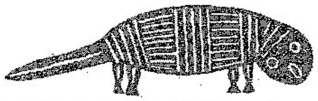


THE LION, THE HARE, AND THE HYENA

In this story from Kenya, told to Phyllis Savory by Gwido Mariko, the hare and the hyena again try, as they so often do, to outwit each other.

A lion named Simba once lived alone in a cave. In his younger days the solitude had not worried him, but not very long before this tale begins he had hurt his leg so badly that he was unable to provide food for himself. Eventually he began to realize that companionship had its advantages.

Things would have gone very badly for him, had not Sunguru the Hare happened to be passing his cave one day. Looking inside, Sunguru realized that the lion was starving. He set about at once caring for his sick friend and seeing to his comfort.

Under the hare's careful nursing, Simba gradually regained his strength until finally he was well enough to catch small game for the two of them to eat. Soon quite a large pile of bones began to accumulate outside the entrance to the lion's cave.

One day Nyangau the Hyena, while sniffing around in the hope of scrounging something for his supper, caught the appetizing smell of marrow-bones. His nose led him to Simba's cave, but as the bones could be seen clearly from inside he could not steal them with safety. Being a cowardly fellow, like the rest of his kind, he decided that the only way to gain possession of the tasty morsels would be to make friends with Simba. He therefore crept up to the entrance of the cave and gave a cough.

"Who makes the evening hideous with his dreadful croakings?" demanded the lion, rising to his feet and preparing to investigate the noise.

"It is I, your friend, Nyangau," faltered the hyena, losing what little courage he possessed. "I have come to tell you how sadly you have been missed by the animals, and how greatly we are looking forward to your early return to good health!"

"Well, get out," growled the lion, "for it seems to me that a friend would have inquired about my health long before this, instead of waiting until I could be of use to him once more. Get out, I say!"

The hyena shuffled off with alacrity, his scruffy tail

tucked between his bandy legs, followed by the insulting giggles of the hare. But he could not forget the pile of tempting bones outside the entrance to the lion's cave.

"I shall try again," resolved the thick-skinned hyena. A few days later he made a point of paying his visit while the hare was away fetching water to cook the evening meal.

He found the lion dozing at the entrance to his cave.

"Friend," simpered Nyangau, "I am led to believe that the wound on your leg is making poor progress, due to the underhanded treatment that you are receiving from your so-called friend Sunguru."

"What do you mean?" snarled the lion malevolently. "I have to thank Sunguru that I did not starve to death during the worst of my illness, while you and your companions were conspicuous by your absence!"

"Nevertheless, what I have told you is true," confided the hyena. "It is well known throughout the countryside that Sunguru is purposely giving you the wrong treatment for your wound to prevent your recovery. For when you are well, he will lose his position as your housekeeper—a very comfortable living for him, to be sure! Let me warn you, good friend, that Sunguru is not acting in your best interests!"

At that moment the hare returned from the river with his gourd filled with water. "Well," he said, addressing the hyena as he put down his load, "I did not expect to see you here after your hasty and inglorious departure from our

presence the other day. Tell me, what do you want this time?"

Simba turned to the hare. "I have been listening," he said, "to Nyangau's tales about you. He tells me that you are renowned throughout the countryside for your skill and cunning as a doctor. He also tells me that the medicines you prescribe are without rival. But he insists that you could have cured the wound on my leg a long time ago, had it been in your interest to do so. Is this true?"

Sunguru thought for a moment. He knew that he had to treat this situation with care, for he had a strong suspicion that Nyangau was trying to trick him.

"Well," he answered with hesitation, "yes, and no. You see, I am only a very small animal, and sometimes the medicines that I require are very big, and I am unable to procure them—as, for instance, in your case, good Simba."

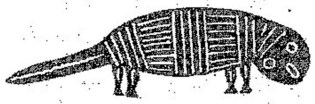
"What do you mean?" spluttered the lion, sitting up and at once showing interest.

"Just this," replied the hare. "I need a piece of skin from the back of a full-grown hyena to place on your wound before it will be completely healed."

