

Poonam Mistry

A RIVER OF STORIES

Tales and Poems from Across the Commonwealth



Compiled by Alice Curry

Natural Elements Series

VOLUME 2 ~ EARTH

From tiny island to vast territory, each of the member countries of the Commonwealth of Nations has a vibrant heritage of storytelling. With a central theme of earth, this glorious collection brings together a tale or poem from each of the fifty-three countries of the Commonwealth. It complements the other three volumes in the series, with their themes of water, air and fire that together comprise the four classical elements recognised from ancient times across cultures.

Each entry brings us closer to the natural world – whether inviting us to sit under the shade of a breadfruit tree or listen to the music of raindrops on leaves, regaling us with the hilarious antics of animals or recounting the genesis of islands or the naming of flowers. Together they provide a fascinating glimpse into the extraordinary planet we all call home.

Poonam Mistry's intricate and beautiful illustrations unify these diverse tales and poems and complete a celebration of global storytelling that documents the meandering nature of tales that traverse continents.

Visit www.ariverofstories.com for further information.





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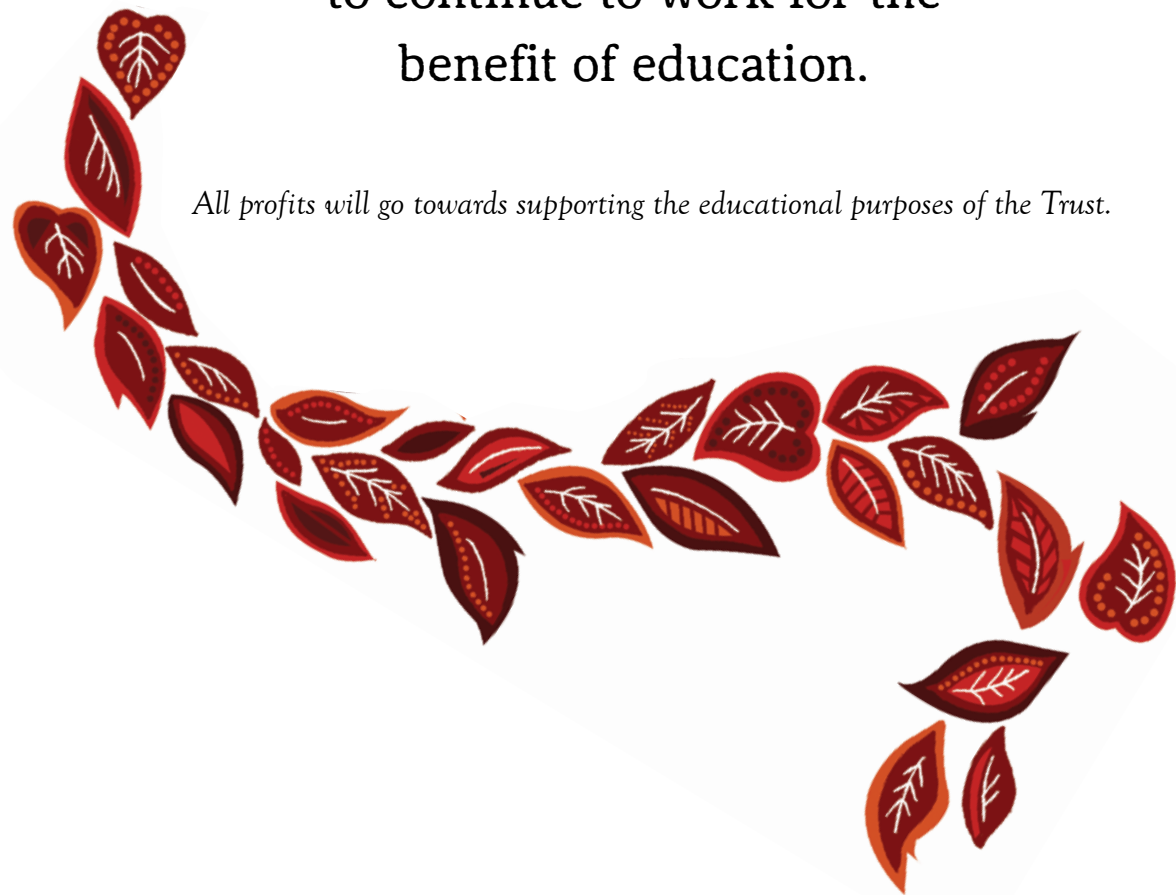
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in appreciation of the generosity
of those citizens who, in 1886,
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the Commonwealth Education Trust
to continue to work for the
benefit of education.

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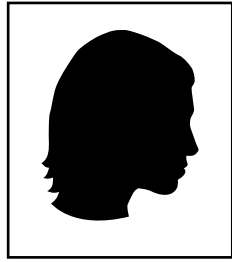
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ABOUT THE WORDS



Gaia, Parvati, Pachamama, Mother Nature – throughout history, the Earth has come to be known by many names. Following its tumultuous beginnings over four billion years ago, our planet has been home to a dazzling array of life forms and witness to a spectacular range of cataclysmic events – from the splitting apart of continents to the formation of mountain ranges to the encasing of land under ice and sea. No wonder people of every culture have weaved stories around the Earth, to give a name and a tale to such terrifying natural forces.

Yet Earth, despite wielding such awesome powers, has almost without exception been represented as a nurturing figure in the myths and legends of storytellers across generations – a mother or goddess with the capacity to bring forth new life. And this is the impression we gain from reading the stories and poems gathered in this collection – that Earth is a thing of wonder, vitality and vulnerability. In a century marred by species extinction, deforestation, loss of habitat and widespread pollution, where food shortages and debilitating hunger are all too common, stories that celebrate our miraculous natural environment need to be cherished.

In the same way that single trees form a forest when standing together, the stories and poems collected here are together much greater than the sum of their parts. They whisk you away on a journey from treetops and mountain peaks to the depths of caves. They immerse you in sunshine and showers, spring flowers, harvest moons and autumn chills. They poke fun at the hilarious antics of animals and the mischievousness of jungle spirits, not to mention the trickery of giants. In these stories and poems from many cultures, Earth – in all its myriad forms – is the true protagonist. We invite you to relish these stories inspired by our extraordinary planet and, in reading them, to imagine a greener future.

Alice Curry

ABOUT THE PICTURES



My earliest memories of drawing are of sketching characters and animals with my sisters. Our father told us stories of the Hindu gods and goddesses so that we could connect with our family's heritage. Just like the Earth's animals and plants, stories and poems grow over time. Stories begin like seedlings, tiny and full of potential, and like plants and flowers, they blossom into wonderfully magical tales and myths as they are passed down from generation to generation.

Earth is one of the fundamental elements of life. It is involved in the life cycle – the creation and decomposition of life forms. It is the home of many living things, including such invertebrate animals as earthworms. In many parts of the world, people use earth to make houses.

During the growing season, we rely on earth to provide us with the nutrients, water and minerals we need to raise crops, such as wheat, rice and barley. Without them, we could not grow the food we consume on a daily basis.

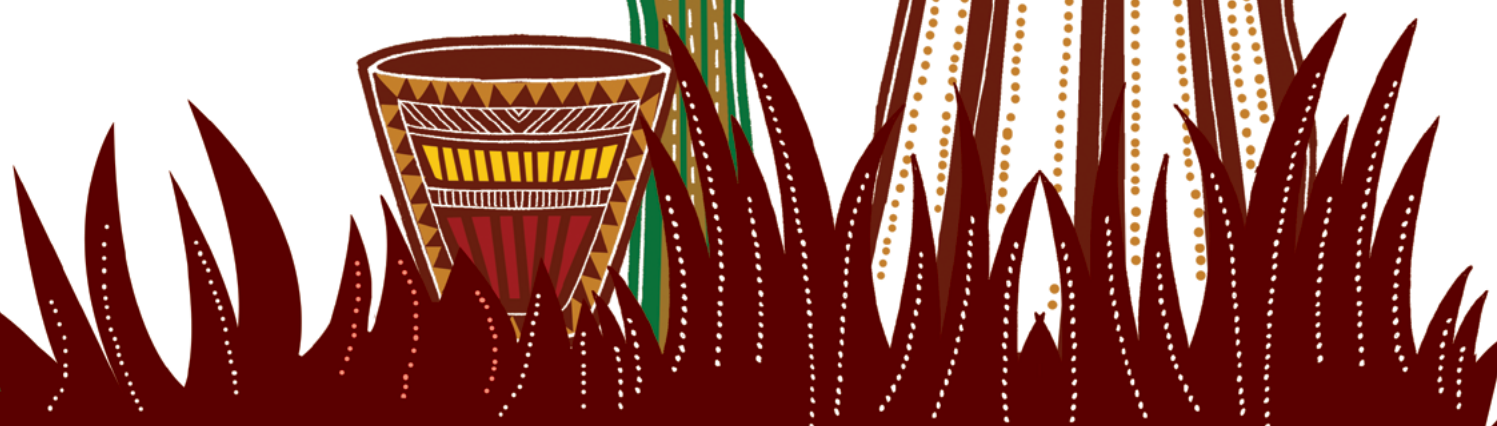
So it is no surprise that human imagery is filled with representations of earth. From Stone Age cave drawings to the earliest hieroglyphics etched in stone, these representations have conveyed stories associated with earth.

Almost all the world's landscapes are fashioned from earth. They are a huge inspiration in my artwork, which focuses on my love of nature and the natural beauty that surrounds us. My style incorporates the organic forms, shapes and patterns created by plants, mountains and streams. From them, I fashion images that reflect the enchantment that the Earth creates. The world's many beautiful and extraordinary species of animals and birds also heavily influence my work. I've used all these elements to illustrate the stories and poems in this collection.

Working on these illustrations has been such a pleasure. I hope my pictures will take you, too, on a visual journey through the many picturesque places on our planet. When you appreciate how beautiful the Earth is, you cannot help but want to protect it.

Poonam Mistry

UNDER THE BREADFRUIT TREE



INVITATION

By Heather Archibald

Come in out of the sun, Chile,
to the shade of this breadfruit tree;
Come cool your brow a minute
and sit down here chat wit' me.
You up since early morning,
and you comb all them pickie hair;
You done feed and send them off to school
So why you still hurrying out there?

Come sit and rest a while, Girl,
you done did your very best;
Come sit in the shade till the ole hot sun
go marching off to the west.
Let the clothes you washed stay on the line
and flap some more in the breeze;
Come sit on this stool under this tree
and give yourself little ease.

Come in out de sun, rest a while, Dear,
When the children come back with their play,
you chance to sit and relax will be gone
'cause you'll work till the end o' the day.
When I was a young mother bearing me load,
the only thing that gave joy to me
was to hide from the sun ev'ry now and then
in the shade of this same breadfruit tree!



THE KING AND THE TAMARIND TREE

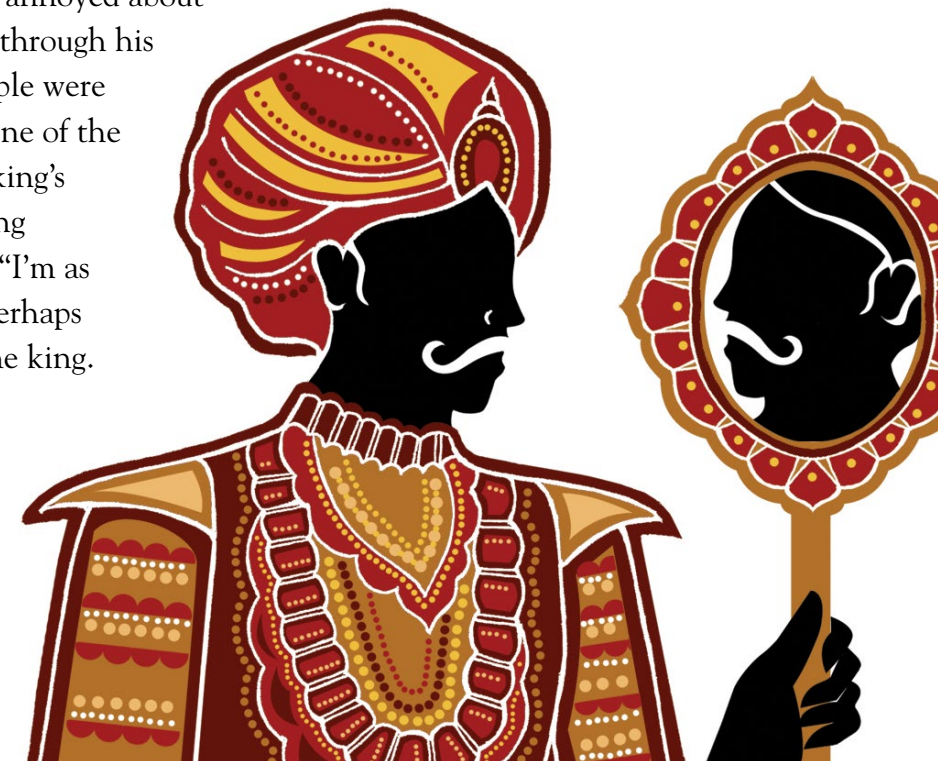
Retold by Eunice de Souza



Once upon a time, there was a young king who was very handsome. Unfortunately, all he thought about was his looks. He spent all his time in front of mirrors, turning this way and that, to enjoy his own perfection.

He admired his flawless profile, his moustaches that twirled so well, his beautiful clothes and his many jewels. Some days, he did not even make it to court, for he was too busy looking at himself. If he did attend court, he would suddenly discover a small flaw in his clothes and leave in the middle of whatever discussion was going on, to change his outfit. He didn't think about his kingdom at all.

The gods were a little annoyed about him and sometimes flew through his kingdom to see how people were getting on. One day, as one of the gods was flying past the king's window, he heard the king talking to his reflection. "I'm as handsome as the gods. Perhaps more handsome!" said the king. The god was furious and decided to punish him.





The next morning, the king woke up and went straight to the mirror, as usual. He was horrified to find that a pair of horns had grown on his head. He tugged at them gently and then with increasing force, but they would not budge.

Finally, he sent for his barber. "My good man," he said, "I have a rather serious problem. You see these horns?"

The barber had, of course, seen them but hadn't dared to say a thing.

"I want them removed," the king said.

The barber pulled and tugged and heaved but to no avail. He tried to cut them off, but his razor broke. So finally, he decided to cover the horns with hair, jewels and a turban. It didn't look too good; in fact, it looked ridiculous, but it was the best he could do.

As the barber was leaving, the king said, "Please don't tell anyone about this."

As soon as the barber left the king's room, he burst out laughing and couldn't stop. Courtiers gathered around him and asked him what the matter was. He ran out of the palace, holding his sides. He kept running until he found himself in a deserted spot in the palace gardens, near a tamarind tree. "If I don't tell someone, I shall burst," he thought, and so he told the tamarind tree what had happened to the king.

The king, meanwhile, went to court, for he could not bear to see himself. For the first time in his life, he sat there all day. While the courtiers were very puzzled by the ugly hairstyle, they were very happy that he seemed to be taking his work seriously. "Maybe he has now grown up and become responsible," said one minister to another.

That night, there was a storm, and the tamarind tree was uprooted by the winds. "Chop it up," the king said. "Give some of the wood to the drummer to make new drums, and the rest should go to the kitchens."

The drummer made some new drums. He made them extra-large so that they would be heard all over the city. But the first time he beat them, they did not make the usual *boom-boom-boom* sound. Instead, they shouted, "The king has horns."

The drummer was horrified. He tried to get the drums to sound normal, but that was all that they would say. The sound rang out across the city, and everyone in the palace gathered around to hear. Now everyone knew what was behind the strange new hairstyle, and everyone was laughing at the king.

The king could bear it no longer and fled to the forest. There he lived for years, begging the trees for fruit and the streams for water. He was so grateful that the animals did not laugh at him that he made friends with them. He cared for them when they were hungry or wounded. Slowly, he became a different man, for he forgot to think about his looks and thought about others instead. Then, one day, he touched his head and found that the horns had disappeared.

Soon after, some of the king's courtiers were riding through the forest and saw the king. They saw that he did not have horns any more. "Your Majesty," they said, "please return to your kingdom. It hasn't been the same without you."

The king went back and, instead of thinking about his looks, concentrated on ruling his people wisely and well.

AT THE BATTLE FRONT

By Anton Buttigieg

The two armies were in the trenches facing each other: out of all the beautiful countryside of farms and houses, trees and gardens only an old almond tree remained.

All at once, the almond tree donned its white dress and upon the horizon, full of anguish and ruin in place of the birds long since fled, it sang: "Brother men, it's springtime!"



THE WONDERFUL TREE

An Amerindian tale retold by Odeen Ishmael



long, long time ago, the great forest spirit Tamosi created a special tree, which he placed in the forest. But though the tree looked similar to others, it produced almost all the different useful fruits and vegetables in the world. The tree was left there purposely by Tamosi for people or animals to discover and make use of its produce.

It was shortly after people began living on Earth that Maipuri, the tapir, while roaming in the forest one day, accidentally bumped into the strange tree. He was absolutely astonished, for he had never in his life seen so many different kinds of fruits and vegetables hanging from the same tree. In fact, it was the first time he had ever seen some of those fruits and vegetables.

"This tree will feed me for the rest of my life," Maipuri contemplated.

After he ate as many fruits and vegetables as he could, he went back to the village at the edge of the forest where he lived with other animals among the people.





During that period, a dreadful famine enveloped the entire land. Very little food was available, not only for people but for animals as well. Even in the rivers and creeks, fish became scarce. Everyone was virtually starving.

But the selfish Maipuri decided not to tell anyone of the wonderful magical tree he had discovered. With the food shortage throughout the entire land, he would be forced to share the fruits and vegetables with everyone. But he had no intention whatsoever of doing so.

“If I tell the animals and human beings of this tree, I won’t have enough to eat, and the food will finish way too quickly,” he reasoned.

So every day onward, Maipuri went, all alone, deep into the forest to the wonderful tree. And after stuffing himself like a glutton, he returned to the village in the evenings. With the amount of food he was eating, he soon became excessively plump.

The people in the village noticed that Maipuri was getting fatter and fatter.

“Where are you getting food, Maipuri?” they asked. “You’re being very selfish if you have food and keep it all to yourself.”

“Just because I’m getting fat doesn’t mean I’ve found food,” he replied. He deliberately ignored the villagers and the other animals and went home to sleep.

But Maipuri’s actions soon aroused the curiosity of the villagers.

“Let’s send some men to follow him when he goes into the forest in the morning,” some villagers suggested. “If the men follow him, they’ll be able to see where he gets his food and bring some back for us.”

Early the next morning, five young men set out secretly behind the tapir.

But the sly Maipuri saw them coming and slipped away among some thorn bushes.

The thorns did no harm to the tapir because of his rough skin, but the men were forced to give up their chase. They returned disappointedly to the village and told everyone about Maipuri’s escape.

“Now we know he’s found food in the forest,” one of the young men said. “Otherwise, he wouldn’t have slipped away from us. We have to follow him secretly and find the source of his food.”

The villagers came up with other means of following the tapir.

“Let’s send Woodpecker to trace him,” one old man suggested. “Woodpecker will fly in the air, and Maipuri won’t suspect him.”

Everyone thought that was a brilliant idea and immediately agreed. The next day, Woodpecker followed the tapir quietly into the forest. But Woodpecker could not resist tapping on trees along the route. Soon, Maipuri heard the steady tapping and realised that Woodpecker was following close behind.

“So they’ve sent Woodpecker to follow me,” he chuckled. “I know how to fool him.”

Suddenly, Maipuri darted from the track into the thick bushes and through to an area with many dead trees. There were countless worm holes on the tree trunks. Hiding under the nearby bushes, Maipuri watched as Woodpecker flew towards the trees.

The bird could not resist the worms and began tapping away vigorously. Maipuri knew that Woodpecker would not leave the area until he had finished checking all the holes.

Maipuri then smiled to himself and moved away quietly to the magic tree where he had a lavish meal. In the evening, as darkness slowly crept upon the land, Maipuri journeyed home and could still hear Woodpecker tapping at the dead trees.

It was late that night when Woodpecker returned to the village and reported his failed mission to the villagers.

Another lengthy discussion started, and the villagers decided to send Rat, this time, to follow Maipuri. The villagers all felt that Rat was the perfect choice. He was small and moved about quietly.

The next day, Rat followed Maipuri to the magic tree. As Rat approached the tree, he saw Maipuri lying under the tree and chewing a mouthful of cassava.

“So this is where you get your food,” Rat said. “You’re very selfish and greedy. Don’t you want others to enjoy the fruits the same way you do?”

“Look, Brother Rat,” replied Maipuri, “if I show this tree to everyone, in no time all the fruits will be eaten. Why don’t we keep this secret together, then only the two of us will enjoy these tasty fruits?”

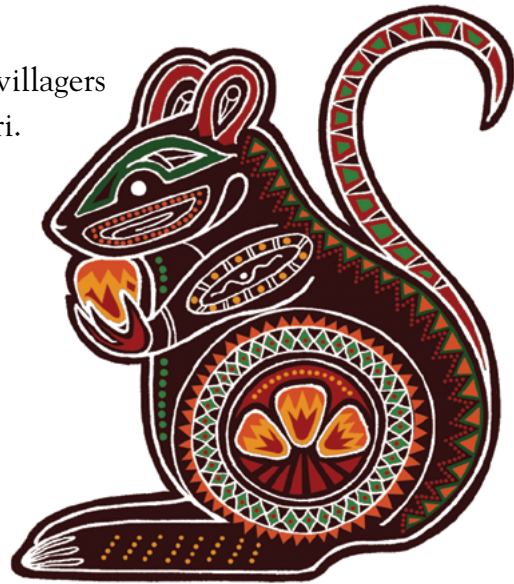
Rat, being a selfish animal himself, readily agreed to Maipuri’s suggestion. He sat beside the tapir and stuffed himself with as much corn as he could eat for a week.

Late that evening, he returned to the village. “I’m sorry, but Maipuri was too clever for me,” he told the villagers. “I lost his track in the forest and, after trying for hours to find it, I gave up and decided to come home.”

Every day, the villagers and other animals watched Maipuri growing fatter and fatter. However, no-one ever suspected Rat. He was clever enough to slip away to the tree at night to eat.

But one morning, Rat overslept. He had returned home just before daybreak and was awfully tired. He was so tired that he even fell asleep on his doorstep and snored with his mouth wide open.

Sigu, the old fisherman who was passing by that morning, saw some grains of corn stuck to Rat’s teeth! At once, Sigu alerted the villagers, who came and angrily shook Rat awake.



“You were fooling us!” they shouted. “Where did you get the grains in your mouth?”

“I won’t tell you!” Rat yelled back.

“If you don’t tell us, we’ll feed you to Cat,” Sigu warned.

Rat trembled with fear, for he was terribly afraid of Cat. He quickly revealed his secret. Upon hearing such good news, the people forced him to lead them to the magic tree deep in the forest.

And what a wonderful tree it was! On its branches hung plantains, bananas, cassava, yams, corn, papayas – fruits and vegetables of all kinds.

