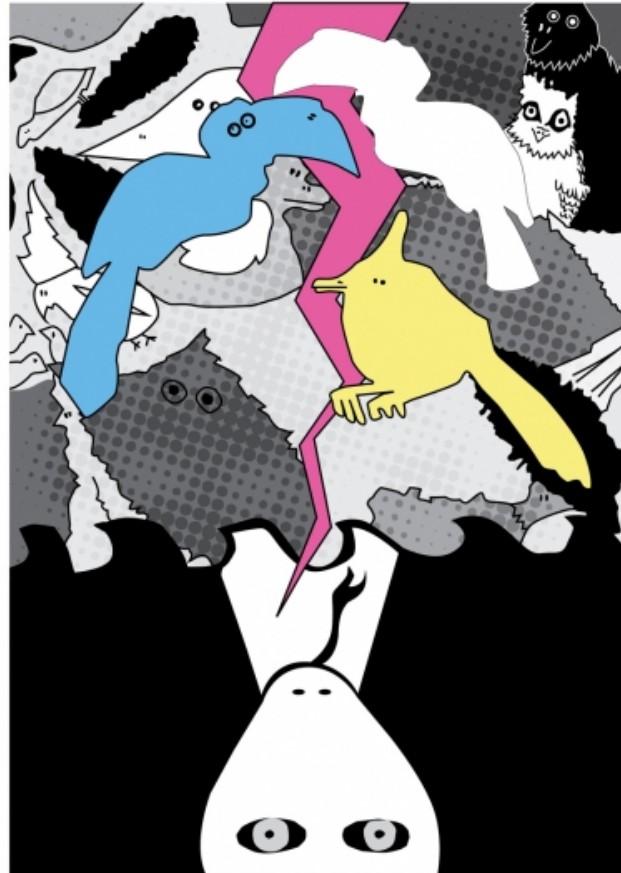
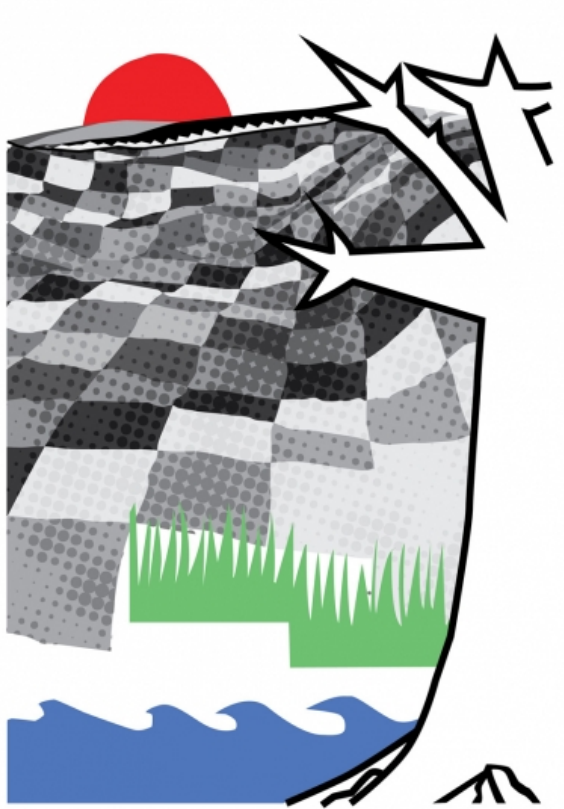


# First man and first woman

Southern African Folktale  
English





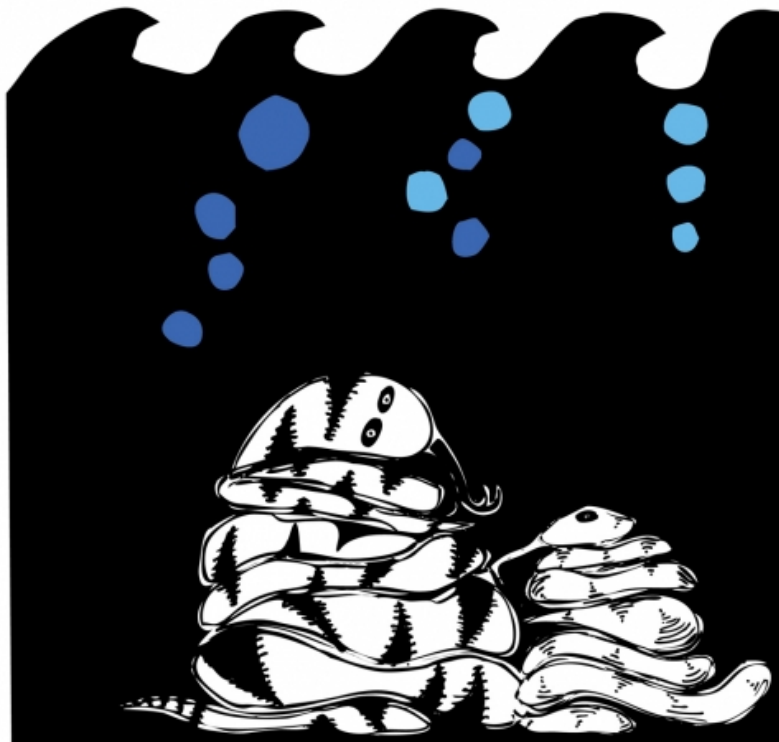
Long long ago when the earth was new,  
great mountains covered the world like a  
blanket, and tall trees spiked the sky.

