

Story 1: The story of Saint Nicholas



Story shared by: *Andrijana*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade*

The Story:

In a kingdom, there lived a king who had a daughter, a princess. A disease spread through the kingdom, causing people to suddenly develop sores on their bodies. Most of the population fell ill, including the princess. The king announced that whoever could find a cure would be given everything: the kingdom and the princess, just to heal his people and his child. Various princes and nobles from neighboring kingdoms came forward, but none succeeded in helping. One day, a young man from a village appeared and promised to find a cure. He was so convincing that the king believed him and placed all his hopes in him.

The young man embarked on a long journey - he got into a boat and began to sail, letting fate guide him. Suddenly, a light shone upon him and he heard a voice telling him to go to a nearby island and gather certain plants. Once he gathered them, the voice would return and tell him what to do with them. On the island, the young man gathered the plants exactly as the voice had instructed. After collecting them, the light and voice reappeared, instructing him to go to a nearby swamp, collect mud from it, and mix it with the plants.

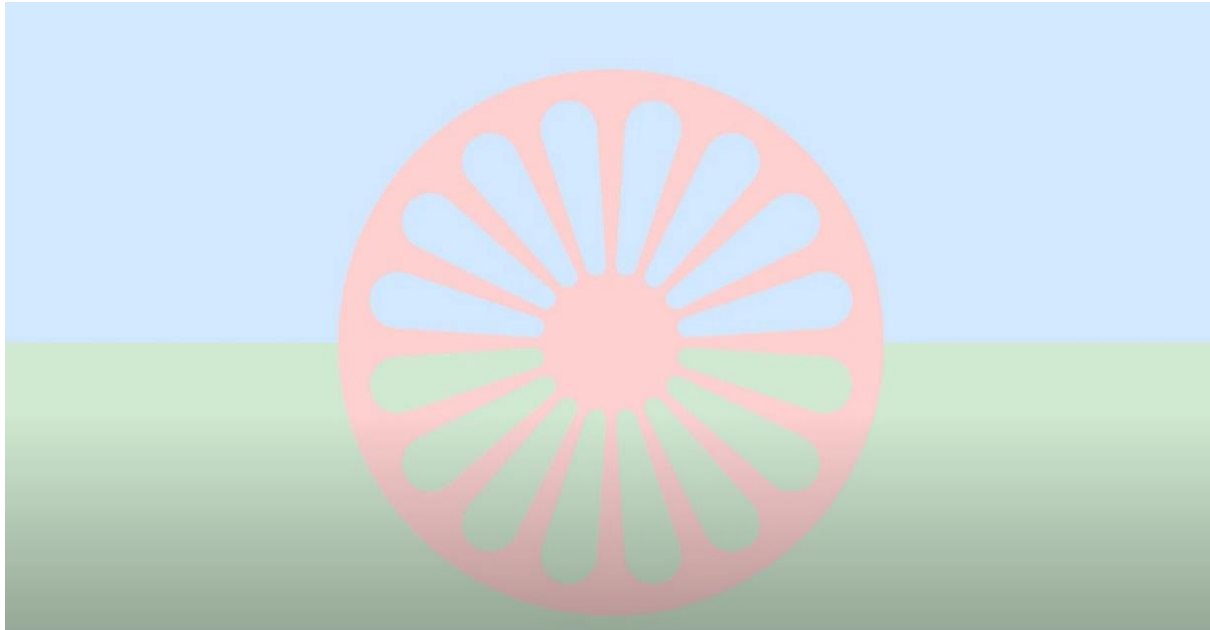
The young man reached the swamp by boat, dipped his hand in, retrieved the mud, and mixed it with the plants as the voice had instructed. At that moment, the light appeared for the third time, and the voice announced one more trial for the young man. It gave him a sword with which he had to kill a wolf, and mix the wolf's fat with the plants and mud. The young man found the wolf and fought with



it for a long time. In the end, he managed to pierce the wolf with the sword and extract the fat from its belly. He mixed the fat with the other ingredients as the voice had instructed.

At that moment, Saint Nicholas appeared from the light. He said to the young man, "With this, you will save the kingdom. Now go, and you will see that everything will be alright." The young man returned to the kingdom, where everyone had already lost hope. They first applied the remedy to the princess, and when they saw it worked, they used it on the entire population. When everyone was healed, the king, as promised, gave the young man his kingdom and the princess, with whom he lived happily ever after.

Story 2: The story of two brothers



Story shared by: *Merima*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

This is a story of two brothers - one is crazy, the other is normal. Now, the normal one had his own store and didn't have much love for his crazy brother. And the crazy one, he wandered around, begging, drinking, moving from street to street, but he had a good heart. He gave to everyone and helped everyone, but he had no luck, no children, nothing.

