

Fourteen Stones

A Namoran folk tale dating to the earliest years of worship of the Goddess Kenavi (first century SM)

Once there was a woman who wished to build a house. Not a house for her husband and children: she had no husband yet, was too young to have children, and in any case, she meant to live alone a while longer. She loved the scent of the wind, the warmth of the sun, and the sound of the sea as it rushed and broke against the rocky shore of her land. While she could, she wanted to have those things all to herself.

She was a strange woman or, at least, so her people thought. She had strange eyes, the color of the sky on a cloudless autumn day, and she had a strange will, all edges and corners, without any softness. She did not seem to understand that people must find their safety in each other. The world was an uncertain place. Enemy tribes roamed the land. Wild creatures fed on the tame goats that meant food and certainty. In such a world, people must live together behind high stone walls with spears to guard themselves.

This woman loved to walk beyond those safe walls, fearing no strange man or creature. Her people called her Klaya, which means wanderer. She walked under the sun that browned her skin and let the wind brush her hair, let the sea lick her fingers. At those times, delight softened the proud blue of her stare, but none of her people were there to see it.

When her people built houses, they made them of stone. Stone houses clustered like eggs in a nest behind the stone guarding wall where spear-wielding men paced back and forth. The village stood on a long green hill at the end of a peninsula. To build a new house, people dug rock out of the hill or carried it from the shore. You must build your home out of the homeland.

But Klaya loved the wider land. The peninsula and the village rested in her heart, but the broad mainland fanned itself out before her eyes. She walked there at will, greeting the woods, learning

the feel of the grass of the plains under her bare feet. She knew she would build her house on the green hill, but she would build it separate, touching no other walls, sharing no other air. And she would build it not only out of the stone of home, but out of pieces of the world beyond.

Houses needed many heavy rocks, carried and shaped and laid into place by scarred and callused hands. Klaya's hands were strong, toughened by years of weaving rope and working skins, of digging and planting in the earth. But her body was slender, a tall young tree. Her muscles were not hard but supple, her chest and shoulders fine and narrow.

One day, her people watched her leave behind the safety of the guarding wall and walk out to the mainland. They muttered and whispered about her strangeness, the house she meant to build and live in all alone. They asked themselves why she could not be a woman such as any other. And they watched, later, as she limped back, dragging behind her a rough-made sledge of branches that carried a single large stone.

The next day they watched her go out again. And they whispered about how she could dig stone here on the green hill or carry it up from the shore. She wished to punish herself, surely. She wished to show how wayward she was. They said they would leave her to it.

But on the third day, as she left again, one man went with her. She did not ask for his help; she lifted her head proudly and walked alone, with him following behind. When they came back, the sledge held two stones.

That night, over his cooking fire, the man told others that, during their day of searching, Klaya had explained herself to him. That alone surprised those who heard. The explanation surprised them more: that Klaya wished to bring stone from each part of the mainland she knew – the forests, the coast, the grassy plains – and have pieces of each place she loved in her home.

What difference did it make?, the people asked. One stone looked like another. Surely no one could see the difference between a stone dug from the hillside and one carried from the mainland forest. But the next day, two men left the village with Klaya. When they came back, the sledge held three stones.

On it went. Another day, and another, and now the women of the village joined, and then the children. Always Klaya walked at the

head of the group, her head held high. Each day the sledge returned with a bigger load.

On the day they brought back eight stones, they built a bigger sledge. And still they went out again, and again. On the last day, all of the tribe went. The smallest children rode on their parents' backs or in their arms. The elderly leaned on the strength of the young. When they came back to the village as the sun dipped down to the horizon, the sledge carried its biggest load of fourteen great stones.

Klaya declared herself satisfied. She could build her house out of the stones the tribe had helped her carry.

She meant to live alone, but the village did not leave her to build her house alone. The people stayed, helping Klaya cut and shape the rock with chisel and mallet, helping her lift and set each piece into place.

Then the house was finished and the village went about its business. Klaya lived on the green hillside with the freshness of the sea wind and the warmth of the sun around her, and the home her people had helped her build out of the world she loved.