

A Collection of Revised Fairy Tales and Fables from Around the Globe

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

The majority of Americans are familiar with fairy tales such as Cinderella, The Little Mermaid, Jack and the Giant Beanstalk, and the Three Little Pigs, etc. They're commonly presented in children's books and woven into popular culture—Disney is a well-renowned example. Although there are excellent lessons to be gleaned from these stories, this small section of Western European-derived tales are often the extent of the exposure an American citizen experiences in perspective of the globally stretching fabulist realm. Much more waits to be gleaned culturally and morally from reading non-Western European fairy and folk tales. Stories, from the fabulist genre specifically, accordingly reveal a society's core values because they showcase what behaviors and knowledge they desire to pass on to their young people. Exclusively including Western European fairy tales in American literature education is a detriment to our development as well-rounded people. In order to aid in amending this situation, I have crafted a collection of thirty-one stories (all from different countries) whose breadth extends to the far reaches of the world. Each story was written or dictated by someone originally from each respective country to ensure story authenticity. Additionally, I have revised each story to at least the base structural level to provide readers with clear and easy-flowing literature that reads like any other modern story. May this collection expand and deepen your understanding of the rich and diverse cultures that exist in both our world's past and present.

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I would like to thank Professor Sean Lovelace for advising me for the duration this creative project. His guidance throughout this project has been irreplaceable. He was always willing to lend an editorial, creative, or logistical hand: whatever role I needed to be filled in order to be successful. I will never forget his kindness and support.

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Lastly, I would like to thank Andrew Lang, the noted fairy tale collector, for being my main inspiration for this project. His shared love of learning and cultural representation helped guide me to the core idea of this project.

Process Analysis Statement

Back in the Spring of 2020, when I first started drafting my proposal for this thesis, I worked through a multitude of potential options for project topics. I came up with a couple solid ideas that I could potentially see myself heading towards, but, no matter how hard I tried to dive into any of them, I felt like something was missing from them. Up to that point, both of my favorite proposal ideas had been over topics outside my major (one was a research topic regarding the French language and the other was an exercise-related research project).

Although looking outside of my major for my thesis topic was a really intriguing prospect, I couldn't shake the urge to do something within my major. As an English major, I find most writing-centered topics enjoyable, so that didn't really help narrow down my search. But, as I sat at home, thinking over my favorite aspects of English and writing, storytelling surfaced to the forefront of my mind. Allegorical retelling is a linguistic medium that sits close to my heart. I have always enjoyed the craft of telling stories, so it makes perfect sense for my thesis to center around something in that realm of the English world!

After having this moment of realization, I dug deep into my interests to narrow down a specific area of storytelling that I could work with and out of which I could craft a thesis. Part of me wanted to work with horror and scary stories because I find them quite fascinating, but I sat on that idea for a while with no follow-up ideas coming to me of how to work that genre into an actual creative project. As much as I enjoy reading horror and scary stories, I find it very difficult to try to write them myself, so I eventually decided that it would be for the best if I left that genre to my free time and picked something else to focus my thesis on. I knew that, in order to create a thesis worthy creative project, I would have to be extremely attached to my proposal and feel confident that my existing skillsets would be

proficient for crafting an entire thesis. I needed an idea that I genuinely felt excited about. If I was going to put 130 hours into one project, I wanted them to be enjoyable, not painstaking.

Because of all these points, I left my horror genre idea in the past and looked toward another one of my favorite genres: fabulism! (To a more specific point, fairy tales, because they're the point where fiction and fables come together.) The fairy tale subgenre can lean more toward domestic or adventure fabulism, depending on the plotline, but either way, my heart lies with this genre. From a young age, I have been in love with fables. Like a lot of little kids, I loved fairy tales when I was young because of the typical grandeur and elements of magic they encompass. From dragons to far away kingdoms to talking animals and magic spells, everything about fantastical stories captivated me. I was one of those kids who spends all of their time in their own make-believe worlds, being the hero (and sometimes the villain) of a different story every day. As I grew into a middle schooler, a high schooler, and then an adult, I refused to let that imaginative part of myself go. Even though I no longer spend much time pretending I'm in my own imagined world, I still spend a lot of my free time absorbing fairy tale related content. Anyone I know can vouch for the fact that I am obsessed with everything Disney, and I have an ever-growing collection of fabulist books on my bookshelf. My love of the fabulist genre has only grown as I've gotten older. I attest a lot of my ever-deepening interest in the fact that fairy tales exist in a paradoxical sweet and bitter state. The Rapunzel tale presented by Disney and the original tale drastically differ from each other. Many, if not all, fairy tales have a much more grave or gruesome origin than the version we are familiar with—and I love that! I would honestly be disappointed if they existed exclusively at the surface level of butterflies and rainbows. Real life lessons are

not learned by taking a stroll down easy street; they're learned by facing difficult challenges, experiencing loss or pain, and coming out victorious in the end. Coming to terms with this root of my love for fairy tales helped me know for certain that I had found my niche.

Newly pumped up about my anecdotal idea, I jotted down a bunch of possibilities to potentially work with from within that genre. Unfortunately, along with new ideas came new questions. I pondered over questions like these while deciding exactly what to create my thesis out of. Should I try to write some fairy tales of my own? Should I work with pre-existing stories? How do I define a fable in contrast to a simply fantastical story? How much content do I need to aim for in order for my thesis to be considered acceptable? Fortunately, during my proposal meeting with Dean Emert, he was able to provide me with a lot of clarity regarding the specific parameters and expectations for a creative thesis. He also helped me get to the root of why I wanted to not only focus on the fabulist genre, but why I wanted to create something that I could share with others that focused on fabulism. This was a really defining moment for me because it brought me to the thesis of my thesis—as funny as that may sound. The reason I wanted to focus on fairy tales is for the global aspect! Like I said before, the fabulist genre touches the whole world; every people group in existence has some sort of oral and/or written fables, and that's a beautiful thing. Folk tales connect the whole world together—and how many cultures worth of this genre are we typically exposed to in the United States? Hans Christian Anderson: Danish. The Grimm brothers: German. Madame d'Aulnoy: French.

Much like other subject areas of the American education system, most of those raised in the United States have only been exposed to Western European examples and perspectives of fairy and folk tales. Now, I do not mean to discount any of these authors; I

will personally attest to their splendor, and I hold many of their tales close to my heart. But I do believe that everyone, including me, has been missing out! Sure, everyone still enjoys a good Hans Christian Anderson reinterpretation in shows like *Once Upon a Time*, and I'm sure everyone can name three different versions of Hansel and Gretel that exist in modern media, but what about all the other amazing authors and cultures that exist out there? Whether intentionally or unintentionally, they're being left out, and I wanted to help amend that with my thesis. This project was my chance to leave behind my comfort zone of Western European, Disney-ified fairy tales and dive headfirst into unknown territory: new cultures and new stories!

Now, when it came to deciding what exactly my thesis would consist of, once I had decided that the global/international aspect of my thesis was so close to my heart, I knew that I needed to work with pre-existing fairy and folk tales. I had no business trying to craft stories as if I was someone of another ethnicity; I could never write a story about characters from another culture better than someone who is actually from that people group if I tried! Plus, by working with pre-written stories, I could be confident in the validity of any cultural-related topics like names, locations, words/terms included in a non-English language, objects, etc.

On top of my own personal desire for crafting a thesis focused on international (non-Western European) fairy tales, I drew inspiration for this project from a man named Andrew Lang. Lang was a Scottish poet who lived from 1844-1912. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Lang published 25 books exclusively on the topic of fairy tales. He too felt that the world should experience (and hopefully appreciate) a variety of cultures' fairy and folk tales. Each of his books consists of a collection of international fairytales. His most famous

collection are the 12 volumes of *The Coloured Fairy Book* collection. Each fairy book starts with an individual color. For example, the first fairy book published was *The Blue Fairy Book* (1889). Lang's dedication to bringing together a globally reaching collection of folk tales inspired me to do something very similar—and maybe even reach a little further. Although Lang obviously dedicated his whole life to his authorial endeavor, no spirit of heart can match the capabilities of modern technology. Thanks to the vast databases and archives of Bracken Library, I was able to find sources sharing fairy tales from literally every corner of the world without ever leaving Indiana or having to translate any of the tales personally—which is something Lang and his wife had to do semi-frequently!

Because I was so excited about my topic for my thesis, I started my researching escapades in early June. I had been riding a continuous intellectual high after having my proposal accepted in April that I was prompted to just jump right in and get started. My original goal was to work on my thesis consistently throughout the summer so that I would be more likely to complete it during the Fall semester of 2020. (Little did I know that I would still be working on this project through March 2021, but I had high hopes back in the Summer of 2020.) At the beginning of my research endeavors, I felt very overwhelmed. The Western European fairy tales that we are accustomed to in the United States are barely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the breadth of fabulist content that exists in the world. As I'm sure most people could guess, every people group on the planet holds their own set of fairy and folk tales, which is amazing, but which also made my job of selecting stories to work with very difficult. The United States recognizes that 196 countries exist in the world; obviously I could not include a fairy tale from all 196 of them in my thesis, no matter how much I might want to. But how was I to decide how many and which ones to include?

In order to answer this question, I started by searching for some of the most famous (but potentially not well-known) fairy tale authors. FairyTalez.com turned out to be a great tap for this knowledge and continued to be a dependable resource for me for the duration of my thesis work. From the authors I learned about on FairyTalez.com, I was introduced to my first non-Western European fairy tale authors. Again, I was entirely overwhelmed by the sheer number of potential authors and works to read through. FairyTalez.com provided over 100 different authors' worth of content to search through. On a personal note, I could not believe that such a plethora of published stories were public domain; it made me very happy to know that the public has a definite means of accessing such a plethora of international fairy tales. I spent approximately 12 hours sifting through the list of authors and their published pieces on FairyTalez.com. I read through story after story, trying to find the ones with prominent cultural aspects and an intriguing plotline.

After selecting some stories to be the first additions to the list for my collection, I decided on what I considered to be the most effective approach for choosing the number of countries to pull stories from. I found a website called amcharts.com which, on the "Visited Countries" page, presents you with an interactive map of the whole world. To start with, each country is grey, but you can click on any country to turn it blue. This tool was helpful for me because I knew that I could use it to keep track of how much of the world I was covering with the stories I was choosing. If I wanted to ensure the global aspect of my thesis, I needed to keep track of where each of the stories was coming from. Looking at the selected countries on the map, compared to looking at them on a list in a Word doc, allowed me to see where the holes were in my selections. Now, obviously I was aware that some areas of the world needed to be more heavily concentrated with stories, but, in the

general sense, using the map helped me to make sure that I was at least touching each region of the world. For example, at one point, I felt pretty confident that I had selected a story from every area of the world, but when I checked back in with the interactive map and updated it with all my selections, I realized that I didn't have any selections at all from South America! I had a couple from Central America and North America, but none from South America. I'm not sure how I managed to overlook a whole continent, but that is exactly why I was keeping track of my progress with the interactive map.

In the end, I chose stories from 31 different countries. Thanks to the interactive map, I feel confident that I at least got close to selecting a story from every region of the world. I am fully aware that my collection is not complete in the sense of having coverage from every people group in the world, but, like I said before, that was not a realistic goal to set for myself for this project. All I could do was try my best to reach every general area of the world with the countries I selected, and I truly believe that I did just that. I made certain that I included a story from every continent (except Antarctica), and I even organized my final document by continent to hopefully pave a clear path for my readers when they are going through my collection. Although the focus of my thesis was to focus on non-Western European fairy tales, I knew that I couldn't forgo them completely, so, instead of simply including some of the more 'classic' fairy tales, I intentionally looked for lesser-known authors or chose stories from countries whose tales we are less familiar with. Out of Europe, I selected stories from: Scotland, Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Norway, and Ireland. At the start, I thought it was going to be challenging to find fables from European countries that were not the typically sources ones (Germany and France), but there were definitely still plenty of wonderful countries and stories to choose from. I was pleasantly surprised with the

cultural variety I was able to achieve while choosing stories from the European area of the world. If I hadn't labeled them, I would guess that you would believe the stories from Scotland, Norway, and Greece to be from completely different corners of the world from each other. Although their hero narratives are similar, the geographical/environmental and behavioral tendencies of the characters of those stories are rather different.

Choosing stories from North America was an interesting experience because, at first, I didn't expect to include any stories from North America in my collection. In my head, I was only considering Canada, the United States, and Mexico as North America, so I figured that my North American section would be minimal, but the Internet kindly reminded me that the Caribbean is also included in North America, so that helped me open up my horizons to the possibility of the number of stories that could be included in the North American category. I knew that I wanted to include a piece from Mexico, which I did, and then I covered the Caribbean with a heart-wrenching love story from Cuba. On top of those two, I ended up selecting a Pawnee tale to represent the United States, and a Kauwerak (people from Alaska) to technically represent the United States, but also to represent the Canadian area of the world.

Continuing down into South America, I found it more difficult than any other continent to make a decision about which countries to choose stories from. Out of all the continents or global regions, I have the least amount of knowledge about the cultural variations between countries when it comes to South America. Luckily, I was able to turn to trusty Bracken Library to help me find some good sources for several South American countries. Having a book in my hands of stories from a certain country really helped me feel

connected to that country and their cultural roots. In the end, I chose stories from Chile, Venezuela, and Brazil.

On the other hand, one of the easiest continents to choose countries from was Asia. Asia encompasses so many amazing and distinct cultures that it was easy to make a list of countries I knew I need to have in my collection. The problem with the ease in choosing countries, though, was that I didn't know how to stop. I chose the most countries from Asia compared to any other continent (although it also helps that the Middle East is considered a part of Asia). While I was picking countries, I had to stop for a moment and just stare at the world map. How is it that countries can be so close to each other geographically, and yet so different culturally? I think that variance is one of the most beautiful things in the whole wide world, and I am so grateful that I got to showcase that in my thesis. From the Middle East, I chose Iran and Israel. Both of these tails entail the involvement of genie-like magic, which I think is fun. As for the more mainland Asian countries, I chose Japan, Korea, Russia, Mongolia, India, China, and Vietnam. Again, it blows my mind that countries who share borders can contain such vastly different cultures. The Russian, Indian, and Chinese stories have absolutely nothing in common with each other, which only adds to my reasoning for the necessity of collections such as these!

Moving south from Asia, I encountered the same problem about knowing when to stop. I feel a little guilty that I included 3 stories from Australia and Oceania and only 1 story from the Caribbean, but my contentedness with the countries I have chosen far outweighs that guilty feeling. The Australian tale I chose is one of my favorites because it's one of the few that deals with part of a culture's creation story. (Funnily enough, the New Zealander tale I chose also has to do with their creation story, but to a much lesser extent.)

The Australian account tells the tale of how all the stars came to be in the sky, and also shares the names and jobs of some of the biggest, most important stars. I also included a story from Indonesia because I thought that those 3 cultures (Australian Aborigine, New Zealander, and Indonesian) were different enough to warrant a selection from each country.

Lastly, similar to my experience with South America, I had trouble deciding which countries from Africa to pick to choose pieces from. There are so many countries in Africa, and, as much as I wanted to choose them all, I knew that I didn't have the capacity to do so. To help with my decision, I mentally split the continent up by region. From the southern half of Africa, I chose South Africa and Tanzania. With South Africa being a melting pot of cultures and Tanzania representing both the southern and eastern part of Africa, I felt that those two countries justly represented that region. For the northern half of Africa, I chose Nigeria to cover more central Africa, Senegal to cover the French influenced area of Africa, Egypt because their cultural is such a prominent part of global history, and Morocco to cover the northern coastal region of Africa. If I were to add more stories to my thesis, I would definitely add more countries from Africa. So many fascinating native tribes across Africa that I could probably find a different people group to represent almost every country in the whole continent. I would definitely add a story from the eastern African region: perhaps Sudan or Ethiopia.

When it comes to my writing procedure for processing these stories into my collection, my main goal was to retain the original author's voice and any identifiably culturally significant pieces of the tale, while also melding in some of my own voice into the stories, along with some plot additions wherever I deemed it necessary. I would consider each of the stories enthralling in their own respect as they are in their original form, but, in

order to hopefully appeal more to readers, I edited all the stories (some more than others) to ensure that the plot was driving through the whole storyline and to increase the reader's emotional connection to the characters. I found that sometimes, in fairy tales or folk tales, because they are more lesson-based, their storylines can become a bit dry. I wanted to avoid my readers ever becoming bored with the stories in my collection, so I added some more variation and/or action in the narrative when needed. No one wants to read a story that drones on by simply saying 'they did this, and then they did this, and then they did this' and so on. The stories all hold excitement and drama within; some of them just needed a little help being spotlighted in a more theatrical way to highlight those already existing elements. In some cases, I also altered the language of certain sentences because they were written in an older or more complicated way which might be considered difficult to understand by a modern-day reader. Although none of the stories I chose are extremely old, some of them are over a hundred years old, so some of their jargon needed to be updated for the sake of clarity and to ensure that reading through them was a smooth process.

The majority of the stories I chose came from physical books I checked out from Bracken Library. Through my preliminary research, I figured out that there's a whole section dedicated to the fabulist genre. So, one day, I walked over to Bracken and scoured that shelf top to bottom, pulling any books that caught my eye or were from a country that I knew I wanted to include in my collection. I'm sure it was quite a sight seeing me struggle to carry about 20 books at once. Because I had selected so many of my chosen countries by whole book, I had to take the time to scan through the entirety of all 22 of the books to pick one story from each of them. Sometimes, my first time through a book, I would note a couple stories that piqued my interest, go through a different book, come back to the first

book, review the bookmarked stories, and then choose one. If I ever felt myself getting bored of or zoning out looking at one country, I would immediately switch to working on another. Something I wanted to ensure remained standing throughout this whole endeavor was my enjoyment of the process.

Of course, I knew that this thesis would demand hard work, determination, and a whole lot of self-discipline, but I wanted to make sure that I never lost my love for this project. The whole concept behind the Honors College allowing seniors to choose their own area of study for their thesis is so that we can choose to research something that we love—and I have loved this project from the start. Did I hit some walls while working on this project? Yes. Did I consider quitting at any point in time? I think anyone who has completed one of these projects would be lying if they said no. But would I choose to go through this thesis adventure if I could go back in time? Absolutely.

After accounting for the hours I've spent writing this Process Analysis Statement, I will have spent more than 130 hours on this thesis. Looking at my Excel sheet where I logged all of my work time for this project, 130 hours doesn't look like all that much, but when I look at my official doc of *A Collection of Fairy and Folk Tales from Around the Globe*, it looks like a whole lot more. When my experience with this thesis is recorded in numerical form, it looks like very little, but when I look at my collection of the fully-fledged tales, it looks like a whole lot more. When I scroll through those book-like pages, what I see is the people and the lessons shining through from within each and every story. I see people groups from around the world gathering together at some giant bonfire somewhere outside time and space to share a piece of their history and their ideology with the rest of the world. I see my intended audience—people from the United States, people like me—sitting and

listening to all these people groups, reverently absorbing all the cultural and moral impact of such a significant part of a people group's culture. If nothing else, from this process, I've learned that a people's fairy/folk tales say a lot about who they are and what they value—maybe more than any other kind of recording: especially more than any other kind of literature. Numerical records will give you the facts, but fairy/folk tales will give you the story, the emotion. There's no better way to get to know a people than by looking at what they teach their kids, and that's what fairy/folk tales are for after all.

A Collection of Revised
Fairy Tales and Fables
from Around the Globe

Emma Thatcher

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Asia & The Middle East

The Story Bag: Korea

There once lived a very rich family. They had only one child, a boy, who loved to have stories told to him. Whenever he met a new person, he would say to them, "Tell me another different story, please!" Each time someone would tell him a new story, he would store it away in a small bag that he carried on his belt. He didn't want to forget any of the wonderful stories, so he sealed them up in his little sack. The boy gained so many stories throughout his childhood that bag was packed tight! He had to push hard to force any more new stories in. To make sure that none of the stories ever escaped, he kept the bag tied up tight and always had it with him.

As the years went by, the boy grew up into a handsome young man. The time came for him to take a wife, and so a bride was chosen for him. The man's whole house was greatly anticipating meeting the young master's new wife, so everything was in an uproar of preparation.

Now, there happened to be, in this rich home, a faithful old servant. He had been with the family since the time when the story-loving boy was a toddler. As the household made ready for the young master's wedding, the servant was tending to the kitchen hearth.

Suddenly, his ears picked up on some faint whispering sounds coming from somewhere nearby. He tuned his mind to the sound and discovered that the voices were coming from a bag hanging on the wall; it was the young master's story bag!

The old man listened very carefully to hear what the story bag was saying.

"Listen everyone," said a voice, "for a long while now, the boy has kept us stuffed in this bag, packed so closely and uncomfortably together. We have suffered for long enough! He hasn't opened the sack to listen to us in years! We must make him pay for this one way or another. Now, the boy's wedding is set to take place tomorrow, so we must act swiftly!"

"Yes," said another voice, "I have been thinking the same thing and have come up with a plan. Tomorrow, the young man will leave by horse to bring home his bride. I shall change into some bright red berries, ripe for the picking, and place myself on a bush by the roadside. When the young master rides by, I will look so beautiful to him that he will want to eat me, but I shall be poisonous! If he eats me, I shall kill him."

A third voice broke in, saying, "If he will not eat the berries, I will surely get him. I shall become an iron skewer, heated to red-hotness, and I shall hide in the bag of chaff¹ that will be placed by the young master's horse for him to dismount onto once he reaches his bride's home. And when he steps on me, I shall burn his feet badly! (For you see, a bag of chaff was customarily placed by the bridegroom's horse so that he would not have to step directly on the ground).

A fourth voice whispered, "If that too fails, then I shall become a bundle of poisonous string-snakes, thin as threads. I shall hide in the bridal chamber. Once the bride and groom have fallen asleep, I will come out and strike them with death!"

¹ Protective layer on seeds/grains that is removed during the threshing process

The servant retreated from the story bag, deeply troubled. "I must not let any harm befall my young master! When he leaves the house tomorrow, I must take the bridle and lead the horse myself."

Early the next morning, the wedding procession was ready to set off. The groom, dressed in his best, came out of the house and mounted his horse. The faithful servant came running out of the house and made a grab for the horse's bridle before the young master could. He asked to be allowed to lead the horse.

The master of the house's servants told the servant, "You have work to do, you had better stay behind."

But the servant refused to let go. "I must lead the horse today. I don't care what happens to me because of it; I insist that I take the bridle." The master, surprised by the old man's stubbornness, allowed him to lead the horse to the bride's home.

The procession wound along on its way, when suddenly they came upon an open field. There by the roadside, many bright red berries were growing. They looked temptingly delicious, and a desire for them sprung into the young master's stomach.

"Wait!" the bridegroom called out. "Stop the horse and pick me some of those berries for me."

Ignoring the bridegroom's order, the servant did not stop. In fact, he hurried the horse along. "Those berries you can find anywhere, master. I shall pick some for you later."

The young master was mildly annoyed at his servant's dismissal, but said nothing. Soon they reached the bride's home. There, gathered in the yard, was a large crowd of people. The servant led the horse into the compound and stopped it beside the waiting bag of chaff. Just as the bridegroom was about to put his foot down to

dismount, the servant pretended to stumble and shoved the bridegroom onto the straw mats waiting in front of the chaff.

The bridegroom blushed in shame at his clumsy fall but did not want to scold the servant in front of his bride's household, so he kept silent and entered the bride's home. The wedding ceremony was held at the bride's lovely home. After they had been married, the couple made their way back to the groom's house.

As soon as the bride and bridegroom turned out the lights to go to bed, the servant opened the door of the room and leapt inside! The newlyweds were startled beyond description. "Who's there?" they both shouted, jumping out of bed.

"Young master," the servant said, "I shall explain later. Right now, I need you to hurry and get away from that bed."

As soon as the couple had gotten out of bed and moved aside, the servant kicked the bedding aside and lifted up the mattress. A terrible sight greeted their eyes! Hundreds of string-snakes coiled and writhed in a poisonous ball! The servant unsheathed his dagger and sliced at the offending coil. Some of the snakes tried to snap at the servant while others tried to slither away, but he did not let a single one of them land a successful strike or escape. He slashed here and there, killing every last one of the snakes.

After he was certain his young master and his bride were safe, the servant heaved a great sigh of relief, and fell at his master's feet. He begged forgiveness for his many outbursts from the day. In hopes of earning forgiveness, the poor servant recounted the story of the day, starting with the whispers he'd heard coming from the old sack on the

kitchen wall. After the old servant had shared his tale, the young master immediately forgave his servant's behavior, and on top of that, thanked him earnestly for his faithfulness and devotion.

That is why, when stories are heard, they must never be stored away to become mean and spiteful. Stories must always be shared with other people! In that way, they are passed from one person to another so that as many people as possible can enjoy them.

The Tale of Ivan Tsarevich, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf: Russia

Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a mighty Tsar. The pride of the Tsar's kingdom was its magnificent orchard, surpassed in excellence by no other orchard or garden in the whole world. People would travel hundreds of miles to come see the kingdom's gorgeous orchard, which in turn brought trade and prosperity to the whole kingdom.

Unfortunately, one visitor who frequented the orchard was not welcome. This visitor was a glorious firebird, with golden feathers and eyes like crystal. He would swoop down into the Tsar's favorite apple tree and fly off with a few golden apples every night. The Tsar was very distressed by this and called his three sons to help resolve the issue.

"My dear sons," he said, "whichever one of you can catch this firebird and bring it back to me alive will be given half of my kingdom now, and the other half when I die."

The Tsar's two younger sons leapt at the opportunity to become the heir to the kingdom, and the eldest son prepared to defend his position as heir. They all promised to do their best to catch the bird for their father.

The oldest son took the first opportunity to catch the bird and stood watch over the orchard that night. Unfortunately for him, he fell asleep, and the firebird made off with a number of apples like before.

The next night, the second son camped out specifically by his father's favorite tree, in hopes of

increasing his chance of catching the bird, but he too fell asleep, and the firebird took some more apples.

The third and youngest son, Ivan Tsarevich, guarded his father's favorite tree determinedly. One hour went by, then two, then three...but even though Ivan became sleepy, he took the task seriously, and managed to stay awake. So, when the firebird made its appearance, lighting up the orchard with its brilliant shine, and began to pluck some of the golden apples off the tree, Ivan snuck up behind the bird and grabbed it by the tail!

Ivan held onto the firebird's tail with all his strength, but the firebird was mighty, with feathers sleeker than oil, so it managed to wriggle out of Ivan's grasp. The bird stole off into the night, leaving a single, bright red tail feather in Ivan's hand. The feather was so luminescent that if it was brought into a dark room, the room would glow, as if illuminated by the setting sun.

Because of Ivan's attack, the firebird never returned to the orchard again, but the Tsar was not satisfied. He became completely enchanted by the glowing feather that he sent his sons out to find the bird and bring it back alive. The two older sons, envious of their little brother's success, went off together, leaving Ivan alone on his horse.

Ivan rode on until he reached a big stone standing in the middle of an open field. On the stone were the following words: he who passes to the left will be killed, but his horse will be safe. He who goes straight will be hungry and cold. He who passes to the right will be safe, but his horse shall die. Choosing what he considered the lesser of the three evils, Ivan decided to go right and rode for three days.

Suddenly, a gray wolf appeared out of nowhere. Ivan's horse reared, tossing him onto the ground. The horse tried to escape, but the wolf was faster, and quickly

devoured Ivan's horse. For a long time, Ivan wept over his horse, knowing that he had chosen its fate, but he eventually continued his journey on foot.

He had walked for an entire day when suddenly, the same wolf appeared. Before Ivan could try to run away, the wolf spoke.

"I'm sorry I killed your horse, young sir. I have forced you to travel all this way on foot, but it was God's will. Jump on my back, and I'll take you wherever you want to go!"

For some reason, Ivan trusted the wolf, so he told the wolf about his desire to find the firebird.

"Ah, yes! The firebird!" said the wolf. "I know exactly where that creature is. I shall take you there to fulfill my debt."

Ivan climbed atop the wolf's back and they sped off. After a short while, they reached a stone wall whose ridge was so high up that Ivan could not make it out clearly.

"Climb over the top of this wall, Ivan, and you will find the firebird. It will be sitting in a golden cage in a garden. Now, be sure not to touch the cage, or you will be caught."

Ivan thanked the wolf for his help and started his ascent.

Right before reaching the point of exhaustion, Ivan managed to reach the top of the wall. He hauled himself over the ledge to find himself in the margin of a beautiful garden! Worried there might be guards about, Ivan crept through the garden until he discovered the firebird's cage. At first, he followed the wolf's instructions and went to remove the bird touching the cage, but then he thought, 'Where am I going to put the bird if I don't take its cage?', so he took hold of one of the cage's golden bars. The

moment he touched it, alarm bells blared and guards rushed in, seizing the lad. They immediately took him to their tsar, Tsar Dolmat, who was furious.

"I demand an explanation!" he yelled.

"I am the son of Tsar Vislav," Ivan said. "Your firebird has been stealing apples from my father's orchard every night, so he has sent me to get the bird."

"Well, if you had just come and asked me, I would have simply given the bird to you. Unfortunately, you have disgraced yourself and chosen the path of thievery.

However, there is something you can do for me to redeem yourself. Go to the kingdom of Tsar Afron and bring back to me his horse with a golden mane. If you do this, I will forgive you and you may take the firebird."

Ivan accepted Tsar Dolmat's deal and started his new quest. He climbed back down the stone wall, surprised to see the wolf still sitting there. Ivan told the wolf everything that had happened and apologized for not listening to him about not touching the cage.

"Well, what's done is done," replied the wolf. Get up on my back again and I will take you to Tsar Afron's castle."

As soon as the wolf felt Ivan grip into his fur for security, the wolf took off like a bullet. They reached the kingdom of Tsar Afron in a miraculously short time. The wolf padded over to the royal stables and let Ivan slip off his back to go look for the horse with the golden mane. He warned Ivan not to touch the golden bridle that hung on the wall.

Ivan nodded in understanding of the wolf's warning and crept into the stables. He quickly found the horse with the golden mane because it was the most beautiful of all Tsar Afron's steeds. He started leading the horse out, when

a twinkle caught his eye, and he stopped. There, hanging on the wall, was the stunning golden bridle! Ivan was so attracted to its shine that he could not resist taking it. But, the second he touched it, alarm bells rang out and stable boys came running in. They seized Ivan and took him to see Tsar Afron, who was furious. Ivan lamentedly told Tsar Afron the whole story.

“Well, if you had just come and asked me, I would have given the horse to you! But, instead, you have disgraced yourself once again. However, to get your honor back, there is something that you can do for me. Go to the Thrice Tenth kingdom and bring back Princess Elena the Fair to me. If you do this, I will pardon you and give you the golden bridle.”

Ivan left Tsar Afron’s palace in tears. Once he had made it back to the gray wolf, he told him everything. Ivan apologized again for disobeying the wolf’s instructions.

“Well, what’s done is done. Get on my back and I’ll take you to the Thrice Tenth Kingdom.”

Ivan jumped onto the wolf’s back, and off they went. They soon reached the Thrice Tenth Kingdom, and the wolf told Ivan to wait by an oak tree. (This time, the wolf was going to do the job himself!) The wolf hid himself in the bushes along the main path in the Princess’s garden; when she came strolling by, the wolf snatched her up with his teeth and hurried back to the tree where Ivan was waiting. The Princess screamed and fought against the wolf, but his jaw’s grip was too strong. Ivan hopped up onto the wolf’s back and the wolf threw the Princess up next to him. Ivan held tightly onto the Princess so she couldn’t jump off, and the wolf began running back toward Tsar Afron’s kingdom.

Knowingly, the wolf took a longer path back to Tsar Afron’s kingdom than necessary, which allowed Ivan and

Elena a long time to get to know each other. Despite the circumstances, Ivan and Elena fell in love during the trip back to Afron’s kingdom. Eventually they did arrive, and both Ivan and Elena broke out in tears.

“My dear friend, how am I to stop grieving? Elena and I are in love now. Am I really to hand her over to Tsar Afron?”

“I have served you well,” the wolf answered. “Allow me to help you one final time. I’ve come up with a plan. I will transform myself into the Princess, and you will take me to the Tsar. He will think that I am Elena and trade you his horse for me. Then, once you two are safely riding outside Tsar Afron’s borders, simply call out my name, and I will appear. This way you shall not need to be separated from your true love and keep the horse with the golden mane to trade for the firebird.”

Ivan liked the idea very much because it meant that he would be able to both regain his honor and be with Elena. In an instant, the wolf turned himself into an exact replica of the Princess! Ivan led him to the Tsar, who was overjoyed at the sight of who he thought was the fair Princess. Tsar Afron gifted Ivan the return of his honor and the horse with the golden mane for bringing the Princess to him. Ivan bowed and left Tsar Afron’s lands riding the horse with the golden mane. He picked up Elena just outside the kingdom where she had been hiding, and they rode toward Tsar Dolmat’s kingdom.

For several days, the two were so enchanted with each other that they completely forgot about the gray wolf. Luckily, on the fourth day, Ivan thought, ‘What ever happened to my friend, the wolf? I have forgotten him!

Then he called out loud, “Oh! My dear friend, Gray Wolf! Come back to us!”

It just so happened that, at that moment, the wolf was alone. He, as the Princess, had been permitted to take a solitary stroll through Tsar Afron's gardens, so he was able to magic himself out of Afron's palace and appear next to Ivan!

So Ivan, Elena, the wolf, and the golden-maned horse together went back to Tsar Dolmat. They soon reached the Tsar's palace and traded him the golden-maned horse for the firebird. Feeling triumphant, Ivan set the group's course for his home kingdom and they set off. Suddenly, when they reached the spot where the wolf had first eaten Ivan's horse, the wolf stopped walking.

"I cannot be of any more service to you, my friend. My debt has well been fulfilled, and I must go on."

After a brief farewell, the wolf ran off into the forest. Ivan shed many tears over the parting of his good companion, and then he, Elena, and the firebird headed home. Ivan and Elena stopped to rest while they were still many miles from the kingdom, keeping the bird beside them.

