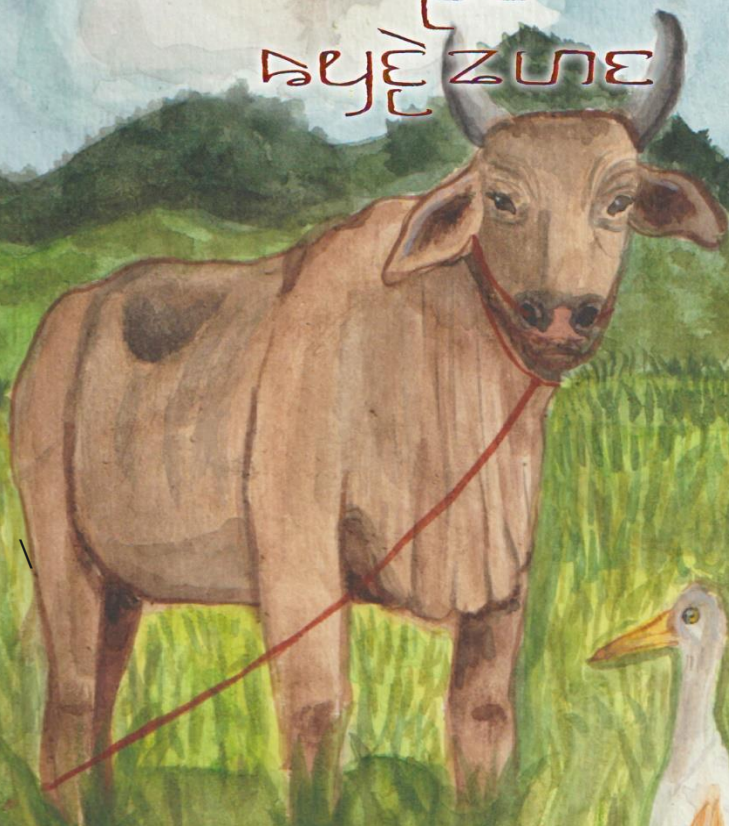


KARENNI MYTHOLOGIES & HISTORY

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KARUNIA FILA

2023

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Authors Note

I am so happy to share some Karenni stories with you.

Before hearing the stories from my students, I had no idea what I would be getting when asking to hear folk tales or mythologies. I asked my students to share stories they may have heard as children that were “maybe real, maybe not real.” However, most of the stories in this book were told to me by my students as Karenni History and are not considered fiction.

Keep in mind that the English language level of the students who shared their stories could be higher, so the stories have been greatly extended to me. Details have been added, but the stories and important pieces have not been changed.

It is interesting to compare these stories to the children’s folktales you are used to and see the similarities and many differences.

I had the most amazing time slowly listening to the students share their stories. Some were eager to share, and some were a bit more shy. Usually, one person reciting a story would end in a small group gathering and everyone paying close attention. These are some of my fondest memories at KSDC (Karenni Social Development Center).

Who are the Karenni People?

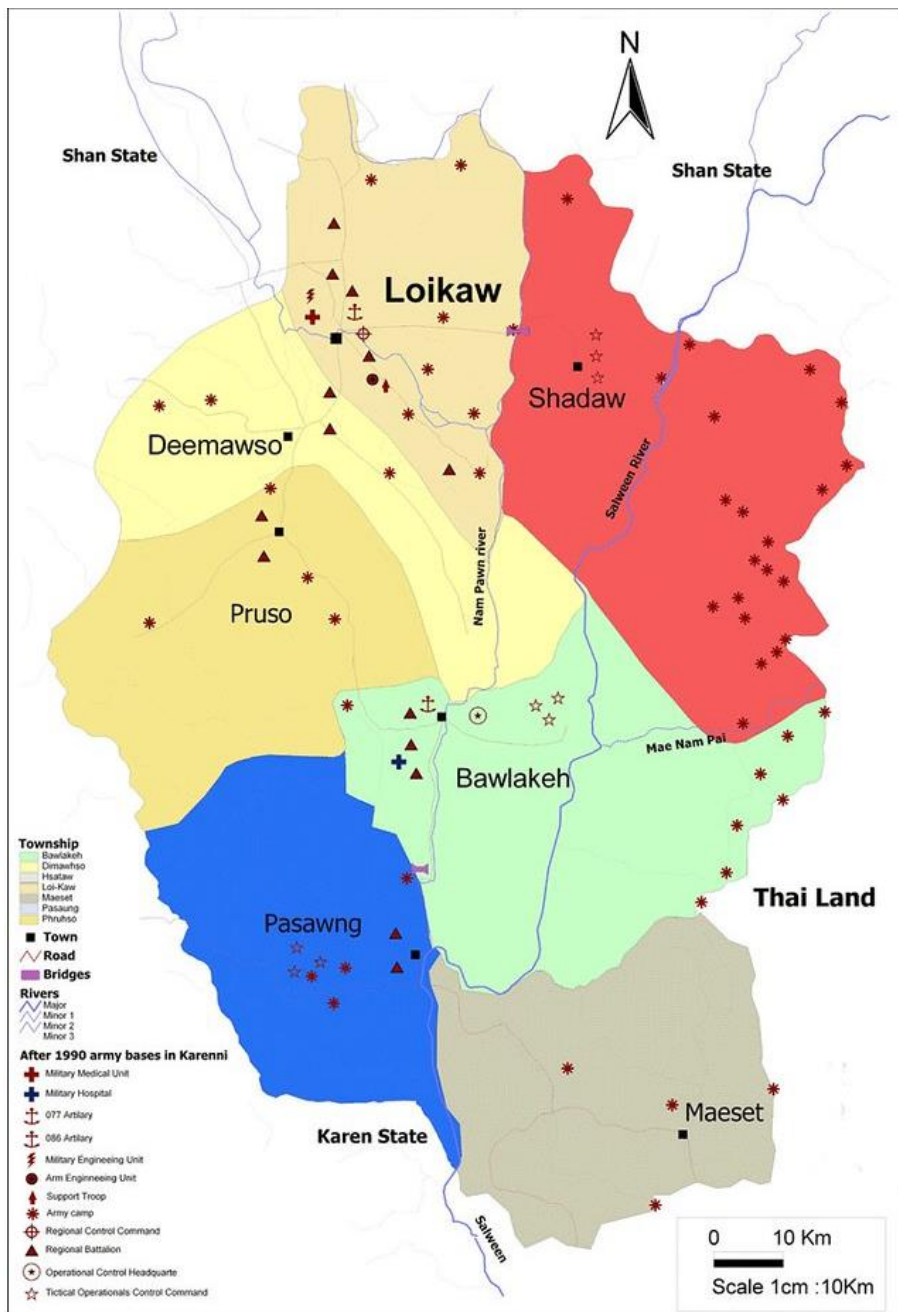
Note that this is the Karenni history shared with me by my students; there may be different opinions or ideas about certain things between the ethnic minority groups.

Most Karenni people refer to Burma as Myanmar. The name “Burma” comes from a dominant ethnic group, the Bamar. Burma refers to only Burmese people, while Myanmar includes the different ethnic groups. Myanmar has over 135 different ethnicities and 7 states: Shan, Karenni, Chin, Mon, Kachin, Rakay, and Karen.



Karenni State is in the Southeast part of Myanmar on the border of Thailand. The biggest township is Loikaw, with a population of 11000 people. The name Karenni means “Red Karen” because of Karenni people's bright red traditional clothing. Traditional

clothing is an integral part of Karenni culture, and different ethnicities have differences in their traditional dress. Villages will have a weaver who specializes in handcrafting their ethnicity's traditional clothes. There are 9 ethnic groups within Karenni. Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Kay Koh, Kay Bar, Yay Baw, Yay Taleh, Ma Nu, Ma Naw.





Above is the Karenni flag. The different colors of the flag represent courage, bravery, truth, honesty, and purity. The flag's center symbolizes a drum, in the Karenni language, a Kalow, and represents the unity of all the different ethnicities and cultures within Karenni State. The star represents ethnic equality, and the frogs are there to welcome good rainfall and symbolize the vast agriculture and natural resources.

Karenni people live in close-knit communities very closely with nature. Many work as farmers, mainly growing rice, corn, peanuts, and sesame. People follow a mix of religions. Many follow Christianity, Buddhism, or traditional Animist religions. Some people follow a mix of Christianity or Buddhism and traditional Karenni Animism. An important part of the Karenni Animist religion is Kay Htoe Boe. Kay Htoe Boe is a tall flagpole that follows a specific creation ritual. People give offerings to the spirits of the land and pray to the Kay Htoe Boe flag pole on full and new moons. When they pray to Kay Htoe Boe, they pray to the nature god Pu Su Lu.

