



Mariang Makiling, the Fairy of the Mountain

Tagalog - Philippines

South of Lake Laguna, on the island of Luzon, in the Philippines, stands the immense and solitary mass of Mount Makiling, where the people of the area have for centuries revered a deity or spirit, a fairy who takes care of all the beings who live in the mountain.

They call her Mariang Makiling. According to the humans who have seen her, she is a tall and slender woman of superhuman beauty, with sun-browned skin, big black eyes, and long black hair that reaches almost to her feet. She is a fantastic creature, from a long lineage of nymphs and sylphs. Her vaporous white tunic is made from moon rays, and the mysterious mists of the woods and the lake.

An old woman claimed to have seen her a long time ago, when she was a child, crossing the meadows in the distance with such lightness that the grass did not even bend under her feet. Some deer hunters swore to have recognised her figure on the edge of a cliff, with her hair blowing in the wind under the moon light. They said that she had once passed in front of them, greeting them ceremoniously, before disappearing into the shadows of the forest. No one dared to follow her or spy on her, and everyone worshipped her.

Many say that they have seen her sitting on a rock by the river, as if contemplating the gentle passing of the waters. Even an old hunter swore to have discovered her bathing at midnight in a secret spring, when the crickets sleep and the moon illuminates the silence. On clear

nights, the people of the region claim to have heard a harp, as well as a beautiful voice singing mysterious and melancholic songs. They say that she is the mountain fairy, lulling to sleep the all of the beings that inhabit her dominions.

For more than six generations of Tagalogs, Mariang Makiling has been considered a protector spirit. They say that she loves to walk after storms and typhoons to restore the broken trunks of trees, to return fallen nests to the branches, to mend the wings of the butterflies, to clear the entrances of the anthills, and to clean the rivers of fallen branches and tree trunks. Wherever she goes, the orchids bloom, the birds sing again, the deer let themselves be seen to greet her, and new buds sprout from the trees.

She doesn't just take care of the animals and plants of forests, prairies and mountains, but also the humans that inhabit them. Compassionate, with a tender heart, she has appeared innumerable times under different guises to the old and to poor villagers who have gone into the woods in search of firewood and fruit. She slipped gold nuggets, money, and jewelry into their pockets. And they also say that many poor villagers, asking for help to celebrate certain ceremonies received jewels and fine clothes, even dinnerware and cutlery in exchange for a white hen that has not yet laid eggs.

It is said that a young hunter, chasing a boar through the thorn bushes of the meadows, suddenly found the fairy's hut, where the boar was taking refuge. Shortly afterwards, a beautiful young woman came out saying calmly: 'The boar belongs to me. I see that you have hurt yourself while chasing it, because you bleed from your arms and legs, and I see that you are weary. Come in, eat something and then leave and go your way.' Confused and amazed, but above all fascinated by her beauty, the young man had obeyed her with pleasure. He ate everything that she offered him, but was unable to utter a single word. Before he left, Mariang Makiling gave him some pieces of ginger, so that his mother could add them to her sauces in the kitchen. After thanking her, the hunter put the ginger in his hat. When he arrived home, he discovered that the ginger had turned into gold.

It has been many years since anyone has claimed to have seen Mariang Makiling. Her vaporous silhouette is no longer seen crossing

meadows, nor bathing in the waterfalls under the moonlight. No one hears her mysterious harp anymore, nor do lovers receive jewelry or gifts from her on their wedding day. Some say that it is because the inhabitants of a neighbouring village did not comply with their agreement to give her a white hen. Other say that this is a petty excuse, and that she stopped showing herself because the Spanish Dominican friars wanted to appropriate half of Mount Makiling. But some people also claim that she disappeared because of a love disappointment with a young farmer, whose parents she had helped to take care of for many years.

Others say that she has distanced herself from humans because of the excessive hunting and the indiscriminate felling of trees.

In any case, what is evident is that human beings, for one reason or another, have disappointed her, and she has stopped showing her beneficent, mysterious and beautiful presence to them. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2018).

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Comments

This beautiful Tagalog legend, which has multiple versions (Barile, 1995), is based in part on APCIEU et al. (2010). However, I have taken most of the story from José Rinzal (1890), a brilliant Philippine doctor and writer, to the point that, in many sections, I have followed his words verbatim. I have done this for two reasons. First, because his version is the one that I found most beautiful and poetic. And second because, as a Spaniard, I wanted to pay my most humble and profound tribute to this man, who was accused of sedition and rebellion and shot by the Spanish army, after accusations made against him by the Spanish religious orders present in the islands.

It is one more case among thousands for which the peoples of Europe will have to ask forgiveness to the other cultures and peoples of the world.

Sources

- APCEIU, SEAMEO, SEMEO INNOTECH & SEAMEO SPAFA (2010).
Mariang Makiling, the Fairy of the Mountain. In *Telling Tales from Southeast Asia and Korea*, pp. 51-53. Bangkok: Advanced Printing Service.
- Barile, L. (1995). Mariang Makiling: Un análisis histórico de una leyenda filipina. *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 544, 87-97.
- Rizal, J. (1890). Mariang Makiling. *International Philippine Philatelic Society website*. Retrieved from <http://www.theipps.info/Presentations/makiling.pdf>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: Universal Responsibility.- To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

The Way Forward: This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.