The people and animals that came ate like gluttons. And when they could eat no more, they went to sleep under the tree’s shady branches. When they awoke, they were surprised to see a strange old man standing nearby.

“Who are you?” they asked.

“I am Tamosi, the forest spirit,” he replied. “I planted this tree.”

“We’re sorry we ate without your permission,” Sigu apologised.

“Don’t be sorry,” the forest spirit replied. “I planted this tree so all humans and animals could have fruits when they need them, but I certainly don’t want anyone to be selfish like Maipuri and Rat. Everyone must learn to share. So I want you to cut down the tree and divide the branches equally. Then go home and plant the branches in your own plots. In this way, you will have all the fruits and vegetables you need.”

For many weeks thereafter, the people of the village cut away at the thick tree trunk with their stone axes. Eventually, the tree fell. They took away the branches and planted them in their respective gardens.

As time went by, people began reaping cassava, sweet potatoes, corn, bananas, papayas and many other fruits and vegetables. Indeed, it was from those very branches that so many plants bearing different fruits and vegetables began to grow all over the world.

As for the selfish Maipuri and Rat, they were so ashamed of themselves that they moved away into the forest and lived alone.

SUMMER IN FIJI

By Rohitash Chandra

Green mangoes
hang on trees
like beads
of fancy earrings.

Green weeds creep
while flowers drip
fragrance in the air
and blossom
in the season splendid.



THE GONE-FOR-EVER TREE

*Retold by an unnamed narrator from Swaneng Hill School,
transcribed by Mary Kibel*



ong ago, before dogs lived with people, they used to go out hunting. One day, they found a lion. They chased the lion for a long, long way. Over rocks, along paths and through trees they chased him, until at last, the lion grew so tired that he could run no further. Just then, he saw a man sitting under a tree in the forest.

“Man, please help me,” cried the lion. “The dogs are chasing me, and I’m so tired that I can’t run any further.”

“Quick! Hide behind this tree,” said the man.

The lion crept behind the tree, just as the dogs came running up.

“Man,” said the dogs, “have you seen a lion come past this way?”

“Yes, I have,” said the man. “He ran off towards that hill over there.”

“Thank you,” said the dogs, and they all ran off towards the hill.

The lion came bravely out from behind the tree. He jumped on the man and caught him in his great paws.



“Hey! What are you doing?” cried the man.

“I’m going to eat you,” said the lion.

“But you can’t do that. I saved your life,” cried the man. “The dogs have run off towards that hill over there.”

“So they have,” said the lion, “but I’m very hungry now, and I’m too tired to hunt for food. I shall have to eat you.”

“But I saved your life, Lion. You can’t eat me!” cried the man.

Just then, along came Hare.

“Why are you quarrelling?” he asked.

The man told Hare what had happened.

“I know what to do,” said Hare. “But first, Man, I want you to go and get a stick from the gone-for-ever tree.”

The man went off, and after a while he came back with a stick from a mopane tree.

“No, Man, that’s not what I mean,” said Hare. “I want a stick from the gone-for-ever tree.”

So the man went off again, but he did not understand, and soon he came back again with a stick from the mokgalo tree.

“Man,” said Hare, “I want a stick from the gone-for-ever tree. If you can’t find one, bring me a stick from the never-come-back tree.”

The man went off again, but he still did not understand, and this time he came back with a stick from the moana tree.

Hare sighed. “Lion,” he said, “this silly man just doesn’t understand me. Will you wait here while I go and show him?”

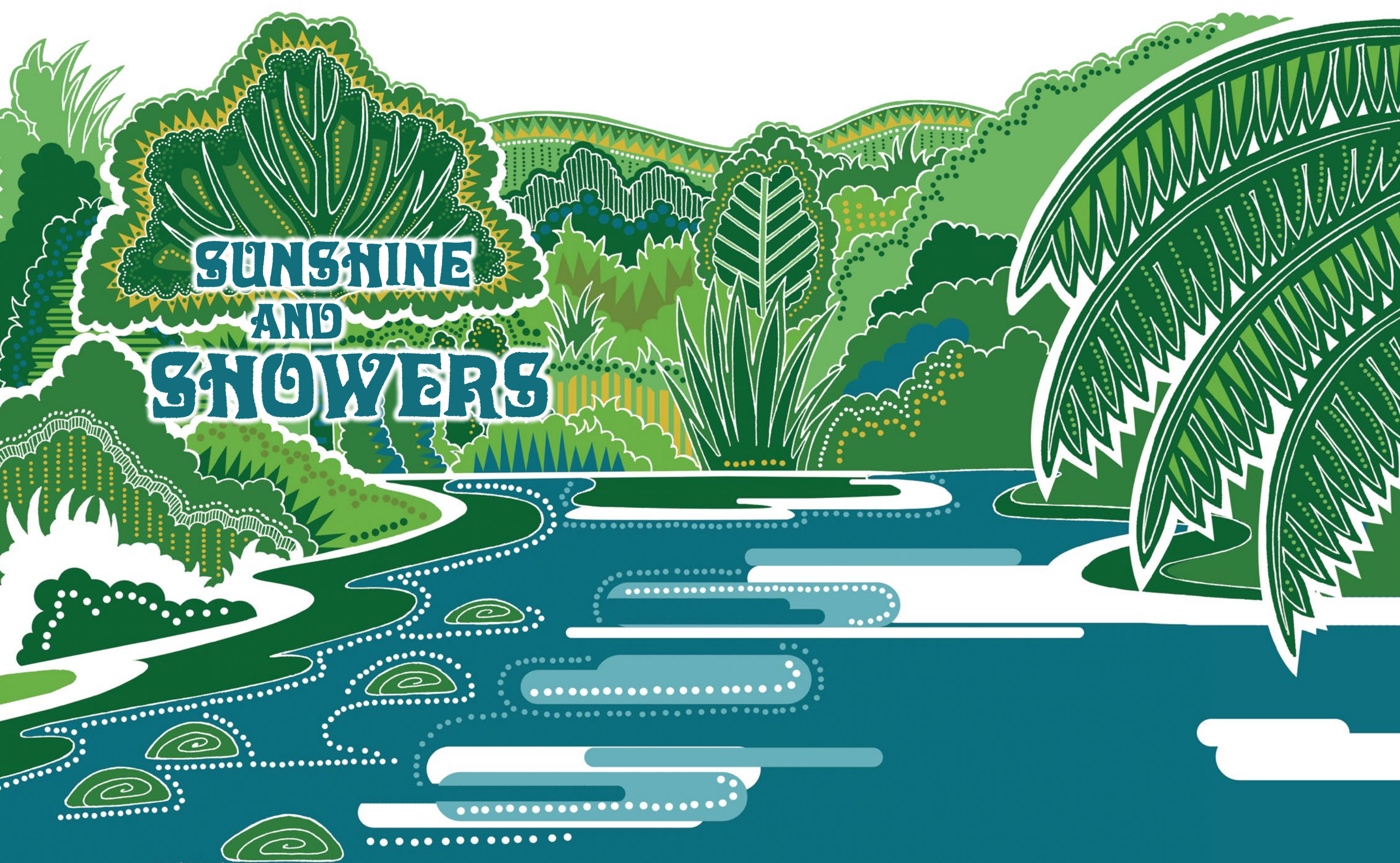
“All right,” said the lion. “I’m too tired to come with you.”

So Hare went off with the man to show him the gone-for-ever tree. The lion waited and waited and waited, but they never came back.

They had gone for ever!



SUNSHINE AND SHOWERS



POEMS IN THE RAIN

By Ruperake Petaia

In the rain,
people like chickens
cluster under the wings
of buildings; and

trees like old men
hang their bones
lazy with wetness.

In the rain,
fale like sickbays
droop their blinds
in isolation; and

green mountains
in the skies
sleep like giants
with grey beards.

Looking
 down
on a rainy day
I see
careless
 feet
shatter my face
rippling in the water.



EIDABANONO

Retold by an unnamed narrator,
transcribed and translated by Timothy Detudamo



ong, long ago, trees, plants and shrubs were plentiful on Nauru, but none of them had any flowers.

There was a woman – a witch – called Eidabanono who had three sons, Agabanairio, Agabanairage and Agabanaiapi. It was said that Eidabanono did not have a single bone in her body and, for this reason, she was supposed to be helpless. Her three sons used to work like slaves day and night for their “helpless” mother.

Besides the three boys, Eidabanono also had several daughters, who were unknown to their brothers. It was said that, when these daughters were born, they were placed by their mother among the branches and twigs of trees, and were instructed by her not to move from where they had been stationed unless they heard a call from their mother’s own mouth. When they heard this, they might jump down and run as fast as their legs would carry them towards the spot whence the call had come.





Eidabanono used to say to the three boys, “I wish I could use my limbs, so that I could cook your food and keep house for you, but you know that I can’t.”

In those days, the people ate a lot of fish. One day, the three boys went out to fish and came back in the afternoon with a canoe-full. They built a fire to cook their catch and then gave some to their mother to eat, choosing the best variety of fish for her. The remainder they put up on a platform, specially built for the purpose, and then they set out again to look for some more.

Eidabanono waited until the boys were out on the reef and then called all her bones together. They came, flying from all directions, and fitted themselves each into its proper place. Then Eidabanono went outside the hut and lifted up her voice and called:

Eideberan-kwan-Emet o rijao maeao!
Eideberan-kwan-Ut o rijao maeao!
Eideberan-kwan-Kaura o rijao maeao!
Eideberan-kwan-Amwie o rijao maeao!
Eideberan-kwan-Oano o rijao maeao!
Eideberan-kwan-Oerata o rijao maeao!



Kun a bare gani bwe eanana o rugag wan
Agabanairio eamana o rugag wan Agabanairage,
eanana o rugag wan Agabanaidiapa, o rivio, roguraga o.

Flower-of-Emet, oh come quickly!
Don't delay or else the canoe of Agabanairio will come back!
Or else the canoe of Agabanairage will come back!
Or else the canoe of Agabanaidiapa will come back!
Come now, hurry!

When the boys came home from fishing that night, they found to their amazement that all of the fish they had left on the platform had gone, that not a single piece was left. One of them said to Eidabanono, “All of the fish that we left on the platform has gone. Have you seen anyone there?”

Eidabanono only answered, “You know that I’m helpless, that I cannot even move my head sideways, so how could you expect me to see what was going on at the platform?”

The boys cooked their fish as usual and, after putting what was not eaten onto the platform, they went to their hut to sleep.

Early next morning, the boys said to Eidabanono, “We are going out to fish, and we shall not be back until later in the afternoon.” They carried their canoe out of the shed and down to the beach, but there they left it and returned to the hut and hid themselves behind the hanging mats at the back of the house.

Presently, they saw their helpless mother sit up, and shortly afterwards, they saw her outside her house, and heard her calling to some people by name. And before she finished doing so, the boys saw a number of girls running towards Eidabanono. They could not understand what was happening and thought they must be dreaming.

Then one of the boys, Agabanairio, took a stick and threw it at the girls, who by this time were helping themselves to the fish, saying as he did so, “Who are all these people?”

At once, the girls ran away, fleeing as fast as they could to their respective places in the trees. But the stick struck the eldest of the girls, Eideberan-kwan-Emet, and broke her leg so that she could not escape. Poor Eideberan-kwan-Emet was left behind and lay on the ground, crying.

The three boys ran up to her and said, "Who are you?"

She answered, "My name is Eideberan-kwan-Emet and my mother is Eidabanono."

Then the boys said to their mother, "You have daughters as well as sons, then, and you are not as helpless as we always thought you were."

From that very day, Eidabanono began to work for her boys and, henceforth, until the day of her death, she kept all her bones in her body.

The unfortunate girl, Eideberan-kwan-Emet, is lame in one leg to this day. If you gather a basketful of Emet flowers containing perhaps one thousand blossoms, you will find that only one flower is in perfect condition; all the others have their stems split. The one perfect flower represents Eideberan-kwan-Emet before she was injured. Whenever the Nauruan girls saw Emet flowers, they used to say, "Oh, how sad Eideberan-kwan-Emet was!"

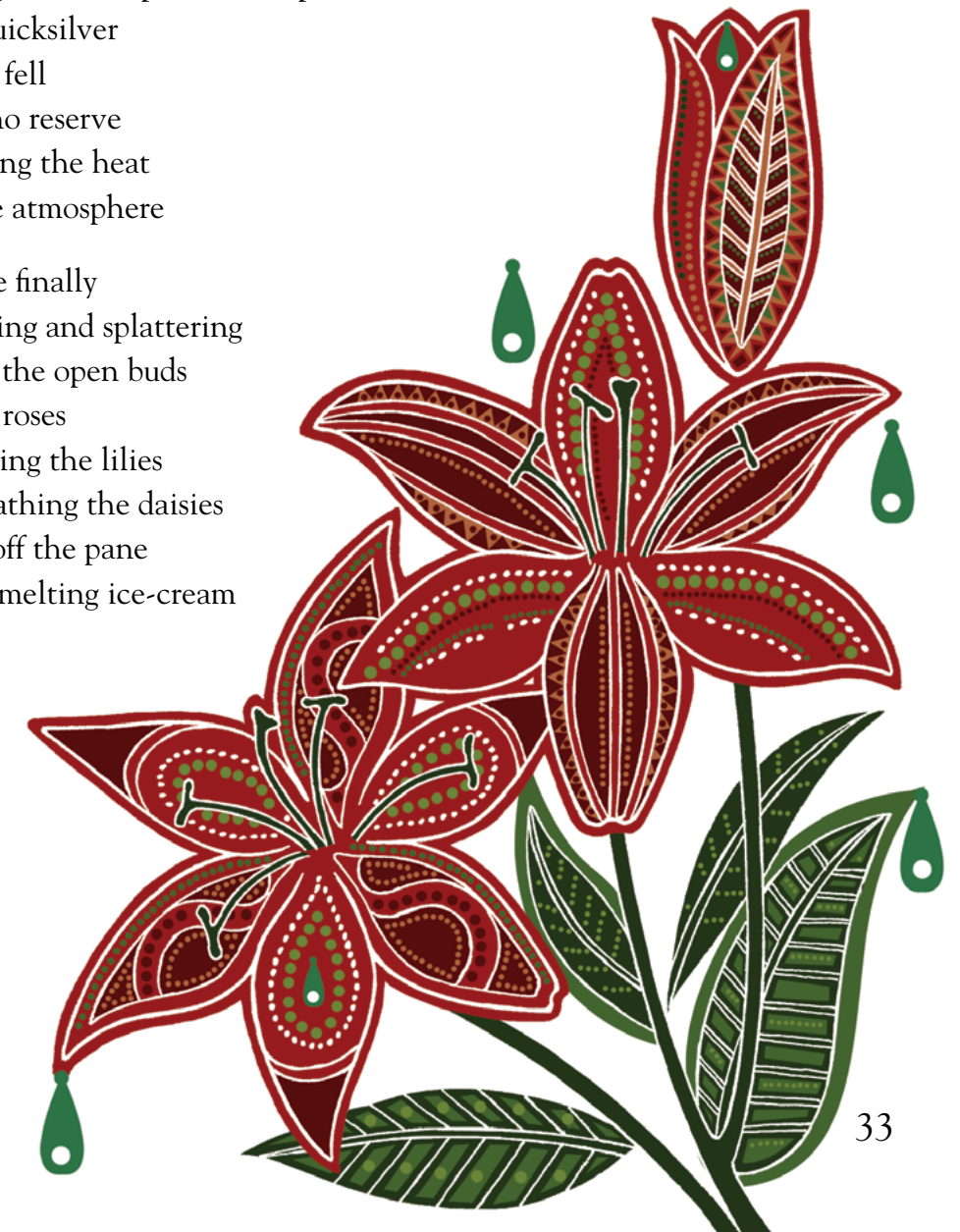


MOTHER NATURE MAKES MUSIC

By Ivenia Benjamin

It came finally
Dispersing the dark atrocious clouds
Letting their components drop
Like quicksilver
And it fell
With no reserve
Stripping the heat
Off the atmosphere

It came finally
Splashing and splattering
Filling the open buds
Of the roses
Drowning the lilies
And bathing the daisies
It ran off the pane
Like a melting ice-cream



It came finally
 Making music on the roof
 A cataclysmic rhythm
 Of drums, pans
 Tambourine and cymbals
 It made rock, reggae
 Jazz and kaiso
 They were all
 Out of tune
 The quartets and quavers
 The sharps and flats
 It was puzzling
 It was annoying
 It was sweet

I waited long
 To hear the rhythm
 I knew so well
 To feel the rain's coolness
 To hear its song.



SPIRIT OF THE RASPBERRY

*A Mohawk tale retold by Alma Greene
 (Gah-wonh-nos-doh / Forbidden Voice)*



It is the custom when berries are in season for the native women to go into the woods to pick the berries to preserve for winter's food.

After rubbing lard on their shoes to keep the snakes away, two women went into the woods in search of berries. On and on they walked. Finally, they came to a clearing, and there, on the side of a little knoll, was a patch of raspberries.

They were very thankful for their rich discovery. They picked all the berries and filled their baskets. When they left to return to their homes, the sun was going down; it would soon be dark.

To their amazement, they found that trees and shrubs had closed them in as if they had been there for many years. They did not know what to do, for they could find no way out. It was getting dark, and they were very tired, so they lay down on the soft green grass to rest.



The women wondered if their families would come in search of them. Finally, one of them went to sleep and dreamt that their predicament was the work of some kind of witchcraft. She awoke and told her friend about her dream. They talked in whispers, planning what to do. When morning came, they were frightened to see that more trees had grown closer around them. They knew it would be no use to scream.

Then they heard voices saying, "If you will join with us, no harm will come to you." Remembering from the dream that this was the work of witchcraft, they replied that they would not join the voices.

Early next morning, they awoke to find a solid wall made out of stones surrounding them. The voices were speaking again, "There is no escape for you unless you join us. There are only two of us, but if you join us you will have the same power and, in time, control the world."

They would never give in to the witches. But what could they do?

At that moment, they heard a noise like thunder.

The ground upon which they stood trembled, and the wall of stone began to crumble to the ground. The trees and shrubs vanished before their eyes. A ball of light appeared, and a dainty little object emerged from it. The rays of the morning light carried a message to the native women.

"I am the spirit of the raspberry plant. We supply your food from our fruit, and medicine from our roots. We have great powers unknown to the world, but when you come to us for sustenance, you come humbly and with prayers. Your reward for your humbleness is our protection. Go now to your homes."



BUYING FRUITS

By A. C. W.

Mary, Mary,
What to buy with our penny?
Your tray's piled so high
With ripe fruits of all kinds.
We won't tell a lie;
We can't make up our minds.

You have genips and guavas,
Sapodillas, sweet lime,
Sweetsop, granadilla,
Sweet grapes from the vine.
You have watermelon, cherry,
Mammy apple, plum rose;
Though we have only a penny,
We want all of those.

Oh, Mary, just sell,
We don't know what to buy;
Take our penny for luck,
Give us something to suck!



You have orange, star apple,
Cockillian, papaw,
Sticky-buey, custard apple,
Penapiece, balata,
Some luscious pineapple
Eight-seed tamarind,
Hog-plum golden apple,
All fresh, ripe and clean.

Oh, Mary, just sell,
We don't know what to choose;
Take our penny for luck,
Give us something to suck!

You have sapot, gooseberry,
Ackee, mandarin,
Coubarry and melon,
Grapefruit, tangerine,
Calata, grafted mango
Cashew, china plum,
Pois deaux, ripe bananas,
Fat pork pears – my gum.

Oh, Mary, just sell,
We don't know what to buy;
Take our penny for luck,
Give us something to suck!



A VERY SPECIAL PINEAPPLE

Retold by Geetha Premaratne



One hot afternoon, Andare was walking home through the royal gardens after a very long morning at the palace. He was both hungry and thirsty when, suddenly, he was attracted by the unmistakable smell of ripe pineapple.

Following the pineapple trail, he soon came upon a large, juicy pineapple sitting in a luxuriant bush in the noonday sun. The pineapple was unusually plump and fleshy, and its skin was already turning golden.

Delighted with his unexpected discovery, Andare was about to pluck the fruit when he saw the royal gardener running up to him, making frantic signals to him to stop.

“Don’t you touch that pineapple! It’s reserved for His Majesty the King, by special order,” he called out from a distance. Then, catching up with Andare, he said, “His Majesty is waiting to eat this pineapple as soon as it is ripe.”



Didn't you see the white flag I stuck in the bush to warn people like you?"

At this, Andare burst out laughing.

"What a fuss over a pineapple!" he said in great amusement. "Why is the king waiting for this fruit when he has so many good things to eat?" Then he added, in a more thoughtful tone, "Don't you see the painful truth of it all? For the king, this will be another worthless thing tomorrow, but for me, its worth can't be valued because I'm both hungry and thirsty now and still a long way from home. Isn't nature's bounty for people who deserve it the most?" And so saying he plucked the pineapple and ate it, while the gardener watched, helplessly, unable to stop him.

A few days later, remembering the pineapple, the king ordered the fruit to be plucked and brought to the palace, to be served at lunch that day. It was a special variety, and he was eager to try it. And as was his usual practice on days he had a special dish, he invited the chief minister and a few other favourites to lunch with him, to share the delicacy. Even the cook was given orders to prepare the dishes that went well with pineapple.

But the men who had been sent to fetch the pineapple soon came back, bringing the gardener along with them instead of the fruit. Shivering from head to foot like a straw caught up in a typhoon, he gradually came out with his story.

The king was very angry to hear that the pineapple was gone. He was angrier still to hear how Andare had flouted the royal decree. And before long, the words Andare had said, just before he ate the pineapple, were also repeated to the king.

At this, the king sat up in a terrible fury. Fire broke out from his eyes. His face stiffened into a granite mask. Then, like a thunderbolt, came the deadly words, "Put the dog to death on the stake instantly". Everybody gasped in dismay. Nobody uttered a word. An impenetrable gloom hung over the palace.

Within minutes, Andare was brought to the palace with head shaved and hands bound. A garland of red flowers was placed around his neck, and when the death drums began to beat, the king walked to the palace grounds, to witness the event with full ceremony. He meant to keep law and order in his land. He was born to perform that sacred duty.

The moment Andare saw the king, he began to weep like a child, falling at the king's feet. But the king remained unmoved. Empty philosophies had to be crushed while they still could be nipped with a fingernail, or any big-mouthed fool could poison the minds of a whole nation. So the king sniggered for everybody to hear, then asked Andare, "Are you afraid to die, you swollen-headed pumpkin? Come on, give us another piece of your philosophical mind before you die.

We will have it written in gold in the annals of Lanka, for all posterity!"

"O King, I'm not weeping for myself," replied Andare. "My tears are only for your sake. For I've looked into the future and seen dreadful things. I've seen your name carved as in rock, Your Majesty, as the king of Lanka who made a poor man die for eating a pineapple from the royal gardens. And I've heard the laughter of unborn people, Your Majesty, laughing at you through generations. How can I die in peace when my beloved king is about to put cow dung in his golden pot of milk?"

