



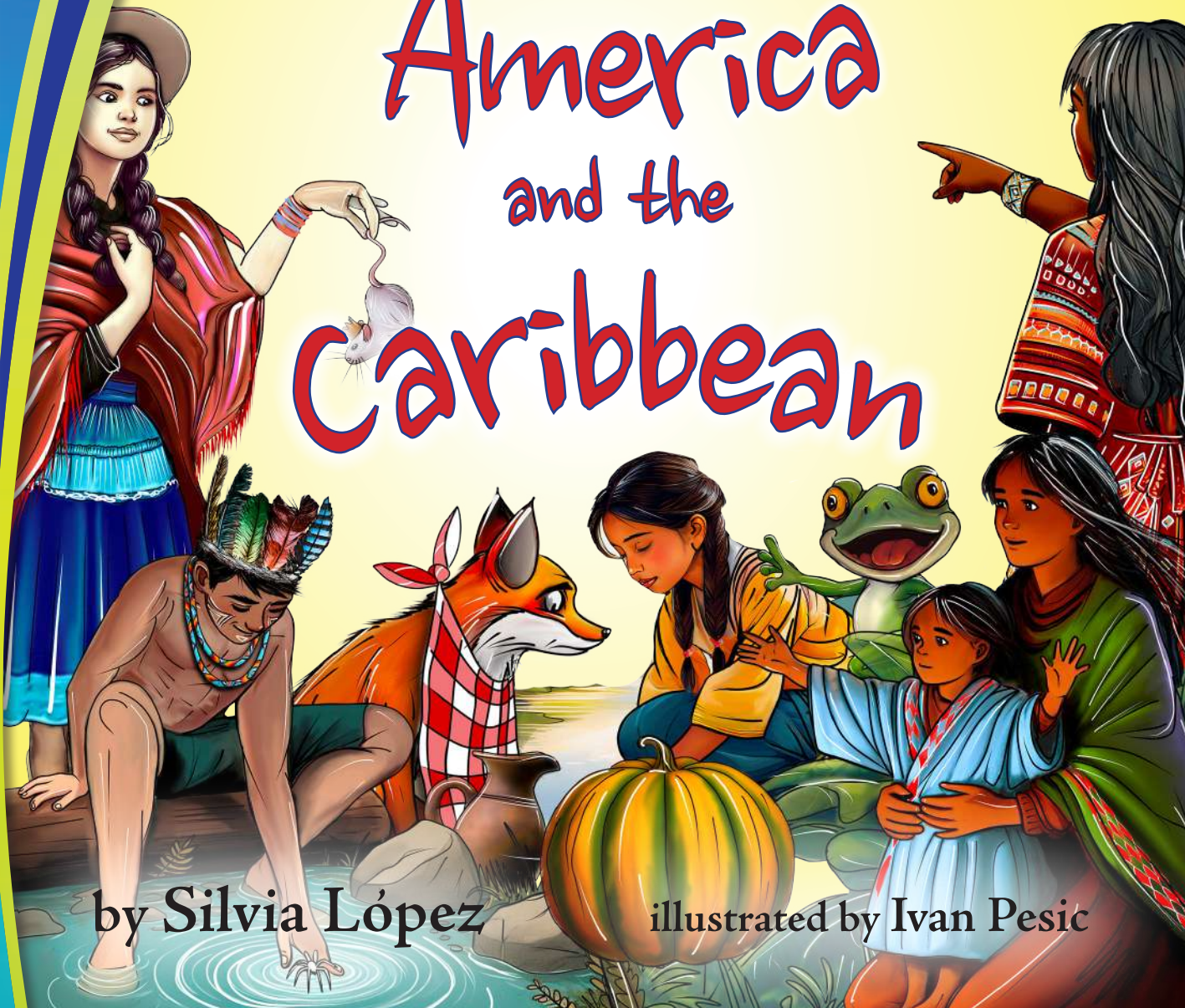
Core Knowledge®

Collection of Tales



FROM

Latin America and the Caribbean



by Silvia López

illustrated by Ivan Pesic

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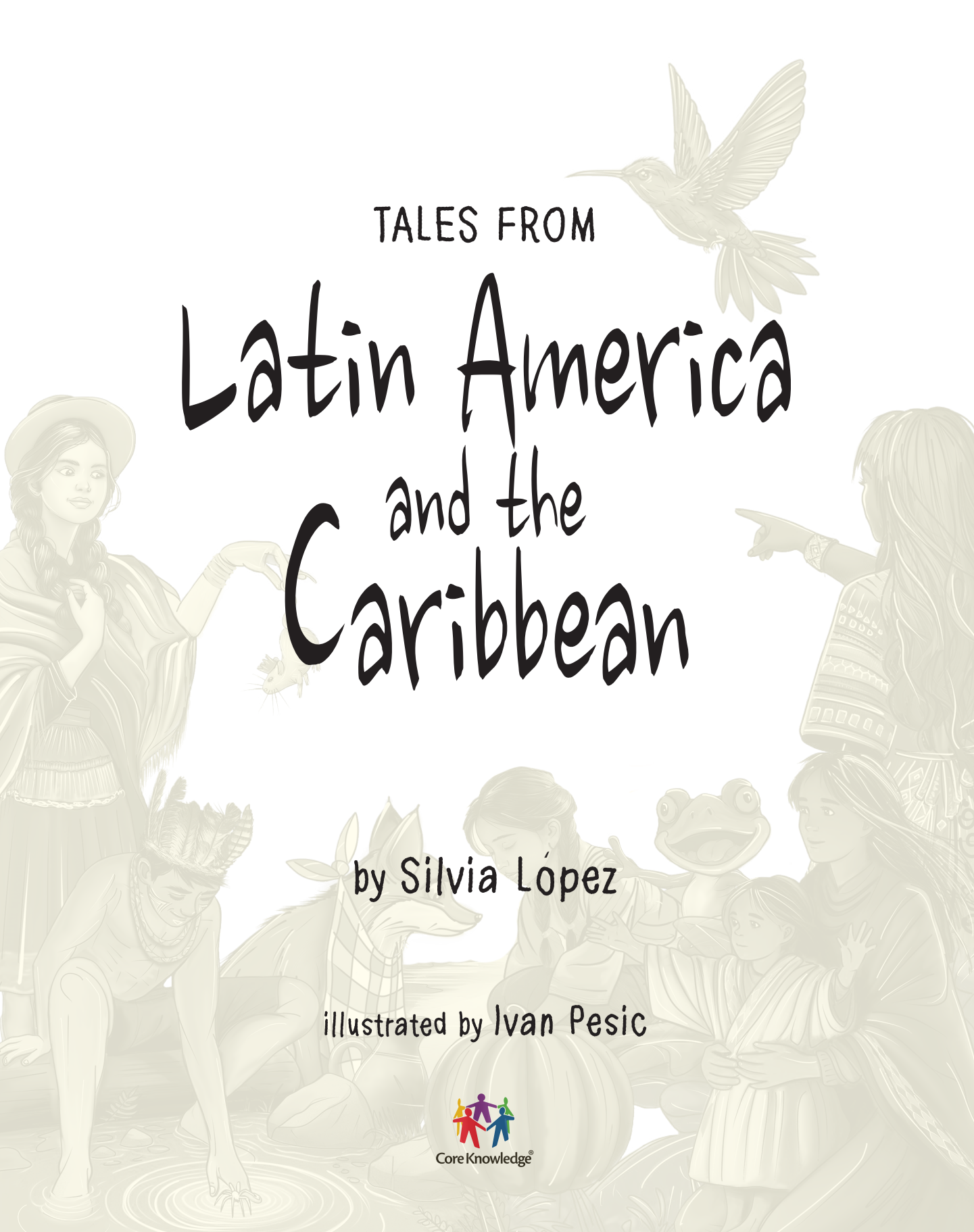
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Latin America and the Caribbean

by Silvia López

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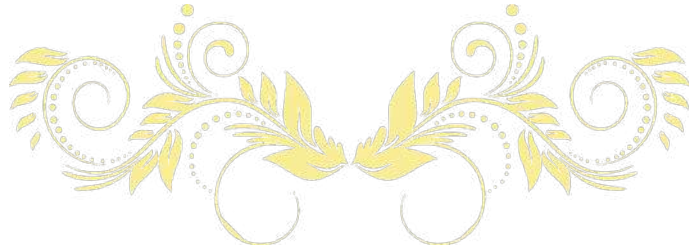
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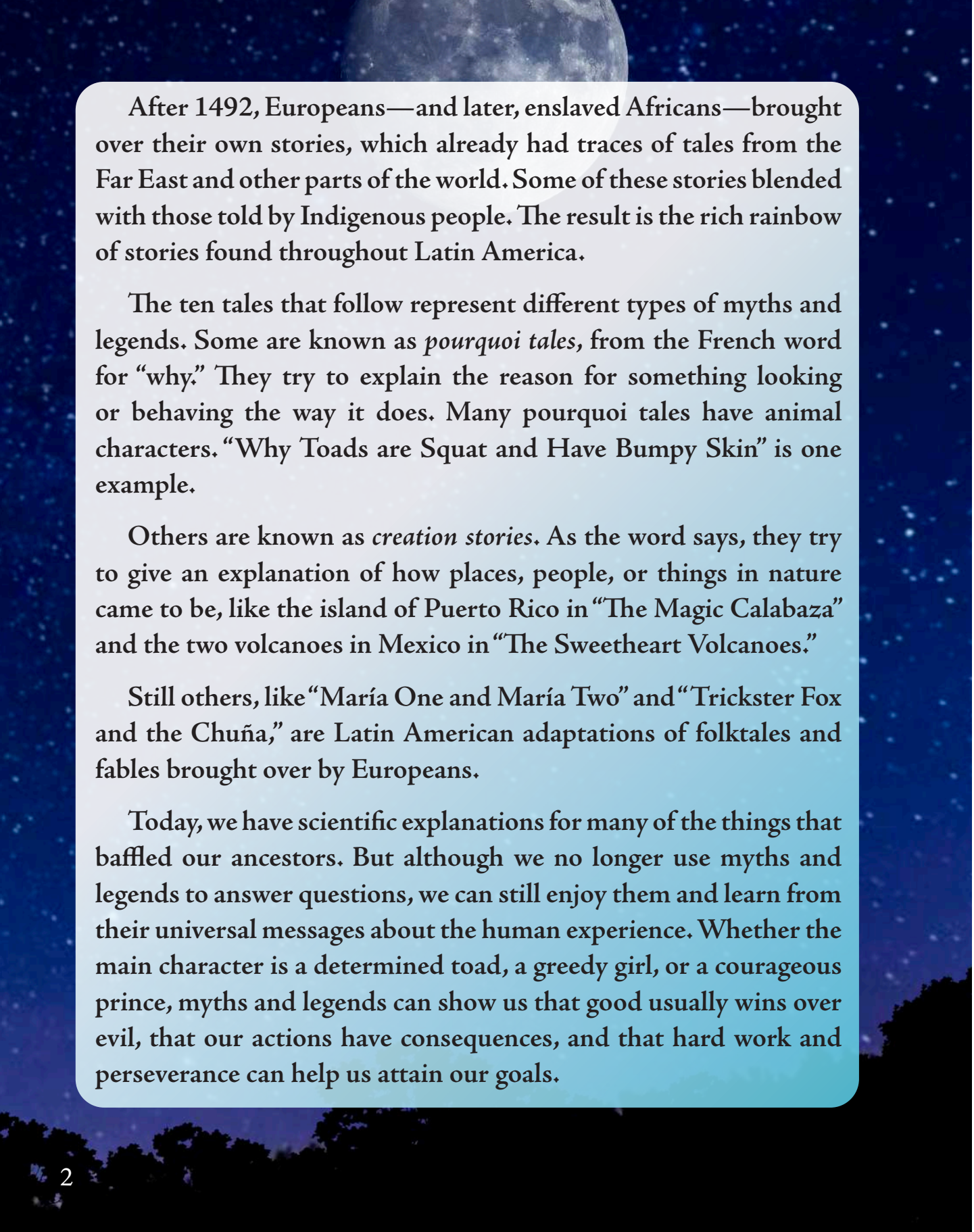


INTRODUCTION

One of the things that makes humans different from other animals is the use of imagination. Our early ancestors, who did not have the knowledge of science that we have today, used their imaginations to try to explain what they did not understand. Eventually, these explanations, sometimes containing magic and supernatural beings, became stories we call myths and legends.

Every culture and group of people in the world has its own set of myths and legends. This is true of the people living in the huge area of land we call Latin America. It includes South America, Central America, and some of the islands in the Caribbean Sea.

Thousands of years before the first ships carrying Europeans appeared on the horizon, these lands were already inhabited by Indigenous people. Over the centuries, the people formed groups who developed their own distinct languages, cultures, and sets of beliefs—and of course, their own myths and legends.



After 1492, Europeans—and later, enslaved Africans—brought over their own stories, which already had traces of tales from the Far East and other parts of the world. Some of these stories blended with those told by Indigenous people. The result is the rich rainbow of stories found throughout Latin America.

The ten tales that follow represent different types of myths and legends. Some are known as *pourquoi* tales, from the French word for “why.” They try to explain the reason for something looking or behaving the way it does. Many *pourquoi* tales have animal characters. “Why Toads are Squat and Have Bumpy Skin” is one example.

Others are known as *creation stories*. As the word says, they try to give an explanation of how places, people, or things in nature came to be, like the island of Puerto Rico in “The Magic Calabaza” and the two volcanoes in Mexico in “The Sweetheart Volcanoes.”