One day, he set off on an old path, and along the way, he came across a giant dragon. It was a giant dragon to whom a young maiden, a virgin, was being offered as a sacrifice, bound in chains. Around the place of the great ritual, there were many people watching and waiting for the dragon to take its victim. The crazy brother saw the crowd but didn't understand why they were gathered. He couldn't get close enough to see what was happening and why people were gathered. He squeezed through little by little and finally made it to the centre of the crowd and saw the girl bound right by the water. Then he saw the dragon coming out to grab her. If the dragon took her, there would be food, drink, and health for everyone. But if the dragon didn't get its prize, nothing would remain. The dragon would destroy everything.

The girl's mother and father wrung their hands, their hearts aching, but they had to give her up, their one and only. What did the crazy one do? He climbed up a tall rock and waited to see what would happen next. Sitting on that rock, he noticed a big branch right above his head. It was a huge branch. He broke off the branch, and being crazy, he started stripping it down just to calm his nerves. He stripped and stripped, and from that branch, he made a big sword. He made himself a sword from the large branch and waited for midnight.



At midnight, the dragon emerged from the water. As soon as it came out, it lunged at the girl. But just as it was about to grab her, the crazy one suddenly jumped and stabbed it in the eye, through the throat, and the dragon released the girl. She fell to the ground, and the dragon started rampaging around. The wounds the crazy one inflicted started bleeding, so the dragon finally thrashed in pain. Seeing the pools of the dragon's blood, the girl dipped her hand in the blood and turned to mark the young man who had just saved her life, marking his back with her handprint. He was now marked by her. They both went their separate ways.

The next day, the girl told her parents, "I must find that boy, wherever he is. I have to find him. He saved my life. If it weren't for him, I would have been the sacrifice." Her parents looked at her and said: "Alright, as you wish." Village by village, village by village, with her mother and father, she eventually found him. They found him in a small hut, sleeping on the side, covered with leaves. The king's soldiers, and the king's daughter, uncovered the leaves and saw the mark she had left on him. Since he was poor and had no clothes, the mark remained on him. "That's him," she said, and the soldiers grabbed him to take him with them.

They took him to the palace and made him kneel right in front of the princess's father. The king looked at him and said, "You're the one!" The crazy one replied, "What did I do?" The king answered, "You're the one who saved my daughter". He looked at him again and said, "You're the one, and you will be my son-in-law!" "I can't be your son-in-law," said the crazy one, but the king replied, "No! Only you can be my son-in-law!" And they took him, bathed him, groomed him, dressed him, and that day he became a prince, and the princess's husband.

Story 3: The story of Bibijaki



Story shared by: *Bratislav*

Representing: *a Roma and lives in Belgrade*

The Story:

One of the stories that is told among us is the story of Bibija. We are Orthodox Roma, and we recognize Bibija as a sort of family patron saint, similar to how Orthodox Christians celebrate their family patron saint (slava). Essentially, we celebrate her in the same way. However, she is not recognized by the church. Since Bibija's feast day is a moving holiday, meaning it's not always on the same date, when a priest comes to read the prayers, he prays for the saint who is recognized on that day. Therefore,



Bibija is generally not mentioned. We have an icon of her, which is painted, but again, the church does not recognize or acknowledge her as a protector or saint.

The story that is passed down among us is that Bibija was actually a woman who travelled the world, but in our context, she travelled through Serbia. She was an old woman, almost like a homeless person, and as she travelled, she sought shelter. In return, she helped the people who took her in and who helped her continue on her journey. Mostly, she protected their children and healed them.

There is a story about a man who had a sick child. Bibija came to him almost by accident. They hosted her and gave her food and a place to sleep. But she didn't sleep; she just sat quietly in a corner. The family was a little scared, wondering why she was so silent and why she didn't speak to anyone. In the morning, the woman simply disappeared, and no one knew when she left. The sick child suddenly began to feel much better, even started walking, and eventually fully recovered.

These are the kinds of stories about Bibija. Essentially, they are stories about an old woman who went from town to town, village to village, helping children. And this is the celebration we call the children's feast, the protector of children. Bibija is celebrated in different towns at different times precisely because there was a path she travelled. For example, in Arilje, she is celebrated at the end of February or the beginning of March, then a few days later in Požega, and after a few days in Čačak—roughly following the route she is believed to have taken.

Story 4: Story of dog and cat

Story shared by: *Merima*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

The world came into existence as we know it today on an ordinary afternoon, when a simple housewife was stretching dough for the pies she planned to bake that day. At that fateful moment, it so happened that her child relieved itself on the doorstep of the kitchen. Realizing there was no paper in the house, the housewife was at a loss. Unaware of the consequences of her actions, she took the dough from the table and cleaned the child, not wanting to leave the little one, innocent as it was, in its own filth. However, such ingratitude and arrogance did not escape the Lord's notice. In His wrath and indignation, He retaliated by stripping humanity of everything that allowed them to be so prideful. There was no more flour for making pies and bread, nor any other food or drink. This was their punishment, the price of ingratitude.

