



LEGENDS OF MICRONESIA

Book Two

MICRONESIAN READER SERIES

Legends of Micronesia

BOOK TWO

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She gave the little coconut sprout a name, *drirjojo*. The word *drir* meant "sprout" and *jojo* meant "flying fish." As the leaf grew and spread open, and other leaves came, she gave the tree new names. The coconut tree has them to this day.

People came from far and near to see the first tree in all the world. They called it *ni*, which became the Marshallese word for "coconut."

The little tree became tall and beautiful and strong. It grew away from the window, high in the air. At its top grew waving leaves that made cool shade for Limōkare. She often sat beneath them and wove mats from them.

Limōkare told the people the things that Debolār had told her. She told them how the parts of the tree could be used—the leaves, the wood, the bark, the roots, the nuts, the husks, and the juices. The tree was a great blessing to her. It gave her many useful things.

The elder brother, Lōkam, no longer wanted Debolār to be killed. He also liked the gifts of the coconut tree. He boasted about his brother.

"We kept him, and we cared for him, and we planted him," he said. "Now the rest of you may have his coconut children and grandchildren. They will be your food, your drink, your oil, your clothes, your wood, and your houses."

He would look around, then, to see if all the people were listening. Then he would say, "Don't forget, I'm his brother."

Debolār's Brother, Lōkām

Stories about the first coconut were told in many places in the Marshall Islands. They were not always told in the same way. Here is another story of Debolār and his family.

At one time, they lived in Enibiñ, a part of Ailinglaplap Island. Limōkare was a wise, good woman, the sister of the famous king, Irilik. They were of the royal clan, or Iroij, and were known to people in many islands.

Limōkare had, first of all, a son named Lōkam. Then she had a strange baby that was a coconut. He grew to be a tree, the

first one in the world. She called him Debolār. Later, she had two other sons. They were small boys when Debolār had grown to a tree.

The elder brother, Lōkam, was jealous of Debolār. He moved away to a place of his own, but he used to come to his mother's home often. When the first young green leaves and nuts came on the coconut palm, Lōkam couldn't wait. He gathered a few and put a few pieces into his mouth.

"They're bitter!" he cried. He spit them out and threw away the leaves and nuts. "Let's chop down that thing called a tree," he said to his mother. "It's no good."

"No," she said. "I'm going to keep it and tend it always."

There were dozens of young coconuts on the tree. She made them all *tabu* for Lōkam until they were ripe. "You just leave them alone," she said.

Many nuts ripened. They fell to the ground, and young coconut-palm sprouts began to grow. Soon, Limōkare had a great many young coconut trees. Even Lōkam became proud of his brother. He said to his mother, "I'd like to take some coconuts over to my proud uncle, the Iroij Irilik. I want to show him how wonderful our Debolār is. Irilik hasn't anything like that."

"Take him some, then," said Limōkare, "Let your two little brothers go along with you."

Limōkare and her brother, the great Iroij, were good friends. She wanted her children to respect their uncle.

Lōkam gathered a great pile of ripe nuts. He husked them and put them into large baskets. He threw the husks into the sea. They drifted far away to the westward, where the Iroij Irilik lived. The great chief picked up the strange-looking things and looked at them. "They have strong fibers, which would make good twine and rope," he said.

He soaked the husks in sea water, keeping them in place with stones. Then he was able to pull out the fibers. He made several kinds of twine and rope by rolling the fibers upon his thigh. All the people came to see them.

Then, Lōkam came in his outrigger canoe, bringing his two little brothers and the coconuts from the tree, Debolār. His uncle thanked him and asked, "Where did you get these wonderful things?"

"My mother got them from a strange thing called a tree," replied Lōkam.

Lōkam saw the twine that his uncle was making. He wanted to learn how to do it. So Irilik sat down and showed him.

While the two men were busy, rolling the fibers, Lōkam's little brothers ran around and played. They made a great deal of noise. They played the game called *anirep*. They found a ball that some larger boys had left on the ground. It was a square-cornered ball, made of soft pandanus fibers, tightly folded and tied.

In playing *anirep*, the game is to kick the ball sidewise, frontwards, or backwards. The players must keep it in the air, all the time. It is played to different kinds of rhythm—two-rhythm, or three-rhythm, or four-rhythm. The players clap their hands and keep time for the kicking.

With two-rhythm clapping, the playing is slow, one, two—one, two—one, two. Everybody starts the game with that slow rhythm. Then the clapping becomes faster. Soon the players are kicking fast—one-two-three, one-two-three, and then one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four. Those who miss are out of the game. The players shout and laugh when someone drops the ball. Sometimes they throw small pebbles at the losers.

The two little brothers of Lōkam lost the ball many times. They threw pebbles at each other, screaming and laughing. One of the pebbles fell upon the arm of the Iroij Irilik.

Lōkam turned to the boys. "Stop that noise!" he shouted angrily. "Have you no respect for your uncle, the great Iroij?"

"Go ahead and play," said the king to his small nephews. Then he spoke to Lōkam. "Children don't make noise to be bad," he said. "Leave them alone. Let them laugh and play."

When the Iroij had a large roll of twine, he laid it inside his house. The two little boys soon found it. They played with it for a while. Then they sat down outside and began to tie a net with it. The net grew and grew in their small hands, until it was the largest one that ever had been seen. The boys couldn't stop tying the net until all the twine was used up. Irilik and Lōkam came and watched.

"That net shall hold up the sky," said Irilik.

