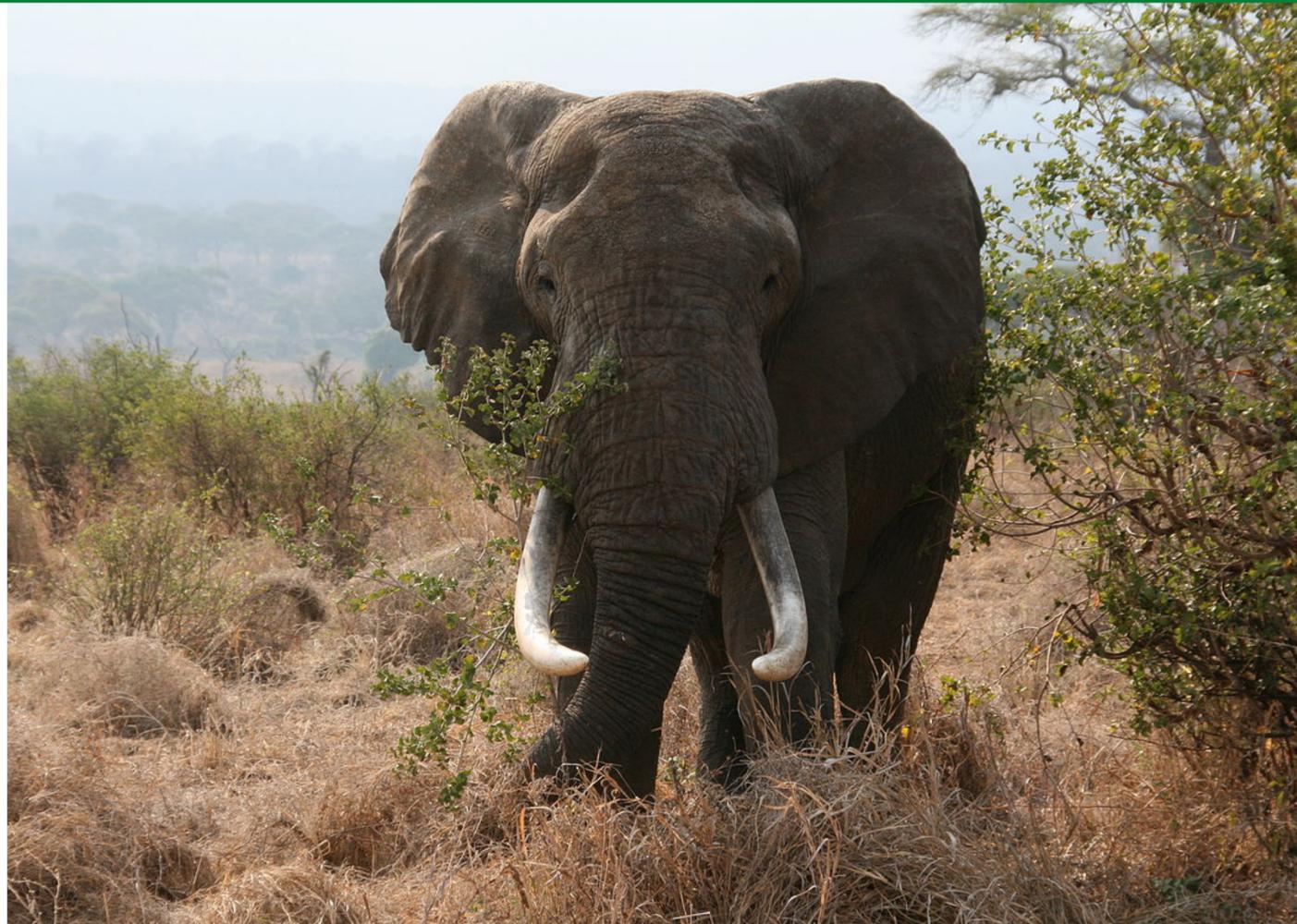


Tiny Tales from Africa

THE ANIMALS, VOLUME 1



TWO HUNDRED 100-WORD STORIES

by Laura Gibbs

Tiny Tales from Africa: The Animals (Volume 1)

TINY TALES FROM AFRICA: THE ANIMALS (VOLUME 1)

A Book of 100-Word Stories

LAURA GIBBS



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CONTENTS

About This Book	1
The Stories	3
Bibliography of Sources	213
Image Credits	218
List of Titles	222

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is the first in what I hope will be a long series of books about African animal tales. You will meet tricksters here like Rabbit (ancestor of Brer Rabbit and Tio Conejo), along with Tortoise, Spider, and more. There are “pourquoi” stories about why Bat flies at night and why Lemur’s eyes are big. There are also stories of magical transformations, like the woman who became a lion. The stories come from many different African traditions; see the list of sources in the back of the book. You can find out more and also listen to an audiobook at 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, at 100Words.LauraGibbs.net.

THE STORIES

1. Anansi the Spider and His Children

It was a feast-day, and all the town's cooks were cooking. Anansi wanted to eat everything, but which food would be ready first?

Anansi summoned his children and gave each one a rope, tying the ropes around his waist. "Go watch!" he told them. "When the food's ready, tug on the rope and pull me there."

Anansi waited.

Pepper-soup: ready!

Pumpkin-stew: ready!

Fry-fry, foo-foo, binch-beans: all ready!

Anansi's children were all pulling at once: this way, that way!

Pulled in every direction, Anansi didn't get to eat anything, and his waist is still narrow from being squeezed by those ropes.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



2. Anansi the Spider and the Singing Ghosts

One night Anansi went to the river alone.

He heard singing. The ghosts were singing!

Dead men scooping water in skulls, scoop-scoop-scoop...

Anansi wanted to sing with the ghosts.

“No!” they told him. “Your head will explode.”

Anansi couldn’t resist; he started singing.

His head exploded, and the ghosts repaired it.

“We won’t be there to help you next time,” they warned him.

But Anansi couldn’t stop himself. The next day he started singing that song: *Scoop-scoop-scoop...*

His head exploded.

“Help, ghosts!” he shouted.

It was daytime; the ghosts didn’t hear him.

That’s why Anansi has such an itty-bitty head.

[a story from Ghana]

3. How the Monkeys Got Their Tails

God the Creator made humans, and he made monkeys.

God also made tails.

But God created the tails separate. He made the tails and then just left them lying there on the ground.

The monkeys, being monkeys, were curious. They liked to pick things up that were just lying around and play with them, so they picked up the tails and started to play with them.

One monkey stuck the tail on his behind.

Then all the other monkeys copied what that monkey did... and the tails wouldn't come off!

That's why monkeys have tails today, but humans do not.

[an Ashanti story from Ghana]



4. How the Animals Got Their Tails

The animals had no tails.

Then the Chief of the animals proclaimed, “Come get your tails!”

All the animals went... except Elephant.

Elephant sent Jackal to bring his tail.

Jackal went to the Chief and chose a long tail for himself. Then he chose a short tail to bring back to Elephant.

“That’s not what I wanted!” shouted Elephant.

“But that is what you get,” replied Jackal.

Because Elephant didn’t go himself, he has only a short tail.

The Elephant should have gone to choose his own tail.

Hence the proverb: Elephant lacks a tail because he sent a messenger.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



5. The Rabbits and the Elephants

The dung of an elephant fell on a baby rabbit, crushing it to death.

“This means war!” shouted the rabbits, and they attacked the elephants.

The elephants, however, easily defeated the rabbits in battle, cutting off the rabbits’ tails as punishment, and that’s why rabbits have short tails today.

The rabbits then devised another plan. “We will collect all our dung in one place until we have enough to crush a baby elephant.”

So the rabbits leave their dung in the same place, but before they can collect enough, the rain always washes it away.

Still, the rabbits keep trying.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



6. The Crocodile and the Leguan Lizard

When Crocodile and Leguan were first created, they didn't have tongues.

Then the Creator made two tongues and said to Crocodile and Leguan, "You two are going to run a race. I have put both tongues at the finish line. The winner of the race will get two tongues, and the loser will not get any tongue at all."

Crocodile was bigger and stronger than Leguan, but Leguan was faster than Crocodile, and he reached the finish-line first.

That is why Crocodile now has nothing but a sort of stump in his mouth, while Leguan has a long double tongue.

[a Bantu story from southern Africa]

7. The Woman and Her Yams

There was once an old woman who planted a field of yams. One morning when she went to the field, she found that someone had dug up the yams. This made her angry. “Who’s been eating my yams?!” she shouted. She could not figure out who the thief was. Then while she was working in the field, she saw a herd of pigs. They were eating her yams! The woman chased the pigs, hitting them on the nose with her hoe. She hit them hard! That’s why pigs today have flat noses: the woman punished them for stealing her yams.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]

8. The Sun and the Jackal

The Sun came down to earth one day and sat beside the road.

People went walking by; they took no notice of the Sun.

When Jackal walked by, he saw the Sun sitting there.

“Oh!” he shouted. “The people have left this child behind.

And what a fine-looking child he is!”

Jackal picked up the Sun. “I’ll carry you,” he said, and he put the Sun on his back.

Then the Sun burned him.

“Ouch! That hurts!” screamed Jackal. “Get down!”

But the Sun stayed stuck to Jackal’s back and kept burning him.

That is how Jackal got his stripe.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



9. The Leopard and the Hyena

Two lion cubs saw human warriors wearing war-paint.

“We need some war-paint!” said one cub.

“I’ll paint you,” said the other cub. “Then you’ll paint me.”

They got some paint, and one cub painted the other with beautiful black spots.

The spotted cub had just begun painting the other cub when they heard a human shouting, “Help! One of my goats has escaped!”

Eager to catch the goat, the spotted cub threw the entire pot of paint at the other cub and ran off.

The cub with the carefully painted spots became the leopard.

The other cub became the hyena.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]

10. The Parrot and the Hen

Parrot and Hen used to be friends, and they lived together in a village.

“I’m getting married,” Parrot told Hen one day. “Will you please let me borrow some of your beautiful feathers?”

In those days, Hen had very fancy feathers, but Parrot did not. When Parrot returned from his marriage journey, he decided to keep the feathers. “They look better on me!” he said to Hen. Hen was angry and attacked Parrot, so Parrot flew up into the trees.

That’s why Parrots wear pretty feathers and live in trees now, while Hens are plain and live in the village.

[a Benga story from Gabon]



11. The Lemur and the Shrew

“The humans have fire,” said Lemur. “We need fire too!”

“I’ll go steal some fire,” said Shrew, “while you stay here and wait for me to return.”

Shrew went to the human village and found a fireplace where there was a faintly glowing coal. He puckered and blew gently. Then he blew harder. Finally the fire was strong.

Shrew came back with the fire and saw Lemur waiting faithfully, eyes wide open.

“Your eyes have grown so big!” said Shrew.

“Your snout has grown so long!” said Lemur.

That’s why Shrew’s nose is long now, and Lemur’s eyes are big.

[a Fang story from Gabon]



12. The First Fire

In the beginning, there was a very big tree.

All the people and all the animals came out from the tree like from a womb.

It was dark all around, everywhere.

Dark like midnight.

Then a man lit a fire. The flames blazed up in the darkness.

Terrified, the animals scattered. They fled into the darkness.

Animals are still afraid of the man's fire, and people today still light their fires at night to scare the animals away.

That is what gives people power over the animals: the people know how to make fire.

Otherwise, the animals wouldn't be afraid.

[a Damara story from Namibia]

13. The Animals and the Fire

In the beginning, the animals lived in the forests.

Then God called the animals. “Come!” he said, and the animals came.

Next, God built a big fire.

The animals were frightened and fled back into the forest.

“I’m not afraid!” bellowed the cow.

“I’m not afraid!” shouted the sheep.

“I’m not afraid!” bleated the goat.

God praised these animals and blessed them. “From now on,” he said, “you will live with the people. The people will feed you, and you will feed the people, and you will all stay warm by the fire, safe from the animals of the forest.”

[a Chok story from Kenya]



14. The Jackal Sends the Dog to Get Fire

“I’m hungry,” Jackal said to Dog, his brother. “Go into the village and fetch fire. We’ll burn the grass and catch locusts to eat.”

Dog went into the village and entered a house. A woman was feeding mush to her baby. She scraped some mush from the pot and fed it to Dog.

The mush tasted good!

Dog stayed in the village.

Jackal waited, but Dog didn’t come back. Jackal howled, “I sent Dog for fire. He never came back! Never! Neeeeeee-veeeeeer!”

You can hear the hungry Jackal still howling.

Dog stayed in the village where the food was good.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

15. The Dogs of Long Ago

Long ago, dogs were like men: they lived in a village, they kept cattle, they took wives and had families.

Dogs and men were often at war.

One time the men raided the dogs' village and stole all their cattle.

The dogs mounted a counterattack to recapture their cattle, but the men climbed into trees and threw sand down into the dogs' eyes.

The dogs attacked again; again, the men threw sand in their eyes.

Blinded by the sand, the dogs couldn't find their way back to their own village ever again.

That's when dogs became the slaves of men.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]



16. The People and the Sea-Turtle

The ocean waves flooded the land again and again.

The people despaired.

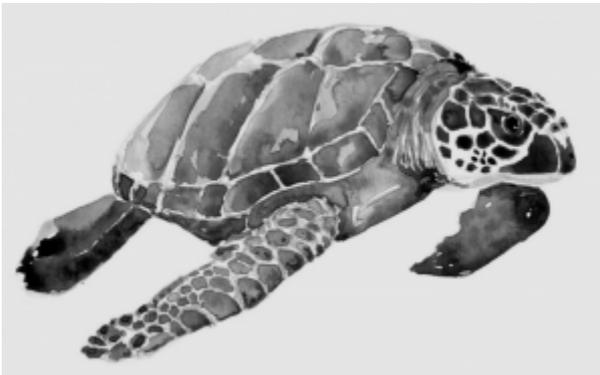
“Plant palm-trees,” Sea-Turtle advised them. “The roots will hold the sand and stop the waves. Your villages will be safe!”

The people planted trees, and Sea-Turtle was right: their villages were safe from the ocean’s waves.

But are the people grateful? No, they are not. They dig up the turtle’s eggs in the sand and eat them. They catch turtles in the sea and eat them.

Just watch: captured turtles flap their flippers against their breast as if to say, “You owe us thanks! Not this! Not this!”

[a story from Ghana]



17. Grandmother Crocodile

Long ago, a man married a crocodile; their children are our ancestors. The people called her “Grandmother Crocodile,” and they lived on land and water happily together.

But one day a man killed a baby crocodile and ate it.

Grandmother Crocodile wept and complained to the people, “Your grandchild has eaten my grandchild. We crocodiles will go live in the rivers now, and we will attack people whenever they get into the water.”

Then the people said, “We will make spears and kill you if we ever find you on the land.”

That is when crocodiles and people became enemies.

[a Shilluk story from the Sudan]

18. The Hippo and the Crocodile

Crocodile and Hippo used to be enemies, but then Crocodile proposed friendship instead.

“You will rule the running waters, and I will rule the marshes and pools,” said Crocodile. “Moreover, I will let you freely graze and eat the grasses in my marshes and pools.”

“And what must I do in return?” asked Hippo.

“I only ask that you overturn the people’s canoes so that I can eat the people who fall into the running water.”

“Oh, I like this plan!” exclaimed the Hippo.

That is why Hippo now sinks canoes, turning the passengers into food for his friend, Crocodile.

[a Bangala story from the Congo]



19. The Three Creatures

At first, there were three creatures: Thunder, Elephant, and Man.

“Beware of Man,” Thunder told Elephant. “He’s dangerous. I’m going to the sky to escape Man. Come with me!”

“Man is very small,” said Elephant, laughing. “I don’t fear him.”

When Thunder went to the sky, Man rejoiced. “Thunder, whom I feared, is gone at last!”

Then Man made a bow and arrow, dipped the arrow in poison, and shot Elephant with the arrow.

Elephant groaned. “Take me up, Thunder!”

“No,” said Thunder. “I tried to warn you, but you wouldn’t listen.”

So Elephant died, and Man ruled the earth.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]

20. The Ram and His Mother

There was once a bad-tempered ram. Whenever he got angry, he burned down houses and knocked down trees.

“Calm yourself, my son!” his mother shouted.

But the ram ignored her.

The people complained to the King, and he sent the ram and the sheep into the bush, but that was even worse: there the angry ram burned down whole fields and forests.

The people complained to the King again, so he sent both ram and sheep into the sky: the ram became lightning, and the sheep became thunder.

Thunder still tells her son Lightning to behave; he still doesn't listen.

[a story from southern Nigeria]



21. The Bat and the Dove

The King sent Dove to bring the Moon, and Bat the Sun.

Dove flew quickly, and the Moon arrived first.

“I grant you the honors I’d planned for the Sun,” said the King.

“You will rule the night, and people will drum and tell stories by your light.”

Because Bat dawdled, the Sun arrived later.

“I gave your honors to the Moon,” the King explained, “but you will rule the day and shine on people as they walk about.”

The Sun was furious. “We’re enemies now!” he told Bat.

So Bat looks down by day and flies only at night.

