

Quak-wah-tania and Her Sisters – A Folk Tal from Guyana

Once there were three sisters named Fell-in-bone, Fell-in-bitania, and Quak-wah-tania. Everyone was in love with Fell-in-bone, the oldest. Her skin was smooth as porcelain, and her eyes flashed green meadows of delight. Fell-in-bitania, too, was beautiful. She had silky black braids that danced in the wind, and left behind a perfume of wildflowers.

But the youngest, Quak-wah-tania, was a different story. The girls in the village ran if they saw her coming, and the little boys threw stones.

Even her mama couldn't stand the sight of her. Every night Mama would walk home from work, thinking of her two pretty girls. The thought of Quak-wah-tania's face would spoil her good mood, so she'd approach their house singing:

Fell-in-bone, come hah;
Fell-in-bitania, come hah;
Leh Quak-wah-tania stah deh.

Fell-in-bone and Fell-in-bitania would open the door and fly down the road to meet their mama. She'd give them both a big hug and swallow them in kisses. Every day, she'd have a special gift for them—a ribbon or a sweet. She'd go without lunch just so that she could buy it. Nothing was too good, she'd say, for her two pretty girls. With one of Mama's arms wrapped around Fell-in-bone's waist and the other arm smoothing Fell-in-bitania's braids, the three would come up to the house, laughing and swaying and talking about their day.

Meanwhile, Quak-wah-tania stayed inside, watching her mama and sisters from the window. When the three finally entered the house in a fit of giggles, no one even noticed Quak-wah-tania in the corner. In fact, their mama would ignore Quak-wah-tania entirely, unless there was a problem with the floor not being scrubbed or the dinner not tasting right. It was Quak-wah-tania's job to take care of all the cleaning and cooking, because Fell-in-bone was too busy picking out pretty dresses to wear, and Fell-in-bitania was too busy combing her hair.

One day, just as Mama was coming home from work, a wolf passed by the girls' house. He hid behind a tree and watched as Fell-in-bone and Fell-in-bitania spilled from the house when they heard their mama sing. The wolf's mouth watered at the sight. Those two girls, he knew, would make a delicious meal. But the wolf didn't want to make his move too quickly and risk his life or his dinner. So he hid outside the girls' house and waited for an opportunity to introduce himself.

His chance came one day when he overheard the girls' mama say that she would be working late. The wolf's stomach growled with hunger. That evening, he stood out on the road leading to the girls' house. Coating his mouth with flour and sugar, he sang in Mama's voice:

Fell-in-bone come hah;

Fell-in-bitania come hah;

Leh Quak-wah-tania stah deh.

The two girls ran out of the house with their arms open wide. The wolf caught Fell-in-bone in one paw and Fell-in-bitania in the other and swallowed them whole.

Now, Quak-wah-tania was watching from the window. When she saw the wolf smack his lips after guzzling down her sisters, she ran to the kitchen cupboard and locked herself inside.

A few minutes later, the girls' mama approached their house and began her song. No one came. She sang once more for her daughters. Still no one ran out to greet her. Then Quak-wah-tania crawled out from the cupboard, opened up the window, and sang back:

Fell-in-bone nah heh;

Fell-in-bitania nah heh;

Only me Quak-wah-tania one heh.

Her mama rushed up to the house and threw open the door. Quak-wah-tania told her about the wolf. Her mama began to wail and shake uncontrollably. How could she have lost her two babies—all that she loved in the world? Quak-wah-tania held her mama in her arms and tried to soothe her. But her mama couldn't stop crying.

Then, Quak-wah-tania had an idea. The wolf could not have gone very far. Picking up a knife from the kitchen, she ran into the yard.

Quak-wah-tania found the wolf sleeping under a mango tree. Before the wolf even knew what was happening, she slit a hole in his belly. Out popped Fell-in-bone and Fell-in-bitania, crying and screaming and running to their mama. Quak-wah-tania then heaved a big stone into the wolf's belly and closed him up.

Her mama knew then what a brave girl Quak-wah-tania was, and she hugged her as tight as she hugged the pretty sisters. She bathed Quak-wah-tania that night, oiling her skin with perfume and combing her hair. Soon Quak-wah-tania looked so clean and neat that the girls stopped running when they saw her and the little boys stopped throwing stones. And when Mama came home from work, she now sang,

Fell-in-bone come hah;

Fell-in-bitania come hah;

Quak-wah-tania come hah!