STRANGER FROM TULKAN
Children's Edition

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STRANGER

FROM TULKAN

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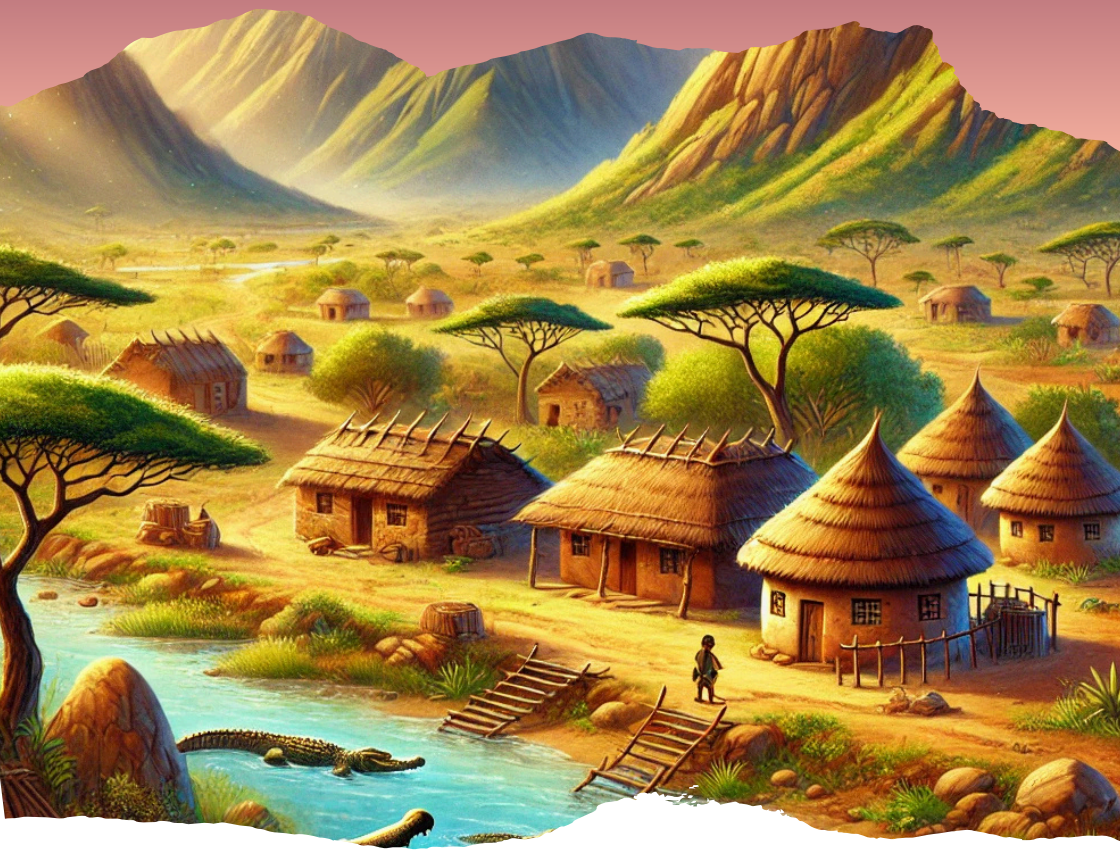
story time

The bearded, robed stranger to Kurut village sat deep in thought on a boulder overlooking the sprawling residence of Loruti villagers. It was evening, and a slight breeze had lessened the otherwise unbearable heat that normally engulfed the entire region that these villagers dwelt in. Kurut itself was one of the poorest areas of Boguni province in the vast Kingdom of Zonka.

The Kingdom of Zonka, ruled by King Diba in the capital Pur, consisted of four large provinces. Needless to say, Boguni province was the poorest and least important.

It lay to the east of King Diba's domain, with high rugged mountains to one side and a crocodile-infested lake on the other. What little land lay between the high mountains and the lake was scrubland, grassy plains and rocky hills. Boguni boasted only six villages, and Kurut was the shabbiest.



Loma was the name of the bearded stranger, and he had now lived among the Kurut villagers slightly over a year. Every person who had met Loma thought that he was deaf and dumb. Nobody could tell where he came from, or what his purpose in Kurut was. He lived a little distance away from the village in a tiny hut, and always dressed in robes of light fabric. This was in stark contrast to the villagers, who invariably wore animal-skin skirts and loincloths[WU1] . Owing to the difficulty of life in Kurut, and Boguni in general, few villagers bothered to find out more about Loma.

