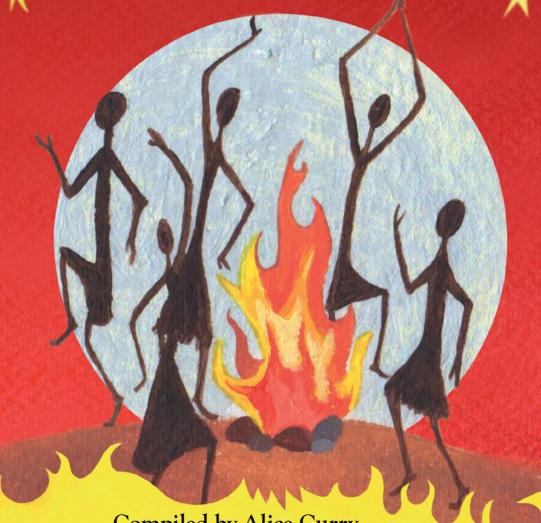


ARIVER OF STORIES



Compiled by Alice Curry

Natural Elements Series

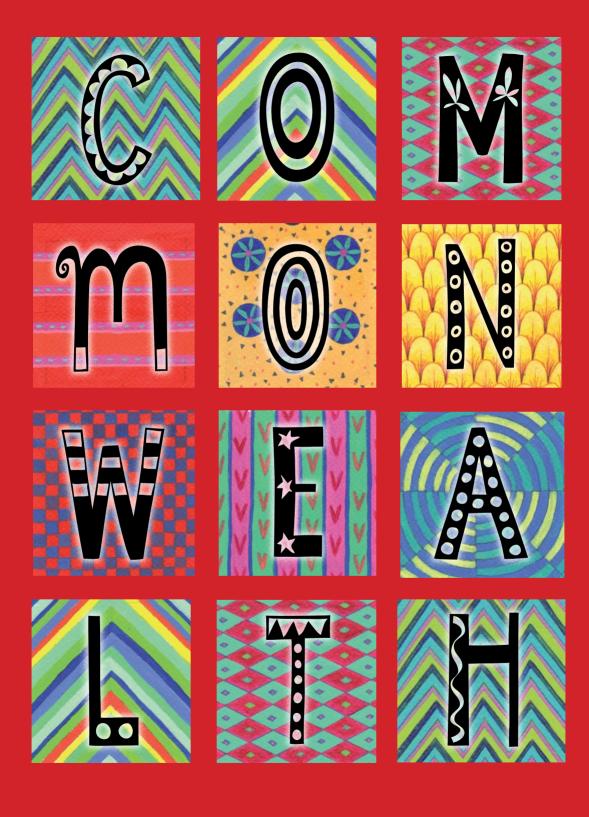
VOLUME 4 - FIRE

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

Each entry sizzles with its own energy — whether relating the genesis of the sun or the origins of smoke, recounting the adventures of warriors dancing on hot coals or the bravery of heroes stealing fire from the gods. Together they are testament to the awe-inspiring power of fire across cultures and our enduring fascination with this most dangerous of elements.

Emma Butler's gorgeous 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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Emma Butler

ARIVER OF STORIES

Tales and Poems from Across the Commonwealth



Compiled by Alice Curry
Natural Elements Series
VOLUME 4 ~ FIRE



Dedicated to the children of
the Commonwealth of Nations
in appreciation of the generosity
of those citizens who, in 1886,
contributed the resources that enable
the Commonwealth Education Trust
to continue to work for the
benefit of education.

All profits will go towards supporting the educational purposes of the Trust.







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ABOUT THE WORDS



Fire holds within it the power both to create and to destroy. From the spark of life, once said to animate the body, to the wildfire that germinates the seeds of desert plants, to the sun itself, without which life on Earth would perish, fire is a powerful symbol of creation – a treasure that countless folk tale heroes have faced death to possess.

Yet, while it is present at the beginnings of life, it is also invariably present at its end – from the raging bush fires of Australia to the molten lava flows of Mount Yasur in Vanuatu, the origins of which are recounted in this collection. Fire is a dangerously enticing substance. It is not for nothing that mothers in the Caribbean warn their children to beware of the soucouyant – an old woman by day but a deathly fireball by night!

Like flames leaping from branch to branch, the stories and poems gathered in this collection resemble single strands of an ancient dance – the dance of fireflies, attracted to light; the dance of warriors, preparing for battle; the dance of the flames themselves, reaching up into the night sky. Dance encapsulates the exhilarating nature of these tales from many cultures – the sense of energy and movement that permeates our planet. From tricksters who steal burning brands for humankind to the sun gods and goddesses who fiercely protect them; from ghosts with feet of flames to fire-breathing dragons, the characters in this collection paint a stunning picture of the ways in which humans have interacted with fire for thousands of years.

This lively collection is inspired by the fires of old, around which generations of storytellers have weaved their craft – an art that is sadly becoming all too rare. What better way to honour this age-old tradition than by turning the page and joining the dance?

Alice Curry

ABOUT THE PICTURES



Fire – what an exciting element to illustrate!

I have drawn upon a wealth of personal experience to create the illustrations in this collection. From camping trips as a little girl and singing songs around campfires in England and Wales; to travels through the epic and breath-taking landscapes of Africa listening to

fireside stories told by local people; to many happy nights with travelling companions sitting around campfires on the beaches of Australia and New Zealand as an adult, fire has been right at the heart of many wonderful adventures.

As a result of these experiences, for me the element of fire is synonymous with comfort, cooking, light, protection, warmth and the gathering of friends and families. This is reflected in many of my illustrations in this collection.

But fire can also be ferocious and dangerous. I have vivid childhood memories of witnessing the house next door being hit by lightning during a terrific storm. The lightning strike set the house on fire and I watched, wide-eyed, the destruction that ensued.

I have tried to bring to life fire in all of its guises in this collection, reigniting fond and poignant memories of interactions with this powerful element. It has been a joy and a challenge to illustrate these wonderful stories and poems. I hope that you gain as much pleasure from the pictures as I did from creating them.

Emma Butler

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Rhythms of the Dance (An extract)

By Lukas D. Mkuti

We dance watched by the moon and the stars;

The drums are shaking the wind; we are shaking our bodies.

Our hearts rise and fall in the steps of the drum,

Our bodies drenched in rhythm.

The tree under which we dance is burning with desire

To join the dance, to jump.

We dance, thinking of nothing, but dance, we dance;

We dance, looking at nothing, but the steps of this sweet dance.

We sing songs to welcome the new season tonight.

Each step, each jump lifts the heart;

Each step, each jump lifts a song;

Each step, each movement, lifts the eye.

Limbo Dancer

By Omowalè D. Franklyn

She was born out of the beat of a drum a black woman –

your mother

an' di beat of her heart was di sound of di drum an' di sound of di drum was di beat of her heart an' she would survive until di sound should stop

she danced limbo for a livin'

her mind an' body knew di secrets of bendin'

an' she danced to the tune of di day she danced to di rhythm of life she danced to stay alive she danced to de tom-tom of di times –

di times dat she knew – times hard like survivin' in dese times of strugglin' hard to make a livin' in dese times of troubles

her life was a limbo dance she had to limbo to live



she would bend backwards under di weight of mountains under di fury of oceans under di risin' of suns an' di settin' of suns

BARBADOS

she would bend backwards for bread an' water

dancin' a limbo for a livin' dancin' a limbo for a livin' dancin' a limbo for her chil'ren

bendin' backward to rise up forward – forward to a future of flowers in a field of harvests

she was a down-to-earth woman
an' when dat day she danced
bendin' backwards under di stick o' fire
five inches from di' ground
an' came out unscathed
on di other side
of life

a cheer went up from di street for she had made it

for she is one of dose t'ousands of limbo-dancin' ladies in di land bendin' backwards under di stick to make ends meet.

The Calman's fire

An Amerindian tale retold by Odeen Ishmael



ong, long ago, people ate their food raw because they possessed no fire. Only the fearsome caiman possessed fire at that time. Throughout the day, he hunted in the creeks and rivers and, in the evening, would return to his home in a cave near the river bank. There, he used the fire to

cook his meal, which exuded a wonderful aroma that filled the air all around.

All the people and the animals living in the vicinity smelled this enticing aroma of the caiman's roasted meat and wished they could have a taste of it. The caiman became very powerful, because he alone had cooked food.

Looking on from outside the cave, everyone could see the caiman cooking his food. He kept a ball of fire in his mouth, and when he opened it, the flame rushed out and lit a pile of dried sticks he had collected. Over this fire, the caiman roasted the wild meat he had set aside for his dinner. And after enjoying his meal, he would put out the fire, but he made sure he always kept a ball of flame in his mouth. When he closed his huge mouth, the fire could not be seen, but it remained inside, guarded by his powerful teeth and jaws.

Witnessing how the fire could spice up a meal, and in dire need of having their food roasted as well, the people in the area came up with a plan.

"Let us all put our meat outside the caiman's cave and beg him to roast it with his fire," the chief suggested. "We should also tell him to take some for his service. Maybe that will encourage him."

This suggestion won acceptance, and the chief went to the caiman's cave to explain this proposal. Readily the caiman agreed, since it surely would save him much time from hunting for fish and wild meat.

And so, every day, the people delivered their wild meat at the mouth of the caiman's cave to be cooked. The caiman breathed his fire on it, and the roasted meat soon gave off a delectable aroma that tickled the taste buds of everyone in the vicinity. But every time they went to collect their roasted meat, they discovered that the caiman had taken a very large portion for himself. Despite this, they felt satisfied that at least they were having the opportunity to enjoy cooked food for themselves.

This arrangement with the caiman went on for quite some time, but eventually, everyone wanted some of the fire for himself and wondered how to get it from the caiman. What the people did was to check to see if he left any of it carelessly about so they could steal it for themselves. They watched as he left his cave in the morning as he set out to hunt. As usual, he caught fish and killed wild animals and took them back to his cave where he opened his mouth, set fire to his pile of sticks, and roasted everything before enjoying his meal. Then he made certain to close his mouth as he slept so no-one could steal the fire.

One day, a boy, while hunting with his father in the forest, got separated from him and arrived, by chance, at the mouth of the caiman's cave.

He peeped in and saw the beast sound asleep. Fully aware he was at the home of the "owner of fire", he became terrified, wondering if the caiman would suddenly wake up and see him. Despite his fear, he looked quickly about for any cooked food or a piece of burning stick, but he saw nothing except a burnt leaf near the mouth of the cave. Grabbing the burnt leaf, he hurried home to await his father.

When his father returned home, he held up the leaf for his father.

"Father, I found this burnt leaf," he told him.

"Where did you find it?" his father asked in amazement.

"Near the mouth of the caiman's cave," the boy answered.

"Was the caiman there?" the father questioned. "Did you see any fire?"

"The caiman was sleeping," explained the boy. "His mouth was closed, so I could not see the fire."

"How can we ever manage to steal the caiman's fire?" the father mumbled.

"I think we should try to make him open his mouth so that someone can snatch it out," the boy suggested.

His father thought about what the boy suggested and, shortly after, came up with a plan.

The next day, after discussing the idea with his friend the hummingbird, he invited all the people and the animals in the area to a big party in his yard. He also invited the caiman, who never missed an occasion when there was much to eat and drink.

Meanwhile, the host had told all the other guests in advance that when the caiman arrived at the party everyone should make jokes and do tricks that would make everybody laugh.

So when the caiman arrived, everyone took turns to crack jokes and do funny antics and soon the crowd was roaring with laughter. But the caiman did not laugh at all. He kept his mouth tightly shut.

All the animals showed off their skills, and while everyone laughed and was having fun, the caiman did not even break a smile.

The birds did magnificent swoops in the air and brought expressions of "oohs" and "aahs" from the guests, but the caiman remained as glum as ever.

Finally, the green-tailed jacamar began a very funny dance. As the caiman looked on, he suddenly gave out a loud chuckle and burst out in loud laughter. Immediately, flames spurted from his mouth. All of a sudden, the hummingbird – as swift as ever – flew into the caiman's mouth, grabbed the ball of fire in his beak, flew away with it and dropped it on a pile of dry wood. In no time, a great fire sprang up, and there was a mad rush to collect pieces of the burning wood.

As soon as the fire was stolen from the caiman's mouth, his tongue instantly shrank and became very small. Totally ashamed that he had now lost his control over fire, he rushed away from the party and hid himself in his cave. Soon after, knowing he no longer had any control over the people and animals around him, he abandoned his cave and took up residence in the depths of the river.



Dancing Poinciana

By Telcine Turner

Fire in the treetops,
Fire in the sky.
Blossoms red as sunset
Dazzling to the eye.

Dance, Poinciana, Sway, Poinciana, On a sea of green. Dance, Poinciana, Sway, Poinciana, Regal as a queen.

Fire in the treetops,
Fire in the sky.
Crimson petals and white
Stained with scarlet dye.

Dance, Poinciana, Sway, Poinciana, On a sea of green. Dance, Poinciana, Sway, Poinciana, Regal as a queen.



The fireflies' dance

By H. V. Ormsby Marshall

Here they come a-dancing, What a happy throng! Twisting this way, that way, Through the whole night long.

Now they bunch together,

Myriad lights a-gleaming,

Now they scatter far;

Each one like a star.



Peering twixt the bushes, Flying round and round: High towards the heavens, Low towards the ground.

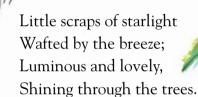






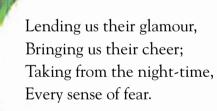
Fallen from the heavens; Mystic, wondrous sight. Mortal eyes to gladden, By their glinting light.







Glittering and flitting, On the constant go; Fireflies are dancing, Swiftly to and fro!







To walk on fire

Retold by Joseph C. Veramu



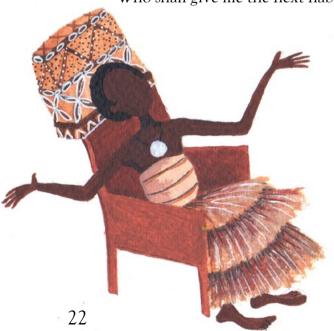
t was tale-telling night amongst the Sawau people who lived on Navakaisese Hill on the island of Beqa.

Dredre, the storyteller, came in to the crowded bure (men's hut), sat down and chanted good-naturedly:

What shall it be? What shall it be that will fill your hearts with glee?

He looked around at the crowd who were already laughing and added:

Who shall give me the next nabu? Who shall give me the next nabu?





Each young man present volunteered to bring yams, fish or other gifts. A handsome young man called Tuinaiviqalita promised to bring a big eel.

The next morning, Tuinaiviqalita woke up early to go into the mangrove swamp. He walked along the banks of a stream with his spear raised. Then he went to another stream. He stopped when he saw something move in the muddy water. When he saw that it was only a small fish, he cursed it silently. He continued to move from stream to stream, hunting for a big eel, but had no luck.

"Nevertheless," he thought, "I am young and strong. I must not be downhearted." So he stood by the last stream and looked carefully along it. Then, in a fleeting moment, he saw something luminous and black. A very big eel was moving upstream, unaware that it was being watched.

"This must be the king of the eels because it is the biggest I have ever seen," he thought. "Dredre will be happy with this nabu."

With a cry, he lunged his spear at it. But the spear slipped past the eel's side. The eel was no longer the same carefree eel, for it rushed into its abode, a dark hole. But Tuinaiviqalita would not accept defeat, and he jumped into the stream. He was angry with himself, but soon other thoughts entered his mind. What would the villagers say if he appeared with a big eel strapped on his shoulder? They would gape at him in admiration. He resolved to catch the eel.

He smiled. Soon it would be low tide. With his digging stick strapped to his back, he would dig the hole.



It was easy to dig as the swampy mud was soft. As he dug, he chanted:

I'll get you in the end and carry you through the land. Your cooked flesh our tongues will taste.

As he dug and dug, he became more angry with the eel and said:

In the end, I'll trap you, cunning eel. So watch out when my spear you feel.

But as he dug on, he was surprised to see a beautifully designed tapa cloth covering the hole. "It is beautiful," he thought, "but it is the eel that I want."

A short time later, he heard loud wailing, which grew louder and louder. It would have frightened the bravest man, but Tuinaiviqalita was a youth of exceptional courage. He cursed the eel and chanted:

Wail as loud as you can.
You'll cease when I catch you.
Tomorrow, in an earth oven, you'll be roasted and of my skill I will have boasted.
So wail as much as you can, eel.

It's not frightening me in the least.
It's only making me angry.
I shall spear your head
and, for my deed, I shall only be glad.

Suddenly, to his surprise, he saw a small man appear from the hole. "Who are you?"

"I'm Tui Namoliwai, the spirit of these streams and forests."

"Where have you hidden my eel?" Tuinaiviqalita demanded.

"There was no eel. It was I in the form of an eel."

"You have taken my eel, and for that I shall kill you and present you as my nabu."

"Wait. Spare my life, and I shall make you a great leader."

Tuinaiviqalita refused this offer.

"I can make you very rich, if you spare my life."

Tuinaiviqalita also refused this offer.

"I can give you the power to walk on fire."

Tuinaiviqalita was impressed with this offer and agreed to it, saying, "I also wish that when I die my descendants will inherit this power."

Tui Namoliwai agreed to this.

Thanks to the determination and courage of Tuinaivigalita, the people of Sawau in Bega still have this amazing power to walk over white-hot stones, even today.

ST KITTS AND NEVIS ST KITTS AND NEVIS

BIS DIUM RIGGIM (An extract)

By Imruh Bakari Caesar

so silently so sure my secrets are jewels under my tongue

I am the spark
From the donkey's hoof
On rock-hard road
I am the spark
That raised cane fields
To the ground
The dry bone
That nurtured the earth
The oneness
The everything
A sweet rumba box
An earthquaking spirit
Oracle of maps
A cool breeze
A hurricane whiplash



The nothingness
The indestructible breath
Blood of Ogun
The salt ocean
The potent fragrance
From the illusive depths
To the rippling surface
The skeleton shack-shack
Voice from the Ashanti coast
The bawling skin
Of a talking drum
The fundeh clap-clap
A thunder roll

SEYCHELLES

\$683 (An extract)

By Hazel de Silva

twelve men form the circle near is the drummer cha la la la!

beating the tam tam music *commencez!*

dancers clap clap clap...
slowly slowly clap clap clap...
bat la main!
bat la main!
bat la main!

five or six dancers at first slowly clapping

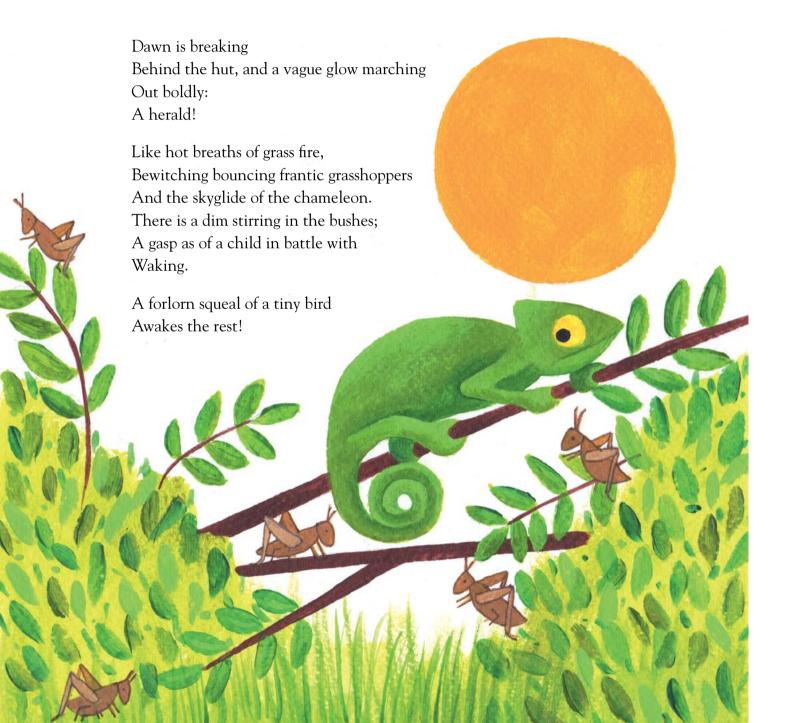
bat la main!
bat la main!
the song arises
song of the people





The Return (An extract)

By Okello Oculi



Son of the sun (An extract)

Retold by Tupou Posesi Fanua



here was at that time a Tuʻi Tonga who had a daughter by the name of Fatafehi. One day, the Tuʻi Tonga decided to go for a sea trip and visit all his islands,

and at the same time look for a husband for his daughter. Preparations were made for the trip, and the royal party set out and finally reached Ha'apai. At every island, the royal party stopped and some of the party went ashore to see if it was inhabited and, if so, bring back a report on their findings.

