

THE MASALAI OF LEP ISLAND

Story by Mike Soanin
Translated by Thomas H. Slone

Long, long ago, in Manus Province, there was a small island behind Baluan Island [Baluan-Pam People]. This island was called Lep.

On Lep Island, there was a masalai who had exactly ten heads. This masalai had two wives. The three of them lived happily together on their island. There were many kinds of foods and fruits. Tree fruits filled the island.

There was no other person who lived on this island. It was just the masalai, his two wives, the animals, and the birds that lived there. The people of the big island, Baluan, often heard stories about Lep Island.

Many men would say, "Lep Island is just behind Baluan. There are many kinds of foods and wild animals there." Sometimes, the people of Baluan would wake up in the morning and search the many good tree fruits that were lying about in the grasses and areas around their houses.

They would take these fruits and eat them. The fruits were very sweet. Some men took the fruits and tried to plant them near their houses, but the fruit trees did not grow well.

Many men of Baluan wanted to try to find this Lep Island. So one day, an old man and his little boy wanted to try. They took their canoe and paddled off to find Lep Island.

They paddled the canoe for ten whole days. Later, they saw a small island. The boy said, "Hey papa, I think that's Lep Island over there!"

The father said, "Sssshh, don't talk loud. It would be bad if some man hears you and comes to kill us." So the two of them paddled very quietly and went closer to this small island.

It was getting dark when they went towards the shore of the island. They did not go up on the beach. No, they were completely exhausted and slept in the canoe. Late that night, they heard the sweet bird songs of the island.

Oh my! The father and son heard bird songs and salivated [lit. "their mucus fell"] for this island. They did not know yet that a masalai lived on this island because they had come ashore on one end, and the masalai lived on the other end.

In the morning, they paddled up to the beach. They walked up the island and they gorged themselves on fruits.

Later, the father said, "Son, let's try to see the other side of the island." So they walked around the island and came to the other side. They were surprised to see smoke coming from a fire in the forest.

They said, "There must be some people living here. Let's try to go closer and see this fire." They walked very quietly and went closer and they saw two young women making a garden.

They did not show their faces. They hid and watched. The old father told his son, "We must hide and see where they go."

The women finished working and got up to walk away. The old man and the boy followed the two women to their home. They went there and saw a house standing there.

The old man saw the house and said, "I think that the two women live with their husband in that house." But no, the two of them were married to a masalai with ten heads, and they lived in that house.

Later, the two women walked down to the beach to bathe. The old man walked very quietly and went inside the house. He heard a man breathing heavily inside a room.

The old man wanted to go closer, but he heard the two women returning. He sped outside and spoke to his son. He said, "We must hide inside the shed." Then two of them went and hid inside the firewood shed.

They stayed there quietly until it was night. They did not sleep well that night. They tried to hear all the noises inside the house.

In the morning, the women woke up and cooked food. They left it there for their husband. They walked into the forest and continued to work in their garden. In the late afternoon, they would return to the house.

When the masalai woke up, he said, "Ah hah! I can smell a new kind of smell inside the house." Then the ten heads got up and looked everywhere inside the house.

The masalai got up and walked around outside. Oh my! When the old man and boy saw the masalai, they gnashed their teeth and were completely afraid. They trembled fiercely inside the firewood shed.

They did not tremble quietly. The firewood trembled with them and fell about. The masalai looked and said, "Ah hah! I think that this smell is in the firewood shed."

So the masalai asked them, "Why did you two come here?" The old man said, "We came to look for fish in the sea and a strong wind came up, and the waves carried us ashore on this island."

The masalai listened to the old man's story and he was sorry for them. He took the food and gave it to them. Then he hid them in his room. They hid in the masalai's room until the afternoon.

The two women came back from the garden. They came and cooked some food. Later, they served the food, leaving some for their husband. They finished their food and went to sleep.

In the morning, the two women woke up. They wanted to look, but no! All their food was gone. They got up and cooked again. They left some for their husband and went back to the garden.

The two women returned in the afternoon and saw that all the food was gone. Some days later, they saw what was happening: the food was being finished very quickly.

They talked to each other and said, "Oh my! This masalai is not like before. Is he getting hungry too quickly? It would be bad if he found the food to be bad, and killed and ate us."

The women said, "We must find a way to run away to another place." The poor women did not yet know that the old man and boy were in their house. The two of them only knew that the masalai's food was being eaten.

One woman told the other, "I know a kind of vine in the forest. Let's take it and cook it and give it to the masalai to drink. This liquid or soup from the vine can kill the masalai."

The next morning, the women went to work in the garden. Later, they removed the vine from the forest and brought it back to the house. They cooked the vine with the food.

The two women did not eat that night. The masalai ate and later he gave some to the old man and his son. They were famished and finished the food right away.

They all slept that night. The next morning, the masalai felt a big pain in his stomach. The poor old man and his son had died because the poison from this vine was very strong and killed them quickly.

The ten-headed masalai cried and turned about. When he called out and cried, the clouds in the sky broke and thundered. He wanted to cry, but no. A heavy rain fell. When his body trembled, all the places on the island shook with him.

The two women looked for a place to go, but they did not have a way to run away to another place. A strong wind came up. The clouds thundered. A heavy rain fell. A strong earthquake shook the island. Then the masalai died.

Water flooded over Lep Island. The two women, the ten-headed masalai, the old man and the boy all went down into the sea with the island.

If today you go around to the back side of Baluan Island, you can see a small reef in the sea. On Baluan, you can also see various kinds of good fruits and foods. People had planted these when the birds carried them from Lep Island to Baluan.

I believe that this story from the ancestors is a true story.

THE END

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