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### *The Legend of Halmonga*

#### **Abstract**

When ice began to melt, three black seeds from the first poppy fell. Old Candamu, the Bent- Back, took them and sowed them in the land of his house. He watched and waited, but they did not sprout. “What ails you, Old Candamu?” asked Pisuerga, the Mother-River, the Giver of Life.

#### **Additional Keywords**

Story; Fiction; Hector Vielva

# The Legend of Halmonga

By Hector Vielva

## Part I

When ice began to melt, three black seeds from the first poppy fell. Old Candamu, the Bent-Back, took them and sowed them in the land of his house.

He watched and waited, but they did not sprout.

“What ails you, Old Candamu?” asked Pisuerga, the Mother-River, the Giver of Life.

“They will not grow without your favour, I fear,” said Old Candamu woefully.

“Worry not, I shall help you! Yet if a girl is born from one of them, I will keep her, for I need a maiden to care for my banks.”

Then the river laid smoothly on the garden. Shortly after, from the first seed emerged a little linden tree. While Old Candamu was opening some furrows, the linden grew and grew until he blocked the light of the sun and the moon. All living and non-living beings complained, so Old Candamu took his axe and set himself to cut down the tree. For three days and nights he hewed and hewed until the linden fell with a loud creak on the Mount Halmonga, creating an enormous crack on the side of the mountain. Fallen branches became the forests that are nowadays at the foot of the Halmonga and surround the villages in the shire.

From the second seed came into being a little ermine. Naughty creature, it did not please Old Candamu, for it was no good for the labour. From the third seed, at last, a young girl was born. Very much pleased with the young girl’s vivacious eyes and fine face, Old Candamu wished to take her for his maiden. He named her Cervaria, for that was a land with plenty of deer, and she was beloved by the creatures of the mounts and the creeks, and above all by his friend the ermine. Then came Mother Pisuerga to demand what was hers.

“Behold me! For I am too old of a man, I need someone to care for me and help me to plow,” begged the ancient one.

“And yet you agreed, Old Candamu, the Bent-Back,” concluded the river.

Old Candamu refused to give away the girl, who was sobbing scared. Rose then Pisuerga and, in its ire, flooded the garden of Old Candamu. The ancient man, uncannily for his age, escaped in a few strides to the slopes of Mount Halmonga. The ermine dragged Cervaria to a nearby mound, though the Mother-River meant them no harm. From that day on, Cervaria became the Maiden of the Water and dwelt in the Cueva Deshondonada. And it is told that she only left the riverbank to visit her dearest ermines, who lived in the ruinous walls where once stood the garden of Old Candamu.

Mount Halmonga, who had seen it all from his heights, did not unlove Old Candamu and allowed him to wander on his slopes. The Bent-Back was for long grumbling and pondering his vengeance against Pisuerga, but his axe would be of no use. Over time, he grew more and more bitter in character, until one day he got lost in the crack that the linden had opened in the side of the Halmonga. Never was he heard of again, and since then he is known as Old Candamu of the Dark Crack.

## Part II

Hundreds and hundreds of winters passed until a small town, Cervera, was founded at the foot of Mount Halmonga. Though many different tribes and peoples had come and gone through that shire, it was thus named in honour of Cervaria, the Maiden of the Water, for the folk still remembered the old legend. Then happened something that gave minstrels matter for beautiful songs.

One cold and light morning, the Town Warden's horse appeared at the house door of Al-Mutawir. This young man, one of the barely bearded of Cervera, deemed very strange that the Warden visited his humble house or family. Then he realized that the horse was not tied, for it had come freely. The folk in Cervera knew very well what this meant. According to the old tradition, if the Warden's mount stayed for more than a day and night in front of someone's door, that person should become the new Town Warden. At noon rumours started. When Warden Serabraño found out, firstly he did not believe it, then he disregarded it, and upon dusk he began to worry. Al-Mutawir wished no trouble or foe, so he prayed all night for the bay horse to leave.

