

Survival

A Daring Thing To Put Your Hopes On

An Ecofictional Exploration by Malin Klinski



“We won’t have a society if we destroy the environment”

- Margaret Mead

The Story follows a young orangutan while he is exploring the jungle of Borneo. Even though he is certain that the forest will never end, he one day has to learn that his home is threatened by man-made fires. The second part of the story is told from the perspective of a young activist student from Java who works at an animal rescue center during her community service. “Survival” is told for young readers but tries to include complex topics like deforestation, indigenous rights, environmental change and human-animal relations.

Keywords:

Borneo, Orangutan, Palmoil, Deforestation, Animal Trafficking

Tans Perspective

In Which The Jungle Is Endless And Dreams Are Filled With Smoke

*There is no War to end all Wars
No Knife that will Caress your Scars
No Fire that will Grow you Trees
Mad are Those who Kill with Ease*

The days were always sprinkled with birdsong and the smell of warm soil. I would sit in the nest that my mother had built for me and snuggle deeper in the different layers of branches and leaves. My mother calls me Tan. I am safe and sound up here, there is no danger of falling off the high trees, even when the wind is blowing harshly. Here in our nests, we are protected from enemies and parasites. They can't climb up the way we can. The only thing I see is the leaf canopy and some stars shining through the tight branching. Only very seldom it happens that we sleep in the same nest two days in a row. We are always on the move, discovering the jungle and keeping an eye out for fruits to eat. Fruits are by far my favourite food, though I also enjoy eating bark, young shoots and smaller insects. I am using sticks to dig for insects but sometimes I just use them to scratch places in my fur that I can't reach out to. It is not a nice feeling to have an itching spot that won't go away. It might be one of the things I dislike the most. Often I use sticks to break open the hard shell of fruits as the mangosteen or the tampoi belimbing that looks and tastes just like a mixture of mango and mirabelles. One of my favourite fruits is the langsat, a yellowish fruit with a sweet taste and a waxy, compact peel. From time to time I like to eat durian. It is a fruit with a very strong smell. I am able to tell that there is a durian tree nearby even when it grows more than 100 meters away. It is also really big, as big as my head I would say. It is one of my great pleasures to reach a durian fruit that grows really high up in a tree. Durian trees can grow up to 50 meters and some animals call it the queen of all fruits in the jungle. It is a pity when you don't like the peculiar taste of the durians as only one fruit keeps your stomach that full and lifts your mood up, just like the durian does. My favourite fruit for a sunny day spent on a branch is by far the jackfruit. It can grow giant and there are many tiny yellow fruits, bright as the sun, with a round pit in the middle. The consistency is a bit fibrous but once I took the first bite I won't stop until the whole fruit is in my stomach. You see, I could talk about the fruits of the jungle for hours and

hours, eating is one of my favourite things in the world. I know that it is a good place to be when there are a lot of fruit trees growing nearby. Sleeping underneath a fruit tree is really smart as well, I can tell you. Once you open your eyes in the morning you only need to reach out and your breakfast is right there.

Flying Away

The jungle provides for everything I need and I believe the jungle is endless. Ever since I can remember there was nothing but forest around me. No matter where I go, I always find familiarity in the unknown and all the steps that I took reminded me of the lessons I learned before. Being in the jungle keeps me safe and I know how to navigate my way around. There are surprises, nevertheless. Sometimes a waterfall I have never seen before happens to cross my way and I take a swim. I do love water but I like to have a shelter when it rains. Big leaves can function as decent rain protection when I am not snuggled in a nest with a rainproof roof. At noon I like to take a nap wherever I find a comfortable place to stay. A butterfly comes along from time to time and takes a rest on my warm fur. The jungle is a playground with endless possibilities and other animals to meet when swinging by. When I want to speed up my pace I like to use my long arms to grab the branches and swing from tree to tree. I don't like to touch the ground. Up in the trees, I keep an overview of the world around me. I am not jealous of the snakes that slide over the ground and I don't envy the pangolin. Pangolins, as I think about it, are funny contemporaries. They have a tongue, longer than their body and eat nothing but ants all day long. One would think I like being an orangutan so much, there is no other animal I would rather be. This is true, but not quite. There is an animal that I do sometimes envy and that is the hornbill. As I like to stay high up in the trees, it makes me wonder how it is to hover over the tree crowns with ease. Hornbills are gracious and sometimes I happen to sit next to one of the elegant birds, simply enjoying its company, when suddenly they fly away, blown off by the wind and I can do only as much as daydream to be able to fly alongside them.

