

# Tiny Tales from Africa: The Animals (Volume 2)



**TINY TALES FROM  
AFRICA: THE ANIMALS  
(VOLUME 2)**

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# ABOUT THIS BOOK

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This is the second in a series of books featuring African animal tales. You'll find many tricksters here: there's Rabbit (the ancestor of Brer Rabbit and Tio Conejo), along with Tortoise, Spider, and also Mouse-Deer, *Neotragus pygmaeus*, an African antelope barely a foot tall. There are "pourquoi" stories like how Warthog got his tusks and how Crab got his shell, plus stories of magic and supernatural adventure. These tales come from many different African traditions; see the list of sources in the back of the book. For even more information about each story, plus a free audiobook version, go to:

[Africa.LauraGibbs.net](http://Africa.LauraGibbs.net).

The paragraph you just read is 100 words long, as is this paragraph, and that's also the length of each story in this book. The stories go fast, but you can slow down when you find one you like. Read it again. Read it aloud. Let it sink in. Maybe even write your own version of the story, using your imagination to add more details. Meanwhile, if you don't like a story, don't get bogged down; just move on to the next one. You can find many more African animal tales, along with 100-word stories from other cultural traditions, here:

[100Words.LauraGibbs.net](http://100Words.LauraGibbs.net).



# THE STORIES

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## 1. Creator Gives Horns to the Animals

Long ago, the animals had no horns.

Then Creator called them to come get their horns.

Buffalo and Bushbuck, Eland and Antelope, all the animals who wanted horns stopped grazing and ran to receive Creator's gifts.

But Zebra didn't run. He stayed where he was, grazing. He ate and ate and ate.

Then, when he finally arrived to get his horns, there weren't any left.

There were only long ears, stripes, a mane, and a big mouth.

No horns.

Then all the horned animals laughed at Zebra. "It's your own fault," they said, "because you were so greedy for food."

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 2. Why Chimpanzees Don't Have Farms

The chimpanzees wanted to be farmers. They went to town and stole everything they needed — rakes, hoes, shovels — but the baskets loaded with tools were so heavy that the chimpanzees abandoned them by the roadside and never farmed.

Some chameleons found the baskets and tried to carry them away, but the baskets were too heavy. That is how chameleons got their hunched backs.

Some frogs found the baskets and tried to carry them away but they had no foreheads for the straps, so they put the straps in their mouths. It broke their teeth; that's why frogs have no teeth.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



### 3. The Warthog and the Elephant

Warthog went with his uncle, Elephant, to drink water.

Warthog drank first. As he was drinking, he stirred up the water.

Then Elephant drank, and a leech got inside his trunk. “It’s a leech!” Elephant screamed. He beat his trunk on the ground and bashed it against a rock; nothing helped. The leech hung on, and blood streamed everywhere. Finally Elephant died.

“Because my uncle’s dead, I am now the great one!” Warthog proclaimed.

He took his uncle’s tusks; that is how Warthog got his tusks.

Over time, Elephants became bigger and Warthogs became smaller, but Warthog still has tusks.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 4. The Bird Who Loved His Wife

“Dear husband,” said the robin, “I am all out of camwood powder!”

“You look beautiful just the way you are,” replied her husband, “but I will go buy some for you right away.”

The bird flew all the way to the market and there he finally found a cosmetics merchant with camwood powder for sale.

The bird then carried the tiny lump of powder in his throat, but by the time he got back home it had melted all around his throat and chest, and that is why the robin now has a red breast, but his wife does not.

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]



## 5. The Beaks of the Kestrel and the Hornbill

Kestrel used to have a very big beak, while Hornbill had only a small beak. In fact, Hornbill's beak was so tiny that he was embarrassed to be seen in public.

"Kestrel," he said, "loan me your big beak!"

Reluctantly, Kestrel agreed. "Just temporarily," he said. "I want my beak back!"

But Hornbill didn't return the beak. He liked how the other birds now admired him. "Suits me fine!" Hornbill cried. "Suits me fine!"

Meanwhile, Kestrel cried, "Tiny! Tiny! It's too tiny."

You can hear the birds crying those words even now; Hornbill says: *Suits-me-fine*, and the Kestrel protests: *Tiny-tiny-it's-too-tiny*.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 6. The War of the Birds and the Snakes

The Snakes and Birds were at war.

When the Snakes seized the palm-trees, the hungry Birds had no palm-nuts.

“Whoever brings us palm-nuts to eat,” proclaimed the Bird-King, “shall receive a beautiful cloak of white feathers.”

Crow went to a palm-tree and alighted between two Snakes. He looked left, saying, “I’m glad to see you, Brother!” Then he looked right. “I wish you well, Brother!”

Surprised, the Snakes gave him palm-nuts.

Crow did this again and again until he filled his sack.

The grateful Bird-King obtained white feathers from all the birds, and Crow wears his white cloak even now.

[a story from Liberia]



## 7. The Mother of the Snakes

After Mother-Snake gave birth to all the Snakes, she told them, “Listen for when I call you to come get your poison.”

Later, Mother-Snake called her children and gave them their poisons. Puff-Adder came, and Bush-Viper; Spitting-Cobra came, and so did Black-Mamba and Green-Mamba.

Water-Snake, however, had gone fishing. He didn’t come when his mother called.

“Where’s my poison?” Water-Snake asked when he finally returned home.

“I called, but you didn’t come,” Mother-Snake said. “Because you were disobedient, you have lost your poison. Now the people will just laugh when you bite them because your bite can do no harm.”

[a Loki story from the Congo]

## 8. The Witch and the Crab

“No food for you,” the witch told her granddaughter, “unless you guess my name.”

So the little granddaughter went hungry.

Crab pitied the girl, and when she came to fetch water, he whispered, “Her name is Sarjmoti-Amoa-Oplem-Dadja.”

The girl thanked him and ran home, but forgot the name. She went back and begged Crab to repeat it. Reluctantly he whispered again, “Sarjmoti-Amoa-Oplem-Dadja.”

The girl ran home and shouted, “Sarjmoti-Amoa-Oplem-Dadja, feed me!”

The witch realized Crab must have betrayed her. Crab ran, but not fast enough. She threw her calabash at him, and it stuck! That’s how Crab got his shell.

[a Gurunsi story from Burkina Faso]



## 9. The Creation of Night

Long ago it was always day; there was no night.

Then God called the people and the animals together. “I’m going to create night now,” God said. “It will be a time for sleeping.”

“Thank you, God!” the people and the animals said.

“You must cover your faces with your hands and paws while I do this,” God explained, and everyone obeyed — except for Lion, Leopard, and Hyena.

Those three animals peeked while God created night.

That is why Lion, Leopard, and Hyena can see in the dark.

They hunt at night, while everyone else is sleeping as God intended.

[an Oromo story from Kenya]

## 10. The Medicine of Immortality

After God created people, he saw that the people grew old and died, so he filled a jar with medicine and gave the jar to a crow, saying, “Take this to the people so that they will live forever.”

The crow flew down from heaven, but an eagle overtook him and stole the jar. Because the eagle flew so swiftly, he spilled medicine all over the forest.

When he reached the people, only a little medicine remained. That is why people recover from some sicknesses, but eventually they die. Meanwhile, the forest lives on and on, renewing its life everlasting.

[a story from Liberia]



## 11. The Bees and the Honeyguide Bird

There was a Bird who had a son, but Bees killed him.

The mother vowed revenge on the Bees. She couldn't attack the Bees herself; she needed help. So, she followed the Bees to see where they lived, and then she found a human being. She flew around and around the person, singing and fluttering. She kept singing and fluttering until the person followed her to the Bees.

Seeing the Bees, the person built a fire, drove the Bees away with the smoke, and took their honey.

That is what the Honeyguide Bird does even now, forever avenging her son.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 12. The Bird Who Married a Bee

There was once a Bird who went looking for a wife in Beetown. “I want to get married!” he said.

The Bees agreed, so the Bird married a Bee.

Later, however, the Bees came and stole the Bee-wife away from the Bird.

“Since you stole my wife,” shouted the Bird, “I’ll help the humans steal your honey.”

That is the origin of the Honeyguide Bird who now leads humans to where the Bees have hidden their hives. Then the Honeyguide Bird watches the humans break open the hives to steal the honey.

“That is my revenge!” he chirps. “Revenge! Revenge!”

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 13. The Honeybadger and the Honeycomb

Honeybadger follows bees and steals their honey, carrying away pieces of honeycomb. He then hides the honeycomb and goes back for more, building a pile of honeycombs in his hiding place.

When boys who herd cattle see Honeybadger carrying pieces of honeycomb, they follow him to discover his hiding place. Then, as Honeybadger brings back more honeycomb to add to his pile, the boys steal pieces of honeycomb for themselves.

Honeybadger is suspicious: why does the pile get smaller, not larger?

Hence the proverb for when things are not going as they should: *Honeybadger is suspicious when the honeycomb disappears.*

[a Tswana story from southern Africa]



## 14. The Jackals and the Honeybadger's Beer

Jackal and Honeybadger used to live in the same village, and Jackal married Honeybadger's daughter.

One day, Honeybadger brewed some honey-beer and invited his son-in-law to come drink. Jackal came with all his wives and all his children, and they drank. They drank all day, they drank all night, and they were still drinking the next morning.

By noon the next day, they were all very drunk.

Jackal staggered off in one direction, one wife in a different direction, another wife in another direction, the children likewise, and that is why to this day jackals do not live in packs.

[an Ila story from Zambia]

## 15. The Frog and the Elephant

Elephant challenged Frog to a wrestling match.

“I accept your challenge under one condition,” said Frog. “We must run and jump into the wrestling ring.”

“I agree!” said Elephant, confident in his strength.

All the animals came to watch the match.

Then Frog and Elephant ran and jumped into the ring. Frog jumped easily, but Elephant isn’t a good jumper; he stumbled and fell. When Elephant hit the ground, Frog pinned him down and declared victory.

To celebrate his victory, Frog’s whole family started croaking loudly, and that is why frogs croak today: they are celebrating Frog’s victory over Elephant.

[a story from Liberia]



## 16. The Lion and the Monkey

“Help!” yelled Lion, trapped in a pit.

Monkey walked by.

“Rescue me, and I’ll make you rich, Monkey!”

Monkey helped Lion out and said, “Now make me rich.”

“I’ve got to eat first,” roared Lion. “Give me something to eat!”

“I don’t have any food to give you.”

“Give me some of your tail!” said Lion. “It’s long; there’s plenty to spare.”

“But...”

Lion grabbed Monkey’s tail. “Or I could just kill you!” he snarled.

“Curse you, Lion!” said Monkey. “You’ll never catch another monkey.”

Then Lion killed and ate Monkey; since then, monkeys live in trees, safe from lions.

[a Vai story from Liberia]



## 17. The Hen and the Hawk's Chick

A hawk gave birth to a son, and the hen was her midwife. When the hawk was recovered enough to go forage for food, she said to the hen, “Take care of my son! I’ll be back soon.”

But when the hawk did not come back, the hen grew impatient and killed the young hawk.

When the hawk came home and found her young one dead, she was furious.

“I curse all chickens!” she shouted. “From this day forward, anyone who is my offspring will kill the young ones of the hen because this hen has killed my young one.”

[a story from Madagascar]



## 18. The Hawk Who Imitated the Hen

Returning from market, Hen saw Hawk coming towards her. She tucked her leg under her wing and then said, “Hello, Hawk!”

“Hello!” he replied. “What did you buy at the market?”

“I bought meat,” Hen answered.

“Was it expensive?” Hawk asked.

“I paid with my leg,” said Hen. “You’ll be able to buy a lot of meat with your big leg. Shall I cut it off for you?”

“Yes, please!” said Hawk.

Hen cut off Hawk’s leg, and he couldn’t walk anymore.

“I’ll kill you for this!” Hawk shouted.

Ever since, hawks chase chickens, and chickens still tuck their legs.

[an Ankole story from Uganda]

## 19. The Hippo Who Imitated the Hen

Hen tucked one leg beneath her wing and squawked, “I sold my leg at the market for a sack of gold.”

Hippo thought to himself, “My leg is far bigger, so it will be worth even more.”

Then he told his friends Hawk and Kite, “Let’s go to the market together.”

But when Hippo cut off his leg to sell, he bled to death.

Hawk and Kite then flew back to the village. “With your trickery, you killed our friend Hippo!” they shouted at Hen, and to this day hawks and kites are enemies of the hen and her family.

[a Loki story from the Congo]



## 20. The Elephant and the Child

Long ago elephants lived with people in the village, and the people's children took the elephants out to graze.

Then one day an elephant killed a child. The other children ran home, shouting, "Mother! Father! An elephant killed one of us."

The children's father took his bow and arrow and shot the elephant, and the elephant died.

The other elephants said, "We did wrong, and now the people will kill us."

So the elephants all ran away.

When the people saw an elephant, they said, "You killed our child," and they shot the elephant.

Elephants and people are still enemies.

[a Yao story from Malawi]

## 21. The Donkeys Who Touch Noses

Two men met on a road, each riding a donkey.

The men greeted each other, and the donkeys also touched noses in greeting.

“I understand why people exchange greetings,” one man said, “but why do the donkeys put their heads together?”

“Long ago,” the other man replied, “the donkeys sent a messenger to God, imploring him to free the donkeys from their servitude. Now when donkeys meet each other, they ask: has our messenger returned yet? They are always hoping for news that God will grant them their freedom.”

The donkeys remind us that every creature longs to be free.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 22. The Origin of the Suk-Suk Bird

There was a young bride who went to dwell in her husband's house.

One day, her father-in-law and mother-in-law sent her to water the donkeys. "*Suk-Suk!*" she called to the donkeys, which is what people say to lead donkeys to water.

While she was watering the donkeys, robbers attacked. They killed her and stole the donkeys.

The dead bride's soul became a bird, and the bird sings this song: *My father-in-law, my mother-in-law, they told me to water the donkeys! Suk-Suk!*

You can hear her in lonely places and near the riverbeds.

That is why the bird's name is Suk-Suk.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 23. The Chief and His People

There was once a tribe, and their chief had the power to bring rain.

Then, the rain stopped falling.

The people complained, but the chief shouted, “I am the chief! You, go and chop down trees! You, go and plow!”

When the rain still did not come, the people stopped chopping down trees and stopped plowing.

In the sunshine, a large, flat stone grew red-hot, and when the people sat there, it burned off the skin off their behinds.

They grew tails.

Their bodies bent down, and their arms became like legs.

They could no longer speak.

They became baboons.

[a Tswana story from southern Africa]



## 24. The Origin of Baboons

Long ago, Baboons were people.

They were lazy and stole their food from other people's fields, but even that was too much work. "Let's go live in the forest," they said. "We'll eat the fruits that fall to the ground."

In the forest, they became Baboons. If you look at their hands and their feet, you can see that they were once people, but now they are covered with fur.

They remember their old village and the fields, so when they are hungry, they still come out of the forest and steal from the fields like they did long ago.

[an Ila story from Zambia]

## 25. The Origin of Chimpanzees

The chimpanzee was once a man.

The man got tired of working and took his family into the forest.

They no longer farmed; instead, they foraged for fruits.

Living in the forest, they lost their human intelligence. They became chimpanzees.

Now they imitate things humans do, but they are very foolish. For example, the chimpanzee builds a house in the trees, but when it rains he gets on top of the roof because he thinks the rain goes up, not down. He tries to get out of the rain by sitting on the rooftop, and instead he just gets wet.

[a Mangbetu story from the Congo]



## 26. The Men Who Went Fishing

Some men and their sons went fishing, even though it was a holiday.