Hearing this, the lion sprang onto Nyangau before the surprised creature had time to get away. Tearing a strip of skin off the foolish fellow's back from his head to his tail, he clapped it on the wound on his leg. As the skin came away from the hyena's back, so the hairs that remained stretched and stood on end. To this day Nyangau and his kind still

have long, coarse hairs standing up on the crests of their misshapen bodies.

Sunguru's fame as a doctor spread far and wide after this episode, for the wound on Simba's leg healed without further trouble. But it was many weeks before the hyena had the courage to show himself in public again.



MMADIPETSANE

In old tales found both in Africa and across the world, children are sometimes warned very specifically against disobedience. This story from Lesotho, retold here by folklorist Minnie Postma, is no exception.

The old people tell the story of Mmadipetsane, the child who refused to listen to the warnings of adults: One day Mmadipetsane's mother calls her. She calls, "Heee-laaa! Mmadipetsane!"

"Yes, Mme, I'm coming!" answers the girl.

When she arrives, her mother says to her, "Listen, dear child. Take the basket, the seroto, to collect some roots for us from the veld, and pick some wild spinach leaves for us to stew."

Mmadipetsane takes the basket and goes to the veld. It's a long way before she finds a spot where many wild roots

grow. She digs and digs, and when she uncovers a root, she wipes it clean on a tuft of grass and puts it into the seroto.

Along comes the ledimo, the man-eating monster. He sees her. She sees him. He is very ugly. He is almost as big as a tree and darker than the blackest night. His teeth are the size of a boar's tusks.

"Heee-laaa, Mmadipetsane! What are you dig-digging?" he shouts, and his voice sounds like the noise the rainbird makes when he comes to lay his egg among the stones on the ground. But Mmadipetsane is not afraid of him. She doesn't even reply. Once again he calls, "Heee-laaa, Mmadipetsane, why are you dig-digging?"

This time she replies, in a voice that sounds like the wind blowing across the veld. "I am dig-digging the roots which belong to the ledimo and I am picking the young leaves of the spinach which grows near the dung heap."

He strides toward her. He tries to catch and eat her, because he eats people. She darts away from him as quickly as a field mouse . . . and like a field mouse, she slips into a hole. The hole is too small for the ledimo, the big cannibal, and he can't catch her.

"Just you wait," he says in a loud voice. "I am clever, I shall find a way to catch you." And he smacks his lips and he swallows so loudly that he sounds like the frogs when they jump into deep water: *duma-duma-duma!*

But Mmadipetsane laughs at him. She teases him. She taunts him and says that he looks like a creepy-crawly, a kgokgo. Teasing and taunting him, she sings:

"Sai kgokgo, sai kgokgokgo-kgo. Sai kgokgo, sai kgo-kgokgo-kgo . . . Sai! Sai!"

It hurts the ledimo's ears to hear her. It feels as though he has fleas biting him inside his ears: "Sai! Sai! Sai!"

He walks back home, where he cannot hear her any longer.

Like a little field mouse, the naughty girl peeps out of the hole. When she sees that he has gone, she slips out quietly and scuttles between the grasses and the shrubs until she reaches her hae, her home.

"Here are the roots, Mme," she says.

"Where have you been, my child?"

"Ao, Mme we, I had to go very far, to the field of the ledimo."

"Jo—nna nna! Why do you not listen? Did the pigs bite off your ears when you were little? I told you to keep away from him."

"Tja!" answers the naughty child. "I am not afraid!"

"How can you not be afraid of him! He is bigger than any chief, he is stronger than any bull and he is more dangerous than the big water snake coiled up in the gleaming deep pool."

"Just look at me, Mmadipetsane. I am so small and weak, but I am cleverer than him," she retorts. "He cannot catch me, because I am as clever as the jackal, the phokojwe."

"What are you thinking, you disobedient child!" exclaims her mother.

"Mme, I know how the jackal works. I hide in the hole in

the ground that the jackal has dug for me with his paws. But the ledimo, the Giant, the Strong One, the Dangerous One, cannot get inside. Then I tease him like this:

"Sai kgokgo, sai kgokgokgo-kgo. Sai kgokgo kgokgokgo-kgo . . . Sai! Sai! Sai!"

"What happens then, my child?"

