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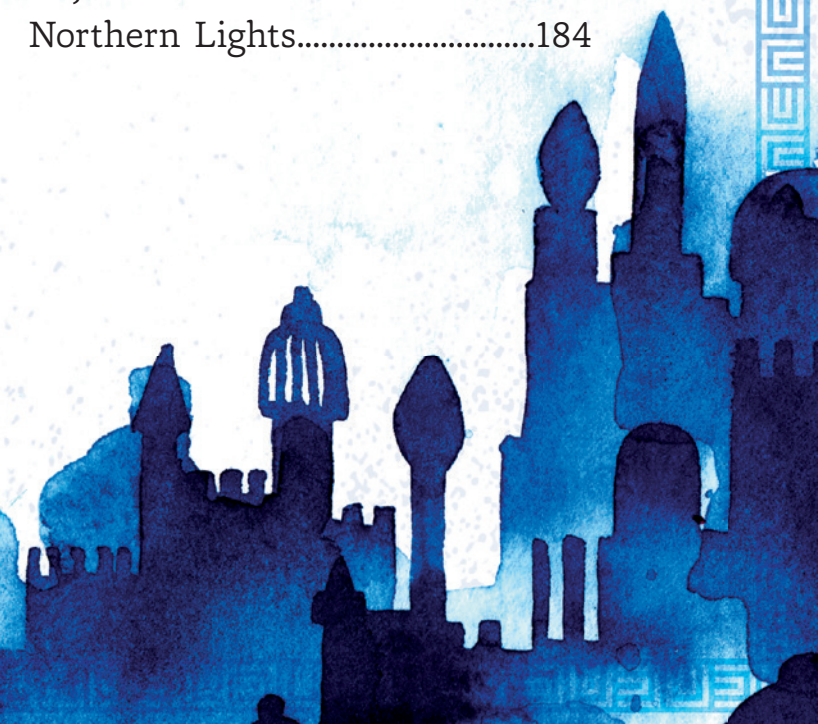
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MYTHS OF ... AFRICA

Africa is home to over a billion people who live in 54 countries and speak about 2000 languages. Each African village has its own traditions, gods, spirits, and stories. Because they are passed down orally, African myths adapt and change, with each community adding its own twist. The stories often involve animals who talk and think like people, explanations for how the world began, and moral lessons. Here are four age-old myths from this vast continent. . . .

THE TALE OF THE Ghosts and the Flutes

FROM THE BEBA PEOPLE OF CAMEROON

In the middle of a forest, there was a small village where two widows, Manda and Ngonda, lived with their young sons. Manda had her son Kweni, and Ngonda had her son Chebe. The women and their boys were as different from each other as sun and moon, north and south, desert and sea.

You see, Manda and Kweni were humble and hardworking. They toiled daily and without complaint in the sun-scorched fields. They respected

everything around them—their fellow villagers, all of Earth’s creatures, and the blessed land on which they lived. But Ngonda and her son, Chebe, were of a different kind: they were lazy and greedy. Those two put in as little effort as possible and stole moments of rest when it was time to work. They took more than their share of food and water when it was time for everyone to eat and drink.

