

AN AFRICAN FOLK TALE

Some folk tales tell of **valiant** deeds performed by great heroes; an example is the Japanese story of Tokoyo and the sea monster. Others, like the Welsh tale of the silver cows and the water lilies, explain how things came to be. A third group tells how the weak and helpless defeat the strong and powerful. This does not always happen in real life, but it does happen in folk tales, as in this East African story of the *maskini* and the *tajiri*.

Every evening, the *tajiri*, or rich man, sat down to a **heartly** meal prepared for him in his own kitchen. The food that was left over would have been enough to feed a whole family, but the *tajiri* was extremely **stingy**. The leftovers from his table went to fatten his pigs so that he would have the benefit of them later.

The *maskini*, or poor man, lived on simple **fare**. He owned a goat that gave him milk and cheese, but his evening meal was usually nothing more than a bowl of porridge. However, he had found a way to make it more enjoyable. He would eat his meal while hidden outside the *tajiri*'s kitchen, where wonderful smells came **wafting** through the open window. They made the *maskini*'s mouth water, and the porridge seemed like a feast.

One evening, the *tajiri* decided to take a walk in his garden in order to work up an appetite for dinner. He saw the *maskini* sitting outside the kitchen window. As the *tajiri* watched, he saw the *maskini* **inhale** deeply, and a blissful look come over his face. How dare he help himself to my smells, thought the *tajiri*, and he ordered his servants to seize the *maskini* and **escort** him to the village jail.

A few days later, the *maskini* was **summoned** before the court that met weekly in the village center, where the case would be decided on its **merits**. The *tajiri* explained that the smells from the kitchen belonged to him, and the *maskini* was **depriving** him of them. As payment, he demanded the *maskini*'s goat, which was the only thing he owned. When asked to respond, the *maskini*, looking very **forlorn**, could only stare at the ground and shuffle his feet, afraid to speak. The village **elders**, who had been hearing the case, now withdrew to the shade of a nearby baobab tree. After a brief discussion, the village chief came forward and **addressed** the crowd.

"The *maskini* did help himself to the smells from the *tajiri*'s kitchen," she said. "However, he did not receive any food from him. We have **concluded**, therefore, that the *tajiri* should not be given the goat. However, in fairness to him we believe he should have the right to smell the *maskini*'s goat whenever he wants."

The *tajiri* was furious and left without saying a word. But the people of the village **approved** the court's decision. They felt that justice had been done.

