

Around the World in 20 Days



Summer Reading Challenge

United Kingdom

Dick Whittington

A long time ago there was once a poor boy called Dick Whittington who had no Mummy and Daddy to look after him so he was often very hungry. He lived in a little village in the country. He'd often heard stories about a far away place called London where everybody was rich and the streets were paved with gold.

Dick Whittington was determined that he would go there and dig up enough gold from the streets to make his fortune. One day he met a friendly waggoner who was going to London who said he would give him a lift there, so off they went. When they reached the big city Dick couldn't believe his eyes, he could see horses, carriages, hundreds of people, great tall buildings, lots of mud, but nowhere could he see any gold. What a disappointment, how was he going to make his fortune? How was he even going to buy food?

After a few days he was so hungry that he collapsed in a ragged heap on the doorstep of a rich merchant's house. Out of the house came a cook:

"Be off with you" she shouted "you dirty ragamuffin" and she tried to sweep him off the step with a broom.

At that moment the merchant arrived back at his house and, being a kindly man, took pity on poor Dick.

"Carry him into the house" he ordered his groom.

When he was fed and rested, Dick was given a job working in the kitchen. He was very grateful to the Merchant but, alas, the cook was always very bad tempered and, when no one was looking, used to beat and pinch him. The other thing that made Dick sad was that he had to sleep in a tiny room at the very top of the house and it was full of rats and mice that crawled all over his face and tried to bite his nose.

He was so desperate that he saved up all his pennies and bought a cat. The cat was a very special cat, she was the best cat in all of London at catching mice and rats. After a few weeks Dick's life was much easier because of his clever cat who had eaten all the rats and mice and he was able to sleep in peace.

Not long after, Dick heard the merchant asking everyone in the house if they

Can you illustrate your favourite stories?

to her home of bright shells far under the sea.

Greenland

The night before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house, Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, In the hope that St. Nicholas soon would be there. The children were nestled all snug in their beds, While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads. And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap, Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap;

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash, Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash. The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow Gave the lustre of midday to objects below. When what to my wondering eyes should appear But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer. With a little old driver so lively and quick, I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick. More rapid than eagles his coursers they came, And he whistled and shouted and called them by name. "Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer! Now, Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Dunder and Blixen! To the top of the porch, to the top of the wall! Now, dash away! Dash away! Dash away! All!"

As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly, When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky, So up to the house-top the coursers they flew With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas, too. And then in a twinkling I heard on the roof The prancing and pawing of each tiny hoof. As I drew in my head, and was turning around, Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot, And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot; A bundle of toys he had flung on his back, And he looked like a pedlar just opening his pack. His eyes—how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry; His droll little mouth was drawn up in a bow, And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow. The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath. He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself. A wink of his eye, and a twist of his head, Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And filled all the stockings—then turned with a jerk, And laying his finger aside of his nose, And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose. He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, And away they all flew, like the down of a thistle; But I heard him exclaim ere he drove out of sight,

wanted to send anything on board his ship they thought they could sell. The ship was going on a long voyage to the other side of the world and the captain would sell everything on the ship so they could all make some money. Poor Dick, what could he sell?

Suddenly, a thought came to him,

"Please sir, will you take my cat?"

Everyone burst out laughing, but the merchant smiled and said,

"Yes Dick, I will, and all the money from her sale will go to you".

After the merchant had left from the city Dick was on his own again with the mice and rats crawling over him by night and the cook being even nastier in the day because there was no-one to stop her. Dick decided to run away.

As he walked away the bells of all the churches rang out and seemed to say,

"Turn again Dick Whittington. Three times Lord Mayor of London"

"Goodness, gracious, gosh" thought Dick astonished. "If I'm going to be Lord Mayor I'd better stay. I'll put up with cook and the scurrying mice and rats, and when I'm mayor I'll show her!"

So back he went.

Across the other side of the world, the merchant and his ship had arrived at their destination. The people were so pleased to see them and were so welcoming that the merchant decided to send some presents to their king and queen. The king and queen were so delighted that they invited them all to a feast. But, believe it or not, as soon as the food was brought in hundreds of rats appeared as if by magic and gobbled it all up before they had a chance to eat.

"Oh dear" said the king "this is always happening - I never get a chance to eat my apple pie. What can I do?"

"I have an idea" said the merchant "I have a very special cat which has travelled with me all the way from London, and she will gobble up your rats faster than they gobbled up your feast."

Sure enough, to the king and queen's joy, the next time a feast was prepared and the rats appeared, the cat pounced and killed all the rats as quick as lightning.

The king and queen danced for joy and gave the merchant a ship full of gold in return for the very special cat.

When the ship returned to London Dick was overwhelmed with the amount of gold the merchant gave him for his cat. Over the years he used his money so wisely, and did so much good for all the people around him and who worked for him, that he was elected Lord Mayor of the City of London three times. But he never forgot his kind friend the merchant, who had been so honest in giving him all the money that the cat had earned and kept nothing for himself. When Dick grew up he fell in love with Alice, the merchant's beautiful daughter, and married her.

Norway

The cat on the Dovrefell

Once on a time there was a man up in Finnmark who had caught a great white bear, which he was going to take to the King of Denmark. Now, it so fell out, that he came to the Dovrefell just about Christmas Eve, and there he turned into a cottage where a man lived, whose name was Halvor, and asked the man if he could get house-room there for his bear and himself.

"Heaven never help me, if what I say isn't true!" said the man; "but we can't give anyone house-room just now, for every Christmas Eve such a pack of Trolls come down upon us, that we are forced to flit, and haven't so much as a house over our own heads, to say nothing of lending one to anyone else."

"Oh?" said the man, "if that's all, you can very well lend me your house; my bear can lie under the stove yonder, and I can sleep in the side-room."

Well, he begged so hard, that at last he got leave to stay there; so the people of the house flitted out, and before they went, everything was got ready for the Trolls; the tables were laid, and there was rice porridge, and fish boiled in lye, and sausages, and all else that was good, just as for any other grand feast.

So, when everything was ready, down came the Trolls. Some were great, and some were small; some had long tails, and some had no tails at all; some, too, had long, long noses; and they ate and drank, and tasted everything. Just then one of the little Trolls caught sight of the white bear, who lay under the stove; so he took a piece of sausage and stuck it on a fork, and went and poked it up against the bear's nose, screaming out:
"Pussy, will you have some sausage?"

Then the white bear rose up and growled, and hunted the whole pack of them out of doors, both great and small.

Next year Halvor was out in the wood, on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, cutting wood before the holidays, for he thought the Trolls would come again; and just as he was hard at work, he heard a voice in the wood calling out:

wife to live with him in his home under the sea; now he said, "Here at last is a shore maiden for me," for the voice of the singer was beautiful to him.

So he went to his looking-glass to dress himself in the most genteel fashion. From bright clean sea-weeds and sea-leaves he quickly made himself a new suit, all green and yellow; and he covered his feet with bright-coloured shells, and his neck with pearls which the oyster gave him; and dressing himself carefully, he hastened in the direction of the song. But when he came close enough to hear the words and to know what the box contained, he remembered his oath at the great gathering of the fish, and although he loved the singer he swam hurriedly away. For, like the skate-fish, he too feared to try to punish the maiden.

The maiden was now sore distressed, for it was growing late and the moon was already far up in the sky. The box was still unopened, and the girl was hungry for the fish. Going to the edge of the sea, she knocked the box hard against a large rock that lay in the water, hoping thereby to break it open. But the box would not break. Now, it chanced that under the rock a large black lobster lay sleeping quietly after a long battle with an enemy in the sea. The tapping on the roof of his sleeping-place awoke him, and he rubbed his eyes and listened. The maiden was again singing her song:—

"Oh I love sardines when they're boiled with beans,
And mixed with the sands of the sea.
I am dying for some.
Will nobody come
And open this box for me?"

Then the Lobster remembered his oath at the great gathering of the fish. Unlike the skate-fish and the merman, he had no fear of the maiden, for he knew his power. He determined to punish her, and he resolved at once upon a crafty trick. He came out of his hiding place, and waving his claw politely he said, "Fair lady, I can open the box for you; give it to me and let me try."

But when, in answer, she held the box out towards him in her hand, he grasped her by the wrist with his strong claw, and, holding her fast, he swam with her far out to sea. Where he went and what he did with her, no man knows. It is believed that he sold her to the merman who had long sought a shore-wife, and that she is still being slowly changed into a fish. One thing is certain,—she never came back to land.

But on the first day of May she always appears on the water away off the coast of the Island; and if that day is fine and clear you can still always see her there. She holds in her hand a looking-glass in which in the sunlight she looks at herself to see if she is nearer to a fish than she was on May Day the year before when she last appeared in the sun; and she is combing her long hair which is now covered with pearls; and she looks with longing eyes to the shore and her old home. And sometimes on moonlight nights in May, when the wind is still and the sea is calm, the fishermen hear her strange sad song across the waters. They know then that she is lonely, and that she is singing her song to lure land-comrades for company to her side. And on these nights they stay on shore, for they know that if they venture out to sea she will seize them and carry them off for playmates

called one of the islands when they first visited the group hundreds of years ago, and it is an "Isle of Birds" still. It is a wild and rock-bound desolate land.

But although the islands are barren of grass and flowers and trees, the waters around and between them are rich in fish. "The Kingdom of Fish," men call the place, for adventurous traders grow wealthy there reaping the harvest of the sea. The greatest product of the waters is the lobster. He always inhabited these northern seas, and about his power in olden times strange tales are told. Away off the coast of one of the islands, you can still see on fine moonlight nights in May, and also during the day once a year, a maiden holding a glass in her hand, combing her long hair, and looking wistfully to the land. Sometimes, too, on calm nights you can still hear her strange song above the murmur of the waves. She is the phantom lady of the Island over whom the Lobster in far away days used his power. She is now a prisoner in the deep, held there as a punishment for her deeds.

Now, it happened that long ago when fish were first canned for food there was a great slaughter of sardines—the tiny fish of the sea—by cruel money-greedy traders who caught them, packed them in small boxes, and shipped them to far countries, just as they do to-day. These traders received large money rewards for their labour, for people all over the world liked the little fish and paid a high price for them. The sardines saw their number slowly growing smaller, for, being little, they were helpless against their captors, and among all their family there was great sorrow. In despair they asked the big fish of the sea to help them. At last, in answer to their appeal, a meeting of all the fish in the sea was called. Here the big fish took an oath to help their small cousins in their struggle with man, and to punish when they could all who ate or fished the sardine family. And the little fish rejoiced greatly.