Every morning, as the pink sky welcomed the early sun, all the

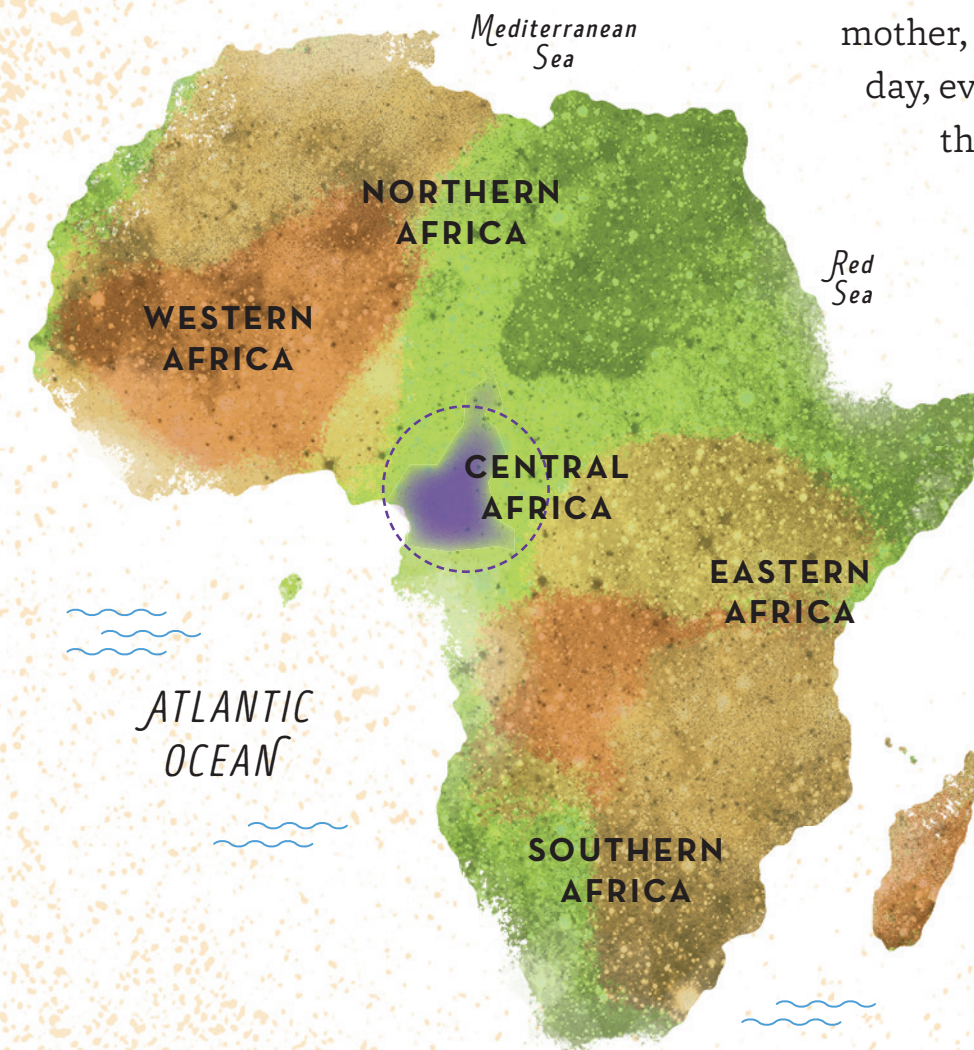
women and children in the village walked together to a distant farm to work. The women got their hands dirty, planting and harvesting the crops, while the boys and girls played bamboo flutes to entertain and sustain them. Melodies from the

children mixed with the women’s grunts and breaths. The sun arced above the workers and shone down upon their wrapped heads.

To escape the heat of the midday sun, the women and children rested in the old farmhouse. As they cooled off and drank water, Kweni asked his mother, “Why do we race home every day, even before the sun dips low in the sky? Isn’t there more work to be done?”

“Loyal child, we cannot be here after dark. This farm is ruled by ghosts at nightfall,” Manda told her son.

Chebe pondered Manda’s reply. As he reached for another cool drink, the lazy child asked his mother, “Mama, if there are ghosts here at night, why don’t we leave now? It’s getting late enough. Surely today’s work can be done tomorrow!”



ON THE JAGGED OUTCROPPING
RIGHT OUTSIDE HIS SMALL
COTTAGE, WERE A HALF-DOZEN
SELKIES.

They lounged and gazed out at the sea, while singing the most exquisite song that ever was.

