

# *The King and the 'Nsiat Bird*

Elphinstone Dayrell

Nigerian

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When 'Ndarake was King of Idu, being young and rich, he was very fond of fine girls, and had plenty of slaves. The 'Nsiat bird was then living at Idu, and had a very pretty daughter, whom 'Ndarake wished to marry. When he spoke to the father about the matter, he replied that of course he had no objection personally, as it would be a great honour for his daughter to marry the king, but, unfortunately, when any of his family had children, they always gave birth to twins, which, as the king knew, was not allowed in the country; the native custom being to kill both the children and throw them into the bush, the mother being driven away and allowed to starve. The king, however, being greatly struck with Adit, the bird's daughter, insisted on marrying her, so the 'Nsiat bird had to agree. A large amount of dowry was paid by the king, and a big play and feast was held. One strong slave was told to carry Adit 'Nsiat during the whole play, and she sat on his shoulders with her legs around his neck; this was done to show what a rich and powerful man the king was.

After the marriage, in due course Adit gave birth to twins, as her mother had done before her. The king immediately became very fond of the two babies, but according to the native custom, which was too strong for any one to resist, he had to give them up to be killed. When the 'Nsiat bird heard this, he went to the king and reminded him that he had warned the king before he married what would happen if he married Adit, and rather than that the twins should be killed, he and the whole of his family would leave the earth and dwell in the air, taking the twins with them. As the king was so fond of Adit and the two children, and did not want them to be killed, he gladly consented, and the 'Nsiat bird took the whole of his family, as well as Adit and her two children, away, and left the earth to live and make their home in the trees; but as they had formerly lived in the

town with all the people, they did not like to go into the forest, so they made their nests in the trees which grew in the town, and that is why you always see the 'Nsiat birds living and making their nests only in places where human beings are. The black birds are the cocks, and the golden-coloured ones are the hens. It was the beautiful colour of Adit which first attracted the attention of 'Ndarake and caused him to marry her.

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