

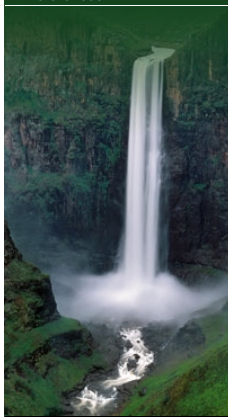
Orange-Senqu River Awareness Kit

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This story from the Nama people in Namibia, is taken from 'The Stolen Water and Other Stories: Traditional Tales from Namibia', by Jennifer Davis (1993). It has been reproduced with kind permission from Gamsberg-MacMillan Books and New Namibia Books, Namibia.

Long long ago, in the land of Nama, there lived a husband-and wife with their two daughters. The older daughter, Abas, was admired by everyone for her beauty and goodness. Every day, like all the other girls of the village, the two sisters fetched water from the waterhole at the foot of the hills.

There was plenty of water in the hills so the people were happy and prosperous. Their herds were fat and healthy a fid their crops were the best in the land.

One morning, Abas and her sister arrived first at the water hole. As Abas filled her pot, a voice called to her from the water.

Abas, I have chosen you. Come to me. The girl dropped her pot in fright. "Did you hear that, little sister?" "Yes, but there is no one here. Who can it be?" Again the voice called out across the water.

Abas, I have chosen you. Come to me. A giant snake rose from the water. Yellow foam streamed from his green scales and he breathed out tongues off flames. The two girls fled in terror, dropping their water pots. When they met the other girls on their way to fetch water they warned them, but the girls did not believe the story;

"There's no such thing! You're only trying to frighten us," laughed one of the girls. The others laughed too and they continued on their way.



The Water Snake.

Source: Libby Costandius 1993
(click to enlarge)

"Let's follow them and hide. Perhaps we did imagine this" Abas took her sister's hand and they hid in the long grass near the water hole. The sisters watched the other girls filling their water pots, singing and laughing together

"They make me feel foolish," whispered Abas. "We must get water too, or we'll be in trouble. Please, sister, fetch the water. I will not go near the waterhole again."

The younger sister wanted to please Abas, so she left their hiding place. She found the water pots and joined the other girls. "Where is Abas, the beautiful, dreaming one?" "Where is your water serpent?"

"You cannot frighten us with your tales!" The girls laughed. The younger sister said nothing. Silently she filled the pots and hurried back to Abas. Abas thanked her sister. "Let's not tell our parents about this," she warned. "They; too, may not believe us and we will only make them angry."

The next morning, Abas said she felt ill, so her sister set out without her. She walked with the other girls and soon forgot her fears as they chatted and sang together. When they reached the waterhole, they filled their water pots. But just as they younger sister filled her pot, a voice called out across the water.

"Where is Abas, little sister? Tell her she is the chosen one. She must come to me.

The water frothed and bubbled and the giant snake rose from the waterhole. With terrified screams the girls ran off, scattering their waterpots. When the younger sister arrived home, she and Abas told their parents what had happened. The worried parents went to the chief for advice. The chief called all his people, who had by this time heard the story, and led them down to the waterhole.

When the villagers arrived at the waterhole, they stared in horror. It was as dry as dust! Messengers were sent out to all the springs and streams, but they all reported that there was no water anywhere. The chief then turned to his people. "It is said by our forefathers that if the water snake calls a maiden, she must obey! Now we have been cursed. Without water we will be destroyed. Let us return to our homes and gather our things. At sunrise we must leave this place."

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The people wept in despair. Abas saw the sorrow of her nation and knew what she must do. She knelt before her family for their blessing. Then, tall and graceful, she walked down the path to the waterhole, watched by the silent villagers.

Early the next morning, the family of Abas hurried down to the valley. What they saw filled them with fear for Abas. The waterhole was overflowing. The springs in the hills were gushing down to the valley below. They called out for Abas. Again and again they called, but there was no reply. Abas was gone forever.

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