

The Story of Bat and Sun

Once upon a time, Aleleb-the-Bat and Neneb-the-Sun had a good friendship, a friendship stronger than *ngrwalii*. They were like finger and nail. It is said that they were such good friends they were always visiting one another. Sometimes, they'd spend one night at Bat's home and the next night at Sun's compound.

One day, Bat went to visit Sun. On this visit, they spent a few days together. And then Bat went home only to find his mother seriously ill. You remember the saying that the strongest tree is the one that sprouts from beneath a rock? Bat had always seen his mother as one such tree. She had taken care of him through good times and many hardships. Now Bat feared for his mother's life. He flew from the compound of one healer to another pleading for their help. The healers gave the ailing woman potent herbs. They poured libations and called on the ancestors to watch over Bat's mother. They did their outmost, but Bat's mother's health worsened alarmingly and she grew weaker and weaker with each passing day.

"My son, I can feel that my time has come to leave you and join the ancestors. Do not grieve after I am dead. You must continue to be dutiful and take good care of yourself," she said, her breathing coming in short gasps. "If I have taught you anything, it is this: the rain which beats on a stone merely washes its body. You have been a good son and I know you will find the

strength to go on.” Bat’s mother spoke these words one evening to her son and died.

Bat was inconsolable. His grief-stricken heart was as heavy as the *ngwalii* stone. He knew what he had to do. He decided to honor his mother by burying her before darkness threw its shadow over the village. My friend can wait until I’ve buried my mother, he reasoned happily, and rushed to see Sun.

Bat said, “Sun, my ailing mother has died. Hold your light. Please let your light shine a little longer. Give me the time to bury Mother-of-Mine. You can put out your torch after I have finished laying her to rest.”

“My good friend, I know you need me but I’m sorry that I can’t wait for you to bury your mother,” Sun replied. “Can’t you wait for daybreak?”

“How can you ask me that? Death has snapped the shoulder bone on the spot where the bag is carried. What kind of a friend are you?” Bat moaned and flew off into the twilight.

Bat’s throat grew bitter, more bitter than *ghee*.¹ “No, I must bury her today,” the sobbing Bat kept repeating to himself. He arrived home as darkness fell and hurriedly buried his mother. It was completely dark by the time he was done. And so, in the deep of night, Bat lay down by his mother’s grave and swore never to look upon Sun’s face again. Never! He buried that friendship along with his mother. And that, it is said, is the reason why, from that day forward, bats have shunned the face of the sun and move about only at night.

The story is finished.

¹A type of vegetable with a bitter taste; known in Pidgin English as bitter-leaf.