One May day a large ship loaded with packed fish was wrecked on the sunken rocks of the Magdalene Islands. Soon the ship was broken up by the heavy surf on the sharp reef, and her cargo was strewn along the shore. It happened that in the cargo were many boxes of sardines, and they too were washed up on the beach by the tide. In the evening, after the sea had calmed, a fair maiden who lived on the Island with her father, a fish trader, walked along the shore alone to view the wreckage of the broken ship. She found, to her delight, one of the boxes in which the sardines were packed. She resolved at once to eat the contents, for she too, like all the world at that time, liked the little fish. But although she tried as hard as she could, she was unable to open the box. She sat by the side of the sea and sang a song of lament, calling on anyone who could to open the box for her. She sang:

"I love sardines when they're boiled with beans
And mixed with the sands of the sea."

Away out from the beach a skate-fish was resting on a sand-bar. Hearing the song of the maiden, he quickly swam towards the shore. When he came close enough to hear the words of the song and to know what the box contained, he swam away in great disgust, for he was cousin to the sardines in the box, and came from the same family tree as they. But he was too timid to try to punish the maiden. Then a bold merman heard the song. He had long looked for a land

"Halvor! Halvor!"

"Well," said Halvor, "here I am."

"Have you got your big cat with you still?"

"Yes, that I have," said Halvor; "she's lying at home under the stove, and what's more, she has now got seven kittens, far bigger and fiercer than she is herself." "Oh, then, we'll never come to see you again," bawled out the Troll away in the wood, and he kept his word; for since that time the Trolls have never eaten their Christmas brose with Halvor on the Dovrefell.

Poland

The Fern Flower

Long ago, there was a young boy called Jack, but everybody in the village called him The Curious One because Jack always wanted things which appeared beyond the grasp of others. He did not care about things which he could get simply by reaching out his hand. Instead, he wanted things which required a great effort to obtain.

Once, when everybody in the village was sitting around the bonfire, the elder of the village told the story of the Fern Flower. The woman was very old and had travelled all over the world and seen many strange things, so Jack listened to the story very carefully.

The young boy was fascinated and promised himself then and there that he would find the flower and make all of his wishes come true. It did not matter that the Fern Flower bloomed only once a year. If Jack did not find the flower on the first year, then he would keep looking year after year.

When St John's Night finally arrived, Jack dressed in his best clothes and went into the forest to seek out the mythical flower. Jack knew the paths and the trees of the forest very well, but on this night he did not recognize a single thing. The trees appeared much taller, and their branches and trunks stretched out in such a way that he could not always walk around them. The bushes were thicker and spikier, and the pathways were all darker and scarier.

Jack kept walking despite all of the obstacles in his way; despite the darkness and the terrifying blue, red, yellow and green eyes watching from the darkness. Jack walked on because he knew that the strangeness of the forest, and the scary eyes in the darkness, were all there to prevent him from finding the mythical Fern Flower.

The pine trees were tall and wide and caused Jack to make very slow progress. The bushes were so thick that he had to hack at them with his hands and feet in order to continue on his journey.

Then he came across a pine tree that was so tall it seemed to stretch up into the sky, and so wide it seemed to him as if it would take forever to walk around its trunk. When eventually he had gotten to the other side of the tree, he noticed that it was not so tall and wide after all, but rather another trick of the mysterious forest.

Some time later, Jack came across a marsh in the middle of the gloomiest, dampest part of the forest. There was no way around the marsh, and when Jack tried to put his foot into the water he almost sank to the bottom. Eventually the young boy noticed very small clumps of grass dotted here and there across the length of the marsh. He decided that this was the only way to cross the boggy water, so he took a deep breath and jumped from one clump to the next until he had crossed over to the other side.

Jack continued on his winding journey through the forest until he came across a massive fern in the middle of a clearing. He noticed a tiny, radiant flower growing on a leaf of the fern. Jack had never seen anything so beautiful. The flower had five golden petals, and in its centre something like an eye that flickered and glowed against the darkness of the night. Jack also thought he heard the distant sound of laughter, but told himself that it was just another trick of the forest. He reached out very slowly, but just as he was about to touch the flower, the rooster crowed and there was a bright flash of light and the flower disappeared. In the darkness Jack fell asleep, and the next time he awoke his mother was standing over him and he noticed that he was laid out in his own bed. Jack's mother looked very worried and explained how she had found him asleep in the middle of the forest that morning.

The young boy felt ashamed that he had failed, but he never told his mother or his friends what he had been doing in the forest that night because he was afraid they would not believe him. Instead, Jack made a silent promise to himself that he would try again the following year.

Jack thought about the flower all year long until St John's night finally arrived again. As the villagers gathered around the fires, he dressed in his best clothes and went into the dark forest in search of the flower. This time the trees were even wider and taller. There were huge, slippery stones on the forest floor, and thick ferns, some much taller than the young boy. Once again, the strange eyes looked at him from out of the darkness, but Jack continued on his search. After many hours, he saw something glowing in the distance. As he got closer he knew that it was the same flower with its five golden petals and the amazing glowing eye at its centre.

Jack approached the flower in awe, but before he managed to touch it, the rooster crowed and the flower disappeared just as before. Jack was so tired after his adventure that he instantly fell fast asleep and experienced a strange dream in which the eye of the flower looked right at him. The flower asked the young boy, 'are you ready to give up yet?'

When eventually he awoke from the dream, he promised himself that next St John's night the flower would be his for certain. The year passed very slowly, but eventually St John's night arrived, and again Jack dressed in his best clothes and set off into the forest.

This time the forest looked normal, just like it did in the daytime. Jack looked for the flower but could not find it anywhere. Then, quite suddenly, he noticed it, right there at his feet: the flower with five golden petals and the mysterious,

ful music'

The musician said to the armadillo 'But in order to help you make the beautiful music that you love so much, you will have to wait until you die and you are such a beautiful creature that I really wouldn't want that to happen to you too soon' But the armadillo was so amazed that the musician would be able to help him achieve his ambition, that even the thought of death could not stop him wanting the man to help him in any way that he could.

They spent many hours talking and the armadillo agreed that he would continue to enjoy listening to the music of the other animals until he became very old and then he would return to the musician's house so that he could learn how he might be able to make beautiful music himself after his death.

After living a long and happy life in the forest, the armadillo realised that he was close to death and returned to the town. The musician made him welcome and explained that after the armadillo died, he would make a wonderful stringed instrument from his shell and travel all through the land playing music to all the people and animals. This made the armadillo very happy and he died with a smile on his face at the thought of how he would at long last achieve his greatest wish. So the musician did as he had promised and made a beautiful harp from the shell of the armadillo and he travelled all over the land playing sweet music in memory of the armadillo. Sometimes the musician would play his instrument by the pond where the frogs lived, and they would stare at him with big eyes and say: "Listen! The armadillo has finally learned to sing."

Sometimes the musician would play his instrument by the trees where the crickets lived, and they would creep outside to stare at him with big eyes and say: "Listen! The armadillo sings so beautifully."

And often the musician would visit the town where the canaries now lived in cages in the windows of all the houses and the little birds twittered to each other in amazement: "Listen! The armadillo makes the most beautiful music in the whole forest now."

And so it was. The armadillo had learned to sing at last, and his voice was the finest in the land.

Canada

The Mermaid of the Magdalenes

Far off the north-east coast of Canada is a group of rugged islands called the Magdalenes. They are a lonely, barren group, where grass and flowers and trees grow scantily. There, the northern storms rage with their wildest fury, and the sea breaks with its greatest force upon the bleak rocks. Numberless birds of strange cries and colours fly constantly about. On days when the storm dashes the sea white and angry against the coast, even the thunder of the surf is almost shut out by the screaming of countless gulls; and on clear days the sun is hidden when the birds rise in clouds from their nests. The "Isle of Birds," the Jesuits

The youth fished him up and cut off his head. Then he changed back to his own form. He went to the dragon-man's lodge to see how the old woman had fared, but she had gone with her bright robe, and the lodge was empty. Then the youth went back to his home and reported what he had done. And he received many rich gifts from the Chief for his brave deed, and the land was never troubled again by dragons. But from that time the snake family was hated because its shape had concealed the dragon-man, and to this day an Indian will not let a snake escape with his life if he meets one of them in his path. For they still are mindful of the adventure of their ancestor in the old days, and they are suspicious of the evil power the snake family secretly possess.

Spain

The Song of the Armadillo

Once there was an armadillo who lived in the Bolivian rainforest. He loved music more than anything else in the world and all he wanted to do was to be able to sing like many of the other animals could.

He sat by the pond and listened to the frogs calling to each other. 'I wish I could sing as low as you can. Can you teach me to sing please?' he asked them. But the frogs just laughed at him and said 'Don't be silly - armadillos can't sing!' He sat under the trees and listened to the crickets chirruping to each other. 'I wish I could sing as high you do' he said to them. Can you please teach me?' But the crickets laughed at him as well and said 'Don't be silly - armadillos can't sing!'

So the poor armadillo left the pond and walked slowly back to the edge of the town. Now the music that the armadillo loved the best was the song of the beautiful birds - hummingbirds, martins and parrots. He could hear them singing all day long high up in the trees and yearned to be able to sing as beautifully as they could.

Suddenly he heard the beautiful song of some canaries in a cage being taken to the local market by a young man. The armadillo stood spellbound as he listened to the beautiful music. He pleaded with the canaries to teach him how to sing as beautifully as they could. The canaries laughed just like the crickets and the frogs and mocked the poor armadillo.

'Don't be so silly - everyone knows that armadillos can't sing and there is no point in you even trying to learn!' they said to him scornfully.

So the poor armadillo turned away, so sad that he was nearly in tears. Now the man carrying the cage was a famous musician and he realised that the armadillo would never be happy until he was able to make the same beautiful music that he heard all around him every day in the rainforest. So he said to the armadillo kindly 'I might be able to help you, but you will have to wait a long time' The armadillo was so excited that he rushed over to the man and said 'I really don't care how long I have to wait - all I want in life is to be able to make beauti-

glowing eye at its centre. Jack reached out and finally touched the mythical flower before the rooster could crow.

The flower burnt his fingers as if the petals were on fire! But Jack did not let go. As he put the flower inside his jacket, he heard a quiet voice say to him, 'now you can have anything in the world you have ever wanted, but you may never share your happiness with another soul.'

But Jack was too excited to hear the words of warning as he felt the flower laying down its delicate roots into his young heart. The Fern Flower was finally his, and he was going to have his every wish fulfilled.

When Jack reached the edge of the forest he should have been able to see his cottage, but instead he saw a palace in the middle of a large kingdom. This was something Jack had always wished for: to live in a palace and be ruler of his own kingdom. There was also a carriage with six white horses waiting to take him to his new palace.

There were many servants inside the palace, but his family and friends were not there, nor anybody from his old village on the edge of the forest. The young boy had a very comfortable bed and mountains of gold in the vaults of his palace. He often thought that he might send some of this gold to his family, but then he would remember how it was forbidden for him to share any of his wealth and happiness with another soul, even his family. I

f he did this, then everything would disappear and he would be poor again. And so the young boy decided that he must keep everything for himself, and if anybody else ever needed anything then they would just have to search for the Fern Flower as he had done.