Accordingly, when they arrived at Felemea, some of the men went ashore. They returned with the report that the island was not inhabited, except for a woman and her son on one of the beaches at a certain part of the coast.

"The son is a full-grown man, and what a young man!" they said. "Your Majesty, he is so handsome that it hurts the human eye to look at him. Yes, we are certain that such beauty has never been seen by human eyes."

The Tuʻi Tonga told them to return ashore and take this message to the youth's mother: "The king needs the services of your son and will take him on this trip. He will await your son on board."

When the men returned and took the message to the mother, imagine how sad it made her. She had isolated herself and her son to prevent this very thing from happening.

She told Sisimataela'a to go and pick some piu (fan palm) leaves and bring them to her. When he had done this, she made a long cloak of the leaves and put it over her son's shoulder. She instructed him on the proper respect that he should show towards the king and his chiefs. Then she kissed him and sent him down to the beach where the king's boat was loading.

The royal tour continued from island to island, as far as Futuna and 'Uvea, and then returned by way of Samoa. On this whole journey, they did not find anyone as handsome as Sisimataela'a.

In the middle of the eighth night of their return from Samoa, Sisimataela'a took off his piu leaf cloak and crawled on his knees to the Tu'i Tonga. Here he knelt in obeisance.

"What is it you want?" the king asked

"May your voyage safely reach its destination, O King," Sisimataela'a said. "I beg your permission to swim ashore from here."

"What place is it that you will go ashore?" the king asked.

"We are directly before my home island now," answered Sisimataela'a. The king was surprised because it was midnight and pitch black, but Sisimataela'a knew that they were at Felemea by the feel of the sea.

"No," the king said. "Wait until we reach Tongatapu, and then some of my people will bring you back."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Sisimataela'a answered. "I made this request to go ashore now so that it would not trouble you to bring me back later." Thus the royal tour continued on its way.

When the party arrived at Mu'a, the town where the Tu'i Tonga lived, word was sent to the king's daughter that her father had returned with a husband for her.

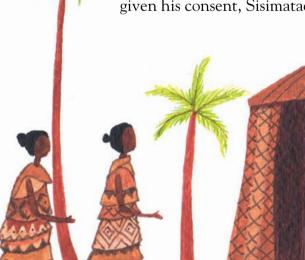
Excitement reigned over the household of the young princess, and there was anxious speculation about the man whom her father had brought for her.

When the time came for the princess to meet her future husband, she received a message from her father asking her to come to his house. So amidst a babel of excited talk, the girl was anointed with sweet-smelling oil. After being properly prepared, she walked to her father's house with all her maids following behind her, in the usual custom.

They arrived to find the young man sitting next to the king. Sisimataela'a had lowered his head because he knew in his heart that whether the princess was ugly or pretty, he would have to marry her.

Then the king told Sisimataela'a that his bride had arrived, and the youth looked up half-heartedly. But when he saw the princess, he could not believe his eyes, so beautiful was this maiden. The same was true of Fatafehi, for when she saw Sisimataela'a, she fell down in a swoon, dazzled by his handsomeness. So it was love at first sight between Sisimataela'a and Princess Fatafehi, and thus the wishes of the Tu'i Tonga were realised.

Preparations for the wedding were begun immediately, and Sisimataela'a asked the Tu'i Tonga if he could return to Felemea to tell his mother of the great honour that had been given him. The king granted him this request, although the princess did not concur because she wanted the marriage to take place right away. So great was her love for Sisimataela'a that she did not want to let him out of her sight. But because her father, the Tu'i Tonga, had given his consent, Sisimataela'a was allowed to go.





So Sisimataela'a returned to Felemea and told his mother about his forthcoming marriage. Fataimoeloa then told him that his father was the sun and that he must go and tell his father about the wedding.

He said to her, "But how can I get near enough to tell him? I'll be burned alive if I go near him."

"You shall swim due east," Fataimoeloa told him, "until you come to a big rock standing out of the deep blue sea. You must climb onto this and wait there until the sun rises, then call to him and tell him about your betrothal."

Fearlessly, Sisimataela'a turned and started swimming in the black darkness of the night. He swam and swam until at last he saw the big rock that his mother had described. He swam towards it, climbed onto it and sat down to watch for the rising sun. As he was sitting there, he began to feel drowsy and very tired from his swim, so he stretched himself out on the rock and fell asleep. He was awakened by the warmth of the sun on his skin, and he jumped up in surprise to see that the sun was above the horizon and was steadily climbing higher.

"O Sun," Sisimataela'a called out, "please wait until I tell you why I have come. I am Sisimataela'a, and I have come to tell you that I am going to be married. The Tu'i Tonga has seen fit to choose me as a husband for his daughter."

The sun put out one of his rays and lifted Sisimataela'a into the sky. He then put out another ray and pulled a piece of black cloud over his face so that the world could not see him talking with his son.

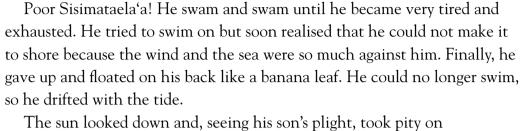
Sisimataela'a said to his father, "My mother sent me to tell you of my marriage because you are my father. I will marry Fatafehi, the daughter of the Tu'i Tonga."

"It is good," the sun told him. "You shall take these two packets: one is Mala (misfortune), and the other is Monu (fortune). You must not try to see what is in Mala. You shall only unwrap it after the wedding ceremony is over. Monu you must open on the day of the marriage katoanga (celebration)."

The sun pushed the piece of black cloud away and returned Sisimataela'a to the rock. Tied to the rock was a little boat with the parcels. Sisimataela'a got into the boat and began to paddle. As he paddled, he felt a great craving to know what was in the packet Mala. Finally, he could no longer restrain his curiosity, so he lifted the corner of the wrapping and peeked into the package.



Suddenly, there were bolts of lightning and great crashes of thunder, and the sea became very rough. The wind blew, and the waves tossed the little boat to and fro like a coconut shell being thrown about in the waves. Earthquakes shook the sea. What a frightening experience! It was as if Pulotu had opened its doors and released all of the evil spirits that dwelt there that they might wreak havoc in the world of men. Sisimataela'a's boat sank in this storm, but he was able to tie the two packets around his neck and swim with them.



The sun looked down and, seeing his son's plight, took pity on Sisimataela'a and quieted the wind and the waves. The sea became calm and the wind, instead of blowing against Sisimataela'a, turned around and gently pushed him towards the shore. Slowly, slowly the body of Sisimataela'a, on the bosom of the sea, was gently pushed ashore, and was at last laid upon the beach where his mother and he had made their home. He was still alive but quite unconscious from his ordeal.

Fataimoeloa, his mother, saw him and ran down to the beach. She very gently massaged him until he regained consciousness. Then she brought him into their little house. How tenderly she cared for him; how she fondled him. For indeed, he was her only child. To her, he was no longer a grown man but was still her baby.

Sisimataela'a rested for only a few days, then packed his boat and set out with his mother for Tongatapu. They took only their bedding and the two packets. When they arrived at Mu'a, the people all flocked to the beach to see what gifts they had brought for the wedding. They were very surprised to see that the mother and son had brought only their bedding and two small packets with them.

"Look!" the people said to one another. "How poor is the man who is to marry the princess!"

Although the chiefs worried about the apparent poverty of Sisimataela'a and his mother, and had doubts about the wisdom of the union, Fatafehi herself was impatient, and she regretted the need for such prolonged preparation. She wished the marriage could take place straightaway so that she could feel that she belonged to her husband and he to her.

When the day of the marriage ceremony came, Olotele, the compound of the Tuʻi Tonga, was full of excitement and noise, and the harbour was jammed full of ships coming from all over Tonga to join in the wedding celebration of the Tuʻi Tonga's daughter. The only possession of Sisimataela'a's mother was a kie tonga (mat), which she had made herself. All the people were in an excited turmoil of speculation over how these apparently poverty-stricken people were to receive the Tuʻi Tonga's koloa (ceremonial cloth).

Everything was in its proper ceremonial place and was now ready. Even the 'epa (bed) was ready to receive the bride and bridegroom. Word was sent to Sisimataela'a that he should come because the 'umu (earth ovens) were about to be opened and the food laid out for the guests.

Sisimataela'a then took the parcel Monu and unwrapped it. Suddenly there appeared a huge falehau (chief's house) that stretched from Kolongahau to Fue, and it was filled with all kinds of Tongan koloa. A multitude of people came into being, taking the koloa and 'umu to the king's allotment. There was such a large amount of food and gifts that it almost covered the whole town of Mu'a. The king's people were amazed at what they saw, and they realised that it all had been done by some supernatural power.

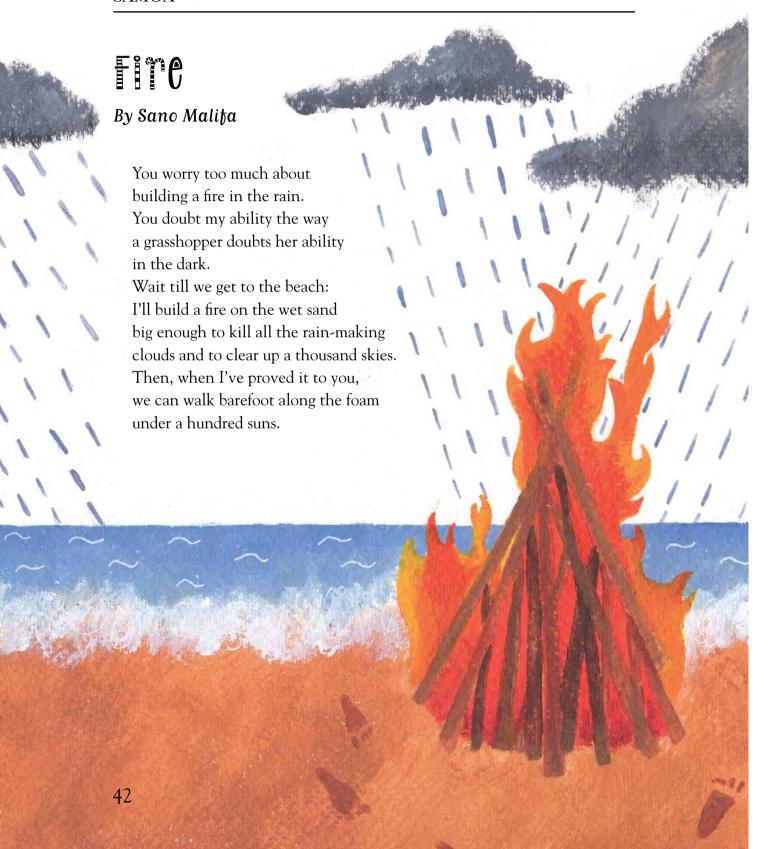
Fataimoeloa then made a vākai (special garment) for Sisimataela'a, and she put the kie tonga that she had made earlier on top of the vākai. From that time on, the kie tonga has been worn on top of the wedding vala (waistband).

Thus, at this wedding, the koloa and 'umu of the groom's party were far greater than those of the bride's people. When Sisimataela'a's people brought their offerings, the Tu'i Tonga told them, "After you have put your 'umu and koloa in place, you may all come and sit in the 'alofi (ceremonial circle)."

That is why, even now, the descendants of these people can sit in the 'alofi after they have made their presentations. They were given this privilege because they were considered to be supernatural beings.

packet Mala and opened it. There came at once a strong wind, which cleared the town of all the rubbish left over from the festivities. It also took away the falehau; but the people whom Monu had brought were left to care for Sisimataela'a. And so Sisimataela'a and Fatafehi lived happily at Olotele. The land to

When all the wedding ceremonies were over, Sisimataela'a took the



About a Chief and His Beautiful Wife

A Tswana tale retold by an unnamed narrator, transcribed by Susheela Curtis



t is said that there was once a chief called Lepenyole, who had three wives. He took the darkness and gave it to one wife, he took the moon from the sky and gave it to another wife, and he took the sun and gave it to Melwadi, his third wife.

The other wives were jealous of Melwadi because she was beautiful, and the chief, their husband, had given her the sun. So one day, when the chief was away hunting in the veld (grassy plain), they said, "Let us show each other the things our husband has given us."

First they went to the house of the wife who was given the darkness. She took a little darkness and showed it to them. Next they went to the house of the wife who had the moon, and she showed them part of it. Then they went to Melwadi, who took out the sun and showed them half of it.

But they said, "No, we have not seen the sun. Take it out again, and let us see it."

Melwadi said, "Do you want to bring trouble on me?"

The other wives said, "No, we just want to see the sun."

So Melwadi brought out the sun and gave it to one of the wives to look at. She took it and let it go.

The sun shone fiercely on the hunters, and thirst dried their throats and parched their mouths. The chief was amazed to see the sun. He said, "How has it happened that the sun is burning me?"



He sent his men to Melwadi saying, "Go, tell that woman that Chief Lepenyole is calling her."

The men went singing:

You are called, Melwadi,

You are called, Melwadi,

You are called by Chief Lepenyole.

Melwadi knew that her husband was angry because the sun had escaped, and she sang:

I hear you; I am coming,

I hear you; I am coming,

I know that I am going to be killed

For what his other wives made me do.

The men took her to the chief, and he said to them, "Take her away into the hills and kill her, then bring her liver back to me."

The men took Melwadi into the hills, but they couldn't bear to kill such a beautiful woman, so when they saw a buck, they shot it and cut out its liver. Then they said to Melwadi, "You can go home."

Melwadi returned to her parents' village, and the hunters took the buck's liver to the chief. When the chief saw it, he said, "Yes, you have killed her." The chief, in a fit of anger, had ordered her to be killed, but now he was sad because he thought that he would not see the beautiful Melwadi again.

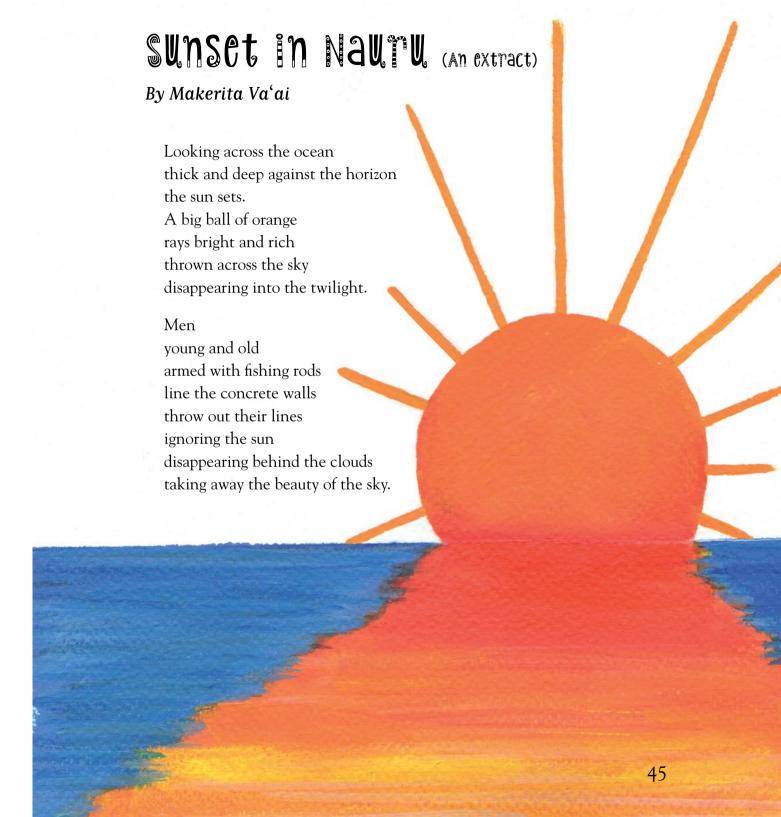
Many years later, Chief Lepenyole in his travels through the country came to the village where Melwadi lived with her parents. There he saw her. He was both surprised and happy to see her again and cried out joyfully, "My wife, my wife!"

But Melwadi said, "I am not your wife; you have cast me away. You said that I should be killed. Go away."

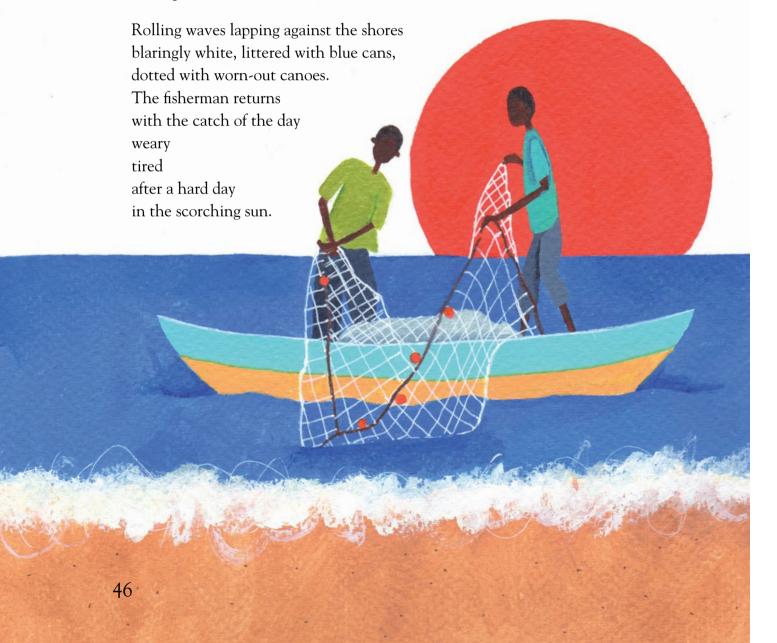
The chief said, "Come back to me. I will give you the sun."

Melwadi refused to return to him. She said, "No, sir, you have killed me, but your servants let me go."

And she walked away from him.



Lovers
stand and watch
admiring the multicoloured sun
burning strong and bright
reflecting the bondage of their attraction.
They reach out to catch the last glimpse
to keep the flame alive.

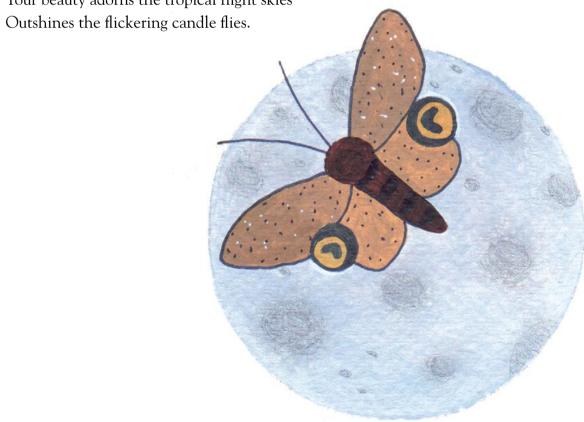


Caribbean Moon (An extract)

By Josiah Bobb

Caribbean moon keep shining Send down your tropical glow Spread out your silver lining We await your nightly show.

You and your billions of glittering stars
We all await you near and far
Your beauty adorns the tropical night skies





BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

The Beginning of smoke

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



t the beginning of the world, smoke was a man. At that time, there was a boy named Si Lasap, an orphan, who was constantly harassed by the village youths. Lasap was brought up by his grandmother. There were many forms of harassment by the villagers so that it was common for

Lasap to cry in torment. Not a single person came to his aid or took his side to stop the harassment.

One day, while Lasap was having his bath in the river, a number of villagers came and stole his trousers, which were laid on the bank.

"Lasap," they said. "Come out of the water. Here are your trousers."

Lasap hastily got out of the water on the bank. As he reached for his trousers, the fellow who was holding them threw them to his friend. Lasap started chasing his trousers from one lout to another.

"Give me my trousers!" cried Lasap.

"Here," said the youth holding them. But as soon as Lasap tried to grab them, the trousers were tossed to another.

"Give me my trousers! Give me my trousers!"

And so the trousers were tossed from one youth to another whenever Lasap tried to grab them. Seeing Lasap thus tormented made them all laugh and cheer in merriment.

Finally, Lasap was exhausted. He realised that he would not get his trousers back. He returned home in tears, and arrived very cold. He had no other clothes besides that pair of trousers. His grandmother was not at home. He started a fire to warm himself.

While fanning the fire, he muttered gloomily to himself, "Dear fire, be quick and make flames to warm my cold body. I am an orphan with no-one to give me clothes. No-one in the whole world will assist me."

The flames suddenly sprang up, and he felt warm. Without realising it, he became part of the flames.

At that moment, the youths who had harassed him came to his hut. They wanted to bully him again. They saw the fire and flames, but they did not see Lasap. Finally, smoke rose from the fire in the form of Lasap – fully clothed. The smoke quickly enveloped them and got into their eyes.

The smoke called out, "I get into your eyes so that you can feel the pain. You too will cry like I whom you tortured!"

At once, the youths felt their eyes hurting and watering. The thing that made their eyes smart and weep was thus named "lasap" (smoke). But after a long while, it was changed to just "asap". To this day, asap still gets in people's eyes, which then smart and become watery, like crying!