At that time, all living beings had their own language – from the ant to the elephant. Likewise, man's friends, the cat and the dog, could speak. Before God took everything from man, the cat and the dog cried out, and He paused to listen to them. The cat spoke first and, with a melodic voice, said: "Lord, I beg you, the child away from the man. Let him bear no more children, let him not bear them and let him love me as he would love his own child. Let him hug me, let him kiss me, and let him give all his food to me." God looked at her but did nothing. Then He turned His gaze to the dog as if waiting for its counsel. The dog, humble, patiently waited before making his request and said: "Dear Lord, if it pleases you, leave man as he is. I will give up my voice. Let me never speak again. Let me only communicate through my thunderous bark, but let the man keep what is his. He does not need to remember me; I will not ask for that from him. All I ask of you is to leave him a seed so that he can feed me."

God considered both supplicants and smiled. The cat, a cunning, selfish, and deceitful creature, had enjoyed its place beside man, sharing in the same comforts, receiving food and affection it hadn't earned with its soul. In contrast, the loyal and devoted dog, in his request, showed humility and goodness, wishing no harm to man. God looked at them both once more, then turned to the dog and said: "My good little friend, I see your wish is sincere and pure, and I see the light in your soul, so it shall be as you ask." The cat bristled, her eyes bulging, and her fur turned sharp as needles, and she, no longer melodious, hissed: "What do you mean by this, Lord? To give this foul, filthy creature command over the world? That's an injustice!" The dog responded: "I know, dear sister, you do not love me. I know you would scratch out my eyes with your claws if you could, but your life will remain the same. I am the one who will sit outside, in the rain, snow, and storms, chained, protecting you all. I am the one whom man will often forget, the one who will rejoice at man's presence, and it is precisely my joy that will make you more beloved than I." The cat stared at him, each of his words stabbing her like a needle. "And you will be the one who sits in warmth every day, eating the crumbs man makes, being cherished and petted while I sit alone outside, guarding. But that's fine; one day, the burden I have taken upon myself will tip the scales in the afterlife in my favour."



The cat, without another word, retreated into the shadows, and God completed His work, taking away all of humanity's abundance, leaving them with only one seed, with which man fed the dog. That afternoon, the dog initiated the world anew through the cycle of sowing the seed into the ground from which plants would grow. Over time, the world regained most of its colour, and man learned to treat what was given to him with dignity. Throughout all this time, the dog remained outside, fulfilling his duty without tear or complaint, while the cat remained inside, reigning over her small kingdom. But even she knew that one day, when she crossed to the other side, she would regret what she had been, and the dog would finally find peace and contentment.

Story 5: The poem of a poor man

Story shared by: *Zlata*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

Because I'm poor, no one cares for me,
When they see me near, they turn and flee.
If I asked for bread, for my children a tiny piece,
I'd fear they'd turn away in peace.
For the poor, the table is kept out of sight,
They close their doors, even at first light.
Is it just because I have no gold?
No one asks about the heart I hold,
Only how much wealth my hands can fold.

Story 6: The story about Gipsy court

Story shared by: *Milan*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

This is a story about the tradition of the Gypsy court, which still exists in some Roma communities.

In many Roma families, tradition has been cultivated for generations. This applies to marriage, lifestyle, and other customs. Among us, we are all equal. There is no distinction. If someone is a millionaire, he will sit at the same table with someone who has nothing. There must be a sense of unity. We are very close as families, constantly seeing each other and staying in touch every day.

In some Roma groups, we have the Gypsy court. There, there is no real police. The leader holds the knife, holds the bread, and it's his decision that stands. It's not just the family that gathers. Whenever a disagreement arises, the court is immediately convened. Both sides must be heard, and both stories must be examined. Then the people around comment and bring judgment. For example, if two people can't agree on something, all the Roma in the area are called. They might occupy a café or a hotel hall... A large crowd gathers, sometimes even two hundred people. A court sessions have been held in the middle of a square. The leader is the oldest, the one most involved in these Gypsy courts. He can sense who is lying a bit and who is being more honest. He listens to both versions and always has questions for each side: "Couldn't it have been resolved like this...?" or "You said earlier that it could have been done this way...". The play of words is very important here; you have to be careful with what you say. These sessions last for hours and hours, sometimes five, six, seven, eight hours... sometimes an entire night and day, depending on the issue. In the end, the leader delivers the verdict. If the court decides on something, that's how it will be. Out of so many people, essentially just a few make the final decision. The others only comment, observe, and provide suggestions to the leader.