Still others, like “María One and María Two” and “Trickster Fox and the Chuña,” are Latin American adaptations of folktales and fables brought over by Europeans.

Today, we have scientific explanations for many of the things that baffled our ancestors. But although we no longer use myths and legends to answer questions, we can still enjoy them and learn from their universal messages about the human experience. Whether the main character is a determined toad, a greedy girl, or a courageous prince, myths and legends can show us that good usually wins over evil, that our actions have consequences, and that hard work and perseverance can help us attain our goals.

1

According to the famous scientist Charles Darwin, the most important of all human achievements were language and fire. The ability to cook food, and therefore kill bacteria, improved people's health. It also allowed them to eat foods that would be poisonous if eaten raw. Fire gave warmth and reduced the need for as many furs. This change meant that they could wear lighter clothing, enabling them to run faster after—and away from—animals. They could also sleep safely knowing many night predators feared the hot flames. Finally, sitting around open fires brought groups of early humans together to bond and use language to tell stories.

Legends about the origins of fire are found in practically every culture in the world. The Aztecs believed that when the gods decided to create a world with people in it, they first made the sun as a ball of fire. Other cultures tell the story of fire by using animals as characters. For example, there's a story about an opossum who loses the fur on his tail by using it to bring fire to the humans. In other stories, a spider, a rabbit, and a buzzard help humans obtain fire. And in one story, it is a brave young man who seizes the sun and holds it captive until it agrees to share fire with the world.

This story, the story of “Mallén [mah-yén] and the Gift of Fire” may have come from the oral tradition of the Mapuche [mah-pooh-cheh], Indigenous people who live in Chile and parts of Argentina. One of the languages spoken by the Mapuche is Mapudungun [mah-pooh-doon-goon].

In the story of “Mallén and the Gift of Fire,” the star moving across the sky with “long streaks of golden hair” may have been a comet. And since there are over one hundred volcanoes in Chile, the mountain that rumbled and sent down rocks could have been a volcano.

Mapudungun words found in this story:

Mahuida [mah-oo-ée-dah]: mountain

Antü [ahn-tóo]: sun

Michai [me-chá-ee]: spiny bush



MALLÉN AND THE GIFT OF FIRE

Long ago, the people didn't know what fire was. They had no way to cook food, hold off the night's chill, or keep wild animals at bay. Their only source of heat was from *Antü*, the sun, as it journeyed across the heavens. But as soon as it dipped below the horizon, whole families hurried into caves at the foot of a large *mahuida*. There, terrified of the darkness, they huddled together for warmth and safety.

The *mahuida* not only gave the people shelter, but it also provided them with food. Each year, before the weather turned cold, the women and children traveled up its slope to gather enough pine nuts, hazelnuts, fruits, and root vegetables to feed their families during the months ahead.

These outings were happy occasions. The women laughed and chatted, keeping an eye on the children running here and there. By the afternoon, everyone's woven baskets overflowed with precious winter supplies.

On the night before one of the outings, a woman named Mallén and her husband Caleu [cah-lew] looked out from the cave's entrance.

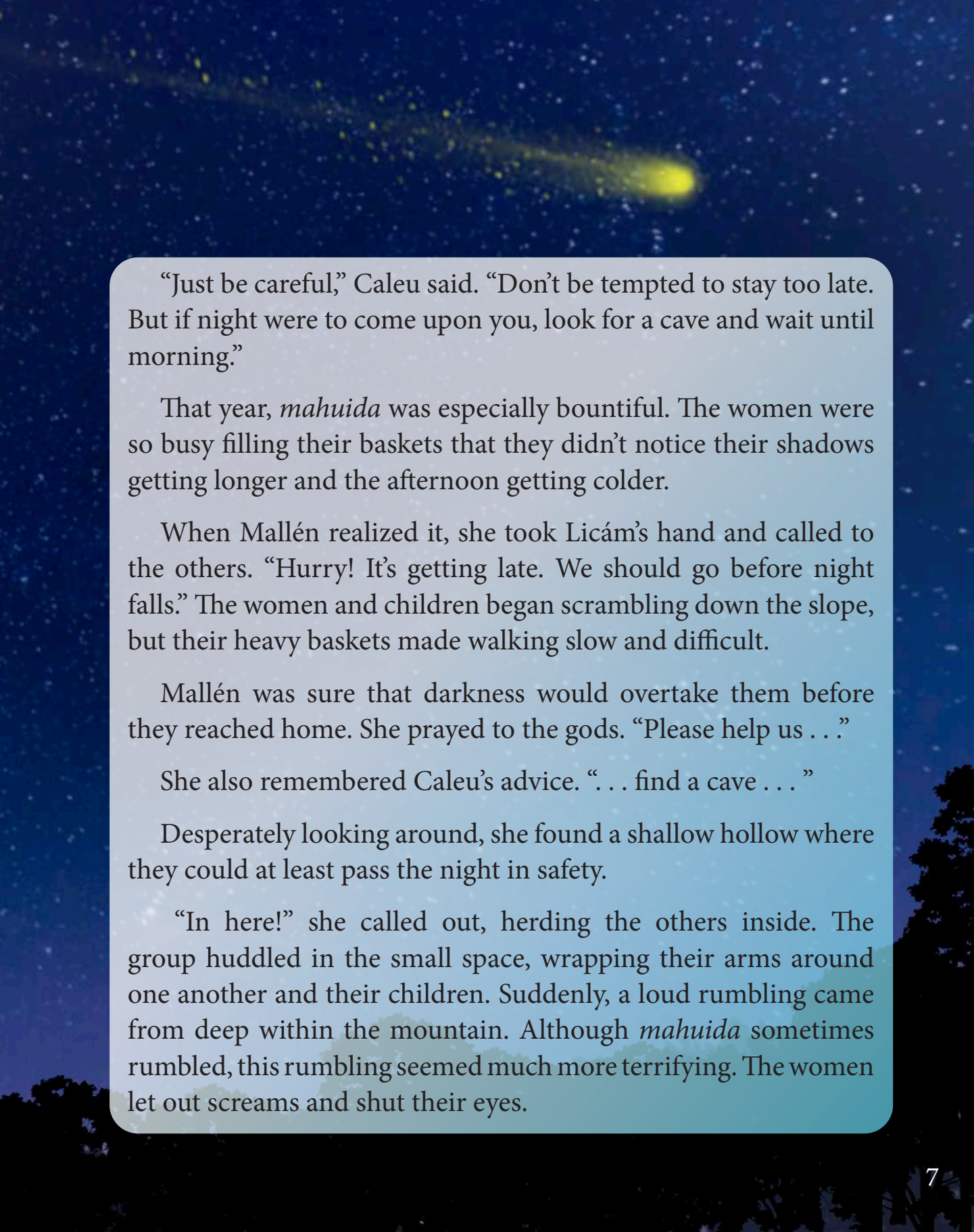
“Look!” Mallén said, pointing to a strange star that shone brighter than the others. She and Caleu alerted the rest of the people, who came to the entrance and peeked out. They noticed that the star seemed to be moving very slowly across the sky. Long streaks of light, like strands of golden hair, streamed behind it.

“What could it be?” Mallén asked Caleu.

“It might be a sign from the gods,” her husband answered. “Perhaps something bad is about to happen.”

“Or perhaps something good,” Mallén said. She took their little daughter Licám [lee-cám] in her arms and held her close. “I have faith in the gods. Tomorrow, when we climb *mahuida*, they may tell us.”





“Just be careful,” Caleu said. “Don’t be tempted to stay too late. But if night were to come upon you, look for a cave and wait until morning.”

That year, *mahuida* was especially bountiful. The women were so busy filling their baskets that they didn’t notice their shadows getting longer and the afternoon getting colder.

When Mallén realized it, she took Licám’s hand and called to the others. “Hurry! It’s getting late. We should go before night falls.” The women and children began scrambling down the slope, but their heavy baskets made walking slow and difficult.

Mallén was sure that darkness would overtake them before they reached home. She prayed to the gods. “Please help us . . .”

She also remembered Caleu’s advice. “. . . find a cave . . .”

Desperately looking around, she found a shallow hollow where they could at least pass the night in safety.

“In here!” she called out, herding the others inside. The group huddled in the small space, wrapping their arms around one another and their children. Suddenly, a loud rumbling came from deep within the mountain. Although *mahuida* sometimes rumbled, this rumbling seemed much more terrifying. The women let out screams and shut their eyes.



But Mallén was curious. Watching at the hollow's entrance, something caught her attention.

A shower of rocks and pebbles was raining down from the top of *mahuida*, giving off tiny sparks as they knocked against each other. When a few sparks fell on a nearby spiny bush—already dry and brown with the changing season—there was a hissing sound, then a crackling. To Mallén's amazement, the *micchai* suddenly burst into dozens of dancing lights!



As soon as the shower of rocks stopped, Mallén stepped out from her hiding place with Licám close behind. Cautiously, mother and daughter came close to the *michai* and put out their hands.

“Do you feel that, Licám?” she asked the little girl.

“Yes. My hands feel . . . warm,” Licám said. She looked up at the dark sky. “But *Antü* isn’t shining.”

“The warm feeling must come from the dancing lights!” Mallén said.

Rushing to the hollow’s entrance, the other women stared at the *michai* covered in dancing lights.

“Come out. It’s safe!” Mallén called out.

Then she heard Caleu’s anxious voice.

“Mallén! Licám!”

Braving the darkness, Caleu led the worried men up the slope.

“We’re here!” Mallén answered.

Once they were together, the families stood around the *michai*. They could see each other as clearly as if it were daytime, and the night didn’t feel so cold.

“What is this . . . this thing?” Caleu asked.

Mallén remembered how the rocks falling from the mountaintop had struck each other and created the magical dancing lights.

“It’s a gift from the star with the golden hair,” Mallén told him.

“She asked *mahuida* to give it to us.”

Turning to the others, she said, “Find branches and put them close to the *ichai*. Let the lights jump on your branches, then take them with you. If they go out, I will show you how to make new ones.”

Mallén taught the people how to strike rocks against each other to make sparks, as she had seen the rocks do when they had tumbled down *mahuida*. Holding them close to dry leaves and twigs, they could summon the precious light whenever they wanted. They used the light to cook food, to stay warm, and to keep dangerous animals at bay. They made homes where the light shone all night. When darkness came, they no longer huddled in caves.

The star and the *mahuida* had given the people the gift of fire.



One of the best-known stories in the world is that of Cinderella. One early version can even be traced back 2,000 years to ancient Egypt. Other versions of the tale about a girl who overcomes hardships and marries the man of her dreams can be found in practically every country in the world. In Latin America, the story is called “La Cenicienta” [seh-nee-syehn-tah], or “the girl covered in ashes.”

In Europe, “Cinderella” was made popular by the writer Charles Perrault in 1697 and—over one hundred years later—by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. When Spaniards and other Europeans colonized the Americas, they passed the tale along to Indigenous people. Each group made changes to the characters and the plot in ways that reflected their own culture.

Versions of “Cinderella,” from Argentina to Chile to Mexico, and even in the Caribbean, have blended the original tale with the culture of their own Indigenous people. This story, “María One and María Two,” takes elements from stories collected from places such as New Mexico and Colorado. Those, in turn, were retellings of a version from Spain.

Spanish words found in this story:

Hija [i-ha]: daughter

Churros [choo-ross]: sweet, doughnut-like pastries

Mejor no [meh-hor no]: better not

Sopa [so-pah]: soup

Estrella [ess-tréh-yah]: star

Cenizas [seh-knée-sass]: ashes

Mi amor [meé amor]: my love



MARÍA ONE AND MARÍA TWO —A CENICIENTA STORY

Long ago, María lived with her father, a well-to-do merchant who was also a widower.

Their neighbor, a widow named Doña Pascuala [pas-qua-la], also had a daughter named María. The town knew the girls as María One and María Two. But though they shared a first name, they couldn't have been more different.

María One was sweet and helpful. María Two was lazy and envious. She often sat at her window, glowering at her neighbor's nice home.

"*Mamá*," she whined to her mother. "That merchant has lots of money. Someday, his daughter will marry well. But who will want a girl whose mother doesn't have one *peso* to her name?"

"Leave it to me, *hija*," Doña Pascuala answered.

The widow bought a basketful of sugary *churros*. "When you see the girl, offer her these," she instructed María Two.

Seeing María One from the window, María Two ran out and, forcing a smile, handed her the *churros*.

"My mother made them for you and your father," she lied.

"Please thank her!" María One said.

One day, María Two told María One, “If your father married my mother, we could be sisters.”

María One loved the idea of having a stepsister and a stepmother who could bake such delicious treats, but when she told her father, he replied, “Better not—*mejor no*—my child. What today is sweet, tomorrow may be bitter.”

Still, María One kept asking him to marry the widow until, to make her happy, he finally gave in.

After they moved into the widowed merchant’s house, Doña Pascuala made no more *churros* and María Two complained about everything.

Realizing his mistake, the merchant decided to send the two away. But before he could do so, he received a message which forced him to go to the capital city for business. He explained this to María One. “I must go to the city for business reasons. Sadly, it will be three months before I can return.”

As soon as he left, Doña Pascuala told María One, “I’m the new mistress. Your father has spoiled you. From now on, you’ll have to earn your keep.”

She took María One’s nice clothes and handed her some ragged clothes. “These are good enough, since from now on you’ll sleep on the kitchen floor,” she said.

