a shower yet. I immediately remembered my responsibility for my final project, which is the main requirement for me to graduate and leave this boring academic world.

With a bit of concern lingering in my mind, I hurriedly boiled water in a considerable amount for my bath and got soaking in the large bucket in my bathroom. I filled the pot I was going to use to boil water, and I didn't forget to add a little salt to the water. I don't know the benefits, but every time I bathed with boiled water mixed with salt, it felt different. I felt fresher than usual.

I placed the pot with the salted water on my kitchen stove and lit it with a high flame so that the water in the pot would boil quickly. Usually, while waiting for the water to boil, I would open my phone and play a game. Thinking that I'd better play a game to avoid getting bored while waiting, I opened my phone and started playing the game. Finally, after fifteen minutes, I played the game, the water I was going to use for my bath had boiled. I quickly lifted and transferred the water from the pot to the bucket I had prepared in the bathroom.

"Ouch," I exclaimed because my foot got into the hot water.

But without much thought, I ignored it because the heat sensation quickly passed, unlike the pain in my foot caused by an incident a few days ago.

I have everything ready, from clothes, pants, soap, shampoo, face wash, and even the tools to shave my quite thick mustache, which often causes an itching sensation on the upper

part of my lip. I take off my clothes and pants, then immerse myself in the hot water that I previously boiled until it reached the boiling point. I also mix it with normal-temperature water because I can't soak in water that is still too hot. After all, I am still normal, and my skin cannot withstand the water of this high temperature.

I slowly immerse my foot, knowing it will be painful because the wound on my foot is still open and oozing pus, although not much, but it's quite disgusting if seen directly. After my foot is in, I immerse my abdomen, and then I soak both of my palms. Once I'm fully immersed, I drift back into my thoughts.

"Can I complete my final project in such a short time?" I ask myself.

"I feel uncertain about my abilities."

"I feel weak and lost."

"I feel like the path I chose is wrong."

"Can I be happy if I don't complete my studies?"

"And will my parents be proud of me?"

"Or will they discard me and consider me a disgrace to the family?"

Questions that are always the same and always arise every time I was drifting into thoughts. I often have these, questions that make me doubt the decisions I've made, questions that make me afraid of my future. On one hand, I want to make my parents proud and improve my family's economic situation, but on the other hand, I realize that I am so weak even in facing my final project with such a limited time frame. I was confused, scared, disappointed, and felt a need to resign. But what I fear most is making my parents disappointed, especially my father, who has funded most of my education. Although I know that he seems indifferent, I am very sure in his heart he's starting to feel tired.

Once upon a time, a few years ago—I forget exactly when—I helped him with a task that required a lot of energy. I know that

as my father gets older, he has less and less energy. In the deepest recesses of my mind, I want to make him smile with pride at my presence in this world, because at the same time, I see every drop of sweat soaking his face. His cheeks, which already have wrinkles that can no longer be concealed, are glistening with the sweat dripping from the top of his head down to his face, showing that his age is no longer young. I make sure to finish my father's work quickly so that his energy and sweat won't be wasted. I am very aware that the sweat my father sheds every day during his work is the sweat shed to support and educate his children to the highest level he can.

Unaware that my daydreaming during my soak took quite a long time, I didn't notice that the water I used for soaking no longer felt as hot as when I initially poured it. I quickly pour shampoo on my head, rub every part of my head, and then leave the task of rubbing my head and replacing it with scrubbing every inch of my body using the bar soap available in my bathroom. After finishing these two activities of scrubbing my body with soap and rubbing my head with shampoo, I rinse both with warm water that is no longer too hot from my bathroom bucket.

It's quite strange for an adult man who is over twenty years old, quite strange indeed, where he has to bathe using hot water and always soak in a bucket like a seven to ten-year-old child. This habit has existed and formed unintentionally since I was a child. Sometimes, I also want to get rid of it, but my body isn't quite up to it if I have to endure the cold from the water that has been stored in the bucket beforehand.

Next, I pour a little toothpaste on my toothbrush to brush my teeth, which have felt strange since earlier in the evening. I brush left and right, up and down, and I also brush my tongue so that the breath I exhale doesn't smell weird to my future conversation partner. After my mouth is clean, I immediately pour facial cleanser on my fingertip. I don't need much since a small amount of facial cleanser can produce enough foam to cleanse my face. I massage my facial skin, and unintentionally, the injured part under my chin is touched by my facial cleanser. It feels a bit

stinging, but it doesn't matter to me. I rinse my face with the remaining water in my bathroom bucket, then quickly put on the towel that is available behind the bathroom door. I dry every inch of my body, from the tip of my hair to the tip of my toes. Also, when passing through the wounded area, I reduce the pressure slightly while drying it.

I put on my clothes again, including the ones I had prepared before entering the bathroom for my usual shower. After everything is done, I leave my bathroom. Glancing at the wall clock, it shows twenty past seven, which means I spent more than an hour bathing this evening. Usually, I only spend between twenty to thirty minutes soaking and showering, or maybe I just spend a long time daydreaming and contemplating my future on what if I don't complete my final project. That's why I directly go up to my room and start opening my laptop to work on my final project. However, I again feel anxiety, worry, confusion, and indecisive within myself. I truly don't know where to start and what things I should write as a masterpiece for my final project that will determine my graduation fate. In the end, I ended up opening Google and watching YouTube, even though I still have a significant responsibility to promptly complete my education.

I am truly aware of, how foolish I am. Instead of utilizing this limited time, I relaxed and acted as if nothing significant would hurt the feelings of my parents. While I'm engrossed in watching YouTube on my laptop, my phone suddenly rings. Quickly, I check if the notification is important or not.

"Ach, it turns out it's just a useless notification from Facebook."

"I thought there would be an important notification from someone."

I continue watching a YouTube video where someone showcases their activity of fishing an invasive species. This fish is still related to the tilapia fish that is commonly consumed by the people in Indonesia, even though tilapia itself is not native to Indonesian waters. The fish I'm referring to as an invasive species is the Red

Devil cichlid. It belongs to the Cichlidae family, related to tilapia and flowerhorn fish that can be kept as aquarium pets. Red Devil cichlids are considered pests that can disrupt the ecosystem and the balance of aquatic biota, especially for juvenile fish that haven't grown to adult size yet.

Red Devil juvenile fish often prey on other juvenile fish, making them a prime target for hunters. Many YouTubers and anglers hunt these fish, despite having less meat compared to tilapia. However, Red Devil cichlids have a higher protein content. Coupled with the thrilling sensation during fishing, it's no wonder these fish are sought after and eradicated by many anglers in Indonesia. Before I finished watching the video I selected, Nopal sent me a message saying he could meet and go out with me tonight earlier than what he mentioned in our earlier chat.

"I'll be at your house in ten minutes," he said in a chat message.

"Where are we going?"

"I haven't had dinner yet, that's why I let you know earlier."

"Is all your business done, already?" I asked. "You said you would come around nine or ten at night."

"Not really, but I feel tired today," he replied. "I received a lot of orders from students to buy various things, be it food or anything else. I'll get ready before coming to your house," Nopal said, and he didn't send any more messages afterward.

I continued to finish watching the video I had selected earlier. I did ask myself whether I could learn anything from just watching videos like this. I pondered, asking myself such a trivial question, knowing that any knowledge gained from watching videos would differ significantly from the facts and practical experience gained in the field. Nevertheless, after a few minutes, Nopal promptly sent me a chat message.

"Come out, I'm already downstairs."

"Okay, sure. Wait for me to put on my jacket."

"Okay."

That's how it goes when Nopal and I exchange chat messages—short, concise, and clear. For us, there's no need for unnecessary details that waste valuable time.

After putting on my jacket, I went down to meet him on my porch. It turned out he was waiting for me on his motorcycle. Coincidentally, my father arrived on his motorcycle. I wasn't sure where he came from.

"Where are you going with Nopal?" my father asked me.

"Just going out to find something to eat and chat."

"Okay, but don't come home too late," my father advised.

"Do you have money?" he inquired.

I replied, "Yes, but not much."

Unexpectedly, my father gave me some extra money. "Take this for you to buy drinks and dinner. Don't forget to get Nopal something to drink."

"Okay, Dad," I responded. Then my father went back inside the house.

"Well, that's some extra money," Nopal remarked.

"Yeah, it's quite rare for my dad to give me money unless I ask for it."

"Come on, let's go to our usual spot," I suggested.

Nopal quickly started his dusty motorcycle, indicating that it hadn't been washed in a while. It didn't take us long to reach our favorite spot, as it was only about five hundred meters from my house.

The spacious café could accommodate around thirty to fifty people, with red-themed decor and wooden tables and chairs for customers to spend their time chatting or simply having a meal

before leaving the place. After Nopal lowered the kickstand of his motorcycle, we headed to the cashier to order something that would accompany us tonight as we chatted and spent time, time that we should have used to finish our respective final projects.

"I'll have a chocolate ice blend with extra sugar, and please don't put too much ice."

"What do you want?" I asked my friend.

"I'll have chicken fried rice and iced tea to drink."

Hearing that he was going to eat, I quickly added another order for myself.

"I'll add an omelet of rice with canned sardines."

"Is that all for the orders?" the cafe employee asked us to make sure our orders were complete.

"Yes, that's all," I replied.

I went straight to choose a seat for us.

"How about over there?" Nopal spoke instantly.

"Okay, that's fine with me."

We headed to the table we had chosen. I placed my bag and immediately took out my phone from my bag. I also took out my phone charger to charge my phone battery. As I plugged my charger into the electrical outlet, Nopal suddenly began to speak as if initiating a conversation for the night.

"I was very tired with my uncle this morning until afternoon."

"What was your uncle doing today?" I asked in surprise.

"So, here's the thing. My uncle asked me to order a stone material for him to build an inn."

"And then?" I asked.

