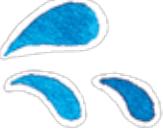




WATER STORIES

FROM AROUND THE WORLD



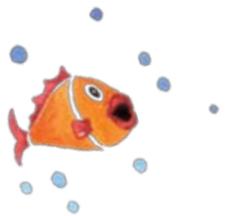
Edited by Radhika Menon and Sandhya Rao

Illustrated by Nirupama Sekhar





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Water Stories from around the world

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Designed by Nirupama Sekhar

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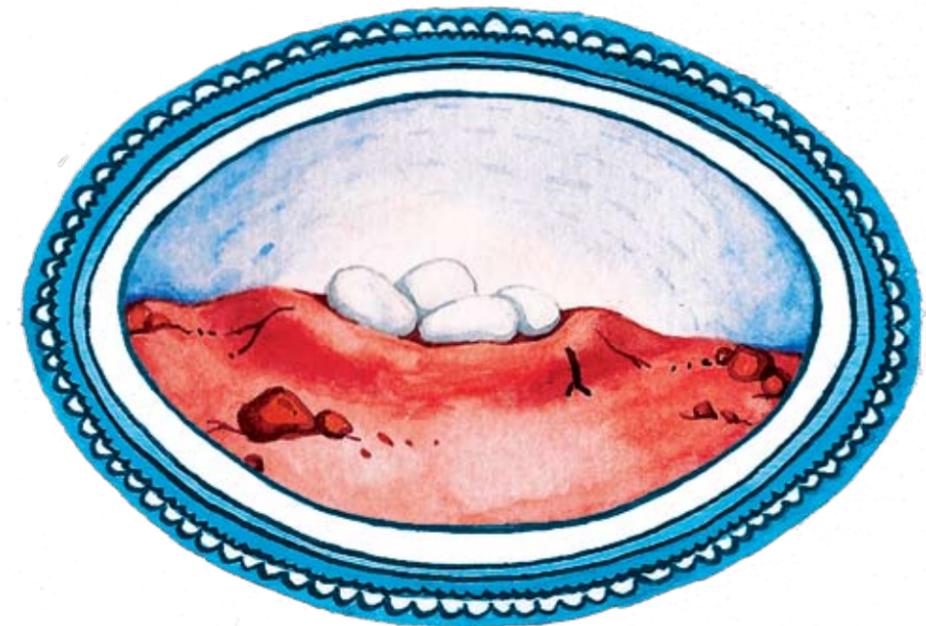
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Who owns the Water?

A STORY FROM INDIA

retold by Deepa Balsavar



Once upon a time, on the outskirts of a dusty little village, a tiny bird searched for a place to lay her eggs. The land was parched and dry and there wasn't a bush or tree in sight. Finally in desperation, the little bird discovered a shallow depression in the ground. Using her claws to remove the stones and loosen up the packed earth, she broadened the hole and there, underneath the hot sun, she laid her eggs. The eggs hatched and the good mother protected and fed her babies until they were big enough to fly away... And here our story would have ended, except, this isn't a tale





of the little bird but a much more interesting one of the hole she used as a temporary nest.

“A hole?” you may ask. “What could be interesting about a hole in the ground?” Well, this hole grew to be quite important, as you will discover.

For some time the hole remained dusty and untenanted, until one day a passing wild boar settled his rump into the depression. The fit was not comfortable enough and getting up, he scraped and dug, carving a pit of more hospitable proportions. Backing into this hollow, he turned around a few times and with a satisfied grunt settled down to a long snooze. A very long snooze it was too. The boar turned and scrabbled in his sleep, loosening the earth around his cosy dugout until the fading sun and the rumble in his stomach told him it was time to get up. With a mighty stretch and a final kick, the hungry boar departed his daybed without a backward glance.

“And is that it?” you will enquire.

To which I will reply, “No it isn’t, dear one. Not by a long shot. Our story has just begun.”

A pack of wild dogs catching the scent of boar in the wind came to the spot where he had lain. They sniffed the circle that was rich with the smell of the animal. They whined and snarled and dug at the smell as if digging the elusive boar himself out of the ground. Finally, realising that there was no dinner to be found there, they departed, their noses and tails high in the air. And in



doing so, they left the hole a little bigger and wider than they had found it.

“And then what happened?” you will ask. “Do other animals come along too?” They do indeed, my child. I told you the hole had a story to tell!

Not long after, the rains came. It poured and poured and only those of us who have seen the monsoons will know what that means. It rained without stopping for three days and three nights and the dry earth soaked up the moisture, as a hungry puppy laps up milk. The whole earth smelled wet and fresh and even the normally serious-looking people in the village went around with smiles on their faces. The hole in the ground collected the water that fell and around its edges the grass grew a brighter green.

Soon buffaloes discovered the grassy spot and as buffaloes are wont to do, they wallowed in the puddly water, turning the hole into a muddy pit. I was not there to see, but I am told that many afternoons did the buffaloes gather and thus with a multitude of hooves trampling the soil, the pit that was once a tiny depression, widened and grew and became a little watering hole.

“And they all lived happily ever after!” you will say in glee. But that rarely happens in real tales, my dear. There is more to go, so you will have to wait awhile.

A poor farmer tilled the land near the once small depression. His life was hard and the rains were often cruel. In summer months he had to travel far to get water for his thirsty crops and even then his harvest was meagre. One day, not long after the last of the season’s rains, he straightened up from his back-breaking work and looked over the land that was soon becoming brown again. And on the horizon, just beyond his pitiful plot, his eyes came to rest on a patch of green. Going closer to investigate, the farmer fell to the



ground with gratitude at the sight of the verdant bowl. Here was water to be had, and so close to his holding! Forgetting all tiredness, he raced home and brought out his pickaxe and spade and soon the buffaloes' picnic spot was a perfectly decent little pond.

"Is this story going to end with a moral?" you ask me suspiciously. No, little one, but there is something to learn from everything we see and hear; so hush, while I come to end of the tale.

So happy was the farmer that he told his wife who summoned the village priest to bless their fortune. I do not need to tell you how soon news travels in a little village and so it was quite a crowd that gathered by the side of the pond to see the priest furrow his brow and chant serious somethings that nobody ever understands.

Just then, the richest farmer in the village pushed his way to the front of the group. He was always upset when things took place that he was not invited to. Looking at the farmer and the placid pond, a slow smile of contentment creased his face. "I see you have come to bless my pond," he said to the priest. "Your pond?" stuttered the poor farmer. "Why yes," smoothly oiled the rich one. "Your patch, surely, ends just there. This land is all mine." And saying this he crossed his arms and planted his feet four square on the ground. As the rich farmer and the poor one looked at each other, the buffaloes, the dogs, the boar and yes, even the little bird stopped by to see. They all stood around the little jewel of blue and in every mind, small and big, came a similar thought: "Surely, I had something to do with this!"

And so I end with a question to you, my beloved friend. "Who owns the water?" Not a moral, just a thought — a germ of an idea to dig and make bigger. 🌱



The Hero Twins and the Swallower of Clouds

A NATIVE AMERICAN STORY

retold by Suniti Namjoshi

Day after day the sun rose, the rain rained and the seasons passed in proper succession. The trees grew straight and tall in the forests. The children were healthy, the people happy. And all went well until a water grabbing giant took to swallowing the clouds. Then no rain fell. Soon the rivers ran dry, and the brooks and the streams, and the ponds and the puddles. Great gashes opened in the earth. The people prayed for rain and when they saw a cloud overhead their hearts lifted. It was no use. The water grabbing giant grabbed the clouds one by one and squeezed them dry. He would wring them out as one wrings out the washing and let the water trickle into his gaping mouth. While he did this, the people watched. What else could they do? They just watched while the woodlands withered and the land died.

“This can’t go on,” the Hero Twins cried. “We have to do something. We must at least try.”

The Hero Twins looked exactly like each other. Well, they looked exactly like reflections of each other. The left side of one reflected the right side of the other and the other way about. And because they were so alike, they often spoke together. They looked at the tired faces of the people around





them and they said, "We'll slay the giant." Then they hesitated and added, "Well, at least we'll try."

When the people heard this, they tried to raise a cheer, but their throats were so dry, they could only croak. And the children tried to turn cartwheels, but they were so thirsty and so hungry — after all, no water meant no food — that they tumbled down. Seeing the state of their people the Twin Heroes shed a tear, or would have shed a tear if they had had any tears left. Without saying a word, they waved to the people and set off in the direction of the giant.

They walked in silence mostly: in part because they didn't want the giant to hear them, but also because there would have been no point in talking.

If one twin had said to the other, "What do you think, Brother?" the other would have replied, "I think what you think, Brother. You know that."

They were walking on a path through the forest as dusk fell, when both brothers suddenly jumped back. A large spider was blocking their path. They had nearly stepped on her. They were good-hearted young men and

appalled by the thought that they might have hurt her.

"Grandma!" they cried, both speaking at once. "We almost didn't see you! Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right," Grandmother Spider retorted. She looked at them out of her wise, old eyes. "Where are you off to, my handsome young men?"

"We're off to slay the giant," Brother One said.

"He's swallowing the clouds," Brother Two added.

"And no rain falls," Brother One went on.

They spoke turn by turn, adding to each other's phrases and concluding each other's sentences.

"If, in your wisdom, you know of anything, Grandma -"

"That would help us to slay the giant -"

"Then please tell us -"

"Because the land is dying -"

"And our need is great."

Grandma Spider looked at the two young men and said gently, "Your cause is just and your need is great. Come with me and rest in my cave for the night. And I will tell you the giant's secret. Others have come before you, and failed, you know."

"We know, Grandma," the Twin Heroes said humbly. "And we thank you."

The old spider told them that the giant made a practice of sprawling across the path to his lair and pretending to be asleep. Then when people came along and walked under his legs, he would spring to life, snap them up in his



fingers and hurl them over a cliff. The Twin Heroes shuddered a little as they heard this.

“Don’t worry,” Grandma Spider told them. “I will help you. I am so small that I’ll be able to creep under his legs and slip by unnoticed. And then, I’ll cover up his eyes with giant cobwebs so that he won’t be able to see you. That way perhaps we might be able to deal with him.”

And that’s what they did. The next day when they saw the giant’s foot sticking up in the air, and the giant’s legs sprawled across the path, they crept as close as they could without making a sound. Not a twig cracked, not a leaf rustled. Then Grandma Spider leapt off the shoulder of the first twin and crept silently under the giant’s legs. The giant heard nothing, felt nothing. He went on pretending to be asleep. Grandma Spider scurried on as fast as she could on all eight legs. Every now and then she threw out a filament and swung herself from frond to frond and bush to bush. When she got to the giant’s head, she spun her webs over the giant’s eyes. He was still pretending to be fast asleep. The Twin Heroes, meanwhile, circled around the giant’s legs, one went to the left, the other to the right, and caught him unawares. The giant groped for them. He swung his arms this way and that, but he couldn’t see them in order to catch them. And so they slew him.

The entire countryside sighed with relief. There would be rain again! The clouds gathered, there was a mighty thunderclap, and the rain fell. As the Twin Heroes walked back, Grandma Spider rode on the shoulder of Brother Two. The people greeted them in the way returning heroes deserve to be greeted: with shouts of joy and roars of applause. But the Twin Heroes held up their hands. Brother One held up his right hand and Brother Two

held up his left hand.

“She is the true hero,” they said simultaneously, pointing to Grandma Spider. “Without her nothing would have been possible.” They told the people how she had crept unnoticed under the giant’s legs and spun cobwebs over his closed eyes. The people roared and applauded and shouted hurrahs for all three of them, and they honoured them ever after.

Now, should you ever come across an image of two young men, with a river running below their feet, and if the two young men look like mirror images of one another, you will know that you are looking at the Twin Heroes. One of the heroes always has a spider resting on his shoulder. If it’s the hero on the left side of the image, then the spider rests on his left shoulder. If it’s the hero on the right side of the image, then the spider rests on his right shoulder. Grandma Spider and the Twin Heroes don’t much mind which hero’s shoulder she rests on as long as the rivers run and the trees in the woodland grow straight and tall and reach towards the clouds drifting above them.



THE Green Man

A STORY FROM MANY MYTHS

retold by Mariam Karim-Ahlawat

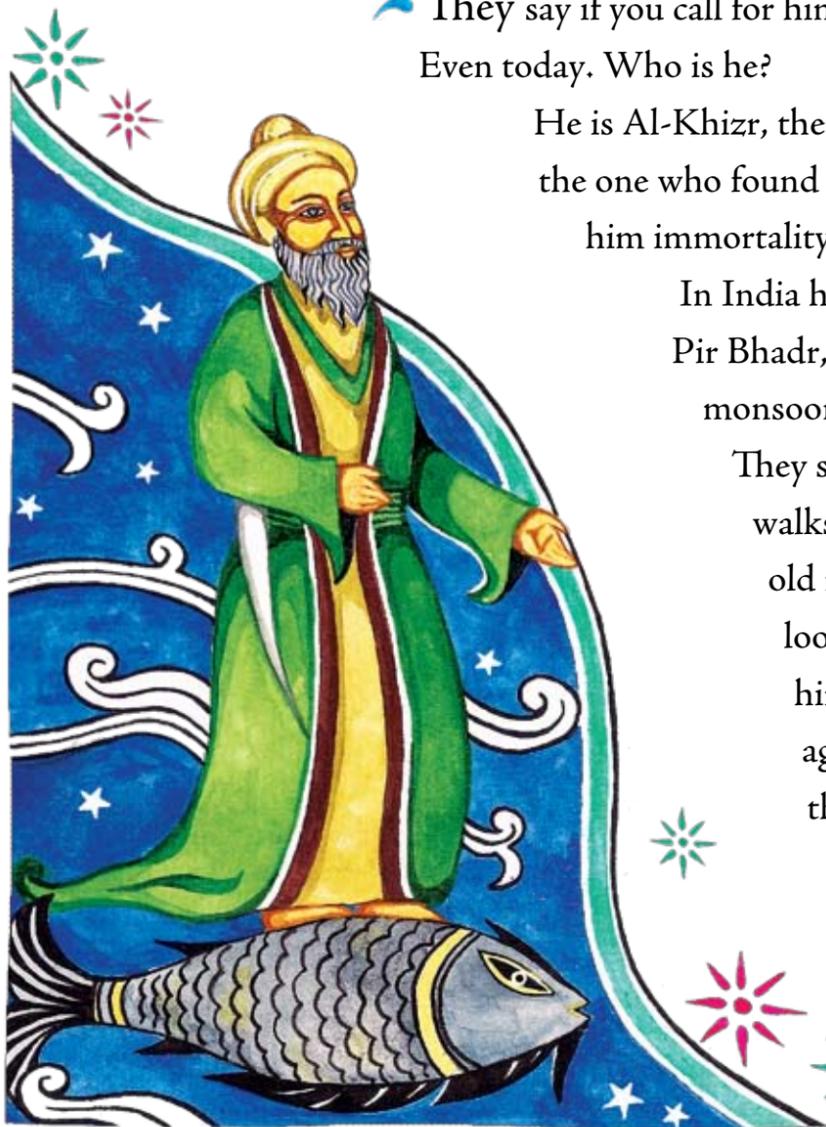
They say if you call for him, he may grant you audience. Even today. Who is he?

He is Al-Khizr, the Green Man. They say he was the one who found the Water of Life which gave him immortality.

In India he is known as a water deity, as Pir Bhadr, as Raja Kidar. He rules the monsoon and his vehicle is a large fish.

They say flowers sprout where he walks. So, if you happen to see an old, old man in a long, green garment... look again! It may be Al-Khizr himself. But by the time you look again, he may be gone, for he has the gift of invisibility too.

Who is this man and how did he come by his gifts?



There are many stories. Here's one...

There was once, about 2,300 years ago, a great Greek king and general, known in Asia as Zul-Qarnain (of the Two Horns) or Sikandar. His kingdom extended from Macedonia to Egypt to Gujarat and the Himalayas. He had a wazir, a minister and companion who, they say, went by the name of Al-Khizr, a humble and pious man with an amazing intellect. The strange thing was that sometimes *he wasn't there at all*. Either he made himself invisible or, some say, he travelled into Another Time, wherever he was needed.