Every day was hardship for the Loruti people. A few were fishermen on Lake Edun, as the crocodile-infested lake was called. Fish provided much-needed meat to the villagers, although the poverty prevailing among them brought the fishermen very little profit. Others were nomadic herdsmen, always on the move throughout Boguni in search of pasture for their goats, camels and donkeys. A few had cattle, but of a small, hardy kind producing little milk, and occasional meat as well.

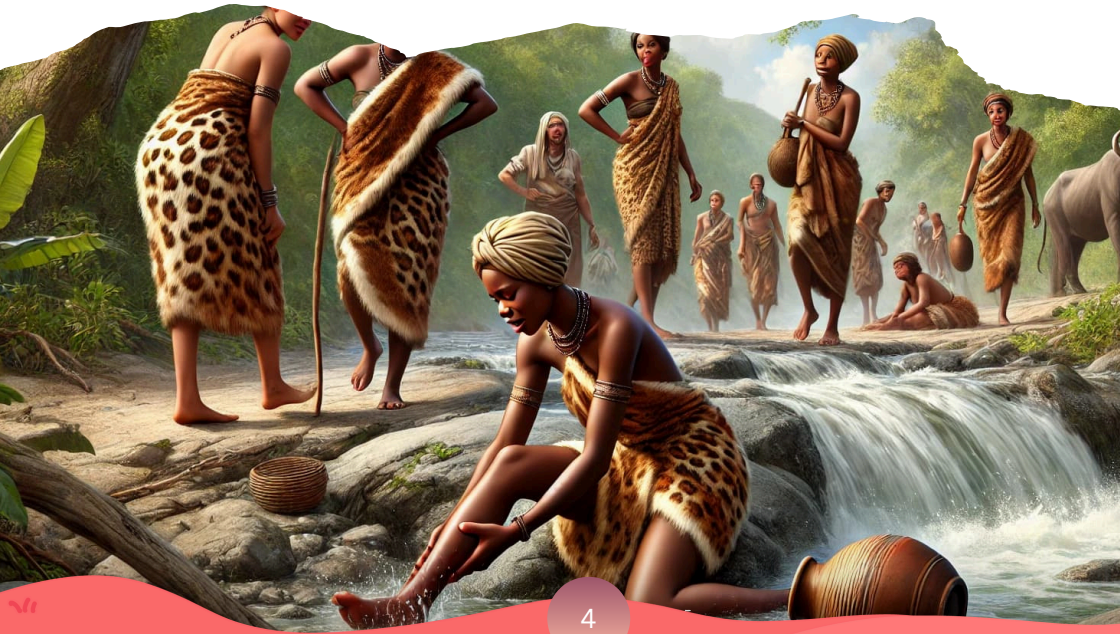
A few men and women made desperate efforts to grow crops, which more often than not consisted of tubers and cereals that could withstand the near-arid conditions prevailing throughout Boguni. The young men occupied themselves in either fishing or hunting which provided the opportunity for trade once in a while with other Boguni villages far away.

Unknown to the inhabitants of Kurut, Loma had quietly been studying these strange, poor people. He had also made a great effort to learn their difficult dialect, and was beginning to feel confident that he could at least communicate in it. He longed for the opportunity to practice the little that he had learnt.

Loma lived in great sadness. This was occasioned in part from memories of his past, as well as from watching the pathetic plight of Boguni and its people. He had long-resolved to do all that he could to change these people and their sorry status, and now felt that the time was ripe.

Lake Edun was the source of two small rivers on one side of Kurut, and these were the main source of water for the Loruti community. Loma began frequenting the places where Loruti women drew water. He intended to find some elderly women that he could befriend, with the sole intention of becoming fluent in the Loruti dialect. He did not know how to approach them without causing alarm, so he just sat watching them regularly at a place where he was clearly visible. He was sure that, sooner or later, some opportunity would arise to make his intentions possible.

One morning as he sat on a rock watching them arrive, Loma was alarmed to hear one woman scream in pain on the pathway going down to the river's edge. As she dropped her pot, she fell down clutching her ankle.



Loma had come to realise that Boguni had more than a fair population of venomous snakes. The people of Kurut had lived with this knowledge since time immemorial, but occasional deaths from snake-bite were not uncommon. He was now almost certain that this was an encounter with one, and he lost no time in unsheathing a small dagger. With this, he quickly dug at the base of some tough shrubs, and proceeded to pull out some roots.

