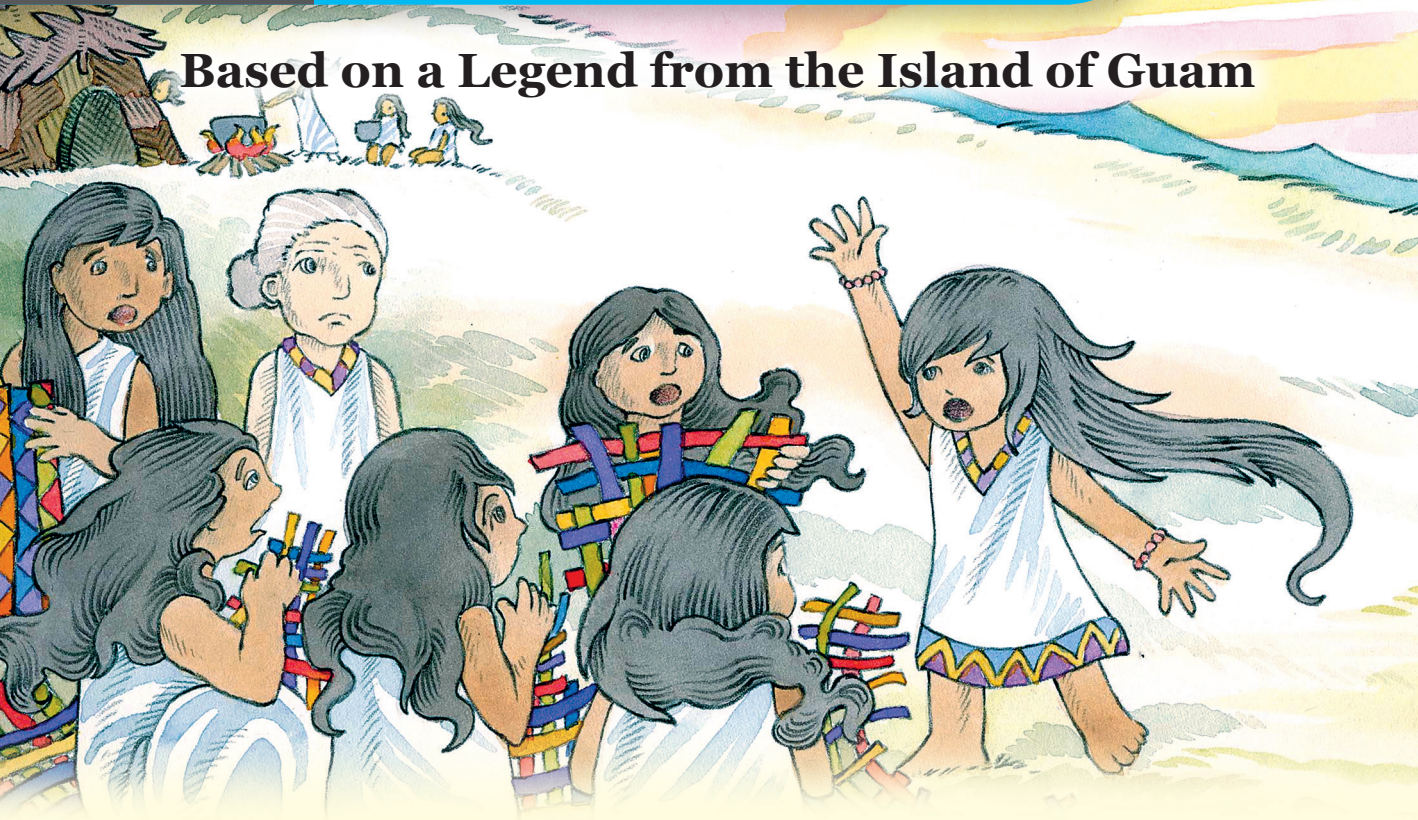


# 6

# Stop the Hungry Giant Fish!

Based on a Legend from the Island of Guam



The earth trembled beneath Nineti's feet. She ran toward Hagatna Bay. Out of the water surged a giant parrotfish with a mouth like a gaping cave and a beak as sharp as spiraling coral. It splashed as its mighty jaws approached the jutting rock, and . . .

*Chomp!*

The earth shook.

? What made the sound "chomp"?

“Eeeee!” Nineti cried. “I must warn the others!”

She fled toward her village. Between gasps, she told the *maga’lahi*, the chief, that a giant sea creature was eating their island.

The chief gathered the men, who were known to possess great strength. They decided they could use their strength to seize the fish.

The men jumped into their *flying proas* and soared out in the fast-sailing canoes to catch the beast. But the men could not find the fish, even though they could hear the rumbling of each bite.

*Snap!*

The giant fish continued to devour the rock, but each time the fish heard the men approaching, it slipped into deep underwater caves to hide.

Heart pounding, Nineti ran toward the home of the *maga’haga*, the wisest woman in the village.

 Who did Nineti go to for help?

There at the outside kitchen she saw a gathering of maidens sitting in a circle, weaving mats and singing.

“A sea creature is eating our island!” Nineti cried.

“What can we do so that our entire island does not end up in the belly of a fish?”

The wise old woman replied, “I have seen the great parrotfish that eats rock instead of coral. Come join us. Together we will think of a plan.” She motioned Nineti to sit down with the others. As she sat, Nineti noticed that some of the best singers in the village were there.

With every minute, the ground shook more violently as the parrotfish's chomping brought it closer. Nineti's heart beat faster.