If you remember, Ivan's two older brothers, Dmitriy and Vasiliy, had also been looking for the firebird. They were returning to the kingdom, feeling defeated, when they stumbled upon their sleeping brother and the Princess. Filled with envy, they decided to kill their brother and take the firebird for themselves. Dmitriy took out his sword and thrust it into Ivan's heart, killing him instantly. Then they shook Elena awake, who immediately took notice of her lover's motionless body and burst into tears.

"You fiends! You might have been called honorable knights if you fought and won a battle in an open field, but there is no honor in killing someone who was sleeping and defenseless: even less so if that someone is your kin."

The brothers paid Elena's words no attention. They scooped her up, along with the firebird, and made their way back to the kingdom with their treasures.

"One word of this to the Tsar," Dmitriy said to Elena, "and you won't live to see another day!"

Ivan lay where he was slain for thirty days, when his old friend, the gray wolf, happened to be near and picked up on the lad's scent. He ran over to Ivan, excited to see him, but was soon horrified to find that he was dead. He didn't know what to do at first, but then he noticed a mother crow and her two babies circling above Ivan, eyeing him hungrily. The wolf waited until they dipped closer and snatched one of the babies.

"Please, don't harm my child mister wolf!" the crow pleaded.

"Go to the Thrice Tenth kingdom and bring me back some magical life-and-death water within the next three days and your child will be spared."

The crow agreed and took off at once. After three days, the mother crow returned, bringing with her two vials of water. Without warning, the wolf ripped into the flesh of the young crow he held, tearing it in two. But, he quickly sprinkled some "water of death" on the young crow; miraculously, the little crow's wounds healed! Next, he sprinkled some "water of life" onto the baby crow, and he sprang back to life!

Rejoicing at the magical water's success, the wolf repeated the procedure with Ivan. Just as with the little crow, Ivan came back to life!

"Oh, how long I've slept!" he said, bolting upright.

"Yes," said the wolf. "And you would have slept much longer had I not found you!"

The wolf relayed to Ivan all that had happened, including the fact that Ivan's brother Vasiliy was set to marry Elena that day. The wolf told Ivan to climb on and, in a flash, they made it to the castle. Ivan arrived in the middle of the wedding feast, but thankfully, before the actual ceremony. Elena saw Ivan enter the area and jumped up from the table.

"There is my love! *He* is my true fiancé, not this coward sitting next to me!"

The Tsar, confused at this turn of events, demanded an explanation. Elena gladly told him everything. Naturally, the Tsar was quite furious with Dmitriy and Vasiliy. For their crimes, they were thrown into prison that day. Then, considering that a wedding feast had already been prepared, Elena and Ivan took advantage of the situation and got married that night. And they were so happy with each other that they never parted.

The Dragon King's Palace: Japan

Long, long ago, in the capital city, there lived a young samurai, whose name has and will remain unknown. This samurai was a pious man. On the eighteenth day of each month, which was the day of worshipping Kannon², he abstained from animal food and visited the Buddhist temples in the capital.

One day, when he was on his way to a temple on the eastern outskirts of the capital, he came across an old man carrying a cane. A tiny snake hung from the end of the man's cane, writhing against its captor.

"Where are you going, sir?" asked the samurai.

"I am heading to the capital, sir."

"Why do you carry the snake with you?"

"I have a particular reason," the old man said with a wink.

"Would you please set it free? Today is Kannon's day; it's a sin to kill an animal on such a day."

"Though I don't want to kill the snake, I have to do it to earn my living. I think Kannon-sama will forgive my sin."

The old man began to walk away from the young samurai, but the samurai jogged back into pace with him.

"How do you earn your living with snakes?"

"I use the snake's grease for making maces. Then I make my living by selling those maces."

"Oh, I see. Well, how about I exchange my outer kimono for your snake? Then you may still have something to sell for a living but will not break the sacred day of Kannon."

The old man gladly accepted the samurai's offer and they exchanged their goods. As the young man was about to go, the old man stopped him for a moment to tell him that he had caught the snake in a pond a little ways off. The samurai thanked him for the information and headed off in the direction of the pond to return the snake to its rightful home. The young samurai quickly found the little pond, released the snake into its cool waters, and then resumed his pilgrimage to the Buddhist temple.

After walking a ways from the pond, the young samurai came across a pretty girl, about twelve years old, standing alone by the side of the road.

"Why is such a girl standing at such a random, isolated place?" he wondered.

"Hello!" she greeted. "I've been waiting for you here."

The samurai was taken aback.

"Waiting for...me?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Why would you be waiting for me?"

"Why, to say thank you! You saved my life today. My parents would also like to express their gratitude, so please, come with me. I will take you to them."

The samurai was very confused by the girl's words. He couldn't have saved her life today, for he had not saved any girl's life today! But, curious to learn more about what the girl meant, he followed her. And where did she lead the

² Japanese deity/goddess of compassion and mercy

young samurai but back to the pond he released the snake into—how peculiar. The young girl asked the samurai to wait for her for a moment. And behold! She vanished into the pond!

After a short time had passed, the young girl resurfaced and told the young samurai to close his eyes for a moment, to which he complied. When he was told to open them again, he was standing in front of a massive entry gate to a magnificent castle! The girl walked the samurai into the castle grounds and showed him inside. The young man could not believe his eyes. All the walls in every room were studded with jewels; it was like a fairyland.

In the middle of the girl's tour, an old man of dignity, about seventy years old with a long white beard, appeared before them. He showed the young man the most gorgeous chamber he'd seen yet and then thanked him for saving his daughter's life. He had warned his daughter not to play so close to the surface, but she didn't heed his warning, and was caught by the old man from the road!

"Are you saying that you are the little snake that I freed from the old man earlier today?" asked the samurai.

"Yes, good samurai. It is true. I am that little snake that you rescued today," replied the girl.

The old man then brought the young samurai into the dining hall, and the whole family entertained him handsomely with all kinds of delicacies. The old man said to the samurai, "I am the Dragon King. I wish to present you with a treasure in return for your kindness, so please, accept this gift." Then the old man took out a piece of golden rice cake from a treasure box. He divided it in two and gave one piece to the samurai. "Whenever you need money, break this rice cake and use a part of it. With it, you will find that you are never out of money."

Graciously, the young samurai accepted the Dragon King's gift. He thanked the whole family for their hospitality, but insisted that he bade them all farewell to resume his pilgrimage. The girl accompanied him to the front gate and told him to close his eyes again. The samurai did so, and when he opened his eyes again, found himself standing by the edge of the pond, back on the surface. The young girl thanked the young samurai a final time for saving her life, then dove into the pond and disappeared.

The samurai did indeed complete his pilgrimage that day. Once at the temple, he spent the rest of the day in prayer and meditation. The next day, he returned to the capital city to carry on with his normal life. Whenever he needed to buy something, he simply broke off a piece of the golden rice cake to pay for what he needed and then placed it back into his sack. Every time the young samurai took out the rice cake again to pay for something else, it was always its original size again! Because of this, the young samurai became a rich man before long and lived a long and prosperous life.

After his death, however, all his treasures mysteriously vanished, so it was not handed down to posterity. Some say that the treasure did not simply vanish but was actually sent magically to the Dragon King in his hidden, underwater kingdom as a gift from the samurai to say thank you for letting him use the golden rice cake all his life.

Root Boy Gray: Mongolia

Once upon a time there was a young boy named Root Boy Gray. He was poor and had no goods or possessions other than what he made day by day supporting himself by gathering roots. Root Boy Gray was content with his simple life, but, deep in his heart, he also longed for more.

One day, Root Boy Gray was walking along with his sack of roots when Sly Yellow Fox came rushing up to him.

“Oh! Root Boy Gray! Please, save me! I met up with three of the Khan’s³ game hunters, and now they are pursuing me. Unless you help me, they will surely catch me and skin me!”

“How could I possibly manage to save your life? I am worn out from gathering roots to buy food. Do you expect me to stand up to the Khan’s men?” Root Boy Gray responded.

“Simply let me burrow into the bottom of your sack of roots. Cover me up with some roots and just continue walking. The Khan’s men won’t suspect a thing, so we both win! You will not have to defend me against the king’s men at your own risk, and I live to see another day!”

Root Boy Gray at last agreed to Yellow Fox’s terms and dumped out his bag of roots, allowing Fox to hop inside. He refilled the bag until Yellow Fox was completely hidden, woefully dumped the remaining roots off to the side of the road and continued walking down the road. When the Khan’s men passed Root Boy Gray, they didn’t stop to give him a second thought and continued past on their pursuit, just like Yellow Fox had predicted.

Once all the game hunters were past, Root Boy Gray heaved a sigh of relief and released Fox from his sack. Sly Fox thanked Root Boy Gray immensely.”

“What a kind, good fellow you are. I will surely repay your kindness someday.”

With that, Sly Yellow Fox dashed off to visit Khurmasta Khan (the Khan of a bountiful nearby area). After being permitted to do so, Yellow Fox spoke to the king.

“Fine sir, give your daughter in marriage to the Khan of our land so that our peoples may be prosperous together.”

Khurmasta Khan agreed that the deal was favorable, but requested that a gift in the form of three predatory beasts be presented as a token for gaining the Khan’s approval of the marriage. The Fox agreed, a day and month for the ceremony were set, and Yellow Fox took off to find Root Boy Gray. He searched most of the forest, the main road, and several fields before finally coming across him.

“Root Boy Gray! I’ve been looking for you everywhere! I come bearing great news. I have asked for the hand of Khurmasta Khan’s daughter for you, and he has given her!”

At this, Root Boy Gray dropped his sack and turned to the fox.

“Why would he do such a thing? I am but a simple root gatherer. Surely he would not approve of a marriage between someone like me and his daughter.”

“I might have told the Khan that you were the son of our Khan, but he does not need to know any different! All

³ King

you must do to prove your worth is gift three predatory beasts to the princess, and her hand is yours!”

Root Boy Gray slumped onto a nearby boulder and dropped his head into his hands.

“Oh, Sly Yellow Fox, do you wish to kill me? Is this how you are repaying me? I am so poor that I can barely afford to find three good, sturdy roots to eat, let alone three predatory beasts.”

Sly Yellow Fox jumped to his defense.

“Don’t fret, my worrisome friend! I shall take care of the matter for you. You will marry the Khan’s daughter; you have my word.”

Leaving Root Boy Gray to his gathering, Yellow Fox ran off to attain the three predatory beasts. He ran straight to the home of the fifteen-headed black mangus monster, Atagaljin and greeted him jovially.

“Great news, Atagaljin! I have asked Khurmasta Khan to give his daughter’s hand in marriage to you, and he has accepted! All you must do to secure his proposal is to bring three wild animals as a gift. He has already gone and fixed the day and the month for the ceremony to take place. One that precise day, Khurmasta Khan’s servants will come and fetch you, and there will be a great feast! Oh, but there’s a problem.”

“What might that be?” Atagaljin said.

“When Khurmasta Khan’s servants come to fetch you, surely they will be terrified by your many heads and refuse to give you the girl. May I recommend that you have the young Root Boy Gray represent you? He may be poor, but he is a handsome young man.”

Atagaljin considered Yellow Fox’s proposal for a moment, and then all fifteen of his heads flashed toothy smiles.

“Good, good, Yellow Fox. When Khurmasta Khan’s servants come, Root Boy Gray shall be my representative so that they are not frightened off. Where should I wait when they come?”

“Just dig a large hole over there by the right pole of the enclosure of your cattle. Line the interior with fine felt, cover it with silk, put a lantern in it, and then sit in there comfortably while Root Boy Gray and I figure everything out for you.”

Yellow Fox dug a hole ten fathoms deep there at the right pole of Atagaljin’s cattle’s enclosure, cleaned the inside of the pit, and lined it with the felt and silk fabrics. Once the mangus was comfortably inside, Yellow Fox sealed up the opening of the hole with a big, black rock the size of an ox, and went running off. Atagaljin had been bested by Sly Yellow Fox.

As Yellow Fox walked along, he gathered up various bugs and insects and other small creatures. A bear happened to be passing by and came over to the fox.

“Why are you walking here doing that?” he asked.

“There will be a great wedding feast, since Khurmasta Khan’s daughter is to be married. They told me to gather all living creatures for the marriage celebration. If you think this is a lie, don’t you see all these many creatures I have gathered?” And he showed the bear the many insects and bugs.

Believing him, the bear joined Sly Yellow Fox’s troop to attend the grand wedding. Along the way, they met a lion, to whom Sly Fox called out to.

“Oh, Lion! Why are you walking here idly? Aren’t you going to Khurmasta Khan’s feast? They told me to go and gather all the animals to be guests. If you say this is a lie, don’t you see these many animals I’ve gathered?”

The lion, too, believed Sly Yellow Fox and followed him. Next, they met a tiger, and the same conversation was had between him and Yellow Fox. The tiger ended up following Sly Yellow Fox too, just like the bear and the lion.

Yellow Fox led the three predators to Khurmasta Khan's palace, where he lured them on them swiftly and locked them into a three-story iron building. The three predators had fallen right into Yellow Fox's trap. After ensuring their capture, Yellow Fox informed the Khan of what he had brought, and ran back home to Root Boy Gray.

"Root Boy Gray! I have deceived the mangus and buried him underneath the earth. Go to the mangus' dwelling, put on some of his elegant attire, and sit there all dressed up. Tomorrow, Khurmasta Khan's servants will come, bearing his daughter to be married because I have already delivered the three wild animals to him as your gift."

Root Boy Gray could not believe what Yellow Fox had managed to do for him! Stunned, Root Boy Gray followed him companion to Atagaljin's home. Root Boy Gray pulled on his most elegant clothing and boots. Together, Root Boy Gray and Sly Yellow Fox made all the various preparations necessary for the wedding feast.

On the following day, Khurmasta Khan's servants arrived to deliver his daughter. They accepted Root Boy Gray as her bridegroom, and there was a grand wedding feast. Atagaljin roared and thrashed below them in protest, but his guttural cries were silenced by the rock which sealed him into the pit. When it was time to return to Khurmasta Khan's palace to continue the ceremony, Yellow Fox pulled Root Boy Gray over to the side for a moment.

"Now, when Khurmasta Khan asks you, 'How many livestock do you have?' you will say to him, 'Fine sir, I have 15,000 horses, 15,000 sheep, 15,000 camels, 15,000 goats, and 5,000 cattle.' Then, if he asks you, 'Why do you have so few cattle? Have you inquired of the wise lamas?' you shall say to him, 'I have asked the wise ones. They say that there is a demon by the right pole of the cattle enclosure.'

Khurmasta Khan asked these questions to Root Boy Gray just as Yellow Fox said that he would. When he heard Root Boy Gray's response to his question about his number of cattle, Khurmasta Khan was struck with the need to protect his new son-in-law's livelihood.

"Well, my son, as an example of acceptance of you into my family, I will let lightning strike at the spot to the right of the cattle enclosure. That demon shall be eradicated so that your cattle may flourish once again!"

The Khan stood and walked over to the nearest window. He called to the skies and willed a storm in the direction of Atagaljin's property. Root Boy Gray watched the storm clouds rush over to the mangus' dwelling. The clouds gathered directly over the right pole of the cattle enclosure, a great downpour began, and there was much thunder and lightning. Three blasts of lightning crackled down into the pit where Atagaljin sat, striking and killing him.

Assured that the evil mangus was dead, Root Boy Gray married Khurmasta Khan's daughter that evening and became very wealthy on the mangus' property. He and the Khan's daughter lived happily ever after.

And, having paid his debt to Root Boy Gray, Sly Yellow Fox left Khurmasta Khan's grand palace to await his next scheme.

The City of Gold: India

A long time ago, in the city of Vardhamāna, the jewel of the earth, there was a king named Paropakārin: benefactor of his neighbors and tormentor of his enemies. Just as the thundercloud holds the lightning, so the exalted monarch had a queen. Her name was Kanakaprabhā, which means Golden Lustre. She bore her husband a daughter so beautiful it was as if the gods created her to humble the goddess of beauty. The King named his daughter Kanakarekhā, Streak-of-Gold, after her mother. The young Princess grew all the more beautiful as she matured, and the people of Vardhamāna adored her.

One day, the King and Queen were discussing Kanakarekhā's future.

"Kanakaprabhā, my heart is burdened for our dear daughter. She is very beautiful and full of grace and knowledge. A high-born virgin without a proper place is like a song that is out of tune, but a girl foolishly given away in marriage to an unworthy man is like wisdom imparted upon an inattentive pupil. To what king shall we marry our daughter? Who could equal her?"

The Queen smiled knowingly. "Well Paropakārin, surely our work is cut out for us, because, even if we could find a fitting suitor, she does not wish to be married—ever! Just today, she reassured me that, even as a virgin, she will bring us happiness. She said that if she is forced to marry, she will surely die. The reason for this she would not say, but she holds firm to the fact that there is a reason."

Greatly upset by his daughter's words, the King went to confront his daughter in her chambers. When he entered, Kanakarekhā smiled at the sight of her beloved father, but

the smile slipped away just as quickly when she noticed the look on his face.

"Is it true that you refuse to accept a husband, my child?"

Kanakarekhā lowered her eyes. "Father," she said, "I don't want to marry just now. Why does it bother you so? Why do you insist that I be married as soon as possible?"

The King replied wisely. "How can a man ever atone for the sin of not marrying off his daughter? A girl depends on her family; she cannot afford to be independent. In effect, a daughter is born for a husband. Her parents simply safeguard her for a time. If a daughter remains a virgin when she is able to bear children, her family will be ruined. The girl will lose her caste."

The Princess, smiling to herself, then revealed what she had had in mind the whole time. "If it must be so, Father, that I will marry, then I must be married to a brahmin or a nobleman who has visited the City of Gold. No one else shall be my husband. It is useless to try to force me to marry someone else."

The King pondered over her proposal for a moment. "At least we are fortunate that she is willing to marry at all, but how are we to find any man who has been to the City of Gold? My daughter must be a goddess in disguise to be so clever at her young age."

The following day, the King posed a question to his court of advisors. "Are any of you knowledgeable as to where the City of Gold is? Or better, do any of you know of a brahmin or nobleman who has visited this city?"

All the members of the court looked at each other in surprise and confusion. One of the men replied, "No Sire, we have never heard of such a city, much less seen it."

Frustrated, the King sent out a proclamation all across his land, calling any brahmin or noble youth who had visited the City of Gold to present himself to the King, who will then bestow upon him his daughter and the title of crown prince.

Now, in the town of Vardhamāna lived a man named Śaktideva, the brahmin son of Baladeva. He was a fiendish young man with a good name and empty pockets. He was a slave to his vice—gambling. He thought, “I have gambled so much that my father will not welcome me into his home anymore. I must win back my father’s approval. What better way to do so than to become the crown prince? I will announce myself to the criers as having been to this City of Gold. Who will know the difference?”

So, when the King’s men came passing by his home, the selfish brahmin rushed into the street and proclaimed to them, “Attention, sirs! I know the City of Gold!”

“Bless you!” they cried.

The King’s men took Śaktideva immediately to see the King, where he repeated his lies. The King, overjoyed at the prospect of marrying his daughter, rushed to present Śaktideva to the princess.

She looked the young man over for a long while. “Is it true that you know well the City of Gold?”

Śaktideva smiled and replied smoothly. “It is true. I visited the city once while I was a student and travelling the country searching for knowledge.”

“What road did you take to the City?” Kanakarekhā inquired. “What is the City like?”

Śaktideva spun a tale of lies for the Princess about which road he took to get to the City and what it was like there. In response, the Princess laughed in his face.

“Aho!” she cried. “Yes, great brahmin, you certainly do not know anything about the City, but please, please, tell me again, which road did you take?”

Śaktideva tried to salvage his standing with the Princess, but she was already gesturing for her maids to lead him away before he could defend himself. After he had been thrown out, the Princess went to go see her father, appearing gleeful. He beamed at her presence and asked, “Did that brahmin tell the truth?”

The Princess turned on him in a second, dropping her façade of happiness. “Father, you may be the king, but you do act thoughtlessly! Are you unaware that crooks will try to deceive honest people? That brahmin tried to cheat me; that liar had never seen the City!” She turned to leave but looked over her shoulder for a short moment at her shell-shocked father. “Do not be so hasty in marrying me off, or I will remain unmarried forever.”

The King thought that his daughter must have memories of a former life because she was so firm in her resolutions. Seeing no other way to find a husband for her, he sent his men back out to make the same proclamation every day until a man was found.

Meanwhile, Śaktideva lumbered out of the palace and thought glumly, “The only thing I have gained with my lies is the contempt of the Princess. But now, after meeting her, I feel determined to win her the right way. I shall travel the face of the earth until I find this City of Gold, and then I shall return and be the one to marry the Princess after all.”

With his vow instated, Śaktideva departed southward from Vardhamāna, set on finding the City of Gold. After many days of travel, he reached the vast jungles of the Vindhya Mountains. The forest swallowed Śaktideva and glared at him with the day’s unbearable sun—but he

kept pushing through. Śaktideva moved into the most dangerous part of the jungle where predators lurked behind every palm and no trace of water could be found, but still he persisted.

Luckily, just as the sun was slipping below the treeline, Śaktideva stumbled across a hermitage⁴. He approached the man with caution and called out, “Good sir! Might you aid me in offering direction for my journey?”

The hermit jumped up from his place by his meager fire. “Ahh! A visitor! I have not had a visitor for many many suns! Come here, my son, and share with me your desired destination. Perhaps I can help you.”

Śaktideva walked over and sat next to the old man. “I am searching for the City of Gold. Have you heard of it?”

The old man’s eyes lit up. “City of Gold, yes, I have heard rumor of this City. Never travelled there myself, but I will gladly take you to someone who has.”

“I wish you a thousand blessings for your kindness, sir.”

“We will leave first thing in the morning. For tonight, we feast! You look as though you have not had water in many days, young man. If you wish to stay hydrated in this jungle, tap into the mighty banyan tree. She will bless you with clean water.”

“The banyan tree, I see. I thank you again for sharing your wisdom with me. Not many others have been so kind to me in my lifetime.”

After sharing an evening meal, Śaktideva and the hermit lay down to rest. The following day, Śaktideva awoke to the warmth of the morning sun. The hermit led him away from camp toward the upward slope of the

mountains. For the whole day, Śaktideva and the hermit clambered up the steep ground. The brush was getting thicker and thicker and Śaktideva was struggling to keep up with the hermit, who wove through the vegetation with ease.

Suddenly, the two travelers broke through the layer of brush into a vast clearing that looked out over the expanse of the jungle. Śaktideva could not imagine anything more sublime.

“This way,” said the hermit as he took off across the top of the plateau. “We are close to my friend now. He should be just over here.”

Śaktideva jogged to catch up to the hermit and crossed the clearing to a large hole in the mountainside.

Nonchalantly, the hermit called out into the darkness. “Satyavarta! Are you home, old friend? I have come to ask for a favor, if you’ll allow it! Here, Satyavarta!”

Śaktideva was confused by the old man’s calling. He thought, “What man could possibly live this high up in the mountains? Maybe this hermit has lost his mind to the jungle after all.”

After a few minutes of silence, a loud whooshing sound reverberated out of the cave. The ground rumbled slightly, and a strong wind rose against Śaktideva and the hermit. Suddenly, a huge bird flew out of the cave. Śaktideva crouched, fearful that the giant bird had surfaced to eat them, but the hermit looked unphased! The hermit strode up to the bird and bowed reverently.

“Ah, Satyavarta! My friend. I am so grateful that you were home today! This young man has travelled very

⁴ A person (typically a man) living in recluse with very little possessions

far in hopes of seeing the City of Gold. Would you take him there?”

The majestic creature leaned down to peer at Śaktideva with one of its golden eyes. After a moment of hesitation, he spoke. “Śaktideva, I deem you worthy to visit the City of Gold because you have truly labored to reach it. I can see the desire in your heart for the princess Kanakarekhā, but I warn you, do not let your desire rest as it is. Foster it into love, or all of your labor will be for nothing.”

Śaktideva bowed in acknowledgement of the bird’s heed. Satyavarta nodded in return and unfurled one of his wings so Śaktideva could climb onto his back. Satyavarta said goodbye to the hermit, spread his wings, and took off into the sky. Śaktideva gripped tightly onto handfuls of Satyavarta’s feathers so that he would not fall off the great beast. Satyavarta flew for so long that Śaktideva fell asleep atop his feathered back. He awoke to the soft thud of the bird landing.

“Welcome to the City of Gold, Śaktideva.”

Śaktideva rubbed the sleep from his eyes and slid off the bird’s back. He gazed out over the steaming hills which they’d landed on. Upon seeing the beauty of the City of Gold, Śaktideva’s eyes blurred with tears of wonder. The trees were all blooming in full, every building was laced with gold and studded with gems. Even the pathways were lined with gold. Śaktideva walked into the city, his eyes wide with awe. Two women were gathering flowers up ahead, and Śaktideva went to speak to them.

“Tell me, good ladies, is this truly the City of Gold?”

The women, although startled by his appearance, responded calmly. “Yes, this is the City of Gold, the realm of the aerial spirits. A fairy queen named Candraprabhā

rules our land. We are her gardeners for this park. Today we are gathering these flowers for her.

“Wonderful!” Śaktideva said. “Would you be so kind as to bring me with you to your mistress once you are done picking her flowers?”

“Certainly,” they replied.

While waiting, Śaktideva sat near the women and took in the wondrous landscape. Creatures he had never seen before roamed both the air and the ground placidly. He gazed into a small pool, which housed some strange-looking fish with large eyes and fins that glowed like the sun.

The two women soon led Śaktideva to the Queen’s palace. Once inside, he waited only a minute before she made her appearance. She was very beautiful and looked as though she floated over the tile floor. Something familiar lingered about her, but Śaktideva could not place it.

“How is it, O mortal, that you have found this country where surface-dwellers are not allowed?”

Śaktideva knelt before her. He tried to take her hand to kiss it in reverence, but she pulled it away out of reach. Nonetheless, Śaktideva went on to share with the radiant queen his story.

She looked on him with kindness and smiled. “So, you are in need of proof then, that you have travelled to this place so that you may gain the Princess’s favor?”

“Yes, Highness. If only you were willing to bless me with a small trinket, I would be eternally grateful to you. The Princess was not easily persuaded by work of the tongue alone.”

The Queen walked over to Śaktideva and addressed him in a suddenly intimate tone. “Before I give you the gift you seek, let me tell you a story of my own. I am Candraprabhā, or, Radiant Moon, as you already know. I

was playing by the river one day while a hermit was trying to pray his daily prayers. I accidentally angered him with my play and so he cursed me! He cursed me so that I would be forced to be reborn as a mortal. Luckily, he was not so cruel as to remove my celestial consciousness from this place, so I may visit here in my mind when my mortal body is asleep. This form that you see before you is merely an illusion. The only way to break the curse and return to my true form is for my human self to take a mortal husband, a man who has also seen my ethereal form. No man has successfully found their way here, except you! Please, dear Śaktideva, take my hand in marriage. Free me from this awful curse so that I may return home!”

Śaktideva was quite taken aback by the queen’s proposal. He thought about Princess Kanakarekhā. “How could I forgo my princess back on the earthly plane? I have tackled this great journey as to prove myself to her.”

The Queen again smiled. “I understand, my dear Śaktideva. You are an honorable man, indeed. But please, follow me. I must show you something.” The Queen glided away to the back corridor and led Śaktideva all the way to the corner of the palace. She plucked a small, golden key from the lining of her dress and unlocked a door which Śaktideva would have thought a mere wall had she not revealed the lock.

The inside of the room was almost pitch black. Śaktideva felt along the wall so that he would not lose his balance. Thankfully, the Queen magically lit a few lanterns hanging from the ceiling, providing a dim glow to what turned out to be a bedroom. Śaktideva noticed that a curtained bed was resting along the back wall—with someone lying in it! Śaktideva froze, but the Queen assured him that everything was alright.

Śaktideva stepped gingerly up to the bed, and the Queen pulled the curtain to the side, revealing the body of Princess Kanakarekhā! Shocked, Śaktideva fell away from the bed.

“Do not be afraid, Śaktideva! I could tell that when I came to you in the front room that you looked at me as if you recognized me; this is why. The Princess you wish to woo, and myself, are one and the same.”

“But...but how can this be?”

“It is just like I told you, my love. My consciousness may exist here if my physical body on the earthly plane is enchantedly asleep. I did not mean to deceive you, but I knew that you needed to see my mortal body for yourself to believe that the Princess and I are the same. Could it be possible that you still wish to marry me?”

Śaktideva stood up and came to stand intimately close to the Queen. He smiled lovingly and said, “I love you all the more now, my Queen. I am as much in love with your aerial homeland as I am with you. I would be honored to marry you and free you to return home permanently.”

With that, the Queen showed Śaktideva the way back to Satyavarta so that he could leave the City of Gold and return to the earthly plane. As soon as Satyavarta returned to his cave, he slid Śaktideva off his feathered back and Śaktideva took off running back to the Princess’s kingdom. He travelled as fast as he could bear until he finally made it back to Vardhamāna. He immediately requested an audience with the Princess, and she accepted. Śaktideva entered her room and bowed before her. “I have returned from the City of Gold, my Princess!”

She looked down at him with a steely expression. “Says the man who deals in lies.”

“No, Highness! I have truly travelled across the land and through the dense jungles of the Vindhya Mountains to find my way to the City of Gold—all to seek your hand.”

The Princess stood up and circled Śaktideva slowly. “What proof have you that you entered the City of Gold?”

At this, Śaktideva stood up purposefully. “Listen to my words of truth, and you will know! How could it be that I am lying about seeing the City of Gold if I tell you that I have seen your unconscious body lying upon a curtained bed?”

The Princess’s eyes widened and her pursed lips melted into a smile. “You *are* telling the truth! You are indeed the one I dreamt about last night! Dear Śaktideva, you have passed the test! Come, let us tell my father, and we will be married tomorrow!”

Together, Śaktideva and Kanakarekhā went to tell the King the news. That same day, the whole kingdom was called to celebrate the engagement of the Princess. The following evening, Kanakarekhā was married to Śaktideva. As soon as they shared their first kiss as a married couple, a glamour of light encased them, and they were transported to the City of Gold. Kanakarekhā was reunited with her celestial consciousness, and she was fully Radiant Moon, Queen of the aerial spirits, once more. She granted her beloved Śaktideva the gift of eternal life and they spent forever together in the City of Gold: a pennant of the Realm of Spirits, blazoned with mansions of golden splendor, and showered with the concentrated sunlight from the clearest skies.

The Phantom Vessel: China

Once, a ship loaded with passengers was sailing from North China to Shanghai. High winds and stormy weather delayed her, and, while she was still one week out from port, a great plague broke out on board. This plague was of the worst kind imaginable, attacking passengers and sailors alike until there were so few left alive that they could barely manage to sail the ship on their own; they were left to the mercy of the winds and waves. Dead bodies lay scattered about the deck. Groans of the currently dying, a truly terrible sound, cut through the wind and the crashing waves to the ears of the unfortunate living.

In the end, only one passenger out of the large company survived—a little boy named Ying-lo. The few remaining sailors heaved their dying breath into trying to salvage the ship, but they too were obliged to lie down upon the deck and die, prey to the dreadful sickness.

Ying-lo now found himself alone on the sea. For some reason—a reason he did not understand—the gods or the sea fairies spared him. But, as he looked about the ship in terror at the lifeless bodies of his friends and loved ones, he almost wished that he could join them. What was he to do?

The sails flapped about like great broken wings while the giant waves dashed higher and higher above the deck, washing many of the bodies overboard and drenching the little boy to the bone. Shivering with cold, Ying-lo had

given up hope of living, but he prayed a final, desperate prayer to the gods (whom his mother had often told him about). He prayed that they would take him from this dreadful ship and let him escape into the cold recesses of the whirling sea.

As the boy lay there on his knees praying, with his face bowed to the deck, he heard a creak in the rigging above his head. When he looked up, he saw a ball of fire rolling along a yardarm⁵ near the top of the mast! The sight was so strange that he forgot his prayer and stared open-mouthed at the wonder. To his further astonishment, the ball grew brighter, and suddenly, began slipping down the mast toward the deck, exponentially increasing in size. Poor Ying-lo was petrified at the sight. Had the gods sent fire to burn away the ship as an answer to his prayer?

Nearer and nearer raced the fireball, until, at last, when it reached the deck, to Ying-lo's surprise, the light vanished! In a strange turn of events, a funny little man appeared where the fire ball had been! He peered curiously into the child's frightened face.

"Yes, you are the lad I'm looking for," he said in a piping voice that almost made Ying-lo smile. "You are Ying-lo, and you are the only one left of this wretched company."

Although he saw that the old man meant him no harm, Ying-lo could say nothing because his voice had caught in his throat. So, he waited in silence, worriedly wondering what would happen next. By this time, the vessel was tossing and pitching so violently that it seemed any minute it might go down beneath the foaming waves and never rise again. Plus, not many miles away to the right,

⁵ Outer edge of the rigging holding up the sail

some jagged rocks stuck out of the water, reaching up like cruel fingers, eager to take hold of any and all ignorant sea craft that dare enter their territory.

The strange man, seemingly unshaken by the state of their predicament, strolled over to the mast and tapped on it three times with an iron staff which he had been using as a cane. Immediately, the lifeless sails of the ship embraced the wind once again. The vessel righted itself atop the waves and began to glide over the sea so fast that the gulls were soon left far behind, and the threatening rocks upon which the ship had been nearly dashed appeared as specks in the distance.

“Do you remember me?” asked the strange man, as he made his way back over to Ying-lo.

Ying-lo strained to hear the old man’s words, but he couldn’t hear him over the whistling of the wind. The grey-bearded man came to a halt inches from the boy’s face and bent over until his mouth was at Ying-lo’s ear.

“Have you ever seen me before?”

With a puzzled look, the child shook his head. But, then, after taking a closer look at the old man’s face, there did seem to be something recognizable about that wrinkled face.

“Actually, yes, I think I have seen you before, but I can’t remember when.”