The king squirmed in shame. And he hurried back to the palace with a decree to acquit Andare instantly and to pay him in gold for compensation.



MANGO

By John Robert Lee

On Sunday afternoons, in mango season,
 Alleyne would fill his enamel basin
 with golden-yellow fruit, wash them in clean water,
 then sit out in the yard, under the grapefruit tree,
 near the single rose bush, back to the crotons,
 place the basin between his feet
 and slowly eat his mangoes, one by one, down to the clean, white seed.
 His felt hat was always on his head. The yellow basin, chipped near the
 bottom, with its thin green rim, the clear water, the golden fruit,
 him eating slowly, carefully, picking the mango fibre from his teeth,
 under those clear, quiet afternoons, I remember.
 Me sitting in the doorway of my room, one foot on the steps that dropped
 into the yard, reading him, over a book. That's how it was.



THE BOY AND THE PUMPKIN

Retold by Mabel Gabb, transcribed by Shirley A. Warde



My mother sent me out to school, and I went into a fine
 yard, and I saw some pumpkin trees. I took the one that I
 wanted, and it fell on the ground and chase me, and I run.
 When I was running, I met a big bear. And the bear said
 to me, "What are you running for?"

I said, "A pumpkin is chasing me."

And he said, "Well, get on my back. I am not afraid of pumpkin."

And I start to sing:

*Grealy bomba,
 Grealy berrywell,
 Grealy bomba, yea.*

The pumpkin said:

*Miahli mutay,
 Tumbay dumbay,
 Miahli mutay,
 Mwai yai.*

The bear said to me, "What is that?"

"The pumpkin."

"I can't stick that. Get off my back."

I had to jump off his back. And I run again, and I met with a tiger.

The tiger says, "What are you running about?"



“A pumpkin is chasing me.”
He says, “Get on my back.”
And I start to sing:

*Grealy bomba,
Grealy berrywell,
Grealy bomba, yea.*

The pumpkin said:

*Miahli mutay,
Tumbay dumbay,
Miahli mutay,
Mwai yai.*

You hear the pumpkin rolling:

*Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu
Bugu rugu waaki.*

Tiger say, “What is that? Come off my back.”
I had to come off. I run again.
I met with an elephant. “What are you running for?”
“O,” I says, “a pumpkin is chasing me.”
“Get on my back.”
I get on his back. I start to sing:



*Grealy bomba,
Grealy berrywell,
Grealy bomba, yea.*

The pumpkin said:

*Miahli mutay,
Tumbay dumbay,
Miahli mutay,
Mwai yai.*

You hear the pumpkin rolling:

*Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu
Bugu rugu waaki.*

The elephant stop. “Get off my back.”
I had to get off his back. I start to run again. I met with a monkey.
The monkey says, “What are you running about?”
I says, “A pumpkin is chasing me.”
He says, “Well, get on my back.”
I get on the monkey’s back. I start to sing:

*Grealy bomba,
Grealy berrywell,
Grealy bomba, yea.*

The pumpkin said:

*Miahli mutay,
Tumbay dumbay,
Miahli mutay,
Mwai yai.*

You hear the pumpkin rolling:

*Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu,
Bugu rugu waaki.
Bugu rugu shugu rugu
Bugu rugu waaki.*



“What is that?”

“It’s the pumpkin.”

He says, “Well, I will jump from tree to tree, and you must hold my tail.”

And the monkey jump from one tree to the next tree, and after he finish jump from the last tree, he take his last leg and shove the pumpkin down.

And it split in two, and there came a beautiful girl.

And the monkey said, “I will marry you.”

And there they were both married.



HARVEST MOON



WHERE ARE THOSE SONGS?

By Micere Githae Mugo

Where are those songs
my mother and yours
always sang
fitting rhythms
to the whole
vast span of life?

What was it again
they sang
harvesting maize, threshing millet,
storing grain...?

What did they sing
bathing us, rocking us to sleep...
and the one they sang
stirring the pot
(swallowed in parts by choking smoke)?

What was it
the woods echoed
as in long file
my mother and yours and all the women on our ridge
beat out the rhythms
trudging gaily
as they carried
piles of wood
through those forests
miles from home?
What song was it?



And the row of bending women
hoeing our fields
to what beat
did they
break the stubborn ground
as they weeded
our shambas?

What did they sing
at the ceremonies
child-birth
child-naming
second birth
initiation...?

How did they trill the ngemi?
What was
the warriors' song?
How did the wedding song go?
Sing me
the funeral song.
What do you remember?



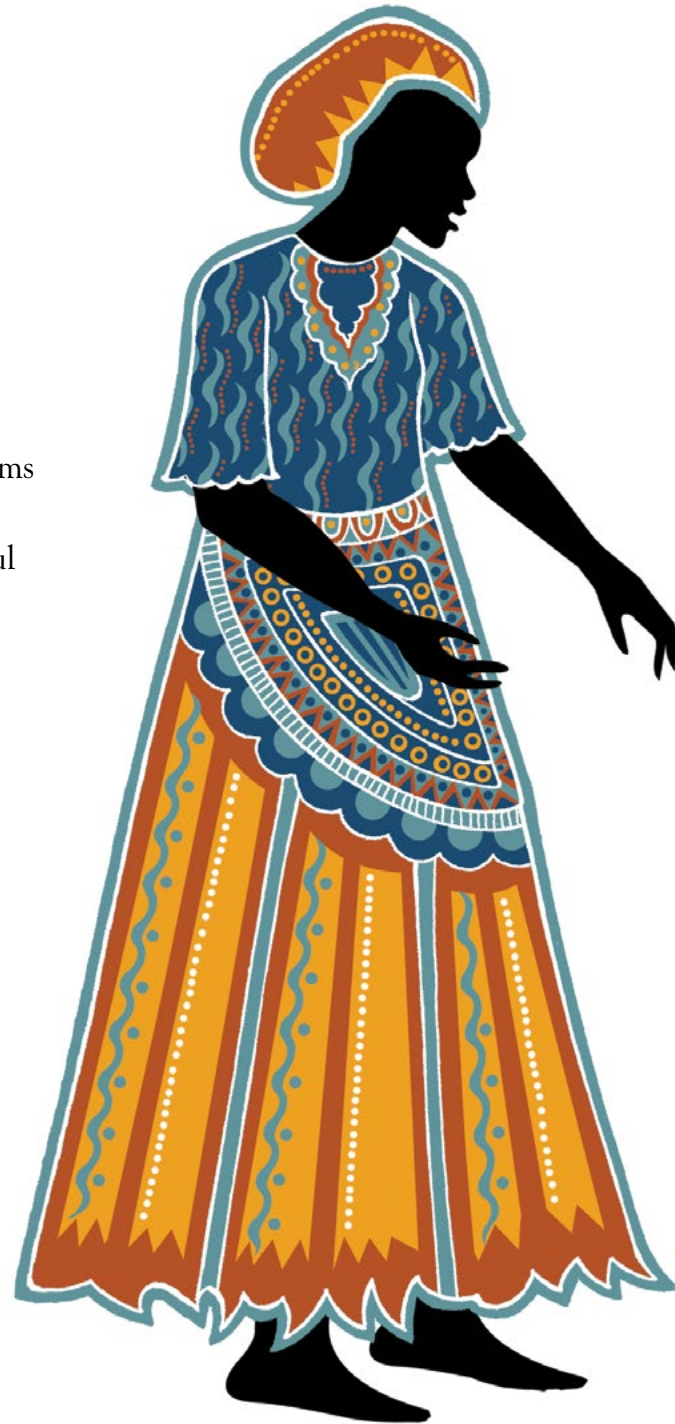
Sing

I have forgotten
my mother's song
my children
will never know.

This I remember:

Mother always said
sing child sing
make a song
and sing
beat out your own rhythms
and rhythms of your life
but make the song soulful
and make life
sing.

Sing daughter sing
around you are
unaccountable tunes
some sung
others unsung
sing them
to your rhythms
observe
listen
absorb
soak yourself
bathe
in the stream of life



and then sing
sing
simple songs
for the people
for all to hear
and learn
and sing
with you.



MĀKANA AND HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW

*Retold by Ali Najibu of Nedunge,
transcribed by Xavier Romero-Frías*



Once upon a time, Mākana, a grey heron, lived on an island with his wife. One day, his brother-in-law proposed that they plant a field together. “It will be hard work, but if you help me, I will give you half the harvest.”

Mākana told his wife about the job, but she warned him, “My brother is a very cheeky person. Watch out.”

The next day, Mākana went to his brother-in-law’s field and helped him weed it. It was difficult to do because the field was in an area that had been left to become jungle. It took them three days of constant effort, and Mākana suspected that his brother-in-law was giving him the worst tasks. But finally, they cleared the field.

Then it took them three more days to plough it. Again Mākana thought that his brother-in-law was not working as hard as he was, but he brushed the thought aside.



The following day, the brother-in-law planted the field. When finally the work was done, he told Mākana, “I promised that I would give you half the harvest. I shall take the lower part and you will take the upper part of the plants that will grow.”

Mākana agreed, and they both went home and waited for a few months.

It so happened that, when the time for the harvest came, Mākana realised with dismay that his brother-in-law had planted sweet potatoes. Thus, while the brother-in-law took home four big baskets of sweet potatoes, Mākana brought to his wife a big bunch of leaves.

She was annoyed. “You see, I warned you about my brother. But you paid no attention.”

During the next few days, Mākana sighed every time he had to eat the boiled leaves. Meanwhile, the cunning brother-in-law blissfully ate the sweet potatoes every day.

At the next rainy season, the brother-in-law came again to Mākana and asked him whether he would help him to plant another field. Mākana agreed but added, “This time, I want the lower part.”

For the next week, Mākana toiled very hard with his brother-in-law in order to prepare the field. This time he was more eager to work because he was sure he would get the better part of the harvest. After the ground was ready, the brother went alone to plant the field.

But this time, the wily brother-in-law had planted bananas. After a few months had passed, Mākana went back to the field for the harvest and saw how his brother-in-law carried away a dozen banana bunches home, while he only had three baskets of banana roots, a very rough food item.

His wife got angry. “Why did you let yourself be fooled by my brother again?”

And this time, it took Mākana a very long time to calm his wife down.

DROUGHT

By T. Alias Taib, translated by Muhammad Haji Salleh

the sun sprinkles its powder
on to the padi field's tongue

the clouds roll on restless
in its heart
the winds break

the winds yawn
in the mouth of a buffalo
the thunder is stranded

silence and drought smoke
between the brown leaves
it does not rain

a dune stretches
in the grey heart
of a peasant

the sun sprinkles
over the throat of a village



THE CLEVER CARPENTER

Retold by Kolapo Oyejoso



here was once a king who had only one daughter. Her name was Enitan, and she was so beautiful that stories were told and songs sung about her. Young men came from far and near to marry her. Princes and merchants, teachers and soldiers; they all came to ask for her hand,

but Enitan did not want any of them. She wanted to marry someone she would love.

The king was worried. He wanted his daughter to marry someone she would be happy with, but he felt that she was being too choosy.

“Enitan,” he asked one day, “don’t you like any of the princes?”

“They are all nice, Papa,” she answered.

“But isn’t there one that you really like?”

“No, Papa.”

The king then asked her what kind of man she wanted, and she said someone who was handsome and kind and who would make her laugh. He nodded and said he would think about it.

A week later, he called Enitan and told her that he had a plan.

“You want someone who can make you laugh, don’t you?” he asked.

“Er, yes, Papa,” answered Enitan, wondering what her father had in mind.

“Good, good,” he smiled. “You will marry the first man who can tell a good story for one week. That way, we will be sure that he can make you laugh and keep you laughing.” The king felt this was a good plan. “And anyone,” he said, as another thought came to him, “anyone who tries and fails shall pay me a thousand cowries.” This made the plan exceptional as far as he was concerned.

The king sent for the town crier at once. When the princes and merchants, the teachers and soldiers heard the news, they were all delighted. They were sure that one of them would win Enitan's hand. They went to the palace to tell their stories, but one by one, they all failed. Some stories were funny, some were strange, but none went on for more than a day. They all had to pay the king, who consoled them and took their money.

When the last of the rich and important men had failed, a man got up from the crowd of people listening and bowed to the king. "Kabiyesi," he said, "I would like to try."

Everyone looked at him, and a ripple of comments ran through the crowd.

"It's Tanmo," someone said.

"Is he all right?" another asked.

"He must have a fever, because he certainly doesn't have any money to pay the king if he fails," someone else said.

"Who are you?" the king asked.

"I am Tanmo the carpenter," he answered.

"Do you know what will happen if you fail?"

"I do."

"Very well," said the king, "you may begin."

Tanmo was afraid. He knew a good story, but he was not sure how to make it last. He tried to speak, but he could not. His mouth was dry. He swallowed and stuttered a few times, and the king gave him a stern look.

Tanmo looked up and saw Enitan staring at him. She smiled and suddenly he felt much better. He started his story.

"It was a good harvest. The farmers were happy. They had worked hard and now all the crops were gathered. On the last day of the harvest, one of the farmers noticed a dark cloud in the sky and he thought it was about to rain. As he watched, the cloud came lower and lower and the farmer realised that it was not rain.

"Locusts!" he shouted, and almost immediately, the swarm descended on the crops.



"There were locusts everywhere; thousands and thousands of insects fell on the gathered crops and covered the field like a carpet. The farmers had to flee. They stood at a distance and watched the locusts eating all their crops."

The crowd listening to Tanmo sighed in sympathy. Tanmo went on.

"It was a sad time for the villagers. They thought that perhaps they had done something wrong. They prayed and made offerings to appease their gods. The farmers met to decide what to do if the locusts came again, and one of them had an idea. He told the others that if they built a store, it would keep locusts and other pests away from their crops. They thought it was a good idea, and they all worked hard to build one.

"The next year, all the crops were kept in the store, and on the last day of the harvest, the locusts came again. They swarmed around the store, but they could not get at the crops. They went round and round, buzzing angrily until a locust found a small hole in the wall. It went in, took a grain and crept out. Another locust went in, took a grain and crept out. Then another locust went in, took a grain and crept out. And yet another locust went in...."

Tanmo went on like this for a while – each locust going in, taking a grain and creeping out – until the king shouted, "Hold it! We have heard all that. What happened next?"

"But, Kabiyesi, the story has just started. I must tell you how the locusts emptied the granary. The hole was big enough for only one locust at a time, and I have told you how thirty-seven locusts went in and came out."



Enitan laughed. Her father frowned. “Go on,” he said to Tanmo.

“Thank you, Kabiyesi. Then another locust went in, took a grain and crept out. Then another locust went in, took a grain and crept out. And another locust went in....”

The king fell asleep. When he woke up, Tanmo was still telling the story.

“How many locusts have gone in now?” asked the king.

“Seven hundred and nine, Kabiyesi,” Tanmo answered.

“I see,” said the king wearily. “Well, the other locusts can wait till tomorrow.”

“Yes, Kabiyesi.”

The king stood up, and the royal party departed. Tanmo had told his story for one day. He had six more days to go.

The next day, Tanmo continued his story.

“Another locust went in, took a grain and crept out. Another followed, took a grain and crept out. Then another went in, took a grain and crept out. Another one....”

The king was annoyed. “Listen, young man,” he said. “This is becoming too much.”

“But, Kabiyesi,” Tanmo replied, “the locusts mean to empty the store. There is only one way in, and they can go in only one at a time.”

“Can’t they find another way in?”

“They are locusts, Kabiyesi. They are not very clever.”

Tanmo went on with his story. After an hour, the king ordered him to tell what happened next.

“But that will spoil the story, Kabiyesi, if I tell the end before the middle.”

The king told him to go on with the story and then promptly fell asleep. When he woke up, he told everyone to go home.

On the third day, the king listened to the story for a while and then sent everyone home again. On the fourth day, he asked Tanmo how long it would take the locusts to empty the store.

“I am not sure, Kabiyesi,” Tanmo answered. “Four thousand and one grains have been taken – about a sack full. There are thousands and thousands of locusts swarming round the store, waiting to go in. Please be patient, Kabiyesi, the locusts are determined.”

“Do you think the store will be empty by the end of the week?”

“The locusts will try their best, Kabiyesi,” answered Tanmo.

The king looked at him and laughed. He turned to his daughter, Enitan, and said, “This clever young man will surely keep you laughing.”

Enitan had found her husband. She smiled, and the crowd cheered.

Tanmo and Enitan had a lovely wedding and lived happily ever after.

WHY THE OLD WOMAN LIMPS

By Lupenga Mphande

Do you know why the old woman sings?
She is sixty years old with six grandchildren to look after
While her sons and their wives are gone south to dig gold.
Each day, she milks the goat, sells the milk to buy soap,
Feeds and washes the children and tethers the goat.
In the evening, she tells all stories of old at the fireside:
I know why the old woman sings.

Do you know when the old woman sleeps?
She rests with the dark, at night she thinks of
Tomorrow: she's to feed the children and graze the goat.
She's to weed the garden, water the seedling beans,
The thatch has to be mended, the barnyard cleared.
Maize pounded, chaff winnowed, millet ground, fire lit...
I do not know when the old woman sleeps.

Do you know why the old woman limps?
She goes to fetch water in the morning
and the well is five miles away,
Goes to fetch firewood with her axe
and the forest is five miles the other way,
Goes to the fields to look for pumpkin leaves
leaving the goat tethered to the well tree
And hurries home to the children to cook:
I know why the old woman limps.



THE TAMED LISEPSEP OF SANTO

Retold by an unnamed narrator from Santo,
transcribed by Paul Gardissat and translated by Sara Lightner
and Kendra Gates



A man from Santo
wanted to leave
his native village
to go and live in
a neighbouring

village. Naturally, he couldn't take all
of his belongings, so he left his herd of pigs
in his native village. Because it broke his heart to
have abandoned them, he returned each morning to bring them some food.
The animals became accustomed to seeing him. Every day, at the same time,
they would gather together, ready to be fed. The man didn't even need to go
looking for them. This lasted for a long time. The man would have liked for
it to last even longer, but he didn't take into account a certain lisepsep.

One lovely morning, the man came as usual to see his pigs and his
native village. So accustomed was he to this daily ritual that he noticed
immediately if anything was out of place. Something was indeed wrong.
No pigs came to be fed. He called to them, yelled with all of his strength, but
nothing. Bitterly disappointed, he took the basket of food destined for the
pigs and left. While walking, he convinced himself that nothing serious had
happened. It was possible that one of the pigs had died, and the others stayed
close to it rather than coming to eat their daily meal. Maybe, later in the day,
the pigs would be hungry.



“I will return and leave the basket and all the food. It would be stupid for my pigs to go hungry like this.”

The man returned as he said he would and left the basket. He walked back to the neighbouring village, but he still felt uneasy. The missed morning ritual wasn't normal; it just wasn't natural. There must have been something extraordinary behind it. Impatience, winning the day, pushed the man to return to his native village. Nothing could compare to his surprise when he saw his herd rush towards him. However, his astonishment grew when he saw that all the food had already been eaten.

“This is absolutely incredible. My pigs are hungry, but there isn't any food left from what I had put here for them! Well, we'll see about this!”

The next day, the same thing happened, and again every day thereafter for three days. It was too much. The man searched the surrounding area, looking for the key to the mystery. Looking down, he saw a footprint, a footprint like that of a child.

“Ah, I understand! It's a lisepep that is playing this horrible trick on me. Well, we shall see what we shall see.”

In the village where he now lived, the man warned the men that a lisepep was happily eating all of his pigs' food.

“You understand that this cannot last. My herd will die of hunger. I suggest that we go in search of the lisepep quickly – tomorrow, for example.”

The decision seemed wise. The next day, very early, the man headed up a group of sixty men from the village. Once they arrived in the other village, the chief of the group looked for his pigs. He didn't see them. After a week of this, he had become used to it. He began calling and yelling with all of his might. Nothing. So he climbed up a namambe tree and hung his basket full of provisions for the pigs. He descended very quickly and acted like he was going back to the other village. But as soon as he was at a suitable distance, he quickly hid in the bushes with his sixty companions. During this time, the lisepep was doing all he could to stop the pigs from approaching the tree where the basket hung. But seven minutes later, believing the man to be far

away, the dwarf decided to free the animals, who arrived at a gallop under the namambe.

In the bushes, the lookouts cried, “There are the pigs! The lisepep must be close behind.”

Sure enough, the lisepep came charging towards the tree on the back of a big pig. Very quickly, he jumped to the ground and climbed the tree like a cat. He sat on the branch where the basket still hung, and started to eat.

The provisions, ample enough to feed a herd of swine, quickly filled him up. It was at this moment that the men decided to grab the lisepep. Slowly, walking on their tiptoes, the men approached the tree. Their goal was to stop the dwarf from coming down. However, one of the men became frightened.

“No, I don't want to go! A lisepep is supernatural, and we never know what he will do. No, I won't go! I'm too afraid.”

The plan was ruined. The man who owned the pigs made the decision to send two volunteers up the tree to try and catch the dwarf, who was drowsing happily after his meal. Courageously, the two men climbed the namambe, but at the moment that they were to surprise the lisepep, he saw them! He gave a malicious laugh and in one jump landed safely on the ground, well beyond the men waiting at the foot of the tree.

Unfortunately for him, the dwarf fell precisely into the bag that the coward had left behind. Having followed this scene with his eyes, the man who had led the whole village threw himself at the bag and tried to grab the dwarf by the feet. Lively and agile, the latter was able to grab the man's head.



The other men from the village leapt to their friend's aid. But what can one do against a lisepep that is as big as a seven-year-old child but as strong as a herd of pigs? The battle raged, but the men seemed vanquished from the start.

Yet, a man from the village remembered what he had heard on the island. He had been told that, to defeat a lisepep, one must cut his hair! He would lose his power at the same time as his hair. Why not try? Without waiting, he grabbed a knife.

"Hold it, men! Let me do it. I will get to the end of this dwarf."

The men backed off. In one gesture, the man threw his knife and the blade shaved off the lisepep's hair. The dwarf fell to the ground, emptied of his strength. He retained his malicious and sly air, but he was, at present, inoffensive. The sixty men escorted him all the way to their village, savouring their victory. But on the way, the lisepep said strange things.



"It is true that I am your prisoner and that you have won against me and that I am without strength. But I can be very useful to you. However, you must respect certain rules. You must never let me sleep on the ground, you must let me choose my own lodgings and you must never play the flute or the tamtam. If you do exactly as I have told you, you will not regret it."

At first, the men from the village laughed at this speech, but little by little, they realised that maybe it should be taken seriously.

"After all, this dwarf has already shown us his strength. It's true that he might be useful. We have only to follow his advice. Let him choose his own shelter, and maybe he will help us!"

The dwarf, overhearing the men's discussion, reminded them, "You must never play the flute or touch the tamtam. Don't forget: no flute, no tamtam."

