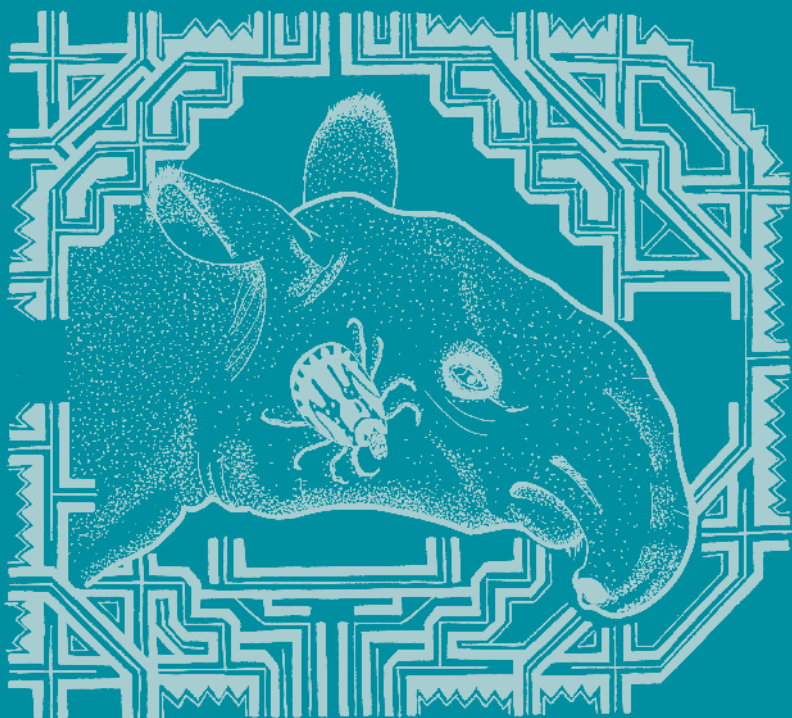


Pantanî

# 33 Amerindian Tales



from the  
**North Rupununi, Guyana**

Edited by Géraud de Ville de Goyet

Grace Albert | Abigail Buckley  
Kenneth Butler | Lakeram Haynes | Janissa Roberts



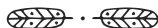
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To Althéa and Luther

Cover: *The Tapir and the Tick*  
Illustrations: Géraud de Ville de Goyet

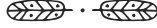
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## PREFACE



*If you happen to visit the Rupununi region of Guyana, and take a hike with a local guide, it is likely you will hear plenty of fascinating stories and legends, as it happened to me. At the end of January 2014, I travelled to the south of Guyana with a group of researchers and had an opportunity to visit a place called ‘Skull Mountain’. During the trip, our local guide shared many tales and stories about the rivers, and valleys that surrounded us. It felt like being walked through an old town, with its church, its streets and its main square. The place was buzzing with memories and legends, evidencing the close ties between local communities and their environment. Of course, this is a subtle relationship, one that does not immediately spring to the eye of the foreign observer. It is without material evidence, marks or scars. Instead, it is deeply spiritual and largely invisible. What appears as thousands of hectares of wild savannah, forests and mountains is in fact the result of a mutual relationship, where human beings shape their environment and their environment, in turn, influences who they are and what they believe in. No wonder Indigenous territories also happen to be amongst the most preserved habitats on earth.*

*Oral storytelling has traditionally been the main vehicle for the transmission of beliefs in the Indigenous communities of the North Rupununi, Guyana. It allows these communities to transmit their worldview and reinforce their sense of community. But the absence of writings also makes these social values particularly fragile to the test of time. With the arrival of new information and communication technologies, and the avalanche of cultural content they provide access to, the practice of oral storytelling comes under increasing threat. Yet, these technologies also present new opportunities. Thanks to recent developments, new possibilities for capturing, broadcasting and safeguarding oral stories have emerged, as discussed here by Grace, a Makushi storyteller:*

*“Over the last few months, I have been visiting some homes to gather traditional stories from community members of different ages. Gathering stories*

*of our customs, traditions, and beliefs from the elderly who are still alive in our communities is important for me as an individual. This time, however, I am very proud of two young boys, aged 8 and 9, whom I found debating about a story they had heard from their teacher in school. When I met them, they were both arguing about who knew the story right and who got it wrong. It was a great opportunity for me to explain to them how important it is to document these stories. They both liked the idea of recording the story and they both agreed to share it with me. They told me that one of their interests is listening to stories told by elders and teachers at school. As I started recording, I could see their excitement growing and they soon couldn't stop telling story after story."*

*Pantanî — pronounced 'pan-duh-nee' — means "stories" in Makushi, the language of the Indigenous peoples of the North Rupununi, Guyana. It is also the chosen name for a digital storytelling project, which took place between June 2014 and May 2015 with the help of local storytellers Lakeram Haynes, Grace Albert, Abigail Allcock, Kenneth Butler and Janissa Roberts. All stories were originally published online, on a blog called [www.pantaniblog.org](http://www.pantaniblog.org). This book proposes a selection of the best ones. It is a tribute to the wisdom and the kindness of the Makushi people of Guyana, with whom I have had the privilege of living and working in 2014 and 2015.*



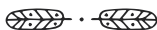




# 1

## **Staying Out of Trouble**

**Abigail Allicock**



Long ago, a group of persons lived in the jungle. Every year, it was a custom, an annual feast was held to which everyone was invited.

A burning fire was always lit at the centre of the house, producing light and warmth.

There was a great demand for food and drinks, so women were given the task to produce and prepare all the drinks, while men went to find meat for the feast.

It was a celebration where young men met their spouses.

As usual, music was essential and the musician had some good music going.

Everyone was having a great time when suddenly a fight broke out due to jealousy. The strongest and handsomest man was the main cause of the fight because he was having all the girls to himself.

Since the fire was a great danger to anyone nearby, one woman shouted, "The fire!"

She started to put it out with the other women while the great fight continued.

But the Great Spirit was always around, observing.

And he decided to punish everyone who was involved in the fight by transforming them into birds and animals.

The fight was so intense that they did not notice the changes to their bodies, the different shapes, sizes and colours.

The strongest one was transformed into a frog called pragko in Makushi; the two musicians, one into a tarantula and the other one into a crab; another one into a rodent called red-rump agouti known as curri in Makushi; and the last one into the grey-winged trumpeter called the cammie.

The frog was now fighting with everyone.

While trying to challenge him, the crab was thrown into the fire and roasted. He was luckily rescued later that night.

The next one facing the frog was the curri and he also was easily thrown into the fire and had his rump burnt.

Despite his friends being no match to the frog the cammie went in but likewise, he found himself landing in the ashes.

Realising that they were not strong enough to fight the frog individually, they decided to fight it together.

The fight went on and the frog was now under a great heap



of jungle animals. As he was under a lot of pressure, he gave a great push and managed to throw them all off.

Tired and worn out by the effort, his bottom had also gone flat because of the weight and his two back legs were now pinned onto the ground, forcing him to use his forearms to balance.

After some time he gave a great push and hopped away.

To this day, the pragko remains hopping.

Everyone was so tired, sore and in pain that they all went off in different directions.

The crab went down to the river to clean up but he was surprised by the reflection of his image and shouted, "Oh my goodness!"

He was so ashamed of himself that he went under a rock, never wanting to come out and experience another fight again.

The curri went off into the rainforest where he remains, sometimes venturing in the farms, looking for anything it can eat.

Lastly, the cammie was also embarrassed of his condition and

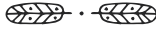
tried to clean himself but he was so tired that some of the ashes can still be seen today on his feathers.

As for the tarantula, it remained singing during the fight and, to this day, it can still be heard singing and playing in the rain-forest.

## 2

### **The Great Oma**

**Kenneth Butler**



In a time before Europeans knew about Guyana and its many great creatures and giants, Indigenous people believed in magic, mysteries and myths.

The Makushi people used the word oma to describe things they had seen for the first time or anything that they could not explain.

This is the story of two brothers who were the trouble-makers of the village and told lots of tales to get other villagers to do what they wanted.

On that day, however, their lives would change as well as history as we know it. Early that morning, the two brothers set out hunting in the nearby forest.

They were very good hunters but for some reason they didn't have much luck in the forest. So, around noon, the youngest brother said, "Let's go to the river, we will have more luck there."

After thinking it over, the older brother agreed and they both went on their way to the river.

However, they were not the only ones hunting that day, for another hunter by the river was one of the great giants of our lands, known as the oma.

Upon arrival at the river, the two brothers started thinking about getting something to eat and to take home and did not pay attention to what was around them.

They did not know that the hunters would become the hunted.

Then, out of the water came this great oma. It grabbed the older brother and squeezed him tightly.

When he saw all this, the younger brother ran back to village as fast as his legs could take him. He alarmed everyone in the village and told the chief what had happened to his brother. He then asked the chief if he would send other warriors to kill the oma.

But the chief did not believe him and instead thought that he had killed his brother and made up this story about the oma taking him.

The chief said to the boy, "Go back and bring me the head of this oma which you spoke of, and then I will believe you. If not you will suffer the same faith as your brother did."

So, with nothing else on his mind but the oma, the young boy set out to capture this great creature.

Just as he reached the river's edge he saw the creature on the bank, sunning itself there.

Knowing that he couldn't even get close enough to scratch it the boy looked around the area for anything that he could use against it. But there was nothing big enough to use there, only the mukru plants, which are known in Makushi as muna.



The boy suddenly had an idea: "if I can't capture this great oma, what if I made something that looks and moves like it instead?"

So the boy cut some of the mukru plants and started to stripe them. He sat where he could see the oma, how it moved, and observed him discreetly without it seeing him.

After looking at it for a few hours he noticed that when the oma got longer in length it got thinner, and as it got shorter in length it got thicker. So he tried and tried until he finally got

something done that resembled the creature.

He then quickly ran back to the village to show the chief how it looked and moved.

After seeing all this, the chief sent all the warriors to capture the oma.

After a great battle the warriors returned to the village with the skin and head of the oma.

The chief was happy to see this but still wanted to know how the boy had learnt to weave such a thing, so he asked the boy to teach the other men to weave with the same technique.

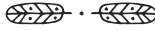
After months of teaching all the men of the tribe knew how to weave it and they started to use it for many things like keeping fruits.

But its most important use was the squeezing of the bitter cassava and from that day until today, it is still being used by most if not all the Indigenous people of Guyana.

# 3

## At Night Comes the Îwara

Kenneth Butler



It all started one night when all the animals of the day had fallen in a deep sleep, thereby becoming prey food for night predators.

One of these predators was the common opossum, also known as îwara.

Late at night it would come out to hunt, sniffing and clawing around on the forest floor (for his eyesight was not good).

He came across the area where the kami kami would rest at night, and hunted himself a good meal.

Given how easy it was to pick the kami kami, the îwara realised that it was a perfect source of food that also avoided him from having to hunt very far and putting himself in danger.

So he started to attack and kill kami kami every night. Chicks and families were being killed for food and their number was going down rapidly.

Looking at all of this some of them started complaining to their leaders, asking them: "What should we do now that we are being hunted and killed?"

One of the leaders called a meeting with all the kami kami flock and suggested that they tried sleeping in the trees for the îwara would not find them there.

But the flock would pay dearly his ignorance that night for the leader didn't anticipate that the îwara is also an excellent climber! After finding a nearby tree they hid in its branches. But be-

cause they were all in one tree, an even greater number of them was killed by the îwara that night.

The next morning, at the brake of dawn, the leaders gathered everyone to assess the situation and, after a long debate, a young bird said: "Why don't we just stand on one leg for our legs look like sticks?"

On hearing this, the leaders mumbled among themselves and said: "Ok, lets try, but everyone must be far apart from each other for it to work."

Everyone went on to do their daily tasks in the forest and, at sunset, the kami kami found a stop to rest. As planned in the morning, they all stood on one leg to sleep.

When the îwara came that night, expecting to have a good dinner, he did not know that the kami kami had decided otherwise.

As he got to the area where he would normally find the birds he couldn't see anything apart from small trees right where the kami kami used to stand.

He searched and searched, sniffing around, saying to himself: "I can smell them but I can't see them!"

After a while he decided to leave and look for food somewhere else.

The next morning came and the kami kami woke up finding out that no one was killed or taken that night. They rejoiced and decided to keep doing the same thing every night from now on.

As for the îwara, he could never forget the sweet taste of the kami kami.

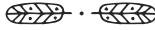
So, ever since that night, he still goes out in search of it, unknowing that the small trees that surround him are in fact kami kami birds standing on one leg!



## 4

### **The Turtle and the Jaguar**

**Grace Albert**



Long ago, the turtle was a fast runner and the deer was a very slow animal.

One day, the turtle climbed up a genipap tree to pick fruits leaving his slippers at the bottom of the tree. While on the tree, a deer came by and exchanged his footwear with the turtle's slippers.

Soon after, the deer ran away as fast as he could and left the turtle struggling behind with his slow footwear.

Now that the turtle had become very slow, he was vulnerable for any predator to capture.

One day, while walking in the savanna, the turtle bumped into a jaguar who was hunting for food.

As he was getting ready to attack, the turtle told the jaguar that he could not be eaten because of his hard shell, and that he could only be killed on a rock over the water.

So the jaguar took the turtle by the water and threw him on a rock as hard as he could.

The turtle sank into the water and did not resurface for the jaguar to eat. After waiting for a while, the jaguar went in the water and searched for the dead turtle relentlessly but never found it.

The turtle had fooled the jaguar by disappearing underwater and swimming away to a safe shore!

Later, the jaguar found the turtle resting under a big rock. Upon seeing the predator, the turtle swiftly held on to the rock, telling him that it was going to fall and smash him down.

The turtle asked the jaguar to help hold the rock while he went to cut a stick to reinforce the rock's base. So did the jaguar, forgetting about his hunger and assisting the turtle by bracing the rock while the shelled animal went to cut the stick.

The turtle kept knocking trees with a cutlass as he walked away from the jaguar.

After waiting for a long time, the jaguar grew tired of waiting for the turtle which was not returning and decided to jump away from under the rock.

Looking back at the rock, the cat noticed that it was very still and that none of the two could have even moved or shaken it as it was so sturdily and solidly in place.

He realised how smart the turtle was and told himself that one day he would catch the turtle and eat it!

The jaguar didn't give up and kept on hunting for the turtle.

This time he found him in a clear spot in the forest. As the jaguar came closer, the turtle told him that a great breeze was on its way.

"We should tie ourselves up to a tree with bush rope so that we won't be blown away," the turtle said.

The turtle told the jaguar to wait there while he was going to get some rope. He came back with the rope and tied the jaguar to the tree first. When came his turn, the turtle instead slowly walked away from the jaguar, leaving him to die there.

When the jaguar's family found him without life, they decided to seek revenge with the turtle for good.

The jaguar's family found the turtle and began to threaten him.

"I have a big family too, there are many of us and we will catch you and eat you. You won't be able to get away," said the turtle, as the jaguars were about to kill him. The jaguars did not believe the turtle and continued to threaten him.

So he started making the chant of the chacalla, a little bird that is known for responding when hearing the sound of its peers. And everywhere, the chacallas responded to the call of the turtle.