Together, Al-Khizr and Sikandar, along with Sikandar's conquering armies, voyaged far and wide. They covered half the earth. They even travelled to Iceland. They went to Sri Lanka.

The two companions had heard that somewhere beyond all the seas in the Land of Darkness at the End of the World was the Fountain of the Water of Life. They had heard that if you drank from this fountain you became immortal.

Now Al-Khizr wasn't really bothered about finding this fountain. He was a humble man, unlike young Sikandar. Sikandar was full of his own importance — he wanted to conquer the world, and become a partner to Allah. They say he was searching for immortality. And so he sought the Fountain of Life that lay at the End of the World in the Land of Darkness beyond the setting of the sun in the western waters.

But whenever Sikandar and his wazir sat down to discuss this quest, Al-Khizr did not show much interest. This puzzled Sikandar. He began to doubt his wazir. It was all very well that he was now the greatest emperor that ever lived but if he didn't find the Water of Life, surely some day,

like all mortals, he would die and that would be the end of him! Sikandar couldn't bear the thought of leaving all his worldly achievements behind when he died. No, he *must* find the magical fountain that would give him life forever! And Al-Khizr thought it wasn't important! Had he been an emperor instead of just a wazir, he would know!

With this in mind he said to Al-Khizr one day, "Lead me to the End of the World!" This way, he thought, he would find the Water of Life without having to discuss it with the old man. Sikandar announced to his people that he was going on a long and arduous journey with his armies, across seas and mountains and deserts and forests, to the End of the World, where in the Land of Darkness was hidden the Fountain of Immortality.

From time to time during their journey, Sikandar would ask, "Where are we going, my friend? To look for what?" But not once did Al-Khizr utter the name of the magical fountain and Sikandar was disappointed each time.

As they visited strange and distant lands, met with their kings and wise men and rulers and wazirs, Sikandar would make it a point to ask each of them if they knew the way to the Land of Darkness where lay the Spring of Immortality. Many pretended to know, some said they didn't. Others said it was only a tale and there was no such place, nor any such spring.

Then, many, many months later, Sikandar and his armies along with Al-Khizr arrived at a cold, dark desert. In the distance, on one side, they could see some lights, very bright lights.



On the other side was complete darkness. A chill wind seemed to be blowing from the darkness. Sikandar said that they should move in the direction of the bright lights for there they were likely to find people who would tell them where the miraculous spring was. Al-Khizr, on the other hand, said they needed to move in the direction of the chill wind and the darkness! But for once, and only because destiny had fated it so, Sikandar did not listen to his wazir and they parted ways.

Sikandar went off towards the bright lights with all his pomp and attendants and cooks and tents and horses. Al-Khizr went into the darkness with only a few followers, among them Ilyas. They had some meagre provisions with them, a few containers of salted fish, almonds and dates.

A day and a night they travelled — one cannot really say day, because it was true they had unknowingly reached the End of the World, the Land of Darkness. But Ilyas noticed that as they crossed the desert it had become green and full of flowers and ferns and trees! They tried not to feel hungry, to save their provisions, but they were assailed by hunger pangs and sat down by a spring surrounded by lush greenery to eat a small meal of salted fish.

Before opening their bundle of provisions, they slaked their thirst at the clear and sweet spring. The water was cool and went like quicksilver down their throats. How energised and relaxed they felt, having drunk from the spring! Then they opened their tiffin of dried fish. By mistake one fish fell into the pool of the spring — and what did they see? The fish became alive on touching the water, and



swam away! That was when they knew they had found the spring of the Water of Immortality, the Ma'ul Hayaat, that Sikandar had searched for far and wide!

Ilyas had also seen ferns and grasses and flowers spring in the path Al-Khizr walked, and suspected he was the Immortal Saint of Water and Verdure. He asked him, "Your name is Al-Khizr, the Green One, where do you come from?"

Al-Khizr told him his home was on a lush green island in the middle of the seas, a place called Khidargama or Katargama (the home of Khidar or Khizr, as we know that 'gam' or 'gram' means 'village'). And 'khizr', of course, means 'green'.

It is indeed confusing. For one, time in these stories isn't stable. For another, there are many questions. Did Al-Khizr know the secret of the fountain before he reached it? Was he already immortal? How did the desert turn into lush forest as he crossed it? Was the fountain they discovered the Fountain of Life at all? If it was, why didn't Ilyas become immortal as well?

The story doesn't tell us if Al-Khizr met Sikandar ever again. But we do know that Sikandar *didn't* attain immortality. He died in Babylon in 323 BC at the young age of 32 of a mysterious illness in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. Some say he was poisoned.

Now, even if the fountain in the desert in our story *wasn't* the Fountain of Life, even if there *isn't* any such fountain at all (who knows?) we can be certain of one thing: that it is water that gives life to all living things on earth. In our Solar System, earth is the only planet that has water, and therefore has life. Water makes the green plants grow, which in turn give



food and oxygen to all creatures, including humans.

It's a curious tale, open to different kinds of interpretation.

One message rings loud and clear if we see the quest for immortality as a metaphor for preserving and finding ways to sustain life: we can exist only if we preserve our water bodies, keep them clean and sweet and pure, and our seas free of pollution. Only then can we continue to live on earth with flowers and trees and grasses and ferns springing all around us, with the birds and insects, fishes and animals that live in the glades and ponds and forests. This continuity of life on earth, surely, is the true meaning of immortality. The continuity of a Green World, therefore, the Green Man!

Interestingly, there is a place in Sri Lanka called Katargama with a mosque and a shrine to Hazarat Khizr, the Green Man. Is Sri Lanka then the island in the middle of the seas that Al-Khizr spoke of? Many pilgrims come here to look for the Ma'ul Hayaat, the Water of Life.

Yes, you can go there too, but who knows if such a spring still exists? And would you really want to be immortal? But maybe we can all be companions of the Green Man in his quest, to keep the earth pure and clean and green... 



Selekana and the River Goddess

A STORY FROM BOTSWANA

retold by Zai Whitaker

Now listen well, reader, because this story comes to you from the Land of Stories which is, as you may or may not know, Botswana in Africa. And some say it's a true story and some say it isn't, and there are fights about this under a very old baobab tree. But this need not worry us; we will just get on with the story.

Now the beginning of the story is this, that the old African sun has just peeped over the thorn trees and sprinkled a dusty morning light on the veld and on the river and on the impalas standing as still as stone statues.

The morning light also falls on a small village and on the river below it.



But it's a thin and hungry river compared to what it was a year ago. Until a year ago it was a fat, healthy, noisy river with waterfalls and pools and large, lazy fish. And in the rainy time of year it doubled, and the big bullfrogs came out of their summer tunnels and made such a loud roar that you couldn't sleep! Awake and irritated, some of the older Batswana would carry their reed mats outside and sleep behind the row of mopane trees. One Motswana even ran down to the river in a rage and shouted at the frogs to be quiet. But he only succeeded in making them call twice as loud. (Now before we go any further I must explain that Batswana means people, and Motswana means one person. This is of course in Setswana, which is of course a language in Botswana.)

But gone were the days of the waterfalls and the bullfrogs. Was the River Goddess angry with the Batswana?

"Maybe she feels we have become selfish," said one wise old Motswana. "But what have we done?" asked the other Batswana. "And how can we make her happy?" But the old Motswana only looked into the distance and gave no answer.

Around the evening cook-fires, the elders talked about



how to make the River Goddess happy again. One Motswana said this, another said that. And life went on.

There were many beautiful young girls who lived in this village. And the most special of them all was Selekana. Not only was she as lovely as a mopane flower and graceful as an impala, but she was very kind-hearted. One of her many daily acts of kindness was to fetch water for all the old people of the village. She fetched water for them because the pathway to the river was steep and they were scared of slipping and falling. In exchange for this kindness the old ones would give her their bead jewelry. The old women wear very little jewelry, just a small bangle maybe, so they had plenty to give away. They loved Selekana and this was a good way of thanking her for fetching them pots of water and for all the other things she did for them so willingly. You may know, or you may not, that the Batswana are famous for beadcraft. They make bracelets and amulets and arm bands and waist bands, and also necklaces and earrings and anklets in beautiful, eye-catching colours. Blue and red and yellow and green... but also many unusual half-colours that have names in Setswana but not in English.

"Ke itumetse" they would say, which means thank you, and give her another piece of jewelry. "Tswee tswee" Selekana would say, with a shy smile. Please. Please don't, I like helping you. But they wouldn't take it back. Soon Selekana had the best collection of bead jewelry in the village and she wore all of it, every single thing, all the time, which is the way of the Batswana. And the other girls of the village became more and more jealous,



which is the way of the world. And one day they became so jealous that they couldn't bear it any more. They made a plan.

Now listen well. The household work is done. The mealie or maize pap has been made for lunch. It is time to go down to the river. Selekana has three pots to fill today, and strides down to the water with the first one balanced on her head. She can turn her head this way and that and even laugh with her whole body without losing the pot. She says hello to everyone she passes on the track. "Dumela mma" she says to the women, and



"Dumela rra" to the men.

The girls are waiting for her at the river. Selekana notices something very strange. None of them are wearing their jewelry! No beads, not even a ring or bangle! As she hurries down, puzzled, they come up the jungle path to meet her. They call out in loud, excited voices. They tell her that today is a river-sacrifice day. They tell her they have given the river all their jewelry. They tell her that the arms of the River Goddess burst out of the water to receive their offerings. They tell her she must do the same.

Selekana's heart misses a beat or two because she loves her jewelry. Not only because it's so beautiful but also because each bracelet, each ring and each necklace has been given to her in thanks for her kindness. And she is also a little puzzled because sacrifices were usually announced in advance, by an old Motswana during the evening cook-time. But she puts these doubts out of her head, takes off her beads one at a time, and throws them all into the water. And she prays to the River Goddess with the special words that the Batswana use after a sacrifice.

She prays to the waters and to the River Goddess while the other girls giggle and laugh behind a thorn tree. As they giggle and hug each other in delight, they pull out their beads from under a pile of leaves. They feel proud of the success of their plan.

When Selekana sees them laughing and clutching their beads she realises she's been tricked. She kneels down on the bank and cries. She begs the river to return her jewelry. "Oh Goddess, have mercy on me!" But there is no reply and she goes home with sad, slow steps.

A sad, slow week goes by.



But the River Goddess had seen it all. One morning, Selekana bent over the water to fill an old Motswana's water pot. As she pulled up the pot, she thought she heard a voice in the water. It was a faint, watery sound and at first she felt she was imagining it. Then she remembered the old stories. It was the River Goddess! The voice called again and again, and finally spoke these words: "Kind-hearted girl, follow me." Selekana was confused about where the River Goddess wanted her to go. But her body knew. Her legs walked into the water, to a small pool where moss had greened the slippery rocks. Then there was a

swirl of water and she was pulled in, in, in, into a beautiful cave decorated with the most amazing beadwork. On the cave roof were flocks of stars, but no, there couldn't be stars in this dark underwater room. Looking closely, Selekana realised that they were swarms of fireflies. How had they got here? The effect was magical as they flitted in and out of the crisscross curtains of beads.

The River Goddess spoke again. "Kind-hearted girl, this is all yours, as much as you can carry. Take whatever you like. It's all yours." Selekana ran here and there and then here and then there again, picking up the most beautiful necklaces and anklets and bracelets. Soon she was wearing several layers of jewelry and carrying more in her hands.

But then, just as she turned to leave, a strong feeling shook her whole body. These treasures belonged here in this luminous underwater cave. It wasn't right to take them. So, only taking her own beads, the gifts from the old people, she left the cave and was lifted up to the surface of the water by a gentle, unseen hand. Can you imagine the surprise of those other girls when she walked back to the village? Their eyes almost popped out of their silly heads!

Now listen well, because the strangest thing of all happened about a week after this. The river swelled and almost flooded its banks. It swelled to twice its size, even though there was not a drop of rain. And the Batswana in that village and other villages downstream and upstream never had a water shortage again. They could grow mealies and cassava and other crops. And the water pots always came back full.

But not the water pots of the girls who had played the trick on Selekana. When they bent down to fill their pots, the water would rush away in the other direction, leaving sand and mud for them. It was a long time, about two years, they say, before the River Goddess forgave them and let water flow into their pots. At least, that's what an old Motswana told me just the other day...

Queen of the World

A STORY FROM SPAIN

retold by Sandhya Rao

“Back to earth, are we?”

Hernando opened his eyes to a blur of shadows that gradually became sharper until he was able to find the person who had spoken. A man with an unshaven face was leering at him. “Water!” gasped Hernando. “I beg you!”

He was hanging forward from the foremast, rough ropes biting into his bones. Hernando had no recollection of how he had come to be like this. His mouth was dry and his body felt like a bag of broken glass. His clothes were bloodied and torn, his stomach griped and the salt air made his cuts burn. But he was oblivious to his body. All he was aware of was a terrible thirst.

He did not know that he had been set upon by the crew in his captain's cabin and dragged across the galleon's deck to the foremast where he had been strung up. “This is mutiny!” he had protested. “I shall not allow it! I am your captain! You are traitors!” But by the fourth day of his incarceration, his voice had weakened to a whisper. Starved of food and denied even water by his tormentors, his voice had eventually faded away. By the sixth day he had slipped into a daze, reviving only occasionally when a bucket of water



was slapped against his body, deliberately, every now and then, to shock him back to his senses. Ten days had gone by in this state of being only half-alive. His mind had wandered among past voyages, childhood, and the embrace of home. This last had revived him somewhat and his eyes had fluttered open.

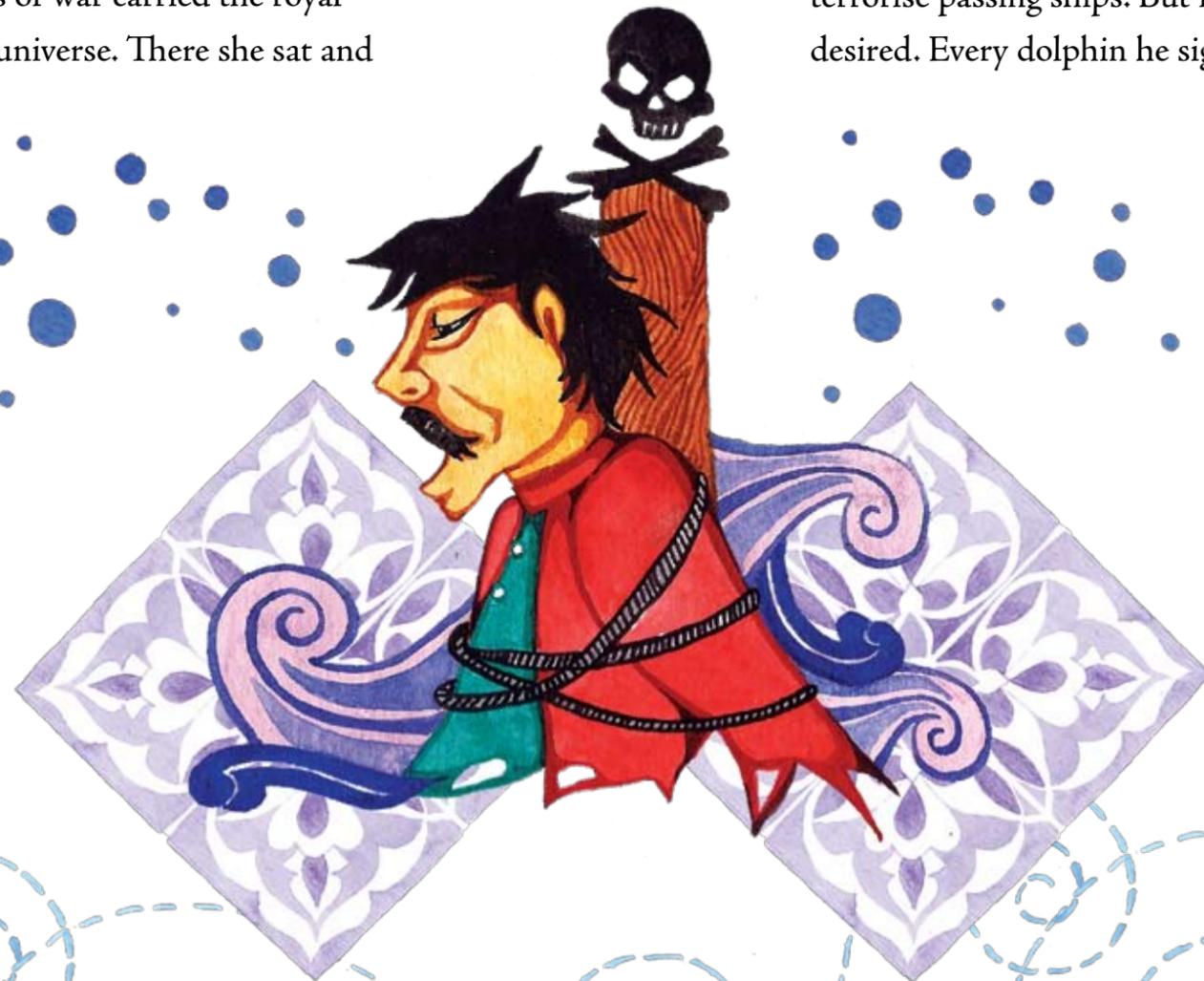
“Back to earth, are we?”

