

## The Visit of Obaiā to Onoua

~~The Story of Obaiā and Nei Terere~~~~named after~~~~Mautake and Hareko of Tarawa~~

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(H.B. It seems that paras 1 and 2 of the original Gilbertese text are missing. A shorter version in English is recorded in para. 5 of 'The Tale of the Ince of Samoa' by Mautake and appears in Series H.)

8. Obaiā was very fond of his mother, Nei Terere. One day, Tautkarawa, his father, called out to him, 'I want you to go to Tabuarora, Kalubuarangana, Abatiku, Atanikarawa and Temanokeu and kill all the birds roosting there.'

Obaiā did as he was told but had no luck, so Tautkarawa sent him back again and, this time, he was successful. Then, he thought, 'It would be nice if I could fly', so he stole into the shed where Tautkarawa kept the birds' feathers. In next to no time, he was in the air looking and flying just like a Fongake Bird. He circled the village, soared high in the sky to the north and south and then set off for Tarawa. But he never got there because his brother, Tabuariki-ke-ang, drove him away so he finished up at Onoua. He surveyed the place from on high, flying all the way from the north to the south, and decided to land in the middle. The people of Onoua looked up and cried out, 'A Fongake Bird, a Fongake Bird. Oh, if only Nei Katua could have it for a pet!' On hearing this, Obaiā flew a little way off and landed again, waiting and watching. In a while, Nei Katua came out of her house and, when he saw her, Obaiā flew low above her and perched on top of the house. There, he was tied up just like any other Fongake Bird and a special perch was built for him in the western gable in which he settled down. But, it wasn't long before he grew restless and Nei Katua, seeing this, called out, 'Bring the bird here and put it under the eaves.' This suited Obaiā very well indeed for, when Nei Katua lay down to rest, he slipped out of his feathers, crawled under the curtain and sat down at her feet. He called out quietly and awoke Nei Katua who fell head over heels in love as soon as she saw him. He was so

handsome!

"Where on earth did you come from", she whispered.

"Why, I'm your pet of course and I want to lie down with you."

"You'd better hide yourself, then"

"Where?"

"Here, close to me"

So he went and lay beside Mei Katura, made love to her and then quickly put his feathers back on again.

It was not long before Mei Anri, the mother of Mei Katura, came in to see her daughter.

"Have you fed your pet bird yet?"

"No, please bring it some fish"

But the bird wouldn't eat the raw flesh.

"It's not eating", said Mei Anri, puzzled.

"Perhaps you'd better bring some cooked fish and see if it likes that"

Mei Anri brought the cooked fish.

"Look, it likes that all right. It's eating"

"Good" said Mei Katura hiding a smile, "that's the kind of food it needs. Bring some more, I wouldn't like it to go hungry"

Mei Anri brought more fish and, when the bird had eaten its fill, she went away.

When they had both eaten, Mei Katura called out to Ishaia, "Come, Mei Anri has gone!". He threw off his feathers, lay down with her again and stayed there until midday.

Next time ~~the~~ Mei Anri brought her food, Mei Katura demanded, "Anri, I want some drinking coconuts! I feel as if I want to be sick and I've a bit of a headache"

While Mei Anri was away, Mei Katura drew some water and washed herself and when her mother returned, complained, "I feel like vomiting now". Mei Anri called her husband, Tarabanga, who asked what the matter was.

"The girl's not well. . . . She's a headache and feels she wants to vomit."

"Oh, let's go outside then", said her father

Immediately,

Mei Katwa stayed where she was and called out to her parents fretfully:

"Don't come back again, I'm sick I tell you. I don't want you near me."

"You're a silly girl," her mother replied.

"It's you who are silly, I am sick, you're both silly — and stupid. I want some raw fish!"

Her parents looked at each other and, shaking their heads, went away.

Mei Katwa made sure they had gone and then called Obaiia to come to her again. He had barely left when her parents returned and her mother, looking closely at her, realized she was pregnant.

"How are you feeling, now?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm all right."

"You're pregnant, you know?"

"How comes I be? By whom?"

