

3 AFRICAN FOLK TALES



THE MAN WHO NEVER LIED

Once upon a time there lived a very wise man who never, ever lied. His name was Mamad. Mamad was famous all over the land, far and wide, for his reputation of always telling the truth.

The king heard about Mamad and ordered his subjects to bring him to the palace. He looked at the wise man and asked:

"Mamad, is it true, that you have never lied?"

"It's true."

"And you will never lie in your life?"

"I will never lie in my life."

"Okay, tell the truth, but be careful! Lies are cunning! They get on your tongue easily."

Several days passed and the king called Mamad once again. The king was determined to trick Mamad into lying. With a big crowd gathered all around, the king talked with Mamad as he prepared to go hunting. With one foot in his horse's stirrup, he ordered Mamad:

"Go to my summer palace and tell the queen I will be with her for lunch. Tell her to prepare a big feast. You will have lunch with me then."

Mamad bowed down to the king and then set off to find the queen. The king laughed and said:

"We won't go hunting and now Mamad will lie to the queen. Tomorrow we will laugh on his behalf."

But the wise Mamad went to the palace and said:

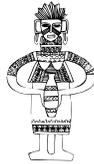
"Maybe you should prepare a big feast for lunch tomorrow, and maybe you shouldn't. Maybe the king will come by noon, and maybe he won't."

"Tell me will he come, or won't he?" asked the queen.

"I don't know whether he got on his horse or whether he put his left foot on the ground after I left."

Everybody waited for the king. He came the next day and said to the queen:
"The wise Mamad, who never lies, lied to you yesterday."

But the queen told him about the words of Mamad. The king realized that the wise man never lies, and says only that, which he saw with his own eyes.



CLEVER JACKAL GETS AWAY

"Hawu, hawu, hawu, my children," Gogo began one evening. "You know, cleverness is a very important thing to own! Why, cleverness has helped Nogwaja out of the cooking pot more than once!"

"The Jackal is also a clever animal, isn't he, Gogo?" asked little Siphon (see' poh), who was quite proud that his nickname was Mpungushe (mpoo-ngoo'-shay = "jackal"). Gogo, in fact, had given him that name because of the loud howl he had made as a baby. Siphon liked to think it was because he was quick and agile as the Jackal.

Gogo laughed and looked at the child at her feet. "Yes, my boy! You are right! Jackal is a very clever animal. Sometimes too clever for his own good!"

"I remember how he helped Jabu the herdboys by tricking Bhubesi back into the snare. Tell us another tale about Jackal, Gogo!" begged Siphon.

"Yes, Gogo," her other grandchildren chorused. "Please tell us...."

"Alright, my children. But listen and learn!" Gogo settled her round self down more comfortably upon the tree stump. "Kwasuka sukela . . ."

One day long ago, Jackal was trotting through a narrow, rocky pass. As he often did, he kept his nose to the ground as he ambled along, to catch the odd scent. "Never know when I'll happen upon my next meal," he thought to himself, although it was highly unlikely that he would find a rat out in the midday heat. But perhaps he could catch a lizard or two.

Suddenly he was aware of a movement ahead of him in the pass. "Oh, no!" Jackal moaned and stopped dead-still in his tracks. Lion was coming toward him. Realising that he was too near to escape, Jackal was filled with fear. He had played so many tricks on the great Bhubesi in the past, he was sure that lion would take this opportunity to get his revenge. In a flash Jackal thought of a plan.

"Help! Help!" cried Jackal. He cowered down on the cliff path, looking above at the rocks.

Lion stopped short in surprise.

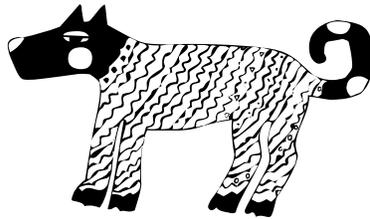
"Help!" Jackal howled, using the fear he felt in the middle of his chest to accentuate his cry. Jackal glanced up at Bhubesi. "Oh, great Nkosi! Help! There is no time to lose! See those

great rocks above us? They are about to fall! We shall both be crushed to death!!!! Oh, mighty Lion, do something! Save us!" And Jackal cowered even lower, his paws covering his head.