There was an instance where a girl was supposed to get married. There was a celebration, but she wasn't a virgin. At first, both families met privately to try to resolve the issue, but when they couldn't find a solution, the court stepped in. Even though the court was involved, the couple stayed together because he was in love. He fell in love, and it didn't bother him. The young man eventually moved out of his family's house. He was around eighteen or nineteen years old. He moved out because he couldn't handle the pressure and the disdain from his father, mother, and the entire family toward him and his fiancée. But this is a very rare case— for a man to stay with a woman if she's not a virgin. Still, it happens.



Story 7: The story of Amir's father

Story shared by: *Amir*

Representing: *Palestinian and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

This is the story of Amir's father. Amir learned about the story from various sources, mostly from his father while they were playing basketball or some other sport. He also learned parts of it from his mother and grandfather, as well as from old recordings.

Amir's father was part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, working with teams that hunted down spies. Because they were a threat to Israel, they were arrested. Amir's father spent 12 years in a war prison. Two months before his arrest, Amir's mother became pregnant. She waited for his father for all 12 years, fighting to survive.

While in prison, Amir's father noticed that there were two types of people there: those who simply waited to be released and receive a government pension as prisoners and those who worked, read, and fought for themselves. He quickly realized he should join the latter group. In prison, he read a lot and learned many things. When he was released, he only had a high school diploma, but he had gained a lot of knowledge. At 32, he resumed his studies, later completing a master's and a PhD. Now, he works on Middle Eastern affairs, teaches at a university, and has become an expert on Israel's system. He was also a negotiator. He speaks Arabic, English, and Hebrew.

After all of this, Amir's father knows he made the right choice by joining the group in prison that focused on reading and working. Now, he lives a good and happy life with Amir's mother; they travel a lot and can afford everything they desire.

Story 8: Joha and the donkey



Story shared by: *Marija*

Representing: *Palestinian and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

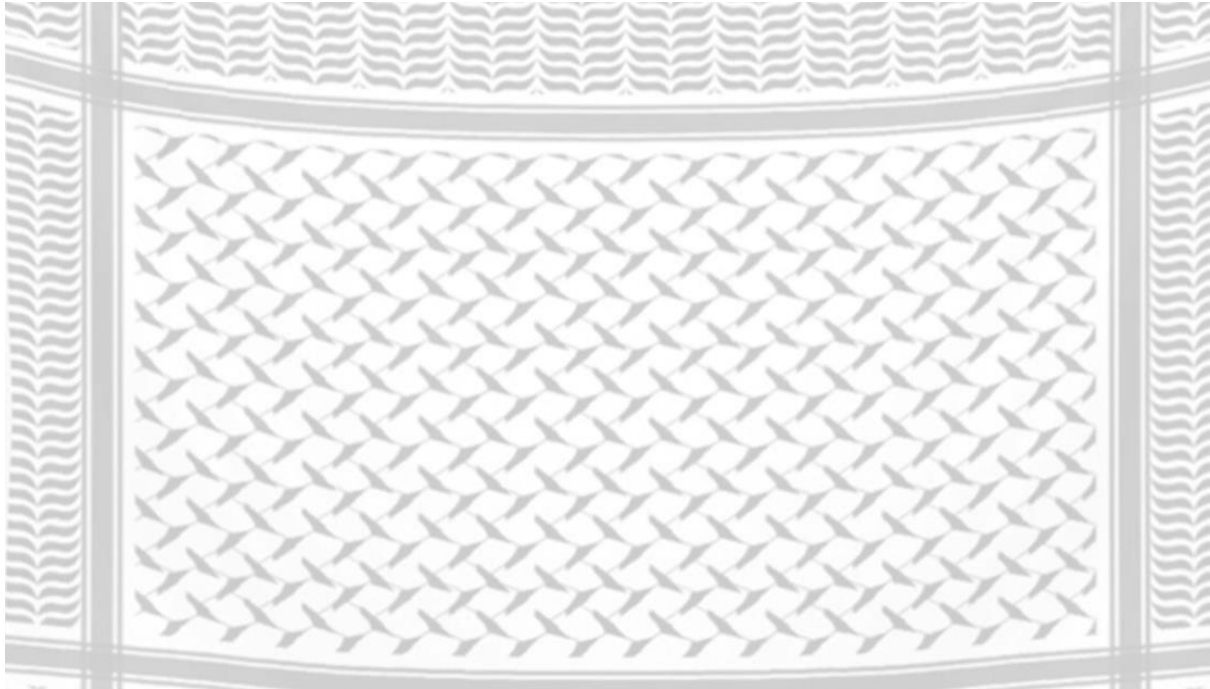
There was a man named Joha. One day, he went to the market, saw a donkey there, and wanted to buy it. The seller priced it high, but Joha bargained until he convinced him to sell it for the money he had on him. He tied the donkey and started back home.

