

Julie Flett

A RIVER OF STORIES


Tales and Poems from Across the Commonwealth



Compiled by Alice Curry

Natural Elements Series

VOLUME 3 - AIR




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 the air, 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, earth and fire that together comprise the four classical elements recognised from ancient times across cultures.

Each entry turns our faces to the sun – whether describing the simple joys of flying a kite or being pushed on a swing so our feet touch the clouds, showing the magnificence of birds soaring across dawn skies or recounting the heavenly adventures of the sun, moon and stars. Together they capture the sense of magic inherent in that space between Earth and sky.

Julie Flett's intriguing 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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in appreciation of the generosity
of those citizens who, in 1886,
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to continue to work for the
benefit of education.

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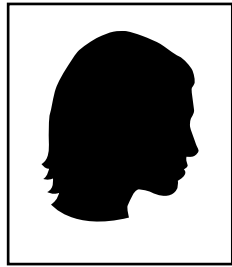
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ABOUT THE WORDS



To fly – to spread wings and soar into the open sky – is a dream we have all shared, and a joy we can only imagine. In this collection, we celebrate the power of the soaring imagination. These tales from many countries have the very wings we lack. They are propelled by word of mouth across landscapes and cultures, swooping down to reach

listening ears wherever they are in the world.

Air is a wonderfully insubstantial thing. You cannot bathe in it like water or crumble it in your fingers like earth, nor will it burn you like fire. Yet when a hurricane blows or a typhoon whirls into town, air makes its presence very clearly felt. Clean air is not only a basic human right but a necessity. With rising levels of air pollution responsible for an estimated seven million premature deaths each year, it is more important than ever that we take care of this precious natural resource.

The sky has always been a playground for a host of real and imagined creatures. From butterflies and birds to winged horses, fairies and spirits, to sky gods and goddesses living in lands above the clouds – all take pride of place in the pantheon of our imaginations. Thus, like a kite rising on the breeze, this collection floats between earth and sky, moving from the heroes who attempt to climb ropes to the heavens to the birds, insects (and occasional tortoise!) who call the wide open sky their domain. Swept up by the winds and breezes that send leaves, clouds and kites tumbling through the air, it finally comes to rest in the heavens, where the sun, moon and stars preside over the Earth in all their glory.

To grow wings and fly may be an impossible dream, but our imaginations know no bounds. So turn to the first story and leap into the sky. Who knows where you might land.

Alice Curry

ABOUT THE PICTURES



Generation after generation, we tell each other our stories. Long before stories were ever written down, we were storytellers. We still are. In this way, we breathe stories and poems. They live in the air.

I approached this collection with a deep respect for the storytellers and the communities who are sharing their traditional cultures with us. I read each story and poem as if the storyteller was present. I imagined myself sitting amongst a group, listening intently, wondering what would happen next.

As I listened, I was aware of the new territory that I am covering as a Canadian First Nations / Indigenous person of mixed heritage. I enjoyed researching each animal, bird or creature, as well as the flora of each place, learning about the different cultural heritages of the storytellers.

My process is to work first in a sketchbook. I sketch each image in response to the story or poem. This is where the “play” happens. Once I have refined these drawings, I start to work on the backgrounds and paint these, adding details and textures. All of the imagery is eventually collaged together to make the final artwork – in this case, to bring the world of the air vividly alive.

I live and work in Vancouver, British Columbia – in unceded Coast Salish Territory – in Canada. I work out of my home in a studio that overlooks a community garden and children’s drop-in centre. I spend much of my time – when I’m not drawing – walking in the forest or along the shoreline of the Salish Sea – breathing the air of a place I love.

I hope that you enjoy your walk through my pictures as you read this book. Welcome to the strange and extraordinary kingdom of the air.

Julie Flett

Between
Earth
and
Sky



Nyambe Leaves the Earth

Retold by Chimam L. Vyas



In the beginning, Nyambe, the creator of the world, lived on Earth with his wife Nasilele, the goddess. There was nothing on Earth at that time. There was only land surrounded by water.

After some time, spent walking alone, singing alone, eating alone and living alone, Nasilele grew tired of loneliness. One day she asked Nyambe, “Please make the Earth full of bright and beautiful things. People it with men and women like us and with a variety of living things, and make me happy or I shall weep and be sad.”

Nyambe loved her so much that the very idea of her being sad, with tears in her eyes, made him uneasy. So he got busy creating things that might please her. First he made trees. Then he made animals and birds, and in between he made fish and reptiles.

“This is a very clever creation!” cried Nasilele.

“Now what will please you?” asked her husband.



“Well, some companions of both sexes,” she said.

“I will do any difficult thing that will please you,” replied Nyambe. “But think twice before you insist that I create human beings. Once that is done, our days will be full of misery and worry.”

Nasilele started to weep. Nyambe could not stand this sight. He thought hard about the shapes and sizes of human beings, though he was not at all willing to do so. Then he made a man and named him Kamunu. This man was as clever as the god himself. Whatever Nyambe did, Kamunu copied, without any mistake. If Nyambe carved a spoon from a log, he did the same. If God smelted iron, Kamunu was not slow to imitate. When he saw his creator building a hut, Kamunu too built one the same size and shape. All this pleased Nasilele but not Nyambe, who was afraid that the temptation of imitating his creator would make Kamunu a powerful enemy.

And he was not wrong in his thinking about Kamunu. One day, this man forged a sharp-pointed iron rod and threw it at a hare. The hare was killed. Kamunu ate it, and he found it very tasty. The following morning, he speared a lechwe and enjoyed its flesh, and then he told Nyambe and Nasilele of his adventures.

Nasilele showed her approval with her bewitching eyes, but Nyambe became angry on hearing the story. “You have killed and eaten your brothers, the children of your parents,” he said. “So you will have to be sent away from your parents.”

Kamunu felt insulted and left them soon after this. He went to a far-off land. There he found himself helpless. He soon realised that he was unable to do anything on his own. He had grown clever simply by imitating Nyambe. Therefore, he decided to return to Nyambe and apologise for his past deeds. He was not allowed to apologise before Nyambe, whose anger had not yet calmed down; therefore he did so before Nyambe’s messenger. The messenger first went to Nasilele, who in turn persuaded Nyambe to forgive Kamunu. Nyambe then took pity on him and permitted him to make a garden to earn his living.

Mealies grew tall and fine in Kamunu's garden. But when the crop was nearly ready to be harvested, an eland entered the garden and ate up all the grain. Kamunu was very angry at this and chased the eland. When he caught it, he killed it and ate it.

Nyambe came to know of this, but this time Kamunu had a good excuse, so he was forgiven. But Nyambe could not live at ease; he was worrying a lot about Kamunu, who was creating trouble for himself by killing the children of his own parents who expected him to take care of them.

After a few days, Kamunu's dog died. He went to Nyambe and asked him for medicine to bring him back to life. Nyambe said, "Yes, I can give you such a power, but on one condition: that you use the power to bring back to life anyone whom you happen to kill."

Kamunu did not like this idea as he had made some enemies by this time. He wanted to kill them one by one. Naturally, he did not agree to the creator's condition, and returned home, thinking that he could find another dog to tame. On his arrival, he placed a pot on the fire to cook mealies. But he forgot to keep the heat low, and his pot broke. He tried to join the pieces together but failed. So he went back to Nyambe and asked him to show him how to mend the pot. Nyambe did not say anything. His silence was worse than a beating for Kamunu. Disappointed, Kamunu returned home and slept hungry that night.

Another day, his hut fell to the ground in a violent storm. He went again to Nyambe, who now said angrily, "Go away from here, and never dare show your face to me again!"

Yet, he was found coming once more to Nyambe the very next morning. Seeing him approaching, Nyambe decided, "I must leave him here, otherwise he is not going to let me live in peace." He reported his decision to Nasilele and then jumped into a broad river nearby and swam across to a small island. His wife followed.

At once, Nyambe called all the creatures on the island to hear him so that in future they could act according to his instructions. When they had

gathered, he said, "Kamunu is stronger and cleverer than any of you. Therefore, be on your guard, and don't let him have any chance to kill you."

Hearing this, the weaker creatures started to run away before they could be seen by their brother, Kamunu, who was not treating them like brothers and sisters. The fierce beasts decided to attack him if he hurt any of them.

Kamunu realised the situation and approached cautiously. He did nothing to offend the wild animals. He sat by the side of his parents and kept quiet. It was Nyambe who broke the silence. He said, "Kamunu, bring some wood and make a fire. I want to cook porridge to eat."

Kamunu obeyed hesitatingly. When the fire was burning and the pot boiling, Nyambe told him, "Here is the real test for you, Kamunu. If you can use your skill to take the pot off the fire without burning yourself, I will appoint you Chief of the People."

Kamunu was not for a moment puzzled. He collected some hay and soaked it in the river water. With that in his hands, he took the pot off the fire without getting burnt. Nyambe appointed him Chief of the People, but the actions of his son made him uneasy, for he was afraid of Kamunu's power.

That night, Nyambe could not sleep. At midnight, a spider appeared and, finding him awake, asked, "What is worrying you so much, my Lord?"

Nyambe was silent.

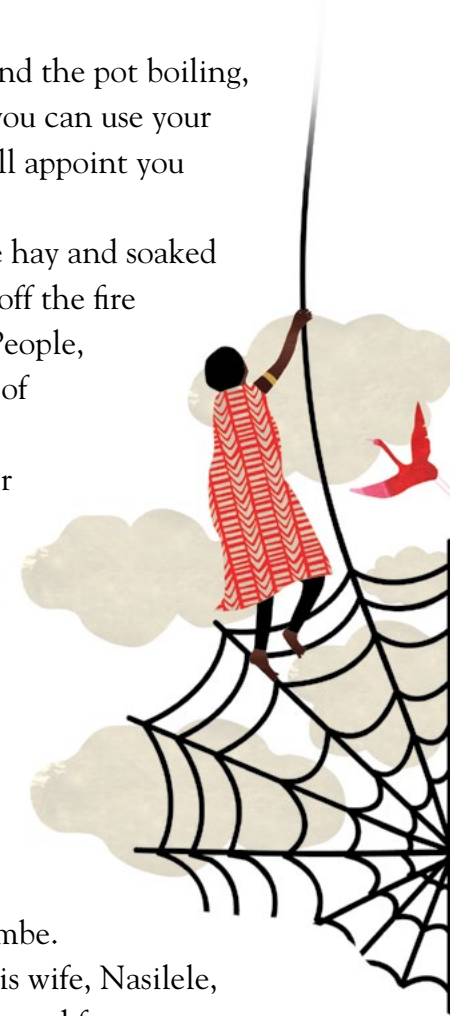
"Do tell me," begged the spider. "It would make me very happy if I, who am born of you, could be of any use to you. I promise to help you to the best of my ability."

"If you wish to help me, just do what I say and don't ask me any questions," said Nyambe at last.

"I'll do that, Father," replied the spider.

"Then spin a web from the Earth to the sky," ordered Nyambe.

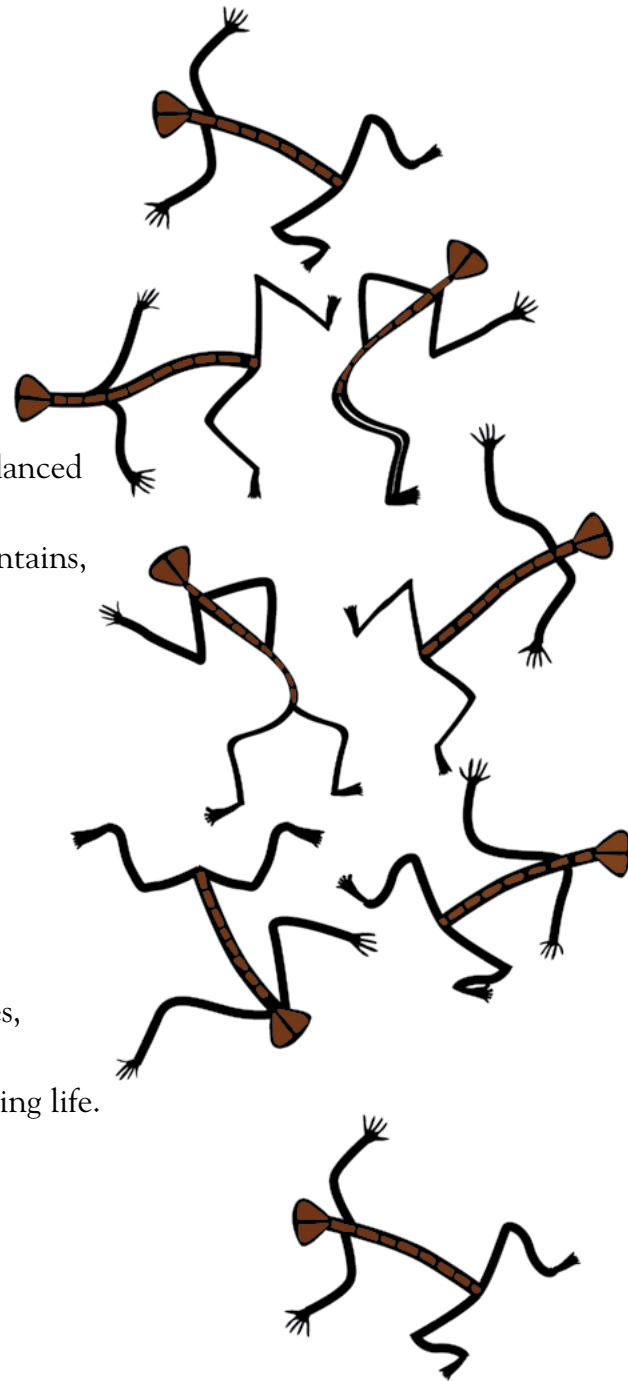
The spider had this done in no time. Then Nyambe and his wife, Nasilele, climbed the web and went up above the clouds, where they stayed for ever.



Mimi Dancers

By Lorraine Mafi-Williams

From out of the spirit world
 they all came dancing,
 the seven spirit brothers
 and the seven sisters,
 the mimi spirits from space.
 Down through the Milky Way they danced
 to the Earth far below.
 They came to dance among the mountains,
 in the rivers as they wound
 their way to the sea.
 They danced across the cliff face,
 the mimi spirits from space.
 They danced upon the earth,
 they danced upon the rocks,
 they danced upon the bark,
 and they danced upon the canvas,
 the mimi spirits from space.
 They danced on the limbs of the trees,
 in the rustling of the leaves.
 They danced in the wind for everlasting life.
 They danced the dreaming alive,
 the mimi spirits from space.



Ananse and the Pot of Wisdom

Retold by Adwoa Badoe



Ananse is a very special spider,
 well known for his wit and
 wisdom. He lives, like other
 spiders, in corners and on
 ceilings. The tricky thing



about him is that he looks no different from other spiders. In fact, he may be the very next spider who comes your way.

Everybody knew that Ananse was wise, for he boasted loud and clear. In his high-pitched voice, he laughed at fools and spoke louder than everyone else.

One very sunny day, Sky God called Ananse up to the skies to have a chat.

“Without a doubt,” Ananse said, “of all the animals you created, there is none as wise as I.”

Sky God said in a quiet voice, “Could you do some work for me? Go about the Earth and collect all the wisdom for me. When you have brought it up to me, I will name you the Sage of All Time.”

Ananse hid a smile. “That’s easy, sir,” he said. “I will be back in three days with the wisdom of the world.”

Now, Ananse, as selfish as he was, had already travelled the length and breadth of the Earth and collected every shred of wisdom. He kept it all in a giant pot in his secret hiding place.

He slid down to his home on a fine woven thread. He took a rest in the shade and had a lazy day.

The next day, he started out to take the pot full of wisdom to Sky God way up in the skies.

It was a huge pot and very heavy. As Ananse tugged it behind him, he was more than filled with pride. When others asked to help, he would say in a stand-offish way, “This work is top secret, for a very high official.”

To get up to the skies where Sky God lived, you had to climb a tall coconut tree that grew beyond the clouds right up into the heavens. Ananse stopped to consider the best way to carry his load. He could not carry it on his head because he needed all his eight arms to creep up the tree. In the end, he strapped the pot tightly to his back and made his way slowly up the tree.

From afar, everyone saw his clumsy figure scaling up so slowly. They knew he was going to meet with Sky God himself. The people gathered under the tree to watch him make his way. And all the while, they wondered what he had in the giant pot.

Inch by inch, Ananse climbed. He was looking forward to the fame his great feat deserved. Meanwhile, the sun moved slowly across the wide sky.

Just before the sun set, he paused and carefully wove a web to keep himself secure.

He could hardly sleep at all that night. He was so excited!

At daybreak, Ananse woke up and continued his climb. A greater crowd was gathered below, waving and cheering him on. He pressed on, never minding his aching muscles. He had an appointment in heaven, and he was going to make it there.

Higher and higher, Ananse kept up the pace until the light of the moon reminded him to take a rest.

That night, he dreamt he wore a crown given to him by Sky God himself. On it was written “The Sage of All Time”.

Another day passed, and a very tired Ananse was near the end of his journey. Below, the crowd let out a cheer.



It was a great moment for Ananse and, as pride filled his chest, he raised all his arms in a victory wave.

It was a shocking moment when he plummeted down to Earth. He hit the ground with a bang, and the pot broke into a million pieces. Wisdom scattered left and right, to the very ends of the Earth.

Ananse lay there in a heap, sobbing his heart out. What he had worked so hard to collect was now out of his grasp. Now everyone and every fool had a little bit of wisdom. He could not claim that all wisdom was his alone.

Then Sky God whispered in his ear, “I gave you eight arms, Ananse. If you really had all wisdom, you would not have waved them all.”

The Sacred Gates of iJabiro (An Extract)

By Um'Khonde Patrick Habamenshi

Would you have envisioned such a wonderful conclusion
 If you had seen where my journey started?
 Could you have imagined me here today,
 Standing at the Gates of my Dreams –
 iJabiro, my Daydream to build my life on,
 My own promised land of poems and lyrics,
 Telling tales of dreams and dreamers
 To better the world for the forgotten and the overlooked,
 Singing Hymns of Liberation built on beauty and sorrows?
 Could you have imagined that I would once again
 Spread my wings and fly high, up to the sky
 So I can leave my past behind?



Nei Nibarara and Nei Ikuku

Retold by Ten Tiroba of Buariki, translated by Reid Cowell



Nei Nibarara lived in the heavens, and Nei Ikuku lived on Earth. Nothing is known about Nei Ikuku's husband, not even his name, but she had three daughters all of whom were called Nei Ikuku after their mother.

When the girls grew up, they used to wander about and, on one occasion, the eldest fell ill and hurried back to her mother. "Go and see your grandmother, who will be able to cure you," she was told.

Not long after this, the second daughter became ill and hurried off to see her mother also, who gave her the same advice she had given her eldest sister. Then the youngest Nei Ikuku fell sick and went to her mother just as her two sisters had done. When Nei Ikuku, the mother, heard the voice of her youngest child, she spoke sharply.

"My girl," she said, "you've been misled by those two sisters of yours. How could you know anything about sickness?" When the child heard the sharpness in her mother's tongue she wept and, hiding her distress within her, joined her two sisters.



One day, they were playing hide-and-seek, and Nei Ikuku, the youngest sister, ran away in a tantrum and her sisters could not find her. But she found a tree called kimatore, which grew on the land Te Kimatore about which the old folk used to speak. There is no tree like it in Kiribati nowadays, and this is how Nei Ikuku discovered it.

She was wandering on waste and uninhabited land far from her home when she saw a half coconut shell lying on the smooth sand. Thinking there might be flesh in it, she turned it over and, to her great surprise, found a tiny tree growing underneath. She sat down nearby but got no pleasure from the little tree – she felt only sadness in the lonely place. Remembering her mother’s sharp words, she began to cry and was wiping her eyes when she saw that the tiny tree had grown a bit. She touched the trunk then, holding it tight with her fingers, and sang out:

*Grow up my little kimatore lest I die of sunstroke.
Grow up, grow up.*

As the tree grew into the sky, it spread over her as she sat there, growing higher all the time. Nei Ikuku repeated her chant:

*Grow up my little kimatore lest I die of sunstroke.
Grow up, grow up.*

The tree grew taller and developed branches, and Nei Ikuku climbed into them, constantly repeating her chant. The tree became a giant. She went higher with it and, looking down, could no longer see the Earth. Still she coaxed it higher with her chant, until it reached the sky, where she stepped off and walked around.

She saw a maneaba (meeting house) without people in it, a house with screens drawn and a hut from which smoke came forth. She peeped into the hut and saw a woman inside who was boiling toddy (palm wine) over a fire.

The woman was Nei Nibarara who was blind and, consequently, had to take great care when walking. As she sat by her fire, she sniffed and smelt the smell of Earth.

“How odd,” she said. “There’s a smell of Manra here as if there were people from there nearby.” Manra was the name given to the Earth by the ancient people of the heavens. “Yes, there’s certainly a smell of Manra here,” repeated Nei Nibarara, and Nei Ikuku, fearing that Nei Nibarara might be a cannibal, hid herself.

Soon, Nei Ikuku felt a strong desire to have a drink of the toddy, and she cautiously approached the fire. Now Nei Nibarara kept count of her toddy shells and quickly noticed that three were gone. Nei Ikuku was not yet satisfied and took more toddy from the fire. Nei Nibarara counted the shells again and found that two more had disappeared. As Nei Ikuku stretched out her hands to get yet another bowl of toddy, her fingers and Nei Nibarara’s touched over the fire, and Nei Nibarara held on tightly.

“Who’s this who keeps on taking the drinks I’m preparing for my children?” she cried. “I’ll kill you!”

“Please do not kill me,” pleaded Nei Ikuku.

“Indeed I shall. You have been wicked, stealing my children’s drink just when they are about to come home. I’m going to hold on to you so that they may kill you.”

“Please,” cried Nei Ikuku, “let me be your servant.”

“I have servants enough – my sons Taurikiriki, Tauroro and Taunabanaba.”

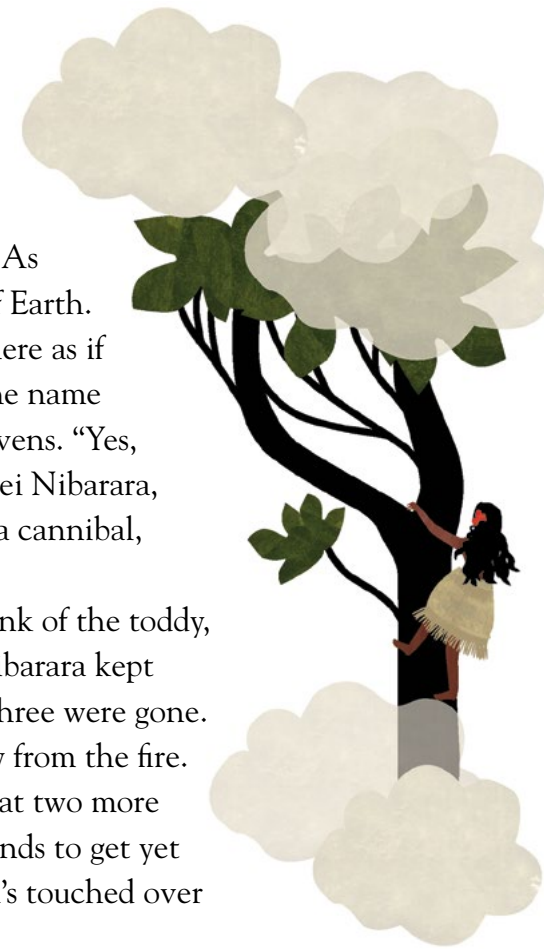
“Hide me then, please, so that I may gather food for you.”

