



THE *ABONI* SPIRIT OF THINGS

ITAMAR VIEIRA JÚNIOR

TRANSLATED BY VICTOR MEADOWCROFT

The *bahi* sun grew in the *neme* sky with a great deal of light. Now is the time to leave. Tokowisa paints himself for entering the forest. Tokowisa carries feathers, blowpipe, and bow and arrow. Tokowisa has bare feet and a strong body. When he enters the forest, the strength of a tree, its life force, cannot be distinguished from Tokowisa's. The *aboni* spirit of a tree cannot be distinguished from the *aboni* spirit of Tokowisa. The *aboni* spirit of a *kobaya* musk hog cannot be distinguished from Tokowisa's *aboni* spirit, nor the *aboni* spirit of the *dyico* howler monkey distinguished from that of Tokowisa. All the animals speak and indicate the ways of things. Tokowisa stops and listens to what the tree says. He crouches by the edge of the *faha* river and listens to what it tells him. He looks up at the *neme* sky before closing his eyes to listen to what the *faha* rain is saying.

Tokowisa needs to find the abatosi palm to cure his wife, Yanici, who is expecting a son. Tokowisa has other sons and daughters. The old shaman said Tokowisa must go find the abatosi palm in faraway lands. Tokowisa has his legs and wants to reach one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river. He also has arms, and it is in the canoe that he travels upstream until he reaches the great river. Tokowisa's wife is bleeding and it is only moons before her son is born. Tokowisa's wife, Yanici, no longer carries the basket nor tends to the plots of cassava and maize. She remains lying in the hammock while Tokowisa goes to hunt. But Tokowisa's *ati boti* thoughts stay with his wife. The shaman blew tobacco over his wife's body and called upon the gods. He asked for the abatosi to be brought to him so he could cure her. Tokowisa will not set out with other men from his village because his *aboni* spirit will lead him into a land of war. He and the shaman know of the danger. Tokowisa must proceed without the men from his village.

"Is it really you?" asked the shaman. "Yes, it is me," answered Tokowisa. The shaman wanted to be certain Tokowisa's *aboni* spirit inhabited his body. "Go to one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river and gather the green leaves and fruit of the abatosi," ordered the shaman. "Yes, I will go," said Tokowisa. "Paint yourself for war," ordered the shaman. "Yes, I will do so," answered Tokowisa. Then he prepared his canoe, tied adornments to his body, picked up what he needed and left when the *bahi* sun illuminated the *neme* sky.

Tokowisa readies the canoe and waits for the *neme* sky to become illuminated. He leaves his oldest daughter, Neme, who can wield the basket and harvest cassava, to watch over her mother who cannot leave the hammock. Tokowisa travels upstream, rowing smoothly through the calm waters. He sees *aba* fish and *bani* birds. He looks up at the *neme* sky and listens to everything. Tokowisa must pay attention to the



ati boti heart of the forest because no sign should escape his *aboni* spirit. To find the abatosi, Tokowisa must listen to everything, he must keep watch over everything, must know the movement of the *boni* wind, must listen to the running of the waters and the songs of the *bani* birds in the *neme* sky. He travels up the *faha* river and prepares himself for the days when he will be far from the village. Tokowisa needs strength to find the abatosi. He paints himself and begins to chant so that the gods will hear and give him the strength and richness of spirit he needs.

In his *ati boti* heart Tokowisa carries the image of pale-faced Yanici lying in the hammock. She is surrounded by a pack of *yome* dogs and children who cry wanting *aba* fish and *fowa kabe* cassava cake. Yanici was surprised by a spell cast by a shaman from the village that is at war with Tokowisa's village. The spell was intended for Tokowisa, but it was Yanici who collapsed from weakness because she carries the warrior son. The shaman fears that Yanici's *aboni* spirit has been abducted by the *inamati bote*, who live beneath the earth. The *inamati bote* were summoned by the shaman who cast the spell, in retaliation for losses sustained in the last battle. That is why Tokowisa must bring back the abatosi, so the intentions of the old spirits can be reversed. Tokowisa goes alone, so the *tabora* village will not remain unprotected.

Tokowisa is a warrior, but now he is in danger. His village is at war with the *yawa* village on one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river. Tokowisa will not hunt for meat until he finds the abatosi. Tokowisa does not wish to displease the *yama* that visited him in a dream to show him the location of the abatosi palm. The *yama* appeared with flaming eyes and bright white fur. Tokowisa clearly remembers the abatosi palm by the edge of the water, just as it appeared to him in the dream. The *yama* led Tokowisa to the abatosi palm. Tokowisa must not eat animals. He will eat *asahi* and other fruits he finds so as not to displease the *yama*. His people fear the *yama*. Tokowisa does not fear the *yama*.