Some Karenni traditions include local festivals, such as Deeku. Deeku is a festival uniting 3 ethnicities: Kayaw, Kayah, and Kayan. Long ago, Thailand tried to colonize Karenni State, and these ethnicities worked together to fight off the Thai (This was a very long time ago, and at this time, the Thai were called Yun "Jhyeun"). Every year, Karenni people celebrate this victory with the Deeku

festival by weaving three pieces of sticky rice wrapped in Deeku leaf, a sharp and strong leaf similar to a thick bamboo leaf.



In small villages, some schools may only teach for a few years. In some villages, school only goes to grade 4, some until grade 7 or more. After finishing school in their village, most students go to bigger towns to continue their education. However, in school, education is only in the Burmese language using the Burmese alphabet, and only positive Burmese history is taught.

A Brief History and Current Situation

Karenni people originated from Mongolia to Karenni State in around 700 BC. When the British colonized Myanmar in 1886, Karenni state was never colonized. In 1875, the British and Burmese leaders recognized Karenni State's independence and agreed that Karenni State was separate from Myanmar. June 21st, the day that the British recognized Karenni State as a sovereign entity, is celebrated every year as Karenni National Day. Myanmar gained independence in 1948.

In 1948, when Myanmar gained independence, the country started fighting Karenni State as a result of Myanmar wanting to build a federal state in Karenni land. Karenni people refused to join Burma, and the war began. The civil war started in 1948 and continues until now. Karenni Resistance Day is August 9th and is celebrated every year for the day that Karenni people resisted joining Burma. August 17th is Military Day, when the Karenni people built the Karenni Army. On September 8th, 1948, the leader of the Karenni army was killed. Every year, people take this day to honor him.

Years later, in 1962, the military lost the election, leading to a military coup. After losing the election, the military took control of the country with guns, violence, and force. The military arrested around 20,000 protesters and killed thousands. The military invaded Karenni villages and houses and burned them to the ground, forcing residents to flee their homes. Entire villages were burned. Karenni State was very isolated and had poor infrastructure, so communicating with other parts of Karenni State or the rest of the world in a timely manner was virtually impossible. Karenni people could not share their situation.

This is not only Karenni history; this is still the present situation. The students have a far more intimate knowledge of the brutality of the Myanmar Military than I could have imagined. Many have either been directly persecuted or have had close family or friends who have been imprisoned, tortured, raped, or killed by the Military. The Burmese military is now being supported by countries such as Russia, China, and India and fighting against the Karenni Army.

Estimates from human rights organizations on the ground place the number of Karenni people fleeing their homes at some point during the current war at 200,000 out of a total population of 300,000. With thousands of people being forced to leave their homes, there are now numerous IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps within Karenni State. Daw Noe Kue is an IDP camp, only a 2-hour motorbike ride from KSDC in Thailand and, where some of the students are from. Over 5000 people are living there. Currently, people are moving to the refugee camp in Thailand because on July 11th, 2023, about a month after arriving at KSDC, the Burmese military bombed the IDP camp inside of Karenni State. Being only a few kilometers from the school, the bombs were heard by some of the students.

There are 2 refugee camps along the Thai, Karenni border. Refugee Camp 1, a 20-minute motorbike ride from KSDC, is where the students studied on the Basic Course, and many have families living there. Camp 2 is a bit smaller, has a mix of Karenni and Karen, and a population of around 5,000. Camp 1 has a population of over 8000 people. Everyone entering camp in Thailand by the road must pass through a Thai government checkpoint. In the past, there was a road from Camp 1 into Karenni State, but the road is not safe anymore because the Burmese military watches it. This leaves Karenni people to walk through the jungle to get to camp or to

reenter Myanmar. The students told me their stories of walking through the jungle for 4 – 8 days and nights to reach Camp, some accompanied by the Karenni Army but some alone with only friends or family.

As of now, the majority of Karenni refugees do not have Burmese or Thai identification and, therefore, have no mobility rights. Students cannot go into neighboring towns or cities in case Thai officials catch them. The situation in Myanmar is terrible, but young Karenni people are dedicated to helping their communities in their futures. The Karenni Army is growing, and people hope that in the future, they can safely return home.

"What Does Karenni Culture Mean to Young Karenni People?"

Karenni culture is diverse because very ethnic and ~~very~~ many culture and in the Karenni people living together.

Community is important for me. Because it is united and harmonious, and it's good to be happy if you sit with many people. We can depend on each other, help each other and beautify our community. A community can give us a sense of belonging and identity, help us learn. My community is beautiful because I want to build it with many young people.

My culture is Eth Doe Pass Mi
My culture means are doing good for parents and living parents and expelling ghost and invading enemy.

To make make the community peaceful and safe.

that people have a different culture and then I will learn their culture and they can also learn my culture, too.

My culture is Karenni national flag. Our flag has 3 colours, red, white and blue. The red symbolizes courage and brave, the white symbolizes honesty and the blue symbolizes righteousness.

My community is beautiful because it is culture. my community is small. We made peasant work. Boy and girl so beautiful in the my community. after good-hearted, kind and quiet. 😊

My culture is traditional ~~these~~ clothes. This colour is red include Karenni flag. This means is brave and usually we were ~~was~~ wear in our traditional festivals and celebrates.

→ They help each other, Reciprocity, depend on other.

→ To Live in unity, To be able to unite as a Deeku.

→ beautiful for me because it is a tribe that comes the land of gods / because it is a race descended from a human and a Fairy.

My culture is important for me because of this is not appear in my community. Need to maintain my culture. My culture is makes it beautiful for my community. Culture need to has in my community.

* Karenni culture means that is our traditional wears, clothes and foods.

* My culture is important to me because we love it, we make it if we have no culture and history we can lose our traditional and language.

Deeku Festival is my culture.

Because this festival make our Karenni people to unity.

my culture is important to me, because when I go back to my mother land I should know about my culture and traditional, and my culture mean to me lucky and happy.

Thank you to my students who shared their culture with me and welcomed me into their community.

The Dancing of Lion Lake

Told to me by Sel Reh, who heard it from his parents, a Karenni Story

Long, long ago in Karenni state, there was a small and poor village. In the village, there was a teenage boy who lived with his old grandmother. The grandmother loved her grandson very, very much. The village was located beside a big river that provided for the villagers, a place to collect water, a place to bathe and wash, and a place to fish. In the rainy season, the river would grow fast, and the water would become too powerful to bathe in or fish in.

One day, the villagers decided they would build a dam in the river. The men of the village gathered together to walk to the river and begin building the dam. The grandmother's grandson went with his friends to help the men.

"Don't come home too late," the grandmother called to her grandson as he walked towards the river. When they arrived at the river, everyone got to work.

When the dam was halfway done being built, the older men of the village decided they wanted to make an offering to the spirits of the river to keep their dam safe and for the river to continue providing for the village. The villagers all agreed and decided they wanted to make a special offering, the offering of a human head. The older villagers agreed to offer the head of the teenage boy to the spirits. There was nothing the boy could do or say.

They took his severed head and put it on a spear in the ground beside the river and finished work on the dam. After the dam was completed, some of the men decided they would do some fishing for dinner before returning home to their families. They fished for a few hours and then started walking home as night fell.

By dusk, the grandmother had begun to feel concerned for her grandson, so she tightened her **longyi**, put a sun cover on her

head, and started walking towards the river. She walked slowly along the path and eventually saw some of the men from the village walking towards her.

"Where is my grandson?" she asks the first man.

"Oh... He is following behind us," said one of the men, looking back. He reached into his basket and handed the old lady a rope and a fish. "Here, take this." he said and continued walking.



A few minutes later, another man from the village came walking by.

"Where is my grandson?" the old lady asked him.

"Um... I think he is not too far behind me," replied the man. Without making eye contact or saying anything, he took a bloody fish from his basket, put it in the old lady's hand, and then kept walking.

The grandmother saw another man, and he said the same thing,

"Your grandson is following behind us with his friends." He gave her a fish for her dinner and hurried off to the village.

The grandmother took the rope from the first man, attached the three fish, tied the rope around her waist, and kept walking. She had almost reached the river when she saw another man.

"Where is my grandson?" She asked him. The man looked around and then looked into the old lady's eyes.

"We used his head as an offering for the dam," he said quietly. The grandmother said nothing, so he kept on walking. As

the grandmother stood there, she began to realize what the man had just told her.

"They killed my grandson?" she says quietly. But as she started to understand, she got angry.