SINGAPORE

Gallery III

By Alvin Pang



Retold by an unnamed narrator



hen the Creator started the Earth, He had an assistant, Mantis, who had been given the duty of looking after fire. Fire was not freely available to all animals at that time, as the Creator considered that no-one was clever enough yet to use it. But, one day, Mantis was called away

to Heaven, and he decided that of all the animals, Ostrich was the most loyal and dutiful and would therefore keep the fire safely until his return.

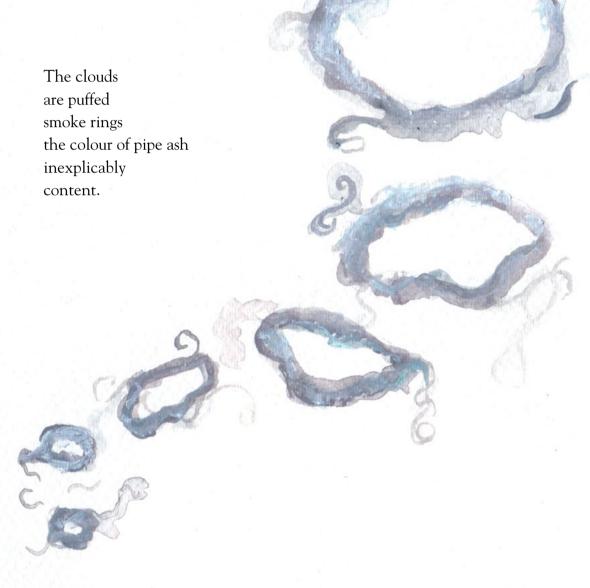
Ostrich proudly tucked the smouldering coals under his great wings, never dreaming that within a few days, Bushman would have tricked him into giving up the precious fire.

Bushman was a wily creature, wiser than the rest, and he realised that fire would be a great improvement in his life. He could cook his food, stay warm during the chilly winter nights and protect himself against the dangerous animals that hunted in the dark.

Being gifted with the speech of animals, he went to Ostrich and told him of a strange but exiting dream he had had. If Ostrich were to stand on the edge of a desert dune in the early dawn with his eyes shut tight and his wings opened to the cool morning breezes, he would be granted the gift of flight!

Of all things, Ostrich wanted to fly, so the next morning found him on the highest dune, following Bushman's instructions very carefully. And Bushman, of course, was hiding close by, ready to snatch the glowing coals as soon as Ostrich stretched his mighty wings. That is precisely what happened, which is how Man received fire from Mantis!

Poor Ostrich lost his mind from sadness and humiliation and became a most silly creature. He even has to leave an egg or two outside the nest, to remind himself of his duties whilst sitting on the rest of the clutch!



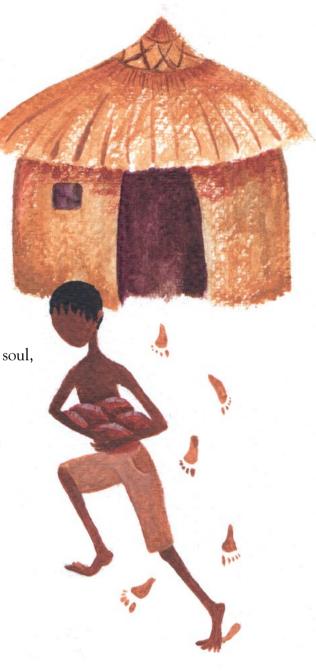
confession

By Edward C. Okwu

Like a mischievous boy,
I peep through the door-hole,
beholding a naked old man, half asleep,
spent,
on the bamboo bed;

and I raise a fire alarm, false, for the man to scuttle away to his shrine, his ikenga, his life-wire, his soul, into the cold claws of the harmattan;

while I, showing broken teeth of laughter, sneak into his hut to emerge later with large rounded yams, hurriedly treading on scattered corns, mouth bursting with red-ripe nuts and eyes squinting sentinel-wise like a mischievous boy.



The Land Crab in the Kitchen

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



ong ago, all land crabs in Maldives were fair in colour. But one day, a carefree land crab entered a kitchen while a woman was boiling rā hiyani (palm syrup). This was not any ordinary kitchen, for the woman cooking there was Dōgi

Āihā Kāṅlēge, a very beautiful woman and also a great sorceress. Instead of using firewood, she was thrusting her feet under the pot and abundant fire was coming out of them.

Dōgi Āihā Kāṅlēge had warned that no-one should enter the kitchen while she was cooking, not even her husband. She was married to Oditān Kalēge, the greatest faṇḍita man (sorcerer) of Maldives, who both loved and feared his wife.

The crab didn't know that Dōgi Āihā Kāṅlēge was a hot-tempered lady and that she would get very angry if someone saw her cooking. It just entered the kitchen because there was a nice smell, walking cautiously on tiptoes, as land crabs always do.



When this crab reached the threshold of the kitchen, it thought that noone had seen it. But Dōgi Āihā Kāṅlēge was always watchful, and she saw the intruder from the corner of her eye. She became furious at once.

The woman instantly got up from the fireplace and stepped with her left foot, still on fire, on top of the crab's shell. Dōgi Āihā Kāṅlēge moved so fast that the poor crustacean didn't have time to escape. When she saw that the back of the crab was burnt, she let it go.

Outside it was raining heavily and the fire on the crab's back was quickly extinguished. But the crustacean had a large black stain where he had been charred by Dōgi Āihā Kāṅlēge's foot.

And that is the reason why nowadays all land crabs in Maldives have a black spot on top of their bodies.



The firefly

By Celestine Kulaghoe

You firefly
You are a demon alight
You are the sorcerer's spell
You are the departed mama's eye
that diverts me tonight
with your winking dance.

The forest darkness is your stage like the cloudless sky for the stars.

By your magic I sit bewitched knowing not how it's done.

I watch for an hour

And would watch for hours more.

I'm trapped in a trance subdued by your uncanny flicker

Not able even to blink lest you vanish into the void of night.

You are the demon

luring me to shine my own light

You are the sorcerer's spell
the twisted forefinger of his right hand
burning life's flame away

withering me to dust

You are mama's eye
lingering on to watch over me
that I walk safely

through daunting days and nights.

Firefly

Beyond light

You are lore.



MAURITIUS

The Legend of the Wood Apple Princess

Retold by Pahlad Ramsurrun



very long time ago, there was a king and a queen who were reigning peacefully over their kingdom. They had three sons. As the sons grew up, the two eldest sons got married, but the youngest prince remained unmarried.

As usually happens with the youngest child in the

family, the youngest prince was getting more affection from his parents than his brothers were. Witnessing this, both sisters-in-law started hating him. And, in the absence of their husbands, they would mock him by giving him all sorts of names and by teasing him. Thus, the youngest prince's life became miserable. While serving him his meal, the sisters-in-law would say, "When are you going to marry, our beloved brother-in-law? When are you going to relieve us from serving you every day and night?"

Hearing the mockery of his sisters-in-law all the time, the youngest prince felt angry and unhappy. One day, when their mocking became unbearable, he took a firm decision.

"From tomorrow morning, I will not take anything from my sisters-in-law's hands." After taking this decision, he went to sleep that night.

The next morning, his sisters-in-law came to wake him as usual. They told him, "Wake up, beloved brother-in-law! Wake up! Take this brush and water, wash your mouth and drink the hot milk that we have brought. If you do not hurry up, it will turn cold."

The youngest prince drew the bed cover over his head and replied from under the cover, "I don't need your brush and water nor your hot milk. From now onwards, I will not accept anything from your hands because I cannot bear you mocking me any longer."

At this, the sisters-in-law rudely replied, "If you do not accept the brush, water and milk from our hands, what will you do? Is only the wood apple princess good enough to serve you?" And they left with their noses in the air.

When they had gone away, the youngest prince got out of bed. He thought about his sisters-in-law's words. "Maybe it is true what they said," he thought. "If I could only marry the wood apple princess, the most beautiful woman in the land, then I would be happy."

So he went to his mother and said, "Mother, I want your blessings. I am going to the Izoo-bizoo Forest."

"Izoo-bizoo Forest! Why, my dear son? What has happened? What are you looking for? Wealth, horses and coaches? Why are you going to that dreadful forest?" asked his mother.

"I need nothing, mother. But my sisters-in-law tease me all the time. I cannot bear their mocking words any longer. Every day, they utter sarcastic remarks to me," said the prince.

"Is that so? Well, wait for the arrival of your brothers. I will tell them about the misbehaviour of their wives. But you must not go to the Izoo-bizoo Forest, my son," said the queen. But the prince had already made up his mind.

The youngest prince immediately left the palace without the blessings of his parents. He marched and marched throughout the day on the forest road. By midday, he reached a crossroad. Now he was confused for some time. Which way to go – turn right, go straight ahead or turn left? Finally, he decided not to turn right or left, but continued his path. He pursued the road till evening. But unknowingly, he had gone deep into a dense forest. There he saw a sadhu sitting under a tree in mediation. The prince made up his mind to stay there and serve the sadhu. He built a hut nearby and provided

comforts to the sadhu for days, as he intended to get the blessings from that holy man before proceeding with his difficult journey.

A few days later, the sadhu woke up from his meditation. On opening his eyes, he saw the young prince who had been at his service for days. He asked, "Who are you, young man? Why are you serving me? What do you want from me? Tell me, and your wish will be fulfilled!"

The young prince bent down in reverence and touched the sadhu's feet and said, "Baba! I am the youngest prince of the kingdom. I am mocked by my sisters-in-law, so I have decided to go to the Izoo-bizoo Forest, find the wood apple princess and marry her. Do give me your blessings so that I may succeed in my journey."

"Young prince! This is not an easy task. It's very difficult; no, almost impossible. Many brave men have lost their lives while trying to find the wood apple princess. Hence, listen to my advice. Go back home. Forget the idea of going to the Izoo-bizoo Forest. You won't be able to find her," replied the wise sadhu.

"Let me perish in this search, Sadhu Baba! Without finding and marrying the wood apple princess, I will not go back home," was the firm reply of the young prince.

The sadhu felt pity for him. As the sadhu possessed supernatural powers, he turned the prince into a bird and told him, "Fly northwards. There you will find the Izoo-bizoo Forest. There are many wood apple trees, and in the middle of the forest, there is one huge tree on which grow many wood apple fruits. However, she-demons are guarding the tree. You must outwit them, break off a fruit and fly away.

The she-demons will pursue you. They will be calling to you to stop and they will be insisting that you should look back. You must not look back under

any circumstances. Otherwise, you will be burnt to ashes. The she-demons will follow you, but you must not stop for a single moment on the way."

The young prince, in the form of a bird, flew towards the north. He flew for a long time and at last reached his destination – the Izoo-bizoo Forest. And, indeed, he found the tree in the middle of the forest on which there were many wood apple fruits. As told by the sadhu, he saw the she-demons guarding this particular tree. Most of the she-demons were asleep at that time. Only a one-eyed she-demon was awake and she was on the watch.

The young prince waited until the right moment. He flew towards the tree, snatched a wood apple fruit and flew away with it. To his great astonishment, the one-eyed she-demon shouted and awoke all the other shedemons. "Look over there! That bird has stolen a fruit, and it is flying away with it. Catch it! Hold it! Don't let the bird fly away with the fruit!"

At this sign, all the she-demons woke up and started chasing the bird. They came after him like a storm. They shouted to him, "Look behind you! Look behind you! This wood apple princess is more beautiful than the one in your possession. Exchange this one with yours!"

When he heard this, the young prince forgot all about the sadhu's warning. He stopped and looked back. The next moment, he was burnt to ashes. The she-demons took their wood apple fruit and went back to the Izoo-bizoo Forest.



The sadhu was all the time waiting for the young prince's arrival, but when he did not return, the sadhu understood why. The prince was surely outwitted by the she-demons, he thought, and he had lost his life like the other brave men. But he would not let him perish like this. He took the road to the Izoo-bizoo Forest. In the middle of the road, the sadhu saw the ashes of the young prince. He collected the ashes in his hands and recited a few hymns. Miraculously, the ashes turned back into the prince. Then the sadhu told the prince, "Go home, young prince. You cannot deceive the shedemons. They won't let you get away with a single wood apple fruit."

"No, Sadhu Baba! Without a wood apple fruit I will not go back home. Let me die in this dangerous journey rather than go home without the fruit."

This time, the sadhu turned him into a green parrot and again warned him, "Do not listen to the she-demons. Do not look back under any circumstances. Fly back to my hut as soon as possible."

The green parrot flew away and sometime afterwards reached the Izoo-bizoo Forest. This time, too, he outwitted the she-demons, broke off a wood apple fruit and flew away with it. One of the she-demons had seen him, and she signalled the theft to the other she-demons. They all pursued the young prince. They called out, "Look behind you! Look at this! Take this wood apple – it is a more beautiful wood apple princess!" But this time, the young prince did not look back. He reached the hut of the sadhu and hid himself in it. The sadhu recited a few hymns and turned the green parrot into a cat and the wood apple fruit into a fly. By that time, the she-demons had come into the sadhu's hut. They asked the sadhu, "Sadhu Baba! Sadhu Baba! Where is our thief? Is he hiding somewhere in the hut? Surrender him to us!"

The sadhu replied, "Nobody, except my cat and I, lives in this hut. If you do not believe me, search it." Hundreds of she-demons entered the hut and searched for their thief everywhere, but they could not find the green parrot and the wood apple fruit. At last, they went back to the Izoo-bizoo Forest.

When they had gone away, the sadhu again recited a few hymns and turned the cat into the young prince and the fly into the wood apple fruit.

While sending the young prince home, the sadhu warned him, "Do not break the wood apple fruit on the way. If you do, a calamity may befall you. But suppose you break the fruit on the way, a beautiful princess will emerge from the fruit. You will fall unconscious, and the princess will have to give you water to revive you. For this reason, you must break the wood apple fruit at home."

The young prince started the homeward journey with his wood apple fruit. After walking for several days and nights, he finally reached the royal palace. Before entering the royal gate, an idea came to him. "If I go into the palace and break the wood apple fruit, but nobody emerges from the fruit, then what will happen? My sisters-in-law will laugh at

Thus a few yards away from the palace, the young prince broke the fruit. What a miracle followed! The prettiest princess emerged from the wood apple fruit. When he saw her beauty, the young prince fell down unconscious. Now, the wood apple princess had no idea what to do, but she wanted to awake her future husband. So the princess ran away to a nearby well to fetch water.

me, and their mocking will be even worse."

From the well, the village dancer, a crafty woman, was pulling water. The wood apple princess begged her, "Sister, lend me your rope and bucket. My future husband is unconscious. I need water from the well to revive him."

The village dancer threw an ominous glance at her and said, "I can give you the rope and the bucket on condition that you lend me your dress and jewellery for some time, and that you take my dress and jewellery if you want to save the life of your future husband."

MAURITIUS

As she had no alternative, the wood apple princess removed her dress and jewellery and gave them to the village dancer, and put on her dress and jewellery instead. Then she took the rope and bucket and started pulling water from the well.

In the meantime, the village dancer had put on the princess's dress and jewellery, and, from behind, she pushed the wood apple princess into the well. After that, she fetched some water and searched for the prince. When she found him, she threw a few drops of water on his face. When the prince woke up and saw the village dancer in the dress and jewellery of the wood apple princess, he mistook her for the real wood apple princess. The next moment, he took a bit of sindhoor, put it on the head of the village dancer and thus made her his wedded wife.

From the windows of the royal palace, the young prince's sisters-in-law were watching the whole scene, and as the young prince entered the palace with his beautiful wife, they pretended to be happy and welcomed him warmly. But only a few days after the incident, when they were alone with him, they said mockingly, "Accept our congratulations, brother-in-law! You went away on the journey to bring the wood apple princess! But in reality, what have you brought? The village dancer in the form of the wood apple princess!"

The young prince had no knowledge of this. He tried to overlook their remarks, thinking that they were jealous because he had brought the most beautiful woman in the land into the palace.

A few months later, a strange plant grew in the well, and a beautiful flower appeared on it. All the people in the surrounding region were excited after seeing it. They wanted to cut the flower from the plant, but they could not do so, because the flower-plant had magical powers, and it receded into the well whenever somebody tried to get hold of it.

One day, the young prince saw the beautiful flower. He was attracted to it and felt a strong urge to pick it. He went to the well, got hold of the plant and broke off the beautiful flower. He brought it home and placed it in a flower pot in his bedroom.



From that day onwards, exactly at midnight, the wood apple princess would come out of the flower, sweep the room and tidy it. Then she would enter the flower again. Every morning, the young prince could not understand how his room suddenly looked clean and tidy. As he suspected that something strange was going on, he decided to stay awake at night. That night, he pretended to be fast asleep.

Exactly at midnight, the wood apple princess came out of the flower, and while she was sweeping and tidying the room, the young prince secretly got out of bed, took the strange flower, crushed it with his feet on the floor and again secretly went back to bed.

At last, when the wood apple princess had finished cleaning the room and wanted to enter the flower, she could not find it. At that moment, the young prince jumped up from his bed and got hold of the wood apple princess.

"Who are you?" asked the prince. "Why do you clean my room every day?"

"Dear prince," the wood apple princess replied, "I am the real wood apple princess. The woman you married is actually the village dancer." And the princess related all the incidents that had happened between her and the village dancer near the well.

The next day, the young prince revealed the matter in public. The village dancer was caught, judged and punished. After her beautiful hair was cut, she was put into prison for the rest of her life for her evil acts towards the young prince and the wood apple princess.

The young prince and the wood apple princess lived a happy and fruitful life for a long time. Now, his sisters-in-law could not show their faces because the king had chosen the youngest prince to be his successor.



The Gifts of the Months

Retold by Liza Galea, translated by Margaret A. Murray



nce upon a time, there were two brothers. One was very poor. The other, who was a trader, was quite well-to-do.

One morning, the poor man started out and wandered about. When he had gone as far as, let us say, Mellieha, he found a large door standing open. He rested against it

a little while and then went in. He found there a table spread for a meal and twelve people sitting round it eating.

He asked them to give him some food. "I have not had a mouthful since morning," he said.

"Sit down," they all said, "and eat with us."

When he had made a good meal, January spoke to him, though he did not know it was January.

"Friend," said January, "what do people say about January in your part of the world?"

The poor man answered, "It is a month of rain and of plenty. Vegetables grow and all that your heart can desire."

"Do you know any rhymes about it?" asked January.

"Just imagine asking!" cried the poor man. "As many as ever you like."

"Tell me some, please," said January.

The poor man then repeated the following three: "January sits in the cosiest nook in the house. A warm January makes full barns in the summer. The January moon brings the girls out of the caves for they think it is daylight."

January smiled, and the others laughed. Then February took up the running, "Friend, what do they say about February?"

"He is January's own brother, bless him," said the poor man. "Quantities of rain, and everyone satisfied, for February fills up all and brings riches to the peasant's house. In the month of February, all mistakes are discovered. In February, sow, water and tend the small-leaved basil."

"What a lot you know!" they all cried.

"Friend," said March, "what about March?"

"Days long and beautiful," answered the peasant. "The cold braces you like iron, and a little wind is always desirable."

The poor man answered in this way each question of the rest of the months, letting his tongue wag in their honour, praising each one up to the skies.

When the time came for him to go, he asked for some food for his wife and children, "For the poor things are hungry."

January took up a white cloth, such as is used for covering bread, and gave it to the poor man saying, "When you are in need of anything, say to the bread-cloth 'Unfold', then ask for what you want, and it will come. When you want no more, say 'Stop', and the bread-cloth will fold itself. This is not just for once but for always."

The poor man thanked them all, calling down blessings upon them. Then he saluted them and returned home.

"Mary," he said to his wife, "there is plenty now for you to eat." He took the bread-cloth out of his bag, laid it on the table and said, "Unfold", and it unfolded.

Then he turned to his wife, "What would you like for this evening?" he said.

"Well," she replied, "if we have a plate of mnestra soup with some bread in it and then a little tiny fish, we should not do badly."



The man asked for this, and at once, there was plenty of it. When they had finished, he said "Stop", and the bread-cloth folded itself up, and he put it away in his big box.

"Mary," he said, "we might invite my brother and his family to come and spend the day."

So Mary went to the house and found her fine-lady sister-in-law at home, but the husband was out.

"How are you all?" said Mary. "I am delighted to see you looking so well. Simon hopes that you will all come and spend the day with us tomorrow."

When Mary had gone and the husband had come home, his wife said to him, "What has happened to your brother? He has nothing in the world, and yet he wants us all to go and dine with them tomorrow!"

However, the next morning, they all went, taking care not to arrive till about half an hour before noon. When they came, there was no fire, no smell of cooking and no sign of any preparation for a meal.