Of Friends and Enemies

I know my life sounds just a little bit too good, but I do have an enemy that can become a bit annoying when a day is just perfectly calm. As I have mentioned I love to spend a hot day in the water. Either in the river or in a little lake next to a waterfall. My mum tells me to take a bath at least every other day. I don't mind that. She sometimes rummages through my fur and looks for insects that she picks out. This is not my favourite activity as I really don't do anything

other than sitting there and waiting for her to finish looking. But my mum wants me to look neat and tidy for when we meet other orangutans. Living in the forest without my mother is quite difficult to imagine. I am three years old now but most orangutans stay with their mum until they are at least 9 years old. There is so much I still need to learn. How to be the best climber, build stable nests and find my way through the dense jungle. I never spent a day in my life without my mum. She is right there when I wake up and will always be there when I go to sleep. I already know a lot but there is always more to find out. There are other animals that love the water and they have sharp teeth that I would like to keep far away from me. Crocodiles sometimes lie in the water and don't move for hours. Just like a piece of driftwood. I don't mind them, I really don't. But it is a bit tricky when you want to take a swim and then suddenly you realize that the long tree branch next to you suddenly intends to eat you up. Then it is all about getting out of the cool water as fast as possible and climbing up the closest tree. I can do that real quick, climbing trees is my speciality. It is just really annoying. They act like the water is all theirs and you can't even talk nicely with them. My mum always tells me that there is only one animal even more hungry for baby orangutans than the crocodiles. It is the clouded leopard and sometimes at night when I can't sleep I imagine meeting one of them at some point in my life. It is not the nicest idea to have when you just want to sleep. My mum tells me its fur is greyish with an irregular grey pattern, looking just like the sky on a cloudy day, that's where the name comes from of course. Other than me, as I simply like to eat fruits all day long, the clouded leopard likes to taste orangutan children more than anything in the world. In any case, this is what my mum says.

[Soleakena or the Sound I Never Heard Before](#)

I am sitting on a particularly nice tree that I just climbed in the morning and enjoy the birdsong I love so much. There just seems to be one bird that I can't place. What is that sound and why have I never heard it before? Strangely it seems not to come from somewhere around me but from far below. My mum is taking a nap so it really can't hurt to climb down and see what kind of an animal makes such noises. As I get closer to the ground I see a really strange looking animal. It is standing on two legs and the fur only covers its head. With its two front paws it is holding a branch that is shaped in a funny way. The sounds that seem to come out of the branch sound like nothing I have heard before. I wonder if the animal is peaceful or might be a possible danger just like the crocodile or the clouded leopard. Even though my mum tells me to be careful if something seems unfamiliar, especially in moments when she isn't close by,

