



KAROKI AND THE STRAY PEKINGESE DOG

Children's Edition

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KAROKI

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story time

It was a beautiful day, after four days of unceasing rain over the city. It was now ten in the morning, and as the sun rose steadily, a young freelance photographer strolled casually around the recreation park called Igulu Freedom Park. The young man was Karoki and he was a self-taught photographer. His casual stroll was actually not so much a stroll as a search for clients interested in a photo or two.

Igulu Freedom Park was the most popular venue of recreation to a wide range of citizens. It was a large expanse of steadily-rising ground away from the busy central business district, often referred to as the CBD and had few buildings. It was all covered in beautiful lawn grass, kept trim by a section of workers from the city council, and several features were of particular interest to the hundreds of citizens flocking to this place every weekend.

There was an artificial lake, not deeper than three and a half feet, covering a generous proportion of the park in an amorphous configuration. On this, and again run by the city



council workers who kept the park's grass trimmed, a person could get a ride on small open boats. The boats were constructed of strong fiberglass bodies, with appropriate attachments to hold oars. Even children visiting the park could hardly resist the urge to continually plead with parents, guardians or charges until they got a ride. Occasionally, a family or group could be seen riding together.

Another feature that attracted many was the neatly-built restaurant, part of the few buildings in the park. Here, drinks and a wide variety of food could be bought, as well as

numerous indoor games played. The restaurant's front provided ample and secure parking for a good number of vehicles.

Other features were a beautiful artistic stone structure in abstract art form, various swings and slides and a fish-pond in which beautiful, vividly coloured fishes kept many attendants kneeling around the pond fringes to watch.

With the exception of food and drinks sold by numerous vendors around Igulu Park, the only other payments visitors were expected to meet were for the boat rides and photography. This being the case, the park had long become the favourite place of relaxation for many idlers, job-seekers, workers from surrounding businesses during lunch breaks, poor people needing to rest on arrival to the city, students



from outlying schools and colleges, families looking for some quality time together, couples trying to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city, and many others. These were all, with few exceptions, people of average means of life. The affluent of the city's dwellers rarely came here.

Karoki sat down in one of the numerous concrete benches built around Igulu Park. After several hours of looking for clients to take pictures of, he was frustrated.

"I know there are many photographers all over the park," he mused, "But it's a weekend, and month's end at that."

He couldn't understand this. His faithful Canon camera, looking worn, hung from a leather strap around his neck. In it, a film with thirty six exposures was still unused. It was hard going of late and Karoki couldn't help remembering the success of previous years with nostalgia.

Over the years, house rents around the city's residential estates, had steadily risen, forcing Karoki to live on the outskirts of the city in an area called Nyagi Hillrise. To one side of this area covered by tea-estates and farms, small shopping centres with residential plots behind them had grown over the years to become small towns. With this growth, demand for land grew and farms were sold and consequently sub-divided by businessmen.

These were soon developed into business premises and residential houses. It was in one of these small shopping areas that Karoki had found a house whose rent he could afford. He had managed to buy himself a bicycle, on which he rode during his excursions to the city centre. This enabled him to save much money that he would have otherwise spent on fare.

As Karoki sat in deep thought, he wondered whether there was any future in photography.

“Perhaps I am living in the stone-age,” he concluded.

“With modern digital photography enabling studio owners to cut prices of photos by almost half, we freelancers have no hope!”

Not only had Karoki found the competition too stiff against digital technology, but operations in some areas of his work were now “no-go” zones. With heightened insecurity around the city, residential areas that would have been lucrative to seek clients in, were now inaccessible. The wealthy and luxurious estates in several regions of the city had become too stringent in their security to allow access to people like Karoki. He had been denied entry in some, with the simple message, “No hawkers allowed!” No amount of explanation that he was a photographer and not a hawker could get him beyond their gates. He had concluded that only God could break this stale-mate making survival difficult.



One morning as Karoki rode from home towards the city, he was surprised to see what looked like a white bundle by the side of the road. To one side of this particular area, a vast expanse of tea bushes grew. Karoki knew that beyond this tea estate lay one of the most beautiful residential estates in the city outskirts. He had tried venturing into this area only three weeks previously but been denied entry right at the first barrier.

Karoki was shocked to see that the white bundle was actually alive! It appeared to be a small, very fluffy dog. Its tiny form

shivered in the morning cold as it lay at the base of a large tree by the road.

“Why, you poor little thing!” Karoki exclaimed loudly.

“You must have lost your way from the executive Roody Rise Complex. I can’t let you die of cold, little one. Come puppy, come!”