Nearby, there were two thieves who spotted Joha, followed him, and saw that he was lost in his own world. One managed to untie the donkey and escape with it, while the other tied himself to the rope the donkey was tied to. When he got home, Joha turned around and was surprised: "Where's the donkey?" The man said to him: "It's me! Thank you so much! You saved me! I wasn't good! I didn't listen to my mom, so God turned me into a donkey. Thank you for saving me." Joha, full of pride, untied him and let him go. And he told him: "Please be good, listen to your parents, and don't cause trouble."

The next day, Joha went to the market again, and there was the same donkey. Joha quickly sneaked up to him and whispered: "There you go! Didn't I tell you to listen to your mom?"



Story 9: Mice, help!



Story shared by: *Marija*

Representing: *Palestinian and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

There is an abandoned village. For years, no one lived there until the mice settled in. Over time, the mice arranged the village to suit their needs, creating tunnels and building houses underground.

One day, a herd of elephants headed toward a pond near the mice's village. They went there to rest and drink water, but as they passed through the mice's village, they damaged the tunnels and underground houses the mice had built. When they reached the pond, the leader of the mice appeared.

"Who's in charge here?" asked the leader of the mice. "We have lived in this village for years, and we have come to ask you to take a different route on your way back. We worked hard to build our houses and tunnels, and now they are damaged because you passed through. We know that our efforts may mean nothing to you, but who knows – maybe one day you will need our help."

The elephant laughed and said, "There's no way we'll ever need help from a mouse! But fine, we'll take a different path on our way back."

The elephants kept their promise and took a different route from the pond. However, there was a trap. The king knew the elephants would pass that way, and his men surrounded them and captured



them. They trapped the elephants in nets and tied them to trees. One elephant managed to escape from the king's men. Since he couldn't help on his own, he went to the mice.

"We need your help," he said.

At his request, the mice went to the place where the elephants were tied. They began gnawing at the nets, chewing and chewing until they freed the elephants. Then, the elephants realized they should not have underestimated the mice because, even though they were small and seemingly insignificant, they were able to free them from the king's trap.

Story 10: From sand to gold

Story shared by: *Marija*

Representing: *Palestinian and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

Once upon a time, there was a young married couple. The husband was trying to turn sand into gold. He was wasting a lot of time on this idea. He spent the entire day working on it, trying to figure it out, imagining himself as some kind of chemist. His wife came to him and said, “What you’re doing makes no sense. You’re wasting time and spending the little money we have! When are you going to come to your senses?” To which he replied, “I’m close. I just need a little more time. We’ll be rich... I’ll succeed!” She realized there was no use in arguing, so she went to her father and told him what was going on. He said, “I’ll handle it!”

And indeed, the next day, the father-in-law came and started talking to his son-in-law. “What are you doing?” he asked. The son-in-law replied, “I’m trying to turn sand into gold.” The father-in-law then said, “Wow, that’s amazing! Want me to share a secret with you? I tried to do the same when I was young. I almost discovered the secret, but I got old and couldn’t achieve it, having wasted so many years and so much time on it... I need a young person to see it through.” To say the son-in-law was excited would be an understatement. The father-in-law told him he needed to plant a banana tree — from the banana leaves, a powder could be extracted that was supposedly golden. The son-in-law was still thrilled. The father-in-law continued, “While planting it, you have to recite this mantra. Say it, and you’ll succeed!”

He even rented a piece of land for his son-in-law, bought the seeds, and the son-in-law started planting. Each time he planted, he would recite the mantra. He watched over the plants, taking care of them and cleaning off pests whenever they attacked. He was so dedicated. He then asked his father-in-law, “How much of this powder is needed to turn the sand into gold?” The father-in-law replied, “You need enough powder to make two coins.”

After the son-in-law had planted everything, he realized it wasn’t enough. So, he went and bought more seeds, continued planting and doing all the work, and eventually succeeded. He went to his father-in-law and said, “Here, I brought what you asked for. How do we turn it into gold?” The father-in-law responded, “Now you’ll see how.” His daughter came in, and he asked her, “Did you succeed?” While her husband was growing bananas and collecting the powder, she had been taking those bananas and selling them. In doing so, she managed to accumulate a pile of gold.



Story 11: The story about Zrajfa and her sisters

Story shared by: *Ji*

Representing: *Moroccan and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

This is a story from a rural area about a woman named Zrajfa. She lived with her two sisters. They only had a father, who was a successful merchant. Their mother had not been with them since they were young, and no one knew why. Zrajfa was known as the clever one. Because their father was a merchant, he often left them and travelled to other regions to sell carpets and rugs. So, the three sisters were left in Zrajfa's care, as she was always responsible and sensible.

