Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

opening extract from

The Great Tug of War

written by

Beverley Naidoo

published by

Frances Lincoln

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

The Great Tug-of-War

Long long ago, Mmutla the hare lived in a cave halfway up Kololo Hill. People lived at the top of this hill and Ntsu the eagle lived even higher. Humans knew how to talk with animals in those days. Of course, they didn't always listen properly. Except when they were in trouble. Perhaps if people



had listened better to animals, they wouldn't have made such a mess of Earth! But that's another tale...

Mmutla the hare stayed out of the humans' way most of the time. He took special care to avoid the young boys. Didn't they boast how their arrows were even swifter than Ntsu the eagle? Mmutla always kept his ears pricked up for her. Ntsu sailed so silently, so sky-high, that she could hide herself as a tiny speck. But she could dive to earth faster than Mmutla could blink. He had no wish to take his first and last flying lesson in the grip of Ntsu's sharp claws! No, thank you!

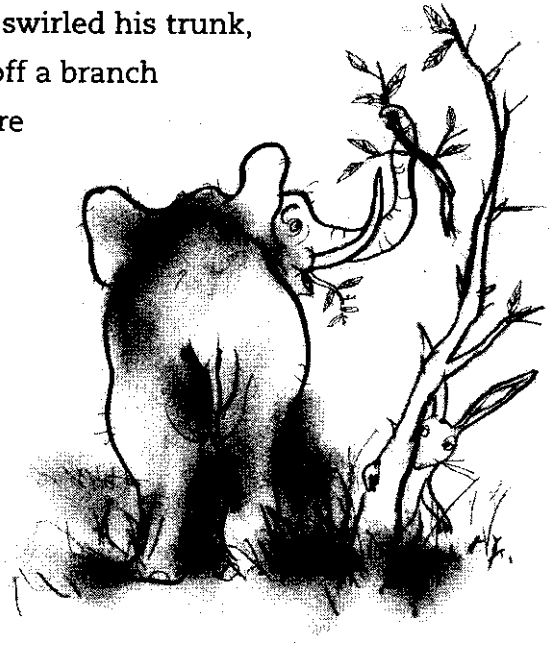
One morning Mmutla woke up with his nose tingling. Outside, Sun was spreading his red tentacles into the sky above Lenong Mountain on the far side of the valley. The colour quickly drained out of Moon's dark cloak. Mmutla sat watching her stars fade away, one by one. He listened to the early morning sounds around him. A twitch here, a tweak there. Some birds twittering, a sudden skittering. Nothing unusual. Nothing he couldn't handle!

Mmutla set off, scrambling over rocks, down

into the grey-green bush and the long veld grass. He was heading towards the water-hole and those tender green shoots that sprouted near the water. *Mmmmmm!* He shivered with delight. Nothing was as tasty as those shoots sprinkled with fresh morning dew! He was leaping to the bottom of Kololo Hill when *CRREAKK! CRRACKK! CRRASSHH!* A morula tree plunged towards him.

SWOOOOSSSHHH! It almost whipped off his nose and then pinned him down.

Tlou the elephant loomed over him. Tlou swirled his trunk, snapped off a branch as if it were



a twig and stuffed the sweet-smelling fruit into his mouth. His jaw chewed steadily as he glared at Mmutla through his deep sunken eyes. Mmutla tried to look calm, although his heart was throbbing.

"Good morning, Tlou," he began.

Tlou chewed and chomped but said nothing.

"I said good morning, Tlou," Mmutla repeated a little louder.

Tlou twitched his tail but still said nothing.

"I said good morning, Tlou!" Mmutla shouted.

SWISH! Tlou waved his trunk in the air and raised one of his feet so that it hovered just above Mmutla's nose.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT, PIPSQUEAK? NO ONE INTERRUPTS MY BREAKFAST!"

"No need to be rude, Tlou! Just because you're biggest, you think you're the strongest! If we had a tug-of-war, I could beat you any day!"

Well, Tlou was so surprised that with one mighty sweep he lifted up the morula tree so that he could see Mmutla more clearly.

