

English Version

Alhaji Abubakar Imam



Ruwan Bagaja

The Water of Cure

Alhaji Abubakar Imam



*The Northern Nigerian
Publishing Company
Zaria*

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*First published in this version, 1971
Reprinted 1978*

Published by
The Northern Nigerian Publishing Co Ltd
Zaria

Printed in Hong Kong on behalf of Gaskiya

RUWAN BAGAJA

This book is one of the first Hausa books to be written in the North for people to read and enjoy. It was written by Alhaji Abubakar Imam in the year 1934, when he was a teacher in the Katsina Middle School. He was then twenty-two years of age.

It is the first book that he wrote, and it brought him to the notice of the Government. Since this book he has written nearly twenty others in Hausa, between the years 1934 and 1970, and nearly all the Hausa books now in use in primary schools are from his pen, or written jointly by him and another person.

If the Hausa language could talk, it would say, 'Alhaji Abubakar Imam, may God reward you, for you have made me something to be read and admired like any other language in the world.'

BABA AHMED

Imam of Zaria Government College

The publishers felt that it was worth while turning *Ruwan Bagaja*, along with three other well-known Hausa novels, into a graded English reading series so that a new generation of children both in upper primary and junior secondary classes could learn English through the medium of these well-known tales.

The words and structural patterns are controlled at each stage and present a graded progression towards a 2,000 word vocabulary and coverage of all fundamental tenses, verb-patterns, adverbial and 'adjectival sequences, and clause construction. The vocabulary and structural items covered by this series have been selected and graded to fit in with up-to-date English course-books used throughout the world. *Ruwan Bagaja* (Stage 4) is written within a vocabulary of 1,400 words, with structures restricted

to an appropriate level.

Words new to each stage are set at the foot of the page where they first appear. The intake of these words is controlled in such a way that not more than six new words appear for the first time on any one page. Words that are beyond the reader-stage but are made essential by the topic of the text are kept to a minimum and listed under 'topic words' at the end of the book. The sentence and/or utterance progresses in length and complexity over the series.

RUWAN BAGAJA

Once upon a time there lived a story-teller called Koje. Everybody thought he was mad, but he never hit anybody and he was never angry. He just listened to stories, and then went to other countries, where he told the stories to rich people. They gave him food and money.

One day Koje reached a place called Kontagora, a large town in the country of Nigeria. He went to the emir of the town and asked if he could stay in the palace. The emir agreed, and Koje went to the emir and began to tell stories. He spent about three days telling stories to the emir, and the emir's courtiers told him stories in return.

One day as he walked round the town he passed a large field with several buildings in it. 'Who does this house belong to?' he asked the servants.

They replied, 'Surely everyone in the world has heard of Alhaji Imam?'

'Will he come out soon?' asked Koje.

'No, he never comes out until after he has said his prayers in the afternoon,' the servants answered.

As soon as it was afternoon Koje heard the sound of footsteps, and everybody stood up. Alhaji Imam came out, and they all fell down on their knees, saying, 'May you live for ever!'

The great man looked around him and saw Koje. 'Who is this?' he asked.

Koje said, 'I am a story-teller. Would you like to listen to

mad agree building belong to afternoon

one of my stories?’

‘Yes, please,’ replied Alhaji Imam.

So Koje began to tell a story. When he finished the first one he told another, and then another. After he had told about thirty stories he said to Alhaji Imam, ‘Will you please tell me some of your stories now to pay me for my stories? Then I shall know that you like them and I can tell you some more.’

‘No,’ replied Alhaji Imam. ‘First tell me all your stories; then I will pay you.’

So Koje told story after story, story after story, until he was tired of telling them. He finished in the evening, and Alhaji Imam said, ‘You can tell all your stories in one day, and yet you say that you are the best story-teller in the country. Come again tomorrow, and I’ll tell you all that I have done on this earth. I don’t think I shall be able to finish telling you in ten days!’

Koje bowed, said goodbye and left Imam’s house. Early the next day he returned there, and waited. Before long Alhaji Imam came out. He was greeted by the people who were in the court-yard. He sat down on a chair and made himself comfortable. Then he turned to Koje and asked, ‘How many ears have you got?’

‘Two!’ Koje answered in surprise.

‘Add another one, then, and listen to me,’ said Alhaji Imam.

‘Very well,’ said Koje. And he sat back and listened with all his ears.

tired of bow (v.) goodbye greet
comfortable

ALHAJI GOES IN SEARCH OF RUWAN BAGAJA, THE WATER OF CURE

‘ My name is Alhaji Imam,’ began the great man. ‘ My father was an important imam to the emir of Kontagora, Mai Sudan. His name was Malam-Na-Bakin-Kogi. He had four wives, but none of them gave him a child, and now he was quite old. This made him very sad. He was rich and had many books, but there were no sons to enjoy them in the future.’

Although the malam had no child of his own, he had a stepson called Sakimu. But Sakimu was neither polite nor obedient to his stepfather. When the boy grew up he became a soldier. He was very brave, but before long he became a thief. The boy’s stepfather was very angry with him and put him in prison for three days.

This made Sakimu angry, too, and the night after he came out of prison he went into the malam’s room and killed him.

The next day he went to the emir and said that his stepfather had died in the night. After the malam was buried, Sakimu had a dream. He dreamed that the malam was standing by his side, and a seed came out of his stomach. The seed grew into a lion which attacked and killed Sakimu. He was very frightened by this dream, and the next day he went to some wise men to ask them what it meant.