While Doña Pascuala and María Two spent the merchant’s money, María One cleaned, cooked, and washed. At night, she lay down by the hearth for warmth.



Despite these hardships, she remained good-natured. But María Two grew more jealous every day.

“*Mamá*,” she screamed, “we must get rid of her before her father returns!”

“Leave it to me, *hija*,” Doña Pascuala said.

The next morning, she handed María One a basket of muddy, matted wool and a tiny bar of soap.

“Wash this in the river, then untangle it. Not a speck of dirt or a single knot must remain! But . . .” she added with a malicious smile, “bring back the bar of soap twice the size it is now.”

“How . . . ?” María One cried.

Ignoring her question, Doña Pascuala then gave her half a jug of *sopa*. “You can have this *sopa*, but . . . the jug must come back full. Don’t return to the house until you do all these things!” And she slammed the door in María One’s face.

At the river, María One tried in vain to wash and untangle the wool only to see the soap get smaller and smaller. She was sure she would never be allowed to return to her father’s house. Believing she may never see her father again, she sat down and began to cry.

Suddenly, a frail old woman wearing clothes more ragged than her own appeared at her side.

“I’m hungry, child,” the woman said.

Without hesitating, María One offered her *la sopa*. “Have this, dear lady.”

The woman drank hungrily. “You will receive what you deserve,” she said, walking away.

María One looked at the basket. The wool lay untangled and clean, the soap bar was twice as big, and the jug of *sopa* overflowed.

Then, she felt a twinge above her eyes. Glancing at her reflection in the water, she saw that a small gold *estrella* had appeared on her forehead!

When María One returned to the house and told Doña Pascuala what had happened, María Two yelled, “I want an *estrella* too!”

“Sí, *hija*, go tomorrow. The old woman is obviously a magician,” Doña Pascuala said.

At the river, María Two didn't even try to wash the wool, but just sat and drank *la sopa*. It wasn't long before the ragged old woman appeared.

"I'm hungry, child," she said.

"Here, fill it yourself," María Two said, handing her the empty jug.

"You will receive what you deserve," the woman muttered, walking away.

María Two felt a twinge above her eyes. She glanced at her reflection on the water, hoping to see a star.

Instead, a donkey's tail was growing on her forehead!

When María Two returned home, Doña Pascuala tried to cut it off. But each time, the donkey's tail only grew back longer. Finally, she handed her daughter a silk scarf and María One a dirty rag. "Wear these so no one will see your foreheads," she told them.

Several days later, Doña Pascuala came home very excited.





“The governor is giving a ball at his palace. He wants his son, Elías [eh-lée-as], to meet a girl and get married. Hurry! Get ready!” she told María Two.

“Will I go too?” asked María One.

“YOU?” mother and daughter said together. “Your clothes are rags, and you’re covered in *cenizas* from the kitchen. You’d embarrass us.”

After dressing in their finest and wrapping the silk scarf tightly around María Two’s forehead, the two pranced out the door.

Alone with her thoughts, María One pondered, “I can’t go to the ball, but I could peek through a window. . . .” And so, she did.

Watching the dancing couples, María One thought Elías seemed bored. Suddenly, a gust of wind blew through the ballroom. Elías turned to the window just as the wind tore the rag off María One’s forehead. The gold *estrella*, sparkling in the bright lights, caught his attention. So did María One’s eyes, full of kindness and sweetness.

Elías knew right away this was the girl he wished to marry.

“Bring her inside!” he ordered the guards. But María One, afraid of Doña Pascuala’s anger, had run home.

The next day, Elías went from house to house, but no one had seen a girl with a golden *estrella* on her forehead.

At Doña Pascuala’s house, María Two came out wearing the silk scarf.

“My daughter is that girl. However, she’s forbidden to show the *estrella* until she’s married,” lied Doña Pascuala.

Elías looked closely at María Two. Her eyes didn't show the kindness he'd seen in those of the girl in the window.

"This is not she, madam," he said. "Is there anyone else here?"

"No, only the maid. It wouldn't be her," Doña Pascuala said.

Disappointed, Elías turned away. Just then, a gust of wind blew through the house. Remembering the wind at the ball, he turned around and saw María One at the kitchen door. The wind had once again blown the rag off her forehead, and the gold *estrella* shone in the afternoon light.

Elías approached María One and looked into her eyes. He recognized the sweetness and kindness he'd seen the night before.

"It's you, the girl at the window!" he exclaimed. "Will you marry me?"

"B-but . . ." spluttered Doña Pascuala and María Two.

Ignoring them, María One was about to say "yes" when her father, back from his trip, walked through the door.

"*Mi amor*, what is going on?" he asked, embracing his daughter.

"*Oh, Papá!*" María One cried. She told him all that had happened since he'd left. The angry merchant ordered Doña Pascuala and María Two out of his house. Elías, even more angered, told them to leave town and never return.

The whole town rejoiced when, after a little planning and much excitement, Elías and María—no need to call her María One anymore—were married.

And Doña Pascuala and María Two? They were never seen or heard from again.

3



Stories about toads are told in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. It is possible the story was originally told by the Guaraní [gwa-rah-neé] people who live in parts of all three of these countries. But Toad's tale seems to have spread further and is even found in books published on the island of Cuba, in the Caribbean.

There are many versions of Toad's story. Some stories explain why toads have bumpy skin or splotchy marks, or why they are squatter than frogs. Some stories explain all of this.

Toad is always the main character, but the kinds of birds in the story often change depending on the version. In this version, it is a crow that takes Toad up to the clouds in the sky. But in others, the birds involved are a hawk, an eagle, a *caracara*, and even a woodpecker. Although Toad is usually transported in a guitar carried by a bird, in one version from Brazil, a buzzard carries him up inside a violin!

Indigenous words found in this story:

Maracuyá [mah-rah-coo-yáh]: a smooth-skinned fruit that grows in many parts of South America and Central America; in English it is called “passion fruit”

Marimba [mah-réem-bah]: a musical instrument very similar to a xylophone

Quena [kéh-nah]: a type of flute, traditionally made of wood

Jabiru [yáh-bee-roo]: a large bird of the stork family, found in many parts of the Americas and sometimes in the southern United States; in Guaraní, the name means “swollen-neck”

Caracara [cah-rah-cáh-rah]: a large, long-legged bird related to falcons



WHY TOADS ARE SQUAT AND HAVE BUMPY SKIN

One morning long ago, Toad woke up in the forest to a loud chorus of warbling, chirping, and trilling. He shook off the damp leaf litter that was his home and saw birds perched on trees as far as the eye could see.

“What is happening?” Toad called out to Crow.

Crow stopped grooming his glossy black feathers long enough to answer.

“We are preparing for tomorrow’s party at the gods’ palace in the clouds. They wish to celebrate our beauty and talent.”

Toad felt a little jealous.

“Humph! Toads are just as beautiful and talented as birds,” he thought. “I have a lovely round body and my skin is smoother than a *maracuyá* fruit. Plus everyone knows I’m also an excellent dancer.”

“I’ll admit many birds sing well,” Toad told Crow. “But your ‘Caaaw, caaaw’ and the hawk’s scream and the peacock’s screech are not pleasant, so what will you do at the party?”

Crow pointed a wing to a guitar propped at the base of a tree. “Some of us are gifted musicians. I myself create lovely melodies on that instrument, while others excel at the *marimba* or the *quena* flute.” He gazed dreamily at the white puffs that dotted the sky. “I can’t wait to fly up there. . . .”



Toad realized only birds were going to the party because they could fly! Without feathers or wings, he'd never get to visit the gods' palace.

Unless . . .

After Crow went back to his preening, Toad hopped to the guitar, dove into the sound hole, and fell asleep. The next morning, he woke to much jostling. Crow had taken to the skies!

"This instrument feels heavier than usual . . ." Toad heard Crow grumble. "But I can't stop or I'll be late for the celebration."

And what a celebration it was!

From his hiding place, Toad watched a condor, a *jabiru*, and a *crested caracara* strutting by, each trying to impress the other. He marveled at a toucan with a colorful bill and at a hummingbird whose feathers glistened like jewels in the sunlight.

Suddenly, the gods appeared! A great cry arose as every bird lifted its voice in praise, thankful for the gift of flight.



Knowing he would soon be found out when Crow began to play, Toad jumped from the guitar and threw himself at the gods' feet.

"Have mercy," he cried. "I only wanted to see what it was like above the clouds. . . ."

"How did you get here?" one god asked in a voice like a thunderclap.

After Toad related his adventure in Crow's guitar, to his amazement, the gods smiled!



"Ah, you are not only daring, but clever," another said. "But now that you *are* here, what will you do?"

Toad thought fast.

"I'm a good dancer . . ."

"Fine," said the gods, waving to the birds holding instruments. "Let's have music!"

While the musicians played, Toad jumped, pirouetted, and showed off fancy steps, for he was indeed very talented.

The birds clapped and cheered, and even the gods seemed delighted.

Only Crow looked less than happy.

“Toad made me look foolish,” he thought, vowing revenge.

“Jump into my guitar, Toad, so I can fly you home,” Crow said when the party was over.

Toad, who felt tired, was thankful. “I’m glad you don’t bear a grudge, friend.”

“We’ll see . . .” the bird muttered under his breath.

“Comfortable?” Crow asked Toad on the way down.

“Yes, flying is wonderful,” Toad replied.

“In that case, get ready for some real flying . . .” Crow said, tipping the guitar over. Toad slipped through the hole and, legs flailing, hurtled head over heels toward the hard ground below.

“Goodbye, world!” he cried, just before he smashed into a pile of rocks.

Dazed but alive, Toad stood up and examined his body. The fall on the rocks had left him a little beaten up. He was a little flatter than before, and his skin was covered in bumps.

“I look awful!” he cried.

“What happened?” asked several other toads who had rushed to the scene.

When Toad recounted the story, he was surprised to hear a murmur of approval.



“You’re a hero!” one toad said.

“No other toad has ever flown before!” said another.

“And actually, you don’t look half-bad . . .” said a third.

Since then, in honor of Toad, who not only outwitted a bird but danced for the gods, all toads are a little squatter and are proud to show off the bumps on their skin.

4

The story of “Trickster Fox and the Chuña” [choon-yah] is a Quechua [keh-choo-ah] version of one of Aesop’s fables, “The Fox and the Stork.” It’s found in a book of folktales that includes stories collected from the Indigenous Quechua people living in parts of Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, and Peru. The Quechua are often considered descendants of the Inca.

Although a lot has been written about Aesop, very little about his life is actually proven fact. It is believed that he was born into slavery in Greece around the year 620 BCE and was a great storyteller. Many of his stories, such as “The Tortoise and the Hare” and “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” are still told today. Each of Aesop’s stories, called fables, was meant to teach a lesson. This lesson is called a moral, and it is written at the end of the story in one or two lines.

Quechua words found in this story:

Chuña [choon-yah]: a type of stork

Comadre [coh-mah-dray]: a friendly term for a female neighbor or acquaintance

Compadre [kom-pa-dre]: a friend or companion (male)

Tulpo [tool-poh]: a soup made from corn with onions, tomatoes, and green peppers

Charqui [char-key]: dried salted meat, a kind of beef jerky

Yuro [yoo-row]: a clay bottle for carrying liquids



TRICKSTER FOX AND THE CHUÑA

Long ago, the animals in the forest lived in peace and harmony. Although Fox was friendly enough, the other animals knew him as a trickster because he liked nothing better than playing practical jokes.

One morning, while Fox was on his daily walk, he ran into Chuña.

“Good day, *comadre*,” he said to the long-legged bird. “Where are you going on this fine morning, my friend?”

“Nowhere in particular, *compadre*. Just enjoying the lovely weather. Why do you ask?” Chuña answered.

“Because it’s been a long time since you had dinner at my house,” Fox told her. “Why don’t you come over tomorrow? I will prepare a fine *tulpo* for both of us.”

Chuña looked warily at Fox. Could he have something up his sleeve? Ah, but she did love a good *tulpo*! Her mouth watered at the thought of onions, green peppers, and tomatoes swirling around in the delicious corn soup.

When Fox saw that Chuña was interested, he added, “It’s my mother’s own recipe, the best for miles around.”

“Fine, I accept. I will come to your house tomorrow,” she said.

The next evening, Chuña turned up at Fox's door. A wonderful aroma wafted through the window, and a very cheerful Fox greeted her as soon as she walked inside.

"Please, have a seat, *comadre*," said Fox. With a flourish, he placed a napkin around Chuña's neck. "This way you will not soil your feathers."

Going to the kitchen, he returned with two very shallow bowls of soup. He placed one in front of Chuña and, tying a napkin around his own neck, began lapping up *tulpo* from his own bowl.

Chuña tried to sip the soup, but the bowl was so shallow that whenever she dipped her pointy beak in the liquid, she could not even take half a mouthful. In the meantime, Fox licked his own bowl clean.

"What's wrong? Aren't you hungry, *comadre*?" Fox asked. "Oh, well, no sense letting good food go to waste!" And he reached for his guest's *tulpo* and drank up all the soup.



Realizing she had been tricked, Chuña wiped the tip of her beak with the napkin and went to the door. But then, she heard Fox snickering behind her.

“No! I will not leave it like this!” she thought angrily. “It’s time that trickster learned a lesson.”

Turning back, she said in her sweetest voice, “Wait, Fox, I owe you a meal. Come to my house tomorrow for more *tulpo*. I, too, follow my own mother’s recipe. And I make my *tulpo* with *charqui*,” she added.

Fox licked his lips. The salty meat made *tulpo* even tastier!