"You? You pipsqueak? *P-W-W-WOOOH-H-H-H!*" The elephant blew out a trunkful of air. It would

have blown the little hare sky-high if he hadn't jumped aside as quick as a tick.

"Tomorrow morning, when Sun peeps over the mountain, I'll come with a rope. Then you'll see!" Mmutla boasted.

Without waiting for an answer, he scampered away towards the water-hole.

There he found Kubu the hippo with her eyes half-closed, bathing in the water.

"Good morning, Kubu," he began.

Kubu stared at Mmutla and said nothing.

"I said good morning, Kubu," Mmutla repeated a little louder.

Kubu closed her eyes and, without a word, disappeared under the water. Mmutla watched the bubbles and waited. When Kubu's head re-appeared, he shouted, "I said good morning, Kubu!"

Kubu opened her mouth so wide that Mmutla could see past all her teeth down into the great cave of her throat. When she completed her yawn, she boomed, "WHAT DO YOU WANT, PIPSQUEAK? NO ONE INTERRUPTS MY MORNING NAP!"

"No need to be rude, Kubu! Just because you're



biggest, you think you're the strongest! If we had a tug-of-war, I could beat you any day!"

"You? You pipsqueak? *P-W-W-WAA-W-HHH!*"

The hippo spluttered a mouthful of water. It would have drowned the little hare if he hadn't jumped aside as quick as a cricket.

"Tomorrow morning, when Sun peeps over the mountain, I'll come with a rope. Then you'll see!" Mmutla boasted.

Without waiting for an answer, he scurried away.

All that day Mmutla worked hard at making

an extra long, extra strong rope. He had only just finished by the time Sun had travelled far across the land and was giving way to Moon. Before going to sleep, Mmutla wound up the rope and hung it over a branch of the live-long tree hanging over the entrance to his cave.

The next morning Mmutla woke even before Sun began to send his orange and red warnings to Moon. By the time Sun was creeping over Lenong Mountain, the little hare was leaping down Kololo Hill. The long, strong rope was hung over one shoulder.

Sure enough, Tlou the elephant was there at the bottom of the hill! He pretended to take no notice of Mmutla and carried on munching.

"Good morning, Tlou! I've brought the rope."

"*H-H-H-MMMM-PPPP-FFFF!*" said Tlou.

Mmutla skipped up close. He held out one end of the rope.

"You take this. I'll take the other end and run over there." He pointed to some very thick bushes. "When I'm ready to pull, you'll hear me whistle. Like this – *www-hhhhhh-hee-ee-ee-ee-ee-www-hhhhh-hee-ee-ee!!!!*"

Mmutla whistled softly, then held his breath until Tlou began to wind the rope around his single tusk and his trunk. (His other tusk was lost in a fight but that's another story.)

Quick as a river-bank fly, Mmutla hopped towards the thick bushes, calling back towards Tlou, "You'll soon see that I'm stronger!"

But Mmutla did not stop at the bushes. He still had more rope as he bounded on down to the water-hole.

Kubu the hippo pretended to take no notice and sank beneath the water. Mmutla waited for her eyes to rise.

"Good morning, Kubu! I've brought the rope."

"P-B-L-P-B-L-P-B-L-P-B-L-P-B-L-P-B-L!" Kubu blew a spray of bubbles.

Mmutla skipped up close. He held out the end of the rope.

