

**UniqueID:** 202103271725

**Author:** S. W. Koelle

**Title:** [African Native Literature, or: Proverbs, Tales, Fables, and Historical Fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu Language](#)

**Published:** 1854

**Internet Archive:** [Always Available.](#)

**Description:**

## 8. A Weasel and his Wife

The wife of a weasel bore a child, and then called her husband and said, "Seek such clothes as I like, and bring them to me."

The husband listened to his wife's word, and said to her, "What kind of clothes dost thou like?"

The wife replied to her husband, "I like the hide of an elephant."

The husband attended to his wife's wish, arose, and went to a fowl, saying, "Sister fowl, listen, and I will tell thee something which my wife told me."

The fowl replied to the weasel, "Tell me what thou hast to say: I will hear."

The weasel said to the fowl, "Sister fowl, yesterday, when my wife had given birth to a child, she said to me that she does not like any kind of clothes, except an elephant's hide: now what shall I do to obtain an elephant's hide so as to give it to her?"

The fowl answered, and said to the weasel, "Stop, and I will teach thee a trick that thou mayest obtain an elephant's hide: go, call the muck-worm, the fowl, the cat, the dog, the hyena, the leopard, the lion, and the elephant, call them all and ask them, saying, 'Be pleased to come: my farm is overgrown with grass,' and when they are come, thou mayest obtain an elephant's hide."

The weasel attended to what the fowl said: he called all whomsoever he liked, and when they were come to him, he asked them, and they agreed to his request and went home.

Next morning the muck-worm arose first, took his hoe and his spear, and went to the farm of the weasel. Then he stuck his spear in the ground, and began to hoe. The weasel was sitting in the midst of his farm, while the muck-worm hoed, and the fowl came.

The fowl having come, she said to the weasel, "Who came before me?"

The weasel replied, "Behold, the muck-worm has come, and is at work."

As soon as the fowl had seen the muck-worm, she took and swallowed it, and then began to work.

When the cat arose and went to the farm, she asked the weasel, "Brother weasel, who did come before me?"

When the weasel replied, "The muck-worm came," the cat asked, "Where is the muck-worm?" and on being told that the fowl had swallowed it, she asked, "Where is the fowl?"

The answer was, "Yonder the fowl is at work."

The cat went, seized and swallowed the fowl, and then fell to work alone.

The dog arose, and on arriving at the farm, asked the weasel, "Brother weasel, who came before me?"

The weasel replied, "The muck-worm came."

He asked the weasel, "Where is the muck-worm?"

The weasel replied, "The fowl swallowed the muck-worm."

He asked again, "Where is the fowl?"

The answer was, "The cat has swallowed the fowl."

Next question, "Where is the cat?"

Answer, "Behold, here is the cat at work."

The dog took and swallowed the cat, and then began to work alone on the farm.

The hyena arose, and when he came to the farm, asked the weasel, "Who came before me?"

The weasel answered, "The muck-worm came before thee."

He asked again, "Where is the muck-worm?"

"The fowl swallowed the muck-worm."

"Where is the fowl?"

"The cat swallowed the fowl."

"Where is the cat?"

"The dog swallowed the cat."

"Where is the dog?"

The weasel answered to the hyena, "Yonder the dog is at work."

When the hyena saw the dog, he went, seized and swallowed him, and then went, and began to work.

Next the leopard arose, took his hoe, and went to the farm. When he had come and asked the weasel, the weasel said, "The muck-worm came first."

He asked, "Where is the muck-worm?"

"The fowl swallowed it."

"Where is the fowl?"

"The cat swallowed it."

"Where is the cat?"

"The dog swallowed it."

"Where is the dog?"

"The hyena swallowed it."

"Where is the hyena?"

"Yonder he is at work."

As soon as the leopard saw the hyena, he went, seized, killed, and ate it, and then began to work.

Next the lion arose, took his hoe and went to the farm. When he came, and saw the weasel sitting, he asked him, "Brother weasel, who came first, before me?"

The weasel replied, "The muck-worm came."

He asked again, "Where is the muck-worm?"

"The fowl swallowed it."

"Where is the fowl?"

"The cat swallowed it."

"Where is the cat?"

"The dog swallowed it."

"Where is the dog?"

"The hyena swallowed it."

"Where is the hyena?"

"The leopard swallowed it."

"Where is the leopard?"

The weasel answered to the lion, "Yonder the leopard is at work."

When the lion looked before him, he saw the leopard at work. Then he went, seized the leopard, and, after some wrestling, killed him, upon which he went and began to work.

Next the elephant arose, took his hoe, and went to the farm. — They did not know that the weasel was more cunning than all of them. — When the elephant asked the weasel, "Brother weasel, who came before me?" the weasel replied, "The muck-worm came."

He asked again, "Where is the muck- worm?"

"The fowl swallowed it."

"Where is the fowl?"

"The cat swallowed it"

"Where is the cat?"

"The dog swallowed it."

"Where is the dog?"

"The hyena swallowed it."

"Where is the hyena?"

"The leopard swallowed it."

"Where is the leopard?"

"The lion swallowed it."

"Where is the lion?"

The weasel replied to the elephant, "The lion is working yonder."

The elephant listened to what the weasel said, but did not know that the weasel was cunning. The weasel had made a trap-hole, fastened a pointed pole in it, shut it with a mat, and covered it with earth. The elephant did not see it, so when he went and attacked the lion, and they fought and wrestled, they came near the trap-hole, and the elephant fell in. When he had fallen in, the lion went back to his forest.

Then the weasel arose, and when he came to the trap-hole, he saw the elephant in it. As soon as he saw this, he fetched his knife, flayed the elephant's skin, and brought it to his wife, saying, "As thou saidst to me that thou didst not like any clothes, except an elephant's hide, today I bring thee, by the help of God, what thy soul likes: behold, here it is."

The wife arose, took the hide from her husband, and also took her children, and covered them with the elephant's hide. At that time was this done by the weasel and his wife, the weasel's wife had not known that her husband was more subtle than all the beasts of the earth, nor that he was more subtle than herself, but then she knew that her husband was most subtle.

Now it is said of any one who is observed to be subtle: "This man is as subtle as a weasel." — This is finished.