On their way to the river, they met an old man.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“We’re going fishing,” they replied.

“But you can’t go fishing today,” said the old man. “Today is a holiday. The fish are praying to God.”

But the men and their sons didn’t listen. They didn’t respect the holiday.

As they cast their nets into the river, thunder rang out and a voice boomed, “Are you equal to me?”

Then the boys turned into pelicans, and the men turned into monkeys.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 27. The Man Who Didn't Go to Funerals

There was once a man who refused to attend funerals.

Then, when his own child died, he did not know how to prepare the body or where the burial ground was. So he put the child on his head and went about asking, “Where are the graves?”

Nobody would tell him.

He kept on wandering and asking, and as time passed, the dead body decayed and dripped down his nose. He kept asking, “Where are the graves? *Ku malembe, kwa-kwa-kwa?*”

Eventually he became a hornbill bird with his strange beak and strange cry: “Where are the graves? *Ku malembe, kwa-kwa-kwa?*”

[a Yao story from Malawi]



## 28. The Man Who Loved Women

There was a man who loved women. He loved all the women! The man also wanted to make love to every single woman, but didn't want to marry.

The king summoned this man.

While the man waited to see the king, he made love to all the king's wives.

The king was furious!

"I'm going to sell you as a slave," proclaimed the king.

But when the king's soldiers went to grab the man, he turned into a bat.

He flew away into the forest, where he hangs upside-down even now, swinging back and forth, shrieking, "No-no-no! No-no-no!"

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



## 29. The Dove and the Handsome Man

This story comes from the world's beginning.

Dove flew high in the sky, and she saw a man up there. He was very handsome! Dove wanted to marry him, so she brought him food.

He ate, but said nothing.

“Talk to me!” Dove said.

“No!” he said. “And don’t make me speak again.”

Dove kept pestering him, and when the handsome man spoke again, winds raged and clouds grew dark. Then his eyes opened wide, and light burst forth. His voice boomed.

“I’d never agree to marry a man like that!” shrieked Dove.

That was the first thunder and lightning.

[a story from Liberia]



## 30. Thunder and the Elephant

“I’m not afraid of you,” Elephant said to Thunder.

“You should be!” replied Thunder. “I’m more powerful than you.”

“Not true!” said Elephant.

“Prove it!” said Thunder. “Go a long way off and bellow. I’ll tell you if I can hear you.”

Elephant went away, and then bellowed loudly.

“I can’t hear you.....!” said Thunder. “Are you making any noise?”

Elephant trumpeted as loudly as he could.

“I can’t hear you.....!” said Thunder again. Then Thunder roared and lightning flashed.

Elephant was terrified.

“It’s just me, your brother,” said Thunder.

“No, you are my master,” said Elephant, acknowledging Thunder’s power.

[a Lozi story from Zambia]



## 31. The Dispute of Night and Day

Day and Night argued about who was most powerful.

The people declared, “Night is the most powerful!”

Angry, Day went away.

It was dark all the time.

“Make some light,” the people said to Night, but Night stayed dark; he couldn’t create light.

Desperate, the people sent Rooster to get Day.

Rooster traveled far and wide, and finally he found Day.

“I bring news!” Rooster said. “The people were wrong. You are more powerful than Night, and they sent me to announce your return, singing your praises.”

Day came back, and that is why Rooster announces daylight’s return every morning.

[a story from Liberia]



## 32. When People Returned from the Dead

Long ago, when people died, they returned from the dead, but animals who died didn't return. The living would dress in their best clothes to go greet the returning dead.

In that long ago time, there was a woman who had a dog that she loved very much, but her dog died.

"Get dressed!" her brother said. "We must go greet the returning dead."

"Why should I greet them when my dog won't return?" she replied.

God heard her words and became angry. "No longer will people return from the dead!" he said. "Like animals, they will die, never returning."

[a Nyoro story from Uganda]



### 33. The Bird Bearing God's Message

God sent a bird to tell the people that they need not die; when they grew old, they could shed their skins and become young again. “Tell this secret only to the humans,” God said. “Not to anyone else!”

As the bird flew along, it saw a snake eating a dead animal.

“Let me eat too,” the bird said, “and I’ll tell you a secret.”

“Agreed!” said the snake.

“When people grow old, they will die,” said the bird, “but you can shed your skin and become young again.”

That is why people die, but snakes can change their skin.

[an Oromo story from Kenya]

## 34. The Messages of the Chameleon and the Lizard

God told Chameleon, “Take this message to the people: you will multiply and not die.”

Lizard overheard, and he went running faster than Chameleon, who was very slow.

“O people,” Lizard announced, “hear God’s message: you will multiply, but you will die.”

“We hear you, Messenger of God,” the people replied.

Later, Chameleon arrived, and he said to the people, “Hear God’s message: you will multiply and not die.”

“You’re lying!” the people replied. “God’s messenger arrived already. We will multiply, and we will die.”

The people thought Lizard told them the truth, all because they heard his message first.

[a Giriama story from Kenya]



## 35. The Messages of the Chameleon and the Rabbit

God chose Chameleon as his messenger. “Tell the people: You will die, but then you will rise again.”

Chameleon walked so slowly that he forgot the message and had to go back.

Angry at Chameleon’s failure, God sent Rabbit instead. “You’re quick,” he told Rabbit. “You’ll be my messenger.”

Rabbit ran fast, but he also forgot the message. Afraid to go back, he delivered the wrong message, telling the people, “You will die, and you will die forever.”

This made the people angry. One man threw a stone that hit Rabbit on the mouth.

That’s why Rabbit’s lip is split.

[a San story from Botswana]

## 36. The Moon's Messengers

Moon sent Tortoise with a message for the people: “As I, the Moon, die and live again, so shall you.”

Tortoise repeated the message over and over as he walked, but he walked very slowly.

Moon waited and waited.

Finally she sent Rabbit.

Rabbit ran fast, but he didn't repeat the message while he ran, and he delivered the wrong message instead: “Moon dies and lives again, but you will die forever.”

Later, Tortoise arrived with Moon's message of eternal life, but it was too late.

The angry people threw stones at Rabbit; that's why Rabbit has a split lip.

[a San story from the Kalahari Desert]



## 37. The Baboon, the Python, and the Rabbit

Baboon was turning over rocks looking for beetles and worms to eat when he heard a voice. “Help! Help!”

It was Python, trapped under a big rock.

Baboon lifted the rock and Python slithered out. Then he grabbed Baboon and squeezed.

“I’m hungry!” said Python.

“That’s not fair!” screamed Baboon. “Help!”

Rabbit came running. “How can I help?”

Python and Baboon both began shouting.

“I can’t understand all this shouting,” said Rabbit. “Show me what happened.”

So Python crawled back under the rock.

Then Rabbit said, “Be wise, Baboon: this time when he asks for help, leave him there!”

[a Tswana story from southern Africa]

## 38. When Rabbit and Baboon Were Friends

Rabbit convinced Baboon that they should kill their mothers.

“It’ll be fun!” Rabbit said.

“I’m not sure,” Baboon said.

“Don’t worry,” Rabbit reassured him. “I’ll go first!”

Then Rabbit went behind his house, hit a barrel loudly with a stick, all the while screaming like his mother. His mother watched her son, smiling.

“Okay!” shouted Baboon. “I’ll kill my mother now,” and so Baboon killed his mother.

Then Baboon sat and cried; there was no one to cook dinner for him now. He was sorry his mother was dead.

Meanwhile Rabbit and his mother both laughed at the foolish Baboon.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



## 39. The Rabbit, the Lion, and the Ant-Hill

“Ant-hills are strong against fire,” Rabbit told Lion.

“Show me!” said Lion.

“Pile wood around this ant-hill and set it on fire,” said Rabbit.

Rabbit had built a burrow there, but Lion didn’t know that.

Rabbit hid inside his burrow until the fire went out.

Lion was amazed when Rabbit emerged from the ashes.

“You can do it too,” said Rabbit. “You just need a bigger ant-hill,” and he led Lion to a huge ant-hill. “Stay here; I’ll build the fire.”

Lion had nowhere to hide. His tail burned. Then his beard.

Lion finally burned to death.

Rabbit just laughed.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 40. The Rabbit and the Lion Play a Game

“Let’s play a game!” Lion said to Rabbit.

“How about Swallow-the-Stone-and-Vomit-It-Out?” replied Rabbit.

“I don’t know that game,” said Lion.

“Climb this tree and throw a stone down. I’ll catch it, swallow it, and vomit it.”

While Lion climbed, Rabbit chewed some leaves. Then, when Lion threw the stone, Rabbit jumped aside, spitting leaves on the stone.

Lion thought Rabbit had really swallowed and vomited the stone.

“Now you!” said Rabbit. “Open wide!”

When Rabbit threw the stone into Lion’s open mouth, it broke all his teeth.

Lion died.

“Poor Lion!” said Rabbit. “He should have opened his mouth wider.”

[an Ila story from Zambia]

## 41. The Rabbit and the Lion-Skin

Hyena saw Rabbit wearing a lion-skin.

“Where did you get that lion-skin?” Hyena asked.

“I pulled it right off a living lion,” Rabbit said. “You can do it too!”

Hyena chased a lion, but when she tried to grab his skin, the lion started chasing her.

Hyena ran to Rabbit’s burrow. “You tricked me!” shrieked Hyena, running into the burrow.

Rabbit ran out the back entrance and sealed it with his lion-skin, so Hyena couldn’t get out that way. Then, when she ran back to the entrance, the lion was there, waiting.

Hyena was trapped.

She died in the burrow.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 42. The Rabbit and the Hyena

Hyena had chased Rabbit to his house. “I’m going to eat you, Rabbit!” she yelped.

“Rabbit’s not here,” came a voice from inside the burrow.

“If you’re not Rabbit, who are you?” Hyena asked.

“I am He-Who-Vomits-the-Blood-of-His-Victims!” shouted the voice angrily. “And how dare you disturb my sleep like this! Who are you?”

Hyena replied cautiously, “I am Hyena.”

“Ah, I am glad you have come, Hyena! You’re just in time. I ate a whole family of Hyenas for breakfast, and now I’ll have Hyena for lunch!”

Hyena turned tail and ran, while Rabbit sat safely in his burrow, laughing.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 43. The Rabbit and the Hyena Go Hunting

Rabbit and Hyena went hunting. Whatever Rabbit shot, Hyena put in her sack. “It’s mine!” she growled.

Finally Rabbit got angry and left. He went and rolled in red mud, covering his body, and then made spots with white clay. Thus disguised, he waited atop an ant-hill.

Hyena was terrified when she saw the weird creature.

“I demand tribute!” shouted Rabbit.

“O Something-on-the-Ant-Hill,” replied Hyena, trembling, “I’ll give you all I have!”

Hyena pulled out the animals Rabbit had shot, one by one.

When he knew the sack was empty, Rabbit yelled, “Enough! Be gone!”

Hyena fled, and Rabbit laughed.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 44. The Rabbit and the Skunk

Rabbit and Skunk were friends.

“Let’s play hide-and-seek,” said Rabbit. “You go hide!”

Rabbit waited and then turned himself into a leopard. He found Skunk hiding under a bush and growled at him.

Skunk was terrified; he didn’t recognize Rabbit. “Help, Rabbit!” he shrieked. “There’s a leopard!” Then Skunk started crying.

Rabbit revealed himself and said, “Skunk, you are more cowardly than a hyena. But I will teach you to twist and turn so that you can run away from your enemies and escape.”

Then Rabbit taught Skunk how to maneuver, and that’s how Skunk got his nickname “Mr. Turn-and-Swerve.”

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 45. The Rabbit and the Elephant's Garden

Elephant caught Rabbit stealing vegetables from his garden. He chased Rabbit down to the riverbank; then Rabbit jumped in the water.

“I’ll get you, Rabbit!” Elephant shouted.

Rabbit finally climbed out of the water.

Elephant was gone.

Rabbit hopped onto the road.

Elephant was there!

“Have you seen Rabbit?” Elephant asked.

Rabbit smiled; Elephant didn’t recognize him because he was all wet and muddy. “What?” said Rabbit. “I don’t understand! I speak Water-Animal language. I don’t understand you Land-Animals.” Then he jumped back in the river.

Rabbit had barely escaped, so he decided to steal from other people’s gardens instead.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 46. The Rabbit, the Elephant, and the Hippo

“I challenge you to a tug-of-war,” Rabbit said to Elephant. “I’ll go stand on the other side of these trees. If you can’t pull me, you’ll have to pay me.”

“Agreed!” said Elephant, confident in his strength.

“Just pull when you hear the horn,” Rabbit said, tying a rope around Elephant.

Then Rabbit made the same bet with Hippo, tying Hippo with the same rope he’d tied around Elephant.

When Rabbit blew his horn, Elephant and Hippo pulled against each other, thinking it was Rabbit. Each one thought Rabbit had equaled them in strength, so Rabbit collected on both bets.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



## 47. The Rabbit Fools the Elephant (1)

Rabbit and Elephant were best friends.

One day they heard music.

“The people are having a party,” said Rabbit. “Let’s go.”

Elephant agreed, and they went to the people’s party.

“Let’s dance!” said Rabbit.

Elephant agreed, and they danced.

The people applauded Rabbit. “You’re a good dancer!”

But they laughed at Elephant.

“It’s because you are too big to dance,” said Rabbit. “I’ll cut off some of your fat.”

“Okay,” agreed Elephant, “but you must give it back later.”

Rabbit cut off Elephant’s fat.

Then while Elephant was dancing, Rabbit ran off.

Elephant and Rabbit were not friends after that.

[a Swahili story from Zanzibar]

## 48. The Rabbit Fools the Buffalo (2)

Elephant was angry. “Go get my fat from Rabbit!” Elephant told his friend Buffalo.

Rabbit welcomed Buffalo to his house. “I just made soup!” Rabbit said, and he gave Buffalo some elephant-fat soup.

“This tastes delicious!” said Buffalo. “What is it?”

“I made it with meat I found in a hole,” said Rabbit. “There’s lots more. I’ll show you!”

Rabbit led Buffalo to a deep hole. “Go down there and take all you want!” he said.

When Buffalo got in the hole, Rabbit threw a boulder on his head and killed him.

Then he threw Buffalo in the soup-pot too!

[a Swahili story from Zanzibar]



## 49. The Rabbit, the Leopard, and the Wolf

Leopard played dead to catch Rabbit.

“Fine meat!” Rabbit chortled. “And fine fur!”

He tied Leopard’s body with rope and made a head-pad of grass to carry the load.

As Rabbit walked, Leopard dug his claws into Rabbit’s head.

“What sharp thorns that grass has!” Rabbit thought.

Leopard kept clawing, and Rabbit kept groaning.

Wolf came running. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Help me carry this load,” said Rabbit, “and I’ll give you half.”

Wolf put the load on his head.

Leopard started clawing Wolf!

Wolf groaned, and Rabbit ran off, laughing.

Then Leopard broke free, grabbed Wolf, and ate him.

[a Swahili story from Zanzibar]



## 50. The Rabbit, the Hornbill, and the Party

“The horned animals are having a party,” said Hornbill.

“Then we’ll wear horns!” said Rabbit.

So Rabbit and Hornbill made horns of beeswax and went to the party.

After a while, Hornbill whispered, “Our wax is melting.”

“What did he say?” Cow asked Rabbit.

“He said: give us beer,” so Cow gave them beer.

“It’s really melting,” said Hornbill, more loudly.

“What did he say?” Goat asked Rabbit.

“He said: give us wine,” so Goat gave them wine.

At last the wax was all gone.

