



LEGENDS OF MICRONESIA

Book Two

MICRONESIAN READER SERIES

Legends of Micronesia

BOOK TWO

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and fruit this year. Bejwak has just come from his father Irilik in Eeb and told us."

When they heard that crying before dawn, the king and the people came together and gave prayers of thanks to Bejwak and Irilik for the coming harvest. The priests talked to the people. Afterwards, there was a happy feast.

The *ao* on Jekkar's head brought him luck. It passed on to his children and his children's children. They too can be seen in the Marshall Islands today. They are small, dark sea birds, each with a white cap on its head, that looks something like a halo. They are handsome birds that move fast, and they are the best fishers among all the bird children of Irilik.

As they fly over the waves, their bright eyes look into the blue water. Their beaks are turned downward, ready to snatch. Each dive brings up a fish.

Lijakkwe, The Beautiful

The island of Ebon, in the Ebon Atoll of the Marshall Islands, has so many food trees and other plants that many persons believe it once was the land of Eeb, a heavenly place.

The richest part of the island is Jitaken, in the west. At the other end of the island, Jittoen, the soil is poor. Coconut trees, which usually grow well in any kind of place, are few and poor in Jittoen.

There is an old legend about this. Once upon a time, many years ago, there lived in Jitaken a young woman named Lijakkwe. As she grew up, her mother and father saw that she was more beautiful than anyone else on earth. Light seemed to shine from her. She was so shining that people could hardly bear to look at her. She was not only beautiful, but she had a strange, magical charm.

No one could think or work near her. Her *ao* dazzled the people.



"She must live by herself," her parents said. "It's too exciting for people to have such beauty around all the time."

So they built her a little pandanus-leaf house near the shore in Jitaken. There she lived by herself, with only a few visits from other people. Her parents brought her food and clothes.

"Leave the house only in the evening," they said.

Lijakkwe did as she was told. She stayed inside, but every evening, she went to the shore and bathed in the lagoon.

Before that time, the sun went down every day without any changes in the sky. But when Lijakkwe bathed, everything around her shone in rosy colors that changed the sea, the sky, and the earth. Today they are called "sunset colors," but they came first from Lijakkwe, the beautiful, in Ebon. They were her special *aa*, or halo.

The news of the young woman's beauty went far and wide, for at sundown, the bright colors could be seen over all the islands.

A very ugly man named Borlap lived on the island of Toka, in the same atoll. Once, he saw Lijakkwe at the seashore, and then he thought of her night and day. Borlap was not only ugly, but foolish. He felt sure that he could get the most beautiful woman on earth to be his wife.

"A man doesn't have to be handsome or young," he thought. "Women are easy to win. I'll just get together a big pile of presents and take them over to her. She'll like me at once when she sees them."

So Borlap gathered and husked all the coconuts that he owned. Then he sailed over to Jittoen and took all the coconuts that he could find there, until he had a large number. He took so many from that part of the island, that they never again have grown well there; but there have always been plenty in Jitaken, where Borlap took them.

He made two large floats, in which to carry the coconuts. He towed them over to Jitaken behind his outrigger canoe. He also brought along some large fish.

He anchored the two piles of coconuts to the coral reef and carried the fish to Lijakkwe's house.

"Most beautiful Lijakkwe," he said. "See the presents I have brought you. Here are some fine fish. And outside the reef are all the coconuts of Jittoen. They are yours, my dear!"

The young woman came to the door, but she was frightened by Borlap's ugly face. "Thank you," she said. "And now, please go away, and don't come again."

Borlap was so shocked that he fell dead on the spot. And what a fall! He fell four miles east to the Jittoen end of Ebon Island and turned into a large rock. He turned away from the west, so that he could not look at Lijakkwe and her sunset colors.

When people visit Ebon Island, they see an enormous rock that is called "Borlap" to this day. The two piles of coconuts are now coral heads. They are still on the reef at Jitaken. They are called Jikit and Bukit, which are Marshallese words that mean "one hundred" and "two hundred." On shore, not far from the two large coral heads, stands a very old tree, which the people call Lijakkwe. When the trunk of the *binbin* tree is old, there is always a new tree growing from it.

"Lijakkwe became a *binbin* tree and lives forever," they say.

When the sun goes down, and the sky is filled with colors, the people say, "Now Lijakkwe is bathing." Some persons claim that sunsets are more beautiful in Ebon Island than anywhere else.

Jitaken still has many fine coconut trees, while Jittoen has few. "We used to have them, but Borlap took them away," say the people of Jittoen.

Girls in Ebon Island often are named for Lijakkwe. They like having the name, but sometimes a girl is joked about it. "Look out for her," the young people may say. "She can turn a man into stone."

When a young man of Jittoen goes to visit a girl in Jitaken, his friends say, in fun, "We'd better watch our coconuts!" Or, they may say to him, "Going over to see a young lady in Jitaken? You know what happened there once. It might happen again. Better be careful!"