Lion looked up, most alarmed. Before he even had a chance to think, Jackal was begging him to use his strength to hold up the overhanging rock. So Lion put his brawny shoulder to the rock and heaved.

"Oh, thank you, great King!" yelled Jackal. "I will quickly fetch that log over there to prop under the rock, and we will both be saved!" With that Jackal bounded out of sight.

Lion was left all alone to struggle under the weight of the unmoving rock. How long he remained there before he realized that it was another trick, we will never know. But this much we do know: Jackal continued to live by his wits!



THE MONKEY'S FIDDLE

Hunger and want forced Monkey one day to forsake his land and to seek elsewhere among strangers for much-needed work. Bulbs, earth beans, scorpions, insects, and such things were completely exhausted in his own land. But fortunately he received, for the time being, shelter with a great uncle of his, Orang Outang, who lived in another part of the country.

When he had worked for quite a while he wanted to return home, and as recompense his great uncle gave him a fiddle and a bow and arrow and told him that with the bow and arrow he could hit and kill anything he desired, and with the fiddle he could force anything to dance.

The first he met upon his return to his own land was Brer Wolf. This old fellow told him all the news and also that he had since early morning been attempting to stalk a deer, but all in vain.

Then Monkey laid before him all the wonders of the bow and arrow that he carried on his back and assured him if he could but see the deer he would bring it down for him. When Wolf showed him the deer, Monkey was ready and down fell the deer.

They made a good meal together, but instead of Wolf being thankful, jealousy overmastered him and he begged for the bow and arrow. When Monkey refused to give it to him, he thereupon began to threaten him with his greater strength, and so when Jackal passed by, Wolf told him that Monkey had stolen his bow and arrow. After Jackal had heard both of them, he declared himself unqualified to settle the case alone, and he proposed that they bring the matter to the court of Lion, Tiger, and the other animals. In the meantime he declared he would take possession of what had been the cause of their quarrel, so that it would be safe, as he said. But he immediately brought to earth all that was eatable, so there was a long time of slaughter before Monkey and Wolf agreed to have the affair in court.

Monkey's evidence was weak, and to make it worse, Jackal's testimony was against him. Jackal thought that in this way it would be easier to obtain the bow and arrow from Wolf for himself.

And so fell the sentence against Monkey. Theft was looked upon as a great wrong; he must hang.

The fiddle was still at his side, and he received as a last favor from the court the right to play a tune on it.

He was a master player of his time, and in addition to this came the wonderful power of his charmed fiddle. Thus, when he struck the first note of "Cockcrow" upon it, the court began at once to show an unusual and spontaneous liveliness, and before he came to the first waltzing turn of the old tune the whole court was dancing like a whirlwind.

Over and over, quicker and quicker, sounded the tune of "Cockcrow" on the charmed fiddle, until some of the dancers, exhausted, fell down, although still keeping their feet in motion. But Monkey, musician as he was, heard and saw nothing of what had happened around him. With his head placed lovingly against the instrument, and his eyes half closed, he played on, keeping time ever with his foot.

Wolf was the first to cry out in pleading tones breathlessly, "Please stop, Cousin Monkey! For love's sake, please stop!"

But Monkey did not even hear him. Over and over sounded the resistless waltz of "Cockcrow."

After a while Lion showed signs of fatigue, and when he had gone the round once more with his young lion wife, he growled as he passed Monkey, "My whole kingdom is yours, ape, if you just stop playing."

"I do not want it," answered Monkey, "but withdraw the sentence and give me my bow and arrow, and you, Wolf, acknowledge that you stole it from me."

"I acknowledge, I acknowledge!" cried Wolf, while Lion cried, at the same instant, that he withdrew the sentence.

Monkey gave them just a few more turns of the "Cockcrow," gathered up his bow and arrow, and seated himself high up in the nearest camel thorn tree.

The court and other animals were so afraid that he might begin again that they hastily disbanded to new parts of the world.

