

The Children of Melanesia

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A GIFT THAT LIVED ON

Mosmeli was certainly one of the least interested in school. Her dress partly torn and stained from eating young green coconuts seemed to be the only one she had. Her hair as stringy as seaweed was never combed. She had a runny nose that ran ceaselessly like the Poha river.

Mother died last June before she turned eight. Dad, an alcoholic, cared very little for her. She spent most of her time with 40-year-old Lena, the house girl.

Lena, an active church member, would usually bring Mosmeli to Sunday School as often as possible. For Mosmeli, her outward appearance and behaviour reflected lack of attention at home. She certainly was one of those that were just hard to love. Her Sunday School teacher Ms Kalolaen confirmed it. She says she loves all her Sunday School class the same, but deep down inside she wasn't completely truthful about Mosmeli.

Mother's day came and all the children in Sunday School brought presents for the teacher. Among the presents was one from Mosmeli. Her gift was wrapped in Solomon Star newspaper. On the paper was scribbled in black charcoal the simple words "For Ms Kalolaen from Mosmeli".

Ms Kalolaen opened Mosmeli's present. Out fell a turtle shell bangle, and a small bottle of "Topmarewa" coconut oil. The children giggled over Mosmeli's gift. Ms Kalolaen put on the bangle. She opened the coconut oil and rubbed some on her arms. Mosmeli leaned over quietly and whispered, "Ms Kalolaen, Ms Kalolaen. The bangle looks nice on you. You smell like mother too." She looked down on the floor and great big tears rolled down her cheeks.

Ms Kalolaen kept silent for a while, then she rose up slowly, stretched out her arms and hugged Mosmeli. "Mosmeli, thank you so much for the beautiful presents". She whispered. She also had great big tears in her eyes. "I love you dear child." This time it was from deep down within. Ms Kalolaen did finally learn to look deep beyond the outward appearance.

THE PIG CHASE

It was the end of another school day and instead of going straight home, Qula had decided to go with her other friends to climb coconut trees behind where the public library now is.

Qula and four of her friends went round the back of the library area and chose a short coconut tree to climb. The whole area was covered with tall thick reeds and swamp. Qula climbed the tree and threw four green nuts down. They all sat down and began husking the nuts using their teeth.

In the meantime, some Public Works Division labourers had been asked to cut down coconut fronds for a function to be held later on during the evening. Not knowing that four girls were sitting under a coconut tree husking nuts, two of the men made their way towards the tree.

Qula and the girls saw the bush moving in front of them and thought it was some wild animals charging towards them. They got a fright and started running

in different directions. The three other girls managed to race towards the clearing. Qula ran in the opposite direction and found herself in more reeds. She stopped for breath. Just as she regained strength she noticed the bush behind her moving again.

This time she felt so frightened that she almost fainted. She whispered a quick prayer and stood still. To her amazement, from out of the bush appeared a Public Works Division labourer with a huge stick in his hand. He got a shock too when he saw Qula. "What on earth are you doing in here?" he shouted. "I thought you were a wild pig and I chased you. Now you'd better get out of here real quick. Let me show you the way."

Qula quietly followed. Soon they came out to where the rest of them were. After retelling the whole incident, the girls were really thankful that they were safe from harm. Qula and her friends certainly learnt their lesson well. They never went around climbing coconut trees again.

THE RESCUE

The weather had been wet and stormy for the last four days. Tony, a student attending King George VI high school has been hoping that the weather will soon improve. He and his family had spent the previous week collecting coconuts from grandad's plantation to make copra for his boat fares to Honiara and for the year's school fees.

This in itself had been very tiring. Now that all the coconuts have been husked, they would need to be transported down to the main land for splitting before drying in the copra dryer. The whole process would eventually take about two weeks.

On this particular Friday morning Tony thought that if Pita the 60-year-old family bachelor and himself could paddle up to the islands early while the sea was still calm, they might be able to transport some coconuts over to the dryer without much difficulty. Thus, Pita and Tony got onto the old family canoe and paddled up to the island. It didn't take them long to fill up the canoe with coconuts.

They then decided to take the first load down to the dryer. They had paddled a distance of about five meters when a strong wind blew up the waves and created large swirls. The waves soon got bigger and bigger until Tony and Pita found it impossible to paddle any more. Pita also got quite frightened and panicked. He accidentally moved over too far on the edge of the canoe and fell overboard.

Tony tried to balance the canoe to keep it afloat, but it was unable to. The canoe began to sink slowly with all the coconuts in it. Water flowed in. Coconuts began floating all over the place. Tony and Pita clung on to the canoe to keep themselves from being carried away by the strong currents. They also had to try and keep the family canoe from totally sinking.

Villagers looking on saw what happened and paddled up to rescue. Pita was taken to shore. Tony and the rest of the younger boys rescued the family canoe. They also managed to rescue a good number of the floating coconuts, which they transported safely to the copra dryer.

THE LOST OLD MAN

It was already late afternoon when Ula and Arima headed for the seashore. They were going to collect a few shells and some white sand for their art classes the next day. They picked up quite a number of cockle shells and some washed up

seaweed. Just as they were going to turn back, Arima noticed fresh footprints on the sand. At first she thought she must have discovered a turtle track, and so she cautioned Ula to double check.

The girls followed the footprints for a while. They didn't go far though. The tracks led to an old tree stump. Right under the stump sat a strange looking old man snoring quietly. The girls trying not to disturb him, carefully and slowly turned. In their rush to disappear quickly, they stepped on some fresh twigs. The crackling sound made him open his eyes.

Ula, not quite knowing what to say, slowly whispered "Dadi! Iu hao?" He spoke in simple pidjin. "Nem blong mi Sau. Mi blong Gela. Mi go fishing asterde. Raf sea karem mi kam long hia." Arima then asked him if he knew any relatives nearby. He said he had a distant cousin that lived not far from here.

The girls took him home, fed him with warm pumpkin and taiyo soup and put him up for the night. The next day, they contacted the nearest police station and informed the police about what happened. That afternoon Sau's distant cousin came and took him. He was reunited with his family the following day.

To thank the girls for their kind deed, the old man and his family gave them a huge pig and told them that they were welcome to visit his family any time. The two families kept in contact for the rest of their lives. The two families also had many more get-togethers after that.

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