[a Baganda story from Uganda]



22. The Cane-Rat and the Bat

“This soup tastes so good,” said Cane-Rat to his friend, Bat.

“What’s your secret?”

“I boil myself in the water,” said Bat. “I’ll show you how to do it.”

Bat got into a pot of water and got out again a few minutes later. The water wasn’t boiling, but Cane-Rat thought it was.

Cane-Rat went home and told his wife to boil him. “That is Bat’s secret for tasty soup,” he explained. “Just boil me a few minutes.”

Cane-Rat died!

His widow told the King, who ordered Bat’s arrest.

That’s when Bat went into hiding, only coming out at night.

[a story from southern Nigeria]

23. The Queen's Feast

The Queen organized a feast for the animals, appointing Cow as hostess.

The first course came, and Cow distributed the food. “For you, Goat,” she said, and likewise Sheep, Dog, Cat, Pig, Rooster, and so on.

“What about me?” squeaked Fly.

Cow had forgotten about Fly. “Wait your turn!” she said angrily.

Cow served the second course; again, nothing for Fly.

“I’m hungry!” squeaked Fly.

But Cow didn’t listen, and Fly didn’t get any food.

After the feast, Fly complained to the Queen.

“From now on,” the Queen proclaimed, “Fly will nibble at Cow’s eyes; that will be his feast.”

[a story from southern Nigeria]

24. God and the Birds

In the beginning, God said to the birds, “Rise up and go!”
“If it be God’s will,” the birds chirped, “we shall rise and go.”

The other winged creatures said the same.

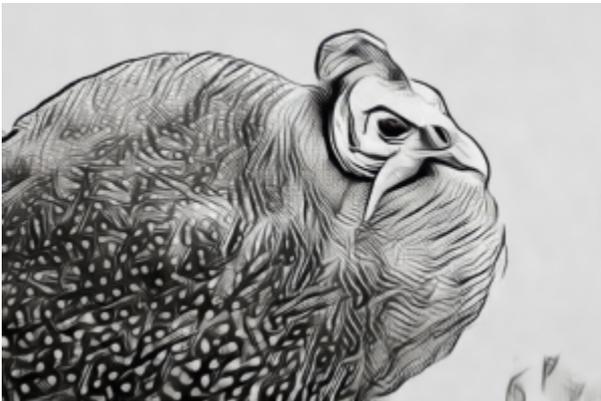
But Guinea-Fowl did not say the same. Guinea-Fowl was proud, so she said, “Whether God be willing or not, I shall rise and go.”

She rose to go, but she fell down; she rose again, and again she fell down.

God then said, “Guinea-Fowl, I remove my blessing from you: instead of flying, you will walk.”

That is why today Guinea-Fowl flaps her wings, but she cannot fly.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



25. The Mosquito and the Ears

One day, Mosquito and the Ears went bathing together in the river.

Afterwards, the Ears rubbed wax on their skin. “It keeps our skin soft,” the Ears said. “Your skin looks very rough, Mosquito. We’ll give you some wax when we’re done.”

Mosquito waited and waited, but when the Ears were done, they put their wax away and went home.

Mosquito followed them. “Give me some wax!” he said.

The Ears told Hands to chase Mosquito away. “Slap him, Hands!” they said.

That’s why Mosquito buzzes in your ear. “I want wax!” he’s saying, and he bites because he’s angry.

[a Mpongwe story from Gabon]

26. The Tortoise and the Pig

Climbing a tall palm-tree, Tortoise fell down and his shell shattered.

“Please help me put my shell back together,” he begged the passing animals, but nobody helped, except for Pig.

“Thank you!” Tortoise told Pig. “I promise to reward you.”

When Pig came for his reward, Tortoise hid, pretending to be the grinding-stone where Mrs. Tortoise was grinding grain. Pig got angry and threw the supposed grinding-stone into the woods.

Next time Pig came, Tortoise said, “Oh, that fine grinding-stone you threw into the woods is your reward; go get it!”

Pig is still digging around, looking for that grinding-stone.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]



27. The Jackal and the Hyena

Jackal climbed a cloud high in the sky and ate the cloud; it was very tasty.

“I’m coming down now!” he shouted to Hyena. “Catch me! I’ll do the same for you.”

Hyena caught Jackal, and then Hyena climbed the cloud and ate her fill.

“I’m coming down now,” she shouted to Jackal. “Catch me!”

Jackal reached up his paws to catch her, but then jumped aside.

“Ow, a thorn has pricked me! So sorry! Ow! Not my fault!”

Hyena crashed into the ground and was badly hurt.

To this day, Hyena limps because she was injured in that fall.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

28. The Elephant and the Rhino

Elephant and Rhino fought fiercely, and Elephant won.

“I will go far away,” said Rhino, and he went to live in a different forest.

Later on, Elephant’s child got lost. When she saw Rhino’s dung on the ground, it looked like her mother’s dung, so she followed the trail to the other forest.

When Elephant finally found her child, she was furious. Once again she fought Rhino and defeated him.

“Listen to me, Rhino!” she shouted. “From now on you must scatter your dung so you won’t mislead my children ever again.”

That is why Rhino always scatters his dung.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



29. The Little Frog and the Little Snake

One day little Frog and little Snake played together.

Then they went home.

“Who were you playing with?” Frog’s mother asked.

“With Snake,” he replied.

“They’re bad people!” shouted his mother. “They have poison. Don’t ever play with Snake again!”

When Snake told his mother he was hungry, she shouted, “It’s your own fault! After you play with Frog, just kill him and eat him.”

The next day Snake went to play with Frog.

“I can’t play with you anymore,” Frog said.

“Ah, you spoke to your mother,” said Snake. “So did I.”

Snake and Frog never played together again.

[an Ekoi story from southern Nigeria]



30. The Fish and the Leopard

Fish used to live on land, and he was friends with Leopard.

Then Fish fell in love with Leopard's wife.

When Leopard caught them, he was furious, but Fish was his friend, so he didn't kill him; instead, he took Fish to the King.

Fish offered no defense.

"Fish betrayed his friend, which makes his crime even worse," said the King. "I decree that Fish will live forever in the water. He cannot live on the land. Moreover, people and animals will be free to catch and kill Fish in the water. That is Fish's punishment for his bad behavior."

[a story from southern Nigeria]

31. The Leopard and the Man

In olden times, leopards grabbed people by the arm, which meant the people sometimes escaped.

“The leopard was so foolish!” one man boasted. “If he had grabbed me by the throat, I’d never have broken free. But the stupid creature grabbed me by the arm, so I broke free and got away.”

A leopard in the bush heard the man’s words. “The biggest fool of all,” he said to himself, laughing, “is the one who teaches his enemies how to kill him.”

Ever since, leopards catch people by the throat and nobody escapes, all because of the man who boasted.

[a Banyoro story from Uganda]



32. The Lion's Family and the Leopard

Lion had been gone a long time, and his wife and children had no food.

When Lioness saw Leopard walking by, she begged for help.

“Lion hasn’t come home,” she said, “and we’re starving.”

Feeling sorry for the little cubs, Leopard caught an eland and dragged it back to their den.

Just as the cubs began to eat, their father came bounding back home, roaring loudly.

Terrified, Leopard ran and hid in the grass.

Lion raged at his wife in jealous anger. “How dare you take help from Leopard!”

To avoid meeting Lion, Leopard now only comes out at night.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



33. The Flying Lion

Lion used to be able to fly; his power came from the bones of his victims.

He appointed Crow to guard those bones. “Let no one break these bones!” he commanded.

But Frog came and smashed the bones. “I’m not afraid,” he told Crow. “Tell Lion I did this!”

When Lion realized he could no longer fly, he ran back home.

Crow squawked, “Frog came and broke the bones.”

Lion tried to grab Frog, but each time, Frog hopped farther away.

Now Lion cannot fly, and he punished Crow for failing to guard the bones: nobody understands Crow’s words anymore.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

34. The First Lion

A long time ago, the lion used to be an ordinary house cat, and he lived together with the people in the village.

But then one day that cat chased a chicken, caught it, and ate it. The people were very angry.

The next day the cat did something even worse: he attacked a baby and scratched it.

The cat's owner shouted at him, "I'm going to kill you!"

The cat knew he was in danger, so he ran away and hid in the bush, far from the people.

He became a lion, and now lions and people are enemies.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



35. The First Baboons

A woman once had three children.

As she gazed upon grain growing in other people's fields, she decided, "We will take that grain for our family."

Her children stole the grain, but the chief caught them. He killed two of the children, and one escaped.

Her friends told her to cut her hair in mourning, but she refused. "I won't cut my hair!"

After this, the woman ran away together with her surviving child.

The woman's hair kept growing, and so did the hair of her child.

They walked on all fours. They were covered with fur.

They became baboons.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



36. The First Fish

A woman took bark-cloth and wrapped it around herself.

When she was bathing in the river, the water took the bark-cloth from her.

“Help!” she shouted to her companions. “The water took my bark-cloth!”

They waded into the water to find the bark-cloth while the woman sat beside the river, naked.

Then she saw her bark-cloth. “Look!” she shouted. “It’s moving like an animal.”

They grabbed the bark-cloth, which had become a fish, and cut it open. It was full of eggs which they threw into the water.

More fish hatched from the eggs.

That is the origin of fish.

[a Yao story from Malawi]

37. The First Snake

To keep robbers out of his garden, a man took some bark-cloth, twisted it tightly, and armed it with sharp thorns. “Bark-cloth,” he said, “if robbers come here, bite them with your thorns!”

A robber came, and the bark-cloth bit him.

“Why did you do that?!” shouted the robber.

“My master put me here to bite robbers,” replied the bark-cloth.

The robber died.

The chief came.

“Bark-cloth,” he said, “you have killed a man; you have a bad heart.”

Then the bark-cloth crawled away into the bushes.

When it sees people, it bites them.

That is the origin of snakes.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



38. The First Bird

A man had two sons.

“Give us a bow!” they said.

He gave them a bow. “You mustn’t shoot one another,” he said.

But the boys quarreled. One boy picked up grass and shot the grass at his brother. The grass struck the boy and killed him.

“You killed your brother!” the father shouted.

“I did not kill him,” said the boy. “The grass killed him.”

“Yes, I killed him,” said the grass sadly, “and I don’t want to stay down here anymore.”

The grass flew up into a tree and became a bird.

That is the origin of birds.

[a Yao story from Malawi]

39. The Cattle and the Buffalo

The cattle and buffalo fought, and the cattle won.

“You must change your appearance,” the cattle decreed, “so everyone will see you aren’t cattle. Your horns must spread farther apart and your hooves must change their shape so no one will mistake our footprints. You will live in the wild and eat wild grass, while we will live in the villages of the people and eat in their pastures, giving them our milk in exchange.”

Now, because of cattle, there is war among humans.

Without cattle, there would be no war, because nobody would ever fight a war over buffalo.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



40. The Rabbit and the Moon

The Moon dies and then rises to life again.

“The people need to know,” Moon told Rabbit. “Go tell the people: as I die and rise to life again, so too shall you rise.”

Rabbit went to the people, but he told them, “As I die and do not rise to life again, so too shall you die.”

When Rabbit returned and told Moon what he had told the people, she was furious. Grabbing a stick, she hit Rabbit hard on the mouth and split his lip.

Then Rabbit angrily scratched Moon’s face and ran off... and he’s still running.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



41. The Chameleon and the Lizard

After Creator finished making the world, he sent Chameleon on a mission. “Go tell the people: after you die, you will wake up again.”

Time passed; Chameleon didn’t return.

Then Creator sent Lizard. “Go tell the people: after you die, you will not wake up.”

Lizard ran fast and reached the people before Chameleon did. “After you die, you will not wake up,” said Lizard, and the people said, “Yes.”

When Chameleon finally arrived, he said, “After you die, you will wake up again.”

But the people had already accepted Lizard’s message.

That’s why the dead do not wake up.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



42. The Dog and the Sheep

At first, there was no death.

Then someone got sick and died.

The people told Dog, “Go ask God what to do.”

Dog went and talked with God, but dawdled coming back.

When Dog didn’t return, the people sent Sheep.

Sheep returned and told them, “God says: bury the dead.”

Later, Dog returned. He told them, “God says: put warm ashes on the person’s body, and they’ll rise again.”

But Dog’s message came too late; the dead body was already in the ground.

The people were angry and drove Dog away.

Because of Dog, the dead do not rise again.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]

43. The Dog's Message

Long ago, Dog brought the people a message: “You will die as the moon dies. But, like the moon, you can live again, provided you give me milk from your gourd and let me drink beer through your straw. Then I will make it possible for you to return from death, like the moon.”

The people laughed. They gave Dog milk and beer, but they didn't let him drink from their gourd or use their straw.

Dog got angry. “The moon will return to life,” he said, “but you people will die and you will not come back to life.”

[a Nandi story from Kenya]



44. The People Who Wanted to Live Forever

Long ago, in the time of the first animals and the first people, there was a man who spoke for the people. “We want to live forever,” the man announced.

The hyena heard him and said, “No! It cannot be this way. You cannot live forever.”

“Why do you say that?” the man asked.

“You cannot live forever,” explained the hyena, “because we want to eat your dead bodies.”

This is the reason why people must die. People want to live forever, but they die so that the hyenas can eat their dead bodies.

This is the origin of death.

[a Gogo story from Tanzania]

45. The Hyena Who Waited

Hyena was hunting one night when she walked by a hut. Inside, a sick man was groaning. “He’ll die soon,” another man said. “Then we can bury him.”

“Lucky me!” Hyena thought. “I don’t need to hunt. I’ll just dig up the grave and enjoy a nice fresh corpse.”

Hyena waited all night, but the man didn’t die.

At dawn, Hyena began to howl. “Liars! They’re all liars! Liars and drunken fools! The man didn’t die, and I didn’t get any food. Liars! All liars!”

Hyena is still complaining even now. “Liars!” she howls. “They’re all liars!”

She’s not laughing.

[a Banyoro story from Uganda]



46. The Owls and their Servants

Long ago, the owl decided to employ a servant to help care for her chicks. “*Mbwa* the dog will make a good servant,” she decided, and she took the dog into her service.

The dog was a good servant, and when the dog’s puppies grew up, they also became servants of the owls.

Then one day the owl told the dog, “Go to the people’s village and bring back fire.”

The dog went to the village. The people fed and petted the dog; he decided to stay there.

The owl keeps calling, *Mbwa! Mbwa! Mbwa!* but the dog has never returned.

[a Bangala story from the Congo]



47. The Dog and the Cow

The dog lay down in the cow's grass.

When the cow came to eat the grass, the dog prevented her.

"I don't understand," said the cow to the dog. "You don't eat grass; that's my food, not yours. Why are you keeping me away from my grass?"

The dog just barked at her, "Wo! Wo!" which means, "Go away! Go away!"

The cow said, "Dog, you are very hard-hearted."

Ever since, the dog chases the cow. When he chases her, she tries to stab him with her horns, but when the dog barks, the cow gives up and goes away.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

48. The Squirrel and the Viper

Squirrel and Viper were such good friends that one day Viper said to Squirrel, “We should live together in a single nest!”

Squirrel hesitated. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she said. “If we start sharing the same nest, you might harm me. You are a Viper after all.”

“I would never harm you!” Viper protested.

So Squirrel and Viper lived together.

Later on, Squirrel gave birth.

One day when she went looking for food, Viper ate all of Squirrel’s children.

Now when you hear Squirrel cry, she is saying, “Is Viper really my friend? Really my friend? Really?”

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



49. The Frog and His Two Wives

Frog had two wives, and both were good cooks.

One day Frog's two wives cooked porridge, and their porridge was ready at the same time. The first wife called, "Porridge is ready; come!" The second wife called, "Porridge is ready; come!"

Frog despaired. "Both wives want me: if I go to the first, the second will be angry; if I go to the second, the first will be angry."

So Frog began to sing:

I'm in trouble! I'm in trouble!

Kuo-kuo! kuo-kuo!

That is what Frog sings about: the trouble he has with his two wives.

I'm in trouble! Kuo-kuo!

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



50. The Animals and the Rain

The land was dry, and the animals needed rain.

Elephant trumpeted, but no rain fell.

Giraffe stomped his hooves; no rain fell.

Big animals, small animals, they all tried and failed.

Then Frog started singing. When he croaked, clouds gathered, and the rain fell.

“Dig holes!” Frog shouted to the other animals. “Save the water in ponds and lakes and rivers.”

While Frog sang, the other animals dug holes for the water.

“We frogs will live in the water,” he proclaimed, “and when we sing, the rains will come.”

So if you hear frogs croaking, it means rain is coming.

[a Gogo story from Tanzania]

51. The Frog and the Water

Some frogs lived together in a pond. It wasn't warm, but it wasn't cold either, and they lived happily there.

There was one frog, though, who wanted to find warmer water. He hopped near the kitchen fire, and then he hopped into a pot over the fire. The water was boiling hot!

"My fellow frogs," he shouted, "you need to know: water is more than one kind." Those were his last words.

"More than one," croaked the frogs, "more than one!"

When you hear frogs croaking, that's what they are saying:

"Water is more than one kind! More than one!"