Upon hearing this, the jaguars ran away as fast as they could,

ignoring that it was another trick from the turtle.

As the turtle seemed to be getting much faster and smarter, the jaguars came back with hunting dogs, hoping to make a great meal of the shelled animal.

But when they found it, the turtle jumped into a hole, away from their reach.

The hunters asked a Cara Cara bird to watch the hole as they were going to cut some sticks to dig out the turtle.

Hearing that they had left, the turtle pulled out his head and saw the bird watching the hole. He said to the bird, "Oh, it's you who is looking after me? Well, if you are, please look at me really good and open your eyes very wide!"

The bird did as instructed by the turtle and opened his eyes wider. At that very moment, the turtle picked up a handful of sand and threw it in the bird's eyes.

As the blinded bird tried to clear his eyes from the sand, the turtle got out of the hole and walked away. Once again, the turtle had defeated the jaguars.

One jaguar continued to hunt the turtle and found him eating what seemed like a fruit. When seeing the jaguar, the turtle held on one of his testicles.

The jaguar asked the turtle what he was eating. The turtle responded, "It's my testicle, and it tastes really good," asking the jaguar if he wanted to taste the fruit. The jaguar accepted and tasted the fruit, which was really good.

The turtle then turned to the jaguar and asked him if he could taste his testicle too. So the jaguar cut it off and ended up dying.

The news came back to the jaguar's family that once again, a jaguar had been killed by the turtle.

Another jaguar found the turtle but did not really know what to do for fear of his reputation. The turtle asked the jaguar if he was a good hunter. The jaguar answered that he was. The turtle then said, "All right, let's see who is the greatest hunter of us two by comparing our mess."

They both closed their eyes and started defecating. But during the action, the turtle quickly exchanged his mess with the jaguar's. So when they opened their eyes, the turtle's side contained animal fur while the jaguar's side was very leafy and green.

The jaguar couldn't believe his eyes and asked the turtle to prove it was not a trick by going hunting.

The turtle went hunting and met a great tapir. The turtle told the tapir that he was very thirsty and that he needed to drink right away.

The tapir wondered where he could find liquid to give the turtle, which really seemed thirsty. The turtle noticed the tapir's penis and pointed at it: "There, the liquid can be found there!"

Without hesitation, the tapir urinated in the turtle's mouth, coming closer as the turtle asked him to. But when it was really close, the turtle suddenly bit on the tapir's member and held on to it until the tapir was dead.

The turtle then returned to the jaguar with the dead tapir and was very proud because he had proved he was a good hunter.

The turtle and the jaguar became good friends and happily went to cook a great meal with the tapir's meat. But the jaguar got stingy and calculated that if he was careful enough he could give the tapir's lungs to the turtle while keeping the good meat for himself.

Unfortunately, during the meal, the jaguar seemed to enjoy his food very much, while the turtle was not, so the latter started to do his tricks again.

The turtle discretely threw curare into the jaguar's pot who soon started coughing and complaining that the food tasted very bitter.

The turtle also pretended that his food was bitter and coughed all the same but the jaguar died while the turtle remained alive and enjoyed the rest of the meat.

In the end, the jaguars gave up trying to eat the turtle forever. But who killed the turtle?

All satisfied with his victory over the jaguar, the turtle went to defecate.

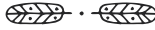
But someone else was watching him: the great beetle, also known as the dung beetle. As the turtle mess with his butt wide open, the beetle jumped straight into his rectum and blocked his butt.

Ironically, a beetle and not a jaguar finally killed the turtle!

## 5

### **Lovesick**

**Lakeram Haynes**



One day a beautiful young woman stumbled on a young and handsome man. Right away, love between them blossomed intensely.

And after seeing each other for a while, they decided to live under the same roof. There was nothing that really mattered to them but love.

Time passed and the intensity of their love was growing stronger, but they still had no income to afford the family they were planning to start.

They had to come to a decision and it was agreed that the man would leave to work in a nearby community.

The man's departure was felt deeply and saddened the young woman immensely. A few days after the departure of her man, she began to feel terribly love sick. Sometimes, she would cry secretly and pray for her love to return to her.

Her immediate family was not aware of her suffering so much.

One evening, however, she was surprised by the appearance of the young man. Seeing him filled her heart with joy.

They chatted for a while but he told her that he couldn't spend the night with her, as his work required him at certain times after midnight. Both agreed that they would see each other every evening at the same time.

The visits continued as planned and over time the woman realised that something was wrong. Since that first night when he

came back she had wanted to see a complete image of her lover but as her eyes were going towards his feet he would ask her not to look.

She respected his request but she could not refrain her curiosity to develop. So one day she decided that she would find out why he did not allow her to see his feet.

It happened when he visited that evening.

Without asking she took a flashlight and aimed towards his feet. To her astonishment, he did not have feet but something that looked more or less like the tail of a boa constrictor.

Realising that the secret on his real shape was compromised, the young man told the woman that he would like her to come with him into his world.

He then transformed into a huge boa constrictor and slithered away.

After witnessing what had happened, the woman became very ill. A few days later, and despite her family's efforts to save her, she eventually died.

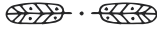
It is said and believed that instead of dying, she joined him in his world. Her last words were:

"I am going to live by my lover."

*It is also believed that if you are love sick, you need to be strong and not starve your body. Thinking constantly about it does not allow you to eat or takes away your appetite. This gives an opportunity for foreign minds and spirits to take control of your mind. Particularly, the boa constrictor.*

## 6

### **Seven Stars** **Abigail Allicock**



Long ago, when the Great Spirit lived among our ancestors, there lived an extended family. This family consisted of seven children, the mother and father and a selfish grandmother, whose role was to look after the children during the day, while the parents were toiling in the farm to support the family.

Although the parents were comfortable and happy with the grandmother taking charge of the children, they were being ill-treated everyday by their grandmother: she would hide the ripe bananas in a basket, suspended to the roof, away from their reach.

When the parents returned in the evenings the children complained about it. Day after day, they reported to their parents that their granny did not want to share the bananas with them. Every time they would ask for a banana from the basket, she would say that it was not ripe yet and too green to eat.

This went on for some time. The mother was sensible to what the children were saying and every night she would try to figure out what was happening.

But the father did not agree and for only answer, he would tell the children that they were telling lies. And since the children were not successful, the granny would smile maliciously.

One day, as the parents were in the farm, the oldest child decided to check inside the basket to see if the bananas were ripe

and ready to eat.

Finding they were, she quickly went to tell the others and they decided to talk to their granny to see if she would change her mind. To their surprise, however, the granny shouted very loudly:

“No! You can’t have it!”

And the children felt really bad.

The children began calling upon the Great Spirit by chanting and signing to lead it to their house. Their chants were heard by the Great Spirit and, having reached the house, he felt really sorry for the situation of these children.

He decided to teach the mean granny what love is by turning them into stars of the sky. And so he did, as the children were chanting and singing in a circle, the oldest sister having the baby on her lap, was now being moved by the Great Spirit.

When the parents returned home, they heard the children’s chant and saw them rising above the tree. They couldn’t believe it and started to question each other:

“What is happening there?”

The mother shouted:

“Come back, come back, come back! Where are you all heading and who has done this to you? Please tell me and please come back to us, we love you all so much, oh please don’t leave us here...”





But it was too late, the Great Spirit was now in control. So the mother started questioning the granny what she had done to the children. The granny was so tired of crying and calling for the children that she couldn't really explain. She continued to weep what a greedy granny she had been. The mother then blamed the father for not taking what the children were telling them seriously and, to the granny she said that she would never again see any grandchildren.

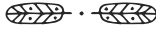
Soon, the children were so high that the parents could not see them distinctly anymore. They went higher and higher and turned into shining stars in the sky. And to this day they can still be seen. Our ancestors made a song about this event and it is passed on from generation to generation:

Yekkariton paruru tauyatanne  
 Kaane taapî ko'ko' man  
 Yekkariton paruru tauyatanne  
 Kaane taapî ko'ko' man  
 Ya`pire man taapî ko'ko man  
 Maïpe man taapî ko'ko man  
 Ya`pire man taapî ko'ko man  
 Kurapa ya man taapî man  
 Yekkariton paruru tauyatanne  
 Yuukiyapara ko'ko man.

7

## **The Master of the Bush**

**Kenneth Butler**



In a village deep into Guyana's rainforest, a group of Indigenous people lived off the land and respected all living things, for the people would only hunt what their family needed and could eat.

One morning, as villagers were doing their usual tasks, some of the younger men decided to go hunting in the mountains for a few days so that the village could have a feast.

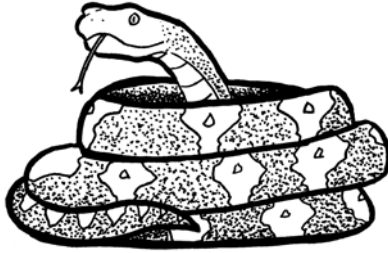
After getting their things together for the trip and, as they were ready to leave the village, the Semechichi blessed them. And so they set out to the mountains in search for game.

On the first day in the mountains they didn't find anything, so they just set up camp and spent the night there. Early the next morning, before the sunrise, the young hunters got up and started hunting again.

They came across a nest that looked like a bird's nest. The young hunters decided to search it but they did not find anything, so they moved on in the mountains.

Little did they know that some things in the forest are better left undisturbed, especially the nest of the Madunaros, which they had mistakenly taken for a bird...

Later that day, when the Madunaros returned, they saw the mess around the nest. They smelled it was the work of the young hunters and went after them in the mountains.



At sunset, without the faintest idea of what was about to happen to them, the hunters built a camp and prepared dinner.

One hunter, however, felt that something was not right and had a bad feeling about them disturbing the nest earlier that day. He asked the others what they thought was the nest they had found.

The other hunters admitted they did not know but that he should not worry about it. So, slightly reassured, he tried not think about it anymore and just went into his hammock for the night.

But later that night, everyone was awoken by some strange noises in the distance.

The noise seemed to come from the trees and it was coming fast, it sounded like a storm but at the same time it sounded like something was ripping the tree tops off as it was approaching.

On hearing this, the young hunters got afraid. Everyone grabbed their bows and arrows and got ready to defend themselves against this strange noise.

Having stopped at the level of the hunters' camp, the Madunaros looked down at the hunters from the trees. The oldest one crawled down the tree and stood tall as the hunters. Scared, one of the hunters fired an arrow and killed it on the spot. And soon after, all the other hunters opened fire at the other Madunaros and killed the rest of them.

Things having quiet down, one of the hunters went to take a closer look at the Madunaros and noticed that it had two springs on its tail. This scared the hunters even more so they packed up their hammocks and nets and left for the village the same night to tell the chief what had happened to them.

But the worse was still to come, for the Madunaros they had killed were the females, and soon the males would come looking for them.

After travelling relentlessly for a night and a day, they finally reached the village and went straight to the chief's house. They told him what had happened and what they did to the Madunaros that came after them.

The Semechichi who had overheard the story told them that theses animals were called Madunaro because they are the masters of the bush. He told the chief and hunters that they would come to avenge their mates and that the village should get ready for a battle like no other.

After waiting for a day, the villagers saw many Madunaros surrounding the village and suddenly attacking from all around.

Despite their preparations, they did not expect so many of them to attack at once. Many villagers and hunters died along with some of the Madunaros.

But the latter were winning the battle, so at some point, the Semechichi told the hunters to try keep them at a distance while he was doing a chant that would help them to win.

The hunters did as he asked. And as they tried their best to keep the Madunaros at a distance, the Semechichi started his ritual with a great fire, chanting around it for a long time.

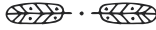
Suddenly, the sky changed and became dark as the night, and with it came thunder and lightning that stroked around the village, starting a fire between the Madunaros and the villagers, followed by more thunder.

On seeing this, the Madunaros went back into the forest as they couldn't get past the fire around the village. And soon after they left, the rain started falling and a rainbow appeared.

The fire died down and the hunters and the villagers rejoiced for they had finally won the battle. They all praised the Semechichi for his powers were great and had saved the village.

## 8

### **The Clever Monkey** **Lakeram Haynes**



*The wedge-capped capuchin is very clever. Some animals, as the jaguar, would say too clever... This story tells about the superiority of the monkey over the jaguar and the tricks that the cats invent to get the monkey down from his tree...*

In the old days, the wedge-capped capuchin would occasionally find himself in strong disagreement with other animals, especially the jaguars. Their dislike for the monkey had developed precisely because the monkey was so clever and smart at doing things.

This did not please the jaguars; they felt that they should be the masters of the forest. So the jaguar family started conspiring against the monkey. They planned to kill him at any length and efforts it would take. Their first idea was to call upon the monkey to check on the grandfather jaguar, pretending to be in serious illness, and to strike him when the time would come.

The monkey was lying on the low hanging branch of a white tree, which was full of fruits. He had just finished eating some sweet juicy fruits and was relaxing. Suddenly, a young female jaguar arrived in haste.

“Quick, monkey,” she said, “my grandfather is very ill, and he looks like he will not be able to live much longer unless you help him. I am here kindly asking you to come and check on him.”

Not only was the monkey clever and smart, but he was also very knowledgeable of forest products and medication for illnesses which were rarely known by the rest of the animals.

Notwithstanding the hurriedness of the jaguar, the monkey quickly scanned his memory on the status of the grandfather jaguar and he thought right away that this could be a trap:

“Is he really sick?”

“He is very sick!” responded the female jaguar.

The monkey consented to go and look at the grandfather. They both agreed that they would meet at the grandfather’s place. The monkey jumped from tree to tree, and branch to branch while the female jaguar travelled on the ground level.

Upon arrival at the jaguar’s home, the monkey assessed the scene from the tree. The grandfather was placed in the centre, lying on freshly laid grass and surrounded by strong, younger jaguars.

The monkey instantly saw the threat and understood that the sudden illness of the elderly jaguar was an attempt to capture him. So he devised a plan to verify the sickness of the jaguar while heading down the tree. When the jaguar family saw the monkey approaching, they began to rejoice. As he stepped a little closer to the grandfather, one of the young jaguars welcomed him and said they were happy that he had come to his rescue.

“So, family...” said the monkey, stopping at a fair distance.

“Is he really sick?”

And every member of the family assented:

“Well, we have to see how serious this is. I remember, when my grandfather was very sick and dying, he would release very loud farts with groaning sounds before dying...”

Upon hearing this, the grandfather jaguar released one of the loudest farts that the monkey had ever heard, and started moaning and groaning.

“Indeed, he seems very sick,” said the monkey.

But he knew. Because the sick jaguar had responded to him by farting and moaning and groaning meant that he was not sick and that he had better run and save himself.

“I need to go back to get my medication,” the monkey explained, adding that he would return soon.

Unaware of his plan, the jaguars agreed and urged him to return as quickly as possible.

The monkey hopped on a branch and disappeared. He never returned.

Having realised they had been tricked, the jaguars planned a new trap. It was a time where the whole land was going dry, with all the creeks and shallow ponds drying up.

The jaguars decided to wait for the creeks to completely dry up until the only water point left was a deep pool. They waited for that deep pool to shrink in size, until they could place the whole family in circle around it, leaving just about enough space between them to allow other animals to pass through and get a drink.