“They don’t have horns!” bellowed Buffalo, and then both Rabbit and Hornbill turned and ran.

[an Ila story from Zambia]

## 51. The Rabbit, the Hornbill, and the Bread

Hornbill and Rabbit were traveling together, and each had some bread.

At the river Rabbit said, “To cross safely, we must give the river our bread.”

Hornbill threw his bread into the river, but Rabbit secretly kept his, throwing a rock instead.

After crossing, Rabbit pretended to find his bread, “Look! The river returned my bread.”

“But not mine,” said Hornbill sadly.

Later, Hornbill begged Rabbit for bread. “I’m so hungry!” he said.

“Trade me your spear,” said Rabbit.

So Rabbit got Hornbill’s spear, and in exchange Hornbill got only a little bread, not even enough to fill his stomach.

[an Ila story from Zambia]



## 52. The Rabbit, the Guinea-Fowl and the Farm

Guinea-Fowl had cleared a farm in the jungle.

Rabbit stumbled across the farm. “There’s no road here,” Rabbit exclaimed. “I’ll make this my farm!” So Rabbit cleared a road to the farm with his hoe and began farming.

Guinea-Fowl came back and found Rabbit working there.

“This is my farm!” she shouted.

“Impossible,” said Rabbit. “This is my road to my farm. Where is your road?”

“The sky is my road,” replied Guinea-Fowl.

“Liar! The sky is no road, and if you don’t leave me alone, I’ll take you to court.”

Guinea-Fowl was scared and abandoned her farm to Rabbit.

[an Angas story from Nigeria]



## 53. The Rabbit and the Bee

Bee invited Rabbit to dinner. “Dress my hair,” Bee said, “while I make honey.” Bee sat in a bowl and made honey while Rabbit dressed Bee’s hair. Then they ate the honey.

Next, Rabbit invited Bee to dinner. “Dress my hair,” said Rabbit, “and I’ll make honey.” Bee dressed Rabbit’s hair, while Rabbit sat in a bowl and peed.

When Bee tasted Rabbit’s honey, he said, “This is no good. Wash the bowl, and I’ll make honey.”

Then Bee made honey, and Rabbit ate, but Bee refused to eat; instead, he went away angry.

Bee and Rabbit aren’t friends anymore.

[a Lango story from Uganda]

## 54. The Rabbit and the Python

Python invited his friend Rabbit to dinner.

“I’ll go catch termites,” Python said. “You sweep the yard!”

Python came back and said, “Hit me!” When Rabbit hit Python, Python spat out termites, which they ate.

Rabbit invited Python to dinner.

“Dress my hair!” said Rabbit, and Python did so.

“Sweep the yard!” Python did so.

“Now hit me!” Rabbit said, but no termites emerged.

“Again!” Still no termites.

Then Rabbit hit Python and termites came out, which they ate.

“Please dine with me again tomorrow,” said Rabbit.

But Python did not go back; that was the end of their friendship.

[a Lango story from Uganda]



## 55. The Rabbit, the Tortoise, and the Millet

“Come to dinner!” Tortoise told his friend, Rabbit.

When Rabbit came, Tortoise said, “Grind the millet on my body.”

Tortoise lay down, Rabbit ground the millet, then Tortoise cooked it, and they ate.

Next time, Rabbit invited Tortoise to dinner.

“Grind on me!” said Rabbit, and he lay down. Tortoise started grinding, but it hurt so badly Rabbit jumped up and said, “No, I’ll grind on you.”

Tortoise lay down, Rabbit ground the millet and cooked it, but when he served the food, Tortoise was angry. “That wasn’t fair!” he said, and he went away hungry.

They aren’t friends anymore.

[a Lango story from Uganda]



## 56. The Rabbit, the Tortoise, and the Tunnel

Tortoise had no food to eat, so he hired Rabbit to dig a tunnel under the market.

Then, when the merchants had set up their stalls full of food, Tortoise and Rabbit hid in the tunnel, making terrible noises.

“Whooohooohoo! Whoooohooohoooo!” they shrieked.

“WHOOOOOOOOOHHOOOOHOOOOOO!”

The people thought evil spirits had invaded the market, so they ran away.

Then Tortoise and Rabbit emerged, took all the food they could carry and escaped back through the tunnel.

They did this again and again, and the more often they did it, the more convinced the people became that the market really was haunted.

[an Igbo story from Nigeria]

## 57. The Rabbit and the Tortoise Run a Race

“Let’s race!” Rabbit said to Tortoise, and Tortoise agreed.

That night, Tortoise hid his friends in the bushes all along the track and at the starting-post. “All Tortoises look alike to Rabbit,” he told them.

When the race started, Rabbit dashed ahead. Laughing, he glanced back and shouted, “Look at me, Tortoise!”

“No, look at me!” said a Tortoise, sticking his head out of the bushes in front of Rabbit.

Rabbit ran faster.

“Not fast enough!” said another Tortoise ahead of him.

When Rabbit reached the finish-line, there was Tortoise!

“You really do run fast,” gasped Rabbit.

Tortoise just smiled.

[a San story from southern Africa]



## 58. The Tortoise, the Elephant, and the Hippo

“I’m so strong,” Tortoise told Elephant, “I could pull you into the river.”

Elephant laughed.

Tortoise tied a rope around Elephant. “I’ll show you!” he said. “Wait here.”

Then Tortoise found Hippo. “I’m strong enough to pull you out of the river.”

Hippo laughed.

“I’ll show you!” Tortoise said, tying the rope around Hippo.

“Dive deep,” he said. “Then pull!”

Hippo dove deep, and then he pulled.

When Hippo pulled, Elephant pulled.

They both pulled hard.

“You really are strong!” shouted Elephant.

“Wait!” shouted Hippo, lifting his head up. “Is that you, Elephant?”

Then they both realized: Tortoise tricked them.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]

## 59. The Tortoise, the Buffalo, and the Elephant

“I challenge you to tug-of-war!” Tortoise said to Buffalo, and Buffalo accepted the challenge.

Tortoise said the same to Elephant, who also accepted.

The rope was so long Buffalo and Elephant didn't realize they were pulling against each other, not against Tortoise. Buffalo and Elephant pulled so hard they died!

Tortoise rejoiced, thinking about all the meat he would get.

“I'll butcher Elephant first,” he decided, and he set to work.

Then the wind blew through the trees.

“Someone's coming to steal my meat!” shouted Tortoise, and in his fearful frenzy, he fell on his own knife and killed himself.

[an Igbo story from Nigeria]



## 60. The Tortoise and the Porcupine

Tortoise and Porcupine were friends.

One day Tortoise got a jigger-flea in his foot. “Help me, Porcupine!” he said.

Porcupine gave him a thorn to use, and another, and another. “They’re no good!” shouted Tortoise. “Give me a quill from your back.”

So Porcupine gave him a quill, although it was painful to do so. Then Porcupine told Tortoise, “I need to grind tukula powder. Give me a bowl!”

Tortoise gave him a bowl, and another, and another. “They’re no good!” shouted Porcupine. “Give me the bowl on your back!”

When Tortoise removed the shell from his back, he died.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 61. The Tortoise and the Crane

“Help me, Crane!” shouted Tortoise. “Jackal wants to catch me and kill me.”

“Grab onto my tail with your mouth,” said Crane, “and we’ll fly away.”

So Tortoise grabbed Crane’s tail, and together they soared into the sky.

Jackal shouted from down on the ground, “Look at the ugly Tortoise! He’s so old and wrinkled!”

“Liar!” shouted Tortoise, but when he shouted, he let go of Crane’s tail and fell, shattering his shell.

“Who are you calling a liar?” snarled Jackal.

“Not you!” pleaded Tortoise, but to no avail; Jackal killed Tortoise and ate him.

Tortoise should have stayed quiet.

[a Tswana story from southern Africa]



## 62. Who Will Marry the King's Daughter?

“If you want to marry my daughter,” proclaimed the King, “bring me this wicker basket full of water from the stream.”

Many men and many animals tried, but the water always escaped through the holes in the basket.

Tortoise took the basket to the stream and dipped it into the water. Then he sent a message to the King: “Let the King give me a carrying-strap made of smoke so I can bring him the basket.”

When the King heard Tortoise’s message, he laughed. “Tortoise is even wiser than I am!” he said, and so Tortoise married the King’s daughter.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 63. Chimpanzee's Kola-Nuts

Chimpanzee lived in a big kola-tree. “Come enjoy my kola-nuts!’ he proclaimed, and the animals came, standing in line. As each animal reached the front of the line, they bowed to Chimpanzee and received a kola-nut.

Tortoise, however, stood quietly off to the side.

As each animal received their kola nut, they said to Tortoise, “Why don’t you get in line?”

“Oh, I’m just a small fellow,” he said modestly. “I don’t need a whole nut. Just share yours with me; that’s all I need.”

So one by one, Tortoise got half of all the nuts, more than anyone else!

[an Edo story from Nigeria]



## 64. The Leopard's Kola-Tree

“You must guard my kola-tree,” King Leopard said to Snail.

“Let no one steal the nuts!”

Monkey climbed the tree, but Snail knocked him down and Leopard ate him.

Squirrel climbed the tree. Snail knocked him down too, and Leopard ate him.

Then Tortoise climbed the tree. Snail knocked him down, but Tortoise’s shell protected him when he fell. The shell also protected Tortoise when King Leopard tried to eat him.

“I’m not really hungry,” Leopard claimed.

Tortoise just laughed. “You’re always hungry,” he said, “but you can’t eat me.”

Tortoise is the only animal who doesn’t fear King Leopard.

[a story from Liberia]



## 65. The Tortoise and His Kola-Nuts

Tortoise had feasted on kola-nuts and was sitting at the foot of his kola-tree, empty shells strewn all around him.

Then Chief Leopard walked by.

“Help!” yelled Tortoise. “Someone has been eating my kola-nuts.”

Leopard believed Tortoise and summoned the animal village.

“We must punish the criminals who ate Tortoise’s kola-nuts!” he proclaimed.

After the animals assembled, Tortoise told Leopard, “Feelings of guilt will make the criminals tremble.” Then Tortoise pointed to the sheep, who were trembling with fear already.

“Sheep,” said Leopard, “explain yourselves!”

“We’re innocent,” bleated the Sheep, but because they were trembling, Leopard seized and ate them.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 66. When the Tortoise Wrestled the Leopard

“I’ll beat any animal in wrestling!” boasted Leopard.

What the animals didn’t know was Leopard had tied his tail to a tree stump, making it impossible to throw him. Then he ordered Elephant to block the stump from view.

One after another, the animals tried and failed to throw Leopard.

Tortoise said, “I’ll wrestle you tomorrow!”

During the night Tortoise came and dug up the stump so Leopard and Elephant couldn’t play their trick again.

The next day Tortoise wrestled with Leopard and threw him to the ground.

“Now you can all see,” said Tortoise, “I am strongest of all!”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 67. The Tortoise and the Leopard Go Hunting

Tortoise went hunting with Leopard, and they caught a hyrax. They butchered the hyrax, but before they carried the meat home, Tortoise said, “I’m so hungry! Let’s roast the liver now.” Leopard agreed.

Then Tortoise secretly stuffed the gall-bladder and bitter herbs into the roasted liver.

“Here,” he told Leopard, “you go first.”

Leopard bit into the liver and spat it out. “This meat is no good! The hyrax is spoiled.”

“We’ll have to throw it away,” said Tortoise sadly.

Tortoise threw the meat away, but later he returned and took it home.

So Tortoise got everything; Leopard got nothing.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 68. The Tortoise and the Leopard's Farm

Leopard made the animals hoe his fields.

Working hard, the animals grew thirsty, so Leopard agreed to bring them water.

After Leopard left, Tortoise said, “We’re fools to work for Leopard who killed our mothers and fathers.”

“Stop grumbling, Tortoise!” the animals replied.

Then Tortoise hid in a bush. He waited until Leopard returned and then shouted in an eerie, booming voice, “You’re fools to work for Leopard who killed your mothers and fathers.”

Amazed, the animals exclaimed, “A divine voice has spoken!” They all threw their hoes at Leopard and ran off.

Leopard had to hoe his own fields.

[an Edo story from Nigeria]

## 69. The Leopard in the Tortoise's Garden

When Tortoise saw Leopard prowling around his garden, he was afraid but pretended otherwise. “I know a good game we can play here in the garden!” Tortoise said.

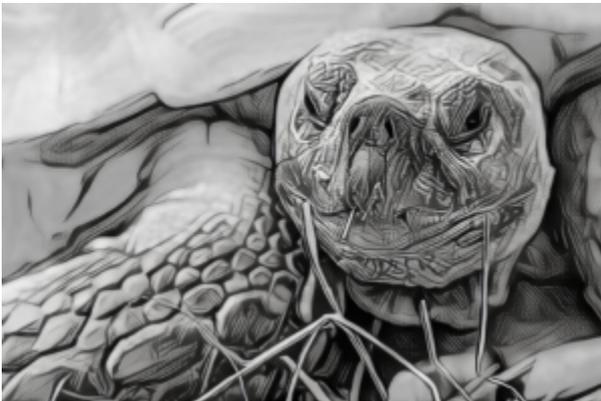
“Yes, let’s play!” said Leopard.

“You’ll like this game,” said Tortoise. “You stand here next to the tree, and I take this rope, and then I wrap it around you like this...” While he was speaking, Tortoise tied Leopard to the tree.

“I don’t like this game!” yelled Leopard. “Let me go!”

But Tortoise just laughed. Then he went into the house and warned his wife to stay out of the garden.

[an Edo story from Nigeria]



## 70. The Tortoise, the Leopard, and Their Drums

Tortoise and Leopard used to be friends.

“Let’s make drums!” Leopard said to Tortoise one day, so they went into the forest. Together they cut down a tree, and each made a drum.

Tortoise’s drum had a much better sound than Leopard’s drum, and Leopard was jealous.

After a while, Leopard tried to take Tortoise’s drum by force.

“Give it to me!” he snarled.

“No!” said Tortoise. “It’s mine!”

Then Tortoise ran, holding his drum tight.

Leopard chased Tortoise.

When Tortoise reached the river, he jumped in.

Leopard couldn’t swim, so Tortoise escaped.

That was the end of their friendship.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 71. The Tortoise, the Leopard, and Their Mothers

During a famine, Tortoise told Leopard, “Let’s kill our mothers and eat them.”

Leopard agreed.

“Mine is across the stream,” said Tortoise. He crossed the stream, gathered plums, and squeezed plum-juice into the water.

Thinking he saw blood flowing, Leopard killed his mother too, putting her body into a bag.

Tortoise brought back a bag also, but it contained only plums.

“I’ll cook yours,” said Tortoise; “you cook mine.”

They ate Leopard’s mother first.

Then, when Leopard went to cook Tortoise’s mother, he found only plums.

“What have you done?!” shouted Leopard.

Tortoise replied, “Ask instead: what have YOU done?”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 72. The Tortoise and the Antelope

“I saw where Leopard tapped a wine-palm,” Tortoise said to Antelope. “Let’s go drink the wine!”

Yes,” Antelope agreed, “let’s go!”

Together they climbed the tree and drank the wine.

It was intoxicating!

Then Tortoise gave Antelope a bag. “Collect more wine in this bag, and then lower it down to me.”

Tortoise climbed down, but instead of waiting at the foot of the tree, he hid in the bushes.

When Leopard arrived, he saw Antelope. “Hey! Are you drinking my wine?” he shouted. Then he leaped into the tree and killed Antelope.

Tortoise just laughed, watching from the bushes.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 73. The Tortoise and His Children

Tortoise gathered his children and told them, “Dear children, you must never steal and you must never lie.”

