



Moonhag's Encounter with the
MONSTER MONKEY

Once upon a time in the bush, there lived a beautiful hyena female called Mpisa, who had just given birth to her first litter of cubs. Her clan had carefully chosen a good den. It was a large burrow underneath a tall ant hill. Every day the clan would bring food for the new mother, so that she could look after her little ones while they were very small.

After a few months, the clan leader, whose name was Lady Crocuta, wanted Mpisa to come out on the daily hunt again. The cubs were toddling about now, and could safely be left with auntie Moonhag. Moonhag was getting old; her night-sight was not as good as it once was, and she could no longer keep up with the rest of the clan when they were hunting or foraging. Often they would stay out all night, only coming back the next day. So Lady Crocuta decided that old Moonhag should stay at home in the den and look after the young ones.

There were three cubs in the litter, and their names were Balani, Bamani and Bazi. Balani and Bamani were girl cubs, and Bazi was the only boy. Auntie Moonhag soon found out that Bazi was a bit of a pawful. He was large for his age, strong and quite adventurous.

Every day, auntie Moonhag would wait for mid-morning time, which is when things start to quieten down in the bush. Then she would lead the three cubs out of the den. She let them romp around in the sunshine and explore the area all around the ant hill, but they were never allowed to wander off, out of sight.

“The lions will get you,” she would say.

The cubs would play with old bones, pretending to hunt and pounce on them. But a hyena’s favourite game, of course, is Tug o’ War. Balani and Bamani would each grip one end of a bone and pull and pull, giggling in their little high-pitched voices. They didn’t like to play Tug with Bazi, because he was stronger than they were and he always won. So Bazi often had no-one to play with and he had to amuse himself. He would try to catch grasshoppers, or see if he could sneak up on auntie Moonhag without her hearing him. She was a bit deaf, so this was almost too easy.

Bazi had great eyesight and hearing but best of all was his nose, which he used to discover things. The cemented earth walls of the ant hill, the grass, the heaps of dry leaves, and the bark of nearby trees all had a different smell. After a while he could close his eyes, pretend it was night-time, and find his way around using only his nose.

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Of course Bazi, being a hyena, liked really smelly things best. The stinky old bones that lay around, the doggy stench inside the den, other hyenas' bottoms, even auntie Moonhag's foul breath—which to tell the truth, had the strongest pong of all—these things were like delicious perfume to Bazi.

So you can imagine his interest when one day, nose to the ground, he came upon a stink he had never smelt before. What could it be? He looked around but he couldn't see anything unusual. He noticed that auntie Moonhag was dozing with her head on her paws in the shade of a bush nearby. She was practically asleep.

Bazi knew he wasn't supposed to go out of her sight—but Moonhag wasn't watching, and the new smell was so inviting! His sisters had their backs to him. They lay side by side, strengthening their baby teeth on an old, dry piece of horn.

"I think I'll practise my tracking," thought Bazi. "Why not? Lady Crocuta says it's a very important part of hunting." So he put his little black nose down to the ground and tiptoed off, carefully following the faint trail of scent. To Bazi it was like an invisible, smelly ribbon lying along the ground. "I can always follow the trail back again," he thought.

Along he went, under some trees, around a little rock, over a fallen log, and right through a big patch of thorn scrub. The exciting smell was getting stronger, which made the trail easier to follow, and Bazi found he could go faster. On and on he went, until suddenly, he found the end of the trail.

His nose touched a large, bright green bug. The bug immediately lifted its back end, and "Pfft!" before he could blink, Bazi felt the most awful, stinging feeling inside his nose. Bazi had found a stinkbug, and it had sprayed something very nasty, right up his nostrils!

"EEEEEEEEuw!" he wailed, pawing his nose frantically, "Oooo-eeee-oy-oy-oooo!" (which in hyena, means, "Ouch").

The bug, which had thought Bazi was going to eat it, scuttled off and hid under a log. The bug wasn't wrong either, because if it hadn't used its very own self-defence spray, Bazi would most probably have gobbled it up.