The children began to complain and whine. "Mother, we want something to eat. We're hungry. Where's the dinner?"

And their father muttered, "My brother must have lost his head. This is sheer madness."

Simon took out the bread-cloth from his big box, put it on the table and said, "Unfold". It unfolded itself, and at once, there was everything to eat that they liked best: turtle soup as thick as curds; baked rice; the best wheaten bread; jugged rabbit; stuffed capon; round cheesecakes with peas and beans in them; Gozo cheese; nougat of white honey; hot date cakes and habb ghażiż (sweet sedge root) for the children. Then there was a toothful of Alicante wine and another of old Malaga wine, and fruit to their hearts content, including a watermelon from Tripoli as big as a boat.

"Brother," said the rich man, "how does this come about?"

"Yesterday," answered Simon, "I wandered away, and after going a long distance, as far, let's say, as Mellieha, I found a big door and rested against it. In the house, there were twelve people eating. I asked for some food, and

they kept me and made me eat with them, and when I was taking my leave, they gave me this cloth."

The rich man was not needy but greedy, and he wanted to have the same as his poorer brother. So the next morning, he dressed himself in rags and tatters and started off, but he took care to start before it was light so that the neighbours should not see him. He reached the house of the twelve months at about the same time of day as his brother had done.

"Have you anything for me?" he shouted, while he was still a long way off. The twelve months invited him to come in and join them at their meal.

When they reached the dessert, January said, "What do you say about January in your part of the country?"

"No-one can walk in the roads on account of him," said the rich man. "Rain and wind and pitiless cold."

"Can you tell us any rhymes?" asked January.

"One or two, perhaps," he answered. "Here is one: When January rains, the peasant complains."

February then asked, "What about February, friend?"

"He is January's own brother," said the rich man. "Rain, thunder, wind, drowning everybody and everything in water."

The others each asked him in turn, and he had not a good word for any of them. June got very angry when the rich man told him the rhyme, "June is big; his head is a donkey's head."

When they all rose from the table, the rich man said, "Have you nothing for me that I can take away?"

January presented him with a stick saying, "When you want anything, say to it, 'Do what you have to do'. When you have had enough, say to it 'Stop' or 'Whoa'."

The rich man thanked the twelve and started off for home. But he was so eager to see what the stick would do that he turned off into the first quiet lane he came across. There were some men ploughing close by, but he said to himself, "They can't see me."

He went close up to the wall so as to be hidden and said to the stick, "Do what you have to do." At once, the stick began to beat him mercilessly on his head, his arms, his back, his legs. He was so confused that he forgot the word to use to make it stop, and it was only when he heard the ploughmen calling "Whoa" to the plough animals that he remembered. He called out "Whoa", and the stick stopped at once.

"It is not like my brother's bread-cloth," he said to himself.

It was quite dark when he reached home. He pulled the string of the latch, went in and stood the stick up against the door.

"What a time you have been!" remarked his wife.

"I was delayed because it was so far," he replied. "Now, look at this stick. I warn you against touching it, for it is not like my brother's bread-cloth. And never say in its presence, 'Do what you have to do'."

He said this because she was a great talker and gossip and worried him very much. He went outside and peeped in to see what she would do. As soon as he had gone and she thought herself alone, she did exactly what he had told her not to do. She went up to the stick, took hold of it and repeated the words. Then she began screaming loudly for the stick at once rained a shower of blows on her.

The husband opened the door and called out "Whoa", and the stick stopped.

"O the monkey face, he did not even warn me!" cried the wife.

"Did I not tell you?" said the husband. "Did I not open your eyes? Did I not warn you that it was not like my brother's bread-cloth? Woman, whom will you believe except the devil?"

The next day, he met his brother and said to him, "By the way, I went." "Well?" said Simon. "Were you given anything?"

"Given anything?" said the rich man. "I was given a beating, both I and my wife; all our bones are sore."

"Were you asked anything?" enquired Simon.

"I was asked what the months do," replied the rich man.

"And what did you say?" asked Simon.

"What was there for me to say?" answered the rich man. "It is not my business to answer silly questions."

"You utter fool!" said Simon. "Didn't you see that they were the months? Why did you abuse them?"

The rich man broke the stick into two pieces and threw the bits away, and a beggar passing by saw them and picked them up. He took them home, and when he arrived at his house, he examined them carefully, wondering what kind of wood it was. While doing this, he accidentally said, "Do what you have to do".

At once, the sticks flew up and up and up to the roof, and there fell all around the beggar a rain of gold coins so great that he grew tired of trying to count them.

cosmopolitan Grandma

By Raymond Ntalindwa

Grandma said:

To the kitchen, I trod at seven
To pick my knitting needles misplaced last night
And I glanced at the sink
Sinking my heart in disbelief!

That sink so crammed
With the washing to be done
By whom, search me for an answer
Since your tired mum in bed she lies
Maid off and I in abandon to my craft.

In her work was your mum lost Yesternight in pondering The character and conduct Of each learner in her class The report at end of term.

Onto the drawing board, she stooped till dawn Marks she awarded and average she found Position she allocated to each and all And after weighing all pros and cons Sound reports she wrote and signed.

And so when to bed she retired
In the early hours of morning
Minutes before my creative mind waked
She simply slumped down by your dad's side
Feebly, softly, she tosslessly fell asleep.



And so afraid am I to wait you must

For when one with the creative-fire engaged

One burns with a must to mould

And record for posterity to emulate

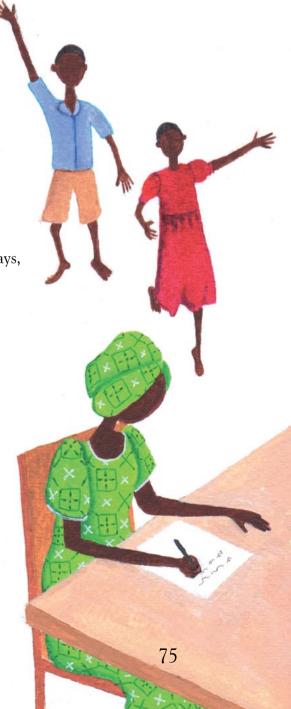
The fertility of elders' imagination.

And so dilly-dally must I advise
To distract the hunger pangs
Before you can break that belt of fast
You've fastened yourselves with since dinner
For a night of sweetest dreams.

Oh! I can hear one of you we would rather, he says, Back home to Butimba we think of going Where aunts and cousins many Where distant relatives abound Where maids float on penny misery.

Ah! But what with your hubbubish chorus: I want my breakfast
I want my cereals
I want my juice
I want my this, my that...

Harken, to your call must I hurry
Speedily must I stash away my paraphernalia
Quickly must I to your relief respond
Fast must I react, dear ones
To assist you break the sharp pangs of fast.



SRI LANKA

How to share five cakes

Retold by D. Walatara



nce upon a time, there was a farmer who, some time earlier, had married off his two daughters. One day, he decided to pay his daughters a visit to see how they were getting along.

First he went to see the younger daughter, as she had married only recently. She had been wooed by a rich man, but the farmer had refused him because, he said, his family was not good enough. So she had eventually married a man who, though of good family, was very poor, and now she lived in poverty. Her clothes were cheap and ragged, and she and the other members of her husband's family lived from hand to mouth.

When her father arrived, she invited him to have a seat and then pretended to get some food ready for him. But there was no food in the house, and all she did was place a pan on the fire and put into it some old, dry tamarind seeds, which are not at all fit to eat. She kept stirring the seeds, and when they began to roast, they made a sound like "kas, kas, kas".

"Whatever are you roasting?" asked her father, curious.

Now, the daughter was still angry because she'd been made to marry such a poor man. She said, "Since we don't have any money, Father, we sometimes have to cook the only thing we have – my husband's good family name."

The farmer felt insulted by his daughter's words. Without even replying, he rose and left the house and started off for his other daughter's place. Now, the older daughter had been married to a rich man and was very well off. When the father reached her house, his daughter treated him with great consideration, the way he thought a child should act to show gratitude to

a parent. After making him comfortable, she set to work and made him some special cakes out of rolled rice pastry that were a great delicacy in her village. Her father found the cakes delicious and asked what they were called. The daughter answered, "They're called 'vella vahum'," which is a name that means something like "sweet-rice dough".

After he'd eaten his fill, the farmer set out for home, beaming with satisfaction and hurrying as fast as he could. He kept muttering to himself, "Sweet-rice dough, sweet-rice-dough," so he wouldn't forget the name.

Along he went, jiggety-jig and joggety-jog, sometimes leaning forward as he ran loping and sometimes leaning to the side, but always to the tune of "Sweet-rice dough, sweet-rice dough". He passed some girls going to market and smiled at them to the tune "Sweet-rice dough, sweet-rice dough". People along the way thought it very funny to see the old farmer hurrying along singing "Sweet-rice dough, sweet-rice dough". Had he gone weak in the head? Was he taking leave of his senses? But the old man ignored all the curious glances and rude stares. Whenever he met anyone he knew, he'd give the customary greeting "I wish you long life," and add, "Sweet-rice dough, sweet-rice dough."

Hurry! Hurry! And the faster the old farmer went, the more he wobbled. Suddenly he stubbed his toe against a big rock and cried out in pain, "Oh my toe! Oh my toe!" But he kept going, hopping and limping and sometimes stopping to rub his foot. And he kept saying, "Oh my toe, oh my toe." Somehow, he had unconsciously replaced the name "sweet-rice dough" with this new refrain.

When he finally reached home and limped to his chair, he had no sooner seated himself than he said to his old wife, "Our daughter made me some delicious oh-my-toe, which is a speciality of her village. You too must make me some oh-my-toe because I'm very fond of it."

"Whatever is oh-my-toe?" the old woman answered. "I never heard of such a thing in my life!"

"What a fine wife you are! Here I am over sixty years old, and in all our years together, you've never made me any oh-my-toe! It's a disgrace! Your own daughter can make oh-my-toe, but you – you've never even heard the name!"

"And in all our years together, I've never heard a good word from you," shrilled the wife. "Nag, nag, nag! You've never appreciated anything I've done for you. What an ungrateful husband!"

"Out of my house, you old hag!" stormed the farmer.

Their quarrel grew louder and louder until all the neighbours were looking in the windows. One of the neighbours, watching the way the old woman looked as she quarrelled, said, "She rolls her lip up till she looks like a cake of sweet-rice dough."

"That's it! That's it!" cried the old farmer jubilantly. "That's what I meant – sweet-rice dough!"

So the quarrel ended as quickly as it had begun. The old woman knew very well how to make sweet-rice dough, and she set to work immediately to make some for her husband.

When the wife had finished making five cakes of sweet-rice dough, the farmer said, "Fine – three cakes for me, and two for you."

But the old woman served him only two of the cakes, keeping three for herself. This raised another storm, and they started abusing each other until they were shouting loudly.

"If you'd only shut your big mouth," shouted the farmer, "we could sit and enjoy our cakes."

"My big mouth!" screamed the wife. "And what of your big, big mouth?"

"You should stop your shrieking out of respect for your mother's memory," the man shouted.

Then, for a moment, there was complete silence. Finally, the farmer said, "Now, isn't this silence wonderful? Let's make a bet: whoever breaks the silence and speaks will get the smaller number of cakes."

"You'll be the one to break it!" retorted his wife.

"Then let's bet!" said the husband.

"Done!" said the wife.

So there the two of them sat at the table with the five cakes before them, and neither of them would say a word. Noon wore into evening and evening into night, but not a word did they utter. In silence, they went to bed.

Next morning, the silence continued. The farmer and his wife lay in separate beds, making not a sound, not a whisper. Occasionally, they would speak in sign language about whatever had to be done, but not a word was said. Thus the days passed, and the cakes stayed uneaten on the table, and the daily chores stayed undone. The food they had in the house began to run out, and neither of them would tell the other to go get more. Finally, they were too weak even to speak in sign language, and they took to their beds for good.



The neighbours and friends had been so used to the sound of quarrelling from the farmer's house that they became worried by the silence. They came to the house to see what was wrong and found the old man and woman lying motionless in their beds. The people came into the house and prodded them, but still they would not speak. They lay as if deaf and dumb.

The people decided that the old couple must be dead, and they got ready to bury them, and still the old man and woman would not utter a word. The people dug two graves and began to lower the bodies into them. As they were lowering the farmer, someone dropped a shovel, and it landed right on the old man's sore toe.

He simply couldn't stand the pain. "Oh my toe!" he cried loudly.

Up rose the old woman, dressed in her grave clothes. She cried, "I've won! It's you who broke the silence, and the three cakes of sweet-rice dough are mine – all mine!"

Indeed, it was the old woman who had won the bet... And that, my dears, is the difference between sweet-rice dough and oh-my-toe. Please don't ever forget.



Sina Married Loutali

A traditional children's singing game from Niutao, recorded by Tinilau Matolu

Sina married Loutali.

She opened up the earth oven and took the food to the house.

I look at you, you look at me.

They turned away from Savave.

Papu, Papu, Papu; Leia, Leia, Leia.

Tonu, Tonu, Tonu; Seka, Seka, Seka.

The sailors travel everywhere.



The Tricky Invitation

Retold by Veronica Maele



ne friendship that animals admired in the forest a long time ago was between Kamba the tortoise and Nyani the monkey. Each

and every day, the two were found together chatting on a big rock that lay on the river bank.

Many animals wished they had such a friendship where they could chat and laugh. It was difficult for one to believe that the two did not really live together.

One day, Kamba invited his friend, Nyani, to his home behind the big m'bawa tree. Getting up early in the morning, Kamba swept the surroundings of his house. He set the table and prepared a delicious meal. Nice flowers in a vase were put in the middle of the table, so the whole of it looked fantastic. By noon, Kamba went round the table, smiling that he had done a good job. He opened one plate and tasted a piece of beef. He opened another one with vegetables.

"Uuh, how tasty," Kamba said, eating the vegetables and taking another piece of beef from the plate.

Realising that he had prepared nice and tasty food, Kamba wished he had not invited his friend, Nyani.

But Nyani had been looking forward to visiting his friend. He left his house some few minutes before noon. As he came close to Kamba's house, he smelt the nice food. He imagined what he was going to eat.

"Odi! Odi!" Nyani said, standing at Kamba's door.

"Eeee," Kamba answered after some seconds.

Because of greed, Kamba did not open fast. He was busy tasting another piece of beef. He put the plates in order and ran to open the door.

"Welcome, my friend, come in," Kamba said to his friend, while chewing a piece of meat.

"Thank you," Nyani responded.

Nyani entered the house, but noted that Kamba was not as happy as he had expected him to be. When Kamba had greeted his friend, he told him that the meal was ready on the table.

"But first of all you must go to the river to wash your hands," Kamba told Nyani, as he continued chewing the piece of meat.

"No problem," Nyani replied as he tried to peep at what was on the plates.

Nyani quickly went to the river. The river was not far away. He washed his hands and came back. However, his hands were no longer clean when he reached Kamba's house. He had touched some soil as he walked, and his palms were dirty.

Meanwhile, Kamba was at the table enjoying the food. Seeing that Nyani's hands were dirty, Kamba told him to go and clean them once more. Nyani went again to the river, but the same thing happened on his return. His hands were dirty. Nyani went to the river several times, but each time, he reached Kamba's house with unclean hands.

"What should I do?" Nyani asked himself.

He was very hungry. Yet Kamba could not allow him to eat with such dirty hands. Nyani failed to understand how his friend could have treated him like that. Each time he came with dirty hands, he found Kamba eating the food happily. Finally, Nyani decided to give up.

"My friend, I have just been called home," Nyani lied to Kamba.

"Ooh, is that so? Okay, go well," Kamba said happily, without taking note of his friend's anger.

Nyani went home. All the way, he had to imagine how delicious the food he had failed to eat was.

Some months passed, and Nyani thought of inviting Kamba to a party. He sent a message to his friend telling him of the great party. Upon receiving the message, Kamba was very happy. He was then hoeing in his garden. He sat down, thinking of the suit he was to put on for the party. What interested him most was that several animals had also been called to the party.

"Oooh, that new suit; I will be the best dressed," Kamba said as he took his hoe home to try the suit on.

Days seemed to be dragging. At last, it was the day of the party. Kamba bathed and dressed in his suit. He looked at himself in the mirror for some time, taking steps forwards and backwards. Contented that he was looking handsome, he set off for the party. On his way, he met other animals. They all asked him where he was going.

"I am going to a party at my friend's house, just near the hills," he answered.

Kamba left the other animals admiring his suit. When he reached Nyani's house, he found the place well-decorated. The party had already started. Chameleon, Leopard, Butterfly and Namzeze, the clever bird, were already there. They were drinking and eating. It was then time for the master of ceremonies to welcome Kamba.

Namzeze, who was the master of ceremonies, immediately rose and made a loud applause while dancing. All responded, "Cheers!"

"Welcome, Kamba," Namzeze said, amidst noise from the other animals.

All of them clapped their hands. Kamba felt greatly honoured. He looked directly at his friend, Nyani, up in the tree where the party was taking place.

"My friend, come up please," Nyani told Kamba as he chewed a banana.

All the animals looked at Kamba, who tried to climb the tree. But he failed! Every time he lifted his leg, he fell on his shell. The shell produced an interesting sound, which made the other animals laugh. No animal felt sorry for Kamba as everybody was busy drinking and eating together with their friend, Nyani.



Ashamed, Kamba just turned and headed for his home, leaving the party still going on. On his way back home, he met some animals. They asked him if the party was already over. Kamba lied that it was. He did not reveal what he had experienced.

The next morning, news was all over the place that Kamba had failed to join his friends at the party in the tree. Kamba shrank into his shell for some days, ashamed at having been such a bad friend to Nyani.



ST LUCIA

Bush cat and cock

A Mende tale retold by an unnamed narrator from Bo in Freetown, transcribed by Marion Kilson



t one time, Bush Cat was very afraid of Cock. When Bush Cat saw Cock's comb, he thought that it was fire. Every time that Bush Cat saw Cock, he ran away.

Cock used to wonder, "Why is it that

every time this handsome young man sees me, he runs wui-wui-wui – he never stops?"

One day, Cock met Bush Cat. Bush Cat was about to run away.

Cock said, "Wait a minute!"

Bush Cat waited.

Cock said, "Why is it that every time you see me, you run away?"

Bush Cat said, "Friend, there are all kinds of things of which I am not afraid. But I am afraid of that big fire that is set on your head."

"Oh," Cock said, "there is no fire there!"

"You are lying."

Cock said, "Come, touch it."

"I will not do that. I would burn myself."

For some time, Cock kept saying to Bush Cat that there was no fire on his head. Bush Cat had wanted to eat Cock, but he was afraid of the fire. As soon as Bush Cat learnt that Cock's comb was not fire and that it would not burn him, he bent over and killed Cock.

Since that day, bush cats catch cocks and eat them.

This is the end of the story.

compere Lapin Pays a Price

Retold by Jacintha A. Lee



ompere Lapin could not stand gossip. He always got really annoyed any time he came across a group of animals discussing other people's affairs.

"But what wrong with them – they only talking about other people?"

Compere Lapin tried telling them that this was a bad habit to indulge in, but they only teased him.

Compere Lapin started getting really angry. He decided to ask God a favour.

"Mr God, these animals really talk a lot, you know. Teach them a lesson. Any time they talk about anyone, let them fall unconscious for one hour."

God granted him that favour. Next day, Compere Lapin filled a basket with all kinds of plants and seeds. There were yams, lettuce, cabbage, potatoes, dasheen and many others. These he started planting on a piece of hard, dry rock, singing away as he worked.



A few minutes later, Compere Tigre passed by. He could not believe his eyes. What was Compere Lapin doing on this dry place!

"Compere Lapin," he called out. "Man, what are you doing there?"

"Well, Compere, I just planting a bit of food. You know how hard things are these days," Lapin sang out, but still working away.

Compere Tigre scratched his chin and moved away.

"You mean to tell me on this rock Lapin go plant food? The man must be going ma... a... a..."

Compere Lapin smiled as Compere Tigre fell unconscious to the ground.

"Ah!" he breathed out. "There's one that go mind his business later on."

He then placed Compere Tigre under the naked sun.

"One whole hour of this go make him regret he said that about me."

Compere sat under the shade of a tree and waited until the hour was up. Tigre got up, frowning.

He could not understand what he was doing there. His eyes were sore, his lips were dry and some of the hair on his body had even got burnt. Tigre rubbed his eyes and looked at Lapin.

"Compere, what happen to me?"

"Well, Compere, that was a lesson on minding you business."

"Bu... bu... bu...," Compere Tigre stammered.

"If you tell the others why you in this state, the same thing go happen to you again," Compere warned him.

"Okay, Compere, I eh go tell nobody," Compere Tigre said as he limped away.

Compere Lapin smiled and looked around to see whether there was a new victim in sight. He saw no-one, not even Compere Pigeon who sat in the tree above him. Pigeon had seen everything that had taken place!

