

THE BLACKSMITH AND THE IRON MAN

The country of Uganda is famous for its blacksmiths, and all Ugandans knew that Wakaluga was the greatest blacksmith of them all.

Wakaluga was so skilled that people would come from miles around to watch him shape red-hot iron into wonderful tools with only a hammer and anvil.

One morning, when he went to his forge, Wakaluga found a very important-looking man in a white robe waiting for him. The visitor was a messenger from the king of that land.

“Wakaluga the smith! The king of Uganda has heard of your skill and wishes you to visit his court! Gather your tools, for we must leave immediately!”





The two journeyed for many days to reach the capital city, and Wakaluga was impressed by how big the buildings were, how big the crowds were, and how rich and important everyone seemed!

Wakaluga was even more impressed by the king's great palace. He was called in before the ruler, who was seated on a carved wooden throne with many servants around him. Behind him were many drummers, playing the royal drums that are very important in that kingdom.



The king was a large man with a deep and serious voice, and Wakaluga was a bit frightened. He had heard stories about how the king would punish anyone who did not obey him.

“Wakaluga the blacksmith!” said the king, “I have been told that you are the greatest metalworker in this land, and I have a task for you!”

The king nodded to his servants, who were holding sacks. The servants emptied the sacks, and many pieces of iron tumbled onto the ground.

“Wakaluga, I want you to make this iron into a man that can walk and talk and think, and has blood flowing in his veins. You have two weeks!”

Wakaluga was going to protest, saying that such a thing was impossible, but he was too nervous to speak to the king. Instead, he bowed, gathered up the pieces of iron, and left. ➡





On the side of the dusty road, Wakaluga saw a man with wild hair and ragged clothes. The man was grinning at him.

“You must be the famous blacksmith Wakaluga!” said the wild man.

“Why is the greatest blacksmith in Uganda looking so glum?”

Wakaluga replied, “The king has given me an impossible task – he wants me to make this metal in my bag into a walking, talking iron man!”

As the blacksmith walked home, carrying the heavy iron, he worried about what he could do. He did not believe he could make a living man from iron and was worried that the king would throw him in prison.

He came up with all sorts of plans. Could he make a suit of iron, and put a man inside it? Or should he just run away and go to live in another land?

The wild man laughed. “Why, when someone gives you an impossible order, there is only one thing to do! Come here, I will tell you how to get out of this!”

After the wild man had told him what to do, Wakaluga turned around and went back to the capital – and when he arrived, he asked to see the king! This is what he told the mighty ruler:



“Oh great king, to make this metal into an iron man, I will need very special water and charcoal! I need ten tons of charcoal made from human hair – and a hundred buckets of human tears. Otherwise, I cannot do as you ask!”

The king sent out messengers to the far corners of his kingdom, ordering all of his people to shave off their hair and send it to the palace – and they must also cry for him and gather their tears!

The people of Uganda did as he asked. They sent their hair to the capital where it was turned into charcoal – but when piled up it was less than one ton, and the teardrops

of all the people in the kingdom did not even fill two buckets.



When he heard this news, the king called Wakaluga before him and said, “Blacksmith, you have asked the impossible of me. I cannot give you the charcoal and the tears you need to make my man of iron!”

Wakaluga replied, “That is fine, your majesty, for you had also asked the impossible of me. No smith can make a living man of iron!”

The king realised how unreasonable his own orders had been. He burst out laughing, and let the blacksmith go home to his village. ➡

Wakaluga walked home feeling happy, and on the way he saw the wild man by the side of the road. He grinned at the man and said, “My friend! Your advice has saved me – you can come and live in my smithy, and you will never go hungry again!”

The wild man grinned, patted Wakaluga on the shoulder and said, “Thank you, blacksmith, I accept your kind offer!”

The two went off together, laughing about all that had happened. ★

DID YOU KNOW?

In earlier times, many people believed that blacksmiths were wise and special people with magical abilities!

