

St. Moses the Ethiopian (Eva Topping)

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Moses the Ethiopian was tall as a tree, strong as Samson, and black as a starless night. He was also a very wicked man. Moses had a mean temper and evil ways. Stealing was his passion.



Moses was a slave in Egypt. He belonged to a government official. Moses' master tried to curb his slave's temper and to reform him. But all his efforts proved vain. It was not possible to change a man as bad as Moses.

His master then decided to sell Moses. But everyone had heard of his evil ways and no one would be found to buy him. Who wanted a slave like Moses? The official tried to give him away. But no one would take Moses, even as a gift.

Finally, in despair, the official set Moses free. He wanted to be rid of him. So Moses the Ethiopian left his master's house, a free man to go wherever he wished, to do what he liked.

In a short time the ex-slave became the most daring and successful thief in the country. His evil reputation stretched from one end of the Nile River to the other.

In every hamlet, town and city the name of Moses the Ethiopian was known. Everyone feared him and dreaded his coming.

Once a poor shepherd unwittingly thwarted Moses in an evil act. Moses never forgave him. He waited and plotted his revenge.

One day Moses learned that the poor shepherd was across the Nile, grazing his flocks. Although the river was swollen at that time and had flooded its banks, Moses determined to cross the river and kill the shepherd who had frustrated him. So he prepared to swim the swollen river. He wrapped his clothes around his head and clenched his sharp knife with his teeth. Then he swam across to the other side of the Nile where the shepherd was grazing his flocks.

A sheep dog who guarded the flocks heard Moses' footsteps and barked, warning the shepherd of his enemy. The shepherd fled and thus escaped death at the hands of Moses. When Moses discovered that his victim had escaped, he became very angry. For a second time that stupid shepherd had outwitted him, Moses the Ethiopian, the most famous and feared thief in all of Egypt.

Furious, Moses went into the sheepfold and found the abandoned flock. Swiftly with his sharp knife he killed the four fattest lambs and tied them tightly together. Then with his clothes wrapped around his head, his knife clenched in his teeth, and with one hand holding the string to which he had tied the four fat lambs, Moses swam across the flooded river again. In his hideaway he feasted on the four lambs. He sold their skins to some leather merchants in a nearby town. This done, he rejoined his friends, a band of thieves and outlaws, and resumed his life of terror, murder and robbery.

Then one day--the reason for this is not recorded--Moses threw away his knife and entered a monastery. Moses was born again and began a new life as a monk. The new Moses lived a simple life of prayers and good works. His days were spent in singing psalms and weaving rope and baskets out of the reeds gathered by the river.

Peace replaced violence. Hate gave way to love. Evil yielded to goodness. Because of Moses' example, many of his old companions in crime began a new life.

But not all thieves knew that Moses had become a monk and had renounced his old

life. One night some thieves came to Moses' cell to kill the monk whose goodness they had heard of. They were unaware that their intended victim was none other than their old comrade, Moses the Ethiopian.

Moses awoke from his sleep when he heard them entering his cell. Without any difficulty he captured the intruders and tied them together with a strong rope that he himself had woven. Then, as if they were no heavier than a bundle of river reeds, he threw them over his huge shoulder.

He carried the terrified thieves to the monastery church where the monks were gathered for prayers. Entering the church, Moses threw the thieves down at the abbot's feet.

«Holy Father,» he said, «it is not for me a sinner to pass judgment on these wretched men, even though they came to my cell to kill me. Do whatever you wish to them.»

Until this moment in the candle-lit church the thieves had failed to recognize the tall, strong, black monk who had captured them. When they saw he was Moses the Ethiopian, who used to be the most feared and notorious outlaw, they confessed their evil deeds and repented. They too renounced the world and became monks like Moses.

Moses spent the rest of his life in the monastery. He won new renown for his godliness and good works.

In the seventieth year of his life, Moses the Ethiopian died on the twenty-eighth day of August. Seventy devoted disciples mourned the death of the saint who had led them to God.

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