Every day, a different animal suffered the same fate as Compere Tigre. They could not warn the others for fear of a repeat. After a few days, Compere Pigeon decided to make his appearance. He placed a towel over his back and passed near Lapin. He said nothing except, "Good morning, Compere," and continued on his way.

Compere Lapin stopped and frowned. "That funny," he said to himself.

"Compere Pigeon," he called out, "I there working hard. I planting something here so that I go get some food later on."

"Work away, Compere. I myself going for a bath and a trim. See you, Compere." Pigeon walked daintily away. Compere Lapin could not believe his eyes and ears. He shook his head slowly.

"Ah! Ah! Pigeon really fresh you know. You mean to tell me Pigeon have hair on that bald head of his for him to trim? His head looking like a... a... a... a... "

Compere Lapin could not understand why the trees were dancing around him, why the ground was getting closer, closer, closer and closer...

Compere Pigeon, a little distance off, smiled as he saw Compere Lapin fall to the ground. He ran to the spot and said to the unconscious Lapin, "Do unto others as you want them to do to you, Compere."

E di Queek.

Quack.

The Dry Season

By Kwesi Brew

The year is withering; the wind Blows down the leaves; Men stand under the eaves And overhear the secrets Of the cold dry wind, Of the half-bare trees.

The grasses are tall and tinted, Straw-gold hues of dryness, And the contradicting awryness Of the dusty roads a-scatter With pools of colourful leaves, With ghosts of the dreaming year.

And soon, soon the fires,
The fires will begin to burn,
The hawk will flutter and turn
On its wings and swoop for the mouse,
The dogs will run for the hare,
The hare for its little life.



GON DUCKE (D

Why the Hippo has no hair

Retold by Pamela Kola



nce upon a time, the hippo and the fire were friends. They used to meet each other in the forest. They used to talk all night. It wasn't dark, because the fire's light was very bright.

One day, the hippo asked the fire to visit him.

"Thank you very much," said the fire. "Can I come tomorrow?"

"That will be very nice," said the hippo.

The two friends said goodbye to each other, then they went home.

The next day came. The fire did not wake up until the middle of the morning. Then he got up and began to walk to the hippo's house.

Suddenly, he saw a bush running away from him.

"Why are you running away?" asked the fire.

"You know why I am running away," answered the bush. "Look! The grass is running away too."

The fire was very near, and the bush was beginning to get very hot.

"I must go," said the bush. "You are hurting me. You are too hot. And you are hurting the little animals who live in me. You'll kill them."

"Wait for me!" called the fire. "I'll come with you."

The bush saw the fire running towards him. He tried to run. It was too late. The fire ate him, and he ate all the little animals, too.

The fire went on walking towards the hippo's house. When he went near bushes or grass, they ran away. If they did not run away very fast, the fire ate them.

The hippo was in his house, waiting for his friend. He looked out of the door. He saw the fire eating the bushes and the grass. The hippo was afraid.

When the fire saw the hippo, the fire called, "I'm coming!"

The hippo went to meet his friend.

"Come into my house," he said.

The fire went in. He looked round the inside of the house.

"This is a very nice house," said the fire. "I like it."

When they were both in the house, the fire was very near the hippo. The hippo was too hot. But he did not want to be unkind to his friend. He was afraid of the fire. But he did not want to show that he was afraid. So he told his friend to sit down.

"Where shall I sit?" asked the fire.

"On my bed," answered the hippo.

But the hippo's bed was made of dry grass. When the fire sat on it, he burnt it. The fire ate it all. When the bed was burning, the fire jumped on to the wall of the house. Soon all the house was burning.

The hippo was very, very frightened. He tried to run away but he was too fat, and he couldn't run fast. The poor hippo was too slow. So the fire caught the hippo's hair. Then the hair started to burn.

The hippo tried to run to the river. But he was running very slowly. All the time, his hair was burning.

"Help! Help!" he shouted.

In the end, he got to the river. He jumped into the water. At last, he was comfortable. The fire wasn't burning him. He wasn't too hot. He was very comfortable in the river.

But all the hippo's hair was gone. And it didn't grow again. It never grew again at all.

Why do hippos never go far from water? Why do they have no hair? Now you know the answers to these questions.

Why the Tail of the Deer Is short

A Haisla tale retold by Gordon Robinson



t was freezing. It was cold. It was the middle of winter and no-one had any fire. People were so cold that they would do anything to get some fire.

Some people had heard that a monster in a distant land had some fire in his house,

but he would not give any of his fire to anyone.

A meeting was called, and all the bird people and animal people were assembled to discuss ways and means of getting some of the fire. The grizzly bear, because of his strength, was chosen to go first on the dangerous mission of getting some fire for all the people and, after travelling many days, he managed to find the monster's house. The doorway to his house was in the form of a great big mouth, and this door, the grizzly bear decided to force open. He took hold of the jaws of the door and, by using all his strength, he was able to force the mouth open enough to let himself through, but just as he got part-way through, the mouth snapped shut and bit him in two. So the poor old grizzly bear lost his life.

Because of his ability to sneak so quietly, the wolf was chosen to try next, and when he arrived he found that the door was open. He sneaked as quietly as he could up to the door. Then, very carefully, he sneaked through, but he too slipped and was bitten in two as the door snapped closed.

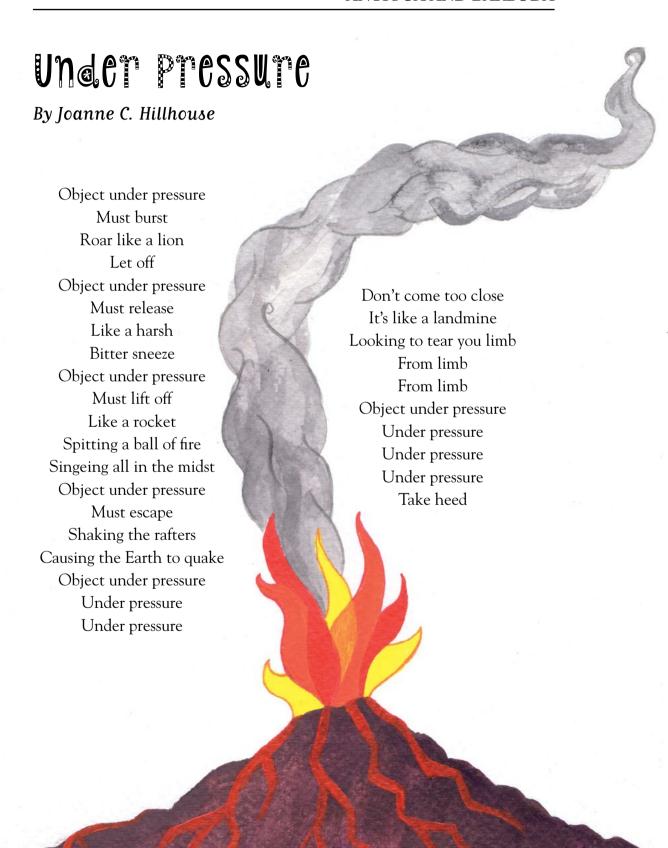
The mallard was then chosen next, and when he arrived, he flew right through the open door, which snapped shut behind him. He stuck his tail feathers into the fire and, as there was no other means of escape, he leaped straight up and flew out of the chimney hole in the roof. His tail feathers burned too rapidly, however, and the fire that he had taken with him soon went out. His tail was so badly burnt that it curled into a tight little curl, and it has stayed like that even to this day. He has also ever since been able to leap straight up when starting to fly.

Although he had failed, the mallard had shown how fire could be taken from the monster. All that was needed was someone with a long tail, and the deer was now chosen. He had a very handsome tail, fully as long as his body and beautifully wavy.

Without hesitating, the deer bounded gracefully away towards the house of the monster. He looked so graceful, and his leaps seemed so effortless, that a cheer went up from all the bird and animal people. In due time, the deer arrived and, as the door was open, he leaped right through and the door snapped shut behind him. He bounded several times around the inside of the house, then he put the end of his tail into the fire, leapt out of the chimney hole in the roof and raced away back home.

Running with all his speed, he was able to get back to the meeting place and light the large pile of wood that the others had already gathered, and then everyone warmed themselves at the fire. But the beautiful tail of the deer was no more – all that was left was a little stub, and the deer's tail has been short ever since.





Yasur, the voicano man

Retold by an unnamed narrator from Tanna, transcribed by Paul Gardissat



aving come from the vast stretches of southern oceans, Yasur started to look for a home suitable to his liking. He tested the depths, here and there, of all possible underwater places, but he couldn't find the ideal place anywhere. He thus spent his days and nights without any success.

However, one lovely morning, full of ardent desire to find his home at last, he came ashore on the island of Tanna at the point of Loanpakel. Once on dry land, he took the form of a human being so as not to arouse the suspicions of the people living on the island. He criss-crossed the north part of the island, passing seven villages and asking at each one if he could rest there for a while in order to catch his breath. No-one was willing to welcome him.

He continued on his way, and that night arrived in the village of Namtain, which is close to the sea. Yasur saw many advantages to staying there, and so, once again, took the form of a volcano without difficulty. He stayed there for five days and five nights but, in the end, was not pleased with the place because, several times during the night and day, the sea came and tickled his feet. He decided to find asylum elsewhere.

In the afternoon, when he had become Yasur the Volcano Man again, he left the village of Namtain in the north of the island and started to head south-east. He kept on, village after village – Loeasia, Wesisi, White Sand – always prospecting for a suitable place to rest but never finding one. In this way, he arrived at Siwi in the middle of the night.

He saw smoke rising from a small hut and, beside it, two old women. The two old women were watching two laplaps that they had just put into a traditional oven: that is to say that the laplaps were well-wrapped with leaves, laid on red-hot rocks and then completely covered with earth to preserve the heat. Thus, the two laplaps looked like two little volcanoes placed one next to the other.

Yasur found the occasion a perfect time to stop and smoke a pipe before taking up his journey again. With all the charm and politeness required of the situation, Yasur asked the two old women to light his pipe. The two old women, pleased to help a traveller from far away, jumped to his aid and even, when Yasur asked, let him sit in their hut while smoking.

Yasur felt very comfortable next to the two ovens that were giving off an agreeable heat. It was the perfect place for him. In a little while, his desire became truth. The ground shook with such violence that the sound was heard all over the island.

The two old women panicked and ran for the door of their hut only to see Yasur sink quickly into the ground and disappear forever.

The earth was shaking harder and harder and huge cracks were opening at the feet of the two old women. Enormous flames followed by burning lava swallowed up the two old women and their hut, covering them forever.

This is how, at Siwi, on the island of Tanna, Yasur the volcano was born. If you have the occasion to visit the island of Tanna one day, you will see the conical form of Yasur in the village of Namtain in the north of the island and, at the foot of the volcano, the two laplaps covered by lava that look like two small volcanoes.

Banza (An extract)

By Paul Keens-Douglas

How yu mean
Banza break he foot?
He what? Been in fire again?
Ah know it, ah know it.
Ah always say it bound to happen.
Ah caution him time an' time again,
Leave de people fire alone,
But he can' hear.
Like he have hot-foot.
Every fire in town, he dey.
He can't hear siren blow,

De man always chasin' fire brigade.

If he like fire so much,

But is gone, he gone.

Why he don't turn fireman?

Eh? Yu tell me dat?

If fire in de country, Banza dey.

If fire in de town, Banza dey.

Anywhere dey have fire, Banza dey.

How he break de foot?

He what? He fall off de roof?

Yu mean Banza been on de roof?

He been what? Helpin' dem hold hose?

How yu ehn see he mad?

What he doin' on de people roof?





The Chinese Princess

Retold by Zainab Ghulam Abbas



n the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, the Valley of Kashmir was under the rule of a governor named Ali Mardan Khan. He was very fond of hunting. One day, he was in search of game in a forest not far from the beautiful Dal Lake when he saw a stag. Leaving his

companions behind, he gave chase. After some time, the stag eluded him and disappeared into some bushes.

Ali Mardan drew rein, and waited in the hope that it would come out of its hiding place; but there was no sign of it. Tired and disappointed, he was returning to his companions when suddenly he heard someone crying. He went in the direction of the sound, and there he found, seated under a tree, a damsel of surpassing beauty, richly dressed and bejewelled. It was obvious that she did not belong to this country.

Ali Mardan was dazzled by her beauty. He dismounted and enquired of her as to who she was and why she was crying.

"Oh, sir," she replied, "I am the daughter of a Chinese king. My father fell in a battle between him and the ruler of a neighbouring province. Many of our noblemen were taken prisoner, but I, somehow, managed to escape. Since then, I have been wandering from place to place until I reached here." "Fair maiden," Ali Mardan replied, consoling her, "now you need wander no more. No harm will come to you, for I am the ruler of this country."

The Chinese princess wept on hearing this.

"Oh, my lord," she said, "I weep for my father, I weep for my mother, I weep for my country and I weep for myself. What will become of me? Friendless and homeless, how can I live?"

"Weep no more, lovely one," the governor said compassionately. "Stay in my palace, where you will be safe and comfortable."

"That gladly will I do," said the girl, still crying. "And were you to ask me to become your wife, I should not be able to refuse you."

On hearing these words, Ali Mardan's face brightened. He held the girl's hands.

"Come, my beloved! I will make you my wife," he said, and he took her to his palace, and they were married soon after.

Ali Mardan and his wife spent some time happily together, when, one day, she approached him, saying, "Build me a palace by the lake where, from the balcony, I can see my reflection in the water."

Thereupon, Ali Mardan immediately gave orders for the construction of the new palace. Thousands of labourers and masons were engaged to complete the building and, in the shortest possible time, a beautiful palace of marble adorned the bank of the Dal Lake. It was enclosed on three sides by gardens full of flowers of the rarest fragrance and beauty, and there, beside the lake, she lived happily with Ali Mardan whose love for her increased every day.



But their happiness did not last long. One morning, Ali Mardan woke up feeling unwell.

"I have a pain in my stomach," he told his Chinese wife.

He did not worry much about it. But, as the pain persisted throughout the day, his wife sent for the royal physician, who examined him and gave him some medicine, but still the pain did not subside. Ali Mardan was confined to his room, and the Chinese princess constantly attended to his needs. Many days passed, but his malady was no better.

Now it chanced that a yogi (holy man) was passing by way of the Dal Lake, carrying a small jar of water. He was surprised to see the new palace.

"I have never seen a palace here before," he said to himself. "Who could have built it, I wonder?"

As he felt tired and the day was hot, he went into the gardens of the palace and sat down under a tree. So much at peace did he feel among the flower beds, and so sweetly did the birds sing around him, that soon he was lulled to sleep.

Now, at this very hour, Ali Mardan, feeling slightly better, was having a stroll in the garden. He was walking slowly, supported by his courtiers.

Ali Mardan was a man of humble heart and always showed great respect towards holy men irrespective of their belief, so instead of becoming angry with the intruder, he smiled.

"Don't disturb the sleeping yogi," he said to his attendants. "Go bring the best bed you can find and lay this holy man gently upon it." Then seeing the jar of water, he added, "Take great care of this too."

Two hours later, when the yogi awoke, he was surprised to find himself on such a comfortable bed.

"Don't worry," said an attendant, who approached, seeing him awake. "You are the guest of Ali Mardan, the governor of Kashmir, who desires to see you."

Then, noticing that he was searching for something, the attendant added, "Your jar of water is in safe custody, rest assured."





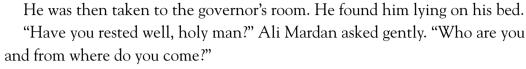












"Sire," replied the yogi, "I am a humble disciple of my guru (teacher), who lives at some distance from here in a forest. My master likes to drink the water of a sacred spring and sends me every now and then to fetch it. The last time I passed this way, there was no palace here, so I was surprised to find this one today. But I must now take leave of you as I am already delayed, and my master will be anxious if I don't get back before dark."

The yogi then thanked him for his kindness and was just leaving the bedroom when Ali Mardan was seized by a spasm of pain. On enquiring, the yogi came to know of the governor's mysterious malady. Then he left the palace.

That evening, the yogi returned to his master and related to him the events of the day. He particularly mentioned the hospitality shown to him by the governor. The guru was very pleased to hear of it. Then the disciple told him of how the governor was in the grip of a strange illness, which no physician had so far been able to cure.

"I am sorry to hear about his illness," said the guru. "Take me to him tomorrow, and we will see if we can do anything to help him."

Next morning, the disciple took his master to the palace and sought an audience with the governor, who was still confined to his bedroom. The disciple introduced his master to Ali Mardan, and also told him the purpose of their visit.

"I am much honoured by your holy presence, o guru," said Ali Mardan.

"And if you can cure me of this disease, I shall be grateful to you all my life."

"Show me your body," said the holy man.

Hardly had he uncovered himself, when the guru enquired, "Have you recently married?"

"Yes," said Ali Mardan and briefly told the holy man of his encounter with the Chinese princess and of his marriage with her.















"Just as I suspected," observed the holy man. Then in a grave tone, he said, "O Governor! You are really very ill, but I can cure you if you do as I tell you."

The governor was alarmed and assured the holy man that he would do as he was bidden.

That evening, Ali Mardan, as instructed by the guru, ordered two kinds of kitcheri to be cooked, one sweet and the other salty, and placed on one dish in such a way that the salty kitcheri was on one side and the sweet on the other. When, as usual, the governor and his Chinese wife sat down to eat, he turned the salty side of the dish towards her. She found her portion too salty, but seeing that her husband was eating with relish,

When the time came for them to retire, Ali Mardan, under the instructions of the guru, had secretly given orders to the attendants that the drinking water should be removed from their bedroom and that the room should be locked from outside.

she made no remark and ate in silence.

As was expected, the Chinese princess woke up very thirsty in the middle of the night and, finding no water and no way out, she became desperate. She looked at her husband to assure herself that he was asleep, then she assumed the shape of a snake, slipped through the window and went down to the lake to quench her thirst. After a few minutes, she returned by the same way and, resuming her human shape, lay down beside her husband again.

Ali Mardan, who in fact had been feigning sleep, was horrified at what he had seen and was unable to sleep for the rest of the night.

"O Governor!" said the holy man. "As you have seen, your wife is no woman but a Lamia, a snake woman." Then he explained to Ali Mardan,

"If, for one hundred years, the glance of no human being falls on a snake, a crest forms on its head and it becomes the king of the snakes, and if, for another hundred years, it comes not within sight of a man, it changes into a dragon, and if, for three hundred years, it has not been looked upon by a human being, it becomes a Lamia. A Lamia possesses enormous powers and can change its appearance at will. It is very fond of assuming the form of a woman. Such is your wife, o Governor," he concluded.

"Horrors!" exclaimed the governor. "But is there no way of escape from this monster?"

"Yes, there is," replied the holy man. "Only we must act cautiously so as not to arouse her suspicions. For, if she suspects even remotely that her secret is disclosed, she will destroy not only you but your country as well. Therefore, do precisely what I tell you."

Then the guru told the governor of his plan, which was carried out at once. A house of lac was built at some distance from the palace, which had only a bedroom and a kitchen. A big oven with a strong lid was built in the kitchen.

The royal physician then advised Ali Mardan to confine himself in this house for forty days. During this period, no-one but his wife should be allowed to see him.

His wife was only too glad to have Ali Mardan all to herself. A few days passed, during which she happily attended to all his needs. One day, Ali Mardan told his wife, "The physician has prescribed a special loaf for me."

"I dislike ovens," she said.

"But my life is in danger," said the governor. "If you really love me, do this for me."

She had no alternative but to cook the loaf. She went to the kitchen and set to work. Just when she stooped over the mouth of the oven to turn the loaf, Ali Mardan, seizing his opportunity, collected all his strength, pushed her in and clamped down the lid so that she was unable to escape. He then

hurried out and, as directed by the holy man, set light to the house, which, being made of lac, flared up instantaneously.

"You have done well," said the guru, who just then came up. "Now go to your palace and rest there for two days. On the third day, come to me, and I will show you something."

The governor obeyed. In these two days, his health was completely restored. He became as cheerful and strong as he had been on the day he met the fake Chinese princess.

On the third day, as appointed, Ali Mardan and the guru went to the place where the house of lac had stood. All that was left of it was a heap of ashes.

"Look carefully in the ashes," said the holy man, "and you will find a pebble among them."

Ali Mardan searched for a few minutes.

"Here it is," he said at last.

"Good," said the guru. "Now, which will you have: the pebble or the ashes?"

"The pebble," answered the Governor.

"All right," said the holy man. "Then I will take the ashes." Whereupon he carefully wrapped the ashes in the hem of his garment and went away with his disciple.

Ali Mardan soon discovered the virtue of the pebble. It was the philosopher's stone, the touch of which can change all metals into gold. But what the worth of the ashes was remained a secret, for Ali Mardan never saw the guru or his disciple again.



