

# INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to our first book of Super Great Kids' Stories – a treasury of 30 traditional tales told by storytellers from around the world. These stories are carefully chosen favourites from our award-winning podcast recommended for ages 5 to 105! Through these tales you'll meet surprising characters, such as the magnificent Amazonian Snake King, a fish from Southern Africa who is actually a fairy godmother and a Russian witch who is sometimes helpful, but who also likes munching on children for breakfast. Eek!

These wise stories make you think and give you lots of things to talk about, like what would you do if you woke up and a fruit tree was growing out of your head? Most of the tales have been around for hundreds of years. They can teach us about the past and remind us that life is a bit easier and fairer today. Some stories have been written down in books, others have travelled from mouth to ear, passing from one storyteller to the next and now here they are for you! Hidden gems, strikingly illustrated by artists from across the globe, bringing all the life and colour of the cultures they represent. Designed to be read aloud and to be told, we hope that you will enjoy sharing this book with your family, and that one day, you might even tell the stories to children of your own.

So, are you sitting comfortably? Then turn the page, and as storytellers in the Caribbean say:

**"Mouth open, story jump out!"**

Kim and David

**STORY OWL TIP**  
Look out for Story Owl Facts to learn more about the stories behind the stories, and Story Owl Tips for hints on how to tell your own tales.



# ABOUT THE PODCAST

**Kim Normanton:** "The first traditional tale I ever heard performed was *The Whistling Giants* at a festival when I was sixteen – that's a long time ago. I've been trying to convince people how amazing these traditional tales are ever since. I first started telling stories myself to crowds lining up outside a Viking museum in York. I thought as people were stuck in a queue they were less likely to walk off! I went on to produce some storytelling programmes when I worked for BBC Radio. Now, podcasting has introduced me to a worldwide family who really 'get it'! Thank you."

**David Smith:** "I've loved stories ever since my grandfather used to tell made-up tales to help my sister and me get to sleep. I also used to play around with tape recorders, broken guitars and bits of electronics to make music when I was a kid. Now I'm a grown-up, I get paid to do those things and I'm very lucky I can bring them all together to make *Super Great Kids' Stories* with Kim."

*Super Great Kids' Stories* was founded in 2020 by BBC Radio 4 producer Kim Normanton and audio producer David Smith. The podcast has had over 20 million downloads since it first began and was the winner of the gold award in the British Podcast Awards for the Best Kids Podcast 2023.





# AFRICA

Illustrated by Tinuke Fagborun

## THE STORIES:

Anansi and the Hot Pepper Soup

Keeya and the Purple Fish

The Name of the Tree

Anansi and Number Five

Why the Sky Is Far Away

# KEEYA AND THE PURPLE FISH

a story from Eswatini retold by Kim Normanton



Once upon a time, there was a man and a woman who had a daughter. They called her Keeya, which means flower. The years passed, and sadly, the mother fell ill and died. She was buried near the King's fields.

The poor father was now on his own. And every day, he had to take the cows up the hill to graze, so he took Keeya with him. And as the years passed, she learned all about cows. And, Keeya grew as tall and strong and skilful as any of the boys herding cows.

Ten years passed, and the father looked at his daughter and thought, *I can't teach her the things that girls need to know. I must find myself another wife so she can have a mother to teach her these things.* There was a woman in the village whose husband had died and she had a daughter of her own. And so, that woman came into the home of Keeya and her father.

But like the stepmother in the *Cinderella* story, the woman was unkind. She was nasty to Keeya, yet doted on her own daughter, who had a sour face and was mean to Keeya.

The stepmother gave nearly all the food to her own daughter and very little to Keeya. Every day, Keeya brought the cows back to their shed and fell asleep on the floor with her tummy growling from hunger.

One day, Keeya was crouching by the edge of the lake near their home, dizzy with hunger. She felt so sad that she began to cry. Suddenly, out of the water appeared a fish! It was a shining, purple fish.

"Why all these tears?" asked the fish.

Keeya told it the whole sorry story. And the fish said, "Come with me!" and it opened its mouth and – **schloop!** – it swallowed her whole.

Down, down, down, down, down swam the fish.

And then – **plink!** –

It spat Keeya out.

Keeya found herself in another world. A world where the grass was greener and the cows were glossy, there were mango trees full of ripe fruit and there was cream and honey dripping from the trees. And Keeya ate and she ate and she drank and she drank. And when she'd had enough, she wiped her mouth and went back to the fish and – **schloop!** – it swallowed her whole.

And then up, up, up, up, up it swam and –  
– **plink!** – it spat her out.

And that night, for the first time in a very long time, Keeya lay on the earth floor in her home and slept with a smile on her face, her tummy full.

And every day, it was the same. Keeya took her father's cows out and while they were noisily eating the grass –

**CRUNCH MUNCH,  
CRUNCH MUNCH**

– she would go to the lake and meet the purple fish, who would take her down to the land of mangoes, milk and honey. And she'd eat and eat and eat, and all the time, the fish would sing to her.

## STORY OWL FACT

This old Eswatini story exists in many different cultures. Did you know there are more than 1,000 versions told around the world? You might see similarities with the European fairy tale, *Cinderella*?



And then the fish would take her back up and – *plink!* – spit her out again. And there she was back in her own world.

Well, the weeks passed and the months passed, and Keeya grew big and strong, and her face glowed.

One day, her stepmother looked at her and said, “Where are you getting your food?”

And Keeya shook her head and she said nothing.

And the stepmother reached into the fire and took a stick and said, “Where are you getting your food?”

Keeya lay down on her sleeping place on the ground and said nothing. The stepmother was becoming angry.

“I will find out – you can be sure of that!” she shrieked, shaking her stick and stamping her foot.

The next day, the stepmother asked her husband to follow Keeya and watch what happened. And that night, he told the stepmother about the purple fish.

“I want some fish,” said the stepmother. “Get me that purple fish and I’ll make a nice fish stew!”

And the husband said, “Very well.”