"THEY KILLED MY GRANDSON?!" the grandmother, now furious and heartbroken, tightened the knot on the rope around her waist and quickly walked back to the village. Tears of sadness and rage dripped slowly from her eyes as the smell of dead fish surrounded her. Barefoot, she wiped the tears from her eyes and began to dance.

Some villagers had gathered and watched her as she threw her hands in the air and danced her way all around the village. She stomped her tiny old feet and danced around the village 3 times. With each step she took, the village began to shake, rocks trembled, and trees on nearby hills began to fall.

By her second dance around the village, houses had begun to crumble, and the earth beneath the village shook. An earthquake. Finally, after her third lap around the village, she came to a stop, and with a final stomp, the village sank into the earth in a giant landslide. Everything and everyone was gone. All the houses and animals, all of the people, even the grandmother. All that was left was a big indent where the village once stood. This indent eventually filled with water and became what today is known as Lion Lake in Shan State.

Longyi - A longyi is a cylindrical piece of fabric often sewn together at each end to make an enclosed circle and worn like a skirt by both men and women of Karenni culture. The longyi has no elastic or ties; you wear it by folding it tightly and tucking it in.



How the Chickens Became Wise

Told to me by Sel Reh, who heard it from his mother, a Karenni Story

Long, long ago, the Karenni people had to work very hard all day long on the farm just to have enough food to eat. This was before they had a language; they had no paper, no writing skills, and no time to learn language. God thought it was time that they learn language and learn to communicate, so he sent the people a big plank of wood with the Karenni Language written on it. From this plank of wood, they could learn.

God gave this plank of wood to the people, excited for them to learn. However, when the plank of wood arrived, the people paid it no attention. Instead, they headed to the farms as they had every day.

"We are busy; we don't have time to read this piece of wood." thought the people, "We'll read it when there's no more work to be done on the farm." They placed the plank on a big old stump to return to later. But there was always work to be done on the farm, and so the villagers passed by the plank every day and paid it no attention. They only focused on their work at the farms.

Weeks passed, and the termites who lived in the stump began eating at the plank.

Months passed, and the termites had eaten almost all of the plank when the people noticed anything had happened.

"Where is our wood!?" They asked the termites.

"I don't know, it's long gone." The termites replied. The villagers looked around and noticed the termites eating the remaining pieces of the plank, then looked around and saw the chickens eating the termites.

"Our language is in the chickens!" They cried. The people killed the chickens and read the chicken bones, hoping to find the wisdom eaten by the termites, eaten by the chickens.



In Karenni culture today, reading chicken bones is a very important part of their culture. Chicken bones are read to tell fortunes and futures. They are read before significant events such as engagements or during ceremonies. They are read to determine dates of festivals such as Deeku Festival, or as offerings to the spirit. Some ethnicities have different ways of reading the bones. In one way, the chicken bones are placed on bamboo sticks, and very thin pieces of bamboo are placed in pre-existing holes on each bone. The angle of the bamboo determines the fortune. Only certain village elders have the knowledge and ability to read the chicken bones.



The Jah

Told to me by Byar Reh, who heard it from his grandmother, a Kayah Story

In Kayah State, by Loikow Township, there is a big mountain. On the side of the mountain, there is a big cave. The cave is so deep that people think it goes on forever. No one has ever found the end. Many people visit the caves and walk around inside. Inside the caves, people found big coffins from many, many years ago. They are wooden coffins longer than any human. The tallest coffin is 15 feet and 8 inches. The coffins are said to belong to the Jah. The Jah are believed to come to this cave when they die. People have tried to take the coffins away from the cave in trucks, but upon trying to leave, the trucks would not start. People took this as a sign, and the coffins were returned to the cave.

The Jah look like people but are not human; they are like ghosts in human bodies. They are very tall and very thin and can only be seen by humans when they want to be seen. They have pale skin and long dark hair; their hair is matted, and their skin and clothes are dirty. They look like wild people. They walk around the forest at night, and some believe they eat humans. If you hear a howl in the dark, don't follow it; this could be the howl of a Jah. They will chase you before you have seen them and are fast, even barefoot, even though their feet are backwards.

A villager was walking home on a quiet path through the jungle under the moon's light. She hummed quietly as she walked the path, just as she had walked many times before. As she approached the crossroads, she noticed a figure standing under a tree. The woman slowed her step as she drew nearer. When she got closer, she could hear the sound of a woman crying.

"Miss, are you okay?" The woman asked when she was close enough to see a tall lady crying in the shadow of a tree. The lady looked up; her face was pale and hollow, her eyes were pitch black, and her hair fell over her face. Her clothes were ripped and old. The villager was startled but tried not to show her fear.

"My baby," the woman said, "My baby is desperately ill, and I am afraid she is going to die... Can you help me?"

"I... I will do what I can," replied the villager.

"My husband," said the woman, "My husband needs to know; he can help us. He is traveling now to the full moon celebration in the village of Moe Byeh. Find him and tell him our daughter is ill."

"But how will I find your husband?" the woman searched the ground and picked up a small stone. The woman recited something under her breath and blew onto the stone, then held out her hand.



"Look through this stone when you think you are near my husband, and you will be able to see him," with that, the lady, holding her baby, turned and walked straight into the dark jungle

and was gone. The villager shivered, pocketed the stone, and kept walking home.

The next day, as night fell, the villager made sure the stone was still in her pocket, then packed a small bag and began the walk towards Moe Byeh for the full moon celebration. The celebration was on top of a small mountain, as the villagers reached the top, the sky was pitch black, but the light of the full moon gave everything a soft glow. She scanned the crowd but could not see anyone who stood out to her. She reached into her pocket and took out the stone. Looking through the hole in the stone, she saw a new figure, a tall, thin figure standing taller than all the other people. Holding the stone tightly in her hand, she entered the crowd and tapped the tall man.

“Sir, I have been sent to speak to you,” she said.

The man looked her up and down and said nothing

“Your wife sent me to tell you that your daughter is extremely ill.”

The man's hollow eyes grew big, and his face took on a look of concern.

“How can you see me?” he asked.

The woman held out her hand, revealing the stone ring.

The man looked at the stone and looked at the woman. Without saying anything, he grabbed the stone from her hand and vanished.

With nothing left to do, the woman returned to her home and put the events of the two nights from her mind.

However, every once in a while, when walking through the jungle at night, she thinks she can see a Jah woman holding hands with a young girl from the corner of her eye.

Go Ma Eh

*Told to me by Saw Lay Wee, who heard it from his grandmother,
Kayen History*

Long, long ago, a woman sat by the rice fields in the shade of a big tree, taking a rest. A small fly flew around her once, twice, then landed on her stomach and took a bite. From this fly bite, the woman became pregnant.

After 9 months, the woman gave birth to a fatherless baby boy whom she named Go Ma Eh. As this boy grew up, his mother began to realize that he was unique. He had special abilities and powers. He was always more clever than the boys his age and wise beyond his years.

By the time he was a young adult, all the village knew of his abilities. He could tell you about the time to come, repair misfortune, and provide advice for problems you didn't even know you had. The villagers would go to him with problems or worries about their businesses.

"Fear not," Go Ma Eh would say slowly, "This year is not your year. However, your business will grow next year, and your family will be very well off."

Karenni people would come to him asking for help with the war. People from nearby villages who had heard of Go Ma Eh's powers would make the long journey just to speak with him.

"I am a poor man," Some would say, "I want to provide for my family and have enough to share with my children." Go Ma Eh would share his wisdom and give them the solutions to their troubles. Everyone who visited Go Ma Eh would leave feeling uplifted.

Once Go Ma Eh was a young adult and left home, he lived on a big piece of land, a land that was especially lush and fertile. Fruits grew all year round, and the flowers on his land always looked

bigger and brighter than anywhere else. As a man with much power and respect, Go Ma Eh had many enemies who were greedy for his power and riches.

One day, an enemy disguised as a poor villager came to Go Ma Eh's home. After their conversation, he opened a bottle of wine. He said he wished to share it with Go Ma Eh as a token of his gratitude. He poured Go Ma Eh a tall glass and waited for him to take a sip. Go Ma Eh was a kind and trusting man. He accepted the "poor villager's" gift with appreciation. But as the liquid touched his lips, Go Me Eh fell to the floor and died a quick and painless death. The liquid was a mixture of menstrual blood and poison.

After his death, the land around Go Ma Eh's house changed. Plants that never needed to be trimmed before became overgrown and wild. Fruit that never used to sour would go moldy and fall to the ground. Even Go Ma Eh's house changed. His stilt bamboo hut seemed to become overgrown itself. All the windows and doors became covered until his house was only a box on stilts with no entrances. It is said that his house is full of gold and jewels inside.