“We hear you, Father,” said Tortoise’s children.

Then a famine came, and after three days with no food in the house, Tortoise went and stole some food. Then, when he brought the food home, he lied about it. “Look, children!” he said. “I found this food in the forest.”

The children knew their father was lying.

“Father,” said the children, “you told us we must never steal and we must never lie.”

“Who is the teacher here?” asked Tortoise. “You or me?!”

[an Igbo story from Nigeria]

## 74. The Spider Puts on a Disguise (1)

Spider found the skin of a dead Bushbuck and put it on. Then he went to see Bushbuck.

When Bushbuck opened the door, he was shocked. “My poor brother!” he shouted. “What happened to you?”

“Spider spit on me,” said Spider from inside his disguise. “Now I’m dying. I came to warn you before I die: beware of Spider!”

Then Spider limped back into the forest, groaning.

The next day Spider showed up at Bushbuck’s house.

“Feed me!” he said. “Or else I’ll spit on you.”

Terrified, Bushbuck gave Spider all the food he had in the house.

Spider smiled.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



## 75. The Spider, the Bushbuck, and the Rabbit (2)

Rabbit noticed Bushbuck was looking thin. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “Are you sick?”

“No,” said Bushbuck. “I’ve been giving all my food to Spider. Otherwise, he’ll spit on me.”

“So what?” said Rabbit. “His spit hurts insects, but not big animals like us. I’ll show you!”

Rabbit waited at Bushbuck’s house and when Spider arrived for his meal, Rabbit said, “Go away!”

“Watch out!” shouted Spider. “I’m going to spit!”

“Spit all you want,” said Rabbit, laughing.

Spider spit.

Nothing happened.

The more Spider spit, the more Rabbit laughed.

Then Bushbuck slammed the door.

He wasn’t afraid of Spider anymore!

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]

## 76. The Wise Man, the Hyena, and the Spider (1)

A wise man journeying home on horseback stopped to rest. Hyena saw him. “Help!” she shouted. “I’m late for a funeral. Loan me your horse!”

The man agreed. “But come back soon,” he said.

“I will!” lied Hyena. She rode away on the horse, then killed the horse and ate it.

Spider saw the wise man weeping. “Why do you have a saddle but no horse?” he asked.

“Hyena stole my horse,” he replied.

“I’ll bring back Hyena,” said Spider. “She can be your horse! Just give me a magic charm as my reward.”

“I promise,” said the wise man.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 77. The Spider, the Hyena, and the Saddle (2)

Spider then took the saddle and went to Hyena's den. "Hey, Hyena!" Spider shouted. "Do you want to come with me to a feast?"

"Of course I do!" said Hyena.

Hyena was running very fast, but Spider walked slowly.

"Hurry up!" said Hyena.

"I can't hurry up," said Spider, "because I'm carrying this heavy saddle."

"I'll carry the saddle," said Hyena.

"Good idea!" said Spider. He put the saddle on Hyena, and then jumped up and spurred her. "Run, Hyena, run!"

Spider rode Hyena back to where the wise man was waiting.

"Here's your new horse!" Spider told him, laughing.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 78. The Spider, the Hyena, and the Chain (3)

The wise man gave Spider the charm as he'd promised and rode away on Hyena.

Spider shouted, "Tie her with a chain! Not a leather cord!" But the man couldn't hear him. "What did Spider say?" he asked Hyena.

"Tie me with a leather cord," replied Hyena, "not a chain."

When the man got home, he tied Hyena with a leather cord.

In the night, Hyena ate the cord, and then she ate all the man's goats and chickens too.

Hyena was very angry at Spider for the way he had tricked her, but the magic charm kept Spider safe.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 79. The Spider and the Deer

“Whoever wins the race will marry my daughter!” proclaimed the King.

Certain Deer would win, Mongoose told the other animals, “We must tie up Deer so he can’t compete.” Then they caught Deer and tied him.

“Help!” shouted Deer, and Spider came.

“Untie me, Spider! When the Princess and I have a daughter, she’ll be your wife.”

Spider agreed and untied Deer.

As the race began, Spider grabbed onto Deer’s horn, and Deer outpaced the other animals. Then, near the finish-line, Spider jumped from Deer’s horn to cross the finish-line first.

Spider won! So Spider, not Deer, married the Princess.

[a Vai story from Liberia]

## 80. The Mouse-Deer and the King

The King invited his friend Mouse-Deer to visit him.

During the night, Mouse-Deer crept into the kitchen, stole some eggs, and ran, but then he had to wait at the river for Frog to ferry him across in his canoe.

That's where the people who were chasing Mouse-Deer caught him. "You stole the eggs!" they yelled.

"Only the King may search me," insisted Mouse-Deer.

The King found the eggs in Mouse-Deer's pockets but didn't want to shame himself by declaring his friend a thief.

"No eggs here!" declared the King.

That's why they say: *The King can restore any reputation.*

[a story from Liberia]



## 81. The Mouse-Deer and the Medicine-Man

Mouse-Deer told Medicine-Man, “Give me wisdom!”

“First, bring me a Leopard’s tooth,” said Medicine-Man.

So Mouse-Deer went to visit Leopard. “Smile for me, Leopard!” he said.

“Why should I smile for you?” snarled Leopard.

“Because Medicine-Man said Elephant’s teeth are whiter than yours,” Mouse-Deer replied. “I wanted to see for myself.”

“My teeth are the whitest,” insisted Leopard. “Just look!”

When he opened his mouth, Mouse-Deer grabbed a big stick and knocked out one of Leopard’s teeth.

Then he ran to Medicine-Man with the tooth.

“This proves you’re wise already,” said Medicine-Man. “It would be dangerous to make you wiser.”

[a story from Liberia]

## 82. The Mouse-Deer and the Leopard

The animals were supposed to work Mouse-Deer's land, but Leopard made them all go work for him.

Angry, Mouse-Deer went to the spring near Leopard's land and began playing his harp. "Leopard is a mighty man," he sang. "Mighty, mighty is he!"

When the animals came to get water, they couldn't resist: they started singing and dancing.

Goat came.

Then Monkey.

Also Pangolin. Warthog. Buffalo. All of them.

Finally, Leopard came. "Where are my workers?" he shouted.

Then he heard the song.

"Leopard is a mighty man..."

Leopard starting dancing too!

No work got done at Leopard's farm that day.

[a story from Liberia]



## 83. The Leopard and the Ram (1)

When he saw Ram for the first time, Leopard asked, “Who are you?”

Ram shouted, “I AM RAM! Who are you?”

“Uh.... I’m...” Then Leopard ran away, afraid even to say his name.

Jackal saw Leopard running and asked, “What happened?”

“I met a loud creature with enormous horns!” said Leopard.

“His name is Ram.”

Jackal laughed. “Fear not! Ram is actually good to eat. Let’s go; I’ll show you.”

“I’m too frightened,” said Leopard.

“Let’s tie our tails together,” Jackal said. “That will stop you from running away.”

So, tails tied together, Jackal and Leopard went to see Ram.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



## 84. The Jackal, the Leopard, and the Ram (2)

When Ram saw Leopard and Jackal approaching his house, he knew they were coming to eat him. Since he couldn't fight them, he would have to trick them instead.

“Oh look!” shouted Ram. “I'm so hungry, and Jackal has brought me Leopard to eat. Perhaps I will eat Jackal too, because I really am very VERY hungry!”

At those words, Leopard fled in terror.

“Stop, Leopard!” Jackal shouted. “Stop!”

But nothing Jackal said could stop him, and as Leopard ran, Jackal bounced along behind him, tied to Leopard's tail, battered and bruised by the rocks and bushes.

Ram just laughed.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

## 85. The Leopard and the Goat

Leopard caught Goat in the forest.

“Tell me three truths,” said Leopard, “and I’ll let you live.”

“You aren’t hungry, or else I’d be dead already.”

“True!” said Leopard.

“I wish I’d traveled a different path today.”

“Surely true.”

“Nobody will believe I met Leopard and lived.”

“Also true,” said Leopard. “So I suppose I must kill you!”

“I demand a witness,” pleaded Goat. “Let me go fetch Dog.”

So Goat went to the village to fetch Dog... and never came back.

Leopard sent Cat to fetch Goat... but Cat never came back.

Now Leopard hates both Goat and Cat.

[a Vai story from Liberia]



## 86. The Leopard and the Gazelle

Gazelle was boiling maize when Leopard walked by.

“What smells so good?” he asked.

“Those are my mother’s teeth,” Gazelle said. “Have a taste!”

Leopard ate a spoonful. “Delicious!” he exclaimed.

When Leopard got home, he pulled out his mother’s teeth and then boiled her teeth just as Gazelle had done, but the teeth didn’t get soft.

Leopard confronted Gazelle, and she laughed. “Only a fool can’t tell the difference between his mother’s teeth and maize!”

Leopard roared with anger, but before he could attack, Gazelle ran away, leaving Leopard with a pot full of teeth that he couldn’t eat.

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]



## 87. The Leopard and His Dog

When Leopard chased Gazelle, she hid inside a log.

“Where did she go?” Leopard wondered.

Later, when Leopard chopped the log for firewood, a beautiful dog jumped out. “This will be my dog!” Leopard said. Then he told his wives, “Don’t you ever scold my dog!”

But one day the dog misbehaved, and a wife scolded it. When Leopard heard the dog howling, he killed that wife.

This happened repeatedly until all of Leopard’s wives were dead.

Then the dog became Gazelle again. Running away, she shouted, “Only a fool can’t tell the difference between a dog and a gazelle!”

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]

## 88. The Leopard and the Antelope's Wife

Leopard and Antelope were the best of friends.

Then Antelope's wife became ill. Desperate, he ran to the house of his friend. "Leopard!" he shouted. "Come quickly! My wife is very ill. Help me!"

Leopard ran with Antelope to Antelope's house. After examining Antelope's wife, Leopard said, "Put some dried banana-leaves on your wife's belly."

Antelope did so.

Then Leopard said, "Now set the leaves on fire. Hurry!"

Antelope did so, and his wife burned to death.

Leopard just laughed.

Meanwhile, Antelope ran away as fast as he could, having realized at last that Leopard wasn't his friend after all.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]



## 89. The Leopard and the Pangolin

Leopard and Pangolin vowed to feed one another in turn.

First, Leopard killed a deer and fed Pangolin.

“Now you must feed me,” said Leopard. “Kill me a pig!”

“Alright,” said Pangolin.

First, he said to Mr. Pig privately. “I often hear your wife uttering curses against you.”

Next, he said to Mrs. Pig privately, “I often hear your husband uttering curses against you.”

The two Pigs fought fiercely and killed one another.

Then Pangolin took one dead pig to eat for himself, and he gave the other to Leopard.

Husbands and wives should not believe the gossip of strangers!

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 90. The Leopard and the Cheetah

Leopard killed the chief's ox and then smeared the ox's blood on the mouth of his brother, Cheetah, while Cheetah was sleeping.

"One of my oxen is missing!" shouted the chief.

"I haven't seen your ox," said Leopard.

"I haven't seen it either," said Cheetah.

"But you have blood on your mouth, brother," said Leopard.

"Look, chief, there is the blood!"

The chief then ordered Leopard to punish Cheetah, so Leopard attacked Cheetah fiercely.

"You will always be fierce, Leopard," said the chief, "and you, Cheetah, will always be guilty of biting cattle, for which you will forever be punished."

[an Ila story from Zambia]

## 91. The Lion and the Fox

Tired of Fox's tricks, Lion decided to lure Fox into his den by pretending to be sick. He sent Fox this message: "Come quickly! I'm dying."

Fox immediately went to see Lion, armed with a long wooden staff.

"Dear Fox," said Lion, "I'm burning with fever."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Fox replied.

"Come in," Lion urged him. "Touch my forehead; feel my fever."

Fox reached out his staff and touched Lion without coming in. "Truly!" Fox exclaimed. "The fever burns me through the staff."

Then Fox laughed and ran.

Lion sprang, but he was too late; Fox had escaped.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 92. The Lion and the Baboon

Baboon knew that Lion was stalking him, so he took two flat, round rocks and attached them to the back of his head. They looked like eyes!

Now when Lion crept up on Baboon from behind, he thought Baboon's eyes were staring at him, and he backed off.

Even so, Lion did not give up stalking Baboon.

One day, Baboon sat on the edge of a cliff. He knew Lion was approaching. As Lion got closer and closer, Baboon suddenly bent down. Lion sprang and then went hurtling over the cliff, falling to his death on the ground far below.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



## 93. The Lion and the Mule

“My father was a lion,” boasted Lion, “and my mother a lioness.”

“My mother was a horse,” said Mule, “but my father was a donkey.”

“Miscreant!” snarled Lion. “You don’t deserve to live. I’m going to eat you!”

“Wait,” said Mule. “You need to read my full pedigree. Let me go get the documents!”

Mule ran to the blacksmith. “Shoe my back hooves,” he said, “and leave the nails sticking out.”

Then Mule returned to Lion. “All the documents are in my back hooves,” he said, and when Lion bent down to examine Mule’s hooves, Mule kicked and killed him.

[a Kabyle story from Algeria]

## 94. The Lion and the Jackal

Lion and Jackal were hunting elands.

Lion shot, but missed; Jackal's shot killed an eland.

"I killed it!" Lion roared.

"Of course," said Jackal.

Later, while Lion slept, Jackal crawled into the eland and began eating.

When Lion awoke, he saw Jackal's tail sticking out of the eland, so he grabbed it and pulled.

"Caught you!" he said. "As punishment, your family will get the worst meat, and now you must take the best meat to my wife and cubs."

"Of course," said Jackal.

But Jackal took all the meat home to his wife and children; Lion's family got nothing.

[a San story from southern Africa]



## 95. The Jackal and the Hyena

“Nothing hurts more than a sharp spear,” said Hyena.

“No,” said Jackal. “Lies hurt more than a sharp spear.”

“Prove it!” said Hyena.

So Jackal took some honey-cakes and went to see Lion.

“O King,” he said, “I offer you this treat.”

Lion devoured the honey-cakes. “Delicious!” he roared. “What was that?”

“Hyena-Tears,” said Jackal.

Then Lion visited Hyena. “Cry me some tears!” he said.

Hyena cried.

“These are salty!” growled Lion. “I want the sweet ones.”

When Hyena couldn’t produce honey-tears, Lion beat her until she was nearly dead.

Jackal was right: *Lies hurt more than a sharp spear.*

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 96. The Man and the Snake

Snake was trapped under a heavy stone.

“Help!” she yelled.

A man freed her; then she hissed, “Now I’ll eat you!”

“Not fair!” protested the man. “Let’s ask Rabbit.”

But Rabbit said, “It’s fair.”

Snake smiled.

“Let’s ask Hyena,” said the man.

But Hyena said, “It’s fair.”

Snake smiled again.

The man was getting desperate. “Let’s ask Jackal.”

When the man explained the situation, Jackal was confused. “I can’t imagine Snake fitting under that stone,” he said.

“But I did!” said Snake. “Look!”

The man put the stone back on top of Snake.

“Now leave her there!” said Jackal, smiling.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

## 97. The Hunter and the Antelope

A hunter shot an antelope in the forest. The antelope fell dead, and then the hunter skinned the antelope.

To the hunter's surprise, the skinned antelope jumped up and ran.

"Antelope!" yelled the hunter. "Stop! Come back! Everyone will say you are very foolish to be without your skin. Come back here and get your skin!"

The antelope went back, and then the man shot the antelope again.

The antelope did not jump up anymore.