They all thought about it for a long time. Then one of the malams said, ‘ One of the wives of the malam will have a child. This child will kill you.’

search	future	polite	obedient	attack
frighten				

Sakimu did not believe him and he left the wise man's house, feeling very angry. He decided to kill all four of the malam's wives just in case the wise man was right.

He poisoned three of his wives, but the fourth one, who was my mother, ran away. She returned to her own village, and Sakimu could not find her. He sent one of his slaves to the village to find her and kill her. The slave went to her village in the night and took her away into the forest. She tried to escape and succeeded, and ran and hid in a cave.

My mother did not know where she was, and she was very frightened. She wandered eastwards through the forest, trying to find her home. After some months she had a baby. I was that baby. I was born in this town, and I was called Alhaji Imam, because the imam of that town had no child. He named me Imam, hoping that I would become imam after he died.

One day when I was about twelve years old, the imam came home with tears running down his face. My mother had married him some years ago, and I now called him Father.

‘What is the matter, Father?’ I asked.

‘Mai Sudan, the emir, has shamed me,’ replied the imam. ‘He told me his son was very ill. I said we should get the Water of Cure, Ruwan Bagaja. Then all would be well. When the emir heard me say so, he called me a foolish old man. He said that nobody can find the Water of Cure. It could be anywhere in the world. But I know that it is the only cure for Yarima.’

I was very angry indeed. The emir should not call my father a fool. When I got home I told my mother I was going out into the world. I was going to get some Water of Cure, Ruwan

poison (v.)	slave	succeed	cave	eastwards
shame				

Bagaja. I was going to show the emir that my father was not a fool. I took the road to Timbuctoo and set off.

After I had travelled for some days I saw a high mountain in the middle of a forest. When I reached the bottom of the mountain I saw a large cave. 'There might be some water in that cave,' I thought, and I went inside.

Soon I heard someone say, 'Are you a real person or an evil spirit?'

My body shook with fright, but I answered, 'I'm a real person.'

A very old man came up to me. He asked me to tell him my story, so I told him everything. When he heard that I wanted to get some of the Water of Cure he shouted loudly and said, 'That's impossible, young man!'

I still shook with alarm, but I thought it was probable that he didn't know what he was talking about. 'Who are you? How do you know that it is impossible?' I asked him.

He shook his head sadly. 'Many people pass this way, but no one can find the Water of Cure,' he answered. 'I know, because I have been living here for the past seventy years.'

He then told me his story, and I discovered that he was my uncle, the imam's elder brother. I told him who I was, and we were both very happy. He asked me all about my home.

I spent two days with him, resting and eating fruit. Before I left to continue my travels, I asked him again about Ruwan Bagaja, the Water of Cure.

'The Water of Cure belongs to evil spirits,' he said.

'I don't care who it belongs to,' I replied. 'I must get some

evil **shook** **alarm** (n.) **probable**



A very old man came up to me.

of it for the imam.'

He addressed me once more. 'God bless you, my son. I will pray for you,' he said. And then he turned and walked back into the cave.

I travelled on for another seventy days, and then I arrived at Timbuctoo. I had no food and no money. So I dressed like a wandering traveller, and went to the chief of the town. I told him that I was a merchant and that my goods would arrive in three days' time.

Everyone in Timbuctoo thought I was wealthy. The chief gave me food and I told him that I would sell my cows to him when they arrived.

About three days later the chief saw some wandering traders. 'Why don't you ask them about your cows?' he said. 'They have probably passed them on the road.'

'Yes, that's a good idea!' I said. I went over to the traders and asked them if they had seen any cows on the road.

'Yes,' they answered. 'They will arrive here tomorrow.'

I knew they weren't my cows because I didn't have any. I asked the chief to give me a bag of money. 'You can take the cows in payment,' I told him.

'I am sure I can depend on your honesty,' said the chief, and he gave me the money at once.

I then left the village and travelled on for another forty days. At last I arrived at a city called Saburi, where the people had never been taught to read and write. It was the Town of Fools. I went to the chief's house and told him that I was a teacher of Islam.

address	wealthy	trader	idea	depend
honesty				

‘Where from?’ he asked.

‘From Arab countries,’ I answered. I then said that I would like to stay in this town. I knew from a dream that the people there were very good, I said. In the dream I learned that I must teach them about Islam.

I spent six months saying prayers for them, although I did not know any of the correct words except *Muduhammatani*. All the children of the town were brought to me so that I could teach them. After a few days all the children had learned the word *Muduhammatani*. They used it in many different ways, to show joy, alarm and so on.

After I had been there for about seven months, a real malam, the Malam Zurke, arrived in the town. The chief told him about me, so he came to see me and examine my knowledge. He said that we could perhaps correct each other’s mistakes.

The next morning when we went to prayers, he saw that I knew almost nothing, and he told the chief this. The chief sent for me and told me what the malam had said. I was very alarmed because I knew that the malam was right. However, I said that I was sorry for the malam if he really thought that he knew more than I did.

‘We had better arrange a special meeting tomorrow morning,’ I said. ‘Then I can prove that I am more clever than he is.’

The next morning all the people in the town came to the chief’s palace. I was already there. Soon three boys came towards us, carrying heavy Arabic books. I asked them where they came from.

They replied, ‘We come from the house of Malam Zurke

and so on	examine	knowledge	correct
had better	special		




‘They are all books of learning,’ he answered.

dan Muhamman, the Great.'