[a story from Liberia]

52. The Boar and the Hog

Wild Boar and Wild Hog lived together in the forest, but then Hog decided to go live in the village.

“I will eat the people’s food,” Hog said. “Forest-food is bitter.”

“Don’t go!” said Boar. “The people hate animals. There is nothing good there!”

But Hog didn’t listen; he went to the village.

The people gave Hog food. They built a sty for him.

But when Hog had mated with the village pigs and reproduced, the people killed him and ate him.

Now when Hog squeals, he’s saying, “Boar told me not to go! Boar told me! Boar told me!”

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



53. The Rooster and the Sun

Long ago, Rooster stole God's Sun.

"Give my Sun back!" God shouted, but Rooster refused.

Then God proclaimed, "I'll reward whoever brings back my Sun."

"Everyone wants to steal your Sun," Lizard warned Rooster.

"You best build a wall around it for protection."

When Rooster built the wall, Lizard climbed over and returned the Sun to God.

"I want fur as my reward," Lizard announced.

"I used up all the fur," God said, apologetically. "Your reward will be to dwell in human houses."

Meanwhile, Rooster crows every morning when he sees the Sun; he's telling God to give it back!

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]



54. The Leopard and His Drum

Leopard was hungry. “I’ll say I’m sick,” he decided, “and when my friends come to visit, I’ll eat them.”

So Leopard beat his drum slowly and sang:

O Antelope! Rabbit! Monkey!

Your friend is sick; he needs you.

O friends, Leopard needs you.

Antelope approached, together with Rabbit and Monkey.

“Give me the drum,” Antelope said. “I will sing too.”

Leopard gave Antelope the drum, and Antelope sang:

Leopard isn’t sick, O friends!

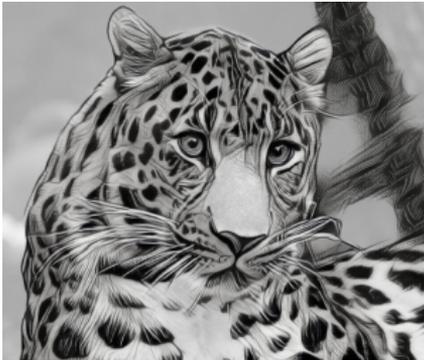
He’s scheming, scheming...

Leopard grabbed the drum. “You’re no musician!” he shouted.

But Antelope, Rabbit, and Monkey had already run away.

Leopard didn’t get to eat anybody.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



55. The Spider and Lion's Ram

Spider volunteered to guard Lion's ram.

"That one," Lion pointed, "with the bell on its neck."

After Lion left, Spider ate the ram, and then took the sheepskin, bell, and fat to Hyena.

"I'll give you clothes, jewelry, and food for singing this song," Spider said.

Hyena eats the fat;

Hyena wears the skin;

Hyena rings the bell ting-a-ling-ling.

Hyena sang as she ate the fat and put on the sheepskin and bell.

"You look beautiful," Spider said. "Let's go show Lion!"

As Hyena sang for Lion, Spider shouted, "She stole your ram!"

Lion killed Hyena, and Spider just laughed.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

56. The Spider in the Storeroom

The animals of the town saved their grain in a common storeroom so they would have food to eat during a famine.

Spider went there secretly every day and ate the grain.

He also collected Hyena's dung in a calabash, dumping it out in the storeroom.

When famine came, the animals went to their storeroom.

"It's empty!" they yelled.

Then they saw the dung and shouted, "That is Hyena's dung!"

"But I'm innocent," protested Hyena.

Spider replied, "The evidence says otherwise."

They chased Hyena far from town, and now she has no friends among the animals.

All because of Spider.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



57. When the Jackal and the Hyena Were Servants

Jackal and Hyena together went to work for the same man as his servants.

During the night, Jackal got up and raided the pantry, eating all the lard in the lard-tub. He then scraped out what was left and smeared it on Hyena's tail while Hyena was fast asleep.

In the morning, the man shouted, "Hey, who ate up all the lard?"

First, he accused Jackal.

"Not me, sir," protested Jackal. "Not me! Just look at Hyena's tail, and you will see who is the thief."

The man then thrashed Hyena till she was nearly dead, while Jackal just laughed.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



58. King Lion and the Corn-Thief

Someone was stealing corn from the fields.

“I will catch and kill the thief!” roared King Lion.

He lay in wait... and caught Rabbit.

“I’m no thief!” protested Rabbit. “I came to give you this crown!” He showed Lion a crown. “Lean against this tree, and I’ll crown you.”

Rabbit parted Lion’s mane, pretending to make room for the crown, but he was really tying Lion’s hair to the tree.

Lion was trapped!

Then Rabbit scattered corn husks around Lion.

“Thief!” Rabbit yelled. “Come see the thief!”

All the animals came and beat Lion to death for stealing their corn.

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]

59. The Rabbit, the Baboon, and the Peanuts

Rabbit and Baboon raided a peanut-garden.

As they feasted, Rabbit said, “Let’s play a game with our fingers!”

“No,” said Baboon. “I’m using my fingers to eat.”

“With our mouths!”

“No, I’m using my mouth.”

“With our eyes!”

“No, I’m using my eyes.”

“With our tails!”

“Okay,” Baboon agreed, “but you’ll have to show me how to play this game.”

“It’s easy,” said Rabbit as he grabbed Baboon’s tail and tied it to a stake in the ground. Then Rabbit shouted, “Come, people! Come, dogs! Baboon’s stealing your peanuts!”

While the people and dogs attacked Baboon, Rabbit ran away, laughing.

[a Ndau story from Mozambique]



60. The Wildcat and the Monkey (1)

Exhausted by a long night of hunting, Wildcat lay down to rest, but she couldn't sleep because fleas were biting her all over.

Then she saw Monkey.

“Help me, Monkey!” she groaned. “Come pluck these fleas.”

“Gladly!” said Monkey.

Monkey plucked the fleas, and Wildcat slept.

Then Monkey stopped plucking the fleas. He took Wildcat's tail and tied her to a tree. He then hit her on the head to wake her up as he ran away, laughing.

When Wildcat tried to chase Monkey, she realized she was stuck.

“I'll get you for this, Monkey!” she shouted.

Wildcat wanted revenge.

[an Ewe story from Ghana]



61. The Wildcat's Revenge (2)

Wildcat summoned all the animals who hated Monkey because of the tricks he played on them. “Go announce that I am dead,” she told them, “and that you are arranging my funeral. Make sure you invite Monkey to the funeral feast.”

Before the funeral guests arrived, Wildcat lay down and pretended to be dead.

All the animals danced the funeral dance around her body, including Monkey.

Wildcat is dead, dead, dead... they sang as they danced.

Then Wildcat sprang up, reaching for Monkey.

But Monkey had already leaped high into a tree.

Ever since then, Monkeys have lived in trees.

[an Ewe story from Ghana]

62. The Birds' Fasting Contest

“Let’s see who can live longest without food!” Turaco said to Coucal.

“I accept your challenge!” said Coucal. “I promise not to eat if you promise not to eat. We will see who lives longest!”

Coucal did not eat, and he grew thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker.

Turaco pretended not to eat, but secretly he went to eat every night. He did not grow thin. He did not grow weak.

Seven days passed.

Coucal died!

“Who killed Coucal?” asked the other birds.

“It’s his own fault,” squawked Turaco. “He didn’t eat, he got thin, he got weak, he died.”

[an Edo story from southern Nigeria]

63. The Elephant and the Rooster

“Rooster, I challenge you to an eating contest!” Elephant said. Rooster agreed.

Elephant ate and ate; then he fell asleep. When he woke up, he saw Rooster was still eating.

Elephant ate some more; then he fell asleep again. When he awoke, he couldn’t believe it: Rooster was still eating!

Elephant ate, slept, and when he woke up, Rooster was on his back, pecking him.

“What are you doing?!” Elephant shrieked.

“I’m just looking in your bristles for insects to eat,” said Rooster.

Terrified by Rooster’s appetite, Elephant ran away, and he is still afraid when he hears Rooster crowing.

[a Dinka story from the Sudan]



64. The Elephant and the Goat

“Elephant, I challenge you to an eating contest,” said Goat.

Elephant laughed. “I’m so much bigger than you!” he said. “I know I’ll win.”

The contest began.

Elephant ate and ate: grass, sticks, weeds, everything he could see.

Goat, meanwhile, ate some grass, but not much, and then lay down on a rock, chewing his cud.

“What are you eating over there?” Elephant asked.

“I’m eating this rock,” said Goat. “After I eat the rock, I’m going to eat you.” Then Goat gave Elephant a hungry look.

Elephant ran away, terrified.

Elephant is still afraid of Goat to this day.

[a story from Liberia]



65. The Elephant and the Tortoise

“You’re very short,” Elephant told Tortoise.

“True,” said Tortoise. “But I can jump over you! Come here tomorrow and I’ll show you.”

In the night, Tortoise dug two holes; he hid his brother in one of them.

The next day, Elephant came.

“Stand here,” Tortoise said, placing him between the holes.

“Now close your eyes!”

Tortoise hid, while his brother emerged. “Open your eyes! I jumped over,” he said.

Elephant was amazed.

“I’ll do it again,” Tortoise’s brother said. “Close your eyes!”

Then he hid and Tortoise emerged. “Look! I jumped back!”

“You really can jump,” Elephant admitted.

Tortoise smiled.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]

66. The Frog and the Deer

“You’re fast,” said Frog, “but I’m faster.”

Deer laughed. “If you think so, let’s race!”

Before the race began, Frog told his brothers to station themselves along the race-course. “Just hop in front of Deer when he approaches,” Frog told them. “Deer thinks we all look the same; that’s how we’ll fool him.”

Deer was surprised that around every twist and turn Frog hopped out ahead of him. “Here I am!” he croaked, always ahead no matter how fast Deer ran.

Deer ran faster and faster and faster, and then he dropped down dead.

That’s how Frog won the race.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]



67. The Chameleon and the Elephant

“You may be big,” Chameleon told Elephant, “but I’m fast. Let’s race!”

That night, Chameleon went to all his brothers and arranged them along the race track.

The next day, the race began. Elephant charged ahead as fast as he could. Imagine his surprise when he saw Chameleon ahead of him!

Elephant ran faster.

Then he saw Chameleon ahead of him again. “Aren’t you tired?” Elephant gasped.

Chameleon laughed. “Not at all!”

Elephant ran and ran until he couldn’t run anymore.

“You win, Chameleon!” he said. “You really can run faster than me.”

Elephant never realized that Chameleon tricked him.

[a Mangbetu story from the Congo]

68. The Rabbit and the Chameleon

Rabbit and Chameleon decided to race.

Without Rabbit realizing it, Chameleon grabbed onto Rabbit's tail.

Rabbit ran and ran. Confident that he had left Chameleon far behind, Rabbit stopped to rest.

Imagine his surprise when Chameleon suddenly appeared, passing him and running farther down the race track. "How did he keep up with me?" Rabbit wondered. "How can Chameleon be a better runner than me?"

Rabbit called for a new race, and Chameleon rode Rabbit's tail again.

When they raced a third time, Rabbit had to admit: Chameleon was the better runner.

He never realized that Chameleon had tricked him.

[a Gogo story from Tanzania]



69. The Elephant and the Frog

Elephant and Frog were courting the same woman.

“Elephant is my horse,” Frog told her one day.

When Elephant found out, he was furious.

“We’ll go see her together,” Elephant told Frog, “and you’ll take back your words!”

They started walking, but after a while Frog collapsed. “I’m sick,” he gasped. “No strength for walking.”

“I’ll carry you,” Elephant said, using his trunk to lift Frog onto his back.

When they reached the woman’s house, Frog bit Elephant’s ear, and Elephant bolted. As they ran by the house the woman saw them. “Elephant really is Frog’s horse!” she said, laughing.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



70. The People and the Turtle

A man once caught a turtle.

“How shall we kill him?” he asked the people.

“Chop him with hatchets!” the people shouted.

Turtle laughed. “Hatchets can’t chop me.”

“Let’s crush him with stones!”

“Stones can’t crush me.”

“Then burn him in fire!”

“Fire can’t burn me.”

“We’ll cut him with knives!”

“Knives can’t cut me.”

“We must throw him in the water!”

“Oh no!” screamed Turtle. “Please don’t throw me in the water!”

So they took Turtle to the river and threw him in.

Turtle dove down and popped up. *Water is my home!* he sang.

Water is my home!

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

71. The Monkey and the Leopard

Monkey and Leopard used to be friends and shared their food. But one day Monkey caught some fish and ate it all; he didn't share with his friend.

Leopard saw the fish bones. "Where's my share?" he demanded.

"Forgive me," Monkey said. "I ate all the fish myself."

Leopard was furious. "Then I will eat you!" he snarled, grabbing Monkey in his paws.

"Don't forget to say grace before you eat me," Monkey reminded him, and when Leopard folded his paws to give thanks to God, Monkey escaped up into the trees.

Monkeys have lived in the trees ever since.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]



72. The Jackal and the Rooster

“At last!” shouted Jackal as he grabbed hold of Rooster. “I’m starving!”

But before he could bite off Rooster’s head, Rooster squawked, “You must pray first, Jackal! Pray before eating me! That’s what the white man does.”

“What do you mean?” said Jackal. “How does the white man pray?”

“He folds his hands in prayer,” Rooster explained.

So Jackal folded his paws, letting go of Rooster.

“And he closes his eyes,” Rooster added.

When Jackal closed his eyes, Rooster soared to safety in a treetop.

“Well,” Jackal muttered to himself, “that’s what I get for praying like a white man.”

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



73. The Hunter and the Leopard

A hunter saw Leopard in a trap.

“Help!” Leopard shouted.

The hunter freed Leopard.

Then Leopard snarled, “I’m starving! Give me your dog.”

Terrified, he gave Leopard his dog.

Leopard ate the dog. “I’m still hungry!”

The hunter gave Leopard his cartridge-case.

Leopard ate the cartridge-case. “I’m still hungry!” he said.

“Now I’ll eat you.”

“Help!” the hunter shouted.

Rabbit came running. “What are you arguing about?” he asked.

“I found Leopard in a trap...” the hunter began.

“Don’t tell me,” Rabbit interrupted. “Show me!”

Leopard got back in the trap.

Then Rabbit told the hunter, “This time: shoot him.”

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



74. The Lioness and the Chicks of the Ostrich

Lioness stole Ostrich's chicks. "They are my babies," she insisted.

Ostrich summoned the animals to an assembly. "Lioness stole my babies!" Ostrich said. "I demand justice!"

The animals feared Lioness, so they said nothing.

Only Mongoose spoke up. "Fur cannot beget feathers! The chicks belong to Ostrich. That is justice!"

Lioness roared in anger, and Mongoose disappeared into an anthill.

Lioness clawed the ground; then she waited for Mongoose to come out.

She didn't know Mongoose had dug a hole out the other side.

Lioness waited there until she starved to death.

Meanwhile, Ostrich happily took her chicks home again.

[a Maasai story from Kenya]

75. The Gorilla and the Monkey

All the animals mocked Gorilla. “You are so ugly!” they shouted, laughing. “Broken-Face! Broken-Face!”

This made Gorilla mad, so he went to Monkey and asked, “Tell me, friend: is my face really broken as they say?”

Monkey was afraid to answer. “Let me go get us some fruit,” he said, “and then we can talk.” Monkey quickly scrambled up a tamarind tree, and from the very highest branch he shouted down to Gorilla, “Look up here!”

Gorilla looked up.

Monkey laughed and said, “It’s true, Broken-Face, it’s true, it’s true.”

Then Monkey scampered away through the tree-tops, leaving Gorilla behind.

[a Fang story from Gabon]

76. The Wildcat and the Nightjar

Wildcat and Nightjar were friends.

One day, Wildcat growled, “I’m going to eat you!”

Nightjar flapped her wings and fluttered away in fear.

Wildcat just laughed. “Oh, I was only joking, my dear friend.”

Then she added, “But seriously, one of my kittens is sick. I need two of your feathers to make medicine.”

Reassured, Nightjar gave her two feathers. “I’m glad to help,” she said.

Wildcat made the same request the next day, and the next, and the next.

Finally, Nightjar had no feathers left, so she was unable to fly.

That’s when Wildcat grabbed Nightjar and ate her.

[a Kaonde story from Zambia]



77. The Pious Cat and the Mouse

There was once a cat who pretended to be very pious, as if he were a great saint.

A mouse approached this holy cat, seeking wisdom.

“Enlighten me, O Cat!” squeaked the mouse.

“Come closer,” said the cat. “I’m hard of hearing. Come closer!”

“He is devoted to God,” the mouse thought to himself. “Surely I have nothing to fear.” So the mouse got close enough to shout into the cat’s ear, whereupon the cat grabbed him.

“O Holy One!” shrieked the mouse. “What happened to your devotion?”

“It comes and goes,” said the cat as he swallowed the mouse.

[a Swahili story]

78. The Leopard and the Dog

Leopard appointed Dog to be nanny to her three cubs. “I’ll pay you with meat,” she said, “but you must never gnaw the bones.”

