
Ikotofetsy and Imahaka

A Malagasy Tale

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To the Reader

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Chapter 1

The Two Crafty Men

Once upon a time, there were two men called Ikotofetsy and Imahaka. Ikotofetsy comes from the West and Imahaka from the East. One day, the two met at a valley and chatted for the first time.

Imahaka brought a fake spade made of clay and Ikotofetsy brought a pied crow packed in a bag.

“Morning, buddy,” Ikotofetsy said with a smile. “What’s in your hand?”

“It’s a spade. I want to barter it for chicken.”

“Really? I have a chicken here in my bag to be bartered for spade.”

“That’s nice, so let’s barter them if you want.”

“Sure. Be careful though, because it’s a shy chicken, so please don’t open the bag on your way.”

“Okay. I urge you as well not to use the spade right away because I’ve just forged it. Just wait a little while.”

After cutting the deal, they exchanged farewells and left.

When they arrived at their respective homes, Imahaka opened the bag and the crow flew away; Ikotofetsy dug with the spade and it shattered into pieces. “Gee, we are so crafty!” they all mumbled, almost together.

The two men met again few days later.

“Listen bro,” Imahaka said in a friendly tone. “Now that we are friends, why don’t we weigh each other up a little bit?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“So I tell you something that puzzles me and if you know the answer, I’ll accept that you’re smarter than me. Okay?”

“Go ahead.”

“I ask myself why a black female zebu produces white milk. Do you know the answer?”

Ikotofetsy pondered for a while and said, “I don’t know, me too I’m so confused about it.”

“It’s your turn now, Imahaka continued.”

“For me, I wonder why zebu and sheep don’t have the same type of tail, even though they eat the same type of grass: zebu’s tail is thin and long, whereas sheep’s tail is short and furry.”

“Uh, you’re right. I find it bizarre as well.”

“Well, buddy,” Ikotofetsy said. “That means we are all smart, so let’s have a good friendship.”

And they prepare a delicious meal to celebrate their new friendship.

“Let’s cut a deal first,” Imahaka said as soon as the meal was ready.

“Yeah?”

“Let’s sleep before eating, and the one who’ll have a nice dream will be the only one who’s gonna eat the meal.”

“No problem.”

So they went to sleep and tried to have a dream as nice as they could.

When they woke up, both of them were eager to tell their dream. Imahaka started first.

“I dreamed that I went up to heaven and saw things that are so wonderful . . . And how about you? Tell me if you had a better one.”

“I dreamed that I saw you went up to heaven and I muttered to myself ‘I’d better wake up and eat the meal because that guy won’t come back anymore.’ But, when I actually woke up I realized that you’re still here.”

They couldn’t stop laughing.

“That’s amazing,” Imahaka finally said as he glanced at the meal. “Shall we eat?”

Chapter 2

Time to Fool

A couple of days after the friendship celebration, Ikotofetsy and Imahaka met again at the habitual valley and hugged each other warmly.

“We are all smart, buddy,” Ikotofetsy said once again. “I think we should stay close all the time because together, we might achieve some great things.”

“That’s true. Let’s start it today and see what happens.”

So they agreed that on every occasion, they will use their craftiness together to fool someone.

The weather was cool at that time. Everything was quiet. As they were walking, Imahaka saw a sheep gazing in a field. He looked for its owner but no one was around. Then he took the sheep and was about to run away with it when the owner came.

“Excuse me, why do you take my sheep?” he shouted at Imahaka.

“I’m just weighing it,” Imahaka replied calmly as he put down the sheep.

That was the origin of the proverb: “Imahaka’s way of stealing sheep: if caught he would say ‘I’m just weighing,’ otherwise he would take it away.”

Our two heroes did not give up even if they failed in their first attempt. They continued their stroll in the hope of finding another person to dupe.

At the edge of the valley, they came across an old woman busy watching her sheep. The woman seemed to have caught an eye disease so Ikotofetsy and Imahaka were ready to delude her.

“Morning, ma’am,” they said as polite as they could.

The old woman looked back over her shoulder, trying hard to recognize them. “Who are you?” she finally asked.

“We live in the same village as you,” Ikotofetsy answered. “If you want, we can heal your eyes because we are medicine men.”

“That’s very kind of you. I really want it.”

“All right. Just give us a second to prepare an effective cure for that.”

Feeling that their trick will work this time, Ikotofetsy and Imahaka exchanged knowing smiles. They prepared a glue-like substance to put on the woman's eyes.

"This ointment is the best remedy for your pain," Imahaka said when the substance was ready. "Please, close your eyes and keep still while I put it on them."

The poor woman accepted with good grace. She didn't know they were trying to hoodwink her.

Because of the glue-like substance, she couldn't open her eyes anymore. In addition, the pain turned out to be more intense than before. "Please, wipe up your ointment a little bit," she whimpered. "I can't see anything now."

"You have to go through it, ma'am, or else your eyes won't be healed," Ikotofetsy replied.

The two crafty men looked at each other. They were satisfied because their trick seemed to work fine.

Ikotofetsy leaned over Imahaka and whispered in his ear, "We can take the sheep now."

"I'll do it, bro," Imahaka whispered back.

After taking the sheep, they left the poor woman stranded at the valley. She couldn't make it home until someone came up and walked her to the village.

That was the origin of the proverb: "Treating an eye disease with medication, you have to go through it or else your eyes won't be healed."

Ikotofetsy and Imahaka's wives were sick one day, so the two men had to find some orange because that was the only known cure to treat the illness. However, oranges were out of season at the time. They could only be found at Trimobe's field, which was located in an island surrounded by deep water with wild creatures.

The two men had to think of a trick to get oranges from Trimobe. They asked him first if he can give them some, but he didn't accept. Then, they collected some pebbles on the shore and threw one to Trimobe who was hit right on his head. Trimobe knew exactly what they wanted, so he just took the pebble and threw it back to Ikotofetsy and Imahaka. The two men repeated their trick many times, but each time they threw pebble, Trimobe just threw it back.

In the end, they had a thought of hurling dry mud instead of pebbles. The dry mud crashed squarely on Trimobe's forehead, blocking his vision temporarily. He could not hurl back the dry mud this time, so he had no other choice than throwing oranges to Ikotofetsy and Imahaka who taunted him and left after getting the oranges.

One day, Ikotofetsy and Imahaka ran across an old woman watching a huge flock of sheep. The woman made every effort to control her sheep, but not very well did she handle them. Since the two men had a weakness for mutton, they were up to their old tricks, giving phony advice for someone in trouble.

"Ma'am, we can give you advice on how to handle your sheep, if you want," Imahaka offered. "Look at you, all day long you do nothing but control those difficult sheep."

“That’ll be great, thank you,” the woman replied.

“All right. This is what you should do: tie up each sheep’s leg to your hip. Like that, if some of them want to go away, you just pull their strings.”

The advice seemed useful enough to the old woman so she did exactly what Imahaka told her. Unfortunately, when she finished tying up her sheep, Ikotofetsy and Imahaka incited a dog to chase them. The sheep ran away from the dog, dragging the poor woman to death behind them.

When the two men were certain the woman was dead, they took their time to cook the sheep, one after the other.

Fooling someone has now become a habit for Ikotofetsy and Imahaka. One day, they wanted to steal oranges from a nearby field, so they laid a trick to be used for defending themselves, just in case. Their trick was simple but smart enough. . . .