Yet at dawn the mount was still there. Al-Mutawir's family convinced him to honour the tradition and claim his right. Not much convinced by these reasons, he was heartened by another motive that he did cherish in his chest. Accompanied by a crowd by now, Al-Mutawir decided to mount the bay horse and made way to the Castle of Cervera. Deep down, Warden Serabraño ardently wished to crush that insolence, but he would not risk unsettling the folk by opposing the custom, for the dastard lords of Vado and Campomunga were always lurking in the boundaries of the shire. He spoke gravely from a turret:

“Welcome Al-Mutawir! For returning my horse have my sincere gratitude.”

Al-Mutawir remained stone-silent, full of doubt.

“We all know the tradition, and the tradition has manifested. Well, what have you to say, boy? Speak!”

“My sublime Warden, I do not wish to quarrel with you, but if we are to settle this unexpected sign...”

The young man gathered his courage at last to reveal his most intimate intention:

“...if you allow, I shall request your daughter's hand, the incomparable Brañaflor. Then there will be no further dispute between us, magnanimous chief.”

“Obstinate insolent...!” said to himself the Warden in his wrath, but he did not dare to speak in these terms.

Considered Serabraño that it might indeed be a good solution to both hold his authority and not to incite the folk. Besides, he was convinced that he would outwit the young man with an impossible task.

“Alright, Al-Mutawir, but with one condition. To show your courage as the future Town Warden and your worthiness to my dearest daughter, you must climb to the peak of Mount Halmonga.”

There were murmurs and whispers of complaint, for even the little children knew that nobody was able to reach the top of the Halmonga in the middle of the winter. Young Brañaflor, who had been listening aside, finally stepped out to see her long-time suitor, for they had desired each other already for several moons.

“I accept!” answered Al-Mutawir.

“At daybreak you shall depart and with the last light we will know, only by a sign of fire, that you have survived,” specified Serabraño.

“I shall bring you the very axe of Old Candamu if I must, my chieftain,” replied the young man, gazing at the vivid eyes of Brañaflor.

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*Those who are born in the mountains are doomed to restlessly look upon the heights among the fog.*

At dawn, Al-Mutawir looks up and believes that the peak of the Halmonga is revealing itself to him. Encouraged by this sign, he is certain that he will have the blessing of the day.

*Those who are born in the mountains are obliged to honour the highest.*

Mount Halmonga. From below it is believed to be a dwelling of mysteries and primordial secrets. All admire it from afar. It is yet when they consider it a demigod being. But they also dream of raising a hillfort at its foot and be chieftains over the brows and dales.

*Those who intend to crown its top break the bound of ancestral homage.*

During the climb, Al-Mutawir realizes that the peak is not invincible nor divine and, when reaching the top, his sight finally rules over the High Basin of Pisuerga and the whole valley. However, after that moment of euphoria, he suspects that the old mountain is barely tolerating his presence. Suddenly he finds himself surrounded by rocks and crags with human shapes.

“Are these the ones that tried it before me?”, says he to himself, bewildered.

A voice emerges from the bosom of the earth like a slow cataclysm:

“I, WHO HAVE SEEN THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF THE LIVING AND THE NON-LIVING, ERE MEN AND AFTER MEN AND WILL DO SO... HARK, AL-MUTAWIR, I AWAIT YOUR FALL FOR YOUR ARROGANCE!”

Terrified by the mountain blare that is cracking the rocks around him, the young man regrets his previous thoughts and regains his initial modesty. Deep inside him a new form of homage to the great mount is born. It is neither a being to be worshipped nor a fortress to dominate the others, but the imperishable guardian of the valley. In the heart of Al-Mutawir, the bound with the mountain becomes one of a profound respect, an admiration without superstition, and a sincere love for every crag, stone, and tree. And it is only then when Mount Halmonga begins to love him. The last light of the day falls inexorably and below the folk wait, staring at the peak. Brañaflor shivers like a folded poppy flower. Finally falls the dark and everyone holds their breaths. Before the Town Warden claims his victory, a flame trembles on the top of the mountain.

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Following his derring-do, Al-Mutawir, The One who Climbed, eventually united with Brañaflor and one day he became the Town Warden of Cervera. But until then, he continued plowing the land under the caring look of Mount Halmonga.