Mei Anri shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know but you've got your eyebrows and eye-lashes."

Mei Katwa did not answer this remark and her mother called the people of Onouma together:

"Come here, all of you and see Mei Katwa."

They did so, and marvelled:

"The girl's pregnant! Who comes the father be. No one could have been near her."

"There's no doubt but that she's pregnant" replied her mother, and added sarcastically, "It must have been that fat bird of her's, I suppose."

After everyone had left and as Mei Katwa grew fatter, heavy with child, Obaiia asked her to plait a long, long cord. She got her parents to do it for her and, when it was finished, she took a small paddle and wound the cord around it. Obaiia tied it to his collar and flew low over the fishing grounds. All who were out fishing looked up: "See," they exclaimed, "there's the Fingare Bird. What is it doing? Looking for a nest maybe?" Obaiia heard them and, swooping swiftly down, caught sight of a school of tuna frolicking in the ocean. He dived, skewered his prey, threaded it on the

and carried it ashore. He put it down outside Mei Katura's house and, when she came out, she called ~~to~~ Mei Anti. Mei Anti ran to her and saw the fish, a dozen or more of them:

"Is this your bird's catch?"

"Yes, mother, but don't look so surprised. The bird is really a man, you know."

"Don't be surprised, you say. A man indeed! You've made a fine choice to take a Frigate Bird to be your husband."

In the course of time, Mei Katura gave birth to a daughter and they called her Mei Kirinere. Obaia flew off to look for kindling for a fire to keep the baby warm and, when he came back, he also dropped choice pieces of Taro from the sky — much to everyone's astonishment. Then he went away once more and <sup>far and wide;</sup> roamed. This time, he brought back sweet toddy and lots of other food for his daughter.

Later on,  
Mei Katura became pregnant again and bore another daughter whom they called Mei Kirimoi. When this child grew up, Obaia spoke to his wife, "The time has come for me to go and attend to my affairs. I'm going to take Mei Kirinere to look after me and leave Mei Kirimoi here with you." He spread his wings and left. Mei Katura remained behind and her mother, seeing Obaia go, cried out, "Daughter, hold on to that husband of yours!" Mei Katura held him tight until Obaia promised, "I'll be back after I've taken Mei Kirinere to see her grandparents." But Mei Katura wept and, when Obaia threw off his feathers to console her, Mei Anti couldn't believe her eyes. There, before her, stood a young man, pale-skinned and handsome. She promptly called the people of Onouna together: "Come here, come here quickly, come and see Mei Katura's husband!" They all came running and were amazed when they saw Obaia hit, because Mei Katura kept on weeping, Mei Anti scolded him:

"Don't you go off. Your wife loves you so much that she'll pine away if you do."

"I must go", replied Obaia, "but I promise

you I shan't be long. I don't want to abandon  
 Anei Katura, my wife.

They had to be contented with this and, next morning,  
 Obaia flew off into the sky to visit Tankarawa.

As he drew near, Tankarawa saw Obaia flying high  
 in the sky and was afraid. "Look up there!" he exclaimed  
 nervously, "He's taken wings. He's flying!" Everyone who  
 saw Obaia was frightened too and they called out to  
 Tabuariki-te-ang who waved his arms to drive  
 Obaia away, and shouted, "Go away, go away,  
 we're afraid of you!" So Obaia returned to Onoua  
 and confessed to Anei Katura;

"I had to come back, my body was too light  
 for my wings and I couldn't land."

"Well then, stay here!" said Anei Anei shortly.

"No, I must go again but I shall return."

He ordered them to cover his head and body with a  
 giant clam shell and, with Anei Kirivare clinging to  
 his back, he took off and made for Tarawa. As  
 he approached the shore, he saw Tabuariki-te-ang  
 standing there still waving his arms to drive him away  
 so he turned round and flew towards the northern  
 tip of Taliteua. He glided slowly on, looking  
 closely at the land and decided to alight at  
 Kabubuareranga where he shook off the clam-shell  
 which weighed him down. And so the flights  
 of Obaia came to an end. He stayed at  
 Kabubuareranga until Beiamatekai arrived.