In those days, the sky hung very low. Sometimes, it touched the heads of tall persons and the tops of houses. It was heavy work to push up the sky to gather coconuts from tall trees. And besides, there wasn't enough breeze under the sky. It often was hard to breathe.

After a while, the net was finished and lay in piles around the house. Then the Iroij Irilik made magic and sang a chant.

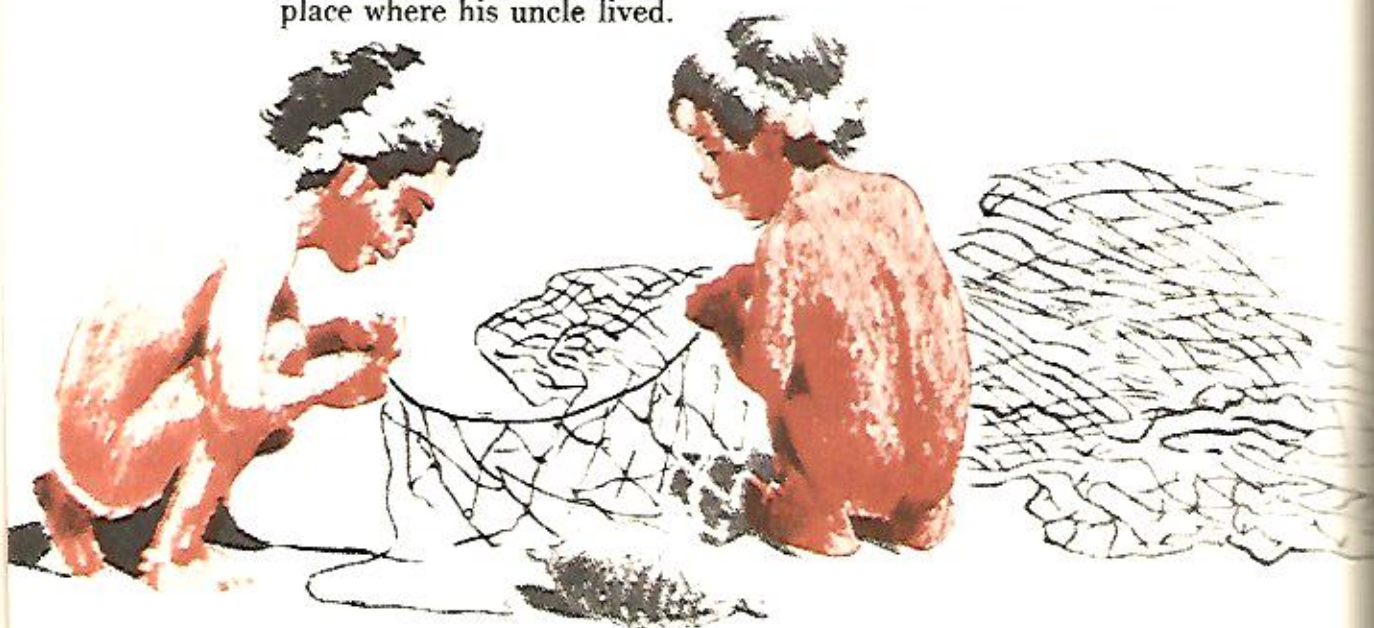
First, Irilik sang to the boys. He told each one to turn himself into a *keār*, the swift white sea bird that flies high in the sky. Then he sang something like this:

“Oh, *keār*, white, fast sea birds,
Take up the net, take up the net,
Catch the sky and lift it high!”

The people didn't understand what the king sang in the chant, but they saw the boys change into white birds. The two birds took up a corner of the great net in their strong beaks. They flew with it toward the east. There they pushed up the sky and fastened it with the net. Then they flew with the net to the north, to the west, to the south. Last of all, they flew high in the middle, rounding up the sky and making the arch of heaven. They fastened the net so that it would stay forever, far above men's heads. And there it still is.

The people were happy. They felt free, with the sky lifted up. They breathed more easily. They thanked the Iroij, but he said, “It has been done by my sister's three wonderful sons, Debolār and the two little boys.”

Lōkam was jealous of his three brothers. He got ready to sail back home to Enibiñ. Before he went, he made fun of the place where his uncle lived.





"Why don't you come over to our part of the island and see how green it is?" he asked. "This land of yours is a poor place. It isn't one-tenth as good as ours."

The Iroj Irilik was angry. He looked at his nephew for a moment. Then he said, "Very well! I'll come and visit you, if my servants may come too."

"Let them come also and see," said Lōkam.

Irilik and his servants sailed away to Enibiñ. Lōkam sailed ahead. He ordered his people to get fruit, fish, and other foods.

"Bring only the best," he said. "Let him see how well I live."

Irilik and his men ate a great deal of food, but much remained. Then Irilik gave magical power to his servants. He said to them. "Spoil the crops and the food of Lōkam."

His men obeyed. One servant made all Lōkam's cooked food smell badly; another filled it with worms; a third man put black spots on the fruits; another made the breadfruit sour; and another turned all the leaves of the trees white and dry.

"I thought you said you had wonderful crops," said Irilik to his nephew. Then he sailed away.

In that way, Lōkam's uncle punished him. But Irilik didn't want Lōkam and his people to starve. He sent two kinds of fish to the shores of Enibiñ, the *melemel* and the *lejabwil* fish. Large schools of those fish are still there. When he thought that Lōkam had been punished long enough, Irilik took away the curse.

The net which the two young boys made still holds up the sky and keeps it from falling down upon the earth. When a heavy dark cloud is above them, all ready to fall, the people do not worry, for the fiber net holds it up. The rain falls through the small holes in the net, which separate it into raindrops.