Two bandits noticed that the three girls lived alone in the house, so they decided to dress in women's clothing and pretend to be two older ladies in order to gain their trust, enter the house, and take advantage of them. The bandits tried to imitate female voices, but their voices cracked. Zrajfa noticed this, but her two sisters didn't, and they were very excited when the man said, "We are your aunts. We're part of the family. Your father was supposed to tell you we were coming, but he didn't." They asked, "Can we stay the night?" The girls replied, "Of course!" But Zrajfa was suspicious.

At one point, one of the bandits turned around, and she noticed that he wasn't a woman under the clothing. She saw under the djellaba that it was a man, but she continued to pretend and made them Moroccan mint tea. She added something to the tea to put them to sleep. Her other two sisters desperately wanted to drink the tea, but Zrajfa skillfully kept it away from them. She waited for the two men to drink the tea and fall asleep. Then she rolled them up in potato sacks and gave her sisters brooms. They took the sacks outside and started beating them. The whole village watched as two potato sacks bounced around, trying to escape the women.

Story Moral: *Be careful whom you let into your home.*

Story 12: The story about Zrajfa and animals

Story shared by: *Ji*

Representing: *Moroccan and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

One day, Zrajfa was walking through the woods and came across a hyena, a lioness, and a wolf. They were all named Zrajfa. She met them and started caring for them in her own way, without words. Trust grew between them. Eventually, she returned home. As she was walking down the street, a man twice her size stopped her and demanded that she give him all her money. Zrajfa told him she couldn't because she didn't have any. The man replied, "Then you'll take me to your house and give me everything you have." Zrajfa answered, "Alright, my house is this way," and led him into the forest.

At some point, the man realized she wasn't taking him to her house. He tried to kill her. Zrajfa pleaded, "Please, don't! Just wait a moment! Can you do me one last favour? Before you kill me, can you shout my name three times?" He shouted, "Zrajfa! Zrajfa! Zrajfa!" Then the hyena, the lioness, and the wolf appeared and took down the villain.

Story 13: Ghost stories from Iran and Afghanistan

The Story:

It is believed that there is a spirit that calls out to you when you are alone. The name of this creature, translated from Persian, means “Calls-your-name.” For instance, this spirit would show me the face of my brother or someone I know, making me start to trust it. When someone falls for it, they follow the spirit, believing it to be their, say, sister or daughter... And in doing so, they lose themselves, unaware of where they are. The spirit leads them down the wrong path. It’s always ahead of you, calling you. You keep following and following... and you never reach it, only to find yourself somewhere completely empty. When this begins to happen, you don’t understand what’s going on, and in the end, the creature just disappears, and you realize where you are. All you remember is the beginning and the end—nothing in between.

2.

There is a creature that doesn’t appear until someone says your name out loud. No one knows what this creature is called because the trouble with mentioning and summoning it is that it causes chaos. There’s a story about a wedding where some women were sitting and chatting in a separate room, talking about this creature. During their conversation, they mentioned its name. It appeared and devoured all the wedding guests.

3.

There is a spirit that latches onto your body. It controls what you do. This belief is mostly held by women, not men. When someone is possessed by such a spirit, they might hit themselves or scream because the spirit sometimes shows up and can harm them. Some people avoid those who are said to be possessed by such a spirit. However, this spirit is seen as both a positive and negative presence, depending on the situation. If someone claims not to believe in it, the spirit will get angry and harm the person it’s attached to. On the other hand, people say that the spirit allows them to do things others can’t—almost as if it gives them a superpower. It is said that these spirits most commonly leach onto beautiful girls.



Story 14: La Milagrosa



Story shared by: *Jorge*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

La Milagrosa means a woman who performs miracles. But in this story, La Milagrosa did not perform any magic. She was a normal woman from Havana, and her real name was Amelia. She fell in love with a poor guy. The problem was that she was a member of the aristocracy in Havana, so they could not get married. This happened around the time of Cuba's war for independence against Spain, and he fought against the Spanish. When the war ended, the whole political system changed. So, when he came back, they would finally be able to get married. However, they could not have had kids for a long time. Eventually, she conceived, but she died while she was giving birth to her boy.

The whole myth started after she died. Her husband used to go to her grave every day to talk to her. So he would come, knock, and talk to her. Eventually, the graveyard had to be rearranged so the bodies were exhumed from the grave. During the exhumation process, they opened Amelia's coffin only to realise that her corpse was wholly preserved. From that moment, she was named Milagrosa because it was a miracle that her body was intact. Since then, her monument has been believed to have magical power, especially for women who have problems having children. Thus, they started to go to her grave and ask for things - for having babies and for the protection of children.