The lisepep chose to reside in a large tamtam. He would have been forgotten if strange things had not started happening. A man had but to say, "I feel like eating fish," and the next morning he would find the fruits of a miraculous catch in his hut. If a woman wanted to go to the river to wash some clothes, she didn't have to lift a finger. The dwarf took care of it. Or if a garden needed to be weeded, the lisepep started working without having to be given a single order. The village became a virtual paradise. Men and women lived in harmony, free of any material woes. All this could have lasted a very long time, but...



One day, a man from a neighbouring village came to visit his friends. They spoke a long time about the lisepsep, whose reputation had become known all over Santo. However, no-one had told him about the lisepsep's recommendations. The story of the dwarf's exploits lasted a long while, so long that the quickly falling night surprised the stranger. He did not want to return to his village through the bush at night. It was so dark in there that no star could pierce the blackness. Thus, he accepted his friends' invitation to sleep in the village.

Very early the next morning, an earthquake abruptly woke them. Everyone was used to the tremors that came from time to time, but this one was particularly violent. The man from the neighbouring village became frightened. He rose hastily and ran towards the large tamtam and began to beat it. This was the custom when something bad had happened.



But alas, he had done just what the lisepsep had always forbidden. Wakened abruptly, the lisepsep jumped out of his lodgings. Someone had beaten his tamtam! Supple and agile, he lunged towards the stranger and hit him so violently that the man fell to the ground unconscious. The dwarf then took advantage of the situation to escape into the bush.

The whole village despaired. They had just lost their good luck charm because a stranger had ignored their new customs. It was too bad! The men pursued the lisepsep through the bush, but he was already very far away. Arriving at the shore, the lisepsep followed the reef into the deep water. The men saw him and, without hesitating, plunged into the water in an attempt to catch him. But in turn, the dwarf dived and disappeared forever. The men searched a long time, but they could find no trace of him.

When they had returned to the village, the men cried and lamented bitterly the loss of such a precious companion. The lisepsep was never seen again in Santo. But maybe, if you dive, you will come upon him. He will surely pull a few tricks to amuse himself, but if you know how to catch him by cutting his hair, he will do many wonderful things for you. And if you are this lucky, follow his advice and don't let any friend remain unaware of his recommendations. If you do, you will lose him like the inhabitants of Santo did, and a lisepsep is not easy to find!

MONKEY TROUBLE



HOW TROUBLE MADE THE MONKEY EAT PEPPER

Retold by Grace Hallworth



An old woman used to buy molasses from a nearby village. One day, as she was returning home, she tripped over the roots of a tree and her calabash fell and broke, spilling the molasses she had just bought.

When the old woman saw her molasses running on the ground and going to waste, she began to cry:

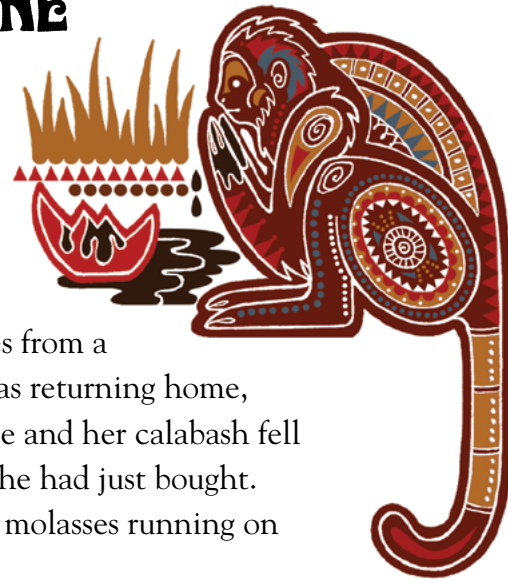
*Lordie, Lordie, look at mi trouble, oui,
Lordie, Lordie, how trouble overtake me!*

She scooped up as much molasses as she could with a bit of broken calabash and continued on her way. As soon as she had gone, Monkey climbed down from the tree where he had seen and heard all that had happened.

He sniffed the treacly, sweet syrup on the ground and in no time he had licked it all up.

“Yum, yum!” he said, smacking his lips. “If this is trouble, then I’ll have double.” And off he ran to the village shop to buy some trouble.

Now when Monkey entered the shop and asked for double trouble, the shopkeeper could make neither head nor tail of it. So Monkey explained what had happened to the old woman. Then the shopkeeper saw his chance of getting even with Monkey, who had pelted him with coconuts the last time he had taken a short cut through the forest.



He went to the back of the shop, seized two bull dogs sleeping there and put them into a sack, which he tied securely. Then he returned to the shop and handed the sack to Monkey.

“There’s enough trouble in here to keep you busy for quite a while,” said the shopkeeper.

Without so much as an “If you please” or a “Thank you”, Monkey threw the money down on the counter, grabbed the sack and rushed off. He ran deep, deep into the forest until he came to a quiet shady patch under a grugru palm, where he sat down and made ready to enjoy trouble. No sooner had he opened the sack than the two bull dogs jumped out and rushed to attack him. Monkey barely had time to leap to a branch of the grugru palm, and there he crouched, not daring to move, the hot sun burning into his skin and the thorns digging into his paws and the bull dogs baying and barking at the foot of the tree.

Thus it was that the shopkeeper found Monkey late, late that evening when he went to look for his dogs.

“Ah, Monkey! What trouble is this I see? Double trouble wait under this tree!” said the shopkeeper.

Poor Monkey was so faint and weak, he could hardly speak. Growing quite near was a pepper tree laden with red-hot peppers. He had eaten nothing all day and peppers, even red-hot peppers, were better than nothing. Monkey reached out and devoured pepper after pepper until there wasn’t a pepper left on the tree.

Tears ran down his face, and as the pepper burnt his tongue, his mouth and his stomach, Monkey gasped:

*I have had my fill of trouble,
Hungry and thirsty, I’m seeing double.*

“Then,” said the shopkeeper, “take my advice, Monkey, and never trouble trouble unless trouble troubles you.”

LUCKY LITTLE LIZARD

By Michael Dom

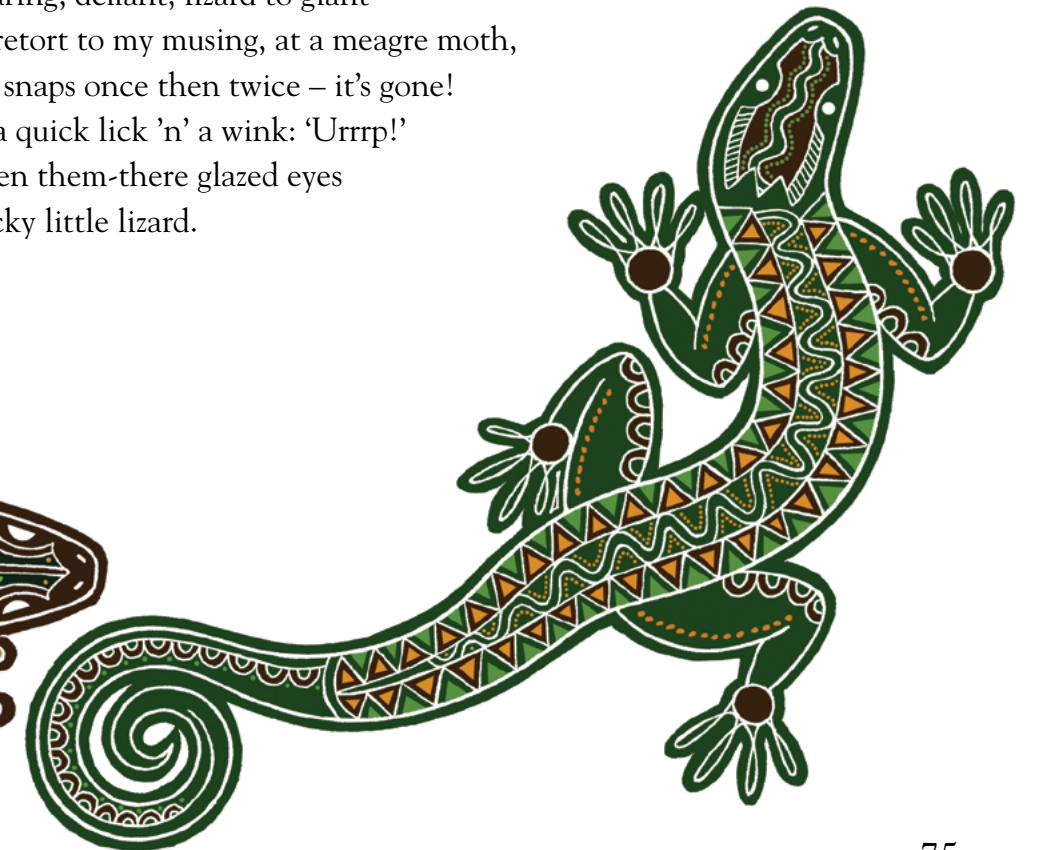
Tak! Tak! Tak-tak, tak-tak, tak-tak, tak-tak!...
 Small mercies fall upon a tin roof
 Glad tidings whistle through rafters
 A pleasant evening between here and there
 And a song to share with musing geckos
 Eating silly bugs bedazzled
 By luminous glows.

Tchk! Tchk-tchk, tchk-tchk, tchk-tchk!...
 Staccato feeling at a flick of tail
 Defying laws that hold me
 Neither over nor under
 Neutrally buoyant or rather
 Drowning in suspended animation
 Better a ceiling clinging critter.



Tshhh! Tshhh-tshhh, tshhh! Tshh, tssshhhhhh!
 Simmering rice on a hot gas stove
 Is habit not hunger driven
 Mouthful of moth
 He scurries off
 Like some freak reflection
 Of me entering the kitchen.

Wibbly-wobbly, dribbly-gobbly, bibbly-bobbly, blur!
 Glaring, defiant, lizard to giant
 In retort to my musing, at a meagre moth,
 He snaps once then twice – it's gone!
 In a quick lick 'n' a wink: 'Urrrp!'
 Then them-there glazed eyes
 Lucky little lizard.



THE TORTOISE AND THE ELEPHANT

Retold by an unnamed narrator, transcribed and translated by
Chris Searle et al.



n times that are a long time gone, Tortoise and Elephant had an argument. Afterwards, Elephant laughed and began to poke fun.

“Well, Tortoise, you really have got short legs!”

Tortoise answered him, “I may have short legs, but I can still jump over you – even when you’re standing up.”

Elephant didn’t believe it.

“What? You must be joking. With those short legs and no height at all – how can you get over me, an elephant? No chance – you can’t jump over me.”

Tortoise insisted.

“That’s what you think! But I can guarantee you that I’ll make it.”

“Never! You can’t jump over me.”



“But if I manage it – what will you give me?”

Elephant replied, “Listen, if you do it, I’ll pull out one of my tusks and give it to you.”

Then, as they were there together, Tortoise had his idea. He went off to speak with another tortoise, his companion, and told him, “Listen. I’ve just been speaking to Elephant. Do you know what he said to me – ‘If you can jump over me, I’ll give you a tusk.’ Now, we can work together for something. You go and hide there, near to where I’m going to jump. Then afterwards we can get a lot of money for the tusk.”

They decided to work together. The second tortoise would go in front and hide, and the other would arrive with Elephant at the entrance of the village.

Elephant and Tortoise both stood up, ready for the contest.

Tortoise said, “I’m going to jump!” – and then hid himself in the bush.

From the other side of Elephant, the second tortoise suddenly appeared from his hiding place and said, “*Chito, chito, chito*,” which was the sound of someone falling to the ground.

Then the second tortoise asked, “Well, did I or did I not jump over you?”

Elephant confessed, “I still don’t understand this.”

He stood up again. The first tortoise came out of his hiding place and cried out, “I’m going to jump!”

At the other side of Elephant, the second one appeared. “*Chito, chito, chito!*” he said.

Elephant had to admit defeat.

“All right, boy, the discussion’s over,” he said. He took hold of a tusk, pulled it out and gave it to Tortoise.

Later, when other elephants began to arrive with missing tusks, they understood how the tortoises had tricked them. But the tortoises always managed the trick because they worked together. So Elephant had to learn to live without the tusk that he gave to Tortoise!

THE TALE OF THE TAIL

Retold by Cecil Mbuli



long time ago, when tails were being distributed, the rock rabbit's friends, the hares, said to him, "Let's go and get our tails!"

The rock rabbit was a lazy animal and said, "Ahh, I can't be bothered to go. Please bring me one."

So, the rock rabbit's friends all went off to get their tails. When they returned, the rock rabbit said, "Where's my tail?"

His friends replied, "They ran out of tails; there were no more tails left!"

So the rock rabbit never got his tail and had no one to blame but himself, hence the proverb "*Imbila yeswela umsila ngekulayetela*", which loosely translates as, "If you don't do things for yourself, you might get nothing!"



THE SKIN OF LIONS

Retold by Ahikirije Jean Bosco, translated by Gabriel Constans



here once was a man named Cambarantama, who looked after his sheep and cultivated his fields. One day, while he was looking after his sheep and leading them to the grasses, he found a small animal that had eaten some of his crops hiding in a bush. When the man came back the next day, the same creature had eaten more of his crops.

He took the little animal back home and said, "I'm going to have to kill you for eating my crops."

The small animal said, "Wait! Please don't eat me. Forgive me, and I will not eat your crops any more."

Cambarantama had a good heart. He forgave the little animal and let him go.

On his way to the shamba the next day, a very big animal approached him. The big animal told Cambarantama that he had to kill one of the sheep in his field and give it to him for his kettle. Cambarantama was scared and did as he was told. He went and killed one of his sheep and gave it to the big animal. This kept happening day after day.

Another day, on his way to his shamba, Cambarantama met the little animal he had forgiven.



The little animal said, "I see that you have fewer and fewer sheep every day. What has happened?"

Cambarantama replied, "There is a big animal that comes every day and makes me give it one of my sheep. That is why you see that so few are left."

The little animal he had saved said, "The next time that big animal comes, I will be next to you, hidden in a bush. I will tell you what to say."

Cambarantama took his sheep to the grasses, and the big animal came from the forest once again and told him it was time for him to give him another one of his flock, but Cambarantama said he would not give him any more. The small animal was hidden in the bush next to Cambarantama and spoke out loud.

"Who are you talking to?" asked the big animal.

The small animal said loudly, "I am the King of Heaven and Earth, who puts on the skin of lions."

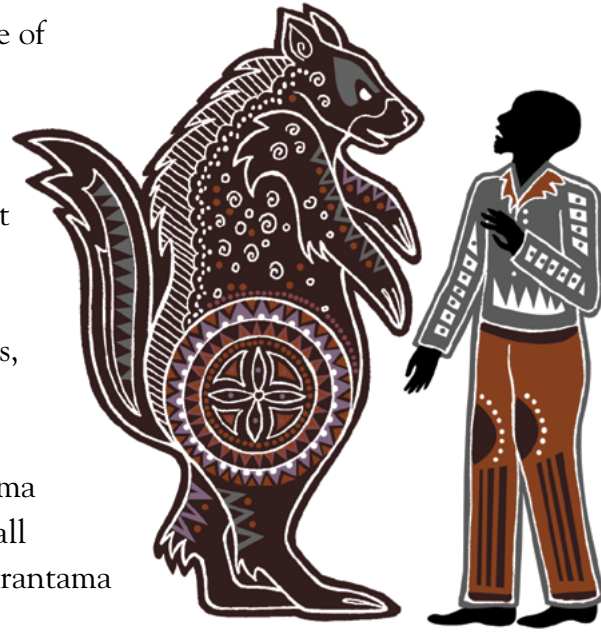
"Who is that?" asked the big animal.

"What are you looking for?" shouted the little animal, hidden behind the bush.

The big animal was scared and said, "I – I'm just looking for firewood."

"Sit down and don't move," shouted the little animal, who then whispered to Cambarantama to get the rope for firewood and use it to tie up the hands and legs of the big animal.

That is how Cambarantama captured and killed the big ferocious animal and saved his sheep, with the help of the little vegetable-eating animal he had forgiven.



CAT

By Edward Kamau Brathwaite

To plan plan to create to have
whiskers cool carat silver ready and curved
bristling

to plan plan to create to have
eyes green doors that dilate greenest
pouncers

to be ready rubber ball ready
feet bouncers cool fluid in
tension

to be steady steady claws all
attention to wait wait and create
pouncing

to be a cat eeling through alleys
slipping through windows of odours
to feel swiftness slowly

to halt at the gate hearing
unlocking whispers paper feet wrapping
potatoes and papers

to hear nicely mice spider feet
scratching great horny nails
catching a fire flies wire legs etch-
ing yet stretching beyond this arch
untriumphant lazily rubb-
ing the soft fur of home



THE BHUTUA HORSE

Retold by Asad Chowdhry,

translated by Azfar Hussain and Neepa Ahmed



Once there was a rich businessman. His business was expanding every day, and he had to travel to distant places. He felt the need for a good, strong horse.

He went to several marketplaces where horses were sold. But he did not like any horse that he saw. People advised, “If you want a really good horse, you should go in for a Bhutua. It can cover in one day the distance for which an ordinary horse would take seven days.”

The businessman set his heart on getting a Bhutua horse. He went to the biggest horse market. As he was looking around, a trickster sighted him and knew immediately that he would be an easy and good catch. The man, who was selling pumpkins, waited for the rich man to pass by. As he approached his stall, he asked him, “Sir, what are you looking for? I have been watching you going round and round. Maybe I can be of help.”

Touched by the man’s politeness, the businessman said, “I have been looking for a Bhutua horse, friend. Can you tell me where I could get one?”

“You have come to the right place, sir. A Bhutua horse will cost you the Earth if you get one at all, which is highly unlikely. I have Bhutua eggs. Buy one. It will hatch soon, and you will get a beautiful, strong colt.”

“How much do you want for an egg?” asked the rich man.

“Only one thousand taka for you, sir.”

The rich man readily bought a huge yellow pumpkin and paid a thousand taka.



As he counted the silver coins, the young trickster cautioned him, “Please carry the egg on your shoulder. If you ever put it down, the colt will escape and run away. Good luck with your horse, sir.”

The businessman carried the pumpkin on his shoulder and started walking back towards his village.

The sun had set and it was getting dark. The rich man, however, kept walking until he could not walk any further.

He set the pumpkin down under a banyan tree and leaned against the trunk of the tree, wiped the sweat off his face and body, and closed his eyes to rest. Just then, a fox came running by. It saw the pumpkin and, perhaps out of curiosity, hit it hard. The pumpkin broke open. Frightened, the fox ran.

All the hustle, and the sound of the dry leaves as the fox ran, made the man open his eyes. He was amazed to see the animal running. He ran after it, presuming that it was the colt that had come out of the broken egg. He ran after it, thinking, “If it can run that fast soon after birth, I can’t imagine how it will gallop when it grows up.”



The fox had never been chased by a man like this. It hid in a haystack. The man started beating the haystack with a stick.

Now it so happened that a tiger was in the haystack, too. The stick hit the tiger. It came out and ran. The man was even more surprised. He thought, "How could the colt grow that much within minutes?" He was immensely pleased with his buy. He was sure the horse would be his most prized possession. Now all he had to do was to run after the animal and catch it.

At last the tiger slowed down, as it was very tired. The man caught up with it and mounted its back. He patted the tiger on the back and said, "No more hanky-panky, son. Take me home fast like a good boy."

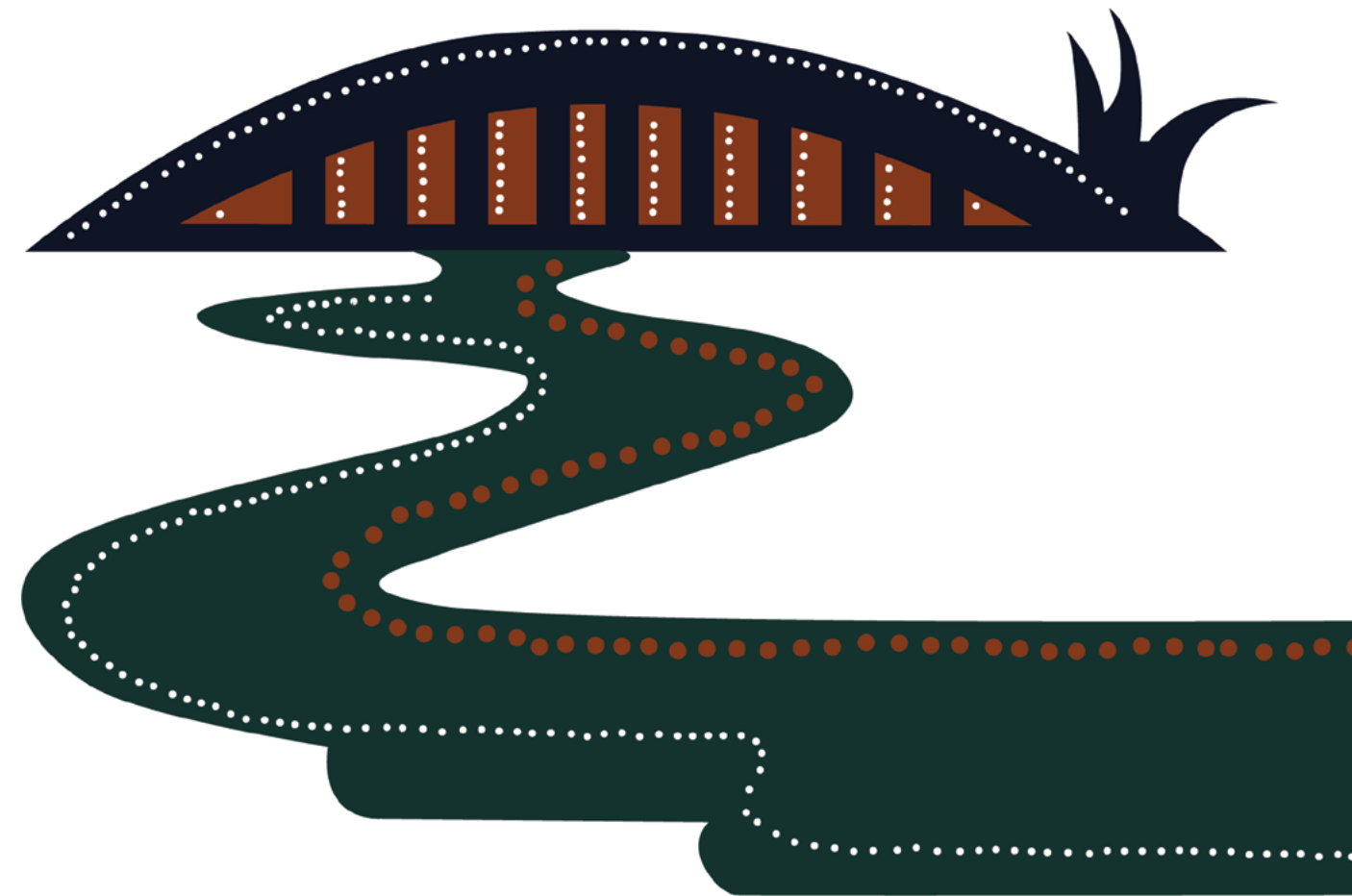
Carrying the man on its back, the tiger ran.