I am not scared at all. I wonder if this is a problem and if it could be smart to just turn around and flee. I decide that it could be smart to stay and observe the situation. This animal seems to be peaceful and what startles me most is that it seems to be similar to me in a way. As I carefully touch the ground a branch underneath my foot brakes and a cracking noise makes the animal look up. From a closer distance I realise that it might actually not be a full-grown but a child – just like me. We are both standing there, stonelike, not moving at all. I don't even dare to wink. The strange baby animal is reaching out with her hand and comes closer. I don't know why but I still don't feel scared. What does it intend to do? The hand that has not a single hair on it touches my nose and before I can wonder why it just did that I have to sneeze. The unknown animal laughs. It laughs so much that it falls over and lands in the grass. Rolling about I start jumping up and down in excitement! This could be a potential playmate for me. I also want to touch its nose – a nose that seems to be too small for all the things noses are good for – and when I reach out the animal puts both hands on my head. I don't know what kind of a game this is but it is fun. I want to introduce it to my mum. When I try to pull the animal towards a tree and gesture for it to follow me it shakes its head. I start climbing up but the animal just keeps standing there. Maybe it is shy, I wonder or maybe it can't climb like me and is scared I will make fun of it. But after some while of eyeing the tree it starts climbing up. I don't want to brag and say I am the best climber the world has ever seen but compared to the strange animal I can climb much faster. My arms are longer of course, maybe this is the reason why. The strange animal tries to follow me and copy my movements. I have the hope that after one hour we could be back at the branch where my mum is probably still taking a nap. Suddenly I hear someone calling. "Soleakena! Soleakeeeena! Where are you?! Soleakeeeeeena!". The strange animal turns its head to at me with an unhappy look on its face. It wrinkles its nose and tries to blow away a strand of hair that just fell in its eye. Then it starts to slide down all the way of the tree trunk that we just climbed up. This takes just a few seconds, all the hard work of climbing up has been for nothing. I feel very sad. I just found a new playmate and now it should already be gone? Once the animal reaches the ground I jump in the grass next to it. Just out of curiosity and just to see what the strange animal will do next. I also want to know where the voice comes from and who just called her. Maybe it is one of the animals parents? Together we start walking towards the nearby river and stroll along the riverbank. As soon as the animal realises that I am coming alone, it starts laughing again. Everything I do is funny I think and I like it. I made the right decision, I am sure. Suddenly a tall figure is standing in front of us, only some more lianas are in between us. I decide (not because I am scared but to

first observe the situation) to climb up in one of the nearby trees. The tall figure has incredibly long hair on its head and seems to be very angry. I believe it must be a male animal as it is quite muscular and big. "Soleakena! How many time have I told you not to run away without telling anyone where you go. Your mother is worried sick! And I have better things to do than running around, looking for little girls in the jungle." He picks the little animal up as if it were a piece of durian fruit anyone could easily lift. Then he places her on his shoulders and stomps away. I decide to not consider that male to be nice as he took away my playmate and seems to be upset in an unhealthy way. Also he didn't even notice me. The little animals name seems to be Soleakena as the male repeats the name over and over again. He says things like: "Little girls shouldn't go into the jungle alone. You have duties at home. You need to help cooking, help washing, help drying the fish and collecting roots. See, you have been strolling about for the whole afternoon and there is not even one single fruit you bring back home! What have you been doing? What are girls like you supposed to do when they grow older? You need to take care of your siblings and help you mother." I don't really understand any of the things the big male animal says and most of all I don't understand what could be so upsetting for him. They walk below me for quite some time, honestly, it seems to be an eternity and I disappear into the trees from time to time and follow the two of them by swinging over their heads. Soleakena notices this and keeps looks at me with a wide smile. Suddenly the jungle is getting lighter and we arrive at a very strange place. I have never seen anything like this before. Everything looks like it is made of trees, but parts of trees that have been put together so they form shelters on the ground. There are a lot of these strange animals walking around and I see an old male with a wooden thing that looks just like the one Soleakena had before to make music with it. He blows some air into the branch and a very beautiful sound comes out. At the same time he is moving forward and backward softly, just like the wind was telling him what do do. As my attention shifts away I realise everyone is doing something and nobody seems to mind that it is so many of them in such a small space. I think other orangutans would want more space to move around and wouldn't like to share their food and drinks with so many other animals. There are no trees and it seems like they are living there all year long I sit in a tree nearby and watch what is happening. It is nothing like I have ever seen before. Some of the smaller animals jump around and draw something in the sand with a stick. The ones that must be mothers carry around smaller animals in big, colourful leaves. Some are even eating fruits but before they do that they open them up with various instruments that are made of wood with a silver ending. One of the men sings a strange melody and it again sounds like

nothing I have heard before. Some children play in the river, dive in and come back up, splashing water everywhere. I don't even realise that the sun sets down as more and more people gather around the fireplace. I am hypnotised by the strangeness happening right in front of me. Suddenly I remember that my mother must have noticed my disappearance hours ago and is probably worried sick in the meantime. I wonder if I can find my way back in the dark but I need to try. As I slowly distance myself from the new animals I promise to myself to come back the other day and find out more about them.

