

DECEMBER 11, 2009

THE FLYING TORTOISE -- the play -- by Tololwa M Mollel

INTRODUCTION

The forest has a multiple spiritual identity. This identity is represented through six spirits who stand for the various phenomena in the forest: one spirit for trees, the second for grass and flowers, the third for ponds and swamps, the fourth for rivers and streams, the fifth for paths and clearings, and the last for the skies above the forest. One of the spirits, personified by Chris, doubles as the spokes-figure; the first among equals.

The spirits always look forward to visitors to the forest. They welcome the opportunity to share tales, something they enjoy every bit as much as their main task of sustaining, nurturing and protecting the forest. They have been privileged and omniscient witnesses to many happenings, recent and ancient, in the forest and beyond.

With cast from World Premiere Production, Edmonton, November 2000:

Chris -- *with roles as Musician, Main Narrator, chorus,*

Pat – *Ngwele, Hummingbird, narrator, chorus, Far-Away Messenger 1, wind*

Dave – *Mbeku, narrator, chorus, Far-Away Messenger 2, wind*

Althea – *Dove, Monkey, narrator, chorus, Far-Away Messenger 3, wind*

Maureen – *Flamingo, Gazelle, Sky land Queen, narrator, chorus, wind*

Randall – *Hornbill, Sky land King, narrator, chorus, wind*

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1. GLOWING MBEKU

ALTHEA: A ja ja a a.

ALL: A y o

ALTHEA: A ja ja a a.

ALL: A y o

ALTHEA: A ja ja a a.

ALL: A y o

ALTHEA: A ja ja a a.

ALL: A y o

CHRIS: We are the unseen eyes
and ears of the forest.
We are spirits of the forest.
We are one with the forest.
You might even say we are the forest.

PAT: The towering trees.

DAVE: The grass and flowers on shadowy fields.

MAUREEN: The ponds and the swamps.

RANDY: The gushing rivers and streams.

ALTHEA: The paths and clearings between the foliage.

CHRIS: The star-studded skies over the forest.

ALL CHORUS: And to be the forest...

CHRIS: ... is to listen unheard to watch unseen.

CHORUS: To be the forest...

CHRIS: ... is to feast uninvited ... and unnoticed.

CHORUS: To be the forest...

CHRIS: ... is to feast upon things heard and seen.

CHORUS: To be the forest...

CHRIS: ...is to share with you
strange tales of happenings
recent and ancient
that we've seen and heard

(Stops drumming) Like the tale of Mbeku...

ALTHEA: *(with a chuckle)* Mbeku...

PAT
and RANDY: Mbeku the Tortoise.

MAUREEN: Mbeku...

DAVE: the Trickster.

ALL: Mbeku the Flying Tortoise.

A brief musical celebration of the story to come. Music stops.

CHRIS: Long, long ago, it rained upon the earth for months and months without a pause. Can you make the sound of the wind? And now the rain? A little louder? Pouring?

(leads audience to make the sound of rain)

Then one day, the rain stopped.

To celebrate the return of sunny days, the forest creatures asked Ngwele the lizard to make each of them a special thing. Ngwele was a wonderful maker of things. After she had made everything, she called a gathering of all the forest creatures. She had something for everyone.

To the zebras she gave bold glossy stripes.
To the leopards loud mesmerizing spots.
To the rhino a massive poking horn.
To the mice gnawing teeth and delicate whiskers.
To the giraffes graceful long necks.

To the gazelles lovely tapering horns.
(Maureen – Gazelle -- receives horns)
To the monkeys fine long tails.
(Althea –Monkey -- receives tail)
And to the birds beautiful adorning feathers.
(Randy – Hornbill – receives feathers)
The last to receive his gift was...

MONKEY *(to others, gossipy)* Mbeku!
Look, look at Mbeku.
He didn't get anything!
Do you think he will get anything?

HORNBILL: You didn't get anything!

MBEKU: *(with a smugness lost on the celebrating forest creatures)*
I know. I know.

HORNBILL: How could that be?

GAZELLE: *(only half meaning)* Imagine. Poor Mbeku.

MONKEY: *(forgetting Mbeku, admiring her tail)* Well, I got what I wanted. *(to Hornbill)* Did you get what you wanted? Is that what you asked for?

HORNBILL: *(exhibiting his wings and feathers)* Of course. I got what I wanted.

GAZELLE: *(with pride)* This is really nice. We all got what we wanted. Look at my horns.

HORNBILL: Look at my wings!

MONKEY: Look at my tail!

Ngwele, lugging a big sack, cuts short their celebration.

NGWELE: *(to the puzzled forest creatures)* Hey there. Yes, you. Don't just stand around. Give me a hand. It's the least you can do after all I have done for you.

While Mbeku struts about, the Monkey, the Gazelle and the Hornbill help Ngwele put down the load. They try to pry into the sack.

MONKEY: *(ear to the sack)* What have you got in there? *(to others)* She has got something in there, I just know it. What has she got in there? Do you think it's for us?

GAZELLE: What is it?
What is it, Ngwele?

HORNBILL: Who is it for? Who?

GAZELLE: Oh, please do let us see.

Noisy agitation among the forest creatures. "Let's see. Show us. Tell us."

NGWELE: Calm down. Calm down. You will see. *(struggling with the load inside the sack, groaning)* If you help me get it out.

*The forest creatures jump to it.
The sight of the beautiful, magnificent, glowing shell stuns them.*

NGWELE: All right, Mbeku.
Your turn.

The forest creatures exchange astonished looks.

HORNBILL: What?
MONKEY: No!
GAZELLE: It's for Mbeku?!

NGWELE: If you ever help me to get it on him.

Ngwele, fastidious, directs them to bestow the shell on Mbeku with ceremony.

DAVE: *(to audience)* The shell was all that Mbeku had dreamed of.

ALL: *(chanted)* Ah oooooh ah. Ah oooooh ah. Ah oooooh ah. Ah oooooh ah.

NGWELE: *(in awe, to the audience and to anyone who would care to listen)* This is the most beautiful thing I have ever made. My proudest creation yet. Fantastic. Fabulous. I have outdone myself. Look at that!

Savors her handiwork from all angles. She polishes the shell here and there.

CHRIS: But not every one was as happy.

The forest creatures protest.

MAUREEN: Glowing shells!

RANDALL: Glowing shells!

ALTHEA: We want our own glowing shells!

NGWELE: Wait ...

CHANT: Glowing shells
Glowing shells
We want our own glowing shells!

NGWELE: Listen, listen...

CHANT: Glowing shells
Glowing shells
We want our own glowing sh...!

NGWELE: Enough! You should have thought of that before. I toiled long and hard to make each of you the special thing you asked for. Nothing more, nothing less. You all had a good chance to think of what you wanted. And how you pestered me!

CHANT: *(in the background through Ngwele's speech)*
Glowing shells
Glowing shells
We want our own glowing...