The night was over. It was dawn. The eastern sky was a brilliant red as the sun rose like a gold disc. What the man saw now in the daylight almost killed him with shock. He was actually riding a tiger!

But the tiger continued to run. The man, now desperate to save his life somehow, jumped and held on to a low branch of a tree. The animal, unaware of this, continued to run.

After a while, the man fell off the tree and hurt his legs. Some passers-by helped him to reach home.

From then on, if someone ever mentioned the word "Bhutua", the businessman would fly into a rage. That was one word he wanted to forget for the rest of his life!



**SPIRIT
OF THE
JUNGLE**



THE SMELL OF MANKIND

By N. M. Rashed, translated by M. H. K. Qureshi
and Carlo Coppola

From where has this smell of Man suddenly come?
Jungle demons stand stone-still;
Their footprints turn to fetters on their feet;
The smell of Man.
In dim jungle meadows,
In the moonlight, they dance without fear,
without sorrow.
But now, their feet are numb, their hands cold,
Their eyes petrified, without light.
A single whiff has turned them white with fear;
For them, one smell is enough.
Who is a match for them?
A shadow, hidden in the Tree of Time,
Among the branches of months and years,
Looks on them through tangled silent branches.
One smell of Him and they panic.
They turn to wax.
Yes, tonight Man will descend,
And demons' valour will be shattered.



THE SACRED DOOR

A Beba story retold by Makuchi



So, this is how it is. It's all about a poor man. His father and his mother die, leaving him with nothing. He has no crops in his farm. Not one young woman will look at him or think of marrying him. Some call him the village scarecrow. For that reason, he often flees to the forest where he spends most of his days. No-one actually knows what he does among the trees.

One day, he takes his cutlass and axe and goes into the forest to look for a fertile piece of land to plant his seeds. Not confident of the parts of the forest he already knows, he decides to go even further and deeper into the forest. He gets tired and sits down under a mahogany tree.

After a while, he feels strong hunger pains; his stomach rumbles, he feels faint, but he has no food. He searches the trees hoping to find some fruit. There is none in sight. To his surprise, he sees an old woman instead. He greets her, "Mother, are you lost?"



She says, "Where are you from?"

The man says, "Father-mine and Mother-mine have died. I am looking for a place to plant some seeds."

And he hears her command, "Give me that cutlass and axe."

He gives her the cutlass and the axe he is carrying across his shoulder.

The old woman says, "Turn around. Take off your clothes."

The man turns around, his back to the old woman. He takes off his brown tattered singlet and the loincloth tied around his waist. He finishes undressing, looks up, and finds himself in a different country.

People of this country are happy to see him. They take him to their palace and crown him as their king. The poor man can hardly believe what is happening to him. A nkwo, the most senior of all the nobles, gives the king a tour of the entire palace. There is a lot to see: all the living quarters, the ceremonial grounds, the king's gardens. It takes all day. It is a long day.

They finally come to a door and the nkwo bows and says, "Mbeh, everything in this palace is yours, but you should never open this door. It is the sacred door."

Years pass. The king settles comfortably into his duties. He looks after his subjects. He is doing a very good job. His subjects love him, and the gods bless him with many offspring.

But, as the Beba say, the king's throat is bitter, very bitter inside. He is unhappy about the door. "Why shouldn't I touch that door? Am I not the king? Have I not been good to my people? Why am I being treated as if I were a stranger? What is it about that door?" He gnashes his teeth.



The sacred door torments his dreams. He vows to do something about it – after all, *he* is the king.

His plan materialises on the most important day of the year, the day of the nwa ngeh, the Feast of the Cutting of the Grass. The king gives food; he gives drinks to his subjects. The people are festive. They nwa ngeh and invoke their gods. They thank their gods for the rains, for the new births, for good health, for the bountiful harvest, for another peaceful year. They pour libations, kill a goat, spill its blood and say incantations to ward off their enemies, bad omens and evil doers. They eat and drink and dance and celebrate.

The festivities over, the king tries unsuccessfully to fall asleep. His satiated subjects have stumbled into their beds and are profoundly asleep. One lonely figure begins to roam the halls of the palace. He can hear his tortured mind whispering into the darkness, "Today is the day I must open that door. If I don't open it on a sacred day like this, the annual day of reckoning, when can I? A sacred day like this one merits the opening of the sacred door."

The king tiptoes through the graveyard silence of the palace. He approaches the door and gently opens it. He steps outside and shuts the door. He suddenly feels shivers shoot down his spine. He realises there are no clothes on his body. He is stark naked. The old woman is there, sitting under the mahogany tree.

"Here are your things," she says, handing him his rags, his cutlass and his axe.

What would you have done?

The story is finished.

THE PIONEER (AN EXTRACT)

By John Okai

Expect me... my dear mother –
 Expect me... but only
 When you shall see me
 Coming;
 I am still in the wilderness
 Alone,
 But do not worry because
 Of me.
 The fruits of the tall trees,
 The waters
 Of the silent springs and streams
 Feed me.
 From the moon and sun, I have
 My light,
 For my bed and pillow, I approach
 The leaves,
 The animals clothe me with
 Their skins,
 The birds sing for me – this is all
 I need...



Our native forests are rich
 In these,
 And in forests, our native land
 Is rich.
 I would have told you this:
 “Your memory
 Has made me endure the sunrays’
 Bullying,
 The biting of the ants and the
 Cold night.”
 This is not so – the elephant’s skin
 Is mine,
 The hare has leant me her feet,
 The nose
 Of the bat is mine; mine is the
 Lion’s heart.
 To me has been leant the neck of
 The giraffe,
 The stomach of the camel and the
 Zebra’s hair.
 I speak the language of the antelope
 And leopard.
 Yet expect me... my dear mother
 Expect me... but only
 When you shall see me
 Coming.

LORD OF THE JUNGLE'S DESIRE TO CONQUER THE BUSH

Retold by an unnamed narrator, transcribed by Haji Abdul Hakim bin Haji Mohd Yassin



Once upon a time, the jungle was ruled by King Elephant. He was elected due to his big size and enormous strength. All animals were afraid and thus respected him.

One day, the elephant summoned a meeting of all animals. The response was immediate, and they all gathered at the palace of King Elephant. When King Elephant appeared from his palace, which was made of a heap of stones, all the animals were silent and bowed before him.

"Is everybody present?" he asked.

"Yes, Your Majesty, except for representation from the bush," answered the tiger.

"How come they haven't arrived yet?"

"I am not sure, My Lord. My Lord's order may not have reached them."

King Elephant immediately stood up and spoke in a loud voice, "I've conquered all the jungle, no-one was excepted, and now I'm going to conquer the bush too with all its inhabitants."

He looked around, but not one animal dared to say anything.

"What do you say? Agreed?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Aye, My Lord."

"We are all with you."

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

All the animals replied time and again in unison, which echoed through the jungle. Those at the back likewise declared their agreement though they could not hear clearly what was actually said by King Elephant. They would never dare to argue, for they knew that argument would mean punishment or at any rate they would become victims of the king.

"Good, good. I'm going to send a delegation to the bush as soon as possible."

"You don't have to worry, My Lord. The bush animals are all small, and surely they will not dare to oppose your desire," the lion offered his opinion.

King Elephant then raised his trunk and trumpeted, "We are the all powerful King of the Jungle!"



This call, as it echoed through the jungle, was acclaimed by the shouts and roars of the other animals. As the animals were dispersing, the elephant commanded the lion and tiger to gather several other animals to go along with them as messengers to the bush.

“As I have said just now, My Lord has no need to worry. This is a small matter, which we can easily accomplish,” answered the lion confidently.

“He’s right, My Lord. I’ll be leading the delegation myself,” added the tiger.

King Elephant was so happy to hear their assurances that he gave one of his big ears to be brought along as token of his communication to the animals in the bush territory.

“Go ahead and convey our message thus: I am the Mighty Lord of the Jungle and the Bush as well!”

When the Elephant King’s messengers arrived in the bush country, all the bush animals gathered to welcome them. They were bemused as well as frightened to see the elephant’s big, floppy ear being carried in procession.

“See that ear of King Elephant, that’s just an ear. I wonder how big his body could be,” whispered the slow loris to the squirrel.

“His body may be as huge as a mountain,” said the squirrel.

The lion then spoke out in a loud voice. “Be it known to all inhabitants of the bush, the King Elephant, the Lord of the Jungle, promulgates the bush as part of his sovereign territory. You are therefore all required to be loyal to him.”

When the messengers had left, the bush animals immediately called a meeting.



“The giant lord will trample down all the trees in the bush,” said the squirrel.

“When the woods are all trampled down and dead, where then are we going to live and search for our food?” said the slow loris.

“Yes, we must do something about it. Although we have never seen the Lord of the Jungle, I’m sure he is very strong and destructive. Certainly we’ll not be able to live in peace anymore,” added the squirrel.

“We must find a way to avoid being ruled by the Lord of the Jungle,” said the slow loris.

The rest of the animals agreed with him.

“But how are we going to oppose them?” the little animals asked each other.

“Well, don’t we have the mouse deer?” said the squirrel.

“What use is a mouse deer? He is just about our size,” they said.

“We are not trying to set the mouse deer to fight the Lord of the Jungle, but he should have an idea of how to defeat a stronger opponent,” explained the slow loris.

The next day, the mouse deer was invited to the meeting. The squirrel told him about all their plans.

“Please help us. You, sir, must know of a way to save our territory,” pleaded the slow loris.

“I agree. Something must be done before it is too late,” the even more anxious but usually taciturn forest lizard put in.

The mouse deer rose and walked to-and-fro in front of them. He was beginning to have an idea.

“All the jungle animals are indeed big. This is just an ear; the body must be monstrous. What can we do to fight them?” murmured the mouse deer repeatedly with head bowed. But then he went on. “But we can master the problem if the porcupine is willing to give his biggest and longest quill.”

All the rest immediately turned their heads towards the porcupine, who was standing on a decaying trunk, busily eating the myriad termites.

“What do you say, Mr Porcupine?” asked the squirrel.

The porcupine was at first reluctant to give a quill, but urged by all those present, he finally agreed to give his largest and longest.

“And what are we going to do with this quill?” asked the squirrel.

“We’ll use it as our weapon to deceive them,” replied the mouse deer.

When preparations to attend on King Elephant had been made, messengers from the bush started out for the residence of the Lord of the Jungle.

“What on Earth are you carrying there?” enquired the lion, as the messengers arrived to present the gift.

The mouse deer who led the mission from the bush immediately bowed in respect.

“What our delegation has brought is a message from our king to Your Majesty.”

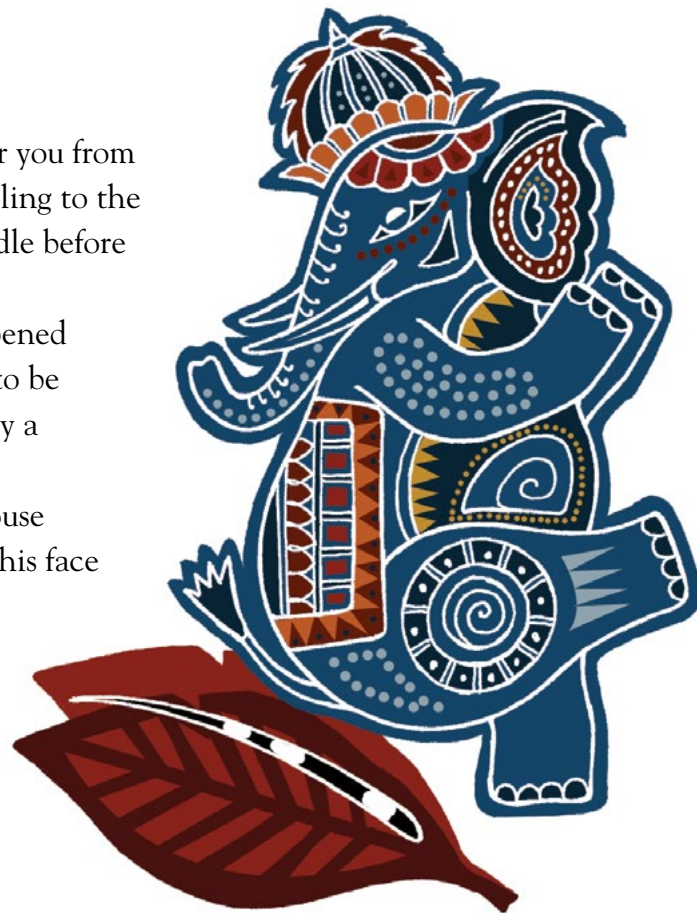
“For me?” asked King Elephant, laughing.

“Yes sir, this is the return message for you from our king,” added the mouse deer, signalling to the squirrel and slow loris to bring the bundle before the Elephant King.

His Majesty was so happy that he opened the bundle without further ado – only to be taken greatly aback to find inside simply a large, long and sharp quill.

“What’s the meaning of this, Mr Mouse Deer?” the King asked the mouse deer, his face dark with fury.

“Our ruler sends that. That’s a hair from the body of the King of the Bush.”



King Elephant was dumbfounded. His face was red and his eyes transfixed by the quill. The lion and the tiger too were struck dumb by the sight of the “hair” and could not utter a word.

“Our apologies to Your Majesty, but we have to take our leave now as we have several other missions to fulfil,” said the mouse deer as he withdrew.

King Elephant gazed blankly at the departing messengers from the bush. He was really scared at the sight of the quill.

“If the hair of the King of the Bush is this big, his body must be a lot bigger and stronger than mine.”

“You... must be right, My Lord,” the tiger put in stutteringly.

“In that case, I’m calling off my plan to conquer the bush. I don’t want to court disaster or to get killed,” declared the elephant.

All the animals in the bush territory were delighted to hear the news and celebrated. After a period of great anxiety, the bush dwellers could look forward to a time of tranquillity again. Everybody was thankful to the mouse deer for saving them.

On the other hand, ever since then, the elephant has not dared to rove into the bush for fear of meeting the supposedly monstrous and incredibly powerful King of the Bush.

MINSTREL'S SONG

*A traditional Mende song,
translated by an unnamed translator*

There are, some people say, no riches in the bush.
But look at an anthill:
It has a helmet, providing shelter from rain.
See that beetle:
His coat does not go round him
And yet it has three buttons.
A bird, which lives there in the bush,
Has a wooden house:
Who is the carpenter?
This bush cow wears boots
Like those of a soldier;
That baboon has a black coat
Like a policeman;
And the kingfisher has a silk gown.
Why, then, do some people say
There are no riches in the bush?



SILILINN

Retold by an unnamed narrator, transcribed by Lee Haring



ell, once there was an old wolf named Zalumbe. He stayed in a house in the forest. Next to his house, there was a big lemon tree that was always full of lemons.

Not too far from his house was a lady who lived with her little daughter. The little girl was named Sililinn.

She was an obstinate girl. She did everything her mother told her not to do. She had a passion for going and picking Zalumbe's lemons every day. Every time she came back, her mother argued with her, "Sililinn, my child, you're a bad child. Stop stealing lemons. Someday, Zalumbe's coming to catch you."

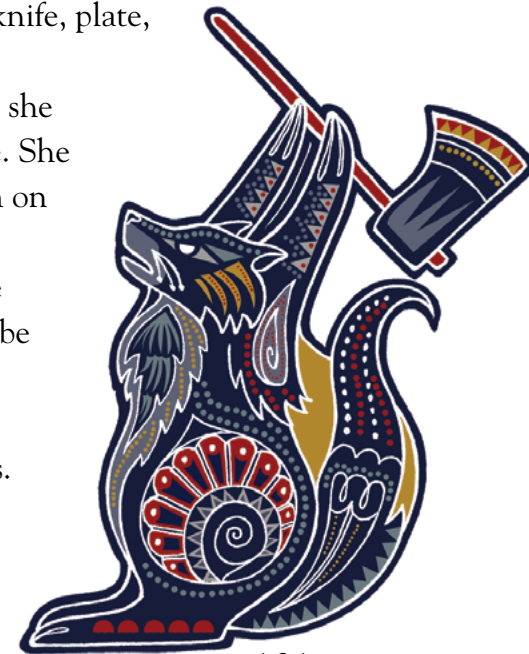
She didn't stop.

Sililinn said to herself, "Every day, Mama argues with me, but today, so she doesn't smell it, I'll eat the lemons over there by myself." So Sililinn took everything she needed for a salad, including her knife, plate, salt, sugar, pepper, vinegar and chilli, and she went.

She got to the lemon tree. She looked around a bit; she didn't see anyone. She quickly climbed the lemon tree. She looked everywhere; still nobody. She took her position on a branch and started on the lemons.

In just a minute, she heard a noise in the straw. She looked. Who could it be? Zalumbe! Ahhh! Yes, Zalumbe came with a big sack on his back and an axe in his other hand.

Sililinn shook. She remembered her mother's words. She wanted to cry out, she wanted to jump, but it was too late.



Then she heard Zalumbe and his big voice saying, “Hmmm! Fresh meat here! There’s fresh meat here!”

Wow! Then Sililinn made herself small, small; she thought Zalumbe couldn’t hear her. Then Zalumbe said, “Sililinn, Sililinn, come down out of there.”

Sililinn answered, “You’ll eat me if I come down.”

Zalumbe told her two more times to come down. Sililinn didn’t come down. She said, “Zalumbe, you might eat me. I’m scared.”

Zalumbe said, “I’m going to cut down the lemon tree.”

So Zalumbe took his big axe and started cutting, *tok, tok, tok, tok!* He cut down the lemon tree.

Sililinn shook. The lemon tree fell over. It went, “*Weeeeeeeeeeyyaaa!*” So Sililinn tried to run, but Zalumbe jumped on her, put her in his big sack, ran with her to his house and put her in a concrete bed of coconut leaves, which he filled with all kinds of insects – bedbugs, centipedes, cockroaches, scorpions, millipedes, mosquitoes, spiders and so on. He covered Sililinn with a big mat, blocked his door with a coconut stick and was very happy.

Zalumbe ground his teeth, he started lighting a big fire and then thought, “I don’t want to eat Sililinn all alone. Better I go find my whole pack of pals to make us a good party.”

He went looking for the whole herd of wolves: Matumak, Songor, Kapiler, Chimite, Yoyote, Budume. He told them all to bring their wooden forks. So they made their way to the party at Zalumbe’s.

Meanwhile, Sililinn’s mama went out searching for her child. When she got to the woods, she saw the lemon tree cut. Her heart went up in her neck. She put her hand on her head and said in her heart, “Must be Zalumbe has caught Sililinn.”



She ran to Zalumbe’s house and saw the coconut stake blocking the door. She took courage and opened the door. She saw Sililinn covered with the mat and picked up a basket. She put Sililinn in it. She took a banana trunk and put it in Sililinn’s place.

Going into the woods, she met the crowd coming to the party with Zalumbe. Zalumbe said to her, “Madame, we’re going to a party at my place.” Just then he didn’t know Sililinn was in the basket.

The lady told him, “I’m in a hurry; I can’t turn back.”

So when Zalumbe got home with his pals, he had them come in. They didn’t lift up the mat, they just started jabbing it with forks. They thought it was the meat.

One jabbed it and said, “Bit thin.”

Another said, “Yes, it is.”

So Zalumbe lifted up the mat. What did he see but a banana trunk? His gang of friends said to him, “We get you now.” They started beating him till he was half dead.

During that time, Sililinn arrived home. Her mother gave her two rotten eggs. She told her, “Go back in the woods before Zalumbe comes looking for you and when you hear him, run and throw the two eggs behind you, and after running, come back here.”

Sililinn went. She heard Zalumbe come running. Sililinn threw those two rotten eggs. She started running. The two eggs became a big river.

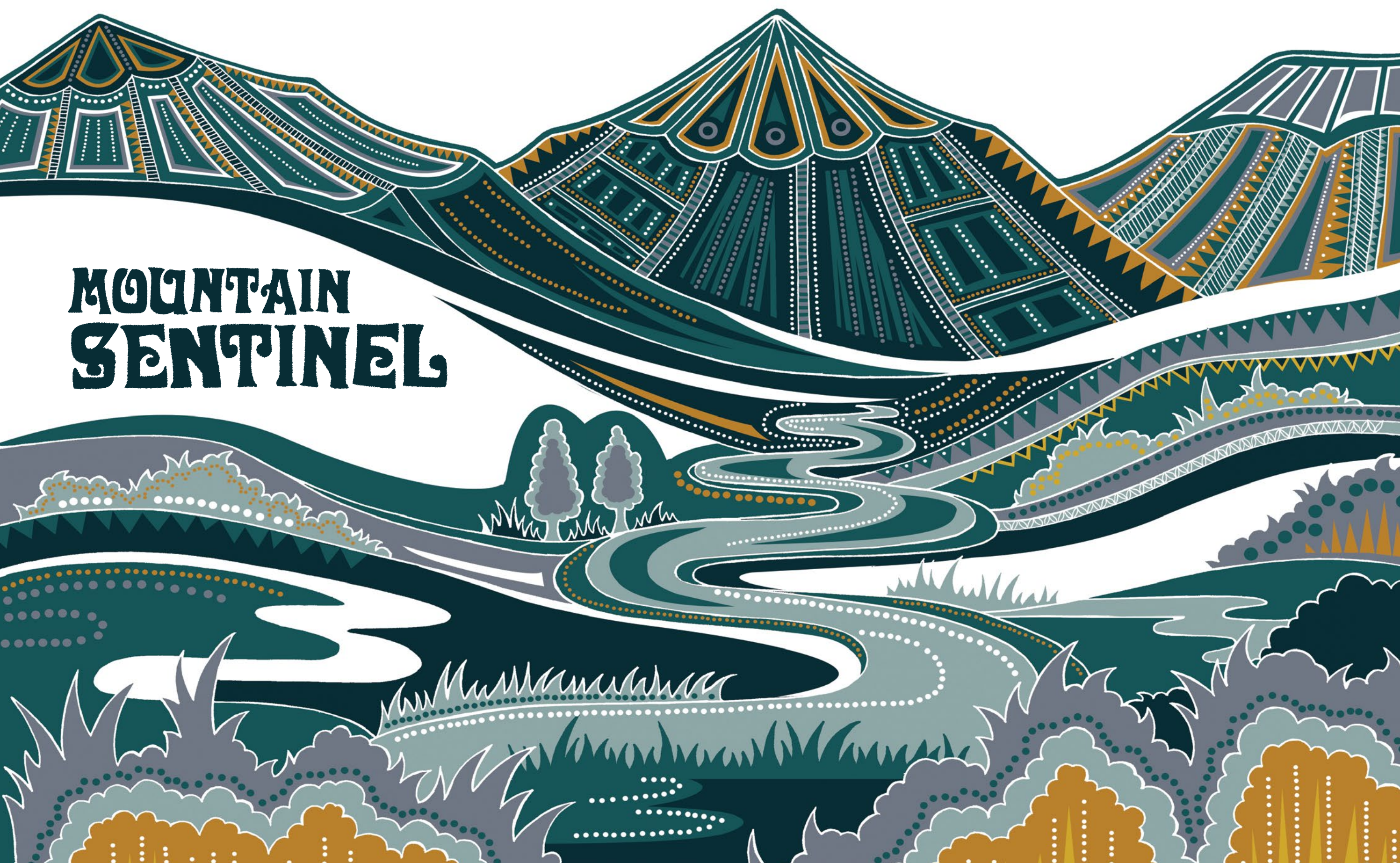
Zalumbe cried, “Ok, Sililinn, I’ll catch you!”

