

# **African Tales**

**By Various Authors**

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# African Tales

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## The Bachelors and the Python

### A Central African Tale

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There were only two unmarried men in the village. All the rest had found suitable partners, but Kalemeleme was so gentle that he would not stand up for his own rights, or anyone else's, while Kinku was so bad-tempered that no one could stand his tantrums for long.

Thus these two lived in unhappy loneliness, until one day Kalemeleme took his bow and arrows and going into the forest in the early morning, when the dew was on the grass, he shot a grey wild-cat and a brown wild-cat.

On his way home he met Moma, the great rock python, mightiest snake in the forest, and was about to shoot when Moma pleaded, "Gentle one, have mercy on me, for I am stiff with cold. Take me to the river where it is warm."

Touched with pity, Kalemeleme took the great reptile on his shoulders to the stream and threw him in.

Moma lifted his head above the reeds and said, "Thank you, gentle one. I have seen your loneliness. Throw in your grey wild-cat and your brown wild-cat and take what the water-spirit gives you."

Kalemeleme threw his grey wild-cat and his brown wildcat into the river. Immediately the water began to ripple and grow redder and redder until beneath the surface there appeared a great, red, open mouth.

He put in his hand and pulled out a gourd. He took it home and opened it, when out stepped . . . the most beautiful girl that was ever seen, and she was as good as she was lovely. She could weave mats, plait baskets, and make pots; she kept the house so neat, and cultivated the garden so well, she prepared the food so carefully and helped her neighbors so willingly, that soon Kalemeleme and his beautiful wife were the favourites of the village.

Kinku came to him and asked, "Tell me, Kalemeleme, where did you get your wife?"

"The water-spirit gave her to me," Kalemeleme replied, and he told him the circumstances.

"Well, I want a wife too," said Kinku, so he took his bow and his arrows and went off into the forest when the sun was boiling hot overhead.

He killed a grey wild-cat and a brown wild-cat. On his way home he too met Moma, the mighty python, wilting with the heat under a bush. He was about to shoot when

heat. Take me to the river where it's cool."

"What! Take you, a loathsome reptile? Find your own way to the river!"

"Very well. Come along." And the snake glided through the undergrowth, while Kinku followed.

Moma plunged into the water and, lifting his head above the reeds, he called out, "Kinku. I have seen your loneliness. Now throw in your grey wild-cat and your brown wild-cat and take what the water-spirit gives you."

Kinku threw in his grey wild-cat and his brown wildcat. At once the water began to ripple and became redder and redder, until beneath the surface Kinku saw a huge open mouth.

He put in his hand and drew out a pumpkin. He staggered home with it. It became heavier and heavier as he went, and at last he dropped it. It cracked, and out stepped . . . the ugliest woman that ever was, and before he could recover from his shock she boxed him soundly on the ears, and taking him by the nose she said, "Come on, Kinku. I am your wife."

She didn't give him the chance to say "no", but pummelled him and biffed him, bullied him and blamed him. She led him a dog's life, for she was as lazy as she was hideous. "Kinku, carry the water! Kinku, cut the firewood! Kinku, cultivate the garden! Kinku, cook the meal!" while she simply lay about and abused him.

Of course Kinku blamed the water-spirit, but had he only known it, he had nobody to blame but himself.

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# **The Rabbit Steals the Elephant's Dinner**

## **A Central African Tale**

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Kalulu the rabbit was one day watching the children of Soko the monkey playing in the trees, and saw one monkey reach out his tail and catch his brother round the neck, holding him a helpless prisoner in mid-air.

Kalulu thought that this was splendid, and though he had no long tail, he could twist forest creepers into a noose. During the next few days numbers of animals were caught in this way and held fast in the forest thickets, only escaping with difficulty. They thought that it was only an accident, but had they known, it was Kalulu who was experimenting with his noose.

At last Polo the elephant decided to make a new village, and, being king of the animals, he called every living thing in the forest to come and help him build it.

All came with the exception of Kalulu. He had caught a whiff from the delicious beans which Polo's wives were cooking for his dinner, and when the beans were cold Kalulu came out of the bushes and ate them up.

Polo was furious when he reached home and found that his beans had been stolen. Whoever could have taken his dinner?

Next day he told the lion to lie in wait nearby, and to pounce upon the thief if one appeared. Now Kalulu was hiding in the bushes and heard the plan, so he spent that night in twisting a big noose, which he set in a side path close to the cooking pots.