However, the villagers know of the curse Go Ma Eh put on his land. Anyone who tries to steal the treasure in his house will die on the spot, even people who do not ask for his permission before taking fruit or plants from his land will die. A boy was once walking by Go Ma Eh's land when he noticed a nearby banana tree overflowing with perfectly ripe fruit. The boy took a low-hanging banana and went on his way. While eating the banana that he took without asking, the boy choked and died.



Some believe that Go Ma Eh is still alive. His enclosed house is still standing to this day on his overgrown land. Some people go there to celebrate his birthday each year. On the day of his birth, his spirit comes back to this world. Some people journey to Go Me Eh's land, and after asking for permission to enter, they place candles in a circle around his house. As the candles burn, the people pray and share their problems with Go Ma Eh. It is said that he comes to them in their dreams with his wisdom and responses. On his birthday, when his spirit is near, no one can see Go Ma Eh, but he is present. He is the wind.

Why Centipede and Worm Could Not Be Together

Told to me by Loki, who heard it from a Kayan person, A Kayan story



On the jungle floor, there are many creatures and critters who roam about. Ants march by the thousands, and butterflies, moths, flies, and other winged critters flutter about the sky. Centipedes climb trees and hide under rocks or leaves to retain all the moisture they can.

Of all the centipedes, one centipede had fallen in love. This lady centipede had fallen in love with a big worm that lived in the area. One rainy day, when this centipede was gliding on the muddy jungle floor, she stopped and began talking with one of her friends, an ant. They spoke of their families and gossiped about the things they'd seen and heard. Then Ant asked Centipede if she had anybody special on her mind. Centipede confessed, blushing, that she had fallen in love with Worm.

"Oh, Centipede, what great news! I can picture the wedding already!" said Ant in support.

Ant, who got around a lot and was a bit of a gossip, took this news straight to Worm.

"Worm!" Ant exclaimed, "You have a secret admirer!"

"Who could you possibly be talking about?" replied Worm, a bit annoyed.

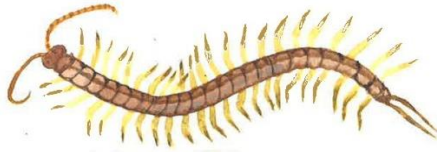
"Centipede has said she's fallen in love with you," said Ant, grinning.

"Urg!" cried Worm, "Centipede?! She's beautiful, but I could never be with Centipede."

"But why not?" responded Ant, a bit shocked and taken aback.

"Are you joking? Do you know how many shoes I would have to buy for her if I were to marry her? I can't afford that!" Cried Worm as he slithered away.

Ant thought about this for a minute, then took the news straight to Centipede.



"Centipede, I'm so sorry, but I told Worm about your feelings for him, and he said he can never be with you." Ant told her friend.

"But... But why?" replied Centipede, devastated.

"He said that if he were to be your husband, he would never be able to buy you all the shoes you'd need for your many feet." Centipede cried and felt sorry for herself, and then she gave the situation a good thinking.

"You know," she began saying to Ant, "I don't want to be Worm's wife anyways! Think of all the laundry I would have to do! I'm sure he comes home covered in mud from head to toe every day! I would never be able to rest as his wife!" then Centipede left, her many legs moving quickly as she glided away.

Ant reflected on the responses of Worm and Centipede, both so unwilling to put in the hard work. Ant could not understand their laziness, and she laughed at her friends. She laughed all the way back to her colony and kept laughing after that. She laughed so hard her stomach hurt and then kept on laughing. She laughed until her stomach shrunk to the size of her neck. To this day, ants' waists are still very small because of Ant, who laughed and laughed and laughed at Worm and Centipede.



Strange Siblings

Told to me by Aung Naing, who heard it from his mum, a Karenni Story

In a small town called Thandem in Karenni State, there lived two siblings. The siblings' parents had died when they were young, and so they lived in a small hut with their grandparents. The villagers of Thandem were weary of the siblings, and the siblings were known to be very strange. The girl's name was Yianta, and the boy's name was Latyn.

One day, Latyn was sitting outside in the shade and weaving a container for his **betel nut** from pine needles he had collected when his grandfather came outside and called for him.

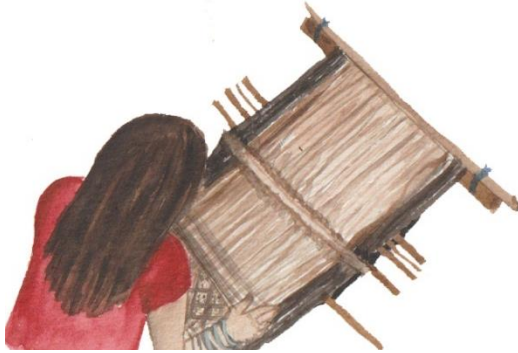


"Latyn," he said, "You are nearly an adult now, and it is time that you start to think about marriage. A nice young man like yourself, the girls will be lucky to have you. Is there anyone special that you like?"

Latyn thought about the girls in the village, and no one in particular caught his interest.

"I don't like any girl," he replied after a few moments, "I only like my younger sister, nobody is as special as her."

This same day, on the other side of the house, Yianta was sitting by her loom, weaving herself a new dress from human hair she had collected from herself and girls around the village. "This will make a beautiful dress." She thought as she wove. Then, her grandmother came out and called for her.



"Yianta, you are becoming a fine young woman," began her grandmother, "It is time that you begin thinking about marriage. A graceful and beautiful lady like yourself, the men will be lucky to be with you. Is there someone you have your eyes on?" Yianta thought for a moment and considered the young men of the village.

"No," she answered, "None of the men in the village are good enough for me. I only love my brother. No one can compare to him."

That evening, their grandmother and grandfather got together and discussed their findings from the day. They were not happy with the responses of their grandchildren.

"They cannot marry each other!" they agreed.

However, Yianta and Latyn had made up their minds; they did not want to be with anyone else, only each other. The village, already distasteful of the strange siblings, refused to allow them to be married to each other.

In the night, Yianta and Latyn packed a small bag of food and a blanket and ran away. They ran far away from the village to a mountain they used to visit as children. They hiked up to a big cave and fell asleep for the night.

That night, a heavy rain washed away the side of the mountain they had climbed earlier that day. In the morning, they awoke to find they were stuck in the cave. The hill they had climbed up was now a steep and muddy cliff. They would not make it down uninjured. Within a day, they ran out of food.

Back in Thandem, their grandparents were beside themselves. They were devastated and beyond worried for the safety of their grandchildren. The grandmother had an inkling that she knew where they were hiding. She packed a bag of fresh rice and fish, and early in the morning, when no one would see her, she started walking to a big cave they used to visit many years ago. When she reached the base of the mountain and realized she could not climb up to the cave, she called for her grandchildren.

“Yianta! Latyn!”

“We’re here, Grandma!” they cried as their faces popped out of the cave. “We are sorry for leaving you! We’re stuck, and we cannot climb down.”

Their grandma found a long vine and threw one side into the cave.

“I brought you food. I will hoist it up with this rope!” she shouted, “I must go now, but I will find a way to get you home safely.”

Then she turned around and headed back for Thandem. Their grandmother continued sneaking off to the cave secretly to give food to her beloved grandchildren. One day, the village discovered what she had been doing.

“We told you we do not support the decisions of your grandchildren!” said the community leaders. “For your disloyalty

and lies, you will be executed.” That day, the grandmother was killed.

After a day without food, Yianta and Latyn sat against the cave wall, hungry, tired, bored, and afraid. As they were resting, they were startled by the crashing sound of thunder and heavy pouring rain. A big storm was upon them. It rained like they’d never seen before, and it did not stop for many hours. After many hours of rain, a big flood had appeared, and as it reached the entrance of the cave, the cave began to fill with water.

“This may be our chance to escape!” they cried to each other. At that moment, a great enormous crocodile swam into the cave from the flood. Yianta cried out in fear. Latyn grabbed a sharp rock and cut the tail off of the crocodile. As he cut off the tail, blood spurted out, flying everywhere. The blood strayed their face, and as they licked their lips clean, they died.

The crocodile's blood was poisoned. Latyn, Yianta, and the crocodile lay dead in the cave flood as the water slowly filled it up.

As the night continued, the flood made its way to Thandem and washed away every house, animal, and every person. No one survived.

Betel nut- *Betel nut, also called areca nut, comes from the areca palm tree. It is a mild stimulant and has calming and has psychoactive properties. In Karenni Culture, many people chew ground betel nuts wrapped in betel leaf with tobacco. Many households will have a betel nut tray with all the different “ingredients”. Betel nut is an important part of Karenni culture.*

The Monkey Who Would Not Share

Told to me by Hse Myar, who heard it from her grandfather, a Karenni story

One day, two friends, a turtle and a monkey, were walking home after a day of being out. As they were walking, the sweet smell of fruit filled the air around them.