“I have gatherers enough – Taurikiriki, Tauroro and Taunabanaba.”

“I’ll carry you to the lavatory or anywhere else you want to go,” pleaded Nei Ikuku.

“I have my carriers – Taurikiriki, Tauroro and Taunabanaba.”

Nei Ikuku made many suggestions but the reply was always the same –



I have Taurikiriki, Tauroro and Taunabanaba to do that.

At last Nei Ikuku said, “Look here! Hide me, and I’ll open your eyes for you.”

“Are you telling me the truth?” replied Nei Nibarara. “If you are, I’ll be kinder to you than I am to my own children, and I’ll give you gifts that are better than anything they have.”

Nei Ikuku told Nei Nibarara to lie down in front of her, and she opened Nei Nibarara’s right eye. A host of birds flew out of it – the eitei, mouakena, makitaba, tairo, korobaro, kibui and the naru. When these birds flew off, they attracted much attention. They were seen by Nei Nibarara’s children, who asked each other, “Where have those birds come from? It looks as if they’re



flying above Nei Nibarara’s home.” Those were the birds that flew out of Nei Nibarara’s right eye and, when her left eye was opened, these were the birds that flew from it: the kai, kewe, kaka, kitiba, kun, kiriri, matawanaba, karakara, mangkiri, io, rube, kabarei and the nna. All of these birds flew out of Nei Nibarara’s eyes, and she could see clearly when they had gone.

Nei Nibarara was so happy she could see that she treated Nei Ikuku very generously and could hardly wait to show off her eyes to her children. When they arrived home, Nei Ikuku had hidden herself under a large, wooden bowl made of itai wood.

The children were filled with astonishment and joy when they saw their mother. “Tell us, who opened your eyes for you?”

“Why, no-one! I did it myself.”

They sniffed the air.

“How is it there’s an Earthly smell here?” they asked. “Is there a human being about?”

“Where would a human being come from?” replied Nei Nibarara. “How could one reach the heavens?”

They questioned her again and again and, at last, Nei Nibarara said, “Listen and I’ll tell you everything provided you will behave yourselves. I’ve been lucky that a woman came who was clever enough to open my eyes out of which flew a great number of birds. I want you to treat her with all the respect I have promised her and allow her to do what she wants to do. You are to be friendly to her because she is a visitor from Earth.”

“We agree,” they replied, “but let us meet her.”

Nei Nibarara told them that Nei Ikuku was hiding under the bowl, and they went and turned it over. They were happy at finding her and led her away and looked after her.

Nei Ikuku stayed in the heavens and lived there, all because a tiny kimatore had grown up and up. Nei Nibarara and her children made her very welcome and provided many comforts for her.

Winging It



The Man Who Wanted to Fly

By Jorge Rebelo, translated by Maria Luísa Coelho et al.

Once upon a time
There was a man
Who wanted to fly.

That's it: to fly –
But not by plane
Or in a balloon!
He wanted to have wings
 like the condor in the story,
To be able to unfurl them
 stretchingly
And, copying the wind's naughtiness,
Rise in the air, in space, in infinity,
Fly to the sky.
It was just his dream,
Really a mania.

But listen to this: so ardent
Was his wish, so intense his will
That wings grew on him.
After this, he would fly
Every day –
Close at first, then
Already confident further away
Shortening the distance from the sky.



He dreamt the sky,
No god ruling everything:
He was tired of being ruled!
He dreamt the sky as a big village
Where destinies idyllically cross,
Nature is treated tenderly
 and the rain falls at the right time,
Children are not lost in the streets
Everyone works bread is abundant
Wealth is fairly divided...
And other utopias that came to mind.

Once he flew and he didn't come back.
Did he arrive...? No-one knows.
But it is known
That other men also grew wings
And they are already a multitude
Seeking the sky.

And it is said
That the powerful
Are restless.

The Tortoise and the Birds

Retold by Joyce D. Khumalo, transcribed by Phyllis Savory



long, long time ago, besides the animals of the Earth and birds of the air, there lived some strange creatures whose home was far above the clouds. They were good and kind, and although it was only the birds who had ever seen them, the animals knew of their existence, but no one knew their names.

One year, there was a drought throughout the land, and both birds and beasts were near to starvation. The cloud creatures looked down in pity upon the Earth dwellers and said, “Come up, all you who have wings, so that we may satisfy your hunger, for here, we have food in plenty.”

The birds were delighted, and word went round to all their fellow beings to gather upon a big rock from which they would begin their upward flight. While they were waiting for the late arrivals, they chatted excitedly about the treat in store for them. In this rock were many crevices, and in one of them, Mr and Mrs Tortoise had made their home. They too were suffering from hunger, and while Mrs Tortoise was away hunting for a bit of food to ease her hunger pangs, Mr Tortoise listened to the excited twittering of the birds.

“Oh, had I wings to go with you, my friends!” he said, coming out of his crevice to join them. “Cannot you take me with you? For I am also starving.” Of course, he realised, he did not look like a bird, but surely the invitation had included all the creatures that could fly, and the Cloud People would take pity on him too.

“This we would gladly do,” answered the birds, “but you are too heavy for us to carry, and without wings you cannot fly.”

“Oh, but consider my hunger!” he sobbed. They listened to him with sympathy, and discussed the matter among themselves.

“Could we not each pluck a feather from our wings and fix them to his feet?” they wondered. This was an exciting idea. Surely it would add to their prestige, they decided, if they were to pass him off as their king! Without delay, they began to carry out the plan, and it was a strange looking creature that at last took to the air surrounded by his feathered friends.

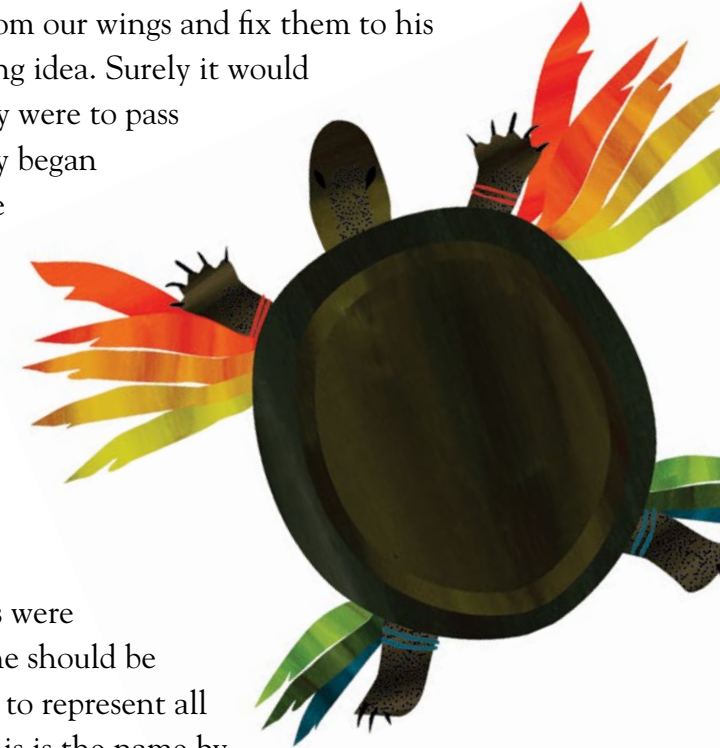
There was a great deal of laughter and chatter as their plan succeeded and the tortoise soared into the sky with them.

“What shall we call him?” the birds asked one another as they neared the home of their cloud friends. Many names were suggested, and they finally decided that he should be called “All of You”, meaning that he was to represent all of them – the greatest of them all; and this is the name by which he was introduced to their hosts.

The Cloud People were very honoured to think that the birds had brought their king to visit them, and at once prepared a large feast. “Whose food is this?” asked the birds politely, as they were taken into the hut where all the good things were spread out upon the floor.

“It is for all of you,” replied the Cloud People, and the tortoise, hearing his new name called out, strode forwards and, with great relish, ate nearly all the food that had been provided, leaving very little indeed for his companions.

“Surely,” thought the Cloud People, “it must be the custom of our friends to see that their king satisfies his wants before attending to their own.” And they stood aside while the tortoise enjoyed all that was set before him.



The birds were so angry at the tortoise's greed that, after they had picked up the few scraps of food that were left, they took back all the feathers they had so carefully attached to his feet, leaving him no means by which to return to Earth. Although it was no more than he deserved, he was in a sorry plight when the birds flew away, abandoning him to his fate.

The parrot was the last to leave. "Please, Mr Parrot," begged the unfortunate tortoise. "Have pity upon me. Go at once to my wife and bid her gather all the soft grass that she can find and pile it high near the big rock so that I may fall softly, for otherwise I shall surely be killed."

The parrot's crop was, however, as empty as were those of his companions, so he too was angry, and the message he took to the tortoise's wife was that her husband wished her to gather as many rocks and stones as she was able and to build them into a platform on which he would land.

This the dutiful wife did, and down the tortoise jumped. But with what a crash he came! His nice smooth shell was broken into many pieces, and although his wife nursed him most devotedly, the scars between his bits of broken shell never left him, and to this day they show in the generations that have followed – a reminder of the day when he jumped from the clouds.



I Wish...

By an anonymous poet

I wish I was
a dragonfly
hallelujah
in sunbeam.



The Mosquito

By Celestine Kulaghoe

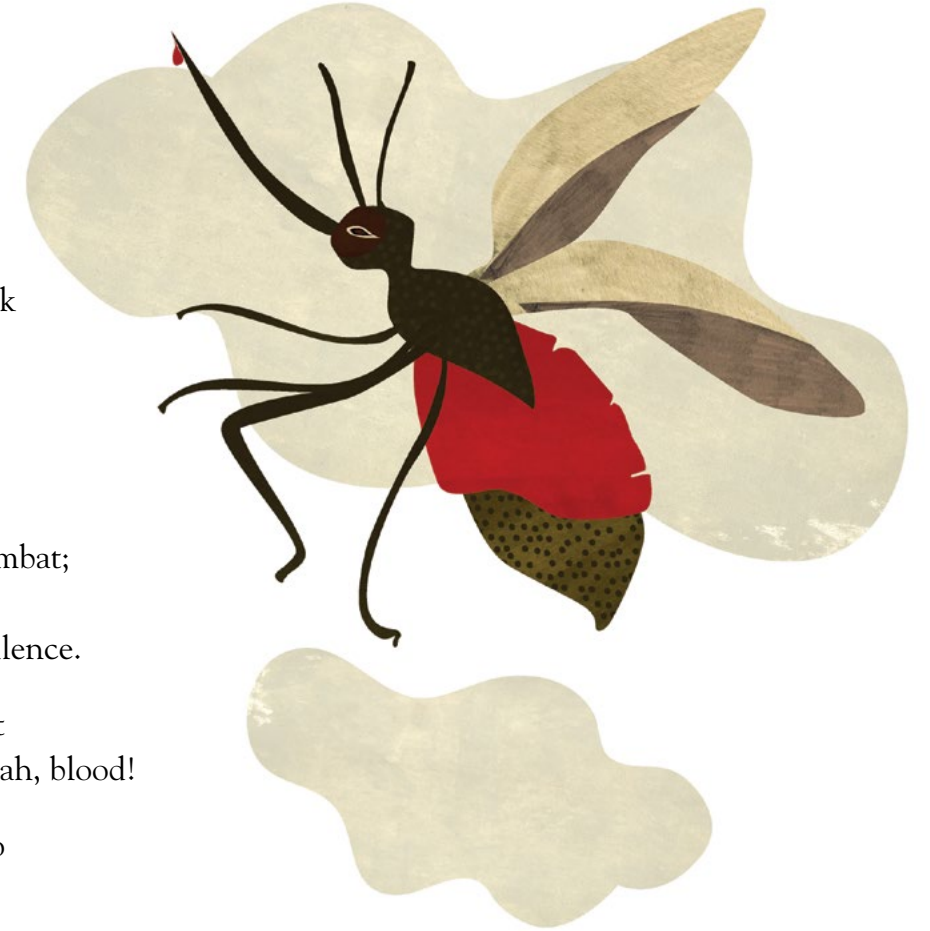
It is blood
I crave,
Only blood.

Water
Is for birds to drink
After their meal
Of virtuous fruit.

I am malagai:
A warrior,
Born to jungle combat;
A guerrilla
Exercised in excellence.

To spear is to feast
On pulsing fare – ah, blood!

And the mosquito
Flies away,
Head high
In deft haughtiness.



The Bird of Seven Colours

*Retold by an unnamed narrator from San Ignacio Town,
transcribed by Timothy Hagerty*



Once upon a time, a man and his wife had three sons. The two older sons did not like the youngest, and they treated him very badly. The man owned a peanut farm. One day, he called his sons together and told them, “We have not been able to harvest our peanuts because every night the Bird of Seven Colours comes and eats them. I want you to help me get rid of this curse. Those of you who are successful will be rewarded, but if you don’t help me solve this problem, you will be driven from my house.”

The oldest son went first, but before leaving he asked his mother, “Will you buy me a guitar and two bottles of rum? That way, I can entertain myself and won’t fall asleep while I’m waiting for the Bird of Seven Colours.”

So his mother gave him what he had requested, and he went off to the peanut field to wait for the bird. As soon as he got there, he began to play his guitar and drink his rum. By the time the Bird of Seven Colours got there, the oldest



son was so drunk that he did not hear him. The bird ate until it was full and made a mess of the peanut plants. When the son returned home and told what had happened, his father was very angry. “You’re good for nothing!” he shouted. “Get out of this house and never come back!”

Now it was the second son’s turn. He asked for the same things as his older brother and he repeated his mistakes. The Bird of Seven Colours came and ate the peanuts, and the second son was kicked out of the house.

The youngest son thought to himself, “I’m not going to make the same mistakes as my brothers. I need to have a better plan.”

So he asked his mother for ten pounds of wax, some pins, a stool and a spool of string. When he got to the peanut field, he found the plants that had the most peanuts, and he began to put wax on the leaves. He sat down on his stool to wait, but first he put the pins all around so

that if he dozed off and leaned over, the pins would stick him and wake him up. Sometime around midnight, he heard the noise of the Bird of Seven Colours. It was so loud and strong that it sounded like a hurricane. He watched as the bird landed on one of the plants.

“Who’s holding my feet?” asked the bird. “You might have my feet, but I can still use my wings and my beak.”

The bird tried to fly away, and its wings got stuck in the wax. Then its beak got stuck when it tried to free its wings.

“So you’re the Bird of Seven Colours that has been digging up my father’s peanuts,” said the little boy. “I’m going to teach you a lesson now.”

He used his spool of string and tied the bird up, feet, wings, beak and everything. Then he put it on the ground.



“If you understood my magic powers and my ability to help you in the future, you would not be treating me like this,” said the bird. “Your life will be in great danger soon, and I’m the only one who can help you. Turn me loose, and I’ll become your ally. I’ll be there to help you every time you get in trouble.”

“How do I know you’re not tricking me?” asked the boy.

“Trust me, and you will never be sorry,” answered the bird.

So the boy untied the Bird of Seven Colours. It flew off but came back quickly, carrying a large macaw.

“We’ll fill the macaw’s stomach with peanuts. Since the macaw also has seven colours, your father will believe it is the Bird of Seven Colours, and you will inherit his riches.”

The youngest son took the macaw home and told his father he had captured the Bird of Seven Colours. His father was overjoyed.

“Son, you’ve done what your brothers could not do. You have relieved our family of this terrible plague. All that I own will now be yours.”

“Thank you, Father, but I don’t want your riches. All I want is to be with my brothers. I know that they are drunks, but I still love them.”

The next day, the youngest son ran away from home, looking for his two brothers. They had already travelled far from their house, but he hurried and was able to catch up with them in three days. As he approached, he yelled, “Wait for me, brothers. I love you and want to share your fate.”

“You’re the cause of all our problems,” they said. “You’re Father’s favourite. We lost all our inheritance because of you. Now you’re going to pay for what you’ve done. We are going to kill you.”

They grabbed him and tied him to a tree. They gathered firewood and set it on fire. Then they ran off so that no-one would catch them. The boy was about to die. The fire scorched him and burned the hair off his head. All of a sudden, he remembered the promise of the Bird of Seven Colours.

“O, Bird of Seven Colours, save my life!” he cried. “Please get me out of this dangerous situation.”

As soon as he said these words, he heard the loud wind of the Bird of Seven Colours. The wind was so strong that it put the fire out immediately.

“See there,” said the bird. “You would have been dead now if it weren’t for me. Who else would have saved you? This is not the last time you will need me. More trouble waits for you down the road.”

The boy ran off down the road yelling, “Brothers, wait for me!”

“How can that be the voice of our little brother?” they wondered. “He should be dead by now. Is it possible that he has escaped?”

When they saw him, they felt sorry for him and decided not to try to kill him again. “It is God’s will that he escaped,” they said.



They continued down the road until they came to the house of an old witch. They were hungry, and the witch fed them well. She told them about a big celebration that was taking place at the king's palace. The king was having a contest to see who would marry his daughter. All the young men of the kingdom were trying to win the contest. The one who could ride past her at full speed on a horse and put a ring on her finger would win her hand in marriage.

The two older brothers begged the witch for two horses and two rings so they could take part in the contest. The witch gave them what they wanted and asked them, "What about your little brother?"

"He's so ugly from being burned," they said. "Look at his bald head. He won't stand a chance. Let's leave him here."

So they rode off on their horses and left the youngest brother crying and begging to go too. As soon as the brothers were out of sight, he called on the Bird of Seven Colours for help.

"O Bird of Seven Colours, help me win this contest."

The bird appeared and told him to close his eyes. When he opened them, he had the appearance of a prince. His hair and skin were back to normal, and he was dressed in the finest clothes imaginable. The bird told him to close his eyes again, and when he opened them, he was sitting on a beautiful stallion with a diamond-studded bridle and saddle. The horse could not only run but also fly. The bird gave him a ring and sent him off to the contest.

When the youngest brother arrived, the contest was almost over. The two brothers had tried to put the ring on the princess's finger but were not able to do so. All the other young men had failed also. The princess did not like any of them, so whenever they got near, she would twist her finger so that the ring would not go on. The king was about to call off the contest when they saw a horseman far off in the distance. It was the youngest brother. His horse was flying, not galloping. As he got closer, the princess was so impressed with his good looks and the way he was dressed that she straightened her finger and let the ring be put on.

The next day, they got married. The king gave them a beautiful palace to live in with many servants. One day, two beggars came to the door asking for food. One of the servants got angry and told them to leave, but the young man recognised the beggars as his brothers. He told the servants to let them come in. In spite of all the mistreatment he had received from his brothers, he felt sorry for them and gave them work as gardeners on the palace grounds. And they all lived happily ever after.



The Butterfly

By Arun Kolatkar

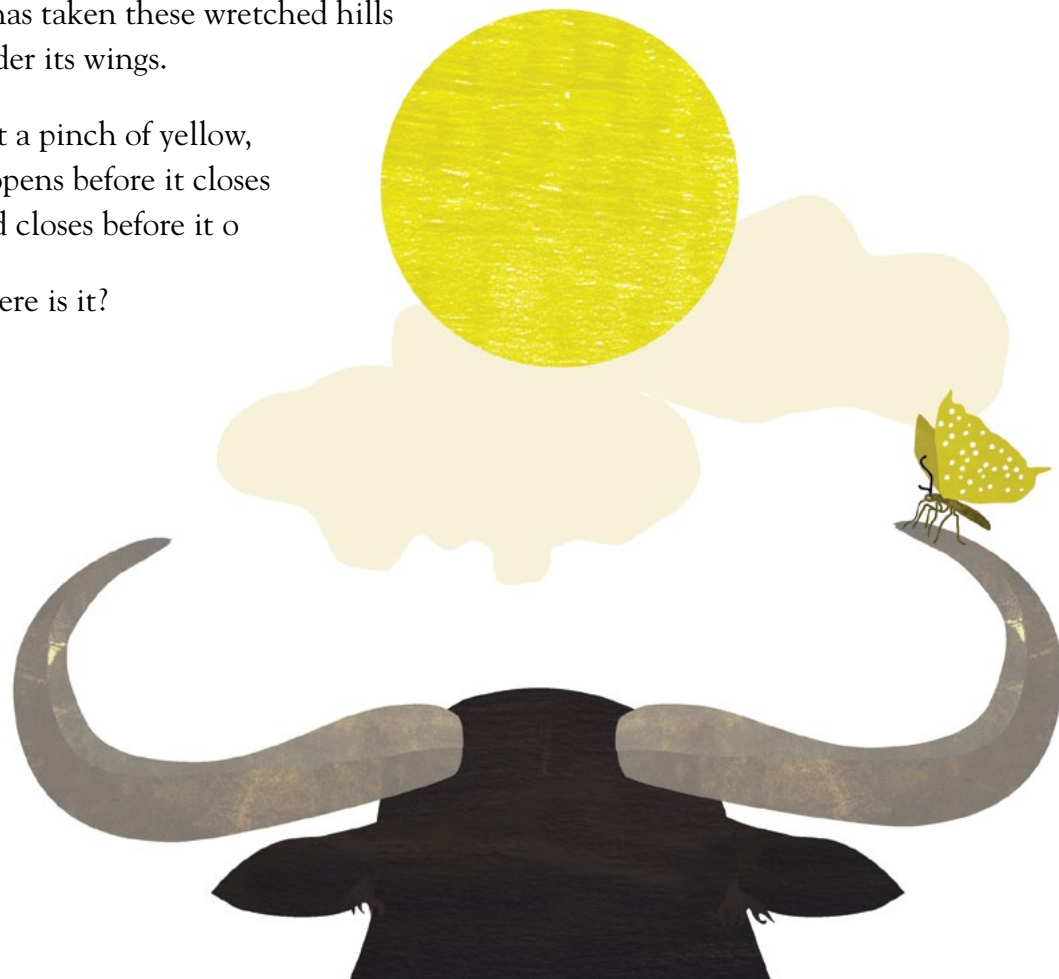
There is no story behind it.
It is split like a second.
It hinges around itself.

It has no future.
It is pinned down to no past.
It's a pun on the present.

It's a little yellow butterfly.
It has taken these wretched hills
under its wings.

Just a pinch of yellow,
it opens before it closes
and closes before it o

where is it?



