

Noé and the panther

This is the story of the panther. When she was walking in the wild, she came across a feral cat who was out hunting.

“Tell me, old friend,” she said, “what happened to you? You are obviously my brother, but why aren’t you more like me, and how did you come to be so small?”

“Oh, dear sister,” the cat replied, “me, I live in contact with human beings, but God has preserved you from them. You are your own master: you do whatever you want. Me, I’m subject to humans. I watch them eat and when they’re done, if they’re reasonable, they give me some little thing. If they eat meat, they give me the bone. If I steal something and they see me, they beat me to the point of almost killing me. These are the conditions that have made me the way I am.”

“Come,” said the panther, “show me, so that I can see these human beings and understand what they’re like.”

So they walked together until they met a camel. The panther asked the cat, “Is that a human being?”

“Oh, no, no,” said the cat. “That, the human beings make him carry heavy burdens, they hobble him, and when they’ve put big saddlebags on him. They hit him to make him get up, and they lead him where they want him to go.”

They continued on their way until they met a horse. “Is that a human being?” the panther asked.

“Oh, no, no,” said the cat. “That thing you see there, they grab him and put iron on either side of his belly; they squeeze him and prick him with spurs; they make him gallop fast whether he wants to or not, until he’s exhausted all his strength.”

“The really amazing thing,” said the panther, “must be how these human beings are made.”

“Well, come on,” said the cat. “That’s what I’m going to show you.”

Having gone quite a ways into the forest, they met old Noé, who was sawing the trunk of a tree—or rather, to be precise, he had set the corners of the trunk ready to be split.

“Salamu aleikum,” said the panther. “Peace be with you.”

“Wa aleikum u salam,” replied Noé. “And also with you.”

“I have come, sir, to ask you some questions concerning my brother here, whom you have made as he appears now,” said the panther. “Whatever his debt may be, I will pay it, but you don’t have the right to impose such injustice on him.”

“Can you lend me a hand here,” said Noé, “and when I’ve split this trunk, I’ll give you my reply?”

“Of course,” said the panther. “Where do you want me to help you?”

“Put your hands here,” said Noé, “and hold on tight.”

The panther put her paws in the middle of the trunk, and Noé struck the splits, making them jump. The trunk closed up again with the panther’s paws inside the wood.

Then Noé pulled his axe out and began beating the panther on all sides with the handle of the ax.

“Please forgive me!” begged the panther. “I’ll never bother you again!”

“I will only let you go,” said Noé, “if you give me your word that no matter where you come upon human beings, you will never do them any harm.”

The panther gave her word and when Noé set her free, she said to the cat, “Go, my brother, and remain as God has placed you. Since you’re in relationship with these human beings, if there’s any small thing left to you, you had better not complain. Go on then: farewell.”