The Samurai's Daughter:
A Tale of the Oki Islands

This story is set during the feudal period of Japanese history, around the year 1300 CE.

Many years ago in Japan there lived a samurai named Oribe Shima. By some misfortune, Oribe Shima had offended the emperor and had been banished to one of the Oki Islands, a group of rocky islands off the coast of Japan.

Oribe had a beautiful daughter, eighteen years old, of whom he was as fond as she was of him. Her name was Tokoyo. When Oribe was sent away to the Oki Islands, Tokoyo wept from morning till night, and sometimes from night till morning. At last, unable to stand the separation any longer, she decided to risk everything to try to reach her father, or else die in the attempt, for she was a brave girl. She had learned many of the virtues of the samurai, including bravery and loyalty.

Tokoyo sold everything she had and set out on her long journey to the Oki Islands. After many days of travel she arrived in the province that was closest to the Oki Islands. She tried to persuade the local fishermen to take her to the islands, but she had spent all of her money, and, moreover, no one was allowed to land on the Oki Islands.

The fishermen laughed at Tokoyo and told her that she had better go home. But the brave girl was not to be put off. She spent her last money on some food and supplies, and that very night she went down to the beach, found an abandoned boat, and pushed it with difficulty into the water. Then she started sculling. After several hours, Tokoyo reached the Oki Islands. Cold and exhausted, she stumbled ashore and, finding a sheltered spot, lay down to sleep.

In the morning she awoke, ate the last of her food, and began asking if anyone knew of her father's whereabouts. The first person she met was a fisherman. Tokoyo asked the fisherman if he knew her father.

"No," he said. "I have never heard of your father, and if you take my advice you will not ask for him if he has been banished, for it may lead you to trouble and him to death!"

Poor Tokoyo wandered from one place to another, asking about her father but never hearing any news of him. One evening she came to a little shrine near the edge of the ocean. After bowing before a statue of the Buddha and imploring his help to find her father, Tokoyo lay down, intending to pass the night there, for it was a peaceful and holy spot, well sheltered from the winds.

Tokoyo had slept for a few hours when she was awakened by the sound of a girl weeping and wailing. As she looked up, she saw a girl even younger than herself.
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sobbing bitterly. Beside the girl stood a man who seemed to be the priest who kept the shrine. He was clapping his hands and mumbling a prayer. Both the man and the girl were dressed in white. When the prayer was over, the priest led the girl to the edge of the rocks, and was about to push her over the edge and into the sea, when Tokoyo ran to the rescue, grabbing the girl's arm just in the nick of time. The old priest looked surprised but was not angry.

"It would seem that you are a stranger to our island," said the priest.

"Otherwise you would know that this unpleasant business is not at all to my liking. Unfortunately, on this island we are cursed with an evil god called Yofun -Nushi. He lives at the bottom of the sea, and demands, once a year, a girl fifteen years of age. This sacrificial offering has to be made on this morning every year. If our villagers do not do this, Yofun -Nushi becomes angry and causes great storms, which drown many of our fishermen. By sacrificing one young girl each year, we avoid these evils. For the last seven years it has been my sad duty to supervise the ceremony, and it is that which you have now interrupted."

Tokoyo listened to the priest's explanation, and then said, "Holy priest, if these things be as you say, then it seems there is sorrow everywhere. Let this young girl go, and tell her that she may stop her weeping, for I am more sorrowful than she, and I will willingly take her place and offer myself to Yofun -Nushi. I am the sorrowing daughter of Oribe Shima, a samurai of high rank, who has been exiled to this island. I came here to find my father, but he is so closely guarded that I cannot get to him, or even find out where he has been hidden. My heart is broken, and I have no desire to go on living. I am therefore glad to save this girl. Please take this letter, which is addressed to my father. All that I ask is that you try to deliver it to him."

Saying this, Tokoyo took the white robe off the younger girl and put it on her own body. She knelt before the figure of Buddha and prayed. Then she drew a small and beautiful dagger, which had belonged to one of her ancestors, and, placing it between her teeth, she dove into the roaring sea and disappeared. The priest looked after her with wonder and admiration, and the girl with thankfulness.