Jack lived what many would call a happy life, but although the young boy had everything his heart desired, he was very bored and so became a cruel and wicked king who treated his subjects unfairly.

One day, he decided to take the carriage and visit his old village because he missed his mother very much. When he arrived at the little cottage on the edge of the forest, Jack's mother observed the six white horses with fear in her eyes. He stepped down from the carriage with open arms but his mother did not recognize him. She said, 'My son Jack dead. If he were alive he would never leave his family. If he ever found the Fern Flower he would not keep such wealth and happiness for himself. He would share it with his family and friends.'

Jack wanted to show his mother how much he longed to share everything he had with her, but each time he reached for the gold in his pocket he remembered that he would lose everything if he were to share with others. With this realization, Jack's heart turned to stone and he ordered his carriage to take him back to his palace.

Upon his return, he ordered his subjects and his servants to entertain him. He got drunk on wine and tried to forget about his old life in the little village; but no matter what he did, Jack could never forget the look of sadness on his mother's face.

One year later, Jack decided to visit his family again. This time, when the carriage pulled up outside of his home, his mother did not come out to greet him. Instead, his brother approached the carriage. When Jack asked about his mother, his brother told him that she was very sick and that his father had gone. Jack entered the cottage and saw his mother laid out on her tiny, uncomfortable bed. She looked very sick and could not even sit up to face her son. Jack felt a great guilt and fear come over him. He could not stand the thought of losing his mother. He wanted to reach into his pocket for the gold that might help his family, but again he remembered that he would lose everything if he were to share his wealth with others.

'My mother is old and will not suffer for long,' he reasoned. 'I am young, and if I give up everything now I will suffer for many years.'

Jack turned his back on his family and returned to the palace. But as hard as the young boy tried to forget his family, he was haunted by images of his sick mother and his poor brother. He tried to ignore his feelings but was unable to enjoy his wealth or his beautiful palace.

It was during these long, lonely nights in the palace that Jack realized how useless his wealth really was if he could not share it with friends and family. As time went by, Jack lost weight and his health became very poor. He was always miserable and his vast wealth no longer seemed to matter.

The young man awoke one day and knew that he must return home to his family and his friends. He ordered his carriage to take him right away to his old house in the village on the edge of the forest. But when Jack arrived back at his old home, nobody came out to greet him.

Jack stepped down from the carriage and approached the little cottage. He looked through a tiny window hoping to see his family inside, but the cottage was empty.

It was then that an old beggar approached Jack and told him, 'Nobody lives in that cottage anymore. They all died of disease and hunger for they were too poor to buy food and were unable to send for a doctor.'

Jack began to cry over the loss of his family. He was the boy who could have anything he wished for, but what good was that if he did not have his family or friends around to share in his happiness? Jack wished he was dead because he could not bear the thought of being alone any longer.

Suddenly the ground opened up beneath his feet and Jack vanished into the darkness below, the mythical Fern Flower still clinging to his cold heart after fulfilling the young boy's final wish. The Fern Flower has never been found by another, and Jack, the young boy whom the villagers once called The Curious One, has never been seen again.

evening he came to a lake. As he was looking about for a warm place to pass the night, he suddenly came upon the dragon-man, now in the form of a monster dragon, hiding behind the trees. The old woman's words had come true, for his enemy had overtaken him before nightfall, as she had said. There was no time to lose, so the boy waved his magic bark, and at once he became a little fish with red fins, moving slowly in the lake.

When the dragon-man saw the little fish, he cried, "Little fish with the red fins, have you seen the youth I am looking for?"

"No, sir," said the little fish, "I have seen no one; I have been asleep. But if he passes this way I will tell you," and he moved rapidly out into the lake. The dragon-man moved down along the bank of the lake, while the youth watched him from the water. He met a Toad in the path, and said, "Little Toad, have you seen the youth I am looking for? If he passed this way you would surely have seen him."

"I am minding my own business," answered the Toad, and he hopped away into the moss. Then the dragon-man saw a very large fish with his head above water, looking for flies, and he said, "Have you seen the boy I am looking for?"

"Yes," said the fish, "you have just been talking to him," and he laughed to himself and disappeared. The dragon-man went back and searched everywhere for Toad, but he could not find him. As he looked he came upon a musk-rat running along by the stream, and he said angrily, "Have you seen the person I am looking for?"

"No," said the rat.

"I think you are he," said the dragon-man.

Then the musk-rat began to cry bitterly and said, "No, no; the boy you are looking for passed by just now, and he stepped on the roof of my house and broke it in." The dragon-man was deceived again. He went on and soon came upon old Turtle splashing around in the mud.

"You are very old and wise," he said, hoping to flatter him, "you have surely seen the person I am looking for."

"Yes," said Turtle, "he is farther down the stream. Go across the river and you will find him. But beware, for if you do not know him when you see him, he will surely kill you." Turtle knew well that the dragon-man would now meet his fate. The dragon-man followed the lake till he came to the river. For greater caution, so that he might be less easily seen, he changed himself to a Snake. Then he attempted to cross the stream. But the youth, still in the form of a fish and still using the power of his magic bark with the mystic sign, was swimming round and round in a circle in the middle of the river. A rapid whirlpool arose where he swam, but it was not visible on the surface. As the Snake approached it, he saw nothing but clear water. He failed to recognize his enemy, and as Turtle had told him, he swam into the whirlpool before he was aware of it, and was quickly drawn to the bottom, where he was drowned.

After they had eaten, the man went out to gather wood for the fire, and the boy sat talking to the old woman. And she said to him, "You are very young and beautiful and innocent—the most handsome I have yet seen in this place. And because of that, I will take pity on you and warn you of your danger. The man whom you met in the forest and whom you dined with tonight is none other than the dragon-man of whom you have often heard. He cannot be killed in ordinary combat, and it would be folly for you to try. Tomorrow he will kill you if you are still here.

Take these moccasins that I will give you, and in the morning when you get up put them on your feet. With one step you will reach by their power the hill you see in the distance. Give this piece of birch bark with the picture on it to a man you will meet there, and he will tell you what next to do. But remember that no matter how far you go, the dragon-man will overtake you in the evening."

The youth took the moccasins and the birch bark bearing the mystic sign and hid them under his coat, and said, "I will do as you advise."

But the woman said, "There is one more condition. You must kill me in the morning before you go, and put this robe over my body. Then the dragon-man's spell over me will be broken, and when he leaves me, I will rouse myself with my power back to life."

The youth went to sleep, and the dragon-man slept all night beside him so as not to let him escape. The next morning, when the dragon-man was out to get water from the stream some distance away, the boy at once carried out the old woman's orders of the night before. First of all, he killed the old woman with a blow and covered her body with a bright cloak, for he knew that when the dragon-man would leave the place she would soon rise again. Then he put the magic moccasins on his feet and with one great step he reached the distant hill. Here, sure enough, he met an old man. He gave him the piece of birch bark bearing the mystic sign.

The man looked at it closely and smiled and said, "So it is you I was told to wait for. That is well, for you are indeed a comely youth." The man gave him another pair of moccasins in exchange for those he was wearing, and another piece of birch bark bearing another inscription. He pointed to a hill that rose blue in the distance and said, "With one step you will reach that hill. Give this bark to a man you will meet there, and all will be well."

The boy put the moccasins on his feet, and with one step he reached the distant hill. There he met another old man, to whom he gave the birch bark. This man gave him another pair of moccasins and a large maple leaf bearing a strange symbol, and told him to go to another spot, where he would receive final instructions. He did as he was told, and here he met a very old man, who said, "Down yonder there is a stream. Go towards it and walk straight into it, as if you were on dry ground. But do not look at the water. Take this piece of birch bark bearing these magic figures, and it will change you into whatever you wish, and it will keep you from harm."

The boy took the bark and did as he was told, and soon found himself on the opposite bank of the stream. He followed the stream for some distance, and at

Turkey

Bald Boy and the Magic Seal

One day, Bald Boy was walking back from the marketplace after selling his crops to the people of the neighbouring village. He had made three gold coins that day and was very pleased with himself because now his mother would be able to buy food and clothing to last through the long winter.

Suddenly Bald Boy came across a group of men who were teasing a cat with a long stick. The cat looked very scared and was unable to escape. Bald Boy walked up to the men and said in a kindly voice: 'Please stop teasing that poor cat. If you stop, I will give you a gold coin.'

The men agreed to put down the stick and Bald Boy handed over a shiny gold coin. The cat was very grateful to the boy and walked by his side. He promised that if ever he was able to repay the boy's kindness, he would surely jump at the chance. Bald Boy could not imagine how a cat might help him in his life, but he agreed that the cat could join him, and so the two friends continued on their journey back to the boy's home in the neighbouring village.

The boy and the cat walked for a few miles until they came across an old man and an old woman who were beating a dog because it had been barking too loudly. Bald Boy approached the old couple and said in a kindly voice: 'Please stop beating that poor dog. If you stop, I will give you a gold coin.'

The old couple stopped beating the dog and took the gold coin from the boy. The dog was very grateful to the boy for saving him from the old couple, and he asked to join the boy and promised that he would always be faithful and help whenever he could. The young boy could not imagine how a dog might help him in his life, but he agreed that the dog could join him, and so the three friends continued on their journey home.

Not long after this, Bald Boy and his new companions stumbled upon two woodcutters in the forest who were trying to kill a snake with their sharp axe. Bald Boy walked up to the angry woodcutters and said in a kindly voice: 'Please do not kill that snake with your axe. If you leave the snake in peace, I will give you a gold coin.'

The woodcutters thought about Bald Boy's proposition for a moment and then agreed to put down the axe. The boy handed over his last gold coin without thinking because he was happy to have saved the snake from certain death. The snake was very grateful and slithered up to whisper in the boy's ear. 'Thank you, Son of Adam, for saving my life. I am the son of the Snake Emperor and you must come home with me so that my father might thank you in person for your kindness.'

Even though Bald Boy had no more gold coins to buy food, he was happy to have saved his three friends and agreed to go and see the Snake Emperor before returning home to his mother.

When they arrived in the forest, the Snake Emperor was very grateful to Bald Boy for saving his son's life.

'I will give you anything that you ask of me,' said the Snake Emperor to the boy. It was then that the young snake whispered in the boy's ear once more. 'Ask my father for his magic seal which he keeps under his tongue. With this seal all of your wishes will come true. All you have to do is ask and it will be given.' And so the boy asked the Snake Emperor for his magic seal, and the Snake Emperor replied: 'You ask me for my most precious possession, but you saved my son's life and I will grant you what you ask.' The Snake Emperor relinquished his magic seal and Bald Boy stuffed the seal into his pocket and returned home with his faithful cat and faithful dog by his side. When Bald Boy's mother learned that her son had given away all of their gold coins she was very angry, but the boy promised that he would make up for this loss by marrying the Emperor's daughter and making a new life for his mother. 'And how will you do that, my son? This cat and this dog will not help you do such a thing.'

