

That it might not be extinguished,  
Might not leave her in the darkness.

"Farewell!" said he, "Minnehaha!  
Farewell, O my Laughing Water!  
All my heart is buried with you,  
All my thoughts go onward with you!  
Come not back again to labor,  
Come not back again to suffer,  
Where the Famine and the Fever  
Wear the heart and waste the body.  
Soon my task will be completed,  
Soon your footsteps I shall follow  
To the Islands of the Blessed,  
To the kingdom of Ponemah!  
To the Land of the Hereafter!"

## The Creation of Night

retold by Mercedes Dorson and Jeanne Wilmot

IN the beginning there was no night. Only daytime existed. There was sunshine and there were chirping birds and parrots, and mimosa flowers, and grasshoppers. But there were no crickets who sang through the dusk light nor were there night flowers like the beautiful *Victoria regia* whose petals spread at the suggestion of darkness. There was no sunset, no starlight, nor any night beasts. The jaguars, who only hunt in the night, did not yet live in the world where the people lived. The perfume of the delicate hanging orchids was burned by the bright heat of the ceaseless sunlight. There was no time to rest. Everywhere the sun and heat urged life on with no respite.

It happened that the Great Water Serpent who lived in the depths of the Madeira River had a beautiful daughter who possessed special powers. The daughter married a handsome man from a nearby village on the banks of the river. This man worked hard preparing his field and planting manioc, corn, and sweet potatoes. It saddened the daughter's heart when she saw her husband and his tribesmen toiling in the unending heat of the sun. He was a good man, and she loved him very much. During the harvest season, he would become so tired he would fall ill. But even though he would grow tired, he could not fall asleep because there was no night.

The sun made many beautiful things too vibrant to enjoy. Even the flaming macaw feathers worn as headdresses by the men were too bright for the Serpent's daughter. She grew to hate the sparkling river water that shimmered under the power of the baking sunlight. She was enraged, for she knew that a peaceful darkness called "Night" existed at the bottom of the river where her father had taken her once. Night was inhabited by all sorts of creatures, sounds, and phenomena. The Indians had never seen Night.

Finally, she cried out to her husband, "You must send someone to my father. He will bring us Night from the bottom of the river. He took me to see it once. There are night songs and peace in the cool darkness there. My husband, you will be able to sleep if there is Night. A calm, dark silence covers everything where it exists."

The man protested and told his wife, "My wife, I am afraid you are delirious from lack of sleep. There is only day."

But she exclaimed, "Night does exist! Send your servants to fetch Night!" The husband had no choice but to call three of his strongest and most loyal servants.

He told them, "You must go to the Great Water Serpent's house at the end of the large river and beg him to send me Night. Tell him his daughter wishes for the peace that will come with the darkness. And his daughter desires, too, the end to this exhaustion which will cease when Night comes and we are allowed to sleep. Tell the Serpent that his daughter's happiness depends on Night's arrival. Without it she will go mad."

And so the three servants set out. They boarded a canoe and traveled downriver. They paddled past the sandy cove where the crocodiles were basking in the sun and past the bend where the large fallen tree could be seen protruding from the water. Finally they found the Great Water Serpent curled up in his hammock, soundly asleep. The snake's hammock was woven from the fronds of the *miritti* palm and hung between two fallen trees on the bank of the river. The men quietly tied up their canoe and slowly approached the Serpent. He was a rowdy old spirit who had just feasted on a whole tapir whose carcass lay at the foot of the hammock. A cask of *caxiri*, a rum made of manioc flour, rested against his body. With difficulty the three tribesmen awakened the Great Serpent. At the moment his ungainly body stirred, they threw themselves at his feet.

"Who are you?" asked the Serpent. "And what do you want?"

"We implore you, Great Serpent, send Night back with us for your daughter. Your son-in-law labors long and hard, and yet he can never sleep. Your daughter hides from the light of day, always shielding her eyes. She grows sadder every day, and her husband worries that she might go mad."

The Serpent drew up from his prone position and spoke in a commanding voice. "You do not need to convince the father of a suffering child to end her suffering if it's within his power to do so. Wait here until I return."

The big snake descended to the bottom of the river. He was gone for over one hour. The three servants began to worry and commenced circling the area where he had disappeared. Finally he surfaced with a large fruit from the *tucumã* tree which looked like a big brown coconut. The Serpent handed the nut to the anxious men. The men noticed that a hole had been pierced on the top of the fruit and that the hole was now sealed with hardened resin.

As the immense snake handed the nut to the nervous men he warned them, "You must not open this nut or all will be lost. If the nut is cracked, everything will become dark. Only my daughter can manage the spirits of Night. When you return to my daughter, give her the nut and she will know what must be done."

That having been said, the Serpent curled himself back up into the hammock and waved to the loyal servants who departed immediately. The three servants boarded their canoe and started paddling their way home up the powerful river.