Flight of the Roller Coaster

By Raymond Souster

Once more around should do it, the man confided...

and sure enough, when the roller coaster reached the peak
of the giant curve above me, shrill screech of its wheels
almost drowned out by the shriller cries of its riders—

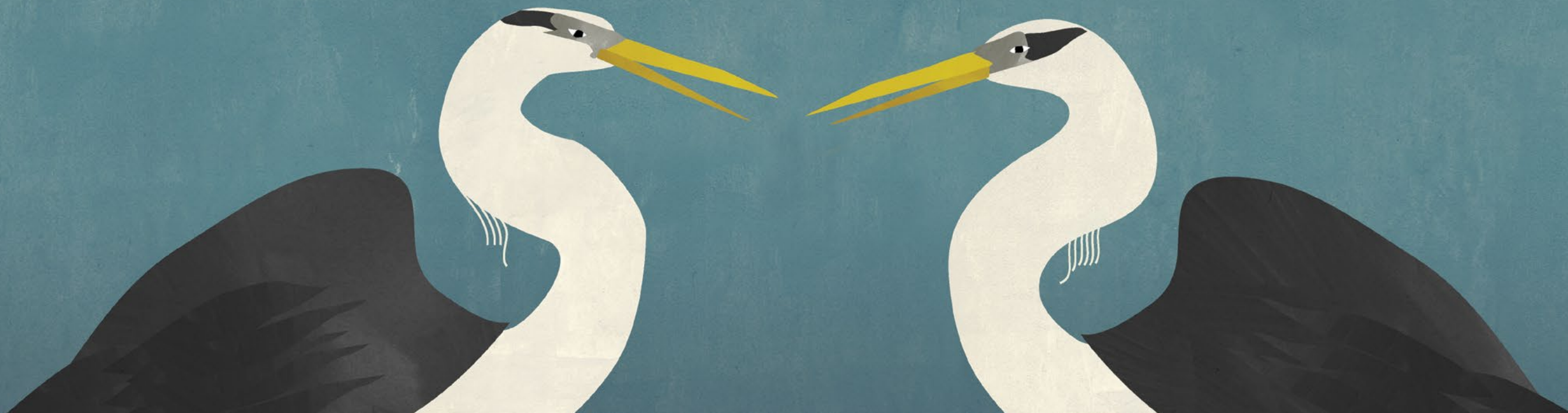
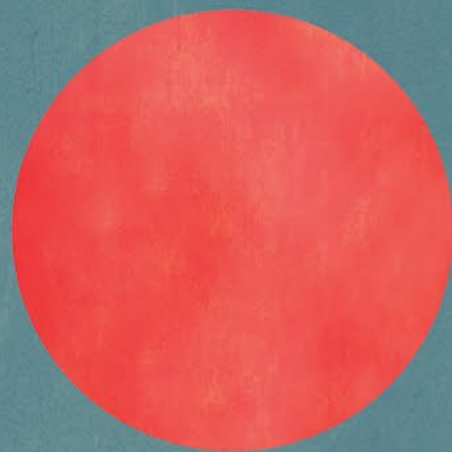
instead of the dip, then the plunge with its landslide of screams, it rose in
the air like a movieland magic carpet, some wonderful bird,

and without fuss or fanfare swooped slowly above the amusement park,
over Spook's Castle, ice-cream booths, shooting gallery;
then losing no height made the last yards across the beach, where its
brakeman cucumber-cool in the last seat saluted
a lady about to change to her bathing suit

ending up, as many witnesses reported
later, heading leisurely out above the blue lake water,
to disappear all too soon behind a low-flying flight of clouds.



Birds
of a
Feather



Little Bird

By Alick Lazare

you come to my window
with the dawning
each day
as if called to fulfil
a morning's prayer,

your soft brown feathers rising
where the tiny heartbeat
lifts your timorous spirit
and the wayward wind flutters
gently the vermilion of your breast.

shy anxious eyes
in deep obsidian
dart as swift as the humming bird
to capture meaning
in the morning's light.

stay but awhile
and still your trembling flight
even as I stand
unworthy to share
your simple purity.

stay, and I will place upon my window sill
some crumbs of gladness
and know tomorrow
that your soft sweet chirping
blessed my presence here.



Gaulettes (An extract)

By Hazel de Silva

gaulettes
that cloud the air
in the season

on the outlying islands
millions
come down
on the golden sands

from the high sky

on the golden sands
to spread
a pattern of eggs

no nest

the eggs



laid all over the shore
shining in the sun
laid on the shores
for miles



The Birds' Annual Beauty Contest

By Neltrice Whiteman



In the clearing of the Grand Étang Forest, just above the cascading falls, there was a gentle, cold spray as the wind whipped it softly back to the trees.

In the valley beyond, where the river teased the

sloping banks with its winding and twisting, the mountain laurel heralded the arrival of the hot season.

Up in the forest, where the trees grew thick, lived the birds of the Caribbean. They were all centred in one place, which they called Bird Kingdom. They flew to other countries, but they eventually came back to their home.

Another year had passed since Miss Blue-grey Tanager, known as Blue Bird, had been crowned the most beautiful bird in the Caribbean. Competing in this year's finals for the title was Blue-crowned Motmot, commonly known as Queen of the Woods. It would add to her vanity to know that she could be called Queen of the Caribbean. The other competitor was the Great Kiskadee.



The contest was due to start in an hour's time. Already the audience could be seen flying in. Among them was the most unwanted old black witch, Smooth-billed Ani. She was perched on the branch of a tree like most of the others, but the appearance of her face was not at all pleasant, her bulging eyes flashing with wickedness. Those near to her could hear the magic words tumble from her long ugly beak. She was wishing failure on the entire contest.

Streamertail, the Doctor Bird, was not known as a doctor for nothing. When he heard the curses that the witch was casting, he went immediately into his bag and drew out a slender black bottle labelled "Black Magic". Then he went on the branch above the witch and began to pour the liquid drop by drop onto the old witch's head. At first, she was unaware of everything save the mischief in her mind, but when the liquid began to take effect, she sprang around and around on the branch and with a loud shriek disappeared completely.

Bananaquit's eyes were as keen as her name, See-see Bird. She missed nothing and saw all the happenings of the afternoon in one glance. She was mostly black with a yellowish colour on her chest.



Her small black eyes shone with excitement as she saw that the contest was starting.

Now the deep rich voice of the huge Imperial Parrot could be heard as he introduced the contestants.

"Now coming on stage is Miss Blue-crowned Motmot. She is fifteen inches long. Now just look at her multi-coloured feathers. Her green wings have a fringe of blue, which makes her adoringly attractive. Her slender-shaped head has red eyes, which stand out against the blue, green, black and orange of her well-built body. Her long central tail feathers have no webs just above their tips."

After hearing all the praises of the MC, Blue-crowned Motmot's shyness left her, and she whirled around and around, opened her perfect wings and gave a last bow to the cheering audience, then made her way off stage.

Again the Imperial Parrot introduced the other contestant. "Here we have Miss Great Kiskadee. She is nine inches long. Her delicate body is arranged in red, brown and yellow. Her head looks alluring with strips of white and black. She moves into the middle of the stage with a most professional walk. The yellow patch, which was concealed on her crest, can now be seen as she turns and makes her way off stage."

The audience cheered for quite a while, as they had been properly entertained. Now the great moment had come, and everyone was waiting expectantly to hear who would be the new queen.

Then fate intervened in the shape of the old witch, who, angry because she had been left out, got six Siamese cats and let them loose. The audience and contestants alike fled for their lives. They went north, south, east and west and, to this day, there is no longer an annual beauty contest at the Grand Étang Forest. Now birds are found all over the Caribbean.

Mother Parrot's Advice to Her Children

By A. K. Nyabongo of the Ganda,
translated by an unnamed translator

Never get up till the sun gets up,
Or the mists will give you a cold,
And a parrot whose lungs have once been touched
Will never live to be old.

Never eat plums that are not quite ripe,
For perhaps they will give you a pain;
And never dispute what the hornbill says,
Or you'll never dispute again.

Never despise the power of speech;
Learn every word as it comes;
For this is the pride of the parrot race,
That it speaks in a thousand tongues.

Never stay up when the sun goes down,
But sleep in your own home bed;
And if you've been good, as a parrot should,
You will dream that your tail is red.



The Zobo Bird

By Frank Collymore

Do you think we skip,
Do you think we hop,
Do you think we flip,
Do you think we flop,
Do you think we trip
This fearful measure
And hop and hip
For personal pleasure?

Oh no, oh no,
We are full of woe
From top to toe:
It's the dread Zobo,

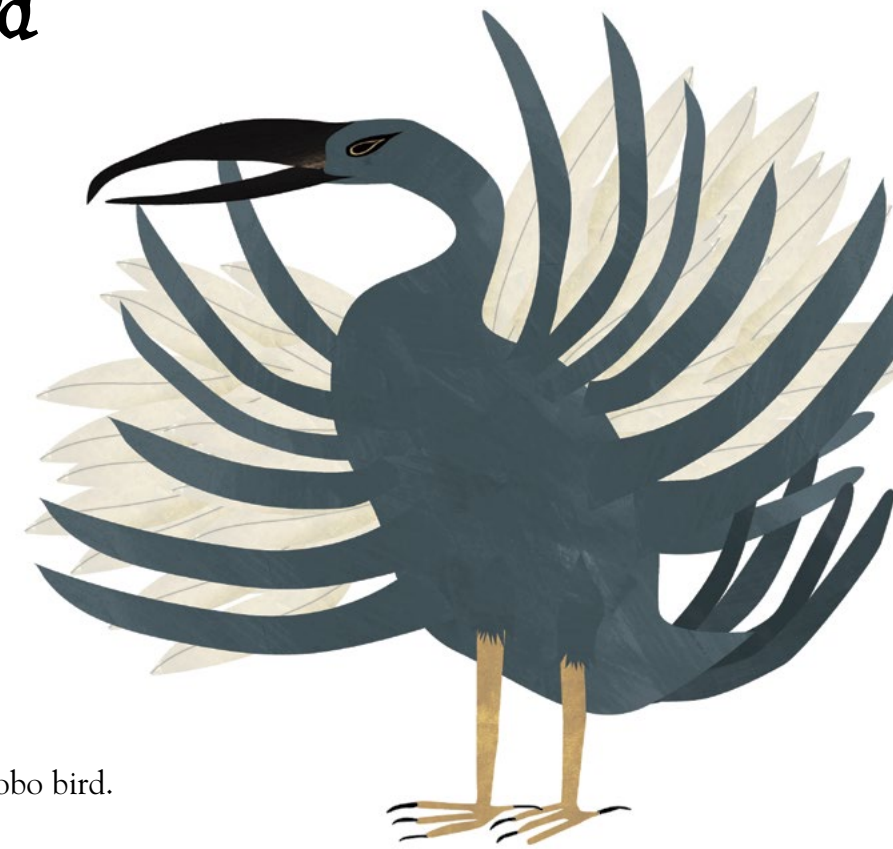
The Zobo bird.

He brings us bane,
He brings us blight,
He brings us pain
By day and night.
And so we must
Though it take all day
Dance or bust
Till he flies away.

Away, away!
Oh don't delay.

Go, Zobo, go,

O Zobo bird!



Call of the Birds

Retold by Nahdjla Carasco Bailey

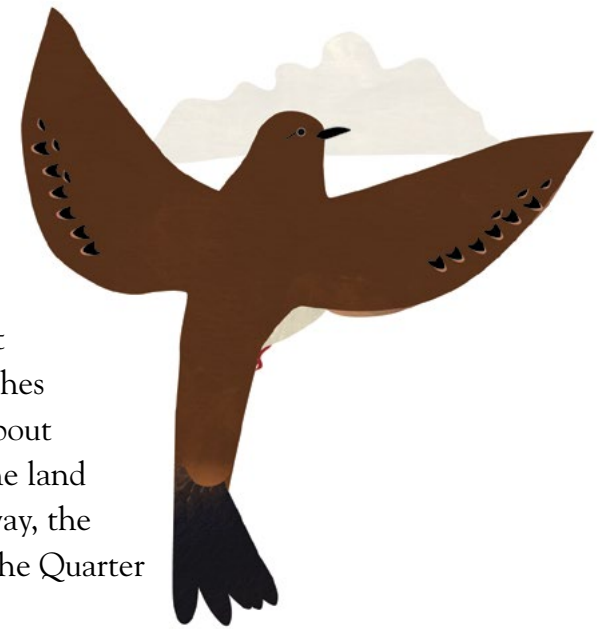


long time ago in the land of St Lucia, the birds were having a particularly bad year. The island had experienced a pretty nasty hurricane, which managed to leave rather a lot of our feathered friends dead. God, in his mercy, felt he should warn the birds that there was more bad luck to come; only this time, it was the opposite situation: there was going to be an awful drought throughout the period of the dry season. First, Papa God called Pipirit, the grey kingbird, which got its name from the sound of its call. Pipirit was in the middle of doing what it usually does, that is, sitting on a high tree branch along the roadside, waiting to dart out at flying insects, knock them out and eat them. However, Pipirit had no choice but to leave and go when God called.

God said to Pipirit, “I am sending you on a mission, Pipirit – a very important mission. I want you to fly around at great speed and give all the birds of St Lucia a message from me. Go to Toutrelle, Kilibri and Perdwi. Make sure you tell Ramier, Mel and Zotolan. Include Jacquot, Siffler Montagne and Mweson. Go to the cattle egret and even the tiny bananaquit. Look among the bright blossoms for the hummingbirds; that’s where you will find them taking their meals. Don’t leave out the white-breasted thrasher, the peewee, the oriole and the wren – they are not so easy to find. Most of all, be sure to call the cuckoo manioc. You know how he likes to stay atop the trees and not move about on the ground.”

Pipirit was proud to have been chosen as God’s messenger and set off at once. He went high and low, up and down, north and south, east and west – all over the place – just as Papa God had instructed.

He first spotted Toutrelle, the zenaida dove, with its reddish brown colour and whitish abdomen, walking along in the dry forest area and gently cooing its usual sad-sounding call. The white tips of its rounded tail stood out. “Good day, Toutrelle, and how are you today? Papa God has asked me to deliver an important message to you and the other toutrelles. He wishes to meet with you early on Sunday morning – about six o’clock to be exact. All the other birds of the land will be there. Please don’t be late. Oh, by the way, the meeting will take place at the Big Savanne in the Quarter of Micoud.”



Next, Pipirit took his message to Kilibri, the purple-throated Carib. He knew it would be tucked away in a shady spot somewhere, so he concentrated on looking out for its deep purple throat and hoped that the light would strike it at the right angle so it would glow and be easier to see.

When Pipirit got to Siffler Montagne, the rufous-throated solitaire, deep in the rainforest, was, as usual, way up high and letting out its flutelike whistle, which Pipirit thought sounded more like a squeaky bicycle. Before leaving the rainforest, Pipirit took the opportunity to pass on the important news of the meeting to Ramier, the red-necked pigeon, also way up high.

Now God’s messenger flew to the coffee plantations and discovered Perdwi, the ruddy quail-dove, feeding on the ground of the forest. The bird was easy to observe with its rust-coloured back, facemask and wings, as well as its breast, rump and under-eye stripes of a lighter brown colour.

It would not be so easy for Pipirit to find the famous Amazona versicolor (pet name “Jacquot”), the national bird of St Lucia, despite its bright green, yellow and red feathers. He searched the crowns of the trees and hoped that he would eventually find Jacquot there. In fact, it proved very difficult to pinpoint the bird in spite of its large size. When Pipirit did catch up with

Jacquot, moving awkwardly among the masses of leaves, it was busy searching for fruits, nuts, seeds and berries from a wide variety of trees, including the big gommier tree, from whose wood the local fishermen make their colourful canoes.

A bit later, Pipirit was having no trouble locating Mel, the Carib grackle, known to most folks as the blackbird. In fact, there were lots and lots of them everywhere in the city and towns chattering non-stop, and when Pipirit observed them, they were boldly entering the various restaurants to seek food. Pipirit watched them closely as they landed on the edges of tables, either waiting for hand-outs from patrons enjoying a meal or feeding on leftovers sitting on plates. They sure knew how to pick up an easy meal, those Mels. When Pipirit called out to them, they paid attention just long enough to listen and accept the message from Papa God, then they went right back to their pecking.

Mweson, the bullfinch, was singing a song and sunning itself when Pipirit found it. He gave his message in a nice clear voice, and Mweson stopped his enjoyable activity in order to listen attentively. Mweson thanked Pipirit kindly and told him to tell Papa God that he would be the first one there.

Pipirit visited all the other birds of the island, and they too thanked him for bringing them that most important message. All accepted the invitation with the greatest of pleasure.

Now it was time to search for Cuckoo Manioc. Cuckoo Manioc, the mangrove crackow, as its name suggests, was usually found in the mangrove forests atop the trees and large shrubs. He was a proud bird that did not mix easily with the other birds and preferred to keep atop the trees, getting his water from the leaves at that level. When Pipirit found him, Cuckoo Manioc was doing just that.

“Hello, friend,” said Pipirit. “Soon you will not be able to do what you’re doing at this moment.”

“What do you mean by that?” questioned the crackow.

“Listen well, and I’ll tell you. Papa God has sent me to invite you to a grand meeting, which He will be having with all the birds of St Lucia to provide them with some really important information for their own good.” Pipirit then provided the other bird with all the details of the meeting. “Make sure you’re there. You surely won’t regret it. All the members of the bird family will be there.”

“So? What do I care? I don’t have to be there.”

“But there is going to be an important statement by God about the upcoming dry season. And you know how we birds must have water every single day or else...”

“Well, personally, I can’t be bothered. Goodbye!” said the crackow, showing no interest.

Sunday arrived, and all the birds assembled before Papa God, who declared, “I have called all of you here today because I wish to warn you that the dry season will be very severe this year. In fact, there will be a long period of drought. Do whatever you must: collect water in any container that you can, dig holes for ponds, and do whatever is necessary to store water for the tough times ahead.”

The birds wasted no time. They began collecting water whichever way they could, and as for digging holes, well, they dug so many, and they dug very deep, and the ponds were nice and full.



Cuckoo Manioc observed the flurry of the birds here and there, but he stayed put atop the trees of the mangrove forest. There was no way he was going to join the birds in doing any of that running around. What was more, he pronounced in a loud voice for all to hear, “I’m not going to dirty myself in any mud. No way!”

Now, the critical time had arrived: the great cedar flowered just as it did every year immediately before the start of the dry season, the Earth became scorched, and the soil was completely parched. Not a drop of rain fell for days – no, weeks – no, months on end. Yet Toutrelle drank water with delight, Ramier bathed in the little pool that it had dug in a shady spot, and all the others refreshed themselves as necessary from the stores and supplies that they had prepared either individually or jointly. In their hearts, they thanked Papa God for looking graciously upon them and warning them to be prepared.

Meanwhile, a certain bird, whose name you know very well by now, was not at all happy and was growing unhappier by the second. He went from leaf to leaf looking for water, but not a drop did he find to drink. He had done nothing to plan for the difficult weather conditions, and really, he should have known that the leaves from which he liked to obtain his water would soon turn yellow, dry up, die and fall off the trees. Yes, Cuckoo Manioc was totally without water. He decided to go to each of the birds in turn, begging them for some of their water. But the birds had their families, especially their babies, to think of and were in no position to assist Cuckoo Manioc. Besides, they were upset with the disobedient bird for deliberately not doing what he should have done and yet expecting to benefit from their obedience and hard work. They simply had no time for him.

Cuckoo Manioc had no choice therefore but to keep flying up and down in the sky crying out for rain. What a terrible noise he made, his throat all dried up and feeling like sandpaper. The grating noise went like this: *grak, grak, grak, grak, grak, gro*. Up and down he flew, crying out, *grak, grak, grak, grak, grak, gro*. And that is why every dry season, when you hear the harsh sound of “grak, grak” coming from the sky, you should know that it is none other than the mangrove crackow in search of water to drink.



Two White Birds

*By James Numbaru of Yuo Island,
translated by Don Laycock et al.*

Two white birds
fly fly together
sit sit together
one fruit on a tree
steal steal together
eat eat together
swallow swallow together
take off take off together
fly fly away together
sit sit together



Wind and Weather



Brother Breeze and the Pear Tree

Retold by Philip M. Sherlock



Anansi had a large pear tree in his front garden. It was a very large tree, with wide-spreading branches and leaves of dark green. It was not the pear tree that grows in the gardens of northern countries. This tree bore avocado pears. The fruit was larger than a man's fist, with a single large seed inside and a thick green skin. Every year, the pear tree bore so heavily that the branches almost seemed to bend beneath the weight. Then Br'er Anansi and his family turned down their pot and stopped cooking. They lived on bread and pears until there were no more pears to eat.

One day, it happened that Anansi was sitting under the tree looking up at the pears that hung heavy on the tree. They were not quite ready for picking. But they soon would be ready! He looked up and tried to count them. There were too many. As he counted, he licked his lips and wondered if perhaps even one of the pears would be ready for picking on the following day.



But that night, a strong breeze blew. Br'er Anansi became very anxious. He knew how easy it would be for the breeze to blow the pears from the tree. The breeze blew harder and harder so that he began to fear that it would blow the roof from the house.

By next morning, however, the breeze had fallen away. It was very quiet outside. There was silence everywhere. Anansi opened the door and ran out into the garden. When he saw what had happened to the pear tree, he began to shout and to lament. The breeze had blown all the pears off the tree. It had beaten the tree and filled the garden with leaves and broken branches. Anansi saw that many years would pass before the pear tree could recover. Anansi's wife and children heard his shouts and ran to him. They, too, lifted up their voices and wept.

By and by, Anansi turned to his wife and said, "Let me think – let me think! What am I going to do now?"

For a time, he thought, and then he said, "I'm going to find the place where Brother Breeze lives, and I'll ask him to pay me for the pear tree!"

"Yes," said Crooky, Anansi's wife. "He must pay for our fine pear tree. Look at it now, with its branches torn off." And she began to weep again.

Anansi set off. He walked a long way, and he asked many people to show him the road to the house where Brother Breeze lived. When at last he came to the house, he stood outside for a moment, and then he knocked. A loud voice from within asked, "Who is that?"

"It is I, Anansi, Brother Breeze."

Breeze went to the door and said, "Oh, it's you, Br'er Anansi, it's you. Did you know that I passed by your house the other night?"

"Yes, sir," replied Anansi, "but a sad accident happened when you were passing. You blew down all the fruit from my fine pear tree, and you broke off all its branches. I am sure that you did all this by mistake."

"That is a pity, Br'er Anansi," said Breeze. "I am sorry to hear that. I remember now that I leaned on the tree a little heavily as I passed. I know that a pear tree is a good tree to have. Perhaps I can give you something in return for it."

“Thank you, Br’er Breeze,” said Anansi. “My wife and I knew that you would help us. That pear tree was our life, you know, Mr Breeze. It gave us all the food we needed for month after month. We turned down our pot and never had to cook when the pears were ready.”

“Well, well, Br’er Anansi, you take this instead. All you have to do with this little tablecloth that I am giving you is to spread it and ask for what you want.”