The fisherman had heard folktales about the Selkie people since he was a little boy. They were enigmatic creatures and shape-shifters, able to live as seals in the ocean or shed their skins on land and exist as men and women. He could tell they were Selkies not only from the seal skins strewn about the rocks, but also because they were extraordinarily beautiful. They glowed like quartz in the twilight, their hair was like hot flames licking the air all around them, and their eyes . . . Well, they were a color of green that the fisherman could not find the name for.

What a rare sight! the fisherman thought, delighted. He stood back

from the group to watch, mesmerized. The Selkies finished their song and began playing and giggling—a sound that was like bubbles fizzing and popping. The fisherman smiled at the spirited scene and couldn't help but laugh along.

Then there was one Selkie who held his interest the most. He suddenly noticed that he was no longer looking at the entire group, but his eyes were now trained upon her alone. The fisherman thought he locked eyes with hers for a moment, and he abruptly stood up and began moving toward the group.

"Hello!" he called to her. "What's your name?"



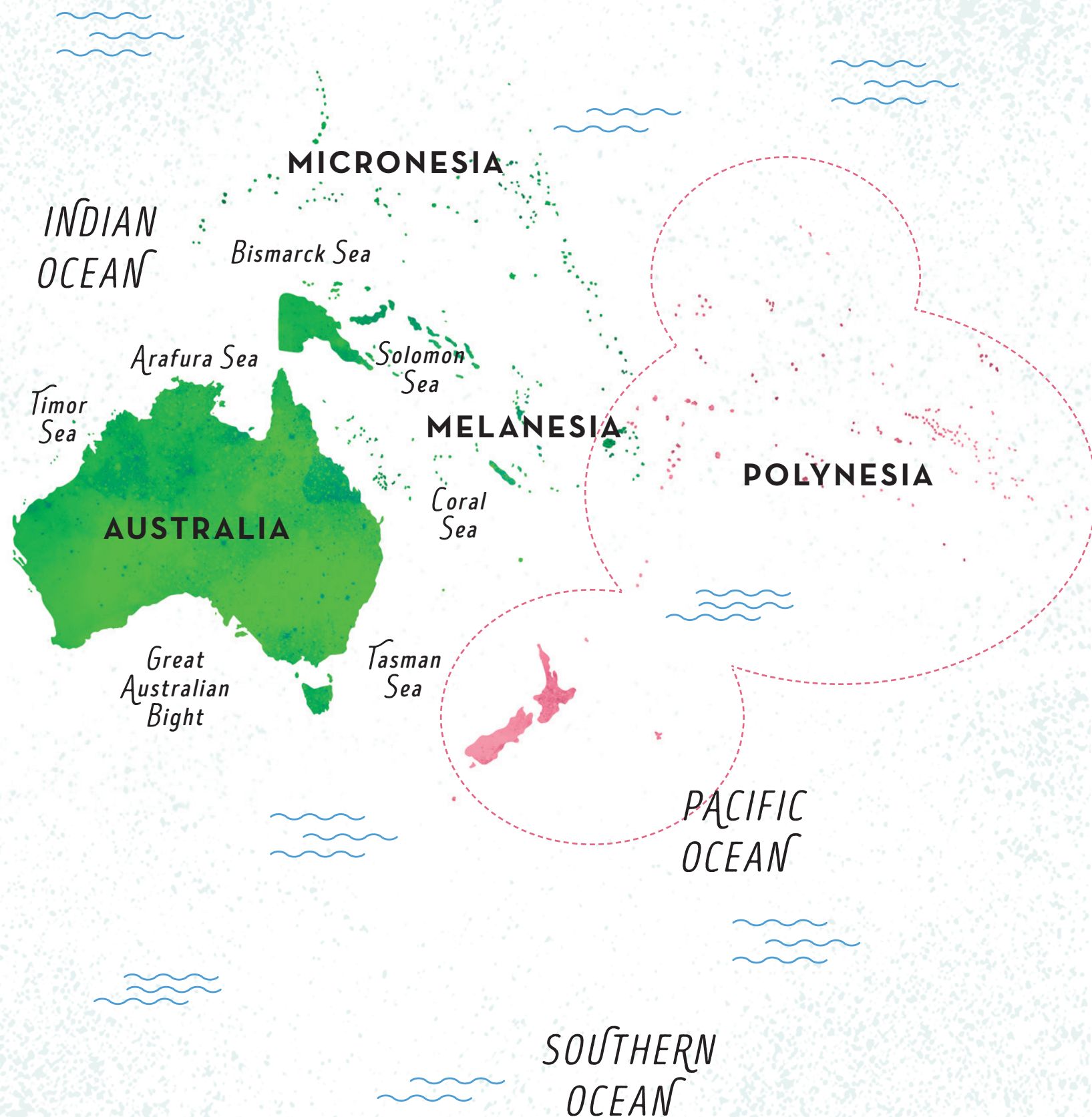
whole,” she wept. “My heart will never truly beat again if my art cannot continue.”