So he took his spear and set off by the light of the moon. Soon he came to the lake and there was the purple fish! With all his strength, he speared the fish and took it home to his wife, who laughed and threw it into her cooking pot.

The next day, Keeya went down to the lake.

But no fish came. She waited and waited and waited.

When she got home, her stepmother said, “Child, have some stew, some delicious fish stew.”

And Keeya looked at the stew and shook her head. And the stepmother and her daughter slurped and burped as they devoured the stew and spat the bones onto the floor.

And Keeya lay down and fell asleep, her tummy once again growling with hunger.

And Keeya dreamed. In her dream, she heard a song ...

♪ ♪  
“When I’m gone, Keeya, Keeya, do not cry.  
Please be brave, Keeya, Keeya,  
please be brave.”

Lay my bones, Keeya, Keeya, lay my bones  
in your mother’s grave, very gently.”



The next morning, Keeya got up before the sun rose, gathered all the fish bones together and then walked the cows to her mother’s grave. She placed the fish bones in the red earth and cried for the fish and her mother. At the end of the day, she saw a beautiful purple flower had grown. Keeya buried her head in her hands. And when she looked up, she saw a brightly coloured cloth, and upon it was a feast fit for a king! She ate and ate and ate.

The following day, the King’s men, who were working in the fields, saw the beautiful purple flower and they told the King about it.

“Bring me that flower!” said the King.

But try as they might, none of them could pick it.

Keeya came back to the fields that evening and spread the cloth next to the purple flower. And just as before, a feast appeared, but this time, next to it was a beautiful pair of leather sandals.

Just as Keeya started to put on the sandals, she saw the King coming across the fields. She jumped up and ran as fast as she could – and you know what happened, don’t you? One of the sandals fell off.

And the King said, “I will marry any girl in this country who can pick this flower and whose feet fit this sandal.”

And so, the next night, under the glow of the full moon, the girls came flocking from far and wide. They all tried to pick the flower, but none of them could. And they all tried to fit their feet into the sandal, but not one of them could do that either.

The King asked, “Are all the girls in the kingdom here?”

And one girl with a sour face answered, “No, my stepsister is asleep on the floor at home. You wouldn’t want to marry her – she smells of cow dung.”

But the King commanded, “Go and fetch her!” So, the girl ran home and dragged Keeya off to meet the King.

And to the astonishment of all, Keeya plucked the flower and gave it to the king! Everyone cheered.

And then the King asked, “Can you fit your foot into this sandal?”

And of course, Keeya took the leather sandal and her foot fitted it perfectly.

Keeya looked at the King and his eyes were kind. And before long, they were married. There was a great feast and dancing that went on long into the night and as far as I know, they’re still dancing to this very day.





# BRER RABBIT AND THE BIG WIND

a story from the US, Caribbean and Africa retold by Baden Prince Junior



There came a time when things were hard and food was difficult to find. All the animals in the forest were starving and miserable. The only animal who had food was Tiger, because Tiger lived on a piece of land with a stream flowing through it. And, in the middle of his field, there was a massive breadfruit tree.

Now, if you don't know what breadfruit is, it's a big, round vegetable about the size of a football. You can boil it, bake it, roast it or fry it. And one breadfruit can feed a family of four easily.

But would Tiger share the fruits of his tree?

**No!**

In fact, Tiger spent his days walking around and around the edge of his field, roaring at anyone who came too close.

"If you come anywhere near my breadfruit tree, I'll deal with you!"

The other poor animals sat around sighing and moaning.

"Look at Tiger! Why is he keeping all those breadfruits for himself? Why can't he share?"

In the middle of this commotion, along came Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit was looked up to by the animals as the one you'd go to if you had a problem.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Ah!" they said. "It's Tiger! None of us have any food to eat. And look at all the breadfruit growing on that tree! Tiger won't even share one with us!"

"No! That's not right," Brer Rabbit said, thinking. "But don't worry. I'll come up with a plan."

He gathered all the animals around him and turned to Brother Bear.

"I want you to break off a big branch from that tree. And you see that hollow stump? I want you to climb inside it, and when the time comes, I'll give you a signal and this is what I want you to do." And he whispered into Brother Bear's ear,

**"Psss, WSSS, sssss!"**

Brother Bear's eyes shone, and he clapped his paws together and said **"Yes!"** and off he went.

And then Brer Rabbit called all the big birds of the air, Buzzard, Eagle, Vulture, Falcon and Hawk.

"I want you to fly up to the tops of the trees and hide among the leaves. And when the time comes, I'll give you this signal and I want you to do this ..." And he whispered,

**"Psss, WSSS, sssss!"**

"Yes, Brer Rabbit," they chorused. And off they flew.

And then Brer Rabbit spoke to all the smaller birds, Sparrow, Dove, Pigeon and Woodcock.

"And you folks, I want you to go and hide among the lower branches of the trees. And when it's time, I want you all to ..."

And he whispered the plan,

**"Psss, WSSS, sssss!"**

And off they flew in a flurry of excitement.


Finally, he turned to all the little creatures that lived in the field: Hedgehog, Vole, Field Mouse and Squirrel, and he said,

"And you little ones, right, this is your job. I'll give you this signal and this is what I want you to do – **psss, WSSS, sssss!** Now off you go! Take your places."

And off they scampered.

STORY OWL TIP  
Add a feeling of panic to the story by making Brer Rabbit speak quickly and making howling wind noises.





Five minutes later, Brer Rabbit came running down the road with a long piece of rope – running as if the end of the world was coming. As he got nearer to Tiger’s field, there was a sudden commotion from the middle of the forest, a booming and a banging that was shaking the ground like an earthquake.

It was Brother Bear, hiding inside the hollow log, beating it with the branch that he’d broken off the tree. You wouldn’t believe how much noise it made.

It brought Tiger racing to the edge of his field to find Brer Rabbit with the rope, looking terrified.

“What’s going on?” asked Tiger.

