

TWO FOLKTALES OF THE MONTESES OF PANAY  
(VISAYAN ISLANDS, PHILIPPINES)

By Eugenio Ealdama

How a Brook Came to be Called Tabon, or the Race Between the Deer and the Banags.

Many years ago, the brook which is now called Tabon had no name. The people living near it could not decide by what name it should be called. For generations, the brook remained nameless. Later, however, the people easily agreed to call it "Tabon" for the following reason:

Once upon a time a deer went to drink in the nameless brook where he found some fresh-water snails, called *banags*. When the shells saw the deer, they hailed him and said:

"We don't have long legs but we are sure we can run faster than you. Will you run a race with us?"

Amused by the challenge, the deer laughed at the shells and replied:

"You don't have legs at all and yet you want to run a race with the fastest runner of the world?"

"Fastest runner of the world! ha! ha! ha!", the shells mockingly laughed.

The deer felt insulted and became so angry that he stamped on the shells, breaking the tails of some of them. Snails had tails in those days.

"You ugly little creatures, how dare you deride me?"

One of the shells whose tail was badly hurt cried:

"You have broken our tails, but we are sure that we can still beat you in a race from this place to the last waterfall down stream."

"All right, let us run the race; I will prove that you shells are nothing but boasters", replied the deer.

After counting three, the deer ran downward along the bank of the brook, and the great race was on.

Under a leafy narra tree on the bank of the stream, some distance from the starting place, the deer stopped for a while to rest, but as he looked around, he saw many *banags* crawling in the water. He was so angry that he again kicked at all the shells he could find, breaking and blunting all their tails. Then he ran as fast as he could until he reached the goal, but there, to his astonishment, he also found many shells.

"I wonder how these shells can run faster than I", said the deer panting.

Being so tired, he took a bath; then he lay down to sleep. While he was asleep the snails gathered around and ate his long and hairy tail—which deer had in those days. When he awoke, he found his tail missing and the shells clinging to every part of his body. He was so badly frightened that,

after shaking off the shells, he ran as fast as he could into the forest. Before he knew it, he was caught in a thicket of sensitive and spiny rattan. He struggled to free himself but the vines held.

“We will not let you go unless you give us your gall for food”, the vines told him.

Believing that to reject this demand might mean his death, he gave his bile to the rattan vines which devoured it. This is the reason why the rattan vines are bitter.

The deer was thus defeated in the race, but what was worse he lost his tail. His only satisfaction was that he had broken the tails of the banags.

When the people learned of this event, they called the brook “Tabon” because the deer that ran the race and the shells that were found there became “blunt tailed” which, in their language, is tabon.

How Paray (Rice) Was Discovered.

Many years ago there lived a man by the name Siguinlum and his wife name Tiguinlum. They lived a very simple life. Whenever they were hungry, they just went out to the forest near-by to look for fruit, vegetables, or roots to eat.

When Tiguinlum gave birth to a child, Siguinlum then had to go out alone to look for food. But as fruits and tubers were already scarce in the vicinity, all that he could gather was scarcely enough, and the child cried almost all the time because of the insufficiency of Tinguinlum’s milk. So for the sake of their child, the couple decided to move for some other place where they might find more food.

Passing through a forest, they saw a tall grass bearing tiny grains which aroused their curiosity. Siguinlum touched the grain and, to their astonishment, they heard a voice which said:

“Take us to your home and remove our husks. Then put us in a tube with water, cook, and then eat us.”

The man gathered the grain, and the two started back to their house. On the way, they found another plant with similar grain, which also said:

“Take us to your home and plant us near your house after cleaning the land”.

Siguinlum also gathered this grain and the two continued on their way home.

When they reached their house, Siguinlum cut a joint of bamboo, into which he put water and the grain after removing the husks, and then he cooked it over a grass-fire. When later he opened the tube, he found it full of food which he and his wife ate to their great satisfaction.

Thinking that if they had much rice they would be able to live without going to the forest to look for fruit. Siguinlum planted the remaining seeds in a plot near the house. The plants grew lustily, and the harvest was so

abundant that when Siguinlum and his wife gathered it, there was enough to fill the house.

Upon hearing of the discovery of this food-giving plant, the other people went to see Siguinlum and begged that they be given a quantity of seed to plant in their land. Siguinlum gladly gave them sufficient quantities for food and for planting. Thus rice became plentiful.

Happy for the discovery of the plant that gave them food, the people named it in memory of Tiguinlum's child who, whenever he became hungry, cried "*pa-ay!*" which later became *paray* (rice).

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