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An extract from

The Emperor's Nightingale and Other Feathery Tales

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Published by

Boxer Books Limited

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"Please, my dear friend, stay with me one night longer," said the prince. "Help me once more before you go. Down in the square there is a little girl begging. She has no shoes and only rags to wear. Pluck out the other sapphire and take it to her."

The swallow began to weep. "Dear prince," he said, "how can you ask me to do such a thing? I cannot pluck out your other eye. How will you see?"

"Swallow, little swallow," said the prince, "the child is living and I am not – do as I command you."

So the swallow took the other sapphire to the child in the street and returned to the prince.



green, purple, red and blue. He gave the lovebird a sweet peach-coloured face and the hoopoe handsome black and white stripes and a russet-coloured crest.

Now, the boubou is a fussy bird who is forever running up and down, cheeping and twittering, trying to attract attention at all costs. He was near the end of the row but he couldn't wait for his turn. He was very impatient, behaving like a spoilt child, hopping up and down saying, "Me next! Me next!"

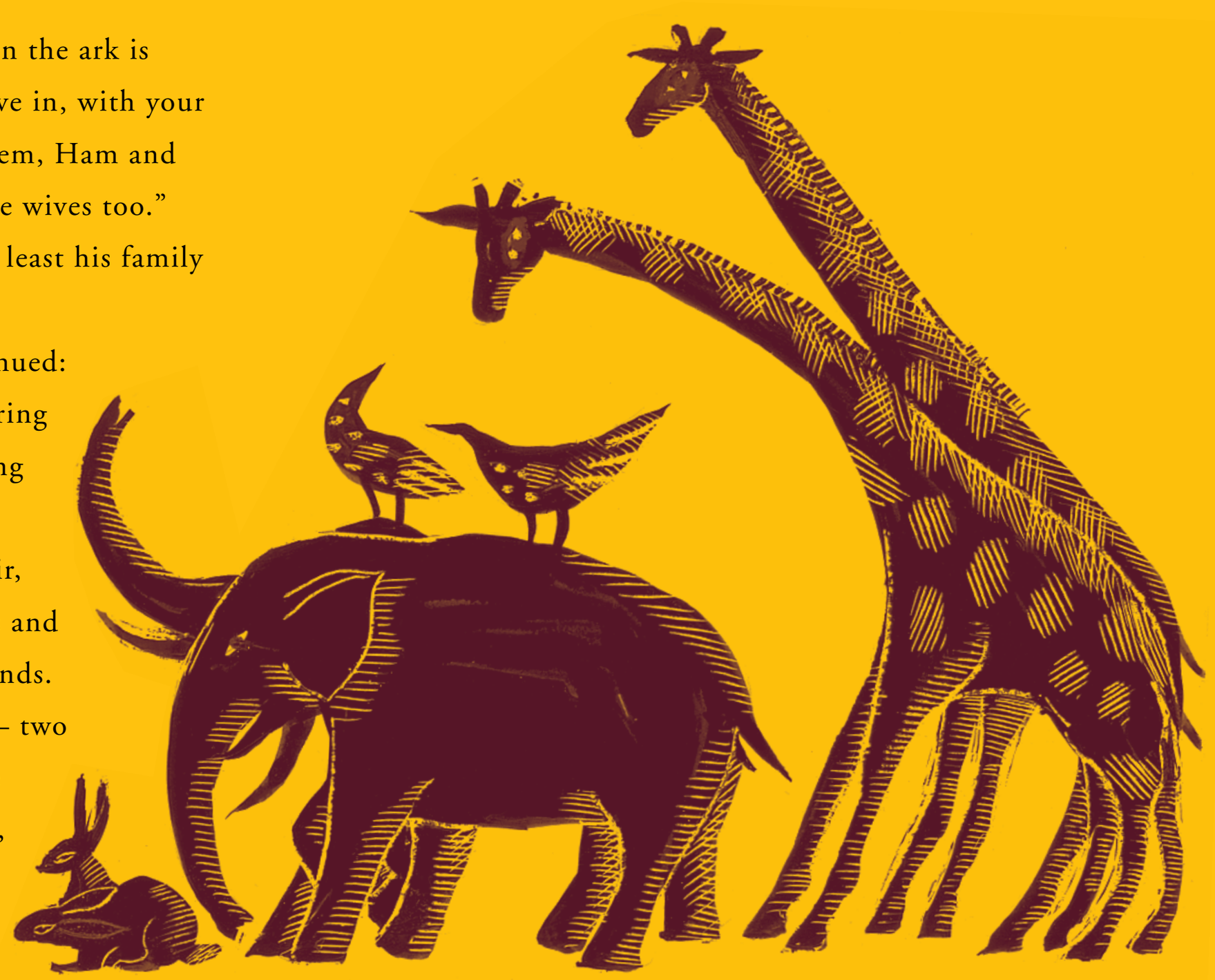
At first Mulungu ignored him, determined to make him wait for his turn. He painted the cuckoo emerald green and the little kingfisher purple and blue. But still the boubou kept clamouring and fussing. Mulungu was

Pussy said to the Owl,
“you elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married!
Too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?”
They sailed away,
for a year and a day,
To the land where
the Bong-tree grows
And there in a wood
a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.



God went on: "When the ark is finished, you must move in, with your wife and your sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their three wives too." Noah was relieved – at least his family would be saved.

But then God continued: "Now, I want you to bring two of every living thing into the ark, male and female – birds of the air, and beasts of the fields and mountains and woodlands. Don't forget anything – two of everything, even the tiny creeping creatures, worms and ants and







half the court, in their fine shoes and flowing silken robes, following behind.

As they struggled through the mud and brambles, a sound rang out.

"Ah!" sighed a courtier. "That must be the nightingale! What a glorious sound!"

The kitchen maid giggled. "Oh no, sir, that is not the nightingale. That is a cow!