He hastened to where the woman was sitting surrounded by panic-stricken companions. To their surprise, he greeted them in Loruti language, and proceeded to examine very gently the site of the snake-bite on the woman. His assessment had been correct, clearly so from the two bleeding holes on her lower leg.

Presently, he made a slight cut across the two holes, all the time assuring the elderly woman that she would be alright. He then sucked on the cut and spat out the blood. He proceeded to pound the roots he had dug into a fine paste, which he then applied gently over the cut. He stripped some bark from a nearby tree and tied two strips over the mixture, before allowing the woman to rise to her feet. By this time, all her friends were laughing with relief and thanking Loma. He quickly left them, recalling the quick temperament of Loruti men!

Loma continued to frequent the river at this place, and was surprised four days later to see the elderly woman whose snake-bite he had treated coming towards him. She was in the company of two other women and several elderly Loruti men. As they approached him, Loma hoped that there was no trouble.

“Stranger,” began one of the men who bore a look of authority, “do you know our tongue?”

“I greet you elders,” Loma spoke, haltingly.

“I know only a little but am trying to learn more!”

“We are happy to hear this. It is a good attempt. We have come to say how pleased we are for saving our sister here. She is sister to the chief of Kurut, and he has sent us to ask you to pay him a visit in two days’ time”.

After a few more exchanges, they left, and Loma was thankful for this opportunity to be received by the Kurut chief, Kadem.

As requested, Loma visited the chief after two days. He was warmly received, and as the chief shook his hands, he laughed and said, “Behold, the deaf and dumb stranger hears and speaks!”

Soon, they were served with a delicious meal of fish and roasted cassava , and proceeded to talk slowly. Loma did his

best to articulate his words in Loruti, occasionally causing the chief to laugh at his pronunciation.

The chief finally spoke slowly in a serious tone.

“Loma, you have become a friend to the Loruti. Feel free among us and do not hesitate to mingle with us and request anything that you need. I shall assign you a young woman to teach you our language better every evening, after which I shall expect to meet you again after one month. You are free to go.”

Over the next few days, the chief sent Loma a shy young girl accompanying the women going to draw water. Her name was Lesi, and she reminded Loma of some lovely person in his past, bringing tears to his eyes. She was under instructions to talk with Loma in Loruti every time the women went to draw water. In time, Loma was completely at ease talking in Loruti. It was as if he had been born among them.

During the time that Lesi taught Loma, a deep bond developed between them. Although Lesi was only fifteen years of age, her mature attitude never ceased to amaze Loma. They were soon talking extensively over every kind of issue, laughing and sharing jokes. Loma treated Lesi like a younger sister, and began teaching her various things even as he learnt Loruti.

He first taught Lesi how to find water using special sticks, the knowledge of which helped some of the Kurut women to dig and find hidden streams of water very close to the village. He also taught her how to make intricate woven items of adornment like necklaces, bracelets and belts. Very soon, this too spread and Kurut women began turning out in beautiful bracelets and necklaces, to the joy of their husbands and suitors!

One day, Loma asked Lesi to seek out a number of women interested in learning herbal remedies. Many responded, and Loma's trip to the river began to be a serious learning experience for Kurut women. He carefully taught them how

to dig out different roots that would treat a wide range of ailments, including snake-bite. He showed them various medicinal shrubs, bark from trees, and even parts from birds and reptiles that became effective treatment for a host of diseases.

By the time Loma's visit to Chief Kadem was due, his vast knowledge of herbal remedies imparted to the Loruti had spread like wildfire. Sicknesses which had long plagued the Kurut were now becoming a thing of the past.

As Loma sat in Chief Kadem's presence, he was surprised to see how warmly welcomed he was this time. A goat had been slaughtered for him and several elders invited to meet him. The chief called for order and spoke.

"My fellow elders and our guest, Loma, I greet you warmly. I shall not keep you long from your homes. My main intention today is to thank this kind stranger you see here for making Kurut village his home for many months now. As you are all aware elders, since his formal reception a month ago, no deaths from snake-bite or any kind of disease has afflicted our people. That is not to say there have been no snake-bites, for you are all aware that no less than four villagers have been bitten by them. We want to express our gratitude Loma. The elders have decided that as a token of our gratitude, we are going to let you keep the young girl Lesi as yours henceforth!" There was cheering and laughter from all the elders of Kurut before Loma stood up to speak.

“My noble chief and honoured elders, I greet you, and also say thank you. It has been my joy to see sickness dealt with better among you. It has also been my joy to see children healthier and your women stronger. I am content. On the subject of the girl, I would greatly appreciate our continued companionship.

