

THE CASE OF MOUDOU KEBBE

The receptionist in the hotel that Alassan John performed his magic tricks was friendly and helpful, and lectured me about the power and value of honesty and sincerity. He said that a dishonesty person would never attain happiness. However, later on, I heard that he had been fired by the European proprietor of the hotel for embezzling funds. One of his tricks was to falsify the duration of hotel visits and pocket the money.

During the short period of time that I stayed in the village of Fajara, I had a rather troublesome neighbour by the name of Moudou Kebbe, who was craving the bike I had borrowed from my teenage boy relative.

I had just moved into the above-mentioned hotel when Moudou, looking haggard, paid me a visit. With a trembling voice, he asked for a glass of water. It was a very hot day and he told me that he had to travel a long distance to sell ashtrays fashioned from seashells. So, could I borrow him the bike? He sat down, sighed and held his head in his hands. I felt pity for him and lent him the bike, which he promised to return in the evening.

As you have probably guessed, he didn't return the bike. I waited and waited and tried to contact him, but he was unreachable. Moudou didn't have a phone and used other peoples' handsets. It was reported that he had been seen at Serrekunda, at a golf club, at a casino, at Kotu Beach or in bars in Senegambia. It was difficult to locate him.

One day, however, I bumped into him, and sharply warned him that I would report him to the police, if he didn't return the bike. Calm, composed and wolfing his mayonnaise sandwich, he rudely told me to bugger off. If I reported him to the police, he warned me, I would only cause trouble for myself. Moudou flatly refused to come to the police station, and ran away.

I went to the nearest police station to report my case, but the clerk advised me to go to the one in my village. So, I went there, and behind the counter sat four heavily built police officers. One of them was a woman. They appeared serious, and were recording some numbers into a huge, old registry book. After reporting my case, they informed me that they did not know Moudou Kebbe, and that it was my job to arrest him and report back to them.

It was around ten in the morning when I left the police station. I called Moudou Kebbe's acquaintances and asked them to help me search for him. They readily agreed because I had healed the inflamed foot of one of their colleagues with my baking powder medication. I waited and, then sometime in the evening, the phone rang. Moudou had been spotted in Serrekunda market, but the place was too crowded to apprehend him. Then another call came in the evening at 8 o'clock. Moudou Kebbe had been spotted in Casino 77 – gambling and drinking. We drove to the casino in a taxi and called the police. They went inside and arrested him. We drove to the police station.

Moudou said that he had not stolen the bicycle but had lent it to some Spanish tourists, who had gone inland. He said that he did not have their telephone numbers, but they had promised to return the bicycle. The police chief shook his head and said that Moudou Kebbe was lying and he was insane.

Moudou maintained that he was an artist, who fashioned ashtrays out of seashells to sell to hotels and restaurants. Unimpressed, the police chief retorted that all artists are crazy, and then arrested Moudou, and dumped him into the cell - an old kiosk-sized iron cage in the reception area. We left the police station, with Moudou arrogantly peering at the police from the cage. The bicycle was still missing.

Moudou Kebbe persuaded the night shift officer to release him, and when his brother, who had agreed to be his guarantor, came to visit him in the afternoon, he was promptly arrested and locked up in the cramped iron cage. Feeling pity for him, Kebbe family revealed that the bike had all along been in their backyard.