Things went well, until one day Dog was so hungry he gnawed the bones. A bone-splinter flew into the air, hit a cub, and killed it.

When Leopard called for her cubs to nurse them, Dog fooled her by bringing the first cub twice.

When Dog accidentally killed another cub, he ran away and hid.

Eventually Leopard caught Dog gnawing on a heap of bones, and she killed him, thus avenging the death of her cubs.

[a Banyoro story from Uganda]



79. The Woman and the Rabbit

A woman needed a nanny for her baby.

“I love babies,” said Rabbit. “I’ll be your nanny.”

But Rabbit got bored while babysitting.

Meanwhile, something smelled good... He went into the kitchen and peeked in the cooking-pot: there was goat stew!

Rabbit ate the stew.

All of it.

Then he realized the woman would be mad when she got home and found the stew all gone, so he cut the baby up and made more stew.

Rabbit left her a note: “Took the baby out for a walk.”

The parents came home and ate the stew.

Rabbit never came back.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]

80. The Rabbit and the Antelope

Rabbit wanted Antelope's horns to make a trumpet, so he persuaded her to marry him.

"Now let's make a love-feast!" Rabbit said. "I'll get into the pot and stew over the fire, then you."

Rabbit sat inside the pot of cold water. When the water was warm, he climbed out.

Then Antelope got in. "It's very warm," she said.

Rabbit slammed the lid down. "Just tell me when it gets hot," he said.

Soon Antelope yelled, "It's hot! Let me out!"

But Rabbit didn't let her out.

After he feasted on her meat, he made a trumpet from her horns.

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]



81. The Swallow and the Rooster

Swallow invited Rooster to dinner. When Rooster arrived, Swallow's wife said, "He's in the stew-pot with the pumpkins." Then she shouted, "Husband, come out! Rooster's here."

Swallow came flying through the smoke above the cooking fire so it looked like he had risen up out of the stew-pot. "The stew tastes better when I boil a little while with the pumpkins," Swallow said to Rooster, and Rooster believed him.

Then Rooster went home and told his wife, "You must boil me with the pumpkins. That's what Swallow does."

Rooster's wife did as he told her, and Rooster boiled to death.

[a Chewa story from Malawi]



82. The Rooster and the Swallow

Rooster sent word to his friend, Swallow, “Please come, friend! I’ve received bad news.”

When Swallow came, Rooster’s wife said, “Rooster received bad news and has cut off his head.” But Rooster had only tucked his head under his wing.

“My condolences!” Swallow said.

Later, Swallow got some bad news. “Call Rooster,” he told his wife. “Meanwhile, I too will cut off my head.”

Rooster found Swallow with his head cut off. “I’ll come back tomorrow to see if he’s better,” Rooster said. He came back the next day, and the next, but Swallow didn’t get better. Swallow was dead.

[a Chewa story from Malawi]

83. The Hen and the Rabbit

Hen invited Rabbit to come drink beer.

Rabbit arrived and saw Rooster there, his head tucked under his wing.

“Where’s Rooster’s head?” Rabbit asked.

“Oh, I cut it off,” Hen said. “I sent his head to invite our guests while his body takes a nap. Don’t worry: his head will be back soon.”

Hen was joking, but Rabbit believed her. He went home and made some beer, and then he told his wife, “Cut my head off! I’ll stay here and sleep while my head goes to invite our guests.” So Rabbit’s wife cut off his head, and he died.

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]



84. The Rabbit and the Deer

“I’ll play dead,” Rabbit told Deer, “and you can sell me to the women working in the peanut-patch. Tie me loosely so I can escape. We’ll have a peanut feast!”

Deer sold the dead rabbit to the women. As planned, Rabbit wiggled free; then he and Deer feasted on peanuts.

When the women saw Rabbit was gone, they cried, “Oh! Someone stole our rabbit.”

The next day Rabbit said, “You play dead this time, and I’ll sell you.”

The women bought the dead deer.

“Look!” one woman shouted. “It’s still breathing.” So they beat Deer to death with their hoes.

[a Mwanga story from Zambia]

85. The Rabbit Visits the Baboon

To escape from a grass fire, Rabbit hid in his hole. Then, when it was safe, he came out, rolled in the ashes, and went to see his friend, Baboon.

“What happened to you?” asked Baboon. “You’re covered with ashes.”

“There was a grass fire,” said Rabbit. “But I spit on the fire to put it out. I have powerful spit.”

“My spit is powerful too!” shouted Baboon. “Set my house on fire, Rabbit. I’ll show you!”

Rabbit set Baboon’s house on fire.

Baboon spit and spit, but he couldn’t put out the fire.

Foolish Baboon died in the fire.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



86. The Wildcat and the Gazelle

Wildcat and Gazelle were friends, vowing that if famine came, they would eat each other's mothers.

Famine came.

They killed Wildcat's mother and ate her, but Gazelle hid his own mother in a cave. "Hide until I call you," he said.

Wildcat discovered Gazelle's secret. He went to the cave and imitated Gazelle's voice: "Come out, Mother!"

When Gazelle's mother came out, Wildcat killed her and prepared a great feast, inviting Gazelle as guest of honor.

Gazelle later discovered his mother was missing and realized where the meat for the feast came from.

After that, Wildcat and Gazelle were enemies.

[a Bakongo story from Zaire]

87. The Tortoise and the Bat

Tortoise and Bat used to be friends. A mutual acquaintance invited them to dinner; Tortoise wore a white shirt while Bat wore his usual black.

The journey was long, so they decided to nap before dinner. Tortoise whispered to their host, “Wake the one wearing white when dinner is ready; let the one in black sleep. He’s very tired and doesn’t want to be disturbed.”

Bat overheard, so he switched their clothes when Tortoise was asleep.

The host woke Bat when dinner was ready, and Bat ate all the food; Tortoise got nothing.

Tortoise and Bat are not friends anymore.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]



88. The Dog and the Chimpanzee

Dog and Chimpanzee traveled together.

“Promise me I can eat any bones that fall on the ground,” said Dog.

“Agreed,” replied Chimpanzee, “provided you promise to give me my loin-cloth each morning.”

When they reached a town, the people killed a chicken to feed their guests.

Chimpanzee threw a bone on the ground, and Dog ran to eat it. The people laughed. “What a greedy fellow!” they said.

Dog was angry at Chimpanzee for embarrassing him.

At dawn, he threw Chimpanzee’s loin-cloth in the garbage.

The people laughed at their naked guest. “What an ugly fellow!”

That was Dog’s revenge.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

89. The Tortoise and the Baboon

“Come to my house for beer,” Baboon told Tortoise.

But Baboon lived in a tall tree. “I can’t climb up there,” Tortoise protested.

“I drink up here,” Baboon said, “not on the ground. Too bad for you.”

“Come to my house for beer tomorrow!” Tortoise replied.

Tortoise burned the grass around his house, so when Baboon arrived, he was covered with ashes.

“You’re dirty!” Tortoise said. “Go wash in the river!”

Baboon washed in the river but got dirty walking back across the ashes.

And again. And again.

“I drink beer with clean hands,” Tortoise said. “Too bad for you.”

[a Chewa story from Malawi]



90. The Leopard and the Python

Leopard begged Tortoise to catch Python. “Python scares me,” Leopard explained.

“I’ll do it,” Tortoise promised.

Then Python begged Tortoise to catch Leopard. “Leopard scares me,” Python explained.

“I’ll do it,” Tortoise promised.

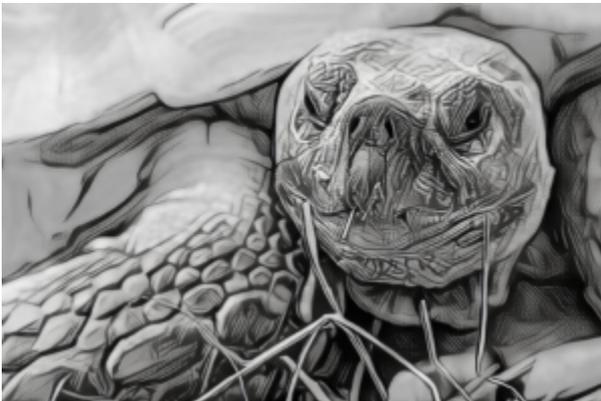
Next, Tortoise dug a pit and went to Leopard. “Come here,” Tortoise said, and Leopard fell into the pit.

Then Python. “Come here,” Tortoise said, and Python fell in.

“I caught Python for you, Leopard,” Tortoise said, laughing, “and Leopard for you, Python. Now: get acquainted!”

Python stared at Leopard, and Leopard stared back. Then they helped each other out of the pit and became best friends.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



91. The Tortoise, the Elephant, and the Hippo

Tortoise told Elephant, “I can pull you out of the forest.”

Then he went to Hippo. “I can pull you out of the water.”

Tortoise came back with a rope that he tied to each one. “Pull when I say pull!”

So Elephant and Hippo pulled against each other while Tortoise laughed.

When Elephant and Hippo collapsed in exhaustion, they crawled along the rope to ask Tortoise how he possessed such strength.

“It’s you!” Elephant shouted.

“It’s you!” Hippo shouted.

Furious at being tricked, they vowed to kill Tortoise.

Now Tortoise hides from Hippo and Elephant whenever he sees them.

[a story from Liberia]

92. The Antelope and the Tortoise

“I can run fast!” Antelope told Tortoise.

“I run even faster,” said Tortoise. “I’ll prove it: let’s race!”

Then Tortoise hid his companions in the grass along the race-track.

The race started, and Antelope ran fast. “Tortoise!” he yelled.

“Where are you?”

Tortoise shouted from in front, “I’m ahead of you!”

Antelope couldn’t believe his ears.

He ran even faster. “Where are you?” Antelope yelled again.

Tortoise stuck his head out of the grass, “I’m still ahead of you!”

Antelope couldn’t believe his eyes.

“I heard it and saw it,” Antelope admitted. “Tortoise really can run faster than me.”

[a Chewa story from Malawi]



93. The Giraffe and the Tortoise

Giraffe went out walking one day and crossed paths with Tortoise.

“Out of my way!” Giraffe said. “Or I’ll trample you to death.”

Giraffe stomped his hooves to show he was serious.

Tortoise said nothing.

“Or I might just swallow you!” Giraffe shouted.

“Beware!” Tortoise replied. “Others have tried to swallow me.

Go right ahead; you’ll see what happens.”

Giraffe laughed, bent down, and swallowed Tortoise... and then Giraffe choked to death on the spot.

Tortoise slowly but surely ate his way out of Giraffe’s corpse, and then he feasted for a whole year on Giraffe meat.

“Delicious!” he said.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



94. The Tortoise and the Guinea-Fowl (1)

“Let’s go eat apples!” said Tortoise to Guinea-Fowl, and they went to the apple-tree.

“How will we get apples?” asked Guinea-Fowl.

“Like this,” said Tortoise. He lay down and shouted, “Give me an apple!”

The tree hurled an apple on Tortoise’s back. The apple split, and Guinea-Fowl ate the apple. “Delicious!” she said.

“Now you!” commanded Tortoise.

But Guinea-Fowl was scared. “My back isn’t strong enough.”

They argued, and finally Tortoise shouted, “Give Guinea-Fowl an apple!”

The tree hurled an apple down on Guinea-Fowl’s head, killing her.

Tortoise ate the apple, and then he ate Guinea-Fowl too.

“Delicious!” he said.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]

95. The Tortoise and the Hawk (2)

Tortoise used Guinea-Fowl's leg bone to create a flute. Then he sat outside his house and played: *tilo-ntiloo-tiloo! tilo-ntiloo-tiloo!*

Hawk flew down and started to dance. "What a wonderful flute!" he said to Tortoise. "Let me try it! I'll play while you dance."

"No!" replied Tortoise. "If I give you the flute, you'll just fly away with it."

"Grab hold of my feathers if you want," said Hawk. "I won't fly off."

Tortoise grabbed Hawk tightly by the feathers and handed him the flute.

"Thank you!" said Hawk, and then he quickly flew away, leaving Tortoise with nothing but feathers.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]



96. The Tortoise and the Hawk's Mother (3)

Tortoise got angry when Hawk stole his flute. He watched and waited until Hawk flew away from his nest. Then Tortoise climbed up to the nest.

Hawk's mother was there.

“Hawk forgot his flute!” said Tortoise. “He sent me to fetch it.”

Hawk's mother gave Tortoise the flute.

Later, Hawk heard Tortoise playing.

“Where's my flute?” he yelled at his mother. She told him what had happened.

Hawk was so angry he threw her on the fire. Then he repented, but it was too late. She burned up.

That's why hawks hover over bush-fires: they are seeking their old mother.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]

97. The Tortoise and the Leopard

“My powers are so great that if you bury me in a grave, I will rise again!” Tortoise boasted. “Nothing can stop me!”

Leopard didn't believe Tortoise, so he dug a very deep pit into which he threw Tortoise and then buried him. Leopard was sure he'd never see Tortoise again.

But Tortoise's friend Rat came and dug a hole so Tortoise could escape.

At first Leopard was surprised to see Tortoise, but then he said, “You're not so great! I can rise again like you!”

So Tortoise dug a pit and buried Leopard.

That was the end of Leopard.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]

98. A Husband for the Princess

The Queen proclaimed, “Whoever fells this baobab tree with a single stroke of his sword shall marry the princess.”

Elephant swung his sword at the tree with all his might; the tree did not fall.

Likewise Rhino, Hippo, Lion, all the great creatures; they failed.

“Now let me try,” Tortoise said, and everyone laughed.

Then Tortoise spread food around the tree. Ants came. They ate the food. And then... they gnawed at the tree.

Tortoise waited while the ants gnawed; then Tortoise only had to touch the tree with his sword, and it fell.

That’s how Tortoise married the princess.

[a Swahili story from central Africa]



99. The King's Magic Drum (1)

The King's drum produced unlimited food and drink: it was magic!

Only the King knew the drum's secret: if the drum's owner ever stepped over a stick, warriors would emerge from the drum and attack whoever they saw.

Tortoise wanted the King's drum, so he climbed a palm-tree and waited. When the King walked by, Tortoise dropped a palm-nut.

The King picked it up.

"Thief! You stole my food!" Tortoise shouted. "You must pay!"

"Take whatever you want," said the King kindly.

"Give me the drum!" said Tortoise.

Smiling, the King agreed, but he didn't tell Tortoise the drum's secret.

[a story from southern Nigeria]



100. The Tortoise and the Magic Drum (2)

Tortoise rejoiced. “With this drum, I will have food and drink without working!”

Tortoise ate, and he was happy.

Tortoise fed his family, and they were happy.

Tortoise feasted the whole village, boasting about his wealth.

Everyone admired Tortoise now!

One day Tortoise got drunk on palm-wine and started to dance. As he danced, he stepped over a stick. Then, when he beat the drum for more wine, warriors emerged, armed with whips and clubs, and they attacked Tortoise.

This made Tortoise angry. “I should not be the only one to suffer!” he thought, and so Tortoise made a plan.

[a story from southern Nigeria]

101. The Tortoise's Revenge (3)

“When I was poor, everyone mocked me,” Tortoise thought. “Now they only pretend to like me, but I’ll teach them a lesson.”

Tortoise announced another feast. He invited all the people and the animals, but he sent his own wife and children away. Then, when everyone arrived, Tortoise beat the drum. Just as Tortoise expected, the warriors appeared and attacked all the guests. Tortoise kept drumming, and the warriors kept attacking.

Tortoise didn’t stop until all the guests were lying on the ground, groaning in agony.

“That will teach them!” Tortoise said, laughing. “They won’t pretend to like me anymore!”

[a story from southern Nigeria]



102. The Tortoise and the Magic Breadfruit

The King showed Tortoise a magic breadfruit-tree. “Every morning, the tree produces breadfruit, but you may harvest only once each day, no more.”

Tortoise gathered breadfruit each morning, and his family ate happily.

Tortoise’s son asked where the food came from, but Tortoise wouldn’t say.

So, the son poked a hole in Tortoise’s sack and filled it with ashes. After Tortoise returned with breadfruit, his son followed the trail to the breadfruit-tree. But when he reached for a breadfruit, the tree turned into a thornbush.

When Tortoise came back the next morning, there was no more breadfruit, just a thornbush.

[a story from southern Nigeria]

103. The Spider and the Cobweb

Spider wanted to go to the feast in the sky.

“I’ll carry you,” Cobweb said, so Spider rode up on Cobweb.

There they ate kola-nuts and honey.

“Who brought you?” the Sky-People asked Spider.

“That dirty old Cobweb,” Spider replied.

This made Cobweb angry, so he left, abandoning Spider there.

“Help!” said Spider. “I’ll pay with gold for a ride down.”

Dove carried Spider down. “Now give me my gold!” she said.

“It’s in there.” Spider pointed to a hut.

When Dove went in, Spider shut the door, burned the hut down, and ate her.

“What a feast!” he said.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

104. The Spider's Funeral

Spider was hungry, so he started a rumor: “Spider is dead!”

Then he lay down, axe nearby, waiting.

Elephant told Buffalo who told Hartebeest who told Gazelle who told Duiker who told Rabbit who told Jerboa who told Francolin.