“Look!” exclaimed Turtle. “A tree full of ripe figs. Mh... I bet they are so sweet and delicious. Don’t you wish-” Turtle turned to see that Monkey had already dropped his things and was quickly climbing up the tall tree. Turtle looked up. All he could do was watch.

“Mh!” cried Monkey as he picked and shoved the fresh fruit into his mouth. “These are the tastiest figs I have ever had in my life! I am so glad we stumbled upon this tree.”

“That’s great,” answered Turtle, envious, “Do you think you can toss some down for me? I’m starving.”

Turtle waited at the bottom of the tree for Monkey's response. Monkey, enjoying the fig tree all to himself and did not want to share, took a bruised fig and rubbed it on his bum, then threw it down for Turtle.

“Urg! This fruit smells bad, Monkey! Can you throw down another one?” said Turtle.

“No!” yelled Monkey.

Sick and tired of Monkey being greedy, Turtle decided he would find a way to get the fruit.



"Fine," he said to Monkey, who was hardly paying any attention anymore and picking all the fruit he could.

"I'm going to keep on heading back home, and when I get home, I am going to sleep with your wife!" then he started heading in the direction of their homes.

It took Monkey a few moments to register what Turtle had just said.

"He's going to do what?!" He yelled to himself. But Monkey, who had eaten as many figs as possible, was so full he could not move. He sat in the tree for some time while he digested and thought about how he would get back at Turtle.

After a quick nap, he found he could move again. Monkey quickly picked as many figs as he could until his arms could hold no more. Then he climbed down the tree and started running home. He knew he was faster than Turtle.

During this time, Turtle, who knew he was not faster than Monkey, had chosen a nice dark area to stop at. With the ground covered in fallen leaves, he dug himself a hole big enough to fit his shell in, then laid down with his feet facing up and covered himself with leaves.

He lay very still until he heard Monkey coming around the trees. He kicked his legs up at the perfect moment, and Monkey tripped and fell face-first onto the ground, knocking himself out and spilling his fruit all over the ground. Turtle got up, slowly collected the fruit, and then went home.

Egotistic Eagle and the Songbird

Told to me by Philip, who heard it from an old teacher, a Burmese Story



Long ago, there was an eagle. A great big bald eagle who spent his days flying through the air and hunting small animals to eat. The eagle soared through the clear blue skies and looked down at the land below him.

“I am the biggest bird, and I am the strongest, fastest, and most clever bird in all the sky. Nobody can beat me!” He cried.

Eagle was not humble. He was a proud and boastful bird. As he flew through the skies one day, he went to take a rest on a great big tree.

As he gazed over the land and sky, he became irritated when he heard the chirping of a small songbird. He looked around in annoyance, trying to locate where the maddening noise was coming

from. Then he saw a small yellow and gray bird pecking about on the jungle floor for food.

“Oh, a tiny songbird!” said the eagle, looking down at the little bird, “You are so small, I bet that you cannot do anything but sing your annoying little tunes.”

“Excuse me! That is very rude,” responded the furious little bird, “Are you crazy? Do you want to challenge me? Just try and kill me.”

The fierceness and daring of the little bird infuriated the eagle, who was not used to being challenged. The eagle got angry.

“Okay, little bird, I will try and kill you! You better watch out.” With this, Eagle flew up many feet above the ground. When satisfied with the distance, he spun around and dove with great speed to the forest floor.

The little songbird was quick, though, and dashed into the covering of an old cow print dried up in the mud. The eagle could not reach him, and he was forced to retreat and try again. As he dove down the second time, the songbird darted into another dried-up footprint, and Eagle missed him again.

“How can this small bird be evading me!” thought Eagle as he flew up again. “This time I will get him.”

Eagle, who was by this time very angry, flew up extra high before spinning around and then dive-bombed straight for the songbird. The songbird, cheerfully hopping about, leaped and dashed to yet another footprint and watched as Eagle flew full speed right into the ground. Eagle was flying with such speed that the impact of his body crashing into the earth killed him.

“Don’t think too highly about yourself.” - Philip

Why Elephants Walk So Gently

Told to me by Sel Reh, who heard it from his parents, a Karenni Story

Long, long ago, in the jungle, there lived a proud tiger. This tiger was so proud he believed he was the greatest animal in all the world. One day, he noticed an elephant as he was dozing off under the shade of a big tree.

"That is one big animal... He would keep me fed for days, and I wouldn't have to hunt," thought the tiger to himself. He got up and slowly walked over to where the elephant was drinking water.

"You are one big animal," he said, looking up at the elephant.

"Ya, I guess I am," said the elephant humbly.

"I bet you're also the strongest, bravest, and loudest animal in all the jungle," said the tiger mischievously.

"Ya, maybe, I don't really know," replied the elephant, uninterested.

"Well... let us have a competition," proposed the tiger, "a yelling match, to see who is louder. Just for fun."

"What do you have in mind for the winner?" asked the elephant skeptically.

"If I win, I get to eat you. If you win, then I will not eat you. And if you decline, I will hunt you down," said the tiger, grinning.

"Well, it seems I have no choice then," said the elephant.

"This time tomorrow, in the open field," stated the tiger as he turned and walked away.

The next day, the tiger and elephant met in the open field and greeted each other.

"When I count to 3, we will begin roaring, and whoever is loudest will be the winner. 1 - 2 - 3 -"

"RRROOOAAAARRRRRRRRRRRR!" they both cried with all their might.

Tiger, who was as dishonest as he was arrogant, had promised all his friends a bite of the elephant if they hid in the trees and roared with him.

They stopped yelling.

"Well, tiger, I had my doubts, but you are clearly the winner. I can admit defeat," said Elephant

"Yes, well, you never stood a chance," said the tiger boastfully. "I have already eaten enough for today, but tomorrow at this time, meet me here, and I will eat you up." With that, he strode off.

Elephant left the field feeling disappointed in himself and depressed. He stomped around the jungle for what he thought would be the last time.

"Watch it, Elephant, you almost stepped on me!" said a small voice far below him. "Wait, what's wrong? Why do you look so sad?" Elephant looked down and saw a small rabbit near his big feet.

"I made a bet with Tiger and lost. Now he's going to eat me!"

"Oh! I hate tigers!" replied Rabbit. "Maybe I can help you trick him, and you can live."

Elephant agreed to try anything, and Rabbit prepared his plan.

The next day, Rabbit brought Elephant back to his small home and began cooking up a pot of rice.

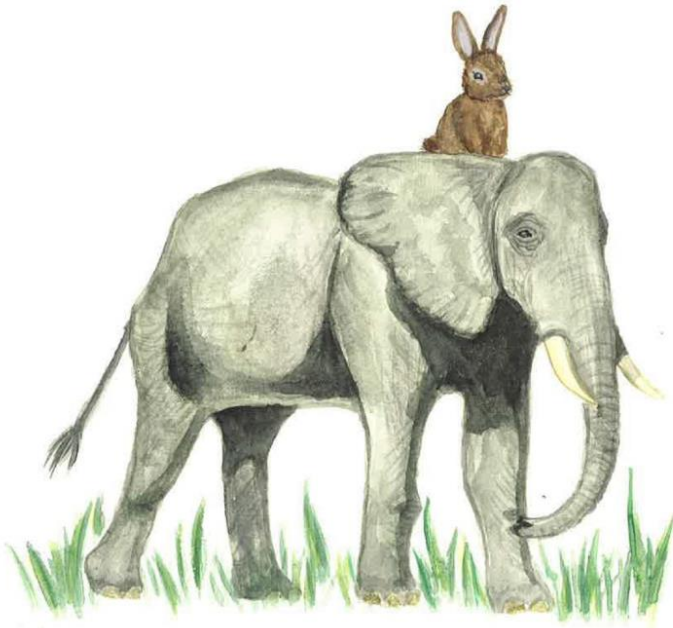
"Pound this rice with that stick until it is all fine and gummy," ordered Rabbit.

Elephant did as he was told. When the rice was pounded and sticky, Rabbit took the pot. He spread the rice on Elephant's legs and climbed onto his back. He spread the sticky pounded rice over Elephant's back and then glued himself to Elephant's back with the rice.

"Let's go!" Rabbit cried to Elephant, and Elephant began walking to the open field, hoping Rabbit knew what he was doing.

“Oh good!” cried Tiger as they entered the field. “My lunch comes with a rabbit!”

