

From - The Festival of Stones

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Complete chapter 15 – the illustrations are not included

The Myth of Ellah-jah

“Once,” said Tiptoes, “the angels lived on the earth. One angel was called Ellah-jah, and she loved singing. The earth was as young as a baby then, and swaddled in warm mist. Tall trees grew out of the ground, with leaves bigger than an elephant and softer than a rabbit’s ear. But no people were in the world in those long-ago times – and no animals lived there either.

One day, when Ellah-jah was singing beside a lake, she saw strange shapes glimmering underneath the water. She was astonished. She had never seen such beautiful creatures, and she stopped singing in case they would hear her and swim away. But the moment she stopped singing the wonderful beings vanished.

Ellah-jah pondered this for a long time. That night she had a dream, and in her dream she was singing, and with every word she sang a beautiful creature came out of her mouth – just like the ones she saw at the water’s edge.

Ellah-jah awoke and went to the lake. All was calm, and the water was as still and clear as glass. She sang, and again the creatures appeared within the water. They were transparent, and shimmered with many colors. Some were silvery-green or silvery-blue; others flashed red and gold. But as soon as she fell silent they all vanished back into the water.

“Well,” said Tiptoes, “time went on, and time went on. Long ages passed and the world fell asleep. For a long time the earth slept. Deep asleep she was, and no one disturbed her.

At last the world awoke, and a new earth-day dawned. Ellah-jah awoke too. She looked around and the world was different. The rocks were firmer, the trees did not grow so tall, and their leaves were smaller and not as soft. She yawned and stretched, brushed her hair back from her face, and went to the lake to wash the sleep from her eyes. It was misty, but much cooler than she had ever felt before. She splashed her face with water, and began to sing her morning song. But, as soon as she sang, shapes appeared in the mist. They had wings, just like she did, and when she stopped singing to look at them they did not vanish, but flew away silently into the mist. These were the first birds in the world.

Ellah-jah turned and gazed into the lake, and again she sang. Exquisite creatures appeared within the water, and when she stopped singing they also did not vanish, but swam away into the deep. These were the first fish in the world.

Ellah-jah wandered over the earth singing, and wherever she sang living beings sprang forth from wind and water, and even from the warmth of the sun. She sang fish into the rivers and streams. She climbed mountains at sunrise and sang golden eagles into the wind and they wheeled away high above the earth. She went to the great plains and sang the buffalo into numbers we shall never count. She sang butterflies for the flowers; bees for the heather, and beavers to make marshes. She sang the jumping mouse and all of his family, and the great brown bears of the hills.

“That was long ago. Time has passed and Ellah-jah does not live on the earth anymore – but we can still hear her voice. We hear her in the gentle cooing of the white dove, the growl of the fierce cougar, and the chattering of chipmunks.”

“And that,” said Tiptoes, “is the story of Ellah-jah and how the animals come into the world.”

“Hoo, humpf,” said Ompliant, “that was a good story. Did she sing elephants too?”

“Yes, of course,” replied Tiptoes. “Ellah-jah went to the great land far away from here, to the land of Africa. She rode there on the back of Orca the whale.”

“This is a big land and a wild land,” she thought. “I will have to sing a big song.”

All day and all night she sang, and in the morning, Mompadana, the first and greatest elephant, stood before her.

“Oh, yes,” said Ompliant, “we call her our Greatest Grandmother. She was bigger than a house and taller than a tree. When she walked the ground shook so hard that mountains fell into the sea, and when she flapped her ears clouds of dust rose up and turned the day into night. Oh, yes, she was our Greatest Grandmother!”

All the animals listened in awe. They had never heard Ompliant speak for so long and with such heart.

“Hurray for Mompadana!” they burst out. “Hurray!”

Now was the time for the festival Wandering. Tiptoes led the way. Then came Jeremy Mouse and all the other mice. Then came Mr. Mole and the chipmunks, Pine Cone and Pepper Pot, and last of all came Ompliant. Through the forest they Wandered, singing songs of moles and mice, lizards and lice, and giant kangaroos.

Soon they met another festival group Wandering; then another and another. Tiptoes looked around. The forest was filled with animals; all singing, all Wandering, all joyful in the forest on this night of the Festival of Animals.