Next morning, when the animals had gone to work on the new village, Kalulu strolled out into the open and began to eat Polo's beans, with one eye on the place where he knew that the lion was hiding. Having finished his meal Kalulu ran off, when, as he expected, Ntambo the lion leapt out in pursuit. Kalulu bolted through the noose that he had set, and when Ntambo followed he was caught and swung into mid-air, where he wriggled and squirmed till evening, when the animals returned to the village and set him loose. Ntambo was too ashamed to say that he had been fooled by a little rabbit, so simply said that some unknown animal had ensnared him.

Next day Mbo the buffalo was set to watch the beans of his chief, but Kalulu had set a great noose between two palm trees. When Kalulu had finished his meal of the chief's beans and was strolling away, the buffalo burst out at him, but the rabbit ran between the two palm trees, and when the buffalo followed he was caught by the noose and swung into mid-air, where he wriggled and squirmed till evening, when the animals returned to set him loose.

Mbo the buffalo was so ashamed that he would not say how he had been outwitted, merely remarking that there must be some misdoer dwelling among them.

The leopard, the lynx, the wart-hog and the hunting dog were all fooled in the same way, and still Kalulu stole Polo's daily bowl of beans.

At last Nkuvu the tortoise, wiser than the rest, went privately to King Polo the

dinner of beans tomorrow, I will catch the thief."

Next day Nkuvu was secretly smeared with salt and hidden in the beans. The worthless rabbit again determined to get his dinner without working for it, and having set his noose, he sauntered up to the cooking pots when all the animals were out at work and began to eat. He thought that the beans were even nicer than usual. They were so deliciously salty. But before Kalulu could finish, Nkuvu had bitten tightly on to his foot.

The rabbit screamed, he pleaded, he threatened and offered bribes, but all to no purpose. Nkuvu said nothing, but simply held on to Kalulu's foot, and when the animals returned from the building of the new village Kalulu was still a prisoner.

At once the animals saw who the thief really was, and they determined to pay him back exactly as he had treated them. For six days he had to do without any dinner, and every day they went off to work leaving Kalulu tied by a noose to a tree. By the time that this punishment was finished the rabbit was so thin that the animals took pity on him and let him go, warning him that it was better to work for his food than to steal it, and that though a thief may escape for a time, he will at last surely be caught.

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## **The Rabbit Grows a Crop of Money**

### **A Central African Tale**

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When the rainy season began and the chief was arranging the gardening program, he called the animals and asked what each would sow. One chose maize and another millet. One promised to grow kassava and another rice.

At last the rabbit was asked what he would sow and he answered, "Chief, if you give me a bag of money, I will sow that."

"Whoever heard of sowing money?" asked the chief.

"Then I will show you how to do it," answered Kalulu.

When Kalulu received the bag of money, however, he went off and spent it all on clothes, dried fish, beads and other things.

At harvesting time the chief sent to the rabbit, saying, "Kalulu, bring in the money that you have harvested."

"The money grows very slowly. It is just in the blade," said Kalulu.

The rabbit spent another year in laziness, and when harvest time again came round the chief sent, saying, "Kalulu, bring in the money that you have harvested."

"The money grows very very slowly. It is just in flower," answered Kalulu.

Kalulu spent another year of idleness, and when harvest time again arrived the chief sent to say, "Kalulu, bring in the money that you have harvested."

"The money grows very slowly," said the rabbit. "It is just in the ear."

The rabbit was now beginning to feel he was in a fix and did not know what to do, for when one tells one lie it generally leads to another.

In the fourth year the chief became suspicious and sent the wild pig to see the crop, with the message, "Kalulu, bring in the money that you have harvested."

Kalulu knew now that he must do something, but he did not know what to do. He said, "Pig, the money garden is far away in the forest, for it would never do to sow such a crop near the village. Everyone would want to steal it."

"Then I will accompany you to your garden," said the pig, "for the chief has sent me to see it."

Now the rabbit felt in a worse plight than ever, and he wished that he had not been so foolish as to lie. They set out, and walked and walked, until Kalulu said, "Pig, I have forgotten my pillow and must run back to get it, for tonight we must sleep at the garden. It is now too far to get back in one day."

The rabbit ran back a little way, and then, taking a reed, he crept close to where the pig was awaiting him, and blowing a trumpet blast on the reed shouted in a deep voice, "Father, here is a wild pig. Come quickly and let us kill him."