Lost Forever

As soon as the lights are gone and I am on my own I get a little bit scared. I don't want to be, but it is not that easy because I never spent a night alone in the jungle. I start screaming loudly in the hope that my mum will hear me and find me. I swing from tree to tree but I just can't remember my way. It is just like my memory was erased. I already feel very sleepy and hungry and once I find a nest that must have been built by other orangutans I fall asleep. The next morning a very loud noise wakes me up. I am happy to see my mother's face even though she looks furious. She didn't stop looking for me all night long and it wasn't until a hornbill told her where to look for me that she found me in this net. Even though I know it is all my fault, I can't help but think about the events of the day before in excitement. Now everything is fine again, my mum is there, it is daylight and so many things have happened. Before my mother can keep on growling I start to tell her about the strange noises, the animal with so little hair and the place where they live and where they do strange things - transforming everything they find within nature into something else. Where they live nothing stays the way it is. Everything is being painted on, carved, shaped, used in some way, it is funny and interesting and they do all kinds of odd things. They live in a big community and they don't wander around. My mother listens to my words but I feel like I didn't lift her mood with my story. As soon as I stop talking she looks at me with a stern look. "I have imagined you are lost forever, eaten by a crocodile or a clouded leopard. But the animal that you met yesterday is worse than any danger you can possibly imagine. It is worse than fire because it is the cause of it. Do you know how many animals died because of this one? It has no emotions and its greed knows no limits. It is called the human." I can't believe what my mom is saying. Soleakena and her friends, the older men that was singing and even the strict man that reminds me a bit of my worried mum just now - all of them should be dangerous? "You might have met a child", my mum continues without mercy. "But every child will become an adult and once it is an adult it will act like all

the other humans. They poison every river, cut down every tree, murder every animal until the world is theirs alone and nothing is left alive.” I feel more scared now than I felt yesterday night when I was wandering about all alone. My mum must know things I don’t, otherwise she wouldn’t speak like this. Normally she is the most peaceful orangutan I know and full of tenderness. Something must have happened in the past that I can’t imagine now. I am not sure if I even dare to ask.

Just Around The Rivershore

As time passes by I think a lot about the day I met Soleakena, the first night I spent without my mother and the beginning of my understanding that the world I had know has hidden something away from me. My mother and I follow the river further up north, I have the feeling that she wants to get away from the place I learned to call a village. Some people live in a village all their life, they only leave it to go smaller distances or collect roots and fruits in the forest. Humans are evil, I heard this many times now, but I still can’t manage to stop thinking about them. Soon I get tired of moving so far and so fast every day. I can’t understand why. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night to smell something acrid and strong creeping up my nose. When I ask my mom where the strange smells come from she just answers “humans” and I don’t dare to ask more. I feel like my most has grown distant to the world around us. There is a grim look that never leaves her face now and once in a while she says things that make me feel like all that I have seen that day by the river was only a hallucination. Humans, I am sure, are in fact much taller, have long teeth and can attack you at any time with less pity than the clouded leopard. “They are never satisfied”, my mum tells me one evening. “They will not stop until all the fruits only grown on the trees for them to eat. They will not leave a fish in the water that could be taken by another animal. They don’t even stop there. They want to own the water itself, the trees, the soil. What is worst: they even want us. They take hornbills, pangolins, proboscis monkeys, sun bears, sambar deers, pygmy elephants, rhinos, slow loris and even clouded leopards, they take them with them and once they are gone, they never return”. “But what happens to them?”, My words stick in my throat, I can’t swallow. I can hardly imagine why they would want to take all these animals with them when they could just come and meet them here in the forest. “Nobody knows”, my mum says and her eyes seem empty. “Some believe they take them away and lock them behind bars in giant cages. These cages are not made of wood, but with a material much harder to break. I have heard they also simply kill other animals so they are not disturbed when they destroy the

forest. Maybe they also just eat us, as their hunger is never satisfied and they stop from nothing". I wonder if Soleakena would have eaten me sooner or later, had I stayed in their village. It seems likely after all that I have heard.