All the same, I can’t accept her as mine. I am a stranger, and one of these days may move on. I would not have her wander around homeless as I have. I do have one request as I bid you all a pleasant night. Speak favourably of me to your young men and women of Kurut for I have much that I can teach them to uplift their welfare. To illustrate this, I shall bestow on each of you a gift of great value, yet from your very own surroundings!”

Loma proceeded to hand each elder a neatly woven leather strap from which a lustrous and colourful smooth stone hung. They were in colours of blue, red, yellow and green.

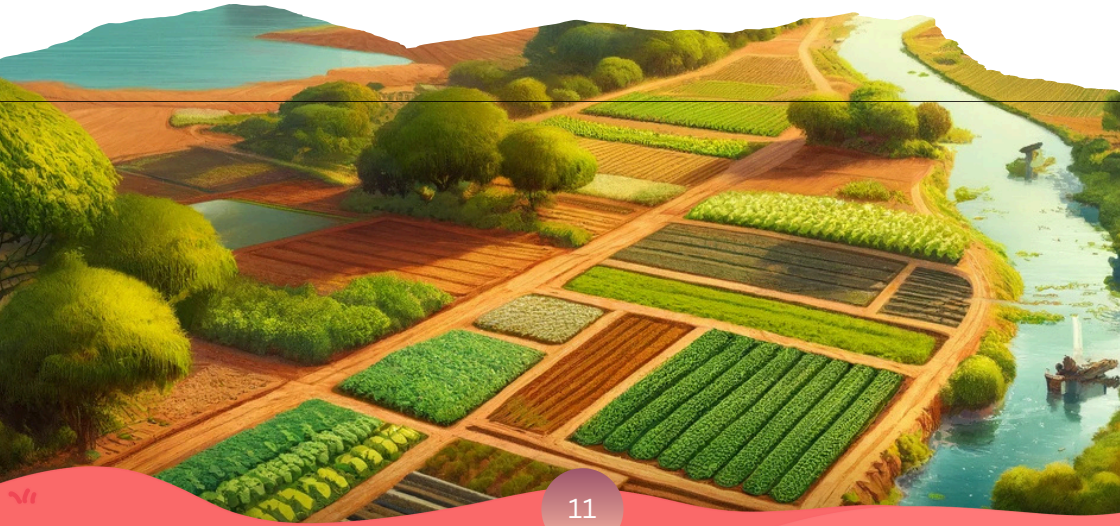
The men admired their gifts in great wonderment, caressing the smooth and clear stones. They could hardly believe that these beautiful gems had come from nearby.

“My elders, each of those stones, in King Diba’s own province of Zakul, would fetch you three cows, on the lower side! Farewell and May you all live long and happy lives.” Loma walked out into the night.

The chief and elders granted Loma his desire, and Kurut villagers were soon treating him kindly and with great respect. Lesi continued visiting him regularly, and Loma was shocked to see how fast she was growing after only a few months. She was now very fond of Loma, and would express jealousy whenever any young woman so much as greeted him on their way to fetch water. Loma knew that there would be trouble in the future, but resigned himself to fate.

In time, Loma began teaching the women of Kurut how to control the ever-present risk of crocodile attack by pounding special shrubs and pouring the mixture of these into water along Lake Edun's shores. This was effective in repelling the reptiles, and was important for his next series of lessons.

He now showed the women how to cultivate on the shores of Lake Edun, and how to dig trenches from the lake into these pieces of cultivated land.



One day he brought them seeds of a kind that they had never seen before. They planted them in excitement, and watered them well. At the same time, they started growing vegetables previously only eaten by Chief Kadem, and that from great distances away. Plants used to season food were also now grown, and Loma taught the women how to use them as they cooked fish and other meals. Kurut was soon full of accomplished cooks, as well as over-weight men!

After only one full year, Kurut village had been completely transformed. Children became much healthier, and adults began looking and feeling stronger. The previously rough skins of Chief Kadem's people became smooth and even the beauty of Loruti women suddenly became a major topic.

Meanwhile, the strange seeds that they had planted from Loma produced large round fruits with sweet reddish flesh inside. These became instant attractions during market days to people of Boguni from great distances away.

For once, in all known history, Kurut had become important, and its women discovered that they could feed their families better. From the influx of traders, even the profits from sale of fish by Kurut men rose to new levels. With the increased wealth, new and better huts sprung up all over Kurut, and families grew as food increased.