Night of the scorpion

By Nissim Ezekiel

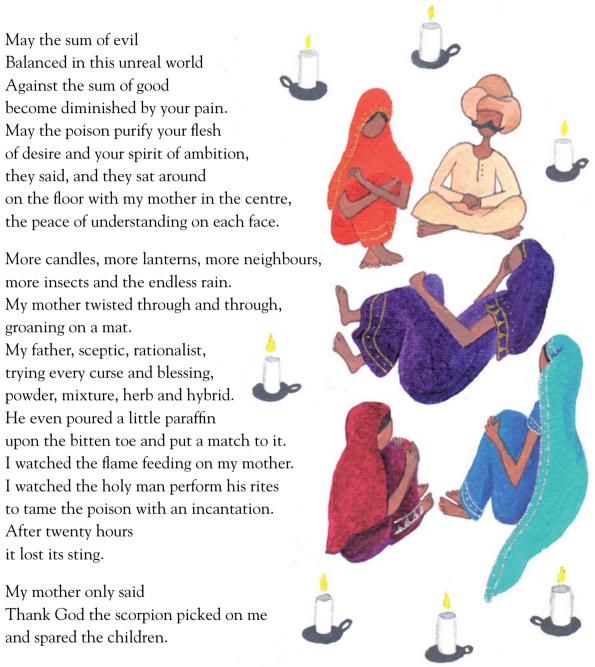
I remember the night my mother was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours of steady rain had driven him to crawl beneath a sack of rice. Parting with his poison – flash of diabolic tail in the dark room – he risked the rain again. The peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times to paralyse the Evil One. With candles and lanterns throwing giant scorpion shadows on the mud-baked walls they searched for him: he was not found. They clicked their tongues. With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said. May he sit still, they said. May the sins of your previous birth be burnt away tonight, they said. May your suffering decrease the misfortunes of your next birth, they said



May the sum of evil Balanced in this unreal world Against the sum of good become diminished by your pain. May the poison purify your flesh of desire and your spirit of ambition, they said, and they sat around on the floor with my mother in the centre, the peace of understanding on each face.

more insects and the endless rain. My mother twisted through and through, groaning on a mat. My father, sceptic, rationalist, trying every curse and blessing, powder, mixture, herb and hybrid. He even poured a little paraffin upon the bitten toe and put a match to it. I watched the flame feeding on my mother. I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation. After twenty hours it lost its sting.

My mother only said Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared the children.



Bhadazela and Mningi

A Zulu tale retold by Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi, translated by Noverino N. Canonici



he king of a certain country had died. The kings of that country were customarily strengthened with the fat of the liver of a water dragon. When the new king was installed, the nation was told to get ready for the day of his strengthening, according to their customs. Messengers

were sent to the doctors to supply the fat in question, but in vain. It was soon found that all the doctors had run out of it.

It was then announced that there was a pool that held many of those water dragons, but that the pool also had a snake with many heads by the name of Mningi. This pool was feared by every single person because of this snake. Noone dared attack the snake. The doctors, when consulted, declared that Mningi had to be killed if the dragon's fat was to be obtained. Each doctor proposed a plan to achieve this, but all failed.

The king then issued a proclamation: the young man who was able to get hold of the dragon's liver fat would be rewarded with the hand of Ntanyana, the king's daughter, in marriage.

As soon as this was made known, young men vied with each other to get the dragon's liver fat. Each one confident they would be the one to marry

Ntanyana. But all failed miserably. The king was greatly distressed at the news that the fat from the dragon's liver could not be obtained. He realised that it would be a bad omen were he not to be strengthened by such a medicine.

As people were running out of plans, a young man called Bhadazela came forward. He said, "Your Majesty, I can kill Mningi."

This young man, Bhadazela, did not look very strong. Therefore, when he made such a daring statement, many laughed at him saying, "How can you, being as you are, aspire to the hand of Ntanyana?"

Bhadazela, however, spoke with great confidence. The king gave him his trust and told him to do what he had set his mind to. Should he succeed in getting the dragon's fat, Ntanyana's hand would be his.

Bhadazela asked for some time to get ready, because he understood that he was exposing himself to sure death in case of failure. He built a big house, leaving only a small aperture. When the house was completed, he searched for young horses as fast as the wind. He placed them at regular intervals, so that, when one was tired, he could mount another.

When all of his preparations were finished, he set off to find out where the snake placed its lamp at night, and then decided on the day for attacking Mningi. He understood that, in order to lure the snake away from the pool, he had to get hold of its lamp. He prepared sharp weapons and left them at home. When everything was ready, he went to the king.

"Your Majesty," he said, "today is the day. Today I shall kill Mningi. I am going to the pool now." The king and Ntanyana wished him good luck.

When the sun was setting, he took his horse and made for the pool. He stopped some distance away. He saw the snake's lamp on the bank. He made a plan to take that lamp. It was the snake's habit to leave the lamp at the water's edge to shed light on the whole pool.

When he had worked out his plan, he left his horse at a short distance away and tip-toed towards the lamp. The snake was not looking and did not see him. He snatched the lamp and jumped on his horse, driving it as fast as the wind. There he was, disappearing as he went! When he reached the

second horse, he jumped on it and left the tired one. He did the same with the third horse.

But what about the lamp's owner? As soon as it realised that its lamp was gone, it started off in pursuit. In spite of its enormous mass, it ran very fast. Its dust rose to the sky. Bhadazela could hear its whistling noises getting closer and closer behind him. Even the earth seemed to tremble.

He looked back and saw the dust getting dangerously close. He knew that, should the snake catch him on the road, he was as good as dead. But he was now near his house. Even the horse was not just running: it was flying like the wind, as it could feel the danger approaching at its back.

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When he arrived in his yard, he immediately got inside the house, still holding Mningi's lamp. He bolted himself in, leaving the small aperture open. He had just finished locking himself in when Mningi's massive frame burst into the yard, having seen where he had entered. The aperture was just large enough for one head at a time.



But who had ever counted the heads of that snake? Mningi wrapped himself round Bhadazela's house with its whole massive body. Bhadazela, however, had built the house so strong that it did not crumble up. He waited in silence inside, clutching his weapons.

A head came in, he cut it off smartly. Then another and another and another, until all were cut, and Mningi fell completely motionless.

At the king's palace, people were sitting and waiting. A messenger came from Bhadazela saying, "Bhadazela sent me, Lord. He asks permission to bring Mningi's lamp, which he has snatched from the pool."

What a surprise for all those gathered there, including the king! They looked at the messenger as if he had been talking nonsense. But when they realised that Bhadazela's achievement made it possible to get the fat from the dragon's liver, all acclaimed with great joy, including Ntanyana.

Everybody dressed up for the occasion, waiting for the arrival of Mningi's lamp. The king issued a proclamation to the whole kingdom that all should be present when Bhadazela brought Mningi's lamp to the king. Indeed, there were a good number of people on the day Bhadazela appeared, holding the token of his heroic deed, happily singing. All the people now looked on him with different eyes.

After that, Bhadazela went to catch the water dragon. He also took Mningi's fat, because it too was a powerful medicine to strengthen the king. On the day the king was strengthened with the fat from the dragon's liver, it was also announced that Ntanyana was to marry Bhadazela. Bhadazela became an important person.

The Glass knight

Retold by Jan Williams



hat's happening?"

The people of Saffron Walden just could not understand it. Fruit was rotting on the tree. Birds were dropping dead from the sky. The rivers were poisoned. They were terrified.

Soon there would be nothing left to eat or drink.

"It's the fault of that thing... that monster... that dragon," a local farmer moaned. "I have seen it in the fields, and it's terrible. It just opens its mouth and puffs out that foul breath, and then everything living in its path dies..."

As he talked, fear got the better of him, and he could no longer speak properly.

In the end, the sheriff said, "Let's go and see the wise woman. Maybe she can explain it." A small crowd gathered and followed him. They too wanted to hear what she had to say.

The wise woman was waiting for them on top of the hill. Her head nodded and nodded on her skinny neck as she greeted them, "Ah! You have come. I have been expecting this. I have seen the beast myself and know what damage it does." Very gently she patted the farmer's arms and encouraged him to tell everybody what the dragon looked like.

"It has the head and claws of a rooster." For a moment, the farmer half expected the people to laugh at him, but they did not. His terror was too obviously real. Encouraged by the fact that they were taking him seriously, the farmer babbled on, "It has the forked tongue of a serpent, which swings backwards and forwards. It has the wings of a bat and a long arrow-shaped tail like... like the Devil. All over its body there are barbs."

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"And what colour is it?"

"Every shade of black and yellow, with a white spot like a crown on its head. And it walks upright on two strong legs with a mighty tail..."

This seemed to match the diagrams that the wise woman had found in her well-thumbed *Book of the World's Most Hideous Creatures*. Then she drew breath and asked the question that was obviously the most important of all, "What are his eyes like?"

The farmer shook his head. He did not know. He had not looked into the dragon's eyes.

The wise woman's nods grew more and more frequent. She was growing increasingly agitated, "I knew it! I knew you could not have looked into his eyes. You would have been dead if you had. I must warn you all. This monster is a basilisk!" she screamed. She waved her skinny finger at the crowd in warning, "Never look into its eyes, for its baleful glance will kill any living creature. The basilisk is the rarest and most dangerous of dragons."

She began to give all sorts of magical descriptions, using proper technical terms. Not everybody present understood all this mumbo jumbo, but they could sense the danger they were in. The town's sheriff advised that a knight be sent for, a knight with experience in rescuing other towns in danger.

"Yes! Yes!" the people all said.

The sheriff galloped off to see what could be done. Sighing with relief, the people went home to the safety of their warm beds.

It took a while to find a suitable knight. Sadly, some foolish people could not wait. They had to see the dragon for themselves and ventured into the street, only to be confronted directly by the dreadful eyes of the basilisk. One glance, and death was immediate. If the killings were allowed to continue, there could be a severe decline in the population. The basilisk was such an enthusiastic man-eater. Nothing seemed to deter him.

The knight was terrified to be told of all the basilisk's powers. The good people of Saffron Walden, it was clear, were in peril. He went to his room at the inn immediately to begin his preparations. Gloomily, he polished his armour late into the night, going over and over the difficulties of fighting this sort of dragon. He was rapidly coming to the conclusion that he had taken on more than he could cope with.

How could he kill such a ferocious man-eater? How could he avoid the breath that burns all in front of it? It could not be defeated by a sword or a spear, for its poisonous blood would flow the length of the weapon like lightning, withering the body of the person holding it. There were some, however, who said that in this situation the herb rue could have healing qualities.

And those eyes! How hideous they were! It was curious that the beast only closed its eyes when it drank water from a pool. Did that hold a clue to its weakness? He was determined to find some way to help these people.

Right up until dawn, the knight tossed and turned; and you know how it is – sometimes, in our sleep, we get the answer to our most nagging problems. He woke to an early sun, feeling far more cheerful, yet he did not rush into action yet. He had something to arrange first.

The people watched from behind their shuttered windows, getting more and more restless, but they had faith in the knight. Then, one of the village lads caught a glimpse of the knight riding to the field where the basilisk lay.

"He's here. Hurrah!"

"Whatever is he wearing?"

"Whatever it is, I can see myself reflected in it."

"It's a suit of armour made of crystal mirrors!"

"Whatever good will that do? He's got no sword. He's carrying rue and a sprig of magic rowan."

Silence fell. The people had lost faith in the knight, but slowly they followed him through the trees that lined the road. Then they stopped when he stopped.

The knight stood in front of the basilisk with his eyes tightly closed. The monster itself rose up on its legs and stared at the knight, its baleful eyes glittering with malice; and then, with an almighty shriek of pain, the loathsome creature saw itself reflected in the armour's crystal glass. The horror of the moment seemed to freeze it into complete immobility. The beast fell and was still: still in the finality of its death, caused by looking into its own toxic eyes.

No-one moved. Then the knight rolled the basilisk's corpse into a hole in the ground and scattered it with rue to eliminate any trace of poison.

An almighty cheer echoed on all sides. Drums, tabors and fiddles began playing, and the people danced. All day and all night they danced, some dancing as far as Thaxted, and some say the dancing still goes on when the people remember their lucky escape.





War sons

By Christopher Talie of Wape, translated by Don Laycock et al.

Give me bow, give me arrow, give me shield, give me spear. The journey is long and dangerous; give me betel nut, pepper stick and lime. Come my dog, come! The journey dry and weary, so fetch me water. Bring me dagger and knife. Light me the magic fire; light me the fire of life. Hand me the devil's blood wrapped in the magic leaf. Hand me the devil's bone wrapped in the magic leaf. Now give me power. Hand them all from your back; let your eyes not see – lest my enemies survive. I must leave before dawn; daylight will weaken my charms. Ancestors, kinsmen and friends, you who have left before me, be close to me, be at my side.



Thi, the sun woman

Retold by Francis Firebrace



t the beginning of time, Yhi, the warrior Sun Woman, whose campfire was the only light on Earth at that time, liked the taste of Aboriginal flesh. She would kill, roast and eat anyone she caught. So all the people lived in fear of the Sun Woman.

At this time, travelling through the country was a brave warrior, Kudna, the Lizard Man, who possessed five boomerangs. He'd performed many incredible feats with them.

So it was that Lizard Man came upon the camp of his friends, the Euro people, only to find that every single one had been dragged off, killed and eaten by the Sun Woman. In a fit of rage, Lizard Man swore, "I will kill Yhi, the evil Sun Woman!"

The Lizard Man quietly approached her campfire. But Yhi saw him coming. She snarled her hate in his direction and hurled fireballs at him, making him shelter behind rocks and trees. Closer and closer he came.

Sensing the danger, the Sun Woman turned and reached for her spear. The first boomerang left the brown-skinned warrior's hands, whirring around in a savage arc, striking the Sun Woman with such force that she fell backwards into her fire, turning the whole thing into a giant fireball, which rolled off the edge of the Earth.

Immediately, the whole place was plunged into darkness.

The Lizard Man stood there in the darkness and silence. He'd saved his people from the Sun Woman, but at what cost? Now there was no light, only darkness. He stood there, horrified at what he'd done, not knowing how to bring the light back again.





Then Kudna, the Lizard Man, remembered. He still had four boomerangs left in his possum-skin belt. So he turned to the north, took a boomerang from his belt, and he threw it.

Whrrrrrrr... and he waited. Nothing happened. The darkness remained.

He turned to the south and threw another boomerang.

Whrrrrrrr... and he waited, but again, nothing happened.

The Lizard Man turned and faced the west and threw a boomerang.

Whrrrrrrr... but, once again, nothing happened. There was not even a glimmer of light.

Finally, he slowly turned in an easterly direction, took the last remaining boomerang from his possum-skin belt, raised the weapon far back past his head, and, with all the strength he could muster, he threw it.

As it left his hand in a blur of yellow ochre and wood, it made a sound that only a boomerang makes when thrown by an Aboriginal warrior.

Whrrrrrrr... It disappeared to the east, into the darkness over the edge of the Earth.

In darkness and a really deep silence, the warrior waited... and waited... until, finally, an amazing thing began to happen.

For the first time ever, a light began to appear on the eastern rim of the Earth, and the Lizard Man was able to see the silhouettes of the mountains and the trees. Suddenly, a great ball of fire rose high into the air and travelled, ever so slowly, across the sky and disappeared into the western sky, thus creating day and night: day, to hunt and to gather food; night, to sit around the campfire, to dance and sing, to listen to stories, and, finally, to rest.

The Lizard Man became the hero of his people for saving them from Yhi, the Sun Woman, and for creating day and night... way back at the beginning of time.

To this day, some Aboriginal people will not kill a goanna or gecko because they believe the Lizard Man saved them from the Sun Woman, Yhi, and a life of darkness when he created day and night.

Mama

By Steve 'Nii Kwashi' Roberts

For Mama and all childless mothers

Dey seh I nevah come from your womb
An' yet you are my mother
Strong firm an' living
Even as my whimpering eyes
Gaze to yours seeking
A cure for my grazed knees
Mama you are the lamp
Shining strong in the darkness
That I fear
Extolling the virtues of my destiny

With love an' honesty
You calm my fears
Looking proudly at my 10 over 10
Lashing me firmly towards
The way of truth an' right

Mama dear mama
You are my mama
My hurricane lamp
Tossing in the wind
Protecting
Loving
An' being loved
For blood may be thicker than water
But love thicker than blood.



ZAMBIA

The Spean That Brought fire

Retold by Chiman L. Vyas



n a certain village, there were two men who had married two sisters. One of the brothers-in-law was a blacksmith, the other was a carpenter. The blacksmith forged all sorts of iron weapons, for example, axes, spears and arrows.

One night, a herd of elephants was heard trumpeting very near the village. So the carpenter's wife urged her

husband to hunt one of the elephants. The carpenter went to the blacksmith and borrowed a spear and went to the bush to kill an elephant.

After a hard chase, he managed to thrust the spear into an elephant's thigh. The elephant gave a loud roar and started to run fast, with the spear still in his thigh. The carpenter followed him to the edge of the bush but failed to find him. Disappointed, he returned home.

In the morning, his brother-in-law came to ask for his spear. The carpenter told him the story of how he had lost the spear, but the blacksmith insisted that he should return his spear to him. The carpenter was quite prepared to buy him another spear, but this did not please the blacksmith, who began to threaten that there would be trouble if he did not get back the same spear that he had lent.

Wearily, the carpenter set off with his dog in search of the speared elephant. He travelled all day long and rested in a tree at night. In this way, he spent nine days and nine nights searching for the elephant but did not find him.

On the tenth day, he happened to see some elephants. He went to them and asked, "O kind and helpful animals! Can any of you tell me where the wounded one is?"

One of them came forward and informed him. "That one has left the Earth and gone to the underworld, still carrying the spear that he could not manage to take out of his leg."

"Do you know the way to that world? If so, I should be grateful if you would show it to me."

"Turn to the south, climb up and over three hills and cross three rivers, and you will arrive at that place."

The carpenter started off. He climbed the three hills and crossed the three great rivers, and he saw the footprints of the elephant. Following the track, he reached the underworld. It took forty days and forty nights to arrive at the place. Then he approached the chief of that world. After an exchange of greetings, he asked the chief whether he had received the speared elephant.

The chief first served him with some food and water and asked him to eat and drink and wait for the reply. When the carpenter had finished his food and drink, which he shared with his dog, the chief said, "Yes. There is one elephant who has brought a spear with him in his body."

"Then may I see the spear and take it back?" asked the carpenter.

"Certainly. It is of no use to me or my people here," replied the chief.

"Then show me the spear for which I have come such a long way."

"There's no harm in my doing so, but there's a problem. I can take you to my armoury and show you all the spears, but it is up to you to find your own. They are all mixed up. I myself am helpless. If you can distinguish one of them, you may take it with pleasure," smiled the chief.

The chief entered the armoury. The carpenter followed him with his dog. All the spears were standing by the wall. Seeing the large number of them, the carpenter was really puzzled. All were of the same size. All had gone rusty. It was not easy to distinguish the one that belonged to his brother-in-law from the others. In order to hide his inability

to find the spear, he patted his dog.

As if the dog understood his master's difficulty, he began his work. He began to smell spear after spear. In a few minutes, after smelling one of them, he pulled it out and threw it straight on to the floor.

LESOTHO

Then he came back to his master and looked at him anxiously. He looked at him and looked at the spear. He looked at the spear and looked again at his master.

The carpenter wiped the sweat from his face and came forward. First he bowed before the chief, lay himself down at his feet and said in a happy voice, "O Lord of the Underworld, I have found the spear." He picked up the spear and showed it to the chief. The chief was very surprised at the skill of the carpenter and his dog.

"You are a clever human being," he said. "And your dog is equally clever. I must reward you for showing such skill. Ask for anything you like, and it shall be given to you."

The carpenter thought for a while. He remembered how difficult it had been for him to find the way to the underworld because it was so dark. He also found that there was fire burning here all day and all night. But he could not ask for it.