"Then he is furious. He stomps the ground, like Puhu, the bull, with his hooves . . . and all I hear is *dump-dump-dump* as his feet pound the ground."

The woman warns her child once again, but Mmadipetsane does not take any notice of her. Early the next morning, while her mother is fetching water in the clay pot from the fountain, she takes her seroto and runs to the fields of the ledimo to dig for roots and to pick young leaves from the wild spinach that grows near the dung heap.

The ledimo sees her kneeling and digging.

"Heee-laaa, there! Why are you dig-digging so early in the morning, Mmadipetsane?"

"I am dig-digging the roots that belong to the ledimo and I am picking the wild spinach that grows in his fields!"

He charges toward her to catch her, but she glides as fast as a field mouse over grass and shrub to the hole that the jackal has dug for her. The ledimo cannot reach her. He is furious. He can smell her and this makes him long all the more for lovely, juicy human flesh. Out of the hole he can hear her voice: ". . . Sai kgokgo, sai kgokgokgo-kgo, sai, sai, sai!" It pierces him like arrows.

He is clever, though, the ledimo. He is even more cun-

ning than the jackal, but Mmadipetsane does not know it. He is furious with her, but he does not say anything. He sits and waits outside the hole—like an old woman who sits and waits for her children to bring her food. He sits like a cat that waits for a mouse to come out of a hole.

But Mmadipetsane is even more cunning than he; she is as clever as the mouse. She is also sitting, waiting quietly. *Tu-u-u-u.*

Then the ledimo thinks of a plan to get her out.

"Mmadipetsane, you must come out now. The sun is shining high in the sky. Your mother is already standing on top of the big rock, the lefika, and she is looking for you. She is waiting for the roots and the wild spinach, because she is hungry!"

"Sai, sai, sai, sai—kgokgokgo-kgo!" she teases him. He is so furious that he falls to the ground, like a tree that the wind has blown over. He strikes the ground, *boom!* She knows that he is not dead and she sits as quietly as a mouse in the hole: *tu-u-u!* When she is hungry, she eats some of the roots that she has collected for her mother, but she does not move from her hiding place.

Now the ledimo has another idea. He tries to sound like her mother. In a high-pitched voice he says: "He-la, Mmadipetsane, my child! Where are you? The sun is setting over the treetops in the west."

But Mmadipetsane is not silly. She laughs at him and teases him: "Sai, sai, sai, kgokgokgo-kgo, sai, sai, sai, sai, kgokgokgo-kgo. . . . Oh, are you my mother? You who are as

ugly as a baboon, with teeth like a boar and with a stomach like a beer-pot? Forget it!"

The ledimo sits quietly and listens to this. He thinks and thinks and thinks. That's it—he will make his voice even softer.

He calls her again: "Mmadipetsane! Darling, where are you? It's late, the sun is setting faster. It is now behind the branches of the trees. . . ."

"Sai, sai, sai, kgo-kgo!" she teases. "Oh, are you my mother? Your voice is as rough as the rock face of the mountain! Mme's voice is smooth—as smooth as the fine sand that washes out at the water's edge! Sai, sai, sai, kgo-kgo." She laughs at him from inside the hole.

This time the ledimo calls softly, softly, softly. "Mmadipetsa-neee, come home. I am waiting for the roots and for the spinach leaves. The sun is touching the mountaintops in the west!"

But his voice is still strong and rough. It does not sound anything like the voice of a mother.

From deep inside the hole, Mmadipetsane answers, "Go to sleep, ledimo. . . . I told you, when Mme speaks it sounds like tiny little grains of sand that would not hurt even a toddler's feet if he were to take his first steps on it."

And when the round, red sun falls behind the mountains in the west, she hears the ledimo walk home. As quietly as a mouse, she slips out of the hole and runs all the way home, to her hae.

That night the ledimo has a brilliant idea. In the dark he

runs over the tufts of grass, like a hare, to the hole where Mmadipetsane always hides from him—from him, the Giant, the Strong One, the Dangerous One. With his huge hands, he fills the hole with stones. . . . At the top, he leaves just enough room for Mmadipetsane's head. Then he goes to sleep.

