

The blind man and the hunter

West African



Once upon a time there was a blind man who lived with his sister in a hut in a village on the edge of the forest.

Now, this blind man was very clever. Even though his eyes saw nothing, he seemed to know more about the world than people whose eyes were as sharp as needles. He would sit outside his hut and talk to passers-by. If they had problems, they would ask him what they should do, and he would always give good advice.

If there were things they wanted to know, he would tell them, and his answers were always the right ones.

People would shake their heads with amazement:

‘Blind man, how is it that you are so wise?’

And the blind man would smile and say:

‘Because I see with my ears.’

Well, one time the blind man’s sister fell in love; she fell in love with a hunter from another village. And soon enough there was a wedding: the hunter was married to the blind man’s sister.

And when the great wedding feast was finished, the hunter came to live in the hut with his new wife.

But the hunter had no time for his wife’s brother, he had no time at all for the blind man.

‘What use,’ he would say, ‘is a man with no eyes?’

And his wife would reply:

‘But, Husband, he knows more about the world than people who can see.’

The hunter would laugh then:

‘Ha, ha, ha! What could a blind man know, who lives in darkness? Ha, ha, ha...’

Every day the hunter would go into the forest with his traps and spears and arrows. And every evening, when the hunter returned to the village, the blind man would say:

‘Please, tomorrow, let me come with you, hunting in the forest.’

But the hunter would shake his head:

‘What use is a man with no eyes?’

And the days and the weeks and the months passed, and every evening the blind man asked:

‘Please, tomorrow, let me come hunting.’

And every evening the hunter shook his head.

But then, one evening, the hunter was in a good mood. He had returned home with a fine catch, a fat gazelle. His wife had prepared and cooked the meat, and when they’d finished eating, the hunter turned to the blind man and said:

‘Very well, tomorrow you will come hunting!’

So the next morning they set off into the forest together, the hunter with his traps, spears and arrows, leading the blind man by the hand along the track between the trees. For hours and hours they walked.

Then, suddenly, the blind man stopped; he tugged the hunter’s hand:

‘Shhh, there is a lion!’

The hunter looked about – he could see nothing at all.

‘There is a lion,’ said the blind man, ‘but it’s all right... he’s eaten and he’s fall asleep. He won’t hurt us.’

They carried on along the track and there, sure enough, was a great lion stretched out fast asleep under a tree.

As soon as they had passed it, the hunter asked:

‘How did you know all about the lion?’

‘Because I see with my ears.’

For hours they continued, and then the blind man tugged the hunter’s hand again:

‘Shhh, there is an elephant!’

The hunter looked about – he could see nothing at all.

‘There is an elephant, but it’s all right... he’s in a water-hole. He won’t hurt us.’

They carried on along the track and there, sure enough, was a great bull elephant wallowing in a water-hole, squirring mud on to his back.

As soon as they had passed it, the hunter asked:

‘How did you know about the elephant?’

‘Because I see with my ears.’

And they continued deep, deep into the forest until they came to a clearing.

The hunter said:

‘We’ll leave our traps here.’

The hunter set one of his traps, and he showed the blind man how to set another one. When both traps were ready, the hunter said:

‘We’ll come tomorrow and see what we’ve caught.’

And together they made their way home to the village. The next morning they were up early. Once again they set off along the track into the forest. The hunter offered to hold the blind man’s hand, but the blind man said:

‘No, I know the way now.’

The blind man walked ahead this time, and he didn't catch his foot on a root or a tree stump; he didn't miss a single turning.

They walked and they walked until they came to the clearing deep in the forest where the traps had been set.

The hunter saw straight away that there was a bird caught in each trap. And he saw straight away that the bird caught in his trap was a little grey one, and the bird caught in the blind man's trap was a beauty, with feathers of green, crimson and gold.

'Sit down there,' he said. 'We've each caught a bird. I'll fetch them out of the traps.'

So the blind man sat down and the hunter went across to the traps, and as he went across he was thinking to himself:

'A man with no eyes will never know the difference.'

And what did he do?

He gave the blind man the little grey bird, and he kept the beautiful bird with the green, crimson and gold feathers for himself.

And the blind man took the little grey bird in his hand and he got to his feet and they set off for home.

They walked and they walked, and as they were walking the hunter said:

'If you're so clever and you see with your ears, then answer me this: why is there so much anger and hatred and warfare in this world?'

And the blind man answered:

'Because the world is full of so many people like you – who take what is not theirs.'

And suddenly the hunter was filled with bitter shame. He took the little grey bird out of the blind man's hand and gave him the beautiful green, crimson and gold one instead.

'I'm sorry,' he said.

And they walked and they walked, and then the hunter said:

'If you're so clever and you see with your ears, then answer me this: why is there so much love and kindness and gentleness in this world?'

And the blind man answered:

'Because the world is full of so many people like you – who learn by their mistakes.'

And they walked and they walked until they came home to the village.

And from that day onwards if the hunter heard anyone ask:

'Blind man, how is it that you are so wise?'

He would put his arm around the blind man's shoulders and say:

'Because he sees with his ears... and he hears with his heart.'