“Thank you a hundred times, a thousand times,” said Anansi. He took the little tablecloth from Breeze, folded it carefully and set off for home.

When Anansi was halfway home, he began to feel hungry, so he put down the cloth on the grass and said, “Spread, my little tablecloth, spread!”

The tablecloth spread itself, and a big pot full of rice and peas appeared on top of it. When Anansi saw this, he began to dance and sing, and he said, “Ha-ha! Ha-ha! This is better than a pear tree, better than a pear tree that bears once a year!”

He sat down, ate all the food, folded the tablecloth and took it home. How pleased everyone was! Anansi did not have to work, and his wife did not have to cook any more.



Then, on Monday morning, Anansi’s wife went down to the river to wash the clothes. She washed the little tablecloth and spread it out on the rocks to dry. At noon, she went home tired, with all the clean clothes. Br’er Anansi took the cloth and said, “Now it’s time to eat. Spread, little tablecloth, spread!”

But the tablecloth did not spread. Anansi spoke the words again and again, but the tablecloth would not spread.

Then he said in a rage, “It’s not any good, this tablecloth.” And he went off to the house where Breeze lived. He shouted, “Breeze, the cloth that you gave me is no good, no good at all.”

Breeze listened and scratched his head. He could not understand it. “I don’t know what can be wrong with it,” said Breeze, “but take this pot, and when you are hungry say, ‘Boil, my little pot, boil!’”

Anansi hurried home with the pot. He put it down on the ground while his wife and children gathered round him. “Boil, my little pot, boil!” he said, and they all ate the food that appeared in the little pot.

Next morning, Anansi’s wife looked at the pot. “It’s very dirty,” she said. “I must wash it clean.” She washed the pot inside and outside and put it on the shelf in the kitchen.

When Br’er Anansi came home at lunchtime, he put the pot on the ground and said, “Boil, my little pot, boil!”

But nothing happened. Nothing at all. Anansi tried over and over again, but no food appeared in the pot.

Once again, Anansi hurried off to the house where Breeze lived. He knocked at the door, and Breeze opened it. “It’s Anansi again,” said Breeze to himself, “and he is becoming a nuisance. I will have to put a stop to this.”

“Look, Breeze,” shouted Anansi. “This is all nonsense. The pot you gave me is no good, no good at all.”

“I am sorry, Mr Anansi,” said Breeze. “I have one thing that might help you. Take that big stick that you see leaning up in the corner. When you want anything say, ‘Round about, club out, round about!’”

“Thank you, Breeze,” said Anansi, “and I hope that this will work.”

“Yes, it will work,” said Breeze, as he closed the door and smiled to himself.

Halfway home, Anansi began to feel hungry. He put the stick on the ground and said, “Round about, club out, round about!”

The stick jumped up from the ground and began to beat Anansi, who ran and shouted, “No round about, no club out, no round about!”

But wherever he ran the stick followed him. When he reached his home, the stick began to beat his wife and children too, until at last they ran out of the house into the river. Then the stick lay down quietly on the bank. Every time they tried to come out of the river the stick jumped up again. So they had to cross the river and go and live far away on the other side of the forest.



The Whirlwind

By Joy Lawrence

Blow! Blow! You idle wind;
You have no responsibilities –
You don't go toiling in the sun all day
Then go home too tired to sleep.

Blow! Blow! You wanton wind;
You are not a family man –
You don't have any wife and children
To keep from starvation.

So you dance the “Twist” and do the “Twirl”
Picking up dust and leaves and paper and all,
And spin them mercilessly against their will.
Then when you've had enough of a whirl,
You let them fall wherever you will.

Then you disappear as suddenly as you came,
To travel to another unsuspecting place
To do your taunting dance again.



Hardship Rewarded

A Maasai tale retold by Stephen Muturi Gichuru



here was once a group of warriors who were marching along to find their enemies in order to fight them. On the way, one of them lost his sandal.

“Comrade warriors,” he called out, “wait for me to find my sandal.”

He was leading the group, and all the others wanted to continue their journey.

“There are so many of us that by the time the last warrior reaches you, you will have found your sandal,” said the warrior next to the leader.

As each man passed, the leader called out to him to stop, but they all went by, saying that by the time the last man passed, the leader would have found his sandal. But when the last warrior came up to the leader, he still had not found his sandal.

“Please wait for me,” said the leader.

But the warrior wanted to go on with the others in case he missed the fighting.

“I’ll go on with the other warriors,” said the last man, “but I’ll help you to catch up with us as soon as you have found your sandal. I’ll drop piles of leaves on the path as we go. If you follow the path where you see the leaves, you will soon find us.”

So they all went on their way and left the warrior alone to look for his sandal.

The other warriors walked and walked until they came to a place where the road divided. They went to the right. The last man kept his promise and dropped piles of dried leaves all along the way.

After some time, the leader found his sandal, and he started off quickly, following the trail of leaves. He soon came to the place where the road divided, but just then, a strong wind blew and swept away all the leaves from the path. The wind blew them around and around in a whirlwind that sped up into the sky.

The warrior followed them up into the sky, until he came to a wide road. He walked along until he saw a very strange sight. There were some swords that were sharpening themselves. The warrior was very surprised when they spoke to him.

“Warrior, warrior,” they called out together, “come and see which of us is the sharpest, and you can have that one for yourself.”

But the warrior took no notice. He followed the road and walked straight on. He walked on until he saw another strange sight. He saw a pot on a fire. It was full of meat, which was slowly cooking itself.

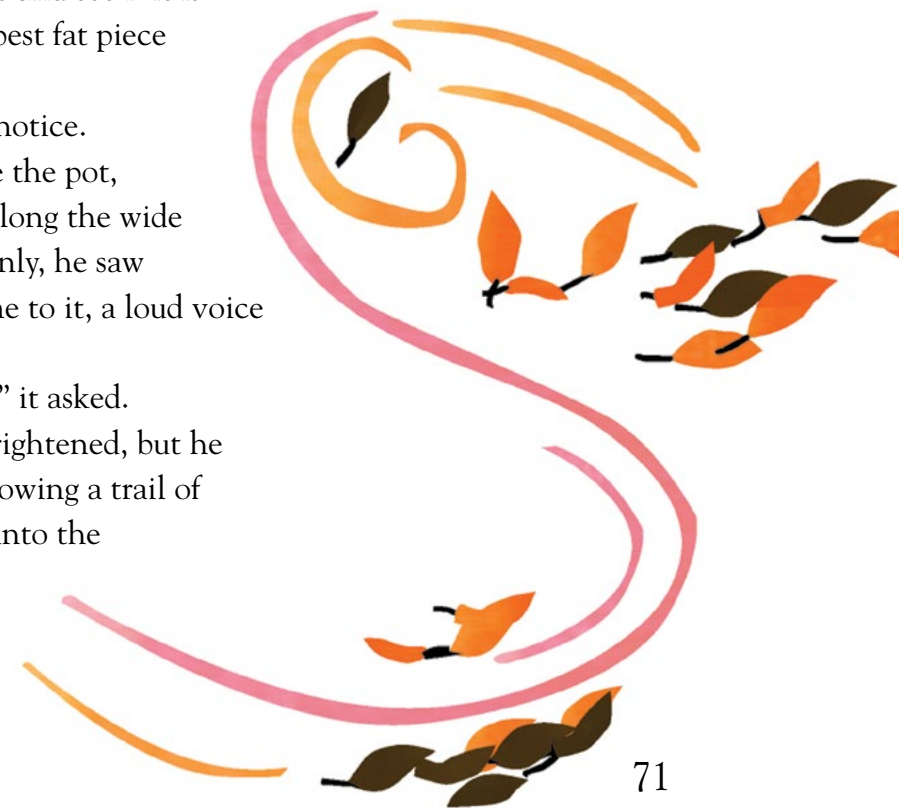
The pot spoke.

“Turn the meat inside me and see if it is cooked,” it said. “Take the best fat piece and eat it on your way.”

But the warrior took no notice. He did not even look inside the pot, but continued his journey along the wide path in front of him. Suddenly, he saw a house. As the warrior came to it, a loud voice came from inside.

“Who brought you here?” it asked.

The warrior was rather frightened, but he answered clearly, “I was following a trail of leaves, and they led me up into the sky. Then I saw a wide path and I walked along until I came here.”



“Why did you follow a trail of leaves?” asked the voice.

“I lost my sandal, and my companions would not wait for me to find it. The last man in the group said he would drop piles of leaves along the way so I would be able to catch up with them.”

“It will soon be dark,” said the voice. “Do you want to sleep in a big house with beautiful girls for your servants? Or do you want to sleep in a small dirty house and do everything for yourself?”

The warrior felt very frightened. He thought he would never find his companions if he stayed in the large house full of beautiful girls.

“The small house will be all right for one night,” he said. “I must go on my way early in the morning.”

“There is some milk to drink in the house. Do you want sweet, rich milk or sour, clotted milk?” asked the voice.

“Sour milk is good enough for me,” said the warrior. He felt that he was pleasing the owner of the voice by not asking for the best things.

“Look to your right,” said the voice. “That is your house for the night. Open the door and go inside.”

The warrior opened the door and saw a beautiful room inside. A lovely girl came and handed him a large gourd of milk. The warrior drank it and found it was sweet, fresh milk.

He saw a pile of thick skins arranged as a bed in the corner of the room. He lay down and fell fast asleep.

In the morning, the warrior heard a voice calling him. The beautiful girl brought him another gourd full of milk.

When he had finished drinking, he heard the voice say, “Go outside the house and you will see a huge anthill. Kick it as hard as you can. As you kick it, call out the names of all the animals you would like to own.”

The warrior went outside and saw the huge anthill. He kicked it once, saying, “I want a large herd of cattle.”

At once, a large herd of cattle came out of the anthill.

He kicked it again, saying, “I want a large flock of sheep.”

At once, a large flock of sheep came out of the anthill.

He kicked it a third time, saying, “I want many goats.”

At once, hundreds of goats, of all colours, came out of the anthill.

He kicked the anthill for a fourth time, saying, “I want a dozen donkeys.”

At once, twelve fine, fat donkeys came out of the anthill.

The warrior could hardly believe his good fortune as he looked at all the cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys.

He sat down and wondered how he could get them all home safely and which way he should go.

Suddenly, he heard the voice say, “Follow the road by which you came!”

The warrior was just going to say that this was impossible, when he saw a pile of leaves swirling in front of him. He stood up and collected his herds of animals and followed the leaves, which kept a little way ahead of him.

“Thank you, thank you,” he called back to the voice. “Whoever you are, thank you for your kindness.”



The other warriors had given their leader up for lost. They had gone to fight their enemy. They had won the battle and brought home many herds of cattle and sheep. They told the people of their village how they had left their leader to follow them, but that they had not seen him again.

One day, one of the warriors was looking out from the door of his hut when he saw a great cloud of dust in the distance. It came nearer and nearer. He called his friends to come and look. Soon they realised it was a great herd of cattle, sheep and goats. Then they saw a man riding on a donkey, with eleven others following behind him. They went out to meet the stranger.

“It’s our long-lost brother!” they cried, and ran to meet the returning warrior.

How glad the village people were to see their former leader return. They had a great feast to celebrate his homecoming at which he told them about all his adventures.



An African Thunderstorm

By David Rubadiri

From the west
 Clouds come hurrying with the wind
 Turning
 Sharply
 Here and there
 Like a plague of locusts
 Whirling
 Tossing up things on its tail
 Like a madman chasing nothing.

Pregnant clouds
 Ride stately on its back
 Gathering to perch on hills
 Like dark sinister wings;
 The wind whistles by
 And trees bend to let it pass.

In the village
 Screams of delighted children
 Toss and turn
 In the din of whirling wind,
 Women –
 Babies clinging on their backs –
 Dart about
 In and out
 Madly
 The wind whistles by
 Whilst trees bend to let it pass.

Clothes wave like tattered flags
 Flying off
 To expose dangling breasts
 As jagged blinding flashes
 Rumble, tremble and crack
 Amidst the smell of fire smoke
 And the pelting march of the storm.



Two Sisters

*A Bengali tale retold by Sayantani DasGupta
and Shamita Das Dasgupta*



There was once a weaver who had two wives. Each wife had one daughter. The weaver preferred his eldest wife and her daughter, Sukhu. Although both were mean and idle, he showered them with love and affection. Neither Sukhu nor her mother would lift a finger to help around the house, but lazed from morning until night stuffing themselves with food. On the other hand, the weaver's younger wife and her daughter, Dukhu, would spin cotton, clean the weaver's home, cook and serve Sukhu and her mother. Only then were they allowed their daily allowance of food.

Then, the weaver died. Right away, the elder wife claimed all his money, turning out his second wife and daughter from their home.

One day, Sukhu's mother would bring home the largest fish from the market; the next, she would bring the freshest vegetables. She would cook up savoury meals for herself and her daughter, eating them with relish. Of course, she made sure her banished co-wife and stepdaughter knew of these feasts.

Next door, in a poorly built, ramshackle hut, Dukhu and her mother would spin cotton until their fingers bled.



But no matter how hard they worked, they only managed to weave a tiny towel here, a handkerchief there. By selling those pieces, they were just able to afford one measly meal per day.

One morning, Dukhu and her mother awoke to find their spindle cotton soaked from the rainwater that had leaked through the roof. Putting out the cotton to dry in the sun, Dukhu's mother went to bathe in the river. Dukhu was left to watch over the precious material. Suddenly, a gust of wind swept the wispy cotton high into the air. Poor Dukhu ran after the errant threads, but was not able to catch even the smallest handful. Finally, she collapsed upon the ground, sobbing piteously. The wind comforted the little girl, "Dukhu, don't cry. Come with me, and I will give you all the cotton you want." Still wiping her eyes, Dukhu followed the breeze.

On the way, a cow called out, "Dukhu, where are you going? Will you clean my shed for me?" Kind Dukhu was not able to deny the animal's request. She swept the shed clean, piled fresh hay for the cow to eat and filled its trough with cool water. Then, she started again on her mission.

A few steps down the road, a banana plant asked, "Dukhu, where are you going? My trunk is covered with twisted vines. Can you take them down for me?" Dukhu happily did as the plant bid.

A little while later, a thorn tree called out, "Dukhu, where are you going? My base is crowded with fallen leaves. Will you sweep them clean for me?" Braving the thorny branches, Dukhu put the tree to rights before heading off after the wind.

Then a horse neighed at her, "Dukhu, Dukhu, where are you going? Will you gather a little sweet grass for me to eat?" Without complaining, Dukhu halted again, not resuming her journey until she had gathered a mountain of downy grass for the horse.



The gusty breeze led Dukhu on a windy journey, down paths that seemed to lead forever. Finally, she came upon a shining white house circled by airy verandas. Although the house looked uninhabited, the enormous rooms sparkled spick and span, and the lush gardens seemed well taken care of. In the central courtyard of the house, Dukhu came upon an old woman who was spinning endlessly. In the blink of an eye, she would weave a hundred thousand shimmering saris. The breeze whispered, "Dukhu, this is old Mother of the Moon. Ask her for your cotton and you will get it."

Touching the old woman's feet respectfully, Dukhu said, "Ayi-Ma, the wind has stolen all my cotton. My mother will scold me for losing it. Please, Ayi-Ma, can you get it back for me?"

The old lady, Mother of the Moon, had hair like the froth of fresh milk. It glowed like the light of a full moon. Pushing it away from her eyes, she looked up from her spinning. Before her was a little girl with words as sweet as melting honey. The old woman said, "Come, my golden child. In the other room is a soft towel, a sari and some hair oil. Take these and dip yourself twice into that yonder pond. Have something to eat and then we will find your cotton."

In the room, Dukhu found piles of soft towels and the richest of cotton saris. She pushed these aside, and took for herself a simple garment of cotton and an old and tattered towel. Putting the smallest drop of oil upon her hair, she went to bathe in the pond. The first time she dipped into the water, Dukhu became more beautiful than even a devi. But little Dukhu did not realise her beauty. At the second dip, Dukhu's body became covered with gold jewellery. From head to foot, she sparkled. Dukhu then went off to eat as the old woman had bid. The dining room was filled with such delicacies as she had never seen before, but Dukhu sat in a corner, eating nothing but a little rice with salt. Then she returned to the old Mother of the Moon.

The old woman said, "Come, my little golden baby. Go to that room at the far end of the house and you will find a trunk filled with cotton."

Dukhu went as she was told and found not one but hundreds of different trunks of all shapes and sizes. From the darkest corner of the room, she picked out a tiny trunk, almost like a toy box, and returned to the side of the old lady.

The old Mother of the Moon said, "My little treasure, go home to your mother. This trunk holds your cotton."

Bidding farewell respectfully to the old woman, Dukhu started back home. Her beauty and jewels lit the way for her through the darkness.

The horse whom she had helped called out, "Dukhu, Dukhu, how can I repay your kindness? Here is a little token of my gratitude." He presented Dukhu with a graceful winged horse.

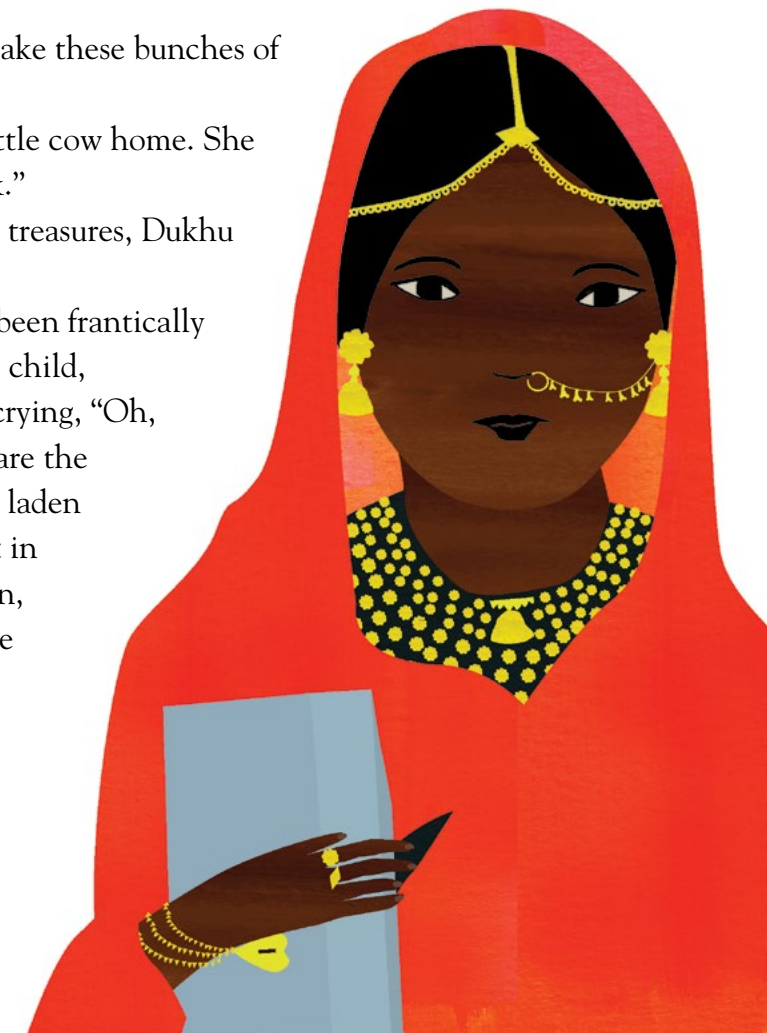
The thorn tree then said, "Dukhu, what else can I give you? Here, have this pitcher full of gold coins."

The banana plant offered, "Here, take these bunches of golden bananas."

The cow said, "Dukhu, take this little cow home. She will always give you the sweetest milk."

Carrying her trunk and new-found treasures, Dukhu arrived home.

In the meantime, her mother had been frantically searching for her. Seeing her precious child, Dukhu's mother ran to embrace her, crying, "Oh, where have you been, my child? You are the light in this darkness." Seeing Dukhu laden with such valuable gifts, she cried out in alarm, "Oh, daughter of a poor woman, from where have you brought all these priceless riches?"



After Dukhu had told her mother about her adventures, the younger wife of the weaver ran to her old home. “Sister, sister,” she called, “see what Dukhu has brought back from the old Mother of the Moon. Let Sukhu share in these gifts.”

Twisting her face and scowling viciously, Sukhu’s mother retorted, “Sharing a pauper’s treasure? My daughter is of better measure!” She slammed the door on Dukhu and her mother.

That night, when Dukhu and her mother returned to their shack, they decided to open the old woman’s tiny trunk. They were thunderstruck when a handsome prince stepped out of the magic trunk and asked for Dukhu’s hand in marriage. Immediately, the shack became a splendid palace, where Dukhu, her princely husband and her mother lived in joy. From then on, the prince rode upon the winged horse, the mother tended the gentle cow and sweet Dukhu kept her royal home with great delight.

The next day, Sukhu’s mother bolted and locked her front door, spread out a bale of cotton in her backyard and went to bathe in the pond. Before she left, she whispered some secret instructions to her daughter. “Phish... phish... phish.” In a little while, the breeze came and blew away all the cotton. Sukhu dashed after the wind.

On her way, the cow called out, “Sukhu, where are you going? Will you stop a moment for me?” But Sukhu ran on, ignoring the request. The banana plant, the thorn tree, the horse all called after Sukhu, but she had no time for them either.

She yelled out to them over her shoulder, “I’m going to see the old lady, the Mother of the Moon! Why should I have to stop for you?”

Chasing the wind, Sukhu finally arrived at the old woman’s home. Without pausing to look at the beautiful surroundings, she bustled into the central courtyard and marched straight up to the Mother of the Moon. “Hey, old lady,” she called out rudely, “stop your useless spinning and give me all my things! You gave so much to that little twit, Dukhu, you’d better give me even more!” With these harsh words, Sukhu pulled the distaff out of the old woman’s hands and knocked over her spinning wheel.



The old Mother of the Moon cried out in alarm. “Stop, stop! Such a little girl and such big words!” She gazed thoughtfully at Sukhu before adding, “All right, you’ll get your things; but first, why don’t you take a bath and have a little food?”

Sukhu ransacked the room for the most gorgeous silk sari and the softest towels. She grabbed the most fragrant hair oil and a bowlful of sandalwood paste before heading off to bathe. The first dip was beauty. The second brought her jewels. Sukhu jumped in joy and thought, “The more I dip into this magic pond, the more splendid I will become!”

“Ayi-ayi-ayi!” After the third dip, Sukhu yelled in dismay. Her body was covered with warts and blisters, bumps and rashes. Her nails grew like talons, her hair stuck out like brittle hay. Sukhu gazed into the water and met her reflection – an ugly crone! Crying, “Oh Ma’go! Oh Baba-re!” Sukhu ran back to the old Mother of the Moon.

Seeing her, the old woman exclaimed sorrowfully, “Oh, my unfortunate dear! Did you dip three times? Oh well, don’t cry now. Why don’t you at least get something to eat?”

