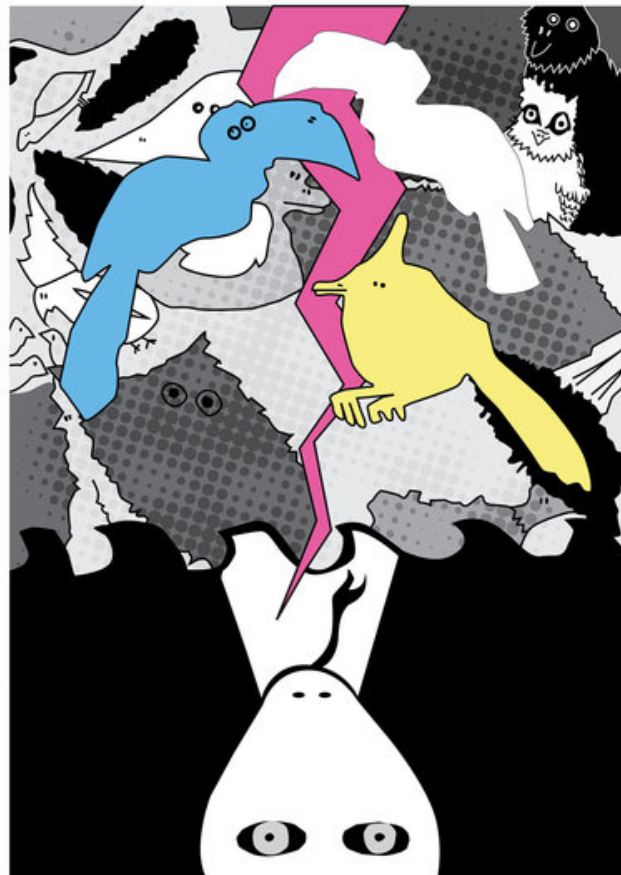
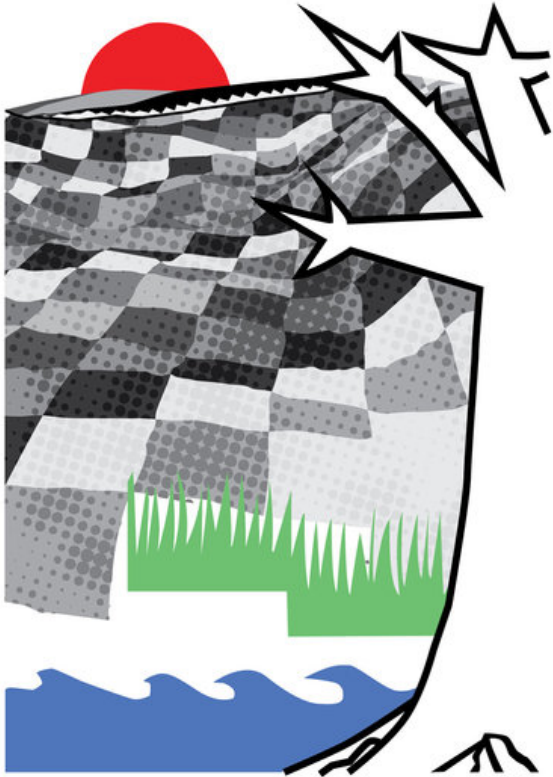


First man and first woman

Southern African Folktale
English





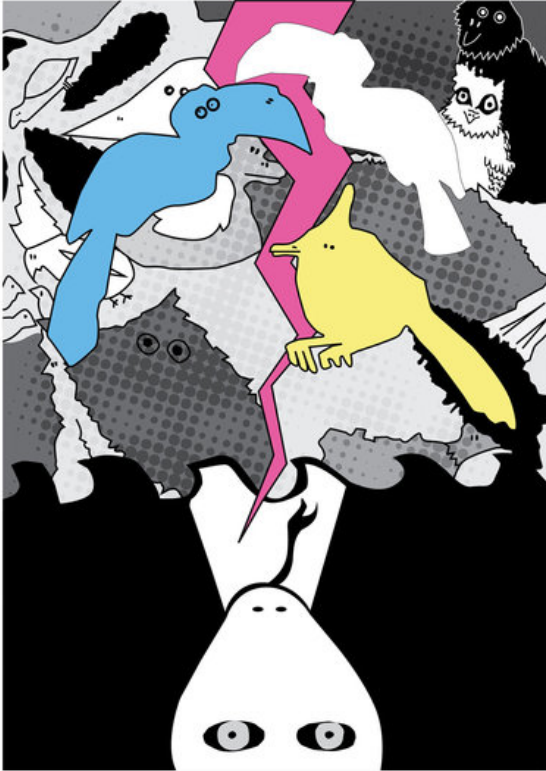
Long long ago when the earth was new,
great mountains covered the world like a blanket, and
tall trees spiked the sky.