“Hasn’t anybody told you?” Brer Rabbit replied. “There’s a **BIG WIND** coming. This wind is gonna blow away everybody and everything! I have to tie all my friends to the trees so they don’t get blown away. I can’t stay here talking to you. I’ll see you later, Tiger!”

But Tiger said, “Whoa! Hold on! What big wind?”

And just then, the tops of the trees started shaking. And all the leaves were rustling as if a wind was going to blow every leaf off every tree. (That was Buzzard, Eagle, Vulture, Falcon and Hawk, hiding in the treetops, flapping their wings.)

“Look, see what I told you!” said Brer Rabbit. “I’ve got to hurry! My friends are waiting for me.”

But Tiger put a paw on Brer Rabbit’s shoulder and said, “You stop right there! You’re not gonna go and help your friends. You’re gonna stay here and help me!”

“I can’t do that!” said Brer Rabbit. And just as he spoke, the lower branches of the trees started shaking, and the leaves started rustling and rattling. (That was the smaller birds – Sparrow, Dove, Pigeon and Woodcock – all flapping their wings among the trees!)

“Oh! I hope I’m not gonna be too late,” said Brer Rabbit. “I’ve got to go and help my friends!”

“Oh, no!” said Tiger. “You are going to help me.”

Then the grass looked as if it was rising off the ground (because Hedgehog, Vole, Field Mouse and Squirrel were shaking the grass with all their might).

“Lord!” said Brer Rabbit. “Even the grass is gonna blow away. Tiger, I’ve got to GO!”

“No!” said Tiger. “You need to tie me, so I don’t blow away.”

“Tie you?” asked Brer Rabbit. “But what about my friends?”

“I don’t care about your friends,” said Tiger. “Tie me to this bamboo tree, as tight as you can!”

Brer Rabbit ran round and round the tree and he said, “But Tiger, let’s leave some rope so I can go and tie my friends.”

“No!” said Tiger. “Use all of that rope on me! Tie me up! Tie me good and tight.”

“OK, try and move now. Let me make sure that when the wind comes, it can’t blow you away,” said Brer Rabbit.

Tiger twisted and turned and tried to move every muscle, but he couldn’t budge.

Brer Rabbit clapped his hands and suddenly, all the rustling at the top of the trees stopped. All the leaves rattling at the lower branches stopped. All the waving grass stopped. Then all the animals came out from their hiding places. And Brer Rabbit said, “There you go! Go and help yourselves to all the breadfruit and all the water that you want – and take it home to your families.”

“What about Tiger?” the animals asked.

“Tiger? Tiger won’t trouble you. Look, over there by the bamboo!”

And there was Tiger, tied up tight, growling and furious, but he couldn’t do a thing to stop them.

And that is how Brer Rabbit dealt with the greedy Tiger.

STORY OWL FACT

Trickster rabbit stories are told in many countries, particularly in West Africa, the Caribbean and the US. It’s not surprising these stories are popular – we all love to hear about someone small but clever overcoming someone big, strong and mean but not so clever!





# SOUTH AMERICA

Illustrated by Camila Carrossine

## THE STORIES:

How Snakes Got Their Poison

The Owl Girls

Paca and Beetle

Around the world, owls have been used as symbols for wisdom and good fortune for thousands of years. Pictures of owls have been found in ancient art in countries including France, Egypt and Mexico.

STORY OWL FACT



# THE OWL GIRLS

a story from Argentina retold by Kim Normanton



Once, long ago in Argentina there lived two girls, Catalina and Martina. Catalina came from a rich family and Martina came from a poor family, but no matter, they were the best of friends.

And you know how it is, when you have a best friend, you think you know everything about them. But it turned out that this was not quite true. Martina had a wonderful secret that she hadn't even shared with Catalina.

*Do you want to know the secret? Do you think you can keep it? I'll whisper it now ... her grandmother was a witch!* Not a mean witch, but a good witch, for there are good witches too! The kind who can really help you when you're in trouble.

Every night, Martina and her grandmother would hold hands under the stars and make a magical sound like the cooing of doves,

★ *"Cu-coo-ruck-cucooo, cu-coo-ruck-cucooo, cu-coo-ruck-cooo, cu-coo-ruck-cooo, cu-coo-ruck-cucooo!"* ★

And **whoosh!** The old woman and her granddaughter would turn into owls! They would beat their wings – **wumph, wumph, wumph** – and head off on an adventure.

One night, Martina's grandmother took her up to the north-west, to the place where the orange trees grow and the blossom smells like paradise. And the next day, Martina gave Catalina a present – a basket of oranges – sweet, round and delicious.

"Martina, how did you get these oranges?" asked Catalina's dad one day when they'd finished sharing the last juicy fruit.

"My grandmother gave them to me," said Martina, hoping there'd be no more questions.

"But they don't grow around here at this time of year," said her friend's dad. Martina looked at the floor.

"Please Martina, tell me where we can get some oranges!" Catalina said, wanting more.

The days passed and the weeks passed and Martina kept the secret. She didn't think her friend would believe her even if she did explain. I mean, would **you** believe it if your friend said, *Oh! By the way, my grandmother is a witch.* But you know how it is – when you know something really exciting, it's very hard to keep it secret.

Now, Martina's grandmother was very wise. She knew that secrets can burn you, and sometimes turn on you and bite you. So, one night after a flight together under the stars, she said, "Martina, if ever you're in trouble and need help, just call *pio, pio, pio* and I'll be there." And it was lucky she said that because it wasn't long before Martina did need help.

One evening after dinner, the two friends were licking *dulce de leche*, sweet sticky milk, from the bottom of a jar when Catalina said, "Martina, this is delicious, but what I really want is more oranges. Where can we get some? Please tell me – I promise I'll keep it secret!"

"They come from Catamarca, where oranges are ripe and sweet and ready to pick right now," Martina said.