“You’re going to eat this elephant?!” demanded Rabbit with distaste, “Have you ever eaten an elephant before? Their skin is so tough and sticky, you’ll be chewing forever! Look, he’s so sticky I’m stuck to him!” Rabbit tried to lift his feet, showing Tiger just how sticky Elephant was.



Tiger looked at Elephant and walked over to him. He reached out and touched Elephant’s leg.

“Urg, you’re right!” he exclaimed, “I can’t eat this. My mouth will be glued shut! You’re lucky, Elephant.” Tiger gave Elephant a disgusted look, then turned his back on them and walked back into the jungle.

“You did it!” said Elephant, full of joy, “Thank you so much, Rabbit! How can I repay you?”

“Well,” began Rabbit, “I am happy to help out a friend, but next time we meet, don’t step on me!”

“I will make sure I don’t!” Elephant replied.

To this day, elephants, grateful for their friend's help, always walk softly and gently so as never to accidentally step on a rabbit.

The Trickster Rabbit

Told to me by Kue Reh and Sel Reh, who heard it from their families, a Karenni Story

In the jungle, there lived a proud and arrogant tiger. He crowned himself king of the jungle and the ruler of all the other animals. The creatures of the jungle feared this tiger and did nothing to contradict anything the tiger said or did. All the creatures were unhappy to be ruled by such an undeserving king. Within the jungle, there lived one animal who was brave enough and clever enough to trick the tiger. A rabbit named Sey. Sey was tired of Tiger bullying the smaller creatures and boastfully walking through the jungle as if he owned it. Sey was a clever rabbit and devised a plan to rid the jungle of Tiger.



One day, Sey was collecting food when he saw Tiger coming. Sey jumped with fear at the sight of Tiger, then said,

“Oh, Tiger, it’s only you. I was scared for a moment!”

“Who could you be scared of if not me? No one in the whole jungle is more

terrifying than I!” roared Tiger.

“Oh, well, the other day, I saw a tiger who was bigger, stronger, and more terrifying than you. I thought maybe it was him approaching. He would have scared me,” said Sey calmly.

“What!? A tiger greater and more fearful than me? Take me to him at once and I will show him who the strongest tiger in the jungle is.”

Rabbit agreed, and they started walking together. After a while of walking, Sey stopped and said,

“This is where he lives. He likes to spend his days in the cool shade of that big stone well over there.”

Sey pointed to a large stone well close to where they stood. Tiger puffed up his chest and slowly peered into the well. Then he turned back to Sey,

“You were right! There is a tiger down there, but he is not big or strong. He is ugly and shameful. I will have no problem beating him in a fight!” Tiger looked down again to see his opponent when Sey came up beyond him and gave him a big push. Tiger, who had not been paying attention to Sey, lost his balance and tumbled to the bottom of the well.

At the bottom of the well, he found he was alone, only him, water, and his reflection. Sey leaped with joy and looked down into the well.

“Good thing you are as stupid as you are ugly!” he cried down at Tiger.



As Sey walked away, he realized he could achieve much more out of this situation. There was a chance Tiger would escape from the well, and then he would definitely hunt Sey down. Sey started heading to a nearby village instead of back to the jungle.

When he reached the village, he told the villagers that a great big tiger had fallen into the nearby well and that the tiger would make an excellent dinner for many families. Excited by the news, the villagers packed their machetes, matches, and seasonings, then headed with Sey to the well. Sey watched as the villagers killed Tiger then hoisted him out of the well.

"Oh no!" yelled one of the villagers making a fire, "We forgot a pot!"

"Oh no!" the others cried in unison.

"Sey," said a tall, thin man. "You are the fastest out of all of us. Will you go back and grab a pot from my house?"

"Sure I can!" replied Sey.

As Sey left the villagers at the well, he thought about simply returning to the jungle. The villagers had already taken care of Tiger. Then an idea came to him, maybe he could gain even more from this situation. Sey hurried to the village and searched for a pot on a fire stand. Instead of grabbing the pot, Sey rubbed off the black soot from the side of the pot and smeared it on his face. As he left the house, he grabbed a bamboo-woven chicken pen and ran back to the well.



“Villagers! Villagers!” he cried out as he arrived, “Your village! It’s burning to the ground! All that was left of your house was this bamboo chicken pen...”

The villagers wasted no time and returned to their village, leaving behind the freshly cut tiger meat.

Sey looked around and noticed an old man sitting under a tree who had not yet returned to the village. The old man was resting and holding onto a beautifully hand-crafted golden cane.

“What a beautiful cane,” Sey thought, “I must have it.”

Sey collected as much tiger meat as he could and then walked a short distance until he found a nice open area. Sey took the tiger meat and buried it, spread out, in the ground. Then, he fashioned himself a simple bamboo cane and walked over to the old man.

“Old man,” Sey said to the old villager, “Let’s trade canes.”

“Are you crazy?” replied the old man. “My cane is pure gold, and yours is just bamboo, I may be old but I’m not a fool!”

“Well, I have not told you yet but my cane is magical. It can make food appear when you are hungry. Come, let me show you.” The old man, a poor villager, followed Sey to a nice open area. Sey stabbed the ground with his bamboo cane right into a pile of fresh meat.

"Look here, what did I tell you?" said Sey. He did it again in a different spot, and the cane stabbed another pile of fresh meat. "You will never have to be hungry again!" he said, grinning at the old man.

"Fine," the man sighed, "I don't want to be hungry anymore. I will trade you for my golden cane." Sey quickly traded with the old man and left him, clasping his new prize.

"Aha, old fool!" he cried to himself, "No one is more clever than me!"

The man, trying to use the cane to find meat, realized that the rabbit had tricked him. He returned to the well enraged just in time to see the villagers returning as well.

"He tricked us!" the villagers yelled, "There was no fire, and now all the tiger meat is gone!"

"He tricked me too!" said the old man, "He stole my golden cane. We have to find this rabbit!"

The villagers agreed they would hunt the rabbit and kill him. The villagers tracked Sey through the jungle, and when they saw him, they cried out.

"There he is!"

Sey, startled, grabbed his golden cane and dashed into a small hole in the ground. The villagers, who could not follow him into the hole, tried to think of a plan.

"Pass me your rope," one villager said to another. "We'll drop the rope down to see how deep the hole is, then we'll know how long the rabbit can stay in there for."

The villager dropped a rope into the hole. Sey, sitting quietly in the tiny hole saw the string and gently took hold of it. Then, very gently, he rolled the string until he held a big handful. Then he peed on the end of the string and rolled it in the dirt.

"Wow, that is a very deep hole!" said a villager after pulling up the string.

Only the tip of the rope touched the bottom. See, it's all muddy." The villagers decide that the rabbit could stay in that big

hole for a very long time. They did not have the time to wait around for him to come out, so they set a trap at the hole's entrance. The old man Sey had tricked was not too eager to return home and tell his wife of his trade. He decided to stay beside the trap and wait for the rabbit to come out. The villagers gave him a big brass gong to ring. When the rabbit came out with that, everyone but the man left.

After a few minutes, Sey became bored. He wanted to leave the dark hole and run around the jungle, but he saw the trap they had set for him.

"Hey, old man!" yelled Sey, "Quick! Come into the hole with me. The sky is going to fall on you!"

The man looked up quickly and saw that the clouds were indeed moving. Still watching the sky, he made his way over to the hole and stepped right into the trap, setting it off. Sey jumped out of the hole and laughed at the old man.

"You old fool!" he cried.

Sey took the gong from the old man and rang it loud and clear. Then he ran off with it. The villagers quickly arrived and see the old man dead in the trap.

"He's tricked us again!" they said, then they heard the gong ringing in the distance and ran off, chasing after it. Sey rang the gong, running and laughing at the people. He ran with the gong all the way to the top of a mountain. When he saw the people approaching, Sey threw the gong down the mountain. The gong crashed and clanged on every stone it hit.

The people hearing the gong going back down the mountain, turned around and chased it all the way down.

"Fools!" cried Sey as he and his golden cane hopped away.



The Kayan Necklaces

Told to me by Noh Myar, a Kayan Story

Long, long ago, there lived a man in a village. This man had two daughters who were the most beautiful girls in all the village. The men of the village all wanted their hand in marriage, and even neighboring villagers knew of their beauty.

When the sisters grew up, they chose lucky villagers as their husbands. They lived happily for many years.

One day, the sisters decided to go into the forest and forage for food. The girls went to the forest together with their baskets and came across a clove tree.

“Oh! Look at this clove tree! We must fill out baskets with as many clove leaves as we can.” Said one of the sisters.

However, the clove leaves were too high up for the girls, and they could not reach them. For a while, they struggled and tried to reach them but failed. After a few minutes of trying, they heard a noise coming from behind them.