A few minutes later the Malam Zurke himself arrived. The chief and all the people were looking at us. I greeted him and asked him why he had so many books.

'They are all books of learning,' he answered.

'Do you mean that you are trying to prove your great knowledge, and yet you still have to study books?' I asked.

The malam looked at me and smiled. He told one of the boys to take the books away, and I asked everyone to come near. Then I swept the ground in front of me and made this sign . I asked the malam what it was.

He said it was the letter N in Arabic.

'What?' I laughed. 'Try again!'

He said it was the letter R in Arabic. He then said it was the letter L.

'You are quite wrong,' I answered. 'Whoever taught you?'

He went on saying all the Arabic letters which look like that, but I told him he was wrong every time. At last he gave up, and I asked all the people to come nearer.

'It is not the letter R; it is not L or N,' I said. 'This is the sign of the new moon.'

The foolish people of the Town of Fools looked at the sign and said, 'Yes, you are right! That is exactly what the new moon looks like.'

The children were very happy to see their teacher win and drove the malam away, shouting 'Eho-cho-cho!' He did not even return to his house to collect his books, but ran straight out of the town as fast as he could.

smile sign exactly collect

ALHAJI AND MALAM ZURKE IN PRISON

I spent a few more days in Saburi, and then I went on to another city called Yamel. When I arrived there I found that it was a feast day. I asked a small boy what the feast was for.

The boy replied, 'The emir's son has just been married.'

I went straight to the emir's house and began to give money to the beggars. The emir heard them calling me 'Alhaji Imam', which means 'the friend of the prince'. I soon became friendly with him and his son. Many people asked me to help them to speak to the emir, and gave me money and presents.

When I had enough money I went on to Sasa. On my way into the town I met a Syrian trader. I talked to him for a little time and he thought I was trustworthy. He asked me to look after his money for him.

After some time I started to spend his money wastefully. I arranged parties, with special musicians, and I enjoyed myself as much as I was able. The Syrian heard about this. He tried to catch me and put me in prison, but I ran away.

When he found that he couldn't catch me, he sent a message to me. The message said that he had died, leaving me all his money. I knew that this was only a trick, but I said I would go and see him before he was buried.

From the window I saw him lying on a mat with his mouth open. I then said, 'Is he really dead? I doubt it.'

'Why do you doubt his death?' the messenger asked.

feast trustworthy message trick



From the window I saw him lying on a mat with his mouth open.

I said, 'When I was young, I was told that Syrians never die with their mouths open.' When the Syrian heard that, he slowly closed his mouth.

From there I ran out of the town, passing village after village. On my way I met a villager who was very rich. I asked him how he had got all his money. He told me. He also asked me to keep his money for him for a little time. He thought we had become friends.

Later, when he asked me to return the money to him, I smiled and said, 'Return what? Return *my* money to *you*?'

This began as a game, but it soon became a quarrel and we decided to go to the judge. The judge was called Malam-mai-bakin-cin-rashawa, and I knew that he would be on my side if I gave him some money secretly.

I said, 'Sir, the money is mine. I have five friends—Malam Pound and four of his brothers—who know that it is mine. They are not here now, but they will come in the night.'

The judge understood from this that, in the night, I would bring him five pounds if he said that the money was mine.

He therefore said, 'If this man has five malams who know the truth, then the money is his. Take it away. We don't want trouble in this town.' He looked at the villager and said, 'You're trying to bring trouble to this town, and I shall send you to prison for three months.'

A few days later, I was walking near the river and I saw a valuable necklace in the street. I picked it up and took it to the market to sell it. I did not know, but it belonged to the emir's daughter. A thief had stolen it in the night.

game valuable market stolen

I was caught and sent to prison, because people thought that I was the thief. In prison I was put in the same room as the villager I had tricked the week before. He and I were tied together with rope.

I looked at the villager carefully and saw that he was Malam Zurke, whom the children had chased out of Saburi.

‘Zurke dan Muhamman!’ I said, and he answered, ‘Himma dai dan Shehu!’

We then started to tell each other stories, and soon became friends. After three months we were set free, and we left the town together.

We travelled on and on through the bush until we reached the city of Ris. There we shook hands and said goodbye to each other.

rope bush shake hands

ALHAJI'S VISIT TO DANDAGO AND HIS STORY

I went on searching for Ruwan Bagaja, the Water of Cure, but I met no one who had even heard of it. Soon I came to a town called Dandago. There I met a girl called Jamilatu, who was the daughter of a learned teacher. She was very lovely, so I asked her if she would marry me.

I was a good-looking young man in those days. The other men who had asked to marry her were old and ugly, although they had plenty of money.

At last her father asked her to choose from among us the man she wanted to marry. She told her father to send an old man to tell each one of us that she was dead. We should come for the burial.

When the first man was told of her death he said, 'Good news! She refused to choose the man she loved, and now she is dead.'

The old man went to the second man and told the same story. He too said, 'Well done, Death! Jamilatu refused to choose one of us for her husband, and now she is dead! Well done, Death!'

The old man went to the third man, and there, too, he got the same reply: 'Go and bury her. I will not come.'

When he came and told me, I started to weep. I thought it was all a trick. I went to the room where she was lying, and put my arms around her, weeping. She opened her eyes and said, 'Here is my real lover. Here is the man I'll marry.'

lovely choose refuse

We chose the day for our marriage, and had a wonderful feast. Everybody in the town hated me, however. ‘Why should a stranger marry the most beautiful girl in the town?’ they asked.