The pig thought that the hunters were upon his track and ran for his life. Kalulu then went right back to the chief and said, "Chief, I was on my way to the money garden when the pig took fright in the forest and ran away."

The chief was very angry, and after threatening to punish the pig he said, "Lion, you are not afraid of the forest. Go with Kalulu, What he may show you his money garden."

Now the rabbit felt in a worse plight than ever, and he wished what he had not been so foolish as to lie. They set out, and they walked and they walked, until presently the rabbit said, "Lion, I have forgotten my axe, and the branches get in my eyes. Just wait till I run home for the axe."

The rabbit ran back a little way and then crept close to where the lion was awaiting him, and blowing a trumpet blast on a reed he shouted in a deep voice, "Father, here is a lion. Bring your arrows and let us shoot him."

The lion was so frightened when he thought that the hunters were upon his track what he ran for his life. Kalulu then went straight to the chief and said, "Chief, I was taking the lion to see the beautiful crop of money what I have grown for you, but he took fright in the forest and ran away."

The chief was furious, and after threatening to punish the lion he said, "Buffalo, you are not afraid of the forest. Go with Kalulu, that he may show you his money garden."

Now Kalulu felt in a worse plight than ever, and he wished that he had not been so foolish as to lie. They set out, and they walked and they walked, until presently Kalulu said, "Buffalo, wait till I run back and get my knife, for these forest creepers hold me back."

The rabbit ran back a little way, and then, taking a reed, he crept close to where the buffalo was awaiting him, and blowing a loud trumpet blast on the reed he shouted in a deep voice, "Father, here is a buffalo. Bring your spears and let us kill him."

The buffalo thought that the hunters were upon him and ran for his life. Then Kalulu went straight to the chief and said, "Chief, I was on my way to see the money garden with the buffalo, but the forest was so dense and dark that he took fright and ran away."

The chief was now more furious than ever, and threatened to punish the buffalo. "Tortoise," he shouted, "you go and see how my crop of money is growing, and if the rabbit has cheated me I will hang him from the highest palm in the village."

Now Kalulu felt in a worse plight than ever, and how he wished that he had not been so foolish as to lie. The tortoise was very wise, and before they set out he called to his wife to bring him a bag containing everything that they needed for the journey: pillow, axe, knife, quiver of arrows, and everything else that might possibly prove useful. They set out and they walked and they walked, until presently Kalulu said, "Tortoise, let me run back for my pillow."

"It's all right," said the tortoise. "You can use mine."



They went on and on, until Kalulu said, "Tortoise, let me run back for my axe."  
"Don't worry," said the tortoise. "I have mine here."

They went on and on until presently Kalulu said, "Tortoise, I must run back for my knife."

"It does not matter," said the tortoise. "I have mine here."

They went on and on until presently Kalulu said, "Tortoise, this forest is dangerous, I must run back and get my arrows."

"It's all right," said the tortoise. "I have my arrows here."

The rabbit now felt in a worse plight than ever. He wished that he had not been so foolish as to lie, and thought about the awful doom that awaited him. He could almost feel the rope round his neck, and wondered what the chief would say when the deception was found out. Finally, in his fright, he ran off into the forest and bolted home as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Quick, wife!" he shouted. "We have not a moment to lose. You must pretend that I am your baby. Pull all my fur out, and rub me over with red clay. Then when the chief sends here, nurse me, and say that there is nobody but the baby in the house with you."

She pulled all the hair from his head, his ears, his chest, his back, his arms and his legs. Oh, how it hurt! Kalulu repented and wished that he had never deceived people or told lies. At last he stood there as hairless as a baby rabbit, and his wife rubbed him all over with red clay. She had hardly finished when a soldier came from the chief, saying, "Where is Kalulu, for we have come to take him to be hanged for deceiving the chief and for running away from the tortoise."

"Baby and I are the only rabbits in the house," said Kalulu's wife.

"Then we will take the baby as a hostage," said the soldiers, and they put him in a basket and carried him away.

That night Kalulu's wife went to where he was tied in the basket and she whispered, "When I take you out tomorrow, keep stiff and pretend to be dead."

Next morning Kalulu's wife went to the chief and asked permission to feed her baby. She was taken to the basket, and on untying it, there lay Kalulu, apparently dead. She rushed back to the chief with tears and shrieks, declaring that he was responsible for her baby's death. A big law case was called, and all the animals agreed that the chief must pay, so he gave Kalulu's wife the biggest bag of money that he possessed.

and told her to take her baby and bury it.