He started making a bridge out of coconut poles across the river to reach Sililinn. When he went on the bridge, it broke, and he fell into the water.

Sililinn was very happy to get home all right.

Me, I ran to see what was happening, and me too, I fell in the river.

MOUNTAIN SENTINEL



MOUNTAIN

By Peggy Carr

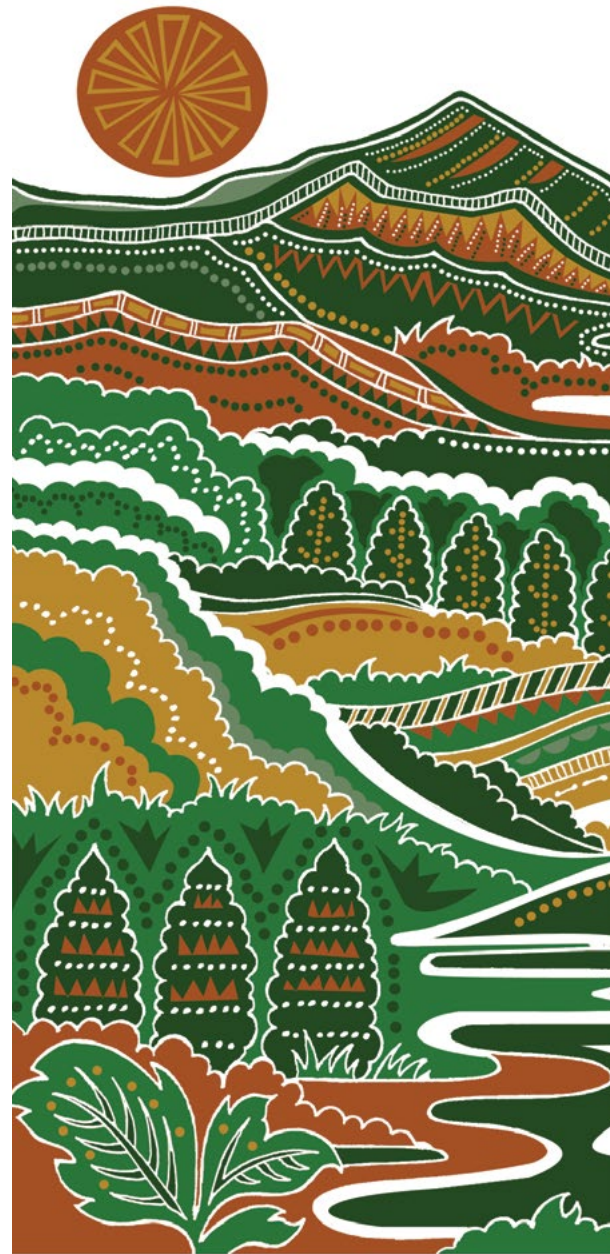
My footsteps hear your call
and like docile children
stand still before you

My eyes lift up a silent anthem
to your splendour

Your lines are strong
and clean and pure

Your face behind a subtle veil of dew
holds age-old secrets
and memories of before-time

The sun comes out
to touch
to love
you
as I do
and trails a pensive shadow
across your breast



I love you still

The light slowly seeps
into your pores
as you stand aloof
and wrap the night about you

I breathe the fragrance of your darkness

The wind comes visiting
and runs an idle finger
down the edges of
the silver moonbeams
hanging from your hips

I hold your essence like a fragile gift

My ever-changing
never-changing brother
some day I'll sleep
beneath your heart



THE MOUNTAIN AND THE FOREST: AN ARGUMENT

By John Harris

Said the forest to the mountain,
“Look at you, ugly thing.”
Said the mountain to the forest,
“Stop that! Look at you, you have hair
all over you!”
To himself, the forest said,
“That really is a fact,
So there is nothing to say about that!”

Said the forest to the mountain,
“Look at me! My feet are dangling
in the water.
I feel as cool as the wind.
Look at you up there like a pot.
You certainly must be hot!”
To himself, the mountain said,
“Now what can I say about that?”



NANUMEA

Retold by Taulu Isako



Our traditions say that the first people to settle on the sandbank now called Nanumea were two women named Pai and Vau. It is said that the neighbouring islets were formed from the sand that fell out of the women’s baskets after they had been sent away from Nanumea by the

Tongan warrior named Tefolaha who became the ancestor of the people of Nanumea. This is the story of how he came to Nanumea.

Tefolaha was involved in some battles between Tongan and Samoan warriors. After one of these wars, Tefolaha decided to settle in Samoa. He was given some land by the Samoans for helping them fight the Tongans. But Tefolaha soon became tired of fighting, so he decided to leave Samoa, hoping to meet with new adventures somewhere else. He travelled for many days, meeting with strong winds and currents until he finally arrived on the beach at Nanumea.

Tefolaha thought that the island was uninhabited, but he soon found some footprints in the sand, which he followed until he came upon two women, Pai and Vau. They were weaving baskets and garlands when Tefolaha suddenly appeared. He ordered the women to leave the island at once on the grounds that he was its owner. The women, however, insisted that Tefolaha should leave, unless he could tell them their names.

Tefolaha was known in Samoa as “Folasa-aitu” because he was able to turn himself into a spirit. As he was keen to know



the names of the women, he turned himself into a spirit so he could easily get up into the rafters of the hut to observe them. Then he took a piece of string, tied a wooden hook to the end of it and, having climbed onto the roof of the house, lowered the hook down close to one of the women.

When the other woman saw it, she called out, "Pai, look out! There is a hook above your head."

Tefolaha then knew that the name of that woman was Pai.

He now wished to know the name of the other woman, so he pulled up the hook and then lowered it down again, this time close to the other woman's head.

Pai called out, "Vau, look out, the hook is over your head!"

Now Tefolaha knew for certain the names of both women.

Using his magic powers, he turned himself back into a man again and walked towards the two women. "Why have you come to my island without my permission?" he asked.

One of the women said, "It is our island. We were the first to live here." And so the argument broke out afresh.

At last, Tefolaha said, "There is, as we have already discussed, only one way to sort out who owns this island. If you can tell me my name, you can have the land. If I can tell you what your names are, I can have the land." The two women agreed. They asked Tefolaha to tell them their names. Tefolaha paused for a while and then, pointing to one of them, he said, "You are Pai." He then pointed to the other and said, "You are Vau." The two women were very surprised because the man knew their names.

Tefolaha then said, "Now, it is your turn to tell me my name." They thought and thought. They gave him this name and that, but none was correct. Tefolaha had now the right to be the owner of Nanumea. He asked the two women, Pai and Vau, to leave the island. They picked up their baskets of sand and left Nanumea, spilling sand as they went. The sand they spilled formed the islets of Lefogaki, Te Afua-a-Taepoe and Lakena. The two women eventually landed in Kiribati, where they stayed.

TRAILS

By Eva Johnson

I once walked along the trails of my ancestors
through deserts, mountains, rivers and sands
where food was plenty,
where goanna tracks led to waterholes,
where the bandicoot whistled its name.
I gathered nuts from the kurrajong tree
and suckled wild honey.
I swam with catfish in billabongs of water lilies
and tasted cooked food from ovens underground.
I smelled the promise of the winds
along trails of the dreaming
and traced my mother's footsteps embedded in the sand.

I once walked along the trails of my ancestors
that now have been blown away with the winds of time.
Only in memory will I walk along the trails.
Only in memory will they remain.



TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES

By Jully Sipolo

Take off your shoes,
For you are standing on holy ground.

Take off your shoes
Step into my footprints
Tho' the road ahead is thorny
I'll pave the way.

Take off your shoes
Walk beside me
Give me your hand
I'll protect you.

Take off your shoes
Barefooted, feel the pain
Trials, temptations
Hills and valleys
It's not easy

But

Take off your shoes
Harden your soles
From this day forward
We'll battle together.



THE STORY OF THE FOUR BELLS

Retold by C. Baissac, translated by K. Goswami Sewtohul



here was once a young man who had married a young maiden. As he had to go and work in a sugar-cane field quite a long way from his house, he gave his wife four bells: a copper bell, a silver bell, a golden bell and a diamond bell. Then he said to her, "Listen carefully. If you have anything to tell me and you want me to come home, you ring the copper bell; if you want me urgently, ring the silver bell; if you need me really badly, ring the golden bell; but you will ring the diamond bell only if you are in terrible danger."

The young woman, who loved her husband a lot, replied, "All right. I'll do what you say." Thereupon, they kissed each other, and the husband left to attend work.

When the young woman was alone in the house, she began to get bored. She paced the room, sat down on her bed, stood up and found that time was dragging. She was bored to death. What was she to do? So she rang the copper bell.



Her husband came running and said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing, I was just bored staying alone."

The husband shook his head and said, "My dear, you mustn't disturb people who are at work!" As it was still midday, the husband went back to the fields.

On the following day, the young woman rang the bell again. Nobody came. She rang the silver bell. The husband heard the silver bell and came running, thinking that his wife had something urgent to tell him.

"I am here! What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I was just bored."

"Come on. Be serious. Why don't you let me get on with my work?" And he went back to the fields.

The third day, the copper bell rang. Nobody came. The silver bell rang. Nobody came. The golden bell rang. The husband heard the golden bell. He left his work and came home running, thinking that his wife was ill.

"What's the matter? Come on. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I was just bored to death."

The husband didn't say anything. He took his hat, turned his back and went away.

On the fourth day, "*Ding, ding*" went the copper bell.

Nobody came.

"*Dang, dang*" went the silver bell.

Nobody came.

"*Dong, dong, dong.*" It was the golden bell.

Nobody came.

"*Dong, dong, dong.*"

Nobody came.

"*Bzinn! Bzinn! Bzinn!*" It was the diamond bell!

The husband gave a start. "There is danger at my house!" He ran. He flew towards his house. "Have no fear! I'm here, my wife!"

The young woman laughed and said, "What's the matter with you? Are you mad? Do you think that the house is on fire? There is nothing to worry

about. I was just bored."

The husband was furious. "Wretched woman! You have cast a spell on yourself! A great calamity will fall on you, you'll see!" He flopped on a chair, holding his head in his hands and started thinking.

Two or three months passed.

One day, the young woman was sitting alone on a mat in her room and was eating vavangues. All at once, she turned her head and saw a huge beast standing on the threshold. She was terrified and rang the copper bell.

The beast entered the room and stood on the mat.

The young woman rang the silver bell.

It was a wolf. He sat beside the poor woman and looked at her.

The young woman rang the golden bell.

The wolf looked at her with his terrible eyes, fell upon her and shouted, "I am going to eat you."

The poor woman, mad with fright, jumped to the far corner of the room and rang the diamond bell.



The wolf ran after her. They went round the table, upsetting the chairs. The young woman rang the bell in vain. Nobody came. The wolf took hold of her and swallowed her.

In the evening, his work done, the husband returned home. When he entered the house, he saw all the mess: chairs and tables upset, all the strings of the bells broken. The husband suspected a calamity. He called for his wife again and again. No answer from his wife. He went into the yard; he looked for her; he shouted to no avail! The husband sat on a big rock and cried, "My wife is lost! My wife is lost!"

That night, while he slept, he heard a rat scratching the vetiver grass of his roof. He listened. It was outside on the roof of his hut. He went out and looked. But it was so dark that he could not see a thing. He was asking himself what it might well be when he heard a voice that said, "It's me."

"Who are you?" asked the husband.

"Me, your friend, the paille-en-queue."

Three years ago, one day, while he was looking for guavas on the mountain, he had saved the eggs of the paille-en-queue from the mouth of a monkey on the edge of a cliff.

"It's me. I know where your wife is. If you want to find her, follow me. There is no time to lose."

"But how can I follow you in this black night?"

"I'll fly near the ground. My body is all white. My wings are all white. But do hurry up. Let's not waste time talking."

The bird flew and the man followed it. They moved on and on till they came to the edge of a huge hole. That huge hole was the boundary between the wolf country and the country of men. The paille-en-queue stopped flying, perched on a bois-de-natte tree and said to its companion, "It's here! We must wait a little while. In a few moments, the wolves will pass through the bottom of this hole. You'll see the one who has stolen your wife."

The man sat down, stopped speaking and watched. He had been sitting for some time when he heard, "*Tah, tah, tah, tah.*" It was a wolf, who was approaching.



"Is it you who seized my wife?"

"Houn, houn!"

"It's not him, let him go," said the paille-en-queue.

Another wolf came.

"It's not him. Let him go."

And the wolves passed, one after another.

All of a sudden, the paille-en-queue shouted, "There he goes! It's him, look at his tummy!"

It was a big black wolf, with fiery eyes and a tummy as big as a barrel.

The man fell on him; the paille-en-queue jumped on his head. They beat him, the bird pecked him and he was altogether given a good thrashing. The wolf, afraid of getting killed, gave up the woman after some time.

The husband was happy. While he was kissing his wife, the wolf said to them, "From now on, you won't find diamonds scattered on the ground. To get them, you must dig deep mines."

It's from that time that diamonds have become rare. And to have a very small piece, women must give lots of gold and lots of silver in exchange.

THE STONE

By Michael Andrew Wakabi

I am a sentinel, a guardian of times
 Days and men come and pass
 But I, the sentinel, I persist
 Like vagaries of weather, they batter to crush me
 But summer, spring or winter, I stay the stone
 Men hurl themselves at me, bouncing, flying off like balls
 But I, the sentinel, I stay
 They teach me lessons I learn
 I teach them lessons they never learn
 Me, I'm a witness of times
 Times have brought men and gone with them
 But I, the sentinel, I stay
 I stay because I go deep in this crust
 I need neither wings to fly nor bees to stay
 No, I just occur here, and here I'll stay for all seasons to come
 For men and their like are mere riders on time
 With time they come
 With time they go





**NIGHTS
DRAW IN**

OCTOBER SKIPS AWAY

By Obediah Michael Smith

I am touched
By your skippity-hippity hopping
Across the grass
In your red shorts

Your fullness
Caught up in my breath

You, jumping about
Within my senses,
Within this evening,
As if Wordsworth were still
Watching.
Fortunately,
I see as well as he.

Your fullness
Is almost right for white lace

And promises to keep.



AUTUMN NEWS BULLETIN

By John Foster

Today, the trees are in shock.
Overnight, a sustained assault
Has left them battered and bare.
There were leaves everywhere –
On roads and pathways,
Scattered on lawns and flowerbeds,
Clustered in doorways
And the corners of buildings.

In some gardens,
Men with rakes have appeared.
In due course, barrow loads of leaves
Will be heaped into bonfires.
Now, in the aftermath of the storm,
There is an air of resignation.
As one of the residents put it:
“I suppose it’s to be expected.
It happens every year.”



THE KING AND THE COBBLER

Retold by Niki Marangou, translated by Katerina, Kathleen and Stephanos Stephanides



here once lived a poor cobbler, whose workshop was just across from the king's palace. Every afternoon when he had finished work, the cobbler would buy a bottle of wine and meze (small dishes) to accompany the wine. He would sit at the table on his balcony, playing the mandolin. He would have a good time.



Meanwhile, the king in his grand palace was filled with worries over the many tasks and affairs of the kingdom. Every evening, he would listen to the cobbler singing and playing the mandolin, and he would wonder how it was that he could sit all alone and enjoy his wine and have a good time.

One evening, the king had a headache from tending to many affairs throughout the day. He decided to go to the cobbler's house and ask him where he found the energy and spirit to have such a good time when he was only a poor man. The king donned the garb of a commoner so that the cobbler would not recognise him, went out and knocked on the cobbler's door.

"Welcome, my friend," the cobbler said. He invited his visitor to take a

seat at his table and then brought out a glass and plate so that they might eat and drink together.

"I pass by here every evening," the king told him, "and I listen to you sing and enjoy yourself. How do you find the money? How can a poor man manage to do such a thing?"

"Well," the cobbler said, "I work the whole day long, making shoes and boots for people. The money I earn is enough to buy some food and a little wine for the evening. Let's eat and drink and have a good time together."

"Thank you very much," said the king, "but I have much work, and I am in a hurry. Some other time I will join you."

The king returned home to his palace and all night long he thought about the cobbler. "If he didn't have work," the king wondered, "what could he do to have a good time?" He decided to test him, and the next day, he ordered that all cobblers' shops in the kingdom be closed so that no cobblers could work.

As soon as the cobbler heard about this, he nearly went mad with worry. He couldn't sit around all day doing nothing! He closed his shop and went into the town to see what else he could do. He was walking around in desperation, when he heard the town crier calling out for workers to unload a ship that had arrived from Egypt.

"One pound to any man who is willing to work," the town crier shouted.

The cobbler didn't hesitate an instant. He went to the ship at once and set to work. One pound was much more than he would ever earn for a day's work in his cobbler shop! The captain of the ship appreciated the cobbler's industry and, when the work was done, he gave the cobbler a strange-looking fruit. It was long and yellow and sweet inside. It was plentiful in the Nile country but unknown in Cyprus.

The cobbler was very happy. He had doubled his earnings, and he had a new treat for his table!

When the king heard him singing that evening, he quickly disguised himself and went down to find out what had happened.

“Welcome, my friend,” said the cobbler as soon as he saw the king. “Come and taste a new fruit that was given to me today.” Then he related to the king how he had spent his day. “And what luck for me, for the ship will be unloading all week!”

Once again, the king did not stay to eat or drink but hastened back to his palace. The next day he issued a new order forbidding any ships at port to be unloaded.

Again the cobbler was very worried, and he set out at once to find work. All morning long, he walked around seeking work in the market places and along the harbour. When he had no luck, he decided to sign on as a soldier.

He received his pay every afternoon and besides, he had a good time and made new friends in the army.

One day, his sister came to see him.

“I owe money,” she told him, “and they’ll put me in prison if I don’t pay. You must find a way to help me!”

The cobbler didn’t have a penny. All that he earned he would spend eating and drinking every evening.

“What can I do?” he thought. His sister was so desperate, and he felt sorry for her. So he went and sold his sword and gave her the money she needed.

As soon as his sister left, he learnt that the king would come the next day to inspect the barracks. He really didn’t know what to do – how would he look at inspection without his sword! He thought and thought, and then he went into the forest and cut a piece of wood. He carved it and, when he put it into the sheath, it looked exactly like a sword.

The next morning he lined up with the other soldiers to be inspected by the king. When the king came to him, he stopped and said:

“Draw your sword, soldier, and kill the man next to you.”

“In the name of God, my king,” he said, “what has the man next to me done that I should kill him?”

“It is an order,” the king said.



The cobbler put his hand on his sword and said aloud, “My God, make my sword wooden so that it cannot kill.”

Then he drew out his sword and said to the king, “You see, my king, God does not want injustice, and he has made my sword wooden.”

“I have seen that you are a very clever man. You will come to live in the palace, and I will give you my daughter for a wife.”

So the cobbler went to live in the palace. He married the king’s daughter, and when the king died, the cobbler ruled the country justly and well.

CHRYSANTHEMUMS

By Cai Xin, translated by Chao Yemin

*In the wild west wind, they are planted throughout the garden
Their chilly petals and cold fragrance keep the butterflies at bay*
– Huang Cao

The butterflies don't come round
For I am chrysanthemum
Standing forever beyond the doors of spring

Let the peach blossoms seduce with their smiling faces
Let peonies put on their rouge
Let all the darlings of Nature
Put on their varied make-up

But I cannot abide the crowd
With my cold fragrance and chilly petals
I am no flower
And have no flattering seduction
When I stand I stand upright
And do not bend

I can dwell under the eastern fence
In the land of Tao Qian
In silent communion with the southern hills



I am not skinny
The leanness only that
Of proud bones in my body
My forehead and shoulders are broad
And can put on armour and helmet
And can lead
A billion golden armies

The eighth day of the ninth moon, the west wind
Comes howling from the outer heavens
Leisurely I meet the challenge
For when the wind arrives

I am chrysanthemum
I am armoured peasant
I am rebel

THE WINTERMAN

By Lionel Murcott

The Winterman's coming.

With his thin blue feet
he walks the lawn white.
With his long grey fingers
he taps the trees
and down fall their leaves.
He stalks through the land,
breathes out, all over,
cloudless cold air.

Until the Spring-girl catches him.

She ties him up
with ropes of green.
Shoves him headfirst down an old antbear hole,
kicks in sand,
stamps and packs it tight.

Blossom and cloud
hang white.

The sun swings longer,
higher.



And he lies underground
with his eyes open,
with sand in his eyes,
and strains at his bonds.

The ropes turn yellow.
The ropes turn red,
they burst apart.

The Winterman claws his way out of the ground.
He shakes the trees
with his long grey hands.
He walks
with thin blue feet
through the land.

THE HONEY GATHERERS

An Iraqw tale retold by W. D. Kamera



Once upon a time, there arose eight youngsters whose occupation was to gather honey from the forest. One day, they went to the forest and gathered so much honey that all their gourds were full, and they ate some to their satisfaction.

Unfortunately, these youngsters finished their drinking water before they were ready to go home. And as fortune would have it, the quantity of honey they had eaten was taking its toll on them. They grew extremely thirsty. Without hesitation, they unanimously started to search for any source of water in that forest so as to quench their thirst before they could turn their thoughts homewards.

In their adventurous search for water, the youngsters saw a magnificent house. They were happy, for they thought that their misery would now be allayed. They hurried to the entrance of the house and knocked, seeking admittance.

The owner of the house, who happened to be at home, came to answer the door and to greet the visitors. This owner was none other than Hatama-Iluni, but the youngsters did not recognise her. The youngsters were cordially asked in, and when they asked for a drink of water, they were given one, then they rested for a while after quenching their thirst.

Night was closing in at that time, and the youngsters thought it sensible to request accommodation in that house. Before they had even voiced their thoughts, the lady of the house read their minds and told them, "My dear youths, you should not punish yourselves with an exhausting walk this night. Pass the night here, and early tomorrow morning, you can start your journey in broad daylight."

On hearing this, the youngsters were very happy, for they knew that they did not have to worry about shelter and lodging for that night.

One of the youngsters, however, was suspicious of the lady's motives. He had a hunch that the lady of the house was not a normal human being. He told his friends what his fears were, but they told him, "You surely do not think that. Over and above the kindness that we have been shown, you would like us to suspect our lady host of sinister motives instead of thankfully accepting her generosity. After all, we are eight young men, and it is inconceivable that we can be overpowered by a woman." The youth, who had sown seeds of doubt amongst his fellows, became silent, for he saw that he could not argue with them.

