Why the Bat Flies by Night

A Nigerian folktale

A bush rat called Oyot was a great friend of Emiong, the bat; they always fed together, but the bat was jealous of the bush rat. When the bat cooked the food it was always very good, and the bush rat said, "How is it that when you make the soup it is so tasty?"

The bat replied, "I always boil myself in the water, and my flesh is so sweet, that the soup is good."

He then told the bush rat that he would show him how it was done; so he got a pot of warm water, which he told the bush rat was boiling water, and jumped into it, and very shortly afterwards came out again. When the soup was brought it was as strong and good as usual, as the bat had prepared it beforehand.

The bush rat then went home and told his wife that he was going to make good soup like the bat's. He therefore told her to boil some water, which she did. Then, when his wife was not looking, he jumped into the pot, and was very soon dead.

When his wife looked into the pot and saw the dead body of her husband boiling she was very angry, and reported the matter to the king, who gave orders that the bat should be made a prisoner. Every one turned out to catch the bat, but as he expected trouble he flew away into the bush and hid himself. All day long the people tried to catch him, so he had to change his habits, and only came out to feed when it was dark, and that is why you never see a bat in the daytime.

The Story of the Lightning and the Thunder

A Nigerian folktale

In the olden days the thunder and lightning lived on the earth amongst all the other people, but the king made them live at the far end of the town, as far as possible from other people's houses.

The thunder was an old mother sheep, and the lightning was her son, a ram. Whenever the ram got angry he used to go about and burn houses and knock down trees; he even did damage on the farms, and sometimes killed people. Whenever the lightning did these things, his mother used to call out to him in a very loud voice to stop and not to do any more damage; but the lightning did not care in the least for what his mother said, and when he was in a bad temper used to do a very large amount of damage. At last the people could not stand it any longer, and complained to the king.

So the king made a special order that the sheep (Thunder) and her son, the ram (Lightning), should leave the town and live in the far bush. This did not do much good, as when the ram got angry he still burnt the forest, and the flames sometimes spread to the farms and consumed them.

So the people complained again, and the king banished both the lightning and the thunder from the earth and made them live in the sky, where they could not cause so much destruction. Ever since, when the lightning is angry, he commits damage as before, but you can hear his mother, the thunder, rebuking him and telling him to stop. Sometimes, however, when the mother has gone away some distance from her naughty son, you can still see that he is angry and is doing damage, but his mother's voice cannot be heard.

The Sun and the Moon

A Filipino folktale

The Sun and the Moon were married, but the Sun was very ugly and quarrelsome. One day he became angry at the Moon and started to chase her. She ran very fast until she was some distance ahead of him, when she grew tired and he almost caught her. Ever since he has been chasing her, at times almost reaching her, and again falling far behind.

The first child of the Sun and Moon was a large star, and he was like a man. One time the Sun, becoming angry at the star, cut him up into small pieces and scattered him over the whole sky just as a woman scatters rice, and ever since there have been many stars.

Another child of the Sun and Moon was a gigantic crab. He still lives and is so powerful that every time he opens and closes his eyes there is a flash of lightning. Most of the time the crab lives in a large hole in the bottom of the sea, and when he is there we have high tide; but when he leaves the hole, the waters rush in and there is low tide. His moving about also causes great waves on the surface of the sea.

The crab is quarrelsome like his father; and he sometimes becomes so angry with his mother, the Moon, that he tries to swallow her. When the people on earth, who are fond of the Moon, see the crab near her, they run out of doors and shout and beat on gongs until he is frightened away, and thus the Moon is saved.

The Galah and Oolag the Lizard

An Auatralian folktale

Oolah the lizard was tired of lying in the sun, doing nothing. So he said, "I will go and play." He took his boomerangs out, and began to practise throwing them. While he was doing so a Galah came up, and stood near, watching the boomerangs come flying back, for the kind of boomerangs Oolah was throwing were the bubberahs. They are smaller than others, and more curved, and when they are properly thrown they return to the thrower, which other boomerangs do not.

Oolah was proud of having the gay Galah to watch his skill. In his pride he gave the bubberah an extra twist, and threw it with all his might. Whizz, whizzing through the air, back it came, hitting, as it passed her, the Galah on the top of her head, taking both feathers and skin clean off. The Galah set up a hideous, cawing, croaking shriek, and flew about, stopping every few minutes to knock her head on the ground like a mad bird. Oolah was so frightened when he saw what he had done, and noticed that the blood was flowing from the Galah's head, that he glided away to hide under a bindeah bush. But the Galah saw him. She never stopped the hideous noise she was making for a minute, but, still shrieking, followed Oolah. When she reached the bindeah bush she rushed at Oolah, seized him with her beak, rolled him on the bush until every bindeah had made a hole in his skin. Then she rubbed his skin with her own bleeding head. "Now then," she said, "you Oolah shall carry bindeahs on you always, and the stain of my blood."

"And you," said Oolah, as he hissed with pain from the tingling of the thorns, "shall be a bald-headed bird as long as I am a red thorny lizard."

So to this day, underneath the Galah's crest you can always find the bald patch which the bubberah of Oolah first made. And in the country of the Galahs are lizards coloured reddish brown, and covered with spikes like bindeah thorns.

Why the Moon Waxes and Wanes

An Eskimo folktale

In a certain village on the Yukon River there once lived four brothers and a sister. The sister's companion was the youngest boy, of whom she was very fond. This boy was lazy and could never be made to work. The other brothers were great hunters and in the fall they hunted at sea, for they lived near the shore. As soon as the Bladder feast in December was over, they went to the mountains and hunted reindeer. The boy never went with them, but remained at home with his sister, and they amused each other.

One time, however, she became angry at him, and that night when she carried food to the other brothers in the kashim or assembly house where the men slept, she gave none to the youngest brother. When she went out of the assembly house she saw a ladder leading up into the sky, with a line hanging down by the side of it. Taking hold of the line, she ascended the ladder, going up into the sky. As she was going up, the younger brother came out and, seeing her, at once ran back and called to his brothers:

"Our sister is climbing the sky! Our sister is climbing the sky!"

"Oh, you lazy youngster, why do you tell us that? She is doing no such thing," said they.

"Come and see for yourselves! Come, quick!" he cried, very much excited.

Sure enough! Up she was going at a rapid rate.

The boy caught up his sealskin breeches and, being in a hurry, thrust one leg into them and then drew a deerskin sock on the other foot as he ran outside. There he saw the girl far away up in the sky and began at once to go up the ladder toward her; but she floated away, he following in turn.

The girl became the sun and the boy became the moon, and ever since that time he pursues but never overtakes her. At night the sun sinks in the west, and the moon is seen coming up in the east to go circling after, but always too late. The moon, being without food, wanes slowly away from starvation until it is quite lost to sight; then the sun reaches out and feeds it from the dish in which she carried food to the kashim. After the moon is fed and gradually brought to the full, it is permitted to starve again, thus producing the waxing and waning which we see every month.