

Once upon a time, there lived two sisters who had only charcoal to eat. They used to play with a *kafei* ball, eat their charcoal, and then sleep. One day they were tossing the *kafei* when they saw some taro floating down the river. The younger sister said, "That is taro floating there." Her sister told her to swim and get it and this she did. They cooked it. The younger sister was tired and lay down to sleep while it was cooking. The older sister could not resist the fragrance of the cooking taro and, once she tasted its sweet flesh, she ate it all up. The younger sister awoke and said, "Sister, where is the taro?" When the older sister admitted to eating it all, she became very angry and walked up along the river.

As she was walking, the younger sister came to a village. She was going around its edge when she disturbed a rooster, causing it to race around and crow. An old woman called out, "Who is chasing my rooster?" The girl wondered whether she should call this old woman 'mummy', 'auntie' or 'grannie'. She decided on 'grannie'. "Grannie," she said. "I was walking here and disturbed your rooster. That's why it is crowing and running around." The old woman replied, "My goodness! Grandchild, you are talking so much! Come here." The girl went in and the old woman said, "Look for head lice, my grandchild." When the girl parted the old woman's hair to pick out the lice, she discovered worms twisting about. Now earlier the girl had decorated herself by rubbing coconut on her body. She had taken the unused coconut and pushed it inside her armlets to be used later. When she saw those worms, she pretended to pull them out but she really took the coconut from her armlet and put that instead of the worms into her mouth. She bit down on the coconut and the old woman said, "My good grandchild! Give those to me to eat — why are you chewing them?" When they were done, the old woman sent the girl down a road and off she went.

Meanwhile, the older sister had been coming up behind. She too startled the old woman's rooster. "Who is making my rooster run about and crow?" called out the old woman. Like her sister, the girl replied, "Grannie, I disturbed your rooster as I walked in. That's why it's running around and crowing." The old woman told her to come over, look for lice in her hair and take them out. When the girl parted the old woman's hair she was alarmed by what she saw. "Yikes! Grannie! Your hair is full of worms!" The sun was going down, but the old woman did not show the girl the road that her sister had taken. Instead, she sent her down a path to her own house. And so that girl went up into the old woman's house to sleep when night came. Every time she tried to sleep, the old woman poked her with a needle. "Grannie, what are these things poking me?" the girl cried out. "They are also poking me, my grandchild," the old woman replied. This went on all night, right until dawn. They remained there and the same thing happened on the following night. As the nights passed, the girl's skin went bad. She was covered with sores.

Now her younger sister had gone down that other road to a different village. She got married there and gave birth to a boy. Her son grew bigger. One day he and some other boys were hunting lizards with their small spears. As they wandered around, they came up to the old woman's place. They chased a lizard which ran up the house post. The boys knocked it down and tried to spear it. The older sister was still lying inside. "Wo!", she cried out. "Boys! Who is striking the house post? I'm confined here. I used to live with my younger sister — we are the Charcoal sisters. One day I cooked a taro and ate it while my younger sister was sleeping. She was cross and went away. I was chasing after her when this old woman trapped me in her house. I am suffering in here." That little boy heard her, so he returned to his mother and told her about it. "Mummie, my friends and I were hunting lizards. We went to the old woman's

place and saw a lizard climbing her house post. We chased it and speared it on the post. When we did this, a girl inside the house asked who was hitting the house post. She said, 'I used to live with my younger sister who was also a Charcoal girl. My sister became angry and left me after I didn't share a taro with her. I came after her and was caught by this old woman. I am confined here and suffering.'" That is what the little boy told his mother. His mother told him that his aunt had been unkind and now she was trapped by the old woman. The younger sister then went to her sister and carried her back to her own village. She took care of her older sister whose body slowly healed. The older sister married a man from that place and they stayed there together ever after.

*Notes:*

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*Kavan radu tiffefero*: "Mouth wet they falling" don't talk a lot for saliva's coming out - not a common expression - used in stories mostly.

- When you sit on the floor and the story is nice or people like it they might say: "anso yavaransi leutoki kwefaaafi" ("Why sit you and speak on a bad floor"): not used very often.

- About the punishment. When the younger sister looked for the lice, she saw the worms - but she tricked her by eating the coconut, and not the worms. The old lady knew that there were worms in her hair and said: "Why are you eating the lice - give me and I'll eat by myself!" but the girl didn't give it to her - just an expression on how good that girl was. Then as a reward she showed her the way to go. But the older sister wouldn't help so she was punished.

Does it teach anything? No...

Old people usually eat the lice they pick out of hair - but younger people don't do this anymore.

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