# ASIA

Illustrated by Terri Po

## THE STORIES:

Inch Boy

How the Elephant Got Its Trunk

Baba Yaga and Vasilisa

The Three Dolls

The Boy Who Used His Head

Great Aunt Tiger



# BABA YAGA AND VASILISA

a story from Russia retold by Kim Normanton



A long time ago – or as they say in Russian *davnym-davno* – there lived a young girl who was as beautiful as she was kind, called Vasilisa. Vasilisa lived happily with her mother and father, knowing she was very loved. But one day, sadly, as happens in so many fairy tales, Vasilisa’s mother died. The day she died, she gave her daughter a little doll with a blue hat.

“Hold this doll close to you, and if you’re ever in trouble, she’ll help you and keep you safe,” her mum explained.

The days passed, and the months passed, then Vasilisa got a new mother and she was a nasty piece of work. She and her two stuck-up daughters hated Vasilisa. Every day, they made her work ...

“**Vasilisa!** Sweep the floor!”

“**Vasilisa!** Chop the wood!”

“**Vasilisa!** Light the stove!”

And I’m sorry to have to tell you that Vasilisa often went to bed with her tummy rumbling and with more work to do than she could possibly manage. But as soon as everyone was asleep, she would creep down to the woodshed, take out her doll and ask for help. And the doll would blink her blue eyes and wiggle her nose and for a second, Vasilisa would see nothing but spinning stars. And when the air cleared, her pockets would be full of sweet berries from the forest.

Vasilisa’s goodness made her stepsisters’ blood boil. They begged their mother to think of a way to get rid of her forever.

“I know,” said the stepmother. “Let’s leave our fire to go out, then we can send Vasilisa to ask the witch Baba Yaga for a piece of burning coal. And then ...

**crunchy-munchy, yum, yum, yum!**

... Baba Yaga will eat her for breakfast!”

The three of them laughed as if that was the funniest thing they’d heard all year.

That evening, when Vasilisa returned from chopping wood, her home was in darkness. “What can we do if we don’t have fire to warm our hands or a light to help us see to mend our clothes?” she asked.

“Vasilisa,” crooned her stepmother, “are you completely stupid? Someone has to run to Baba Yaga and ask for a glowing piece of coal to light our fire. And that someone, Vasilisa, is **YOU!**”

Out in the forest, the owls were screeching. Vasilisa tiptoed along the path, looking for Baba Yaga’s hut. She wasn’t sure how she was going to find it. So she reached into her pocket, and pulled out her little doll.

The doll told her to go *this way ... and that way ... and that way ... and this way*, until eventually, Vasilisa arrived in a clearing, and there it was.

Baba Yaga’s house was standing on two huge chicken legs and it rocked and moaned to itself. All around it was a fence made of bones. And threaded onto those bones, like beads on a necklace, were glowing skulls filled with red hot coals.

⚡ *TSSSS, TSSSS, TSSSS* ⚡





STORY OWL TIP

Have fun making Baba Yaga's voice as scary as possible. But try not to terrify the grown-ups!



Suddenly, Vasilisa spotted Baba Yaga flying through the skies in a giant mortar and sweeping the stars out of her way with a huge pestle. The old witch landed with a bump and sniffed.

"I smell with my long bony nose ... a Russian girl with tasty toes!"

And Vasilisa, who was shaking with fear, stepped forward and said, "Here I am, Granny."

"**WHAAAT!** What do you want?" she snapped.

"Our house is cold because the fire went out," said Vasilisa, "and my stepmother and stepsisters sent me to ask you for some burning coals."

"**AAAARGH!**" shrieked Baba Yaga. "You useless child! Tell me, why should I give **YOU** fire?"

And Vasilisa touched the doll in her pocket and said, "Because I asked you."

"**Grrrr!** Aren't you the lucky one?" said the witch. "That is the right answer! Come with me."

Inside the hut was a huge oven, next to which hung pots and pans. Beside the oven was a long bed made of polished bones. Baba Yaga served herself some stew from a bubbling pot. Eagerly, the old witch shoved her long nose into the bowl. She slurped down the stew, making hideous noises. Vasilisa was then given a scraping of cold cabbage soup.

"Now I'm off to bed," Baba Yaga said, wiping her mouth on her sleeve. "I want you to wash the dishes, sweep the floor and then go outside where there's a heap of wheat and peas. Separate the peas from the wheat. And if you don't finish by the morning, I'll eat you for breakfast ..."

**crunchy-munchy, yum, yum, yum!**

And with that, Baba Yaga lay down on her bed of bones and began snoring through her long bony nose.

Vasilisa washed the dishes and swept the floor. Then she went into the yard and burst into tears. "I'll never get this all done before morning!" she cried.

"Don't worry, Vasilisa," comforted the little doll. "Say your prayers and go to bed. The morning is wiser than the evening."

When Vasilisa woke, there was a **HUGE** pile of peas and a **HUGE** pile of wheat, all separated.

Just as the sun was rising, Baba Yaga woke up.

"Well, my little pigeon, is everything done?" she asked.

"Look for yourself and see, Granny," said Vasilisa. Baba Yaga seemed disappointed.

"All right. I have a question," she said. "How did you manage to finish all this work?"

"It's because of my mother's love," said Vasilisa. "My mother's blessings helped me."

"**AAAARGH!** A curse on your mother's blessings! Get out! I don't need your blessings polluting my house. Be off with you! Get out, get out, get out!" shrieked Baba Yaga, jabbing Vasilisa with her pestle.

She dragged Vasilisa out of the hut and yanked a skull – with red hot coals for eyes – off her fence. She stuck it on a stick, and handed it to Vasilisa.





“Give *this* to your stepmother and her daughters. That’s what they wanted and that’s what they shall have. Be careful what you wish for!” she grinned, revealing a row of sharp metal teeth.

Vasilisa was about to thank Baba Yaga, but the little doll jumped up and down in her pocket. So she kept quiet.

The young girl walked carefully through the forest, holding up the glowing skull until she spotted her house through the trees.

