



# LEGENDS OF MICRONESIA

Book Two



MICRONESIAN READER SERIES

# Legends of Micronesia

BOOK TWO

*Text by* EVE GREY

*Illustrations by* TAMBI LARSEN

*Maps by* Charles A. Williams, *Journalist Third Class, USN*

1951

HIGH COMMISSIONER

*Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*

*Department of Education*

When the birds flew home from the war, they found out that a certain flying animal had not taken part in the fight. They looked for him and found him on top of a high tree. They surrounded him and drove him down. Then they all gathered around in a circle, with him in the center.

"Why didn't *you* show your face?" they asked. "We didn't see *you* in the fight!"

The flying animal replied, "I didn't fight, because I don't belong either with birds or fish. Don't you see that I have the face of a fox, and that I look like an animal, because I have fur and four legs?"

"You were a coward! Well, you can just stay a coward!" said the birds. "Don't ever come near us again. From now on, when you rest, you shall hang upside down from tree branches."

Ever since then, the flying fox, or fruit bat, is afraid of everything, and hangs upside down to rest and sleep. It has a foxlike face, upright ears, long thin fingers, helpful to it as all other animals. It

The great  
satisfied, be  
about their  
gotten.

Nobody  
great many

"Was th  
been made  
him. And  
struggling



e long thin  
of all other  
es.

fishes were  
They talked  
ad been for-

knew that a

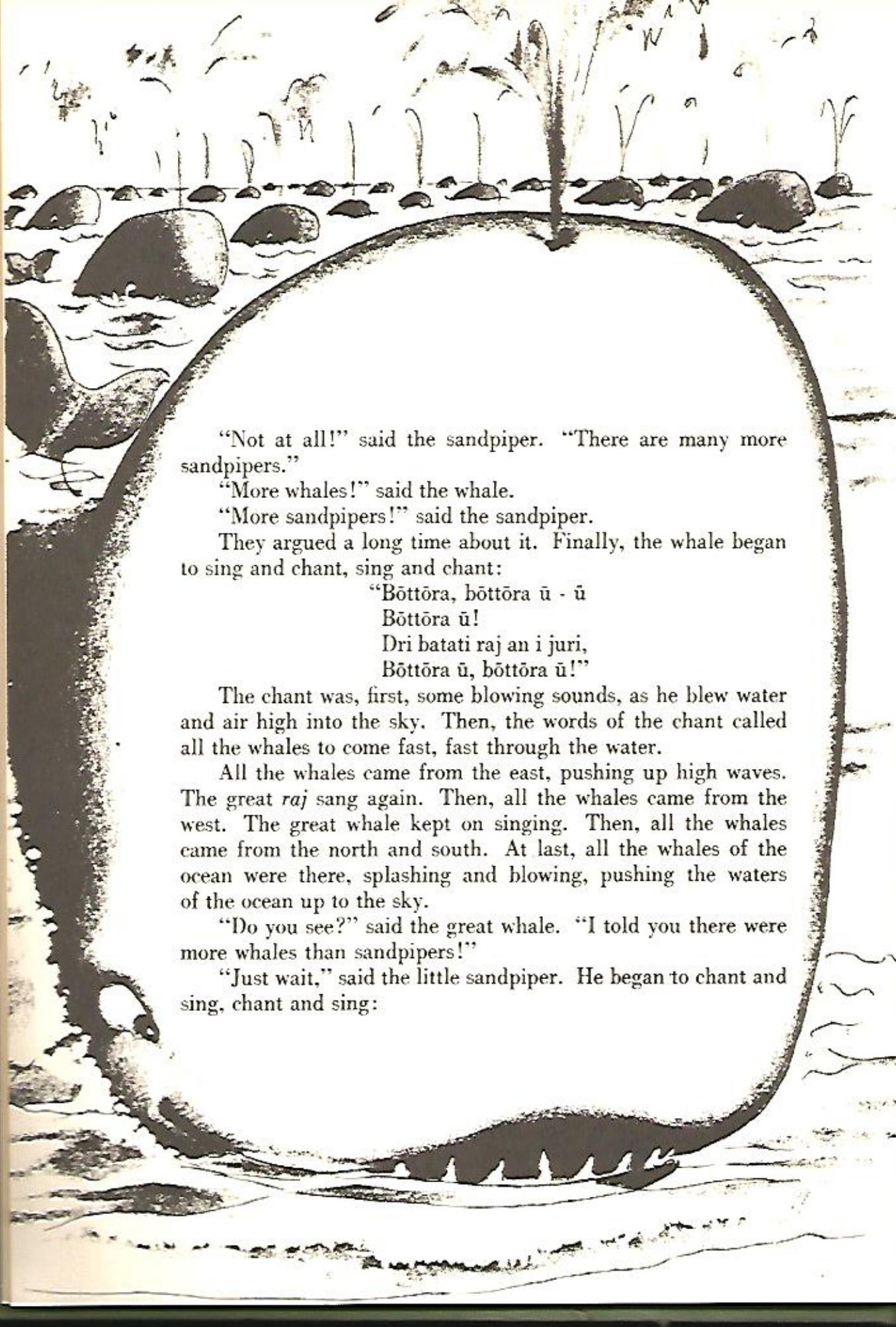
bird who had  
er answered  
me as ever,