It was then that Bald Boy told his mother all about the magic seal that would grant his every wish. The very next day, Bald Boy set off with his faithful cat and dog to the palace to ask for the hand of the Emperor's daughter.

'I cannot allow my daughter to marry such a poor boy,' said the Emperor when Bald Boy asked to marry the beautiful princess. 'If you wish to marry my daughter you must first build a palace next to mine so that I know she will be well looked after. But I know that you will not build such a palace with the help of a cat and a dog.'

That night, Bald Boy held the seal under his tongue and wished that he had a palace of his own. Suddenly there was a blinding light in the night sky. And when the light faded, there at the edge of the forest stood a magnificent palace gleaming beneath the light of the full moon! The most magnificent palace the boy had ever seen. And it was his!

When the Emperor saw that the young boy had indeed built a beautiful palace, he agreed to the marriage at once. And so it was that Bald Boy and the Princess were wed that very same day. The mother moved in with her son and daughter and lived like a queen in her new home. And the cat and the dog were also very happy in their new life.

The months passed and Bald Boy wished for nothing else as he was so happy with his new wife whom he loved very much. And so he placed the magic seal in a room all of its own and never told the Princess of its magical powers. But one day, when Bald Boy was out at the marketplace, a crafty old bead seller knocked on the door of the palace and enticed the beautiful Princess to buy some of his beads.

'They are very fine beads, my Princess, and you would do well to buy them from me.'

'But I have no coins with which to buy them,' the Princess replied.

frog, it lifts its tail up in the air!

United States of America

The boy and the dragon

Once, long ago, before the white man came to Canada, a boy was living with his parents in a village near the ocean. As he had no brothers or sisters, he was often lonely, and he longed for adventure and companionship. At last he decided to set out to seek his fortune elsewhere. He was just on the point of leaving his home when it was noised abroad one day that there had come into the land a great dragon, who was doing great havoc and damage wherever he went.

The country was in great terror, for the dragon carried off women and children and devoured them one by one. And what was still more mystifying, he had the power to take on human form, and often he changed himself into a man of pleasing shape and manner and came among the people to carry out his cruel designs before they knew that he was near. The Chief of the tribe called for volunteers to meet the dragon-man, but none of his warriors responded. They were strong and mighty in combat with men, but it was a different matter to encounter a dragon.

When the youth heard this dreadful story and saw the terror of his people, he said, "Here is my chance to do a great deed," for somehow he felt that he had more than human power. So he said good-bye to his parents and set out on his adventure. He travelled all day inland through the forest, until at evening he came to a high hill in the center of an open space. He said, "I will climb this hill, and perhaps I can see all the country round about me." So he went slowly to the top. As he stood there, looking over the country which he could see for many miles around, a man suddenly appeared beside him. He was a very pleasant fellow, and they talked together for some time. The boy was on his guard, but he thought, "Surely this man with the good looks cannot be the dragon," and he laughed at his suspicions and put them from his mind.

The stranger said, "Where are you going?"

And the boy answered, "I am going far away. I am seeking adventure in the forest for it is very lonely down by the sea." But he did not tell him of his real errand.

"You may stay with me tonight," said the newcomer. "I have a very comfortable lodge not far from here, and I will give you food." The boy was very hungry and tired, and he went along with the man to his lodge. When they reached the house the boy was surprised to see a great heap of bleached bones lying before the door. But he showed no fear, nor did he comment on the horrible sight. Inside the lodge sat a very old and bent woman, tending a pot. She was stirring it with a big stick, and the boy saw that it contained meat stew. When she placed the stew before them, the boy said he would rather have corn, for he feared to taste the meat. The old woman fried some corn for him, and he had a good meal.

Mexico

The frog and the fox

A frog was having a bath in a puddle in the middle of the jungle. He appeared quite happy splashing about in the water. A fox passed by that place. "What are you up to there in the mud, you slimy creature?" asked the fox contemptuously.

"None of your business" croaked the frog, turning over in the mud once more.

"You really are a weird specimen", said the fox. "How can you get about with one pair of short legs, and one pair of extra long ones?"

"You'd better watch out, you with your hairy nose", replied the frog. "I'm the fastest frog in this whole jungle!"

The fox laughed dismissively.

"Tell you what", said the frog, puffing himself up to twice his size, "I bet I'm quicker than you. We'll have a race to prove it."

The fox couldn't believe what she was hearing. "You? Quicker than me? You slimy little toad! Very well, we'll have a race. Meet me at the guava tree, twelve o'clock sharp!"

They met at the appointed hour. Frog had brought along his friend, duck. Duck had a very good voice, so he was going to shout out the starting signal. They stood at the starting line, ready to dash off. Duck quacked the start signal. Fox started running. Frog, standing on his hind legs, took one almighty leap, and landed on the fox's tail, where he hung on. Fox was so concentrated on her running that she didn't notice a thing.

After having sprinted as fast as she could for a few minutes, fox stopped and turned round. She laughed. Frog was nowhere to be seen, she knew she had already won the race; all she had to do now was saunter along at a gentle pace. All the time frog was hanging on to fox's tail, unobserved.

The finish line approached, and fox decided to make a little sprint, just for show. Just then, frog flung himself onto fox's bag, and standing on his hind legs, made another almightily terrific jump. He landed over the finish line, just as fox was about to cross it.

Frog jumped up and down. "I've won! I've won!"
Fox was incandescent with rage. "You cheat! You slimy spotty little cheat!"

Frog just laughed. "I was first to cross the line", he said "You lost!"

Fox turned to duck. But duck agreed that frog was the winner. "Frog won the race fair and square" he quacked. From that time on, whenever a fox passes a

The crafty old bead seller said that he would be willing to trade his wares for something within the palace. 'I hear that you have a dusty old seal which you keep in a room in the palace; surely that is no use to you. I will take the seal in exchange for all of my beads.'

Because she did not know any better, the Princess handed over the magic seal to the crafty old bead seller who quickly disappeared across the lake towards his home in the dark forest somewhere on the other side.

As soon as the seal was gone, the palace disappeared into thin air and the Princess and the mother were left standing in the cold. When the Emperor saw that the palace had disappeared, he reclaimed his daughter and promised that she would not be with her new husband if he could not look after her.

When Bald Boy returned home that day he was very sad to find his mother alone, his palace vanished, and his beautiful wife returned to her father. He did not know how to find the magic seal and was sure that his new life was over forever. The cat stepped up to the boy and said to him: 'I can find the seal but I cannot swim across the lake.'

Then the dog stepped forward and said to the cat: 'I can swim across the lake with you on my back and together we will find the magic seal.'

And so the faithful cat and the faithful dog set off on their journey to recapture the magic seal from the crafty bead seller. When they reached the river, the cat climbed up onto the dog's back and the dog swam across to the opposite bank. Once they were across, the cat began sniffing at the air and followed the scent of the bead seller through the forest with the dog close behind. It did not take long to find the cottage where the bead seller lived, and they could see through the window that the old man was fast asleep in his chair before the fire.

'I will catch us a mouse,' said the cat, 'while you find us some peppercorns to grind up with your strong paws.'

And so the cat caught a little mouse and told it to sneak into the cottage and take the seal from under the tongue of the crafty bead seller. The dog sprinkled the ground peppercorns onto the mouse's tail and the little mouse scurried into the cottage and climbed up the bead seller's leg as he slept soundly by the fire. When the mouse wiggled his tail, the peppercorn dust went straight up the old man's nose and caused him to sneeze. It was then that the magic seal flew out into the air and the mouse caught it in his tiny paws!

The little mouse ran from the cottage and returned the magic seal to the cat and the dog who quickly made their way back through the forest towards the river. Once again the cat climbed up onto the dog's back and the brave dog swam across the great river.

And so the faithful cat and the faithful dog returned the seal to their master and the palace reappeared in a blinding flash of light. Upon seeing the palace returned, the Emperor agreed that his daughter might once more live with Bald

Boy. After all, the Emperor could tell that his daughter was very much in love. Bald Boy decided to throw a huge party to celebrate the return of his beautiful wife. The whole village was invited and so began a feast that lasted for forty days and forty nights.

The mother and the Emperor agreed that there was indeed much that a cat and a dog could do if they were faithful to their master. Bald Boy smiled because he had learned that friends always help each other when they can, and there is magic in such friendship. Perhaps even more so than in the magic seal.

Pakistan

The Boy Who Cried Wolf

Once upon a time, there was a shepherd boy named Asif who lived in a village in one of the many beautiful valleys in Northern Pakistan. Asif's village was located at the foothills of Pakistan's famous mountain range known as Kurra Kurram. These mountains are very high and very bare with no vegetation whatsoever. But it is a very different scene in the valleys. There are fast-flowing rivers, like the Swat River, which runs from the snow-covered mountains to create beautiful waterfalls and lakes below. There is lush green grass; and in the springtime the ground is covered in brightly coloured flowers and hundreds upon hundreds of butterflies take to the air creating a truly heavenly place.

There was another village further up the valley where Asif's cousin lived. Looking down from that village, the trees and houses below appeared like little toys. Asif always enjoyed this scene whenever he visited his cousin, Hamza, and would often look for his own house in the village far below. The young boy marvelled at how small and distant it all seemed.

Asif's father, Ahmed, owned a small herd of goats which he would take out of the village for grazing early each morning. Asif often liked to accompany his father on these trips as there was no school in the small village. Asif's mother always made them a lunch of meat curry, chapattis and parathas, and a lovely milk drink called lussie. She would wrap the lunch in a square of cloth and Asif would carry it with him to keep it safe until it was time to eat.

Asif was a very active boy and would run around after the goats and keep them in check. His father was very pleased and thought that such training would make Asif a very good shepherd when the boy was older.

At midday, Asif and his father would spread out a roll of cloth beneath the shade of a tree and sit down for their lunch. The young boy always enjoyed his paratha and his lussie drink. When eating, both father and son would keep a watchful eye on the goats to make sure that none wandered away from the herd. They would always return home before sunset as there was no electricity in the village and they needed to eat their dinner before the night set in. Asif went to bed soon after his dinner because there was little to do in the dark, and also because he had to wake very early each morning to milk the goats before taking them out to graze.

broke its banks and it was then that Adao's friends suddenly grew very scared.

'We must run from here!' they screamed. 'The forest has destroyed all of our equipment and there is nothing left!'

Then the two friends ran out of the forest as fast as they could and never returned again. Despite fearing for his life Adao stayed where he was and allowed the winds to push him and the rains to fall on him and soak his clothes to his skin until he was cold and battered and bruised.

'I will not leave the forest!' he cried out at the top of his voice. 'I will stay and plant new saplings to replace the trees that my greedy friends chopped down! I shall stay and do this until I die and nothing will change my mind!'