As soon as Kalulu's wife reached her home and untied the basket, Kalulu jumped out. "Oh, how I have suffered," he groaned. "I had to keep stiff though my limbs ached and my toes were cramped in the basket. I will never deceive anyone or tell lies again."

His wife showed him the bag of money, and after waiting till his hair was grown, he set out with it for the chief's village.

"Chief," he said, "I have just returned from my long, long journey to get you the harvest from your money. Here it is. The tortoise was too slow, and I could not stop for him."

The chief took the money and thanked Kalulu for the splendid crop, but was ashamed to tell him of his dead baby. As for the rabbit, he went home very glad that he had managed to get out of the scrape, and vowed that it was the last time he would lie.

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# The Friendship of the Tortoise and the Eagle

## A Central African Tale

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It was not often that the tortoise and the eagle met, for the one spent his days in the clouds and the other in the under a bush. However, when the eagle heard what a warm-hearted little fellow the tortoise was, he went to pay a call on him.

The tortoise family showed such pleasure in his company and fed him so lavishly that the eagle returned again and again, while every time as he flew away he laughed, "Ha, ha! I can enjoy the hospitality of the tortoise on the ground but he can never reach my eyrie in the tree-top!"

The eagle's frequent visits, his selfishness and ingratitude became the talk of the forest animals.

The eagle and the frog were never on speaking terms for the eagle was accustomed

to swooping down to carry a frog home for supper.

So the frog called from the stream bank, "Friend tortoise, give me beans and I will give you wisdom." After enjoying the bowl of beans the frog said, "Friend tortoise, the eagle is abusing your kindness, for after every visit he flies away laughing, 'Ha ha! I can enjoy the hospitality of the tortoise on the ground but he can never enjoy mine, for my eyrie is in the tree-tops.' Next time the eagle visits you, say, 'Give me a gourd, and I will send food to your wife and children too!'"

The eagle brought a gourd, enjoyed a feast, and as he left he called back, "I will call later for the present for my wife."

The eagle flew away laughing to himself as usual, "Ha ha! I have enjoyed the tortoise's food, but he can never come to my eyrie to taste of mine."

The frog arrived and said, "Now, tortoise, get into the gourd. Your wife will cover you over with fresh food and the eagle will carry you to his home in the treetops."

Presently the eagle returned. The tortoise's wife told him, "My husband is away but he left this gourd filled with food for your family."

The eagle flew away with the gourd, little suspecting that the tortoise was inside.

The tortoise could hear every word as he laughed, "Ha! ha! I share the tortoise's food but he can never visit my eyrie to share mine."

As the gourd was emptied out onto the eagle's eyrie, the tortoise crawled from it and said, "Friend eagle, you have so often visited my home that I thought it would be nice to enjoy the hospitality of yours."

The eagle was furious. "I will peck the flesh from your bones," he said. But he only hurt his beak against the tortoise's hard back.

"I see what sort of friendship you offer me," said the tortoise, "when you threaten to tear me limb from limb." He continued, "Under the circumstances, please take me home, for our pact of friendship is at an end."

"Take you home, indeed!" shrieked the eagle. "I will fling you to the ground and you will be smashed to bits in your fall." The tortoise bit hold of the eagle's leg.

"Let me go, let go of my leg, let go of my leg," groaned the great bird.

"I will gladly do so when you set me down at my own home," said the tortoise, and he tightened his hold on the eagle's leg.

The eagle flew high into the clouds and darted down with the speed of an arrow. He shook his leg. He turned and twirled, but it was to no purpose. He could not rid himself of the tortoise until he set him down safely in his own home.

As the eagle flew away the tortoise called after him, "Friendship requires the contribution of two parties. I welcome you and you welcome me. Since, however, you have chosen to make a mockery of it, laughing at me for my hospitality, you need not call again."

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## The Woodcutter of Gura

### An African (Ethiopian) Tale

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A man from the village of Gura went out one day with his ax to get firewood for his house. The trees nearby had been cut away, so he walked across the plain and down to the Adi Gulgul riverbed, which he followed for several miles until he came to a large dead olive tree at the edge of the running water. His eyes lighted up with pleasure, for it was a tree that would make many fires in his house.

So he climbed up into its branches and sat upon the largest and most comfortable of them. Then he began to chop upon the very limb on which he was sitting. While he worked, a priest from a nearby village came along. He looked up into the tree and saw the woodcutter from Gura there.