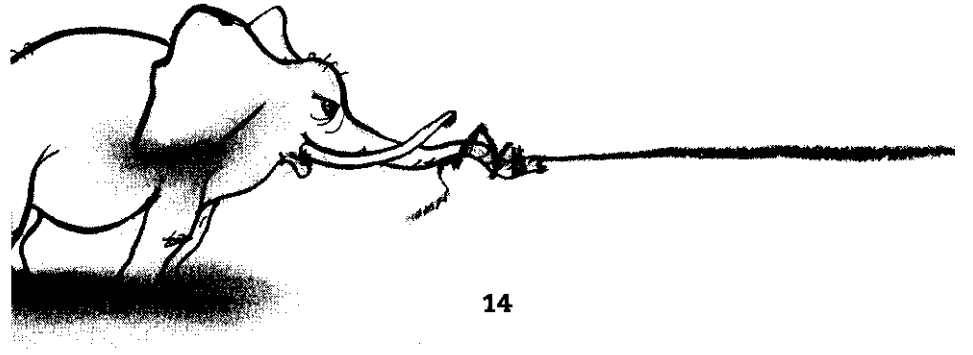
"You take this. Do you see those bushes? I've left the other end just behind them. I'll run and get it and when I'm ready to pull, you'll hear me whistle. Like this – *www-hhhhhh-hee-ee-ee-ee-ee-www-hhhhh-hee-ee-ee!!!!*"

Mmutla whistled softly, then held his breath

until Kubu clutched the rope tight within her jaws. Quick as a klipspringer, Mmutla skipped to the thicket of bushes.

As soon as he had hidden himself well, Mmutla took a deep, deep breath and whistled – this time for all he was worth. From each end he could hear as Tlou and Kubu began to pull. They pulled and tugged, tugged and pulled. Mmutla made a little peep-hole for himself on each side of his hideout. First it was Tlou humping and thumping and Kubu shaking and quaking. Then it was Kubu humping and thumping and Tlou shaking and quaking. Great drops of sweat poured off Tlou – almost enough to make a river – while Kubu splashed so wildly that she might have emptied the water-hole! Mmutla laughed so much that he was nearly sick! He didn't know who looked funnier, Tlou or Kubu.

The tug-of-war continued from Sun Up until Sun Down. Neither Tlou nor Kubu wanted to give up

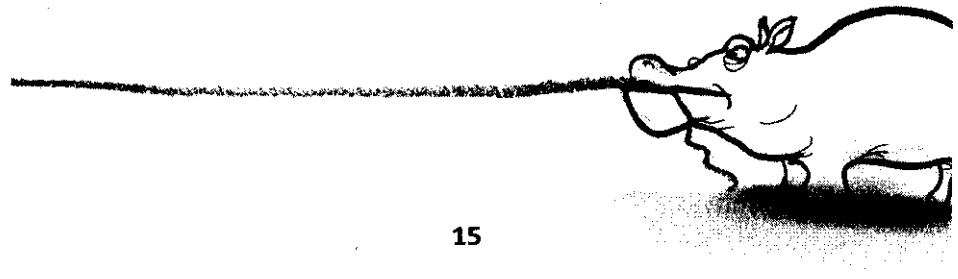


because neither wanted to lose. What could be more terrible than to be beaten by a little hare?

Late in the afternoon, Mmutla caught a glimpse of Ntsu the eagle circling above. With Ntsu marking the spot, the humans on top of Kololo Hill would know that something was going on. So would all the other animals. The news of this great tug-of-war would not remain a secret for long.

But just as Sun gave way to Moon, Tlou the elephant felt that he could not go on for another second and Kubu the hippo also felt she must give up. At the very same moment, each of them let go of the rope!

Kubu gasped for great gulps of air and collapsed out of sight. Tlou panted like he had never panted before and dragged himself to the water-hole. There he slapped and slurped up gigantic dollops of water. (Luckily there was some left!) He swallowed so much so fast that he got hiccups.



But while he was hiccupping, Kubu came up for another gulp of air. Her mouth was open wide enough to swallow an elephant. Kubu saw Tlou and Tlou saw Kubu and in an instant they knew what had happened!

"WERE YOU-?" snorted Tlou.

"WERE YOU-?" spluttered Kubu.

Was it Mmutla's imagination that made him see steam rising from both animals? *Time to go!* he thought. *Time to go and get some supper!* He would have to travel further to find water to drink, at least for a while. Mmutla scampered away as Moon took her turn to peek over Lenong Mountain. But not before he let out one last loud, "*Www-hhhhhh-hee-ee-ee-ee-ee-www-hhhhh-hee-ee-ee!!!!*"