"Well, the stones I ordered have arrived at the place where the inn is supposed to be built. But the stones I ordered are the wrong size compared to what my uncle asked for. Even though I clearly stated the size of the stones I ordered to the building supply store. But the unfortunate part is, I started to realize that the size of the stones was wrong when the stones were almost unloaded by the workers from the building supply store. So, because I felt sorry for these workers, I ended up helping them to stack the stones back onto the open-bed truck."

"Hahahaha, that was careless, why would you make a mistake in measurements and only realize it when almost all the cargo is unloaded from the car?" I said mockingly, accompanied by a little laughter.

"I didn't want to help, but out of pity and since that person had been unloading a significant amount of stones for almost an hour, I finally took the initiative to assist. If there's a measurement error, my uncle will surely be angry with me. Even though if only he knew it wasn't my fault, he would still be mad at me for not checking it before unloading the cargo from the car."

"Unfortunate for my friend", I remarked.

I've seen him experience such unfortunate incidents quite often. Sometimes I feel sorry for him, but sometimes I just laugh because there's always something comical happening to him.

The conversation with Nopal didn't take long, and suddenly our orders had arrived and were ready to be enjoyed by both of us. I savored the food provided by the chef in this restaurant eagerly. But before that, I washed my hands at the sink, making sure to use the available liquid soap. After drying my hands with the tissue on our dining table, I proceeded to pray before eating. I'm not a religious person, but it would be a big mistake not to involve God in every aspect of our lives.

After finishing the prayer, I sipped my drink, took some rice, and added a small piece of sardine to my spoon. I put it into my mouth, enjoying slowly every flavor mingling in my mouth. Honestly, the taste was enough to make my mouth and tongue smile at the sensation of this dish. But something was missing for me, yet I didn't pay too much attention to it, grateful that I could eat at all. It didn't take long for Nopal and me to finish our meals. There was a bit of my drink left, and I was about to order the same drink again from the staff.

"Do you want to add another drink?" I asked my friend.

"Ah yes, I'll have one more iced mung bean porridge," he replied.

"Are you serious? You just finished a portion of fried rice, and you still want more food? You must be insane; there's something wrong with your stomach."

"Alright, I'll order your request," I said with a surprised tone, and quickly went to order the additional food and drinks we wanted.

Our orders were quickly added to the queue, and just as I sat back in my chair, our orders were served to us.

"Oh, I want to ask something. What's up with your legs, hands, and face?" my friend suddenly asked.

"Hah? Why are you asking all of a sudden?" I replied.

I suspected that he was curious because there were some scars on my face, and perhaps he was suspicious of my limping walk, as if I were trying to endure pain in my leg.

"I just want to know, I also noticed your peculiar way of walking when you were about to order our second round," Nopal answered.

"I knew it, he's probably suspicious of the scars and my walking style," I thought to myself. alright, so here's the

story. I'm confused about where to start because everything is connected when I try to remember it all."

"What's the connection and what have you done to say that all of this is related?" he asked again.

"Okay, so here's the story. I'll start from three days before I got all these injuries. Please listen and pay attention to my story. Don't interrupt whatever you're about to do because I won't repeat it for the second time."

After saying that, I began to narrate how I got all the injuries that now marked my body.

"So, this is the story and how it all began."

BELIEVE

Chapter 2

Two days before the incident that almost took my life and robbed the remaining time of my existence in this world, I woke up today with a lingering sense of sleepiness in my body and eyes. Unaware, as I woke up today, the sun was already high in the sky, and spontaneously, I hurriedly checked my phone, surprised to see what time it was when I woke up. I was shocked when I saw the time on my phone.

"Oh my, it's already eleven in the morning. Oh goodness, how foolish of me," I muttered, grumbling to myself.

I quickly rushed down the stairs of my house towards the bathroom to get ready to go to my campus, as I had made plans with one of my friends. As I was heading toward the bathroom, I crossed paths with my mother, who was about to leave for work.

"Where are you going?" my mother exclaimed with a scolding tone.

"I'm going to the campus," I replied. "Where else do you think I'd be going? Do you think I just wake up, eat, and go play, huh!?"

"If only you know how to talk respectfully when your parents ask you something! You should lower your tone!"

"but you shouldn't just blame me and assume that I'm angry with you, Mom! You can't talk to your child with a gentle tone!"

After that tense conversation, I left my mother who was about to go to work, and grabbed the clothes and shorts I would wear later to go to campus. My relationship with my mother would have been fine if, during my childhood, I received enough love. Unfortunately, I didn't get that, especially when I was still in elementary school. While I was young, I might have been labeled as a lazy and naughty child, but I did all of that just to seek attention

from those around me, something I didn't get from my parents at that time.

Childhood, which should have been enjoyed with laughter and smiles, was filled with bitterness and insults for me. Perhaps, for some people back then, I was just a mischievous child. However, in reality, that wasn't what I wanted; I only desired attention and love, but in a slightly different way from most kids my age.

I vividly remember in my brain's memory when I was still in elementary school, I faced mockery, insults, and even bullying not only from my classmates but also from my teacher at that time. I distinctly remember the day report cards were distributed. I was in a phase where I didn't want to do anything, not even the homework assigned by my teacher. On the day of report card distribution, instead of class rankings being displayed on the classroom blackboard, there was a ranking for the students who were lazy at that time. What's worse, I found myself at the top of that ranking.

There was also a time when I didn't have the opportunity to do the homework assigned by my teacher. What my teacher did then was throw my school bag, containing my study books, into the river in front of our school. And it wasn't just my bag; it was the bags of my classmates who also hadn't done their homework that day. Immediately after my bag and my classmates' bags were thrown into the river, a few friends and I jumped into the river. Although not deep, the current was quite strong, and unfortunately, the river was filled with sharp rocks that could hurt our feet.

Using shoes to retrieve our bags from the river would be inconvenient, and not using any footwear would risk injuring our feet. It was a troublesome choice, but there was no other option.

"Come on, let's quickly grab our bags before they drift further!" shouted one of my childhood friends.

In an instant, several children, including myself, retrieved the bags. Some entered the river, and others waited at the top to catch the

bags thrown from below. Besides this unfortunate incident, there were more bad experiences that both my friends and I went through. These events have influenced my emotional sensitivity to this day as an adult. Many factors have shaped my current personality, but it would be too long to tell them all.

Back to the present, after finishing my shower and preparing some essentials like my laptop, charger, vehicle documents, and a helmet for riding. I was concerned about not wearing a helmet as there was currently strong enforcement of electronic traffic tickets by the police. Yet, without having breakfast, I headed straight to my campus. I started my motorcycle and drove at a fairly fast speed. When I stopped at a traffic light, my phone suddenly beeped, and it was a notification message from my friend Kelvin.

"Hey Awan, where are you? Have you left for campus? "I'm currently in the campus lounge. Please buy me a drink too if you're still on your way," my friend wrote in the chat message.

"I'm still on my way. Yes, after I buy your drink, I'll head straight to the campus lounge."

After replying to that chat message, I quickly rode my motorcycle to my campus. I didn't forget to stop by the convenience store first to buy the drink Kelvin had requested earlier. Unfortunately, I didn't ask him what drink he wanted at the moment. Without much thought, I just grabbed two bottles of soda for myself and my friend.

After obtaining the sodas from their display, I immediately headed to the cashier to pay for them. I figured those drinks were perfect to enjoy on a hot day like this. I gave money to the cashier and then left, intending to go to my campus right away.

Once I arrived at the campus, I immediately parked my motorcycle in the campus parking lot. I hurriedly went to the room Kelvin had informed me about earlier. While on my way there, I crossed paths with some of my junior classmates who were waiting to enter their classrooms. I seemed arrogant and conceited at that

moment because, fundamentally, there was still a high sense of seniority on my campus, where younger students had to respect the older batches. I found such a trivial thing unnecessary on this campus, as all students here shared the same status and goal—to learn, graduate successfully, and proudly achieve their degrees. I believe everyone aims to secure a job with a better salary in the current job market.

Once inside the campus lounge, I immediately looked for my friend. I glanced around, and there he was, in the corner of the room.

"Finally, you made it here. I thought you forgot about our plan last night," he greeted me as I was placing my laptop bag on the table.

"I almost forgot about this. You know, I slept at four in the morning last night. Even though I had determined to sleep before midnight. But it seemed futile because every time I tried to close my eyes, it felt pointless," I replied to Kelvin's question.

A little flashback about how Kelvin and I met and became close friends. During the orientation period for new students at the campus, I didn't know anyone until Kelvin came to sit next to me and asked me.

"Excuse me, do you know where the line for the Language and Arts faculty students is?" he asked at that moment, even though we were in the same faculty.

"I also don't know where we should line up; I'm from the Language and Arts Faculty, too," I said spontaneously, happy to find a new friend from the same faculty.

"Let's ask the committee first where we should line up," I suggested to Kelvin. It seems like he's one of the committee members. I'm judging by his appearance, and he's wearing an identification badge around his neck," I added to my friend, whom I had recently met.

Without further thought, Kelvin and I approached the committee member and asked where the line was for students accepted into the university and choosing the Language and Arts Faculty. It turned out the line was on the right side of the field, as designated by the university. Without hesitation, Kelvin and I headed towards the line. When we arrived, the line was still empty, and not many students were standing there. Shortly after, more students joined the line, and we realized they also chose the Language and Arts Faculty as their preferred faculty.

Shortly after, the opening ceremony to commemorate the acceptance of new students at the university began, including speeches from the university committee chairman and professors. After all the events that day, my new friend and I decided to go home immediately since regular classes hadn't started, and I still had a week to vacation. I hurriedly went home.

"After this, where are you going, Awan?" Kelvin asked me before I left the campus area.

"I'm going straight home. Is there another event? Besides, I still have to take care of my business at home," I said, providing an excuse to leave the campus that day.

"Wow, impressive that you already have your own business at a young age like this; I admire you," Kelvin said. I might want to have my own business someday, too, but I'm confused about what kind of business to pursue."

