

Legend of Alitaptap



Once, along time ago, in the valley of Pinak in Central Luzon, one of the islands in the Philippines. There was a deep large lake rich with fish. There, the people of Pinak fished for their food, and always, there was plenty for all. Then suddenly, the big river dried up. In the shallow mud, there wasn't a fish to catch. For months, there were no rains. Out in the fields, the land turned dry. The rice-stalks slowly withered. Everywhere in Pinak, there was hunger. Night after night, the people of Pinak prayed hard.

"Dear Bathala," they would recite together in their small and poorly-built chapel, " send us rains, give us food to eat. For the people are starving, and there is want among us!"

Then one black and starless night, the good Bathala answered the prayers of the faithful people of Pinak. For suddenly up in the dark skies appeared a blaze of gold! A beautiful chariot of gold was zooming thru the sky. The people started to panic but a big booming voice came from the chariot soothing them with words.

" I am Bulan-hari, and I have come with my wife, Bitu-in. We are sent to the heavens to rule Pinak from now on. We have come to give you good life!" As Bulan-hari spoke, the black skies burst open. The rain fell in torrents. Soon the dry fields bloomed again. The large lake rose and once again was filled with fish. The people were happy once more under the rulership of Bulan-hari.

Soon Bulan-hari and Bitu-in had a daughter. She grew up to be a beautiful maiden. Such long dark hair! Such lovely eyes under long curling lashes! Her nose was chiselled fine. Her lips like rosebuds. Her skin was soft and fair like cream. They named her Alitaptap for on her forehead was a bright sparkling star.

All the young, brave handsome men of Pinak fell in love with Alitaptap. They worshipped her beauty. They sang songs of love beneath her windows. They all sought to win her heart.

But alas! the heart of Alitaptap wasn't human. She was the daughter of Bulan-hari and Bitu-in, who burst from the sky and were not of the earth. She had a heart of stone, as cold and as hard as the sparkling star on her forehead. Alitaptap would never know love.

Then one day, an old woman arrived at the palace. Her hair long and dirty. her clothing tattered and soiled. Before the king Bulan-hari, Balo-na, the old, wise woman whined in her sharp voice... that she had come from her dwelling in the mountains to bear the king sad news. The news being that she saw the future in a dream and it betold of their fate... the warriors of La-ut are coming with their mighty swords to conquer the land, the only solution is to have a marriage between Alitaptap and one of the young men, so as to have a heir to win the war.

At once Bulan-hari pleaded with his daughter to choose one of the young men in their village. But how could the beautiful maiden understand? Alitaptap's heart of stone merely stood in silence. Bulan-hari gripped his sword in despair... " Alitapatap!" he bellowed in the quiet palace, "You will follow me, or you will lay dead this very minute!"

But nothing could stir the lovely young woman's heart. Bulan-hari blind with anger and fear of the dark future finally drew his sword. Clang! the steel of his sword's blade rang in the silence of the big palace. It hit the star on Alitaptap's lovely forehead!

The star burst! Darkness was everywhere! Until a thousand chips of glitter and light flew around the hall. Only the shattered pieces of the star on Alitaptap's forehead lighted the great hall, flickering as though they were stars with tiny wings.

Alitaptap, the lovely daughter from the heavens lay dead.

And soon, Balo-na's prediction had come true. Riding in stamping wild horses, the warriors of La-ut came like the rumble and clashes of lightning and thunder. They killed the people of Pinak, ruined crops, poisoned the lake. They spread sorrow and destruction everywhere.

When it all ended, the beautiful, peaceful valley of Pinak had turned into an empty and shallow swamp. At night, there was nothing but darkness. But soon, tiny sparkles of light would flicker and lend glimmers of brightness in the starless night.

And so, the fireflies came about. Once, a long time ago, they were fragments from the star on the forehead of Bulan-hari's daughter, the beautiful Alitaptap.

The End.