

Why the Warthog is on his knees - Zulu

"Oh, Gogo," little Sipho asked one evening, "could you tell us the story of clever Jackal again?" Sipho, whose nickname was Mpungushe "jackal," never tired of hearing tales of his beloved namesake.

"Hawu, Sipho," moaned several of his siblings, "Not again, little Jackal! You will wear out our ears with stories of Mpungushe!"

Gogo laughed her deep, round laugh. Soon each of her grandchildren were laughing along with her.

"I, too, love the stories of the Jackal!" Gogo looked at Sipho. "But we do not want to cause your brothers and sisters to become deaf. I think there is another tale that I can tell you of an animal who tried to be as clever as Jackal!"

Kwasuka sukela . . .

Wart hog had made himself a lovely, spacious home in an old termite mound that an aardvark* had cleared out. He had built it up and made a wide entrance. He thought it was the most magnificent home in Africa and would often stand at the entrance of his dwelling with his snout in the air as the giraffe, wildebeest** and zebra passed to the watering hole. "Hah," he thought to himself, "no one has such a fine home!"

One day as he looked out from the entrance of his cave he was horrified to see a huge lion stealthily stalking toward him. He started to back away, but because he had made the entrance to his place so grand, the lion would have no difficulty in following Wart Hog right in. "Ahhhh," panicked Wart Hog, "Bhubesi will eat me in my own lounge! What will I do?"

Wart Hog decided to use an old trick he'd heard Jackal bragging about. Wart Hog pretended to be supporting the roof of his hole with his strong back, pushing up with his tusks. "Help!" he cried to the lion,

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"I am going to be crushed! The roof is caving in! Flee, oh, mighty Bhubesi, before you are crushed along with me!"

Now Lion is no fool. He recognized Jackal's old ploy straight away ("Do you remember that story, children?"), and he wasn't going to be caught out again. He roared so fiercely that Wart hog dropped to his knees, trembling. Wart hog begged for mercy. Luckily for him Lion was not too hungry. So he pardoned the wart hog and left, saying, "Stay on your kness, you foolish beast!"

Lion laughed to himself and shook his shaggy head as he walked away. Imagine, slow-witted Wart hog trying to copy Jackal's trick! Wart hog took Lion's order to heart. That is why, to this day, you will see Wart hog feeding on his knees, in a very undignified position, with his bottom up in the air and his snout snuffling in the dust.

Notes:

**"aardvark" comes from Afrikaans and literally means "earth pig." It is a South African eutherian mammal which is nocturnal and feeds mainly on termites.*

*** "wildebeest" is a South African antelope that has a large ox-like head. It is often also referred to as a "gnu" because its call sounds like "gnu...gnu...gnu."*

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Cloud Eating

Jackal and Hyena were together, it is said, when a white cloud rose. Jackal descended upon it, and ate of the cloud as if it were fat.

When he wanted to come down, he said to Hyena, "My sister, as I am going to divide with thee, catch me well." So she caught him, and broke his fall. Then she also went up and ate there, high up on the top of the cloud.

When she was satisfied, she said, "My greyish brother, now catch me well." The greyish rogue said to his friend, "My sister, I shall catch thee well. Come therefore down."

He held up his hands, and she came down from the cloud, and when she was near, Jackal cried out (painfully jumping to one side), "My sister, do not take it ill. Oh me! Oh me! A thorn has pricked me and sticks in me." Thus she fell down from above, and was sadly hurt.

Since that day, it is said that Hyena's hind feet have been shorter and smaller than the front ones.

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The Clever Farmer - Eritrea

One day a farmer decided to take his cow to the market to be sold. When he met the merchant, he greeted him and told him he had a cow he wished to sell. The merchant asked how much he wanted for his cow, to which the farmer replied, "Fifty measures of grain". The merchant began to laugh and said that the farmer must be a fool to ask such a price since the cow was only worth a single measure of grain.

