

# *Mkaaah Jeechonee, the Boy*

## *Hunter*

Zanzibar Tales

African

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*Intermediate*

*19 min read*

Sultan Maaj'noon had seven sons and a big cat, of all of whom he was very proud.

Everything went well until one day the cat went and caught a calf. When they told the sultan he said, "Well, the cat is mine, and the calf is mine." So they said, "Oh, all right, master," and let the matter drop.

A few days later the cat caught a goat; and when they told the sultan he said, "The cat is mine, and the goat is mine;" and so that settled it again.

Two days more passed, and the cat caught a cow. They told the sultan, and he shut them up with "My cat, and my cow."

After another two days the cat caught a donkey; same result.

Next it caught a horse; same result.

The next victim was a camel; and when they told the sultan he said: "What's the matter with you folks? It was my cat, and my camel. I believe you don't like my cat, and want it killed, bringing me tales about it every day. Let it eat whatever it wants to."

In a very short time it caught a child, and then a full-grown man; but each time the sultan remarked that both the cat and its victim were his, and thought no more of it.

Meantime the cat grew bolder, and hung around a low, open place near the town, pouncing on people going for water, or animals out at pasture, and eating them.

At last some of the people plucked up courage; and, going to the sultan, said: "How is this, master? As you are our sultan you are our protector,—or ought to be,—yet you have allowed this cat to do as it pleases, and now it lives just out of town there, and kills everything living that goes that way, while at night it comes into town and does the same thing. Now, what on earth are we to do?"

But Maajnoon only replied: "I really believe you hate my cat. I suppose you want me to kill it; but I shall do no such thing. Everything it eats is mine."

Of course the folks were astonished at this result of the interview, and, as no one dared to kill the cat, they all had to remove from the vicinity where it lived. But this did not mend matters, because, when it found no one came that way, it shifted its quarters likewise.

So complaints continued to pour in, until at last Sultan Maajnoon gave orders that if any one came to make accusations against the cat, he was to be informed that the master could not be seen.

When things got so that people neither let their animals out nor went out themselves, the cat went farther into the country, killing and eating cattle, and fowls, and everything that came its way.

One day the sultan said to six of his sons, "I'm going to look at the country to-day; come along with me."

The seventh son was considered too young to go around anywhere, and was always left at home with the women folk, being called by his brothers Mkaa'ah Jeecho'nee, which means Mr. Sit-in-the-kitchen.

Well, they went, and presently came to a thicket. The father was in front and the six sons following him, when the cat jumped out and killed three of the latter.

The attendants shouted, "The cat! the cat!" and the soldiers asked permission to search for and kill it, which the sultan readily granted, saying: "This is not a cat, it is a noon'dah. It has taken from me my own sons."

Now, nobody had ever seen a noondah, but they all knew it was a terrible beast that could kill and eat all other living things.

When the sultan began to bemoan the loss of his sons, some of those who heard him said: "Ah, master, this noondah does not select his prey. He doesn't say: 'This is my master's son, I'll leave him alone,' or, 'This is my master's wife, I won't eat her.' When we told you what the cat had done, you always said it was your cat, and what it ate was yours, and now it has killed your sons, and we don't believe it would hesitate to eat even you."

And he said, "I fear you are right."

As for the soldiers who tried to get the cat, some were killed and the remainder ran away, and the sultan and his living sons took the dead bodies home and buried them.

Now when Mkaaah Jeechonee, the seventh son, heard that his brothers had been killed by the noondah, he said to his mother, "I, too, will go, that it may kill me as well as my brothers, or I will kill it."

But his mother said: "My son, I do not like to have you go. Those three are already dead; and if you are killed also, will not that be one wound upon another to my heart?"

"Nevertheless," said he, "I can not help going; but do not tell my father."

So his mother made him some cakes, and sent some attendants with him; and he took a great spear, as sharp as a razor, and a sword, bade her farewell, and departed.

As he had always been left at home, he had no very clear idea what he was going to hunt for; so he had not gone far beyond the suburbs, when, seeing a very large dog, he concluded that this was the animal he was after; so he killed it, tied a rope to it, and dragged it home, singing,

"Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people.”

When his mother, who was upstairs, heard him, she looked out of the window, and, seeing what he had brought, said, “My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people.”

So he left the carcass outside and went in to talk about it, and his mother said, “My dear boy, the noondah is a much larger animal than that; but if I were you, I’d give the business up and stay at home.”

“No, indeed,” he exclaimed; “no staying at home for me until I have met and fought the noondah.”