Raining curses on the old woman's head, Sukhu stomped off to the dining room. There, she gobbled up the best sweetmeats and scattered the remains of her half-eaten meal all over the beautiful room. Then she washed her face and hands and returned to the courtyard, "I want to go back to my mother now, old woman. Give me the trunk you promised!"

Wordlessly, the old Mother of the Moon pointed Sukhu in the direction of the trunk room. Unlike her sister, Sukhu chose the largest trunk she could possibly carry. Balancing it precariously on her head, she headed home, still cursing the old woman's name. At the sight of Sukhu, foxes ran away, and villagers swooned. The horse gave her a swift kick, and Sukhu cried out, "Ayi! Ayi!" A branch from the thorn tree broke off and landed upon her, the banana plant dropped a heavy bunch of fruit upon her back and the cow chased Sukhu all the way home.

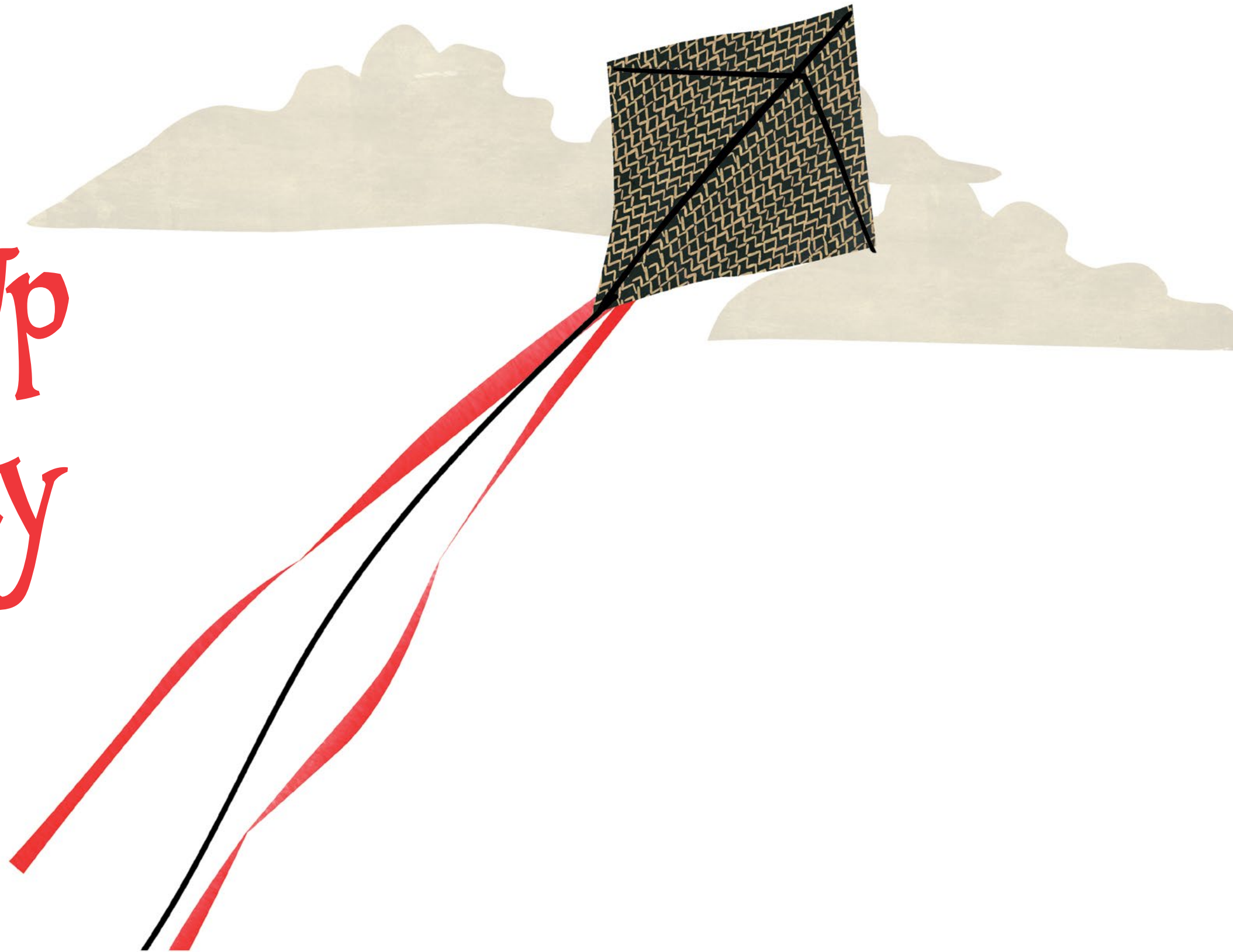
In the meantime, Sukhu's mother had decorated their house in honour of her daughter's triumphant return. Placing two golden thrones on the veranda, she waited expectantly. Seeing her daughter, Sukhu's mother cried out, "Oh, Ma! What will become of us? Where will we go?" and promptly fainted.

After waking, Sukhu's mother mourned, "Oh, well. What else is there to do? Perhaps things will improve when your husband emerges from the magic trunk." That night, the mother and daughter opened the trunk to find Sukhu's groom.

And oh, Ma! Who do you suppose it was? The most enormous python you have ever seen slithered out of the trunk and swallowed Sukhu and Sukhu's mother whole. No-one ever saw them again.



Up, Up
and
Away



Surprised

By Heather Archibald

One late afternoon,
after she gathered
a thousand pieces of little garments
dried by the departing sun;
after she had wrung a third rinse water
from a thousand more
and hung them out to dry
in the evening wind,

she stopped – turned – dropped her basket
and ran into our waiting skipping rope;
with one hand across her chest, she jumped!

Surprised by Mother skipping,
we laughed and screamed
our delight.



The Voice of the Flute

An Indo-Caribbean tale retold by Kenneth Vidia Parmasad



Three brothers lived alone with their only sister in a little hut at the edge of the forest. Their parents had died many years ago, and the children were left to survive as best they could.

Every day, the brothers went into the forest to collect firewood. The boys would then tie the firewood into bundles, place the bundles on their heads and walk to the distant villages. There they would offer their firewood to the village people in exchange for food and the other things they needed. The sister always stayed at home. She cooked, cleaned and took care of the house while the brothers were out.

While the sister treated her three brothers very well, it was clear that the youngest was her favourite. She always paid special attention to him. The other two brothers did not like this. They felt that they deserved more attention since they were the ones who did most of the work in the forest.

“Why do you always treat him better than you treat us?” they often complained to their sister, not even bothering to hide their jealousy of the youngest brother.

“I have three brothers, and I love you all,” the sister would reply. She would never say more than this, for she did not trust her two elder brothers, and she was afraid that they might harm her in some way. So she continued



to try and please the elder brothers in every possible way while still having a special affection for the youngest.

One day, the two elder brothers sent the youngest to collect some firewood while they remained at home with their sister. When the youngest brother returned home, his sister was nowhere to be seen.

“Where is sister?” he asked, worried.

The two brothers were eating and seemed to be enjoying their meal very much. They merely glanced at him to tell him that their sister had gone to collect some berries.

After they had finished eating, the two brothers went to bed. The youngest brother then decided to go in search of his sister. For several hours, he wandered through the forest looking for her and calling her name out loud. He could not find her anywhere. As he was returning home, he noticed some footprints at the back of their house. He followed the footprints and found that they led to a pond not far off. The pond was too deep for him to enter. He returned home convinced that he would never see his sister again.

He cried and cried through the entire night. The next morning, when his two brothers awoke, they saw how grieved he was. They tried to console him by telling him that their sister would soon return.

“That’s not true,” he sobbed. “I know she will never come back to us.”

“There is no cause to worry,” they said. “There are so many different kinds of fruits in the forest, we are certain that she will not die of hunger. We know that she is all right,” they continued.

But try as they might, the elder brothers could not convince the youngest brother that their sister was alive and well. The youngest brother was so unhappy that he could neither eat nor sleep. All he could think about was his lost sister.

Some time later, he noticed that a bamboo shoot was springing up at the edge of the pond where he had seen the footprints. The plant attracted his attention because of its luxuriant, green appearance. He began to take care of the plant. In a short time, a very healthy, stout clump of bamboo swayed and

rustled in the breeze beside the pond. The tall, overhanging bamboos gave a lowly shade, and the youngest brother often came and rested beneath them as they bowed this way and that in the wind. It was at times like these that he thought most of his lost sister and longed for her return.

One day, while he was there, he cut one of the shoots of the bamboo and made it into a flute. When he placed the flute to his lips and blew it, he heard a strange and beautiful tune that he had never heard before. He was very surprised at what he heard. He felt as if he were in a strange dream. Every time he blew the flute, he would hear the same song:

*Blow flute, blow,
Blow flute, blow.
My youngest brother
Is good and kind.
My youngest brother
Is good and kind.*



It seemed to him that the flute had a voice of its own, which came alive every time he blew it. And he was sure that the voice coming from the flute was the voice of his sister.

“She’s alive! She’s alive!” he said, unable to hold back the tears. Bursting with joy, he cherished this thought secretly in his heart. And he blew and blew the flute until he was too tired to blow it any more. That night was the first night he slept so well in a long, long time.

One evening, while he was blowing his flute, his two brothers came up to him.

“Why are you always blowing this flute?” they asked him.

“I like the music it makes,” he answered.

“Let us have a try,” they demanded.

He handed his brothers the flute, and they both took turns blowing it. But the brothers were in for a terrible shock. Each time they blew, the voice of the flute floated in the air for all to hear:

*Blow flute, blow,
Blow flute, blow.
My elder brothers
Are my deadly foes.
My elder brothers
Are my deadly foes.*

With their mouths wide open, they stared at each other. Their faces became pale and drawn as if they had seen something that filled their hearts with terror. Their hands and knees trembled with fright, and the flute fell to the ground. Like madmen, they ran screaming through the forest never to show their faces again.

The youngest brother took up the flute. He dusted it and held it to his breast as he turned and walked quietly home. Soon he was fast asleep, the flute beneath his pillow. And from that day on, the flute was his closest friend.

Blue-town Blues

By Barolong Seboni

This little boy
 six year poor
 waits in khaki shorts
 on a dusty path
 for
 a
 wind
 to
 blow.

His kite,
 a discoloured wrapper from
 Cash Bazaar “where-the-people-shop”,
 loosely tied to the yellow reeds
 from the sandy banks of the Shashe,
 drags now as he runs
 flustering up a low trail of ash.

Hope blows
 in the hesitant breeze,
 and the kite rises
 reluctantly
 as the boy’s feet stamp
 faster, faster and faster.

The kite wings
 and winds steadily
 to fall again at the bare feet of
 this little boy
 waiting
 in dusty despair
 for

 a
 wind
 to
 blow.



After the Rain

By Shahid Hosain

Swinging girl
there is mud
below your skimming
feet, whistling
through the damp air.

The rope
bends outward
as you start,
crouching strongly
a pendulum of wood,
white clothes
and naked feet;
tautening,
you catch
my earthbound form
whirling it up
towards the purple sky,
now I move
between your pumping legs
now I face you
in a close blur of heat
untroubled by the wind:



but the platform
tilts,
the wet rope burns
our hands,
and the journey breaks
in slow release
narrowing to the ground.

Here it is better:
I can sift my hands
through the cool languid tumble
of your hair. Your slow walk
draws me on, and in the shadowless ground
our feet sink soft and pleasant through the grass.

The Diamond Fruit

Retold by Pahlad Ramsurrin



Once in a country, there lived a king who had five sons. The four elder princes were lazy and fickle-minded, but the youngest possessed all the values of a good prince.

For some time, the king lived a peaceful life, but then came a time in his life when he became very miserable. In fact, he had contracted an incurable disease. Many doctors and vaidh were called from distant countries, but their cures were of no use, and most of the doctors declared the disease to be incurable. At last, the king lost all hope of being cured and prayed to God, "O God! Either relieve me of this illness or take my life for good."

That night the king had a strange dream. A pretty woman was standing before him. She was telling the king, "My Lord! Follow me! I will take you to a wonderful garden. In the middle, there is a golden tree on which there are many diamond fruit. If you eat one of the fruits, your illness will disappear."

After that, the pretty woman disappeared and the king woke up. Although it was still night, the king could not fall asleep again and waited impatiently for the arrival of dawn.

The next morning, the king made a proclamation in the royal court. "Whoever finds the garden in which there is a golden tree bearing diamond fruit, and brings one of the fruits, will be given precious gifts by the king and will be proclaimed the future king."

A day later, the four elder princes went to see the king one by one, saying, "I am going in search of the golden tree. I will bring the fruit and cure your disease. Give me money for the journey."

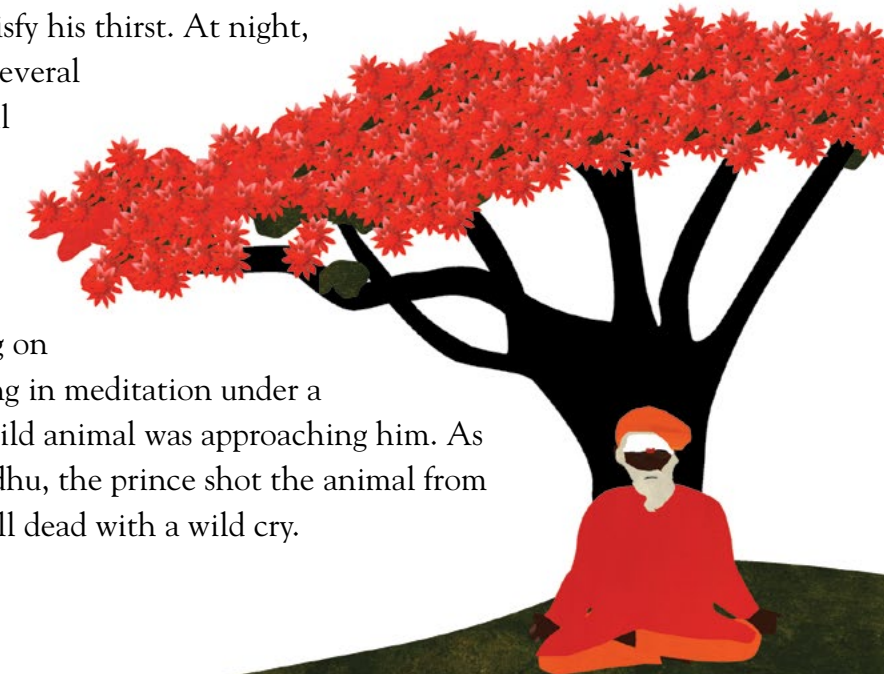
The king gave each of them a fabulous sum of money. The eldest son set out to the north, the second to the south, the third to the west and the fourth to the east.

When all the brothers were gone on their journeys, the youngest prince could not remain alone at home. He too went to his father and said, "Father, although I do not know where the golden tree with the diamond fruit is, I will search for it and bring it back to cure your disease. Moreover, I do not need anything from the royal treasury. I only need your blessing. Wealth and money usually turn people lazy and frivolous in life."

After receiving the blessing from the king, the youngest prince set out towards the forest on horseback with his bows and arrows. Although he had no money like his brothers, he possessed an iron will and the determination to find the golden tree with diamond fruit. With an adventurous spirit he proceeded towards his destination.

For several days and nights, he passed through a very dreadful forest, where there were many wild animals. He crossed rivers, hills, mountains and forests. When he felt hungry, he ate wild fruits and roots and drank pure water from the springs to satisfy his thirst. At night, he slept on straw and spent several nights in bad weather. But all the time, he was thinking only of searching for the golden tree and the diamond fruit.

One day while proceeding on his way, he saw a sadhu sitting in meditation under a tree on the top of a hill. A wild animal was approaching him. As it was about to attack the sadhu, the prince shot the animal from behind a tree. The animal fell dead with a wild cry.



This dreadful cry awoke the sadhu from his meditation. He opened his eyes and saw the dead wild animal. He was very surprised when the prince appeared before him with folded hands in reverence. The prince had saved the life of the sadhu, and in return, the latter granted the prince a wish.

“Brave prince! You saved my life. Tell me your wish, and it will be fulfilled. Why are you wandering in this wild forest alone?”

“Enlightened sadhu! My father, the king, is suffering from an incurable disease. To cure the disease, I am on the lookout for a golden tree that bears diamond fruit,” replied the prince.

The sadhu looked seriously at the prince and said, “I like your strength and valour. Now listen. Ride towards the north very far from here, and you will find a cavern. Go inside it. Do not be afraid. There you will find an orchard. In the midst of the orchard, you will see the golden tree with the diamond fruit. But be very careful of the guards that are protecting that wonderful tree.”

After giving the prince his blessing, the sadhu again went into meditation.

The prince went north as indicated by the sadhu. After a tiresome journey, he saw the big cavern. He entered and went into the depths of the cavern. Then he saw a frightful tiger barring his way. The next moment, it pounced. Luckily, he managed to avoid the attack. Immediately, he drew an arrow and was ready for the second attack. As the tiger jumped towards him, he shot it and, with a dreadful roar, the tiger fell dead on the ground.

But, at the same time, an unusual thing happened. As the tiger fell on the ground, it disappeared, but in front of the prince appeared a shining orchard. In the middle, there was a golden tree loaded with diamond fruit.

The prince was happy at his discovery. His journey had been fruitful. As he was approaching the golden tree, there was a fairy nearby who warned the prince, “Be careful, young prince! There is a powerful demon guarding the golden tree. Nobody can match him. He is very brave, but his bravery is hidden in the black mole on his chest. If somebody can pierce it with an arrow, the demon will die, and the man who kills him can reach the golden tree with the diamond fruit.”

“It’s not a difficult task for me,” replied the prince. He drew up his bow and put an arrow on it, then took aim at the black mole. The arrow whizzed through the air and went straight through the mole on the demon’s chest. The demon screamed violently and fell dead.

The fairy rejoiced at the death of the dreadful demon. She told the prince, “I am impressed with your bravery. As you have killed my worst enemy, you can take a diamond fruit from the golden tree. Tell your father to eat it, and he will be cured. If something happens while you’re going home and you find yourself in difficulty, think of me, and I will come to your rescue. This flying machine will bring you home as quickly as possible.”



After that, the fairy disappeared. The prince took a fruit from the golden tree and sat in the flying machine, which went up into the air and flew towards his father's kingdom. But midway, the prince saw his four elder brothers all returning home. They also saw the flying machine and their youngest brother. They waved their hands for him to stop. The youngest prince descended near them. The four brothers asked him, "From whom have you borrowed this flying machine?"

The youngest prince related his whole story quite innocently. He even showed them the diamond fruit from the golden tree. The elder brothers were ashamed that they had failed, and they could not bear to see their youngest brother succeed where they had failed. So jealous were they of him, evil got hold of their spirit, and they started making plans for ways to kill him and take away his powerful fruit.

They asked him to take them home in the flying machine. On the way, they threw their youngest brother from the flying machine after getting hold of his diamond fruit. They then continued towards their father's royal palace.

The youngest prince fell unconscious to the ground. When he regained consciousness, he felt great disgust towards his elder brothers. He said to himself, "My brothers have snatched the diamond fruit from the golden tree. Now they will fool my father by telling him that it is theirs."

The prince thought of the fairy as she had told him to do in difficult circumstances. The next moment, the fairy appeared in front of the prince. Seeing him in such a bad state, the fairy asked, "Who has thrown you from the flying machine and what has happened to the diamond fruit?"

The youngest prince related the misdeeds of his elder brothers in detail.

The fairy said, "Do not worry. The diamond fruit will lose its miraculous power in dishonest hands. Your brothers will fail to cure your father's disease with that fruit."

"What should I do now to cure the illness of my father?"

The fairy gave him a ring and said, "Take this ring. Pass it three times over the diamond fruit. It will turn smooth and regain its supernatural powers. Tell your father to eat it and he will be instantly cured."

With her celestial powers, the fairy sent the young prince to the palace of his father. There he saw his elder brothers bragging about their valour. The king seemed very impressed. The brothers presented him with the diamond fruit and told him, "Eat it, Father! Your disease will be cured."

The king took the diamond fruit in his hand. He tried to eat it but could not do so because its skin was very hard. The king was very distressed at that. The four princes looked at each other in amazement.

At this crucial moment, the youngest prince appeared before the king.



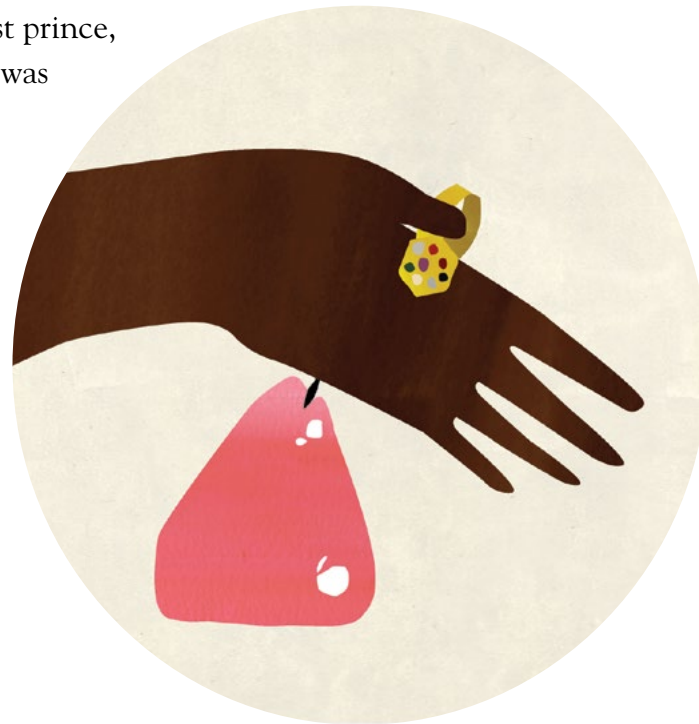
He told him the whole story of his journey – the way he had obtained the diamond fruit from the golden tree, his return journey and his meeting with the four elder brothers and their cruel deeds to kill him to get possession of the miraculous fruit.

The four brothers would not accept their guilt. They protested and asked their younger brother, “Do you have any proof to accuse us of dishonesty?”

The youngest prince went smiling to the king and took the diamond fruit from his hand. He passed the ring given to him by the fairy over the fruit three times and gave it to his father. Strange as it seems, the diamond fruit suddenly turned soft and delicious. The king this time relished the fruit in front of the courtiers. And what a miracle! The king’s illness, which had remained incurable for years, was cured instantly. The king and the courtiers were impressed by the curative effect of the diamond fruit from the golden tree.

At the achievement of the youngest prince, everybody started cheering. The king was proud of his youngest son, but at the same time, he was disgusted by the dishonest and cruel deeds of his elder sons. He gave orders to have them put in prison for their misdeeds.

The old king was cured. He gave all his wealth and the kingdom to his youngest son and made him the king. Thus, the youngest prince reigned for a long time. The people loved him for his bravery and frankness, and there was peace and happiness in his kingdom.



The White Cloud

By *Taner Baybars*

He cried and wouldn't stop crying until a wise man thought of tying a piece of string to a white cloud.