As the stepmother and stepsisters watched the red light moving slowly towards them, they couldn’t believe what they were seeing. Surely, Vasilisa had been eaten by Baba Yaga? But secretly, they were pleased to see her – because ever since Vasilisa had left, the house had been **freeezing**. All the burning twigs they’d carried from their neighbours went out – *ppfffft!* – the instant they’d carried them home.

“What took you so long? Bring in the flame, you wretched child,” said Vasilisa’s stepmother. “Let’s hope Baba Yaga’s fire burns true!”

But the instant Vasilisa carried the skull into the kitchen, its burning eyes locked onto the stepmother and her daughters – and followed them around the room –

⚡ *TSSSSS!* ⚡

“**Ouch!**” they yelled, hopping up and down and shaking their burning hands. “**Too hot! Too hot! Put it out! Put it out!**”

But the eyes in that skull burned brightly and held their gaze tightly – all night long.

In the morning, all that was left of the stepmother and her daughters was a pile of ash on the floor. And that was the end of that.

And from then on, Vasilisa always carried her little doll in the pocket closest to her heart. And they both lived happily ever after.

And as for Baba Yaga – what happened to her? Well, that’s another story for another day.

STORY OWL FACT

Baba Yaga appears in hundreds of Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and other Slavic folktales. In Russian, her name has come to mean ‘scary old woman’.





# EUROPE

Illustrated by Sally Agar

## THE STORIES:

Hey Ho, Off I Go!

Molly and the Leprechaun

The Fairy Boots

The Apple Tree Man

Little Half-Chick

The Elves and the Shoemaker



# THE APPLE TREE MAN

a story from England retold by Kim Normanton



A long time ago in England, there were two brothers who lived on a farm. Different as night and day they were. The older brother, George, was loud, liked winning races and was a bit of a show-off. The younger brother, Jack, was shy and liked animals and climbing trees.

When the boys were young, their father told them stories. Their favourite was one about gold coins that had been buried on their land by smugglers long ago.

"If you want to know where the gold is, listen to the animals talk at **midnight** on **Christmas Eve**," their dad would whisper. "They know more about this farm than anyone. They'll tell you where it is!"

The years passed and the boys grew into young men, then into grown-ups. And when the old farmer died, George said, "I'm the oldest so I get to pick first. I'll have the farm, the big field and the cows. And I'll rent you the old cottage for one silver shilling a month. Oh, and since I'm feeling generous, you can have Daisy the old cow and Plonky the old donkey."

Was that fair? **No!** But Jack was afraid of his big brother so he decided to keep quiet.

The days passed. Jack worked hard and sang while he worked. He fixed holes in the roof, made creamy cheeses and grew vegetables in his garden. He loved his old cow Daisy and his manky donkey, Plonky. They were family.

Next to Jack's cottage was an ancient apple tree that no longer grew apples. Jack pruned it, hoping he could 'wake it up', and sure enough, before long, he had a crop of rosy apples. And by winter, he had a barrel filled to the brim with golden cider. He always

remembered to pour a cup of the amber drink onto the tree's roots to say thank you to the apple tree and to encourage it to grow fruit when spring arrived. And as he poured, he sang,

*"Wassail, wassail to the apple tree,  
I give to you, you give to me.  
Rosy red and good to eat,  
thank you for your apples sweet."*

Then one Christmas Eve, his brother came knocking.

"I've come to get the rent for the cottage," he said. "Oh – and I'll take a barrel of cider since you've got so much!"

"I'm sorry!" said Jack, "I just don't have the money for the rent. Can I give you it in a couple of weeks after I get paid for my cheeses?"

"Nope," said George, stamping his feet. "I need the money and I need it now! Pay up or I'll turn you out of here ... **TOMORROW!**"

"What? Tomorrow's **Christmas Day!**" Jack protested.

But just then, Jack remembered something – can you think what it might be?

"I have an idea," said Jack. "Why don't you come back at midnight? We can go to the cow-shed, and just like Dad used to say, the animals might tell us where the gold is buried!"

"I've got a better idea," said George. "I'll stay here by your fire – you can go and feed your animals then wake me at midnight. But if we find that gold, remember all this land is mine, so the gold belongs to me!"

## STORY OWL TIP

The wassailing song can be sung to the tune of 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush' or 'The Wheels on the Bus'.



So, Jack went off to feed the animals and George settled down by Jack's fire to drink his cider.

Once the animals were fed, Jack went to sing to his apple tree ...

*"Wassail, wassail to the apple tree,  
I give to you, you give to me.  
Rosy red and good to eat,  
thank you for your apples sweet."*

And something strange began to happen. The trunk of the tree twisted and cracked and a face appeared, all rough and wrinkled like an old apple. Then two twiggy arms and hands came out of the trunk, and a tree-like man appeared with skin like bark and rosy red cheeks. He stretched and creaked and grinned at Jack.

"How do you do lad? I'm the Apple Tree Man!"

Jack screamed and turned to run for his life.

"**Wait!**" shouted the Apple Tree Man. Then he whispered, "All these years you've looked after me, the cow and the donkey, and now it's our turn to help you. Do you want to know where the treasure is? **Ha!** It's here, right under my roots. Dig it up carefully and you'll never be hungry again. But **shhhhh**. Don't tell anyone! Your brother would happily snaffle the lot if he found out."

Jack was in shock.





“Are you real?” he asked.  
 “Course I am!” the old tree laughed. “Now quick! Get digging!”  
 So, the brother took a shovel and began to dig.  
 “Ouch!” said the tree.  
 “I’m sorry. Did that hurt?” asked Jack.  
 “Not too bad, but mind my toes!” the tree replied.  
 Jack kept digging, and sure enough, right where he’d poured his cider, he found an old box filled to the brim with **gold coins!** He hid it in the pantry.