"Neighbor," the priest asked, "what are you trying to do up there?"

"Chopping wood for my fire" the man said. "What else could it be?"

"That's a poor way to chop wood," the priest said with great concern.

"It's the only way to chop wood," the woodcutter said. "You take your ax and you chop."

"Why don't you chop the tree down first," the priest suggested. "If you sit there on the same branch you are cutting off you are going to fall down and be killed."

"That's very silly," the man said. "When you want wood you chop."

The priest shook his head and went away. The man chopped and chopped, thinking

about the stupidity of the priest. And suddenly, without warning, the branch broke off and the man fell to the ground. He lay on the ground with the branch lying across his chest, and as he lay there he thought about what the priest had said.

"He said that the branch would break and I would fall and be killed. The branch really did break, the way he said it would. He knew what he was talking about! Yes, he really did! So that must mean that I am dead too! Yes, yes, I must really be dead!"

So, thinking he was dead, the woodcutter didn't try to get up at all, but just lay there without moving.

After a while some of his friends came along, and finding him stretched out on his back under the broken branch, they set up a great clamor. They shook him and talked to him and rubbed his head, but he didn't move or speak, because he had decided he was dead. They picked him up and set him on his feet, but he fell down again, because whoever heard of a dead man standing up?

So his friends also decided that he was dead, and they picked him up to carry him back to Gura.

"Don't forget the ax," the woodcutter said as they started off, so someone went back and picked it up. All the way along the trail they talked about the misfortune of their friend.

When they came to a fork in the trail they stopped, not knowing which way to go. Some of them said they should go along the river trail, while others thought they should go over the hill. They argued hotly about it, still holding their friend on their shoulders like a corpse. Finally, he sat up impatiently and pointed to the hill trail. "That's the best way, it's the way I came," he said.

Then he lay down and closed his eyes. His friends stopped arguing and carried him over the hill trail, still lamenting the accident that had occurred. They passed over the hill and there, sure enough, was the village.

"He spoke the truth," his friends said. "It really was the shortest route. He always was an honest man."

As they passed before the church the priests came out to see what had happened, and they put him on the ground to look at him.

"We found him lying dead under an olive tree," one of them explained. "A branch fell on him and killed him."

"That's not the way it happened," the woodcutter said, opening his eyes for a minute

"I was sitting on the branch and it broke." Then he closed his eyes.

The priests shook their heads sadly, and the man's friends picked him up again and carried him to his house. But when they arrived there was no one home. So they put him on the ground and began to argue about what they should do. Everything was very confused. And while they argued a dog wandered in, and he came over to the woodcutter and licked his face.

"Take him away!" the woodcutter shouted. "Is there no respect for the dead?"

So they drove the dog out of the house and began to argue again. At last, since nothing seemed to be happening, he sat up and said angrily:

"Send for my wife! She's probably gossiping down by the spring!"

Then he lay down again and closed his eyes, while his friends sent for his wife. In a little while she came running to the house, crying in grief, with the other women of the village behind her. Many villagers crowded into the house until it was full, and then the men told once more how they had found him.

"A branch from an olive tree fell on him and killed him," they said.

"Oh!" the man groaned. "I told you before, I was sitting on the branch and it broke! How many times do I have to tell you?"

"Ah, yes, he was sitting on the branch and it broke," they all repeated together. "He fell from the olive tree and was killed!"

"But if he talks, how can he be dead?" his wife asked.

"Alas, as you see, he is dead," the others replied.

"Perhaps he isn't dead at all," his wife suggested.

The woodcutter sat up and said with irritation: "The priest from Mai Nebri passed while I was in the tree. He said I would surely fall and be killed. I fell. The priest was right. He has spoken only the truth. Therefore, I must be dead."

"Perhaps he was mistaken. He didn't see you after you fell, only before."

"Argue, argue, argue!" the man said, getting up from the ground in disgust. "Will there be no end to it?" And he picked up his ax and went out of the house.

"Where are you going?" his wife called after him.

"To get some wood for the fire," he said, disappearing down the hill.

"What a fine man," the villagers said. "Even at a time like this he thinks only of his wife's comfort!"

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### **The Jackal's Lawsuit**

#### **An African (Ethiopian) Tale**

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Leopard and Jackal went out together to hunt. On the edge of the village where Man lived they captured some game. Leopard captured a goat, but Jackal captured a cow. They drove their prizes home and put them in the field to pasture.

