

thing for ever. And how boring would that be? Besides, the boy reached the top and got down safely.”

“But only because of his friend.”

“*Exactly!* Sometimes you have to rely on the ones you love to help you out of a sticky situation. Without his best friend, that boy might still be clinging on for dear life to this day.”

“I still think Mum wouldn’t be very happy if she found out I’d been stuck up a tree all day.”

“That’s true,” Grandma says, chuckle-coughing, “she would worry. But you mustn’t be afraid of making mistakes. It’s good to make mistakes. If the boy hadn’t got stuck at the top of the tree he would never have become aware of all those other islands beyond his own. Climbing that tree, although it was terrifying, opened his eyes to the world around him. He realized that his own island was part of an archipelago – that’s what we call a group of islands – and that this archipelago was probably a small part of a much larger community. And do you know what? He was right. Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands – some say as many as 17,000 – and before he climbed that tree he only knew about his own. Can you guess what he did when he grew up?”

“No, Grandma, what did he do?”

“He repaired one of the old fishing boats that had been damaged in a storm and set off with his best friend to explore the other islands. Some of them were very small and uninhabited – so small you could run a lap of the beach in just a couple of minutes. Others were much bigger and home to unfamiliar plants and animals. Some of them were similar to his own island, except for little differences. And of course, none of them had a palm tree as tall as the one he had climbed as a boy.

“Every so often he would return to his own village and tell the people about his discoveries. To them he was a hero – they welcomed his return with feasts and dancing. And all because once upon a time he had been too scared to move.”

We sit silently in the dark for a few moments. Outside, a cat howls.

“Grandma, is that a true story?”

“Of course it is. Do you think I just make these things up on the spot? I’ve lived for a long time, you know, and I’ve heard a great many tales. That story is far from being the strangest.”

“Will you tell me another one?”

“Maybe in the morning. It’s still night-time, and I need my beauty sleep. Sweet dreams, Budi.”