Then, all of a sudden, the winds died down and the rains came to an abrupt stop. The clouds cleared and the sun came out and dried up the forest floor. Adao was very grateful the storm was over, and as soon as he recovered his wits and dried his clothes he set about planting new saplings in the earth. He worked hard all day and sang to himself the whole time. He planted many saplings and each time he did so he prayed that the sapling would grow into a mighty Mafomeira tree.

All day and all night Adao worked in the forest planting his saplings until he was too tired and too hungry to work any longer. He grew afraid because he was exhausted and in need of food and shelter and remembered sadly how the cabin was destroyed by the storm. But when he returned to the clearing he was amazed to find his little cabin standing there unharmed, a small fire in the hearth and a modest meal on the table.

Adao knew then that the spirit of the Mafomeira had created the storm just as it had returned his cabin to him. The kind man sat down to his dinner and looked into the fire with watery eyes. 'I shall continue to plant new saplings here until I am no more,' he vowed to himself. 'And I shall only ever cut down a single Mafomeira tree each month because that is all that is needed.'

And that is exactly what he did. They say that Adao lived for almost one hundred years and that he took his last breath in the forest. They say that his spirit joined the Mafomeira just as all others who have passed away in the forest have joined the spirit of the Mafomeira and help to protect the beautiful forest from all those who would disrespect the trees and the animals within.

That is the legend of the Mafomeira and that is why it is important to preserve and respect the forests of the world.

Adao was very distressed to hear his friends talking in such a way because he respected the forest and did not want to cut down more trees than were needed. But his friends were not to be dissuaded and so they collected their savings and bought a big tractor and more cutting equipment.

They set out into the forest with their new equipment and began cutting down tree after tree. The mighty trunks fell to the ground one after another and as the forest filled with the crashing and tearing sound of the Lupuna trees Adao's heart filled with sadness.

'What are you doing, my friends?' he asked. 'We must not disrespect the forest in such a way.'

But the two friends would not listen; instead they chopped and stripped the trees and loaded them onto the tractor one after the other. All they could think about was money; they did not care about the forest anymore.

The two friends became so skilled at chopping down the mighty Mafomeira trees that very soon Adao was unable to replace the fallen trees with enough saplings. He knew that what his friends were doing was wrong but he was unable to stop them because they were blinded by greed. He was sure that he was alone in his quest to prevent the forest from being disrespected and he was fast losing all heart.

But he was not alone. The spirit of La Mafomeira was watching and listening, and the spirit was very angry that the trees were being cut down in such a disrespectful way.

That night, as Adao lay awake in his cot in the little cabin, he heard the mighty trees stirring in the forest and was sure he felt a strange presence all around. On the breeze he could make out words whispered into the night. 'You shall not treat the forest in such a way. You shall not go unpunished. I am the spirit of the Mafomeira and I am here to protect and preserve the trees and animals.'

The next day things did not go as planned for Adao's friends. Both men awoke to a terrible pain in their stomachs and nothing they did seemed to ease the pain. Despite their discomfort, greed pulled both men from their cots and made sure that they collected the cutting equipment and prepared for the day ahead. But then the tractor would not start.

'I do not care about the tractor,' said one. 'I am still cutting down trees today.' 'And I do not care about the pain in my stomach,' said the other as he grabbed his axe and made ready to cut down the Mafomeira tree nearest to him. Poor Adao pleaded with his friends to stop what they were doing and spend the day planting saplings in the forest, but neither man would listen.

Just as they raised their axes a mighty wind blew through the forest. The Mafomeira trees swayed and creaked and moaned in the wind and very soon a heavy rain began to fall. The wind and the rain destroyed the cabin and overturned the tractor. Then one of the friends dropped his axe and cut his leg very badly. The wind grew stronger and stronger until there was nothing left of the cabin at all but a few torn planks. The tractor was washed away as a nearby river

Asif enjoyed the lambing season when the goats and sheep gave birth to their kids and lambs. The young boy loved the little lambs and carried them around under his arm, imitating their tiny bleating sounds... 'Maa..maa..maa..maa.'

Hamza would often visit from the hills above, then both boys would carry the lambs around and feed them soft food from their palms and cuddle up close to them to stay warm whenever the weather turned cold.

When Asif was older his father gave him the responsibility of looking after the herd. Hamza often joined Asif and the two boys would get up early to milk the goats and then take the herd out of the village for grazing. This became a routine for both boys and the days and nights passed slowly.

Until, one dark night, a wolf attacked the chickens and goats belonging to a farmer who lived close by. This caused much concern in the village and so it was decided that two men would be posted on guard to kill the wolf if it attacked again.

The wolf did attack again, but this time the men shot and killed the beast and the village soon returned to its peaceful state once more.

Sometime later, when the two boys were sitting on a rock in the meadow watching the goats munching away at the fresh grass, Hamza said to Asif, 'The goats are grazing happily but we are always so bored. It is not fair.'

Asif thought about this for a moment then replied, 'We should do something exciting then. What shall we do?'

Naughty Hamza grinned from ear to ear. 'We should make fools of the people of the village,' he said at last.

'How do we do that?' asked Asif.

Hamza went on to remind Asif about the night the wolf attacked the chickens and goats and how the men had been posted to guard the village with guns. 'Then the wolf did attack and the men killed it! That was very exciting!' exclaimed Hamza. 'But then everything became peaceful and boring again.'

Asif remembered because it was the only exciting thing that had happened in the village for a very long time.

'You know what I am thinking,' continued Hamza. 'If we shout and scream and say, "The wolf is attacking again! Help! Help!" then we would see how the people in the village would run to save us.'

'But it is very bad to tell lies,' said Asif, who was not at all sure about his cousin's naughty plan.

'It is just a joke,' insisted Hamza. 'Don't you want to see their worried faces as they run to help us? It will be so funny.'

'And when they discover that there is no wolf and they see us laughing at them, they will be very annoyed with us,' said Asif. But even as he said this, Asif had to admit that it would indeed be very funny to see the looks on the villagers' faces as they ran into the meadow. He also had to admit that it was very boring watching the goats chew on the grass all day. 'Okay,' he said at last, 'how do we do it?' Hamza explained his plan and the two boys found themselves laughing and rubbing their hands with glee at the thought of making fun of the unsuspecting villagers. The next morning, after milking the goats, the two boys led the herd into the meadow to graze. After enjoying their tasty lunch, packed nicely for them by Asif's mother, they decided to carry out their naughty plan.

Hamza hid himself behind a bush while Asif ran down to the village shouting at the top of his voice, 'Help us! Help us! The wolf is attacking Hamza! Please help us!'

As soon as the villagers heard Asif's cries for help, they picked up their sticks and axes and ran towards the meadow. 'Where is the wolf?' asked one man. 'How did he attack Hamza?' asked another. 'Did the wolf drag him away like he did with my goats and chickens? Tell us, where is Hamza?'

The villagers were very worried as they searched all about for the injured boy. It was then that Hamza jumped out from his hiding place. 'Welcome. Thank you for coming,' said the cheeky boy with a big grin upon his face, 'but there is no wolf here. He ran away when I told him that the villagers were coming to kill him.' Then Hamza fell to his knees and burst out laughing. When Asif saw the looks of concern and panic on the villagers' faces he too burst out laughing and began rolling about in the grass.

The villagers were very angry with the boys, and as they walked away from the meadow they promised to tell Asif's father about his son's wicked behaviour. When Ahmed discovered what his son had done he was very disappointed indeed. He dragged the two boys before the crowd of villagers and made them both apologise for their sneaky trick and promise never to do such a thing again. A few months passed and life returned to normal. But one day, as Hamza and Asif were tending to the goats in the meadow, a fierce wolf came around the hill and tried to drag one of the goats away. Hamza jumped to his feet and ran after the wolf to scare it away. But the fierce wolf simply dropped the goat and got a hold of Hamza's leg instead.

Asif was terrified at the sight of his friend being dragged away by the wolf and quickly ran towards the village screaming, 'People of the village, please come quickly! The wolf is dragging Hamza away! Please help us!'

One of the villagers said, 'We are not going to be fooled again! Go back to your goats.'

'Please!' cried Asif. 'I am telling the truth. Come and help Hamza before it is too late!'

A kindly villager decided to take a look at the edge of the meadow and there he

Bat was not a bird, it was their responsibility to give him a decent burial.

The ground animals agreed to accept the body, but then, as they were preparing for the burial, one of them shouted: "Wait a minute, this bat may have teeth, but he definitely also has wings! How can he be one of us if he has wings?" So now the ground animals had a meeting to consider the problem, and they decided that no ground animal can have wings, so therefore, Mr Bat can't be regarded as one of them. So they too, refused to bury Mr Bat.

Poor Mr Bat, the flying animals refused to accept him because he has teeth, and the ground animals refused to accept him because he has wings. And that is why the bat is still flying around every night.

Brazil

The Legend of the Mafomeira

Deep within the forest there lives the tallest of all trees. They stretch their thick branches full of leaves up into the blue skies and give us oxygen to breathe. Their trunks are very wide and many of these beautiful giants have been in the forest for hundreds of years.

These mighty trees are known as Mafomeira (known as Lapuna in Spanish) and there are many stories that claim the Mafomeira possess a spirit that protects the forest. One such story was told by an old man whose name was Adao.

One day, a very long time ago, Adao and his two young friends decided that they would earn their money by cutting down trees in the forest and selling the lumber to local farmers and builders. The three friends built a small cabin in the forest and set out one morning to cut down their first tree. One tree provided enough lumber for the three men to make an honest living for the whole month.

The farmers were happy and so were the builders. And for every tree they chopped down the three friends planted two baby samplings that would one day grow into mighty Mafomeira. 'This is how we keep the forest healthy and happy,' Adao would say with a smile each time he planted a sapling in the earth. 'And if we take care of the forest then the forest will take care of us.'

Adao and his friends were happy in the forest. They loved their simple cabin and they enjoyed their labours. They only ever cut down one Mafomeira tree each month and they always made sure to plant the baby samplings in order to show respect for the forest. But then, almost without Adao noticing, things started to change.

Adao's friends began to look at the trees in a different way. One asked, 'Why is it that we only cut a single tree each month when we could be cutting many more?'

'We could earn ourselves a great deal of money if we cut down more trees,' said the other.

The wise chief called all four families to the meeting place in the village where he confronted them about the well. 'You three families all stole water from the well even though I told you not to,' said the chief in a stern voice. 'I know this because I visited your homes this morning and discovered the buckets of water. Because you defied my instructions you will be forced to remain in your homes for thirty days and nights without food or water as punishment. I hope that you will spend this time thinking about the wrong you have done.'

To the fourth family he said, 'You listened to my simple instructions and stayed in your home last night and did not visit the well. Take this letter and open it when you return to your home.'

The fourth family took the letter and returned home. When they opened the letter there was a map inside. The family followed the directions on the map and after travelling for many miles they discovered a well surrounded by an abundance of fruit trees and vegetable plants. There was enough food and water to last the family a whole lifetime!