Then, just as the church bells were ringing, he woke George.  
 “Quick!” he said. “It’s time for us to go to the shed and listen to the animals.”  
 “Right, now you listen to me!” shouted George. “It’s my land, so I get the right to listen first. What the animals have to say is no business of yours!” He slammed the door in Jack’s face.  
 George then tiptoed towards the shed and peered in at the window. The cow was mooing and the donkey was braying. He pressed his ear to the wall, and can you believe it? He could understand everything the animals were saying!  
 But their conversation was really, really boring.  
 “**Moooo!** Happy Christmas, Plonky!”  
 “**Hee-haw!** Thanks Daisy, a Merry Christmas and a Happy **Moo** Year to you, too. Do you have any ‘moos’ for me old cow?”  
 “Nothing much. How about you Plonk? Any ‘moos’ from you?”  
 “**Hee-haw!** No, nothing ‘moo’ here,” chortled donkey, amused at his little joke. “**Hee-haw!** This hay is a bit dry. Not as good as last year’s. That was scrummy!”

STORY OWL FACT

Wassailing is an old English tradition where people sing to the fruit trees to encourage them to produce more fruit the following year. The word ‘wassail’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon ‘waes hael’, which means ‘good health’.



They chatted on about hay and grass and mud and bad weather, while the older brother stamped his feet in the cold, getting more and more cross.  
 “Come on, come on, come on!” he said. “What is wrong with you? Never mind all this blather about rain, muck and hay. What about the **gold**, you ridiculous animals?”

Finally, the cow giggled.  
 “Hey! I do have some ‘moos’ for you donk, my old pal. You know that gold the old man was always talking about?”  
 “Ooh, yeah,” laughed the donkey. “Shame he never found it. Say, you don’t know where it is, do you?”  
 “Yup!” replied the cow, slowly chewing.  
 “Holy Cow!” spluttered Donkey. “Tell me where it is! **Hee-haw!** Please, please, pleeeeeease?”  
 George was seriously excited now – he pressed his ear against the shed, straining to listen.  
 “Nope,” said the old cow chuckling. “I’m not telling you. Not in a million moos!”  
 “Ah, come on, why not? I’m your mate,” said Donkey, pinning back his ears in excitement.  
 “Because,” said the cow, chewing carefully on a bit of grass, “that mean brother is listening at the window and he doesn’t deserve a single coin. He’s never given me so much as a mouldy old carrot, not even a scratch behind my ear. So, I think I’ll just keep quiet.”  
 “Good plan, Stan! Er, I mean Daisy. **Hee-haw!**” laughed the donkey.

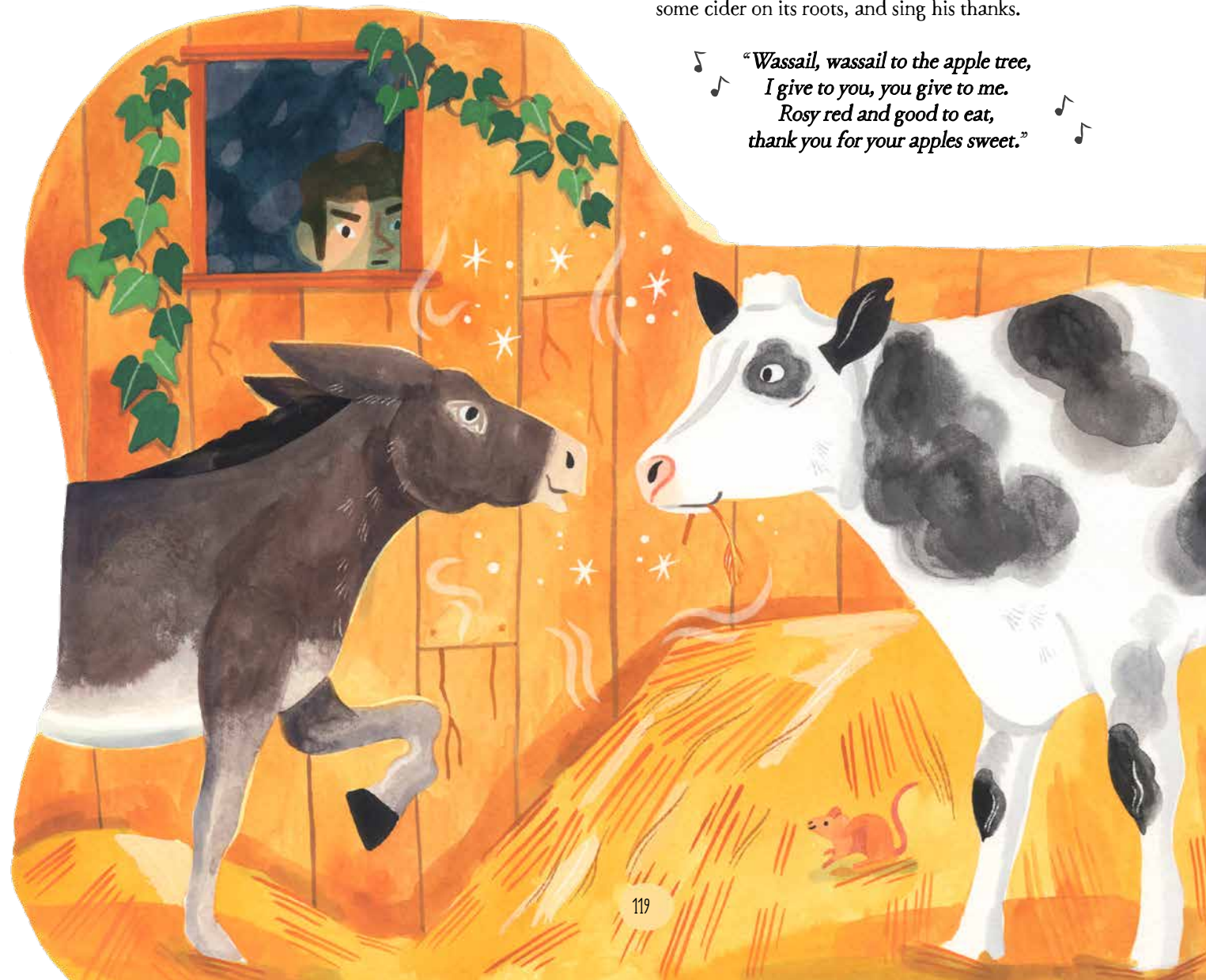
The church bells stopped ringing.  
 George jumped up and ran into the stable.  
 “You stupid, smelly animals! Tell me! Tell me where that treasure is now! Or I’ll ... I’ll ... kick you hard!”  
 But the moment of magic had passed. And all he could hear were “moos” and “hee-haws”. Suddenly, the donkey kicked out with his strong hind legs and sent the older brother flying out of the shed


– **weeeeeeee splat!** –  
 and into a pile of stinky manure.