But now, poor little Bazi sneezed and sneezed, and every sneeze hurt more than the one before. He tried running backwards away from the pain, but that didn't work. He tried rolling on the ground, but the stinging didn't stop. He rubbed his nose in the dirt, but that just made him sneeze even more. So he turned and ran, back to the den, as fast as he could. He wanted auntie Moonhag to lick it better for him.

Bazi soon found that he didn't know which way was home. He would have to find that stinky trail again. He ran around in a big circle, sniffing and sneezing but it was no good—his poor nose wasn't working properly. He sat

down, blinking with confusion and close to tears. How was he going to find his way back to the den?

“Heeee, Hi hi, haha hah!” A merry laugh floated down from above the miserable puppy. Bazi looked up and there, scrambling down a nearby tree, was a little grey shape. It was a young monkey, who came over to Bazi and sat down to stare. “What game are you playing?” asked the monkey, a cheeky grin on its face. “I’ve never seen anyone run backwards in circles before! It looks so funny! Is it difficult?”

Bazi had never in his life been close to any animal except another hyena. He stared back.

“Hello,” he said, politely. Should he sniff this animal’s bottom? That would be the right thing to do. Bazi got to his feet and trotted round behind the monkey. The monkey whirled round and backed off, laughing.

“Oh, so this is how you do it! Round and round in circles backwards! Hee-hee-hee! Look at me!” And the monkey started leaping about like a crazy thing.

Bazi burst into a fit of hyena-style giggling.

The two of them were soon racing about in a wonderful game of tag. The rules were to take it in turn to try and touch the other one’s tail.

It was great fun—but soon they were tired and they flopped to the ground for a rest. Bazi found that his nose had stopped hurting. And he had found someone to play with at last!

“So what’s your name—and what kind of animal are you?” he panted. His long pink tongue lolled out of his mouth as he tried to cool down.

“I am Kubuka, and I’m a vervet monkey. Not just any vervet monkey. I am going to grow up into the cleverest and bravest monkey in the world,” answered Kubuka. “What about you?”

“My name is Bazi, and I’m a hyena. I have two sisters, called Balani and Bamani.” Suddenly he remembered where he was—or wasn’t. “And, um, I think I’m lost.”

Kubuka gasped. Getting lost was the very worst thing a baby animal could do—every creature in the bush knew that.

Bazi told him what had happened.

“I hate stinkbugs, too!” said Kubuka, “I picked one up once, so I know what they can do.”

Bazi looked at his new friend. “Do you know where my den is?” he asked hopefully.

Kubuka didn't know, but he wasn't going to say so, because he was practising to be the cleverest monkey in the world. He scratched his head, hoping this would help an idea to pop out.

"What does your den look like?" he asked, trying to look wise.

"It's underneath a very big ant hill," Bazi told him.

"Hmm. I see. And is your den close to water? Where do you go and drink?" asked the monkey, looking for clues. A small idea was coming.

"Well our clan goes to drink at night, to the river, and that's not too far from the den."

"All right, then," said Kubuka. "I think I can help. But first I have to do something. Wait here a little while." Then he went over to the nearest tree, scampered straight up the trunk and vanished. Bazi looked up. He saw other monkey shapes moving around in the top branches. They must be Kubuka's family, he thought. He felt lonely. He even missed his tiresome little sisters, and dozy old auntie Moonhag. He had to get back before Lady Crocuta and the clan returned, or he'd be in big trouble. His mother would be very upset if she found him missing. Bazi admired and loved his mum and he didn't want to make her worry. He looked around nervously, checking for lions.

Meanwhile Kubuka had climbed right up to the very top of the big tree, disturbing a go-way bird. The bird immediately flew away, shouting,

"Go-waaaay! Go waaaay!"

"Go away yourself, silly bird!" Kubuka shouted back. Now that he was so high up, he could see far in every direction. Soon he saw what he was looking for—the river! It was quite a long way off, and it looked small and thin, between wide, sandy banks. He looked carefully for a tall ant hill sticking up out of the bush. And yes—he saw one right away. But then he saw another and another. Here and there among the trees, were the brown tops of many ant hills. In fact, between Kubuka's tree and the river, there were as many ant hills as the fingers on one hand. Monkeys can't count, so maybe you can figure out how many ant hills Kubuka could see.