It was a time, more than six hundred years ago, when Spain’s name pierced the far corners of the newly discovered Americas, to which shiploads of Spanish men, women and animals voyaged, and settled wherever they could find a foothold. Soldiers of god and soldiers of war carried the royal writ forward and Spain became the centre of the universe. There she sat and so she ruled.

That is why, one day, His Majesty summoned Captain Javier Hernando Marquez, commander of the trusted galleon La Reina del Mundo, queen of the world, to his palace in Madrid. Hernando would give his life for his queen. He would also lay down his life for his king. So when summoned, he went.

“Ah! Adelante, Señor Capitan! Adelante! Come in!” said His Majesty when Hernando’s name was announced by the footman. “I have a job for you. You will go to the New World.”

The New World! More than half a year’s journey away! Hernando had never been so far. His heart skipped a beat. He bowed and said in a voice that betrayed nothing, “Si, Su Majestad!”



“You do not ask why, Hernando!” said the king. “Don’t you want to know?”

“You have only to speak, Su Majestad!” replied Hernando.

The king spoke. He told him he must carry merchants and goods for Spaniards settled recently in his colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas, and return with riches, a treasure ship, for Madrid.

Hernando had heard about these riches. A sailor hears many stories, especially of pirates and plunderers who, down the ages and to this day, terrorise passing ships. But for Hernando, La Reina was all the dreams he desired. Every dolphin he sighted was a shining jewel, every hump-backed

whale more precious than rubies.

A glimpse of olive ridleys swimming serenely beneath the waves was like being blessed with a vision of Virgin Mary.

“Silver from Peru, gold from Ecuador, emeralds and pearls, Hernando!” said the king. “You will bring all these and more for Mother Spain.” Even as he spoke, his officials in the colonies were leading groups of diggers and divers to search the waters and the earth for treasures. Hernando was appointed to bring those treasures home. “Go!” said the king with urgency. “Vaya con Dios! Go with God!”

Within weeks, Hernando had cobbled together a crew of some one hundred and



eighty mariners, grummetts, deckhands and others, and trained them in the ways of La Reina. The journey would take over a year and they stocked up on food, water, and rations. Ready and eager, they set sail from Seville on a sunny April morning.

Over the next few months, Le Reina called at Porto Bello, Havana, Panama, Vera Cruz. At each port, workers arrived by mule trains carrying bags of precious gems and silver and gold bullion worth millions and millions. In Spain, the gold and silver would be minted into pesos that would make that nation the most powerful in the world. Indeed, for many years after that, flotillas of treasure ships would carry back riches to Spain.

Now, though, Hernando watched as the workers unloaded the bags, carried them up the gangplank, and deposited them in the cargo hold. Some of them were young, their faces so unlined, it made him catch his breath and think of his children back home. When the last bag was hauled in, they lifted anchor and set sail for home.

At first, all went well. There was an air of lightness despite the cargo, for gold and silver and gems are heavy and a shift in balance could tilt the galleon. Then suddenly, the wind changed direction, the clouds grew heavy, and the waves began to rise higher and higher until it was no longer possible



to tell sky from sea. La Reina had ridden into a storm. Arms ached, feet swelled, and thoughts of home assailed the crew as they struggled to keep the ship on course. The waves beat relentlessly, shaking the galleon from side to side. The days were dark, and the nights, when the sailors had a chance to sleep, filled with restless dreams.

Slowly, rats and cockroaches emerged from hiding places. Gorgojos vermin feasted on peas and beef and rice, and the bilges below the cargo hold stank from a mixture of sea water, urine and slops. Sailors fell ill and discontent descended upon La Reina.

“Why should we live in such filth while the captain enjoys his cabin?” said Salvador as he came down to his quarters at the end of his watch one night. The sea was choppy, the wind was chill, and dankness hung in the air.

“Here we are, carrying the world’s riches back to Spain, and all we have to show for it is three hundred paltry pesos!” said Miguel.

“That, only when we get home,” said Salvador. “If we do.”

“Why should we wallow in poverty while the king lives in luxury...” There was truth to this, but like fire on oil, disenchantment spread in the quarters and grew into a bitter fury. The word spread, and before long, all the crew, to a man, began to help themselves to the treasure, a handful at a time, so Hernando wouldn’t notice.

Of course he noticed and when he did, he appealed to them, reasoned with them, commanded them, reminded them of their duty to god and king. But by now, the sudden wealth had turned the sailors’ heads, and they refused to listen. And when he rejected their suggestion to help himself too to the booty, they mutinied. They stormed his cabin, berated and beat him, and dragged him across the deck and lashed him to the foremast with rough

ropes. They divided the spoils among themselves. They became pirates aboard their own ship.

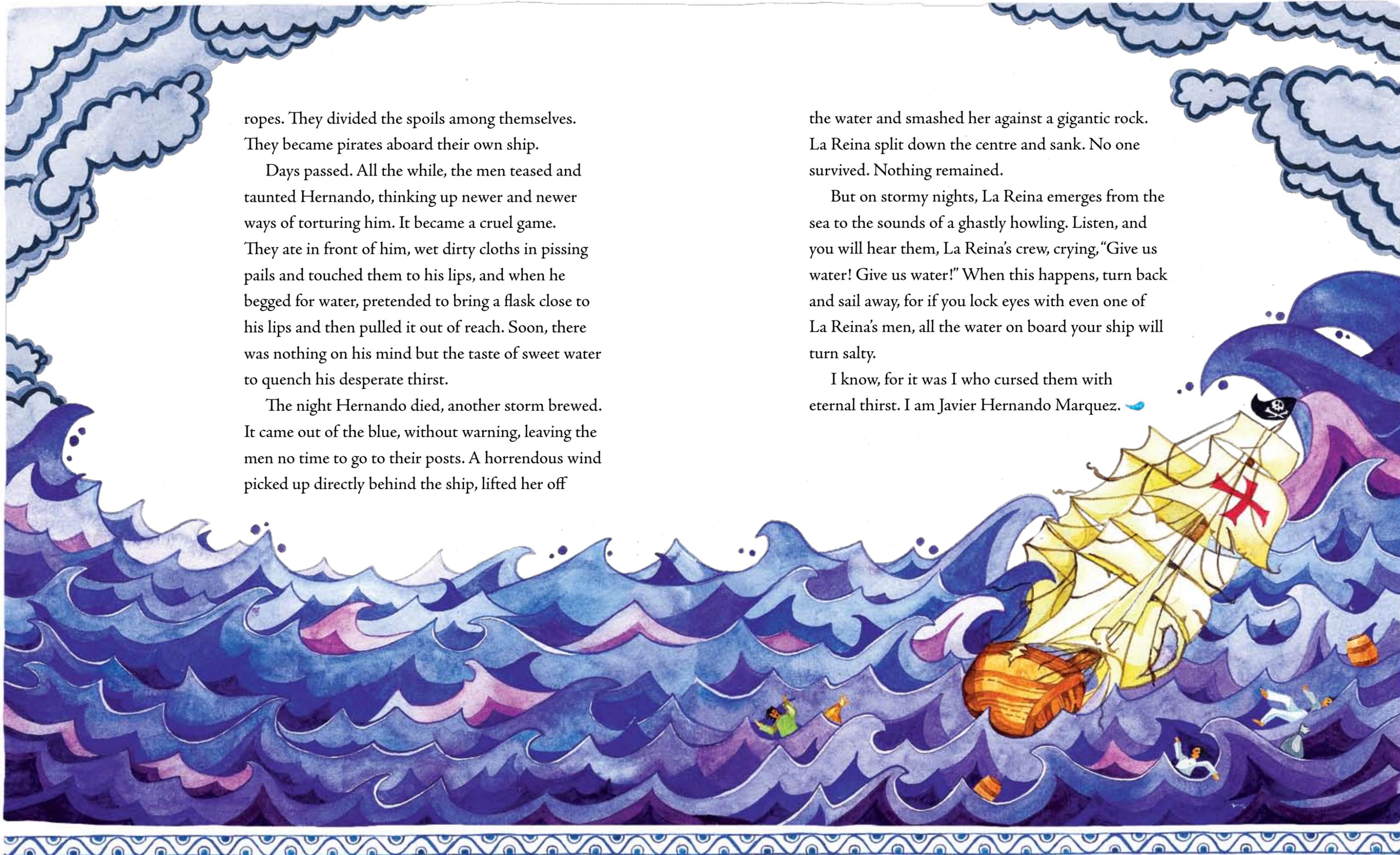
Days passed. All the while, the men teased and taunted Hernando, thinking up newer and newer ways of torturing him. It became a cruel game. They ate in front of him, wet dirty cloths in pissing pails and touched them to his lips, and when he begged for water, pretended to bring a flask close to his lips and then pulled it out of reach. Soon, there was nothing on his mind but the taste of sweet water to quench his desperate thirst.

The night Hernando died, another storm brewed. It came out of the blue, without warning, leaving the men no time to go to their posts. A horrendous wind picked up directly behind the ship, lifted her off

the water and smashed her against a gigantic rock. La Reina split down the centre and sank. No one survived. Nothing remained.

But on stormy nights, La Reina emerges from the sea to the sounds of a ghastly howling. Listen, and you will hear them, La Reina's crew, crying, "Give us water! Give us water!" When this happens, turn back and sail away, for if you lock eyes with even one of La Reina's men, all the water on board your ship will turn salty.

I know, for it was I who cursed them with eternal thirst. I am Javier Hernando Marquez.





A Well is Born

A STORY FROM INDIA

retold by Radhika Chadha

 The Engineer stood before the big crowd and spoke in a voice both cheerful and loud. “By evening tomorrow, I can foretell, your dry little village will have its own well.”

The villagers burst into joyful chatter: after so long, the promise of water! An end to all their problems — at last. Dreading a drought? A thing of the past!

“No more carrying pots for miles and miles,” whispered the women, all wreathed in smiles. The men remembered their lands so barren, and how they’d worried about a famine.

With a well, they could irrigate their fields, with a well, they could get better crop yields, with a well, they’d be free of the terrible fear that the rains would be late again this year.

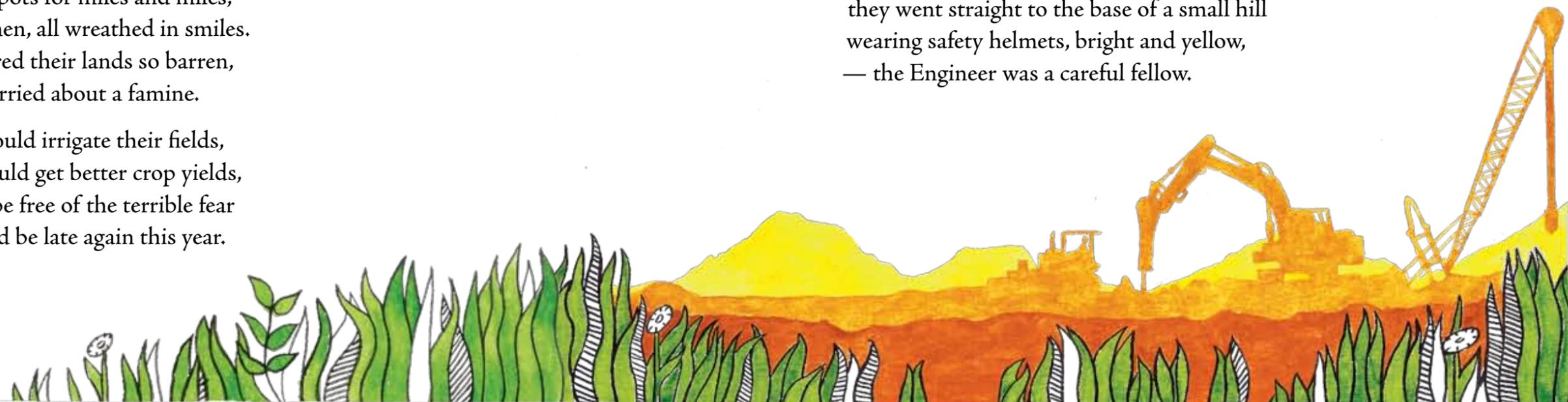
Hopeful, excited, they loudly clamoured, “Engineer Saheb, d’you give us your word? Will we truly be blessed with a well this week? Will we finally gain the water we seek?”

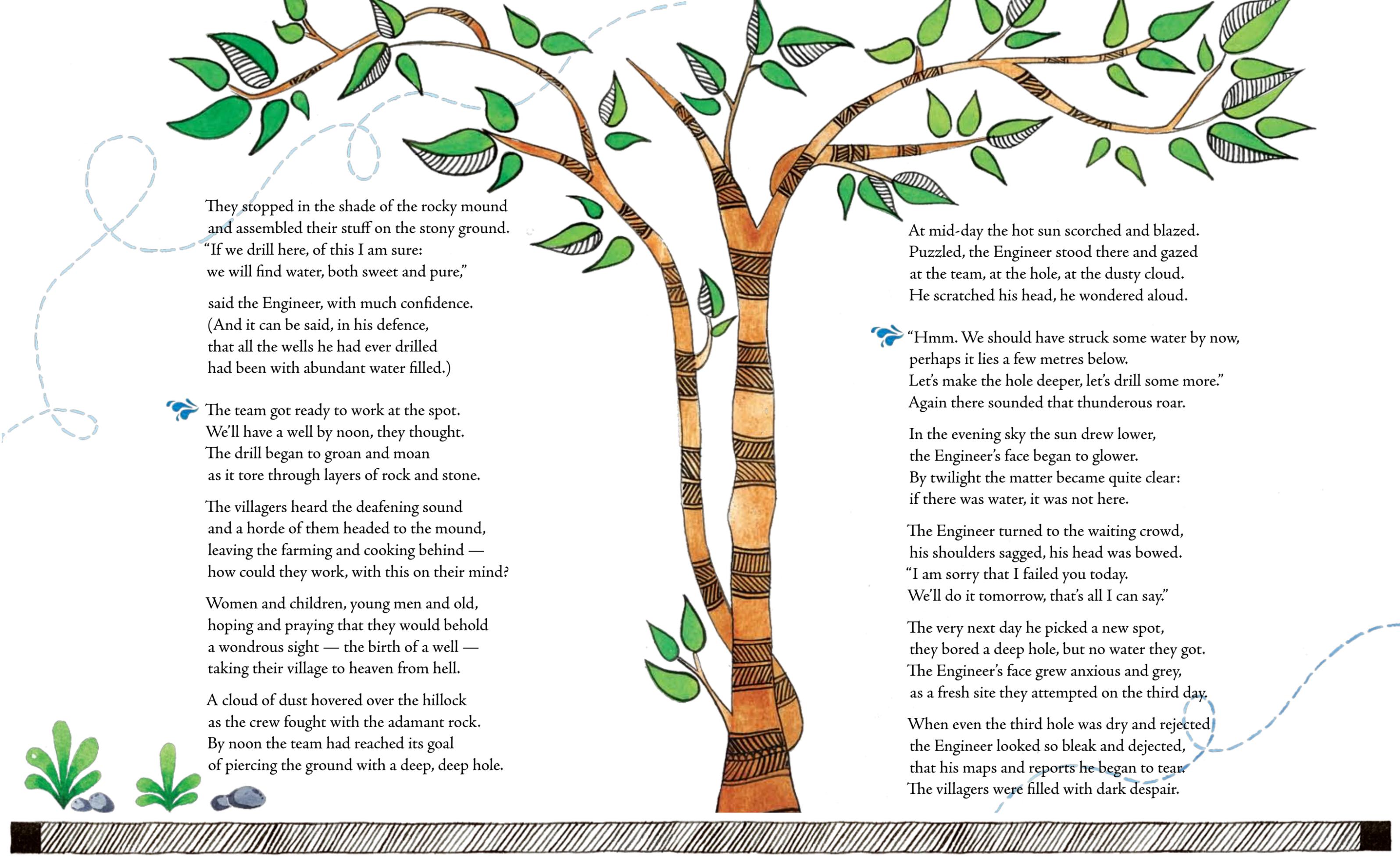
“A week? Oh much sooner than that, I say, you’ll have your well by the end of the day. I’m an expert in water and wells and drilling,” he said to the crowd around him milling.

