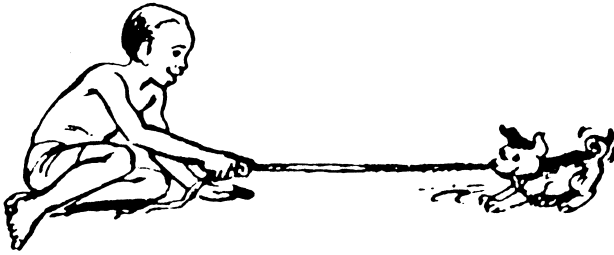


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FREE?



Mgogo held one end of a rope, his small dog at the other end growling and tugging.

Daudi, Jungle Doctor's assistant, smiled as he watched the tussle between boy and dog and then looked at the pile of wood for the campfire. 'There should be enough there for all the stories of Tabu's tug-of-war.'

The two boys, Mgogo and Goha, looked at each other and smiled. 'Tell us about them, Bwana.'

Daudi sat on a three-legged stool. 'It starts with an escape story. Yoh! It was a near thing.'



JUNGLE DOCTOR'S TUG-OF-WAR

'He's trapped,' screeched Suku, the parrot.

'He's in a cage,' boomed Waa, the hornbill.

Twiga, the giraffe, raised his eyebrows. 'Not Tabu, the monkey – young trouble-by-name, trouble-by-nature.' Both the friendly birds nodded. 'This is a thing of no joy,' exclaimed the giraffe. 'The hunter uses the monkeys he traps for bait.'

Waa opened wide his great beak. 'Bait?'

'Yes, bait to catch leopards. And what's Tabu doing?'

Suku shrugged his wings. 'The hunter tied a rope round his neck. Tabu spent a long time trying to chew through it but it was too tough. So now he's just sitting on the floor of the cage eating peanuts – so many peanuts that I don't think he would try to escape even if the door was open. He says he's a pet.'

Waa made anxious noises. 'I looked at that cage. It was strong. Only Elephant could break those bars.'

Twiga nodded. 'And only Elephant has the complete answer for young Tabu and all his troubles.' He hurried and found Elephant and told him about Tabu and the cage and the rope and what the hunter was doing.

'He's in great danger,' said Elephant. 'We must work fast. This is what to do.'

Giraffe listened carefully. 'I'll go at once.'

He came to the hunter's house and stretched his long neck over the thorny fence and pushed the strong cage with his nose.



FREE?

‘Hey! You’re spilling my peanuts,’ squealed Monkey looking up. ‘Oh, hullo, Twiga.’ He grabbed the bars of the cage. ‘I’ve never had as much food as this Twiga – never!’

Giraffe whispered, ‘And you’ve never been in so much trouble.’

Monkey giggled. ‘You’re always telling me my name is Trouble. But I’m all right. The two-legged one who lives here cares for me. I’m in a cage – yes, and he’s put a rope round my neck – yes, but there’s lots and lots to eat.’

Twiga nodded gently. ‘But you’re not a pet. You’re a prisoner. You don’t understand. This hunter has plans. He sells leopard skins in the marketplace. He traps those big cats and you, Tabu, are the bait for those traps. He doesn’t care what happens to you as long as he has leopard skins to sell.’

But Tabu had gone back to eating peanuts.

Twiga saw the hunter hurry back to the village and pick up his spear and *panga* – his great jungle knife. He threw a strong net on top of the cage, thrust his hoe handle through the bars and swung it over his shoulder as he strode off towards the hill where he had seen Leopard’s paw-marks.

When they came to a place where bananas grew inside a fence of piled-up thornbush Tabu watched the hunter tear a pathway through the thorns. Inside he cut down a bunch of bananas with one swish of his *panga*. ‘Amuse yourself with these, Monkey,’ he said, opening the door of the cage, grabbing the rope that was around Tabu’s neck and tying it to a strong stake.

