

“The Barking Mouse”

A Folktale from Cuba

Antonio Sacre

A mice family was on a picnic. After lunch, the brother and sister went off to play with a warning from their mother to beware of the cat behind the fence. The brother and sister find the cat and, disregarding the warning, start taunting it. Although the mice thought they were safe with a fence, the cat eventually jumped the fence and chased the brother and sister to their Mama and Papa. Papa Mouse said that he would protect the family from being eaten by the cat. But when the cat landed in the middle of the picnic, Papa and the children jumped behind Mama for protection. Mama drew herself up and in her biggest voice barked like a dog. The cat got scared and ran away. Once they were home safe and sound, Mama told her family “it pays to speak another language”.

Being a first-generation American, I identified with this story as my mother always told me, and my siblings, that it is important to speak at least one other language. The story also shows young children the strength of the family and that Mama will risk anything to protect her family, even ludicrously barking like a dog. There is even comic relief when Pap Mouse, the stereotypical Latin male, boasted that he would protect the family. But when push comes to shove, it is the Latin woman, Mama Mouse, who actually gets the job done.

“How Hare Drank Boiling Water and Married the Beautiful Princess”

A Folktale from Benin

Raouf Mama

There were too many eligible suitors to wed the beautiful princess. The king set a challenge that whoever drinks boiling water may marry his daughter. All day long, the handsomest princes, the lion, the eagle and all the other animals tried to drink the boiling water but failed. Finally, the Hare announced that he would drink the boiling water. After he took the boiling pot, he held it aloft while speaking to each of the other challengers. The Hare requested that if he dies, as a result of his foolish act for love, that they would tell his story for the rest of their lives. Each suitor swore they would. Then the Hare drank the boiling water. However, the Hare did not die or get scalded. Hare took so long to address each of the other challengers that the water in the pot cooled. The Hare used cunning and creativity to win and to marry the princess.

“The Farmer’s Fun-Loving Daughter”

A Folktale from the British Isles

Taffy Thomas

A dying farmer wrote a test in his will for his three children, two hard-working sons and a fun-loving daughter. In order to inherit the farm and land, each child would receive one pound with which they would have to purchase something that will fill every room in the farmer’s 161-room house. The first son filled every room with feathers. But when the lawyer walked the house

to be sure every room was completely filled, it took so long that the feathers settled in the last room and created a gap between the feathers and the ceiling. The eldest son did not succeed. The second son used candles to put light in every room. Again, the lawyer took so long to reach the last room, the candle burned itself out and there was darkness so he didn't succeed. The fun-loving daughter drew on what she knew best, a party. First, she opened all the doors in the house and played an instrument that filled the house with music. The mourners heard the tune and started smiling and dancing which filled the house a second time with joy. When the lawyer asked her what she has done she said she filled her father's house three times over on the day of his funeral. The two times as described and the third time with life, the combination of music and joy. All approved her simple and creative solution and she inherited the farm. Although the farmer's test was geared towards rewarding one of his two hard-working sons, the farmer's free-spirited, fun-loving daughter, like the prodigal son, succeeded to inherit everything. I enjoyed this story and "How the Hare" because they both remind me to not resort to the obvious solution. With a little reflection and creativity the solution is simpler than originally thought.

"Little Frog and Centipede"

A Folktale from the Haya People of Tanzania

Retold by Susan Klein

The Frog asked Centipede how the Centipede got his beautiful skin. The Centipede started to tell his story but only got as far as his mother prepared boiling oil. At this point, Frog interrupted three times and finished Centipede's story incorrectly. Centipede got so frustrated

that he couldn't fully and correctly answer Frog's question that he told Frog he didn't care how Frog wanted to finish the story and he left. Frog went home and told his mother to boil oil. Once the oil was boiling, Frog jumped in and that is why frogs are so ugly today. This is wonderful story to explain to people to listen to others, not to make assumptions, patience, and to not jump to conclusions before having the full story.

“Tales of Aesop – Quarrelsome Children”

Fables from Ancient Greece

Heather Forest

As it sometimes occurs in families, children do not get along. They bicker and fight. One father asked his children to bring sticks to his deathbed. He gave each child one stick and instructed them to break their respective sticks and then bind all the broken twigs together. Each child understood that the twig of each child is bound and strengthened with the twig of another. The children are bound together like the twigs and give strength to each other no matter how far away they live from each other. This is a beautiful little story to remind us that the family is our strength and family binds us together.