With a firm tap of his staff, the old man caused the wind to stop blowing, and then he spoke once more to his small companion.

“One year ago, I passed through your village. I was dressed in rags and begged my way along the street. I tried to find someone, anyone, who would feel sorry for me and heed my cry for help. But alas! No one, not a single soul, answered my cry for mercy. Not even a crust was thrown

into my bowl. All the people of your village were deaf to my pleas and fierce dogs drove me from door to door. Finally, when I was nearly starved to death, I was inclined to believe that there was not a single good person in your village. But, just then, you noticed me and saw how I was suffering. You ran into your house and brought out food to give me. Your heartless mother tried to prevent you from doing so, but you insisted. After you had given me the food, your mother beat you cruelly. Do you remember me now, my child?”

“Yes, I remember,” he answered sadly. “and now my mother lies dead, along with my father and my brothers also. No one is left of my family.”

Trying to comfort the little boy, the old man said, “Little did you know, my boy, to whom you were giving food that day. You took me for a lowly beggar, but, behold, I am the fairy Iron Staff. Surely you have heard of me when they were telling stories about the fairies from the Western Heaven and of their adventures on earth.”

“Yes, of course!” answered Ying-lo, trembling half with fear and half with joy. “Indeed, I have heard of the tales about you many, many times. All the people love you for your kind heart and deeds of mercy.”

“And yet, they did not show any of that love to me when I looked like a beggar, little one. Surely you know that if anyone wishes to reward fairies for their mercies, then they should begin to do deeds of the same kind themselves. No one but you in all your village had pity on my in my rags. If they had known that I was Iron Staff, everything would have been different; they would have given me a feast and begged for my protection.”

Then Iron Staff shared a poem with the young boy:

“The only love that loves alright
Is that which loves in every plight.
The beggar in his sad array
Is molded of the selfsame clay.

Who knows a man by what he wears,
By what he says or by his prayers?
Hidden beneath that wrinkled skin
A fairy may reside within.

Then treat with kindness and with love
The lowly man, the god above;
A friendly nod, a welcome smile—
For love is ever worth the while.”

Ying-lo listened in wonder to Iron Staff’s poem, and when he was finished, the little boy’s face glowed with the love of which the fairy had spoken. “My poor, poor father and mother!” he cried. “They knew nothing of these beautiful things you are telling me. They were brought up in poverty. As they were knocked about in childhood by those around them, so they learned to beat others who begged them for help. Is it strange that they did not have hearts full of pity for you when you looked like a beggar?”

“But what about you, my boy? You listened when I asked you for a blessing. Have you not been whipped and punished all your life? How then did you learn to look with love at those in tears?”

The child could not answer these questions. He only looked to Iron Staff with sorrow. “Oh, good fairy, could you restore my parents and brothers? Give them another chance to be good and useful people!”

“Yes, I am able to do what you ask, but you must do two things first,” he replied, stroking his grey beard gravely and leaning heavily upon his staff.

“What are they? I will do what I must to save my family. Anything you ask of me will not be too much to pay for your kindness.”

“First, you must tell me of some good deed done by these people. Name only one, and that will be enough. It is against the fairy rules to help those who have done nothing to help others.”

Ying-lo was silent and, for a moment, his face was clouded, but then he lit up with a smile. “Yes, I know! They burned incense once at the temple. That was certainly a deed of virtue.”

The old man considered the boy’s words. “But when was it, little one, that they did this?”

“It was when my big brother was sick and they were praying for him to get well. The doctors could not save him with boiled turnip juice or any other kind of medicine, so my parents begged the gods for his life.”

“Selfish! Selfish!” muttered Iron Staff. “If their eldest son had not been dying, they would not have spent money at the temple. They tried to buy back his health by burning the incense. An attempted bribe towards the gods.”

Ying-lo’s face fell. “You are right.”

“Can you think of nothing else?”

Ying-lo thought very hard for a long time. He knew his family must have done *something* selfless during their lives. When he finally did speak, he did not speak confidently. “I have thought of one deed, good fairy, but I fear it amounts to nothing.”

“No good deed is too small to count when weighing someone’s heart, my child. Do tell me what they did.”

“Last spring the birds were eating at my father’s garden. My mother wanted to buy poison from the shop to destroy them, but my father said no. He told her that the little things must live; he was not in favor of killing them.”

“At last, Ying-lo! You have named a real deed of mercy. As your father spared the birds from the poison, so I shall spare your family’s lives from the deadly plague. But remember, there is one other thing that depends on you.”

Ying-lo jumped up to his feet, giddy at the thought of getting his family back. His eyes glistened gratefully. “If it rests with me, and I can do it, then you have my promise. No sacrifice could be too great for a son to make for his loved ones even if his life itself is asked in payment.”

“Very well, Ying-lo. What I require is that you carry out some instructions—to the letter. But first, let me uphold my end of the bargain.”

Iron Staff asked Ying-lo to point out the members of his family. Approaching them, one by one, Iron Staff placed the end of his iron stick on their foreheads. In an instant, the person he touched rose back to life. Looking around and recognizing Ying-lo, they all ran to him and embraced him. They also gathered behind Ying-lo in an attempt to hide from the powerful fairy. When the last had risen, Iron Staff beckoned them all to listen to him. They did so willingly, too terrified to speak. Each knew that they had been lifted by some magic power from darkness into light.

“Family of Ying-lo,” began the fairy, “you thought nothing of it when, less than a year ago, you drove me from your door as I begged for scraps. Little did you know that you would find yourselves in need of a similar mercy today. Today you have had a peep into the awful land of Yama, the place of after-life that lies in darkness. You have seen the horror of his tortures, have heard the screams of his

slaves. If you had stayed another night you would have been carried before him to be judged. And what is it that has saved you from his clutches? Look back onto your wicked lives. None of your own deeds has deserved this rescue. It is because of this little boy that you have been saved. To him alone you owe my help, because he *did* show me kindness when I went begging through your village.”

Ying-lo’s father, mother, and brothers all gazed in turn first at the fairy in awe, and then on the timid child with gratitude. The gravity of their fate weighed upon them.

“By reason of goodness this child, whom you have scorned, is worthy of a place in the Western Heaven. In truth, today, I came to lead him to that fairyland, but, for you, he wishes to make a sacrifice. With sorrow I am yielding to his wishes. His sacrifice will be giving up his place among the fairies to continue to live here on this earth with you. He will try to make a change within your household, within your hearts. If, at any time, you treat him badly and do not heed his wishes—mark well my words—by the power of this magic staff which I shall place in his hands, he may enter at once into the land of the fairies, leaving you to die in your wickedness. This I command him to do, and he has promised to obey my request.

This plague took you off suddenly and ended your wicked lives. Ying-lo has raised you from its grasp, and his power can lift you from the bed of sin; do not waste it. No other hand than his is to hold the rod which I am leaving. If one of you simply touches it, that person will instantly fall dead upon the ground.”

Turning to Ying-lo, Iron Staff continued, “And now, my child, the time has come for me to leave you. First, however, I must show you what you are now able to do. Around you lie the corpses of sailors and passengers. If you

tap three times upon the mast and wish that they come back to life, they will." With that, he handed his staff to Ying-lo.

Although the magic rod was heavy, the child lifted it as if it were a fairy's wand. He stepped forward toward the mast and rapped on it three times, wishing to give the sailors and passengers their lives back. Immediately, all of the bodies on the boat arose, once more full of life and strength.

"Now command the ship to take you back to your home port, for such sinful creatures as these are in no way fit to make their journey among strangers. They must first return home and free their homes of all their sin."

Again, rapping on the mast, the child willed the great ship to take its homeward course. No sooner had he moved the staff than, like a bird wheeling in the heavens, the bark of the bow swung around and started on the return journey. Swifter than a flash of lightning, the boat flew back to its original port. It had now become a fairy vessel! Before the travelers and sailors could recover from their surprise, land was sighted and they saw that, indeed, they were coming upon their home port.

Just as the ship was about to glide into port, the fairy shared a parting word with Ying-lo and changed himself back into a ball of fire. He rolled along the deck and ascended the mast. Then, as he reached the top of the rigging, he floated off into the bright blue sky. Everyone on board gazed after the fairy until he vanished, speechless with surprise.

With a cry of thanksgiving, Ying-lo flung his arms about his parents and descended with them to the shore.

The Buffalo Boy and the Banyan Tree: Vietnam

Many years ago, there lived a young boy named Cuoi. He came from a very, very poor family and had no education, so the only job he could get was to be a buffalo boy for a rich farmer. Every day he would look after the water buffalos in the rice fields, caring for and looking after them. He would also prepare food for the pigs and collect firewood from the forest. For performing these tasks well, the farmer gave Cuoi food, clothing, and enough money to live on.

One day, while gathering wood in the forest, Cuoi came upon a tiger cub that was frolicking in the sun. He picked up the tiger cub, intending to have some sport with it, but when he did so, the tiny tiger let out a yelp. Immediately after, Cuoi heard a frightening growl from a nearby thicket. It was the mother of the tiger cub! She had momentarily left her little one to search for game. Cuoi threw the cub to the ground and scrambled in terror up into the sheltering branches of the nearest tree.

A moment later, the tigress came crashing through the underbrush and growled ferociously. She ran over to her cub to come to his aid, but when she nuzzled him and pawed at him, he remained motionless. In his haste, Cuoi had thrown the cub to the ground with such force that he had accidentally killed him.

Up in the tree, Cuoi held his breath, for he knew that he should expect the worst to happen to him for this crime. But then a strange thing happened. The tigress walked to a nearby stream and gathered some leaves from a certain

banyan tree. She chewed them to a pulp and then applied the paste to her cub's head. Immediately the young tiger jumped to its feet and ran about as if nothing had happened!

Cuoi could not believe it! The tiger cub had been brought back to life by banyan's leaves! Once the tigress and her cub had disappeared, Cuoi climbed down from his refuge and made his way over to the banyan tree. He gathered a handful of its leaves and took them with him. On his way home, he came upon a dead dog lying on the side of the road. Feeling sorry for the dog, Cuoi made a pulp from the banyan leaves, as he had seen the tigress do, and he applied it to the dog's head. After a few minutes the dog was restored to life! It jumped to its feet and bounded away as if not a second had been taken from its life.

Now fully realizing the miraculous potential power of the banyan tree's leaves, Cuoi went back to the banyan tree, uprooted it, dragged it home, and replanted it in the middle of his yard. He warned his mother never to throw refuse or dirty water where the tree was planted. "Otherwise," he said jokingly, "the tree will fly away to the sky."

Cuoi's mother paid no attention to his warning and threw rubbish directly onto the banyan tree's base continually. One day, the tree grew sick of having trash thrown onto its roots, so it began to slowly pull itself from the soil and fly up into the sky! Cuoi's laughable prediction was actually coming true!

Returning home for lunch from his morning chores, Cuoi saw the miraculous tree floating away and ran after it with great haste. He grasped onto the tree's roots with all his might, but his slight weight was not sufficient enough to bring the tree back down to the ground. Instead, Cuoi was carried off with the banyan tree into the sky.

After many days, Cuoi and the tree reached a strange new world where there was a permanent calm: The Moon. Cuoi planted the tree there and sat down to figure a way out of his predicament. How could he possibly get home?

Unfortunately, there was no solution to be had, and no way to return home. Cuoi was trapped on the Moon, and has been there ever since, even up to this day.

The children of Vietnam will tell you that, on certain nights, in the curve of the moon, you can see the lone silhouette of Cuoi seated at the foot of the banyan tree. They will tell you that sometimes Cuoi will turn his head to look at you and smile. For good fortune, you should wave and sing this back to him:

“Cuoi, Cuoi, the dream-time boy,
Alone alone, on the Moon;
Playing with the stars in the lost twilight
Until late has become soon.”

The Story of the Second Royal Mendicant⁶: Iran

O Mistress, I see you stealing glances at me. I can tell that you know that I have a story to tell—and I do indeed! It is a wonderful one, so I will indulge your curiosity and share my story with you.

It is true that I am both a King and the son of a King. So, like any other prince would, I read the Koran⁷ according to the seven readings and pursued various other subjects and works of my tutors' choosing. My father brought in professors from across our land. With them, I studied the science of the stars, the writings of poets, the way of language from different lands, and other respectable topics. I made myself proficient at everything I set my mind to and quickly surpassed the other children my age. My hand script was extolled above all the professional scribes in our whole kingdom. My famed intelligence spread and Kings from faraway lands took notice of me. The King of India sent a letter and gifts, as is suitable to kings, to my father, requesting for him to permit me to visit him. Therefore, my father prepared six ships to carry me safely on my journey, and we were off!

We sailed across the vast sea for the whole of a month. I began to wonder if we would ever see dry land again, when the Indian plain came into permanent view. We disembarked a team of horses, ten camels loaded with gifts, and all the other necessary provisions for our journey to the King.

Not long after departing the ship, a blinding storm cloud of dust rose and swirled around our caravan. It filled the air before us and forced us to take cover until it passed. It seemed fortune was on our side, because the storm passed quickly, but when the last of the dust settled, we could see that sixty or so horsemen, fierce as lions, were galloping toward us. Fortune was not to favor us that day after all, because we perceived that they were Arab highwaymen, known for annihilating all they came into contact with. Though they circled us and pointed their spears at us, we prayed that they would let us pass once they knew who we were traveling to see. One of my men made signs with his fingers to one of the Arabs, explaining that we were ambassadors to the honored King of India, and asked him not to do us any harm. The man laughed in response. He shook his head and relayed the message to his companions. They laughed as well.

“Unfortunately for you,” he said. “you are not in his territories, nor under his government. You are in *our* territory.”

At that, they slew a few of our young men, and the rest, including me, began to flee. The Arabs stabbed at us with their spears, and I lost track of everyone else except myself. One of the Arabs made a move to spear me, but I leapt off my horse just in time to evade the blow; my horse was not so lucky. Missing me, the Arab's weapon plunged into my horse's chest instead. My beautiful stallion stumbled to the side and fell to the ground, dead. Relentless, that same Arab dismounted his steed and unsheathed a dagger. He grinned at me and made a run at me. I scrambled to get away from him, searching through the

⁶ Beggar

⁷ Islamic sacred book

mess of the fight for a weapon of my own. Luckily, my father taught me to always have a weapon on hand, so I had a small dagger hidden in my boot. I stood to face the man, and he slashed at me a few times. I ducked and dodged out of the way before planning my offensive maneuver. The man stepped as if to jab, so I went for an undercut with my dagger; unknown to me, he planned on faking. The Arab faked his stab and swung in the opposite direction right as I dove for him. I tackled him to the ground, but his dagger landed in my left shoulder, too close to my heart for comfort. He dragged the dagger out as if to strike again, but that was the last move he ever made. I tossed my dagger from my left hand to the right, then slashed his jugular. My father had been right; being deft with a blade in both hands *would* come in handy someday.

I ripped a sleeve off my attacker and wrapped it around my wound, but then I laid face down on the ground, feigning death. The other Arabs finished off the rest of my troop, took possession of our remaining animals and all the gifts for the King, and rode off in the direction from which they had come.

When the sound of their hoofbeats became absent from my ears, I sat up. My arm stung worse than a coal burn, but I knew I had to go on. Not knowing which way to direct my course, I simply wandered off in what I believed to be a straight line until I arrived at the base of a mountain. I managed to find a cavern large enough to take shelter in, and rested for a full day, keeping watch over my wound. After my period of rest, I resumed my journey, tracing the mountain's base.

I felt so hopeless that I considered death my friend. I stumbled about in the blizzarding sands, waiting for my friend to take me away from my miserable fate. Fortunately,

after many more days in the desert, my sandals felt solid ground underneath me. I rubbed the fog from my dusty eyes to reveal a small city in front of me! I had been released from the deserts at last! Seeking some kindness, I greeted passersby, asking for charity, but they all looked at me in disgust and turned away from me. Eventually I passed the open door of the town's tailor. I greeted him and he actually returned my salutation, so I entered his shop. He treated me with a magnitude of kindness, providing me with food, water, and a bed for three whole days.

After the three days, he asked me if I had any skills from which I could make a better living than begging. I told him of my acquaintance with the sciences and arithmetic, but he told me that such endeavors were profitless in his country. He suggested that I take an axe and a rope and cut down firewood to sell in town. I heeded his suggestion and toiled at the scraggly trees outside the town all day, then hauled them into town to sell them for a half-piece of gold.

I continued living as a tree cutter for the space of a year. One day, I was chopping at the base of a large tree, when, instead of meeting root, my axe struck brass! Intrigued, I dug around the spot of brass, which then revealed a trap door! I yanked at the handle with all my might but could not manage to pull it open. I still don't know to this day what it was that motivated me, but I knew that I needed to get that door open. So, I took my trusted axe, and took cracks at the lock until it dented itself away from the wall. Then, I pulled the hatch open and jumped down into the dark pit.

After walking down a set of spiral stairs, I reached a dimly lit cave. And lo! What did I find inside? An efreet⁸ was lashing a young woman! Tears streaked down her soft cheeks, dripping past her gritted teeth to the hard floor. The young woman appeared to me innocent, so I tried to attack the monster with my axe. Unfortunately, he heard me coming, and caught my axe mid-swing. He split it in two with ease and snatched me firmly off the ground by the collar. The efreet was about to take my life when the young woman screamed for his to show mercy. The classic tale of the envier and the envied calls for pardon to be shown, she cried!

The great beast set me back on the floor, but he did not release my tunic. He unwillingly agreed to settle for enchanting me instead of killing me. He grinned wickedly, sprinkled a magic powder over me, and commanded me to take the form of an ape! Instantly, my human self was morphed into that of an ape. That monster not only turned me into a creature less than man, but also slayed his wife for daring to protest his actions.

I cried over my changed self and the poor young woman for days. After convincing myself that I needed to go on, I forced my limbs to carry me to the shipyard. There, I managed to find a kind soul aboard a vessel destined for a far off, very populous city. He found me amusing and, seeing that I had no master, took me aboard his ship. We sailed for fifty days with a fair wind urging our sails forward. I spent that unfortunate time acquainting myself with my new body, so by the time we cast anchor, I was an accomplished swinger. And lo, who should visit the debarking of our vessel than the King of the land! He

desired that each crewmate write a line upon a piece of paper, for the King would only accept the best penmanship in all the land to be used on his documents. He had been riding through his whole kingdom, searching for the person with the finest script. Seeing this as my opportunity for salvation, I snatched a paper from one of the crewmates. Before I could write anything, the Captain snatched the paper back from me, but not without the King taking notice. Therefore, he struck a deal with the Captain. If I could not write intelligibly, then I would be disposed of like a true animal, but, if I could write intelligibly, then I was to be adopted as the King's son!

Luckily, my ape form had done nothing to inhibit my fine penmanship abilities, so I took a pen, plopped it in the ink, and wrote out this couplet in my preferred script:

Fame hath recorded the virtues of the noble; but no
one hath been able to reckon yours into a total.

At that, the King cried out in surprise! He could not believe that an ape had the best calligraphy skill out of all his subjects, but he was a man of his word, and from that day on, treated me like his own son! One day, while playing chess with the King, his daughter came into the room. She removed her veil at the request of her father and looked me directly in the eyes. Somehow, she could see through my enchantment! She told her father straightaway who I was exactly, to which he looked to me for affirmation, and I nodded in confirmation. The King demanded that his daughter explain how she knew that I was enchanted. She became bashful, but confessed that she had befriended an

⁸ Fire spirit, like a demon

old witch in her youth who had taught her the ways of sorcery.

She agreed to turn me human without asking for anything in return. I was skeptical of her grand show of kindness, but oh how I missed being human! She quickly retrieved a sword from a nearby guard and proceeded to engrave some Hebrew names upon it, all while chanting something unintelligible. An eerie gloom encased the three of us, and the efreet appeared! He presented himself in a hideous shape, with hands like long forks, legs like masts, and eyes that burned like torches. The King and I cowered in terror at the efreet's form, but the Princess stood tall, unphased. She called out to the efreet, saying that he was not welcome! In an attempt to strike fear into the princess, the efreet shifted into the form of a lion. The princess retaliated by shifting herself into the form of a humongous serpent. They went back and forth, a great battle ensuing between them: serpent versus scorpion, cheetah versus lion, eagle versus vulture, cat versus wolf. Finally, overcome by the princess's might, the efreet turned himself into a pomegranate, which the cat (the Princess) slashed into pieces. The Princess had single-handedly defeated the efreet! The remaining pieces of the efreet then burst into a tiny flame and burned themselves into ashes. His death broke all of his spells, and I transformed back into my true, princely form!

Sadly, our joy was short lived. The Princess confessed that she had made a promise to Allah⁹ that she would give her life for the power to take on the magical forms needed to defeat the efreet. And so, she too was soon reduced to a heap of ashes. I, the King, and the whole

kingdom mourned the sweet Princess. The King buried her ashes in a great tomb, but the ashes of the efreet, he let loose to the wind. After a time, the King called me to his side and encouraged me to depart the city and never return. He told me to continue on my adventure, because his too was drawing to an end. He was indeed an older King.

So, I departed from His Majesty's kingdom, just as he had told me to do. Before I left, I entered a public bath and shaved my beard, as tradition called for, but then I left the city's borders. After that, I traversed various regions and passed through great cities. I set my heart on finding the Abode of Peace, Baghdad. And that, O Mistress, is the end of my wonderful tale.

⁹ Arabic word for God

The Clever Wife: Israel

Once there was a beloved King who lived in a prosperous kingdom. When he was ready to marry, he made an announcement to the whole kingdom, with one peculiar condition included with his proposal. Whomever accepted his betrothal must break off all relations with her family and friends after the wedding and never see them again. Some might consider the King harsh to make such a request of a young woman, but surely he had a good reason for such a specific request. Regardless, the proposal's strange caveat did nothing to quell the flood of eager, eligible young women who came to apply. As soon as the announcement was made, hundreds of women put on their best clothes and flocked to the palace gates, hopeful that the King would choose her to be his bride.

The King promptly chose the young woman he found most befitting to become his wife, and they were married. Unfortunately for the girl, the King was so busy with receptions and audiences that she wouldn't see him for one, two, sometimes even three weeks at a time. She would be left in her palace chambers, alone, with no one to talk to, for the servants were forbidden from interacting with her. The poor girl tried desperately to get just one word out of them, but they never broke their silence, completing their daily tasks without giving her a second glance. Of course, the girl's promise to the King prohibited her from seeing any of her old friends and family, so she became maddeningly lonely.

After several months of suffering, the sad, young girl passed away from a broken heart. The King mourned his wife's death, but after a short time, he proclaimed the start

of a contest for a new bride. It seemed that the King was a harsh man after all.

He remarried quickly, and the same fate took the King's second wife. The King was soon remarried for the third time, and again and again. Queen succeeded queen, all of them forced to live through the same lonely nightmare. Some lasted longer than others, but in the end, they all passed away before a year's end.

During his latest search for a new bride, the King gazed out one of his front windows to all the young women chattering in the courtyard, and his eyes fell upon the face of a lovely (and clever) young girl. She had come against the wish of her parents, especially her mother, who was innately aware of the fate that awaited their daughter should she be chosen. But the daughter had consoled her mother the best she could.

"Do not be afraid, Mama. The King will not be burying me, I promise. I will settle everything, if you have patience."

The girl indeed found favor in the eyes of the King, and won the contest. Within a short time, she married the King and was parted from her parents. After a mere two days, she became quite bored. The King was always preoccupied with his duties and never came to visit her, as she had anticipated. It was a difficult transition learning to live in a silent house. The new queen decided that if the king forbade her from inviting in her family and friends, then she would just have to create new ones within the palace walls.

She searched through the palace for supplies, finding a goat skin, some extra clothing, and a hat. She blew up the goat skin like a balloon, dressed it in clothing, drew on a face, and placed the hat on top of his head. She propped her

new friend up in a chair in her bedroom and began relaying to him all the troubles that were weighing on her heart.

A few months passed, and the queen continued her habit of chatting with her hand-made friend. Whenever the King was absent, the girl talked with her friend, sharing with him all of her thoughts and feelings from the day. Because of him, she didn't feel very lonely at all! When her husband did come home, she would tuck the doll away and speak to her husband cheerfully, which he found very confusing.

The King wondered to himself, "How is it that she holds such joy when she is left alone for so long?" He decided to look into the matter.

The next day, while the Queen was taking a stroll through the gardens, the King bored a small hole in her wall. When he heard the Queen return to her room, he went to sit by the hole to spy on her. And what does he see? A stranger in his wife's bedroom, talking with her! The King became very angry, presuming his wife to be unfaithful.

He thought, "She has been deceiving me all this time. But I shall punish her and her lover accordingly."

In order to catch them in the act, the king pretended that he had seen nothing, except to tell the watchman to be on high alert for any young man trying to leave the palace. At the first evening hour, the watchman came to the king and reported that not a single person had left the palace.

After dinner, the King said to his wife, "Come, let us inspect your rooms." The Queen agreed, despite being put off by her husband's request. Upon reaching her quarters, the King stopped suddenly and drew out his dagger, directing the blade at the Queen! She froze in horror.

"What have I done to offend you so, my King?"

"Show me where you have hidden your lover, woman!"

"Lover? I don't know what you mean, my King! I have nary even spoken a word to another man besides you since the day of our marriage!"

"Liar! I heard you talking with a man earlier today. Show me where he is so that you may both receive the punishment you deserve!"

Realizing what the King was talking about, the Queen laughed. "Husband, I have no hidden lover here, just a hidden friend, made of goat skin and a drawn-on face." The Queen walked over to her cupboard and opened the door to reveal her doll. The King came over to take a look at it and stabbed it with his dagger, whereupon blood poured out.

"What is this?" he asked. "If it is indeed a doll, where does the blood come from?"

"That is my sorrow and grief, O King. I have shared with my doll all that has been in my heart since my arrival to the palace. My doll holds all of my suffering for me, so that my heart will not burst from its weight."

At last the King understood that he himself had caused the death of his former wives, and that his present wife was more clever than all the rest. He immediately decided to revoke his decree and to allow his wife to visit with her family and friends. The Queen was overjoyed at the news, and she lived out the rest of her days in the palace, content to be surrounded by her real-life family and friends.

South America

The Wandering Soldier: Chile

Once there was a princess who lived in a prosperous kingdom which touched both mountain and sea. The time had come for her to choose a husband, but she worried about being forced to marry an unrighteous man, so she created a great challenge which would both even the playing field between all the eligible suitors and ensure that whoever won was a very clever and resourceful man. The Princess proclaimed to the whole kingdom that whosoever could hide himself anywhere within the border of the kingdom so that she could not find him after three days would be chosen to be her husband. But, a stern warning came with her proposition. When a man applied to the challenge, he had to vow that, if the Princess did spot him before the three days were past, she had the right to execute him if she wished.

Despite the gravity of the Princess's proposition, many men came to pledge themselves to the challenge. The first young man came in, made his vow, and took off into the mountains to hide himself in a hollow tree—a seemingly well-picked hiding place. Close to the end of the three days, the Princess went to her door, took out her binoculars, and scanned the countryside. Sure enough, she spied the young man in the middle of the mountain inside the hollow tree.

At the official end of the deadline, the young man crawled out from the hollow tree and returned to the palace. He sauntered into the main hall, believing that, because the Princess had not found him in person, that he had won.

“Did you see me in my hiding place, Highness?” he asked.

“Yes, I did,” the Princess answered abruptly. The man's confidence shattered. “You were in the middle of the mountain inside a hollow tree, correct?”

The young man fell to his knees before the Princess and admitted, shakily, “By god! I was indeed.” The Princess nodded to herself, ushered to her guards, and without further ado, the young man was hauled off to be beheaded.

Soon after, another young man arrived and made the bet. He thought for sure that he would win the contest because he mounted an eagle and rode away into the clouds, hiding himself behind the sun.

Once the three days had nearly passed, the Princess stepped out onto her balcony to begin her search. She scanned what seemed like the whole kingdom, but she could not find the young man. She looked everywhere, but she didn't see neither hide nor hair of him. Time had almost run out when the Princess chanced to glance up at the sun and, lo and behold, there he was! She spotted the poor man hiding behind the sun, mounted on his eagle's back.

At the end of the three days, the lad arrived back to the palace, full of hope, and asked the Princess, “Did you spot me, Highness?”

“Yes, I saw you, all right. Though clever, I still managed to find your hiding spot behind the sun, sitting on your eagle.” So he, too, was sentenced to lose his head.

Very soon after, a third young hopeful came to accept the contest. This young man turned himself into a fish and went into the sea, hiding himself behind a rock. Once again, the Princess allowed most of the three days to pass before she took up her spot on the balcony to search for the man. She looked first into the mountains, then into the

clouds, all the way to the edge of the forest, but she couldn't find him anywhere! With minutes left on the clock, the Princess searched frantically for the man, when at last she looked toward the sea and spotted the youth behind the rock, made into a fish. "Clever," she thought, "to turn oneself into a different creature to hide from me—but not clever enough."

After the time officially ended, the young man made his way back to the palace confidently, certain that he had stumped the Princess, but she informed him that she had indeed seen his hiding place.

"And where was I?" he asked, unbelieving.

"Behind a rock, turned into a fish," she replied.

"It is quite true," he groaned as they carried him off to the chopping block.

In succession, another man appeared to take up the challenge. This one ran off to a craggy cliff which had a great cave in its face. He slipped inside to hide, and although the Princess struggled for a moment to find him, she eventually did, just the same as with those before him. When he returned, she sent him to the axe like all the rest.

The next fellow to take up the contest was a slightly drunken ex-soldier. The Princess was amused by him and ushered him out the door to hide. Wandering from the palace, he went to simply hide behind a tree for a day. The Princess could spot him easily even without her binoculars and laughed to herself. "Why should I get out my binoculars to look for this fellow? But he still has two days. We shall see what he is capable of."

Realizing that hiding behind a tree so close to the palace was not a good plan, the soldier strolled down the town's main square into the forest, where he came upon a vixen shaking turkeys out of a tree. The vixen nabbed one of

the birds and trotted off to her den. The little soldier observed her for a while but kept his lips tightly buttoned. Soon the vixen returned and carried off another turkey, and another. All this time, the soldier was as quiet as could be. The vixen returned once again, but this time, she invited the soldier to her den, mistaking the soldier for a gentleman because he knew how to keep silent. He accepted and she brewed for him an exquisite stew.

The soldier shared his precarious situation with the kind vixen. Knowing how many men had already failed the test, she felt sorry for him. She told the soldier that she would help him find a hiding place where the Princess would surely not be able to find him. The vixen and all of her fox friends came together to come up with the best possible plan. After a time of debate, the foxes concluded that they had devised a plan sure to bring the soldier success.

The vixen sent the soldier to have two gloves of iron made. Then, upon his swift return, led him back to the palace. She told him to follow close behind her and began to dig a tunnel up under the Princess's palace. The vixen dug until she and the soldier sat at the very threshold of the palace, right as the three-day limit was drawing near. Finished with her task, the fox left the little soldier standing right under the doorsill of the Princess's balcony.

Per usual, the Princess strode out onto her balcony and raised her binoculars to survey the kingdom, searching for the soldier. She looked first into the clouds, then toward the great mountain ranges, and then into the center of the sea, but she could not see him! She looked into every corner of the city, back into the forest, and back to the sea, and yet there was not a trace of him! As the three-day time limit came to a close, the Princess resignedly declared, "I must

keep my promise, just as it is pledged. The tipsy soldier will be my husband.”

At the sound of the Princess’s words, the soldier crawled up over the wall and popped onto her balcony. The Princess yelped at the sight of him while he laughed lightheartedly. “Good morning, my good Princess. Did you see me?”

“No, I couldn’t find you anywhere! Where have you been hidden all this time that I couldn’t spy you out?”

“I was standing right under your feet,” he chuckled.

“How can such a thing be? No matter where I looked, I didn’t catch even a glimpse of you.”

“Sometimes, Princess, the things right under our nose are the things most difficult for us to see or notice.”

“You are right; I never looked down once—and my word must be fulfilled.” The Princess’s maid servant sent for the priest and the bishop and the next day the Princess and the wandering soldier were married. The palace threw a great celebration, and the new couple ended up living happily together for the rest of their lives.

After all the merrymaking was over, the vixen came to see the new Prince and said, “Good day, my fine little soldier. Now that you’re a married man and have say over the rules of the kingdom, I hope that you would grant your little helper a wish. Would you please grant us foxes the favor of having the right to wander wherever we wish?”

The Prince smiled at the vixen. “I owe you everything for the help you granted me during the contest, so I will speak to the Princess about granting you your wish.”

Thus ends the tale of the vixen and the soldier boy.

The Whistler: Venezuela

There once lived a young man who was very selfish and cruel. His parents and brother tried to be loving toward him and soften his heart, but no matter what they did, his spoiled heart only rotted further. One day, the son was craving deer heart and liver. He demanded that his parents provide it for dinner. His father went out hunting immediately, hoping that granting this request would bring contentment to the boy's heart.

The day soon turned into evening, but the boy's father still hadn't returned home. Spurred by the growling of his stomach and irritation from his father's tardiness, the impatient boy went out to fetch his father himself. Once at the hunting grounds, the boy spotted his father trekking toward home from across the clearing, obviously exhausted—and empty-handed. Seeing that his father had no deer, the young man flamed into a fit of rage and charged at his poor father. He tackled his poor father to the ground and killed him. Then, he extracted his father's heart and liver and took them home to cook in place of a deer's.

Back at home, the young man slung the organs onto the kitchen table and informed his mother that she may start preparing them for dinner. His mother went to work preparing some side dishes and a dessert and eventually started working on preparing the heart and liver. She cleaned them and set them in a pan to cook. For some reason, the meat was much tougher than normal; no matter how long she cooked it, the meat would not soften. Then, an unsettled hunch panged within the mother's heart. She peered at the organs once more, and a terrible knot formed

in her stomach. She gathered that these were not the parts of a deer, but instead the heart and liver of her own husband!

This time, it was the boy's mother's turn to be full of rage. Forgetting her fear of her son, she turned on him and cursed him for killing his father. She wished for all of the pain that was now in her heart to be shared also by her son—tenfold. The boy shrugged off his mother's curse and stormed out into the woods.