“I’ve looked at reports, I’ve studied the maps. My knowledge of wells simply has no gaps. I have surveyed the land for miles around, and I’m sure there’s water here to be found.”

 Early next day when the sun was still low, and the sky suffused with a pinkish glow, the Engineer addressed his trusted team, “Come, let us fulfil the villagers’ dream.”

Armed with maps, reports, a truck and a drill, they went straight to the base of a small hill wearing safety helmets, bright and yellow, — the Engineer was a careful fellow.





They stopped in the shade of the rocky mound and assembled their stuff on the stony ground. "If we drill here, of this I am sure: we will find water, both sweet and pure," said the Engineer, with much confidence. (And it can be said, in his defence, that all the wells he had ever drilled had been with abundant water filled.)

 The team got ready to work at the spot. We'll have a well by noon, they thought. The drill began to groan and moan as it tore through layers of rock and stone. The villagers heard the deafening sound and a horde of them headed to the mound, leaving the farming and cooking behind — how could they work, with this on their mind? Women and children, young men and old, hoping and praying that they would behold a wondrous sight — the birth of a well — taking their village to heaven from hell. A cloud of dust hovered over the hillock as the crew fought with the adamant rock. By noon the team had reached its goal of piercing the ground with a deep, deep hole.

At mid-day the hot sun scorched and blazed. Puzzled, the Engineer stood there and gazed at the team, at the hole, at the dusty cloud. He scratched his head, he wondered aloud.

 "Hmm. We should have struck some water by now, perhaps it lies a few metres below. Let's make the hole deeper, let's drill some more." Again there sounded that thunderous roar.

In the evening sky the sun drew lower, the Engineer's face began to glower. By twilight the matter became quite clear: if there was water, it was not here.

The Engineer turned to the waiting crowd, his shoulders sagged, his head was bowed. "I am sorry that I failed you today. We'll do it tomorrow, that's all I can say."

The very next day he picked a new spot, they bored a deep hole, but no water they got. The Engineer's face grew anxious and grey, as a fresh site they attempted on the third day,

When even the third hole was dry and rejected the Engineer looked so bleak and dejected, that his maps and reports he began to tear. The villagers were filled with dark despair.



Just then a farmer with kind and wise eyes said, "If you don't mind, I have some advice. I believe that water can be found there." He pointed to a termite mound.

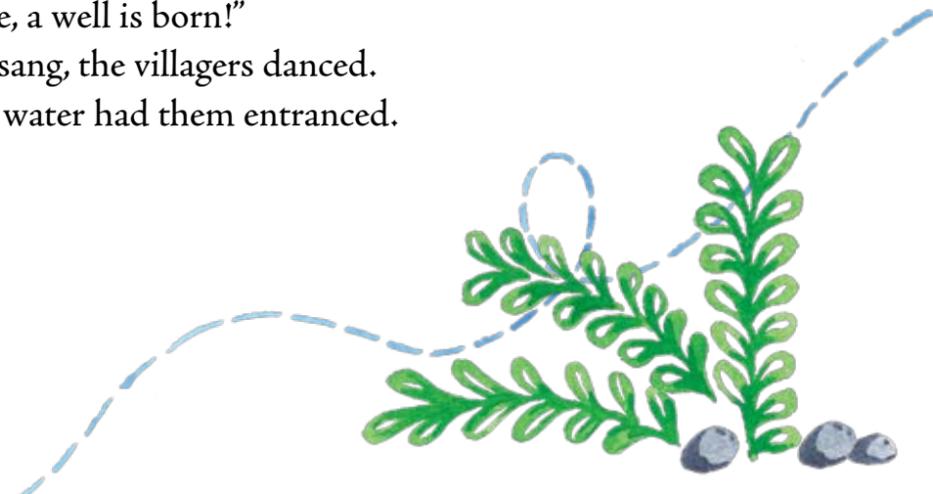
"And in case you think that it's a trick, I assure you — it's quite scientific. I've noticed," said he, in a gravelly voice, "termite hills are always damp and moist.

No matter how dry the summer can get, termites find water to keep their nest wet. So if you drill there, of this I am sure: you will find water, both sweet and pure."

The Engineer listened to what he'd just heard, there was much sense in the old farmer's words. They filled him afresh with vigour and zest. He started to work near the termite nest.

They'd just punched a hole a few metres deep when they saw a sight that made their hearts leap. Water sprayed up — a fountain of joy, with bright rainbow colours misting the sky.

"Bring out the drums, bring out the horn! Let's celebrate, a well is born!" The villagers sang, the villagers danced. The vision of water had them entranced.



When the gushing water the Engineer saw,
he said to the farmer in shock and awe,
“Who’d have thought a well could be found
situated near a termite mound?”

Where did you get this amazing knowledge?
I didn’t realise you’d been to college!”
The old farmer smiled and said, amused,
“I don’t blame you for feeling confused

If you want tips on how to find water,
I’ll tell you the verse in the Brihat Samhita.
I recommend this ancient treatise
written by Varahamihira the wise.”

It’s all about observing life, you know,
where insects live, how the trees grow.
If to nature’s clues we pay careful heed,
the secrets of the earth are quite easy to read.”

The thankful Engineer departed
rich with knowledge the farmer’d imparted.
He resolved to take this learning and
spread it far and wide, across the land.

If I may make a suggestion bold:
Let us combine new science and old.
Then this earth of ours will be truly blessed
with the wisdom of East and West. 

Author’s note: This poem was inspired by a myth from the Ivory Coast.



House of Sun and Moon

A STORY FROM NIGERIA

retold by Amruta Patil



They were a handsome couple, Sun and Moon. Wherever they stood, the world turned beautiful. Together, Sun and Moon built a house. It took a lot of time, and it took a lot of place — all the space the sky had to offer, in fact, but they did it. And when it was ready, the house was bigger than the biggest, more roomy than heaven itself, and filled with the most delightful things. Sun and Moon created trees and mountains in

the distance so there would always be an interesting view. In their garden, flocks of clouds ran about like so many technicolor sheep. And the light! By daytime, the walls of the house were soothing blue, or dazzling gold, or purpled-pink like sunset. By night-time, the ceiling was draped in a billion dazzling, heavy stars.

They were rather vain about this house, were Sun and Moon — they spent hours admiring their own handiwork. Soon it became obvious that a beautiful house was no fun at all unless someone came by to see it. They had friends aplenty (with Water being their best friend among all), so Sun and Moon planned a big housewarming party where everyone was invited. Not a pachyderm or beetle was left out, each bee and seed got a separate invitation. What a grand fête it was! There was a spectacular Sound, Light and Magic show, and sumptuous food, and flowers and honey at the table. The air smelled of wet earth and cake-in-the-oven — and someone gifted Moon a chandelier of asteroids. Wind came by, silk cotton pods burst open in time to hitch a ride up, planets and satellites made careful orbits, meteors showered overhead, flocks of geese did clever sorties, descending snowflakes made a detour so they could get a good view. The sunflowers (who couldn't make it because they were grounded) craned their necks up the entire time so they wouldn't miss a thing. Even when the party was over, it was not all over, and everyone got a shiny precious return gift. Yes, it was the best party in the universe.

When they had put away the last star and settled the last cloud down to sleep, Sun and Moon stood in their garden. They ought to have been happy with the throngs of awestruck guests who had come and gone — but the only thing they could think about were the ones who didn't show up.

And the only ones who *didn't* show up for the best party in the Universe were Water and her children.

"We have been to her house thousands of times. I help her with her waves every day. And see how she ignored us on our big day," complained Moon.

"Now, now. I'm sure she has a very good reason," said Sun unconvincingly. He felt snubbed by Water's no-show too, but knew it was a terrible idea for two people to be sulking together. Especially when one of the two people happened to be Moon. She took days to recover once she went into a sulky crescent – sometimes she disappeared from the sky entirely and drove Sun crazy with despair.

"You'd think our best friend would want to see us happy, but no..." Moon trailed off dramatically.

The next morning, Sun decided to investigate the matter himself. "Ahem!" he cleared his throat loudly from the highest point overhead at noon, trying to look like he was just passing by. "You!"

"Why, hello," said Water shyly, "I hear you hosted the best party in the Universe."

"Why do you care? You didn't come."

"With all the guests, I didn't think you'd even notice."

"We notice when so-called best friends ignore us. Don't you like to see us happy?"

"Of course I do! I couldn't come because I have a *responsibility*..."

"Responsibility!" guffawed Sun. "A puddle dares talk to me about responsibility! That's what you really are, an overgrown puddle. I could evaporate you in minutes, and there would be nothing left but salt and

sand!" And he laughed loudly and cruelly, and made Water feel ashamed and small.

All of a sudden, Sun stopped laughing. "Don't talk to me about your responsibilities again," said he. "I run the entire Solar System and still have time to build a fabulous house and plan a party and make handwritten invites for ingrates. No one else has more *responsibility*."

Water was hurt by Sun's rudeness, but she knew him long enough to know he was not a bad star at heart. She replied in measured tones. "It's true I don't run the Solar System, but I have children I can't leave unattended. They can't live without me."

"Huh," said Sun, who was still not in a listening mood. "In that case you should've brought your children with you. You know how popular Moon and I are with children."

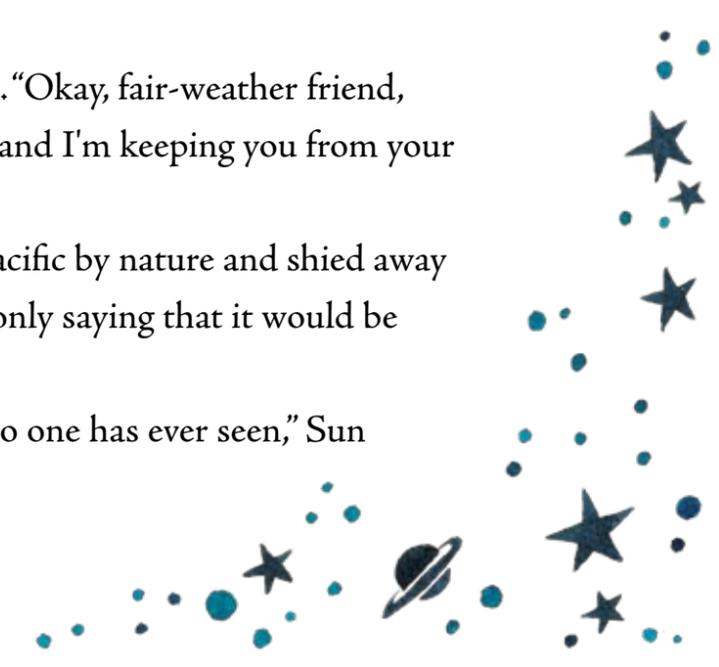
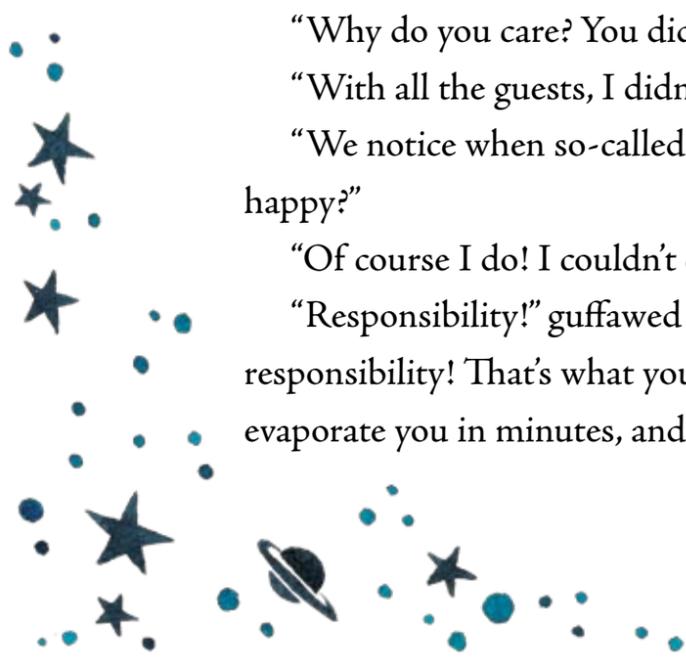
"They love you," Water said patiently, "but there are too many of them. And there is too much of me. Your house would be too small to accommodate all of us."

That was the last straw. If there was one thing Sun prided himself on, it was the grand scale of his ventures, and he was not about to be belittled by a mere liquid.

"Are you trying to mock me?" he hollered. "Okay, fair-weather friend, I am going. I have just a sunset to attend to, and I'm keeping you from your *responsibilities*."

"No! No!" said Water, who was largely pacific by nature and shied away from loud noises if she could help it. "I was only saying that it would be inconvenient. I am a little large."