After The Flames

One morning my mother and I wake up and the smell of burned trees is stronger than ever before. It is as if the forest around us is on fire or at least like warning call is sent out, telling us that it could be burning any minute. Without eating we begin to leave the nest. I follow my mothers steps as we move through the forest. She doesn't have to say it, I already know. The humans have been there and they have taken everything with them. Suddenly my mother stops and climbs up higher up the tree where we just sat. As soon as we reach the tree crown we are able to look over the landscape in front of us. There is nothing. The ground is black, no trees, no flowers, no animals are anywhere to be seen. We are sitting there and to our right and our left is still forest but lying ahead of us is only a desert of nothingness. I have never seen something like this before. All my life I thought the jungle was endless. That it could protect me, give me shelter, food and warmth. Here I am sitting and my heart is pounding in my chest. My mother looks at me and again she has that empty, distant look in her eye. "I was here in my youth, my mother and I have been here and it used to be a part of our island where humans wouldn't go. It was said to be a safe haven. Here we are, there is nothing left. In the end there isn't really a place where they are not able to go to." The ground is so black, it reminds me of endless seeds of the mata kucing fruit, covering every centimeter of the ground so nothing is left alive underneath. Though seeds can grow new life and this ground seems to be dead. I know that we can't stay longer, we have to move on. The fire seems to be put out but there is no certainty that it could not be rekindled and spread again, devouring everything in its way. We move further along the river, the smell of acrid smoke is our constant companion. We continue wandering, we cover longer distances, eat less, sleep less. The constant fear and insecurity of my mother is transferred to me and with the days passing by I lose all hope that my life could ever go back to normal again. Humans, Fire, Smoke, these words are the only things I can think of these days. One day we reach a place close to the river we have been following the past weeks and something about it reminds me of Soleakenas home. Here and there are remnants of former huts, the funny coconut shells humans are drinking out of and various objects in funny shapes are sprawled everywhere underneath the ash. Here and there I can spot blurred footprints. It seems like the fire has destroyed the village of humans living

here by the river. I look at my mother who sits still next to me, observing everything carefully. “How come humans destroy their own homes?”, I ask and I am sure there couldn’t be a right answer to something so wrong and so bizarre. My mother just shakes her head. I know we both wonder the same thing at the same time: “where did the people go after their homes were destroyed and what happened to them? And why would animals do something like this to each other, even when it is humans we are talking about?”. After a while we do what we always do these days. We leave and we keep moving. I don’t dare to ask but I have the feeling my mother wants to see only just how far the destruction has reached and if there is ever going to be a place where everything is still untouched rainforest. I am scared we will never get there. The longer we keep wandering along burned deserts where all life is extinguished, the smaller my hopes become.

They Call It Trees

One day we can’t find any more fruits. The tree I am sitting on has little leaves and the wood seems to be old and rotten. This part of the forest is not yet completely destroyed by the flames but it seems something even worse happened here. All life and all colour is drained off the plants here and I feel just like this is worse than deserts of ash, because this is forest that still lives but whose fate is already written in its dying branches. “Once the forest is sick, nothing can live anymore”, my mother says. “We are nothing without the trees, we belong together”. I wonder how long we could keep on going from now on, having nothing to eat and no shelter, being this close to the source of the flames. In the afternoon we reach a strange place. There are a lot of trees but all of them look the same. They are all standing in a row as if someone had forced them to grow in exactly the same distance from each other. Not only this is weird but the fact that nothing but grass can be seen in between the tree trunks and that all trees have the same height. I have a queasy feeling in my stomach and looking at my mum I know she must have the same thoughts like me. I can’t see where the endless rows of strange trees end, it seems like they could go on forever. We walk along the aisles but there seems to be no fruit, nothing to eat on any of the strange trees. I feel uncomfortable. The distances are too far, I can’t swing from branch to branch, even if I wanted to. As we keep walking on the ground I somehow have the feeling we are doing something dangerous. I wonder why I am thinking about how to hide in case of danger and how I could get away when something unusual was happening. But what could possibly happen? Everything seems fine and calm, just a little bit strange. And isn’t strangeness not something I am getting used to these days? We

