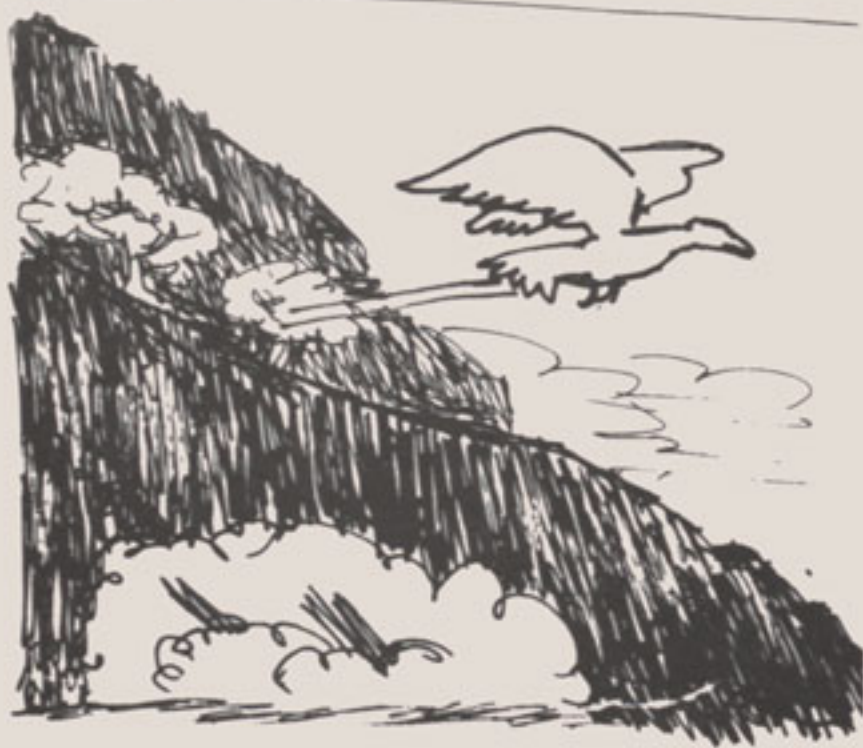


# Myna and Tota

## PART ONE

**MYNA** and Tota were two birds. Myna was a female and Tota was a male. Myna lived alone on a mountain to the north of the country. Tota lived alone on a mountain to the south. Neither of them was married. Each bird wanted to find out why the other had not married. Then one day they both decided to find out.

It so happened that both Myna and Tota set out in search of each other on the same day. Before the early morning mist had cleared, they spread their wings into the wind and sailed across the sky. All day long they flew, Myna towards the south, Tota towards the north. When darkness came, they had completed only half the journey. Now it was time to



sleep. By chance they both rested on the same tree for the night. This was how they happened to meet for the first time and how they started to speak to each other.

"Don't you know that it is not safe for a woman to travel alone at night?" Tota asked.

"I thought you knew that it was not safe for a man to travel alone at night either," Myna replied.

They remained in silence for a while then Tota asked again, "Tell me, Myna, why haven't you married?"

Myna smiled and said, "I have good reason for not having married. But what about you? Why don't you tell me why you haven't taken a wife?"

"I shall tell you a story," said Tota, "and when I am finished you will understand why I have not married."

## PART TWO

Once upon a time there was a merchant. He had married seven times. Each one of his wives had died leaving him alone. He decided to marry for the eighth and last time. Soon this wife also died.

"What am I to do now? I have spent my entire life and all my money in funerals, one after the other. Now I am left with nothing. Death is the only answer to my problems," cried the merchant.

The merchant then climbed on top of the pile of firewood which had been laid out for the burning of his wife's body. Friends and relatives begged him to change his mind. But no-one could get him to do so. He remained sitting beside the body of his dead wife waiting to be burnt along with her on the river-bank. There seemed to be no end to his sadness. So many tears did he shed that even the animals and the



birds joined him in his sorrow.

While the merchant was sitting there, in tears, Mahadeo and his wife, Parbatie passed that way. They were the god and goddess of all the worlds and they had power over life and death. When they saw the merchant, Mahadeo asked him, "Why are you crying?"

The merchant told them the story of his life and ended with the death of his eighth wife. Mahadeo said to him, "The time for her death had come and she had to die. However, you have fifty years still to live. If you agree to give her half your time I can bring her back to life again."

The husband agreed. Mahadeo told the merchant to pour some water on the head of his dead wife. Before the merchant could do this, however, Mahadeo said to him, "If you should decide to take back the years which you are giving to your wife, let her pour some water on your head and say, 'I give back to you what is yours' ." With these words, Mahadeo and his wife left.

