

Siblaw Taraw

derived from the narrative of
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In Fiallig, there is a deep lake called Siblaw that sits atop a tall mountain. The Ifiallig believe that Siblaw is enchanted. Very few know the way to Siblaw because it is concealed by thick forest. Elders say the forest that guards Siblaw is animate. Within its wilderness, one can feel the forest's countless eyes, wary of every move.

Long, long ago, a robust Ifiallig bachelor decided to go hunting at Siblaw, for there is an abundance of deer and wild boar that bathe in its waters. At the break of dawn, he travelled to his *apor* in Tungcho, another lake located below Siblaw, to rest. Upon reaching the *apor*, he laid down his *fiangiwi* and hunting spear. After cooking his meal, he fetched water and rested awhile. Later, though it was still dark, he decided to go up to Siblaw since that was the time animals went to bathe there.

When he got to Siblaw, he spied upon some deer. He approached stealthily and chose the healthiest among them. He hit the deer with his spear, lifted it on his shoulders and carried it to his *apor*. He seared the skin with fire and cut up the animal. It was a tedious task that by the time he finished eating, it was already dark.

He went out the *apor* and looked at the sky. He noticed the full moon. The forest was illuminated and did not appear too hostile, so he decided to try to catch more game. He returned to Siblaw. While walking, he heard laughter, women's voices. He tried to locate the source of the revelry and determined that it came from Siblaw. The women were naked, bathing in the moonlight. He wondered who they were and why they were bathing at night with the animals. He continued to observe them as they bathed, then he went

back to his *apor*. Sleep eluded him as he thought of what he witnessed.

The next day, he returned to the village with his game. Images of the women filled his mind, and he kept wondering who or what they were. He returned to his *apor*. He rested, cooked his meal and ate. Patiently, he waited for darkness. At dusk, he started off towards Siblaw. That evening, the moon was still full.

He concealed himself behind the trees. While waiting, he noticed that the heavens brightened. He looked up and saw winged creatures descending from the sky. They sparkled; their clothes and their wings shimmered. The creatures waded into the shallows and swam towards the deep. They started to undress. He spotted the most beautiful maiden. As she undressed, he carefully observed her, and noted the spot where she left her clothes. Gingerly, he approached the spot and ran off with one of her wings. He hid it in his *finali* basket and brought it home to his *apor*.

At the break of dawn, he returned to Siblaw. The beautiful maiden sat crying near the lake. The young man approached her. "Why are you crying?" he feigned.

"I lost one of my wings. I don't know who could have taken it. My sisters have returned to the heavens, but I could not fly with only one wing," she said.

"You poor creature," he said. "Why don't you come home with me? It would be very dangerous to stay here alone."

Left with no choice, she went with him. At the *apor*, he cooked the deer he caught, then they ate. The maiden was dejected, having been left behind by her sisters.

"What is your name?" the young man inquired.

"I am a *taraw*," the maiden replied. "My sisters are all *taraw*. Our father permits us to descend from the heavens and to

bathe in the lake every full moon. But this is the only time that someone has taken my wing.”

“What shall we do now?” the young man asked. “Perhaps we should just wait until tomorrow to search for your wing.”

The star maiden agreed.

Very early the next morning, they started their search. Because he hid the wing, naturally they did not find it. He then asked the star maiden to marry him. Since she could not return home, she agreed reluctantly.

They went home to Fiallig and lived as husband and wife. Everyone at the village admired his wife for her beauty. They asked him where he met such a resplendent woman. He did not narrate the whole story, instead he just declared that her name was “Taraw.”

The man went on being a hunter while Taraw cooked and kept house since she was ignorant of work in the rice terraces. Several years passed and they had a child. The baby girl was very beautiful, so much like her mother.

One day, as the man was out hunting, Taraw went about her daily chores. As she was cleaning the house, she noticed a concealed *finali* basket by the hut’s ceiling. It was apparent that the basket had not been used much, adding to her curiosity and desire to see what was hidden within. When she opened the basket, she was aghast to discover her missing wing. She then realized it was her husband who took and hid her wing from her. The wing was tattered and full of holes, having been chewed upon by roaches.

Knowing her husband would be home late, she patched up and mended her damaged wing. She also took out her other wing that was still in perfect shape, having been stored properly. When she tried both wings, she was able to fly. She longed to fly home and leave her deceitful

husband. But when she looked back, she saw how little her child was and took pity on her. Taraw could not bear to abandon her, and so flew back. She decided to wait until her daughter was old enough. She returned the stolen wing into the *finali* and slipped the basket back into the hut's ceiling.

Occasionally, her husband checked on the *finali* to make sure that the wing was still there. Every time he saw the wing, he remained confident that Taraw was still unaware of his secret.

When her daughter turned fifteen, Taraw knew it was time. When her husband left to hunt, Taraw spoke to her daughter, "My child, now that you have come of age, I've decided to fly home to heaven."

Surprised when she saw Taraw wearing wings, the daughter asked, "Why, mother? What sort of creature are you?"

"I am a star from heaven who descended into this world to bathe in lake Siblau," she explained. "But that day, I wasn't aware that it was your father who took and hid one of my wings. I could not fly home, so he then forced me to marry him. But now that I've found my lost wing, I must fly back to heaven where my father waits for me."

"Before I go, let me leave you with a warning. If you wish to live long, you must never dance during festivities," Taraw added.

"I must bid you farewell now," she said sadly. "Just tell your father that I'm never coming back." Taraw then flew towards heaven while her daughter, gazing up at the sky, watched Taraw grow smaller until she faded in the distance.

When the father returned from the hunt, he noticed the unusual silence within their home. When he called his wife

and daughter, only his daughter went out to meet him. She told him that she knew the whole story, and that her mother flew back to heaven, never to return. He was astonished and immediately retrieved the *finali* where he hid his wife's wing. It was empty. He knew that his daughter was telling the truth.

"Your mother is gone," he said. "Now that you're grown up, you will have to do the cooking and cleaning." The daughter nodded.

One day, a feast was held in Fiallig. The father decided to join the festivities with his daughter. The revelry started early. They had a hearty meal. Soon, the gongs resounded through the mountains and the dancing began. Since the father knew how to play the gong, he joined in. Heeding her mother's advice, the daughter tried hard to resist the music and did not join the dancing.

"Please dance for us," the villagers prodded. "You are so beautiful, why won't you dance? Why did you wear such a lovely *tapis* if not for dancing?"

When the music ended, the father sat by her side. The next tune started, and the villagers repeatedly said, "Please dance for us."

"I think they're right, my child," her father told her. "Go ahead and dance, what good is our coming here if you won't join in the dancing?" He was unaware of Taraw's warning.

Obedying her father and the summoning of the gongs, she started to sway with the music. Everyone froze upon seeing her dance. Besides being beautiful, she was such a graceful dancer. She seemed to float through the air. All the other dancers stopped so they could watch her. The father felt extremely proud. He was delighted with his daughter's splendor and grace, witnessed by the entire village. Soon

the music came to an end, and only then did she remember her mother's advice. Still, she kept the secret to herself.

A few days passed and soon the young woman fell ill. "I'm not feeling well, father," she said weakly.

"Why? What happened?" her father asked in alarm. It was then that she revealed her mother's admonition.

"But why didn't you tell me that you were forbidden to dance? If I knew, I wouldn't have allowed it." He was utterly worried.

A few days later, despite all their effort, Taraw's daughter passed away. Her father was filled with remorse. After his daughter was buried, he was forlorn. He grew old, all alone.