

CHASING CINDERELLA

— Broken Dreams —

By A.C.K. Min

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NGURUNGUUR'S RE-DREAMINGS

After an hour spent on a tree branch, the blue-winged kookaburra finally made its move. It swooped down swiftly on a baby mouse on the forest floor and ended the life of the tiny, brown rodent with its claws. The hapless mouse managed to let out only a stifled half shriek that was barely audible. Yet, its death was not without significance. Besides being a source of temporary nourishment to the bird, its passing meant the termination of the sufferings of a band of warriors from eons ago. Their stories could finally be laid to rest millennia after their bodies have rot away and became fodder for the storyteller's imagination.

It was a story that has been repeated for generations. Ngurunguur, the first storyteller ever, had forgotten how many times he had retold it. When he walked the scorched earth of the deserts in his land, he never saw the need to change the plot. Like the desert that was constant in its harshness, every retelling by Ngurunguur was unaltered. And so the successive generations of storytellers of his people kept the tradition and faithfully repeated Ngurunguur's story without any alteration.

Like many other nights under the sparkling diamonds that dot the desert sky, Ngurunguur's people sat around the fire after their nightly meal. They eagerly awaited one of Ngurunguur's many stories to incite their imagination and prepare themselves for their own dreams when they sleep. Dreams are stories imparted to them by their forefathers, they believed. A night's sleep without dreams meant that their past have abandoned them as their ancestors refused to communicate with them and that their night's rest would be incomplete. And so now, like other nights in the desert habitat, the expert storyteller begins:

“Out of the dark, milky solution, the black python stirred. Its first movement – lateral, tiny shakes of its muscle fibres which have been dormant ever since it created the cosmic milk that the reptile needed to sustain itself, caused innumerable undissolved flakes to dislodge from the vast expanse of the python’s dark world into the sky-world that was nearer to the realm of men and Earth. The stars were thus formed. For the python’s dark, viscous realm of existence was far beyond that of men and Earth and could only be reached after travelling to the farthest end of the sky-world. But one day, a tribe of the bravest but also the most desperate men of the land of men and Earth ventured out to look for food. Their wives, children and parents have been starving. They lived on an island and have never been in contact with anyone else. Fishing and gathering of fruits were what sustained them. Then came the terrible season. The sea around the island turned yellow and fish, which were once plentiful, were nowhere to be found. After two weeks (having eaten all the fruits – bananas, coconuts and mangoes, on the isolated island), there was nothing left. The only way was to row their boats out to search for other lands – something that had never been achieved. The island tribe had a fable about a young girl who rowed out to the sea and never returned. One day, the girl found a strange, foreign object on the beach of purple sand. She picked it up and saw the picture of a man’s face. She knew that the man did not belong to the island for this man had red, curly hair and a yellowish face. Her people had black hair that was long and straight and their skin was of a dark chocolate colour. As if possessed and a spell was cast on her, the young girl stole a boat and rowed out to the vast ocean, never to return. Every islander knew this tale from birth. None dared to venture out except for the fishermen who made sure they tied their boats with ropes to other boats and at least one boat – usually the one nearest to the shore, had a rope secured to a pole on land. Their style of spear fishing did not require them to row out into the deep sea anyway. Still, the tale of the missing young girl spooked even the bravest fishermen among them.

The islanders were left with no choice in that terrible season. So, the strongest, bravest young men were gathered to save the tribe