

The Blind Man and the Lame Man

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A story from Tanzania told by Tarvisio Mayuva of the Wanyaturu in Kondoa. This first appeared in Gaelic and English in 'Cothrom' 23.

One day a lame man asked his friend who was blind to go with him to the wood to hunt. "How can we do this?" asked the blind man. "You can't walk and I can't see."

"You may carry me on your back," said the lame man, "and I will guide you."

"All right then," said the blind man. He lifted the lame man onto his back and they set off for the wood. They were going on their way through the wood when the lame man saw a zebra. He asked his friend to lower him to the ground so that he could kill the zebra. He strung the bow and, when the zebra moved near him, he fired a poisoned arrow at it. The zebra fell down and died instantly. The blind man helped him to skin the zebra. They took out the guts and kindled a fire to roast the meat.

When they were eating the meat the lame man was giving the toughest meat to his friend. The blind man asked his friend to give him a little of the tender meat but every time, it was the tough meat he got. Sometimes he couldn't chew the meat and sometimes he couldn't cut the meat with his teeth, but the more keenly he asked for tender meat the tougher were the pieces he got. The blind man grew very angry for he recognised from the smell of the meat that it wasn't the same quality of meat that the lame man and himself were eating.

Then the blind man was given a chunk of meat that was particularly tough. He gripped the meat with his teeth and began pulling strongly and shaking his head from side to side and what happened but water and grit spouted out of his eyes and he got his sight back again. Everything was now very clear. He noticed that the meat was very tasty and that it wasn't tough at all.

"Why," he asked, "were you giving me such tough meat?" "Because that sort of meat," the lame man replied, "was good for your eyes. If I hadn't done that, you wouldn't have got your sight back again."

The man agreed that was right, but he wasn't altogether pleased that a trick had been played on him. He thanked his friend and they continued eating the zebra meat. When they had finished eating, the man who had got his sight back said he wanted to pursue a hare and kill it. He picked up the bow and arrows and disappeared into the wood. He pretended he was in pursuit of a hare but what he intended to do was to play a trick on the lame man in return for what he had done to him. And this is what he did.

He lit a fire here and there around the place where the lame man was sitting. The fires burned wildly until they formed one big circle of flame around the lame man.

"Help me, friend!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Help me!"

But his friend paid no heed to him. He tried to struggle to his feet and to jump about here and there until at last he managed to jump over the fire. He was now able to use his legs and he ran for two days without resting. On the third day he met his friend.

"Why," he asked, "did you light that fire around me?"

"I wanted to restore the use of your legs to you," he replied.

They were both very pleased now that they had been so inventive as to be able to cure their ailments. They went home together and told the people and their own children how it had happened. And people have been telling this story from that time until today.