“Do you need some help reaching those leaves?” said a rough and deep voice.

The girls turned around and shrieked as they saw a big and tall monster. His dark hair was long and matted. His skin was raw and scarred, and his bottom teeth stuck out above his upper lips in sharp fangs.

“Don’t be scared,” he said to the girls, “I will not hurt you, I promise. I just want to help you.” The sisters looked at each other and decided they would accept the monster's help. He reached up without trouble and, in one giant hand, picked enough leaves to fill their basket.

The girls chewed some clove leaves and thanked the monster graciously, then turned to leave.

"Where do you think you're going?" the monster called after them, "I just helped you with your problem. Now you must marry me!"

"What! No way!" the girls cried, "We have husbands waiting for us at home! If we're not back soon, they will be worried."

"Your husbands do not threaten me. I am not scared of anything! I am the biggest, strongest, and most terrifying monster in this forest. I am taking you back to my house, and tonight, one of you will sleep on my left, and one of you on my right. I will sleep soundly between you two," he said, grabbing their arms and leading them into the forest. The girls could do nothing but follow him.

They walked a long distance before reaching the monster's home. The night was falling, and the girls were feeling very afraid. The monster started cooking dinner, and the sisters decided they needed a way to escape.

"Excuse me," said the older sister politely, "we hate to trouble you, but we must use the toilet. May we step outside quickly? We will be right back."

"Fine." grunted the monster in response, "but be fast. If you try and run, I will catch you."

The sisters hurried outside and walked until they were out of earshot.

"We need to escape!" they agreed.

They stood there trying to think of a plan when the younger sister noticed shiny iron wire in a nearby bush.

"I know!" she exclaimed, "we are going to scare the monster!"

She grabbed the iron and wrapped it around her sister's neck then took the rest and wrapped it around her own neck,

"We will make the most ugly and terrifying faces we can and tell the monster that we are monsters!" she continued.

They walked back to the monster's house with iron wire wrapped around the necks. They stuck their tongues out and opened their eyes as wide as they could.

"What happened to you?!" shrieked the monster when he saw them.

"We may be beautiful in the day but as night falls, our necks grow long and wiry, our eyes grow big and bulge, and we become ugly creatures," they said to the monster.

"I cannot look at you! You're terrifying!" he said, cowering at the sight of them. "Tomorrow, when you are beautiful again, I will come find you."

The girls left the house and ran as fast as they could to their village and their father's home.

"Father! Father!" they yelled as they ran into the bamboo hut of their father.

"What is it?" their father replied, hurriedly running towards them.

"When we were out in the forest, a monster took us and tried to make us his wives," said the younger sister.

"We escaped by telling him we were monsters and tying this wire around our necks. He believed us and was scared of us." said one sister.

"But he said tomorrow he will come find us when we are beautiful again and take us away," said the other.

Their father thought about what they had said. Then he replied,

"There is only one answer. I will make you permanent necklaces so the monster will never come after you again." The girls agreed, never wanting to be taken away again.



Their father crafted them thick, beautiful copper neck bands that could never be removed. The girls wore them with pride and were never bothered by the monster again. Other women from the village heard of their story and, afraid themselves of the monster, had their own necklaces crafted. The necklaces became a tradition for the Kayan people and are still worn by many of the Kayan women.

The 7 Angels

Told to me by Hse Myar, who heard it from an old teacher, a Karenni Story

Long ago, in Deemawso Township in Karenni state, there was a man named Phoe Byar Da. He was a man who had extraordinary powers but he was lazy. He wasted his days sitting in the shade of trees and wishing for a nice lake to cool off in. He was capable of making a lake but too lazy to ever do so. One day, two other sorcerers came and challenged Phoe Byar Da.

"Our powers are greater than yours!" they boasted. Phoe Byar Da took this as an opportunity to use his gifts finally and in the blink of an eye, he created 7 great lakes spread throughout the nearby land. Unfortunately, he was too lazy to finish his work, and the lakes remained rugged and rough around the edges.

In a village not too far away from the newly created lakes, there lived a poor and orphaned cow herder. His name was Pho Law, and he was an extremely hard worker for a young man. Every day for as long as he could remember, he would take his dog and his cows and walk them through the forest to a big open field to graze. His dog was an old dog but still quick and a good hunter. While the cows grazed, Pho Law and his dog hunted for small rodents or birds. On a day like any other, Pho Law sat under a tree playing his bamboo flute when his dog returned from the forest dripping wet.

"Where have you been?" he asked his dog curiously, "There's no lake or river around here, and it hasn't rained for days!"

Pho Law jumped up and followed his dog back into the forest. They walked for a short while before coming to an opening, and before them was a great pristine lake. The cool water shimmered in the blazing sun.

"Amazing!" Pho Law cried out, "How can this be? There has never been a lake here before!"

Pho Law began to strip down, ready to jump into the water, when he heard a splashing sound. He looked over a bush and, a few meters away, noticed there were girls splashing about in the water. As he looked closer, he realized there were 7 girls. Each one more beautiful than the other.

"I have never seen such gorgeous women," he thought. He watched them for a few moments, awestruck. The girl's long brown hair shined golden in the summer sun. Their skin sparkled in the light. They lounged on rocks by the shore, laughed, and played in the water.

"Those girls are too perfect to be ordinary villagers. They're angels!" Pho Law realized. Before they could notice him, he crept back into the forest and returned to his cows.

In the following days Pho Law returned to the lake, and every day the 7 angels were there bathing and lounging in the water. Pho Law was always too shy to talk to them and always stayed close to the forest.



One day, Pho Law brought his friend, Thu Da Nu, to see the lake. Thu Da Nu was the only person he had told about the magic lake. As they arrived before the lake, Thu Da Nu shouted.

"It's real! It's amazing!" his shouts startled the 7 angels, and they turned around and saw the two young men. Scared, they all jumped out of the water, grabbed their things then disappeared into the forest. One angel took her time grabbing her stuff and was left behind. She wasn't scared like her sisters but curious about the men in front of her. Pho Law took this opportunity to finally talk to the girl.

"Hello," he said, "I am Pho Law. What is your name?"

"My name is Kanyar Maw," responded the girl with a sweet and gentle voice.

He asked her what she was doing there, how the lake had come here, where she lived, and why she spent all her time in the lake.

She answered his questions and spoke gracefully. When Thu Da Nu had to leave and return to the village, Pho Law and the angel sat by the lake and talked until the sunset.

"Come with me to my village tonight. We can eat dinner together," he said to her.

"I cannot go to your village," she replied, turning away, "I am an angel. I have to stay with my sisters."

Pho Law walked home with his dog and cows that night with only one thing on his mind. Kanyar Maw.

"I must marry this girl," he thought to himself.

The next day, the cow herder returned to the lake in search of Kanyar Maw. They confessed that they had fallen in love and wished to be married. In the evening, he followed her to her father's house to ask for her hand in marriage, accompanied by his friend Thu Da Nu. When Pho Law asked for Kanyar Maw's hand in marriage, the angel's father denied him.

“You are just a poor orphan and a cow herder. You cannot marry my daughter!” he bellowed at Pho Law. Kanyar Maw cried into the shoulder of her older sister, and Pho Law left feeling complete despair and sorrow.

Seeing his youngest daughter's sadness and the cow herder's love for her, the angel's father took pity on Pho Law and called him back.

“I can see you love my daughter,” he said, “And I can see my daughter loves you. I will allow you to marry her, and you can have my blessing. But if you take my youngest daughter, who will carry water for our family?”

The angels looked at one another.

“I will!” cried Thu Da Nu, stepping forward. It would be my honor to stay here and collect your water.”

The angels giggled and smiled at him.

“Then it is decided!” said their father. “Pho Law, you will marry my daughter tomorrow.”

The wedding was small and beautiful, and Pho Law and Kanyar Maw could not have been happier. That night Pho Law decided that he wanted to prove his worth to his wife's father, with the help of Thu Da Nu and some shovels. The two young men set out for the 7 lakes. They dug and dug and dug until the lake's shore was beautiful and clean, then they moved on to the next one. They dug all around the perimeter of each lake until all 7 lakes were perfect.



In the morning, Pho Law brought his father-in-law to show him what he had done.

"Magnificent," his father-in-law said with approval. "You may be young, but I can see you are strong-willed and will be a good husband. You have impressed me."

Years passed, and the happy couple grew older. They had a son, and he grew up swimming in the lakes. When the son had grown up, Pho Law passed away. His coffin rested on a mountaintop that overlooked all 7 lakes and remained there for a long time. The 7 lakes are still there today and are an important and beautiful place in Karenni State. Karenni people built shrines on the mountain. On full moons, some people visit the shrines and leave offerings for the 7 angels.



