

BY ROYAL COMMAND

A Tale from Nigeria

Once upon a time the queen invited two flies to her annual banquet. The queen seated the flies at a table where two cows sat. The cows were asked to take care of all the animals seated at their table, including the flies. The cows agreed to this task with smiles on their faces.

The first course was a delicious soup. The waiters served everyone at the cow's table except the two flies. They were so small that the waiters did not see them. The flies asked the cows for assistance in being served. The cows said that they would do so for the main course.

Soon waiters brought the main course to the cow's table. It consisted of a thick stew, rice, vegetables and a salad. The flies were starving and couldn't wait to enjoy the feast. However, the waiters once again served everyone at the table except the flies. As you can imagine, this was very upsetting to them. When they complained about not being served, the

cows asked them to not make a fuss because it would embarrass the queen. They promised that they would make sure the flies would receive a large helping of dessert. Although they were very hungry and very upset, the flies agreed with this.

Soon after the dinner plates were cleared, the waiters arrived with large platters of desert. There were dipped fruits, fancy cakes and special doughnuts called puff-puffs. The flies were very excited at the prospect of finally getting some food. However, the waiters served everyone at the cow's table except them. The flies begged the cows to say something to the waiters. The cows apologized to the flies saying that the waiters were all out of desert. The cows also asked the flies to not complain as it would embarrass the queen. Almost in the same breath, the cows told the flies that they should be flattered that they were invited to the queen's feast at all. And so it was that the flies went home very hungry.

The next day, one of the guests sent the queen a fruit basket in thanks for her hospitality. The two flies just happened to be resting on a piece of fruit within that basket. When the queen saw them, she asked how they liked the feast. The flies thanked her for the honor of being invited to her party then told her that they did not get a thing to eat. They also told her that the cows were no help at all.

The queen was horrified to learn that the cows ignored her command to take care of all the animals at their table. She decided that the cows should be taught a lesson. The queen gave the flies permission to bother the cows and their families any time they wanted. That would teach the cows to ignore the queen's command.

And so it was that from that day forward, the flies and their descendants never gave the cows and their descendants a moment's peace. That is also why cows swish their tails - to get rid of pesky flies that continually bother them, by royal command of the queen of Nigeria.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the following tale:

“By Royal Command,” [Around the World in 80 Tales](#) by Saviour Pirotta. Illustrated by Richard Johnson. Boston: Kingfisher, c2007, pp. 127-128.

