



THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE AND THE KINGDOM OF SPARKS

NIKOLAI TERZIEV





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Once upon a time,

a long time ago, a big misfortune came upon the Kingdom of Sparks. The King's only daughter, Generosity, was struck by an unknown illness and passed away. Some say it was grief, others – that she inhaled impure air; one way or the other, her energy was put out, and together with it died her father's joy of life. The whole Kingdom of Sparks withered. And to make matters worse, the illness soon spread out and started taking the subjects of the Kingdom as its victims. The more sparks died, the less the strength of their fire.

A terrible threat hung over the kingdoms of men...

At this time Amenhotep the Pharaoh was great ruler of Egypt and supreme priest of Amun. He was wise and just but it was hard to take decisions alone on all the deeds in his vast lands. Therefore he relied upon the other priests for counsel on the most urgent matters. He had asked their opinion again, and was now listening to their words with great attention. The Great Nile was high with water, the granaries were stocked with grain, the cattle grew in numbers, the people were rich and there had been peace and prosperity for a hundred years. Regardless of all that, however, the people were unhappy and no one knew the reason.



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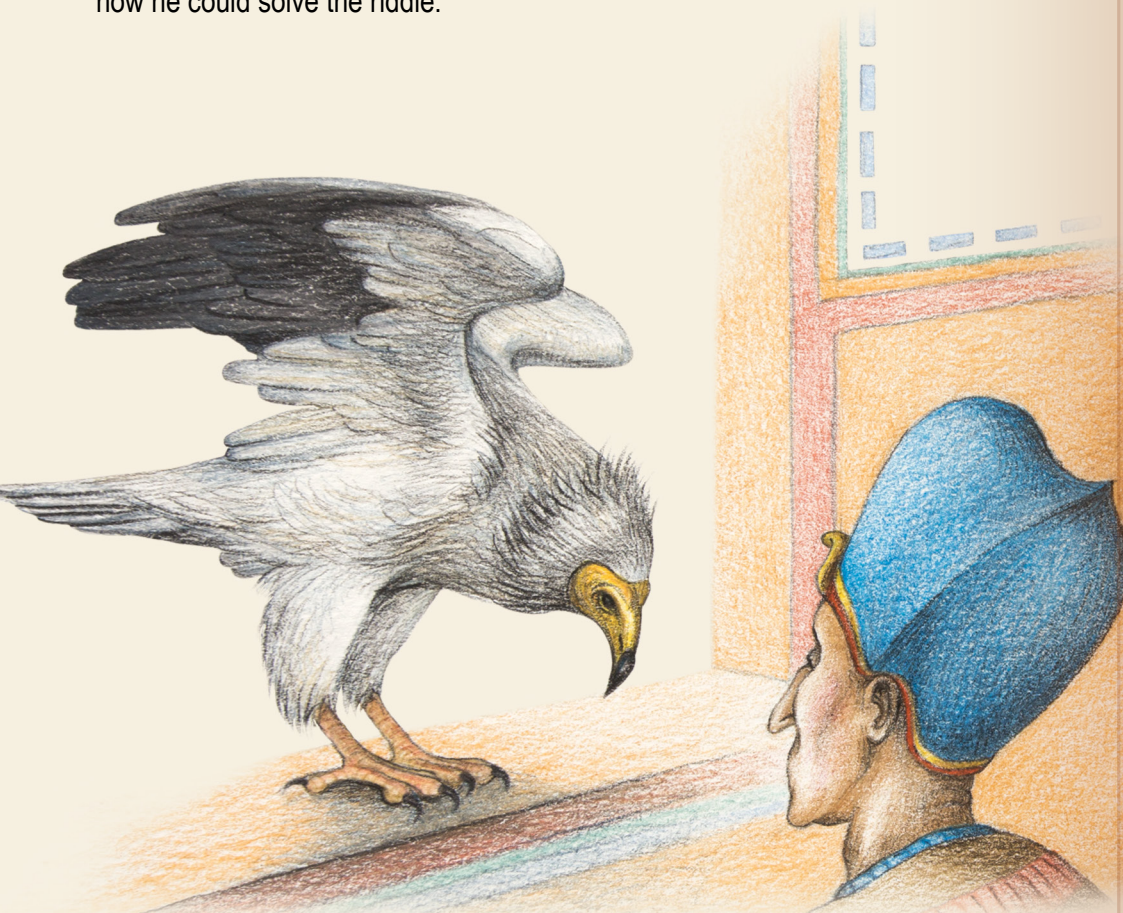
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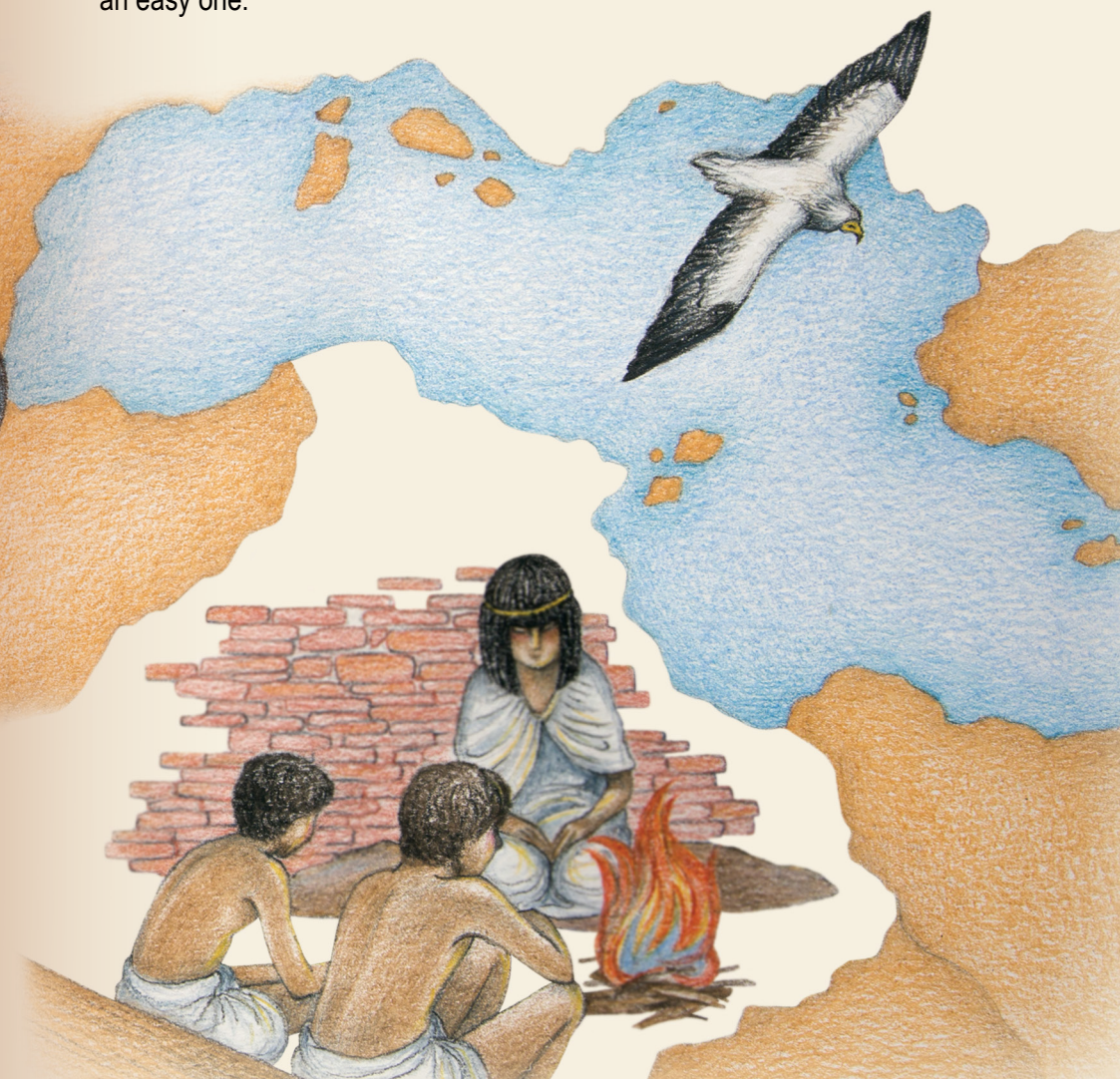
With wisdom befitting a ruler of the old times, the Pharaoh noticed the fire in their hearths had changed recently. It still burned but yielded no joy, nor warmth, nor comfort in their homes.

'This must be the reason for our unhappiness,' thought the ruler and wondered how he could solve the riddle.