For a moment, he wondered if Chuña would try to trick him back. No, he didn't think she was clever enough. And the thought of *tulpo* made with *charqui* was so tempting. . . .

"Yes, thank you! I'll be there," he said.

The next day, a very lively Fox knocked on Chuña's door. A wonderful aroma wafted through the window, and a very cheerful Chuña greeted him as soon as he walked inside.

"Have a seat, *compadre*," said Chuña, wrapping a napkin around Fox's neck. "This way you will not soil your lovely fur."

Chuña went into the kitchen and came back carrying two *yuros*. The clay bottles, decorated with paintings of flowers and trees, had long, narrow necks.



“Umm-umm, you can just smell the pieces of *charqui* floating inside,” she said, placing one bottle under Fox’s snout. “Go ahead. Drink the *tulpo* before it gets cold!”

Chuña stuck her long, skinny beak in her own bottle and began sipping the *tulpo*. Every once in a while, she brought out a tiny piece of *charqui*, which she then delicately swallowed.

Meanwhile, Fox tried to put his tongue into the *yuro*, but could do little more than lick a few drops off the edge. Try as he might, he could not get any of the soup inside.



“What’s wrong?” Chuña said. “Didn’t you like it, *compadre*? Or are you just not hungry? Oh, well, no sense letting good food go to waste!” And she stuck her beak in Fox’s *yuro* and finished off his *tulpo*.

Realizing he had been tricked, Fox got up, wiped his snout with his napkin, and went to the door with his head hanging down. He could hear Chuña laughing behind him as he walked away.

And she was not alone.

Pretty soon, the story of how Chuña had turned the tables on Fox made its way around the forest. Knowing that the other animals were laughing behind his back, it was a long time before Fox tried to play any more practical jokes.

Moral of the story: a trickster cannot complain when he, in turn, gets tricked.

5



When Europeans settled in the Americas, they brought with them many of the stories and tales they knew and loved. In the New World, some of these were blended with myths told by Indigenous people. The characters and parts of the plot were changed, but the message stayed pretty much the same.

The story of “Achaku [ah-chá-koo] the Mouse King,” about a mouse who grants wishes to a greedy girl, is told in Bolivia. It is a version of “The Fisherman and His Wife,” one of the stories published in the 1800s by two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The brothers collected tales that had been handed down from generation to generation, some through writing and some only through spoken words. Some of these, like “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Rapunzel,” and “Sleeping Beauty,” are known all over the world.

Bolivia has the highest percentage of Indigenous people in all of South America. One of the largest groups—the Aymara [ae-máh-rah]—still speak their language.

According to sources, this story is told in other places too, including New Mexico. But only in Bolivia and Cuba is the wish-granting character a mouse.

Aymara words found in this story:

Imilla [ee-mée-yah]: girl

Locoto [low-cóh-toe]: a flavorful red pepper from Peru and Bolivia commonly used in Bolivian cuisine

Achaku [ah-chá-koo]: mouse or rat



ACHAKU THE MOUSE KING

Long ago, a poor family of farmers lived in a tiny, broken-down hut. The family's farm produced barely enough to keep them and their daughter fed, so when a neighboring young farmer asked for the *imilla*'s hand in marriage, the parents hoped their fortunes would change.

"He is a nice, hardworking man," they advised their daughter. "If you become his wife, you will at least live better than you do now."

The *imilla* was very conceited. "Ugh! He's not good-looking enough," she said and stomped out to pick *locoto* peppers for supper.

Her basket full, she was about to leave when she noticed something curious. At the base of a shrub slept the plumpest white mouse she had ever seen. A tiny crown made of pure gold was perched on this *achaku*'s head.

The *imilla* pounced on the sleeping creature and dangled it by its tail.

"Give me that crown so I can sell it," she said.

"I can't," the *achaku* said. "I am the king of all mice. If you take off my magic crown, I will die." Then it pleaded, "Let me go and I will give you anything you wish for."



“Hmmm . . . it might be worth the chance,” thought the *imilla*.

“Fine,” she said. “Change my family’s hut into a large, beautiful farm.”

“Are you sure that’s your wish?” asked the *achaku*.

“Yes!” answered the *imilla*. “And if you’re lying, I’ll come back for the crown.”

“Done,” the *achaku* said.

The *imilla* hurried home and found her parents wearing nice clothes and standing at the door of a comfortable-looking house. Inside, a cook went to and from the kitchen with plates of food, while outside, busy workers took care of different crops.

Just then, the young neighbor rode up.

“Go away,” the *imilla* told him rudely. “I don’t need you. My farm is bigger than yours.”

For a while, all was fine.

But one day, the *imilla* decided she wanted something more impressive. Once again, she found the *achaku* asleep among some shrubs.

“I’m tired of farming. I want to live in a castle,” she told him.

“Are you sure that’s your wish?” he sighed.

“Yes! Or I will take the crown!”

“No, no! Done,” said the *achaku*.

When she got home, the *imilla* found her parents wearing fancy clothes and standing at the door of a fine-looking castle. Delicious smells came from the kitchen. Outside, some workers cared for several horses while others busily tended a large field.

For a while, all was fine. The family held many parties, and one evening, a young nobleman asked the *imilla* to marry him.

“My castle is as nice as this one, and almost as nice as the king’s palace,” the nobleman said.

This gave the *imilla* an idea.

“I don’t need to marry you,” she said. “Go away.”

The next morning, she went in search of the *achaku*.

“I want my castle to be a palace,” she said.

The *achaku* frowned, tired of this silly, pushy person.

“Are you sure that’s your wish?”

“Yes! Or else you know what will happen!”

“Then, done,” the *achaku* muttered.

The *imilla* ran home and found her parents wearing clothes woven with threads of gold at the gates of a splendid palace. Inside, the table was set for a feast. Outside, keepers trained magnificent horses while peasants worked fields that extended to the horizon.

For a while, all was well. The family held extravagant balls, and one day the king himself showed up. That evening, he asked the *imilla* to marry him.

“Hmmm,” she thought. “If I agree, I would only be queen. The king would always be more powerful than me.”

She ran back to the *achaku*.

“I want to be ruler of the world. I want to control every emperor and king and nobleman so that they’ll do exactly what I say,” she yelled.

The *achaku* shook his head sadly.

“Well, my child, that is something I cannot give you. Remember, I am also a king. It is forbidden to do magic against oneself. Besides, you are too greedy for your own good.” And in a puff of wind, the *achaku* vanished.

The *imilla* looked down at her clothes. To her horror, she had on the same ragged dress she was wearing when she’d first found the *achaku*. She ran home only to find her parents, also dressed in rags, standing at the door of their miserable little hut.

Everything else had vanished.



6

The story of “Pikí [peeh-keé] and the White Spider” is a legend of the Guaraní [gwa-rah-neé], an Indigenous people whose descendants live in parts of Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia. The Guaraní language is still spoken in many areas. Along with Spanish, it is the second official language of Paraguay. Guaraní words, like *jaguar*, *tapir*, and *piranha*, have even made their way into English!

The people of Paraguay have a special place in their hearts for the story of the little white spider. The women weave a beautiful type of lace called *ñandutí* [gnan-doo-tée], the Guaraní word for spider web. *Ñandutí* lace is famous throughout the world. The industry is so important that every year, on the second Sunday of October, Paraguayans celebrate National *Ñandutí* Day.

As often happens, there are several versions of the story. In one, Pikí meets a princess named Samimbi [sah-meém-bee] as she rides a canoe down a river. In another, two young men named *Ñandú Guasú* [gnan-doó gwa-soó] and *Yasý Ñemoñaré* [yah-seé gne-moh-gna-réh] fight for the hand of a beautiful maiden. And in a third, the spider web falls apart, and the hero’s mother weaves the lace using strands of her own gray hair. Some stories have also been made into plays.

Guaraní words found in this story:

Ogá [oh-gáh]: house

Tupá [too-páh]: god of goodness

Kuñataí [coo-gna-tah-ée]: maiden

Che r'ay [cheh-reh-ai]: my son

Che sy [cheh-see]: my mother



PIKÍ AND THE WHITE SPIDER

Long ago, near the edge of a dense forest, there lived a young man named Pikí and his widowed mother. They had few luxuries, but Pikí made sure there was always food in their little *ogá* for both of them. His mother, who loved him dearly, prayed that someday *Tupá*, the god of goodness, would reward her gentle, hard-working son.

Every morning, Pikí carried clay jars into the forest to fill from a spring. One day, he noticed a tiny white spider struggling in the water.

“Get on my finger,” he said, putting out his hand. Quickly, the tiny creature climbed on, and after giving Pikí a grateful look, scurried off among the leaves. From then on, the spider always waited in the forest for Pikí, ready to climb onto his hand.

One day, Pikí was collecting berries when he spied a maiden gathering flowers.

“Who are you?” he asked the lovely *kuñataí*. “I haven’t seen you before.”

“I am Tukira [too-keé-rah], daughter of the chieftain Itá Kurá [eetáh coo-ráh]. My mother died when I was born. After that, I was sent far away to be raised by my aunt. I’ve just returned to my father’s house,” she said. “And who are you?”

Pikí told Tukira about his mother, their *ogá*, and even about the white spider. Tukira told Pikí about her life in another village.

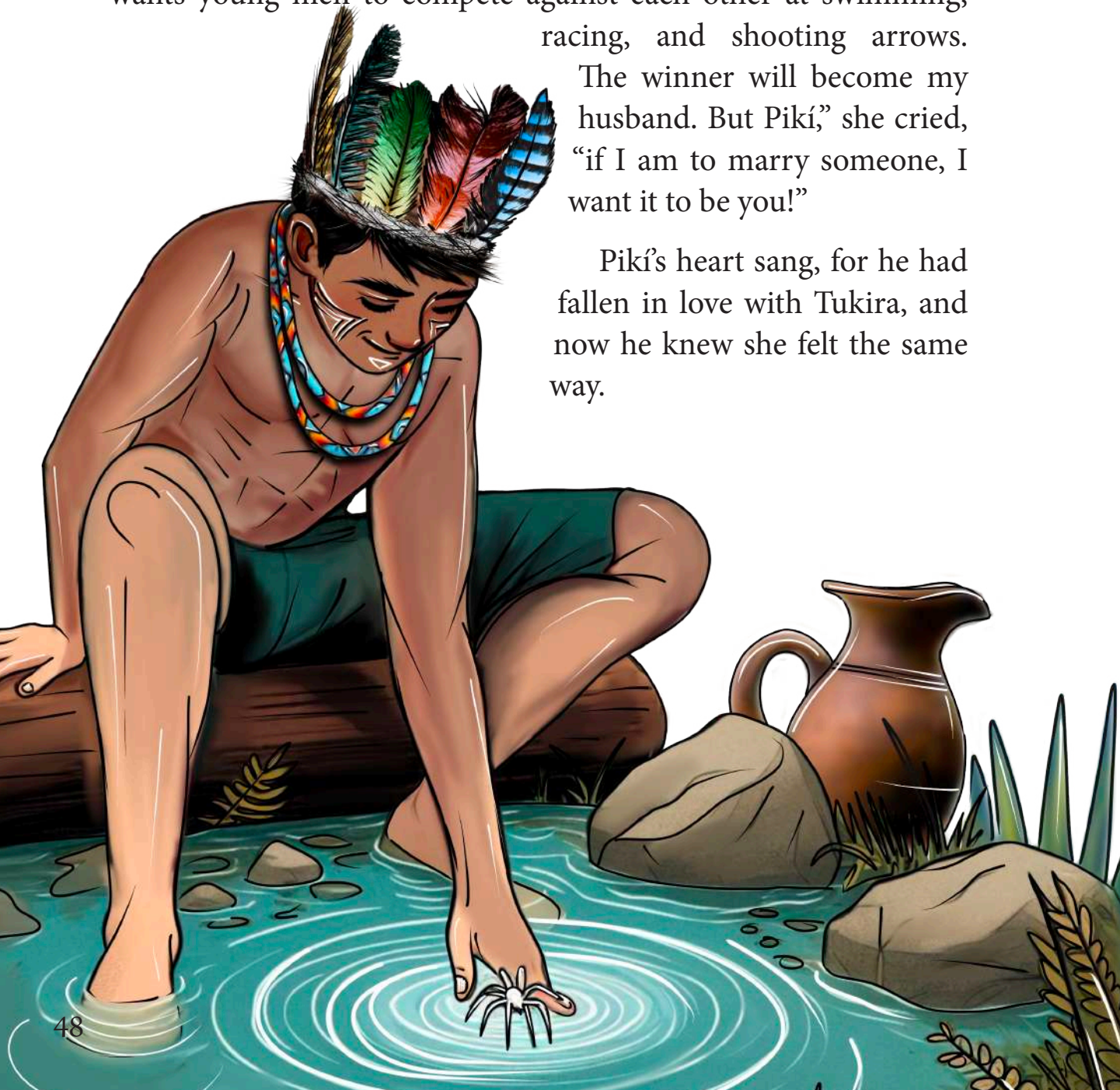
The two soon became friends and began meeting in the forest to talk and laugh together.

One day, Tukira looked sad. “What is wrong?” Piki asked.

“Father says I am old enough to marry,” Tukira answered. “He wants young men to compete against each other at swimming, racing, and shooting arrows.

The winner will become my husband. But Piki,” she cried, “if I am to marry someone, I want it to be you!”