So he set out again, and went a great deal farther than he had gone on the former day. Presently he saw a civet cat, and, believing it to be the animal he was in search of, he killed it, bound it, and dragged it home, singing,

“Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people.”

When his mother saw the civet cat, she said, “My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people.” And he threw it away.

Again his mother entreated him to stay at home, but he would not listen to her, and started off again.

This time he went away off into the forest, and seeing a bigger cat than the last one, he killed it, bound it, and dragged it home, singing,

“Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people.”

But directly his mother saw it, she had to tell him, as before, “My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people.”

He was, of course, very much troubled at this; and his mother said, “Now, where do you expect to find this noondah? You don’t know where it is, and you don’t know what it looks like. You’ll get sick over this; you’re not looking so well now as you did. Come, stay at home.”

But he said: “There are three things, one of which I shall do: I shall die; I shall find the noondah and kill it; or I

shall return home unsuccessful. In any case, I'm off again."

This time he went farther than before, saw a zebra, killed it, bound it, and dragged it home, singing,

"Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people."

Of course his mother had to tell him, once again, "My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people."

After a good deal of argument, in which his mother's persuasion, as usual, was of no avail, he went off again, going farther than ever, when he caught a giraffe; and when he had killed it he said: "Well, this time I've been successful. This must be the noondah." So he dragged it home, singing,

"Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people."

Again his mother had to assure him, "My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people." She then pointed out to him that his brothers were not running about hunting for the noondah, but staying at home attending to their own business. But, remarking that all brothers were not alike, he expressed his determination to stick to his task until it came to a successful termination, and went off again, a still greater distance than before.

While going through the wilderness he espied a rhinoceros asleep under a tree, and turning to his attendants he exclaimed, "At last I see the noondah."

"Where, master?" they all cried, eagerly.

"There, under the tree."

"Oh-h! What shall we do?" they asked.

And he answered: "First of all, let us eat our fill, then we will attack it. We have found it in a good place, though if it kills us, we can't help it."

So they all took out their arrowroot cakes and ate till they were satisfied.

Then Mkaaah Jeechonee said, "Each of you take two guns; lay one beside you and take the other in your hands,

and at the proper time let us all fire at once.”

And they said, “All right, master.”

So they crept cautiously through the bushes and got around to the other side of the tree, at the back of the rhinoceros; then they closed up till they were quite near it, and all fired together. The beast jumped up, ran a little way, and then fell down dead.

They bound it, and dragged it for two whole days, until they reached the town, when Mkaaah Jeechonee began singing,

“Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people.”

But he received the same answer from his mother: “My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people.”

And many persons came and looked at the rhinoceros, and felt very sorry for the young man. As for his father and mother, they both begged of him to give up, his father offering to give him anything he possessed if he would only stay at home. But he said, “I don’t hear what you are saying; good-bye,” and was off again.

This time he still further increased the distance from his home, and at last he saw an elephant asleep at noon in the forest. Thereupon he said to his attendants, “Now we have found the noondah.”

“Ah, where is he?” said they.

“Yonder, in the shade. Do you see it?”

“Oh, yes, master; shall we march up to it?”

“If we march up to it, and it is looking this way, it will come at us, and if it does that, some of us will be killed. I think we had best let one man steal up close and see which way its face is turned.”

As every one thought this was a good idea, a slave named Keerobo'to crept on his hands and knees, and had a good look at it. When he returned in the same manner, his master asked: “Well, what’s the news? Is it the noondah?”

“I do not know,” replied Keeroboto; “but I think there is very little doubt that it is. It is broad, with a very big

head, and, goodness, I never saw such large ears!”

“All right,” said Mkaaah Jeechonee; “let us eat, and then go for it.”

So they took their arrowroot cakes, and their molasses cakes, and ate until they were quite full.

Then the youth said to them: “My people, to-day is perhaps the last we shall ever see; so we will take leave of each other. Those who are to escape will escape, and those who are to die will die; but if I die, let those who escape tell my mother and father not to grieve for me.”

But his attendants said, “Oh, come along, master; none of us will die, please God.”

So they went on their hands and knees till they were close up, and then they said to Mkaaah Jeechonee, “Give us your plan, master;” but he said, “There is no plan, only let all fire at once.”

Well, they fired all at once, and immediately the elephant jumped up and charged at them. Then such a helter-skelter flight as there was! They threw away their guns and everything they carried, and made for the trees, which they climbed with surprising alacrity.

As to the elephant, he kept straight ahead until he fell down some distance away.

They all remained in the trees from three until six o'clock in the morning, without food and without clothing.

