

There once was a big village. At nights a spirit man would come out and wander from end to end. One night he heard a little boy crying for roasted sago skins (*vevi*). "Mommy," he said, "I want *vevi* to eat!" But his mother replied, "Where are you going to find *vevi*!?" The spirit came closer to the doorway and called up, "Why is he crying?" "He is asking for *vevi*." "Well, here is some. Take it so he can eat." While saying this, that old man was peeling off his skin. He gave it to the mother. She gave the skin to her son to eat. The spirit continued his wandering. Close to dawn he returned to the house. "Where is the skin I gave you?" he called up. "Hand down my skin so I can leave." They then realised that this was not a human being but a spirit. "He told us a lie. The boy ate his skin." The boy's father came down and speared the spirit man, killing him.

He left its corpse by the main garden road. People making their way to the garden had to pass either to the right or the left. That body lay there until midday. A boy covered in sores walking that way asked, "Mommy, why is that old man lying there? Why do all the people just walk around him?" He came back to his father and told him about it. "That old man was killed last night. He is lying in the road, and the people just pass to the right and left. Come, help me carry him to the canoe. I will take him out and dump him far out to sea." His father helped him carry the old man to the canoe platform. They pulled the canoe down. The boy took his paddle and paddled a long way out to sea.

While he was doing that, the old man began to stretch. He stretched his hands and legs. "Are!", the boy thought. "I was just bringing him out and now he is stretching." The old man opened his eyes and said, "Do you see that island over there? Paddle me to that island and let me stay there." The boy wondered, "Are! I thought he was dead! How is it that he can get up and talk?" The old man repeated his demand, "Take me to that island and leave me there." So the boy paddled and paddled until at last they reached the island. He pulled the canoe on shore. They both walked up and cleared a place under a *gangasi* tree. They stayed there until night fell and then they slept.

A big storm arose in the middle of the night, shaking the place. As the thunder sounded, sago, betelnut, coconut palms and a house appeared. The boy was frightened by the storm and wondered if he were safe. The thundering continued until daybreak. The next morning, the boy looked around and saw all of those good things. He was astonished by the big stands of betelnut, coconut palms and sago. His grandfather told him to get their things and move into the house. So they moved in and settled there. They spent the night there. The next morning when the boy came out, he could see plenty of ripe crops. The food was so ripe and plentiful that the plants were doubled over from the weight they had to bear.

They had an enjoyable life there. But one day the boy said, "Grandfather, we have stayed here a long time and I should return to my mother and father." The spirit man replied, "Oh, all right." He took a piece of long hair from the back of his head and wrapped it up. He instructed the boy, "Take this with you. This is me — take it. When you get back home and you want something, all you have to do is speak to this and I will hear you." The boy took the gift and then paddled the long distance back to his village. His mother and father said, "We thought you had gotten lost or died at sea. But you are alive and you have returned home?" "Yes," replied the boy. "I was taking my grandfather out to sea to dump his body when he told me to go to a distant island. We have been living there. The first night a huge garden appeared. I have had a good life enjoying these things and now I have returned to the village." "We see," they said.

Now the chief of that place had a daughter so pretty that if you saw her you would not be able to keep your eyes off her. Nearly all the young men in the village were dying for her. The spirit man had told the boy that he would be the one to marry that girl. He turned her heart so that she really loved that boy despite the ugliness of his sores. One night, the sore-covered boy wandered near the girl's house. She came down the steps. She married him and they went up. The next morning, everyone was talking about it. "Are you there? That girl we were all after married the cripple!" "Oh," said others. "How can that be? We were all after her, but you say she has married?" That night, the boy took the girl down to his canoe and they left for his grandfather's place. The village boys said, "Oh, how can a boy like that marry this girl? We were all dying for her. How is it that he is the one who married her." They decided to pursue the matter in the morning.

At dawn, all the young men in the village took down their paddles and set off in a big canoe. The old man could feel the enemies approaching. He called to his grandson and wife, "Are you there? Enemies are approaching! Village people!" The boys were paddling hard. The couple could now see them out in the ocean. "There they are," they said, "just like the old man said." The canoe came up to the shore and the boys began to come up. "Grandfather!," called the boy. "They are coming up." "Just let them come. Let them come," the old man replied. Just then the villagers walked into the clearing. The old man stretched up, growling, "m ... m ... m ... m ... m ... m ... m ... m." This terrified the intruders. They turned around and ran so quickly that their loin cloths came flying off. They ran naked back to the canoe. They jumped on and paddled as fast as they could back to the village.

All the village people asked, "What happened? Did you get her?" "No," they replied. "The old man stretched. We got so scared we came back." The people asked, "Oh, that old man chased you off?!" The women said, "Oh, you have had your turn. You didn't get the girl so tomorrow we will go and bring her back." As the rooster crowed, the women got up, climbed on a big canoe and set off. The old man could feel them coming. "Is your wife with you? This time the women are coming across." The couple saw the canoe come across and arrive. The women took their clubs and other weapons and climbed up. The old man stretched out again, making angry sounds. This so frightened the women that they left their skirts behind in their flight to the canoe. They paddled back to the village.

Like before the people asked if they had gotten the girl. "No," they replied. "We could not." And so the village people said, "Ay! You couldn't do it." After they left, the boy and girl settled down in the grandfather's place. They lived a good life, with plenty to eat and drink. The girl's father and mother thought of them and decided to visit. They got on their canoe and went across to the island. They came and lived with them for some time before returning home again. After this the old man said, "I have had enough of being with you. You must take me out far into the ocean and dump me. After you do that, back up, wait and watch what happens." After getting this advice, his grandson took him down to the canoe platform, and they set out to sea. He paddled a long way and then threw his grandfather into the ocean. He backed the canoe away from the place and waited. The old man went right down and then came up again. He reappeared amidst strong winds and high waves. The place was surrounded by mist. The storm went on for a long time before it subsided.

Translated by John Barker and Franklin Seri, June 28, 1995