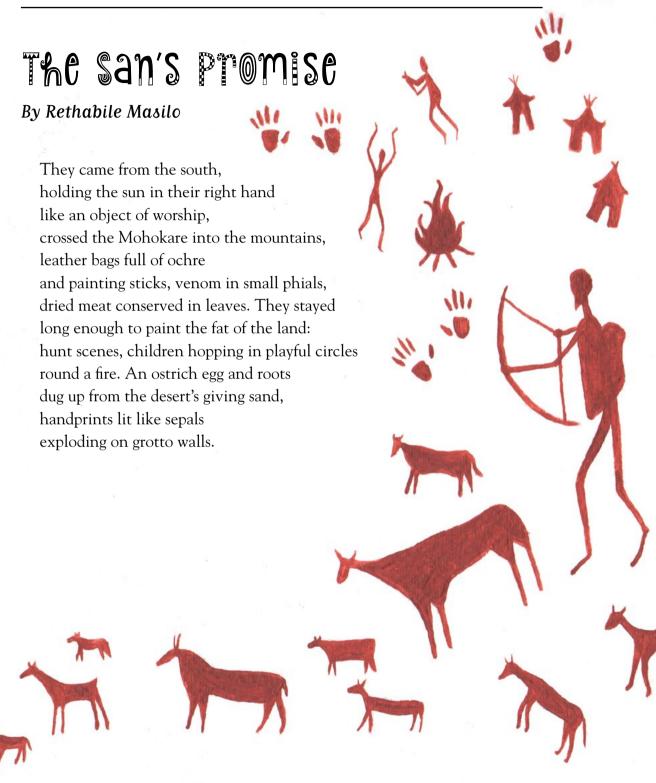
The chief asked him again, "Tell me, you man of another world, what should I give to you?"

At this, the carpenter found his courage and said, "May I have some fire then, if it is possible?"

"Why not? Why not? I can imagine the difficulties you will have finding your way home. You may take some and keep it with you forever, to use for yourself and for all of your kind," said the chief, and he asked his messenger to give some of the fire to the man.

With the spear and the fire and the dog, the carpenter went home. When he arrived at the village, people could not recognise him for a while. It was only when he went to the blacksmith to return his spear that they discovered he was their carpenter.

When he told the whole story of his search, his dog and the secret of fire, the whole village was really delighted. Even their chief came to greet him and welcome him back to the village. The blacksmith presented the spear to his brother-in-law, and the village was merry.



The Burning Heads of the Susua Hills

A Maasai tale retold by Stephen Muturi Gichuru



nce upon a time, there was a group of girls who lived in some caves in a hillside. Those girls were really giants, and they called themselves the Burning Heads of the Susua Hills. Whenever some warriors came to the hills for a feast, the girls would eat them while they were sleeping,

after their food.

One day, some warriors were passing over the hills to fight with their enemies in the neighbouring country. When it was nearly dark, they stopped and decided to build a fire, cook their food and go to sleep. "We'll continue our journey tomorrow," they said.

When the warriors were drinking their soup and eating some meat, the girls came out of their caves and started marching towards them. The warriors saw them and called out, "What beautiful girls! Come and eat with us."



The girls walked over and sat down with the warriors. They talked to them and shared their food, but all the time, they were really counting them and planning to have a feast that night!

The girls ate a lot of meat, and then they said they wanted to go home.

"Come back and see us again," called out the warriors.

"We'll be back sooner than you think," said the girls, laughing, and went back to their caves in the hills.

In the middle of the night, when they thought all the warriors would be asleep, the girls marched down from the hills. As they marched, their hair stood up on end and started burning, until bright orange flames surrounded their heads.

"We are the Burning Heads of the Susua Hills!" they shouted as they walked.

But as they came near to the warriors, they stopped shouting and kept very quiet. They crept up to the sleeping warriors and ate them all up. When the last warrior had disappeared, the flames on the girls' heads died down, and they went off back to the hills.

After a month had passed, the families of the warriors were very worried. They thought their men must have been killed or captured by their enemies. So they decided to ask other warriors to go and find out what had happened.

So some more warriors gathered together and set off. When they were near the Susua Hills, it was nearly dark, so they decided to cook their food and rest there for the night.

While they were gathering firewood, the girls came out of their caves and walked towards them. The warriors saw them.



"What beautiful girls!" they said. "Come and help us collect firewood and then you can share our food and stay and talk to us," they called.

The girls went over to the warriors and soon they had collected enough wood and had a good fire burning. The warriors cooked some meat and made some soup and shared their meal with the girls. The girls kept looking at the warriors, and the warriors thought the girls were admiring them. But really, the girls were counting them and thinking what a good feast they would have that night!

After a time, the girls said they wanted to go.

"Goodbye," said the warriors. "Come back and see us."

"We'll come back sooner than you think," replied the girls, laughing, and went on their way, back to their caves in the hills.

One of the warriors saw a funny look on the girls' faces as they turned away.

"Those are not girls," he said, when they had gone. "They're man-eaters!"

He was the youngest warrior of all and very clever, but the others took no notice of him and made themselves comfortable for the night. They lay on the ground and rolled themselves up in their blankets, but the youngest warrior decided to sleep up in the top of a tree. He filled a can with fat and meat and took his spear and sword and climbed up into a large tree, which had thick branches and many leaves. He pulled the leaves around him so he was hidden in the branches.

In the middle of the night, he heard shouting, and when he looked in the direction of the hills, he saw balls of flaming fire coming towards him.

"We are the Burning Heads of the Susua Hills!" shouted the girls, as they marched down the hills. Then they kept quiet as they came near the sleeping warriors. Their heads burned brighter as they started eating them up.

The young warrior up in the tree did not know what to do. If he called out, the girls would find him and eat him too. He was so frightened, he kept quiet and the girls ate all the other warriors. But as they ate, they counted, and they knew one was missing. They searched all around, but they did not

find the young warrior up in the tree. The dawn began to show in the sky, and the flames on the girls' heads began to die down, and they marched back to their caves in the hills.

When they had gone, the warrior climbed down from the tree and ran back to his village as fast as he could. He called all the people together and told them what had happened to the other warriors. The people were angry and frightened, but some more warriors said they would go back with the clever young man and kill the man-eaters.

The warriors marched towards the hills. The girls were watching from their caves, and when they saw the men, they knew their leader was the warrior that had escaped. They ran towards the group of men. Instead of greeting them, the warriors rushed towards the girls.

"You are not girls but man-eaters," shouted the warriors.

"We are the Burning Heads of the Susua Hills," shouted the girls, but before the flames started to flare up around their heads, the warriors killed them all with their spears.

"What beautiful girls," said the young warrior sadly as he looked at them lying on the ground.

As the warriors watched, bright orange flames shot out of the girls' heads. The flames grew and grew until the girls were all burnt up, and all that remained was a pile of ashes.

The warriors walked slowly back to their village.

creole woman

By Carol Fonseca

An earth goddess, she stands, Blue enamel pot spoon in hand; Glowing embers from the fire hearth, Outlining the very essence of her worth; Sweat, toil, grief and betrayal, All seeming so habitual.

Bosom heaving, sweat pouring, Rice and beans stirring, pigtail bobbing; She whispers into nothingness, Anansi eyes displaying cunningness; The sadness of her own being.

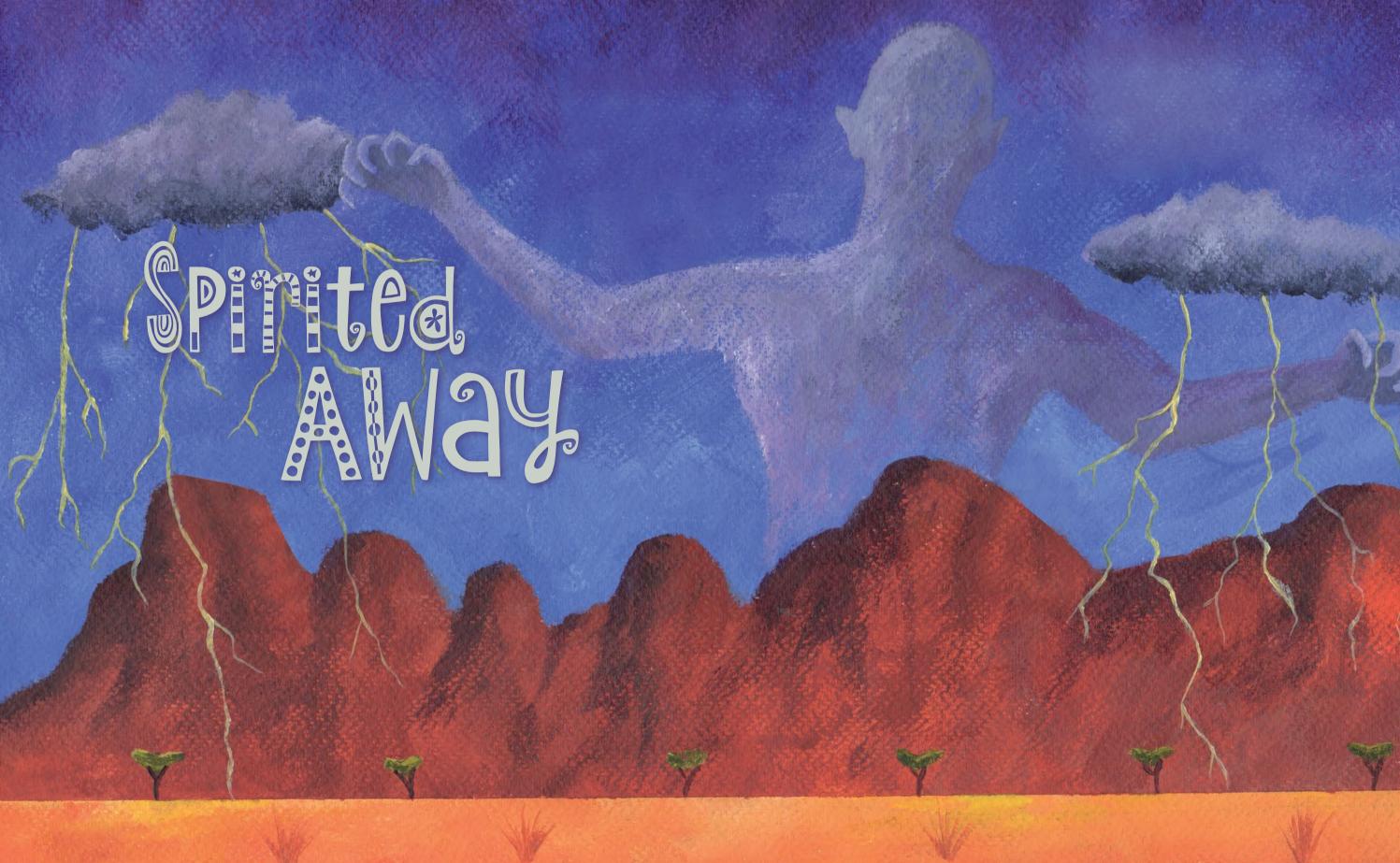
The burning bitterness of
Hazy smoke swallowing her up,
Belching her out,
Finding no answers,
Uncovering no truths,
Continuously searching,
To uncover the truth.



Hibiscus leaves falling,
Manatees dying,
Young girls disappearing;
Deep soul searching,
Questions asking,
Ancestors answering;
Drums beating,
Boom and chime playing.

Outstretched arms towards the sun,
Rising like the phoenix,
Soaring to celestial heights,
Beckoning one and all,
As she proudly proclaims,
I am the daughter of a Creole woman!





Tabuatiki and Nateau

Retold by Ten Tiroba of Buariki, translated by Reid Cowell



abuariki, the Thunderer, originally dwelt in the heavens and came to live on Earth because his wife, Nei Teiti, was human. He is said to have spent most of his time on Maiana and to have visited other places occasionally.

Nareau was the son of Tabakea, a man renowned for his wisdom. Some say Nareau's home was at Temaiku on Tarawa;

that it was there that he was burnt to death as a baby by Tabakea, who then collected the ashes and breathed new life into them; that he was both wise and wicked; and that, after the burning, he was as strong as ironwood, te ngea.

Each day, Tabuariki used to go to sleep in his leaf house. No-one dared to make a noise because, if he was suddenly awakened from his sleep, he became angry and bloodthirsty. Nei Teiti would sit beside her sleeping husband, keeping watch for anyone who might disturb him. She was a kind-hearted woman, who would warn people who approached not to be noisy lest Tabuariki should awake in anger and kill them.

When Nareau heard about Tabuariki's bad temper, he went up to Nei Teiti looking for fire.

"Teiti," he shouted out aloud, "could you let me have some burning embers?" She was worried and waved to him with her hands not to make such a noise in case Tabuariki should awaken. But Nareau persisted and again shouted out, "Teiti, have you any fire?"

She got up and hurried towards him carrying some embers, which Nareau took from her.

"Here you are," she said, "but please don't come back making such a noise or Tabuariki will wake up and kill you."

"So Tabuariki can be bad-tempered, can he?" said Nareau, moving off.

"Oh, why do you keep on talking!" replied Nei Teiti, turning her back on him. "Don't you know how fierce Tabuariki can be?"

Then Nareau went away, plunged the burning embers into a pool of water and promptly returned.

"Teiti!" he cried out. "My embers have died. Perhaps they weren't properly alight when you gave them to me!"

Nei Teiti hurriedly gave him some more, begged him not to return, for Tabuariki was about to wake, and went to her vigil.

Nareau remained where he was. He again put out the fire, by burying it in the sand this time, and called out at the top of his voice, "Teiti, Teiti, my embers are dead again. You gave them to me in a damp container. Look, they really are dead!"

By now, Nei Teiti was thoroughly alarmed for Tabuariki was getting to his feet, awakened by Nareau's loud shouting.

"Who is that noisy man? Tell me! Where is he so I can kill him?" He stood up straight and, catching sight of Nareau, picked up a club to strike him with. But Nareau jumped on to Tabuariki's right shoulder, grabbed his arm and, with a jerk, snapped it. The club fell to the ground and Tabuariki cried out in pain. Nei Teiti heard the club fall and, thinking that Nareau was dead, quickly ran up to Tabuariki, who was sobbing, "Teiti, I'm hurt and in pain. My strong right arm is broken."

Nei Teiti felt humiliated. Tabuariki had always boasted about his strength, and there he was, crouching, defeated by Nareau.

It is said today that, when Tabuariki strikes and there is a low rumble of thunder, he is using his left and not his right arm, and that, because Nei Teiti used to keep watch for him, the lightning flashes before the thunder rolls. Just as Nei Teiti used to be the guardian and eyes of Tabuariki, so the lightning now pierces the darkness before Tabuariki thunders across the skies.

The Harvest

By Sankie Maimo

Come down, brother,
From that lofty mountain height,
Where thunder breaks and roars
With fire and brimstone.
Come away, for a while
And lock the gates against devastating floods.

Come down, brother,
From yonder cheery dreamland
With lotus fruits galore,
Where sirens laugh and sing;
Come away, for a while
And tend the seedlings in the rich green fields.

Descend, big brother,
From your lofty mountain top
Where incense burns and charms!
Off your silk and rich taffeta!
Come away, for a while
And, from the refuse heap, pick up an angel.



The Taming of Fire

Retold by Pita Graham

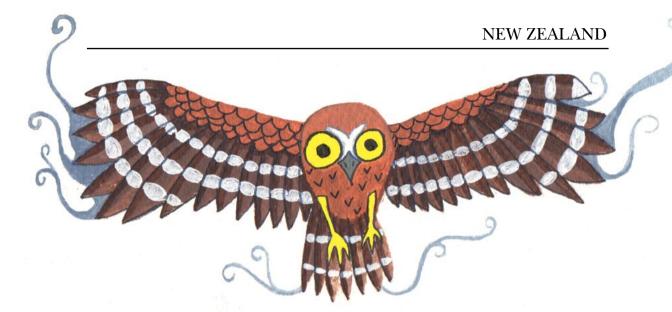


n the early world, there was no fire except that belonging to the gods. The mischievous god Māui set out to steal fire for mankind from his grandmother, Mahuika, the goddess of fire.

First he extinguished the cooking fires of his family. Then he complained that there was no way to cook his breakfast. So his mother told Māui the way into the realm where the goddess Mahuika was hidden.

At length, Māui stood before his grandmother. When Māui asked her for a new flame, she withdrew one of her own fingernails, which instantly sprang alight, and gave it to him. Māui ran off with the burning nail, but not so very far away, he stamped on it, putting out the flame. Then he returned to Mahuika and asked for another flame. This one too he extinguished. Gradually, he tricked the old goddess out of all but one of her nails, taking up each flame and putting out its light.





Almost too late, she suddenly realised how her grandson was tricking her. Taking the last nail from her toes, Mahuika set the world alight. Great gouts of flame consumed the forest and set the seas afire.

Māui leapt into a pool to save himself, but the water in it grew so hot that he was almost cooked alive. Māui turned himself into an owl to escape the flames but could not fly fast enough or high enough to escape the heat. Thus the feathers of the owl came to be scorched brown. Then he became the falcon, but it too was singed by fire. So he became a harrier hawk, another bird that still shows the colour of burns from the fire. Finally, Māui turned himself into an eagle, in an attempt to escape the wrath of the fire goddess.

Then Māui called on his other ancestors, the rains and storms of Tāwhiri. Just in time, these poured down the water that extinguished the great fire.

At length, when the flames subsided, Mahuika realised her power was gone, stolen by Māui for people on Earth. All she could find were a few hot embers. Mahuika hid these embers in various trees. The wood of the kaikōmako was one; the māhoe, the whau and the tōtara are others.

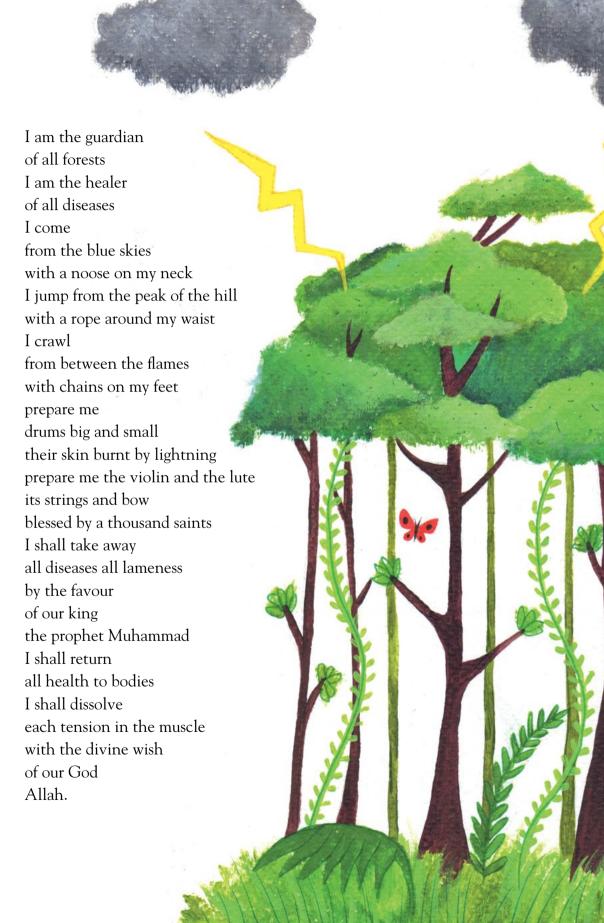
Now people know to look for such trees when they want fire. By using a drill made from the hard wood of totara, Māori can heat up the body of kaikomako and cause the fire to spark again. The friction of the spinning drill makes the wood so hot that it will ignite soft shavings and grass. So is fire stored in the world for people to use.

TOK Basch

By Moechtar Awang, translated by Muhammad Haji Salleh

prepare me turmeric rice from a million fields betel-nut leaves from a million plants prepare me the fragrance of incense from every corner well water from a million districts prepare me farm eggs prepare me copper needles prepare me young coconuts prepare me seven bowls of dew I will rise with the soul of the Earth I will run with the soul of the lightning I will shout with the soul of the thunder





TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

A Ball of fire

By Grace Hallworth

veryone knew that Nen Marie was a soucouyant. She was an old woman who lived in a ramshackle hut on the outskirts of the village with nothing but her cat for company.

Whenever she went into the village, mothers made the sign of the cross as she passed, and men shook their fists behind her back. If there were no grown-ups around, children ran after her shouting:

Nen Marie, you old souci' Nen Marie, you can't catch me So go and suck a cow for tea.

But just to be on the safe side, every child wore a necklace of jumbie beads to ward off the evil eye of Nen Marie.

As far as anyone could remember, Nen Marie had only been accused of the deaths of Farmer Meikle's cow and the shopkeeper's dog. The cow had chased her across a field, and the dog had barked at her heels as she left the shop one day, so when they died soon after, the villagers said that Nen Marie had put mal y'eux, the evil eye, on the animals.

Then, in one week, two mothers lost their babies. People were convinced that Nen Marie put mal y'eux on the children because their mothers had not yet protected them with necklaces. The shopkeeper's wife began the rumour. "The old witch had to lengthen her life, so she steal the children's soul." And a number of people swore that they saw a ball of fire near Nen Marie's hut late one night.

In the village, feeling against Nen Marie was strong and bitter. It was so strong that word reached the priest that there was trouble afoot, and he paid a special visit to the mothers who had lost their babies. He spoke about a welcome in heaven for the innocent children and the mothers listened in silence. Uneasy about the mood, he preached a sermon on Sunday about the sin of bearing false witness. The congregation wore a mask of indifference but decided in their hearts to seek help elsewhere. When they left the church, all the pent-up anger of the past few weeks burst forth, and one mother cried, "How many innocent children have to die before the old witch get her comeuppance?"