Again came Hatama-Iluni, who cooked supper for them, and in the food she sprinkled a certain potion that induces sleep. Since the youngsters were hungry and very tired, they ate as though they were in a racing competition and each fighting for the first place.

The suspicious youth did not participate in this race; he simply kept the rest company. He merely took a small lump of maize bread and rolled it into a ball, then with one finger, dipped it into the sauce bowl in such a way that he only touched the edge of the bowl. It took him quite some time to eat one mouthful of food.

At the end of the meal, the seven youths had stuffed their stomachs with so much food that there was no room to breathe. The eighth youth had only eaten enough to reduce the pain of hunger.

After they had eaten, they were given an enormous bed, which comfortably accommodated all eight of them. The seven youths sank into sleep as soon as they reached the bed.



When the eighth youth saw the general condition of the rest, he concluded that there was something unwholesome about the food they had eaten that evening. Then he tentatively concluded that the house they were in did not belong to a normal human being but to Hatama-Iluni. He desperately tried to awaken the others, but his efforts were all in vain. Then he got out of the house and climbed the tall tree that grew near that house.

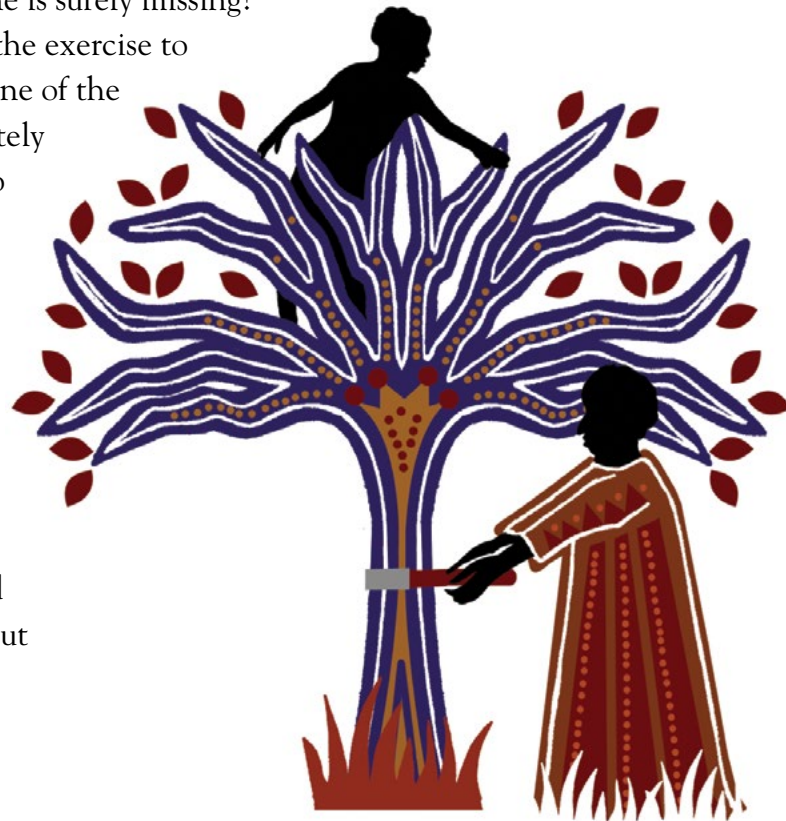
In the middle of the night, Hatama-Iluni also woke up with the intention of tying the youths securely to the bed in order to have a ready supply of food. She touched all of them and ascertained that they were dead asleep. But she had a feeling that their number was not what she originally thought it was. Then she started counting them aloud, “One, two... one, two, three, four, six, seven, eight, nine – oh no, they are more than I thought. They were originally eight. Let me count again!”

She started counting again, “One, two, five, seven. I think one is missing. I must count again.”

The lady of the house resumed counting. This time she did it slowly, “One, two, three... seven. Yes, one is surely missing!”

To be quite sure, she repeated the exercise to confirm her certainty. Certainly one of the youths was missing. She immediately left the house and went outside to look for him.

Fortunately, there was moonshine, and when she looked at the tree, she saw him perched on the branches. Hatama-Iluni rushed to the house and brought an axe and started to cut the tree. As the tree was falling, she returned the axe to the house and quickly came back to the scene, but



she was already too late. The youngster had escaped and climbed another tree. The lady had to go back and bring the axe to cut down the tree.

When she came back, she started to cut down the tree while singing:

Halmo halmo gang
Halmo Tsoori gang
Halmo halmo gang
Halmo Tsoori gang.

The youth too started calling his dog, for he saw that his life was in danger:

So Soay
Soo Mirando –
Dila nilwa gun
Soo yae tlakw?

That is to say:

Dog! Dog!
Dog Mirando –
Where are you sleeping
You lame dog?

Hatama-Iluni, on hearing the youth’s song, started to sing louder. She sang as she swayed the axe:

Halmo halmo gang
Halmo Tsoori gang.



Then both of them tried to outstrip each other in singing. Hatama-Iluni sang and swayed the axe and cut into the stem of the tree as though she were possessed.

When their forces appeared exactly balanced, a dog appeared and started to harass Hatama-Iluni. She had to redouble her efforts and divide her time between cutting the tree and chasing the dog:

Halmo halmo gang – ksh... kshshsh

Halmo Tsoori – kshsh... kshshsh... Get out of here!

As she kept on with her work, the dog continued to attack her. Finally the dog sprang at her neck and killed her. The young man climbed down and went to wake the other youths. They all went home safely, full of gratitude for that wise youth and his dog.

And that is the end of the story.

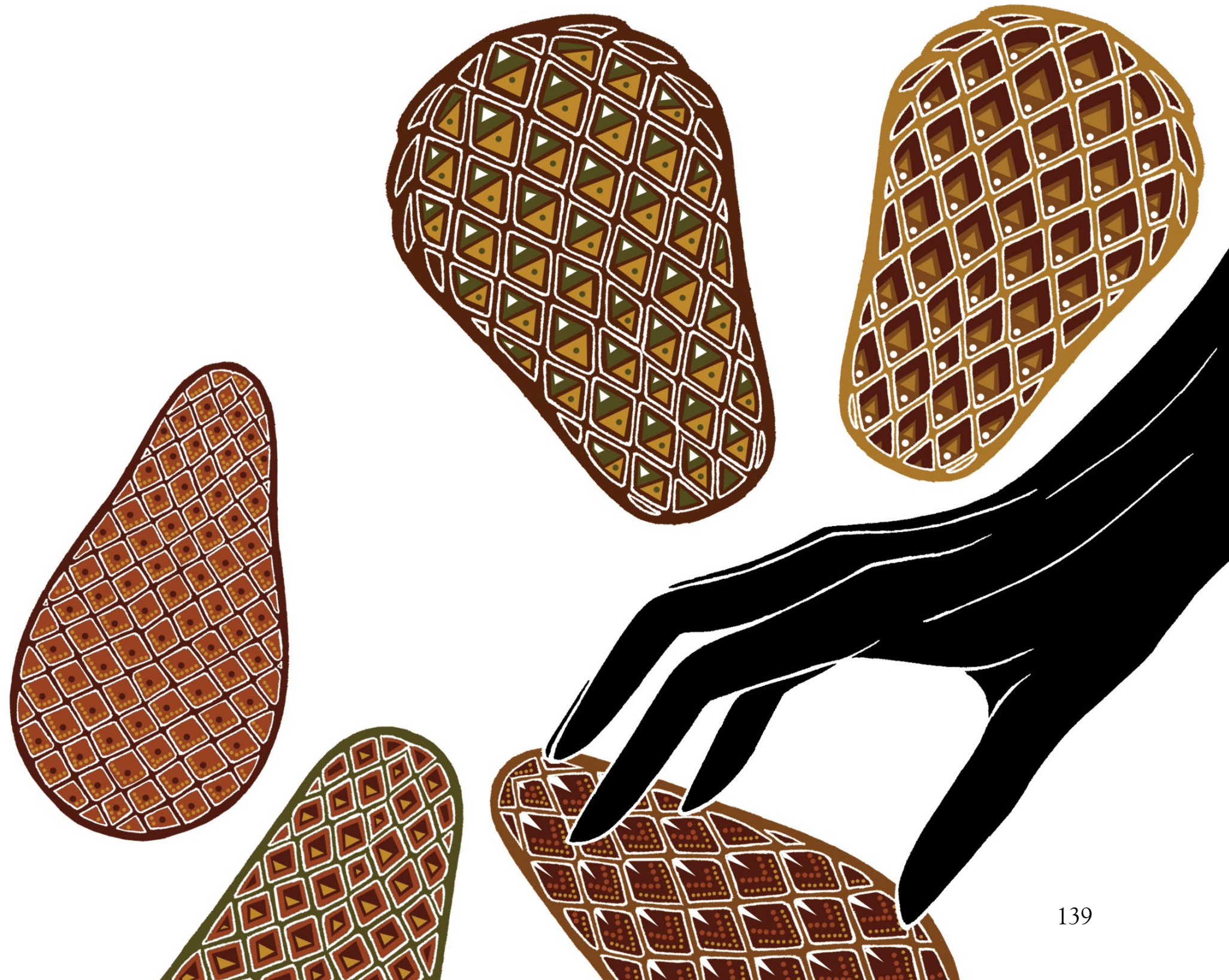
SOMEWHERE IS SUMMER

By Randi Gray Kristensen

Somewhere is summer.
This we know with a precision
the ancients never dreamt of
nor needed to.
The old one, shivering,
wrapped in rags,
crone bent over
a beechwood cane,
stands in the dying light
wind-whipped
as she gazes at the field,
dry
and empty,
and mutters –



“Goddess, forgive
your daughter’s betrayal.
Our hearts wither with you
and pray her safe return.
Youth and beauty,
the blinding curse
only one who lives in darkness
could hope to hold.
Even his hold must loose,
she will return.
Summer is somewhere,” –
mutters the crone
and slowly stoops
to gather acorns
and pine cones
for the mid-winter dance.





**THEN THE
GIANTS
CAME**

TIAEKI AND THE TWO GIANTS

Retold by Kabetitaake oġ Bonriki, translated by Ginette and Keith Sullivan, Peter Kanere Koru and Beta Tentoa



A man called Tiaeki lived on his own piece of land in the south, and two giants lived in the north. The giants decided it was time to clear their land, and they uprooted bushes and undergrowth and huge fruit trees and cleared their land busily until Tiaeki the liar went to stop them.

“You haven’t got any right to clear this land up here because it’s my land,” he said.

The giants turned and looked down at him, a scrawny, skinny man, and said to him, “What are you talking about? What’s your name?”

“My name is Seven with One Blow,” he said. “And do you know what that name means? It means that if seven men stood in front of me, I could kill them all with one blow.”



And the giants said to him, laughing, “Well, we are also very strong.”

“Yes, but I bet you can’t kill seven men with one blow,” Tiaeki retorted.

The giants looked at each other and shrugged, and one of them said, “Perhaps we couldn’t, or perhaps we could. But you can’t tell, because you haven’t seen us uproot a tree, a huge fruit tree, and throw it into the sea.”

“All right,” said Tiaeki. “I’ll see just how strong you are tomorrow. I’ll come back then, and we will have a competition to see who is stronger.”

Then he went away because he needed to find some particular things so that he could fool the giants. He went and picked some fruit from a tree and put it in his pocket, and the next day, he returned to the giants because he was ready to trick them.

He went to them and said, “Here I am, and now we’ll see who’s the strongest. What shall we do to test our strength?” And he said to one of the giants, “Here I have a stone, and you’re going to squeeze out all of its moisture.”

The giant grasped it and squeezed it and squeezed it until it crumbled into sand, for he was so strong that the water did not squirt out, but the stone itself fell apart.

Then Tiaeki said, “Now you squeeze this,” and he gave a stone to the other giant, who squeezed it and squeezed it.

The stone fell to pieces in his hand, and the giant opened his hands and dropped them in a gesture of defeat. “Its water didn’t squirt out either, because the stone fell to pieces,” the giant said with a shrug.



Tiaeki said, "It's my turn now," and he slyly took the fruit that he had put in his pocket, and he picked up a stone from the ground at the same time. "Now I'll squeeze the stone," he said. "I'll squeeze it until I squeeze its water out." And so he squeezed the stone into the fruit and squeezed and squeezed it until water began dripping between his fingers. Then he said, "Look at that, water is dripping out of the stone. See."

"Oh, so you really are stronger than us!" the giants cried in surprised.

"Of course," he said. "You're nobody. You're useless," and he threw away the stone disdainfully. He had them completely fooled because they knew nothing about the fruit he had squeezed against the stone. He said to the giants, "I'll come tomorrow, and we can compete again."

"Very well," they said.

Then he went away because he had to look for a bird, a small bird about the same size as a stone. He caught one.

He went back the next day, and said to the giants, "We will throw stones up into the sky to see whose goes the furthest."

One of the giants threw a stone up into the sky, and it made an arc and soon fell down again.

"Now it's your turn," Tiaeki said to the next giant, and that giant threw a stone high into the sky, and before long it fell down also.

"Oh dear," said Tiaeki, "it's very sad for you. Now when I throw up my stone, it will disappear and stay disappeared." And so saying, he took the little bird out and, at the same time, picked up a stone. Both of the giants watched what he was doing very closely. He casually pretended to scratch



himself and, in so doing, dropped the stone and released the bird skywards. He leapt forward to send it on its way, and of course, it flew free. The little bird glided off into the distance.

"When will it land?" the giants asked, puzzled and confused. "How long before your stone returns?"

"A very long time. We may never see it again, or it may return tonight, it flew so very high," Tiaeki said.

The giants conceded to him once more and said, "So you are indeed stronger than us."

"Yes," said the scrawny, skinny man. "So now you had better believe me when I tell you where the border of your land is, and if you so much as step over it, I can easily kill you. Both of you."



The giants were very angry and insulted, but what could they do in the face of his apparent strength? Their land extended far beyond the boundary, but the scrawny, skinny man had given them another boundary by fooling them.

The giants slouched off, mumbling and grumbling to each other, "How can a man so scrawny and thin squeeze a stone until water comes out of it?"

"And how can a man so scrawny and thin throw a stone so high that it will never fall down? He's much stronger than us, and there is no way we can beat him. We are nowhere near as strong as he is, so perhaps we have to accept the boundary he has given us. We can't get our land back because if we step over the boundary, he'll see us, and he'll kill us. Our huge bodies, our great strength and our great heights are nothing, for he is stronger than us in some other way that we don't understand, and there is nothing we can do about it."

The giants went home quite puzzled.

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

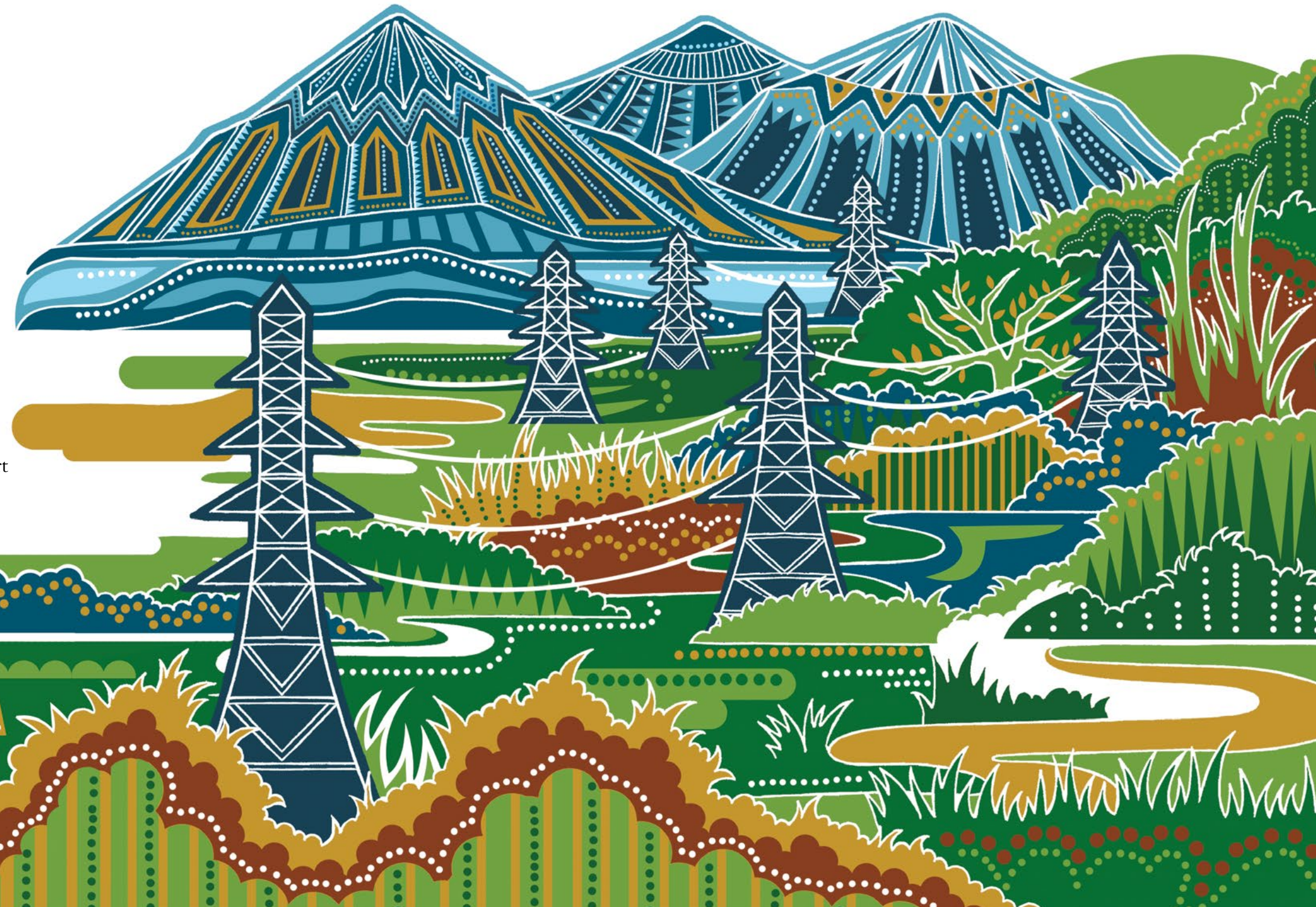
By Barry Mitcalfe

Out of this wilderness of rock
Over the slow whalebacks heaving
In a blue bush-sea breaking
In a splatter of scrub on the slopes

The pylons stride
Steel-sure, wind-swift, arrows sliding
Flight on glinting flight at the sun –
Bowmen, heads in air, rooted in earth

Singing across the wind, marching
Straight, tall, giants strung
On gossamer lines of wind and water
Sifting through a silver grid

At the city's edge, transformed to comfort
To a city sleeping, a nightlight burning.



THE MONSTER AND THE TWIN

Retold by Johannes Shaalukeni



here was once a man and woman who lived in a hut in the forest. The husband's name was Amutenya and he was very fond of hunting. When he went hunting, he would be away from home for days or weeks at a time.

Now it happened that, after they had been married for several years, Nangula, his wife, became pregnant. This made them both very happy. Nangula stayed at home when Amutenya went hunting. However, before he left, Amutenya always collected roots, wild fruits, marula kernels and honey for his wife to eat while he was away. And when he was gone, Nangula always locked herself in the hut because dangerous monsters roamed the dark forest where they lived.

Every time Amutenya returned, he came to the door of the hut and said, "Dearest wife, open the door. I am back, and I have brought you a lot of meat."

His wife knew his voice well, and she would quickly open the door and let him in.

One day, though, a monster who was looking for food nearby heard what Amutenya said and saw the lovely wife opening the door and taking her husband into her arms. The monster drooled and smacked his lips at the sight of them. The man and the woman both looked delicious. But the monster saw Amutenya's spear and his bow and arrow and decided that he must get Nangula on her own. So he wandered off into the forest, repeating Amutenya's words to himself over and over again so he would not forget them.



After a few weeks, Amutenya and Nangula wanted meat again. The husband decided to go hunting and did not see the monster lurking in the trees, watching him as he left. The monster grinned. He could hardly wait. As soon as Amutenya was gone, he hobbled up to the hut, but then he remembered that Amutenya always stayed away a long time. So he stopped and turned away again. After two days, though, he came back to the door and mumbled nervously, "Delicious... little, hummmm... dearest... little wife, open the door. I am back, and I have brought you a lot of meat."

Nangula knew that it was not her husband's voice. So she refused to open the door.

The monster tried several times again, but when nothing happened, he realised that Nangula was not going to open the door for him. So he left, very disappointed, rubbing his stomach. As he walked, an idea came to him. He went to a traditional healer and said that he wanted his voice to sound just like Amutenya's voice, because it was such a beautiful voice. At first, the healer hesitated, but then he agreed. The monster looked lonely, miserable and hungry. He gave the monster a bag of herbs to boil in water and drink.

Immediately afterwards, the monster started to speak, and he sounded just like Amutenya. He could hardly wait to go to the house the next day. When he got to the door, he cleared his throat and said, "Dearest wife, open the door. I am back, and I have brought you a lot of meat."

Nangula was happy to hear Amutenya's voice, so she opened the door immediately. When she saw that it was not her husband but the monster, it was too late. The monster killed her quickly and began to eat her up. As he was busy chewing, cracking her bones and swallowing, he heard the sound of babies crying. He wiped his mouth. He looked and found two baby boys in Nangula's belly. The monster put them in a basket that was hanging from the roof, so that he could eat them later. But when he had finished with the mother, he felt sleepy and full. He forgot about the boys and left, closing the door behind him.

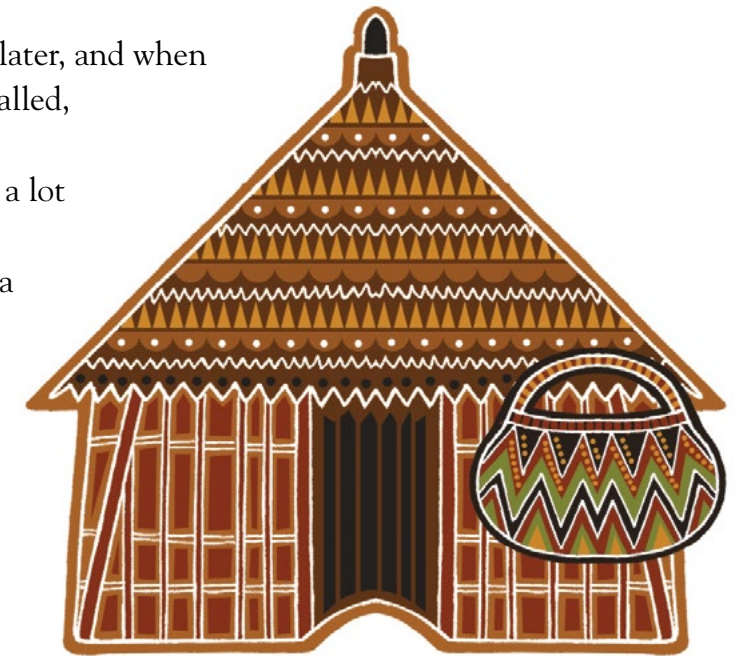
Amutenya came back two days later, and when he was at the door of the hut, he called, "Dearest wife, open the door. I am back, and I have brought you a lot of meat."