The monkey checked all other possible places where he could find water but, to his dismay, there wasn't any. The only water source was a great distance away and it would take him too much time to get there. He knew he was in trouble. Once again, he started thinking in search for a clever idea.

"I know how!" he said to himself. "I know exactly how to pass those greedy animals."

The monkey went to the closest wild honeybees' hive he could find, where fresh honey could be found.

"I do not want to disturb you," he said to the bees. "I just need to use some of your honey."

He gently ripped a piece of the hive and, with the fresh honey running, he rubbed it against his body. The monkey headed back towards the water pool and, as he approached, he looked for the driest spot on the forest floor, where lots of dry leaves of different colours could be found. He rolled himself in the leaves over and over again until his sticky fur was totally covered.

Soon, the jaguars' attention was attracted by some noise coming from the forest and they prepared themselves for the arrival of the monkey. But the creature they saw was not the monkey. In fact, they weren't sure what it was so they sat there and observed it with curiosity as it passed through their ranks and turned around to face them.

In a hoarse and low growling voice, the creature said that he was the master of the forest and all the things living within it. The jaguars got really afraid, but they did not move.

Realising that his trick was working, the monkey advanced between the jaguars, towards the pool, and drank loads of fresh water, which settled painfully in his tummy. Having drank and

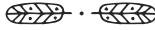
rested for a few minutes, he returned and passed in front of the jaguars, who were still unsure of what to do.

As he reached a safe distance and close to a tree, the monkey rolled on the earth and shook himself free of the dry leaves. When they understood that the creature had always been the monkey, the jaguars quickly plunged in his direction.

But it was too late. From a safe height in the tree, the monkey railed the jaguars and told them that he would never ever be trapped or killed by any one of them and disappeared again.



## 9

**Spirit Came Back****Abigail Allicock**

*“This is the tale of a father trying to save his son who has lost his spirit because of his own mistake. It highlights the deep connection that Amerindians traditionally have with Nature and the role of the elderly for maintaining and passing on this relationship. In the past, resources were used and extracted with care and for the right purposes. Nothing was being misused. In Amerindian communities, the elderly are very wise when it comes to food: they know exactly what to eat and when to eat it. Before going hunting in the forest, it is a custom to seek their advice and blessing. They would tell you what to shoot, and in which quantity so as not to upset the Master of the Forest. But as is sometimes the case, the evil is around to prey on the weak-minded. And those who are ignorant or disobedient would say: “ah! Don’t worry with what that old person is saying. Let’s go and shoot whatever we want. There is no such thing as a Master of the Forest...”*

*Once upon a time, a man set out hunting in the rainforest when he spotted a special deer, which we call Empume. This small deer, we believe, owns and takes care of all the other animals.*

*Without further thinking or consideration, the hunter aimed at the deer and shot it with an arrow. He then picked up the dead deer and returned home to his family where they had a feast, to which everyone was invited.*

*Later that night, however, one of the hunter’s children started suffering from seizures, breathing rapidly and his eyes swelling, as if pulled out of their orbits by some invisible force. While older persons’ minds are stronger and might resist, the spirit of the deer easily affects the children. And, just*



*like that of the freshly shot deer, the child's mouth started to produce liquid foam that resembled soapy water, extending his tongue far out.*

*As people observed the scene in awe, unable to help, the father of the child ran to the Pia'san — the community shaman — to seek his assistance by means of prayers for the child's life.*

*The shaman gathered herbs, including haiawa, tobacco and other leaves and started a chant to implore the spirit of the forest to help him heal the child. But for only answer, the spirit told the father that his child's soul was the price to pay for shooting the Master of the forest.*

*The father begged the shaman to help bring back his child's soul, for when it is gone, the child would lose appetite for all food, leading to only one possible outcome.*

*It is believed that the spirit of the animal takes the child's soul in the forest with him to the place where he lived, and covers it in leaves so that no one can find it. Only the shaman, with the help of the spirits of forest animals can find it and bring it back.*

*So did the shaman. He took a ra'tai — the scissors-tailed bird that always dips into the water — and the water tumtum, or lizard with him. Together, they spent three days into the forest, guided by the shaman's power to try and find the child's soul and bring it back.*

*The first night, the bird tried to find the child's spirit by flapping its wings and moving the leaves that were hiding it. On the second night, the bird grabbed the spirit and put it on the back of the water tumtum, to cross to the other side of the pond. And on the third night, they reached the home of the sick child with the lost spirit. Then, the shaman started singing: Tekaton era pansa! — "Spirit came back!" — entering a state of trans while sniffing tobacco.*

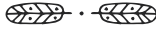
*The next morning, the child felt better and the shaman set to leave the*

house. Before leaving, he warned the child's parents never to do such a mistake again and to always listen to what the elderly say. This is also why, the shaman needs to bless — *atremutî* — all meet caught before people eat it.”

# 10

## Colours of the Forest

Kenneth Butler



*Don't believe everything you see... This story relates to us Makushi people. It means that things that looks beautiful on the outside can have dark intentions on the inside. It is usually told by parents while camping in the forest with their children.*

A long time ago, in the age when the earth was young and human beings were not born yet, birds were totally colourless. One creature, which lived both in the water and on land had all the colours for herself and looked like a rainbow. It also had the power to change its appearance.



This creature had come from a far away place and stopped by the forest pond where all the animals, of which many birds, came to drink water. For a while, the creature observed the birds come and go to the pond as they pleased.

One morning, the first bird to come at the pond was a dove, and the creature decided to show herself to him. She couldn't just come out of the water in front of him, so she hid behind a tree and changed herself into a beautiful woman before approaching the dove.

The bird heard some noise, looked around and at the sight of the woman he was literally mesmerised by her beauty. Staring at her, he couldn't find words to say so she spoke first: "Hello," the woman said, and the bird nodded without stopping staring at her. She smiled at him in return.

After a moment, his sense came back. So he decided to ask her where she was coming from, and what she was doing here by the forest pond so early in the morning. Her surprising response made the bird even more uncomfortable: "I was waiting on you to come." The bird then asked: "me? But why?" And the creature answered: "because I have been watching you for some time now, coming and going from the pond as you please, with no care for the other animals and birds. I could be yours if you tell no one about me and bring me food when you come to the pond in the morning. I will be waiting here for you..."

Without any other questions, the bird agreed to the terms of the beautiful woman and set off for the day.

When she noticed the seduction power she had on the bird, the creature decided to use it to get the other birds to bring her food at the pond, without letting them know that they were all seeing the same creature. In the night, she would return into the water and change back to her true form. The change would only happen in the water, for she was a water serpent. And during the day, when the sun shined on her body, her skin would illuminate like a rainbow.

Day after day, the dove and the other birds brought food to the woman and no one noticed anything for a while. Everyone was happy because they thought they were the only ones seeing her at the pond. Little they know that she was using all of them for her own gain. And so things went on and the creature was enjoying life like it was heaven on earth, in the forest pond, and

that nothing could ever go wrong.

But one morning, the dove was late...

This was not like him, to be late, thought the creature. But she did not think much of it as it was the first time. The dove, on the other hand was going to surprise her by bringing more food than usual. That is why he was late, for it was not easy to lift that much food at once. But when he finally arrived at the pond, he saw another bird with her, doing the same things that he would usually do with her. The dove got very angry with the creature and he decided to tell all the other birds about it and what she wanted him to do for her.

The dove called a meeting with all the birds of the forest and he started to tell them everything that had happened between him and her. On hearing this the other birds got up and said that they had all been doing the same with her. The dove got even more annoyed and suggested that they should kill the creature before she caused even more trouble at the forest pond. Everyone agreed to this mad idea for they too were annoyed by how she had fooled them. But the creature would not be easy to kill. The dove's plan was to go to the pond the next morning and meet with the woman as usual while the other birds would hide around with weapons. Once her attention would be distracted the others would attack and kill her.

Everyone agreed to this plan.

Early the next morning, all the birds got their weapons ready while the dove prepared the food for the creature, as he would normally do. When he arrived at the pond, she was sitting on a log near the edge. The sun was shining on her body and, as he got closer, she turned to him. The sun struck her hair in an explosion of colours he had never seen before. The dove wanted all the colours for himself and he walked closer and closer to her until he could embrace her.

That is when the other birds decided to attack, but the creature sensed something was wrong and pushed him off. Looking around, she realised that the other birds were coming for her. She ran away towards a little stream to escape. But in the heat of the moment, she forgot that when water touches her skin, it changes back to her serpent appearance. Everyone then saw her true form and all the wonderful colours she had and everyone wanted to have them.

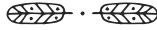
But one bird was very smart. He left the crowd and went around the pond alone. Coming from the other direction he surprised the creature and killed her. And before anyone could see, he took the most beautiful colour from her and put it on his chest. When the other birds arrived, everyone else took a colour from the creature. That is how the forest birds got their colours...

Today, you can still spot the bird that took the beautiful colour because it is on his chest. This bird is the grey-winged trumpeter.

11

**Eyes of my Brother**

**Grace Albert**



One day, a jaguar found himself gazing near a sandbank along the riverside. While looking around, he saw a tiny object that looked like a rock. But this object was moving so the jaguar came closer to it, intrigued. As he approached the little object, the jaguar realised it was a tiny crab and, looking very carefully, he noticed that the crab was throwing his eyes in the middle of the river!

While doing this, the tiny crab would gently sing: “Eyes of mine, in the middle of the river, come back to me, come back to me.” And his eyes would quickly come out of the water and jump back into their sockets. And the tiny crab would start again. After a few times, the jaguar seemed to like the game and he asked the crab, “Can I play with you?”

The crab responded, “No! It is a very dangerous game to play, especially for you. There is a great black caiman in the river.”

But the jaguar did not care and he kept asking again and again. So the crab finally accepted, but he warned him: “If the caiman swallows your eyes, remember that it is your problem!”

The crab started singing: “Eyes of my brother, come out and go into the deep river.”

And the eyes of the jaguar came out of their socket and went into the water. A long minute later, the jaguar was getting nervous, so the crab did the song and the jaguar’s eyes returned to their sockets. “Wow!” the jaguar said, wondering what magic the



crab had done to get his eyes to return like that. He wanted to know how the crab did to get his eyes to come out and return from the river so he asked the crab to do it again.

The crab warned him and told him that it was the last time he would do it. And the jaguar's eyes went back into the river. This time, however, he was not so lucky. Soon after they reached the depth of the river, the great caiman came by and swallowed the jaguar's eyes. Time was passing and the jaguar waited for his eyes to return but he still couldn't see, so he started to get scared. The crab knew what had happened in the river but he did not show it and kept singing, "Eyes of my brother, come out of the deep river, come back."

But the jaguar's eyes did not return.

The jaguar was so worried that he started to grieve and was very disappointed of playing the game with the crab. At sunset, the two animals had to go home, but without eyes, the jaguar could not find his way. So the tiny crab decided to take care of the jaguar by tying a bush rope around his neck and leading him to his home in the forest. As they slowly journeyed into the jungle, a very short man appeared before them. He was what Makushi peoples call a Baku, a bush man.

The crab was very afraid since he was really tiny and could easily have been picked up by the man. The jaguar on the other hand could easily capture the man and have a meal. But nothing of this happened. Instead, the jaguar spoke for himself and told the Baku about his eyes missing and how he suffered. Feeling sorry for the jaguar, the man offered to help him getting his eyes back, "But on one condition," said the short man, "you have to promise me that you will provide me with a meal when I need it."

The jaguar agreed to the man's terms.

The Baku took the jaguar and the crab to a special place, where he performs magic. The man asked the two animals to cover their faces and soon after they could feel a breeze. It was the spirit of the jaguar's eyes, they were returning into their socket. When they uncovered their faces, the jaguar had recovered his eyes and could finally see. Both of them were very happy and went their way.

But the jaguar was disappointed by what had happened, and he still had a promise to keep towards the Baku. The innocent

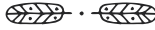
tiny crab on the other hand did not know what was going on in the mind of the jaguar, and he headed back to the landing of the river. And as they walked away from each other, the furious jaguar ran towards the crab and captured him saying: "You are the cause of my suffering, and now I have to provide a meal for someone else instead of myself!"

Sadly, the jaguar killed the poor tiny crab, before bringing it to the Baku for his meal.

# 12

## Into the Wild

Lakeram Haynes



*Historically, in our culture, the way one learnt about the means of survival was primarily through the parents, who are the first people to impart knowledge. Teaching about survival to youngsters has always been critical for parents, but today modernity is challenging this practice of knowledge transmission. New ways of surviving are often preferred and gradually hampering and changing how present generations regard traditional knowledge and skills. Making or building something with your own hands is a great achievement, which you can admire for as long as it lasts. Learning skills from an early age is thus still very important for Amerindians as it was for the little boy in this story.*

This little Amerindian boy was born in a family of six originating from one of the Amerindian tribes of Guyana. They had at the time newly been exposed to other societies and cultures. The Christian religion had been imported within the community and the family had joined in, integrating the practice in their customs and engaging in church affairs.

The boy's father was an evangelist, so he frequently scheduled trips to other communities to practice his duties. When the boy was still a baby, his mother usually came along on these trips with him. These trips were difficult and uncomfortable. The travel entailed canoeing for six to eight hours with frequent stops along the way. When they took place over a holiday period, the entire family joined in, including the boy's elder brothers and sisters, so they could stay for a longer period in the neighbouring communities.

By the age of three, the boy started to travel alone with his dad. His mother stayed home and took care of his brother and sisters who were attending a local school. Usually, the father built a camp for the night by the river so that they could rest after sitting long hours on the solid wooden surface of the canoe. Camping was wonderful and exciting for the little boy, as he loved swimming in the shallow waters, when he was allowed to.

Most of the time, the boy helped his father with various things, staying close to him. Wild animals were an immediate danger for the little boy, so the father had to ensure his protection. The boy was always told not to do things that might hurt him or his family. Not only were animals a matter of concern for his security, but also so were the plants surrounding the camp. The boy had to absorb all this information to stay safe, and the dos and don'ts of being in the wilderness.

Black caimans and jaguars were the most common threats to the boy, as they could be lurking from behind a tree trunk, a floating log or even the stern of the family's canoe at any given time. Sometimes the caimans could be heard from a mile away, calling each other along the riverbank. These sounds were terrifying for the little boy, especially at night. During those times, the snuggles and love from his parents were exactly what the boy needed to comfort him.

The following morning, when the day was young and peaceful, they departed the temporary camp after having a hot porridge. The father had prepared the porridge by the fireside, which he had kept alive through the night. When camping, the father usually did not sleep at night, for the safety of his family, especially that of the young boy.

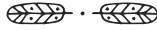
Arriving a few hours later in the community, they usually stayed at a relative's home for the duration of their visit. The boy, who liked to be on these trips met with the other kids of his age and made new friends, telling them about his adventures on the river, and about the advices of his father. The other kids also exchanged stories with the boy, many of which were similar to his experience. His friends were not aware that these little knowledge exchanges were making an impact on the future of the little boy.