In the middle of the night they put poison in the water I used to wash my face. It made me blind. I was full of grief, but I had a good servant called Armigau. He led me everywhere, and took me to the seashore every day to catch fish for food.

One day a man came to me and said he also wanted to become my servant. It was Malam Zurke—but I did not know because I could not see. I was very happy, and the three of us went fishing every day. I was often angry and acted badly, but my first servant didn’t blame me or complain. He knew how hard it must be to be blind.

I didn’t want people to know that I was blind, so I said I could see a little. One day Malam Zurke decided to punish me for what I had done to him in the Town of Fools. He led me to the boat and took the boat right out to sea. Then he said, ‘Here is an island. Can’t you see it?’

I said, ‘Yes, of course I can.’ And I stepped out of the boat and fell into the sea!

I swam to the bottom of the sea and found myself in the land of some strange people with large ears. I told them my story, and they were very sorry for me. They gave me some oil to rub in my eyes, and I found that I could see once more.

I stayed with these kind and helpful people for a few days, and then I said I must continue on my way. Their chief told two of them to take me back to the land again. So they carried

hate	poison (n.)	grief	blame (v.)	complain
swam				



When I woke up he said, 'What is this dead body?'

me up through the sea and showed me the way to go.

I spent seven more days looking for the Water of Cure, and then I left for India. In the first town I reached I met Malam Zurke! I now learned that it was he who pushed me into the sea. I was able to smile about it now, and we became good friends.

A few days later, a thief killed a servant of the town's chief. Malam Zurke found the body down by the river. He carried it back to the house and put it in my room when I was asleep. When I woke up he said, 'What is this dead body? You've killed somebody to get his money!'

I was frightened for a moment, and then I saw that this was another trick. Malam Zurke need not imagine that I would take the blame for such a deed. I would trick him in return!

So I said, 'Didn't you hear the chief say yesterday that he would give a hundred pounds to the person who killed this man?'

When Malam Zurke heard this he shouted, 'I killed him! I just brought the body to your room because I didn't want to get into any trouble.'

'All right, then,' I said. 'Take the dead body to the chief. I'm sure he will not refuse to give you the money.'

Malam Zurke thought this was true, so he picked up the body and went in the direction of the chief's house.

As for me, I took my belongings and left the town. And that was how I parted from Malam Zurke.

moment	imagine	blame (n.)	direction
part (v.)			

ALHAJI PRETENDS TO BE MAD

I continued on my search for the Water of Cure. Soon I came to a village, and I heard some men telling each other what a silly man Malam Zurke was.

I went up to them and asked, 'Where have you seen Malam Zurke?'

They told me the name of the town. It was the one I had just left. 'Why do you think he is so silly?' I asked.

One of the men replied, 'Last Friday we went to see the chief of the town. While we were there, a Malam Zurke came in with something rolled up in a cloth. He opened the cloth, and inside was the body of the chief's most faithful servant. "Here is the body of the man you wanted to have killed," he said to the chief.

'The chief looked at the body in great surprise. "Why did you kill him?" he asked. "He did not harm you."

"Because you said you would make a gift of a hundred pounds to anyone who killed him," Malam Zurke answered.

"You must be mad!" shouted the chief. "He was my favourite servant." Then he called his servants and told them to beat Malam Zurke and put him in prison.'

When I heard this, I felt sorry for Malam Zurke. 'I hope he isn't going to be killed,' I said.

'Oh no, he won't be killed,' replied one of the men. 'In the chief's opinion he must be mad, so he won't kill him.'

faithful	harm	gift	beat	opinion
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I was pleased to hear that, and I went on my way.

Some days later I was walking in the market-place when I saw a very, very tall man. People said his name was Zandoro dan Zotori. 'He possesses great strength, as well as being so tall,' they said.

Zandoro dan Zotori called out, 'Who would like this fat cow of mine? He may have it, if he promises that, next week, he'll touch the top of my head. But if he fails to do so, I will kill him.'

Everybody refused, because no one could reach the top of his head.

At last I said, 'Give me the cow. Next week I'll touch the top of your head.'

Everybody thought I was mad. 'I'll think of some way to deceive him,' I said to myself, and I took the cow and went on my way.

The following week Zandoro came back. There were many people in the market-place, waiting to see how I would die. I was in my room.

Zandoro shouted out, 'Come out; the time has come!'