They came and wept over Spider’s body. “Alas, Spider is dead!”

But Francolin saw Spider’s eyeball sparkling. “Run!” she shouted.

Then she saw the axe. “Run now!”

Francolin flew up, but when Elephant ran, he trampled Buffalo who trampled Hartebeest who trampled Gazelle who trampled Duiker who trampled Rabbit who trampled Jerboa. Spider killed and ate them all.

Only Francolin escaped.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



105. Anansi the Spider and God (1)

“I want all stories to be Anansi-stories!” Anansi shouted.

“Agreed,” said God, “provided you bring me Bees in a calabash, alive, then Snake, then Leopard.”

Anansi grabbed a calabash and went to where the Bees lived. He sat on the ground, shaking his head. “Yes!” he shouted. “No? Yes! No?”

“What’s wrong?” asked the Bees.

“God says no, you cannot all fit into this calabash,” said Anansi, “but I say yes, you can!”

“Yes!” buzzed the Bees. “Yes, we can!” Then they flew into the calabash.

Anansi sealed the calabash and brought it to God.

“Now bring Snake!” said God.

[a story from Ghana]



106. Anansi and the Snake (2)

Anansi grabbed a long stick and sat down outside Snake's hole, muttering loudly. "He is! Or maybe he isn't? He is! Or maybe not?"

Snake slithered out of his hole and asked, "What'sssss wrong, Anansssssssi?"

"God says you aren't as long as this stick," Anansi replied, "but I say you are."

"Of courssssse I am asssss long as that ssssstick," hissed Snake. "I'll prove it!"

Snake wiggled along the stick. Then Anansi grabbed Snake's head and tied it to the stick, and also his tail.

Laughing, Anansi ran back to God and gave him Snake.

"Now bring Leopard!" said God.

[a story from Ghana]

107. Anansi and the Leopard (3)

Anansi prepared a big cage. Then he sewed his eye shut and went to Leopard's den, singing and laughing.

"Why are you so happy?" asked Leopard.

"I sewed my eye shut," said Anansi, "and now I see the most beautiful things. It's magic!"

"Sew my eye shut too!" roared Leopard. "I want to see the beautiful things!"

Anansi sewed one of Leopard's eyes shut.

"It's not working," Leopard growled.

"I'll sew the other eye," said Anansi.

Then Leopard couldn't see anything. Anansi easily trapped Leopard in the cage and took him to God.

That's how all the stories became Anansi-stories!

[a story from Ghana]



108. The Elephant and the Spider

Elephant was tired of Spider's tricks. She wanted revenge! So Elephant went looking for Spider.

Meanwhile, Spider found a dried-up antelope skin and put it on. Then he stood on the path near Elephant's house.

When Elephant walked by, she said, "Antelope! What happened to you? You look terrible."

Spider imitated Antelope's voice. "I fought with Spider," he said, moaning and groaning. "And just look at me now! I fear... the end... is near..."

Spider fell down, and Elephant thought Antelope was dead. "Poor Antelope!" she said.

This made Elephant afraid of Spider; she didn't go looking for him anymore.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

109. The Elephant and the Honey

Elephant was carrying a jar of honey on his back when he saw his friend Rabbit by the roadside.

“Give me a ride please!” said Rabbit.

Elephant lifted Rabbit onto his back, and then Rabbit started eating the honey.

“Give me rocks to throw at the birds,” said Rabbit; Elephant lifted up rocks.

“Give me sand to wipe my sweaty face,” said Rabbit. Elephant lifted up sand.

Rabbit filled the jar with rocks, evened it with sand, smeared a little honey on top, and then jumped down.

Rabbit was long gone when Elephant realized the honey was gone too.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



110. The Elephant and the Rabbit Plant Pumpkins (1)

Elephant and Rabbit were friends.

“Let’s grow pumpkins!” Rabbit said.

“I like to eat pumpkins,” said Elephant, “but I don’t know how to grow them.”

“Don’t worry!” said Rabbit. “I’ll teach you how. The secret is to roast the pumpkin-seeds before planting.”

Elephant bought some pumpkin-seeds, roasted them, and planted the roasted seeds in the ground.

Rabbit, however, roasted only a few of his pumpkin-seeds, which he ate, and then he planted the un-roasted seeds in the ground.

When Elephant saw that Rabbit’s garden was full of pumpkins while his own garden was empty, he realized Rabbit had tricked him.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



111. The Rabbit and His Drum (2)

Elephant raided Rabbit's garden, eating the biggest pumpkin.

"Who ate my big pumpkin?!" Rabbit shouted.

Elephant said nothing.

Rabbit took his drum and hid inside the biggest pumpkin left in the garden.

Elephant returned and ate that pumpkin.

Then, inside Elephant's stomach, Rabbit beat his drum. "I caught you, thief! Caught you! Caught! YOU!"

Rabbit kept drumming inside Elephant until he died.

The people were surprised to see the dead Elephant. They cut him open and found the pumpkin; they cut the pumpkin open, and Rabbit jumped out and ran away, laughing.

"That must be why Elephant died!" they said.

[a Yao story from Malawi]

112. When the Rabbit and the Antelope Were Neighbors

Rabbit and Antelope were neighbors. They each planted beans in their field.

Then Rabbit stole from Antelope's beans, and Antelope stole from Rabbit's beans.

Rabbit and Antelope were both thieves!

Finally Rabbit put a trap in his field, and he caught Antelope.

"I should kill you for your crime," Rabbit declared.

"Have mercy," pleaded Antelope. "Let me go, and you can take all my beans."

"Not enough!" said Rabbit.

"And I'll give you my hoe," said Antelope.

So Rabbit got all Antelope's beans and his hoe.

"I'm going to go live somewhere else," said Rabbit. "I can't abide a thief."

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]



113. The Rabbit and the Leopard

Rabbit took a basket to go harvest pumpkins.

“Where are you going?” Leopard asked.

“To harvest pumpkins,” Rabbit replied.

“You’ll never be able to carry a basket full of pumpkins,” Leopard said.

“I’m strong!” said Rabbit. “I could carry YOU in this basket.” Leopard laughed.

“Just get in the basket,” said Rabbit. “I’ll show you.”

Leopard got in the basket, and Rabbit strapped the basket shut so Leopard couldn’t get out.

Then Rabbit took his hatchet and chopped Leopard into bits.

“No need for pumpkins,” Rabbit said. “I’ll have meat for dinner.”

That meat lasted Rabbit a good long time.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

114. The Rabbit and the Old Woman

“Adopt me!” Rabbit told an old woman. “You’re struggling without children to help you. I’ll work, and you’ll feed me.”

“Yes, Rabbit,” the old woman said, “I adopt you!”

Each day Rabbit took a hoe and went out, but he didn’t work. He slept, rubbed mud on the hoe, and returned for dinner each evening.

At harvest time, Rabbit led the woman to a neighbor’s field. “Behold!” he said.

She began gathering the harvest, but her neighbor stopped her. “Rabbit worked here for me,” she explained.

“Rabbit slept here,” said the neighbor. “He didn’t work.” Rabbit, meanwhile, ran away, laughing.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]



115. The Animals and Their Dance (1)

There was a terrible drought. Lion, Jackal, Hippo, Elephant, all the animals decided to dance in the dry waterhole to pound out the water.

“That’s ridiculous!” said Rabbit. “I’m not going to dance.”

“Then you won’t get any water,” said Lion, who was their king.

The animals danced, the water flowed again, and they all drank happily.

All except Rabbit.

Then in the night Rabbit came and drank the water too.

In the morning, they saw his footprints along the bank.

“I told you not to drink the water!” roared Lion.

Rabbit just laughed. “You can’t stop me! I’m Rabbit!”

[a story from South Africa]



116. The Rabbit and the Stepping-Stone (2)

“We must stop Rabbit!” said Lion, but none of the animals knew how.

“I know how!” said Tortoise. “Cover me with tar so I’ll look like a stone by the waterhole’s edge. Rabbit will step on me and get stuck.”

“How kind of them!” Rabbit thought when he saw the stone.

“They have given me a stepping-stone so I won’t wet my feet.”

Rabbit stepped.

His foot stuck.

“Let go!” he yelled. “Or else I’ll kick you!”

Both feet stuck.

“Let go! Or else I’ll headbutt you!”

Rabbit’s head stuck.

Then Rabbit heard Tortoise laughing.

The animals had caught him!

[a story from South Africa]

117. The Rabbit's Punishment (3)

Rabbit's head and feet were stuck to Tortoise's back.

Tortoise then stood up and waddled over to the other animals.

King Lion pulled Rabbit off Tortoise's back and waved him in the air, shouting, "How shall we punish him?"

"Burn him!" yelled Jackal.

"Burning's fine," said Rabbit. "Just don't whirl me by my tail against a stone."

"Drown him!" yelled Elephant.

"Drown me please," said Rabbit. "Just don't whirl me."

Lion roared and whirled Rabbit by his tail against a stone.

Then Rabbit's tail came off, and he scampered away, laughing as he ran.

That's how Rabbit lost his tail.

[a story from South Africa]

118. The Lion and the Rabbit

Lion was tired of Rabbit's tricks. "I'm going to kill you!" he roared.

Rabbit ran as fast as he could. Then, growing tired, he darted under a rocky ledge, and Lion followed him.

"Hurry, Lion!" Rabbit shouted, raising his paws. "Hold up the stone! Otherwise, it will fall down and crush us."

Lion immediately lifted his paws to hold the stone up.

"Don't let go!" Rabbit warned him, and then Rabbit ran off.

Lion stood there holding up the stone until hunger and thirst overcame him at last.

He let go.

The stone didn't move.

Rabbit had tricked him... again!

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



119. The Rabbit and the Tortoise

Rabbit's wife had cooked porridge.

Then Rabbit saw Tortoise coming; he didn't want to share. So Rabbit invited Tortoise in and seated him up on a high chair. Tortoise couldn't reach the food with his short arms; he didn't get any porridge.

Tortoise's wife cooked porridge, and Tortoise invited Rabbit to dinner, but he scattered ashes all around his house. Rabbit came in, covered with ashes.

"You're dirty," said Tortoise. "Go wash!"

Rabbit went to the river and washed; he walked back over the ashes.

"You're dirty; go wash!" said Tortoise, again and again.

Rabbit didn't get any porridge.

[a Mwanga story from Zambia]

120. The Rabbit and the Earth

Rabbit said to Earth, “You’re so lazy! You never move.”

Earth just laughed. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Rabbit! I’m always moving, and I move faster than you do.”

“You’re wrong!” Rabbit retorted. “And I’ll prove it. Let’s race!”

Then Rabbit started running. He ran and ran, as fast as he could, and then he stopped, sure he had won.

But to Rabbit’s surprise, there was Earth, right there under his feet. Earth had gotten there first.

“I’ll show you!” Rabbit shouted, and then he ran and ran and ran some more.

Rabbit kept running until he died.

[a Luo story from eastern Africa]



121. The Bushbuck and the Rabbit

“I know Leopard is dangerous,” said Bushbuck, “but I’ve never seen him.”

“I can fix that,” Rabbit offered.

He led Bushbuck to a tree by the river. “Wait up in the tree,” Rabbit said.

Then Rabbit went to Leopard. “Bushbuck is bathing in the river,” he said. “Follow me!”

“There he is!” Rabbit whispered to Leopard, pointing at Bushbuck’s reflection.

Leopard jumped in.

No Bushbuck.

Rabbit pointed. “He’s right there!”

Leopard again plunged into the water.

Nothing.

“You wasted my time, Rabbit!” Leopard said angrily as he left.

Bushbuck came down and thanked Rabbit: he had seen Leopard and survived!

[a Lala story from Zambia]

122. The Rabbit and the Cloud-Islands (1)

Rabbit saw clouds reflected in a pool.

“What beautiful islands!” he exclaimed. “I’ll hide from my enemies on those islands. They’ll never find me.”

Then Rabbit insulted Elephant. “Look at that big head!” he shouted. “But no brains!”

Elephant chased Rabbit, but when Rabbit jumped into the pool, there were no islands where he could hide.

Elephant grabbed Rabbit with his trunk and shook him.

“I’ve had enough of your tricks!” he shouted, squashing Rabbit deep down into the mud at the pool’s edge. “I hope it chokes you!”

Rabbit couldn’t say anything because his mouth was full of mud.

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]



123. The Hyena and the Muddy Rabbit (2)

Hyena found Rabbit squashed in the mud. Thinking he was dead, she exclaimed, “How good he will be to eat!”

As she picked Rabbit up, she saw how dirty he was and decided to wash him in the pool.

All the time, Rabbit held his breath so Hyena wouldn’t realize he was still alive. If she knew he was alive, she would have to kill him for real.

After washing Rabbit, Hyena left him in the sun to dry while she took a nap. When Rabbit heard her snoring, he jumped and ran, shouting to Hyena, “Thanks for the bath!”

[a Tsonga story from southern Africa]



124. The Farmer and the Rabbit

A farmer caught Rabbit stealing peanuts. He tied Rabbit to a tree and went to fetch his whip.

Hyena walked by. “What happened, Rabbit?”

“The farmer killed a goat,” said Rabbit, “and told me to eat it. I refused, so he tied me up. He’s going to come back with the goat and make me eat it.”

Hyena was hungry. “I could eat the goat for you!” she offered.

“Would you really?”

Hyena nodded.

“Then untie me, and I’ll tie you.”

Rabbit left Hyena tied up, and when the farmer came back, he whipped Hyena for letting Rabbit get away.

[a Mwanga story from Zambia]

125. The Scorpion and the Hyena

A shepherd led his ram to market.

“I’ll go with you,” Scorpion said; the man agreed.

Along the way, they met Hyena.

“I’ll go with you,” Hyena said; the man agreed.

They camped on the road.

Scorpion hid in the ram’s wool.

Around midnight, Hyena said softly, “Is anybody awake? ...
Anybody?”

Scorpion heard but kept silent.

Hyena then seized the ram, and Scorpion stung her.

Hyena howled in pain. “I’m going home!” she yelped.

“Oh, please stay!” said Scorpion, laughing. “We’re all friends
here!”

“No!” barked Hyena. “I’ve got another appointment
elsewhere. Goodbye!”

Hyena ran off, groaning in pain.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

126. The Jerboa and the Hyena

Jerboa caught more fish than he could eat. “Who wants some fish?” he shouted.

Hyena came. She didn’t just eat some fish; she ate every fish.

Jerboa got angry!

Then Guinea-Fowl walked by.

“She’s very pretty!” exclaimed Hyena. “I wish I had white speckles like hers.”

Jerboa said, “I gave her those speckles. I’ll give you speckles too; I just need white clay and a knife.”

Hyena eagerly fetched the knife and clay.

Then Jerboa used the knife to gouge holes in Hyena. “You took my fish,” he said, “so I’m taking your flesh.”

Hyena ran away, howling in pain.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]



127. The Hyena and Her Friends

Hyena's friends were disgusted by her eating habits: Hyena ate everything, even garbage.

Finally one of her friends said, "I'll take you to a wizard who can cure greediness."

Hyena agreed.

They went to the wizard, who killed a sheep and cut off its tail. "Take this," he told Hyena. "Wash it in the river; then I'll make it into medicine for you."

On the way to the river, Hyena wanted to eat the sheep-tail.

"No!" said her friend. "Do what the wizard told you!"

But Hyena could not stop herself.

She ate the sheep-tail, so she got no medicine.

[a Banyoro story from Uganda]

128. The Hyena and the Man

There was a hyena who kept attacking a certain man's flock of goats.

The man finally dug a pitfall and captured the hyena.

"Let me go!" begged the hyena. "Please don't kill me! I won't eat your goats; I promise. I will give up meat entirely!"

The man didn't believe the hyena's promise, but he felt sorry for her, so he tied a bell to her neck and let her go.

Of course the hyena kept on hunting for meat, but now the bell warned her prey and they were able to get away.

The hyena eventually died of hunger.

[a Shilluk story from the Sudan]



129. The Hyena and the Crane

Greedy Hyena ate too fast and got a bone stuck in her throat. “Crane,” she groaned, “I’m choking! Quick! Put your head down my throat and get this bone out. I promise you a fine reward!”

So Crane stuck his head down Hyena’s throat and pulled out the bone. Then he asked, “Where’s my reward?”

“Your reward,” Hyena snarled, “is that you put your head into my mouth and got it out again. You owe me a fine reward, not the other way around!”

So the proverb warns: Nothing that enters the mouth of a hyena ever comes out again.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]



130. The Lion's Illness

King Lion was ill and unable to hunt.

The animals visited the Lion's den one by one, but not Jackal; he saw their tracks going in but not coming out.

Then Hyena denounced Jackal. "Jackal is disrespecting you," she said.

"Bring Jackal here," Lion growled.

Hyena dragged Jackal into the Lion's den, and Jackal yelped, "O King, I have visited all the doctors to find a cure for your illness."

"Tell me!" roared Lion.

"You must wrap yourself in the skin of a freshly killed Hyena."

Lion immediately grabbed Hyena and pulled her skin off. Jackal, meanwhile, made his escape.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

131. The Jackal and the Fish-Wagon (1)

Jackal smelled fish!

