

The Magician and the Sultan's Son

Zanzibar Tales

African

Intermediate
8 min read

There was once a sultan who had three little sons, and no one seemed to be able to teach them anything; which greatly grieved both the sultan and his wife.

One day a magician came to the sultan and said, "If I take your three boys and teach them to read and write, and make great scholars of them, what will you give me?"

And the sultan said, "I will give you half of my property."

"No," said the magician; "that won't do."

"I'll give you half of the towns I own."

"No; that will not satisfy me."

"What do you want, then?"

"When I have made them scholars and bring them back to you, choose two of them for yourself and give me the third; for I want to have a companion of my own."

"Agreed," said the sultan.

So the magician took them away, and in a remarkably short time taught them to read, and to make letters, and

made them quite good scholars. Then he took them back to the sultan and said: "Here are the children. They are all equally good scholars. Choose."

So the sultan took the two he preferred, and the magician went away with the third, whose name was Keejaa'naa, to his own house, which was a very large one.

When they arrived, Mchaa'wee, the magician, gave the youth all the keys, saying, "Open whatever you wish to." Then he told him that he was his father, and that he was going away for a month.

When he was gone, Keejaanaa took the keys and went to examine the house. He opened one door, and saw a room full of liquid gold. He put his finger in, and the gold stuck to it, and, wipe and rub as he would, the gold would not come off; so he wrapped a piece of rag around it, and when his supposed father came home and saw the rag, and asked him what he had been doing to his finger, he was afraid to tell him the truth, so he said that he had cut it.

Not very long after, Mchaawee went away again, and the youth took the keys and continued his investigations.

The first room he opened was filled with the bones of goats, the next with sheep's bones, the next with the bones of oxen, the fourth with the bones of donkeys, the fifth with those of horses, the sixth contained men's skulls, and in the seventh was a live horse.

"Hullo!" said the horse; "where do you come from, you son of Adam?"

"This is my father's house," said Keejaanaa.

"Oh, indeed!" was the reply. "Well, you've got a pretty nice parent! Do you know that he occupies himself with eating people, and donkeys, and horses, and oxen and goats and everything he can lay his hands on? You and I are the only living things left."

This scared the youth pretty badly, and he faltered, "What are we to do?"

"What's your name?" said the horse.

"Keejaanaa."

“Well, I’m Faaraa’see. Now, Keejaanaa, first of all, come and unfasten me.”

The youth did so at once.

“Now, then, open the door of the room with the gold in it, and I will swallow it all; then I’ll go and wait for you under the big tree down the road a little way. When the magician comes home, he will say to you, ‘Let us go for firewood;’ then you answer, ‘I don’t understand that work;’ and he will go by himself. When he comes back, he will put a great big pot on the hook and will tell you to make a fire under it. Tell him you don’t know how to make a fire, and he will make it himself.

“Then he will bring a large quantity of butter, and while it is getting hot he will put up a swing and say to you, ‘Get up there, and I’ll swing you.’ But you tell him you never played at that game, and ask him to swing first, that you may see how it is done. Then he will get up to show you; and you must push him into the big pot, and then come to me as quickly as you can.”

Then the horse went away.

Now, Mchaawee had invited some of his friends to a feast at his house that evening; so, returning home early, he said to Keejaanaa, “Let us go for firewood;” but the youth answered, “I don’t understand that work.” So he went by himself and brought the wood.

Then he hung up the big pot and said, “Light the fire;” but the youth said, “I don’t know how to do it.” So the magician laid the wood under the pot and lighted it himself.

Then he said, “Put all that butter in the pot;” but the youth answered, “I can’t lift it; I’m not strong enough.” So he put in the butter himself.

Next Mchaawee said, “Have you seen our country game?” And Keejaanaa answered, “I think not.”

“Well,” said the magician, “let’s play at it while the butter is getting hot.”

So he tied up the swing and said to Keejaanaa, “Get up here, and learn the game.” But the youth said: “You get up first and show me. I’ll learn quicker that way.”

The magician got into the swing, and just as he got started Keejaanaa gave him a push right into the big pot; and as the butter was by this time boiling, it not only killed him, but cooked him also.

As soon as the youth had pushed the magician into the big pot, he ran as fast as he could to the big tree, where the horse was waiting for him.

“Come on,” said Faaraasee; “jump on my back and let’s be going.”

So he mounted and they started off.

When the magician’s guests arrived they looked everywhere for him, but, of course, could not find him. Then, after waiting a while, they began to be very hungry; so, looking around for something to eat, they saw that the stew in the big pot was done, and, saying to each other, “Let’s begin, anyway,” they started in and ate the entire contents of the pot. After they had finished, they searched for Mchaawee again, and finding lots of provisions in the house, they thought they would stay there until he came; but after they had waited a couple of days and eaten all the food in the place, they gave him up and returned to their homes.

Meanwhile Keejaanaa and the horse continued on their way until they had gone a great distance, and at last they stopped near a large town.

“Let us stay here,” said the youth, “and build a house.”

As Faaraasee was agreeable, they did so. The horse coughed up all the gold he had swallowed, with which they purchased slaves, and cattle, and everything they needed.

When the people of the town saw the beautiful new house and all the slaves, and cattle, and riches it contained, they went and told their sultan, who at once made up his mind that the owner of such a place must be of sufficient importance to be visited and taken notice of, as an acquisition to the neighborhood.

So he called on Keejaanaa, and inquired who he was.

“Oh, I’m just an ordinary being, like other people.”

“Are you a traveler?”

“Well, I have been; but I like this place, and think I’ll settle down here.”

“Why don’t you come and walk in our town?”

“I should like to very much, but I need some one to show me around.”

“Oh, I’ll show you around,” said the sultan, eagerly, for he was quite taken with the young man.

After this Keejaanaa and the sultan became great friends; and in the course of time the young man married the sultan’s daughter, and they had one son.

They lived very happily together, and Keejaanaa loved Faaraasee as his own soul.

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