The next day, Jack went to pay his brother a visit.  
 “Happy Christmas!” he said smiling. “Here’s your silver shilling.”  
 “Where did you get that?” asked George, eyeing it suspiciously.  
 “Ah! That’s for me to know and you to find out!” smiled Jack. “Have a happy day!” And off he went, back to his old animals and his apple tree.

Well, the months passed, and with all that gold, Jack had enough money to buy back the family farm. And to celebrate, he, Plonky and Daisy had the most delicious feast. But Jack never forgot the Apple Tree Man. Every Christmas he’d go to that old tree, pour some cider on its roots, and sing his thanks.

♪ “Wassail, wassail to the apple tree,  
 I give to you, you give to me.  
 Rosy red and good to eat,  
 thank you for your apples sweet.” ♪





# OCEANIA

Illustrated by Melissa Greenwood  
and Terri Po for *How the Kiwi Lost Its Wings*

## THE STORIES:

Bungoo the Flying Fox  
How the Lyrebird Got Its Voice  
How Māui Slowed the Sun  
How the Kiwi Lost Its Wings





# HOW MĀUI SLOWED THE SUN

a Māori story from New Zealand retold by Emmy Bidois



One day, the trickster demigod, Māui, was sitting with his brothers around the fire when they all started moaning about how short the days were.

“Rā the Sun is just so lazy,” they said. “He’s never up long enough for us to dry our clothes or dig our gardens. There just aren’t enough hours of sunlight to get anything finished. The grass isn’t growing and the flowers bloom and close so quickly you can barely catch a sniff of their beautiful scent.”

One evening, the brothers got particularly frustrated. They were having a delicious *hāngi* – a kind of barbecue where the food is cooked to juicy perfection in a pit with hot stones. The Sun had already gone down, and Māui and his brothers could barely see what they were eating.

“Āe! Brother, I thought I was eating *kūmara* – delicious sweet potato! – but it was actually pumpkin,” complained one of Māui’s brothers.

Māui listened carefully to all of their grumbles and then he had a brilliant idea!

“Aha! I reckon I could slow that fireball if I just had some ropes long enough!” he said.

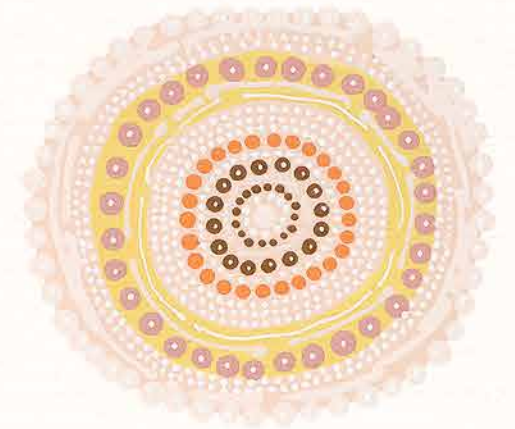
“Yeah, right!” laughed the oldest brother. “Māui, you’re such a dreamer.”

“Seriously, brother,” said another. “How on earth is teeny-tiny you going to slow down that giant hothead, Rā the Sun?”

*Hmmm, maybe I need more than ropes ...* thought Māui. “Aha! I’ve got it! I need **magic ropes.**”

And with that, Māui set to work. He invited all the villagers to help him pick a strong plant called *harakeke*. Then Māui and the villagers wove strands of the plant into long, long ropes, all while chanting special prayers to make the ropes superstrong.

Māui had another important item, which he’d kept safe for special occasions. *Can you guess what it was?* He had a jawbone shaped like a large hook, which was a gift from his grandmother! It was very precious and had strong magic of its own.



Māui prayed to the gods – to Mother Earth, Papatūānuku, and to Father Sky, Ranginui. He prayed to Tāne-Mahuta, the god of the forest, and to Tāne-Hokahoka, the god of the birds. Māui also prayed to his ancestors.

Then Māui hugged his family and friends before he and his brothers set off on their long quest to the land of the Sun. They travelled secretly at night when the Sun was sleeping so he wouldn’t see what they were up to.

During the daytime, the brothers hid in caves and behind rocks and trees so that the Sun wouldn’t spot them creeping towards him.

Eventually, the brothers came to the land of the Sun.



**STORY OWL FACT**

Māori people are the native people of Aotearoa (New Zealand). Rā is a Māori word that means ‘Sun’.

Because of the great heat, the earth had turned to cracked red clay. The dusty earth scrunched and crunched under their feet as they walked and walked and walked.

Māui's brothers said, "Oh Māui, we're so thirsty. Can we please go back and get a big drink of water? Please, please, please, please, please?"

Māui paid no attention to his brothers' demands. He was used to this kind of behaviour from them. He knew he was very strong, the strongest of them all, and he was also very focused. He encouraged his brothers to keep on walking. So on they went ...

*crunch-scrunch, crunch-scrunch,  
crunchety-scrunch, crunchety-scrunch.*

And all the while, the Sun slept soundly, snoring like a pig.

Māui got his brothers to build walls of clay to shelter behind, and they dug deep trenches so they could move around unseen.

Then, while the Sun was still fast asleep in his deep pit, Māui pulled out the magic ropes. He and his brothers tiptoed here and there, laying the ropes around and across the sleeping Sun. They lay them close together so that when the Sun started to get up in the morning, he would get tangled in them.

