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## The Man with No Name

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'And who do we have today?' Asked the Badmash Badshah .

'I don't know your highness' said the Court Crier. 'The prisoner stubbornly refuses to give his name.'

'I don't have any!' cried the Prisoner miserably.

'Nonsense' said the Badmash Badshah 'everybody has a name, a surname, a nickname, a pet name. Take me for example. I've got dozens. My real name is Badshah-e-alam Zabardast Kasai Dhulelal Sikandar Nusrat Fateh Ali Cuddles Hajami.'

'Cuddles?' Said the Boy.

The Badmash Badshah looked bashful.' My mother used to call me that.'

'I too once had a name my mother called me.' Said the prisoner, sighing sadly. 'How I lost it is a long story.'

'Go ahead' Said the Badmash Badshah. 'We have all night.'

'My mother and I lived in Jhumri Talaiya your Highness. My father had died when I was very young and we were very poor. I don't remember him too well. In fact, I don't remember anything too well. In fact, I have a very bad memory. In fact' said the prisoner looking sheepish and standing on one leg 'I can't tell you my name because I've forgotten what it is.'

'Forgotten what it is?!' said the Badmash Badshah 'surely your mother remembers it!'

'That's part of the story too. You had better hear it all. If I don't forget it before I finish that is. My father was the village

dhobi. When he died my mother took over. She washed the clothes and I ironed and delivered them and we managed. Well most of the time. I normally delivered the clothes in the morning and then spend the day figuring out who I'd delivered what too. I never quite remembered you see. Mother used to say - son, one day you'll forget your own name.' He prisoner sighed deeply. 'But we were happy your Highness. Until the letter arrived. I remember the day so clearly. I had just returned from returning the Havalgars uniform to him. It had gone to the Maulvi by mistake. Unfortunately I couldn't remember where the Maulvi's Achkan had got to. I was busy wondering whether I had given it to the milkman, or the panwalla, when the postman came to the door. I gave a little trembling leap of joy when I saw him, because he was wearing the Train Conductors shirt. So now the question was who had I given the Postmans uniform to? Of course Mother and I forgot about clothes the minute he handed the letter over.

'I am coming for a visit it said. Keep all ready.' It was signed Megabelele Aghountunkinki Maga. In small letters at the bottom it said 'P.S. Alias Your brother Munna'.

'Son!' my Mother cried 'Do you remember your Uncle?'

'Er no' I said. I was having enough trouble remembering who I had given the Dudhwalas pyjamas to.

'Stupid question' she said, sighing and returning to the letter. There was PPS that said ' I am now rich and successful.' And a PPS that said 'Filthy rich actually.'

Mother said ' You were just a tiny boy when he went off to seek his fame and fortune in Africa. Well apparently he's found it. And he's coming to visit us. Do you know what that means?'

I didn't. Actually I'd forgotten what we were talking about.

'Uncle. Visit. Money' said mother patiently ' Presents. Rich. End of problem. We must make sure his visit is a successful one. Quick! Run next door and borrow some baswati chaval !'

I came back with some tea leaves and half a boiled onion, by which time mother had made a long list of what was to be done.

You never saw such cleaning and scrubbing as went on in our house. 'This time son' said mother 'Try not to forget what you're doing. We must make his visit a success.' I was ready to do my very best. I made long lists of what had to be done, and then made lists of the lists and in between running around finding the lists, I scrubbed and cleaned and got the house spick and span. By the day Uncle was supposed to come the house was ready and mother was hysterical. She took me aside for a quick bit of advice.

'Now remember ' said Mother ' Your Uncle is an extremely hot tempered man. At least he used to be and I don't suppose he's changed. Be careful not to offend him in any way.'

I promised that I wouldn't forget and mother looked at me and sighed.

'I won't too' I said

'Try to remember' she said again

'Of course I will' I said ' Er ... just remind me again quickly what I have to remember.'