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

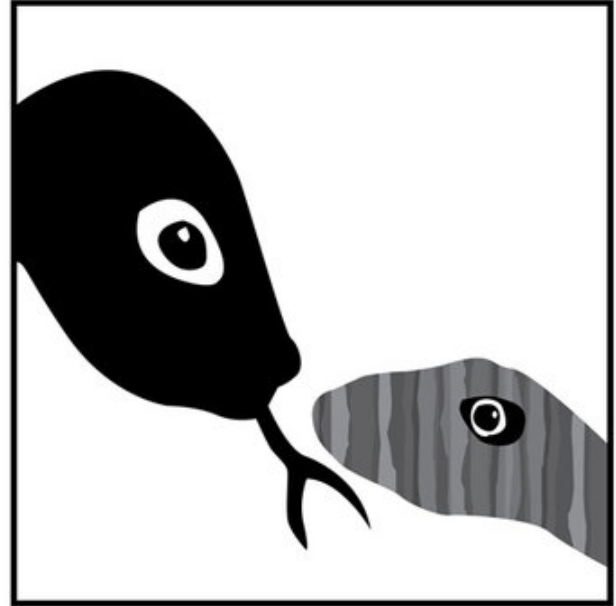


At the bottom of this pool were two snakes.
One had thick strongly patterned coils, and the other was smaller and more delicate.





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.

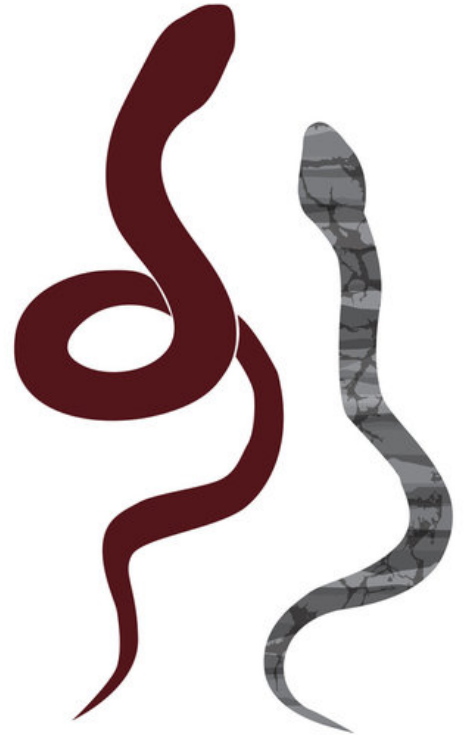
“Will we crawl on our bellies?”

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

“We will not crawl, we will walk!”

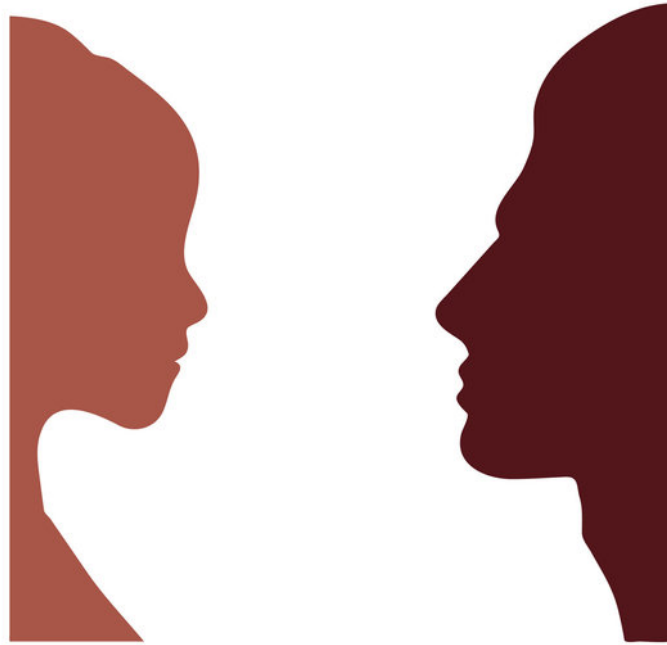
Very slowly the snakes uncoiled themselves.

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).

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