Tokowisa and his canoe travel up the *faha* river and his strong arms manoeuvre the *koyari* oar, alert, listening to know which way to follow. The *faha* river is telling him with the sound of its waters and is opening a path for the canoe which climbs, leaving behind the *tabora* village. Upriver, *nakani*. Downriver, *bato*. Tokowisa is not alone because the *aboni* spirit of things and animals accompanies him. Tokowisa is not afraid of war, or the men of war, or of the whites. Tokowisa knows that his people have died because the white men want to take the bodies of the trees. Tokowisa is not sure if the white men are *jarawara* humans. The white men do not fear the curse that awaits those who disrespect the *wami* land. The white men believe they exist alone and that trees and animals are worthless. The white men kill the old, kill women, kill men, kill children, all so they can take the bodies of the trees. "Why do they want a tree without its *aboni*?" Tokowisa asks himself.



“If you remove a tree from the *wami* earth its *aboni* goes up to the *neme* sky.” “What use is a tree without its *aboni*?” asks Tokowisa as he stops to rest from his journey.

Tokowisa stops to rest and *yama soki* night falls in the *neme* sky. He makes a small fire which illuminates that section of the forest. Yanici is hovering in Tokowisa’s thoughts. Tired, Tokowisa lies down on the jungle floor, with his bow, his arrows and the blowpipe by his side. Tokowisa awaits a dream that will tell him if he is near or far from the abatosi palm. He closes his eyes and waits.

The men carry the bow and arrow. The women carry the basket. The men hunt and go to war. The women plant crops and care for the warring men. The women dance. The men dance. The women sing. The men sing. They paint their bodies the colours of the *wami* earth. The bow and arrow allows the men to hunt their prey and capture *aba* fish. The basket is so the women can carry the fruits of their labour. *Kimi* maize, *fowa bao* cassava, *fowa basota* cassava, *fowa nestona* cassava. The men care for their women, because the women are the men’s strength; the men are the women’s strength. Tokowisa wants to save Yanici and so returns to the canoe at the edge of the *faha* river to continue in search of the abatosi.

Tokowisa begins to make out a clearing in the forest which means there are white men removing trees without their *aboni* spirit. He remembers the many sad stories that reach the village and how the men are preparing for war. The women store foodstuffs in the ground. They plant every kind of *fowa* cassava and leave it safe underground so that, when the war comes, they can feed their people. The white men have wood that spits fire and bleeds men to death. The men from the village have the bow and arrow. They also have the blowpipe, which can paralyse a *yome* jaguar larger than a man with its poison. The men from his village are at war with men from another village. Tokowisa does not fear any of them. Tokowisa was born to be a warrior and has taken part in many battles. He knows nothing can take place upon the *wami* earth without being avenged. That everything we do here must be avenged here also.

Tokowisa is a man who is travelling up the *faha* river in his canoe. The warriors of his people are not by his side, but Tokowisa has the world: the *wami* earth, the *faha* water and the *neme* sky. Tokowisa can speak to the *yati* stone when he leaves the canoe. He can talk to the river dolphin and hear its reply. He can speak to the *aboni* spirits in the *neme* sky. To the *aboni* spirit of the trees. Tokowisa carries the world in his *ati boti* heart. Yanici is in his *ati boti*. So are his children.

Tokowisa hears booming that is like the sound of the wood-that-spits-fire of the white men. They are killing the *aboni* of things, he thinks. Tokowisa can sense flashes of light coming from inside the forest.



Tokowisa told the shaman that the trees tremble with fear of the white men who are devouring the forest. Tokowisa can sense the commotion inside the jungle. He knows the *aboni* spirits in the *neme* sky will be merciless in their vengeance upon the white men.

Many days have passed and Tokowisa reaches the place revealed to him by the *yama* in his dream. The *bahi* sun is high up in the sky. Its light comes down through the clouds, illuminating the solitary abatosi palm by the edge of the stream. Tokowisa touches the abatosi palm and asks permission of its *aboni* to climb its body. He climbs the abatosi palm, gathers the greenest leaves and the ripest fruit. Tokowisa breathes, and breathes, and breathes. He drinks some *faha* water and heads down with his canoe to continue his journey.

It rains heavily after Tokowisa resumes his journey. He decides to stop so the *faha* rain does not fill his canoe. Tired, Tokowisa falls asleep. He does not dream, though he would like to dream so as to receive news of Yanici. When the rain has stopped, the *yawa* spot a canoe on the bank of the *faha* river, under a tree. The *yawa* realise it is a *yawa* enemy who is sleeping there. They raise a cry and carry Tokowisa off to the *yawa* village on one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river he does not know.

