



The Kites and the Crows

Zanzibar Tales

African

Advanced
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One day Koongoo'roo, sultan of the crows, sent a letter to Mway'way, sultan of the kites, containing these few words: "I want you folks to be my soldiers."

To this brief message Mwayway at once wrote this short reply: "I should say not."

Thereupon, thinking to scare Mwayway, the sultan of the crows sent him word, "If you refuse to obey me I'll make war upon you."

To which the sultan of the kites replied, "That suits me; let us fight, and if you beat us we will obey you, but if we are victors you shall be our servants."

So they gathered their forces and engaged in a great battle, and in a little while it became evident that the crows were being badly beaten.

As it appeared certain that, if something were not done pretty quickly, they would all be killed, one old crow, named Jeeoo'see, suddenly proposed that they should fly away.

Directly the suggestion was made it was acted upon, and the crows left their homes and flew far away, where they set up another town. So, when the kites entered the place, they found no one there, and they took up their residence in Crowtown.

One day, when the crows had gathered in council, Koongooroo stood up and said: "My people, do as I command you, and all will be well. Pluck out some of my feathers and throw me into the town of the kites; then come back and stay here until you hear from me."

Without argument or questioning the crows obeyed their sultan's command.

Koongooroo had lain in the street but a short time, when some passing kites saw him and inquired threateningly, "What are you doing here in our town?"

With many a moan he replied, "My companions have beaten me and turned me out of their town because I advised them to obey Mwayway, sultan of the kites."

When they heard this they picked him up and took him before the sultan, to whom they said, "We found this fellow lying in the street, and he attributes his involuntary presence in our town to so singular a circumstance that we thought you should hear his story."

Koongooroo was then bidden to repeat his statement, which he did, adding the remark that, much as he had suffered, he still held to his opinion that Mwayway was his rightful sultan.

This, of course, made a very favorable impression, and the sultan said, "You have more sense than all the rest of your tribe put together; I guess you can stay here and live with us."

So Koongooroo, expressing much gratitude, settled down, apparently, to spend the remainder of his life with the kites.

One day his neighbors took him to church with them, and when they returned home they asked him, "Who have the best kind of religion, the kites or the crows?"

To which crafty old Koongooroo replied, with great enthusiasm, "Oh, the kites, by long odds!"

This answer tickled the kites like anything, and Koongooroo was looked upon as a bird of remarkable discernment.

When almost another week had passed, the sultan of the crows slipped away in the night, went to his own

town, and called his people together.

“To-morrow,” said he, “is the great annual religious festival of the kites, and they will all go to church in the morning. Go, now, and get some wood and some fire, and wait near their town until I call you; then come quickly and set fire to the church.”

Then he hurried back to Mwayway’s town.

The crows were very busy indeed all that night, and by dawn they had an abundance of wood and fire at hand, and were lying in wait near the town of their victorious enemies.

So in the morning every kite went to church. There was not one person left at home except old Koongooroo.

When his neighbors called for him they found him lying down. “Why!” they exclaimed with surprise, “are you not going to church to-day?”

“Oh,” said he, “I wish I could; but my stomach aches so badly I can’t move!” And he groaned dreadfully.

“Ah, poor fellow!” said they; “you will be better in bed;” and they left him to himself.

As soon as everybody was out of sight he flew swiftly to his soldiers and cried, “Come on; they’re all in the church.”

Then they all crept quickly but quietly to the church, and while some piled wood about the door, others applied fire.

The wood caught readily, and the fire was burning fiercely before the kites were aware of their danger; but when the church began to fill with smoke, and tongues of flame shot through the cracks, they tried to escape through the windows. The greater part of them, however, were suffocated, or, having their wings singed, could not fly away, and so were burned to death, among them their sultan, Mwayway; and Koongooroo and his crows got their old town back again.

From that day to this the kites fly away from the crows.

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