The Sun began to rise ...

First, they saw his fierce eyes, and then they saw his spiky arms appearing over the top of their wall.

Realising he was stuck and had been tricked, the Sun pulled and thrashed against the ropes, screaming to get out.

"Ra Ra! Fa la la la la!" roared the Sun.

His angry face frightened Māui's brothers. The more Rā fought, the more tangled he got. The heat was so strong that the brothers screamed in fear and tried to run away, but Māui ordered them to stay.

They didn't really have a choice – either they stayed to fight the Sun or they risked being hit by one of the Sun's fireballs as they tried to escape.

**"Heave ho!  
Heave ho!  
Heave ho!"**

they chanted, pulling on the ropes as if they were in a giant tug of war with the Sun.

Next, Māui pulled out the magic jawbone and started hitting Rā the Sun to try to get him to slow down and listen to him.

**"Ra Ra! Fa la la la la! Ouch, ouch!"**

roared Rā. "Why have you trapped me? I will burn you with my heat, Māui!"

Māui yelled at the giant Sun, "You, Rā! You call yourself the mighty Sun, yet you are naughty and lazy. You're always sleeping. You need to slow down and move calmly across the sky to give us more light and longer days, and you need to stop rushing selfishly back to your bed. We need more time to work in our gardens, dry our washing on the line and eat our dinner in the light."

After a long and violent fight and a few more slaps from Māui's grandmother's magic jawbone, they managed to stop the Sun from rising and the Sun finally gave up the struggle.

"**Stop! Stop! Please!** I'll do whatever you ask," the Sun cried. "Just stop breaking my precious rays!"

And so the brothers let go of the ropes and stepped back to watch as the weary Sun drifted gently up and slowly crossed the sky.

The brothers all cheered, "Three cheers for Māui, the hero of the people!"

And, you know, the Sun did keep his promise, and the days grew longer and longer as he slowed his path across the sky.

So, from that day, everyone had more than enough time to get all their chores done and time to enjoy a little play in the sunshine as well. And even today, if you watch Rā the Sun as he travels across the sky, you can sometimes see those magic ropes that tie him to the Earth. And that's why we can all thank Māui when we're enjoying long, happy days in the Sun.

And that is the story of how Māui slowed the Sun.

### STORY OWL TIP

Use your loudest voice for the roaring Sun when you say the phrase, "Ra Ra! Fa la la la la!"



# MEET THE ILLUSTRATORS

**Sally Agar**  
Illustrating the stories from Europe

Sally lives in a small market town in North Yorkshire in England, but spent the early part of her career living in Sweden, where she had a job drawing pictures to be printed onto t-shirts. Sally and her son are huge fans of the *Super Great Kids' Stories* podcast, so she was over the moon when she was asked to take part in the making of this book! Her favourite story to illustrate was 'Molly and the Leprechaun' as she loves painting forests and flowers.



**Camila Carrossine**  
Illustrating the stories from South America

Camila is an illustrator from Brazil. When she was little, she once painted on her bedroom walls and surprisingly, her mother didn't tell her off! From that moment, she knew she was meant to be an artist. When she isn't illustrating, she likes to swim, travel and walk around barefoot.



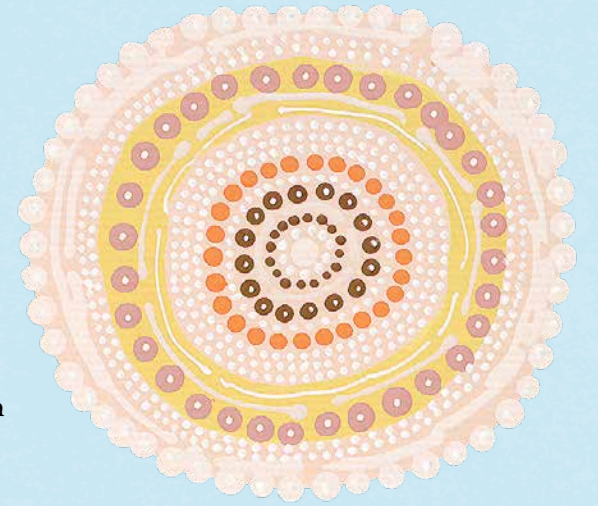
**Tinuke Fagborun**  
Illustrating the stories from Africa

Tinuke is a British-Nigerian illustrator. Based in Manchester, she grew up in a Nigerian household with a dad who loved to tell West African folktales and Yoruba myths. This all fuelled her desire to celebrate diverse storytelling. Her style is deeply tied to her Nigerian heritage, borrowing from its rich history, colourful textiles and intricate patterns. Tinuke's goal is to spread joy with every one of her vibrant illustrations.



**Melissa Greenwood**  
Illustrating the stories from Oceania

Melissa is an Indigenous artist from the 'Saltwater Country' of Australia's East Coast. She loves to share stories from her community through her brushstrokes, creating original artworks, fashion and fabrics inspired by her rich culture and entertaining tales. Melissa has also written and published five children's stories of her own and continues to weave the magic of her culture through her art, intending to captivate imaginations beyond her canvas and keep it celebrated around the world.



**Kaley McKean**  
Illustrating the stories from North America

Kaley is a Canadian illustrator who lives in Toronto. She has been an illustrator for over 12 years, but has loved creating colourful scenes inspired by nature, fantasy and folklore for as long as she can remember. She lives in Toronto with her husband Nolan Pelletier (who is also an illustrator), their dog Lindy and an array of reptiles, amphibians and plants.



**Terri Po**  
Illustrating the stories from Asia and Oceania

Terri is originally from Hong Kong, but now lives and works from the Scottish Highlands. Having fully embraced the final form of a reclusive illustrator-hermit, she enjoys drawing brains, blobby things, and spotting birds in her garden and fighter jets over her house. Most recently, she's been knitting a jumper and reading a book about John Rawls.