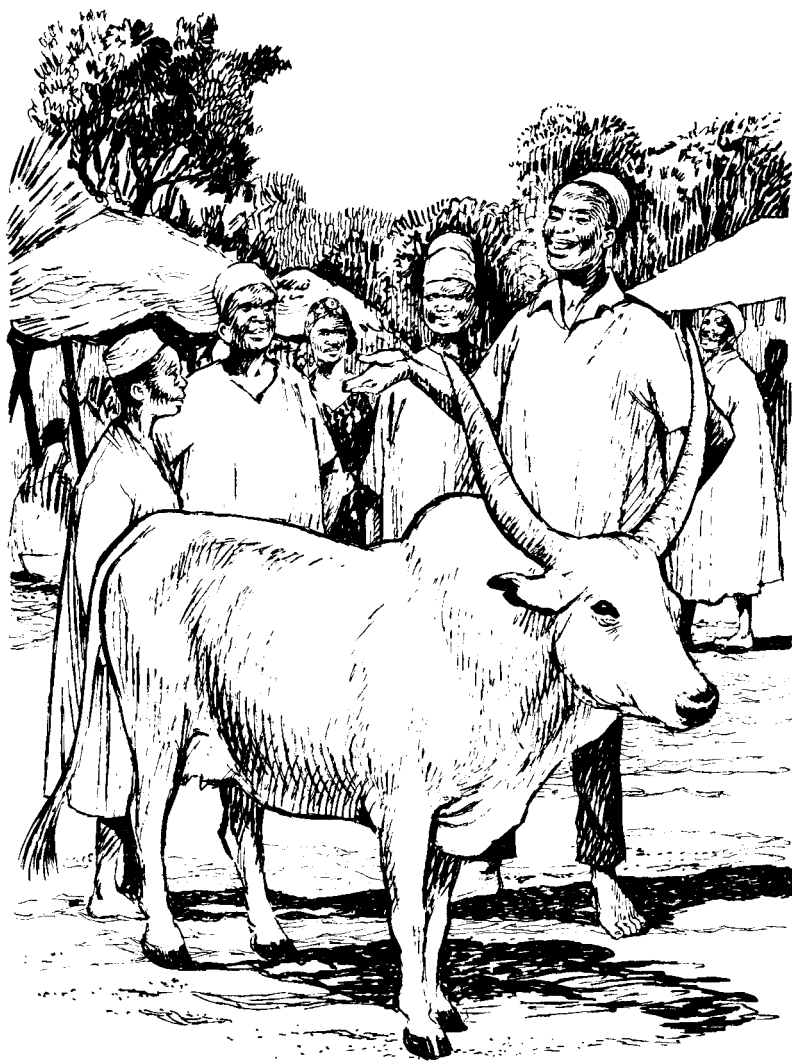
I replied, 'Wait a minute! The wall of my room is breaking into two. Let me mend it with my needle and thread.'

He said, 'How can you mend a wall with a needle and thread?'

I answered, 'That's my trade. It isn't difficult. Look through the window and see.'

Zandoro put his head through the window. I immediately touched the top of his head and cried out, 'I have touched your head!'

possess fail deceive difficult immediately



Zandoro Dan Zotori called out, ' Who would like this fat cow of mine?'

All the people shouted, 'Yes, he has touched it! He has plainly touched it!'

By this trick I won the cow and saved my own life.

Everyone in the town thought I was wonderful. They asked me to all their feasts, and were very kind and generous to me. I was sorry when I had to leave and continue my search for the Water of Cure.

ALHAJI GETS TWENTY COWS

Next I went to a very large town called Tagina. The chief of the town greeted me like a friend, and I became a lodger in somebody's house.

One day I went to the palace, and I heard the chief saying, 'The wife of one of my servants has just died. He cannot sleep at night because he is so sad. He keeps me awake, too, because he walks around the house all night, shouting and weeping.'

'Would you like me to do something about it?' I said.

'Of course, if you can!' replied the chief.

That night I went secretly to the servant's house and hid under his bed. The servant came to bed, and before long he began to cry aloud.

'I wish that I had died instead of my wife!' he cried.

I put on a strange voice and said, 'I am Death! I've been sent to take your life so that you may join your wife.'

The servant was frightened, because he did not really want to die. He ran out of the house in great alarm.

The next day he hastened to the chief and told him that Death had visited him in the night. The chief merely laughed aloud and the man felt very foolish. From that day he stopped calling for Death to take him to his precious wife.

Soon I set off on my way again. Everywhere I went I asked people if they knew where I could find the Water of Cure.

lodger secretly aloud hasten merely
precious

Nobody knew. As I was walking through the bush one day, I saw two villagers attacking each other. Just as I reached them, one of them killed the other. He saw me, and tried to run away, but I shouted 'Stop! I must take you to the chief.'

'Oh, no, please don't do that!' he cried, falling on his knees.

'What will you give me if I don't tell anybody?' I asked.

'I'll give you ten cows,' he answered. He was quite breathless with fear.

'Ten cows!' I said fiercely. 'You must be mad! That isn't nearly enough.'

'I'll give you twenty cows, then,' he said.

I agreed to this price, and we went to his father's field. He chose twenty cows and gave them to me. I drove them into the town, pretending that I had bought them. I sold them in the town. In this way I obtained plenty of money to continue on my journey in search of Ruwan Bagaja, the Water of Cure.

THIEVES FOLLOW ALHAJI

Next I went to a town called Maska and stayed in the house of a malam named Dan Daula. People called him Na-Malam-Iro. I became friendly with one of the malam's servants whose name was Kado. We spent every day together.

One evening, after we had talked for a long time, I went to my room and lay down. Before I could sleep, I heard a knock on my door and a very large man entered. I was alarmed but I thought I had better appear to be calm.

I stood up and said, 'Come in, come in! Please sit down. Why didn't you tell me that you were coming?' I spoke as if I had met him before, and he seemed surprised.

'Where have you seen me before?' he asked.

'I've known you for a long time,' I answered, 'and all your friends and family. Don't you remember me?'

He looked at me again and said, 'If you do know me, what is my name?'

I lifted up my head and shouted in a loud voice, 'Your name is *Thief!*'

He rushed from the room as fast as he could. However, the whole house had wakened at my shout, and lots of people ran after him. He escaped, but the next night he came back with some other thieves who were his friends. I could not defend myself against so many, so I decided to leave that house. I went to stay in the house of Sarkin Gardi, a man who kept a

knock calm rush defend

number of hyenas in his house. He played with them in the market-place, and people gave him money.

The thieves discovered that I had moved, and that night they followed me to Sarkin Gardi's house.