The two began to barter the price and their tempers rose as the argument continued. A crowd began to gather around the two men. Then the farmer said that he wasn't a fool, because no fool could know where the center of the earth was or how many stars there were in the heavens. The merchant got very angry and tried to punch him. At this point a few men in the crowd took both of the men to the judge so that he could decide.

The judge heard the version of both men then turned to the farmer to ask, "If you are able to tell us the number of stars in the sky and where the center of the earth is, then here is your chance." The farmer paused and reached for his cane which he lifted and plunged deep into the ground. "This is the center of the earth", he said, "and anyone who can prove the contrary is welcome to do so now."

He then reached down and took a handful of dust from the ground. "The number of stars in the heavens is equal to the number of dust particles in my hand and anyone who can prove me wrong is welcome to speak now."

The judge understood that he was dealing with a very clever man. So he ordered the merchant to pay the clever farmer fifty measures of grain for his cow.

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Even the Flies and Spiders - Eritrea

"Mother, I hate spiders and flies!" said the prince. The queen replied wisely, "There is a purpose for everything God made."

Although he knew his mother was a wise woman, he doubted her words this time. After all, what purpose could either of those annoying creatures serve? He continued his day, giving it no more thought.

A month passed and something very horrible happened. There was a rebellion in the kingdom and the king's family was killed. The only one to escape was the young prince. He knew that his enemies were not far behind him and that they would never let him escape. Having the prince alive would mean that he could one day gather an army to take the king's place and rule the land.

He decided to go and live with an uncle who lived far away. He traveled only at night and through the countryside so that he would not be seen. But he soon learned that they were close behind. If only he could make it through one more day of travel, he would reach the safety of his uncle's home.

On the last day he reached an open place with a small water hole where he could rest and take a drink. The long days of travel had made him quite tired; so soon he was asleep leaning comfortably against a tree.

A few hours passed and a fly landed on his face. He shooed it away; but it came back again and again. Finally, annoyed by the fly he opened his eyes and saw his enemies approaching in the distance. He had been sleeping so well that he didn't hear them coming.

So, he jumped up and made his way into the hills as quickly as he could. There were many caves in the hills; so he chose one and made his way inside. He went deep into the cave and hid himself as best he

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could. Time passed and he heard his enemies talking outside of the cave.

One said to the other in a loud angry voice, "Don't bother checking that one, can't you see that there is a spider's web? He could not have entered without disturbing the web and as you can see that the web isn't broken! Let us leave and check the next cave!" So, they left and went to check the other caves.

As it turns out, just after he had entered the cave, a big spider had come to weave her web just at the cave's opening. Since she was so large, it didn't take her long to have a large web which covered most of the small opening.

As the prince escaped safely the next morning to his uncle's home, he remembered the wise words of his mother. He wept remembering what she said each time that he had complained as a child saying he hated flies and spiders:

"My dear son, there is a purpose for every creature God made... even the flies and the spiders."

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How the Desert Came to be - Ghana

Kweku Ananse and his friend Akwasi were known to everyone to be very good farmers. They had such large farms that people came from all over to buy everything from them. As time passed they became rich.

Yet one year, everything turned bad as the rains stopped falling. Ananse and Akwasi didn't know what to do. All the streams and rivers had dried up and people quit coming since there was nothing left to buy.

Akwasi decided to go to Nana Nyankopon, the creator of the universe, to solicit his help. So one morning, he called on Nana Nyankopon and said to him, "Nana, there has not been rain for a long time; so all the rivers and streams are dry. All the crops on my farm have dried up and wilted. Please, let me have some rain."

God was touched and said to him, "I have delegated some of my work to people, because I get so tired of small requests all day long. I have given the chore of wind to Paa Kwesi, the chore of sunshine to Yeboah and the chore of rain to Nsiah, the hunchback. If you want rain, go and see Nsiah the hunchback and ask him to give you some rain."