Athena knew that Arachne’s tapestry was better than hers. But how could it be so? No human could surpass a god! The goddess did not know where this mortal had come from, or how she had achieved her otherworldly talents. But Athena did know that there was one way to let Arachne continue making her art and also keep her away from the gods.

So Athena took pity on Arachne and turned Arachne into a spider. Arachne felt her eight arms now move as her ten fingers once did, to weave the exquisite silk. She fell into a calm, enchanting rhythm as she created something brand new.

.....
AS ATHENA WALKED AWAY
FROM HER WORTHY OPPONENT,
— **SHE THOUGHT SHE SAW** —
HUNDREDS OF TINY LETTER
A’s WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC
OF ARACHNE’S FIRST WEB, SHIMMERING
IN THE LATE-DAY SUN . . .
.....





The Legend of Māui

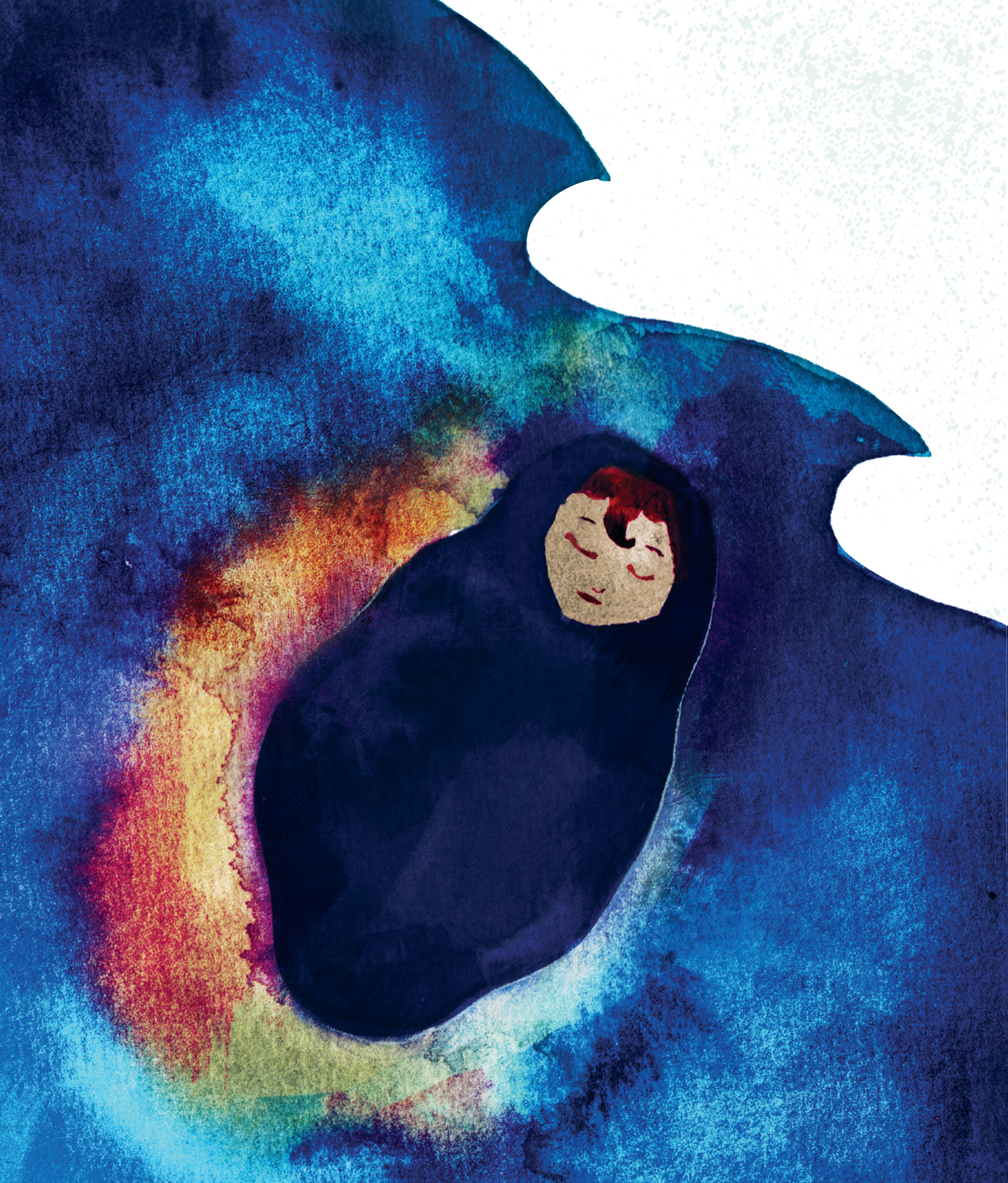
FROM POLYNESIAN MYTHOLOGY

Māui was half human and half god, and moved about the Pacific Ocean playing clever pranks and making trouble. He was a great trickster, but he almost never existed at all. . . .

Māui was the youngest of five brothers, but because he was born prematurely, his mother Taranga and father Makea-Tutara decided to fling him into the ocean. Sea spirits found little Māui, wrapped him in seaweed,

and quickly delivered him to Tamānui-te-rā, the sun god, who revived him and nurtured him into adulthood in the land of the gods.

Māui kept the gods and ancestors entertained with his endless tricks. As Māui grew, he became strong and powerful, like the immortals among whom he lived. And while he now possessed the magic of the gods, he had a human form so he could walk among mortals.