The hunter got both the skin and the meat.

If by some miracle you escape your enemies, it's foolish to go back there ever again.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 98. The Scholar and the Monkey

A scholar sat writing, scratching out mistakes with his knife.

A monkey was watching.

As soon as the scholar left, the monkey jumped on the scholar's desk and tried to write.

When the scholar returned, he found his manuscript all smeared. Then he noticed the monkey watching him. The scholar smiled, picked up his knife and rubbed the blunt edge against his throat.

When the scholar left again, the monkey jumped back on the table and grabbed the knife. But because he didn't know the difference between the sharp edge and the blunt, he cut his own throat and died.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 99. The Mouse-Deer and the Python

Mouse-Deer was wandering in the woods when he carelessly walked near Python's lair, and Python grabbed him.

"You're barely a ssssssssnack!" he hissed. "But better than nothing."

Just as Python started to swallow Mouse-Deer, Monkey appeared, and Mouse-Deer shouted, "Help me, Monkey!"

"What's going on here, Python?" said Monkey. "What gives you the right to eat my friend?"

"Mmm..nnnnh...mwmwmw..." Python said; it was hard to speak with Mouse-Deer already in his mouth.

"I can't understand you with your mouth full," Monkey told Python, so Python spit Mouse-Deer out, and before he could say a word, both Mouse-Deer and Monkey escaped.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]

## 100. The Squirrel and the Python

Python and Squirrel were friends and even shared a nest, but then Python ate Squirrel's children.

"If you eat my children again," Squirrel said, "I'll kill you."

Python just smiled and nodded, confident Squirrel could not harm him.

Time passed, and Squirrel had more children. Then one day she returned to her nest and the children were gone.

"Where are my children?" Squirrel cried.

Python slithered down to the ground and said, "I don't know."

Squirrel squeaked and chattered until a hunter came and, seeing Python at the foot of the tree, the hunter killed him.

That was Squirrel's revenge.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 101. The Man Who Caught a Python

A man caught an enormous python in a trap.

“Take me to your home,” said the python, and the man carried the python home, singing,

*Big snake! Big snake!*

*Not a deer;*

*I caught a big snake!*

When the man got home, the python said, “Now I will eat your brothers.”

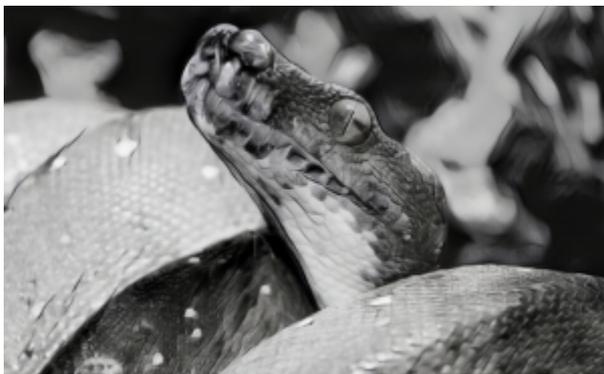
“I’ll give you a goat,” said the man, “or a sheep.”

“No!” said the python.

“Wait here then,” said the man, putting the python inside his hut. “I’ll go get one of my brothers.”

Then he went out, locked the door, and burned down the hut with the python inside.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 102. The Greedy Man and His Wife

There was a greedy man who kept raiding the pantry at night while his wife slept.

“Where did our food go?” his wife would ask.

“Mice must be eating it,” he’d reply.

She went to Mantis. “Put shells over your eyes,” Mantis said, “so he’ll think you’re awake when you’re really asleep.”

It worked! The greedy husband waited and waited for her to fall sleep until finally he dozed off, exhausted, near dawn.

When his wife awoke, she removed the shells. “Wake up, husband,” she said.

“Go away! I’m sleeping,” he groaned.

So she went and raided the pantry herself.

[a Lozi story from Zambia]

## 103. The Fox and the Farmer

Hoping to catch a chicken, a fox lay down in a barnyard, pretending to be asleep, eyes closed, motionless.

A chicken, thinking the fox really was asleep, wandered dangerously close.

The fox pounced and grabbed her by the leg.

“Keaw! Keaw!” shrieked the chicken.

The farmer came running, but it was too late: the fox had already eaten the chicken.

“Fox,” said the farmer, “did you hear a chicken cry for help?”

“No,” said the fox, “I didn’t.”

“Then how do you explain the feathers in your mouth?” asked the farmer.

“Those feathers mean nothing at all,” the fox replied.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]



## 104. The Fox and the Raven

Fox was starving, so he decided to play dead. “When Raven comes to feed on my body,” he thought, “I’ll grab him!”

But when Raven saw Fox lying there, he alighted on a rock, just out of reach.

Fox stayed perfectly still.

“Well, I suppose Fox is sleeping,” Raven squawked. “Because if he were dead, the wind would make his ears wave back and forth.”

Hearing Raven’s words, Fox cautiously wiggled his ears.

Raven cawed loudly. “O Fox, your body may be still and your eyes closed, but you can hear every word I’m saying.”

Then Raven flew away, laughing.

[a Bishari story from the northern Sudan]

## 105. The Leopard and the Crane

One day Leopard said to Crane, “Let’s be friends! Come visit me. I would enjoy your company!”

Crane had her doubts about this, but she agreed to visit Leopard later.

When Crane came to see Leopard, she settled on the branch of a nearby tree. As she and Leopard talked, she plucked out a few feathers, letting them fall to the ground.

Leopard couldn’t resist: he pounced, tearing the feathers to pieces.

“If that’s how you treat my feathers,” said Crane, “what would you do if I dared get close to you?”

Then Crane flew away, leaving Leopard all alone.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]



## 106. The Birds Try to Shake the Tree

All the birds came together for a contest of strength: whichever bird was able to shake the great ebony tree would be declared the winner.

One by one, the birds grabbed the trunk of the enormous tree and tried to shake it, but they could not move the tree. Not a single leaf quivered.

Finally, the little hornbill said, “I’ll make it shake!”

Then he flew up to the top of the tree, landed on one of the branches, and made the leaves shake by bouncing up and down.

“Behold!” shouted the little hornbill. “I am the strongest of all!”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 107. The Eagle, the Sparrow, and the Palm-Wine

“I demand half your kingdom,” Sparrow shouted.

King Eagle laughed. “If you can drink this pot of palm-wine, half the kingdom is yours.”

“I’ll do it,” Sparrow said, “if I can drink water too.”

Eagle agreed.

Sparrow hid his relatives by the river.

Then, he drank some wine and flew to the river for water. A relative returned in his place; to Eagle, they all looked alike.

Then another relative, and another, until all the palm-wine was gone.

King Eagle gave half the kingdom to Sparrow.

When you hear sparrows chattering nowadays, they’re talking about how they outsmarted King Eagle!

[a story from Liberia]

## 108. The Bat and the Honey

There was a famine in Bat's village, so he went into the forest, looking for food, and found a tree with honey.

"Hey, everybody!" he shouted. "Help me cut down this tree!"

The animals worked together to fell the tree.

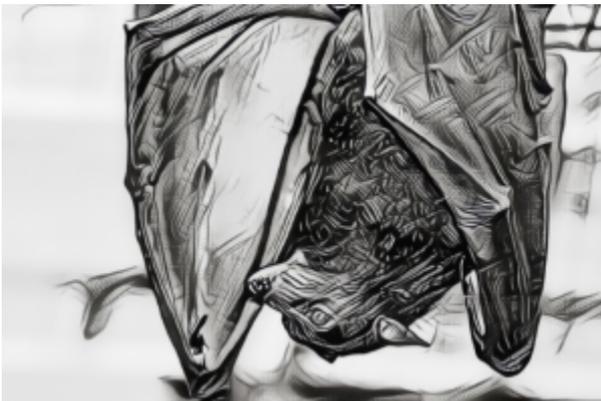
Then Tortoise said, "Bat will divide the honey among us."

"I'll go home and get my scales." said Bat. "Wait here; I'll be back soon!"

Then Bat found a hollow tree nearby. He crawled inside and started flapping his wings, making a strange and terrible sound to scare the animals away.

That's how Bat took all the honey for himself.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 109. The Jackal and the Rooster

Jackal saw Rooster up in a tree.

“Come down, Rooster!” he said. “Lion has declared a holiday of peace among all the animals.”

Rooster stared into the distance and said nothing.

“Lion is our king!” Jackal shouted. “You must celebrate the holiday he has declared.”

“I hear you, Jackal,” Rooster replied. “I’m just watching that cloud of dust on the horizon. I think the dogs are coming to celebrate the holiday with us!”

“Did you say dogs?” yelped Jackal as he turned and started running.

“Why are you running?” Rooster said, laughing. “Stay and celebrate!”

But Jackal was long gone.

[a Ndau story from Mozambique]



## 110. The Rooster and the Wildcat

Wildcat ambushed Rooster walking along the road.

“I know you’re hungry,” Rooster said, “but do me this favor: let me complete my journey before eating me.”

“Why should I?” growled Wildcat.

“I’m on my way to a funeral,” said Rooster. “You can eat the other mourners!”

Wildcat imagined a whole flock of mourners. Delicious.

“Alright,” she said. “I’ll go with you. How far is this funeral?”

“Just up the road at Dog’s house,” said Rooster. “All the dogs are on their way!”

Wildcat turned and ran, not wanting to get anywhere near those dogs.

Rooster smiled and kept on walking.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 111. The Chicken and the Wildcat's Magical Charm

Chicken couldn't lay eggs, so she went to see Wildcat.

"Your magical charms are famous," she said. "Can you give me a fertility charm?"

"But of course," said Wildcat. "You'll just need to pluck all your feathers and then rub yourself with salt and pepper. Do that, then come back, and I'll give you the charm."

Rejoicing, Chicken followed Wildcat's instructions exactly.

When she returned, Wildcat said, "Now, dance in front of the fire and sing: *Charm for children, charm for children...*"

As Chicken was dancing, Wildcat threw her into the fire.

"Roast chicken," he purred, "already salted and peppered."

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 112. The Marriage of the Wildcat and the Chicken

“Dear Chicken,” said Wildcat, “will you marry me?”

“I will,” said Chicken.

“Wonderful!” said Wildcat. “I’ll prepare a lavish wedding feast, and you can invite all your relatives and friends.”

While Wildcat cooked, Chicken visited her friends and relatives, inviting them all to the wedding feast.

Then, as Chicken’s friends and relatives arrived, Wildcat secretly ambushed them, killed them, and ate them.

Chicken was surprised that none of her friends or relatives arrived to share the wedding feast that Wildcat had prepared.

Later, when Chicken and Wildcat went to bed that night, Wildcat strangled his bride and ate her too.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 113. The Wildcats and the Chickens

The Wildcats hesitated to eat the village Chickens. “Those birds might have teeth,” the Wildcats said. “They could bite us.”

To find out for sure, the Wildcats decided to make music in the village, provoking the Chickens to sing along with open mouths.

When the Chickens learned of the Wildcats’ plan, they resolved only to hum when the Wildcats made music.

One Chicken, however, couldn’t resist. When the Wildcats sang and danced, she also sang and danced. The Wildcats looked into her mouth and saw no teeth.

“Eat them!” shrieked the Wildcats, and ever since wildcats chase and eat chickens.

[a Bondei story from Tanzania]



## 114. The Wildcat and the Rat

Wildcat and Rat were friends, and together they caught and killed an ox.

Then Wildcat took all the meat. “The bones are for you,” she told Rat.

“You’ve got more meat than you can eat!” protested Rat.

“Well, take the skin too,” Wildcat allowed, but she kept all the meat, dried it, and put it in a basket.

Rat nibbled the dried meat every day until it was gone.

When Wildcat found out, she chased Rat, who escaped into his hole.

“I curse all Rats,” she shouted. “The whole Cat family will hunt them forever!”

That’s why cats eat rats.

[a story from Madagascar]



## 115. The Rat's Daughter and the Cat

Rat's beautiful daughter had many suitors.

"She'll marry the best farmer!" Rat declared.

Dog's field grew nothing but weeds.

Frog watered his crops too much, Lizard too little.

Nothing at all grew in Leopard's field.

Goat ate all his crops before they could be harvested.

Cat had the best harvest, so he married Rat's daughter.

"Trim your teeth!" the bride demanded, so Cat filed his teeth down.

"Now they're too short!" said the bride. "I still don't like how you look."

Furious, Cat pounced and killed her.

That's why cats still kill rats, angry about the marriage of long ago.

[a story from Liberia]

## 116. The Lion and the Mouse

Lion was sleeping, and Mouse ran on top of him.

Lion woke up, grabbed Mouse, and was about to eat him.

“Mercy!” squeaked Mouse. “You’ll need my help someday.”

Lion laughed and let the Mouse go.

Later, Lion got stuck in a snare. “Help!” he yelled.

Mouse chewed through the ropes, freeing Lion.

“Thank you, Mouse,” Lion said. “You’re a good friend! I like you.”

Afterwards Lion and Mouse became like brothers. They decided to live in the same house.

But one day Lion said, “I don’t think I like you after all.”

Then Lion killed Mouse and ate him.

[an Igbo story from Nigeria]



## 117. The Mice and the Cat

The mice called a council. “We must do something about the cat!” they squeaked.

“Let’s tie a bell on her neck,” one mouse proposed. “That will warn us she’s coming!”

All the mice applauded and then went to see Grandfather-Mouse.

“What have you decided?” Grandfather-Mouse asked them.

“We will tie a bell on the cat!” they replied.

“Good!” said Grandfather-Mouse. “And who will catch the cat and tie the bell on?”

The mice looked at one another in confusion.

“We didn’t think about that,” they said sadly.

Hence the saying: *It came to nothing, like the council of the mice.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 118. The Dog's Medicine

Dog went to a Medicine-Man and said, “Give me medicine that kills whoever hits me!”

“I’ll give it to you,” said the Medicine-Man, “but it will work only if you don’t put your mouth where it doesn’t belong.”

“I understand,” said Dog. “Thank you!”

Then Dog stole food from the table as usual, and his owner hit him as usual. Nothing happened!

Dog complained, and the Medicine-Man repeated, “You mustn’t put your mouth where it doesn’t belong!”

But Dog keeps stealing, people keep hitting him, and he keeps running, looking back to see if maybe the medicine worked after all.

[a story from Liberia]



## 119. The Dog and the Fox Go to Town

Wandering outside of town, a dog met a fox.

“Come with me to town!” said Dog.

“Why?” asked Fox.

“For the food!” said Dog excitedly. “We’ll take what we want and have a feast.”

Fox followed Dog to town. “Let’s start with some chicken!” said Dog, grabbing a big, fat hen.

The people shouted and beat Dog with a club.

Fox and Dog both ran.

When Fox noticed Dog was crying, she asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Education is painful,” replied Dog. “They beat me to teach me lessons, but I never learn!”

Fox left the town and didn’t ever go back.

[a Shilluk story from the southern Sudan]

## 120. The Dog and the Jackal

As Dog was exploring the desert, he met Jackal. “You look hungry,” Dog said.

“I am,” replied Jackal.

So Dog ran back into town and brought Jackal a bone.

“You have good food there!” said Jackal.

“I’ll show you where to get more,” said Dog, and he led Jackal into town.

But when the people saw them, they beat Dog, who howled miserably, while Jackal escaped back into the desert.

“There’s no food worth a beating like that,” Jackal said to himself. “I may not eat well in the desert, but I am better off here than in the town.”

[a Lango story from Uganda]



## 121. The Dog and the Goat

Dog and Goat went from town to town, stealing food. Goat looked for cassavas; Dog looked for meat and rice.