The mother, worried that the younger son would kill her as well if she stayed in the house any longer, ran to her older son's home. Luckily, he lived nearby, and she reached his lands before her legs gave out. The older son embraced his poor mother and welcomed her into his home. He promised his mother that she would be safe in his house and tried to comfort her. He knew that something needed to be done. His brother must pay for killing his own kin.

The following morning, the older brother set out for his childhood home, on the hunt for his younger brother. He searched the entire home, but didn't find his brother. Next, he took to scouring the forest. It didn't take him long to find the younger brother in the woods, for he was not hiding. The younger son had not anticipated that his big brother would come looking for him. The older brother tackled his malevolent sibling to the ground. He bound his hands and then dragged him back to the house. Once there, he tied his brother to one of the house's posts. Then he pulled out his rawhide whip and lashed at his brother until his body was covered in seeping wounds. The older brother sprayed burning flakes of red-hot peppers into all of his brother's open wounds, and then, instead of killing him, released him back into the woods.

The younger son stumbled into the tree cover. He could barely walk because of the searing pain raking

through his limbs. His mind started replaying the moment when he killed his father over and over, torturing him with the reminder of his terrible deed. Tears of regret flowed down the young man's face as he clambered toward the riverbank. He knew that there was little hope for himself unless he could reach the river and cleanse his wounds.

Unfortunately, the younger brother did not realize that the older brother's punishment wasn't over. The older brother had brought one of his vicious hunting dogs with him. Once he'd given his younger brother a fair amount of time to escape, he released the dog from inside the house. He ordered the dog to sniff the whip, layered with his little brother's blood, and sent the dog after the scent. Then the older brother took a seat on the front porch, sighed heavily, and waited. Not long after he had loosed his hound into the woods, he heard the desperate screams of his little brother being torn apart, piece by piece.

Now dead, but not freed from his curse, the young man is forever doomed to wander the vast, rural plains as The Whistler: an eerie ghost searching out cruel or disloyal souls to make his victims. His disproportionately skinny ghost form stands at about twenty feet tall. He wears a tattered white suit and a wide-brimmed hat. Wherever he treads, El Silbón carries a large sack full of bones on his back. Some say the bones are his father's, some say they're the bones of his victims, but no one knows for sure. His brother's vicious dog returns to chase him and bite his heels every once in a while, (until the end of time) to fulfill their mother's curse.

The most distinct sign of The Whistler is, of course, his eerie whistling. He whistles while he haunts the plains at night. It's a simple but bone-chilling sound consisting of the classic seven notes, always in order: do, re, mi, fa, so, la,

ti... He extends each note a bit at the end, and whistles rather slowly. Now, when the whistling sounds close by, then The Whistler is in fact far away, and there is nothing to fear. But, if the whistling seems to come from afar, then it means that The Whistler is near you. Unfortunately, by the time you realize that, it is probably too late.

Sometimes The Whistler dares to venture into people's homes at night. He dumps the bones from his sack on the floor and counts the bones he carries. It is said that if nobody hears him counting or notices his presence, then one inhabitant of the house will die within a day.

Few people survive an encounter with El Silbón, but, as is the same with most ghosts and creatures of his kind, there are several ways to save yourself from his evil intentions. If you do happen to encounter The Whistler, do not run from him. Instead, face him full on and boldly remind him of what happened during his brief lifetime. Remind him of his horrid crime, of his punishment, of his eternal curse; he will be so ashamed that he will leave you be. Some people prefer to have a whip around the house, to carry some hot peppers with them, or even to simply have a dog around because these are the three things that The Whistler fears the most. If you possess one of these things, when he comes for you, you might just survive.

Why the Sea Moans: Brazil

Once upon a time, there was a young princess who lived in a magnificent palace. Her name was Dionysia. Beautiful gardens sheathed the palace grounds with the colors of lovely flowers and rare trees. The feature of the garden that the Princess liked most of all was a hidden gap in the corner of one wall because it led down to the sea. The Princess had no other children to play with, so she loved to go sit on the smooth sand and watch the changing beauty of the sea. She also loved the sea because it often seemed to her that the crashing waves would say her name as they rushed against the shore, “Di-o-ny-si-a, Di-o-ny-si-a.”

One day, when the little Princess was sitting all alone by the sea, she said to herself, “Oh! I am so lonely. I do so wish that I had somebody to play with. When I ride out in the royal chariot, I see little girls who have other little boys and girls to play with, but because I’m the Princess, nobody wants to play with me. I ought to have at least *some* sort of live thing to play with.” She cradled her knees to her chest and a few tears from her chocolate eyes dripped into the sparkling sand.

But then the most remarkable thing happened! The sea very distinctly and slowly said Dionysia’s name over and over again. “Di-o-ny-si-a, Di-o-ny-si-a.” The little Princess walked up as close to the sea as she could, without risking getting her shoes wet, so that she could hear the sea clearer, when, up out of the sea rose a giant serpent! The little Princess fell away from the water, surprised to see a beast she thought only existed in her picture books. All the

sea serpents in her books looked fierce and spiky, like a monster, but this sea serpent was smooth and had giant, kind-looking eyes. So, with all the courage she could foster in her heart, the little Princess stood up and spoke to the sea serpent. “Would you like to play with me?” she asked.

“I would love to play with you!” replied the serpent. “My name is Labismena. I heard your cries of loneliness from deep within the sea and have come to be your friend!”

Dionysia smiled broadly at the serpent’s response, very happy to finally have a friend. From then on out, the sea serpent came ashore to play with Dionysia every day when she was alone. If anyone else came near, Labismena would leap back into the sea, so no one except Dionysia ever saw her.

The years passed rapidly and each year the little Princess grew larger and larger. Eventually, the Princess turned sixteen years old and her responsibilities within the palace doubled. But, sweet as she was, she still came almost every day to the seashore to spend time with Labismena, her oldest and most beloved playmate.

One day, when the pair was taking a stroll along the shoreline together, the sea serpent looked at Dionysia with her kind eyes—they were very sad that day and full of tears. “I too have been growing older all these years, Dionysia. The time has come for us to part ways; we can no longer play together. I shall never again come out of the sea to play with you, but I shall also never forget you—I will always be your friend. I hope that you will never have any trouble, but if you ever do, simply come down to the sea and call my name. I will come to your aid.” Then Labismena disappeared into the depths of the great sea.

About this time, the Queen of a neighboring kingdom lay dying. On her death bed, she gave the King a

jeweled ring. "When the time comes for you to wed again, I ask you to marry a princess upon whose finger this ring shall never be too tight nor too loose." The Queen passed soon after giving her husband the ring, and he mourned her loss for a long while.

When his time of mourning has subsided, the King began to look for a princess to be his new bride. He visited many royal places, testing the ring on the finger of any eligible princess. For some, the ring was too tight and wouldn't even slide past their knuckle, but for others, it was so loose that they could almost fit two fingers into it! The King was unable to find a princess whose finger fit the ring perfectly.

The King's search eventually brought him to Dionysia's kingdom. Dionysia, like most princesses, dreamt of meeting a young and charming prince someday who would come to wed her, so she was not pleased upon hearing the visiting king's proposition. The King was old and no longer handsome, but he was at least kind, so she agreed to try on the ring. Dionysia hoped with her whole heart that the ring would not fit, but to her horror, it slipped easily onto her finger and fit perfectly.

Dionysia was frightened nearly to death. She pulled her father aside to a different room. "Must I really marry that man, Father?" Her father told her how wealthy and compassionate the King was. He tried to persuade her with notions of a great kingdom and a wonderful palace, but to no effect; Dionysia's heart was breaking over the idea of marrying someone she did not love.

Her father had little patience with her for not being content with the match. "You ought to consider yourself the most fortunate princess in all the world," he said.

Believing her fate to be sealed, Dionysia spent the next few days and nights weeping in her room. Her father was afraid that she would grow so thin from refusing to eat that the ring would no longer fit, so he hastened the day of the wedding even more.

One day, Dionysia decided that she could not go through with the wedding, even though her father demanded it of her. Dionysia didn't know what she could possibly do to stop the wedding, but then it hit her! Labismena's promise! Dionysia's face lit up with hope. She knew getting Labismena's help was her only chance. When no one was looking, she crept through the secret gap in the garden wall and ran down to the seaside. With all her heart, Dionysia called out, "Labismena! Labismena! Please come to my aid, old friend! I've been wasting time crying all these days, when I should have come straight to you for help! Please come help me, Labismena!"

The Princess fell to her knees in the grainy sand and hung her head, defeated. But then, Dionysia's ears perked up at the sound of small splashes. She raised her head to the heavens, and found herself looking up at the face of a dear friend! There was Labismena, answering Dionysia's call just like she promised.

"Have no fear," Labismena said. "Tell your father that you will marry the King as soon as he presents you with a dress the color of the fields and all their flowers, and that you will not marry him until he gives it to you. He could not possibly find a weaver of such fine colors!" Dionysia jumped with glee at the sage advice of her old friend. She thanked Labismena greatly and took off for the palace.

She sent word to her suitor through her father that she would wed him only when he procured for her a dress

the color of the fields and all their flowers. Now, the King was very much in love with Dionysia already, so he was secretly filled with joy at this request. He would surely prove his love to her by granting her request. He searched everywhere for a dress the color of the fields and all their flowers—but that is a very difficult thing to find. He searched through city after city, until, at last, he actually found one!

When Dionysia saw that the King had truly found the dress for her, she was filled with grief. “How could this be possible?” she thought. “Surely there must be another way out of this marriage.” Dionysia once more ran to call for help from her old friend. As soon as Labismena had broken through the surface, Dionysia broke down in tears. “Oh, Labismena! What am I to do now? The King has managed to succeed at the most impossible of tasks. I couldn’t possibly request something else from him, but I could not bear to marry him either—I do not love him!”

Labismena drooped her head to get down to Dionysia’s level. “Do not fret, dear child. Go home, pack the gorgeous gown, and then hurry back down to the beach. I have been preparing a surprise for you.” And so Dionysia did just that.

All the time the King had been searching for the wondrous gown for Dionysia, Labismena had been building a ship for her. When Dionysia returned with the dress carefully packed in a box, she looked at the boat inquisitively. Labismena laughed.

“This little ship will carry you far away, over the sea, to the kingdom of a prince who is the most charming in all the world. When you see him, he will surely want to marry you above all the others.”

“Oh, Labismena! How can I ever repay you for all the kindness you’ve shown to me? All the selfless things you’ve done for me?”

“You can do the greatest thing in the world for me,” Labismena replied. “Though I have never told you, and you have ever suspected it, I am really an enchanted princess. I have been cursed to remain in the form of a sea serpent until the happiest maiden in all the world, in the moment of her greatest happiness, calls my name three times; then I shall be freed. You will be the happiest girl in all the world on the day of your marriage, and if you will only remember to call my name three times then the enchantment over me will be forever broken! I shall once again be a lovely princess instead of a sea serpent.”

Dionysia promised her friend that she would remember to break the spell over her. Labismena asked her to promise three times, just to make sure. Once Dionysia had promised three times and embraced her old friend, she stepped into the little ship and sailed off into the night.

The little ship sailed and sailed until, at last, it bore the Princess to a lovely island with a large city surrounding a grand palace. Dionysia stepped out of the boat, remembering to take her boxed dress with her. As soon as she was out of the boat, it started to sail away! “Oh no! Let’s hope I am indeed where I’m supposed to be,” she thought.

Dionysia entered the beautiful city and learned that a great feast was to be celebrated that day at the palace. Dionysia knew that this would be her chance to meet the Prince, so she combed her hair, put on her gown the color

of the fields and all their flowers, and walked up the hill to the palace to partake in the festa¹⁰.

Everybody took notice of Dionysia for the gorgeous color of her dress, and the Prince, without even speaking to her, fell madly in love with her. He approached Dionysia and asked her to dance. They shared an enchanting dance under the light of the crescent moon. Dionysia could not have asked for a more perfect moment. She spent the rest of the night with the Prince, walking the palace grounds and casually chatting with each other. At the end of the night, when the last call of the trumpet could be heard singing out the final line of a festa song, the Prince dropped to one knee. He asked Dionysia to marry him, and she readily accepted! In that moment, Dionysia truly was the happiest girl in the world, but, because she was so wrapped up in the excitement of the moment, she forgot about her promise!

Dionysia did not take the opportunity to break the spell over her best friend like she had promised to do. Because of Dionysia's neglect, there was no freedom to be found for Labismena. She remained in the form of a sea serpent and permanently lost her chance of ever becoming a lovely princess again and marrying a charming prince of her own.

For this reason, Labismena's sad moan can be heard calling over the sea to this very day—perhaps you have noticed it. It's enough to make anyone's heart break to hear the call of the forlorn sea serpent, forgotten by the very person she sacrificed the most to help. You can hear her cries when the waves break against the shore, saying, "Di-o-ny-si-a, Di-o-ny-si-a."

¹⁰ Feast

Africa

Little Husband: Senegal

In the days when this tale occurred, the sound of the sea could not be heard from Rippène like it can be now. The river had not yet turned towards the south, but instead joined the Great Sea to the north. Fisherman from Rippène would leave early in the morning and not return until midnight because the journey was so far. But, even if not to go to fish, the people of Rippène would visit the beach because of its beauty. The fine, white sand stretched perpendicular to the jungle for half a day's ride while the sea's tide lapped gently at its edge.

Rippène was woven together into a village by its patches of fields, quilted together across the plains. Everyone in the village lived as peaceful farmers, hunting and fishing when necessary. A man named Samba was one of the village's best huntsmen. One night, Samba did not return to his family when he should have. His wife, Koumba, grew worried and the village sent out a search party. By the next morning, they had found Samba's body in the bush. He had been killed by a lion and then picked clean by vultures and hyenas, so there was nothing left of him but a few white bones.

Koumba was heartbroken over the loss of her husband, but she kept her strength up in order to care for her two children: a boy, N'Diogane, and a girl, Khary. N'Diogane and Khary were both very young when their father was killed. He lived in their memories only as a somber figure present during the evening meal, so their lives didn't change too much from his absence. As long as a child has their mother, they will not know great suffering.

Samba's widow would often weep over her husband. One day, Khary asked her mother about her persistent sorrow.

"Mother, why do you weep like this all the time?"

Koumba drew her daughter to her and said, "Because there is no longer a man in the house." Khary's face lit up.

"But, Mother! N'Diogane is a man!"

"Oh! No, he is too small to be a man yet."

"Well then, he shall be our Little Husband."

Koumba smiled and hugged her daughter.

"So he shall."

And from that day on, Khary never called her brother anything else but Little Husband. She believed that the term was endearing, relating her brother to being the man of the house. When she would go searching for him under the palaver trees or out by the well, she would shout, "Little Husband! Where are you? Mother is calling you!"

Now, N'Diogane liked being called Little Husband at first. Being called such made him feel like a man, like the protector of his family. But then, his friends started to make fun of the nickname, and as he grew older, he liked it less and less. All the more, Khary persisted in calling her brother Little Husband. She could not call him anything else, for that was what he was to her! She thought it was silly that he should let some light mockery influence him so heavily.

Years passed and soon N'Diogane turned twelve (the age at which a boy became a man in Rippène). So, N'Diogane, along with all the other twelve-year-olds in their village, entered the 'man's hut' and were circumcised and educated in the ways of men. N'Diogane did not cry out or flinch when his skin was cut, which meant that Koumba

could be proud of him; her son would be a strong, resilient man.

For a one month, the new men lived away from the rest of the village and were trained by the older men in the ways of fishing, hunting, and pilfering (for no one had the right to demand anything back that was stolen). In the evening and at dawn they would practice singing the *kassaks*¹¹, many of whose meaning had been lost over time, but were still honored in the present.

N'Diogane returned to his mother and sister the strongest and most handsome of all the new men. Upon his return, his sister welcomed him, saying, "Mother, here is Little Husband! He has returned!"

"Mother," N'Diogane complained, "tell Khary not to call me Little Husband anymore! I am a man now and deserve to be called by my name." Before Koumba could reply, Khary started singing:

"I say it now and I'll say it again: Little Husband! Little Husband!" N'Diogane became so angry at her stubbornness that he stormed off.

Much like before the ceremony, Khary would go to fetch N'Diogane from the fields, saying, "Little Husband! Mother is calling for you!" But unlike before, N'Diogane's heart now filled with fury at his little sister's call. One day, he lost his temper and beat his sister for calling him Little Husband. Khary wept but would not concede. She ran away from her brother's attack, singing:

"I say it now and I'll say it again: Little Husband! Little Husband!"

One day, N'Diogane had had enough. When Khary came calling for him in the fields, he told her, "Khary, you

will tell mother that I am not coming home. I shall never come home again and am leaving forever. I cannot stand your teasing any longer; I will start my own life."

With that, he ran off towards the sea. Khary, shocked by his response, ran home to tell her mother. She burst into the house.

"Mother!" she yelled. "Little Husband is gone! He's run off towards the sea and claims that he is never coming back!"

Koumba ran into the room, frazzled and afraid. "Then we must go and convince him to come back. Come, Khary. Let's bring him home."

The two women set out for the shore, the mother singing as they went:

"N'Diogane, come back,
Dear N'Diogane, come back!
Don't let your sister drive you away,
N'Diogane, come back!"

Off in the distance, they saw N'Diogane running. His mother started singing louder, but he did not turn back. The women chased after N'Diogane all the way to the beach. The burning sand seared their feet, but Koumba and Khary hardly noticed, because there, standing knee deep in the sea, was N'Diogane!

Finally, he turned to face them. Tears streamed silently down his handsome face. "Mother," he spoke loudly, "tell Khary not to call me Little Husband anymore! I'm sick of it!"

¹¹ Songs of wisdom, sung by the ancient people of Senegal

Koumba did not cry but continued to call out to her son to come back. Khary collapsed to her knees and called out to him through tears of her own.

“But you have always been my Little Husband, brother! I cannot call you anything else because if you are not my Little Husband, then how am I to know who I am? I say it now and I’ll say it again: Little Husband!”

At her words, N’Diogane raised his arms out like a bird, looked up into the sweltering sun, and fell back into the waves. Khary and Koumba scrambled into the water to the place where he landed, but N’Diogane was gone!

Khary started sobbing and clawed through the water, demanding that the sea give N’Diogane back to them. Koumba stopped searching through the waves and turned on Khary. She seized her by the throat, dragged her to the water’s edge, and pressed her face into the wet, shifting sand until Khary’s body became as limp as the jellyfish that the waves threw up on shore.

The whole time, Koumba never stopped singing. She let her tune drown out her thoughts as she brought her daughter’s life to an end. Suddenly, the crashing waves unfurled and swallowed Koumba and her daughter: burying them in its cold embrace, just like N’Diogane.

In the evening, if you ever walk down by the sea, pick up one of the swirled shells on the beach and press it to your ear. What you hear being whispered inside is the weeping and the singing of Koumba, calling to her son:

“N’Diogane, come back,
Dear N’Diogane, come back...”

The Woman with Two Skins: Nigeria

Very long ago, in the southern kingdom of Calabar, King Eyamba the First ruled as a very powerful king. He fought and conquered all the surrounding kingdoms with his mighty army. He showed no mercy to anyone unfit for work and had the old men and women who were taken as slaves killed. The able-bodied men and woman he kept as slaves and worked them on his farms until they died.

The King had two hundred wives, and yet none of them could bear him a son. His subjects became worried, for their king was getting old and still did not have an heir. And an empire with no heir amounts to nothing. Therefore, the King's subjects begged him to marry one of the spider's daughters, because spiders always have plenty of children. The King did not want to comply with the people's wish because the spider's eligible daughter was very ugly. The people blamed her lack of beauty on the number of children her mother had borne before her, and continued to plead with the king to marry her. Eventually, the King complied with his people's request in order to please them, and he married the spider's daughter, a young girl named Adiaha.

The young girl moved into the castle, and everyone jeered at her on account of her ugliness. The other wives complained to the King so much about her ugliness that he had a special house built for her. She was given the same delicious food and drink as all the other wives, but she was lonely in her isolation.

Little did they know that Adiaha was not actually ugly, but really quite beautiful! She was born with two skins, and at her birth the girl's mother was made to promise never to remove the girl's ugly skin until a certain time arrived. Her mother was assured that Adiaha would know when the time was right to reveal her true skin. Save for the nighttime, Adiaha had never revealed her beautiful skin to anyone's eyes except her mother's.

One night, Adiaha removed her ugly skin after the sun went down, because she thought she was alone. But, unknown to her, the King's head wife had come to gloat her own beauty over her. Instead of finding an opportunity to flaunt her beauty, the King's head wife found herself enraged at the sight of Adiaha's true skin. She was gorgeous! Without letting Adiaha know she had been seen, the head wife snuck away and returned to the palace.

This wife would not have her position as head threatened, so she went to visit a Ju Ju man and offered him two hundred rods¹² to make a potion that would cause the King to forget Adiaha's existence. The Ju Ju man refused the wife, reluctant to meddle in such a serious matter as marriage, but the head wife haggled with him up to three hundred and fifty rods, when he finally accepted her deal. The man made up the desired potion, and the King's head wife mixed it up with her husband's food so that he would take it without suspicion.

The King ate the enchanted food without a second thought, and so he forgot all about Adiaha. She would try to converse with the King when he took walks by her little house, but he did not recognize her and shooed her away. Adiaha, unknowing of the magic potion, believed that the

¹² Form of payment like coins, but in the shape of small rods

King had simply abandoned her. She tried for weeks to persuade him to remember her, but he drove her away every time. After months of striving for her husband's attention, Adiaha, heartbroken beyond belief, fled from the palace and returned to her parents' home.

Adiaha's father, also a spider, did not believe that the King had stopped caring for his daughter. If he had wished her to be gone, he would have sent her away, not pretend that she didn't exist. Suspicious, he went to a Ju Ju man for wisdom—the same Ju Ju man the jealous wife had visited. The spider divulged his concerns to the Ju Ju man. Regretting the heartbreak he had caused, the Ju Ju man confessed to the spider what he had done for the jealous wife. The spider still had to pay a large sum for such a powerful potion, but the Ju Ju man made up a potion that, when ingested, would permanently release the King of the previous potion's effects.

The spider skittered home and burst into the house, rejoicing the acquisition of the potion. Adiaha thanked her father a thousand times and mourned the hard heart of the jealous wife for being so unkind to her. Then Adiaha prepared herself for her return to the palace. She went down to the river to wash and put on her best clothes. She took the potion from her father, kissed both her parents goodbye, and headed back to the palace.

By the time Adiaha reached the palace gardens, the inky blue of the night darkness had fallen. She felt a surge in her heart that she had never felt before. Because of it, she knew that the time had time; she removed her ugly skin and let it fade away into the past. She decided to let the King come to her, so she took a walk through the gardens that ran under his bedchambers. The King indeed noticed someone walking in his garden. Just as he was about to call

his guards to arrest the person, the moon shone its glossy beams directly onto Adiaha; her true beauty was revealed to the King. His heart melted over her loveliness, and he rushed down to see her.

Once out in the gardens, the King approached Adiaha, who had placed herself gracefully on one of the stone benches. The King sat next to her and said, "Lovely woman, tell me, who are you?"

Adiaha responded, "I am someone you have been made to forget. Please, eat this food I prepared for you, and you will know."

The King gladly took the enchanted dish and ate it. Immediately, the effect of the last potion wore off, and Adiaha's voice suddenly became recognizable to him.

"The spider's daughter? My wife? Is that you? How is it that you are so beautiful now?"

Adiaha smiled. "This is my true form, my King. I have been saving it until the proper time, which I knew was to be tonight. I had to come to you in my true skin, because my ugly skin had been concealed from your memory with a magic potion."

The King's expression soured. "Who would dare use magic on the King? Tell me, my wife. Who had you removed from my mind?"

"It was your head wife, my King. She somehow learned that this is my true form, and, fearing that you would grow to love me more than her, erased me from your mind."

The King rose in anger. "I will deal with her later. But for now, let us retire to my quarters. You shall no longer live in a separate house from me."

And so, the King and Adiaha truly lived together in the kingdom. Adiaha was raised to the position of head

wife. The jealous head wife was deemed a traitor, and they executed her for daring to use magic against the King.

Adiaha moved her parents into her little, separate house on the palace grounds so that they could all be together. By the next year, Adiaha gave birth to a beautiful son. The whole kingdom rejoiced at their country's good fortune, their certainty for the future restored. The King, Adiaha, her parents, and her little boy all lived quite happily together for some years until the King died wherein his son rose to the throne and ruled in his stead.

The Grateful Fish: Egypt

This story was narrated by S. Ghunaim, a 54-year-old policeman of Bedouin¹³ origin from Fayyoun Province¹⁴. He was a very kind man who was married and had several children. He heard this story during a saint's birthday celebration from one of his friends. He knew that he would never forget this tale because it shows how God rewards a small good deed in plenty.

Once there was a poor fisherman who lived only on whatever fish he could catch. He used to catch three fish a day every day: one for himself, one for his wife, and one for his son. His good fortune in catching three fish each day was usually reliable, but one day, he spent the entire day with his lines in the water and didn't catch anything at all. Finally, right before sunset, he caught one small fish. The fisherman gave the little fish to his son to carry on their way home. The son looked at the fish and saw that it was very small and looked like no other fish he had seen before.

He thought to himself, "Surely this fish deserves some more time to grow before being cooked up as our supper," and so he threw it back in the river.

When the father saw that his son had thrown the fish back, he shouted at him, "You son of a dog! How could you? By God, you will not eat tonight."

The same thing happened the following day. The father hoped that his son had learned his lesson from the first time, but the son threw the little fish back into the river

again. The third time this happened, the father cursed his son.

"Go away! And don't ever come back! No son of mine will be so disobedient!"

And so the son ran away from home.

The son's name was Hasan. He had nothing but a little bit of bread in his pocket and a pouch of water slung around his shoulder when he started running, but he knew that he could not go home. About midday, Hasan sat down and got his bread out to eat. A poor dervish¹⁵ came up to him.

"Son, would you give me a drink of water?"

Hasan's heart went out to the poor man, so he not only gave him all the water he wanted, but also split his bread with the man. After the meal, they sat and chatted. The dervish asked Hasan where he was heading.

"I am now drifting from country to country with no place to call home. My father banished me from my own family."

The dervish smiled kindly.

"Well then, we could walk along together, us two lonely travelers."

Appreciative of the company, the boy accepted. The pair traveled from town to town, working odd jobs to provide for themselves. For many years, they lived a poor but content life. One day, they came to a large city.

The dervish said to Hasan, "Look, I'm going to the market to get something for us to eat. Wait for me at that coffeehouse across the square."

Hasan nodded, but, instead of heading straight to the coffeehouse, he stopped to peer at all the people and shops.

¹³ Ethnic group of nomadic Arabs

¹⁴ Northeastern Egypt

¹⁵ Muslim hermit sometimes called a fakir. Seen as austere, enigmatic, and capable of performing supernatural feats

The sights of such a large city market were foreign to him; he was fascinated by all the strange goods. As he was looking around, soldiers suddenly came around shouting at the townspeople.

“Go to your homes! Go to your homes! The sultan’s daughter is going to the bath.”

Everyone except Hasan scattered away from the main street at once, forgetting their business and leaving their wares unguarded. Hasan didn’t know where to go, so he just froze where he stood. Luckily, at the sound of the sultan’s daughter’s personal entourage approaching, his instincts kicked in and he dove behind a fabric cart. He was fully hidden between the swaths of silk, but when he heard the sultan’s daughter coming down the street, he felt the need to catch a quick glimpse of her. He popped his head up for a mere second to steal a glance at the sultan’s daughter, and immediately regretted that he did, because she was so beautiful that he felt himself falling in love with her and could not help but lean in to see her more clearly. Unfortunately, this caused Hasan to lose his balance and accidentally fall right through the fabric swaths. He tumbled onto the ground and landed right at the sultan’s daughter’s feet. When she saw him there, staring at her, she ordered her guards to arrest him at once. The guards yanked Hasan off the ground and threw him in prison for offending the sultan’s daughter.

When the dervish returned from his errand, he noticed the change in the atmosphere of the market, and passersby told him what had happened. The dervish waited until it was night and then took out two of Hasan’s hairs which he pulled from Hasan’s spare head wrap. He recited

the Kursi chapter of the Koran and immediately a telepathic portal formed between the dervish and Hasan.

Hasan told the dervish what had happened to him and apologized for not heeding his instruction. While Hasan retold his tale, the dervish noticed something off about Hasan’s energy. He requested that Hasan talk about the sultan’s daughter once more, and soon figured out that Hasan was sick with love. The dervish encouraged Hasan to try to forget the sultan’s daughter, but Hasan’s condition only worsened over the next couple weeks. He couldn’t eat any food or enjoy any drink, and no medicine helped him. Eventually, the dervish decided that he must find a way for Hasan to see the sultan’s daughter again. One day, the dervish came to visit Hasan in prison and retrieved a small can of kohl¹⁶ from his bag. He used the dip stick to put some kohl on Hasan’s eyelashes. He also wrote some magic words on his eyelashes and forehead.

When he was finished, he told Hasan, “Now go and see the sultan’s daughter...”

“But how can this kohl make a difference in helping me see the sultan’s daughter?” Hasan interrupted.

The dervish answered, “I have made you invisible. Now you can do whatever you want, but remember that God can still see you. Don’t do anything to make him angry at you.”

Hasan could not believe it. He wondered, ‘How could I truly be invisible?’, but he trusted the dervish, so he made an attempt to escape from the prison. He bent one of the bars from the window, which creaked loudly and alerted the guards. Two guards came running to his cell, but when they peered in, they assumed that the sound was just the

¹⁶ Ancient eye-cosmetic made from ground sulfide materials used for similar purposes as charcoal for mascara

wind, for, when they looked into Hasan's cell, it appeared empty. Giddy with excitement over his new power, Hasan made his way to the palace.

When he got there, he tiptoed behind one of the guards and pushed him for fun.

The guard turned around abruptly and shouted, "Who's there? Who pushed me?"

Holding in a laugh, Hasan moved on to find the sultan's daughter's chambers. He heard the sound of women's laughter and followed its echo through the palace hallways. He peered in to one of the rooms and saw the sultan's daughter lying on her bed. Hasan crept into the room and went to go stand by her.

Unlike the prison guards or the palace guard, the sultan's daughter was not so easily fooled. She could sense that someone was in her room, even though she could see no one. After two or three days, she told her father of her suspicions. To ease his daughter's mind, he ordered all the doors and windows closed and every corner of the palace searched for an intruder; they found no one. Despite the sultan's reassurance, his daughter refused to believe that her hunch was wrong.

Luckily, a wise old woman, one of the daughter's servants, came forward.

"If there is anybody hiding in your daughter's chambers, I can bring him out."

The sultan sat back, relieved. "Do all you think is necessary."

The old woman said, "Bring me some green corn cobs and some buffalo dung."

The sultan ordered a few of his servants to fulfill the woman's demands. She lit a big fire in the daughter's bedroom and tossed the cobs and dung onto it. The smoke

that wafted out of the fire was thick enough to blind even the clearest eyes. Hasan's eyes began to water in reaction to the heavy smoke, and he accidentally washed away the kohl with his tears. Once the kohl was gone, he became visible again.

The sultan's daughter screamed when Hasan came into view from behind the cloud of smoke. The guards arrested him at once, and, for the second time, he was thrown in prison.

The sultan sent a town crier through the town with a drum saying, "Hasan will have his head chopped off tomorrow for having entered the private quarters of the sultan's daughter without permission."

The dervish, upon hearing this disastrous news, sent a message to the sultan which read: "Hasan is my son, and I want your daughter's hand in marriage for him."

The sultan got very angry at the dervish's request and shouted at his vizier, "You, go get me this man."

His vizier fled the throne room and scoured the streets for the dervish. After a long evening of searching, the vizier spotted the dervish in the market and ran up to him.

"Sir, the sultan wants to see you."

"I'll go with you then. Lead the way, my friend."

While on their way, the dervish made a magnificent palace appear before them!

The vizier stopped walking and admired the palace in amazement.

"Whose palace is this?"

"Yours!"

The vizier looked at the dervish, confused. "Mine?"

"Of course!" said the dervish. "Let's go in."

The interior of the palace was second to none. The dervish began showing the vizier around the rooms.

“It’s so nice and cool in here,” remarked the vizier. “I’m going to take a nap. But be sure not to be late for the sultan.” And he went to sleep.

The sultan waited and waited for the dervish to arrive, but no one came. He sent his soldiers to see what had happened to the vizier. After looking everywhere, they finally found the vizier lying underneath a mule, fast asleep!

They shook the man awake and demanded to know where the dervish was. “By God, I have failed! Where is the dervish?”

The soldiers told the vizier that he had never gone to see the sultan, and so the vizier returned to the throne room, ashamed.

“Where have you been?” demanded the sultan.

“Your majesty, the dervish would not come here at the request of anyone except you personally. I have been trying to persuade him to come see you all day.”

“I do not care what *he* wants,” shouted the sultan.

“Go back and get him, or I’ll have your head chopped off as well!”

The poor vizier pleaded with the sultan. “Please, let us both go, my lord. For he is going to have much more respect for you.”

The sultan conceded to the vizier’s wishes, and the two of them went to search out the dervish. When they arrived at the dervish’s home, he received them with “ahlan wa sablan¹⁷”.

The sultan replied, “Neither ablan nor Sablan; you come with me now.”

“Where, your majesty?” asked the dervish.

“You will know later. Now, I command it. Come with us.”

The dervish said, “I leave my affairs in God’s hands,” and left with the sultan and the vizier.

On their way back to the palace, they came across a palace that was more beautiful than any they had ever seen before. It was built of alternating bricks of gold and silver. The sultan wondered aloud, “I’ve never seen this palace before. Whose palace is this?”

“Why, it is yours, your Majesty. Let’s go in,” said the dervish.

The sultan agreed and let the dervish lead the way into the palace. Once inside, he inspected the palace until he came to the bath. There was a large marble bathtub inside, filled with glittering water. The sultan said, “I’m going to take a dip.” The vizier was concerned that the dervish was playing his same tricks on the sultan, but of course, he wanted to keep his head, so he said nothing.