He made soothing sounds, and the tiny dog jumped into his outstretched arms. Karoki then unzipped his large leather jacket. He loved this jacket because it protected him from the chilly morning cold as he rode on his bicycle. It was lined with soft fur on the inside, and had numerous, large pockets both on the inside and outside. He placed his shivering friend in one before zipping up the pocket to leave only the head of the tiny dog poking out. As soon as the dog appeared warm and comfortable Karoki resumed his ride to the city.

Unknown to Karoki, and quite as he had surmised, in Roody Rise Complex a little girl sobbed inconsolably in the arms of her father. The girl’s name was Tessy, and her father was a business magnate originally from a neighbouring country. His name was Tesfaye Menges, a father of three girls and a son, as well as husband to a lovely European woman of Italian descent. Tessy happened to be the last-born of this family, and no efforts by any of the family members to console her was succeeding.



“I must have Tommy back! I must see him daddy! I won’t eat till I see him!” Tessy screamed.

Mr. Menges had driven to town disturbed that morning. The house servants did not know where the little Pekingese, Tommy, had gone. The neighbours too did not recall seeing the tiny dog recently. Mr. Menges had finally stopped at the security barrier as he exited Roody Rise Estate on his way to work. He briefly described the little dog to the guards and urged them to make every effort to find it. Handing the most senior guard his house number as well as a wad of currency notes, he drove off in his dark blue jaguar limousine.

Later that day, in his beautiful office on the twelfth floor of the impressive ultra-modern World Habitat Conservation Headquarters' building, Mr. Menges buzzed his secretary. A beautiful and executively dressed young woman quickly entered.

"Yes, Mr. Menges?" she asked.

"Sarah, we have lost our family pet, a Pekingese dog actually, last night. Kindly organize appropriate adverts in all three newspapers, as well as the weekly magazines. Ensure that you mention a reward in all the adverts, too. Do all this before my meeting with the Directors, Okay?" Mr. Menges said.

"One question Sir," Sarah briefly stopped to enquire, "Should we say how much the reward is to be?"

"Of course, Sarah dear, I forgot. A hundred thousand should be okay."

Mr. Menges, later while in deep thought, concluded that a

Hundred thousand shillings was a small price to pay, in comparison to Tessy's grief at the loss of Tommy.

Although the adverts containing the quest for a lost Pekingese dog went a full fortnight, no response was received.

Back at Roody Rise Complex, Mr. Menges was having the worst nightmare of his life! Why, if he didn't take appropriate action soon, his blood pressure promised future chaos. Where was the little thing? And why did Tessy value it so highly? Even at nine years of age, and able to reason better, Tessy had lately screamed at her father in tears.

“Daddy, how can you offer me another dog when Tommy is missing? Have you no feelings?”

He had, admittedly, felt rather silly after this outburst for offering Tessy a replacement dog.

As various shades of drama unfolded in Mr. Menges home, Karoki took great pride in taking care of Tommy, the tiny puppy. Since finding it by the roadside, he had made sure he passed by a friend's butchery every evening before getting home. Here, he would collect remains of that day's sales of boiled soup, roast meat and fried meat dishes. There was, on any day, a ready supply of these left -overs. Tommy soon grew quite plump. Karoki also made sure he got the little dog de-wormed in the first few days and he had also bought a dog shampoo with which he washed the little fellow every three days. Soon Tommy looked like he was a prize dog at a dog show!

“I must be crazy! Here I am doing things as if I live in Roody Rise myself! I must be joking!” he had mockingly upbraided himself one afternoon.

Not long after this, on a beautiful Sunday morning while coming home from attending church, Karoki stopped to buy some fruit at a small roadside vendor's kiosk. Some distance ahead of this place, the road that turned to the right was the main access road to Roody Rise Complex Houses.

Karoki had taken the little dog with him, as he always did when going out. He had bought a beautiful, red-leather collar for it, as well as a long dog-leash. He now thought of letting it play near the place where he sat, still at the end of the leash. As he ate his fruit, his bicycle leaning against a tree nearby, Karoki enjoyed the morning sun. The dog happily jumped around, yapping in delight as it ran in circles. Its coat was glossy white, and Karoki was happy to see it looking so healthy.

There was suddenly a loud squeal of brakes! It so startled Karoki that he was sure someone had just got knocked down by the blue limousine! It immediately reversed until it was opposite Karoki. Proceeding to park by the roadside, the driver unlocked the doors to the car and Karoki was shocked to see a little girl come running towards him.

"Tommy, Tommy! My little darling is it you?" she shouted, approaching Karoki.

