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Nuru and the Doves

By Debra Shrimplin

There was a time in the Great Valley before the Ash Fall and Great Rain when all the doves were pure white and their song sweeter than the nightingale. They built their nests in the acacia trees along the banks of the rivers that flowed into the land of flamingoes, white rhinos and the great cats.

When the Ash Fall and Great Rain muddied the skies and sent torrential rains on the earth, a small flock of white doves took refuge in their large acacia tree near a river. With the wind, ash and rain beating down on them, the doves struggled to protect their eggs and young chicks cowering in the nests. Their feathers turned gray from the falling ash. A sudden strong gust blew the nests from the tree. The flock took flight and flew north to find a new home.

When the Great Rains stopped and the sky was clear of the Ash Fall, a young girl, Nuru, found the nests on the ground beside the old acacia tree. Only one nest had two eggs that were not broken. Nuru, thinking the eggs may still hold a live baby, picked up the nest and took it home to her grass hut.

Nuru covered the eggs with bird feathers and leaves. She placed it near her fire and watched over the eggs as if they were her own children. When the two eggs hatched, the chick's feathers were gray and their eyes were white. She named the male Amari and the female Ayaan.

Nuru nurtured the chicks until they could take flight. Then, she set them free. Now, Amari and Ayaan had grown attached to Nuru and were always seen hovering near her. They watched Nuru play, learn and become a young woman.

One day, a lightning storm set the foothills near Nuru's village ablaze. The smoke and heat forced Amari and Ayaan to fly north. From afar, they watched the skies over Nuru's village. When a patch of blue sky appeared over the village, they returned to find the village a pile of charred wood and ash. Nuru's hut was a mound of dark, gray ash.

Amari and Ayaan circled above Nuru's hut and found no trace of their beloved Nuru. They walked around the hut calling out for her. The pain and sorrow at her loss changed Amari and Ayaan forever.

To this day, the mourning doves of Africa still cry out for her. Their feathers remain gray from the ashes, their eyes are perpetually red from grief, and their call is no longer sweeter than the nightingale. Their call is now an eternal voice of mourning for their beloved Nuru.