

'Is' The Boy With Creativity



Wood engraving by Dalziel after J. Leach

Ismail, or Is, as he was known by those who regarded him with affection, sat on a rock as he did every day. The rock was rarely the same one as his occupation necessitated moving around the countryside, covering on occasions, quite considerable distances. However, on this particular day Is had been fortunate. He had come across, quite by accident, a large expanse of untouched cud that allowed his small herd to chew with expressions of obvious self-satisfaction and allowed Is to sit and stare.

It is not my intention for the reader to be under the

impression that Is stared at nothing or that his head was full of empty thoughts, as this would be far from the truth. Knowledgeable, Is was not, but his imagination was of that very rare variety that allowed him to be Chief of his Village, Leader of the Kikuyu Tribe, President of Kenya and Ruler of Africa, all in the space of one day. He would mete out punishments most bloody and tyrannical to those he did not favour and lavished gifts and honours on those most dear to his heart. With Is there was no in-between, he loved or he hated.

Using his only audience, the cows, as his subjects, inattentive as they were, he would place wreaths of leaves around their necks, attach garlands of wild flowers to their horns, and those poor beasts who had displeased him would be beaten with his long sharp whip into suitable submission. Such a boy of imagination was Is! But as with all such talents that are not guided along the correct path at the correct moment, things got out of hand.

Is had a propensity to tell lies. Of course he did not recognise them as being lies as he often had difficulty at the end of a day sorting out truth from fantasy, with the result that many of those around him were left bewildered by this extraordinary boy. Of an evening he would quite often be seen heading toward the village covered in flora and fauna, cows likewise, shouting commands of a very human nature to those more than averagely stupid animals. If he were late, he would regret it, and go to endless trouble with unlikely explanations, that even the most gullible would have difficulty in accepting. Either he had been detained in Nairobi on matters of State, or been summoned to sign the death warrant of a cattle thief and had stayed around to watch the hanging! It was all very worrying.

Is had, for a period of almost eight years, attended the local school, located in the village next to his own. A small spartan building where a few dedicated teachers managed against all odds, to produce a surprising number of very promising students. Although it has to be admitted that our hero received

his fair share of admonishments, due to inattention and a certain indefinable vagueness, the white teacher with the extremely sharp nose that held a pair of thick horn-rimmed spectacles, that had a habit of falling into her lap each time she lowered her head, was forced to admit that Is was an enthusiastic student, with a lively mind who possessed a talent for creativity.

Is's father and indeed Is himself, had been at a loss to understand the exact meaning of this hopefully worthy talent and many hours were spent in conjecture and supposition, but with no conclusion. So one day Is had taken all his courage, which was quite a great deal, in both hands, marched up to Miss Dumbfold, being the lady who had made the astonishing statement, and demanded there and then a complete explanation of this creativity. Is had reported back to his father as best he could, as his own understanding still remained somewhat foggy in his mind, but fortunately it had the desired effect, as from then on Is was excused all kinds of misdemeanors due to his new-found talent. Sadly however, hard times hit the Kariuki family and Is was obliged to leave school at the age of fifteen and tend the cattle instead, so it was little wonder that this 'creativity' had got quite out of hand and resulted in the sheer bewilderment already mentioned.

Is's father had resorted to various tactics, sending Is to his sleeping mat without supper, beating him until his bottom stung, but all such attempted remedies proved useless. His father consulted his brothers on the matter, the brothers consulted the cousins, the cousins consulted the uncles, the uncles consulted the elders and finally the elders consulted the ancestors. And following these numerous consultations, it was decided that Is should be escorted directly to the Mchawi who would shake his magic bones in his skinny old hand, prescribe herbs effective in cases of 'creativity' and all would hopefully be well. Not so.

Is, it seemed, was unique. He had remained totally unmoved by the gruelling experience at the home of that learned and