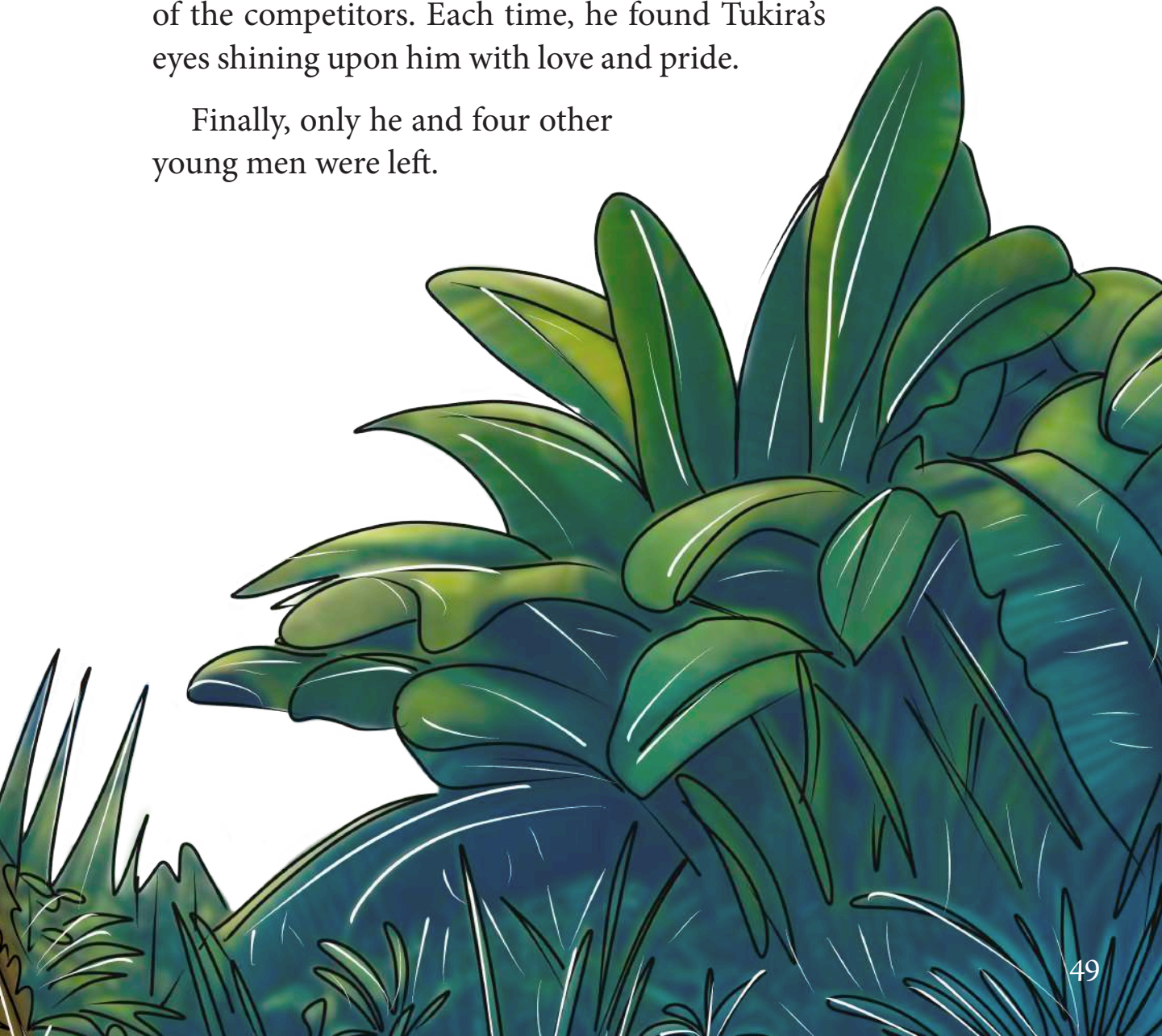
Piki’s heart sang, for he had fallen in love with Tukira, and now he knew she felt the same way.



That evening, Píkí told his mother about Tukira. “*Che r’ay*, my son,” his mother said. “You are strong, and skilled, and as deserving of this girl as anybody else. You should compete for Tukira’s hand in marriage.”

Following her advice, Píkí presented himself in the village, ready to take part in the contests. His mother had been right. He was as strong and skilled as the others and soon beat most of the competitors. Each time, he found Tukira’s eyes shining upon him with love and pride.

Finally, only he and four other young men were left.



“The five of you have done equally well,” Itá Kurá said. “But there is one more test you must fulfill. In two days, whoever brings Tukira a gift as exquisite, unique, and beautiful as she is will be the one she marries.”

Pikí went home in despair.

“Oh, *che sy*,” he said to his mother. “We are poor. I have nothing to give.”

“Don’t worry, Pikí. Pray to *Tupá*. I am sure that he will fulfill your wish.”

As always, the next morning when Pikí went to fetch water, the white spider waited at the spring. But this time, to his amazement, the tiny creature spoke.

“*Tupá* knows you saved my life and asked me to help you. Tomorrow, I will give you a gift for Tukira that your rivals will not match.”

Early the next day, the white spider showed Pikí a package wrapped in a large leaf.

“This is your gift. Open it only in front of Tukira,” said the spider.

Thanking the little animal, Pikí made his way to the village where he saw that the other contenders had brought Tukira wonderful gifts.

One offered a gold ornament studded with precious stones. Another, a large cape adorned with colorful feathers. There was an intricately carved vase brimming with rare flowers and a silver

cage in which a lovely bird sang a sweet, but sad, song. The people of the village gathered, everyone marveling at such gifts.

But Píki trusted in *Tupá* and the white spider, for he knew that his gift must be magical. When his turn came, he stepped before Tukira and opened the leaf. Inside, he saw something that looked like a square of white lace. As he placed it gently on her head, the square became a veil that kept spreading and unfolding until it fell over Tukira's shoulders and down to her feet.



The people gasped!

The lace, as fine as any *ñandutí* woven by spiders, had designs of guava and lapacho flowers, orchids, jacaranda blossoms, and *Passiflora*. No one had ever seen anything so beautiful.

Itá Kurá placed his daughter's hand in Píki's. "This is the most priceless gift of all, as unique and delicate as Tukira's beauty and as beautiful as her heart. I know you have already won that heart. It must be the wish of the gods."

The very next day, Tukira wore the wonderful veil to marry Píki. Afterward, Píki went back to the spring to thank the white spider, but she was gone. His mother did go often, though, and thanked *Tupá* for the gift the little creature had given her son.

When Itá Kurá passed away, the people, who already loved Píki for his wisdom and kindness, made him their new chieftain. He and Tukira ruled their tribe together and lived a long, happy life.



“The Legend of Night” comes from a story told in the Amazon area of Brazil. The Amazon biome stretches across a large section of Brazil but also takes up parts of Peru, Ecuador, and other countries in South America. Most of the Amazon is made up of a tropical rainforest and is inhabited by many different tribes of people. Some of these people spoke a language called Tupi [too-pee], which is not used so much anymore.

As in so many legends, there are variations to the story. In the one you are about to read, the Great Serpent is a man. In another, the Great Serpent is a woman called Great Cobra. In that version the servants travel by canoe to her kingdom, where she gives them night inside a nut of the tucuma palm. When they disobey her, the servants are punished by being turned into monkeys!

In another version, told by the Kaxinawá [kah-shi-na-wáh] tribes of Brazil and Peru, the people borrow night from a *tatu* [tah-too], a type of armadillo, but never return it. Since then, the armadillo sleeps all day in its dark shell until the sun sets, forever hoping that what was stolen will be returned.

The story of night can also be found in other places in the world. In the Dominican Republic, the sun becomes furious when he cannot enter a dark cave on the side of a mountain inhabited by a beautiful woman with flowing black hair. When she comes out from the cave, her hair covers the sun and creates darkness. The woman and the sun come to a compromise. She can spread out her hair, but only for twelve hours—the hours of night.

Tupi words found in this story:

Abá [ah-báh]: man

Kunha [cooh-nah]: woman

Abápe endé? [ah-báh-peh endéh]: who are you?



THE LEGEND OF NIGHT

Long ago, the world had no night.

There were no animals that sleep all day or hunt when it is dark. There were no flowers with petals that open and give off scent only when the sky is black. The people had never seen starlight or moonbeams. They hid in their huts and shut their eyes tight in order to sleep, for the sun shone all the time.

Only the Great Serpent, ruler of the rivers that crossed the jungle, knew where night was. He kept it in a sack deep below the surface of the water.

One day, the Great Serpent's daughter, curious about what lay above her world, rose to the surface. Seeing a handsome young *abá*, she came close to shore.

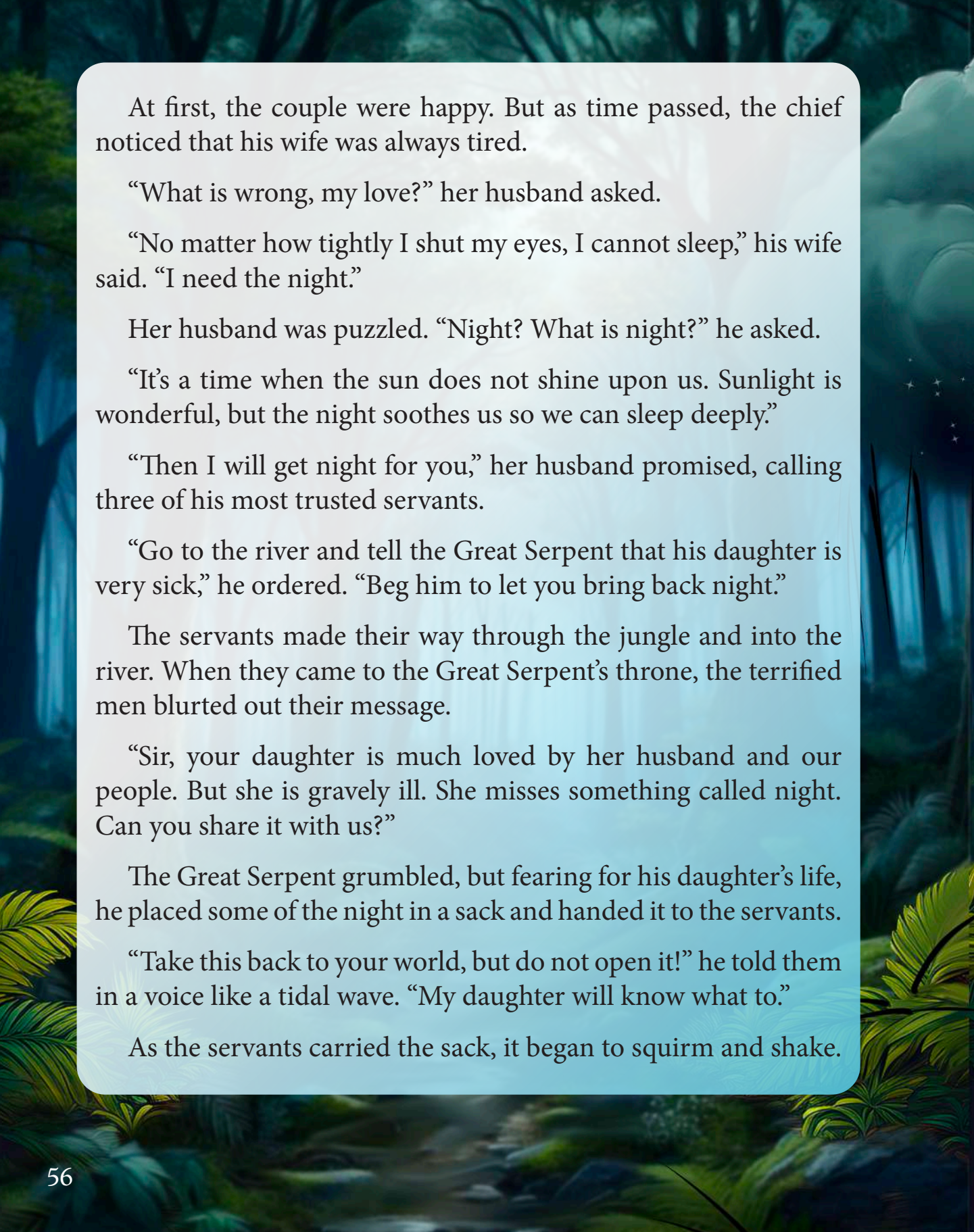
"*Abápe endé?* Who are you?" the young man asked her. He was the chief of a tribe that lived nearby and had never seen such a beautiful *kunha*.

"I live with my father, the Great Serpent, below the waters of the river," the *kunha* responded. "I love your world. Mine is shadowy, but yours is full of light."

"Come. I'll show you my village," the chief said.

Afterward, the young couple continued meeting at the shore. One day, realizing they were in love, they decided to marry.

The Great Serpent was upset, but he wanted his daughter's happiness and finally agreed to let her marry the chief and go live in his village.



At first, the couple were happy. But as time passed, the chief noticed that his wife was always tired.

“What is wrong, my love?” her husband asked.

“No matter how tightly I shut my eyes, I cannot sleep,” his wife said. “I need the night.”

Her husband was puzzled. “Night? What is night?” he asked.

“It’s a time when the sun does not shine upon us. Sunlight is wonderful, but the night soothes us so we can sleep deeply.”

“Then I will get night for you,” her husband promised, calling three of his most trusted servants.

“Go to the river and tell the Great Serpent that his daughter is very sick,” he ordered. “Beg him to let you bring back night.”

The servants made their way through the jungle and into the river. When they came to the Great Serpent’s throne, the terrified men blurted out their message.