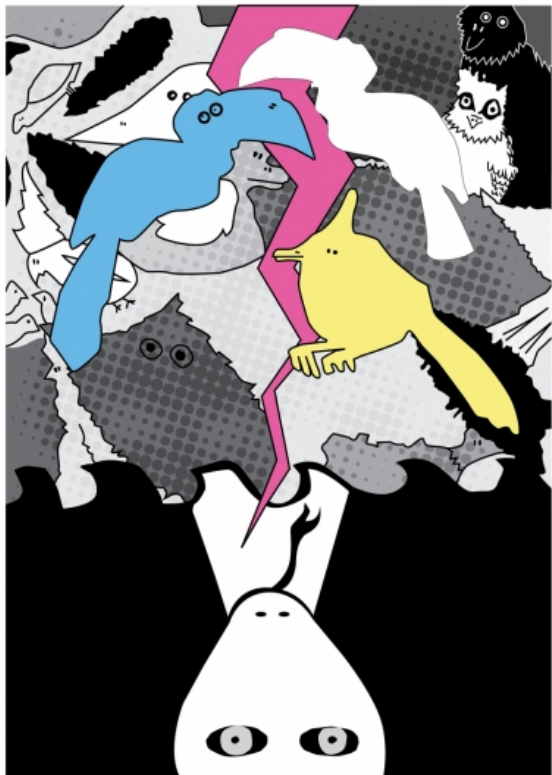
In this world, there was a deep dark pool, silent and cold.



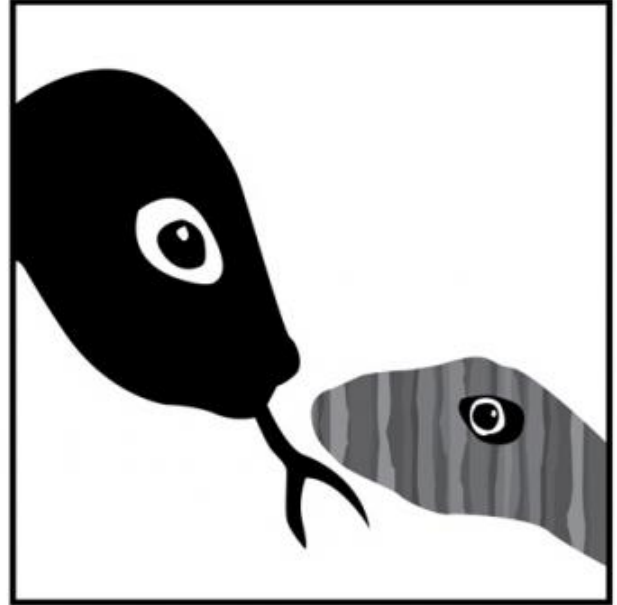
At the bottom of this pool were  
two snakes.

One had thick strongly  
patterned coils, and the other  
was smaller and more delicate.





Then one day, there was a great storm.  
A flash of lightning pierced right to the bottom  
of the pool.  
The waters parted for a moment.  
The snakes saw the earth above, full of colours  
and shapes and feathered creatures.  
When the waters closed again, the snakes  
could not forget the beauty they had seen.



“We cannot stay in this dark cold pool any longer,” they said to each other.  
“Let us go up and see the earth above.”  
“How will we live on earth?” said the smaller snake.  
“Will we crawl on our bellies?”

“The birds of the air will not laugh at us for being so low,” said her friend.  
“We will not crawl, we will walk!”

Very slowly the snakes uncoiled themselves.

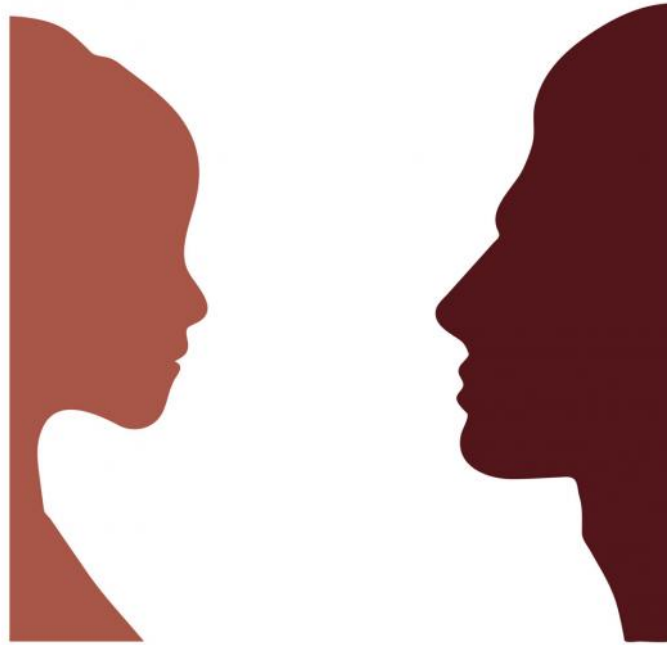
Close together they began to swim up, up, to the light above.



And as they reached the surface of the water,  
a strange thing happened.  
The tips of their tails split into two.  
They grew limbs with feet and toes.  
From just beneath their heads grew two arms  
with hands and fingers.







They were no longer snakes, but Man and Woman.



“We will make our home in the hills,” said Woman. “Each morning we will see the sun rise and feel it warm on our backs.”

“We will look after the grass and the trees,” said Man. “And be friends with Bird and Beast.”



“Come,” said First Man.  
“I will,” said First Woman.  
And they walked out together into their new world.

# First man and first woman

Writer: Southern African Folktale

Illustration: Jemma Kahn

Language: English



The inspiration for this retelling came from Diana Pitcher's version of the folktale in *The Calabash Child: African Folktales* (Skilton & Shaw, 1980).

© African Storybook Initiative, 2014



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) Version 3.0 Unported Licence

Disclaimer: You are free to download, copy, translate or adapt this story and use the illustrations as long as you attribute or credit the original author/s and illustrator/s.

**Saide**   
South African Institute  
for Distance Education

[www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org)  
*A Saide Initiative*