

## The Time the Babies Grew Fangs and Hunted Their Parents

The first people in this world did not know how to raise their babies. When Father Sun made those people he made only men and women in their strength. He did not make old people, and he did not make babies. When Mother Moon taught those people to love each other she did not tell them about the little ones that would sprout forth. So when the first infants were born no one knew what to do with them. They did not know that babies need to be cleaned and fed. They did not know that babies need to be talked to and carried from place to place so they can see this world. They did not even know that their babies would grow up to be men and women. That was how ignorant they were. All they knew was how much pain it caused women to bear them and how noisy their infants were.



People became angry. "We try to teach them to speak, but they do not learn. We try to teach them the many tasks there are to do, but they are too weak to help us. We try to feed them, but they do not like deer or cobs of maize or armadillo steaks. All they do is cry and scream and make messes. This will make us crazy!" So they took the noisiest babies to the river and threw them in for the crocodiles to eat.

"This is better," the people said. "Listen! No more noise. Look! No more messes. Now the crocodiles are well fed and do not attack us when we go to swim. From this day any baby that cries will be fed to crocodiles. We have thought of a very good solution to this problem of babies." And those people clapped each other on the back for their cleverness.

But the babies were very unhappy. "This is not fair!" they cried. "We have traveled so far down the white-blossom road to be born into this world, and look! Our



own parents do not care for us. Maybe we should just go back to the garden of the gods." But of course they could not speak words, they were gurgling to each other.

When their parents were near, they just cried in frustration. The people took the rest of their babies to the river, but the crocodiles had already eaten so many babies that they were no longer hungry. So they took those babies into the jungle and hung them on the spiny branches of the calabash tree, where vultures pecked at them. Red fire ants climbed up the bark and chewed on them. Jaguars bit their hands and feet. There were twenty babies dangling in the gourd-trees, here were their names:

K'uk'umpakal, or Feather Shield

Saknik, or White Blossom

Bak'aak', or First Fire

Chan Mam, or Little Ancestor

Yaxch'am, or New Harvest

Yaxxolb, or New Thought

Hunch'ok, or First Sprout



Hunkan, or One Serpent  
Chakk'aak', or Great Fire  
Baitz'at, or First Artist  
Yaxpak, or New Dawn  
Chactok', or Red Flint  
Hunatlata, or First Spearthrower  
Saksih, or White Frog  
Saktok, or White Cloud  
Yaxuncoh, or Bird Puma  
K'annik, or Precious Blossom  
Chakum, or Great Bird  
K'aak'chan, or Burning Sky  
Yaxnab, or Fresh Water

The animals bit all of them, every one, while they were helpless in that place.

"Please help us!" those babies cried to the golden toad, but k'ansih only hopped over them and soiled them. He was hungry and was going to the river to eat insects.

The babies cried to the scarlet macaw, "Please take us down from these branches! Help us find food and drink!" But the macaw only squawked and plucked out



their bright eyes to line her nest.

"Won't you take us back to our parents?" the babies cried to the spider-monkey. "Won't you talk to them for us and tell them what we need?"

The spider monkey only laughed. "What foolish things you are! Don't you know that your parents brought you here to die? Who would want noisy babies like you?" He just slapped them and pulled their hair out. Then he swung off laughing through the trees.

Now the babies understood that the animals were not going to help them. They understood that they had truly been left in the jungle to starve or to be eaten. Most of the babies only cried and cried, but one was stronger than the others. His name was K'uk'umpakal, he was Feather Shield. That strong baby climbed a great ceiba tree and lifted his empty eye sockets toward the heat. He called to Father Sun, "We have been abandoned by our parents in this awful place. We are hungry and



afraid. Won't you help us, Father Sun?"

But Father Sun did not want to hear those babies. The gods and goddesses had noisy babies of their own, and he did not like their crying. He was not going to listen to the crying of those people babies, too. He turned his back to them, and they were cold.

"Mother Moon! Mother Moon! Can't you see how we suffer in this world?" K'uk'umpakal shouted. "Won't you bring us to your garden up above, and care for us?"

But Mother Moon had already raised her own babies, they were little gods and goddesses. She was not going to raise all those human babies as well. She could not even say some soothing thing to make them feel a little better, since it was her husband's face that filled the sky. She could not answer them at all.

The baby in the treetop did not give up. "ix-Chel!" he called. "Great Lady of Childbirth and Medicine, we are cold and frightened down here in this world! Our



eyes have been taken, and our hair has been pulled out.  
We have been chewed by fire ants and bitten by jaguars.  
We are very unhappy, ix-Chel. Won't you give us help?"

But ix-Chel did not help them. She was away in another part of the world, looking for medicine plants. She did not hear that baby. She did not show her face.

K'uk'umpakal climbed down the ceiba tree and said to the others, "No one will help us. The animals do not care. The gods and goddesses do not care. We will have to find our own way in this world."