"Hahaha, think about it first; usually, businesses emerge from your hobbies."

"Alright, then see you in a week during our first class in our college journey."

After that, I left the campus. A bit of information about my friend Kelvin: from his body posture, he is taller than me. It's no wonder; I, with a height of one hundred and seventy centimeters, look like a short piece of wood in front of him. I estimated that Kelvin's height is probably around one hundred and eighty-five, but I didn't ask him for sure before leaving.

He has a cheerful and kind disposition, very open to new people he recently met. Fortunately, I found a friend like him, although currently, our situation is precarious. Our status as students has reached a point where if we don't pass this semester, we will be kicked out of the university, in other words, we will be dropped out.

"Hey Awan, why are you daydreaming?" Kelvin shouted, startling me out of my thoughts.

"Ah, it's nothing, Kelvin. I'm just daydreaming a bit, thinking about my future. Can I finish my tasks in such a short time? The chances are very small, but there should be a way."

My rambling, unnoticed by me, only made me doubt my abilities once again.

"Yes, you can!" Kelvin exclaimed. "You just need to try and have faith in your God. Well, even though our gods are different, there's nothing wrong, right? Besides, even if the chances are small, it doesn't mean they're zero. So, there is still time and a way for us to complete our studies before we get dropped out of this university."

Unconsciously, his words struck a chord. Why do I always consider myself inadequate and lacking the ability to overcome all problems, even though so far I have managed to solve every problem that has come my way?

"Your words have some truth, Kelvin. Okay, let's try to do something today. But I can only accompany you with your final project until three in the afternoon. Is it okay if I have to leave you again later to take care of my fish at home?"

Kelvin responded casually, "No problem. I also intend to go back to my boarding house at three in the afternoon. So we can go home together later. I also didn't bring my vehicle today."

"If that's the case, just come with me, Kelvin. Isn't your boarding house in the same direction as my way home? So,

I don't think it's a problem if you want to hitch a ride with me later in the afternoon."

Casually, he replied, "Alright, I'll hitch a ride later. Hehehe."

Four hours passed quickly. Kelvin and I immediately tidied up our belongings when we were about to go home to our respective places. Once I finished all my campus activities that day, I immediately took Kelvin home.

When I arrived home at exactly four in the afternoon, I had stopped by a fish store in my neighborhood earlier, just to see if there were any fish collections I could add to my home or maybe just to relax by looking at various types of ornamental fish displayed in the store near my house. My eyes instantly noticed a fish that seemed enough to capture my attention this time.

I quickly asked the fish seller, "Ma'am, how much is the price of this fish? And what kind of fish is this?"

"Well, I don't know the type of this fish. I only got three from this fish supplier," she said.

I immediately asked about the price of the fish after hearing a few explanations from the fish seller.

"How much is it, ma'am?"

"It's fifty thousand," and then I tried to negotiate the price.

"Can you make it thirty-five thousand, ma'am?"

"Unfortunately, not yet," she said. "If you want it for forty thousand, it's okay for you since you often buy fish from my place. So, I consider you a loyal customer in my store." Without further thought, after hearing the price she mentioned, I immediately asked her to pack the fish I was going to buy.

"Well, ma'am, just wrap the fish. Fortunately, I agree with the price you offered me."

I don't know the name of this fish, but it seems that this fish is still endemic to Indonesia. However, I'm not familiar with further information about this fish, such as its Latin name, genus, or family, let alone its specific type. After the fish seller finished packing my fish into a reasonably large plastic bag, as the fish I bought this time was over twenty centimeters in size, I was quite happy today. Despite having problems and arguments earlier in the morning, I didn't pay much attention to them. I just considered it part of my daily routine.

Done with my fish, I quickly returned home. Once home, I immediately unwrapped the fish so that it could quickly get a supply of oxygen in my aquarium. I watched the fish move around freely, lost again in my thoughts.

"If only I were a fish, would I be happy?"

"Would I be well cared for by someone if I were sold in a fish store?"

"Would I be valued at a high enough price if I were sold in that fish store?"

"And could I adapt to a new environment if I were bought and placed in a new aquarium, which would initially be unfamiliar to me?"

I know these trivial things shouldn't occupy my thoughts, and I should ignore them because, after thinking about it, they don't bring any benefit to me at all. So why do I always daydream when observing my fish? It's not just once or twice; often, I get lost in my reverie.

While I was engrossed in my daydreams, I was abruptly interrupted by my mother's shout, breaking and disrupting the peace of my thoughts. This is how my mother speaks, always sounding harsh in my ears when I hear her talk,

"What were you doing at the campus just now? If you went to the campus and didn't do anything useful, it would have been better if you stayed home!"

"Come and help with the many household chores!"

Instantly, my emotions flared up upon hearing the harsh words that came out of my mother's mouth.

"Do you think I'm not tired?"

"Is there something wrong with my going to campus? If you must know, I went to search for reference sources. Why do you consider it wrong in your eyes."

"Anyway, who has been forcing me to go to college all this time?"

"From the very beginning, since I graduated from high school, I have never asked you or Dad to finance my college. I know my intellectual capacity. Even before I completed my internship, the manager at the place I interned offered me a job there!"

"But what have I gotten now? Only deep pressure from you. In the past, during my childhood, where was your role as a parent, as my mother?"

"Even from the beginning, you could only demand me to be a perfect child in your eyes. Do you think you have become a perfect parent for me?"

"Before you demand something from someone, look at yourself first. Are you worthy or not?"

"You, haven't given me the attention that other children receive. You only give me pressure!"

"I remember when I accidentally spilled a glass of tea. It didn't break, but what did you do at that time? Haaaah!"

"You just scolded me in public. Is that something a mother should do?"

"Similarly, Dad, what did he do at that time?"

"He just stayed silent and turned his face away as if he didn't want to defend or calm me down!"

"If there wasn't a grandmother at that time, to whom should I turn for shelter?"

Immediately after stating those facts and expressing the pressure I felt, I went upstairs. Climbing each step and entering my room, the only space where I could feel safe and comfortable, even if I was alone in that room. I sat silently on my bed, contemplating my mother's feelings after I scolded and shouted at her with such a harsh tone. However, in reality, that's what I've been feeling all along—only pressure from both of my parents. Once, I wanted desperately to leave home. There were even thoughts of suicide, but I knew their reaction would be the same. I believed they wouldn't feel a loss even if I died right in front of them. Yet, I always remembered why I was born into this world. I always believed and harbored a great curiosity about where God promised happiness for me. This belief kept me enduring every problem that constantly struck me, like waves regularly hitting every grain of sand on the wide beach, forming a vast expanse of sand along the shore.

Unknowingly, I dozed off into my sleep shortly after placing my bag and lying down on my bed. It was unclear what I dreamt about, as I hadn't had clear dreams for a long time. Even if it's just about seagulls flying freely on the beach or dreaming of a vast meadow with a majestic apple tree standing in the middle.

I never expected to sleep so soundly during that twilight moment. Unconsciously, I woke up abruptly with extraordinary spontaneity. I tried to check the time because, before looking at my phone, I noticed the sky, which had previously emitted an orange hue like the skin of a refreshing and sweet orange. However, as I woke up, the sky had changed to night, indicating that it was time for the moon to radiate its bright light that evening.

I checked the time, and it was already 7:00 PM. I sat in silent contemplation, not knowing what to do. My body felt itchy from the sweat flowing profusely. I wanted to take a shower right away, but I felt very lazy and reluctant to get out of bed. Unbeknownst to me, a chat message arrived on my phone:

"Tomorrow I want to go to the swamp; do you want to join?"
It turned out the message was from Riko.

"Who else is coming?" I asked.

"You, me, Opang, and also Yahya, and one more friend whose name I forgot," replied Riko.

"What time are we leaving?" I inquired.

"As usual, around nine or ten, so that it's not too hot when we arrive at our destination."

I hesitated without knowing what to do. My body felt very itchy due to the sweat flowing profusely from it. I wanted to take a shower at that very moment, but I felt very lazy and reluctant to leave my bed.

Without realizing it, Opang, a person I consider a problem, was inviting me to join them tomorrow. Despite my reluctance, Riko insisted that Opang had just received his salary and would cover all our expenses for the fishing trip. Reluctantly, I agreed to join them. After I replied to Riko's message, he didn't respond anymore. He might be busy playing games on his phone. I wasn't excited about the fishing trip tomorrow because of Opang, who I felt was a burden to Riko and the others. Opang, my acquaintance, is significantly younger than me, at eighteen years old, while I am almost a quarter of a century old. His stature is short and small for someone his age, possibly due to genetic factors, stunting, or malnutrition during his childhood.

With straight hair, a slender figure, and hints of hair dye adorning various parts of his head, Opang gave me an odd impression. Despite being a university student accustomed to seeing people with various hair colors, I couldn't help feeling that Opang's choice was peculiar. It's worth noting that Opang had decided to dye his hair blonde. Perhaps this peculiarity was due to the beliefs of the people around my neighborhood, who considered hair coloring as something strange and associated it with mischievous and unruly behavior in society. Additionally, Opang's facial features didn't quite match his new hair color. I thought to

myself, "You're a resident; why adopt a Western appearance?" His small stature, incompatible facial features, unconventional hair color, and a few other factors made me reluctant to go on a fishing trip with him. One significant factor was learning that he only completed primary school. Not intend to belittle him, but we undoubtedly had vastly different mindsets. His environment also encouraged external behaviors, as he lived among people who enjoyed consuming alcoholic beverages and engaging in gambling.

