

The Journey

Kumé was known to be a fine beader. She could create beads from anything: Trees, leaves, ashes, stones, shells, water, mud, sunlight. And with these beads she would create beautiful objects that no one was ever able to recreate.

She had learned the gift from her father, who had learned from his mother, and Kumé was overjoyed when she had a child of her own. She would now have someone to teach her gift to.

Kumé names her child Yeuka. She promises to never leave Yeuka's side and to teach her all she knows about creating beautiful objects with special beads. Kumé shows her the soil and the stones, the rivers and the ocean, the mountains and the stars. Kumé's favorite, however, is the moon and the sun.

Every morning, Kumé and her daughter watch the sun rise on the far edge of the river. Every evening, they watch it set on the near edge. And every night they watch the moon rise through its center.

Together they string beads from stones and shells they find in the river. Kumé creates beautiful and elaborate objects with the beads, but Yeuka's hands are too small and she is unable to mimic her mother.

"Do not worry, child," her mother says. "I will teach you to make beautiful objects as I do. Go to the river and fetch us more stones."

Yeuka is happy to obey and walks to the river. She splashes her hands into the clear water and searches the basin for stones but stops when she hears her mother shout. Yeuka begins to run to her, but the river grasps her hands. She is pulled gently into the current, cradled by Enza and stroked by Uzwe until her mother's screams vanish.

When the river releases her, Yeuka runs to where her mother once sat. Kumé is gone.

Yeuka looks for her mother deep into the night, into the morning, and throughout the day, but she is nowhere. Yeuka is convinced that it must be the moon and sun who have stolen her mother away.

From then on, every morning Yeuka asks the rising sun to return her mother. Every evening she asks the setting sun. And every night she asks the moon.

Yeuka begins to keep beads from the river in her pockets. *When Mother returns, she thinks, we will create something beautiful together.* And for many years, Yeuka continues to question the moon and sun, receiving only silence.



One night, Yeuka asks the moon as always to return her mother. This time, the moon replies.

"I do not have your mother, child, and neither does the sun."

"Who has her?" Yeuka asks.

"I do not know," says the moon.

"Where is she?" Yeuka asks.

"I do not know," says the moon. "What I know is that the days and nights have aged her. Her hair is pale as I am, and the sun has wrinkled her skin."

"You are a liar, moon," Yeuka says. "You describe her to me, yet you claim to not have her."

"I do not have her, child, but I see her every night. As you watch me where you stand, she watches the rising sun."

"You are a liar, moon," Yeuka says. "No one can watch both the moon and sun."

"It is true, child. As I rise here, the sun rises there. And when the sun rises here, I will rise there."

"Then you must take me to her, moon. Allow me to ride with you as you rise where she sits."

"Very well, child," says the moon, and he allows Yeuka to climb atop him.

Kumé is surprised to see a woman riding atop the moon. She is more surprised still when the woman embraces her.

"Mother, I am so happy to have found you!" says Yeuka.

"Who is Mother?" Kumé asks.

"You are Mother. You are Kumé, the great beader," says Yeuka.

"No, child. In this world I am called Rasa."

That is fine, Yeuka thinks. Even if by another name, she is still Mother.

"Sit with me, Rasa, for I have brought you a gift," Yeuka says.

Yeuka presents her mother with beads from the river. "You may now finish teaching me how to string the beads as you do."

"I cannot, child, for I do not know how to string these beads," Rasa says.

That is fine, Yeuka thinks. It has been many years. She will remember once more when she is home.

"Return home with me, Rasa. We will ride the moon as he travels back to our homeland."

Rasa declines. "I cannot come with you, child, for you are but a stranger."

"You do not recognize me?" asks Yeuka.



"No, child," Rasa says.

That is fine, Yeuka thinks. The days and nights have aged me as well and I am much older than she remembers.

"Then I will tell you about me, Rasa. I will tell you about our home and the beautiful objects you create with beads, and soon you will remember," Yeuka decides.

Yeuka spends all night and the next day telling her mother all she knows. By the time the setting sun arrives, Yeuka asks her mother once more to travel home with her.

Rasa agrees to this, which makes Yeuka smile.

Yeuka asks the setting sun if they may ride with him as he rises in their homeland. The sun agrees, and the two of them climb atop him.

As the sun begins to rise on the far edge of the river, it grows too hot for them to hold onto. They fall through the sky and land in the river, where Enza and Uzwe help them to shore.

Rasa looks around. "This is not home," she says.

"Of course, it is home, Mother. This is where we watch the moon and sun."

Rasa looks around once more. "No," she says. "I have been away for too long. This cannot be my home."

Yeuka is saddened. "Would you like to return to the land where I found you?" she asks.

"No," Rasa says. "That land cannot be my home either."

"Tell me where you would like to go, Mother. I will take you anywhere on the back of the moon and sun."

Rasa looks around for a third time. "Where I wish to go you cannot take me, dear child."

Rasa turns and walks toward the river.

"Mother, you must stop. You are not strong enough to swim the river. Allow me help you."

But Rasa ignores her and walks gently into the deep river. Yeuka watches her white hair disappear below the reflection of the moon.