Chief Kadem himself was not left out of the rapid and helpful

developments taking place in Kurut, and was now able to build a bigger residence, as well as exact better revenue from his people. He even married a new wife, and appointed more elders!

The developments around Kurut made Loma very happy. One morning, as he just finished making Lesi a beautiful necklace of the same stones he had presented the elders and the chief with, she came running excitedly to him. He quickly hid the necklace, and greeted her warmly.

“Well now, my lovely one,” he began, “why all the rush? Is anything the matter?”

“No Loma, nothing is wrong,” Lesi said, as she sat next to him. He had asked her a few weeks previously not to call him ‘father’ as girls of her age called him. She was fast becoming a beautiful woman, and he felt awkward whenever she called him father.

Lesi proceeded to explain that one of the elders had sent several young men to Zakul, King Diba’s province. They had sold his precious stone and returned with no less than five healthy cows. Even chief Kadem’s cows looked thin and sickly in comparison to those they had returned with.

It was no surprise to Loma. He knew that high on the slopes of the rugged mountains that formed Boguni’s border near

Kurut, precious stones could be found. He now took out the beautiful necklace of clear blue stones and hung it around Lesi's neck.

"That is for you, my lovely. Please keep it as safe as you can. It is actually worth thirty of the cows you have just mentioned!"

Lesi could hardly believe her ears. She laughed and stood up to dance in glee. She could hardly stop caressing the beautiful, smooth stones that hung around her neck. She finally jumped into Loma's arms as he stood, and threw her arms around his neck!

He was glad that nobody was around to see this unreserved expression of her joy. He could hardly get Lesi to release him but she finally did. She continued to thank him over and over again.

Unknown to Loma and all Kurut, the stone that the elder had sold finally became the property of one of King Diba's prominent elders. Its origin was also disclosed after a while, and months later brought very important visitors to Kurut.

Chief Kadem one morning received word that several wealthy men under armed escort had come to Kurut's market day. They had brought with them a large herd of very healthy oxen.

“What do they want to buy?” asked the chief.

“Sir, it would appear they want precious stones like that one sold by elder Abom. Where can they find more?”

Chief Kadem pondered a while, and then sent for all his elders. As soon as they arrived he gathered them around a small table and spoke in low tones.

“My fellow elders, riches seem to be seeking us out. Do you each remember the stones we got from Loma? Well, if you

ever wanted herds of cattle to your names, bring your stones out, for wealthy traders from Zakul have come seeking them. For the sake of uniformity, I suggest that none of you sell his for less than four cows. Are we in agreement?"

The elders agreed, and almost ran to their homes in haste. Soon, they were at the market-place with the beautiful stones. As agreed, each elder returned home with no less than four cows, and eventually the wealthy traders from Zakul left. Before they left, they also bought from Kurut women all the large juicy fruits grown by the shores of Lake Edun.

That evening, Chief Kadem invited Loma, Lesi and all his elders to a feast. He slaughtered a bull, and roast meat was served in great abundance as the feast began. Chief Kadem had invited dancers and singers too, and these kept all the guests thoroughly entertained. Lesi, for her part, sat close to Loma, wearing her beautiful necklace. She was now a beautiful young woman, and all the elders whispered among themselves how appropriate their offer to Loma had been. They all hoped he would reconsider their token of appreciation and marry her.

"Most honourable guests," began Chief Kadem, standing up to speak when eating was over. "I greet you all. I do not wish to hold you long, but just wanted to extend my gratitude to you all for coming. Our feast today is in appreciation that the

gods sent Loma our way. Since he became one of us, Kurut has suddenly become important.

The knowledge of our women in treating all kinds of affliction has been sought out from as far away as Zakul, the King's own province. The sweet fruits now grown so readily on Lake Edun's shores by our women are served to even King Diba and his dignitaries. Why, in his entire kingdom, no other province grows fruits as delicious as ours. We have Loma again to thank for this.

Water, previously hard to come by, is found even in the village now, as Lesi over there taught our women to find. We even have herbs to treat the water. As you have also observed on our women, beauty is lately one of their qualities. Their fine woven leather bracelets, necklaces and anklets are the envy of all Boguni.

Recently, several young men from other Boguni villages have visited me with the sole purpose of expressing their desire to marry some of our girls! This has never been heard of in as much history of Boguni as we know! Again, thanks to Loma for his skills of special skin lotions and beautiful adornments that have made this a reality.

