

TILAG

derived from the narrative of
Jerzon Ayongchi

For the Fiallig of old, the tilag (rainbow) was mysterious for they little understood it. It was believed that a tilag revealing itself augurs death.

Long, long ago, in Makarana, a place in Fiallig, there lived a young hunter. One day he went to the forest to hunt. Although it was drizzling then, the sun was shining, and he saw a rainbow. The rainbow was so beautiful with its different colors that he wanted to uncover its mystery.

The young lad decided to follow the rainbow to its source. But though he walked many miles, he could not find its origin. The rain shower stopped and the rainbow faded. He headed home and consulted the *ichiw*, an oracle, for guidance. The *ichiw* gave a favorable omen. He cooked his food and while eating he admired his collection of animal skulls on the walls. The skulls were trophies from his hunting trips.

Then it was time again for him to go to the forest. By some dint of good fortune, it drizzled and the rainbow revealed itself once more. He quickly followed the rainbow's path to its root and soon he reached a stream. There, he was surprised to find a woman busy catching crablets and frogs.

"What are you doing?" he asked the woman.

She turned to him and said, "Catching crablets for my dinner."

"What is your name?" asked the lad.

"I am Tilag."

“Would you like to come with me so we can cook the crablets that you have caught?” he asked. The woman consented.

Upon reaching his home, the young man asked Tilag if she would agree to become his spouse. Hesitant, Tilag kept silent for a moment. She thought a while and said, “Why not? I am bound to no one.”

From then on, they lived as husband and wife. After a few years, Tilag bore children. As time passed, the man noticed that each time he came home from the hunt, some of the animal skulls from his collection were missing. He could think of no reason why this was so. He decided to wait in stealth for whoever was stealing them.

One day, the man pretended that he would be working in the *payyiw* all afternoon. He even brought his provisions along with him as he headed out for the rice terraces. At noon, he slowly sneaked into his home, hid himself and lay in wait for what would happen. The sight of his wife voraciously gnawing at an animal’s jaw filled him with shock. He looked on, with mouth agape. He leaped out from where he lay hidden and confronted his wife. “Tilag, why do you eat those bones when we have meat? It was you all along who had been taking the skulls from my collection!”

Tilag, caught unaware, was speechless. Much later, all she could say was, “My heart is so full of shame. It is perhaps best that we part ways.”

“No,” said the man. “All I meant was to forbid you from eating the skulls. Oh, why did you have to eat those skulls when we have meat that I bring home from hunting.”

“This is too embarrassing. There will be talk. I can no longer stay here,” said Tilag. “Anyway, our children will remain here for you to shower with your affection. I feel I must go.”

She left the next day and never returned. The Tilag clan grew for her children begot more children. In fact, the elders say, Tilag's descendants, like the man Fongnor, still live among them to this day.