Then he saw it: a wagon full of fish coming down the road.

Thinking fast, Jackal lay down in the road, pretending to be dead.

When the driver saw him, he stopped. “What luck!” he shouted. “I can make this into a fine fur for my wife.”

He grabbed Jackal and threw him on top of the fish.

Jackal tossed the fish out of the wagon one by one, very quietly.

Then he jumped down, gathered the fish, went home, and had a feast.

When the man got home, he had no fish, and no fur either.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



132. The Hyena and the Fish-Wagon (2)

Jackal invited Hyena to dinner, but greedy Hyena ate all the fish.

This made Jackal angry.

“Do you want more?” he asked.

Hyena nodded.

Then Jackal explained how he played dead. “Whatever happens,” he said, “you must not move. Stay absolutely still.”

Hyena thanked Jackal, ran to the road, lay down, and waited.

The wagon came, and the driver jumped out. “You thief!” he yelled, and started kicking her.

Hyena didn’t move.

The driver whipped Hyena with his whip, but she stayed still.

Finally the man drove away.

“I followed Jackal’s instructions exactly,” Hyena moaned.

“What did I do wrong?”

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

133. The Wedding of the Jackal and the Hyena

To celebrate his marriage to Hyena, Jackal stole a cow from the Ant-People.

He butchered the cow and cooked the meat; then he took the cowhide and gave it to Hyena for a wedding dress.

When the Ant-People discovered that Jackal had stolen their cow, they came running. They beat the cow to drive it home, and from inside the cowhide, Hyena said, “Oh, Jackal! You are kissing and hugging me very hard!”

Then the cowhide fell off; she saw it was not Jackal after all, and when the Ant-People saw Hyena, they chased her and hit her even harder.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

134. The Jackal and the Hyena's Wedding Feast

To celebrate his marriage to Hyena, Jackal built a kitchen on a high platform. He cooked a beef stew, and he also wrapped a sharp rock in fat, putting it in the pot. “Come, animals, and enjoy the feast!” he announced.

“Me first!” Lion shouted, and Jackal hauled him up with a rope. Then, near the top, Jackal cut the rope, and Lion fell.

“I’m sorry!” Jackal said. “That was an old rope. I’ll use a new one!”

Jackal hauled Lion up again.

“Open wide!” Jackal said, stuffing the hot rock into Lion’s mouth. When Lion swallowed it, he died.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



135. The Jackal and the Goat

“You are a fool, Goat,” said Jackal, “living with chickens instead of eating them! Let the chickens out, and I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Goat let the chickens out of the coop, and Jackal ate all the chickens.

Then one day Jackal jumped down in a water-hole and couldn’t get out.

“This water is so good, Goat!” he yelled. “Come try it!”

Goat jumped down, and then Jackal leaped up on Goat’s horns to get out.

The next time Jackal came to the farm, Goat chased him away.

Now Jackal has to steal chickens; Goat won’t help him anymore.

[a story from Ghana]

136. The Dove and the Jackal (1)

Dove built her nest on a high rock.

Jackal came and shouted, “Give me one of your chicks!”

“No,” Dove replied, “I won’t!”

“Yes, you will!” Jackal insisted. “Otherwise, I’ll fly up there and eat you and all your chicks.”

Terrified, Dove threw a chick to Jackal, who gobbled it up and went away.

Heron saw Dove crying. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Jackal took one of my chicks,” she replied.

“How could he possibly do that?”

Dove told Heron what Jackal said.

“Foolish Dove!” shouted Heron. “Jackals can’t fly.”

The next time Jackal came, Dove laughed and said, “Go away!”

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



137. The Jackal and the Heron (2)

Jackal was angry at Heron, and he vowed to get revenge.

He found Heron standing on the water's edge and said to him, "My dear Heron, your neck looks very long, and I am sure it is very delicate. What will you do when the wind starts to blow hard?"

Heron smiled. "I know how to stay safe in the wind! I just bend my neck this way." Then, as Heron bent his neck to show Jackal, Jackal reached out and twisted Heron's neck so that he could not straighten his neck again.

That's why Heron's neck is bent today.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



138. The Dog and the Jackal at the Wedding Feast

“There’s a wedding feast next door!” Dog told Jackal.

“Let’s go!” said Jackal.

They crept through a narrow gap in the fence and raided the kitchen.

Dog ate non-stop, but Jackal kept returning to the fence, making sure he could still get through.

Then the cook arrived. “I’ll beat you to death, thieves!” he shouted, grabbing a stick.

Jackal escaped, but Dog was too fat. He was trapped!

The cook beat Dog until he was dead and threw the corpse over the fence.

But Dog wasn’t dead! He opened his eyes and limped away.

“That was worth it,” he thought, smiling.

[a Hausa story from northern Nigeria]

139. The Leopard and the Bloodthirsty Jackal

Jackal watched as Leopard caught, killed, and ate an antelope. “You are very fierce,” said Jackal, “but no animal is more bloodthirsty than I am!”

Leopard laughed. “Prove it!” he said.

Jackal ran to a field of white pumpkins, stripped off their leaves, and then smashed several pumpkins, smearing the pumpkin’s red pulp all over his face.

“Come see!” he yelled to Leopard.

When Leopard arrived, he thought the smashed pumpkins were skulls and that Jackal’s face was covered with blood. He fled, terrified. “You win, Jackal!” he shouted as he ran away. “You are the most bloodthirsty of all!”

[a Mangbetu story from the Congo]

140. The Cat and the Leopard

Leopard didn't know how to hunt, so Cat had to teach him.

"Stalk like this." Cat stalked a mouse. "Then use your left paw like this." Cat killed the mouse.

Leopard did the same.

"Good!" said Cat. "Next time I'll teach you how to use your right paw."

In the meantime, Leopard got hungry. He went to Cat's house, eager for his next lesson.

Cat wasn't home, but her kittens were, and Leopard ate them all.

When Cat found out, she refused to give Leopard more lessons, so now he can only kill with his left paw, not his right.

[a story from Ghana]



141. The Rat and the Fish

Walking along the riverbank, a rat saw some fish. “Good!” he thought to himself hungrily. “I want some!”

In his eagerness to steal the fish, the rat didn’t notice the fish were in a fish-trap. As he reached into the water to grab the fish, he also got caught in the trap.

“Why have you grabbed hold of me?” shouted the rat. “I have no quarrel with you, and you have none with me.”

“You wanted to steal what I had caught,” replied the trap, “so I caught you too.”

Those who steal from others will be punished as thieves.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]

142. The Tortoise and the Mushrooms

Tortoise found some mushrooms growing on a log. “I will wait until the mushrooms are done growing,” he said, “and I will make a very fine feast indeed!”

Tortoise waited and waited.

Then Antelope came running by. “Dogs!” she gasped. “Hunters! Hurry! We’ve got to get out of here. You can come with me!”

“No!” said Tortoise. “I’m staying here until the mushrooms stop growing.”

“Well, I warned you,” said Antelope, and she ran.

Next came the hunter’s dogs; then, the hunter. “What a fine feast I have here!” he said, taking Tortoise away with him, and the mushrooms too.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



143. The Elephant in the Swamp

A hungry elephant saw a bamboo-palm in a swamp. He rushed into the water, tore down the bamboo-palm, and grabbed the tender palm-leaf bud, but being so excited he dropped it into the water.

The elephant grabbed, reaching with his trunk: nothing! He reached again: nothing! He couldn't find the delicious food, and the more he splashed, the muddier the water became. He couldn't see anything.

"Calm!" croaked a frog.

The elephant wasn't calm.

"Calm!" repeated the frog.

Finally the elephant heard the frog.

He stood still.

The water grew clear.

The elephant found the palm-leaf bud and ate it.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



144. The Hyena and the Moon

One night Hyena saw something shining in the waters of a lake. “It’s a bone!” she thought hungrily, but it was just the moon’s reflection.

She jumped into the water, but she couldn’t reach the bone.

She got out of the water, and again she saw the bone.

She jumped in again, and again, and again.

The water got muddy, and Hyena thought the bone was gone.

But then the water cleared, and there was the bone.

At daybreak, Hyena was still there by the lake, jumping and jumping, trying to eat the moonlight that she thought was a bone.

[a Ndaou story from Mozambique]

145. The Chameleon and the Snake

Chameleon and Snake were friends.

“Snake, I’m going to show you something special,” said Chameleon one day. “Watch! I can change colors!” Chameleon climbed a tree trunk, turning brown to match. Then he walked onto a leaf and turned green. “Am I amazing or what?!”

Not saying anything in reply, Snake rubbed against the tree trunk, and her skin came off. All of it. She had completely new skin, bright and shining.

Chameleon stared at his friend in wonder, embarrassed about his boasting. He could change color, it was true, but Snake had outdone him, changing old skin for new.

[a Kaonde story from Zambia]

146. The Proud Wren

A wren family nested beside a road.

One day, the chicks saw a camel walking by.

“Papa!” they chirped. “We saw a gigantic animal!”

The wren stretched out his foot. “This big?”

“Bigger!”

The wren stretched out his wings. “This big?”

“Even bigger!”

“You’re mistaken, children,” he said. “No creature is bigger than me.”

“Wait and see,” said the chicks.

The camel returned the next day, and the wren stretched and stretched, whereupon the camel gobbled him up, but then spit him out.

“I’ll admit that creature is big,” the wren said, “but I still insist: I am the biggest.”

[a Berber story from northern Africa]



147. The Francolin and the Tortoise

“I am so much better than you!” boasted Francolin. “I walk fast, but you are slow. And I can fly!”

“Congratulations to you,” said Tortoise. “I just do the best I can.”

Then they smelled smoke.

“The grass is burning!” shouted Tortoise.

“We must get to safety!” squawked Francolin.

Tortoise found a deep hole made by an elephant’s foot that was full of water. He plunged into the hole and survived the fire.

Francolin tried to fly away but the smoke and flames overcame him, and he fell to the ground and died.

He who boasts is not always best.

[a Banyoro story from Uganda]

148. The Eagle and the Leopard

Eagle and Leopard were boasting about who was the best predator.

“I’m the best!” proclaimed Eagle.

“No, you are not!” Leopard protested. “I’m the best!”

“I’ll show you who’s best,” Eagle shrieked, and then he swooped down, seized one of Leopard’s cubs, and flew back up to his nest.

Leopard began to weep. He ran, he jumped, but he could not fly up to rescue his cub. He went everywhere, looking for someone to teach him to fly. But Leopard did not have wings; he could not fly.

That is how Eagle showed Leopard who was the best predator.

[a Fang story from Gabon]



149. The Lion and the Crocodile (1)

Lion and Crocodile were boasting.

“I’m stronger than you!” roared Lion.

“No, I’m stronger than you!” protested Crocodile. “I can kill Hippo in the water.”

“But I can kill Buffalo on the land,” retorted Lion.

To prove it, Lion stalked Buffalo by the riverbank. As Lion pounced and then dragged Buffalo down, Crocodile came out onto the land, grabbed Buffalo by a hind leg, and pulled. Crocodile pulled Buffalo into the water, and he pulled Lion into the water too. Then Crocodile drowned both Lion and Buffalo and devoured them.

“Delicious!” he said. “Now everyone knows I am the strongest.”

[a Baganda story from Uganda]

150. The Young Lion's Revenge (2)

When Lion's son heard that Crocodile had killed and eaten his father, he wanted revenge.

Young Lion went and stalked a Buffalo along the riverbank. Once again, Lion pounced on Buffalo, and once again Crocodile came onto the land, grabbed hold of Buffalo's leg, and pulled.

This time, however, young Lion fought back. He pulled hard, dragging Crocodile further up onto the land. Then young Lion pounced on the Crocodile and tore him to pieces.

Thus, young Lion avenged his father and proved that Lion is the strongest animal on the land, while Crocodile is the strongest in the water.

[a Baganda story from Uganda]



151. The Rat and the Crocodile

Rat used to be rich, but Crocodile was poor.

“I’ve got such troubles,” Crocodile told Rat.

“What’s trouble?” asked Rat. “I don’t know what trouble is.”

“I can show you,” said Crocodile.

“Yes!” said Rat. “Come to dinner and show me.”

Crocodile showed up with a big sack. “I brought trouble,” he said, “but let’s eat first.”

After dinner, Crocodile said, “Open that sack if you want to know trouble.”

Rat opened the sack. Four cats jumped out. Rat hid, but the cats ate his brother, his son, his wife, and her brother.

Now Rat is poor.

He knows trouble.

[a Kwahu story from Ghana]

152. The Sheep's New Dress

The animals were all going to a dance in a neighboring village. Everyone wore their best clothes, and Sheep had sewn herself a beautiful new dress made of wool.

“Don’t I look beautiful?” she said as she danced all the way to the village.

When the animals arrived, they all went to bathe, as is the custom, but Sheep did not bathe; she just kept on dancing.

By the time the party started, Sheep was so exhausted that she fell asleep and missed the party completely!

That is the origin of the saying: Don’t play until the time is right.

[a story from Liberia]



153. The Python with Two Heads

A very long Python had two heads — one forward, one behind — but he didn't know about the other head.

Whenever he sang, he heard someone else singing.

“Stop that!” he yelled.

Whenever he coughed, he heard someone else coughing.

This made Python angry.

“Discover who mocks me,” Python told his servants, “and kill him!”

Python's servants walked and walked, finally reaching the other head.

They returned to Python. “His body is your body!” they said.

“I said kill him!” shouted Python.

The servants obediently ran and chopped off the other head.

When they got back, Python was dead.

[a Chewa story from Malawi]



154. The Snake and the Rat

Snake and Rat used to be friends.

Snake was rich, but Rat was poor.

“Let’s try our luck in another country,” said Rat.

“Agreed!” said Snake. “We can use my wealth to start a new venture together.”

Rat ate a good breakfast before their journey, but Snake did not.

Along the way, Snake grew hungry.

Very hungry.

“Don’t worry,” said Rat. “We’ll reach a town soon.”

“Not soon enough!” hissed Snake.

“Be patient,” Rat said.

But Snake wasn’t patient. He attacked Rat and gobbled him up.

Since then, Rat and Snake are enemies; Snake chases Rat, and Rat runs away.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]

155. The Partridge and the Puff-Adder

Partridge smelled smoke, and then she saw the flames. The grass was on fire! She knew she needed to fly away.

Just as she was taking flight, Puff-Adder shouted at her, “Dear Partridge, don’t leave me! I will burn to death here. Pleassssse take me with you!”

Feeling sorry for the helpless snake, Partridge grabbed him up in her beak and carried him away with her.

But Puff-Adder did not thank his rescuer. Just the opposite. When they alighted on the ground, safe from danger, the snake killed the bird and ate her.

Hence the proverb: Mercy killed the partridge.

[a Kaonde story from Zambia]

156. The Leopard and the Goat

“Stupid Goat!” shouted Leopard. “Why do you let the people touch you with their long, bony hands? You should come with me instead; my hands are so soft and furry.”

“No!” bleated Goat. “I’m staying here! I’m not going with you.”

Then Leopard grabbed Goat, and Goat screamed, “Me-e-e-e-eh!”

“Fool!” said Leopard. “Why do you scream when I touch you, but not when people touch you with their skeleton hands? I don’t understand you.”

Goat kept on screaming, and Leopard ran off, afraid that the people would come.

Ever since, Leopard is angry at Goat and tries to kill him.

[a Chok story from Kenya]



157. The Lioness and the Antelope

Once there was a lioness who gave birth to a cub.

Then, after giving birth, she was hungry. Seven days passed, and she had not eaten.

“I must go hunt. I must get food,” she thought, “or my cub and I will die.”

She saw an antelope grazing and crept up on him, slowly, quietly.

Then the antelope realized the lioness was there. He turned his head and stared right at her. “Welcome, cousin!” said the antelope.

The lioness was ashamed and did not attack the antelope. She could not attack someone who was her cousin.

So the antelope survived.

[a Swahili story from Zanzibar]

158. The Crocodile and the Hen

Hen was walking by the riverbank when Crocodile grabbed her. “Oh, my brother,” she squawked, “don’t do that!”

Crocodile was so surprised by her words that he let her go.

The next day, he caught Hen again, and again she said to him, “Let me go, my brother!”

Crocodile was confused. “She lives on land; I live in water. How can I be her brother?”

He asked his wise friend Lizard to explain.

“Don’t you understand?” said Lizard. “Crocodiles lay eggs, lizards lay eggs, so do hens. That makes us a family.”

For this reason crocodiles do not eat hens.

[a Bakongo story from Zaire]



159. The Fruit-Bat's Funeral

Fruit-Bat was sick.

Having no one at home to care for him, he died, so the neighbors called his kinfolk to prepare the funeral.

“Come, Birds!” they said. “Your cousin, Fruit-Bat, has died.”

The Birds came, but when they saw the dead Fruit-Bat, they said, “He’s no kin to us; he doesn’t have feathers.”

Then the neighbors called upon the Rats.

“Come, Rats!” they said. “Your cousin, Fruit-Bat, has died.”