After the servants had been rowing a while, however, they began to hear strange noises coming from within the *tucumã* nut. The servants had never before heard such strange sounds. One of the servants suggested opening the nut. At first the other two did not agree. But soon new and peculiar sounds resonated inside the *tucumã* nut. "*Shay-Shay-Shay*" and "*Tem-Tem-Tem*." These sounds were followed by a medley of nightsongs. Full of curiosity and a small measure of fear, all three servants fell upon the nut and tore at its exterior. The noises became louder, and the night calls of the frogs, the crickets, and the *murucututús* soon overwhelmed the loyal servants. Their curiosity now was stronger than they could bear. The three men paddled their canoe to the shore and lit a small fire on the muddy banks of the river to melt the resin that closed the hole in the *tucumã* nut.

As soon as the hole opened, the sky turned black. The terrified servants could not see anything in the opaque air that surrounded them until the stars emerged from the hole. Once the starlight accumulated, they were astonished by the sight of the night animals flying out of the hole and invading the darkness with their eerie sounds. A swirl of creatures, moonbeams, and dew drops blew around the servants, transforming the texture of the very air they breathed.

In her sleeping hut many forests away, the daughter turned abruptly to her husband and said, "My father has given us the gift of Night and your servants have set it free."

The toads and small frogs began to croak. The owls and snipes started hooting. The *jurutai* birds, the *acuranas*, and the bats rushed out into the darkness, filling the forest with wailings and cries and night shrieks. The imprudent servants were dumbstruck.

The husband of the Great Water Serpent's daughter was terrified when he saw the basket that lay at the foot of his hammock transform into a jaguar with night eyes. The canoe on the river turned into a duck. The oar became a fish and the cord an anaconda. Everything in the rivers and the forest was transformed.

The man called out to his wife, "What shall we do? We must save daytime. All is lost!"

The woman pulled out a strand of her hair and told her husband, "Do not worry. With this strand I will separate Day and Night. I have no fear. Close your eyes and wait."

When the servants arrived, the husband, with closed eyes, reprimanded his men. The Great Water Serpent's daughter, who was an excellent sorceress, turned the men into monkeys for having disobeyed orders.

Meanwhile Night spun gleefully around the Water Serpent's daughter and her husband. Soon the husband fell asleep to the rhythms of the night beasts, the tree frogs, the crickets, and other night insects. Moonbeams lit the way for the newly born jaguar. Night owls hunted, and the gentle hum of bat wings comforted the daughter as she waited. She pushed aside the palm fronds at the entrance of their hut and the sweet night air her father had sent her streamed in, perfuming the darkness surrounding them. Soon, she, too, fell into a restful slumber. When she awakened, she used her strand of hair to gather up the ends of night which were scattered all over, and she forced them back into the *tucumã* nut. She picked up only part of the darkness, leaving some for people to use for sleeping and resting.

"Open your eyes, husband. Notice that dawn is coming and the birds are singing happily, announcing the arrival of the sun. And the night creatures have bedded down and are silent. The stars have disappeared into the sun's rays and the night petals of the *Victoria regia* flower are shut." From then on, Night took turns with Day so people could rest.

And so that is how Night was born.

## The Seven Simeons

retold by James Riordan

ONCE upon a time there lived seven brothers, seven bold workingmen—all named Simeon.

One day, as they were in the fields greeting the sun at dawn, plowing the soil and sowing wheat, the king and his grandest noblemen came riding by. The king looked and, seeing the seven brothers, was much surprised.

"How can it be?" he said. "Seven lads plowing the field, all looking alike and of the same height too. Find out who they are."

The king's servants ran and brought back the seven Simeons.

"Tell me who you are and what you do," the king demanded. And the seven brothers replied:

"We are seven brothers, seven bold workingmen, and we are all called Simeon. We plow the land that was our father's and his father's before him. And each of us has a craft of his own."

"What, then, are your crafts?" asked the king.

Said the eldest brother:

"I am Simeon the Carpenter, and I can make a wooden column reaching to the sky."

Said the second brother:

"I am Simeon the Climber, and I can climb to the top of that column and look round the world."

Said the third brother:

"I am Simeon the Sailor, and I can build a ship in the wink of an eye, and sail her over the seas and under water, too."

"I am Simeon the Archer," said the fourth brother, "and I can hit a fly in the air with an arrow."

"I am Simeon the Star-Gazer," said the fifth brother, "and I can count the stars without missing a single one."

"I am Simeon the Plowman," said the sixth brother, "and I can plow a field, sow the grain and reap the harvest all in one day."

"And what can you do?" asked the king of the youngest of the seven Simeons.

"I can sing and dance, and play a flute," the lad replied.

At that, the king's counselor said scornfully:

"Workingmen we need, O King, good father, but what do we want of a fellow who can do nothing but dance and play! Send