When she was young, Tokoyo had spent many days diving with the older women in her village, holding her breath and swimming down to the ocean floor to look for the valuable pearls and oyster shells. Because of this, she was a perfect swimmer. She swam down through the clear water, which was illuminated by bright moonlight and sparkling with schools of silvery fish. At last she reached the bottom, where she found an underwater cave. As Tokoyo peeped in, she thought she saw a man seated in the cave. Fearing nothing, willing to fight and die, she approached, holding her dagger ready to strike. Tokoyo took the man for Yofun -Nushi, the evil god of whom the priest had spoken. The god gave no sign of life, however, and
Tokoyo soon saw that it was not a god, but only a wooden statue of the emperor, the man who had exiled her father. At first she was angry and inclined to strike the statue with her weapon; but, after all, what would be the point of that? She decided it would be better to rescue the statue.

Tokoyo took hold of the statue and was about to lift it to the surface, when a horrible creature appeared in front of her. It was pale and scaly and shaped like a snake, but with a head and claws like a dragon. It was more than twenty feet long, and its eyes burned with hatred.

Tokoyo gripped her dagger with renewed determination, feeling sure that this was the evil god, Yofun -Nushi. No doubt, Yofun -Nushi took Tokoyo for the girl that was sacrificed to him each year on this day. Well, she would show him who she was, and kill him if she could, and so put an end to the sacrifices.

The monster came on, and Tokoyo braced herself for combat. When the creature was within six feet of her, she ducked sideways and struck out his right eye. Now the monster was half blind and clumsy in his movements, so the brave and agile Tokoyo was able to strike him again, this time on the left side, near the heart. Yofun -Nushi lurched forward, gave a hideous gurgling shriek, and sank lifeless to the ocean floor. Tokoyo placed her dagger between her teeth, took the monster in one hand and the statue in the other, and swam to the surface.

In the meantime the priest and the girl were still gazing into the water where Tokoyo had disappeared. Suddenly they noticed a struggling body rising awkwardly toward the surface. They could not make it out at all, until at last the girl cried, “Why, holy father, it is the girl who took my place and dove into the sea! I recognize my white clothes. But she seems to have a man and a huge fish with her.”

The priest realized that it was Tokoyo who was coming to the surface, and he dashed down the rocks and pulled her ashore. He hauled the hideous monster up onto the shore, and placed the carved image of the emperor on a rock beyond reach of the waves. Soon other people arrived, and everyone began talking about the brave girl who had killed the evil god Yofun -Nushi.

The priest told the story to the lord who ruled the island, and he in turn reported the matter to the emperor. The emperor had been suffering from a strange disease that his doctors could not cure, but as soon as the statue of him was recovered from the lair of Yofun -Nushi, he got better. Then it was clear to him that he had been laboring under the curse of someone he had banished to the Oki Islands—someone who had carved a statue of him, put a curse on the statue, and sunk it in the sea. Now that the statue had been recovered, the curse had been broken. On hearing that the girl who had recovered the statue and cured him was the daughter of Oribe Shima, the emperor ordered the noble samurai released from prison immediately.
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Now that Yofun-Nushi had been slain, the islanders were no longer afraid of storms and bad weather, and no more girls were offered to the evil god. Tokoyo and her father were reunited and returned to their homeland, where they lived happily ever after.
The Sun Dance

For many of the Plains Indians tribes, the Sun Dance is the way to ask for or repay a favor granted to them by one of the great powers or gods. Because the dance involves great effort and sometimes even pain, the dancers undertake it only for the most important reasons. Some dance so that a sick friend might be healed. Others in the past have danced to celebrate military victories. Many of the tribes tell stories that explain the origin of the dance. The story of Feather Woman, Morning Star, and Scar Face is told by the Blackfoot Indians.

One summer night, a young girl named Feather Woman left her airless tepee to sleep in the sweet-smelling breeze of the plains. When she woke, she found the Morning Star winking back at her. She lay under his spell, and laughing, said, “Morning Star, I would like to wake to your bright welcome every morning.” Then she rose to help her sister gather berries and herbs for the dyeing of buffalo skins.

The sisters had wandered far into the woods. They had drifted a great way from each other, when Feather Woman discovered a tall young man standing in the midst of a juniper bush before her. His head was crowned with eagle feathers, and his hands and face glistened as though he had passed through a spider's web.

“Feather Woman,” he said, “I am Morning Star. Would you come away with me?”

Feather Woman laughed so hard that she spilled all of her berries on the ground. “Oh, you foolish boy,” she said, “Why would I leave my family for a stranger?”

As Morning Star took her hand, Feather Woman felt the warmth of the sun on her skin. “Feather Woman,” he said. “I have tried to read your thoughts during the many early mornings that you have lain dreaming on the plain. I would like to marry you and take you to Star Country.”

Taking his other hand, Feather Woman stepped onto the silk gloss of the spider web as he showed her, and flew with him into the sky as magically as the spider casts his silken threads.