"A bigger house than Moon's and mine, no one has ever seen," Sun



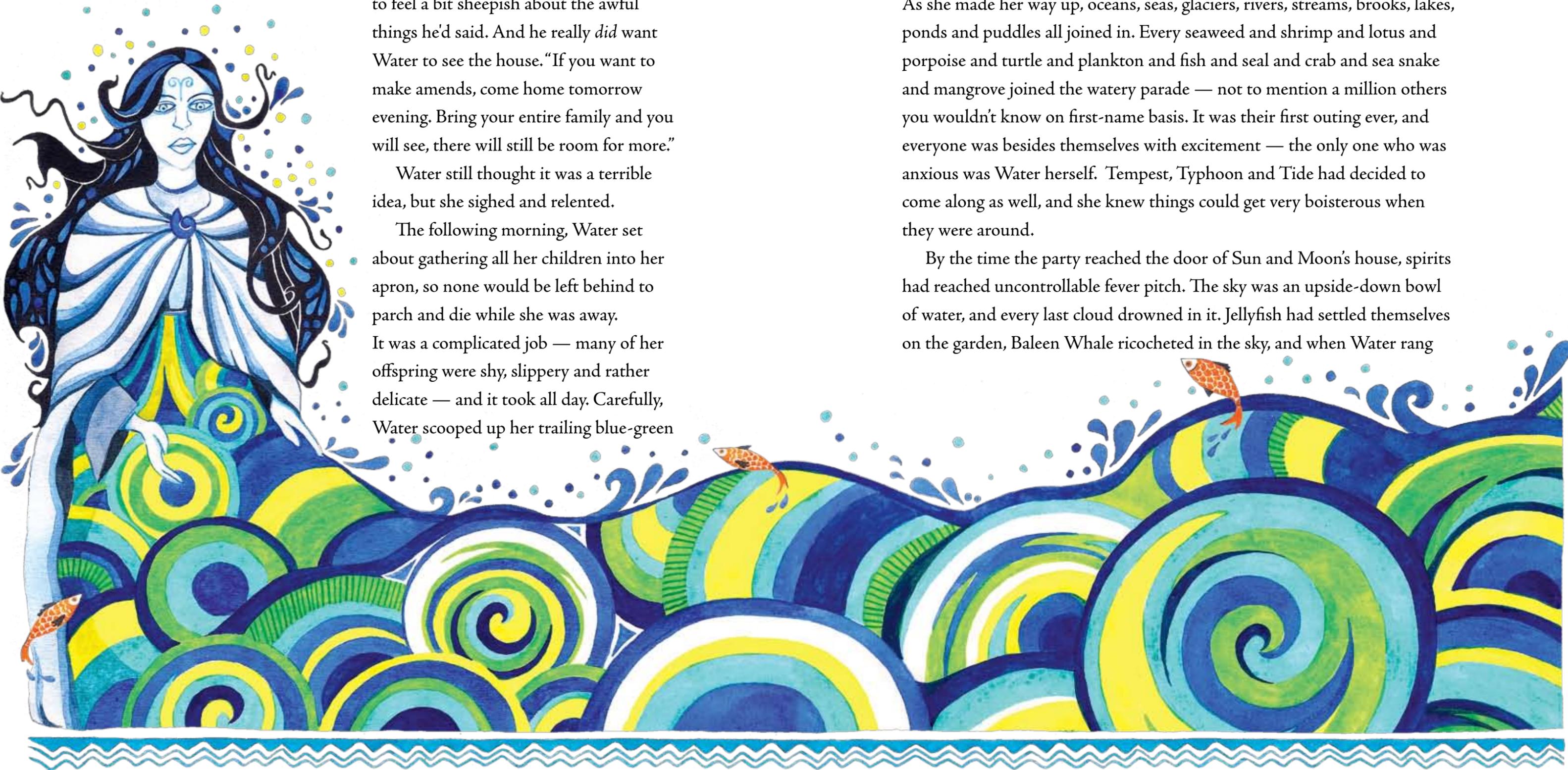
continued cuttingly, but he was beginning to feel a bit sheepish about the awful things he'd said. And he really *did* want Water to see the house. "If you want to make amends, come home tomorrow evening. Bring your entire family and you will see, there will still be room for more."

Water still thought it was a terrible idea, but she sighed and relented.

The following morning, Water set about gathering all her children into her apron, so none would be left behind to parch and die while she was away. It was a complicated job — many of her offspring were shy, slippery and rather delicate — and it took all day. Carefully, Water scooped up her trailing blue-green

skirt, and started her long journey towards the house of Sun and Moon. As she made her way up, oceans, seas, glaciers, rivers, streams, brooks, lakes, ponds and puddles all joined in. Every seaweed and shrimp and lotus and porpoise and turtle and plankton and fish and seal and crab and sea snake and mangrove joined the watery parade — not to mention a million others you wouldn't know on first-name basis. It was their first outing ever, and everyone was besides themselves with excitement — the only one who was anxious was Water herself. Tempest, Typhoon and Tide had decided to come along as well, and she knew things could get very boisterous when they were around.

By the time the party reached the door of Sun and Moon's house, spirits had reached uncontrollable fever pitch. The sky was an upside-down bowl of water, and every last cloud drowned in it. Jellyfish had settled themselves on the garden, Baleen Whale ricocheted in the sky, and when Water rang



the doorbell, a gargantuan wave built up behind her back — everyone wanted to peer over her shoulder to see what wonders the house held.

“Be right there,” called out Moon in her silvery hostess voice.

“You may want to reconsider the invitation before you open the door,” said Water, “and I will not feel bad at all.”

“Every creature in existence,” said Sun in an imperious voice from the other side of the door, “must see the glories of the house of Sun and Moon at least once in their life.” No sooner had he unlatched the door did the gigantic wave crash down into the house of Sun and Moon. What a lot of water it was! Broke the door right off its hinges and washed away everything in sight. Torrents of water poured in from every crevice, fish skidded on the carpets, a sea cow landed smack in the middle of the dining table. Soon there were whirlpools all over and the house of Sun and Moon came tumbling down. Moon leaped atop the asteroid chandelier to evade the flood. As for Sun, his dignity was a bit dampened, but he managed to escape through the ceiling and wait till the water had calmed a bit.

So that was all about the day Water visited the house of Sun and Moon.

But did they hold a grudge? No they didn't. The universe is big, as anyone can see, and such little things really don't count. So Sun and Moon went on to build themselves another beautiful house. Water cheered from a distance and sent them a rainbow when they were done. The three of them went right back to being best friends again. And needless to say, Sun and Moon never underestimated Water's responsibility again. 

Koluscap and the Water Monster

A NATIVE AMERICAN STORY

retold by Sowmya Rajendran

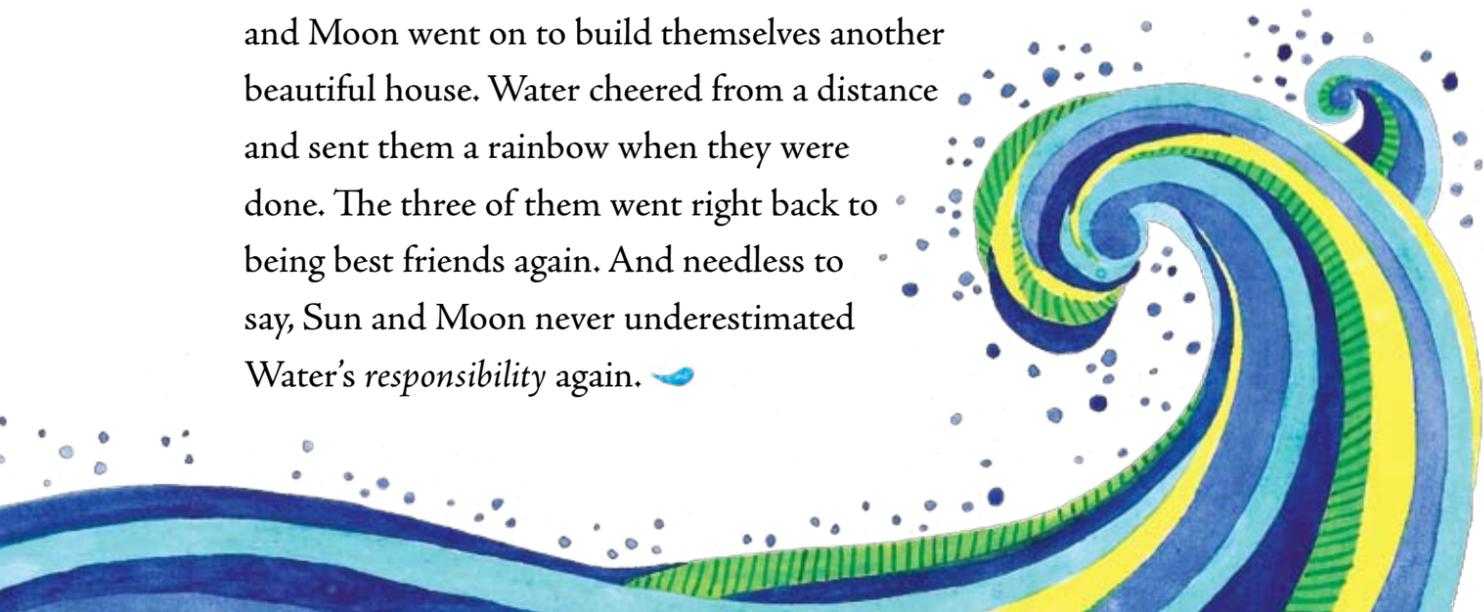
Have you heard of the sea monster whose eyes were red suns? At night when he slept in the deep ocean, the little fishes looked at his breaths of fire and dared one another to go closer, just an inch closer, to him. But not one did. The sea monster was so terrifying that only Koluscap, the great spirit, could stop him...

 Ayasha, the oldest woman in the village, looked up at the burning sky and sighed. The sun spat out arrows of fire like an angry warrior who could not be stopped. There were no rain clouds to be seen. Ayasha could feel the earth under her give up hope. It would not rain today either.

The stream had dried up. It had laughed and sung with the people of the village for so many years. As a little girl, Ayasha had tried to catch the moon as it floated in the water, leaping with the ripples. And now, it was gone.

It is evil magic that has sucked up our stream and driven the rain clouds away, some whispered. Others said, No, we must go upstream and find out what has happened.

So a messenger was sent to the village where the stream began to find out the truth. When he reached the village, the messenger was shocked to

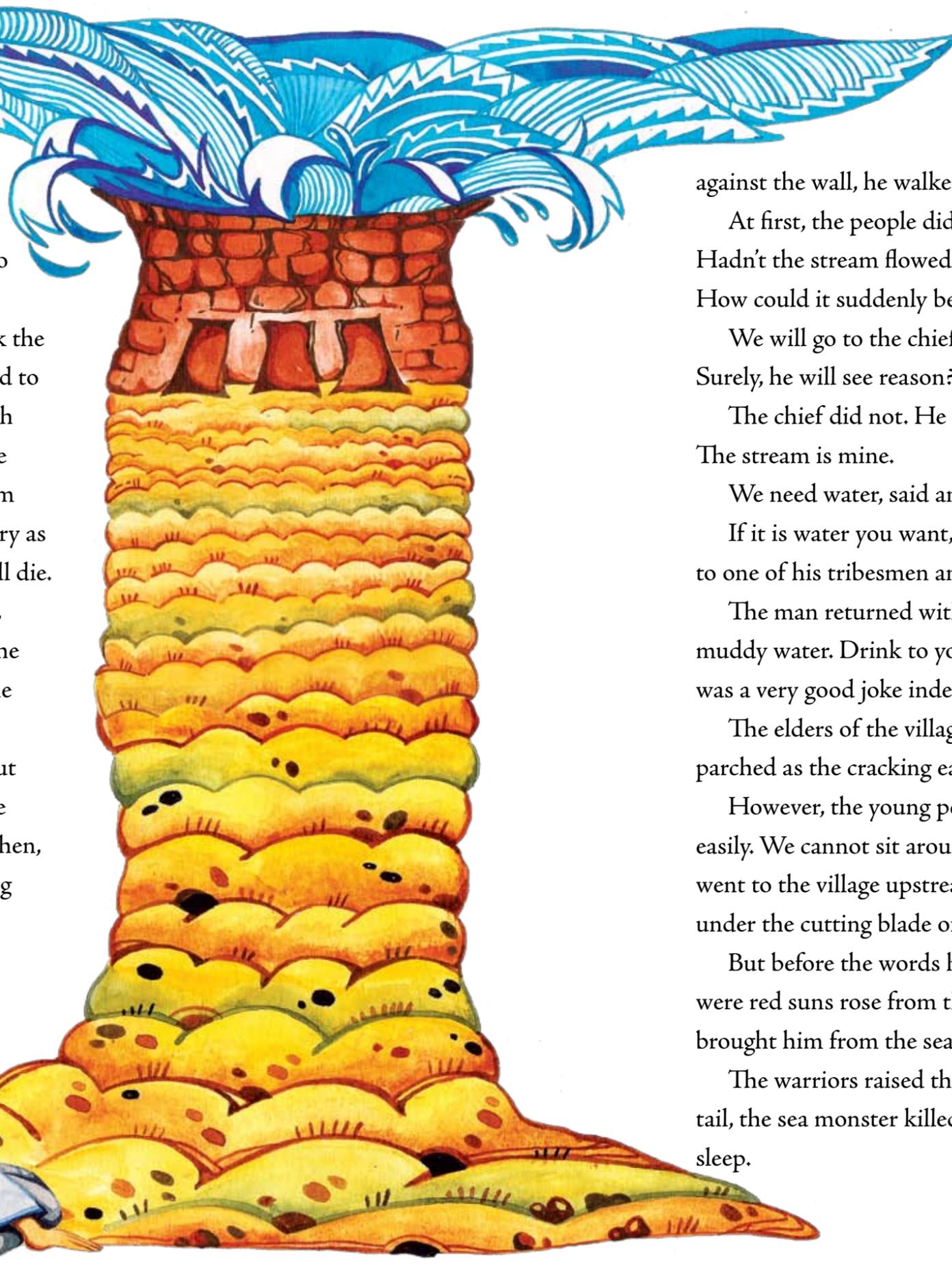


see that their stream had been made captive! The chief of the village had built a dam because he did not want to share the water with anybody else.

A tall wall now stood, holding back the stream. The messenger saw that it tried to leap above the wall, but it fell back each time, defeated. He then went up to the chief and said, You must break the dam and set our stream free. The earth is dry as a bone. Without our stream, we will all die.

This is my stream replied the chief, his eyes gleaming like hard pebbles. The stream begins here and so it is mine, he said.

The messenger was a small man, but he had his pride. He stood as tall as he could and said, You will regret this. Then, looking at the brave stream still leaping



against the wall, he walked away.

At first, the people did not understand the messenger's words. Hadn't the stream flowed through their village for so many years? How could it suddenly belong to one person alone?

We will go to the chief and talk to him, the elders of the village said. Surely, he will see reason?

The chief did not. He only laughed at them and said once again, The stream is mine.

We need water, said an elder.

If it is water you want, I will give you water, said the chief. He called out to one of his tribesmen and whispered something in his ear.

The man returned with a small cup made of bark that contained some muddy water. Drink to your heart's content! roared the chief. He thought it was a very good joke indeed.

The elders of the village returned home in silence. Their lips were as parched as the cracking earth.

However, the young people of the village would not admit defeat so easily. We cannot sit around doing nothing! they said. And so the warriors went to the village upstream to fight. The tips of their arrows shone bright under the cutting blade of the sun. They stood and challenged the chief.

But before the words had left their mouths, a sea monster whose eyes were red suns rose from the water and glared at them. The chief had brought him from the sea to frighten away the warriors.

The warriors raised their bows bravely, but with one lash of his mighty tail, the sea monster killed all of them. Then he went back to the stream to sleep.

They say his eyes can shoot balls of fire, said Ayasha's grandson, as she sat quietly by the dry stream. He is made of the sun itself, the child said. Ayasha looked at the knobby bones on her grandson's chest and said nothing. He spread out his thin arms as wide as he could and said, This is how big his head is. A smile cracked open Ayasha's tired lips.

There was nothing left to do now but to go to Gitchee Manitou, the Creator.

Gitchee Manitou listened to the people of the village as they told him all that had happened. He watched the sad sag of their shoulders. He heard the weariness in their dry voices. Gitchee Manitou's heart filled with love. He would save them, he decided. He called for Koluscap, the great spirit. He was the only one who could stop the sea monster.

The people of the village cheered when they saw Koluscap. He looked like a warrior. He was tall, taller than the tallest tree in the village. His face was half black, half white. He could be gentle as well as terrifying, the people knew. A great eagle perched on his right shoulder. Its talons were burning stars and its beak was cruel and calm. Two wolves, one black and one white, walked by Koluscap's side.