“Sir, your daughter is much loved by her husband and our people. But she is gravely ill. She misses something called night. Can you share it with us?”

The Great Serpent grumbled, but fearing for his daughter’s life, he placed some of the night in a sack and handed it to the servants.

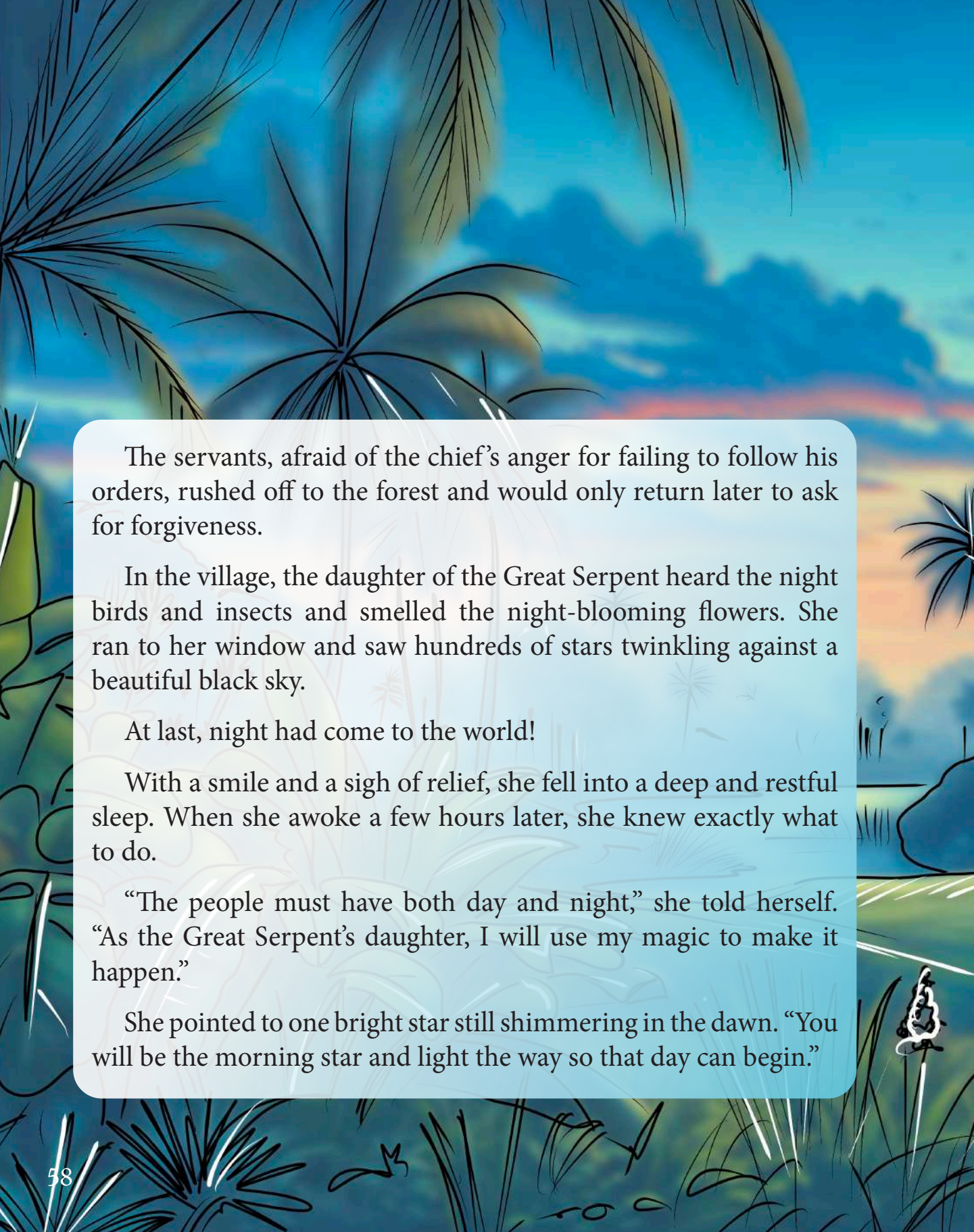
“Take this back to your world, but do not open it!” he told them in a voice like a tidal wave. “My daughter will know what to.”

As the servants carried the sack, it began to squirm and shake.

The servants just couldn't contain their curiosity. They set down their burden . . . and loosened the rope.

Whoosh! A big dark cloud quickly enveloped the sky, covering the sunlight. Strange birds and insects flew out of the sack, noisily winging toward the trees or wriggling along the ground, while dozens of strange-looking seeds scattered in the wind.



The background of the page is a vibrant illustration of a tropical sunset. Large palm trees with dark fronds are silhouetted against a sky that transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. In the lower right, a body of water reflects the colors of the sky, with a small, dark, rocky island visible in the distance. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

The servants, afraid of the chief's anger for failing to follow his orders, rushed off to the forest and would only return later to ask for forgiveness.

In the village, the daughter of the Great Serpent heard the night birds and insects and smelled the night-blooming flowers. She ran to her window and saw hundreds of stars twinkling against a beautiful black sky.

At last, night had come to the world!

With a smile and a sigh of relief, she fell into a deep and restful sleep. When she awoke a few hours later, she knew exactly what to do.

"The people must have both day and night," she told herself. "As the Great Serpent's daughter, I will use my magic to make it happen."

She pointed to one bright star still shimmering in the dawn. "You will be the morning star and light the way so that day can begin."



“And you,” she said to a rooster perched outside her window, “will crow when the sun appears. The birds will then wake and lift their songs to welcome the new day until the blanket of night falls again.”

Afterward, the people worked and played in the light of the sun. But when darkness descended upon the world, they slept deeply and rested.

And so it has been since then, with night following day and day following night in the endless cycle that we know today.

8

This “Legend of Quetzal” [ket-zal] comes from the K’iche [keé-chay], a group of Indigenous people whose descendants can still be found mostly in the Central American country of Guatemala. They are part of a larger group of people known as Mayans, a powerful civilization whose kingdoms once spread over much of what is today Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, and parts of Nicaragua and Mexico.

With its iridescent colors and long, trailing tail, the quetzal is thought to be one of the most beautiful birds in the world. Found only in the moist forests of Central America, it was considered sacred by the K’iche and other Mayan groups. For the people of Guatemala, the quetzal is a particularly important symbol of their nation. The Guatemalan currency is actually called the quetzal, and the bird is featured on the country’s flag. After a government decree in 1871 proclaimed the quetzal as the official national bird, Guatemalans celebrate National Quetzal Day every year on September 5. The quetzal has long been a symbol of freedom. Just as the quetzal is known for not doing well in captivity, so did the K’iche believe that they need freedom in order to live well as a people.

There are many variations of the legends of the quetzal. In most, Quetzal is a prince whose amulet—a necklace or, as in this story, a feather—keeps him from harm. How the prince dies also changes from version to version. After a jealous relative steals the amulet, Quetzal is killed either by the relative himself or by an enemy arrow. In a completely different version, a young man named Kuk—believed to be the K'iche word for the quetzal bird—is a child of the gods. He is sent to earth but is very vain and disobeys his elders, who punish him by turning him into a bird.

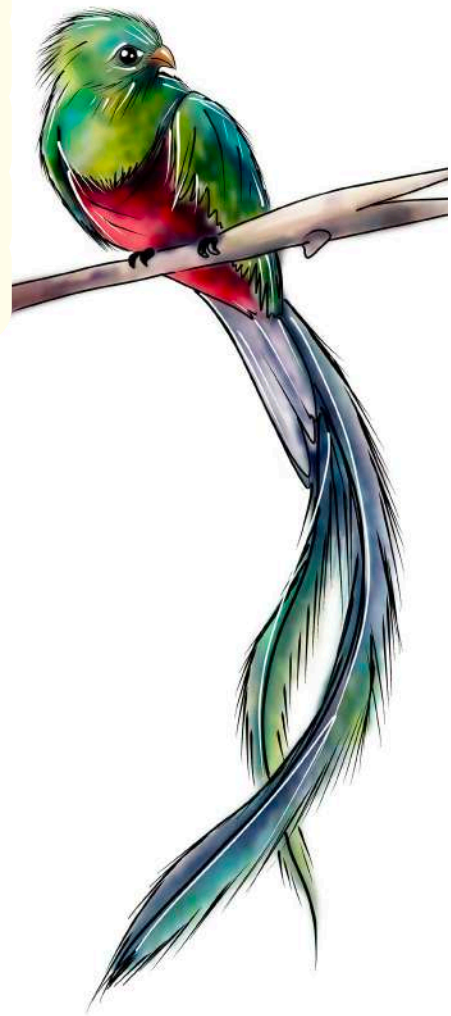
K'iche words found in this story:

Ajawanel [ah-jah-wah-néll]: king, ruler

Ak'al [ahk-al]: boy

Echb'anel [ech-beh-ah-nél]: heir

Xts'unu'um [zoo-oo-noom]: hummingbird



THE LEGEND OF QUETZAL

Long ago, a wise and kind ruler longed for a child, an *echb'anel* to inherit his throne. He appealed to the gods, but the deities never seemed to grant the *ajawanel* his wish.

Until one day.

“My wife has given birth to an *ak'al*, a healthy boy!” the ruler proclaimed to a cheering crowd.

As was the custom, soothsayers from all corners of the kingdom were summoned to predict the baby's future. Upon entering the room where the little one slept, they found a hummingbird perched on the edge of the crib. The tiny *xts'unu'um* dropped a feather at the *ak'al*'s feet and, in a blur of wings, flew out the window.



“It’s a sign from the gods,” one soothsayer proclaimed. “This child will bring our people good fortune.”

“His name must be Quetzal—‘brilliant tail feather,’” suggested another. “The *xts’unu’um’s* feather is his amulet. He must always wear it around his neck.”

Then the oldest soothsayer stepped forward. “The gods have also given me a prophecy,” he announced. “Quetzal will never die. His destiny is to live forever among his people.”

All the soothsayers pondered these words, but none could decipher their meaning. Still, they proclaimed that Quetzal was a special child.

The people of the kingdom were filled with great joy. Only Chirumá, the *ajawanel’s* much younger brother, did not share in their happiness. He’d hoped to rule the kingdom someday. He was filled with jealousy because the new *echb’anel’s* birth made this impossible.

Years passed, and Quetzal grew into a handsome young man. His skin was the color of cinnamon and his hair as black as a raven’s wings. He showed intelligence as well as skill with the spear and the bow and arrow. His father, knowing that someday he would be the *ajawanel*, took great care in preparing him for his future role.

He taught Quetzal how to read the stars, how to settle disputes among the people, and how to direct the kingdom’s planting and harvesting.

“And always listen to the gods. They will help you make fair laws,” his father told him.

The people were confident that Quetzal would make a great ruler.

One day, the *ajawanel* received word that a nearby tribe had invaded the kingdom's borders.

"We offered to share our harvest, but they are greedy. We have no choice but to defend our lands."

"I will lead the men, father," Quetzal said.

Arrows flew as the warriors faced the enemy. While several men fell wounded, somehow the arrows always seemed to swerve around Quetzal.

This did not go unnoticed by Chirumá.

"The *xts'unu'um* feather is keeping him safe . . ." the jealous uncle thought. "Without it, he'll have no protection."

As evening fell, Quetzal spent long hours caring for his wounded men. When he finally fell into an exhausted sleep, he was too tired to hear Chirumá sneak close, cut the leather cord from around his neck, and run off into the night carrying the amulet.

At daybreak, Quetzal noticed that his precious feather was missing. But there was no time to search. An alarm sounded that the enemy was attacking!

Bravely, Quetzal ran to the head of his men, unafraid of the shower of arrows raining down. Only Chirumá, hidden behind a tree, noticed that the arrows no longer seemed to swerve around the *echb'anel*.