The sultan removed his clothing and stepped into the tub. As soon as he went underwater, he found himself changed into a woman! And a woman who was not inside the glamorous castle but was now standing by the riverbank no less!

A shadowed man came by and asked her, “Where did you come from, sweet lady?”

She answered, “I–I don’t know.” (She being the sultan.)

When the man realized that the woman was all alone and very beautiful, he approached her and grabbed one of her wrists menacingly.

“Why don’t you come with me?”

¹⁷ A greeting meaning both ‘hello’ and ‘welcome’

She shouted, "Take your hands off me! I am the sultan!"

The man just laughed wickedly. "Sultan who, crazy woman! Come with me," and he dragged her behind him.

When they reached his tent, he yanked her inside and she fell at the feet of his existing three wives and fifteen or twenty children. They all started ordering her about to do this or that. They kicked her and punched her and, for her midday meal, fed her only crumbs. They tossed all their laundry to her and ordered her to take them to the river to wash them. She sorrowfully picked up the sack of clothing and hauled it to the riverbank. Once there, she set the sack of clothes down on the shore and hopped into the water to wash off the sweat and dirt that had accumulated on her skin from her hard chores. She stayed under the cool water for a moment and then made for the surface, only to find that she was resurfacing into the marble bathtub, and was changed back into the sultan! The sultan gasped for air and scrambled out of the water. The vizier looked horrified, but the dervish was barely holding back a smile.

"How was the bath, your majesty?" asked the dervish.

"Not an experience I would like to repeat!" he shouted back. "That's enough of your tricks, dervish."

"Your majesty," the vizier interjected. "I think we ought to marry your daughter to the dervish's son—before he can play any more cruel tricks on us."

The sultan thought for a moment. "That is perhaps the best counsel you have ever given, my pitiful vizier. I concur. I will pacify your ambitions, dervish. Your son may have my daughter's hand in marriage."

That night, Hasan was confusedly released from prison, given time to wash, and treated to a fine dinner

where he and the sultan's daughter were reintroduced to one other. Once made aware of Hasan's intentions when entering her chambers while invisible, the sultan's daughter forgave his intrusion. She also found herself swiftly falling in love with his charming and kind personality. Hasan was later reunited with the dervish as well, who told Hasan of all that had happened while he was in prison and explained how he had won the sultan's daughter's hand for him. He also admitted to Hasan that, in his eyes, Hasan would always be his son.

Within a week, Hasan and the sultan's daughter were married. The whole city celebrated for forty days and forty nights. Near the end of the celebration, the dervish pulled Hasan aside.

"I cannot stay with you any longer, Hasan. Your journey continues here, while I must go on. May you live long and be prosperous, my friend. I have cherished our time together. Do you remember the small fish that you returned to the water those three times when you were a boy? Well, that fish was I."

The Stars and the Stars' Road: South Africa

Dark-blue and endless, the arc of the sky hung over the great Karroo¹⁸ like a canopy of the softest velvet, making a deep, mysterious background for the myriad of stars which twinkled brightly at the frosty world.

Three little boys, Jan, Pietie, and Willem, gathered at the window in their home. They pointed out the many constellations Governess Minnie had made familiar to them. They also enjoyed coming up with constellations of their own creation, giggling to themselves about the endless possibilities for pictures in the sky. While they were discussing the nature of the stars, Outa Karel, the old storyteller, shuffled in.

“Outa,” said Willem. “Do you think there could be a billion stars up there in the Milky Way?”

“A billion, you know,” Pietie piped up, “is a thousand million. And it would take months just to count even one million!”

“What about ten billion? Could there be ten billion up there?” asked Jan.

Outa Karel simply chuckled at their many questions and made his way over to a stool by the fireplace. He motioned for the boys to come sit by him and they all ran to him, stumbling over each other to sit at Outa Karel’s feet; they loved nothing more than hearing Outa’s stories.

“Listen well children,” said the old man readily. “There are surely a billion stars up there. Perhaps, even *two* billion.”

The three boys all gasped, unbelieving.

“But no one knows for sure, because you can never count them all. There are too many. And to think, the bright road in the sky is made of ashes.”

“Ashes?” asked Pietie. “What ever do you mean, Outa?”

Outa resettled himself on his stool and the boys perked up their ears, ready to hear more about the stars.

“Yes, ashes, Pietie. Long, long ago, the sky would be completely dark when the Sun had gone away for the day. But then, people learned how to make fire and we lit up the night’s darkness. One night, a young girl, who sat warming herself by the wood fire, was playing with the ashes of her small fire. She took some ashes in her hands and threw them up to watch them float back to the ground. The gray embers looked rather pretty coasting back down to the ground. While the ashes floated down, the girl put some green bushes on the fire and stirred it with a stick. Bright sparks flew out of the fire suddenly and went high into the sky, mixing with the silver ashes. Instead of floating down, the ashes mixed with the sparks and floated up so high that they became a part of the night sky. They hung in the air and formed a bright road across the sky. You call it the Milky Way, but Outa calls it the Star’s Road.

The little girl was so pleased with her accidental deed! She clapped her hands and danced, admiring the new additions to the glossy sky. She sang a song to the beauty:

‘The little stars! The tiny stars!

They make a road for other stars.

Ash of wood-fire! Dust of the Sun!

They call the Dawn when Night is done!’

After singing her song of thankfulness, the little girl took some of the roots that she had been eating and threw them into the sky. They too clung onto the night, turning into large,

¹⁸ Semiarid plateau region of southwest South Africa

blazing stars. The old roots turned into stars that give red light and the young roots turned into the stars that glow with golden light. After the girl had filled the sky with stars, she admired how they hung in the sky so beautifully, winking and twinkling against their navy background. This time, it was the stars that sang to the little girl instead of her singing to the sky:

‘We are children of the Sun!
It’s so! It’s so! It’s so!
Him we call when Night is done!
It’s so! It’s so! It’s so!
Bright we sail across the sky
By the Stars’ Road, high, so high;
As we sail across the blue!
It’s so! It’s so! It’s so!’

Dear children, know this: when the stars twinkle up there in the sky, it’s like they are children themselves, nodding their heads and saying, ‘It’s so! It’s so! It’s so!’

At each repetition, Outa nodded and winked, and the three boys, in an antic of approval, laughed and followed suit.

“Have you sometimes seen a star fall out here on the Karroo?” Outa asked. The three little heads nodded in time together.

“When a star falls,” said the old man tenderly, “it tells us someone has died. The stars know when a person’s heart fails and they die. In commemoration of that person, a star falls from the sky to tell those at a distance that someone they know has died.

Once, a star grew and grew until he was much larger than all the others. He was called the Great Star and, through song, he named all of the other stars. It’s true! One by one, he named each of them. In this way, they knew that he was the Great Star. No other star could possibly have done what he did.

When the Great Star had finished naming every star, all the stars sang together to praise the Great Star for his good work.

Now, when the day is done, all the stars walk across the sky on each side of the Stars’ Road. It shows them the way across the sky. And when Night is over, all the stars turn back and sail back across the Stars’ Road to call the Daybreak, which comes before the Sun. The Star that leads the way is the biggest, brightest star. He is called the Dawn’s-Heart Star. Even in the darkest hour of the night, he shines! He is very beautiful too. The wife and child of the Dawn’s-Heart Star are pretty too, but not quite as big and bright as he. Their little family sails at the front of the group of all the stars flying across the Star’s Road: calling, calling, calling to Dawn at the end of the Night. Dawn must come up so that she can rouse the Sun from under the world where he has been sleeping.

All the stars call and sing to the Dawn, twinkling as they sing:

‘We call across the sky,
Dawn! Come, Dawn!
You, that are like a young maid newly risen,
Rubbing the sleep from your eyes!
You, that come stretching bright hands to the

sky,

Pointing the way for the Sun!
Before whose smile the Stars faint and grow

pale,

And the Stars’ Road melts away.
Dawn! Come, Dawn!
We call across the sky,
And the Dawn’s-Heart Star is waiting.
It’s so! It’s so! It’s so!’

So they sing, little ones, because they know that soon they will go out. Dawn always comes when she hears the

singing of the stars. She rubs her eyes, smiles, stretches out her bright fingers, and chases the darkness away. The Stars grow faint and the Stars' Road fades while the Dawn makes a bright pathway for the Sun. At last, when he comes with both arms lifted high, the Sun uses his brightness to make wonderful day for the world, waking people to their work and play.

But do not fret, my children! The little Stars sleep peacefully until it is the Sun's turn to sleep again—then they may resume their singing! Summer time is when they sing best, but even now, in the time for Frost, you can see the stars, twinkling and singing.”

Willem, Jan, and Pietie ran to the window once more and gazed out into the starlit heavens. Outa watched the boys with a loving smile as their three little heads bobbed up and down in time to the ancient music of the Stars.

Jan excitedly rang out, “Yes, it's quite true, Outa! They *do* say, ‘It's so! It's so! It's so!’”

Seven Brothers and a Sister: Morocco

Long, long ago, there was a family with eight children: seven sons and one daughter named Aisha. Aisha was the youngest and most cherished child in the family. Her parents and all of her brothers loved her dearly. One day, tragedy struck their happy family. Both the children's mother and father drowned in a flooding river while trying to save their livestock. All the children mourned greatly over their parents, but they held onto the hope that everything would be okay as long as they had each other. Aisha's brothers took good care of her after the death of their parents. They provided her with everything she needed, and she was very grateful for it.

To ensure Aisha's safety, her brothers rebuilt their house and put locks on all the layers of the front door, which was seven doors thick, so that nothing bad would happen to her when they went hunting or were out working in the land. Although Aisha appreciated her brothers' desire to keep her safe, she became bored and lonely as she spent more and more time alone.

Luckily, Aisha found a beautiful cat one day to keep as her company. She named the cat Minoush, and they became the best of friends. They swore to share everything with each other and never betray one another. Aisha's brothers were glad for the cat because it kept Aisha's mind occupied. She no longer complained of loneliness or boredom even if they were gone for the whole day. They felt sure that Aisha would be safe at home because they always

locked all seven doors behind them whenever they went out.

One day, Aisha's brothers learned that they all needed to travel far away on business. They took every possible precaution for ensuring Aisha's safety in their absence. They supplied her with all the provisions she could possibly need during their trip so that she would not need to go out by herself. When the time came for them to leave, they all hugged their sister goodbye and left in the early morning. As always, they locked all seven layers of the front door when they left. Aisha picked up Minoush and they both waved farewell to her brothers until they were out of sight.

A few days passed, and Aisha and Minoush were happy sharing each other's company. They talked and played all day, enjoying the quiet in the house without Aisha's seven brothers being there. Aisha cleaned the house room by room and casually prepared meals for her and the cat. Everything was going perfectly until Aisha came across a chickpea while sweeping the floor. She picked the chickpea up off the floor and wiped it on her dress. Minoush had been lying on the bed asleep, but her ears perked up at the stopping of the broom. Minoush raised her head and asked for a share of the chickpea, but Aisha was greedy and ate it all.

Angry at Aisha's selfishness, Minoush padded off in a huff and went back into the bedroom to sleep. Later that night, while Aisha was busy kneading dough to make bread, Minoush slipped into the kitchen, peed on all the matches, pranced back out of the kitchen, and went back to sleep.

When night fell and it started to get cold, Aisha headed into the kitchen to get a match to start a fire to heat

up her and Minoush's dinner, but, much to her dismay, the matches were all soaking wet.

"Oh, Minoush," she said, turning to the cat, "the matches are all soaked through. What are we to do?"

The cat acted surprised. "Well," she replied, "why don't you go out and borrow some matches from a neighbor?"

Aisha's face paled. "G-go outside? But it's dark out!"

Minoush jumped up onto the counter to meet Aisha at eye level.

"You don't want us to freeze to death, do you? We can't possibly make it through the night without matches! You have to do this, Aisha."

Aisha nodded, realizing that she had no choice. So, one by one, she opened each of the seven front doors and stepped outside for the first time in many years. The air carried a harsh chill, so Aisha huddled into her scarf and began searching for a neighbor. Luckily, in the stark darkness of the night, she quickly spotted a small fire glowing somewhere not too far in the distance. She followed the hazy glow through the woods until she emerged into a small clearing around the fire. A small hut sat in the clearing, but it was only when Aisha saw the fire's attendant that she froze completely, and her tongue stuck to its palate.

An old ghoulish was sitting by the fire. He was using a donkey's head as a chair; for a turban, he had wrapped the donkey's intestines around his head, and he was slowly stirring a large black pot that was resting over the fire with the donkey's leg. Aisha sucked in a gasp at the sight of him, and the ghoulish snapped his head in her direction.

"What do you want?" he demanded in a disgruntled tone.

When Aisha failed to reply in a timely manner, he repeated the question with more menace. Poor Aisha started shaking all over. She finally managed to respond to the gruesome ghoulish with great effort.

"I need fire, Uncle Ghoulish. I've run out of matches."

"Oh, so that's what you've come for. Certainly you may have some."

With that he selected a few embers from the heart of his fire, laid them on a zinc plate, and handed it to her. When Aisha came close to take the gift, the ghoulish scratched her soft arm with his sharp claws as though by accident. Aisha flinched at the pain, whispered her thanks, and left quickly; blood dripping from her arm the whole way.

After a while, the ghoulish went out and sniffed the ground. A drop of Aisha's blood had dripped onto the ground there, and the ghoulish licked it up voraciously. He followed the scent of Aisha's blood all the way back to her house. He knocked on the front door and waited, licking his lips. Aisha began shaking with fear when she heard the knock. She hoped that it was her brothers returning from their trip and took heart. She stepped into the front room close to the doors.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"O Aisha, dear heart," the ghoulish intoned in his eerily echoing voice, "open the door for me."

Recognizing the ghoulish's voice, Aisha's heart dropped and she went numb. Her brothers had not come home; it was the ghoulish. Aisha did not open the door.

"Tell me," the ghoulish asked after a long pause, "what did you see when you found me sitting?"

Aisha knew that the ghoulish was trying to trick her, so she lied.

“Oh, Uncle Ghoul, you were sitting on a chair of...gold!”

“What did you see on my head?”

“A fine, silk turban.”

“And what was I doing?”

“Stirring your soup.”

“With what?”

“A lovely silver spoon, of course.”

The ghoul was flattered by her responses, so, instead of trying to kill Aisha, he simply knocked down the first door and went away, satisfied. Unfortunately for Aisha, the ghoul returned the following night, and the night after that, and the night after that, asking the same questions. Each night, Aisha gave him the same answers, and he broke down one more door every night.

On the seventh day, Aisha found herself in real trouble. Only one door stood between her and the ghoul tonight; she was beside herself with worry over what would happen once he had broken down the final door. Minoush was no help. She simply remained silent and sat resting on the corner of the counter.

Night fell, and the ghoul’s visiting hour drew near. Aisha’s fear intensified with every passing minute; her heart kept beating faster and faster, it’s thumping like the drum of fate. Aisha knew that if she tried to run, the ghoul would find her wherever she went, so she stood her ground and waited for his arrival, wishing that her brothers had never left.

When the thudding of footsteps outside reached Aisha’s ears, she wrapped herself in a thick cloth and sunk into a corner of the front room. She tried to hold her breath to listen more carefully, but her heartbeat was deafening.

Suddenly, her ears distinguished many voices outside; they sounded like her brothers’ voices! Was it just her imagination? Aisha shed her cover and crept over to the door, lightly pressing her ear against the paneled wood. She could now clearly make out her brothers’ voices, talking amongst themselves. They were shocked to discover that six of the front doors had been broken off.

They knocked cautiously on the remaining door, apprehensive to know what awaited them inside. Overwhelmed with joy, Aisha burst through the door and fell into their arms, sobbing. All her brothers were extremely delighted that she was still alive and listened intently to her frightening tale about the blood-thirsty ghoul.

Thinking fast, Aisha’s seven brothers immediately dug a large hole beneath the front door, covered it with hay, and joined Aisha at the back of the front room, where they waited silently for the ghoul’s arrival. Despite the circumstances, Aisha stood glowing among her seven brothers, confident in their survival now that they were all together again.

Before long, the ghoul came knocking at the door. When Aisha did not open it, he asked her as usual, “O Aisha, dear heart, what was I sitting on at my campsite?”

“A donkey’s head,” she replied defiantly.

“What was on my head?”

“A turban made from a donkey’s intestines.”

“And what was I doing?”

“Stirring rotten water.”

“With what?”

“A donkey’s leg.”

With each true but offensive answer, the ghoul’s rage grew. At Aisha’s last response, his anger reached its climax. The ghoul charged forward at the door with all his might.

The last door broke open with ease, and the ghoul, forgetting to watch his footing, fell right through the hay into the hole! Before he had a chance to make an escape, the seven brothers dumped a bunch of firewood into the hole and set it on fire. The ghoul tried to claw his way out of the hole, but it was too deep to escape—even for his long, clawed arms.

All the siblings gathered around the hole to watch the ghoul burn to ashes. Aisha stood over him, watching with pride and triumph. As the ghoul crumbled to pieces, he reached his arm out from the embers and shook his fist at Aisha.

“You have not escaped me, Aisha!” he yelled. “You will surely die at my hand someday!”

In response, Aisha simply gave a mocking laugh, and the flames swallowed up the horrible ghoul.

One day, several years later, when the ghoul had been all but forgotten by Aisha and her brothers, Minoush died of old age; Aisha did not mourn her deeply. Ever since the day of the chickpea incident, the cat was always in a sour mood and spent all her time alone. Aisha buried Minoush in the yard with a simple goodbye.

Later, Aisha was sitting on the roof of the house watching her brothers at work in the nearby field. She casually combed through her hair with some olive oil and sang softly to herself. Suddenly, a shadow was cast between her and the sun. Aisha looked up, confused, and saw that a raven was the reason for the shadow. He hovered over her for a moment, then landed on the ground and started digging with his beak and claws until he reached the spot where the ghoul had burned to death and was buried. The black bird fished around in the dirt for a moment, then picked up a bone and flew overhead, letting the bone slip

from its beak directly over Aisha. That particular bone was one of the ghoul’s extremely sharp claws, so when it hit Aisha, it pierced her head like an arrow. She dropped dead on the spot, fulfilling the ghoul’s prediction.

The Lion, the Hyena, and the Rabbit: Tanzania

Once upon a time, Sim'ba the lion, Fee'see the hyena, and Keetee'tee the rabbit made up their minds to start farming together, so they travelled far into the countryside where the earth was rich and fertile. There they dug a large garden plot, planted all kinds of seeds, and then came home and rested for quite a long while.

Months later, when the time came for the crops to be harvested, the three animals said to each other, "Let's go over to the farm and see how our crops are coming along!" So, early the next morning, they began the trek to their garden.

Before they had gone very far, Keetee'tee, the rabbit, suggested a proposition. "While we are going to the farm, let us not stop on the road even just for a second; if any one does stop, let him be eaten by the other two." Sim'ba and Fee'see readily accepted the deal, confident that they could outwalk the little rabbit.

After consenting to the arrangement, they started off again. They hadn't made it very far at all when the rabbit stopped walking. The lion and hyena turned on him, ready to attack.

"Hullo! Look at this!" said Fee'see. "Keetee'tee has stopped...so he must be eaten."

"That's the bargain," agreed Sim'ba.

"Although," said Keetee'tee, "I happened to be thinking."

"About what?" asked his partners with great curiosity.

"I'm thinking," said he, in a serious, philosophical manner, "about those two stones, one big and the other little. The little one does not go up, nor does the big one go down."

The lion and hyena, having stopped to look at the curious stones, could only say, "Why, really, it's singular, but it is just as you say."

Forgetting their ravenous appetite for the little bunny, they absentmindedly resumed their journey. Keetee'tee had both gotten a good time of rest in and avoided getting eaten.

When they had gone some distance more, the rabbit stopped again.

"Aha!" said Fee'see. "Keetee'tee has stopped again. Now we *must* eat him."

"I rather think so," assented Sim'ba.

"That was our deal, indeed, but would you first like to know what I am thinking?"

Their curiosity aroused once more; the rabbit's comrades begged him to tell them what he was pondering.

"Why," said he, again in his philosophical tone, "I was thinking this: when we put on a new coat, where do the old ones go?"

Both Sim'ba and Fee'see stopped to consider the matter. Eventually, they exclaimed together, "Well, I wonder!", but, by that time, the rabbit had had time to rest and the lion and hyena had again forgotten their intent to eat the little rabbit, so the three of them continued on their journey.

After a little while, the hyena, thinking he could show off his own philosophy, suddenly stopped walking.

"Here now," growled Sim'ba, "this won't do. I guess we'll have to eat *you*, Fee'see."

“Oh, no,” said the hyena. “I’m...thinking.”

“What are you thinking about?” inquired Sim’ba and Keetee’tee.

“I’m thinking about nothing at all,” said he, imagining himself to be quite witty.

“Ah, pshaw!” cried Keetee’tee. “We won’t be fooled this way!”

Sim’ba leapt right in to eating Fee’ssee; Keetee’tee let him have it all. He was not interested in eating Fee’ssee but in saving his own skin from the lion’s teeth.

When Sim’ba had finished eating their friend, the lion and rabbit proceeded on their journey. Their flourishing garden came into sight on the brink of the horizon, and yet, Keetee’tee stopped to check out a nearby cave.

“Hmm!” growled Sim’ba. “I’m quite full after finishing off Fee’ssee, but I guess I’ll have to find room for you, little Keetee’tee!”

“Oh, I believe not,” said Keetee’tee. “I’m thinking again.”

“Don’t try to trick me with your trails of thought, Keetee’tee! I *will* be eating you.”

“I know you will, but first, let me share my thoughts with you.” Before continuing, Keetee’tee went all the way into the cave. “I’m thinking about this cave! In olden times, our ancestors used to go in here, and go out there. I think I’ll try to follow in their footsteps. He then hopped in and out several times successfully, hiding from the lion how hard he had to work to squeeze through the exit. “Sim’ba, my friend, let’s see *you* try to do that.”

Curious to follow in the steps of his ancestors too, Sim’ba stepped into the cave with ease. But, when he tried to get back out again, he stuck fast! He could go neither forward nor backward.

Keetee’tee walked around the outside of the cave so that he could face Sim’ba. “Eating Fee’ssee has made you fat and arrogant! It looks like you will not be eating me after all Sim’ba, or anyone else for that matter—ever again.”

“O, brother, please help me! I promise that I will not eat you!”

Keetee’tee started to back away from the lion. “You promised the same thing to Fee’ssee this morning, Sim’ba, and look where his trust in you got him.”

So Keetee’tee left Sim’ba stuck in the cave and went to become the sole owner of the farm and its crops.

North America

The Bear Man: United States, Pawnee Tribe

There was once a young boy who, when playing with the other children, used to often imitate the ways of the bear. He liked to pretend that he was one, growling at the other children and running about on all fours. The idea of the bear seemed magical to the young boy, for neither him nor any of the other children in their village had ever seen one before.

Now, it happened that about five or six months before this boy was born, his mother had been left at home alone because his father had been called to go to war. As the father was heading to the warpath, he came upon a little bear cub whose mother had gone away, and he caught it. He did not want to kill it because it was so young and helpless; to him, it seemed like a little child and not a threatening predator. The baby bear looked up at the man and cried after him because it knew no better, and the man hated to kill it all the more.

So, instead of killing the cub, the man simply placed him in a safe spot in the woods. He took a string and tied it around the cub's neck, also tying some medicine tobacco to the string. After doing this, he said, "Pi-rau"¹⁹, you are surely a Nahu'rac²⁰; Ti-ra'-wa²¹ created you and takes care of you. May this necklace be a blessing to you so that he will look after you. I have good feelings toward you, and I hope that when my child is born, the Nahu'rac will take

care of him and see that he grows up to be a good man. I hope that Ti'ra'-wa will take care of you and of mine." He talked to the little bear for a while longer, looking at it for a long time, and then continued on his way.

After the war was won, the man returned home to his village. He had missed his wife dearly and was worried about the fate of his unborn child while he was away. The man told his wife about the bear cub: how he had looked at it and talked to it and hoped for its safety.

When the man's wife gave birth to their child, a healthy young boy came to life, but he had all the ways of a bear! This is known among the Pawnees; a woman, before her child is born, must not look hard at any animal, for the child may turn out to be like it. There was a woman in the Kit-ke-hahk'-i village who caught a rabbit while she was pregnant. She liked that it was gentle and soft, so she kept it and looked at it for a long time. When her son was born, he had a split nose, exactly like a rabbit.

But this boy, who was born with traits of the bear, only grew more like the bear as he grew up. Often he would go off by himself and try to pray to the bear, because he felt like a bear. The boy felt more comfortable believing that he was actually a bear than when he was trying to fit in with the other boys his age. He even used to say jokingly to the other boys that he could make himself into a bear if he willed it.

After the boy had grown into a man, he was called to the warpath with a party of about thirty-five others; he was the leader of the party. They travelled up on the Running Water, but before they had even come to any village, they were discovered by the Sioux, their enemy. The Sioux

¹⁹ Child

²⁰ An animal blessed with supernatural powers

²¹ God who created the world and sent the stars to support the sky

pursued them, surrounded them, and then battled fiercely with them. The Pawnees fought bravely, but they were gravely outnumbered, and soon all of them were killed.

The countryside where this battle took place was quite rocky. Many sturdy cedars grew there, and many bears lived in the area. Right after the fight, when the sun was just beginning to set, two bears came traipsing by the place. When they came to the spot where the Pawnees lay dead, the she-bear's eye was caught by one of the bodies. She saw the bear-like boy from the village and recognized him as the boy who was like a bear! She called to the he-bear and said, "Here is the son of the man that was very good to us. He often sacrificed smokes to us, and every time he sat down for a meal, he used to always take a piece of his food and give it to us, saying, 'Here is something for you to eat. Eat this.' His son has imitated us all these years and sung about us and talked about us. Is there anything we can do for him?"

The he-bear came to see the young man's body. "I fear that I cannot help him. I may not have the power, but I will try. While the sun is still shining, we might have a chance at saving his life."

The young man was all cut up, hacked into small pieces by the Sioux warriors, for he was the bravest of all. The two bears gathered up all the pieces of the man and laid them together in their rightful places. The he-bear lay down and laid all the man's pieces on top of himself and then the she-bear laid on top of him, to warm the young man's body back to life. They worked over the body with their medicine too. Every now and then the he-bear would cry out and say, "A-ti'-us, Father, help me. Use the shining sun to heal this good man."

After a while, the dead body did indeed begin to grow warm and began to breathe! It was still all cut up, but the body began to have life again! Pretty soon, the man began to move. All his pieces slowly came back together, and he regained his consciousness. When he came to, he opened his eyes to see that he was in the presence of two bears! He could not believe his eyes. He was finally seeing the creature he had felt so close to his whole life.

The he-bear spoke to him, saying, "It is not through me that you are living. It was the she-bear who asked for help for you, and had you brought back to life. Now, you are not yet fully well again. Come, live with us until all your wounds are healed."

The young man nodded in understanding, still in shock at the fact that he was alive once again. With that, the bears led the young man away with them to their home. The man was very weak, so every once in a while he would stumble or faint, but the bears helped support him when he needed it. They padded along until they came to a cave in the rocks among the cedars, which was the bears' home. When the young man entered the cave, he smiled at the sight of the bears' young ones who had been left behind when the bears started out their day.

Despite partially healing, the young man was still all cut up and gashed. Plus, he had been scalped, so he had no hair on his head. He lived contentedly with the bears until he was fully healed from all of his battle wounds. While living with the bears, the young man came to truly understand the ways of the bear. The two older bears taught the young man everything that they knew.

One day, the he-bear said to him, "None of all the beings and animals that roam over the country are as great and as wise as the bears. No animal is equal to us. When we

get hungry, we go out and kill something to eat. We never kill more or less than our share. I did not make the wisdom that I have though; I am an animal after all. For my wisdom, I look to the one above. He made me, and he made me to be great.

I am going to make you a great man, but you must not deceive yourself. You must not think, 'I am the greatest, or that I can do great things of myself.' You must always look up above to the giver of all power for all great things that you do. Then you shall be great in war and great in wealth.

Now you are fully well, and I shall take you back to your home. After this, I want you to imitate us with no shame. Being like the bear will be part of your greatness. I shall look after you as well. I shall give to you a part of myself so that you may share in my strength and greatness. But, if I am killed, you shall be killed too. As I grow old, you shall be old. We will be shared spirits."

Upon approaching the village, the he-bear said to the young man, "Go into the village and tell your father that you have returned. Then, get for me a piece of buffalo meat, a blue bead, some tobacco, and some sweet-smelling clay."

Following the he-bear's instructions, the young man went into the village and presented himself to his father. The boy's father was very much surprised to see his son living. The village had nearly forgotten about the boy because they supposed that the whole party had been killed. But, once he realized that his son's homecoming was real, the boy's father rejoiced greatly; he had dearly missed his son. After greeting his father, the young man gathered the presents for the bear and brought them to him. He gave the gifts to the he-bear and talked with him for a while until the bear told him that it was time to part ways.

The he-bear put his arms around the young man and hugged him. He put his forehead to the man's forehead and said, "As the fur that I am in has touched you, it will make you great, and this will be a blessing to you." Then the he-bear drew his paws from the man's shoulders and down his arms until they came to the man's hands, which he took hold of. "As my hands have touched your hands, they are made great, never to fear anything. I have rubbed my hands down over you, so that you will be as tough as I am. Because my forehead has touched your forehead, you shall be made wise." Then the he-bear went away.

The young man returned to his village and stayed there for the rest of his life. He became the greatest of all warriors across the lands. He lived and fought like the bear: brave and true. He originated the bear dance which still exists among the tribe of Pawnees. Eventually he came to be an old man, and at last died of old age. I suspect that the old he-bear died at the same time.

Two Brothers: Alaskan Kauwerak people

Once there lived two brothers. They were the only children in their family and were deeply bonded to each other. They lived by a coursing river and went to fish there together frequently. They would catch the salmon as they leapt up the river in the summer, and place a wood trap under the ice to catch fish in the winter.

One spring, the two brothers were playing out in the countryside when a cache robber flew out of a tree right beside them. They looked up into the tree and saw a tiny, thatched nest peeking out amongst the limbs. The older brother shimmied up the tree to look into the nest and found four eggs there.

“One of them is hatched!” he said. “But there are still three more speckled eggs in here. Let us return in a few days to see them all hatched.”

The younger brother agreed, and they marked the tree with a pile of stones before running off to play some more.

A few days passed and the brothers had forgotten all about the tree until they stumbled upon their little stone tower.

“Oh! The nest! We forgot, brother, about the eggs!” cried the older brother.

Sure enough, all of the eggs had hatched. The older brother carefully carried the nest down to the ground so that his little brother could see the baby birds. The younger brother did not look upon them with the same wonder as his older brother.

“When they grow up, they’ll be thieves, just like their mother. Why not destroy them now? Here, I have a good idea.” The boy snapped a twig off a nearby tree and sharpened it with a rock. He hovered his tiny spear over the babies. “I will kill them with this stick to spare the world of their misdeeds.”

The baby birds cheeped wildly, and the mother bird start flying in circles around the boys, helplessly crying out in protest. The older brother started to speak, but before he could say anything, the younger brother took his miniature spear and stabbed one of the baby birds right down the throat. Blood drizzled out of its tiny little mouth as it squeaked out its last chirp. The boy laughed.

“There is one robber dead. He will never rob anything now. I’m going to kill all of them.”

“No!” the older brother said, gripping onto his brother’s hand. “Leave one for the mother bird. Please, leave the smallest one for her sake. Even though they steal, they do not do that much damage.”

The younger brother agreed, slaying only the two larger, remaining babies. After he had finished, the older brother set the nest back up in the tree, and they went home. Neither of the boys told their parents what had happened because they had done something against the rules. By killing the little birds, the younger brother had broken one of their ancestors’ sacred rules—never cause any harm to or abuse birds or animals.

Several blissful years went by and the boys grew into strapping young men. During one winter, the two brothers set out into the deep snow to go hunting. They were looking to catch rabbits, and followed one’s tracks far away from home. After a long time, the older brother stopped walking. He quickly realized that he did not recognize the lay of the

land. They were lost! The older brother encouraged the younger to keep going, hopeful that they would find their way back home. The two traveled for the rest of the day, but they never came any closer to finding familiar land. It had started to snow heavily, and the older brother began to worry for their safety. For where is there to go to take shelter in the middle of a frozen forest?

Luckily, the two brothers caught sight of a small cabin in the distance. Hungry and exhausted, they trekked to the cabin and knocked with their last ounce of energy. A kind-looking old man opened the door and, seeing the state they were in, immediately ushered them inside.

“Got lost in the woods, did you? Could happen to anybody with the weather in such a state. I’m glad you came across my humble home, or you might have been stuck out there over night!” The two brothers’ eyes widened as they settled in close to the fire. “I’m sure you’re hungry after the long journey you’ve had. I’ll go get some fish for you to cook.”

The man turned and walked out the front door, with no covering except his normal indoor clothing! The brothers thought to themselves that the man must be magic, and magic he was indeed. Come to find out later, the little man was actually a beaver!

The old man returned quickly to the cabin with a sizeable stock of fish in hand.

“Now you’ll have to cook this yourself, boys. I don’t eat fish, or any kind of meat for that matter. I live off that there leafy deliciousness only,” he stated—and pointed to a willow tree!

The brothers looked at each other in great confusion, but they did not say anything because they didn’t want to

offend their gracious host. The two brothers spent the night at the foot of the fire, safe from the storm.

The next day, the brothers set out to try to find their way back home. They walked on for hours, but no tree or distant mountain scape looked remotely familiar. Suddenly, they stepped out into a clearing with berries growing up through the snow.

“Food!” yelled the younger brother, but the older brother held him back.

“I don’t like this place, there’s something funny about it.”

“Nonsense, brother. They’re just berries.” The younger brother dashed to the bushes and ate his fill, but the older brother stood to the side and refused to eat them.