I was sleeping inside the room where the hyenas were. I wasn't afraid of them at all. I always gave them meat to eat. Therefore they trusted me, and never bit me with their sharp teeth.

One of the thieves entered the room through the window. He knew it was the room where I slept, but he didn't know the hyenas slept there, too.

When the hyenas heard his movements beside the window, they started to attack him. He was very frightened, and cried out to me, 'Get up! You've caught a thief!'

I knew why he said this. He was afraid of the hyenas, and needed my help. So I answered, 'So far as I know you're not a thief. Nothing of mine has been stolen. Go on your way!'

He cried, 'Please protect me from these wild hyenas! Look! They've torn all my garments. I would rather go to prison than be killed.'

I shook my head. 'Make haste—go away while you can,' I repeated.

Then Sarkin Gardi woke up and asked what was the matter. I told him all about it. After that, I took a stick and beat the thief until he cried aloud. I put his hands behind his back and tied them with rope.

The next morning, soon after dawn, I looked at him and discovered that it was Malam Zurke! I spoke his name as

protect garment haste repeat



He cried 'Please protect me from these wild hyenas!'

usual: 'Zurke dan Muhamman!'

He quickly answered, 'Himma dai dan Shehu!' and held out his hand to shake mine.

We were delighted to see each other, and spent the rest of the day in talk and laughter. Malam Zurke told me one story after another, until I was quite breathless with laughing.

Soon we set off together to the town of Nassarawa. Here we parted once more. Malam Zurke said he was going farther,

farther

but I wanted to stay in the town. Soon I found the entrance to a mosque and I went inside. People thought I was a learned teacher and they brought me bread, milk and other foods.

Soon everyone in the town knew me. If there was any special service they asked me to say the prayers. I always refused, saying that I always prayed in silence. But really it was because I could neither read nor write.

One day the daughter of the chief died in a small neighbouring village. I was asked to go to the funeral.

‘Where is the road to the village?’ I asked. Someone showed me the way, and told me that the funeral would take place that afternoon. A horse was got ready for me, but I told the chief I was not leaving until I had said my prayers. I said I would follow them later. ‘And I do not need a horse,’ I added. ‘I am quite accustomed to journeys without one.’

The chief looked at me in surprise. ‘It is a long way,’ he said.

‘I’ll be there in time,’ I answered with a smile.

As soon as they had gone I left the town quietly. I ran as fast as I could through the bush. My aim was to get in front of them, and I succeeded. This would make them think I was a very wonderful person!

I went to the house where the little girl had died. When the others arrived I went out and greeted them saying, ‘God be with you!’

They all fell on their knees in front of me. They couldn’t understand how I had arrived in advance of them. ‘He must be a powerful saint!’ they whispered to each other.

entrance accustom aim in advance whisper

ALHAJI AND ZURKE FORGET THEIR QUARRELS

I asked the chief of Nassawara to call all the people of his native country together.

‘ Please ask them if they have ever heard of Ruwan Bagaja,’ I said.

He agreed, and at once called them together and asked them. An old man stepped forward and said, ‘ Yes, I have heard of it. When I was a child my grandfather said that in a certain place called Rama there was a well on a mountain. It is said that Ruwan Bagaja is in that well. If you wish to know more, go to Baitul Mukaddas. My older brother lives there. We were together when the story was told. He may remember the name of the country where Rama is.’

I left immediately, and did not stop anywhere until I reached a town called Sarai. Everybody there caught parrots and taught them how to speak. Then they sold them.

I caught one myself and taught it to say, ‘ O Sir, can you look at a bird like me and say that I am not worth one hundred pounds?’ Then I went on my way, carrying the bird in a cage. That night, as I slept in the bush, some thieves came and stole all my money. They had not removed my handkerchief or the knife from my pocket. And I still had my little green bird. But they had taken everything else.

The next morning I walked sadly into a town called Yelwa. The first person I saw was Malam Zurke! I cried as usual,

native	remove	handkerchief	knife
pocket			

‘Zurke dan Muhamman!’ He looked back and answered, ‘Himma dai dan Shehu!’ He said to me, ‘We ought to forget all our quarrels and the bad things we’ve done to each other.’

‘Yes,’ I agreed. ‘Many of them were my fault.’ So we shook hands and resolved to remain worthy of each other’s trust for the rest of our lives.

I told Malam Zurke about the thieves who had stolen all my money. ‘You will have to sell your talking bird,’ he said.

So the next day we went to the market. When we got there a man asked me, ‘What kind of bird is that? Do you wish to sell it?’

‘It is a talking bird,’ I answered. ‘I will sell it to you if you wish.’

‘It’s a pretty bird,’ the man said. ‘I like its long green tail. How much do you want for it?’

‘A hundred pounds. It’s a very special bird,’ I explained.

‘A hundred pounds!’ the man shouted. ‘You must be mad!’

‘It’s worth that,’ I said. ‘If you don’t believe me, ask the bird.’

He looked surprised, but he turned to the bird and asked, ‘Are you really worth a hundred pounds?’

The bird answered in the words I taught it: ‘O Sir, can you look at a bird like me and say I am not worth a hundred pounds?’ The man laughed and gave me the money.

A few days later I asked the chief of the town to call his people together and ask them if they knew where Ruwan Bagaja was. At first nobody spoke. Then an old man said he knew

fault resolve worthy of tail explain

about it. I asked him where he came from and he said he was born in Nassarawa. I knew he must be the elder brother of the first old man.