Early the following morning, the disobedient child is once again dig-digging for roots in the ledimo's field. He leaves his house early to catch her. He shouts: "Heee-laaa, there! What are you dig-digging?"

"I am dig-digging the roots in the ledimo's field."

He is furious and charges at her. She runs away as fast as a field mouse to hide in the hole, but she does not know that it is almost filled with stones.

She tries to slip in safely, like a little mouse, but only her head fits in because of the stones. Her whole body sticks out.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" the ledimo says with a laugh, his rough voice sounding like rocks rolling off the mountain. "Ha-ha-ha-ha!" The ledimo laughs and smacks his lips, with a sound like children diving and splashing in the pool. Then the ledimo, the Giant, the Strong One, the Dangerous One, grabs the child who would not listen to her mother's warning.

He puts her in a bag and Mmadipetsane cries: "Hiiiii-hiiiii, I'll never do it again, until I am old . . . until the day my legs fold under me from old age . . . until my teeth have all fallen out like the leaves . . . until my eyes are blue like those of the white people, I shall never come to dig for roots here. Hiiii . . . please let me go!"

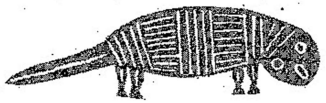
But the ledimo does not listen. He does not even hear her cry. He only hears her teasing . . .

"Sai, sai, sai, kgokgokgo-kgo!"

He knots the bag and throws it over his shoulder and walks to his hae, his home, where he will eat her.

This is the end of the story of a disobedient child and her punishment.

Translator: Leila Latimer



KAMIYO OF THE RIVER

In this story from the Transkei, recorded and retold by Hugh Tracey, a theme is depicted that also appears in various guises in the folklore of other indigenous language groups: a statue or other inanimate object changes into a living being, or vice versa.

Once upon a time there was a man who had plenty of cattle and sheep and goats, but one thing was lacking: he could not find himself a wife.

One day he was walking down the valley by the river when he said to himself, "I really must find myself a wife; or I shall be getting too old. What can I do?"

Then he sat down beside the river, and on the other bank he saw a large tree with beautiful green leaves on it.

"Ah!" he said. "Supposing I take that tree and carve myself a statue of a beautiful young woman."

And that is exactly what he did. He took his ax, and his

adze, and carved from the tree the image of a lovely woman. When he had finished, she looked so beautiful that he breathed into her nostrils, touched her eyes—and at once she came alive.

"Ah!" he said. "Here's my wife at last!"

Then he said to her, "You must never tell anyone where you come from. If anyone should ask you, you must just say, 'I am Kamiyo—Kamiyo of the river.'"

And so he took her home. He gave her the married woman's head-ring to wear, an apron, beautiful clothes and beads—everything she wanted. So they lived very happily together at his home.

Now, one day, some young men came past and saw Kamiyo, and said, "How can such an old man have such a beautiful young wife? It's not right. We will take her away to our own village."

So they caught hold of her and took her away to their village on the other side of the hill.

The husband was very sad that the strong young men had taken away his wife and wondered what he could do.

Then he had an idea. He had two pigeons, and he called them to him and said, "Pigeons, you will fly for me across the hill, to the village where they have taken my wife, and you shall sing her a song I will teach you, and then you will bring back to me her apron."

So the two pigeons learned the song, flew across the hill, landed on the fence around the yard where the girl was held prisoner by the young men, and they sang:

Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
We are sent by your husband.
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
He said we must come here,
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
And bring him your apron, your apron.

Now when the young men heard the pigeons singing, they said, "All right! Give them your apron. We have plenty more. All we want is you."

So she gave the pigeons her apron, and they flew back with it to her husband.

The next day the husband said to the pigeons, "Today you must go and ask for her head-ring."

So they flew over the hill, landed on the fence again, and sang:

Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
We are sent by your husband.
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
He said we must come here,
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
And bring him your head-ring, your head-ring.

And the young men said, "Give them the head-ring. We don't want it; we only want you."

So she gave the pigeons her head-ring, and they flew back again.

Each day the pigeons flew across the hill and asked her for something else, for everything she had, until finally the husband said, "Now, my pigeons, you must go and ask for her life."