But Uncles arrival was enough to make anybody forget everything. The first we knew of it was when all the neighbourhood dogs set up a howling that could be heard for streets, and our dog shot out the back door with his tail between his legs. We went to the door to see what was the matter and there down the dusty road came a procession like all of Jumri Talaiya had never seen. There were Elephants, and tumblers doing seventeen somersaults at one go, and fire swallows swallowing buckets of purple flame. There were head hunters as black as night and seven feet tall all dressed in lion tails and feathers. There was a whole troupe of pygmies who grinned and brandished spears. There were men with

rings in their ears and bones through their noses. And last of all came Uncle, with a purple parrot on his shoulder, leading a leopard on a leash that was studded with rubies.

'Oh dear' said mother 'How embarrassing! What will the neighbours think?'

'Sister!' said Uncle, embracing mother. 'I have been longing for just this for years. A quiet little family reunion.'

Mother looked around at the tumblers and the jugglers, and the trumpeting elephants and the pygmies who were doing handstands on the roof and said 'Quite.'

'Just my little following. Do they bother you?' said Uncle

'Well you see' said mother 'I don't think we'll have space enough to keep them all.'

'No problem' said Uncle, waving an airy hand and making them all disappear. Mother gave a nervous shriek and clutched her heart.

'I am sister' said Uncle ' A magician. A most famous Magician.'

'How nice' said Mother nervously, as the leopard rubbed against her knees 'I am so happy for you Munna.'

'Munna!' cried Uncle gnashing his teeth, while his beard turned a peculiar shade of blue. 'My name is Megabelele Aghountunkinki Maga. It would do you well to remember it.'

'It wasn't for the last thirty years' said mother

'Ah' said Uncle 'But now I am a famous magician known in 53 countries Asia wide. You can't expect me to be called Munna. And this is my nephew. Not a very smart looking fellow.'

I grinned and bowed and tried to look intelligent while the leopard rubbed his head against my knees. 'Er kitty' I said 'Nice kitty'.

Uncle shade turned a virulent yellow ' He is not a nice kitty. His name is Zabimba. It would do you good to remember it. And the parrot is Ougamouga Mamishi. It would do you good to remember that too.'

Every time he said 'remember' I quickly scribbled on the cuff of my brand new shirt. This time I was determined there would be no chance of forgetting.

'Why don't we all go into the house and have a spot of something to eat Munn- Megabelele Aghountunkinki Maga' said mother, running out of breath on the last word.

We went into the house, leopard, parrot and all, and I muttered frantically to myself as I tried to memorize Uncles name. Zabimba. Oops! That was the parrot. Or was it?

That evening we had the strangest dinner I have ever had in my life. Uncle took one look at the table and said 'How charmingly - rustic'. Then he snapped his fingers and the table was laden with the most wondrous dishes you could imagine. He sat himself at the head of the table and looked pointedly at a leg of mutton until it obediently fell into neat slices and slid over to where he could reach comfortably for it. 'Do you mind if I smoke before dinner? ' said Uncle, reaching for his pipe. 'Drat I've forgotten my matches again.' He snapped his fingers and turned himself into a dragon. The dragon breathed flame through one nostril to set it's pipe alight and then calmly smoked while it told us stories. Wonderful stories that came from furthest Africa. Stories of Men who turned into panthers and ran under the full moon, and children who talked all day in the tongues of the birds. Of forests where the flowers glowed like living flame and every leaf was a green gem. Of clearings deep in the woods where the elephants gathered to dance all night long, of waterholes where the animals plunged in and emerged as beautiful young girls and boys who played and sang under the tamarind tree all day and turned back into animals at night.

And while he talked, the dishes rose and floated across the table to whoever wanted them, and the sherbet poured itself into the glasses, and the parrot sang the latest hits it had picked up in the bazaars of Timbuktu. The leopard lay under the table and purred to itself. Midway through the first course, the dragon gave a cough and a start and turned back into Uncle. 'Sorry' he said 'I always have to do that to light my pipe when I can't find my matches.'