walk for another hour and there are still the same trees, no matter in which direction I look. It is getting dark but there seems to be no place to build a nest. I look at my mum but she just keeps on walking, as if she is determined to find something. Suddenly a light flashes past us. It reminds me of the thunder I once saw striking a tree. It is much brighter than the moonlight and it disappears as quickly as it came. Just as I think it might have just been my imagination, the light comes back, even brighter now. Suddenly I hear loud screams and other sounds I can't place, then footsteps. I don't know what is happening, what am I supposed to do. Should I run? But where to? I can't seem to find out where the noise is coming from. Suddenly everything is light just as if the night decided to leave out of sheer fear and everything is way too harsh and dazzling. I see a human, big and tall, running towards us. He has a piece of wood with shining silver in his hand. There are shadows behind him as well. The sound I hear is so loud sound that it makes the ground and my whole body shake. The last thing I see is my mother lying there as if she is finally too exhausted to take another step. Motionless in the flashlights as the sounds fade away.

Fillas Perspective

Every Morning a Reminder, Every Evening a Memory

*A world full of pain and loneliness; people walk to the end of their life,
Changing places, changing goals, always playing with the knife
Wherever people go, they always take along their fear,
They close their minds and hearts from all the things they cannot bear
Wanderers that lost their home, Wanderers that can't belong,
Children who never see how their way was wrong all along
How can we heal this world instead of destroying it from within?
We leave our waste, then we leave our corps, while our skins are too thin*

I am sitting in an airplane for the first time in my life and there is ocean below me. So much ocean, so much water. In Indonesia all undergraduate students who go to university have to fulfill a three-month long community service called KKN (Kuliah Kerja Nyata which means translated "the lecture is real"), in an area in need. Some go to villages that have been struck by

volcano eruptions, others travel to national parks and try to help getting rid of trash. The village where my KKN is going to take place is called Sungai Awan (which translates to cloudy river) and lies about 30 meters drive from the town of Ketapang. It is part of West Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo. Borneo is the third biggest island on earth, just after Greenland and New Guinea. I am studying at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. It is the oldest university of Indonesia and I am a student at the faculty of forestry, just like our president Jokowi used to be. The city is located on Indonesia's main island Java and is home to many different religions even though over 90% Muslims live in the city. I was born in the capital Jakarta, which sounds similar but the name is really the only similarity the two cities share. Jakarta has about 9 million more inhabitants than Yogya - with a rising trend. At the moment I am going to a place with hopefully only very few people. In Sungai Awan is a rescue and rehabilitation centre for orangutans and other animals. This is where I am going to work for the next three months during my semester holidays. The animals who are sent there have lost their homes because of the destruction of the rainforest, primarily for palm oil production. Palm oil is everywhere, especially the Western countries have an insanely high consumption of it. One third of EU imported palm oil is used for biofuel, electricity and warmth. The rest goes into food, cosmetics and cleaning products. Every day giant areas of rainforest are cleared excessively to provide space for plantations and monocultures. The carbon dioxide saved in the earth is thereby released. Giant amounts of climate-damaging gases are disappearing into the atmosphere and are the reason why biofuel produced with palm oil is three times as bad for the climate as fuel from mineral oil.

Words Weigh Nothing Without Actions

There are more problems than the production of palm oil of course. Deforestation, land conversion, climate change, wildlife hunting and trade, illegal water removal and mining are killing Borneo's rainforest just the same. Small farmers and indigenous people who have lived in the forest are being threatened by big companies so they are forced to leave the land they lived on for centuries or need to fear for their lives. The government is doing nothing to protect the rights of indigenous people, the animals and the forest. If I was to become the president of Indonesia, with the knowledge I have after studying forestry for 6 semesters, just like Joko Widodo, I would do everything in my power to save the rainforest. I would certainly do more than Jokowi does today. Nobody could silence me. With the situation being as it is loggers, miners and oil companies have an easy game in Indonesia, they do whatever they

want and turn nature into profit. It is so easy to understand, any child knows that the killing of the forest will be the end of humankind. Of course it is not right to blame the local communities. There is simply no sufficient alternative economic development, so the people living close to the rainforest often decide to work for logging companies because they have no other perspectives. It is not like I believe a three month long KKN service can make me the saviour of the rainforest. But I want to be there and learn more so I can one day become a politician or an important scientist and bring about structural change in Indonesia. Looking out of the window the blue ocean lies behind us. I can already see the palm oil plantations from above. It is a never ending nightmare of trees that look exactly the same, arranged in perfect geometric shapes. Tonight I will already lie in a new bed, close to the rainforest and meet the animals whose home was burned down for money.