Finally, we have so many cattle of late that our young men are finding great difficulty feeding them. We can't complain, and even this very week Loma has been showing many of our

villagers special plants easily grown on Lake Edun's shores to supplement animal grazing. We are indeed grateful, and I want to personally thank Loma again. In conclusion, I ask Loma to reconsider the special offer we made him!"

There was great applause, and Loma stood up to speak.

"My chief, elders and guests here, I thank you all. I feel ill-placed to speak after Chief Kadem, but please allow me to. I am happy to see Kurut and its villagers wealthy and happy, as well as to see them become important to even King Diba.

I would only request that we all make every effort to instil integrity and wisdom in all our people. Pride in successful people becomes an impediment and unnecessary burden. I would also mention at this point that the success and increased wealth of Kurut's people will not go down well among many people. Chief among these will be Boguni villages that were previously deemed more important than ours.

It would be good of Chief Kadem to begin establishing a way to defend this part of Boguni, but at the same time establish friendly ties with villages of Boguni nearest to us. In this respect, I would kindly request Chief Kadem's support in recruiting young and unoccupied men of Kurut to some special training that I could offer. Thank you all".

There were shouts of support and prolonged applause, and the feast ended with Chief Kadem's expressed commitment to Loma's suggestion.

Over the next few months, Loma received numerous young men, instructed by Chief Kadem and his elders to keenly follow any instructions given by Loma. He proceeded to form two teams from these men, one of which was assigned to hunt adult crocodiles. This was not very difficult, as most were already familiar with techniques enabling this to be done. The crocodiles were skinned carefully, and provided much meat to Kurut villagers over several weeks.

While still fresh, Loma showed this team how to cut the toughest sections of crocodile skin and stretch them over curved mounds of hot, sandy soil. To these curved tough hides, special frames of thin, flexible branches were woven in cords made from animal gut. Soon, numerous tough crocodile hide shields were complete, the like of which no Loruti had ever seen. In later testing of the same, no arrows or spears could penetrate these shields, no matter how forcefully projected!

Next, Loma taught the same team how to make quivers, bows and arrows. After a few months, a formidable arsenal of bows, arrows and quivers was stocked in Chief Kadem's armoury.

To the second team of Kurut men, Loma taught the skills of smelting iron from the base of the rugged mountains nearby. This team was delighted to learn how to forge iron into various weapons and tools. They at first made a heap of arrow-heads, spearheads and axe heads, which were again amassed in Chief Kadem's armoury.

Next, they made helmets and bucklers, to be worn by warriors. By the time they had finished, every able-bodied man in Kurut could be formidably armed and equipped at short notice, and Loma knew too well that the only obstacle

remaining would be training in military combat.

When Chief Kadem finally received Loma's report on the progress of arms and how skilful Kurut's men had become in the art of the blacksmith, he was a very happy and proud man. He again convened a meeting of all leaders, including young men and fishermen.

At this meeting, in which Loma sat as consultant, Chief Kadem expressed gratitude for all their efforts and cooperation. He also expressed the need for all Kurut villagers to exercise general secrecy about any matters touching on areas like the production of iron weapons. This was to be constantly repeated to all Lorutis until it became part of their customs. As the meeting ended, Loma requested leave to proceed with recruitment of warriors as well as their training in hand-to-hand combat.

Several months of training by Loma provided Chief Kadem with a well-disciplined warrior force. The warriors, though not very many, had become proficient archers, spearmen and swordsmen. They were confident that they could defend their families efficiently, and Loma ensured that they all kept arms handy in each of their homes. Crocodile skin shields hanging on walls became a common sight in every Kurut home, as well as bows, arrows and spears.

Chief Kadem met Loma several times after this military preparation was accomplished. From this meeting, Chief Kadem appointed commanders to take charge of protection of Kurut's environs. Lake Edun's shores were hereafter routinely patrolled and watched. The village's outskirts were constantly guarded, although not visibly. A special watch protected Kurut's villagers on each market day.

At the end of that year, Kurut had grown rapidly to a very large and beautiful village, surrounded by many young trees that Loma had recommended the planting of. The market place was well laid-out, and visited from far and wide.

The traders that came from distant places sought the now-famous water melons grown by Kurut women, adornments of every kind, goats, camels, tools and weapons of iron, crocodile skins and items made from them, herbal medicines, fish of all kinds and vegetables.

Poverty in Kurut had now been lost to memory, and Loma was very happy to watch the Loruti people become a strong healthy and beautiful people.