At the end of dinner I rose to escort Uncle from the room. 'This way Uncle' I said.

He scowled at me 'Not Uncle -' he said.

'I know I know' I said hastily, turning back the cuff of my shirt. And horrors! I had quite forgotten that I had changed into a clean one for dinner!.

'Well?' said Uncle

'This way Magantoukinikinaka' I said, taking the plunge and hoping for the best.

'What did you say?' said Uncle, as his beard turned an ominous shade of puce.

'I meant of course' I added, bowing and scraping like mad 'Makanakagogo'.

'What?!!' said Uncle, as his beard began to turn purple.

'Which is another way of saying' I got in desperately, trying not to catch mother's agonized eye 'Mananagambagumbolo.'

'Insult upon Insult! And then injury!' Cried Uncle 'Do you know what Mananagambagumbolo means in Swahili?' When he told us, my mother lost her breath and turned bright pink.

'Rude and audacious boy' said Uncle, grinding his teeth and smoking a little at the edges ' May you lose your *own* name and *never* find it.'

'No' cried my mother 'Don't curse my poor son. My beloved, my precious, my one and only... *what* did you say your name was?'

'Mother' I cried 'I'm your son. Your son --er-- um...' And - I couldn't remember! I scratched my head, I stood on one leg. I ran around in circles with my eyes closed. But all to no avail. It had gone clean out of my head and nothing seemed to make it come back. I flung myself at my mothers feet.

'Mother' I cried ' Don't you know me?'

'Of course I'd know you anywhere. You are my precious son - er son - er - Whatchamacallim.'

'Mother!' I cried

'You've been named after your father who was called - er - er Thigummybob.'

'At least' I cried weeping bitterly 'At least remember my nickname.'

'Of course I do' said mother ' I've been calling you by it for years my dearest - sniffles? Ghontu? Shona? Boobool? Dhakkan? Gadbadjhala?'

'It's no use I said,' breaking down and weeping bitterly.

'We will have to find it.' Said mother with determination

' But how?' I wailed.

'Munna' said Mother while Uncle started and his beard turned a violent shade of peach.' Stop this nonsense immediately or I shall smack your wrist.'

'You would dare lay a hand on Megabelele Aghountunkinki Maga'' said Uncle drawing himself up to his full height.

'Yes I would. You've always been Munna to me. And a pestilential little brat you were too. Many is the time I slapped your bottom. I only wish I had done it more often. Stop looking down your nose at me, your whiskers need trimming.'

Uncle subsided a little meekly and said 'Erm'

'Enough of this curse business, or may the curse of an elder sister be upon you. Give my son back his name immediately'

Uncle stood on one leg and said ' But I'm a magician. I can't take back a curse so easily. Think of what it'll do to my reputation.'

'Think of what it'll do to my son' said Mother ' He can't go through life being known as Hey you! How will he ever get a ration card made? Or a dentists appointment?'

'Oh all right' said Uncle sulkily ' I'll give you a hint.'

'Quick' said Mother 'Get pen and paper and write it down.'

And this is what Uncle said

'My first is in Krishna and also in Kans  
My second in Aangan and andhera and Hans  
I'll not and never give you my third  
My fourth is in hiding, haven't you heard?  
You'll find the next letter in all, always.  
I think I can see what the next letter says  
Why? Why? Just answer completely  
And put the first last to end it all neatly'

Mother and I looked at each other in dismay 'That's as bad as no hint at all' I said

'That's all you'll get out of me' said Uncle ' I am going sister. But if your son ever manages to figure out what his name is, I shall return and reward him. But he doesn't look awfully smart to me.' And he disappeared in a puff of smoke before mother could box his ears. He reappeared a second later giving us a

start, and said ' Here kitty. Nice kitty' The leopard crawled out from under the table, and the two of them walked into thin air.