### The Whale and the Sandpiper

Here is a story from the Marshall Islands.

One day a great *raj*, or whale, said to a little *kirrir*, or sandpiper, "There are many more whales than sandpipers in the world."





"Not at all!" said the sandpiper. "There are many more sandpipers."

"More whales!" said the whale.

"More sandpipers!" said the sandpiper.

They argued a long time about it. Finally, the whale began to sing and chant, sing and chant:

"Böttöra, böttöra ū - ū

Böttöra ū!

Dri batati raj an i juri,

Böttöra ū, böttöra ū!"

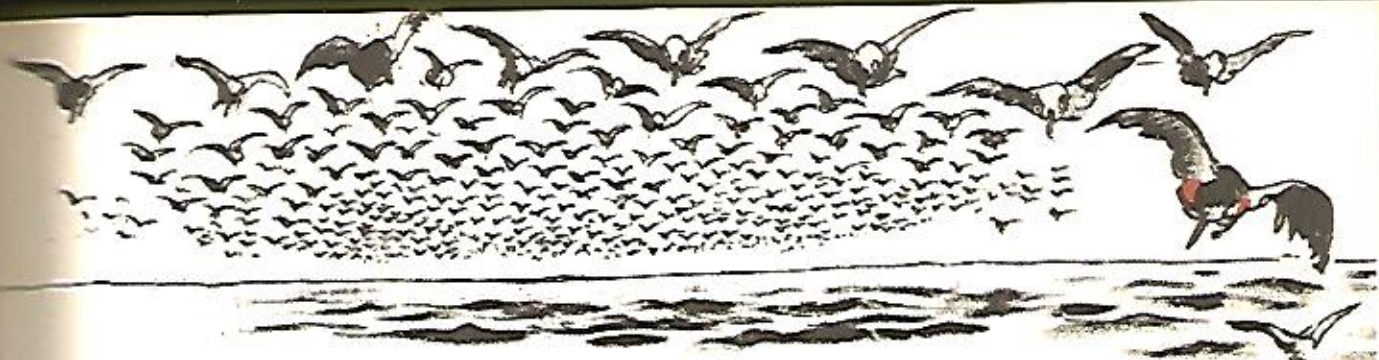
The chant was, first, some blowing sounds, as he blew water and air high into the sky. Then, the words of the chant called all the whales to come fast, fast through the water.

All the whales came from the east, pushing up high waves. The great *raj* sang again. Then, all the whales came from the west. The great whale kept on singing. Then, all the whales came from the north and south. At last, all the whales of the ocean were there, splashing and blowing, pushing the waters of the ocean up to the sky.