When people saw the thieves, they beat them with sticks, driving them away.

Dog would howl when people beat him. “Ow! Ow! Ow!” he said each time he got hit.

Goat, on the other hand, said nothing at all.

“Why don’t you howl when they beat you?” asked Dog.

“What’s the point of howling?” said Goat. “Of course they’re going to beat us. You need to stop stealing or stop howling. As for me, I plan to keep on stealing.”

[a story from Liberia]



## 122. The Elephant, the Leopard, and the Goats

One day Leopard went hunting. “Stay here,” he said to his cub. While Leopard was gone, Elephant came and stepped on Leopard’s cub, killing him.

Leopard was furious when he heard the news. “Goats killed my son!” he shouted.

“No,” said the eyewitnesses, “we were there; we saw. It was Elephant.”

“Not Elephant! This was the deed of Goats,” Leopard insisted. “Goats did it!”

Then Leopard went and slaughtered many Goats to avenge his son’s death. Leopard knew Elephant killed his son, but he was not strong enough to fight Elephant.

Hence the proverb: *Goats did it, says the Leopard.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 123. The Leopard and the Fox

Leopard saw some goats and wanted to kill them but didn't want to commit a sin, so he went to Fox for advice.

"What happens to sinners?" Leopard asked.

"Sin punishes the sinner's posterity," Fox replied.

"My posterity can take care of themselves!" shouted Leopard, and he dashed towards the goats.

As he did so, he accidentally impaled himself on a tree stump.

"I thought you said sin would punish my posterity," Leopard groaned.

"That's right," said Fox. "Your father has eaten for you, and now you're paying for his sin."

Hence the proverb: *Your father has eaten for you.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 124. The Old Leopard and the Goats

When the leopard grew old, he lost his teeth and couldn't kill animals to eat, not even goats. The leopard grew thin, shrinking with hunger, while he saw goats roaming nearby.

As the leopard thought about the delicious food he used to eat when he was young, he sang this song:

*Woe is me! I am too old.*

*Too old for the meat of the goat,*

*For the liver, kidneys, heart, flesh...*

As the leopard sang, the goats danced around him and laughed.

Then the leopard died.

So says the proverb: *When the leopard grows old, the goats mock him.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 125. The Leopard and the Hawk

Leopard and Hawk were friends.

One day Leopard visited Hawk.

“I’ll get us something to eat,” said Hawk. Having soared to the highest treetop, Hawk swooped down, grabbed a stray chicken, and killed it.

Leopard was very impressed. Hawk didn’t waste any time stalking; he just swooped — *kpwing!* — and grabbed.

Another day Hawk visited Leopard. “I’ll get us something to eat,” said Leopard. He climbed the highest tree and swooped — *kpwing!* — but he hit the ground so hard that all his bones were broken, and he died.

Hence the proverb: *Do only what you can do.*

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 126. The Leopard and the Python

Leopard and Python were friends.

When Leopard's wife had a child, Leopard said, "Please, can you give me your skin to make a carrying-strap?"

"Of course I can!" said Python, and he shed his skin so Leopard could make the carrying-strap.

When Python's wife had a child, Python said, "Now give me your skin for a carrying-strap — or is your skin not strong enough?"

"Of course my skin is strong enough!" shouted Leopard. Then he turned to his cub and said, "Strip off my skin!"

But when the cub stripped off Leopard's skin, Leopard died. So Leopard's foolishness killed him.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 127. The Little Leopard and the Little Otter

Little Leopard and Little Otter were best friends.

Then each went to visit his father's village.

When Leopard learned his son's friend was Little Otter, he said, "Otters are not our friends. Catch him, bring him here, and I'll show you how to kill him."

Meanwhile, Otter warned his son, "If you must be friends, play only on the riverbank near the water."

When the friends met again, Little Otter kept near the water.

"My father warned me about you," he said.

Little Leopard said, "My father likewise." Then he pounced, but Little Otter jumped into the river and escaped.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 128. King Leopard and the Deer

King Leopard wanted to test his subjects, so he pretended to be gravely ill.

The animals all came to pay their respects.

“May the King live forever!” said Deer, and all the animals said the same.

Next, Leopard pretended to be dead.

When Deer heard Leopard was dead, he painted himself with spots and went to Leopard’s house. “I will be King now!” proclaimed Deer. “And Leopard’s beautiful wife is now my wife!”

Then Leopard sprang up and killed Deer.

Ever since, the leopards and the deer have been enemies: deer run from leopards, and leopards catch and kill them.

[a story from Liberia]

## 129. The Leopard and the Hyena

Hyena and Leopard went hunting together and killed many animals.

“Let’s cut up the meat and cook it right here,” said Leopard.

“I don’t have a knife,” said Hyena.

“Don’t worry,” said Leopard. “But what about the fire?”

“Don’t worry,” said Hyena.

While Leopard cut the meat with his claws, Hyena smashed a stone to make fire.

“How did she make fire?” Leopard wondered. “I’m scared she’ll burn me!” So Leopard ran away.

“How did he cut the meat?” Hyena wondered. “I’m scared he’ll cut me!” So Hyena ran away.

Now Leopard and Hyena run whenever they see each other.

[an Edo story from Nigeria]



## 130. The Hyena Who Wanted to Be King

Lion died, so the animals needed to choose a new king.

Some wanted Fox, others Hyena.

Finally, Hyena's supporters prevailed.

"But Hyena stinks!" protested Fox. "You can't elect a king who feasts on corpses."

"I'll just sniff the corpses from a distance," Hyena vowed. "No more eating corpses, I swear."

So the animals put Hyena on the king's throne.

Then Fox found a putrid corpse and threw it at the foot of the throne.

King Hyena sniffed, and sniffed... and then the king pounced on the corpse and began eating.

The animals rejected Hyena and made Fox their king instead.

[a Bishari story from the northern Sudan]



## 131. The Hyena and the Moonbeam

A thirsty hyena came to a waterhole. She bent down to drink... and then she saw something! It was only a moonbeam shining on the water, but she thought it was a bone.

The hyena yipped happily, but when she tried to grab the bone, it was just out of reach. “To get to that bone,” she decided, “I must drink all the water.”

So the hyena drank and drank, but there was still more water. She drank and drank and drank some more, desperate to get that bone... and finally the hyena drank so much water that she died.

[a Swahili story from eastern Africa]



## 132. The Lion, the Leopard, and the Hyena

Lion had killed a deer and was eating when Leopard attacked him and tried to take the meat away.

“Stop it!” Lion yelled.

“Make me!” yelled Leopard.

Then Lion and Leopard began fighting.

A bird squawked, “Hyena! Do something! Lion and Leopard are fighting.”

Hyena ran up and started singing. “Only a fool gets between Lion and Leopard, la-la-la!” she sang. “Only a fool! Only a fool!”

Lion and Leopard began singing too. “Only a fool! Only a fool!”

Then they started dancing. “La-la-la foolish! La-la-la fool!”

As Lion and Leopard sang and danced, Hyena grabbed the meat and ran.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 133. The Elephant Who Wrestled the Animals

Elephant boasted that he was the best in wrestling. “No animal can throw me!” he proclaimed.

Many animals tried: Rhino, Hippo, Lion, Leopard... none of them was strong enough to throw Elephant.

“I’ll try!” squeaked Bat.

Everyone laughed, especially Elephant. “Go ahead and try!” he said.

Then Bat flew into Elephant’s ear and started flapping his wings. The terrible noise made Elephant’s head hurt. He thrashed and screamed. He reared up, and then he ran, and as he ran, he fell down.

“Bat won!” shouted the other animals. “He may be small, but Bat has thrown Elephant to the ground.”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 134. The Elephant and the Turaco Bird

Turaco and Elephant argued about who was richer, shouting at one another.

“I’m richer!”

“No, I’m richer!”

Their wives heard them shouting

Turaco’s wives knew his loud voice meant lovemaking, so they prepared a great feast for their lover.

Elephant’s wives knew his loud voice meant anger, so they ran away into the forest.

Then Elephant and Turaco went to Turaco’s house. “Look at this feast!” said Turaco. Elephant had to admit: Turaco was very rich.

Then they went to Elephant’s house. It was deserted. There was no feast.

Elephant was embarrassed.

“See?” said Turaco. “I am richer than you!”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 135. The Elephant and the Dog

Elephant invited Dog to dinner. He watched as Elephant kindled a fire and cooked plantains. Next, Elephant thrust his foot into the fire and then held his foot over the food so that fat dripped everywhere. Dog stuffed himself with plantains and fat. Delicious!

Dog then invited Elephant to dinner. He also kindled a fire and cooked plantains. Then he put his foot into the fire, but it burned. Dog shrieked and pulled his foot from the fire. There were no fat drippings.

“Foolish Dog!” said Elephant. “You shouldn’t invite guests to dinner if you don’t know how to cook.”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 136. The Chimpanzees Decide to Build Houses

The chimpanzees did not like getting wet when it rained.

“We should do what the humans do,” said one chimpanzee.

“What is that?” asked the others.

“The humans build houses. That is how they stay dry!”

So the chimpanzees went and looked at human houses in the village, and then they built houses for themselves in the forest.

But... they did not know how to use the houses. Instead of sitting inside the house, they sat outside on the roof.

They still got wet when it rained.

“Humans are stupid,” the chimpanzees decided. “Their houses do not work after all!”

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



## 137. The Bushbuck and the Goat

Bushbuck and Goat used to be friends.

“You should stay with me,” Bushbuck told Goat. “Leave the village! Come live in the forest!”

“Death stalks this forest,” Goat replied. “Sooner or later the humans will catch you. Then they will skin you and eat you.”

Bushbuck just laughed. “You’re a fool, Goat!” he said as he bounded back into the depths of the forest.

But Goat was right about what would happen: hunters killed Bushbuck, and when they carried his body into the village,

Goat mocked him. “Who’s the fool now, Bushbuck?” he said.

“Look at me: I’m still alive!”

[a Mongo story from the Congo]



## 138. The Antelope and Her Child

“Don’t walk there!” said the Antelope to her child, nodding toward a smooth patch of dirt. “The earth will swallow you.”

“Don’t be silly!” said the little Antelope. “Who ever heard of the earth swallowing someone?”

“Believe me,” the mother repeated. “Death awaits you there. Be careful!”

But the little one did not listen. As soon as he set foot on the place of danger, a hunter’s pitfall opened up beneath him, and he fell to his death, impaled on sharp spears in the pit.

“Woe is me,” said his mother. “My child has died because he would not listen.”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 139. The Antelope and the Monkey

Monkey had climbed up a tree and was throwing fruit down for Antelope.

“This fruit is delicious!” said Antelope.

“I’m glad you like it,” said Monkey. “But listen! I hear hunters coming. You better run.”

“Not yet,” said Antelope. “Give me more fruit.”

“They’re getting closer,” warned Monkey. “I can see them!”

“Don’t worry!” said Antelope. “I’m not afraid. There’s still plenty of time to escape.”

So Antelope kept on eating the fruit.

Then when Antelope finally decided to run, it was too late; the hunters had surrounded him. He ran straight into a net, and the hunters killed him.

[a Mongo story from the Congo]



## 140. The Hyrax's Warning

Hyrax saw people planting milkweed in the forest.

“Those are milkweed plants!” he told the other animals. “We must destroy the plants immediately.”

The animals protested. “Such plants are harmless,” they said.

“Death comes from those plants!” warned Hyrax. “We must hurry!”

But the animals ignored Hyrax’s warning and did nothing.

When the milkweed grew, the people harvested fibers that they twisted into cords, and from those cords they made nets that they used to catch and kill the animals.

“Death has come, as I foretold,” said Hyrax. “You didn’t listen to my warning, and now it is too late.”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 141. The Hyrax Who Learned to Climb

All the forest animals feasted on the flowering bushes down on the ground.

All the animals except Hyrax.

“Instead of feeding down here, we should climb the trees,” Hyrax said, but the other animals didn’t listen.

Hyrax alone learned to climb.

When people saw animals eating the flowering bushes, they laid traps there. The next day when the animals came to eat the bushes, they were caught in the traps and died.

From high up in the tree, Hyrax said, “You did not listen to me and learn to climb the trees, and now look what has happened to you!”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

## 142. The Squirrel and the Nut

There was a famine. Squirrel and his family were hungry, so when Squirrel found a nut, he grabbed it.

“Please,” said the nut, “let me go!”

“No!” said Squirrel.

At just that moment, a hunter shot at Squirrel. Squirrel dropped the nut and scurried into his hole.

The hunter then wove a trap from tree fiber and laid it at the hole’s entrance; the trap caught Squirrel when he ventured out.

“Please,” said Squirrel, “let me go!”

“No!” said the trap. “You showed no mercy to the nut, and I’ll show none to you.”

The hunter came and killed Squirrel.

[a story from Liberia]



## 143. The Snake and the Scorpion

Scorpion went to see Snake. “Give me more poison!” he said. “You get angry too easily,” Snake replied. “I won’t give you more poison.”

“Please!” begged Scorpion. “I’d only use it sometimes.”

So Snake agreed, telling Scorpion to return the next day.

When Scorpion arrived, Snake wasn’t home, so he lay down and fell asleep. Then, when Snake came in, he glided over Scorpion, squishing him.

Enraged, Scorpion stung Snake.

“That hurts!” groaned Snake, writhing in pain.

“It’s your own fault,” said Scorpion. “You squished me.”

“Go away!” shouted Snake. “I won’t give you more poison. You would kill everybody!”

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 144. The Snake and the Frog

There was once a snake who swallowed a frog.

As he disappeared inside the snake, the frog shouted, “You’re the ugliest creature I’ve ever seen! What happened to your feet? Why do your eyes stick out? And why are you speckled all over?”

“I wore my feet down chasing frogs!” replied the snake. “My eyes stick out from watching for frogs, my skin is speckled because I have eaten so many speckled frogs, and now I’m going to eat you!”

“Curse you!” shouted the frog. “Curse you and your children and your grandchildren and...”

Those were the frog’s final words.

[a story from Madagascar]

## 145. The Lizard and the Chameleon

Chameleon and Lizard were brothers.

One day when the brothers were playing together, Chameleon said, “How nice it is to be alive!”

“It’s nice to be alive,” agreed Lizard, “but not so much when your eyes are all big and bulging. Your eyes are the ugliest I’ve ever seen!”

“At least I’m not a dirty brown color. I’ve never seen such an ugly color!”

They argued back and forth until finally a human came to see what the shouting was about. Lizard hid in his hole, Chameleon climbed up a tree, and they have not spoken to each other since.

[a story from Madagascar]



## 146. The Man and the Ants

“You’re so weak!” Army-Ant said to Little-Ant. “I’m strong, and my bite is fierce.”

“True,” said Little-Ant, “but even so, I can do what you cannot.”

“That’s impossible!” shouted Army-Ant.

“I can get a piece of a man’s skin,” said Little-Ant.

“I can do that too!” insisted Army-Ant. Then he climbed onto a man’s hand, but when he bit the skin, the man hurled Army-Ant to the ground.

Then Little-Ant climbed onto the same man’s hand, nibbled very gently, and brought the piece of skin to Army-Ant.

“Now you see,” said Little-Ant, “we small creatures can also accomplish great deeds.”

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]

## 147. The Partridge and Her Eggs

Partridge screamed when Python coiled around her eggs.

“What’s wrong?” asked Buffalo, and when Partridge explained, Buffalo said, “I’ll stomp Python and kill him!”

“No!” shrieked Partridge. “You would smash my eggs.”

Elephant made the same offer, and again Partridge said no.