The families who were forced to stay in their homes without food or water learned a valuable lesson that day. They learned that it was always best to listen to the advice of one's elders and not to take things when you were told not to. They also realised that the fourth family were rewarded for their patience and their willingness to follow the simple rules which benefit a community.

Africa

Why the bat flies at night

Once upon a time, in the distant past, there was a great war between the animals who live in the sky and those that live on the ground. Nobody now remembers how the war started or what it was about, but it was a terrible time. Many animals on both sides were wounded or killed, and eventually somebody said that if they carried on like this, there would be no animals left on the earth. So some of the sky animals and some of the ground animals had a meeting, and as nobody could recall what they were fighting each other for, it was agreed that a truce should be called, and peace declared.

For the sky dwellers, the heron was appointed to make the announcements, and for the ground animals, the hare would do this job, as he was able to get around the area very quickly. This was done the next morning, but as all animals settled down, realising they could now live in peace and rebuild their lives, somebody found the body of Mr Bat. He was the last victim of the war, and must have been killed late the previous day. All the flying animals were very upset, and decided to organise a big burial for their friend. But as they were preparing his body for the funeral, one of the birds noticed that Mr Bat had teeth in his mouth. How was that possible? Flying animals don't have teeth. They called a meeting, and they agreed that Bat can't be one of them, as no other bird has teeth in his mouth. So they took bat's body to the ground animals, and told them that as Mr

saw Hamza with his leg trapped in the wolf's powerful jaws. 'Asif is telling the truth!' he cried. 'Come help at once!' The villagers grabbed their sticks and axes and ran to help poor Hamza. And when the wolf saw the crowd running towards him, he let go of the boy's leg and disappeared into the forest.

Two men picked Hamza up by his shoulders and they all returned to the village. The boy's leg was very badly injured and he was in a great deal of pain. Asif was close to tears and asked the villagers, 'Why did you not come sooner? Why did you not believe me?'

A woman stepped forward. 'You lied to us once before,' she explained. 'This is why we did not believe you. Do you see now why it is wrong to tell lies? You must never behave in such a way for it causes mistrust.'

Asif looked at his injured cousin, and at the villagers who had saved the boy from the wolf, and he knew then that he would never tell a single lie ever again.

Russia

A chapter of fish

Sometimes in spring, when the big river flooded its banks and made lakes of the meadows, and the little rivers flowed deep, old Peter spent a few days netting fish. Also in summer he set night-lines in the little river not far from where it left the forest. And so it happened that one day he sat in the warm sunshine outside his hut, mending his nets and making floats for them; not cork floats like ours, but little rolls of the silver bark of the birch tree.

And while he sat there Vanya and Maroosia watched him, and sometimes even helped, holding a piece of the net between them, while old Peter fastened on the little glistening rolls of bark that were to keep it up in the water. And all the time old Peter worked he smoked, and told them stories about fish. First he told them what happened when the first pike was born, and how it is that all the little fish are not eaten by the great pike with his huge greedy mouth and his sharp teeth.

On the night of Ivanov's Day (that is the day of Saint John, which is Midsummer) there was born the pike, a huge fish, with such teeth as never were. And when the pike was born the waters of the river foamed and raged, so that the ships in the river were all but swamped, and the pretty young girls who were playing on the banks ran away as fast as they could, frightened, they were, by the roaring of the waves, and the black wind and the white foam on the water. Terrible was the birth of the sharp-toothed pike.

And when the pike was born he did not grow up by months or by days, but by hours. Every day it was two inches longer than the day before. In a month it was two yards long; in two months it was twelve feet long; in three months it was raging up and down the river like a tempest, eating the bream and the perch, and all the small fish that came in its way. There was a bream or a perch swimming lazily

in the stream. The pike saw it as it raged by, caught it in its great white mouth, and instantly the bream or the perch was gone, torn to pieces by the pike's teeth, and swallowed as you would swallow a sunflower seed. And bream and perch are big fish. It was worse for the little ones.

What was to be done? The bream and the perch put their heads together in a quiet pool. It was clear enough that the great pike would eat everyone of them. So they called a meeting of all the little fish, and set to thinking what could be done by way of dealing with the great pike, which had such sharp teeth and was making so free with their lives.

They all came to the meeting—bream, and perch, and roach, and dace, and gudgeon; yes, and the little erish with his spiny back.

The silly roach said, "Let us kill the pike."

But the gudgeon looked at him with his great eyes, and asked, "Have you got good teeth?"

"No," says the roach, "I haven't any teeth."

"You'd swallow the pike, I suppose?" says the perch.

"My mouth is too small."

"Then do not use it to talk foolishness," said the gudgeon; and the roach's fins blushed scarlet, and are red to this day.

"I will set my prickles on end," says the perch, who has a row of sharp prickles in the fin on his back. "The pike won't find them too comfortable in his throat."

"Yes," said the bream; "but you will have to go into his throat to put them there, and he'll swallow you all the same. Besides, we have not all got prickles."

There was a lot more foolishness talked. Even the minnows had something to say, until they were made to be quiet by the dace. Now the little erish had come to the meeting, with his spiny back, and his big front fins, and his head all shining in blue and gold and green. And when he had heard all they had to say, he began to talk.

"Think away," says he, "and break your heads, and spoil your brains, if ever you had any; but listen for a moment to what I have to say."

And all the fish turned to listen to the erish, who is the cleverest of all the little fish, because he has a big head and a small body.

"Listen," says the erish. "It is clear enough that the pike lives in this big river, and that he does not give the little fish a chance, crunches them all with his sharp teeth, and swallows them ten at a time. I quite agree that it would be much better for everybody if he could be killed; but not one of us is strong enough for that. We are not strong enough to kill him; but we can starve him, and save our-

calm and patient, and they enjoyed living in their small community.

One night, the daughter of the third family was out exploring when she discovered a well hidden among some trees in the wilderness. The daughter ran back to her family and told them about the well and so they started to use the well to get their water.

It was not long before the other families heard news of the well, and very soon all four families were using the well to get their water until it was in danger of running dry.

This went on for some time, and it was obvious that the water in the well was getting lower and lower, yet none of the families wanted to stop using the well as it was close to the village and meant that they did not have to walk so far to get the water which they used to drink and cook and clean with.

One day, the wise chief, who had always known about the secret well, spoke to each family in turn. The chief said to them, 'Tonight you must stay in your homes. You must not use the well for one whole night, that way the water will have time to rise once more.'

Each of the families agreed to stay away from the well, especially as the wise chief warned that there would be a severe punishment for any family who disobeyed this simple rule.

But when night fell, the son of the first family could not resist visiting the well as he wanted to make sure he had plenty of water for the following day so that his family would not argue over who would walk the long distance to the usual well used by the rest of the villagers. He crept out to the well carrying two large buckets and filled them both to the top before returning to his home and hiding the buckets where they would not be seen.

Not long after, the son of the second family also crept out to the well and filled two large buckets all the way to the top as he was very greedy and wanted the water for his family alone.

Then the daughter of the third family also crept out to the well as she could not resist exploring at night and reasoned that it was she who had discovered the well in the first place so it was her family who deserved the extra water despite the warning from the wise chief.

The next day, the chief visited the well and was distressed to find that it was completely dry. He waited until he knew that all of the families were away from their homes, then he visited each home in turn.

In the first home he discovered the two buckets, one of which was already empty, but the other still contained the water which was stolen from the well. When he visited the second and third homes he also discovered the buckets of water hidden where nobody would see them. But when he visited the fourth home he discovered that the buckets were dry and realised that the patient family had remained in their beds all night. They had listened to his warning and had stayed away from the well so that the water might rise once more.

cooking in a pot."

"Come eat our beans with us," cried the monkeys. "They are almost done."

"I would love to Father Monkey," said Anansi. And again, Anansi suggested he spin a web, with one end tied around his leg, and one end tied to the big bean pot. Father Monkey thought that was a great idea. All his children thought so, too. And so it was done.

"I smell sweet potatoes," Anansi sniffed happily as he ambled along. "Sweet potatoes and honey, I do believe!"

"Anansi," called his friend Hog. "My pot is full of sweet potatoes and honey! Come share my food with me."

"I would love to," said Anansi. And again, Anansi suggested he spin a web, with one end tied around his leg, and one end tied to the sweet potato pot. His friend Hog thought that was a great idea. And so it was done.

By the time Anansi arrived at the river, he had one web tied to each of his eight legs.

"This was a wonderful idea," Anansi told himself proudly. "I wonder whose pot will be ready first?"

Just then, Anansi felt a tug at his leg. "Ah," said Anansi. "That is the web string tied to Rabbit's greens." He felt another. And another. Anansi was pulled three ways at once.

"Oh dear," said Anansi as he felt the fourth web string pull.

Just then, he felt the fifth web string tug. And the sixth. And the seventh. And the eighth. Anansi was pulled this way and that way, as everyone pulled on the web strings at once. His legs were pulled thinner and thinner. Anansi rolled and tugged himself into the river. When all the webs had washed away, Anansi pulled himself painfully up on shore.

"Oh my, oh my," sighed Anansi. "Perhaps that was not such a good idea after all."

To this day, Anansi the Spider has eight very thin legs. And he never got any food that day at all.

Somalia

The Well

A long time ago, there were four families who lived in a small village in Somalia. The first family would argue all of the time, the second family were very greedy, the third family were always away from the village exploring because they were never happy with what they had or where they lived. But the fourth family were

elves at the same time. There's no living in the big river while he is here. Let all us little fish clear out, and go and live in the little rivers that flow into the big. There the waters are shallow, and we can hide among the weeds. No one will touch us there, and we can live and bring up our children in peace, and only be in danger when we go visiting from one little river to another. And as for the great pike, we will leave him alone in the big river to rage hungrily up and down. His teeth will soon grow blunt, for there will be nothing for him to eat." All the little fish waved their fins and danced in the water when they heard the wisdom of the erish's speech. And the erish and the roach, and the bream and the perch, and the dace and the gudgeon left the big river and swam up the little rivers between the green meadows. And there they began again to live in peace and bring up their little ones, though the cunning fishermen set nets in the little rivers and caught many of them on their way. From that time on there have never been many little fish in the big river.

And as for the monstrous pike, he swam up and down the great river, lashing the waters, and driving his nose through the waves, but found no food for his sharp teeth. He had to take to worms, and was caught in the end on a fisherman's hook. Yes, and the fisherman made a soup of him—the best fish soup that ever was made. He was a friend of mine when I was a boy, and he gave me a taste in my wooden spoon.