Feather Woman discovered a country much like her own. The prairie grasses sang in the wind, the star people stitched soft, white deerskins, and women dug for roots to dye them. Morning Star took her to the tepee of his parents, Sun and Moon. Moon welcomed her with smiles; when Sun returned in the evening, weary from his passage across the sky, he bid her to learn the ways of his people if she wanted to stay in the country of the stars.

He said that Moon would teach her.

Morning Star and Feather Woman were married and soon had a child, Star Boy. Whenever Morning Star went with Moon and the other star women to do their daily work, she would bundle her child in soft clothes and carry him with her.
The Sun Dance (continued)

Moon showed her which roots were edible, and which cast the perfect colors for a painting. She also pointed to a large turnip root, which grew nearly as high as the trees, and told her never to dig there. The turnip root was a mystery known only to Sun.

One afternoon, Moon returned her smiles only weakly, and asked her to go to gather the roots alone while she rested. Feather Woman wandered into the woods, hugging her child for company. She sang the songs of her own people, and wondered if her sister had married. Deeply homesick, she discovered that she had wandered near the turnip root. Curious, she forgot Moon's warning and began to dig.

She had made little progress, when two white cranes alighted beside her. They cooed, "Can we help you? Our bills are sharp. We can unearth the root for you."

Not knowing that there was a terrible history between the cranes and the star people, Feather Woman consented. The cranes tore at the turnip's roots, and finally the plant fell to its side, pulling up a great chunk of ground. Gathering her baby close, Feather Woman jumped away from the opening. Urging Feather Woman to "Look, look," the cranes spread their wings and disappeared.

Feather Woman lay on the ground and peered into the yawning doorway to the earth. Far below, she saw her sisters running on the prairie. Her father was returning from a hunt, and echoes of her mother's singing reached her ears. Her heart yearned for home.

That night when she returned to the tepee, Sun gazed on her face and saw her sadness. Harshly he asked, "You have seen below the turnip root to the earth and your people?" When Morning Star heard her say yes, his hands turned cold.

Sun sighed and said, "There can be no sorrow in the Country of the Stars. You must return to earth."

Morning Star and Moon begged him to allow her to stay, but Sun refused. "She must go," he said. "You can talk to her as you used to, when you traverse the sky."

That night, as Feather Woman's family lay in the prairie grass, they saw a star falling towards them. When they awoke, Feather Woman lay beside them. Her child, scarred on the face by their rapid journey, was crying.

* * * *

Feather Woman missed Morning Star more as the years went by. To protect her son from hurt, she did not tell him who his father was. They spent much of their time alone. One day, when Star Boy tried to wake her, her spirit had left for the sandhills.

Because of the mark on his face, the boy was called Scar Face and was treated unkindly by many people in the tribe. His birth was mysterious, and they did not want to be near him. In time, so many called him Scar Face that everyone forgot his real name.
The Sun Dance (continued)

When Scar Face was a young man, he fell in love with the daughter of the Chief. She talked to him kindly when they met, and she never looked away from his face, but smiled and looked in his eyes. Scar Face wanted to marry her.

But when he asked, she said, “I have seen the Sun in my dreams and he told me to wait for him.”

Scar Face knew that many men wanted to marry her. They held dancing contests in which each tried to dance better than the others to gain her attention. Scar Face knew that she could marry anyone. Ashamed for asking, he turned away.

Several days later she met him near the river where she was gathering water. “Scar Face,” she said. “If you find the Sun and ask him, I will marry you. But you must bring me some proof that he has agreed.”

“But the Sun lives far in the West,” he cried. “No one knows how to reach him.”

The young woman gave him moccasins she had made and a new shirt. “You will find him,” she said.

Scar Face traveled far into the mountains. He climbed until he reached the highest peak farthest to the West. Hoping that he might receive a message from the great forces, he began to fast and pray. One night, the Milky Way seemed to reach down to the peak where he was sitting. Scar Face stepped into the air, and journeyed into Sky Country.

Scar Face waited in the path until he saw that Sun had risen, made his day’s journey, and was home to rest. Then he entered his tepee. “My name is Scar Face,” he said. “And I love a young woman who was told by you that she must follow your word all of her life. I have come to ask your permission to marry her.”

Sun knew who Scar Face was, for it was Sun who had marked the boy’s face as he fell to earth. He wanted to know him as he traveled overhead.

Looking at her husband, Moon knew that Sun felt kindly toward the boy. She smiled and said, “Stay with us while Sun decides. You can keep our son, Morning Star, company.”