The young man sat in his tree and wept bitterly, saying, “I don't exactly know what death is, but it seems to me this must be very like it.” As no one could see any one else, he did not know where his attendants were, and though he wished to come down from the tree, he thought, “Maybe the noondah is down below there, and will eat me.”

Each attendant was in exactly the same fix, wishing to come down, but afraid the noondah was waiting to eat him.

Keeroboto had seen the elephant fall, but was afraid to get down by himself, saying, “Perhaps, though it has fallen down, it is not dead.” But presently he saw a dog go up to it and smell it, and then he was sure it was dead. Then he got down from the tree as fast as he could and gave a signal cry, which was answered; but not being sure from whence the answer came, he repeated the cry, listening intently. When it was answered he went straight to the place from which the sound proceeded, and found two of his companions in one tree. To

them he said, "Come on; get down; the noondah is dead." So they got down quickly and hunted around until they found their master. When they told him the news, he came down also; and after a little the attendants had all gathered together and had picked up their guns and their clothes, and were all right again. But they were all weak and hungry, so they rested and ate some food, after which they went to examine their prize.

As soon as Mkaaah Jeechonee saw it he said, "Ah, this is the noondah! This is it! This is it!" And they all agreed that it was it.

So they dragged the elephant three days to their town, and then the youth began singing,

"Oh, mother, this is he,

The noondah, eater of the people."

He was, naturally, quite upset when his mother replied, "My son, this is not the noondah, eater of the people." She further said: "Poor boy! what trouble you have been through. All the people are astonished that one so young should have such a great understanding!"

Then his father and mother began their entreaties again, and finally it was agreed that this next trip should be his last, whatever the result might be.

Well, they started off again, and went on and on, past the forest, until they came to a very high mountain, at the foot of which they camped for the night.

In the morning they cooked their rice and ate it, and then Mkaaah Jeechonee said: "Let us now climb the mountain, and look all over the country from its peak." And they went and they went, until after a long, weary while, they reached the top, where they sat down to rest and form their plans.

Now, one of the attendants, named Shindaa'no, while walking about, cast his eyes down the side of the mountain, and suddenly saw a great beast about half way down; but he could not make out its appearance distinctly, on account of the distance and the trees. Calling his master, he pointed it out to him, and something in Mkaaah Jeechonee's heart told him that it was the noondah. To make sure, however, he took his gun and his spear and went partly down the mountain to get a better view.

"Ah," said he, "this must be the noondah. My mother told me its ears were small, and those are small; she told me the noondah is broad and short, and so is this; she said it has two blotches, like a civet cat, and there are the

blotches; she told me the tail is thick, and there is a thick tail. It must be the noondah.”

Then he went back to his attendants and bade them eat heartily, which they did. Next he told them to leave every unnecessary thing behind, because if they had to run they would be better without encumbrance, and if they were victorious they could return for their goods.

When they had made all their arrangements they started down the mountain, but when they had got about half way down Keeroboto and Shindaano were afraid. Then the youth said to them: “Oh, let’s go on; don’t be afraid. We all have to live and die. What are you frightened about?” So, thus encouraged, they went on.

When they came near the place, Mkaaah Jeechonee ordered them to take off all their clothing except one piece, and to place that tightly on their bodies, so that if they had to run they would not be caught by thorns or branches.

So when they came close to the beast, they saw that it was asleep, and all agreed that it was the noondah.

Then the young man said, “Now the sun is setting, shall we fire at it, or let be till morning?”

And they all wished to fire at once, and see what the result would be without further tax on their nerves; therefore they arranged that they should all fire together.

They all crept up close, and when the master gave the word, they discharged their guns together. The noondah did not move; that one dose had been sufficient. Nevertheless, they all turned and scampered up to the top of the mountain. There they ate and rested for the night.

In the morning they ate their rice, and then went down to see how matters were, when they found the beast lying dead.

After resting and eating, they started homeward, dragging the dead beast with them. On the fourth day it began to give indications of decay, and the attendants wished to abandon it; but Mkaaah Jeechonee said they would continue to drag it if there was only one bone left.

When they came near the town he began to sing,

“Mother, mother, I have come

From the evil spirits, home.

Mother, listen while I sing;

While I tell you what I bring.

Oh, mother, I have killed

The noondah, eater of the people.”

And when his mother looked out, she cried, “My son, this is the noondah, eater of the people.”

Then all the people came out to welcome him, and his father was overcome with joy, and loaded him with honors, and procured him a rich and beautiful wife; and when he died Mkaaah Jeechonee became sultan, and lived long and happily, beloved by all the people.

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