Over time, the boy was taught more skills on how to survive in the natural environment. He learnt fishing and hunting skills as

well as how to live off the land without needing to worry. As he grew older, the knowledge shared with him by his dad became more difficult to share with others. But the man had become a lover of the wild environment and aspired to become a real guardian of the land and forests, which he calls home, as it provides everything one needs to live.

# 13

## **Never Judge by Seeing** **Abigail Allicock**



One day, a yawari was by his yako's (brother-in-law) house, the turtle, joking and teasing about how slow he was. The turtle answered to the yawari, "I know that I am very slow, but at least I can wait for my bananas to get ripe. But you, you can't wait or endure waiting for a long time."

Slightly embarrassed by what the turtle had said, the yawari decided to go on a bet and challenge him to prove that he too was a very patient individual. The turtle agreed to the yawari's challenge and decided to go first. He headed towards a hole in the ground and sat in it to wait for his banana to get ripe.

Knowing that her brother would win the bet, the yawari's wife tried to discourage him, telling him that he could not endure such a long wait as the turtle. But the yawari is known for not giving up easily, and he refused to cancel it. The bet was on.

The turtle had now been in the hole for a while and the yawari was getting worried. So he went to see how the turtle was keeping. The yawari arrived by the hole and called out, "Yako, your banana is not ripe yet!"

And the turtle answered him in a loud voice, "OK!"

The yawari went home. A few weeks later, the yawari was on his way to see if his brother-in-law was still there. Arriving by the hole, he called the turtle and repeated: "Yako, your banana is not ripe!" And the turtle answered, "Good to know!"

The yawari was surprised to know that the turtle was still in

good condition. He went home and continued his activities. A few more weeks passed and by now, the banana was finally ripe. The yawari went on his way to tell the turtle that his banana was ready. When he reached the hole, he called the turtle. "Finally!"

And he came out of the hole to head home and enjoy his lovely ripe banana.

It was now the yawari's turn to honour his part of the challenge and get down in the hole. Shortly after, the turtle went to inform him that his banana was not ripe yet. "Good to know!" answered the yawari.

And so the turtle went back home. A few weeks later, the turtle visited the yawari and called him again. This time, however, the answer was weak. The turtle could only hear a groaning: "Hum hum."

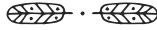
The turtle left him alone. Later again, as the banana was finally ripe, the turtle went by the hole but when he called out there was no answer. Instead, hundreds of blue flies came of the hole and the turtle had to move as fast as he could in order to get fresh air.

The poor yawari never got to enjoy his banana, he was dead!

# 14

## **Aniéké and Enskiran: A Tale of Two Hunters**

**Grace Albert**



*This legend tells the story of two brothers who lived a life envious of each other. In the past, we, Amerindian tribes lived with hatred towards each other over the possession of various resources. This jealousy made our fellow Makushi and Wapishana ancestors suffer, fight and eat each other. Today, to remember our history, present generation preserve and cherish the sites that have witnessed our ancestors' struggles. These sacred sites include skulls, pots and special rocks. We do not fight with each other the way our ancestors did. Instead, we mix; we live in other tribes and marry with each other, without any hatred like before.*

Long ago, there lived two handsome brothers whose names were Aniéké and Enskiran. Aniéké was the smaller brother and also the most jealous one while the eldest, Enskiran, was a humble man. Both were great huntsmen and one day, they set off to hunt in the forest. On their way, they reached a pond not very far from their home, where they stopped.

Aniéké was always thinking how he could hurt his brother. He found a rock and sharpened it in the shape of a fish with his great sharp teeth. He threw it in the pond and, as it entered the water, the fish-shaped stone magically changed into a fish, which disappeared underwater. Enskiran joined his brother in the pond, not knowing what he had planned for him. As he excitedly swam into the pond, the fish bit Enskiran on his legs. It is said that this moment was when the dangerous piranha came into



existence. Aníéké had purposely done this to his elder brother because he was jealous of him. But he was not satisfied yet, for his brother was still alive.

The two brothers continued to hunt in the jungle. They thought that it would be good to make a trap on a tree, hide into it, and to wait for wildlife to come by. They hid in the trap and shot many animals but suddenly, they heard the sound of what seemed like a chacalaca bird coming. As it got closer, all they saw was a big monster. This monster was also on the hunt for a meal. Both brothers had agreed that neither of them should peep if strange and danger appeared, for if they did, the predator would know that there were preys in hiding. Despite this, Enskiran mistakenly made a little peep and the monster shot him in his eyes before he could hide back into the trap.

The monster knew that he had shot something and he requested that the man should be dropped down from the tree. Instead of this, Aníéké dropped some animals they had hunted. But it did not fool the monster who insisted again that the man he had shot should be dropped, otherwise he would climb up the tree. So, the little brother executed himself and dropped his brother to the monster, which happily took the man into a big cave in the mountain.

Aníéké felt very sorry about his older brother being taken away by the monster. He came down the tree and followed the drops of blood left by his brother that led him to a big cave. The monster had given the dead body of Enskiran to his mother, who had already chopped him up into quarters and was getting ready to cook him. Aníéké glared at what they were doing, worrying that his brother would be eaten by the monsters.

As they were busy preparing the great meal of his brother, the monster went out to cut firewood while his mother went to fetch some water. At that moment, a fly visited Aníéké and they both talked to each other. The fly picked up all the blood that had dripped off from his brother in a big bowl. Quickly, Aníéké fitted his brother's body back together and he poured the blood from the bowl back into the body. And then, just like he had done with the fish-shaped rock, he breathed life back into his brother.

Aníéké seemed as though he had been gifted with the power of healing. The mother of the monster returned to the cave with water but discovered that the man had disappeared. Aníéké seized a blowpipe and shot the monster's mom, killing her im-



mediately. The brothers cut up her body as the monsters had done with Enskiran and they hung her head.

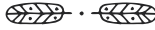
The monster came back with firewood and called after his mother, but there was no answer. He rejoiced at the idea that he was going to have a massive meal just for himself. Hidden not far from the monster, the two brothers observed him eating silently. When he was fully filled and satisfied, the monster looked up and saw his mother's head.

Realising what he had just done, the monster felt very sick. This is the moment the two brothers chose to surprise the monster and kill it. The two brothers then returned to the village and their families were happy to have them home. And Enskiran and Aníéké continued to be great hunters and live in the forest ever since.

# 15

## Why the Tortoise Won't Lay Eyes on Humans

Lakeram Haynes



*Aunt Joyce, from Rupertee Village told me this story. It explains why tortoises will pull their legs and head into their shell when you come across them. Although it does not have much connection to traditional beliefs, I do think it tells something about human beings and their lost care and respect for the natural world.*

Once upon a time, an armadillo found a baby tortoise in the forest, which appeared to be lost.

Itasi wei — “I am lost” — said the baby tortoise to the armadillo! So the armadillo kindly and safely brought the baby tortoise to his mother. The mother was so happy and thankful to the kind armadillo, for saving her child from the danger.

Having grown older, the tortoise was now able to go and fetch food for his mother in the forest, where it is usually dangerous. It had become a usual activity for him but today was different, as a human being also happened to be looking for food in the forest. The human was gathering fruits and looking for any sort of meat that he could get with little effort and time. So when he came across the tortoise under a wild cashew tree, he picked it up and put it in his warishi, his basket work ruck sack, and left. Meanwhile, in the warishi, the tortoise was helpless and terrified for his life, as he was properly strapped up and he was not

sure where the human being was taking him. Deep in his heart though, the tortoise felt that he was never going to see his mother again.

The human stopped at his camp, where a fire was burning. While relaxing, he thought about what he should do with the tortoise that he had caught earlier. He had not eaten for most of the day, so he decided to prepare the turtle for a tasty roast. Later that afternoon, back at the tortoise home, the mother started to worry about the absence of her son, who had passed the usual time of return. Seeing a figure appearing in the distance, she was hopeful her son was returning to her. But as the figure got closer, it was the human, to her great disappointment. The human walked straight towards her and said: "tosh koko, granny."

Sensing that something was wrong, the tortoise mother started to question him about what he had for a meal. Carelessly, the human responded that he had a very tasty tortoise meal. At first the mother thought that he was just making a joke, but as time passed and her son was not returning, she realised that it might as well be her son that the human had feasted on.

The mother sadly and quietly shed tears and decided that she should seek vengeance by getting rid of the cruel human. She offered him to spend the night at her place and showed him a corner where he could sleep.

Late at night, as the human was sleeping, the mother came in the room, singing sadly and holding a stick in her hand. As soon as she stopped singing, the tortoise repeatedly struck the stick on his head and beat him to dust. Feeling slightly better with her vengeance, she went back to sleep and promised herself to never lay an eye on a human again.

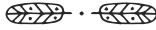
But on the other side of the room, hidden behind a log, the human had witnessed the whole scene. Earlier that night, having sensed a change in the mother's behaviour, he had quietly got up and gone to hide, not without having first placed some objects under a blanket, looking like a human sleeping. Seeing the anger of the mother having lost her child, he ran away in the night and ensured that he was far when the day broke.

Since that day, tortoises do not lay eyes on humans.

# 16

## **How Poisonous Plants Got Their Poison**

**Abigail Allicock**



A long time ago, when things were very different, a man fell in love with a woman. Or so he thought, as the woman was in fact a disguised tapir, also known as bush cow. It was on a very hot day at a famous water source. While having a wonderful time bathing, the man was distracted by a noise coming from the water edge. Looking up, he saw this beautiful woman standing on the shore. He spoke first and asked her if she wanted any help. She said yes and he helped her. After some time, the two parted, vowing to see each other again.

Every time they met, the man would admire the woman, not knowing that she was in fact the well-known tapir. They were in love. Before long, she conceived and delivered a baby boy who was born with mixed features of both parents. But when she saw that her baby was half human half tapir, the mother abandoned



the father and the child and disappeared forever. Being in custody of the child, the father went to his mother and asked her gently if she could raise the child as her own, which she agreed after a long discussion.

The grandma decided to take the child to the creek to have a bath. She placed the baby in the water and, a few minutes later, she noticed that a lot of fish was now floating around in the creek. It did not immediately cross her mind that the baby could have been the cause of the fish dying. So she went home without paying much attention to this strange phenomenon.

As time was passing and the fish was still dying, she started telling some friends about what she was observing with the child. One person said to her:

“Let us take him to a pond to see if it is really the child!”

They headed out to the pond and soon found out it was true. She was very pleased with her discovery and rushed to tell other family members. They no longer had a need for casting a net or fishing with a rod, they could just use the power of the child to gather fish for themselves and their friends.

And they went on to live happily, feeding abundantly on fish.

After a while, however, the family started to cause jealousy amongst other people in the village. One guy in particular, was eager to get rid of the child. His plan was to bring him to a big pond, where a lot of different types of fish live, but where he knew that a jumbie — a monster — lived in the middle.

He invited the child’s family to fish and the little boy started swimming in the pond. As the others were collecting the dead fish, they did not notice that the boy was swimming towards the middle of the pond, where the jumbie was living. Someone finally looked up and, realising that the child was under attack, started shouting. The rest of the family looked towards the middle of the pond but all they could see was the head and the hand of the child up in the air. They too were shouting now, but it was too late, before they could do anything the child had disappeared under water.

The grandfather decided to call on Rabaka - a big bird that is always used in prayers to bring back lost spirits when they are gone or hiding. The shaman uses this bird because of his powerful wings. When the bird arrived, the old man told him what had happened. Rabaka flew towards the middle of the pond and

rose high in the sky. At some point, he dove with all his might down in the water. But when he came up, there was no boy. So the bird went a little higher and dove again. This time, he did resurface with the boy, unfortunately it was too late, the little boy was already dead.

His family went into weeping and a great crowd gathered to see the body of the poor boy. Since the grief of the family was so deep, the village leader suggested, "Let's take the body to make plants, in remembrance of the child. The younger generation will use the different parts of the body for different purposes."

Everyone agreed.

They took the boy's feet and turned them into a plant called yaapupui, and another part was turned into the konanie (to use this plant, one has to pound the bark). The ears were turned into a plant called panagro (this is a soapy type. If one touches it, it swells the face) and the guts were turned into a vine, the famous hiree.

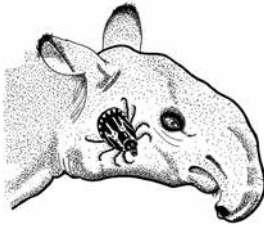
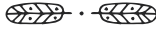
All these plants would later be used as poison to make the fish drunk or to kill them. However, only the elder were allowed do the poisoning and everyone had to keep quiet. The elder times the process and, when enough fish has been gathered, in a pray, he calls on the mother of the boy, the tapir, the caiman, the electric eel and the anaconda to help him weaken the poison so that no more fish are killed and the fresh water is restored. Once this process is over, he would call the youth to come and harvest the fish that has been poisoned.

Today, it is told to the younger generations to never poison stagnant water, but only the running ones, and one must always seek the help of the four animals: the tapir, the caiman, the electric eel and the anaconda.

17

## The Tapir and the Tick

Grace Albert



*In the old days, our ancestors believed in marrying someone who possessed very specific knowledge and skills. Women had to have the essential skill of weaving hammock and, even more importantly, they had to have o'kai ipu pun (big and fat feet flesh), meaning that they had to be strong, in particular at their feet. Likewise, men had to be very hard working too. The following story reflects on these values. It is the story of a tapir who wanted to marry a young woman and had to prove to her parents that he was capable of taking care of her and the family...*

Once upon a time, a tapir and his parents were getting ready to celebrate his birthday. It was a very special age for him as he was about to get himself a wife and become a grown up man. He had planned to invite all the animals of the jungle to the party. The cooks were working hard to prepare plenty of food for the evening and the music set was ready to make everyone dance.

At about 17:00, all the animals started gathering in the tapir's yard, with plenty of beautifully dressed females. It was truly going to be a great party and everyone soon started to eat, drink



and celebrate. After the meal, the tapir began to play music and the animals were invited on the dance floor. Soon, all the couples were dancing and rocking. Meanwhile, the tapir was standing on the side, eye spotting for a partner amongst the daughters of all the animals. He seemed very excited about the young female animals but couldn't put his mind of one.

As the party continued and all the adults were getting intoxicated with the local beverages, the tapir was still admiring the young female animals, not knowing which one to choose from. At some point, his eyes stopped on a very short, fat female and wondered whether she could be married. He was attracted to one of the youngest females, the beautiful daughter of Mr. Tick.

He couldn't wait to get close to the young lady tick, so he built up his bravery and approached her parents to orally ask them for their daughter's hand. The parents agreed on the principle to let go their daughter with the tapir, but they first asked him to prove that he was willing and strong enough to take care of their daughter and family. The tick father insisted that he had a very large family and that if the tapir could manage to take care of them, he would be allowed to marry his daughter. He suggested that the tapir could take all the family members on his back for a ride into the forest instead of having the family walk alongside him.

The tapir did as the father asked. And as the whole tick family climbed on his back, the tapir asked them to hold on very tight because he would be running speedily into the forest. He walked quietly towards the forest, but as soon as he got into the depth of the forest, he started to run, assuming that everyone was holding on.