'Now what?' I said, but mother was already busy packing.

'Here you are son' she said ' I know you'll be able to find your name, whatever other people may say about your face.'

I took my bag with a breaking heart 'Goodbye mother' I said

'Good bye my dearest er um.' She said ' May god be with you my precious ahem.'

And I set out that very day and have been searching for my name ever since' said the Prisoner 'You can't imagine what a bother it is not having a name. I made a scraping sort of living for a while, hiring myself out as a party of the first part for lawsuits. But it told on my nerves. It was no use going to see a doctor. Have you ever tried to get an appointment without a name? Collecting my clothes from the Dhobi is such a nightmare that I've been reduced to one pair of shorts and a vest. And I never get enough sleep. I'm forever being woken up by Yamraj in the middle of the night and told my time is come. He's said I'd better get myself a name, or I'm going to be in hell before I know it. And' said the Prisoner, breaking down and crying ' It's awful being called 'Hey you! And Next! All the time. What do I do?!!!'

The Badmash Badshah smiled widely and said 'Simple.' He snapped his fingers and the Chief Torturer stepped forward. 'There's nothing we haven't been able to abstract from unwilling people. Sometimes they've even confessed to things they had no idea they'd done. Shall we begin with a little gentle interrogation?'

The Chief Torturer grunted and produced a few whips and saws and things. The prisoner turned as white as a sheet.

'Spill it' said the Chief Torturer briefly out of the side of the mouth. 'Is your name Sodawaterbottleopenerwala?'

'Er.. no' said the Prisoner.

'Is it Moolchandraichand Jeejeebhoy?'

'I don't think so' said the Prisoner

'Is it Rampiyare?'

'No'

'Is it Hashmukhrai?'

'No'

'is it Karoremal?'

'No'

'Is it Shahabzade Ali Saheb Pataudi?'

No'

'Is it Screwvala?'

'No'

'Latkantappu? Gadbadjhala? Meetodictofus?'

'No. No. No' said the Prisoner, breaking down and crying.

'A tough nut' said the Chief Torturer ' But we have ways to make you talk. Shall we try Method Number Twenty Seven? The one that requires the thumb screws and feathers?'

'Goody!' said the Badmash Badshah while the Prisoner tried to crawl under the carpet.

'If I may interrupt your Highness' said the Boy. 'It Might be simpler to try and solve the riddle.'

' Oh All *right*.' Said the Badmash Badshah 'but we were just starting to have fun.'

'I have it!' cried the Prime Minister suddenly starting out of the light doze he had fallen into 'Your name is Alphonso!'

'It is not' said the prisoner

'Alisdair!' cried the Court Crier.

'No' said the Prisoner looking distinctly unamused.

The whole court joined in enthusiastically ' Tuktuki? Minmini? Pappu? Pinky?Sweetie?'

'I believe' said the Boy, when the shouting had died down. 'that I have the answer already.'

'Show off! said the Badmash Badshah, sulking ' Bet you don't too!'

'It is -' said the Boy and there was a moment of suspense that was quite ruined by the Prime Minister quickly yelling 'Palladio!'.

'It is' said the Boy 'Kanhaiya.'

And if you think about it, you will see that he was right.

The prisoner pointed a trembling finger at the Boy. 'Kanhaiya! that's me! Kanhaiya! Kanhaiya! Known as Kanwa for short!'

'Another happy ending ' said the Badmash Badshah while the Torturer grumbled and sulkily packed away his whips and thumbscrews.

'Thank you thank you thank you' cried Kanhaiya ' Now at last I can go back to my mother.'

The Badmash Badshah beamed ' You may go Kanwa' he said genially.

' Thank you Thank you your most gracious -' Kanhaiya stopped. A look of consternation came over his face ' er um' he ended weakly and took to his heels.

'CUT OFF HIS --' howled the Badmash Badshah.

But he was gone.