Our Ancestor, the Sea Dragon

Told to me by Loki, who heard it from Kayan elders, a Kayan Story

Long, long ago, in the deep sea, there lived a beautiful and wise sea dragon. She loved her life in the ocean but always felt something was missing. She longed to learn about the human world and yearned to meet people. So, one day, she left the sea and set off in search of humans.

After a while, she came across a small frog.

"Do you know where I can find the people?" she asked him kindly. The frog told her that he did not know where to look for people but that every day he saw a bright light moving from the forest every morning then back to the mountain every night.

"I am sure the light will know where you can find the people," the frog told her.

The dragon asked the frog if he could be so kind as to lead her to the mountain he spoke of. The frog obliged and led her to the top of a mountain and the mouth of a cave.

When the dragon entered the cave, she transformed into her human form. Looking around, she realized someone obviously lived there. There was an unmade bed, dirty pots and pans and things lying all around.

"What a mess!" she thought to herself. She walked around the cave, tidied the place, made the bed, washed the dishes, and organized the cave. After she finished, she decided it was best that she left and waited to see who would return.

That evening, as night fell, she saw a handsome man walk into the cave. The man was shocked to see his home so neat, no dirty dishes, bed made, and everything in order! He was tired and didn't know what to do, so he fell asleep. The next day, the dragon woman saw the man leave his house again and head down into the

forest. In her female form, the dragon entered the cave, washed the dishes, made the bed, and tidied up like before. He then left the cave to rest in the forest.

That night, the man returned home to find his house neat and tidy again. Now, feeling suspicious, he decided that he would only pretend to go out in the morning the next day and then come home early and catch whoever was doing this.

The following day, the man left for the forest, and the dragon woman entered the cave and began cleaning. After a short while, the man returned home and was shocked to see a beautiful woman in his cave. Startled, he asked her,

“Who are you, and what are you doing cleaning my cave?” The woman did not want him to know she was a sea dragon, so she made up lies to tell him. They sat in the cave and talked until the stars shone bright overhead. They soon realized they had much in common and were falling in love. From that night on, the woman stayed in the cave, and they lived together happily. However, as good as the dragon was at keeping up her human form when she slept, her shadow was the shadow of a dragon. The woman was always careful to fall asleep after the man and always woke up before him.

Many months passed, and the woman became pregnant. With her pregnancy, the woman became very weak and very tired. One day, she fell asleep when the man was out collecting food and medicine from the forest. He came home early to check on her, only to find her fast asleep. When he looked around the room and saw her shadow cast against the cave wall, he noticed it was a dragon's shadow and let out a scream. His scream woke the woman up, but the man was already running back to the forest, furious to have been tricked by a dragon.

The dragon waited for him to return, but days went by, and he never returned.

Heartbroken, she decided to return to the sea. Before returning to her home in the sea, in dragon form, she laid two big eggs on the beach, then waded into the ocean and disappeared.

Later that day, a monk named Tay Taa was walking the beach and washing medicinal herbs in the ocean water when he noticed the eggs. He carefully carried the eggs all the way back to his home on the top of a mountain. That night, he lit a fire to signal to his friend, another monk named Dee Ha, to come to his house. When Dee Ha arrived, Tay Taa showed him the dragon eggs, and they each decided to keep one.



That night, after Dee Ha returned home, the egg began to crack. A few moments later he was holding a baby girl. He named her Shway-Nan-Dor, and she was the first Kayan woman. Tay Taa's egg also hatched that night, and out came a baby boy. Tay Taa was so excited tears fell from his eyes, and he named him Tay Taa Dee Ha Ya-Sah, and he is believed to be the father of the **Pa-O people**.

Dee Ha could not keep the baby girl as he was a monk, so he took her to a nearby village, left her with the village headman, and told him how the baby had come from a dragon's egg. Tay Taa decided to give the baby boy to the king.

Eighteen years passed, and the king wanted his adopted son to be married. However, none of the women in the village were good enough for him. One day, a soldier visited the village where Shway-Nan-Dor lived and brought her back to the king. The king agreed she was perfect for his son, so the two fell in love and were married.

They lived happily for a long time and had two children. A boy and a girl. One day, Shway - Nan-Dor and her husband went to visit the village where she had grown up in and she fell terribly ill and died. The local spirits were angry that she and her husband had not made offerings to them on their wedding day,



Tay Taa Dee Ha Ya-Sah raised his children alone, and when they were grown up, the daughter wanted to follow the traditions of her mother. She returned to the village where her mother had lived and died and wore her hair in the style of a dragon to honor her grandmother, the sea dragon. The son stayed with

his father and lived his life as a king.

The girl following her mother's traditions is why in Kayan culture, the women wear brass coils around their neck to resemble their ancestor, the sea dragon.

Pa-O - *Pa- O is an ethic group of Myanmar that is "brother" to the Kayan people. They have a very similar language.*

People Who Shared Their Stories



“My name is Sel Reh, and I am 19 years old. I am Kayah ethnicity and my family lives in Karenni State. They live in a small village. My village name is War Ngot. When I was young my parents always tell to me and my siblings stories. In the future I hope to be a lawyer and a leader.”



“I am Hse Myar, I come from Karenni State and I am 21 years old. I continue my education because I want to help my new generation of Karenni people by learning as much as I can, anyway. Before I wanted to be a tour guide but depending on the situation maybe I will change my goal.”



“Hello my name is Aung Naing and I am 20. My parents live in Loikow Township in Karenni State and I have 13 siblings. I like to study about computer. I have many goals for the future.”



“My name is Khu Kue Reh, I am 23 years old. I am Kayah. I study now at KSDC and my favorite subject is English subject. I want to improve my speaking, reading and learning. I walked to Thailand with my younger sister in 2021. I want to say thank you.”



“My name is Philip. I am 18 years old. I am Kayah. I came to Thailand to study at KSDC because I want to learn about democracy and politics and improve my skills. I like playing games and playing football.”



“My name is Byar Reh. I am 23 years old. I am Kayah ethnic. I came to Thailand and study to learn about Karenni history and learn about English and computer skills. I am a Karenni soldier for 3 years. When I finish school, I will go back to my soldier camp and fight to get independence.”



“My name is Noh Myar and I am 21 years old. I am Karenni. I came to Thailand because in Myanmar I don't feel security. In my future I will come back to my home town and I will do my own business and support my family.”



“My name is Khu Saw Lay Wee. I am 23. I am Kayah ethnicity. My family is living in Karenni state and is poor so last year I came to Thailand to search. My dream is to support my family because I have many family members.”



My name is Loki, I am Kayan. I am the Community Project Management teacher at KSDC. I am 41 years old and I live in Kayan Long Neck village with my family. I have 2 daughters.



"What are your Hopes for the Future of Karenni State?"

I want to see
a peace and development
state.

My hopes for the future of Karenni
State will be peaceful soon. I hope
that the people who are fleeing
because of the war will be able
re-establish the Karenni land
peacefully.

In the future I hope Karenni
Karenni state ~~is~~ peace
and freedom I think.
May be in 2025 Karenni state
don't fight.

I hope, the future
for Karenni state is that
we will be justice and
peace i.e we have no wars,
and armed conflicts. I
prayed for my people everyday.

I hope in the future Karenni
state will get federal and will
be federal state. ~~to~~ I hope
the Karenni government will ~~manage~~
manage all resources of Karenni
state and Karenni people will live
peaceful.

I hopes for the future of
Karenni state ~~is~~ will get
independent and peace. we
don't ~~have~~ need war, kills and
now we need justice and
freedom.

I hope for Karenni state is that be peace the last month in 2023. Because I want to meet with my family and friends. So be peace firstly.

We are hopes over throw the military dictator for the future of Karenni state.

I wanna see my Karenni State stop civil war and I hope my Karenni state get a peace.

I hopes for the future of Karenni state is to get federal democracy and to have a leader who can lead all ethnic groups to unite.

In the future I hope will Karenni State Peace. because young people are fighting in the war.

In the future in Karenni state, I hope to get Freedom and no war. I just need peace and happy country.

For the past 6 months, I have been living and teaching English at KSDC (Karenni Social Development Center). I have been immersed in the way of life of Karenni people and extremely inspired by my environment and surroundings. This book is a collection of 13 Karenni mythologies from different Karenni ethnicities shared with me by my students. There are creation stories, lessons, and different versions of history. I then illustrated the stories as the images came to me. I am so grateful for the students' willingness to share their stories, past experiences, and knowledge, and I am greatly in admiration of their strength, compassion, and kindness.