Jorge explained to us: I learned this story while walking through the cemetery with my mother. We passed by the tomb of Milagrosa, and it is a beautiful tomb, a statue of a woman with a baby, and her eyes are amazing. When you walk around the statue, you must be turned towards her and shouldn't turn your back to Milagrosa. And you can see that the monument is always full of flowers, sometimes





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even papers with people's wishes and requests. These requests are mostly about fertility or about protecting the kids, but they are usually written by mothers or by women who want to be mothers.

Story 15: The story about Hatuey



Story shared by: *Jorge*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

In the 15th century, Spaniards came to Cuba and started to colonize the island. One they, Spaniards imposed a new system in Cuba - which we call colonisation of the island. As a part of the process of colonisation, they took the native population and “integrate” them into Spanish society. But this integration was terribly violent, so a lot of native Cuban people decided not to follow the Spanish rule. They rebelled against the Spanish. And one of them was Hatuey.

Hatuey’s rebellion is said to be the first one against the Spaniards, and he represents the real spirit of the Cuban people. When the Spaniards caught Hatuey, they put him on the bonfire. Before they lit the fire, a priest asked Hatuey if he wanted to say anything to atone for his sins so that he could go to heaven.

Hatuey then asked the priest: “Do Spanish go to Heaven as well?”



And the priest answered: “Yes, the Spanish go to Heaven.”

Then Hatuey said: “Then, NO, I do not want to go to that Heaven!

Then Spaniards set the fire and Hatuey died.

Today, in the eastern part of Cuba, people often say that they have seen lights in the countryside. For them, it is the light of Yara. Yara is a village where the spirit of Hatuey goes out every night because he could not go to Heaven. It is said that he is still moving around this region where the rebellion happened and where he was killed.

Jorge explained to us: When you go to school, you learn the story about Hatuey as a part of history. It appears in history books, but it is a kind of a mixture of legend and history. We cannot exactly know what happened in 15th century, but the part that tells me it is a legend is when Hatuey talks to the priest in fluent Spanish – although he is a Cuban native who opposed colonisation. He is the first Cuban national hero and a symbol of liberty. Hatuey is still present in Cuban popular culture, he is everywhere - there is even a brand of beer called after him.

Story 16: The story about energies

Story shared by: *Angelica*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

Back in the day, everything was energy, but one day, different energies came to the earth in human forms to travel around, live a human life and help humans by giving them all sorts of information. The energies were different, and each of them had its own temperament and vibration. There were three of them, three sisters: Oshun, Yemaya and Oya. Oshun is yellow, sensual, and very feminine. She lives in the rivers and represents motherhood and femininity. Her colour is yellow. Yemaya lives in the sea, and her colour is blue. She is the mother of all beings on this earth. Oya is the youngest one. She is the queen of the spirit world and guardian of the cemeteries and uses all colours.

The three sisters lived in a village together with the other deities who had come to Earth. One day, their village was ransacked, and Oya was kidnapped. That was about the time Olofi, a creator of everything that has ever existed, shared the powers and kingdoms of his creation with the deities. Every single deity received a kingdom and power – except for Oya, who was kept captive. But her sister Oshun did not want to leave Oya. She managed to gather enough for her ransom and went to rescue Oya. On her road, Oshun comes across a trap that is set in case she tries to save Oya. However, she managed to rescue her.

After rescuing Oya, the three sisters went to see Olofin and told him what had happened. Oshun and Yemaya begged him to grant their little sister the same favours. But no kingdom was left for Oya except the Kingdom of the spirits. This is how Oya became the queen of the spiritual world and guardian of cemeteries.

The moral of this story is that unity is strength. Love takes us through rocky paths, but if we believe in the purity of our actions, everything will be ordered in due time. The sisters are also a reflection of the magnitude of femininity, our integrity to protect our family and the grace given by the creator for such an attitude.

Story 17: Uncle Perico's wedding



Story shared by: *Jandry*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

A parakeet is about to go to a wedding. He feels hungry, devours the first thing he sees, and it messes up his mouth.

He goes to the weed and says: "Please, weed, clean my mouth!"

And the weed says: "No, I will not!"

Then he goes to the goat and says: "Please, eat the weed because the weed doesn't want to clean my mouth!"

And the goat says: "No, I will not!"

Then he goes to the dog and says: "Please, beat the goat because it doesn't want to eat the weed that doesn't want to clean my mouth!"

And the dog says: "No, I will not!"

The parakeet then goes to the stick and says to the stick: "Please, hit the dog because the dog doesn't want to beat the goat that doesn't want to eat the weed that doesn't want to clean my mouth!"