Once the younger brother was done, they continued on their journey, but soon the younger brother said, “My stomach hurts.”

His big brother said, “I told you not to eat those berries; now we have another trouble to deal with! But alright, we can stop and rest for a short while.”

Before the older brother could finish his sentence, the younger brother collapsed! The older brother helped carry him to a nearby group of trees, resting his back against a trunk. The younger brother groaned out in pain and lifted his shirt to reveal his stomach. It had grown three sizes and was turning bright red! In fact, his whole body was turning red; his face too. The younger brother cringed in pain and took his brother’s hand.

“I do not think I will pull through whatever sickness it is I have been struck with. You should go. I feel that I only have moments left in my life. You have to leave me and find home, or you will be lost in this forest forever. When you make it home, tell Mother and Father what

happened to me. Tell them that my death is my own fault. I have been struck with this illness because of the wrong I committed in killing those baby birds back when we were boys.”

“No, little brother, I will not leave you out here to die. Surely the spirits will not take you for such a petty crime. You rest here while I find us a way home.”

He stood and started circling the area, looking for any sign of the way home. He was not gone long, but when he returned, his brother had died. The young man fell to his knees and cried beside him.

“Oh brother, how come you have left me? Now I have to face the world without you...But do not worry, brother. I will tell Mother and Father all that has happened to us.”

After a long while, the heartbroken young man stood up. “I must find my way home.” No sooner had he said that when a cache robber flew over his head. It circled him a few times then flitted off, heading deeper into the forest. “Perhaps that bird will lead me home. I have no better option at this point.” So, the young man started following the cache robber into the woods.

He stepped back through the tree line to exit the clearing and followed the cache robber through the snowy woods. After a little while, they came upon a tiny igloo made of sod! As he approached, a young woman with box-like earrings appeared from inside and invited him in. He graciously accepted and stepped into the igloo—to find that it was the biggest house he had ever seen! Magic must be at work here. The igloo appeared tiny on the outside but could surely fit his whole village on the inside! Many people were inside, seated two by two in the sizeable room. Each pair donned their own style of clothes. One pair, dressed in all

white, sat right next to the man, but no one spoke to him directly.

Suddenly, an old man appeared at the back of the room. He gazed over the whole room and motioned for everyone’s attention.

“Our guest must be hungry! Let someone give him something to eat.”

One of the two people who wore black parkas turned and called out in response, but his voice was inhuman; it sounded like the honk of a Canadian goose! The strange man presented the older brother with a plate of berries, but there were a bunch of live bugs crawling amidst the berries! The young man tried to politely reject the food, but that only encouraged them to bring more! Eventually the old man told them to stop so that he could speak to their visitor in peace.

“I will tell you about you and your brother that died, but first I must tell you about what happened to me years ago. I had gone off to scavenge food for my children like usual, but when I returned to our nest that day, three of my children had been killed! Only the littlest one, my only daughter, was left alive. My poor wife witnessed the tragedy. She wanted to try to save the children, but she knew the humans committing the crime would easily overpower her, so she could only circle around them and call for my help. I tried to get back in time, but I couldn’t. My poor wife went into such a state of distress after that tragic day. Within a month, she died of a broken heart, leaving just me and my daughter as the only remaining members of our family (he gestured to the young woman with box-earrings). That is the reason you and your brother were brought to this area. I asked the rabbit to lead you far from home so that you would become lost. It was I who

spread the berries which grew the bushes that tempted your brother—and killed him. He had to pay for his crime, but I have spared your life because you spared my daughter's life. For the sake of this girl of mine, you will not have any harm done to you at my hands."

The young man began to weep. He wept both for the loss of his brother and for the suffering his brother had caused. Most of all, he wept over the loss of the old man's children and his wife.

"Your actions are just. I cannot defend my brother's wrongdoings against your family, even at the expense of his own life, because of what it cost in yours."

The old man stepped down to where the young man was and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"I am old and do not have many more moments left of my life. Please, take my daughter as your wife. Protect her as you did that day and have her as a companion so that neither of you will ever have to be alone."

Those were the last words the old man spoke. As soon as the last word left his tongue, he transformed into a bird. All the people in the igloo started calling out their native birdcalls and transformed into birds as well. All together, they flew out of the igloo, leaving only the young man and woman remaining. The young man cautiously approached her, placed her hands in his, and asked her to come home with him. She agreed, and together, they managed to find their way back to the young man's home. The older brother shared with his parents the reason for the passing of the younger brother; their parents mourned greatly for him. But, although they were heartbroken over losing their younger son, they wept for joy at their older son's return, and that he had brought back a wife with him!

The older brother lived a long and happy life with his wife. When he was very old, he knew that his life was about to come to an end. He took a walk into the woods and went down by the seashore. A figure approached on the salty waves. It was his younger brother!

"Brother! It that you? How is it that you are here? How can this be?"

The younger brother laughed. "Yes, it's me, brother. I have come to start our next adventure together. I have been away for some time while you lived out your adventure with your family. But now your time on that journey has come to an end. Look, see this cut in my lip? It is because I slit the throats of those baby birds. See, you have one too."

The older brother looked down and felt his lip, surprised that, indeed, a cut had appeared there.

"So I see that we are once again one and the same, as we always were, little brother. It is good to see you again."

"It is. I missed you, big brother. But let us forget the past and begin our new adventure! I prefer the sea, where we would go to throw rocks at the sea gulls, so I shall go there, to the ocean, and become a seal."

The older brother stepped up beside his younger brother and placed his hand lovingly on his shoulder.

"I do remember those times, but I prefer the land, so I will become a rabbit and live in the grassy countryside."

The brothers smiled at each other and hugged goodbye, knowing that they would see each other again soon—and see each other someday, they would! We know that the seal and the rabbit are brothers because they both have a cut on their upper lip. This is the story of how they got them.

Yareya: Cuba

There once lived a gorgeous young woman named Yareya. She was as pretty as the pitahaya²² flower, as pure as the dove, and as graceful as the hummingbird. Not only was she beautiful on the outside, but she was also very beautiful within; she did everything with utmost passion and determination. Her eyes, black as the cloak of night, burned with the fire of a tropical noonday.

When Yareya strolled through the village, everyone's eyes fell on her. Her supple body swayed with the grace of flowers blown by a morning breeze, or a palm tree bending to the afternoon gusts. Her silky black hair trailed a most sweet fragrance behind her soft steps. Everyone from the peaceful edges of Yarigúa to the high green banks of the Cauto loved her.

One afternoon, Yareya followed the light's rays to the water's edge. She allowed herself to glimpse at her reflection in the water's moving mirror. A tiny smile crept onto her face at the satisfaction of her lovely features and a rose-tinged flush appeared on her cheeks. But, as she fixed her eyes on the horizon, the tiny smile slipped from her lips. The sun was starting to dip below the horizon. She heaved a sigh and exclaimed, "How late he is!"

The impatient words had barely escaped the beautiful Cuban's lips when the sound of oars could be heard hitting the water. A simple canoe surfaced out of nowhere from within a mass of seafoam. A proud looking young man leapt ashore and came face to face with Yareya. It was none other than Guacanayabo, the chief of the

province. He too, was astoundingly attractive, with a magnificent feather piece adorning his head and precious stones embedded in his clothes. A mighty bow and arrow hung loosely on his tanned, broad shoulders. Neither of the two spoke aloud, but an echo of 'I adore you!', full of passion and true love, could be heard whispering through the wind. Suddenly, Guacanayabo took hold of one of Yareya's hands.

"Yareya, goddess of my thoughts, soul of my soul, are you sad? Perhaps Mabuya, the sorrowful skink, has taken hold of your spirit?"

Yareya squeezed Guacanayabo's hands and peered upwards to meet his gaze. "Be quiet, my love, and hear my words. I know that you are the bravest man in the eastern province; everyone has disarmed their bows and laid down their clubs before you. Everyone fears and loves you. I know that it is true that you can shoot the arrow more powerfully than the lightning from the clouds, but even you, with all your might, cannot ease my sorrow; you cannot banish my tears today."

A few tears streaked silently down Yareya's glowing cheeks.

"What's wrong? Why are you so upset my lily of the valley? Tell me, please."

"A premonition as black as your eyes has entered my heart. An evil spirit has told me that soon the waters of this beloved river will be stained with the blood of your warriors, and worst of all, yours!"

Yareya dropped to the ground and began to beat the sand with her fists. Guacanayabo fell to the ground with her and took hold of her arms tenderly.

²² Dragon fruit

“Be calm, Yareya. Know that your sad news fills my soul with a terrible dread. My sorrows are your sorrows; your laments are mine, because I love you, Yareya. You shimmer in my loving heart like the moonlight shimmers on the crystal waters of this river. Oh, you who are weeping, please do not weep. If the sky of your happiness clouds over, everything appears sad and ugly to me. Hold back your tears, Yareya; do not let this premonition hurt our love. We shall not allow our hope to fade. Even if this premonition does come to pass, you will always love me as I love you, won’t you?”

Yareya threw herself into Guacanayabo’s arms. “Always!”

The sun dipped below the horizon, and it was night—one of those Cuban nights that speaks to the soul. The moon hazily illuminated the green expanse of the island and the fireflies glimmered in the undergrowth. A gentle breeze scented the fields and rustled the treetops.

Against this enchanting night came a host of canoes and guairos²³ slithering down the mighty Cauto river. They carried many warriors from the tribe of Jiguaní, armed with arrows and stout clubs. The ever cruel Ornofay commanded the troops. He was coming in pursuit of Yareya’s love. He came with the intent of abducting her at any cost—even that of the blood of his own men.

Guacanayabo and Yareya, still at the beach, heard the approach of the warriors, and Yareya’s heart dropped. The premonition that she had seen was a glimpse into the future after all. Guacanayabo sent Yareya to hide in her village while he gathered his troops to resist the offenders.

Yareya ran to her family’s hut, sank into the back corner, and willed strength to her beloved warrior.

Ornofay reached Yareya’s village and demanded that she be brought out to him, or else he would set fire to their whole village. Yareya’s tribe rose to her defense; they proudly declared that Ornofay had no claim to Yareya’s heart and that he must leave immediately. Thirst for blood raged in Ornofay’s heart, and he told them, “So be it.” He called to his warriors to attack, and all the villagers scattered to arm themselves or to hide. Luckily, the great warriors of Guacanayabo burst through the tree line at that moment!

A vicious battle ensued between the two men and their warriors. The only sounds that could be picked up by Yareya were the cracking of clubs on skulls, bodies hitting the sand, and the resounding conch shell, bellowing out the battle hymn.

“I want the sun of suns, the lovely Yareya! Her charms have captured my heart and I will have her!” cried Ornofay.

Guacanayabo rose from the ranks and came forward to face Ornofay.

“Yareya? She who has joined her soul to my soul? You will not have her! Come, let the angel of death decide between us.”

With that, they threw themselves at each other. The fighting kept on throughout the entire night. Only when the morning rays began to tinge the lofty mountain peaks did Yareya unveil herself from her hiding spot. Emerging from the hut, Yareya’s eyes grew to the size of two moons as she turned to look at the remains of the battle. She trembled like a young bird and moaned piteously; the entire hillside was

²³ Small, two-sailed boats

littered with dead warriors. She searched frantically through the fallen for her lover.

There, off to the left, covered in blood, lay the cruel Ornofay—dead. Only a few feet from him lay the handsome Guacanayabo! He lay unconscious, but was breathing shakily. The lovesick Yareya threw herself onto his body.

“Guacanayabo, wake up. It is I, your faithful, loving Yareya! O gentle breezes of the forest, tell Guacanayabo to wake up! Tell him that I am here, eager to hear him speak again!”

The young man stirred and opened his eyes partially. Yareya gasped and planted a torrent of passionate kisses on his lips. He gripped Yareya’s hand weakly.

“Do you still love me, Yareya?”

Yareya laughed and tears flooded her eyes. “Do I love you? See, Guacanayabo, I love you more than my own soul. You are my life; the ray of warm sun that lights up my existence.”

Guacanayabo fixed his faltering gaze upon her and Yareya bent her head over the chief’s face. He sealed their everlasting love with a kiss, the final kiss for these loving souls, and then breathed his last breath, a soft sound that broke the ominous silence of the battlefield. Yareya clutched Guacanayabo to herself. She gazed up at the sunrise sky and cried out in anguish.

“Guacanayabo, I love you as the green palm groves love the murmur of the April breezes! If your life is ended I will die like the flowers when the sun’s rays do not give them life.”

And Yareya was no more!

According to tradition, on nights when the moon is full and the banks of the Cauto river rest in silence, a silver canoe covered with flowers may be seen on its clear waters.

A woman will climb out, casting her sad sighs into the wind. She will stop beside a grave that is shaded eternally by flowering camellia flowers. She will kiss the green grass deliriously and then run away, crying out, “I love you! I still love you!”

This ghost is the lovesick Yareya, forever lamenting her lost love.

The Sleeping Princess: Mexico

In an age long past, there lived an Aztec princess who was very beautiful and exceptionally talented. She was skilled in needlework and all the other household arts practiced by the favored daughters of nobility.

Shortly before she reached marriageable age, her father, the great monarch and an enlightened man for his time, came to her chambers and detailed his plans for her marriage. It was his will that the Princess choose a prince of the Aztecs to be her husband. She would not be permitted to marry a foreigner, even one of noble birth, because the King desired for the Aztec lines of royalty to be melded. Now, within these limitations, the Princess may choose whomever she wished, which was a big deal back then (a child of noble birth always had their spouse handpicked by their parents). Because of this opportunity, the Princess was very happy. She appreciated of her father's trust in her, and she promised him that she would not make him regret his act of kindness.

Days, weeks, and months passed after that day. The Princess had ample opportunities to meet one handsome noble after another, but none of them struck up affection in her heart. The Princess knew that her choices were limited, but she refused to give up hope of finding true love. All the Princess's friends tried to help her out by making a sort of game out of her mission. They collected all the names of the eligible noblemen and went through them one at a time,

listing the man's qualities which would be of benefit to the Princess. Sometimes, the Princess's friends had to make up the list for her because she had never met the man who belonged to the name on the parchment. Her friends' descriptions always formed a favorable impression, but it was always shattered later on when the Princess actually met the man; they all disappointed her. Gradually, the Princess began to lose heart in her quest for love. She even requested that her father lift his limitation of marrying a fellow Aztec nobleman, but her father denied the request. The King could not be moved from his decision, so the Princess left his presence feeling sad and hopeless.

One day, word reached the palace that a Chichimecan prince was coming to visit the capital city to engage in some business transactions at the great market. Upon hearing this news, the Princess's curiosity was peaked, and she began plotting with her maids to come up with a way in which she could meet him. Their scheme would take some careful planning because, normally, no foreign prince (especially a Chichimecan prince) had the right to merely look upon a female member of the royal Aztec house, let alone speak with her. Luckily, the Princess's maids were enthralled by the idea, and put their heads together to form a plan so the forbidden meeting could occur.

On the day of the Prince's visit, the Princess ordered her entourage to take her for a ride on her litter²⁴ through the city. She directed them to take her a roundabout way from their normal course because her maids had been able to discover the schedule of the Prince's day. They knew he was destined to be passing through a certain area of the city

²⁴ Open chair or bed used to carry royalty

during the normal time of the Princess's outing. And, as fate should have it, the Princess and Prince's entourages met head to head in the narrow streets of the city.

The Princess's heart quickened at the sight of the Prince. He was a very handsome fellow—the most attractive she had ever seen in fact. He was tall and well-proportioned, with a bronze, muscular body, and features that outshone any she had seen on the Aztec noblemen. The Prince flashed his dark eyes to the Princess and locked his gaze on her; his eyes seemed to sparkle in the day's light.

Realizing that the streets were too narrow for both their litters to pass at once, the Prince, in a pleasant gesture of courtesy, alighted his ride and stood respectfully to one side so that the Princess's litter might continue undisturbed.

As the Princess passed, she did something daring. Instead of lowering her curtain, as was customary, she gazed at the Prince frankly. Shocked by her boldness, but enamored by her beauty, the Prince returned her gaze. After a moment, the Princess felt as though the Prince's stare was burning into her very soul, bringing a crimson blush to her cheeks, and she lowered her head in modesty. The Prince took one step toward the Princess, but halted because he had realized who she was, and wanted to respect the Aztec's law about speaking with their women royalty. The Princess's escorts took note of the Prince's admiration of their charge and hurried the litter along, but the damage was done; the Princess had met the man of her dreams.

After the Princess's litter had turned around the next corner, the Prince tried to shake off his meeting with the Princess and move on to his work at the marketplace. Unfortunately, the Prince did not trade very well for the

entire day. Blankets, gold, silver, and feather-work paled in comparison to the new subject of importance in his mind. His thoughts looped an endless image of the beautiful Princess; her lovely features had imprinted themselves on his brain.

At the end of the day, the Prince ordered his servants to bring his litter, and he returned home. They traveled back through the crowded streets and up the winding, treacherous trails, until they reached his capital city. The Prince lived high up on the slopes of old Ajusco²⁵. All his people lived in the mountains that bordered the southern edge of the Great Valley. The entire way home, the Prince sorted through his frustration with the King's law forbidding him from marrying the Princess. Bowing to the inevitable, he resolved to forget the Princess's radiant face from his mind.

Weeks passed from the moment of the Prince and Princess's meeting, and the usually happy Princess became lethargic and moody. She had fallen completely in love with the idea of being with the Prince and nothing else satiated her. The Prince was not coping well with their separation either. He tried desperately to erase the Princess from his memory, he could not. In fact, he wished to see her again more than ever with each passing day. He needed to test the love which he felt in his heart and speak with the Princess.

Now, the Prince knew that the King would disapprove of him meeting with the Princess, so he needed to proceed with caution. If the King found out about their rendezvous, it would constitute a breach of state, which meant a threat of war between their two peoples. The Prince called aside a trusted friend and asked him to make contact

²⁵ Dormant dome volcano

with one of the Princess's servants. The friend agreed and, disguised as a commoner, struck up conversation with the local fishermen and tradesmen until he came into contact with one of the servants from the palace. To this servant, the friend revealed the true object of his mission.

As it turns out, this servant was well acquainted with one of the Princess's ladies-in-waiting. That night, the servant whispered to the lady-in-waiting that an agent of the Prince had come to arrange a meeting between his Prince and the Princess. Eagerly entering the intrigue, the maiden ran to the Princess and told her of the Prince's intent. The Princess's good spirits were restored, and she knew in her heart that she loved this mysterious royal noble from afar. Only someone who returned her affections would go to so much trouble to arrange a meeting between them. Once again, the Princess called her ladies-in-waiting together, and they schemed until they had come up with a way in which the Prince could come and meet with the Princess undetected. As soon as the plan was forged and the news relayed, the Prince's friend hurried home to share the plan with the Prince.

This was the plan: on a certain night, the Prince was to come, disguised, to an obscure side door of the palace. There, he would be admitted into the garden by a trusted servant. Then, the Princess could meet him in the shadows of the great Ahuehuete²⁶ trees.

On the morning of the scheduled day, the Prince dressed himself in the garb of a mighty hunter so that he might be permitted into the city (but not be recognized). He hung a tiger skin around across his shoulders, put on a stout loincloth of maguay²⁷ fibers, and tied his feet into strong

sandals of softly tanned deer hide. His servants rubbed his bronzed skin with oils until it glistened.

With a bundle of skins thrown casually over one arm, the Prince set off for the Aztec's capital city and entered without great difficulty. The guards bought his disguise and thought him a mighty hunter come to sell his skins. When night had fallen, the Prince made his way along the streets and across the bridged canals back to the indicated side door of the palace. He rapped a pattern of knocks on the door's panels and the trusted servant soon opened the door to let the Prince in. The Prince entered the garden but paused for a moment to take in its wonder; surely, this was a place of magic. Beneath the Ahuehuete trees, pale shadows flitted among the multicolored flowers and delicate shrubs. Moonbeams danced over the walls and through the mists of the sparkling fountains that dotted the grounds.

The Prince walked slowly down a pebbled path the servant pointed him down into the inner recesses of the garden, still admiring the flourishing flora. Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks because, just ahead, seated on a low marble bench, surrounded by blooming flower blossoms, sat the Princess of his dreams. The moon light softly etched the beautiful features of her face, and she was dressed finely in a robe of white maguay linen. The low-fashioned neckline, flowing sleeves, and full skirt of the garment were all edged with brightly colored embroideries. Her jet-black hair was carefully coiffed in the usual custom of the Aztecs: two tightly woven braids hanging down her back. She wore no jewels, but none were necessary.

²⁶ Montezuma bald cypress

²⁷ Agave

Inquisitively, he took a step forward, crunching some fallen leaves. At the sound, the Princess raised her eyes. He froze, and they gazed at each other for a single moment: long enough for both of them to be certain of their feelings. The Princess sprang up from her marble seat and ran to the Prince, who gladly folded her into his arms. They spent the remaining hours of the night together in bliss. When the first light of day slipped over the palace's wall, the Prince took his leave from the Princess so that he could return home safely.

For the next few days following his encounter with the Princess, the Prince pondered what his next course of action should be. He called together all of his advisors to request counsel from them on the matter. At last, he drafted a letter to the King of the Aztecs telling him of his love for the Princess and asking for the privilege of her hand.

Upon receiving the letter, the King fumed. The Chichimecan Prince knew that the King's law forbade the Princess from marrying outside of her own people, but he blatantly requested her hand anyways. Ordering his daughter to be brought before the throne, the King raged at her in a manner never before experienced by the Princess.

The Princess was shaken by her father's anger, but she was truly the offspring of a proud race, so she told her father outrightly that she loved the Chichimecan, that he loved her in return, and that he was her choice for a husband; under no circumstances would she marry anyone else.

The Princess's bold proclamation infuriated the King so much so that he ordered the Princess confined to her chambers and declared that she would only receive visitors with his permission. He believed that, with time to reflect upon her rash decisions, the Princess would come to

understand the seriousness of her error in desiring to marry a foreign prince and would in time resign herself to marrying an Aztec nobleman. Unfortunately for the King, he was wrong to believe that the love burning between the Princess and her Prince was a passing fancy.

At first, the Princess thought she was doomed to never see the Prince again, but she quickly learned that the guards' love for their beautiful charge outweighed their loyalty to the King. They were easily persuaded into permitting the Prince to visit the Princess in secret. Months passed, and although the Prince and Princess were grateful for the time they were able to spend together in secret, they hoped that, someday, the King's heart would soften, and he would make their marriage possible.

The King, however, was a shrewd man, and, one day, during his regular visit to his daughter, read in her eyes that something was amiss. Without her knowledge, the King stationed extra guards outside the gates of the palace. That night, one of the guards spotted a strange figure, dressed in the tiger skin of a hunter, entering the palace through the side door of the garden. The guard ran to relay the information to the King, who, from their description of the figure, recognized the person as the Prince of the Chichimecas. He said nothing and made no move against them that night, but instead worked out a plan to rid the palace of this rash intruder permanently.

It happened to be that, at this time, the Aztecs were engaged in war with multiple enemies. So, the King wrote to the Prince, offering the hand of his daughter in marriage if the Chichimecas came to the assistance of the Aztecs and helped them vanquish their enemies. Upon reading the King's letter, the Prince rejoiced and readily accepted and marched to the Valley of Anáhuac with a large company of

Chichimecan warriors. The generals of the King, who had full knowledge of his plot, planned their battle strategy so that the Prince and his forces would hold one flank of the army which, by a skillful withdrawal of the Aztec forces, could be cut off and annihilated. Through this maneuver, the Prince would be killed, and the King's vexing problem taken care of.

The great battle between the Aztecs/Chichimecans and a coalition of enemies was fought as anticipated. After a time, the main body of Aztec troops retreated from the flank of Chichimecans, leaving them to battle against the enemy hordes alone. Unfortunately for the King, he underestimated the fighting prowess of the Prince and his warriors. After a long, bitter struggle, the Chichimecans won the battle! The Prince then returned to the capital city to make arrangements for his coming wedding to the Princess, in accordance with the King's promise.

Enraged by the Prince's victory, the King turned treacherous. He refused to give his daughter's hand to an outsider. Before the Prince could make it back to the palace, the King sent word to him that, during the war, his daughter had been stricken with a strange malady and had died; at the same time he told the Princess that the Prince had been killed during the battle.

Unconvinced by the King's word, the Prince returned to his country but sent spies into the city to seek out the truth. They quickly returned to him with the knowledge that the Princess was indeed alive, though she was saddened almost to the point of death because she believed the Prince dead.

Once again, the Prince trekked down the mountain trails and into the city, this time disguised as a simple soil tiller. An agent had made plans for the Prince to be

admitted into the garden through the same side door as before and had also sent word to the Princess that she must go out into the gardens. The Princess, though confused, was moved by the servant's persistence, and persuaded her guards to let her out of her room. She crept down the stairs and through the halls, silently letting herself out into the garden.

Upon opening the door, the Princess was blinded by the darkness of the night, but she managed to notice a figure pacing under a tree close by. She called out to the stranger to identify themselves, to which the stranger stopped and complied. Immediately recognizing the voice of her beloved, the Princess burst into tears and ran blindly into the outstretched arms of her lost lover. They talked until the morning mists were settling over the city. Before the Prince left, they arranged that, on the next moonless night, the Prince would come for the Princess, after which they would elope and be married without the King's permission. Perhaps the King would eventually relent and give them his blessing, but they would deny their love for each other no longer.

The night of their escape, just like they had planned, the Prince knocked the signal on the side door of the garden, but to his surprise, a servant opened the door instead of the Princess. The servant lamented to the Prince that the Princess had truly fallen ill with a strange malady since his last visit. She had already lapsed into a coma, from which everyone feared she would never awaken.

Heartbroken by the news, the Prince barged past the servant. He ran right into the palace, not caring about potentially running into some of the palace guards. Luckily, the only guards the Prince encountered were the ones who had been at the Princess's door before—the ones who had

kept his presence secret many times before. They warned the Prince that the King was inside, but the Prince could not care less; he needed to see his love. The guards bowed solemnly to his request and opened the doors for him to pass. Inside the main room, the Princess was laid on her couch, shaded paler than the moon. The King sat by her side, turning at the sound of someone entering the room. Recognizing the visitor as the Prince, the King stood defensively. He told the Prince to stay away from his daughter, but the Prince did not listen. He leapt at and quickly knocked the old King unconscious. Laying the King aside, the Prince scrambled to his beloved's side.

He knelt by the Princess's couch and was borne down with grief heavier than the weight of all the world. He gently took one of her chilled hands in his and held it to his heart. Suddenly, he heard a deep, rumbling voice that he recognized as the great god of all the mountains, speaking to him.

"My son, tonight is the last night of life for your loved one. But fear not, for the gods have observed the injustice the King of Anáhuac has treated you with. You will be granted tonight to say farewell to your Princess. Tell her that the gods have decreed that she will not die, but instead, fall into a deep slumber. She will one day be awakened from this slumber by your kiss. And when that day arrives, you will drive from the Valley of the Aztecs a strange race which are even now on their way hither."

Awed by the god's words, the Prince turned back to his Princess, whose hand was now warm with life. She had awakened and been refreshed back to health! The two lovers talked far into the night of many things: their love, their past adventures, how happy they had been together, and of the promise of the gods. The Princess managed to persuade her

father to be civil with her Prince, and, although he still disapproved, he blessed their love.

Just as the lights of morning began to steal into the room, the Princess kissed her beloved for the last time, and relaxed peacefully into his arms, now deep in slumber just as the god had promised. Just then, the voice of the god rumbled in the Prince's ears once more.

"My son, take your loved one in your arms and carry her up the western slope of the valley. There, behold the gods of all the heavens engaged in their mighty tasks."

The Prince obeyed the god's command and, immediately after reaching the height of the valley, heard a distant rumbling. Turning toward the sound, the Prince beheld an awesome and momentous sight, accompanied by strange and terrifying sounds. The earth trembled and shook with the ripples of a mighty earthquake. From the top of the low line of hills on the other side of the valley two volcanoes began to form, belching great sheets of blazing fire which roared in all directions. Clouds of smoke issued from the craters, soon covering the heavens, and great streams of lava, destroying everything in their paths, rolled slowly down the slopes. After a brief time, two great mountain peaks had been formed from the momentous activity. The gods all gathered atop the northernmost peak and put out the fires with blankets of snow. For the final time, the voice of the god was heard by the Prince.

"Now, my son, take your loved one and carry her to the top of the northern mountain. Lay her gently upon a couch which you will find already prepared for her there. Then, take up your position on the top of the southern peak, so that you may guard her well during the long centuries ahead. The hour will come when we will call upon you to

awaken your Princess and to drive the coming invaders from the Valley of Anáhuac.”

Lifting the body of his sleeping Princess, the Prince carried her up the slopes of the now snow-covered mountain. There, resting on the peak of the mountain, just as the god promised, was an ornate couch. The Prince gently laid the Princess upon it and kissed her one last time. Heavy-laden, he turned and walked with determined strides to the very top of the adjacent mountain. There on that peak lay his lance and all his other accoutrements of war. He picked them up and assumed his guarding position; the fire coming from his mountain would make a great torch to illuminate the sleep of his beloved Princess.

The snows of the mountain tops then tenderly folded the body of the sleeping Princess and her proud guardian into the mountains. To this day, when the pale moon goddess rises over the Valley of Mexico, you can see that the gods have kept the torch fire burning, warm and eternal, like the love of Popocatepetl, Prince of the Chichimecans, and Ixtaccihuatl, Princess of the Aztecs. The lovers still sleep in the twin peaks which lie off to the east of the Valley of Anáhuac. Popocatepetl is the tall, mysterious, cone-shaped mountain, and the lengthy fragments of prehistoric craters make up Ixtaccihuatl. Popocatepetl continues to smoke fitfully as if disturbed in his slumbers by disquieting dreams. He is eagerly waiting to someday hear the call of the gods, reviving him to awaken his sleeping Princess and forever banish the invaders from their Valley.

Australia & Oceania

Mataora and Niwareka in the Underworld: New Zealand

In the days of long ago, when the world was young, a young warrior chief named Mataora lay sleeping one night. He was quite restless because his dreams were tormenting him. He dreamt that his taiaha²⁸ was in his hand and he was combatting someone to the death. Other men and women surrounded him, crying out in delight with each of the warriors' thrusts or blows. The villagers started to laugh at Mataora, and he started losing the battle. When his opponent cracked him over the head with the might of a blow that would bring death, Mataora sprang awake, drenched with sweat. He peered around in panic, scanning his room for his opponent and all the surrounding villagers, but what did he find instead of the jeering crowd? Several ethereal white faces were staring in at him from his door and windows!

"Who are you?" Mataora cried.

Slipping in through the windows and the door, the white faces drew close to Mataora. Whispering, one of the white faces answered, "We are the Turehu."

Mataora sucked in a sharp breath. No man had ever laid eyes on the Turehu before. The rumored, pale-faced women of the Underworld never revealed themselves to the villagers on the surface. Mataora was filled with awe and

curiosity at his good fortune of having the mysterious Turehu pay him a visit.

"Come inside," he invited, "and I will give you something to eat."

The tallest of the girls smiled and answered him. "While we accept your invitation to stay, we will eat outside." The Turehu stepped, barefoot, back outside, their flaxen hair brushing the ground behind them.

Mataora hurried to his storehouse to grab some cooked food for his guests. He placed the food in front of the Turehu, who inspected it and reacted with disgust.

"Is it good to eat?" one asked.

"No," another answered, "this is bad food." They looked at Mataora expectantly.

He had forgotten what the elders had taught him. The Turehu are strange in their ways; they only eat food raw! Noting his mistake, Mataora dashed to the nearby pond and quickly collected some fish. He hurried back to the women and set the raw fish in front of them, which they dug into hungrily. Mataora observed the Turehu thoughtfully. They held themselves erect at all times and had very thin noses. They wore waist-mats made from dried seaweed.

In hopes of entertaining his peculiar guests, Mataora jumped up and began to dance for the Turehu. He whirled around and around to the beat of his feet. One of the women in particular kept catching his eye. She had soft eyes and a glowing complexion. She was taller than the rest of her kind, so Mataora could pick her out in a second. The girl smiled lightly at Mataora and came to sit by him.

²⁸ Whale bone spear

Mataora suddenly felt a deep love for her rising in his heart, anchoring deeper and deeper every time their eyes met.

All of the other Turehu stood up and joined together in a stately dance of a kind Mataora had never seen before. It was different from any poi-dance or haka Mataora knew. The tall girl hopped up to join her sisters in the dance, coming to the front to weave a pattern in the dirt at Mataora's feet. Then, the women all joined hands and danced in a circle, bending under and around each other's arms until Mataora grew dizzy watching them. The girls' melodic voices rose from the circle and floated to Mataora's ears. All he could understand was:

Here goes Niwareka,
Niwareka, Niwareka.

Once the dance was over, Mataora asked the women if he could choose one of them to be his wife. Eagerly heeding his request, the Turehu all came to brush up next to Mataora, except Niwareka, who stood bashfully behind her sisters.

"Which of us do you want?" they asked, vying for his attention.

He pointed to Niwareka, the tall girl. The girls all giggled and jostled Niwareka to the front. She stepped forward gingerly and pressed noses with Mataora. He moved to place her hand in his, fully content in his heart. The rest of the Turehu began to leave, while Mataora and his wife stood at the door watching them.

"Where are they going?" he asked, and Niwareka replied, a little sadly, "Back to the Underworld, where everything is beautiful and full of light."

Mataora wrapped his arm around his wife. "Please don't feel sorrowful, my love! You can find the light in any place where Te Ra, the hot sun, shows himself. Tell me about your family. Who is your father?"

Niwareka turned to Mataora. "I am called Niwareka. I am the daughter of the high-born Ue-tonga of Rarohenga²⁹, but now I belong to you, Mataora, the mighty chieftain of the Overworld."

Mataora loved his wife dearly, and they were quite happy together. Mataora would go off to work while Niwareka sat by the window that faced the sea, weaving beautifully patterned clothing for her husband and herself.