The Rats came, but when they saw the dead Fruit-Bat, they said, “He’s no kin to us; he doesn’t have a tail.”

Thus, having no kinfolk, Fruit-Bat was left unburied.

[a Yoruba story from Nigeria]

160. The Lioness and the Ostrich

Lioness roared.

Ostrich roared back.

“You’re a worthy comrade,” Lioness admitted. “Let’s hunt together.”

Ostrich hunted with her feet; Lioness used her teeth. They killed elands and dragged them to where Lioness’s cubs waited.

“Please take all the meat,” Ostrich told Lioness. “I prefer to drink the blood.”

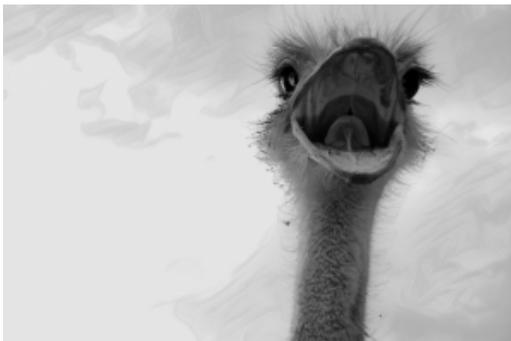
Then Ostrich, Lioness, and the cubs rested.

Ostrich’s mouth fell open as she slept.

One cub looked inside Ostrich’s mouth. “Mother,” he whispered, “that creature has no teeth!”

Lioness roared angrily. “You are not a worthy comrade,” she screamed at Ostrich, and then she pounced, tearing Ostrich to pieces with her teeth.

[a Tswana story from South Africa]



161. The Fox and the Rooster

Fox and Rooster used to be friends. Fox would kill chickens, to be sure, but he never attacked Rooster because he feared the fierce-looking comb on Rooster's head.

Finally one day Fox asked, "How do you sharpen that weapon on your head?"

"My comb is flesh; it's not a weapon," Rooster explained, laughing. "It's not sharp."

Then Fox laughed too. "I used to be afraid of your comb," he admitted. "Now I realize I was just being foolish."

The next time Fox saw Rooster, he attacked him from behind and killed him.

Rooster should have kept the truth to himself.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]



162. The Dog Who Would Be King

The people decided to make Dog their king.

On Dog's coronation day, the people gathered to celebrate. They brought forth the crown, the scepter, the rings, and the royal robe. They spread out a fine mat and placed a throne on the mat. Dog sat on the throne. Drummers drummed, and musicians played the marimbas.

Then the feast began. But before the food was even served, Dog jumped up, grabbed a roast chicken, and ran off into the bush.

"Look at that!" the people shouted. "Dog has run off with a roast chicken. He's no king; he's just a thief!"

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

163. The Deer and the Pig

A pig and a deer were traveling together when they reached a fork in the road.

“Let’s go this way,” said the pig, pointing to the path that led through open fields.

“No! That way takes too long. Let’s go this way,” said the deer, pointing to the path leading through the forest. “It’s much faster!”

They argued and argued, and finally the two friends parted, the pig going one way, the deer going the other.

After a long journey, the pig reached his destination.

The deer had not gotten even halfway there before a hunter shot and killed him.

[an Igbo story from southern Nigeria]

164. The Hasty Tortoise

Once upon a time there was a tortoise.

This tortoise happened to see some stone steps leading upwards; he didn't know where the steps went, but he knew that he wanted to climb them.

Steps are not made for tortoises, so it was not easy.

It took him one hundred years to climb the first step.

Then, on the first day of the hundred and first year, the tortoise stumbled as he began to ascend the second step, and he fell back down to where he had started.

“Allah curse all haste!” he exclaimed. “I need to go more slowly.”

[a story from Morocco]



165. The Tree That Blocked the Sun

Long ago a tree grew so tall that it blocked the sun. It was night all the time; the sun could not shine.

Elephant tried to pull the tree down with his trunk; he failed.

Lion and Leopard used their claws and teeth. Other animals pulled and pushed, they butted with their horns, but nobody could bring the tree down.

Then Mongoose came. The animals laughed because the little creature was not strong.

But Mongoose had an axe! It was small but sharp, and he cut and cut until the tree fell.

That's how Mongoose brought daylight to the world.

[a story from Liberia]

166. The Rhino and the Bees

The bees came to Rhino's watering hole. "Go away!" he shouted.

"But we're thirsty," they said.

"Drink somewhere else!" snarled Rhino.

"Please, let us drink here today, just this once."

Rhino agreed, and the bees drank.

Then the bees held a council.

"We're stronger than Rhino!"

"We can take his water!"

"He can't stop us!"

They went back the next day. When Rhino challenged them, they laughed. "You underestimate our strength!"

The bees fought with Rhino, stinging his nostrils until he bled, and Rhino couldn't stop them.

"You win," he groaned. "We are brothers now; drink here whenever you want."

[a Chok story from Kenya]



167. The Python and the Guinea-Fowl

A Python slithered into Guinea-Fowl's nest, wrapping around her eggs.

Guinea-Fowl screamed.

Elephant came. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Python wants to eat my children," said Guinea-Fowl, sobbing.

When Elephant saw Python, he ran away.

Then Lion came. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Python wants to eat my children," said Guinea-Fowl, weeping.

Lion also ran when he saw Python.

Next, Ant came. "Why are you weeping?" he asked.

"Python wants to eat my children," said Guinea-Fowl.

Ant grabbed Python and bit him, hard.

Python slithered away; the eggs were safe.

"You are bravest of all, Ant!" said Guinea-Fowl. "You saved my children."

[a Lamba story from Zambia]

168. The Lion and the Boar

The animals were choosing a king. Some wanted Elephant; others wanted Lion. Lion's party prevailed, and he became king.

For a while, Lion ate grass, but he began to grow hungry. He invited his subjects, one by one, to his den. Then, in secret, he devoured them.

Boar received an invitation but wasn't feeling well, so he sent his son. The son didn't return. Boar grew suspicious, and he found his son's bones near Lion's den.

"Lion is no king!" Boar shouted. "He is our enemy!"

Ever since, the animals hate Lion and do not honor him as their king.

[a Luo story from eastern Africa]



169. The King's Cat and His Rat

In the King's palace, Cat was the royal steward, and Rat the royal janitor.

Rat fell in love with a housemaid, but because he was poor, he had nothing to give her. Desperate to prove his love, he crept into the storeroom and stole some pears which he gave to the housemaid.

When the King learned the pears were missing, he immediately blamed Cat, his steward.

Then, when Cat discovered Rat stole pears for the housemaid, Cat denounced them both to the King.

The King flogged the housemaid, while Cat killed Rat.

Cat and Rat are enemies to this day.

[a story from southern Nigeria]

170. The Disobedient Boy

A mother and father went to work in the fields. “Don’t touch the stew!” the father told his son and daughter.

The son disobeyed: he ate the stew.

When he did that, horns sprouted from his head. He grew a tail. He became... a rhino!

The daughter ran from the house, shouting, “Father! Mother! Your son is now a rhino, but not me: your daughter is not a rhino!”

The mother looked up.

“Get back to work,” said the father.

But then they saw their daughter, and a rhino chasing her.

The father shot the rhino.

The disobedient boy died.

[a Yao story from Malawi]



171. The Man Who Became an Elephant

There was an old man who was too weak to work, so the people took him to a shack in the woods. They brought four mortars with them, a pestle, and two winnowing-fans.

They put one of his feet into a mortar, then the other.

Then they put one of his hands into a mortar, then the other.

They put the pestle in his mouth, and they tied the two winnowing-fans on his ears.

Then they left him.

A while later they came back: he was gone.

They saw elephant tracks leaving the hut.

That man had become an elephant.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]



172. The Song of the Monkey

Once upon a time, two girls went to fetch firewood.

They heard a monkey singing up in a tree.

“Don’t listen to the monkey’s song,” one girl said to the other.

But the other girl couldn’t stop herself. She started singing the song... and she turned into an elephant!

The other girl got scared. She ran back to the village and told everybody what had happened.

“That’s impossible!” they said.

“I saw it happen,” she insisted. Then that girl started singing the monkey’s song, and she also turned into an elephant.

Thus the people knew she was telling the truth.

[a Temne story from Sierra Leone]

173. The Woman Who Became a Lion

A man and a woman walking in the desert saw wild horses far away.

Knowing the woman's powers, the man told her, "Become a lion and kill a horse for us to eat."

"I don't want to scare you," she said.

"I'm starving!" he said. "I won't be scared."

The woman then transformed into a lion.

Terrified, the man climbed a tree.

The lion pursued the horses, killed one, and dragged it back to the tree.

"Don't kill me!" the man begged.

The lion roared angrily and then resumed her human form.

The man never asked her to hunt again.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]



174. The Woman and Her Suitors

A beautiful woman refused every suitor.

Then two handsome strangers came; she married one of them.

She didn't know they were lions!

In the woods the men became lions again. The lions hunted and feasted on raw meat, bringing bones home from the hunt.

The woman made stew.

“We don't eat stew,” they said.

The woman's brother warned her they were bad men. He followed them and saw them become lions.

She didn't believe him.

In the night, her husband became a lion again, killed her, and ate her.

Then the two strangers escaped into the woods; they never returned.

[a Mwanga story from Zambia]

175. The Mother and Her Daughter

“Bring me a melon,” a mother told her daughter.

On the way, the girl’s admirers flattered her; she gave them the melon.

“You accursed green-eyed girl!” her mother shouted.

Then the girl sang:

My mother curses me, oh!

She curses my eyes, crocodile-green.

Then her mother beat her to death, grinding her body to dust.

The wind blew the dust into the water where Crocodile lived.

Crocodile shaped the dust into a beautiful underwater woman.

She rose up from the water, singing to her sister:

Our mother killed me, ground me to dust.

Crocodile saved me, Sister! Here I am!”

[a Sotho story from southern Africa]



176. The Baboon Who Became a Man

There was a woman without a husband. Many suitors came, but the woman was proud, and she refused them all.

A baboon saw this woman and wanted to marry her, so he took off his baboon-skin and put on a man-skin.

The woman chose that man to be her husband and married him.

He worked hard, planting crops in his mother-in-law's garden and tending the garden carefully.

But his fellow baboons came out of the bush and raided the garden, taking all the food. Then the husband became a baboon again and ran off into the bush, never to return.

[a Ngoni story from southern Africa]

177. The Bad-Tempered Wife

There was a man whose wife was bad-tempered.

He finally sent her to live in a hut in the bush.

A hyena decided to occupy the same hut, eating the woman's food and drinking her water. When the hyena gave birth, she made the woman tend her cubs.

One day when preparing stew, the woman threw the young hyenas into the stew-pot and ran back to her husband.

When the enraged hyena arrived and attacked the woman, her husband defended her, killing the hyena with his spear.

From then on the wife was well-behaved and lived happily with her husband.

[a Bari story from the Sudan]



178. The Woman Who Married a Crow

A man loved a woman, but he had no wealth.

Crow came, offering many cattle, so the woman's father gave her to Crow, and Crow led his wife into the forest.

Each day Crow went away, telling her, "Wait here!" Then each evening he returned with food.

The woman sat in the forest all day, weeping and singing.

Her lover, walking through the forest, heard her. He came running, and she told him about Crow. "I'll kill him!" the man vowed.

He hid, and he shot Crow that evening.

The man took the woman home, and they married at last.

[a Maasai story from Kenya]



179. The Woman and the Mysterious Bird

A woman weeding her fields noticed a strange bird.

“Come!” it said. “I’ll feed you.”

The bird led her to a granary; she filled her basket, but when she returned for more, the granary was gone.

The next day, she saw the bird again. “Follow me!” it said, flying away. She followed the sound of its chirping until she reached a great plain.

There she saw a handsome man.

“I am the bird,” he said. “Marry me!”

“I don’t believe you,” she replied, laughing.

He turned back into a bird and led her home.

She never saw the bird again.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]

180. The Woman Who Lost Her Way

A woman lost her way in the forest. Night fell, and she heard lions roaring in the darkness.

Then some baboons came and rescued her. They brought her to their home and treated her kindly, giving her milk to drink and food to eat.

The woman lived for a long time with the baboons, and she learned their language.

Meanwhile, the people of her village thought the woman had died.

She finally went back to her home, but she would return to the forest at night and talk with the baboons.

When the woman died, the baboons howled in grief.

[a Bantu story from southern Africa]



181. The Lost Boy

A little boy, just five years old, wandered off alone.

His people searched but couldn't find him.

A year later, someone saw baboon spoor together with a child's footprints.

The people followed the tracks and found the boy sitting on a rock with a troop of baboons. The baboons ran, carrying the boy away, but the people followed, and the baboons finally relinquished the boy.

The boy wanted to go with the baboons, but after a while he resumed his human life. "They were kind," he said, "feeding me special treats and always letting me be the first to drink."

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

182. The Woman Who Went Fishing

A woman put her baby on the riverbank while she fished.

The baby started crying.

Then an ape came and cradled the child.

The mother screamed, but the ape said, “Don’t be afraid,” handing the baby to her.

The woman’s husband wanted to see this ape, so he went with her to the river and hid.

Again, the ape came and cradled the child. The man hurled his spear at the ape, but he hit the baby instead.

“You have killed your own,” groaned the ape as she placed the dead child on the ground and retreated into the forest.

[a Kele story from the Congo]



183. The Farmer and the Baboon

A farmer once found an abandoned baby baboon. Feeling sorry for him, the farmer took him home and raised him up to be a shepherd, guarding the sheep by day and driving them back into the kraal at night.

The farmer gave the baboon a goat to ride on, and the baboon lived on that goat's milk.

Whenever the farmer butchered a sheep, he would give some meat to the baboon, but the baboon himself never killed a sheep.

So things went on happily until a leopard attacked the flock one day and killed the baboon shepherd.

The farmer grieved.

[a Khoekhoe story from Namibia]

184. The Villagers and the Chimpanzee

The village children liked to chase the chimpanzee, taunting him. They would shoot toy arrows at him and pelt him with rocks until the chimpanzee ran away.

One day, however, the chimpanzee surprised the villagers. He entered the village, brandishing a spear. When the people confronted him, the chimpanzee threw his spear and killed one of the men.

“Tell me where you got that spear!” shouted the village chief.

“No! You tell me: who took my spears?” the chimpanzee replied. “Who stole my land? Wasn’t I here first? Are you not my children?”

The chimpanzee then returned to the forest.

[a Bangala story from the Congo]



185. The Man Who Tracked a Gorilla

A man tracked a gorilla who had raided his fields, planning to kill it. He followed the gorilla's tracks and found fruit heaped at the base of a tree; the gorilla was up in the tree. The man waited for the gorilla to come down.

Meanwhile, a chimpanzee approached and began eating the fruit.

The gorilla then descended, and the chimpanzee angrily tried to chase the gorilla away. When the gorilla protested, the chimpanzee grabbed a stick and hit the gorilla, whereupon the gorilla struck the chimpanzee dead with a single blow.

The man had seen enough: he ran home.

[a Bakongo story from Zaire]



186. The Crocodile and the Two Children

Crocodile saw two children bathing. He grabbed one, dragging him to his hole in the riverbank. “Stay here,” Crocodile said, “while I go get the other one.”

After Crocodile swam off, the child escaped and ran to the village.

When Crocodile returned to the bathing place, the other child had run away, and people on the riverbank were shooting at him.

He swam back to his hole; that child was gone too.

Enraged, Crocodile crawled onto the land and went into the village. He stalked the people in the village for three days before he finally returned to the water.

[a Benga story from Gabon]

187. The Deadly Crocodile

A crocodile was killing sheep, cattle, even people. Everyone was afraid.

The chief asked for advice, but no one knew what to do.

Then a fox spoke up. “I may be small and not strong, but I can save you from future trouble. What you need is not strength; what you need is wisdom. That is what I can offer you.”

“What do you advise?” asked the chief.

“Don’t try to kill the crocodile when it has grown big and strong,” said the fox. “Do what I do: eat the crocodile eggs. That is how you will defeat your enemy.”

[a Ndau story from Mozambique]



188. The Hunter and the Deer

The Hunter's wife gave birth; so did Deer's wife.

For first food, the Hunter's child needed deer-liver, and Deer's child needed coffee-leaves.

Hunter went to the coffee tree and waited. Deer came; Hunter raised his gun.

"Stop!" shouted Deer. "We are both in need. Let me take coffee-leaves to my child so he will thrive. I'll return tomorrow!"

Hunter agreed, and Deer ran off with coffee-leaves for his child.

The next day, Hunter went to the tree; Deer was there. Hunter shot Deer and carried the meat to the village. He fed deer-liver to his child, and the child thrived.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

189. The Dog and the Lizard

Dog and Lizard were friends.

One day Lizard said, “You must enjoy eating meat when you hunt.”

“The men take the meat,” Dog sighed. “We dogs don’t get anything.”

“But you work hard!” Lizard exclaimed.

“Just watch,” Dog said, and Lizard waited in the tree, watching.

The hunters sent the dogs after the game, and the dogs chased the game down. Then, when Dog took a small piece of meat, a hunter clubbed him on the head.