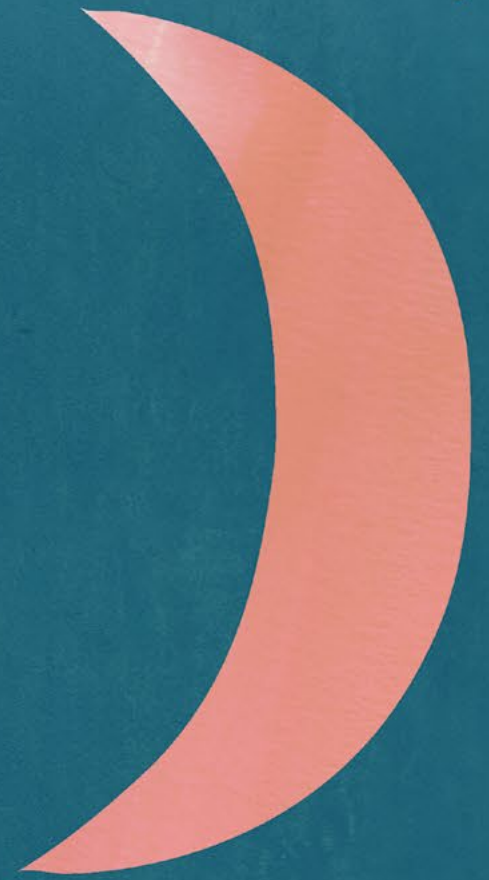
He pulled it down, pulled it down – past the secret layer above him the cloud rained, the string fell down.

Another cloud rained as the first. A dark cloud hailed and injured one of his tiny but strong hands.

He cried, and the wise man tied a piece of wire round the sun. Revolving, it pulled him up, burning until his tiny body was a white cloud.



Heavens
Above



The Shy Sun

By Eti Sa'aga

I woke up
this morning
with the sun
standing outside
my window
blocking the night.

She started moving
when she saw
me looking!



The Heavenly Elephant

Retold by Indi Rana



It was time for the gamarala to harvest his rice field. He worked hard for a week, piling up the rice sheaves. When the rice was harvested, he rested for a day.

“Tomorrow,” he said to his wife, “I’ll begin threshing.”

But when he went to the field the next morning, he cried, “Hey! What’s this?” A quarter of the rice sheaves were gone. All around on the ground were huge, round marks, like those made by the huge rice pounding vessels in which the farmers pounded rice.

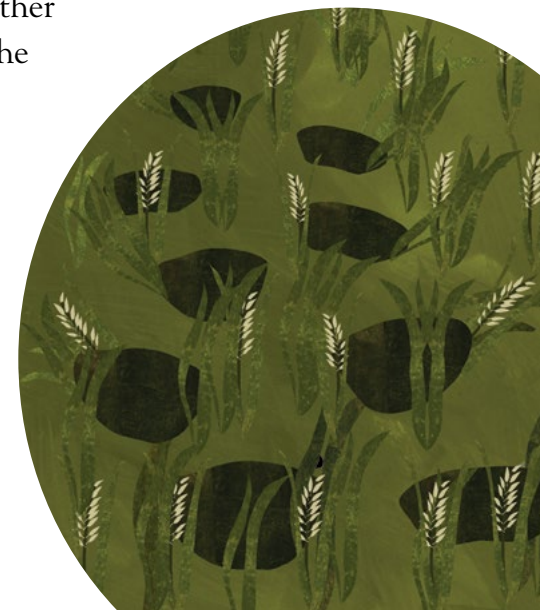
“Perhaps the pounding vessels came to life at night and stole the rice,” his wife suggested.

So the gamarala went to all the nearby farmers and asked them to tie up their pounding vessels. “I don’t want them to escape at night and steal more of my rice sheaves,” he said.

The other farmers agreed. “After all, we don’t want the pounding vessels to steal our rice too, do we?” they said.

But the next morning, the gamarala found that another quarter of his rice sheaves were gone... and again on the ground were the same huge round marks.

“Tonight, I’m going to stay awake and chase away whatever it is that steals my rice,” the gamarala said. That night, he hid behind the remaining rice sheaves.



In the middle of the night, just as the gamarala was dozing off, a huge white elephant floated down from heaven on a moonbeam and, right before the gamarala's eyes, began munching on the rice sheaves. The gamarala was so amazed he couldn't move. He just stared with his mouth hanging open.

Just as dawn broke, the elephant turned to fly back to heaven on the last moonbeam. The gamarala jumped up and caught hold of its tail.

And up he flew with the elephant to heaven. And my, what wonderful sights the gamarala saw! He saw the gates of heaven covered with stars. He saw Sakaraya, the greatest of gods, sitting on his throne. He saw beautiful palaces and sparkling lakes. He saw flowers made of mist and trees made of jewels everywhere. All day, the gamarala wandered around heaven, holding onto the elephant's tail.

Meanwhile, down on Earth, it was day, and his wife missed the gamarala. She cried so loudly that all the villagers came to find out what had happened.

"My husband has been taken away by the thing that makes huge round marks on the ground," the gamarala's wife wailed.



The farmers and villagers searched for the gamarala all day. They looked in all their pounding vessels. They looked in the fields and forests. They looked in the wells and up into the trees. But in the evening, they came to the gamarala's house to report that they had not been able to find the gamarala anywhere. They sat late into the night talking about the strange disappearance. And at midnight, what did they see but a heavenly elephant sliding down a moonbeam. And there, hanging on its tail, was the missing gamarala!

"O my friends," the gamarala cried when he saw the gathering, "you should see the wonders I've seen." And he told them of the beauties of heaven.

"We must go too!" the washerman cried. "When the elephant returns, we must go too."

"How can we all go?" the cowherd asked. "Let's pick the most intelligent among us. He can tell us all about it when he comes back."

"That's me!"

"No, no, that's me!"

"No, no, let's send someone who can write, so he can describe the wonders in a book," the goatherd said.

"I write the best."

"No, no, I do!"

And soon everyone had started to fight. The elephant paid no attention to this. Quietly, he ate up the last of the gamarala's rice. And when dawn broke, he turned to fly back to heaven on the last moonbeam.

"Oh! Oh! The elephant's going!" the cowherd cried.

"Run after it!" the blacksmith shouted.

The gamarala reached the elephant first and grabbed its tail. The gamarala's wife grabbed her husband's legs as he was lifted off the ground. The blacksmith grabbed the woman's legs. The washerman grabbed the blacksmith's legs. The goatherd grabbed the washerman's legs. The cowherd grabbed the goatherd's legs. And soon there was a whole train of

people who had all grabbed the legs of the person in front, all flying up to heaven on a moonbeam.

“Hey!” the blacksmith called as they flew up. “Gamarala, did you see any rice in heaven? You should ask for your rice back.”

“Oh yes! There’s plenty of rice in heaven!” the gamarala turned his head and called back. “The elephant just liked my rice. It’s good quality, you know.”

“I wonder if they measure rice like we do,” the gamarala’s wife said.

“Yes, they do,” the gamarala replied. “They have so much rice, they only use large measures, not like ours.”

“How large are the measures?” the goatherd asked.

“Oh,” the gamarala said, “this large.” And he spread his arms to show exactly how large.

Well, of course, he let go of the elephant’s tail, and the whole train of people hanging on to each other fell slowly, slowly, and then faster and faster, back to Earth.

It was lucky they fell back just then, you see, because the elephant was not going to return. He had eaten all the rice he wanted.



The Formidable Enemy

By Lobiane C. F. Rakotsoane

He is but a mere lounge
Who enjoys traipsing
Round the ways of heaven.

Looking down on Earth,
He spots farmers in their fields;
Envious of their diligence,
He plans atrocity:
To roast them alive.

As they finally succumb and surrender
He proudly sets his face to the west
Boasting of his nefariousness
Like a victorious warrior
After a tremendous fight.
He is the hero of the day!



Rainbow and Her Daughter (An extract)

Retold by Tupou Posesi Fanua



Once there were two brothers. The older one was named Pungatoloaki (Moveable Rock), and the younger was Hema‘imatangi (To Tack with the Wind). They both lived in the same house.

One day, the younger brother said to Pungatoloaki, “Let’s go and find wives and bring them here to cook our food for us. If we continue living like this, what is to become of us?”

“All right,” said his elder brother.

They left, going separate ways. Hema‘imatangi walked a long time and finally got tired of walking on the road, so he turned and went through the bush. After walking on for a while, he saw a hut in the distance and hurried over to it.

When he reached the small house, it seemed to him that it had not been lived in for a long time. The pola (plaited coconut fronds) on the roof were falling off, and the walls were deteriorating. So he thought he would go in and have a short rest before continuing on his way. As he entered, he noticed something covered with an old mat at the far end of the hut. He went over and lifted the mat and found a girl curled up under it. Seeing that she was covered with festering sores from head to toe, he thought that she was an old woman.

The girl sat up and said, “Who are you that you should come and torment me? Can’t you see how I have been tortured? My own mother has forsaken me because she could not bear my sores, and now why have you come to bother someone who has been forsaken even by the womb that bore her?”

Hema‘imatangi just stood staring at her, and great pity for the girl rose up in his heart. “I have come to ask you to be my wife,” he said to her.

“What? Can’t you see these sores?” she exclaimed.

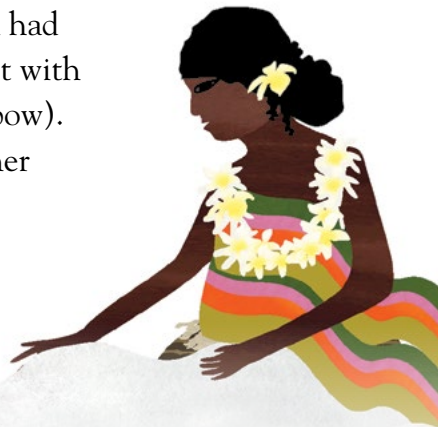
“Never mind,” Hema‘imatangi told her. “I still want to care for you.”

“All right,” the girl answered. “But you must wait, for I shall go and tell my mother. Go back home, and I’ll come to you there.”

Hema‘imatangi returned, and the wretched girl limped off to her mother. It turned out that the mother of the girl was half-human and half-goddess and that she lived in the second heaven. This woman had fallen in love with a human, and she had come down and slept with him every night. The name of this woman was ‘Umata (Rainbow). After a while, she had become pregnant and then cautioned her lover to never tell anyone about her, for if her child could be born on Earth without anyone knowing, she herself could be fully human and could then live with him and their child on Earth.

Unfortunately, the young man liked to brag, and he had boasted about the beautiful goddess who was living with him and who came down each night from the second heaven. The people had come and hid by his house and watched her coming down from the sky. This had made ‘Umata very sad, and she went back to the sky, never to return to him again.

When ‘Umata’s time was due, she had given birth to a beautiful baby girl and named her ‘Ofatonoa (Unrequited Love). Unfortunately, the child was a human and had no characteristics of the gods. Therefore ‘Umata could not keep the girl in heaven but had had to bring the child to Earth. ‘Umata had come down and built a little hut and left the child in it, and she had come down every day to look after her. As the child was growing, her mother had realised that she was becoming a beautiful maiden and therefore used her divine powers to protect her child lest a wicked man should try to abduct her. Thus she had made the child so repulsive that no-one except a very nice and kind-hearted person would want to go near her.



‘Ofatonoa went to the place where her mother usually came down from the sky, and she chanted:

*Blow wind from the south,
Go and tell ‘Umata
The man Hema‘imatangi,
In spite of my sores,
Asked me to be his wife.
If there be any love, show it,
Take these sores away
So I can accept his love.*

‘Umata heard her and told South Wind to bring her daughter. So South Wind blew and gently lifted the girl upward into the sky and laid her at her mother’s feet. Her mother lifted her up into her arms like a baby, took her to a small pool of water nearby and put her into it. The girl sank to the bottom, and when she came up, all the sores had disappeared. Her mother took her into a nearby house and dried her. Then she put on her a vala made of tapa cloth, and over that a kie; then she led her outside.



Seeing the beauty of the girl was like watching the sun rise. Her skin was shining like a mirror, and her appearance was like the beautiful pink flowers of the pandanus tree. ‘Umata then summoned the winds:

*South Wind, North Wind,
‘Ofatonoa waits for you.
North Wind take her,
South Wind be kind and
Carry her possessions.*

North Wind blew and carried ‘Ofatonoa down, while South Wind came and carried her dowry right to the door of Hema‘imatangi’s house.

Surprised at the sudden strong wind blowing, Hema‘imatangi ran into the house, thinking it might be a hurricane. The wind quieted, and he came out. Imagine his surprise when he found a huge heap of mats and tapa cloth before his door, and on top of it all, there sat the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

Hema‘imatangi just stood and stared at her. Seeing that he made no move towards her, ‘Ofatonoa got down, approached him and took his hand saying, “Don’t you know your wife? I am the poor girl full of sores on whom you took pity and whom out of the kindness of your heart you asked to marry you. Here I am.”

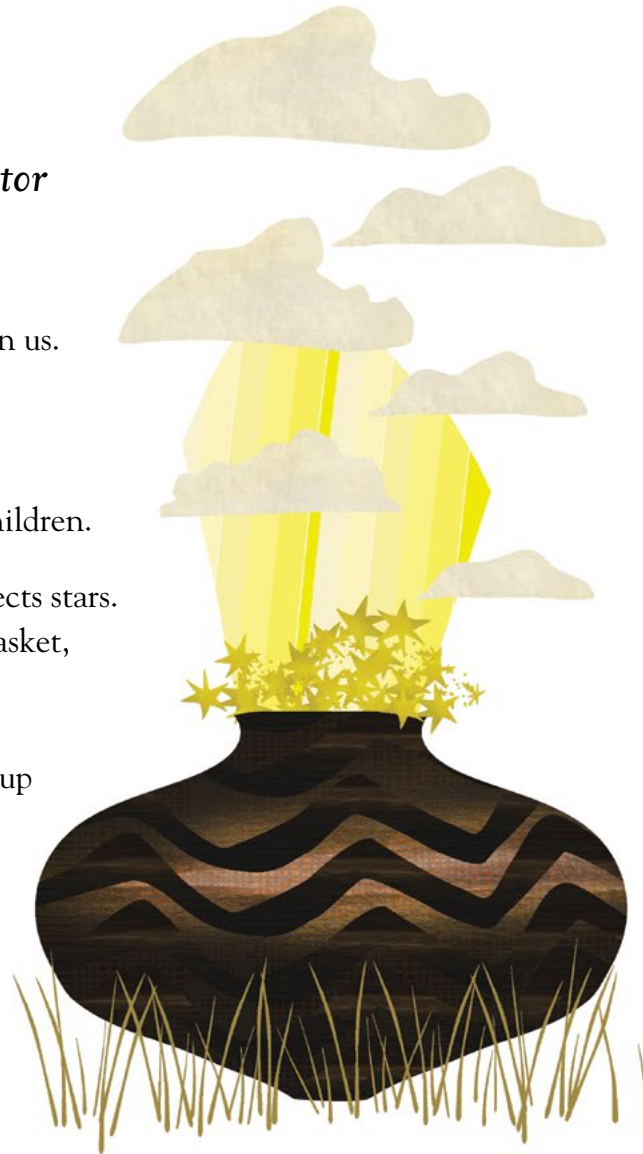
Hema‘imatangi could not believe that this beautiful girl was to be his wife. ‘Ofatonoa moved closer and kissed him. The touch of her lips, which was like water to a man dying of thirst, awakened all the emotions in his body, and his love became like a mist that crept out and enveloped the young girl. And so they lived happily together as a family with the two sons that were later born to them.

Song for the Sun that Disappeared behind the Rain Clouds

*Traditional Khoikhoi song,
translated by an unnamed translator*

The fire darkens, the wood turns black.
The flame extinguishes, misfortune upon us.
God sets out in search of the sun.
The rainbow sparkles in his hand,
the bow of the divine hunter.
He has heard the lamentations of his children.

He walks along the Milky Way; he collects stars.
With quick arms he piles them into a basket,
piles them up with quick arms,
like a woman who collects lizards
and piles them into her pot, piles them up
until the pot overflows with lizards,
until the basket overflows with light.



Sun, Wind and Cloud

Retold by Kariuki Gakuo



long, long time ago, Sun and Wind had a quarrel. They could not agree which was the stronger.

“I’m stronger than you,” said Sun. “If I get angry, the whole world will dry up from the heat of my rays.”

“Oh no, you’re not,” replied Wind. “When I get angry, even the mountains tremble with fear.”

A small, white cloud was floating overhead. She heard the argument between Sun and Wind and stopped to listen.

“Which one of us is stronger?” asked Sun and Wind together.

“Well,” said Cloud, “there’s only one way to find out. I suggest you have a competition.”



“Then I will start,” said Sun, “for I know I shall win.”

Sun smiled golden and bright and spread his beams into the most distant corners of the world.

When the animals of the world saw the sunshine, they all went out to play.

“What a beautiful day it is,” they exclaimed. “There isn’t a single cloud in the sky, and the sun is looking so round and bright.”

But as the day wore on, Sun grew hot, fierce and angry. His burning rays scorched the earth.

The soft, green grass became brown, and the leaves on the trees shrivelled and fell to the ground. All the rivers dried up, and not a single drop of water could be found.

The animals were alarmed. “Ngai, the god of all living things, is angry. What shall we do?” they asked each other.

Mzee Kobe, the ancient tortoise, was the oldest and wisest animal on Earth. The animals went to seek his advice.

“We are afraid that Ngai is angry with us. What shall we do?” they asked.

Mzee Kobe peered into the sky through his cloudy spectacles. He shook his head, wiped his glasses and peered again at the bright blue sky.



“We have done wrong. We must send a messenger to Ngai and beg for rain. Who shall be chosen for this important task?”

All the animals were eager to go. Above the chatter came a loud roar that made the hills and the mountains tremble.

“I shall go,” roared the lion.

“No, no, no,” Mzee Kobe shook his head. “Your voice is far too loud. You might anger Ngai further with your mighty roar, and then he will not send us rain.”

“Then I shall go,” said the crested crane, strutting proudly. “Look at my golden crest. It is much more beautiful than the lion’s mane. Ngai will listen to me.”

The crested crane ruffled her feathers, and the sun shone on the golden crown. All the animals gasped in admiration.

“No, no, no,” Mzee Kobe shook his head again. “Ngai does not like animals who are proud and vain. Who else will go for us?” he asked.

The tiny dik-dik stepped forward. “I will go. I am swift as an arrow. I can be there by evening.”

Mzee Kobe peered at the dik-dik through his cloudy spectacles and nodded.

“You are small, humble and swift. You will make a fine messenger. Go now to Ngai’s resting place on top of Mount Kirinyaga.”

All the animals cheered and clapped as the tiny dik-dik sped away, as fast as a hunter’s arrow.

Sun and Wind watched the dik-dik as he dashed away.

“There you are,” said Sun. “I am so strong that the animals have been forced to ask Ngai for help. Now it is your turn to show your strength.”

Wind was very clever. She saw a hut in the middle of the forest. Inside the hut, a fire was burning brightly.

Blowing hard through the cracks in the walls, the mighty Wind lifted up a glowing red coal from the fire and let it fall onto the dry, brown grass outside. The grass began to burn, sending wisps of smoke into the blue sky.

Blowing even harder, the roaring Wind made the trees shake and the animals shiver. The fire began to spread. It spread from the grass to the bushes and then to the tall trees. As Wind blew harder and harder, so the fire spread further and further.

A tall giraffe looked across the thorny acacia and saw the hungry flames licking at the dry trees.

“Run, run,” she screamed. “The whole world is on fire!”

Kicking up her heels, she fled for her life, her long neck bobbing up and down over the blazing treetops.

“Run, run,” growled the cheetahs as they sprang into the air and raced off away from the flames.

Gazelles, hyenas, kudus and jackals all followed, racing madly away from the crackling fire.

Monkeys screamed as they swung from tree to tree, the sparks of the fire landing on their coats, adding more frenzy to their escape.

The hooves of the animals made a noise like a thousand drummers, which could be heard for many miles.

Wind huffed and puffed until the whole sky became a blazing red and orange.

“Stop, stop!” shouted Sun.

But proud Wind would not listen. She wanted to show the world that she was the strongest of all. She blew harder until the thick, black smoke covered Cloud, filling her eyes with tears.

“Stop, stop!” coughed Cloud, but Wind would not listen.

The little white cloud grew thick and heavy from the black smoke. Soon her eyes became so sore that she began to cry. The rain fell down in torrents.

Lightning flashed through the sky and claps of booming thunder made the earth tremble.

When the animals heard the thunder, they stopped their flight and looked up into the sky.

“Ngai has answered our prayers!” they said as they danced with joy in the heavy rain and began to sing their rain song:

*Open your wings, your wings,
We'll fly to the sky,
Then the sky will cry,
And the rain will fall,
And put out the fire,
And the grass will grow,
And feed the calves.*

The sound of their singing reached Cloud, and she was so happy that she cried even harder. As the rain reached the ground, it began to put out the fires.

More rain fell, and the rivers began to flow again. The dry earth soaked up the falling rain, and new grass grew, covering the land with a sparkling green.

Trees swayed with joy to feel new leaves covering their bare branches, and the animals relaxed, wandering peacefully on the grassy plains and drinking from the flowing rivers.

In the sky, Sun and Wind agreed that Cloud was stronger than either of them.

Even to this day, when the animals see the clouds growing dark and heavy with rain, they stop what they are doing to give thanks and praise to Ngai, the god of all living things, who saved them from both drought and fire.