In Star Country, people do not age as they do on earth, so Morning Star was only slightly older than his son Scar Face, whom he did not recognize. The two became good friends, and both received the words of wisdom that were given to them by Sun.

One day, Sun explained why the cranes were so feared by the stars. “They wait until a star begins to cross the sky, and then they attack, using their bills to tear the fragile ladder that Spider has spun for the stars to climb.”

Morning Star explained that the cranes had attacked his brothers when they were very young. Falling, his brothers burst into fire and then disappeared in the black sky.
The Sun Dance (continued)

One afternoon, when Morning Star and Scar Face were hunting, the cranes appeared and began swooping down on them. Morning Star frantically ran for cover. Scar Face waved his spear at them, daring them to come closer. As the birds closed in, Scar Face turned to meet them. He did not care if they threatened to hurt his face; it had always hurt him. He felled them one by one.

When Morning Star saw that his friend had saved him, he gathered the heads of the cranes and scalped them. He was afraid that no one would believe his friend's bravery.

When Sun heard the story, he danced a celebratory dance and Moon sang praises for the young man's courage. Sun took Scar Face to a hole in the sky, and together, they looked down upon the earth. Sun traced its shape with his hand, and when they returned, Moon had gathered willows and used them to build a lodge in the earth's shape. She dug a hole in the center of the lodge and filled it with stones. When the people had raised a sun pole outside, the family entered the lodge. Moon poured water over the hot rocks, and the steam rose up to cleanse them.

When they emerged from the lodge, the scar was gone from the boy's face. Instantly, Morning Star knew him as Star Boy, his son. The father and son walked to the edge of the Milky Way and bid each other good-bye. "In the morning," Morning Star said, "Look up. I will be watching you and your good wife."

Star Boy found the chief's daughter near the river. When she saw him, she knew that Sun had consented for them to marry, and she was happy. Together, they returned to tell the others. In this way, the people learned the Sun Dance.
Coyote Goes to the Land of the Dead

A trickster character who appears in many tales told by the Native Americans of the Northwest and Southwest is called Coyote. The following adaptation of “Coyote Goes to the Land of the Dead” draws on elements from stories told by the Nez Percé and Zuni peoples.

It had been a bitter winter, filled with sickness and death. Coyote’s wife fell ill, then died. Coyote wept.

Eagle tried to cheer him. “Spring will soon be here,” he said. “Soon the ice on the river will break and the bears will fish again.” But still Coyote wept. His lonely howls filled the night.

One day the Death Spirit came to Coyote and said, “You feel great pain because your wife is dead. I will take you where she has gone. Follow me. But listen: you must do exactly what I tell you.”

“Of course, of course, whatever you say,” promised Coyote. “But it is very hard to see you.” It was hard, because the Spirit was invisible in the daylight.

“I will carry something for you to follow, then,” said the Spirit. “Give me something your wife loved.” Coyote hated to give away anything that reminded him of his wife. Reluctantly he gave the Spirit a feather his wife had worn when she danced.

They set off. In the daytime Coyote could see the feather. At night, he could not see the feather but he could see the shimmering Death Spirit.

Soon they were in a vast plain. The wind blew swirls of snow. Then the Spirit stopped. “Now,” it said, “do as I do.” The Spirit pointed ahead and said, “What a fine group of strong-looking horses there.”

Coyote saw nothing, but pointed and said, “Yes, what a fine group of strong-looking horses there.”

They walked on for some time, until the Spirit said, “There, just ahead, is the longhouse.”

“Yes,” said Coyote, though he saw nothing, “there is the longhouse.”

The Spirit walked ahead, then bent down as if to lift a skin-covered door and crawl into a longhouse. Coyote did the same.

“Take a seat there, next to your wife,” the Spirit ordered. Coyote sat, though he saw nothing around him but open plain.

“Now, your wife will serve us something warm,” the Spirit said. Coyote looked around eagerly but could see nothing. He cupped his hands before his chest, as the Spirit did. Then both drank from their hands. Strangely, Coyote felt warmed.

“Now we must wait for nightfall,” said the Spirit. Coyote slept. When he woke, he heard the sounds of drums. When he looked around, he saw shadowlike
Coyote Goes to the Land of the Dead (continued)

figures in the darkness, dancing. He recognized his old friends who had died in the hard winter and in years past. Then he saw his wife. He greeted her with joy, then they all talked and danced till morning. When the sun rose, the spirits disappeared.