Gorilla, Hippo, Warthog all offered to stomp the Python, and Partridge said no to each one.

Then the Ants came.

Partridge explained, and the Ants said, “We will rescue your eggs.”

The Ants attacked the Python, nip-nip-nipping all over his body, and he slithered away in terror.

No harm was done to the eggs.

Small can be strong.

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]



## 148. The Crab and Her Children

Mother Crab had two little Crab children, and one sunny day she took them out for a walk along the shore.

When the crabs had gone a short distance, Mother Crab said, “Run on ahead, children! Run! Run! You go play, and I will catch up with you in my own time.”

One of the crab children said, “I will walk with you, Mother! I don’t want to leave you.”

The other child just laughed. “Silly! We’re all crabs and none of us can run. We can’t go any faster even if we wanted to, no matter what Mother says.”

[a story from Liberia]



## 149. The Bird and Her Chick

A mother-bird left her chick alone while she looked for food.

Then she heard screams. “Help! Mother! It’s a python!”

Terrified, she flew back to the nest.

“Ha, I tricked you,” said the chick.

“You shouldn’t tell lies,” the mother said patiently.

But the chick kept doing the same thing again and again.

Then one day when the mother-bird went foraging, a python really did come.

“Help! Mother! Help! It’s a python!” screamed the chick.

But the mother-bird ignored his cries, and the python ate him up.

She found nothing but a few feathers when she returned to the nest.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 150. The Frog and the Chicken

Frog and Chicken lived together.

Each morning, Chicken would tell Frog, “It’s your job to go gather firewood.”

But Frog didn’t gather firewood. Instead, he sat in the sun and thought to himself, “It’s so nice and warm. We don’t need firewood.”

Then, when it got dark, Chicken would have to gather the firewood herself.

This happened day after day after day.

Frog never gathered firewood.

Frog never did any work.

Finally one day a Hawk swooped down and grabbed Frog.

“Help, Chicken!” yelled Frog.

But Chicken didn’t help.

She was glad.

Now she had the house all to herself.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 151. The Rooster and the Crocodile

“Cock-a-doodle-doooooo!” sang Rooster. “Crocodile is my friend; he is my family!”

“Rooster’s a liar,” said the angry reptiles. “We’re reptiles, and Crocodile is our king. Rooster is a bird; his king is Eagle.”

Uncertain what to do, Crocodile went to Eagle for advice.

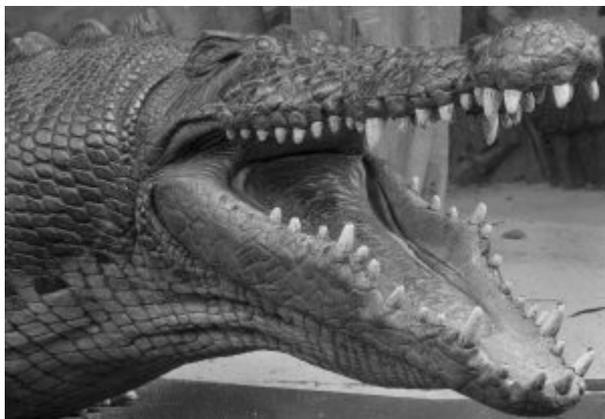
Eagle smiled. “You come from an egg, and I come from an egg, as does Rooster! We are all friends. We are all family.”

“Ah!” said Crocodile. “I understand.”

Then Crocodile said to Rooster, “Your enemies are my enemies now! Because humans kill roosters, I will kill humans.”

True to this promise, crocodiles attack humans even now.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



## 152. The Rooster, the Hawk, and the Eagle

Hawk and even Eagle feared Rooster's crest of sharp red horns, so Eagle sent Hawk with a message of peace.

"King Eagle wants to be your friend," Hawk told Rooster, "but he fears your red horns."

Rooster laughed. "They're not horns. Come feel! They're just soft flesh."

Hawk touched the cockscomb. "Indeed!" he said. Then he grabbed one of Rooster's daughters and carried her off to Eagle.

"We need not fear the Rooster!" Hawk announced. "I even stole one of his daughters for you."

That is how Eagle and Hawk began to wage war on Rooster and all his kin.

[a Yao story from Malawi]

## 153. The Rooster and the Fox

The fox was afraid of the rooster. She would eat the chickens without fear, but whenever the fox saw the rooster, she would run and hide.

One day as the fox turned to run, the rooster said, “I don’t understand. Why are you so afraid of me?”

“Because of the fiery flame you carry on your head!” the fox replied.

The rooster laughed. “That isn’t fire,” he said. “That’s just flesh. Touch it, and you’ll see. It’s very soft and nice!”

The fox approached cautiously, felt the rooster’s comb... and then, without fear, she grabbed the rooster and devoured him.

[a story from Liberia]



## 154. The Ostrich and the Lion

The animals made Ostrich their king because of his mighty wings. Even Lion was afraid when Ostrich flapped his wings. When Lion and Ostrich hunted together, Ostrich flapped his wings to drive the animals towards Lion, who killed them. Then Ostrich would take only the soft parts and the blood for himself, telling Lion, “Go ahead! You may eat the bones and meat.”

One day Lion saw Ostrich asleep, his mouth wide open.

Lion looked inside.

Ostrich had no teeth!

“O King,” roared Lion, “you have no teeth!” Then Lion attacked, tearing Ostrich to pieces with his teeth and claws.

[a San story from southern Africa]



## 155. The Sparrow and the Monkey

Monkey and Sparrow were friends.

“Let’s go drink palm-wine!” said Monkey.

“No!” said Sparrow. “That’s dangerous.”

But Monkey insisted, so Sparrow finally agreed, and together they went into the forest, tapped a wine-palm, and drank the wine.

The two friends drank so much palm-wine that they became drunk. The drunken Sparrow began chattering loudly, and then all the birds started chattering.

A hunter heard the noise and came to investigate. He saw Monkey, aimed, and fired. The birds all fluttered away safely, but the shot hit Monkey and killed him.

Thus Sparrow escaped, while Monkey died because of his foolishness.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 156. The Woodpecker and the Weaverbird

Woodpecker and Weaverbird used to be friends.

They once made a long journey together and had to spend the night on the road. Weaverbird wove a nest attached to a tree branch, while Woodpecker drilled a hole for herself in the tree's trunk.

Then the two friends went to sleep.

A fierce storm came during the night, and it demolished Weaverbird's nest; she barely escaped with her life.

"Let me in!" Weaverbird pleaded, tapping outside of Woodpecker's hole.

"Don't bother me!" shouted Woodpecker. "I'm sleeping."

So Weaverbird spent the night shivering in the rain.

The two birds aren't friends anymore.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]



## 157. The Turaco Who Didn't Listen

When it rains, Turaco always gets wet. He doesn't build a nest like the other birds.

"Let me stay in your nest!" he says whenever it rains.

"No!" the other birds tell him. "Build your own nest."

Then, when the rain stops, Turaco sits warming himself in the sun. "I don't need to build a nest," he thinks. "Not now."

The other birds remind him, "Build your nest!"

"I don't need a nest," Turaco replies.

Then, when it rains again, Turaco begs the other birds, "Let me stay in your nest!" and they say, "No!"

The foolish bird never learns.

[a Loki story from the Congo]

## 158. The Pigeon and the Tree-Branch

Pigeon and Tree-Branch were friends.

One day, however, Pigeon insulted Tree-Branch's wife.

"Please apologize," said Tree-Branch, "to save our friendship."

"No, I won't apologize!" shouted Pigeon, flying away. "Look at you: just sitting there! I don't know why I was friends with someone like you who can't even fly."

So Pigeon flew and flew and flew without stopping. Eventually he grew tired. "Perhaps I should renew my friendship with Tree-Branch," he thought. But by then Pigeon was so exhausted that he plunged from the sky and died as he struck the ground.

That is what happens to people without friends.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



## 159. The Hornbill and the Yams

The Hornbill gave his wife some yams. “Cook these!” he said. Then, after she cooked the yams, he said, “You eat them. I will get better food at my mother-in-law’s house.”

Yet when he reached his mother-in-law’s house, they had already finished eating, so Hornbill didn’t get anything to eat. Angry, he flew back home. “Bring me those yams!” he told his wife.

But his wife had eaten the yams as he had told her to do.

That is why Hornbill is always hungry: not content with the food he had, he ended up with nothing at all to eat.

[an Igbo story from Nigeria]



## 160. The Birds Who Went Canoeing

Chicken was scared when she saw the big birds, but she relaxed when they squawked, “We’re all going to a party; you’re invited too!”

Chicken happily accepted their invitation.

The birds headed to the river and got into a canoe, but when they hit a log just below the water’s surface, the canoe broke in two.

“That’s your fault, Chicken!” shouted Hawk.

“You’re so big and fat,” added Eagle. “We never should have brought you.”

“It can’t really be my fault,” Chicken protested, but the other birds pressed her down into the water, and she barely escaped with her life.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]



## 161. The Birds Who Needed Fire

Long ago animals lived with birds in the sky. It was cold there, so the birds told Dog, “Go down and bring back fire.”

Dog went down, and he found bones lying on the ground. He stayed there gnawing the bones and never came back.

Then the birds sent Chicken to fetch Dog.

Chicken went down, and she found corn lying on the ground. She stayed there pecking the corn and never came back.

The birds are still angry at Dog and Chicken. “*Mbwa-owa!* Dog-you-die!” they sing. “*Nsusu-akende-bombo!* Chicken-is-a-slave!”

And they shiver in the cold because they have no fire.

[a Loki story from the Congo]

## 162. The Birds Who Chose a King

The birds called a council to choose their king.

Owl didn't come; instead, he stayed at home with his wife, so the birds declared Owl an outcast. Now Owl comes out only at night, fearful of the other birds.

Hawk wanted to be king, but the birds rejected him. This made Hawk angry, and now he is an enemy to other birds, always attacking them.

The birds chose Drongo as their king because he sounded like a king with his beautiful song and he looked like a king with his tall feather crest.

So Drongo is king of the birds.

[a story from Madagascar]



## 163. The Tiny King of the Birds

Long ago, Tit-Bird ruled all the birds, even though he was very small.

The bigger birds got together and challenged the king. “You are too small to be our king!” they squawked.

“I am small,” he replied, “but I am a survivor. I don’t destroy anything that belongs to the humans. You, on the other hand, steal from the humans. You eat the food in their fields, Crow, and you steal from their barnyards, Hawk.”

So the tiny Tit-Bird rebuked the big birds one by one.

“You will all be killed,” he said, “for you have all become thieves.”

[a Tswana story from southern Africa]

## 164. The Rabbit and the Grasshopper

Grasshopper and Rabbit went shopping for cloth. Grasshopper bought beautiful cloth; Rabbit could only afford something plain.

On the way home, Rabbit killed Grasshopper and took his cloth. Then he burned Grasshopper's body, but some blood spilled and the drops of blood became a bird.

"Rabbit killed Grasshopper," sang the bird, "for Grasshopper's beautiful cloth."

Rabbit killed the bird; again, the spilled blood became a bird. And again, and again.

When Rabbit got home he said, "Grasshopper fell ill and died," but the bird sang: "Rabbit killed Grasshopper for Grasshopper's beautiful cloth."

So the people caught Rabbit and killed him.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



## 165. The Two Hunters

Two hunters rode into the wilderness, searching for game.

“I could kill you right here,” one said, “and nobody would know.”

“God would know,” replied the other.

“Then may God help you!” shouted the first, and he slit his companion’s throat.

Where the dead man’s blood fell onto the ground, enormous vines grew, and on those vines grew enormous grapes. Then the grapes burst, and birds emerged. These birds had the power of human speech, and wherever they flew they denounced the murderer and his crime.

Thus people learned the truth about what happened and sentenced the murderer to death.

[a story from northeastern Algeria]

## 166. The Hunter and His Son

A man and his son went hunting. The man killed no animals, so he killed his son, bundled up the flesh, and went home.

A bird sang, "*Hunter hunted his son, his son!*"

The man stoned the bird and burned it in a fire.

But when he reached the village, there was the same bird again, singing the same song. "*Hunter hunted his son, his son!*"

"No!" he shouted. "Our son went with meat to his grandmother," but when the grandmother said the boy never arrived, the man confessed. His wife left him, and the man soon died, all alone.

[a Lozi story from Zambia]



## 167. The Boy Named Chinziri

Chinziri bought beautiful red cloth; his brothers bought plain cloth.

While traveling home, Chinziri's brothers killed him. "We'll say he got sick," they agreed, and they took his red cloth.

Chinziri's blood fell to the ground and became a chinziri-bird. "I'll tell!" said the bird.

The brothers stabbed the bird; it didn't die.

They burned the bird; it didn't die.

At home, they said, "Chinziri got sick and died," but the bird sang, "*Chinziri I am; my brothers killed me! For my cloth they killed me!*"

The villagers put the brothers to death.

The bird became Chinziri again.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 168. The Masmeraye-Bird

There was once a mother, and she had a son; the son's name was Masmer.

Masmer went on a journey. At nightfall, he came to a village.

"May I spend the night here?" he asked.

"Yes!" said the people. But instead of offering their guest a meal, they killed him.

When Masmer didn't return, his mother died of grief, and her soul became a bird. All night long, she flies here and there, crying, "*Masmeraye! O Masmeraye!* What kind of meal did they feed to Masmer? What meal did they feed him?"

So Masmeraye became the bird's name.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 169. The Wives Who Quarreled

Two wives were quarreling.

A child approached the women and said, “Why are you quarreling? Wives should live together in peace.”

“Go away!” shouted one.

“Or else we’ll kill you!” shouted the other.

“But people should love one another,” said the child.

Then they killed the child.

When the mother saw her child lying there, she said, “Wake up, my child,” thinking the child was asleep.

A bird flew by and said, “The child is dead, not sleeping. Those two women killed your child!”

When the women heard the bird say this, they ran away and never came home again.

[a Duala story from Cameroon]



## 170. The Woman and the Rabbit

There was once a woman who lived in a cave.

Rabbit fell in love with her. “Marry me!” he said.

The woman agreed.

Rabbit brought Lion to see his beautiful bride, and she sang:

*Who needs Lion? I do not like him.*

*I love only my Rabbit, my Rabbit alone!*

Rabbit brought other animals, one after another, and his bride sang the same song.

But then Rabbit brought a man to meet his bride, and she ran off with the man and married him instead.

Rabbit wept bitterly, singing a sad song:

*My beautiful bride, she is gone, long gone!*

[a Lozi story from Zambia]



## 171. The Man and His Monkey-Wife

A farmer once married a monkey.

“Come!” he told his monkey-wife. “We must work in the fields.”

But his monkey-wife groaned. “I can’t,” she said. “I have a toothache.”

Then, after he left, she cooked herself a fine stew and ate it all. As she cooked, she sang, “*Holiday for me, for me, but not for my foolish husband!*”

This happened the next day, and the next.

Finally the man’s neighbor said, “Every day I hear your wife singing. *Holiday for me, but not for my foolish husband* is her song.”

The husband drove his monkey-wife away.

He never remarried.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



## 172. The Jackals and Their Brides

Two Jackals transformed into men.

“Marry us!” they said to two sisters.

“Don’t do it!” said their brother, but the sisters married the men and went away with them; the boy followed secretly.

When they reached the village of Jackals, the men became Jackals again.

“Now we will eat you!” they said, and the women screamed.

Their brother ran forward. “Brothers-in-law!” he shouted. “I must make you a wedding gift!”

Then he felled a tree and carved a canoe.

“But there’s no water,” said the Jackals.

The brother and sisters got in; the boat flew away!