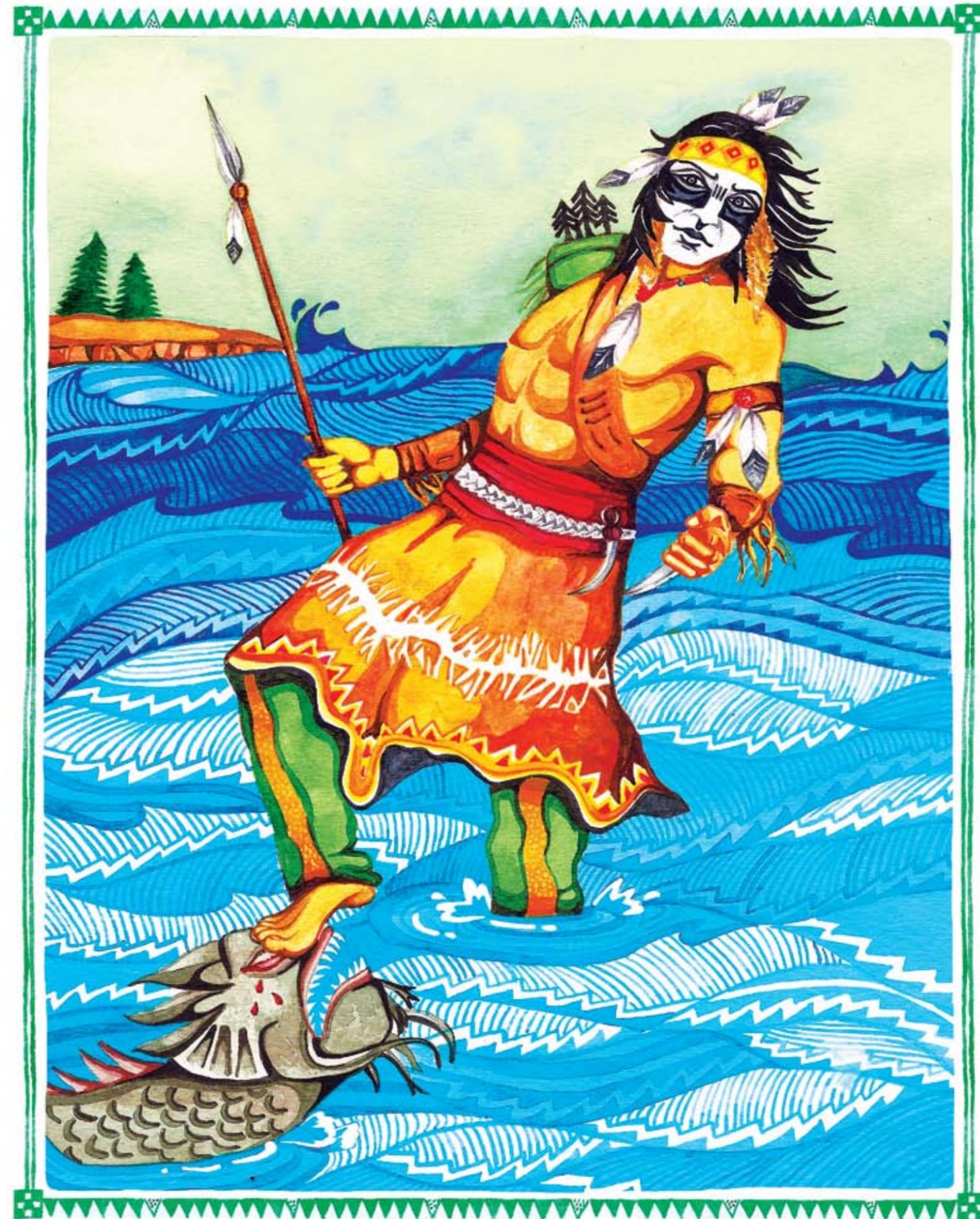
Koluscap's stride as he walked to the village upstream was firm and unflinching. When he reached the village, he called out to the chief, Let the stream free or prepare to fight!

The chief made no reply. Koluscap called out again, The stream is for everybody, it is not one man's plaything!

Still there was no answer.

Now Koluscap strung his bow. At once, the earth shook.

It was the sea monster, Koluscap knew. His wolves pawed the ground,



their noses twitched. The eagle could see the sea monster as it rose from the water. Koluscap watched its unblinking eye and knew it was time. He was ready.

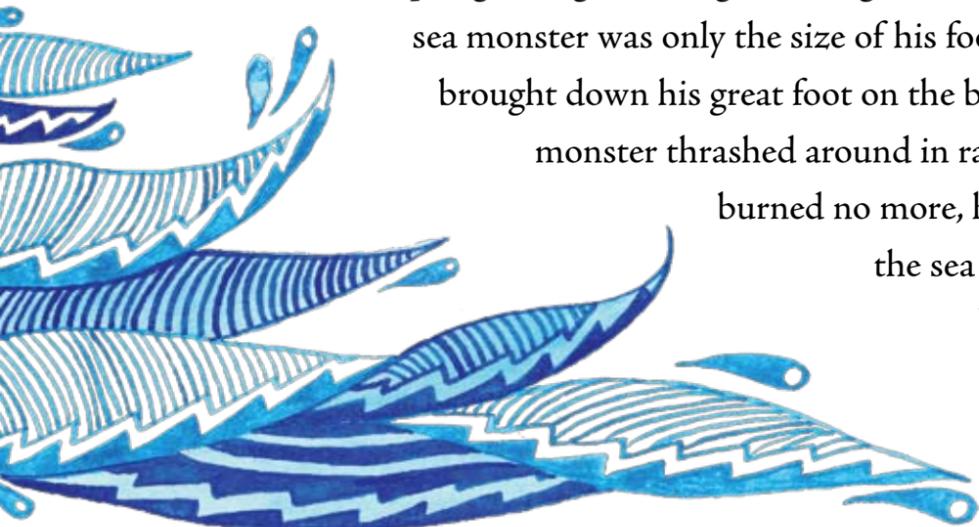
The sea monster was furious. He'd been woken from his slumber by Koluscap. With a mighty roar, the sea monster tried to crush Koluscap with its foot. But the two wolves plunged their sharp teeth into his scaly flesh. The sea monster howled in pain. He tried to shake away the wolves, but their yellow eyes were fixed on his feet. One step towards Koluscap and they would bite him again!

The sea monster turned towards Koluscap and sent out a ball of fire from his terrible jaws. Koluscap swerved and the tree behind him caught fire. The sea monster was so angry that he shook his head wildly. Before he could send out another ball of fire, Koluscap's eagle flew swiftly and plucked out his eyes. One! And the other!

The red suns that had so terrified the people of the village were now gone. But the sea monster was still fighting. His pride was hurt and he was now more dangerous because he did not care about dying. He kicked away the wolves as they tried to dig their teeth into his flesh. He was approaching so fast that Koluscap could feel the monster's hot breath singeing his hair.

Koluscap began to grow. He grew and grew till he was so huge that the sea monster was only the size of his foot. And then, Koluscap brought down his great foot on the beast. He held on as the monster thrashed around in rage. Finally, when his foot burned no more, he lifted it and looked at the sea monster gently.

With a wave of his mighty



arm, Koluscap broke the dam. The stream was free! In joy, it galloped towards the village like a wild foal.

When the people of the village saw their stream leap towards them, their eyes lit up. Ayasha's grandson smiled and his bony chest heaved in joy. Ayasha was so happy to see the stream that she forgot her age and jumped into it, a girl once more. As the people watched her swim in the stream, the years falling off her back, they too, forgot themselves and leapt in. The people swam in the stream till night fell and the moon floated in the water. Some of them remembered their chores then and climbed to the banks of the stream, tired but happy.



But some of them never climbed back. They followed Ayasha as she chased the moon in the stream, her silver fish-back glinting.

They would swim in the water forever, the people who loved their stream so much that they became fishes. They would swim forever in the water that belonged to everyone. 

Tiddalik the Frog

AN ABORIGINAL STORY FROM AUSTRALIA

retold by Suniti Namjoshi

Tiddalik started out life like any other frog. He was small, lively and partial to water. He lived his life and harmed no one. In short, he was a good little frog of no importance. But then he started drinking water, more and more water, huge quantities of water. And as he drank, his ability to drink it grew greater and greater and he himself grew larger and larger. Soon he was larger than a wombat, and heavier too. He continued drinking. He couldn't seem to stop. And in no time at all he was larger than a kangaroo. And still he drank. He grew larger than a rock, larger than a hill. He grew and grew. In the end he had drunk up all the water in the whole world. There was no water left for anyone else. And then he just sat there while all the animals



came up to him and looked up at him with pleading eyes, begging him to disgorge at least some of the water.

You'd have thought that Tiddalik might have begun to feel ashamed of himself. And at first he did feel a little ashamed. Had he perhaps been a trifle thoughtless? A tiny bit greedy? He dismissed the thought. He was beginning to enjoy his new found grandeur. He sat there looking stolid and unmoving and exactly like a mountain. And it was easy for him to do this because by now he was as large as a mountain or even larger. The creatures didn't know what to do. They had to have water; but no matter how much they pleaded, Tiddalik wasn't paying the slightest attention.

"I know what we have to do," the kookaburra said decisively. "We have to make him laugh. Once he laughs a good belly laugh, all the water will spill out of him."

The others thought this was an excellent idea. Pleading with the frog hadn't worked, perhaps making him laugh would.

"I'll have a go," the kookaburra offered. "I, myself, have such a very splendid laugh that I'm sure I'll be able to make him laugh too".

"Ha ha ha haaaa!" the kookaburra cried.

"Hoo hoo hoo hoooo!" the kookaburra wailed.

"Hee hee hee heeeeee!" the kookaburra screamed.

It was no use. It's true that Tiddalik's expression changed a little; but there wasn't even a hint of amusement in it. If anything, Tiddalik seemed to be sneering slightly as if to say he really didn't think much of such an outlandish performance.





“Let me have a try,” the emu said when it was clear that the kookaburra wasn’t getting anywhere. “I have an eloquent neck, long slender legs and amber eyes. I will dance for him. I will dance so well that, who knows, perhaps he will begin to smile a little. And the smile will turn into a delighted laugh and the laugh will turn into a bellow of laughter, and then all the water will spill out of him and everything will be fine again.”

The emu was inclined to be fanciful, but she did dance well. And though the creatures were parched with thirst, they smiled and applauded when she was done. But not Tiddalik. If anything, he looked even more contemptuous.

The creatures were at their wits’ end. The kangaroo stepped forward. “We’re going about this the wrong way,” he said firmly. “I know how to make him laugh. I’ll tell him a joke. In fact I’ll tell him a story about a frog who was just like him. That will interest him. It will make him laugh.”

The kangaroo swaggered up to the frog-mountain that was Tiddalik and called out to him, “Hey, listen Tiddalik, I’ll tell you a funny story. Once upon a time there was a frog who drank so much water that he grew bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger -” The kangaroo paused. He had forgotten how the story ended. He had to make up something quickly, so he said, “Yes. He got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until one day he burst! Ha ha. Don’t you think that’s funny?”

Clearly Tiddalik didn’t think that was at all funny. The frog-mountain’s expression had become stonier and stonier.

The other creatures dragged the kangaroo away before he annoyed Tiddalik further. They looked at each other. What were they to do?

“Let me try to make him laugh,” the eel piped up.

“Well, don’t tell jokes,” the kangaroo warned. “He doesn’t like that.”

“I won’t,” promised the eel.

“And don’t dance,” the emu put in. “He doesn’t appreciate dancing.”

“No, no dancing,” the eel agreed.

“And no laughing either,” the kookaburra told him.

“No, no laughing,” the eel said meekly.

He went before Tiddalik and began tumbling. The young eel was an accomplished acrobat. He stood on his tail and rose straight into the air. He rose higher and higher, and, as he descended, he glanced at Tiddalik. Tiddalik’s expression hadn’t changed. He still looked bored and utterly contemptuous. The eel grew desperate. He redoubled his efforts. He flung himself even higher. At last he flung himself so high that the wind caught him and tossed him over the top of Tiddalik. He came down splat on Tiddalik’s back and began to slither slowly all the way down the frog-mountain.



The creatures despaired. And then suddenly they heard a low rumble. It was Tiddalik laughing. He couldn't help himself. Anyone would laugh if he had an eel slithering slowly down his back. And Tiddalik was ticklish. As the eel slid over his vertebrae, Tiddalik laughed harder and harder, louder and louder. The rumble of his laughter increased to a roar. It sounded like a waterfall. Suddenly the creatures realised that it was a waterfall. All the water Tiddalik had swallowed was tumbling out of him in a great rush and spreading across the earth.

The creatures were terrified. They had been suffering from a lack of water and now they were likely to be drowned in a flood. Those who could fly rose into the air and flew as high as they possibly could. Those who could swim did their best to cope with the flood. And those who could neither fly nor swim clambered up the nearest gum tree and clung to its branches for dear life.

And still the water gushed from Tiddalik's mouth. And still the water level rose and rose. Nobody knew what to do. They knew that the water would subside eventually, but would they survive until that happened? It was the pelican who saved the day. He looked around and found a canoe. He got into it and rowed here and there, guiding the canoe skillfully over the surface of the waters. He rescued everyone, except possibly Tiddalik. Tiddalik was never heard of again, but this was hardly the pelican's fault. Tiddalik would never have fitted into the boat. 🐸

The Dragon's Pearl

A STORY FROM CHINA

retold by Niveditha Subramaniam

In China, dragons are revered as gods. Unequalled in power and wisdom, the dragons are believed to rule the land, the clouds, the wind and the rain. In ancient China, the most sought-after treasure of the dragon was its pearl, which it held under its chin. But not all dragons possessed the pearl.



The river dragon had lost his pearl. He flew high and low over the barren hill, desperately hoping that he would find it. But now the sun had almost set.

Without his pearl, how would he breathe clouds ever again? What would happen to the people who prayed to him for rain? Who would save them from the great drought?

Come back to me, he prayed. *Come back*. And, lifting his scaly wings, he rose into the sky and flew away.

In a small burrow under the hill, lay the pearl, safely hidden. Above it grew an unearthly shade of grass. So green that its blades glistened in the sunlight like wet tongues.

And that is how ten-year-old Xiao Sheng came upon it.

He had climbed the hill, determined to find *something*. His mother

worked so hard that her hands were coarse and her feet callused. They had barely enough food to eat and just enough water to live. Soon, the water in their well would run dry. If only he could help!

As he climbed the hill, panting and wiping the sweat from his brow onto his sleeve, Xiao Sheng saw a lush patch of grass.

He let out a whoop of delight. He could sell this at the market, as cattle feed! Farmers would pay well for it, he knew they would. And wouldn't his mother be proud!

Carefully, he cut as much as he could carry in his basket and ran to the market, a song on his lips.

That night, when Xiao Sheng gave his mother the money, she kissed his forehead. He smiled at her. Tomorrow, he would go again. He shut his eyes and was fast asleep.

He ran up the hill faster the next day. He had been lucky once but these were hard times. What if there wasn't any grass? What if he cut too much the last time? What if someone else had discovered it?





But it *was* there. That same unearthly patch of green. Relieved, he laughed out loud and broke into song.

No matter how soon Xiao Sheng returned to the patch, it had always regrown. He went as often as he needed to. Once, he came back the same day and there they were — those blades of green dancing in the wind.

One day, when his knees were weak from climbing and the sun beat down his back, Xiao Sheng collapsed. He sat on the hill, panting. His head was pounding, but he needed that grass! What could he do now?

And it was as he shaded his eyes from the glare of the sun that an idea occurred to Xiao Sheng.

What if he were to take the grass back home and plant it there? The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea.

He sprang up and ran to the patch. Gently, he dug up the turf by the roots and what do you think he found?

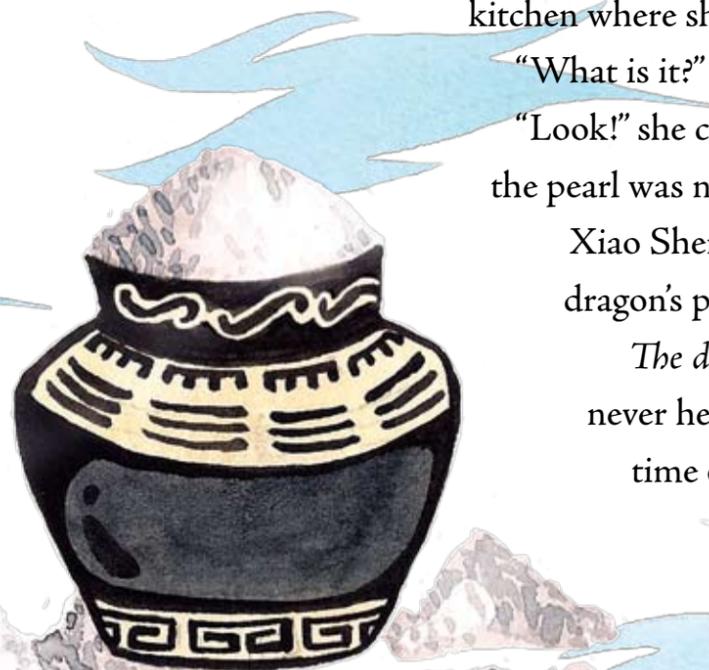
The dragon's pearl.