Tears ran down her face, and Karoki then realized that it was the little dog that she was so happy to see. The tiny dog seemed to recognize her too, and happily barked and yelped as it jumped into her arms!

“What a re-union!” Karoki thought as he recovered from shock at the events dramatically unfolding around him.

Presently, two bigger girls and a young man came to join the first girl. They were all so smart and clean that Karoki felt a little shabby in their presence. An elderly man who had been the driver presently came and stopped to greet Karoki.

“Hello young man .Do you speak English?” he asked.

“Hello sir. Yes I do speak English,” Karoki replied.

“What is your name, young man? And is this your dog,” the man continued.

“My name is Karoki, Sir, and this dog is not mine. I found it by the road about two months ago. It was cold and looked lost. I have been taking care of it since then.” Karoki explained.

“What is your name, young man? And is this your dog,” the man continued.

“My name is Karoki, Sir, and this dog is not mine. I found it by the road about two months ago. It was cold and looked lost. I have been taking care of it since then.” Karoki explained.

Mr. Menges proceeded to narrate to Karoki how they had lost the dog and had been looking for Tommy all this time.

“Well Mr. Karoki, can you sell the dog back to us?” Mr. Menges finally asked. The children were, at this moment eagerly gathered near to hear his reply. They were shocked when Karoki spoke.

“No, I can’t sell it Sir,” Karoki spoke slowly, looking at Tessy. Before he could continue, Tessy burst into tears and grabbed Mr. Menges trouser in urgent appeal.

“Why not, Mr. Karoki? As you can see, someone here will die if she doesn’t get Tommy back!”

“I didn’t mean what you think, Sir. I meant that she can have him for free. I don’t want to feel I took advantage of you people!” Karoki quietly said.

Now there was shouting and happy jumping around by all the children. As Karoki unfastened the little dog’s collar and leash, Tessy threw her arms around Karoki and kissed his cheek.

“Daddy, this is a very good man!” She exclaimed.

Mr. Menges was shocked, but said little. In his heart he wondered,

“How can this poor-looking young man say he wants no money? It’s obvious he needs money. Can he be so chivalrous?”



Before they left shortly afterwards, Mr. Menges removed a business card from his pockets and gave it to Karoki.

“Thank you young man. Please make every effort to see me in my office tomorrow so that we can talk, okay?”

“Okay Sir. It’s been my pleasure to meet you all,” Karoki replied as he rode away. The children cheered loudly.

That evening, before going to bed, Karoki said a prayer in gratitude to God.

“Thank You for the joy of seeing that little creature return to the little girl, Lord,” he said. “And thank You that I did not become a burden to the father. Give me wisdom to know what to say when I meet him tomorrow,” he concluded.

The following day, Karoki followed directions given to him by various people and finally found the grand building in which Mr. Menges worked. As he arrived, Mr. Menges secretary respectfully received him. She was, unknown to Karoki, from the same community as he. As Sarah went about making the young man comfortable, she immediately took a liking to him.

“True, he does look a little shabby,” she thought. “Yet there is something pleasant about this young man.” She couldn’t quite pinpoint what it was.

Shortly afterward, as Sarah offered him some coffee, Karoki spoke gently. “I am honored to receive such kindness from such a very lovely person!”

Sarah was left speechless as Karoki sipped his coffee.

Later, the meeting with Mr. Menges went very well. Karoki answered all his questions with great respect, sharing his aspirations in photography and the challenges he faced just trying to survive. Finally, Mr. Menges spoke.

“Mr. Karoki, I am in the process of establishing one of the largest modern studios in a very executive area of the city,” Mr. Menges began. “It will feature state-of-the-art technology and equipment. I see a quality in you that I have not encountered before in this country. I would like to make you the Director of this business. What do you think?”

Karoki was nearly rendered speechless by this unbelievable opportunity.

“I have no words to express how thankful I am, sir,” he finally replied. “I accept and only hope I can perform to your expectations.”

“Very good, Karoki!” Mr. Menges said, visibly pleased. “The position is effective immediately. However, I will need to send you out of the country first. This will be for training on the features and applications of every aspect of this modern technology. Do you have your birth certificate and ID?”

“I do, sir, and I am ready to avail myself whenever you are prepared to send me,” Karoki assured him firmly.

The meeting concluded with a firm handshake, and Mr. Menges personally escorted Karoki out. On the way, he briefly stopped to introduce his new Director to Sarah, his secretary.