Then he told them the story of other pike, and particularly of the pike that was king of a river, and made the little fish come together on the top of the water so that the young hunter could cross over with dry feet. And he told them of the pike that hid the lover of the princess by swallowing him and lying at the bottom of a deep pool, and how the princess saw her lover sitting in the pike, when the big fish opened his mouth to snap up a little perch that swam too near his nose. Then he told them of the big trial in the river, when the fishes chose judges, and made a case at law against the erish, and found him guilty, and how the erish spat in the faces of the judges and swam merrily away. Finally, he told them the story of the Golden Fish. But that is a long story and a chapter all by itself.

Japan

The mouse's marriage

Once upon a time, there lived a wealthy mouse family. Their only daughter was a good-natured young mouse, and Father Mouse and Mother Mouse were very proud of her.

One day Father Mouse said to Mother Mouse, "Wouldn't we want our daughter to marry the best person in the world? Who could be the greatest in all the world?" Mother Mouse replied, "It must be Mr. Sun. He lights up the whole world from high up in the sky."

So Father Mouse and Mother Mouse visited Mr. Sun and said, "Mr. Sun, Mr. Sun, we beg you. You are the greatest person in the world. Will you marry our precious daughter? Our only daughter is most good-natured, and we want her to wed the very best groom."

But Mr. Sun answered, "Hmm. The greatest person in the world is surely not myself but Mr. Cloud. However hard I may try to light up the world, I am easily hidden away when Mr. Cloud comes out."

So the two went on to see Mr. Cloud. "Mr. Cloud, we have been told that you are the greatest person in the world. Please do take our dearest daughter as your bride," they asked.

"Oh no, there is someone greater than myself," replied Mr. Cloud. "It's Mr. Wind. However hard I may try to cover the sky, Mr. Wind can blow me away with a single puff."

"I see," Father Mouse and Mother Mouse said, and went off to Mr. Wind.

"Mr. Wind, as you are the greatest person in the world, we would like you to marry our only daughter."

"Well, thank you, but there is someone who is greater than myself."

"Who is that?"

"It's Mr. Wall. However hard I blow, I just can't blow him down."

Finally, Father Mouse and Mother Mouse went to see Mr. Wall.

"Mr. Wall, please wed our daughter. We want our daughter to marry the greatest person in the world and lead a happy life."

"Ho-ho, Father Mouse and Mother Mouse, you are quite mistaken. If you mice nibble on me, I'm full of holes. The greatest ones in the world must be mice."

"Now, that never occurred to us. So we are the greatest in the world!"

Father Mouse and Mother Mouse went back home smiling. "Why, we mice are the best after all. Well then, Chusuke Mouse next door gets along well with our daughter. If the two are happy to do so, it must be best for them to marry."

So Chusuke Mouse and Daughter Mouse were happily wed. Their wedding celebrations went on for three days and three nights, and they lived happily ever after.

China

The island of the sun

There was once a farmer who had two sons. The older son was selfish and greedy, while the younger son was kind and generous. When the farmer died, the older brother took all of his land for himself leaving the younger brother with nothing except a basket and a sharp knife with which he could cut firewood. He would go into the forest and chop wood and sell it in exchange for a little rice in the marketplace. He was poor. He had nothing.

about gathering sticks. The Magpies took a big stick each, and began to push at the sky.

The Emus, the Kangaroos and the Wombats watched as the Magpies pushed the sky slowly upwards. They used the sticks as levers, first resting the sky on low boulders, then on small hills. As the animals watched, the Magpies, pushing and straining, reached the top of a small mountain.

It was still very dark, but at least the Emu could straighten up, and the Kangaroo was able to move in long proud hops. The Magpies kept pushing the sky higher and higher, until they reached the highest mountain in the whole land. Then with a mighty heave, they gave the sky one last push! The sky shot up into the air, and as it rose it split open and a huge flood of warmth and light poured through on to the land below. The whole sky was filled with beautiful reds and yellows. It was the first sunrise.

Overjoyed with the beauty, the light and the warmth, the Magpies burst into song. As their loud warbling carried across the land, the Sun-Woman rose slowly, and began her journey towards the west. Now, each morning when the Sun-Woman wakes in the east she lights a fire to prepare the torch that she will carry across the sky each day. It is this fire that provides the first light of dawn. Then she takes up her torch, and begins her daily journey across the sky. When she reaches the western edge of the world, she extinguishes her flaming bark torch. Then she sits down, and repaints herself in brilliant reds and yellows, ready for her journey through a long underground passage back to her camp in the east. So that is why, to this day, every morning when the Sun-Woman wakes and lights her early morning fire, all the magpies greet her with their beautiful song.

South Africa

Why Anansi has eight legs

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a spider named Anansi. Anansi's wife was a very good cook. But always, Anansi loved to taste the food that others in the village made for themselves and for their families.

One day, he stopped by Rabbit's house. Rabbit was his good friend.

"There are greens in your pot," cried Anansi excitedly. Anansi loved greens.

"They are not quite done," said Rabbit. "But they will be soon. Stay and eat with me."

"I would love to, Rabbit, but I have some things to do," Anansi said hurriedly. If he waited at Rabbit's house, Rabbit would certainly give him jobs to do. "I know," said Anansi. "I'll spin a web. I'll tie one end around my leg and one end to your pot. When the greens are done, tug on the web, and I'll come running!" Rabbit thought that was a great idea. And so it was done.

"I smell beans," Anansi sniffed excitedly as he ambled along. "Delicious beans,

When Monkey had finished and was fat, had eaten all of the yellow bananas, he jumped down from the tree... 'Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!'

The thorns stuck in the bottom of his feet as he ran. He sat down and he pulled the thorns from his feet and he was full of anger. He ran and quickly, quickly caught Turtle.

'I am going to carry you to the cliffs and dash you down upon the rocks so your shell breaks! I'm going to take you to the top of the mountain of fire and throw you into the flames!'

'Yes, yes, said Turtle, throw me into the flames! Yes, dash me from the cliff onto the rocks! But whatever you do, Monkey, don't throw me into the torrent of the river.'

'Ah, that's what you're afraid of,' said Monkey.

Monkey ran, carrying Turtle to the edge of the river, and tossed him high into the air. Turtle landed with a splash in the deep waters and sank down... and then rose to the surface.

'Oh, Monkey, don't you know that Turtles love to swim in the river.'

Turtle wisdom, Turtle slow, Turtle knows what turtles know.

But what of the banana tree?

The Turtle and the Monkey did not work together, and the tree was grown over with weeds. No more bananas.

Australia

The First Sunrise

Long, long ago in the Dreamtime the earth was dark. There was no light. It was very cold and very black. Huge grey clouds kept the light and the warmth out and were so low that the animals had to crawl around. The Emu hobbled neck bent almost to the ground; the Kangaroo couldn't hop, and none of the birds could fly higher than several feet in the air. Only the Snakes were happy because they lived close to the ground.

The animals lived by crawling around the damp dark earth, feeling for fruits and berries. Often it was so hard to find food that several days would pass between meals. The Wombat became so tired of people bumping into him that he dug himself a burrow, and learned to sleep for long periods.

Eventually, the birds decided they'd had enough. They called a meeting of all the animals. The Magpies decided that they would raise the sky by gathering sticks and pushing the sky up. All the animals agreed it was a good idea, and they set

One day, the young brother climbed through the forest to the top of the mountain, and there he sat upon a rock gazing out towards the west where the sun was setting. And as he sat there all alone he felt a rush of air from above and he looked and there was a bright bird flying down towards him, a huge wingspan. He felt the beating of air, the rush of air. And then it landed next to him:

'Why do you sit here all alone?'

'I am poor. I have nothing.'

'Is this true or is this false?'

'It is true, I am poor. I have nothing.'

'Then climb on my back,' said the mighty bird, 'and I will carry you to the Island of the Sun. There you may take one piece of gold before I bring you back.'

He climbed onto the back of the bird and the bird took off. Away from the mountain the great bird flew. Over the forest the great bird flew. Over the waters the great bird flew. To the Island of the Sun the great bird flew. And as the bird landed, the sun set behind the island which glittered brightly, and the boy took one piece of gold. He put it in his basket and climbed onto the back of the great bird.

Away from the island the great bird flew. Over the waters the great bird flew. Over the forest the great bird flew. Back to the mountain the great bird flew. The young brother took that piece of gold and went down out of the forest. And there he bought a small piece of land. And there he reared pigs, cows, and a few hens. He lived well. He worked hard. But one day his older brother came.

'Where did you find this wealth, this land?'

And the young brother told him. 'I want this. Give me that old basket and your knife.'

And the older brother set off up through the forest. And when he came to that mountain he sat upon a rock and waited. After a while he felt a rush of air and a beating of wings was heard. And there, as he gazed towards the west, towards the setting sun, a bird appeared from its bright rays, beating its wings, coming closer. It landed next to him:

'Why do you sit here all alone?'

'I am poor. I have nothing.'

'Is this true or is this false?'

'It is true, I am poor. I have nothing. I want gold!'

'Climb on my back,' said the great bird. 'I will take you to the Island of the Sun. There you may take one piece of gold.'

Away from the mountain the great bird flew. Over the forest the great bird flew. Over the waters the great bird flew. To the Island of the Sun the great bird flew. And as it landed, the sun set behind the island. The older brother looked and saw sparkling gold everywhere. He picked up one piece and placed it in the basket.

'The basket seems empty. I may as well take another.'
A second piece he placed in the basket, then a third. He continued picking up the largest chunks of gold until the basket was completely full.

Then he turned. And as he turned he saw that the bird had flown away and the sun was rising. He stood there and was burned to a crisp. The young brother inherited his older brother's land. He tended the land well and with love. And what he produced he shared with others of the community.

India

The Gift of the Forest

Venu had spent the day with his mother at the busy bazaar in Kodaikanal town selling their crops of fresh cauliflower, cabbage, garlic and onions. As they wearily made their way back to their village, Venu played his flute. He carried this flute everywhere and played exquisite music which always made his mother happy.

On entering their farmhouse in Vilpatti, Venu sat on a stool next to the bed where his father was resting. 'Tantai,' said the boy, 'please eat some more rice. It does not look like you have eaten at all today and the doctor said you need to try and keep eating regularly so that you might keep up your strength.'

The old man looked lovingly at his son. 'Venu, my sweet boy, the doctor says all sorts of things, but the truth is my health is getting no better. If only I had not worked in that mining factory for all those years I am sure my health would not be so bad. Poor Adhir's wife has received no compensation from the company after losing her husband and he worked so hard. What does the company do? They just brush it aside under the carpet as if nothing happened. They are getting away with murder!'

Venu was always upset whenever his father spoke of his illness. 'Tantai, please don't talk like that, it makes me sad. I love you, Tantai!'

'I love you too, my boy, but there is no future for you here.' It was then that the old man's face took on a very serious expression. 'That is why you must leave this place. I do not want you ever working in the mining factory. Not ever!'

'But I don't want to leave, Tantai. I love the forest and have many friends here. I don't want to leave.'