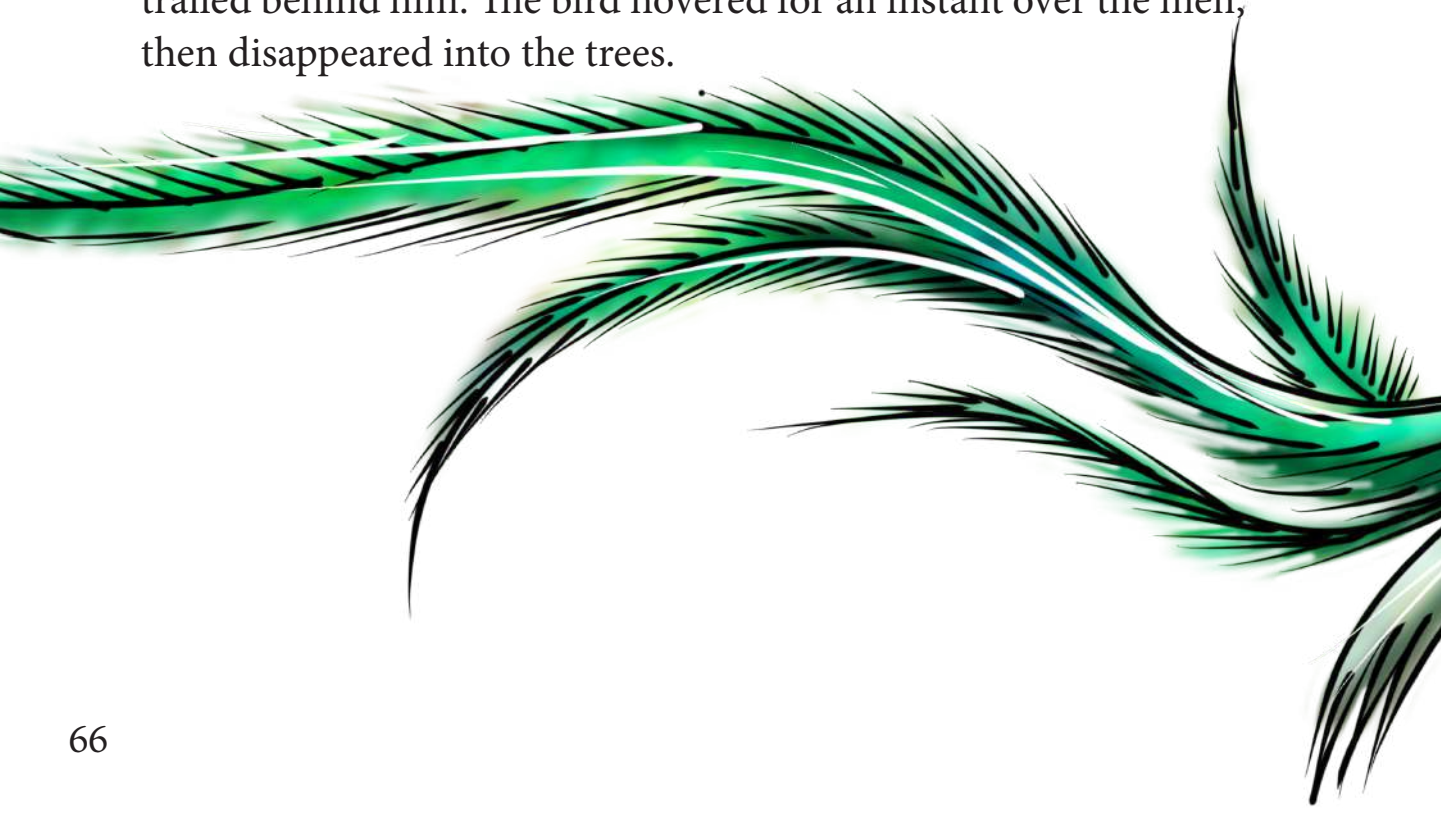
And then, with a “whoosh!” one plunged straight into Quetzal’s heart. He gave a cry of pain, fell onto the soft grass, and lay still.

The fighting stopped as the warriors gathered around, grieving for their leader who now seemed dead.

Then, their eyes grew wide. Something magical began to happen! As the men of the rival tribe ran off, fearing the anger of the gods, a great change took over Quetzal.

Feathers as green as the grass on which he lay covered most of his body. Those on his chest were red, the color of the blood seeping from his wounded heart. He was no longer a man. He had transformed into a bird, the most beautiful the warriors had ever seen.

With a flap of wings that had once been arms, Quetzal rose in the air. A tail of brilliant green feathers longer than his body trailed behind him. The bird hovered for an instant over the men, then disappeared into the trees.



Just then, Chirumá stepped out from his hiding place. He tried to conceal the amulet, but a sharp-eyed warrior shouted, “He has Quetzal’s *xts’unu’um* feather!” When the men ran to seize him, Chirumá ran into the jungle and was never seen again.



At the palace, the *ajawanel* and his wife wept for their beloved son even as they puzzled over the men's astonishing story. Suddenly, a loud bird call sounded above their heads. Everyone rushed outside in time to see a bird with shimmering green and red feathers and a magnificent tail flying over the palace.

“Quetzal, my son!” the *ajawanel* cried out.

The soothsayer's prophecy then became clear. Quetzal had not died. Instead, the gods had transformed him into one of the most beautiful birds in the world. He would never leave his people. He would live among them, a symbol of good triumphing over evil, until the end of time.

9

In the year 1492, when Christopher Columbus arrived in what would later be called the Americas, the first people he met were those living on the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Columbus, sure that he had reached the subcontinent of India, called these people “Indians,” something he believed for the rest of his life. Actually, the islands had been inhabited for almost two thousand years by groups of Indigenous people. One such group were the Taínos.

According to historians, these natives greeted Columbus with the words “Taíno Taíno.” In their language, this meant “We are good and noble.” Thinking that was their name, he called these peaceful “Indians” Taínos.

Between 1492 and 1504, Columbus made four voyages to what came to be known as the New World. He landed on several islands of the Caribbean Sea, such as the Bahamas, Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti), and Cuba. It was during his second voyage, in 1493, that he made landfall on the island of Puerto Rico, an island inhabited by Taínos.

Taínos have a rich oral tradition of myths and legends handed down from generation to generation. The legend of “The Magic Calabaza” tells the story of the creation of the island of Puerto Rico.

Stories of how the waters of the sea were hidden inside a pumpkin have been told in different ways by other groups in the Americas and the Caribbean.

The *calabaza* is a type of pumpkin or squash. Its skin is yellowish-green, and its lovely flower is shaped like a bright golden star. Like tomatoes, cucumbers, and zucchini, calabazas are fruits and not vegetables. Many traditional Puerto Rican dishes feature the calabaza. It is one of the island's most important staple foods. A yellow variety was developed in Puerto Rico and named Taína Dorada—Golden Taína—as a tribute to the native peoples.

Taíno words found in this story:

Kachi [cah-chee]: one of several Taíno words for the sun

Bohío [boh-ée-oh]: circular huts that served as Taíno houses

Guali [wah-lee]: son

Rahe [rah-hay]: daughter

Cacique [cah-sée-cay]: Taíno chieftain

Bori'ken [boh-rée-ken]: land of the great and valiant lords



THE MAGIC CALABAZA

Long ago, the people lived on the slope of a mountain whose base was surrounded by a vast and arid desert. Their life was difficult, for the mountain had no animals, trees, or flowers. Their only foods were roots and grasses, and their only source of water came from a thin stream just beyond their *bohíos*, the round huts that made up their village. Despite these hardships, the people never forgot to praise the sun, *Kachi*, raising their voices in gratitude every day for the warmth and light he gave them.

One morning, young Guali and his sister Rahe decided to venture down to the desert. “Maybe we’ll find some food to bring back to the village,” they said.

But after walking for hours, they accepted the truth.

“There is nothing here but sand,” Guali said sadly.

Rahe agreed. “You’re right, let’s go home.”

As they began their climb, a small object drifted from the sky and fell into Guali’s hands. Turning it round and round, he saw that it was a hard, white seed.

“Should we eat it?” Rahe asked.

“No,” Guali said. “We’ll come back soon and see if there are more.”

When they returned a few days later, another seed fell, this time into Rahe’s hands. More seeds followed until it seemed as if

the sky was raining seeds. Delighted, the children ran back to the *bohío* of the village's *cacique*.

"I think these seeds are magic. Maybe they are a special gift from *Kachi*," Rahe said.

"Nonsense!" the chief said. "*Kachi* would not give us something so lowly."

The children were disappointed, but they would not give up.

"We'll plant them high on the mountain so they'll be closer to the sky," said Guali.

The next day, Guali and Rahe made their way to the top of the mountain. After planting all the seeds, they called out, "Oh, *Kachi*, if these are your gifts, please show us what they are for."

To their amazement, the seeds sprouted into plants of many shapes and sizes. Some became bushes bursting with



flowers. Others grew into tall trees. Soon, the entire mountaintop was covered in a lush, thick forest where gentle rivers meandered among the vegetation.

One plant, however, was different than the others. It had a single flower with five bright yellow petals, and from the flower's stem bulged a small green ball. To the children's amazement, the ball began to grow. It grew bigger and bigger until it was nearly as tall as Rahe and Guali themselves.

Then something even stranger happened.

"Do you hear that?" Rahe asked.

Guali put his ear to the ball. "Yes! There are rumblings and hums and chirps coming from inside . . ."

"And buzzes and whistles and screeches!" Rahe added.

The odd sounds became louder and louder, making the people of the village run into their *bohíos* in a panic.

"There's nothing to fear," Guali shouted. "*Kachi* would never harm us."



“Maybe if we take it down to the village to show them . . .” Rahe said.

The children wrapped their arms around the strange ball and tugged and pulled until it came off its stalk.

“It’s heavy!” Guali complained.

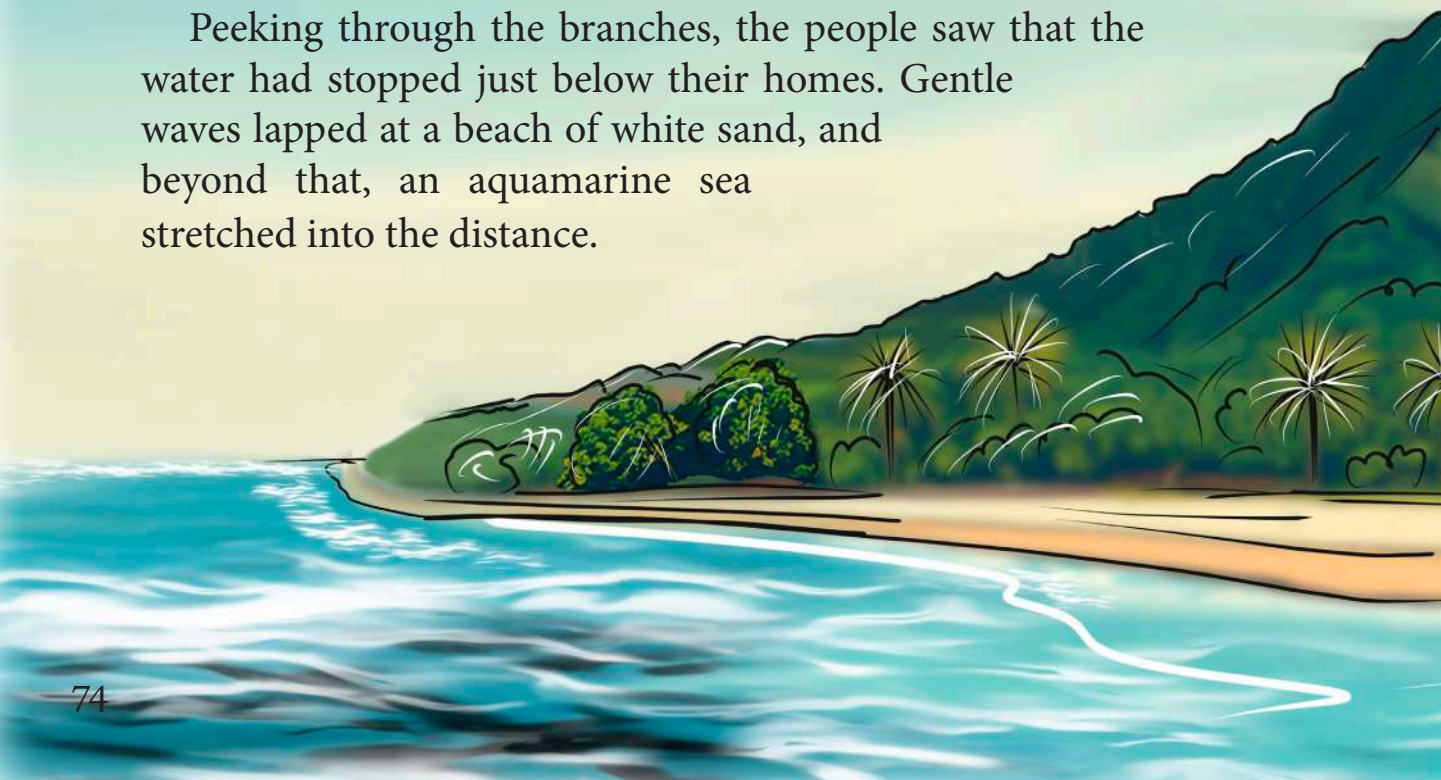
“I . . . can’t . . . hold . . . on . . . !” cried Rahe.

The ball slipped from their grasp, rolled down the mountain and, almost at the village, bumped into a sharp rock, and—CRACK!—split in half.

A gush of water spurted from the ball, soon becoming a huge torrent that rushed down the slope and flooded the desert. When the water began to rise up the sides of the mountain, the frightened villagers ran up to the forest and asked *Kachi* to spare their lives.

Suddenly, all was quiet.

Peeking through the branches, the people saw that the water had stopped just below their homes. Gentle waves lapped at a beach of white sand, and beyond that, an aquamarine sea stretched into the distance.



The villagers gasped, for the beach and the sea were full of wondrous creatures!

Gulls and plovers pecked at clams in the sand while dolphins jumped over the waves, and all manner of fish swam below the water's crystal-clear surface.

