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Description: These are Swahili stories. The illustrations are by illustration by John Hargrave.

Pemba Muhori

There was once upon a time a man and his wife, and the wife gave birth to seven sons, and the seventh was called Hapendeki, and he was the last.

And these sons grew and grew till one day the youngest, Hapendeki, said to his father and mother, "What goal is there in life for a man?" and they answered, "The goal in life for a man is to find a nice woman and marry her and rest in peace."

So he said, "If that indeed be the aim of man you must look for a wife for me."

And they said to him, "You are too young, you will not be able to manage a wife."

And he said, "Never mind, look for a wife for me."

And they said, "No, you are not old enough yet."

So he answered them, "All right, if you won't get me a wife I will look for one for myself."

So he went and searched till he found a wife, and then there were shouts and trills as he brought her home and married her.

So they stayed indoors the appointed time of the honeymoon, and when it was nearly accomplished his wife said to Hapendeki, "Now that the honeymoon is

nearly over I want some nice clothes to show myself in when the honeymoon is completed and I go out once more."

So the husband went out and sought all the Indians' and Banyans' shops, and bought all the best clothes he could in the town, and brought home one man's load of different kinds of clothes. And he said to her, "Here, my wife, look at the clothes I have brought you."

So she opened the parcel and looked at the things and said, "Do you call these clothes, my husband? Do you think that I could go out in such things, my husband?"

So the husband took ship and went to Maskat, and there he bought all the most beautiful clothes he could find, and dresses of silk and all kinds of garments, two bales full, and with these he returned home.



So he took ship with his two bales of clothes and arrived home again, and had them carried up to his house.

When he came into the house his wife cooked food for him, and he sat down and ate, and when he had finished he said to his wife, "Now open those two bales and see the clothes I have brought you." So she opened the bales and looked at the clothes and said, "Do you call these clothes? you must be a fool to have bought things like these. Are these things fit for your wife to wear? Do you wish me to wear grass and bark cloth? Do you imagine that I could wear things like these?"

So he said, "My wife, these are the best that I could find, now say, what sort of clothes are those that you want?"

So she said to him, "My husband, the only clothes fit for me to wear are clothes made of the skin of Pemba Muhori, the great sea serpent."

Next day he went to his father and mother and told them how he had bought every kind of expensive clothes for his wife, but that she refused to wear anything but the skin of Pemba Muhori.

His father and mother said to him, "Did not we tell you that you would not be able to manage a wife?" and his elder brothers said, "You, the youngest, must needs marry before us, your elder brothers, and this is what comes of it."

So Hapendeki said to his mother, "I do not want words or advice, all I want you to do is to make seven loaves for me, and to make up a parcel for me containing these seven loaves and seven cigarettes and seven matches."

So his mother baked seven loaves and made up the parcel, and next day he took his sword and the parcel and set out. He travelled and travelled through plains and forests, plains and forests, for one month, till at the end of the month he came to a big lake. He sat down on the shore and ate one loaf and lit one cigarette and smoked it and thought, "Pemba Muhori must be in this lake," so he sang--

"Pemba Muhori, Pemba Muhori, are you in there? My wife has sent for your skin to wear."

All was silent, so he picked up his load and journeyed on through desert and hills, desert and hills, till he came to a lake larger still, at the end of the second month, and he sat down and ate a loaf and smoked a cigarette and sang--

"Pemba Muhori, Pemba Muhori, are you in there? My wife has sent for your skin to wear."

All was silent, so he travelled on and on till he came to a third and bigger lake, and now he had spent three months in the way.

So he sat down on the shore and ate a loaf and smoked a cigarette and sang again, but all was silent, so he travelled on, and at the end of each month he came to a bigger lake, and he ate one loaf and smoked one cigarette.

Till, at the end of the sixth month, he came to an enormous lake, bigger than any before, and its breadth was the distance of Tabora from the coast.

And he said, "Pemba Muhori can hardly miss being in here," so he ate a loaf and lit and smoked a cigarette and then he sang--

"Pemba Muhori, Pemba Muhori, are you in there? My wife has sent for your skin to wear."

But all was silent, so he picked up his load and went on and on, and now he had only one loaf and one cigarette and one match left.

At the end of the seventh month he came to a lake as broad as from Ujiji to Zanzibar, and on its shores was white sand, white like bleached calico.

So he sat down and thought, "Now I have come to the last of my food. What am I to do if I miss Pemba Muhori here?"

So he ate his last loaf and tried to light his last cigarette, but the match went out, so he threw it into the lake saying, "What matter? Now I have nothing."

Then he sang--

"Pemba Muhori, Pemba Muhori, are you in there? My wife has sent for your skin to wear."

Then there was a noise like thunder, and great waves went foaming away to the shores, and Pemba Muhori appeared with his seven heads and said, "Who is making use of my name?"



So he answered, "It is I, Hapendeki," and took his sword and smote off one head, and picking it up he put it on one side. Then the snake came and said, "Who are you that are not worth eating at a mouthful?"

Hapendeki took his sword and cut off another head and the snake disappeared in the water again, and he took the head and laid it on one side.