Akwasi was very happy and thanked Nyankopon. He went off to look for Nsiah, the hunchback. Eventually, he came across him sitting under a tree resting from the weighty task which God had given to him. Akwasi said hello then told him that God had sent him to ask the hunchback for rain. "If it is God who sent you, I cannot refuse. Take a small stick and beat my back" he said.

Aswasi picked two small sticks and gently tapped Nsiah's back two times, thanked him and went home. In the morning, he went to his farm and sure enough, there had been a heavy spell of rain. All the plants were standing upright and green.

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Ananse passed Akwasi's farm the next morning and was so happy that he jumped up and down with joy.

He punched the air and yelled, "Yippee!" He thought the rain had fallen on his farm, too. But unfortunately when he got to his farm, he realized with shock that the rains had stopped at the boundary. There had not been any on his farm. But why had rains fallen on Akwasi's farm? Surely, there must be an answer. He became suspicious of his friend and decided to go and ask him how on earth he got rains on his farm.

Akwasi did not want to tell Ananse about God's rainmaker because of Ananse's sly nature. But later he changed his mind, so he told Ananse about God's rainmaker.

As soon as Ananse heard this, he too decided to go and look for the rainmaker. He combed the forest for many hours and at long last came upon him sitting under a tree taking a rest from the heavy task God had given him. As soon as Ananse saw him, he picked up a big stick and hit the hunchback's back with all his might. The hunchback cried in pain. But Ananse continued hitting him at the back with all his might with the heavy club. The hunchback fell down panting, but still Ananse continued hitting him with brute force. After continuous beating, the hunchback lay still, not moving. Ananse called out to the hunchback, but there was no response. Ananse had killed the rainmaker. He had killed God's rainmaker. He became frightened. "Oh dear, what have I done? I have killed God's rainmaker." He wanted to run, but realized that if he ran away he would put himself in difficult position. Because his friend Akwasi would know he had killed the rainmaker.

Ananse was so cunning though that, it wasn't long before he came up with a solution. He picked up the dead body and went to hide it in the middle of a mango tree.

He then went to call on Akwasi and told him that he had seen a mango tree which was full of ripe mangoes. He told Akwasi that they should go and pick the mangoes. Akwasi liked mangoes very much but he was reluctant to go, because he didn't trust Ananse. He later

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changed his mind and went with Ananse. When they got to the mango tree, Ananse told Akwasi to climb up the mango tree and shake it. So Akwasi climbed the mango tree and when he got to the top, started shaking it vigorously. Suddenly, there was a big crash. The body of God's rainmaker had fallen from the tree top when Akwasi shook the tree. Ananse started shouting and wailing. "Akwasi, see what you have done. You have killed God's rainmaker. He must have been hiding in the tree taking a rest from the heavy task that God had given him. See what you have done now, you have killed him. What will God say now?" Akwasi became confused; he didn't know what to do.

He quietly got down from the tree; but then as he was getting down, his mind worked like lightning. He pretended to be shocked and said he was going to see God about it. Then, he went away. Ananse was very happy and jumped and clapped his hands. "Fool, I have put you into trouble. God will really punish you." Little did Kwaku Ananse know that his friend Akwasi had gone to make a plan to teach Ananse that he wasn't a fool after all.

Before long, Akwasi Owusu came back with some people and told Ananse that there was no problem at all. God was happy that the rainmaker was dead because he had been lazy at times and refused to work. "I am going to reward you for killing him" God said. Then Akwasi started singing and dancing happily. He said again that he had come with God's messengers to carry the dead body to God. Ananse immediately became furious when he heard this. He said angrily "Look, Akwasi, don't try to be too clever. I killed him! I was afraid God was going to punish me, that is why I hid the body in the tree. I am going to claim the reward." So he carried the body on his shoulders and quickly went to God's Palace to tell him that he had killed the hunchback and that he should be rewarded.

But when God heard the news He was so angry that he punished Ananse by never allowing rain to fall on his farm again. Ananse's farm was where the desert is now.



Abu Nuwasi Sells his House - Kenya

Abu Nuwasi built a two-story house for himself. He decided to live in the bottom and sold the top story to a merchant. After some years, he made the decision to move out of his house and live in a far-a-way town.

