



A Home for All – The Story of Hyena

Luo People of Kenya and Tanzania

It all started when Hyena got lost in thoughts not only about being alone, but even being lonely. He was loitering in the mopane wood at the edge of the savanna plain. He wanted to laugh, but he was not in the mood. Even a juicy chunk of someone else's prey did not make him feel better. Suddenly, he got the feeling he was being watched. Goodness, Lion was observing him from a jumping distance. To avoid an uncomfortable confrontation, he instantly conceived a rescue plan.

'Lord Lion, every day I feel alone. At daybreak, after hunting is done, I return to nothing. It is a very unpleasant lack of cosiness, because I am supposed to be a partner of a pack.'

'Your lack of a packacity is caused by the fact you always giggle at your own jokes. Nasty habit.'

'Excuse me, giggling is more civilized than roaring, I assume? However, lord Lion, what do you think about sharing a dwelling? During daytime both of us need our sleep and at night we'll take care to avoid each other's company. At most, I shall clean up the scraps of your meals.'

'Do you have something in mind? A hole? A cave? A tree?'

'I'm going to look for something. If you can wait for a day, I'll find something.'

'But two things, Hyena, I want a spacious place to sleep where I won't be disturbed. When I come home from the hunt, I demand rest. And

secondly, I absolutely can't stand being woken up from my sleep. Then I go mad, and I can't be held responsible for the consequences.'

'Reasonable, lord, hihhi, we'll get it done.'

And Hyena hopped away into the bush. He was thinking of an ant hill whose inhabitants had disappeared. Well, when the queen has flown away, her people will leave too. The termites had built their mound around the trunk of a tree. Nice place and spacious enough.

Suddenly Leopard appeared out of nowhere. Hyena just managed to jump sideways.

'Stop it, Leopard. I'm not here to bother you. On the contrary. May I ask you something?'

Leopard growled deep in his throat.

'Don't look at me, Hyena. I cannot stand anyone staring at me, it makes me very aggressive.'

'All right, take it easy please,' Hyena said, humbly looking away from Leopard.

'What did you want to ask?'

'How would you like to live in a den with me and Lord Lion? For comfort and cosiness. No longer we'll be alone during the day, and we can go to sleep peacefully, after we have shared the hunting stories of the night. I have a place in mind which is spacious and very suitable for us. What do you think?'

Leopard was lost in thoughts. After a long while he replied.

'I could try it, but I have two conditions. First of all, no one should look me in the eye. You know why. And secondly, I don't want to sleep in a den, but in a tall tree nearby so I can keep an eye on things.'

'No problem, Leopard, I let you know when I have found the perfect place.'

And onward, Hyena hopped to find a den. After a while he found it in the next bush: a deserted ant hill near a baobab tree. As he stepped

inside, Snake darted out from under the carpet of fallen leaves. Hyena jumped in fright.

‘Get out of my lair, Hyena. I already live here.’

‘Why, how much space do you really need, Snake?’

‘I don’t care, enough to stretch out and take an occasional nap.’

‘How would you like it when Lion, Leopard and I came to live with you? Leopard will sleep outside on one of the branches.’ proposed Hyena.

Snake didn’t have to think for a long time, for he was flexible in his views.

‘No better protection against snake eaters. I agree there is ample space, especially because Leopard will sleep in the tree outside. We can try it for social reasons, I suppose. Why should everyone sleep alone? Maybe we can even help each other. However, I do have two preconditions,’ he said. ‘I always want to keep my safe place under the leaves over there. And no one should step on me when I lay there, because then I’ll be really poisonous. My beautiful skin is too precious to me.’

A few days later, Lion, Snake, Hyena and Leopard moved into the den together. They acknowledged each other’s conditions and listened carefully to each other’s wishes. They all agreed they would try. After all, it should be possible, because they were not each other’s favorite prey.

Leopard climbed the tall tree rooting in the den and watched the distant perimeter. Snake nestled under a thick layer of leaves, in the same room as Lion.

‘I don’t need much,’ said Snake, ‘but I am proud of my skin. So, you should keep that in mind, Lion, if you’re going to sleep here.’

Of course, Lion didn’t mind.

Hyena had indicated he would not be home most of the time.

‘I like to roam, you know it. So don’t worry if I won’t be in our house often.’

He had told the other animals not to watch him or hold him accountable for anything.

‘Just let me do my thing, then I won’t bother you the least.’

Thus, the animals lived in apparent harmony, each in their own way, and after a while they got used to each other’s differences. Though they failed to utilize differences as possibilities. Sometimes you have to respect differences and leave it at that.

One morning, Hyena came home tired from a long wandering. It was already getting light. Up in the tree, Leopard was watching. With his sensitive eyes he saw Hyena coming from afar. Approaching in the twilight, Hyena saw Leopard was at home.

‘What?! Are you watching me?’ Hyena snapped, looking Leopard straight in the eye. ‘I told you I don’t want you to watch me, I come and go as I please.’

‘You look into my eyes, into my sensitive eyes,’ Leopard burst out, ‘I told you that’s the one thing you should never do to me!’

A fierce altercation ensued, Hyena having the biggest mouth. They started fighting each other. Enraged, they rolled into the den, growling and biting. The quarrel aroused Lion, who got up in rage, roaring furiously at Leopard and Hyena. In the following confusion, Leopard seized his chance and bit Hyena on the neck. The blood spurted in all directions and Hyena slumped to his feet.

Lion roared in anger.

‘All I ever asked you was not to make noise in this dwelling! And now you’re waking me up with your senseless quarrel.’

He clawed furiously at Leopard and hit him on the head with a fatal blow. Leopard spun on his axis, faltered for a moment, then fell dead against Lion.

Lion recoiled and stepped on the foliage in the corner without thinking. Snake, who had already braced himself against all the noise, reacted immediately. Before Lion realized what was happening, Snake appeared between the leaves right beneath him.

‘Why are you standing on my beautiful skin, you brute!’ he said venomously.

In sheer rage, Snake bit Lion in the hind leg, leaving him barely enough time to realize he was dead. He collapsed upon Snake, who was completely buried under his weight. Snake couldn't breathe anymore. That's how they all came to an end, together forever alone. □

As told by Simon, in Kenya, recorded and adapted by Dick de Groot (2022).

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Comments

Dick de Groot, a Dutch social geographer and writer, has been teacher, headteacher and education consultant since 1975 in different countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa. As the adapter of this story, Dick draws on his memories to explain:

This story was told during a storytelling session in Ukunda, Kwale, Kenya. The storyteller was Simon. Given the context of the story could originate from Western Kenya, because it is a story of animals which live in that area. It could be told because nomadic people have their doubts about living peacefully together with other peoples. For nomads it is difficult to settle anyway. They travel with their cattle, trying to find food. Land is not their interest, they consider land to be of the earth, not to be owned by men. Therefore, I should suggest the story is from a Nilotic people, like the Luo. (Groot, 2022)

The Luo People are distributed in western Kenya and the Mara Region of northern Tanzania and their population is estimated at over 10 million. They appear to be a breakaway branch of the Luo Peoples of Uganda who migrated west in different waves between the 15th and 20th centuries.

Sources

Direct oral sources.

Groot, D. de (2022 Sep. 2). Remarks 'Story of Ubuntu'. Personal email.

In addition, you have other versions here:

Laird, E. (sf). The Clever Fox. In *Ethiopian English Readers*. Available on <https://www.ethiopianenglishreaders.com/15-stories/afar/302-the-clever-fox>

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead.- The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: The Global Situation.- Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Principle 16b: Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.

The Way Forward: Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals.