

The myth of the women of thunder

From chapter 24

“I know,” Kaita said. “It’s one of the stories of the women of thunder.”

“Tell us,” I said.

Kaita rubbed her face and we waited. When I had given up and thought I would have to be the one to tell the story, she began.

A tapir named Dolora had a dream that came to her each night for three nights. She dreamed a man floated on spider webs from the moon. The man had beautiful skin that shimmered with the gold of a full moon and eyes like still pools on dark nights. “Take me to the other women of your tribe, Dolora,” the moon man said to the tapir woman. “Let me ride on your back and I will bring gifts to all of them.”

Dolora fell in love with the soft voice and the shimmering beauty of moon man and allowed him to ride upon her back. She took him deep into the jungle where her family lived. As she approached, the man leaned close to her ears and whispered that he came to lock all the women of thunder within stone hills so they could serve as beasts of burden for spirits of the night. Dolora tried to throw him from her back, but he wrapped his spider webs around her and there was nothing she could do. She had to watch as he killed all of her family and captured their spirits to take to a hollow hill beside a great river. While he was inside the hill, Dolora broke the webs that held her and hid among bamboo. Moon man returned and searched and called to her until the sky became light from the sun, which caused him to shimmer and vanish in the morning air.

Each night for three nights she had the same dream, and each morning she told the dream to her family as they walked beside a river to seek food. The first morning Dolora’s sister told her the dream meant she would die. The second morning Dolora’s mother told her the dream meant her family would die if they had anything to do with the men who lived in the forest. The third morning Dolora’s grandmother told her the dream meant she must be loyal to her family and stay with them or they would all perish. Dolora thought they were all wrong, and she wandered far down the river to seek among the animals the meaning of her dream.

Armadillo told her she must learn to dig in the earth to discover the meaning of the dream. Anaconda told her she must learn to swim under the river if she wanted to discover the meaning of the dream. Parrot told her she must give up searching for the meaning of the dream if she wanted to learn

the meaning of the dream.

Dolora dug in the earth but found only worms. She swam under the river but found only leeches. At last, she returned home to find the forest people had killed her sister and mother and grandmother and made a shelter from their hides. Inside the shelter was a young girl whose first moon had come upon her. Dolora found the girl did not know about the killing of the tapirs and did not know the walls of her shelter were made from hides of Dolora's family.

Dolora left with her sadness and wandered beside the river until she came to a stone hill with someone inside, knocking on the stone. She remembered the words of the armadillo and dug at the base of the hill until she found a cave that took her inside the hill. Within she found the spirits of her sister and mother and grandmother, along with the spirits of many other tapirs who had been killed by forest people to use the hides for shelters where they kept girls whose moon had come upon them. The spirits yearned to escape the stone hill and wander again in the forest. Dolora found a river that ran through the bottom of the hollow hill. She remembered the words of the Anaconda and dove deep into the river, swam under the rock hill, and emerged at night where the river flowed out of the hill. All of the tapir spirits followed her, and when they climbed to the shore, they shook themselves and stomped to get the water from them.

"Their shaking and stomping sounded like thunder," Kaita said. "When the forest people saw them in the moonlight and heard them, they named them *the women of thunder*."

I waited for the rest of the story, but Kaita's silence said she was finished. "I heard the story differently," I said.

"The story is evidence that spirits live in the hills and under the earth," Poí said.

"The way I told the story is the true and proper way to tell it," Kaita said.

"The parrot was wrong," Tom said. "She did not find the meaning of her dream as the result of giving up the search."

"But she did find the meaning," I said, "and she found the meaning only when she stopped trying to find it. The parrot was right. We could learn from the parrot."

"It's just a story," Kaita said. "There's nothing to learn from it."