By day, Coyote slept fitfully on the open ground in the bitter air. At night, he woke to find himself in the great longhouse surrounded by the spirits of his loved ones. Night after night they talked and danced.

Then the Death Spirit came to Coyote and said, “It is time for you to go.” Coyote began to protest but the Spirit silenced him. “Listen: your wife may go with you. She may leave the Land of the Dead and return to the Land of the Living, but only if you do exactly as I say. Follow your wife for five days over five mountains. On the sixth day, when you have crossed all five mountains and see the fires of home, only then may you touch her. Do not touch her before then. If you do anything foolish then the spirits of the dead will never again be able to return to the Land of the Living.”

The Death Spirit tied the feather that had belonged to Coyote’s wife to her hair so Coyote could follow her spirit in the daytime. In the morning Coyote set off, following the feather as it floated along. On the first day they crossed the first mountain. On the second day they crossed the second mountain. As they went on, Coyote no longer needed to watch the feather, for the farther they went, the more clearly he could see his wife.

On the fifth night they camped on the fifth mountain. Coyote sat and watched the glow of the fire on his wife’s face and hair. He could see her well, so well. Then—who can say what drove Coyote to do this?—he jumped across the fire and gathered his wife into his arms. As he touched her, she vanished. He cried out as the feather dropped to the ground.

The Death Spirit appeared before Coyote and said sternly, “See what you have done. Because of you, no spirit will ever again return from the dead.”

Coyote ran howling back over the five mountains till he came again to the open plain. Though he saw nothing but swirling dust and snow, he stopped and said, “What a fine group of strong-looking horses there.” Then he went on and said, “There, just ahead, is the longhouse.” Then he bent as though to lift a skin-covered door and crawled in on his knees. Then he cupped his hands and drank from them but felt nothing. He waited through the night to hear drums and see spirits dancing. But he heard only wind, and saw only darkness.

The next day, he began the long walk home.
There came a time when the water began to disappear. The rain fell less often, and when it fell there was less of it, and soon the lakes began to shrink, the rivers began to dwindle in size, and the ocean receded from the shore.

The people had to save their water and use it only for drinking. They had to eat their food raw, for there was not enough water for boiling and steaming. They stopped bathing, and guarded their drinking water carefully.

With no water for bathing, there was no water for purification ceremonies, and without purification ceremonies, the hunters could not hunt, the fishers could not fish, and the newborn could not be welcomed to this life.

The animals suffered and began to die of thirst. The fish had no water in which to make their homes, and the plants wilted. Even the huge trees began to die for lack of water.

Raven was so thirsty she thought she would die. She flew to the creek and found it dry. She flew to the river and found it dry. She flew to the lake and found it dry.

She knew she had to do something.  
She knew she had to find the water or the entire world would die.  
She put a round, smooth pebble under her tongue to make the saliva flow, and swallowed her own saliva. Then, only slightly refreshed, she flew in search of the missing water.

She flew over high mountains and saw that the snow and ice which usually sits on the tops of the mountains had melted and vanished. She flew over deep valleys and saw that the mighty rivers usually found in the hearts of the valleys had dried. Only rocks and sand showed where the rivers had been. She flew over huge bare patches which had once been lakes.

She saw plains and prairies covered with rocks and dirt, with sand and gravel. She saw fields that once blossomed with flowers and grass, and were now barren and dry. She saw forests where the trees were no longer green but dried brown, pointing like arrows to the sky, their bark peeling, their limbs bare.

She flew until even her powerful wings began to ache. And one evening, just as the sun began to dip behind the mountains in the land from which Raven had come, she saw some small lights twinkling in the distance.

Raven went to investigate and found the last green valley on earth. The last place where there were trees and flowers and grass and birds and butterflies and hummingbirds and all things beautiful and precious.

And in the middle of the valley, sound asleep, a giant frog, her belly swollen and distended. The bright lights Raven had noticed were drops of water which
Raven Returns the Water (continued)

had fallen from the giant frog's mouth. They lay glittering in the last light of the setting sun.

Raven tiptoed quietly to the giant frog and sipped the water which had fallen from the frog's mouth.

Cool, refreshing water! Raven knew she had never tasted anything so delicious in her life! She took another drink and the frog opened her eye.

“That is MY water you are drinking,” the frog croaked, and she lashed out with her long sticky tongue, meaning to knock Raven away from the water.

Raven hopped quickly and avoided the tongue of the frog. She drank another drop of water, her head cocked to one side, watching the frog to see what she would do. Frog lashed with her tongue again, and again Raven hopped out of the way.