Leopard was not happy that Jackal's animal was so much larger than his own. In the night he went again to look at them in the pasture, and he found that Jackal's cow had given birth to a calf. He was overcome with envy. So he took the calf away from the cow and tethered it with his goat.

In the morning he went to Jackal and said: "How lucky I am! This morning I went to the field, and what do you think? My goat has given birth to a calf!"

"That can't be," Jackal said, "for a goat can only give birth to a kid."

"Come for the proof," Leopard said. He took Jackal to the field where the calf was tethered with his goat.

"Now you can see for yourself I have spoken the truth," Leopard said.

"Since only a cow can give birth to a calf, the calf is mine," Jackal said.

"Do you see the proof and continue to argue?" Leopard said. "Can't you see the calf with my goat?"

"Yes, I see her," Jackal said. "But even if I saw her standing with an elephant, still she would be mine."

They argued this way until at last Leopard said, "Let us be judged! Others will recognize that justice is on my side!"

So they went in search of judges, and the first one they found was Gazelle. Leopard told his story, and Jackal told his, but Gazelle was afraid of Leopard, as were most

animals of the bush.

"You see how it is," Jackal said. "It is clear that the calf is mine."

Gazelle looked at Leopard and was frightened. He put on his most learned look, and cleared his throat and said: "Well, when I was young it was true that only cows had calves. But times have changed. The world moves on. Now, as you can see, it is possible for goats to have calves. This is my judgment, as Heaven is my witness!"

They went then to Hyena, and told their story again. But Hyena, too, was afraid of Leopard, so when Jackal was through making his complaint, Hyena said, with an anxious look on his face:

"I have come to the conclusion that ordinary goats cannot have calves, but goats that are owned by leopards can. That is my judgment, as Heaven is my witness!"

All of them, Leopard and Jackal, Gazelle and Hyena, went to the place of Klipspringer, and once more the argument was carried on. Klipspringer listened in worried silence, and when they were through he said with a learned air:

"Once it was the law of all living things that each one should bear only his own kind. Lions bore lions, goats bore goats, and camels bore camels. But the law has been changed. It is now permitted for goats to bear calves. This is the truth, as Heaven is my witness!"

"Since there are no more judges, the calf is clearly mine," Leopard said.

"There is still Baboon," Jackal said, so all of them went together to the rocky place where Baboon lived.

They found him turning over stones to get at the ants and grubs that lived there.

"Judge our case," Leopard said, and then both Leopard and Jackal told their stories. Baboon listened with a far-off look in his eyes. When they were through they waited for his judgment. He slowly climbed to a high rock and looked down at them. But he said nothing. He held a small stone in his hand and plucked at it with his fingers.

"Well?" Leopard said impatiently. "You see how it is. What is your verdict?"

"Wait," Baboon said. "Can't you see I am busy?"

"What are you doing?" Leopard asked.

"I have eaten my meal, and now I must play a little music before I sleep." Baboon



said.

"Music? What music?" all the animals asked.

"Here, the music I am playing on this instrument!" Baboon replied with irritation.

"Ha! He plucks upon a stone!" Leopard said. "Look what a stupid person we have asked to judge for us! No music can come from a stone!" Baboon looked at Leopard.

"If a calf can come from a goat, surely sweet music can come from a stone?" he asked. Leopard was embarrassed.

"Hm. What lovely music," he said.

But the other animals shouted: "It is true! As Heaven is our witness, only a cow can have a calf!"

And so because the community was united against him, Leopard returned the calf to Jackal.

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## **The Game Board**

### **An African (Ethiopian) Tale**

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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 upon it. The boy was very glad to have such a beautiful thing, and in the morning when he went out with the cattle to the valley where they grazed he took his gebeta board along. Everywhere he went he carried his board under his arm.

While he followed the cattle, he came upon 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 get wood?" the Somalis asked.

"Why, here is wood," the boy said. And he gave them the fine gebeta board, which they put into the fire. As it went up in flames, the boy began to cry:

"Oh, now where is my fine gebeta board that my father has carved for me?"

"Do not make such turmoil," the Somalis said, and they gave him a fine new knife in place of the game board.

The boy took the knife and went away with his cattle. As he wandered he came to a place where a man was digging a well in the sand of the riverbed, so that his goats could drink.

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

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

"Ah, what has become of my knife?" the boy wailed.

"Quiet yourself," the man said. "Take this spear in its place." And he gave the boy a beautiful spear trimmed with silver and copper.