Far off in his sweaty grove in the heart of the jungle ah-Puch heard that baby speak. The Lord of the Night heard anger and bitterness, and so those words sang to him. Long ago at the beginning of time he had tried to destroy the seven worlds that his brother, Father Sun, had made, but Father Sun had defeated him and thrown him out of the garden of the gods to live alone in the



jungle. He too knew anger and hunger for revenge. So when he heard those babies, he knew he could plant black seeds in them. He could raise them in his own way, and they would grow into strong servants. So he left his dark grove to travel to those babies and talk to them. When they heard him coming they were very frightened. Even babies know the footfalls of ah-Puch.

"Now we will die," they said. "Now our flesh will be torn away, and paper wasps will fill our skulls with their nests."

"Wait," K'uk'umpakal said. "Do not give up. Let us hear what ah-Puch has to say."

"There has been terrible injustice here," ah-Puch said. Those were his first words, and they pleased the fearful babies. "I can see that you have been wrongly treated. How have you come to such a sorry turn in the path?"

"Our parents put us here to die," those babies said. "The animals would not help us. They plucked out our





eyes and pulled out our hair and bit us. The gods and goddesses did not answer our prayers."

"Oh!" ah-Puch said. "Truly this world is cruel when the gods and goddesses will not answer the prayers of babies! But listen, now. I will help you. If you wish, you can come to my hut, and I will raise you as my own."

"We need new eyes," said K'uk'umpakal. "We need hair. We need food and drink."

"I have many servants to do these things," ah-Puch said. "You will not want."

"We will go with you, then," the babies said.

ah-Puch spread a great net on the ground, and the babies crawled onto it, and he carried them to the steamiest grove in the jungle. His servants were all around that place. Lord Jaguar sat in the doorway of ah-Puch's palace of bones and licked his paws. Lord Crocodile swam in a pool of rotten water behind that place. Perched on the roof were the birds that kill children, Motancaz and



Tzitzmotancaz are their names, these are night fliers and poison spitters. They saw those babies and drooled. But the babies had no eyes to see those servants, so they were not afraid.

Inside his hut, ah-Puch put his net down and let the babies out. He ordered new hair brought for them, and Lord Jaguar pulled tufts from his own body and put them on the babies' heads. Those hairs grew into the babies as though they had always been there. Then ah-Puch commanded that the babies be given new eyes. Lord Fer-de-lance slithered from the shadows and spat up old snakes' eyes. ah-Puch thumbed those into the babies' eye holes, and they could see again. But, because it was the Night Lord who put those eyes into their heads, the babies could not see his true face, of great cruelty. They saw only the face of an old man.

"Thank you!" the babies said. "Now we can see, and we have hair again. But we are very hungry. We are



very thirsty. Won't you feed us and give us drink, as your guests?"

"Of course," ah-Puch said. "My servants will bring you some refreshment. You only have to wait a little longer."

Far off in the jungle Lord jaguar killed a woman as she took water from the river. Wicked spirits drained her blood into drinking bowls and took those back to the babies. There were five spirits in all, they did not walk but flew from place to place in the form of little whirlwinds. Here are their names: they were Cocik the fever-wind, Naktancokik the pneumonia-wind, Kakazik the swellings-wind, Mamukik the wind of weakness, and Zuhuyik the wind of chills. Those were their names and their functions. Lord Jaguar dragged the woman's body to ah-Puch's hut and tore it into small pieces, and that meat and drink was served to the babies.

"This is not milk," said K'uk'umpakal, the strong baby.



"What will happen to us if we drink such stuff? And what meat is this? It smells strange."

"You are a clever baby," ah-Puch said, "but you ask wrong-headed questions. Ask instead if it would be sweet to punish those who treated you cruelly. When Father Sun and Mother Moon do not bring justice, who will? You must make your own justice. Is this not true?"

"Yes," K'uk'umpakal said, and his voice was hot with humiliation. "Yes, that is true. I have learned that myself."

"This drink and this meat will help you to strike those who punished you," ah-Puch said. "This food is the meat of justice. This drink is the cacao of joy, for your suffering has ended. Now throw those wrong-headed questions into the river and eat and drink."

These words pleased the babies, and they forgot their questions. As they drank the blood, their mouths changed. They grew long fangs that dripped poison. Their ears fell off and left only small holes, and scales grew on their



faces. Their tongues became long and thin and forked at the end.

"Look," Lord Fer-de-lance said. "They are becoming so handsome."

"Only to you," said Lord Jaguar. "Wait and see how my gifts change them."

As they ate the meat, their bodies became heavier. Lord Jaguar's hair grew to cover all their skin and became thick and long. Their hands grew into claws. Only their fat cheeks looked like those of infants.

"What have we become?" the strong baby asked. "We look so different!"