The shopkeeper's wife said, "When it come to mal y'eux and matters of that kind, the priest and them is no use. It is we who have to find our own salvation."

They found a wise man, or obeah man, who agreed to come to the village, but he said, "I can't promise you anything until I see for meself a skin without a body." And he began to watch Nen Marie's hut at night.

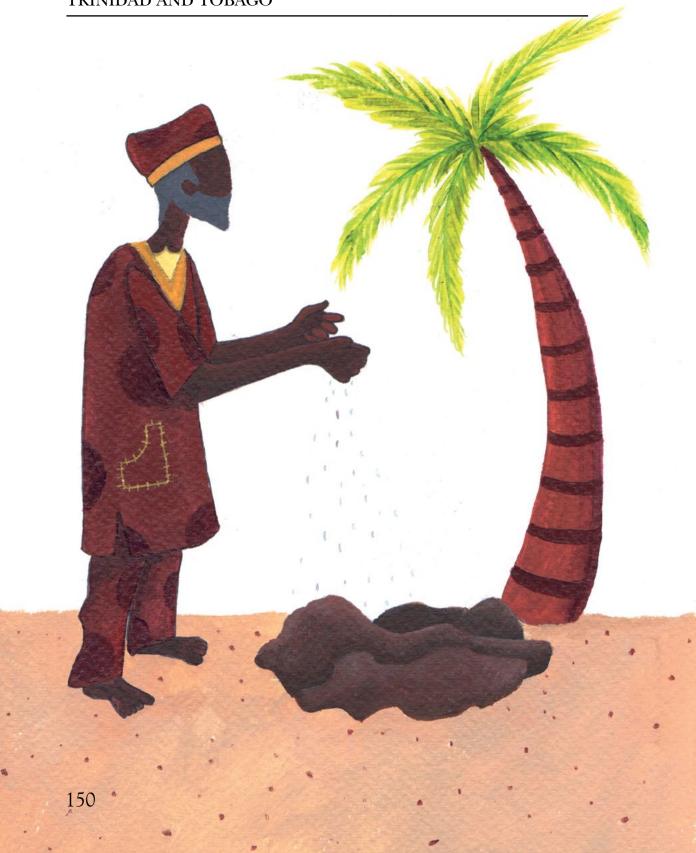
Some time passed, and then one day, the obeah man met the villagers.

"There are signs and signs," he said. "And I think that, by tomorrow morning, we should have proof. Bring me a bag of salt, a bottle of holy water and a thick piece of wood from the poui tree." Armed with all these things, he took up his night watch near the old woman's hut.

At midnight, he saw Nen Marie leave her house and head towards a small wooded area where she disappeared from sight. A few minutes later, he saw a ball of fire shoot up from the copse and float away in the direction of the village centre.

Quickly, he ran along the path that led to the woods and began to search the area. Yes! There, partly hidden in the undergrowth, was a wooden mortar. In it was the evidence he sought – the skin of Nen Marie.

He emptied the bag of salt over the skin, which began to writhe in hideous contortions. When all movement ceased, he turned the skin inside out,



using the poui stick, for he had to make sure that no part of the skin was left unsalted. Then he sprinkled the holy water around the mortar.

He had barely returned to his hiding place when he saw the ball of fire. It hovered over the copse for a few seconds before descending. Slowly the man walked towards the spot. There was nothing to fear. The holy water would render the soucouyant harmless. There was no need for haste. The salt would render the skin useless. The soucouyant was entirely powerless.

He came on Nen Marie as she was struggling to get into her skin but it had shrunk so much that it would not fit her. She tried it this way and that, and as the brine burnt her, she cried out in pain:

Skin, skin, you na know me? Skin, skin, why you burn me? Skin fight with me, skin tight for me Skin, skin, why you na go to me?

It was no use. Gradually, her struggles became weaker, until all her life ebbed away. As the clouds of night parted to let the sun through and the cock crowed, the obeah man went to the village. He brought the people to the place where the old woman lay with the shrunken skin beside her.

And ever since that day, the people of that village will neither lend nor borrow a mortar. They say, "It's not everyone who does use their mortar for pounding breadfruit!"

Shadows on the Wall (An extract)

By Theodosis Nicolaou

The sun casts strands of hair from mountain peaks. The rocks glow red with tongues of fire;

The blades of grass bend faint into the smoke.

But this small place remains untouched.

Like sparrows flying safe from a child's approach,

So tendrils of the sun creep on

And find a place where vineyards spread their leaves

And flowering forms take measured shape,

And later find a coolness for the stems

In the swaying of the wind,

And coolness for the snake

Coiled prudently around.

Horses gallop neighing.
The gentlest of them and most lovely,
The pink one that you see,
So light, free now of wisdom's charge,
That you think he does not gallop –
That he flies.



The Chostly wife

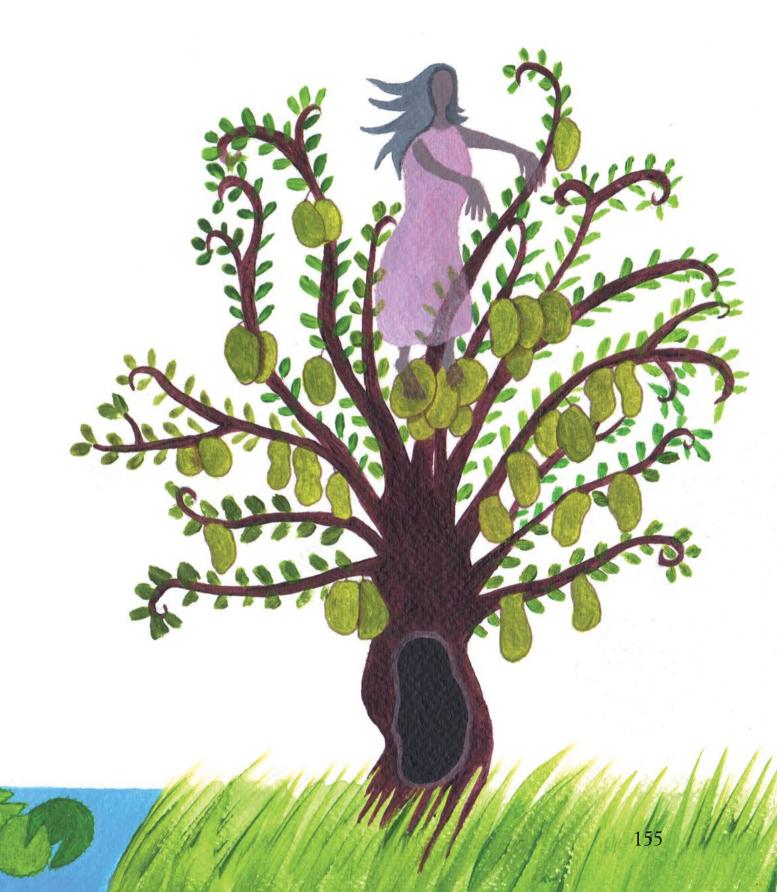
A Bengali tale retold by Sayantani DasGupta and Shamita Das Dasgupta



here once was a poor villager who lived in a tiny hut with his young wife and his mother. The hut was located at the very outskirts of the village, by an enormous pond. On the east bank of the pond grew many jackfruit trees, and in the tallest of these trees lived a shakchunni. Every

evening, when the village women came to the pond to fetch water, the shakchunni would watch wistfully from her jackfruit perch. As you know, shakchunnis are ghosts of married women who have died accidentally, and so their greatest wish is to once again become wives. This particular shakchunni wanted nothing more.

One evening, when the wife of the poor villager was returning from the pond with a brimming pitcher, the ghost whisked the unfortunate woman into a dark hollow of her jackfruit tree. Slipping into the wife's sari and shell bangles, balancing the pitcher of water expertly on her waist, the shakchunni gleefully headed towards the poor villager's hut. So clever was the ghost's disguise that neither the villager nor his mother realised there was anything amiss.



The next day, however, the young wife's mother-in-law began to suspect that there was something a little different about her son's wife. While her daughter-in-law had once been slow and lazy, taking all day to complete a single chore, she was now finishing all her household chores in the blink of an eye. The old woman rejoiced, "Finally, my daughter-in-law has learnt her wifely duties."

But, as days went by, the mother-in-law became more and more amazed by the younger woman's swiftness. She would cook the day's meals, clean the hut and fetch water all before the morning had even passed. When the old woman wanted something from the next room, the object would appear even before the words were out of her mouth. What she didn't realise was that her shakchunni daughter-in-law could extend her ghostly arms without moving. Thus, the shakchunni wife would complete a task faster than the mother-in-law could speak.

Then, the mother-in-law noticed a very bizarre incident. One evening, when sitting down for his dinner, the villager asked for a slice of lime with his rice. Without moving, the shakchunni wife extended her arm out the window, picked a fresh lime from a nearby tree and brought the fruit back to the kitchen. Although the son didn't notice anything, being too busy with the steaming meal before him, the mother-in-law's eyes widened with fear. Later, when the young wife was busy washing dishes, the old woman drew her son aside and recounted what she had seen. Together, they decided that they would have to keep a watchful eye on the young wife.



One morning, before preparing the day's meals, the mother-in-law noticed that there was no fuel left in the tiny hut. As she headed out to gather some firewood, she glanced back through the kitchen window and witnessed a frightening sight. There, a pot of rice was boiling merrily over a blazing fire. Rather than using wood, the young wife had stuck her own two feet into the stove and set them aflame. The old woman ran straight to the fields where her son was working and informed him, "That cannot be our bou, my son. It must be a shakchunni or petni!"

The old woman and her son went to fetch the village ojha. The ojha declared, "The first thing we must do is to discover whether this woman is truly a ghost." He lit a piece of turmeric and let its smell permeate the villager's hut. As you know, neither shakchunnis nor any other kind of ghost can tolerate the odour of burning turmeric. To them, it is the worst kind of torture. So, when the villager's wife began howling about the awful stink in the house, no-one had any doubt as to her identity.



Then, the ojha began his real work. He took a handful of mustard seeds, said an incantation over them and threw them at the shakchunni. The seeds were like little arrows on the ghost's skin. Still holding her nose, she let out a blood-curdling scream as the seeds struck her body. Returning to her shakchunni form, she piteously begged the ojha to stop. But the ojha had no mercy for such sneaky ghosts and continued to pelt the shakchunni with the incanted seeds. He declared, "I won't stop until you bring back the actual bou of this house! What have you done with her?"

The shakchunni screeched in her nasal, ghostly voice, "I punished the young bride for splashing me with water. I took her away." She shrieked at the villager, "Your wife is in the hollow of the jackfruit tree! I'll set her free! Now let me be!"

Of course, the ojha would hear none of this and wisely advised the villager to rescue his wife before they released the shakchunni. When the villager returned with his true wife, the ojha made the shakchunni promise never to trouble anyone in the village again.

The shakchunni was as good as her word and did not bother anyone ever again. After recovering her health, the young wife happily tended her home and was careful about her duties. She and the villager had many healthy children, who listened wide-eyed to their grandmother tell tales of the ghost who had once stolen their mother.



NAMIBIA

By Masule Sibanga

We sit around the fire, we, the children of the village. Grandma and mother unfold folk tales, fire burning like an orange.

We roast maize cobs.

Pumpkins are boiling in the black pot.

We fetch more firewood if we want more tales.

In the midst of the night, we leave the fireplace as the story fades to ash. We fear the giant. A gentle breeze blankets us as we sleep a story sleep.



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 – *goanna*: a monitor lizard; *gecko*: another kind of lizard, which is usually nocturnal.

BAHAMAS – *poinciana*: a flowering tree that is native to tropical countries. Its distinctive bright red flowers have given the tree the nickname "flame tree".

BANGLADESH – *bou*: the Bengali word for "wife"; *petni*: a female ghost in Bengali culture who has died before achieving a cherished desire, for instance, the desire to wed. A petni can take human appearance, but its feet are turned backwards; *ojha*: a man born into the Brahmin caste, or class, of people in Hindu society and a spiritual leader or teacher and, in this case, a spiritual healer and exorcist.

BARBADOS – *limbo*: a popular dance that originated in Trinidad, in the Caribbean. The dance takes the form of a contest between dancers, each dancing under a low horizontal bar while bending backwards. If a dancer falls or knocks the bar, he or she leaves the contest. The other dancers continue until the bar is so low that one winner emerges. As is signalled by the words "stick o' fire" in the poem, the bar is sometimes set on fire. When the dance first originated, it was performed after funerals, probably signalling the deceased's crossing over into the afterworld. It is also said to represent slaves passing into the galleys of slave ships; *tom-tom*: a cylindrical drum.

BELIZE – Creole woman: a woman who is descended from both native and non-native peoples, usually as a result of colonisation. English and

Scottish settlers, known as "Baymen", arrived in Belize in the 17th and 18th centuries, bringing with them West African slaves. Belizean Creole people therefore may be of European, African and Caribbean descent, as well as indigenous Mayan; *phoenix*: a mythological bird common to several cultures. In ancient Greek mythology it dies by fire and then rises again from the ashes in a continuous cycle of death and rebirth. In this poem, it is used as a symbol of survival and renewal.

FIJI – nabu: a gift given to a storyteller in appreciation of his tales.

MALAWI – Odi! Odi! ... Eeee: a typical greeting and response in Malawi, whereby the visitor shouts "Odi" to alert the householder to his or her presence, and the householder responds with "Eeee" or "Eeya" to signal that he or she is home and ready to greet the visitor; namzeze: the name for the bird known in English as a "swallow" in the Chewa language spoken in Malawi.

MALTA – *Mellieħa*: a large village beside the sea in the north-west of Malta. It is used here to denote somewhere very far away – to show how far the poor brother walked that day; *small-leaved basil*: traditionally, young women would place pots of small-leaved sweet basil outside their windows to let young men know they were of marriageable age. Young men in return would walk up and down the street, wearing a red carnation behind their ear and a red handkerchief thrown over their opposite shoulder to show their similar intention to marry; *mnestra soup*: a vegetable soup with pumpkin, thickened with dry peas or beans. This is a customary dish in Malta.

MAURITIUS – *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; *sindhoor*: a red powder traditionally worn by married women in Hindu communities. In this

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story, the prince anoints the forehead of the (fake) wood apple princess with the powder as part of a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony.

NEW ZEALAND – *kaikōmako*, *māhoe*, *tōtara*, *whau*: tree species associated with fire-making.

NIGERIA – *ikenga*: a deity held sacred by the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria. An Igbo man, like the one in this poem, may keep a statue of this deity in his household shrine. The ikenga is associated with success and accomplishment; *harmattan*: a hot, dry wind that blows off the Sahara desert, carrying large amounts of dust and sand over West Africa.

PAKISTAN – *kitcheri*: a thick rice and lentil dish, traditional to the Punjab, in Pakistan; *house of lac*: a house made from the red pigment secreted by the lac insect. In this story, lac is used in the house construction because it is highly flammable and will therefore help Ali Mardan to destroy the Lamia; *philosopher's stone*: a legendary stone believed by early scientists, astrologers and alchemists to be capable of turning base metals into gold. For hundreds of years, alchemists experimented with chemical substances to try to create the philosopher's stone. Within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, from which this story emerges, the philosopher's stone is known as the "Cintāmaṇi", a wish-fulfilling jewel of the lotus flower.

SEYCHELLES – *sega*: a dance based on the African rhythms originally played by slaves. This dance simultaneously evolved across the western Indian Ocean islands. Over time, these rhythms incorporated traditional western European folk music, such as the French contredanse, as well as Indian rhythms; *Bat la main! Sote en l'aire!*: these phrases are written in Seychellois Creole. A creole language develops when a native population establishes an informal, simplified version of a non-native language, mixed with their own native tongue, which then becomes the mother tongue of the

population's children. The phrases in this poem, based on the French, can be translated as "Clap your hands! Jump in the air!"

ST KITTS AND NEVIS – Ogun: the god (also known as "orisha") of iron in the religion of the Yoruba people of West Africa. "Orisha" in Yoruba signals a deity or spirit. This deity, and others like it, was brought to the Caribbean "from the Ashanti coast", as the poem says, through slavery. Ogun is associated with the craft of the blacksmith, as well as with warriors and hunters.

ST LUCIA – *E di Queek. Quack*: a traditional story closure whereby the storyteller says: "E di Queek" and the listening audience responds: "Quack". This ending is most often used in folk tales known as "Tim-tim stories" told in St Lucia in dialect.

TONGA – *Pulotu*: the Tongan underworld containing the souls of deceased chiefs; *Tu'i Tonga*: the Tongan king.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO – *soucouyant*: a demon or evil spirit in the folklore of Trinidad and Tobago, Guadeloupe and Dominica. Its similarities with the western vampire have led some to believe that this figure evolved from French vampire stories combined with African slave beliefs; *jumbie beads*: the brightly coloured seeds of the *Abrus precatorius* tree, the most common of which are red with black spots that look like eyes. These are strung together to make necklaces and bracelets in order to ward off evil spirits. "Jumbie" is a word used in many Caribbean islands to describe malevolent spirits or demons, of which the soucouyant is one; *obeah man*: someone who practises folk religion, often combined with charms, magic or sorcery. The practice is thought to have originated in the spiritual traditions of the Igbo people of West Africa, who were brought to the Caribbean as slaves.

TUVALU – Sina married Loutali: this is a counting rhyme that involves children sitting in a circle and passing stones or coral pieces of various sizes from hand to hand. One large stone represents the chief, smaller stones represent the number of boys in the group and even smaller stones represent the number of girls in the group. When the song finishes, whoever ends up holding the large stone loses the game, since this stone represents power and injustice. It is unknown whether the characters of Sina and Loutali in the song were historical figures; Savave: the inhabited area of Nukufetu atoll in Tuvalu; Papu, Leia, Tonu, Seka: historical figures who lived at one time on the island of Niutao in Tuvalu. Papu was a Niutao man, Leia a Niutao woman whom Papu loved, and Tonu and Seka were Leia's female relatives; the sailors travel everywhere: from around the 1820s, whalers from many countries, and in particular America, came to hunt in the waters off the coast of Tuvalu. Many men from Tuvalu joined the whaling ships as crew members. It is still quite common for Tuvaluan men to train as sailors and work on ships overseas.

UNITED KINGDOM – *sheriff*: the elected head of a county or town; *tabor*: a cylindrical drum with taut skins on two sides, played with sticks; *Saffron Walden* and *Thaxted*: medieval market towns in the county of Essex in the south-east of England.

VANUATU – *laplap*: a traditional dish in Vanuatu made from cassava (a root vegetable), coconut milk, various meats and local cabbage, wrapped up in banana leaves and then baked in a pit in the earth.

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-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. The 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

A NOTE FROM THE ANTHOLOGIST

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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Serpents' Tongues

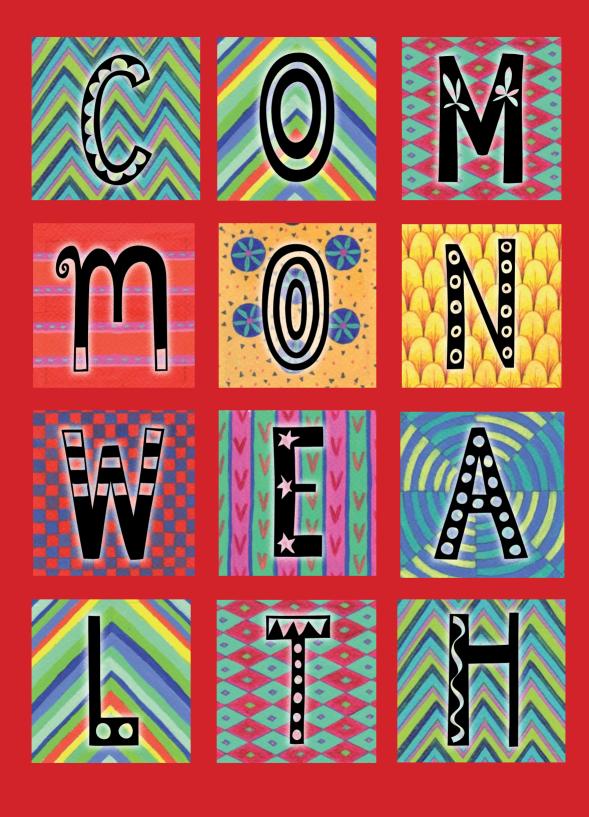
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Warriors Do Battle

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Emma Butler is an award-winning English artist and illustrator based in Queenstown, New Zealand. She studied textiles at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she graduated with a first-class honours degree in 2001. She won the Best Use of Colour Award at the prestigious New Designers exhibition in London. She has travelled extensively in Africa and Australasia. Her work has been published in the United Kingdom and New Zealand and is exhibited in art galleries in both countries.

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.

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