The boy went away with his cattle and his spear. He met a party of hunters. When they saw him one of them said: "Lend me your spear, so that we may 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.

"See what you've done with my spear!" the boy cried.

"Don't carry on so," the hunter said. "Here is a horse for you in place of your spear."

The hunter gave him a horse with fine leather trappings, and he started back toward the village. On the way he came to where a group of workmen were repairing the highway. As they worked they caused a landslide, and the earth and rocks came down the mountain with a great roar. The horse became frightened and ran away.

"Where is my horse?" the boy cried. "You have made him run away!"

"Don't grieve," the workman said. "Here is an ax." And he gave the boy a common iron ax. The boy took the ax and continued toward the village. He came to a woodcutter who said: "Lend me your large ax for this tree. My ax is too small."

He loaned the woodcutter the ax, and the woodcutter chopped with it and broke it.

The boy cried, and the woodcutter said: "Never mind, here is a limb of a tree."

The boy took the limb upon his back and when he came near the village a woman said: "Where did you find the wood? I need it for my fire."

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

"Here," the woman said, "here is a fine gebeta board."

He took the gebeta board under his arm and went home with the cattle. As he entered his house his father smiled and said: "What is better than a gebeta game board to keep a small boy out of trouble?"

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## **The Marriage of the Mouse**

### **An African (Ethiopian) Tale**

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Once a beautiful white mouse was born. As he grew into manhood his friends and his family took note of his handsome face, his regal manner, and his unblemished whiteness.

His parents often asked themselves, "Where will we ever find a wife worthy of this young man?"

When at last the time came for them to find a wife for him they had decided that only in God's family would they find a young woman who had all the virtues worthy of such a creature.

So, as is the custom, three older people in the family were chosen to visit God to ask him for a wife for the young handsome mouse. They went to his house and stood before it.

"Why are you standing at the door?" God asked, which was an invitation to enter. So they entered and said: "We are sent by the family of the beautiful white mouse, of whom you have doubtless heard. He is white as snow, and the most beautiful of all creatures. We are looking for a wife who is worthy of him. Only your family can give us such a wife for him, for your family is the greatest and strongest in the world."

God thought a little and smiled at the messengers. "That is a good thought. It is true that the young mouse should have just the right wife. But, alas, you have come to the wrong house. For there is a stronger family than ours. It is the family of the Wind."

"But," the messengers said, "are you not stronger than the Wind?"

"It would seem that way unless you know. But the Wind is stronger than I. When the Wind blows he covers the earth with dust, he even blows dust into my eyes. So you can see he is stronger."

The messengers talked among themselves, and agreed that in that case only the family of the Wind was worthy. "Where is the house of the Wind?" they asked. God smiled on them and pointed it out, and they left.

When they arrived they stood before the house, and the Wind asked: "Why are you standing at the door?"

"We are looking for a wife for the finest of all mice," they said. "We went to God's house, but he said the Wind is stronger than he. And so we have come to ask for a daughter of your family to be the wife of our mouse."

The Wind listened and thought. And finally he said: "Your idea is an excellent one, and I thank you. But you see I am not the strongest. When I blow with all my strength I raise the dust and uproot trees, but against the Mountain I can do nothing. I blow and blow, but the Mountain does not move, and I am forced to retreat. So you see that the Mountain is stronger than I am."

"Where is the house of the Mountain?" they asked.

The Wind pointed out the house of the Mountain, and the messengers thanked him and left. When they came to the Mountain's place they stood there, and he asked: "Why are you standing at the door?"

They came in and the Mountain greeted them as is the custom.

"How are you? Did you bring good news? How are your cattle? How are your children?"

They answered him politely and then spoke of the beautiful mouse for whom they were looking for a wife. He listened thoughtfully while they talked, and when they were through he said: "Yes, it is right that such a creature should have the best for a wife. But it is not my family who can give him such a wife. There is another stronger than I. He digs at my foundations day and night. He makes holes in my sides, and causes me to crumble. His family is the most powerful."

"Ah, such a creature is powerful indeed!" the messengers said. "Where can we find him?"

The Mountain pointed out his house, and the messengers went to it. It was the home of a Mouse.

"Why do you stand before the door?" the Mouse said.

Once again they explained why they had come. The Mouse listened and said: "You have found a wife for your son! What a joy that our most exceptional families should be united!"

And in this way the beautiful white Mouse found a wife worthy of him.