He said, 'Ruwan Bagaja is in the land of Irami, which is the country of evil spirits. It is on top of a high mountain called Kaf. No man can go there. I have forgotten the name of the well where the water is. No man can go there. It is guarded by wild animals and other strange creatures. There are certain words which you have to say before you can get any water. There are also a few rules which you must follow, but I cannot remember what they are.'

The next day I took a boat and proceeded to the land of Irami. There was a storm in the night and our boat was overturned. All the other people in the ship were drowned, but I succeeded in reaching land. I found myself all alone on an island. There were no trees. All I could see was water, with high cliffs behind me.

I found a cave in the cliffs and entered. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. There was no food on this island, and with nothing to eat I must surely die. I lay down in the cave, waiting for death.

Suddenly the ground opened beneath me, and a man came out. I asked him his name and where he came from. He told me—and I knew at once that he was my evil stepbrother, Sakimu, who had killed three of my father's wives. He had also tried to kill my mother, all because of the dream he had about the seed that came from my father's stomach.

I asked Sakimu if he remembered that dream, and I told him

creature rule proceed cliff beneath



Then I cut off his head.

who I was. I looked around me, and suddenly I saw a sword. I took it in my hands and cried out to Sakimu in a loud voice. Then I cut off his head, crying, 'Now my father's honour is pure once again!'

sword honour pure

ALHAJI RETURNS HOME

After I had cut off Sakimu's head I took a cloth and cleaned the sword.

Immediately a spirit appeared and said, 'O master, I will do anything you tell me to do!'

'Who are you?' I asked in surprise.

He touched his head and then his breast, and bowed low before me. 'I am the spirit of the sword,' he answered. 'And I possess great power. You now own the sword, so I am your slave.'

When I heard this I was filled with joy and I said eagerly, 'Very well. Take me to the place where I can obtain the Water of Cure, Ruwan Bagaja.'

When he heard this he gave a terrible cry. 'Oh, I haven't the power to do that, master!' he said. 'But I will take you to an older evil spirit and perhaps he will help you. He is the only one who is able to go to that strange place.'

Straightaway we went to a large cave near the city of Irami. The slave of the sword said to me, 'He is inside the cave.'

I went inside the entrance and I saw a very old and evil-looking spirit. I bowed to the ground in front of him, and told him why I had come. I hid nothing from him and placed myself at his mercy.

He laughed a terrible laugh when I told him about Sakimu. 'It is good that you have killed him,' he said. 'I owe you my

breast eagerly terrible mercy owe



I saw a very old and evil-looking spirit.

thanks for that, because my own son was slain by him. I am the king of all the evil spirits on this earth,' the terrible creature continued. 'I will show you where you can find Ruwan Bagaja, because you have been brave enough to come so far.'

I spent the night with the spirit and his children inside the cave. The next morning he called me and said, 'Listen very carefully to everything I say to you on this occasion. If you disobey me you will surely die.'

When I heard this I bowed low and said, 'Very well. May God help me!'

The spirit led me outside the entrance to the cave. He pointed his finger towards the city. 'Look at that high mountain in the centre of the city,' he said. 'The city is the home of all evil spirits of the world; it is called the city of Irami. The mountain is called Mount Kaf. When you reach the city you will see these words written on the entrance gates: *La Tas'al*. That means "Don't ask questions". Don't take any notice of anything you see. Just go straight to the mountain with this sword.' He gave me a sharp sword. 'As soon as you enter the city, begin singing this song: "Wa yaf'alu fi hukmihi ma yasha'u. Ta'alal ilahu wa jallal hikam." Continue to sing it until you have obtained the water. Then depart from that place as fast as you can. Do you understand me so far?'

I bowed my head and replied, 'Yes, I understand you.'

'You will see many strange things,' the spirit went on. 'You will see a cow milk a Fulani woman. You will see a horse ride a youth, and you will hear a dog talk. You will see a goat catch a lion, and a man give birth to a baby. And you will see

slain occasion disobey sharp depart youth

many other wonderful things. But if you stop to look at them, or attempt to speak to them, you will surely die. If you sing the song, however, the evil spirits will know that you know God, and they will not harm you. But you must not attempt to hit anything with the sword, even if you think it is going to kill you. Nothing will happen to you, unless you fail to follow my orders. When you get to a large golden palace, go inside. You will see twelve rooms in a row. Count five rooms from the right, and then enter the sixth. The well is in that room. It is called the Well of Sinaini. It will only open if you say the correct words. These words are "Open, in the name of the wise Solomon, son of David. O Solomon, O Solomon, O Solomon!" When it opens, you must take a brass pot to collect the water. Do not stop singing that song. Take this small bottle to put the water in. You must not take too much. Fill this bottle and take it home. The water is the cure for every illness. Now goodbye! May God bring you back in safety.'

I took the bottle, thanked the spirit for his help, and set off for the city. By this time it was six o'clock in the evening, and it was already growing dark. I felt tired and a little frightened, and I decided to wait until tomorrow before I set forth on my dangerous journey.

The next morning at dawn I went to the centre of the city and began to climb the mountain. I saw all the things the spirit had told me I would see. I obeyed his orders, however, and I did not stop once. I found the palace and went inside. I saw the twelve rooms in a row, just as he had said. I began to count them, and then I stopped in alarm. During the night

attempt	row	brass	bottle	safety	o'clock
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I was attacked from all sides.

I had forgotten which room I must enter! Was it the fifth room from the right, or the sixth? I just couldn't remember!