From his great store of wealth, Chief Kadem gradually set aside items that would become very useful in the future. At Loma's insistence, Chief Kadem invited delegates from the rulers in all surrounding Boguni villages to a very great feast after one market day.

They duly came and were hosted in splendour not seen even in their own villages. Roast meat of every kind was abundantly served, as well as special stews and fruits. At the end of this feast with his neighbours, Chief Kadem expressed his desire to see Boguni people living in unity. He then gave gifts to every delegate, as well as a befitting escort by his formidable armed warriors. These looked so fierce and war-like, that it was only Chief Kadem's kind gestures and assurances that allayed the delegates' fear that harm would befall them.

While all these things were taking place, Loma and Lesi continued their deep friendship, which was of late getting harder to maintain as just friendship.

Lesi had blossomed to become a stunning beauty of great attraction. Loma knew that he could not help falling in love with her before long, and Lesi herself was already deeply in love with him. She could not live through a single day without seeing Loma. Her family had already known and approved of Chief Kadem's offer of Lesi as wife to Loma, and she wondered every day why he did not take her home with him.

One day, as they sat together away from Kurut village, Lesi decided to ask Loma several deep questions.

"Loma dear one, could I ask some questions and not offend you?"

"Why, please do, Lesi," he replied. "There is nothing you can ever say that would offend me."

"Where did you come from, and who were your people?" Lesi quietly asked.

Loma paused and sadly began his answer to Lesi's question.

"I am a Tulkani from a people that lived on the shores of Lake Tulkan. That is a far-off country beyond the highest of those mountains that you see there."

Loma went on to tell Lesi of how the Tulkani were a skilled and very advanced people that lived all by themselves on the shores of a great crater lake by the same name, Tulkan. He went on to tell her of how the Tulkanis border to one side was a great and high volcano that rumbled gently once every few months.[WU1]

“One day, Lesi, this great volcanic mountain called Banu began spewing smoky ash down its side. My people had often seen similar events, and ignored it.

I had a dream, around this time and in it I saw great devastation over the entire region I called home. I tried very hard to tell my fellow Tulkanis about the dream, only to be derided and sneered at. I had a young friend, as lovely as you, that I had intended to marry.

Even she laughed at my dream.

I decided to take leave from them all and travel for a few days over Mt. Banu into the region between Tulkan and these mountains here. I had hardly gone two days when a great rumble on Banu turned to a loud explosion of hot ash that rained over a wide expanse. Soon, a downpour of rain such as I had never seen fell over Banu.

When it ended a day later, I hastened to the top of Banu to see whether Tulkan had survived this. I was relieved to note that it had not been fire and molten rock raining over Tulkan. In spite of this, my heart was heavy as I reached the lofty mountain-top. Over all Tulkan, a heavy, grey and sluggish mud had covered everything! Lesi, not even the animals had escaped!"

At this, Loma and Lesi hugged each other in tearful sobs of anguish. They stayed this way for a long time, and finally Lesi whispered, "Loma, please forgive my asking. I have dug out painful wounds in you, and I am sorry. I won't ask any more questions, but I do love you very much Loma. Never forget that."

Loma only stayed a few days more before deciding that he had done enough for the Loruti people. He felt that, unless he left them now he would never leave at all. He summoned all the courage he had and found his way to Chief Kadem's residence. Soon, he was sitting beside the chief sharing a delicious meal.

"Loma, what brings you to my house today? I hope there is no problem because I haven't had better days in years!''

"Well Chief Kadem," replied Loma, "I have come to actually say farewell. I feel that my continued stay among your people is becoming quite unnecessary. Your people have become adept at feeding, treating and protecting themselves quite admirably. I beg leave of you before I go."

Chief Kadem's face could not conceal his sadness as Loma spoke. He gradually pulled himself together and spoke.

"Loma, I have no words to express either my gratitude at your arrival many months ago, or my grief at your departure now. I only ask that may every blessing rest upon you as you leave us. Kindly allow me only one day before you leave to summon my fellow elders to bid you farewell."

Loma consented to the chief's request, and this was set for the next evening.

Many guests arrived the next evening at Chief Kadem's feast in farewell to Loma. Although Loma had tried to keep all this from Lesi, she was formally invited by one of the elders, as were her parents.

The feast began on a high note as music, dances and other entertainment begun. Much roast meat was served, as well as the best stews from chief Kadem's kitchen. Loma and Lesi were treated royally and kept well-fed. They both looked very happy, although Loma had some misgivings about leaving Lesi out of the picture. He had planned to bid her farewell only at the last moment. Now as she sat contented and happy, he began feeling as if there was something going on that he did not know about.