Lungi Crossing

By Iyamidé Hazeley

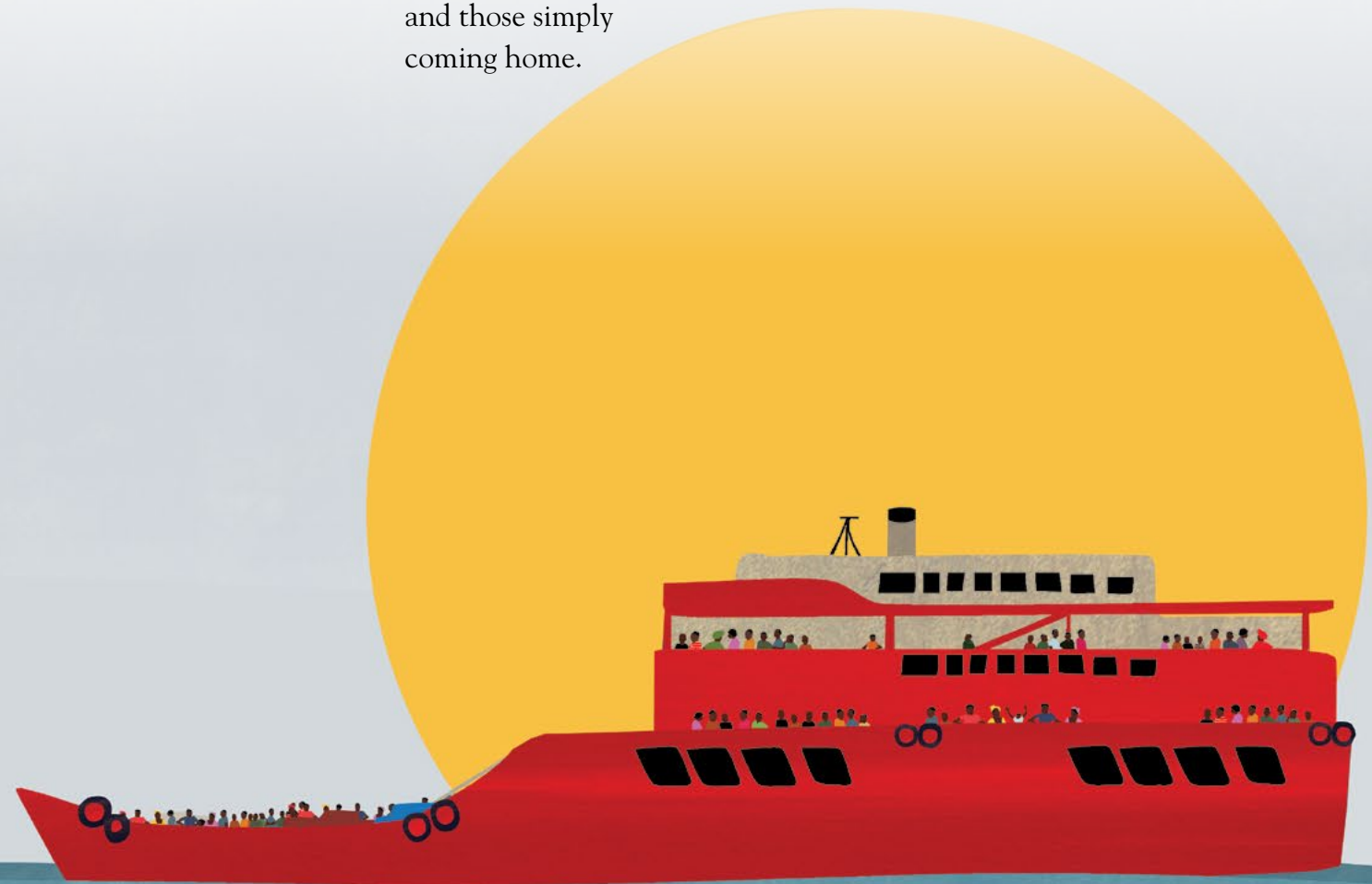
Early in the morning
after sixteen years away,
with still one leg of the journey
remaining,
I arrived home.

The air, the water, the sky,
all were tinged with the blue
of early morning
darkness.

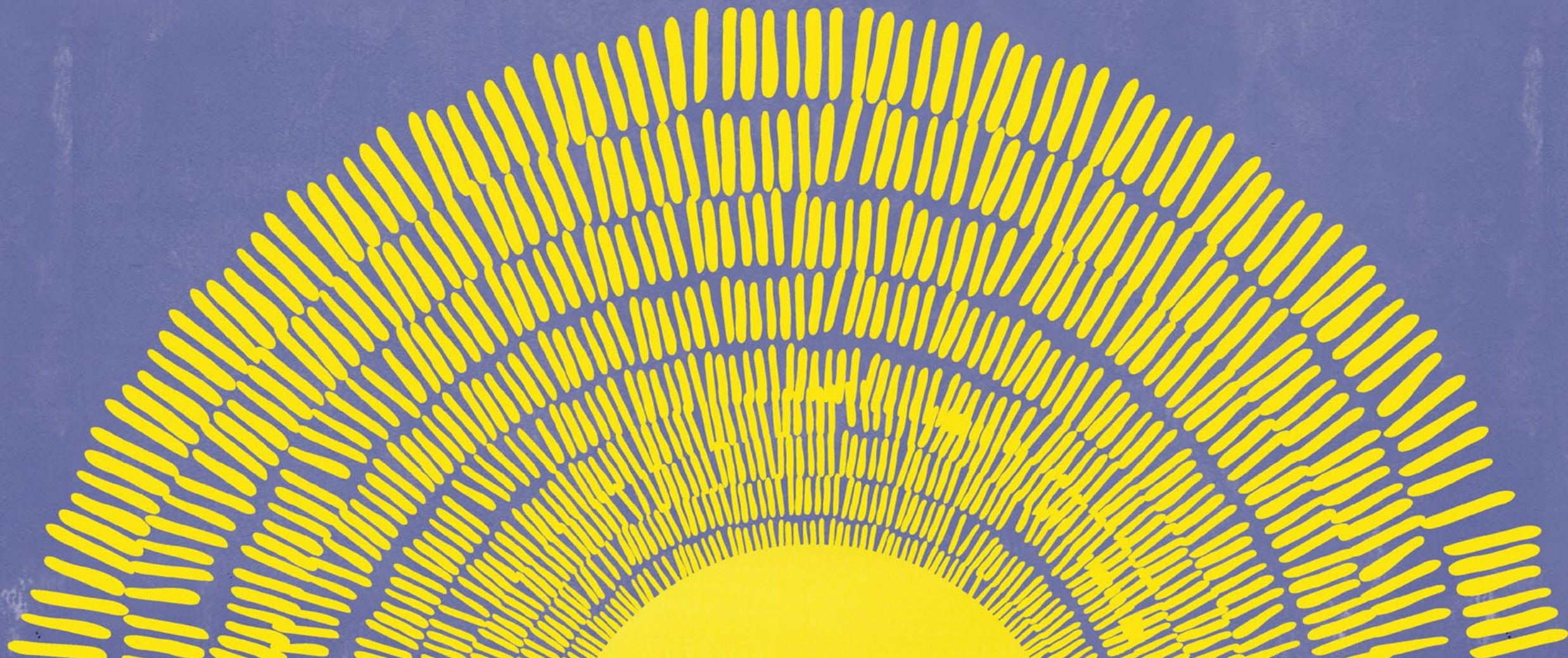
Slowly,
the ferry's motion
through the water
nudged the sun
into the sky.

I leant one foot
and one elbow
against the rails,
watched as children
and grown people
milled about,
squeezing past cars
parked cheek by jowl
on the deck.

There we all were.
Those coming
to visit ageing parents,
those who came to meet
those coming to visit,
those wearing the affluence
of tourists,
those bringing home their dead
and those simply
coming home.



*In Their
Element*



A Child's Sketch

By Baha Zain, translated by Muhammad Haji Salleh

I
sun,
I place you on the horizon,
moon,
I put you between the trees' crown and the clouds
may you rest there
and not have to climb higher
I love to see you from this window.

II
sun,
tomorrow I shall colour you green,
but moon,
if it rains tomorrow night
I shall reserve you the black
because you are not gay
and I am eternally sad.

III
I cannot again
place you as my heart desires
over the bamboo leaves, beside clouds, at the horizon,
I must leave you
to rise
whether you are black or green
and I myself am
far away
in your shadows.



Alligator Lullaby

By Fred D'Aguiar

The sun comes up
And the sun goes down
Up in the morning
Down in the evening
Up-down up-down

Here comes the moon
Not a second too soon
Bright in the darkness
Dark in the brightness
Bright-dark bright-dark

Stars in the sky
None low all high
Winking and blinking
As if they were thinking
Wink-blink wink-blink



The Daughter of Thunder and Lightning

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



here once lived a man whose name was Debao (Thunder), and with him was his wife, Etsin (Lightning). This pair lived high up in the sky. They had a little infant daughter, and they named her Eoejbeon. They made a snug little home for her, then left her so that she was often very lonely.

As the years passed, this little Eoejbeon grew up to be a beautiful girl, and she played by herself and wove the flowers that grew near her home into garlands. Every morning, she went to the beach to wash her face and teeth, but she never met anyone. Although she was very lonely, she had a patient heart and longed for the time when she would meet someone.

One morning, when she visited the beach as usual, she was seized by an unknown witch, who bound her hand and foot and placed her in a valley nearby. Soon afterwards, a great storm arose and great waves dashed upon the shore. The sea rose higher and higher and at last flooded the valley where she lay. The high seas washed her out into the surf, which then carried her far out to sea.



Suddenly the storm ceased and a great calm descended upon the sea. When she looked around, she found herself in another valley in a strange land. Great terror laid hold of her, and she lay there, crying bitterly.

The next morning, Awatanijon, the king of the island, visited the beach to wash his face and teeth. As he drew near to his usual bathing place, he was astonished to find a strange figure lying there in the shallow water. He at once saw that the figure was that of a beautiful girl and immediately fell in love with her. He stooped down, lifted her out of the water, untied her bonds and took her home as his bride.

When Eoejbeon told him that her parents lived in the sky, Awatanijon told her that they must go to her parents at once and tell them the news of all that had happened. The girl readily agreed to this, so, having put on their fine ridis (leaf skirts) and all their ornaments, they hurried to Debao and Etsin and told them all the news.

Debao and Etsin were delighted to find that their beloved daughter was still alive, and tjjhjhjhey arranged a great feast in honour of the marriage of Eoejbeon and Awatanijon. Debao blew through his best horn, and Etsin sent forth her best lightning. The people knew what this meant, and great crowds came to attend the wedding and to look at the beautiful Eoejbeon. They sang and played and laughed and danced at the feast that followed, and when the great crowd broke up, Awatanijon and his wife went home and lived happily ever after.



Dusk

By Rohitash Chandra

The sun like a loose kite
is slowly falling
into the mountains.

The north-east trade winds
blow a soft gale
while the clouds fade from
one colour into another.

The moon with its round crater-face
and magical spell of faded shadows
all night befriends
the lonely man with a tired face,
walking home,
tired and trapped
in the shoe of a long hard day
knitted by its lace.



Children Playing

By John Cremona

Children dance on the sands,
on the thin skin of evening, hands
scattering bats and shadows, feet
pressing the delayed, sweet
hours like harvested grapes
into the sheltered redness of
the centre of the earth.

Children drumming their mirth
in the face of a large sun falling
hopelessly into the sea.

Riding the moon like a white horse over
the static housetops and the charcoal trees.

The night is open on the world and breathes.



The Legend of the Moon and the Sun

Retold by an unnamed narrator, transcribed by Father Elie Tattevin and translated by Sara Lightner and Kendra Gates



long time ago, Sun and Moon lived together, happy to be linked by that noble sentiment, friendship. The two friends lived under the same roof, and their lives were free of problems. They spent a good part of each day walking next to each other, savouring the sweetness of nature. This carefree life lasted a long time, a very long time.

One day, as was their habit, Sun and Moon went for a walk. They had no particular goal in mind. They were just going for a stroll. Suddenly, the sky clouded over, and it started to rain – a terribly violent rain known only during the rainy season. It was so strong that the two friends decided to take cover. They found a house located conveniently next to them. Quickly, they went inside. Because the rain had cooled the air, they decided to build a fire. As if by chance, some sticks of wood were lying on the ground. Sun started to light the fire. The fire was soon crackling merrily, nourished by the wood.

“I’m hungry,” Sun said suddenly.

“Me too! I’m hungry,” echoed Moon.

While searching for their shelter, the two friends had found a couple of yams. They decided to cook them. It was then that the unforgivable happened.

“I’m going to eat first because I’m very hungry,” said Sun crossly.

“Oh no, you won’t. I’m going to eat first because I’m hungrier than you,” replied Moon.



The fight was terrible. It could even have been called war. Sun caught Moon and threw it into some cold water. Moon got back up and threw Sun into the fire. The battle lasted a long time. Since that fateful day, the two friends have been enemies.

When Sun rises in the morning, Moon disappears. When Moon rises in the evening, Sun disappears. The two friends can no longer be in the same place at the same time. You will never see them together. It is said that Sun is very hot because Moon threw it in the fire. Moon, of course, is very cold because Sun threw it in freezing water.

Foretaste of Paradise

By Peggy Carr

I live the day for that hour
when the soft seductive eyes of evening
flutter in invitation to the night

when trees shyly surrender their leaves
and embrace the wind

and bats
frantic in their haste
stitch the last fragments of scarlet sun
to the new silk of the moon

when a thousand flowers
conspire to spill their magic musk
at the feet of unsuspecting lovers

Then may the spirits steal my
essence and I shall be none
the more aware



The Stars in the Sky

Retold by Dan Keding



long time ago, there was a girl who wanted to touch
the stars in the sky. Each night when the sky was clear,
she would gaze out of her window at the stars as they
twinkled and glittered in the velvet blackness above her.
The girl sometimes imagined them as diamonds, other
times as tears of lost lovers and other times as the laughing eyes of a
merry soul.

One summer evening when the sky was as clear as it could get, the young
girl decided to seek the stars. She walked until she came to a millpond.

“Good evening,” she said. “I am seeking the stars in the sky. Can you help
me find them?”

“They’re right here shining on my face,” replied the pond. “They shine so
brightly, I can’t sleep at night. Jump in and see if you can catch one.”

The girl jumped into the pond and swam around and around, but try as
she might, she never caught a star.



She walked across the fields until she came to a woodland stream.

“Good evening. I am trying to find a way to reach the stars. Can you help me?”

“Yes of course,” replied the stream. “The stars come down each night and dance on the stones and on the water. Come in and see if you can catch one.”

The girl waded in, but found no stars in that stream.

“I don’t think the stars come down here at all,” cried the young girl.

“It looks to me as if they do,” replied the stream happily. “Isn’t that just as good?”

“Not at all,” said the girl wearily.

She walked on until she came to a clearing in the woods, and there, dancing in the moonlight, were a host of Little Folk, no taller than herself and elegant in their green and gold clothes.

“Good evening to you, Folk of the Hill,” the young girl said respectfully. “I am looking for a way to reach the stars in the sky. Can you help me?”

The fairy folk laughed and almost sang out their answer.

“The stars shine on the grass here at night. Come join our dance if you want to find a star.”

The girl joined their dance. She whirled and she twirled, but though the grass sparkled, not a star did she find as she danced.



She left the dance and sat down on a fallen tree.

“I have looked so hard and not found the stars in the pond or the stream nor in the dances of the fairy folk. Can’t anyone tell me how to find the stars?”

They all kept dancing except one who walked over and smiled at her.

“You have indeed looked well, but now take this advice. Keep going and ask Four Feet to carry you to No Feet At All. Then ask No Feet At All to carry you to the Stairs Without Steps. If you climb them, you might find what you are looking for this night.”

“Will I be up among the stars?”

“You’ll be somewhere, if not there,” he replied.

She walked on until she came to a silver grey horse standing beneath a rowan tree.

“Excuse me, would you know the way to the stars?”

“I know little about the stars. I am here to do the bidding of the fairy folk,” the horse replied.

The girl grew excited. “I’ve just been dancing with them, and they told me to find Four Feet and that he would carry me to No Feet At All.”

“I am Four Feet, and I will take you where you need to go.”

They rode on until the forest was far behind them and they had come to the shore. A wide path of silver ran out to the edge of the sea where an arch of brilliant colour rose from the surface and climbed into the sky.

“This is as far as I can take you,” said the horse.

As the girl climbed down, the horse bowed to her and ran off into the night. The girl looked out over the sea, and a huge fish swam up to the shore and spoke.

“What are you doing here, young lady?”

“The fairy folk sent me here on the back of Four Feet. I am looking for No Feet At All to carry me to the Stairs Without Steps.”

“Well I am No Feet At All, and you can climb up on my back and hold on very tight.”



The huge fish swam along the silver path that led to the arch of many colours. As they neared the arch, the girl saw that the stars glistened above the arch as it rose higher into the sky.

“Here we are,” said No Feet At All. “These are the Stairs Without Steps. Hold fast as you climb and walk carefully.”

She started off on her journey. The way was very steep, and the climb very hard, but she kept going. Whenever she thought about turning back, she just looked up and saw those beautiful stars, and it gave her heart new hope to keep climbing.

The air grew colder and colder, and the stars became more and more brilliant. At last she reached the top of the Stairs Without Steps. All around her, the stars twinkled and sparkled, racing across the heavens in dazzling streaks as if they were playing a game.

She had finally reached the stars, and now she stood there, awed by their beauty.

After she had stood there for a while admiring the beauty of the stars, she realised that it was very cold up there in the sky. She looked down, but the colours of the Stairs Without Steps seemed to disappear in the darkness below.

In one last effort, she reached out to touch a shining star. She stretched and stretched and almost touched the star, her hand brushing up against it, when she lost her balance and down she tumbled. She fell and fell, faster and faster, down into the night. A bit sad that she hadn't touched the star but very content that she had stood up in the sky and watched them dance around her in the heavens, she fell. And as she fell, she seemed to fall asleep.

When she opened her eyes, it was morning and she was in her bed, the sun warm on her face. She wondered if it was a dream, when she suddenly remembered brushing her hand against that star. When she opened her fingers, her hand was full of twinkling stardust.

She told her story to her own daughter years later as they both watched the stars in the night.



Lullaby

By Michael Echeruo

I
now the sun goes down
into the valley
beyond the palms;
the broods will be returning.

soon the last cock will crow,
the last clay pot be stowed,
and the fifth finger licked.

sheep and dogs and kids
beside the hearth
sleep beyond all reproach.

II
let fireflies fly
in your eyes
by the playground sands
under a quarter of the moon.



III
the sun has died again
in the dark valley
beyond our loves,
beyond the high-arched roots
of the demon tree.

then it was your afternoon
and love was in your eyes.

now the sun has set;
the virgin moon is out again –
a most maidenly quarter moon.

Moon Landings



Mystery Moon

By Tikum Mbah Azonga

The moon tonight is different.
Just yesterday, it was three-quarters round;
Tonight, suddenly, it is not only round
But has wheeled out its great axeman.

There he is, up there with his axe.
Held up above the head with both hands
Ready to strike, but never striking.
What then is this moon of light and mystery?



Rona and the Moon

Retold by Wiremu Grace



Rona and her husband, Tamanui-te-rā, did not have a happy marriage. In fact, their marriage was a rocky affair, full of arguments and misunderstandings. They had married in a traditional taumau (arranged marriage) ceremony, whereby they were chosen for each other by their grandparents and leaders of their respective tribes. Taumau marriages were quite common and were often to secure blood lines or align certain tribes with others. Most times, these marriages would grow into happy unions between the chosen couple, but from day one, Rona and Tamanui-te-rā found they didn't have much in common. To make things worse, on the night of their wedding, there was a downpour, the marae (the area in front of a tribal meeting house) was flooded, and Rona's whānau (family) were forced to sleep in a sodden whare (house). This was the cause of the first argument between Rona and Tamanui-te-rā – unfortunately for them, it was only the beginning.

Over the years that followed, Rona and Tamanui-te-rā continued to battle with each other. They argued over anything and everything – doing chores, fetching water, gathering food. Anything that could possibly come between them did. Rona and Tamanui-te-rā were oblivious to the fact that their arguing was painful for everyone else around them. The people of the village tried to set a good example for Tamanui-te-rā and Rona to teach the couple to live together in harmony, but unfortunately, the unhappy couple could hear nothing but their own critical voices.

One summer's night, when the moon was full and Rona and Tamanui-te-rā had gone to bed, they began to argue over who was going to fill their tahā (gourds used as water containers). The reason they had no water in the first

place was because they were both too busy arguing during the day to realise the tahā were empty. When Rona told Tamanui-te-rā that she was thirsty, he turned over in his bed and pretended to be asleep.

“Don’t pretend you can’t hear me. I said I’m thirsty!”

“Well go and get some water. You’ve got legs.”

“Typical lazy attitude. Ever since we got married you’ve done practically nothing!”

“I do nothing? I’m the one who caught the fish today!”

“And I prepared the veggies and cooked your fish, remember?”

“I remember all right – it was burnt!”

“It wasn’t burnt. You’ve just got no taste.”

“Huh!”

“Huh!”

Rona lay in the darkness fuming. When Tamanui-te-rā started snoring, Rona couldn’t take any more and stormed out of the whare. She stomped down the path, carrying empty tahā, muttering to herself. “Useless... good for nothing... and always moaning. Moan! Moan! Moan! Actually he’s good for something: moaning! The best moaner in the pā (fortified village)!”

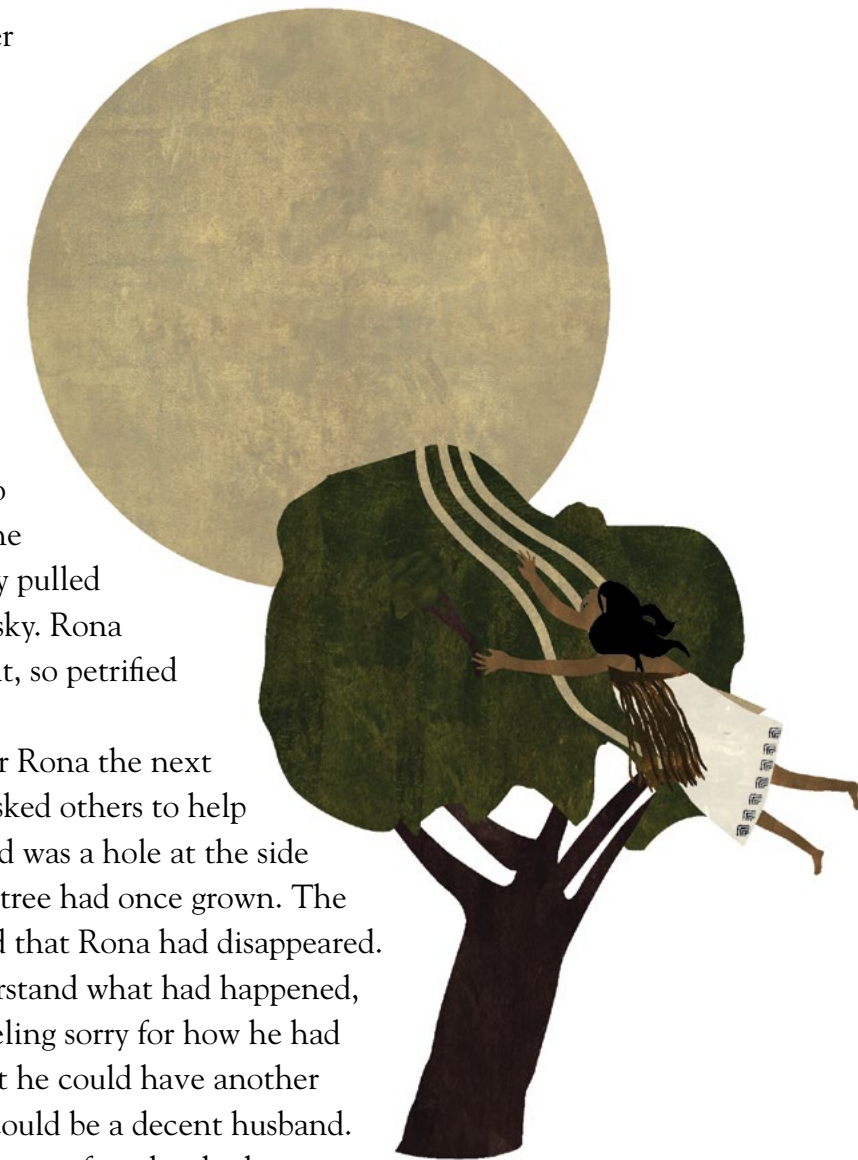
Rona had no idea that her words were being carried up into the still night and that Marama, the large full moon in the sky, was listening. As Rona walked along the path, a breeze pushed clouds across the face of the moon, blocking the light and casting a dark shadow. Rona stumbled in the sudden darkness and fell to the ground, grazing her arm. Her tahā scattered in front of her. Dazed, Rona felt around the ground for her tahā and gathered them up. As she stood up, the clouds passed. Boiling with anger, Rona looked up at Marama and cursed, “You stupid, inconsiderate moon! Couldn’t you see what I was doing or are you blind? Even the stars have more sense – at least they keep shining. It’s just stupidity, that’s what it is! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!”

