

## The Game Board

Once a man in the town of Nebri carved a beautiful gebeta board for his son. He made it from the wood of an olive tree. When he was finished, he showed his son how to play games on it. The boy was very excited about having such a terrific thing. In the morning, when he went out with the cattle to the valley where they grazed, he took the gebeta board with him. Everywhere he went he carried the board under his arm.

While he followed the cattle, he came across a group of wandering Somalis with their camels gathered around a small fire in a dry riverbed.

"Where in this country of yours can a man find some wood?" one of the Somalis asked.

"Here's some wood," the boy said handing them the gebeta board, which they put straight into the fire. As it went up in flames the boy began to cry, "What have you done with the gebeta board carved for me by my father?"

"Don't make such a fuss," the Somalis said. They gave him a brand new knife in place of the game board.

The boy took the knife and went off with his cattle. He came to a man who was digging a well in the sand of the riverbed so that his goats could drink.

"The ground's too hard," the man said. "Lend me your knife to dig with."

The boy gave the man his knife, but he dug so vigorously that it broke.

"What have you done with my knife?" the boy exclaimed.

"Don't worry about it," the man said. "Take this spear instead."

He gave the boy a beautiful spear trimmed with silver and copper and so the boy moved on with his cattle. Then he met a group of hunters.

One of them saw his spear and said, "Lend me your spear so we can kill the lion we are trailing."

The boy gave him the spear and the hunters went out and killed the lion. But in the hunt the shaft of the spear was splintered.

"Look at what you've done to my spear," the boy said.

"Don't carry on," the hunter said. "Here's a horse for your trouble."

The hunter gave him a horse with fine leather trappings, so the boy started back towards the village.

On the way he came to a group of workmen who were repairing the road. Their work caused a landslide sending earth and rocks down the mountain. The horse was frightened and ran away.

"You made my horse run away," the boy said.

"Stay calm," said the workman. "Here is an axe to replace it."

He gave the boy an old iron axe, which he took before continuing on to the village.

Before he got there he came to a woodcutter who said, "Lend me your large axe to cut down this tree, mine is too small."

He gave the woodcutter the axe and he swung it at the tree. The axe broke and the boy cried, "My axe is ruined."

"Never mind," said the woodcutter, "here's the limb of a tree."

The boy put the limb on his back and as he got near the village a woman said, "Where'd you get the wood? I need some for my fire."

The boy gave it to her and she put it on her fire. As it went up in flames the boy said, "Now where is my wood?"

"Here," said the woman, "here's a really nice gebeta board."

The boy put the gebeta board under his arm and took his cattle home.

As he walked in the house his father smiled and said, "There's nothing better than a gebeta game board to keep a small boy out of trouble."