There was no answer. Amutenya pushed at the door, and it opened slowly. He went inside. His wife was not there, but he saw the mess and heard the babies crying. He looked up and found the two boys in the basket. He took them out and saw that they were twins. Then he looked around the room, and he realised that his wife had been eaten by a monster. He was very sad and cried alone for a long time.

Amutenya looked after the boys and fed them milk and honey until they grew up. When the boys were fifteen years old, their father told them that a monster had eaten their mother. He also told them that if they ever found and killed the monster, they would find their mother inside it.

A year later, Amutenya died after a bad illness. He left the twins a big piece of land, where they grew different types of beans and other vegetables. They worked very hard on their land and loved and looked after each other very well because they had no other family.

One day, the brothers decided that they must have a feast for the monsters in their neighbourhood. They were not afraid of them because they were strong from all the hard work they did every day. They cooked beans in large pots and invited all the monsters. When the monsters came, the boys told them that they would give food only to those monsters who danced well. So the ugly beasts formed a circle for dancing. The first one went into the circle and moved around singing, "Shalashasha, shalashasha, shalashasha."



“You don’t know how to dance,” the boys shouted, laughing. “Get out and give another ugly monster a chance.”

The monster left the circle and went to stand with the others. The second monster then bounced into the circle and danced as he sang, “Pulukutu, pulukutu, boys! I ate your mother, but I did not know you at the time, and I did not know that her boys would make such fantastic beans! I have a tail. I have a spot on the lower part of my body. Pendu, pendu!”

The twins were stunned and sick with disgust. One of them said to the monster, “You dance well. Have some more beans and dance some more.”

The monster ate the beans and continued dancing, round and round until there was a cloud of dust in the air.

While the monster danced, the twins whispered to each other, “So this is the monster that killed our mother. We have found him out.” They picked up their spears and killed the monster while he still sang to the moon. The rest of the monsters screamed and howled, running away. They did not expect the boys to be so brave.

One of the boys called out, “Mother, where are you?”



Their mother answered, “I am in the stomach.”

The boys cut the stomach open, but the mother was not there.

“Mother, where are you?” the second boy shouted.

“I am in the head,” she said, but when they cracked it open, they did not find her.

“I am in the left finger,” their mother called again. Then they split the finger open, and out came their mother.

The boys were very happy and took their mother home.

The king heard the news about the twins and the monster, and he invited them to the palace. He told them that he was going to make them headmen of their area because they did not turn back from fear. He also gave them each many cattle.

The people in the village respected and liked the twins. They were pleased that the king had chosen them as headmen. With time, the twins became rich and respected throughout the land. And they lived happily with their mother for a long time.

I HAVE BEEN TO THE VILLAGE

By Patu Simoko

we return to a village abandoned
we cry for the music of those times
will memories alone give back our dance?

father, we return kneeling at your feet
you, owner of the hills and the rivers and harvests
bringer of peace and winner of all wars on Earth
listen
we are the drummers
returning from cities where from mealie bags
we fed fat and abandoned the praise songs of your seasons
we are the prodigal singers
who drank from taps
and forgot to compose in praise of your rivers
we are the dancers
who stood by jukeboxes
no longer in touch with the rhythm of our hearts
we left to the village
songs composed on lips of singers long dead
listen we return to beat the drums forever
and call back your lost dreams
we return prostrate at your feet
our lips full with songs and dance
we beg one thing

the drum of your ancestors
on which to beat the dance of our times



THE DUEL OF THE GIANTS

Retold by Mary L. Pope and Tupou L. Pulu



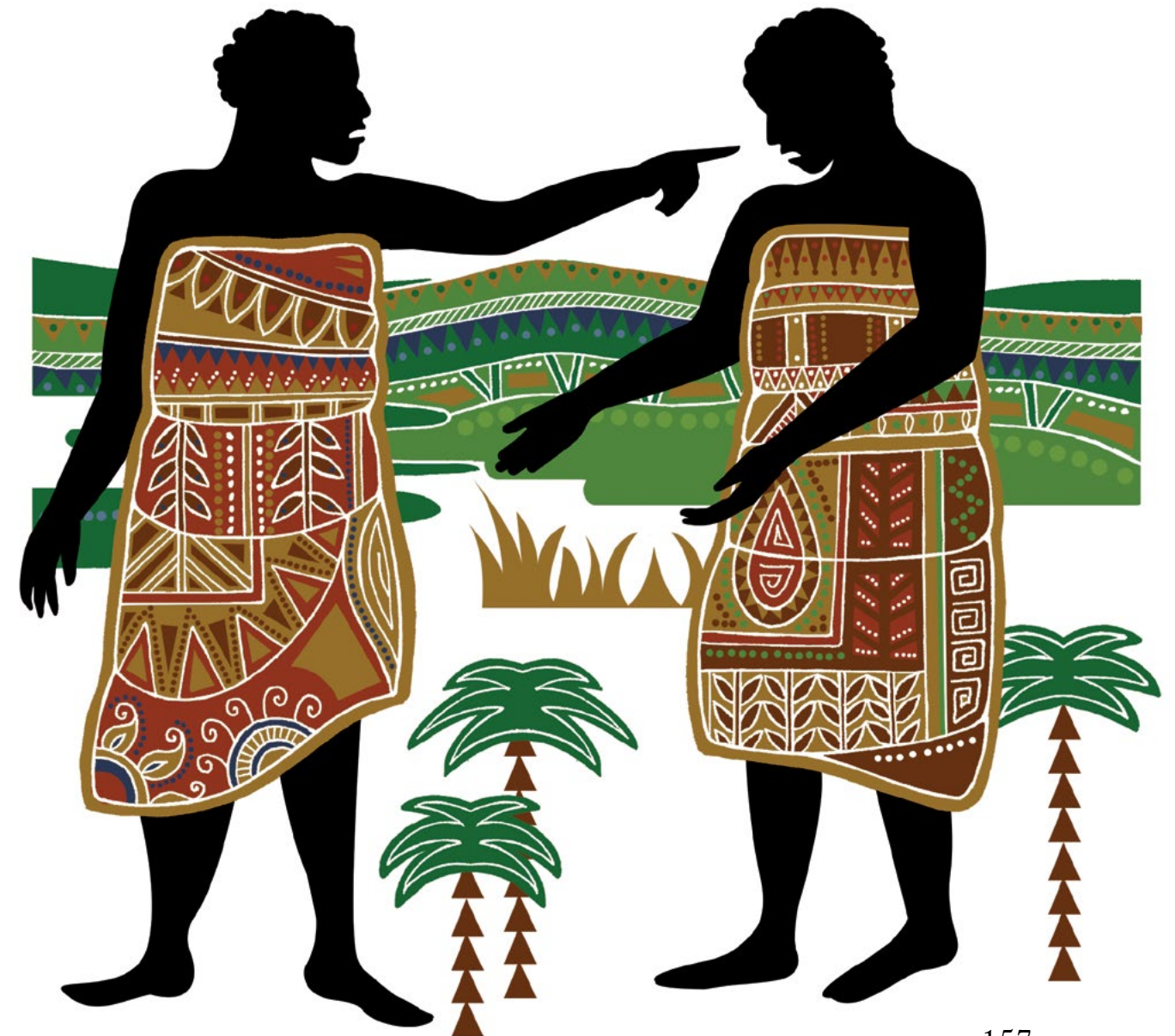
ong ago, when the Earth wasn't like it is today, two giants lived in Tonga. One lived on the island of Tofua, and his name was Taufu. The other lived on a little island called Mo'unga'one, and his name was Fakapatu. Of course, each giant was jealous and very curious about the other. Each wanted to be the strongest, the smartest and the only giant in Tonga. But of the two, Taufu was the most jealous and the most curious. Finally, his jealousy and his curiosity reached a point where he just couldn't stand it another minute, and he decided to pay a visit to Fakapatu on Mo'unga'one.

It took a very large canoe to transport Taufu. Fakapatu saw it coming a long way off, and he planned a surprise welcome for Taufu. He went inside the cave where he lived and sat down. Then he opened his mouth very wide so that it filled the door of the cave and looked just like the mouth of the cave rather than the mouth of Fakapatu.

When Taufu's canoe reached the shallow water, he jumped impatiently off and ploughed his way towards the shore where he saw the open entrance to the cave. Not knowing that he had already been seen, Taufu hurried towards the cave thinking to take Fakapatu by surprise rather than the other way around. But he stopped just short of entering the cave to inspect the large white rocks that grew towards each other from the floor and ceiling.

Suddenly realising what they were, he jumped backwards and yelled, "Fakapatu, close your mouth and come out of that cave. You can't fool me with that silly trick, and did you know that you have a hole in one tooth?"

Fakapatu came out of his cave and blinked in the sunlight, which was magnified by the brilliantly glittering sand. He said, "What brings you to visit this poor little island, Taufu? Are you just wandering around, or did you hope to learn a few new tricks from me?"



Taufa didn't exactly like the way Fakapatu spoke to him. After all, he, Taufa, was the strongest, smartest giant in all of Tonga, and he could prove it. Suddenly, in front of Fakapatu where Taufa had been, there was only a little goat fish standing upright on its tail. Then, as suddenly as the fish had come, it was gone, and Taufa stood in its place again.

"Ha! Fakapatu! What do you think of that clever trick? I'll bet you can't change yourself into a fish!"

"You're right, Taufa. I can't change myself into a fish. That really was a great trick. Can you do any other tricks? How about changing yourself into a seashell?"

Taufa changed himself into a beautiful brown and white spotted cowry shell. Then he changed back to his own form.

"Ha, Fakapatu! How about that? I'll bet you can't change into such a beautiful shell!"

"Taufa, you're right. I couldn't do anywhere near as well as you're doing. Keep going, I'd like to see what else you can do."

So Taufa, filled with pride and success, changed forms from one thing to another. He became a bird and then a starfish, a coconut, a banana plant and a little red crab. Each time he returned to his own form, he said the same thing, "Ha, Fakapatu! How about that? I'll bet you can't change into a..." and he named the item.

Each time Fakapatu gave the same answer. "Taufa, you're right. I couldn't do anywhere near as well as you're doing. Keep going, I'd like to see what else you can do."

Finally, Taufa wore himself out and stopped to rest. He neglected to be cautious, and he failed to watch Fakapatu, who suddenly disappeared. Although Taufa looked everywhere and called his name, Fakapatu didn't reappear.



Then Taufu began to feel strange. He had a pain in his stomach, and it seemed that his stomach was growing larger. At that instant, Taufu realised what had happened. Fakapatu had tricked him. All the praise that Fakapatu had given him was just to make Taufu tire himself out showing off. Now that Taufu was weak from his efforts to show off, Fakapatu did just one trick. He turned himself into a very tiny animal and went down into Taufu's stomach, where he began to grow.

As Fakapatu grew, so did Taufu's stomach, and he cried out in pain, "Fakapatu, please stop hurting me, and I'll give you anything you want. You can have all of my land and all of my wealth!"

Fakapatu just kept growing until Taufu looked like a bloated sea cucumber, lying on the sand, and he cried, "Name your price, I'll give you anything I have, but please stop!"

"Taufu, I don't want your land or your wealth, I only want a promise from you. That promise is that you will order the creatures of the sea to never again bite the people of Mo'unga'one when they are in the water."

Since Taufu was chief over the sea creatures, he could easily order them to do as Fakapatu asked, but he hesitated to answer. Fakapatu grew a little larger, and Taufu howled, "Yes! Yes! I promise that the sea creatures will never again bite the people of this island."

And so it was, Taufu returned home in defeat, shameful for his foolish boasting. Fakapatu lived his life quietly on the island of Mo'unga'one, secure in the knowledge that even though he wasn't the only giant in Tonga, he was the strongest and the smartest giant in Tonga. The people of Mo'unga'one were free to swim in the water around their island with no fear of attack from any sea creature. Taufu's promise is still being kept to this day.



TAKE ME BACK TO MY HOME

By Patrick Mohlaleji Bereng

I hear the beating of the drums.
 What is that song to be?
 Take me back to my home –
 Oh please.
 Or is it just a dream?
 Take me back to the warmth of the land
 Where nature is the poem
 And flowers are wild.
 Your voice is soft, I hear;
 Your hand is light but firm.
 Humility is your pride;
 Yet, your mind is bright.
 Kindness is a virtue;
 You are the daughter of the sun.
 Take me back to my home, I plead,
 Where the sun is radiant blue.
 You are the claim of Africa,
 Your magnet is the face,
 Your love to me is gold,
 Dearer far than crown of kings.



GLOSSARY

The following are terms, expressions, mythological creatures and characters from folklore that originated in languages and cultures other than English. These terms are explained below, in alphabetical order of country and, within that, in the order they appear in the story or poem.

BANGLADESH – *Bhutua horse*: a breed of horse found in Bhutan, Nepal and the Sikkim and Darjeeling regions of India, also known as a “Bhotia pony”. This breed is commonly used as a pack horse or for transportation; ***taka*:** the currency of Bangladesh.

CAMEROON – *Beba*: an ethnic group in Cameroon who live in the village of Beba, an area in the north-west of Cameroon spanning several agrarian communities. The Beba people speak a language that is also called Beba and that has no written alphabet. The words used in this story, such as “Mbeh” (a respectful term of address) and “nwa ngeh” (the Feast of the Cutting of the Grass) are therefore approximations of oral speech.

CYPRUS – *mandolin*: a stringed musical instrument belonging to the lute family of instruments. It typically has a rounded wooden body and a neck with eight strings, which are plucked or strummed by the musician.

DOMINICA – *rock, reggae, jazz* and *kaiso*: different types of musical styles. Kaiso originated in West Africa and migrated to the Caribbean by means of the slave trade. Calypso music in the Caribbean evolved from this West African musical style. Jazz was developed by African-American communities at the turn of the 20th century. Rock emerged from rock ‘n’ roll in America in the 1950s, and reggae followed not long after in Jamaica in the late 1960s.

GRENADA – *cockillian, sticky-buey, penapiece, coubarry*, etc: different types of fruits, written in a local Grenadian dialect.

GUYANA – *Tamosi*: supreme creator god whose name means “Ancient One” or “Old Man Sky”. It is said that Tamosi has never been seen by human eyes.

KENYA – *shambas*: a Swahili word for fields that are used to grow crops. Swahili is a language spoken in East Africa; ***ngemi*:** a sharp high-pitched trill that women make to show support or praise, also called “ululation”.

MALAYSIA – *padi field*: or “paddy field”, a flooded field where rice is grown. Padi fields are very common throughout east, south and south-east Asia and constitute the most common form of rice growing.

MAURITIUS – *vavangue* and *guavas*: two types of fruits grown in the tropics. The first is also known as Spanish tamarind or tamarind of the Indies; ***vetiver grass*:** a kind of grass native to India and Sri Lanka that can be used as thatching on roofs; ***paille-en-queue*:** a seabird known in English as the “tropicbird”. Its French name, when translated literally, means “straw tail”, referring to the long thin feathers of its tail.

NIGERIA – *Kabiyesi*: a respectful form of address for a king. This word is in the Yoruba language, the native tongue of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and West Africa, and roughly translates to “He whose authority cannot be questioned”.

RWANDA – *shambas*: please see the explanation in the entry for Kenya; ***kettle*:** a pot in which to cook food.

SAMOA – *fale*: a house or building.

SRI LANKA – *cow dung in his golden pot of milk*: this colloquial expression is used by Andare to suggest that the king will spoil his good reputation by ordering Andare’s brutal execution on such a trivial basis as Andare eating a pineapple.

ST LUCIA – *crotons*: a flowering plant, also known as “rushfoil”.

TUVALU – *Folasa-aitu*: the name given to Tefolaha in Samoa. The word “aitu” in many Polynesian languages means ghost or malevolent spirit, hence Tefolaha’s Samoan name signals his capacity to turn himself into a spirit in order to trick Pai and Vau.

UGANDA – *bees*: here a metaphor for dictators.

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA – *Hatama-Iluni*: a female ogre, also known as Hatama-Ilmi, who eats humans in the mythology of the Iraqw people of Tanzania (known in Swahili as the “Wairaqw” people). The Iraqw live in the Great Lakes region of East Africa and along the Rift Valley.

VANUATU – *lispsep*: a mythological creature that is dwarf-like in appearance. It has very long hair, which contains much of its power, and it can be harmless and helpful or harmful and destructive, depending on its situation, as can be seen from this story; *tamtam*: a slit drum. This tall, thin drum – often beautifully carved – is played in ceremonial dances and is used as a signalling device between villages, as it is in this story.

ZAMBIA – *mealie bags*: bags holding maize or corn on the cob.

THE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION TRUST

In 1837, a diminutive but self-willed teenager ascended the British throne. Fifty years later, Queen Victoria had established the monarchy and her own presence at the heart of the nation’s identity. She was not merely Queen of the United Kingdom but Empress of India and titular head of one of the greatest empires the world had ever seen.

Edward, Prince of Wales, resolved that this fiftieth anniversary should be celebrated in a way that would unite all the peoples of the Empire. He decided to found an Imperial Institute to undertake research, education and related activities that would promote the prosperity and development of that Empire. Supported by the Lord Mayor of London, he set about raising the money, writing personally to friends and communities across the globe to promote the idea. A central organising committee was formed, and local campaigns sprang up in towns and villages across the Empire. The Jubilee became a major Empire-wide public event with donations, however small, going to help fund the institute and local civil facilities. Overwhelmingly, the money came from individuals. The top-up from overseas publicly-held funds was minor.

The Prince, as president of the campaign, remained closely involved in the project from its launch in 1886 until his own accession to the throne fifteen years later. By 1893, with the help of a grant of six-and-three-quarter acres of land valued at £250,000 from the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, the funding was complete. The institute was built at a cost of £350,000 and later won for the architect, Thomas Edward Colcutt, a Grand Prix at the Paris exposition of 1899. The Queen, greatly affected by this manifestation of popular generosity and affection, became very attached to what she informally termed “my institute”.

Since the launch of the appeal, the world has changed beyond recognition. The Empire has given way to a Commonwealth of fifty-three countries, a voluntary association of equal members united by a framework of common values. The Commonwealth Education Trust is now entrusted

with the funds that originated in the great public subscription. The great-great-granddaughter of Victoria, Queen Elizabeth II, has been Head of the Commonwealth for over sixty years.

The initial volume of *A River of Stories*, published in 2011, celebrated the first 125 years of the Trust – and articulated its hopes for the future. The Trust saw that history as a river, bubbling into life, full of enthusiasm and ambition, tumbling through the rocky terrain of the 20th century. In the first decade of this century, the flow virtually ceased, and the Trustees worked hard to keep the fund – and the river – alive. They have channelled the remaining resources into enhancing opportunities for the young people of the Commonwealth to learn skills to contribute to their communities' economic and social growth, notably by developing innovative learning materials and teaching methods based on careful research.

The success of that initial volume inspired the Trust to create a set of anthologies linked by the same title and covering all four natural elements: earth, air, fire and water.

These anthologies celebrate the literature and storytelling of the wonderfully diverse communities that make up the countries of the Commonwealth. These four themes are intensely relevant today, when we are increasingly concerned about rising sea levels, species extinction, climate-related natural disasters and the pressures associated with finding homes for, and feeding, a rising world population. The themes underline the fragility of our planet Earth and the need for creative learning to stimulate imagination, creativity and critical thinking when our decisions have the potential to change the lives of future generations.

By equipping young people with the tools that will enable them to make the choices necessary to benefit their communities into the future, the Trust is keeping alive the vision, ambition and enthusiasm that led to its creation. But above all, through these books, it also seeks to encourage young people to read for pleasure.

The Trustees thank all the purchasers of *A River of Stories* for their part in keeping the river flowing.

A NOTE FROM THE ANTHOLOGIST

In bringing together tales from around the world, I hope to have offered the reader glimpses into different cultures and their storytelling traditions. This collection does not attempt to represent any country as a whole – rather, it celebrates the unique imaginative heritage of cultures encompassed by the Commonwealth. I have been humbled by the passion with which writers, teachers, librarians and scholars from across the world wish to see their countries' stories reach new readers. With this collection, the Commonwealth Education Trust has created a transformative space for cross-cultural dialogue and opened up the lines of communication between different storytelling traditions.

These stories and poems are written by indigenous and local authors and poets, living in their ancestral homelands or within the diaspora. I have respected the authenticity of each story and the attitudes prevailing in the period in which it was set and no adjustments have been made to reflect current culture or values. Some of these storytellers have written in their mother tongue and the stories have reached us through transcription and translation. Others have been written in English, a national language throughout the Commonwealth, or an English creole, a localised language that has developed through the adoption of a non-native language mixed with the country's mother tongue. Many of these tales were once recorded by ethnographers or folklorists living in indigenous communities and recording tales that might otherwise have become lost to future generations. Others were pioneered by storytellers using small presses. Some were self-published. Some were posted on websites. Such methods are a lifeline for communities with fledgling publishing industries whose writers can now find a truly global readership for their work.

We hope that this volume of *A River of Stories* will become an effective teaching aid in schools throughout the Commonwealth – an anthology through which young people can enjoy learning about other cultures, about ecological sustainability and about the power and importance of storytelling

as a means of disseminating ideas, customs and histories as well as stimulating creative thought and encouraging the imagination. For young people in communities that have little access to imaginative writing, a collection of this kind is an invaluable resource.

I hope I have done justice to the Commonwealth Education Trust's aspiration to create an anthology that young people across the world will find relevant and entertaining and to the creative visions of the authors and poets who lent their voices to this volume.

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Alice Curry

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Then the Giants Came

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Her continuing love of folklore inspires her illustrations. In addition to commissions, she produces limited-edition screen prints and ceramics. Her work has been featured in the Inspiration Grid (www.theinspirationgrid.com).



Alice Curry assembled these stories when she was engaged as an academic adviser in children's literature to the Commonwealth Education Trust. With a first-class degree in English from the University of Oxford in England and an award-winning doctorate in children's literature from Macquarie University in Australia, Alice has

published widely in the academic field of children's literature. She is currently a director of an independent publishing company that specialises in high quality, culturally diverse books for children. As a seasoned traveller, she enjoys introducing folk tales and legends to new readers all over the world.

Praise for the first volume of *A River of Stories*:

- *The Guardian* Top 10 Children's Fiction and Picture Books, 2011
- *London Evening Standard* Top 10 Books of the Year for Older Children, 2011
- finalist for Communicator of the Year, NEXUS Commonwealth Awards, 2012
- featured in *SPLASH! ASIA: An Annotated Bibliography of Water-themed Stories from Asia* published by the National Book Development Council of Singapore in 2013
- inspiration for a ten-month performance and education programme run by the Glasgow dance company Visual Statement – performances were held at a Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster and the 2014 Commonwealth Games.



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