And the stick says: "No, I will not!"



Then he goes to the fire and says: “Please, burn the stick that doesn’t want to hit the dog that doesn’t want to beat the goat that doesn’t want to eat the weed that doesn’t want to clean my mouth!”

And the fire says: “No, I will not!”

Then he goes to the water and says: “Please, put out the fire, because it doesn’t want to burn the stick that doesn’t want to hit the dog that doesn’t want to beat the goat that doesn’t want to eat the weed that doesn’t want to clean my mouth!”

And the water says: “No, I will not!”

So he goes to the Sun and says: “Please, Sun, evaporate the water because it doesn’t want to put down the fire that doesn’t want to burn the stick that doesn’t want to hit the dog that doesn’t want to beat the goat that doesn’t want to eat the weed that doesn’t want to clean my mouth!”

And the Sun says: “Yes, I will!”

When the Sun went to evaporate the water, the water said: “No, no, no, I will put down the fire!”

And the fire said: “No, no, no, I will burn the stick!”

And the stick said: “No, no, no, I will hit the dog!”

And the dog said: “No, no, no, I will beat the goat!”

And the goat said: “No, I will eat the weed!”

And the weed said: “No, no, no, I will clean the parakeet’s mouth!”

That is how the parakeet went to his uncle’s wedding.

Story Moral:

Story 18: The story about El Guije

Story shared by: *Jorge*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

El Güije is like a child with long, curly hair. He lives in the forests. In Cuba, forests are usually found on hills and mountain ranges. El Güije lives near rivers and feeds on fish and small animals. He typically comes out at night, and all the stories, especially those from the villages, warn that you shouldn't go near the river late at night because El Güije might appear.

For older people, El Güije was everywhere, not just by the river or the lake, but all around. Originally, El Güije lives near rivers and lakes or in any wet places, and he tries to make contact with people who go there. In some versions of the story, he just plays tricks on you, laughs at you, and tries to scare you, but in other stories, he can take you away. El Güije is a fantastic but also comical creature who does mischievous things for fun (like teasing, without causing real harm). All depictions of El Güije are the same — he's a black guy with curly hair, built like a child or a tiny man.

Story 19: The tale of Osain

Story shared by: *Fernando*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

“Do not kill the Sacred Deer. A sacred animal is a holy spirit,” pleaded the spirit of the young hunter, but Osain wanted to prove himself by taking the trophy of this magnificent creature’s head as his immortal recognition. The spirit warned Osain: “Do not kill the Sacred Deer, Osain, do not test the powers of this universe to validate your own.”

However, the currents of sorrow knew that the young man’s mind was too arrogant to heed his bodiless mentor, and so the wise words fell on deaf ears. As one might deduce from this brief commentary on the nature of youth and humanity, Osain, despite the warning, hunted the Sacred Deer. However, even the unyielding will of a man was forced to bend under the wrath of something greater and more powerful. As punishment for his ignorance and for offending the divine, he was split in half—left with one eye, one arm, and one leg. Like the true ruler of His domain, God understood that the punishment for the young hunter would not erase the sin cast upon his mortal world through the killing of the Sacred Deer. The divine hope for Osain was that, through the act of losing half of his being, he would come to understand the gravity of his actions and, despite his new physical limitations, learn to judge his actions carefully and value the natural flows of life more than his personal ambitions.

Fortune turned for Osain, as he responded to every divine prayer from his Creator and became a preacher to young men like him—to appreciate the life around them and understand that any power they may possess is always at odds with something greater, something ancient that knows all and wishes well, and that they should place their faith in that sacred existence and honor its watchful gaze.

Story 20: The Olokum and God

Story shared by: *Fernando*

Representing: *Cuban and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

Olokum, the evil spirit, was having a conversation with God. They sat above the Earth, watching the daily happenings in God's kingdom. As they observed, Olokum said to God, "Look at what they're doing—how badly they behave! They're committing vile acts against one another. And worst of all, the greatest offence—they're neglecting you and your legacy."

God looked at Olokum, his heart heavy and burdened, and replied, "I know this, I know it all. But as their creator, I understand them, and I don't want to punish them."

Olokum, the royal heir hungry for God's power, sensing that God seemed like a tired father and ruler, knew just the right words to say: "You don't know if any of them will ever become like you, and from what I see, they are far from your light. Renounce your throne, abandon them. Release them from your divine protection—and let me rule!"

Olokum stood up, towering over the holy father, and began to weave his fantasy of power: "I will punish them. I will crush them under my great foot and mould them into what they must become. They will be forced to understand their arrogance and sin, and from the ashes of their downfall, the most righteous will rise to build a world worthy of your sacred reign—of course, under my strict supervision as the executor of your divine will."

This is how great fires in Cuba have started...