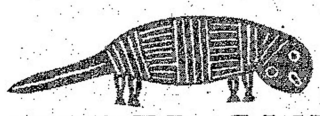
So the pigeons flew back once more. This time they landed on her lap as she sat outside the hut, and they sang:

Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
We are sent by your husband.
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
He said we must come here,
Kamiyo, Kamiyo,
And bring him your life, your life.

And as they sang, they both pecked at her eyes, and immediately Kamiyo turned back into a statue.

First her feet fell away, and then her legs; then her arms fell away, and then her head; and last of all, her body rolled slowly down, down the slope, all the way down to the river.

And the moment it touched the water, she turned back into a tree, and put out green leaves again, and that is where Kamiyo has been ever since, to this day.



SPIDER AND THE CROWS

The spider plays a dramatic role in many African stories. He is often exceptionally resourceful—as is evident in this Nigerian folktale. In the stories of the Ashanti he is known as Kwaku Anansi.

Long ago there was a great famine in a certain land and no one had anything to eat; no one, that is, except the crows. Every day they flew a great distance to pick figs from a tree that stood in the middle of a wide river. Then they brought the fruit home to eat.

When Spider heard about this, he immediately thought of an ingenious plan. He smeared his hindquarters with beeswax, took a potsherd and went to the crows on the pretext of borrowing a burning coal.

The crows were busy eating when he arrived and all around them on the ground lay figs.

"Morning, dear friends," said Spider, sitting down care-

fully on one of the delicious figs. "Could you give me a burning coal?"

Taking the burning coal, Spider thanked the crows and walked away with the fig firmly attached to his sticky hindquarters.

The crows did not suspect anything because the cunning thief, pretending to be courteous, walked backward as he left them.

At home, Spider extinguished the burning coal and quickly went back to the crows to ask for more fire. This time Spider chose the largest and ripest fig and, after some time, walked away cheekily with his spoils.

And then he did it a third time. But now the birds were beginning to get suspicious. "Why do you keep coming to get a burning coal from us?" they asked.

"By the time I get home, the coal is burned out. This happens every time," answered Spider.

"You are lying!" said the oldest crow. "I'm sure you put it out so that you have an excuse to return here again. You are just after our food, you sly creature!"

Spider began to cry bitterly. "Oh, no! That's not true! The coal burned itself out. Oh! Ever since my parents died, life has been difficult for me. When they were still alive, my parents assured me that if ever I needed anything I should ask their friends, the crows. Yes, that's just what they said. And now, look how you treat me," he sobbed.

"Oh, stop crying now!" said the oldest crow, picking up a

fig. "Take this and go home. If you come back again tomorrow morning at daybreak, we'll take you to the fig tree."

"Thank you kindly, dear friends," said Spider and ran home as fast as his legs could carry him.

That night, just as the crows were dozing off, Spider took a bundle of straw and made a large fire near the birds' nest.

"It's morning! It's morning!" called Spider as the flames rose high in the sky. "Just look how red the sun has made the eastern sky."

But the oldest crow answered, "No, Spider, you made a fire. Wait until you hear the cock crow."

Spider crept into the henhouse and disturbed the fowls until the hens began to cackle and the large cock crowed.

"Wake up! It's morning!" he called out.

"Trickster! *You* have woken the fowls, Spider!" answered the oldest crow. "Come, let us rather wait until we hear the first call to prayer."

"Allah is great! Allah is great!" called Spider from behind a bush.

But the oldest crow said, "No, I recognize that voice. It's you who called, Spider. Go home and stay there! I'll call you when the sun rises."

All Spider could do was wait. He went home and fell asleep.

Eventually, when it began to get light, the crows woke him and each crow gave him a feather.

With his borrowed feathers, Spider flew with the crows to

the fig tree in the middle of the wide river. But every time one of the crows wanted to pick a fig he shrieked, "No, you can't! I saw it first! It's mine!"

And then he would take the fig and put it in his bag. Things continued in this way until there was no fruit left on the tree. Spider picked all the figs for himself and the crows got none.

"Now I know that you really are a trickster!" said the oldest crow. Angrily, the crows snatched back the feathers that they had lent him and flew away, leaving him alone.