“It is NOT your water,” Raven contradicted. “Water belongs to everybody and everything.”

“It's mine,” Frog argued, slickering out her tongue and scooping up some of the spilled drops.

“What belongs to the trees, too,” Raven said firmly. “And to the flowers who will die without it.”

“It's mine, all mine,” Frog insisted, and slithered out her tongue for more.

“Water belongs to the fish and to the animals and to the people and to itself,” Raven replied. “No one person or thing has the right to keep the water, for water is life, and without clean water, nothing can live.”

But Frog wasn't going to listen to reason. She lay there, so full of water she couldn't move, so full of water her skin was stretched tighter than any drumskin, trying to capture and gulp for herself those last precious drops.

Raven knew force was not the answer. Raven knew fighting would not solve the problem. Even if Raven managed to beat Frog and made her give back the water, there would come another day and Frog would again steal the water. Raven knew no matter how many times she beat Frog, unless Frog learned to respect the water, and share it, and live in harmony again, there would be no peace or security or safety, and there would be other times of drought.

As Frog flicked out her tongue and lapped up another drop of water, Raven dropped the little stone she had kept under her tongue.

The stone landed on Frog's tongue, and Frog pulled the stone into her mouth and swallowed it.

Raven waited.
Frog blinked her big round eye.
Her belly quivered.
The expression of Frog's face became one of sadness.
“Oh,” Frog croaked. “Oh my!”
“What's wrong?” asked Raven, sounding very kind and very concerned.
“My stomach hurts,” Frog admitted.
“I think,” Raven said gently, “you have overextended yourself. I think,” she said softly, “you have swallowed a rock.”
“I have a bellyache,” Frog moaned.
Raven waited.
Soon a large tear escaped from Frog's eye.
“See,” Raven said reasonably, “your body can't hold all that water AND that rock. You have to give up one or the other or you'll never get rid of that bellyache.”
“Take the rock,” Frog bargained, “because it's MY water and I want it all.”
Raven did nothing.
“Well,” Frog demanded, her face twisted in pain. “Are you going to help me or not?”
“Probably not,” Raven shrugged.
Frog stared at Raven and another tear escaped her. “Why not?” she asked pathetically. “Can't you see I'm in agony?”
“Guess that's what you get for being greedy,” Raven agreed, although, as we all know, Raven herself is a glutton.
“Please?” Frog begged.
“What if some of your water spills?” Raven asked. “Are you going to get angry with me and try to slap me with that long tongue of yours?”
“No,” Frog promised. “I will keep my mouth shut and tongue wrapped up inside me, and I won't do anything at all to hurt you. I promise.”
So Raven poked Frog in the belly. Then poked again, harder. A gush of water came from Frog's mouth, landed on the ground, and flowed away, becoming a small river.
“I have to find out where that rock is,” Raven explained. “I'm not poking at you just because I like to hurt you. I have to be very sure where that rock is.” And she poked again and again, and each time, Frog winced, and water gushed from her mouth.

The small river grew into a bigger river and flowed out of the valley to the parched land beyond. The thirsty earth soaked it up gratefully. Flowers drank it through their roots, the grass began to live again, and the fish, which had almost died, were saved.
“I think I've found it,” Raven said.
“Oh, I feel so sick,” Frog moaned. “Please remove that rock.”
Raven jabbed her powerful beak and pierced the side of the frog. The water that had been trapped inside gushed through the hole.
“Oh, I haven't felt this good in months!” Frog smiled. “It feels so much better...
Raven Returns the Water (continued)

to be in the water than to have the water in me.”
“Remember that,” Raven laughed. And to help Frog remember, she left the rock where Frog could see it.
Raven rolled the escaping water up like a dance cape, and tucked it under her wing.
“Thank you,” said Frog, shrinking steadily as the water escaped from inside her.
“Thank you,” said Raven, flying off with the water tucked under her wing.
Raven flew home, and, as she flew, drops fell from the blanket of water and refilled the lakes. Raven poured water into the streams and creeks, the ponds and rivers. She poured water back into the ocean, and the oolichan, herring, cod, salmon, and halibut were saved.
Mussels, clams, oysters, and crabs celebrated the return of the water.
Mink, otter, seal, sea lions, and walrus danced with joy.
All the plants and animals were saved, and when the green leaves again appeared on the alder, maple, and birch, Raven knew the world was safe.
She sat high in the branches of a tree and sent her sharp call to the skies to tell the clouds they, too, would soon be filled with water.
When Frog heard the sound of Raven's cry, she realized what she had almost done, and she felt sorry for her greediness. She swam to the rock Raven had removed from her belly, and Frog climbed up on the rock. She croaked “sor-ry, sor-ry,” and all of creation forgave her.
And to this day, if you move carefully and quietly, you may see Frog sitting on a rock on the bank of a pond or lake, or in a quiet stream or river, her throat swelling with the promise that she will never again take all the water.
And Raven calls to her often as she flies overhead. “Rock,” she calls, and if you listen carefully, you will hear her.
Turquoise Boy