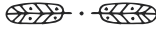
Unfortunately they were not! The faster he ran, the more the ticks fell, from small to big, all over the forest floor.

As he continued, he noticed his back felt very light and empty and he suspected that the ticks had fallen off. He decided to stop and check. To his surprise, however, the young lady tick, which he really loved, had held on tight and not fallen in his run. They both looked at each other and momentarily hesitated on what to do next as everyone else had disappeared. They finally decided that, from this moment, they would continue to travel and live together.

Since that time, all tapirs carry ticks over their bodies, just like if they were married. It is also why ticks are so widespread in the forest!

# 18

## **The One Legged Man** **Abigail Allicock**



*Sitting by the corner of my home is a place I will never forget. It always makes me think of my youth; the stories that my mom told me when I grew up. This story is told to the younger ones to teach them to never harm anyone, because it comes back at full speed.*

In a community lived a couple, which shared a house with the man's brother. For a while, they lived a very quiet and happy life, but one day, rumours started to spread that the couple was experiencing difficulties, finding themselves in constant arguments. The woman was frequently making reproaches to her husband, whenever he would head to the farm or to gather firewood. In fact, she had fallen in love with her husband's younger brother.

On a rainy night, the husband suggested to his wife that they embarked on a fishing trip. The wicked wife found this was a great idea and immediately started packing for the trip. Deep down, she knew this was an opportunity to get rid of her husband once and for all. Early on the next day, they woke up and got ready for the journey ahead. Before leaving, the man and his wife both greeted the younger brother, as they wouldn't see each other for a few days.

During the trip, they harvested everything they could take, from fish, to wild animals and birds until one last thing was miss-

ing: natural honey. Having found a beehive in a tree, the man told his wife to start preparing a fire to smoke the bees away from the hive so that he could climb the tree and collect the honey. Once in the tree, the man collected an impressive amount of honey, which he sent down with a bottle attached to a rope to his wife standing at the tree foot. But in the process, he mistakenly lost his cutlass, which fell not far from the woman although without hurting her.

Tired and thirsty, but also satisfied that they had found everything they needed to bring back home, the man descended from the tree. Upon reaching the ground, he found his wife facing him with the cutlass in her hand and a threatening face. Slightly surprised, he asked her what she was doing with the cutlass and started laughing. However, this was not a joke. And by the time he realised that she was not playing, the cutlass swayed and chopped his right leg.

The man was in a lot of pain, screaming and shouting at the wicked wife, and asking why she had done that. For answer, he only heard that she would replace him by his younger brother. She then left him to die and took off with the idea of never returning to this place.

When the woman reached home, the younger brother asked her where his older brother was. She told him that she had to leave him behind so that he could gather some more firewood for the home, adding that he would return a few days later. But down in the woods, the poor guy was in pain and in need for help. As no one was coming, he crawled on the forest floor in search of bark and wood skin to help stop the bleeding. After a while, the man fell deeply asleep, hoping that someone would rescue him. But when he woke up, no one had arrived.

The man decided to make a remembrance for other people. He took the part of his leg that had been chopped-off and started painting stripes on it with the natural dye of the genipap fruit. While painting, he kept talking to his leg, saying that it would turn into a fish called *kulet kuruta*, or tiger fish. Having finished, he threw the leg in the river and it immediately turned into a *kulet* with stripes all along its body.

The man stood up and hopped away singing. He was now floating seven inches off the ground. The Great Spirit had arrived to transform him, by elevating him in the skies to become

a star of the universe. He became part of the L shaped constellation that looks just like someone sitting under a tree and always seen with the seven stars.

A few weeks had passed and things at home had not improved. The woman had increasing difficulties persuading her brother-in-law that her husband was going to come back, and that he had probably decided to go collect more honey. Knowing that his brother always returned, the younger man told her that he had waited enough, and that he would head off to find his brother. He took his bow and arrow, along with some food, water and extra clothing and headed to the forest in search of his beloved brother.

The search took some time, but when the young man finally got to the place where his brother had been left, he saw him floating above the ground. He ran towards him and they hugged each other at length. They cried and the elder brother told the entire story to the young man, saying there was no coming back to earth. He then said goodbye and started ascending in the skies.

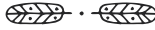
Having discovered what the woman had done to his brother in order to live with him, the young man headed home full of anger, and planning his revenge against her. When he arrived, the woman ran towards him to ask whether he had found her husband. The young man stayed calm and said that he was dead, causing the wife to weep and pretend she was very sad.

A few weeks later, the young brother told her to pack and get ready for a fishing trip. She agreed with excitement and soon the two of them were wandering alone in the forest. Having spotted a beehive, he suggested that she climbed the tree while he waited by the fire. The woman obeyed the brother and climbed the tree to harvest the honey. When she came down, he was standing with the cutlass. She screamed and screamed, asking what he wanted to do. The man replied that she was about to pay for the wrongs she had done to his brother. He then chopped her and she fell, breaking her neck.

# 19

## A Gift from the Heavens

Kenneth Butler



*This is a story that Mrs Susy Bartholomew, from Massara Village told me. She shared it with me at Karanambu lodge, by the edge of the beautiful Rupununi River.*

This is the story of a hunter who lived alone and worked hard to keep his house clean. He would go hunt for meat but he would also produce his own cassava. The only friend he could speak to was a brown female dog, which he also fed. Day after day, the dog looked at the hunter and saw how lonely he was and felt sorry for him, as he had no one to help him do anything in and around the house. One day, the hunter decided to go hunt with the dog and he noticed that she was very good at hunting paca. The dog's help made him feel very happy, and they went on several hunting trips together.

At night, when the hunter was asleep, the dog would go outside the house and look to the heavens, wishing she too was human, just to be able to help her friend with the house and the cassava work. Night after night, the dog followed the same ritual, hoping her wish would come true. One day, the hunter called his dog to go hunting. She saw a paca and ran after it until it hid in a hole, far away from the house. The hunter came after and started digging for the paca, but in the meantime, the dog ran back home to try and do the work that he had left.

Back at the house, the dog found out that she was able to take

her dog skin off. Underneath the skin was a beautiful young woman. She did all she could in the house and put her dog skin back on before the hunter returned so that he would not know that it was her. She did not notice that the neighbours had been looking at her working in the house, although they did not think much of it.

And so did the female dog on every hunting trip. The hunter did of course notice that someone was helping with the house, but he thought that it was his neighbours. In gratitude, he decided to keep some meat he had hunted for his neighbours on every trip. Intrigued by his generosity, they asked him why he was offering them meat and he replied that it was to thank them for their help in cleaning up his house. They replied that they were not the ones doing it but that they had seen a beautiful young woman working in his house while he was out hunting.

On his next trips, the hunter decided to observe the dog more carefully. He noticed that on every occasion she would take him farther and farther, running animals into holes. When he started digging, the dog would always disappear and he would only meet her again at home, waiting by the doormat. So he decided that if the dog did the same thing on the next trip, he would come home earlier to try to surprise her.

And so came the day where they left hunting. Again, the dog took him far away from his house and started running after a paca, which ran into a hole. The hunter quickly started digging and as he dug he looked around and noticed that the dog was



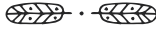
gone. He got the paca out of the hole and ran back to his house as fast as he could. As he entered the house door, he saw a dog skin hooked on a nail on the wall. He took the skin off and threw it in the fire but at the same time, the woman came out of the other room and saw him. Their eyes crossed each other. He was mesmerised by her beauty. But at the sight of him, she fell to the ground and started crying because she did not want him to see her like that, and she was afraid of his reaction.

But the hunter was very happy to see that she was human, and he decided to marry her, setting a wedding date for the new moon. When the wedding came, everyone was very happy to see that the hunter had finally found someone to love him. Everyone was curious, and wanted to know where she was from. In response, he simply told them that she was a gift from the heavens.

## 20

### A Craftsman's Tale

Kenneth Butler



*This story was told by Madonna Allicock at Surama Junction on a hot and sunny afternoon. It is the tale of a craftsman who lived out in the forest with his mother long ago. Having no father or any other family member to help with money and his mother, the craftsman took it upon himself to look after her and bring income into their home by making crafts and selling them in the nearby village.*

The craftsman collected base material — muna — with the idea to weave it into beautiful craft pieces. Having gathered enough material, he returned towards his home in the forest and picked a spot where he sat to work. Every day, he would come back to the same spot, sitting down for hours, making crafts and throwing the waste or damaged material at his side. Eventually, the waste turned into a pile, which in turn got bigger and bigger. His mother offered her son to clean up but the man refused, arguing that he would do it himself when the time was right.

In the meantime, a crappo came by the pile of waste and decided to make her home in it. Every day, she would listen to the craftsman, talking how much he wished he had a wife and someone to help him with the house. She showed herself to the craftsman and he said:

“Look at you! Where did you come from?”

And he went back to work. Day after day, the crappo would stare at the craftsman. At some point, the man turned and



looked at the pile where he was throwing the waste and crossed the eyes of the crappo. He said again:

“But look at you! Where did you come from?”

After a while, the man began to regularly talk to the crappo for it was the only creature around that would listen to him.

One day, the crappo got really worried as she had not heard or seen the craftsman for a while. Her love and willingness to help him got so intense that she changed into a beautiful young woman. She headed to the man’s house and decided to help clean up the place and cook food for him and his mother. She also put on some of his mother’s clothes and eagerly waited for the man to return from the village and show him her new appearance.

But on that day, the man did not return until late in the evening and found an empty house. The woman had waited the whole afternoon, but when the clock struck six, she began to change back into her original appearance. She then quickly hopped back to her pile of waste and started crying of sadness at what had happened.

She spent the night in the waste pile and did not want to come out to see the craftsman. But much to her surprise, the next morning she had changed again into the beautiful woman. The craftsman had just arrived to work when he heard noise coming from the pile next to him. He looked up towards it and saw a beautiful woman rolling out from under the waste. He was so surprised that he could not speak for a moment. But it did not matter as their eyes made four and that was enough. No words could describe the feelings they shared at that moment. The craftsman stood up and walked towards her to help her up from the ground. He asked her where she was from and what she was doing there without any clothes.

The woman smiled and told the craftsman that she was the one who had helped him in the house the day before. She also told him about how she turned into a crappo at night and needed to spend the night in her nest. Surprised but happy to have found someone, the craftsman fell in love with the woman and decided to tell his mother and introduce her this strange lady. Unfortunately, his mother did not share the same feelings towards her. She was very upset and furious with him for being with a crappo and tried to persuade him to let her go.

She could not change his mind, for he was very much in love

with the woman.

One day, his mother came home early, when the craftsman and the woman were still out selling his craft in the nearby village. She used the opportunity of his absence to burn the pile of waste. When the craftsman and the woman came home, they saw the fire. The young woman ran as fast as possible but it was too late: the flames had taken her home. She cried and became very angry with the mother. But she kept it for herself and did not say a word. She returned to the craftsman's home and began cooking as if nothing had happened.

To avenge herself, she took some of her ears wax and put it into the old woman's food. The craftsman's mother took her plate outside and they all ate quietly. But suddenly the mother made a loud scream and fell, dead, to the ground. The craftsman and the woman rushed outside to assist her and realised that it was too late. Standing next to the craftsman, the woman said:

"Good to be ridden of bad rubbish!"

At the sound of this, he knew that the woman was behind his mother's death but he loved her too much that he could not resolve to quit her. They decided to leave the house, as she needed to build a new home for herself before she returned into a crappo or she would die too.

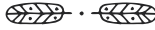
The night was upon them and it was getting darker and darker but she still had not found the right place. She began changing back into the crappo and got weaker and weaker as they went further into the forest. At some point, she was so weak that she couldn't go anymore, she was dying. The craftsman looked relentlessly for the right place but he had no luck and she died in his arms. He cried a lot and screamed for hours. After that, he returned home very sad of having lost both his mother and the love of his life on the same day.

It is said that the poor man never fell in love again.

# 21

## **The Bimitti Run**

**Lakeram Haynes**



Uncle Fred Allicock, who comes from the Arawak tribe, once told me how the traditional way of life used to be similar across Amerindian communities in Guyana. These common practices concerned hunting and fishing, of course, but also certain sports, which would be practiced by most communities. One of these sports was the Bimitti, an important endurance run. This run tested the resistance of young men willing to prove to their community that they were tough and could handle running on a long distance. Only the toughest members of the community would win but the Bimitti, as a social event, was also a way of keeping the community togetherness, happiness and harmony.

To hold a Bimitti race, a community would dedicate a local building in which it would store plenty of parakari — a local drink similar to kasiri. The building would contain approximately 50 to 100 buckets of strained parakari containing 20 litres each, while two sturdy men guarded the entrance. Many ambitious young participants coming from several communities took part to this race, which would go over seven miles before reaching the house.

Once a runner had reached the house, his objective was to get past the two strong men guarding the door. But if the two guards managed to grab him and lift him up, the runner would lose the competition and be put aside while the guards would wait for the next runner to test his toughness. The runner who



successfully passed the guards after running seven miles was then able to enter the house, where two old women would wait to congratulate him. These two women would then feed him with the husk of the parakari.

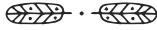
Having found a new winner, the two women would tell him that the house full of parakari was all his, and that as the new master of the house he now had the power to open it up to the rest of the participants and the wider community. And then, the celebrations of the toughest runner would start with everyone having a great time dancing and drinking.

The Bimitti race used to be done in the past. Unfortunately, it does not happen these days and most young men are not challenged in this way anymore. But I suppose that they do other things, which keep them tough and strong.

## 22

### **Fishing Birds**

**Kenneth Butler**

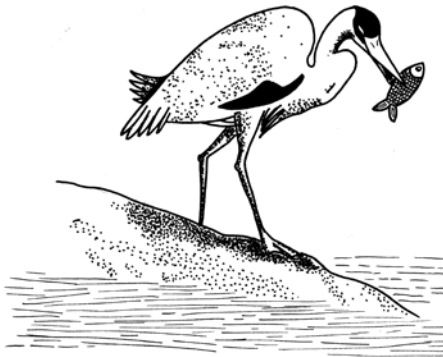


*This story was told by Thomas John from Surama village. It is told to teach about pride and self awareness.*

In a time before human beings, where everything lived as one with the sea and the forest, there were two fishing birds. One was for the river and one was for the ponds.

The first one was a green ibis, which only fished for worms on the shores of the river. The other was a cocoi heron, which looked for fish in the ponds. Both were the best at what they did.

Rumours spread about their individual skills and there were talks of one being better than the other. It came to the attention of the green ibis, which became very upset and decided to trick the cocoi heron into displaying his 'charms'. Having heard about the rumours, the heron also wanted to see the ibis' charms, so he



accepted the challenge without further discussions.

They decided to hold a competition to see who was the best fishing bird of all. It was set to begin at the first sign of the full moon and to last for the whole duration of the full moon. The other birds would be the judges of the two. The ibis and the heron got themselves ready for the big event and, after several days of hard training came the full moon, which signalled the beginning of the competition. Both birds took out their charms and rubbed them. Everyone was amazed at what was taking place in front of them. There were so many fish coming towards the heron and so many worms towards the ibis! Both birds continued fishing tirelessly for three nights.