Xiao Sheng's eyes glowed. He dusted it carefully, and slipped it into his pocket. But as he walked home, he couldn't help pulling it out every now and then to admire it. It was as beautiful as a cloud.

When he got home, he made his mother close her eyes and stretch out her hand. He placed the pearl gently in her palm and cried, "Now, open!"

His mother gasped. The pearl was so lovely that she didn't dare hold it. "Fetch the rice jar from the kitchen," she said.

Xiao Sheng ran to get it. It was half-empty. Here, inside the grains of rice, she hid the pearl.



"It is safe now," she told Xiao Sheng.

But the little boy did not notice that the grass he had planted in the garden had lost some of its brilliant colour.

The next morning, Xiao Sheng awoke not to the calls of the birds, but to the shouts of his mother. He rubbed his eyes sleepily and walked to the kitchen where she stood, her hands filled with grain.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Look!" she cried, and he saw that the jar of rice in which they had put the pearl was now overflowing! Rice grains were scattered all over the floor.

Xiao Sheng's eyes grew wide with awe. "Do you think this is the dragon's pearl?"

The dragon's pearl! His mother could not answer him. Why, she'd never heard of such a thing! But how else could grass grow in a day's time or rice multiply?

While she was lost in thought, Xiao Sheng ran out to the garden. He called out to his mother, impatiently now. "Look!" he said, pointing at the patch of grass.

"Look how it has withered! It was always so green before!"

She was sure now and nodded her head. "It is the pearl of the river dragon. But it is a blessing, Xiao Sheng. A miracle. It is not yours or mine to keep. Its treasures belong to everyone."

So quietly, Xiao Sheng and his mother began to share their miracle. They gave grain and food to their neighbours.

Word spread quickly. People flocked to their home, like sheep. Some were thankful, and Xiao Sheng and his mother were happy to help

them. But some were so terribly greedy, it shocked Xiao Sheng. Then his mother would remind him that the pearl wasn't his, in the first place. He would smile and nod his head. The days were filled with such peace, it was as unreal as the lush green of the grass Xiao Sheng had first discovered on the hill.

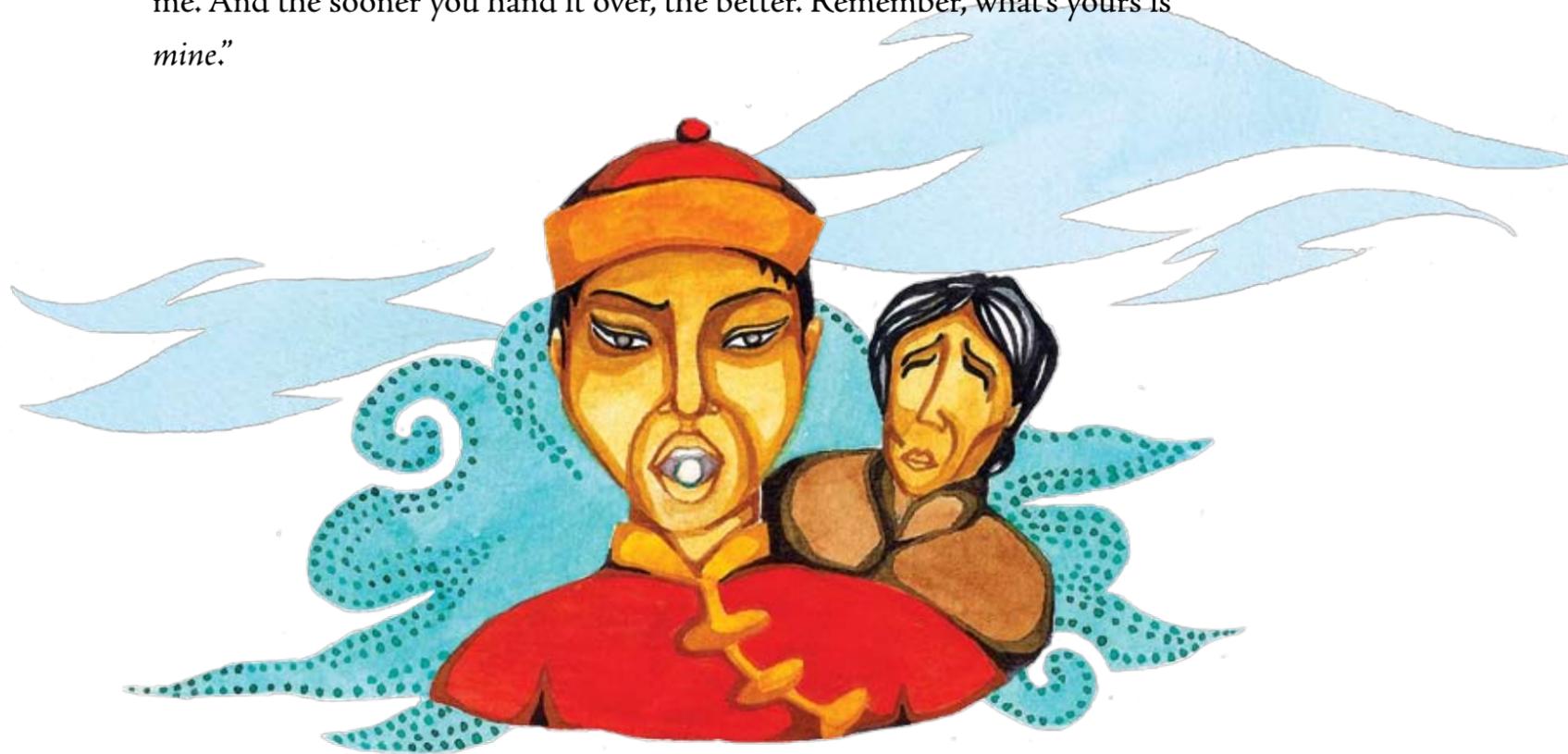
Then one day the landlord stood outside their door with an oily grin on his face. "Doing well for yourself, I see!" the landlord remarked.

Xiao Sheng said nothing.

The landlord inched closer. "What is this great secret of yours? Tell me!"

His mother came out and said loudly, "We share what we have. There's nothing to hide."

The landlord's smile vanished. "I know you're hiding something from me. And the sooner you hand it over, the better. Remember, what's yours is *mine*."



Xiao Sheng crossed his arms and said, "No!"

The landlord snorted and stormed into the house.

Xiao Sheng walked in after him. "Wait!" he said and as the landlord turned around, he said, "This secret. I will give it to you."

The landlord's eyes glinted, as he followed the boy into the kitchen. He did not notice the strange look of determination in Xiao Sheng's eyes. He just hoped to find something that would make him very rich. He did not expect Xiao Sheng to turn around with a pearl in his mouth.

The boy faced the man and, with a glimmer of a smile, swallowed the pearl.

"Xiao Sheng! No!" cried his mother. But it was too late.

Suddenly, a terrified look came into her son's eyes. "Water! I - I need water!" His stomach and his whole body seemed to be on fire. His insides were raging!

As fast as she could, his mother drew what water there was from the well and gave it to him. He drank the whole of it, but it was not nearly enough!

"More!" he cried, his voice hoarse. But there was no more.

Screaming in agony, the boy ran down to a muddy stream, for this was all that remained of the river. It seemed the whole village heard for soon the villagers had gathered on either side to watch him.

What was he drinking?

No one knew when exactly Xiao Sheng stopped being a boy and became a dragon.

No one noticed, until he stopped drinking and turned around and lifted his majestic, glowing wings.

His golden eyes were searching. For whom?



His mother.

When he found her, he rose into the air and as the villagers looked up, clouds filled the sky and the rain fell down in great sheets.

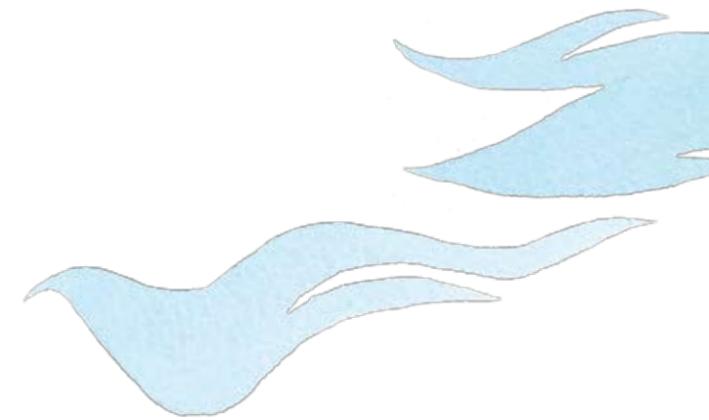
The people wept, their hearts filled with joy, and they danced.

At last, the great drought had come to an end. The river was full! And Xiao Sheng, the dragon who was once a boy and now a dragon, swam serenely in the river, turning around many times to look at his mother, who stood in the rain, watching him.

He turned around so many times to look at her before he swam out of sight that the river is called Wang-Niang-Tan, which means “watching the mother, the river bends”. There are twenty-four snake-like turns in this river.

We don't know what happened to the dragon who lost the pearl. But if he has heard the story, he must be at peace. He brought rain, after all.

Sometimes, Xiao Sheng flies over his village. And sometimes, when his mother sits on the river bank, she looks up at the clouds passing high above. Some of them look like dragons. She wonders if Xiao Sheng is up there. 



Tribute for a King

A STORY FROM GREECE

retold by Sandhya Rao



“Why should I give you anything?”

“Because I rule the land!”

“But I am king of the seas!”

“Not for long if I have my way.”

“And what manner of fish are you?”

“Alexander III of Macedon, whose flag flies over all the lands of the earth...”

“Indeed! Impressed!”

“...and will now fly over all the waters.”

“I see. An ambitious amphibian!”

Alexander couldn't take any more. He had gone to great trouble to make it to the palace at the bottom of the sea, quite apart from looking quite silly, his horse and he, with their newly acquired fins and gills. And

now Poseidon, ruler of the seas, was daring to make fun of him. He would not take any more.

He drew his sword from its sheath and scattered a school of tiny, rainbow-coloured fishes

swimming just above his head. They got into his nostrils and mouth and ears. A passing octopus wrapped its tentacles around the sword and yanked it out of Alexander's grasp. This sparked a manta ray to burst into a fit of giggles. A tiger shark swung by baring a sharp-toothed grin.

Poseidon reprimanded them with a wave of his wand, and hid a smile. “So, you were saying, Alexander the Great of Macedon and all the land?” he said.

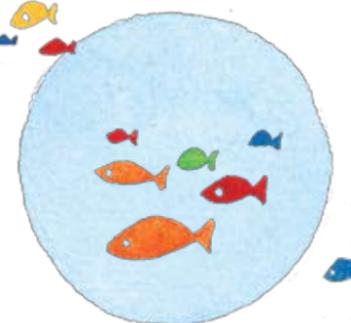
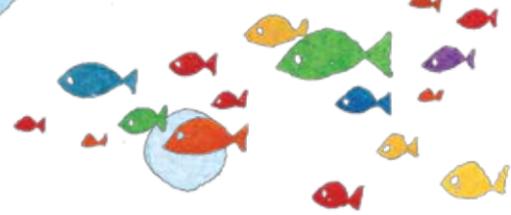
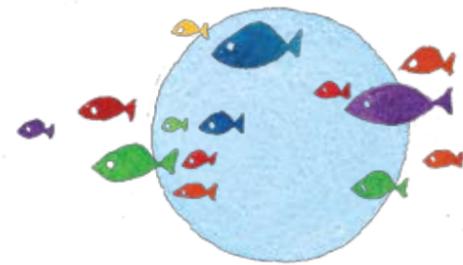
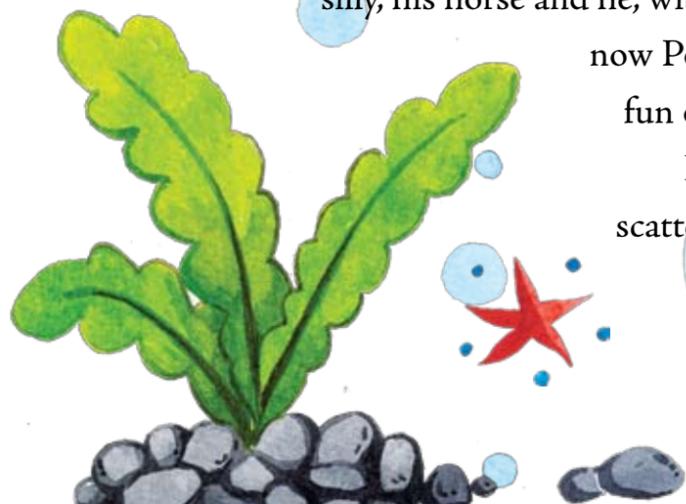
“I was saying, Poseidon,” replied Alexander, recovering his composure. Not for nothing was he The Great. “I was saying I rule the land, and now I shall rule the waters. Kneel, Poseidon, and pay me rich tribute.”

Conditions below sea level are not conducive to the smooth functioning of joints and Poseidon had no intention of kneeling, or paying some land creature tribute. “Give me one good reason,” he said, folding his arms firmly across his chest.

“From the beginning or the end?” asked Alexander.

“The beginning,” prompted Poseidon.

Alexander, whose bedtime reading was Homer's *Iliad* even when he marched on his conquering campaigns, had a small suspicion that Poseidon





was pulling his leg. However, he dismissed the thought and replied, "When I was ten years old, my father, Philip II of Macedon, refused to buy a horse because it wouldn't allow anyone to mount it. But I did. I observed that it was rearing up only because it was afraid of its own shadow. I managed to control it and calm it down. My father bought the horse for me. I called him Bucephalus. He served me well for many years."

"Good thinking, but not good enough reason," responded Poseidon.

"I have been tutored by Aristotle," said Alexander, with a fair amount of pride. After all, what better credentials could anyone have than being taught medicine, philosophy, morals, religion, logic and art by the master himself?

"Hmmm, olive league, but no," said Poseidon.

By now, Alexander was getting desperate. Romping on the beach was one thing. Debating underwater was another. It was so ... wet! Even so, he kept his head and thought furiously. Of course! How could he have forgotten? The Gordian knot! It was the stuff

of legends, starring him, Alexander! He cleared his throat and keeping his excitement in check, asked, "Do you know the Gordian knot?"

"Should I?" asked Poseidon in return.

Wondering who had tutored Poseidon, Alexander began to explain. "Well, you see, at one time the Phrygians, who now owe their allegiance to me, did not have a ruler. You know there cannot be a kingdom without a ruler and the people were in a fix. So they went to an oracle. She declared that the ruler would be the next person who entered the capital on his ox-cart. Who should enter but Gordias, a peasant! Amid great pomp and show he was installed king, and his ox-cart tied to a post outside the temple of Sabazios, god of the skies."