(a Navajo legend written and adapted by Terri Cohlene)

In the days of long ago, when the Holy Ones still visited this land, a young Navajo named Turquoise Boy looked down on his people. In the heat of the desert, he saw them toil in their fields of corn and squash. He watched them labor under baskets heavy with fruit and nuts.

Turquoise Boy was saddened. My father, Sun Bearer, brings sunshine for the crops, but he offers little else. If only there were something I could do.

"Mother," he said, "The People work hard in their fields and search long in the desert for food. Surely there is something to make life easier for them?"

Changing Woman looked up from grinding her corn. "That may be so, my son. I am not certain."

"But you are mother of all people. Do you not wish for this also?"

Changing Woman resumed her grinding. "What you seek is not a simple thing," she said. "You must prove yourself worthy. Perhaps you would find the answer with the Talking Gods on the White Shell Mountain of the East."

"I will do as you say, Mother," said Turquoise Boy, and he set off at once.

Many days he walked before finally reaching a giant hogan. It was surrounded by baskets filled with white shells. The Talking Gods greeted him and asked the purpose of his visit.

"The People work hard in their fields and search long in the desert for food," he said. "Surely there is something to make their lives easier?"

The Talking Gods shook their heads. "What you seek is not ours to give. Take these white shells and go to our brothers of the sacred Turquoise Mountain. Perhaps they know the answer."

Turquoise Boy accepted their gift and turned his steps southward. Many suns had passed when he finally reached a giant hogan surrounded by baskets filled with turquoise stones.

He greeted the Holy Ones there and asked them his question. "The People work hard in their fields and search long in the desert for food. Surely there is something to make their lives easier?"

But the Talking Gods sent him away with only a basket of blue stones. "Perhaps our brothers of the Yellow Abalone Shell Mountain in the West know the answer," they said.

When Turquoise Boy arrived at the Holy Mountain of the West, the Talking Gods there said, "What you seek is not ours to give. Accept this basket of shells and visit our brothers on the Black Jet Mountain of the North. Perhaps they know the answer."

Turquoise Boy (continued)

But the Talking Gods of the North did not give him the answer. “Take this basket of jet stones and return to your mother,” they said. “Who would know better than Changing Woman?”

Turning his tired moccasins back to Dinetaa, Turquoise Boy carried home the baskets from the Talking Gods. “I have failed, Mother,” he said. “I did not find a way to make life easier for The People. I bring only these gifts from the Talking Gods.”

Changing Woman smiled. “You have done well, my son,” she said.

“But, Mother,” said Turquoise Boy, “I do not understand. The Talking Gods said you would know best how to make life easier for The People.”

In answer, Changing Woman left her grinding stone and went inside her hogan. Soon she returned with a small pouch of soft deerskin. From each of the four baskets, she took a shell or stone and dropped it into the pouch. “Take this to your father,” she said. “Surely he will see your worthiness.”

Turquoise Boy tied the pouch to his belt and traveled toward Sun Bearer’s home in the East. He saw rattlesnakes coiled in the sun and scorpions hurrying from one clump of sage to another.

The wind carried the scent of juniper, and Air Spirit whispered, “This is not an easy path. Perhaps you should turn back.”

The young Navajo laughed. “I am not afraid, my friend. I have walked this path before. I have songs to protect me.” Suddenly, fiery hot sands swirled up all around and cacti hurled their needles. Boulders from the cliffs above fell toward him.

Turquoise Boy chanted rhythmically,

“Beauty before me,
Beauty behind me,
Beauty above me and
Beauty beneath me.”

At once, the sands settled into place, the cacti held their spears, and the rocks rolled harmlessly away.

Turquoise Boy sang as he walked on until finally, his path led across a rainbow bridge to Sun Bearer’s great hogan. Hissing filled the air as snakes flicked their tongues at him. Strong winds tore at his hair and lightning bolts seared the sky.

But Turquoise Boy could not be frightened away. Just then, Sun Bearer stepped out from his lodging. He greeted the boy and asked the purpose of his visit.