Once, Riko invited me to that environment, not for leisure but to retrieve Riko's fishing tackle box. I was shocked and almost facepalmed at the degraded living conditions. The second factor was Opang's lack of paternal affection. I wasn't sure where his father had gone, but rumors circulated that his father left when Opang was seven. The reason behind his father's departure at that time remains unknown. Growing up without the constraints of societal norms and rules resulted in Opang developing traits that I found difficult to accept. I wasn't sure if Riko could tolerate such peculiar and annoying behavior. With these thoughts about Opang, I decided to go back to sleep, keeping in mind that tomorrow we would embark on a fishing trip to the swamp. The swamp had its legend; according to tales, it was once a village submerged by a child who, due to myths, was constantly insulted and demeaned for being born with snake scales covering his entire body.

Although I had been to the swamp many times with Riko or sometimes with Nopal, traveling a considerable distance on a motorcycle wasn't an issue for me. However, the prospect of not catching anything during the fishing trip, especially if it required enduring a long journey with Opang, was something I found displeasing. Imagine spending the entire day fishing after traveling a long distance only to come back empty-handed; that would indeed be frustrating, especially if I had to endure the journey with Opang, who I was certain would drain both my energy and patience the next day.

The clock has struck midnight; it's time for me to go to sleep so that I can gather enough energy for the undoubtedly exhausting journey tomorrow. Reflecting on today, I experienced a mix of joy,

anger, and, of course, fatigue. Joy filled my heart when I added a fish, the species of which I was uncertain but brought immense happiness. Anger arose from a heated argument with my mother. Undoubtedly, we won't be speaking to each other for quite some time after this. This is a usual and expected scenario for me. Feeling tired also played a part as I grappled with solving my problems, particularly concerning my studies. I'm uncertain about what steps to take and which path to follow to resolve this issue that seems to have no end in sight.

"That's the beginning of it," I said to Nopal, who was leisurely enjoying his meal.

"What happened next?" Nopal inquired.

"All right, listen closely to my story."

BELIEVE

Chapter 3

One day before the worst incident I've ever experienced in my life. I woke to mark the beginning of a new day, where new things will unfold, and new problems will come with the changing of days. I check the time on my smartphone, and it's already nine in the morning, indicating that I have only one hour left to prepare everything for the fishing trip today, as promised with my friend Riko that we and the others will go fishing together.

I descend the stairs in my house, ready to quickly prepare the supplies for my journey today. I light up the stove in my kitchen and set up the frying pan to prepare the lunch I'll bring. Just a simple menu today – fried eggs, a few pieces of nuggets, and fried green onions as a complement to my lunch. While I'm frying my lunch, I gaze at the eggs on the pan, observing how they transform into delicious sunny-side-up eggs that will be delightful with a warm serving of rice. I imagine that if I were one of those eggs, and if I were not seasoned with flavorful spices, I would be as bland as a human without confidence and self-doubt.

Done with the egg-frying routine accompanied by my usual daydreaming, I clean up the kitchen utensils I've used, wash every side of my frying pan, and arrange the spices back to their places. Time to put all the lunch items into the lunchbox. I take rice from my rice cooker, making sure to take a sufficient amount since I know I won't be satisfied with a small portion, especially when I've prepared quite a substantial lunch. I arrange everything neatly to make it look appetizing, even though it will all end up in my stomach and be digested by the gastric acid later.

Preparing lunch takes almost half an hour, even though I've only fried two eggs, a few pieces of nuggets, and some green onions. With full awareness, I quickly get ready to take a shower since I hadn't bathed the night before, feeling quite sticky due to the dried sweat from the previous night.

I rub and scrub using soap on every inch of my body, pour shampoo onto the palm of my hand, and gently massage it onto my head. I also make sure to thoroughly scrub my hair; I feel very itchy because I didn't shower the night before. Done with the activity of scrubbing my body with soap and massaging my hair with shampoo, I immediately pour water all over my body using a dipper in a sea-blue color. After that, I don't forget to brush my teeth to avoid any unpleasant odor from my mouth later.

After finishing my morning shower, I intend to pick out the clothes I will wear today. I choose a long-sleeved shirt and training pants as its pair. After putting on the clothes, I spray perfume on several parts of my body, including my neck, both palms and also my armpits. All of this is just to make me look and feel fresher than before.

Suddenly, my phone rings. At first, I thought it was just a message notification from Riko, but it turned out to be a call from him.

I answered Riko's phone call, "Hello, how are you? Are you ready yet?"

"In a moment, I'll be ready. Just wait, I want to prepare my fishing gear first."

"It's still a while, roughly. If it's going to take longer, I might as well come to your house first."

"Looks like it will be another ten to fifteen minutes."

"Alright, if that's the case, I'll head to your place."

"Why do you decide to come so early?"

"Everyone is ready to go. The only issue is that Opang didn't bring his vehicle, and my motorcycle can't handle carrying someone else." Unfortunately, I catch a whiff of an unpleasant odor that will bring misfortune when Riko says that.

"All right, let Opang come with me, as long as he's willing to pay for the fuel later. If not, it's better to leave him; no need to invite him along with us."

"Hahaha, good idea. Okay, I'll go there with the others."

"Is Yahya and his friend ready?" I asked about Yahya's whereabouts.

"Yes, he's already at the gas station halfway down the road, waiting there with his friend."

"Okay, just come directly here; I just need to put my fishing gear in."

"Sure, I'm heading to your house right now."

After my recent phone conversation with Riko, I sensed a bad feeling about our journey today. Based on my previous experiences, Opang has always been a burden and a disaster waiting to happen, which could lead to accidents for all of us.

"Well, it's already too late; everything has already happened. Besides, Riko is on his way to my house with Opang," I muttered to myself in my thoughts.

It didn't take long for the two of them to arrive. "Ready yet?!" was a statement and a question that came out of Opang's mouth as soon as he got down from Riko's motorcycle.

"In a moment, I'm checking today's weather to see if it will rain or not."

"No need to check the weather forecast; it definitely won't rain today," Opang said confidently.

I just kept silent and refocused on packing all the equipment, from the fishing rod, reel, a set of hooks I had bought before, floats, and sinkers, to the container we would use to hold the fish later. When everything was ready, and I grabbed my helmet from my room downstairs, I had an unpleasant premonition, but I didn't know what it signified.

"Weird, I feel like something bad is going to happen later," I said to myself, pondering the strange premonition.

I handed all the gear to Opang because he was just riding a pillion on my motorcycle and didn't bring much equipment compared to me.

"Take this backpack containing my fishing tools."

"No, why don't you just put it in the bottom of your bike?" We just met, and he immediately showed his bad traits and behavior.

"Okay, if you're lazy to carry it, but later you have to pay for my fuel bill, not much, just ten thousand, surely that won't burden you at all," I said with a slightly firm tone, intending for Opang to understand and remember what he had to do.

"Yes, I'll pay for your fuel bill later," he said without paying any attention to my words.

Once everything was settled, Riko, Opang, and I started our journey to our fishing spot today. During this journey, I had to give Opang a ride, who I found quite disturbing to my mood, especially during the trip to the gas station where we were going to meet Yahya, who had been waiting there for a while, Opang didn't intend to talk to me at all. I saw him through the side mirror of my motorcycle, being engrossed in his phone as if I didn't exist.

"This guy is completely crazy. How could he be so absorbed in his phone and not even bother to talk to me?" A sentence that made my heart feel irritated.

During the hot and tiring journey, it was pointless for me to offer a ride to someone who didn't want to engage in conversation. The intercity roads were bustling with motorbike riders and various types of cars, whether private or office vehicles used for work. Large trucks also added to the mix, sometimes forcing me to use my skills to overtake vehicles. This happened not just once or twice, but several times I found myself between the right and left

sides of two trucks. If I hadn't quickly accelerated my bike, I wouldn't have managed to overtake these two trucks. Without much thought, I immediately twisted the throttle of my motorcycle.

Regardless of the moments and actions of overtaking numerous vehicles during my journey to meet Yahya, eventually, I and the others arrived at the location Yahya had informed us about earlier.

Riko initiated the conversation, "What bait are we using later?" he asked Yahya.

"Anything available; we can buy it at the nearest store there," replied Yahya.

"Alright then," Riko said, concluding the brief conversation with Yahya.

"Wait, I need to go to the toilet first," suddenly I glanced back, and apparently, it was Opang who was talking.

"Alright, hurry up, it's already very hot," Riko responded, indicating that we shouldn't spend too much time on the journey.

As far as I remember, we were not even halfway through our journey to reach our fishing spot today. While waiting for the tiny Opang to finish his business, I observed several clouds above me. These clouds weren't signaling rain, but I was fascinated by the various shapes and sunlight reflections attached to them.

Imagining again, if only I were an eagle, free to soar as high as possible without any hindrance, where I could feel the texture of the clouds resembling sweet cotton candy. I really wished I could experience freedom above the clouds, merging with the sky and looking far below, witnessing every human activity that seemed so boring to me. People chase worldly demands without considering what they will become after death.

Glancing at the clouds once more, I imagined with profound meaning what it would be like to dance with the sky as the roof and clouds as the stage, with other birds as the audience. Wouldn't that

be a pleasant fantasy to imagine? Suddenly, the tiny Opang arrived back from the restroom at the gas station.

"Let's go again; I can't wait to go fishing," he said, seemingly without guilt, and immediately jumped onto the back seat of my motorcycle.

"The one making it slow is you; we waited outside for almost ten minutes. What were you doing in there?" Riko said with a flushed face due to the hot weather, even though the clock hadn't struck noon yet. However, the temperature and the sun today felt extremely hot.

"I took the opportunity to use the bathroom, hehehe," Opang said with a hint of humor, without a trace of guilt for making his friends wait outside in the heat.

"Let's just go," I said, rather than wasting precious time without any meaningful movement.

"Alright, let's go; it's already very hot," Yahya responded, and instantly, we all started our motorcycles again.

Unnoticed, the forty-minute journey we undertook yielded results. We finally arrived at our fishing destination. But before we actually reached the fishing spot, we took a moment to stop and buy bait for today's fishing.