But which one was the right ant hill?

Down below, Bazi waited and waited. He wished he could climb a tree like Kubuka. It would be much safer up there, he thought. Here on the ground, all alone, a lion might come along at any moment! Bazi started to look about for somewhere to hide.

Just then, Kubuka came scrambling down to the ground. "Let's go, Bazi!" he smiled, "This way!" And off they went. Bazi followed the little grey vervet, who walked on all fours, with his long, slim tail in the air. Bazi

put his short, hairy tail in the air, too, because he was happy to be going home.

Soon they came to a large ant hill.

“Here we are!” cried Bazi. But it was not the one. As they came up to the tall brown hill, a mongoose popped its head out of a hole.

“What do you want?” squeaked the mongoose. “This is my ant hill. There are no hyenas here. Go away!”

So Kubuka and Bazi kept going towards the river.

After a while, they saw another ant hill. This one looked very like the first one, but it was bigger.

“Here it is!”, cried Bazi. But when they got to the ant hill, they found that it was not the one. There was a deep burrow, and inside the burrow lived a pair of large, prickly porcupines!

“Go away!” grunted the father porcupine, rattling his black-and-white quills fiercely. “This is my ant hill. There are no hyenas here. Go away!”

So Kubuka and Bazi went on, with their tails in the air.

“Here’s another ant hill,” said Kubuka, “I wonder who lives in this one?” “I hope it is auntie Moonhag,” replied Bazi. “And watch out, because she might be very angry.”

So they walked quietly and carefully up to the next big ant hill. But it was not the one. This time, Kubuka climbed up to the top of the hill, to see the way ahead.

As he sat on the top, a voice right behind him said, “SSssss. Excussse me!” And there was a big brown snake. “SSssss! What do you want?” hissed the snake. “Thiss iss my ant hill, so sscram!” Kubuka was afraid of snakes, and he got such a fright that he jumped down in one great leap.

And Kubuka and Bazi went on, with their tails not so high in the air.

Soon, they saw another ant hill. This one was not very high, and it had a big hole in it where an aardvark had been digging for its favourite food—ants.

Bazi said, “Oh dear. This is not the one.”

But Kubuka wanted to see what sort of animal was using this place as a home. He went closer and called,

“Hello! Who lives here?”

There was a snort and a grunt and a big head popped out of the hole. The head was wide and hairy and lumpy. It had a pair of shiny brown eyes at the top and sharp white tusks at the bottom. It was a warthog.

“Ug?” snorted the warthog.

“Good day, Mr. Warthog,” said Kubuka politely. “We are looking for Bazi’s den. Do you know where it is?”

“Ug-ug, den be down by de river,” said the warthog, “Over dat way. Go on de bush path. Ug.” And he backed down into his hole. He didn’t much like hyenas.

A bush path? Kubuka looked around. And yes, there was a thin, dusty path, made by the feet of many different animals as they went down to the river to drink each day.

“Aha!” cried Kubuka, “Now we are close! Let’s follow the path and see!”

So he and Bazi went on, with their tails high in the air.

The path led them down a slope and up the other side. When they got to the top, they could see the sand banks of the river, not very far away. They looked around for an ant hill, but they could not see one.

Bazi put his tail down. “Oh dear,” he said sadly, “What shall we do now? Are we lost?”

Kubuka, who was still practising to be a brave and clever monkey, said, “You’re only lost if you stop looking.” And he stood up tall on his back legs, to see what he could see. Bazi tried to stand on his back legs too, but he could not.

“There’s a big lump just over there,” said Kubuka, “On the other side of those bushes. Maybe that’s your ant hill.”

So the two little friends left the path and ran to the big lump. They climbed onto a fallen tree trunk and ran up to the top of the lump. Suddenly, they felt the lump move under their feet.

“RRrrrrrr!” they heard a rumbling sound and to their horror, a large brown eye flicked open and fixed on them. They were standing on top of an elephant!

The elephant had been lying down, fast asleep and dreaming happily of a tree full of marula fruits. Kubuka and Bazi had run right up its leg, thinking it was just a log. But when the elephant suddenly woke to find a hyena staring into his face, he got such a fright he jumped to his feet, shook his great head and ran off, squealing!