The boy was very upset at his father's words and he began to cry, but the old man, despite his sickness and his frailty, remained stern. He said:

Philippines

Turtle and Monkey

Monkey stood at the edge of the river and watched Turtle swimming against the torrent with a tree that he had caught in the flood: a young tree.

'Oh, Monkey, I have caught a banana tree. Monkey, will you help me to drag it to the clearing and plant it? It will grow and there will be sweet bananas.'
Turtle pulled the tree by its heavy end - the roots and the trunk - across the ground. Monkey carried just a couple of green fronds from the top end of the tree. Lazy monkey.

When Turtle wasn't looking, Monkey jumped onto the fronds.

Monkey nimble, Monkey quick, Monkey play a monkey trick - and was pulled along by Turtle to the clearing.

Turtle made a hole. He pulled the tree down into the hole and pressed the earth down around it. 'Soon it will grow, Monkey. We will tend the tree together. We will water it. We will weed around it. We will share the bananas.'

'Share the tree,' said Monkey. 'Very well.' And Monkey climbed half way up the tree, just below where the green fronds grew, and with his strong hands he broke off the top of the tree and ran away with it, laughing.

He pressed his half, the top half, into the damp earth. Soon he would have bananas, he thought. Turtle tended the bottom half of the tree. There was no green. Turtle wisdom, Turtle slow, Turtle knows what turtles know.

Time passed, and the bottom half of the tree began to green up. Fronds appeared and green bananas began to grow. Monkey, with the top half of the tree, had green fronds that wilted and died. There was nothing. Turtle worked hard around his tree, weeding it and watering it, and now big, long, yellow bananas were hanging down in bunches.

'Oh, Monkey, won't you help me? Climb the tree and pick the bananas. I cannot climb the tree.'

Monkey nimble, Monkey quick, Monkey play a monkey trick - up the tree he went to the top, and there he picked one banana and peeled it and ate the delicious fruit. He tossed down the skin so it struck Turtle upon his shell.

Monkey took another banana and ate it, tossing the skin down upon the shell of Turtle. Banana after banana. Monkey nimble, Monkey quick, Monkey play a monkey trick.

But Turtle, without Monkey noticing, went and fetched thorns and placed them around the trunk of the banana tree. Turtle wisdom, Turtle slow, Turtle knows what turtles know.

ain can be very cold at times.'

Venu took a seat at the table as Balu prepared a breakfast of paratha and sweet chai.

'I've got a surprise for you,' he said.

'What is it?' asked Venu, still half asleep.

'Well, after we finished creating our song last night, I uploaded it onto the internet. I was just too excited and wanted to share it with everybody as soon as possible. You're not angry with me are you, Venu?'

'Not at all. It *was* finished and it is *our* song. It belongs to us both.'

'Good, good,' said Balu, now barely able to contain his excitement, 'because guess what? We've already had over three million people listen to it so far! Three million!'

'What!' said Venu, his mouth full of paratha.

'It's gone viral! Unbelievable! And there are emails from people who are asking about the petition. An environmental charity wants to talk to you as soon as possible. They want to stop the mercury pollution from further damaging the forest, and they say they have the power to do this. Can you believe it?'

'Venu could barely believe his ears. 'Let's call them!' he said, as excited as Balu. 'I'm ready to talk to them right now!' He jumped out of his chair and hugged his friend. 'Without your help none of this would have been possible. Thank you Balu.' 'I just want you and all children to experience the gifts of our forest. No company has the right to destroy such a beautiful place. Come on; let's call the environmental charity who are going to help us.'

Balu dialled the number and Venu spoke to the serious sounding gentleman who answered the phone. The man explained how many of the people who worked for the charity had listened to the song on the internet and how they were all very impressed. Venu told the man about the factories and how his father was sick, and how Laila's mother and father had died after drinking from the contaminated lake.

The man from the environmental charity promised Venu that the factories would be made to stop. 'It will not be easy,' he said. 'It will be a long fight. But we will make sure they leave the forest in the end. And we shall make them pay compensation to the workers.'

When Venu put down the phone he was as happy as he had ever been. He and Balu had begun the process of saving the forest. Venu realised that one person could make a difference if they really cared, and he promised himself that he would never forget this lesson. 'And one day soon,' he thought, 'I will return home to my family and to Laila and the kurinji flowers, and all of the beautiful gifts of the forest.'

'How many times have we discussed this, Venu? There is no cure that can rid my body of the damage done by the mercury pollution. No cure for me or for my fellow workers. These companies have no shame: coming to our beautiful land and taking over, destroying nature just for money. They do not care about the beautiful trees or the animals who make their home deep within the forest.'

'But I care!' said Venu as he jumped to his feet and stormed out of the house. His father knew where the boy was going: to his favourite place, his beloved forest. Venu had always loved the forest, ever since he could remember. It enchanted him, made him feel alive, safe and loved. He felt a freedom within the forest that he did not feel in any other place in the whole wide world. And he loved to play his flute there, alone with the wildlife and the music.

Deep within the forest, the blue and purple flowers of the Kurinji were in bloom. 'How majestic,' thought Venu as he admired the colourful plants spread here and there between the big cypress, eucalyptus and acacia trees.

Venu's favourite gifts of the forest were the wonderful fruits which he could pick off of the trees and eat. He spotted a tree with peaches on it and picked himself a plump, juicy specimen that he knew instinctively would be ripe. He bit into the red and orange flesh and the rich juice oozed out and ran down his cheeks.

How he delighted in this simple pleasure, sitting in his forest eating his peach while watching the nilgiri monkeys up above chasing each other from branch to branch. Venu also admired a beautiful flock of Red-Whiskered Bulbul birds that flew towards him out of the blue sky above. Then he saw Laila the baby elephant approaching. He had been witness to her birth the previous year and they had been close friends ever since.

Venu walked up to Laila and offered her the remaining half of his luscious peach which she accepted in one mouthful. The boy looked at his friend, his heart full of sorrow. 'My father has plans for me to leave Kodaikanal, to leave my forest, but I don't want to go! This is my home.'

Once these words had left Venu's lips, the young boy began to cry. Laila looked up at the boy and said:

'Venu, my mother and father are both dead after drinking from the lake where the factory dumps its mercury waste. It is not safe here anymore. They have spoiled our paradise and they are not stopping. You must leave, Venu. I do not want you to fall ill! When you arrive in your new home, tell them what is happening to our forest. Tell them that the forest needs help. Tell them that the factory and the mines must go!'

Venu wiped the tears from his eyes. 'You are right, Laila. That is exactly what I am going to do. I will let people know what is happening here.' As the sun slowly fell from the sky, the two friends sat side by side in silence and took in the variety of sounds, textures and colours of their beloved forest. Eventually Venu got to his feet and brushed himself down. He felt much better for being in the forest but it was time to get home.

'Laila, I must leave now. Dusk is falling and I ran out of home in a real huff. Tāy and Tantai are probably worried sick.'

The little elephant smiled at the young boy. 'Ok, Venu,' she said, 'you go home. And thank you for caring.'

'Thank you for being my friend,' said the boy. And with these words they parted company.

Venu got back to his house and saw a star in the night sky. It was all alone, but it was so bright and it twinkled silver and white in the night sky. Venu stopped to admire this sight until his thoughts were interrupted by his father's voice. 'Venu, come here, my son.'

The boy approached his father and gave him a big hug. The old man was very grateful to have such a loving son. He said:

'Your mother and I are not angry with you. We do not want you to leave. We just want what is best for you. A very generous friend in London has offered you a place in his home and he will support your schooling there. You will be leaving next week. I am sorry, my son. I cannot work anymore so we cannot afford to keep you with us.'

Venu put on his bravest face but was unable to stop the tears. 'Yes, Tantai,' he said in a quiet voice, 'I understand that you love me and want what is best for me so I will go to London.'

Venu held his father as tightly as he could because he did not know when he would see him again. The young boy was also very nervous because he knew nothing of London or of Britain. But he carried a glimmer of hope in his heart; He hoped that one day he would return to the forest, that he would come back and see the tall trees and the monkeys. He would see Laila and together they would watch the kunjiri flower bloom once again.

Venu was deeply unhappy about leaving his parents, but the forest needed him to stop the factory so he braved the shock of landing in a foreign land with the most courageous face he could muster.

He was met at the airport by his father's friend who was known to him simply as Balu. Balu was a large man with a jolly disposition. His favourite pastime was singing along to Tamil songs whilst he prepared his meals. Balu wanted to make the boy feel at home so he had prepared a large array of dishes for Venu's first meal in London.

Tamil songs played on the radio in the background as the two of them ate together that first evening. Venu shared with Balu what was happening in the forest back home, how the gifts of the forests were being destroyed, polluted by the mercury from the mining factory. 'I am saddened to hear of what is happening to our beloved forest,' said Balu.

'I need to tell people about what is happening back home so that they might help

us,' said Venu, 'but all I can do is play my flute. I do not know what else I can do.' The man and boy sat in silence over their dinner. They enjoyed the music on the radio but neither of them had a very good appetite. Then, quite suddenly, Balu shot up out of his seat with a look of excitement etched on his face.

'That's it!' he exclaimed.

'What is it?' asked Venu

'We will make a song about the forest and we will put it on the internet. We will get people to sign a petition to stop the factories and the pollution!' 'How will we put a song on the internet? I have never done that.'

'It's easy,' said Balu. 'You have the talent. Your father has told me many times about your beautiful flute playing. And me... well, I have the technology. Ha, ha! I love doing stuff like this, making up Tanglish songs. This is going to be fun, I can feel it.'

'What is Tanglish?' asked Venu.

'It is when the words of a song are a mixture of Tamil and English... Pretty cool hey?' said Balu, chuckling to himself as though he had just found a secret key. 'Come on, let's do it now. We've had a lovely meal and I feel good. I've got all my equipment set up in the living room already. You have got your flute haven't you, Venu?'

The young boy was very excited by Balu's idea, but he was also a little bit nervous as he had never recorded his music before. He said:

'I take my flute everywhere, but I am not sure about playing and recording. So many people might listen if we put it on the internet.'

'That is the whole point, my boy! And you are not just going to play,' said Balu with a big, mischievous smile. 'We are both going to sing too, you and I. We shall sing about the beautiful forest and how the factories are destroying our lands. Come on, let's get started.'

And so Balu and Venu spent the whole night recording music and thinking up lyrics that would capture what Venu wanted to say about the forest and all of its natural beauty and wonder. And most importantly of all, Venu wanted to tell people how the factories were causing damage to his beloved forest and how they should be made to stop.

All night long the duo worked on their song about the forest. They wrote and recorded the lyrics that would fit nicely alongside Venu's flute playing and some very strange and wonderful sounds that Balu created on his computer. All night long they worked, right up until the young boy was so tired that he dragged himself to bed and fell asleep instantly.

'Good Morning, Venu,' said a cheery Balu as the young boy walked into the kitchen the following day. 'Did you sleep well? Was the duvet warm enough for you? Brit-