When it finally came to an end, the judges started counting the number of fish and worms that the two birds had gathered. Both birds were so tired that they could not even stand on their legs anymore so they just dropped right there, waiting for the judges to tally up the numbers. When the judges finally finished their count, it was time for everyone to know which was the best fishing bird of all. The ibis was certain it would be him, but so did the heron and everyone had their feathers crossed for their favourite bird. But when the judges announced that it was a tie, the ibis couldn't believe it and fainted upon hearing the result. Likewise, the heron was so disappointed that he started crying. And all the other birds left the ibis and the heron.

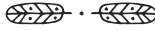
A few hours later, having digested the initial shock of the results, the ibis and the heron were still curious to know how the other had done. They decided to exchange their charms so that the other could feel how it works. But what they had not realised is that they did not fish for the same thing. And when they set out to test the other's charm they were about to get surprised. Using the ibis' charm by the river, the heron started seeing worms crawling towards him and he got scared and flew away. At the same time, the ibis was doing the same thing with the heron's charm and, seeing all the fish swimming towards him he was so scared that he left the pond and did not return. He went to the river, looking for the heron, while the heron was looking for him by the pond.

To this day, they still haven't found each other. That is why you can see the heron fishing in the ponds while the ibis is always by the river, looking for worms...

# 23

## **The Vampire Bat**

**Grace Albert**



It is said that a long time ago, lived a group of great Makushi ancestors near the Ireng River. They lived close to huge mountains in a locally made shelter made of forest materials and slept in hammocks. In those days there was no civilisation in them, they lived according to their beliefs and traditions, fishing and hunting and they did not fear no danger.

During the night, the men would frequently guard their wives and children whiles they went to sleep. One night, it happened that an elder Makushi man was awake. He sat on the ground near a blazing fire and started performing his traditional prayer to protect himself and his large family from predators. But in the middle of his prayer, he went silent for a few moments, sensing that something odd was happening. The man could not see

anything wrong or threatening, so he decided go to sleep into his hammock without informing the other men about the strange feeling he had had.

Another night, everyone had fallen into a sound sleep. In those days, the mothers used to tie their children's hammock high above their own to make them less vulnerable to dangerous creatures like jaguars and other predators. Hence, they felt really safe.

Unfortunately, they were not.

The group slept well past sunrise. When the day came bright, however, the mother of a young child got up and started preparing breakfast. Everyone joined her to eat while she waited for her daughter to wake up. At some point, she lost patience and decided to go and check on the child's hammock. When she discovered that her daughter was missing, she started screaming of desperation.

The men immediately gathered their weapons and began their journey to find the missing little girl whilst the wives and children stayed put. But at the end of the day, the girl had still not been found. So everyone went to sleep with great grievance. But this time, the men prepared themselves and had their weapons ready in case any more danger presented itself.

As the time came close to midnight, a great wind blew towards them, soon followed by a huge flying mammal, which circled around their home and went away. But the men were very tired from their long day seeking the little girl. They could hardly keep their eyes open so they decided to get some rest before the morning. Late that night, however, the monster came back and took another child away from one of the hammocks. This time, some people saw the monster flying away with the child although not very clearly as it was dark. Saddened by their second loss and convinced that the strange monster would come back the next night, the group prepared properly for its return.

There, in the group of Makushis, was a very old woman, who was in her 90s. The men thought they could use her as a bait to attract the monster and kill it. The men tied the old woman high up in the housetop with a blazing fire so that they would be able to follow the light wherever the monster was taking the old woman.

And just as they had planned, the flying monster came by and



took the old woman away. The men followed the light as it flew away and noticed the fire disappearing in the big mountains. As they arrived at the foot of the mountains, they searched until they found a great cave. As they entered the cave, it became darker and darker, but the men had no fear. They searched in the darkness of the cave for hours, since it was so large and deep.

Finally, the men spotted a big black thing hooked up on a rock in the cave. They restlessly attacked it until it fell, dead, to the bottom of the cave. They decided to wait until the day rose to see what it looked like.

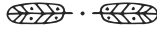
On the next morning, when the sun finally illuminated the cave, the men investigated the dead monster and discovered that it was a huge male vampire bat. The elder of the Makushi then performed a prayer to turn the bat into a small mammal. The group then continued searching the cave and found an even bigger, impregnated, female bat, which escaped before the men could kill it!

Nevertheless, it is said that ever since this tragic encounter with humans, bats have become small and they have changed their food source from people's meat and blood to feed only on blood from other mammals and birds!

# 24

## **Under the Hunter's Skin**

**Lakeram Haynes**



Sometimes, human beings and wild creatures become equally vulnerable to each other, particularly during the peak of the rainy season. In tropical regions, at the height of the rainy season, many wild creatures and animals become clustered into condensed areas known as forest islands. As major rains start pouring on their grazing and feeding grounds, gradually flooding them, the animals are forced to retreat in small forest islands along the rivers, or deeper into the jungle. The ones close to the rivers and those that are in the proximity of human settlements become vulnerable to human hunters. Those that travel deeper into the jungle also stay vulnerable to humans, as well as other predators.

Though it is a typical Amerindian practice, Amerindian people do not hunt for commercial purposes. They do not hunt on a regular basis, as alternative meat sources are available for the sustenance of their families. Those who live far out from the forest usually rely on domesticated meat production such as cattle, or purchase meat in the shops. Hunting is usually done opportunistically, which is a very good practice as it maintains the animal population healthy, near and far.

The height of the rainy season marks the opening of the short period where Amerindians hunt for personal consumption. They do not use modern day navigational practices or GPS technologies to find their hunting grounds. Having navigated these lands

for many years, the Amerindians are aware and knowledgeable of the highlands, the ponds, the swamps and their environment in general. And so are they of the forest islands where animals take refuge during high waters.

But hunting is a dangerous activity. As hunters depart from the safety of their canoes and venture into the forest, they become vulnerable to creatures such as the labaria or the bushmaster snakes, the deadliest venomous pit vipers. Although it is not venomous, the anaconda is just as dangerous and usually lurks in the creeks surrounding the islands. Not to forget the black caiman, which patiently waits for his opportunity. Humans too can be on their menu if they are not careful.

Armed with his bow and arrows, a skill he has learnt from a very small age, the hunter needs to pay close attention to these threats and dangers. However, when the excitement of hunting kicks in, these dangers are quickly ruled out! If his prey decides to cross a creek towards another island, the hunter is determined to cross as well. It is not rare, when swimming through the swamps and the lurking giants, that hunters loose dogs to the black caimans and anacondas.

After the hunt, the hunters usually regroup with accompanying community members and gather their hunting prizes. If hunting has been very productive, each hunter leaves with enough meat supply for his whole family. When the day is over, the hunters head home in their canoe, paddling either up river, against the fast running stream, or down river, along with the current. These factors are taken into account when planning for the trips, as well as the time needed for the hunting to take place.

The hunting season usually lasts a maximum of three weeks per year. No permit is needed as nature is controlling the season. Therefore, what is taken does not affect too much what is left until the next hunting season. This practice has been done for as long as I can remember and it is being passed on to the young generations.

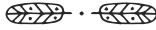
Today, however, some people in the communities own shotguns, which makes hunting easier but more boring too. This new practice can also have an impact on the animal population in the absence of control. Other challenges we have are related to the changing climate, which affects our rainy season and the threats that are posed by logging activities carried out by foreign logging

companies. Even if logging does not take place on Amerindian lands, it affects the animals. For instance, during the dry season, the animals are forced to migrate to new feeding grounds and this is when miners or shortsighted hunters kill them. While they do not always see the benefit of keeping healthy animal populations, for us Amerindians it is very important not to over use the meat resources.

# 25

## A Life Changing Experience

Lakeram Haynes



*On a beautiful Saturday afternoon, a father of seven and his sons left his farming camp in search of new roofing materials, when an event occurred that would change his life forever and the way he sees wildlife. From that moment on, he has cultivated a deep respect for wild creatures and decided to leave them undisturbed, in their natural habitat. The following events are based on a true story.*

It was during the year 1994, that a man in his late 40s decided to go fetch new kokerite leaves for his farming camp that needed repair. After eating a delicious tuma pot, a local dish with freshly caught cullet (a catfish) boiled in squeezed cassava water and loads of chilli, he told his family and sons about his plans for the afternoon. Everyone agreed to the father's plan and got ready to leave.

The father took the first canoe with his son-in-law. It was a narrow canoe made of wood, built in such a way that it could travel fast despite the strong current during the height of the rainy season. His second and third sons, along with a grandson and a friend visiting from a nearby village departed in another canoe. These young boys were all in the age ranging from 13 to 16 years old.

The two crews paddled against the river's rushing tide and approached the place where kokerite leaves could be found in abundance. However, as they progressed, the father's canoe

distanced the second one with the younger boys, and lost sight of them behind the river bend. Only a few minutes away from their destination, the father and his son-in-law needed to cross the stream towards the banks situated on the other side of this wide part of the river. Having crossed half the river, they noticed a black caiman emerging under overhanging tree branches by the riverbank towards which they were heading. It was quite common to observe black caimans lurking along the edges of the river as it was the height of the rainy season and many of these creatures were deep into the flooded swamps rather than in the middle of the river. Being accustomed to what was a common sighting, the two men ignored the caiman and progressed towards the riverbank.

But, seconds later, the two men noticed that the black caiman was advancing in their direction, heading towards the bow of the canoe from ahead. It only took seconds to respond to the advancing reptile. Being in the front and the prime target of the attack, the son-in-law grabbed his bow and arrows and shot one to deter the caiman. But his aim was off as the adrenalin was affecting his focus and aim. At this point, the creature increased its speed and charged into the bow by clamping on with its massive jaws, capsizing the canoe in the process.

Moments later, the two occupants were swimming, disoriented, in different directions. They first looked at where the caiman was, but it was nowhere to be seen. Until they heard a big noise and saw the caiman emerging 20 meters away from where it had attacked. They were in the middle of the river surrounded by small islands, in a place with strong and spinning currents, as several streams were meeting. Paradoxically, this was useful for the escape of the two men.

Being the bigger person, the father decided to swim towards the closest bank. But when it noticed the moving mass, the caiman immediately began to chase him. The screams of his son-in-law warned the father that the caiman was approaching dangerously so he sunk below the surface and swam under water to disorient the caiman, which was forced to pause to see where the man had gone. Emerging closer to the riverbank to get some air, the father looked back at the caiman and noticed it was now at a safe distance. Once again, he dove and swam under water for

the second time until he crashed into submerged branches and leaves, which gave him a deadly scare! He slowly raised his head from between the leaves and looked for a branch that would support his weight. As he spotted one, he climbed out of the water onto the safety of the tree branch. The scrambling and climbing noise coming from the shore attracted the black caiman, which advanced and eventually stopped right under the father who was suspended on a his branch three meters above the water.

Taking advantage of the fact that the caiman's attention was focused on the father, the son-in-law climbed onto the capsized canoe, and was now floating and spinning around, drifting towards the edge of the river towards a clump of submerged bushes. He had lost all his weapons in the attack and was now holding on to his last tool: a paddle.

Meanwhile, having not witnessed what had happened to the first boat, the youngsters were still paddling upriver when they heard loud shouts that sounded unusual. The boys speeded the cadence and a few minutes later, they arrived into hearing range. At first, they heard something about 'caiman' and 'bad,' but it did not make any sense until they noticed, in the distance, what seemed like a person sitting on a floating log.

As they got closer to the voice, they realised that it was their brother-in-law, although he was not sitting on a log but on the canoe that they had come in. They immediately joined the dots: the shouting and the floating canoe, the brother-in-law and the 'bad caiman'. But at this stage they were still unsure from where the shouts were coming from, as their father could not be seen. As they approached, the father gave another shout, saying that there was a cross and aggressive black caiman waiting just under him at the very moment.

"Be careful!" he shouted.

The boys were equipped with deadly wire-pointed arrows, which could take the animal down, but they decided to first help the brother-in-law, who briefly told them what had happened.

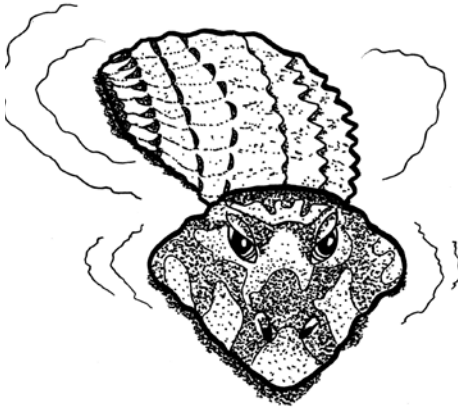
Then it was time to go rescue their father. Landing a few meters away from the caiman, the elder son equipped with his bow and arrows made his way on the branches. He took an arrow and aimed at the caiman. Without further hesitation, the boy shot his arrow at a spot just next to his eye, known as the death spot. He hit the target dead on, the caiman submerged without

a fight. The group saw branches shaking under the water as the dying reptile was tumbling down to the bottom of the river. The father, who was now relieved from the danger was no longer in the right mindset to work, so he cancelled the expedition and everyone returned to the camping site.

A few days later, a group went back to where the caiman had been shot and they found his body floating. Giving a closer look, they confirmed it had died from the arrow in seconds.

Since that incident, the father has become very respectful of caimans, venomous snakes as well as all wild creatures. When he speaks to youngsters he tells them to leave these creatures alone and not to interfere with them as one day they could attack in unexpected ways. When he was young, during his travels to other communities and while camping on the beaches, he would usually scare the caimans who came close to the camping by suddenly running towards them and even plunging in the water to scare them away. That seemed fun at the time, but thinking of it with retrospect, maybe this was a consequence of those acts he had done when he was younger. Today, he respects wild creatures by saying:

“You stay in your corner, and I’ll stay in my corner.”

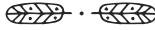




## 26

### **Tanin! Tanin!**

**Abigail Allicock**



*In our communities, the elderly usually tell stories to advise young people about the things of life. Sometimes, these stories are passed by women to young girls, as is the case with the following story... It was told at my daughter's 11th birthday party by my mom Jean Allicock. Seeing that her granddaughter would soon become a young woman and marry, she saw fit to give her a good warning...*

Walking and walking, deeper into the forest, a hunter was just about to give up for the day when he heard a sound. Turning his head to hear where the sound was coming from, he thought:

“A party?”

Being naturally curious, he decided to head in the direction of the music. The sound was now loud and clear. The man's heart was pounding to the rhythm of the tune as he entered a house inside of which people were dancing. He greeted them and the host greeted him back. For a while, the man just stood there, hesitant; he observed the ball, the people, and the head of the house, who was dancing with several pretty young ladies and wondered:

“Is this all for real?”

The hunter closed his eyes, shook his head and gazed again at the dance floor. Everyone was still there, dancing and having fun. So he made himself comfortable and just then, he heard a

voice saying:

“Look there, a bowl of kari!”

Someone was walking with a calabash full of kari and handed it over to him to consume. As he was really thirsty, he grabbed the calabash and started to drink it with all his might, not wanting to let it go. Minutes later, the calabash was lying on the floor, empty, and the hunter was now feeling very sleepy. He fell asleep on the spot.