The Lecture is Real

I wake up in the morning and before I even think about breakfast I decide to go to the cages where the animals are held. Yes it is cages and the reason why is because the government does not provide enough money for the activities of the rescue center, there is not enough space and it is simply too many of them who arrive here every day. So many big sad eyes behind bars: sun bears, howler monkeys, macaques... and my favourite animal, the orangutan. I know I shouldn't have a favourite animal, it sounds naive, but when I was a child I had a book about orangutans and ever since it was my dream to help them. Growing older nothing much changed and I decided to go to university and learn more about the forest. One orangutan child just arrived yesterday, like me. Rizki who is the head of the rescue center showed me its cage just when I got there. His name is Tan. He sits right in the back of a small cage, his red hair sticking out, a young man of the forest behind metal bars, captured and alone. Rizki said they found him on a palm oil plantation, his mother was murdered and he was brought here. Both of them were malnourished and probably went onto the plantation in search of food. I look at the 3-years old orangutan and try to imagine how it is to live in the rainforest every day of your life and suddenly find yourself in the hands of humans. Humans who might have just killed your mother. Tan is looking at me with sad eyes, I can't imagine how scared he must be. After a short familiarisation phase Tan will begin to learn what to eat, how to build nests and where to find other orangutans. All of these things should have been thought to him by his mother, who raised and nourished him until now and who would have been a better teacher than any of the workers at the rescue center could ever be. His playground should have been

the tops of shady trees, not the narrow borders of the center. It is due to fortunate circumstances that Tan even arrived at Sungai Awan, he could have just as easily been sold as a pet or worse. Animals are being trafficked much like humans, illegal drugs and arms. For profit of course. As mother orangutans are so protective, they are usually killed before the baby is taken away. It makes business easier. Wildlife crime is the second most dangerous threat to species survival, it comes just after habitat destruction. Tan will spend at least the next 6 years here, until he reaches adulthood and can return to the forest. Suddenly I feel sad, knowing that I will leave him here when the three months have passed by and I need to return to university. I begin to learn more things about orangutans and why they are much more difficult to study compared to gorillas or chimpanzees. Rizki tells me and two other KKN volunteers how orangutans live solitary lives, which is unusual for big apes. They live in the top of trees most of the time and can only rarely be spotted on the ground. Every day they move, travelling wide distances. A female orangutan gives birth only every 6 to 9 years and is pregnant only three times in her life. Borneo and Sumatra are the only places where orangutans can still be found. The overall population of orangutans has decreased by at least 80 percent in the past 75 years. Most of these things I remember easily but they are still hard to imagine.

How High Can We Grow

Every day at the rescue center is new. I learn a lot about the different animals, the way they interact, how much they sleep, what they eat. In the morning I clean the cages even before I go to have breakfast. I talk to the vets and the activists who come in and out of the station. One day I meet an older woman from the Dayak people, who had to leave the village where she was born due to a massive fire. The longer I am there the more I want to help and it makes me happy and sad at the same time to see that just like me, the little orangutan Tan gets used to the unfamiliar situation. He starts to eat more and climbs some trees in the training grounds. In the end of my KKN I need to write a report and I am describing all the things I experienced. How beautiful the forest and its inhabitants are and that it is destroyed for something so perishable as consumer goods. Some of the trees are more than 1,000 years old and up to 70 meters high. A fire can destroy them within seconds. The sounds of the rainforest resemble nothing I have heard before and it makes me happy to wake up to the sound of birds in the morning. Once we destroy the forest there is no turning back. You can't just grow a new tree and expect it is in any way a replacement for the complex ecosystem that it was once part of.

In university I learned about all of these things in practice but now I know why I learned them and why it matters.

