

# The Golden Flower- How water came to the world

*The Tainos were the first people Columbus encountered in the Americas. They inhabited the Caribbean islands of modern-day Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Columbus asked Friar Ramón Pane to get to know the Tainos, their language, and culture. The Tainos taught the friar about their way of life and beliefs. The Tainos shared with Friar Ramón their view of how the world came into being and how they, the Tainos, came into being. In this myth the Tainos tell of how their island and the sea came to be.*

*Long ago, the island of Puerto Rico was called Borinquén. This was the name given to it by the first people who lived there, the Tainos. From time to time, the families in a Taino village would stop their work and gather together for a celebration called an Areito. All through the night, they would dance and sing. Then young and old*

*would gather in a great circle and listen to stories of magic and wonder, of Taino heroes,*

*and of how things came to be.*

*As you read this story, imagine that you, too, are sitting in this magic circle on a warm*

*tropical night. The wind is blowing through the palm trees, the stars twinkle in the sky,*

*and the storyteller begins to weave an ancient myth, a Taino tale from long ago.*

In the beginning of the world, there was no water anywhere on earth. There was only

a tall mountain that stood alone on a wide desert plain. There were no green plants. There

were no flowers. All the people lived on top of this mountain.

One day, a child went walking on the dry land below the mountain. As he bent down

on the ground looking for food, something floated by on the wind. He reached out and

caught it in his hand. It was a seed. A small, brown seed. He put the seed into his pouch.

The next day, he went walking, and again found something as it floated by on the wind. It was another seed. Day by day, he gathered these seeds until his pouch was full.

It could not hold anymore. And the child said to himself, "I will plant these seeds at the top Of the mountain."

He planted the seeds and waited. One morning, a tiny green leaf appeared. The child watched. From under the ground, a forest began to grow high on top of the mountain.

All the people came to see. It was a forest of many colored flowers, a magic garden of green leaves and thick branches. The child was happy.

In the middle of the forest, at the foot of the tallest tree, there grew a vine that wrapped itself around the tree. And from that vine grew a flower more beautiful than all the rest.

A bright flower with golden petals.

And from that flower, something new appeared in the forest. It looked like a ball. "Look!" cried the child. "Something is growing out of the flower!" As the people gathered around to watch, the ball grew larger and larger, until it became a great yellow globe that shone like the sun. Even as they walked on the dry land far below, people could see it shining on top of the mountain.

One woman said, "If you put your ear next to the ball, you can hear strange noises coming from inside." The people listened. Strange sounds and murmuring could be heard.

But nobody knew what was hiding inside. The people were afraid. After that, they all stayed away. Even the child stayed away.

One day, a man walking on the desert plain saw the golden ball. He said, "If that shining ball were mine, I would have the power of the sun. I could light up the sky, or make darkness fall." And he ran toward it, climbing up the rocky mountainside.

On the other side of the mountain, another man saw the shining globe, and he also said, "I want that thing for myself. It will give me great powers." He, too, began to run. Each one climbed quickly. Each one found a footpath that led to the tree. They both ran without stopping until they reached the shining globe at the same time.

But what they found was not really a ball; it was the fruit of the golden flower: a pumpkin.

The two men began to fight and argue. "It is mine!" said one.

"No, it is mine!" said the other.

Each man grabbed the pumpkin. They pushed and pulled. They pulled and tugged until finally, the vine broke. The pumpkin began to roll down the mountain faster and

faster, until it crashed into a sharp rock and burst apart.

Whoosh! Waves of water poured out of the pumpkin. The water bubbled and foamed.

The waves began to cover the earth, flooding the desert plain, rising higher and higher.

For it was the sea that had hidden inside the pumpkin. Out came the creatures: whales,

dolphins, crabs, and sunfish. All the people ran to the top of the mountain to hide in the

forest of green leaves.

"Will the whole earth be covered?" they cried. Higher and higher the waters kept rising,

up the sides of the mountain. But when the water reached the edge of the magic

forest the little boy had planted, it stopped. The people peeked out from behind the leaves.

And what did they see? Small streams running through the trees. A beach of golden sand.

And the wide open ocean, sparkling all around them.

Now the people could drink from the cool streams and splash in the rippling waves.

Now they could gather fish from the flowing tides and plant their crops. The child laughed and sang as the sun shone down and breezes blew through the green leaves and

rustled the brightly colored flowers. Water had come to the earth! And that is how, the

Tainos say, between the sun and the sparkling blue sea, their island home—

Borinquén—

came to be.