Marama felt no pity for Rona or her temper and had soon heard enough of her insults. “Be careful what you say, lest you be made to pay.”

Rona just laughed at the moon and carried on with her insults. After fifteen minutes of continuous barrage, Marama could take no more, so he reached down out of the sky towards Rona. Rona saw Marama coming and tried to run, but he blinded her with his light and she had no way to escape. Rona grabbed a ngaio tree growing on the side of the track, but Marama eventually pulled her and the tree up into the sky. Rona floated up into the clear night, so petrified she was lost for words.

Tamanui-te-rā searched for Rona the next day but found nothing. He asked others to help him search, but all they found was a hole at the side of the track where the ngaio tree had once grown. The people of the village were sad that Rona had disappeared. Tamanui-te-rā couldn’t understand what had happened, and he spent many nights feeling sorry for how he had treated Rona. He wished that he could have another chance to show her that he could be a decent husband.

At first, Rona resented Marama for what had happened. She tried to argue with him, but instead of arguing, he made her feel welcome and treated her with kindness. Over time, Rona realised she had no reason to argue. Instead, she told Marama about her life on Earth and how unhappy she had been in her marriage. She also grew a large garden, wove garments out of stardust and taught herself how to



build new rooms onto the huge house that they shared.

One day, Marama asked Rona if she would like to return to Earth. He had grown to love Rona but didn't want her to stay against her will. Rona had come to love her new life and also knew that she had fallen in love with Marama. Although it was hard to leave her family, Rona knew that her decision to stay was what she wanted.

Marama was very happy with Rona's decision, and he gave her a special gift, a taonga (treasured possession) that had been handed down to him from his great grandmother. The gift was a korowai, a cloak adorned with stars and woven with magic. With this korowai, and from that time on, Rona would become the controller of tides, Rona-whakamau-tai. From her home in the sky, Rona would control the sea, the rivers and all large bodies of water. And because people are also largely made up of water, she would strongly influence their emotions, knowing from experience that being in control of her emotions was an important part of finding true happiness.

One night, when the full moon rose over the small village where Rona had once lived, Rona stood looking down at her whānau, happy with her new life. When her whānau looked up at the moon, they saw Rona wrapped in her beautiful korowai and holding the ngaio tree and tahā. They knew then that Rona was finally happy.

Tamanui-te-rā was sad to begin with, but he too eventually accepted that Rona was happy where she was. Years later, Tamanui-te-rā married again, by which time he had learnt to be the best husband that he possibly could be, sharing responsibilities, communicating effectively and talking through disagreements with his new partner.

Rona-whakamau-tai, the guardian of tides, lived happily with Marama, the moon. And to this day, when the moon is full, Rona can be seen in her magical korowai, still holding the ngaio tree and tahā in her hands.



Dog Bark / Break the Night

By Pat Rahming

Dog bark / break the night
clapboard houses huddled tight
clapboard echoes barking tune
barking echoes silver moon

Moon reflects in puddled rain
rain collects in open drain
drain becomes a dog's best choice
a drink to soothe its breaking voice

Dog bark / break the night
clapboard people huddled tight
clapboard echoes bursting dream
of leaving dog, clapboard and stream.



Raja of the Moon *(An extract)*

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



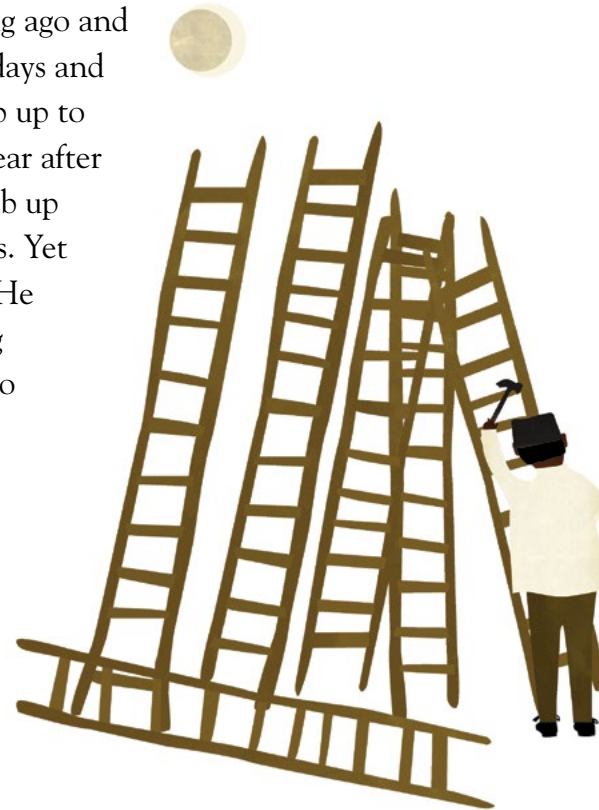
This is a tale about a young boy who lived long ago and wanted to go to the moon. He spent all his days and nights making ladders so that he could climb up to the moon. That was the only thing he did year after year. But, although he made so many ladders, he could not climb up to the moon because the wooden ladders rotted after a few years. Yet the boy never gave up. He just carried on making new ladders. He firmly believed that one day in the future, when he was a strong and active youth, there would be enough ladders to allow him to climb up to the moon.

One day, an old man came along and told him, “You’ll never have enough ladders to climb up to the moon, young man.”

“If I live long enough, I hope to do it,” replied the boy.

“Look at the ladders you’ve made. After a few years, they’ve all become rotten,” said the old man. “Even that one you’re making now will rot too, which means you’ll never have enough ladders.”

For days and months, even years, on hearing the old man’s words, the boy became glum. He thought about what the old man had said. All the time he was thinking, most of the ladders that he’d made slowly rotted away. This made him cry. He cried floods of tears, until both his eyes were swollen.



At that moment, his father came along and said, “There’s no point in crying your eyes out, son. You’ll never find any wood that does not rot with time.”

“But I hope to have my tall ladder ready before too many of the ladders rot away,” said the boy.

“You’re going to need a lot of ladders,” said the boy’s father.

“Yes, I’m going to work very hard indeed to make enough ladders before they start to rot away,” replied the boy.

Then the father told his son, “No matter how hard you work, even if you use up all the wood in the world to build your tall ladder, you’re still not going to be able to climb up to the moon.”

“I’ve already planned that the ladder I’ll build will be taller than the highest mountain in the world,” said the boy.

“You’re wasting your time, son,” said the father. “No-one can possibly reach the moon simply by climbing up a ladder.”

The boy started to cry again. When his father said that no-one would ever be able to reach the moon by climbing up a ladder, it almost broke his heart. Sobbing, he asked himself how else he could climb up to the moon.

One night, the moon was full, and the boy sat outside his house, crying. The raja (king) of the moon slid down to Earth on a moonbeam and said to the boy, “Is my home too high up for you to reach, boy?”

“Won’t Your Royal Highness invite me to go up there?” asked the boy.

“I know you’ve tried your best,” was all that the raja said.

“But my best wasn’t good enough,” went on the boy. “An old man told me my ladders would all rot away. And my father told me that all the wood in the world would not make enough ladders for me to climb up to the moon.”

“What older people say is always true,” said the raja.

“If that is so, what does Your Royal Highness suggest?” asked the boy.

“Make a long coil of rope. Make it as long as possible. Take a whole year over it.”

“But how can a long rope help me to climb up to the moon?”

“Easily.”

“How?”

“Tie a wooden hook to the end of the rope. When the moon is full, throw the end of the rope with the wooden hook into the air and the gods will come down and fly it up to the moon.”

From that moment on the boy was happy again.

While the youth and the raja of the moon had been talking, the rats had been listening. What had been said was passed on by one rat to another. As a result, the whole colony of rats decided to frustrate the boy’s ambition.

Unaware of the rats’ intentions, the boy started to collect pieces of twine. These pieces were twisted and woven together to make a thick rope. The boy worked hard until one day the coil of rope he had ready was big enough to fill a house.

Every day, the boy continued to work at his task. He used up all the vines he could find in the jungle and wove them into his rope until it had become immensely long.

Then one year later, he became aware that something terrible was happening. His coil of rope was being gnawed to pieces by rats. There were so many rats! They made their nest in the coil of rope and continually gave birth to their young there.

It was said that rats were the only creatures on Earth who could get to the moon, for it was firmly believed that the black shadows to be seen on the moon were rats.

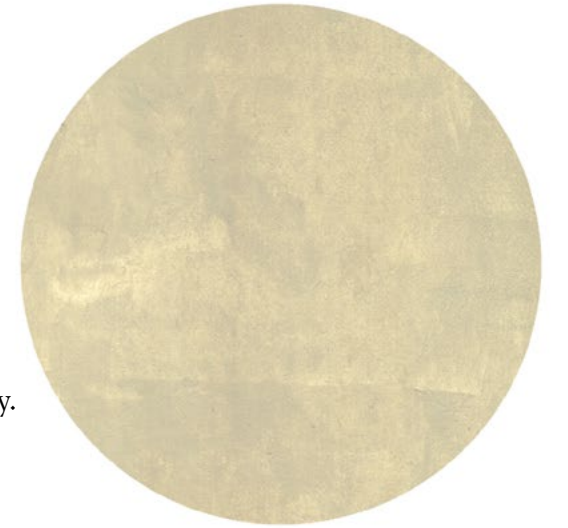
That’s the reason why rats have always chewed rope and made their nests out of it. That’s also why the boy’s coil of rope could never get him to the moon.



Prayer to the Moon

*Traditional San prayer,
translated by an unnamed translator*

Take my face and give me yours!
Take my face, my unhappy face.
Give me your face,
with which you return
when you have died.
When you vanish from sight,
you lie down and return.
Let me reassemble you, because you have joy.
You return evermore alive,
after you vanish from sight.
Did you not promise us once
that we too should return
and be happy again after death?



The Legend of the Sandara Shell

Retold by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi of Funādo,
transcribed by Xavier Romero-Frías



The King of the Moon lived very happily in his palace with his wife. Her beauty eclipsed all other women, and she was very intelligent and courageous.

The king was a hugely wealthy man, but one day, a hideous demon emerged from the sea, stole all the king's gold and jewels and carried them away to his lair in the ocean's depths.

Stricken by this calamity, the king became very depressed and ill. The doctors feared for his health and agreed, "The king is going to die."

His wife was worried. She longed to bring the jewels and gold back from the bottom of the sea, but she didn't know how. She spent many sleepless nights in distress as her husband's condition worsened.

Finally, the queen decided to go to the bottom of the sea to retrieve the king's gold and jewels herself. Furtively, she left the palace in the middle of the night and went to the beach alone. She removed her royal dress, stepped into the dark water and began swimming boldly into the black depths.

A big māroṇḍu (triggerfish) met her. He carried a Sandara shell between his teeth and dropped it into her right hand as she swam. Then he told her, "It is not fitting for you to swim further, Your Majesty. If you continue, the demon will tear you to pieces."

"But I must recover the jewels and the gold from the hands of that wicked demon," she said. "If I don't go, my husband will surely die."



The fish replied, “O Queen, I admire your courage. Take this Sandara shell to your husband. He must wear it. Then he will become strong enough to fight the demon.”

But she said, “My husband is very weak and almost dead. He will not be able to fight.”

The māroṇḍu said, “The king will be strong if he wears this shell.”

Clutching the Sandara shell in her hand, the queen swam rapidly back to the beach. She ran to the palace, arriving before dawn. There she made a necklace with the shell.

Then she washed and perfumed herself, put on an elegant dress and went to her husband’s chambers.

The king was sleeping, but as soon as his beautiful wife entered, he awoke. He looked very bad. “You are so beautiful, and I am going to die,” he moaned.

Pressing the shell necklace into his hand, the queen said, “You must wear this.”

When she put the shell on him, new vigour filled the king’s body. He exclaimed, “I feel very strong now, strong enough to take my jewels and my gold back from the bottom of the sea.”

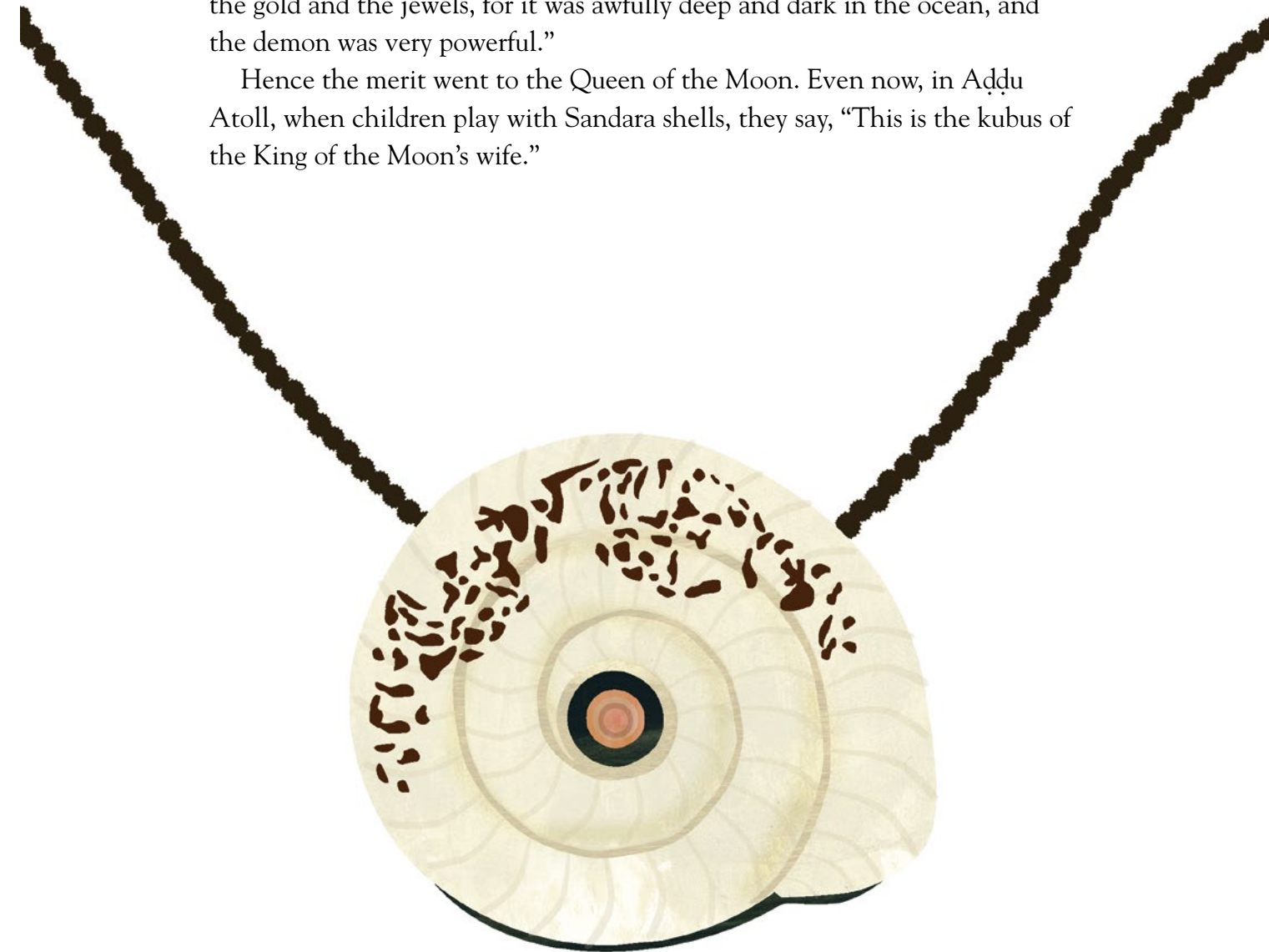
So the king went down to the beach. As soon as he dived into the water, he became a mighty fish with powerful jaws and huge teeth.

Plunging into the gloomy abyss, he devoured the demon and returned with the jewels and the gold. As soon as the magnificent fish touched the sand, the king took his human form again and waded out of the water. Then his servants, who had been waiting on the beach, took the treasures back to the palace.

On his arrival at the palace, everyone rejoiced and praised the king for his brave deeds. “Long live the King of the Moon!” the crowds shouted.

But turning to his wife, he said, “This is your shell. If you hadn’t given it to me, I would not have had the strength to defeat that demon and get back the gold and the jewels, for it was awfully deep and dark in the ocean, and the demon was very powerful.”

Hence the merit went to the Queen of the Moon. Even now, in Aḍḍu Atoll, when children play with Sandara shells, they say, “This is the kubus of the King of the Moon’s wife.”



Collecting

By Zhou Can, translated by Chao Yemin

When I see any flower on the bush
That is beautiful
I would pluck it
For my collection

When I see any shell on the sand
That is unusual
I would pick it
For my collection

When I see any star in the sky
That is bright
I would gather it
For my collection

I have also collected
A broken piece of rainbow,
Two pearls of the black dragon,
And a few pieces
Of the mud that Nu Wa used to mend the sky.
Now thinking of collecting the Milky Way,
And keeping within the vast atmosphere
Time that rapidly passes along,
Never anticipating that time itself
Had silently
Collected me.



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.

AUSTRALIA – *mimi spirits*: thin, stick-like beings who are said to live in the rocky mountains of Arnhem Land in the north of Australia. These spirits are so fragile that they need to stay hidden in rock crevices to avoid being blown away by the wind. In stories passed down of the Aboriginal Dreaming, these beings taught Australia's indigenous people how to hunt, cook and paint, as well as Aboriginal customary law.

BANGLADESH – *sari*: a long piece of cloth, wrapped around the waist and draped over the shoulder, worn by South Asian women over a blouse and petticoat; *devi*: goddess in the Shakta (or Shakti) tradition of Hinduism, symbolising the essence of all Hindu goddesses; *Ayi-Ma*; *Oh Ma'go!* *Oh Baba-re!*; *Oh, Ma!*: “ma” and “baba” are honorific titles in Hindi – female and male respectively – with the first approximating “mother” and the second “father” or “grandfather”. “Ayi” is an exclamation of surprise or horror.

BOTSWANA – *Blue-town*: a high-density township in the city of Francistown, Botswana; *Shashe*: a river that flows along the border of Botswana and Zimbabwe, past Francistown and into the Limpopo River.

KENYA – *Ngai*: supreme creator god in the religions of several ethnic groups in Kenya, including the Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai. He is believed to live on Mount Kenya, known to the Kikuyu people as “Mount Kirinyaga”, as it is named in this story; *dik-dik*: a small antelope that lives in wooded areas and grassy plains in eastern and southern Africa.

KIRIBATI – *wooden bowl made of itai wood*: a traditional bowl used for food and to mix liquids in. There is a constellation of stars that is said to be such a bowl.

MALDIVES – *Sandara shell*: the shell of a sea snail, shaped like a half sphere with one flat side and one round side. The round side is decorated with concentric circles, making the shell look like an eye. Traditionally, this shell was worn around the neck on a cord as a charm to ward off sickness; and, locally, it is ground into a powder for use in medicine; *kubus*: a type of local cake that is shaped in a half sphere, like the Sandara shell.

MAURITIUS – *vaidh*: a traditional healer or medicine man. This is a variant spelling of the Indian word “vaid”; *sadhu*: a holy man who has chosen to live apart from society and without material possessions in order to focus on his spiritual practice. Sadhu often live in forests, like the sadhu in this story.

RWANDA – *iJabiro*: a shrine for an ancestral spirit in the Kinyarwanda language spoken by Rwandan people. Here, the poet is using the word to mean a place of deep spiritual significance.

SINGAPORE – *pearls of the black dragon*: dragons are legendary creatures in Chinese mythology and are often depicted chasing a fiery pearl, which symbolises wisdom and enlightenment and is associated, in the Buddhist tradition, with the wish-granting jewel of the lotus flower. Chinese dragons come in many colours; the black dragon of this poem may refer to the black dragon killed by Nu Wa for causing a devastating flood; *Nu Wa*: goddess of Heaven and Earth in Chinese mythology, also known as “Nüwa” or “Nügua”. The poem refers to the story of Nu Wa repairing the pillar of Heaven when it had been tipped out of balance following a battle between Gong Gong (or Kanghai), the god of water, and Zhurong (or Chongli), the god of fire. Nu Wa used five coloured stones, symbolising the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal and water), and mud, as mentioned in the poem, to patch up the sky and restore the balance between Heaven and Earth.

SOLOMON ISLANDS – *malagai*: a warrior.

SRI LANKA – *gamarala*: a Sinhalese word for a farmer, who is often a village elder or leader. Sinhalese is spoken by the Sinhalese people, the largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka; *Sakaraya*: this refers to Indra, the leader of the gods.

ST LUCIA – *savanne*: a large open plain a little distance outside a village where community activities take place, such as bazaars or fairs; *Quarter of Micoud*: a district or parish on the southeast coast of St Lucia with the village of Micoud at its centre.

TONGA – *vala*: waistband made from tapa cloth; *kie (kie tonga)*: a very fine mat woven from tapa cloth; *tapa cloth*: cloth made from the inner bark of mulberry and certain other trees. The vala accompanied by the kie tonga forms a ceremonial outfit worn on festive occasions such as, in this case, a wedding.

ZAMBIA – *mealies*: maize; *lechwe* and *eland*: different species of antelope. The first inhabits flood plains and marshy areas and the second lives in grasslands and open plains.

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 Collcutt, 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 have otherwise 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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Julie Flett is an award-winning author, illustrator and artist based in Vancouver, Canada. Born in Toronto, she is of Cree, Métis Scottish, French and Inuit ancestry. She studied fine arts at Concordia University in Montréal and Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. She is a winner of the Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize and was nominated for the Governor General's Award for Children's Literature for her book *Owls See Clearly at Night (Lii Yiiboo Nayaapiwak lii Swer): A Michif Alphabet (L'alphabet di Michif)*. Her book *Wild Berries / Pakwa Che Menisu* was a First Nation Communities READ title selection for 2014–2015. In 2014, she became the first recipient of the Aboriginal Literature Award.



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.



COMMONWEALTH
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Reviews of the first volume of *A River of Stories*

“What a fabulous anthology!”

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it will be particularly fascinating for children.”

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