His hope was that the merchant who rented the upper story of his house would agree to buy the lower half so that Abu would have the means to build a new home elsewhere. But the greedy merchant refused Abu Nuwasi's offer. The merchant hoped that if Abu could not find a buyer, he would simply leave anyway and the merchant would get the entire house for free.

After trying again to talk the merchant into buying the house with no success, Abu went to town. He returned with a dozen men whom he left outside and then went upstairs to talk to the merchant. "I have come to inform you that since I was unable to sell my part of the house I have hired some men to help me destroy it. I just wanted to let you know so that you could do what is needed to save your part."

Needless to say, the greedy merchant changed his mind and decided to purchase the lower story from Abu Nuwasi at his original asking price and Abu was able to leave the town as planned.



The Guinea Fowl Child - Zimbabwe

Pitipiti should have been a very happy woman. She was married to a rich man who had many cattle. But after years of marriage, she was still unable to give him the many children which a man like him deserved. She went to see many people in the hope that they would be able to solve her problem; but to no avail.

Day after day, she watched as her husband's love for her faded away before her very eyes. She was very sad the day that her husband married a new wife so that he could at last have children. But she was also happy for him when she learned that his new wife had given him a child, and then another.

Each time she learned that the new wife had given birth, she went to offer the newborn a gift; yet she was refused each time. The new wife would tell her, "My husband wasted too many years with you. In just a short time, I have already given him children. Go away since no one wants your gifts!"

Pitipiti was saddened to see that her husband's love for her that once used to shine in his eyes was slowly replaced by pride for his children. Yet, she continued to work her fields and live life the best she could in her solitude.

A few months later, while she was working in her fields she heard some screeching from the bushes. She approached to see what it was and found a guinea fowl at the top of a branch. He looked at her and cackled, "I am really lonely. So will you make me your child?" Pitipiti responded that she could not have a guinea fowl for a child because everyone would mock her. But he didn't give up and continued to ask her if she would make him her child just at night so that nobody would know.

After a little thought she decided that if she kept him as a child at nights it would give her company and someone to care for so she agreed. The guinea fowl promised that he would come late at night

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and he would leave the house early in the morning so that no one saw him.

That night, when she returned home she started to prepare her meal when she heard the screeching of the guinea fowl at the window. She let him in and they enjoyed their meal before going to bed. They lived very happy together like a mother and child would.

Very often though the new wife would pass and jeer at Pitipiti mocking her while she worked in her fields. "What a waste that our husband gave you so much land to work. You have no one to feed but yourself." Then she would laugh and go to her own fields to work. Pitipiti would just ignore her comments; but the guinea fowl could not support that someone spoke to his mother like that.

So, he flew to the bushes just near the new wife's fields and began to sing this song: Come and eat my friends there is lots of grain Come and eat my friends, eat all of this woman's grain

The new wife simply thought that it was a bird like all the others singing in the bush. One by one though, the guinea fowls started to arrive. Soon her fields were filled with guinea fowls that had heard the song and come to fill their bellies.

In a panic the new wife started to scream at them and kill the guinea fowl one after the other including Pitipiti's son. She immediately prepared them for dinner.

Her husband was pleased to see that his wife had prepared so many birds for dinner and thanked her for being such a good woman. They feasted to their hearts content and sat at the table talking.

Just as they finished the last bite of the meal, they heard the song of the guinea fowl. Looking around to see where it was coming from, they discovered that the singing came from their own stomachs. They got so scared that they grabbed the knives from the table and cut stabbed at the birds. The birds flew out of the holes and left the couple dead on the floor. They then returned to the field to eat the remaining grain.

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When Pitipiti learned what had happened, she was happy that she would no longer have to endure the insults of the new wife. She also got to keep all of her husband's cattle and his land.

Once people heard what happened, there were many men who wanted to marry Pitipiti. After all, she had a very intelligent and interesting son.

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