Upon arriving at the fishing store near the swampy area, I immediately bought shrimp for fifteen thousand, and with enthusiasm, Riko added another five thousand to buy shrimp. It turned out that Yahya also wanted to buy shrimp, although he only added five thousand as well. Still, it was more than enough because Yahya had also bought other bait, in the form of aquatic moss, usually used for fishing tilapia.

I diverted my gaze and gave a sarcastic look to Opang because he did not contribute any money to buy shrimp. Instead, he bought five cigarettes for himself, even though just moments before we started the journey, he asked Riko for two cigarettes, both of which had been smoked without leaving any remainder.

I didn't pay too much attention to Opang's decision, which I considered foolish. After all the bait was packed in plastic bags, we immediately headed to the place where we could safely park our vehicles. We parked our motorcycles at the boat rental place, which was still within the local villagers' area. I also paid a boat rental fee of ten thousand for one boat. I willingly paid for it because Riko and I were paired, Yahya was paired with his friend, and Opang only rented for himself.

We chose the rowboat that we would use shortly after completing the boat rental payment transaction with the boat owner, who was a local resident of this swampy village. In a hurry, Riko and I headed to the boat we would be using, but before that, we all agreed to share the bait that we should use, considering the money we had previously spent on buying shrimp. Yahya with his five thousand shares, and wouldn't it be fair if Riko and I brought most of this shrimp bait since we were the ones who spent the most on buying it? However, it was Opang who brought the most significant portion, simply because we used his bucket for a while. Irritated, I immediately took out the bucket I had prepared earlier.

"Come here, bring all the shrimp. You didn't contribute any money to buy shrimp, but you're carrying the largest portion," I said with an annoyed tone.

"Come, let me buy the shrimp for ten thousand," Opang replied firmly to my statement. Then Yahya intervened in our debate, "Just give Opang some shrimp."

Reluctantly, I shared the shrimp that should have been rightfully mine and Riko's. After giving some of the shrimp that I should have brought with Riko, the two of us boarded the sampan boat we had chosen. It was my job to paddle this small boat since Riko couldn't and didn't understand how to row a boat. Although Riko and I had often traveled with this sampan boat in this place, Riko never wanted to learn how to row this small boat. Once, I playfully asked him why he didn't want to learn to row.

"Why don't you want to learn to row? It's very easy; all you need to do is paddle on the right and left sides to keep the boat straight," I said.

"I don't want to. I'm afraid the boat will overturn if I paddle, and besides, I don't know how deep this swamp is," that was the main reason why he refused to take over the helm of the small boat we were currently riding.

I paddled the small boat towards a place where I felt many fish gathered. The spot I aimed for was adjacent to the fish cages owned by residents. There were bamboo poles used as supports for the fish cages, and under these support poles were many fish that we intended to catch today.

Our target for today was the red devil fish. As I explained earlier, this fish is considered a pest that can disrupt the ecosystem of water bodies, whether it be rivers, swamps, or even lakes. For bait, we used shrimp, which is the natural food of this fish.

When Riko and I arrived at the point where I believed there were many of our target fish, I immediately tied the rope on our boat to the edge of the fish cage belonging to the residents. I skillfully tied the knot using a knot I had learned back when I was in high school. In the past, I was an active member of the scout organization, so simple tasks like knotting ropes were easy for me.

Similarly, Riko prepared and assembled the fishing equipment we were going to use. At the same time, after I took out my fishing gear, Opang appeared seemingly out of nowhere.

"I need the stoppers," he said with a slightly demanding tone.

In my mind, I thought, "Does this person have no shame at all? After arguing with me about the shrimp earlier, he comes here asking for my equipment?"

"Oh, he has no shame at all," I muttered to myself. "I only brought a few, there are only 6 left, and it's just enough for me and Riko to use," I replied to him.

In reality, I still had a stock of stoppers in a small bag hanging around my neck. If I didn't do this, I was sure he would use up all my equipment. After Opang left us two who were still busy assembling our fishing rods, I took out the stock of stoppers from my bag.

"You said you only have six stoppers?" Riko asked me.

"Not really, there's one more package in my bag. I just keep it just in case we need it later."

"Besides, he can only ask for equipment from us, even though I bought it with money. He claimed to work and said he would cover our travel expenses yesterday, but what's the proof? He didn't bring anything and instead asked for bait from us."

"What you're saying is true. I also feel a bit lazy having him with us, but what can we do? He has already joined us."

"I also don't know why he refused to spend money to buy some shrimp earlier," Riko explained to me.

"Well, let's finish assembling his fishing rod first. The sooner we finish, the sooner we can start fishing," I suggested to Riko.

After we finished assembling the fishing rods, we immediately tested them in the water at this spot. As far as I remember, the depth at this point was between half a meter and one meter. However, I was not sure about the current conditions of the swamp and this spot today, as it had been a long time since I went fishing in this swamp.

The equipment and preparations were completed perfectly. Without further delay, Riko and I started fishing. It didn't take long for the first fish to bite; Riko opened the scoring by successfully raising an orange Sunkist-colored red devil fish onto the boat. Unconsciously, my float sank, indicating that my bait was taken by a fish. I immediately gave a tug to prevent the fish from escaping from my hook. To my surprise, the energy of this fish was quite

substantial, evident from the sensation of the pull and resistance it provided. I genuinely enjoyed the excitement of pulling and resisting this fish. When the fish's energy seemed to be depleted, I casually reeled in my fishing line. As I saw the fish I caught, it turned out to be not a red devil but a fish closely related to it, called Vieja.

Still belonging to the same family as the red devil and tilapia, Vieja is a genus of this fish with several subspecies. After examining the patterns on its head and the tail's rear, I concluded that this fish belonged to the Vieja Guttalata subspecies. With patterns resembling its relative, the Louhan fish, this Vieja fish had a diamond-like pattern on its body extending to the base of its tail.

I immediately put the Vieja fish into the net, which I had previously prepared and kept in my fishing gear bag. It's quite rare to catch a Vieja fish, especially of this size, comparable to an adult's hand.

After putting the fish into the net, I re-baited my hook with shrimp and cast it back to the spot where I had previously caught the Vieja fish. I observed seriously, but after a while, there was no bite on my fishing line. I started to feel a bit bored with my current situation, so I tried to strike up a conversation with Riko, who seemed to have caught quite a few red devil fish but appeared slightly disappointed with their sizes.

"Hey, Riko," I called out to him.

"What's up?" he responded.

"Do you think I can finish my current thesis within less than two weeks?"

"Do you think you can accomplish that without any obstacles?"

There was a brief silence as I saw my friend contemplating. Eventually, he began to answer my earlier question.

"You could do it. You just need motivation and encouragement from your parents."

"But you know very well what my relationship with my mother is like especially my father, who is very indifferent towards me."

"You should be a little grateful for having both of your parents, unlike me, who no longer has a mother. But considering what you're asking and what you've been through, especially your relationship with your parents, I can only suggest that you push yourself harder. You should go beyond the limits within yourself. And aren't those limits created by ourselves, not God or anyone else, but ourselves."

I was momentarily silent, pondering my friend's words. It's not usual for him to be so wise, and it's the first time I've heard such wise words coming from him.

I gazed at the vast expanse of water that seemed endless, contemplating my friend's words. I started to doubt my abilities even more. I really want to break my limits, but at the same time, I'm afraid of what might happen in the future.

"Never mind, don't dwell on it too much. I'm sure you can do it, even a thousand percent sure that you can overcome it," he said, encouraging me, who was lost in my thoughts on this small boat.

"I've known you for quite a long time. I've seen you unwilling to give up and always breaking your limits when we were searching for fish in the fields at night. You willingly let your hands get scratched by the foundation stones of the rice fields, which you pried open bare-handed. Doesn't that also mean breaking your own limits?"

His words penetrated deep into my heart, making me more certain that I could do it on my own, with or without someone to encourage me. Unconsciously, I drifted into my thoughts, and my fishing rod moved downward, indicating that a fish had bitten the bait. Reacting quickly, I jerked my fishing gear again, enjoying the sensation of the fish pulling. Once the fish appeared on the surface,

I was quite surprised to find the same type of fish as before, but slightly smaller than the previous Vieja. Could they be a pair, or perhaps they formed a group under the support poles of this fish cage?

After successfully lifting it onto our small boat, I carefully removed the firmly embedded hook from the fish's lip. Though it didn't bleed, it could cause a serious injury if mishandled.

I re-baited my hook with shrimp, casting it into the same spot as before. However, this time, I felt no enthusiasm. Was it because I subconsciously considered Riko's earlier words, or maybe I was still convincing myself that I could overcome all of this and break my own limits? I couldn't be sure what I was experiencing.

"Don't think too much about what I said. I don't know what I just told you," he said spontaneously, right after I placed my fishing rod on my thigh.

"But your words are true. I am still swaying in the fact that I doubt myself and my own limits right now. I am still afraid and worried, even though it is not so scary if I dare to take steps to move forward."

"Well, now you know. So why not just break through and shatter all those limits?" my friend said casually, even though he also knew that I always felt lonely if there was no one to accompany me, except for my current friends.

After a long time had passed, and the clock showed four in the afternoon, Opang arrived. He casually passed in front of us, where the area was the most abundant with fish. Instantly, I shouted at him with full emotion.

"Hey, why did you just pass by without saying anything!"

"In front of me, there are plenty of fish with varying sizes, and yet you casually ruin it!"

"How was I supposed to know there were many fish there? Besides, there's no written rule saying you can't pass in front

of others," he said casually as if he had done nothing wrong at all.

"Oh, alright then. After all of this is over, you can just walk home. Do you think you can go back on your own after coming with me?" I yelled, threatening him with consequences he couldn't retaliate against.

"I didn't expect to travel with you either. Moreover, I have many friends. I could easily ask them to give me a ride home later!" Now, it was his turn to challenge me.

"Hah? Friends? Who would want to be friends with someone like you? Someone shameless enough to ask for bait from his friend just because we used your bucket temporarily when buying shrimp earlier," I retorted, unwilling to lose in this debate.