When he woke up, he was lying next to a huge termite nest and his whole body was covered in termites. Still hung over, he wondered: was it this same termite nest that he was calling a home a few hours ago? A strange feeling crossed his mind.

The sun was still out so he started to get walking again to see if he could get to where he was heading prior to falling asleep. But on the way he saw a big silk cotton tree where he felt the urge to take another nap. This time, when he woke up it was completely dark. He said to himself he would go home the next day. But at around 4 in the morning, he heard strange noises. It was a chant with at least two voices:

“Hurry and get bright day, I want to eat this lost stranger.”

And another voice saying:

“Can I have the head?”

To which the first one replied:

“Tanin! Tanin! (Don’t let him hear!)”

The man moved a little. He thought, “Am I hearing someone who wants to eat me? Am I dreaming?”

And he doze off again.

The chant continued:

“Hurry and get bright, day. I want to eat this stranger that is lost.”

“Give me the head!”

“Tanin! Tanin!”

The man was now fully awake, sitting alert, and listening. He looked around and, to his surprise, it was again a termites’ nest on a bush rope and two pretty birds singing at the top, in harmony with nature.

This is when he realised he had left home the day before, at the command of his wife. She had told him to go fishing and hunting to get something to eat for the children. It was a custom for men to hunt for a few hours in the night, but they would nor-

mally return in the morning. How long had he been gone? He stood up and started to walk back towards the village.

At home, his wife, children and mother-in-law were getting worried about the poor fellow not returning home. The mother-in-law told her daughter that it was her fault; she had sent the man off to hunt while he was under the influence of alcohol. She went on to say:

“Now you will go and find him.”

So the wife set off to find her husband. And as she walked out of the village, she saw a shadow approaching:

“Is that him?”

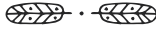
She ran fast towards the shadow and there he was, tired and hungry. She hugged him and they greeted each other at length before marching home together. Upon arrival, the couple sat down and they ate a meal. The man told everyone his experience in the forest, vowing never to over-drink again.

This is why we say: Never let your husband go on a hunting trip under the influence of alcohol, because their spirit becomes very weak and the evil spirit may take control of it.

# 27

## **When the Sky Was Near and Low**

**Grace Albert**



*As I was sitting outside, meditating on this special Easter Day, which we call Good Friday, I noticed this 71 years old Wapishana woman who appeared unoccupied and I decided to question her about Easter. She had spent part of her life in the South Rupununi before moving to the North. She told me how she and other people spent Good Friday in years gone by.*

In my early years we, Wapishanas in the South, believed in many things, such as Good Friday. This special day was very important and highly respected by our fore parents. Their experience was that many things would happen to people who were being disobedient on this day. It was said that things happened according to what we believed since the sky was very near and low, meaning when the earth had just been created by the Almighty. In these days, there was not much religious activity. People believed what they were experiencing and, most of all, we knew that the son of the Almighty had died for us and so he should be honoured on that day.

According to our beliefs, really scary things could happen if we did not respect certain interdictions. For instance, people would be untenanted the entire Good Friday. Cooking was not allowed so the food had to be prepared the day before and could not include any kind of meat. For drinking, water also had to be fetched the day before and people used to fill buckets or containers. More oddly, no showering was allowed for the entire day either. It was said that disobeying these beliefs would bear serious consequences. If you took a shower, you would be turned into

a fish that swam in the water. If you drank Good Friday's water it would turn into blood. Similarly, we did not handle cutlasses, knives, or any other sharp equipment otherwise it would cause danger. Fruits were not eaten for it would turn you into animals, like the monkey, who eats fruits. These things, we used to obey them in my early days and since the world was very young, the old people would say.

This is the truth, because I experienced several stories... One year, on Good Friday, my uncle and some men decided to go to work and disobey the words of our fore parents. And so they went, in the jungle, and it happened that they decided to take a day of rest to go fishing and have a feast. They fished and started cooking by the fireside. At first, it was fine. The fish was boiling in the pot and the men were getting ready to eat. But after a few minutes, my uncle went to check the pot and discovered something odd: there was no more fish in the pot and everything had disappeared! It was also said that one Makushi tribe did not believe in this and, one day, a group of people went to the river to wash and bathe despite the interdiction. Immediately after, they all changed into fish and disappeared. They never returned.

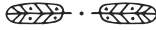
Another year it was me who disobeyed. On the day of Good Friday, my stepson visited me home and I had in my house some parakari. I knew it was not allowed but I still did it! I strained the parakari and offered him some. Immediately after, when he was about to consume it, blood dripped into the bowl of parakari. He became very scared but I wasn't because I had done it to prove him!

Hence all these things happened.

Today I am still living and it does not happen anymore. I remember my great, great grandparents telling me that it would change as the sky went higher, meaning as years would pass after the creation. So today we have a lot of religious preaching going on and we continue to obey but with spiritual prayers rather than through specific interdictions.

# 28

## **Turtle Ranch** **Lakeram Haynes**



*This story was told to me by uncle Campbell Ewell, resident of Wowetta village, in the North Rupununi. It illustrates how places came to be named in Amerindian territories, and the importance of storytelling for passing on traditional knowledge about the landscape and its inhabitants.*

A very long time ago, a family lived in a place that is today known as Wowetta, in the North Rupununi. During one of their outing into the nearby forest, the family heard a noise coming from the mountain, which is very high to our standards. It sounded as if a creature was blowing into a bamboo whistle from the top of the mountain:

“Tuuuuung, tuuuuuuuung...”

The family wanted to know what was making such a strange noise. But as soon as it stopped, a very strong wind engulfed the whole forest and the area was plunged into darkness as sudden rains developed. The family got so scared that they hastily headed back to their camp, which fortunately was not too far away.

Another day, they managed to observe the creature. It took the form of a giant domesticated cat, which had lots of bright spots on its body, what is today known as the Jaguar. It was making the exact same noise than the one they had heard before, when the storm and rain had passed through the forest.

“Tuuuuung, tuuuuuuuung.”

This time, however, the creature had come down the mountain into the Savannah. Despite having weapons to defend

themselves, the family had to make good escape. The jaguar was so huge and mighty that they did not stand a chance!

After this, no one was allowed to venture into the Savannah or the nearby forest for a long time as the massive jaguar was known to be lurking in the area, and it was by far the largest creature they had ever seen in their lifetime.

A long time passed and people eventually started to go back to the forbidden area. They were relieved to notice that the bamboo whistle sound could not be heard anymore. Out of curiosity, they even decided to overnight in the area, and spent a very quiet night. To make sure that it had disappeared for good, they returned several nights but to their relief, the noise was gone and so was the creature.

It was suspected that the jaguar may have died or moved away. They decided to call the Savannah: Kiwan Piti, or Jaguar Point Savannah. But people wondered what had caused the jaguar to be so big in size. It was thought later on that the abundance of yellow-footed tortoises in the Savannah and the forest might have been the reason.

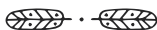
Uncle Campbell confirmed to me that during his young days, he used to run into an abundance of turtles congregating in the Savannah. He said, "For the jaguar, feeding on these turtles would have been an easy life". An elder man had told him that in the centre of the Savannah there is an island forest, and in the centre of this forest, there is a boulder in the shape of a canister that looks almost like a turtle. It was believed to be the master of the turtles, which is why they were always found in abundance there.

*As people realised that these turtles were a good source of food, they started to harvest them. In recent times, their population has dwindled and the time has come to protect them, but the memory of their abundance has remained and is passed from generation to generation through storytelling and in the names given to the landscape. Today, we call this land: Turtle Ranch.*

## 29

### **How Monkey Became the Weeping Capuchin**

**Abigail Allicock**



One day, Jack the monkey asked the King to marry one of his daughters.

The King told him:

“If you want my daughter, you have to catch the biggest caiman and then you will marry her.”

So Jack went to try his luck and found a big caiman floating on the river.

“Hey, what you want?” the caiman asked.

“I want a partner like you,” said Jack.

“A partner like me?”

“Yes, I want you and me sleeping together.”

The caiman and Jack now went on the land to sleep.

“I can’t sleep just like that you know. I need a piece of wood as a pillow for my head said Jack.”

And he went to search for a piece of wood.

After the caiman fell asleep, Jack took the piece of wood and knocked the caiman on his head. But he missed and the caiman woke up in shock:

“What you doing, man!”

“That wasn’t me,” said Jack, “a tree fell in the middle of the night. Look, it nearly hit me too.”

“If it had caught my dead spot I would have been dead,” shouted the caiman angrily.

“So where’s your dead spot?”

“Right behind here,” and the caiman pointed at a spot on the side behind his eyes.

“Ah!” thought Jack excitedly, discovering the caiman’s dead



spot. And he gave one big blow to the caiman's dead spot.

Jack had killed the caiman. He tied his four feet up and carried him proudly to present it to the King. He said:

"King! King! I caught the biggest caiman, now I can marry your daughter!"

Jack was dancing up and down because he was so happy.

"Ok," said the King, "but I want you to do more thing, catch for me the biggest kamudi" — also known as tinki in Makushi.

The next day Jack carried a canister into the forest and put it underneath a tree. He climbed up the same tree and waited until a huge kamudi passed by.

"You want anything?" asked Jack from the top of his tree branch.

"What I want? I want you!" responded the snake.

"Me? No man, but I got a nice canister for you there. You could go there. I want to give you something," Jack told the kamudi.

"How am I going fit in that canister?"

"That going to fit you nice, you know. You just got to curl up" promised Jack convincingly.

So the kamudi crawled inside, curled himself and his whole body disappeared into the canister.

Jack jumped off the tree and quickly closed the canister.

Then he ran to the King's palace and shouted:

"King! I caught a pet for you. I caught the biggest kamudi!" he said.

"You lie," replied the King.

"No, I am not lying, now I can get the girl," responded Jack.

The King's workers went to collect the heavy snake. It really was the biggest kamudi they had ever seen.

And the King said: "Ok, you can have my daughter."

But when the King presented his daughter, she was so disappointed at the sight of Jack that she started crying.

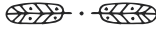
She said: "Oh no, not him please."

The monkey tried to convince her but with no luck; the girl didn't want him. Screaming, she said that she did not want no monkey! Since he could not change her mind about him, the monkey disappeared, weeping.

That is why, until this day, we have the Weeping Capuchin monkey.

# 30

## **The Praying Baboon** **Abigail Allicock**



At 5:00 in the morning the baboon was howling “Ohohoh,” saying his prayer.

A man was on an early morning hunt when he saw the baboon up in the tree. Below the monkey, he saw a pretty girl coming up towards him.

“Hey what you’re doing there?” The girl asked the man.

“I came to find something to shoot. I heard that baboon howling and I am going to shoot he,” the man answered.

“No, you can’t do that. That is my father and he is praying, he always says his prayer at 5:00 in the morning.”

“You want to follow me?”

“No, I come to shoot that baboon, because I don’t have anything to eat,” the man said.

She pleaded again to the man not to shoot her father.

“Wait here and I will come back. You must stay here!”

And so she went up this big kumaka ye tree.

When she came down she touched his feet with a bina tree and she blew upon his foot.

“You just follow me,” she said.

“But I can’t climb that tree!”

“No,” she answered, “don’t say so, you just follow me.”

And up they went.

And there was the baboon high up in the tree.

After the man got his bina, he saw the baboon as people and

became just like them.

The baboon father told his daughter, "Strain the drink, you bring a strange man."

"Offer he food, offer he some drink!"

The man drank and ate, but he didn't get to see what was going on.

A couple of mornings later, the baboon told his daughter that they were going out to find some bullet wood tree.

When they were gone, the man walked around in the baboon's apartment and found big calabashes and saw that this is where they messed in.

Though he decided to keep what he saw as a secret.

When the family came back they cooked and ate.

The man was now trying to understand where the baboons made their drinks because he didn't see anything in the kitchen.

Then they went to sleep.

In the night the father howled, "Man, get up and bring your calabash."

The man woke up too, and he saw them mess in the calabash.

"Nasty mess," he thought disgustedly, "oh, Lord!"

"Come and strain yours now," the father said.

"What is this mess that we're drinking?" the man asked the girl.

"Wait, I going to strain a drink for you just now."

"Me not want, I feeling sick! I don't want no drink," the man answered.

"How come?"

"I tell you, I feeling sick this morning."

Then the old man asked his daughter, "You carry any drink for the boy?"

She said, "No he won't eat nothing he won't drink nothing, because he feeling sick!"

His father told her, "Now careful, when you go to strange places all kinds of things follow you and all kinds of things make you get sick."

He should go to the piasan.

The piasan or piainan is the other white monkey. So the girl and her brother went with the man.

"Uncle, Uncle, daddy sent we to you. My sister carry up some man and he is taken sick. We don't want he dead!" said the

brother.

"I see. For this one I ain't shake bush. He na sick, he scorned your food," said the piaiman wisely, lying in his hammock.

That made the baboons get vexed now.

And so the angry father talked to his daughter in the night, "I don't know what you brought this man for! For scorn me drink scorn my food! Tomorrow we are moving from here to the bullet tree where plenty fruit is bearing."

The next morning they left.

The girl said to the man, "I going along too."

And he said: "how am I going to get down that tree? The tree high you know!"

But she left without him and in this moment all the bina she had used on him went with her too and the man was left alone on the tree.

Now there was a big marabanta — kamaiwa in Makushi.

He was sitting on the tree in the hot sun. The marabanta approached the man and said, "Hey, what you're doing here?"

"Man, them baboon left me," he responded sadly.

"All right, I'm going to help you. If I shoot the tree, you're going to get enough branches to hold yourself on to," said the marabanta. And he made one shot.

The tree grew and got enough branches. And the man managed to climb down.

The marabanta said, "I know where them baboons went. Let's go behind them!"

And they went.

He said, "You must shoot your girl first and I will shoot she father."

The man wanted to shoot all of them because they punished him. But he didn't want to shoot his girl. The marabanta insisted that she be punished too.

When they found the baboons, they were eating on the bullet wood tree.

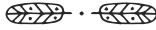
With the blow pipe and the poison they shot at them, until everyone was dead.

And they went home.

# 31

## **Ma and Pa's Home**

**Janissa Roberts**



*Long ago there was a family living on an island. The family consisted of the mother, the father, one brother and one sister aged 14 and 9. The children were always left at home with safety rules and tasks to do while the parents went hunting. The children never disobeyed their parents until one day...*

Shortly after their parents left for hunting, the children began to gather their cooking materials and ingredients. Gathering things in order was part of the children's daily chores, as well as getting the pot on the fire just before their parents arrived. They finished cleaning and tidying up the home and lit up the fire. Then, they added a large pot of poisonous cassava juice, a product of cassava processing and flavouring ingredient, which they cannot do without. While the pot was boiling the children went to play.

Suddenly, the children saw two huge tattooed-skin people, brightly smiling at them. They were shaken and afraid since no stranger had ever visited them, and they had never heard their parents talking about neighbours living close by. But in just a minute, the strangers' charming smiles and words took over the children's fears. The children were invited to visit the strangers' home that had bountiful of foods and was said to be nearby. They obediently followed the kind strangers to their home, who insisted that they would bring them back home afterwards. On the way, they told the children to call them Ma and Pa.