Tans Perspective

Freedom Could Be Here To Stay

*We have one life, live it right, take the chance
We can wake each other up, express our thoughts and dance
There is beauty in our difference, we want to stay the way we are,
This life is a present we should relish, create love and peace instead of war*

It has been 7 years now that I spent in Sungai Awan. I met many animals that share similar stories like me. The humans I met here are not like the ones who my mother told me about and they have given me shelter. Being here I know that not all humans are evil but that a lot of humans feel powerless and helpless regarding all the wrongs that are happening. The night I lost my mother has been burned into my memory. I can't forget the lights, the screams, the terror I felt. When I was all alone I had a feeling of turning into dust and ashes, like nothing really mattered anymore. I felt like the forest, burned and eradicated, erased from earth. Then there is darkness.

The next thing I remember is a girl, her name is Filla. She is the second human I see from up close. Right after Soleakena. They are both very different, their looks, their voice, their age, the way we meet. I still have the feeling this person is someone I can trust, aside from everything I experienced in the past months. She doesn't stay long but her energy makes me believe that I wasn't that wrong, not all humans are evil, it is not that simple. It has been 7 years in the rescue center and nearly 7 years had to pass by until I meet Filla again. Only last week she walked back into the station like she had never really left. Filla has grown older, she seems to be an adult now, maybe even a mother. She carries around books, talks excitedly, with the same energy as before and gestures with her hands. Filla is still gentle and she comes to visit me every day, smiles and sits by my cage for at least an hour. I feel like she is somehow

important now. People seem to listen to her at least.

Something I Didn't Know I Missed

Today I am supposed to go back to the jungle. I always thought that day would never come. I was sure the longer I was at Sungai Awan, the more trees would have been eaten by flames and finally nothing could be left. It seems like I was wrong and there is still forest somewhere, somehow. Though of course it is not endless but maybe it never was. This feeling I had when I was a little orangutan, dreaming to fly next to the hornbills, doing nothing but eating fruits and taking a bath from time to time, it is gone. I will never take anything for granted anymore, life is short and it is unstable. In the morning Filla comes to my cage and whispers to me “today you will be free Tan and I hope you will live a life far away from humans like me. But the world is not black and white, there is not only good and bad. I will do everything I can to make sure orangutans like you and all other living beings in the forest are protected. I can't promise I will succeed but I will do my best.” She reaches out her hand and I take her finger, the way I did many years ago when we both were younger and didn't know quite as much about the world as we might do today. We soon leave, it is me and two other orangutans that are going to be released today. We are being brought to a platform and when I climb out of my cage and carefully place my feet on the wood, I feel like I am suddenly home again. Excitement runs through my body and I jump up and down. I hear Filla's soft laugh behind me and I hesitate for only a second. Then I don't wait anymore. I know in front of me lies forest. It is still there, it has waited for all these years. I can swing again, climb to the top of trees and find a territory in which I want to grow old. Before I wait for the other orangutans to follow me, I jump. Maybe not quite as fast as I used to, but with an energy I haven't felt for a long time. I move hand over hand and disappear into the dense forest.

Motivation

I chose to write about this topic because I lived in Indonesia for 6 months during my exchange semester at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and carried out fieldwork for my Bachelor Thesis there. My thesis was about human–environment relations in connection to natural disasters. Two seminars inspired my short story, one was on “Violence in World Politics” and our task was to write a fictional story for children, explaining the topics we discussed in an easy and understandable way. The other seminar was on Animal Trafficking. For the seminar paper we interviewed several people working at wildlife rescue centers, discussed the Indonesian policy and the actual actions undertaken, just as perspectives for the future. I never went to Kalimantan or Borneo myself, but many of the animals at the rescue center came from there. The orangutan is an umbrella species that is used by many wildlife organizations and NGOs to raise awareness for destruction of the rainforest and the protection of the whole ecosystem and a wide range of species. I think the orangutan functions as a good protagonist to the story as the human reader can develop feelings of empathy quite easily, as the monkeys are proven by scientists to be very similar to humans in many ways. Another aspect is the emotional effective force the orangutan triggers, similar to the whale as we discussed it in the seminar. I am very much interested in the many aspects concerning the future of Borneo's rainforest. It is impossible to cover everything that is important or worth thinking about in depth in a story like mine, but I certainly hope to be able to go back to Indonesia one day and continue linking my personal experiences with the knowledge I gain from university.

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