"Let me tell you, no one would willingly be friends with you for a long time. If not out of necessity, those people would never bother to get to know or possibly be friends with you."

"Hah! Fine, we'll see when we go back. I won't be bothered to ride with you at all."

After the heated debate and exchange of words that echoed loudly, I felt like our voices might have reached the nearest houses in this swampy area. An instant silence fell as if there was no commotion at all. Unknown to me, the beautiful evening unfolded. The sun was setting, bringing an end to this afternoon. The warm atmosphere and bright orange colors presented before me were a form of beauty promised by God. Through this setting sun, God revealed the happiness He had promised to me when my spirit was still in my mother's womb – serene, peaceful, and warm. All these feelings enveloped me as I gazed at the brilliantly shining sun on this beautiful evening, signifying the end of our fishing trip.

I packed up and placed the fish I had caught into a square-shaped bucket I had prepared. I transferred the fish from my fishing net into the bucket filled with water, choosing only the larger ones to take home as decorations for the aquarium on my front porch.

Once I finished all the tasks on my boat, I rowed towards the edge of the swamp. There, a small makeshift dock was visible, often used by the locals as a point of embarkation and disembarkation from their boats. I thought of returning my small boat to its original condition before I borrowed it, returning the oars to their owner. Gratefully, I thanked the boat owner for kindly renting it to all of us.

I wanted to conclude the story about today with a happy feeling in my heart, but that all disappeared instantly the moment Opang suddenly approached me. I knew exactly his intention; he wanted to hitch a ride with me on the way back.

"What are you doing? Why are you approaching me?" I asked.

"Isn't it clear that I'm here to go home?" he replied.

"Hah? Didn't you say earlier that you wanted to go home with your friends, who you claimed were numerous? Why not go back with them?... "And why should I give you a ride?"

Suddenly, he fell silent as if under a spell. Reluctantly, I ended up going home with him hitching a ride on my motorcycle. Deep inside, my heart said, "Where is the arrogance and pride you displayed on the boat?"

"You said you wanted to go home with your so-called numerous friends. Where is the proof? Now you're hitching a ride with me. Shameless and faceless, after what you said to me earlier, now you're casually asking for a ride home with me."

Throughout the journey, he didn't open his mouth at all. However, I observed him through the rearview mirror of my motorcycle, and he wasn't holding his phone. Was he contemplating my words from when we were fishing, and he foolishly passed right in front of the spot with the most fish? Regardless of all that, our fishing trip today was quite successful. The estimated weight of the caught fish was likely close to seven kilograms or more. I didn't know for sure,

and I didn't care much about it. What mattered to me was obtaining large fish and those with beautiful patterns carved on their bodies. In the end, I only brought home five fish suitable for my aquarium.

I navigated the journey back, riding my motorcycle with someone annoying and quite testing my patience today. I enjoyed the journey until I reached my home. Opang returned to his house, getting a ride with Riko because their homes were in the same direction, so Riko decided to give him a lift.

Just as I arrived and placed my helmet on the storage cabinet, my phone suddenly rang. I saw a chat notification from a loyal customer who wanted to order a considerable quantity of fish.

"Brother, do you have a stock of *limbata* fish?" he asked in the chat.

"Not yet, I haven't had the chance to go hunting again."

"When will you have the stock again?"

"Maybe the day after tomorrow, I will try to find them for you tomorrow night, and I will also try to look for them elsewhere the next day."

"Alright, can I order forty of them?"

"Of course, you can order as many as you want; I will still find them for you," I replied confidently.

"Okay, I'll order forty then."

"As for the quality, is it free?" I asked.

"Or are you only concerned about the quantity of fish you'll get tomorrow?"

"Quality doesn't matter; the most important thing is I have a lot of stock to sell to the kids around my house," said my customer.

"Alright, I'll try to get them tomorrow night if it's not raining."

"Okay, I'll wait for the news," that was the last chat my customer sent to me.

I didn't expect that fortune would come to me. Instantly, the tiredness I felt after spending the whole day fishing decreased on its own as soon as I received an order for a significant quantity.

That night, when I was about to go out to fulfill an order from my loyal customer, it rained heavily, forcing me to postpone my night hunt. Perhaps God understood the limitations of my physical strength, and by sending rain, He might have intended for me to have a complete rest tonight. Back to the present..., "Wait a minute, I think I understand the story you've been telling. Did the incident happen the next day?" Nopal asked as I casually sipped a cup of warm milk coffee.

"Of course, it wouldn't have happened on the same day," I replied to his question.

"Okay, I understand. So, what happened next?" he asked again.

"This will be the climax of the story, where the most terrifying incident occurred, all by myself, without friends or anyone around. It was purely my effort and determination."

"But wait, I need to go to the bathroom for a moment," I said.

After finishing my bathroom business, I returned to the table and sat in my previous chair. Just as I was about to continue my story, a street musician came to our table, asking for money. I immediately gave him a ten-thousand note from my pants pocket. "Isn't that too much to give him?" Nopal asked skeptically.

"It's nothing to me. Now, let me continue my story." I said.

BELIEVE

Chapter 4

The day when this incident occurred was the most terrifying day of my life. It was terrifying because I went through this incident alone, without a friend by my side when it happened. Once I arrived home and received news that one of my loyal customers wanted to order a large quantity of fish, I eagerly wanted to find them because it was a great opportunity not to be missed.

The next morning, after waking up from a restful night's sleep, I felt exceptionally comfortable due to the physical limits I had reached the previous day after a long and exhausting day of fishing, coupled with the heavy rain that forced us to sleep early. I checked my phone; it was already eight in the morning.

"It seems like I'll go hunting later," I said to myself because I still wanted to be lazy this morning, and, of course, I hadn't taken a bath yet.

I went down the stairs of my house just to feed my fish on the terrace and check the progress of the five fish I obtained from yesterday's fishing. I observed them swimming and adapting well, indicating that they did not suffer any injuries during my journey from the swamp to my house yesterday.

Surprisingly, I already had various types of fish that I had nurtured and maintained in this aquarium. They ranged from fish that inhabited fast-flowing rivers, such as those from the genus *Barbonymus*, to fish from the genus *Barbodes* with the scientific name *Barbodes Binotatus*. This fish has physical characteristics such as an elongated body to optimize its movement against the current, aiding quick responses to predators trying to make it their prey. Another physical characteristic is two black spots on its mid-body and another spot at the base of its tail. With a maximum length of seventeen centimeters, this fish is a suitable option for those who want to keep fish in a tank with the concept of a fast-flowing river.

There is also the commonly called Nilem fish here, scientifically known as *Osteochilus vittatus*. Its physical features include a greenish body color when it reaches adulthood, and red spots all over its belly, making it an attractive choice for a tank-themed around fast-flowing fish. I often find this fish under rapidly flowing water, and its downward-facing mouth indicates that it primarily consumes algae.

Another type of fish I keep can be a suitable choice for those who enjoy maintaining fish in fast-flowing environments, clear water, and a sandy or small rocky bottom. This fish looks stunning, especially when kept in large numbers, as it naturally lives in groups of ten to fifty fish. It feeds on algae as its main diet and considers worms as a supplementary meal. This fish is closely related to fish from the *Barbonymus* family and has various local names, including wader kepek and wader sreteng. Its scientific name is *Barbonymus collingwoodii*. Physical characteristics include a flattened body shape, classifying it as an excellent swimmer with above-average speed compared to other fast-flowing fish. Other physical features include shiny scales when exposed to light reflection, and its tail, as well as upper and lower fins, are yellow, providing a refreshing appearance when observed moving together in a group in our aquarium.

There are still many fish that I nurture, but not all of them do I know their species. Once, someone came to my house wanting to buy worms, and accidentally, they saw a fish with a deep black color in my aquarium.

"How much is this?" asked my customer.

"Why are you suddenly asking about the price of this fish?" I replied, questioning them in return.

"Don't you know? This fish is on the list of protected fish in Indonesian waters. People call it charcoal fish, but some also refer to it as the black shark from the Bengawan Solo River."

"What!? Seriously?" I exclaimed spontaneously, with a tone of surprise and a facial expression as if I couldn't believe what my customer was saying.

"Where did you get this fish?"

"I received it from my sibling when I visited their house in the neighboring city."

"How about I buy this fish for two hundred thousand?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I would ever want to sell this fish. The reason is simple; it was a gift from my sibling. It would be different if I obtained this fish by purchasing it."

"Oh well, then. Is my order ready?" asked the customer.

"Yes, it's ready. I've packed it."

"Alright, then I'll go home now."

"Sure, be careful on the way. Thank you for stopping by to buy worms here."

That was a brief conversation I remember from one of my customers, who revealed the fact that one of the fish in my aquarium was on the protected species list.

Unnoticed, the sun had risen a bit since I went downstairs to check on my fish. I suddenly remembered that two breeding fish hadn't been fed for a few days. I went back to the front room of my upper-floor bedroom, carrying some worms from the ground floor. I chopped and crushed these worms to a size suitable for the mouths of the fish fry. I intended to feed only the fry, but along with that, their parents also joined in consuming the food I served for their offspring. I deliberately did not separate the fry from their parents due to their relatively small size, and they were not yet capable of living independently without the presence of their caretaker.

I glanced around my room filled with these fish. I observed with care the fish I cherished the most, the one that proudly brought home a trophy for its victory in a fish contest two months ago. I

vividly remembered how and where I obtained this fish. I found it accidentally while it was caring for its offspring. I noticed a fry that had gotten under the tree roots. With high enthusiasm and my instinct as a hunter, I looked under the tree roots. It turned out that there was indeed a mother fish quietly residing there. I observed it closely; there was no water flow entering the place where this fish nested. It relied only on a very thin puddle of water. I didn't expect that this fish could nest here. Feeling pity for the fish and with a strong desire to care for it, I immediately caught the fish with a small net that I had brought from home at that time.