The merchant then poured the water on the head of his dead wife and she came back to life. He was overjoyed to see his beloved wife alive. But since

he had not slept for some time, he was very sleepy and tired. He placed his head on his wife's lap and fell fast asleep.

Not far off, a boat was gliding along the river. "What are you doing there with that dead man? Come with me. I shall make you rich and happy," the boatman called out to the merchant's wife.

"I cannot come," said the wife, "his head is on my lap. If I get up he will awaken."

"Then use this," said the boatman, throwing a pillow for her. The merchant's wife placed the pillow under her husband's head and climbed on to the boat.

As soon as she entered the boat her husband got up. Seeing his wife on the boat, the merchant thought that she had been kidnapped. "Why are you taking away my wife?" shouted the merchant.

The boatman turned to the woman and asked, "Who is your husband?"

She looked straight into the boatman's eyes and said, "You are my husband."

"Please let her do me just one favour before she leaves," the merchant asked the boatman.

"What's that?" the boatman questioned.

"I shall soon die," said the merchant, "just let

her bring me some water."

The boatman saw no harm in this and he allowed the woman to leave the boat.

"Please pour the water on my head and say, 'I give back to you what is yours'," the merchant said to his wife.

The wife did as she was told and she fell to the ground, dead.

"Now take your wife and go your way," the merchant said to the boatman.

The boatman turned the bow of his boat away from the shore. The merchant calmly walked home.



So ended Tota's story.

"This is my story. Now you tell me why you have not married," Tota said to Myna.

"Listen well to my story, and you will understand why," Myna told him in turn.

### PART THREE

There was once a king who had seven sons. One day while out hunting the sons lost their way in the forest. They wandered through the forest for many hours but could not find their way back home. Night was approaching. They could hear the strange noises of the night animals and they were becoming quite afraid. Suddenly they came upon a hut deep in the heart of the forest.

In the hut lived an old woman and her seven daughters. The old woman seemed very kind. She offered the brothers food and gave them shelter for the night.

Early the next day, the brothers mounted their horses and once more they roamed the forest seeking a way home. When evening came, they sadly returned to the hut of the old woman. Their search had all



been in vain.

One year passed and it seemed that the brothers were trapped in the forest with no hope of escape. Then one day while the youngest of the daughters was preparing food, the youngest prince noticed that the girl was crying. "Why are you crying?" he asked.

"I can't tell you. Enjoy your meal while you can. Soon you won't be able to eat," she cried.

"I won't eat until you tell me what is wrong," he continued.

"I can't tell you," the girl insisted.

"But if it concerns me, you must tell me," the prince demanded.

Finally, the girl told him, "My mother is a witch. She is planning to kill you and your brothers one day soon."

"Is there any way we can escape?" asked the prince.

"Yes," she said, "but you must do exactly as I say."

The prince agreed. And together they worked out a plan of escape.

Now the witch had seven horses. These horses

were able to cross rivers, mountains and seas. The plan was that the brothers would go to the witch and ask her for a chance to ride the horses. With these horses, they would try to escape from the witch. At first, the witch refused. Then the youngest daughter begged, "Please, mother, what harm can that do? They will be sure to be back before dark."

The witch reluctantly agreed.

For three days the brothers went out riding. Each day they returned on time. On the fourth day they planned to escape. When the brothers were leaving that morning the youngest girl told them that if the witch should hold on to the tail of any of their horses, they should quickly cut off that tail. They thanked the sister for her help and took their leave.

The witch had a pet vulture which followed the brothers wherever they went and reported back to her. On this day, the bird reported to the witch that the brothers were trying to escape.

"Take me to them!" screamed the witch.

The vulture led the way and the evil witch followed him, flying like a bird. Close behind the witch were her seven daughters. As the brothers raced along, the witch made a huge ocean appear ahead

of them to try and block their path. Six of the brothers crossed easily but the youngest did not. The witch grabbed on to the tail of the horse. The prince seemed to have forgotten to cut off the tail.

"Mother, be careful, you might be injured. The prince is smart. He might cut off the tail of the horse," shouted the youngest daughter to the witch.

The prince heard. He took out his sword and slashed off the tail of the horse. The girl had saved his life. He sped across the ocean and escaped.

"Tell me who helped you to escape," the witch shouted out to the youngest brother.



"Your youngest daughter," was the reply.

The witch became so enraged that, there and then, she killed the girl and threw her into the ocean.

"This is my story," said Myna to Tota. "This is why I shall never marry."

Myna and Tota spent the rest of the night talking to each other. When the light of day began to spread across the land, it was time for them to return to their homes in the mountains. Myna and Tota said good-bye and went their separate ways.