And so the snake came at him again till he had cut off the third, fourth and fifth head and put them on one side.

Then the snake said, "What sort of witchcraft is this, that you who are so small think you can kill me?" and he rushed at him again, and Hapendeki cut off his sixth head and put it on one side. Then the snake rose up and came at him, and Hapendeki cut off his seventh head and ran away.

Then the snake's body writhed and twisted, and he lashed so with his tail that the mountains fell into the lake and the waves tore up the hillsides.

When all was still again, Hapendeki returned and picked up the heads, which were a heavy load, and as he picked up the sixth he staggered, but he said to himself, "I must take them all home to show my wife." So he made an effort and picked up the seventh head, and when he had them all, he suddenly looked round and behold, he found that his journey home was finished and that he was already in his house.

His wife was astonished to see him and said, "My husband, how did you return?" and he answered, "By the grace of God."

Then she cooked food for him and said, "Now eat." And he said to her, "Last time I ate here you told me that I was a fool for not getting you the clothes you wanted, now look first in the parcel I have brought and see if they are indeed the clothes you want before I eat."

So his wife looked at the load and was astonished, and the neighbours came and looked and were astonished, for there were the seven heads of Pemba Muhori.

Then that youth thought to himself, "I must now teach my wife a lesson, as she has put me to a lot of trouble and worry;" so he told her to prepare a large feast for the next day, and he invited all his friends to come.

Next day his friends came and they all ate till they were full, and he then said to his wife, "My wife, bring me water that I may drink."

His wife brought him water, and he looked at it and said to her, "Do you call this water, do you think that this is fit for your husband to drink?"

So she went away and brought him milk, and he said to her, "What is this you have brought me? Am I a baby that you think that I can drink this?"

So she went and brought him honey-wine, and he said to her, "Am I a drunkard that when I ask for water you bring me wine?"

So she said to him, "My husband, what kind of water do you want? tell me, that I may get it for you."

So he said, "That water you brought me smelt of frogs. I want water from a lake in which there are no frogs."

So she took a water jar, and putting it on her head went forth, and he, taking his sword and putting it over his shoulder, went after her, and followed at a distance to see what she would do.

And she travelled on and on till she came to a big lake and said to herself, "Perhaps this water will do." So she sang--

"My husband has sent me out to draw Water no frog has touched with his claw."

And the frogs answered, "K--r--r--r, K--r--r--r."

So she took her water jar and travelled on and on till she came to another big lake and sang again--

"My husband has sent me out to draw Water no frog has touched with his claw."

"K--r--r--r, K--r--r--r."

So she travelled on and on, and her husband followed, watching from behind, and every lake she came to and sang the frogs only answered, "K--r--r--r, K--r--r--r."

At last she came to a great lake, and there she sang--

"My husband has sent me out to draw Water no frog has touched with his claw."

All was silent, so she said, "This must indeed be the water my husband wants." So she filled her water jar, and, turning round to go home, she saw a huge demon coming forth saying, "I smell man, I smell man."

Her husband behind, who knew how to talk to demons, called out,

"Demon bwe! bwe! bwe! Demon bwe! bwe! bwe! My wife run quickly past me, Demon bwe! bwe! bwe!"



So his wife ran past him, and as the demon followed after her he cut off his tail, and at that moment he found himself in his house again and his wife found herself on the threshold.

She tried to take the water jar from her head to pass in at the door, but she found that it had stuck there, and she was not able to move it.

Then a neighbour came forward and tried to pull it off, but he could not, then came two men and then five and then twenty, but they could not get the water jar off. Then fifty tried, but failed, and at last five hundred men tried to pull it off, but it was of no avail.

Then came out the husband and said, "My wife, put down that water jar," and he slapped her in the face and at that moment the water jar fell off.

His wife said to him, "What do you strike me for?" and her husband said, "My wife, do you not see that that was the medicine that broke the charm and released you from the water jar? Did you not see that five hundred men were unable to get it off, and that I, by just slapping you, was able to get it off?" But the woman would not be satisfied, so went off to the Sultan and accused her husband before the Sultan of beating her. So the Sultan sent his soldiers to fetch Hapendeki, and when he was brought said to him, "How is this that you have beaten this woman your wife?"

So Hapendeki told him the story from first to last, and the Sultan said to him, "Have you the heads of Pemba Muhori?"

He answered and said, "They are there in my house."

So the Sultan said, "Bring them here that I may know that your story is true."

So Hapendeki said, "I will bring them here at eight o'clock to-night, but I want you to turn out all the lights when I come and only turn them on when I tell you."

So at eight o'clock Hapendeki brought the seven heads, and all the lights were turned out, and he arranged them in front of the Sultan's palace, which was seven storied, one head he put on the roof and one head on every storey.

When the lights were turned on everybody fell back in fear and astonishment, for there, shining and glittering in the light, were the seven heads of Pemba Muhori.

So the trumpets pealed and the cannons roared and there was great rejoicing, and the Sultan gave his daughter in marriage to Hapendeki.



And this is the end of the story, and whether it is good or whether it is bad I do not know, but if it is good, its goodness belongs to all, and if it is bad, its badness belongs to him who tells it alone.