As he sat wondering in his palace, they say a beautiful white bird flew from the blue skies onto his windowsill. It was an Egyptian Vulture, sent by the mother-goddess Mut. O how pleased was the Pharaoh by that omen! He immediately asked of the vulture to find out where the men's unhappiness came from and how he could help his people. The bird accepted the quest. It bowed before the Pharaoh and flew away.

For a whole year Mut's messenger flew across the lands, over thousand upon thousands of kilometers – from the savannahs in Central Africa, to the lands of the Celts, from Mesopotamia and the horse peoples of the East to China, and back. Everywhere it saw the fire burn in the hearths of shepherds' huts and royal palaces alike, but its flames spread nothing but chill. The hearts of men had become empty and with time they lost all hope for joy and happiness. Same as the Pharaoh, the local rulers and sages were bewildered by the sad event. The Egyptian Vulture didn't give up with its search even though its journey was not an easy one.





Once, when it tried to fly over the Mediterranean, a storm caught up with it and exhausted it so much that it only just survived; from then onwards vultures don't like flying over great expanses of water and try to cross the seas at places where the shores are close, even if it means they have to fly farther over the land. At another time the vulture was so tired and hungry that it had to rest for two whole days on a dry tree.



On the third day the grey forest wolves took pity on it and killed an old ill stag which was spreading disease among its herd. The Egyptian Vulture fed with them for a few days until the whole body of the stag was gone; thus they prevented the disease from spreading throughout the forest. Ever since wolves and vultures share one destiny and still live together at some places in the world.





Days became nights, and nights became days. The seasons changed, and years passed. The messenger grew old and tired, and decided it was time to fly back to the Pharaoh and confess that it didn't find anyone to reveal the reason for mankind's unhappiness. On its way back it had to fly over a cold mountain plateau, so high up that only the Golden Eagles and the geese dared fly above it. There the vulture met an old monk. The man was clad in a rough robe and had not a tooth in his mouth. When he saw the white bird, he sat on the ground and took a handful of seeds out from his pocket to share with his new friend. We all know vultures do not feed on seeds but our friend was grateful for the monk's noble act. It told him its story with a heavy heart and admitted it had failed in its quest. The monk listened, deep in thought.

'You left Egypt a long time ago,' he said eventually, 'and you survived countless ordeals. You visited many lands far and wide, and met with poor and rich, with sages and fools, with beasts and birds but you never strayed from your quest! My friend, you are pure at heart and you have gained so much experience and wisdom, as no people in the world has. Stop asking men about your quest. Fly back to your Pharaoh because the answer to your question is within yourself.'



The Egyptian Vulture flew back to the Pharaoh. Both their faces were scarred by the long years since they first met. The Great Nile was muddier, and many of the great priests had passed away.

The old vulture told the Pharaoh about his ordeals and about what he had seen in the lands it visited. It said it now knew why the fire in the hearths burned without warmth and why it was harder and harder for men to find peace and comfort – the Kingdom of Sparks in the heart of men was disappearing.

'I had almost ended my journey when I found the real reason for men's unhappiness,' said the wise bird.



'It is a fearsome disease. Its name – greed. It makes you always want more than what you have. If you are a farmer, you want more cattle; if you are a priest, you want more power, if you are a King, you want to subject all the other Kingdoms to your rule. No one is safe. The disease has spread across the whole world. As soon as it affects a man, he starts to lust for more of all that is before his eyes – more water, more land, more wood, more humans to conquer... until all that is left in his soul is an unquenchable desire and desolation. And then the sparks which bring peace and comfort die in the man's heart, and with them perishes the joy of life.'





The Pharaoh saddened. He realized he too was struck by the terrible illness. When he imagined the sparks die out in men's hearts, his sadness grew even bigger. He turned to the wise bird and asked it (yes, and it was the first time he asked for anything – up to then he was used to giving orders only) to save the fire which kept the our humanity alive and brought warmth and comfort. Then the Egyptian Vulture opened its heart and took all the surviving sparks inside it. The King of Sparks was also there. Ever since the bird roams ceaselessly across the world and gives men joy and warmth because its caring heart has become the home of the fire of family happiness.

Mut's messenger started living close to the people so that it could help them and remind them what it was to be human. And one day, when we all heal and put an end to our greed, it will open its heart again, and it will give us back the sparks that make us happy. And if it disappears, as many of its wild brethren do, together with it we will lose our happiness – forever.

I don't know that for sure.

It is just what people say.



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