

Told by: Anetipa

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The Tree of Tarawa

On Samoa grew the Tree, the Ancestor, whose name was Kaintikuaba. The Tree blossomed and bore fruit, from the fruit sprang Kourabi. The Tree sent forth a root into the underworld; from the root sprang the woman Aeriki.

Kourabi lay with Aeriki; she bore him a son who was called Baretoka.

When Baretoka was grown to be a man, his mother and father set about choosing him a wife, and their favour fell upon a girl of Samoa whose name was Abinoko; she also was a daughter of the Tree, for her ancestors had sprung from the trunk.

But Baretoka looked upon the daughters of the Samoan Tree and had no heart for them. And when his father and mother named the name of Nei Abinoko as his wife, he would have nothing to do with her. So they were grieved and angry with their son.

At last Baretoka could no longer bear his father's talk of marriage, so he took his canoe and fled over the sea Northwards from Samoa; he searched the sea for Tarawa, for it was one of the broken fragments of heaven.

So Baretoka came to Tarawa, the fragment of heaven, and there he stayed. Now there was a woman of Tarawa whose name was Batiavea; she held the mooring rope of that land, for it was not yet anchored in the sea but followed the moods of the winds and waves. And when Baretoka saw Batiavea he loved her; he took her to wife and he made the island of Tarawa fast in the sea so that it no longer drifted with the wind. So Baretoka and Batiavea lay together, but they had no children because Batiavea was barren. That was a great grief to her.

And it came to pass that Batiavea fell ill, because she was consumed with grief at her barrenness. And when she was about to die she said to Baretoka: 'After I am dead, lay me in my grave, and watch every day for the thing that shall grow from my flesh'. Then she died, and Baretoka buried her; he watched every day by her grave as she had told him; and behold, in a little while, a young tree sprang from the flesh of Batiavea. And when Baretoka saw the Tree he called the women Winibong and Nibongibong, saying, 'It shall be your work to care for this Tree; every day look to it and enrich the soil by its roots'. So these two women cared for the Tree of Batiavea until in a little while it began to grow marvellously; it grew into a mighty Tree whose crest was up against the very rock of Heaven over Tarawa.

So the Tree stood over Tarawa and the winds fanned it every day. Its crest swayed in the wind; it swayed West, it swayed East; and when it swayed East it met with Flicker-of-Dawn (Ingini Ngaina) and Stormy Dawn (Ngaina buaka); and when it swayed West, it met with Red-of-the-West (Uraurani Maeao). And with all three it lay so that at last it bore a child: from the crest of the Tree sprang the woman Tereere, the Ancestress.

So Tereere stayed on the crest of the Tree of Tarawa until she was a woman. When she was of marriageable age she was seen on the crest of the Tree by Taukarawa, the Dweller in Heaven. He went down to her and begot children by her, whose names were Tabuariki the Wind and Obaia the Feathered.

When Obaia was a grown man he said to his mother, 'Tereere, where is my father?' She answered, 'He is Taukarawa and lives in Heaven'; so he set forth to see his father. Much time he spent in Heaven with Taukarawa, but at last his father said, 'It is time for you to return to your mother Tereere'. Then he set forth from Heaven to go back to his mother on Tarawa; but alas when he came to that island he could not come near his home for his brother Tabuariki the Wind went out to prevent him and blew him back into the West. So Obaia fled Westwards until he came to the land of Onouna. There he stayed and married the woman Anti, who was the daughter of Karebanga and Katura, the chiefs of the place.

Obaia lay with Anti and begot two girls with her, whose names were Kirirere and Kirimoi. Kirimoi he left with her mother on Onouna, and Kirirere he took with him to the island of Tabiteuea. With him at the same time he brought the Uekeueke, the Tree of Onouna, and the giant clam shell that is even now to be seen on Tabiteuea, at the place called Temanoku. So Obaia came to Tabiteuea; he planted the Tree of Onouna, the Uekeueke, and lived with his daughter Kirirere at the place Temanoku, until he died.

Kirirere married Beia and Tekai of Tarawa; she bore a son Teboi; Teboi married Komao of Onotoa; she bore a son Mamanti. Mamanti married Moeroa of Nonouti; she bore a son Mange. Mange married Teteu of Nonouti; she bore a son Kekeia.

Kekeia married Tongabiri of Beru, the sister of Tanentoa; she bore a daughter Tabiria, who was the greatest of all the chieftainesses of Nonouti, the descendant of Beia and Tekai of Tarawa, who begot her ancestor Teboi with Kirirere, daughter of Obaia, of the Tree of Tarawa.'

there is an error here, probably made in transcription,
 1 ~~Anetiba~~ is almost certainly in error here for Tongabiri was Tanentoa's brother and not his sister. The correct passage should presumably read: 'Mange married Teteu of Nonouti, who bore a daughter Nei Kekeia. Nei Kekeia married Tongabiri, the brother of Tanentoa, and had a daughter Tabiria'.