In fact, one day he walked right back to his mother's home and boldly reclaimed his rightful place among his brothers! The family accepted Māui back into the fold. But he was still the youngest and smallest, and his brothers thought he caused too much mischief. They often taunted him, calling him Māui-pōtiki, or "Māui the Last Born." Māui thought his brothers were brutes, so he ignored their insults.

Māui's brothers were all skilled fishermen and enjoyed nothing more than being out on the open water. Every day, his brothers would take their rods, lines, hooks, and canoe out on the ocean, and every day, Māui would ask to join. Māui's brothers always said no.

"And why not?" Māui would ask.

"You'll get us in trouble," they told him, referring to his trickster ways.

"Plus, you don't have any fishing gear and you're not borrowing ours!" Every day, they'd sail off the sandy, golden shore into the vast ocean . . . without their little brother. And every day, Māui vowed he'd get aboard that canoe one way or another.

Instead, Māui spent time with his grandmother, who loved his sense of humor and charm. Like her grandson, she also had a bit of magic in her. She enjoyed Māui's clever trickery, just like the gods who raised him. Māui's grandmother doted on him alone, since she thought the rest of her grandsons were rude.

ONE DAY, as Māui told her that he wanted to become a great fisherman, she popped out her jawbone and handed it to him. "Use this as a fishing hook, dear grandson, and great fortune will come to you at sea!" she told him.

"Thank you, Grandma Muri-rangawhenua!" Māui said, hugging her.

"You're welcome, my little Māui."