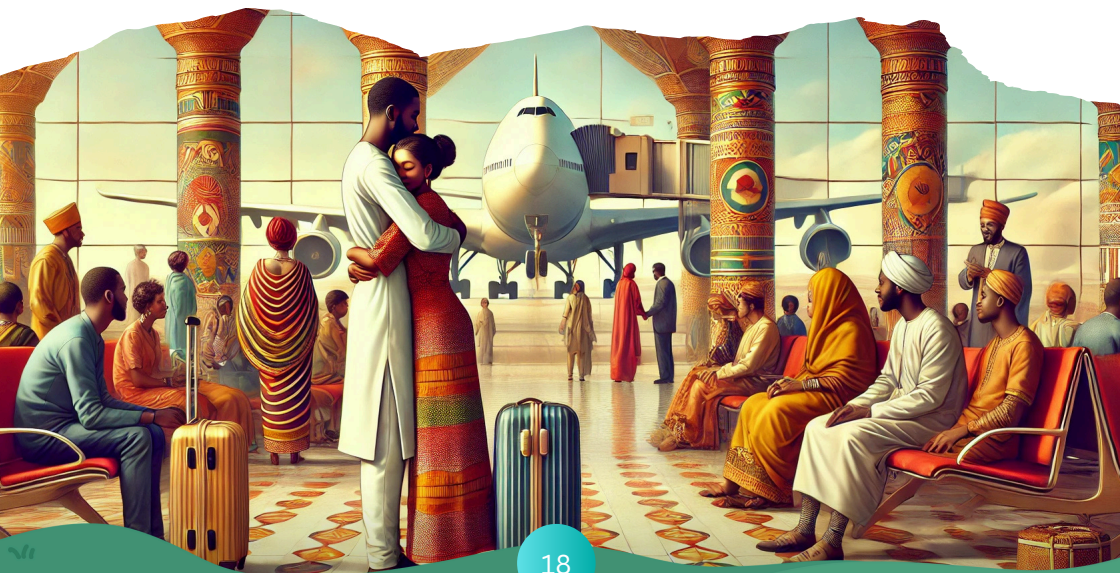


Three days later, a beaming and very smart Karoki arrived at Mr. Menges reception. Sarah was shocked beyond words at his transformation. He was very smartly dressed and looked very handsome now. She found herself stealing glances at him!

Karoki's passport and travel documents were swiftly processed hereafter and he was asked to prepare to leave for Belgium for a period of three months, followed by a longer stay in London, for eight months. Karoki's preparations were completed and he flew out after a few days.

About a year passed before Karoki returned home. He was met by relatives and a few friends, all overjoyed by his return. He was shocked to see Sarah too, at the Airport. She looked more beautiful than when he left, and he hugged her warmly. She was full of joy to see him too, and was left dumb-founded when he hugged her. Unknown to Karoki, Sarah was already in love with him.

Karoki gradually settled down in the ultra-modern studios of Mr. Menges. He learnt much and soon became a marvelous administrator. Over time, his hard work, good administration as well as a fine perception of his work ensured that the studio of Mr. Menges very soon acquired executive status. The profits rose steadily, as did the clientele, mainly celebrities of the city.



One day, Mr. Menges summoned Karoki to his office. By this time, Karoki and Sarah's relationship had become well known, and everyone who knew them eagerly anticipated the sound of wedding bells.

As Karoki took his seat in the closed office, he was surprised when Mr. Menges came around his desk and warmly shook his hand with both of his.

"Superb! Absolutely superb, Karoki!" Mr. Menges exclaimed. "We now even have members of the First Family as our clients! Congratulations on your excellent work!"

Shortly after this, he concluded the meeting with an announcement.

"Karoki, I want you to become not just my Director but also my partner," Mr. Menges said with a broad smile. "I am extremely pleased with your work. In recognition of your efforts, I am also upgrading your benefits and company car. From now on, you'll drive a Jaguar like mine—though of a smaller capacity. It has already been ordered from Britain and should arrive in three weeks!"

"Mr. Menges sir, words fail me to express how grateful I am. I shall forever be indebted to you!" By the time he left the office, they hugged like old friends.



A few months later, Sarah wed Karoki in a colourful wedding attended by hundreds of friends, associates relatives and well-wishers. Among Sarah's bridesmaids was Tessy, Menges daughter and she could hardly sit still for joy. Her joy, however, was complete when Karoki and his wife Sarah became close neighbours to Mr. Menges in Roody Rise Complex, after their honeymoon!

Karoki gradually rose to become a partner and the Director of all Mr. Menges' studios, in addition to holding key positions in his other businesses. Over time, the Menges family became close personal friends of the Karoki family, and it was eventually hard to remember exactly how it all began.