

Story Title: A Tug-of-War

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Story Notes from Author (Nassau): Ekaga is Tortoise; Ngubu is Hippopotamus; and Njagu is Elephant. African natives are sensitive about questions of equality and seniority. A certain term, "Mwera" (chum) may be addressed to other than an equal only at risk of a quarrel. Observe the preposterous size of Elephant's trunk! But everything, to the native African mind, was enormous in the pre-historic times.

A TUG-OF-WAR

Leopard was dead, after the accusation against him by Tortoise for killing the great Goat. The children of Leopard were still young; they had not grown to take their father's power and place. And Tortoise considered himself now a

great personage. He said to people, "We three who are left — I and Njagu and Ngubu, are of equal power; we eat at the same table, and have the same authority."

Every day he made these boasts; and people went to Elephant and Hippopotamus, reporting, "So-and-so says Ekaga."

Elephant and Hippopotamus laughed, and disregarded the report, and said, "That's nothing; he's only to be despised." One day Hippopotamus met Elephant in the forest; salutations were made, "Mbolo!" "Ai, mbolo!" each to the other.

Hippopotamus asked Elephant about a new boast that Tortoise had been making. "Have you, or have you not heard?"

Elephant answered, "Yes, I have heard. But I look on it with contempt. For, I am Njagu. I am big. My foot is as big as Ekaga's body. And he says he is equal to me! But I have not spoken of the matter, and will not speak, unless I hear Ekaga himself make his boast. And then I shall know what I will do. "

And Hippopotamus also said, "I am doing so too, in silence. I wait to hear Ekaga myself. "

Tortoise heard of what Elephant and Hippopotamus had been threatening, and he asked his informant just the exact words that they had used, "They said that they

waited to hear you dare to speak to them; and that, in the meanwhile, they despised you."

Tortoise asked, "So! They despise me, do they?"

"Yes," was the reply.

Then he said, "So! Indeed, I will go to them. " He told his wife, "Give me my coat to cover my body." He dressed; and started to the forest.

He found Elephant lying down; his trunk was eight miles long; his ears as big as a house, and his four feet beyond measure.

Tortoise audaciously called to him, "Mwera! I have come! You don't rise to salute me? Mwera has come!"

Elephant looked, rose up and stared at Tortoise, and indignantly asked, "Ekaga! Whom do you call 'Mwera'?"

Tortoise replied, "You! I call you 'Mwera.' Are you not, Njagu?"

Elephant, with great wrath, asked, "Ekaga! I have heard you said certain words. It is true that you said them?"

Tortoise answered, "Njagu, don't get angry! Wait, let us first have a conversation." Then he said to Elephant, "I did call you, just now, 'Mwera'; but you, Njagu, why do you condemn me? You think that, because you are of great expanse of flesh, you can surpass Ekaga, just because I am small? Let us have a test. Tomorrow, sometime in the morning, we will have a lure-lure (tug-of-war)."

Said Elephant, "Of what use? I can mash you with one foot."

Tortoise said, "Be patient. At least try the test."

So, Elephant, unwilling, consented.

Tortoise added, "But when we tug, if one overpulls the other, he shall be considered the greater; but if neither, then we are Mwera."

Then Tortoise went to the forest, and cut a very long vine, and coming back to Elephant, said, "This end is yours. I go off into the forest with my end to a certain spot, and tomorrow I return to that spot; and we will have our tug, and neither of us will stop to eat or sleep until either you pull me over or the vine breaks."

Tortoise went far off with his end of the vine to the town of Hippopotamus, and hid the vine's end at the outskirts of the town. He went to Hippopotamus and found him bathing, and going ashore, back and forth, to and from the water. Tortoise shouted to him, "Mwera! I have come! You! Come ashore! I am visiting you!"

Hippopotamus came bellowing in great wrath with wide open jaws, ready to fight, and said, "I will fight you today! For whom do you call 'Mwera'?"

Tortoise replied, "Why, you! I do not fear your size. Our hearts are the same. But, don't fight yet! Let us first talk."

Hippopotamus grunted, and sat down; and Tortoise said, "I, Ekaga, I say that you and I and Njagu are equal; we are

Mwera. Even though you are great and I small, I don't care. But if you doubt me, let us have a trial. Tomorrow morning let us have a lure-lure. He who shall overcome, shall be the superior. But if neither is found superior, then we are equals."

Hippopotamus exclaimed that the plan was absurd, but finally he consented.

Tortoise then stood up, and went out, and got his end of the vine, and brought it to Hippopotamus, and said, "This end is yours. And I now go. Tomorrow, when you feel the vine shaken, know that I am ready at the other end, and then you begin, and we will not stop to eat or sleep until this test is ended."

Hippopotamus then went to the forest to gather leaves of Medicine with which to strengthen his body. And Elephant, at the other end, was doing the same, making medicine to give himself strength, and at night they were both asleep. In the morning, Tortoise went to the middle of the vine, where at its half-way he had made on the ground a mark, and he shook it towards one end, and then towards the other. Elephant caught his end, as he saw it shake, and Hippopotamus did the same at his end.

"Orindi went back and forth" (a proverb of a fish of that name that swims in that way), Elephant and Hippopotamus alternately pulling.

"Nkendinli was born of his father and mother " (a proverb, meaning distinctions in individualities), each one, Hippopotamus and Elephant, doing in his own way.

Tortoise smiled at his arrangement with each that, in the tug, if one overcame, it would be proved by his dragging the other; but, if neither overcame, they were not to cease until the vine broke.

Elephant holding the vine taut, and Hippopotamus also holding it taut, Tortoise was laughing in his heart as he watched the quivering vine.

He went away to seek for food, leaving those two at their tug, in hunger. He went off into the forest and found his usual food: mushrooms. He ate his belly full, and then took his drink, and then went to his town to sleep.

He rose in late afternoon, and said to himself, "I'll go and see about the tug, whether those fools are still pulling."

When he went there, the vine was still stretched taut, and he thought, "Asai! Shame! Let them die with hunger!"

He sat there, the vine trembling with tensivity, and he in his heart mocking the two tired beasts. The one drew the other toward himself, and then, a slight gain brought the mark back, but neither was overcoming.

At last Tortoise nicked the vine with his knife; the vine parted and, at their ends, Elephant and Hippopotamus fell violently back onto the ground.

Tortoise said to himself, "So! that's done! Now I go to Elephant with one end of the broken vine; tomorrow to Hippopotamus." He went and came on to Elephant, and found him looking dolefully, and bathing his leg with medicine; and he said, "Mwera! How do you feel? Do you consent that we are Mwera?"

Elephant admitted, "Ekaga, I did not know you were so strong! When the vine broke, I fell over and hurt my leg. Yes, we are really equal. Really! Strength is not because the body is large. I despised you because your body was small. But actually, we are equal in strength!"

So they ate and drank and played as chums; and Tortoise returned to his town.

Early the next morning, with the other end of the broken vine, he went to visit Hippopotamus, who looked sick and was rubbing his head; and he asked, "Ngubu! How do you feel, Mwera?"

Hippopotamus answered, "Really! Ekaga! So we are equals! I, Ngubu, so great! And you, Ekaga, so small! We pulled and pulled. I could not surpass you, nor you me. And when the vine broke, I fell and hurt my head. So, indeed strength has no greatness of body."

Tortoise and Hippopotamus ate and drank and played, and Tortoise returned to his town.

After that, whenever they three and others met to talk in palaver (council) the three sat together on the highest seats. Were they equal? Yes, they were equal.