And there Spider stayed, all alone in the fig tree, completely surrounded by water. And for the first time in his life, he didn't know what to do.

Later when darkness descended, he began to cry.

"If I don't want to stay here in the tree for the rest of my life, I'll just have to jump into the air like the crows," Spider said to himself at last.

He took a deep breath and . . . *plop!* He fell into the water right among the crocodiles!

"And what do we have here?" asked an old crocodile. "Can we eat it?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Spider answered quickly and he began to sob. "I'm one of you. Don't you know that everyone has been searching for me for years? I ran away in the days of your grandfathers, when I was very small. And no one has ever found me. You are the first of my family members I've met."

Spider cried so hard that the tears splashed on the

ground. The crocodiles themselves cried crocodile tears. "You poor thing!" they cried, sniffing loudly. "Don't worry, you can stay here with us, in the hole on the bank where we lay our eggs."

But one of the crocodiles was suspicious and examined Spider very carefully. "We must first make sure that he really is one of us," he thought.

"Come, let's give the stranger a little mud soup," he said quietly to another crocodile. "If he drinks it, then we'll know he speaks the truth. If he doesn't want it, we'll know that he tells lies and he is definitely not one of us."

And so it was done.

When Spider saw the gourd of mud soup, he pretended that he was very excited. "Where did you find this delicious recipe of my grandmother's?" he asked, pretending to drink the soup. But he quietly dug a hole with his back feet and made a tiny hole in the bottom of the gourd with his front feet.

"That was delicious!" he declared, putting the gourd behind him while the concoction oozed into the ground.

"Well, he's definitely one of us," the crocodiles said to each other when they saw the empty gourd. So they allowed Spider to sleep in the hole together with a group of small crocodiles and a hundred and one crocodile eggs.

Before Spider crept in, he said, "Remember now, children, if you hear a *plop* in the night, don't be afraid. It will just be me burping as a result of your mother's delicious mud soup."

When all the crocodiles were asleep, Spider took an egg and threw it into the fire.

Plop! The egg burst open.

"That's the strange grandfather-uncle of ours burping," said the little crocodiles to each other.

And the large crocodiles who overheard them said, "Quiet, children, one mustn't speak about family like that!"

But Spider said, "Leave them alone. They are my grandchildren. They can say what they like."

So he baked the eggs in the fire, one after the other, and ate every single one. All through the night the crocodiles heard *plop* every now and then. And every time someone said, "It's just our strange grandfather-uncle who is burping."

By morning, there was only one egg left.

When the adult crocodiles asked the young ones to turn the eggs, Spider said quickly, "Don't worry, I've done it already."

Then the crocodiles suggested that the eggs be counted.

"I'll bring them out one at a time for you," said Spider.

He brought the egg out of the hole, put it in front of the crocodiles, and the crocodiles made a mark on it.

Spider disappeared into the hole again, licked off the mark, and brought it back. Again the crocodiles marked the egg.

And so he carried the same egg back and forth.

"Two . . . three . . . four . . ." the crocodiles counted the eggs until they reached one hundred and one.

"All of our eggs are still there," they said every day, entirely satisfied.

"I'm so glad I have found my blood relatives again," said Spider one day. "But I want to go and fetch my wife and children, so that we can all be together."

"Go and do so," said the crocodiles. "But come back quickly so that you can play with us again and help us count the eggs."

"Of course," said Spider, the trickster. "It's a great game, isn't it? If you help me to cross the river, I'll come back very soon."

The crocodiles put him in a canoe, and two of them rowed him away.

But one of the pair, who thought further than his long snout, did not trust the situation. When they were in the middle of the river, he turned around and said, "Wait a minute. I'm coming back now. I just want to go and check the eggs."

And thus the crocodiles discovered the one marked egg.

"Such a trickster!" they screamed. "Bring him back immediately! He is not one of us!" they shouted across the river.

But the crocodile who was rowing the canoe was a bit deaf.

"Listen!" Spider said to the rower. "They say you must hurry. It's nearly high tide," and he spurred the crocodile on until he was safely on the other side. And so he got clean away.

Translator: Dianne Stewart