"You look like my children now, truly," ah-Puch said. "Look at your claws. Look at your fangs. Now you can punish those people who left you to die."

"That is what we will do!" the babies said. "They will wish they had never left us in the jungle. They will be sorry they threw our brothers and sisters into the river



for crocodiles to eat."

"Good," said ah-Puch. "When you are finished with them return to me, and I will teach you everything you need to know about this world."

So those babies went through the jungle on all fours like Lord Jaguar, and sometimes they crawled through the underbrush, like Lord Fer-de-lance. They spoke to each other in animal sounds.

"Those people shouted at us," one of the babies said.

"The people who brought me into this world did not even clean me," said K'uk'umpakal. "They left the birth blood on me for days, and the flies bit me. Now we will see who suffers."

As they ran through the jungle, they clawed and tore the animals. They found Golden Toad and bit and slapped him. They caught Scarlet Macaw and pulled the feathers from her face and broke her jaw. They chased Spider Monkey through the trees and beat him and pulled out



his hair so that he was bloodied and crying. Then they ran to their village, where all the people were asleep. It was night, but the babies did not know night from day anymore. Their snake eyes saw the darkness as light. They ran through the village, howling like the jaguar and hissing like the fer-de-lance. They raked the doors with their claws and leaped onto the roofs of the huts.

"Come out!" they shouted. "Come out, and we'll see who is thrown to the crocodiles and who is hung from branches!" They jumped and roared and hissed, and the people were afraid. Some hunters ran out with spears, but the babies jumped down from the rooftops and bit their necks and filled them with poison. Three men died from their bites. The caçique of the village ran out with his spear, but K'uk'umpakal cut him with his claws, and the caçique ran back inside his hut. There was nothing the people could do to defeat those fierce babies. They cried out in fear and begged the gods and goddesses for



help. They burned copal incense, and they prayed. Finally the gods and the goddesses heard their calls and looked down from their garden, so very high above.

"Look at that!" Father Sun said. "Look at those horrible creatures ah-Puch has loosed on my people in the middle of the night. He is up to his wickedness again. I will put a stop to this." And he sent down great shafts of sunlight to burn the babies.

But K'uk'umpakal saw the light coming down from the sky and jumped up on the roof of the caçique's hut, the tallest in the village. "Father Sun!" that baby roared. "You did not hear us when we were hungry. You did not hear us when we were cold and afraid. You did not see when the animals tormented us. But now you see us? Now you want to burn us? Come down here, and we will see who feels whose bite!"

The gods and the goddesses understood that baby's hissing and roars, and they were amazed. "What?" said





ah-Iztamna, Lord Medicine. "What are those things?"

"Arrogant and foul," said Father Sun. "They will be slapped down." He dropped a heated ray of light and burnt K'uk'umpakal, who fell from the roof of the cacique's hut and lay dying. He started to cry, then, for really he was just a hungry, cold baby who had been badly treated and only wanted to be cared for. The other babies heard him and began to cry also. The people in the village heard those cries, and the gods and goddesses heard them, and the animals in the jungle heard them. Then everyone knew what those creatures truly were.

"It does not matter," Father Sun said. "They have turned wicked and must be destroyed."

"They would not have turned wicked if we had helped them," Mother Moon said. "No one listened to them, and look what has happened. We need to take ah-Puch's evils out of them. And we need to teach people how to care for their babies."



"I can take the poison out," ah-Iztamna said. He came down to this world and made medicine which he gave to those babies to drink. Then they vomited up the blood and meat they had eaten, little white maggots just cleaned up that mess. Lord Jaguar's hair fell out, and Lord Fer-de-lance's eyes plopped out of their heads. Their scales became skin once more. ah-Iztamna went to K'uk'umpakal and rubbed medicine on him, and his burns healed.

"I cannot make their eyes grow back, or their ears," ah-Iztamna said.

"This I will do," Lady ix-Chel said. She came down to this world and pinched the babies' ear-holes, and new ears grew out. She blew breath into their eye holes, and new eyes grew there.

"I will show those people how to care for their infants," said Mother Moon. She had raised the children of many gods and goddesses and knew what to do, so she came to live in this world for a time. She taught the people



how to hold their children and how to bathe them and how to soothe them. She taught them what foods babies like and how to feed them and how to care for them. She brought the parents and the godparents together and showed them how to present their little ones with the tools they would need in this world, so they would know what paths to walk to become men and women. Then the people understood how to care for babies and were pleased to have them.

ah-Puch was angry that he had been cheated of his new servants, but he had caused a woman and three hunters to die and a caçique to be clawed and a baby to be burned. He was pleased with his work, there was a great celebration in his nasty palace, and he would never forget how easy it was to twist badly treated people into his own tools.



Now we have the hetzmek ceremony to welcome new babies when they come into this world. That way they know they are wanted here and will not listen to ah-Puch and any wicked words he says.