Only one thing drove a wedge between Mataora and Niwareka. Sometimes Mataora would fall into a fit of an evil temper. During one of these fits, he struck Niwareka across her cheek. She did not fight back, but took the blow silently. Her eyes watered, and she gazed up at her husband sorrowfully. The Turehu are gentle people, and not accustomed to violence.

That night, Niwareka ran away from home. Mataora searched the whole land for her, stricken with guilt over his mistake. Without Niwareka, the light had gone out of his life. He searched day and night, but to no avail. Finally, Mataora realized that Niwareka must have gone back to the Underworld.

Determined to win his wife's forgiveness, Mataora packed a small travel sack and headed for the House of the Winds, where the spirits of the dead return to Rarohenga.

²⁹ The Underworld

Once he arrived, Mataora asked the Guardian of the House, “Have you seen a woman pass this way?”

“What is she like?” the guardian replied.

“She is gorgeous and pale, with long flaxen hair and a straight nose.”

“Ah, yes, I have seen this woman. She passed this way many days ago, weeping as she went.”

“May I follow her?”

“Yes, you may follow her, if you have the courage to do so. Through this door is the way.” He cracked his staff on the ground and the doorway opened to reveal a tunnel leading downwards.

Mataora lowered himself into the tunnel and the door immediately slid shut behind him. There was not even a glimmer of light in the tunnel. Mataora felt fearful and cold, but he pushed on through the darkness, hopeful of seeing Niwareka’s beautiful face again.

After hours of stumbling in the pitch black passageway, Mataora noticed a small glow of light in the distance. He hurried towards the light, and soon realized that the half-light was Tiwaiwaka, the fan-tailed bird, fluttering about.

“Have you seen a woman pass this way?” Mataora asked.

“Yes, I have seen her. Her eyes were red from weeping. She passed through many days ago.”

Mataora took off running through the last portion of the dark tunnel. He stumbled toward the light until he burst through the end of the tunnel into the Underworld. There was no sun nor a blue sky, only rocks for a roof, and yet, light somehow filled every part of the realm. Birds sang in

the trees and grasses waved in the breeze. Somewhere close by, water was rolling over stones. Mataora wandered about until he came to the village where Ue-tonga, Niwareka’s father, lived.

Ue-tonga was sitting on the ground with a young man lying on the ground in front of him. Ue-tonga was cutting lines into the man’s face with a bone chisel and hammer, smearing pigment into the fresh wounds. Mataora approached, astonished by the blood flowing up from under the sharp edge of the chisel. What a strange way to paint their faces!

“This is not the way to tattoo!” he cried. “Up above we paint the face designs in red and white and blue.”

Ue-tonga looked up at Mataora. “Bend down your head,” he ordered. Mataora complied, leaning down towards Ue-tonga. Ue-tonga reached up and rubbed his hands quickly across Mataora’s skin, easily wiping away his painted design. The Turehu nearby laughed at him. Mataora scanned the crowd for Niwareka, but she was not present.

“You see how useless your painted moko³⁰ is,” Ue-tonga stated. “You have not learned the true art. Here in Rarohenga we carve designs into the flesh so that they will never wear out.”

Mataora looked closely at Ue-tonga’s face and could see the stained, pigmented designs engrained in his leathered skin. At the sight of the expert patterning, Mataora became ashamed of his simple, painted design.

“You have destroyed my moko,” he said to Ue-tonga. “Now you must carve onto my skin so that I may have true moko.”

³⁰ Facial design or tattoo

Ue-tonga nodded. "It is well. Lie down."

Mataora laid on his back while Ue-tonga used charcoal to draw the design on his face. Then Ue-tonga bent over him and tapped the bone chisel into his flesh. Mataora shuddered at the pain of the rendering edge. The tapping chisel slowly crept across Mataora's face. To distract himself from the waves of agony sweeping over his body, Mataora started to sing:

Niwareka, where are you?
Show yourself, O Niwareka!
'Tis love of you that brought me here,
Niwareka, Niwareka.

Niwareka's younger sister heard Mataora's song and ran to her sister, who was not far away, weaving with her friends. "A man is being tattooed over there and he keeps calling your name! Who could he be?"

Niwareka told her sister not to worry and went to see for herself who was calling for her. Niwareka and her friends crowded around the young man. Ue-tonga became annoyed by their presence.

"What do you want here, girls?" he demanded.

Niwareka replied, "We have come to fetch the stranger to the village to entertain him."

At this point, Ue-tonga was done tattooing Mataora's face. Mataora slowly rose to his feet, but Niwareka did not recognize him at first because his face was so swollen and disfigured and streaming with blood. Despite his temporary disfigurement, many people chattered about his broad shoulders and handsome figure. Everyone walked together to the place of entertainment in

the village. Niwareka watched the young man closely, recognition coming into her eyes.

"This is the body of Mataora. He is wearing the garments I wove for him."

Mataora winced at the sound of his name on the woman's lips, for he knew as soon as she spoke that she was Niwareka, his wife. He sat down, and she stood a little distance from him.

"Are you indeed Mataora?" she asked softly.

He could not see her, for his eyes were swollen, but he looked in the direction of her voice. "Indeed, I am he. Please forgive me, my wife. I have wronged you by striking you. My heart has had no light while you have been gone from me." Niwareka wrapped her arms around her husband and wept for joy. "Let us now return to our long-standing world above Rarohenga."

Niwareka looked at him. "I think we should stay here. Let us ask my father." Niwareka beckoned her father over to them. "Father, may Mataora, my husband, and I stay here in the Underworld together?"

At once, Ue-tonga replied, "Let it be you alone who goes back to the Overworld, Mataora. Niwareka will stay here." He leaned in close to his son-in-law. "I have heard it said that you Upper World men sometimes beat your wives, and I will not have that for my daughter."

Mataora, ashamed, stood. "That is the past, sir. In the future I will follow only the good that is done in Rarohenga. Please let me stay with your daughter. My heart beats for her alone."

Ue-tonga smiled. "If your words come from the heart, my son, then do not stay here. Go and take Niwareka with you. The Upper World is full of darkness, while

Rarohenga is full of light, so take our light with you and shine it over the world of darkness.”

“Look at my face,” Mataora replied. “You have carved into it your moko of the Lower World, and it will never wash off. I shall never forget your ways; it is my desire to follow you in the way of peace and love.”

Ue-tonga’s whole village escorted Mataora and Niwareka to the tunnel, where the reunited husband and wife set off together. After entering the tunnel, they were met by Tiwaiwaka.

“You will need someone to guide you back to the Overworld,” he said. “Take Popoia, the owl, and Peka, the bat, with you.”

Niwareka looked concerned for the creatures. “If we take them they will be chased by the forest birds of Tane³¹.”

“They will hide in the darkness of the night where they will be safe,” said Tiwaiwaka. So, Mataora and Niwareka took Popoia and Peka with them to become birds of the night. The two creatures showed them the quickest way through the tunnel. At last, the pair came to the House of the Winds.

The Guardian said to Niwareka, “What is in the bundle you are carrying?”

She replied, “Nothing out of the ordinary, honorable guardian. It is only the clothes we shall wear in the Upper World.”

The Guardian frowned. “It is more than that. You are trying to deceive me, you dishonest people. You are attempting to bring creatures into the Upper World which do not belong there. For this, I will never again allow anyone to cross over from Rarohenga to the Upper World.

Only the spirits of the dead will travel from the Overworld to Rarohenga.”

Defeated, Niwareka replied, “It is so,” and took Mataora’s hand in hers for strength.

They slipped past the Guardian and made it back to their home safely, where they lived happily together for the rest of their days.

It was Mataora who handed on to men the secret of moko that cannot be rubbed off and Niwareka who passed on to women the knowledge of weaving colored borders into their cloaks. From the love of Mataora and Niwareka in the beginning years came these gifts of knowledge.

³¹ An essential god in Maori culture; the god of the forests and the birds

How the Tortoise Got His Shell: Australia

Long, long ago, all the bush birds and animals lived in a big, deep valley that was hemmed in on all sides by rough, high hills. They all lived in harmony together for many years, but after a long time had passed, food became scarce, so all of the birds and animals held a great Yun mundi³² to find a solution.

All the birds and animals talked and talked and talked to each other, trying to come up with the best idea of how to obtain more food, but none of them could come up with a solution. Tortoise arose to speak, but the other animals only laughed at him, for he was slow and ungainly. How could someone who sleeps all day possibly come up with a good plan?

Disregarding their mockery, Tortoise spoke. He proposed that big Eagle Hawk, king of the birds and a great hunter, should fly over the hills' ranges and find some food.

"Oh, yes," said big Eagle Hawk, "that is not a bad idea after all."

So he flew away over the ranges. When Eagle Hawk had reached a far distance from the animals' valley, he saw a beautiful country full of all kinds of food. But, the strange thing was, no birds or animals already lived there, except little Willy Wagtail. Eagle Hawk landed next to Willy Wagtail.

"Greetings, friend! May I fetch my brothers and sisters, who are starving, and lead them into this beautiful country of yours?"

"Absolutely!" said Wagtail. "That is, if you can wrestle me and win."

Of course, Eagle Hawk thought this would be an easy win because of his strength, but cunning little Wagtail had placed some sharp fish-bone spikes in the ground where they were to wrestle, hidden within the grass. They started wrestling, and Wagtail was able to hop and jump around the spikes because he was so quick and nimble, but Eagle Hawk was not so fortunate. When Wagtail tripped the Eagle Hawk, he fell right on top of the fish-bone spikes, which pierced his beautiful feathers, and pinned him to the ground. This put him at the mercy of Wagtail, who showed none, and pecked Eagle Hawk to death.

Back in the valley, all the other birds and animals waited for Eagle Hawk to return. They waited and waited for over a week, but at last they got tired of waiting. So, the birds and animals decided to send Kite Hawk to search for food in place of Eagle Hawk, but he met the same fate as Eagle Hawk. Magpie, Wombat, Dingo, and others went too, desperately searching for their friends and food, but all of them met the same gruesome fate as confident Eagle Hawk; little Wagtail tripped them all onto his hidden ground spikes and then pecked them to death.

With so many of their friends journeying out of the valley and not returning, the remaining birds and animals became very much afraid. If they did not die of starvation in the valley, then surely whatever awaited them over the range would kill them anyways!

³² Conference

One day, old Tortoise volunteered to go. The birds and animals warned him against it, believing him to be incapable of fighting off any predators because of his slowness. But away Tortoise went, crawling painfully slowly over the hills' ranges, determined to help his friends. He eventually made it to the land of Wagtail, and, per usual, Wagtail challenged Tortoise to a wrestling match.

"I accept," replied Tortoise, "but just wait a while. I need to stretch before we wrestle."

Desiring to make up some sort of protection, Tortoise hobbled over into the bush, where he came across a gum tree. From it he cut a coolamon³³ and a thick strip of bark. Tortoise placed the coolamon on his back like a shell and tied the strip of bark on as a breastplate. Now ready to face the Wagtail, Tortoise emerged from the bush and called out to him.

Just like before, once the two had started wrestling, Wagtail hopped around and tripped Tortoise, but when Tortoise fell onto the spikes, the coolamon protected him! Frustrated, Wagtail tripped and flipped Tortoise onto the spikes again and again, to no avail. The coolamon and the breastplate fully protected Tortoise from the spikes every time.

After a while, Wagtail became exhausted from the wrestling, and Tortoise saw his chance; he fell upon Wagtail with all his might, and killed him. Victorious, Tortoise returned to the valley to share the great news with all the other birds and animals. He led them all to the flourishing countryside, and they feasted and celebrated Tortoise's success.

What Eagle Hawk, Dingo, Kangaroo, and all the others who lost to Wagtail failed to accomplish with brute force, slow-moving old Tortoise achieved with wisdom and preparation. As a memorial of his great victory in overcoming a cunning and wicked enemy, Tortoise is to be blessed with a long life, humbly bearing his shield.

³³ Long wooden dish used for carrying water

The Legend of Malin Kundang: Indonesia

Near the town of Padang, on the shores of the mouth of the Batang Arau River in West Sumatra, lies a heap of stones that exists as a reminder of the wickedness of those who refuse to acknowledge their own parents. Those stones, which you can still see to this day, are the remains of the ship of Malin Kundang, a son who was unkind to his mother: this is their story.

Once, a large fishing village rested along the banks of the mouth of the Batang Arau river. Its harbor was always crowded with large ships and sailing vessels from all corners of the world. Among many fishing families that resided there lived a poor fisherman and his wife and son. They spoiled their son so much that the other villagers started calling him Malin Kundang. Everyone called him this as an insult because kundang meant spoiled.

While his parents only saw the good in him, Malin was truly a naughty child. He would often get into trouble, and one day, when he was playing too roughly, he fell and scraped his forehead. The gash left a scar which clearly marked him apart from all the other boys. Even after he'd grown into a young man, the scar could be plainly seen.

The boy's father wanted to ensure his son success in the future, so one day, when a large vessel anchored into the harbor, the father asked for an audience with the captain. He was granted his request, and, upon meeting the captain, pleaded with him to take his son into employment.

"Good sir, if you need a crewman, please take my son with you. He is well-built and intelligent; he could be of

much use to you. You may bring him up and consider him your own son if you wish. I hope for him to learn much from you in the years to come, and perhaps, one day, become a seaman himself."

Fortune was in Malin's father's favor that day because the ship's captain was willing to take Malin Kundang aboard. The father dashed home to bring his son the good news. Malin was excited to hear of this grand opportunity his father had secured for him and couldn't wait to see the world.

When the time came for Malin to leave, it was hard for his parents to let him go. They were worried for their only child, going off into the world all by himself. They watched his ship sail off into the horizon until it dipped out of sight. Returning to their quiet hut, the couple hoped that they would be able to see their beloved son again someday.

Day after day passed until a whole year had gone by since Malin's departure. Malin Kundang, leaving his lazy attitude and name behind him, worked diligently on the ship and indeed learned a great deal from the sea captain. He loved life at sea. After a few more years of hard work, he became a sea captain himself! He commanded a large, luxurious ship—all his own. He married the daughter of a wealthy merchant and got so wrapped up in his new, successful life that he forgot all about his native village and his loving parents, who continued to eagerly await his return.

Many more years passed, and Malin's father became gravely ill. With no one to help take care of them, Malin's mother could not manage to bring in enough money to support them while caring for her husband, and so, sadly, he died. Grief-stricken at the loss of her dear husband,

Malin's mother held onto the hope of seeing her son once again.

Eventually, thoughts of his native village did come to Malin's mind. And once he had thought of it, he couldn't shake the memories of his childhood. They kept resurfacing in his mind incessantly, so he finally decided to make a trip to visit Batang Arau. He had refrained from telling his wife his origins for fear that she would spurn being married to someone of such a lowly birth.

When Malin Kundang's grand ship began to make its way into the Batang Arau harbor, all the villagers rushed to the shore to see the wonderful sight. Malin Kundang's ship was one of the most luxurious vessels to ever drop anchor in their humble harbor! All the villagers talked among themselves, wondering, who could be the owner of this striking vessel?

As soon as Malin disembarked his ship, a dense crowd gathered around him, vying for his attention and flooding him with questions. One old man in the crowd spied the scar on the captain's forehead and knew that he was none other than Malin Kundang! He hurried off to tell Malin's mother that her son had arrived—and that he was a rich merchant!

Malin's mother was ecstatic to hear that her son had finally returned home. She immediately started preparing her son's favorite dish and, once it was finished, grabbed her neighbor and hurried down to the port to greet him. Once in sight of the docks, Malin's mother spied the marvelous ship and tears formed in her eyes. How proud she was that her only son had grown up to be so accomplished!

Arriving near the ship, she called out to Malin Kundang, "Malin! My son! My dear son!" Malin recognized his mother's voice at once, but out of shame, he

pretended that he could not hear her. "At last you have come home! I have been longing and waiting for you all these years. It's me, your mother, dear son!"

Realizing that his mother was not going to give up, Malin asked his crew to remove her and the rest of the crowd from the shore near his ship. They pushed the crowd back with ease, but Malin's mother slipped through the rank and fell onto the beach in front of Malin.

"Malin, just look at me. You must recognize your own mother! I've even brought you your favorite food. Remember, from when you were a child?" She held up the food to show him.

Still, Malin Kundang turned away. He would not admit before his wife and crewmen that this poor, old woman was his mother—but she would not be ignored. She called out to him again, even though the crewmen were encouraging her to leave.

"Malin, how can you forget me? I am your own mother! Look at me, Malin! Surely you have missed me at least a little over all these years."

Malin, despite his mother's pleas, remained ashamed. He finally faced her, saying, "Shameless old woman! I do not have a dirty and poor mother like this. My mother is dead. Don't ever claim yourself as my mother again."

At that, the crewmen started to drag her away by force, but she still called out to Malin, her heart broken.

"Malin! You are Malin Kundang indeed! You are a wicked child who has neglected his own mother. You are ungrateful and ashamed to admit where it is you come from, where your mother and father brought you up." With tears flowing from her eyes, she yanked herself free from the crewmen's grip and sorrowfully went home. Malin cringed

at her words, but held up his pretense and resisted the pull in his heart to call out after her.

The following day, Malin Kundang ordered his crew to weigh anchor and set sail. They took off toward the open sea with ease, but, once they reached the middle of the sea, the wind rose and began to hurl Malin's ship left and right. Lightning and deafening thunder overtook the air and all the clouds turned pitch black.

As soon as the storm started, Malin became aware of the full weight of the sin he had committed against his mother. He knew that god and nature were conspiring to punish him for his contemptible deed. He began to pray and cry out for forgiveness, but it was too late. The waves became more and more fierce. The great waves eventually swallowed Malin's ship, ending the lives of Malin Kundang himself and all his crew, and smashing his magnificent ship into thousands of broken pieces.

Europe

The Mermaid Wife: Scotland

A story is told of a young Shetland³⁴ man, who, while taking a stroll one summer night along the sandy margins of the seashore, happened to notice a number of mermen and mermaids. They had shed their seal skins so that they could take human form and come onto the surface to dance under the moonlight. Drawn in by the liveliness of the elusive creatures, the young man crept toward them to get a closer look. He kept very quiet, but merpeople have exceptional hearing; the simple sinking off his boots into the wet sand alerted them to his presence.

Immediately they all panicked and fled to secure their garbs. Once back in their skins, they took up their natural form as seals and plunged into the safety of the ocean's depths. Before they had all gone, the Shetlander perceived that one of the skins lay close to his feet. He peered down at it and snatched it up before its owner could claim it, putting it away swiftly into his jacket.

Despite the fact that he held one of the merpeople's skins, it appeared to the young man that all of the merpeople had returned to the sea. Curious about the seemingly extra skin, the Shetlander began to make his way back home. He hadn't made it very far down the surf when he came across the fairest maiden that was ever gazed upon by mortal eyes. The striking woman was sobbing in a heap by the edge of the tide. She was lamenting the theft of her

seal skin. Without her skin, she was trapped as a tenant of the upper world, an exile of her aquatic home.

The young man ran over to her and tried to comfort her.

“Why do you sob so dreadfully, beautiful lady?”

Normally merpeople would not disclose the truth of their identity to humans, but the young woman was so torn up that she didn't care.

“I have been separated from my homeland, good sir. I do not belong to this surface world. That is why I cry so. I do not understand. How could my skin have simply gone missing? I placed it right with everyone else's. I was off hunting for seashells by myself when someone startled my friends. They scrambled to slip their skins on and return home, forgetting me in the chaos. When I heard the commotion, I came running, but by the time I made it to our spot, my skin, and all of my friends, had disappeared. Without my skin, I can never return to my family... to my home. Surely I have no hope for a life now.”

The Shetlander's heart broke upon hearing the mermaid's laments, but he did not reveal that he was the one who had stolen her skin. Instead, he chose the path of selfishness and offered the woman protection beneath his roof: as his betrothed. He had drunk deeply of love at the very sight of her, so much so that he would sacrifice her happiness so that she would stay with him. The merlady, believing that she was doomed to become an inhabitant of the surface world, found that she could do no better than to accept the offer.

This strange attachment went on for many years. The young man and the mermaid were married, and had

³⁴ Native of the Shetland islands off the coast of Scotland

several children. The Shetlander's love for his merwife was unbounded, but his affection was coldly returned.

In order to help ease her aching heart, the young woman would often go off to the seashore alone and think of her home and her people. One day, she learned of a bit of magic that she could summon to help her keep in touch with her home world. Upon a special signal being given, a large seal would make his appearance on the beach beside her. He would waddle over to the mermaid and let her hold him, releasing some of her anxiety from being trapped on dry land for so long. The lady loved her seal friend dearly and eagerly awaited the short periods of time when she could slip away to visit him.

Some more years passed, and one day, it just so happened that one of the couple's children was playing in the storehouse and found, concealed beneath a stack of corn, a seal's skin. Amazed by the smoothness of the skin, the little boy ran to show his mother the prize that he'd discovered. When the mermaid saw her son running to her with the skin in hand, she recognized it immediately and her eyes glistened with rapture. At last, the means to lead her back to her native home had come back to her. She burst into an ecstasy of joy at the thought, only feeling slight hesitation when she beheld her children. She did love them, but unlike them, she did not belong to this world, and had already stayed away too long. She embraced her children for a moment, but then took her skin in hand and fled towards the seaside.

Her husband was on his way home from work when she made her break for the beach, and he caught a glimpse of her golden locks flowing behind her as she sprinted toward the beach. He also recognized the leathery skin she held in her hand. He dropped his tools and took off running

after her. Horror struck the man's heart and he ran with all his might to catch up to his beloved wife, but he only arrived in time to see her transformation completed. He sorrowfully watched his wife, now in the form of a seal, dive from the ledge of a rock into the sea. He cried out in anguish and dropped to his knees.

Fortunately, the merlady had heard her husband. His cry of despair sent a small pang through her heart, so she swam over to say goodbye to him.

"Farewell!" she called out. "And may all good attend you. I loved you as well as I could while I resided upon the earth, but my first love is my people. I know, deep down, you understand that. Remember me when you look into the sea-green eyes of our children and we will never be truly parted."

She cast one more glance back at her heartbroken Shetlander, and then dove into the unknown depths, never to surface again.

Prince Kindhearted: Poland

Once upon a time there lived a King who had but one son. He was nicknamed Kindhearted at a young age because everyone in the kingdom swore that he actually had a heart forged from gold. When the Prince turned twenty years old, he asked his father, the King, to let him go travelling. The King agreed heartily and fitted his son for the journey. He gave him a servant to guard him and gave him his blessing. The Prince mounted his brave steed and visited many countries, both near and far. He yearned to see what God's world had to offer so that he could learn many things and return home a wiser and better man.

One day, the Prince was casually riding through a grassy field when an eagle's wings flapping above the grass-line caught his eye. He rode closer, only to find that the eagle was in pursuit of a swan trapped in the open space of a good-sized pond. The slender swan was almost caught by the eagle's sharp talons when the Prince, through careful and quick aim, fired his pistol. The eagle fell dead and the happy swan swam over to the Prince.

"Dear fellow, I thank you for your help. It is not simply a swan that thanks you though; I am the enchanted daughter of the Knight Invisible. You have also not just saved me from an eagle's talons, but the evil clutches of the terrible magician King Koshchey. My father will repay you well for your services. Remember this: whenever you are in trouble, you need only to say, 'Knight Invisible, come to my help!' three times, and you will be saved."

The enchanted swan flew away as soon as she had finished speaking. The Prince gazed after her for a moment, pondering her words, then continued on his journey. He crossed many high mountains, traversed deep rivers, passed foreign countries, and eventually came across a great desert, where there was nothing to see but sky and sand. No man lived in the place, no animal's voice was ever heard, and no vegetation grew there. The sun shined so brightly and burned so terribly that any rivers that tried to form there dried up within a day.

Prince Kindhearted took notice of the harsh landscape and urged his horse to continue straight through, going farther and farther, deeper and deeper, into the desert. He hoped that they would soon make it to the other side. After a while, the Prince became desperately thirsty, and no break in the dunes was within sight. In order to find some water, he sent his servant in one direction while he went in another. After a long time, the Prince succeeded in finding a well. He called out to his servant to join him at the well.

"Look! I have found a means of getting some water. Dismount and I will let you down into the well by some long ropes and you may draw up some water."

"No, my Prince," answered the servant. "I am much heavier than you are, and Your Majesty's hands will not be able to hold me. You take hold of the ropes, and I will let you down into the well."

The Prince trusted the servant, so he tied the ropes around him and went down into the well. Fortunately, the water at the bottom was sweet and cool, so the Prince drank some himself then took some for the servant. He tugged on the ropes as a sign for his servant to pull him back up, but his servant refused.

“Listen, you kingly son! From your cradle-days until now you have lived a happy life, surrounded by luxury and love. I have always led the life of a miserable wretch—until now. You must agree to become *my* servant, and I the Prince, or I shall leave you to rot in this well.”

Flabbergasted, the Prince responded. “Oh, do not leave me here, my good man! You will not gain anything by it. You will never find another master as good as I am, and you know what a murderer may expect in the next world.”

“Let me suffer in the next world. It shall be worth it if I make you suffer in this one.”

He began to loosen the ropes.

“Stop!” cried the Prince. “I will be thy servant. And you shall be the Prince. I give you my word.”

“I do not believe your word. Swear that you will write down what you promise me, for words are lost in the air, but writing always remains as a testimony against us.”

“I swear!”

In response, the servant let down into the well a sheet of paper and a pencil and told the Prince to write the following: The bearer of this note is Prince Kindhearted, traveling with his servant, a subject of his father’s kingdom. The Prince complied, and sent the finished note back up to the servant. The servant glanced over the note for a moment, then, satisfied by the Prince’s oath, hauled him out of the well. He gave the Prince his shabby clothes to wear and he put on the Prince’s rich dress, as well as his armor. Lastly, they traded horses, and then went on.

After a week or so of travelling, they came to the capital city of a lovely kingdom. When they approached the palace, the false prince gave his horse to the false servant and told him to go to the stable, while he himself went

straight into the throne chamber. The sorrowful Prince obeyed, and the disloyal servant went to meet the king.

“Your Majesty, I have come from a faraway kingdom to ask for the hand of your daughter, whose beauty and wisdom are well-known all over the world. If you consent, you will have my kingdom’s favor; if not, we will decide it by war.”

The King was deeply offended by the false prince’s harsh words.

“You do not speak to me in a courteous manner at all, not as a prince ought to speak. But, it may be that in your country you are not used to better manners. Now, listen to me sir. I would grant you my blessing to become my future son-in-law, but my kingdom is not mine to give. An enemy of mine has taken my kingdom into his own hands. His troops have captured my best soldiers and now they surround the capital, threatening to lay waste to the city. If you rid my kingdom of these troops, my daughter’s hand will be yours as a reward.”

“It is a deal,” answered the false prince. “I will surely drive this enemy from your kingdom, Your Majesty. By tomorrow morning, not one of their troops will be left in your land.”

That evening, the false prince left the palace in search of his false servant and found him caring for the horses in the stable.

“Listen, servant! Go out to the city walls and drive away the foreign troops attacking there. For this service, I will return to you your note, by which you denied your kingdom and swore to be my servant.”

The honest Prince Kindhearted agreed to the servant’s terms and put on his knightly armor once again. He mounted his steed and went out to the city walls. After

noting the number of troops that awaited him outside the wall, he feared he might die and was struck with sorrow. But just then, the swan's words came to mind! The Prince was again filled with hope and cried out into the night three times over, "Knight Invisible! Come to my help!"

"Here I am," said Knight Invisible, appearing out of thin air. "What do you wish me to do for you? I am ready to do everything for you, because you saved my child from the terrible Koshchey."

Prince Kindhearted showed the Knight the army of enemy troops outside the city wall. The Knight surveyed the area, nodded to himself, then whistled loudly.

"Oh steed, my ever-wise horse, come to me quickly!"

There was a rustling in the air, a few rumbles of thunder, the earth trembled, and then out of nowhere a truly wonderful horse appeared! He had a coat as white as snow and a flowing, golden mane. His nostrils worked like a fire burning with a passion, bright sparks were flying from his eyes, and thick clouds of smoke plumed out of his ears.

Knight Invisible jumped up onto his horse and unsheathed a glorious sword from the horse's saddle. "Take this magic sword and attack the troops from the left. I will attack them from the right, and together, we shall vanquish them all!"

They both attacked the invaders with great courage. From the left soldiers fell like branches off a rotted tree, and from the right, like whole forests being stepped on by a giant. In less than an hour the entire army was indeed vanquished. Some of them remained upon the field, dead, while the rest fled. Prince Kindhearted and the Knight Invisible met upon the battlefield and shook hands in a friendly way. The Prince had barely begun to thank the Knight for his help when he and his horse burst into a bright red flame, then into thick smoke, and dissipated into the

darkness. The Prince returned to the palace, quietly rejoicing.

Unbeknownst to the Prince, the Princess had been watching the events of the evening from the beginning. Earlier, she'd been feeling restless over the fact that she was being forced to marry such a snob of a prince. In hopes that the cool night air would calm her nerves, she'd cracked her window open, which allowed her to accidentally eavesdrop on the whispered conversation between the false prince and the true prince. She peeked her eyes around the window frame in time to see the snobby prince give his armor to his servant to go fight. Realizing what was taking place, the Princess watched the real Prince Kindhearted slip off to the city wall, ready to take on her father's enemies. She also noted that, when he returned, Prince Kindhearted allowed the false prince to put on his armor and go to the castle in his place, while the Prince entered the stable to rest. The true prince's servant had broken his oath about returning the Prince's note to him.

The next morning, the King, knowing that his land was freed from their enemies, felt very happy and at peace. He gave the false prince many expensive gifts as a show of his gratitude. The Princess said nothing in response to this, but, when he announced the engagement of his daughter to the false prince, she stood up and objected. Her father tried to silence her, but she refused. She strode over to the man who appeared to be the prince's servant and took his hand. She led him right up to the feet of the King.

"My dearest father, and all you that are present here! This man is to be my bridegroom! He is your true savior, and the real prince. That man, who calls himself the prince, is a traitor! A truly false and dishonest man."

The Princess retold everything that she had witnessed the night before and ended with speaking of the existence of the note. At this, the false prince rushed to stand before the King as well.

“Let me provide proof that I am the real Prince Kindhearted, Your Majesty.”

The Princess tried to object, but the King accepted his proposal. The false prince brought out the note the Prince wrote whilst in the well and presented it to the King, who read it aloud.

“The bearer of this note, the false and untrue servant of Prince Kindhearted, asks for your pardon and expects a just punishment. This note was given to him in the well by Prince Kindhearted.”

“Is it really so?” cried the wretched servant, who had turned pale as death.

“Yes, read it for yourself if you do not believe me,” replied the King.

“I confess, I cannot read,” said the poor fellow. He knelt before his master and begged for mercy, but he received what he deserved.

Prince Kindhearted and the Princess were happily married that day, and lived happily together for the rest of their days.

The Little Girl and the Winter Whirlwinds: Bulgaria

One year, the wicked Winter Witch decided that winter should be the only season on earth, so she stopped spring from coming on time! During the night, she hid the sun behind dark clouds and covered the land with a heavy snow.

The next morning, the people who lived in a small village in the mountains woke up to find their houses buried under the snow up to the roofs! They started digging tunnels from their front door to the neighboring houses, and gathered in small groups, trying to decide what could be done.

After much discussion, the villagers decided that the best thing to do was to send someone to the highest mountain peak, where the good wizard Father Christmas lived in his palace of ice, and ask him for help. Unfortunately, no one who was able was willing to go on such a dangerous trip.

“I am ready to go,” an old man said. “But, I’m afraid that I am too old and slow to reach the peak in time. If only I was twenty years younger...”

“Don’t worry, grandfather, I will go!” his little granddaughter said. She was an orphan and had been living with her grandfather since her parents’ death.

“No, not you!” everyone replied, for they all pitied her and thought her helpless. No one believed that she could complete the task: “You are too young and tender for

such a hard job!”, “You don’t even have a warm coat!”, “No hat or scarf!”, “Not even a pair of woolen mittens!”.

“I am not afraid,” said the little girl. “My feet are strong and I’m as fast as a mountain goat trekking through the snow!”

“But you’ll freeze up there, with no shelter to hide from the frost!”

“I will not,” she replied firmly. “I may be little, but my heart is big and warm, full of love for all of you. It will save me from the frost.”

The girl’s grandfather knelt before her, while all the other adults continued chattering away. “Go, my child. I know your good heart, and I trust it to carry you through this journey to victory.” He motioned then to all of the children around. They were all friends with the little girl and gave her their warmest clothes. Soon, the little girl was ready to go. She waved back at her friends on her way out, then started making her way to the snowy mountain peak at a quick pace.

Further and higher the girl trekked, never thinking about rest. Soon she was able to see the glittering ice on top of the highest peak. The little girl picked up her pace, but little did she know, she had begun walking through the land of the Whirlwinds. They awoke to the sound of her footsteps crunching through their snow, and became furious at her presence.

“Who dares trespass on our property? Let’s blow at her so hard she forgets where she’s heading!” they screamed.

The Whirlwinds blew their hardest around the poor little girl, but she hardened herself against the whipping winds, huddled into her warm clothes, and bravely went on towards the tallest peak.

The whirlwinds quickly exhausted themselves, and fell to the ground in a heap, gasping for breath.

“What a strong girl!” one of them said. “We are exhausted, and she’s not even tired. What special breed of little human is this?”

“No human has ever overmastered us,” said another, “let alone a fragile little girl. If we cannot manage to best her ourselves, let’s call our sisters, the Blizzards, for help.”

The Whirlwinds grouped together and howled out to their sisters for help. Immediately, the Blizzards flew to their brothers’ aid and became very angry for them.

“She will pay for what she’s done!” they roared.

The Blizzards threw themselves at the girl. It was a long and tiresome struggle, but the girl eventually bested all the Blizzards too, thanks to her strong, warm heart. It beat as strong as the most well-made drum, never failing her and never letting her fear or weariness be stronger than her determination.

The Blizzards too fell into a breathless heap on the cold ground, exhausted from storming around the little girl.