Tokowisa is imprisoned in the village on one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river. The men who are at war with his *tabora* village now own his body. Tokowisa does not fear his enemies and knows he should die like a warrior. He cannot disappoint the men of his *tabora* village by fleeing from the *yawa* village. As if the men from the *tabora* village, the village of his birth, were not warrior enough to avenge him. Tokowisa cannot disappoint them. He knows he is not greater than all the men together. Tokowisa believes the men from the *tabora* village will save him. Tokowisa knows that now he will be transformed into a *yawa* enemy. He will lose his adornments, his bow and arrow, his blowpipe. He will lose the colours of his *wami* land. He will receive the colours of the *wami* land of the *yawa*. He will receive *yawa* adornments. But Tokowisa's *aboni* spirit will never be a *yawa*.

The *yawa* will transform Tokowisa into one of them. Then the *yawa* will consume his body. Tokowisa will depart for the *neme* sky. He will inhabit the *neme* sky and meet with all those who have already departed. The trees killed by the whites and the animals he has eaten. Tokowisa will live at war in the *neme* sky, because war created the man of the forest. Tokowisa must take the green leaves and the fruit of the abatosi to rescue Yanici's *aboni* spirit and save his son. Many days have passed, and Tokowisa must find a way to bring the shaman what he needs to reverse the spell. Tokowisa cannot disappoint the warriors of his *tabora* village. The warriors will expect Tokowisa to grant them the honour of rescuing him or, if that is not possible, the honour of avenging his death, but they will not be expecting him to flee like a *bato mawa*.



Tokowisa needs to bring back the abatosi to save Yanici. The *yawa* have taken the abatosi. They have also taken the bow and arrow, the blowpipe and the canoe. Tokowisa's hands and feet are not bound, but he is guarded by *yawa* warriors. Tokowisa feels sadness because he wishes to save Yanici.

At night, Tokowisa dreams of Yanici: she is lying in the hammock and her eyes are closed. Yanici has sweat all over her body and gives birth to a *kobaya* musk hog. Yanici is happy with her musk hog son. But from her body pours a river of ama blood. Tokowisa awakens to the cry of the *howaraka* white-billed toucan. The *howaraka* toucan is very nearby and *yama soki* night has fallen. The *yawa* are sleeping. Tokowisa rises. The *howaraka* toucans he has seen before were not white, but the *howaraka* toucan perched watching Tokowisa is white with red eyes like the *yama*. Tokowisa appears with his bow and arrow, blowpipe, and the green leaves and fruit of the abatosi. Tokowisa takes everything to his canoe, lying on one of the thousand banks of the *faha* river, and the white *howaraka* toucan with red eyes watches him. Tokowisa calls to it and raises his arm. The *howaraka* toucan alights on his arm. The *yawa* sleep as if bewitched by the *yama* that is the *howaraka* toucan. Tokowisa puts everything inside the canoe and feels a desire to leave. Tokowisa takes the *howaraka* toucan to the canoe, it flaps its wings and lands alone. Tokowisa is aware of the scent of the *yama* that is the *howaraka* toucan. He pushes the canoe so it can travel down the *faha* river and goes to sleep.

The canoe reaches the banks of the stream where Tokowisa and Yanici's home can be found. Tokowisa's daughter, Neme, goes down onto the bank because she recognises her father's canoe. Neme cries out to her *abi* father and the men and women of the *tabora* village come down in search of him. The men recover the bow, the arrows and the blowpipe from the canoe so that Neme need not touch them and bring bad luck to her *abi* father. The men gather the leaves and the fruit of the abatosi palm. Neme requests they take everything to the shaman, so that he may cure her mother. Neme does not tell Yanici that Tokowisa did not arrive in the canoe.

The shaman crushes the leaves and burns a portion of them until it turns to ash. The shaman covers Yanici's face with the ashes and makes her drink another portion of the leaves mixed with juice from the fruit. Then he speaks sacred words, calls upon the gods in the *neme* sky, calls upon Tokowisa's *aboni* spirit. The shaman has his eyes turned toward the sacred and he senses that Tokowisa lives, that his *aboni* spirit is not in the *neme* sky. The men of the *tabora* village divide up: some dress themselves for war and travel up the *faha* river. Upriver, *nakani*. Downriver, *bato*. Others remain in the *tabora* village to defend the women, the children and the old.



Two nights go by, two days, and Yanici is freed from the *inamati bote* and recovers her strength. She goes down to the edge of the stream, because the hour of her son's birth is near. Yanici contemplates the canoe resting at the edge of the *faha* river. She sings because she misses Tokowisa. She also sings because Tokowisa's son will be born. If Tokowisa returns, he will find his son drinking milk from the breast of Yanici.