Kubuka and Bazi fell to the ground in a heap.

Bazi just stared, while Kubuka ran after the elephant, shouting, “Sorry! We’re sorry!” But the elephant didn’t stop. It crashed off into the bush and disappeared.

Bazi caught up with Kubuka and they looked at each other in amazement—then they both burst out laughing.

“Haa ha, haahh! Can you believe that? We actually scared an ELEPHANT!” giggled Bazi.

“Eee, hee hee hee!” squealed Kubuka, “A HUGE fright for a HUGE elephant!”

The two little animals thought this was so funny that they couldn’t stop laughing. They whooped and sniggered and yelped until they were dizzy.

“Hey, Kubuka,” gulped Bazi, catching his breath, “How come monkeys can laugh? I thought only hyenas knew how.”

“What? Of course monkeys can laugh. So can hippos! They go like this: Oooooog, oug, oug...” Kubuka made a deep grunting chuckle, like backward burps. This sounded so hilarious, Bazi started giggling again. Soon, the two were having a contest to see who could imitate the silliest laugh. They imitated jackals, and hadeda ibises, and even night owls (Bazi was good at doing owls, because he was often awake at night).

Then Kubuka realised what a noise they were making. It’s not wise to make a lot of noise in the bush, in case you attract the attention of predators. The troop mother had told the young monkeys this many, many times.

“Shhhhh—Bazi, shush!” said Kubuka, “We forgot, we have to be quiet!” They both sat very still for a few minutes, listening as hard as they could in case something was coming to see about the noise.

“Let’s move now. Come on, we will sneak along as silently as we can,” whispered Kubuka. “Let’s carry on this way, on the path to the river.” Bazi followed, tiptoeing along behind and looking all about him.

Soon they came to a clearing, and there in the middle of the clearing was an enormous brown ant hill.

“Is this the one?” asked Kubuka.

Bazi lifted his nose, sniffed and looked.

“Oh, oh, oh - yes! At last! This is the one!” he cried. “It’s our den! I’m home!”

He trotted up to the den, his little tail in the air.

A head appeared at the entrance to the den. It was his auntie Moonhag.

“Oh my ribs and bones!” cried old Moonhag, “Get down here this minute! Hide! Quick! There’s a terrible, dangerous monkey around! Did you see

him? Even the elephants were running away!” As she peered short-sightedly out of the den, she caught sight of Kubuka. “Eeeek! There he is! It’s the monster monkey!”

Kubuka looked quickly behind him, but there was nothing there.

“Bazi, look out! Save me! Help! Help!” screamed old Moonhag, and she scuttled back down the hole into the den, leaving little Bazi outside. The two young animals stared, then burst out laughing again. Silly old Auntie Moonhag!

Just then, the hyena clan returned. Lady Crocuta was surprised to find Bazi in the company of a small monkey. “Where is your auntie Moonhag?” she frowned.

Bazi’s mother, Mpisa, rushed up to see if her son was all right. “Whoooooo-ooo’s this?” she said, looking at Kubuka, “And where-erre are your sisters? Balani! Bamani!” she called. The little girl hyenas crawled out right away, looking around with big brown eyes. They saw Kubuka and giggled. “Hee hee hee! Look at Bazi and the Monster Monkey!” they squeaked.

Monster Monkey? Him? Lady Crocuta and the rest of the clan looked puzzled. Then Kubuka noticed that the little girl hyenas were staring at him with great admiration. He smiled and puffed his chest out a bit. “Yes, well, I’ve just been sorting out an elephant or two for my friend Bazi here,” he said.

Crocuta looked at him doubtfully. “You had better tell me what’s been going on, right now,” she growled.

It took a while to explain everything, but once the clan was quite sure that Kubuka had only been helping out, and had rescued little Bazi by leading him back to the den, then everyone had another good laugh.

Poor auntie Moonhag was in disgrace. The clan teased her for weeks about Monster Monkeys, and falling asleep on duty. And to this day, Moonhag is still afraid of monkeys, and hides away whenever she sees one.

But Kubuka and Bazi, as we all know, have been the best of friends ever since.



Kubuka



Bazi

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