After successfully capturing this fish, I brought it home and immediately placed it in a small aquarium specifically for quarantining wild fish that needed to adapt to their new environment within the aquarium. Day by day, I spent time with this fish, observing and studying its characteristics. However, I was instantly reminded of the time when I was bullied by my teacher as a child, and treated poorly, and back then, I didn't understand the meaning behind their actions. I seemed to interpret it as if my teacher hated me just because I didn't do my schoolwork that day.

I manifested that the fish in front of me was myself. If only I had listened and understood what my teacher meant, surely I wouldn't easily lose my direction now. Undoubtedly, if I had understood, I would have become someone extraordinary and proud one day, just like this fish. I now comprehend and understand the purpose of my teacher's actions back then. If I hadn't been lazy, I would surely have become someone to be proud of in the future.

Remembering that, I unconsciously shed tears of regret from my childhood. It was a regret that spontaneously emerged from my heart. However, what's the use of continually regretting the past without looking and planning for my future? Surely, I wouldn't become someone useful in society.

I was startled to hear the sound of a falling bucket, caused by the construction activities happening right in front of my house.

Instantly, I went downstairs to hurry to my bathroom and quickly go to get the ordered fish for my loyal customer.

After a refreshing shower in my bathroom, I immediately grabbed the clothes from my wardrobe. I wore a long-sleeved shirt and training pants, considering that the place I was going to explore today was quite risky and potentially could cause injuries to my body.

I checked my hunting equipment and gear for today, as the place I was going to had challenging terrain. This location was deep into the wilderness and far from the nearest residential area. It was my third time going to this place, which still felt somewhat unfamiliar, and I hadn't fully memorized the terrain and trail from the forest.

I loaded my tools and necessities, including a machete I used for self-defense in case there were unexpected attacks from wild animals in the forest. There was also a large-diameter fish spear, with the span of the diameter reaching thirty centimeters. I chose a fish spear of this size personally because, in my opinion, it was the most ideal size for use in various terrains, from shallow and flowing rivers to muddy puddles that fish used for camouflage.

The most crucial equipment for my journey this time was just the machete and the fish spear. As far as I understood, this terrain only required tools for prying and digging the ground to a certain depth to reach the end of the fish nest hole. I checked the weather for today with a faint smile on my lips.

"It seems like the weather is very clear and supportive."

"I think there won't be any problems today."

I said it casually and foolishly as if forgetting that this month had already entered the beginning of the rainy season.

I grabbed the helmet in my room to leave my residence and quickly headed towards the place where I believed there were still many of those fish. The location had a small river that led directly

to the main river if you followed the flow of this small river, guiding you to continue exploring downstream from this mountain.

During my journey to that place, I sang calmly and casually on the vehicle I was driving quite swiftly on the intercity roads. It could be said that this road was the only fastest route I could take to reach my destination quickly.

In the first ten minutes of riding my motorcycle, I felt my heart pounding irregularly. I wondered if there was a problem with my heart causing it to beat irregularly without any apparent reason. Was it because of sudden anxiety creeping in because I remembered my past, giving me a deep trauma that left a mark, resulting in a lack of trust in my own abilities?.

Without me realizing, my journey had reached halfway, and I decided to take a brief stop at one of the fuel stations to relieve fatigue and refuel my motorcycle. I felt the quietness as I stretched my leg muscles after a long ride at what felt like a fast pace for me.

I resumed my journey after a few moments of stretching and taking a few minutes to sit casually. I rode my vehicle back to the place I intended to visit. However, just before I reached the destination, I suddenly had a bad feeling. My hand started trembling without any clear reason, and a sense of anxiety emerged again from the depths of my mind.

Ignoring this feeling, I continued my journey until just before I arrived at my destination. I saw some people carrying another person's body to be buried.

"Isn't this also a bad sign?" I muttered to myself as I passed the funeral procession at a reduced speed, entering an area close to the village and adjacent to the forest I was about to explore.

"Where are you going, dear, in the middle of the day?" an old lady suddenly spoke from behind, surprising me.

I noticed that the old lady was carrying a sickle, probably used for cutting grass to feed her livestock. Additionally, she had several

firewood logs on her back, secured by a thin cloth. Surprisingly, the thin cloth managed to support several large pieces of firewood. I also noticed some freshly cut grass that she probably intended to use as feed for her animals.

"Oh, Grandma, you startled me. I'm going into the forest and heading to the tributary to catch Channa Limbata, locally known as 'kotes.' That's my plan," I replied to the unexpected question from the old lady.

In that area, Channa Limbata is often referred to as "kotes." There's nothing wrong with the name; it's just a local term used for Channa fish in different regions.

"Be careful. Just yesterday, a child went missing in there," the old lady warned again, speaking softly in her aged voice.

"Really? When did the disappearance happen? Have they found the child?" I inquired.

"Yes, they found the child after three days of being missing. The child got lost in the forest during thick fog, not because of ghosts, but due to the unpredictable weather. Even if we try to predict it by looking at the weather forecasts," she explained further, shedding light on the reasons behind the child's disappearance.

I had known this old lady since my first visit to this place. She had a garden near the stream I intended to visit. The reason she had a garden there was that the soil's nutrient content required for gardening was highest near the stream. The old lady had always been kind to me. Moreover, when she found out that I had finished fishing, she would make me a cup of warm coffee or tea once I emerged from the forest.

I couldn't help but feel a bit sorry for the old lady. She lived alone in a house near the edge of the forest, and while there were a few houses nearby, I felt pity upon learning that she lived alone. Additionally, with her age evident in her stooped posture and her ability to carry firewood from the forest, it was clear that she had done this many times. The wrinkles on her face and the gentle

smile whenever I saw her reminded me of my grandmother, who had passed away a long time ago.

After a brief conversation with the old lady, I prepared to continue my journey. I parked my motorcycle in front of her house and proceeded on foot into the forest. The clear weather accompanied me as I entered the dense wilderness. Bushes on both sides might hide dangers behind them, and towering trees seemed to reach for the sky, each trying to prove that it was the best. The dense bamboo forest awaited me ahead, giving a frightening and eerie impression to those afraid of ghosts or supernatural occurrences. However, such things didn't bother me at all; instead, I feared encountering snakes or other wild animals that could threaten my life.

I entered the thick bamboo forest, accompanied by the sound of bamboo rubbing against each other due to the wind blowing above them. I felt the wind was quite strong that day, enough to make the bamboo sway.

I continued, following the faint trail in the forest. Only the old lady used this path to go in and out of her garden in the middle of the forest. I confidently stepped forward, savoring the serene and peaceful atmosphere of the forest, a stark contrast to the lively and noisy environment of my home.

I enjoyed every step of my journey until I reached my destination. Unnoticed, I finally arrived at the front gate of the old lady's garden. It had been a long time since I had seen this garden. To my surprise, there were many types of vegetables and fruits ready to be harvested—tomatoes, mustard greens, white radishes, eggplants, and cucumbers, all thriving in the old lady's garden.

Continuing my journey, I was about to reach my destination. Besides carrying a machete and a fish scoop, I also brought a small net that I could fit into my bag, just in case I found fish in fast-flowing water.

After half an hour of traveling from the old lady's house, passing through the bamboo forest and her garden, I finally arrived

at my destination. Without wasting time, I immediately began my search for these fish. Before starting, I removed the sandals I was wearing because the terrain could get slippery with mud mixed with water.

Not long into my hunt, I finally caught my first fish—a relatively small one, measuring between eleven and twelve centimeters. I continued my search and spotted another fish darting into a hole. Without hesitation, I swiftly ran towards the entrance of the fish's burrow.

I cautiously inserted my wrist to check the condition of the fish hole—whether it was deep or not. Surprisingly, the hole was deeper than I thought. I had inserted my entire arm up to the elbow, but the end of the hole was blocked. However, the fish that had entered it earlier didn't make contact with my fingertips.

I tried again to see if there was another branch leading to a different part of the hole, and indeed, there was a path upwards. I directed my hand upwards in the hole, feeling the tip of my finger making contact with the elusive fish.

"Ah, there you are!" I exclaimed with enthusiasm, finally discovering where the fish was hiding.

I withdrew my arm and used a handful of soil to quickly cover the entrance of the fish's burrow so it couldn't escape easily. Taking a machete from my bag, I used it to dig through the soil obstructing the space between me and the fish. After almost ten minutes of effort, I successfully grabbed the tail of the fish inside the hole, slowly pulling it out, and finally, I got my second fish of the day.

With my instincts as a hunter, I decided to go upstream following this tributary, as there might be more fish if I followed this small river. Indeed, my assumption was correct. Shortly after walking upstream, I found my prey again. It didn't take long for me to catch a total of fifteen fish.

As I was about to continue my journey, I saw a black bird with glowing red eyes looking at me meaningfully, indicating that

something was about to happen. After encountering the bird, I resumed my journey, heading further uphill, moving away from the initial spot where I started looking for these fish. Delving deeper into the wilderness, I lost track of how far I had entered following this small stream. One by one, I caught the fish I saw and placed them in the plastic bag I had prepared beforehand.

Unbeknownst to me, the sky suddenly turned dark. Just moments ago, it had shown clear weather with no sign of clouds. When I realized the sky was darkening, I tried to hurry back down the path I had taken.

Suddenly, heavy rain started pouring down, accompanied by the sound of thunder rumbling in different directions. My clothes were instantly soaked, and the rain added weight to my body, making movement a bit cumbersome due to the heavier load in my bag, which also absorbed the rain.

The intense raindrops disrupted my vision, and without realizing it, I had deviated far from my original trek. Instead of heading towards the exit of the forest, I found myself going deeper, uncertain of where my feet were taking me.

A sense of anxiety overcame me. "What if I can't get out of this forest? Why didn't I check the weather forecast before coming here?" I scolded myself inwardly. "This is so frustrating! Why do I have to face such a miserable fate!"