JUNGLE DOCTOR'S TUG-OF-WAR



‘Why bother to tie me up?’ thought Monkey. ‘Only a fool would run away from food as good as this.’ He peeled two bananas and started eating happily.

Sticki, the sweet-toothed monkey, who was lurking behind an anthill saw the hunter pick up his *panga* and go outside the fence. Racing up to Tabu, he pushed him over, grabbed a banana in each paw and bolted.

The hunter cut a great pile of thornbush and built the fence higher and thicker – everywhere except in the gap he had made to get into the banana garden. Here he used his hoe to dig a large hole shaping it with skill and lining it with the net.

In the shade of the umbrella tree Twiga, the giraffe, stood with Waa and Suku close behind him. ‘You know what’s happening,’ he said. Waa nodded his bill. ‘When the wind changes Chewi the leopard’s nose will tell him that his favourite food is close at hand.’

‘Look at what the two-legged one’s doing now,’ squawked Suku.

They all watched as the hunter covered the gaping hole with thin sticks and spread over them leaves and grass till it was hard to tell that a pit was there. Then he built a thornbush tunnel over the top which was just high enough for a leopard to crawl through.

FREE?

‘You see what he is doing?’ said Twiga. ‘Tabu is tied to the stake. All around him is this fence of thornbush. No leopard can jump it. No leopard can push through it and the only path to what that fierce one wants, to what makes his mouth water, is over the pit.’

Waa interrupted him, ‘Monkey at one end, a clear path at the other, but in the middle ...’ He blinked his large eyes.

The hunter checked everything he had done. Tight knots anchored Monkey who only had eyes for bananas. He gripped his *panga* and hacked some



especially fierce-looking thorns and packed them above the entrance tunnel. He glanced towards Tabu who was peeling another banana. ‘Goodbye, leopard-bait. Your work is an important one, though uncomfortable. Both you and I hope that leopard falls safely into my trap.’

He picked up his *panga* and spear and hoe and moved to a place where he could see but not be seen. He soon felt the afternoon breeze begin to fan his face.

The same breeze stirred the tawny-coloured grass near where Leopard sunned himself. The great cat stretched and yawned and sharpened his claws on a

JUNGLE DOCTOR'S TUG-OF-WAR

dead tree. Suddenly his nose was awake and saying, 'Monkey. Monkey. MONKEY.' His stomach took up the theme. 'Monkey. A-a-h-h-h monkey.'

Like a shadow he glided towards the trap.

Suku and Waa flew down and perched on a dead limb. 'Hullo,' said Hornbill. 'You're properly trapped. Don't you want to be free?'

Tabu didn't answer. His mouth was too full of banana. Parrot looked down and noticed the rope and the stake. He squawked cheerfully, 'Must be a nuisance to be tied up like that and be shut in a cage.'

Monkey threw a banana skin at him. 'Don't you worry about me. I'm all right. I'm free. Look at all this lovely food.' He peeled still another banana. 'Go away. I'm busy.'

Waa and Suku looked at each other and then flew back to the umbrella tree. Parrot scratched his head with his claw. 'Free? How can he be free if he's tied up?'

Waa waggled his bill. 'He's free in a sort of a way.'

Suku thrilled, 'But how can you be free when you're tied up with a rope?'

Waa's eyes twinkled and he said softly, 'His legs are free, his mouth is free, his jaw is free – look how he eats bananas. He can breathe, he can make monkey noises. He can lie down, sit down, scratch his back and swish the flies away with his tail. Oh, he thinks he's free.'



FREE?

Suku shook his head so hard that he fell off his perch. ‘You aren’t free if you’re tied up. Monkey down there is not free – not really free. *Whoops!* Look down there.’ His sharp eyes saw Chewi near the piled-up thornbush fence.

Tabu went on eating till his nose told him very bad news. Leopard! He shivered. ‘There’s nothing to worry about. That fierce brute will be caught in the trap before he can get near to me. I’m quite safe.’ But the banana fell from his trembling paw as he scrambled up the nearest palm tree as far as the rope would let him. He clung there, his anxious eyes following every step Leopard took as he prowled, cat-like, round the thorny hedge.