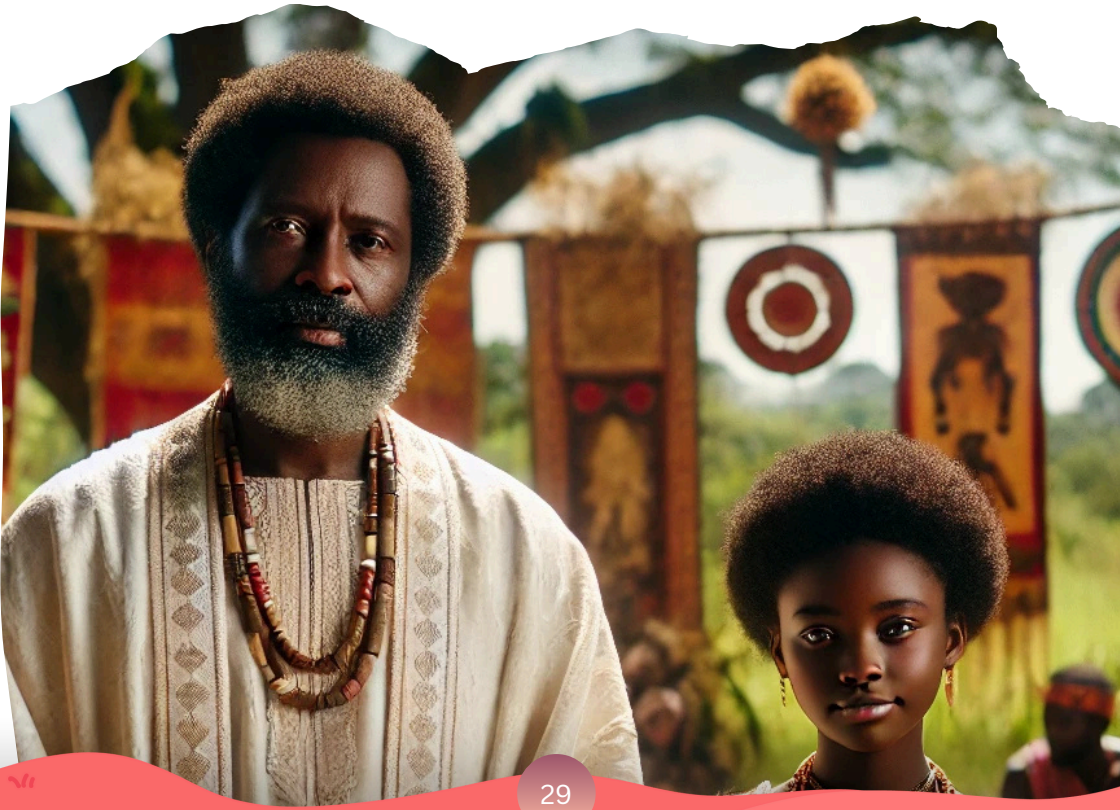
Chief Kadem finally stood up and asked for silence. He, on his part, had studied Loma and Lesi's relationship for some time now. He had realized that Loma would certainly leave Lesi when he left Kurut unless something was done about it. He now purposed that he would not be left nursing a broken-hearted young woman as the love of her life walked away.

"Honourable guests, fellow elders and our chief guests Loma and Lesi, I greet you all. Thank you for coming. As I speak, I invite Lesi's parents to come and stand by my side."

This was done, and the chief resumed his speech.

“We are here to bid farewell to a stranger that came to Kurut many months ago. He has now accomplished what he came to do, and I will not hold him against his will. As he leaves, Lesi’s parents here have confirmed one thing to me. Please come here Loma.”

As Loma stood up, he was perplexed at these developments. Soon, Lesi’s parents went to her side, took her by the hand and led her to Loma. They put Lesi’s hands in Loma’s and said firmly, “Loma, Lesi is yours as wife from this day on. If you leave her, you leave your wife behind!”



“There was renewed cheering, applause and great rejoicing and Loma at once knew that he had been outwitted by Chief Kadem.

He took his wife Lesi by the hand and thanked the parents profusely. He thanked the chief, too, and made lengthy praise of his wise guidance of the Loruti people.

When the feast ended, Loma left with Lesi, who was by now so full of joy that she could hardly speak. For good or for worse, she was determined to live out the rest of her life with this strange man from Tulkan that she had grown to love so dearly.