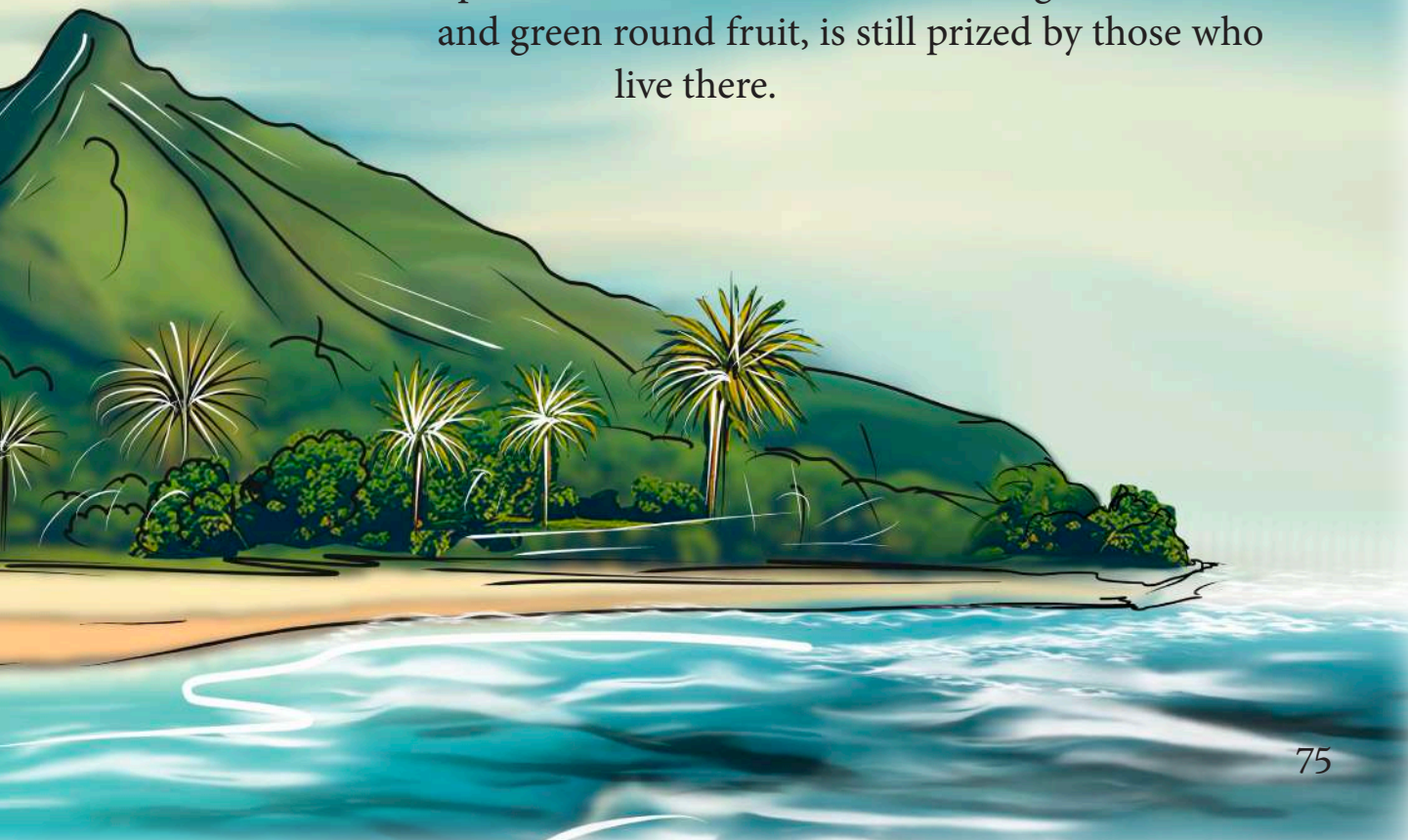
The *cacique* thanked Guali and Rahe.

"You were wise. The seeds were indeed *Kachi's* magic gift," he said. "I was foolish not to trust him."

The people then lifted their voices in praise of the sun, who had sent them a bountiful sea and turned their mountain into an island filled with riches.

They called the island *Bori'ken*. We know it as Puerto Rico.

And the plant called the *calabaza*, with its golden flower and green round fruit, is still prized by those who live there.



10

A decorative floral ornament with yellow and white swirls and leaves, framing the chapter number 10.

Not far from Mexico City lie two volcanoes called Popocatépetl [poh-poh-cah-téh-pet-uhl] and Iztaccíhuatl [ees-tah-zée-wah-tuhl]. The word Popocatépetl means “smoking mountain.” Iztaccíhuatl means “white woman.” These are words in Nahuatl [nah-wah-tuhl], the language spoken by the ancestors of groups who lived in the region like the Aztecs, the Tlaxcala [tlax-cáh-lah], and the Mexica [meh-shée-cah], from which Mexico gets its name. The volcanoes share their names with the two protagonists found in an ancient legend about love and magic.

In all the versions of the story, a brave warrior, Popocatépetl, falls in love with a beautiful princess, Iztaccíhuatl. The princess is tricked into thinking the warrior has been killed in battle, and she dies of grief. Heartbroken, the warrior carries her body to the top of a nearby mountain, and soon, two volcanoes rise nearby. Some versions have different endings. In one, Popocatépetl orders two pyramids built as tombs and lights a torch that will burn forever in Iztaccíhuatl’s honor. The pyramids later turn into volcanoes covered in snow. One is always seen giving off smoke.

The volcano Iztaccíhuatl is dormant, but Popocatepetl, the tallest of the two, is still active. Its white smoke can be seen from Mexico City. One eruption in 1520 happened just as conquistadors looted Aztec temples. The people saw it as a sign that the gods were angry.

Besides their Nahuatl names, the two volcanoes have been nicknamed “the kneeling man” and “the sleeping woman” because of their shapes when seen from a distance.

Nahuatl words found in this story:

Cihuapilli [see-wah-péel-ee]: princess

Tecutli [the-cut-lee]: ruler

Oquichtli [oh-quitch-lee]: man

Altepetl [áhl-teh-pet-uhl]: city

Tepetl [the-pet-uhl]: volcano

THE SWEETHEART VOLCANOES

Long ago, there lived a princess who was beautiful, kind, and more graceful than any other woman in the land. This *cihuapilli* was the joy of her father, a mighty *tecutli*, and the pride of her people. Because of the white robes she always wore, they called her Iztaccíhuatl, which meant White Woman.

When Iztaccíhuatl was old enough, her father decided she must marry.

“Above all, your husband must be a brave man,” he told her.

Iztaccíhuatl had other ideas. “My husband must be more than brave,” she said. “He must also be smart and kind-hearted.” And to her father’s despair, she rejected every young *oquichtli* who came asking for her hand.

One of these was the son of the high priest, both of whom were very greedy. “If I marry the *cihuapilli*, you and I will have great power,” he told his father. But when his dreams were dashed, the son’s disappointment turned to bitterness.

One day, a young warrior appeared at the royal palace.

“My name is Popocatépetl,” he said to the *tecutli*. “I have heard of Princess Iztaccíhuatl’s great beauty and character. If you and she agree, I offer myself as a suitor.”

Iztaccíhuatl looked closely at the newcomer. He was not only

handsome, but she also saw compassion and intelligence in his eyes.

“I’d like to get to know him better,” Iztaccíhuatl told her father.

The ruler was delighted. The *cihuapilli* had found someone at last!

Turning to Popocatépetl, he said, “Before I consent, you must prove your bravery. For months, an enemy tribe has overrun our lands and terrorized peaceful farmers. Take a group of warriors into battle. If you make the enemy retreat and obtain their promise never again to cross our boundaries, you may marry Iztaccíhuatl when you return.”

While Popocatépetl trained his warriors, he and the princess found time to see each other and soon realized that they were very much in love.

“I’ll come back to you,” Popocatépetl promised Iztaccíhuatl as he left for battle. “After that, nothing will separate us.”

Meanwhile, the high priest’s son hatched a plan to keep the royal marriage from happening. Pretending loyalty, he joined Popocatépetl and his warriors. Then, one night, he sneaked away from camp and made his way back to the royal palace.

“My lord, we were ambushed and outnumbered. Popocatépetl fought bravely, but . . . but . . . he was killed in battle,” he told the *tecutli*, false tears streaming down his face.

Upon hearing this news, Iztaccíhuatl was stunned. She ran to her room, locking herself up for days, refusing to eat or drink. To her father’s despair, she grew weaker every day.

“There’s little we can do, my lord, for we fear the *cihuapilli* is dying of a broken heart,” the court healers told the *tecutli*.

And one morning, as great sobs racked Iztaccíhuatl’s father, she took one last breath and died in his arms.

Just then, a great commotion was heard outside the palace.

“The warriors are back!” the guards cried out.

The ruler ran to the window. He saw that a crowd had gathered to cheer the triumphant warriors and, at their head, battle-weary but ready to claim his bride, walked Popocatépetl.

Realizing that he had been deceived, the *tecutli* ordered that the high priest and his son be brought to him. But the two had fled, never to be seen again.

Popocatépetl looked up to the princess’s window. The *tecutli*’s face told him something was wrong.

He ran to Iztaccíhuatl’s bed. “Nothing will separate us . . .” he whispered, lifting her in his arms.

The *tecutli* stood aside as Popocatépetl left the palace. Servants, healers, and guards made way for them. The people, their hearts full of pity and sorrow, watched the warrior walk out of the city carrying his beloved *cihuapilli*.

Popocatépetl did not stop walking until he reached the mountains. At the top of a peak, he lay Iztaccíhuatl down, spread her white robes around her, and turning his face to the heavens, called out to the gods.

“Help us!”



A rumble of thunder rolled across the skies, and a lightning flash tore apart the clouds. Below, the people of the *altepetl* cowered in fear, knowing something magical was about to happen.

Astonished, they watched as the earth parted and two volcanoes rose between the mountains. One, resembling the shape of a sleeping woman, was covered in snow as white as Iztaccíhuatl's robes. Beside it, the other volcano rose even higher, a plume of smoke drifting from its peak.

The gods had taken pity on the sweethearts, changing each into a large *tepetl*. In their honor, the people named the sweetheart volcanoes Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl. To this day, the warrior and the *cihuapilli* still rest side by side, waiting to return to the land of the living and finally be married.







MEET THE AUTHOR

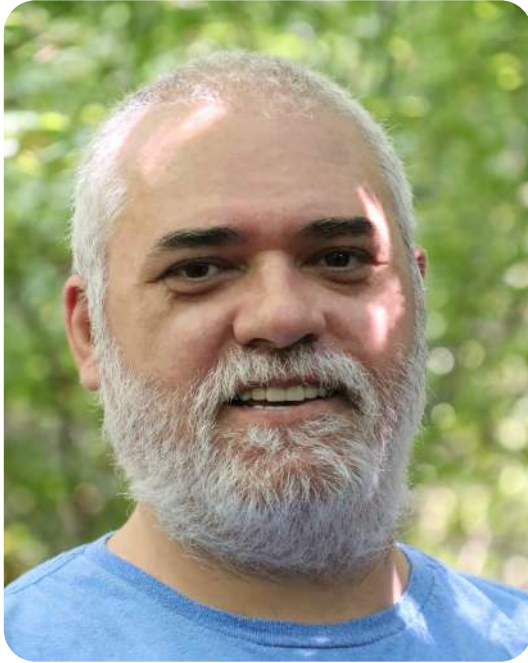


Silvia López was born in Cuba and emigrated to Miami as a child. Her lifelong love of books led to a career as a school librarian and later as a children's author. Silvia's work reflects her interest in animals, history, folklore, and the lives of people who overcome obstacles to achieve great things. Her books include *Just Right Family: An Adoption Story* (2018 Florida Book Award winner);

Handimals: Animals in Art and Nature (2022 Illinois Bluestem Award nominee); *Pacho Nacho*; *Queen of Tejano Music: Selena* (English and Spanish), (a Junior Library Guild selection, 2020 Florida Book Award winner, and Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Books selection for 2020); English and Spanish versions of *My Little Golden Book About Frida Kahlo* and *Sonia Sotomayor: A Little Golden Book Biography*; and Bilingual Easy Readers, co-authored with Susan Rose, *José and El Perro* (NY Public Library Best Books for Children 2023) and *José and Feliz Play Fútbol*. Her latest book, *Uno Más, One More: A Latino Retelling of an Old Scottish Ballad*, received a starred review in *School Library Journal*.

Silvia is bilingual and has a great interest in Hispanic culture, but she loves to write about anything and everything that catches her attention. She also enjoys mentoring other writers who have a true belief in and are excited about what their manuscript has to say, regardless of the topic. Silvia currently runs the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) picture book critique group in Miami.

MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR



Ivan Pesic was born in Blace, Serbia, in 1975. In 2000, Ivan moved to Belgrade, Serbia, where he studied graphic design in college. Unhappy with the political and economic situation in Serbia, Ivan emigrated to Virginia, USA, in 2005. Ivan and his wife, Alisa, have two children, Tara and Luka. His work can be seen in many galleries in Virginia, Washington D.C., North Carolina, and

Georgia. Ivan has also donated his paintings to public schools and charity organizations. The primary medium Ivan uses is acrylic and oil paints; however, he also likes to experiment with different mediums and techniques.

Aside from painting, Ivan has done pencil drawings, wall murals, mixed media art, photography, graphic design, and more. In his work, he reconstructs dreams, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and lullabies—the pieces of our lives and memories that are a part of us. Every piece of his artwork tells a story, stories with a hero, a villain, with action, movement, and other elements that give his work life and energy. Ivan's work can be viewed on his website: [*www.ipartstudio.com*](http://www.ipartstudio.com).

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TALES FROM Latin America and the Caribbean

Thousands of years before the first ships carrying Europeans appeared on the horizon, South and Central America, as well as the Caribbean, were lands already inhabited by Indigenous people. Over the centuries, the Indigenous people formed groups and developed their own distinct languages, cultures, and sets of beliefs—and of course, their own myths and legends.

After 1492, Europeans—and later, enslaved Africans—brought over their own stories. Some of these stories blended with those told by Indigenous people. The result is the rich rainbow of stories found throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

The ten tales in this collection are different types of myths and legends, most of which try to answer big questions. Some, known as *pourquoi tales* (from the French word for “why”), try to explain why things are the way they are. Others are *creation stories* that try to explain how places or things in nature came to be. Still others are Latin American adaptations of folktales and fables brought over by Europeans.

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