Chewi knew his prey could not escape him so he crouched, muscles tense, glaring at him and moving forward claw-by-claw, revelling in monkey’s terror. He had only gone a leopard’s length into the tunnel when he stopped, his eyes blazing. He knew that now one spring and he could reach Monkey but he liked better to move forward step-by-slow-step, saliva dripping from his half-opened jaws.

He purred, ‘I’m coming, Monkey, I’m coming.’

One spotted leg stretched forward. The bared claws suddenly sank through the grass. The sticks broke. Chewi pawed wildly but he couldn’t save himself. More sticks broke and his face, full of burning anger, disappeared into the darkness of the trap.

Waa and Suku made ear-splitting noises as they flew round and round watching the furious beast battling to free himself from the tangling net. He

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snarled and spat, but the more he struggled the more he was trapped. Giraffe, almost invisible in the sunlight and shadow underneath the umbrella tree, stood stock still as the hunter ran down the hill. His spear flashed.

Leopard would never eat another monkey.

Hunter's big hand grabbed Tabu and crammed him, rope and all, into the cage, ramming down the catch. He grinned at Tabu. 'There are riches in leopard skins, little helper. We'll catch another big cat tomorrow, *eh?* Keep eating your food. I need a fat monkey for bait to catch big leopards.' He smirked. 'Don't worry, you'll get used to it in time – unless!' Then he started skinning the great spotted beast, working fast and skilfully.

Tabu, shivering with fright, crouched on the bottom of the cage. Over the side of the thorn fence Twiga stretched his long neck. 'Tabu, don't you see this is no way to live, tied up and locked up? The only way to really live is with Elephant as your friend.'

Monkey clutched at the iron bars that surrounded him. He looked at the pile of peanut shells and at the mash of squashed banana. He nodded.

Twiga put his head on one side. 'You want to be really free?'

Monkey nodded three times fast. Twiga looked at Suku and raised his eyebrows. Parrot flew fast over the treetops. He screeched with relief when he saw Elephant pounding towards him.

'Tembo, help! Tabu is in terrible trouble.'

FREE?

Elephant trumpeted and came charging down the hill. Through the thornbush fence he crashed. Dropping his knife the hunter dashed for safety. Elephant stopped beside the cage. Suku and Waa perched on his tusks and Twiga peered over his shoulder.

‘Tabu,’ came the great warm voice, ‘do you want to stay in that thing? Wouldn’t you like to be free?’

Monkey breathed, ‘Please help me, Tembo.’

The great kindly animal put one huge foot on the cage and with his trunk tore off the barred door, then with a wonderfully gentle touch the rope was taken from round Tabu’s neck. He suddenly realized that he was free.

‘Thank you, Tembo,’ he stammered.

Elephant lowered his trunk. Tabu climbed up it and whispered, ‘I was terribly scared. I’m the thankfullest monkey in the jungle now.’

‘To stay that way,’ said Tembo, ‘keep close to me. Trust me and do what I say. And keep close to Twiga and my other friends. You know now to keep away from fierce ones like Leopard and two-legged hunters. They’re deadly. But also beware of the cunning, crafty, cruel ones of the jungle. They will work hard to get you back into the dark places of the swamp. Remember, it was down there that you were first trapped.’

Elephant put him gently on top of the great anthill. They watched the strong one of the jungle as he moved out of view.

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Mgogo looked at the moon rising over the hills. 'It's good to be free, Bwana Daudi. Goha and I were trapped and tied up just like Tabu.'

'And how do you know you're free?'

'We understood about the sin trap and the sin rope so we asked Jesus to set us free and to forgive us and to give us eternal life.'

'And did he?'

Both boys nodded. 'It's grand to know that,' agreed Daudi.

'And it's great to be able to tell people that everyone who trusts Jesus is set free from sin by his death and coming back to life.'

* * *

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