"Do you see?" said the great whale. "I told you there were more whales than sandpipers!"

"Just wait," said the little sandpiper. He began to chant and sing, chant and sing:





"Kirir i e,  
Kirir i e, kōla raj i e  
Ej mōn iō kolo ñe kar jab  
Bwijirokwa eo ke i baj mij oo-oo-oo!"

The chant was, first, some cheeping, chirping sounds. Then the words called all the sandpipers in the world: "Come quick! If I didn't have the eagle to protect me, I would be killed. Come, sandpipers, oo-oo-oo!"

First, all the sandpipers flew in from the east, and their wings flapped until a high wind was blowing. The little sandpiper kept on chanting and singing, chanting and singing. Then, all the sandpipers came from the west, from the north, and the south, until the whole sky was dark.

"Do you see?" said the little sandpiper. "I told you there were more sandpipers than whales."

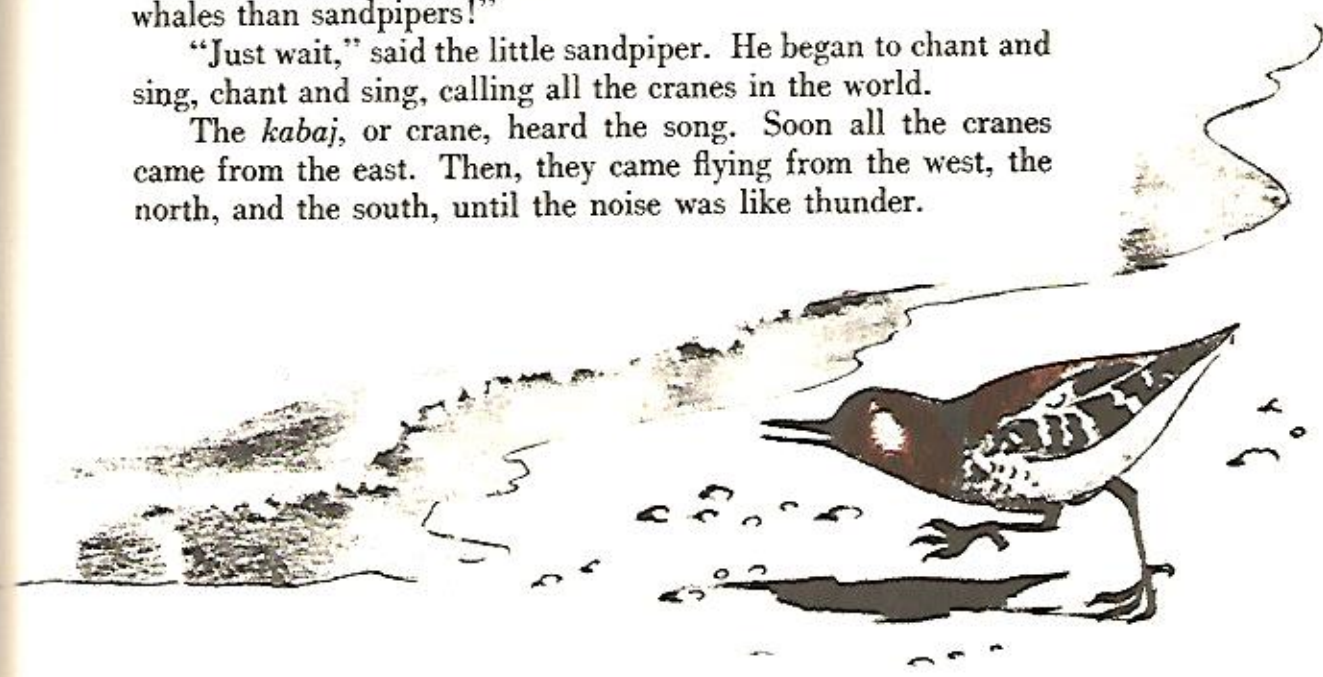
"Just wait," said the great whale. He began to sing and chant, sing and chant, calling all the sharks in the ocean.