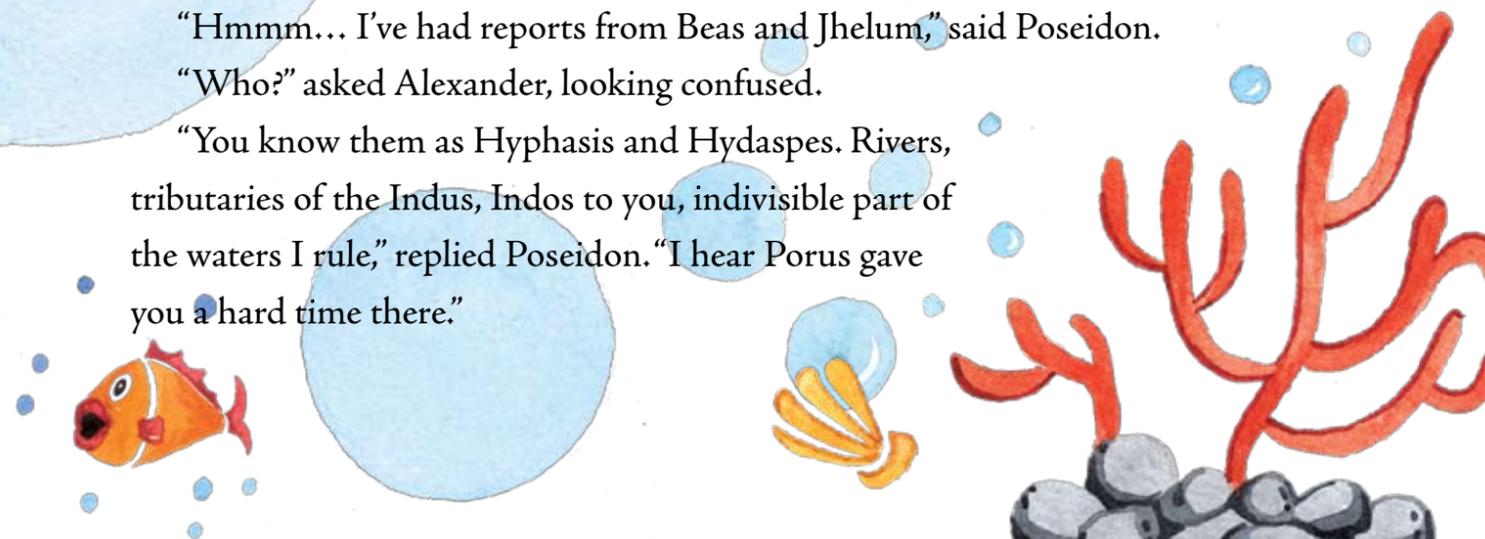
By now Poseidon was beginning to regret having entertained Alexander. Not so Alexander who was quite warming to his story.

"You must note that the cart was tied to the post with the most intricate knot in the world," he continued, "a knot so tight and strong and secure that nobody could untie it. Many tried, not that they didn't, for it had been prophesied that whoever undid the knot would become king of Asia. For years, many took a shot at the knot, without success. Then I came along. I thought about it for a while, then I picked up my sword and slashed the knot in two. It was done! Today I rule Asia!"

"Hmmm... I've had reports from Beas and Jhelum," said Poseidon.

"Who?" asked Alexander, looking confused.

"You know them as Hyphasis and Hydaspes. Rivers, tributaries of the Indus, Indos to you, indivisible part of the waters I rule," replied Poseidon. "I hear Porus gave you a hard time there."





“Well, yes, he’s not bad, really. That’s why I let him continue to rule,” Alexander prevaricated, not wanting to admit the truth openly but loath to resort to lies.

“But he kneels before me, and pays me tribute,” he said in a rush, suddenly remembering why he had made this journey to the bottom of the sea. “Don’t think you can distract me, I’ve seen too many tricks. Surrender!”

Poseidon was impressed by Alexander’s persistence. So he said, “All right. I have a proposition.” He gestured with his wand and in seconds a sea horse appeared beside him, bearing a box on its back. Poseidon took the box in his hands and held it out to Alexander. “Here, take this box and go back to land. There, fill it with anything, and bring it back to me. Then I shall pay you all the tribute you want.”

Relieved at the chance for some action and the opportunity to return to land, Alexander took the box and returned to camp.

He felt confident, and was in no hurry. He dried himself off, and had a hot meal. All that swimming had made him hungry. He rested for a bit and once refreshed, he summoned his horse and raced off to the seashore once again. There he dipped the box in sea water and lifted it up. The water which had seemed to fill the box was gone. He dipped it again. Again the water was gone. The box was dry.

Alexander inspected the box closely. “Maybe it has sprung a leak,” he thought. He looked around. “Okay, this should work,” he said to himself and scooped up some sand with the box. But when he lifted it up, all the sand that had seemed to fill the box was gone. The box was clean.

Once more Alexander inspected the box. “Maybe it has a hole,” he thought. He scrunched up his eyes and rubbed his temples. Then he

mounted his horse and raced off to a river. He ran his fingers in the cool, clear waters and began to pick pebbles rubbed smooth and round, lying in heaps in and around the river. One by one, he tossed them, pink, yellow, black and white, into the box until it was full. But when he lifted up the box the pebbles that had seemed to fill the box were gone. The box was light.

Alexander returned to his camp and stomped into his tent. He placed the box on a table and stood staring at it, willing it to reveal its secret. He walked up and down, lost in thought. He pulled out his well-thumbed *Iliad* and flipped through it, hoping to find in its poetic pages some clues to the mystery of Poseidon's box. Thinking brought to mind the story of the Trojan horse, a giant wooden horse that was gifted to Troy by the Greeks. The Trojans did not know that hidden inside this giant toy were Greek soldiers, who thus entered Troy in broad daylight and plundered it by night.

"I know what to do," exclaimed Alexander. He summoned his master sculptor and said, "Carve me a block of hardest stone that will sit exactly inside this box. Now!"

The master sculptor returned with a block of exactly the right dimensions. Alexander placed it carefully in the box but when he lifted it up, the block of stone that had seemed to fill the box was gone. The box was empty.

Now Alexander had to concede defeat. He mounted his faithful Bucephalus and returned to Poseidon's palace. "Here," he said, holding out the empty box to the king of the seas. "I have failed. The waters can never be mine for I have failed to fill this box with anything. Nothing stays."

"Oh, but you're wrong," returned Poseidon. "For one, the waters are not mine either. I am only king, the man in charge. For another, look!" And he

thrust the box forward.

Alexander saw that it was filled with innumerable sea creatures of many shapes and colours swishing merrily in and out, in and out, until finally the box disappeared altogether and only the water with its teeming life remained. He smiled. He understood. 🐉



WATER TIMELINE



Around **10,000 BC**, melting glaciers cause sea levels to rise

The earliest irrigation practices are recorded in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Peru, and the Indus Valley Civilisation across Pakistan and India dating as far back as **6000 BC**. Sunshu Ao from China is credited with being the first hydraulic engineer.

Between **3000 and 2000 BC** people use sophisticated systems to store water as also water-based toilets during Indus Valley Civilisation in India and Pakistan. People filter water through charcoal, store it in copper containers, and purify it by exposing to sunlight. Egyptians find ways of storing water in desert conditions.

Over the **next 2000 years**, an irrigation method called Qanat is developed in Persia. It is still practised in Asia, Middle East and North Africa. Highly precise engineering techniques are used in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka for irrigation. A dried up lake in India called Lake Sudarsana is rejuvenated and the Chinese use chain pumps to lift water.

By about **1100 AD**, two carved rock slab dams are built to create a lake in Madhya Pradesh, India. The water gauge is invented by Jang Yeong-sil, Korea. Around **1400**, the Mudduk Maur dam near Bhopal, India, is the highest earthfill embankment dam for 300 years. Meer Allum Dam, near Hyderabad, is the first multiple arch buttress dam and is still being used. Step-wells are carved in rock in Gujarat and Rajasthan, India.

In the **1920s**, while the British Raj is still holding sway, Sir William Willcocks advises that an ancient flood irrigation system be used for its manifold benefits: flood waters to irrigate, silt to enrich soil, and fish to control malaria. Meanwhile, the Nile Basin Treaty regulates the sharing of Nile waters between Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo.

In a rare instance, the African Sahel, a semi-desert zone bordering the Sahara, is greened by trees in the **1980s**. Niger becomes the most greened region in Africa. India and Bangladesh sign 30-year treaty to share Ganga waters. Uruguayans vote to amend the constitution so that access to piped water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, and government considers people more important than money while drawing up water policies

Around **5000 BC** the desertification of the Sahara begins. People migrate closer to the Nile, setting foundation for Egyptian civilisation.

From **2000 to 1000 BC** the Saraswati River in India dries up. The Thar desert is born.

Tsunamis occur all through history, particularly in Japan. Over the **following 2000 years**, droughts and famines alternate with floods and storms all over the world. In a freak incident in **1228**, thousands are killed in the Netherlands after flooding breaks dykes.

Over **400 years**, bubonic plague sweeps across Europe, Asia, Africa, killing thousands. Floods and famines test people's resilience in China and India. A major famine in the Horn of Africa in the **19th century** affects Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia.

By the **end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st**, 75% of European glaciers advance. There are mass movements against construction of dams such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan against construction of dams on the Narmada River, and in Brazil, there is a huge march against the Castanhao Dam. March 14 is declared International Day of Action Against Dams and For Rivers, Water and Life. Three Gorges Dam, still under construction in China, is set to become world's largest.

2004 is one of the worst years when a tsunami in the Indian Ocean kills 2,30,000 people across several countries.

Rising sea waters affect people in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. River Po in Italy dries up while River Kosi in Nepal breaks its dam, displacing millions. Tsunami hits Chile.

Water is vital to human survival. Human beings store, transport, purify, use and control water in many ways. It is a destructive force during floods or tsunamis, and its absence causes droughts and plagues. That's why we have so many stories about water through which human beings have tried to understand why a life-giving force suddenly turns against them.

Today, we are faced with the threat of a world with less and less water. Where have we gone wrong?

Looking at some facts and following the history of water helps us make connections between events across time. It is interesting to create a timeline of our own neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities and countries and see what answers we get.

Three-quarters of the earth is covered with **water**. Of this, 97% is salty, 2% is ice, and the rest, freshwater. Most living things need freshwater to survive.

About **95%** of all the **freshwater** is below the ground, 2% is moisture, and the rest available in the form of lakes, rivers and streams.

There are **12 big river systems** in the Indian subcontinent, apart from smaller rivers and streams. The Ganga-Brahmaputra and the Indus network provide the most water.

Women in Africa and Asia have to **walk an average distance** of at least 6 km to find freshwater. They often have to carry a waterload of about 20 kg on their heads.

Water **dissolves more substances** than any other liquid. It always carries chemicals, minerals and nutrients.

The important rivers in India originate from one of the following three sources: the **Himalaya** and the **Karakoram** ranges which are snowfed and perennial; the **Vindhya** and **Satpura** ranges in central India; and the **Sahyadri** or Western Ghats in western India which depend on the monsoons.

A person can live without food for about a month, but only about a **week without water**.

Roughly **70%** of an adult's body is made up of water.

Creatures like the koala bear and the desert rat **do not drink water**.

It seems that the water requirement per person for sanitation, bathing, cooking and consumption is approximately **50 litres per day**. But over one billion people have access to **less than 6 litres** per day.

A typical family in the US consumes **eight times more water** than a typical family in India that has access to sanitation and bathing facilities.

Water is the only substance that is found on earth in the form of solids, liquids and gases. Further, it's the **same water that gets recycled** through evaporation and rain. Perhaps the water you are drinking at this moment was drunk by a dinosaur millions of years ago!

Rajendra Singh of Alwar, Rajasthan, received the Ramon Magsaysay award in 2001 for his pioneering work in water management. He showed how old village wells could be recharged and the use of check dams to collect water. His organisation, Tarun Bharat Sangh, has helped many villages in Rajasthan improve their water problems.

Another person who has changed the lives of villagers who had always suffered from water problems is **Anna Hazare**, in Maharashtra. Thanks to his pioneering ideas, many people have increased groundwater levels in and around their villages.

The **conversion of waste water** into good water is an important innovation. Systems such as microfiltration and reverse osmosis are used for this, as also ultraviolet technologies and conventional water treatment processes.





CONTRIBUTORS

 **AMRUTA PATIL** is an author and artist. She grew up by the Arabian Sea in a family of swimming, sailing, scuba diving water babies. Nor surprisingly, water features prominently in her work — as does her other big love, mythology. Amruta’s first graphic novel (*Kari*, HarperCollins, 2008) has a sewer as its backdrop, while her next book has a river as one of its narrators. Amruta believes that it is water — in all its states and forms — that is the closest likeness to the lives, minds and histories of all people. She is currently based in New Delhi. To view Amruta’s writing and artwork: <http://amrutapatil.blogspot.com>

 **DEEPA BALSAVAR** is bringing up her daughter who she thinks is a dolphin or maybe a mermaid, on the shores of a badly polluted megalopolis, Mumbai. Through her daughter’s eyes she has been shown a connection to the vast universe and to all living and non-living things that make our planet so special. “We already know the need to protect water for drinking and sanitation and agriculture, but if we destroy our seas as we are destroying our land, where will all the dolphins and mermaids go?” she asks.

 The image of water as mighty and daunting yet the essence of life is an inalienable part of the Indian psyche, says **MARIAM KARIM-AHLAWAT**, who currently resides in New Delhi. For her, Al-Khizr is the ultimate prophet of the present day when the environment is threatened by climate change and global warming, by pollution, and the disappearance of pristine water bodies. She believes that different aspects of the significance of water in our lives ultimately convey the message of oneness with the world, of continuous exchange, and acceptance.

 “Being a city-girl, my connection with water has always been indirect and measured,” says **NIRUPAMA SEKHAR**. “This project has been a refreshing plunge into understanding water in a much deeper, truer sense. As designer and illustrator, it has been an exciting journey delving into ancient folktales, imagining sea-gods and talking frogs, and conjuring up oceans, rivers and rain to depict the glorious majesty of the world’s waters.” After five years of working in television and design in Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai, Nirupama is currently pursuing a Masters in Graphic Design at the London College of Communication, UK. *Water Stories* is the first book she has illustrated.

 Based in Chennai, **NIVEDITHA SUBRAMANIAM** is currently working as a creative writer for a children’s magazine. Fascinated by picture book art and drawn to storytelling, she says it was great fun working on a fantasy story on water. “This myth is both a charming creation story with an unexpected turn and at the same time a very real tale,” she says, “because the dragon’s pearl is symbolic of the transformative quality of water and its dual nature — it gives rain to the village but turns the boy into a dragon.”

 As a consultant in innovation, **RADHIKA CHADHA** was drawn to the story of finding water for its underlying message of hope: that we can look to both age-old wisdom and modern science for help in a crisis. She was also intrigued to find that the ideas in this myth from Africa resonated with those in the *Brihat Samhita*, an encyclopaedia written in India in the sixth century AD, by Varahamihira, famous astronomer and mathematician, which gives detailed instructions for locating underground water by using bio-indicators such as termites and trees.

 For years, **SANDHYA RAO** has sat on the beach near her home in Chennai watching the waves come and go, imagining whales swimming serenely in the Bay of Bengal and olive ridleys making their mysterious journeys. She has never been able to understand why anybody would want to test their strength against the sea’s unquestionable power, its constancy, and its beauty. Maybe that’s what drew her to the stories of Alexander, and the Spanish treasure fleets.

 **SOWMYA RAJENDRAN** works for a children’s magazine and enjoys reading and writing children’s literature more than anything else. She has a BA in English (Stella Maris, Chennai) and an MA in Gender Studies (University of Sussex, UK) and presently lives in Pune. “When I first heard the story of Koluscap,” she says, “it reminded me of the Plachimada struggle in Kerala, a case I’d followed closely. These stories — one mythical and the other real — question our tendency to play god by drawing lines across maps. I fleshed out the story by placing Ayasha, the anchor of the tale, as the voice for all similar big-little struggles that the world has seen across the ages. The struggles may never cease, but neither will its soldiers.”

 **SUNITI NAMJOSHI** is a poet and a fabulist (*Feminist Fables*, *The Blue Donkey Fables*, *Sycorax*) and also a children’s writer. Though she lives in England now, she grew up in western Maharashtra where the landscape is arid and dry. The dragon at the outset of the Aditi Adventures (a series of 12 books set in different countries published by Tulika) ranges over the countryside drinking up every drop of moisture it can find. Perhaps that is what attracted her to the Swallower of Clouds and Tiddalik, Suniti says: “gigantic figures who neither understand nor care that water is essential to life.”

 **ZAI WHITAKER** is a teacher and writer. Her books are mostly about our environment, and the need to protect it. She also writes about adivasi people like the Irulas of Tamilnadu and the Jarawa of the Andaman Islands. She enjoys reading and bird-watching. She has two sons, and both of them, she says, “are Crocodile Dundees, and work at the Madras Crocodile Bank. I live in Kodaikanal, a place where, not long ago, water was plentiful. Today, there is just as much rain as before, but there’s no forest to hold it in the ground. Public taps make a dry hissing sound and waterfalls are trickles rather than torrents. This story is duplicated all over the country. The River Goddess is definitely not happy with us. We need to listen to Selekana, and learn from her story.”

