Niti-eu: The Water Creature

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By: Patti Pedrus

In the old days, my female ancestors who lived in the remote village of Fason, Tol in the Chuuk lagoon would teach their young daughters about how to handle female chores, and especially warned them about fetching water from the well of Newonong at nightfall. They believed that a water creature lived in the dark corners of the well who took pleasure in plucking out the eyeballs of those who visited the well, especially at night. Chuukese young women have always been taught to do their chores and be in their homes by 5pm.

There was a time on Tol island when there were only three people and a creature that occupied its rich soil. In the village of Chukienu, there lived a couple and their three years old daughter. They settled in a thatched roof hut surrounded by prolific rows of coconut trees. Nearby there stood the fireplace and several distinct hand-made tools. This piece of land where they settled was called Neurau’u. On the east side of Tol island was the village of Fason. There lived a water creature that was half woman and half spirit. She lived in the dark corners of a well that was covered with a big rock, known as the well of Newonong. Half of her body could be seen, while the other half was invisible. She had beautiful, long, black hair that fell beneath her ankle. She was the only beautiful, yet bizarre creature on the land. She was the water creature for she lurked in the darkest depths of the well. Her name was Niti-eu.

One day, Niti-eu, the water creature advanced her way up to the surface of the well and hovered over a big rock. She surveyed her surroundings until she spotted something moving at a far distance. She drifted further to the right and there she saw a little girl roaming around the fields outside her family’s humble abode. Feasting her eyes upon the little human, the water creature beamed with delight and uttered her thoughts, “My, my, this is a joyous day for I have spotted my dinner.” Immediately, she fled to her dark corner under the big rock where she began to summon the nature spirits to pay heed to her plot. She began chanting these words:

INEMES O INEMES
fabricate a thirst in the
little human and enchant
Later that evening in Neurau’u, the couple and their little daughter sat down to eat their evening meal. But while they were eating, the little girl cried in desperation and said, “I want water from Newonong. Please get me water. I am thirsty for water from Newonong.” Her father looked at her mother and sighed. Then he told her, “Get the porr and go and fetch water from Newonong.” Agreeing with her husband, the wife took the porr and carried a lit torch, so she could see her path in the dark and began her journey to the well of Newonong.

She had walked ten miles when she arrived at the well of Newonong. She immediately lifted the rock and began to fill the porr with water. Just as she was removing her hand out of the well, Niti-eu rose to the surface of the well and clasped the porr. The woman winced. Then, she looked fearfully at the water creature with wide eyes. Suddenly, the water creature snatched the porr from the woman’s hand and impended over the well, facing the intruder. Niti-eu smirked, chuckled, and said, “My, my, you are very brave to enter the dark corners of my world. Who are you to come here and get water from my well? No one is supposed to fetch water from this well.” Fearful of the water creature, but determined to get water for her little daughter, the woman begged, “Please, I plead with you, let me get a cup of water for my daughter. She will die if she doesn’t drink this water. I beg you; give me a cup of water.” Niti-eu was amused and said with a grin, “Tonight, I will gorge you first before I gorge your daughter.” Frightened, the woman tried to flee, but the creature seized her by the neck and plucked out two of her eyeballs. Niti-eu spilled the water out of the porr and placed the woman’s eyeballs inside. Then, she flew to Neurau’u in Chukienu where the dead woman’s husband and their little daughter were anxiously waiting for her return.

Before Niti-eu landed on the ground, she hovered over the hut and transformed herself into the little girl’s mother. Then, she landed outside the hut and entered. The little girl immediately ran to what appeared to be her mother and seized the porr from her hand. The transformed creature watched the little girl and said, “Your cup of water from Newonong.” On her first and second sip, the little girl felt the eyeballs of her dead mother
and muttered in discontent, “There is no water. I want water from Newonong!” Then, Niti-eu burst into laughter and told her, Tunokamot! You hear, Tunokamot! Who are you to drink my water? No one! No one drinks from my well! No one! She leaned forward and plucked out the little girl’s eyeballs and swallowed them. The porr fell from the little girl’s hand. Then, the water creature turned around to the petrified father and plucked out two of his eyeballs and gorged them. Finally, the water creature picked up the porr from the ground and swiped the dead woman’s eyeballs from its surface and swallowed them. Satisfied, Niti-eu transformed back to her creature self and flew away.

Today, the well of Newonong still stands and remains a mysterious place for it never runs out of water, even during a drought.

Terms:
Inemes: nature spirit
Porr: a coconut shell cup used to hold water
Tunokamot: an expression used when one is angry. Similar to the expression, “bullshit.”

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