The *bako*, or shark, heard the song. Soon all the sharks came from the east. The great whale kept on singing and chanting, and all the sharks came from the west, from the north, and from the south, until the ocean was covered with their high fin-sails.

"Look, look!" cried the great whale. "There are many more whales than sandpipers!"

"Just wait," said the little sandpiper. He began to chant and sing, chant and sing, calling all the cranes in the world.

The *kabaj*, or crane, heard the song. Soon all the cranes came from the east. Then, they came flying from the west, the north, and the south, until the noise was like thunder.





"Look, look!" cried the little sandpiper. "There are many more sandpipers than whales."

The great whale and the little sandpiper kept on calling the fish and the birds with their singing. The *bwebwe*, or tuna, heard it. By and by, all the tunas in the world came swimming from the east, the west, the north, and the south. The *kwolej*, or plover, heard the singing, and they came by thousands. Then the great whale called to the *lejabwil*, or bonito, and the little sandpiper called to the *bejwak*, or noddy tern, and they all came by millions.

And so it went, the great whale singing and chanting, and the little sandpiper chanting and singing, until all the fishes and birds in the world were called together. The noise could be heard high in the sky and over all the land and sea. And still, no one knew whether there were more whales than sandpipers in the world, or more sandpipers than whales.

The fish asked the great whale, "What shall we do now?"

"Let's eat up all the land, so that the birds will die," he said. And they began to eat the land.

The birds asked the little sandpiper, "What shall we do now?"

"Let's drink up the whole ocean, so the fish will die," he said. And they began to drink the ocean.

It took much more time to eat the land than to swallow the water. The birds finished first. They drank up the whole ocean, before the fish had a chance to eat much land. Then, with no water to live in, all the fish died. That is, all except the *kiro*. He had a big belly full of water. He could live a whole day on dry land. The *kiro* lay on the dry ocean bottom for a while. Then he spit out the water that he carried. It made a great pool, but not a whole ocean.

The sea birds began to worry, for they ate fish for food. "We need to have fish," they said.

So the birds spit out all the water they had swallowed and made the ocean again. One by one, the fish became alive and swam around, as well as ever. Then all the fish and birds swam and flew back to their homes, in the east, the west, the north, the south. Everything was just the same as before. No one knew whether there were more whales or sandpipers in the world.



The story of the whale and the sandpiper was a favorite sleepy-time chant in the Marshall Islands. It was sung about many birds and many fish. The chants of the whale and the sandpiper were sung each time a new fish or bird was named.

Like children everywhere, Marshallese boys and girls never wanted to go to sleep at night. They liked to stay awake. They liked to be with older people, listening to them, especially if there were visitors. Marshallese people visited a great deal in the cool evening, after a day of hard work in the sun.

Around an outdoor fire, under the moon and stars, fathers and mothers and older children sat with their friends, talking and laughing. The babies slept. A little distance away, the grandfather or grandmother spread a mat upon the coral stones and called together the children who were too young to stay up late.

Sometimes, the grandmother lay down upon the mat, with the smallest child close to her and the other children near by. She chanted the story of the whale and the sandpiper, over and over. It made the little ones drowsy, and soon, their minds and bodies went to sleep.

The grandmother stopped, now and then, to see if the children were asleep. "What! Not yet?" she would say, as she saw some wide-open eyes. Then she chanted again. Sometimes, it was the grandfather who tended the children and sang.

No child ever heard the story to the end. First, the youngest went to sleep, and then the others, one by one. Their father or grandfather carried them inside the house and put them down upon sleeping mats.

Next day, the children would ask the grandmother, "What happened in the story, after we fell asleep?"

"I'm busy. Wait until this evening," the grandmother said.

Daytime was for work, of which there was a great deal. If a person had a little time free from work in the daytime, he had a nap. The weather was much too warm for storytelling by day. Some people said that it was bad luck to tell stories or sing songs by daylight. "Your head will swell up very large, if you do," said some of the old people, and some of the youngest children believed it.