Nineti tried to concentrate on the clean scent of the maidens' long hair, flowing like pools on the floor beside her. In order to keep the maidens' minds off the shaking, the maga'haga started to sing a new *Kantan Chamorrta*. Nineti listened as the women added verses about catching the attention of the village's strongest fishermen. One girl sang about catching him with her long hair. This gave Nineti an idea. Words formed in her head. She sang:

*Weave, weave with fingers quick  
the nets to catch this giant fish.  
Let us use our flowing hair  
to grant this life-saving wish . . .*

A light flashed in the maga'haga's eyes. "Yes, child! You are wise!"

The old woman brought out a sharp shell knife and said, "We need to cut off our hair and weave it into a net if we are to defeat the creature. Let us work together. Quickly, quickly!"

The maidens let their hair fall to the ground in mounds. With the speed of a sailfish, they nimbly wove the black tresses into a web. Songs floated through the air until the powerful net was complete. Then together the maidens set off to find the great fish.

But when the maidens arrived at the bay, there was no sign of the parrotfish. They saw only men shaking their heads, with faces full of worry.



*Boom!* Another bite was felt underneath the island.

Nineti noticed lemon peels bubbling up from the water. "Look!" she said, pointing. "What is happening, Maga'haga?"

The old woman answered, "They must be from Pago Bay. The women there use lemon to wash their hair."

Nineti's face grew hot, and she whispered, "But Pago Bay is on the other side of the island!"

The fish must have eaten a tunnel underneath their island and started to munch on the other side. The island would soon split in two! They needed to find a way to get the fish to swim back to Hagatna Bay.

The old woman shouted, "Hurry, girls! Use your beautiful voices. We will set a trap for the fish."

At once, the maidens sang a sweet, melodious song. Their hearts were full of love for their people and their island. Tears sprang up in Nineti's eyes as she sang.

Suddenly, the rumbling stopped.

A giant gurgling came up from the bay. The huge fish swam toward the soothing melody of the maidens' enchanting voices.

"It's time to throw the net!" the maga'haga said.

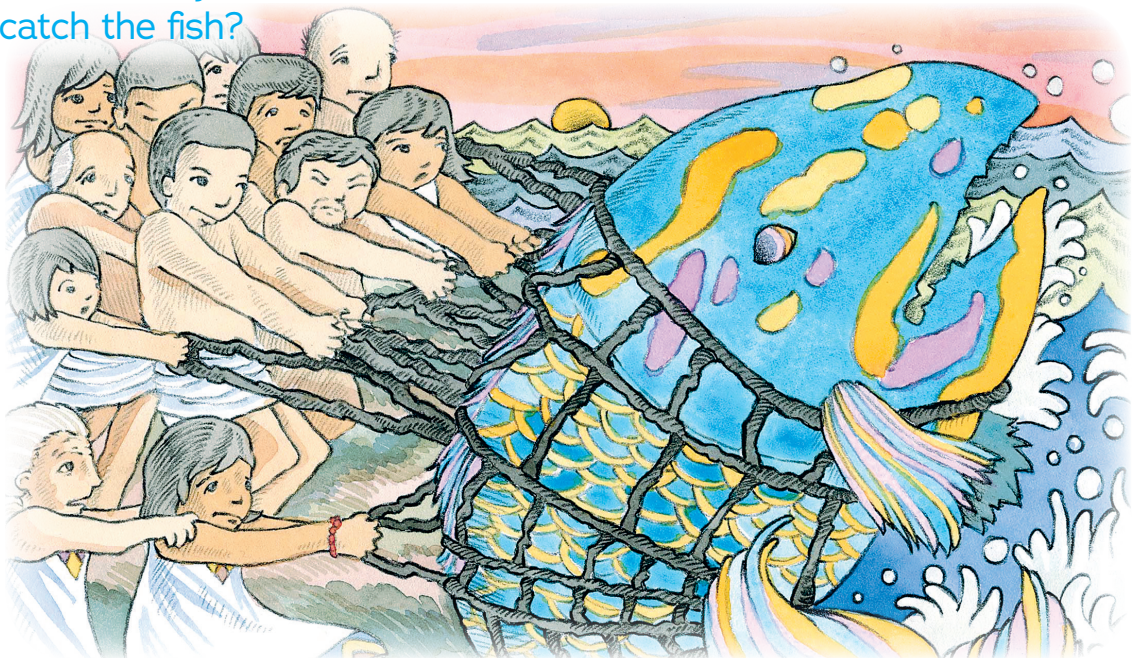
Together, the women hurled the net over the fish and pulled.

"Harder!" the maga'haga ordered.

But the fish was too strong.

Then the hundreds of men and children looking on rushed to the bay to help the women pull on the net.


? How did they catch the fish?



And it was the combined strength of all the people on the island—men, women, and children—that was finally great enough to haul the enormous creature to shore.

That night, Nineti shared in a feast of the huge parrotfish that fed all the people. Everyone was thankful and proud of the bravery of their women.

For generations since, the native people have pointed out the narrow coastal “waist” to their children and shared the tale of how, working together, the maidens miraculously helped to save the island of Guam.

 What did the people feast on that night?



## Guam's “Waist”

The island of Guam is a U.S. territory in the Pacific Ocean, southeast of Japan and west of Hawaii. The island is 30 miles long and 8 miles wide, except in the middle, where it is only 4 miles wide (so it looks like a waist). The indigenous people of the island, the *Chamorros*, tell this legend to explain how the “waist” came to be—and to honor the bravery of the women on the island.