“I bring greetings from Changing Woman, Father,” said Turquoise Boy, handing him the pouch. “The People work hard in their fields and search long in the desert for food. Surely there is something to make their lives easier?”

Sun Bearer shook his head. “In what way, my son?”
Turquoise Boy (continued)

Turquoise Boy thought of the many moons his search had taken him, and of his worn moccasins and sore feet. “Walking is slow and tiring,” he said. “Perhaps there is a better way to get from place to place?”

SunBearer frowned. “I travel on sunbeams, rainbows and lightning. It is foolish to think mankind could do this.” He gave back the deerskin pouch. “Return to your mother. It is time for my daily journey to the West.”

With a heavy heart, Turquoise Boy once again walked the path homeward. As he crossed the Mountain-That-Is-Wide, he saw a ladder sticking up from a hole in the ground. “It was not here when I passed this way before,” he said. “I have heard of a world below. Could this be the way to reach it?”

He looked down the hole and was startled to see an old fat man sitting at the foot of the ladder. “Is that one who walks the earth?” called the man.

“It is I, Turquoise Boy. Who are you?”

“I have been called many things, but you may call me Mirage Man. Come down so I can see you better.”

Turquoise Boy descended the twelve rungs and stood in a wide cavern. The old man asked, “What is your purpose in traveling this path?”

“I seek a way to make life easier for The People.”

Mirage Man saw the pouch hanging at the boy’s belt. “You are the one I knew would come someday,” he said. “Come. I will show you something.”

He walked along a path until he came to a door facing east. He opened it, and Turquoise Boy gasped. In a white pollen mist, grazing on wildflowers, were magnificent creatures he had never seen before.

“These are SunBearer’s horses,” said Mirage Man. Then from Changing Woman’s pouch, he took the white shell and placed it in a horse’s mouth. Next, he removed it and returned it to the pouch together with pollen from the horse’s mane.

“Come,” said Mirage Man, and he led the boy to the south meadow. There, a sky-colored horse rolled on the ground. Then it stood and shook off a cloud of glittering dust. Behind him, an entire turquoise herd pranced and neighed.

Mirage Man repeated his ceremony with the turquoise stone before showing the boy the yellow herd of the West and the black herd of the North. Each time, Mirage Man rolled the proper shell or stone in a horse’s mouth and shook pollen from its mane.

Finally, Turquoise Boy said, “These animals would indeed make life easier for The People. How can we prove worthy of such a gift?”

Mirage Man was pleased with the question. “First you must learn to keep the horse sacred,” he said, and taught Turquoise Boy a holy song. “This you must remember and teach The People of Dinetaa.” He handed back the pouch and said, “Go, now. Take this to Changing Woman.”
Turquoise Boy (continued)

Turquoise Boy returned home and found his mother weaving cloth outside the hogan. "I bring a song and a gift from Mirage Man," he said.

Changing Woman looked up and smiled. "You have indeed proven yourself worthy, my son." She took the pouch. "It is time," she said. "Send messengers to The People and the Holy Ones. Ask them to come while I go inside and prepare for the hatal."

Turquoise Boy did as his mother asked, then went into the hogan to watch her. Changing Woman took a deerskin, spread it on the floor and put upon it the beads and shells from Mirage Man and the Talking Gods. Then she laid out ears of white corn, yellow corn, blue corn and corn-of-many-colors.

Over this, she sprinkled the sacred pollen. Finally, Changing Woman covered all she had done with twelve more skins. "I am ready," she said. "Now you must help me chant."

Outside, The People and Talking Gods had gathered. Moon was there, and Mirage Man and the Mist People. Sun Bearer joined them also. They built a fire and sat on the ground, chanting. They sang hogan songs, healing songs and songs of blessing. Turquoise Boy came out and taught them the song of the horse.

Into the night they sang. Until finally, Sun Bearer left for his daily journey. The God People nodded into sleep, and as they slept, Turquoise Boy closed his eyes tightly and sang for horses.

Suddenly, there was neighing under the deerskins as they trembled and began to rise. Then, with the first rays of the sun, came horses of white shell, turquoise, yellow abalone, and black jewel.

They rose up and kicked off their blankets, and as their numbers increased, the Navajo rejoiced. They rejoiced for their gift, and for Changing Woman, and for Turquoise Boy.

To this day, the people of Dinetaa offer pollen to the winds, and they chant for the sacred horse,

"Nizho'ko ani-hiye!
Nizho'ko ani-hiye!"
"How joyous he neighs!
How joyous he neighs!"