

THE MAN WHO COULD TRANSFORM HIMSELF

A tale from Kenya

Once upon a time there lived two orphaned brothers who were very poor. Their only possessions were two cows. The older brother learned about a magician who had come into their village. He sought out and asked the magician to give him magical powers in exchange for his cows.

The magician warned the boy that magical powers were dangerous and should be used with care. The boy said he understood and agreed to use his powers wisely, to help others. After hearing this, the magician gave the boy a charm that would enable him to change into any animal that he thought of. The boy was ecstatic and began running home immediately. The road was long and the boy soon became tired, so he transformed himself into a bird and flew the rest of the way home. As soon as he saw his younger brother the boy transformed back to himself.

The youngest boy was amazed at what he saw his older brother do. He was also angry that he traded their cows for

magic. The older boy asked his brother not to worry; he had a plan. The next day the oldest boy transformed into a bull after telling his brother to bring him to the market and sell him for two cows and five goats.

At the market, a rich man saw and coveted the bull. He readily gave the boy two cows and five goats in exchange for it. The young boy took his newly acquired animal's home immediately. However, almost as soon as the rich man began leading the bull out of the market, the bull ran away from him. The rich man chased the bull as far as he could but couldn't catch him. This was, in part, due to the fact that the bull transformed back into a human.

The oldest brother was so pleased by his scam that he became greedy. He wanted more cows and goats. He wanted to become rich. So, instead of being satisfied with two cows and five goats, the oldest boy told his younger brother that he would transform into a bull again so that they could trade him for more livestock. This time he wanted his brother to ask for three cows and eight goats.

The young boy led his brother, the bull, to the market. There he found a tall man who was willing to trade three cows and eight goats for the bull. The youngest brother took the animal's home immediately.

When the tall man tried to lead the bull out of the market, the bull ran away. The tall man chased after him, and soon caught up to him. The bull turned around to face the tall man, then transformed into a lion. Surprisingly, the tall man also transformed into a lion.

The tall man was actually the magician who had given the oldest boy his magical powers. When the boy realized this, he transformed into a bird and flew high into the sky. The magician then transformed into a hawk and flew after the bird. The boy barely escaped the hawk's sharp talons by flying back down to the ground and turning into an antelope. However, the magician also flew down to the ground where he turned into a wolf that began chasing the antelope.

The boy knew he was no match for the magician. He turned back into his true form and faced the magician, who had also transformed back into his human self. The boy begged for forgiveness. He offered to return the three cows and eight goats to the man. The magician countered the offer by saying he would spare the boy's life if he would return his magical gift and give the magician all of the cows and goats obtained through the use of magic.

And so it was that the boy lost his magical power and his herd of animals. He also learned some valuable lessons: that a trickster must be careful who he tries to trick, and greed is not a good path to follow.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the following story:

“The Man Who Could Transform Himself,” Wonder Tales from Around the World by Heather Forest. Illustrations by David Boston. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., c1995, pp.75-77.