Later, the parents of the two children came back only to be confronted with a boiling pot and a saddened home. They called for their children, but there was no sign of them. The poor parents wept and wept every day and night for their boy and girl. They hoped deep down in their grieving hearts to see them back once more. On the way with the strangers, the children were longing for their parents too.

It was a long way to Ma and Pa's home. Their house was built with gigantic plates of rocks. There wasn't anything that they were accustomed to see at their home. In a corner of the home, chubby lazy babies were asking Pa and Ma for food.

"We have to look for food, that's why we brought you here as babysitters," said Ma and Pa in a growling sound.

Upon hearing the growling, the children realised that the strangers were tigers, and grew really scared of them.

After relaxing, Ma and Pa left the exhausted children with their babies. The children hugged each other very tightly and burst into tears for there wasn't any bit of food for them and they were missing their dearest parents. An hour passed just by looking at these helpless chubby cubs. Then, they heard the growling noises coming back towards their home. The growling came nearer and nearer and calmed down when reaching their home. Ma and Pa were loaded with bloody, fleshy meat. The hungry cubs woke up and cried for food and the children saw Ma giving them pieces of uncooked meat. The children immediately scorned it. But the rest of it was for them, so the children tried to eat the raw meat and swallowed a bit forcefully to please the tigers.

The dark shadows covered the day. The children asked Ma and Pa how they would sleep. "Just like us!" they growled. So, the unhappy children slept on uneven fragments. And it went on, like this, for many days and nights. And many kinds of fresh meat were eaten every day in the morning, at midday and in the evening.

The children grew frustrated at looking after the cubs and could not stand living with flesh eaters. They noticed that the hunting hours were increasing as the cubs got bigger and bigger, so they planned an escape in the morning hours. One last time, the children ate dinner with the tigers, after having prepared for their morning escape. They all slept until the hungry hunters woke them up to babysit.

The next day, when the tigers left home, the angry children immediately killed the cubs with no sound and anxiously ran and jumped through the door before it closed forever. The house was said to be haunted and its door only opened when the tigers left or returned home. When things in the house happened it would shut down and things found inside would be eaten.

After the second child jumped out, the haunted house locked down in a loud harsh noise. The two siblings held each other's hands and ran for their lives. They ran and ran straight ahead. When the tigers reached home they found that their cubs were dead so they went around roaring, looking for the two children. Soon the tigers sniffed behind the tracks of the children.

About two miles away, the children heard loud angry clashing down noises coming from behind in the distance. The brother hurried his sister by pulling her faster. She started to cry as her brother fought throughout the thick vegetative forest. They emerged in a clear spot, but the angry tigers were now much nearer. The brother and sister looked back, and saw instant forks of lightning stabbing the earth and tree branches moving continuously. Ahead, they saw a fisherman and they ran towards him. By now, the tigers were very near and even came into view. The fearing and grieving children eventually looked up and saw that Grandfather was coming. Grandfather came down and the two children held on to his wings and in 1... 2... 3... he went off the ground. The growling angry jungle monsters jumped and nearly clawed them down, but Grandfather and the children were now flying 30 metres above the ground.

Grandfather took them home safely through the strong breeze. Confused, the children were warmly welcomed by his wife. Grandpa and Grandma had a tall wooden upstairs house. Inside, their home was similar to the children's home, the one they had before with their parents. They slept well on warm soft feathers and ate only roasted and smoked fish. Grandpa had the boy fishing along with him until the boy started to enjoyed flying with grandpa's substitute wings. Grandma had the girl relaxing since she had terrible nightmares. The children were happy, but they were still missing their parents.

One morning, the children were sitting happily at the door. Suddenly, a lovely creature known as large stinging lizard — *en wi ra* — approached them. This animal told them about their parents' road and home. The children told the lizard that they didn't know how to come down from the tall house. So the lizard told them to climb on its back. The children jumped on and the lizard started to sing a song to charm them. The lizard sang *yo yo sipori, yo yo sipori, yo yo sipori wi wi* up and down while coming down until it met the bottom of the house.

As they were near the ground the clever children jumped off his back. The poor lizard wanted them for its meal but the children were smarter than him.

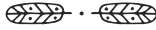
The children ran towards the road indicated by the lizard. Eventually, when they came out of the bush, there it was: their home. At first, they couldn't believe it, so they approached the house prudently. But as they were coming, the mother saw them. She did not recognise her children because they had grown up so she called her husband for help. The children came nearer, with great bright smiles. Finally, the parents realised so they ran towards them with joy, welcoming their back and comforting them. They were given the food that they wanted at home. The children were now living comfortably and happily with their parents.

After a few days the children went back to visit Grandpa and Grandma. When they reached their place the children tried to find the house that they had left. But they only saw a huge tree. They looked up and saw two big Jabirus sitting and looking. The children did not know what had happened to Grandpa and Grandma. They did not know their grandparents were looking at them silently, as birds.



# 32

## **Morning Star** **Abigail Allicock**



Once there were two sisters. The young one was a good girl but the older one was a bad girl. Because she was so bad, the older sister just couldn't find a good husband.

She was so bad that Makunaima had to come down and intervene.

He came down disguising himself as an old man. As the sisters were coming home from the farm, they met the old man on the road. And because he was old, the kindhearted sister decided to invite him home. Not the older sister, she didn't want to see an old man.

When they arrived home, the younger sister introduced the old man to the family and gave him some food; meanwhile the older sister was annoyed that her sister brought this old man in the house.

"Why don't you chase him out?" She said the younger sister.

"He is old and I respect old people," she replied.

Sitting in the corner, Makunaima was listening. And it so happened that the old man pretended to fall in love with the two sisters. The custom was that he could only marry the older sister before the younger one.

The parents agreed to their union, since he was a traveler and a kind person. They got married and moved together, but the old man never really talked. He always remained quiet in the corner. His wife rapidly began to take advantage of him and

started calling him names and talking bad things about his age. Day after day, the younger sister would watch the old man going to cut his cassava farm, and she would feel sorry for him. So she tried to prepare kasiri, pepper pot and tuma for when he would come home.

Meanwhile, the older sister would always be grumpy and complaining.

This continued for some time until one day the younger sister decided to follow him to the farm to see what the old man was really doing. When she arrived to the farm, at midday, she did not see an old man but instead there was a handsome young man. The girl hastily ran home to tell her older sister, but she did not believe her.

As time passed and the farm neared completion, time came when the old man decided he could not stay anymore, as he could not bear to see that his wife did not love him. And so he told the younger sister:

“I cannot stay with your sister any more, she doesn’t love me and I have to go, but you’ve been very kind to me and instead of your sister I love you very much. It’s just that your older sister is married to me.”

“But make a wish and I will probably leave something for you, so that you’ll always remember me when I gone, and your sister too,” he continued.

That night after drinking their kasiri, the old man left. On his way out the door he said:

“You must look for me in the morning. I’m no ordinary man. I’m Makunaima himself.”

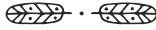
So the younger sister went out of the house at five o’clock in the morning and she saw this beautiful star in the sky and she transformed into an even more beautiful woman, into a princess.

When she returned inside the house and looked at her older sister, she saw a ninety years old lady. All her skin was old and wrinkly with frizzy grey hair. She was now no good anymore as a wife.

# 33

## **A Disobedient Girl**

**Janissa Roberts**



There was a girl who lived among a big family. She was the only girl left in the hands of Grandmother. Fishing was her favourite activity. She spent most of her time doing it during the weekends and after school. She really loved fishing.

One day the girl grew up into a young lady on her most exciting month. She was weird and vexed of staying home. She stayed home until her menstruation was eased.

During the girl's homestay her grandmother comforted her from worries and advised her. She was more enlightened about outside life and about things that would affect her granddaughter in life, if she failed to follow certain beliefs. But the girl never believed in myths.

A couple of days later, her menstruation ended. And without her grandmother knowing she happily tossed about and hopped out of the house with her fishing equipment while Grandmother was working in the kitchen garden. Grandmother stopped weeding and stood up to a calm yard. Since there weren't any chats she went to check inside the house only to find her granddaughter was nowhere to be seen and her fishing bag was missing too. Grandma was in shock and could not believe it.

Outside, happy young lady was fishing with her cousins in the shallow pond. While fishing she was cracking funny jokes with her cousins. All of them had fun pulling up different types of fine fish.

Suddenly, a boisterous noise was heard, halting instantly giggles and laughs. They stood up to see what had made the noise and where it was coming from. All their necks went back and forth and side to side. It finally came into sight and it was a strong breeze rustling up from the calm surface of the water. It brushed around a huge tree, which was approximately 100 meters away... After terrorising the tree the twirling breeze erupted harshly into the water and scattered the leaves behind. Then the young lady heard her cousins scream

“OMA, OMA baiiiii!!!” It was stunning that she did not move her eyes off the beast coming towards them.

Within seconds, the beast approached them with a heap of water and with no sound. It calmed as it reached the boat bough. At that stage, she did not see any image of the beast but only the tiny waves. The girl pulled her head back and the fear hit her like a bully. She screamed around and scrambled her youngest cousin who was next to her. The group hopped off the boat and hustled through the razor grasses — sa’ra — heading for the land, which was about 70 meters away. They heard more loud noises rushing behind in the distance. As they heard the noise they felt weak and down but steady on their way through, leaving the boat and the fishing equipments scattered behind.

As they were almost on the land, they heard their worried grandmother calling from home and soundly ran towards her. The girl was looked after by her grandmother since she had been rude. It was most stunning and unbelievable that the young lady and her cousins were saved.

Two months later, as she was having her second menstruation, the young lady and her grandmother were asked to visit some families in Brazil. Grandmother was happy to go but worried at the same time, since her granddaughter had to go to school first and would need to do part of the trip with her cousin. So she planned ahead.

It was Friday morning when Grandmother was getting ready to travel. She advised her granddaughter, as she would usually do before leaving her. This time, however, Grandmother forgot to remind her about the dangers of the trip. The young lady headed happily to school whilst her worried grandmother left ahead with her eldest daughter on a bullock cart to Brazil, on a journey that would last eight hours.

The young lady went to school and anxiously waited for the class to be over. Back then, school used to finish at 1:30pm. She was steadily checking the time. Tingah-lingah-ling...the bell rang. She ran out of the school and waited for her cousin to meet her.

Now it was time to jump on one old but smooth running bicycle and meet the bullock cart. They were wondering how far their aunt and grandmother had gone. The bicycle had them coming off and they walked up a hill in a scorching sun heat. There came a pond called chicken pond – Kiriwana kubi. The young lady was so thirsty and longing to bathe that she decided to bathe while crossing the pond. Her cousin who was already on the land hurried her up. They continued their ride and took turns in toying each other. It was a long way and their energy was already sapping away by unseen tiredness. After riding a long distance, they finally saw the bullock cart ahead. They all met up and stopped to have dinner, roast tasso and soaked farine — paga pung pusa yakiri sheba.

After eating they continued their journey together. When the sun was about to hide its face, unfriendly mosquitoes — pisami



— started to bite and the heat was blown away by fresh air. Now they were about three miles away from the border with Brazil: the Ireng River. The young lady rode behind the cart while her cousin was on the cart. Everyone was feeling tired so they beat the bulls to walk faster.

Suddenly, the breeze became stronger and stronger along with huge dark clouds. Big rain drops that stung hard, and terrible lightening flashes with distance thunders. They were being sur-

rounded. The bulls started to snort and breathe harder and the white sand was washing away from the road. Instantly the young lady shivered and hustled to jump onto the cart. Poor her had to hold a heavy old bicycle on her lap. Troubled and worried, Grandmother questioned her:

“Did you bathe at the pond?”

The young lady hesitated and, eventually, she admitted:

“Yes.”

Her grandmother once more stuffed her ears with stabbing words. Grandmother immediately worked her magic sticks and tried to ease the hunting chicken. They reached the Ireng River crossing and only to hear people’s complaints. Grandmother didn’t say who was the cause of that mishap. The young lady felt guilty enough. But Grandmother was still not reassured because her granddaughter had to cross over the Ireng River. Fortunately, they spent the night at the crossing and nothing happened anymore.

The next day, they all went across to Brazil. There, they were advised to seek help from a neighbour who was a Bush Doctor – piaiman. The doctor instantly saw the help and troubles of the young lady. He told them she had nearly been caught by a huge snake — kari yami and even her cousins who were with her. They ran away before the snake softened the ground. He also saw and told them that on the way she had a bath at the chicken dad’s pond and just the power of that beast had met them as a strong wind. If they had gone closer to the pond the chicken could have had them as a healthy dinner. So the young lady was said to be a prey for all unseen zombies. The Bush Doctor prayed over her, to give her safety.

After the crises and help of her grandmother and the Bush Doctor the young lady was touched and vowed not to be too disobedient. And everyone was reassured.

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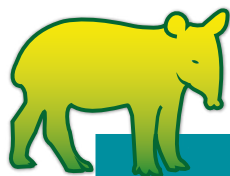
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## GLOSSARY

Atremuti	Bless
Baku	Bush man
Bimitti	Traditional endurance run
Bina	Magie
Pragko	Frog
Cammie	Grey-winged trumpeter
Chacalla	Little bird that is known for responding when hearing the sound of its peers
Crappo	Cane toad
Curri	Red-rump agouti
Empume	Deer (Master of the Rainforest)
En wi ra	Large stinging lizard
Îwara	Common opossum
Jumbie	Monster
Kamaiwa	Marabanta
Kami kami	Grey-winged trumpeter
Kamudi/tinki	Snake
Kari yami	Snake
Kari/parakari/kasiri	Local drinks made of fermented cassava juice
kiriwana kubi	Chicken pond
Kulet kuruta	Tiger fish
Madunaro (Arawak)	Bushmaster snake
Muna	Mokro plant (base material used in crafts)
Pia'san	Shaman, healer
Oma	A thing seen for the first time, or that cannot be explained
O'kai ipu pun	Big and fat feet flesh
Pia'san/Piaiman	Bush Doctor/Healer
Pisami	Mosquito
Rabaka	Big bird that is always used in prayers to bring back lost spirits when they are gone or hiding
Ra'tai	The scissor-tailed bird
Sa'ra	Razor grasses
Semechichi (Arawak)	Shaman, medicine man
Tanin!	Shhhhhh, don't let him hear!
Tinki	A hand-woven tubular tool mainly used to squeeze bitter cassava (Matapee in Arawak)
Tuma	Pepper pot
Warishi	Basket work ruck sack
Yako	Brother in law
Yawari	Opossum







## Pantani

33 Amerindian Tales from  
the North Rupununi, Guyana

The north Rupununi region has been the home of the Makushi people for many centuries. Its unique ecosystems, made of extensive savannas, wide rivers, and lush rainforests harbour countless species, small and large, which have lived alongside human beings to this date.

Local tales and stories witness the intensity of that relationship. However, few have reached a public beyond Indigenous communities and many are now threatened with disappearance as the sirens of modernity challenge the practice of traditional storytelling.

The result of a cooperation between a European and five Makushi storytellers, this book lifts the veil on an Indigenous culture that is as important as it is fascinating.

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