That’s how they escaped.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]

## 173. The Hunter and the Antelope

There was once a mighty hunter. He went hunting every day, and every day he killed an antelope. He was the greatest hunter among his people.

Then one day in the forest, he heard voices. Strange voices. He realized they were antelope voices, and he could understand what they were saying.

“I heard you gave birth to twin calves!” the first antelope said.

“I did,” the other antelope replied. “But I am sad. Before they grow up, I know the mighty hunter will kill them.”

Shaken by this experience, the hunter vowed that he would never hunt any animals again.

[an Edo story from Nigeria]



## 174. The Boy Who Went Fishing

“Don’t fish in the big stream,” a father told his son. “Water-People live there.”

But the son disobeyed.

He went fishing and caught a fish.

“Clean me!” shouted the fish. “Cut my head off! Make me into soup! Eat me!”

The boy obeyed. He cleaned the fish, cut its head off, and made soup.

But when he started eating, he choked on the first bite and died.

Then the fish’s body came back together, and its head popped back on.

“That’s why you shouldn’t fish where Water-People live!” the fish shouted, leaping out of the soup back into the stream.

[a story from Liberia]



## 175. The Boys and the Singing Tree

A woodworm sang while gnawing a dead tree: “*The tree is now wood, woody-goody-goody, woody-good-good-good!*”

A boy heard the tree singing and ran to tell his brothers.

“Come!” he said. “The tree is singing!”

The brothers listened to the singing tree all day and wanted to listen all night too, so they lay down beside the tree.

A lion came. “Go away!” he growled. “Or I’ll eat you!”

But the boys didn’t leave, and the lion ate them, all except the first boy.

“I can’t swallow you,” the lion said. “Your head is too big.”

The boy went home alone.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]

## 176. The Boy and the Elephant

There was a boy with no legs. His brothers carried him to the riverbank and left him with a basket of mealies while they fished.

A hungry elephant said, “Give me those mealies and I’ll loan you my front legs.”

“Agreed!” said the boy, giving the mealies to the elephant. “I’ll bring back your legs soon.”

The boy took the legs, jumped up, and ran to find his brothers. “*How mighty is the elephant!*” he sang. “*He loaned me his legs! His legs!*”

When his brothers found out, they said, “Run home! Keep the legs.”

Then they killed the elephant.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 177. The Two Boys and the Snake

Two brothers went into the forest for wood. A snake bit one, and he died.

The other wept. “When I return alone, they’ll say I killed him. Please, Snake, restore my brother! Then, come to the village and kill him there.”

The snake brought medicine, revived the boy, and went with the brothers.

In the village, the snake again bit the boy; he died, and his brother told the people what had happened.

The people said, “O Snake, revive him again. You have the power!”

Moved to mercy, the snake revived the boy again and slithered back into the forest.

[a Vai story from Liberia]

## 178. The Magical Korhaan-Bird

A man cut down some trees, but when he returned the next day, the trees had grown back.

He cut the trees down again; again they grew back.

The third day, a korhaan appeared, singing:

*“Trees, wake again! Awake! Awake!”*

Then the man killed the bird, and the dead bird shouted, “Kill me properly!”

He picked it up. “Pick me up properly!” it shouted.

He took it home and plucked it. “Pluck me properly!” it shouted.

He cooked it. “Cook me properly!” it shouted.

He invited his friends to eat. “Eat me properly!” it shouted.

All who ate became birds.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 179. The Magical Head

A little boy caught a fish and put it in his sack. Later, he looked in the sack: it had turned into a guinea-fowl's head!

Then he heard his older brothers shouting, "Where is our goat? Have you seen it?"

"No," said the little boy.

They grabbed the sack and looked inside: they saw the goat's head.

"You killed it!" they said angrily, and they dragged the boy home to their mother.

The mother looked in the sack: she saw her husband's head!

The mother and brothers ran away, leaving the little boy behind.

He never saw his father again.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]

## 180. The Hyena's Grindstone

Some girls found a grindstone in an empty hut and ran to tell their mother.

Their mother realized it must be Hyena's grinding stone.

"Don't go there!" she said. "That is Hyena's grinding stone."

But they went there again, and this time they met Hyena's

doorkeeper. "Grind quickly," he said, "before Hyena returns."

The girls ground their flour and left.

Hyena returned. "Who's been using my grindstone?" she snarled.

"I saw no one," said the doorkeeper.

The girls returned the next day, but Hyena ambushed them.

"Who said you could grind with my stone?"

Then Hyena killed and ate them.

[a Lango story from Uganda]



## 181. The Hyena and the Prophet

God's prophet told the hyena, "Pronounce the Shahada, and eat only what you have killed yourself."

The hyena pronounced the creed and vowed not to eat carrion. She then became the prophet's disciple.

As they were traveling together, the hyena smelled a carcass.

"Daughter of Moses," said the prophet, "remember your vow."

"I just want to sniff at the food of my mothers and fathers," said the hyena.

The hyena sniffed, and then she pounced on the carcass.

The prophet, saddened by his disciple's behavior, left the hyena behind.

Hence the proverb: *Your vow is like that of the hyena.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 182. King Solomon and the Birds

King Solomon was in love. When his beloved asked for a house built of eggs, Solomon ordered all the birds of the world to bring him eggs.

The hoopoe arrived last, and he brought no eggs.

Solomon glared at the hoopoe angrily.

“I’m late because I was pondering a difficult question,” said the hoopoe. “Which are more numerous: men or women?”

“What did you conclude?” asked Solomon, curious.

“Women!” replied the hoopoe. “Because fools like yourself, building houses of eggs, cannot be counted as men.”

Enraged, Solomon cursed the hoopoe to have a foul smell, and hoopoes stink even now.

[an Amazigh story from Algeria]



## 183. The Prophet Joseph and the Birds

To test Joseph, his prophet, God turned the angel Gabriel into a hawk and Michael into a dove.

The hawk chased the dove, who landed on Joseph's shoulder.

"Protect me!" she cried.

"I will protect you," said Joseph.

The hawk protested. "But I'm starving!"

Joseph felt the dove trembling with fear.

To resolve the dilemma, Joseph cut flesh from his own thigh, offering it to the hawk. "Eat this instead," he said.

The hawk ate and demanded more, and still more. Joseph complied.

Finally, the two birds flew away.

Pleased by Joseph's generosity of spirit, God healed his thigh completely.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

## 184. The Shepherd and the Sheep

There was a shepherd who took his sheep to pasture every day. In the pasture there was a tall fruit tree. One day the shepherd climbed high into the tree, looking for fruit. He fell down from the tree and was killed.

One of the sheep returned home, singing:

*Baa-baa-baa! My man wanted to climb the tree.*

*Now he has fallen down. Baa-baa-baa!*

The people were surprised. They listened, but couldn't understand.

Finally someone said, "I think the sheep is saying the shepherd needs help!"

They followed the sheep who led them to the dead shepherd in the pasture.

[a Nyanja story from Zimbabwe]



## 185. The Woman and the Crocodile

An old woman was crossing a stream when a crocodile grabbed her. He carried her to his hole in the riverbank, and stuffed her inside the hole; the old woman pretended to be dead. Then the crocodile swam away, leaving the corpse to ripen.

As it happened, two bulls were fighting just above the crocodile's den. As they stamped the ground, one bull's foot broke through into the den. The woman grabbed the foot, and the bull pulled her back out into the daylight.

To honor the bull, she vowed that she and her descendants would never eat beef again.

[a story from Madagascar]

## 186. The Woman and the Lion

A woman was filling her ostrich eggshells with water at the spring.

A lion saw her and wanted to eat her. He crept up from behind.

Thinking she heard her friends, the woman called out, “Wait; I’m getting the water.”

The woman didn’t turn around; she didn’t see the lion.

Then the lion roared, “LEAVE MY WATER TO ME!”

The woman jumped and ran into the bushes, and the lion smashed the eggshells, angry that she had gotten away.

Women don’t go to the spring alone now; this is their song:  
“*Lion said leave, leave, leave my water to me.*”

[a San story from southern Africa]



## 187. The Women Who Went Fishing

Five women went fishing. One woman caught many fish; the others caught none.

“Let us have some of your fish,” they pleaded.

“No!” said the lucky woman. “The fish are all mine.”

On the way home, she realized she had lost her bracelet.

“Come help me to look for it,” she said, but her companions refused. “Ask your fish for help, not us!”

So the woman went back to the river alone. There she met a python who enchanted her.

She could not move.

The python killed and ate her.

Thus she lost her bracelet, her fish, and her life.

[a Bakweri story from Cameroon]

## 188. The Woman and the Hyena

A woman sat by the fire, cooking.

A hyena approached.

In the evening twilight, she didn't see the hyena; she thought it was her husband.

“Take the baby so I can stir the porridge,” she said, holding out the baby that was in her arms.

The hyena took the child.

Then the hyena ran off with the child, and when she heard her baby crying, she realized what had happened and screamed.

“Help! A hyena stole my baby!”

Her husband chased the hyena, but it was too late.

The baby was gone, and the parents wept a river of tears.

[a Lozi story from Zambia]



## 189. The Hunter, the Zebra, and the Lion

A hunter had just shot a zebra when a lion rushed up and grabbed the zebra from him. Terrified, the hunter climbed a tree.

The wounded zebra managed to escape, so the hungry lion then paced around the tree. Night came; the lion was still there, guarding the tree.

The hunter eventually fell asleep and dreamed he had fallen into the lion's mouth. Thrashing in his sleep, he fell and landed on the lion. The startled lion ran away, thus allowing the hunter to make his own escape by running in the opposite direction.

Hunter, zebra, lion: they all lived.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



## 190. The Wise Man and the Foolish Man

Two men, one wise and one foolish, were traveling together.

When night came, they chose their sleeping places.

“I’ll sleep up here on this tall rock,” said the wise one.

“I’ll sleep down here beside the road,” said the foolish one.

The wise man smiled and thought to himself, “Good! If a lion comes, he will take my companion, not me.”

In the night, a lion came, leaped onto the rock, killed the wise man, and ate him. The lion ignored the man beside the road.

So God protects the foolish.

The rock is still there; it is called “Resting-Place-of-Wise-and-Foolish.”

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]

## 191. The Man and the Chicken

“Some honored guests have arrived,” the husband told his wife.

“We must kill a chicken in order to prepare a meal for them.”

The wife grabbed a chicken, but the husband couldn’t find his knife to use to kill it, so the wife let the chicken loose again.

The chicken resumed its search for food, scratching the ground, and as it scratched, it unearthed the knife. The husband saw the glint of metal, picked up the knife, grabbed the chicken, and killed it.

The guests enjoyed their meal.

Hence the saying: *The chicken uncovers the instrument of its own death.*

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]



## 192. Long Ago, When Things Were Bigger

“Things used to be bigger,” said one man. “When God created the world, everything was big. I once saw a bird so big it took seven days to fly overhead.”

“And I once saw a tree so big all of God’s angels couldn’t cut it down,” said another man. “God gave the angels axes and told them to cut down the tree. They tried for six months and couldn’t cut it down.”

“Impossible!” protested the first man. “How could a tree be that big?”

“That’s the tree God made for your bird to nest in,” said the second man, smiling.

[a Vai story from Liberia]

## 193. The Man and His Dogs

An ogre possessed the world's only kola-tree.

A brave man took a basket. "I will steal those kola-nuts," he told his two dogs. "You stay here," and he tied them.

As he climbed the tree, the ogre sensed his presence. "Human!" it shouted. "I'll chop down this tree and eat you."

"Let me pray to God first," said the man, who then called to his dogs.

The dogs broke their chains and ran.

The dirt their paws threw behind them became mountains.

They tore the ogre to pieces.

Then the man scattered the kola-nuts, and now there are kola-trees everywhere.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



## 194. The King and His Cattle

The king let his favorite cattle sleep just outside his palace door, wanting to keep them close.

One night, as the king lay in bed, he heard the ghosts of the former kings arguing.

“I will no longer come here!” one of them shouted. “The filth that these cattle leave by the door soils the hem of my robes.”

The other dead kings pleaded with him. “The living need our guidance.”

“No! The cattle must go, or I won’t return.”

In the morning, the living king sent the cattle away, not wanting to offend the ghosts of the former kings.

[a Nyoro story from Uganda]



## 195. Chief Mangeh and Her Cattle

There was a woman named Mangeh who became the chief of her people, but her brother hated her and stirred up the people against her.

When she died, they buried her near a swamp.

Then Mangeh's spirit arose from the grave as a strong wind. The wind toppled trees. It swept away cattle and people, blowing them down into the swamp.

Now she rules them in a village at the bottom of the swamp. You can hear Mangeh's cattle bellowing in the swamp, the sound of drums drumming, people singing, grindstones grinding.

If you see Mangeh's cattle, you will die.

[a Lozi story from Zambia]

## 196. The Father and His Son

“Let’s play hide-and-seek!” said a son to his father.

“Go hide,” said the father. “I’ll find you later.”

The son hid in a peanut-shell.

A chicken swallowed the peanut; a wildcat swallowed the chicken; a snake swallowed the wildcat.

Then the snake slithered into the river and was caught in a fish-trap.

The father couldn’t find his son, so he went to check his fish-trap. He found the python, cut it open, found the wildcat, cut it open, found the chicken, cut it open, found the peanut... and inside the peanut was his son!

“Found you!” said the father, smiling.

[a Bakongo story from the Congo]



## 197. The Man Who Slept

There was a man who slept all day. He did no work.

Finally, the people drove him away. “Go to the forest!” they said.

He went into the forest... and fell asleep.

While he was sleeping, a python ate him.

Then a crocodile ate the python.

Then a hippo ate the crocodile.

Next, a hunter killed the hippo. He cut the hippo open, found the crocodile, cut the crocodile open, found the python, cut the python open, and awoke the sleeping man.

“What’s happening?” the man asked.

“Don’t you remember?” replied the hunter.

“No,” said the man. “I was asleep.”

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]

## 198. The Bird and Her Eggs

“I flew to the treetop to lay my eggs,” sang the bird, “but a wind blew the tree down. Then the wind was blocked by a hill, and inside the hill a rat dug his tunnels. The rat became food for a dog, and the dog obeyed his master’s commands. Then his master was felled by a spear; a rock smashed the spear, and then floodwaters flowed over the rock, and over the floodwaters I flew to the treetop to lay my eggs, but a wind blew the tree down...”

And around goes the bird’s song again, around and around.

[a story from Madagascar]



## 199. The Tortoise and His Debts

God gave Tortoise some porridge.

“In one year, I’ll give you a man as payment,” Tortoise promised.

A year passed.

Then Horse ate Tortoise’s okra. Tortoise said, “Pay me a man!”

Then Horse stumbled on a Root. Horse told Root, “Pay me a man!”

Then Hen ate some ants walking on Root. “Pay me a man!”

Root told Hen.

Then Hawk took Hen’s chick. Hen said, “Pay me a man!”

Hawk chased a man, but the man ran.

Result: Hawk didn’t pay Hen who didn’t pay Root who didn’t pay Horse who didn’t pay Tortoise, so God never got paid.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]



## 200. The Leopard, the Goat, and the Grass

A man needs to ferry a leopard, a goat, and some grass across a river.

His boat is small, so he can only carry one at a time.

If he leaves the leopard with the goat, the leopard will eat the goat.

If he leaves the goat with the grass, the goat will eat the grass.

How can he ferry all three across?

Take the goat across.

Return, take the leopard, and bring the goat back.

Leave the goat, take the grass, and leave the grass with the leopard.

Then he can go back and safely take the goat across.

[a Tigray story from northern Ethiopia]





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