As I continued deeper into the forest, I felt the rain easing up a bit compared to earlier. However, something unexpected happened. A nightmare I didn't want to experience—the cold air approached me gently, accompanied by a breeze that casually passed through my skin pores.

"Damn it!" I cursed. "So cold!"

I tried to move my ankle to get out of this annoying forest, but I fell and was shocked by the sudden impact on my body.

"Argh! Damn it! It hurts so much!"

"Why did I have to slip? Damn it!"

I fell again, slipping on the slippery ground I had previously stepped on. Before the rain, the ground didn't feel slippery at all. However, now, my feet were hard to move due to the piercing cold, making it difficult to navigate.

After attempting to stand, I realized there was a wound on the sole of my foot from the previous fall. The wound, caused by the friction between my foot and a sharply edged-stone, was deep enough to cut through my skin.

Blood flowed freely from the sole of my foot, creating a sensation of intense pain. I tried to strengthen myself and mentally endure this situation. As I tried to take a step, I fell again because the tree branch I used for support suddenly broke. Once again, I found myself on the ground, and this time, I didn't notice the cut from a scratch against a tree branch, slowly oozing a significant amount of blood.

Pain, agony, fatigue, and surrender engulfed me simultaneously without giving me the slightest chance. I tried once again to rise with these wounds on my body, attempting to walk with a staggering gait while enduring the pain. However, I fell again, this time tripping over a stone. Fortunately, I fell on an open grassy area.

I lay there, facing the dark sky adorned with black, ominous clouds, accompanied by the cold air penetrating my body. I could only surrender to this situation. I closed my eyes, acknowledging my surroundings. Unconsciously, I lost consciousness and entered my subconscious realm. Suddenly, I saw my entire past—problems, happiness, and sins. It felt like watching a movie, but this film showcased flashbacks of my life until now.

"I want to give up. I've faced too many problems and pressures until now. If I have to die here, I will accept it with an open heart."

"Moreover, why should I continue living? I feel useless throughout my life, especially after seeing everything I've

done. I am increasingly convinced and feel that I was born as a failed human, utterly useless to anyone."

In this subconscious mind, four figures manifested, representing fear, anxiety, and lack of confidence.

"Hahahaha, finally, you're defeated, and you chose to surrender," said the figure of anxiety.

"HAHAHAH, that's right, you've lost this time. The proof is you can't do anything now," laughed the figure of fear.

"You are afraid to face the problems that come to you. You are not worthy of surviving in this world," continued the figure of lack of confidence.

"Indeed, no one will come to help you this time. You are alone in your current situation," echoed the voice of anxiety.

"If only you knew, I could fight all of you and make you all kneel before my abilities," I said confidently.

"What can you prove to us? You are afraid to solve problems, problems that arise because of your own making. You still limit yourself and fear to take a step forward for your future!"

"Exactly, what can be done by someone who doesn't believe in their own abilities? You are no longer worthy to live in this world."

"HAHAHAH, EXACTLY!"

"BETTER OFF DEAD!"

"USELESS!"

"WEAK HUMAN!"

"TRASH!"

They hurled many insults at me. I wanted to confront them all at once, but I was afraid of myself—past traumas, excessive worries, and overwhelming anxiety made me doubt whether I should rise

against them or not. As my subconscious world became colder and darker, a dazzling light suddenly appeared from nowhere. The light spoke loudly behind me, tapping my shoulder.

"You can do it. I believe you can. I'm sure you can do it. You are only limiting yourself. You are only anxious about things that may not even happen if you make this decision. Face it, break and destroy the limitations that prevent you from unleashing your full potential."

"Direct it to all of them. Show them, show the dark side of yourself, show that you are not afraid at all, that you can destroy them all. Because fundamentally, you created them. Like a creator, you can also destroy them."

"COME ON, DESTROY THE LIMITATIONS THAT HINDER YOU FROM BRING OUT YOUR GREATEST POTENTIAL!" shouted the figure of light behind me.

Slowly, I turned my face and looked back. Who was this light? I squinted my eyes because the light was blinding. All I could see was that the bright light had transformed into me, surrounded by many people supporting me—my friends, my grandmother's spirit, and even my parents were there. Friends from Nopal, Riko, Kelvin, and friends from my high school days were all there. Tears slowly streamed down my cheeks, feeling the immense support they offered to help me break the limitations hindering my potential.

At that moment, I regained the spirit to face my life again. I became aware of my subconscious and returned to my real self, still lying in the rain, facing the sky. I tried to sit up, recalling the events in my subconscious just now. I mustered the courage to endure the pain throughout my body. Though the mist had thickened, suddenly, the bird that entered the forest with me appeared, landing on my shoulder. It seemed as if I understood what the bird wanted. I followed its lead, enduring the pain in my feet, hands, and all over my body.

The pain was still manageable, not enough to make me bow down in resignation. I took slow steps, one after another until I saw

a small river flowing down the forest path. The bird on my shoulder seemed to guide me on where I should take my steps to get back on the right track. As I walked slowly with the blackbird on my shoulder, I remembered Riko's words.

"To surpass the limitations within you, you just have to believe and have confidence in your abilities. After all, it's we who create these limitations, not God or anyone else, but ourselves."

I believed that there were still many happy moments in my life that I hadn't experienced yet. Therefore, I couldn't give up on my current physical condition. I had to overcome my current physical limitations, so, I pushed myself beyond my previous limits. Unconsciously, I reached the garden belonging to my grandmother, indicating that it would take another half an hour for me to reach a safe place.

With a fiery spirit bursting out of me, I quickened my pace, ignoring the pain and moving forward to see myself in a brighter tomorrow. Moments later, I entered the bamboo forest, passing through it quickly and without fear. The conditions in that place, shortly after the rain, made it seem like the atmosphere could kill anyone who deliberately entered the bamboo forest.

I paid no attention to the risks that would come my way; I continued my steps and reached a narrow path. On both sides of the road, there were thick bushes, and I noticed various animals I had never seen in this area before. From a jungle fowl to a snake, they calmly observed me without any intention of attacking. Many animals accompanied me on the way to Grandma's house, as if welcoming and encouraging me. These creatures followed me, leaving their habitat, and traced my footsteps out of the forest.

Upon reaching the edge of the forest, the bird on my shoulder suddenly made a loud sound. Instantly, the animals that accompanied me returned to their respective habitats, as if they were following the bird's command. Before leaving, the bird handed me a small, brightly white stone. At that moment, I remembered the incident in my subconscious where the bright light

transformed and manifested into this stone, symbolizing the spirit and the fact that I had successfully broken my previous limitations.

Arriving at Grandma's house, I collapsed onto a wooden chair in front of her house. Unaware, Grandma was surprised to see me in this condition. She quickly fetched medicines from her house and washed all my wounds with a cloth soaked in warm water.

Pain surged as Grandma cleaned the worst wounds on my legs and palms. Still, I ignored it, feeling relieved and proud of myself for overcoming my limits when I resigned and surrendered in the forest.

I believe now.

From now on, I trust in myself and my abilities.

I am confident and capable of enduring life, ready to witness the various beauties promised by God.

Without saying a word, Grandma seemed to understand that I had completed a challenging chapter in my life. She returned to the front porch, and handed me a cup of hot tea, and I eagerly drank it, feeling the warmth spreading through my body. It was truly enjoyable to have a cup of hot tea that provided energy to stay alert in my current state.

Feeling that I was better than before, I immediately planned to return home. Given the distance and the fact that my wounds still needed proper treatment, I had to go back, despite the stopped bleeding. After finishing my last cup of drink, I expressed immense gratitude to whom I call upon as Grandma, because she felt like my own grandmother. If my real grandmother were alive, she might be proud of my struggles to survive.

I rode my motorcycle back home at a moderate speed. On the motorcycle, I recalled the events I experienced, events that would change my perspective on the world and its inhabitants. Experiences that made me BELIEVE! There are many hidden potentials within me that I must unleash starting today.

Time passed quickly, and before I knew it, I was in front of my house, feeling safe and comfortable. I left my fish-filled bag carelessly and entered my room. I lay down on my bed, closed my eyes, and reflected on the events that made me grateful for the opportunity God gave me to continue living. Through retelling my life's story, I have now changed into a person who believes in myself better for what I am .I BELIEVE that many people in the world feel uncertain and ambivalent about themselves. Therefore, *I must* break and destroy the limitations that prevent *me* from unleashing *my* potential and talents. *If I can* believe in *myself*, *I can* have the ability to conquer this often cruel world.

BELIEVE

Epilogue

I sincerely hope that my life story can motivate you to continue BELIEVING! in yourselves and your abilities. Remember that God has promised happiness for all of you. So, keep BELIEVING! to live through sometimes dull days, knowing that the promised day of happiness will come. When that day arrives, don't forget to be thankful to God for giving you life. Also, be grateful to yourselves. You are all great, especially those who have broken and destroyed the limitations that restricted themselves. This is the end of my story, based on real experiences, although not all of them. I hope you all continue to strive through your days. Best of all, I'm fully grateful now because my dream of finishing my academic studies will finally be realized with this ending. Thank you, Lord! You are the GREATEST! Amen.

A few days ago, I experienced a terrifying incident that I had never imagined before. My legs, hands, and even my face bore scars from the event I went through at that time. Fortunately, I was still able to endure and survive the incident.

I initially thought that I would never be able to survive and resume my life as usual because I had given up at that moment.

However, in the end, when I felt like I had given up, feeling hopeless and resigned to accept my fate that I would end up here, in this place, in the midst of a wilderness covered by thick fog that obstructed the view of every creature within it. It was as if I gained the spirit to rise again and break the limits that hindered my development to unleash my greatest potential.

Boldly, I had to confront fear and anxiety to rise from a situation that was risking my life, a situation between life and death. All of it to find clarity and the courage to unlock the greatest potential and talents within myself by breaking the unconscious limits I had imposed on myself.

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