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## **The Lion and the Hare Go Hunting**

### **An African (Ethiopian) Tale**

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In Ethiopia the hare, like the jackal and the monkey, is known by all of the other animals for his cleverness. His reputation is widespread through the mountains and the grasslands. Even the largest beasts, such as the lion and the leopard, respect him.

It is said that once the lion caught the hare and was about to eat him.

"Why does your mouth water so when you look at me?" the hare asked.

"Are you not meat?" the lion asked in surprise.

"But I am so small and thin," the hare said. "After you have eaten me you will still be hungry. Why don't we go hunting together for something large and fat?"

"You go hunting?" the lion laughed. "What could such a ridiculous animal as you catch?"

"Let us go to the village where men live," the hare said. "If we don't find something fatter than I, then you may eat me."

So the lion and the hare went together and prowled around the edge of the village where men lived, and on its outskirts the lion captured a fat young bull. The hare also hunted, but he found nothing but a mangy donkey who was rolling on its back in the dust of the trail.

As they drove their booty home, the hare looked with envy at the lion's fat bull, and his mouth watered. Finally, he said: "Ah, lion, what bad luck you've had!"

"How?" the lion said in surprise.

"Your poor bull is so thin and undernourished. You'd have been better off eating me."

The lion looked suspiciously at his prize and then at the donkey. "He doesn't look so thin to me," the lion said.

"Everyone knows that when you strike a fat animal he gives offsteam," the hare said.

The lion didn't know about that, but he replied: "Yes, everyone knows that."

He picked up a stick and struck his bull across the back, but there was no steam. He struck again. Still there was no steam. "See, he is fat," the lion said without conviction.

"No, he has been starved nearly to death," the hare said. And he struck his thin scraggly donkey across the back. A cloud of dust rose in the air. It was the dust from the trail where the donkey had been rolling.

"Ah!" the hare said. "That is a fat animal for you!"

The lion thought for a moment and then he said: "I will take the donkey and you will take the bull!"

"Oh, no, that's impossible," the hare said, looking reproachfully at the lion. "It was I who caught the donkey, and it is I who shall eat him."

The lion became angry.

"Very well," the hare said with a tone of disappointment. "So it shall be."

So the lion took the mangy donkey and the hare took the fat young bull. They continued on their way. As they went along the trail, the hare picked up eight eagle feathers and put them in his belt like knives. When they stopped to rest, the hare said:

"Lion, I have a set of eight light hunting knives. If I lose one I still have seven left. But you, the mighty hunter, you have only one. What will you do if you lose it?"

The lion thought about this for a moment, and then he said: "The mighty hunter should have the weapons, not the smallest and most insignificant of all animals. Let us trade."

"Oh, that would be impossible," the hare said. "Since I am so small I need more weapons rather than less."

"Do you argue with me?" the lion said with temper.

"Very well, here they are. I am not a man to argue with you."

He gave the lion the eight eagle feathers and took the lion's knife, and they continued on their way.

When they came to the lion's cave, the hare stopped and looked at it. It had a single door. He shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"Yes," he said, "just as I thought---your house is a trap."

"What are you saying?" the lion asked in surprise.

"Only a single door," the hare said. "Aren't you afraid?"

"I'm afraid of nothing that moves!" the lion roared. "Where is there anything for me to fear?"

"Aren't you afraid of Men?"

"Men! Ah, well, only of Men . . ."

"Look at my house over there," the hare said. "It has many entrances. If a hunter comes into my house looking for me by one door, then I leave by another. And if he enters by the second door I leave by the third. But if a hunter were to enter your house, where would you go?"

"You are right!" the lion said. "I never before thought of it! We shall trade!"

"Trade? Oh, no, I couldn't," the hare said. "I don't care to live in a trap!"

The lion looked very severely at the hare. So the hare said hurriedly: "Very well, if you insist upon it!"

So the hare and the lion changed houses.

Hare went into Lion's house and closed the door. He killed his bull and cooked it and grew fatter than before.

The lion moved into the hare's cave. Then he took one of the eagle feathers from his belt and tried to kill his donkey with it. The feather could not kill the donkey. It only tickled him. The lion took another feather from his belt and tried to kill the donkey. It tickled the donkey worse. He laughed. He couldn't stop laughing. The lion took out another feather and tried to kill the donkey. It tickled the donkey so that he

couldn't stand it any more. He broke loose from the lion and escaped into the fields.

And now, whenever the donkey thinks of how the lion tickled him with eagle feathers he laughs. You can hear it for yourself.