For a long time I stood in doubt. Then I thought, 'Well—I'll try the fifth door. No great harm can come to me.' And I entered the fifth door.

Immediately I stepped inside I heard a voice say, 'He has made a mistake! Beat him, everybody!'

Suddenly there was a great noise of shouting and laughter and I was attacked from all sides. One evil spirit struck my shoulder with a heavy stick. Another hit my head with a stone. I struggled breathlessly, but there were too many of them. I was soon knocked down. Then two of the spirits carried me out of the palace and threw me down the mountain-side. My leg was broken.

I lay there in great pain for some time, and then I remembered that I still had my sword. I rubbed it with my hand, and the slave of the sword appeared at once. He took me in his arms and carried me back to the king of the evil spirits.

The king saw me covered with blood, and he said, 'This time you were lucky enough to escape alive. Next time, the evil spirits will kill you if you make a mistake. As soon as your leg is better you must go back. Don't delay too long, or you will fail again.'

After twenty days I was able to walk again and I went back to the golden palace. This time I made no mistakes. Evil spirits appeared to me in terrible shapes, but I took no notice. Singing my song, I took the water out of the well with the brass pot. I poured it carefully into the little bottle, and returned to the king of the evil spirits. He received me with joy.

After I had rested for seven days the king of the evil spirits said, 'It is time now for you to return home. I will help you to go home as fast as possible. Take this ring. If you get into any trouble, rub the ring and a spirit will come and help you.'

I put the ring on my finger and put the small bottle of water safely into my pocket. The next day I thanked the king of the

struck	shoulder	struggle	knock down
delay			

evil spirits, and set off on my homeward journey.

I had to travel across the sea, so I found a small boat and climbed into it. I was on the sea for many days, and I lost hope of ever seeing land again. One day I woke from a deep sleep and found that my boat had stopped. I looked round me, and saw that I was in some kind of well.

I could hear people talking up above me. They were speaking my own language—Hausa. I shouted for help but they did not hear me. Then one of them said, ‘I want some water,’ and he let down a bucket into the well. I took hold of the bucket and pulled the rope.

I heard someone say, ‘Who is holding my bucket? There must be somebody down there.’

I shouted, ‘Please help me. I fell in last night.’

A rope was cast down for me at once, and I climbed up. I was very wet and my hair had grown down to my shoulders. I must have looked very strange. At first the people would not believe that I was a real man.

‘I am real!’ I told them. ‘Give me some meat and water first. I am very hungry and thirsty. The water down there was full of salt. Afterwards I’ll tell you my story.’

The emir asked someone to bring me food and I ate it hungrily. Then I asked where I was.

‘You’re in the city of Kano,’ replied the emir.

‘I’m in Nigeria, then?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ he answered. I asked him if he knew where KONTAGORA was, and he said, ‘It’s about fifteen days’ journey from here.’

homeward	cast	meat	thirsty	salt
afterwards				

‘I don’t know how I came here,’ I said, and the emir led me back to the famous well of Mai Burgame.

‘You came through there,’ he said. ‘It’s a wonder that you’re alive to tell your story.’

‘The well must be joined to the sea,’ I explained. ‘I came on a long voyage across the sea, and suddenly I found myself in the well.’

Everybody was very surprised, and I told them my whole story, describing my experiences.

After I had rested for ten days the emir gave me gifts of horses and clothes and sent me right to my house in Kontagora. It was fifteen years since the day I left my home. The imam came out to the gate, but he did not know me. I had changed so much. I had set out as a lad of fifteen, and returned as a full grown man of thirty.

I told him who I was, and he put his arms round me and wept for joy. When my mother saw me she knew who I was at once, and she also wept for joy. All the town came to see me, and Mai Sudan, the emir of Kontagora, sent me a message of greeting. Nobody knew why I had left home, or what I had brought back with me.

That night I told the imam and my mother all about my journeys, and I took out the bottle of water to show it to them. I cried aloud in grief. Most of the water had fallen out while I was in the boat. The bottle was almost empty!

When the imam heard this, he went at once to the palace to tell Mai Sudan. The emir sent for me. After he heard my story he ordered his servants to prepare a splendid feast in my honour.

voyage describe lad empty splendid



He jumped to his feet and laughed happily.

I asked him whether his son was still ill and he replied sadly, 'Every doctor in the land has tried to make him well again, but he grows weaker every day.'

I took a small piece of grass and placed it in the Ruwan Bagaja bottle. Then I cut up the grass, put it in a cup of water and gave it to the boy to drink. In a moment he jumped to his feet and laughed happily. He was quite well again!

The king was filled with wonder and surprise at the wonderful nature of the Ruwan Bagaja.

After a time I decided to rub my ring. The slave of the ring appeared, and I told him the names of the towns where I had left my belongings and my wives. He carried me there and we brought everything back.

I still have the ring in my possession. It is a great comfort to me. I shall leave it to my descendants when I die. If I ever wish to see Malam Zurke, or any of my other friends in distant places, I can rub my ring and the spirit will take me there. He brings me anything I need. Even this house of mine was built by the spirits in one night.

And that, my friend, is the end of my story. You may believe it or not, as you wish!

doctor	nature	comfort	descendant
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LIST OF TOPIC WORDS

Arab

Arabic

bucket

bull

courtier

cow

cure

emir

fish

fright

funeral

give birth to

hyena

Islam

lion

mend

mosque

necklace

palace

pound (£)

saint

seed

stepbrother

stepfather

stepson

thread

world