“That’s a s-s-s-shame!” one of them hissed. “We were not able to stop her! We must call mother for help.”

“Yes, mother, mother!” they all screamed together. “Mother! Come help us, please!”

And who was their mother? None but the Winter Witch herself! She came at once upon hearing the pleas of her howling children.

“I saw everything, my children. Now listen to me. When you cannot defeat someone by force, turn thing the other way around. Be good to her!”

“What do you mean? To kiss her?” a Whirlwind asked ironically.

The Witch blew him over with an icy blast from her hand.

“Nothing of the sort. Let’s just try to be polite and kind so that she will never suspect us to have any evil thoughts, and then we will strike and get our revenge on her.”

So the Whirlwinds calmed their gusts and the Blizzards halted their snowfall. The Winter Witch materialized before the little girl in the form of a beautiful young woman in a sparkling white gown, with long, white hair and a crown of icy diamonds. The little girl could not believe her eyes. She rubbed them profusely, but the woman did not disappear.

“Am I dreaming, or is this some good miracle?” the girl thought. “This beautiful lady has the face of my dear mother, and I can hear her sweet voice singing my lullaby! Oh, how I want to hear some more. I’ll just sit here for a while and listen. I’m so near to the Palace that I’m sure I’ll still make it there in time...”

The little girl sat down and closed her eyes. The Winter Witch grinned in delight.

“Yes, sleep, little girl. And may you sleep forever!”

After the girl had fallen fast asleep, the Winter Witch left her there on the snowy hill and flew away to tell her children of how she had managed to deceive the girl.

It seemed like all hope was lost for the little girl and her village, but then, something stirred in the snow! A squeaking sound was heard, and a tiny head popped up from a hole in the snow near the girl. It was a little white mouse! Her shiny, black eyes fixed on the sleeping figure.

“Oh no!” she squeaked. “This poor little girl is in danger! She’ll freeze to death if she sleeps out here much longer!”

The little mouse called to her friends, and soon, a whole colony of little white mice had popped up in the snow near the little girl. They ran to her and started massaging warmth back into her feet and hands. Unfortunately, the little mice's work was not enough to wake the girl, so they decided to call their friends the rabbits to help. Soon, bigger holes opened in the snow, and a number of white rabbits hopped out to come to the girl's rescue.

Seeing the situation going on below from up in their snow-covered pine trees, a number of squirrels jumped down to help too. Soon, the little girl was covered with their white and brown fur, all of them working to warm her back to consciousness.

At last, the little girl opened her eyes! She thanked her new friends for saving her life, and explained to them why she was here in the first place, and where she was going.

"We will help guide you to the ice palace!" the animals all cheered. "We are also suffering from this never-ending winter, and would very much like to see spring again."

Flocking around the girl, all the animals accompanied her to Father Christmas's ice palace. They finally reached the palace and knocked at the front gate, but no one answered.

"What might have happened to Father Christmas?" the animals wondered.

"Let's try to open the door!" the girl suggested. She pressed into the door with her whole bodyweight. Although it was quite heavy, the door was unlocked. "It's not locked. We must see if Father Christmas is alright!"

Together, the girl and the animals managed to heave the gate open, and they all stepped into the palace. A glittering, icy corridor led them to a big, crystal hall. And there, on a gorgeous throne of carved ice, Father Christmas sat, fast asleep, dressed in silver-embroidered clothes. Two of the squirrels jumped onto his shoulders and tickled his nose with their furry tails in hopes of waking him.

Father Christmas's nose twitched at the touch of the squirrels' tails, and suddenly sneezed a mighty sneeze! He bolted upright in his throne, which froze the girl and animals with fear, but his blue eyes twinkled, and he smiled at the sight of them.

"What are you all doing here, little friends?"

The girl relayed to Father Christmas everything that had happened.

"You mean, I have sat here, sleeping, while the wicked Winter Witch has been preventing spring from coming?" Father Christmas asked, astonished. "I suppose she thinks she has outsmarted me and believes she can stay forever, but it is not so! I will not let her! Thank you, little ones, for waking me up. I'll restore the natural order and give that Witch and her children what they deserve."

He stood, retrieved a silver whistle from his coat, and blew into it. Within an instant, all his subjects appeared in the big crystal hall. He ordered them to go and find the Winter Witch, the Whirlwinds, and the Blizzards. Father Christmas's subjects rounded them all up and brought them to the palace, where Father Christmas locked them down in his palace's cellar where they would be until the appropriate time next winter. He also told his subjects to get to work clearing the skies of her dark clouds, so that the sun could melt the snow.

By the time the little girl and her animal friends made it back to the front gate, the sun was already shining outside and the snow was starting to melt. Father Christmas had followed through with his promises right away. Before heading home, the little girl thanked her new friends once more. They promised to help each other anytime when needed and then parted ways.

Making her way home was quick and easy, and soon the girl made it all the way back to her village. Everyone in the village cheered for the brave little girl and her grandfather couldn't have been prouder. They celebrated the end of winter for several days, feasting and toasting the little girl's triumph.

Spring was delighted to finally come about; no spring more beautiful had ever come before that year, nor would a more beautiful spring come after. All around, snowdrops started sprouting into full bloom the very day the girl returned, and all the villagers picked the first ones to give to her as a token of their gratitude.

The Princess and the Salt: Greece

Red thread dyed
On the spinning wheel tied
Kick it to spin
Let the tale begin

Once there was a King who ruled over a peaceful seaside kingdom. His lovely queen ruled at his side, and they were blessed with three fair daughters. One day, the King called his daughters together and asked them how much they loved him. The first daughter told her father that she loved him like gold. The second daughter said she loved her father like silver. And the third daughter, she said she loved her father...like salt!

The King looked at his daughter with great confusion. "Salt? The cheapest thing in the world? How can you say you love me like such a thing? Surely you do not love me at all."

The Princess tried to protest her father's offense, but he stormed from the room before she could speak. The King raged to the front door, threw it open, and asked the first passer-by to marry the third daughter. That man happened to be a poor, young fisherman.

The fisherman bowed in reverence, but protested. "My King, how could it be that a poor fisherman like me should be asked to marry a princess?"

"This is my wish," the King replied, "and this is what shall be."

The poor fisherman accepted the King's offer and married the third daughter. He took the Princess to his small hut where he lived with his mother. Though he had little to give in possession, the young fisherman had much to give from his heart. He treated the Princess with tenderness and affection, and the two soon fell in love. Alas, the three of them had a happy life together, even though they lived on little.

One day, a group of rich merchants stopped in the village to rest from their travels. They asked around for someone to hire who could tend their animals for the rest of their long journey. Determined to provide more for his wife and his mother, the young fisherman offered to fill the position. The merchants accepted the fisherman's offer, so he ran home, rejoicing the great news. His wife and mother admitted that they would miss him terribly, but they would not try to stop him from taking advantage of such a grand opportunity. Within a week, he kissed his wife, now showing with child, and mother goodbye and set off with the wealthy merchants.

While on the road one day, the merchants stopped to rest and asked the fisherman to fetch some water for them from the nearby well. The fisherman humbly complied and went to draw water. As he was lowering the bucket into the well, the spirit of the well appeared in front of him!

The astonished fisherman fell backwards onto the ground, frightened at the fantastical sight, but he quickly recovered and bowed in reverence to the spirit. "Good day, my friend."

"Good day, weary traveler," the spirit responded. "I usually devour any soul who comes to my well for water, but in exchange for your kind greeting, I will instead not only spare your life, but also offer you a gift."

The fisherman looked up at the spirit. “A gift, kind spirit?”

The spirit smiled at the fisherman. “Yes. As my gift, I give you three pomegranates. Cut them open at your will, but do not open them in front of your present traveling companions. They will surely try to steal my generous offerings.”

“Thank you, spirit, thank you. I will cherish them.”

With that, the spirit laid the pomegranates at the feet of the fisherman and disappeared back into the well.

The man snatched up the three pomegranates and finished drawing water for the merchants. He hid two of the pomegranates with his belongings, and sent the third one back to his wife and mother.

After receiving the pomegranate, the two women curiously sliced open the pomegranate. And what should fall out of the scrumptious fruit but a stream of sparkling diamonds! The two women yelped in amazement at the miraculous sight.

At once, the two women sold some of the diamonds and built a house as stunning as the palace. But, keeping the generosity of the magic pomegranate in mind, they placed a fountain in their front yard for passers-by to drink from and quench their thirst.

Soon after their house was built, the Princess gave birth to a healthy, beautiful baby boy. Several years passed before the fisherman finally returned home. When he reached the place where their small hut used to be, he was astonished to find a mansion! At first he worried that his wife and mother had been forced to move away, but then he spotted his wife sitting at the window, with a handsome boy next to her!

At this, the Princess looked up, recognized her husband, and ran out to greet him. She leapt into his arms and wept over his return. “My sweet husband! You have returned to us!” She gestured to the boy, who had run out after his mother. “You have been away so long, you’ve not been able to meet your son.”

With tears in his eyes, the fisherman knelt down next to the boy, who hid behind his mother’s legs. He reached out to the boy lovingly. The Princess nudged the young boy forward, telling him to kiss his father’s hand as a sign of respect. He did so, and the fisherman beamed and wrapped his son in his arms, along with his wife. At last, the family was together!

“How on earth did we happen upon this beautiful mansion, my wife?”

“Your mother and I used the money from the diamonds you sent us to build it.”

The fisherman scrunched his brow. “Diamonds? I wish I had the good fortune to send you diamonds, my love, but I did not find great fortune with the merchants after all.”

“Did you not send us the pomegranate?”

“I did, but not any diamonds.”

“The diamonds were inside the pomegranate, dear husband! Your mother and I sliced open the pomegranate right after we received it, and a handful of diamonds poured right out from inside!”

Now wide-eyed, the fisherman remembered the other two pomegranates. He slung his pack off his shoulder and took out the other pomegranates. He cut them open and, just like with the first, their inside was full of diamonds!

With this new treasure, the family built another house even more splendid than the first, with huge gardens

and fountains. Some of their wealth they gave to the poor, and some they used to build an inn, where passers-by could eat for free.

The King came to visit the inn once to meet the generous owners. The Princess recognized him immediately and invited the King to their home. She ordered the cook to prepare an exquisite dish for the King, but to only put salt in half of it and leave the other half unsalted. She then told the cook to put the unsalted food on gold and silver platters and the salted food on a simple wooden plate.

When it was time to eat, the servants brought out the unsalted dishes first, and placed them in front of the King. He tried the fancily presented food, but could not force himself to eat the dishes; their lack of flavor was appalling. Then the cook served the King the salted dishes on the simple plates, and those he ate with great pleasure.

At the end of the meal, the Princess asked the King why he would not eat the first dishes.

“Though they looked beautiful,” the King replied, “the first dishes had no salt, and food without salt cannot be eaten, for it has no flavor!”

The Princess then revealed herself to her father. The King could not believe his eyes!

“Father, remember when I told you that I loved you as much as salt? You became angry and sent me away because you thought I did not love you, when, in fact, I loved you more than my older sisters. Gold and silver look beautiful, but they do not add flavor to a dish like salt does.”

The King placed his hand over his daughter’s and tears came to his eyes. “How right you are, my daughter, and how wrong I have been all this time. Salt is indeed more valuable than gold or silver.”

The Princess squeezed her father’s hand and smiled. “It’s alright, father, I forgive you. Because of your actions, I was rewarded with a loving husband, a healthy son, and vast wealth.”

From that day forward, they all lived well, and we all lived better.

East of the Sun and West of the Moon: Norway

Once upon a time there was a poor farmer who had so many children that he could barely provide enough clothing and food for them all. All of the children were blessed with attractiveness, but the prettiest was the youngest daughter, recently turned fifteen, who was so exquisite that there was no end to her loveliness.

One day, the weather was wild and rough outside. It was cruelly dark; heavy rain fell; the wind blew angry gusts. The poor family's little cottage shook and shivered under the attack. They all sat around the fire, busying themselves with this and that to try to forget about the storm. But just then, something gave three taps against the windowpane. The father went out to see what had happened, and what should he see but a great white bear!

"Good evening to you!" said the bear.

"The same to you!" replied the man, very confused by the bear's presence.

"Good sir, I have observed your family living about this hill and took notice of your youngest daughter's beauty. If you will give her to me, I will make you as rich as you are now poor."

The farmer weighed the bear's trade in his mind. He loved his youngest daughter greatly, but he loved all his other children as well. Deciding that he ought to consult the children on the matter, he asked the bear for a moment to discuss the deal with his family, which the bear patiently agreed to. Once back inside, the father explained the situation to his children.

The youngest daughter absolutely refused to consider the bear's offer. Nothing her father or siblings said could sway her on the matter. Seeing that this was going to take more time to work out, the father returned outside and asked the bear if he would be willing to come back the following Thursday to get an answer. The bear agreed and padded off into the storm.

Throughout the next week, the father pleaded with the youngest daughter. He encouraged her to think of all the riches they would get if she accepted. He begged her to see the situation from his point of view. At that, the girl began to reconsider her perspective. What better sacrifice to make than to ensure that one's entire family is taken care of? At last, the girl thought better of her first response and told her father that she had changed her mind. Thursday morning, she washed and packed her rags and prepared herself to leave with the bear.

Right when the dipping sun kissed the hilltops, as promised, the white bear's bright fur appeared over the ridge of the hill. The daughter kissed all of her siblings and her father goodbye, fetched her bundle, and walked out to meet the bear. If she was going to surrender herself to this creature, she was going to do it on her terms. She met the bear on the hillside, and he bade her climb onto his back. She complied, and off they went. Once they had gone a bit of the way, the bear spoke for the first time.

"Are you afraid, fair lady?" he asked.

"No," she replied. And she wasn't.

She rode on the bear for a long, long way, until they came to a massive, steep hill. There, on the face of it, the white bear gave a pattern of knocks, and a secret door opened! They entered the dark cave and emerged into a bright and beautiful castle! There were many rooms, all lit

up with gleams of silver and gold. The girl could not believe her eyes. This castle was more glorious than she could ever have imagined—and all hidden within the mountainside.

In one room, there was a table laid with a feast's worth of food. The bear encouraged the girl to indulge herself to her content. He also gave the girl a silver bell and told her to ring it whenever she needed anything. If she simply rang the bell, she would get what she wanted at once.

After the girl had eaten till her belly bulged out, she became sleepy and thought that she would like to go to bed. She rang the bell with that desire in mind, and suddenly she found herself standing before a wonderfully decorated bed chamber! Everything in the room was gold or silver. The bed was as comfortable as anyone could ever wish to sleep in, with silk pillows and a plush bed cover that begged you to wrap yourself in it.

The girl did just that, and fell asleep almost instantly. After she had fallen asleep, a man came and laid alongside her. The girl awoke at the feel of his weight on the bed, but he simply laid there, and she missed the comfort of her siblings sharing a bed with her, so she did not object. What the girl didn't know was that this man was actually the white bear, who could throw off his beast shape at night. Every night, after the girl had put out the lights and gone to bed, he climbed into the bed and laid next to her.

Things went on happily like this for a while, but the girl started to get silent and sorrowful. She spent most of the day alone while the bear was gone, which sparked a longing for the company of her father and siblings. One evening, the white bear asked the girl what it was she was lacking, and she shared with him her growing sense of loneliness.

“Well, well!” said the bear. “Perhaps there's a cure for all this; but you must promise me one thing. If I take you to see your family, you must not talk alone with your oldest sister. She will take you by the hand and try to lead you into a room to talk alone, but you must not do that, or else you will bring bad luck on both of us.”

The girl agreed to the bear's terms, and, the next Sunday, the bear had the girl climb onto his back, and he carried her back to her father's farm so that she could visit with her family. When they reached the top of the hilltop next to her family's, the girl's eyes grew wide. In place of her family's meager cottage was now a grand mansion! Her brothers and sisters could be seen running about joyfully and care-free. The girl teared up at the sight.

The bear carried her the rest of the way, and once they got close, the girl's family all came running to see her! She leapt off the bear's back and ran into their arms, her heart feeling whole once again. None of them could thank her enough for the sacrifice she had made for them. Since she'd left, they'd been blessed with everything they could ever want. They had all been blessed with presents overnight, on top of the new house, including some new farming equipment for her father. They also inquired of the girl about her new life with the bear.

All of the girl's sibling gushed over her tale of the far away castle. They didn't believe her when she told them that such a magnificent castle could be hidden in a mountainside, for it was too amazing to believe! She also told them that the bear ensured that she was well-provided for. He gave her everything she needed and requested. Her eldest sister tried to pull her away to talk alone, but the girl heeded the bear's warning. She brushed her sister off and resumed her storytelling. She even told her family about the

mystery man that slipped into her bed each night. Her eldest sister would not stand for this!

“My darling! It may well be a troll that you have shared a bed with!”

“Regardless of his form, I do not think he wishes to be seen. He only comes into my room once I have put out all the lights and then he leaves before the morning dawns.”

“How ridiculous!” exclaimed the girl’s eldest sister. “Here, take this bit of candle and hide it in your dress. Once the supposed man is asleep, light the candle and see for yourself who it is that you have allowed into your bed.”

Regretfully, curiosity flared in the girl’s heart, so she took the bit of candle from her sister and hid it in her dress. Once the day was through, the bear told the girl that it was time to return to their castle. She said a long goodbye to her family then climbed up onto the bear’s back. When they had gone a ways, the bear asked if she had heeded his warning.

“Of course I did,” she replied. “I refrained from speaking with my eldest sister alone, just as you requested.”

“As that may be, I sense the potential for betrayal on your skin. If you follow your sister’s advice, then you will have brought bad luck on us both, and all that has passed between us will be as nothing.”

“Do not fret, good bear. I have never heeded my sister’s advice, and I do not intend to start doing so now.”

That night, when the girl retired to her bed chambers, she put out all the lights as usual and slid into bed. After a short while, the mysterious man came in and lay down beside her. Once she sensed that his breaths had fallen into the steady beat of sleep, she got up and brought out the candle that she had kept hidden in her dress. The girl’s hands shook, torn between her curiosity and her

promise. After a long moment, the girl exhaled sharply and lit the candle. She let the light shine on the man and found the loveliest Prince one could ever set eyes on being illuminated by the candle’s humble glow. She fell in love with him in that moment, so much so that she couldn’t resist leaning in right then to kiss him. But, when she kissed him, he of course awoke, and cried out in alarm.

“What have you done?” he shouted. “Now you have made us both unlucky, for had you only held out for one year without falling into the temptation to look at me during the night, I would have been freed. I wanted to explain myself to you, but I couldn’t. My stepmother has bewitched me, you see. I am cursed to be the white bear by day and my true princely self only at night. But now, I must set off and go to my stepmother. She made me swear to come back to her if I could not find a girl to break the curse within three years’ time. You are my true love, I know that now, but your impatience has cost us our chance at love. An ugly, long-nosed princess, chosen by my stepmother, awaits me. I shall be forced to wed her instead of you.”

At the Prince’s words, the girl wept and took ill, but there was no helping it; she had broken her promise. She asked if she might go with him. They could face his stepmother together! He refused. His stepmother would kill the girl on sight if she arrived with him.

“Tell me the way then, my love, and I will search you out. Surely you will allow me to try and fight for you.”

“Yes, you may try, my beloved, but there is no way to that place. It lays east of the sun and west of the moon, thus you will never find your way.”

“There you are wrong, my Prince. I will never stop searching for you, as long as I live. I will not let my weakness stand between us if I can help it.”

The young prince nodded solemnly at the girl's words. He wished for her to be able to find him in time, but he had little hope. His stepmother was a wickedly smart woman and her castle was well-hidden.

When the girl woke up the next morning, both the Prince and the castle were gone. She was laying on a little green patch of grass amidst a gloomy, thick wood. By her side lay the bundle of rags with which she had started her journey. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and set out to find her Prince, weeping for most of the day.

She'd been stumbling forward without paying much attention to her surroundings, when suddenly she felt the ground beneath her feet turn stone cold. She had almost walked straight into a lofty crag! Under the crag's overhang sat an old hag who was tossing about a golden apple. The girl asked the hag if she knew the way to the Prince, to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon.

"How did you come to know about him?" the hag asked. "Are you the lassie who ought to have married him?"

"Yes, that girl is me. I made a grave mistake and now I seek to find my Prince so that we may be together. He must not be forced into marrying the Princess his stepmother has chosen."

"Well, I do not know how to find the stepmother's castle, but you may have the loan of my horse. Ride him to see my neighbor; perhaps she can help you. And here, you may take this golden apple with you for some luck."

The girl thanked the hag for her great show of kindness, and mounted the horse. She gave him a nudge and he started off, knowing the way well. After a little while, she came upon a second crag. Under this crag sat another old hag, who sat holding a gold comb. The girl

asked the hag if she knew the way to the stepmother's castle. She answered the same as the first hag; she did not know anything about it. But, just like the first hag, the second hag offered the girl the loan of her horse to go see her neighbor. The girl got off the first horse, patted him under the ear to send him home, and mounted the second hag's horse. As a gift of good will, the second hag gave the girl her gold comb, and the girl was off.

The girl rode a fair way, but finally came upon another crag. Under this spot was a third hag, working at a golden spinning-wheel. She too, knew nothing of the castle, but advised the girl to ride to the East Wind and ask him about the place, for he was very wise. She gave the girl her horse to go see him, along with her golden spinning-wheel (for a bit of luck). The girl dismounted the second hag's horse, patted him under the ear to send him home, mounted the third hag's horse, and headed off to meet the East Wind.

This time, the girl had to ride for three days before she reached her destination. At last, she reached the home of the East Wind and immediately asked him if he knew of the castle that lay east of the sun and west of the moon. The East Wind did know of the place! Unfortunately, he could not take the girl to the castle because he never blew that far. Instead of carrying her there himself, the East Wind offered to fly the girl to his brother, the West Wind, for he was much stronger. Perhaps he could carry the girl to her Prince! The girl readily accepted the East Wind's proposition. She gathered her golden gifts, patted the third hag's horse under his ear to send him home, and climbed onto the East Wind's back. He gusted up a strong gale to fly them over to see his brother.

They soon sailed all the way to the West Wind's home. The East Wind brought the girl into his brother's

home and explained to him her situation. The West Wind sadly told the girl that, although he knew of the place, he could not fly her all that way either. What he could do was fly her to the home of their other brother, the South Wind. Perhaps he was strong enough to fly her to the castle!

Together, the East and West Winds flew the girl to the home of the South Wind. His heart was filled with compassion over the girl's tale, but he too admitted that he was not strong enough to take the girl to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon. He suggested instead that they go to the North Wind; he was the oldest Wind and stronger than the other three combined. Surely he would be able to take the girl to her Prince!

The East and West Winds had to return to their homes, so the girl bade them farewell, then allowed the South Wind to carry her to the home of the North Wind. Hearing visitors approaching, he stormed outside to meet them.

"Blast you both, what do you want?" he roared, shooting an icy shiver in their direction.

"Why so foul-mouthed, brother?" replied the South Wind. "We have come to inquire as to whether you would be willing to take this girl to the castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon. Her Prince is being held captive there, and neither I nor both our two brothers are strong enough to carry her there except you."

"Yes, I know well enough where that castle is. If you really wish me to take you there, and aren't afraid of a getting a little chill on your skin, I will take you there."

"Yes!" the girl replied with all her heart. "I must go and see my Prince. I do not care if I lose all my fingers and toes to frostbite on the way. Please, North Wind. Take me to him at once."

"Very well, then," the North Wind replied.

He huffed and puffed himself up into a grand whirlwind, then motioned for the girl to climb onto his back. The North Wind was indeed freezing, but the girl held onto him tightly. He carried the girl across what felt like the whole world. They skated through the clouds over nameless expanses of land until a glowing castle came into view, perfectly settled east of the sun and west of the moon. The North Wind had gotten so weary from their journey that he barely managed to throw the girl onto the shore of the castle before slipping into an unseen form. He had rejoined the invisible gales of the earth in order to regain his strength. The girl silently thanked the North Wind for providing her safe passage to her lover, then took off running for the castle.

The girl approached the castle's impressive outer wall, taking notice of a very long nose sticking out of one of the nearby windows. The girl figured that such a long nose must belong to her Prince's fake fiancé. Casually, the girl leaned on a tree within the princess's view and started tossing her golden apple around. The long-nosed Princess took notice of the girl's golden apple and called down to her.

"What do you want for that golden apple, you lassie?"

"It's not for sale, for gold or money," replied the girl.

"Well if it's not for sale for gold or money, what is it that you will sell it for? Name your price."

"Well, if I might be granted an audience with the Prince tonight, then I will give you this golden apple."

The Princess scoffed at the girl's meager request, but accepted the deal. So, that night, the Princess let the girl into the Prince's room. She ran to her beloved's side and

wept tears of joy over being able to see him again. The girl tried to shake the Prince awake, but, no matter how hard she shook him, he wouldn't wake up! If not for the steady beating of his heart, the girl might've thought him dead! The girl tried to wake him the whole night through; her broken heart never ceased its flow of tears. Unfortunately, as soon as the day broke, the long-nosed Princess drove the girl from the castle.

Needing to see the Prince again, the girl sat in the same spot under the long-nosed Princess's window and played with her golden comb. Again, the Princess bargained with her for it, and the girl traded it for another night with the Prince. She wept and prayed over her dear Prince's body the whole night, but again, nothing would wake him. Nothing she said or did brought the life back into him. Like the night before, as soon as the light of day made its way into the Prince's chamber, the long-nosed Princess drove the girl from the castle.

Once more, the girl took up her spot in front of the Princess's window, this time playing with her golden spinning-wheel. Just like before, the Princess bargained with the girl for it and they made the same deal as the two times before.

Luckily, that day, some of the Prince's servants came to him while the Princess was out walking and told him that she had been slipping something into his nightly drink. They also told him that a young woman, who was not the Princess, had been coming to visit him and weep over him during the past two nights. Shocked by this news, the Prince devised a plan. When the Princess came with her sleeping potion for the Prince, masked as his nightly drink, he feigned drinking it, and instead threw it over his shoulder.

He went to bed as if he was exhausted, and the Princess left him, believing that he had taken the potion once again.

A moment later, the girl came bursting into the Prince's room, but was completely taken aback to see him wide awake! She froze where she stood and simply stared at him, unbelieving. The Prince sat frozen for a second too, but they soon broke out into smiles and ran into each other's arms. The girl told the Prince the whole story of how she had managed to find him. He eagerly listened to every word of her magnificent tale.

"You've arrived just in the nick of time, my love, for tomorrow was set to be my wedding day. But I will not be marrying the long-nosed Princess; you are the only woman in the world for me. I have come up with a plan for how we may trick my stepmother into agreeing for me to marry you and not long-nose. I will declare a test of the woman who shall be my wife. My stepmother will accept, believing her pick of a bride capable of anything. But, the test shall be this: to wash a shirt free from three spots of animal fat on it. You are pure of heart, so the stains will be removed when you work at them, but the long-nosed princess is rotten inside. She has been sneaking a potion to me these past two nights so that I would be asleep while you came to visit. For this, when she works at the stains, they will only worsen."

So there was great joy and love between the Prince and the girl all that night. And the next day, when the Prince was to be married, he brought forth the stained shirt and made his declaration.

"Let us see what my bride is fit for!"

"Yes, indeed!" said his stepmother, sure that long-nose would be successful.

"Well, everyone, as you can see, I have this fine shirt here, but I seem to have gotten some animal fat on it. I

hereby swear that the woman who can wash these stains from my shirt shall be my wife. If a woman cannot perform this task, then she is not worth having.”

The whole crowd agreed that this was a fitting task, and the long-nosed Princess stepped forward first to take the shirt. She began to scrub at the stains as hard as she could, but the stains only got worse! The spots grew bigger and darker with every scrub. She screamed in frustration and threw the shirt to the side. The Prince retrieved his soggy shirt and stepped back from the Princess.

“Ah! See! You are not worthy of being had as my wife. If you cannot simply wash some stains from my shirt, what kind of wife will you be? Surely your spoiled upbringing has turned you rotten, and these stains prove it. Now look, over there sits a beggar lassie. I’ll bet that she knows how to wash better than you. Come on in, lassie!”

Although her rags looked humble as can be in comparison to everyone else’s glamorous outfits, the girl entered the room with confidence and made her way over to the Prince. She took the shirt from the Prince and dipped it into the same water basin that the long-nosed Princess had. At the first touch of the scrub brush, all the stains in the Prince’s shirt lifted, leaving it white as snow. The Prince ran over to the girl and snatched her up into a loving embrace.

“Yes, you are indeed the lassie for me,” said the Prince.

At his words, the Prince’s stepmother flew into such a rage that she burst on the spot, and the Princess long-nose after her!

The Prince set free all of the poor people his evil stepmother had kept up in the castle. Then he and the girl took with them all the silver and gold in the castle and flitted away as far as they could from the castle that lay east

of the sun and west of the moon, eager to start their life together.

William of the Tree:

Ireland

In a time long ago there was a king who lived in Erin. He was married to a beautiful queen and they had just one child, a daughter, whom they loved dearly. Very suddenly, the Queen was struck with a grave illness, and she knew in her heart that she would not live for much longer. The King and Princess spent every waking moment with the Queen until the day she passed. On her last day of life, the Queen made but one request: that the King should not remarry until the grass around her tomb was a foot high.

After the Queen was buried, the King would visit her grave daily to check the height of the grass, for, although he had truly loved the Queen, he could not stand to be alone. But, unbeknownst to the King, his daughter crept out into the graveyard each night with a pair of scissors and cut the grass to the ground.

Eventually, the King caught on to the fact that someone was deceiving him. He hid in the churchyard the next night to stake out the thief, and who does he spot sneaking into the graveyard but his own daughter! Watching her bend down and cut the grass, the King whispered to himself, "For my daughter's betrayal, I will surely marry the next woman I meet."

After his daughter finished cutting the grass, she snuck back out to the road to go home, and the King emerged from his hiding spot. He too walked out to the road to return to the castle, but along the way, he ran into an old hag. The King remembered the vow he'd just made

to himself, and thus, he brought the old woman home and married her; he would not break his word.

Unfortunately for the Princess, the old hag was cruel and mistreated the Princess. She forced the girl to take an oath not to tell the King, or anyone else (except anyone so young as not to be baptized), about anything she did—not a single thing. The Princess unwillingly agreed because she was afraid of her stepmother and also because she loved her father and wanted to treat his wife with respect.

One morning, the King went hunting. While he was away, the new Queen killed his favorite hound. When the King returned, he saw his favorite hound lying dead on the floor and yelled, "Who killed my hound?"

The new Queen rushed into the room and replied, "Your daughter did, my King!"

The King rushed to his daughter's room and demanded to know why she had killed his favorite hound.

"I didn't kill your hound, Father!" the Princess exclaimed.

She wanted to tell her father the truth, but she couldn't because of the oath she'd made with the old hag!

Because his daughter would not tell him what he thought was the truth, the King grew furious and said, "Fine; I will *make* you tell me."

The King dragged his daughter out into the forest, strung her up in a tree, and cut off her hands and feet! The enraged King left his poor daughter hanging there in a state of death. He took a few steps away from her when a thorn wedged itself in his foot.

Gravely, his daughter said, "May you never get better until I have hands and feet to cure you."

The King grumbled over his daughter's response and half-walked, half-hobbled back to the castle. As soon as the King entered his palace, a tree sprouted from his foot!

Later that day, the King had to open a window to let the top of the tree out so it wouldn't take up the whole room! He thrashed in pain with every inch the tree grew, but no doctor they called in could find a cure for the tree stuck in the King's foot. They hacked, sawed, and sliced at the tree, but no tool could puncture the enchanted infliction. The tree only grew stronger with the passing days.

Now, there was a gentleman walking that day the King punished his daughter, and he came upon the King's poor daughter, hanging unconscious and dripping with blood! He tenderly took her down from the tree and carried her home with him. He bandaged her wounds and nursed her back to health, all while falling in love with her. After a while, the Princess too fell in love with the gentleman, and soon they were married!

One year later, the Princess gave birth to triplet boys. Hearing of such a magical birth, Granya Öi, the local wise woman, came to visit. Noting the strength and love in the Princess's eyes for her children and her husband, the wise woman placed her hands on the missing hands and feet of the princess. Quicker than in the blink of an eye, the Princess's hands and feet returned! The Princess shed tears of joy and fell sobbing at Granya Öi's feet.

"Oh, wise woman. Whatever can I do to return this great kindness you have shown to me?"

Granya Öi smiled and placed her hand on the girl's head. "Dear child, all I ask in return is that you tell the truth. That old hag made you swear to never tell of her wicked deeds to anyone, but she did not count those who are unbaptized in her oath. Your three sons are not baptized

yet. Take them into the presence of your misguided father and tell your boys the stories of all she's done to you in front of him so that he may know. Then, if you wish, you may rub your hand on his heel and he will be healed of the tree taking root in his foot."

With that, Granya Öi retreated back into her forest home, and the Princess and her husband rejoiced at the return of her hands and feet. The Princess's husband was hesitant to take their children to see the King, but the Princess knew that the old hag was influencing her father even more than she had realized before. She decided that she must free him of her wicked grasp.

So the Princess and her husband went to the castle, and the King welcomed them in. The King immediately began weeping at the sight of his daughter. He would have gone to her, he lamented, but the tree in his foot had grown big so quickly that he couldn't move; he had been trapped in his own bedroom! The Princess wept over her father's grieving heart, and presented her young boys to him, whom he gladly received. Then the Princess told her boys the story of her wicked stepmother, which in turn revealed the truth to her father. As if a magic spell was lifted from him, the King's eyes widened at her tale, and again he began to weep over the return of his daughter's hands and feet.

In response to his love and show of remorse, the Princess smiled and reached over, gently rubbing her father's heel. As soon as she did so, the tree detached itself from her father's foot and fell through the castle wall.

Free of the tree and reunited with his daughter and her family, the King was overjoyed! The day on the morrow, the King hanged his Queen, finally seeing her for the evil person she was. Later that day, he blessed his daughter and her husband for showing him compassion. As

a show of good will, he gave them his estate, where they all lived out the rest of their lives, happy and together.

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