“Ow! Ow!” he yelped, looking up at Lizard in the tree, and Lizard nodded sadly at his friend: Dog had spoken the truth.

[an Ambundu story from Angola]

190. The Hyena's Prophecy

Hearing his wife was in labor, a man ran home.

A hyena by the roadside shouted, “A boy is born; a buffalo will kill him!”

Seeing the baby was indeed a boy, the father worried about the hyena’s prophecy, but told no one.

Years later, while tending their flocks, they saw a buffalo.

“I’ll kill it!” the son shouted.

“No!” shouted the father. “I must do this.”

He killed the buffalo and then exclaimed with relief, “So much for the hyena’s prophecy!”

Running up to congratulate his father, the boy tripped and fell on the buffalo’s horns, which killed him.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]



191. The Bird Who Made Milk

A poor man and his wife hoed their garden all day. By night a magical bird came. “Garden, be mixed again,” it said.

The couple hoed the next day; again the bird came.

That night they kept watch and caught the bird.

“I can make milk for you,” the bird told them.

Thus they become rich. The family grew fat eating milk.

The village children were curious. “How did you get so fat?” they asked.

“From the milk-bird,” the poor children answered. “We’ll show you.”

But when they freed the milk-bird from its cage, it flew away and never returned.

[a Bantu story from southern Africa]

192. The Grateful Python

Python was caught in a bush-fire. “Help!” he screamed.

A man heard the cry and came running.

“Save me!” shrieked Python.

“But then you’ll kill me,” said the man.

“No, I’ll reward you!” Python promised.

With his hoe the man dug a deep pit around them, keeping the fire away.

Python then transformed into a young boy. He gave the man a magical bottle. “Open it when you are in danger,” the boy said, and then he vanished.

When the man got home, he found his village overrun by enemies. He opened the bottle; the enemy all fell down dead.

[a Yao story from eastern Africa]



193. The Cowherd and the Antelope

A young cowherd saw an antelope grazing with his cattle.

“Get on,” the antelope told him. The boy obeyed, and they rode away. They rode on and on, never stopping; the boy couldn’t make the antelope stop.

When he pulled on one of the horns, it came off; it was full of food.

The antelope finally collapsed. “Take both horns,” he told the boy, “and keep them.”

Then the antelope died.

“Take me home!” the boy said, and the horns magically transported him home.

Thanks to the wonderful horns of the antelope, the boy became a wealthy and powerful man.

[a Bantu story from southern Africa]



194. The Goat-Dung

Please throw some goat-dung my way!

Why goat-dung? To hurl at the sky.

Why the sky? To get a little water.

Why a little water? To make the burnt grass grow.

Why grass? To feed my cow.

Why a cow? To butcher it for the eagles.

Why eagles? To get eagle-feathers from them in return.

Why eagle-feathers? To put on my arrows.

Why arrows? To hunt my enemies' cattle.

Why cattle? To get a wife.

Why a wife? To have a son.

Why a son? To pluck my lice.

Why lice? To go and die with them, an old man.

[a Nandi story from Kenya]

195. The Obstinate Child

“Child, eat your dinner!” The child refused.

“Stick, beat child!” The stick refused.

“Fire, burn stick!” Fire refused.

“Water, quench fire!” Water refused.

“Ox, drink water!” Ox refused.

“Knife, kill ox!” The knife refused.

“Blacksmith, break the knife!” The blacksmith refused.

“Rope, hang the blacksmith!” The rope refused.

“Rat, gnaw the rope!” Rat refused.

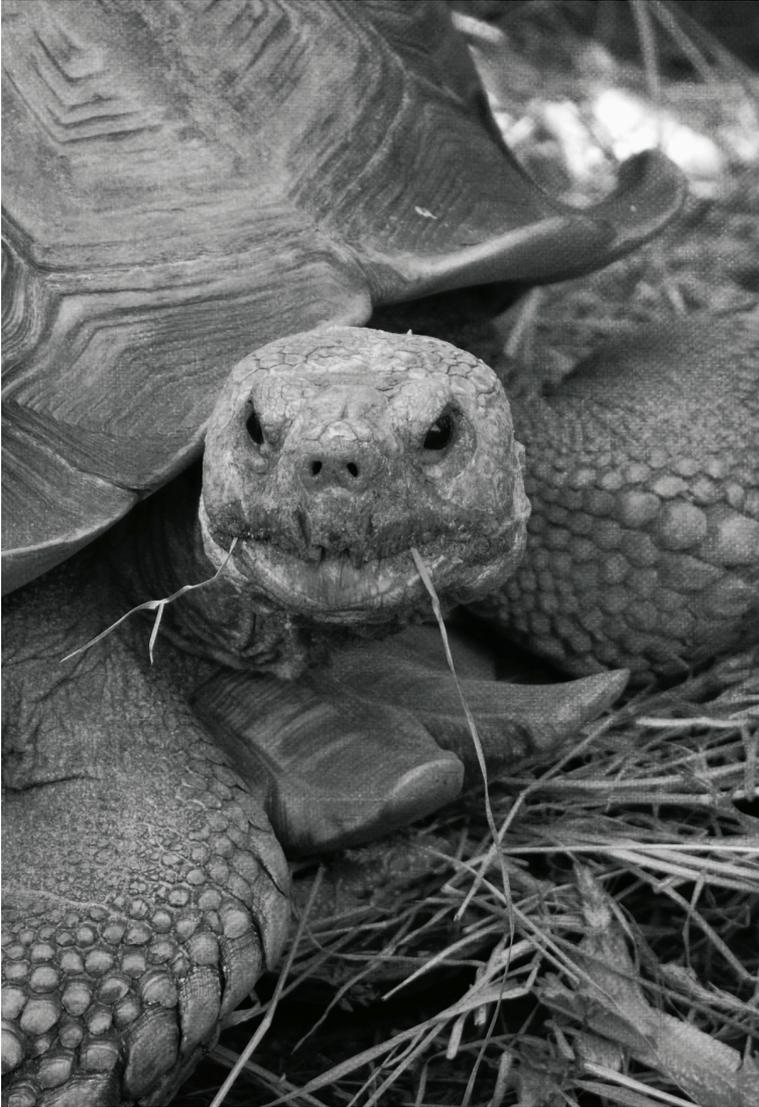
“Cat, eat the rat!”

“Gladly!” said Cat.

Cat scared Rat, who scared the rope, which scared the blacksmith, who scared the knife, which scared the ox, who scared the water, which scared the fire, which scared the stick, which scared the child, who ate her dinner.

[a Berber story from northern Africa]





196. The Tortoise and His Debts

Tortoise owed money to all his friends.

“Pay me!” Worm said.

“Wait here,” Tortoise replied, and went to Rooster.

“Pay me!” said Rooster.

“Come with me!” replied Tortoise.

Rooster came, ate Worm, and waited for his money.

Then Tortoise went to Wildcat.

“Pay me!” said Wildcat.

“Come with me!” Tortoise replied.

Wildcat came, ate Rooster, and waited for his money.

Then Tortoise went to Leopard.

“Pay me!” said Leopard.

“Come with me!” replied Tortoise.

Leopard came and attacked Wildcat. They fought fiercely and killed each other in the struggle.

Then Tortoise laughed and ate them both.

He didn't pay anybody.

[a Calabar story from southern Nigeria]

197. The Camel and Her Seven Companions

Camel had seven companions: Lion, Snake, Thorn-Bush, Fire, Flood, Honesty, and Deceit.

Deceit said to Snake and Thorn-bush, “Let’s kill Lion! Snake can bite Lion, then hide in Thorn-Bush.”

So Snake bit Lion and hid.

Camel was angry. “Fire, burn Thorn-Bush and Snake.”

Fire obeyed.

Then Camel said, “Flood, douse Fire!”

Deceit shouted, “Flood is drowning us.”

“Flood cannot go uphill,” said Honesty. “Carry us uphill, Camel!”

Camel carried Honesty and Deceit up the hill.

Deceit said, “Let’s kill Camel!”

Deceit and Honesty killed Camel and cooked her.

But when they ate her flesh, it choked them.

They died.

All gone.

[a Somali story from eastern Africa]

198. The Dog and the Pangolin

Dog and Pangolin were cracking pumpkin-seeds.

Pangolin ate all her kernels, but Dog saved his.

“Why don’t you save the kernels?” Dog asked, and Pangolin fell down dead.

A woman walked by. “How did Pangolin die?”

Dog said, “I asked Pangolin: why don’t you save the kernels?”

When Dog said this, the woman fell down dead.

Dog’s sister walked by. “How did the woman die?”

Dog said, “I told the woman that I asked Pangolin: why don’t you save the kernels?”

When Dog said this, his sister fell down dead.

Terrified by this series of events, Dog never spoke again.

[a Bulu story from Cameroon]



199. The Sparrow and the Parrot

A man died.

Sparrow and Parrot disputed who should inherit the man's property.

"I lived my whole life with the man," Sparrow said. "Where he moved, I moved. I always stayed with him."

"That's nothing!" Parrot squawked. "The man took me from the tree-tops. When my feathers grew, he made a head-dress which he sold for money that bought him a wife, who had daughters, who got husbands, who gave them children. I am the cause of the wealth of this family; therefore, I should inherit."

The people ruled in favor of Parrot. "He is the source; he must inherit."

[a Fang story from Gabon]

200. The Danger of a Nonexistent Donkey

A boy found a few coins in the street. “We can buy chickens!” he said.

“Yes!” said his father. “The chickens will lay eggs, and we’ll sell the eggs to buy goats.”

“Yes!” said the son. “The goats will breed, and we’ll sell the kids to buy a donkey, and you’ll give me the donkey to ride.”

“No!” shouted the father. “The donkey is mine!”

“No!” shouted the son. “The donkey is mine!”

“Mine!” shouted the father.

“Mine!” shouted the son.

And then the father hit his son and blinded him in one eye.

All because of a nonexistent donkey.

[a Swahili story]



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LIST OF TITLES

1. Anansi the Spider and His Children
2. Anansi the Spider and the Singing Ghosts
3. How the Monkeys Got Their Tails
4. How the Animals Got Their Tails
5. The Rabbits and the Elephants
6. The Crocodile and the Leguan Lizard
7. The Woman and Her Yams
8. The Sun and the Jackal
9. The Leopard and the Hyena
10. The Parrot and the Hen
11. The Lemur and the Shrew
12. The First Fire
13. The Animals and the Fire
14. The Jackal Sends the Dog to Get Fire
15. The Dogs of Long Ago
16. The People and the Sea-Turtle
17. Grandmother Crocodile
18. The Hippo and the Crocodile
19. The Three Creatures
20. The Ram and His Mother
21. The Bat and the Dove
22. The Cane-Rat and the Bat

23. The Queen's Feast
24. God and the Birds
25. The Mosquito and the Ears
26. The Tortoise and the Pig
27. The Jackal and the Hyena
28. The Elephant and the Rhino
29. The Little Frog and the Little Snake
30. The Fish and the Leopard
31. The Leopard and the Man
32. The Lion's Family and the Leopard
33. The Flying Lion
34. The First Lion
35. The First Baboons
36. The First Fish
37. The First Snake
38. The First Bird
39. The Cattle and the Buffalo
40. The Rabbit and the Moon
41. The Chameleon and the Lizard
42. The Dog and the Sheep
43. The Dog's Message
44. The People Who Wanted to Live Forever
45. The Hyena Who Waited
46. The Owls and their Servants
47. The Dog and the Cow
48. The Squirrel and the Viper
49. The Frog and His Two Wives

50. The Animals and the Rain
51. The Frog and the Water
52. The Boar and the Hog
53. The Rooster and the Sun
54. The Leopard and His Drum
55. The Spider and Lion's Ram
56. The Spider in the Storeroom
57. When the Jackal and the Hyena Were Servants
58. King Lion and the Corn-Thief
59. The Rabbit, the Baboon, and the Peanuts
60. The Wildcat and the Monkey (1)
61. The Wildcat's Revenge (2)
62. The Birds' Fasting Contest
63. The Elephant and the Rooster
64. The Elephant and the Goat
65. The Elephant and the Tortoise
66. The Frog and the Deer
67. The Chameleon and the Elephant
68. The Rabbit and the Chameleon
69. The Elephant and the Frog
70. The People and the Turtle
71. The Monkey and the Leopard
72. The Jackal and the Rooster
73. The Hunter and the Leopard
74. The Lioness and the Chicks of the Ostrich
75. The Gorilla and the Monkey
76. The Wildcat and the Nightjar

77. The Pious Cat and the Mouse
78. The Leopard and the Dog
79. The Woman and the Rabbit
80. The Rabbit and the Antelope
81. The Swallow and the Rooster
82. The Rooster and the Swallow
83. The Hen and the Rabbit
84. The Rabbit and the Deer
85. The Rabbit Visits the Baboon
86. The Wildcat and the Gazelle
87. The Tortoise and the Bat
88. The Dog and the Chimpanzee
89. The Tortoise and the Baboon
90. The Leopard and the Python
91. The Tortoise, the Elephant, and the Hippo
92. The Antelope and the Tortoise
93. The Giraffe and the Tortoise
94. The Tortoise and the Guinea-Fowl (1)
95. The Tortoise and the Hawk (2)
96. The Tortoise and the Hawk's Mother (3)
97. The Tortoise and the Leopard
98. A Husband for the Princess
99. The King's Magic Drum (1)
100. The Tortoise and the Magic Drum (2)
101. The Tortoise's Revenge (3)
102. The Tortoise and the Magic Breadfruit
103. The Spider and the Cobweb

104. The Spider's Funeral
105. Anansi the Spider and God (1)
106. Anansi and the Snake (2)
107. Anansi and the Leopard (3)
108. The Elephant and the Spider
109. The Elephant and the Honey
110. The Elephant and the Rabbit Plant Pumpkins (1)
111. The Rabbit and His Drum (2)
112. When the Rabbit and the Antelope Were Neighbors
113. The Rabbit and the Leopard
114. The Rabbit and the Old Woman
115. The Animals and Their Dance (1)
116. The Rabbit and the Stepping-Stone (2)
117. The Rabbit's Punishment (3)
118. The Lion and the Rabbit
119. The Rabbit and the Tortoise
120. The Rabbit and the Earth
121. The Bushbuck and the Rabbit
122. The Rabbit and the Cloud-Islands (1)
123. The Hyena and the Muddy Rabbit (2)
124. The Farmer and the Rabbit
125. The Scorpion and the Hyena
126. The Jerboa and the Hyena
127. The Hyena and Her Friends
128. The Hyena and the Man
129. The Hyena and the Crane
130. The Lion's Illness

131. The Jackal and the Fish-Wagon (1)
132. The Hyena and the Fish-Wagon (2)
133. The Wedding of the Jackal and the Hyena
134. The Jackal and the Hyena's Wedding Feast
135. The Jackal and the Goat
136. The Dove and the Jackal (1)
137. The Jackal and the Heron (2)
138. The Dog and the Jackal at the Wedding Feast
139. The Leopard and the Bloodthirsty Jackal
140. The Cat and the Leopard
141. The Rat and the Fish
142. The Tortoise and the Mushrooms
143. The Elephant in the Swamp
144. The Hyena and the Moon
145. The Chameleon and the Snake
146. The Proud Wren
147. The Francolin and the Tortoise
148. The Eagle and the Leopard
149. The Lion and the Crocodile (1)
150. The Young Lion's Revenge (2)
151. The Rat and the Crocodile
152. The Sheep's New Dress
153. The Python with Two Heads
154. The Snake and the Rat
155. The Partridge and the Puff-Adder
156. The Leopard and the Goat
157. The Lioness and the Antelope

158. The Crocodile and the Hen
159. The Fruit-Bat's Funeral
160. The Lioness and the Ostrich
161. The Fox and the Rooster
162. The Dog Who Would Be King
163. The Deer and the Pig
164. The Hasty Tortoise
165. The Tree That Blocked the Sun
166. The Rhino and the Bees
167. The Python and the Guinea-Fowl
168. The Lion and the Boar
169. The King's Cat and His Rat
170. The Disobedient Boy
171. The Man Who Became an Elephant
172. The Song of the Monkey
173. The Woman Who Became a Lion
174. The Woman and Her Suitors
175. The Mother and Her Daughter
176. The Baboon Who Became a Man
177. The Bad-Tempered Wife
178. The Woman Who Married a Crow
179. The Woman and the Mysterious Bird
180. The Woman Who Lost Her Way
181. The Lost Boy
182. The Woman Who Went Fishing
183. The Farmer and the Baboon
184. The Villagers and the Chimpanzee

185. The Man Who Tracked a Gorilla
186. The Crocodile and the Two Children
187. The Deadly Crocodile
188. The Hunter and the Deer
189. The Dog and the Lizard
190. The Hyena's Prophecy
191. The Bird Who Made Milk
192. The Grateful Python
193. The Cowherd and the Antelope
194. The Goat-Dung
195. The Obstinate Child
196. The Tortoise and His Debts
197. The Camel and Her Seven Companions
198. The Dog and the Pangolin
199. The Sparrow and the Parrot
200. The Danger of a Nonexistent Donkey

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